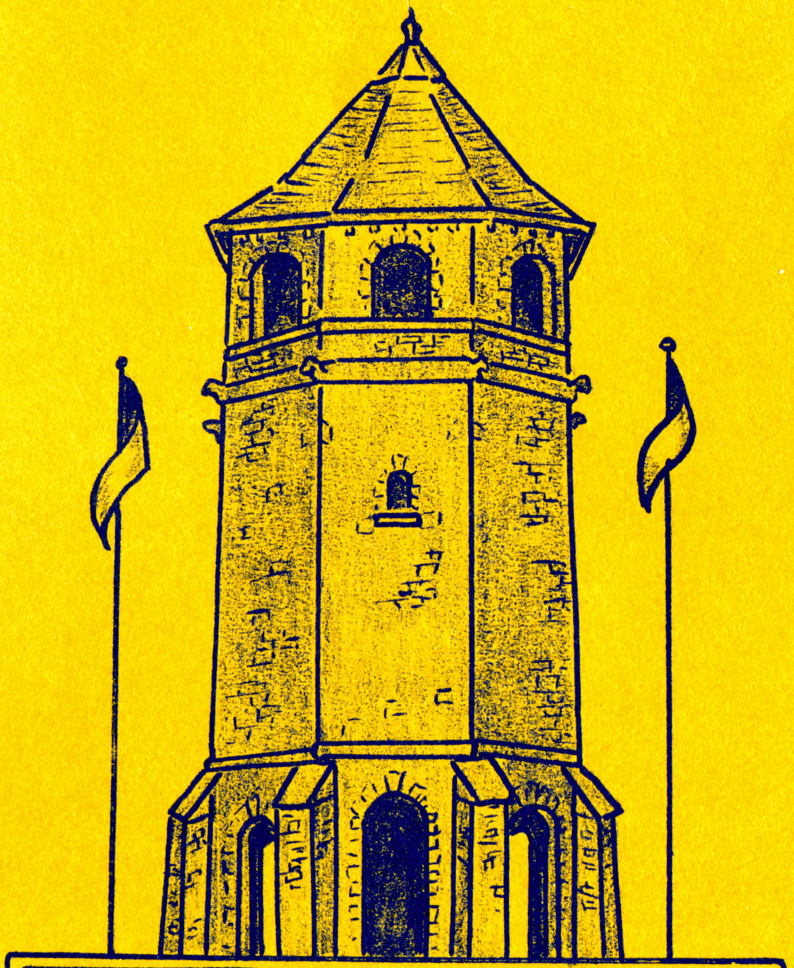
VERNON VIGNETTES



VERNON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Vernon, Connecticut

VERNON VIGNETTES

Volume I

by

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FOREWORD

The greater number of the articles contained herein were originally published in the Rockville Journal. They were written to help stimulate an interest in Vernon's past and to awaken a greater appreciation of the rich heritage left by those who, in the days gone by, laid the foundations of this community.

I am very grateful to all the citizens who so generously shared with me their memories of former years, especially Miss Mariette Fitch, Frank Lutz and the late Mrs. Jennie Meyers. The staff of the Rockville Public Library has also been most helpful. Dr. George S. Brookes' book, "Cascades and Courage" has been used as a reference to check dates and verify many of the facts.

Hazel P. Lutz

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COLONIAL MILESTONE

In Vernon Center, at the corner of Center Road and Route 30, stands Vernon's only Colonial milestone. This stone was erected in 1801, before Vernon was a town, by the turnpike company that operated the stage coaches between Tolland and Hartford.

Cut on its stone face are the letters: "M T C H" and "VI". This indicates that it was six miles from this spot to the Tolland Court House. As fares were computed by the miles traveled, these markers, placed at each mile, not only indicated the route but helped to determine the cost of the ride.

Thanks to the forethought and generosity of the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, this stone is preserved in excellent condition. In 1934, they had it set in a slab of Barre granite with a bronze plaque above it bearing this inscription:

> "Old Milestone erected by Hartford and Tolland Turnpike Co., 1801. Six miles to Tolland Court House. McLean Tavern built in 1793, stood on these grounds. Marker placed by Sabra Trumbull Chapter, D.A.R., June 14, 1934"

A laurel bush, our state flower, is planted close to it. Thus it is not only an historic spot but a beauty spot as well.

Of the 15 or 20 milestones that may have been set on this route only one other one remains. It is located in Buckland, in the parklet at the junction of North Main Street and Tolland Turnpike.

HOW VERNON GOT ITS NAME

No one knows with certainty just how Vernon got its name. Who named it, when, or in whose honor are all a matter of conjecture.

Some early records say that our town was named VERNON after "Mount Vernon", Washington's home in Virginia. This ancestral home of the Washingtons was itself named by Lawrence Washington, the General's brother, in admiration of Admiral Edward Vernon of the British Royal Navy. Lawrence had served under this English Admiral when as the commander of an expeditionary squadron he was commissioned to break the power of Spain in the West Indies in 1740. The American colonies sympathized with England in this endeavor and sent 3,600 troops to join him in Jamaica. Among these troops were two companies from Connecticut.

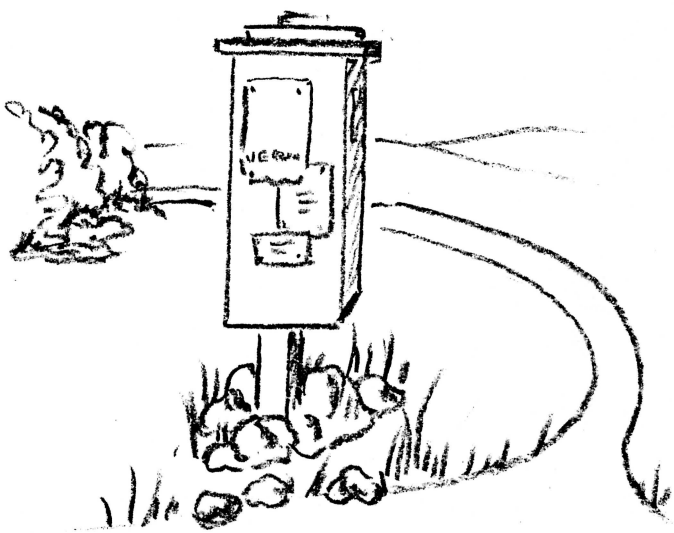
The expedition was a failure, but the friendship of Colonel Lawrence Washington and Admiral Vernon remained a life long one.

In selecting a name for our town the founding fathers may have chosen to honor our first president, George Washington, by naming it after his home, Mount Vernon.

Other accounts say that Vernon was named from the French word, "verdure" which means "green vegetation". Its hills were covered with virgin forests of green trees and its valleys lush with green grasses.

It has also been surmised that our town was named for the town of Vernon in Evreux Province in northern France.

Perhaps, someday someone will come upon an authentic document from those early days in the 1800's that will prove conclusively why we are called "Vernon".



HOW DOBSONVILLE GOT ITS NAME

Dobsonville and Dobson Street in Vernon are named in honor of Peter Dobson, who was born in Lancashire, England, in 1784. His mathematical talent was recognized when he was a young man, for at the age of twenty-two, he was invited to a competitive examination for an official position in the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. This he refused, for his interest was in mechanics and not in war.

At the age of twenty-five he decided to emigrate to America. In those days there were strict laws forbidding those skilled in manufacturing to leave England. Peter, armed with plans for making textile machinery, contrived with his friends to have himself hidden in a hogshead, which had been bored full of gimlet holes. This barrel they rolled on to a ship bound for America. After the vessel was some distance out of port he was safely released from his small quarters.

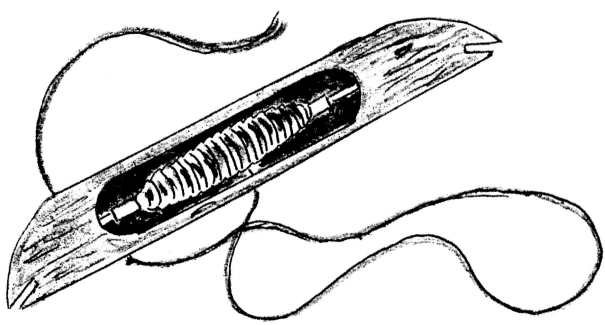
He settled in Vernon and there with a co-worker, Samuel Slater, set up the first cotton mill in the town and one of the very first in America. For many years, he, and later, his son, John S., were identified with manufacturing here.

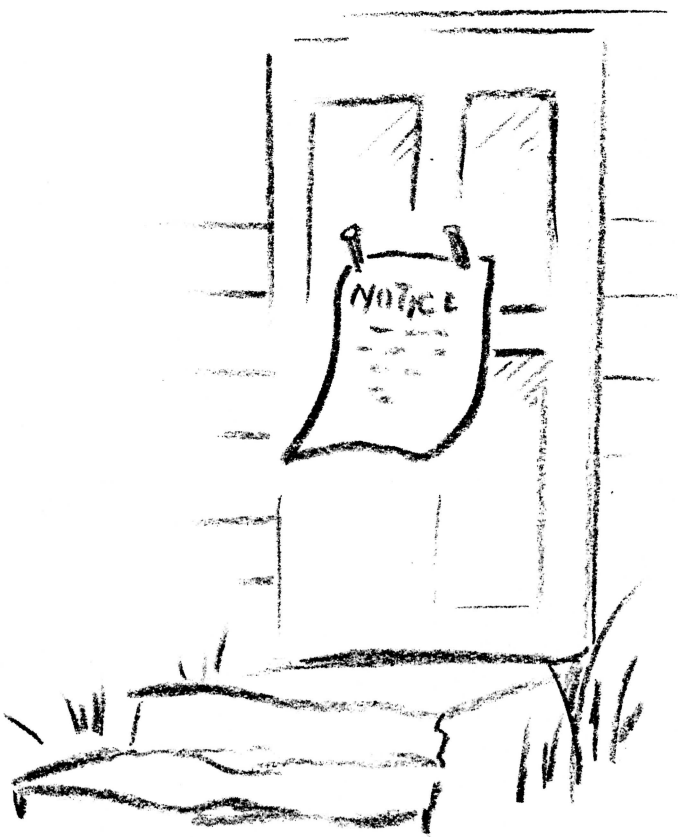
While manufacturing was his vocation, it is for his avocation that he has become world-famous. When excavating for the foundation of his mill at the falls on the Tankeroosen River, he observed large boulders which weighed up to fifteen tons being dug out of the clay and gravel. He noticed that they were worn and scratched on the lower side, "as if done by their having been dragged over rocks and gravelly earth in one steady position". Thus, he concluded, "I think we cannot account for these appearances, unless we call in the aid of ice as well as water, and that they have been worn by being suspended and carried in ice over rocks and earth under water".

Mr. Dobson wrote a paper a little more than a page in length, entitled, "Remarks on Boulders", in which he set forth the theory that much of our soil had been brought a long distance by a great glacier. This is the same theory by which geologists explain the presence of so many different kindsof rocks in the stone walls in and about our town.

This paper went unnoticed until the year 1842, when the president of the Goelogical Society of London, in an address, paid tribute to Peter Dobson, who discovered the "glacial theory" so long before that body of learned men came to this same conclusion. From then on, he was recognized both here and abroad as the "Original Author of the Best Glacial Theory".

It is most appropriate that Vernon take pride in the fact that Peter Dobson, manufacturer and scientist, was one of its early settlers, and that it is in his honor that the section of our town, where he built his factory, is still called "Dobsonville".




NOTICE

HOW ROCKVILLE WAS NAMED

In 1726 Samuel Grant traded his farm in Bolton for 500 acres in the north part of that town. This included what is now known as "Rockville".

For more than 100 years this settlement remained as a hamlet without a name.

By the year 1836 the population had grown to 440. This consisted of 61 families with 89 children under 10 years of age. These people had been drawn to this area by the mills that had been built beside the many falls along the Hockanum River. The first mill erected stood by a spot known as "the Rock", where a natural dam of solid stone made a high falls. This furnished water power for the mill to manufacture woolen cloth. It was hence known as the "Rock Mill".

At that early date mail service was meager. One mail a day, by stage coach, was brought from Vernon Center, which was then the post office and voting place for the town. In 1837, according to an old record, "an amateurish notice was posted on the Rock Mill announcing

a public meeting in the lecture room of the village to decide in a democratic way the most suitable name for the vicinity". If they were to have a post office of their own, a permanent name was needed. A number of suggestions were made. Some thought it should be called "Frankfort" in honor of Francis McLean who had built the Rock Mill. The name, "Vernon Falls", was favored by a few. As Samuel Grant was its first settler, others felt that the name, "Grantville" would be most appropriate. Some said that "Hillborough" seemed the best name for a village of such hilly terrain. There were others suggested, we may be sure, but history failed to record them.

After much debate Simon Chapman, who kept a local boarding house for mill workers, who knew from their daily table discussions the real wishes of the male population, submitted the name, "Rockville". "Going to the Rock", he explained was a common expression understood by all the surrounding countryside, hence, "Rockville" it was officially named.

Many years passed. It was not until 1842 that Rockville finally got a post office of its own.

VERNON'S HISTORIC ASH TREE

According to legend, the huge white ash tree, which stands on the highway's edge in front of the old Squire Bruce house on South Street, dates back to the Revolutionary War days.

In 1775, so the story goes, a group of seventeen soldiers, volunteers recruited in Vernon, marched northward on Hartford Turnpike to join the Colonial troops at Bunker Hill. They stopped in the shade of this tree to enjoy a draft of the cool, clear water from the deep spring that flowed beside it.

In later years this spring wss capped and still serves as a well.

In 1958, as a part of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of Vernon, a group of Vernon area National Guard men re-enacted this march and stopped for their refreshments under this same old ash tree.

The ash tree has many myths and legends associated with it. To the Norsemen of old, an ash tree was "Igdrasil", tree of the universe, the origin of all things. The American Indian sought it out for

its strong, straight wood from which he made his canoe paddles. "Straight as an ash", was the very highest compliment that could be paid to a pioneer boy. Today it is the symbol of physical and moral excellence.

In the days of the early settlers in Vernon, wood was needed for so many purposes: to build houses, furniture, tools, utensils, wagons, and most of all to furnish all the heat for the long winter months. The primeval forests were soon leveled and the land cleared for the planting of crops. It may well be, that inasmuch as this ash tree grew by the trailside and sheltered a spring, it was spared.

Resplendent in its autumn foliage of violet and gold, it is a living memorial to the days when Vernon was covered by virgin forest.

DRAY HORSES IN OUR TOWN

In the early days of Vernon, horses provided the primary means of transportation. Every farmer had to have a work horse or team of horses to plow his fields, to bring in the wood from his wood lot, which often was located miles away from his farm, and to bring his family and his produce to town. Once a week, usually on a Saturday, the farmer hitched up his team, put on a load of wood or farm produce and journeyed over rutted, often muddy dirt roads to sell his load and buy staples at the village store.

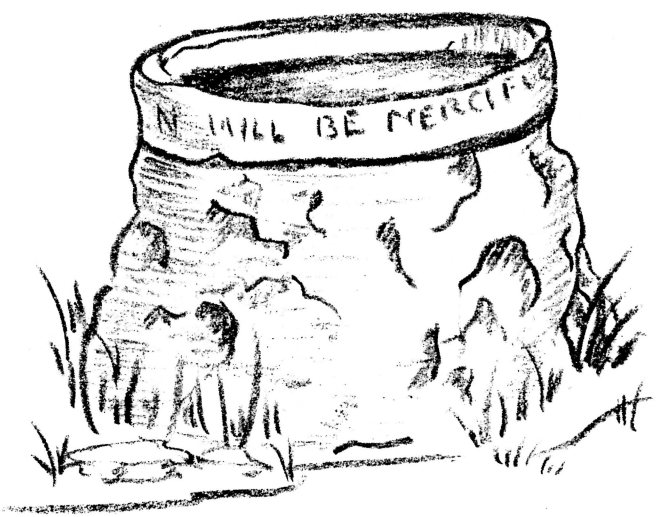
Watering troughs for horses were located at the entrances to Rockville and Talcottville. Here the team was stopped and refreshed from these large receptacles of fresh water. One, located at Lafayette Park, was made of fine granite and enriched with the motto: "A merciful man will be merciful to his beast". This was erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution. It still stands today as does the iron one at the corner of Snipsic and East Main Streets. Others, now vanished, stood against the stone wall in the center of Rockville, at the corner of West and Union Streets and at Talcottville.

As with automobiles, horses grew old and had to be replaced. The woods where Mount Vernon Apartments now stand on Hartford Turnpike contained the whitened bones of dozens of horses that were brought there when their life had ended. To get a new horse was not as easy as shopping for a new car is today. The horses used here came from many sources. Some were bred here. The Tucker farm, now the Mitchell farm on Hartford Turnpike, was the source of many a fine horse. Most of the heavier horses came from out of town. Once a year, generally in the Fall, a band of gypsies encamped outside the Fair Ground fence on Hyde Avenue. They brought with them a string of horses they had bought from tramway companies in New York City. These horses, still well and strong, had their hoofs worn down from pulling horse cars over the cobbled stone streets of the big city. Farmers here about were glad to get these strong creatures for they were docile and could walk easily on dirt roads and soft fields.

At other times of the year horse traders from East Hartford found this same place on Hyde Avenue a convenient spot to swap horses. They used the Meyers' homestead which stood just across the highway for their head quarters.

As late as 1923, the Rockville Journal records that a train load of three hundred fifty horses arrived in Connecticut from North Dakota. Of these thirty-six were sold in our town. It was noted how strong and healthy they were,"Not a sick one in the lot." Some of these horses were used in the building of the old Route 15 highway from Union to the Massachusetts state line. Others were purchased by merchants in town to pull their business wagons, while others drew town-owned vehicles, such as fire engines and watering carts.

As automobiles, trucks and tractors gradually replaced horses as workers and burden bearers, the dray horses and the horse traders vanished.



HORSES USED FOR PLEASURE

As young men of today crave sports cars, so in days gone by, the young "blades" coveted spirited horses. These fine animals with legs much more slender than those of the dray horses, with tight check reins to hold their heads high, pulled buggies, broughams, gigs and carriages along the roads of Vernon.

Harnesses, ornate with metal trim and gaily wound whips in silver encrusted sockets were enough to make any young man envious. Sheep, pigs, and chickens scattered in all directions as the sleek horses of yesterday dashed down the dirt roads raising clouds of dust.

In our town the great majority of the families did not own horses as did the farmers in the nearby rural areas. Their homes were built close to the mills as possible for these people walked to their work. Those who had horses were generally mill owners or business men and not employees of the factories.

Although all of the mill owners had carriages of which they were very proud and fancy harnesses for their horses, the one "turnout" that was the pride of the town was that of

Spencer Fitch, Rockville's first mayor.

Mayor Fitch was a tall man with flowing white whiskers. What a picture he must have made driving his matched team of high stepping black horses resplendent in their shining gold-plated harnesses with his little granddaughter, Mariette Fitch, sitting by his side! Their Sunday drive to Lafayette Park from their Union Street home was a sight watched for from many a front porch along the route.

The taxi of those days was a black hack, a covered coach-like carriage, all enclosed, with doors on each side and a driver perched on top. They were used for funerals, weddings, and general taxi service. They were drawn by well-groomed horses from the local livery stables.

Saddle and racing horses also had their devotees in early Vernon. Although it was only the well-to-do who could afford to participate in these sports, most of the citizens in our town were as proud of these horses as if they owned them.

THE WARP MILL

In the stone mill at the corner of Snipsic and East Main Streets Henry Adams set up a factory for making cotton warps in 1866. It was known as the Adams Manufacturing Company for many years until the name was changed to Rockville Warp Mill.

Weaving of cotton cloth was a relatively simple operation in those days after the warp had been prepared. For gingham, stripes and plaids, the warp consisted of a series of colored threads spaced according to a pattern. Not only did the warp have to be made of threads of the desired thickness, so many threads to an inch, but it had to be kept at a uniform tension on its beam or roller. The uniformly fine warps prepared at this mill were sold to textile plants throughout the East.

The Adams family had been associated with manufacturing for many generations. Their ancestors came to America from England back in the time of Charles I. It was they who settled Adams, Massachusetts. Henry Adams' father was a millowner there and while yet a boy Henry acquired a knowledge of manufacturing. After learning the trade he went to

Pittsfield where he worked for the famous Indian Orchard Mills and became a "master manufacturer of cotton goods". He stayed there for five years before coming to Rockville to set up his warp mill here.

Those who knew Henry Adams are of the opinion that he was one of the largest citizens Rockville ever had. He was at least six feet and eleven inches tall and weighed about three hundred and seventy-five pounds. All this topped with a high plug hat made him seem even bigger.

He lived in Rockville in the long house on Prospect Street which later housed the first Rockville Hospital. The Fitch family also lived in an apartment in this house at that same time. In the yard grew a huge elm tree. Here suspended from a branch Adams rigged up a chair swing to the wonderment of the neighborhood children. He enjoyed swinging in it himself.

As the warp business prospered, Adams built an impressive mansion on Davis Avenue with two towers and a carriage porch. The tennis courts in its yard were used by the first Rockville Tennis Club. Today this

mansion is used as a rest home.

Some of our older residents recall that every morning before dawn, Adams drove from his fine home up to his mill in a buggy, the seat of which he filled completely. He sat squarely in the middle for if he moved to one side or the other it might tip the whole carriage over.

Adam's arrival at the mill heralded the beginning of another work day all along the Hockanum River for his first task was to open the gate at the Snipsic Lake dam and let the flood of water race down beneath the mill to turn his water wheel and from thence it rushed along to start all the other wheels of the mills built on the banks of this stream.

In 1906 when the Hockanum Company erected the Minterburn Mill the warp mill was incorporated in it and ceased to exist as a specialized industry.

VERNON'S TUNNEL

The one hundred eight foot keystone arch tunnel, the longest in Connecticut, located on Tunnel Road, is an outstanding example of the stonemason's art. Built between 1846 and 1849, by masons and stonecutters, many newly arrived from Ireland, with only the help of oxen and hand tools, it is a marvel of engineering skill.

The sudden rise in elevation from the level sandstone valley at Vernon Depot to the hills of Connecticut's eastern highlands in Bolton proved a problem to the men who set about laying the first railroad tracks from Manchester to Bolton Notch. To provide the gentle incline necessary for the trains to ascend, a tremendous amount of earth fill had to be brought in and stamped into place. In order not to block the then long-existing road from Lake Street to Vernon Center this tunnel was constructed. To do this a strong, temporary wooden frame, called a "central", the exact size and shape of the finished vault was built. This held the weight of the inward leaning side stones until the keystone at the top of the arch was firmly set in position.

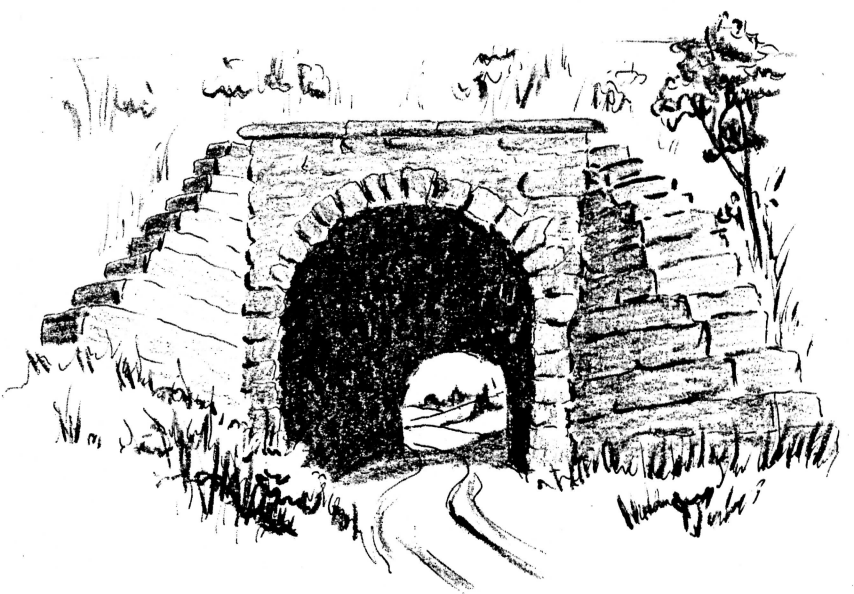
This keystone thrusting downward on each side pressed the side stones of the arch more tightly together. At this point the wooden scaffolding which had been holding the weight was removed.

This tunnel is made up of thirty arches. Native sandstone from the quarry on Box Mountain was cut and set in each inner arch as carefully as for those facing its two entrances. Mounds of earth on both sides were needed to support the thrust at the base of the walls and the tracks on the roadbed above, along which trains have passed for over one hundred twenty one years.

At its opening the tunnel is fourteen feet wide at its floor and sixteen feet high up to the base of the keystones. Each arch is composed of nine stones on either side of the keystone, supported by five blocks, some as much as five feet long and one and one-half feet in height and width. Its retaining wall is made up of forty to forty-five huge sandstone blocks arranged in a stair-like formation. Two courses of stones rest above the arches surmounted by a twenty foot four-part capstone.

Along the inside corridor of the tunnel not a crack nor falling stone is in evidence and the walls themselves silently speak of the pride in their workmanship those early craftsmen felt, for high on the vault's sides are carved the initials of many of those who toiled here. Near the north entrance, four blocks up and four in is carved the whole name, "GRADY, JERRY", a mason who settled on Lake Street in 1854.

This venerable tunnel, sometimes referred to as the "Keyhole Tunnel", stands not only as a fine piece of architecture but as a monument to the integrity and honest workmanship of Vernon's forbears.



WILLINGTON GLASS OF VERNON SAND

The sharp sand that served as "fill" in the redevelopment area in the center of Rockville once had a far nobler destiny. In the early 1800's the sand hills on the east side of the Town of Vernon, along Tolland Avenue, provided the sand used in the factory of the Willington Glass Company. It was hauled up hill all the way, through Tolland to Willington Hill in huge ox-carts drawn by several teams of oxen.

The Willington Glass Company was located in what is today known as the Glass Factory District. There Vernon sand was combined with wood ashes and salt to produce glass bottles. Bottle collectors today prize the old-fashioned brown quart bottles, once used for whiskey, that were made there.

The bottles varied greatly in design, some reflecting current events of importance. In 1824 Lafayette visited this country. On his way to Boston he stopped at King's Hotel which stood on the site of the Northeast Shopping Plaza in Rockville. In honor of this visit the Willington Glass Company produced some bottles with the likeness of Lafayette blown on the side. Vernon's sand gave them their color now so prized by collectors.

THE COFFIN SHOP

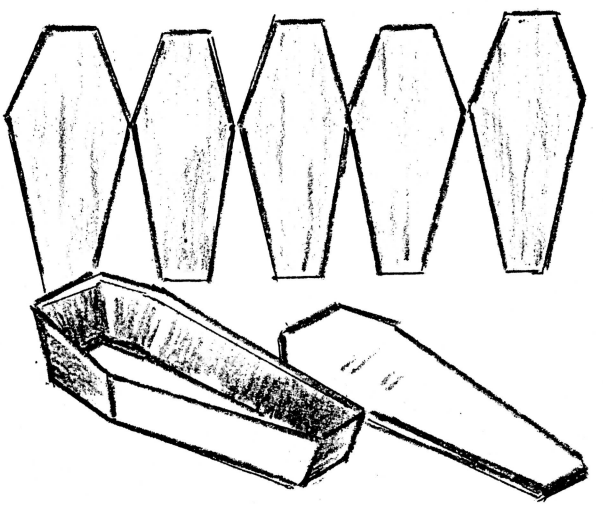
As the Hockanum River flows down from Snipsic Lake through Rockville it cascades over the many rocks that line its bed, making a series of waterfalls which were utilized as a source of power. One of these falls was located nearly three stories below the level of old Market Street. Here from earliest times an overshot water wheel was located, built, repaired and rebuilt by the early fathers of our community.

This great wheel provided power for a long succession of woodworking shops that stood above it. In the middle 1800's a coffin shop was in operation there. Martin V. B Metcalf, grandfather of Dr. E. H. Metcalf was its owner and craftsman.

This coffin shop stood in the rear of the Robinson Block, opposite the railroad station. Here in a three storey wooden building all the coffins used in Rockville and vicinity for many a year were made from the pine and oak that grew in the nearby forests. The first floor housed the woodworking shop where the lumber was sawed and the boxes nailed together. The upper floors were used for the storage of the finished product.

When, in later years, it was no longer needed, Orlando Ransom, who owned a grocery store on Market Street, used it as a store house.

This same building was used even later as a warehouse for the George W. Lutz Hardware Store, for storage of building supplies. The first floor was still strong enough to house such heavy materials as roofing paper, nails and glass, while the upper floors contained barrels, baskets, and lighter weight goods. In the 1923 great fire this building with its contents was totally destroyed and was never rebuilt.



OUR VILLAGE GREEN

Our Central Park since the early 1800's had been our "Village Green". It was created from two smaller parks, each of which had a fountain. In 1877 a Park Improvement Committee was set up and plans were carried out to unify the two parks into one. This committee visited the stone quarries in Monson and ordered six hundred tons of granite to be used to form a curbing about its edge. These stones, six feet in length, with tops dressed flat and beveled on the front edge were placed three feet above the sidewalk and the highway. In 1878 these huge blocks of stone, costing $3,000. arrived and were set in under the direction of F. W. Clark, the then town civil engineer. So carefully were they placed that the joints all fit together as if they were cabinet work. Today, nearly one hundred years later, this wall is still in fine condition.

In 1883 the two small fountains were replaced by the Cogswell Memorial Fountain which stands at the park's east end. Although it originally had a statue of the donor at its summit, today it has a cast iron urn filled with plants.

At the south side of Central Park is a granite monument "in honor and memory of the men and women of the Town of Vernon who gallantly served their country in World Wars". It was erected in 1951 to replace the huge wooden Honor Roll which had been on this spot during World War II listing all the names of those in service.

Benches line the two cross walks and the town flag pole where Old Glory is flown every day, is located near the middle. Of late the Christmas season sees the Santa's house near the fountain and the Nativity Scene at the west end.

The brick buildings that face the Park are all good examples of the vanishing art of excellent masonry. The Memorial Building dedicated in 1889 to the memory of the three hundred thirty-six veterans from the Town of Vernon who fought in the Civil War contains some genuine Italian stained glass windows as does the Methodist Church building erected in 1897. The now demolished Henry Building, the Park Place business block and the bank building were all of the same period and style. They have a character that radiates stability, security and solidity which box-like, thin-walled structures lack.

CENTRAL PARK DRINKING FOUNTAIN

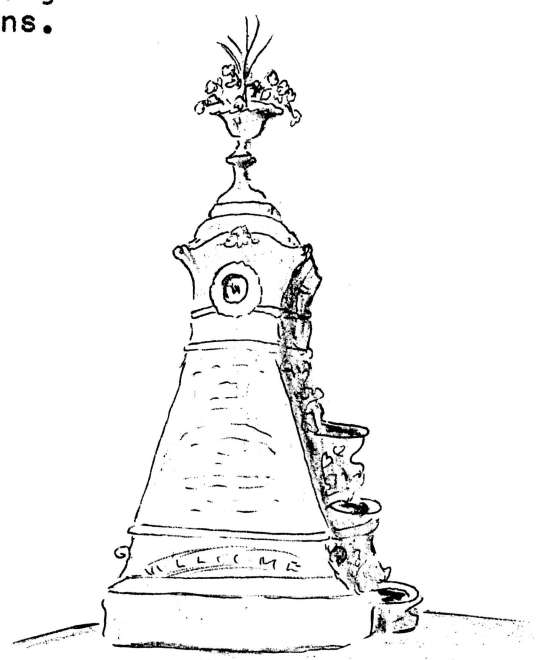
In 1883, Dr. Henry D. Cogswell, one of the first dentists to open an office in Rockville, gave this ornate white bronze fountain to the Town of Vernon and the "Village of Rockville". On two sides of it were bubblers for ice water and below each was a basin to catch the overflow and serve the canine population. Beside it was an underground room where the ice which provided the ice water was housed. According to the original agreement the town supplied the ice for it.

On the pinnacle of the fountain stood a statue of the donor, six and a half feet tall, resting on his left foot, presenting a cup of water with his right hand and holding a scroll with a temperance pledge in his left hand.

At the time of its erection there were many citizens who did not approve of this statue, for the liquor question was then a point of great controversy. On the fourth of July in 1885 the statue mysteriously disappeared. It was found several days later in the mud at Snipsic Lake. After a cleaning it was restored to its pedestal, only to vanish again.

It remained "lost" for years until the Centennial celebration in 1908, when it reappeared, standing beside the fountain with a placard saying, "I've come back for Old Home Week!" After the celebration it was decided to retire the statue to the Town Farm, the former King's Tavern at Lafayette Square. There it remained in a dark corner of a shed at the rear of the building, an object of great interest to the children of the neighborhood.

During World War II, the town fathers donated the unwanted statue to the scrap metal drive. Considered by some a "monstrosity" and by others a "necessity", the Cogswell fountain has provided a refreshing oasis for several generations of Rockville citizens.



MEMORIAL HALL

Memorial Hall which stands facing Central Park in Rockville is also known as "Town Hall". It was erected in 1889 as a memorial to the soldiers and sailors of our town who fought in the Civil War. Ever since then it has served the community as a civic and government center.

This fine example of Victorian architecture has a proud history. In 1888 a grateful citizenry voted in a town meeting to build it as a "practical memorial" to Vernon's Civil War veterans, who by that time had been organized as the Grand Army of the Republic. The site on Park Place was chosen instead of those offered on Union and School Streets, for it was here, on the very same spot, that the First Congregational Church of Rockville once stood.

A firm of Springfield architects planned it and a Worcester contractor was its builder. Over one million bricks were used in its construction, laid up by skilled craftsmen in ornate patterns. Sandstone and granite were utilized for its trim. During the building of its high tower, a bricklayer fell down sixty feet to his death.

The first town meeting was held in the new hall on September 6, 1890. At this time the building committee presented its report of the total cost of its construction, $88,106.05. It took until September 1944, 54 long years later for the taxpayers to make the final payment on it.

On the hall's first floor are offices for the town clerk, tax collector, city court and probate court, as well as public sanitaries, and a large hallway.

The Grand Army of the Republic club rooms, consisting of a large meeting room, an anteroom and a kitchen, line the entire west side of the second floor. The Burpee Post G. A. R., named in honor of Col. Thomas F. Burpee, met here until the death of its last member. Colonel Burpee of the 21st Regiment of Connecticut Volunteers was mustered into service in 1862 and commissioned only the day before his death. He was mortally wounded in 1864 going his rounds as a brigade officer at the Battle of Cold Harbour, Virginia.

This meeting hall, facing the front of the building, has a large stained glass window whose design

incorporates crossed guns as symbolic of the infantry, cannon for the artillery and an anchor for the Navy. Across the top are the initials, " G. A. R." The original light oak furnishings are still in place. At each of the three officer's stations is a stand on which a cannon resting on cannonballs is carved at each corner. Even the oak piano case is ornately carved with patriotic motifs. Along the walls are cabinets containing mementos brought back from the battlefields of the Civil War. In one corner rest some of the flags once carried in battle.

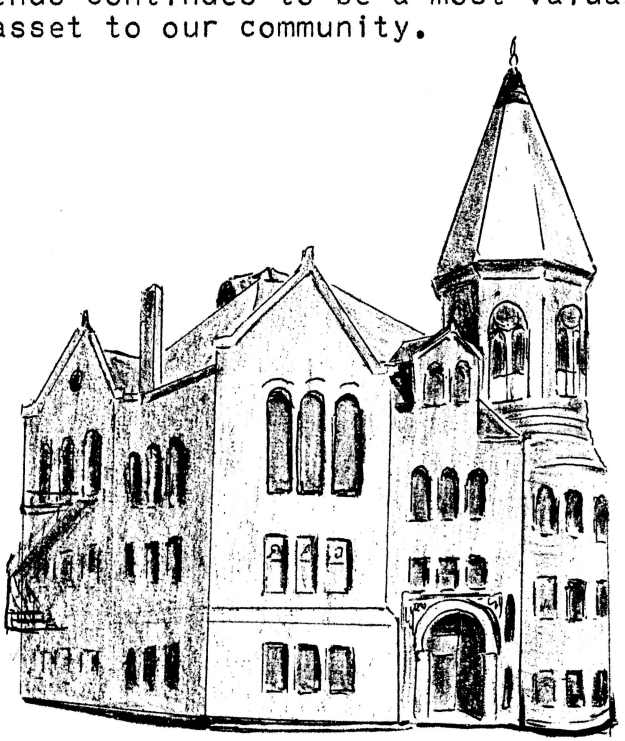
Of late the Sons of Union Veterans and other patrictic groups and their auxiliaries have used these facilities for their meetings and have preserved the treasures left by the G. A. R.

Across the hall along the east wall is the court room, where until very recently, the Superior Court of Tolland County was held.

The large hall which occupies the entire third floor is reached by climbing 53 low riser, maple stairs. Here town meetings were held for many years. Fairs, dances, graduations, Junior proms, Senior Dramatics, basketball games, roller

skating and minstrel shows used it until other facilities became available elsewhere.

This solidly constructed, fireproof building has recently been designated as the only Civil Defense Air Raid Shelter in the center of Rockville. It has extra thick walls supported by huge cast iron I beams, joined by long bolts and encased in specially made clay tiles. At today's prices it has been estimated that it would take close to a million dollars just to duplicate its vaults which contain all town and probate court records. Memorial Hall thus continues to be a most valuable asset to our community.



SPOOL BIRCH AND POWDER ALDER

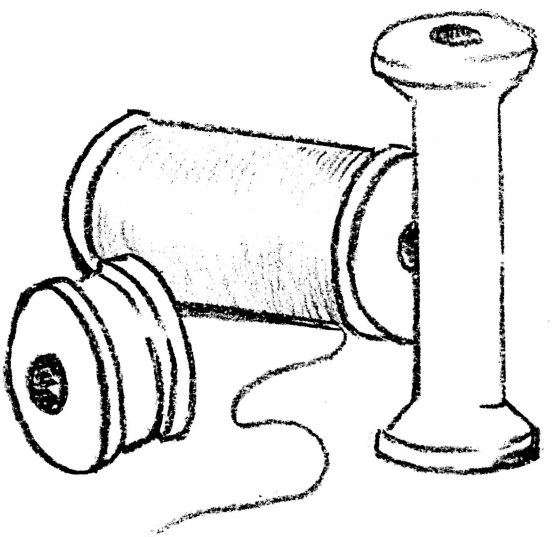
Farmers in the 1800's had to be very ingenious to earn a livelihood. A "cash crop" that many depended upon during the winter months was wood.

The silk mill in Rockville and the thread mills in Willington and Willimantic were always in the market for straight, uniform sized birch logs. These they used to make spools to hold the thread they manufactured. When the crops were in and the farm chores fewer, the farmer spent his time in the woodlots cutting the birches. These he stacked on his wagon or pung and waited for opportune weather to haul them to the mill. The journey to Willimantic might be an over-night one, but the cash was certain and the people he met along the way made the trip enjoyable.

In those days every farmer owned a woodlot. Often it was far removed from his home plot. Many a purchaser of an old homestead in the Rockville area found, in his deed, the title to a woodlot as far away as Ellington or Tolland.

The Vernon farmer whose woodlot bordered on the Hockanum River or one of its tributaries was indeed fortunate, for alder swamps were

numerous all along the banks of these streams. These alders were in great demand at the powder plants at Hazardville. Alder logs, if large, had to have their bark removed but the extra work was worthwhile for, at the powder mills, they brought $5.00 a cord when other mills paid much less. From these alders charcoal was made that furnished the basis for the black powder used in guns and cannon. Many a load of Vernon alders, pulled by ox-cart on the long journey to Hazardville, was turned into gunpowder which was used by the Union soldiers during the Civil War.



THE FIRST TOWER ON FOX HILL

The Memorial Tower now standing on Fox Hill was not the first to be erected there. In the days of the Indians this hill served as a look-out for the Podunk tribe. As the territory of three tribes, the Podunks, the Nipmucks and the Mohegans all met at Mischenipsit Lake, occupying this high point must have been a great advantage for the Podunks.

From the early days of the settlement of the town by white men, some talked of building a watch tower on Fox Hill for it commands such a broad view of the Connecticut River valley and beyond. On a clear day Mount Tom, Mount Holyoke and Talcott Mountain can be seen without glasses. In those days the hills were quite free of trees and under-growth. The Indians had, according to their custom, burned it over each year. The early inhabitants needed large amounts of wood to keep their homes warm during the long winter months. Any tree of appreci-able size was cut down for firewood and the land from which trees were removed served as pasture for the farm animals. Early pictures of Fox Hill show only a few very small trees on its summit.

In the first issue of the Rockville High School Magazine, predecessor of the Banner, published in 1877, an editorial appeared in which the students expressed their hope that a tower would soon be built on Fox Hill. Their wish came true very shortly for in 1878 a Mr. Jeffery of Meriden erected an observation tower there. It was a wooden structure twenty feet square at its base, extending sixty feet into the air tapering up to a ten foot square platform at its top. The walls of the first floor, where ice cream and refreshments were sold, was enclosed but the upper platforms were open. A four-foot telescope was placed on the top deck. For the admission price of 15¢ one could climb to the top of the tower and view the surrounding countryside through the "spy-glass".

According to all reports Jeffery's Tower was very popular, serving a "steady stream of visitors". However, it was very short-lived, for on February 3, 1880 a severe blizzard blew off the superstructure. It lay a mass of broken timbers for many years, until Nature covered it with tangled vines and bushes.

The bottom storey, which was enclosed, its window and door facing

east, remained standing for many years. It was used as a studio by the artist Charles E. Porter, brother-in-law of Jeffery. Here he painted his still-lifes when weather was too cold or wet for him to paint in the fields directly from Nature. With only the sun to warm it, during the winter it was a very cold place in which to work.

After the death of Mr. Porter this small structure fell into further disrepair and disappeared.

For almost sixty years Fox Hill was without a tower. Two homes were built near its top on the southern side. Then in 1939 the present Memorial Tower was erected to the memory of all of our soldiers and sailors in all of our wars.

WHITE'S OPERA HOUSE

The Cyrus White Opera House stood at the corner of Brooklyn and Market Streets in Rockville and predated the Henry Opera House by about twenty years. It was erected by Cyrus White, an early industrialist, who came to Vernon Center with only three dollars in his pocket. He walked all the way from Vermont driving a herd of cattle to a farm in Vernon. On this farm he remained as a farm hand for seventeen months, receiving about eighty cents a day and his board. As soon as he had accumulated one hundred dollars from his wages he left Vernon for Rockville where he opened a a shop and hired two assistants.

This little shop prospered and in 1848 he bought half-interest in an iron foundry and smelting business. He employed Milton G. Puffer as a pattern maker. This ingenious mechanic began experiments to improve a letter folding machine. The result was the Puffer machine which was capable of folding and pasting 10,000 letter-sized envelopes per day. With Puffer as a partner White started the C. White & Co., which today we know as the U. S. Envelope Company. In 1855 his partner sold his interest to L. A. Corbin and

the firm became White & Corbin. In 1856 they built a four story building to house their growing envelope making business.

All during the time Cyrus White's business was growing he collected real estate. When he married he had erected for himself an impressive Greek Revival type home which still stands at the corner of West Main and Orchard Streets in Rockville. Its two story columns make it easily recognizable.

In 1866 William H. Prescott, their bookkeeper, was taken into partnership. At that time White was also operating Highland Farm where he raised prize stock along with his many other enterprises.

When the congregation of the Ellington Church decided to replace their 1806 church, White bought the old one and had it moved to Rockville. Here, sans steeple, it was set on a basement foundation so that the shops housed below it might contribute to its maintenance. The structure was renovated, redecorated and a long flight of steps made to reach up to the front entrance. Another door on the Market Street hill side made it possible to enter from the ground level. It was lighted by some twenty

gas chandeliers, open gas footlights and stage lights. At the sides of the 22' x 30' stage were four private boxes. It had an elaborate drop curtain and the six or seven standard sets of scenery. It seated 770 persons and 200 extra chairs could be brought in if needed. The gallery held 168.

In 1869 it opened with a dedicatory concert of instrumental and vocal music and a speech by Cyrus White. Governor Jewell, Governor of Connecticut, was present and said a few words. In it were held travelling shows, temperance meetings, Sunday afternoon lectures, political rallies, concerts and entertainments featuring local talent. The rates were 10, 20 and 30 cents per seat. The Rockville High School held its first graduation exercises in this hall. It was the cultural and entertainment center of our fast-growing community.

After the opening of the Henry Opera House, the White Opera House began to lose its patrons. Fewer and fewer shows were booked until at last only the advent of the early movies kept it open. In 1924 a fire gutted the rear of the building and in March 1941 another blaze destroyed it completely.

THE HENRY OPERA HOUSE

Until the spring of 1969 when it was condemned as "unsafe" and demolished, the Henry Building stood at the corner of Park Place and Park Street in Rockville, This Victorian four storey brick and granite structure was built in 1880 by Congressman E. Stevens Henry and deeded by him to the Town of Vernon in 1923. The first floor contained stores, the second offices, and the third and fourth, the Henry Opera House.

Entering from Park Street one ascended gently rising, iron treaded stairs to the second floor. Here was an opening in the hallway wall from which tickets were sold. Mounting a few stairs to the right one passed through a double door that led to a landing from which more steps brought one to the auditorium.

The double doors which opened into the hall were covered in imitation red leather and studded with brass nail heads. The large, two-storey hall contained seats of red plush for an audience of six hundred sixty-three. Its walls of soft Pompeian pink were gaily stencilled in a multi-colored design

which at dado height encircled the room.

An elaborate wrought iron horse-shoe shaped balcony overhung the rear of the hall. Its railing, richly padded in maroon velvet had an air of grace and elegance. In this balcony were three platforms on which were arranged the seats for the dress circle clientele. Fourteen foot tall Roman-arched stained glass windows surrounded the auditorium on three sides.

At the front of the hall the stage was flanked with two boxes. The one to the left was reserved for E. Stevens Henry and his family, but tickets were sold for the one at the right. Each box was brightly decorated in light blue, pink and gold, with carpet and curtains to match.

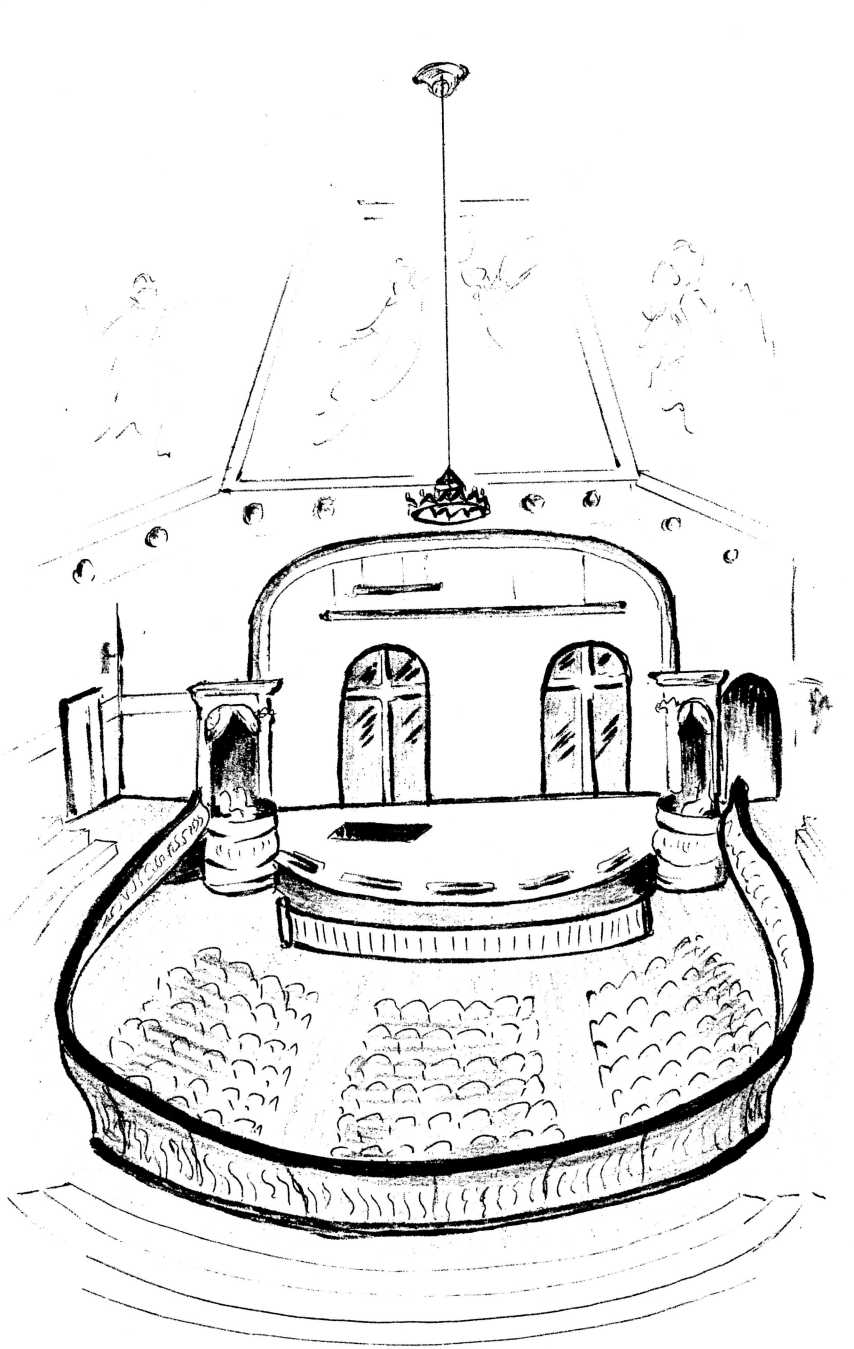
Below the stage an elaborately carved wooden railing separated the orchestra from the audience.

A six foot by two foot trap door in the stage floor concealed an elevator used to make ghosts rise and disappear. Suspended from the ceiling above was a pinrail and winch used to raise Little Eva to heaven.

Outside the curtain, on which was painted a Venetian Canal scene by Charles Brandt, the footlight trough with its bat-type open gas jets outlined the front of the stage. On one side of the stage was the gas control board, hidden by the proscenium arch. From this point the gas for the huge chandelier hanging over the center of the auditorium as well as all angel decorated side lights were controlled. At the rear of the stage was an opening through a window to a balcony with a wrought iron railing where bands stepped outside to play and attract audiences along Park Street.

To the stage left were located the actors' dressing rooms and the "green room" where they awaited their cues. One had a small sink in the corner and the walls all papered with play bills and photos of the actors and actresses of the 1880's Scribbled signatures and comments also filled the walls.

Such famous actors as Denman Thompson, George M. Cohan, Buffalo Bill, DeWolfe Hopper, Fannie Davenport and a host of other legitimate stage personalities played in this hall. It was last used in the mid 1890's.



THE COUNTY HOME

The Tolland County Home for "neglected and dependent children". was its official name. In 1887 it was opened at Vernon Center in a building built for this purpose. Prior to then the home had been located in Andover.

Children housed here were wards of the county and remained here only until a suitable home was found for them. Children from two to sixteen years old were admitted.

It was managed by a board consisting of the county commissioners, a member of the State Board of Health, and a member of the State Board of Charities. They employed a supervisor and his wife to live with and care for the children.

According to an old report the children of the Vernon home were found "romping around the yard, eight happy little barefooted boys and one little girl. They attend the district school and church. They are bright and intelligent looking and compare with the children of any well-to-do people in the county".

This same report records that it was more difficult to find homes for

boys than for girls, for as soon as the little girl was big enough to assist with housework, homes for twelve girls could be found to one home for a boy.

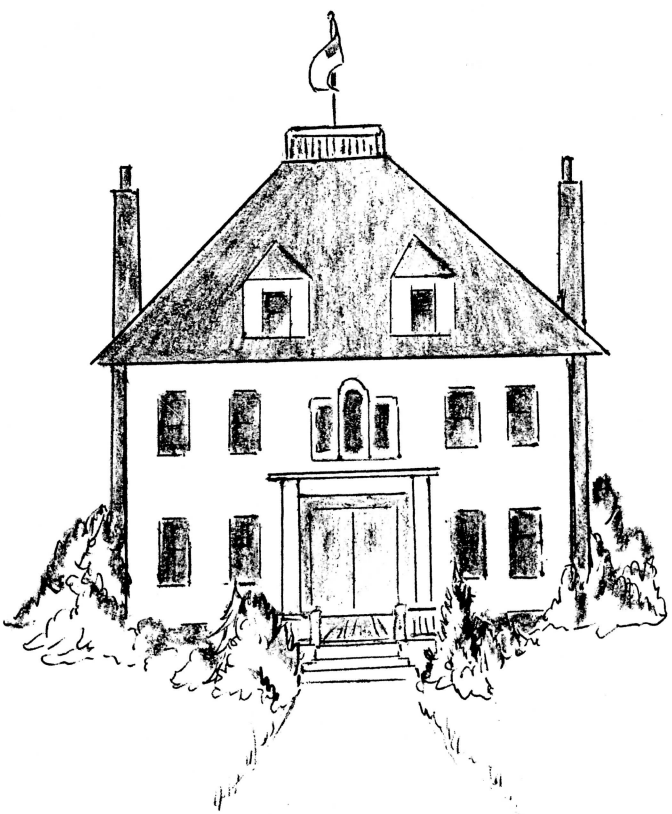
The building itself was a large, three-storey wooden structure. The first floor consisted of a reception room, a hall, the family living room, kitchen and dining hall. Here the children ate"plain, wholesome food, with little pie and cake".

The superintendent's bedroom, a boys' and girls' dormitory and several small rooms for sick children occupied the second floor. The third floor was used as a play room. Here the toys, books and games donated by local civic societies were used.

The children's schedule called for rising at 5:45 A. M., breakfast at 6:30, dinner at noon, supper at 5:30 and bed between 6:30 and 7:00. Each child had tasks to do about the home, in the barn or in the garden.

The barn stood at the rear of the home plot. In it were housed two cows which furnished milk and butter. A large garden provided vegetables and a well-kept orchard yielded fruit.

When the State of Connecticut took over from the counties the responsibility of caring for dependent children the building was closed. The barn was demolished to make room for the new Center Road School. The fine old weather vane from the barn's cupola is now with the Vernon Historical Society's collection of articles used in early days.



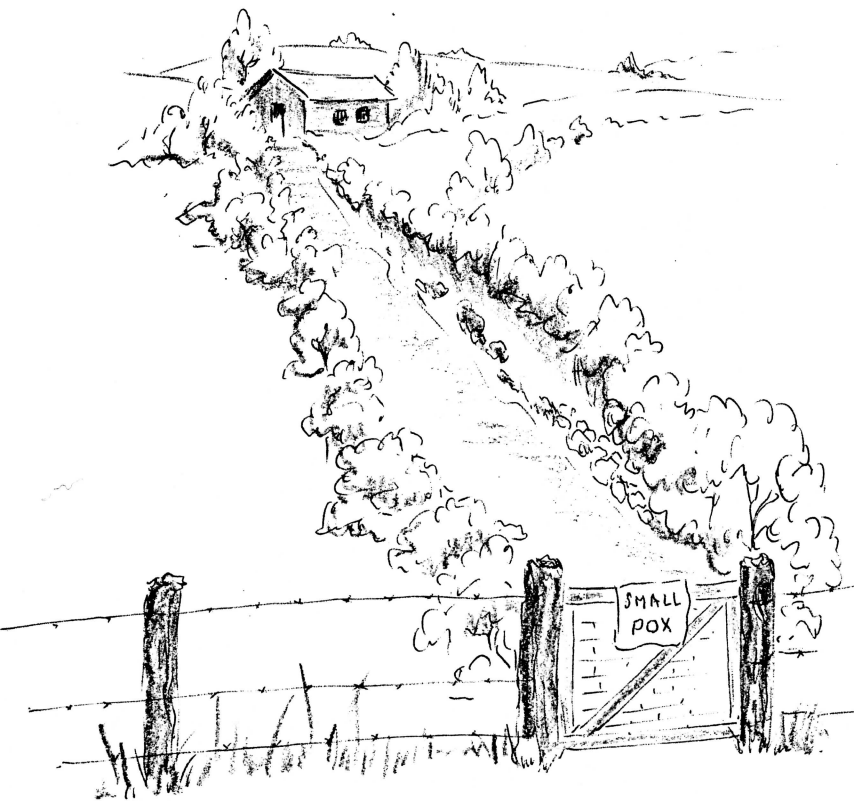
THE PEST HOUSE

During the latter part of the 1800's, the town pest house stood at the end of a long lane that extended down through the pasture opposite the Town Farm, where the Northeast Shopping Plaza now stands. It was a small unpainted shack with one window and a space for two or three cots. Here those with small pox were isolated until they recovered or expired.

Tom Fay, who lived on Hale Street, was the good Samaritan who brought them one meal a day. This he did over the years until the last lone inhabitant there recovered.

Although the process of vaccination, which confers protection against small pox, was discovered in 1796, it was not widely accepted until well into the twentieth century. During an outbreak of the dread disease in the early 1900's the Vernon School Board for the first time required all children entering school to be vaccinated. At that time a group of parents who were opposed to vaccination opened a private school in Wesleyan Hall in the rear of the People's Savings Bank.

Unused for many a year, the pest house in its latter years served as a target for a company of local militia, who took aim at it from the end of the lane. Today it is but a mass of rubble overgrown with bushes and weeds.



THE ROCKVILLE FAIR

Each fall the famous three-day Rockville Fair was held on the Fair Grounds on Hyde Avenue. All schools, mills and stores in town closed for its middle day so that all might attend.

This fair originated in 1854 by the Tolland County Agricultural Society and continued as a yearly event until 1929. In the northeast section of town thirty-five acres of level, gravel-covered land was purchased and named "Hyde Park" in honor of its first president. An eight foot high, tight board fence was built to entirely enclose the area. There were two entrances, one on Hyde Avenue for vehicular traffic and one on East Street for foot and trolley patrons. This entrance was reached by climbing a long series of plank steps to the west of the spot where the freight-way's driveway is now located.

There were several permanent buildings on the site. The principal structure was a tall, covered grand-stand which had a large display hall beneath it and bleachers in front and on both sides of it. Here spectators watched the horseraces on the well-kept, oval half-mile

track in front of it. A judges' stand, a band stand and a stage stood directly across the track from the center of the grandstand. A series of barns for the horses, cattle and poultry were also structures built to last for many a year.

The midway ran from the East Street gate and a "promenade" from the Hyde Avenue entrance to the grandstand. Both were lined with tents of concessionaires. Each year they varied but the Thompson's Eating Tent, the fortune teller, the weight-guesser, wheels-of-chance where Kibbe's Candy, dolls or Beacon blankets could be won were almost always there. Of the many eating tents that lined the midway, the one run by the senior class of the Rockville High School was one of the most popular, for the money they made here helped finance their annual trip to Washington.

A cider mill in operation furnished fresh cider in those days before cola drinks had been invented. A motordome shaped like a huge bowl gave many a thrill as motorcycles climbed up its inside wall. The ferris wheel and merry-go-round also did a thriving business.

The local merchants set up tents to display their newest wares. Many a local farmer caught his first sight of a tractor, sawrig, harrow, spreader, ensilage cutter, water-pump and other farm equipment at this fair. Early automobiles were also on view in huge tents.

The spacious hall underneath the grandstand was decorated with crepe paper streamers. It housed farm products, both fresh and home-canned, mouth-watering cakes and pies as well as plants and flowers. Fancy work and paintings adorned the walls. All had been entered to be judged for awards. Blue and red ribbons were attached to the largest and best of each class of entries. When space permitted, early phonographs, washing machines, stoves and pianos were displayed in this same hall by local merchants.

Along the north fence stood the cattle barns where cattle, sheep, pigs and goats were exhibited. Many breeds of chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys and pets were shown on the second floor of this building.

This annual event attracted crowds of people from all over New England. They came by trolley, by horse and carriage and by foot for the seventy-five years of its existence.

ROCKVILLE FAIR ATTRACTIONS

Two of the most popular features of the Rockville Fair were the ox-drawing contest and the horse racing.

For many years this fair was primarily an agricultural one. Farmers from all surrounding towns brought their oxen to the fair to compete in the ox-drawing competition. For many years Perkins Lathrop, President of the Savings Bank of Tolland, presided over this event.

A very heavy stone-boat loaded with large rocks stood on the starting line. Each contestant in turn hooked his team of oxen on to it and tried to pull the load. The judge held a yardstick at the point where the stone-boat stood at the start of the pull. The distance moved was measured from this point to where the load stopped.

Each pair of oxen pulled in his own class. Two year olds of the same weight competed with two year olds and three year olds of the same weight with three year olds. Although there were many breeds represented, the red Durhams and Devons predominated. Justin Lathrop, Thomas Daily, Robert Doyle, Rufus Reed and Jim Lathrop, all, at one time or another, were winners of this contest, cheered on by enthusiastic crowds.

The Rockville Fair with its fine half-mile oval track was on the New England horse race circuit. The horse barns along the north fence housed many a famous race horse during the days of the fair. Horses came in huge vans, together with all their equipment, jockeys, trainers, handlers, and mascots. They were owned by well-to-do business men who followed and enjoyed this sport. Several Rockville men, among them Roy Martin, W. S. Martin and Tom Lutton, kept their own private stables on the grounds. "Guess-work" and "Betsy Lightfoot" were two of Martin's most famous horses.

Each afternoon at race time the grandstands filled with spectators. Here fancy score cards were sold. The starter, up in the judges' stand called out instructions to the jockeys through a large hand megaphone. The sulkies lined up and at a signal from the starter they were on their way. With the lowering of the checkered flag the race ended and the winners were announced, the excitement abated and the band began to play.

In the interval between races a series of vaudeville acts were presented on the platform next to the judges' stand. George Peter Wendheiser acted as master of ceremonies.

THE TROLLEY TO STAFFORD SPRINGS

Many people have wondered what the wide strip of land, the length of Hale Street which is now Hale Street Park, was used for. In 1908 a trolley line ran through it up Hale Street on its way to Stafford Springs. The entire line cost over $1,000,000 to build. The company that owned the line used the land on the sides of the tracks to stock pile railroad ties. These were piled twelve feet high on this right of way. These ties were brought by farmers from Tolland and Coventry. They were hand-hewn from the chestnut trees in their woodlots. Many ties were needed to replace worn ones and to install new ones underneath the rails on all the lines owned by the company. Hence, this huge pile had to be replenished all the year around. A work-car would stop and load them on to be carried to other parts of the line.

There was no power equipment for maintenance men of those days. All work on the trolley's tracks was done by hand with the workmen using only hand tools such as, shovels, pickaxes and crowbars. Even the cutting of the rails was done with a hand hack saw.

Some of the piles along this right of way consisted of triangular shaped timbers which were used to construct cowcatchers on both sides of the tracks at all crossings from Rockville to Stafford Springs. These were laid close together parallel to the rails, between the rails and on both sides of them. These stopped any cow that decided to run down the tracks while crossing them. Having split hooves, a cow could not walk on these sharp triangular timbers.

From the center of Rockville the line ran up Hale Street and then between the Rockville Fair Grounds and St. Bernard's Cemetery and across Tolland Avenue. Then it headed directly north following close to the shores of Snipsic Lake to West's Bridge, under Brown's Bridge, through Martin's Crossing, Dimmock's Crossing, Bowler's Crossing at Crystal Lake and on to Boyer's Crossing. From there to West Stafford there was another crossing at Cooper Lane, but here it crossed on a trestle. A still higher trestle took it across the Central Vermont Railway tracks and from there it went down the Main Street in Stafford to Furnace Avenue, the end of the line.

Maintenance crews, their trolleys equipped with only ratchet jacks, helped get many a car back on the tracks. In 1928 the line as abandoned.

TRAMPS

Near the turn of the century, tramps were an almost daily sight in our town. These mendicants generally followed a regular route with a headquarters in each of the localities they visited. In his annual report for the year 1897 Mayor Heath reported that "430 lodgers, mostly tramps" spent the night in the lockup, a gain of 78% over the previous year. These were but a part of the population on the move, for the Town Farm hay barn served most of those who traveled the Hartford Turnpike on foot. Many rode the freight trains into town.

A regular in the Rockville area was known as "Monk" Sloan. A kind lady who lived on High Street let him sleep in her shed. There he deposited all the "hand-outs" he received each day. He feared to eat bread before it had molded, hence he stored it hung up in bags suspended from the rafters until he deemed it fit to be eaten. When a new owner withdrew this hospitality he used the large culvert near Grove Hill Cemetery as his shelter.

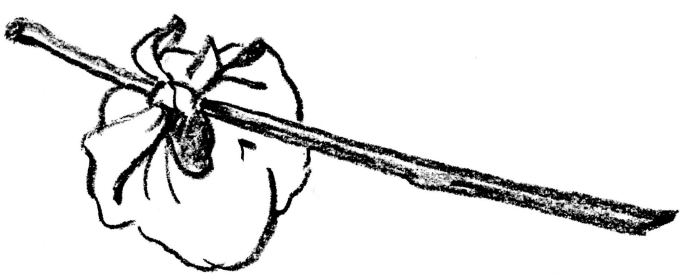
Another well-remembered "knight of the road" was Tramp Taylor. One day two little girls out in search of yellow violets along the Green Road

that leads to Walker's Reservoir, came upon him washing his feet in the little brook that crosses the path. So frightened were they at this tattered, unshaven man that they never again explored the Green Road.

Some housewives kept a place setting just for the use of these occasional visitors and brought them into the house and set a warm meal before them. Others filled a paper bag with sandwiches and sent them on their way. Others gathered their children inside the house and bolted the door until the tramp shuffled on his way.

Some tramps offered to saw or split firewood for the stove in payment for a meal or for the privilege of sleeping in the hay loft. Others considered work of any kind far beneath their dignity.

Since World War I, the tramp population has steadily decreased until today it has almost vanished.



ROCKVILLE ARTISTS

At the turn of the century two professional artists lived and produced their works here in Rockville.

Charles E. Porter, who resided at 23 Sprice Street near the top of Fox Hill, had a studio at the summit. This one storey, single room building was all that was left of Jeffery's sixty-foot tower after its top had been blown off in the blizzard of 1880. Here Mr. Porter produced his still-life paintings and held his classes for pupils in drawing and painting. He had been trained in the methods of the Viennese School and hence turned out paintings of flowers and fruits in this dark, mysterious style.

Porter was a tall, kindly gentleman who loved children and tolerated their comments and questions when they surrounded him as he set up his easel out-of-doors to paint the countryside from fields near his studio. His paintings, reasonable in price, easy to understand, and a delight to look upon, found a ready market among the home-owners of our town. They are today the treasured heirlooms of many a local family.

Among Mr. Porter's pupils was one destined to become far more famous than his master. He was Gustave Adolph Hoffman.

Hoffman was born in Germany in 1869, one of nine children. His father came to Rockville with his family and found employment as a designer in the local mills. When Gustave was fourteen, his father passed away and the young man entered the factory to help support the family. When he was sixteen his health failed him and while he was recuperating Mr. Porter took him on as a pupil. His brother, Paul Hoffman, a court stenographer in Norwich, now aware of his brother's budding talent, helped him to enter the National Academy of Design in New York City where he studied for three years.

At the Academy he learned the art of etching from which he derived the money for further study. In 1891 he went to Germany where he spent the next three years studying and producing many dry points and etchings, some of which he sold to the Royal Gallery in Munich, Frankfurt Art Museum, National Gallery in Leipsig, National Gallery of Berlin and the British Museum.

On his return to Rockville he set up his studio in his home at 5 Laurel Street and continued to produce his intricate copper-plate etchings, accurate in detail and draughtsmanship. He also painted portraits in oil of outstanding citizens for the government and private institutions. The portraits of Governor Everett Lake and Lieutenant Governor Lyman Twining Tingier which hang in the Senate Chamber of the State Capitol are the products of his brush. The portraits of Judges Reed and Loomis in our Superior Court are also his works.

Gustave Hoffman is remembered by those privileged to know him as a clean-shaven, dapper little gentleman with a shock of hair who was always "dressed up" and jauntily swinging his cane. Although much of his work was done for clients from out-of-town, bank and insurance officials, here and there a Hoffman etching is a prized possession of a Rockville family.

THE LUCINA MEMORIAL CHAPEL

Near the center of the Grove Hill Cemetery, surrounded by elms and maples, nestles the Lucina Memorial Chapel, a gem of Norman architecture. Hon. Edward Stevens Henry, who served our town in so many ways during his long lifetime, provided in his will for its erection. He felt that there was a need for a chapel where funerals could be conducted in dignity for those former residents who might be brought back to this spot for their final rest.

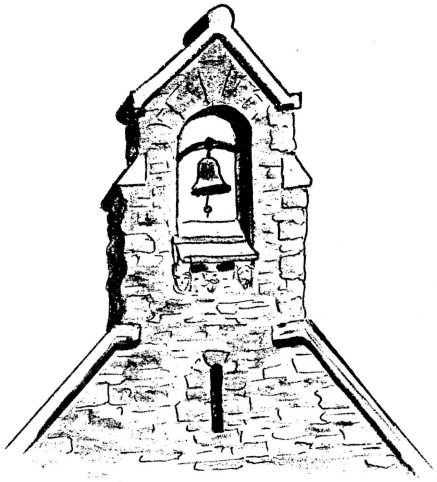
The architect, Walter B. Chambers, was selected to draw up the plans. He patterned the structure after the early Norman Churches in England. Built of native stone from the Richard Glessman farm on Hartford Turnpike, it was constructed in the old traditional way. It contains no steel girders for its thick stone walls reinforced by buttresses easily support the slate roof which is applied in an irregular pattern. The leaded glass windows are slit-like and heavily curtained. A typical Norman entrance, consisting of a series of curved, carved arches surrounds the heavy oak door with its ornate wrought iron hinges. Over the doorway a belfry rises, housing a gentle-toned bell. At its base are three sculptured heads, King David

representing the Jewish faith, Martin Luther, the Protestant and Saint Peter, the Catholic.

Oak pews and screen resting on the slate floor fill the interior. A raised platform is located at the East end. Here an altar table and two large chairs are placed. These chairs of the Elizabethian period are of carved oak. On the panel back of one is the date "1601" and on the other "1603" is carved as a part of the detailed rosette design. They are very old and may well have been made during the time when William Shakespeare was writing his plays. The building is heated by electricity, a great innovation for the year 1923 when it was built.

According to old records, the first funeral conducted in this chapel was that of Miss Esther Henry, one of Mr. Henry's four surviving sisters, who taught in the Hartford Public Schools. Rev. Thomas P. Haig officiated at services held here for her on November 13, 1923.

The following Memorial Day the Chapel was dedicated. The altar table was banked high with flowers and a memorial bronze plaque was placed on the South wall. It bears a bas-relief of Mr. Henry and the following inscription:



Edward Stevens Henry
February 10, 1836--October 10, 1921

Treasurer of Connecticut	1889-1893
Mayor of Rockville	1894-1895
Member of Congress	1895-1913

According to Mr. Henry's wish expressed in his will this chapel was named LUCINA MEMORIAL in honor of his wife, Lucina E. Dewey Henry who, incidentally, shared a common ancester, Josiah Dewey, with Admiral Dewey, hero of Manila Bay.

Many years have passed since this chapel was given to our town. Although through these years it has not been used as often as Mr. Henry thought it might be, its very presence cloaked in stateliness and quiet charm continue to lend an aura of serenity and reverence to "God's Acre".

THE HENRY MONUMENT

What a sight it must have been to watch all the dray horses in town pull the Henry Monument up to the Grove Hill Cemetery! Some say that twelve horses were used while others recall that sixteen were needed on this gigantic hauling job.

Honorable E. Stevens Henry, benefactor of our town, planned his own memorial and supervised its erection. This forty-six foot tall obelisk of fine Barre granite came from the quarry in Vermont on a flat-car into our town. Here at the depot on Market Street it was loaded on to a platform wagon and pulled up Market Street, to Park Street where it turned on to School Street and around the corner to East Main and Grove Streets. This circuitous route avoided the American Mill Hill. The sidewalks were lined with the curious who would never again witness such a sight. A crowd of young men and boys followed in back of it as the horses strained to get it to the top of Grove Street Hill.

On its arrival at the Henry plot in the cemetery a tripod of telephone poles was erected from which a block and tackle was suspended. With this simple equipment it was slowly removed

from the wagon and by "cribbing" it was finally erect on the ten foot square matching granite base that had already been put in place. This magnificent column, all in one piece, joins its base with a gentle curve. A band of carved papyrus buds in true Egyptian design ring the bottom of the tall obelisk. A band of this same motif is carved across each of the headstones that mark the graves of the members of the Henry family buried at its foot.

In those days before the crane-boom, tractors and winches, the erection of this huge shaft without accident was a miracle. Stone carvers from towns around came to marvel at this feat. The erection was accomplished by Albert F. Street, who lived at 95 Orchard Street, and was famous for moving so many buildings in this as well as surrounding towns.

Today the Henry Monument is still the tallest one in the cemetery, where it stands over-looking Paper Mill Pond and the winding Hockanum River.

OLD TIME TEACHING AIDS

In the days before there were Audio-Visual Departments in our schools, each teacher had to supply her own teaching aids. The three quite commonly used here in Vernon were music slips, "Minimum Essentials of Arithmetic" and the "Palmer Method Manual".

A music slip was a piece of paper about one and a half inches wide and six inches long on which was printed a single scale with a variety of notes on it. They came in sets and on each a different arrangement of notes in varying difficulty. These slips were passed out, one to each pupil. A few moments were given for study, then one by one the pupils were called upon to stand and sing the notes. Desks screwed to the floor provided much needed support for shaking legs as quavering voices tried to intone the slip's content.

"Minimum Essentials of Arithmetic" consisted of a series of number facts printed on oak-tag, a stiff paper. Holes were cut out under each column of figures where the answer was to be inserted. Number 1 was very easy, drilling the number facts from one to ten. Each card was progressively more difficult. Cards were assigned

to each student according to his ability. A sheet of arithmetic paper was slipped under it and the answers were written in pencil in the holes onto the paper underneath. At a signal work began and two or three minutes later time was called and the card turned over. Answers which were printed on the back were checked with those the pupil had inserted and the score recorded by the teacher. If all were done correctly the following lesson the pupils was given the next card in the series.

After several seasons of use these cards became very "dog-eared" and soiled. Some slower pupils worked on the same card for weeks. These cards provided drill in arithmetic for the teachers who had several grades in one room and very little blackboard space.

In penmanship the Palmer Method Manual was used as a copy-book. Each page of the thin booklet contained one letter, a word or a sentence using it and exercises in making the strokes needed to copy it. These booklets were placed at the top of the desk and with steel pens, that sprayed ink in directions not intended, each page was carefully copied over and over again. The Palmer Company awarded certificates to those who reproduced the whole manual reasonably well.

MEMORIAL GINKO TREES

At the close of World War I, our town fathers sought for a suitable memorial in honor of the nineteen soldiers and sailors from Vernon who lost their lives in that conflict. After considering many suggestions, it was decided to plant a tree as a living memorial to each man. Ginko trees were chosen as best suited for this purpose.

This was a wise choice, for the Ginko tree is a hardy one that has survived from prehistoric times. Some say its ancestors lived as many as one hundred fifty million years ago. Horticulturalists consider it one of the eleven most beautiful trees in the world, since it grows tall and straight to a height of eighty feet. Its leaves are most distinctive for they have veins that run almost parallel like the staves in a fan. No other tree has leaves shaped and veined in this pattern. Being attached by very slender stems or petioles, its thin green fan-shaped leaves flutter, as does the aspen's, in the slightest breeze. In the Autumn they turn a bright yellow and fall all at the same time at the first frost.

The Ginko, originally from the Orient, is a city tree which even in

the shade of tall buildings and with its roots under cement sidewalks still finds the nourishment it needs to survive. It can tolerate heat and weather as cold as thirty degrees below zero. Its straight trunk and sturdy branches resemble the pine and other conifers.

Unique among soft wood trees, the Ginko can be grown from cuttings. Hence only the non-seed bearing trees are planted for its seeds might be poisonous to youngsters or offend oldsters by the odor of their decaying fruit. Each Spring, before its leaves are full grown, it makes an attempt to reproduce its kind. Catkin-like clusters of stamens droop gracefully from thick spurs one inch long and one quarter inch in diameter that grow along its branches cascading some pollen as yellow dust onto the ground beneath them.

Maple Street School grounds, then the West Street School grounds, were selected as a site for planting these memorial trees. Here they were carefully set out and each marked with a plaque bearing the name of the hero it commemorates.

On May 3, 1919, a parade led by returned soldiers and sailors, veterans of the Civil and Spanish American Wars, together with members

of patriotic organizations, school children and townspeople, wended its way to Maple Street where exercises were held to dedicate these nineteen Ginko trees to Vernon's war dead. The Rockville Band, Talcottville Drum Corps, and the Governor's Foot-guard Band participated. The then Governor of Connecticut, his Excellency Marcus H. Holcomb, and Rockville's mayor, John E. Cameron spoke, paying tribute to "these brave boys".

Today over half a century later, these trees, all nineteen of them, have grown tall and strong under the stewardship of the American Legion and the watchful eyes of the teachers and pupils of Maple Street School. Every year a wreath is placed on each tree on Armistice Day, November 11, the day we now know as Veteran's Day. On Memorial Day a new flag is set at the base of each one. These fine trees have indeed served well as living memorials to those young men who gave their all in World War I "to make the world safe for democracy".

BELLS AND WHISTLES

A chorus of whistles and bells summoned the skilled workers to the mills of Rockville in the years of her woolen supremacy.

At 6:55 A. M. each weekday morning this chorus began as the whistle at the Minterburn Mill near the dam at Snipsic Lake blared forth the news that the sluice gate was open. As the rush of water sped down the river, this was followed by the shrill whistle of the sawmill on Paper Mill Pond. Then the Belding Silk Mill's longer tone came forth. The American Mill's mellow bell, quickly joined by those of the Rock, New England, Florence, Springville, Hockanum, and Saxony, each sounded in rapid succession.

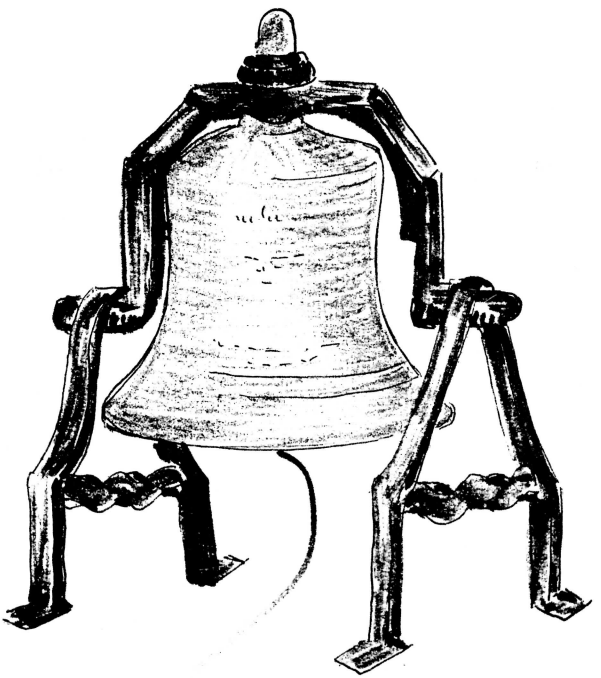
These signalled the beginning of a new 12-hour working day, broken only by an hour lunch period. When the last echo had died away, woe be unto the laggard who was not inside the mill's gate, for the tardy worker had to go in through the office and be docked 25¢ from his wages. Inasmuch as he received $1.25 a day for his work, this was a considerable loss.

At 12:55 the bell and whistle choir pealed forth again to announce that the power was on and the afternoon's work ready to begin. All who lived within walking distance went for lunch to their homes or boarding houses, for they were all so closely clustered about the mills.

When the day's work was over, some of the bells and whistles again called forth. The whistle at the sawmill alerted many a housewife to get the kettle on the fire, for the bread-winner would soon be home for the evening meal. As clocks were scarce and watches a luxury, these whistles and bells served as timepieces for many a family in our town.

One by one their voices have been hushed. Those who toiled at their call are happy to know that some of them, at least, are preserved. The Florence Mill bell, which later served the U. S. Envelope Company, is now in the steeple of the Vernon Center Church and the American Mill bell is mounted on the bank opposite Valley Falls Park.

With the mill bells and whistles now long silenced, there is naught left but memory to sound the requiem of the once flourishing, world-famous woolen industry of Rockville.

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