



# The Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

www.thompsonhistorical.org

Winter 2004

## Calendar of Events

Membership meetings / events:

### Board of Directors Meetings—7 PM ELM Bldg

- Monday, January 31, 2005
- Monday, March, 21, 2005
- Monday, April 18, 2005 (at Old Town Hall)
- Monday, June 6, 2005

### Membership Meeting—April 18, 2005 Monday

Two presentations: (a) A Presentation on Interesting Stories of Old Quinebaug with old photographs

(b) A Presentation on the History of the Phonograph by Society member Wayne Saravara.

### Annual Meeting and Picnic—Monday

**June 6, 2005, 6 PM**—Greystone Farm, Rt. 21 (Home of Rob & Sue Vincent); Food is served at 6 PM; the meeting begins at 7 PM. Rain or shine.

### Museum Hours:

The Museum at the Ellen Larned Memorial Building (Rt. 193—Thompson Common) is open the first Saturday of every month from 10 AM to 2 PM. Visit our exhibit on the last Thompson country doctor, Dr. Robert Paine and his family in the wonderfully restored building.

The Board of Directors has voted to keep the Paine exhibit in place until the end of 2005 to allow everyone a chance to see the unique collection of photos, personal goods and furniture donated to the Society by the Paine family. If you have not seen this exhibit, put it in your 2005 calendar. There is a game area for children too.

## Society Gift Shop Hours:

The Gift Shop is now in its Holiday season. Holiday hours are 10 AM to 4 PM, Saturday and Sunday on the following dates:

- December 11 & 12
- December 18 & 19
- Friday December 24—(Men's Emergency Shopping Day) 12/24 (10-2 pm)

New items will include:

- The wooden, hand painted Mechanicsville school building
- 2005 THS Calendar with a new look.

The Pictorial History of Thompson—Echoes of Old Thompson Book. A new update / errata sheet for the book will be available on the website soon.

The book is also available for sale at the Thompson Library & Town Clerk's office. Call 860 923 3776 for information.

## Membership Information

\$15.00 Family Membership

\$10.00 Individual Membership

\$25.00 Contributing Membership

\$5.00 Student / Year 1 Membership

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

- 1st reminder: Summer newsletter

- 2nd reminder: Fall newsletter

THS—PO Box 47, Thompson CT 06277

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## Officers / Contact Info:

President: Joe Iamartino

Vice President: Sue Vincent

Treasurer: Barbara Weaver

Secretary: John Lengel

Curator: Mark Savolis

Grant Coordinator: Lynne Lengel

Photos: Alice Biesiadecki

Museum Shop: Lucille Barrette, Helen Flood, Carol Holowa, Val Iamartino, Henrietta Panu, Jane Provost, June Schoppe, Sue Vincent, Sandra Warner

Website: Barbara Loy

Museum: Barbara Weaver

Administrator: Blair Cole

**Call our administrator at 860 923 3200 or visit us at:**

**www.thompsonhistorical.org**

### The President's Quill—Joe Iamartino

For readers of the last newsletter, I apologize for the abrupt ending to my last column. A print formatting error dropped the last line which should have read, "the messages have been sent along to the owner."

You may have noticed that there are advertisements for local businesses in the 2005 calendar and in the Echoes of Old Thompson book. Purists may say that the Society is selling out to commercialism. Let me offer a different view. By my calculations, the Society has lost money publishing the calendar for the last 8 years. While we could have raised the price, we felt the better option was to hold the price steady by offsetting the costs with Thompson-only business advertisements. Personally, I also find it better for a purely historical reason. Fifty years from now, it will be interesting to see the business listings in the calendar!

I marvel at the old Thompson businesses marketing such items as wagon wheels, saddles, blacksmith work, shoe making, coal delivery services, picker sticks, shoddy cloth material, ice block delivery and horse blankets. How about the grocer who came to the house to take orders in the morning and delivered the goods in the afternoon from a horse-drawn wagon?

I am not advocating that we go over to the dark side of commercialism, but if we recognize the benefits that the advertising revenue could bring, we could use the funds to further our mission and offset the rising oil, insurance and repairs costs we face. Perhaps a few ads in our newsletter, tastefully placed, could pay the entire cost of printing and mailing, giving us a few extra pages for photos and stories. I am interested in your perspective. Please send in your comments, for and against, and we will carefully consider our options. Thank you as always for the support.

### Blair Cole - Administrator's Corner

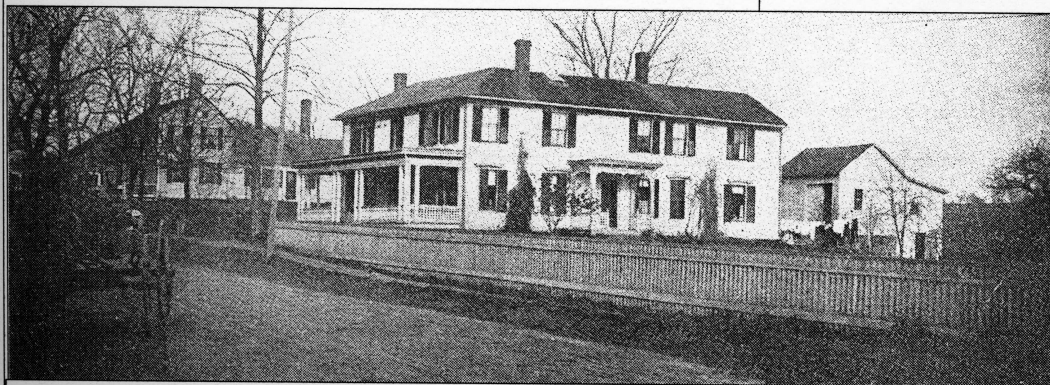
"Volunteers Needed!" Of all the words in the English language, those two, in that sequence, top the list in the Administrator's lexicon. With all of the initiatives we have begun this year, opportunities to become involved abound for members of every age and interest.

The 'Past Perfect' teams have embarked on the project of the year, the cataloging of our collection in the new Museum Software "PastPerfect". Lucille Barrett, Jean Cole and Ruth Barks have been cataloging furniture and larger easy to identify objects. Ron Tillen has offered to catalog the Thompson Fire Company book collection. Volunteers are still needed to catalog our photographs, textiles, smaller objects and ephemera. If you have basic computer skills, a free afternoon or two each month, and would enjoy participating in a little bit of detective work, please call.

For those who enjoy working with their hands, help us preserve two of Thompson's architectural treasures. Lou Lane provided his painting expertise and Ken Goloski volunteered time to help with repainting and reglazing windows in the Old Town Hall. Emile Breault fashioned and installed a set of screen windows to ventilate the basement of the OTH. Painters and handymen are needed to assist with various minor repairs. Leave your mark on a Thompson landmark. Give me a call.

CG Bostwick Company of Hartford, CT will make repairs to the roof of the Ellen Larned Museum. The major hurdle faced by companies submitting bids was finding a source of replacement tile. The tile on the ELM roof has been out of production for many years. CG Bostwick located a supplier of antique tile in the Chicago area that can supply 400 replacement red clay tiles. Among the repairs to be made are; the replacement of broken tiles, the application of mortar at the top of the northwest hip, the installation of copper rake edging at the front gable, and the replacement of the brown and green tile in the field of the roof.

A list of volunteer opportunities will be posted on the website. If you are interested, please contact me at 860 923 3200, or by email from the Volunteer page on our website. Many thanks to all who have volunteered!



A circa 1900 photograph of a street scene in New Boston





## Society News

### Open Position: Collections Administrator

The Society seeks a volunteer to work with our museum collections team to handle incoming artifacts. Responsibilities include: accepting new items per Society guidelines; documenting accepted materials in our Past-Perfect Museum Software; sending written acknowledgements to donors; helping catalog and place our collections in permanent storage locations; assisting in the preservation of fragile materials. No experience needed but some computer experience preferred. We will train. Applicants please call 860 923 3776 for information.

### Open Position: Exhibition Planner

The Society seeks a volunteer to design and coordinate the creation of our next exhibition in the recently restored Ellen Larned Memorial Building. We are targeting a late Fall 2005 opening date. This position will be responsible for planning the exhibit, creating a budget and scheduling work to complete the project, on-time and on-budget. Working with other volunteers, the planner will coordinate all creative activities needed to complete the exhibition tentatively titled: "The 10 Villages of Thompson". Call 923 3776 if interested.

### Open Position: Membership Clerk

The Society seeks a volunteer to manage our membership database in Microsoft Excel. Prior experience with Microsoft Word and Excel is required. This important position is just right for a person who wants to volunteer but cannot dedicate specific hours. This role has tasks that can accommodate any schedule. Quarterly updates of membership lists and mailing labels require about 4 hours a quarter. If interested, call 923-3776

Lynne Lengel, one of our directors, has volunteered to lead the Grant Writing activities of the Society. Last year, our two grant writers, Brenda Verdone and Sara Laughlin, submitted a number of grant requests and one of Brenda's resulted in a \$10,000 award from the 1772 Foundation to help repair the roof of the Larned Building. Lynne will help identify more grant opportunities for our grant writers to pursue. Thanks Lynne.

We thank the many folks who have donated personal items to our collection this year—too many to thank all individually here. We appreciate the confidence you have shown in our collections group. We have dedicated this year to modernizing our collections process and stabilizing the artifacts we have. Volunteers are always welcome. There is plenty of work to go around!

## Coach Canty—Baseball Stories

The recent passing of Tourtellotte's noted Coach James Canty brought in a couple of his baseball stories. Mr. Cassells, formerly from town and now living in New Jersey, passed one of the stories along.

The story goes that Canty was an excellent baseball player in his younger days at Holy Cross and even had professional opportunities in the Washington Senators organization. He was playing for the Holy Cross college baseball team when an exhibition game was arranged between the school and the Boston Braves on April 15, 1935. Now, in 1935, the Boston Braves lost 115 games, a major league record, and the organization went bankrupt at year end. The team was so bad that it couldn't be sold and the National League took it over until a new owner was found. To give the team a fresh start, the new owner changed the name to the Boston Bees. The name changed back to the Braves in 1940 and in the 1950s, the team moved to Milwaukee for 12 years and then to Atlanta in 1966. Enough history, now to our story. Some may also remember that Babe Ruth played his last years with the Boston Braves after he left the New York Yankees.

When the Boston Braves played the Holy Cross team on that cool April day in 1935, Jim Canty was playing in the outfield. The Babe had been clowning around for much of the game, and at one point, grabbed a trombone from a school band-member and started to play it. Things started to get serious though when the Braves began to fall behind the Holy Cross team. Late in the game, up to the plate strode the Babe. With one mighty swing, he crushed a towering hit in the direction of Canty. Jim raced after the ball but it shot over his head and the Braves went on to win the game. That is how Jim Canty met the Babe.

One more Canty baseball story - On April 14, 1938, the Holy Cross baseball team played Jimmy Foxx and the mighty Red Sox. Holy Cross defeated the Red Sox by the score of 3-2. Playing catcher for the Red Sox that day was Thompson's Eugene "Red" Desautels. His friend, Jim Canty, was there for that game too.

Rest in peace, Coach.

## Working Out the Road Tax

Before the coming of the federal, state, and town highway departments, local residents 'worked out the road tax' by building new roads or maintaining existing ones for a set amount of time in a given year. Dating back to English common law from the Middle Ages, 'the mending of the highways' was assigned to local authorities who chose highway surveyors for each district to collect the taxes. The taxes were paid for in labor though later, cash or worker substitutes were allowed. As an example, here are the instructions for 1847 from the Thompson Selectmen:

"To Edward Joslin, Collector of the Highway Rates in District #11 (East Thompson) of the town of Thompson....Greetings; by the authority of the State of Connecticut, you are hereby commanded forthwith to levy and collect of the persons named in the annexed list...a tax or assessment of four cents on the dollar on list 1846 granted and agreed upon by the inhabitants of the said town of Thompson regularly assembled at an adjourned town meeting held on the 7th day of Dec 1846 for the repair of highways to be paid in labor ...by allowing each able bodied man at the rate of 8 cents per hour and the like sum for a good yoke of oxen while actually engaged on said highways....".

*Alpheus Russell*  
*Highway Rate Bill*  
*Dist. No. 5. 1838*

On the cover of the 4 x 6.25 in. booklet

Rates changed with the growth of the town. In June 1826, the rates were 2 and 1/2 cents per hour. In 1838, typical assessments ranged from \$0.30 to over \$10.00 based on the 1838 rate of 4 cents per hour. It would have taken Asa Ross, a Thompson district 5 (Quaddick) landholder with large properties, more than 145 hours of labor to work off his 1838 tax burden. Thankfully children and hired help counted too. In Thompson, the highway rate bill with instructions was handed out annually to the rate collectors in booklet form. Example pages from the 1838 booklet are shown here. Thanks to Town Clerk Jeffrey Barske for the booklets.

*To Alpheus Russell Collector*  
*of the Highway Rate in District*  
*No. 5 of the town of Thompson in*  
*Windham County Greeting.*  
*By authority of the State of*  
*Connecticut you are hereby*  
*commanded forthwith to levy and*  
*collect of the persons named in the*  
*annexed list herewith committed*  
*to you each one his several proportion*  
*as therein set down of the sum total*  
*of such list it being a tax or*  
*assessment of four cents on the*  
*dollar on list 1837 granted & agreed*  
*upon by the inhabitants of the*  
*said town of Thompson regularly*

	<i>cts</i>
<i>Eddy Nelson &amp;</i>	<i>" 83</i>
<i>Eddy Samuel</i>	<i>2 06</i>
<i>Eddy Asaph</i>	<i>1 07</i>
<i>Green Amos</i>	<i>2 11</i>
<i>Green Ebenezer</i>	<i>1 47</i>
<i>Green Ebenezer Jr.</i>	<i>1 70</i>
<i>Green Samuel B.</i>	<i>1 10</i>
<i>Green Jacob</i>	<i>1 46</i>
<i>Gleason Thomas N.</i>	<i>7 37</i>
<i>Gleason Eli</i>	<i>" 80</i>
<i>Green Francis A.</i>	<i>" 98</i>
<i>Gay Ezekiah</i>	<i>" 83</i>
<i>Leonard Isaiah</i>	<i>2 04</i>
<i>Munyan David</i>	<i>1 38</i>
<i>Munyan A. &amp; M.</i>	<i>" 15</i>
<i>Munyan Albion</i>	<i>" 80</i>
<i>Wills Frederick</i>	<i>2 51</i>
<i>Randall James &amp; John N.</i>	<i>3 41</i>
<i>Randall William</i>	<i>" 80</i>
<i>Randall Asenath</i>	<i>" 45</i>
<i>Randall Daniel</i>	<i>" 63</i>
<i>Ross Asa</i>	<i>25 82</i>
	<i>39 77</i>



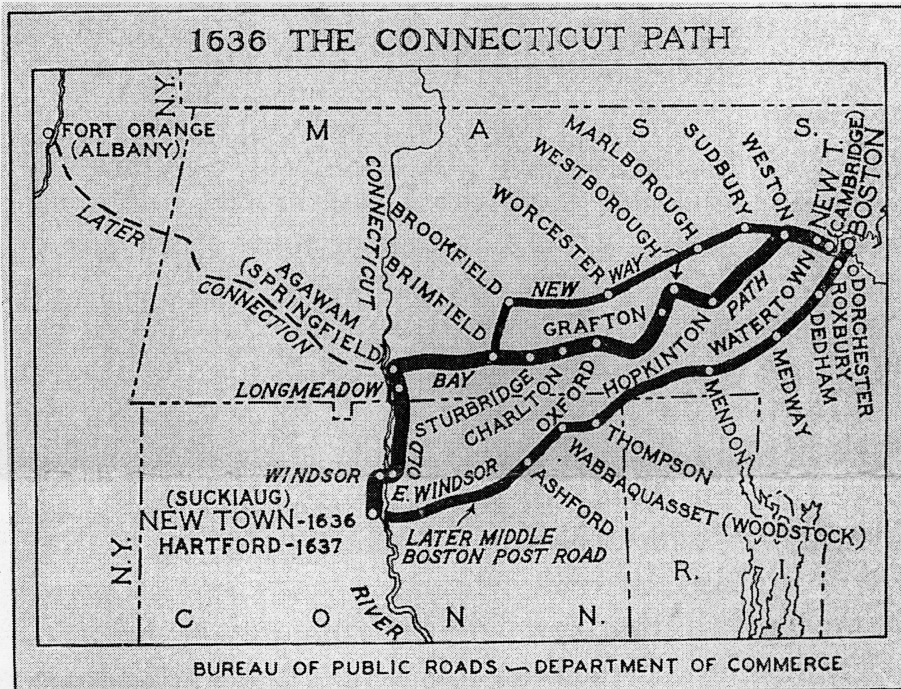
### Early Highways & Thompson:

I continue to receive questions on the track of the Connecticut Path and the Middle Boston Post Road. Hopefully, these maps will answer the questions.

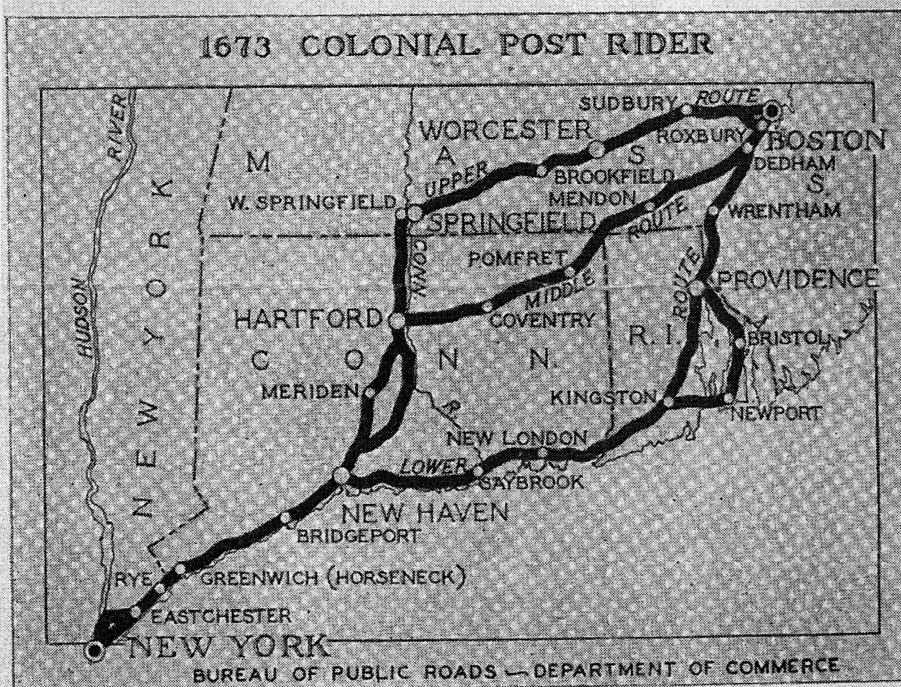
The top map shows the three paths leading from Hartford to Boston in the 1600s. All three were called, early on, the Connecticut Path. Later, the middle path, the most traveled in the earliest days, came to be known as the Bay Path and the bottom trail became the Connecticut Path. The Connecticut Path as it headed north came through Woodstock, entered Thompson in the Fabyan section, crossed the Quinebaug River where the ruins of the mill dam are now visible, met the modern Rte. 131 to the right of today's Beno's store, and then intersected with/continued north on modern Rte. 197.

The map at the bottom shows the Post Roads. The top route, known as the Upper Post Road, began in 1673. The Upper and Lower Roads ran through the settled villages of colonial times, while the Middle Road, in the Eastern Connecticut section, had long stretches of wilderness, even as late as the 1790s. The length of the upper route was 250 miles; the middle route was 203 miles and the lower route was either 247 or 259 miles depending on the Narragansett Bay branch chosen.

The early roads were horse paths and only with great difficulty could horse-drawn carriages pass. The average speed was four miles per hour. Postmaster Benjamin Franklin introduced a great innovation with a day and night post between Boston and New York in 1764. Foot or horseback traffic prevailed until the American Revolution. Merchants would use carriages in town, but for long distances would switch to horses with saddlebags. The poor road conditions would be solved by the formation of the turnpike companies of the 1800s.



These maps and facts are from public records published in a book called Public Roads of the Past—Historic American Highways, American Association of State Highway Officials. The book is filled with fascinating snapshots of road history.



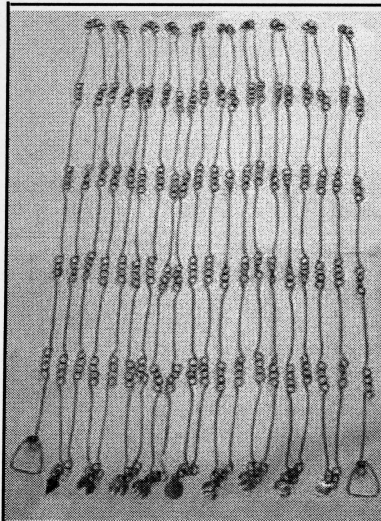
Post service began in 1673 between New York and Boston though houses had been designated as official repositories for mail as early as 1639 in Boston. Prior to this, mail would be carried by friends, relatives, and even strangers for lack of any established system.



## Ask The Society

**Q. Quinebaug's Frank Fitzgibbons asks, "Back in the 1940s, there was some branch of the Roosevelt family living on the hill? Can I be right?"**

A. Barbara Versocki and daughter Flo Fisher remember that Leila Roosevelt (Cousin of Eleanor & Franklin D. Roosevelt who were also cousins) and her husband, the noted movie director Armand Denis, lived on Quaddick Rd. after WWII. Leila and her husband made exotic travel adventure films, "Wheels Across Africa, Wheels Across India, Dark Rapture". Leila herself may have anticipated the reality television fad when she filmed herself traveling with Edna Olmstead in the 1934 movie "Round the World Trip Made by Two Girls" (see photo). There is a story that Leila may have had a pet monkey living at home too. Leila and Armand divorced, but she remained in Thompson to be near some of her 4 chil-



A 66 foot Gunter Chain

**Q. Why are some of the roads in Thompson (i.e. East Thompson Rd, Quaddick Road) so wide?**

A: For this response, I am not discussing current rules on road-building and dimensions. My answer refers only to the historical reasons.

Typical old turnpike roads might be one Gunter Chain (66 ft.) in width, though some major routes could be 6 rods wide (99 ft.). The 'chain' measured 66 feet. Let's examine the implications of the chain dimension. For example, an acre is nothing more than 10 square chains (43,560 ft).

A mile, originally the Roman *mille passus* or 1000 paces, was set at 80 chains (5280 ft). Other related dimensions:

1 League = 3 miles = 240 chains

1 Furlong = 10 chains

1 Chain = 100 links

1 Rod (or Pole) = 25 links = 16.5 feet

According to Eric Sloane (author of Return to Taos and other books), even fence rails were made 11 feet long so that a farmer could use a chain to measure property in chains (6 rails = 1 chain). Edmund Gunter (1581-1626), born in Hertfordshire, England, was the inventor of the chain and of many other devices. The chain came into common use just prior to 1700 and was used for the next 160 years.

**Q. What is the oldest standing home in present-day Thompson?**

A. This is an extremely difficult question to answer because of two reasons. One, wood homes were subject to frequent fire, insect, and water damage, especially in the years before homes were painted. Secondly, the early houses were frequently modified or expanded to meet the needs of growing families, necessary farm hands and innovations such as the indoor toilet and electricity. After the 1850s, as Thompson's wealth grew, many homes were remodeled in the Victorian fashion. With all of the changes, it is very difficult to identify the original sections of the older homes. One contender for the title is the Samuel Watson house, located at the north end of Thompson Hill. It is the home with the columns on the left side of Rte. 193 facing southeast, just past the Thompson Common and Vernon Stiles Inn. Bob and Jo Godfrey, the former owners of the Watson house, found, incorporated into the home, a building of just a single room and loft, and under 7 layers of flooring a hand-lined indoor well. According to Ellen Larned, Watson built the small house in 1754. However, there were dozens of homes built in Thompson before this date. For example, the old Thompson library sits on the foundation of Hezekiah Sabin's Red Tavern, built c.1717 near a ruined wigwam. The key though is to find proof that a house contains original, documentable sections with characteristic construction details. Other contenders for the oldest house will certainly be submitted by readers. Please send 'em in.