

THETFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Calendar of Summer Events - 2010

Saturday	31 July	Exhibit at Thetford Hill Fair, 1:30 to 4:30 PM.
Sundays	8, 15, 22, 29 August, 5 September	Openings of Hughes Barn Museum, 2274 Route 113, 2-5 PM.
Thursday	14 October	THS Annual Meeting, followed by a talk with Nina Strauss - 7:00 pm. See description inside.

Historical Library Open Hours: Mondays and Thursdays, 2 to 4 pm, Tuesdays, 10 am to noon.

Visit us on the web: www.thetfordhistoricalsociety.org

2010 Summer Schedule

Our program this summer included a return to the Vermont History Expo in Tunbridge in late June, with an exhibit on the 1911 Thetford Pageant. We again plan to be open in conjunction with the Thetford Hill Fair in late July, and our Barn Museum will be open on Sunday afternoons in August. Additional information on these events follows in this newsletter.

Thetford Hill Fair

The 105th annual Thetford Hill Fair happens on Saturday, July 31st. As we have done in the past, the Historical Society will be open from 1:30 to 4:30 pm. In the Historical Library, we'll feature an exhibit on the 50th anniversary of the "Thetfordnauts", as envisioned by former Thetford Hill resident Carl Clark. Who are the Thetfordnauts, and why do they have a connection to the Thetford Hill Fair? You'll have to visit on the 31st and see for yourself. Downstairs in the Bicentennial Gallery's "Black and White Room", we will feature an encore hanging of our History Expo exhibit on the Thetford Pageant, which will remain up through the month of August.

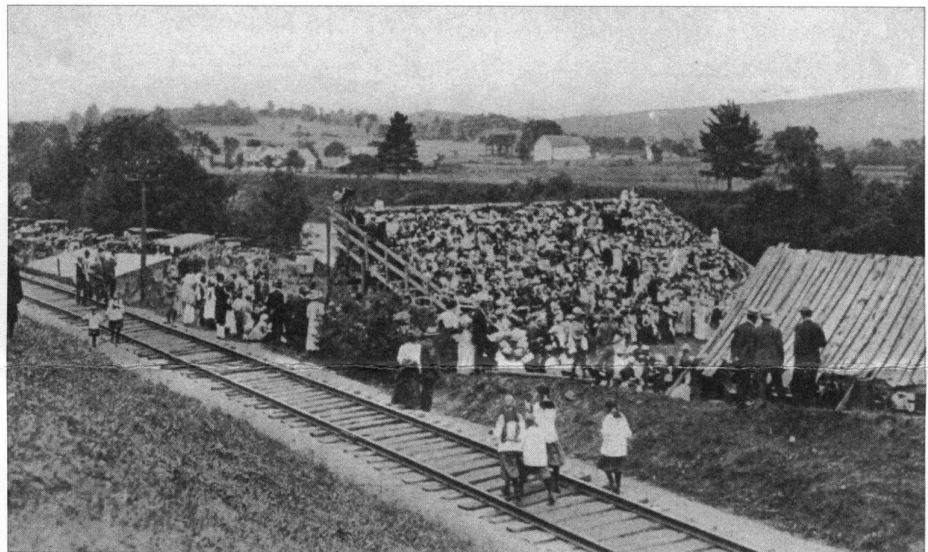
The Thetford Pageant of 1911

We selected the Thetford Pageant as our theme for the Vermont History Expo this year to mark 2011 as the 100th anniversary of the event, and to call attention to the fact that next year is the 250th anniversary of the Town's charter.



The idea for Thetford's pageant is credited to William Chauncy Langdon (shown at left) of the Russell Sage Foundation in New York. Langdon had a number of friends in and around Thetford, and he spent significant time here. He saw Thetford in the early 1900s as a town in decline; population had fallen to an all-time low, young people were choosing to move to more urban areas in search of better employment, and many of those remaining here were skeptical of modern technology as the means to economic prosperity. A pageant, Langdon believed, would provide the vehicle to unite the town; celebrate its history, acknowledge current activities and endeavors, and look toward a future in which Thetford played a larger role in state and country affairs.

Langdon and local members of the Pageant committee were persuasive; more than half of Thetford's population participated in the Pageant, either as performers, or in a behind-the-scenes role. In addition to local children, a number of girls from Camp Hanoum danced as well (dance was popular then at the camp). A large grandstand with a seating



capacity of 900 people was constructed, and at each performance, there were several hundred additional who had to stand or sit on the ground. All in all, more than 5,000 persons saw the Pageant on August 12th, 14th and 15th, 1911 (there was no performance on Sunday the 13th; instead, there was a town-wide church service). They came by horse and wagon, car, and special passenger train to Northboro Station in North Thetford, walking south along the tracks to the Pageant site, on the banks of the Connecticut River, just south of the village.



The Pageant itself celebrated Thetford's first 150 years in a dozen episodes, beginning with the arrival of the first white settler, "Quail John" Chamberlin. Following Chamberlin's interaction with a local Abenaki band (who agreed to let him settle as long as he stayed on this side of the river), viewers watched scenes depicting the capture of local Tories and Thetford's involvement in the Revolution, the founding of the Thetford Hill Church and Thetford Academy, a typical Country Fair, and the Civil War.

Later episodes focused the decline that followed the Civil War, portraying a typical farm family: the father holding fast to traditional ways, the son wanting to try new methods. Unable to compromise, the son leaves the farm, his family, and his sweetheart, in search of new opportunities. On a more optimistic note, a former resident returns to then present day Thetford in the Old Home Day scene, and is impressed to see a display of healthy animals and a celebration of families at a picnic, with activities for children in the form of newly-established Boy Scout and Campfire Girls groups. The grand finale featured a parade of players, and riders on horseback portraying Thetford, Vermont, neighboring states, and America. Thetford in 1911, celebrating 150 years, is a town back on course to prosperity who had found its place, both regionally and nationally.

In 2011, Thetford will celebrate its 250th anniversary, along with a number of other area towns who share a 1761 charter date. Revisiting the Pageant seemed to be an idea whose time had come again. It was a fitting tribute to Thetford's first 150 years, and could be again next year, as we celebrate 250 years.

Martha Howard

THETFORD LEARNS ABOUT ELECTRICITY, 1887-1913

In these days when we communicate electronically and endlessly with or without the aid of wire, and when we power our houses and appliances and cars with electricity, it is surprising to think that all of this power and convenience and endless talk were unknown in this peaceful countryside not much more than a century ago. Our historical library has several collections of papers that show how some of this change came about.

(Cont'd on page 5)

Barn Museum Open Sundays

The Hughes Barn Museum, located at 2274 Route 113 (just up the hill from Garey Road) will be open Sundays in August beginning on the 8th, and on Sunday September 5th (Labor Day weekend), from 2:00 to 5:00 pm. The following is an outline of events at the barn, by week:

August 8 **Start the Presses!**

Local printer Bob Metzler will demonstrate the art of letterpress printing, with examples of historic presses and typefaces. A “hands-on” event.

August 15 **Pie for Breakfast (or lunch)**

It's the First Annual THS Pie Baking Contest!! Bring your handcrafted fruit pies to the Barn Museum for your chance to win! Local Historical Society judges; slices of pie for all. Visit our website for more information.

August 22 **Transportation**

Ken Robinson will talk about how we used to “get there from here”, focusing on our collection of buggies, sleighs, wagons and the like.

August 29 **Strike up the Band**

Join the Lyme Town Band at the Museum for a concert and ice cream. View our exhibit of Thetford area band items, including instruments, uniforms, and sheet music. Photos too!

September 5 **Cemetery Lore**

Charlie Marchant of the Vermont Old Cemetery Association will present a program on old cemeteries, stones, epitaphs, and the like. View our collection of stonecutter's tools, and an early gravestone or two.

Annual Meeting

Our annual meeting will be held on Thursday, October 14th, 7:00 pm, in the downstairs Gallery of the Bicentennial Building. Follow a brief business meeting, our guest speaker will be Nina Strauss, long-time Thetford Hill summer resident. Nina will speak about her grandparents, Nicholas and Maniefa Khrabroff, who came to Thetford in 1920, settled in a small house just south of the Common on Thetford Hill, and for two decades lent a cosmopolitan air to the village. General Khrabroff had been a purchasing agent for the Tsar during WWI; he returned to Russia to aid Admiral Kolchak's counter-revolution against the Bolsheviks, and had an exciting escape through Siberia. He had a memorable mustache, and gave their house a distinctly Russian look with a birch fence and a tow-story awninged porch. Madame Khrabroff had been a talented actress, and in this country had quite a reputation as a maker of dolls. Their daughter Irina gave lectures on gardens in the Balkan peninsula, and worked with photographer Clara Sipprell who had her summer studio next door.

THETFORD LEARNS ABOUT ELECTRICITY, cont'd

The first electrical marvel to hit the Upper Valley was the telegraph. Invented by Samuel F. B. Morse in 1844, it soon became indispensable to the railroads which came to Thetford two years later. The first local record of the telegraph is the record book of the Thetford Academy Telegraph Company, from 1890 to 1892. It begins with a constitution stating the company's purpose: "to become proficient in the science of telegraphing," and calling for a president, secretary, and treasurer, and a board of directors, all to be elected at the start of each school term. Here and in the bylaws are rules about manners on the telegraph line. Membership is open to anyone with an "instrument," some wire, and a battery. There is an undated list of twenty-two founders, including four young women: Mary E. Slade, Arlene E. Ladd, Grace H. Mallory, and Mamie A. Simonds. Of these, nineteen actually paid dues, often in cents. Apart from a record book, the only expense was for "blue vitriol" or copper sulfate. Of this, the company bought from ten to sixteen pounds each term, at ten cents a pound. This was used to maintain batteries which produced electricity by the interaction of a zinc cylinder suspended in a solution of crystalized copper sulfate.

Presumably there was a wire circuit inside or outside the Academy building, with the members hooked into the line at various places, "texting" each other as they learned the dots and dashes of Morse code. The most active members of the company were B. A. Babcock, Clarence Hosford, Mary E. Slade, Arlene Ladd, and E. N. Dodge. The record ends in 1892.

The telephone, invented by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876, seems to have come to Thetford in the late 1880s, and one name prominently associated with it was Burton Riley Dodge (1851-1939) of Post Mills, a man of many interests, projects, and ideas. Bills from 1887 to 1894 show that Dodge was secretary of the West Fairlee, Thetford, and Fairlee Telephone and Telegraph Company, and was buying considerable equipment for the company from J. H. Bunnell & Company in New York City. This was clearly an operating company, though it is not clear just where in the three towns it operated.

Dodge had several other projects. One, which got at least to the stage of a formal proposal, was the Lightning Telephone Line. The plan for this was laid out in two legal documents, one hand-written and the other typed. One is dated 1902. Investors were to buy shares (one document says for \$27, the other for \$32) to Dodge, who would build a "Metallic Circuit Telephone Line" from Post Mills to Hanover. There is no follow-up to these two sheets.

On a small undated sheet of paper Dodge estimates the cost of laying out a line for the thirteen miles from West Fairlee to Chelsea— so many telephone posts, brackets, and glass insulators, and so much wire— an approximate total of \$1,025. Dodge also laid out diagrams of projected telephone lines. One, reproduced here, runs from the Peabody Library and Chubb factory in Post Mills to A. Poor's house at the top of the hill as you come up from Thetford Center to Thetford Hill. Each dot represents a telephone pole. An image of Dodge's diagram is shown on page 6.

It is not clear that any of these projects was actually carried out. Dodge's other interests included photography, done with a bulky professional camera; coal, ginseng, and motorcycles. He continued to work with telephones, and in his eighties, in the 1930s, he was still writing to Sears Roebuck and AT&T about his inventions to improve long-distance service.

