

NEWS from the Vernon Historical Society



December 2007

Vernon, CT 06066

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President's Message

“The Ripple Effect” As the town begins to celebrate Vernon’s bicentennial, the public’s awareness of the event is having a positive impact on the Society. Donations of materials related to the history of Vernon and Rockville have increased during the last year. Some wonderful new items, including many from the 20th century, have been added to the collection. When these donations become part of the Society’s archives, they become available for use in exhibits, as teaching tools and as aids to researchers. Our museum volunteers have been kept busy cataloging the donations. More willing hands to assist with this interesting and vital job are always welcome. The museum staff looks forward to another busy year as the town continues to commemorate 200 years of history.

Jean Luddy

President, Vernon Historical Society

Bicentennial Celebration Starts at the VHS



State Representative Joan Lewis, State Comptroller Nancy Wyman, Mayor Ellen Marmer, State Representative Claire Janowski, State Senator Tony Guglielmo and Bicentennial Committee Chairman Rudolph Rossmly pose by the Bicentennial Banner

On October 13, the Vernon Bicentennial celebration officially began with a ceremony at the Society’s Museum. Mayor Ellen Marmer was joined by state and local dignitaries. Rudolph Rossmly, the chairman of the Vernon Bicentennial Committee, was the Master of Ceremonies. In addition to introducing the speakers for the program, he read a special Proclamation from Governor M. Jodi Rell.

The Vernon Historical Society was honored that our building was chosen to be the site for the start of the year-long celebration. The front of the building was decorated in bunting. A special exhibit upstairs in the auditorium featured enlargements of vintage postcards from the 1908 Centennial celebration. Several pieces of bunting that decorated buildings in the city in 1908 were taken out of storage and displayed.

The Society would not have been able to present this special exhibit without the generous support of several local businesses. C&G Photo of Vernon reproduced and enlarged the postcards. The Artsake Gallery of Tolland matted the photographs. Swiss Cleaners of Vernon cleaned the hundred year old bunting.

In addition to viewing the exhibit in the auditorium, those who attended the Bicentennial event were able to go downstairs to the Museum to see two displays: “Rockville Remembers: Promotional Items from old Rockville Businesses”, and “When Wool was King”.

The exhibit of 1908 postcards has been moved for an extended stay in the Peck Room at the Rockville Public Library. The public is invited to view the display during library hours. Please call the Library at 875-5892 for information.



Vernon Historical Society members Jim Ashe, Cheri Arzt, Carolyn Blouin and Maureen Bourne prepare to greet visitors to the Bicentennial Celebration.

Holiday Craft Fair



During Thanksgiving weekend, the Vernon Historical Society hosted our annual craft fair for the 11th year. Over 30 crafters offered handmade items to sell. Business was a little slow this year, but the holiday spirit was present. The Society extends its thanks to this year’s crafters and also to all those who contributed items to our popular “Nearly New” table.

Now that the Craft Fair is over, it’s time to look ahead to the Book Sale!



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A Field Guide to the Rockville Mills Notes for Walking Tour

The map pictured on the right page shows the mills that lined the Hockanum River as it flowed through Rockville. For each mill site, the map lists the names and dates of the companies that operated there. The numbers by each site indicate the height of the falls. From the first mill site near Snipsic Lake to the Saxony Mill site on West Street, the Hockanum river falls over 200 feet. This steep drop spread over the length of the river made the Hockanum an ideal source for waterpower in the early years of industrial development in Vernon. Earlier mills were located on the Tankerhoosen River in the Talcottville section of town and over in the Valley Falls region, but the limited strength of the water power restricted the number of viable mills.

In addition to factory locations, this map provides a chronology of manufacturing in Rockville. Before the textile industry was developed in the area, the only mills along the Hockanum were grist mills for grinding grain, saw mills for cutting lumber and fulling mills for processing woolen cloth. During Rockville's industrial heyday, textile mills dominated the landscape, but other local companies utilized Hockanum water power. The White Corbin Company developed a special process to make envelopes and later became known as the United States Envelope company. In the early 1830's a paper mill operated on what is now called Paper Mill Pond.

To see what remains of the textile industry in Rockville, an explorer should start up near the source - Snipsic Lake. The Minterburn/Roosevelt Mill complex is visible from the road, but access to the property is restricted. Follow East Main Street to the intersection of Grove Street, noting that the Hockanum River flows near the road and empties into Paper Mill Pond. At the intersection, the Amerbelle complex includes the former Belding Brothers buildings, the Fitch Mill and the Stone Mill. These buildings dominate the Rockville skyline.

Proceed down East Main Street toward the center of Rockville. The Hockanum River flows under Grove Street and then pours out from under the mills in a spectacular waterfall. (In the winter, spray from the waterfall coats the trees with sparkling ice. In the spring or after a heavy rain, the power of the surging water is awesome.) The water from the falls goes into a mill pond before flowing over the dam which was part of the American Mill building. In 1960, the American Mill was destroyed in a devastating fire.

Once past the dam, the river goes underground through the center of Rockville. The Rock Mill building and the Leeds Company buildings no longer exist. The Hockanum River reappears behind the shopping center across from Rockville Hospital and can be seen from West Main Street or from the end of Brooklyn Street. The river remains visible from the Regan Mills on Brooklyn Street all the way along West Main Street. Three mill buildings have been renovated into apartments or senior housing: the New England Mill facing Vernon Avenue, the Florence Mill and the Springville Mill which face West Main Street. The Hockanum Company complex on West Main Street has the last remaining wooden mill building. By the time the walker reaches the corner of West Main Street and West Street, all the existing mill buildings have been seen. The Saxony mill was located on West Street facing West Main Street. After it was destroyed in a fire in 1994, the site was converted into a park. From here the Hockanum River flows toward Vernon and Manchester, leaving behind the buildings that remain from the days when water powered the looms.

To learn more about the textile industry in Rockville, see [Building the Loom City: Rockville Connecticut, 1821-1906](#) by Dr. S. Ardis Abbott

To see photographs of the mills when they were in operations, see [Vernon and Historic Rockville](#) by Dr. S. Ardis Abbott and Jean A. Luddy

Bicentennial Celebration Starts at the VHS

During 2008 the Vernon Historical Society has planned a series of lectures that will look at aspects of our local history.

January 20, 2008, Sunday

"Vernon, the First Century, 1808-1908: From Settlement to City"

Lecturer: Dr. S. Ardis Abbott, Municipal Historian Vernon Historical Society, 734 Hartford Turnpike (Snow date 1/27/2008), 2pm.

March 16, 2008, Sunday

"Decades of Turmoil: How our Town Faced two World Wars, a Great Depression, Influenza, a Hurricane, Strikes and the Closing of the Mills"

Lecturer: Jean Luddy, President of the Vernon Historical Society Vernon Senior Center Auditorium, Park Place (Snow date 3/23/2008), 2pm.

June 1, 2008, Sunday

"Unbuilding the City: Consolidation and Development in the 1960s"

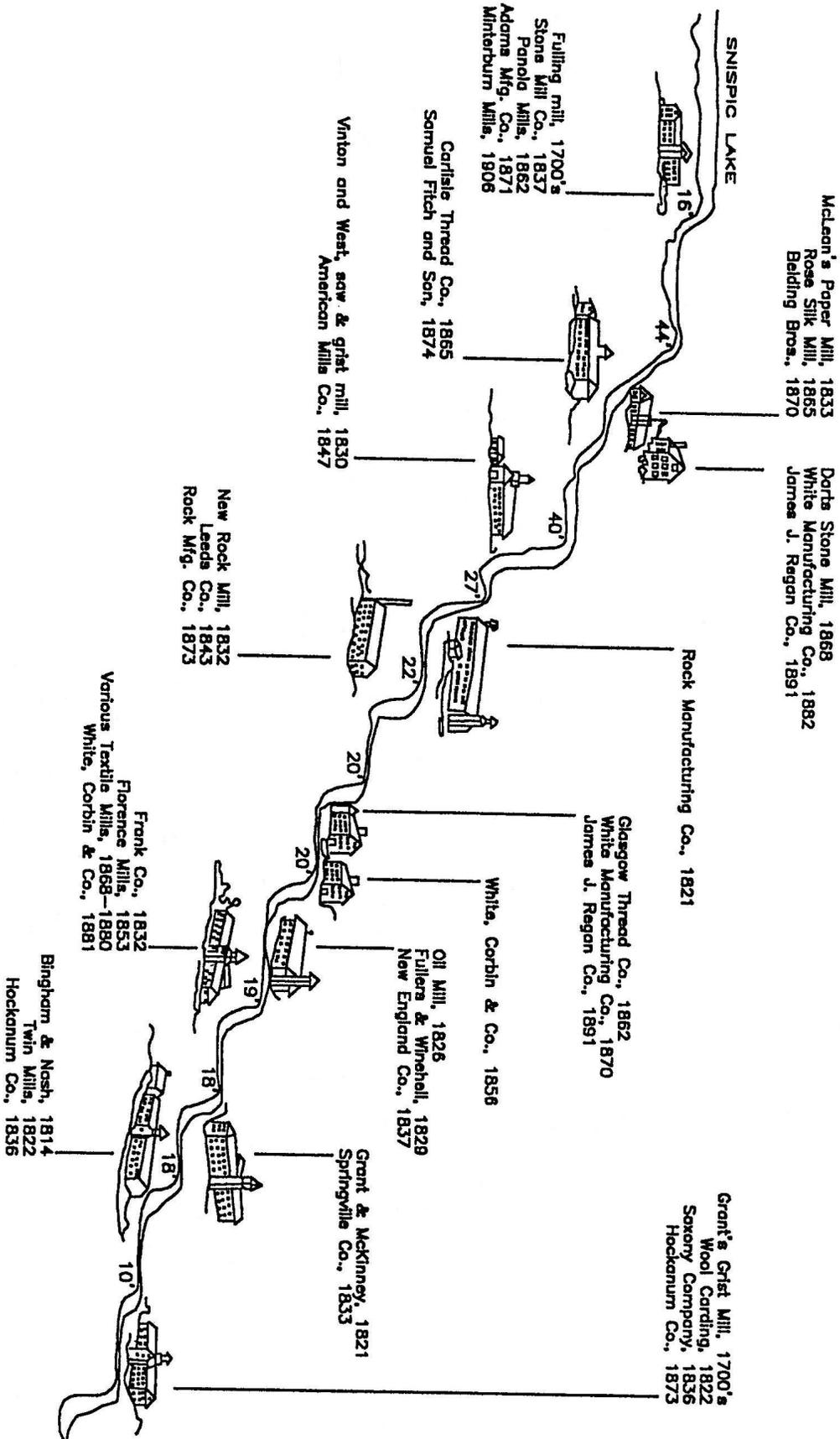
Lecturer: Carolyn Blouin, Assistant Museum Director Vernon Historical Society, 734 Hartford Turnpike, 2 pm.

September 21, 2008, Sunday

"Treasures from the Vault: Unique Items from the Society's Collection"

Lecturers: Dr. S. Ardis Abbot, Municipal Historian and Robert Hurd, Past President of the Vernon Historical Society Vernon Historical Society, 734 Hartford Turnpike, 2 pm

The public is invited to all of these programs. Admission is free. For further information, please call the Vernon Historical Society at 875-4326 or email us at vernonhs@sbcglobal.net



Keeping in Touch

If you have questions or comments, you can reach us by e-mail at:

VERNONHS@SBCGLOBAL.NET

If members with access to e-mail provide us with their e-mail addresses, we will be able to send to you additional reminders of events and special meetings.

E-mail to the address above and you will automatically be added to our list.



Keep up-to-date, visit us at:

**[http://
VHSVernonCT.tripod.com](http://VHSVernonCT.tripod.com)**

Calendar for 2008

Mark this date on your calendar

Vernon Historical Society Winter Program

“Vernon, the First Century, 1808-1908: From Settlement to City” A Bicentennial Lecture

As part of the town-wide celebrations of Vernon’s Bicentennial Anniversary, the Vernon Historical Society has planned a series of bicentennial lectures focusing on the history of Vernon and Rockville.

The first one in the series is entitled “Vernon, the First Century, 1808-1908: From Settlement to City”. The talk will be given by Dr S. Ardis Abbott, Vernon’s Municipal Historian. Dr. Abbott will discuss the origins and expansion of the textile industry in town by highlighting the roles played by certain individuals. She will tell the stories of such people as the Vernon farmers who gave financial support to early factory owners, the local inventors who improved production, the immigrants who worked in the mills, and the leading families whose bequests have benefited our citizens. The textile industry started in the 1820s and was the economic base of the town until the 1950s. Dr. Abbott ran across many of these stories during the research for her dissertation on the Rockville mills. Come and learn about the people behind the successful growth of Vernon and Rockville during the Industrial Revolution.

The lecture will be given at 2 pm on Sunday, January 20, 2008 at the Vernon Historical Society at 734 Hartford Turnpike (Route 30). Snow date, January 27, 2008. There will be a brief business meeting of the Society before Dr. Abbott’s talk. The lecture is free. The public is invited.

For further information, please call the Vernon Historical Society at 875-4326 or send an email to vernonhs@sbcglobal.net

Vernon Historical Society

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