



# Hartford Historical Society

The Garipay House • 1461 Maple Street  
Hartford Village, Vermont 05047

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

Volume 20, Number 2

SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

November - December 2007

## Seth Parker, Vermonter

By Leonard Twynham

[Editor's note: This article is reprinted from *The Vermonter*, June, 1932.]

**"There's nothin'  
better'n associatin'  
with pigs to take  
down a man's pride."**

**- Seth Parker**

### **November Program: 19th Century Popular Music**

*Wed., Nov. 14th - 7:00 pm  
Greater Hartford United  
Church of Christ*

Eric Bye's presentation examines the phenomenon of our music before amplification and dissemination by electronic means. It considers various types of popular music, the uses to which it was put, settings and performers, instruments, and its significance in American Life.

Funded by a grant from the  
Vermont Humanities Council.

Seth Parker is the radio name for Philips H. Lord, whose work is now broadcast throughout the earth. He is a native Vermonter, born in the parsonage of the Congregational Church at Hartford, Vt., on July 13, 1902, the son and only child of the Rev. A. J. Lord and Maude Phillips Lord, natives of Maine, who were residents of the village during Mr. Lord's first pastorate. Vermont is proud to find another native son among the galaxy of stars now worshipped by the public.

Mr. Lord became pastor of the Hartford church in 1897, coming direct from Andover Seminary. He "bached it" for a short time at the parsonage until he was married and brought his bride there. He was a fine singer, one of the best mixers the church has ever had and was extremely active in the interests of the parish. During his pastorate the church building was restored to the Colonial, largely at his instigation. His accomplishments are talked about in Hartford to this day.

The boy Phillips arrived within sight of this planet in the fifth year of the pastorate of his father in Vermont, and was removed at the age of about five months, when his father accepted a call to the First Congregational Church in Meriden, Conn. Of the spiritual blood in the veins of the boy an acquaintance in Vermont gives this testimony: "if ever a man lived up to his name in bearing and comport, the Rev. A. J. Lord was the one." Mrs. Lord is also a gifted woman, talented in music and efficient in leadership. The boy Phillips was named after his mother, her maiden name being Phillips.

The father speaks with delightful rec-



**Phillips H. Lord**

*(Continued on next page)*



*Phillips H. Lord as  
Seth Parker*

ollection of his fondness for the state where he first tried his clerical mettle and where he equipped himself for the extensive activities of his present flourishing parish in Meriden, in which the varied functions of an institutional church are carried on, under his careful supervision

of every detail, by two assistants and many active lay workers. The growth of that church has been remarkable, under the able leadership of this true minister of the Gospel. In noting the attainment of the son we cannot fail to recognize the importance of the rock whence he was hewn. Neither father nor son has wandered far from the dependable soil of New England. They both speak of its inescapable lure. During residence in Meriden, before Phillips left for school, they frequently visited friends in Hartford and now occasionally motor to Vermont to drink with eager eyes the beauty of its scenery.

During boyhood years Phillips frequently went to the farm, in Ellsworth, Maine, of his maternal grandfather, Hosea Phillips, and there spent happy days in outdoor labors and diversions of the countryside, and in constant association with the unique old gentleman who stood, irrespective of his striking high silk hat, almost as tall as Saul, the Son of Kish. There, along the Maine coast, he absorbed the salt of the sea into his blood, from the tang of which he has never escaped. Now, near his home on the shore at Bayside, Long Island, a yacht is anchored, on which in spare hours, he and his family take frequent trips, so that in the quietude which only waters provide he may compose the script of

his acts and sketches for the radio. The substance of these fascinating character delineations and dialogues and anecdotes he often recalls from the conversation he heard on the farm, from the gossip of the natives, and what he terms the “dickerins,” and the quaint ways for which his grandfather was noted. The grandson slates that he imagined Seth Parker as a composite of many Yankee characteristics; but he does not use Hosea Phillips precisely as a model, though many of his suggestions come from that source, to which have been added hints taken from the thoughts, manners, attitudes and utterances of the old fashioned folks in the rustic habitat which he knew as a boy during his summer holiday.

The grandson does admit that he often slips back into his grandfather’s shoes and assumes the personality of that well-remembered companion. He refers to the old gentleman as the David Harum and the Ancient Mariner, titles sometimes applied to him along the waterfront in Maine. To be sure, any grandfather, who was so individualistic as to wear a stovepipe hat when manning a schooner in a rough sea or pitching hay in the blazing sun, could not be easily forgotten by a boy. So it is that in that region Seth Parker places the scene of his Sunday program, not indeed in the immediate area of the family homestead, which is in Ellsworth,

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## **Hartford Historical Society**

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<http://www.hartfordhistory.org>

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but in the village of Jonesport, nearby on the coast, a community but little touched by modern inroads of civilization. Thousands of motorists now hunt for this spot between Calais and Bangor, and imagine they can locate by inquiry the home of Seth himself. Their search is in vain. However, the selectmen of the town have encouraged their false hopes by placing this sign along the road way: "8 miles to Jonesport, home of Seth Parker." This notice is poetically true, and certainly does not misguide sightseers any more than numerous other markers. Hartford, Vt., is likewise entitled to credit for this illustrious son. Well might the selectmen there also erect a marker to call the attention of passersby to a site already historic.

Phillips attended the Alma Mater of his father, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Me., from which he was graduated in 1925. The father has told the author of this article that his son was inclined to the ministry partly under paternal influence; but that in his conscientious sincerity he felt that there are many vexatious problems to which his temperament might not be adapted. Phillips thought himself probably too impatient and self-willed and restless to deal with the peculiarities of various types of people in the ordinary church. His wisdom in this judgment can be easily discerned. The result of this self-knowledge was that he decided to try the profession of teaching. The romantic elements in this resolve cannot be denied. There was a boyhood sweetheart whom he could not forget. Her name



*Hartford Congregational Church, where the Rev. A. J. Lord served as Pastor at the time of his son's birth.*

was Sophia Mecorney. At the time of Lord's graduation, she was an instructor in the grammar school at Plainville, Connecticut. The shrewdness of the suitor is obvious in the fact that he persuaded the local board to elect him principal of the high school. It is clear that he did not need the sophistication, which Sophia might impart, to help him ahead in the world; but he needed her affection. The marriage took place shortly, and the couple immediately began to devise means for improving themselves in the world of affairs.

The young principal tried his hand and pen at stories and scenarios. These were chronically rejected and still remain as mementos in typical piles of paper which every author hates to burn. He comments now in characteristic style with reference to his failure to sell his ideas to editors – "They all came back; not one of them was even lost in the mails."

With a few savings in hand and frugal plans in mind, the young couple moved to New York City at the close of the second Year. Finally, Mr. Lord secured a position with a candy company in which his salary was eventually raised to \$55.00 a week. He also worked both for a law firm and a publishing house. His nights were devoted to his hopes and ambitions as an artist. One night he listened to the broadcast of a so-called Rube sketch upon the quality of which he felt that he could himself decidedly improve. He set out industriously upon the task. His first experiment was with the familiar singing school. Though he was confident that he had the real stuff of rural color and knew his onions in this particular field and could reproduce actual incidents of quaint humor, no critic who read his material grabbed at the chance. An opportunity came to fill a vacancy on a radio program; and then for six weeks he and his associates were given the air, without charge but without pay.

But at last the open sesame presented itself. For twenty-five dollars a week he sold the first broadcast, "The Singing School," to W.T.I.C., Hartford, Conn. His popularity waxed more rapidly than the moon increases its size. Other stations made bids for his program. Meantime while five stations were featuring "Seth Parker's Old Fashioned Singing School," Mr. Lord became

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*Former Congregational Parsonage, birthplace of Phillips H. Lord, as it appears today.*

sure of the value of sketches emphasizing the religious emotions. He then had a chance to present a second broadcast before the board of the National Broadcasting Company. The Cottage Community Sing and Prayer Meeting seemed to appeal; consequently, this sort of revelation of New England life went on the air as "Sunday Evening at Seth Parker's." The initial date of that epochal event was March 3, 1929. In the cast of characters Mrs. Lord has continued to impersonate the role of the snappy, querulous Lizzie. Now their joint fame is eminent, and has an abiding security in that Hall of Fame which is "not made with hands," the Pavilion of the Four Winds.

Mr. Lord is really producer, actor and preacher. He is busy at his New York offices on Fifth Avenue, where he paces the floor early and late, composing his scripts and rehearsing dialogues in the queer voices of the different characters. It is unmistakable that this program in the mind of the promoter is not merely a business proposition. The author has a devout sense of vocation. The profound sincerity, devoid of all caricature, in each broadcast, redeems the work from any charge of irreverence or sacrilege. Catholics and Protestants alike are impressed

by the religious atmosphere created by hymn, dialogue and story. I know of no other instance in which silence is permitted in the progress of a broadcast. Every second counts, to the director and announcer, except when Seth Parker calls for fifteen seconds of speechless devotions. Sometimes he says definitely, "Let's bow our heads while we thank God in our own way for being with us," or "Let's tell our heavenly Father that we love Him."

This evangelical method is carried into the Bowery mission; and there once each week, the listener-in can hear not only the stirring revival songs, but also the telling preachments, of Mr. Lord, couched in subtle tale and comment and quotation, which carry a distinct message without being in the direct nature of a sermon. The appeal is irresistible, so that both the unseen audience and the audience in the hall are deeply moved and inspired. Already the sale of the Seth Parker Hymnal has reached the two hundred thousand mark.

While these outer evidences of the missionary enterprise of this son of Vermont, of whom the state is justly proud, continue with undiminished popularity and pious effect, Mr. Lord, his wife and two little girls, live in an attractive house within easy motor range of the Manhattan headquarters. A courteous maid receives visitors at the door into a studio alcove where stands Mr. Lord's piano strewn with music in preparation and the pastime sheets for moments of leisure. Still in dreams the family dwells on the Maine coast. In a few minutes they can take to sea and orient themselves from the bad habits of the western world. There his father and mother frequently visit. All members of the household greet visitors with charming hospitality. There is no stiffness related to the statement of Calvin Coolidge that Vermonters are like the New England soil, a bit inhospitable but dependable. The happiness of attained ideals is evident to the observer.

Joy reigns in the heart of him who has climbed to the top of this narrow world and bears the palm of conquest. He has the satisfaction of knowing that in winning his laurels he has done something distinctly worthwhile. Millions of people not only admire him, but love him. The Government paid him a signal honor not often vouchsafed to an

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*Hartford Historical Society Newsletter*

unofficial person of the country. This was a tribute spoken in Congress when he was introduced to that august body: "This young boy is the source of more cheer and contentment and wholesome enjoyment than any person living in the United States today." We who watch for his appearances remember the fascinating sketches of Chic Sale, who never was able to get beyond the quirks and eccentricities of rural types, and who even failed professionally with his whimsical portrayal of Abraham Lincoln as a storyteller by the side of a stove in a country store. He revealed the rural mind and personality in the theatre, as did Holman Day in poem, story and scenario. But Phillips Lord has succeeded in portraying the humble virtues of the real soul. It is no wonder that the House of Representatives rose in a body and applauded his presence in their midst. Vermonters would like to add: "Remember he is a native of Hartford. We claim him as another evidence that giants in the earth spring from our soil."

Now it is impossible for the son to fill all the engagements for which he is wanted. Many of these calls are answered by the father, Dr. Albert J. Lord, who is free to accept appointments booked by the National Broadcasting Company. He lectures on the history of the family, which on both sides is of notable ancestry; and with the use of pictures thrown on the screen he tells the story of the boyhood experiences of Phillips. He himself relates typical New England anecdotes and scenes, and interprets some of the famous hymns which have become common property of the spirit for thousands not nurtured in the revival songs of the Protestant Church. Not only is the eminent father busy with such programs of special interest to the hero worshippers of his son; but he fills many lecture appointments of a

more professional nature in school and club and convention courses. He, too, is helping to make the world appreciate the solemn grandeur, as well as the naive simplicity, of the New England heart.

The interested person who desires to appreciate more fully the general



*Mrs. Phillips H. Lord,  
"Lizzie"*

atmosphere in which these qualities have their birth should not fail to witness the presentation of Yankee character and life in the screen version "Way Back Home," for which Phillips Lord is responsible. The billboards have properly proclaimed it "The colossus of the screen." In broadcasts extensively presented at the present time he takes the part of a country doctor. It is amazing to realize that this young man, who has climbed the ladder of fame to the height indicated in this brief account, is only thirty years of age. His countless friends wish him "Good luck in the name of the Lord" in his pilgrimage along the continued highroad of success. May he continue in his sentiments to be an oracle not only among the singing circle of his studio, but among all those who like to join in the choral expression of religious emotions.

### *Reminder!*

Dues notices for 2008 have been mailed out to each member who is not already paid through the end of 2008. If your mailing label reads 2007/12 in the upper corner and you have not received a notice, please call Jim Kenison or Peggy McDerment (See page 2 for contact numbers).

Additional gifts are greatly appreciated as a large amount of money has been spent on maintaining our building this year. Any gifts above and beyond your dues are tax deductible, and a donation receipt may be requested.

Keep in mind that all dues payments are due by December 31st.

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## From the Chairman

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By Dorothy Yamashita, *Board Chairman*  
chairman@hartfordhistory.org

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Members of the Hartford Historical Society Board were invited to attend the dedication of the Mira Williamson Davis Building in Hartford Village on October 24th. Many of you will know this building as the former Hartford Grammar School building located at 49 School Street in the village. Several board members attended school in this building, and board president Dot Jones recalls life as a student in Mira's class. Board members who spoke at the dedication, in addition to myself, were Dot Jones, Jim Kenison and Noel Vincent.

Although I am a relative newcomer to this area, I was excited to attend this momentous occasion, realizing that Mira had probably attended school with my grandmother, Millie Mae Martin. Although I never had the privilege of meeting Mira Davis, we were both granted emergency teaching certificates in 1945-46.... Mira with her years of experience here in Hartford and Dorothy Whitney (me) with only two

years college teaching in a one-room schoolhouse in Tunbridge!

This historic building is now the home of Health Care and Rehabilitation Services of Southeastern Vermont (HCRS). The community is fortunate that Judith Hayward as CEO of HCRS has been able to retain so many of the original brick walls, the lovely wainscoting, and beautiful windows as the building was remodeled to house modern, attractive working space for about 40 employees. Hartford has another significant historical landmark as well as a valuable community resource at HCRS.

*Pat Stark's Curator's Corner  
does not appear this month as  
Pat is on vacation.*

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## News and Notes

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### HCRS Dedicates former Hartford Grammar School Building to Mira Davis

On Wednesday, October 24th, Health Care and Rehabilitation Services of Southeastern Vermont (HCRS) dedicated its new home, the former Hartford Grammar School to longtime Hartford Village teacher, Mira Williamson Davis.

Mira, born in 1878, attended the Hartford Village School that stood on the site of the HCRS building prior to 1906. She later



taught at the school for many years. Mira was also active with the Hartford Congregational Church and the Hartford Village PTA. She died in 1964.

The current building was built in 1906-07, and the first classes were held in the fall of 1907. The school closed in 1993. This fall, the village celebrates the 100th anniversary of the building.



*A young Mira Williamson Davis*

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# News and Notes

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## White River School 100th Anniversary

The White River School, built starting in 1906, welcomed students for the first time as Hartford High School in fall 1907. This year marks the 100th year of classes at the building, which now serves as an elementary school.

As part of their 100th anniversary celebration, the staff of the White River School is looking for former students and teachers that attended and/or taught in the building while it served as Hartford High School. The school is looking for people who may be willing to come speak to students about what school was like then.

If you are interested, or know of someone who may be, please contact Melissa Hecsh at the school by calling (802) 295-8650 or via e-mail at [hecshm@hartfordschools.net](mailto:hecshm@hartfordschools.net).



*Hartford High School (now the White River School) as it appeared in 1911 before the addition of the gymnasium and auditorium.*

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## Thank You!

The Board of Directors would like to thank the many volunteers that serve us in many ways. While we can't thank everyone, we would like to thank a couple individuals who stand out. Without volunteers like them, our work would be much more difficult.

- Bob Follensbee - the Board thanks you for the hard work you do, be it mowing the lawn, filling holes or painting the porch. Thank you for your continued dedication!
- Judy Barwood - the Board thanks you for the time

you spent with us during your internship. Your work is greatly appreciated.

- Pat Stark - the Board thanks you for your dedication to the Society as our volunteer archivist, contact person, Discover Historic Hartford coordinator and general "go-to" person. It is easy to take your work for granted, but your dedication is recognized and appreciated.

We also thank the many volunteers who assist us by providing refreshments for our programs, hosting open houses and volunteering at special events. Thank you all!

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## Hartford Trivia

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### Easy Trivia (Grades 5 and below)

Q: The large hotel in downtown White River Junction is named after the father of which U.S. president? (Bonus: What was the president's father's first name?)

### Advanced Trivia (Grades 6 and up)

Q: The Society's September program told the story of a railroad accident that occurred on Feb. 5, 1887. Who was the conductor of the train involved in that accident?

Both answers may be found in common Hartford History publications, available at most libraries in town and at the Garipay House. If you think you know the answer, e-mail it to [newsletter@hartfordhistory.org](mailto:newsletter@hartfordhistory.org). Be sure to write "November Trivia" in the subject line and include your name and grade (if you are a student). Also, please tell us the book in which you found the answer, along with the page number. The correct answers will be printed in the next issue.

# Hartford Historical Society

Post Office Box 547  
Hartford, Vermont 05047-0547

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U. S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
PERMIT NO. 15  
HARTFORD, VT

**November Program:  
Wed., Nov. 14th - 7:00 p.m.  
19th Century Popular  
Music**

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## HHS Calendar

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### Special Meetings, Programs and Events

Programs are held at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ on Maple Street in Hartford Village at 7:00 p.m. and are followed by refreshments.

**Wednesday, Nov. 14 -- *19th Century Popular Music*,**  
Eric Bye presents a lively history of popular music from the 19th century, accompanied by live and recorded music.

**Wednesday, Apr. 9 -- *Reminiscing with the Town Manager*,** Ralph Lehman will speak on his experiences both as a resident and as former Hartford Town Manager.

### Ongoing Meetings and Events

Regular meetings and Open Houses are held at the Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street in Hartford Village unless otherwise noted.

**First Tuesday (February through October) -- *Open House*.**  
6:00 - 8:00 p.m. The public is welcome to visit the

Garipay House and see items from our collection on display. Volunteers are on hand to give tours and answer any questions.

**Second Sunday (May through September) -- *Open House*.**  
1:30 - 4:00 p.m. The public is welcome to visit the Garipay House and see items from our collection on display. Volunteers are on hand to give tours and answer any questions.

**Fourth Tuesday -- *HHS Board of Directors Meeting*.**  
7:00 p.m. For more information, please contact Peggy McDerment, Board Chairman (See page 2 for contact info.)

*Happy Holidays!*  
from the Hartford Historical Society  
Officers and Directors