

Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

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June 2011

2011-2012 Board of Directors Meetings will be held at the Thompson Library, Community Room 3, 7 pm:

September 28, 2011

November 30, 2011

January 25, 2012

February 29, 2012

April 25, 2012

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Society News

Alice Biesiadecki has passed the reigns on of the photo curatorship to Mark Snay. The Society thanks Alice for her many years of unsung service caring for our photo, slide, and negative collection. Her organizational skill and sharp eye, combined with her careful handling of such irreplaceable material, gives the Society today a rich base of well-documented material in our archives. *Thank you Alice!*



The THS presents Mr. John Proctor and a **Civil War Story of Soldier Brown from Thompson CT** on **November 17, 2011, 7 pm**, Community Room 2 at the Thompson Library.

Mr. Proctor's presentation will be about his ancestor, Private Henry Brown, who was from East Thompson. Private Brown fought in many battles during the Civil War and died of infection in a PA hospital in 1864. His family preserved many letters from PVT Brown which will be part of the presentation.

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's newsletter.

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.

Society Contact Information

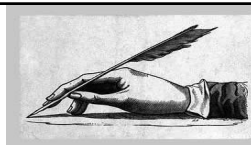
President:	Joe Iamartino
Vice President:	Burton Rhodes
Treasurer:	Susan Vincent
Secretary:	Mark Snay
Curator:	Joe Iamartino
Photos:	Mark Snay
Website:	Blair Cole
Newsletter:	JoAnn Thorstenson
Museum Shop:	Lucille Barrette, Helen Flood, Henrietta Panu, Kiku Andersen, June Schoppe, Sue Vincent, Lisa Reinholdsten

Please direct any questions/comments to Joe Iamartino at 860.923.3776 or jiamartino@charter.com.

The Thompson Historical Society would like to offer its sympathies to the families of Mr. Wally Brodeur and Mr. Frank Fitzgibbons. Both were newsletter contributors and valued members of the Society and will be missed.

President's Quill

Joe Samartino



I think it was Bil Keane (*The Family Circus*) who wrote "Yesterday is the past, tomorrow is the future, but today is a gift so that is why it is called the present." I feel that way all of the time. I really do!

One can wring one's hands about the slow economy, lack of work, the rain (or snow if we want to go back that far). The price of oil, food, electricity is high now, taxes continue to climb, our national debt is creeping higher, Europe has numerous countries in trouble, and China has a combination of flooding, drought and disgruntled workers jumping from buildings. Fires in the west, floods to the north, west and south of us, tornadoes struck down the street, and real earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, hurricanes, wars, terrorists, and bad politicians all compete against Hollywood-made disasters for our attention. Scam artists and the unworthy siphoning tax money from those who truly need the help. Drugs and disease too! Next it will be the locusts and the plague. If we watch television, this is the way things are portrayed, much bad and little good.

It is our fate that with the gift of life we must deal with adversity. Some trouble can be prevented. 'Don't drink and drive.' 'Do your homework so you can get a good job.' 'Liar liar, pants on fire.' Wiser folks try to hammer home certain maxims to help the young avoid the bigger potholes in life. Despite all best intentions, we will face adversity. Some turn to religion to calm and direct our minds to positive thoughts, others philosophy, and still others try to distract themselves any way they can. History is filled with the resulting stories.

For myself, I realize how lucky I am to be living in America and especially Thompson. I see our community pulling together in various ways to make the new TEEG building a reality. I see our town and government leaders doing their best to steer us through difficult times, making the tough decisions. Our volunteer fire companies represent the true spirit of service. The many unsung volunteers in so many organizations that bring good and positive things to our lives. Folks, this doesn't mean that there aren't things to fix or sadness in our lives but c'mon.....living in America at this time in history is the same as winning the Powerball lottery! Despite the daily challenges, for my time on this earth, I will gladly take this time and place, this 'present', here in Thompson, USA.

Newsworthy

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

Feb 1891 - Thompson

Something a little burglarious occurred here Sunday night Feb 1. A young man by the name of Whitfield, who was in the employ of Landlord Chapin a short time last summer, found his way into Thompson depot, getting a few dollars in pennies and then tried his hand at Cundall's store here, but without success. Finally he was captured in one of the buildings of the hotel, and will probably lead a somewhat different life for a few years at least.

11 Feb 1891 - Thompson

The Whitfield Boy

He Kept Police Officials Busy—His Shocking Death

John Whitfield, the State Reform school boy, and account of whose death was published last Friday, was originally farmed out from a Boston orphanage to a family up in Thompson, in this county. He there distinguished himself by being concerned in four burglaries, his last criminal act being the robbery of the railroad ticket office at Thompson. For this he was committed to the Reform school.

Whitfield arrived at the institution Monday afternoon, the 29th inst. Tuesday he complained of being unwell, and at supper time said he preferred to remain in the pleasant play-room rather than go to supper, as he was not hungry. His request was granted, and he was locked in and left there alone.

Then he tore a board from the top of a long table in the room, forced the door, made his way into the yard in the rear and by the help of the board scaled the wall and made his escape. He was arrested on Wednesday in Putnam. Constable Warren and Whitfield were on a down train Thursday morning and on their way to the Reform school, and when not far from Newington, the boy asked to be allowed to go into the toilet room. Permission was granted and the constable went to the door with him. The next he saw was Whitfield's feet going through the window; the lad had evidently thrown himself headmost from the train. The constable lost not a moment, but ran out to the platform and jumped off himself. He escaped injury. The boy's skull was fractured by the plunge.

Sharing Recent Correspondence

March 2011 newsletter's pictures of the Town Jail and John Elliot's General Store generated some member correspondence. David Cassells of Hawthorne, NJ wrote:

"In your last newsletter, March 2011, page 7, there is a great picture of the Elliott Store. We lived three doors away toward the village center "downtown" across from the huge mill chimney, 210' tall. We were more familiar with the building because it housed a "First National Store" on the near corner and the town courtroom, with the jail a part of the court-room, on the far back side. The jail was barred, equipped with a filthy bed and a slop pail - no running water, no real shelter from courtroom proceedings. The jail and the courtroom were at the far end, with the entrance door located around the corner and at the rear far corner.

Most cases held were to due to drunkenness, motor vehicles, and cases brought by the Danielson State Police. Cases were tried before Judge Percy Tourtelotte and judged by Grand-Juror Parker (the same person that was trapped by his collapsing barn, 1938 hurricane, pinned by the ceiling of the upper floor - also the same person whose ear was severed by his horse - (he) lived in Fabyan). State cases were brought by Officers Scranton, Martin, Heckler - all drove Model-A black coupes or beautiful Henderson motorcycles. I covered the stories because I was the correspondent for the Worcester Gazette. The "First National Store" was, at first, managed by Ernest Prince (lived down by the Salle Union Theatre) and, later, by Earnest Grenier. It was a well-run establishment and I believe operated between the middle 30s to the mid 50s.

Paula Watson Elliott of Gainesville, GA wrote:

"I was particularly interested in the photo and question about the Thompson Jail. It was noted that the jail was in Elliott's General Store, my husband recognized the building as the one he remembers as the Quinn Shirt Shop. There was indeed a jail in Thompson, right

on Thompson Hill. It was located in the lower floor of the former Hannah Bates house, which was between the Frank Dexter and the Jim Kelly house (the Kelly house is located across from the Chandler house).

My in-laws, Jim and Hollace Elliott, lived upstairs above the jail after they were married. My mother-in-law was always afraid that an escaped prisoner would come back some night and kill her in her bed! In about 1928 my in-laws moved to Chase Road across from the old Grammar School and what is now the Masonic Hall.

My father-in-law was the Thompson Hill Fire Chief for over 25 years. He also drove Dr. Paine on house calls in the area, and I am privileged to have the sleigh bells that were used on the horse and sleigh during the winter months. My husband graduated from TMHS in 1953, and I followed in 1955. My father, George Watson, was Treasurer of the Village Improvement Society in 1962 and my mother, Pauline Watson, was Librarian at the Thompson Library (now Ellen Larned Museum) and at Marianapolis for many years."

Our December 2010 newsletter featured a photo Christmas card. We received a lovely note from Mary Ellen (Dalton) Tomeo of Pomfret Center, with a bit of familial history regarding the house in the photo:

"My grandmother Elizabeth (Bessie) Reynolds sent one to us (we were living in NJ at the time) with a note on the back dated Dec. 17, 1950. She wrote 'here's how it looked several years ago.' At that time (in the 1940s) it was occupied by Mary Ellen Chase, her sister Martha (Chase) Eddy, Bessie (Martha's daughter) and her husband Allen Reynolds.

My mother, Ellen Dalton, was the daughter of Bessie and Allen. I spent many a happy Christmas at this location as a child with my grandparents, great-grandmother, and great-aunt."

The Brass Ball Tavern

Scott Berglund of Ellicott City, MD, sent the THS an email with information on the Brass Ball Tavern:

I recently visited my uncle, a native of Boston now living in Georgia. As he knows I enjoy researching history and as he does not use computers he asked me to research some antiques he has collected over the years.

One of these is a sign board. His notes indicated it was from the Brass Ball Tavern, located on the Boston to Hartford turnpike in East Thompson, Conn. The rates are supposed to be shillings. (JI Note: This needs to be verified.)

Using this information I found your society and in particular your Summer 2001 newsletter with some history of a Brass Ball tavern. I have attached some pictures (see pg. 5). I am not an antique expert at all. I can tell you it seemed to be one large board with a grain as though it was weathered. The frame might be newer. The letters were actually a little raised as though paint had protected them from the elements. I didn't measure it but would estimate about 4 feet high. (Editor's Note: This is why we post our newsletters on the web—to be found by researchers!)

Webster Times Article

The Demise of the Brass Ball Inn
12/28/1883

The "Brass Ball Tavern," which was burned at Thompson, a few weeks since was supposed to be the oldest house in Windham county. It was built in 1710, and was a famous station on the Boston and Hartford turnpike stage route "many years ago."

THE WALLUM POND ESTATES

69

The Brass Ball.

About three-quarters of a mile southwest of the Coffee House, in Connecticut and close to the State line, was an old tavern, The Brass Ball, so called from a bronzed wooden ball, about the size of a bushel basket, which was used as a sign. As the traveler crossed the State line, he passed through the Toll Gate, near a large rock, still seen by the road side, where he was required to pay the following rates:

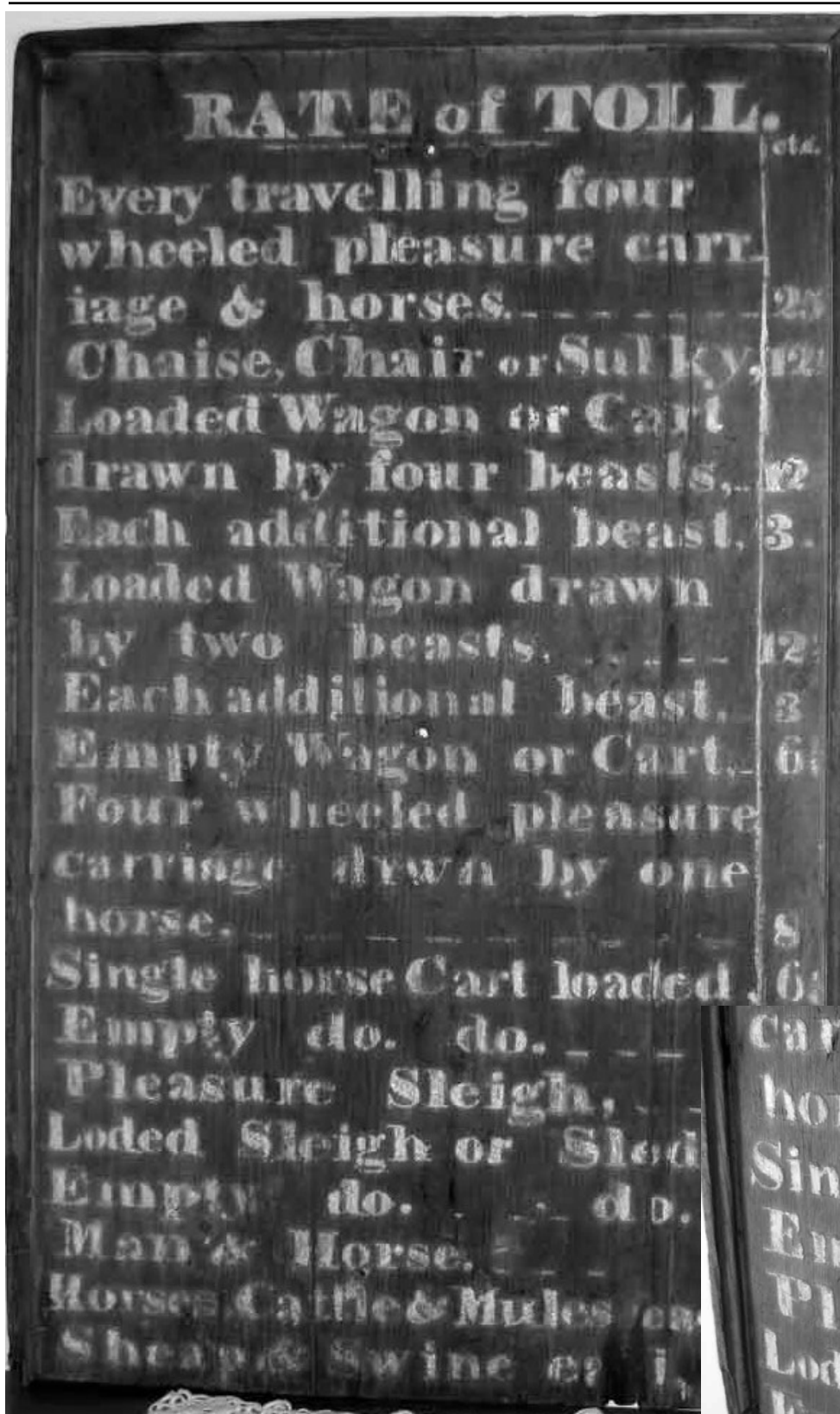
Rate of Toll¹.

	Cents
Every travelling 4-wheeled pleasure carriage and horses..	25
Chaise, chair or sulky.....	12½
Loaded wagon or cart drawn by four beasts.....	12½
Each additional beast.....	3
Loaded wagon drawn by 2 beasts.....	12½
Each additional beast.....	3
Empty wagon or cart.....	6¼
Four-wheeled pleasure carriage drawn by one horse.....	8
Single horse cart loaded.....	6¼
Single horse cart empty.....	4
Pleasure sleigh.....	6¼
Loaded sleigh or sled.....	5
Empty sleigh or sled.....	4
Man and horse.....	4
Horses, cattle and mules, each.....	2
Sheep and swine, each.....	1

The Toll Gate was still in use in the early forties but was disused after 1853². Daniel Barrett bought the Brass Ball of the Sprague heirs and operated it as a hotel until about 1849, when he leased the property to Jason Young for hotel purposes. Barrett returned to the Brass Ball in 1853 and died in 1866, when the land was bought for the lumber on it by the Stockwell brothers. About 1857, William Church, intoxicated by liquor

obtained at the Brass Ball, wandered from the highway at night into the Douglass Woods and was frozen to death. The Brass Ball received much of the business formerly given the Coffee House, but, with the coming of the railroad and the passing of the stage coach, it was used less as a tavern and more as a saloon until operation as a public house ceased, not far from 1860. After being vacant for a time, it was used by Italian railroad laborers and shortly afterward it burned down, about 1884.

From *The Wallum Pond Estates*, by Harry Lee Barnes, pub. 1922.



The THS Summer 2001 newsletter had an update on the Brass Ball Tavern's location, as well as a picture of a boulder that served as a reminder to all travelers that a toll was to be paid for use of the road, then the Boston to Hartford Turnpike. The time period would be in the late 18th and early 19th century.

At that time, prior to the coming of the railroad, East Thompson, being on the main road from Hartford to Boston, had two inns, one of which was the Brass Ball.

The inn was located just south of the Massachusetts line, on the right hand side of East Thompson Rd. The foundation is barely recognizable today.

2001 newsletter can be viewed at:
http://www.thompsonhistorical.org/Newsletters/2001_Summer.PDF

The insert below shows the relief of the letters on the wooden sign.



Gift of the Killingsly Historical Society



It appears that these 1906 photos (above and right) were from none other than Oscar Swanson. The markings on the photo are original and are probably an inside joke between Swanson and the intended recipient of the postcard. The photo above shows the southern end of North Grosvenordale from the TMHS hill in 1906.

David Hetherman of Osterville, MA wrote that he is working on a genealogy of the Hetherman family and would appreciate any information our readers may have to offer. Please send to jiamartino@charter.net who will forward to David.

"On a recent trip that way, I visited my great-grandparents' (John Hetherman & Ellen Crone) graves in Calvary Cemetery (Dudley). I also went to St. Stephens Church in Quinebaug and found that there is a window dedicated to my great-grandparents. They came over from Ireland in 1880 and lived in Webster for a few years when John worked at Stevens Linen. They moved to Quinebaug a few years later when he worked at the Intervale Mill. After retiring, he became the sexton of St. Stephens. If you know of any Hethermans or Macks (my grandfather's sister Mary married James Mack around 1889) in the area, I'd appreciate it."

North Grosvenordale Trolley Station



This photo is a real gem with a clear view of the track as it went toward Buckley Hill. The road that heads to the left with the wood guardrails is today's Rt. 12, where it bends around the park. The park on the left in the photo is today called Swanson Park, named after Oscar following his death in WWI.

We are looking for later photos of the trolley stand. It is believed that it was converted into a barber shop after the trolley line stopped running in the mid-1920s.

The THS December 2006 newsletter ran a Q&A on the North Grosvenordale Trolley Station.

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.

While space prevents us from re-running the entire 2006 Q&A, we invite you to view the newsletter at:

http://www.thompsonhistorical.org/Newsletters/Dec_2006_NL.pdf



The Thompson Historical Society
P.O. Box 47
Thompson, CT 06277
www.thompsonhistorical.org
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Excerpt from a Jolly Club note dated Sept. 12, 1933

To Betty Ann!
Welcome to this great wide World,
little Stranger Dear!
Everyone is very glad,
that you are safely here!
Though we are not Fairies,
we do the best we can!
We wish you Health and Happiness
little "Betty Ann!"

Q: Construction of the *Quinnebaug Battleship* began in 1864 and completed in 1866, was a steam sloop, this was after the Civil War. Does anyone know why the battleship was so named? - Dave Cassells, Hawthorne, NJ

Q & A

Q: I am trying to get information on a "Jolly Club." My grandmother, Maria Steioff Wetherbee, wrote poems and cards, and apparently this group sent them along with gifts for birthdays, weddings, and new babies. She lived in N. Gros. And a few letters I have are dated in the early 1930s. Have you ever heard of this group? - Beverly Walker

Q: We have a photo that we are planning to use for our 2012 calendar at the CT Eastern Railroad Museum. The photo has a train at the station. What side of the tracks was the station located on, north or south? - Jean Lambert, Chaplin, CT

A: There were two tracks to/from Boston on one side of the station, and one track on the other side of the station for the Southbridge line.