

# THETFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

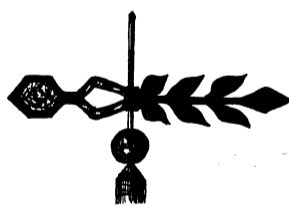
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## *Calendar of Autumn Events - 2007*

Friday	26 October	Potluck Supper, Annual Meeting and Election of Officers, followed by a program entitled: " <b>Exploring the Westward Movement</b> ", with Jennifer Boeri-Boyce. Post Mills Church, 6:30 PM
Friday	30 November	Vermont Humanities Council Program: " <b>AHA! Dr. James Naismith, Creator of Basketball</b> " with Dr. Robert Cheney. Two performances: 3:30 PM and 7:00 PM, Thetford Elementary School. Co-sponsored with Thetford Youth Sports.
Thursday	13 December	Program with Dr. Colin Calloway, Dartmouth Professor of Native American Studies, " <b>First Contact in the Connecticut Valley Corridor: Early Encounters Between Native Tribes and European Colonists.</b> " Thetford Bicentennial Building Gallery, 6:30 PM.

### *Thetford Historical Society Library Hours:*

Mondays, 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM ~ Tuesdays, 10:00 AM to Noon ~ Thursdays, 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM  
 phone: (802) 785-2068 • E-mail: [info@thetfordhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@thetfordhistoricalsociety.org)



## SUMMER RECAP

Once again the Society enjoyed a busy summer. Our exhibit at the Vermont History Expo at Tunbridge in June featured the Union Village Dam; the area before and after the project. We hung that exhibit downstairs in the Gallery for the month of July; then it resided at the Barn Museum until September. Other Museum exhibits this year included photos from Union Village, Currier and Ives prints, and Grandad's Toy Shop, formerly in North Thetford. Jean Munn continued to provide weaving demonstrations during our open Sundays at the Museum, and on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August, we celebrated Thetford's founding by displaying the Town Charter, signed 245 years ago to the day. The following Sunday, living historian Susan Cain provided a demonstration of flax processing into linen, which we supplemented with a display of linen textiles from our collection. We welcomed over 100 visitors during our five-week season.

## UPCOMING PROGRAMS

### Annual Meeting

Friday, October 26 is the date of the Annual Meeting, which will be held at the Post Mills Church. Evening begins with a potluck supper at 6:30, followed by a business meeting and election of officers. Hartford Middle School Social Teacher and THS Trustee, Jennifer Boeri-Boyce will present a slide show and discussion on her recent trip to Montana this past June, as part of the *Flow of History's* Summer Institute for area teachers.

### "AHA! Dr. James Naismith, Creator of Basketball"

On Friday, November 30, 2007, the Historical Society and Thetford Youth Sports will co-sponsor a Vermont Humanities Program on the origins of Basketball. The program features Robert Cheney, who portrays Dr. Naismith. There will be two performances at Thetford Elementary School in the gym: the first at 3:30 PM, and the second at 7:00 PM. There is no admission charge for this event, and it is open to all.

### Colin Calloway comes to Thetford

What was life like here three hundred years ago, and how did the Abenakis and other native people of this region interact with European colonists? On Thursday, December 13, 6:30 p.m., join Colin Calloway, Professor of History and Samson Occom Professor of Native American Studies at Dartmouth College, for a discussion of early contacts between European and native populations in the Connecticut Valley. Co-sponsored with Latham Library.

## EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

In addition to our usual schedule of Sundays in August and Labor Day weekend, we were pleased for the opportunity to keep the Barn Museum open a bit longer this year, in order to host visits from Abby Logan's and Meredith Moore's fifth grade classes from Thetford Elementary School. The fifth graders used the field trip as an opportunity to hear early Thetford stories and examine artifacts, which they sketched and then described in a write-up.

While exhibiting at the History Expo in Tunbridge, the Historical Society was asked to consider exhibiting our Civil War items at the Civil War Expo, held in September in Chester, VT. We brought artifacts and correspondence and displayed our items along side those of the Norwich Historical Society. It was a worthwhile endeavor, as we met a number of persons interested in our collection, and received an offer to appraise and document various items. We may turn this opportunity into a public program.

## ACQUISITIONS

In the Town Report for 2002, we had an article about Daniel Waterman, a Thetford man who sailed around Cape Horn in 1849 to join the California Gold Rush, and left some interesting information about his mining operations. A weeks or two ago, a yellow plastic bag showed up on our library porch, with a note from two of Waterman's descendants and a leather bag he carried to California, filled with at least a hundred letters and documents. So far we have unfolded the papers and sorted them by year, from 1799 to 1901. The first three are deeds signed by our first settler, John Chamberlin, and his sons Amos and Joel. More later.

## PUBLICATIONS

Ever since the Thetford Center bridge was damaged by a dump truck ten years ago, Bob Brown has been our local chronicler of covered bridges. He has produced well-illustrated books about the repairs at Thetford Center and the reconstruction of the bridge at Union Village. He has just done another, mainly about the work done last summer at Thetford Center, and with characteristic generosity has given us some to sell. The photographs in this one are especially good.

## THE SANBORNS AND THE CIVIL WAR

Usually, when you are dealing with history, you simply show the final product, rather than how you reached your conclusion. Once in a while, however, the process seems interesting enough to describe. That is what happened in the last couple of months with material about the Sanborn family in Thetford.

Early last winter we got a letter from West Danville asking if we would be interested in a pair of family portraits held by a cousin in California. We wrote back asking about the size and condition of the portraits and who the subjects were. Several months later the cousin, Nancy Crosby of Davis, California, wrote, sending photographs of the portraits and giving some information about the subjects, Thomas G. Sanborn (1805-1880) and his wife Mary (Leighton) Sanborn (1810-1894). Our genealogical file told us that Thomas was born in Enfield, and his wife in Grafton, NH. They were apparently married about 1830, and were living in Springfield, NH, when they had a son in 1834. They moved to Thetford in time to be listed in the 1840 census. They were the grandparents of Harley Sanborn, who lived on Sanborn Road on the eastern edge of the town.

The historic district nomination for Thetford Center shows that in 1858 Thomas Sanborn lived in the Cook (now King and Richardson ) house at the east end of the main street, and that in 1877 he owned the brick house farther west now owned by Elmer and Bertha Brown. This house is sometimes listed as a station on the Underground Railroad. Ted Peters once told us that there used to be an underground room between the back of the house and a barn which has disappeared, where he played with the children of the Reininger family.

One tends to get a bit skeptical about underground rooms and the Underground Railroad, which did not run in a tunnel. However, W. H. Siebert, who wrote the main book about this subject in 1937, shows that though the main route of the Railroad in this part of the state ran from Woodstock through Randolph to Montpelier, there was a secondary route from Lyme, NH, through Post Mills and Chelsea to the north. The strongest evidence about this route involves the Hinckley house in Post Mills now owned by Nellie Glaser.

Our internet sleuth, Martha Howard, found that Siebert's papers are stored at Ohio Historical Society, and the collection guide shows that he listed Thomas G. Sanborn, Ezra Worcester of Thetford Hill, and Samuel Saville of Post Mills as workers on the Railroad. The only problem is that Sanborn did not live in the Brown house until after the Civil War when there was no Railroad. But he could have hidden escaped slaves at the Cook house in his barn or his cellar.

Meanwhile Martha was getting ready to take an exhibit to the Civil War Expo at Chester on 29 September. We remembered our favorite bit of Civil War lore, about a Thetford officer who was murdered while drilling his black troops in Norfolk, VA. When we checked the story, it turned out that the Thetford officer was Lt. Alanson L. Sanborn, and that he was a son of Thomas G. We also have a copy of the funeral sermon for him, delivered in Thetford by the Rev. D. S. Frost, and had a newspaper story at the end, in an appendix. In the style of the period, this was a rather florid oration, but it also gave some solid facts.

Alanson Sanborn was born in Springfield, N. H., on 19 April, 1834. He is listed in Thetford Academy's 1851 catalog as a student in their English section. By 1857 he was in Iowa, and "experienced faith in Christ" when he was in Fayette, in Fayette County. There was a seminary in Fayette, which soon changed its name to Upper Iowa University. Documents from UIU's archives indicate that Alanson was a student there in 1858-1859, taking a normal and preparatory course. He then taught for two years in Missouri, but when war broke out in 1861, he "barely escaped with his life," and returned to Thetford. He then taught for a year, apparently in a district school.

In December 1862, according to Mr. Frost, he "began his labors... at Columbian Coll. [?Columbia College?] Hospital;" it is not clear in what capacity. At any rate he was in New York City, and soon got involved in recruiting for a regiment of black soldiers. On 16 May he wrote his mother that he had "inscribed the names of the first twelve men who had enrolled in this regiment... It is my duty... and I would rather die in the field fighting for my country than be spared at home in finest ease while my brothers die on the altar of their country." The next day he wrote to his sister in the same patriotic and religious vein. During the next two months the regiment moved to Washington, DC, to enlist more men.

In early July, 1863, the regiment, now called the 1st U. S. Colored Volunteers, were shipped to Norfolk, VA., which amounted to a Union outpost at the entrance to Chesapeake Bay in a Virginia which was still largely in Confederate hands. Recruiting continued in Norfolk. On Saturday afternoon, 11 July, exactly a week after the battle of Gettysburg and the fall of Vicksburg, Lt. Sanborn led his troops to the Custom House to be reviewed by General Viele. As they passed Arthur Foster's dry goods store, "a notorious secesh den," Dr. D. M. Wright addressed Sanborn with a "grossly insulting remark."

Sanborn halted his troops facing the store, and commanded "Order arms." He stepped up on the sidewalk to tell Wright that if he repeated the insult to the troops he would have him arrested. As Sanborn turned back to his troops, Wright pulled a revolver from his coat pocket and shot him in the back. As the lieutenant turned around and tried to seize the gun, the doctor shot him again, hitting the left arm. Sanborn soon died. His body was transported home to Thetford, and he was buried in the Thetford Center cemetery, after a funeral in December.

Dr. Wright was arrested on the spot, and "immediately placed in double irons." He was tried in Norfolk, and the local Union paper assures us that "every advantage was given to the prisoner for a fair and impartial trial." Our internet sleuth finds that this trial was one which used the insanity plea (unsuccessfully) as a defense. The case's high profile attracted the attention of President Lincoln, who was instrumental in the selection of expert witnesses chosen to testify to Dr. Wright's state of mind. Wright, determined sane, was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged, though he thought that being shot would be a more genteel method of execution. His wife and daughters were allowed to visit him regularly. On the day before his execution, one daughter came to visit, and smuggled in a set of women's clothes. Disguised as his daughter, Wright got out of his cell but, thanks to "the keen eyes of one of the guard," he was caught and returned to his cell to await his doom.

Now that we have described the process, what is the product? This centers of course on the Sanborn family. We found out where they came from, and some of the places they lived in Thetford. We found the possibility of their having helped fugitive slaves. The fact that they raised a son with strong similar sympathies makes that possibility more likely. We traced a large part of Alanson Sanborn's short life and even shorter military career, and saw the strong feelings on both sides in the incident at Norfolk and in its aftermath. The trial of Dr. Wright and the funeral of Lt. Sanborn may help us understand the deep and long-lasting feelings on both sides.

This account leaves some unanswered questions. Can we find out solid information about the Underground Railroad in Thetford, rather than possibilities? How much secondary education did Alanson Sanborn get and what drew him to Iowa? What kind of work did he do in the New York Hospital? What became of this colored regiment? Want to come help us find out?