

# Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

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December 2010

## Calendar of Events:

**Board of Directors Meetings** will be held at the Library, Community Room 3, 7 pm on the following dates:

**January 26, 2011**  
**March 2, 2011**  
**April 19, 2011**

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## Thompson Museum at the Ellen Larned Memorial Building

The museum is now closed for the season, but will reopen the first Saturday of May 2011, from 10am to 2pm. Remember, 2011 begins the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of our nation's **Civil War**.



**A recreated soldier and family tent & encampment scene, part of the Civil War exhibit at the Thompson Museum.**

## Jane Johnson Collection

Two Historical Society directors, Karen Charbonneau and Blair Cole, recently delivered three more videos to add to the Jane Johnson Collection of Thompson Video Histories. These video interviews of Thompson personalities will be available for viewing at the Thompson Museum at the Ellen Larned Building when it reopens in May 2011.

The Society would also like to take this opportunity to thank **Mr. Joe Langer**. Joe has been plowing our Old Town Hall lot for the past few years at no charge. **Thank you Joe!**

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**HOURS 10 AM - 4PM...**

FRI, SAT & SUN... NOVEMBER 26, 27 & 28

SAT & SUN... DECEMBER 4 & 5

SAT & SUN... DECEMBER 11 & 12

SAT & SUN... DECEMBER 18 & 19

AND

FRI... DECEMBER 24

**HOURS 10 AM - 2PM ONLY**

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**THE TEEG CHRISTMAS TREE!**

**THE • OLD • TOWN • HALL**

**EXIT 99 OFF I-395 • TO RTE 200**

**At The Thompson Hill Common • Rtes 193 & 200 • Thompson, CT**

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## President's Quill

Joe Iamartino



The recent Veteran's Day presentation by Ron Tillen about the Airmen of N.E. Connecticut was a moving experience for me. To see those brave men up on the projection screen, some who came home and a few that didn't, really affected me. It is one thing to think of heroes of war as an abstraction but, sitting in the same room with men who really did put their lives on the line, I realized just how grateful I am that they did what they did for all of us. To think that I took what they did for granted! I never will again.

Some never came home, and others did, perhaps scarred physically or mentally from their experiences. Elmer Preston's opening words on behalf of the VFW and American Legion organizations illustrated the need to provide care for our soldiers not only during war but to ensure they are not ignored after they return to civilian life.

Now, let me say a few words about Ron Tillen, our presenter for the Veteran's Day airmen program. His excellent research and lively presentation style brought that war period to life for the audience.

He was a young boy in London during WWII, seeing and hearing the bombing that we can only imagine from grainy black and white photos and movies. He painted a picture of the lives of the men and women from our area, normal folks, who were trained and drilled to defend what they wanted to defend.

Mr. Tillen's message to us is that we should never forget those who sacrificed a piece of their lives or, for some, life itself, to defend the world from those who cared little about humanity.

Ron is a grand story teller, a true historian, and someone who volunteers his talent and his time to make Thompson a better place for all of us. Thanks for all you do for us Ron.



From my family to yours, Happy Holidays and best wishes for a blessed New Year!  
~Joe Iamartino

## Ecumenical Holiday Celebrations!

From the archives of the Killingly Historical Society,  
Windham County Transcript articles from the past.  
Supplied by our friend Marilyn Labbe

### 8 January 1890—Thompson

The Christmas entertainment in the Congregational church by general consent is reported to be one of the finest ever enjoyed in this town. The devoted pastor was generously remembered, and no one seems to have been forgotten in the distribution of the beautiful tokens of friendship.

The Christmas eve exercises in the Baptist church were of a most agreeable character. The children from the Home added interest to the literary program. Rev. Mr. Ives received an envelope containing \$30.

Rev. Mr. Cummings, the Congregational pastor, held a reception New Year's day, and many of his parishioners enjoyed a pleasant call.

### 15 January 1890—Thompson

The "roll-call" at the Baptist church, on the first Sunday of the New Year, was an innovation that revived pleasant and tender memories. Many lived over again their experience, especially the early part of it—conversion, baptism, uniting with the church, etc. The sacrament that followed was filled with solemn reverence and deep humility and thankfulness for what the Heavenly Father has brought to all hearts.

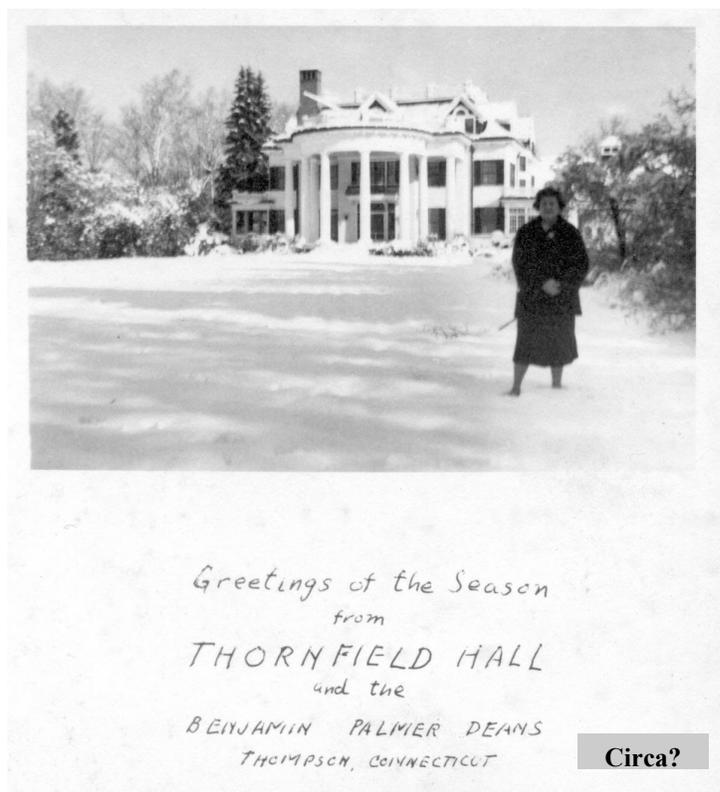
### 10 December 1890—Thompson

The social of the Y.P.S.C.E. (Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor) Thanksgiving evening is reported to have been a very enjoyable affair. Light refreshments were served, and Miss Stephens read two choice selections.

### 19 February 1890—Thompson

#### PLUCKY GIRLS

The ladies of Thompson have been getting up barrels to send to a missionary in Dakota, to be distributed among the poor and needy in that section, of whom the latter had written. After filling one barrel the young ladies had a surplus, and two of them went to a store to get an empty barrel. The storekeeper kindly donated it, but the question was how to get it removed to where they desired to use it. Some young fellows standing by were asked if they would not convey it where wanted, but refused unless paid for the job. The two spirited ladies took up the barrel themselves and lugged it off, putting the young men to shame. A third barrel was filled and sent away.



## Membership/Dues Information:

Members can find their paid status on the address sticker of this newsletter. (Membership runs on the THS fiscal year July 1 to Jun 30.)

Members are encouraged to bring their dues up-to-date as the income generated by membership contributes greatly to the continued operation of the Society.

**Thompson Historical Society**  
**Attn: Membership**  
**P.O. Box 47**  
**Thompson, CT 06277**

**Contributing Membership: \$25.00**

**Individual Membership: \$10.00**

**Family Membership: \$15.00**

**Student/Gift Membership: \$5.00**

Members are invited to purchase first-year memberships for new members for a low introductory price of \$5.00.

The Society recently received a book called *"We Go Down to the City Tomorrow"* by Richard Lemon. Prior to WWII, and as a child of privilege, Richard lived in the fancy turreted house on Rt. 200, now a girls' dormitory on the Marianapolis campus. Mr. Lemon graduated from Yale and worked as a writer and editor for People Magazine and the New York Daily News to name just two of his jobs. The book details Lemon's childhood time in Thompson. Copies will be available in the Society's Gift Shop.

### *A review from Amazon.com:*

*We Go Down to the City Tomorrow* is the memoir of Richard Lemon's first 12 years in his grandparents' sun-filled summer home in Thompson, Connecticut. One year it and many of its people vanished and he and his world turned upside down. This is the story of that place, the people who created it, how he finally turned himself right side up again, and how much of that magic place still remained, after the fall.



**Help Wanted:** Looking for people who have lived in Thompson for at least 30-40 years who would like to help identify photographs of Thompson locations, events and/or people. This is for all-volunteer research positions. The position entails looking at old photographs, identifying the image, describing it in 1 to 2 sentences (or more if needed) in an Microsoft Excel file and assigning a tracking number to the photograph. Typically 100 photographs per disk will be issued for review and it is expected that the disk and Excel spreadsheet with the new tracking numbers will be returned in 6 weeks by the reviewer. If the photos cannot be identified immediately, it is requested that the reviewer seek out other help if possible. Please contact Joe at 860.923.3776 or jiamartino@charter.net. *Thank you!*

**Other opportunities to assist the Society are listed on our website and we welcome all in any capacity**

## *The Ream Estate and Marianapolis*

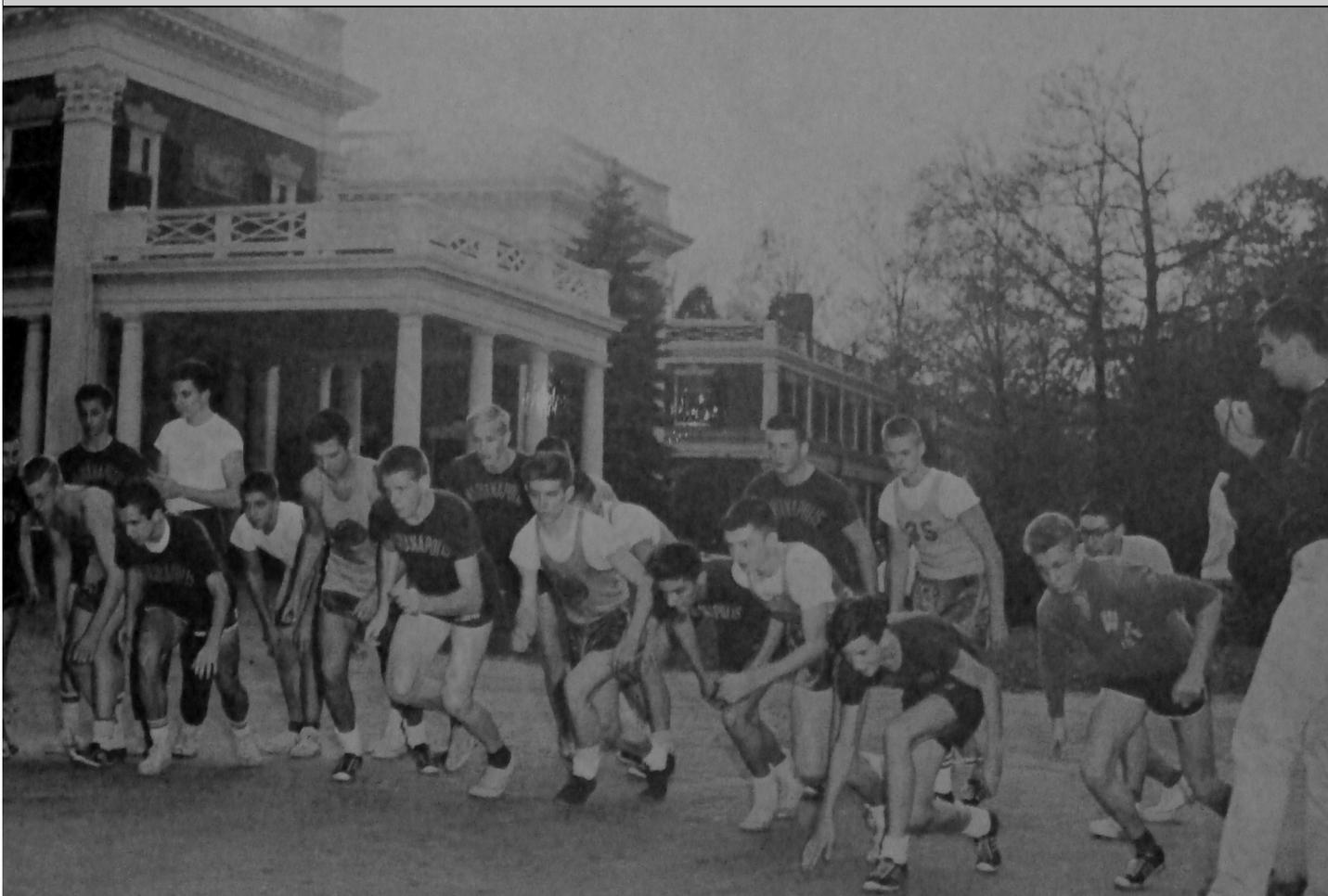
**THOMPSON** -- Norman B. Ream, who is erecting a mansion in Thompson, is a director and member of the finance committee of the billion-dollar steel company (*the Federal Steel Co., one of the companies that later became part of the United States Steel Corporation\**). Mr. Ream, it is stated, is to dispose of his present home in Chicago and to reside permanently in Thompson. The mansion home, now in course of erection there, is a model one. It will cost \$500,000. Mr. Ream is delighted with Thompson, and is expending a large amount of money there.



The Ream Mansion as it looked circa 1912

*Source: Norwich Bulletin: July 22, 1901*

The Ream Estate burned down March 5, 1964 \* (<http://johnream.net/norman.htm>).



This Marianapolis track team picture is pre-1964. There will be a presentation about the Ream Estate and the Beginnings of Marianapolis in April 2011. Check [www.thompsonhistorical.org](http://www.thompsonhistorical.org) for updates on time and location.

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*Ryscavage Auditorium — Contributed by the TMHS Alumni Association*

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**1909 Auditorium Named after One of Thompson's Very Best  
AFTER MANY MONTHS OF WORK THE JEROME RYSCAVAGE  
MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM A REALITY**

After many months of work by both the TMHSAA and the School District Naming Committee, the Thompson Board of Education unanimously passed a resolution on January 12, 2010 naming the 1909 Auditorium, located in the original building the Jerome Ryscavage Auditorium in honor of Mr. Ryscavage's many years of service and accomplishments.

Few people in Thompson's history have had a bigger impact on our education community as a whole as had Jerome Ryscavage. Jerry worked for the Thompson school district for 23 years, starting as a math teacher in 1948, finishing his career as superintendent in 1971. Throughout his career at Thompson he also served as Tourtellotte's vice principal and principal, making countless contributions to the academic and athletic growth of the Tourtellotte Memorial High School.

According to the Northeast Connecticut Oral History Project (1978), as the Town of Thompson's Superintendent of Schools, Jerry, in the late 1940's, launched a ten-year campaign that combined the many district (village) schools into two units and then eventually one centralized school, something incredibly progressive for the time.

After years of tireless effort and several contentious referendums, the Town of Thompson agreed with Jerry and finally approved the consolidation effort. A short time later the Thompson Memorial School (now the Thompson Middle School) was constructed and elementary and middle school students from all over town were being educated for the first time, in one location. Four years later, the consolidation and educational growth continued and Jerry led the charge to construct the Mary Fisher Elementary School.

After the consolidation process subsided, Jerry, never the one sit on his laurels, turned his attentions to the development of the town's first kindergarten program, once again, proving his thinking was years ahead of many of his contemporaries. Jerry understood the value of adding early childhood learning and development to antiquated pedagogy.

Other than the donation of the 1909 Tourtellotte Memorial High School by Dr. and Mrs. Tourtellotte to the Town of Thompson, few events in our town's history have galvanized our community more than the consolidation of our primary and early learning schools. No one person did more to make that happen than Jerome Ryscavage.

Jerry started life as the son of Lithuanian immigrants. His father worked most of his life in the dusty coals mines of Pennsylvania. In spite of the fact that few in his family had much more than a primary education, Jerry and his family understood the value of a good education. As a young man he, like his dad, worked the mines of Pennsylvania as a means to help support his family and to help pay his way to a college education. Jerry excelled in college and developed an irrepressible love for teaching, a love that would last his entire life, and a love from which we, the citizens of Thompson benefitted greatly.



*Left: Thompson Superintendent of Schools Jerome Ryscavage circa 1955. Mr. Ryscavage performed many functions during his years with Thompson to include teacher, athletics champion, and mentor to many administrators and teachers. Picture compliments of the TMHSAA*

*The THS is pleased to include this article after Ron Tillen's Veteran's Day presentation was done in the Ryscavage Auditorium on November 11th.*

*The full article can be found at the TMHS Alumni Association's website:*

*[http://www.thompsonpublicschools.org/TMHSAA/newsletters\\_10/February.pdf](http://www.thompsonpublicschools.org/TMHSAA/newsletters_10/February.pdf)*

*Many TMHS graduates have fond memories of Mr. Ryscavage and we thank Joe Lindley for sharing this information with us.*



**Above:** N. Grosvenordale Salle Union Theatre, Children's Christmas Party by the Textile Workers of America, 1945  
**Left:** Christmas greetings from the Dalton House, Chase Road, circa?  
**Below:** Cluett Peabody Christmas Party, 1940 in the Cluett Gym, now the Knights of Columbus Hall



MERRY CHRISTMAS...  
HAPPY NEW YEAR!



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*Local Airmen at War, a Presentation by Ron Tissen*

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On November 11, Veterans Day, I was privileged to make a presentation to interested residents that told the stories of eight airmen from the *Quiet Corner* who flew in World Wars I and II.

Some of this was possible because there are logs, audio records, DVDs and diaries concerning some of the men, but there were other stories, notably those of Oakley Ragland and Lloyd Seaver, that took research in order to unearth even the basic facts of their service.

There are many more stories about local men and women who have served that deserve collection. All of this emphasizes the importance of the Thompson Historical Society's efforts to gather information before memories fade and records deteriorate, are lost or thrown away in error.

One notable story told was that of Harry Elliot who flew on the bombing raid led by General Doolittle on Rome in August 1943. As a result the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini was overthrown, and in September 1943, Italy signed an armistice with the Allies.



TSGT Oakley Ragland, Jr.

Later, in August on his fourteenth bombing mission, Harry's B-17 Flying Fortress plane was badly damaged and ditched in the Bay of Sorrento. He and his crew were captured and split up. Harry escaped from a transit camp in Italy and traveled 80 miles through countryside, now controlled by the Germans, to meet up with advancing Canadian infantry. He avoided spending the rest of the war in a German POW camp.

Another tale told was that of Floyd Cole who flew many missions including the shuttle operation to bomb a key target that was unreachable from England. His group flew deep into southeastern Germany, hit the target and went on for a brief stay at a Russian airfield before flying back to his English base by way of a captured airfield in Italy.

Then there was the drama of Burton Rhodes (father of the Society's current Vice-President) whose many missions ended with the shooting down of lethal Messerschmitt 262 jet fighters that attacked his squadron. More accounts are being researched and contributed.



Records of George Pompeo's performance as a fighter pilot in the Pacific have been provided and need to be remembered by the Society. Then there are other histories in danger of being lost or overlooked as time erases the lessons learned and the laudable efforts of ordinary people from Thompson who did extra ordinary things when their country needed them. Please do your bit to make sure these accounts are preserved.

**B17 Flying Fortress used by the U.S. Army Air Corp. in Europe during World War II.**



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*East Thompson School House (Over)*

**Q:** Why do old schoolhouses typically have 2 doors? Here is an example - the old East Thompson Schoolhouse, which is no longer standing.

**A:** In small schoolhouses built prior to the 1900s, we have evidence from numerous sites that boys used one door and the girls the other. A good website to see 2 door schoolhouses can be found at: <http://minotmaine.com/schools.html>.

***Q & A Correction:***

In our June 2010 newsletter we featured a picture of a TMHS production of "Buttons & Bows." We captioned the picture as being taken in 1952, however, it has been brought to our attention by Norma O'Leary that the picture was taken in either 1950 or 1951. Thank you Norma!

**THS Info:**

**President:** J. Iamartino  
**V. Pres.:** B. Rhodes  
**Treasurer:** S. Vincent  
**Secretary:** M. Snay  
**Curator:** J. Iamartino  
**Website:** B. Cole  
**Buildings:** G. Aubin