

Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

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Summer 2015

THS BOD Meetings

September 21

November 16

7 pm,

Ellen Larned Museum

In this issue:

- | | |
|---|----|
| ◆ BOD Meetings | 1 |
| ◆ Membership Info | |
| ◆ Local Events | |
| ◆ President's Quill | 2 |
| ◆ The End of Mr. Starr | |
| ◆ Memories of West Thompson School | 3 |
| ◆ W. Thompson School (cont.) | 4 |
| ◆ 50th Anniversary of the West Thompson Dam | 5 |
| ◆ We know you love pictures! Grotto & Mill | 6 |
| ◆ The Little House in Quaddick | 7 |
| ◆ Record of Early Crime in Windham County | 8 |
| ◆ Stolen Wolfs Heads | 9 |
| ◆ Walktober! | |
| ◆ Forgotten Hero, presentation info | 10 |



Events

**50th Anniversary
Celebration of the West
Thompson Dam
October 3,
9 am to 4:30 pm**

Contact Ranger Michelle Cuchi for more information @
860-923-2982

Or watch the West Thompson Lake, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Facebook Page!



A Thousand Days to Live: The Civil War Letters of Henry Washington Brown

A presentation by Joe Lindley
October 21, 7 pm
Thompson Library

Rail Day in Thompson, II

Saturday, Oct 31

Please see THS website for more details after September 15th.

"Straight Up Jazz Quartet"

Featuring Scott Chaurette of the Seven Hills Symphony and other local musical talent.

Saturday, October 24th, 6:30 pm

In the restored "Old Auditorium" at Tourtellotte Memorial High School
Limited Seating

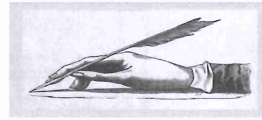
Contact TMHSAA for tickets or
Joe @ 860-428-4154
Val @ 860-428-1290

Thompson's Tourtellottes and the Civil War

A presentation by Joe Lindley
November 18, 7 pm
Thompson Library

Please see last page for Learning in Retirement Events Sep. 16 & Oct. 20!

President's Quill ~ Joe Iamartino



Friends, we hope you have had a pleasant summer and are enjoying the last vestiges of it and looking forward to a beautiful autumn season in New England.

Many interesting things are happening at the THS. The Civil War exhibit has ended and we have a fine team, Sue Vincent, Kathy Welch and Lisa Snay, working on the next exhibit. Top secret—stayed tuned and watch our website and Facebook page!

On the Ramsdell archives, Bob Belletzkic, Tom Chase, Joe Lindley, Mark Snay, Chris Iamartino, Kathy Welch, Cindy Obert, and others have been getting things in order on this massive collection.

John Rice is leading the renovations at both THS buildings, including significant repairs to the rooms on both floors of the museum building. Joe Lindley has been the point on so many projects, but especially authoring important books, coordinating the West Thompson Dam's 50th event, and the school tour for the 2nd graders. Mark Snay is running our archives in both buildings.

Overall, we have many people doing great things. The team at the museum shop, with its 50 plus volunteers, and grounds crew!

Wish we could mention you all! I am so happy to see such dedicated involvement. Yet, there is still so much to do. Big thanks to Sue and Rob Vincent for once again holding our annual meeting/picnic at their Greystone Farm home. We so appreciate it!

I want to say to our readers, we need volunteers, even just for single-day events. If you are unable to commit to volunteer for any length of time, we understand! Just call, or email, Facebook message us, and say that you could offer 1 or 2 days, hours, and we will assign meaningful work for that time. Many hands make light the work, and we are buried right now Help is needed!

Best wishes, Joe Iamartino

AmazonSmile Foundation:

Would you please bookmark this link? <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/23-7346324> ~ All of your eligible shopping at Amazon will benefit the Society! When you shop at AmazonSmile, Amazon donates 0.5% of the purchase price to the Thompson Historical Society, Inc. You can support us every time you shop!



*Ebenezer Starr, Died 1804,
Tavern Inn Keeper*

(Editor's note: This account is from a genealogy post found by Sue Vincent.— Please see Page 8 for more. Enjoy!)

Communication – Died, suddenly, at Thompson, on Saturday, the 13th. Mr. Ebenezer Starr, aged 62 years—The circumstances as we are enabled to collect them, are as follows:

Mr. Starr had kept a public house for a number of years in said town, and was esteemed as an honest man, and alive to all the tender feelings of humanity. Dr. Thomas Weaver, who had formerly lived in the state of Rhode Island, but for several years past has resided in Thompson, had, it appears, entertained an inveterate enmity against Mr. Starr, the circumstances of which we are not acquainted with. Doc. Weaver came into the house of the deceased on the morning of his death, in an inebriated state, used bad language, & etc. Mr. Starr demanded his quitting the house, which irritated him to a very high degree; and he refused to leave it with oaths and imprecations. Mr. Starr being a strong, muscular man, put him twice out of the house. The last time he walked off a few steps, and immediately returned into the bar-room by another door, unobserved by Mr. Starr. It is presumed, from many circumstances, that he returned armed with a stone or club, determined to dispatch him. A blow was heard by one of the family, which was doubtless the fatal one; some one of them entered the room; he was standing, but fell immediately, and exclaimed, *See the Wretch!!* He immediately retired, but was soon after secured, and is now in Windham goal. A jury of inquest was called, whose verdict was *Murder*.

~ The West Thompson School ~

This is a transcription of the original handwritten document by Marjorie H. Chapman, who was the teacher there for five years during the mid- to late-1950s. Mrs. Chapman passed away in 2014 at the age of 103.

The old West Thompson schoolhouse was demolished. For many years it was the multi-graded school - home for the children in the West Thompson area. Then, I don't know just when, it became the school - home for the fourth graders of one side of the town. Its counterpart was the Wilsonville school, a real "little red schoolhouse." The West Thompson School was white.

Unlike the Wilsonville School which had houses nearby, West Thompson School was really in the country with not a building in sight. As I remember, Donnelly's was the first house on one side and Alice Ramsdell's the first on the other side.

At the back of the school were woods with much poison ivy, a deterrent for childhood explorations. The so-called "playground" was studded with large rocks, one a big boulder that became the teacher's "watchtower" - a leaning post at times. Also, it was for "nature study" a large group of children watching ants carrying loads many times their size - crumbs from luncheon sandwiches eaten picnic style.

On one side of the playground was an old apple tree. The girls would start their homemaking skills early by marking off rooms with an assortment of bricks that had been left there at some time. One year, some of the boys thought it would be fun to break up those bricks - which they did. Being quite irate, in no uncertain terms, I said I wanted those bricks replaced by Monday. Amazingly, they were. No questions were asked as to the source.

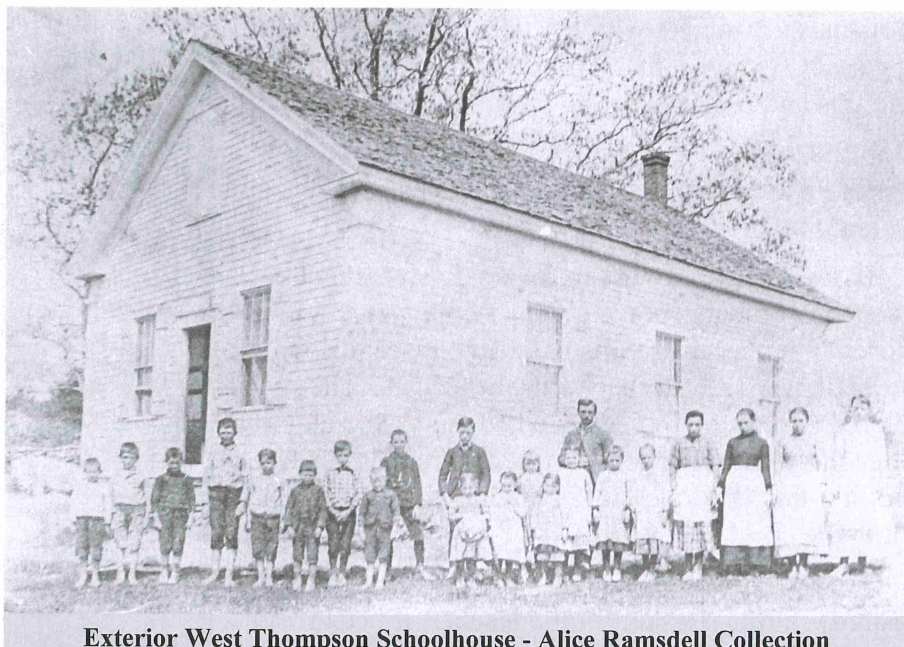
Just beyond the apple tree was a

sometime small stream that flowed from a culvert under the road. It was just a trickle for most of the time, but likely to be gushing in the spring - probably from snow melt. Exciting!

Inside, there was one large room that could accommodate thirty-five (sometimes more) children comfortably, with enough extra room for an activity table, a listening circle for an A.M. daily chapter from *Charlotte's Web* - a favorite - or some other book, and an upright piano with a phone on top - our link with the outside world.

As I remember it, the room had long windows at the back - four, I think, and high windows on each side with blackboards under them on one side. My memory of that is a bit vague.

Along the front of the room were doors, and more doors, five or six - one to the basement, one to the cloak room, one to the vestibule, one (or two) to closets (one very shallow) and one to the sink room. Sometimes Mr. Ryscavage, the superintendent at the time, would open the wrong door to leave after one of his supervisory visits, and we'd hear a few stifled giggles, especially if he chose the wrong door which opened into the very shallow closet.



Exterior West Thompson Schoolhouse - Alice Ramsdell Collection

~ *West Thompson School. cont.* ~

On the wall between two of the closet doors was a drinking fountain, which, if it was not handled gently, would send forth an exuberant squirt which was likely to go far afield. Each child was allowed one accidental squirt without dire consequences. The second time brought forth 'just retribution for sin' no bubbler privileges for a while. Of course, this rule did not apply to Mr. Ryscavage and on occasion we heard more stifled giggles.

From a teacher's point of view, one of the best aspects of a one-room school was no bells. If, as the teacher, you had the children "with you" – that is, very much interested (yes, it did happen occasionally), you could extend the period for a time. So what if you swiped ten minutes from the next subject? Make it up the next time. So what, if the noon recess was extended for ten minutes while you all watched ants?

Each week brought its special events, visits from the music teacher and the physical education teacher. Mr. Ryscavage's visits were "specials" too.

There were always some seasonal special events, a few of which have remained quite vivid in my memory. One Christmas program, or a least a part of it, stands out. Santa Lucia, the Swedish spirit of Christmas, complete with her tiara of candles (unlit in this case). (Maybe the girl that played the part will read this and remember. She is still in Thompson.) *

In the spring we'd have a fieldtrip, a walking tour to Miss Alice Ramsdell's to see her sheep, lambs and the antique locomotive. Big event!

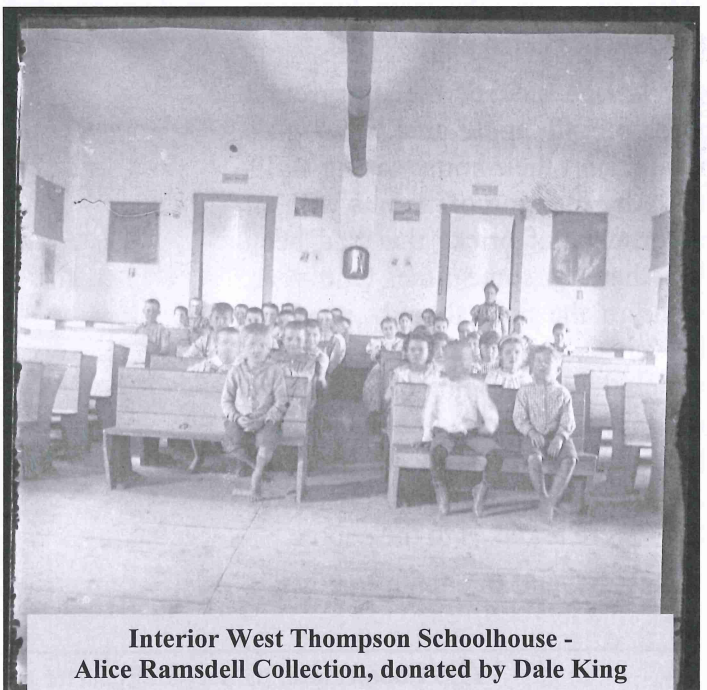
At Easter, we would make an Easter egg tree, a blueberry branch sprayed with white paint and anchored in a plaster of Paris base (my husband John did the spraying and the anchoring) then festooned with colored and decorated egg shells done by the children. After the close of school just before the Easter weekend, it would be taken to Day Kimball Hospital to be put in the children's ward.

One special event became more special than was desired – a May Basket for the teacher. It began with a staged fight (to divert teacher's attention) between two boys as they left the bus. The other children entered

the building. Fight resolved. Teacher entered classroom – basket on desk – not a child in sight – not in the basement. Snickers from the fighters. Then – a leg came through the ceiling of the cloak room, followed by the descent of scared and chastened children through the proper ceiling access to the attic. (How they got through there in the first place I never found out – a tall boy's shoulders?) There was a somewhat scared teacher too. No snickers from anybody. The damage was reported to the superintendent's office. I heard later that the School Board had a good laugh. I didn't. But it was a lovely basket. I haven't had one like it since, thankfully.

I was the teacher there for five years during the mid to late 1950s – five good years of which I have many happy memories. (Finding a dead mouse in my desk drawer one morning was not one of them.) For the most part, the atmosphere was somewhat relaxed and friendly. Those who were children then are now grandparent age. To me especially, those which whom I've had no contact since, [they] are still my fourth-graders – mostly delightful – some not so, but time has cast a rosy glow overall.

**This might have been Marjorie Woodward –still a resident of Wilsonville.*



Interior West Thompson Schoolhouse -
Alice Ramsdell Collection, donated by Dale King

~ 50th Anniversary of the West Thompson Dam ~ October 2015 ~

Historical and Cultural Resources— W. Thompson

Prior to the English colonization of New England, the valley of Quinebaug River was the home to the Nipmuc people. There were two small sub-tribes of the Nipmucs that inhabited the area now known as West Thompson. West of the Quinebaug River were the Wabbaquasett and east of the river were the Quinebaug. These people raised corn, beans, and squash; fished from the river for salmon and shad during the spring; and hunted deer and other game from the surrounding woodlands.

During the colonization period,



West Thompson at Dam

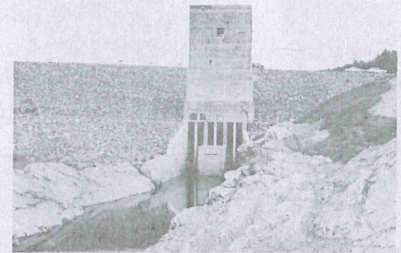
Thompson was the crossroads for the highways connecting Hartford, Worcester, Springfield and Providence. Taverns and stores sprang up to take advantage of the travelers. Several mills were built to utilize the water-power from the Quinebaug River. Agriculture and dairy farming were another important industry in the area. Much of the land adjacent to the lake and river is still used for this purpose today.



West Thompson Village

DEDICATION
Ceremonies of

WEST THOMPSON DAM



FLOOD CONTROL RESERVOIR

Quinebaug River

WEST THOMPSON, CONNECTICUT

OCTOBER 2, 1965



U.S. Army Engineer Division, New England
Corps of Engineers

The Ramsdell Farm was located on the west side of West Thompson Lake. After the devastating floods of 1955, the U.S. Government planned flood control projects to prevent future disasters. The Entire town of West Thompson was needed in order to construct a dam and flood plain on the Quinebaug River. Land was acquired by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers through eminent domain. Alice Ramsdell refused to sell her farm to the government and lived on the land until her death in 1995. You can still visit the historical Ramsdell farm site off of the Old Ravenelle Road trail and view the foundations, stone walls, fruit trees, and even the original rail road ties where Alice's father Frank kept his personal railroad engine and boxcar.



~ Miss Pictures,
circa 1923 ~

~ St. Joseph Church, Grotto ~



Names, Dates, Locations? Any ideas on any of these pictures?
Please feel free to send along to THS!



The Little House in Quaddick - submitted by Lloyd Langhammer, New London, CT

Johann and Suzanne Groen immigrated to America on the Holland-American line ship Ryndham in September 1916. They were fleeing World War I Europe and seeking a better life in America, which they found in Quaddick. Suzanne's brother Fritz Kosmahl was one of the most highly decorated aces who flew with the Red Baron for the Imperial Air Service during World War I, until he was killed in September 1917. After being married on Ellis Island (single women were not allowed into America because of the concern of prostitution) my grandparents lived in Tennessee where my Mother, Eris Groen Langhammer, was born in 1923. Johann Groen was a portrait photographer and prior to the Great Depression worked at some premier photography studios. One studio, in Washington D.C., photographed Presidents and Congressmen. Ultimately, they made their way to Ives Street in Providence,

Johann & Suzanne Groen

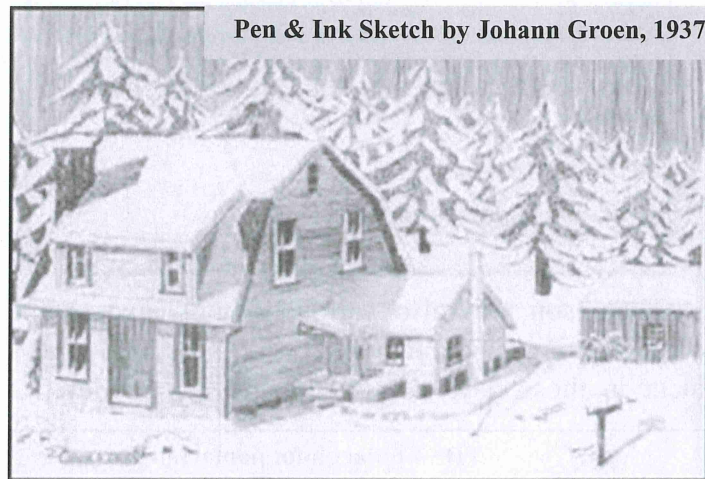


Rhode Island around the time of the onset of the Great Depression. As we all know jobs and food were both scarce during the great depression

especially for a photographer since people had no money to spend on photographs let alone on necessities. This prompted Johann to move his young family to Thompson where things were cheaper and they could scratch somewhat of a living off of the land. They bought a dilapidated home on Quaddick Town Farm Road just a few hundred yards north of the intersection with Quaddick Road. At the time there was this home and a chicken coop on the property. The home burned in the fifties and the chicken coop was nicely restored and is currently owned by Richard and Cindie Gagnon. It is right around this time (August 17, 1933) that my grandmother began a diary/journal of the reconstruction of the little house in Quaddick. *The journal has been donated to the Thompson Historical Society.* The journal provides an interesting vignette about life in Thompson during the Great Depression. A time when people lived so close to the margin that every expenditure was documented. Yet while they lived a marginal existence the journal shows the compassion and desire to lead a normal life through purchasing small things for their daughters Renee Delano and Eris Groen Langhammer. It shows expenditures and experiences like ice skating, movies, etc. They had a glorious time skating all over the Lake (Quaddick Pond) on January 20, 1934. They went to After Christmas Sales (a dozen ornaments for 30 cents, cards for 15 cents). The journal

lovingly documents their transition from Providence to Quaddick and all the expenses attendant thereto. On August 18, 1933 the journal tells us that they spent 68 cents for gas which was selling for 13 cents/gallon. On October 18 we know that a thief stole the entire wheel off of my grandfather's car potentially leaving the family in a desperate financial circumstance since my grandfather needed the car to seek employment. From the journal, for example, we know that my grandmother bought on December 21, 1933 a bushel of tomatoes for 25 cents. She wrote "must have been stolen at this price at this time of year." They canned 10 quarts string beans, 17 quarts blueberries, 10 quarts of corn, 8 quarts of bread and butter pickles, 35 of jellies and 10 quarts of peas. The journal contains names of Quaddick/Thompson tradesmen (Laval, Baker and Morrello). Mr. Laval for six days earned \$30 while Mr. Baker for 5 days earned \$12. A Mr. Morrello was paid \$7 a dollar extra for Sunday. The lumber was milled at the Logee Saw Mill. 5.00 for rough boards for floors. Five bags of cement and 40 flue bricks were \$7.50. Two kegs of nails were \$3.00. Insurance was bought through J. A. Archambault of North Grosvenordale. Other merchandise was bought from Charles Johnson Company also of North Grosvenordale. By the early 1950s Johann and Suzanne wanted to build a retirement home which they did on the adjoining land which they split off from the original parcel. Shortly after selling the little house in Quaddick they commenced construction on their retirement home. The Little House in Quaddick burned in the 1950s and my grandparents lived in their retirement home until they passed away in the late 1970s. Notwithstanding all the trials and tribulations they went through during the Great Depression, my grandparents wrote on the exterior wall of their of their retirement home :I too have lived in paradise." There exist several translations of this Latin phrase. While America never provided them with the riches in the traditional sense, they would never have traded their experiences in Quaddick, which for them was paradise.

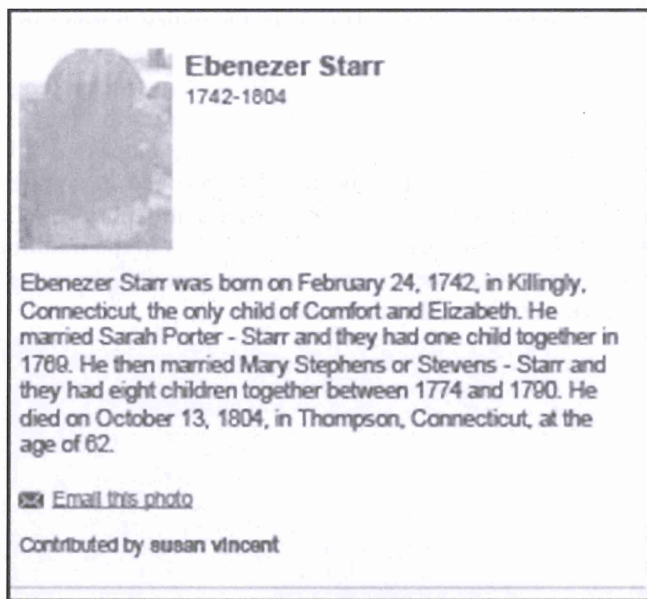
Pen & Ink Sketch by Johann Groen, 1937



~ Windham County Ct, CTGenweb Project, and the end of Mr. Starr ~

Record of Early Crime in Windham County, Connecticut, taken from "History of Windham County, Connecticut" by Richard Bayles, 1889

The tendency of certain crimes to become epidemic is often marked. Even the decorous and conservative town of Thompson indulged in a murder excitement and trial at about the same date of the preceding. Ebenezer Starr, the popular landlord of the Brandy Hill tavern, while violently disputing with the well known physician, Doctor Thomas Weaver, died instantly from rupture of the brain. Though it was quite obvious that "passion was the cause of his death," public opinion demanded the arrest and trial of Doctor Weaver on charge of manslaughter. He was acquitted of the crime, but nevertheless sentenced to a public whipping and branding on the hand as a punishment for his assumed agency in arousing such angry passions.



Thompson was also variously implicated in the counterfeiting epidemic, which was exceedingly prevalent in those days of poverty and bad money. Its

frontier position, cornering upon Massachusetts and Rhode Island, furnished admirable facilities for illicit enterprise, enabling fugitives from justice to dodge back and forth from pursuing officers. A professional expert from New Hampshire availed himself of these peculiar advantages, brought down die and tools, and enticed a simple minded rustic to join with him in counterfeiting silver money. This work was carried on in a cave in the Buck hill woods, while the simple young man engaged in outside trade, buying up produce and stock, for which he paid in spurious coin. One good silver dollar was made to cover a number of the counterfeit, and money became very abundant. It is said that many recipients suspected something wrong, but quietly connived in the young man's business operations. His own folly at length brought the matter to light. "The goose that laid the golden eggs" committed suicide in this instance. Intoxicated with the rare delight of plenty of spending money, the young man insisted upon treating all his friends in all the taverns about town, squaring the accounts with his new silver dollars. Such unprecedented freeness and flushness aroused suspicions which led to investigation and discovery. His sudden arrest carried consternation to his self-seeking aiders and abettors, who hid away in meal chests and outhouses till the excitement subsided. The crafty old offender evaded capture; his victim escaped trial for forfeiture of bonds and went out west, returning after a few years a sadder and wiser man to settle down into a sober and law abiding citizen. Some years later, a larger gang, in the same vicinity, engaged in manufacturing fraudulent bank notes, which ended in exposure and punishment, the ringleaders suffering prolonged imprisonment.

<http://www.ctgenweb.org/county/cowindham/records/other/earlycrimesrichardbayles.htm>

Stolen Bronze Wolf Heads Returned

WINY NEWSROOM, MAY 2015: A cold case thirty years in the making has been solved in the town of Brooklyn, where two bronze wolf heads have been returned to the town, after they were stolen off of a statue dating back to the mid-1980s.

Historically, the two bronze wolf heads had stood on the statue of General Israel Putnam at his burial location in the center of town by the Town Hall. The statue was dedicated in 1888, and depicts General Putnam at command on horseback. The two wolf heads represented the wolf that Putnam killed in the mid-1700s in a cave at Mashamoquet/Wolf Den Park in Pomfret. As legend has it, the wolf had killed some of Putnam's livestock, and was believed to be the last of its kind in Connecticut.

The wolf heads were stolen at separate times, one in 1984 and one in 1985, according to Brooklyn First Selectman Rick Ives.

About ten years ago, Maury Bowen was First Selectman of the town. "He had replicas made and put on the statue and that's where [they've] been up until a couple weeks ago, when a couple of our citizens noticed that a Coventry, Connecticut auction was coming up, and the lead item of that auction was two, bronze wolf heads," says Ives.

After some research, the town contacted the State Police. They spoke with the auctioneer, who was sympathetic to the town's plight, and pulled the two heads—which had passed through many hands over the years—out of the auction.

According to Ives, "We had an anonymous resident pay a certain amount of money to the auctioneer, and the wolf heads are back in Brooklyn—and at some future point, they will go on display in our Historical Society Museum."

Ives said that a number of town residents were determined to ensure that the historical heads were brought back to the town. The outcome in the long run? Even after thirty years, all's well that ends well.

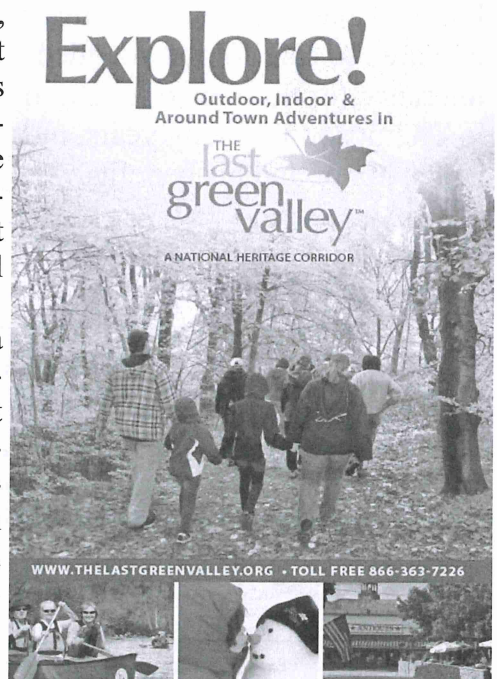
Many years ago, 2 cast metal dogs were stolen from the porch of the Williams home on Thompson Hill. This Brooklyn story provides proof that this mystery, plus the mystery of the Ellen Larned portrait (Jan. '15 newsletter) can be solved if people keep their eyes open! Where is Sherlock Holmes when we need him?

Walktober!

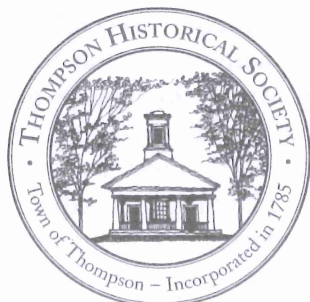
The Last Green Valley, Inc. (TLGV) has just released its fun-filled Walktober brochure to celebrate the 25th year of amazing autumn activities in the National Heritage Corridor. Bursting with 190 unique guided walks, strolls, hikes, bike rides, paddles, tastes, sips and events galore during the region's most invigorating time of the year, you can start planning your adventures now. Dedicated volunteer leaders, their sponsoring organizations and TLGV partners eagerly await the chance to reunite you with familiar places or introduce you to new discoveries.

The Walktober brochure is still full-color and free, and with some new contests and challenges for members. The brochure is a must-have! To receive your own, email mail@tlgv.org, call 860.774.3300, download a .pdf from www.thelastgreenvalley.org, or pick one up at any town hall, library or information kiosk within the region. All updates, additions and cancellations will be posted on the Walktober page on TLGV's website and Facebook page, so please check them often. Last year, nearly 60,000 participants enjoyed Walktober, providing a major economic boost to the region. Walktober grows each year with no slowdown in sight.

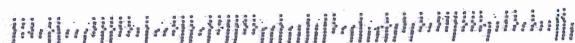
The Last Green Valley is a National Heritage Corridor, the last stretch of dark night sky in the coastal sprawl between Boston and Washington, DC. The Last Green Valley is the 35-town National Heritage Corridor in eastern Connecticut and south-central Massachusetts. It's also a member supported, non-profit stewardship organization working for you in the National Heritage Corridor.



The Thompson Historical Society
P.O. Box 47
Thompson, CT 06277
www.thompsonhistorical.org
Address Correction Requested



0625531115 R021



Presentation on the Book & Story of Calvin W. Heath by Joe Lindley

Forgotten Hero details the life of Silver Star recipient Calvin Heath - D Co., 3/187th Infantry, 101st Airborne. Heath was seriously wounded in 1968 during a vicious battle near the jungles of Phuoc Vinh, Vietnam. He returned home to a military system unprepared to care for its wounded warriors and a country with little tolerance for those who fought. It would take Heath, who resided in Thompson for many years, more than 30 years to restore his stolen honor and his benefits.

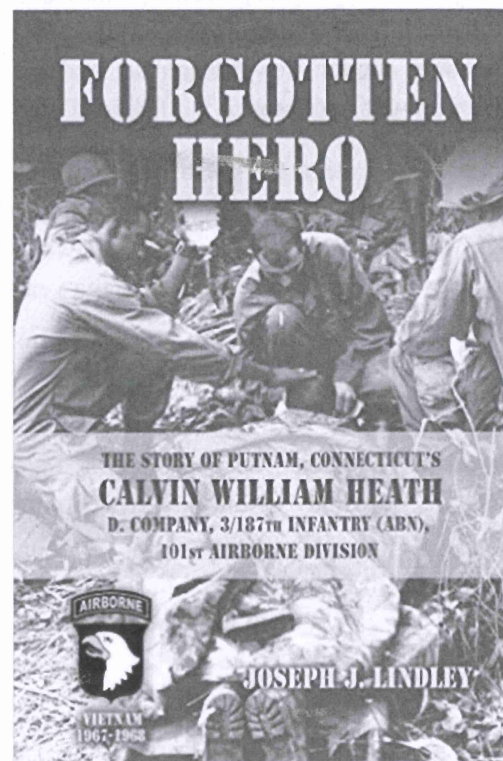
Come hear the author at:

Thompson Public Library, September 16, 7 pm
Admission is free.

Quinebaug Valley Community College
(Learning in Retirement)

October 20, 10:30 am in the main auditorium.

There is a small admission fee to benefit the LIR program.



THS Contact info: jiamartino@charter.net (please for give late replies) — 860.923.3776