



# The Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

www.thompsonhistorical.org

Spring 2002

## Calendar of Events

Planned membership meetings for the Society. All are welcome to attend the meetings at the Old Town Hall, 7 PM (unless otherwise stated).

### Thursday, April 4, 2002

- Membership meeting

*Presentation: Native Americans in Thompson by Bert Heath. Bert will discuss Native American traditions in the Thompson area. Thompson residents will display arrowheads & artifacts*

### Saturday, April 13, 2002 (Raindate—April 14)

- Patriot's Day Celebration—day event at the Thompson Common: School of the Soldier, Women of the Revolution, Cannons

### Thursday, May 2, 2002

- Membership meeting

*History of the Ream Estate & Marianapolis School*

### Monday, June 10, 2002 (New Date!)

- Annual meeting & picnic at the Vincent home on County Home Rd.

**See the wonderfully- restored Ramsdell barn re-erected on the Vincent property.**

The following dates are for Board of Director meetings, to be held at the Ellen Larned Memorial Library at 7 PM (unless otherwise stated).

### Thursday, March 21, 2002

### Thursday, April 18, 2002

Please note these meetings are for directors only. Members may attend to present issues or ideas by arrangement. Call Dave Babbitt @ 935-5196

### Museum Shop

• Come see the items for sale in our museum shop @ the Old Town Hall. We will be open from 10 am—2 pm on the following dates:

- Saturday March 2
- Saturday April 6
- Saturday May 4
- Saturday June 1
- Saturday July 6
- Saturday August 3
- Saturday September 7

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## Officers / Contact Info:

President: Dave Babbitt  
 Vice President: Joe Iamartino  
 Treasurer: Jeffrey Barske  
 Secretary: Jane Vercelli  
 Curator: Mark Savolis  
 Collections: Hattie Greene  
 Photos: Alice Biesiadecki  
 Website: Barbara Loy  
 Nomination Committee Chairperson: Barbara Weaver

For information, visit our website at:  
 www.thompsonhistorical.org  
 Or call 860-923-3200

## Membership Information

Fifteen members of the Society comprise the Board of Directors. Four of these directors make up the Executive Committee. We are looking for members willing to contribute time and effort to the administration of the Society as well for the Society's functions and preservation work. If you are interested in joining the Society or helping us administratively, contact Dave Babbitt @ 935-5196 for more information.

- Membership dues are:
  - \$10 Individual Membership
  - \$15 Family Membership
  - \$25+ Contributing Membership
  - \$5 Student Membership
- Dues to be paid by July 1st
  - 1st reminder: Summer newsletter
  - 2nd reminder: Fall newsletter

## Larned Library dedicated 100 years ago

About 50 years ago, Mr. Donal Howard spoke about the original Thompson Library on WPCT radio, a local Putnam radio station. On the Larned Library's 100th birthday, his broadcast tells us its history.

"...The history of the Thompson Library begins with the vision of a few people. Back in 1898, on a harsh and stormy February night, Miss Ellen Larned asked some of her friends to meet with her at her home to consider the possibility of having a library... Miss Harriett Lewis was one of those friends, and she was to become the first Librarian of the Thompson Library. Mr. Charles Searls was another, and he became the first President. Through his efforts the Library was incorporated by an act of Legislation.

Little but Miss Larned's faith & hope were supporting the idea of a library for Thompson. However, a group of young people had raised a sum of money through various entertainments in the village, and had dedicated this sum to a cause that would be of value and appeal to the entire community. With this small financial base, land was bought and negotiations begun toward building. In 1902, the Library Building was completed. It is truly a part of Thompson—built of native stone gathered and contributed by townspeople, with money as native as the stones. Even the architect was a descendant of the Gay Family, one of the first to settle in Thompson.

The Thompson book club, organized in 1882, gave its 800 volumes to the new Library. The Fire Engine Company contributed its collection of books, and the Scarborough and Gay Estates added their libraries. Miss Lewis catalogued all these gift books and the Thompson Library was a going concern—with 1375 books on its shelves.

...At the moment, those books have grown from the original 1375 to just under the 10,000 mark. On September 27, 1952, the Thompson Library celebrated its 50th birthday with an informal tea and reception...May I conclude by saying that we like and are proud of our Library in Thompson...."

The founder of the Thompson Library, Ms. Ellen Larned, Windham County's most notable historian, spoke at the dedication in 1902.

"...From this hill & meeting house, soldiers were sent out to carry forward the 3 wars to which we owe our national existence & preservation. In this public library, instituted for the use of the town we hope to gather up & preserve such memorials as are connected with its history & development. We ask the co-operation of all in carrying forward this design & in helping to make this old hill-library an honored shrine, worthy of the interest & support of every son & daughter of Thompson. We cannot yet report permanent provision for carrying it forward but in view of what has been already accomplished, the interest manifested by many, & the public demand for such local institutions, we cannot but hope that its future will more than fulfill its promise of the past, & that this Thompson Public Library will prove a potent factor in the life and development of the town through the coming generations."

## The Ellen Larned Memorial Library Building today

The building today serves as the headquarters for the Thompson Historical Society. In addition to a fine conference room for board meetings, the library holds the Society's paper and book archives.

The Thompson Historical Society negotiated an agreement with the Town of Thompson whereby the Society is responsible for the upkeep of the building in return for its exclusive use. Past historical society members have left financial legacies to help defray the costs of maintaining the building. Fund-raiding is continual for its upkeep.

Recently, the building has undergone a delicate roof repair involving clay tile, a roofing material not commonly seen in New England. A foundation drainage system was installed to keep moisture out of the basement. THS is investing in the building to assure its survival for a long time to come.



*Ellen Larned, founder of the Thompson Library*



THOMPSON LIBRARY — RESIDENCE OF DR. PAINE (LEFT). THOMPSON, CONN.

**The Thompson Library, as it looked in the early part of the 1900s.**



This photo shows the Library as it originally sat next to the Quinnatissit Inn & Annex. The Inn, sometimes called "The Hotel", later burned. The Inn was also called the Arcade, and had small shops in it. If anyone has additional information on this building, please send it in as a caption for this photo in our archives.



This Postcard shows another view of the Inn that stood next to the Thompson Library on Thompson Hill. The local doctor and his driver are posing for the camera.

The last house visible on the right is Ellen Larned's house.



The Grosvenor-Dale Mill village as it looked many years ago. The mill buildings, in disrepair today and not in use, were the focal point of the village then, figuratively and literally. We're told that the mill is to be disassembled in the coming months. The current owner of the mill has agreed to donate





Picture P/4390 is this issue's mystery. We believe that it is a photo taken in Thompson, and possibly East Thompson. The steam engine is really blowing! Can anyone identify the location or what these men are doing with the belt-driven apparatus?



This rare photo shows a section of the Farm Complex owned by the illustrious John Doane. While Doane's Mansion "Primrose" (featured in the Fall 2001 newsletter) sat near the intersection of Rt. 193 and Rt. 21 (and later became the Howe-Marot College for Women), his farm sat on Quaddick Rd, at the foot of Fort Hill and included Fort Hill itself. The farm complex later burned. You can still see the amazing stone foundations of the farm at Quinntisset Gardens at Fort Hill today. We are looking for more information on John Doane, especially his connection to the Larned Library. Ellen Larned left a cryptic note that suggests that Doane left her money to partially fund the library land or building. Photo courtesy of Colleen Bishop.



Betty Leclair, one of our active Quinebaug correspondents, has been submitting wonderful photos from the Fabyan / Quinebaug area. Thanks to the Bodreau family and Betty for submitting the fire department photos.

**The Thompson Historical  
Society  
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www.thompsonhistorical.org



This is a old photo of the General Store in Wilsonville. Contributed by Mary Byrnes.

## Other Society News

- The Old Town Hall's water woes are almost over. A well drilling contract is circulating around for final THS board approval.
- The Ellen Larned Memorial Library will have a new sign this year, thanks to Beth Greene.
- The Society's book project is currently seeking financial sponsors for the proposed 192 page hard cover pictorial history of Thompson. Local banks and businesses have been sent a solicitation letter and we anticipate a positive response. If any reader is interested in becoming a sponsor or knows of a possible sponsorship candidate, please call Joe Iamartino at 860 923 3776.
- Hattie Greene & her crew have been working to spiff up the Ellen Larned Memorial Library for its 100th birthday. Hattie reported in the last meeting that the old place is starting to look quite good internally after a thorough cleanout and wash-down. The foundation excavation work done to keep the basement dry hasn't had much of a test yet with the dry weather but we hope the dry basement continues to keep the mold and mildew away.
- The new H-P computer system is now up and running with the entire digital photo and document archive. If anyone is interested in adding photos or documents to the archive, please contact the Society. We can scan photos and documents while you wait so you don't have to part with them!
- The Museum Shop generated a good sum of money last year which will support the on-going operations of the Society. Thanks to all of the volunteers who helped make the shop successful.

## ***Ask the Society— Questions on Thompson History***

### **Q. Where does the -ville in Wilsonville & Mechanicsville come from**

A. According to Ellsworth Grant, author of the book, Yankee Doers and Dreamers, "The use of 'ville' was almost entirely post-Revolutionary War, replacing the English "borough" and Scottish "burgh". Ellsworth said, "England had no 'villes' that could set a precedent. Being a Gallic word for village, 'ville' suggests French influence. Five years before the naming of Montville, 6000 French soldiers under Comte de Rochambeau marched through there on their way to Yorktown." Anti-British sentiment ran high from the Revolutionary War until after the War of 1812 and then the popular use of 'ville' started a slow decline, ending by the late 1840s. Connecticut had at one time 206 'villes', but most are now gone (e.g. as with our own Fisherville & Masonville). Grant wrote that the 'villes' were mostly formed "for a particular economic purpose and adjacent to some river or stream. Most were founded for manufacturing purposes; many were named for the founder himself." Grant says that Wilsonville was named after the woolen goods mill owner, O.S. Wilson. Local Thompson tradition has a Captain Wilson, a gristmill owner who gave his name to the village. They could be one and the same person. Masonville, now Grosvenordale, was named after William Mason, owner of the cotton mill there. For Mechanicsville, the Thompson Bicentennial book has the story of James Cunningham who started a business in that region, sold it and decided to take up mill machinery repair. He and 7 other mechanics lived in present-day Mechanicsville and related or not, by 1827, close by, there existed The Mechanics Company, hence the name of the village.

### **Q. When did St. Joseph's School open?**

A. At the end of 1882, 6 Sisters of the Holy Cross from Canada came to No. Grosvenordale at the request of Father Hyacinthe Martiale to teach 300 hundred local children. The school opened in early 1883 according to a 1930s St. Joseph's pamphlet describing the school's origins.