



The Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

www.thompsonhistorical.org

December 2009

Calendar of Events

Board of Director Meeting Dates—2010

January 27, 2010
February 24, 2010
March 31, 2010
April 22, 2010
May 19, 2010

7 PM, Thompson Community Center

***** Upcoming Events:

**Thursday, 7 PM
March 18, 2010**
The History of the
Thompson Speedway,

presented by. D.R. Hoenig; with more than 100 slides; at the Tourtellotte Memorial High School Auditorium; Free admission; data is tentative; call 860-923-3776 to confirm date and time
***Co-sponsored by the Thompson Historical Society and the Thompson Recreation Department.

Thursday, May 16, 2010 (tentative)
An Evening of American Historical Music with the nationally known Heritage Band

This is a fundraiser to help restore Thompson's Old Town Hall, completed in 1842. The concert will be held at the Tourtellotte Memorial High Auditorium; call to confirm time, date and price for the tickets. Call 860 923 3776 for details. Sponsored by the Thompson Historical Society and the Thompson Recreation Department.

**2010 TMHS ALUMNI BANQUET
MARK THE DATE!
June 19, 2010
at the Thompson Speedway**

Call to confirm details, 860-923-2350 or visit the TMHS Alumni Association on the web at: www.thompson.ctschool.net/TMHSAA/index.html

The Alumni Association has TMHS music room seats available for private markings. For \$100, individuals or families can pay for a seat to be reupholstered. A fine marker plate will be attached to the chair and the chair will be installed permanently in the TMHS Music Room, across from the Memorial Room at the TMHS.

Membership dues are:

Individual Membership—\$10;
Family Membership—\$15;
Contributing Membership—\$25;
Student/Gift Membership—\$5

Dues to be paid by July 1, 2009 for the 2009-2010 year:

Thompson Historical Society, Membership, PO Box 47, Thompson, CT 06277

Members can find their 'paid through' status on the address sticker in the mailing information section of the Historical Society newsletter. Members can buy first year gift memberships for non-members for a low introductory price of \$5

Shop News: 2010 Calendars and Echoes of Old Thompson II still available (markdown)

Look for a Museum Shop clearance sale soon. Call 860 923 5728

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Officers / Contact Info:

President: Joe Iamartino
Vice President: Burton Rhodes
Treasurer: Susan Vincent
Secretary: Mark Snay
Curator: Joe Iamartino
Photos: Alice Biesiadecki
Museum Shop: Lucille Barrette, Helen Flood, Henrietta Panu, Kiku Anderson, June Schoppe, Sue Vincent, Lisa Reinholdtsen
Website: Blair Cole
Bldgs Admin.: Gregg Aubin
www.thompsonhistorical.org
or call Joe Iamartino:
860-923-3776;
jiamartino@charter.net

President's Quill: Over the past two years or so, I've played a small part in a number of controversial situations involving the town. Well, there are three more controversial situations that need to be addressed in the months ahead and I am expecting the calls and emails to start up again as these topics rise for action.

Situation 1: Loss of Historic Buildings in Thompson

In 2009, we've seen the loss of several historic buildings in Thompson, most notably the Starr Tavern. What is the role of the Historical Society if it isn't to push for respect for our historical properties? This year, I've asked the Thompson Town Planner to look into enacting rules affecting properties older than 150 years. Many towns have such rules that allow for a review period before allowing demolition or major changes to historic properties. While all properties can't be preserved, perhaps a review period could be used to find a buyer willing to restore the property or to move a property slated for destruction or, worst case, dismantling of the building for reuse of the historic materials elsewhere. While no one likes restrictions on their property, if the wholesale destruction of historic barns and homes continues, Thompson will lose that element making it so special today.

Situation 2: Installation of the Sewer to Marianapolis School

Without restating the sewer controversy, the plan to bring the sewer line to Marianapolis could help the two Society buildings, the Larned Building & the Old Town Hall. Neither property has sufficient land for proper waste disposal according to the studies the town has on file. To rectify this, the THS Board of Directors has approved a motion to attach the two buildings to the upcoming sewer line should the town make attachment a possibility.

Situation 3: Addressing Neglected Historic Properties

Every month, the Historic Society receives letters asking how we can allow such and such property to fall to ruin. In each case, we've tried to connect the parties to resolve the particular situation but rarely is the problem easily resolved. Without adequate local rules that put real teeth into enforcing historic building preservation, we stand by helplessly wringing our hands, watching the properties decline past the point of restoration.

This year, my goal is to ask for rules that advocate for upkeep on historic properties. I know of several towns where the enacted rules are overly strict & have created problems for homeowners. That is not my goal. The lack of rules however allows the disgraceful situation now occurring with the Mason House on Thompson Hill. Instead of the Mason House being the flagship property overlooking the Thompson Common, we have a once-majestic property with falling, unpainted fences, overgrown grounds, and collapsing porches. A past 'winner' as a property designated one of the Top 10 Most Threatened Historic Places in Connecticut; the Mason Home is just one example what happens when a community can't protect its historic places. I hope you will support rules that bring sanity to an out-of-control situation.

More Civil War Topics

Dr. McGregor Letters: Thanks to everyone who wrote about the Dr. McGregor Civil War era newspaper articles. For those interested in knowing more about Dr. McGregor, a relative, Jeremiah S. McGregor, wrote a book entitled "Life and Deeds of Dr. John McGregor", published in 1886. You can find this book online as Google had it scanned, and it is available via the Google Books feature. Visit Google Books (<http://books.google.com>) and type in: *Dr. John McGregor* and the scanned book should appear as the first choice.

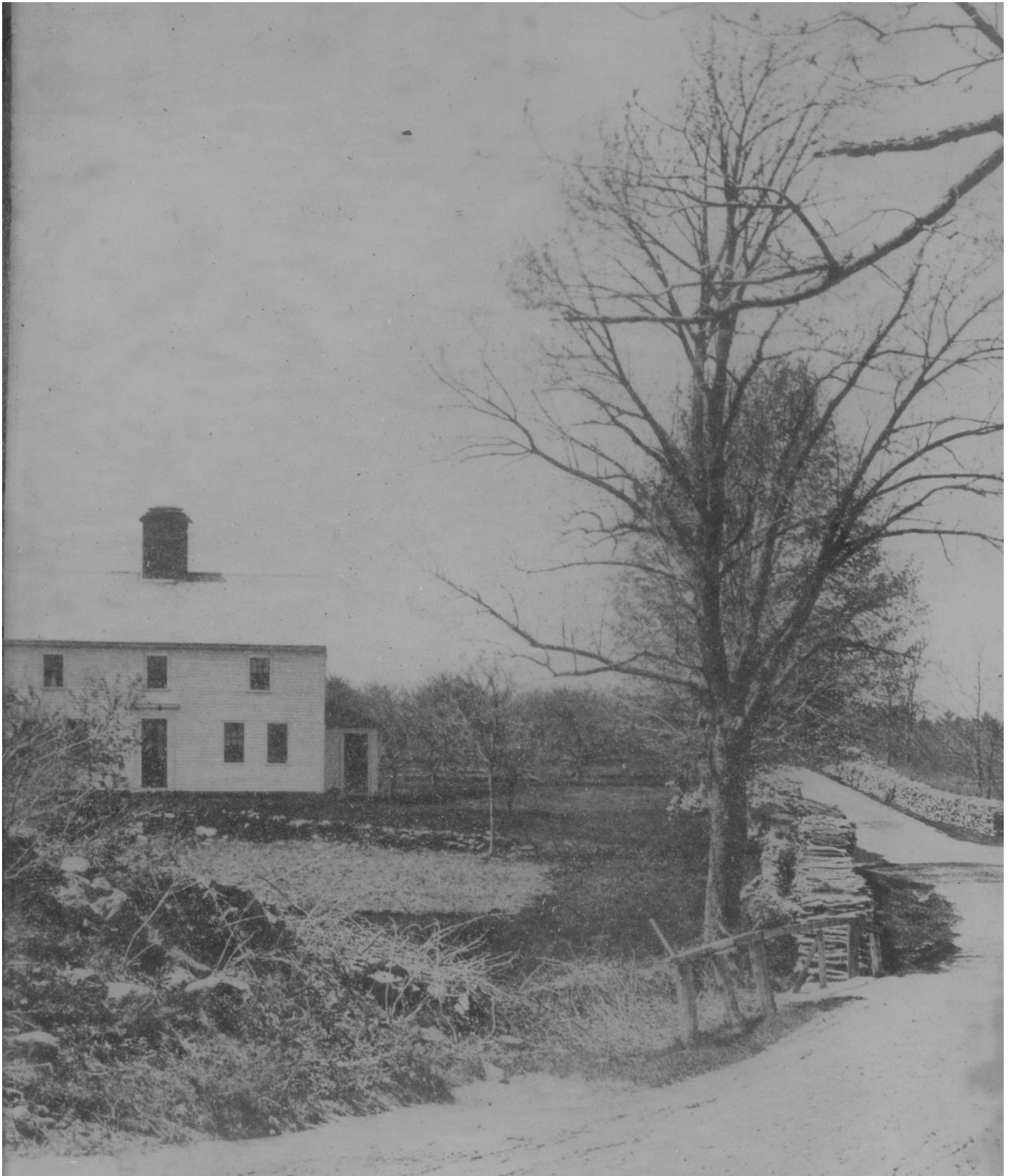
More Civil War era letters: In 1861, Thompson's Henry Washington Brown left home with two friends and signed up as a volunteer for the Massachusetts Volunteers (because Worcester was easier to reach then by train. The letters trace Henry's adventures from 1861 through 1864. Thanks to John Proctor for putting these up for us: www.espdesigns.com/letters/index.htm.

Dear Transcript: Society officers Burt Rhodes & Mark Snay represented the Society at the Killingly Historical Society's November 18th release of their book "Dear Transcript". The book is a collection of articles from the Windham County Transcript covering the Civil War period. It is hard today to imagine living through wartime with little to no press coverage, no live images from competing news teams, no home video & very few still shots as photography was then in its infancy. The best available information then was the occasional letter that made it home via a friend or neighbor or a story in the local newspaper. Stories could take weeks, sometimes months, to reach the editors. Knowing that people were hanging on every word, newspaper publishers would print excerpts from family letters, 3rd or 4th hand war stories, & long political war reports to meet the desperate need for information.

The Thompson Historical Society is selling "Dear Transcript". We thank Marilyn Labbe and the Killingly Historical Society for their fine work supporting Windham County history.

General John Tourtellotte: The TMHS Alumni Association continues to grow & prosper. More information on the Tourtellotte family continues to come in. The latest information is on the Tourtellotte hospital in Mankato, MN which can be found at the TMHSAA website: www.thompsonpublicschools.org/TMHSAA/newsletters_09/October_November.pdf The alumni team continue to find fascinating stories relating to the school and its benefactors. Please note that Gen. John Tourtellotte is not the same as John E. Tourtellotte, the Architect, though both were born in Thompson. The architect Tourtellotte is currently being remembered by Idaho Public Television for his design of Idaho's 100 year old state capitol. See <http://idahoptv.org/productions/specials/capitoloflight/>

Next Exhibit: The Society is working on a new Civil War exhibit, to open in May 2010 at the Ellen Larned Memorial Building. Interested? Call Joe @ 860-923-3776 to volunteer.



Our 2nd mystery photo believed to be from Alice Ramsdell — There are two mysteries in this photograph. One is the location. The second is the reason for all of the firewood stacked along the edge of the property. Ideas welcome!



The rot on the column years ago was cut away, making the column shorter. Repairs today are more complex as the column must be repaired & the plinth and column base must be fully replaced.

About 1910— columns with no plinth & base



Old Town Hall Restoration Project:

In a March 1968 newspaper article by Jim Sali, he wrote, "The Old Town Hall has not been used for about four years, since it was ordered closed by the fire marshal due to its unsafe condition." In July 1968, another article reports, "Our venerable Town Hall on Thompson Hill may not be lonesome much longer...The Historical Society hopes to preserve to improve the building & preserve it as a landmark."

Later in 1968, the newly formed Thompson Historical Society took responsibility for the Old Town Hall, paying a \$1 for a condemned building covered with graffiti and in desperate need of repairs.

Historical members, Boy Scouts, and other volunteers in the 1960s and 1970s stabilized the building.

Thousands of hours were donated then and later to improve the building and to find innovative ways to use it. The Society entertained with wonderful Christmas Concerts, opened a museum gift shop, taught Thompson students to write with quill pens, held Town Meetings once again, offered once again a platform for political speeches, cooked up family dinners and hosted Society presentations to name just a few of the activities.

More than 40 years have passed since the Old Town Hall became the heart of the Thompson Historical Society. Each decade saw more repairs to the hall. Since 2005, a new roof has been put on the building, a new bulk head installed, all of the main windows have been redone, and emergency lights upgraded.

This work is expensive and folks should remember that this is but one of two buildings we are maintaining.

Over at the Ellen Larned Building, now our Museum, we've also repaired the roof and numerous other upgrades since its conversion into a museum. We're grateful for the grants we've received from the 1772 Foundation and from funds from private donors and the labor of honored volunteers.

We've drained our reserves making needed repairs but more areas need attention. Like the previous generation at the Historical Society that found a way to pay for essential repairs, it is our turn to find a way to get things done.

We want our next generation of Thompson residents to point to the Old Town Hall and know that it was cared for, preserved, for all to enjoy who value Thompson's rich past.



THS Director Mark Snay pointed out that c1910 photos of the Old Town Hall showed the columns sitting directly on the porch floor. Rot at the bottom of the columns forced managers to cut the rot away and to add a plinth and column base to make up for the cut column section. Today's view of the Hall on pg. 4 shows the plinth / base rot.

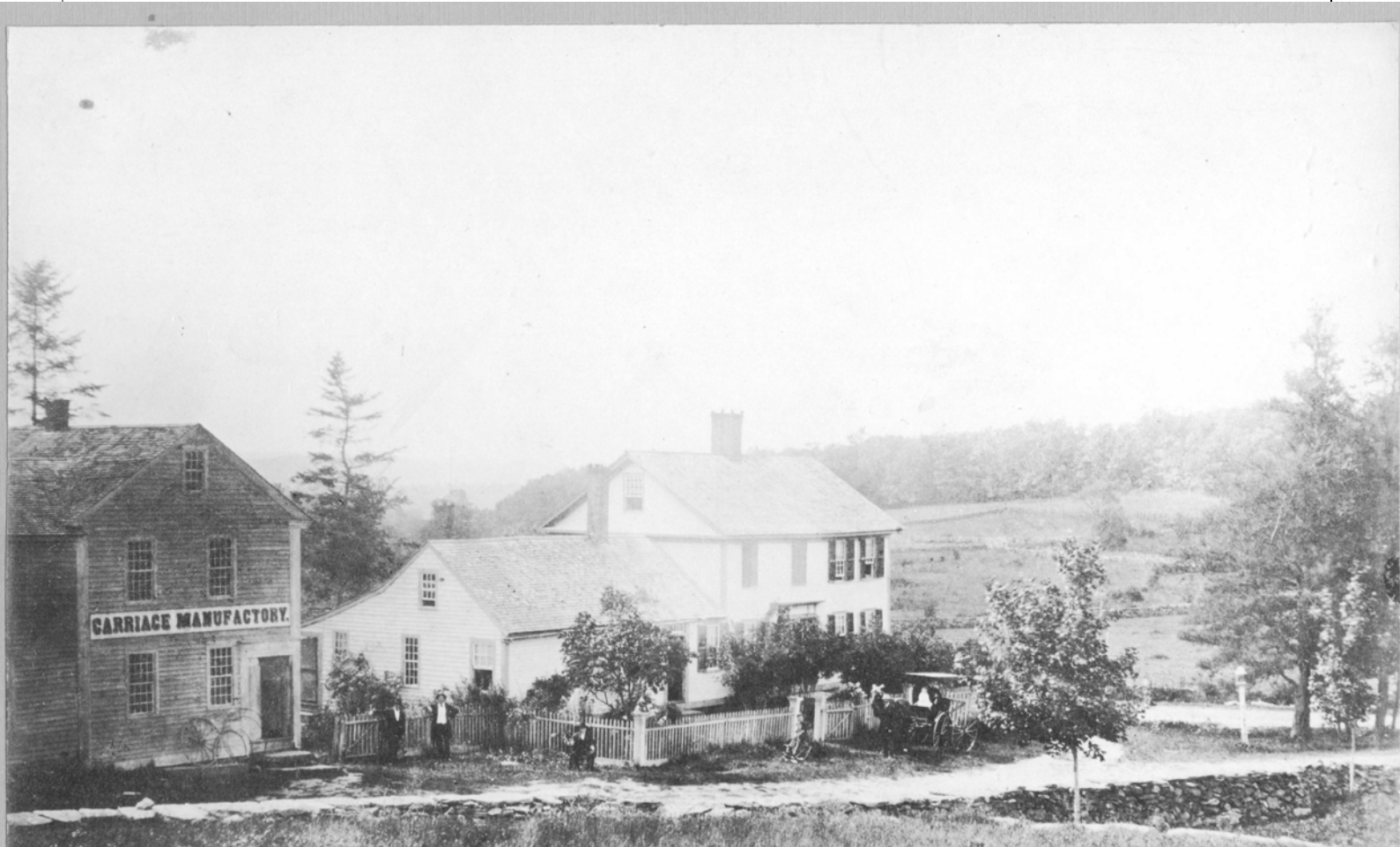
I want to help preserve the Old Town Hall. Here is how I can help.

My gift in the amount of \$ _____
is enclosed.

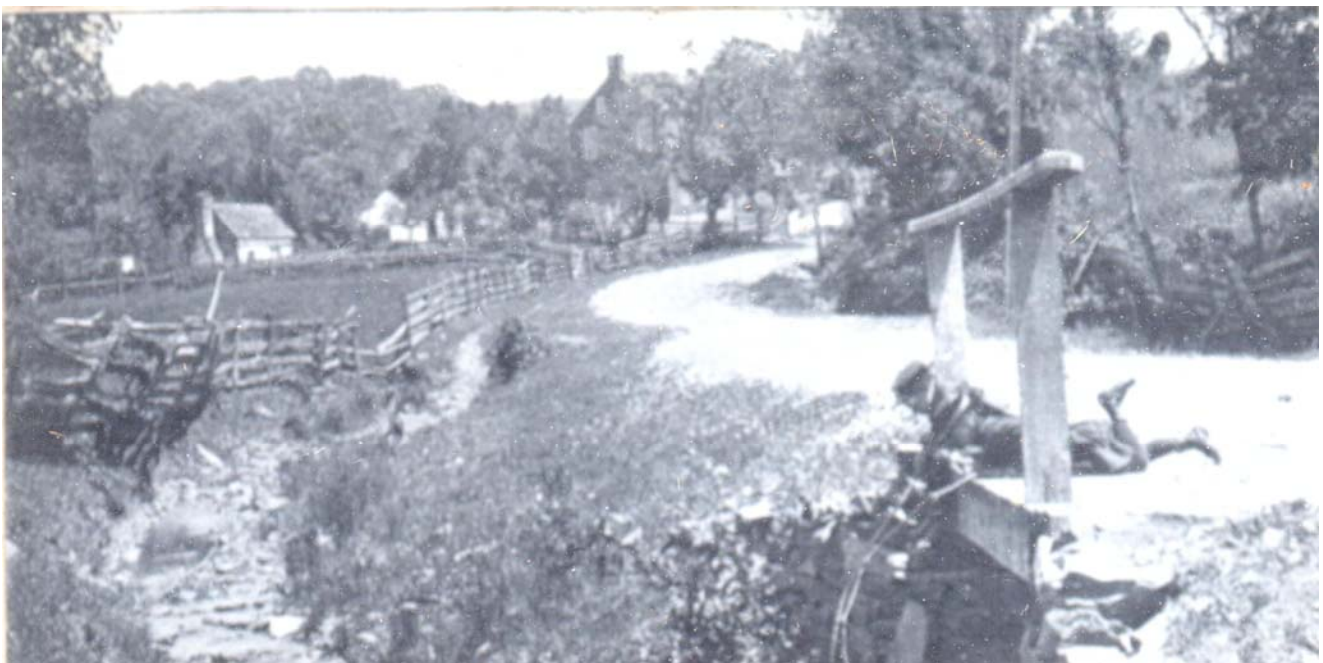
I'd like to help in another way. I'd like to contribute
paint, other materials, or my talent in helping restoring
the Old Town Hall. My contribution will be:

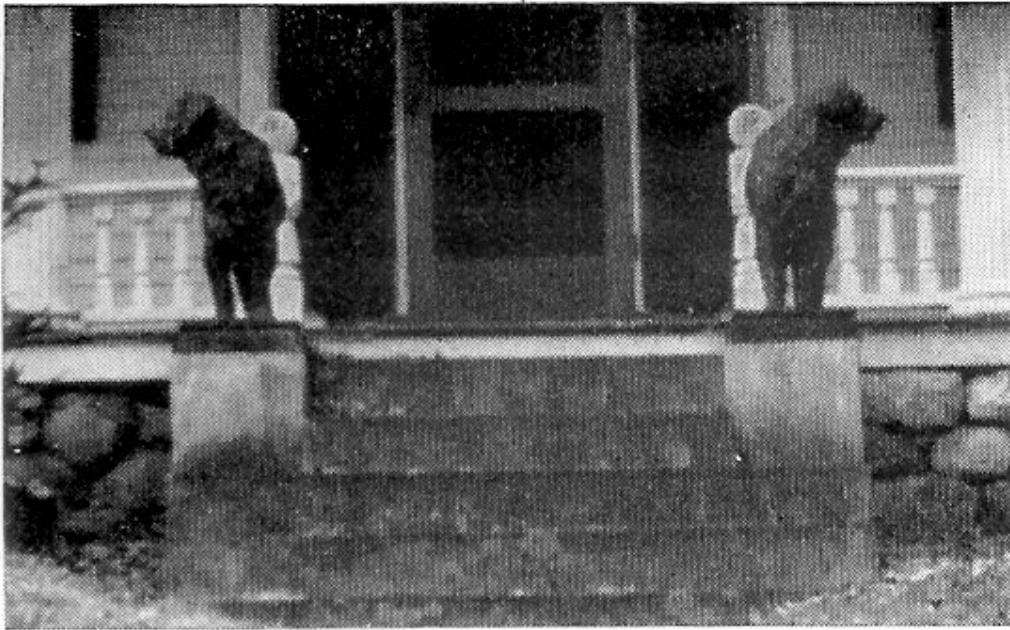
Mail to: **Thompson Historical Society**
Old Town Hall Preservation Project
P.O. Box 47, Thompson, CT 06277 or call 860-923-3776.

The Thompson Historical Society is 501c3 organization and donations are tax deductible. We thank you for your continued support.



The image above shows the Baldwin Carriage Manufactory located at the intersection of Rte 193 and Rte 21, south of Thompson Hill. The date of the photograph is probably about 1867. The mystery photo below is also believed to be from Alice Ramsdell and the scene is from one of Thompson's villages. Help wanted!





STOLEN DOGS FOR SALE

☞ These two life-sized, cast iron dogs, 100 years old (see photograph), were stolen from our property, known since 1842 as the Chandler House, in Thompson, Connecticut, last June 16th. Their origin is credited to Mr. William Henry Chandler, who had a mold taken in Boston from a beloved dog, from which two replicas were cast. The dogs have been on these granite steps since the mid 1800s and have become a local landmark. We feel that this is more than a personal loss and would very much appreciate any help your readers could give us in regaining them.

*Mrs. D. E. Williams, Box 333,
Thompson, Ct.*

The Iron Dogs of Thompson Mystery

Almost 40 years have passed since Mrs. Williams reported her iron dogs missing. It is a shame that nothing has been learned of their whereabouts. Hopefully, our efforts here might spur someone's memory.

Thompson is a wonderful community, but, in recent months, a rash of robberies has infuriated local residents. One brazen thief stole a copper weathervane off a rooftop. Another homeowner reported a missing lawn mower, only to point the mower out, on the back of a passing pickup to the trooper who came to take down his robbery details. The trooper took off in pursuit & captured the suspect.

Men aren't doing all of the evil deeds. Residents from East Thompson and Thompson Hill reported a woman with a backpack walking in the woods. She was later arrested with a male friend for larceny. Our visitor was apparently taking in more than just the sights of Thompson! Catch 'em...

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Quarterly Newsletter

The Thompson Historical Society

P.O. Box 47

Thompson, CT 06277

www.thompsonhistorical.org

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Ask The Society

Question: Who is George W. Dexter?

Answer: In 1984, Thompson resident Jim Ryan told various stories about his grandfather, G.W. Dexter. Dexter was one of several Dexters who built homes in Thompson. Most of the

homes he worked on had brick ends with quoin corners or fancy details such as round dormers or piazzas. Ryan had in his possession a paper written by Dexter for a 1914 speech at the Thompson Grange called the "Early Mechanics of Thompson" about homes built in town. Wish we had that paper!

Question: Did Thompson ever have a winery?

Answer: We know that the Ream Estate had an extensive grape arbor. It would make sense that some wine might have come off the estate. The only commercial winery was called St. Hilliary's or St. Hiliary's Winery, located off Rt. 12 in No. Grosvenordale. Grapes were grown starting in the early 1960s and grape & raspberry wines were produced by Peter and Mary Kerensky ca. 1978.



Thompson Hill Station