



The Thompson Historical Society Newsletter



Fall 2023

PO Box 47, Thompson CT 06277

www.thompsonhistorical.com



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Dave Babbitt, a former THS President, Selectman and Educator led a wonderful Community Day Walk in the N. Grosvenordale mill village. Our thanks to David! He pointed out the metal tracks in the railway tunnel that crossed the water between the mill and the old cloth room, formerly the Jim's Hardware building.

Readers, our indefatigable archivist, Mark Snay, found a Library of Congress treasure trove of Olmstead documents for the Gladding estate, now called Lord Thompson Manor, built by John Russell Gladding about 1916. Olmstead Brothers, famous for their tailored landscapes for wealthy patrons, designed the expansive grounds at the Gladding's estate.

https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss52571.mss52571-02-306_0008_0045/?sp=1&st=gallery

From The President's Quill— By: Joseph Iamartino



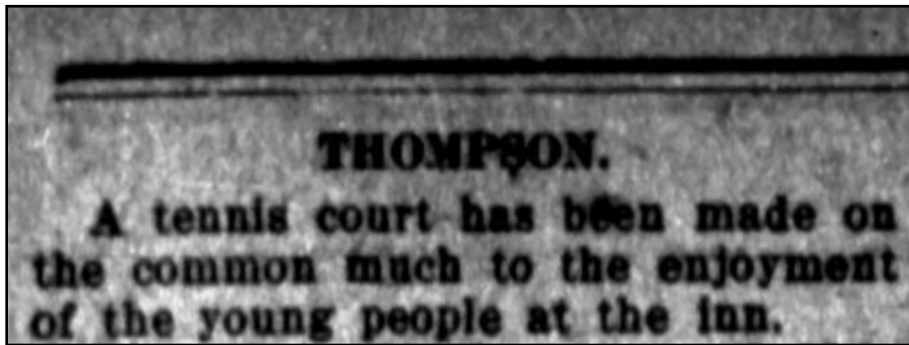
The Vacant, Abandoned, Delinquent sites incentives vote supporting the Mill and other neglected large sites was indicative of the mood of our town. It is time to clean up those areas of the town from the past.

Those VAD areas of town had their day in the sun. They were once new. Proud owners stood back and saw their visions come to life in stone, brick, wood and iron, to be filled with the people who depended on these industrial buildings for their livelihood and housing.

It is our time now. The Present. We can wring our hands and say nothing can be done to clean up these sites or we can all get behind the town leaders to push forward past obstacles. Here is the key point for me in this article. Now that the town has spoken in its classic New England small town way, please SUPPORT the mission. Don't let the reelection intervals cause backsliding and changes to this long term mission to repair those key areas needing to be fixed.

You are preserving history and making history at the same time now. Let's see this mill rehabilitation through to completion and jump-start decades of change for new generations of Thompson residents still to be born. They don't have to deal with the mess of two centuries of change alone. We can give them a head start on this transition. Let them grow to love a renewed Thompson, one no less loved than that one we cherish today.

Early Tennis Courts in Thompson



Thompson was blessed with some early tennis courts. The clipping talks about a tennis court being on the Thompson Common. Others were known to exist at the Ream Estate, now Marianapolis School, St. Joseph's Church, Howe-Marot School, and maybe the Mills Home on Rt. 200. Others? Let us know.

Webster Times August 15, 1906

The 1892 Thompson Station Accident

By Keegan McOsker

On January 24th, 1892, a young couple, William and Alice Marion (Ballard) Cranska, were headed back to their home in Glasgo, Connecticut, located in Griswold, although they were formerly Thompson residents. William Cranska at this time was the superintendent of Glasgo Thread mills, having been appointed to the position two years beforehand. They had decided to spend their Sunday with their parents, but dusk was soon to be on the horizon, so they departed. There is little doubt that the death of their daughter at her own birth still weighed on their minds and may have even played a part in their carelessness.

At 4:39 pm on that very Sunday, the two 26-year-olds made a costly gamble. They decided to take their chances as they crossed through Thompson Station

on the New York and New England Railroad. They had seen a train rapidly approaching but thought there was enough time to cross. To put it plainly, there was not. The young couple was hit by the "white" train while crossing the tracks in their wagon, crushing both of their skulls instantly and demolishing their wagon. The only one to escape this tragic accident was their horse. Both victims of this accident were then buried with their daughter at West Thompson Cemetery, 1 year and 3 months after their marriage.

Note from JI - It was rumored that the horse unexpectedly jolted forward upon the arrival of the train and perhaps it was not driver error and recklessness after all. Either way, a tragic story.

Eight Streets to Get "Hot Top" Treatment

THOMPSON — First Selectman George F. Bates, Sr., announced this week that eight more Thompson streets will be given the "Hot Top" treatment.

The streets scheduled to be covered with an average of three inches of asphalt are Central, Marshall, Vandale, First streets, and Red Bridge road in front of the Little League Field up to where it meets Reardon road.

The first two streets are located in the area better known as "Three Rows" and the last three streets are in the section of North Grosvenordale known as "The Lots".

Three other streets which

will be recovered are all in the Quinebaug area. They are Top View, Norman and Poulin drives.

These projects will be paid out of the Town's State Aid account and state officials in charge of purchasing bituminous concrete for all Connecticut towns have indicated that State Line Asphalt Company of Wiltonville will do the work.

The total cost will amount to around \$8,000 figured at \$7.50 per ton laid in place.

First Selectman Bates stated that while the initial cost of these road improvements may seem high, in the long run it will prove more economical for

the town. This is so, he explained, because these roads will not have to be oiled and should be maintenance free for at least 15 years.

The program of hot-topping began during his administration four years ago, according to the First Selectman. He hopes that eventually all or most Thompson roads will be so improved and give the town one of the finest highway systems around.

An additional break for the town, which should help Mr. Bates' wishes become a reality even quicker, is the fact that all roads currently being rebuilt or replaced in the West Thomp-

son Dam area are covered with this bituminous concrete.

Roads and streets which have been hot-topped in the last four years are Main street, Buckley Hill and Quadic roads, Bates avenue and the road that runs alongside the Thompson Hill Common.

The work on the current project is expected to begin during the last week of July and should be completed by August 1.

Mark Snay writes: Prior to asphalt paving, roads were typically packed stone and gravel. They were prone to quick wear from weather and use and required frequent regrading. With the advent of the automobile, the longevity was greatly shortened. There was also the issue of dust in dry weather which became worse with the use of automobiles. To help reduce wear and dust, oil was applied to the road surface on a regular basis which helped to reduce the frequency of regrading. One of the down falls of the oiled surface was some areas were slick which made travel dangerous. Accidents were frequently caused by the slick spots and the deep ruts in the mud after wet weather.

Archivist Corner By: Mark Snay

Mary Walsh of Bonnette Acres was moving out of her home recently and came across a box of historical items left by the previous owners. Mary asked me to find family members who might want these items or to keep them in the Society's archives. There were property documents, baptismal/death records and blank receipt pads from Albert Houle's Garage in N. Grosvenordale. While working the Kenney Store/Village Museum Room on Community Day, Joanne Blain and I serendipitously struck up a conversation during which she mentioned a garage in N. Grosvenordale that her grandfather, Albert Houle, owned. Further discussion confirmed that the collection found by Mary



was from her grandparents who had moved to their then newly built home in Bonnette Acres.

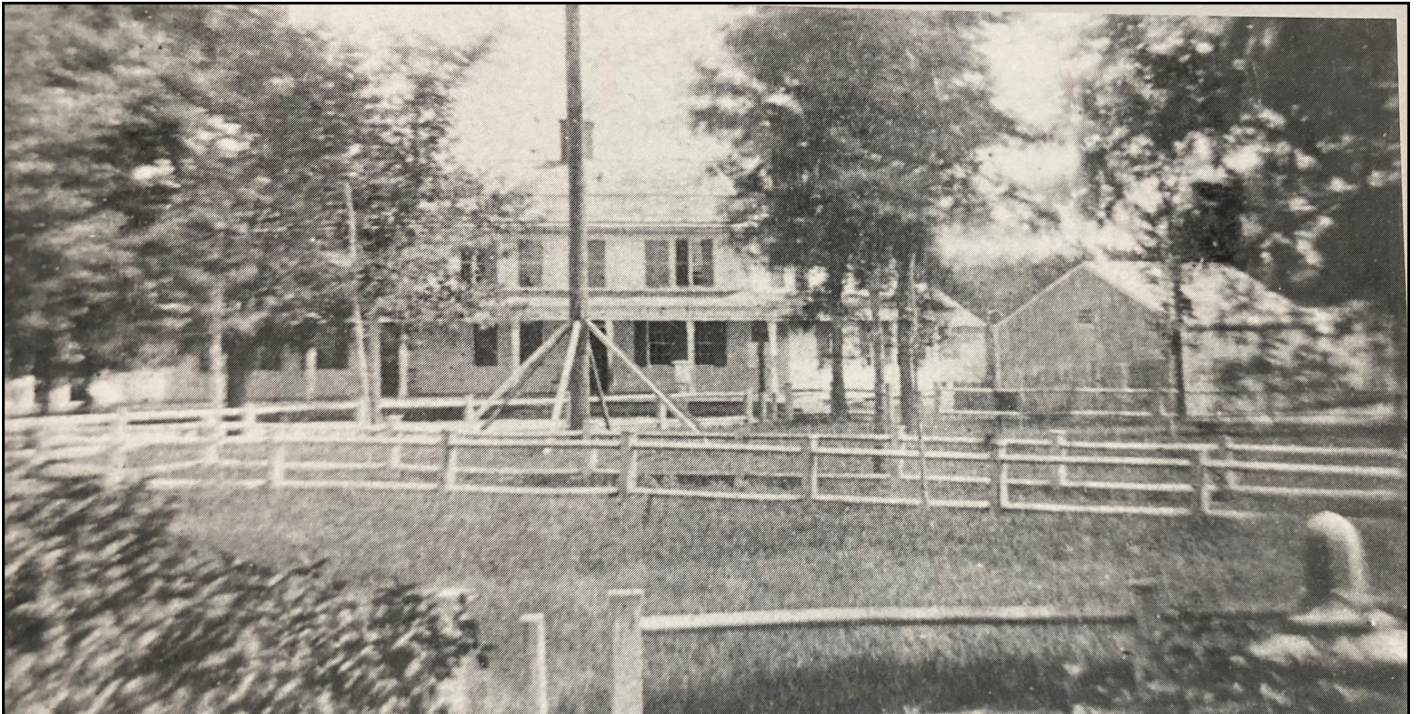
The following week, Joanne visited THS with photos of the garage and gas station. The garage was located at what is present day 1152 Riverside Dr. crossing from N. Grosvenordale to Wiltonville. The gas station building, no longer present, was located to the left of the present driveway at the end of which the garage still stands. The documents are now back in the possession of Albert Houle's family and we have scanned images for the THS collection.

The Old Flagpole on Thompson Hill

By Keegan McOsker

On Thompson Hill, a flagpole stands on the Common, proud. One may gaze upon a waving American flag on that flagpole and think of our current freedom. In the 1860s, near where our current flagpole is today, another of greater stature once stood, as shown in the extremely rare photograph below, one of the earliest known taken in Thompson.

Taking a photograph back then was not as easy as taking out our smartphone and snapping a quick picture today. A picture then was expensive, deliberately taken, likely because it had great meaning. Someone, unknown to us today, took a photo of the great flagpole erected on the Thompson Common with the Vernon Stiles Inn and its horse barns in the background. Why was this photo taken?



Our country was then divided by the Civil War and it was not so easily described as North vs South or Union vs Confederacy. The views of our Connecticut ancestors were not black and white. Nearly half of the population of our state wished for peace. Many did not want to send sons or husbands to fight their southern cousins. The slight majority wanted to fight to preserve the Union. The Union did not strictly fight to end slavery. They wanted to preserve the political union and the safety that union provided.

Connecticut's internal division showed itself as secession talk grew greater. Most Democrats wanted nothing to do with the war, wishing to preserve themselves and their kin. Money was a factor as well, as northern textile mills needed the cotton from the plantations in the South. Republicans supported the Union pro-war stance. Connecticut had a great weapons industry too.

This division revealed itself in the 1860 gubernatorial campaign with former Governor and head of the "Peace party" Thomas H. Seymour against William A. Buckingham. The Republicans, fearing defeat, called upon President Abraham Lincoln who delivered 5 speeches to the people of Connecticut, leading to the slim victory of 571 (0.6%) votes for the Republican Governor William A. Buckingham. However, this would not be the last of this clash.

Large flagpoles flying the American flag began to appear in the north to show solidarity for the Union. As these flagpoles appeared, some had small cabins nearby, with volunteers inside encouraging men to enlist for service.

In opposition, peace-seeking Democrats, known as "Peace-Men" had their own flag, the Peace Flag. These flags were sometimes white in color, maybe plain or with the word "PEACE" boldly exposed or a circle with a central red star. On one side of town, a Union flag might whip in the wind, attracting people to gather. On the other side of town, so-called "Copperheads" flew a Peace flag, showing their unwillingness for the war.

(Cont'd on Page 5)

In some Connecticut towns, some would try to tear down the Peace flags. A sizable group of Danbury CT men supporting the Union marched on nearby New Fairfield and unsuccessfully tried to tear their Peace flag down. In Brookfield CT, there was a large flag on one hill and, visible on an adjacent hill, stood a huge Peace flag with a red star in a circle of stars. This large flag has survived and is in the possession of the Brookfield Historical Society today (see News-Times photo below). Guards were placed outside of the flags, watching for persons of antagonistic intent. Mystic in particular has a storied tradition about their Civil War era flagpole.

Tensions were spurred on by *The Hartford Times*, *The Courant*, *Litchfield Enquirer* and *Bridgeport Farmer* newspapers. Some of these newspapers would speak out against peace meetings, calling the Peace party traitors and then claim that everybody knows that peace meetings are designed to operate against the Union. One newspaper, the *Bridgeport Farmer*, had been specifically spoken out against for their claims of Lincoln being a despot who fights for money and abolitionists being “the real dis-unionists”. Around 7 p.m. on August 24th, 1861, Unionists stormed the office of the *Bridgeport Farmer*, destroying the office and finding proof of correspondence with the Confederacy inside, along with a supposed 200 “billy clubs” meant to be sent to the south. This would spell the end for the *Bridgeport Farmer*.

In stories such as these, it’s easy to look past seemingly small details such as the meaning of the flags erected high on massive flagpoles. Many know the stories of great marksmen and generals past. These heroes may have never enlisted had they not seen a great Union flag high in the air driving them to make a choice. Should they support their Union in the war or vie for peace to protect themselves, their families, and their farms? Should they continue to try to stop the war once it had commenced? We all know the outcome.

What flag flew at the top of the great flagpole in Thompson shown in the picture? Was it for or against the war? How ironic that the flag isn’t shown! More research is needed on this wonderful early photograph.



Architecture Question



Q. I have a small three shelf closet above and to the right my fireplace. What is it?

A. Some call this a chimney closet, not to be confused with a chimney cupboard. The original purpose was to keep certain things warm such as your clothes during those long, cold winter days and nights.

Items such as hats, scarves, mittens, night clothes, bedding, shoes, food, candles, medicine and diapers are all good candidates. Liquor is another item that might be kept in the closet.

The example shown from Mark Snay’s house shows two built-in closets above the mantel, aside of the chimney. A freestanding vertical cabinet would be called a chimney cupboard.

See this article for more info:

<https://mainecrimewriters.com/2018/04/10/those-chimney-glosets-what-were-they-for/?amp>

Do You Have a Question?

Q: Thanks for the Odd Fellows article from the last newsletter. It helped solve a mystery. Now, what are the origins of the National Grange?
Thanks, Julie T.



A: Julie, according to Grange writer Chris Szkutak, the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, the National Grange, was founded in 1867 by farmer and post office clerk, Oliver Hudson Kelley and 6 friends. After the Civil War, President Johnson sent Kelly to survey southern farms after the war. The general destruction of the farms and societal disaster that he saw following his tour prompted Kelley to form the group to unite the North and South into one large educational and progressive farming family. The Grange drove changes such as Rural Free Delivery of Mail and Women's Suffrage. Women were allowed to vote and hold Grange leadership positions 60 years before they could vote in federal elections. Young and old could interact and learn from each other. 14 year olds could vote and hold officer positions too. The Thompson Grange held meetings at the Old Town Hall for years. Like many such organizations, after WW2, membership declined and the Grange group in Thompson disbanded more than a decade ago. Some local members joined other granges and, at the state and national level, the National Grange carries on to this day.

Back in 2013, we received the note below from Katie Adams. I am sad to report that we have not made progress on finding a photograph of Harvey's Stand. Though progress has been made at 'The Willows' in E. Thompson, our quest for photos of the various stands around town still goes on. Dig deep, folks! We need help for the drive-ins and food stands in Wilsonville, Grosvenordale & N. Gros., Quinebaug, West Thompson, Quaddick and, of course, this one below.....JI

Hi....I grew up on Thompson Hill in the house right next to the "Old Town Hall" now (owned by) the historical society. My maiden name is Catherine Burgess. My dad recently met a woman whose grandfather ran Harvey's Stand. It was located at the house next to the post office. We started talking about the old days and how much we enjoyed walking across the Common to get French fries, clam cakes and fish and chips at Harvey's. Cars would line up all around the common to enjoy the delicious food on the weekend. I tried to look up information about the stand but could find nothing. Is it possible for you to look into this for me? I would love to see pictures and just read about one of my favorite weekend treats. I lived on "The Hill" 1960 until my parents sold the house in 1986.....Katie Adams

We especially need written stories and photos of both Don's Drive-Ins. JI

Golf Courses in Thompson

There were three at one time. 1) The Pine Hill Golf course was a 9 hole course on Wilsonville Road and listed in the 1964 Putnam Directory as being owned by Stuart B. Siegmund and Albert Beauchesne. 2) Quinntissett Golf Course on Rt. 21 was established by Norman Ream, as 9 holes and later expanded to 18. His daughter Marion turned it into the private club it is today. The Raceway Golf Course, founded by the Hoenic family, was opened in 1947. Donald Hoenic was a successful amateur golfer and was instrumental in using the rolling landscape to build an attractive golf destination in bucolic East Thompson.

Julia Mahon of Thompson Hill was a talented writer, reader, Scrabble player, accomplished cook, proud mother of 5 and wife of 65 years. She was fondly remembered as a TMHS and Thompson Public librarian and the author of the popular book "Mystery at Old Sturbridge Village" and others.

(cont'd pg 7)

For our upcoming book, Echoes of Old Thompson III, we need a writer to summarize the **Jens Risom** story in the Thompson area. Hopefully the writer or writers will have first hand knowledge of the workings of the Risom business in Thompson. Contact Joe at 401-208-6051 if interested. We do not expect Steinbeck or Shakespeare writing skills. We have excellent editors willing to help refine the text. It is the real eye-witness information we seek!



Tragedy at Sharple's Service Station

By Keegan McOsker

A terrifying truth of life, one that haunts many, is that tragedy can strike at any moment. Such was true for one man of Wilsonville named Thurman Sharple, Sr.

Mr. Sharple was a pious man, an Order of the Eastern Star Freemason, and an entrepreneur, the owner of Sharple's Service Station on Rt. 12 in Wilsonville.

On the night of March 11th, 1964, shortly before midnight, Sharple was going about his business as usual. That evening, four young men pulled into the parking lot, stepped out of their car, and entered the store. Sharples always kept a log of the license plate numbers of suspicious vehicles who stopped at his little service station. He recorded the plate number of this particular car on his blotter.

Sharple likely refused their demand for money and was thus bludgeoned on the head with a claw hammer. Money taken from the register and Sharples' wallet totaled just \$20. Fleeing in Klys' car, the thugs left Sharple on the floor of the store in a pool of blood.

At 12:25 AM, a biker pulled in and found the gravely wounded man. Sharples was rushed to Day Kimball Hospital in Putnam and died while en route to a Hartford hospital.

Investigators learned from family members of Sharples' practice of recording license plates on his blotter. James Perry, 20, Leo Vallee, Jr., 18, James Grzembski, 17, and Edward Klys, Jr., 17, were quickly



Pictured from left, James Grzembski, Leo Vallee, Jr., Edward Klys, Jr., and James Perry.

arrested. They signed rendition papers, surrendered their property, and were held in the Brooklyn CT jail.

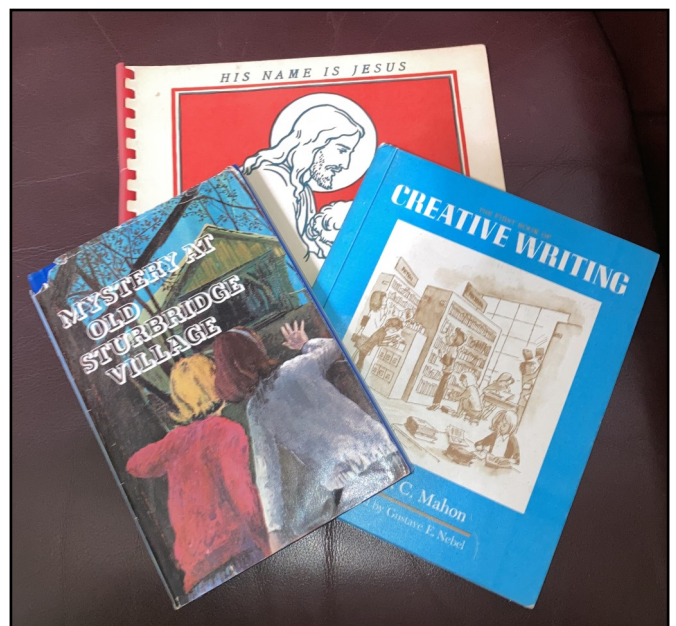
On June 2nd, 1964, the four men appeared at Windham County Superior Court. They plead guilty to murder in the second degree and were sentenced to life in prison.

At the age of 23, six short years after the cold-blooded murder of Sharple, Edward Klys presented a petition for mercy to the Connecticut Board of Pardons which was soon approved, and this shortened his sentence to time served. The fate of the others is unknown but rumored to have shortened prison stays too.

The tragedy of this senseless murder ruined the lives of four young man and cost poor Mr. Sharples his life. All for \$20.00.



Julia C. Mahon



The popular librarian and author Julia Mahon shown here with three of her books.

Membership Information:

\$100.00 Lifetime Membership
\$10.00 Individual Membership
\$15.00 Family Membership
\$25.00 Contributing Membership
\$5.00 Student or First Year Gift Membership

Memberships are due by July 1 of each calendar year

Make checks payable to:

Thompson Historical Society

PO Box 47

Thompson, CT 06277

Anyone interested in joining the Thompson Historical Society can contact us at:

Phone Number: 401-208-6051

Web Site: www.thompsonhistorical.org



Museum Hours

Typically Open

Sundays 9:00 a.m.—Noon
Call Joe before you come
(401) 208-6051



Officers and Contact Information:

Joseph Iamartino - President
Ginny Flood - Vice President
Mark Snay—Director & Archivist
Sue Vincent - Treasurer
John Rice - Building Committee Chair
Abe Gustavson - Director
Ginny Flood - Director
Burt Rhodes - Director
Dr. Chris Wagner - Director
Blair Cole - Director
Kathleen Herbert - Director
Geoff Bolte - Director
Roberta Baublitz - Director
Charlie Obert - Director
William Steglitz - Director
David Laabs - Director
Paul Provost—Director
Mark Savolis—Director
Lisa Berg—Director, Newsletter

Ellen Larned Memorial Building THS Museum

339 Thompson Road
Thompson, CT 06277
(Opened Sundays 9:00 am to noon)

Old Thompson Town Hall

1 Chase Road
Thompson, CT 06277
(Open by appointment)

Tourtellotte Memorial Room

785 Riverside Drive
North Grosvenordale, CT 06255
(Open by appointment)

Thompson Historical Society

PO Box 47
Thompson, CT 06277

