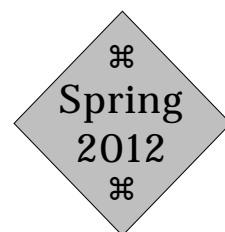


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# THETFORD

## Historical Society

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## Reminiscences of East Thetford

Grace Slafter Chase

*Grace (Slafter) Chase was born in Thetford in 1878. She grew up in the Asa Burton house off Route 113. She married George Chase, and they lived in East Thetford. This account comes from a handwritten essay by Mrs. Chase, from 1950. She passed away in 1954.*

"This little story of East Thetford begins with what happened in 1926, for I haven't a very accurate memory or records of events previous to that time. The year 1926 seems almost like the beginning of a new era for East Thetford. In that year, the present school building was erected to take the place of the hundred-year-old brick school house 1.2 miles west of the village.

" In the fall of 1949 the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades were transported to Post Mills but before that the school had cared for all 8 grades. Attendance has varied greatly but a good average may have been 18. Ever since before the new school house was built there has been a PTA in [the] East Thetford school [district] which has paid for the installation of electric lights in the new school house, bought a piano and kitchen and playground

equipment and been active in all departments of PTA work. There is a large playground, the whole lot being one acre in size.

"In 1926, the high tension electric line was built a short distance west of the village by the New England Power Company to relay power from Wilder to Bradford for the Central Vermont Public Service Corporation.

"The dance pavilion was built in 1926 by John Huntington, who has conducted Saturday night dances there ever since that time, while living in the stone house near the hall. There is a market gardener, Parker Kelly, living on the old road



*Dist. #9 School house, near Cadwell Road and Route 113*

which is almost parallel with Route 5.

*Cont'd on page 3*

## Thetford Historical Society Open Hours

Mondays: 2:00 to 4:00 pm

Tuesdays: 10:00 to noon

Thursdays: 2:00 to 4:00 pm

*or by appointment*

## THS Board of Trustees

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# Director's Notes

We are trying something different with our newsletters. Utilizing a new, lower rate from the Postal Service, we're mailing to Thetford residents, or, more correctly, to persons who receive their mail in one of Thetford's Post Offices. Folks who receive their mail out of town aren't included in this distribution unless they are a THS member.

In each newsletter, we'll focus on some aspect or area of Thetford that we think you'll find interesting, bringing to the forefront items from our archives. This issue highlights East Thetford, and includes a number of images. Visit our website, where we'll post these images in higher resolution, beside a contemporary photo of the same location. Things have changed! There will also be additional East Thetford stories and information there that wouldn't fit in the print issue.

Coming up on June 16 and 17 at the Tunbridge Fairgrounds, the Vermont History Expo will again take place – this year's theme "The Civil War". Thetford will be on hand with an exhibit. Look for other Civil War events as the country commemorates its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, from 2011-2015.

Also in the planning stages for June 30th is a second Old Home Day event in Thetford Center. Many of the same activities that were held last year will again take place - games, ice cream, historical exhibits, an auction, and a dinner have been mentioned. Volunteers needed to make this happen -- contact THS if you can lend a hand.

As we go to press, there are a few final details still left to nail down with regard to the Barn Museum programs this summer. I can say that the open Sundays this year will be August 12, 19 and 26, and September 2 and 9. We're hoping to schedule things from last year that were canceled and bring back perennial favorites, like the pie contest.

Also planned for Fall, 2012 is a Geography Bee. The likely format will include adult and youth divisions, made up of teams who will answer multiple choice questions on geography. Prizes for winners; fun for all. More details as they become available.

Martha Howard

## Reminiscences of East Thetford, cont'd



*Northernmost Pavillion Road crossing, before Route 5 construction.*

"The blacktop road from the then Maude Emerson place south to a point just beyond the 3<sup>rd</sup> railroad crossing from the station was built in the year 1935. This piece of road was built to eliminate the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade crossings south of the station. About that time extensive repairs were made in other sections of Route 5, the road north and south through the village, and it became the main trunk line in the east side of Vermont, from Massachusetts to Canada, also carrying most of the traffic that previously had gone on the East side of the Connecticut River. The traffic has been tremendous, and seems to increase all the time. A book might be written about the types of vehicles and type of load

carried along Route 5. Passenger buses have been running for about 10 years. At the town meeting in 1926 it was voted that the town put five street lights in the village, which was done that same year.

"In the big Connecticut River flood of March, 1936, the iron bridge between Thetford and Lyme was broken by the ice. The next year, 1937, the present bridge was built by the American Bridge Company. At the time of the flood (1936) the water came to the foot of the bank east of Gerald Wilson's house and row boats were used to get about the area between there and the riverbank. Max Hill's goods were moved out of his house and placed in the RR station till water subsided, but no real damage was done aside from the loss of the bridge. The hurricane of 1938 blew down 30 acres of pines on Bernard Tilden's land, demolished Huntington's Dance Pavilion which was rebuilt by Huntington. The Railroad Station chimney top was blown off, and most every place was damaged to some degree.



*High water near East Thetford Bridge, 1936 Flood.*



*"Cemetery Hill", East Thetford*

"The next summer, a government salvage saw mill was set up on land at the east side of the road at the foot of Cemetery Hill. This land was then owned by Otis Hastings. A large amount of lumber was sawed in that mill and there is still sawdust and other mill waste to be seen on this land. At the time of the hurricane, all windows were spattered with an opaque substance which was like that found on Montpelier windows. An analysis in Montpelier showed that it was a solution of sea salt.

"In April, 1936 while snow was still on the ground, a peculiar deposit was found which was found to be dust from the dust bowl storms on the West. This was noted in other section near us and analyzed and so proved to be western soil. Lo! Winds blow everything to East Thetford.



*East Thetford Station and Pressey Store*

"During the winter of 1947-48 and underground cable was laid through the village at the side of Route 5 by the New England Telephone Company to carry the through telephone lines. Local business at the Railroad Station was always comparatively large for it serves a large area both in Thetford and Lyme. This was increased in 1937 when much material and machinery for building the bridge came here. Then at the beginning of World War II business on the Railroad increased till it was of tremendous volume with fast freight trains of well over a hundred cars. The volume of business seems almost as large now as then.

"The building of Union Village Dam brought great business in the form of big machinery and of car loads of crushed trap rock from Northfield, Massachusetts to be used at the Dam. When work began preparatory to building Wilder Dam on the Connecticut River, some sections of railroad track were raised and hundreds of carloads of quarry waste from Massachusetts came for raising track and for rip-rapping the track on the east side to avoid erosion after the Dam had formed the long lake. Of course a great amount of this waste was used in towns north of here but a large job was done  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile north of the Station and another near the south end of the town. Other changes to note in connection with Wilder Dam is the clearing of the riverbanks of brush and trees and the raising of the highway south of Bernard Tilden's.

"In the summer of 1949 we began to see Diesel engines and now in 1950 we rarely see a steam locomotive. In noting the business places in 1950, the Post Office naturally comes first. The building is located on the west side of Route 5, a very short distance shout from the junction of Route 5 and 113A. The present Postmaster since 1942 is Dora Bacon, now Mrs. Loren Bacon. She succeeded Charles Bacon, who came after Mrs. Sarah Pressey, who was Postmaster over forty years. The store north of the junction of Route 5 and 113A was built over forty years ago by Ernest Hithrington, now in a dry goods store in Northfield, VT. He owned the store here by a short time and then it changed owners many times till in 1944 it was bought by the present owner, Miss Anna D. Eaton. She sells gasoline in addition to her general store and carries on a good business in all lines of general merchandise.

"When Ed Bailey came to town, he bought the business of the late Maurice McKnight. Mr. McKnight had carried on a blacksmith shop and later a garage, giving many years of faithful work to the community. After a time, Mr. Bailey built a cement block garage on the East side of the road, opposite the so-called Maude Emerson house. In 1947, he built a new house for himself beside the garage. With gasoline sold at the garage, store and Post Office, one can always be sure of motor fuel.

*Concludes on page 6*

## Thetford Historical Society's Publications for Sale

The Historical Society has a number of publications for sale - local authors, local interest!

<u>Author</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Price</u>
Abbott, Collamer	Green Mountain Copper	\$ 8.00
Bacon, Robert	Register of Persons Buried in the Cemeteries of Thetford, VT 1768 - 1976	\$ 5.00
Baldwin, Jessie	History and Folklore of Post Mills, VT	\$ 5.00
Brown, Robert	Thetford Center Covered Bridge (1997)	\$ 8.00
Brown, Robert	Reconstruction of the Covered Bridge at Union Village (2002)	\$ 8.00
Brown, Robert	Thetford Covered Bridges (2007)	\$ 8.00
Burton, Asa	The Life of Asa Burton, Minister in Thetford, VT 1779-1836, written by himself	\$ 8.00
Hughes, Charles	Beloved Village	\$ 5.00
Hughes, Charles	Mills and Villages	\$ 10.00
Latham, Charles	A Short History of Thetford	\$ 5.00
Latham, Charles	Map of Town of Thetford, VT 1858-1960	\$ 5.00
Slade, Mary B.	Thetford Academy's First Century	\$ 10.00
Thetford Historical Society	Fifty for 250: An Anthology of Thetford's History 1761-2011	\$ 20.00

The above may be purchased at the Historical Library. We're also happy to mail your order, prepaid, plus postage.

## Membership Information

Please consider supporting *your* Historical Society by renewing your membership, or by becoming a new member.

Memberships are valid for the calendar year, and are affordable for everyone. Membership revenues support programming, outreach, and general operations. We would love to be able to count you among our supporters – use the enclosed membership envelope and join (or rejoin!) us today.

Please include your e-mail address on the envelope flap to receive early notifications of upcoming events. As an IRS 501(c)(3) organization, memberships and donations to the Historical Society are fully tax deductible.



*Overnight lodging cabins, constructed in 1933.*

“North of the store a short distance is a new restaurant known as Kay’s Kitchen, built in 1948 by Mrs. Orrin Hutchins. The overnight cabins and house that goes with them were built in 1933 by Martin Jones and Carole Stickney, who were the occupants of the Hotel when it burned in 1932. They have since moved out of town and cabins are now operated by Mrs Neal Stimpson. Mr. And Mrs. Stimpson occupy the house.

“The Hotel was located on the corner at the junction of Route 5 and 113A, and was a large red brick building, nearly one hundred years old when it burned. It was built by King Heaton. L. B. Emerson moved into the Pressey Block in 1946 and remodeled the old store and Post Office in to a woodworking shop which he operated in addition to carpenter contract work. Gerald Wilson is doing well as an electrician and Loren Bacon is his helper. Herbert Smith down by the bridge has given the community years of excellent work in shoe repairing. Since 1947, there have been large commission Sales every Monday at the home of Carleton Gray who owns the so called Orrin Pressey Place. These sales attract a large gathering, and are conducted by Mr. Gray who has a high reputation as an auctioneer.

“As of January, 1950, there are in the village 26 tenements either separate houses or connected with business buildings. Besides this there are 4 single overnight cabins and one double cabin. On the outlying roads in limits of old school district No. 9 there are 10 families, including a family in the old brick school house and Mr. And Mrs. Nye who live over their new gift shop, the Pine Tree Exchange.

“ We are all so accustomed to modern ways of living that it seemed a great hardship when at the time of the 1936 flood, no trains ran through East Thetford for a week. Mail came through by truck. Everyone was running about, hoping to see a newspaper and at the time of the hurricane, there was no electricity for several days. For some time, conditions in this part of town have been as they are everywhere – a changing population and many transfers of real estate.”



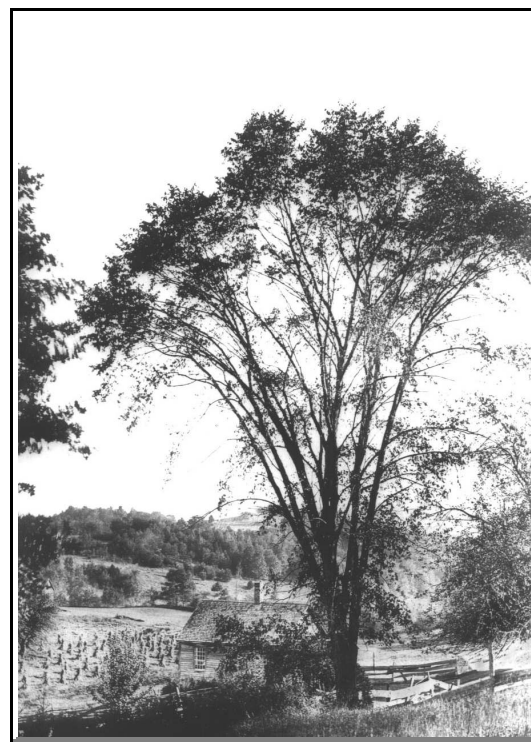
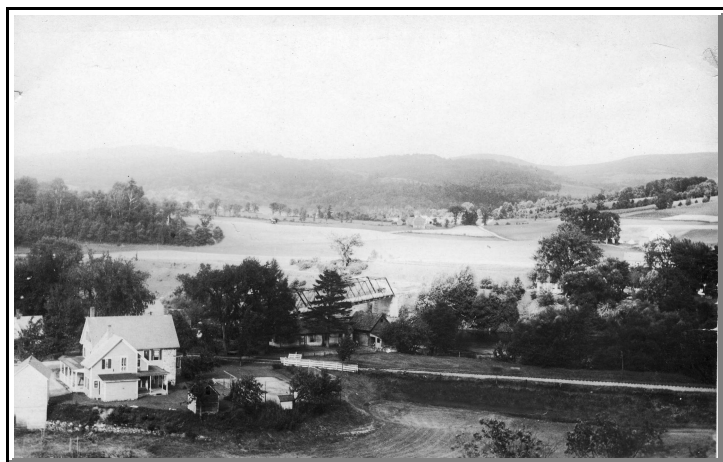
*East Thetford Hotel (present Merchants’ Bank site). Burned in 1933.*

**Photo Scanning Day - Coming Saturday, May 26<sup>th</sup>**



Bring in your historic Thetford photos to the Historical Library to be scanned on Saturday, May 26<sup>th</sup>, between 8:00 am and noon. We'd love to add them to our archives! You'll get your originals back, plus a CD of your scanned images. We'll get a digital copy of your photos for our files.

Photos don't need to be 100 years old or more - we actually don't have as many as we should from the 1930s, '40s or '50s. Does this describe your photo collection? Is it Thetford related, and can you identify the subjects? If so, bring them in!



Can you  
identify these Thetford locations? These are just

four examples of great images that have come in during one of our past Photo Scanning Days. We know there are more gems such as these just waiting to be rediscovered and shared. Sites are identified at the

end of this newsletter.

### Walking Tours Available

Looking for something to do on a sunny spring day? How about a walking tour of one of Thetford's villages? The Historical Society has updated walks for Thetford Center and Thetford Hill, and other villages are in progress.

So much more than just a map, our tours help you identify architectural features, provide historical facts, and offer early photos of many of the stops, so that you can compare then and now. Drop in to the Historical Society and check one out - do your walk, and then return the tour booklet to us.

## Coming in June...

**It's time once again for the Vermont History Expo in Tunbridge, held Saturday and Sunday, June 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. This year's theme is The Civil War.**

**The Historical Society will be an exhibitor in the Dodge-Gilman Building. In addition to exhibits, there will be demonstrations, period crafts and games, food, and fun.**

**Visit [www.vermonthistory.org](http://www.vermonthistory.org) for a general overview of the Expo and try to attend - you'll be glad you did!**

## Late Breaking News !



**We have a date for our Geography Bee! It will be held on Saturday, November 10<sup>th</sup> at Thetford Academy.**

**As noted inside, there will be an adult division and a youth division. Teams will be made up of three members. Grab your friends and form your team. The theme of the Geo Bee and other details will be announced in the near future.**

Images from page 7, clockwise from upper left: Post Mills School, ca. 1899, Thetford Fire Station near Interstate, Senter Schoolhouse near Old Strong/Academy Road, North Thetford Bridge, near present boat landing.



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