

Thompson Historical Society Newsletter

We're on the web! Visit us at: www.thompsonhistorical.org

Fall 2014

THS BOD Meetings
7 pm, Community
Center, Room 3

November 12, 2014
January 21, 2015
March 18, 2015
April 29, 2015

In this issue:

- ◆ Upcoming Event! 1
- ◆ President's Quill 2
- ◆ In the News
- ◆ The Scout Shack 3
- ◆ The Shack (cont.) 4
- ◆ Recognizing our many Volunteers!
- ◆ THS Officers and Directors 2014-2015 5
- ◆ Membership Info
- ◆ Follow us on Facebook!
- ◆ Q & A Mystery Pic 6
- ◆ Henry Brown Event, Oct. 17

Looking for writers!
Anyone with history,
photos, stories to tell, let
us know!

Send your submissions to
jiamartino@charter.net!
Looking forward to
hearing from the field!

THS Contact info:
jiamartino@charter.net

Upcoming Event:

The World's Only Four-Engine Wreck, Thompson 1891

October 8th: Starting at 11:30 am.

The Eastern Connecticut Railroad Museum and the THS are planning a walk-and-talk at the site of the world's only four-engine wreck which occurred in December 1891. The event will take place on the walking trail that intersects East Thompson Road.

Later that day, at TMHS in N. Grosvenordale, at **4:30 pm**, noted train historian Bob Belletzkic will give an interesting presentation on the "Train Stations of Thompson." A short presentation created by historians Bob Belletzkic and Tom Chase on the Ramsdell Train Collection will be given at **5:30 pm**.

This collection, generously donated by Ramsdell relative Dale King to the Thompson Historical Society, contains a diverse range of rail, trolley and a few sea and auto images as well. Following the talk, visitors can see the Ramsdell collection in its initial states of being catalogued.

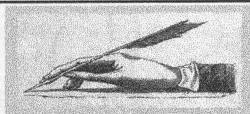
The late Alice Ramsdell, being related to the Tourtellotte and Ballard families, would be pleased to see both her train collection and the Tourtellotte Memorial Room open and available for visitors that evening from **5:30-7:30 pm**. Alice served for many years as the curator for the Tourtellotte Memorial Room, one of the largest museums in a public high school in the country.

Lastly at **7 pm**, there will be a THS presentation at TMHS on the "1891—Four-Engine East Thompson Train Wreck." The circumstances leading up to this disaster will be discussed in detail. Photos from the Ramsdell train collection will be shown. We will discuss the mystery surrounding the death of two, possibly three, people in the wreck and why historians are not sure.



Admission is free! The notes on the events listed in this newsletter are preliminary. Please look to our website for final schedules and agendas.

President's Quill ~ Joe Iamartino



In the News

20 June 1872

Windham County Transcript

Dear Editor:

The people of this place have been very much alarmed for the past few days by the report that there was a large cave near the Thompson depot, on the B. H. & E. R. R., where a band of robbers and thieves made their headquarters. Last Thursday evening, about fifty men and boys from Grosvenordale, under command of N. Gilmore, started out to capture the cave. Three small boys, hearing of the intended raid, proposed to have a little fun out of it. They borrowed an old cannon, two shotguns, and started for the cave, arriving there about one hour before the attacking party came up. The Grosvenordale party soon came up and halted within a short distance of the place to make preparation for a grand charge on the cave. When the command was given to charge on the cave, the men all went forward. When they arrived within about twenty yards of the cave, the boys in the cave fired their cannon and guns, and gave an unearthly yell, when the attacking party broke and run, completely demoralized. Some in the fright lost their guns, hats, caps, etc., while others fainted away and the stampede was awful to behold. One brave man stopped about two miles from the cave and fired his revolver in the air, exclaiming "my ambition has just come up." Friday morning a gentleman visited the cave and behold! he found there was a hole where one had dug out a woodchuck.

Constant Reader of the Transcript.

Friends,

I am not sure this story is a suitable for the THS President's Quill column but here it is nevertheless. There is a reason I wanted to write it and when I figure out what it is, I will let you know.

About six months ago, my son Christian asked me if I had had my DNA tested. "Yes, I am I2A2A3 on my Y-DNA." He said, "I have had my DNA tested too. I have good news and bad news. The good news - you are my father. The bad news - you are not Italian."

After he helped me back into my chair and put a cold compress on my forehead, I asked for the proof that I was not Italian. He showed me the evidence on the Eupedia Genetics Haplogroups page. Now, I am not a molecular biologist so what is on this website is either really good accurate genetic info or really great looking, professionally written hokum huwie. I believe what was written.

It explains how my ancestors, after the last glacier melted some 22,000 years ago, wandered into Northern Europe, and settled in Northern Sweden. Over time, some moved into central Germany, then many thousands of years later, a group left Germany, spent centuries in Austria and southern Hungary, then were invited by the late Romans to be mercenaries in Northern Italy (Lombardy), and finally, my son claims, a small army troop ended up in Campobasso in southern Italy maybe 1200 years ago. One lonely soldier may have met a doe-eyed Campobasso beauty and, the

next thing you know, her loving father is throwing a cobble stone at a fleeing soldier. Or something like this.

Since my father's mother and father both came from this Campobasso area of Italy, I have many ounces of Italian DNA in my blood but somehow, we picked up the blood of that one lonely soldier, a Lombard soldier. In Italy today, there is an area called Lombardy. This is where mainly golden haired, blue eyed soldiers called Longobards, now called Lombards, once settled almost 1500 years. The word may mean "long beards" or "long swords" and they were supposedly nasty fighters and liked to drink wine from goblets made from the skulls of people they didn't like.

Now, all this new information was great info for me but it answered another question that had been nagging at me for years. I am the oldest of 5 boys. Two of my brothers have blue eyes and light blond hair (especially when they were young). I was told that to have blue eyes, the gene had to come from both mother and father. I asked my father years ago how this could be since he was full blooded Italian, with dark hair and dark eyes. He said, "Go ask your mother." Now, my mom had blue eyes, but had long ago passed away so we couldn't ask her. So, there the mystery sat for 25 years.

Well, Mom's reputation is now saved and I am telling people I am a Lombard. This may also explain why I am allergic to garlic and onion!

~Joe Iamartino

The Scout Shack

We received an email from Rachel Hilli, who, while out for a walk with her son behind the K of C, wanted to know anything about the "burned down shack" that can still be seen around the Lily Pond section. We are pleased to present the following colorful account of the history of the shack as told by Gary Thorstenson, E. Lyme, CT, formerly of North Grosvenordale.

My sister-in-law JoAnn recently asked me if I knew anything about the land around Lily Pond that had something to do with the Boy Scouts at one time. Boy, do I ever.....

The official name of the place was Camp Arrow, but everyone in town knew and referred to it simply as "the Scout Shack." The land was owned by the Narragansett Company, who also owned the mill and is not be confused with the brewing company of the same name. It was used exclusively by the Boy Scouts of Troop 29 of N. Grosvenordale, which was sponsored by St Joseph's Church. It was located at the end of the dirt road that begins just past what is now the Knights of Columbus Hall on Route 12.

It was situated on the southeastern side of Lily Pond, which I believe was restricted by the CT DEP to be fished only by kids under 16. So if you needed a fishing license, you couldn't fish there. As kids, we used to fish there with or without a scouting nexus. Sometimes during summer vacation, my brothers, friends and I would spend the day there; bring a lunch and fish all day. We caught perch, pickerel, sunfish (which we called kivers), and some pout. Sometimes we would clean the fish we caught and cook them over an open fire. For a while we had a leaky old wooden rowboat that we would paddle around using an old kid's snow shovel. We had to stay in the bow of the boat as we paddled around the pond because the stern leaked like a sieve. I remember my brother Chucky catching a pretty big pickerel there once.

The Scout Shack was a brown cottage-type building with a front porch facing the pond. I never knew when it was built nor if it was built for the specifically for the scouts. I remember it having a stone fireplace in a single great room, and a small kitchen in the back. When I was a scout beginning in 1966, the building was already in a poor state of repair, and we didn't use it other than to hang around on the porch. The roof was leaking and there was a hole in the floor that had rotted through. There were also a few small shacks, one of which had a sign on it that read "The Feathermans' Club." We always wondered, but never found out the significance of that name.

To the left of the cottage, as you sat on the porch, the scouts had built a swimming pond in the early to mid- 60s. I think one of the men on the Troop Committee had a dozer and they scooped out where Lily pond ran into a stream that fed into the French River. The scouts dammed up the end opposite Lily Pond and the swimming hole was formed. By the time I was a scout, however, no one swam there, nor anywhere else on at Camp Arrow, for that matter.

Past the swimming hole, and about 25 yards into the woods, was a spring where we would get our potable water. It always ran all summer, and the water was cool and tasted great. The Troop would occasionally send a sample out to UCONN for testing, but I can't remember it ever being closed down.

As you came up to the Scout Shack, past an old Sea Scout wooden boat on the right, straight ahead there was a pine grove where we used to pitch our tents and camp out. Between the road and the pine grove there was a flat open area. There was a short hill that separated the area from the shack, and on top of it was a flagpole. We would hold reveille, retreat and other types of formations there. We also had room there for each patrol to cook their meals over an open fire. At night, we would build a big Council Fire in that area.

The Scout Shack, cont.

After playing "commandos," capture the flag, fishing or whatever, we would all sit around the fire; mostly telling scary stories with the intent of scaring the heck out of the younger kids. There were some classics like the Monkey's Paw, but the favorite of the Troop was the story of "Three Fingered Jack" who rode the rails looking to kidnap young boys. The thumb and little finger of his right hand had been sliced off by the wheels of a railroad car, which resulted in his hand forming a permanent scout sign. Ever since that day, he especially hated boy scouts. The story continued that he had escaped recently and the cops were looking for him. He had escaped on the train and the boys were told to keep an eye out for him if the train went by.

Of course, the train from Worcester would go by around midnight on the weekends. From your tent in the dark pine grove, you could hear the whistle as it came closer down the valley through Webster and Wilsonville, blowing before it reached every road crossing on its route. By the time you could hear the train chugging by on the far side of the French River, the new kids would be petrified; hiding in their sleeping bags and crying for their mothers. We were told several times not to tell the story, as parents were complaining, but it was told at every Camp Arrow campfire I remember. And there were plenty in the 6 years I spent in Troop 29.

*Gary Thorstenson,
Brigadier General, US Army (ret.)*

If anyone has pictures of the old Scout Shack, we would love to publish in a future newsletter! Please send to jiamartino@charter.net.

Thank you!



Thank you Volunteers!

My thanks to our volunteers - John Rice, Charlie Panu, our neighbors at both buildings and the wonderful ladies who work at the Museum Shop, especially Sue Vincent, June Schoppe, Lucille Barrette, and Helen Flood. Our archivist and secretary Mark Snay who puts in many hours of behind the scenes work, researches our many leads plus leads his archive team of Kathy Welch, Cindy Obert, and Lisa Berg. We tip our hat to our VP Joe Lindley who has tackled story after story, coordinated the handling of Soldier Brown's letters, gave numerous presentations and has done 101 other things over at the TMHS and Memorial Room. We appreciate all of our directors for giving their time and advice. Shirley & Philip Houle - thank you for helping us keep the museum clean. My family - Val, Chris, Marissa and Alex - thanks for all of the many THS tasks I dump on you. Please forgive my thoughtlessness in asking so much of you. JoAnn Thorstenson - how can I / we thank you for the many hours of newsletter writing and keeping our membership list current and most of all, for your humor? The Thompson Hill Fire Engine Company and Lynn Landry for helping at the 2nd Graders Tour de Thompson, and the volunteers who sing, setup and demonstrate how the children should use the quill pens and ink at the Old Town Hall. The children will remember you and that event for their entire lives. To Burt Rhodes, Bob Belletzkic and Tom Chase, we appreciate you helping with the Ramsdell collection, kindly donated by Dale King. Jon Brynga, we can't forget you squaring us away on our insurance situations and giving solid advice in our director meetings. Many more deserve to be mentioned here but our volunteers number of 100, our membership even more and our annual website visitors and emails are in the many thousands. What are we without all of you? With appreciation to you all!

~ Joe Iamartino

*Your Historical Society Directors and Officers
For Year Ending June 30, 2015*

OFFICERS:

<i>President</i>	Joe Iamartino
<i>Vice President</i>	Joe Lindley
<i>Treasurer</i>	Sue Vincent
<i>Secretary</i>	Mark Snay

DIRECTORS:

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

ADMINISTRATIVE:

<i>Facilities</i>	John Rice
<i>Curator/Archives</i>	Mark Snay
<i>Digital Archive</i>	Joe Iamartino, Christian Iamartino
<i>Insurance</i>	Jon Brynga

COMMITTEES:

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

Thank you to all of our Officers and Directors!

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.)

Thompson Historical Society

Attn: Membership

P.O. Box 47

Thompson, CT 06277

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.

What's the best way to keep up with us? Check out our website often www.thompsonhistorical.org

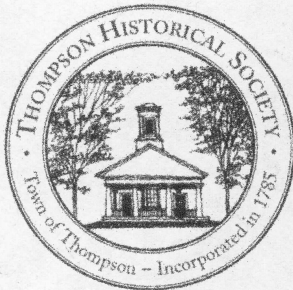
And now you can *Follow Us on Facebook!*
www.facebook.com/thompsonhistory



With special thanks to **Sue and Rob Vincent** for once again opening their home for our Annual Meeting in June, for the tours and for sharing their lovely farm with the THS. A great time was had by all and we truly appreciate the preparation put into our Annual Meeting by our BOD members.

*Please visit our website for news about the Old Town Hall and the ELM Museum's hours for Holiday shopping!
It's never too early!*

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



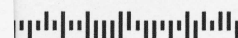
FALL 2014
P 8

NONPROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE PAID
PUTNAM CT 06260
PERMIT NO 703

***** 5-DIGIT 06260

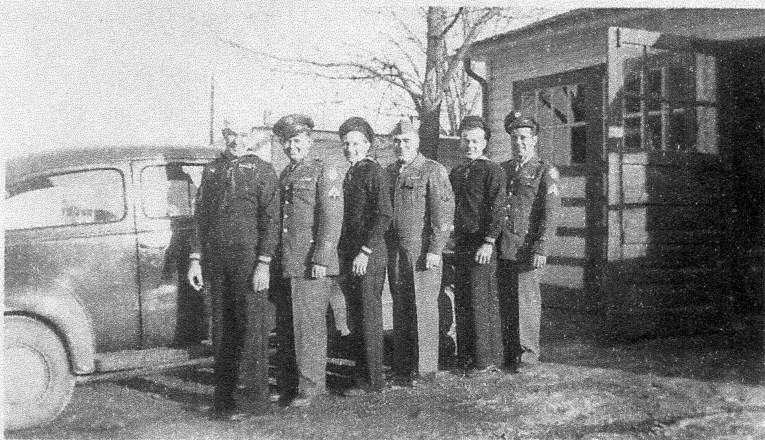
0/2016'

1



WWII Military Q&A Pic!

Here is a great picture for all of you out there! Try to name the six military men pictured! We have an idea about one, two, or more of them, but we sure would love to hear from you and any memories you may have of any of these fellas! Let us know!



Civil War Letters of Thompson's Henry Washington Brown to be Displayed

On October 17, 2014, 12:00 pm-5:00pm the THS will hold an event celebrating the life of Thompson Civil War soldier Henry Washington Brown. Henry's letters, donated to the THS by the Brown family, are the center piece for the book *A Thousand Days to Live*, by Joseph Lindley. The day will start at the Old Town Hall at 12:00 pm with talks about Henry and his time in the U.S. Army (1861-1863).

We will then walk across the Thompson Common and discuss the Common during the Civil War. The day will finish at the Ellen Larned Museum where Henry's letters will be on display. The Henry Brown Civil War Letter Collection is among the most complete in the U.S.

Please see our website for further details on the schedule of events.

The event is free to all!