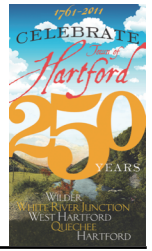




# Hartford Historical Society

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

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



Volume 31, No. 2

SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

March-April 2018

## Diner Days: A History of the Hartford Village Diner

*By Helen Aher*

Reprinted from *The Hartford Village Voice*, April 1992

The Hartford Village Diner, built by Mr. and Mrs. Victor Martin on the present site around 1927, became a mecca for travelers, truck drivers, celebrities, business people and even Pa, Ma and the Kids. A diner that was never locked.

This was really a family venture. Both Mr. and Mrs. Martin worked as cooks in the diner, starting at four o'clock in the morning and working until one o'clock or later at night. Mrs. Martin tells about making, at the most, 82 pies a day and 38 even on the day they closed. Can you imagine buying a piece of pie, with flaky crust made by hand (with pure lard) and yummy filling, for only 15 cents? She was also known for her delicious rolls. At that time, one could buy a good dinner for less than one dollar, a cup of coffee for ten cents and a bowl of soup for twenty-five cents.

Helen Baron ("Mike"), Mrs. Martin's sister, worked there as a waitress for 27 years, and her brother-in-law, Francis Manning, worked in the kitchen for 24 years. Occasionally, her son John and his wife Betty helped out. Laurette Vincent Woodward, a local girl, waited table for 24 years and other girls from the village were hired as needed.



*The Hartford Diner, located on Maple Street in Hartford Village, was known for its good food, friendly service and reasonable prices.*

Many long hours and much hard work went into the "building up" of the business and soon the diner became too small. So around 1944, they bought the land across the road, where the Hathorn/Olson building now stands, and built a larger one. They remained there for about four years, but not satisfied with the location, decided to move the larger diner

*Continued on page 4.*



## April Program: Dora Keen Handy

*By Judy Roberts and Roy Black*

Wednesday, April 11, 2018, at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ in Hartford Village, 7 p.m. Learn about former West Hartford resident Dora Keen Handy, one of the most ambitious and adventurous women of her time.

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## From the Chairman . . .

A reminder that your membership dues were payable in January!

Upcoming vote at Town Meeting in March: We are “up” for renewal of our request for funds from the taxpayers to keep our lights on, etc., for the next three years (we have to submit a new petition every three years). Please let your friends know that this is vital to our ability to continue to preserve Hartford’s history as well as offer programs to the public and our school children (not to mention the cost of printing and mailing the newsletter). Thank you.

The Society’s Board of Directors needs some new members. Some have served for many years and are retiring, and new blood is always an asset. The board meets the fourth Thursday of the month at the Garipay House, starting at 6:30 p.m.

Also, the Long Range Planning Committee is looking for members. This is critical to our ongoing success as a Society, as we have run out of space and need to find a solution to this problem. If you are interested, please contact Judy Barwood or me. Our contact information may be found below.

*Pat Stark, Chairman of the Board*

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## Hartford Historical Society

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### The Mission Statement of the Hartford Historical Society

To acquire, identify and preserve information and artifacts related to Hartford’s past and communicate knowledge of local history through programs, publications, and other interaction with the community.



## April Program to Highlight the Life of West Hartford Resident Dora Keen Handy

*By Mary Nadeau*

Local historian Roy Black and West Hartford resident Judy Roberts will give a talk on the life of Dora Keen Handy at our regularly scheduled program meeting on Wednesday, April 11, 2018, at the Greater

***Dora Keen, born in 1871, toured the world with her father, igniting a yearning for travel and adventure that lasted throughout her life.***

Hartford United Church of Christ, 1721 Maple Street in Hartford Village beginning at 7 p.m. Dora Keen, born in 1871, toured the world with her father, igniting a yearning for travel and adventure that lasted throughout her life. During her extensive travels, she covered the North American continent from Alaska to Panama, both coasts of South America, areas of Asia and much of Europe. Her more noted achievement was as a pioneer among women mountain climbers. Dora scaled such peaks as the Matterhorn, Mont Blanc, Monte Rosa, the Weisshorn and was a member of the first party to ascend formidable Mount Blackburn, at 16,140 feet, the second highest peak of the Wrangell Mountains in Alaska. "I thirst for

Alaska. "I thirst for adventure," was her explanation. Eventually Dora and her husband, George Handy, settled in West Hartford, where they operated a farm until 1930. Their large, white house is located on the West Hartford/

Quechee Road just up the hill from the bridge that spans the White River, on the right. She died in Hong Kong at the age of 92 while on a tour of the world.

Dora's father, a surgeon of considerable renown, served six American presidents. In 1893 he participated in a secret surgical procedure to remove a cancerous jaw tumor on Grover Cleveland, and he was the physician in attendance for Franklin Delano Roosevelt when his paralytic illness struck.

There is a lot more to tell! Dora was well known throughout the Town of Hartford. People who remember her are encouraged to attend and to share their recollections.



*Dora and her husband George William Handy on an iceberg (top). Dora and George operated a farm in West Hartford.*

back to the original site and acquire more parking space. They sold the lot to Dan and Charles Aher, who built the cinderblock building for a supermarket.

Since Route 14 and on westward was the main route to Burlington and Montreal, many travelers, besides the local patrons, found their way to the diner. There were no eating places between Barre and Canaan, NH, and, as the truck drivers had to come this way to get to New York State, the diner became “the place” to stop. They not only enjoyed the delicious meals, but it was also a great place to listen to the juke box and get warm, as there were no heaters in their trucks. Often times they would call ahead for reservations.

Members from the Trapp family stopped for dinner one evening on their way home to Stowe, and a year later the mother and her daughters returned. Harry James, a handsome, well-

***Truck drivers not only enjoyed delicious meals but it was a great place to listen to the juke box and get warm, as there were no heaters in their trucks.***

known trumpet player and leader of a popular band at that time stopped on two different occasions, leaving the waitresses starry-eyed and spell bound.

Because the Woolen Mill opened early, many of the mill hands stopped for breakfast and returned at noon for lunch or dinner. During the noon hour, the diner was a popular place for many business people, not only from the village, but also from other areas. Many families were frequent patrons of the diner, as were several teachers who usually stopped for breakfast.

Mrs. Martin, who still resides in the large brick house on Main Street which they bought in 1948, recalls many of the idiosyncrasies of their routine customers. I wonder if the person who ordered cole slaw with breakfast remembers it. Another patron always ordered salad dressing to go with soft boiled eggs. One person was known to have gone into the kitchen, asking them to make him some hash. Others had their specialties, too, such as beef stew and liver and onions. Another patron always ordered oyster stew but didn't like the oysters, while another man preferred the oysters but not the broth.



*Interior of the diner under the ownership of Victor and Pat Martin.*

In 1966, because of Mr. Martin's ill health, they closed the diner, which was then rented for several years, until it was finally sold in 1985. Victor Martin died in 1972. Mrs. Martin (“Pat”) has one son, John, three granddaughters, one grandson and seven great grandchildren who all live in the area. (Note: Mrs. Martin passed away in 1992.)

Even though Mr. and Mrs. Martin worked very hard, I'm sure they felt it to be a rewarding experience. They became acquainted with many people, listening to their joys, their sorrows and their problems. Many of them, I'm sure, have kept in touch.

The last year the diner was open was 1995. In 1999, Marc Wood, a developer from nearby Sharon, obtained permits to renew the diner and redevelop the surrounding property. In the past several years, there have been legal issues, which have hindered the development. In October 2004 the dilapidated diner was destroyed by fire. Marc Wood and the Town of Hartford have disagreed on the wording of the permits received. In 2002 and April of 2005 the arguments voiced by the town and Mr. Wood were heard by the Vermont Supreme Court. There are still actions pending by both parties.

*Helen Aher was a lifelong resident of Hartford. She taught in the local school system for 27 years and was a member of the Hartford Historical Society. In gratitude for her extensive research and writing on the history of our community, her name was added posthumously to the Hartford Historical Society's Honor Roll in 2014.*



## Postscript to the Story of the Hartford Diner

*By Mary Nadeau*

After the Martins closed the diner in 1966, it was reopened under the management of Lena Butterfield. Lena kept the diner going until 1980, at which time she relocated her business to South Main Street in White River Junction.

Maggie Dudley later managed the diner until it closed for good in 1995. The building remained vacant until it was purchased in 1998 by Marc Wood, who also bought the adjacent former Cascadnac Grange building.

Just after 5 p.m. on October 8, 2004, a customer at the Foodstop, a neighborhood convenience store located just across the street from the diner, rushed in to alert an employee to call the fire department. Firefighters arriving on the scene minutes later witnessed two violent explosions that blew out the front of the building. Hartford Fire Chief John Wood (no relation), not knowing if there would be additional explosions, kept his men out of harm's way by withholding permission for them to enter the burning building.

Despite shooting water on the blaze at the rate of 500 gallons a minute, it was not possible to save the structure. The building was so involved when firefighters arrived that not much could be done to save it. Plumes of thick, black smoke rose high in the air, and the walls and roof were already almost totally

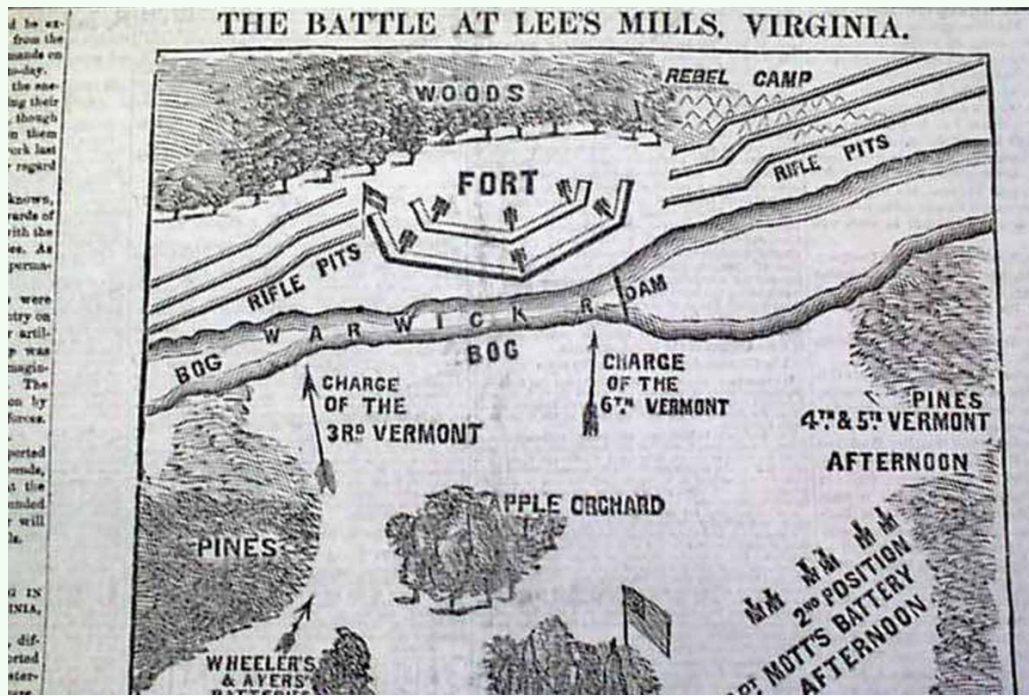
destroyed when the Hartford Fire Department arrived on the scene.

There was great concern that the shooting flames could burn overhead utility lines, causing them to fall into the roadway and posing the threat of electrocution. Despite valiant efforts to keep them cool, the wires were damaged, and hundreds of local residents were without power and phone service for several days after the fire. The department's other priority was to protect the Foodstop and its gas pumps. The intensity of the fire melted a reflector on the department's new ladder truck, which had been parked in front of the convenience store.

According to a Vermont State Police fire investigator, this fire was clearly a case of arson. The diner had no source of electricity, and the dense, black smoke suggested to him that petroleum was used as an accelerant. That suspicion was further confirmed by the fact that the building was consumed almost instantaneously.

To date, no perpetrator has been identified. Following years of litigation, the Vermont Environmental Court ruled that the remains of the structure had to be removed, and the site was cleared in late fall of 2017.

Photo of the diner after the fire courtesy of the *Valley News*.



## Samuel E. Pingree and the Battle of Lee's Mills

Samuel Everett Pingree (August 2, 1832 – June 1, 1922) was a lawyer, Vermont governor, Hartford town clerk, and Civil War hero. He practiced law in Hartford after the war in the small brick building next to the Garipay House and his house still stands on Christian Street. Pingree received the Congressional Medal of Honor for leading the Third Vermont Regiment at the Battle of Lee's Mills in 1862 and left this account of the incident.

*On the 16th of April, 1862, General McClellan confronted the enemy, entrenched along the Warwick and south of Yorktown. No attempt to force the line had been made, although cannonading at long range and musketry firing at close quarters had been brisk. About the middle of the afternoon two companies of my regiment, supported by two others were selected to attack the enemy's line on the other side of the creek, and to capture and hold a crescent battery and the lines of rifle pits protecting it. My company, which headed the assault, was deployed quite closely. Unclasping their waist-belts, each held high his cartridge-box in the left hand and his rifle in the right.*

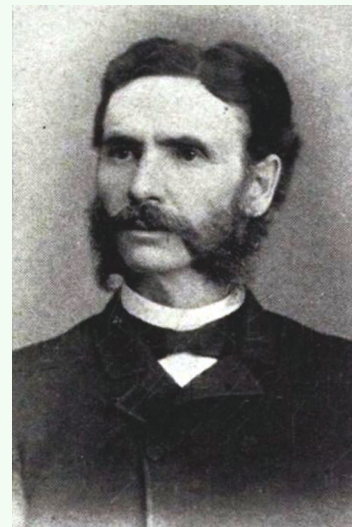
*As soon as the batteries on the slope in the rear ceased firing, both companies started for the creek. The enemy at the same time opened fire from the rifle-pits across the stream. The water was breast high in the narrow channel, but shallower on both sides of it, about two hundred feet wide, mostly artificial flowage for a line of defense, and was further obstructed with felled trees.*

*In spite of the deadly fire of the enemy, the two companies pushed on and, without a halt on the other shore, dashed straight for the rifle-pits and battery, driving the enemy into the woods. Shouts of triumph went up and signals of success were waved back to our lines. The two supporting companies followed us up and joined in holding the captured works. The line of the Warwick was broken. We anxiously waited for the arrival of the head of the division which was to follow us if we found the crossing possible, but no assistance came. The enemy rallied from their panic, and with several regiments hastened to attack our little party of less than two hundred rifles. We had lost heavily while fording the stream, and now the men were falling fast as the enemy rallied against us in overwhelming force. Messengers were sent back twice, explaining the situation and asking for re-*





In 2014, a collection of letters and memorabilia from Samuel E. Pingree sold at auction for \$4,800. The lot included 31 Civil War-era letters and covers, a set of Major's shoulder boards, a cartridge box plate, a GAR badge, a GAR hat insignia, a Vermont GAR appointment to Judge Advocate, and photographs of Pingree's hometown of Windsor, Vermont.



*enforcements or orders to fall back. As we rushed for the rifle-pits, I received a wound below the left hip, which for a few moments prostrated me and benumbed my left leg so that I could not rise, but I soon recovered and, finding no bones broken, continued to lead the men on, as our orders were to capture and hold the works till re-enforcements came. It was a critical moment when the Fifteenth North Carolina came charging down upon us at a run, but the well-directed fire of the brave Vermonters checked and hurled them back, extending their confusion to the two Georgia regiments on their right.*

*It was at this stage of the fight that my right hand was disabled by a shot which tore away my right thumb. While these attacking regiments were reorganizing for an assault on our position, the order*

*came to fall back across the river, which we did, helping our wounded along. The fight had lasted forty minutes. Out of the fifty-two officers and men of my company, twenty-seven were killed or wounded, and of the three hundred and ninety-two men engaged, forty-five per cent were killed or wounded. (<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/chron/civilwarnotes/pingree.html>)*

*At the battle of Lee's Mills, Samuel E. Pingree of the Third Vermont Infantry (above and opposite) was wounded twice in an assault across a creek (above left) into enemy rifle pits. When reinforcements were not forthcoming, Pingree and his men held out against enemy counterattacks, with Pingree having his right thumb shot away before receiving orders to fall back across the creek. On August 17, 1891, he was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions.*

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## Hartford Loses its Oldest Resident

*By Mary Nadeau*

Joseph P. (Joe) DesMeules, holder of the Hartford Cane in recognition of being Hartford's eldest resident, passed away on Thursday, February 8, 2018, following a brief illness. Joe would have turned 98 on March 20.

He was an extraordinary man who lived a full life. A World War II veteran, Joe enjoyed relating his war experiences, which he did with remarkable detail. After his discharge from the U.S. Navy, he worked in the newspaper business, eventually enjoying a lengthy career with *The Boston Globe*, where he was a typesetter and proofreader.

Joe was also an avid outdoor enthusiast, and he favored hiking, skiing, skating, hockey, tennis and golf. Another of Joe's interests was working with wood. He created hundreds of pieces of folk art and built lovely pieces of furniture for his home. One of his joys was giving away his handiwork. Several of his works are on display in the Garipay House Museum.

He was immensely proud of his family and spoke lovingly of them. His son Peter is an attorney in



*Hartford Historical Society president Martha Knapp presented the Hartford Cane and a framed certificate to Joe DesMeules at his home on September 7, 2017.*

Norwich, and his son Mark is an environmentalist living in Maine. There are two grandsons and two granddaughters, all of whom are well educated and share the family passion for athletic activity.

We extend our deepest sympathy to Joe's family. He will be sadly missed by many.

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## Update from the Genealogy Center at the Hartford Library

*By Carole Haehnel, Director*

Access to the Genealogy Center located upstairs in the Hartford Library is now available by appointment only. To set up an appointment, please call the Hartford Library at 802/296-2568.

Resources available include:

- A collection of local family genealogies.
- Books: Town histories from surrounding areas of Vermont and New Hampshire, books on various topics, such as the War of 1812, the Civil War, World Wars I and II, Indian history, list of area veterans and more.
- Issues of *The Landmark*, a former local weekly newspaper, from 1882 through 1952 on microfiche.
- Publications offering advice on genealogical research.
- Files of family names with materials gathered on each family.
- Files of social events and obituaries published in the *Valley News*.

I would be happy to assist you in exploring these resources. There is no charge for this service.



# Major David Wright

By Donna Wright

Major David Wright, who served with the Continental Army (we have always been told that Major was his first name, not his rank) and Hannah Bailey were married on September 26, 1771, in Lebanon, Connecticut. Major Wright brought his bride up the Connecticut River and they were among the first settlers in Hartford, Vermont.

It is said that Major, his wife and one of their sisters traveled to Hartford by boat on their wedding journey. When they stopped for the night, Major told their hosts that the women were both deaf. Then he hurried down to the boat and told both women that their hosts were deaf. He had them all hollering to each other until one of the young ladies asked her host how long they had been hard of hearing. That's when they learned that Major Wright had been pulling their leg.

The young couple lived in a little log house on 600 acres of land near where the VA Hospital stands today. Major Wright always had a fear of being buried alive. He had an above-ground tomb built on land near his home and requested that, when he died, his body be placed inside the tomb. His casket was not to be nailed



*Major Wright's tomb on the VA Cut-off Road.*

shut. A wooden mallet was buried with him so that when he woke up he could get out of the casket. Also buried in the tomb are his wife Hannah, their son David and his wife Elizabeth, and David's and Elizabeth's son Bela and wife Betsy. The tomb was not to be sealed. Unfortunately, due to vandalism in the 1970s, the tomb was sealed.

## Brief Notes on the History of Premature Burial

By Gwen L. Tuson

Major David Wright was not unique in his concern about being buried alive as it occurred in both real life and in literature. The fear of being buried alive has a medical diagnosis called taphophobia.

### ***The fear of being buried alive has a medical diagnosis called taphophobia.***

Allan Poe in 1835 where the female character suffers from catalepsy and is buried alive by her fiancée.

A historical example of this happening was the case of Eleanor Markham. In 1894 in New York, her family placed her in a coffin and planned to bury her quickly two days after the physician pronounced her dead due to the summer heat. On the way to the gravesite, the hearse was stopped because of sounds coming from the coffin. She was alive when the coffin was opened.

An early example of premature burial in literature is found in "Bernice" the short horror story by Edgar

There are numerous accounts of coffins designed with bells inside, hatchways to open from within, provisions placed inside, glass windows installed, and other oddities in the case of something such as Ms. Markham's circumstance occurring. These were sometimes called safety coffins. The first recorded history of a safety coffin was that of Duke Ferdinand of Brunswick before his death in 1792. His coffin had a window installed and an air tube to provide air. He had a lock installed inside the coffin instead of having the cover nailed closed. He had keys placed in his coffin for the locks to his coffin and tomb doors.

The history behind the development of the tradition of a wake is reportedly partly created to prevent accidental burial of a live person. There are many folklore and urban legends on the subject of being buried prematurely. One of the best sources for a summary of the legends and accurate current knowledge is Bondeson, Jan. *Buried Alive: The Terrifying History of Our Most Primal Fear*. WW Norton, 2001.



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Mail this completed form, along with a check payable to Hartford Historical Society, to:  
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THANK YOU!

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## Rest Area Fundraiser a Success

*By Roy Black*

On Wednesday, November 22, 2017, the Hartford Historical Society held its first rest area fundraiser at the northbound rest area in Sharon. Referred to by the state as “safety breaks,” they encourage travelers to pause, stretch their legs, use the facilities, to fuel up

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***At the end of the day, donations totaled \$656.43, which will offset the day-to-day expenses of the Hartford Historical Society.***

with a cup of coffee or some other beverage, and to avail themselves of the food items brought in by non-profit organizations, who are allowed to place a

donation box alongside the “treats.”

While some people choose not to leave a donation,

others compensate by being very generous, especially if the mission of the non-profit strikes a chord with them.

In addition to a wide variety of baked goods, we had items like Chex Mix and fruit to offer to the travelers. At the end of the day, donations totaled \$656.43. We wish to thank all those who contributed to the success of the fundraiser by donating “goodies.”

Currently we are looking at the following dates for additional rest stop fundraisers: Sunday, April 12, 2018; Sunday, August 12, 2018; Thursday, September 13, 2018 and Wednesday, November 21, 2018. When those dates have been confirmed by the state, we will put out a request for donations to “fuel” our table. Volunteers to help cover the shifts throughout the day will also be needed.

All funds raised will be used to offset the day-to-day expenses of running the Hartford Historical Society.

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## Campaign Update

*By Judy Barwood*

Fundraising efforts are still very much underway to raise funds to purchase the former Elks Club facility in Hartford Village. An additional \$200,000 is still needed to enable us to receive the \$100,000 challenge from the Byrne Foundation. Please be in touch with a board member if you have any suggestions for additional fundraising avenues.

If you are a Hartford Historical Society member and employed by Hypertherm, please contact our office, as your affiliation with both entities greatly enhances the possibility of a sizeable grant from Hypertherm. Thank you.

On July 20, 2018, we’ll have a very special fundraising event when our own Susan Cameron Bennett, aka “Siri,” will be here.

She’ll tell us her story, her family connection with White River Junction and will be available to meet at a reception prior to a concert for us with her husband, Rick Hinkle. Susan is a professional singer in Atlanta and sings with a band in which Rick plays the guitar. Stay tuned for advertising and details of this exciting event.

The Stone Hill Table event is still scheduled for May, although a specific date is not available as yet. This will be a dinner at the lovely historic home in the Dothan area owned by Shyla and Andy Stewart. Please also watch for advertising about this event.



## Hartford Historical Society

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### HHS Calendar

#### **OPEN HOUSE** at the Garipay House

Until further notice, the Garipay House Museum is open to the public Thursdays and Fridays each week from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. or by appointment. To be sure that we are open, look for the flag outside the building or contact us at (802) 296-3132.

#### **MONTHLY MEETINGS** open to the public

Fourth Thursday of the month at the Garipay House, 6:30 p.m. (please check for exact date)

**Wednesday, April 11, 2018** – “Dora Keen Handy” presented by **Judy Roberts and Roy Black**, 7 p.m. at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ, 1721 Maple Street, Hartford Village. Refreshments.

**Wednesday, June 13, 2018** – “Growing Up in White River Junction” presented by **David Briggs**, 7 p.m. at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ, 1721 Maple Street, Hartford Village. Refreshments.

The **Genealogy Center** in the Hartford Library is open Tuesday afternoons from 1-3 p.m.. Carole Haehnel will be happy to assist you in exploring the resources we have and in accessing information from The Landmark, which we have on microfiche. Just call the library to set it up.