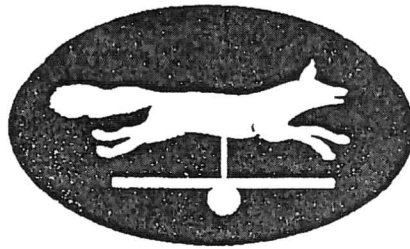


The Antiquarian & Landmarks Society's



Magical History Tours

A Hill-Town Treasury: Woodstock & Thompson.

Tour Study Notes

October 20, 2001

www.hartnet.org/ALS

Special Thanks to Our Hosts & Advisors:

Dawn Adiletta

Horace Sellers

Dan Piotrowski

Jay Cantor

Mary Beth Lee

Jane Vercelli

Pam Russo

Susan Vincent

Donna Williams

Sylvia Danenhower

Mr. & Mrs. John Gould

Theme

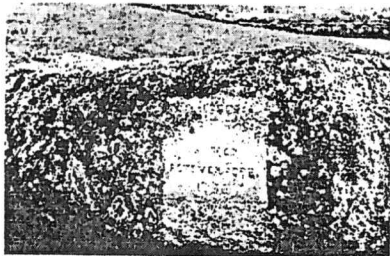
Try pinpointing the source of **Yankee ingenuity** and its certain you'll end up in a place that looks a lot like Woodstock and Thompson. These scenic village settings were the inspiration that lead to the founding of Old Sturbridge Village. Not surprisingly, some of OSV's most famous buildings were removed from these towns which flourished during the half century following the

Revolution, a time when civic ambition, prosperity and traditions of handicraft and design converged to create some of the most impressive historic districts in America.

As the northeastern most town in Connecticut, Thompson is better known to the residents of greater Worcester than in its home State. Woodstock - home of great institutions like Woodstock Academy, the Woodstock Fair and SPNEA's "Roseland Cottage" - has long been a destination for summer travel. Between these two neighboring towns is one of the most impressive collections of nationally significant architecture in Connecticut.

A & L last visited Connecticut's northeast corner in 1963. Fortunately the best of what was there then has been preserved together with a way of life that has earned the upper Quinebaug River Valley a reputation as "the last green valley" in the sprawling metropolitan Boston-to-Washington corridor. In addition to peerless rural scenery, Woodstock and neighboring Thompson have more distinguished architecture and hidden treasures than most small towns in Connecticut.

Woodstock's story begins in 1674 at "Pulpit Rock" when Rev. John Elliot, a visionary evangelist, preached to the Wabbaquassetts Indians in their native tongue. Twelve years later Woodstock became the first English settlement in what is now Windham County.



Woodstock was one of several towns along the northern border of present-day Connecticut that were part of Massachusetts until the 1750s. Hill towns, ideal for grazing cattle and small manufacturing,

grew rapidly from the mid-18th century until the 1820s. Later, during the out-migration of agriculture, Woodstock emphasized shoe-making, and by 1845 employed 900 laborers in manufacturing more than 5 million pair of shoes a year. Thomas Bugbee made redware pottery in Woodstock including milk pans, pudding pots, jars, jugs, mugs and ink stands. Despite a population less than 2,500, Woodstock supported 6 houses of worship - 4 Congregational, 1 Baptist and 1 Methodist.

Itinerary

Our first stop of the day is the **Gen. Samuel McClellan House** (1769), most recently a restaurant and Inn and presently for sale. In 1945 A & L almost bought the house with contents "full of



S. view of the Congregational Church, Woodstock.



South view of Thompson, (central part.)

accumulations of the past 176 years." "It is the worst calamity I have seen to have it broken up," wrote A & L trustee Elmer Keith to Luke Lockwood. The house, contents and 60 acres sold for \$15,000. The resulting auction on Labor Day weekend 1945 was the sort one never sees today with three highboys, a tavern sign a "set of twelve rush bottom Sheraton chairs, including two armchairs" and much, much more. McClellan was a General of 5th Brigade in the Revolution and the direct ancestor of Gen. George B. McClellan, commanding officer of the Army of the Potomac (August 15, 1861 - November 9, 1862); and commander-in-chief, USA (November 5, 1861 - March 11,



1862), during the Civil War. He was also the Democratic candidate for President in 1864.

The house was once famous for the group of Elm trees Gen. McClellan planted on the site after the news of the Lexington Alarm in 1775.

Announcement
OF AN
AUCTION SALE
of Unusual Importance
Of The Rare Early American Furniture

In the Old **ARNOLD INN**, in the
VILLAGE OF SOUTH WOODSTOCK, CONN.
on Route No. 93

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, Labor Day, and
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

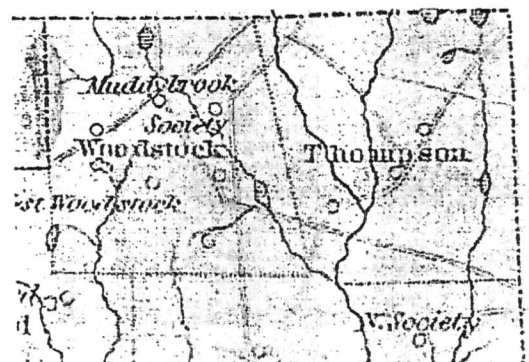
Starting at 10:00 a. m., each day
In a Big Auction Tent

TITE INN—built in 1769 by Gen. George S. McClellan, and sold to Major Moses Arnold in 1814—is full of accumulations of the past 176 years, including the huge, quaint Inn sign, with its original hand-forged iron hangers

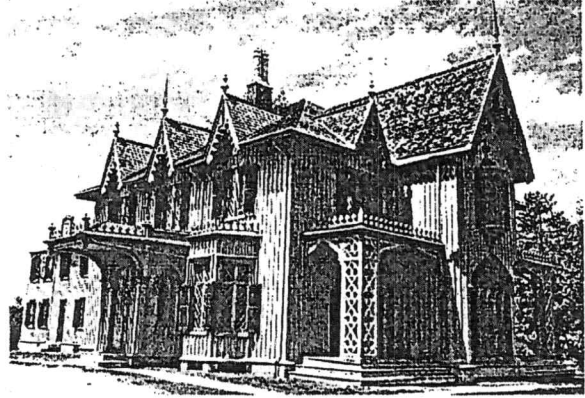
Among the house's many treasure is an overmantle painting - the earliest documented work by Connecticut's most renowned Colonial portrait painter, Winthrop Chandler (1747 - 1790). Born in Woodstock, he became an itinerant portrait and ornamental landscape painter

The house also contains a built in highboy of about 1769 - one of the only examples ever documented in New England. He worked mostly in and around Woodstock and Thompson, Connecticut. He spent the last five years of his life in Worcester, Massachusetts where he lay eight books of gold leaf on the courthouse weathervane. He is considered one of the finest provincial artists in America, having painted about 50 portraits while working as a house painter.

Next we travel to **Woodstock Hill**. Drawn by cool summer air and fine but inexpensive housing, Woodstock and Thompson attracted summer residents from the cities. In 1846, Woodstock native Henry Bowen, returned from New York to build Roseland Cottage, one of the most renowned Gothic-style mansions in America and the site famous for its 4th of July galas. Guests at Roseland included 5 presidents: Grant, Hayes, Harrison, Cleveland and McKinley. Bowen launched a program of beautification on the town green by setting out trees, and stimulating related public improvements. Bowen's support also breathed new life to Woodstock Academy, which is celebrating its Bicentennial this year and is one of the jewels of Woodstock Green.



Roseland Cottage is one of the best surviving examples of rural Gothic style. A “startling aberration in this rural townscape,” it was designed by Joseph C. Wells of Brooklyn, one of the founders of the American Institute of Architects. Known as “the Pink house” its color since 19th century has been bright pink with maroon and dark green ornament. Its Gothic interior and furnishings are highlighted by painted and grained woodwork, and Lincrusta Walton paper (paper mache), heavily embossed like leather, applied 1880’s. Spectacularly sited facing the common,



the property includes barn with bowling alley as part of its original design (the earliest surviving structure of its kind in country), ice house, a 20c green house and aviary, and classical garden pavilion (1920’s), all complementing the house. The house and setting may be the most complete expression in the country of the ideals of landscape designer Alexander Jackson Downing who believed that Gothic design symbolized Christian piety and virtue, in harmony with landscape. Parterre Garden (1850), includes 600 yards of dwarf English boxwood (unusual in New England since it is not hardy) outlining 21 beds. It was restored in 1986.

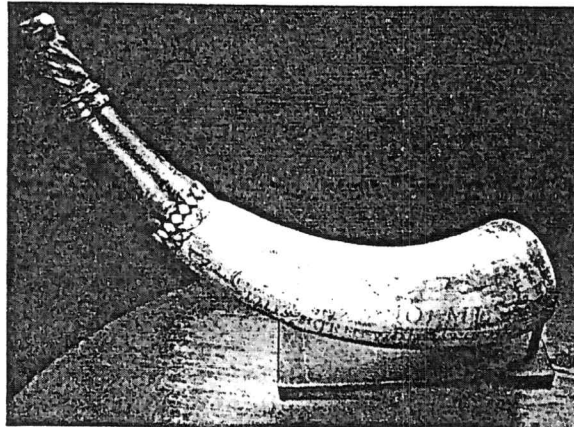


The **Old Burying Ground** at Woodstock Hill has been described by Prof. James Slater of the University of Connecticut, as “one of the finest colonial burying grounds in Connecticut and perhaps all of New England not only for the variety and beauty of its old stones and the immaculate condition...but also because of the setting.” The range and variety of Boston and Rhode Island slates and Connecticut-made folk carving make it a veritable museum of colonial sculpture that is not to be missed. Stonecutters represented include: James Foster II & III , Daniel Hastings, George Allen of Providence, John Stevens of Newport, the Mannings of Windham, Connecticut, Richard Kimball, John Walden of Windham , Benjamin Collins of Columbia, Obadiah Wheeler of Lebanon, and Peter Buckland of East Hartford.



We will also see a stone marking the grave of Dr. David Holmes

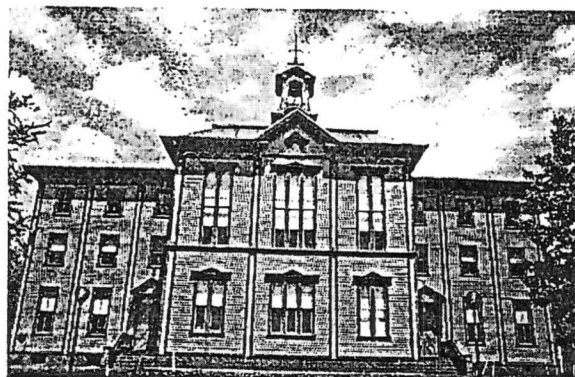
(1721-1779) the "Patriot Doctor of the Revolution," whose descendant was the poet Oliver Wendell Holmes. Physician, poet, and humorist, he joined the Harvard faculty in 1847, and later became dean of its medical school. He won national acclaim with his poem "Old Ironsides" (1830) and also wrote a poem about Dr. David Holmes buried here. Holmes' Revolutionary War powder horn, a recent gift to A & L, is now on display at the Hale Homestead.



We will visit "Sunset Hill" a private home and site of the old **Woodstock Tavern**, built for Asa Bishop in 1782. It was expanded in sections both in 1820 and 1829 and is situated within walking distance of the Woodstock Common. Henry Bowen, who built Roseland Cottage, was born here. At various times the building housed a post office and general store..

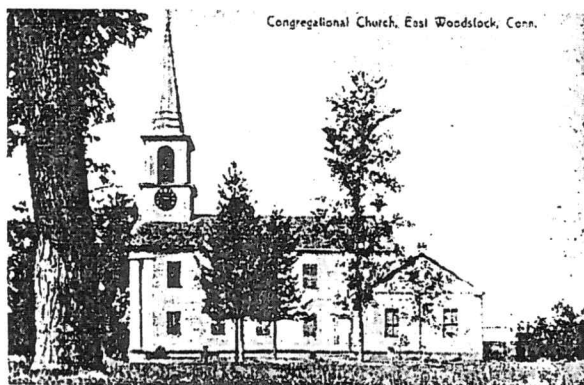
On the town Common is the **Woodstock Academy**

Classroom Building of 1873. This is one of the earliest academies established in CT (1801), part of the proliferation of private academies after the Revolution. Supported by tuition, local endowments and sale of shares (4 or more entitled buyer to attend lectures for a year), it attracted local, regional and out-of-state college bound students. When it was opened in 1802, it served boys on the first floor, girls on second, with tuition ranging from \$1.50 (reading) to \$4 (language and higher math). During a decline in



1843 from competition and the depressed economy, Henry Bowen rescued it, raising money through concerts at Roseland Park and then building Elmwood Hall (1844-46, burned 1907), a dorm in winter and hotel in summer. In the 1880's, when free high schools took over (the earliest from 1840-50's), many private academies closed but Woodstock prevailed and opened to local

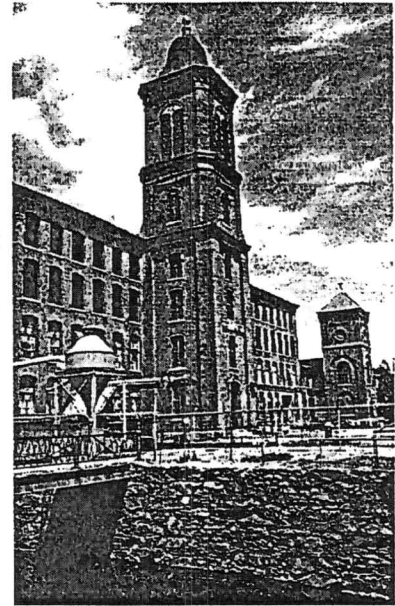
students for free in 1911. It still serves as the public high school, administered by a Board of Trustees rather than a Board of Education.



Congregational Church, East Woodstock, Conn.

Lunch will be at the **East Woodstock Congregational Church** with host Dawn Adiletta. East Woodstock is proud of its village green surrounded by a remarkable cluster of 18th and early 19th century houses.

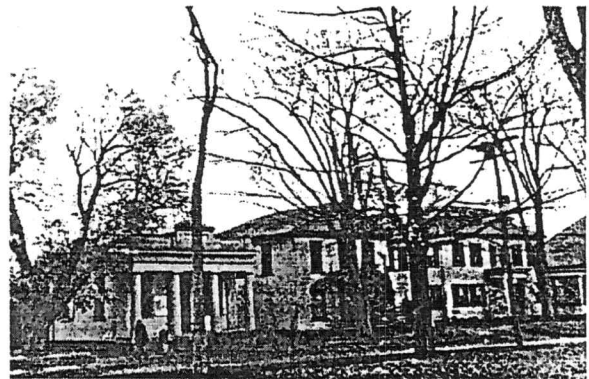
After lunch we'll explore the **North Grosvenordale Mill** historic district. This intact and extensive mill village, one of the largest in the state, includes several areas of uniform mill housing reflecting ethnic and skill distinctions among workers, original mills and support buildings, and one of the state's few surviving textile mill dams with its canal. The swift streams of the area drew mill developers from nearby RI in the late 1700's. Mill No.2 (1872), a 4-story brick, hip roofed, with long narrow proportions for good light, 6-story stair towers and stone tailrace serving wheelpits underneath became one of the state's most productive and long-lasting textile mills, expanding into the 20th century, declining during the Depression, and finally closing in 1954. Today the buildings are used for light industry and warehousing.



In addition to the mill the complex features five simply designed housing types including the uniform 4-family houses along the river that housed the majority French-Canadians, the 4 large 12-family houses across the track for single workers, a less dense cluster of frame buildings (1880) up the hill known as "Swede Village" for the skilled workers, 6 brick supervisors' houses now slightly hidden, and several late-19c simple Victorian frame houses. Note also the prominent Second-Empire company store, and the Greek Revival style Methodist Church (1842) which predates the mill complex.

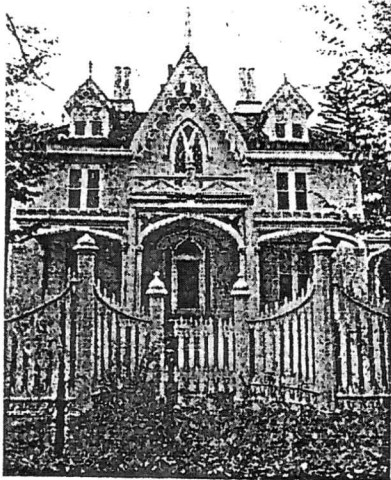
Thompson Hill Common with Jane Vercelli

In 1830 Thompson and Woodstock were the largest towns in the County, though neither had a population of 3,500. A century later Woodstock's population dropped to 1,712. In 1836, Thompson supported 4 churches with a center consisting of "30 well-built dwelling houses, 4 mercantile stores, 1 bank and a printing office." Forty years ago the bank was moved to Old Sturbridge Village.



Thompson Common owes its existence to the old regiment. In 1771 the Common was set apart and donated by Benjamin Wilkinson as a training field for the Thompson companies and for the regiment from time to time. According to Ellen Larned's "History of Windham County," the open broken land about the meeting house was transformed into a comfortable common and training field. The common was a militia training ground for the northeastern Connecticut troops who mustered there in 1775 en route to Cambridge.

Thompson Common includes numerous architectural treasures.



Thompson resident **William H. Mason** built a **Gothic Mansion** as ambitious as the Bowen House in Woodstock in 1845. Presently owned by the "Prince of Chintz" the Mason house is in need of a new friend. Matching in scale, pretense and ornament Woodstock's Roseland Cottage, these dueling Gothic treasure are unrivaled in New England and signal the beginning of the romantic Victorian age.

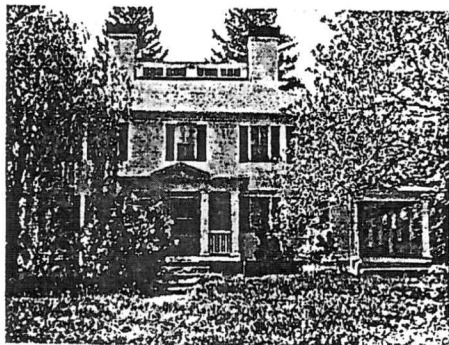
As originally built in 1814, the **White Horse Inn** was a mixed use commercial

building that housed an Inn, a "Hat and Cap Store," a saddler's shop and a jeweler's store. In 1831 it was acquired by its most colorful innkeeper Captain Vernon Stiles who claimed that more stagecoach passengers dined at his tavern than at any other in New England. In 1825 the

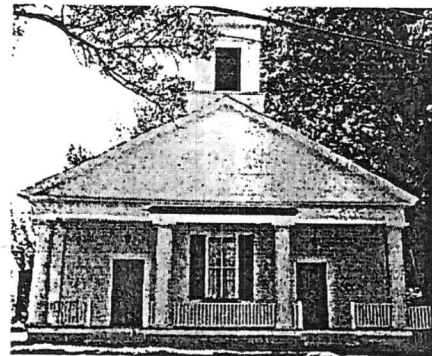


Marquis de Lafayette and Rochambeau, stayed at Stiles Tavern. In honor of the visit, Stiles designed a sign showing LaFayette tipping his hat and seated in a carriage drawn by two white horses. The sign outside the inn is a copy, the original belongs to The Connecticut Historical Society and was recently featured in a national traveling exhibition on Tavern Signs. Stiles Inn became the Gretna Greene of New England because of its proximity both to Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Gretna Greene was a town in Scotland where no notice of intent to marry was required before a wedding took place. As a consequence, people flocked from all over England.

Two of Connecticut's most famous early architects, **Ithiel Town** and **Samuel Belcher** were both Thompson natives. Town is credited with designing the original **Town Hall** (1842) present home of the Thompson Historical Society.



Also situated on the Common is the **Royal Watson House** (1780s) which features one of the finest raised panelwork interiors in eastern Connecticut.



A century ago Thompson was home to a pioneer antiquarian **Simon Davis** who created a museum of curiosities and Indian relics which once contained the largest collection of geological specimens in the country.

We will then visit the **William Chandler House** and carriage house/barn. The house was built in the 18th century and has many add-ons. The carriage house, which is one of the most magnificent in New England, was built in 1888. The owner Donna Williams will take us on a walk around the exterior of the carriage house/barn and then inside the house for a tour of the first floor. This house was recently featured on House and Garden TV. in a program about Connecticut.

From there we will go to the **John Russell House** where owner Susan Vincent will give us a tour of the newly restored and refurbished house and barn. Adjacent to the Russell barn the Vincents are currently in the process of reconstructing the Ramsdell barn which they moved from West Thompson with the permission of the Army Corps of Engineers.

One of the highlights of our adventure will be the **Capt. Seth Chandler House** (1760) in East Woodstock where we will be entertained with a program of **sacred and secular music** of the 1830s and 40s, by Mary Beth Lee and homeowner Horace Sellers. The house was rescued from sure destruction by its present owner in 1983. Prior to that time it had been vacant since the 1950s. Capt. Seth Chandler (1738-1818) was the great-grandson of Deacon. John Chandler who was Woodstock's first First Selectman in 1690. He was a tax collector, lister, surveyor of highways, selectman



(1789 & 1791) and moderator of town meetings. He mustered in as 1st Sargent under Lt. Stephen Tucker in 1776. He and his wife Eunice raised 11 children in this house. By the time of the 1820 Census, when his son John Chandler owned the house, there were 16 living here. The interior features a large formal parlor with tombstone paneling and raised panel wainscoting. Early finishes are exposed under the layers of paint. Feather edge graining, remnants of stenciling, panels with stenciled corner decoration, sponge painted polka dots in stair hall complete an arrangement that is remarkable in its preservation and artistry.

We will end the day with a reception at **Jay Cantor's House and Garden**. The house was built around 1840 for a child of the family in the adjacent house. It was originally a small Greek temple with a kitchen ell and woodshed behind. Mr. Cantor founded the department of American Paintings at Christie's and is a nationally renowned scholar of American art. About the collections in his house he writes "I have collected on an extremely modest budget, buying objects that had style, personality or some cultural expression, ranging over the 19th century. Most objects acquired for the house were bought because they worked with everything else and were of the right scale for an extremely modest house. A small collection of 19th century chairs, which expressed their style period was assembled with the premise that none could cost more than \$50. Several are on display now at Yale University Art Gallery." Libations and refreshments will be served.

Bill Hosley, Director, Antiquarian & Landmarks Society, 66 Forest St., Hartford, CT 06105