



The Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

www.thompsonhistorical.org

Summer 2004

Calendar of Events

Membership meetings or events for the Society.

Saturday, May 15, 2004, 9-2 PM

- Thompson Historical Society Yard Sale: Old Town Hall – Rt. 200 @ The Common

Three sales in one! We are cleaning out our excess inventory at the Society Gift Shop. Items deemed not essential to our collections and archives have been set aside by our collections committee to sell in the Yard Sale. Donated items from Society members round out the offering. Last year, the Yard Sale was a huge success even with the poor weather and we hope to do even better this year. If you have items to donate, please give Sue a call at 860 923-5728 to schedule a time to drop off items. Your donation helps the Society!

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

- Sue & Rob Vincent will 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. All members and their families are invited.
- For those willing to bring food or beverages, please contact Sue at 860 923 5728
- The annual meeting includes a review of the Society activities for the past year, a discussion of the Society finances and the elections of new officers for the coming 2004-2005 year. It is a good time to pay your dues too.
- At this meeting, we will review the decision to hire a Society Administrator. Blair Cole was selected as the administrator for the coming year. We will introduce Blair to the membership & discuss his new role.

Museum 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.

Society Gift Shop Hours:

Society Gift Shop will be open the first Saturday of the month beginning June 5th, from 10-2 PM. New items include:

- The hand painted Grosvenordale Mill wood building
- Belding Corticelli brick door stop
- 1855 Map of Thompson
- The new pictorial history of Thompson – Echoes of Old Thompson Book. FYI – look for book corrections, clarifications & updates on our website
Call Val 860 923 3776 or Sue 860 923 5728 for info.

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

Membership Information

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

Dues to be paid by July 1, 2004 for July 1, 2004 – June 30, 2005 year

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

THS – PO Box 47, Thompson CT 06277

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
 Administrator: Blair Cole
 Concert Chair: Jane Vercelli
Call 860 923 3200 or see
www.thompsonhistorical.org

The President's Quill

by Joe Iamartino

The past 8 weeks have seen a deluge of new material, comments, updates, complaints, compliments, and photographs. It certainly has been a busy two months for us. We sold about \$30,000 worth of books in this period as well. While I wish I could list and thank every one who contributed something over these past weeks, I can only say that you know who you are and you have our thanks. But there is even more! These past weeks are amazing because of the extra-special generosity that is being shown to our Society.

There are two specific situations that I must mention. Recently, a rare letters collector sold a large collection of old letters relating to Thompson. The letters were to or from the Cranskas, Fannie Robbins, some Ballards but most were addressed to Eva Kelly, the daughter of the Wilsonville postmaster. The letters are dated from the 1870s to the mid 1890s. The collector sold these letters in batches on eBay and despite our best efforts to buy them for our collections or for relatives in Thompson, many were bought by non-Thompson collectors.

When we realized that many of the letters were lost to us, we wrote a letter to the winning bidder, begging at least for a copy of the Thompson-related letters. To our surprise, the bidder, after checking out that we were truly representing the Thompson Historical Society, decided to donate her original letters free of charge and when they arrived in the mail, the bidder had ALSO included a

\$100 check made out to the Society as a donation. We were shocked! The donor, a fine lady named Gretchen M. Boeing (yes, one of those Boeings from Seattle, WA), did a fine thing for a small town she had never even heard of. I will never fly in another Boeing jet without thinking of her generosity.

The Society received two more gifts from far away – Brevard, North Carolina to be exact. Paula (Watson) Elliott gave the Society Museum a generous donation in memory of her parents, George & Pauline Watson, former Quadic residents. Pauline worked in the old Thompson Library and George was very active in the Village Improvement Society.

Paula's husband, Lewis Elliott, then gave a matching donation (!) in memory of his parents, James & Hollace Elliott. James was the Fire Chief of the Thompson Hill Volunteer Fire Department for over 25 years and he also drove Dr. Paine on his house calls in a horse & buggy and, in winter, in a sleigh.

We had many parents, now living far away, who spent between \$200 and \$400 to give their children each a copy of our new book, "Echoes of Old Thompson". Mary Bartley donated valuable old glass photo plates in memory of George & Louise Pompeo. I must thank too the Shop team that cleaned out the Old Town Hall back rooms.

Your donations of time, of talent, of material and of money all help us. More of you everyday are stepping forward to contribute in so many ways and for this we are very grateful.

Joslin Revisited

In a previous newsletter, it was suggested that Dr. Elliott P. Joslin, the founder of the world famous Joslin Diabetes Clinic (related to Harvard University), was from Thompson.

Cynthia de Bruyn Kops, who once worked at the Joslin Clinic, checked the story out for us. She writes, "*Can it be said that Dr. Elliott P. Joslin was from Thompson? In a way, yes. His forebears came to the area now known as E. Thompson. ... On the map of 1855, the house of his grandfather Elliott Joslin can be seen. His father Allen L. Joslin was certainly raised there, later moving to Oxford to start his own shoe business. Elliot P was born in a house on the corner of Main & Maple Streets, Oxford, MA.*"

Cynthia, thanks for the final word on the Joslin story.

Society Administrator Position Filled

We are pleased to announce that Blair Cole has been selected as the Society's Administrator for the 2004-2005 year. We were blessed with three excellent candidates for the role and we thank all of the candidates for coming forward. Blair's computing skills and the fact that he operates a home-based video & I.T. business with a flexible work schedule best fit our needs. While it is a contract position, it is the first paid administrator in the Society's history and that itself is history. We welcome Blair and look for the 'Administrator' to help us advance our cause.



Major Robert Thompson - Town Namesake

As some of you may know, we have been searching the planet high and low for a painting of Major Robert Thompson, the person our town is named for. One of the leading researchers of the Thompson line is Virginia Thomson. She wrote the following on March 7, 2004:

Hello Joseph,

I don't know that any pictures of Maj. Robert Thomson exist. It's possible, I suppose, that a bust or portrait might exist somewhere...probably in England..... By the way, Sir William, Robert's brother, is the only family member that changed his surname to include the 'p'. Maj. Robert Thomson was a 'Thomson' until his last breath. Warmest regards, Virginia

Now, she raises an interesting point in that it is possible that our town has the wrong spelling for Major Robert Thompson. Is it possible that we have been spelling the name wrong for 200 years? Virginia wrote again:

Hello, again, Joseph: I may be able to add a little more color to Maj. Robert's story, with excerpts from Robert Brenner's "Merchants and Revolutions": "Robert Thomson actually did emigrate to Massachusetts during the 1630s, becoming an intimate with many of the leading figures of New England congregationalism. Robert Thomson was a beneficiary and trustee of the Connecticut founding father Edward Hopkins." I sent the following in an email to Prof. Alan Thomson (who is the foremost researcher of this line in England): Edw. Hopkins made his will 17 March 1657 - "Signed, sealed, declared, and published by the said Edward Hopkins, Esq., at his house at London, on the 17th day of March in the year of our Lord 1657 to be his last will and testament."

Here's the interesting part(s): I do give to my sister Mrs. Margaret Thomson the sum of £50, to be paid her within one year after my decease. I do give unto my nephew Henry Thomson £800, whereof £400 to be paid within sixteen months after my decease, and the other £400 within six months after the decease of my wife. I do likewise give and bequeath to my niece Katherine Thomson, but now Katherine James, (over and above the portion of £500 formerly given her,) £100.." "My farther mind and will is, that, within six months after the decease of my wife, £500 be made over into New England, according to the advice of my loving friends MAJOR ROBERT THOMSON and MR. FRANCIS WILLOUGHBY, and conveyed into the hands of the trustees before-mentioned.." "I do give unto my honored and loving friends MAJOR ROBERT THOMSON and Mr. Francis Willoughby £20 a piece, in a piece of plate, as a token of my respects unto them;...."

*He makes his nephew, Henry Dalley, "sole executor" and "my good friends MAJOR ROBERT THOMSON and Mr. Francis Willoughby overseers." Robert Thomson purchased the home of Henry Whitfield when the latter returned to England. (I note here that Brenner is also using Savage's "Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England."): **JI note: The Whitfield house is the famous old stone house in Guilford, called the oldest house in Connecticut. CT founding father Edward Hopkins' sister may have been the wife of one of the Thomson brothers, though probably not Robert's. From Marcella Pasay's article in our new book, Frances is the wife of Robert.***

By 1643, all the (Thomson) brothers, Maurice, Col. George, Sir William and Maj. Robert, had returned to England and were extensively involved in parliamentary changes prior to and during the "Civil War". It must also be remembered that these Thomson brothers were also among the new Merchant-Adventurers who began importing slaves from Africa. Warmest wishes, Virginia

Whatever the spelling, Robert Brenner's book "Merchants and Revolution" discusses how Robert's oldest brother Maurice was the most important trader in all England at that time. All of the Thompson / Thomson brothers were very important traders and played significant political and military roles leading up to the execution of the King of England. This new information is very interesting and I hope that some researcher will pick up the ball and go dig up more on the story. For me, I will keep looking for a picture of Major Robert.

Letter from Fannie Robbins to Ms. Eva Kelly (Wilsonville) – 1895

This is one example of the detailed filled letters that we obtained, courtesy of Ms Gretchen Boeing:

East Thompson, July 15, 1895

My dear Eva: - Lois wrote me last week that you were about to choke Bertha and I because I didn't write to you and I presume your anger is at a white heat now. I know I have been a bad girl. Please forgive me.

Edith was here until Saturday night when she went down to her sister's. Aunt Frank is here now but is going away in a day or two to be gone a number of weeks.

I thought perhaps I would write to you Friday but when we got up in the morning, Mamma said we might have the horse in the fore-noon so Aunt Frank, Edith and I went to ride over Buck Hill. The same ride that you and Edith and I took last summer.

We got out and looked into the cellar of the tavern. It looked so queer around there. The sawdust heap where the ice was was smoking (Ed. Note: ice used to be stored by covering with sawdust) then and so was an old apple tree trunk. The apples on the tree were all roasted. We had a good ride and got some pond lilies coming home. We got back about 10:45 and Uncle Nelson's wife got there about the same time. She staid until after four o'clock and then I couldn't write very well. Papa and Mamma went to meeting in the evening and Edith and I went to bed on the lounge.

I must tell you what a night we had of the fire. It was Tuesday evening but we didn't go to the

League meeting. Edith and I were both rather tired so we were going to bed early. Mamma and Papa went to bed between eight and half past, I guessed and Ernest hadn't come from meeting. We undressed in the dark, at least I did. Edith only took off part of her clothes and laid down on the bed to have a talk before going to bed in earnest. All at once we heard Mr. Thompson's voice under our window – "Luther, Buck Hill Tavern is afire!" It took Edith about three minutes to get my wrapper on and get downstairs. She grabbed her rubbers at the foot of the stairs and a shawl as she flew through the kitchen and was outdoors. I had to put on my shoes and stockings and all of my clothes so it took me longer but I got ready after a while and we all went over in Mr. Thompson's yard. I wonder if you could see the fire. Lots of people here didn't see it but it was on such a high hill that I should think it could have been seen for miles. It was lots of fun to watch it. The fire started in the ell part then after a while we could the windows in the big part light up. You know what a long house it was and everything was so wet that it took a long time for it to burn. We stayed out until about 11 o'clock and back to bed. We both wanted a letter that night so I thought I would keep awake if I could until Ernest came. We knew he had gone to the fire. Just before 12 o'clock I heard him come in so I went to the stairs and we both had a letter. I lighted the lamp and we read them in bed. I

had a 14 page letter from Myrtice. Edith got one from one of the Willimantic girls, Grace Norton, and she got to laughing so hard reading it that I had to get up and shut the door for I was afraid we would disturb everybody in the house. At last we settled down and went to sleep.

I have just finished washing the dishes and I am rather tired. I have had to stop two or three times while I have been writing this letter. Mamma wants to know now if I am going to begin at the CREATION and write everything that has happened since the earth was created. I feel as if I had got to do about that way as it is so long since I have written to you. I did the washing today and this afternoon I have been freezing ice cream. Papa got some ice at Mr. Smith's and we had it 3 times last week. It was fine. I wish you were here to eat some. Mamma has been raking hay this afternoon. I suppose we shall have all we want of that business for the next 2 weeks.

Edith and I went to Rose-land Park the 4th with Uncle Nelson's folks. Edith was sick all day and the rain and all we didn't enjoy the day as much as we expected to. I looked for you. Saw Lois and Bertha. The speaking was very good. Murphy was fine and I think his wife looks nice. I would like to hear him again. I never saw Edith so miserable in my life. She hardly stirred out of the house while she was here and was sleepy all the time. She spent a good part of the time abed and now that

she is down to Gertie's, I don't know as she gets up at all. The least thing uses her all up and she don't eat much of anything.

I have one of her pictures. She said tell you she would like to exchange with you. I wish we could go somewhere together this summer and both have some pictures taken. I must have some soon.

Myrtice said tell you to steer clear of the ash heap in the future. Mr. Pierce went to see her the 4th and then went to Purgatory with half a dozen others and had a very nice time.

Chamberlain wasn't at Rose-land and Edith said she was glad of it. I suppose she was afraid I would have too good a time with him.

The ball team here had a game with the Thompson team Saturday. Edith said she was going so I went too. It began to rain just as we got there and we went home again. They played just beyond Mr. Potter's house so it wasn't

far but we got our dresses wet.

We don't have any meetings for two Sundays as the Douglas Camp Meeting begins next Friday. Mr. Baker is having his vacation and will spend it in his cottage on the Willimantic Campground. I don't know whether I shall go to Douglas Campground or not.

I see by the "Webster Times" that you don't have services at your church those Sundays either. Are you going to Providence this summer? When are you and Minnie coming over here? Can't you come soon — this week or next? I suppose Momma or I will have to help Papa rake hay some for a week or two but we won't be busy all the time. Come anytime when you get ready. I want to see you both. I shan't go to Willimantic for about a month. Camp-meeting begins the 12 of Aug. I don't see why you can't drive over here once in a while. It

isn't far and your horse don't have anything else to do. Have you finished your white waist yet? Mamma got some cloth to make me a wrapper but it isn't started yet and I don't know as it ever will be.

Has Maude gone home yet? I am longing for a sight of Wilsonville tonight. It is kind of lonesome here now. Fannie Morse is away visiting now. Did Edith Woodard tell you she saw me at church yesterday? I am tired almost to death and have a lot of work to do tomorrow so I must go to bed. Please don't be revenged on me but write soon. I will try to do better next time. Don't forget that you and Minnie are coming to see me.

Love to all, Fannie (Robbins)



Banquet for Coach James P. Canty in 1950 at the Arrow Grill, No. Grosvendordale

From top left, standing: Jim Karapanos, Chris Carabina, Richard Hagstrom, Jim Naum & Frank Ungerer — can see top of heads only, Tom Tanacea, Tasi Vriga, George Dargati, person next to George is unidentified, Jerry Ryscavage — Supt. of Schools, Thompson, Pondu Bicki — owner of Arrow Grill. Seated: (L) Frank Crotty (Worcester Evening Gazette Sports writer), James Canty — TMHS basketball coach, Tom Carey (Gazette sports writer)

Photo courtesy of Jim Naum

Ask The Society

Question: Why is the Tourtellotte Gym named after James P. Canty?

A. At the last membership meeting, we held a sports panel that discussed sports in Thompson over the years. Jim Naum brought over a wonderful collection of photographs and news articles on baseball and basketball, especially those covering Tourtellotte's basketball team winning the state championship. Panelists Jim Sali, Larry Houle, Sr, George Dargati, Jim Naum & Dave Babbitt (from the back of the room) discussed the major theme of the night – Jim Canty.

When Coach Canty retired from high school coaching at Tourtellotte, he had 501 wins, the most ever in Connecticut high school basketball history. To quote one of Canty's star players, George Dargati, "...*(Canty) had opportunities to coach at the collegiate level but could not be enticed to*

leave his alma mater for the glamour and money of the college game. Thank God he never left Tourtellotte. Tourtellotte won 7 state championships in basketball. He played on 2 teams that won. He coached 4 teams that won. Jim Naum, a great player on Canty's 1950 championship team, coached the last state championship team (for Tourtellotte)....."

All commented on Canty's humble, low key approach to the game but Dargati said "*his basketball strategies of fast break offense and defensive pressure were ahead of their time*".

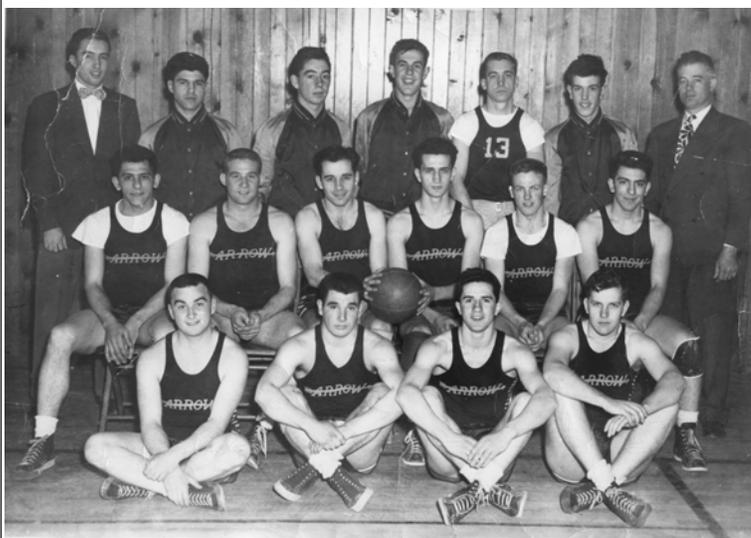
The panel talked about other sports in Thompson. Several locals played professional baseball. Paul Oscar Johnson played for the famous Connie Mack's Philadelphia Athletics. Ted Vriga was in the Boston Red Sox organization. Thompson's most famous player was

Red Desautels who played 13 years for the Detroit Tigers. Mr. Canty himself played in the Washington Senators organization for a while. The panel mentioned that Don Hoenig, owner of the Thompson Speedway, was a very gifted athlete in a number of sports and as a golfer, he participated in the PGA Golf and National Amateur Tours.

Also discussed, basketball games were held in the basement court at Tourtellotte until the end of 1945. After that, the gym at the present day Knights of Columbus Hall was used until the new Canty gym was built.

The Grosvenor-Dale Company maintained a ball-field complete with covered bleachers holding hundreds. A small admission fee was charged to maintain the grounds. The entire ball-field was fenced in. One person mentioned that for a few years, the ball field stands were taken down, and games discouraged by a religious mill manager, probably Mr. Messenger, who was angered by the increasing problem of gambling on the spirited village games. The mill agent Andem rebuilt the stands when he took over operations in North Grosvenordale.

The Society thanks the panel for an enjoyable evening of stories. Thanks to Jim Naum for the displays too.



In addition to the Tourtellotte School teams, there were recreational leagues sponsored by private clubs, the mills and other businesses in town. This photo of the Arrows is from 1950. From left, Bottom row: Ed Navarro, ?, George Dargati, Richard Laflamme; Middle row: Van Tanacea, Dick Mead, Ted Fatsi, Jim Naum, Jack Hession, Tom Tanacea; Top row: Richard Menard (manager), Jimmy Karapanos, Chris Carabina, Tasi Vriga, Frank Olsen, Ted Vriga, and Bob Aucoin (Coach of the Arrows Team).

Photo courtesy of Jim Naum