

Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

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January 2015

THS BOD Meetings

March 18, 2015
April 29, 2015
7 pm,
Community Room 3

In this issue:

- ◆ BOD Meetings 1
- ◆ Membership Info
- ◆ Museum Shop 2014
- ◆ Upcoming Events
- ◆ President's Quill 2
- ◆ In the News
- ◆ Information About us Online 3
- ◆ The Mystery of the Missing Portrait of Ellen Larned 4
- ◆ Mystery continued 5
- ◆ Harry Elliott, an American War Hero 6
- ◆ Harry Elliott, continued 7
- ◆ Harry Elliott, continued 8
- ◆ The Bombing of Antonio Vito's Home 9
- ◆ 2015 THS Officers & Board Members 10

Society News



The Museum Shop 2014

We would like to thank all of the volunteers who gave their time during the holiday season to staff the shop!

Helen Flood, Sue Vincent, Henrietta Panu, June Schoppe, Shirley Houle, Shirley Houghton, Lucille Barrette, A. Aileen Witkowski, Donna Lange, Virginia Mainville, Lisa Faucher, Clarice Guillott, Estelle Bourgeois, Mercedes Robbins, Claudette Hoffman, T.C. Laudner, Peg Babbitt, Grace Landry, Alice Archambault, Carol Romprey, Karen Cole, Gyneth Tillen, Cindy Obert, Anna Naum, Georgia Ballard, Connie Carpenter, Cathy Hiatt, Bernadette Quercia, JoAnn Thorstenson, Romona Savolis, Gail Leveille, Nicole McGarry, Kathy Lewis, Chris Tanson, Sue St. Onge, Ann St. Onge, Sue Leveille, Debbie Faucher, Brenda Olsen, Barbara McGarry, Linda Smalarz, and Pat Cheever!

Thank you one and all, and for all of you who shopped at the Museum for your one-of-a-kind gifts this past Christmas!

Membership/Dues Information:

July 2014-June 2015 Membership

Members can find their paid status on the address sticker of this newsletter. (Membership runs on the THS fiscal year; July 1-June 30.)

Contributing Membership: \$25.00

Individual Membership: \$10.00

Family Membership: \$15.00

Members are invited to purchase first-year memberships for new members for \$5.00.

Upcoming Event

February 25, 2015 ~ 7 to 8:30 pm

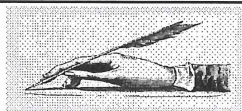
Community Center, Room 2

Paul Rulli of Paul Rulli Reproductions will bring pieces of furniture, bench and tools. He will explain the history of furniture makers and their regional differences throughout Connecticut covering a period from the late 17th century through to the late 18th century. He will also demonstrate carving techniques such as claw and ball foot furniture legs, dovetailing and other joinery techniques.



THS Contact info: jjamartino@charter.net—860.923.3776

President's Quill ~ Joe Iamartino



Friends,

There are numerous topics of research that require hours of investigation. Mark Snay, our diligent archivist, my wife Val, and Susan Vincent are three of the researchers who answer questions for interested readers. Many times, we are stumped by questions we cannot resolve. The historical facts are buried in documents that we no longer have or don't know exist.

Still, over the years, we have resolved hundreds of questions and corrected dozens of assumptions that were passed down by tradition erroneously. Soon, we will be issuing an updated errata sheet to the *Echoes of Old Thompson* books based on new scholarship. The findings may be trivial to some, but for those who care about historical accuracy, these new findings are exciting updates. Long live those bookworms digging gems from those dusty texts. Kudos to those folks willing to take time out of their busy day to write that special letter, drop a box of old correspondence on our doorstep, dial the phone to give us a vital clue told to them by their grandmother.

We seek an answer NOW to one of those mysteries—what hap-

pened to the portrait of Thompson's Ellen Larned?

Mark Snay and Ron Tillen have given us clues in this edition of the newsletter and even an image to look for. Please... someone out there knows what happened to this portrait. Thompson wants to bring Ellen home to her old library building, and we need your help!

Many thanks for any information you may be able to provide!

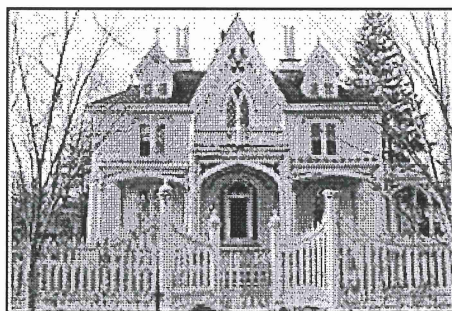
*As we celebrate Thompson's
230 years, Happy 2015
to all of our friends!*

*From the
Thompson Historical Society*

~Joe Iamartino

*Please note new website for the
Mason House:*

www.savethemason.house



In the News

Southbridge Journal, Volume 2, #19
June 27, 1862

An Aquatic Curiosity

A fresh water mermaid was discovered last Saturday, disporting in the placid waters of the Quinebaug, near the "sand-bank." The rare and singular creature when first observed was indulging in aquatic sport peculiar to the species — laving her gentle body, combing her silken hair, spreading "her snowy sail" and floating on the soft bosom of the fair waters, floating with her mate, and wooing the merman in strains of bewitching melody and motions to "come down in the depths of the sea with me."

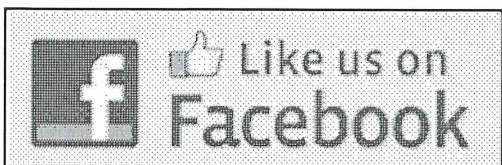
The fisher pair continued their diversions until startled by the sudden approach of two persons in a boat, when, timid and affrighted, they "cut" up the bank, dripping with the pearly drops of the "laughing waters." The mermaid when wholly exposed so closely resembled an identical woman that the persons were led to exclaim, "O fish, fish! How art thou fleshified!"

It had clothes like a woman, hoop skirt and all, which it proceeded hastily to don, and a name sweet as familiar as "Polly." The merman had garments, the nether ones bifurcated like a pair of pants and partook of an elixir agreeable to marines, indulging his frail companion with draughts of the same-jovial amphibian were they.

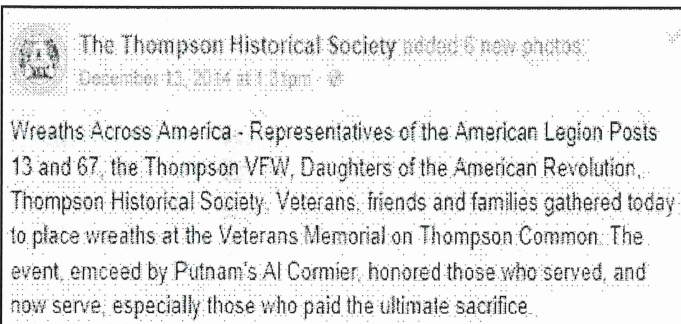
After watching the queer land maneuvers of the unique pair for several hours, the persons in the boat dipped their oars and sailed away, leaving the mermaid to the coo-coo of the amorous merman and seek again if they liked the society of frogs and fishes.

There will be shad in the Quinebaug next year.

~ Information About Us Online! ~



The Thompson Historical Society on Facebook is the place to get the most recent news, events, photos, mystery questions and more! Please join us there and add your own memories of our town as well!

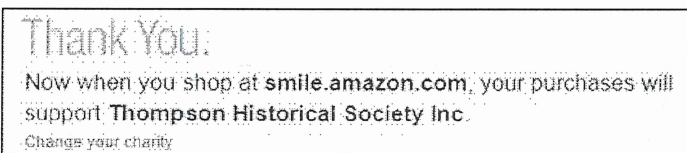


Additionally, please follow the TMHSAA as well, as much of the town's history and interesting information is posted on their page!

Here are a couple of screenshots from recent posts from both pages. Enjoy!



~ Help Support Us With Your Amazon Purchases! ~



Q: St. Joseph Church, Grotto, North Grosvenordale

We have had an inquiry as to the history of the Grotto located on the church's property. Aileen Witkowski was able to provide one memory regarding the building of the Grotto:
"I know that it was built around 1927-29 as my grandfather Amedee Seney helped build it. The workers were paid with eggs, milk, & bread because of the depression."

Anyone have more information? Please send along and include pictures if you have them!



The Mystery of Ellen Larned's Portrait

Contributed by Mark Snay

While doing internet research about Ellen Larned, I ran across an interesting newspaper article from the *Boston Evening Transcript* dated 10/19/1906 (see next page). The article, written by N. G. Osborn, was about the portrait of Ellen D. Larned which was painted by artist Mrs. Adelaide Cole Chase of Boston, MA, and presented to the library by the residents of Thompson. Recalling that I had read somewhere that the painting's location was unknown, it sparked my curiosity; which typically leads to another item to research. A quick check of the books in the THS archives library and I found what I had read in the past, in the 1985 *Thompson Bicentennial Book*, explaining that the painting that had hung in the library for years had disappeared (thought to have happened in the early 1970s) and nobody knows why nor how. In talking to people that might either have knowledge about this story, or were involved with the library at that time, I found that little was known about the situation. In fact, nobody that I spoke to had any idea of what the portrait even looked like.

Going back to the article for clues, I realized two important things. First, the article gave a description of the painting, something that was unknown to all the people I had initially spoken to. Second, the description seemed familiar to me, recalling that I may have seen it at one time. A lengthy search through the THS digital database (no easy task given the large number of files that Joe Iamartino has accumulated through the years) did not produce anything. Going back to the books in the THS archives, I eventually found the image. Again, the source being the Bicentennial book. In this book, there is a pen and ink sketch of Ellen sitting in a high back colonial chair with a shawl around her shoulders. I felt sure that this sketch must have been copied from the portrait, or a copy/photo of the portrait. Fortunately, the artist Sandra McNeil had signed her work. A few phone calls and I found someone that had recently been in contact with Sandra and was able



Image from : Lincoln, A. B. (1920). *A Modern History of Windham County Connecticut: A Windham County Treasure Book*. Chicago, IL: S. J. Clarke Publishing.
<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo.31924092227002#view=1up:seq=9>

to obtain her contact info. I called Sandra, explaining the reason for my call. She said she had remembered doing the drawing and that she had worked from a photo given to her by one of the Bicentennial Committee members. She had returned the photo when she finished the sketch for the book.

(continued next page)

The Mystery of Ellen Larned's Portrait (cont.)

The family that had the photo has been contacted and we are currently awaiting reply to learn if they still have it in their possession.

Afterward, Ron Tillen became involved in the conversations about all this and when I sent him a copy of the news article, he sent me a digital image which was likely produced from a photo of the portrait found in the book cited on the previous page. This was great find in that it actually shows the image and matches the drawing in the Bicentennial book. Although the image is in low resolution and a bit fuzzy, at a minimum, we now know what the portrait looked like.

Research is still being done to try to learn more about what actually occurred when the portrait went missing. If any of our members have information about this to offer, we would greatly appreciate this being shared with us. Maybe we'll get lucky and the whereabouts or disposition of the portrait will be answered.

Note from Joe Iamartino: The photo of Ellen Larned's portrait is the only one known to exist. The portrait, which cost \$1000 in 1906, by the noted artist Adelaide Cole Chase, disappeared in the mid-1970s and has never been located.

Mrs. Chase's Portrait of Miss Larned of Thompson

To the Editor of the Transcript:

A visit to the picturesque Thompson Public Library, in your neighboring State of Connecticut, was an occasion of delighted surprise and prolonged contentment of mind. As the creative power back of this unexpected experience is possessed by Mrs. Adelaide Cole Chase of Boston, the well-known portrait painter, those of your readers who are interested in and concerned for art will, I am sure, not be displeased to hear from one who now feels himself under pleasant obligations to her. Mrs. Chase has this summer painted the portrait of Miss Ellen Douglas Larned, the historian of Windham County, Conn., and it has been presented by her loving neighbors on Thompson Hill to the library, where it hangs in the place of honor over the fireplace, in the charmingly lighted little reading-room. Miss Larned has lived for over four score of years in the historic old town, recording events of interest as they transpire, and patiently and enthusiastically digging down to the roots of the misty past lest old Windham County should be lost in the more commanding advance of twentieth-century ideas. Proud of the history of her town and county, exact in her estimate of their achievements, jealous of the slightest departure from definite and precise statement, sure-footed in her race for information, refreshingly original in her conversational intercourse, Mrs. Chase has been so impressively successful in catching the spirit of this woman as to have given

the world a work of art as well as a faithful portrait.

It is not an exaggeration to say that this Larned portrait suggests strongly the powerful simplicity of Whistler's portrait of "My Mother," though in both instances the subjects lent themselves easily to the treatment of the brush—so easily, in fact, that the soul of the genuine artist was required to save the portraits from the blemish of caricature. Simplicity is a rare bird to catch and tame. Mrs. Chase has placed Miss Larned in an old-fashioned high back colonial chair, facing her friends, and has made her in oil what she is in flesh, even to minute details of dress, the full realization of eighty odd years spent in the natural worship of the simple life. Then with one bold sweep of the brush, Mrs. Chase has given the portrait the dominant note it needed to complete its charm, in the form of an old-fashioned red shawl, thrown gracefully over the shoulders and caught at the waist. It was a master stroke in conception and execution, and, while, as I have said, the Thompson library now has in its possession an enduring portrait of its patron saint, down to the thin firm lips, the world has been further enriched by a definite, convincing and charming work of art.

I am sure you will appreciate the impersonality of this voluntary communication. I have not the pleasure of Mrs. Chase's acquaintance, and know the subject of her portrait but slightly.

N. G. OSBORN

New Haven, Oct. 18.

Harry A. Elliott (1922-2014)

A Thompson War Hero, Bronze Star Recipient
Contributed by Ron Tillen

A member of that great generation that served so valiantly in World War II died on Christmas Eve. Harry Elliott came from an old Thompson family and was very well regarded, and is fondly remembered by his surviving contemporaries from that era. Harry attended the old school house on Chase Road and graduated from Tourtellotte Memorial High School in the class of 1941. He knew the draft was coming, and in the meantime took a job in the office of the Cluett and Peabody Mill. He enlisted in the Army in January 1941 with his friends from school, Walter Thompson and Buzz Brissette. They were separated and Harry did recruit training at the Devson Barracks, Missouri living under canvas in a tent heated only by a potbelied stove.

From Devson Barracks he went to Chanute Field Mechanics School, but the USAAF wanted pilots, and Harry volunteered. Initially he was taught to fly in old planes with an open cockpit and from there he progressed to twin-engine aircraft. He graduated as a pilot and was commissioned from the Gulf Coast Training Center in Texas on February 17, 1943. He was sent to Salt Lake City, UT for crew formation, and then to Walla Walla, WA for flight training in a B17 Flying Fortress. At the young age of 20, Harry was the copilot, while the skipper was a mere 10 years older.

In Palm Beach, Florida, the crew picked up a brand new B17, had their photograph taken, and flew off to war. Their route was south to Trinidad, down to Brazil, and then across the Atlantic to Dakar in West Africa. From there they flew to Casablanca in North Africa, and finally to operational bases in Algeria and Tunisia, there joining the 414th Squadron of the 97th Bomb Group (Heavy). Each squadron had 25 to 30 aircraft, and there were four squadrons in the group. Once again, Harry was living under canvas!

He and his crew bombed targets all over Italy, and some of them were heavily defended by Luftwaffe fighters, especially from the big German air base at

Foggia, Italy. Flak (anti-aircraft fire) was a constant problem over Palermo. Prior to, and during the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943, Harry's plane dropped bombs on military targets in the war zone. Although it was summer, they were cold at their operational altitude of 24,000 feet, and flights to targets in the North of Italy from their base in North Africa could last for ten hours!

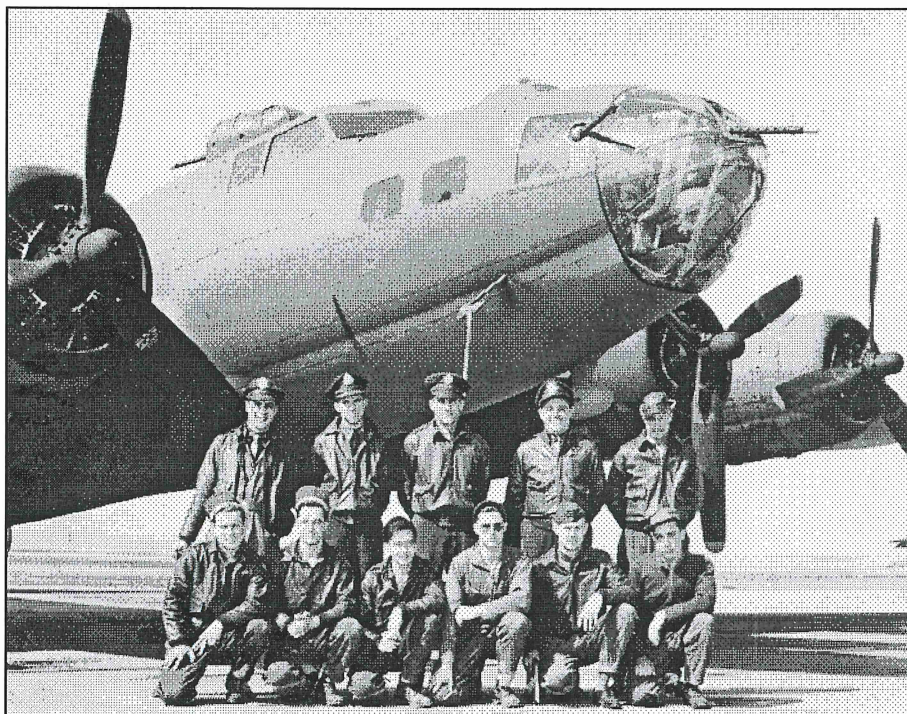
On July 19, 1943, Harry's squadron took part in the first raid on Rome led by General Jimmy Doolittle; the man who had commanded the famous raid on Japan in 1942. Attacking Rome had a profound effect on the Italian Government and anti-fascist leaders, and they began to consider removing Mussolini from office and joining the Allies. On August 25, 1943, the target was Foggia again, and this was Harry Elliott's 14th mission. The aircraft suffered heavy damage to both starboard engines and the outer engine started to disintegrate, with the propeller spinning out of control because it could not be feathered (pitched to desired angle). It was feared that it would fly off to cause further damage, as the oil-less bearings overheated. The plane headed for home but was losing height. As they came low over the Naples and Salerno area, they saw soldiers on the ground shooting at them with pistols and rifles. The B17 was very friendly to its crew and they had a superb skipper. He, with Harry's help, landed the plane upright on the sea in the Bay of Salerno.

Lieutenant



NORTH GROSVENOR DALE, Conn., Feb. 17.—Harry A. Elliott, son of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Elliott of Thompson, was graduated today from the Gulf Coast Training Center in Texas as a lieutenant in the Army Air Forces. Lieut. Elliott was graduated from Tourtellotte Memorial High School in 1941 and Jan. 8, 1942, joined the Army Air Force. He received his preliminary training at Chanute Field, Ill., and then at various flying fields at Texas.

(continued next page)



**Lt. Harry Elliott, back row, second from left, with
Crew and B17 Bomber**

The two five-man life rafts deployed, and the big plane quickly sank out of sight. They were out of reach of any Allied air/sea rescue vessel, but an Italian twin-engine float plane with Red Cross markings landed close to them. Harry had a 45 caliber pistol, and contemplated trying to capture their would-be rescuers, but he and the crew submitted and became Italian Prisoners of War.

Officers and men were separated, and Harry was driven in the back of a truck to a temporary POW camp for 2,000 men at Chieti, northeast of Rome, where the food was terrible – except for the Red Cross parcels. When there were Allied planes flying overhead, they were forbidden to watch. After the railroad at Chieti was bombed, the prisoners were moved to a big POW camp at Sulmona. It was 15 days since Harry had been captured. In the meantime, Italy had signed a secret Armistice with the Allies and peace was publicly announced September 8, 1943, and the Nazis were ready to take over. In anticipation, the senior USAAF POW officer told the men “If you are going to make a break for it, do it soon, because we are being sent to Germa-

ny tomorrow.” Harry did *not* want to go to Germany.

He watched the two Italian perimeter guards go back and forth. There were three strands of wire and ditches to surmount, and Harry carefully timed his run. He got past the first two obstacles and hid. Then he got up to go over the last wire and ditch wondering as he did so what it felt like to be shot. He scrambled up a streambed covered with undergrowth. He met two other men who were obviously fellow escapees.

The three men had no trouble getting help from the Italians who shared their meager food rations and clearly were unsympathetic to the Fascists and the Germans. Fortunately, one of the escapees, Lt. Bernard Pisaro, knew some Italian

and so they were able to exchange their American service clothes for civilian wear. As a result, they were able to walk in the countryside without arousing too much attention, sleeping in barns along the way (sometimes waking up covered in lice).

The last 80 miles south took them toward the advancing British Eighth Army fighting its way up the east side of Italy. At one time, they had to hide in a ditch while a contingent of German soldiers marched by. As they neared the front lines, they stayed low for five days until they saw that the Germans were blowing up bridges and retreating. On October 8, 1943, they were able to meet up with a Canadian Army unit. It was necessary to convince the Canadians that they were really escaped American airmen, and not spies. They gave the Canadians useful information about the German strong points they had come through, and were interviewed by an American officer. They had been on the run for almost one month.

(continued next page)

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Harry's original flight crew spent the rest of the war as POWs in Stalag Luft III, about 100 miles southeast of Berlin. Many years later they were able to have a reunion in California.

Lt. Harry Elliott was sent back to Florida and given time to rest and enjoy a furlough. On his 21st birthday, he managed to get a flight to Providence and hitch-hiked the 26 miles back to Thompson to see his parents. On his return from leave, he was given the job of training new B17 crews at the Training Command Base in Columbus, OH. Harry arranged a transfer to a fighter pilot school near Hartford, but this did not work out quite the way he wanted, and he ended up in Delaware and Virginia flying a plane towing targets for the new trainee pilots to shoot at. On one occasion he dropped his tow line too soon, and it fell upon overhead electric wires blowing fuses and causing the base to be blacked out. He only discovered this when he landed and ended up in the Commanding Officer's office!

Returning to Thompson toward the end of the war, Harry married Ruth Bayer on February 3, 1945. Ruth was a nurse who had also graduated from TMHS. The married couple moved to Oscoda Army Airfield in Michigan. His military career continued in the Active Reserves and the Inactive Reserves, achieving the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. For 30 years after the war, Harry worked for Southern New England Telephone, but he also ran a small motor repair business on Route 21 in Thompson, with the reputation for being the best person in the state of CT to take care of foreign cars, especially Porsche, MG, Austin, and Renaults.

Our condolences go out to the entire Elliott family. Thompson has lost a great resource and he will not be forgotten.



Artist's impression of a B-17 that has ditched and the crew escaping into their life rafts. The pilot of Harry Elliot's B-17 with Harry's help managed to land their badly damaged plane in the Bay of Salerno, August 25, 1943. This is comparable to the January 2009 ditching of the A 320 Airbus jet on the Hudson River by Chelsey Sullenberger.

Antonio Vito's Shattered Home



bail being set at \$10,000. Frank Rouse was presented in the same court Wednesday and was also held for trial under \$10,000 bonds.

Damage at the Vito home, which is near the Thompson railroad station, was extensive. The interior of the four rooms on the lower floor was

Windham County Transcript, 28 December 1933
Vito Home, Thompson, Dynamited. Webster Youth
Confesses to Part in Bombing Episode and Implicates
his Father in Crime – No one is Hurt.
Motive Said to be Wages Owed to Men.

completely wrecked, windows were blown out and the walls of the building were bulged outward. It is estimated that about sixteen sticks of dynamite were used in two bundles, one being tossed into each of two rooms after windows had been broken out.

The Thompson home of Antonio Vito, former road contractor, was shattered by two dynamite bombs tossed through the windows late Friday night. Vito, who was alone in the house, escaped uninjured, but suffered from shock. Alphonse Rouse, alias Russo, 21 of Webster, was brought here by state police and late Saturday evening confessed to State Officer Henry C. Zehrer that he had a part in the bombing. He charged that his father, Frank Rouse, 51, actually threw the dynamite. The elder Rouse, under arrest in Webster, refused to talk or to leave Massachusetts without extradition but changed his mind Wednesday and was brought back to Conn. Alphonse Rouse supplied a motive for the act, claiming that Vito owed money to his father and himself for work done on a highway job in Pomfret.

Windham County Transcript, 8 February 1934

Frank Russo, 51, and his son, Alphonse Russo, 21, Webster, Mass., men who confessed to State Officer Henry C. Zehrer that they were responsible for the throwing of two dynamite bombs which wrecked the home of Antonio Vito at Thompson during the night of Dec. 22, entered pleas of nolo contendere in the superior court at Willimantic Tuesday, 6th Feb. Found guilty by Judge Frank P. McEvoy, the elder Russo was sentenced to state prison for not less than one nor more than three years, while the son was given a suspended sentence to the Cheshire reformatory.

Hears Prowlers: Vito was in his room on the second floor when he heard a noise at the front of the house. Shortly afterward, there was the crash of glass and he took a revolver and went to the head of the stairs. As he stood there, two blasts in the lower rooms rocked the building. Vito ran to a window, and, although he saw no one, fired five shots. He then notified the state police and several men were immediately placed on the investigation.

Windham County Transcript, 6 December 1934

It was learned that shortly after the explosion Frank and Alphonse Rouse drove up to the Vito place in a car, ostensibly to note the amount of damage. They were arrested in Webster, where paper, twisted as for a fuse, and a knife with traces of dynamite on the blade were found in the pockets of Frank Rouse. Alphonse Rouse consented to come to Connecticut and it was at the state police barracks that he confessed. He was presented before Justice P.P. Tourtellotte in North Grosvenordale on a charge of destruction of property with dynamite. Probable cause was found and the young man was held for trial in the superior court,

The home of Antonio Vito in Thompson, which was partially wrecked by a bomb on the night of Dec. 22, 1933, was totally destroyed by fire on Wednesday evening of last week, 28 Nov. 1934. The family was absent at the time, visiting relatives at a nearby house. State Officer Henry M. Mayo was assigned to investigate and checked carefully on the whereabouts of Alphonse Rouse and his son, Frank Rouse, both of Webster, who were convicted of throwing the bomb which nearly ruined the Vito home a year ago. The elder Rouse was found to be at the Norwich State Hospital, where he was transferred from the state prison in Wethersfield because of his mental condition. Alphonse Rouse proved that he had not been out of Webster at any time during the day prior to the fire. Those who were early on the scene stated that the flames were all on the outside of the roof and it was considered possible that the shingles might have been ignited by a train which had passed a short time before, although this theory was scouted because of the lack of wind. The Grosvenordale Fire Department responded to a call for help, but could do little for lack of an adequate water supply.

The Thompson Historical Society
P.O. Box 47
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www.thompsonhistorical.org
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THS Directors and Officers for Year Ending June 30, 2015

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Treasurer	Sue Vincent
Secretary	Mark Snay

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Sue Vincent, Joe Lindley, Jon Brynga, Lucille Barrette, John Rice, Christian Iamartino, Lisa Berg, Joe Iamartino, Burton Rhodes, Dr. Chris Wagner, Dawna Sirard, Mark Snay, Paul Hughes, Kathy Welch, JoAnn Thorstenson

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Curator/	
Archives/Photos	Mark Snay
Digital Archives	Joe Iamartino, Christian Iamartino
Insurance	Jon Brynga

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Events	Joe Iamartino, Mark Snay
Membership/	
Newsletter	JoAnn Thorstenson
Museum Shop	Sue Vincent, Lucille Barrette
Nominating	Burton Rhodes, Joe Iamartino

Thank you all for your dedication to preserving our rich history!

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jiamartino@charter.net

Thank you for your consideration!

