

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 17, No. 5

SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

March-April 2006

The Story of a White Slave

How mill operatives were treated many years ago

*[Editor's note: This article was reprinted
from The Landmark, March 25, 1882.]*

A New England writer has been giving his experience as a mill operative. The writer was an operator in a factory from 1827 to 1837, and consequently knows whereof he affirms from bitter experience. He lacked one month of being 8 years of age when he was hired to work in a woolen factory at 50 cents a week. For this compensation he was required to work 12 hours a day in winter and in summer. The manufacture of woolen goods by machinery was then in its infancy, and the machinery and methods were rude compared to what they are now. The wool was carded into

rolls about one yard in length, and boys of the age of the writer as given above, and up to that of 12 or 14, were employed to "piece" them on the ends of others drawn into the jaws of a machine called a "billy," about 30 feet in length, over an apron slightly depressed from the perpendicular. This apron was of coarse canvas, and coated with paste to make the rolls adhere. Taking a handful of these rolls in the left hand, they were taken thence singly between the first and second fingers of the right and rolled upon the ends of those on the revolving apron until they

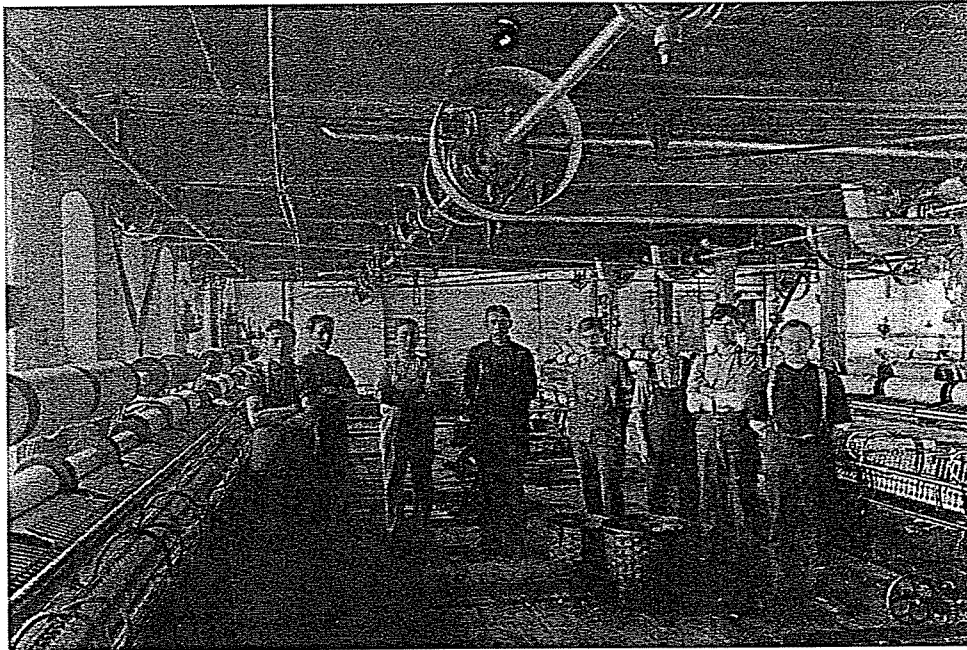
were spliced, the work of only a second. This not only required the boy to be constantly on his feet and in motion, but by constant attrition the skin was worn from the knuckles of his right fingers, which were laid bare to the bone.

THE "ROPER" AND THE STRAP

This "billy" was operated by one man, generally young, and disposed to make the most of his little brief authority over the two boys under his charge, who were the slaves of



Dewey's Mills, Quechee.



Harris Emory Co. Mill, Quechee.

his caprices. Hung upon a nail at one end of the "billy" was a strap made of sole leather about an inch in width, with a knot at one end in readiness for instant use. Each boy had twenty or twenty two ends to attend to. Sometimes, from inattention or inadvertance on the part of the boy, one of these ends was suffered to slip through, causing only momentary inconvenience. Generally this was suffered to pass unnoticed any further than to pick it up and go on. But woe to the boy if the "roper," as the man was called, was in any degree ugly. The boy was then seized by some portion of his clothing, or the hair of his head, as was most handy, dragged off his feet, laid across the apron and cruelly lashed with the aforementioned strap till the brute at the other end of it was tired. Sometimes the knot would be used, and the writer has many times been shown black and blue marks on a boy's body caused by this knot.

TWO STRIKING INSTANCES

Two striking instances of cruelty are fresh in the writer's mind, particularly because he was a victim in one instance, and his brother in the other. On this occasion the "roper" was feeling uncommonly ugly over something in no way connected with his work, and seeing which, and knowing the inevitable consequences should there be the least remissness on their part, the boys laid themselves out to do their level best. This was kept up for an hour or more, the

"roper" all the while watching his chance. Finally, on the writer's side, on of the ends slipped through. On the top of the apron, holding the rolls from being drawn through, was a wooden roller some ten feet long and an inch and a half in diameter. Catching up one end of this, the "roper" hurled it at the boy's head with all his might, one end striking him in the eye, closing that orb entirely and leaving a mark that did not disappear for several days. The effect of the blow seemed to excite a momentary feeling of remorse in the heart of the brute, for

he designed an apology in the words, "I didn't mean to hit you in the eye." On another occasion, for a trifling offense, he seized the brother of the writer by the hair of his head, and lifting him clear off the floor held him out at arms length, and when he sat him down and opened his hand, a handful of hair dropped from it, pulled out of the boy's head by the roots. This hard-hearted wretch has long since gone to his account, but it cannot be wondered that



Hartford Historical Society

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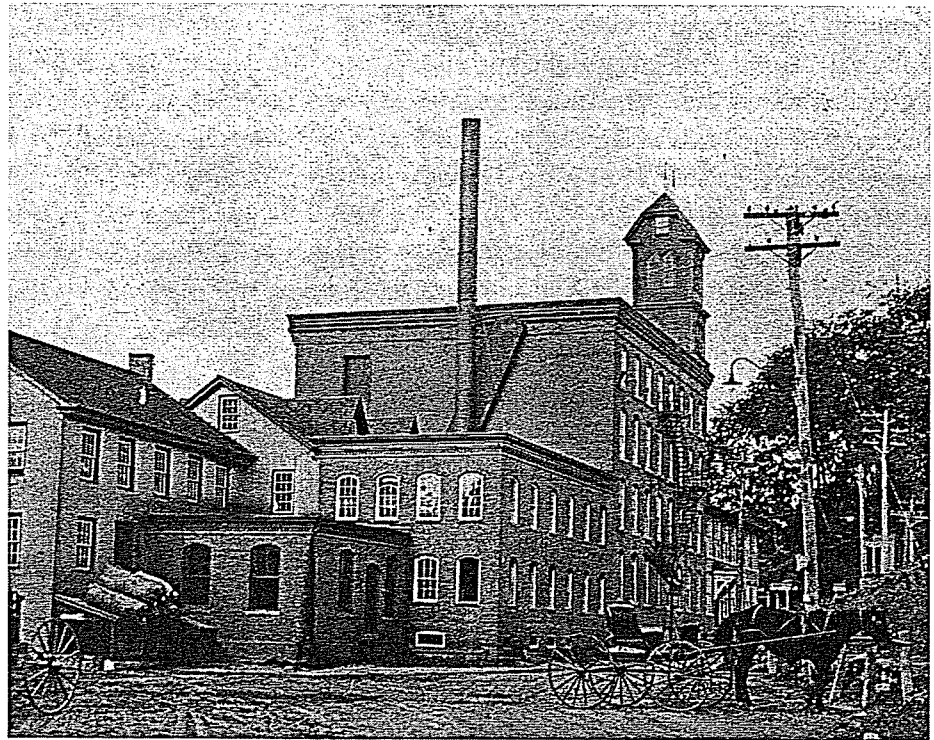
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the writer's blood "boils with indignation," even at the distance of fifty years, at the recollection of his cruelty.

OTHER CASES OF CRUELTY

Although there were extreme acts of cruelty, lesser instances were of no uncommon occurrence. People will almost hesitate to believe that in enlightened New England, and in the nineteenth century, such acts of cruelty could have been allowed to go unpunished. But they were. True, there was a ripple of indignation, and the "roper" in this instance had a "talking to" from the owner of the mill, but that was the end of it. He was continued in his place, though he was a little more sparing in the manner of brute force afterward. It may be asked why were not these men prosecuted for their brutality? It would not have sufficed. Although the man might have been convicted, the owner of the mill would have paid his fine, and the boy would not only have been discharged from employment, but would have been blacklisted, so that he could not have procured employment in any other mill in the place. And it was of no use to go from one mill to another with the hope of getting better treatment. It was the same in every place where children were under the control of overseers, depending somewhat, it is true, on the general disposition of the overseer. The writer heard in his youth of a little girl being for some offense suspended by a rope tied around her waist from a window of one of the factories in Pawtucket, over the rushing waters below, and receiving such a fright that she only lived a few days afterward. And an instance occurred to the writer's own knowledge where a boy ran into the water closet of the mill and let himself down and swung to the edge of the flume, at risk of his life, to escape punishment by an overseer. And so certain was it believed that he must have drowned, that the pond was drawn off to find his body, though he was afterward found in hiding, alive and well.



Quechee Mill.

FOURTEEN HOURS A DAY

Factory operatives and others, who sometimes feel it a hardship to be obliged to labor ten hours a day, can realize to some extent the hardships of those who, at the time I write, were obliged to toil fourteen hours a day. In the longest and hottest days of summer the factories started up at 4:30 in the morning, and were run until 7:30 at night, with only intervals of thirty minutes for breakfast and forty-five minutes for dinner; not even Saturday being an exception, except in lighting-up time when work ceased at dark. At length there was a clipping off at both ends of the day and this is how it came about: A girl about fourteen years of age, a factory operative, sickened and died of a disease the nature of which the local physicians could not define, but which from the similarity of the symptoms, must have been a case of the modern disease of cerebral spinal meningitis. They all agreed, however, that it resulted from overwork, and were unanimous in their recommendation to the manufacturers to shorten the hours of labor. This was in Fall River and the manufacturers agreed, it being in the summer season, to run their mills only from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m., with the usual intervals for breakfast and dinner, thus shortening the time one hour each day. This was probably the first instance of shortening the hours

of labor in New England, sunrise to sunset, in the summer being the rule everywhere, among farmers and mechanics, as well as manufacturers. The operators regarded this as a great boon, full as great, probably, as did those of later years the adoption of the ten-hour system.

NO TIME FOR MENTAL IMPROVEMENT

Education, too, was regarded by many among the poorer classes as a secondary consideration to the

necessity for labor, and as the laws at that time made no provision in that respect, many of the children grew up in ignorance of even the commonest rudiments of learning. As wages, too were a mere trifle compared to what they are now, the condition of those whose necessities compelled them to work in the factories was little better than the African slaves of the South at the time.

April Program

Mills of Hartford

Our next regularly-scheduled program meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 12, 2006, at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ in Hartford at 7 p.m.

The Town of Hartford benefited from having mills located on two major rivers within its borders, the Ottauquechee and the White River. These companies brought strong employment and economic activity to the town for almost a century. Together we will review how these mills were started and learn from accounts of local folks who worked in the mills what day-to-day life was like. Images depicting the rise and fall of these mills will be projected during the program.

We hope to have many former mill workers in the audience to add their comments and share their experiences with us.

Mary Nadeau, Program Chairman

AN OUTLINE OF HARTFORD AREA MILLS HISTORY

HARTFORD MILL:

- 1823 – the site was first used when Elias Lyman 3rd built a cotton factory - fire destroyed it 1835.
- 1853 – Sylvester Morris of Norwich purchased the foundation of the factory on which he built a mill for grinding plaster. Two years later he added machinery for turning out chair stock.
- 1857 – Edward W. Morris bought the business from his father and fitted up a mill for manufacturing chairs in partnership with his brother. The E.W. and E.

MORRIS CHAIR FACTORY employed around 40 workers and produced 12,000 dozen chairs per year which were mostly shipped to South America, Australia or Africa.

- 1886 – the old chair factory closed and the Morris brothers, along with Charles Cone, Henry Hanchett, Daniel Cushing, Vincent Brennan, Dr. Rand and Dr. William Smith organized the HARTFORD WOOLEN COMPANY.
- 1887 – the old chair factory was taken down and the brick was reused for the Hartford Woolen Mill which began production the same year.
- 1927 – Converted from water to steam/electric, the mill employed around 115 men and women. The main products were sportswear virgin wool suitings and plaid back overcoating for male attire. These were sold all around the country.
- 1957 – the mill closed the end of April
- 1976 – in the evening of February 6, the building was destroyed by fire.

QUECHEE MILLS:

- 1769 – Sawmill built in Quechee village by Benjamin Burtch, Abel & Elisha Marsh, and Joshua Dewey.
- 1771 – Gristmill and fulling mill added to the property by Jonathan Burtch.
- 1807 – owner Eleazer Harwood put in the first carding machine.
- 1812 – Harwood & Ramsom erected the first brick factory building in which the manufacturing of woolen cloth was begun. The village mill site went through several owners until John Downer & Co. became the owner.
- 1825 – Downer built the lower brick mill there, which operated until 1828.

From the Chairman

By Clyde Berry, *HHS Board Chairman*
chairman@hartfordhistory.org

Dear Members.

What a great resource of information we have at the Garipay house. Just a thank you to all those who choose to preserve the history of our town by furnishing copies and original materials concerning the history of Hartford. Your donations of materials continue to enhance our collection. If you are going through family photos and have old scrapbooks of the area, remember: if you want to place them somewhere others can share, the historical society is a great place.

Many things are coming up in the near future, one that will be interesting for many is the "Discover

Historic Hartford" a self guided tour of nine historic homes, churches and cemeteries in the area. June 3rd will be the day of the tour so mark in on the calendar and make it a family outing. In today's busy life it will be a wonderful afternoon to spend with family and friends learning more about the history of Hartford.

Remember anyone interested in serving on our Board of Directors please call Dot Jones to volunteer. If you don't have time to attend Board meetings perhaps you could volunteer to man the Garipay house for one of the open house days. Think about it.

April Program (cont'd)

1857 – Denison Taft and J.C.Parker of Barre purchased the property that again had several owners and J.C.Parker ran the business until 1866 when W.S.Dewey and William Lindsey became partners with him.

1869 – In October a freshet caused extensive damage by undermining the north wing so that it collapsed. Much of the wool and machinery were damaged.

1870 – the mill was rebuilt and operated by J.C.Parker Co. It generated 35% of Vermont's woolen industry, producing about 100 yards of fabric a day and employed 45 workers. Producing fine white baby flannel, and fabric for petticoats, men's shirts and pajamas, the 26 looms were operated by water and horse power. Many mill houses for the workers were constructed at this time.

1906 – Robert and Almon Harris purchased the mill becoming the third generation of owners. At this time they introduced the popular Windsor flannel.

1908 – the name changed to the Harris, Emery Company.

1915-18 - Enlargements nearly doubled its output.

1924 – The mill produced 5,000 yards of fine white flannel per day, employing 100 hands. Colored flannels were added with the construction of a new dye house.

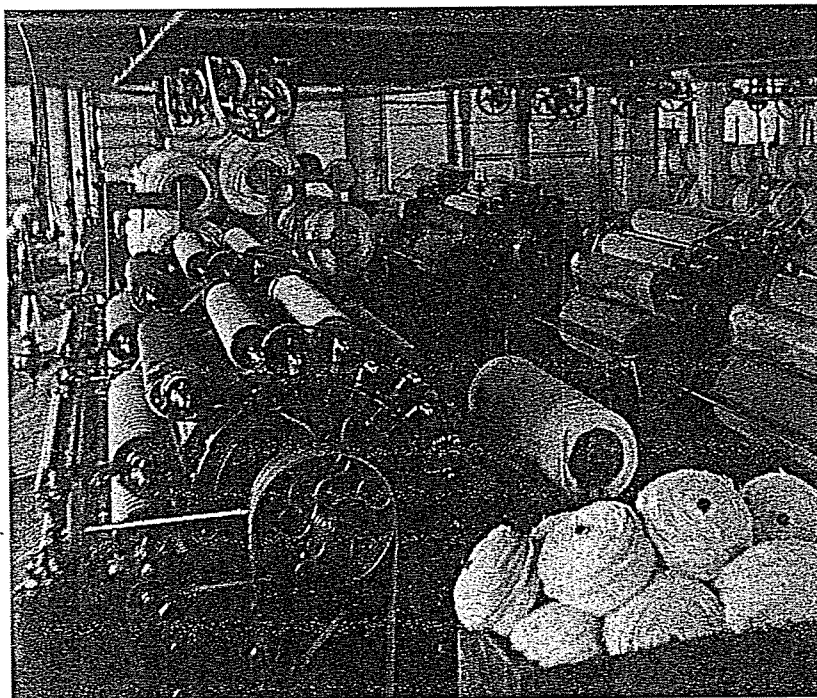
1927 - Quechee Mills were badly damaged during the 1927 flood – it was 5 weeks before they were running again.

1951 – February 1st the mill was closed and the equipment moved to the Penacook mill site. The building was sold to W.T. Dewey and John Cone, Sr. a few years later.

1964 – The easterly sections of the mill were demolished due to safety concerns.

1973 – The Quechee Playhouse opened on the second floor of the old mill after extensive excavation and restoration by the Quechee Lakes Company.

1980 – Simon Pearce purchased the old mill, installed a hydro turbine and pottery and glass are made here.



J.C. Parker Mill, Quechee.

Timeline

200 years ago...

Joseph Dorr became the first postmaster in Hartford Village

150 years ago...

Western Union formed in Rochester, NY

175 years ago...

White River Paper Company was established in White River Jct
the Horseshoe Nail was invented by George Capewell of Bloomfield, CT
the Typewriter was invented

125 years ago...

The White River Paper Company first opened for business on April 19, 1881. It moved into the Gates Street property in 1957, and built the current building on Route 14 in 1985.

100 years ago...

W.K.Kellogg first manufactured Toasted Corn Flakes
Charles Wilder donated two lots to the town of Hartford for a new School in Wilder
[the school opened in 1913]

25 years ago...

the Gates-Briggs Opera House reopened
the IOOF Myrtle Lodge sold their property [the former Universalist Church] on Maple Street on August 31st.

Curator's Corner

Here is a list of some of the over 200 wonderful donations we received in 2005, some of which are on display at the Garipay House:

- Among the many photographs and postcards are the Circus on Watson Field, the Pomona Grange in 1977, Fogg's filling station in Hartford Village, interior of the old First National Bank and the Worthen Family photos.
- A souvenir spoon of Hartford, Vt.
- Cartoon from the open house of the Cartoon Center
- 1930s menu from the Mayfair Restaurant
- Watercolor by Patricia Killian "Peonies"
- 50th anniversary booklet of the WR Rotary
- Dutton & Fellows, Tire Supplier metal container
- Baby flannel from the Harris Emery Mill
- Military uniforms of R.G. Hall
- Remaining photos & records of the Quechee Sunshine Hill Homemakers Club
- Police hat owned by Malcolm Fogg
- School Safety Patrol pin owned by Ron Theriault
- Shuttle used by Mary H. Atwood at Dewey's Mill

- 3 Little League trophies from the 1980s
- Nails produced by a company belonging to Mr. Bugbee
- Wooden water pipes & couplings from the Dothan area
- Menu from the Star Café, WRJct.
- Over 800 glass negatives from the old Wilder Mill
- 1969 Telephone Directory
- 1943 souvenir ticket for Bugbee Flying Service
- Hartford Savings Bank document lock box
- 1990 Quechee Golf Tournament brass paperweight
- Records from the Hartford Woolen Mill

We have also received several interesting items and photographs thru the Hartford Oral History Project. In 2005 we interviewed 26 folks, bringing our total up to 39 interviews. Many are short, but all are interesting. The Hartford Historic Preservation Commission is having most of them transcribed through a Grant program.

Your Society at Work

Garipay House

Spring Cleaning

Sunday afternoon APRIL 8 - 1pm

Come join us for an afternoon of fellowship with your fellow members! We will be doing general house cleaning – washing woodwork, dusting walls, etc. Outside chores as possible weather depending. We have some supplies – rags, a couple of pails, cleaning solvents, etc., but if you have some “favorites” feel free to bring them! We will be moving some of the artifacts [pictures on walls, etc] so if you have cotton gloves please bring them too!. Please call Pat [295-3077 M-F 9-4 or 296-2192] with any questions and/or to let us know you can join us! Hope to see you there!

HMS History Fair

The Hartford Middle School held a History Fair last month – hopefully an annual event. Several students explored the records in the Town Clerk’s Office the Historical Society. Thanks to Priscilla Gadzinski, our Curator, for spending a morning with them at the Garipay House. It was an enlightening experience for all concerned!

Cascadnac Grange Theater Curtain Restoration Celebration

Sunday, March 19, 2006,
2:00 p.m.

Wilder Club & Library

Come celebrate the restoration of the Cascadnac Grange Theater Curtain and view it in its “new” permanent location. See displays on the Cascadnac Grange and a slide show on

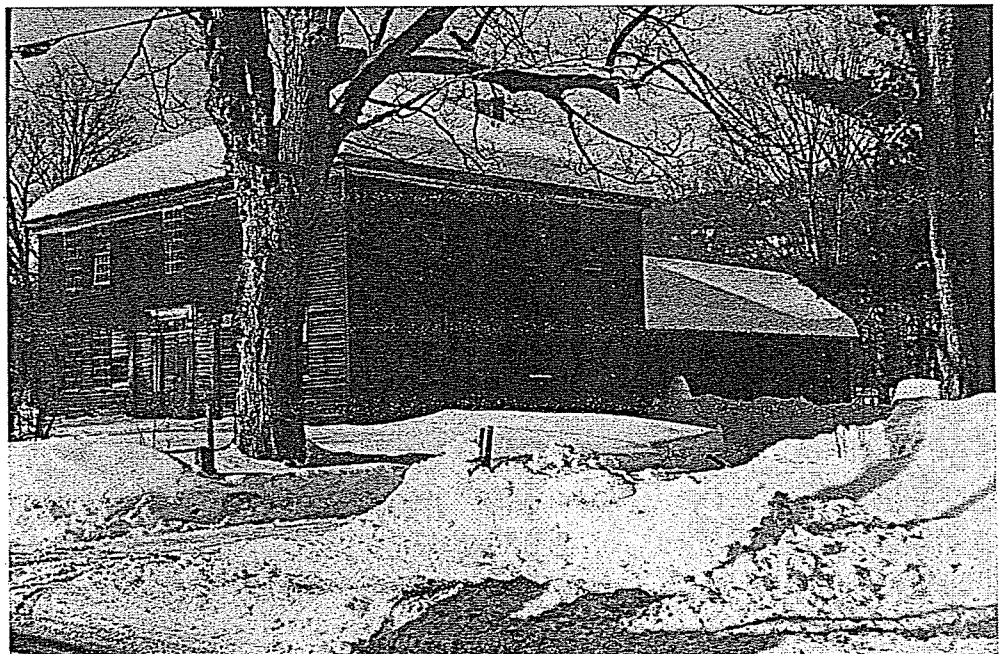
the Painted Theater Curtain Restoration Program.

Join the Hartford Historical Society, Upper Valley Community Grange, Wilder Club & Library Trustees, Quechee Library, Hartford Historic Preservation Commission, the Vermont Museum & Gallery Alliance and your friends and neighbors. Live music and refreshments will be provided.

Thanks to David Ford, David McDerment and Art Peale for the “hanging strips” that now grace our walls! It is wonderful to be able to display our framed photographs and art works. Stop by and take a look!

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

On Saturday, June 3rd, we will be sponsoring a DISCOVER HISTORIC HARTFORD Tour. There will be a building of interest open in several locations around town – including the Theron Boyd house in Quechee, the Old Firehouse in WRJct, and the Hartford Library. We will be creating a ‘passport’ with directions and you will be able to visit whichever buildings you wish, get your ‘passport’ marked, and turn them in for a drawing of several items. Contact us for more information as the date approaches.



The Theron Boyd House, one of the attractions on the Discover Historic Hartford tour.

Hartford Historical Society

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HHS Calendar

Tues., March 7, 2006 Open House – Garipay House,
1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT,
6:00-8:00 p.m. Come and see our collection.

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

Sun., March 19, 2006 Cascadnac Grange Theater
Curtain Restoration Celebration – Wilder Club &
Library, 78 Norwich Avenue, Wilder, VT, 2:00 p.m.
Live music and refreshments.

Tues., March 28, 2006 HHS Board Meeting – Garipay
House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford
Village, VT, 7:00 p.m.

Tues., April 4, 2006 Open House – Garipay House,
1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT,
6:00-8:00 p.m. Come and see our collection.

Sun., April 9, 2006 Garipay House Spring Cleaning
– Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14,
Hartford Village, VT, 1:00 p.m.

Sun., April 9, 2006 Open House – Garipay House,
1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT,
1:30-4:00 p.m. Come and see our collection.

Wed., April 12, 2006 April Program – “Mill Workers
of Hartford” – Greater Hartford United Church of
Christ, Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT,
7:00 p.m. Refreshments will be served following the
program.

Tues., April 25, 2006 HHS Board Meeting – Garipay
House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford
Village, VT, 7:00 p.m.