



The Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

www.thompsonhistorical.org

Fall 2004

Calendar of Events

Membership meetings / events:

Walking Weekend – Oct. 9, 2004, 9 AM

Scenic Shoreline Stroll – Take a 2.5 hour family walk around the West Thompson Lake and discover many natural and historical features. Sponsored by the US Army Corps of Engineers (also 9 AM – October 17, 2004)

Walking Weekend – Oct. 9, 2004, 10 AM

Join former THS President and educator Dave Babbitt on a visit to his hometown of N. Grosvendordale, an authentic mill village. Hear how people worked and played in those old textile days on this easy 2 hour walk. Meet at the Lions Bandstand – Rt. 12.

Membership Meeting – October 18, 2004

Showing of the movie about Eastern Connecticut "East of the River" from CT PBS. At Old Town Hall at 7 PM. Refreshments served.

Board of Directors Meetings – 7 PM ELM

- Monday, October 4, 2004
- Monday, November 15, 2004
- Monday, January 31, 2005
- Monday, March, 21, 2005
- Monday, April 18, 2005
- Monday, June 6, 2005

Membership Meeting – April 18, 2005 Monday

Two presentations: (a) A Presentation on Interesting Stories of Old Quinebaug with old Photos

(b) A Presentation on the History of the Phonograph by Society member Wayne Saravara.

Annual Meeting and Picnic – Monday

June 6, 2005, 6 PM – Greystone Farm, Rt. 21 (Home of Rob & Sue Vincent)

Museum Hours:

The Museum at the Ellen Larned Memorial Building (Rt. 193 – Thompson Common) is open the first Saturday of every month from 10 AM to 2 PM. Visit our exhibit on the last Thompson country doctor, Dr. Robert Paine and his family in the restored building.

Society Gift Shop Hours:

The Gift Shop will open the first Saturday of the months of September, October and November, from 10-2 PM.

Holiday Hours (10am to 4 pm):

Saturday / Sunday:

- November 20 & 21, 27 & 28
- December 4 & 5, 11 & 12, 18 & 19

Note: Friday (Men's Emergency Shopping Day) 12/24 (10-2 pm)

New items will include:

- The hand painted Mechanicsville school wood building
- The pictorial history of Thompson – Echoes of Old Thompson Book. 860 923 3776 for info. Book is available for sale at the Thompson Library & Town Clerk's office.

Membership Information

\$15.00 Family Membership

\$10.00 Individual Membership

\$25.00 Contributing Membership

\$5.00 Student Membership

Dues to be paid by July 1, 2004 for July 1, 2004 – June 30, 2005 year

- 1st reminder: Summer newsletter

- 2nd reminder: Fall newsletter

THS – PO Box 47, Thompson CT 06277

Inside this issue:

Calendar of Events, Museum Hours 1

Administrator's Corner 2

The President's Quill 2

Brandy Hill Meetinghouse 2

Russian Bear Tea Room 3

\$10000 Grant 4

Society News 4

Andy Mamedoff 5

Q & A 6

Officers / Contact Info:

President: Joe Iamartino

Vice President: Sue Vincent

Treasurer: Barbara Weaver

Secretary: John Lengel

Curator: Mark Savolis

Collections: Lynne Thibeault

Photos: Alice Biesiadecki

Museum Shop: Lucille Barrette, Helen Flood, Carol Holowa, Val Iamartino, Henrietta Panu, Jane Provost, June Schoppe, Sue Vincent, Sandra Warner

Website: Barbara Loy

Museum: Barbara Weaver;

Administrator: Blair Cole

Concert Chair: Jane Vercelli

Call us at 860 923 3200 or see www.thompsonhistorical.org

The President's Quill

With Blair Cole, our administrator, taking over many of the operational aspects of the Society, we are able to tackle those projects that we always wanted to do, but never had the time to finish. One such project is our growing collection of artifacts. We are dedicating this year to a full reorganization of the archives with significant progress expected this year.

Those who know me know that I try not to jump too deeply into controversial situations. Life is too short for many of the potential, but truly insignificant battles that are out there. Occasionally though, there are situations that merit attention. One such situation is that of the famous William A. Mason house overlooking the Thompson Common.

Mr. Mason was one of the founding brothers of the textile mill and associated mill village of Masonville, the original name of Grosvenordale. He was instrumental in the construction of the Congregational Church overlooking the Common and much of design of the Common itself. Mason's house, built in the 1840s, is similar in style to the famous Bowen House (known as the Pink House) in Woodstock. The location and design of the Mason house, like the Pink House, reflects the power and prestige the Mason family had in all of Thompson in the textile mill era. Unfortunately, in recent years, this magnificent building, part of the Nationally Registered Historic District, has been allowed to deteriorate by an absentee owner.

I have received dozens of complaints, from residents, Society members and visitors passing through, about the neglect of the house (and others homes too!). But this is America – people are free to do what they want, right? Well, it is obvious from the calls and letters that many people feel that what one owner is doing to a Thompson treasure is not right. The messages have been sent along to the owner.

**Administrator's Corner
- Blair Cole -**

While visitor traffic through the Museum and Old Town Hall slowed this summer, activity in the Administrator's Corner has been brisk! Thank you, Society Members and townsfolk alike, who have graciously volunteered their time and energy for the tasks that contribute to the operation of the Society. I have had the pleasure of getting to know many of you during your mornings volunteering as Docents at the ELM, at our meetings and events.

We have added Voice Mail to the main phone line at the Museum. The outgoing message contains information on museum and gift shop hours and information on our current exhibit, "Dr. Paine, Thompson's Country Doctor". The museum number to the ELM, also our Society's main number, is 860-923-3200. A new phone line has been installed in the Old Town Hall – 860-923-2054.

We recently embarked on this year's largest initiative, the building of the Collection database in our new software, PastPerfect. PastPerfect is approved by the American Association for State and Local History as "exemplary software for museums and historical societies". We conducted our first training session in July for the Past Perfect volunteer team. Mark Savolis and I are currently working out the procedures for transferring our existing handwritten collection records into the program.

We recently were awarded a grant for repairs to the Museum roof. Three contractors have assessed the building and we will be receiving estimates in the coming weeks.

As fall approaches, members are needed to help with the fall cleanup, gutter cleaning, re-painting & re-glazing the windows on the Old Town Hall as well as data entry in PastPerfect and the copying of our photo collection onto the computer hard drive. A list of fall activities will be posted on the website. If you are interested in volunteering for any of these specific tasks, please contact me at the ELM main number, or by email (bcole01@snet.net) or from the Volunteer page on our website.

– Thanks again.....Blair



The Russian Bear Tea Room – Perhaps one of the ladies shown is Andrew Mamedoff's mother? The photo has a hazy, out of focus shimmer, possibly photographic effect. See story on page 5.



Baptist Meeting House on Brandy Hill

Led by the indefatigable Norma O'Leary, Dave Berry and Gerry Beaupre, the Thompson Congregational Church together with the Thompson Historical Society are working on a possible plan to bring the Baptist Meeting House (on Brandy Hill) to a site facing the Thompson Common. The project is in its infancy and feasibility studies are just now being formalized. The Greek Revival era building is in need of serious restoration work within the next few years, a consideration prompting a rapid analysis and project decision. When looking at the Baptist Meeting House in the proposed site near the Old Town Hall, one can't help but be amazed at the design similarities between the buildings, especially in the construction of the bell towers and approximate size.



This lovely photo was found on Ebay – Card reads – Ethel Gates of North Grosvenor Dale, CT, aged 7. Died in the summer of 1906 shortly after this was taken. We encourage our members to help us watch & bid for items on Ebay concerning Thompson's villages and people.

Society News

Jane Johnson and Blair Cole have begun a project to 'film', with digital video equipment, residents from different Thompson villages speaking about their lives and experiences. Several filming sessions have been scheduled for August, September & October.

Work on Volume II of "Echoes of Old Thompson" is underway. Jean Cole is transcribing letters between friends Fannie Robbins, Eva Kelly and others from the 1890s. Section editor Judith Dunn is working on excerpts from Francis Fitzgibbons' reminisces of Quinebaug. Frank's natural writing style makes for interesting reading. Anyone interested in editing, transcribing or providing design/ layout services or illustrations for the project are asked to call 923-3776.

We welcome Jane Johnson and Lynne Thibeault to our Board of Directors. We thank outgoing directors Hattie Greene and Beth Greene for their many years of support and service to the Society. Their presence will be sorely missed by all of us.

An 1865 Thompson Bank \$1 note sold for \$27,600 at auction on January 9, 2004, reports Heritage Galleries & Auctioneers.

We thank Rob & Sue Vincent for hosting the annual meeting & picnic back in June. 65 people attended and we had perfect day.

Society Receives \$10,000 Grant from the 1772 Foundation

Last year, grant-writers Brenda Verdone and Sara Laughlin assisted the Society in the much needed grant-writing capacities. The 1772 Foundation responded this summer with a \$10,000 grant specifically targeting the completion of repairs to the unique tile roof at the Larned Building. We thank both our grant-writers for their donation of time and expertise and the generous folks at the 1772 Foundation for the grant.

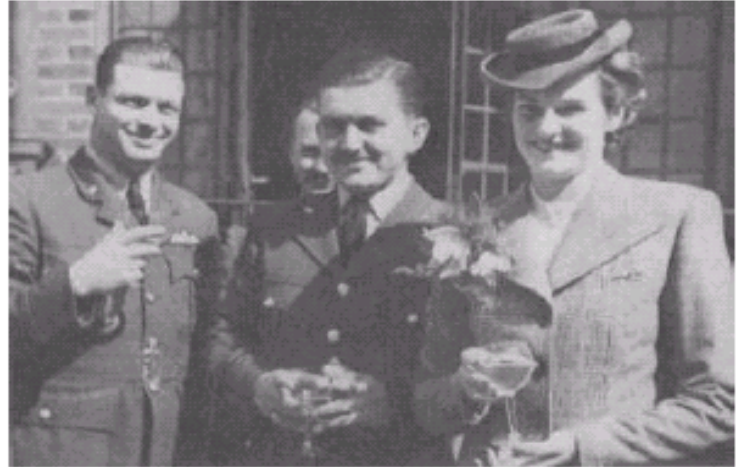
Andrew Mamedoff & WWII

In the summer of 1940 the Second World War had been under way for nearly a year. Hitler's Germany was triumphant. The US was neutral. It was a time, Winston Churchill later observed, when 'the British people held the fort alone till those who hitherto had been half blind were half ready.' Some Americans, however, did not remain neutral. The worst days of the Battle of Britain – from July 10 to September 15 – saw seven US pilots fighting side by side with England's. They included ex-barnstormers, a farm-boy and a millionaire playboy. 'The Few' is the never-before-told story of these Americans who fought to save Britain."

So begins Alex Kershaw's upcoming book about the seven pilots who volunteered to help Britain. One of the pilots was Thompson's own, Andy Mamedoff. There is however so much more to the Mamedoff story that it reads as if it were a Hollywood script. Kershaw mentions that it may indeed become a movie someday.

On Rt. 21, where Kononia Sports is today (across from the golf course) in the 1920s and 1930s lived Marion, the wealthy daughter of millionaire Norman B. Ream. Marion was married to "Count" Anastase Vonsiatsky, a White Russian who had fought the Communist Reds before 1920. According to researcher Charlie Seney, "Vonsiatsky's sister was married to a Mr. Mamedoff. The Mamedoffs moved into a house on Rt. 21 and opened a restaurant called the Russian Bear Tea House".

Author Kershaw reports that Andy may have been Jewish and was the son of Natalie. He was born in August 12, 1912, not in Thompson, though he was in Thompson in his high school years. He may have lived with his parents in London for a time. One resident remembers that he played on the local Thompson football team. Former Thompson resident, David Cassells recalls that "everyone knew how Andy drove his car – WILDLY! As I remember, he drove a 4 door FORD, soft-top open sedan, red, sporty – chrome grill etc.. He didn't stick to the roads – he often just drove off the road and thru the fields, particularly along the Lake Road and lake off Main Street in Webster, near the Cranston Print Works. Car had a spare-tire cover cit-



Best man Vic Bono, groom Andy Mamedoff and his bride Penny Craven, summer 1941.

ing "the New FORD – Auger-Reynolds, Thompson, CT). He used to run around with the Sherry Brothers (Bernard, David, John), Mike Conlon, Wade Chubbuck, Paul & Louis Auger, Jerry O'Brien". Charley Seney remembers that Mamedoff "came from money. Had good clothes, shoes, a nice, nice sporty car. He had a reputation as a playboy type, drove fast and risky."

According to Kershaw, he performed in air shows. At the outbreak of the war, he tried unsuccessfully to fight with the Finnish and French Air Forces. He broke American neutrality laws, was a stowaway to the UK where he was given an emergency commission in the Royal Air Force and sent to a Spitfire Squadron. With two other Americans, these men were the first from the USA to fight in the Battle of Britain.

Somewhere in this period, Andy became the husband of Alys "Penny" Craven of London, England. He died shortly thereafter on a mission in 1941.

The irony of this story is that during this same period, Mamedoff's uncle, Anatase Vonsiatsky, was being investigated and then arrested by the FBI for espionage. While some writers claimed that Vonsiatsky's activities were the work of a misguided, starry-eyed Russian "White" wasting his wife's money on dreams of defeating the Communist Reds, other writers, notably Ladislav Farago, in his book "The Game of the Foxes – the Untold Story of German Espionage in the US and Britain during WWII", claimed Vonsiatsky was far from innocent and was deeply involved in covert activities. The Mamedoff and Vonsiatsky stories are mysteries looking for a few good investigators.

Ask The Society

Q. How did Thompson Little League baseball start in town?

A. Ed Charlton, President of the Thompson League, sent me a League history written by Ray Faucher Jr. and Ray's father:

"The Thompson Little League was established in 1951 by a group of Thompson baseball enthusiasts led by lifelong resident Benny Baron. Through many raffles and fundraisers, the organizing committee was able to secure the funds necessary to form the League. 48 boys between the ages of 9-12 began playing.

During the early years, the Cluett-Peabody Co. allowed the newly formed Little Leaguers to play on their field in No. Grosvenordale. The League used this facility until 1955 when a devastating flood washed it away. Popularity of the League grew rapidly and 3 minor league teams were added in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It became painfully apparent to the early administrators that without fields of their own, the League would rapidly outgrow the facilities donated by local companies. Also during that time, the textile industry in N.E. CT was on the front end of a long and painful decline and money to maintain privately owned fields was becoming scarce. Three of the early organizers, Benny Baron, Bob Robbins and Skip Faucher persuaded the Town of Thompson to purchase 14 acres in the center of the town. The town then leased this land back to the Thompson Little League for 99 years, thus giving our league its first permanent home.

With the help of volunteers throughout the community, the Town of Thompson and the US Army Corps of Engineers, our first two new Little League fields were built on the site and dedicated to the children of Thompson. The growth of the League continued through the 1970s and 1980s with the addition of Tee-Ball and Lassie League. In 1996, the Thompson Little League raised the funds necessary to build one of the area's first Tee-Ball fields.

Since our start in 1951, our League has grown from 48 boys to over 350 children of all ages. Our League now includes Tee-Ball, Minor League, Little League, Junior League, Senior League and Little League Softball. We now run both spring and fall programs and spring Coaching and Baseball clinics, all on a voluntary basis. Many of our players have gone on to great college and professional careers with one of our finest still coaching for the New York Mets."

Q. Were there Quakers in Thompson?

A. The Quaker faith originated with George Fox in England in 1643. An unconventional faith, adherents were heavily persecuted, both in England and in certain sections of the Colonies. Certainly Massachusetts and most of Connecticut did not welcome Quakers, but Rhode Island did. Because Thompson was close to the Rhode Island line and was closely connected to the religiously more open-minded people from Providence, Thompson did have Quakers. The 1819 Gazetteer of the States of Connecticut & Rhode Island by Pease & Niles says about Thompson: *"Its civil divisions are one located Religious Society (Ed. Note – this means the Congregational Church) and 14 school districts. Besides the located (Cong. Church society), there are three religious societies, one of Baptists, one of Methodists and one of Quakers. There are three houses of religious worship....."*

Because Providence's influential Wilkinson family (Slater's in-laws) were Quakers and they sent Smith Wilkinson to set up a mill in modern day Putnam, it is logical to assume that a Quaker Meeting house existed. Wilkinson probably had a Quaker meeting house in the Putnam area that was then partly in Thompson. Does anyone know?

Q. Why did the Bellerose Family have to leave North Grosvenordale circa 1898?

A. Medrick Seney told son Charlie that the Bellerose Family lived in an apartment in Three Rows in No. Grosvenordale before 1898. After the birth of a child, the family held a Sunday christening at a farm off Pompeo Road, and a keg of beer was procured for the occasion. A Grosvenor-Dale Co. 'spy' reported the presence of beer at the Sunday party to mill agent Frank Messenger and he gave the Joe Bellerose Family one week to pack their things and leave their apartment. The family went to Woonsocket and later Chartley, MA.