



Hartford Historical Society

The Garipay House • 1461 Maple Street

Hartford Village, Vermont 05047

www.hartfordhistory.org

HARTFORD • QUECHEE • WEST HARTFORD • WHITE RIVER JUNCTION • WILDER

Volume 18, Number 2

SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

November - December 2005

After The Empire: White River Junction Seen Through the Windows of the Tip Top Building - Part 1 of 2

By Dave Norman

AN overcast sky hangs like a death shroud over White River Junction, the industrial skeleton along the shores of the White and Connecticut rivers in Hartford, Vermont. The city bustled with youthful energy in the mid 19th century, growing like a naïve child fed well on a diet of commerce and philanthropy. Driving slowly through desolate streets I see historic buildings cobbled from smaller units, streets that formerly served some long forsaken purpose—the stretch marks from those formative years. The only cars that share North Main Street are bound in the opposite direction as if fleeing the same city I want to discover. Yet this skeleton twitches...if you look closely. New life stirs behind the historic facades, the sort of glowing embers more subtle and powerful than the sparks of new construction. Within the bones of Railroad Row is new life in renovations from artists who call old buildings “art historical” and mate the classic with the progressive...while using the hallowed walls to hold roofs over their heads. The center of this renovation is a quirky building whose story is that of the town. I turn into its parking lot next to a small sign that reads “Tip Top Media,” and prepare for lessons in history, commerce, and art.

I open the glass double doors into the Tip Top Building and breathe deeply. The alluring bouquet of someone else’s dinner wafts from the Tip Top Cafe, tempting me to detour three steps to the right for a drink and a meal. Below that is the comfortable yellow smell of clay from Tip Top Pottery, where Anthologie—an “antiquarian, used, and first edition books” store, and something of a time capsule in second hand literature—used to be just a year ago. Somewhere between roasted meat and wet clay is the smell of industrial paint spinning the

air into a punch to the nose that stops me dead in my tracks. This is to say nothing of the impression made by the main entrance: that of an eccentric shedding his overcoat to sparkle and jangle in a costume that would awe P.T. Barnum. There is



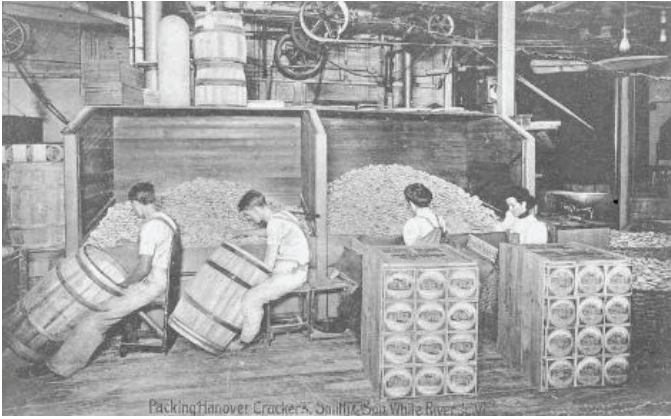
Smith and Sons Building.

nothing available over the counter as strong as the first impression of walking into the Tip Top Building. The floors are red, with exposed green pipes, blue and silver walls, life size abstract art and impressionist paintings hanging against the vertical seas of contrasting primary colors...and everywhere are artifacts from the Tip Top’s childhood. No two adjoining walls are painted the same color—the repeating decorative theme is

aesthetic randomness. The central hallway extends before me, with branches to the left and right and a T-intersection at the far end. Each hallway is a trip through White River’s history and the collective consciousness of the forty different artists and creative professionals who lease office space under the flat Tip Top roof.

The main corridor is the Hall Of Industrial Antiquities, an artistic exhibition of objects once common to the building. Twenty some paces from the front door is the first exhibit, a vertical display of bricks and tile—words fallen from the pages of time. The uniting theme of industrial history, specifically that centered around the Tip Top, is the only theme linking squashed baseballs, rusty metal, wood fragments, and the other pieces of “found art.” The curator of the Main Street Museum—and artistic contributor to the HOIA—David Fairbanks Ford explained that such exhibits in historic spaces around

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Packing Hanover Crackers at Smith & Sons.

White River Junction “create a public space where objects can be critically analyzed through multiple disciplines—utilizing not only traditional methods of art historical, scientific and qualitative criticism, but sociological and even psychological analysis as well. Responsivity in artifacts offers a means of access to their sometimes hidden inner-lives.” The vinculum categories break the displays into manageable units that are easily recognized...but somewhat difficult to comprehend. The Tangled Things section features steel wires and braided metal that is, obviously, tangled. The “Oxidation” section, displaying a theme repeated throughout the display, features rusty metal. What art is there in a deteriorating metal spike in a crumbling gold-painted frame? Ford calls it all “Evidence of Deconstruction in the Construction and Carpentry Trades.” In the February 13th Vermont Standard, he explained “it’s not so much the object as the reaction to it that’s important.” Just as the railroad spikes rust and disintegrate right there before you, so too does the dilapidated frame fall slowly apart on the wall. There is no better frame for that display, and as it documents the former industrial muscle and decline of the city, perhaps it is the most poignant art in the Hall.

There is something of a gothic streak in all this, the notion that the imperfections in the fabric of life are what remind us we’re alive. The railroad spikes rust away before our eyes, crumbling towards oblivion like the sagging buildings throughout the ghostly industrial center. They at once provide a tangible link to the glorious past of bustling commerce and also a reminder that nothing lasts forever. The tangled wires and metal hanging from the ceiling are the detritus from renovating the building, but invoke a sense that the history of the buildings, the town, the workers, and now each of us in the Tip Top Media Building, are interwoven in the complexities of the city’s history. What appears to be junk, and anywhere else would, in fact, be junk, comes alive in this vibrant space. Most striking among the odds and ends is a sealed box of thick, round crackers, stacked atop and beside each other in an inverted mound set sideways. “I constructed a cracker tunnel,” Ford later explained, “one that would be made if you were eating your way out of a massive, life threatening pile of

crackers that had been dumped on your head.” Looking into the tunnel invokes a trip from the surreal HOIA corridor back in time to a small bakery five miles away in Hanover, New Hampshire.

The Symnes family opened a bakery in Hanover in 1815. While they baked several varieties of goods, their primary focus was baking Hanover Crackers, disk shaped unleavened affairs that went well with milk or soup. They baked for the local area, with limited distribution, enjoying sufficient success to maintain the business and attract the eye of Everett Smith. Smith purchased the bakery in 1837, renamed it the Smith Bakery, and added the production of various confections he called Dartmouth Chocolate. Everett’s family grew to include a son, George Williston, in 1841. Fifteen years later George learned the art of successful business, and joined the Smith Bakery as a traveling salesman and representative of his father’s brand. He hitched up the family’s delivery wagon and toured the Upper Valley taking and filling orders. The lessons stuck and George became a full partner in the family business in 1867, when he was twenty six years old. While the family positioned itself as a prominent supplier of baked goods, White River Junction carved its place in Upper Valley commerce with blasting caps and steel trestles: the railroad was coming to town.

White River Junction takes its name from the confluence of the White and Connecticut rivers, and soon came to reflect the junction of several prominent railways as well. The Boston Line crossed the New York Line in White River Junction, with access to the Montreal Line and Quebec City Line all meeting in a grand downtown Railroad Row. An industrial area, built with bricks and lumber brought in by railcar,

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sprouted around the steel highway. Warehouses grew dramatically—as if from the very ground. Area merchants took advantage of rail access to virtually all of New England, points in Canada, and most of America. Everett Smith watched the transformation from across the river and struck upon a golden idea.

In 1871 E.K. Smith & Sons bakery bid a sweet farewell to Hanover, leaving behind Dartmouth College and a small town too delicate to hold Everett's ambitions. They invested the profits from thirty four years of business into building a new, two story brick bakery and confectionery at the corner of Bridge Street and Main. When completed it was the toehold the Smith family used to climb the ranks of White River Junction's business elite...and became the cracker crumb cornerstone of an empire.

Ten years later, in 1881, George Smith joined Alma Farman and S.L. Farman to launch the White River Paper Company out of an office below the family bakery. Arguably cursed, the Farmans brought almost immediate catastrophe to the bakery: a fire broke out soon after the formation of the Paper Company. An 1881 issue of the White River Junction Landmark newspaper recorded the disaster. "Farman has moved into the basement and as he has been burned out in business three times and his house once, all inside of six years, it is safe to say the bakery 'must go' sometime." Productivity dipped, but

the bakery remained open and the White River Paper Company moved into a new Smith building across the street. A fire in 1884 lead to more renovations and the construction of a three story facility, stables for the company's teams of delivery horses, and sundry other buildings and facilities related to the expanding enterprise. Renovations and expansion reshaped E.K. Smith & Sons, expanding their conquest of the railroad right of way. The trains that transformed White River Junction rumbled merely feet away from the facility, and it was upon their deliveries of raw materials and transport of finished products to far flung markets that George Smith depended.

While the Smiths developed their area of Railroad Row, George also had his eye on building the town's resources to sustain the growing ranks of his employees and the other workers who flocked to the boomtown. Driving through the modern streets of White River Junction, the keen observer can discern the matching brick on the buildings used in the Smith & Sons bakery, the Mascoma Bank building, the Library, the High School, and various other structures. A philanthropist as well as a shrewd businessman, Smith saw the benefits of building a community to sustain the business that, in turn, built the community. By 1890 George Smith owned the "Smith Block" of buildings, was a charter member and president of the First National Bank of White River Junction, built

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What is Oral History?

- Second in an occasional series -

From Step-by-Step Guide to Oral History by Judith Moyer (online at dohistory.org)

Used with permission.

Oral History is the systematic collection of living people's testimony about their own experiences. Oral history is not folklore, gossip, hearsay, or rumor. Oral historians attempt to verify their findings, analyze them, and place them in an accurate historical context. Oral historians are also concerned with storage of their findings for use by later scholars.

In oral history projects, an interviewee recalls an event for an interviewer who records the recollections and created a historical record.

**event ◀ interviewee ▶ interviewer ▶
historical record**

Oral history depends upon human memory and the spoken word. The means of collection can vary from taking notes to aural and video recordings.

The human life span puts boundaries on the subject matter that we collect with oral history. We can only go back one lifetime, so our limits move forward in time with each

generation. This leads to the Oral Historian's Anxiety Syndrome, that panicky realization that irretrievable information is slipping away from us with every moment.

Oral history, well done, gives one a sense of accomplishment. Collecting oral history, we have a sense of catching and holding something valuable from the receding tide of the past.

The Hartford Oral History Project has already conducted several interviews, but more are needed. Irretrievable information is slipping away from us with every moment! Your assistance would be greatly appreciated - we provide training and equipment.

If you have an interest in history and would consider participating in this project, please contact Pat Stark at (802) 295-3077 days, or (802) 296-2192 evenings. You may also email ohp@hartfordhistory.org and visit the program on the web at ohp.hartfordhistory.org.

two schools, and established the Masonic Temple.

He carefully followed the mantra “buy low, sell high, and do it as quickly as possible,” to keep Smith & Sons at the fore. Tucker’s 1889 History Of Hartford explained the extent of Smith’s annual production.

As an illustration to the extent of Mr. Smith’s cracker making, it may be said that his annual production is 1,625,000 dozens. If this number were placed in a pile of twenty five feet square, and 113 feet in height, sixty men could stand side by side around such a pile and if each man should eat three dozen daily until the entire lot was consumed, the pile would last 30 years. He annually converts from thirty to forty carloads of flour of choice brands into ‘Hanover’ crackers, in what business he also uses at least 300 barrels of lard. He now makes 65,000 crackers daily, or about 50 barrels.”

These crackers found their way by horse drawn carriage, rail-car, and foot across the Upper Valley, New York, Massachusetts, and undoubtedly to points the Smiths themselves had never traveled. Pipes connecting the ingredient storage tanks were run through the walls so shortening, sugar, and other materials could be pumped directly from railcars into the bakery. Everything in their increasing community of purpose-built facilities was designed for high output.

George added his son, Robert E. Smith, to the family business and changed the company name to George W. Smith & Son. Their trademark Hanover Crackers retained that name even as the company name transformed to reflect the Smith legacy. The purchase of the Vermont Baking Company, and subsequent moving of the Vermont Baking Co. facility into an old steam laundry building Smith owned, secured their prosperity through the close of the 19th century. White River Junction was in full growth, and its brick skin bore the undeniable visage of George and Robert Smith.

Robert simplified the company name to Smith & Son to lead the business forthright into the 20th century. They produced,

at that time, cigars, candy, chocolate, Hanover Crackers, and other goods in a complicated series of buildings that relied expressly on the adjacent railroad. Rumors float through history, and the pages of the “Trains” issue of the Hartford area “The Electric Organ,” that “monopoly, price fixing and gouging...coercion at both the retail and wholesale markets, corporate looting, and the sometimes violent quelling of workplace organization have” been rails under the Smith family’s train of accomplishment. Few private empires escape such allegations, and lingering sentiment towards the Smith family for good and for ill lingers even in modern White River Junction. Despite the allegations he suffered, Robert Smith received deserved acclaim for continuing the family legacy of social leadership. He followed his father’s footsteps and became the President of the First National Bank of White River Junction, the President of the Inter-State Trust Company, a Director of the Passumpsic and Connecticut River division of the Boston & Maine railroad, a member of the “New England Telephone and Telegraph Co.” Advisory Board, a Director of the Ottauquechee Woolen Co., and the chairman of the town’s Board of Selectmen.

Smith & Sons developed profound vertical control over production, as their buying and baking power enabled the regular purchase of trainloads of ingredients. Additionally, they owned their facilities and land and commanded such volume of export as to control a dominant share of any distributor’s business—a formidable bargaining tool. The iron grip they maintained over the company, and over White River Junction’s financial infrastructure, entwined their private prosperity with that of the city—just like the twisted wires in the Tangled Things exhibit, one hundred years later in the heart of their former empire.

Robert Smith fathered two sons, George W. II and Robert W. II, during the height of Smith & Son’s early 20th century success. In 1915 he erected a large building on North Main for the Vermont Baking Company. Adjacent to this production

hub was the sprawling complex of the Smith & Son bakery, confectionery, livery, and the loading docks that kept the family business humming. More than three hundred workers formed three daily shifts, and the sheer volume of manpower employed lead to the construction of tenement houses across the street. The Electric Organ raised the question, “one really couldn’t say whether the company was located in the town or that the town resided within the jurisdiction of the omnipotent factory.”

World War I was the turning point for international politics and the science of warfare, a



Vermont Baking Company plant.

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Mary's Message

By Mary Nadeau, *HHS Board Chairman*
chairman@hartfordhistory.org

It has been a pleasure serving as chairman of the board of directors for the past six or seven years (I actually lost count!). Chairing the board, plus being program chairman and a coordinator of the Hartford history book project had given me too many hats to wear, so I requested that a new board chairman be selected. Clyde Berry expressed interest in the position and was elected at the board meeting in September.

I'd like to encourage all of you to mark your calendars and plan to attend the next program meeting which will be held on Wednesday, November 9th at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ (usual time - 7 p.m.). We are most fortunate to have Charlie Kelton lined up as our speaker. The format will be relaxed and informative as Charlie recollects events that he witnessed over the years and changes that he helped implement in our community over a span of many decades. Those of you who know Charlie will

remember him as an entertaining speaker and a great storyteller. His memory is nothing short of amazing.

See you in November. Why not invite a non-member to come along?

Thank You!

A Big THANK-YOU from Pat Stark to everyone who came out to help put plastic on all the windows of the Garipay House! Not only will it help keep out the cold but the dirt that sifts in around the windows, too!

Thanks also to Phil Hammond for donating copies of old Rotary posters (featuring several local names) to the Society.

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wake-up call to the civilized world that affected every family. The Smiths, despite their affluence locally, could not escape the national supply pinch and the very personal family cost of sending their sons George W. II and Robert W. II to war. The brothers received Army officer commissions and they served while their father tended the family business. In 1917, Robert E. Smith passed away of aciac rheumatism in a railroad car in Burlington, Vermont. Robert's funeral was attended by virtually the entire town, from the workers who arrived "in a block," to the town's vanguard of business and social leaders. Their figurehead, the latest embodiment of the Smith legacy, was laid to rest...along with much of the town's developmental energy. His pallbearers were, with the exception of a single man, the same who bore his father's coffin in 1905. With the sons away for military service, proprietorship of Smith & Son defaulted to an uncle, Asa B. Hebard. The momentum of the Smith men, building exponentially from the Symnes bakery in Hanover, slowed out of respect for the deceased...and never regained its speed.

George returned to the business in 1919, his brother in 1921, and they struggled to hold the steady course their family laid since 1837. The war years were not kind to the business or the brothers' command of the financial monolith, and in 1923 they sold the Vermont Baking Company to the facility's manager, George C. West. George W. II stepped into his

father's role as the President of the First National Bank and the Director of the Interstate Trust Company, ultimately becoming a Senior partner in Smith, Batchelder, Smith, Rugg & Darling Certified Public Accountants. Smith & Son continued to operate into the Great Depression, when money for food was scarce and customers could ill afford confections. They increased their focus on local distribution, adding an automobile garage to maintain a fleet of delivery vehicles. Ultimately they fought a losing battle in an era that swallowed regional businesses with the hunger of soaring national poverty.

In 1934, the Smith family resigned themselves to ignominious defeat. They closed the Smith & Son bakery and abandoned their enterprise. The centralized buildings of Smith & Son slowly transformed into other, far less prosperous businesses. Most sat vacant. The money that poured into the Smith family's coffers ceased, and so too did the philanthropic projects that built the city. The offering plate at the Smith's Presbyterian Church lightened, and the town awoke to an age where unemployed workers could not infuse local stores and landlords with cash. Money flows naturally through societies, from employers to workers, to retailers and shopkeepers who redistribute it again to more workers. One of the prominent pools from which this cycle drew life dried behind the closed doors of the defunct bakery.

To be continued in the January-February 2006 newsletter.

30 Years Ago (November/December 1975 – Valley News)

- WRJ Insurer I.J. Davis dies at 85. He came to White River Jct. in 1929 and was employed by the Hartford Savings Bank and in 1933 he purchased the Brown Insurance Agency, now known as the I.J. Davis Agency.
- Construction plans for the Hartford Outdoor Recreation facility are temporarily on ice, as expected approval on the project from the federal Bureau of Outdoor (BOR) was delayed.
- Hartford Memorial Middle School has announced the honor roll for the first marking term. Included are the following straight A students: Grade 5 – Thomas DeVries, Grade 6 – Jennifer Lorin, Grade 8 – Casey Jones and Dawn Taylor.

60 Years Ago (November/December 1945 – The Landmark)

- Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Aher who have sold their place in Centerville to parties from Connecticut, moved the first of the week to their new home in Hartford village.
- Mrs. Grace Coolidge, wife of former President Calvin Coolidge was a guest at the Hotel Coolidge several days last week while visiting her college friend, Miss Iva Gale, with whom she spent Thanksgiving. Mrs. Coolidge attended the Methodist church on Sunday with Miss Gale.
- Wilder: Rodney Tardie, son of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Tardie, has returned after thirty-eight months in the Armed forces.

110 Years Ago (November/December 1895 – The Landmark)

- Cross Abbott Co. have purchased the Norwich Canning Co's 1895 crop of corn, some twenty-five hundred cans.
- Quechee: List of pupils not absent last term in the intermediate and primary department is as follows: Frank French, Lizzie French, John Head. Absent one day only: Florence Kenyon, Fred Durphey, Jennie Cowen, Fred Farington, Willie Bagley, Gertie Baker, and Osie Carter.

Curator's Corner

By Pat Stark, *HHS Archivist*
archivist@hartfordhistory.org

A slight diversion this issue – I thought I'd share with you some impressions from my recent trip to Washington DC. It was my first visit to our Capital and as those of you who have been there know only the surface can be seen in one week. What a delight for a historical society archivist! All those 'old' documents and artifacts conserved with state-of-the-art technologies!

The most impressive thing I saw wasn't the Hope Diamond or even the original Declaration of Independence – impressive as they were - it was the Star Spangled Banner. Again, if you've seen it you know what I mean, otherwise it is hard to imagine it's size – bigger than my office here in the Municipal Building! Just thinking about what it must have been like for the lady and her daughter who made it to work on such a large item - it must have been like sewing sails. And the time and effort it has taken [not to mention the technology and number of people] to undo the old repairs – laying on their bellies on a framework over the flag removing stitches by hand because the document

is too fragile to handle! The Smithsonian Museum of American History was a real treat – I examined the Americans At War exhibit with much interest, and was surprised to see a 'stuffed' horse [from the Civil War] there. I especially enjoyed the little puppet show they had to teach folks about the Stamp Act issues. I wish I'd had more time to spend there, my quick walk-thru of the Americans of the Move [transportation] exhibit was intriguing to say the least.

Yes, the Memorials are awesome, the Security in every building annoying but understandable, the White House beautiful, the Botanical Gardens amazing, and the Capital building impressive in all its grandeur, but I loved the restored Old Post Office and Union Station [with the great food courts]! Such beautiful buildings saved by the foresight of a few people. If you haven't experienced the Bells from Britain in the Old Post Office I recommend the free ride up the clock tower and the exhibit of them. I also loved the Metro system which I rode daily ride in and out of the city.

Then & Now

Hartford's "Lone Pine" is somewhat of a celebrity, having even been the subject of post cards. The tree, located on Roger's Hill in the village was a popular picnic spot for scouts and local families. Future grooms have proposed at the pine.



At the left is a photo of the tree taken in 2004. At the right is the tree in its glory from a post-card.

If you have any memories of the lone pine, please let us know!



Your Society at Work

New Board Chairman Selected

At their September meeting, the Board of Directors elected Clyde Berry of Hartford Village to the position of Board Chairman to replace Mary Nadeau who resigned from that position at the end of her last term in June, 2005, after many years of faithful service in that position.

Mary had agreed to stay on until a successor had been elected and will remain active on the Board of Directors and on the committee that is working on updating John St. Croix's *Historical Highlights of Hartford, Vermont*.

The Board thanks Mary for her service and for the dedication she has shown to the Society.

Clyde, a recent addition to the Board, is active with the grange and Hartford Library, where he began a genealogy group.

Welcome Clyde!

Bagged Leaves Wanted!

In an effort to reduce heating costs at the Garipay House, Pat Stark is looking for enough bags of dry, clean leaves to circle the foundation of the building. Plastic is being applied to all windows as well. With the rising cost of heating fuels, it is hoped that these efforts will help.

If you are able to provide bagged leaves, please call Pat Stark, (802) 295-3077 days, or (802) 296-2192 evenings.

September Rotary Program

Our September program was held on Wednesday, Sept. 14th at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ. Phil Hammond of the White River Rotary Club spoke to a group of about 20 members and guests on the history of Rotary International (which celebrated 100 years in 2005) and the local club.

The program highlighted several of the local club's activities and was very informative. Thank you Phil!

Hartford Historical Society

POST OFFICE BOX 547

HARTFORD, VERMONT 05047

NEXT MEETING

An Evening with Charlie Kelton

Wednesday, November 9 • 7 pm

HHS Calendar

November - December 2005

Tue., Nov. 1, 2005 **Open House** - Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 6:00-8:00pm. Come and see our collection.

Wed., Nov. 9, 2005 **November Program** - "An Evening with Charlie Kelton". Greater Hartford United Church of Christ, Maple Street, Hartford Village, 7:00 pm. Come enjoy a evening out with former Hartford resident, businessman, and community leader Charlie Kelton. Refreshments will follow.

Sun., Nov. 13, 2005 **Open House** - Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 1:30-4:00pm. Come and see our collection.

Tue., Nov. 22, 2005 **HHS Board Meeting** - Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hart-

ford Village, VT, 7:00pm.

Tue., Dec. 6, 2005 **Open House** - Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 6:00-8:00pm. Come and see our collection.

Sun., Dec. 11, 2005 **Open House** - Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 1:30-4:00pm. Come and see our collection.

Tue., Dec. 27, 2005 **HHS Board Meeting** - Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 7:00pm. *[NOTE: The Board may vote to cancel this meeting due to the Christmas holiday at their November meeting. Please call (802) 296-3132 for more information.]*

