

Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

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September 2013

THS BOD Meetings

11/6/2013

1/29/2014

3/5/2014

4/30/2014

7 pm, Community
Center, Room 3

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Society News



Thanks for the Feedback!

Mrs. Estelle Bourgeois: "The newsletters are very interesting."

Mr. & Mrs. Bob Werge: "The years are rolling by too fast. Thank you for all of your work."

Ms. Jeanne (Boulet) Smith: "I enjoy your newsletter very much. I graduated in the class of 1946."

Thank you to Carol Habercross and Kris Sevigny for their recent donation of the books: *A Bayles' History of Windham County*, and *A Webster/Oxford Historical Summary by the Webster Times* which we are pleased to add to our collection!

Want to "GO GREEN?"

You can help the Society save on printing and mailing costs. To receive your newsletter via email in .pdf format, let us know by sending your email address to:

jthorstenson@charter.net

Thank you for your consideration!

Membership/Dues Information:

July 2013-June 2014 Membership

Members can find their paid status on the address sticker of this newsletter. (Membership runs on the THS fiscal year; July 1-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.

UPCOMING PRESENTATIONS:

November 13, 2013, 7-9 pm

Community Room 2

Nine Depots for Ten Villages: The Iron Horse in

Thompson, 1840-1940 by Bob Belletzkic

See page 3 for more information

January 15, 2014, 7-9 pm

Community Room 2

The First Place to Race: Sports Car Road Rac-

ing at Thompson Raceway in the 1950s and

1960s by David Belden

See pages 3 & 7 for more information

March 19, 2014, 7-9 pm

Community Room 2

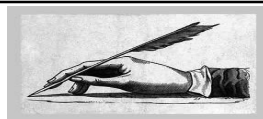
Rediscovering Thompson's Place Along the Old

Connecticut Path by Jason Newton

See page 5 for more information

THS Contact info: jjamartino@charter.net—860.923.3776

President's Quill ~ Joe Iamartino



Friends,

As I write this, I am on my front porch watching the trees sway in a gentle late August summer breeze, and just now saw a few bicycle riders in brightly colored Tour-de-France outfits coasting down Quaddick Road. I do believe it is the single best day of the year!

I am relaxing from a long business trip to Japan, China, Hong Kong, Germany, and the Ukraine. Working with my colleagues around the world, I realize that they are not much different than I am. Sure, they may have different skin colors or local customs. They speak different languages. Deep down though, they are really the same as me. When I try to sell my products around the world, my customers and colleagues sit together at dinner and talk about our lives. They want what we want. A safe home. Good food. A job. Good medical services. A life to enjoy. Family support, good schools for the kids, and a country they can respect. Oh yeah, a reliable car, a great pair of shoes and a good local sports team doesn't hurt either.

I think about the dinner I had with my family at the Greeks' in Dayville after that trip and I saw those same nations represented in the restaurant. It made me think about the way our villages used to be 75 to 125 years ago here in

Thompson. Greek Village with the Albanians. Swede Village. The French Canadians. The Italians on Klondike Street (yes Teresa Muraco!). We had Chinese too.

I looked back at my recent overseas visits, viewing China in my mind and 99% of the people are Chinese, even in the mega-cities of Shanghai and Shenzhen. I looked at Japan and they are 99% Japanese, even in massive Tokyo. I looked at the people in Kiev and I didn't see many from other cultures, though I know they are mixed from many lands over thousands of years. Maybe they were there and I just didn't see them.

Then I came back to America and I see so many cultures mixed together, easy to see our physical, outward differences. Are we mixing perfectly? Maybe not, but thinking about it from my front porch today, what we Americans have done creating a country integrating so many from so far is truly amazing.

I am glad to be home in Thompson, CT of the good old USA. Me - part Italian, part English, part Irish, part American Indian, part Danish and Swedish and who knows what else.

~Joe Iamartino

A Special Note of Thanks, ~ Joe Iamartino

Many thanks to the Beaupres, John Rice and Charlie Panu for the work on and around our buildings. For the 2nd grade tour of Thompson, thanks for a great job by all of the Fire Dept. members attending, the THS volunteers on the Common, at the Old Town Hall, at the Vincent Farm and on the buses.

Many thanks once again to Sue and Rob Vincent for hosting the 2nd graders and the THS annual meeting. A special mention of thanks and deep appreciation to Sue Vincent for her huge 'behind the scenes' support, treasurer's activities and effort on behalf of both the Museum and Shop.

For the entire Museum Shop team, we appreciate you bringing the Old Town Hall alive each holiday season, drawing to the old building old and new visitors each year to admire her antiquity.

To Mark Snay, Joe Lindley, and our archives and research team in and outside of the museum, thanks for the hundreds of hours each year spent preserving those precious items and memories.

JoAnn Witkowski-Thorstenson, as our newsletter editor, she usually deletes my lines of thanks for her work with the membership files and newsletter, but I insisted she keep it in this time.

Lastly, to our directors, for finding the time in their busy schedules to help guide our activities. To all who have contributed, subscribed or donated time, skills, photos, artifacts and memories, this is **your** Society honoring those who have gone before and preserving the Thompson of the past for those still to come.

Nine Depots for Ten Villages: The Iron Horse in Thompson, 1840-1940

On Wednesday, November 13 at 7:00 p.m., Robert Joseph Belletzkie will give a narrated video presentation on Thompson's fascinating, complex, and unique railroad history. The focus will be on the nine railroad stations that once dotted the town map and their evolution over the years. Images will be drawn from those found in visits to the National Archives, Harvard's Baker Library, the Connecticut State Library, the Dodd Center at UCONN, and numerous other repositories and collections.

The story begins in 1840 with the Norwich & Worcester RR which was joined from the east in 1854 at Mechanicsville by Boston & New York Central. By 1869, the Boston, Hartford & Erie RR controlled both lines, plus the East Thompson-Southbridge Branch it built in 1866. All of this passed into the hands of the New York & New England RR by 1875 and in turn came under the control of the New York, New Haven & Hartford RR in 1895. Called the 'Consolidated' by many, this conglomerate was well on its way to dominating most all rail, trolley and water transportation in Southern New England by this time.

Mr. Belletzkie, a retired reference librarian, has been researching railroads for over 40 years and has given a number of presentations to illustrate the railroad infrastructure that once existed and how the Iron Horse brought change to communities across the state. His largest single effort is *TylerCityStation* www.tylercitystation.info, a website that debuted in 2008. With its use of photos, maps, documents and other primary source material, it has been recognized as a uniquely original and valuable source of information on state railroad history.

The speaker is a member of the Connecticut Historical Society, the New Haven Railroad Historical and Technical Association, and is actively involved with other local societies to which he belongs. From 2008 to 2011, he processed the papers of the Board of Railroad Commissioners at the Connecticut State Library, unwrapping materials that had been sealed for over 150 years, organizing them and making them available to researchers for the first time.

Presentation to last about an hour and a half. Discussion period to follow. All are welcome! By Robert Joseph Belletzkie, Librarian, Historian, Ferroequinologist, WebStationmaster.

RR Trivia: "FERROEQUINOLOGIST" *noun* \ ferō, ēkwə' nāləjəst. The study of railways, or a general interest in them as a hobby, is sometimes known as ferroequinology (literally, "study of iron horses").

The First Place to Race: Sports Car Road Racing at Thompson Raceway in the 1950s & 1960s

Road racing in the U.S. was very limited prior to World War Two. After the war, road racing events began to be organized on public roads and later on airfields. The former turned out to be dangerous and politically unsustainable and were fairly soon abandoned. The airport courses were not very satisfying and also had political drawbacks.

The future of the road racing sport lay in private, purpose built, road courses and Thompson Raceway was very much the pioneer in this field. Now common across the country, private road courses to a considerable extent followed the lead of Thompson. The upcoming talk by David Belden will briefly touch on the earlier pre-war and post-war events before focusing on the Thompson courses, primarily the first two Thompson Raceway versions. Courses and participants will be discussed, as well as the Weaver and Hoening family and their racing past.

Thompson Topped the State for Rail Service!

Which town in Connecticut historically had the most railroad stations? Thompson? That's right, little old Thompson up in the quiet, northeast corner.

Around the turn of the last century, there were nine geographically dispersed places to catch the train in this town. Service was provided by the New York, New Haven & Hartford RR which by then controlled most all transportation services in the tri-state area.

On the Norwich & Worcester line, you could get the train at Mechanicsville, West Thompson, Grosvenordale, North Grosvenordale, and Wilsonville. On the New York & New England line, there were depots at Thompson and East Thompson and on the Southbridge branch from there you could flag a train at Bates Crossing and ride all the way to Quinebaug!

The only Connecticut towns having this this number of depots were Newtown and Norwich with six and Norwalk with seven. Most towns had two or three, and larger cities like Bridgeport, Hartford, and even New Haven, the railroad capital of the state, generally only had one downtown 'union' station and one or two elsewhere within the corporate limits at any given time.

And then there was the freight handled at these same stations. Long, heavy trains bringing raw materials in and finished products out and making possible the employment of thousands in the numerous cloth mills in town.

By virtue of its strategic location in the far northeast corner of Connecticut, Thompson early on became a crossroads for people and goods moving between Worcester and New London, Boston, and New York, both locally and to points well beyond.

And that meant dozens of passenger and freight trains passing every day including fabled names like the *New England Limited*, aka the 'Ghost Train,' the *Long Island and Eastern States Express* and the *State of Maine*.

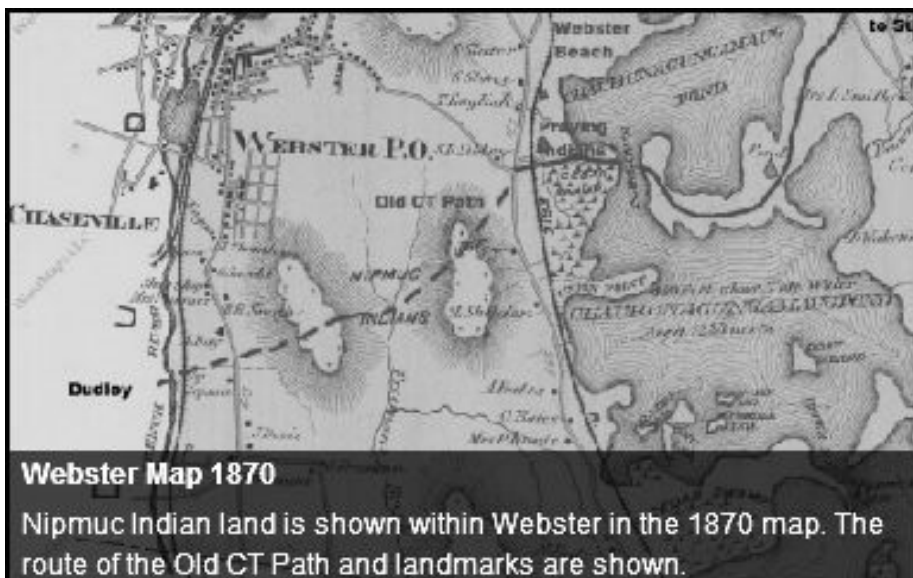
Quiet Corner, indeed! With all those train whistles and clickety-clacks, beautiful to some and just plain noise to others, this northeast corner town was anything but quiet 100 years ago!



Rediscovering Thompson's Place Along the Old Connecticut Path

The Old Connecticut Path, followed by the founders of Connecticut, is an important part of the history of Thompson and the American story. Ellen Larned, Thompson historian, provided a treasure map that opened the way to rediscovering the route of the path through Thompson and across Windham County. The Path is hidden in **plain sight** ready to be rediscovered for its historic importance and natural beauty. The presentation will connect the story of the Path with Connecticut history. Driving tours and walking guides to open the places that lie along the Path will be shared so that you can rediscover the Old Connecticut Path for yourselves.

Jason Newton is direct descendant of Rev. Thomas Hooker, the same Mr. Hooker who led his congregation from Cambridge to Hartford in 1636 along Old Connecticut Path. Mr. Newton is a retired psychologist and educator whose family history project led him to rediscover the Old Connecticut Path followed by his ancestors. His research and exploration has been shared on the Old Connecticut Path website <https://sites.google.com/site/oldconnecticutpath/>, YouTube videos showing the Path at the ground level, presentations in Connecticut towns along the Path and publications by the New England Historic Genealogical Society. The project to rediscover the Path across Massachusetts and Connecticut is ongoing. The best place for a walk to a part of the Old Connecticut Path is along the Quinebaug River/Auger Brook from Brickyard Road. This is within Corps of Engineers land, but the trail needs some clearing to be more accessible.



Here is a link for a driving tour from Webster to Woodstock. This passes through Thompson with several points that may be of interest: http://www.everytrail.com/view_trip.php?trip_id=2223870.

Winter Scenes of Old Thompson



We all love seeing vintage pictures of Old Thompson! Please consider looking through any pictures you have of winter holiday scenes, parties, or gatherings, and scanning them to the THS for publication in our Winter 2013 Newsletter!

Please provide year, location, and the names of individuals in any photo that you send to us. Please email .jpg and information to jthorstenson@charter.net and jiamartino@charter.net. Thank you!

~ Windham County Transcript ~

Letter to the Editor
11 July 1861 ~ THOMPSON

Mr. Editor: Perhaps items of current news from the lovely village of Thompson Center may not be uninteresting to some of your readers, even in these war times and sweltry [sic] days. Local news, of course, have only a local interest. It may not do you any hurt, or lessen your zeal in your work to tell you that your paper holds itself in good reputation among us. Its straightforward course and frankness on all subjects has won it credit and its local news, collected with so much care and accuracy, render it a welcome visitor among us. Mr. Crosby's Hotel is well filled with boarders, many of them from the cities. It is worthy of such patronage and of the patronage of the traveling public. It is, we believe, kept on strict "total abstinence" principles, and for this, as well as other worthy reasons, we wish it prosperity. Did city people know how healthy, quiet and pleasant our village is, they would come in greater numbers.

Anon.

17 August 1911

In speaking of the hot summer weather we have had and are now passing through, Ellen Larned writes: *I am happy to report that in the heated term of July 1911, Thompson Hill has preserved its atmospheric equilibrium, disdaining to join in the contest for highest maximum exhibit. In fact my own special door-porch oracle failed to reach its previous record of two consecutive 95 degree days in 1864 and seven plus 90 degrees in 1876. It did indeed achieve seven plus 90, but paused at 94, apparently reluctant to disprove the assumption that my front doorstep was the coolest spot in Connecticut.*

2 November 1911

John Vedda of E. Thompson tells of collecting \$25.00 from two Worcester men, hunters, who wounded a calf of his so badly with a charge of birdshot that it had to be killed. The man who fired the shot aimed at a partridge. Incidentally, the Worcester men were hunting in Conn. without a license to do so, but claimed that they did not know that had crossed the Mass. border.

It became know here (Danielson) Tuesday, although every attempt at secrecy has been made, that Miss Violet Edmands, fiancée of Rev. C.V.T. Richeson, indicted for the murder of Miss Avis Linnell, was brought to the Vernon Stiles Inn at Thompson Sunday, as a place so quiet she might get the rest she so badly needs after the terrible mental strain to which she has been subjected since her lover was taken from her father's home by officers and lodged in a cell. She did not like the place and left the same night.

Grave Matters

Appreciating and Preserving our Cemeteries. You are invited to participate in a two session workshop, November 2 & 9 at Palmer Memorial Hall, 523 Route 169, Woodstock.

Sponsored by the Woodstock Historical Society, Woodstock Historic Properties Commission, Woodstock History District Commission, the First Congregational Church, the Woodstock Cemetery Association, and the Connecticut Gravestone Network. With a grant from Connecticut Humanities.

Please register through www.woodstockhistoricalsociety.org.

**SMALLPOX PATIENTS
CROWD PESTHOUSE**

*Alarming Spread of Contagion at
Grosvenordale, Conn.*

WEBSTER, Mass. July 15.—The small-pox epidemic now raging in North Grosvenordale, Conn., a thriving cotton manufacturing hamlet four miles from here, has caused the deepest anxiety: The state authorities may close the town, as the traffic through the village by trolley is enormous.

On Monday five new cases appeared and yesterday afternoon, three more were discovered. A majority of these were girls. There are now twenty patients in the pesthouse, and a large portion of the town is under quarantine.

*From The Evening
Times.
(Washington, D.C.),
15 July 1902.*

*Chronicling Ameri-
ca: Historic Ameri-
can Newspapers.
Lib. of Congress.*

<<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024441/1902-07-15/ed-1/seq-2/>>

David Hetherman sent us the following note and attached article:

[Special Dispatch to the Boston Herald]
Webster, Sept. 4, 1903.

Enclosed are a few articles that I came across on genealogy bank.com. If you're not familiar with this website, I suggest you check it out."

Thank you for your note David, and the article is very interesting considering the current tax situation in our state!

...Ex-Senator Stevens' threat is that he will change his residence from Dudley to Thompson, Ct., and it will be a very simple thing for him to do so, as the state line of Massachusetts and Connecticut runs through his present home in Dudley. All he will have to do is change his sleeping room into the Connecticut portion of the house to transfer his residence.

May Move to Connecticut By Changing Sleeping Room.

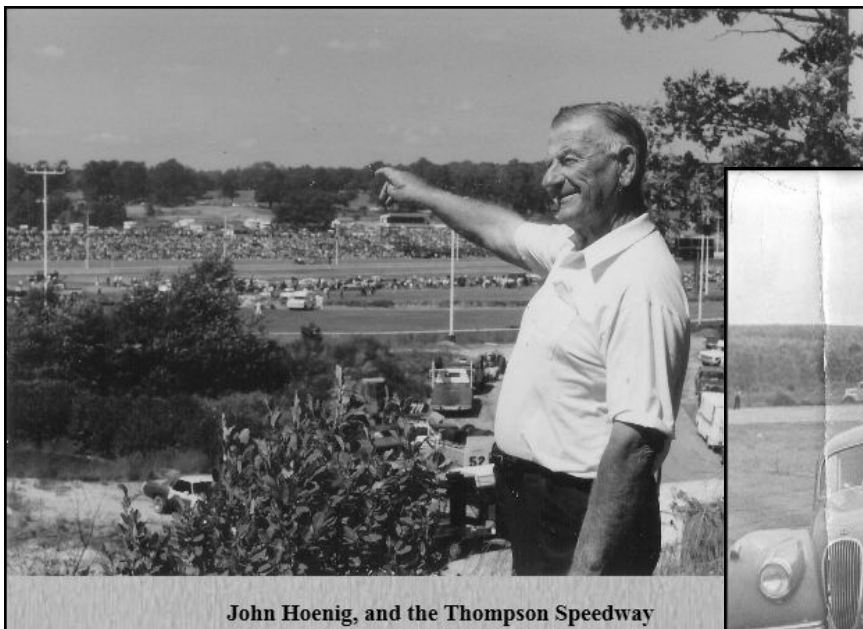
Dudley Citizen, Through Whose Residence the
State Line Runs, Thinks He Is Unjustly
Taxed and May Leave the State.

[Special Dispatch to the Boston Herald.]
WEBSTER, Sept. 4, 1903. The Hon. Eben S. Stevens, former state senator, is dissatisfied with the assessors' valuation of his property in Dudley, and has threatened to move from the state. He is the third largest taxpayer in the town of Dudley. Many other large taxpayers are said to feel the same way as the former senator.

Ex-Senator Stevens' threat is that he will change his residence from Dudley to Thompson, Ct., and it will be a very simple thing for him to do so, as the state line of Massachusetts and Connecticut runs through his present home in Dudley. All he will have to do is to change his sleeping room into the Connecticut portion of the house to transfer his residence.

~ Thompson Speedway Through the Years ~

With the upcoming presentation on January 15, 2014, *The First Place to Race: Sports Car Road Racing at Thompson Raceway in the 1950s and 1960s* by David Belden, we thought you might enjoy these vintage photos! Be sure to follow the links for video footage from the 50s and 60s!



John Hoenig, and the Thompson Speedway

1951:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxyAzN30sVs>



Barbara & George Weaver of Thompson Raceway fame, East Thompson

Undated:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kc-TrGOowNw>

The Thompson Historical Society
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HELP SAVE THE MASON HOUSE

The Mason House on the Thompson Common is one of our town's most significant historic properties. Architecturally, the William Mason House (c.1845) is perhaps Connecticut's best example matching the Bowen House in Woodstock of the Gothic Revival style. It is based upon a design published in Andrew Jackson Downing's Cottage Residences. (c.1842). Please take a look at the information linked below and help us preserve this wonderful structure!

<http://www.savethemasonhouse.org/#!about-the-property/csgz>



THS Contact info: www.thompsonhistorical.org; email: jjamartino@charter.net—860.923.3776