

# Williston Historical Society Bulletin

Editor: Carol Stewart

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*"Every Individual is an Historical Figure"*  
FOUNDED 1974

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Never doubt  
that a small group of  
thoughtful, committed  
citizens can change the  
world. Indeed, it is the  
only thing that ever  
has.

—Margaret Mead

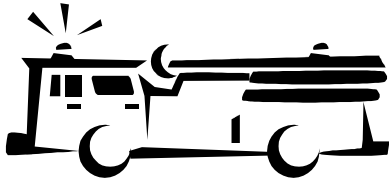
## **FIRE DESTROYS WILLISTON STEEPLE**

On June 2nd, 2007 lightning struck the Old Brick Church, long a centerpiece of the historic village, igniting a blaze that engulfed the bell tower. The lightning bolt struck the wooden cupola that housed a one-ton bell around 4:20 PM, sparking the blaze. It took firefighters on a ladder truck about eight minutes to extinguish the fire, said Williston Fire Chief Ken Morton. Williston firefighters on a 95-foot ladder truck doused the flames. Fire departments from Essex Junction, Essex Town, Hinesburg and Richmond also responded. Fire was contained in the cupola and did not damage the church; however, water used to douse the flames seeped into the walls, basement and balcony.

Fire crews had early concerns about the structural integrity of the part of the tower that held the bell and worried the bell might fall from its moorings. With a crane, crews removed the blackened lumber and cracked 500-pound bell from the top of the church the next day.

Jack Price, a trustee of the church for 17 years, noted that as a public building, the Old Brick Church has great "philosophical significance." "In its restored state it's sort of imparted a sense of calm to the historic building because it's endured," he said. "It's a quiet peaceful reverent kind of place." "It's irreplaceable," Ginger Isham, the former president of the Williston Historical Society, said of the land mark.

The building was constructed in 1832 by the Congregational Society, who had till then met at members' homes. "A Society for Building a Meeting House" had been formed in November 1831 to raise the necessary



**A fire destroyed the Williston Academy in 1949, dramatizing the need for a fire department. Howard P. Lunderville and Roland Osborne organized twelve firemen into the Williston Volunteer Fire Company at that time. There were five calls the first year.**

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Did you know WHS has a  
BLOG SPOT?  
[http://  
willistonhistoricalso-  
ciety.blogspot.com/](http://willistonhistoricalso-<br/>ciety.blogspot.com/)  
Our archivist, Steve Robinson,  
has posted some interesting technical information.

funds. As years passed the Congregational Church's membership dwindled; it closed and joined the nearby Methodist church in 1899. It remained unoccupied for years and had fallen into extreme disrepair; but it had never been struck by lightning nor had there been any fires in its 175 year history. In 1963 a Youth Group of the Federated Church obtained permission to start cleaning up the building. In 1965 the Church was listed on the National Register of historic sites. Over the years till now an assortment of Town funds, grants, and donations had financed its rehabilitation to the present where it is a Town-owned building where neighborhood associations, local committees and other groups frequently meet. It also regularly hosts receptions, memorials and weddings. Just before the blaze broke out, a couple took their wedding vows in the church's sanctuary.

Contractors are proceeding with reconstruction of the interior of the church and the steeple with completion expected by December.

—Information for this article was obtained from various press coverage by the Williston Observer and the Burlington Free Press as well as from sources in the Vermont Room at DAML.

#### **POST SCRIPT- Lightning Rods**

After the fire I wondered why lightning rods no longer appear on rural buildings (including churches) as they once did, which led me to the Internet. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), the nominal standard setter, is technically a voluntary organization. Members and critics continually debate the merits of an assortment of devices alleged to provide protection. The standard since 1749 has been the Franklin rod, which is connected to an earth ground by means of heavy conductors. According to traditional theory a lightning bolt strikes the rod and is carried harmlessly to earth by the grounding apparatus, sparing lives and property. Manufacturers have been arguing for acceptance of some newer designs and the debate goes on. Most seem to agree that lightning remains a largely unpredictable phenomenon and that rods merely improve your chances rather than offering guaranteed protection.

#### **On the web:**

<http://www.straightdope.com/columns/010824.html>.  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sciencenow/>  
[http://www.ideafinder.com/history/inventions/  
lightningrod.htm](http://www.ideafinder.com/history/inventions/lightningrod.htm)

—Carol Stewart, Ed.

## ANCIENT ROADS

In Vermont legal parlance "Ancient road" is the common name for any legally established town highway that, due to a variety of factors and the passage of time, has become largely impassable and in many cases, unobservable. They don't show up on current maps but have never been formally discontinued by a municipality. Reasons for this lapse include the normal ebb and flow of usage patterns such as a change from agricultural to residential or industrial; population changes; weather, e.g., the notorious flood of 1927 when bridges and roads were washed away and replaced with alternates.

Currently the Vermont Agency of Transportation requires sworn certificates to be filed by municipalities citing the various classes of roadways (1 through 4, and legal trails.) The roads so-designated become the official town highway map, which becomes the basis for state highway aid. In the past controversies have arisen, mainly due to real estate transaction-related issues raised by title insurers and attorneys, and litigation between landowners, and between landowners and towns.

Act 178, (19 V.S.A. § 302) passed by the Vermont State Legislature in April of 2006 attempts to correct the situation. It has created a new category of roadway, the "unidentified corridor", by definition highways that:

- 1) have been legally established;
- 2) are not on a town highway map/sworn certificate by July 1, 2009;
- 3) are not legal trails;
- 4) "are not otherwise clearly observable by physical evidence of their use as a highway or trail."

It defines a process which requests that municipalities determine which highways are to be kept and which are to be discontinued. Towns must follow the guidelines which include holding public information hearings and posting warnings which provide maps and information—and other details which are beyond the scope of this article.

Williston has three "abandoned" roads:

1. Old Stage Road to Williston Woods and Fay Lane in North Williston
2. Chapman Lane to Governor Chittenden Road
3. Old Beartown Road

The Williston Historical Society has agreed to assist Carrie Deegan, Environmental Planner for the Town of Williston, in this effort. John Joachim, Carol Stewart, and Carrie have met and begun the search, which will most probably turn out to be a bit of detective work using old maps, the deed records, town proceedings, and town road documents which are located in the vault of the Town Clerk's Office. If anyone is interested in joining the fun please call Carol (aka Ed.) at 878 4135.

[The **Vermont League of Cities and Towns** at 1-800 649 7915 or on their website: <<http://www.vlct.org>> can be contacted for more information.]

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## **Vermont History Expo—June 23 and 24, 2007**

Travel and Transportation: How Vermonters Got There from Here

The WHS planning group comprising Ginger and David Isham, Bill Skiff, and Chris Stewart—fortified by Ginger's pecan pie a la mode—devised a plan for the WHS exhibit at Tunbridge. Using seedlings and sap buckets from the Isham farm a woodland path was recreated in the 8x8 ft. exhibition space; artifacts of travel were also displayed and a quiz about the history of travel was offered. Many who stopped by on Sunday when I was there, enjoyed taking the quiz and talking about memories evoked by the answers. Next year's Expo: June 21 and 22, 2008: Industry and Innovation: Vermont Ingenuity plus Civil War Sunday focusing on the home front during those years. —Ed.



### MEET OUR MEMBERS: The Tuthills

You may have noticed the large white colonial house with the large attached garage and the pull through driveway on the left--a little before Route 2 heads down French Hill. Occupied now by Mary and Arthur ("Tut") Tuthill, it was originally built between 1790 and 1820 by Truman Chittenden, son of Thomas. The couple has lived there since 1952. A replica of Thomas' house sits behind their home. It was built originally as a float for the 4th of July parade and appeared twice before being retired. Later it assumed the ignominious status as a home for the family's goats. It was long a conversation piece for the family and the town. The property is interesting geologically in that it apparently sits on the edge of a long ago inland sea; the property is flat with good soil and no surface rocks. Across Route 2 one finds the ledge rock seen in much of the southern sections of Williston.

"Tut" was a professor in Mechanical Engineering at Cooper Union in New York City in 1941 when he traveled to Vermont for a Christmas ski outing with his wife who had worked as secretary to one of the Deans of UVM. During that visit he was contacted about a transfer to UVM's Engineering Department. World War II intervened before the move could be organized. Tut enlisted in the USAF where he was a flight instructor for fighter pilots throughout the conflict. He joined UVM as a professor on January 1, 1946, where he worked until his retirement in 1981. In 1949 Tut's wife died leaving him to manage his young family of 2 children. He sought help through the office of the Dean of Women at UVM. Mary, who was then a student, filled the position and soon love blossomed between the widower and the student. Mary quit school and the couple married in 1950. They ultimately became a family of seven when three additional children were born to the couple. They also have eight grand children.

### FOND MEMORIES

The Couples Club at the Williston Federated Church became a major social venue. Tut remembers he and Howard Carpenter hired a dowsing to find water for the church, and a well was dug. Till then there was a true water closet in the basement with a pail for the plumbing. The Couples raised money for a new organ for the church, donating the old organ to the Shelburne Museum. With Howard Carpenter, Tut started the Williston Ski Lift in 1960. The original was powered by an automobile and used second hand rope for the tow. Then Minister, Ken Moody, did the splicing. Tut and Herb Painter developed a XC ski racing program with

children from the town and they traveled throughout the state for competitions. Mary and Art both speak fondly of the fun they all had with Minstrel Shows, sponsored by the Couples of the church. Mary says, "They were terrific!"

Tut remembers that in 1964 the Checklist for voting comprised a single page of names. Tut became a selectman (one of three at the time). John Riley took care of zoning; Ward Johnson worked on joining with the South Burlington Water District. All did some of the early work on the planning for what was to become the Champlain Valley Union High School. Prior to its formation, students traveled to nearby towns in the county for their schooling. Tut also was PTA president at Williston Central School for a time.

Mary's parents were Vermonters: her mom came from Rutland and her dad from Bellows Falls. Mary's paternal grandfather produced paper there and in Putney. She jokingly says her dad told her that makes her a descendant of everybody in Putney's Cemetery. Mary was raised in Michigan where her parents had moved but she returned to Vermont for school at UVM. Understandably busy with child-rearing and other family matters in the early years of the marriage, Mary was finally able to complete her degree in History at UVM in the 70's. She subsequently became a tutor at the Pine Ridge School and worked there until retirement. She is still an active gardener and especially likes to use her flowers to make arrangements for St. Paul's Cathedral in Burlington. They also (still) have 6 chickens. Although Tut has experienced some health challenges lately, he is feeling a bit stronger and thinks he might even try a luncheon with some of his retired Air Force pals soon. Mostly, though he especially enjoys reading and listening to music, and playing a little solitaire. --Ed.

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**On the 4th:** This year's **Ice Cream Social** on the Williston Green, next to the Dorothy Alling Memorial Library, was the busiest ever with the waiting line lasting through much of the concert at the nearby bandstand. We served over 1,000 and used 60 gallons of ice cream, 60 pounds of strawberries and 3 large pots of fudge sauce. The ice cream was purchased. Volunteer members and friends picked and prepared strawberries and hot fudge sauce for the event. A variety of stalwart volunteers dipped and served the multitude.

We grossed about \$1,050, with a net after expenses of a little over \$400, but a check in the amount of \$450.00 was donated to Girl scout troop # 820, to support their project to fund a Land Mine Sniffing Dog. Thanks to Terry McCaig and John Joachim who again coordinated the efforts with the help of volunteers too numerous to mention.-Ed.



#### **WILLISTON WALKING TOUR**

Ginger Isham, Secretary of the WHS, led participants on a walking tour of historic buildings and homes in the village of Williston on May 19th. As part of the event—jointly sponsored with the Chittenden County and Williston Historical Societies—Richard Allen (Enrichment Educator for Williston School District and noted local historian) presented a talk and photo slideshow, featuring surprising secrets of a vibrant past for the area now known as North Williston. The event finished with a brunch at the Old Brick Café.

**The Williston Historic Preservation Committee** has published “Historic Williston: Walking & Driving Tours of Williston, Vermont” which is available at the Town Clerk’s office and in the Dorothy Alling Memorial Library. Using the map in this delightful brochure, one can tour the historic sites while reading about their history and learning some new architectural terminology. Williston’s historic village center is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Chittenden County Historical Society awarded this year’s Preservation Award for a Community to the Town of Williston for this publication.

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The **First Williston History Road Show** took place, fittingly, in the Old Brick Church on May 24th. Professional services were donated by well-known auctioneer and appraiser Duane Merrill and his son, Ethan. Another son, Aron, is the teacher in Phoenix House at Williston Central School who shepherded his fifth through eighth grade students in the project. Students worked in pairs with volunteer

members of the WHS in researching ~40 items from the more than 200 artifacts owned by WHS. Much of the information was found in the Vermont Room at the Dorothy Alling Memorial Library or from the heads of people whom they interviewed. Visitors were invited to bring their personal items for appraisal. The \$3 per item plus some larger donations netted Phoenix house \$150 towards their spring field trips. Aron Merrill says the students' research will be compiled in a binder and ultimately catalogued in a database.

WHS will again work with the Phoenix Team of for a **Second Williston History Road Show** similar to the one presented in May. The format will be a little different with students doing a presentation of their object. Tentative plans are to have this road show in late January or early February 2008. The students have many other commitments in early spring and the thought is that we would have a greater attendance the first of the year. Watch for details. —Ginger Isham



#### **The Lake Champlain Maritime Museum**

A few Saturdays ago (September 15) a very small group of (5) WHS members showed up for one of the general membership events: a visit to the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum. Despite the small number they enjoyed an escorted tour by Adam Kane, a nautical architect who gave a blow by blow description of the revolutionary battle of Valcour Island between the Brits and Benedict Arnold’s American Navy. Next they went to a recreated gunboat of that Navy for an additional lecture on its structure and use. Finally they toured the rest of the museum exhibits on the wrecks found in Lake Champlain and early watercraft used on the lake. His commentary and knowledge would make him an excellent visitor for a future meeting of the WHS. —Jon Stokes

**EXCERPTS FROM THE BOARD MEETING  
OF THE WILLISTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY,  
JUNE 6, 2007**

Present: Bob Bradish, Ginger Isham, Terry Macaig, Carol Stewart, Jon Stokes, John Storer  
Absent: John Joachim

Old Business:

**Membership** - all received a new member list from Carol. Decided to add Robert Salter as Honorary Member. He has donated all new granite signs for our 4 cemeteries. John S. will take over file box member cards and keep updated.

**Expo 2007** - Ginger reported she met with Bill Skiff and Chris Stewart and booth is coming together with Ruth P.'s suggestion of small trees potted (in sap buckets) and placed around booth to look like a forest with a path for people to walk. The trees will come from the Isham Farm. The background will be a sketch of mountains and a stream. A map will be on display for visitors on the walk to push-pin where their family came from and a multiple choice questionnaire will be handed to people who stop by booth. An iron kettle from our collection will hold penny candy for those who get some right answers to questionnaire. Ginger will contact folks to cover booth. John S. volunteered to letter the sign for the Expo booth with our theme, "They did get here from there."

• **Ice Cream Social** report from Jon S. We can get ice cream . . . Cost range from \$18 to \$25 for each 3 gallon tub. Cost depends on what flavors we order. We need 16 tubs. Date, time and place set for strawberry picking and slicing. Terry has a list of workers for the night of the social. Fudge sauce will be made by volunteers.. Decision to contribute proceeds from social to CHAMP - Children Against Mines Project. A local brownie troop is trying to raise funds for a mine-sniffing dog to be sent overseas at a cost of \$20,000.00.

• Discussion on committees and lack of enough members to fill committees so the work load is shared. It was decided we should put out some publicity and info on who we are and that more active folks are needed to carry on the work of

the society. Ginger will write a letter to the Observer.

• Jon reported we are all set for a Saturday trip to Maritime Museum on September 15, 2007. Cost of admission will be covered by the society and people will buy their own lunch. A letter with details will go out to membership end of August.

•Ginger reported the road show was a success and a profit of \$120.00 was made for Phoenix House Student trips. Forty items were appraised by Duane Merrill and Son at \$3 each. The public brought in the items.

New Business:

•Terry reported the Old Brick Church fire caused damage to ceiling inside front of church and the slate roof as well as the bell tower. The town is in process of appraising damage. It is expected to be closed until late fall. It was insured. Anyone needing to get anything from the inside of the church should contact Neil Boyden.

• Motion made, seconded and passed by all present to give \$200.00 to VOCA as they are in need of funds for summer cemetery projects.

•Our town band will be celebrating 50 years next summer. It is hoped we can help them celebrate. (The first July 4th parade happened because the band was formed. )The beginning info of the town band and records are in two books Howard Carpenter has kept. We also have one or two sheets of info on band history in our collection.

•We have a possible candidate for our scholarship this year handled by VSAC. A young man is going to apply who will go to St. Michael's College this fall to major in history. Name is Ben Gates from Franklin, VT.

Secretary, Ginger Isham

**Williston' population hit an all time low in 1920 at 929 people. Unlike the rest of the country during the Great Depression Williston's population started to climb, in 1930 it was 961 and the population growth continues from there.**

## ARCHIVES CORNER

\* Recently I was visited by William Burnett and was able to snap of picture of him in front of the display case which contains his mother's wedding dress and shoes which she wore at her wedding in 1929.

\* A short time ago I ordered and received supplies for our new (Pat) Peterson Collection and (Ellen) Walker Collection. There were received in relatively ragged boxes and the new, acid-free cartons will help maintain the quality of materials within these collections. However, we are running out of space upstairs and it is not prudent that we attempt to house materials downstairs because of potential water damage from floods. Both east and west closets are nearly filled to their potential. There are many items that I have not been able to containerize until this shipment arrived and I am happy to be able to store them properly here at the Vermont Room. The movement of these materials is ongoing at the moment.

\* Nearly all our photos have been scanned and put on disk and I will begin to deposit the CDs in the Town Hall vault for safekeeping. However, there are a number of documents I intend to scan and also put on disk. In the event of a disaster we would still have a record of these documents.

\* In addition, Art Tuthill was kind enough to give me a folder about his bike trip across the country in 1977. The folder contains his numerous notes taken during the trip with his two children, as well as some photos and newspaper articles. Please feel free to come in and read through this folder. It will be easily accessible to you, as it will be kept in the vertical filing cabinet next to the computer.

Have a great Vermont autumn!  
**Steve Robinson, Archivist**

**The Dorothy Alling Memorial Library was so-named in 1960 when the original brick building was donated by her husband and dedicated to her memory.**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

The Vermont Historical Society maintains a calendar of events for local historical societies throughout the state. *Local History News* will be e-mailed on a weekly basis. To sign-up contact  
<[patty.wiley@state.vt.us](mailto:patty.wiley@state.vt.us)>

## **PLACE\*** : Place-based Landscape Analysis and Community Education

A presentation and field workshop series exploring Williston's natural and cultural heritage. All evening presentations will be held in the Auditorium of the Williston Central School. A Saturday field trip follows each weekday presentation.

\* Wednesday, **September 26, 2007**, 7 to 9 PM  
Forests, Fields, and Fauna: The Natural Landscape of Williston

\* Thursday, **October 25, 2007**, 7 to 9 PM  
People and the Williston Landscape: A History of Change

\* Wednesday, **November 14, 2007**, 7 to 9 PM  
Rocks, Soil, and Water: Geology and Landscape Ecology of Williston

Sponsored by UVM PLACE, Williston Conservation Commission, and the Williston Historical Society

**NB:** As this effort was getting started the team used many photos from the Williston Historical Society's collection. For more info visit <<http://www.uvm.edu/place/resources/websites.php>>

Dear Readers,

On the back of this newsletter is a truncated membership form which will serve as a first reminder. I have added a space for your e-mail address. It would be nice to get a mailing list going for easy contact about events and opportunities. I promise not to forward chain letters! Please fill out the form if you are willing to do this.

Annual dues are payable in January with a month grace period. If you paid your \$50 for lifetime membership you're good for the duration! Those of you who just joined are paid up through 2008. Your membership card is good for free admission into local history museums around the state.

This process (editing the newsletter) would be enhanced with your feedback.. Please contact me at <[carols.business@verizon.net](mailto:carols.business@verizon.net)>

Carol Stewart, Editor