



Hartford Historical Society

The Garipay House
1461 Maple Street
Hartford Village, Vermont

o Hartford o Quechee o West Hartford
o White River Junction o Wilder

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Society Newsletter

April 2002

April Meeting Presents British Ballad Traditions

At our April 10th meeting, Burt Porter of Glover will present a program on the British Ballad Tradition in New England. The meeting will be held at 7 pm at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ in Hartford Village.

Ballads, narrative songs with a beginning and an end, arrived in New England with the mid-17th century wave of migration from England. Middle class, conservative and educated, these settlers were far more likely to write down songs than were other folk musicians. As the songs were passed down from generation to generation, they retained pieces of the language and flavor from previous centuries, but traces of plain Yankee language were mixed in as well. "They drift in and out of an oral tradition and writing. That's why they stay kind of the same and yet change," he explains.

Through the books he has collected dating from the 1930s and '40s, he is able to compare the original lyrics and their meanings and discover how they have been changed through oral tradition over the years. "I probably have every book that's ever been published on the subject," he adds. "I bought most of them before I was twenty-five."

Mr. Porter has been a semi-professional musician since he was a teenager. After learning to play the mandolin from his parents, he later picked up the harmonica and the fiddle. His fiddle has been passed down through his mother's family since it was

brought here from Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1873.

He will begin the program by sharing information about New England ballad history after which he will perform several ballads before entertaining discussion and special requests.

Upcoming Elections

The Nominations Committee will be meeting soon. Our goal is to find board members who have skills to bring to the society and/or a desire to help our society remain viable and grow. Do you know of any such individuals? If you have any suggestions, please contact Dot Jones [295-2701]

The Society depends on its volunteers to make the Society what it has been and can be. We are anxious to get new people to fill positions being vacated by those people who are moving on.

"Meet Me at the Fair"

We are in need of volunteers for 2 - 3 hours for the VT History Expo June 22 - 23 at the Tunbridge Fairgrounds. Anyone who volunteers will be given a free pass for that day.

If you would like to volunteer please call Pat Stark (296-2192) or Sue Shambo (296-2230). It would be much appreciated. Thank you.

Looking for Ghost Stories

Susan Smitten is a writer for Lone Pine Publishing. She says, in a letter dated January 5, 2002, that she is currently gathering information for a book entitled "Ghost Stores of New England. It is the 18th volume in Lone Pine's series of true ghost stores set in particular regions of North America. She is hoping that members of our Historical Society may be resources of information, contacts and actual stories.

She would love to hear from you if you know of any famous folktales of ghostly legends in our community. You can contact her by phone at 604/734-2442 or by email at mezzo@telus.net. She is interested in reference material of any kind including already published works, information from individuals who have had a first-hand paranormal experience, or accounts or your own. She guarantees anonymity to any persons who would rather not have their names mentioned in the upcoming volume.

Vermont History Center

The Vermont Historical Society Library will be CLOSED until July 13, 2002 prior to relocation in the new Vermont History Center in Barre, Vt. The museum will reopen in renovated space in the Pavilion Building in Montpelier in October 2002. Exhibits in the Pavilion closed in July 2001.

When completed, the Pavilion will house a new 6,000 square foot exhibit devoted to Vermont history, an education space, and a new store with a reading alcove. The new library, collections storage areas, and exhibition and programming space will be in the History Center.

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1974 Speech in honor of Rotary's 50th Anniversary

Congratulations on your fiftieth anniversary. I am please to be with you on this occasion. I am here to tell you a bit about White River Junction in 1924. Of course I was looking at it through the eyes of a twelve-year-old boy, full of the joy of living, enthusiastic and excited about everything. However, I do not think I will be painting too a rosy a picture because that was a good year.

I lived on Pine street opposite the old high school. I was the family errand boy, so I was in the business section of White River Junction nearly every day. It was familiar to me. I started doing the family errands when I was six years old. I visited nearly every store in the village. I was never bashful and some of the merchants were very good friends of mine. One merchant loved to tease me. I had a puppy and loved to talk about him. The merchant said he had seen my puppy and he was a cross between a bull pup and a pair of window blinds. Maybe he wasn't too far off. I remember that I would love to fall in step with people on the street, and before we reached our destination, they knew all my business and the family business. I always felt lucky when I caught up with Rev Mr Hamilton. He must have been at least eighty years old at the time. He would tell me about White River Junction when he was a boy. He was my favorite companion.

My childhood recollections are all of White River Junction. I very seldom got beyond the village limits. We spent a pleasant home life, always plenty to do, contented with our surroundings, and making the most of what we had.

Those were the days of the railroad, and White River Junction was the largest railroad center in northern New England. Engines were constantly shuttling back and forth near the station. There was a constant banging of box cars as shifters were making up the numerous freight trains destined for distant places. There were at least thirty or more passenger trains in and out of the village every day.

The ticket agents were Michael Donahue, Roy
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Whitney and Benjamin Adams. They were good agents, too. When you bought a ticket for Hanover, you didn't end up in Havana. They were busy people.

It was exciting to go to the depot when you knew a train was due, listen to the distant whistle, watch for a column of smoke, and then see the train come into sight on its way to the station. I especially liked to watch for a train from Windsor as there was a long straight stretch of track leading to the station from the South Main Street section of the village, and you could really enjoy watching the train approach. When it stopped, a large crowd would alight, baggage would be unloaded, the Railway Express would gather their shipments, and Mr. Dutton with his cart would be there to pick up the mail pouches for the post office. The cart had regular carriage wheels, a two-wheel affair, a large box was set on top for the pouches and a bar handle was used to either pull or push it. Sometimes it was really loaded, and it was no small task to push it across eight sets of tracks. Of course there was a board walk between the tracks, but it wasn't smooth going, but I think the mail traveled faster in those days than it does now. The post office was where the Lyman Station is now.

When a freight would leave, we would often post ourselves at a vantage point and count the cars, wonder where they were going, and also wonder if any of them would find their way back to White River Junction. I have no record as to whether Old 494, the memorial train near the Municipal Building, was ever in White River Junction, but it didn't make its last run until 1938.

In the 1920s the area opposite the hotel and Gates Block was a nice park with trees, walks and benches. When the passenger trains would arrive, buses and taxis would converge on White River. There was no one-way traffic in those days. Each time a passenger train would arrive, the central part of White River would be faced with a traffic problem.

In 1924 the highway department was authorized to divide the park, remove the turf, cut down several trees, remove the topsoil and create a suitable parking area. The area was paved and set aside for the numerous buses and other vehicles that were coming to meet the trains. There was a Rutland bus, a St. Johnsbury bus, a Newport bus and many others. Cassius Briggs was making regular trips to Lebanon and Ephraim Adams was running a bus to Wilder. The Junction was a very busy place.

Automobiles were busy filling the air with exhaust fumes; factories and the roundhouse were busy pouring smoke into the upper air, and the trains were busy contributing soot and cinders. No one seemed to be worried about air pollution unless some of them were concerned that they were not contributing their share. There was also noise pollution in those days. Besides the banging of the cars, the whistles, the chugging of the engines and other railroad noises, anyone near the railroad can remember a restless night whenever a cattle train was left on a siding near their home overnight. However, you kind of miss those days.

Against this background, White River Junction was expanding. New businesses came in; old businesses were sold to new owners; the well-established businesses were prospering. This was known as the period of "Coolidge Prosperity."

Well-established businesses of that day which are still in existence are the White River Paper Company, Miller Automobile Company, Green Mountain Studios (which was originally the Green Mountain Card Company), Cross Abbott Company (now the Cross Company), Vermont Cut Flower Exchange, Adams & McNichols (now Adams, McNichols and Melen), and Swift and Company. Drown & LeBourveau and Watson & West Insurance are still going strong under one roof. They don't realize it, but they are all going to get a bill for advertising.

None of the retail stores or grocers of that day are left. They included Armstrong's Market, Andrew Morris, Bogle Brothers, Wheeler Brothers, H.L. Hanson, Brownes Shoe Store, T.T. Allen, Hunts Department Store and many others.

In 1919 Burton Shepard started the Shepard Company which is still a thriving business. Calman Colodny started the Surprise Department Store in 1920. It was about two stores down from its present location. The telephone company moved out of its office over the bank into their new building on the corner of Gates and Currier streets in 1922.

That same year Walter C.W. Marshall bought the Bailey Music Rooms, a Burlington concern located in White River, and set up his own business. Alfred Wright, Sr., bought "The Landmark" from Mrs. Jamieson that same year. Chimes Candy Store moved to White River and opened a store where the Kwik-Way store is now. They sold April Fool candy. Soap and onions covered with chocolate. My mother got

hold of a piece. It was tragic. H.A. Perkins built a warehouse in 1921. They sold it to the Vermont Warehouse Company in 1923. This is the building now occupied by Twin State Fruit Company. And, in 1924, Aillard Graves opened the Lyric Theatre on North Main Street. We used to have the latest shows, and every week we had some fine vaudeville entertainment. One of the entertainers said it was the most morbid place he had ever worked in. No matter where he looked, he saw Graves.

We did not have the Town Manager system of government then. The Town Clerk was William S. Pingree. He had just succeeded former Governor Samuel E. Pingree who died in 1922 and had served as Hartford Town Clerk for fifty years. Roscoe Wilmot was the Town Treasurer. He was postmaster in the village several months prior to taking the office. Charles Smith was the Chief of Police, and Fred Hutchinson was the fire chief. When Mr. Hutchinson retired in 1954, he had been Hartford Fire Chief for forty years.

The postmaster at that time was Carl W. Cameron. There were three banks in the village. Leonard Wheeler was the president of the First National Bank, Howard Miller was the president of the Inter-State Trust Company, and Roy Howard was president of the Hartford Savings Bank and Trust Company.

Back in 1884, Lyman Gibbs started a livery stable on Gates Street. Nathaniel Wheeler started a grocery store where the Kwik-Way Market now stands, in 1889. He was always watching Gibb's lucrative business. Finally he couldn't stand it any longer, so he went over and bought him out. Gibbs stayed home for a week. He either couldn't stand the prosperity or the idleness, so he went back down to his old stamping grounds and bought back half the business. This started the famous partnership of Gibbs and Wheeler.

In 1901 the two men bought the Junction House from William Barron. They continued their partnership until 1923 when ill health forced Mr. Gibbs to retire. He sold his hotel holdings to William Wilmot. When Mr. Wilmot died, the garage became the property of Huber Kendall.

The year after Mr. Gibb's retirement, Nathaniel Wheeler changed the name of the hotel from The Junction House to the Coolidge Hotel in honor of John Coolidge, an old friend and the father or Presi-

dent Calvin Coolidge.

It was in that year that the Town of Hartford had the distinction of being the first township in the State to have all its rural schools rated as Superior Schools. Clarence L. Joy was the Superintendent of Schools at that time, and the enrollment for the year was 1,023 pupils.

The State Highway Department also announced that it had found the roads in the Town of Hartford to be the best in the State, a credit to John St John, road commissioner, and his highway crew.

Although each period of history has its prominent citizens, I feel that every citizen who has played his part to perfection deserves praise and credit for his contribution, be it large or small. We have always been blessed with enterprising people throughout Hartford's history. All of you, today, are contributing time, zeal and effort to the betterment of our way of life. I love the past—I find it inspiring. I also love the present—I find it interesting, challenging and intriguing. I look forward to the future—it looks extremely bright.

When the Rotary Club celebrates its one hundredth anniversary, I hope records will be available so that, when they look back to 1974, they will find accounts of what you have done and what you are doing. Under your leadership, Hartford is beginning to move ahead. You should be recognized for your work and for the new progressive spirit that has arisen. When someone picks up the history fifty years from now, I hope you will all get the credit you so richly deserve. Thanks you.

Editor's Note: Does anyone know who gave this speech? If you do, contact Muriel Farrington, and we will give credit for it in the next issue. 295-6511 or mmfarrington1@juno.com.

This speech illustrates how quickly things change. Not many of the business establishments mentioned in this article still exist, and others have moved.

Hartford Historical Society
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Upcoming Events:

- Wednesday, April 10, 7 pm. Bert Porter will speak about "The New England Ballad Tradition".
- Wednesday, May 8 planning is underway. Reserve this night for a brief annual meeting with elections, followed by an interesting program.

Officers

Chairman:	Mary Nadeau	295-2123	Secretary:	David Ford	295-7105
Vice Chairman:	Dot Jones	295-2701	Treasurer:	Peggy McDerment	295-2357

Your Board of Directors

Fred Bradley:	295-3819	Mary Nadeau:	295-2123	Everett Smith:	295-3277
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