



The Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

www.thompsonhistorical.org

Spring 2004

Calendar of Events

Membership meetings or events for the Society. Events are at the Old Town Hall, at the Thompson Common, unless otherwise stated.

Thursday, April 1, 2004 at 7:00 PM

- Presentation on *Organized Sports in Thompson's Villages*. See photos of old sporting events and teams; listen to stories about that big game way back when! The Little League story in Thompson. Coach Canty & the great school teams he played on and later coached. Joe Lindley, Jim Naum, Jim Sali and others will help us relive those glory days.

Thursday, April 29, 2004 at 7 PM

- Presentation on Old Home Restoration Projects – Do's & Don'ts. Warren Lanpher from No. Scituate, RI will discuss his most notable projects, including Thompson. He will explain old building techniques useful in dating construction and repairs.

Saturday, May 15, 2004, 9-2 PM

- Thompson Historical Society Yard Sale – Items deemed not essential to our collections and archives have been set aside by our collections committee to sell in the Yard Sale. We are also looking for articles to be donated by our members. Call Sue 923-5728 to drop off items.

Monday, June 7, 2004 – Picnic and Annual Meeting for Directors/Members

- The Vincents have once again kindly volunteered to host the Annual Picnic at their lovely home, Greystone Farm, on Rt. 21. The picnic starts at 6:00 PM and the meeting is at 7 PM. RSVP 923 5728. Join Us!

The following dates are for Board of Directors meetings, to be held at the Larned Building at 7 PM:

Thursday, March 4, 2004

Annual Meeting of the Society

Monday, June 7, 2004 at Greystone Farm, Rt 21

Museum / Shop Hours:

Ellen Larned Memorial Building (Rt. 193 – Thompson Common) is open the first Saturday of every month from 10 AM to 2 PM. Visit our exhibit on the last Thompson country doctor, Dr. Robert Paine and his family in the colorful Larned building.

The Society Gift Shop will be open the first Saturday of the month beginning March 6th, from 10-2 PM. New items include the hand painted Grosvenordale Mill wood building, Belding Corticelli brick door stop, 1855 Map of Thompson. Call Val 923 3776 for info.

To contact the newsletter editor, send an email to jamartino@charter.net

Membership Information

Membership dues are:

- \$10.00 Individual Membership
- \$15.00 Family Membership
- \$25.00 Contributing Membership
- \$5.00 Student Membership

Dues to be paid by July 1, 2003 for July 1, 2003 – June 30, 2004 year

- 1st reminder: Summer newsletter
- 2nd reminder: Fall newsletter

THS – PO Box 47, Thompson CT 06277

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Officers / Contact Info:

President: Joe Iamartino
 Vice President: Sue Vincent
 Treasurer: Barbara Weaver
 Secretary: John Lengel
 Curator: Mark Savolis
 Collections: Hattie Greene
 Photos: Alice Biesiadecki
 Museum Shop: Lucille Barrette, Helen Flood, Carol Holowa, Val Iamartino, Henrietta Panu, Jane Provost, June Schoppe, Sue Vincent, Sandra Warner
 Website: Barbara Loy
 Museum: Barbara Weaver; Beth Greene
 Concert Chair: Jane Vercelli
Call us 860 923 3200 or see
www.thompsonhistorical.org

The President's Quill

by Joe Iamartino

Thirty months ago, a small group of Society volunteers began collecting Thompson-related photographs for a pictorial history book of Thompson. At long last, Donning Publishing will be shipping us that book, with a scheduled delivery date of February 6, 2004.

So many people contributed that I can't possibly thank everyone. Many of them will have their names listed in the book. Thanks also to our sponsors—Citizens National Bank, Quinnetis Country Club, Ivanhoe, Xtramart, Putnam Savings Bank, Ray Joslin from Hearst and our special Lucille from Barrette LLC. You have our thanks for your generosity.

I apologize now for all of the material that didn't make it into the book. We had over 15,000 photos to pick from. With recorded history of at least 300 years, and a significant Native American presence too, many great photos and stories didn't make it....and that is what this column is about.

Some of the items included were ho-hum, run-of-the-mill items that may seem out of place. My view is that life isn't all parades, 4th of July picnics, floods, school graduations and birthday parties but those are the times when everyone has a camera out. We have thousands of those photos. The rare photo of a girl and her dog playing in the dirt lane or barefooted children in a classroom working at their lessons are frankly hard to find. While we

have the obligatory photos of parades, schools, churches and mills, one goal was to include a few offbeat photos and stories to show Thompson's true character.

Another goal was to provide those interested in Thompson history with a sequel to the Thompson and Killingly sections of Ellen Larned's "History of Windham County". If you are new to Thompson and want to catch up quickly on its history, the new book and Larned's history should be good for this purpose.

The last goal of this book was to document what isn't here in Thompson anymore. This was once a farming community. Then came the busy dirt turnpikes with the village commercial centers. The mills followed and revolutionized not just Thompson, but America. The old was torn down and the new put in its place, and in some cases, a single photo is all that is left to show us what 'it' looked like then.

That single photo, perhaps faded and in tatters, had to be found in someone's attic, that old shoebox in the basement or, in two cases, at the recycling center shack. The photos of an extended Thompson family for the past one hundred years were about to be tossed in the garbage when found by a history buff and donated to the Society for this book. People from all over the world have sent us photos they didn't want. It is from these photos AND those carefully collected by the Society AND those loaned by others who value Thompson's past and want

it remembered, that the book was built around. The book has a few damaged and unretouched photos to illustrate this point.

Considerable effort by our section teams was invested identifying the 'person, place or thing' depicted in the photographs. Very few photos had any identifying marks. It was only through the collective memories of those asked were we able to provide attributions. We apologize now for any errors and beg you to let us know if you do find any.

Lastly, please buy a copy of the book. Buy copies to give to your children, grandchildren and friends too. We added 16 more pages than originally planned so our projected price went up a bit....but it is still worth every cent. Not only will you be helping the Society from the proceeds, but photos in the book just might spur you to check out that cigar box of photos in your attic.

...and when you do find a gem, be sure to share it with all of us too....

Administrative Position Interviews Proceeding

In the last newsletter, we advertised for a paid administrator for the Society. We are pleased to say that a number of qualified candidates have come forward for the position.

Interviews are being conducted now and by the time the next newsletter is published, our new administrator should be on board and diving into his/her duties. We look forward to the help!

News:

The 15th Annual Christmas Concert was postponed on Dec. 6th due to the heavy snow. A wonderful concert was held on the 13th instead. Our thanks to Jane Vercelli for organizing a splendid evening and to the many volunteers, from town and beyond, who contributed.

The photographs with St. Nick at the Museum was a great success. Marlys Elliott's Santa outfit was truly spectacular on the character actor and his beard was real. The photograph of (my daughter) Marissa with Santa is wonderful but you should see it in color! The photograph quality and the setting, with Beth Greene's tree and Sue Vincent's sleigh, in the museum building, made for great photographs. Thanks to the volunteers



too, especially the patient Mr. Elliott who, with wife Marlys, endured the trials and tribulations inherent in digital photography. The results were well worth the effort.



Scott Alexander and North Grosvenordale Cub Scout Den 3—Pack 29 on a recent visit to the Thompson Historical Society Museum at the Ellen Larned Memorial Building. The Museum is open from 10 am to 2 pm the first Saturday of every month.

World War II Spotting Tower

Jim Sali mentioned the other day that he was looking up information on the spotting tower that was constructed during World War II at the intersection of Rt. 12 and Rt. 131, in front of Gervais' Garage. Boy Scouts and townsfolk worked the tower, recording the types of planes flying overhead, their direction and time of passage. After the war, the tower was sold for its wood. Does anyone have a photo of this?



Frank Messenger, at his desk, in the library of the agent's house, about 1900. Courtesy of Marilyn Couch

Frank Messenger

In the last newsletter, we learned what happened to the Grosvenor-Dale Company mill agent, Frank Messenger, after he left Thompson for a commune out west. Two of his grandchildren, Marilyn Couch and Don Berry wrote us with the information. After reading that newsletter, we received the following note from Wally Brodeur, via Charlie Seney:

...Speaking of Messenger reminds me of the days when Dad was handling the contract painting for the Gros'dale Co. In those days both mills were under the same management and Dad had his men working jobs in both places. At that time I was painting during my school vacation. So we had a paint shop near the First National Store in North Village and in Gros'dale we had a paint shop across the street from the old stone mill vicinity. In this building was an antique electric car that looked more like a buggy with wire spoked wheels and rubber tires. I believe it was steered with a tiller rather than a steering wheel. I was told that this was used by Messenger to commute between the two mills. I often wonder if this priceless old vehicle survived the scrap drives of W.W.II. The car described is shown at left.



1901 – Believed to be Frank Messenger and his driver in the electric car in front of the N. Gros. Hose House decorated to honor Pres. McKinley, assassinated in Buffalo, NY that year.

Mystery: On the Disappearing Paintings from the last newsletter, a 100 year old Quinabaug Historical Society article titled "The Old Square" postulated that the Aaron White's life size painting of his wife was buried with him. We had no response on the whereabouts of the painting of Ellen Larned. Our Mystery for this newsletter is: what happened to the electric car shown in the photo above. We think it was still in existence into the 1930s.....Ideas?

Messenger's grand-daughter, Marilyn Couch added some new information too....

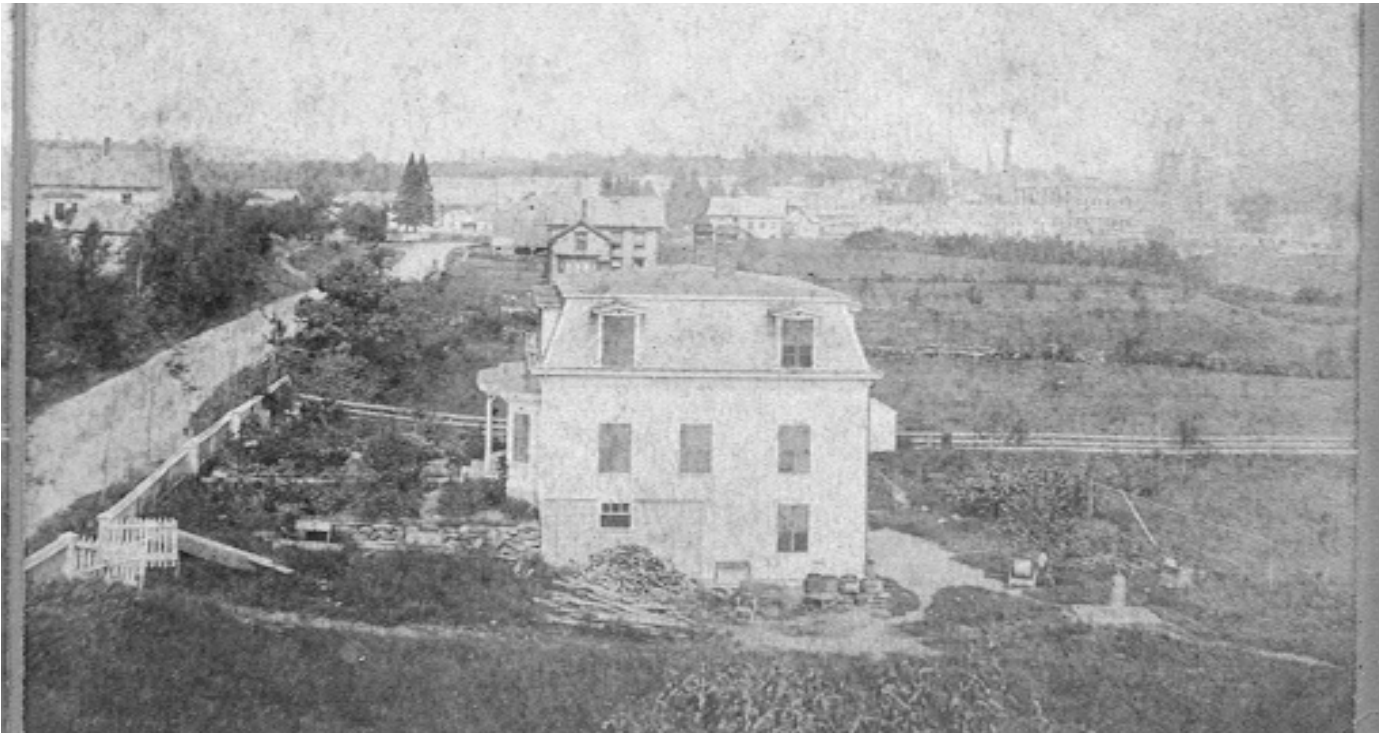
"...I went back to a little blurb our mother wrote in 1972 about our family (only 1-1/2 pages) and in that she relates that "Mr. Doanecalled father and asked if my brother Don could come over with the auto and drive around in front of his horses to get them used to the auto."

The Hospital Block

This is the Hospital Block on Main Street in North Grosvenordale as it looked when it was being dismantled in 1987.

To the left of the Block is the Salle Union building and to right of it is Valade's.

If anyone has better photographs of the Hospital Block, please contact us.



This is the Hospital Block on Main Street in North Grosvendordale in an early stereo-opticon photograph, obviously prior to 1896 (as the 1896 Lutheran Church isn't visible). The Block was built about 1875. Photo courtesy of Larry Houle, Sr.



Ask The Society

Q. How much was the toll on Thompson's old turnpike roads?

A. From the (History of) The Wallum Pond Estates by Harry Lee Barnes drafted about 1922, we have this answer AND the story of the end of the Brass Ball Inn:

"...close to the State line, was an old tavern, The Brass Ball, so called from a bronzed wooded 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:

(from the original board sign now in the possession of Anna Hoyle)

Rate of Toll

	Cents
Every traveling 4-wheeled pleasure carriage and horses	25
Chaise, chair or sulky	12 ½
Loaded wagon or cart drawn by four beasts	12 ½
Each additional beast	3
Loaded wagon drawn by 2 beasts	12 ½
Each additional beast	3
Empty wagon or cart	6 ¼
Four-wheeled pleasure carriage drawn by one horse	8
Single horse cart loaded	6 ¼
Single horse cart empty	4
Pleasure sleigh	6 ¼
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 1840s but was discontinued after 1853 (toll was sometimes collected not at the Brass Ball but farther westward in East Thompson village). Daniel Barrett bought the Brass Ball from 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 to 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."

Q. I know the Marianapolis School building was built on the site of Carolyn Hall on the former Ream estate. Who was Mr. Ream and what happened to Carolyn Hall?

Norman Bruce Ream was born into a farm family in Pennsylvania. He served in the Civil War as a member of the 85th PA Infantry, and was wounded twice. He later became a businessman and rose to corporate prominence, serving on the board of directors of U.S. Steel, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, the Pullman Company, National Biscuit Co. (Nabisco) and the Equitable Life Assurance Society, among others. He was a friend of John Doane who had a summer home in Thompson. Ream built Carolyn Hall in Thompson following a visit to Doane's estate (Primrose). At Ream's funeral, President Lincoln's son Robert served as a pallbearer. Information from the *History of the Eighty-Fifth Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry* by Luther S. Dickey (New York: J.C. & W.E. Powers, 1915). Carolyn Hall burned in 1964 and was replaced by the main building in use at Marianapolis today.

Q. What or where is the Hospital Block?

A. It was a building built by the Grosvenor-Dale Company as a medical clinic for the mill workers and their families on Main Street in North Grosvenordale. It was taken down about 1987. See the photos on page 5. It was next to the Salle Union building / theatre.