



The Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

www.thompsonhistorical.org

Spring 2005

Calendar of Events

Membership meetings or events for the Society.

Monday, April 18, 2005

Two presentations in one evening:

- Thompson Wetlands presents a program for the Historical Society
- History of the Phonograph by Society member Wayne Saravara

Thursday, May 5, 2005—Thompson Recreation and the Thompson Historical Society; 7 PM—Thompson Library and Community Ctr.

From Grecian to Gibson—Women's History Through Fashion by Cynthia Dias-Reid & Katie Hill

This presentation looks at the evolution of 19th clothing styles and their reflection on women's changing roles in society. Dressed in reproduction clothing of the Empire and Victorian Eras, the speakers welcome a discussion of historic 19th century clothing following the 1-hour lecture

Monday, June 6, 2005

Annual Society Meeting & Dinner at Greystone Farm on Rt. 21, the home of Rob & Sue Vincent. 6:00 to 7:00 PM— "Picnic"; Please bring your favorite dish, salad, side dish or dessert; 7:00PM— "Annual Meeting of the Thompson Historical Society"; General meeting, updates, elections of new officers; Please RSVP — 860 923 5728.

Museum Gift Shop

- Our museum shop at the Old Town Hall reopens for the season. We will be open from 10 am—2 pm on the following dates:
- Saturday April 2, 2005
- Saturday May 7, 2005
- Saturday June 4, 2005

May 7th Tag Sale

The May 7th tag sale will be held rain or shine at the Old Town Hall, the same hours as the Museum Shop. Last year's event, despite the rain, was a tremendous success so we are at it again. If you have items to donate, call 860 923 5728 to arrange drop-off or pick-up. It is a great way to help the Society and clean out that garage, attic basement or kid's room.

Special thanks to the dedicated Museum Gift Shop team. Sue Vincent delivered the 2004 gift shop proceeds to the Board of Directors. The \$10,000 check will cover the running expenses of the Society—oil, electricity, insurance, phone & some repairs.

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Officers / Contact Info:

President: Joe Iamartino
 Vice President: Sue Vincent
 Treasurer: Barbara Weaver
 Secretary: John Lengel
 Curator: Mark Savolis
 Collections:
 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, Blair Cole
 Grant Coordinator: Lynne Lengel

www.thompsonhistorical.org
or call us at 860-923-3200

Membership Information

We ask existing members to think of someone who might appreciate a membership to the Society. An existing member can sign up a new member for a \$5.00 gift membership, good for their first year. Members receive the Winter, Spring and Summer newsletters with our calendar of events, stories of local historical interest and the popular Ask the Society column. Please encourage others to support our Society. A good gift anytime.....

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, 2005 for July 1, 2005—June 30, 2006 year

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

The President's Quill

by Joe Iamartino

I cannot resist the opportunity to use this column for a subject not purely historical in intent but about a topic that is surely historical in fact. Most townsfolk are now aware that the March school expansion project proposal passed at town referendum. The vote was close.

In 1907, Mrs. Harriet Tourtellotte laid the cornerstone for Thompson's majestic Tourtellotte Memorial High School. The entire school building was completely paid for by Mrs. Tourtellotte and her husband on land donated by the Grosvenor-Dale Company. When completed, the Boston Globe wrote that it was one of the most modern schools in America. The entire school was given to the town gratis. In fact, there was a sizable additional grant of Tourtellotte money for on-going expenses plus several other donated buildings. The Tourtellottes were very generous to their town of birth.

Town residents should reconsider the blessing given us almost 100 years ago. Through the years, did we do everything possible to keep the school 'one of the most modern in America'? The 1907 school cost almost \$25,000,000 in today's money and that is a large educational head-start to give any small town. With such a lead, Thompson schools surely should be the envy of nearby small towns.

In the March 2005 Connecticut Magazine, Thompson ranked 21st out of 23 comparably-sized Connecticut towns for quality of education. Surely the Tourtellottes would not be content to see their magnificent gift with such an assessment, despite the many hard working people in our school system.

While the tax burden is heavy, the quality of the school is a reflection of us all. We can do better.....

Administrator's Corner

by Blair Cole

Spring has arrived, and with it, many projects both new and on-going for the Thompson Historical Society. It's time for Spring Cleaning at the ELM and the Old Town Hall. Grounds maintenance, painting and minor repairs should be completed this spring. We have a busy calendar and Thompson's architectural gems should be looking their best. Those who enjoy working with their hands are needed to assist with various tasks. If you have a few weekend hours and would like to leave your mark on a Thompson landmark, please call..

Judith Rondeau has been selected as our new Archivist. Judith and Mark Savolis will be working together to oversee the collection. Congratulations to Judith on her selection, and thank you in advance for your contribution to our preservation efforts.

Lucille Barrett, Judith Rondeau and Ruth Barks have made great strides in the computerization of furniture and larger objects in our collection. Ron & Gyneth Tillen are working on the Thompson Fire Company book collection. A very large collection of image CD's containing scanned photos of historic Thompson is next in line for input into our computer database.

A list of volunteer opportunities is posted on the website. If you would like to support the Thompson Historical Society with a donation of your time, please contact me at 923-3200, or by email from the Volunteer page on our website.

Feedback:

Folks, in the course of a year, we get a lot of feedback and ideas from our readers. In this newsletter, I am putting in some of the recent notes touching on different topics:

December 22, 2004:

Dear Mr. Iamartino, I am TMHS alumnus, class of 1947. My sister, Rita Granfors, nee Sheriff, a TMHS alumna, gave me a copy of "Echoes of Old Thompson" as a Christmas present. That is one of the nicest gifts I have ever received. It is cherished in this household. Many thanks to you and the Thompson Historical Society for producing this history. It reflects a valuable and tremendous effort on your part and of the Historical Society. Best Wishes, Francis J. Sheriff

December 29, 2004

Hi Joe, I just finished reading the newsletter. It's funny. As soon as I read your comments on what 'purists' may think about Thompson businesses listed on the calendar, I thought to myself that in years to come, the ads would be interesting to read. Then I read further to find you wrote the same. I think it is a great idea, especially if it helps out with paying the bills. I also think it was thoughtful of you to ask members their opinions on the subject. I look forward to the receiving the newsletter and reading the interesting stories....Happy New Year, Mark Snay

Each year, the Thompson Historical Society distributes tags for TEEG's giving tree....

From TEEG—Dec. 31, 2004—Dear Friends, Thank you for your contribution of dedication and support of TEEG's Giving Tree provided towards the Holiday Giving Program. With your generous help TEEG was able to distribute 109 Thanksgiving baskets that fed 297 people. Additionally 131 Christmas baskets helped to set a place for 330 individuals in local homes. Beyond holiday meals, 124 households with 332 seniors, adults and children received gifts to help them celebrate the season. You are the force that allows this to happen. Your contribution helped to bring a bright holiday into the homes of so many. Thanks, Donna Grant
Dir. TEEG (THS thanks Donna and TEEG)



Feedback—Mr. Canty

I continue to receive stories and letters about Mr. Canty. Jim Sali passed along an article that George Dargati wrote about Mr. Canty, quoted in its entirety;

James Patrick Canty, the legendary and beloved coach of Tourtellotte Memorial High School in Thompson, CT died on August 2, 2004 at the age of 92. The man we called “Mr. Canty” out of respect and admiration had an impeccable reputation and an uncanny ability to teach young men the game of basketball and the game of life. By the time he retired from coaching, he was one of the winningest and most revered coaches in all of New England. His simple, honest values, his moral strength, and his ability to mold championship teams and build productive citizens set him apart from his contemporaries.

Mr. Canty was a sensational athlete at the high school, collegiate and professional levels before distinguishing himself as a record-setting coach. He was born and raised in Thompson and excelled on the basketball court and baseball diamond during his playing days at Tourtellotte. After leading the Tigers to state basketball titles in 1927 and 1929, he attended The College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass., where he continued to fulfill his athletic promise by gaining national recognition for his athletic exploits. He capped off an outstanding college athletic career by hitting safely in every game during the 1936 baseball season, setting a new college record. After graduating from Holy Cross, he signed a baseball contract with the Washington Senators and played professionally for four productive years before returning to Tourtellotte in 1941 to teach chemistry and coach basketball and baseball.

Although he was a highly successful baseball coach, he was best known for coaching the Tourtellotte boys basketball team. Under his masterful guidance, Tourtellotte won four state titles (1944, 1949, 1950, 1951).. Many believe Coach Canty’s greatest team was assembled in 1950, when it went undefeated and, in the process, became the first Connecticut team to post a record of 28-0. At the end of his career Mr. Canty made history once again when he became the first high school basketball coach in the State of Connecticut to reach the 500 win milestone. What made his coaching feats so remarkable is that they were achieved at a high school that had one of the smallest student enrollments in Connecticut. In fact, the Tourtellotte senior boy enrollment in 1950 was just 13. This clearly illustrates the difficult task he faced in building a capable team year after year. During their heyday of Tourtellotte basketball, Thompson was a small mill town and the majority of the players came from the same close-knit neighborhood in the village of North Grosvenordale. We were known as “Cantymen” and played with a unique grit and determination that brought a tremendous amount of pride and excitement to our small town. Revered by his players and respected

in the community, Mr. Canty had an astute mind and was well ahead of his time as a basketball strategist. He utilized a full-court press and multiple defenses in order to confuse opponents, and he favored an offense that featured an up-tempo, race-horse style of play. Coach Canty believed that basketball games were won and lost in practice. As a result, he emphasized hard work, preparation and execution, and spent endless hours teaching offensive and defensive fundamentals in our practice sessions.

Over the years, Mr. Canty amassed impressive numbers and honors, including Hall of Fame inductions and coaching offers from colleges and universities. But his coaching genius was just one part of this brilliant man. He was a beacon of integrity, honor and class. He was a caring and devoted family man and a father figure to hundreds of athletes who benefited from his knowledge, compassion and wisdom. A humble and quiet man, Mr. Canty always kept an even demeanor on the floor. He rarely raised his voice during practices or games. Yet he never failed to inspire and motivate his players and win their devotion and loyalty. He taught his players how to be good people, good sports and fierce competitors.

One month before his death, a number of his former players gathered at the Thompson Historical Society to discuss the life and legacy of James Patrick Canty. We shared our memories and views of a man that we all felt was the ultimate coach, teacher and human being. Everyone gave an account of their personal experiences and, by the end of the night, it was clear that, with the exception of our families, Mr. Canty had served as the single most influential person in each of our lives. The night stood as a testimonial to the durability of this special bond, which for many had lasted for nearly 60 years. He connected with every single one of us because he genuinely cared about us as people not just athletes. He taught us how to be successful and provided us with guidance, support and encouragement. He was a true gentleman in every sense of the word and proved that nice guys can finish first. His love for teaching and for his players and students was one reason I chose education as my profession. His impact on my life was so profound that I named my only son, James Patrick, after him. Mr. Canty will be deeply missed by his family and former players, but his powerful legacy will live on.

George Dargati—Tolland, CT

Editor’s Note: The Tourtellotte Memorial High School gymnasium is today called Canty Gymnasium .

Steak supper at the Thompson Fire House is a part of a long tradition—Ron Tillen, Fire Company Historian

Thompson, March 2005. Friends and members of the venerable Thompson Hill Fire Department had a barbecued steak dinner at the Fire House on Chase Road Saturday, March 19. This was one more event in a long tradition of Fire Company Suppers. Of course, it helped that one of the Founder members of the Company was Captain Vernon Stiles, the jovial innkeeper who came to Thompson in 1830. Company minutes make first mention of a supper in January 5, 1841; however it is a safe bet that there would have been nourishment that July 4, 1832 when the Company was organized at Captain Stiles' Inn. The Thompson Fire Engine Company has had an annual supper and occasional celebratory meals for its members for much of its nearly 175 years of existence. Then as now, the Company may occasionally have a formal meal whenever the mood strikes the members. That was the case for this recent dinner. There was only one sitting and the event was not advertised although there was a charge and the profit will help to maintain the all-volunteer operations of the Company.

Evidence for holding Company suppers appears in the collection of books containing the hand-written minutes of meetings from 1837 to the present. Some quotations follow without changing the spelling, punctuation or grammar. For example: January 6th 1846. *"The Company partook of a beautiful supper prepared by their liberal host Capt. Stiles"* .

Women were first mentioned thus: November 1850. Voted to have supper at the annual meeting and that *"each member having the privilege to invite one or more ladies"* Ellen Larned was one of those so honored. Roads back then were bad and travel by horse drawn vehicles was slow so that it was not until the coming of the railroad in 1839 that fresh seafood would have become readily available as far inland as Thompson. Thus: January 6th 1879. *"It was voted that the company have an oyster supper to consist of oysters cake and coffee also cigars. Voted that the lowest bidder get up the supper. Gilbert A Thompson bid fifty nine cents .59 per head and was accepted as the person to get up the supper the evening of Jan 22."*

Sometimes the affair was more elaborate as noted; January 2nd 1893. *"Voted: that we have a day to go fishing. Voted that 2 members be appointed a committee to procure bait set the day and make all necessary arrangements. The treat to pay for the bait. Voted H.J.Morse & R.H. Chandler said com. Voted that we have a bean supper in the Town Hall after the return from fishing. Voted John Ballard & Val Ballard 2nd committee to procure supper"*. Perhaps it was a mild winter or maybe they went ice fishing.

Things may have been a little dull by the early twentieth century. For example: March 1st 1917. *"The company held an oyster supper at the hotel with eleven members present and a few visitors. After the supper we were well entertained for 2 hours by a Mr. McGee from Hartford, Mr. Charles C. Searles and R.H.Chandler. Mr. Backus introduced the speaker."* The prospect of after-dinner speeches lasting two hours may explain why only eleven members were present. There are no records of this kind of "entertainment" being repeated. There are very few details of the meetings other than attendance for the next twenty years and it might be presumed that the bad times of the late 1920s and the early 1930s might have inhibited any frivolity.

However there was frivolity later on because from the 1940s up to 1962 there were "carnivals" and entertainments performed by members. This ended after a special meeting held on August 26 1964 when it was decided to join with the Woman's Auxiliary to have a chicken barbecue *rather than to have a Minstrel Show*. There was probably more talent available for running the barbecues. Minstrel shows would also have been considered inappropriate, as the civil rights legislation came into effect at this time. This first barbecue was evidently a success because by March of 1965 the Ladies Auxiliary suggested having two per year. This coming May 21st, the Company will hold its regular biannual Chicken Barbecue in the tradition that started forty-seven years ago. The "all-you-can-eat" approach plus a secret sauce has ensured enduring popularity as a community-wide get-together and a solid source of revenue for the Thompson Fire Engine Company. It is hoped that members of the Historical Society will join the Fire Engine Company once again in celebrating this upcoming traditional event. **Ron Tillen**

More Feedback

From David H. Cassells: (letter quoted in its entirety, January 13, 2005):

Dear Joe, the last issue of your newsletter Winter 2004 was beautifully done, full of interesting stories including a sad obit on Coach Jim Canty (Class of 28, TMHS).. Jim Canty graduated in the same class as two of my sisters—1928. I was eight years old when Canty (along with Lester Johnson, Earl Bosquet, George St. Marie, Alvin Lachapelle and Louis & Paul Auger) was the star of the basketball team. He was my hero. He had a distinguished gait, a gait with a slight hitch. I even tried to imitate his walk and baseball swing!! He sure was a prince, giving so much to his school and community. The Thompson young people were very lucky to come under his influence and tutelage. He sure will be missed.

The story on 'roads of the area' was most interesting. I do want to see the exhibit to do with Dr. Robert **CHILD** Paine. It is my hope that in due course you will use his full name. My mother was a CHILD and he and she joked about being cousins. (There was a distant relationship).. My dues are enclosed.

Best!

David H Cassells



Ask The Society

Q. I have an old book from the 1890s filled with handwritten names and signatures with little 'remember me' slogans. What is its purpose?

A. It was common for school children, mainly girls, to have these autograph books as they ended their school days. Most of these books would have the signatures of town notables, teachers, school friends and family, even from other towns. While many books just have trite phrases (Roses are red, violets are blue, you will miss me and I will miss you), occasionally a very original poem will emerge or a nice drawing. A nice example of both emerged recently in an autograph book bought by Sue Vincent. Mrs. Marietta Mills wrote "May your life's garden be ever full of fragrant flowers" to an unknown friend in 1885. The school autograph tradition continued when school year-books became popular after WW I.

Q. I have an old letter that mentions getting off the train at Bates Grove. Where is this?

A. Webster Lake (Lake Chargogga...) has three large sections (North Pond, Middle or Great Pond and the South Pond). The most southern part of South Pond ends at the CT / MA line. If one follows the old NYNH&H railroad line from the south as it approaches the South Pond, where it reaches the Sound Pond is called Ira Bate's Cove. Bate's Grove is the land thereabouts and there was a small train stand there for a time. There is an excellent map of this area in the Oxford, Dudley and Webster 1991 Historical Calendar for those interested in a more precise location. I am looking for a good photo of this train stand. It wasn't a full train depot as I understand it.

Q. What does this term mean—'fumigate the pest house'?

A. In olden times, the pest house was a building designated by the town authorities where people with certain illnesses would be quarantined. Thomp-

son had several pest houses.

The term 'fumigate' has two meanings. The first is the more modern term that implies just cleaning the house or filling it with smoke or certain chemicals/gases to kill insects, rodents or certain disease causing agents. However, the more interesting use is related to the word perfume, originally the French 'par fumer' (by smoke). In the days before modern washing machines, running water, vacuums and bathtubs, hardworking folks and their homes would smell a bit. It was not uncommon to have a small burner in the house to burn certain mixtures to sweeten the odor. When people were sick, very specific herbal mixes were commonly burned to cure the illnesses. It is possible that the term meant that certain herbs were burned in the pest house to cure certain sicknesses. The children's rhyme "ring around the rosie, a pocket full of posie, ashes, ashes—we all fall down" supposedly refers to the failure of dried flower petals that were burned to cure plague victims during a London outbreak.

