

# NEWS FROM NICKWACKETT

VOL. 5 NO. 1 RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 1998

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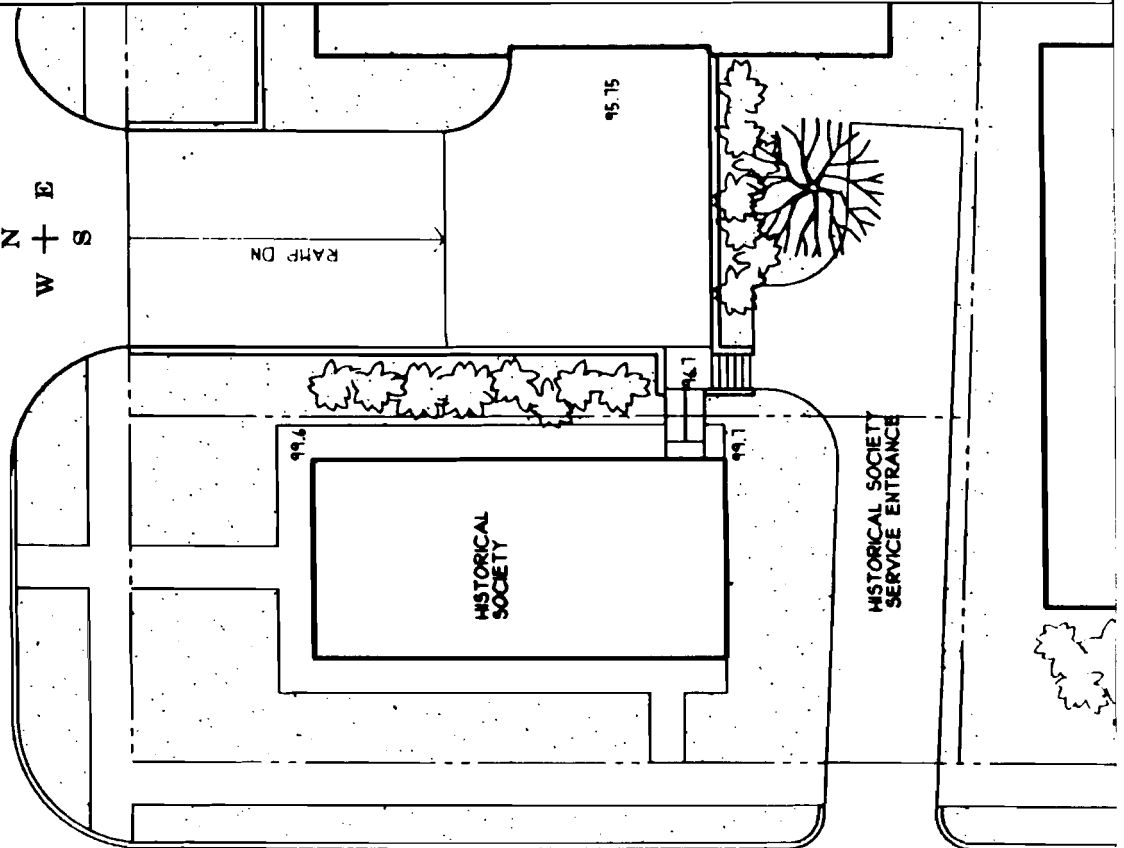
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## UPDATE ON PROPOSED POLICE BUILDING

The proposed police building east of the Society would have three major effects on the Society: (1) The entrance to the underground parking garage of the proposed police building would require an entrance and exit ramp where the current parking area of the Society is. (2) The plan would restrict access to the bulkhead at the southeast corner of the Society. (3) The Society's propane gas tank would need to be relocated.

Tom Carpenter, the Society representative, has discussed the following

with the architect: (1) The lost parking might be replaced with some horizontal and diagonal parking at the rear of the Society. Entrance from Nickwackett Street with an exit through the fire department parking lot would make this feasible. (2) The current ramp plan could be modified to provide a curve or angle where the ramp nears the Society bulkhead. This would allow access from the rear of the Society. (3) The cost of the relocation of the Society's propane tank would be borne by the project.

The current plans are preliminary and subject to voter approval of the project bond issue and the final plans submitted by the architect selected for the project.

## FROM A TEACHER

In December the Society hosted a Vermont History class from the Community College of Vermont. The instructor's thank you note had a number of comments about the Society and its activities that deserve to be shared with our members.

"In behalf of myself and students at CCV, I wish to thank you for a delightful presentation entitled 'Doing History' and for the opportunity to see the many things available to students, researchers, and just plain interested folk at the Rutland Historical Society.

"I felt that the handout [packet] was extraordinary, and you and your staff are to be commended for the extreme amount of volunteer work that you do at the Society's headquarters. The exhibits; namely, the Nickwackett Engine Company, Howe Scales, the fire of 1906, and the ... family treasures were exceptionally well done.....

"The extent of quarterly publications was quite overwhelming. They are a wonderful testimony to the research that has been done by you and others. The wide variety of topics should open the eyes of visitors -- everything from the Irish in Rutland in 1880 to the history of companies and families. The upstairs collection was likewise pretty overwhelming.

"The up close examination of agricultural statistics was very educational and fitted in with a segment of my curriculum. If only students could realize that the Vermont story cannot be taught in fifteen weeks."

Classes and other groups are always welcome to visit the Society by appointment. Special programs can be arranged to fit the needs of the various groups. Call Jim Davidson at 773-7525 if you have a group that would like to visit the Society.

## FROM A MEMBER

"I'm writing to tell you how much I enjoyed the booklet on Mr. Clement. I remember him very well as a wonderful gentleman who helped to fill my pail with beach sand at Patch's Dam.

"I believe the '76 bridge was still there, but I definitely recall the log stairs that you would climb up one side and down the other and then proceed up the pine path to the dam. The smell of pine was awesome and the beauty, peace and tranquillity very wonderful, and Mr. Clement would meet us, pat us on the head, puff his pipe and watch us play with our pails and shovels. He was a wonderful person and I recall his smile so well. My father would swim there and let us play and then on to home on Lincoln Avenue." - *Mary Fortin*

## COMMITTEE CORNER

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Dorothy Whitford - 773-3219

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Elaine Purdy - 773-6819

#### Society Historian

Mary Segale - 773-2326

## WHAT MAKES A HOUSE HISTORIC ?

(This article appeared in the Rutland Herald of 11 October 1997. It seems to provide a great deal of light on an often asked question. We reprint it here with the kind permission of the author, Curtis B. Johnson, and the Rutland Herald. Mr. Johnson has been writing an occasional column under the title "Vermont Architecture Pattern Book" for the Rutland Herald.)

What makes a building historic? You probably know if you have a new or almost-new house or an old house. But, if it is an old house, is it historic?

Most everyone seems to agree that really old and really fancy houses are historic, as well as old churches, schools, and other community landmarks. There the agreement ends.

That is probably a good thing. This is the United States, and everyone, each neighborhood, every municipality, each state, and even the feds get to define when an old home is historic for their own purposes. So whether a house is historic depends on whether you or your neighbors think so or whether your town, the state or the feds decide it is for their jurisdiction.

Despite this all-American welter of historic jurisdictions, for some reason, people think that if you have a historic building it means you can't change it. SOMEONE (God know's who) will make sure you don't.

Folks sometimes tell me they don't like something their neighbor is doing. They ask, "Can't someone stop them? I heard the house is historic!" and I ask, "Are they using government money? Do they need a development permit? Is there any special zoning about things historic?" If the answer is no, why would government tell someone what to do with their property because someone else thinks it's historic?

The well-kept secret about historic buildings is that they are always changing. They have to change just to stay standing and to be continually remade useful for some purpose, so that people will pay the upkeep. So even if someone uses government money or is getting a special permit to develop, owners can change a historic building in whatever ways they need to, since that is what will keep the historic building useful.

Some old homes can become museums, where change is kept to a minimum. But there are so many historic buildings that most of them must meet fire and safety codes, be accessible, and in short be useful for modern life even as we treasure them for evoking times gone by.

Homeowners know this. It is largely through their judicious adaptations and good stewardship that Vermont has so many historic places intact. Not to mention those in every community who volunteer to maintain landmark public buildings with suppers and ballot measures.

So really homeowners and local institutions make buildings historic.

Without their investment in maintenance and adaptation, no historic or any other building lasts really very long.

Before making that investment they of course consider economics and suitability for the use at hand, as anyone would. But they also consider some other things important.

When was the building built and for whom and why? Is it part of my family, say a multi-generational farm or family residence? Does it display noteworthy craftsmanship and design? Is it part of a larger group of buildings built about the same time, a neighborhood landmark? Is it particularly associated with a local social or ethnic group or the town? Is it one of those places that makes our town distinctive?

Thinking about all the buildings in your town that mean something to you, how many do you think are historic? Twelve, thirty, two-hundred, the whole valley?

Whatever motivates owners and volunteers to muster investment in buildings they consider historic, their combined effort in Vermont has been remarkable.

Architecturally, it stands out as the flower of rural northern New England. Nationally, the state is known for having the most intact historic environment in the country.

## SPRING PROGRAMS

The Program Committee of the Society is pleased to announce the following Spring programs:

- Wed. 11 Feb "Vermont's Covered Bridges: A Reassessment" - Ed Barna  
Co-sponsored by the Vermont Council On the Humanities and the Rutland Free Library.
- Wed. 25 Feb "Readings from the WWI Journals of John P. Clement" - Kendall Wild.
- Wed. 18 Mar "History Woven In Silk: the Vermont Civil War Flags" - Donald Wickman

Wed. 1 Apr "The Native Vermonter and His Sense of Humor" - David K. Smith.

Wed. 15 Apr "Ancient Cultures In Vermont" - Warren W. Dexter.

All programs start at 7:00 pm. All programs will be held in the Fox Room of the Rutland Free Library on the corner of Court and Center Streets except the 25 Feb program which will be held at the Society at 96 Center Street.

**IF YOU HAVE A "97" ON  
YOUR MAILING LABEL  
WE NEED YOUR DUES**

**THE FACILITIES OF THE  
RUTLAND HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY ARE OPEN ON:  
MONDAYS           6 - 9 PM  
SATURDAYS        1 - 4 PM**

## DUES SCHEDULE

Sponsor	\$50.00	Students	\$8.00
Contributing	\$20.00	(18 & under)	
Regular	\$10.00	Senior citizens	\$8.00
		(62 & up)	
Life Membership			\$200.00
Memorial Membership			\$200.00

**RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.**  
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Jim Davidson - *Editor*

If you have a "97" on your mailing label, it is time to RENEW.