



# The Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

www.thompsonhistorical.org

SPRING  
January 2008



**Board of Director Meetings:** 7 PM at the Community Center on the following dates: 1/31/08, 3/7/08, 4/10/08, 5/22/08. The annual meeting & picnic on Monday 6/16 at Grey-stone Farm. Food at 6 PM and meeting at 7 PM.

## Membership Events:

February 7, 2008: A joint presentation by the Thompson Library and the Thompson Historical Society—a screening of

## the movie: THE MAN IN THE NET

Filmed in Thompson in the late 1950s, this thriller featured Alan Ladd and Carolyn Jones and was directed by Academy Award winner Michael Curtiz. Come see Thompson as it was in the 1950s. See town celebrity Clarence Ballard as the deputy (he is the officer with the fancy hat on the left above in a clip from the movie). *gpa Q Community CTR.*

## Membership dues are:

Individual Membership—\$10;

Family Membership—\$15;

Contributing Membership—\$25;

Student/Gift Membership—\$5

**Dues to be paid by July 1, 2008 for '08-'09 year.**

**Thanks for your continued support!**

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## Officers / Contact Info:

President: Joe Iamartino  
Vice President: Burton Rhodes  
Treasurer: Susan Vincent  
Secretary: Ruth Barks  
Curator: Mark Savolis  
Photos: Alice Biesiadecki  
Museum Shop: Lucille Barrette, Helen Flood, Carol Holewa, Val Iamartino, Henrietta Panu, Jane Provost, June Schoppe, Sue Vincent

Website / Collections: Blair Cole  
Administrator: Blair Cole

www.thompsonhistorical.org

or call Joe Iamartino:

• 860-923-3776

## President's Quill:

During an average month, I receive about 30 emails or letters on many historical subjects: family tree questions, determining the age of certain buildings, complaints on the treatment of older buildings in town, quotes needed for a newspaper article, Miss XYZ needs a photo for a book she is writing, where was such and such store located and so on. I enjoy the challenge of each question and, when I don't know the answer, I have many town residents, history buffs & books to turn to.

Recently, I had a call from a researcher in England from the popular BBC show "Who Do You Think You Are?" The premise of the show is a celebrity has his/her family tree examined to find an interesting ancestor or two to bring to life. Then, the celebrity runs around the world finding clues and stories about those ancestors.

As many know, the popular shows "American Idol" and "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" began in the UK. "Who Do You Think You Are?" is in its 4th season in Britain and is on episode 12 in Canada. Perhaps the series will come to America some day. The one episode I saw on the actor Jeremy Irons was fascinating!

The researcher wanted to know all about Major Robert Thompson and his connection to America. I sent over a book, a few articles, and names of other researchers to help the young lady with her story. I figured this was our one big chance to perhaps get a portrait of the Major Thompson or at least some additional information about him from the folks in Britain.

Some miscellaneous notes.....Happy Birthday Marion Howard!

Jean & Floyd Cole mentioned that Marion's husband's father (Donal Howard's father), Rev. Howard served the Congregational Church for many years. Rev. Howard's father was Major General Oliver Howard, a Civil War hero, head of the Freedman's Bureau and founder of Howard University.

Paul Rawson, from Easton, CT, wrote: "Your 2008 calendar of barns prompts me to send you photos of some of my barn paintings done in the 1960s and onward, when they were still working farms.....Nice calendar!" You should see Paul Rawson's wonderful paintings of these barns! My wife is trying to get copies of those paintings for our museum shop. Ruth Barks gets the credit for suggesting the popular Barns of Thompson all-color '08 calendar this year. A few calendars are left.

The Museum Shop volunteers, despite nasty weather in December, did a great job once again. Hundreds of people who worked / visited our buildings and contributed to our cause. Thanks to all who contributed on all sides. Have a healthy and safe 2008.

Best, Joe Iamartino

## Administrator's Corner—Blair Cole

The roar from the four Wright Cyclone engines of the B-17 'Nine O Nine' as it races down the runway at Page Airfield in Ft. Myers Florida this February 1st will mark a signal event in Thompson History. On board the WWII bomber as it lifts into the air are Navigator, Arnette Kilpatrick of Riceville, TN, Waist Gunner, Bobby Gayle of Beeville, Texas, and Pilot, Floyd Cole of Thompson, CT. Passengers on this peaceful flight, these men crewed the B-17 G "Final Approach" stationed at Deopham Green, England, which flew over 30 combat missions during WW II.

A DVD documenting the story of "Final Approach"

is archived at the Ellen Larned Memorial Museum, as are the stories of many other Thompson veterans which the Thompson Historical Society has collected through its ongoing Oral History Project, and through gifts from families of Thompson Residents.

Arnette, Bobby and Floyd are in their 80's. Their flight together - in a WWII era B-17 is a rare and special event. History lives in Thompson. Explore the riches of our local history. Visit the Ellen Larned Memorial Museum and Old Town Hall.

Be a Volunteer. Contribute. Learn. And maybe..... discover living history in our own town.

## New Boston Library Association—Mystery

Robert Milburn, from Shirley, MA, a collector of old manuscripts, came across pages from an old booklet dating from 1855 belonging to the Ladies Union Circle of New Boston, CT. After some investigation, he learned of our Society and kindly donate the booklet to us.

The booklet contains details of the formation of the New Boston Library Association and the Association minutes from the years 1855 through to the annual meeting held in 1900. The booklet is torn at this point,

and we have no further pages and no rear cover.

Library by-laws: Life membership: \$1 with \$0.25 annual fee; Yearly member: \$0.50 but can't be on the board. Semi-annual member: \$0.25; can't be on the board. Non-members: \$0.06/book for 2 weeks. Librarian pay: \$6.00 annually. One book at a time can be borrowed. 3 cents fine for each week late. Library open from 4-7 on Saturdays at home of librarian.

Does anyone know what happened to the books or this group?





# POST CARD

♦ VELOX ♦  
 V PLACE V  
 E STAMP E  
 O HERE O  
 X VELOX X

I could use help dating & placing this photo. It is after 1912 because I estimate there are 48 stars on the flag. Is it East Thompson, Little Pond?

## CORRESPONDENCE HERE

## NAME AND ADDRESS HERE

Harry Reich	Clarence Irwin	A.M. Kimball	Alice Joslin	Minnie McJay	Ruth Ransom	Louis Wieloch
Frank Wieloch	Harold Kimball	Miriam Young	Unabell Mathewson	Mary Wieloch	Annie Giewiedzoe	Theresa Mathewson
Harold Munyan						
Cortland Young	William McJay	William Kimball	Esther Mrozinski	Elsie Reich	John Kitka	Sophie Mrozinski
Peter Wieloch	Chester Mathewson	Elmer Joslin	Everett Joslin	Edwin Mrozinski		

### Newspaper Clippings:

I received many notes and calls about the last newsletter. Readers want more historical newspaper clippings and member letters so here are a few more..

**Windham County Transcript: 11 April 1878:** Our Old Folks.—Some very high figures have lately been reported to the Transcript...

We have almost within a stone's throw of each other (in Thompson Hill) four venerable fathers whose united ages are about 365 years. Our old friends will pardon us for giving their names: Mr. Joel Doane, 92 years, 3 mo.; Mr. Abel Gleason, 92 years, 3 mo.; Mr. Andrew Baldwin, 90 years, 3 mo.; Mr. William Fisher, 90 years, 20 days; making an average of over 91 years. We will not vouch for their *hay-making* another season, but the youngest of these patriarchs carried on last year a large garden, walked all over town fishing, and carved his birth-day turkey last month to the admiration of all beholders. It is very pleasant to know that we have so many old people in such excellent preservation, and we hope many more may be reported from other neighborhoods. (Written by Ellen D. Larned on April 4, 1878. Ed. Note: William Fisher founded the mill village of Fisherville, today known as North Grosvenordale).

**Windham County Transcript: 18 April 1878:** From Thompson: Nature begins to put on airs balmy and exhilarating getting ready to receive the annual shower of fugitives from the city's dust and heat. No rival Windham County town can offer better accommodations, finer atmospheric benefits, and, in short, all of the attractions for a quiet country summer that this delightful old corner of the banner County.

The Wilsonville Serenaders gave us good entertainment last Saturday evening—good in every respect, which is saying much in this day of a multiplicity

of good things in the way of public entertainments. The acting was natural and effective, the speaking was distinct and well emphasized, the scenes well "put", in short the "show was tip-top" says everybody so far as heard from. The music from Lindsey's Orchestra was also universally enjoyed and commended.

We are glad that the gifted pen of one thoughtful townswoman lets your readers know that Thompson has her quota of venerable people, enjoying the green old age which proves alike the healthfulness of the town they live in and the wisdom of their living. May many years yet lie ahead for them this side the shadowy valley.

The Congregation church is being newly frescoed and carpeted.

**26 May 1859—Advertisements:** Tavern Stand to Let!

The Tavern Stand formerly occupied by E. JACKSON & Co., situated in Thompson Centre, will be leased for a term of from one to five years on reasonable terms. Said stand is centrally located and offers a good business to the lessee, there being no public house in the vicinity where one is greatly needed. The house is well fitted for a Public House, and has a good stable, suitable for Livery purposes. For particulars inquire of Mr. Callangham, Merchant Tailor on the premises, or the proprietor near by. JOHN H. WILKES (Thompson, May 24th 1859 21-3T\*)

Ed. Note: It is believed that this was an old building then, and was the first tavern on Thompson Hill, located where the Ellen Larned Memorial Building AKA the 1902 Old Stone Library stands today, facing across Rt 193 to the Thompson Common. The location of the Wilkes property can be found on the 1869 map, as part of the Thompson Hill section of the Directory.

**3 October 1878:** A young man by the name of Patrick Rafferty, in the employment of Mr. Nichols, was run over by the night freight going west on the New York & New England railroad near Mechanicsville, on Sunday night, between 11 & 12 o'clock. He was cut and mangled in a shocking manner, his body being scattered along the track for quite a distance. He was a stone cutter by trade, and resided with his father in Mechanicsville. He was last seen about 9 o'clock, and was at that time all right. He was a hard working, industrious man.

**6 June 1878—FROM THOMPSON** Elbridge Buxton has opened a paint shop in Mr. Wilke's buildings.

A large number witnessed the baptism in the river near West Thompson station last Sunday.

Repairs are being made on the bridge at the West Thompson Depot. It has needed fixing up for a long time, and it was hoped a double track bridge would be put in.

**Marion Howard sent this clipping over, dated about 1948**

**No. Gros, CT. Aug 16—**Chet Gibbons of Worcester, & Miss Sophie Hallock of Waterbury, were married yesterday afternoon at Thompson Speedway in a public ceremony in the front of the main grand stand just before the start of a racing program.

Bill Schindler of Freeport LI was the best man and Miss Ronni Karsensky was the bridesmaid. The couple marched up the aisle formed by more than 60 racing drivers, forming an arch of racing flags. Justice of the Peace Donal McG. Howard officiated.

In the racing program which followed, Gibbons failed to start...



Marilyn Labbe sent us the following newspaper clippings:

#### **New Boston: October 27, 1870**

There has been nearly two millions of brick made at the yard of Sylvester A. Dresser this season. So little rain has fallen this season, that brickmakers have had no cause to complain of lost time.

#### **Tourtellotte farm: July 4, 1872**

Don't Go West, If you Want a Splendid Farm cheap for Cash. Will be sold at auction, on Tuesday, July 9th, 1872, at 1 o'clock p.m., on the premises. The Farm of the late Joseph Tourtellotte, near New Boston Depot, Thompson, Ct., on the Southbridge Div. B. H. Erie R. R., within a short distance of four Depots, schools, &c. One large Mansion House of 18 rooms. Two large barns, Woodhouse, Piggery, Aqueduct, &c., and about 165 acres in home Farm, well divided, watered and fenced, usually keeps 35 head of cattle, can be successfully cultivated as a Stock, Mill, or Vegetable Farm. Milk trains run to Boston every day, while all kinds of Produce find a ready market at W. Dudley, Southbridge, Mass., Grosvenordale, Mechanicsville, or Putnam, Ct., all smart, growing towns and villages on both sides of the Farm, where real estate is sure to rise, "a big item." It lies on a beautiful Southern slope, buildings in the centre, a delightful summer residence. The Quinebaug River runs through its Southern portion, on either side, is an interval of self-sustaining deep-soiled bottom land, just as good as can be found any where. For natural richness of soil and location, this Farm has long been called one of the best in New England.

Over \$1000 worth of hay cut last season, and as much, with several acres of Oats and Potatoes, now growing, will be sold with the Farm

if desired.

The "New Boston Picnic Grove," with its never failing spring of cool, fresh water, and splendid fishing cove adjoining; also, two large Quarries of granite, easily worked, near R. R., included. 25 acres of Pasture land, "Blackmore Lot," detached, 4 miles N. East of Farm. Keeps 12 head Young Cattle during the season. Will be sold if wanted, (Parties may examine this before the sale, if they wish it.) just after sale of Farm. Also, Lot of Wagons, Farming Tools, &c., &c.

Terms:--\$1,000 Cash and balance on receipt of deeds. Small articles, Cash. **West Medway, Mass.**

**J. N. Tourtellotte**

**8 Dec. 1853** - Thompson News - The new bell was put into the belfry of the Cong. Church in this village (Thompson) weighing 2012 pounds, from the Foundry of the Messrs. Meneely, Troy, NY.

Mr. Knight's establishment for braiding and working straw, I understand, has lately made an encouraging commencement.

Our Rail Road "drags its slow length along," and one of these days, probably about the first weeks of January it is thought, it will be ready to drag the "fast train" along.

**1 June 1854** - New Church in Thompson. It will be seen that the Congregational Society in Thompson contemplate the erection of a new church. Their present place of worship is the same they have used for nearly sixty years, and the effects of Time's rude touch begin to be seen quite conspicuously. We learn that Mr. Wm. H. Mason, one of Thompson's most enterprising citizens, has subscribed \$3000 towards the erection of a new edifice.

**1 Sept. 1859**— Deputy Sheriff May arrested Andrew Baker of Eastford, on Monday, charged with breaking into

the store of John E. Ross, Quaddic Village, in Thompson, and stealing clothing and jewelry to the value of fifty dollars. Baker has an examination before Stephan Crosby, Esq. He plead guilty and was committed to jail. He implicated another person in the robbery, but there being no other evidence to sustain the charge, he was discharged. Baker is an old offender.

**3 October 1878:** From Thompson.

The Depot at West Thompson was entered by thieves Sunday night, and a box of tobacco valued at \$12 was taken, and two casks of liquor were broken into and some of their contents abstracted.

Mrs. J. R. Barton, of Lawrence, Mass. spoke here on Temperance, last Sunday.

Grosvenordale: The large tene-ment house, made from the frame of the old wooden mill, caught fire on Thirsday and considerable damage was done to the attic, where the fire originated; but the blaze was extinguished in time to save the building, although the property of the inmates was greatly injured by water.

**1 November 1877:** Grosvenordale

The operatives of the Grosvenordale Company have reason for much self-congratulation in the fact that the mills of the company are still running on full time, with every prospect of successful operation through the winter. Our pleasant little village wears a pleasantly busy appearance, and it is to be hoped that the wolf, Hard Times, may not put his cold nose in at our door during the coming cold months.

No. Grosvenordale is to have a new schoolhouse. The voters of the school district have votyed to build one on the land given for the purpose by Mr. R. Spencer.

## Italians and Hired Help

### Italians in Thompson:

There are numerous stories about the Italians brought to Thompson around 1900 to work on Norman B. Ream's estate, golf course and on his friend John Doane's estate as well. Susan Vincent found evidence of these laborers living in a temporary work camp near Thompson Hill. The names of these Italians can be found in the 1900 Federal Census; Thompson, Windham County, Roll T623 152, Page 13A, En. District 526.

'Padrones' enticed Italian farm hands to come to America for railroad work starting in the early 1880s. The Italians were more willing to tolerate lower pay and poor living conditions compared with other ethnic groups. More importantly, many Italians workers were familiar with stone work because of Italy's preference for stone buildings. Railroad trestles, abutments, bridges, culverts & tunnels required stone working skills and Italians had the requisite experi-

ence at a very low cost.

Both Doane and Ream were heavily involved in the railroad industry. Ream often traveled the country in his own private railroad car. With access to the Italian railroad workers & ample funds to pay for their skills, these Italians were heavily involved in the restructuring of Thompson Hill in the early 1900s.

On the Ream estate, the normal 1/2 acre to 1 acre farmer's walls were done away with. Normally,

farmers built walls to discard the stone found in the fields. Ream had the Italians take the inner field walls down to build the massive walls on the estate perimeter. At Ream's golf course, intricate stone bridges & marker pyramids are just a few of the structures built by the Italians. The workers cleared the land, built stone walls & planted new trees. Many Italians took their money back to Italy, but some stayed and chased their American dream.

At right is a page from Alice Searls' 1904 expense journal. A number of items of interest:

- 1) The Searls family of Thompson had three household servants—Mrs. Corbin was the cook and was paid \$7 / week. Della Lougee was the maid and received \$3 / week. The Italian may have been hired to build stone walls or do other yard work, and received \$5.25 for the week.
- 2) In a previous newsletter, the concept of the pew rent was discussed. In the early days, pew seating in the church or meeting house was not open to all. Church members had to own their pews, and later this turned into a pew rent. For many people, this was a considerable sum as can be seen here in contrast to the weekly pay for the hired help.

*August, 1904*

Aug 8	H. S. Morse. by check	\$ 40 77
" 4	Mrs. Corbin - Cash - 1 week	7 00
" 18	Ribboli, Caterer	5 35
" 19	Miscellaneous shopping	15 00
	F. D. Green, by check	6 44
	Pew rent	15 00
" 22	Fruit and House things	3 00
" 27	Fruit, things for house.	3 30
" 11	Mrs. Corbin - 1 week	7 00
" 18	" " " "	7 00
" 25	" " " " to date	7 00
" 27	Della Lougee. Wage from Aug. 22 to 29	3 00
" 29	Children's Aid Society	2 00
" 31	Italians for work	5 25
		<hr/>
		\$ 127 11



## More Clippings

**16 Aug 1877: Large Fire in New Boston:**

Monday noon, the 6th, flames were discovered issuing from the card room of the brick mill owned by G.T. Murdock of New Boston, in such volume that it was impossible to quench them, as the force pump could not be reached. Water was let through the gas jets in most of the rooms, but the fire had gained such headway that it could not be stopped, and all of the buildings, machinery and

stock, save a small lot which was saved, was wholly destroyed. The property consisted of a 2 1/2 story brick mill 117 by 32, with an addition, beside dye and store houses, and was operated by G. Thurston Murdock—the son of G.T. Murdock. At one time several houses in the village were threatened, and aid was summoned from Webster, but by hard work on the part of the inhabitants the fire was kept confined within the limits of the mill property. Some fifty persons

were employed in the mill in the manufacture of satinetts, and the destruction of this property will not only be a great loss to this village, but particularly so to the employees who are thrown out of work. The loss on the buildings and machinery is estimated at \$30,000, and the insurance was placed with Mr. L. H. Fuller of Putnam in the following companies: - Aetna, Home, Hartford, Phoenix, National, Atlas, Fire Association, Atlantic, Lamar, Security, City and Manhattan. There was also an insurance of over \$8000 on the stock.

The origin of the fire is a mystery, all all the workmen say everything was all right at the time they left for dinner. It is undecided as yet whether they property will be rebuilt.

The Grosvenordale Company are making improvements around the village. They have built a fence around each of the overseers' houses, making them look much better. Now they very much need a fence around their mill and yard. It then will be as pretty a factory village as there is anywhere in the country.

## 3rd Grade Tour:

Thanks to the efforts of the Thompson school system, Jane Johnson, and the hospitality of Sue & Rob Vincent, late this Spring, Thompson 3rd graders will have a bus tour of town historical sites, a stop at the French River, the West Thompson Dam, the & Thompson Common. They will see several weaving, spinning, & cooking events at Greystone Farm, capped by a fire company & 'kids' bucket brigade demonstration featuring "The Old Tub", Thompson's oldest but fully functional ca. 1827 fire engine. (See tub & the Thompson Fire Engine Company in this 2007 pic).



**School Openings:** A few days ago, my nine year old son Alexander gave me a tour of the new areas of the Thompson school complex. I know I speak for many people who thank Dave Johnson and the others involved on the school board & building committee to bring this complex project to completion. Their unselfish dedication of time, energy and intellect has delivered a wonderful learning environment for Thompson's youth.

Many years ago, the Tourtellotte Memorial High School opened. Time passed and folks forgot when it did open officially. Thanks to Jeff Barske and some recent documents he sent my way to review, we can say with confidence that the school was presented to the Town of Thompson on Sept. 1, 1909 and the first graduating class was on June 19, 1911. For our newest school opening, can we agree that January 1, 2008 was the official opening date?

2006 JAN P8

### Quarterly Newsletter

The Thompson Historical Society

P.O. Box 47

Thompson, CT 06277

[www.thompsonhistorical.org](http://www.thompsonhistorical.org)

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### Ask The Society

Q. Where is the Mohegan River in Thompson?

A. This was one of the names for the river we now call the Quinebaug River. About 1674, Daniel Gookin wrote that the Indian village of Maanexit was located on the Mohegan River about 7 miles westerly from the Nipmuc village located near modern Webster Lake. See the Gookin section at <http://capecodhistory.us/19th/MHS-1792-Gookin.html#139-customs>

Q. Where can I get more information on the 1891 East Thompson Train Wreck?

A. Try these two sources; New England States Limited Magazine, Volume IV, No. 4 or Yankee Magazine, December 1960.

Q. What is the Grand Trunk Railroad and how is it connected to Thompson?

A. It was a rail line that was never completed, with some construction near Quinebaug. The reasons for the failure of the line are many and is connected with the 1912 sinking of the Titanic. The book, "The Titanic Railroad: The South-

ern New England, the Story of New England's Last Great Railroad War" by Larry Lowenthal should help interested readers better understand this complicated story.

**Windham County Transcript clipping - 12 Aug. 1880**—Judge Martin has decided to grant the layout presented to him for the new road from Wilsonville to Perryville.

**31 October 1878:** From Thompson

A small but very appreciative audience listened on Thursday evening of last week to readings by Miss Julia Lee, a charming elocutionist. Those who heard her, talk of having Miss Lee come again; and if she does doubtless a much larger audience will occupy the town hall.

Quaddic: A twine mill is being built here, on the site of the old saw-mill. The heirs of the late Mowry Ross are the builders. It is to be 150 feet long and 35 feet wide.

West Thompson: The quiet little village of West Thompson is beginning to

throb with new life. Mr. Sibley, of Warren, Mass has hired part of Chase's Mill, and will do something to add to the business of the place.

Mr. Vernon Roberts has opened a store, which makes it convenient for the people in the vicinity.

We had a very enjoyable time at the vestry of the church a few evenings ago. Men & boys turned out in sufficient numbers to saw & put into the wood rooms fuel enough to warm the house during the winter. The manner in which such matters is attended to in this place is worthy of commendation. But what added to the interest of the occasion was the part the ladies took in the affair. While the men & boys were working with a will to dispatch a large pile of wood, they were busy preparing refreshments which were appreciated by the generous workers. Our ladies are not backward in doing their part.... Our worthy Sexton well understands how to do his part to make church-goers feel cheerful & comfortable.