
Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

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September 2011

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

November 30, 2011
January 25, 2012
February 29, 2012
April 25, 2012

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Society News

The THS officers and directors hope that our members and their families remained safe and did not sustain major damage from the recent storm in our area, or the tornado activity in Central Massachusetts. We came upon a news clip from the archives of the Killingly Historical Society dated August 1890 and wondered, "What did they do 120 years ago without WINY Radio?"

27 Aug 1890—Mechanicsville A Big Blow

An infant cyclone struck this village Sunday night, 17th, tearing the slating from the boiler house roof, destroying a large elm tree and seriously damaging several other trees. It struck the company's stock house, damaging the roof of that also to a considerable extent, and then it succeeded in tipping over a half dozen or more outhouses converting two of them into kindling wood and scattering the debris along the ground for several rods. After having frightened nearly the whole village about half to death by its roar it passed on to parts unknown.

The THS presents Mr. John Proctor and a **Civil War Story of Soldier Brown from Thompson CT on November 17, 2011, 7 pm**, in 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 June 30.)

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

Contributing Membership: \$25.00

Individual Membership: \$10.00

Family Membership: \$15.00

Members are invited to purchase first-year memberships for new members for \$5.00.

Society Contact Information

President: Joe Iamartino
Vice President: Burton Rhodes
Treasurer: Susan Vincent
Secretary: Mark Snay
Directors: Karen Charbonneau,
Dave Babbitt, Rob Paton, Judy
Rondeau, David Eddy, Lynn Landry,
Joe Lindley, Jon Brynga, Lucille
Barrette, Blair Cole, John Rice

A presentation on **The Civil War & the Thompson, CT Tourtellottes** will be held in the Ryscavage Auditorium at the TMHS building on **February 15, 2012, 7 pm**. Admission is free.

President's Quill

Joe Samartino



The Thompson Historical Society is a quiet organization that goes about its business without a lot of fanfare. Our museum was open every weekend May until August 1st, with volunteer docents. Our museum shop operated weekends last year through the holiday period, staffed by our wonderful shop volunteers. Helen Flood schedules our shop and docent volunteers well. Our directors contribute their decisions, ideas, and donations of time and talent. Blair & Karen Cole with their video histories. Lucille Barrette with her wood buildings and enthusiasm. June Schoppe with her keen marketing eye. Dave Babbitt helped to organize our presentations and events. Rob Paton scheduled our talented volunteers for the annual tour of Thompson for the 2nd grade classes. Our reliable and humble business secretary, Mark Snay, keeps our minutes and organizes our meetings and isn't afraid to drag his family members into a project if needed. My wife Val, her mom Shirley, and my kids are dragged into many tasks. JoAnn Thorstenson ably handles our newsletter and membership duties. Joe Lindley and Lis Burton are working to combine the THS & TMHS information in our new Past-Perfect Museum Software system. Merc Robbins audits our books. Our VP Burt Rhodes and I can count on many people who contribute in many ways, doing the hundreds of little things that no one knows about but are needed for our organization to function. For our buildings, our neighbors mow the lawns, water flowers, trim trees, and provide general security. For those I didn't mention by name, each of you are wonderful and I wish space permitted a story on each one of you. Some members who once volunteered their time have moved on, in life or death, but their contributions built a stronger Society.

I specifically left Susan Vincent for last. Anyone who knows the Society understands the influence she has on our organization. With her husband Rob, Sue hosts our annual picnic, and an annual tour by the town's 2nd graders of her farm. She is our company treasurer, and runs the museum shop with her small team of volunteers. She personally created the Civil War exhibit at our museum and was instrumental in setting up the two exhibits prior. For years, she handled our mailings. No task was too big or too small for her. This, however, is just the tip of the iceberg that is Sue's life. She contributes her time and talent to other significant organizations. I won't list them because she would probably be angry with me for telling others her business. So I will just say this, Mr. & Mrs. Vincent's contributions to our extended community should never be forgotten. Thompson is blessed to have such a wonderful couple supporting it. Thank you!

Newsworthy

From the archives of the Killingsly Historical Society,

Windham County Transcript articles from the past.

Supplied by our friend Marilyn Labbe

Nov 1889—Thompson

J.W. Doane, Esq., was here last week and it is currently reported consummated the bargain with Mrs. A. Perry which included the purchase of all her property on the west side of the road and adjoining his. Just what this involves is not fully apparent, but we have an idea that, in the years to come, strangers entering Thompson upon this side may think they are about to enter no mean city. The Times has been informed that Mr. Doane has purchased this land for a gentleman even richer than himself who will make Thompson a summer residence.

Feb 1890—Thompson

Mr. Doane's larger barn was started Tuesday of last week, and Thursday night it had reached its destination, hay, horses and all.

Apr 1890—Thompson

Work on the Doane mansion steadily progresses, and it is variously estimated that from \$75,000 to \$100,000 will be spent here before the work is finished. Well, some one will get the benefit, and when the other magnificent place near by is also finished Thompson will have two of the finest country residences in New England.

Thompson hill is peculiarly favored in the character of its summer residents-its own children, not transient strangers. Its young men who went out from Thompson homes to engage in business come back to found new summer homes for their families. These village boys have made successful businessmen. One of the most prominent is Mr. John W. Doane of Chicago, a merchant prince, engaged largely in importing trade, president of Chicago's Board of Trade, prominent in the Pullman Car Company, and in many important business enterprises. Mr. Doane is very highly esteemed in his adopted city, and has won 'by his unaided exertions 'a most honorable place among the foremost business men of the day. A pleasant rural home in Thompson is occupied by his family half of the year.

<http://www.archive.org/details/historyofwindham00bayl>

History of Windham County (1889), R.M. Bayles,
W.W. Preston & Co., Publishers.

Ed. Note: Both the Doane home and the 'other magnificent place' mentioned (the Ream Mansion) are no longer standing.

*There will be a **Ream, Doane & the Early Years of Marianapolis** presentation at the Old Town Hall on*

May 23, 2012, 7 pm.

Joslin Baptismal Font, First Congregational Church of Oxford (MA)

An early Nipmuc corn grinding bowl from Thompson survives today at the First Congregational Church in Oxford, MA. The donor was the founder of the Joslin Diabetes Center, now part of Harvard Medical Center.

1948 – A new and very unique baptismal font is dedicated, given by Dr. Elliott P. Joslin and Mrs. Clarence Daigneau in memory of Ada L. Joslin and Louise Wellington Mayall. Dr. Joslin was an internationally known specialist in the treatment of diabetes, and the stone that forms the font's bowl was a Joslin family treasure. Originally hollowed out by Native Americans grinding maize, it rested outside the door of the Joslins' Thompson, Connecticut home where it was used by the children to wash their bare feet before entering the house. It went with the family when they moved to Oxford and was used as a bird bath and to water the dog. Now a baptismal font, the stone is held by an angel pedestal, designed by sculptress Amelia Peabody and cast in South Boston by Italian stoneworkers. The font and pedestal weigh 800 pounds and stand at the front of the sanctuary, resting on a carrying beam. It is never moved.

Excerpt above from the First Congregational Church of Oxford's website: www.oxfordfirstucc.org. Thank you to Donald Alstrom, church building manager, for meeting THS member for photography of the font.



Photos below courtesy of Don & Betty Mayo



Civil War Era Grosvenor-Dale Company Mill in Grosvenordale, CT. The weave sheds shown in the photo were a major innovation at the time as they allowed for more and better natural lighting in the building.

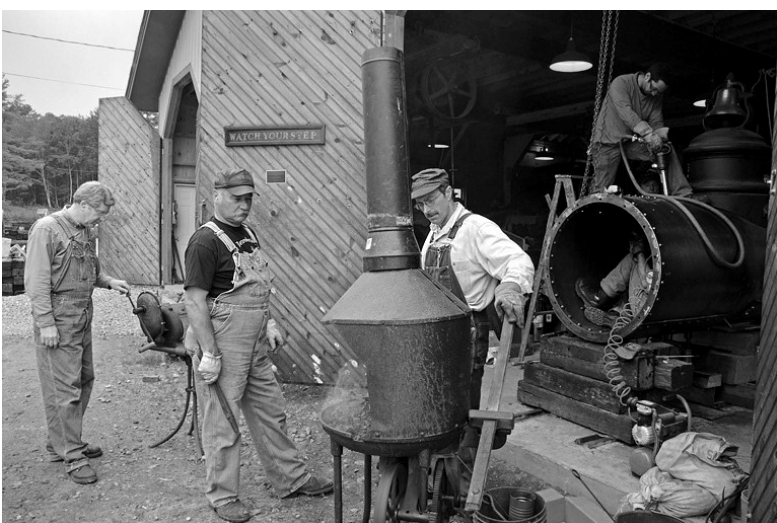
Ladies in 'Fancy Hats'

Lady on the right is identified as Lucie Lamontagne Poirier. Mystery Question: Can anyone identify the lady on the left?

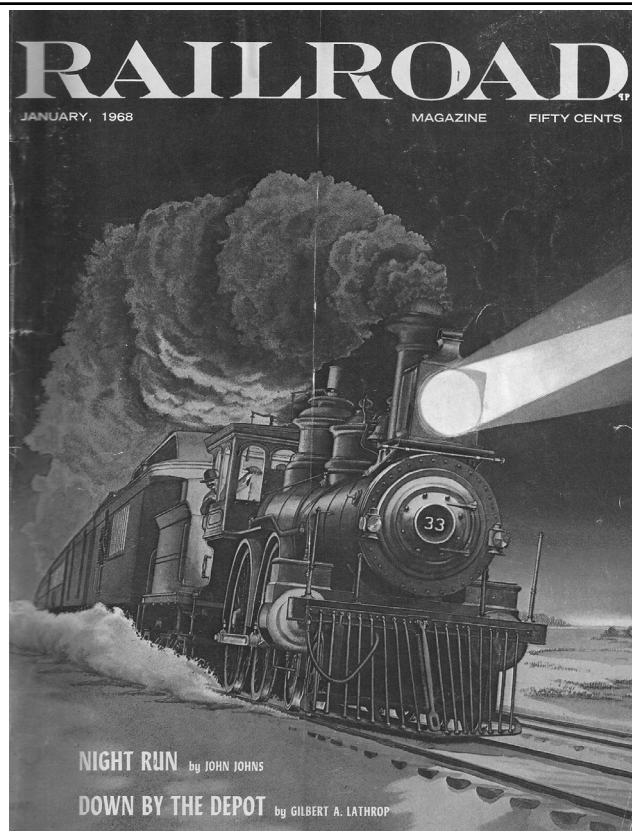
The Restoration of Engine # 9

Right: January 1968 Railroad magazine donated by the DeBerardinis family featured a spread on Alice Ramsdell and her father's collection of 'railroadania.'

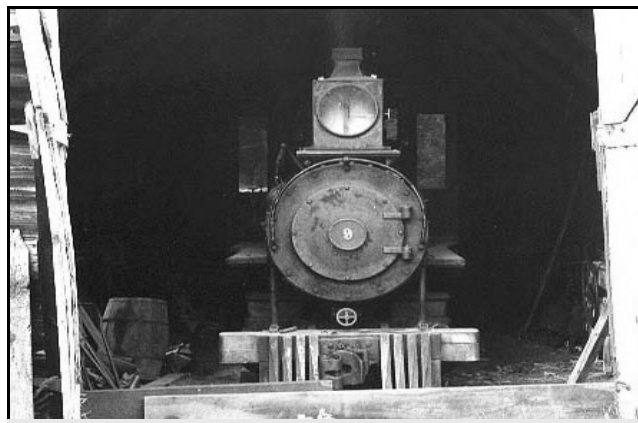
Dave Babbitt sent us information on the #9 railroad engine that is currently being restored at the Wiscasset, Waterville & Farmington Railway Museum, Alna, Maine. It turns out that this particular engine was part of Alice Ramsdell's father Frank's collection of narrow gauge railroad equipment. The engine is being restored in the hopes that the WW&F will be able to ride to Alna Center and beyond behind the 125 year old engine soon!



Above: Three volunteers man the forges while two others install the rivets. **Below:** Jason Lamontagne, Bryce Weeks, Stewart Rhine, Brendan Barry, Dave Crow, Zack Wyllie, Dana Deering, Steve Zuppa & Leon Weeks pose proudly with the finished product. Photos courtesy of Stephen Hussar.



The **Wiscasset, Waterville & Farmington Railway Museum, Inc.**, is a non-profit organization established in 1989 to acquire, preserve, and restore the operation of narrow gauge railroads and equipment and to establish a museum for the display of artifacts for enlightenment and education of the general public concerning the social and economic impact of railroads on the communities served. Please visit their website at: www.wwfry.org for more information on **Engine #9!**



Above: WW&F Engine 9 at Alice Ramsdell's farm. Photo courtesy of Marcel Levesque @ www.wwfry.org.

**The Saga of Engine Number Nine,
a poem by Fred Morse**

www.wwfry.org

I'm engine Number Nine
of Maine's Two-Footer fame.
I reside at Sheepscot Station
in the town of Alna, Maine.

I'd like to tell my story
from beginning to the end,
and I hope with all your kindness
I'll be able to run again.

I was born in Portland, Maine
in "1891",
'twas the shores of Casco Bay,
where my life begun.

I was christened Number Five
and sent upon my way;
to the Sandy River Railroad,
that was to be my stay.

I ran the rails from Farmington to Phillips,
almost everyday,
keeping people happy
all along the way.

In "1908", that was the date,
that I really thought was swell,
I had more track to travel on,
and my number changed as well.

From Number Five to Number Six
when my company did combine,
The Sandy River Railroad
and the Phillips and Rangeley line.

For many years I traveled these rails
with passengers galore,
I carried the mail and freight,
and also much much more.

I blew my whistle and rang my bell
as I'd pass through the towns,
and people waved and cheered me on,
as I would make my rounds.

Alas! In "1925"
my life would change again,
I went to the Kennebec Central line,
as it was known back then.

They made me Number Four,
as it seemed the thing to do,
and I started work all over again
with a brand new crew.

I pulled many loads of coal
from the shores of Randolph, Maine,
to our nation's "soldier's home",
Togus was its name.

Passengers, as well as freight,
were also pulled by me.
I worked real hard until "'29",
then rested till "'33".

My life was then to change again,
it seemed that it was so,
I was always kept a running
and always on the go.

I was sent to the Sheepscot Valley
to the Wiscasset, Waterville and Farm-
ington line.
The railroad to the coast it was,
and I felt that it was fine.

I became engine Number Nine,
away with Number Four,
and that's the number I have
now, and forevermore.

My work on the Two-Footer railroad
ended mighty quick,
for part of my poor old frame
got really very sick.

And then in early June,
the 15th to be sure,
number Eight went off the track
and the railroad closed its door.

I thought my days were numbered,
as well they might have been,
if it hadn't been for a railfan,
who had spotted me right then.

**I was taken to Connecticut
and put inside a barn,
and there I sat for many years
upon the Ramsdell farm.**

After all those years of slumber
my luck has changed again,
I've returned to Sheepscot Station,
I remembered, way back when.

Each summer Saturday morning,
I'm pushed outside the door,
and there I set watching Number Ten,
go by me with a roar.

I'd love to be upon those tracks
heading for Alna Center,
but "alas" there's work to do
before that phase I'll enter.

I'm told that a brand new boiler
will get me on my way,
so now we have to have some funds
to really make my day.

Being engine Number Nine
with all those years of rest,
I've come up with a plan,
I really think is best.

Both old and young should have a chance
to help me to succeed,
a small donation of nine dollars each,
would help me in my need.

So keep those coins aflowing
right into Sheepscot, Maine,
and before you'll even know it,
I'll again be the head of a train.

Your names shall all be entered in a log,
on the station desk,
and I hope to have ten thousand names
to help me in my quest.

That log I'll carry with me,
when I am on my way,
T'will travel to Alna Center
because You've made my Day!



Interesting Railfans No. 61

Miss Alice A. Ramsdell

Civil War Letter

Folks, in light of the 9/11 anniversary and the 150th anniversary of the start of the Civil War, this poignant letter seemed most appropriate to reprint. ~ Joe I.

This Civil War era letter was found among the estate papers of Forest Mills Rhodes, grandson of Horatio Judson Rhodes (1830 - 1914). It has been transcribed by Carol DeBerardinis from the original with its exact punctuation and capitalization:

To: Horatio Rhodes, Thompson, Connecticut
From: his cousin, Lieut. Franklin G. Bixby, Co. "D" 18th Conn.
Vols. stationed in Martinsburg, VA

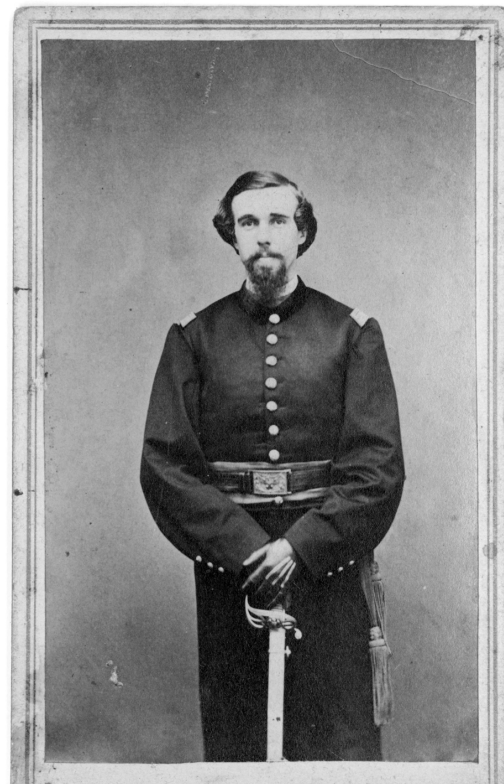
Martinsburg Va.
Feb. 1st 1864

To "Mr. Horatio Rhodes."

Dear Cousin.

With pleasure do I seat myself this morning to address a few thoughts to you for the purpose of informing you of my health and present circumstances. and also that I might hear how you are getting along these days. My health at this date is excellent. and has been so ever since I saw you. My circumstances I consider very comfortable compared with many others who do not have even a "Tent" to shelter them from the driving storm and wintry blasts. We are very comfortably Encamped near Martinsburg Va. Live in Tents - have pretty good Rations. Duty not very arduous hence we have no reason to complain of our lot. Still I will not speak in such a way that you will think we never have seen service or that we are idle now, further that we are going to remain even as comfortable as we now are living. For before this reaches you it may be our fortune to meet with the "Enemy" in deadly conflict. We being at the entire front our condition is very uncertain. Yesterday Gen. Averill's Force that belongs to our Brigade started up the Valley beyond Winchester. I expect they will engage the Enemy whenever they may find him. It is stated that there is a large force at or near Woodstock just beyond Winchester. If so, we shall be very likely to hear from him. But I will not say more upon this point but will only wait for the result. It is the best way to take things easy and make the best of them, yet at the same time be ready to meet whatever may come. I need not state to you the honor that they have seen fit to confer upon me as no doubt you have already learned of the fact. I now have the full command of Co. "G" but add to that I have been appointed "Provost Marshall" and Commander of Post" Hagerstown and I shall enter upon Duty there probably in about two weeks. Have just taken off my "Equipments" it being "9" A.M. the hour that all Guards of Officers are relieved from Duty. Being only Four Officers for Duty in the 18th that are present we do not have to go on Picket now but each Day one Officer is on Duty in Camp. He is called Officer Of The Day". I was on yesterday. Shall be on again Thursday. Will have to say that all the Boys that have joined us as Recruits are well.

(Letter continued next page)



Captain Franklin Bixby, 18th Connecticut Volunteers, wounded at Snicker's Ford, VA, July 18, 1864. Used with permission: Copyright "Military & Historical Image Bank" ©2011 and Don Troiani ©2011 with all rights reserved.

Bixby Letter continued:

Being so many in Co. "D" that they knew I think they are not homesick yet. I trust they will not be. Before I close my letter perhaps you may wish to know what I think about the war's closing etc. This is a question like all else that pertains to the future. It is unknown to finite minds. We may each have his own mind and express his own opinion yet this will not affect a terminus of the war in the least. Less talk and more action will close it much sooner. Had there been more promptness of Action and less Political sentiments expressed this "great Conflict" would in my opinion have been closed. We have yet to see and realize hard fighting. The Battle is not over yet. I cherish this idea in my bosom and I expect to know it by a more solemn reality. When Spring opens, the Ball will commence to Roll. Its cessation is known to no finite mind. How little do those disconnected with the Army know of the horrors of war! In fact how little do any of us realize the cost of this great "warfare". I refer to sacrifices that have and are to be made upon the altar of our Country and not to the meager item of Dollars & Cents which ought never to be mentioned in connection with the afore-mentioned "cost". Do not understand me to say that those at home do not share in this great and awful "sacrifice". Nay! Who but the "heart-stricken and bereft Mother can know her feelings upon hearing the sad but truthful intelligence that her "son" has fallen upon the field of Battle. Who is there who can fully know the feeling that exists in the bosom of that lonely "wife" when she hears that her husband is about to go into the "deadly conflict"? How often are her pillows wet with falling "Tears". No! Sorrow & Distress, Sufferings & trials, afflictions & anguish are not wholly in the army. They pervade our whole land. We have a work to do. If we are "Soldiers" it becomes as such to do our whole Duty as "men". Feel the importance and justness of our work and then "act" accordingly. While we are going forth to the fields of carnage and blood we feel that if we do our duty as we ought as soldiers and patriots no matter if it be our fortune to fall, we have upon our side not only all the good and loyal people of country, but also "One" who is mightier than all the nations of the earth. One that will not permit a sparrow to fall to the ground without his notice. Indeed this is a great, just and holy cause, still we have another that is holier still, in which we are all invited to enlist. May we see that we are truly engaging in this important cause so that when our Master or Captain shall come, we may have our armor on. I would like to write much more had I time and room but think perhaps I now have written more than you will care to read. Hoping to receive a long letter from you soon, I will close. You will please remember me in kind regards to all the friends. Extend my best respects to Uncle Nelson, wife and family. Please excuse all mistakes as I have written this in great hurry and have not time to look it over. Direct your letter to Martinsburg Va. Should like to hear from you all. Uncle James, Aunt Relief, Abby and the children. I wish to be remembered with my best regards.

From your Cousin, Lieut. Franklin G. Bixby, Co. "D" 18th Conn. Vols.

"Citizens of Connecticut! You are again called upon to rally to the support of the government. In the name of our common country I call upon you to enroll your names for the immediate formation of six or more regiments of infantry to be used in suppressing the Rebellion. Our troops may be held in check, and our sons die on the battle-field, but the cause of civil liberty must be advanced; the supremacy of the government must be maintained. Prompt and decisive action will be economy in men and money. By our delay the safety of our armies, even of the nation, may be imperiled. The Rebellion, contending with the desperation of a hopeless and wicked cause, must be met with energy. Close your manufactories, and work-shops, turn aside from your farms and your business, leave for awhile your families and your houses; meet face to face the enemies of your liberties. Haste, and you will rescue many noble men now struggling against superior numbers, and speedily rescue the blessings of peace and good government." ~ *W.A. Buckingham, Governor of CT, 1858-1866*

The Military and Civil History of Connecticut (1869), by W.A. Croffut & J.M. Morris; Ledyard Bill Publishers, NY. Ppg 223.



The Thompson Historical Society
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They Started in MGs; Profiles of Sports Car Racers of the 1950s, (2011). McFarland Publishers; Jefferson, NC. (www.mcfarlandpub.com)

For members interested in the old Thompson Raceway, we offer information on a new book by Carl Goodwin, who raced at most of the courses in the East and Midwest.

Included are highlights on Cam Argetsinger, Briggs Cunningham, John Fitch, Phil Hill, Suzy Dietrich, Isabelle Haskell, Bob Donner, Rowland Keith, Carroll Shelby, Dick Thompson, Bruce Stevenson, Ken Miles, Chuck Stoddard, and George Valentine.

Mr. Goodwin has won eight of the International Automotive Media Awards and three from the Society of Automotive Historians.



Savelli Photo, June 1968 at Thompson, CT.