



# HARTFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

• HARTFORD, VERMONT 05047 •

HARTFORD • QUECHEE • WEST HARTFORD  
WHITE RIVER JUNCTION • WILDER

Volume 6, Issue 2 • SOCIETY NEWSLETTER • May 1993

## *May Meeting . . .*

### Annual Business Meeting - Wednesday, May 12

Our annual business meeting will be preceded by the Third Annual **Potluck Supper at 6:00 pm**. Please bring a food dish to share with others and your own plate and utensils. Forks and cups will be provided. The **business meeting will be at 6:45** with election of officers for the coming year. We hope to have a full slate to present to the membership and additional nominations will be accepted from the floor. We will have Historical Tour maps of White River Jct., Wilder, and Center of Town at the business meeting.

The Meeting will be

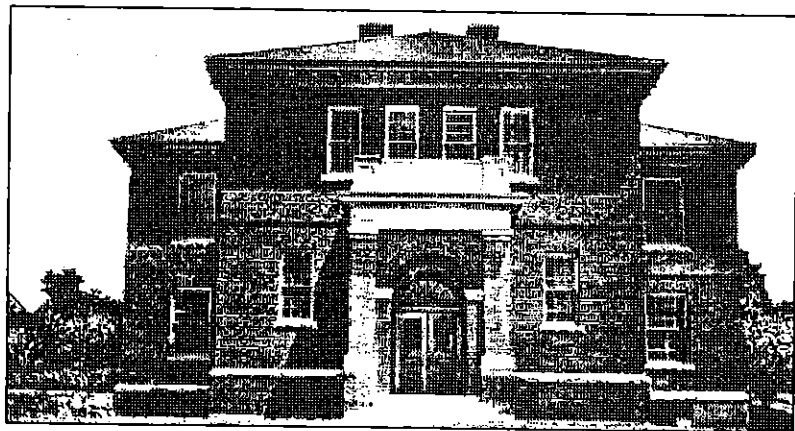
**Wednesday, May 12, 6:00 PM**

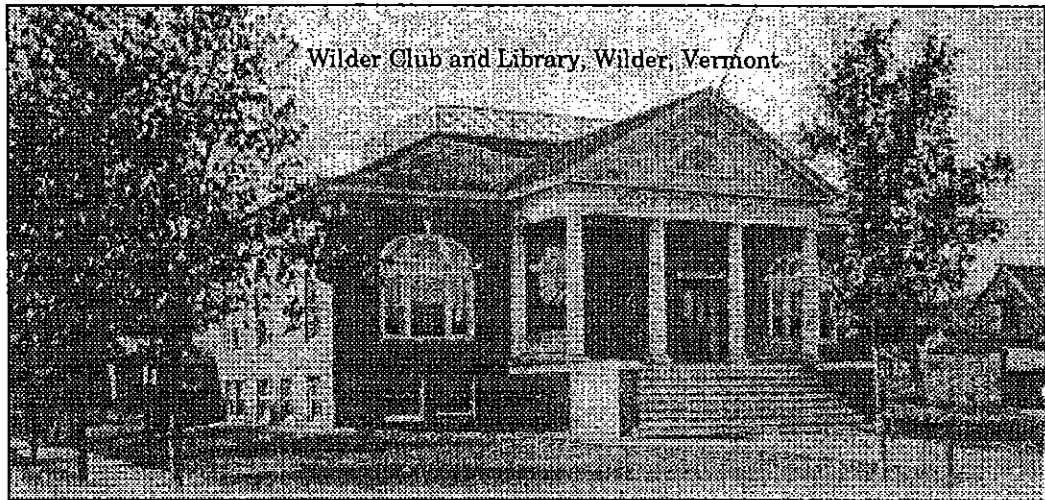
at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ  
Route 14, Hartford Village

**The Program:** At 7:15 children of the third grade, Hartford Elementary School will present **Hartford Village 100 Years Ago**. They become the real people of the past and share historical facts about Hartford with us. Some fourth graders will show their school history projects. This has been a year-long project for the school, as this is the last year that the Hartford Village children will attend school here.

*Hartford  
Grammar School  
Built 1907*

Photo from Historical  
Society Collection





Historical Society Collection Photo

## Wilder Remembered

by

Collamer M. Abbott

Among Hartford's villages Wilder is unique. It has no "Main Street," only avenues. It is also unique, I believe, in being a planned community, laid out in a rectangle we called "the square," with bee-line sidewalks, grass borders and rows of trees, with sidestreets that made smaller rectangles and more streets that wound away to the river or the hills. The long sides of the rectangle are Hartford and Norwich Avenues. East of the tracks is Passumpsic Avenue, taking its name from the days when the steam cars ran through on the Connecticut & Passumpsic Rivers Railroad.

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**PART III**  
of a  
**5-Part Series:**

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Look at an early map and there is empty space; farms perhaps (recalled by the present Chandler Road and Terrace and Gillette Street), a sawmill on Dothan brook, "French & Chandler" paper mill on the Connecticut River. The broad terrace filled after the Wilder brothers dammed Olcott Falls in 1883 and built a paper mill. Before that John G. Henry, a medical student at Dartmouth, wrote his fiancée that on clear, calm nights he could hear the roar of the falls in Hanover three miles away.

The paper mill developed into a full-fledged industry and the village into a community with skilled and unskilled workers of several nationalities—English, German, Cornish, Scotch (enough to celebrate Bobby Burns's birthday), Polish, Irish and Italian, and Little Canada, a settlement south of the village. But all nationalities mingled in the village proper and although each may have had something to say about the others, I don't remember any race riots.

## **Wilder Remembered** *(continued)*

We played, studied and suffered together in the depression Thirties.

The 1880s and 90s were hectic days of home building as the mill grew and businesses multiplied. All still existed in my boyhood of the 1920s and 1930s when Wilder had matured and then entered the first stage of its career as a bedroom town. The mill closed in 1927 after labor troubles and strikes that affected a number of mills along the river. There was hopeful talk of the mill being reopened, but gradually the workers migrated or found jobs in Hanover, White River and other places.

There we were with an eight-room brick grammar school built in 1912 to replace an earlier wooden structure. My mother from Eastport, Maine, came to teach in that first year, convinced that Wilder was the "end of the world." There were two churches, Methodist and Congregationalist, organized in the late 1880s. There were a freight station and spur track to the mill, and a passenger station, where as late as 1943, the train from Montreal could stop at 3 a. m. on a cold January night to pick up a lone passenger headed for parts of the world he had only dreamed about.

Unusual (at least in spelling) was the Wilder Clvb [sic] and Library, the gift of Charles T. Wilder just before the turn of the century, a true community center with bowling alleys, card, pool and billiard tables, exercise gear, theater, library and reading room.

The business district ("downstreet"), at the Norwich Avenue-Depot Street angle, was still alive in the 1930s. There was Cannell's general store, Danforth's with its Tootsie Rolls and penny trinkets, Johnny Banana's fruit store (he walked around the village taking orders in the morning and delivered on foot in the afternoon), A. J. Trottier's drugstore and barber shop with its community shaving mug, Mr. McKnight's shoe repair, Carbonneau's garage, the post office, even a shoe store at one time and more businesses I have forgotten.

Neighboring our house on Hartford Avenue at the northwest angle of the rectangle was F. I. Palmer's general store with everything from buggy whips to dollar Ingersol pocket watches, brown sugar and salt pork in barrels, men's dress shirts with detachable celluloid collars, four-buckle overshoes, grain, hardware and yard goods—and Tootsie Rolls and licorice sticks. At one time, a domestic ferret dwelling in the cellar, caught mice and rats. And in the barn "Tige" who delivered orders to the village, Christian Street and East Wilder. When they had to shoot "Old Tige" in the backyard, even I felt the end of an era. The new age arrived with a Chevrolet pickup for deliveries.

Where Wilder Automotive and Tip Top Tire were on Hartford Avenue, was once a livery stable, then Beattie's trucking business, and then a filling station and convenience store. It seems to me there were a beauty parlor and other establishments I have forgotten. Maybe that was later.

The corner now occupied by the post office and Ken's Country Store was Mr. Ricker's garage.

*Continued next page . . .*

## Wilder Remembered *(concluded)*

How to describe that youthful wonderland? We could play baseball or football or hockey on numerous empty lots. We could swim in Dothan Brook or the saw mill pond and in the Connecticut with a private bathhouse and diving raft at the present picnic ground. We could boat and skate and fish up and down the river, on a pond in East Wilder, or "the culvert" and below the dam. We could hunt and trap and camp in "primeval" forests where we explored and dug for nonexistent Indian relics. If I inadvertently whined to my mother,

"I haven't got anything to do," she would say, "Mow the lawn," and immediately, I was "too busy."

Wilder was a combination of all the above and more, including the intangibles—the insistent bell sounding the hours from the steeple clock Mrs. Palmer gave to the Congregational Church; the time bootleggers stole Uncle Carroll's new Model T from the church shed; Christmas caroling around the village that inevitably ended in a snowball fight; the mournful, reassuring whistle of the locomotives; and one night when we "camped out" in Ralph Roberts' garage beside the railroad tracks, I swore it came right through that garage, obliterating me and all those blissful days of yore.

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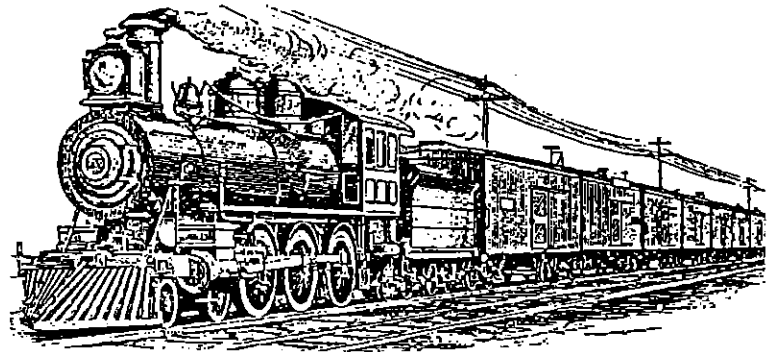
*Collamer Abbott was born in Wilder and dreams that he never left.*

### ***Coming Up:***

On October 2 and 3 **The Glory Days of the Railroads**, sponsored by the White River Chamber of Commerce and River City Arts will be held, with many events planned, including a visit by AMTRAK's new passenger rail car and a model railroad exposition.

At our September 8th meeting, **H. Arnold Wilder**, Assistant Secretary of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, and **John A. Goodwin**, Treasurer of the Boston and Maine Railroad Historical Society will be the speakers.

They are bringing slides and photographs and their years of interest in railroading. Mr. Wilder writes to us that they speak to groups for "mutual pleasure, especially to appreciative audiences who may share our interests." Mr. Wilder is the surviving member of the group that gave Engine 494 to White River Junction. The Hartford Historical Society joined the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, Inc. last Fall and we will have a copy of their newsletter at our meeting for your inspection.



## ***Fifty Years Ago:***

1943 wasn't that long ago, if you remember black-out curtains, rationing, scrap drives and war bonds. Hartford town report of 1943 listed 318 men and women in the service.

In October, 1942, Robert Gilman, manager of the White River Jct. branch of the Vermont Hardware Company, and Ralph Richards, salesman, (both had been trained as machinists) added more machines to the small piston grinding machine shop of the Hardware Company and made it a war factory doing 100% war work. Mr. Richards became shop foreman. Old-time machinists like Emory Mallach and Henry Shepard came out of retirement to help out. Other highly skilled men joined so that at the peak, the shop had 22 full-time machinists and a "Victory" shift of about 6 part-time people who, when their day's work was done elsewhere, put in four or five hours at night.

The shop produced a suprising variety of machines, principally for the manufacture of radio and radar equipment for the Navy, and the workers received the Navy "E" for excellence award for their manufacture of 800 specially-designed machines used in making parts for the proximity fuse, one of the most important weapons for winning the war.



### ***Recommended:***

At the Vermont Historical Society Museum, Montpelier ***Winning the War at Home: Vermont During World War II.*** The exhibit will be open until December 31, 1993 The museum is in the Pavilion Building, on State Street.

Hours are Tuesday - Friday, 9 - 4:30, Saturday 9 -4.

Photographs, clothing, etc. and a corner of a living room in 1943 where you can listen to 1943 radio.

### ***Do You Know Who She Is?***

Unidentified lady working at Vermont Hardware Machine Shop during World War II.

From Priscilla Gadzinski photo collection.

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*The Tower on top of the Old Fire Station in White River Jct., was used for drying the 50' canvas hoses. They were hung from the top down through a hole to the basement, where 3-5 feet above the floor the water could drain out.*

## Recent Gifts

The Society thanks the following individuals for their recent gifts:

**Herbert Adams** - postcard of covered bridge in White River Jct., 1913

**Fred Bradley** - Items from Myrtle Lodge, IOOF 1979-1980

**Sondra Stevens** - 8 photographs of the 1913 and 1936 flood

**Anonymous** - Photograph of Hartford Bridge, 1929; Commemorative program, Congregational Churches on 150 anniversary of arrival of Rev. Aaron Hutchinson, Hartford's first settled minister.

**Evelyn Stevens, Town Treasurer** - copy of the 1761 Town Charter; miscellaneous town items from Treasurer's Office.

**Jack Loftus** - copies of Hartford pages of Vt. Register & Farmers Almanac, 1826-1849

**Helen Kash** - colored picture of her mother, Helen Hoffman-Rust

**Margery Bennett** - postcards, receipts from many White River Jct., businesses 1917, 1918.

**Town of Hartford**, print block of 1935 Post Office.

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From AMERICAN AGRICULTURIST - December 1888

### SUNDRY HUMBUGS

#### The Soap Man Abroad

"A very soapy imposition has been perpetrated recently in some parts of Vermont. A man goes through a section, leaving at each house a box supposed to be filled with soap; also an extra sample cake for trial. Soon after the wily agent returns, and in nearly every case the box is returned. He opens it and several cakes are found to be missing. The fellow charges the lady of the house with having taking them, and persists in the assertion with so much bluster that she finally pays for them, to get rid of him, notwithstanding the fact that there is no legal ground for the claim.

*Moral:* If an unknown man insists upon leaving a closed package of soap at your house, set the dog on him."

#### **HARTFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Office: Room 110, Municipal Building, White River Jct., VT 05001

Hours: By Appointment

Priscilla Gadzinski, *President*, 295-2364 • Mary Nadeau, *Vice President*, 295-2123

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of March, May, September and November at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ, Route 14 in Hartford

**PEOPLE OF OUR PAST:**

**HARTFORD VILLAGE**

**100 YEARS AGO**

*Hartford Village  
Players*

**SPRING 1993**

Step back in history with us to Hartford Village in the late 1800's. Meet the folks of yesteryear and learn as you go. All characters are true and the information they will share with you is based on fact.

#### CAST OF CHARACTERS

**Mr. French**-the village iceman  
played by *Andre Dean*

**Mr. French's Helper**-John  
played by *Ryan Kennedy*

**Mr. Louis Newton**-architect & dance teacher  
played by *Brian Murray*

**Mrs. Almira Morris**-wife of Ephraim Morris, owner of the chair factory and woolen mill  
played by *Heather Morse*

**Kate Morris**-daughter of Almira and Ephraim Morris  
played by *Kelly Halpin*

**Annie Morris**-daughter of Almira and Ephraim Morris  
played by *Chelsea Rector*

**Mary**-friend of Kate  
played by *Debbie Malcher*

**Mr. John Brown**-chair factory worker  
played by *Jeff Coutermarsh*

**Mrs. John Brown**-chair factory worker  
played by *Christie O'Dell*

**Mrs. Bannagan**-millinery shop owner  
played by *Heather Ferrick*



**Mr. Luther Pease**-hardware store  
owner

played by *Eric DeFelice*

**Mr. Allen Pease**-son of Luther

played by *Brian Murray*

**A.D. Childs** order taker-clothing &  
food store

played by *Megan Lallier*

**A.D. Childs** store clerk-Rachel

played by *Amber Christie*

**Mr. Will Braley**-postmaster

played by *Andre Dean*

**Mr. Horace Pease**-businessman and  
benefactor

played by *James Martin*

**Mrs. Seraph Pease**-wife of Horace  
and library supporter

played by *Heather Ferrick*

**Train Conductor**-Woodstock

Railroad employee

played by *Joseph*

*Vaillancourt*

**Mr. Charles Cone**-treasurer & part  
owner of woolen mill

played by *Caleb Poissant*

**Mrs. Kate Cone**-wife of Charles &  
daughter of Ephraim Morris,  
community organizer

played by *Kassie Audette*

**Miss Alice Cone**-daughter of Kate  
and Charles

played by *Amber Christie*

**Mr. Morris Cone**-son of Kate and  
Charles

played by *Brian Murray*

**Mr. Guy Stowe**-chauffeur and  
gardener for the Cones

played by *Joseph*

*Vallancourt*

**Mrs. Truell**-housekeeper for the  
Cones

played by *Christie O'Dell*

**Mrs. Gillette**-embroidery shop  
owner

played by *Kelly Halpin*

**Mrs. Annie Stevens**-grown up  
daughter of Ephraim Morris, a  
musician

played by *Debbie Malcher*

**Paul Stevens**-son of Annie and  
Roland Stevens, a violinist

played by *James Martin*

**Dr. Horace Wells**-dentist who  
discovered laughing gas for dentistry

played by *Kevin McLeod*

**Ladies of the Reading Circle**

played by *Christie O'Dell,*

*Kassie Audette, Amber Christie,*  
*Debbie Malcher*