



Hartford Historical Society

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

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

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SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

September 2003

The History of the Ely Mines

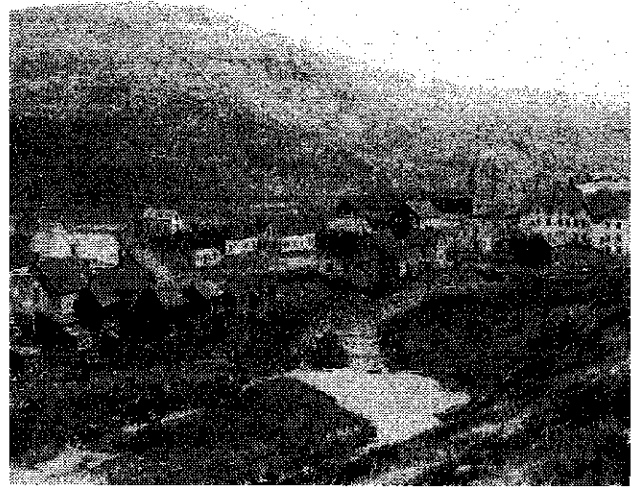
Wednesday, September 10, 2003

7:00 pm

United Church of Christ
Hartford Village

The West Fairlee Historical Society will present a program on the Ely copper mine and Ely village, Vermont's vanished mining boom town, at 7:00 p.m. at the Grater Hartford United Church of Christ in Hartford Village on September 10, 2003. The presentation by Jim McDade includes a documentary depicting the site in 1876. Come join us for this fascinating story about a unique and little known aspect of Vermont's history.

Collamer Abbott, the foremost authority on the area's copper mines, will be joining us and will be available to answer questions.



View of Ely village

A Short History of the Ely Mine

The Ely copper mine is in one of three areas of mining operations in Orange County, Vermont: the Foster (or Cleveland) and Elizabeth mines on Copperas Hill in South Strafford; the Union, Cuprum and Eureka mines on Pike Hill in Corinth; and the Ely mine on Dwight Hill in Vershire. To the first group goes the honor of being the oldest, the Foster mine dating from 1793 (1). Thompson's History of Vermont (1842, p. 167), says the discovery was made by two men out tapping trees. The earliest mention of the discovery found by Abbott was in Niles' Register, XXXIII (November 17, 1827), p. 181 (2). The first group also claims the longest-lived of all the copper mines, the Elizabeth mine, operating (with interruptions) until 1958. The second group includes the Union mine, which produced 31,504 tons of ore (of 8.5-10% copper, after cobbing). The Union mine was reported to have been discovered by a fox hunter chasing a fox into his den in 1847 (as reported in the [Burlington] Daily Free

Press, June 6, 1854, p. 2, col. 4, again in the Daily Free Press of January 25, 1855, p. 2, col. 3, both quoting the Northfield Star), but Hemenway disputes this, stating the mine was discovered by three men on an excursion (3).

But it is the Ely mine which boasts the deepest shaft, at three-thousand four-hundred feet (4) or three-thousand six-hundred feet (5) or even four thousand feet (6), and the most remarkable history. From the discovery and investigation of an outcrop with a "burnt appearance" (7), some four hundred feet above the valley floor (8) reportedly causing fire-balls and smoke (9) or, according to Blaisdell, when John Richardson's daughter Betsey pulled her leg out of a soft hummock she stepped on after a rain-storm in 1812 and noticed it was covered with orange dirt (10) or, as Dec asserts, the notice by a farmer of a rock scuffed by his oxen's shoe (11), interest was generated in

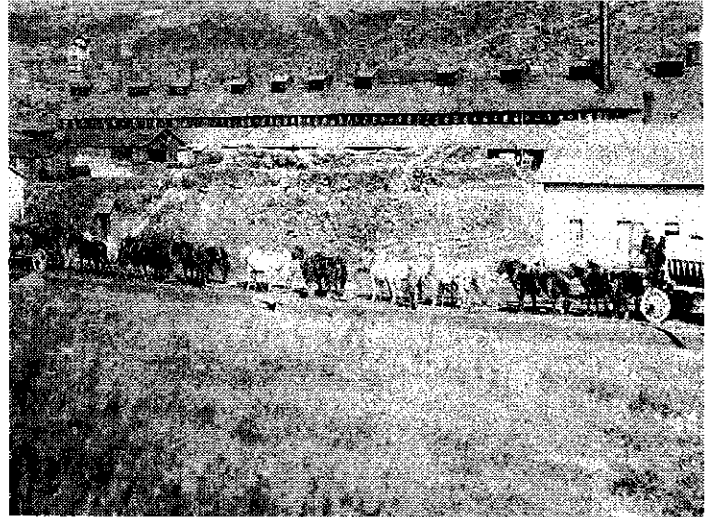
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1821 in what lie under Dwight Hill. The Burlington Daily Free Press alludes to reports dating back to 1800, but was unable to verify any such report, even by the "oldest inhabitant" (12).

Around 1820, group of local farmers formed the Farmer's Company (13) and produced copperas intermittently until 1853. Isaac Tyson, whom Abbott regards as "probably the leading industrial chemist of the day" (14) began purchasing mineral rights as early as 1830 to the area. The Vershire Copper Mining Company was incorporated by Stephen F. Spencer, Hiram Bliss, William Richardson, Philip Matoon, Junior, Sherborn Prescott and others (15). Sometime thereafter, (1833? -with the charter of the Boston Copper Mining Company, Act 40, Laws of Vermont 1833, p. 84 or 1838? -with the charter of the Vermont Copperas Co, Act 17, Laws of Vermont 1838, p. 83) he and Amos Binney (and William Reynolds, John Head and Richard Sullivan) began to drive an adit (a horizontal tunnel) to intersect the vein at some distance from the southern surface of the hill. In two years, they had driven in ninety-four feet without striking ore (16)

and Tyson's partners became uneasy and discontinued the project over his objections (17). Abbott suggests the financial panic of 1834 influenced this decision (18). The Company remained in existence, assuming from the presence of an amendment to their charter in 1858 (19).



18-horse team pulling ore to processing shed

Coming Events

11th Glory Days of the Railroad

Saturday September 6, 2003 10 am - 5 pm. This is a family-oriented, fun-filled, day-long celebration of railroading- past, present and future. 2002's event was named Top 10 Fall Events by the VT Chamber of Commerce. Minimum \$1 per person featuring Kiddie Live Steam Train Rides, Oral History Presentations, WRJ Lions Club Classic Car Show, Historic Displays, Photo Contest, Crafts, Music, Food & Entertainment all day. The White River Junction Methodist Church will be holding a Turkey Supper that evening. Excursion Train Rides - Music Entertainment - Rail Cars on Display - Free Parking

The 2003 Glory Days of the Railroad Festival is dedicated in Memory of Daniel Willard (1861 to 1942)

- 1861 Born in Hartland, Vermont
- January 15, 1910 Daniel Willard becomes B&O's fourteenth president

- October 1916 President Wilson appoints Daniel Willard to Council of National Defense Advisory Commission
- March 1917 Daniel Willard elected chairman of the Council of National Defense Advisory Commission
- April 11, 1917 Daniel Willard meets with top railroad leaders to coordinate the nation's rail network for the war
- 1917 Chicago Junction, Ohio changes name to Willard, Ohio in honor of Daniel Willard, President of the B&O Railroad
- January 11, 1932 Daniel Willard makes the cover of Time Magazine. "He has a conscience in dealing with labor," said Time magazine. AFL-CIO President William Green called Willard "deserving of honor and tribute."
- June 1, 1941 Board of Directors elects Daniel Willard Chairman of the Board
- July 6, 1942 Daniel Willard dies at the age of 81

1927 Flood

Stephen Perry

Stephen Perry, letter to Grace Parsons, his cousin, 20 November, 1927, Hartford Historical Society, 2003.35.01, original spelling, uncorrected typed ms.:

[stationary] Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Vermont Office of Deputy Secretary Hartford, Vermont

[typed] Dear cousin Grace:

It certainly is nice of you to be thinking of us in our times of stress and strain and to write such a nice little letter to us. Conditions in Vermont in many places are quite terrible but fortunately, we have not been hit very hard here. Compared to what happened in Waterbury or West Hartford, our affair was sort of Sunday School picnic. About 6:30 our boss mechanic heard over the radio that conditions in Waterbury Montpelier were pretty bad. At 7:00 he found our river was rising. This was Thursday night, November 3. He telephoned to Morris who stopped for me. When we got to the factory, the water was just beginning to come into the basement. We called in a crew of men and moved out the dyed wool we had stored there. Before we finished, the men were going about in water well above their knees.

About 10:30 I decided to come home for a change of clothing. The water was still rising but we did not expect any great trouble. While home I thought it would be a good idea to get some coffee and sandwiches to take to the mill with me. Before I had them ready, the mill bell rang calling the men in again. Before I had left, the water was coming up fast enough so you could actually see it rise. I got back over to find that we were moving the finished goods out of the finishing room. The highest water on record with the "old timers" was six inches on the finishing room floor. How we worked to get those goods up to the next floor. We didn't have the elevator for the water forced us to put out the fires and let off the steam. The men were very loyal and we worked hard. But before we finished there was water on the floor of the finishing room. Having moved the finished goods and dye stuffs the men tried to save a new generator which we had just uncrated ready to install. There were other things standing about which we moved onto tables to get them out of the reach of the water. I don't suppose I

will ever forget how I walked down the length of that finishing room in water above my knees, looking for things I left behind. In places the water rushed in so fast that it was difficult to stand. While we were working word came that the West Hartford bridge had gone out and we heard it hit our bridge.

When we had finished the moving, we, Morris and I, went out to look at our bridge and we decided that the better part of valor was to keep off it. So we retired to the office to eat our sandwiches and drink our coffee. The water was still rising. Occasionally there were loud crashes and we would rush out to see if the bridge were still there.

It was certainly was terrible to watch that water. About 2:30 our little stenographer came in. She lives at the Junction and wanted to see what was going on. Through her we were able to send word to Alice and Jessie of our state for before this time our telephone had gone out of service. Alice, fortunately, had not expected that I would return. At four o'clock the final crash came and with electric flashes, the bridge went. The water still rose. Morris and I took the books from the safe and started for a farmer friend who lived in the hills. We expected that the mill would follow the bridge into the river. The water must have reached its highest point just about this time.

Coming back the next morning after a very refreshing breakfast we found the mill still standing. The water had come within two or three feet of the weave room floor - the street level - and was seven or eight feet higher than any record of living residents. Friday afternoon we were able to cross the White River at the railroad bridge at White River Junction and join our families. Saturday we were able to enter the mill. I hope I never see such a sight. There was mud on the finishing room floor four feet deep. In the center the floor had given way. There was mud every where. The dyehouse was a wreck.

For two weeks we have been working to repair the damage done. We do not dare estimate the cost. We do know that our style will be cramped for several years

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to come. But two weeks after the flood we were able to weave cloth which speaks wonders for the energy of my brother-in-law.

Here in the village there were no lives lost and with a few exceptions, no great damage done. Two miserable tenement houses across the river were washed away and some barns and sheds. One of our tenement houses is a wreck. The damage to the town, by the loss of two bridges and wash out of the roads will probably be in the neighborhood of \$300,000.00. In White River Junction quite a number of families were made homeless and some were taken out just in time. I am glad to say that our boat aided in some of the rescue work. We have been so busy with our own troubles that I have not been able to get around to see the damage done. I do not think the papers have over stated it. The Dartmouth boys have not been in our village. They have done some good work at the "Point" about a mile below here and they also have done some fine work at West Hartford, which village is a wreck. There the river, I understand, took the main street for its channel and just played havoc.

Alice and I wanted to see you when we were down country last time. The trip was a hurried one. We hoped to make another this fall but Alice had her tonsils out and one thing and another held us here. Now we can't afford it. But we will come to see you all sometime. We remember your nice visit with us last fall and want to have you repeat. But we realize that we must do our part.

The boys are all well. Alice is tired. Peter is still a very heavy care. He does not walk and weighs slightly under a ton. This certainly has been a year to remember! Please give my very best regards to all of your family. If you think that this letter would interest the people in Worcester, by all means send or take it up to them. A flood is not a thing easy to write about. I have seen all the water I want to for some time. I don't think I will ever forget that raging river which so easily picked up our bridge, carried it a quarter of a mile and left it a tangled mass of ruins.

Sincerely yours,
[signed] Stephen

Vermont History Expo

A big THANK YOU to all the volunteers who helped out with our booth at the History Expo in Tunbridge June 21-22 - events like this are important for us to be present at and couldn't happen without all your help.

A special THANKS goes to John Lutz, who practically created the entire exhibit for us, set it up and tended the booth with his wife Ruth! Others were Tom Houghton, Lorna Ricker [who did a double shift!], her friend Clyde, Phyllis Shambo and her friend, Leslie Rench, Dot Jones, Judy Barwood and David Ford who carried our sign [made by Judy] in the Parade.

FOR GENEALOGISTS

The Wisconsin Historical Society now has much information on line:

- The Wisconsin name Index at www.wisconsinhistory.org/wni
- Vital Records Search and Civil War Service Records at www.wisconsinhistory.org/genealogy.ogrs/
- Roster of Wisconsin Volunteers 1861-1865 at [ww.wisconsinhistory.org/roster/](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/roster/)

Also a reminder that the Hartford Library is the local Genealogical Center. We do have some items in our collection, also.

2nd Fall Meeting to be held in October

The October Meeting will be held on **Tuesday, October 21**. This is a **change** from our normal November Meeting due to the speaker's availability. Jim Bisslend will speak on "Mysteries and Strange Happenings in the Connecticut River Valley Area". Make your plans to attend now—this promises to be an intriguing meeting.

The Gilletts

From "The Old and the New",
by the Ladies' Reading Club

The first Gilletts in Hartford were Israel and John Gillett of Lebanon, Connecticut. Their father, Ebenezer, was one of the charter proprietors of the town, though he never came to Hartford. They settled on the west bank of the Connecticut, at White River Falls, in 1768, and built the first house in Wilder, a log cabin, just south of where the International Paper Co's office now stands. The Wilder plain was then covered with magnificent old-growth pine trees, which were later cut down and burned to clear the land. The first winter the brothers kept their oxen at Dothan, where in the summer they had cut hay on a meadow cleared by the beavers, now owned by Mr. Frank Smith. They went up every day on snowshoes to feed the oxen. Later they had a stack of hay or straw near the house at Wilder, but no barn. The cow was kept near this stack. One night a pack of wolves came and drove the cow over to the gully and killed her.

To get grain to mill at Charlestown, NH, they were obliged to put it on the back of an ox and have the ox swim across the Connecticut just below the Lower Falls.

Lieut Israel's wife came all the way from Lebanon, Conn. On horseback, carrying her three-months-old baby in her arms and one the horn of the saddle an iron dinner kettle filled with apple sprouts, not apple-sauce, as Tucker has it. The apple trees which grew from these sprouts are remembered by persons now living. Mrs Gillett arrived at her journey's end in the forenoon, while the men were away at work. She prepared dinner, blew the horn, and, hiding behind the door, gave her husband a great surprise on his arrival.

In their Connecticut home there may have been special friendship and sympathy between the Gillett family and Eleazer Wheelock, for when he came to Hanover NH to set up his Indian School, both Lieut. Israel and John Gillette gave him land, the one hundred acres near the Norwich line, in 1771, and the other sixty acres somewhere in the southwest part of the town the following year. Both brothers were public-spirited men. Lieut Israel took an active part in the military affairs of the town.

John Gillett built and lived in the house on Christian Street afterwards occupied by his son, Azro Gillett. Another son, Billa, lived in the gambrel-roofed house next

door. One morning when Billa Gillett went to his barn, he found a wolf in the stable and killed it with a pitchfork. John Gillette and his wife, Jemima, were both so corpulent that they had to have a wagon and a bed made specially large and strong for their use. We are able to reproduce their pictures, with that of their daughter Jemima. In his old age John Gillett used to sit in his front dooryard and watch people go by to Hanover Commencement. His chair, a large, square one, is still in existence. Lieut. Israel built and occupied the house where his grandson, Daniel O Gillette, lived, no occupied by Mr. Kinsman. His son Roger lived and died in the Reuben Loveland house. Four Gillette families, therefore, lived at one time on Christian Street in as many different houses in sight of one another. The house and farm now owned by EA Gillett was occupied by his father, Nathan Gillett, from about 1840.

Of Lieut Israel's son Israel the following story is told: "He went up to Lancaster in New Hampshire to bring home his bride. For some reason the wedding did not take place, and, as he was returning home on horseback, he met with an accident, breaking his leg. He was kindly cared for by a family named Sanborn, of Haverhill, and the next year married the daughter, Mary Sanborn."

Lieut. Israel and his brother John died the same year, 1829, Lieut. Israel at the age of ninety-one. In the family Bible, now in possession of EA Gillett, a slip of paper is pasted on which Lieut. Israel wrote as follows: "My grandfather, John Gillett, was taken by the Indians, Sept 16, 1696, and returned home and died at Lebanon, Conn, in April, 1755. My father, Ebenezer Gillett, was born June 5, 1705, &c., &c." This was John Gillett of Deerfield, Mass, whose father, Joseph, was one of the earliest settlers of that indian-afflicted town, whose brothers, Joseph and Samuel, were doughty Indian fighters, and whos sister-in-law, Hannah Jennings, with her two young children, Samuel and Hannah Gillett, were carried captive to Candad, from Hatfield, in 1677. John Gillett's own adventures in captivity were not behind those of his fellow townsmen. He, too, like them, was borne up the great river which later was to be the highway for emi-

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Upcoming Events:

- **The History of the Ely Mines**, Wednesday, September 10, 2003, 7:00 pm, United Church of Christ, Hartford, VT
- **Mysteries and Strange Happenings in the Connecticut River Valley**, Tuesday October 21, 7:00 pm, United Church of Christ, Hartford, VT.

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grants to the wilderness. It may be that his captors built their campfire for a night on the very spot where his grandsons were to make their first home in Hartford. His fate was long unknown in Deerfield, so that administration was granted on his estate, "he being killed or captured by the Indians, therefore as to his present residence in Deerfield is dead." In Canada he became a farm servant to the nuns at Montreal, where he stayed two years, when by process of exchange he was sent to France,

thence to England, and then home in 1698. This temporary visit to France may account for the impression current in the family in Hartford that the Gilletts were of French extraction. In reality, the first Gilletts in this country, Jonathan and Nathaniel, came from England in the "Mary and John" in 1630, settled first in Dorchester, and later removed to Simsbury and Windsor, Conn.

Sixty years ago this rhyme was repeated by Hartford children as what the robins say when it is going to rain: "Jonathan Gillett Scoured a skillet."

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