



# Hartford Historical Society

The Garipay House • 1461 Maple Street

Hartford Village, Vermont 05047

www.hartfordhistory.org

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

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SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

January - February 2006

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

By Dave Norman

DWIGHT EISENHOWER'S vision of wide interstates connecting major cities for fast, efficient travel ushered in a bold new era of mass transportation. Where railroads once provided the most direct and reliable access between major cities and outlying bergs, highways came to offer an efficient alternative...and anyone with a car could use the highways. Efficient superhighways and improved rural highways evolved in the 1940s to dominate the direct-access market for transporting goods. Manufacturers and distributors purchased fleets of automobiles to access locations previously hard to reach by rail. Proximity to railroad stations and right of way areas faded as an economic necessity in favor of proximity to major roads. Industrial areas built entirely around railroad centers felt the pinch of business slipping to alternative transportation. Train traffic through White River Junction slowed, and the corner of the market the city held as a shipping hub vanished.

The Vermont Baking Company, under George C. West, survived the Great Depression just yards from the failed Smith enterprises. They continued production through World War II, until George terminated his family's directorship with the sale of the Vermont Bakery Co. to the Ward Baking Co. in 1945. Sometime in the years following the sale, a 100 ton flour tower was erected in the two story production facility at 85 North Main Street. Through annexation, renovation, and the steady influence of transforming existing structure as an alternative to the high costs of razing and new

construction, the Ward Baking Co. facility grew to encompass the former Smith & Sons buildings. Named for Ward's Tip Top Bread, they coined their facility the Tip Top Building. The adjacent bakeries, garages, stables, and other spaces grew together until one large building dominated the railroad right of way. On the eastern face of this building Ward painted their enduring advertisement of a girl unwrapping a loaf of Ward's Tip-Top Bread, with the slogan "It's like opening the door to a bakery." Decades later, the girl's faded ghost still smiles down on the rails that brought her bread to the country.

Ward cobbled the facility into the sprawling single building familiar to current residents and visitors of White River Junction. They attempted new construction in the 1970s when, amidst accusations of economically strong-arming the city,

they convinced officials to sell the municipal parking lot adjacent to the Tip Top. Ward argued that expanding the bakery could produce more jobs and revenue to fight the city's economic decay. The city acquiesced, and Ward built a metal



Vermont Baking Company building, circa 1930's-40's. (Photo: NorthLight Digital)

building to enclose 5,000 square feet of usable space. The next year, they closed the entire facility and Ward left White River Junction completely.

Jobs left White River Junction for places where material was more plentiful, or labor was cheaper, or consumers more centered. The hopes of the community packed and left, taking the highways on the heels of the big businesses that left their brick and mortar corpses rotting along Railroad Row. The Tip

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Vermont Baking Company building, circa 1930's-40's. (Photo: NorthLight Digital)

spot, considering where their future was going just as I look back and wonder where the building has been?

Matt explains that we just exited one building and the wood floor is an original loading dock. Down the hall, towards the tracks twenty feet from the rear exit, is Holmquist Furniture.

Top building changed hands, its various interior spaces rented to sundry businesses ranging from Tip Top Tire to a convenience store, a taxi cab service to various artists seeking studio lofts. One tenant business was a rehabilitation center focused on turning around lives in a city many considered to be itself beyond salvation. The roof leaked. The disease of neglect steadfastly rotted charm into eyesore. An unscrupulous former owner systematically stripped the fixtures and fittings from the building for resale as scrap. White River Junction wilted around its sagging skeleton.

Much of this impression strikes the casual observer to modern White River Junction. Not much happens here during the day, its life whisked away by the tide of history. It's even quieter at night. But look closely: some of the bones twitch and tingle with what could be, perhaps, by a miracle, an ember, a bit, of reanimation. This fight against the ebb of progress comes not with a mason's trowel, but a painter's brush. Less the sweat dripped on worn floorboards, more the paint and plaster splashed across canvass. Several puppeteers plot behind the scenes to rattle the town back to life. One is Matt Bucy, the current owner of the Tip Top Building. The other is David Fairbanks Ford, Bucy's roommate, the curator of Hartford's Main Street Museum.

Bucy purchased the Tip Top Building in 2000, after becoming infatuated with the idea a year before. He searched White River Junction for a place to develop a studio for his visual art, namely filmmaking, and came to the Tip Top to inquire about leasing space. The owners suggested that he buy the whole thing. A year later he closed the deal and began the massive task of reversing decades of neglect.

There comes a voice behind me, and I pull forward through the years and away from the cracker display in the Hall of Industrial Antiquities. The voice is that of Matt Bucy, who this evening is kind enough to share his time and show me around the Tip Top. We walk out of the HOIA hall, stopping on a red floor made from wooden slats that run diagonally. One wall is painted metallic silver, highlighting the tiny bumps and chinks, cracks and chips from long forgotten accidents. I run my hands over the wall, reading a Braille history of the men who passed daily with loads of bread and carts of flour. Did anyone finish their shift and lean heavily against this exact

They custom craft fine furniture in a livery building that was erected by George W. Smith in the 1880s. This hallway was built between three existing buildings, yet in the context of contrasting colors and mixing history, seems so natural.

His vision of the building is to "cater to creative businesses, to artists." Himself an artist and benefactor of creativity, he embraced the opportunity to bring an historical building back to life and infuse it with the soul of White River Junction's art community. "I was surprised to see so many healers," he says of the therapists and healing arts specialists in the building, adding that he welcomes their positive addition to the artistic community.

Renovating the facility was a few man hours and about \$3.25 short of unbelievable. Previous tenants and owners left the building trashed, leaking...and full of treasure. "In the basement we have some of the original hitching gear for the horses from the stable," he said, describing one amazing find. Among the tons of debris from Tip Top Tire, the convenience

## Hartford Historical Society

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www.hartfordhistory.org

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Jim Kenison, newsletter@hartfordhistory.org

store, a former motor reconditioning business, and other transient establishments, he and David Ford discovered more “found art” than either the HOIA or the Main Street Museum could hold. They took the most meaningful of the pieces, preserving them carefully (Ford is an art historian and restoration specialist), and cleared the debris for studio space. Matt sealed half of the building for the initial work, displacing the few artists who were already renting space. Artists brought canvass and clay to life while Matt and David returned the Smith & Sons facility from the dead. After a year of intense work with many hired renovators, the artists moved into the finished spaces and the process began anew on the other side.



*Tip Top “Complex” after renovations.*

There is an elevator where Ward’s 100 ton flour tower formerly stood. Matt used translucent plastic panels to enclose the steel frame of the elevator shaft. Hints of the metal framework beckon from behind the plastic, giving the impression that one can see through into the elevator itself. Step inside, and you are in a plain steel box. Close the doors and you may as well be in any office building anywhere

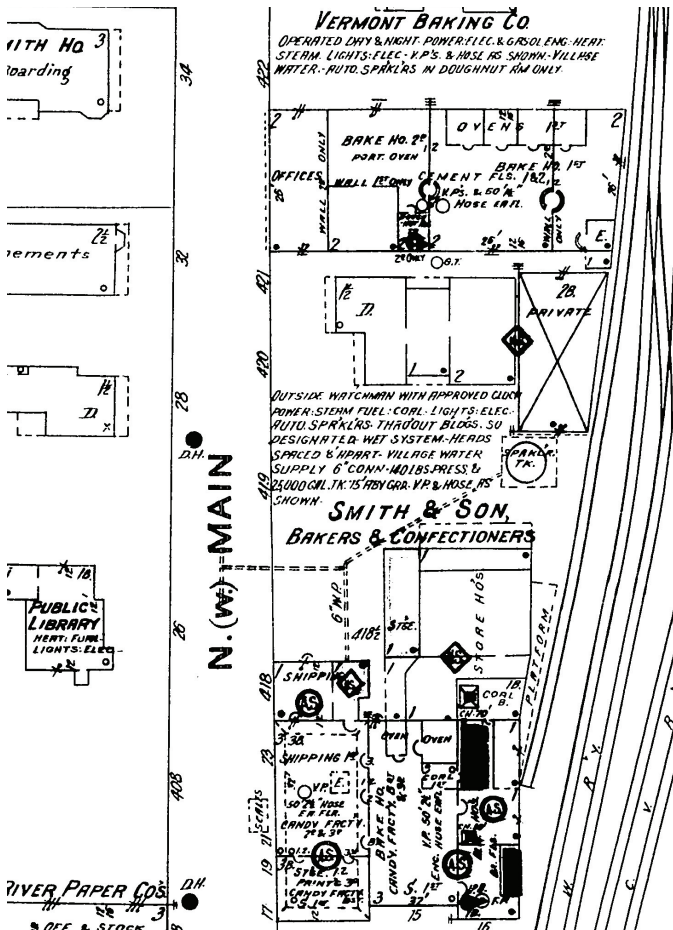
in America. Yet, looking at the elevator from the outside, you cannot shake the feeling that there could be someone inside looking right back at you. I get the same sense walking through the Tip Top Building, where I see the rise and fall of White River Junction in the structure itself and the many artistic displays of antiquity. For all the historical touchstones—the Hall of Industrial Antiquities, various displays, Matt’s running narrative, the feel of a century-old wall—I know that the story is lost in the barrier between the ages. Perhaps George Smith is watching me here in his former empire, checking his watch, annoyed with the slowness of my step.

We come to the Cooler Gallery. A large cooler once occupied most of the space where art hangs. A spiral staircase to the roof is enclosed, kept away from the public for obvious safety concerns, and the rubble has been cleared to present a clean floor and engaging ambiance. The halls on the second floor follow the same style of random multi-color, with contrasting paint on pipes, the floor, the walls, the art... Small tables hold business cards for Sue Kirincich’s yoga classes, Peter Payne’s Bodymind Place, various painters, assorted sculptors...there are forty total artists in fifty compartmentalized spaces carved from the cavernous interiors of the conjoined buildings.

Where conveyor belts once fed bread into ovens, housewives now perform yoga. In the mixing and storage rooms, artists paint their expression of beauty while observing models and cultivating moods. I notice Studio 260, where Mark Merrill creates stained glass art. On the walls outside the studio hang two examples of his painting talent, the Early Autumn Sunrise, and The Sunset. A small sign near the former gives his name. In the irony of humble twelve-point font it boasts a price tag of \$3,600.

We descend a stairwell and circle around to the main hallway, tracing a path through the Vermont Baking Co. building, across former open space, over a loading dock, and into a building from the early 1900s. Framed pictures dot the

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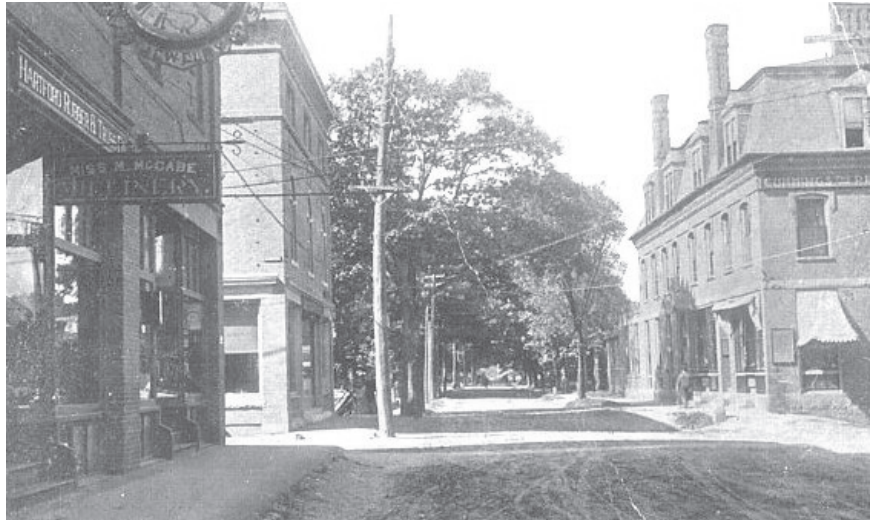
*June 1925 Insurance Map showing Smith & Sons and Vermont Baking Co. locations.*

wall opposite the displays in the HOIA, and Matt points to 1920s era photographs of the Vermont Baking Co. “That door we went in, to the second floor,” he says, pointing to a patch of brick on the upper wall of the bakery, “is right here. That’s where the flour tower was built.” I stare at an architectural drawing of the Vermont Baking Co. façade, penned in 1910, and note the wrought iron planters, brick arches, and stained glass. Those are long gone, replaced successively by the next big thing, then the next great thing, increasing the nostalgic value of the original design with every face-lift. We turn around and Matt points to a plank of wood painted green. Paint is missing where original wooden letters, nailed to the sign, spelled “Bakery.” This is part of the old Vermont Bakery sign, he says, turning and pointing to the sign in an old photograph. “When we found this piece they were using it as a floorboard.” The pride of the Vermont Baking Co., their name, their identity, had been removed in someone’s grand scheme of saving money, cut to size, flipped over and nailed into the floor. Dozens of filthy feet trampled it, damning the Vermont Baking Co.’s pride to the same forlorn corner as the ghost of the Smith family’s dashed empire.

The fresh paint inside the Tip Top does not hide the identity of the building, does not shame the history or obscure the heritage of strong walls and stronger wills both marred by time. Instead, it plays up the details, and the sculptures and portraits on display find ways of integrating themselves into the show-cased pride of Smith’s construction. Such art holds magnetic attraction for connoisseurs and the curious alike. Down a second floor side hallway are belt-high statues formed from what appears to be solid felt. They collect lint and dust, growing as chronicles of the people and pollens that breeze through. The acrylic on canvass painting “Prophecy” by Georgina Forbes hangs in the ground floor entrance way, between the gaping mouth of the HOIA and the rabbit’s hole into Anthologie. A small sign explains her painting:

I like to underpaint some seemingly random motif—color, movement, texture—that gives a dynamic interest to the composition. It may suggest meaning or evoke energy, but remains indefinite and outside specific associations with the familiar. ...I want to surprise myself, be intrigued, and perhaps hooked away beyond limitations. I want there to be inexplicable aspects of the painting that open up a larger realm of possibility, and yet I want the provocative elements of the painting to be so right, so beautiful, that they are easily embraced by the viewer...

The painting itself hangs in the foyer before a swirling realm of possibility: the history of a building, a family, a microcosm of Industrial Age America. Surprising, intriguing, the provocative history of a town encapsulated in the story of the Tip



*View up North Main Street, showing Smith & Sons building.*

Top evokes the energy of a dynasty. A greater introduction to the Hall of Industrial Antiquity, the Tip Top, the Smiths, and White River, does not readily come to mind.

Several wires suspend a length of pipe at the far end of a hallway. A sign introduces it as a “Shortening pipe from the Tip Top Bakery Building painted with traces of antique shortening from the former sculpture studio of Ria Blass. 105x19cm in diameter.” Ria was one of the original artists in the Tip Top Building, and worked on larger-than-life wooden sculptures in an early studio. The summer heat bore into the aforementioned pipe, heating the congealed shortening still contained within. Occasional globs of the historic goo fell from the pipe onto anything below. This made such an impression on her, Bucy, and visitors to her 1994 gallery showing that the pipe was removed and lovingly displayed as part of the found art deconstructing the construction of the Tip Top.

Ria’s contribution to the building, The Electric Organ noted, is not to be overlooked. She drew regional attention to the Tip Top with her show in 1994. The gallery she created from a back room in the Tip Top had windows on three sides, a view of the adjacent railroad tracks, and the undeniable flavor of converted industrial space—leaky shortening pipes and all. Interest swelled in White River’s artistic crafts, fueled that same year by the opening of the nearby Main Street Museum. Though far from a Mecca, the town attracted creative minded individuals inspired by the transformation of industrial areas into art space in SoHo, the Leather District in Boston, and the potential for such new life in White River. Down the street and through the railroad underpass, David Ford is renovating the old fire house into new museum and loft space. Several other historic spaces from the Mascoma Bank building to the Hotel Coolidge wear their history with pride... but none quite so eccentrically as the Tip Top Building.

I say goodbye to Matt for the evening, and retire to the bar at the Tip Top Cafe to tame my swirling thoughts with a

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# From the Chairman

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By Clyde Berry, *HHS Board Chairman*  
[chairman@hartfordhistory.org](mailto:chairman@hartfordhistory.org)

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As we move into 2006 we have to meet new challenges. The Garipay House, our beautiful home, which serves as headquarters and museum for the historical society, continues to need repairs as does any older home. Thanks to several members some much needed repairs have been made. We are planning a parking area in the rear of the house to accommodate those who come to the open houses and other activities.

Thank you for renewing your memberships by sending in your annual dues, if you have not done so yet please do so as soon as possible. The dues of the historical society provide the funds needed to continue many of the programs that we are doing. If you are thinking of making a tax-deductible donation before the IRS dead-

line, consider making that gift to the Hartford Historical Society – we are a 501 C 3. If you have any ideas for fund raising please call me at 295-2091.

We are always looking for volunteers to ‘man’ the Garipay House during open house. The house is open twice a month on the first Tuesday evening and the second Sunday afternoon. If you are willing to help at one of these times, please call Pat Stark at 802-295-3077 M-F 9-5, who coordinates the volunteers. There will always be an ‘experienced’ volunteer there to join you.

We are looking for those who would be interested in being a member of the Board of Directors. We meet once each month and each one of us takes part in some of the other activities as we are able.

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drink. Reservations are accepted for one of the two dozen or so tables, but with the given traffic through White River, they are a stroke for the ego more than a necessity for dining. The stools are empty, a sad waste of a copper top bar. The head chef emerges from the kitchen and greets me with a hello the likes of which nearly bowl me backwards out of my chair. His jovial personality fills the space below exposed rafters, ricocheting off the polished concrete walls, welcoming patrons to his corner of the Tip Top. It’s nice to see such unbridled life in White River. The bartender recommends the wild mushroom bisque, and I readily agree that it would cap the evening quite well. What struck me most about the soup, before I lifted the first spoonful, was a small pile of crackers: round, unleavened affairs, the likes of which George Smith produced more than twelve million yearly. Though now produced by the Vermont Common Cracker Company in Burlington, they are faithful to the ghost crumbs around the building. I lift one reverently, turning it over and trying to imagine how a brick and mortar city grew from sugar, flour, and shortening.

Photographs of White River Junction’s glory days shine down from the walls. The patio is ringed with silver painted radiators, an eccentricity the building would be remiss without. The Rio Blanco Social Club holds occasional dance parties here, most recently hosting a Halloween ball. The event was an annual affair for the Club, a group formed largely from the body of artists already enjoying each others’ company in the Tip Top. Three Halloweens ago Bucy, Ford, Bruce MacLeod and company regarded the quiet

of White River as a stage ripe for a grand drama of caricature, so they organized a costume parade through downtown—the empty streets were not really being used for anything more productive at the moment anyway. In 2003 the boisterous costume parade and clamorous party was so incongruous to the reclusive town that someone called the police and reported a riot. Officers found, instead, a sort of energy long missing from the darkened storefronts.

The artists are taking over White River Junction, slowly, with appreciative eyes for found art and strong desires to coexist with history rather than to smash and build new empires. They kindle a new spirit, one that has no practical use for the railroad tracks—but no hostility towards them either. I exit the building, casting a long look over my shoulder. Smith & Son’s legacy permeates downtown like the musty smell of the evening’s light rain. White River rests motionless around me, but I know there is new life behind the bricks and plate glass windowpanes. Will it flourish again?



*Mural on railroad side of Tip Top building.*

### Green Mountain Civil War Roundtable

By Jim Kenison, Newsletter Editor

On December 13th, I had the opportunity to attend a meeting of the Green Mountain Civil War Round Table for the first time.

Many times I had seen announcements for their meetings and had often thought that I would like to attend, being a descendant of a Civil War veteran or two. Timing, work schedules, and perhaps a fear of trying new things all worked against me until I read the announcement in the Valley News on the 12th and happened to have the next night free. I decided to finally give it a shot.

The meeting was held at the Black Angus Steakhouse in Quechee. The evening started with a social hour and dinner. The menu for the evening was roast pork and lasagna with meat sauce. There was a charge for the meal (which ended up being worth it), but I could have opted for the program only for \$4 as a non-member.

Following the meal was a brief business meeting followed by the main program. Our speaker that evening was Glenn LaFantasie, who teaches at the University of Maine at Farm-

ington and is the author of several books on Civil War history including *Twilight at Little Round Top*. His topic was the heroes of Little Round Top. Glenn was very knowledgeable on the subject.

Following the program was a discussion period during which many of the attendees asked questions that made me understand how little I really know about the Civil War. The combined amount of knowledge present in that room was surely enough to fill volumes. In fact, a few of those present have written articles or even books on Civil War history.

Before I left, I joined the organization for a \$20 membership fee. That will include their newsletter (10 per year) and discounts to programs and events. Of particular interest to me is the fact that the group plans yearly trips to Civil War sites around the country. While I probably won't get to go on this year's trip to Gettysburg in May, I look forward to going on such trips in the future. Now I regret procrastinating for so long!

I would encourage anyone with an interest in Civil War history to attend their next meeting. Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month. More information is available by calling Gail Blake at (802) 296-2919. She may also be reached by e-mail at [auntis@adelphia.net](mailto:auntis@adelphia.net).

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### Curator's Corner

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By Pat Stark, HHS Archivist  
[archivist@hartfordhistory.org](mailto:archivist@hartfordhistory.org)

From time to time I will use this column to share with you information on preserving your treasures. If anyone has specific questions let me know - I have several resources where questions can be researched, and a list of others to call if that doesn't work.

In this issue I will discuss the Seasonal Hazards which we all know about, but often don't DO anything about.

The Winter hazards are dry air and pests. Humidity under 40% is harmful to almost anything - your wooden furniture in particular will come 'unglued' and loose, paper may become brittle and easily damaged, and paint more apt to crack. Insects and mice in particular like to share our living spaces and are a potential hazard to our 'treasurers'.

The Summer hazards are basically the opposite of winter ones - too much humidity [over 60%] will encourage the invasion of molds & mildews. The bright, long days of summer are also a hazard to treasures exposed to light coming in the windows which will cause fading and possibly other unseen damage.

The Spring & Autumn hazards are the sometimes hourly changes in humidity and temperatures. Rapid change can crack wood and generally stress other materials

So - What can we do? Just be aware of the factors: Light can easily be monitored and daily adjustments made or UV filters put on windows. Temperature and Humidity can be monitored with a simple home devise. Although the less expensive ones are not accurate enough for museums, they will give you an indication of what the air in your home is. Temperature is not a big problem in a home - if YOU are comfortable so are your treasures - it is the sudden changes in temperatures that will do harm such as cranking up the wood stove in an unheated house [try to raise the temperature slowly]. Humidity can be controlled by glass pans of water on your radiators in the winter and containers of desiccants placed around the home in the summer [even certain kitty litters will help]. Pest control in museums is done without chemicals which can harm artifacts. Consider non-chemical means for you home also.

Remember that your fingerprints, dirt and household chemicals are constant hazards to be aware of - clean often without chemicals, be aware of any aerosols you use and don't burn candles near your paintings or treasured fabrics.

Happy New Year!

Pat

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## Then & Now

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The photo at the left shows the reading area of the West Hartford Library in the mid-1980s. At the right, the same area is shown in December 2005. The fireplace went unused for many years. The library, through grants from the Freeman Foundation, has undergone many recent improvements - including new shelves in the children's room downstairs. The West Hartford Library is the only library owned by the town of Hartford and has been in its current location since it was built following the 1927 flood.



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## Your Society at Work

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### November Program

On Wednesday, November 9th, Charlie Kelton spoke to a group of 30 plus at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ.

Charlie spoke of his experiences in politics, both locally and state-wide, and as a businessman. His talk was both informative and entertaining. Attendance was above average for this program despite heavy rains that evening.



### History Expo 2006

The Hartford Historical Society is making plans for our 2006 display at the Vermont History Expo in Tunbridge. This year's display will focus on the transformation of Quechee and the history of the Quechee Lakes Corporation.

The Expo will be held on June 24 and 25, 2006 at the Tunbridge Fairgrounds. If you would be interested in helping to staff our booth, please call (802) 296-3132.

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### Volunteers Needed!

We are still in need of volunteers to help staff our monthly open houses at the Garipay House in Hartford Village. Open Houses are held on the first Tuesday of the month from 6 to 8 pm, and on the second Sunday of the month from 1:30 to 4 pm. If you are interested or would like more information, please call Pat Stark at (802) 295-3077 (days) or 296-2192 (eves).

# Hartford Historical Society

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## HHS Calendar

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### *January - February 2006*

**Tue., Jan. 3, 2006**    **Open House** - Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 6:00-8:00pm. Come and see our collection.

**Sun., Jan. 8, 2006**    **Open House** - Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 1:30-4:00pm. Join us as we work toward the revision of John St. Croix's Historical Highlights of Hartford.

**Sun., Jan. 15, 2006**    **Book Committee Meeting** - Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 1:30-4:00pm. Come and see our collection.

**Tue., Jan. 24, 2006**    **HHS Board Meeting** - Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 7:00pm.

**Tue., Feb. 7, 2006**    **Open House** - Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 6:00-8:00pm. Come and see our collection.

**Sun., Feb. 12, 2006**    **Open House** - Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 1:30-4:00pm. Come and see our collection.

**Tue., Feb. 28, 2006**    **HHS Board Meeting** - Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 7:00pm.

***How are we doing?** Please share your comments about our newsletter! We would like to know what you enjoy the most, what areas could be improved, and if you have any suggestions for future articles. You may share with us by writing to the Society, emailing [newsletter@hartfordhistory.org](mailto:newsletter@hartfordhistory.org), or calling the editor at (802) 738-5333. Thanks!*