

# BRIDGEWATER HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

April 2019

Issue No. Fifteen



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## Monthly meetings

held last Tuesday  
of each month at 6:30 p.m.  
Old Brick School House  
12 North Bridgewater Road  
Bridgewater, VT 05034  
[www.bridgewaterhistory.org](http://www.bridgewaterhistory.org)

## Old Brick School will be open

**2nd and 4th Saturdays**

10am to 2pm

Memorial to Columbus Day

and by  
appointment

## PROGRAMS 2019 programs

### Sundays at 2pm

Howard Coffin - May 19  
VT and 1816 The Year Without A Summer

Vermont in the Civil War  
Heritage Trail - June 9<sup>th</sup>

Steve Taylor - July 14  
History of the Grange Movement

Carrie Brown - Aug. 11  
Rosie's Mom Forgotten Women of the First  
World War

Cassie Horner - Aug. 25  
"Lucy E -The Road To Victory"

Erwin Fullerton - Oct. 20  
Every Tool Has a Story

## OFFICERS

President: Polly Timken  
Vice President: Jeannette  
Sawyer  
Secretary: Sue Kancir  
Treasurer: Sondra Stevens  
Membership: Sue Kancir  
Curator: Polly Timken

## DIRECTORS

Alice Paglia  
Audrey Putnam  
Althea Derstine  
Gloria Martin  
Bob Kancir  
Bruce Maxham  
Ernest Kendall  
Laura Robinson



William G. Geno  
WW I

## Letter From the President

By Polly Timken

We would like to welcome you to our 2019 season. This is our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and we have an excellent group of speakers scheduled.

The lecture season starts off early with **Howard Coffin** on May 20. After a long winter it will be fun to hear that things were actually worse during the “Year Without a Summer” 1816. In June we will host the **Vermont Civil War Heritage Trail Group**. In July **Steve Taylor** will speak at the Bridgewater Grange on the history of the Grange movement and its success throughout New England and the Country. August brings us **Carrie Brown** speaking on the role of women during WWI. **Cassie Horner**, formerly with the Vermont Standard, will discuss her book “Lucy E. ‘The Road to Victory’” in August. We will close out the season in October with **Erwin Fullerton’s** presentation of antique tools.

This summer we hope you will come in and see the new exhibit “**Memories from the Motorcorps**”. Items from Richard E. Thompson Sr.’s US Army service in France from 1918-1919. We are fortunate in that his family saved his photo albums, post cards and letters, helmets, gas mask kit and much more. It brings alive the Great War and makes 1919 seem very close to 2019.

As we open for our 10<sup>th</sup> Season, it is fitting to recognize our volunteers and all of the hard work that goes into running a small museum. They continue to come forth in the most amazing ways. Doing research for the newsletter or family ancestry can evolve into trips to the Town Office, hikes in the woods, or visits to one of our 12 cemeteries.

Caring for and accessioning the collection can evolve into online conversations and oral histories. Providing summer programs has not only brought our community together to hear more about our surroundings, but also resulted in more communication between BHS, the Woodstock History Center, the Vermont Historical Society, and our surrounding towns. We have swapped information as well as artifacts. We have learned new ways to present our Town’s past to the new generation of children at the Prosper School. Of course none of this is possible without our cadre of building specialists who are terrific at plowing and shoveling snow, painting, carpentry, and more.

This all brings me to my point that if you have an interest or a talent, or are just looking to help and have fun along the way, please come to one of our meetings.



Dedication of WW I Monument

## When Bridgewater had a U.S. Army Encampment

By Coleman W. Hoyt

It was May 1941 – the spring before Pearl Harbor. The United States was not yet at war, but was at last getting actively prepared for it. Two of my half brothers, Maclean and Charles Williamson, were 1st Lieutenants in the 258<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment based at Fort Ethan Allen, Vermont, under the command of Colonel Lavell. The Colonel ordered the brigade intelligence staff to travel somewhere in the State of Vermont on maneuvers for a few days to test their equipment and vehicles in rugged hilly terrain, preferably with permission when on private property. Naturally my brothers thought of our family farm in Bridgewater, so they called our mother Mrs. Colgate Hoyt, who happily said they would be welcome. Soon thereafter about sixty men and five officers of the 71<sup>st</sup> brigade intelligence staff spent the two nights of May 12 and 13 bivouacked in tents with a field kitchen and a radio setup with contact to Fort Ethan Allen on the hayfield across the road from our house. They slept only after having driven their trucks, jeeps and field ambulance around north Bridgewater in the dark with their blue nighttime lights. This caused quite a sensation locally, with many people (including young ladies) coming up to personally investigate. All of the officers and sergeants of this brigade signed our guest book expressing their thanks for the hospitality they received. Like all mothers under similar circumstances, our mother gave them - to supplement the Army field kitchen - a special celebratory feed, which was so appreciated that the men in gratitude spent their final day sawing up many of the downed maples in the sugar bush that had been destroyed by the 1938 hurricane. Since chainsaws were not then in common use, they used two-man crosscut saws. Being 15 at that time, I was so impressed by how hard those soldiers worked on those trees, that might have been the reason for me to enlist as a sailor in the Navy two years later.

This event was covered in an article on the front page of the May 15, 1941 Vermont Standard, a copy of which is in the archives of the Woodstock Historical Society. It goes into some detail about how impressed its author was about the friendliness of the men and the quality of their modern equipment. Another article appearing alongside this one states that Vermont's Selective Service quota for the month of June 1941 was 62 men.

Many of the soldiers sawing up those maple trees in May 1941 were city dwellers, not experienced in harvesting downed trees lying horizontally on a steep slope. One particular tree became a source of some joy to us in later years. Because the men had sawn its trunk almost through about 10 feet from its roots, the heavy weight of its rootball full of earth was sufficient to hoist up the sawed-off trunk - including the saw still imbedded in it - to its original vertical position. We would bring visitors up the hill, point out the rusty saw hanging 10 feet off the ground, and explain that we had some real deep snow up here last winter.



Saddle Bow Farm 1931

## Richard E. Thompson

By Helen Thompson

Richard E. Thompson, son of Myra "Potwin" Thompson and J.C. Fremont Thompson was born August 5, 1892 just over the Bridgewater town line in Woodstock, Vermont.

Richard lived most of his life in Bridgewater and went to school there in the red brick school which is now a social center. He also attended a military academy in West Lebanon, New Hampshire.

After completing school he worked in different shops and married his first wife Mary Helen Spaulding and had one child, Richard E. Thompson, Jr.

Richard served in the U.S. Army and was sent over seas to France during World War I. While there he had a Sharp Shooting test with a high rank and thought this would send him to the front lines but instead was assigned to the Motor Division. His duty was to keep all vehicles in top condition and to chauffeur the high-ranking officers, colonels, captains, etc. to all posts for meetings. He also had to chauffeur theater groups to their destinations. After the armistice was signed and most of the soldiers went home he was kept to chauffeur the officers to survey the ruins.

After discharge from the service and coming home there was very little work so he took a correspondence course on electricity. After completion of the course, he received a diploma and accepted a position with the new Electric Company in Bridgewater.

After the death of his first wife he married Helen Elizabeth Kurach on September 10, 1931. They had two children, a son Robert and a daughter Cynthia.

After his retirement from the Electric Company Richard loved to work in his workshop. He made repairs to his home and many pieces of furniture. He was very clever to use and convert old discarded things into nice useful things such as using an old musical organ cabinet to make a lovely hutch for dishes. He repaired many small appliances for friends and relatives and never charged them anything as he said, "They don't have much and I do enjoy helping".

He loved his town, the people in it and especially his family. He was a good son, husband and father. We all loved him and miss him-very much. He died November 28, 1983.



Richard E. Thompson and teacher



## Camp Vail

By Bob Kancir

Camp Vail at Lyndon Center, Vermont was organized in the summer of 1917 because of concern about an inadequate supply of farm labor within the state. The Vermont Farm Council appointed Frederick H. Bickford as Farm Labor Agent. He conceived the idea of creating a camp to train young Vermont boys in farm work as means of helping assure an adequate work force at wage rates Vermont farmers could afford to pay. Camp Vail was located on 2,000-acre farm of Theodore N. Vail, president of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company.

Recruiters for the Camp Vail distributed information about the program through posters, newsletters and personal contacts in high schools. Text of a four-page folder included:

### *THE CALL*

As never before in her history Vermont must use her hills this summer. The World is calling for food. But most of all the Older Sons of Vermont have gone to fight the world's battle. Vermont cannot, must not desert them. The hills and fields of Old Vermont Must bring forth their treasures to Back Them Up.

### *THE NEED*

The farmers need hundreds of hands to care and harvest crops, which they are trying to raise. They want the service of the strong red-blooded boys from 16 to 20 years of age. They are willing to pay good wages for service.

### *THE PLAN*

The State of Vermont through the Department of Agriculture proposes to Enlist Her Boys for the Farm.  
At the Theodore N. Vail School of Agriculture a camp to be know as Camp Vail is to be established. The purpose of this camp is to recruit, select and train boys for farm work.

There were three camps of two weeks. A maximum of fifty boys composed each camp. The boys came primarily from larger towns where the opportunity and knowledge of farming was most lacking. Upon arrival at the camp the boys were divided into squads of ten each and put under the charge of an instructor of the school.

The purpose of Camp Vail was fourfold:

First, to enlist in the work of food production.

Second, under the eyes of skilled supervisors, to select and sort the boys, to determine their usefulness and success on the farm.

Third, familiarize the boys with farm life and teach them the importance and responsibilities of the summer's work, which is before them.

Fourth, to place the boys where they can help the most. To be of any use these inexperienced boys must work under the best of conditions. The proper placing of them includes selection of the right kind of farm and the right kind of farmer.

The boys who attended camp were in instructed in:

Dairying, learning to clean the stables, feeding and milking the cows, washing pails and cans and separating the milk.

Care of horses, cleaning the horses, learning to harness and unharness them.

Haying, studying and operating the machinery used in haying. They learn to ride and operate the mowing machine, horse rake and tedder. How to raise the cutter bar of the mower, how to take out and put in the knife section and pitman bar. How to remove a broken fork on a tedder or put a new tooth into a horse rake. They were taught how to make hay tumble and how to pick it up for "pitching on."

Potato growing, plowing, harrowing, planting and hoeing.

Woodcutting, learning to use axe and crosscut saw and how to properly fell a tree.

Truck gardening; learn how to use the hand and horse cultivators, horse hoe and horse planter.

The boys were also taught the importance of faithfulness, honor and conscientious effort in relations with employers, neighbors and community. They were also taught the patriotic nature of the entire undertaking.

*Continued on Page 6*

## Camp Vail

*continued from page 5*

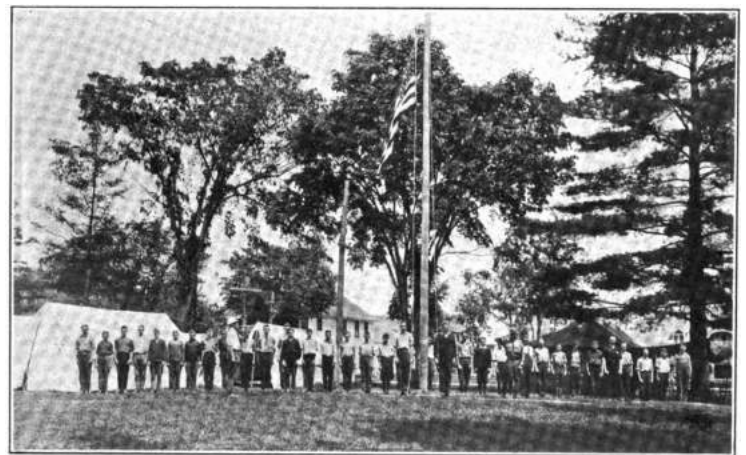
When the training period ended a boy, deemed suitable by the camp director, was placed at a farm for a two-week trial period with a signed contract between Camp Vail and a farmer. The boy was paid \$14.00 during this two week trial period. Camp Vail also provided the farmer with a record of the boy's service while at the camp as well as the boy's home, education and his physical condition as determined by an examination given him by the camp physician. After the two weeks period, if the boy proves satisfactory, the farmer entered into a new contract directly with the boy at wages agreed upon by both of them. The farmer also agreed to furnish the boy as good a home as any boy would expect. If a boy proves unsatisfactory or unreliable the director of Camp Vail would at once remove him and send the farmer another boy.

When a farmer submitted an application for a boy the director of Camp Vail referred the application to the county agricultural agent in whose county the farmer lives. The agent assures the farmer will furnish the boy a good home to live in and live up to his contract with the boy. Also that the farmer will appreciate the fact that the boy is not a trained farmer and will give him the consideration in his work which this fact requires.

Farm Labor Agent Frederick H. Bickford assessed what was accomplished at Camp Vail: Personally, I think the greatest help came from improved morale given the Vermont farmer by those willing to help him. He was encouraged to go ahead and plant his farm feeling that he would be taken care of in some way, and generally he was.

*Sources:*

World War 1: Camp Vail, 1916 - Vermont Historical Society  
The Vermonter Vol. 23, 1918 No. 4



### Bridgewater's World War 1 Service Flag

Made by the Bridgewater Woolen Company

Soon after World War I started, families of servicemen began displaying small service flags in their windows to show support for their sons and husbands fighting in France. Businesses like the Bridgewater Woolen Mill made larger flags to recognize the service of their employees. A blue star represented family members in active service. A gold star represented a soldier (William Geno) killed and the blue bars indicated that 3 soldiers were wounded in action. The Bridgewater flag was displayed in the village and at some point was donated to the Vermont Veteran's Militia Museum located at Camp Johnson Military base in Colchester, VT. It was on display there for years, and when taken down due to the lack of space, Walter Houghton, a museum director, offered it to be donated back to Bridgewater which it was in 2012. It is an honor to have this flag at the Bridgewater Historical Society.

## Curator's Corner

By Polly Timken

What do you do when confronted with Harland Booth's hand made roll top desk of butternut wood? It won't go neatly in a cardboard box or a file cabinet. Jeannette Sawyer put in a call to Ora and Jed Astbury and their friend Ely Chynoweth and everything went quickly from there. After careful assessment of what looked to us like a monster project, they took it apart, loaded in their truck and drove it to BHS. It seemed to be no problem carrying the parts into the school house and reassembling it. The Historical Society can't thank them enough for all of their help.



Ora Astbury, Ely Chynoweth and Jed Astbury

In addition to the desk, the Booth family donated an antique Victrola, books, family photographs and some wonderful clothes dating back generations. We are grateful to Harold Booth who, on behalf of his family, gave us many items from their family home on Route 4.





Richard E. Thompson  
France 1918

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