



# The Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

www.thompsonhistorical.org

Summer 2003

## Calendar of Events

Membership meetings or events for the Society.

### Monday, June 9, 2003

- The Thompson Historical Society Annual Meeting & Dinner at Greystone Farm on Rt. 21, the home of Rob & Sue Vincent.

Come one, come all to the Picnic.....

5:30 to 6:30 PM "Antiques Roadshow"

Joe Allard, a local antiques expert with 25 years of experience, will appraise your treasures. Joe was a hit at our picnic two years ago. Bring as many items as you wish. \$3.00 per item.

6:30 to 7:30 PM "Picnic"

Please bring your favorite dish, salad, side dish or dessert.

7:30 PM "Annual Meeting of the Thompson Historical Society"

General meeting, updates, elections of new officers

Please RSVP early — 860 923 5728. Last year, over 80 people attended the event.

### Museum Shop

- Visit our museum shop at the Old Town Hall. We will be open from 10 am—2 pm on the following dates:

- Saturday June 7, 2003
- Saturday July 5, 2003
- Saturday August 2, 2003
- Saturday September 6, 2003

### May 3rd Tag Sale Update

The May 3rd tag sale was held indoors due to inclement weather but was far more successful than expected. More than \$725 resulted from the sale of "pre-owned" stuff. The eclectic collection must have been gold to those bargain hunters looking for that special something. Not much was left over.

Thanks to all who participated. It was so successful that we are asking you to start collecting now for next year's tag sale.

Questions? Call 860 923 5728.

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## Officers / Contact Info:

President: Dave Babbitt  
 Vice President: Joe Iamartino  
 Treasurer: Barbara Weaver  
 Secretary: John Lengel  
 Curator: Mark Savolis  
 Collections: Hattie Greene  
 Photos: Alice Biesiadecki  
 Museum Shop: Lucille Barrette, Helen Flood, Beth Greene, Val Iamartino, Henrietta Panu, June Schoppe, Sue Vincent, Sandra Warner,  
 Website: Barbara Loy  
 Museum Committee: Barbara Weaver; Beth Greene  
 Concert Chair: Jane Vercelli  
**www.thompsonhistorical.org**  
**or call us at 860-923-3200**

## Membership Information

The Thompson Historical Society year is rapidly coming to a close. Please renew your membership using the enclosed form or by visiting our website and using the on-line membership form at

**www.thompsonhistorical.org**

As a way to show our thanks, an existing member can sign up a new member for a gift membership of \$5.00 for their first year. Please encourage others to support our Society.

### Membership dues are:

- \$10.00 Individual Membership
- \$15.00 Family Membership
- \$25.00 Contributing Membership
- \$5.00 Student Membership

### Dues to be paid by July 1, 2003 for July 1, 2003—June 30, 2004 year

- 1st reminder: Summer newsletter
- 2nd reminder: Fall newsletter

**The President's Quill** by A. David Babbitt

As I write this final President's message of what has been three exciting years as leader of the Thompson Historical Society, I do so with a great sense of satisfaction, appreciation and thankfulness.

I'm satisfied to know that we've flourished over this time. We've expanded our program offerings, our Board has met on a regular schedule, and our committees are carrying on the business of the Society. The future looks bright as we head into 2003-2004. Two of our brightest stars are the soon-to-be-opened museum in the newly refurbished Ellen Larned Building and the Museum Shop in the Old Town Hall.

The Museum will offer a variety of insights into Thompson's history from materials in our collection that we have not been able to display. The Museum Shop contributes a steady stream of revenue to help maintain these buildings and more importantly, promotes Thompson and its abundance of artisans.

I appreciate the support I've received from the Board of Directors, the membership and the many friends of the Society. The Board has done its best to continue our mission of promoting Thompson history, to carefully determine what is best for the Society going forward and then to set in place those plans to make it

reality. We have so many who have contributed in a multitude of ways. Project after project has come to fruition through their efforts.

I'm thinking of the annual meetings, the Christmas Concert, newsletters, membership programs, maintenance and repair, fundraising, research, organizing of materials for the Museum Shop, our website, shop volunteers, museum collections and the renovation of our buildings. These are just a few that come to mind as I write.

As a Society member, think of how you have contributed and give yourself a pat on the back. If you have not contributed, please consider how you can volunteer and really make a difference. Everyone can help in some way.

I am thankful for all of the above but most of all thankful that we, as a collective group, can honestly say that in these three years, we've seen a growing interest in Thompson history and in our Society. We can all look to an even brighter future. It has been a pleasure and privilege to serve you as your President.

Sincerely,  
David

For newsletter story ideas, comments & photo submissions, contact Joe Iamartino (jiamartino@earthlink.net) or call 860 923 3776.

**Museum Update**

The May 21st issue of the Webster Times had a wonderful article from writer Melanie Brezniak about the new museum in the Ellen Larned Memorial Building.

Besides describing the museum, Melanie discussed the Society's history and purpose. While the information alone is compelling, Brezniak's writing was exceptional and brought the Society's efforts forward in a most positive way.

Barbara Weaver, Beth Greene, Hattie Greene, Mark Savolis and others on the Museum Committee are readying the building for a late Summer 2003 opening. Beth is putting in long hours to make sure the floors, walls and ceiling quality match the exquisite lighting planned for the building. Her creativity continues to amaze us all. Barbara Weaver's coordination efforts are keeping the project carpenter and electrician on track and within budget. We look forward to the new museum opening.

We are determined to do electronic accession of all new museum materials. New software has been installed in the Museum computer. Barbara Weaver and Mark Savolis have completed staff training.

**Pictorial History Book Update**

Donning Publishing in Virginia Beach, VA is completing the first pass layout of the book, now standing at 256 pages. We expect a first draft review in our hands in June. The books will be delivered this fall. Get your orders in for a soft cover or leather-bound hardcover version. Remember that this is a limited pressing of 750 copies. Call Val at 923 3776 to reserve your copy. No money is needed until the books arrive. See website for details.



## Thompson’s Disappearing Stone Walls

By now, everyone can see that someone is stealing the large flat stones from the stone walls around our villages. Perhaps more than one person is doing this. As a result, at least one resident has cemented his top layer of stones in place to keep them from disappearing.

Another concerned resident brought a disturbing letter she received from a Massachusetts business to the Society’s attention. The firm is offering to pay for the stone from stone walls. The businessman writes, “... we are interested in purchasing large quantities of stone walls from Northeastern CT...”

Robert Thorson, author of “Stone by Stone, The Magnificent History in New England’s Stone Walls” (Walker & Co., NY 2002), wrote, “there are old stone walls elsewhere, but only in New England do they rise above the level of architectural ornaments to the status of landforms. Kentucky has its caves, Florida its coral reefs, Louisiana its bayous, Arizona its arroyos, Washington its volcanoes, Minnesota its lakes and New England its stone walls. The landscape would simply not be the same without them.”

Residents should be aware that many stone walls are historical boundary markers. Other walls line the paths of historic cart roads. While many of us have that useless pile of stone in the backyard we’d like to be rid of, wholesale disassembling of Thompson’s stone walls for profit robs our villages of that ‘thing’ that makes Thompson unique, not only in America, but in the world.

**West Thompson Map:** In one of the past Society programs, the noted Wilkinson family (Samuel Slater’s in-laws) was shown to be involved in Mechanicsville. This 1855 map shows the property Edmund inherited from his father Smith Wilkinson. Carrie Barske & Joe Iamartino will be presenting a lecture on the Slater & Wilkinson Family in NE CT at Old Sturbridge Village’s Community History series on August 20th, 7 PM at OSV, Sturbridge, MA.



### Society News & Info

We’ve received many requests for information on floods, train wrecks, and crimes. In this issue, we will answer as many questions as we have space for.

The gate house at the 1862 mill in Grosvenordale will remain in place after the main buildings have been dismantled.

The Bennett family in Illinois wrote to tell us that Thompson’s Hallie Bennett passed away in April at 106 years of age.

### Bootscraper—Made in Thompson

The device at right is a boot-mudscraper. In the days of muddy dirt roads, this was needed outside of the front door. Found on eBay.....



**Answers to Spring 2003 Mystery Photo:** One person suggested the road was Hill Road in Thompson. Another thought it was Sabin Rd. in Putnam and a third felt it was Rt. 131 just past Brickyard Rd. A fourth person felt it was Rt. 193 or near Rt. 193 in the Porter Plain Rd. area. This writer has seen all of these areas and isn’t convinced. Interested parties in resolving this mystery, please chime in .....

### Crime & Mayhem Questions

The recent murder in the parking lot of the Thompson elementary school highlights that our small town is not free of criminal behavior, past or present.

While some might say that these incidents might best be forgotten, history includes the bad with the good. I will answer 3 questions sent by email to us by referring interested parties to source material for the incidents in question.

#### (1) The Rape & Murder of Maria Cornell.

Maria Cornell, a 'fallen' textile mill worker looking for redemption, was raped by Rev. E. K. Avery on the last day of a four day Methodist Church camp meeting in West Thompson on the afternoon of

August 30, 1832. When she later learned she was pregnant, she confronted Avery and in desperation, he hung her. He was pursued through several states, caught but later acquitted in a famous trial. However, most were convinced of his guilt.

- Best source: "The Minister & the Mill Girl", George Howe, A Sense of History, American Heritage Press, 1985

#### (2) Four Engine Wreck in East Thompson, CT

The only four engine wreck in history took place in East Thompson on Dec. 4, 1891.

- Best source: "The Great East Thompson Train Crash" pamphlet by Diane Dueber, available from THS Museum Shop. Also a reprint

Yankee Magazine article on the accident is in a booklet available from the THS Museum Shop.

#### (3) FBI Espionage Case against Count Anastase Vonsiatsky

Vonsiatsky married the wealthy daughter of Norman B. Ream in Paris in the 1920s. The 'Count' was a White Russian who fought against the Communist Reds. After moving to Thompson, he was the leader of a U.S. Fascist organization that worked with Nazi Germany and Japan against the Communist Russians. Though considered by some to be just an eccentric, Vonsiatsky's contact with the American Nazi Bund was highly suspicious. Arrested by the FBI during WWII, he was sent to prison for espionage.

Best Source: The Russian Fascists: Tragedy and Farce in Exile 1925-1945, John J. Stephan, Harper & Row, NY, 1978

### 1910 Train Wreck in North Grosvenordale—from eBay photo

Charlie Seney helped identify this 1910 train wreck in Thompson, at North Grosvenordale. Charlie had previously donated a 1938 photo of the train station in North Grosvenordale which helped us to identify this photo. The station is seen behind the crowd in this faded photo.

The train station was located off Buckley Hill Road but is no longer standing. Dave Babbitt said it was taken down in the 1940s or 1950s. If someone has the details of the station removal or this accident, please send it in.



**eBay TALES** At the popular auction site, www.ebay.com, it is not uncommon to see important historical artifacts, documents or photos related to Thompson history sold. A few Society members (you know who you are!!) regularly buy post-cards or documents for their collections and share their findings with the Society. For example: John Lengel, the Society secretary, and his better half Lynn, are scanning their growing photo collection, built from eBay purchases, and donating the scans to our digital archive. We encourage others to do the same. It is just another way to help the Society.....

Some recent finds from eBay on-line auctions.....:

**A) Kimball Text book from 1836**

(from an eBay auction).... “There are 504 Pages. The cover looks like Leather. It is called The Select Reader or UNION no.6. ...The page that reads contents says: PROSE, POETRY, DIALOGUES. It seems to be no. 6 of a series of school books. Written by Oliver Angell, A.M. Principal of the Franklin High School in Providence R.I. Published in Philadelphia by W. Marshall & CO. Stereotyped at the Boston Type and Stereotype Foundry. Finally..it was owned by one Samuel Kimball of Thompson CT. Kimball as in Kimball Ct and Kimball Hospital? He penned his initials inside the cover of the book in ink. The book seems to be bound in Leather, pages bound with string versus glue, and all the pages are intact with no missing pages or tears that I can see...”


**B) 1814 Lg Illustrated Stage Coach Ad - Boston to NY**

(see advertisement at right)

“... the January 24, 1814 issue of the *Connecticut Mirror* newspaper published in Hartford, CT by Hale & Hossmer. The paper has a large, 4-1/2" by 5-1/2", ad for the Enterprize stage line from Boston to New York. The ad has a large illustration of a stage coach and it gives the schedule for the stage which ran from the Exchange Coffee House in Boston to the City Hotel in New York. Agents for the stage line were Solomon Gibson, Cornelius Seaman and J. Ripley of New York, John Jones of Boston, and Pardon Luther of Thompson, CT and Paul Dudley of Douglass, MA. This paper is in very good condition - not brittle, guaranteed authentic - from a bound volume”. (Ed. Note: The middle road mentioned in text refers to the Middle Post Road which passed through Thompson towards Boston)

**C) 1910 Buckley Hill Train wreck post card (see opposite)**

Many eBay photos are posted with little or no information and in some cases, incorrect information. This photo, unidentified on eBay, is the 1910 train wreck in North Grosvenordale.



**WINTER ESTABLISHMENT.**  
NEW-YORK AND BOSTON NEW LINE  
**ENTERPRIZE,**  
Runs to the City Hotel, New-York, and to the Exchange Coffee-House, Boston.

**FOR NEW-YORK.**  
LEAVES Hartford for New-York (through New-Haven) every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings, at nine o'clock, and arrives at the city hotel, New-York, next days at five o'clock, afternoon.

**RETURNING,**  
Leaves city hotel, New-York, every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings, at nine o'clock, and arrives at Hartford next days, at five o'clock, afternoon.

**FOR BOSTON.**  
Leaves Hartford for Boston (on the middle road) every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings, at nine o'clock, and arrives at the exchange coffee-house, Boston, next days at five o'clock, afternoon.

**RETURNING,**  
Leaves exchange coffee-house, Boston, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings, at nine o'clock, and arrives at Hartford next days, at five o'clock, afternoon.

Gentlemen travelling in this line of Stages, will not be discommoded by unvetting nights. Fare as usual, and baggage at the risque of the owners thereof. For seats in the above line, apply at Ripley's coffee-house, Hartford—Ogden's coffee-house, New-Haven—at the exchange coffee-house, Boston—and at the city hotel, New-York.

SOLOMON D. GIBSON, } New-York,	PARDON LUTHER, Thompson,
CORNELIUS SEAMAN, } Hartford,	PAUL DUDLEY, Douglass,
J. RIPLEY, Hartford,	JOHN JONES, Boston,

December 27 1814

**Ad Text reads:** Winter Establishment. New-York & Boston New Line ENTERPRIZE, runs to the City Hotel, New-York and to the Exchange Coffee House, Boston.

For New-York. Leaves Hartford for NY every Mon, Wed & Fri. mornings at 9 o'clock & arrives at city hotel NY next days at 5 o'clock afternoon. Returning, leaves city hotel NY, every Mon, Wed, & Fri. mornings at 9 o'clock & arrives at Hartford next days at 5 o'clock, afternoon.

For Boston. Leaves Hartford for Boston (on the middle road) every Mon, Wed, & Fri. morning at 9 o'clock and arriving at the exchange coffee-house, Boston next day at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. Returning, leaves exchange coffee house Boston, every Mon, Wed, & Fri. mornings at 9 o'clock & arrives at Hartford next days at 5 o'clock, afternoon.

Gentlemen traveling in this line of stage will not be discommoded by unvetting nights. Fare as usual. Baggage at the risque of the owners thereof. For seats in the above line, apply at Ripley's Coffee House, Hartford—Ogden's Coffee House, New Haven—at the exchange coffeehouse, Boston and at the city hotel, New York.

(Solomon D. Gibson, Cornelius Seaman—NY), (Y Ripley—Hartford), (Pardon Luther—Thompson), (Paul Dudley—Douglass), (John Jones—Boston)



**Cheats:** This 1877 check from the Thompson National Bank was found to be a counterfeit note. Thompson has seen a number of bad money schemes over its years. Ellen Larned describes two of them...

*"...the detection of a fraudulent money coinage...(about 1802)...also created much excitement. An expert from New Hampshire brought down die and tools and persuaded a simple-minded youth to engage with him in this unlawful art. Good silver money was obtained from a large number of persons under various pretexts, some undoubtedly conniving at its disposition. One good dollar was made to cover a number of spurious coins, which were chiefly expended by an accomplice in buying horses in the new countries. The work was carried on in a hut near King's Pond for a time and then for greater security removed to a cave in Buck Hill woods, and brought large profits to all concerned until the younger partner brought the hidden deed to light. Intoxicated with the rare delight of plenty of spending money, he came down to Thompson Hill, treating all the loungers at the several stores and taverns, throwing out at each place a new silver dollar in payment. Such unexampled flushness and freeness aroused suspicion and the cheat was discovered. The young man was arrested and packed off to Windham for trial, to the great consternation of the many aiders and abettors, who stowed themselves away in the old barns and meal-chests until the search subsided. The prisoner evaded trial by forfeiture of bonds, and took a journey out west, whence after many months he returned a sadder and wiser man to his own town and settled down into a sober and law-abiding citizen. His tempter went into banishment and bankruptcy. A few years later, a larger gang in the same vicinity engaged in counterfeiting bank notes which also ended in exposure and punishment, the leaders suffering prolonged imprisonment."*

Clearly, the 1877 counterfeiters were not aware that East Thompson was not a lucky place for their kind. They were discovered as well.



Photo caption— The Charge of the Light Brigade at the Schoolhouse Pond School —photo by Edith Kimball—teacher, 1918.

**Ask The Society**

- Q. Where did Fabyan get its name?
- A. The area of present-day Fabyan and Quinebaug together was once called New Boston. The train station was getting repeatedly confused with that at Boston so the station itself was changed to Quinebaug Station, and the village of Quinebaug grew around it. The name Fabyan was given to the remaining New Boston lands but I don't know where the name Fabyan itself comes from. If anyone knows, please send it in. This is this month's mystery question.
- Q. What are the dates of the major storms affecting Thompson?
- A. March 11-14, 1888 Blizzard  
March 19, 1936 Flood  
Sept. 21, 1938 Hurricane  
Aug 17-19, 1955 Flood  
Feb. 5-7, 1978 Blizzard
- Q. Where is Schoolhouse Pond?
- A. Just south of the Massachusetts border on Rt. 193. The school sat at the southern tip of the pond.  
  
Today, it is on the map as Little Pond. (see photo at left)
- Q. What is the Five Mile River Reservoir ?
- A. It is called Quadic Lake now