



Hartford Historical Society

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

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

Volume 17, No. 3

SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

November-December 2004

Paronto: Last of the Mill Workers

by *Dan Mackie*

Valley News Staff Writer

By one account, Dewey's Mills in Quechee was nearly a worker's paradise.

An A.G. Dewey Co. brochure from the 1940s called it "a grand place to live, work and raise a family. There is no smoke or overcrowding. Instead, there is an abundance of sunshine and fresh air, and there is work enough to satisfy a person's desire for accomplishments."

It boasted that people came to work at the big woolen mill there and stayed, including four generations of one family. More than 60 workers had been on the payroll more than five years. "These records mean employees who are happy and satisfied," it claimed.

Ward Paronto Sr. was among the mill workers. So were his father and an uncle. His brother, too. And, for a few years, his sister.

Paronto, who lived in West Hartford much of his life and died in December [2002] at the age of 77, was part of the last great generation of New England mill workers. He carried a metal lunch pail to the job. He worked among noisy, clattering machines. He fixed them with oversized wrenches.

If it wasn't paradise, it was a decent living. His family says he liked the work. "He worked there so long he knew all the ins and outs," said one of his sons, Ward Jr. "He felt comfortable knowing what he was doing."

Paronto was born in Eden, a small town in northern Vermont, in 1925. His grandfather owned a farm there and his sons worked with him. But making a living from the land was tough even before the depression hit.

Paronto's father moved the family to Hartford around 1930. His sister, Arta Grambling of Woodstock, said they probably came looking for work.

Work was to be had at Dewey's Mills, where Albert Galatin Dewey and partners built a woolen mill in 1836. A good water supply provided power. Raw wool was available, too, since Hartford counted 13,207 sheep on its farms in 1836.

A company-sponsored history written 100 years later



Dewey's Mills in 1880. Notice that A. G. Dewey is standing on the office steps.

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was full of pride and optimism. Dewey's Mills by then included 63 company buildings. The A.G. Dewey Co. owned 1,400 acres of land, mowed a ball field and offered free garden plots. It rented homes to workers and, according to the company history, had "a fine boarding house which prides itself on its excellent food and cleanliness." Generations of the Dewey family owned and ran the business.



Workers at A. G. Dewey Co., 1940's

In World War II, the mill made wool blankets for the armed forces. One local history says it produced material for baseball uniforms for the Red Sox and Yankees.

Jack Paronto of Hartford said his brother probably made \$12 to \$14 a week in his early years at the mill in the early 1940s. Ward Paronto lived in West Hartford village and drove to work 6 miles over the rolling countryside. He met his wife, Marilyn Kenison, in the village. They lived near the general store and owned their own home. They'd been married for more than 50 years when she died in 1999.

Paronto repaired carding machines at the mill and worked his way up to supervisor. Carding was one of the steps in production. Before wool was spun into thread or yarn, it was combed, or carded, to straighten fibers and remove impurities.

Mill work wasn't always steady, although Dewey's was steadier than many. His brother said Paronto worked double shifts sometimes and was laid off for periods. He'd pick up work at area farms, but Paronto didn't like the farmer's life. "He didn't like animals that much," his sister said.

Paronto may not have entirely shared his employer's

views about the worker's paradise. His son Eric said "He was a big union man," and supported union drives.

Like many of his generation, Paronto had seen that life wasn't always easy. "He wasn't happy-go-lucky," said a son, Eric. Paronto worried about his family and chewed on political issues, too.

In his free time, Paronto liked to garden, hunt and fish.

He pitched for a town baseball team when he was young. He didn't travel much, family members say.

He didn't have to -- he could hunt in woods nearby and fish in the White River or fish as close by as Wilder or Sharon. Sometimes the family drove up to Eden to see the old family farm.

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Hartford Historical Society

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A 1953 Valley News story about the A.G. Dewey Co. said it employed 200 workers and had a half-million dollar annual payroll. "This is one of the very few Upper Valley enterprises contributing so heavily to the economic health of the area," the story said.

It didn't last, however. In 1957, word got out that the federal government wanted to build a flood-control dam in Quechee. It would take almost the entire mill property.

Only four homes from the old mill complex survive, two of them originally Dewey family homes. Carol Dewey-Davidson of Quechee said the government took the land and buildings by eminent domain. "It was the oldest mill of its kind in the U.S.," she said.

The owners relocated operations to the Hartford Woolen Mill and the Baltic Mill in Enfield. Just about that time, New England mills were migrating to the south in search of cheaper labor, and foreign competition was getting stronger. The A.G. Dewey Co. ceased operations in 1972.

Paronto worked in Hartford, Lebanon, Enfield, and may have driven to other mills as far away as Claremont and Newport in search of work. A son, Ward Jr., worked with him one summer at the Hartford mill. He said Paronto was a "laid-back" boss. "He didn't go around shouting orders or anything. ... He worked, too. He was a working supervisor."

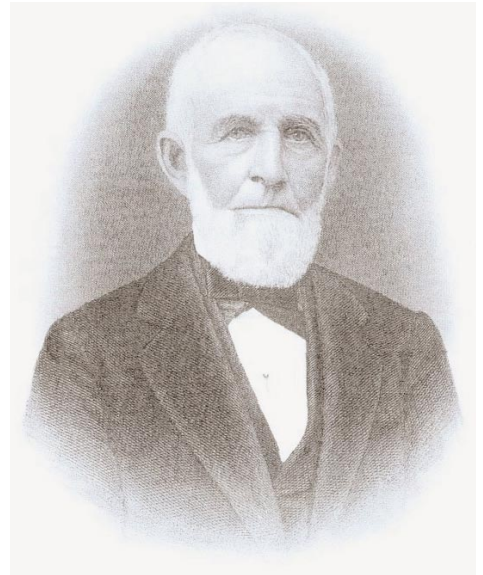
When Paronto was about 50, almost all the old mills were gone. "It was sad," said his sister. "So many people worked in the mills."

Change was hard for him, his family said, but Paronto wasn't bitter about it. He found a job in maintenance at Dartmouth College, where he worked until 1987.

In retirement Paronto liked to read – "He read everything," family members said

– and discusses politics (he leaned toward the Democrats and programs for working people). When he visited his brother Jack's home, they'd talk for hours inside, then they'd walk out to the car and Paronto would get in and Jack would stand outside. Paronto rolled down the window and they'd talk some more.

Like a lot of people, Paronto sometimes thought of his birthplace as home. He talked about going back to Eden. His sister recalled, "He always said when he retired, he'd move back, but he never did."



A. G. Dewey

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A. G. Dewey Company

Reprinted from Employee Handbook, circa 1940's.

In many ways, 1836 was a momentous year. The cry, "Remember the Alamo!" rang through Texas as Sam Houston defeated Santa Ana and brought retribution for the massacre of Davy Crockett and his gallant band. In New York City, the once famous Aaron Burr died quietly in obscurity. By lamplight, Samuel Morse experimented with the electromagnets which were later to operate his telegraph.

America was growing. New stars appeared on "Old Glory" as Michigan and Arkansas were admitted to the statehood, and the railroads cautiously thrust their silvery threads westward through the wilderness. Missionaries, by pack horse and on foot, had at last reached Fort Walla Walla on the Columbia River thus establishing the first settlement in northern Oregon.

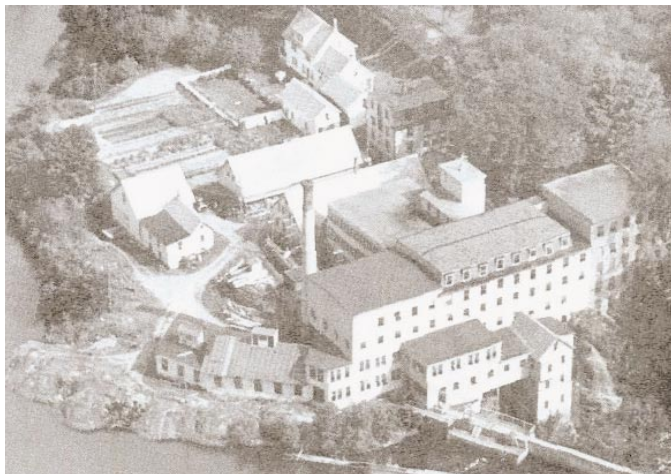
Ambitious men everywhere sensed the surge of the country's forward movement, and felt that the time was at hand for the development of individual ideas. Among them was Albert Galatin Dewey, a young man just past his thirtieth birthday. From his experience as a skilled millwright, he determined to build and operate a woolen mill of his own.

Funds for this project were furnished by good neighbors, while he himself contributed a sound knowledge of textile machinery and processes. Equally important, he brought a sincerity of purpose and steadfast confidence which was to serve the young company well in later years.

Many obstacles were found in the path of the new venture,

continued on next page

among them being the lack of rail transportation and supplies of raw materials. After three years of operation the debts had mounted to \$15,000. However, so great was the faith of the creditors in the serious eyed, persevering Albert Dewey, that additional funds were found. New machinery was purchased and a shift made in the source of raw materials.



Aerial view of A. G. Dewey Company

In 1841 the company showed a profit, and by 1856 every debt had been discharged. While the following years brought success to the company, Albert Dewey took greater satisfaction in the knowledge that his ideas had been sound, and that his friends' confidence in him had been wholly justified.

Before he died in 1881, he took keen pleasure in the fact that his two sons had entered the firm: John J. Dewey, who later became president in 1874, and William S. Dewey in 1876, who subsequently became Treasurer. Both men had prepared for their duties at Norwich University. Since each brother was ideally suited to his office by temperament and ability, the company prospered and expanded under their skilled guidance and direction.

In 1904, James F. Dewey joined the company as superintendent, after his graduation from Lowell Textile School. In 1931, following the deaths of John J. and William S. Dewey, he was elected to the positions which he holds today, that of President and Treasurer.

James F. Dewey has a wide interest in affairs connected with the state and community. He is now serving as President of the Associated Industries of Vermont and Chairman of the Republican State Committee of Vermont. He is a trustee of Norwich University and Worcester Academy, and is a Vice President of the National Association of Wool Manufacturers. R. Dewey is the founder of the Rotary Club in White River Junction, is a past President of the Chamber of Commerce, a past State Senator, and is on many State Committees. He has, in fact, always given graciously of his time and ability to community affairs.

The fourth generation of the family to serve the company is represented by William T. Dewey. After his graduation

from Dartmouth College, he took a year of concentrated study at Lowell Textile Institute. He worked his way up through the mill to his present position of Vice President and General Manager.

Throughout the years the A. G. Dewey Company has been managed by members of the Dewey family, folk who live in the village of Dewey's Mills, who are interested in their state, community, and their neighbors who are fellow employees.

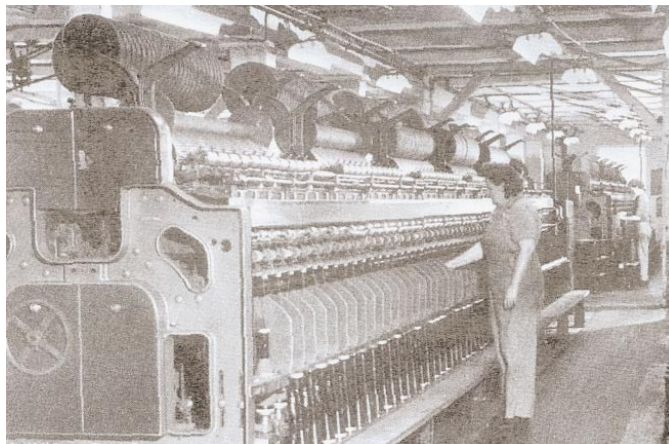
Owner-management has always stood for progress and, as in the past, the officers of the company are forward looking and alert to changing conditions.

With capable and experienced management in the office, trained and willing hands in the plant, the A. G. Dewey Company faces the post-war period and the future with assurance and confidence....

The A. G. Dewey Company is proud of its position in the textile world and proud of the employees who have helped to win and hold this place. In appreciation, the management has been earnestly interested in every employee, and each new worker who joins the Dewey family. Every innovation, whether labor-saving machinery or other device, which will increase production and mean more pay in the weekly envelope, has been installed or considered.

Whenever possible, promotions are made from within the plant. The superintendent, Charles F. Banagan, was trained here, as well as his brother, William H. Banagan, the master mechanic. The boss weaver rose from a loom fixer, the boss spinner and the picker house boss from an ordinary hand. All second hands in all departments were trained in the plant. It is the wish of the company that all overseers could be promoted from among the Dewey employees. Any ambitious man who is anxious to succeed will find that there is always room in the mill for promotion.

The plant is located at the head of beautiful Quechee Gorge amid 1400 acres of land, much of which is covered with pine forests. Dewey's Mills is a grand place to live, work, and raise a family. There is no smoke or overcrowding; instead, there is an abundance of sunshine and fresh air, and there is work enough to satisfy a person's desire for accomplishment.



Interior of Dewey's Mills, 1940's



Mary's Message

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

There has been a lot of activity in and about the Garipay house during the past few months. Thanks to a very generous donation from Ron Therriault, we were able to get badly-needed repairs done to the back porch roof, pieces of slate replaced on the main roof and tar applied around the chimney. The work was done by Mike Bettis, who also did some repairs on the siding adjacent to the driveway. Mike is now in the process of doing an assessment on the entire building to determine what else needs attention.

Bob Follensbee is at home recuperating from multiple injuries sustained in a late-September car accident. The many hours he donates each year toward keeping the grounds in excellent condition are deeply appreciated. Earlier this year, Bob applied two coats of paint to the front porch at his own expense. We wish you a speedy recovery, Bob!

I want to thank Sue Ellen Shambo for helping me to stain the new shingles on the front porch. They are now hunter green to match the trim on the house.

Peggy McDerment did an outstanding job in designing, planting and maintaining the beautiful flower beds in

front of the house. Meanwhile, her husband, David McDerment, built several platforms to go under display items inside the house.

Anyone else wishing to assist with the upkeep of the house is encouraged to contact any of the directors. Our building continues to be a "work in progress"!

The book project committee held its quarterly meeting on September 26th. We are still in the process of determining the content for the updated book.

Two photo days are being planned for the Bugbee Senior Center. At the first one, to be held on November 9th, a group of the Society's mystery photos will be on display in hopes that some of our seniors can help in identifying the people and places. At the second one, which will take place on November 16th, seniors are invited to bring in photos of people, places and events from their own collections. We hope to discover some interesting photos that could be added to the book or the Society's archives. Best of all, we have the technology to scan the photos and then hand them right back to their owners.

Our November program sounds very interesting. David Briggs is an excellent speaker and has a passion for the history of our community. That winning combination guarantees us an evening that is entertaining as well as informative. See you there!

November Program

What's New in White River Junction?

A presentation by David Briggs

On Wednesday, November 10, David Briggs will be the guest speaker at the Hartford Historical Society's November program. This program will be held at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ on Maple Street in Hartford Village, at 7:00 pm. Please join us as we view White River Jct., then and now.

David shares:

"In the summer of 1979 I left my engineering job in Minnesota and moved my family back to Vermont. My father, Fred Briggs, made it possible as he "hired" me away on that leave of absence to study White River Junction to see what we thought the prospects were for major revitalization.

After I had returned to Minnesota I called back to a friend from Hartford High School days and had him

take a roll of photos of the downtown area. The reason was that I was considering, among other things, a major project on the Hotel Coolidge.

These photos have now been "retaken" this fall (2004) and it is possible to see what changes have occurred in the village over the 25 year time frame. In some respects many things have remained unchanged. The details reveal major changes however, and the photos make it possible to talk about the details and stories that have come with them."

Come and see both sets of photos and hear the stories and engage in a discussion on the details. History once again will present much to talk about in the context of shaping the future.

Refreshments will be served following the program.



A Look Back

Events that made the news in Hartford

30 Years Ago (*November/December 1974 – Valley News*)

- Hamelin Dupuis, the Republican challenger from Quechee, said Friday he is rolling up his sleeves to go against Reps. Norman E. Reed, a cross-filed Democrat-Republican from White River Junction, and Stewart A. Rouse, a Democrat also of White River Junction.
- Merritt Cavanaugh and Barry Aldrich, both ninth grade students at **Hartford High School**, joined Wallace Kessler, environmental instructor, on an 83-mile bicycle trip to Stowe.

60 Years Ago (*November/December 1944 – The Landmark*)

- Mrs. J. J. Stetson had a narrow escape from serious injury one morning last week when a horse she was about to hitch became frightened and threw her to the ground and bolted for the **Ballam & Knight** barn going through the fence where he demolished the vehicle he was hitched to before being caught.
- Barbara Tucker has moved to Cherryville, Kansas, and Rosemary Holbrook to Hartford, leaving only thirty-five students in the fifth grade [at the White River Jct. Grammar School]. The **Victory club** gave the girls a party, many presents and each girl \$1.20 in money.

110 Years Ago (*November/December 1894 – The Landmark*)

- West Hartford – R. C. Munsell has fitted up a neat little office for the telephone which is now in working order.
- A junior branch of the **Total Abstinence Society** was organized at **St. Anthony's church** last Sunday afternoon by the pastor, Rev. Longergan, at which time about forty young members pledged themselves to total abstinence.
- We had a fore-taste of winter on Monday night when about one inch of snow fell attended by a chilling wind promotive of rheumatic joints and debilitating grip.



Curator's Corner

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

Donations keep coming in – Dorothy and I are keeping busy processing them! From time to time I will use this column to share information on preserving your treasures. If you have a specific question, let me know – I have several resources where questions can be researched, and a list of people to call if that doesn't work. The following is from *My History is America's History* from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Display or store your treasures in a stable, clean **environment:**

- Filtered air
- Temperature below 72 with little fluctuation
- Humidity between 45 and 55 with little fluctuation

These are also temperatures and humidity levels that are comfortable for you.

Location is important – avoid heat sources, outside walls, basements and attics.

Light is probably the biggest enemy – sunlight and fluorescent lights will quickly fade and discolor most of your treasures – especially fabrics.

Keep an eye out for **Pests** – insects, rodents: look for holes in furniture and textiles, wood shavings and tiny droppings. Consult a conservator if you find these – many household products will damage your treasures!

Daily damage – historic objects can be harmed by abrasive cleaners, dry-cleaner bags, glues, adhesive tapes and labels, pins and paper clips, acidic paper, cardboard or wood, pens and markers.

Repairs – don't do it! Even simple seeming repairs, if done incorrectly, can permanently damage your treasures. Consult a conservator.



Your Society at Work

August 2004

Dear Pat,

Thank you so much for your help over the past school year as well as your willingness to assist with our future projects. Without your help this past winter, Sarah Rooker, Steve Glazer and all of the Team D 8th graders would not have been able to get started on researching Hartford Civil War soldiers. You have also helped us get off to a great start of our new tree inventory project. Access to the old maps of Wilder will really make this an inter-disciplinary project.

Thank you!

We all look forward to seeing you again.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Boeri-Boyce & the Team D 8th
Graders
HMMS

Dear Pat,

Thank you for sending the copies of the Society Newsletter. Reading them brought back a flood of memories of my childhood days in Hartford.

I am sending a return envelope for the enclosed snapshot that was taken on the doorstep of a house we rented when my family first moved to the area. It shows how children were dressed in the early 1920's.

Later, my father purchased a little house on School Street where, one of six children, I was brought up by my widowed mother. My father was a victim of a bronchial pneumonia epidemic that took the lives of three fathers in the little village in 1922.

If the enclosed memoirs would be useful in your record keeping you are welcome to use them.

Sincerely yours,

Alberta Patch-Slegaitis

[Editor: Enclosed was a written set of memories of Hartford Grammar School from 1921 to 1928, where the writer attended as a student. This would have been prior to the time that Alice Smith, as featured in the last issue, worked at that school.]

Hartford Historical Society's

Online Genealogy Forum

HHS Online

Features New Genealogy Forum

Be sure to visit the society's website at www.hartfordhistory.org. In addition to information about the society, past newsletters, and our calendar of events, the site now features several new tools. You will now find a photo gallery which will be updated about every 6 to 8 weeks. Currently featured are photos of the Quechee Gorge and area mills. A new Genealogy page features links of genealogical interest and forms for researchers that may be downloaded. Instructional materials will be added soon. Another popular feature is our new Genealogy Forum, where you may place Hartford-related genealogical queries, or respond to the queries of others.

Please visit the site often and share your comments and suggestions with our webmaster by email at webmaster@hartfordhistory.org.

Visit the Hartford Oral History Project
Website

Now Online at

<http://ohp.hartfordhistory.org>

Help Wanted!

Volunteer to coordinate the maintenance and updating of the Society's display at the Quechee Post Office.

Ideally, the display should be changed every other month – items for display may be picked up from Pat at the Lister's Office during the day, or other arrangements may be made.

Please call Pat Stark if you can help provide this valuable service, 295-3077, Monday – Friday, 9 am to 4 pm.

Hartford Historical Society

POST OFFICE BOX 547

HARTFORD, VERMONT 05047

NEXT MEETING:

What's New in White River Junction?

Wednesday, November 10 • 7 PM



HHS Calendar

Tue., Nov. 2, 2004 Open House – Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 6:00-8:00pm. Come and see our collection.

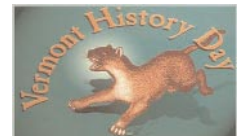
Sun., Nov. 7, 2004 Open House – Garipay House, 1:30-4:00pm. Come see our collection.

Tue., Nov. 9, 2004 Photo Day – Bugbee Senior Center, White River Jct, Lunchtime. A group of the Society's "Mystery Photos" will be on display with the hopes that some may be identified.

Wed., Nov. 10, 2004 November Program – Greater Hartford United Church of Christ, Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 7:00 pm. Local businessman David Briggs will present a "Then & Now" series of photographs of the White River Jct. area that were taken 25 years apart. Refreshments will be served following the program.

Fri., Nov. 12, 2004 Vermont History Day Workshop for Educators - Vermont History Center, 60 Washington Street, Barre, Vermont, 9:00 am-3:00 pm. \$10.00 regis-

tration (includes lunch). For more information about Vermont History Day or other Vermont Historical Society educational programs, contact Amy Cunningham at 802-479-8518 or acunningham@vhs.state.vt.us.



Tue., Nov. 16, 2004 Photo Day – Bugbee Senior Center, White River Jct., 12:30 pm. Seniors are invited to bring in photos to donate to the collection. (Photos may be scanned and returned.)

Sun., Dec. 5, 2004 Open House/Book Update Committee Meeting – Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 1:30-4:00pm (Book Committee Meeting begins at 2pm). Come and see our collection. Members of our Book Update Committee will discuss the progress and next steps to be taken in updating John St. Croix's *Historical Highlights*.

Tue., Dec. 7, 2004 Open House – Garipay House, 1461 Maple Street/Route 14, Hartford Village, VT, 6:00-8:00pm. Come and see our collection.