



The Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

www.thompsonhistorical.org

September 2007

Calendar of Events

All are welcome to attend membership meetings which take place at the Community Center at the Thompson Public Library at 7 PM unless otherwise stated. Board meetings (7 PM at the Community Center) are for directors only.

Board of Director Meeting Dates

Thursday: 9/27, 11/1, 12/13, 1/31/08, 3/7/08, 4/10/08, 5/22/08, Annual meeting on Monday June 16 at 6 PM picnic, 7 PM meeting

Membership Events & Presentations:

Thompson Raceway History presentation (see story on page 3): September 25, 2007– 7 PM, Tuesday

Thompson Raceway Presentation:

David Belden of Woodstock and Barbara Weaver will be speaking on the History of the Thompson Raceway, September 25, 2007. It will be held at the Thompson Community Center, 7 PM, hosted by the Thompson Historical Society and the Aspinock Historical Society.

To clarify for race fans, the Thompson Speedway and Thompson Raceway are not one and the same. The Raceway had a winding road course in the woods of East Thompson while the Speedway was, and continues to be, an oval race track. At one time, the Raceway incorporated the Speedway oval track into the course structure. David Belden will explain the fascinating history of the Raceway at his September presentation.

*Saturday, Oct. 6, 2007
Walking Weekend Walk # 31- 3 PM, Mill Village Memories.*

Join First Selectman Dave Babbitt, a retired educator, on this easy 2 hour adult stroll through the well-preserved mill village of North Grosvenordale, once one of the state's largest producers of cotton cloth. See where the workers lived, played and manufactured their product, and how the railroad, river and families made the community a success. Meet at the Lion's Bandstand directly off Riverside Dr. (Rte. 12) across from Town Hall.

*Sunday, October 7, 2007
Walking Weekend Walk*

#42– 1 PM, Thompson Hill

Join Joe Iamartino for an easy 1 hour tour of the registered historic district at Thompson Hill. Tour will start at the 1842 Old Town Hall and end at the Society's Museum at the 1902 Larned Building.

Thompson's Lithic Structures & the Upton MA Chamber - Cathy Taylor (Upton, MA), October 25, 2007– 7 PM

Cathy Taylor from the Upton (MA) Historical Commission will describe the process used in Upton MA to preserve the intact Upton lithic chamber. We'll have photos of lithic structures from Thompson & nearby communities too.

Reminder:

Membership dues are:

Individual Membership– \$10;

Family Membership– \$15;

Contributing Membership– \$25;

Student/Gift Membership– \$5

Dues to be paid by July 1, 2007

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Officers / Contact Info:

President: Joe Iamartino
Vice President: Burton Rhodes
Treasurer: Susan Vincent
Secretary: Ruth Barks
Curator: Mark Savolis
Photos: Alice Biesiadecki
Museum Shop: Lucille Barrette, Helen Flood, Carol Holewa, Val Iamartino, Henrietta Panu, Jane Provost, June Schoppe, Sue Vincent
Website / Collections: Blair Cole
Administrator: Blair Cole
www.thompsonhistorical.org
or call Joe Iamartino:
? 860-923-3776

**MYSTERY PHOTO:**

Thanks to the sharp eyes of Mark Snay who saw the Doane photo auction on eBay, Society Treasurer, Sue Vincent, won the auction of rare photos that originated from the John Doane estate of 100+ years ago. Help us identify the exact location shown in this rare photo.

Specific Request for Information related to the Thompson Raceway:

Racing historian Larry Berman is looking for copies of any Thompson Raceway race entry & race results as well

as copies of Haybale newsletters. He is specifically looking for the following race results: 8/17/52, 4/25/52, 9/3/55 and 6/29/59. Readers should contact: Larry Berman; Cunningham Motorsport Historian, 1155 Walnut

Street, Newton, MA 02461-1242, Tel: 617-964-0000, Cell: 617-594-6666, Fax: 617-964-5574, eFax: 617-663-6324; email: larry@bermanadjusters.com
website:
www.briggscunningham.com

President's Quill:

The Society has dedicated the Archives Room at the Museum in the Ellen Larned Memorial Building to the memory of Hattie Greene. We thank the Greene family and Hattie's many friends for their gener-

ous donations to the Society. Hattie left us all too soon... ..

At the Annual Meeting in June, several members suggested that having more membership presentations would be a good thing. We will en-

deavor to offer a program a month through our season. Take advantage too of the remaining weeks of our Chase-Ballard-Dalton-Eddy family artifact exhibit at our Museum.

Our new exhibit, to com-

plement our Speedway and Raceway presentations, will be of racing memorabilia and photos in our collections. Expect this exhibit in Spring '08.

We welcome new directors Karen Charbonneau, Burt Rhodes & Blair Cole!



Thompson Raceway "The First Place to Race"

Thompson Raceway, in Thompson, Connecticut, was the first purpose-built sports car racing circuit in the United States. It was the answer to the need by U.S. servicemen who brought sports and racing cars back from Europe after World War II. They brought MGs and Jaguars, Healeys and Triumphs, Fiats, Alfa Romeos and Porsches back and wanted a place to race. At first, public roads were blocked off for racing at Watkins Glen, Bridgehampton and elsewhere, but there were accidents. Then airports out in the country were used for racing, but this lost its appeal.

George and Barbara Weaver had an idea for a paved circuit that would be used for racing only. This is commonplace now but was very innovative at the time. George got together a company and sportsman Briggs Cunningham largely financed construction of the track, in part on leased property. It was initially a 1-1/2 mile course with right and left hand turns, uphill and downhill topography. The first event was August 16th, 1952, sanctioned by the New England Region of the Sports Car Club of America. It was immediately popular and drew entrants and spectators from the eastern seaboard to as far as the Midwest.

The 1952 race began with a novice event for MGs. It was followed by races for Porsches, Jaguars, BMWs, Cunninghams, Allards and Coopers. The drivers were amateurs - on weekdays they were stockbrokers, mechanics, insurance agents, car dealers and engineers. Celebrities also enjoyed the racing: people like movie star Jackie Cooper, Joan Fontaine, announcer Walter Cronkite, bandleader Skitch Henderson and cartoonist Charles Addams.



In 1957, five years after opening, George and Barbara Weaver were able to lengthen the course to 2 miles. This had the effect of making Thompson even more popular. It was a faster course which drew more people and attracted more drivers. As sports car racing grew, the American drivers and teams became more the equal of the Europeans, culminating with our American Formula One world champion, Phil Hill, in 1961.

Thanks to racing patrons and sponsors such as John Edgar, Briggs Cunningham, Elisha Walker and Mrs. Henry Clark Bowden, we had the latest in Ferraris, Maseratis, D-Type Jaguars and Aston Martins, with drivers like Carroll Shelby, John Fitch and George Constantine at the wheel. They all raced at Thompson, as they would until 1967, when the lease ran out and the dream of racing in that little New England town was over. ©2007 Carl Goodwin

NOTE: On September 25, 2007, there will be a presentation on the History of the Thompson Raceway at the Thompson Community Center, 7 PM. Learn the difference between the Thompson Raceway & Speedway!

Newspaper Clippings

Marilyn Labbe sent us old newspaper clippings, many from the Windham County Transcript. Lauren Rhodes transcribed and edited most of these for us. Marissa Iamartino typed some for us too. Thanks for volunteering!

April 1860

... Accidents have seemed to abound in this town this season. A few weeks since Mr. Ezra Jacobs, a man 81 year old, was kicked by one of his oxen. His hip was badly broken. He is now in a fair way to recover. Soon after this, Mrs. John Joslin fell and fractured her hip from which injury she has since died. A week or two after this Mrs. V. Ballou, a daughter of the above mentioned Mrs. Joslin, was thrown from a wagon and considerably injured. March 24th, Dea. V Ballou was at his barn milking, when an ox standing in the stable next to the cow Mr. Ballou was milking kicked him in the small of the back. He was taken from the floor helpless and senseless, carried to the house and for about 24 hours it was with great difficulty he could breathe. He is now better, and he and his wife are in a fair way to recover from their injuries.

Mr. Corbin, the man who has been missing some two weeks, was found in the river at a place called Bundy's Bridge in Thompson, Sabbath Morning, April 18th. His horse was found in the river with him, both drowned. Rum did it.

Mr. Geo. Luke who has long been a burden and pest to this town, has sold out and moved to Boston, where it is fashionable to keep houses of ill-fame and kill people with poisoned liquor.

It is thought that little boys and girls do not go with their tin-pails to John Hascall's after "milk" as much as they did before the town authorities got him un-

der about \$1500 bonds to meet and defend about forty cases of selling liquor and keeping with intent to sell... .

6 November 1862

The new mill being erected at Masonville (now Grosvenordale) in this County, has reached nearly the roof, and shows to good advantage to persons traveling on the railroad, who do not fail to commend the handsome structure. This is said to be the only mill now building in this State.

20 November 1862

Fire— The blacksmith's shop of Samuel Palmer, situated about a half mile west of Thompson Center, was destroyed by fire on Tuesday evening Nov 11th. Cause unknown.

24 September 1863

Masonville – The fine, large mill in the process of erection in this village, for a year past, is now, with boiler and wheel house nearly completed, and a stone arch bridge is being constructed over the canal near the mill.

28 March 1878

The finding of the body of Ezra B. Joslin, suspended from a tree in a piece of woods in the eastern part of the town, last Sat, the 16th., has caused a painful excitement in our quiet community. Mr. Joslin has been a resident of this place for several years, more or less; working faithfully for those who employed him while he remained, but suddenly disappearing after awhile and again as suddenly appearing; so when he disappeared last December nothing was thought of it, as everyone knew of his eccentric habits. He seemed friendless and homeless, having lost a wife and child years ago; but was kindhearted and without bad habits save that one which has ruined so many lives, intemperance. It is supposed from the appearance of the

body, that it has hung there since December, but owing to the infrequency of travel in that locality has not been before discovered. Mr. Joslin was a soldier in the late war.

The suicide. It was a sad spectacle. The sun had been down 3 hours. The moon threw its beams through the evergreen branches of the dense woods... A single lantern guided the mixed crowd of men & boys who had gathered, some to perform their official duty, some to gratify their curiosity, and all to see the remains of a fellow creature who had taken his life with his own hands and whose form had been hanging on a pine tree through the days and nights of an entire winter. He was a tall, gaunt athletic man. His clothing indicated poverty... Homeless, friendless, and in failing health, at last his courage failed him, and he gave up the battle of life before he was summoned to surrender. ..The bolder ones touched the body, one raised the slouched hat that covered the dead man's face and disclosed the protruding, staring eyes. ..When the rope was severed, a few moved cautiously away, as though a beast of prey might spring upon them... .

25 April 1878

The town meeting on Saturday, was largely attended. It was voted by a large majority not to have a high school.

James C Mills, son of Frederick Mills of this place, committed suicide by drowning himself in Quadic pond, September 13th...Mr. Mills has been living in Pawtucket RI for the last few years, but was at home for a visit. It is thought he had become a little deranged, as he has lost heavily in his business, & failed recently. He was a man of about 46 years of age, & leaves two children, his wife having died some three years ago. He has been a merchant & a school teacher & was highly respected by those who knew him.



21 August 1879 (in Putnam locals)

"Nuttall, the marble manufacturer, has in his shop, an old grave stone which bears the inscription: "*Captain Samson Howe, 1736; recut by a descendant of the fifth generation, 1879*". The stone is 2 feet in length, 1 ½ feet in width and 3 inches thick. It stood in the old Thompson burying ground 143 years and its quality is similar to the stone used for building purposes in ye ancient times.

27 November 1879

Horatio N. Rhodes, who died in East Thompson on the 2nd inst was one of the leading citizens of Thompson, a life long resident and always closely identified with the interests and prosperity of the town. He was one of the founders and builders of the Baptist ChurchOf a family of eleven children, nine gathered around his bedside and watched his last hours on earth. ...

22 January 1880

On Saturday evening, Jan 17th a dastardly outrage was perpetrated upon Mr. Nelson Jacobs, depot-master at Thompson. While returning from the lower switch which is south of the depot, he was accosted by two strangers who demanded his money. He told them he had none, when he was felled to the ground by being struck upon the head with a club. His pockets were rifled, the villains taking his watch and money and he was left lying upon the tracks, it evidently being their intention to have some passing train finish the job. Mr. Jacobs had great difficulty in getting home. On Monday his condition was reported critical and it is feared that his skull is broken. He gives the version of the affair that the rascals made the demand in the true style of the road, "Your money or your life". They were tracked towards Putnam by the officers who went in pursuit. A

tree adorned with fruit such as their ugly carcasses would produce would be a pleasant spectacle to quiet, law-abiding people in this section—
Bulletin

5 February 1880

Our little village of North Grosvenordale contains two cotton mills, two churches, one carriage shop, five grocery and dry goods stores, one hardware store, one harness shop, two meat markets, two barber shops one jewelry and clothing store and one blacksmith shop. We think this is a good showing for a place which ten years ago contained only a small mill, church and grocery store. Mr. L.P. Lamoureux has taken a census of the French Canadians in this village and Grosvenordale with the following result: North Grosvenordale, 185 families, 1336 persons. Grosvenordale, 88 families, 588 persons— making a total of 273 families and 1924 persons exclusive of the American and Irish families in the two villages.

13 May 1880 County Locals

James Buckley was to be tried on Monday last for selling liquor at North Grosvenordale, but he withdrew the suit and paid the costs, about \$100 dollars and promised not to sell anymore.

The East Thompson post office was broken into last Friday night and about \$25 in change with some postage stamps, were taken. A dog that stays in the office was drugged, and the family that lived over the office were not disturbed; no clue has been found of the robbers yet.

WEST THOMPSON— Deeds have been given of the ground for a Catholic church and ground was broken on Tuesday. Eli Gilman, of Putnam, has taken the job to build the church, and it is to be finished so as to be dedicated on the 4th of July.

1929-1930— From Thompson Annual Reports

In October through the courtesy of Mr. Reardon, an agreement was completed with the Grosvenordale Company whereby the Committee was able to secure the services of the Company's registered nurse for schools...

For some time efforts had been made by a group of women of whom Mrs. Maitland was the chairman to start a Parents-Teachers Association. On April 3rd, a public meeting was held at the High School during which officers for the organization were elected. There is a large field and much work for such an organization in the community and we hope that during the coming year much support may be given to it... .

Water was installed on the grounds of the West Thompson School, eliminating the carrying of water in pails for a quarter of a mile. Pipeless heaters were installed in the Grosvenordale School replacing two very unsafe stoves. Electric lights were placed in Thompson Hill, Grosvenordale, and Fabyan Schools. We now have water on all school premises, electric lights where such service is available, and indirect heating plants in all two-room buildings.

1942 Thompson Annual Report

...Washington announced the quota of 100 pounds of metal for every man, woman and child in the United States... .Children will be told that an old flatiron will make 2 steel helmets, that an old lawnmower will make 6 anti-aircraft shells, that a galvanized bucket will make 3 bayonets and that a discarded tractor will make 580 machine guns... ..

4 October 1948 Annual Report

Selectmen were authorized to sell the Grosvenordale school in District 7 to the American Legion.

Letters from Readers

From Norman Babbitt, Thompson, CT

... ..May Issue: Super – Super– (I) have read articles over and over – so many friends and acquaintances... Mariellyn Hill, (I) did not know, but she mentioned a rare flower, arbutus. Have not seen any for over 50 years - but my dad (Al Babbitt) would take us to Grandpa's Farm in Gloucester, RI in May to

pick them to sell to neighbors and friends from there to North Grosvenordale - 15 cents a bunch. They had beautiful odor and color...

Mr. Chandler (ed. Note: from Grain Store) used to let us drain materials through our fingers—except fertilizer - as that burned. He taught about all products -how to use them. Later on I could cover an acre with 5 pounds of Millet seed.

It's all in the hands. He also taught us about poor blood circulation. He would squeeze his thumb and describe what was happening as it came back to its natural state—in my case (that was) 72 years ago. He also taught us how to pick up a cloth covered bag of grain. Later we worked free for Faucher Bakery unloading train cars of flour. If you could put 100 pounds over your head,

you were part of the gang. I was 14 at the time.

Many, many memories. The Tourtelotte building next door was magnificent always. Behind the grain store was the Barber-shop and Le'Beau's Candy Store. Thanks for the memories.—Norman F. Babbitt (P.S.) I was brought up in Swede Village, along with Marian and Dave—The Babbitt Boys!!!

From David Cassells Hawthorne, NJ

Dear Joe,

Just home from Angio-Plasty-Stent Procedure last Friday. Tired but freed of arms being in uncomfortableness!!

(I) Finished vol. II and found it more than interesting! Great job and thanks!...In the Robbins and Huntington letters, I'm pretty sure that the "Lois" that was often mentioned was "Lois Edna Child," my mother. When I got my driver's license (at 16 in 1936) ,I used to take my mother to Eva Huntington's in East Thompson— they had been childhood friends and continued to visit right up to the end. Both,

rather all three, attended Wilsonville Elementary School. The "Mark Twain of Quinebaug" (Ed. Note: he is referring to Frank Fitzgibbons) sure did himself proud as well as all of his friends. He always had a flair for a story. Loved reading of Walt Eddy, always one of my heroes.

Best— Dave Cassells

Wally Brodeur from FloridaAt 87, I can still relish the memories of childhood in the town of Thompson... .First, I would comment on riding the trolley to Webster because that landscape along the right-of-way was of greater interest to a 5 year old

than the more populated route to Putnam. As soon as we moved north from Buckley Hill crossing, we were in the deep woods for what seemed like miles. In summer, we occasionally rode on an 'open' trolley which had no outer walls or windows and one could take in the forested vista along with the various smells along the shaded path and listen to the birds along the way announcing our passing.

Secondly, I would comment on the point of origin for these trolley excursions. Living on Buckley Hill, it was a short walk to the little trolley station on the eastern edge of the right of way and on the

south shoulder of Buckley Hill Road. This well-constructed little building with wood shingled exterior weathered to a dark brown was ample shelter from wind and rain for those passengers waiting for the next scheduled trolley. Like any untended building, it became the recipient of countless handbills, posters, and public notices announcing carnivals, circuses, etc.. The building stood for a long time after the trolleys stopped running and I assume it was torn down when the tracks were uprooted.

Long live the trolley!

(from letter written to Charlie Seney... .)



More Letters from Readers

Paula W. Elliott, GA

During the summer of 1953, shortly after my parents (George and Paula Watson) and I moved to what is now called "Brandy Hill Road" in Quadic, I worked at the Lakeside Theater (which is what I remember it was called at the time). I sold tickets and/or ushered customers to their seats, folded programs,

swept the floors in the mornings, helped "strike" the sets and so on— in other words, I worked as a "Go-fer" and loved every minute of it! Some of the plays that I remember being performed were: "The Moon is Blue"; "Bell, Book, and Candle"; "A Streetcar named Desire," (which had a two-week run) and last but not least, "An Old Fashioned Melodrama: Our

Strength is as the Strength of Ten because our Hearts are Pure". The Melodrama was a great success and loads of fun! We sold popcorn, which we encouraged the customers to throw at the Villain (who sported thin, black, curly mustachios); we also booed and hissed when he appeared, (and he had the audience do the same); we applauded the heroine (with her golden curls) and cheered

the hero, who saved not only the heroine, but the farm, home cottage (?) from the clutches of the nasty villain— lots of laughs and good clean fun! A member of the troupe bought the house across from the Davis Shoddy Mill in Quadic and did a very nice renovation of the place. The last time I was in Quadic, (2005) the house was still there, but alas, Bell's Barn is no longer.

Mr. Lavery— Supreme Court— CT

William J. Lavery has invited Society members to visit the Supreme Court Building in Hartford. The historic building houses the Museum of Connecticut History and State Library in addition to the state Supreme Court. A court tour provides an ideal

opportunity to learn what happens in the State Supreme Court. There is a presentation that will describe how the appellate process differs from proceedings in a trial court. During a lecture in the historic courtroom, you will learn the history of the state's highest court dating back to 1784. The discussion will also

include the history of the famous building which opened in 1910. Starting September of each year, the court is in session for eight two-week terms, with three hearings a day, at 10 am, 11 am, and 12 pm. We invite members of the public to attend oral arguments. This is a fascinating experience for anyone interested in the Ap-

pellate process. Summaries of each hearing can be procured by going to www.jud.ct.gov. Space is limited to 30 individuals per oral argument. Contact James Senich at 860 757 2270 if you would like to visit the court or to see the 1910 Supreme Court Building, listed as one of Connecticut's top five favorite buildings by the AIA.

Misc. News and Corrections:

We received word that the Congregation of Emanuel Lutheran Church celebrated their 125th anniversary on August 19, 2007. Congratulations!

The Thimble Club is celebrating their 100th anniversary this year.

We'll report on both in the next newsletter.

In the May '07 newsletter, a M. Boutin 1984 article claimed the Grotto at St. Joseph's was built in the early 1940s. Readers called to say that the Grotto had been started in the mid 1930s.

In that same issue, we

had a photo of the LaFleur brothers from WW II. Please note that Adela LaFleur was wounded during WWII.

If you purchased the Echoes of Old Thompson book (Volume 1), be sure to go to our website to download the latest errata / update sheet.

Visit www.thompsonhistorical.org for the latest updates... ..

Lucille Barrette reports that this year's collectible wooden building will be a well-known barn of Thompson. Look for our full color barn calendar too in November, available at our Museum Shop.

Ask The Society

Q. Where was Spinney Road located? Nancy K- Tampa, FL

A. We received 2 answers to this question. One person claimed it was a path leading from the abandoned end of Sunset Hill Road. We did find a Spinney family living on Sunset Hill Road in the past. Another person told us that Spinney Road is now Anderson Road. Maybe these clues can help someone pinpoint the final answer. ..Help needed here.

Q. What is the story of the St Jude shrine on Rt. 12 in Grosvenordale?

A. Joan Axtell wrote us.....

“Eva Parker, who died 11/24/62, promised to build a shrine to Saint Jude in thanks for recovering from some illness. Eva's husband's name was Clark Parker (died 5/31/80), and they had one son, Robert, who died Sept 1981.

Eva's brother Phillip Bibeault donated the land which adjoined his home. The mason that built the shrine was Zack Deotte. Eva's and Phillip's mother's name was Laura. Her first husband, John, died in 1904. She remarried, about 1911, Louis Deotte. Zack was a cousin to the children of Laura and Louis.

I have a quit claim deed from Phillip to his sons Louis and Charles dated Oct 28, 1963 stating that the .14 acres shall be used for the purpose of a shrine and with the direction that it be retained in the Bibeault family. My mother was Lena (Bibeault) Worrell. Her father was Phillip. She had 3 brothers - all deceased. One of her brothers had a daughter, Phyllis, who is also deceased. I am currently the owner of the property. It was passed to me after Louis Bibeault died in 1995.

The statue of St Jude is currently missing. I have asked Ruth Bibeault (she was married to Charles

Bibeault who died in 1990) who is in a nursing home if she knows where it is, but she does not know. Ruth and Charles are the ones who maintained the shrine over the years. It was a public shrine till the 80's, with a kneeler and a sign, but the cost of liability insurance became too expensive. Candles were available for many years, but people kept stealing the candle donation box. Also for many years, the shrine was decorated at Christmas time, lighted Christmas figures were displayed and lights were put on the shrine.

Phyllis' daughter, Sue Corey, has spoken to someone at QVCC about trimming the trees as part of a class project, so I hope that it will happen this fall... I do not have any pictures of the shrine.”