



The Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

www.thompsonhistorical.org

December 2006

Calendar of Events

**The History of the Thompson Speedway
Tuesday, March 20, 2007 —Thompson
Library Community Center —7 PM**

The Thompson Historical Society & the Aspinock Historical Society of Putnam are pleased to announce a presentation on the Speedway history, presented by D.R. Hoenig. Photos from the Hoenig collection and from the THS photo archives will be projected during the talk. Following the presentation, there will be a question and answer session about the past, present and future of the Speedway. We look forward to seeing you all for this rare event.

**The Thompson Museum Reopens for
the Season— Saturday May 5, 2007,
10 AM—2 PM**

Our current exhibit features information on the Ten Villages of Thompson and the family heirlooms and clothing from the Ballard-Chase-Dalton Family on Chase Road. Please stop in!

Our museum & gift shop will be open the following dates from 10 AM to 2 PM:

- May 5, 2007
- June 2, 2007
- July 7, 2007
- August 4, 2007
- September 1, 2007
- October 6, 2007
- November 3, 2007

Our Gift Shop holiday schedule to be announced.

**Tour of Old Thompson—for 2nd
Graders - Mary R. Fisher Elemen-
tary School, Wed. May 30, 2007
(Rain date—June 5, 2007)**

Our bus tour begins at the river & mill in No. Grosvenordale, continues to the West Thompson Dam, the Thompson Common, Fort Hill & Greystone Farm. The students will learn about writing with quill pens, cooking in an old fireplace, spinning wool, weaving cloth, churning butter, and lugging water in a bucket brigade to put out a fire. Great fun will be had by all.

**Board of Director Meetings
(Community Center, 7 pm)**

2007: Jan. 29, Mar.5, April 23, May 29

Annual Meeting—June 18, 2007 at Greystone Farm, Rt. 21—the home of Rob & Sue Vincent. Potluck dinner starts at 6 PM. Our annual meeting begins at 7 PM. We appreciate the Vincent's hospitality and generosity. It is a special treat to have our Society's annual meeting in the restored Ramsdell barn.

Membership Information

July 1, 2006—June 30, 2007 year

Membership dues are:

- \$10.00 Individual Membership
- \$15.00 Family Membership
- \$25.00 Contributing Membership
- \$5.00 Student Membership (to age 18)
- \$5.00 Gift Membership

Dues to be paid by July 1, 2006. Send to:
THS, PO Box 47, Thompson, CT 06277

Inside this issue:

Calendar of Events, Membership Info 1

The President's Quill, Society Notes 2

Mystery, Larned & the Red Sky Forecast 2

Mamedoff, 1772 Foundation, Farms 3

Windmill in Barn 4

Windmill in Barn 5

Jerry's Swamp, Line House 6

Paul Dudley legal fight, Auditorium 7

Trolley House 8

Officers / Contact Info

President: Joe Iamartino 860-923-3776
Vice President: Sue Vincent
Treasurer: Lynne Lengel
Secretary: Ruth Barks
Curator: Mark Savolis
Photos: Alice Biesiadecki
Museum Shop: Lucille Barrette, Helen Flood, Carol Holewa, Val Iamartino, Henrietta Panu, Jane Provost, June Schoppe, Sue Vincent, Sandra Warner
Website: Blair Cole
Society Administrator: Blair Cole
Newsletter / Publications Reviewer/School Liason: Jane Johnson

www.thompsonhistorical.org
or call us at 860-923-3200



The President's Quill by Joe Iamartino

When I sat down to write this column, I glanced at the 'things-to-get-to' notes which are stacked next to the file containing the 'promised-to-get-done-tomorrow' actions which are all secondary to the 'honey-do' lists. Uh-oh.

Then, my seven year old, Alex, popped his head in my office and blasted, "Dad, Mom says you have to fix the video camera NOW for the birthday party! Needs a new tape." My daughter.... "I need \$10 for the dance, and uh....can I have a ride?" My older son smiled that smile all children use when they want something: "Dad, they're releasing the video game BF2 tomorrow". Sigh.

I do my best to sort through the demands on my time, doing what has to be done now, but eventually getting to most everything. A few slip through the proverbial crack.

With the semi-controlled chaos of today's home life combined with the 'change is constant' business world, isn't there enough action? Why would anyone need more to do? Yet, there are many who squeeze more into their day. Some find the time for music—attending concerts, singing in recitals. Others find participating in the functions of government both necessary and rewarding. Many relax with sports, watching UCONN basketball games, NASCAR racing, football or baseball. How about those who make time to visit old friends or prepare a meal for a sick neighbor? Quiet pursuits—woodworking, birding, hiking—occupy some people while others prefer riding their Harley's, skiing or extreme biking. With so many ways we have to fill our days, we can but admire human creativity.

It was simpler in the old days. When it took half a day to go to Putnam which included the time to saddle the horse and put on the oat bag, it didn't leave much free time if one had many farm chores. At night, with no oil-generated heat or electric lights, it was too darn cold and dark in winter for many late night events. Trudging through the snow and ice for a couple of cold miles would make anyone be-

lieve a winter wonderland was on another planet. Going to fetch the doctor in the horse and sleigh was not what Jingle Bells was all about. Making bread from scratch every few days was tedious work. Taking a bath was an ordeal. One had to haul the water in from the well by the bucket, heat the water on the wood-fired cook stove before pouring it in the wood or metal tub in the open kitchen. For earlier families, a kettle hung over the open fire was used to heat the water. They used the same water to bathe the children, girls first, from youngest to oldest. Hours would be consumed. It wasn't all hard and there were moments of fun too, but few would argue that we have more free time now.

My grandmother (now 92) grew up with no electricity at home. She remembers doing homework by the oil lamp. Her dad felt the new 'tractor' would destroy his soil so he resisted buying one. How excited she was to see her first airplane! Even more important to her was the luxury of a few hours in a store in town on Saturday night once every 3 to 4 months. To buy a single store-bought dress was heaven come true *for her whole year*.

Christmas to her meant she would get an orange and penny candy most years. Imagine! Let's remember the best gift our ancestors have given us—those inventions that give us OUR FREE TIME today! More time for parties, dances, shopping or to-do lists!!

Society Notes:

1) Echoes of Old Thompson, Volume II—We are running late on the delivery of the books. We expect delivery in March 2007. Sorry for the 304 pages of delays.

2) A special thanks goes out to Mary Ellen Tomeo, Sue Vincent and Marlys Elliott for their fine work on the Museum exhibit. Mary Ellen offered her collection of family clothing and heirlooms from 5 generations of the Chase-Ballard-Dalton-Eddy family from Chase Road. The opening on Walking Weekend was very well attended and attracted coverage by the Thompson Villager newspaper. After running for several weekends through the fall, the Museum is closed for the winter but will reopen in May 2007.

3) The Aspinock Historical Society & Margaret Weaver have released an updated "Perspectives of Putnam" book, covering the years 1693 to 2005. To order, call Fab Cutler 860-928-2127 or Fred Hedenberg 928-5312.

Museum Shop & Volunteers:

Our wonderful museum shop contributes so much to our Society, not only in generating much needed cash, but also as an outlet to our community for historical mementos, good cheer and tasteful holiday gifts. The holiday shop is known throughout northeastern Connecticut for its wares.

There are countless hours of preparation by our talented volunteers: Sue Vincent, Henrietta Panu, June Schoppe, Jane Provost, Carol Holewa, Kiku Andersen, Valentine Iamartino, Bernie Davis (woodworking), Lucille Barrette & Family (wood buildings, wood donation), and Ken Goloski (donated woodworking skills).

Shop volunteers include:

Jean Auger, Ann Abry, Alice Archambault, Peg Babbitt, Kiku Andersen, Georgia Ballard, Lucille Barrette, Ruth Barks, Wendy Barske, Alice Bastek, Estelle Bourgois, Violet Bourdeau, Carmen Charbonneau, Karen Charbonneau, Pat Cheever, Joan DaVia, Marilyn Dustin, Judy Eichner, Mary Fatsi, Clarice Guillot, Barbara Goloski, Kathy Hiatt, Claudette Hoffman, Carol Holewa, Shirley Houghton, Shirley Houle, Mary Kinne, Christine Kennedy, Grace Landry, Donna Lange, Betty LeClair, Gail Leveille, Sue Leveille, Barbara Loy, Vicki Martin, Virginia Mainville, Linda Montfort, Sharon O'Brien, Brenda Olson, Ida Ransom, Mercedes Robbins, Bernadette Quercia, Ramona Savolis, Ada Temple, Gwyneth Tillen, Betty Vriga, Donna Williams and Aileen Witkowski. Helen Flood does a wonderful job coordinating the shop volunteers.

Our Museum Shop shines because of our volunteers and their creativity. We thank you all! Thanks also to our Directors and to Blair Cole, our Society Administrator.



Q. Is this poetic line for real? *A red hue at dawn means there comes a storm.* (It must rhyme to make any sense. Pronounce 'storm' as if you were born around Down East Maine or Boston).....

A. Besides being an historian, Ellen Larned kept detailed weather records for over 60 years. As you can see from this Hartford Courant article, she was a keen observer of nature. She wrote regularly for many newspapers on various topics. One popular series for the Courant was her historical comments on the weather.

MISS LARNED'S OBSERVATIONS.

**Experiences of an Amateur Weather
Prophet, 1832-1901.
III.**

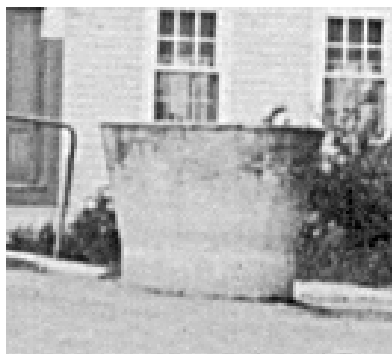
The red glare in the morning sky has given prophetic warning for many generations, while the contrary significance of sunset redness has left its message of hope and cheer. It comes to us as vividly as to the listening Jews in Palestine nearly two thousand years ago: "When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather today for the sky is red, and in the morning it will be foul weather for the sky is red and lowering." That heavy scowling cloud-pack "curtaining it from pole to pole" makes the background for the lurid warning, and the "red dawn" promptly brings "as rain." The luminous radiance of the evening sky prophetic of fair weather is frequently noted by total absence of cloud. A mixture of gray and red at sunset is an unfavorable complication.

The contrasted significance of yellow coloring in morning and evening sky is equally noteworthy. A predominance of yellow at sunrise is one of the surest indications of a fair day, but a yellow sunset is not propitious. Even the familiar sign that a clear sunset is a sure precursor of a fair tomorrow is often falsified even when the sky is perfectly clear if its pervading tone is yellow. Those balmy days known as "weather breeders" are often characterized by this mellow yellow caused, it is said, by vaporous infusions. Pale-green, whity-gray and other abnormal shades of color are vaporous and ominous. Deep shades of yellow and purple precede and accompany high wind. An angry copper gleaming through black clouds betokens hail.

Working the Land, a new documentary now available on DVD from SimonPure Productions, tells the compelling story of Connecticut state agriculture – from its earliest history to its present-day diversity. Where once nearly everyone in Connecticut lived on or next to a farm, today hardly anyone does. In 1944, there were 22,000 farms in the state. Today, there are 4,200.

The relentless and poorly coordinated development of Connecticut's rural and suburban areas has led to a startling loss of state farmland. In recent years, Connecticut lost the highest percentage of its farmland to development than any other state, a trend that is accelerating. Yet, despite these discouraging circumstances, agriculture is still a significant part of the state economy, generating about \$2 billion annually with about 50,000 people working in the sector. In recent years, innovative firms have found different ways to counter the trends as the documentary shows.

The Thompson Historical Society is one of many Connecticut historical groups that assisted Ken Simon, a 3-time Emmy Award-winning producer from East Haddam, Connecticut, in the making of this documentary. The show will be broadcast Spring 2007 on CPTV.



Mystery: What happened to the big stone water trough that stood in the center of North Grosvenordale?

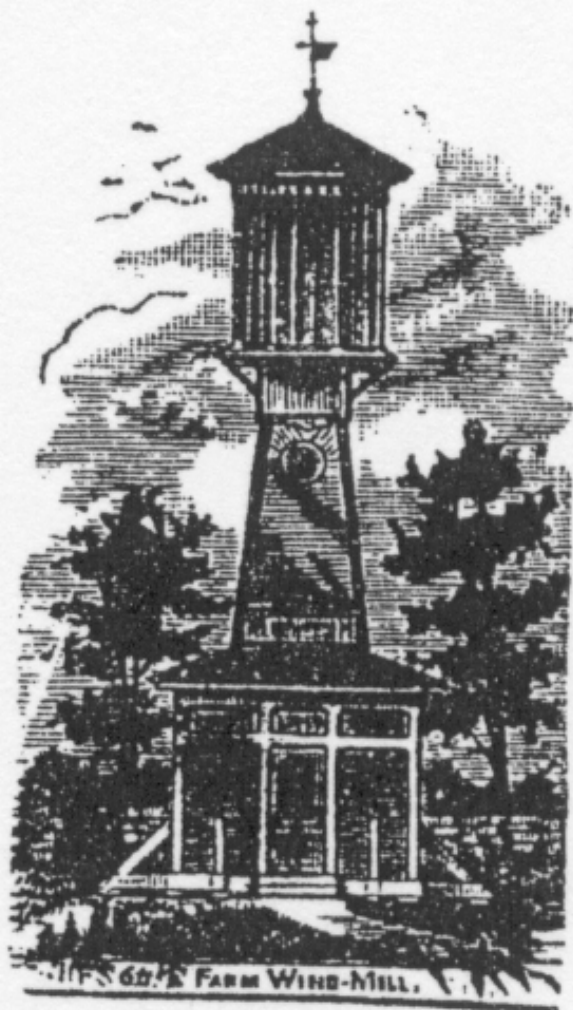
One town annual report asks permission to have it removed (in the late 1930s or early 1940s.....).

Larry Houle Jr. heard a rumor that it was smashed and buried in a field near Seastrand Road. Ideas???

Mystery photos from last newsletter. Despite notes from several readers, no one could identify any of the old homes. The search goes on.....

1772 Foundation: I recently received the 1772 Foundation's annual report. This foundation has generously supported us not only this year but in the past with grant money for repairs to the two Society buildings. I found a wonderful photo of our Old Town Hall taking center stage on page 3 of the report, the first page of many describing 50+ projects they funded in 2006. Over \$2 million in restoration funds were distributed by the group in 14 states. The foundation was started over 20 years ago by Stewart Kean of NJ, who carried on his mother's love of historic preservation. I am very grateful for the support of this wonderful foundation. For more information, visit www.1772foundation.org.

Mamedoff: Alex Kershaw has released his book 'The Few' about a handful of American World War II pilots who violated neutrality laws to fight alongside the British. The book describes the exploits of each of the heroes. One of the pilots was Andy Mamedoff, son of the proprietors of the Russian Bear Tea House on Rt. 21 in Thompson. Mrs. Mamedoff was the sister of "Count" Anastase Vonsiatsky who lived nearby. The Count lived with his wife, Marion Ream, an heir to the Ream fortune, in what is today the Koinonia Sports Center. Years ago, the Society and a few Thompson elders helped Mr. Kershaw by providing memories of Mamedoff when he was a student in town. Rumors are circulating that a major studio has bought movie rights!



HERCULES WIND ENGINE.

"New Departure" in Wind Motors — Turbine Wheel — Upright Shaft — Direct Action — Powerful Movement — Automatic Bell Governor — Runs in a Zephyr — Effective in a Strong Gale. Power for ordinary pumping or for driving heavy machinery. Erected on Towers or built in Cupolas. Ornamental in design and a perfect ventilator. Agents wanted. Send for catalogue. Address,

**HERCULES
WIND ENGINE CO.,**
17 Moore St.,
NEW YORK.

After reading the last newsletter, Doug Williams passed me a copy of this Hercules Wind Engine advertisement for a tower / cupola wind turbine from "The Compleat Farmer". This image answered a question I had about the cupola designs of certain barns in Thompson. There were a number of barns built c1890s that had a large cupola design. The blades in the cupola fascinated me but I could not understand their purpose. It had never occurred to me that these cupola blades were a part of a wind turbine!

The advertisement above is from a wind-power excerpt written many years ago. It reads: "The cheapest motive power in existence is the force of the wind. It can be utilized without preparation; no reservoirs, dams or flumes are needed to apply it to our machinery, and the proper engine alone is to be provided. In some countries wind power is extensively used. The traveler in Europe scarcely loses sight of a windmill in his journeys, and in places the landscape is thickly dotted with them. Substantial grist mills, which have faced the breezes for centuries, still wave their arms and promise to do so for centuries more. Much pumping and drawing is done by these mills, and thousands of acres are either watered by irrigation or dried by drainage, and rendered valuable and productive by their help.

A few years ago a wind mill was an unusual sight in this country, except in the very oldest portions. We were not a sufficiently settled people, and did not remain long enough in one place to make it profitable to build such substantial mills as have been so long in use in other countries; we needed cheaper and more quickly constructed mills. Those which we could then procure, were not satisfactory, they were slightly built, and were not able to take care of themselves when the breeze became a gale or hurricane. Recently our mechanics have turned their attention to wind engines, and great improvements have been made in their construction. We have now a choice of several different kinds of them, all of them useful, but differing chiefly in their degree of adaptation to varying circumstances. At the recently Illinois State Fair there were no less than 13 different wind engines on exhibition, from the small one, 8 feet in diameter, costing but \$100, of half a horsepower, up to those of 30 or 40 horsepower, costing \$3,000 and able to run a grist mill or a woolen factory. Between these extremes there are a number of mills capable of adaptation to almost every purpose for which power is needed on the farm or in the workshop. A mill 22 feet in diameter, costing about \$500, has a power of five horses; a two horsepower mill is about 16 feet in diameter." By the 1930s, the windmills were gone, killed by cheap oil and the newfangled electricity.



The rear of the Williams' barn as viewed from the fence on the Marianapolis School property. A close-up of the vanes on the windmill-cupola is shown at right. Doug tells of a strong iron bar that was inserted through a drilled hole through the turret to keep the vanes from rotating. Thanks for the info Doug!

The barn (now gone) shown below on the estate of John Doane, on Rt. 21, had an oversized cupola. We can now recognize it as a windmill as the pitched cupola vanes are visible. The water tower nearby should have given us a clue.





Q. How did Jerry's Swamp (located in East Thompson) get its name?

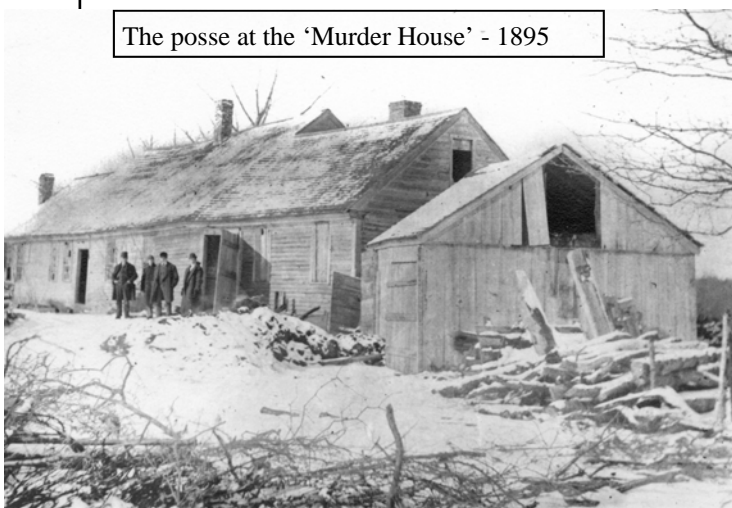
A. This answer is drawn primarily from a Feb. 3, 1982 article in the Worcester Evening Gazette and from a small notebook kept by George Beck of Quinebaug.

According to the article, based on information from Alice Kleindienst, Jerry's Swamp used to be called Joslin's Meadows before the 1900s. It was not uncommon then for a wet, swampy area to be called a meadow because of the tall lush grass that grew there. Farmers wanted that special grass because it made excellent hay for the animals. Deacon John Joslin and wife Sophie owned and possibly built the house that stood at the swamp's edge.

In the winter of 1895, Jerry Staskowicz, his wife Rosa, and Rosa's 7 year old son were living in the old Joslin house when Rosa and the boy mysteriously disappeared. Someone soon reported them missing and a Thompson posse went to visit Jerry in that remote area of Thompson. According to Jerry, his wife had gone to Poland with her son, telling no one of her plans. Investigators reported blood stains found on the walls, floor, and drips of blood in the basement. There was human blood on a flat iron. Jerry was arrested and spent about a year in jail, but lacking bodies and reliable evidence, the state was unable to convict him. He was released and went home, but gradually the so-called "Murder House" fell to pieces around Jerry, as did his life. His last years were spent in a Webster poor house. He died about 1937.

One woman at the time of the disappearance reported seeing a horse-drawn sleigh coming over Webster Lake, then covered in heavy snow. The sleigh was coming from the general direction of the Murder House. Mrs. Kirby, the observer of the sleigh, wondered why anyone would have been out in such weather. Many years later, a skeleton, believed to be that of the dead woman, was found near Webster's Memorial Beach, but it was never proven. The case remains unsolved to this day.

The posse at the 'Murder House' - 1895



Ask The Society

Q. What is the story of the Line House?

A. This question comes from Jim Morrison, the noted Webster—Dudley—Oxford historian. The Line House was a tavern located across from the state marker where Line House Road in Thompson (hence the name) meets New Boston Road in Dudley, MA. According to former owner Martin Witkowski, the property sat half in CT and half in MA. The actual tavern was in Dudley, but there was a separate dancing pavilion in the back of the tavern located in Thompson. The story goes that drinkers could move from the tavern to the pavilion to get around the state drinking hours. The tavern closed around 1990. The building was then converted into apartments. Martin reported that the converted tavern building standing today was built in the early 1900s, replacing a much older tavern. The pavilion, built in the late 1930s or early 1940s, featured fresh steamers and catered to a dancing crowd. The pavilion closed in the early 1960s. Some folks insist the tavern had a moveable bar too, used to avoid state authorities. Charlie Seney reports, *"that my father's relatives from the maternal side owned this house during prohibition and illegally sold booze. It was a convenient location because they could escape a raid by Mass police by transporting the goods into Conn. When Conn. Police attempted a raid, the reverse procedure was executed. Sounds like Keystone Cops to me!"* A photo of the building as it looks today is shown below. We have no old photos of this tavern. Please check those shoeboxes folks...



Q. I've been told that every Indian name has a meaning. What is the meaning of the word, Quinebaug?

A. Long Water.

Q. What was Signe Hagstrom of Thompson noted for?

A. Following her retirement from full-time teaching, Signe returned to the Thompson classroom in the newly-created role of teacher's aide. As the story goes, she was the first official teacher's aide in Connecticut.



Q. What is the Paul Dudley / Quinebaug Controversy?

A. Firstly, this topic should not be connected to the various locales that have attempted to use the name of Quinebaug in the past. For example, in the years prior to breaking away from Thompson in 1855, modern-day 'Putnam' once tried to call itself 'Quinebaug'. In earlier times, an area below Danielson was also called Quinebaug for awhile too.

The Paul Dudley controversy relates to a famous 1822 U.S. Federal Supreme Court case that pitted the nation's two most powerful lawyers against each other—Daniel Webster versus William Pinkney. Pinkney's rhetoric was unparalleled—he would rehearse his speeches for days in advance and continuously refine them. Upon delivery, his logic and bombast awed the court and all listeners. Daniel Webster, powerful and clear, was superb but, against Pinkney, he had more than met his match. The complex legal case involved Dudley's attempt to regain old family land in the modern Quinebaug, Fabyan, Dudley and Webster areas (see *Echoes of Old Thompson* Volume 1, page 25 for a map showing the original Dudley land.). The Dudley land, a colonial grant 'obtained' from the Nipmucs, contained the Gov. Morris / Holbrook mansion which was situated in what is now Fabyan. This Fabyan property and others were supposedly included in the epic battle. The Morris mansion is a story unto itself but it will have to wait for another day.

The great Pinkney was once the attorney general of the United States. President Thomas Jefferson chose him to be Ambassador to Great Britain. In private practice, Pinkney took the great cases and put his heart and soul into them. In this Quinebaug case, Pinkney literally worked himself to death. He died immediately after delivering his two-day long speech before the Supreme Court.

In 1832, the town of Webster was incorporated. The committee for incorporation wanted to name the town for Samuel Slater, the great textile industrialist, but Slater insisted on naming the town for Daniel Webster. While it is true that Daniel Webster worked on cases and laws that supported the New England mill owners (which included Slater), there is a distant possibility that the Dudley land controversy played some role in the decision to name the town 'Webster.' I invite opinions pro & con on this statement.



Q. The Town of Thompson is building a new auditorium in the school expansion project. I thought we already had an auditorium in TMHS? What happened to it?

A. Back in 1909, TMHS had a performing arts auditorium on the upper floor, complete with stage, theatre lighting, Steinway piano, draped curtains, and both floor and balcony velvet-covered, cushioned theatre seats as good as any on Broadway. A memorable event was the annual show by the grammar school students from all over Thompson. The students of the little district schools would meet at last for the grand show in the auditorium. Today, the auditorium is used as a chorus classroom. The velvet-covered seats are no longer present. The photo above is the cast of the grammar school operetta, "Cinderella in Flowerland", directed by Miss Marguerite C. Burns, performed May 25 & 27, 1926. I'm looking forward to some interesting shows in the new auditorium!

Quarterly Newsletter

The Thompson Historical Society
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Q. What year did the trolley stop running? Where was the trolley stand in North Grosvenordale?
What happened to the trolley cars?

A. The trolley stopped running about 1925. It was killed by the combination of Henry Ford's cheap cars and mismanagement by the railroad-minded owners of the time.

The trolley stand in North Grosvenordale stood near the curve of Route 12 today, near the foot of Rawson Avenue. We are looking for photos of the old trolley stand.

I don't know what happened to all of the trolley cars but, thanks to info supplied by Ken Goloski, we now know that one of the trolley cars is currently a house located at #430 Riverside Drive (Rt. 12)! Ken Goloski used to repair furnaces for a living. During one service call to the house, around 1985, the owner of the home at that time, Mr. Bates, told Ken that the house was one of the old trolley cars. Standing in the basement and looking up, Ken could see the frame. The bell that used to hang down between the wheels was still in place. Ken kept the secret for many years but decided to reveal it to our readers for this edition of the newsletter. Anyone with information is invited to call Ken at 923-3101. A photo of the 'trolley house' is below.

