



# HARTFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

• HARTFORD, VERMONT 05047 •

HARTFORD • QUECHEE • WEST HARTFORD

WHITE RIVER JUNCTION • WILDER

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## *November Meeting . . .*

Our topic will be the Flood of 1927 and the program will begin with the video, "And the Rains Came Down" which was produced from films taken at the time of the catastrophic flood. Following the video we encourage audience participation. Please share with us your memories, old photos, newspaper articles, memorabilia or stories handed down in your family. Students from the fourth and six grades, who study Vermont history, have been invited to attend.

The Meeting will be  
**Wednesday, November 10, at 7:00 PM**  
at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ  
Route 14, Hartford Village



*Birdseye view of White River Junction, VT., looking across the White River from "Tafts Flats." Many people were rescued in boats in various parts of the city.*

### ***From the President:***

With sorrow we report the death, on October 6, 1993, of Winfred Derosie, a Charter Member of the Society. We extend our sympathy to his wife, Anita.

We are very grateful for the generous gift from Mr. Loretta Caripay of \$1,000 to the Hartford Historical Society in memory of her husband, Dr. Stanley Garipay. Dr. Garipay served our community as family physician and friend for well over half a century.

Congratulations to Dorothy "Dot" Jones who was elected vice president at our last meeting. Dot replaces Alma Bradley who had kindly agreed to serve as vice president pro tempore in the interim.

— Mary Nadeau

### ***Fund Raising***

In the hopeful anticipation of having our own building as our headquarters, soon rather than later, the Board of Directors wants to explore methods of raising funds for that purpose. Several suggestions have been made which run the gamut of labor intensive, needing volunteers, to capital intensive, requiring the purchase of items for resale.

The suggestions which require volunteers include periodic bake sales, or providing free coffee and home baked goods at the interstate highway rest stops with the expectation of receiving donations in return. It was also suggested that rather than having periodic sales, one massive effort be made at an appropriate time.

There were two suggestions for offering items for sale, primarily items which have the potential of being collectable. One was "The Cat's Meow Village" featuring historic buildings in Hartford. If the initial issue was successful, there would be annual issues thereby creating a collection of Hartford Township. Another suggestion, although more costly to buy and sell would be cast iron truck banks made by Ertle which would have some Hartford identification printed thereon. These would be similar to those now being sold by Agway, John Deere, Tru-Value, and others.

All of these suggestions, and hopefully others, need to be evaluated from the marketing, financial and manpower considerations. The Board members are looking for assistance from one or more people to perform this analysis. If you find this of interest and challenging, please contact Fred Bradley or Mary Nadeau.

### ***The Flood of 1927***

The flood of November 1927, was not exclusively Vermont's. Numerous fatalities, said to exceed in number of the vast floods of the Mississippi region earlier in the same year; hardship and suffering quite as keen; property damages running high up into the millions, were experienced in other parts of the Northeast, notably in the Province of Quebec, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. The fact that upon Vermont fell the major part of all this has given the calamity the title in the popular mind of the Vermont Flood.

## The Flood of 1927 *(continued)*

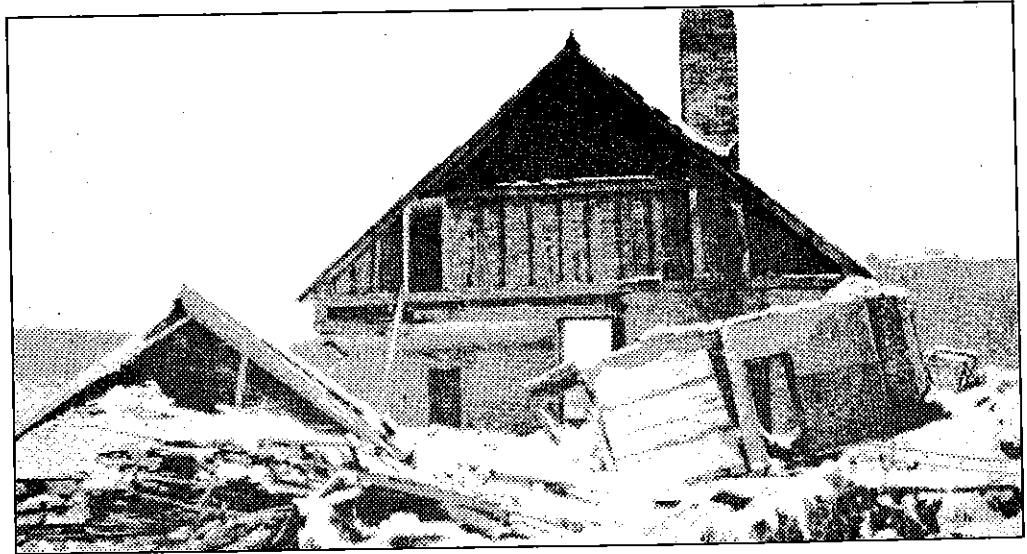
It had been a glorious autumn. A cool spring and a summer at no stage excessively hot had been followed by two months of wondrous beauty, with a steady procession of almost perfect weather. With but two or three frosts coming late in October, and only one of these a killing freeze, the harvest season was long and propitious.

The local weather prophets who predicted, "We shall get our pay for this later" went unheard. If any thought were given this matter it was "Snowfall will come late this year - we have had so much rain."

One quite peculiar phenomenon had been noted during the later summer and fall. Whenever a considerable rainfall had occurred, and there were several of them, the streams had risen very quickly. The "run-off" was heavy. On October 4th there was a heavy rain and the rivers overflowed their banks. The construction work and the equipment employed at the Central Vermont bridge between Royalton and South Royalton completely washed out. Nine days later, almost the same thing happened again, heavy rain and high water. As November arrived, the soil everywhere held abundant moisture and the streams were more than normally high.

In the evening of Wednesday, November 2, a warm rain began to fall. It started as a mere shower, and was expected to be no more but, almost from the start, it rained hard. It continued to rain through the night. When morning came, the rain continued right along without diminution in volume. Still, nobody felt concern. It was just another of those "good rains" that were giving plenty of reservoir storage for winter's demand. Hour after hour the rain fell without slackening. Past noon, and into the afternoon it came. And then word spread that the streams were very high, and rising fast - higher than in '25, when much ruin was wrought in some localities. With sandbags and everything that would serve as an impediment men tried to fight the waters that were rising by inches before their eyes, and then the night came. With dawn of Friday, November 4th, it was still raining, although somewhat abated, and now the terrible damage could be seen. A single twelve hours had completely changed the landscape, and in many places the geography, of practically all the river and brook courses of Vermont.

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*Typical of the flood damage sustained by West Hartford.*

## **The Flood of 1927** *(continued)*

Whole meadows of fine land were gone. Electrical service, gas and water and sewerage systems were out of commission, railroads were paralyzed, highways were disrupted, telephone and telegraph lines were gone, and scores of towns were completely cut off from communication with the world, or even their neighboring communities.

The White River valley laid directly in the course of the great storm and its large basin received a very heavy precipitation. The concentration of rain the first 24 hours, the inability of the soil to absorb it, the heavy "run-off" and the steep narrow water courses produced the unprecedented rise in stream levels, the violence of the currents and the attendant destruction. The total number of inches of rainfall in White River Junction in 24 hours was 6.58 (in Somerset it was 9.65, Rutland 8.55, Woodstock 7.38)

**West Hartford:** The flood which descended so suddenly upon the village of West Hartford Thursday evening, Nov. 3, left devastation in its wake. It became apparent about 6 o'clock that the water was rising very rapidly. At 8 o'clock the low places in the streets were filled with water enough to make them impassable and the people fled their homes for higher land. Unbeknownst to them, the dams for hydro-electric power at Gaysville, Bethel and Sharon had gone out, the river in each case washing a new channel around the construction. The second house to be swept away hit the long covered bridge across the river and both house and bridge collapsed. Every dwelling and building between the street and river was carried away and the river changed its course to flow where they stood.

**Hartford Village:** Several houses were either washed away or badly inundated by the waters, roads and culverts were made impassable and property damaged. The mill of the Hartford Woolen Company was badly washed, machinery soaked and other heavy damage sustained. The long bridge across the White River at Hartford Village, said to have been the longest bridge wholly within the state of Vermont, and the old covered bridge at West Hartford, both going out in the early hours of Friday morning, left the bridge at White River Jct. the only highway connecting link with the south side of the river.

**White River Junction:** The water rose so fast (over two feet an hour) that in many instances the occupants of the dwellings in the stricken area barely escaped with their lives, and very few were able to save any property. In the Nutt meadow section many acts of heroism were noted in the rescue work. At that point the waters of the Connecticut rose so swiftly that many were forced to flee their homes in their night clothes, wading, swimming or being conveyed in the few available boats. Owing to the swift current, no boat could live in the raging torrent, and ropes were thrown from dry land to the houses in the stricken section to guide the boats in their rescue work.

Emery Carpenter, aged 70, refused several attempts to be rescued from his home on Nutt Lane, and it was not until late Friday forenoon that Officer McGoveren took him from the attic of his barn, which was surrounded by water fifteen feet in depth.

Police officer Henry B. Leavitt was probably the most prominent man in the life saving work, making trip after trip in boats to bring occupants of the houses to safety, and in several cases entering the cold and swift waters and swimming to the rescue of some unfortunate, who would otherwise unquestionably have been lost. He was assisted by William Miller, Mark and Raymond Powers, Charles A. O'Neill, Ephraim Adams, John Reynolds and many others.

Several young ladies, lead by Misses Charlotte Elliott and Marjorie Rice, prepared coffee and sandwiches and doughnuts in the kitchen of the Hotel Coolidge, and took the hot food and drink to the almost exhausted workers.

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The waters flooded the basements on lower Maple street, climbing to the surface of the new cement road and to a depth of several feet, filling the houses as far west as Hazen street with water, mud and debris up to the first floor. During the night the White River climbed first to the fire station basement and the buildings in the rear, then to the surface of the highway bridge, pouring from both ends of the bridge and both banks into the streets, flooding the stores and buildings on Bridge street at both ends of the bridge.

The water spread into the Grammar school yard, surrounded the building several feet deep, flowing in the windows of the lower floor, and damaging the foundation to a considerable extent. At least two hundred houses were partly submerged, some being entirely washed away and many business blocks and stores were badly damaged. Water backing up through the sewers caused heavy damage to the merchants on Main Street.

Train service both in and out of White River Jct. was stopped. The Ambassador, northbound Thursday afternoon, could not continue its run. The passengers were quartered in the Hotel Coolidge and such other places as could be provided. The last train was the night mail from Boston, Thursday, which arrived and turned back toward Boston, getting as far as Canaan.

**Quechee:** The bridge in the village over the Ottauquechee River was badly undermined, the woolen mills of the Harris-Emery Company and of the A. G. Dewey Company were badly flooded so that work was suspended, and the highways washed so as to be almost impassable. The landslides and washouts at the "Hogback" between Taftsville and Quechee, damaged the Woodstock railway to the amount of \$20,000.

**Wilder:** Wilder suffered apparently the least of all although several homes were flooded and considerable damage done at the plant of the International Paper company. Great fear was felt for the Wilder dam, where the earth was washed from the ends, letting a huge flow of water down the Connecticut, but even the immense pressure of the seething waters failed to move the new dam so solidly built on bed rock a year ago. Had that dam given way it is hard to say what the damage would have been.

Many of the homeless were in desperate circumstances, having lost their all, their employment being temporarily suspended, no homes to go to and no money to purchase the necessities of life. In one case Sunday afternoon a visitor at a tenement on Maple street found a family of five small children and their mother in a room destitute of any furniture, with no bedding and very little clothing, all five of the children suffering from the croup. The room cold and desolate, and filthy from the flow of the waters. The mother said they had no food since Saturday night. They were taken to comfortable quarters and food and medical attention were provided. This was only one of the many harrowing experiences through which many were forced to pass in this crisis, but help was available as soon as the need was seen. All fraternal and charitable organizations in the town did all they could to relieve the suffering. The various physicians of the town turned out to assist, and the White River Jct., branch of the Red Cross opened emergency headquarters in Gates Library.

The handling of the United States mails proved a problem. The local postoffice force and a number of railway postal clerks who were marooned, went to work getting mail transportation in progress, all of the service as it left White River Junction being by truck, connecting with the railroad at some distant point.

The Boston and Maine and the Central Vermont Railroads were both heavy losers in the flood, their new freight yards, which were largely composed of fill obtained and placed in position last fall and winter at the expense of more than a million dollars, having been badly undermined, a large portion of the Central Vermont yard having been completely washed away.

## **The Flood of 1927** *(continued)*

During the work of clearing the tons of wreckage from the Connecticut River at the railroad bridge between White River Junction and West Lebanon on Saturday morning, Edward McGee of West Lebanon and Lawrence Laroe of Enfield were drowned. There were working under the bridge on the steel girders, and slipped and fell into the waters below.

Immediately following the flood President Coolidge sent Secretary Herbert Hoover to view the damage, and Mr. Hoover made a helpful survey and recommendations. The State Legislature under the leadership of Governor John E. Weeks undertook the costly task of completely rebuilding the bridges, highways and public property lost in the flood.

Locally, the Red Cross Committee, to clean up the mud and silt, enlisted the help of 500 Dartmouth students, who were given free passage from Hanover to Hartford and West Hartford by the B. & M. and VT Central.

*From: FLOODTIDE OF 1927, compiled by Luther B. Johnson, printed by Roy L. Johnson Company, Randolph, VT 1927. (This publication is a compendium of reports, largely taken from local newspapers and rewritten into a general story covering the Vermont situation. The above article is an abridged account of how the Flood affected the Town of Hartford, plus additional items from the November 10, 1927 issue of THE LANDMARK (Wright Collection).*

### **Recent Gifts:**

The Society thanks the following individuals for their recent gifts:

**William and Rosalie Wyman**, 70 color contact prints, with negatives of Quechee Village, May 1969.

**John Rogers**, 41 photographs of railroading in and around White River Jct.

**Richard Steward**, souvenir mug, Hartford Library Centennial; and T-shirt with Glory Days of Railroad, 1993 logo.

**Mr. & Mrs. Fred Bradley**, marble top from hat stand of A. E. Watson estate; souvenir mug, Hartford Library Centennial.

#### **HARTFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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

Hours: By Appointment

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

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 Village.