



# The Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

www.thompsonhistorical.org

Fall 2005

## Calendar of Events

**Board of Director Meeting Dates:**  
**New Thompson Library Building; 7 PM**  
**(2006)1/17, 3/6, 4/24, 6/5**

**President's Quill:** In this 'late' Fall issue, I ask you... How many small changes in a village does it take to make a big change in a town? Photos of well-known places in Thompson demonstrate the passage of time the best.

My thanks to the many people who raise a hand to help us. Ken Goloski, always there with his woodworking expertise; the Barrettes, with their donation of fine wood; Helen Flood, coordination of shop volunteers; Chet Holewa, building woodcrafts for the museum shop; Jane Cassidy & staff at Convenient Graphics for their time and talent; Chuck at Windsor Framing; the team at Chase Graphics in Putnam; Sue Vincent and the creative team of the Museum Shop; the local artists Donna Lange, David Wagner, Sandra McNeil, Roland Giguere, Tom Menard; the board of directors—for their time and advice and to all of the other volunteers. A special mention goes to Bernie Davis who donates his high tech wood cutting skills for our wood building collection. Bernie's expertise also saved the Mechanicsville School building, today a highly regarded tea house. All are encouraged to visit.

David Cassells wanted me to mention the passing of his brother Edward back on July 16, 2005. Born in Grosvenordale in 1917, Edward graduated in 1934 from Tourtellotte Memorial High School, was a reporter for the Worcester Telegram & Gazette writing stories of interest to Thompson (e.g. Vonsiatsky, Kermit Roosevelt) and then served 20 years in the Navy, seeing action in both WW II and the Korean War. He leaves a wife of 60 years, and other family. I am sure there are many in town who remember Ed and the Cassells family.

In looking over the membership list every once in a while, I am amazed how many people who once lived in Thompson continue to subscribe. How many who don't live here anymore have bought our Echoes of Old Thompson book or come to visit! Is this the same for every home town or is there something special about Thompson memories?

I leave it for you to decide. Happy Holidays to you all! Joe

## Administrator's Corner by BLAIR COLE

"Holiday Treasures" - As we enter into this holiday season, I can think of no greater gift to all of us than the stories and memories of a bygone Thompson, handed down to us over the course of this year. Clarence Ballard, Walter Eddy, Ernie Oleary, Behulah Chandler, Robert Langer, Ruth and Harry Elliott, Sally Newcombe, Adrienne Coderre, Millie Reynolds, Harold Davis, Henry Bernard, Marion Howard, Don Hoenig, David Rawson, Russell Robbins, Bob Hagstrom and Mary Maitland were patient and generous enough to sit before our video camera and allow us to hear through their words and see through their eyes a vision of the places, people and events of a Thompson now past. Many of the stories from these interviews will be appearing in the upcoming book Echoes of Old Thompson II. The interviews in their entirety will be archived at the Ellen Larned Museum to be available for viewing and study. Society members and others have contributed to this ongoing project by helping to transcribe the contents of these tapes into text documents that we can store in our museum database.

My thanks to all who have contributed their time and efforts, and especially to those who shared with us their stories. Next year, as we continue to build our oral history of Thompson, we welcome all suggestions of people we should interview. The stories we have gathered thus far are priceless and we look forward developing a permanent digital record of these sessions for use by future generations. I wish everyone a very happy and healthy holiday season! Blair Cole

## Membership Information

### Membership dues are:

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

### • Dues to be paid by July 1, 2005 for July 1, 2005 – June 30, 2006 year

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

## Inside this issue:

*Calendar, Quill, Admin. Corner* 1

*Old photos – Vernon Stiles, No. Gros, Rt 12* 2

*New photos – Vernon Stiles, No. Gros, Rt 12* 3

*New photos – bridge, Quinebaug, bakery* 4

*Old photos – bridge, Quinebaug, bakery* 5

*Starr House Mystery* 6

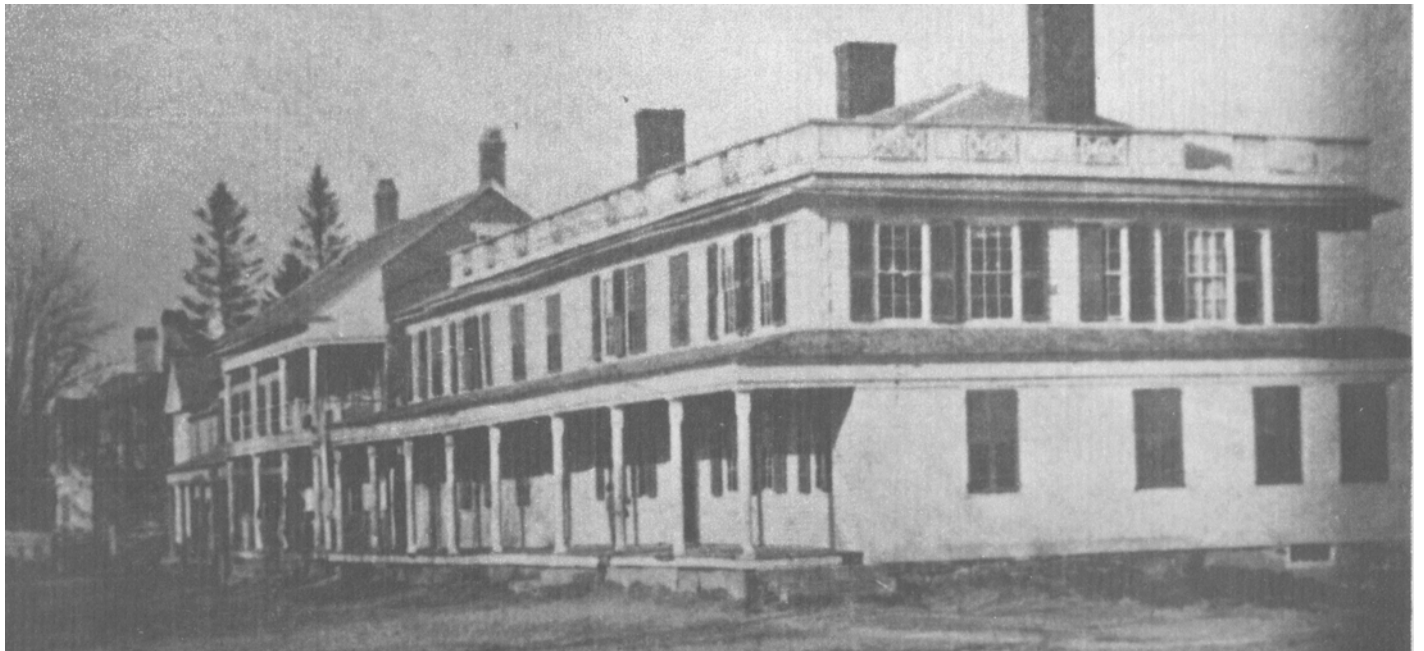
*Oldest House* 7

*Q & A – Beehunt* 8

*Q & A – Outhouse* 8

## Officers / Contact Info:

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**or call us at 860-923-3200**



Near Greek Village in 1911, this girl and her dog posed for photo in the middle of Rt.12, close to the trolley tracks





*Top Photos:* The Vernon Stiles Inn has seen its share of renovation over the years. Here is evidence of at least one merger of two separate buildings. Compare images closely.



*Middle Photos:* This No. Gros. photo from early 1936 (clue - no leaves on trees) shows bridge damage, but reveals the site of the old hose house and worker housing, both gone today. The new library can just be seen through the trees.











*Top Photo:* The bridge at St Joseph's is now two lanes, with far more vegetation. The building close to the water shown in the older photo is no longer standing.

*Middle Photo:* The QUINEBAUG railroad crossing and the church are still in the center of both photos, though the church is obscured by trees in the new one.

*Bottom Photo:* The Superior Bakery building in North Grosvenordale reveals a significant expansion sometime in its past.





At the north end of Brandy Hill, well over 275 years ago, one of our town's earliest settlers, Comfort Starr, built his home. The ruins of this same Starr house were reported by Ellen Larned to have been completely taken down a few years before 1899. While the home of an early settler is in itself interesting, there was a fascinating Larned story, .....a mystery, that surrounds the building, and one old lady who lived there.

While there are a number of variations on the story, the essential elements are this: there was a certain Lord Townley of Lancashire, England who owned a very substantial estate and cash fortune. His daughter, Mary Townley, fell in love with a man not of the same class and despite the objections of her friends and family, announced her intention to marry the man. Her parents insisted that she drop the relationship, they

being greatly embarrassed in society for the daughter's choice. Cut off by her parents from the outside world who believed that more appropriate suitors might appear, Mary secretly communicated with her paramour for months by notes through a friend. A ship bound for Holland had two last-minute passengers come aboard. At the Townley Manor, Mary was reported missing along with her most valuable possessions. The young man was soon found to be missing as well and a search of the entire countryside was made. Years later, it was surmised that the young couple sailed first to Holland and then to America where they disappeared into the rough interior of the New England Colonies. For years, the parents searched for their daughter on two continents but neither parent ever saw her or heard from her again. When Lord Townley passed away, he left his fortune to the missing daughter with the hope that she still lived.

Ellen Larned wrote, .....the "old Starr House" was ...connected with the last days of one who story involves so much romance and mystery – the reputed daughter of Lord Townley. It was here that the dying woman told her story to her daughter and entrusted to her keeping the hoarded relics that the confirmed the truth of her connection with this noble family. So convincing was this testimony that most strenuous efforts were made by her descendants to establish their claim to the great estate in England, left vacant by the un-

married (remaining) daughter of Lord Townley. Even the grave in which the poor remains were laid away, in the East Thompson burial grounds, was vainly searched for further relics. Few more pathetic stories can be found in romance literature than the elopement of this young English heiress with her lover to America, her disappointment and hardships, her long and weary struggles, ending at last in the "old Starr House" at Brandy Hill.

In the years that followed, many people falsely claimed to be relatives of the lost Mary Townley. Books were published claiming to have solved the great mystery. What the truth is about Mary, the old woman at the 'Old Starr House', I do not know. Perhaps one of our readers could research more of this strange story for us.....

The old school house on Thompson Hill (located at about where the gate of Marianapolis School is today on Rt 193) disappeared a little more than century ago. The last we have on its location is this note from the April 1900 Monthly Record: "Mr. Morarty is to have the old school house building and it is being moved." We want to know where the building went— call 860 923 3776.

## THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

FACTS RELATING TO THE  
"LAWRENCE-TOWNLEY," "CHASE-TOWNLEY," MARRIAGE  
AND ESTATE QUESTION.



WITH GENEALOGICAL INFORMATION CONCERNING THE  
FAMILIES OF TOWNLEY, CHASE, LAWRENCE,  
STEPHENS, STEVENS, AND OTHER  
FAMILIES OF AMERICA.

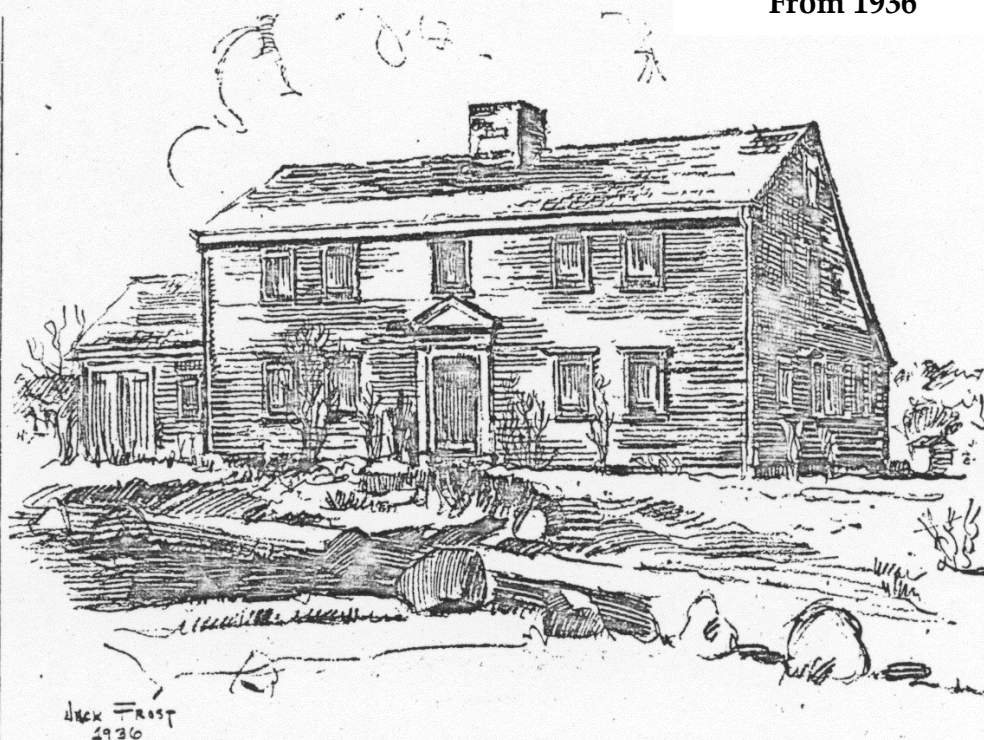
BY  
FRANK ALDEN HILL.

RAND AVERY COMPANY, BOSTON,  
MADE THIS BOOK.  
1888.



**Oldest Standing Thompson House:** A few issues back, the topic of the oldest Thompson house still standing was discussed. Believing that Ms. Ellen D. Larned would also have been interested in this topic, I began a search of her many articles for any candidates. As with so many other historical topics of local interest, typically when we find an unusual, deeply hidden nugget of very old information, invariably we learn that Ms. Larned was there before us. Such is the case with the mystery of the oldest Thompson house still standing. In October 1900, she wrote that the oldest Thompson home was 'probably' the ca. 1715 OLD RED HOUSE, well known as the home of Captain George H. Nichols. It stood on Rt. 193 near the modern I395 overpass. That house came to G.H. Nichols through Aaron Nichols who bought the house of Captain Stephen Keith. How Cpt. Keith came by the house is not stated but Larned mentioned that it was possibly built by the sons of David Shapley, the donor of the West Thompson Burying Ground. Some of the older folks may remember this old house and that in 1935, it was sold to Mrs. Edward Ingraham of Cambridge and moved to Gloucester, MA. Therefore the oldest Thompson house may be still standing but it isn't in Thompson at all. Note too that there were Ingrahams living in Thompson for many years and it is possible that there is a strong town link. I'd like to believe that the people who bought the place had a strong tie to Thompson and this is quite possible.

From 1936



#### ONE OF CONNECTICUT'S OLDEST HOUSES IS IN MASSACHUSETTS

Strange as it may seem, one of Connecticut's oldest houses is now situated in Massachusetts. The building shown in the sketch, and which dates back 218 years, was moved last year to Decatur street, Bass Rock, from Thompson, Ct. It is owned by Edward Ingraham of 7 Lowell street, Cambridge.

When the house was built, the town of Thompson was known as Killingly, Ct. It was first owned by Daniel Shapley, a weaver. Later it came into the possession of John Nichols of Kansas City, who sold it to the present owner. It was carried to its present site in 12 truckloads, the moving being done under the supervision of

Harold F. Conant. The distance was 104 miles.

The front door of the house was not a part of the original Connecticut dwelling. It came from the Ballou house in Cumberland, R. I., which adjoined the birthplace of President Garfield's mother. Before the door is a stone eight feet square and weighing two and one-half tons.

Now, a footnote to this Larned statement, found in the same October 1900 Thompson Monthly Record magazine, mentions that the Old Cady House on Brandy Hill may be the only challenger to the OLD RED HOUSE.

The Cady House may be the one shown on the 1856 map of East Thompson on page 255 of the Echoes of Old Thompson book, listed under the name of Miss Cady. Readers with info on this old home are asked to come forward.

## Ask The Society

**Q. Why is there a moon on the out-house door? (see example)**



**A.** Way back when, the moon was associated with women and the sun was associated with men and each had their own outhouse symbol. It doesn't take a lot of thinking to figure out the connection between women and the moon. For ventilation, the narrow crescent opening was big enough (but kept out small critters) and allowed a bit of light in too. Some claim that the men never took care of (or even needed) their outhouses and that is why we mainly see the surviving crescent moon versions today.

**Q. What is a bee hunt?**

**A.** Ron Tillen writes.....One Sunday morning Dick Asal and I were talking with Albert Bushey and he was reminiscing about the old days and he casually mentioned a place where he had been on a bee hunt. I let this pass – my hearing is not what it used to be. But a little later on he mentioned this again. “Albert, did you say bee hunt?” I asked, “yaas” he said. “What is a bee hunt?” I said. And then he told us. Albert was introduced to bee hunting as a game and a way to enjoy the woods and pastures at the weekend. After he retired in the early 1970s, he and his friend Leon Robbins would go on a bee hunt together. First they would go to a patch of blooming bushes, flowers or shrubs and watch the bees and see where they were headed after taking on a full load of nectar.

The challenge was to locate the hive. However there was more to it than that. First they needed a bee box. Years ago bee boxes were made locally by adapting the wooden containers used to contain the dried salted codfish sold by the Groton Company. These boxes were very well made with mortised joints and a sliding lid. The lid was replaced by a sheet of glass. Several honeybees visiting the blooms would be caught and placed in the box. Then the box might be hung by a leather loop fastened to the top of a wooden stake driven into the ground. The bees could be seen and the lid opened enough to let a chosen specimen go free. The first bee let go was observed and followed until it was lost to view. Then a second bee would be launched perhaps along the route flown by the first and the process repeated until the hive was found. I asked Albert how the bees knew where to go and he said that as soon as the bee was freed it would fly up in a spiral to establish its whereabouts and then it would head off to the hive.

Most likely the hive would be found in old tree stump or in the part of a tree trunk where a branch had broken off and where the stem had rotted away to form a natural hollow or in an old woodpecker hole. When the old timers found the hive they contacted the landowner and requested permission to fell the tree or knock down the stump to pull out the combs, which contained the honey, which would be shared with the landowner. Albert recalls that years ago the Whiting brothers, Oren and Horace, hunted bees as did “Stub” Baker and that it was once a more serious business which now is all but forgotten. When a hive was found whether on a hunt or by chance, the finder might carve his initials on the tree to stake a claim. Honey was harvested in the fall when the bees had completed their work. Albert was never stung but he never tried to get at the honey. Those that did used smoke to calm the bees down. Domestic honeybees are kept not only for the honey but because bees are essential for cross-pollination of fruit trees. If there are no bees in an orchard at blossom time there will not be any apples or pears later on. Bee hunters could help to track down swarms of domestic bees that had escaped and were setting up a new hive in the woods.

There were other tricks used to ensure the success of the hunt. Bees would be trapped as they collected the nectar as before but when a bee was released it would be marked with a small dab of water based paint administered with an eye dropper. The marked bee would be released and the time taken for it to return to the blooms would be noted. Bees were marked with different colors to see if there were bees from more than one hive in the bee box. This way the bees from the closest hive could be followed.

There was another way the bee hunters used to find a hive. Leon's wife Adeline prepared a mixture of anise, honey and water. Some of this aromatic bait was placed in the bee trap. Once the bees found the bait the bee hunt then proceeded as before but with the advantage that the starting place was chosen by the hunters and not by the bees. By combining the use of bait and color drops bees could be tracked over long distances. Albert and his fellow bee hunters traced one hive that was four miles away from the original starting point. On another occasion Albert and Leon were off in the woods near the old rail road track in East Thompson. When they returned to the car they found that it was full of bees that had smelt some bait left on the back seat and had got in through a rear window which had been left open a crack. It must have been good bait because the bees in the car had come from three separate hives. The hunters then opened all the car windows and drove around for several miles before all the bees were expelled.

Albert said that once there was a celebration of a successful honey harvest at the Thompson Rod and Gun Club. Honey combs were placed in a tub on a stool in the middle of the floor and couples danced around the tub pausing to grab a piece of comb to suck out the honey. He said this could be a sticky process. This may seem strange to us in the cybernetic world of today but remember harvest festivals were a major part of the rural year and honey was one of the “crops” that was gathered in. I remember my father bringing home honeycombs during wartime England when sugar was rationed and there was no candy (sweets) for sale. Sucking out the honey and chewing the waxy comb was a rare treat in those days.

Where is the evidence of old time bee hunting in Thompson? The bee boxes used by the Whiting brothers were acquired by Leon Robbins and were later sold at auction. Albert would have liked them but could not get there to make a bid. Leila Roosevelt and a friend took photographs of bee hunting in Thompson. It would have been reassuring to have had copies to support this story. When I first heard about bee hunting I thought my leg was being pulled but there are stories about bee hunting on the WEB – the craft was not unique to the northeast. Bee hunting really was a common pastime in rural areas in this country at one time. A good bee hunter had to have a good understanding of bee behavior, a lot of patience and very keen eyesight.