



The Thompson Historical Society Newsletter



Fall 2021

PO Box 47, Thompson CT 06277

www.thompsonhistorical.com



Blair Cole, director of the *Nine Lives of Engine Number 9* movie, and Joe Iamartino at the premiere. The new movie will be shown on RI, CT, NH, ME and VT PBS stations. Look for schedule announcements on the THS Facebook page as well as Live Streaming info.

CT PBS will show the movie at these times in November:

On CPTV

Premieres Sunday, November 7 at 7:00 p.m.

Also repeats on Monday, November 22 at 10:00 p.m.
and Thursday, November 25 at 11:00 a.m.

On CPTV Spirit

Airs Thursday, November 25 at 10:00 p.m.

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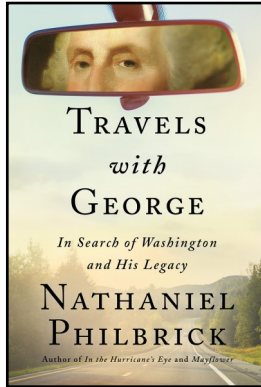
The turntable stones from the Putnam Engine House, weighing an estimated 20 tons, have been moved to the soon-to-be expanded Train Wreck Park.



Using ARPA and CT Humanities funds and well supported by the National Park Service, Thompson Trails, The Town of Thompson, the Historical Society and other groups are working together to add a turntable circle, sheltered picnic area and a welcome center/pavilion areas, toilets and more Airline Trail signage to the old rail site, one of Thompson's main visitor draws.

Travels with George

Does George Washington still matter? Bestselling author Nathaniel Philbrick argues for Washington's unique contribution to the forging of America by retracing his journey as a new president through all thirteen former colonies, which were now an unsure nation. *Travels with George* marks a new first-person voice for Philbrick, weaving history and personal reflection into a single narrative.



When George Washington became president in 1789, the United States of America was still a loose and quarrelsome confederation and a tentative political experiment. Washington undertook a tour of the ex-colonies to talk to ordinary citizens about his new government, and to imbue in them the idea of being one thing—Americans.

In the fall of 2018, Nathaniel Philbrick embarked on his own journey into what Washington called “the infant woody country” to see for himself what America had become in the 229 years since. Writing in a thoughtful first person about his own adventures with his wife Melissa and their dog Dora, Philbrick follows Washington's presidential excursions: from Mount Vernon to the new capital in New York; a month-long tour of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island; a venture onto Long Island and eventually across Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. The narrative moves smoothly between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries as we see the country through both Washington's and Philbrick's eyes.

Written at a moment when America's founding figures are under increasing scrutiny, *Travels with George* grapples bluntly and honestly with Washington's legacy as a man of the people, a reluctant president, and a plantation owner who held people in slavery. At historic houses and landmarks, Philbrick reports on the reinterpretations at work as he meets reenactors, tour guides, and other keepers of history's flame. He paints a picture of eighteenth century America as divided and fraught as it is today, and he comes to understand how Washington compelled, enticed, stood up to, and listened to the many different people he met along the way—and how his all-consuming belief in the Union helped to forge a nation.

Nathaniel Philbrick is the author of *In the Heart of the Sea*, winner of the National Book Award; *Mayflower*, finalist for the Pulitzer Prize; *Valiant Ambition*, winner of the George Washington Prize; *Bunker Hill*, winner of the New England Book Award; *In the Hurricane's Eye*; *Sea of Glory*; *The Last Stand*; *Why Read Moby Dick?*; *Away Off Shore*; and *Second Wind*.

(Cont'd on Page 3)



Nathaniel Philbrick visited the Thompson Historical 'Mafia' while researching his book *Travels with George*, looking at Thompson path taken through Thompson by President Washington in 1789. (L - R: Mark Snay, Nathaniel, Joe Iamartino, Tom Chase and Stan Swanson near the Brass Ball Inn site at the state line.)



President Washington ate breakfast at Jacobs Tavern in East Thompson. A stone marks the site of this tavern at the 3rd hole of the Speedway Golf Course. The Hoenig Family has approved THS mounting a permanent bronze marker on this stone documenting the date and location of Washington's 1789 visit to Jacobs Tavern. Eyewitnesses to George Washington passing through the eastern Connecticut towns and villages on this 1789 trip describe the President riding in his carriage with a small entourage of perhaps 6-8 men. Compare this to today's Presidential outing!

Theodore Vriga: TMHS Athlete and 1954 Red Sox draftee passes away

Mr. Theodore "Teddy" Vriga, a record holding Athlete from TMHS and drafted by the Red Sox in 1954, passed away on 9/13/2021. Below is an article about Mr. Vriga from the April 2009 TMHSAA Hilltopper

Photos from the past:

TEDDY VRIGA IN THE NEIGHBOR

Jane (Jewell) Ellison '61, one of the top contributors, found the following article. As far as we know the *Neighbor* was a newsletter that existed in the early 1950's and ran for several years. The February 1954 edition of the *Neighbor* featured one of Tourtellotte's very best athletes, Teddy Vriga.

Ted and his brother Tasi was part of the State Championship teams that so dominated high school basketball in the 1940's and 1950's. Teddy and his brother were multi-sport athletes who played for Jim Canty during the school's athletic heyday.

Teddy, a four-year varsity starter set records in Tourtellotte basketball that exist to this day. He and his brother both signed professional baseball contracts after high school and from there both served in the service and went on to live full rich lives, Teddy becoming a well-known basketball coach in the Worcester area and Tasi becoming the State of Connecticut Deputy Commissioner for Veterans' Affairs.

According to brother Tasi, Teddy had the incredible privilege of gearing up and catching against the one and only Ted Williams.

Both Ted and Tasi are part of the upcoming book about Jim Canty and the Cantymen.

6 FEBRUARY, 1954

Our Local King of Sports



No hopes are pinned on Ted greater than those of his mother, Mrs. Thimira Vriga. She is confident he will star in the world of sports and her hopes can well be realized.

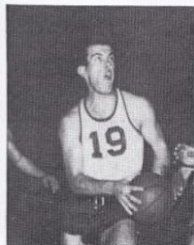
Basketball or Baseball—Teddy Vriga Shapes Up For a Star-Studded Career

There's a fast rising sport star in our midst. And if sheer ability, determination and love of the game are primary requisites, Ted Vriga of North Grosvenordale is already spiraling to record-breaking heights in the world of sports.

Presently, with college definitely

planned, Ted wouldn't mind a professional career in either basketball or baseball. But when pinned down to the specific, baseball got the vote. When he was selected for the Hearst New England Sandlot team last summer, it was just about the biggest thrill in his life.

Sport Report



Ted Vriga of North Grosvenordale credits Coach Canty for his acquired sporting skill at Tourtellotte.

Photos by GERRY COTNOIR

Ted is not only a catcher of outstanding ability, but also shines at bat. This is obvious when glancing at his batting averages for three full seasons at Tourtellotte — .300, .375 and .450. The majors will keep on eye on him.

Right now, wonder-boy Vriga is moving in the basketball limelight at a record-shattering pace. He has smashed George Dargatz's all-time seasonal record of 832 points by tallying 669 points in 27 games. And he has also set a new 1649 point record for four years of playing at Tourtellotte.

As far as Ted is concerned, the most thrilling game of his basketball career was the Griswold-Tourtellotte contest in Jan., 1953 in which he scored 36 points. The final score was 54-47, and at the half, it was a 22-tie. Actually, Ted scored more points in two other games: 42 in a 76-46 win over St. Joseph and 44 in a 82-63 win over Woodstock Academy. In another game when Tourtellotte scored 49-40 over St. Louis, he showed his ability to come through in the clutch by scoring



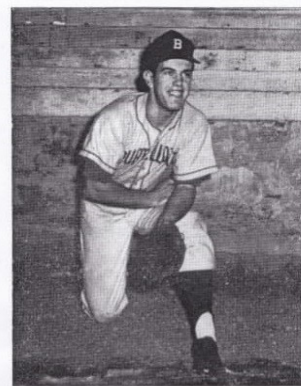
UP —

Moving the ball down the court, passing or losing. Ted excels all the way. Both the seasonal and the four-year total records were smashed by him this season.



AND IN

NEIGHBOR



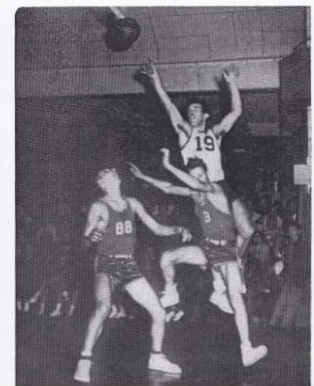
It was life's biggest thrill when he won a spot on the Hearst New England Sandlot team. For a professional career he prefers baseball but would be satisfied with basketball.

six consecutive foul shots in the final two minutes of play.

That's a long way from the time he tossed his first basketball in back of the grammar school gym when he was six years old. And it's still a long way from the Hall of Fame this boy can reach in both college and professional arenas.



His sister keeps a scrap book up to date that is already swelling with Ted's published achievements in sports



Ted scored 31 points in this 61-49 Tourtellotte victory over Putnam. Most points in a single game were tallied against St. Joseph with 44, and against Woodstock Academy with 42.

WHAT MEANS MOST TO YOU?

Value From purchase price to trade-in — the low low Chevrolet cost of operating — prove there's no other car in any price range that gives more for your dollar.

Beauty Look them over on the road or in the showroom and you'll see why Chevrolet's distinctive styling and colors will boost your pride of ownership.

Performance On any road, from seaside to mountain top — in any kind of weather — drive and compare and you'll agree that Chevrolet performs best, mile after mile.

Chevrolet leads in all three — that's why Chevrolet leads all in American car sales!

CARGILL CHEVROLET

Richmond St.

8-3475

Putnam

(Cont'd from Page 2)

When Washington passed through Douglas Wood heading for Thompson, Philbrick wrote '...a 12 year old boy named Independence Whipple was standing on the side of the road...and the vision of Washington's entourage clattering down the road had been permanently imprinted on his brain. First to pass by was 'a gentleman in

uniform on a beautiful dapple horse,' followed by 2 aides, also on dapple gray horses. Four bay horses 'with two negro boys as riders' pulled the carriage, followed by a baggage wagon. When the carriage came opposite him, Whipple 'saw a gentleman' looking toward him. Assuming the man in the carriage was someone special, the boy took off his hat and bowed. Later he learned that it had been President

About Major Robert Thompson from the Presidents Quill

By Joseph Iamartino



(Major Robert Thompson by Sir Peter Lely, circa 1655)

Folks,

A portrait of Major Robert Thompson was located by a lost art dealer in London. This is the only portrait known to exist of the Major.

I want you to share the excitement with the initial letter and follow-up that I received from Peter Harrison in England on the Major's portrait. He wrote:

Dear Joseph,

I wanted to bring your attention to a portrait I have recently discovered of Major Robert Thompson. As far as I am aware it is the only known portrait of Robert so I thought it may be of interest for the Thompson Historical Society to acquire.

It was painted by the Royal portraitist Sir Peter Lely in c. 1655, this has been confirmed by the leading authorities on Sir Peter Lely's work, Catharine MacLeod and Diana Dethloff.

I suspect the reason it has gone untraced is because it was bought from a private collection, almost certainly a descendant of Thompson, by the Parisian art dealer Charles Sedelmeyer and sold by him in 1907 as being by the artist Robert Walker. It then came to America where it was sold again, however this time with a more famous sitter attributed to it, General Monck, Duke of Albemarle.

I believe that the original sitter Robert Thompson is entirely correct and the Albemarle association only came about to try and give the portrait more gravitas on the open market. However as it has

not been on the art market as Thompson for over a century this link was almost lost, and would have been if it were not for Sedelmeyer's wax seal on the reverse of this portrait.

Historically, as I'm sure you know, Robert had come to England to support Cromwell during the civil war. He funded a private militia with his brother Maurice to keep control in Ireland after the civil war. I believe the portrait to have been painted after this in order to show his military associations. Likewise, the armour he wears would have been vastly expensive and by the 1650s a little outdated. No doubt Robert would have asked Lely to paint him in this armour to show off his new wealth and Furthermore, the armour appears to have been a specific request by Thompson as there are no other known sitters painted by Lely wear similar armour.

This is an important early work by Sir Peter Lely and I believe the link to Thompson would make it an invaluable and important portrait for the Thompson Historical Society to acquire. I attach an image of the portrait to this email and would be delighted to discuss it further with you, if you might be interested.

*Kindest regards,
Peter Harrison*

Thompson readers, an offer was placed with Peter for the portrait, but it is unlikely our bid would be accepted. Still, we have received a high resolution photograph and hope to include this in the upcoming Echoes of Old Thompson III book, still in the planning stages for our fiscal 2022 year.

Robert's brother Maurice was one of the great investors called then 'adventurers', hence venture capitalists today. He was considered the Elon Musk, Steve Jobs, or Bill Gates of the period. Another brother controlled the East India Company, which at one time controlled 1/6th of the world's trade. Robert himself was important in the British Navy and was at one time nearly married to the daughter of the Lord Protector of the British Empire, Oliver Cromwell. You can find more about Major Thompson under Collection on the THS website: www.thompsonhistorical.org.

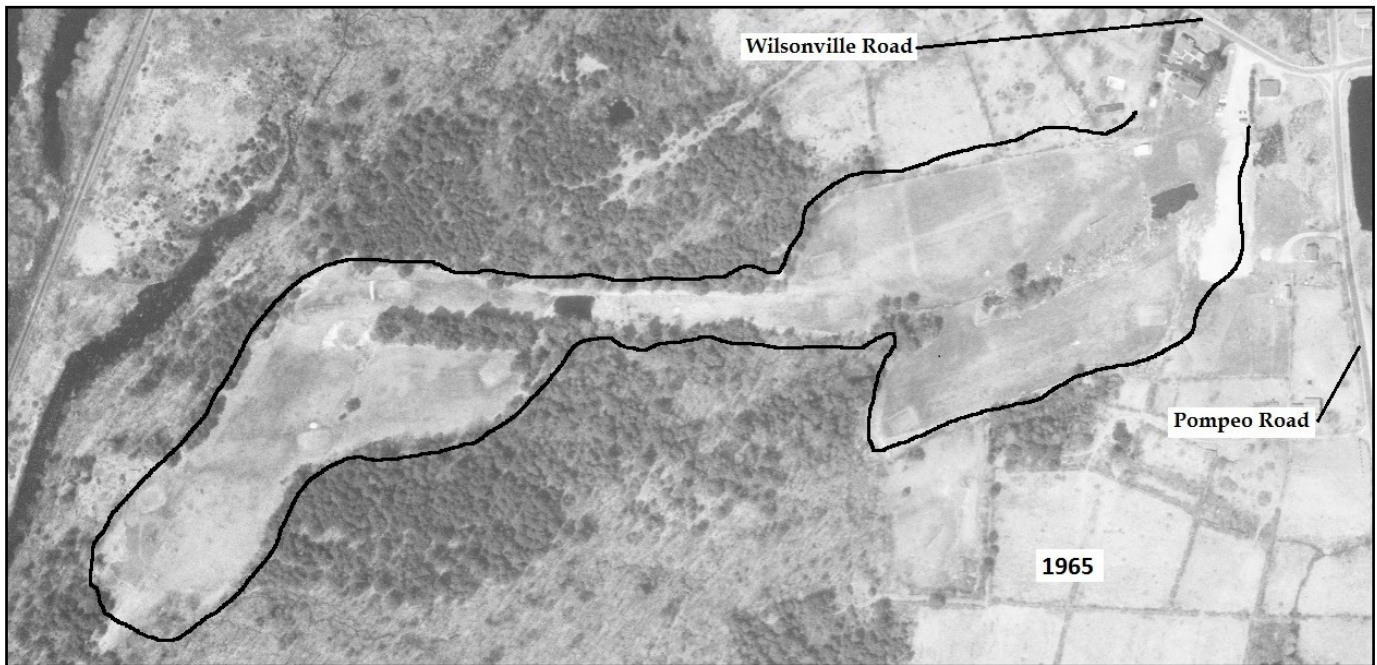
Thank you for your continuing support. The town is blessed to receive great news on the new park in East Thompson too.

Other Information of Interest about Major Robert Thompson

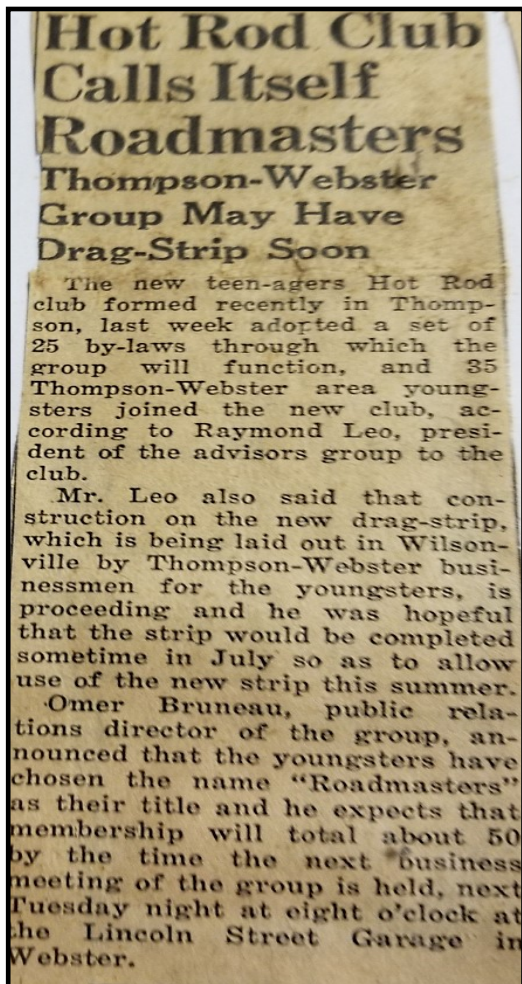
Before becoming Major Thompson, there was Robert, a young son of an ambitious family from an area not far from London. This family was the Thomson family according to researchers with no P in their last name. Spelling then was more art than rule. There was a transition happening with a generation prior and the two that followed Robert's birth where books, education and literature began to flourish. Spelling convention solidified with Doctor Johnson's famous dictionary. Some said the addition of the P was the Scottish influence and others said it was just the later adjustment of more standardized names and words. Whatever the reason, future researchers of the Thompson line, please look for both spellings!

Mystery Questions Concerning Wiltonville

Was there a Golf Course and a Drag Strip In Wiltonville?



(Above: The Pine Hill Golf course was a 9 hole course and listed in the 1964 Putnam Directory as being owned by Stuart B. Siegmund and Albert Beauchesne. It was located on the south side of Wiltonville Road, the entrance just west of the school-house.)



Oral and Video History

In the 1970s, the Northeastern Connecticut Oral History project recorded many senior citizens in Thompson on a broad array of questions.

Blair Cole worked with Jane Johnson to record video interviews of senior citizens about twenty years. Some of these interviews were focused on specific historic themes, especially the topics around school life.

These interviews have been converted to digital audio and video formats and are now available at the Thompson public library. If you are looking to hear perhaps a grandfather or grandmother describe life 100 years ago in town, listen to these recordings to realize just how much change has occurred in the last 100 years.



The new HO-gauge diorama showing the scene about 10 am after the Four Engine Wreck in East Thompson, December 4, 1891. Please see the recently installed signage at the actual wreck site in East Thompson.



Tom Chase (research) and Stan Swanson (model builder) with the Four Engine Wreck diorama at the Library until the end of December. Stencil by Thompson Library team.

1789 Washington button found!

Photo and story by Drew Wainacht (who found the button)

"I was summoned by my Country, whose voice I can never hear but with veneration and love."

George Washington spoke these words at his inauguration in April of 1789. Six months later he took off on his month-long New England Tour in order to "become better acquainted with the principal characters and internal circumstances of the states." Another reason was to promote the Constitution and rally support for a strong federal government. Most of our local friends are aware he traveled right through Thompson and actually breakfasted at a tavern located where the Raceway Golf Course is today.

His inauguration and subsequent tours were such monumental historical events that many artisans produced and sold patriotic clothing buttons to be worn as he passed by on his white horse. These buttons are rare and can usually only be found on Washington's tour routes. This particular button has 63 denticles and is called a "chicken hawk" as the eagle is not depicted as robustly as eagles are today.

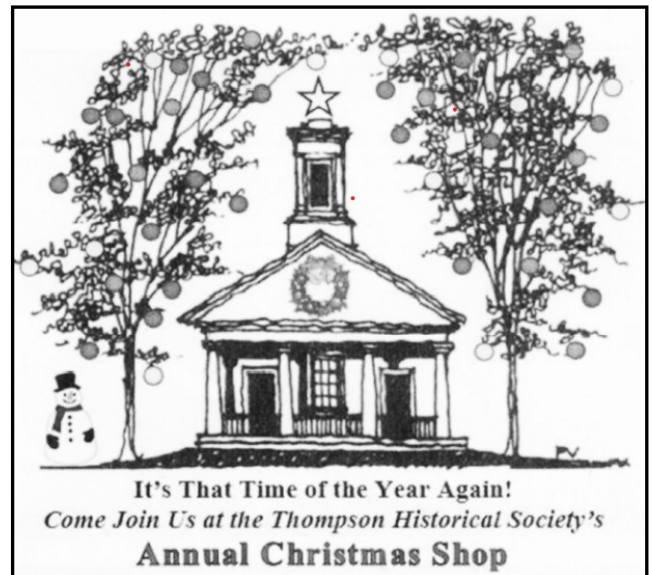
As the 19th century dawned many early settlers left Thompson for the newly opened western territories, leaving old homesteads to rot and return to forest. For this reason there are many cellar foundations in our wooded areas. They dropped everyday items in their yards before they left and those things can now be located with metal detectors. The pictured button was found near a current cellar hole, a short distance from Washington's route. This foundation was a livable home in 1869 owned by a family named Barrett.

It would be special if this 1869 Barrett family were descendants of Thompson's Jon Barrett who fought in the Revolution some years earlier. I'm imagining Jon loading his family on an ox cart traveling the few miles to the tour route, proudly wearing his button and yelling "huzza" as his war general passed.



Archivist Corner By: Mark Snay

For the past few years, the Thompson Library has allowed THS to set up an exhibit in their entry hall display case. This year, for the month of November, we will display items donated to THS by the Lois (Bixby) Thompson Estate. Lois lived at the farm on Thompson Road (Rte. 193), which was owned by her Bixby ancestors prior to the mid 1850's. The exhibit will display some of the implements used on the farm in the 19th and early 20th century. Our thanks to Library Director Alison Boutaugh and Roberta Baublitz in Reference Services for use of the display as well as their ongoing collaboration co-sponsoring THS's historical programs. Working with THS, the library also now has circulation copies of the Jane Johnson interview DVD's and digitized oral history interviews of Thompson senior citizens, many recorded in the 1970's. We thank the library for continuing to promote Thompson's past to our current residents.



Holiday Gift Shop will be open this year.
Friday after Thanksgiving and Every Saturday & Sunday
until Christmas.
10 a.m.—4 p.m.
Contact Ginny Flood (860) 933-5239

Two Old Racing Videos

See the early days of NASCAR and Sports Car racing in Thompson from 60 to 70 years ago in video. The October 1951 Grand National Race at Thompson Speedway won by Neil Cole and several classes of Sports Cars racing at the Thompson Raceway in the late 1950's or early 1960's.

Links:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxyAzN30sVs>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kc-TrGOowNw>

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



Museum Hours

Typically Open

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

*** Volunteers Needed***

We need Sunday morning volunteer
 help to sleeve and later Identify
 incoming photographs for our
 archives. If interested, send an
 email to marksnay@aol.com

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
 Kathy Welch - Director
 Kathleen Herbert - Director
 Jon Brynga - Director
 Roberta Baublitz - Director
 Lisa Berg - 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

Thompson Historical Society

PO Box 47
 Thompson, CT 06277



Preserving Thompson, Connecticut's History Since 1968