

Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

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Spring 2014

THS BOD Meetings

To Be Announced
Fall 2014
7 pm, Community
Center, Room 3

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Looking for writers!
Anyone with history,
photos, stories to tell, let
us know!

Send your submissions to
jiamartino@charter.net!
Looking forward to
hearing from the field!

Society News



Editor's Notes

Q&A: Thank you to Ken Goloski who has been riding up and down every road in town trying to figure out the fishing photo from our last newsletter. Keep looking, and thanks to all who have been trying!

Help wanted!

The THS is looking for 2 or 3 folks with "some age" (no offense!) and computer skills to help us identify people, places and things in old photos. We can give you folks either a stack of photos or a CD disk of photos and we ask that you fill in a simple spreadsheet with any info you can add.

Please contact Joe I. if you are interested in helping!
Thank you!

Editor's Note:

We apologize that **Henrietta Panu** was inadvertently omitted from our volunteer listing for the Museum Shop in our last newsletter! We appreciate all that our volunteers do!

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.

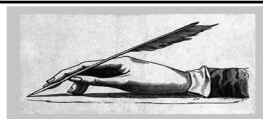


SUMMER IN THE BIG CITY!

Spring and Summer celebrations abound! We hope that you enjoy this delightful time in Thompson (or wherever you may call home) with your family and friends!

Let us not forget our Veterans, past, and present, and give thanks for all of their sacrifices and the freedoms they have provided us with.

President's Quill ~ Joe Lamartino



Folks, it is April and it is snowing and 28 degrees. Will this winter ever end? If someone reads this newsletter 100 years from now, let it be noted that I used ~ 40% more oil this year than last year. It was a long, cold winter. Maybe in 100 years, they will look at each other and say "Oil? Whale oil maybe?" They may not even know what oil was used for!

We had an exciting winter nonetheless. Bob Belletzkis, a noted railroad historian, presented his research on Thompson's many train stations to THS members. Following his presentation, we told Bob about the legendary Alice Ramsdell collection of railroad memorabilia. One thing led to another and soon Bob was talking to Dale King, Alice's nephew, and he then proceeded to donate the entire collection to the Society. This could be one of the largest single railroad engine photo collections in the country! Bob has now become an adopted Thompson resident and is working many days at TMHS to sort and prepare the archive for cataloging and soon an exhibit. Alice Ramsdell was related to the Tourtellottes and was the curator of the Memorial Room at TMHS for many years. It is only fitting that her collection, passed down to her from father Frank Ramsdell, and, passed to us by Dale King, should be shown someday soon at TMHS.

Joe Lindley, my son Chris, and I attended a very interesting NEARA (www.neara.org) meeting in RI recently. At this meeting, we listened to Doug Harris from the Narragansett Indians make an eloquent plea to the region's archaeologists to refrain from dismantling the strange lithic (stone) structures still found throughout the region. The act of archaeological investigation is an act of destruction but for a worthy cause. Doug said that enough have been excavated to know what they contain and it is time to respect these sites as we would graves in a cemetery. In return, Doug explained that the major Indian groups across the country will be more forthcoming about information relating to

their sacred sites. It has been the policy of many of the tribes that silence on this topic would be the best way to protect these sites from looters but enough sites have been demolished to convince the tribes to change this policy. People, not knowing the stone piles and chambers were part of Indian culture or religious practice, tore them down. It was great to hear Nick Belantoni, the retiring state archaeologist from Connecticut, tell Doug that he has changed his position on these structures and he now supports the active recording and protection of the remaining sites. This position will be helpful as more towns have policies protecting historic sites.

One very controversial and related topic is that of the William Mason house on Thompson Hill. Dawna Sirard's website "SavetheMasonHouse.org" has generated thousands of petitions in support of saving this historic property. The noted designer Mario Buatta, the owner of the property, had a recent speech and book signing in Boston canceled by Historic New England, the host of the event, when they learned of the situation. The NY Times published a well-written story about the house as did the Hartford Courant. Buatta's demolition by neglect of the property is evident to all and it is high time that he realize how frustrated many are with the decline of this majestic, National Historic Register property.

Now the State is involved too to encourage Mario to do the right thing. No one wants to see the house reach the point of no return. We pray for Mr. Buatta to respect the flagship property of Thompson. We want to help him do the right thing, not create more hard feelings about an already very sore subject. I encourage people to support a blight ordinance if the town's leaders will prepare one. Many in this town do not like to be told how or what they can do with their property. However, many towns in Connecticut have similar ordinances. In our case, the Mason House is a good reason to support one. Let's do it before it is too late.

~Joe Lamartino

In the News—1911

20 July 1911

Thompson. Hiram S. Franklin has secured a contract to build a large brick storehouse for the Grosvenordale Company.

31 August 1911

Thompson. Hiram S. Franklin of Broad Street, Danielson has the contract for the construction of a stock house for the Grosvenordale Company at North Grosvenordale. The building is to be of brick, two stories in height and about 1109 feet square. It is to be a duplicate of another located near the present stock house. Work will commence at once.

14 September 1911

Thompson. In an attic of an old house in East Thompson has been found a register of the country school kept at Brandy Hill in 1853 and for several years following. Stephen Ballard, who was a teacher at that time, has the register at present and finds that 50 percent of the females who were pupils then are dead, and only 3 percent of the males are dead.

2 November 1911

Thompson. Norman B. Ream, the New York multimillionaire, who has a magnificent country estate in Thompson, is among the notable citizens who has been served with subpoenas in connection with the government suit against the Steel Trust.

Memories from John DeBerardinis—Salisbury, MD

In 1949 the Town of Thompson had yet to consolidate its elementary school grades under one roof. So I attended fourth grade at the West Thompson School, an antique one-room structure in the woods. Every desk, complete with an ink well, was attached to the seat of the one in front of it. An old hot air furnace located in the cellar kept us warm in cold weather. Regrettably, this old school house no longer exists.

A short distance up the road from our school was the Ramsdell farm. Although I had only seen it from the road, I was intrigued by what I could see...a real railroad freight car on a short section of track, cows and sheep grazing in the pasture and chickens pecking in the yard. The house, built in the early 1700s, stood close to the road and aroused my curiosity.

It was convenient that our little school was so close to the farm. In the fall of 1949, our fourth grade class could hardly wait for the day when we would have our first visit to see a railroad steam engine built in 1892. Alice's father, Frank, had bought it in 1937 for its value in scrap metal. It was transported from Maine on a railroad flatcar and stored in its own barn. Frank had hopes of returning it to service one day.

The day of our visit finally came and we got to climb into the engineer's cab, ring the brass bell and pretend we were engineers controlling the throttle. Alice showed the class some of her father's very large collection of steam engine photographs. Were we ever impressed!

In the spring before hot weather, sheep must be shorn. On a beautiful warm day our teacher, Mrs. Forand, took us up the road where Alice and her sheep were waiting. First Alice showed us how shearing was done with hand clippers ... a very slow process. Then she wowed us with a demonstration of her electric shears. That day we learned what a difference electricity and a little motor could make on a farm.

As a fourth grader, little did I know that several years later I would shear sheep throughout eastern Connecticut. Each spring I clipped many hundred sheep, including the Ramsdell flock. My shearing business earned enough to finance my college education.

Alice had the reputation for giving generously of her time and knowledge. In the spring of 1954 I decided to raise a market lamb for the very first time. Alice agreed to sell me one of her lambs and taught me how to select and raise a prize animal. At the New England 4-H Market Lamb Show and Sale in January 1955, my entry was selected Grand Champion from a field of 101 lambs.

Fast forward to 1966...after several years living far away from Thompson, I took my fiancé for a visit with Alice. My "city girl" experienced the farm just as I remembered it in 1949, complete with railcars, steam engine and many animals. Alice served homemade ice cream in the marriage parlor where she performed ceremonies as Justice of the Peace. A most awesome sight was the display of framed railroad photographs which filled the walls from ceiling to floor with barely enough space between them to see the lovely old wallpaper.

We visited again several years later with our two young sons who were excited about all there was to see at the Ramsdell farm. It hadn't changed a bit and was just as their dad remembered it in 1949.

When I learned that the Ramsdell steam engine had been transported to the Wiscasset, Waterville and Farmington Railway Museum in Maine to be restored, a visit there was added to my "bucket list". When Engine #9 runs again, I look forward to celebrating her return to service. The young boy in me would love to ring that brass bell one more time!

It's amazing to learn that the thousands of photographs and artifacts collected by the Ramsdells have recently been transferred to the Thompson Historical Society for safekeeping. What a wonderful contribution to the preservation of railroad history!

Date references from: Yankee Magazine April, 1964;
Railroad Magazine January, 1968



John and his Champion Lamb! Thank you for this wonderful story John!

Spotlight on Joe Iamartino

Editor's Note *This issue was not run by Joe for his final approval. Had it been, he would never have allowed this article, these accolades, to be included. I take full responsibility for publishing this information, along with the assistance of Joe Lindley, and pictures courtesy of the **Thompson Villager (Stonebridge Press)**. Thank you Joe for all that you do for the THS!*

J. Thorstenson

~ April 25, 2014~

Emergency Personnel, Historian recognized by VFW

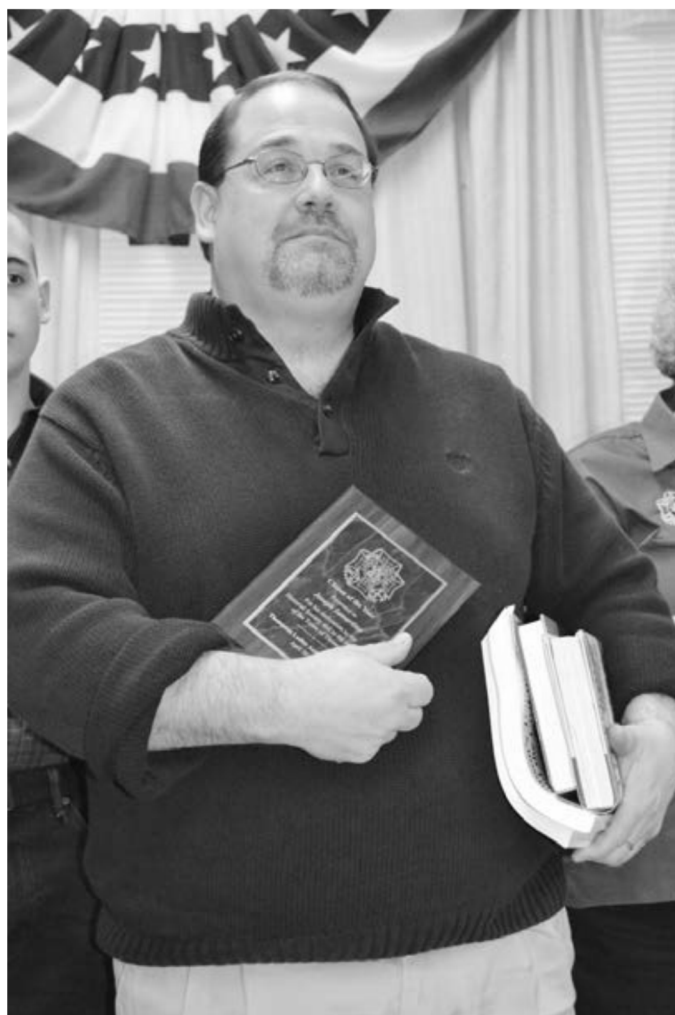
On Monday, April 14, 2014, the Thompson Ladies Auxiliary VFW presented awards to local unpaid professionals and volunteers who have unselfishly given their time to their community. The firefighters receiving the award were selected by representatives of the five Thompson fire departments. Thompson historian and president of the Thompson Historical Society, Joe Iamartino, was selected as Citizen of the Year. The VFW Award recognizes local citizens who constantly go above and beyond the call of duty and seldom get the recognition they deserve. Joe was led to believe he was attending the ceremony to support a family member he thought was receiving the honor. His surprised look when he realized *he* was the one receiving the award was classic!

Thank you to Joe Lindley for sharing his Citizen of the Year nomination letter for Joe with us!

From Joe Lindley:

Few in Thompson's history have accomplished more and dedicated as much to preserving the rich deep history of our town as has Joe. Not since the great Windham County Historian Ellen Larned has anyone in our town devoted more time and effort to capturing and recording the details of our past, making them available for all to enjoy and learn.

As a long-time member and president of the Thompson Historical Society, Joe has guided the THS through difficult times, not only preserving our history, but also our historical buildings. His work with the Ellen Larned Museum, the Old Town Hall, and the Tourtellotte Memorial Room has resulted in the preservation and restoration of these architectural and



historic gems. Under his curatorial leadership, the Ellen Larned Museum and Tourtellotte Memorial Room have become models for small community museums and are visited by many curatorial experts seeking examples of current community historic efforts.

Joe has recently led a massive archival project that allows the THS to digitally capture thousands of historical records, storing them using a program called Past Perfect. Past Perfect allows the THS to upload the records to a cloud server making them available to many history enthusiasts and researchers. Because of Joe's efforts, Thompson and its history can now be shared with the world.

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Joe Iamartino—Thank you Joe!

Joe is also a past curator of the Tourtellotte Memorial Room, where, for many years, he helped to preserve the hundreds of paintings and artifacts left to the Town of Thompson by the Tourtellotte family. He was a leader in reestablishing the Tourtellotte Memorial High School Alumni Association and served as its Vice President while the organization led the charge to preserve the 1909 Tourtellotte Building and the \$2.5M Tourtellotte Trust Fund. The Tourtellotte Memorial Room (Museum), is now the finest public school museum in the United States.

Each year Joe volunteers his time to escort the children of Thompson around our historically deep community on guided tours, teaching them about our town's history and the history of our country. This program has allowed our children to gain an appreciation of the past.

His most historically significant contribution to the Town of Thompson, and the realm of U.S. History, is the two volume series titled *Echoes of Thompson*. Published in 2003 and 2006 respectively, these 576-page masterpieces have become the definitive historical sources for information on our town. His herculean efforts as editor generated a source of town pride shared by all.

Not since Ellen Larned's work *The History of Windham County* (published in 1874), has anyone produced a more significant work. The hundreds of hours this effort required were given to the town on a voluntary basis.

Joe has also given, and coordinated, numerous talks and lectures throughout our area on key historical topics. He is an electrical engineer with a Master's Degree in Business and Technical Innovation Marketing and is recognized as one of the country's leading experts on high speed transmission. He willingly shares this talent with students at Bay Path College.

More important than Joe's contributions to our area and our town, is his quiet demeanor and his modest attitude. He never seeks accolades or recognition for his work and plugs along when many would give up or move on. His dedication to preserving history and continuous education is a credit not only to himself and his family, but is of extraordinary value to the Town of Thompson.
(Contributed by Joe Lindley)

Joe led the recent restoration drive of the Old Thompson Town Hall. Built in 1842, this architectural masterpiece, designed by renowned architect Ithiel Town, is visited by people from all over the country as one of the finest examples of a 19th Century community gathering place.



Photos courtesy of Stonebridge Press, the Villager Newspapers. Photo above, the Iamartino and Houle families celebrate Joseph Iamartino being honored as the Citizen of the Year.

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Harvey's Stand? Pictures Anyone?

Q&A: I grew up on Thompson Hill in the house right next to the "old town hall" now the Historical Society. My maiden name is Catherine Burgess. My dad recently met a woman whose grandfather ran Harvey's stand. It was located at the house next to the post office. We started talking about the old days and how much we enjoyed walking across the Common to get french fries, clamcakes and fish and chips at Harvey's. Cars would line up all around the Common to enjoy the delicious food on the weekend. I tried to look up information about the stand but could find nothing. Is it possible for you to look into this for me? I would love to see pictures and just read about one of my favorite weekend treats. I lived on "The Hill" from 1960 until my parents sold the house in 1986. Thanks for your time. I look forward to hearing from you. Katie Adams

The THS has been asked about this stand and if there are any photos available numerous times. Any assistance our readers can give would be appreciated!



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