



Hartford Historical Society

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

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

Volume 17, No. 5

SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

March-April 2005

A Talk With Bertha Perkins Memories of a Century

by
James M. Kenison

Back in September, I had the opportunity to talk with Bertha Perkins, who turned 100 years old on March 4th. Quite possibly the oldest life-long resident in Hartford, she had a century's worth of memories to discuss during our visit. Our topics of discussion ranged from her childhood, to the farms on Christian Street, to the many changes she has witnessed over the years.

Bertha, who still resides in the house she was born in, remembered, "I was an only child, but I always had plenty of playmates - there were a number across the street. There were always a lot of children on this street until very recently. Now the bus just goes zooming by until it hits the top of the hill, but it used to stop at each place."

"I started grammar school down in Wilder across from where the Post Office is now on the second floor. For second grade I went to the opposite end of the village, across from the Parsonage, upstairs. For third grade, I don't seem to remember, but for fourth grade I went to the new [now old] Wilder school. Then I went to the Christian Street School. For eighth grade I went down to Wilder again. I rode an old horse and buggy. For the first years I rode an old school bus. Justin Smith, my neighbor, used to drive it. I remember in wintertime he had an old, big, long, sleigh. I went four years to high school riding an old horse and buggy

with some of the Smith children. We took their horse part of the time and my horse part of the time. I went to high school at the foot of the hill when it was just four rooms and the auditorium. I graduated there in 1923, and I've been out of school for 81 years."



Bertha Perkins at 99

Community involvement has always been an important part of Bertha's life. She remembered, "I spent quite a few years in the scouts. That was around the eighth grade. There was a couple at church, Mr. and Mrs. Cooper who started the boy scouts and the girl scouts and I was active in that for quite a few years. In fact, I would have liked to have kept it up, but once you get into high school, things are different."

"I had Mrs. Kingsbury in high school. Everybody liked her and if

something funny happened, she would laugh with us. There was another teacher across the hall. You could hear her hollering at the kids all around the building. She had no control over the kids. She didn't last long."

In contrast, all of Bertha's children went to the Christian Street School. "My youngest daughter finished and then they closed it the next year."

After high school, Bertha went to Woodstock for a year of teacher's training and taught a year at the Pomfret Center School then went to Keene and got her teaching

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degree. "Then I taught for three years in Lyme and then had my family. In Pomfret, I taught Wests, Thompsons, a Thatcher, and I don't remember the rest. I boarded with the Johnsons."

Of the Woodstock Railroad, which served as Bertha's means of transportation to Woodstock for her teacher training, she remembers, "I rode that. It got me there, but it didn't go very fast. I sure missed it when it was gone, though. I remember one time that I was riding it in the wintertime in Taftsville by the dam with my mother and I said, 'Isn't that dam pretty!' She didn't want me using curse words, so she caught me pretty quick on that one. Even today when I ride by there I remember that."

Growing up on an active farm, Bertha has many memories of farm life over the years. Of farming on Christian Street, she related, "When I-91 was put in, my husband was beginning to lose his health and he was told we would have to put in a bulk tank, I said 'nothing doing'. So we sold the cows and he worked out for another five years or so. Since then we did hay until my grandson took over. He raises beef cattle and pigs. These other farms just stopped. They were all good working farms. Now they are built up with houses. But the one that is on the old Wood place, Barwood, he keeps his place clear. The original farm families on Christian Street have pretty much moved away. I'm pretty much the last of the original ones."

Of shopping during the early years, Bertha said, "When my mother was doing the cooking, we used to have somebody come around with a meat cart. And she knew her meat. She was a good cook. I am not. She used to have boarders and I was always in the way, so I got out of the way. So, I didn't learn to cook. Dan and Whit's used to take your orders and drive around and deliver your orders."

"During the depression, we bought very little. We had to buy our sugar and flour - just the main staples. We were lucky here. We had our own meat and our own vegetables. So, it wasn't as hard for us as it was for some people. We also had plenty of milk and butter, and eggs. Those things counted up, so we didn't suffer much. I used to have to peddle strawberries for a few years, but I never liked to sell them. As a whole, however, I just think we raised enough for our home. The other farms here pretty much did the same, except for milk. We all sold the milk. We also used to can hundreds of jars of

canned goods - now they freeze things."

In 1942, the family suffered a loss that Bertha remembers well. "My barn burned - it took everything - cattle, machinery, everything. Only one manure spreader was left, and they saved three horses. The barn was totally destroyed. In 1938, the hurricane went through here. It took the roof off part of the barn. There was one place where they couldn't fix it, so it leaked. In '42, April, it was very wet and the fire started from spontaneous combustion. The smoke went up and down the silo and out so the cattle were asphyxiated and never made a sound. The milk tester was here and he undid every one of them, but they never moved." The present barn on the property was built later in 1942.

"We had the first electricity up here then it spread on." An uncle from Massachusetts had come up and wired the first floor with basic electricity. "We had telephone before that. It was on the wall and you would hand crank it. We had an outhouse - in part of the woodshed so we didn't have to go outside. A bathroom was put in later on. Before that, we used the old washtubs for baths every Saturday night. Monday was wash day, Tuesday was ironing, and Wednesday was mending." Being one rooted in tradition, she stated, "Even now, I still do washing on Monday."

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Hartford Historical Society

Post Office Box 547, Hartford, VT 05047-0547

<http://www.hartfordhistory.org>

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Bertha was a charter member of the Olcott Falls Grange, Number 506. She remembers that it was organized just before Cascadnac Grange in Hartford (Number 507). "In fact, I think we had our first installation in December and Cascadnac's was in January. There was a Mr. Brown that came around at that time. He organized one in Wilder and one in Hartford and I told him right then and there that one would never last. They were too near together. There was also a new one organized in West Hartford around the time of Cascadnac, but it didn't last that long. I don't remember the year Olcott Falls closed, but when it did, my husband and I joined the Cascadnac Grange. All the others joined the grange in Norwich."

Bertha and her husband were quite active in Grange life. Bertha served in several different offices over the years, mainly as treasurer until she could no longer do so. She recalls one activity common to Grangers of the time, "At Olcott Falls, we used to go around visiting granges a lot. I remember one time, we had a truck and my husband would put hay in the back and give people a ride. There was one girl who was afraid of the thunder and whenever it would thunder, she would take the blankets from all the others. Well, we went to Pomfret that night and for some reason they didn't have a meeting, so we went to Hanover. We were all wet and drizzly, but they accepted us just the same and we had a nice meeting anyway."

In addition to the Grange, Bertha "belonged to the Church in Wilder because all my friends were going there. When that closed, I joined the church in Hartford. I don't go now, but I make mittens for the church and the senior center, and the Grange. I belonged to the World War mothers until they closed. I don't know if there are any of those left or not."

When asked about pastimes or entertainment, Bertha said, "We went to the fair when it was in White River Jct. The fair here never got very big. They had horse racing and more displays of vegetables and canned goods - what people had made and so on. Not all the rides like they have today. I was never much into radio or TV. My husband came home one night with a television and I had a fit. Then I found out he had won it at a raffle or something. For pastime, I did a lot of reading."

After talking with Bertha, it is quite obvious that she is happy to have lived the life she has lived. She is especially proud of her family - five children, 20 grandchildren, pretty near 50 great-grandchildren, and a few great-great grandchildren. Our talk ended with the fact that, "if I make it, I will turn 100 years old in March." March 4th has come and gone and Bertha has now entered her second century living in the house in which she was born.

Happy Birthday, Bertha!



April Program: An Evening with Sol Levenson

Contributed by Dee Chase

The April program of the Hartford Historical Society, to be held on Wednesday, April 13th at 7:00 pm at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ on Maple Street, will feature as our guest speaker, Sol Levenson.

Sol Levenson, best known locally for his murals mounted on the walls of the Norris Cotton Cancer Center at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Memorial Center, is a gifted artist and scholar, instructor in art, accomplished musician, and recipient of three Fulbright awards. At age 93, he continued in 2003 and 2004 to travel to and teach at universities in Mexico and Columbia, South America.

Sol was born in Union Hill, New Jersey on September 3, 1910, the only son of two Russian immigrants. His father was a tailor from Latvia, his mother, a seamstress from

the Ukraine. Sol had three older sisters: Lillian, Fanny and Esther. Brought up in a neighborhood defined by its ethnicity, Sol's memories of his childhood revolve around Passover times, the synagogue and the elders and his uncle Ysaye and his violin playing on May Day. When Sol was 5 years old, his uncle married Mary Calfiloni on May Day. He also recalls going to five-cent storefront movies in Brooklyn to see Charlie Chaplin.

The family relocated to Danvers, Massachusetts where Sol attended public schools, teaching himself to speak English and studying the basics of art by observing and duplicating the various styles of cartoonists. Soon he could identify them by merely seeing their work. At age 8 or 9, he started studying the violin and continued to



Mary's Message

By Mary Nadeau, *HHS Board Chairman*
chairman@hartfordhistory.org

At our June 8th meeting, we will be electing officers to run the historical society during the upcoming year. The board of directors could use some new people with fresh ideas and insights who are willing to roll up their sleeves and pitch in with enthusiasm. Board members are expected to attend a monthly hour-long meeting, held on the fourth Tuesday of each month, and to assist with running the affairs of the society. If you are interested in serving on the board, please contact our nominations chair, John Clerkin, or speak to any current member of the board. As usual, nominations will be accepted from the floor. Please give this some serious thought.

I'd like to thank John Lutz for creating our display for town meeting as well as Peggy McDerment and David Ford who manned the display. Giant thanks go out to Mike Bettis who has repaired the unsightly hole in the

kitchen ceiling of the Garipay House and to Bob Follensbee who gave the ceiling area a fresh coat of paint. The board also deeply appreciates Bob's volunteer efforts in keeping the driveway and front walk clear of snow during the winter.

Our book revision committee has been busy and is now at the point where they have developed a fairly comprehensive listing of things that were not included in John St. Croix's Historical Highlights. We now need to find photos and recruit volunteers who are willing to write a caption for each photo, after the model used in St. Croix's earlier work. Captions will be kept fairly small, up to about 200 words, and should give a brief overview, not a lengthy history. If you are interested in helping out in this way, please let me know.

Our next program meeting will be held on April 13th. Please come and consider bringing a non-member. I have met Mr. Levenson and can assure you that this will be a very interesting program. See you there!



An Evening with Sol Levenson: *continued*

play with musical groups and symphonies for sixteen years. After high school, he attended the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston. He was particularly interested in the works of Winsloe Homer, John Singer Sargent, Philip Little, Mary Cassat and Goya. He found Thomas Hart Benton's work appealing because every square foot had an intensity to the art work.



Scholarship and a work ethic were ingrained in Sol's character. From the age of 8¹/₂, he worked – first weeding and doing various jobs in truck farm gardens and farms; later, he worked at manual labor of all kinds until the summer of 1935. Throughout all these times, he continued to study the written and artistic works of the masters and to observe history in the making.

His first art work for which he was paid was at age 25 when the WPA hired him as an assistant working on murals. He found his own style of painting and was confident of his taste in communicating through his art. In 1975, he took a Sabbatical from teaching at Quincy Vocational Technical School and visited eight European Countries.

Sol moved to Vermont on December 24, 1983, having married Helen Gayle, who was a librarian at Baker Library. During their marriage, they traveled extensively to Europe and South America. Teaching himself to read and write Spanish, and with Helen's encouragement, Sol won a Fulbright in 1995 to teach at the Universidad Vera Cruzana, Mexico, another in 1997 to return to the same school, and yet another in 2001 to teach at the Instituto de Artes, Medellin, Colombia, South America.

The murals at the Hitchcock became his passion after his daughter Margery died from cancer. Sol realized that his work was the product of the imprint made by society. This has been reflected in all his work - the country scene in the hallway near the MRI unit at DHMC speaks to the time when he worked as a logger in the woods, and demonstrates his understanding of the culture of rural life. Each of his murals is related to an era in his life where he worked at a trade or absorbed the details of a particular time. Hence, the county fair or the railroad or the steam fire engine are all part of his memory, put on canvas for the rest of society to study and enjoy. The only murals he painted from having researched, rather than lived, are those of the Indians and the one now in progress - the Shakers. With the death of his beloved Helen, his art and teaching abroad became an ever more important part of his life. He also continues to do some painting on commission and one of his smaller paintings was donated to the Alice Peck Day Hospital in memory of his daughter Margery, who died there. A professional photographer records Sol's murals, copies of which Sol donates to the Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital to sell for the benefit of the Norris Cotton Cancer Center.

Sol's longevity has not dulled his memory nor inhibited his continual learning process. His intellectual prowess, his understanding of history and the world around him, his spiritual insight and his willingness to share his gifts with others, are reflected in the talent he shares with us all. Although not a native Vermonter, Sol has developed deep roots in this area; he and his work are a welcome part of Hartford's history.



Then & Now...

The two photos below, show the West Hartford Church as it appears today (on the right), and as it appeared over 100 years ago as an active church in the village of West Hartford. The building sits on Route 14 and the photo shows the old West Hartford School in the background,

which today is a private residence. The church, built in 1832, has been unused for many years and has caught the attention of local and state preservation commissions as the building continues to deteriorate.

Photos: John St. Croix and James Kenison





A Look Back

Events that made the news in Hartford

30 Years Ago (March/April 1975 – *Valley News*)

- Plans are under way to push a park project for the banks of the White River, a 1976 bicentennial festival and the possible construction of a permanent display for Hartford memorabilia.
- Hartford may soon have a new ice hockey rink. The roofed-rink proposal has received 50 per cent funding from the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, 35 per cent state money from last year's rec budget and the remaining sum has already been raised by solicitation. The only fly in the ointment is where to locate the \$214,000 facility.

60 Years Ago (March/April 1945 – *The Landmark*)

- Louis Hebert died at his home on Fairview Street, after an illness of two weeks, caused by a shock. Mr. Hebert's work was gardening, and he was employed as gardener for the Misses Lyman, now deceased, on Maple Street, for 45 years. In addition to his work as gardener he had charge of the grounds and all the work around St. Anthony's church.
- Miss Elaine Margaret Mock, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Carl Mock of White River, and Dr. Colin C. Stewart, Jr., son of Mrs. Zoe Stewart and the late Dr. Colin Stewart of Hanover, N.H., were married in St. Anthony's rectory Friday forenoon, April 7, at 10 o'clock. Mrs. Stewart was graduated from Hartford High school in 1940, and from the Nurses Training school at the Mary Hitchcock Memorial hospital in Hanover in 1943. Dr. Stewart is a graduate of Hanover High school and Dartmouth College in 1923, and is a physician at the Mary Hitchcock hospital.

110 Years Ago (March/April 1895 – *The Landmark*)

- School in district No. 5, Mrs. Herbert Adams, teacher, closed March 1. Number of scholars 34. The average standing is as follows: Carrie Hazen 94, Emma Hazen 87, Nina Hazen 82, Blanche Hazen 79, Seymour Hazen 94, Leon Hazen 84, Jennie Hazen 93, Annie Hazen 85, Della Huntley 90, Isaac Huntley 71, Thelbert Huntley 82, Guy Huntley 82, Ralph Howard 82, Eula Howard 87, Roscoe Munsell 91, Chauncey Munsell 91, Erwin Newton 94, Elmer Newton 82, Willie Pitkin 70, Jennie Walbridge 86, Charlie Tucker 84.
- Ex-Gov. and Mrs. Samuel E. Pingree, the latter as school director, attended the meeting of the school directors of the towns of Windsor Co., at W. R. Junction, Tuesday.
- Olcott – E. Carpenter's little boy has the mumps.



Curator's Corner

By Pat Stark, *HHS Archivist*
archivist@hartfordhistory.org

The Society has received 24 issues of Alumni Day Newsletter, but we are missing these years: 1966, 1970, 1974-76, 1980, 1994-96, 1998, 2003-04. Any help in obtaining them for the collection would be appreciated.

We have been informed that the restoration of the stage curtain from the Grange hall will take 5 days and cost us \$1000. The Vermont Painted Theater Curtains Project of the VMGA will cover the additional \$5930 needed to cover the cost of repairs. In addition, they would require involvement from the community. Training would be offered on how to care for the curtain once it is restored. The society is looking at ways to raise our portion of the

project cost. Any ideas and volunteer assistance would be greatly appreciated.

I would like to thank David McDerment for building radiator frames for the Garipay House to help with humidification.

If you have the chance, please visit our new display at the White River Post Office. Throughout the year, this display will focus on lost businesses and buildings in White River Junction.

Our collection continues to grow, and, as always, we are looking for volunteers to assist with our monthly open houses. If you are interested in volunteering, please let me know.



It's a Mystery!

Can you help us identify any of the people in the following photographs from the Society's collection?

If so, please email archivist@hartfordhistory.org and let us know!



March Photo 1 – Fire Chief Hutchinson with unknown firemen and scouts, presumably from White River Jct.

March Photo 2 – Unknown Hartford Grammar School students on jungle gym outside the school.



March Photo 3 – Unknown soldiers in White River Jct., on the Municipal Building lawn – the building was probably the White River Grammar School at the time of the photo.



Hartford Historical Society

POST OFFICE BOX 547

HARTFORD, VERMONT 05047

NEXT MEETING:

An Evening With Sol Levenson

Wednesday, April 13, 2005 • 7 PM



HHS Calendar

- Tue., March 1, 2005 Open House - Garipay House,
1461 Maple Street/Route 14,
Hartford Village, VT, 6:00 - 8:00
pm. Come and see our collection.
- Sun., March 13, 2005 Open House - Garipay House,
1461 Maple Street/Route 14,
Hartford Village, VT, 1:30 - 4:00
pm. Come and see our collection.
- Tue., April 5, 2005 Open House - Garipay House,
1461 Maple Street/Route 14,
Hartford Village, VT, 6:00 - 8:00
pm. Come and see our collection.
- Sun., April 10, 2005 Open House - Garipay House,
1461 Maple Street/Route 14,
Hartford Village, VT, 1:30 - 4:00
pm. Come and see our collection.
- Wed., April 13, 2005 April Program - *An Evening
with Sol Levenson*. Greater
Hartford United Church of
Christ, 1461 Maple Street/Route
14, Hartford Village, VT, 7:00
pm. Come enjoy a special pro-
gram followed by refreshments.
- Tue., May 3, 2005 Open House - Garipay House,
1461 Maple Street/Route 14,
Hartford Village, VT, 6:00 - 8:00
pm. Come and see our collection.
- Sun., May 8, 2005 Open House - Garipay House,
1461 Maple Street/Route 14,
Hartford Village, VT, 1:30 - 4:00
pm. Come and see our collection.