



## TOWNSHEND HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

N E W S L E T T E R

FALL 2011

PO BOX 202, TOWNSHEND, VT 05353

VOLUME TWELVE

### ANNUAL MEETING

**OCTOBER 23rd, 2011**  
**TOWNSHEND TOWN HALL**

**Program starts at 2:45 p.m.**

**OFFICERS TO BE ELECTED.**



**PORTER THAYER**

**And**

**The History Of The Town  
Photographer At The Turn of the  
Twentieth Century:**

*A talk by Jessica Weitz & Forrest Holzapfel*



**Please Join Us for a FREE  
Public Talk & Discussion**



Jessica Weitz, in conjunction with the UVM's Center for Digital Initiatives, has been cataloging and digitizing the 1300 images left by local photographer Porter Thayer. His images are held in the collection of the Brooks Memorial Library in Brattleboro, Vermont but have only been available to the public through microfilm. This digitization of these stunning large format images is meant to create free and open access for the general public.



*Porter Thayer photograph*

Thayer's work in the context of photography at that point in history and how these photographs have defined Vermont's social and landscape history.

In addition, the library is hoping to collect new information from the local public about the people and places shown in these pictures. Jessica's husband Forrest Holzapfel is a local photographer and historian whose slide presentation will put

### WINDHAM COUNTY HISTORY FAIR

The 3rd Annual WCH Fair was held on August 13, 2011 on the Newfane Common. THS participated with an exhibit on the creation of the Townshend Dam and the resulting changes in the area. Of particular interest to fair goers was the model of the dam loaned by the Army Corps of Engineers. This event is always a good opportunity to share information and interest others in the work of THS. Special thanks to Carrie Lee Henderson, Charlie Marchant, Clare Adams, Heidi Clawson, Marge Holt, Rob Thomson, Robert DuGrenier, and Walter Meyer, for putting together an interesting display and for serving in the THS Booth.



[info@townshendvt.org](mailto:info@townshendvt.org)

[www.townshendvt.org](http://www.townshendvt.org)

## MEMORIES OF TOWNSHEND by Charles Gray Atwood

My grandmother was born Betsey Wilkinson and she and grandfather, James Gray, were married at her home in Belchertown, Mass. about 1800. I have often heard Grandmother tell the story of her wedding dress. It was sent from Boston, or rather the material was, and it was of English calico at two dollars a yard! She was so proud of it! Made it all



Drawing Fannef/Stoddard/Atwood house.

herself; and starched it stiff, because she could not afford a hoop skirt. Then she stood it up (think how stiff it must have been) before the open kitchen fire to dry. In walked her pet cossett lamb, and knocked it over into the fire; and poor Granny had to be married in an old linsey-woolsey dress, a bright red one!

After the wedding, the bride and groom started out in an ox-cart holding all their worldly possessions; and traveled to Vermont, about one hundred miles. They often had to dig and shovel a road for themselves, to ford streams, and to camp out at night. They first settled in Acton, Vermont. Then later they bought a big farm about two miles out of the village of Townshend. They spent their lives

there; and brought up their five sons, Alonzo, Sharon, Charles [writer of this memory], James, William and their four daughters. Only one of these girls, my mother, Aurilla, lived. One of the sons, Alonzo, went to Amherst College, and became a minister.

*My mother [Aurilla Gray] married my father, Esek Atwood, in Townshend, on September 21st, 1831. My father was born in Chester, Vermont, June 22nd, 1807. My sister Nellie was born in Chester, on December 6th, 1832. The above selection was excerpted from "A Bit of Family History: Memories by Charles Gray Atwood" by Joyce Coil.* ❀

Look for the next excerpt in Spring 2012 newsletter.



### NEW CD AVAILABLE *Townshend, VT: Collections Relat- ing to the History and Inhabitants*

by James H. Phelps

This rare book is now made available for the first time in CD form to the general public. James Phelps was born in West Townshend in 1817, the son of a prominent abolitionist lawyer and judge. In the early 1870's Phelps began assembling historical materials on Townshend's early years, and in 1877 he published the first volume of his Collections which concerned the area of town named Acton. A second volume on West Townshend was published in 1884.

**TO ORDER: contact [ths@dugrenier.com](mailto:ths@dugrenier.com)  
\$18 per copy (plus S&H)**



## REMEMBERING HISTORIC HOUSES FROM THE 1961 FLOOD PLAIN AREA

*(On Display at the West Townshend  
Post Office and Country Store)*

In thinking back on historic houses and industries of the Townshend Dam floodplain area, research shows that West Townshend village developed almost to its fullest during the



first half of the 19th century. Small-scaled industries driven by water power provided the basis of the village's expansion. Some of these mills were located on a man-made channel in the West River, thereby activity began on the "island" that would remain West Townshend's principal industrial site for the succeeding century. The businesses by 1825 included a carding mill, a grist mill, a fulling mill, a sawmill, and a blacksmith's shop. By 1856 the Island industrial area was actively occupied and in 1880 the train finally connected the towns along the West River Valley. The West Townshend depot was conveniently located on the "island" to serve the various tradesmen there. The branch-line railroad was abandoned in the 1930s and industry also

declined in the area.

Nevertheless, by the time of the dam project in 1961, the island included a large-scale chicken farm of 13,000 birds, and at least five other families lived there. All told, the number of structures removed from the floodplain area included: about 20 houses (13 in W. Townshend; 7 in E. Jamaica);



L: Henry Stratton barn; R: Herbert Burnap house--both removed for the dam floodplain in 1961. (Horses scooping out brook after Flood of 1938.)

1 inactive mill site; 1 grave site (E. Jamaica); 1 diner/auto repair shop (E. Jamaica); 2 train depots; 1 church; and 1 covered bridge.

In recent decades, West Townshend Village has been truncated by fires, floods, fences, and the flood-control dam project on the West River. However, in spite of various changes, the core of the village remains inviolate without the intrusion of modern-day commercial buildings near its center; thus West Townshend retains an extraordinary measure of its historic character as a rural 19th century village.

*The above information is excerpted from The National Register Nomination Form for West Townshend Village, written by Hugh Henry, Architectural Historian*



*The Taft Mill on the "island" (now in the floodplain area)*

PO BOX 202, TOWNSHEND, VT 05353



***IF YOU HAVEN'T PAID YOUR DUES — PLEASE DO SO NOW!***

**TOWNSHEND HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIPS June 2011-2012**

Your continued membership makes it possible for THS to continue. We appreciate every dollar of support. Contributions above the dues amount are welcomed. Please remit by mail.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mail to Townshend Historical Society PO Box 202, Townshend, VT 05353 ~ Thank you.**