



Williston Historical Society
P.O. Box 995
Williston, VT 05495

Exciting Things Happening at WHS – See inside!

Newsletter — Fall 2023



Williston Historical Society Bulletin

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“Every individual is an historical figure.”

Founded 1974

S. & J. Burroughs, Editors

WHS Officers

President – Brenda Perkins

Vice President – Aron Merrill

Secretary – Cameron Clark

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Directors: Peter Callas

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Stacey McKenna

Archivist/Collection Manager – Adriene Katz

Publication Chairs: Jeneva & Stu Burroughs

Membership Chair: Peter Callas

Past President: Terry Macaig

Upcoming Dates/Events

October 14 – Growing Up in Williston in the 50’s & 60’s

Open Forum 2:00pm DAML Community Room

Nov 4 -- Annual Meeting 2:00 pm DAML Community Room

“Vermont vs. Hollywood: 100 Years of Vermont in Film”

Renewal/New Membership

The Williston Historical Society is continuing to offer free membership. **We still ask that you renew your membership each year** so we can keep a count and make sure we have current contact information. To renew or become a member of the Williston Historical Society please send an email to peter.callas@uvm.edu with your preferred contact information. You may also write us at Williston Historical Society, P.O. Box 995, Williston, VT 05495. We are always looking for folks who would like to be more active members by volunteering for events or projects, so please indicate such on your membership email.

Report from the President

October 2023

Dear WHS members,

It is a beautiful, crisp fall afternoon. A welcome relief from what seemed like endless days of rain.

The Board of Directors met early in September to plan the fall activities. Something those of you in the area won't want to miss is an open forum to share stories of growing up in Williston in the 50's and 60's on October 14, 2:00 pm in the Community room of the Dorothy Alling Memorial Library. Dick Allen will preside as host and will have talking points for our panel of folks who grew up here during that time. From their recollections we hope others will add their memories. You are encouraged to bring any photographs you might have of that time in Williston for the Society to scan and return to you. Family celebrations, holidays, school happenings, recreation - all are welcome.

Our Annual Meeting will take place on November 4 at 2:30 pm in the library Community Room. As those of you who have attended in the past know, the official meeting is very brief and involves a quick summary of the past year's activities and the election of officers and Directors. We have a very interesting program on tap for that day. Amanda Gustin, Public Programs Coordinator at the Vermont Historical Society, will present "Vermont vs. Hollywood: 100 Years of Vermont in Film".

The Society has more work to do sorting through our collections with the intent of eventually putting our collection into a cloud-based database accessible to anyone wanting to do research. If you have an interest in helping with this project, please reach out to me or any member of the board. The Society's email address is willistonhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Brenda Perkins, President WHS



The Shambo gravestone in the Thomas Chittenden Cemetery.

Williston Mother Gained Areawide Fame

By Richard Allen

The following piece in the *Burlington Free Press* from January 5, 1872 was worthy of further research. Readers over a hundred and fifty years ago agreed.

Some time ago we copied from the *Middlebury Register* an item concerning a woman in Williston who had given birth to twenty-three children, and the item was widely copied by the press throughout the country. We received letters inquiring as to the truth of the story, which we forwarded to the *Register*, with a request for information concerning name, etc. of the lady. The *Register* has ascertained the following particulars, fully corroborating the previous story.

Mrs. Margaret Shambo was fifteen years of age in 1812. She washed clothes for the soldiers. She married Mr. Shambo, a French teacher, who was twenty-three years older than herself. While living with her husband she gave birth to twenty-three children and no twins. Two sons were in the late war, where the younger died. Mr. Shambo died November 18th, 1843 since which time the [woman] has lived a widow. She was seventy-four years of age last February, is now very smart to work, and for wages has seventy-five cents per week during the short days of winter.

Follow-up research confirmed some of the statements in the article. Margaret (Marguerite Vaillancourt) was born in 1792 (according to the gravestone) in Canada and lived most of her life in Williston as noted in the census records. She married Francis Shambo on October 2, 1819. He was born on July 13, 1777, in L'Assomption, Quebec, Canada, making him about 15 years her senior. Francis died in 1848, twenty-nine years after their marriage, which would mean a noticeably short turnaround time between the births of twenty-three children. What the news article doesn't cover is the number of Shambo births that resulted in infant mortality.

After the father died in 1848, the economic impact on the family was significant. The 1850 census reveals the informal welfare system that came into play and was common at the time. Dependents were placed with well-to-do families that could afford another mouth to feed or were willing to add another helper around their house. Lucy, 9 years old, was living with the Wright Clark family on Governor Chittenden Road and Hiram, 11, was with the Asa Bishop family in Jericho. Daughter Margaret, 18, had moved in with the Benjamin F. Wood family; he was a wagon maker in Williston. By 1860 the mother, Margaret, was a servant on the Clark farm and daughter Mariah was a servant with the Hiram Bushnell family in Williston. The placement of children with other families preceded the establishment of the poor farm in Williston in 1859. The emphasis on work made the poor farm a more suitable home for adults.

The two sons who served "in the late war" were William Harrison Shambo (1822-1891) who went west and enlisted in Company F, of the 44th Wisconsin Infantry and served from 1864 to 1865. Hiram Shambo was in the Vermont 3rd Regiment and died in 1861, according to one newspaper account, although the Shambo grave notes an 1868 death.

In 1875 it sounded like their house was a past tourist attraction with this bit of North Williston news from the August 17th *Burlington Daily Sentinel*: "The traveler will look in vain for the old 'Shambo house,' where were born and reared 22 children, by the same mother." Was it torn down or destroyed by fire? The details were lacking.

Margaret Shambo's death was noted in a Montpelier newspaper, the *Argus and Patriot*, December 14, 1881. She had moved to the capital of Vermont to live her final years with an extensive family network. The Shambo monument in the Thomas Chittenden Cemetery notes her death in 1882. She is buried next to her husband.

Shambo is an English variation of the French name Archambault. Rita Elise Plourde, a bilingually educated Franco-American anthropologist, offers these explanations on the spelling of French names on the American-French Genealogical Society page of Rootsweb.com.

There are two reasons why there are so many variant spellings of some names. First, most of the citizens of the 1600-1800 [period] were illiterate. Of these, a precious few could sign their names. However, the priests, seminarians, missionaries, monks, and nuns were the most educated groups in the citizenry. Only an elite few were educated beyond what we, today, would consider a basic elementary education.

Consequently, many of the clerics and notaries, who under the French system of administration were charged with recording vital statistics wrote the names as they knew them to be in France, as a precious few of the immigrants/colonists signed them, or as they heard them (phonetically).

The second reason for variant spellings is: As the colonists migrated within Nouvelle France/New France and eventually beyond the areas of French-speaking Canada (ex. to current-day USA, the Caribbean, the West Indies, etc.) recorders of vital statistics who were not French speakers, usually spelled names phonetically, or changed them because they didn't have a clue how to write them.

Thus, Francis and Margaret's French last name of Archambault became Anglicized, spelled, and pronounced Shambo. Shambo is not unique in its Anglicization, however, there are many others. For example, the French surname Gagner morphed over time in a similar fashion, becoming Gonyea and even Gonyo. The Anglicization of French names is important to recognize because many of these English versions of surnames are still prevalent in Vermont today.



The Truman Chittenden house and Red Barn Gardens on July 31, 2023.

Disciplining a Wayward Chittenden Child

By Richard Allen

Williston claims Thomas Chittenden, Vermont's first governor, as its most famous citizen. The governor and his family traveled in the manner of the late 18th century when roads were few and a rough trail was marked through the wilderness. A retreat from Williston due to the perils of war brought out the following tale:

Governor Thomas Chittenden settled in Williston before the commencement of the Revolutionary War. In 1776, not regarding it safe to remain there, he left with his family for the southern parts of the Grants. He had one horse on which he placed a bed and other things as he could carry and a sick daughter. The other members of his family traveled on foot. His son Truman, then four or five years of age, bruised his heel, found it painful walking and asked to ride on the horse with his sister. His father told him the horse had all the load it could carry, and he must walk. After repeating the request several times and it being refused as often, Truman told his father that he could not and would not walk any further. His father told him that he must leave him in the woods and then to be taken by the Indians, gave him some bread and cheese and left him. Truman sat down upon a log, ate his bread and some of his cheese, and reflected on the situation. In a short time, he began to cry. About this time his father appeared and asked, "What is the matter, Truman? What are you crying about?" Truman replied, in the tone of a crying person, "You did not give me bread enough to go with my cheese." *Rutland Herald*, reprinted in the *Burlington Free Press* March 2, 1871.

This is a good example of political folklore. The careers of both Thomas and his son Truman were long over when this story appeared in 1871 but remembering them in this way maintained a nostalgic image of Vermont's first family of government service. Thomas is depicted as steadfast, caring, and a family man. Truman appears brave and obedient with a childish sense of humor.

Some themes in political folklore have endured through the ages. There was a time when one's birth in a primitive log cabin was worth noting when seeking political office. It was part of the dichotomy of a rural versus an urban background in campaigning. The simple values of the countryside were preferable to those of a "city slicker." The log cabin motif was heavily promoted by the Whigs in the candidacy of William Henry Harrison during the 1840 presidential campaign. Along with hard cider, Harrison's image was that of a down-home life and pastoral settings, never mind that he grew up in a wealthy family.

Vermont's own Calvin Coolidge played on his rural background and was photographed doing farm chores around the homestead in Plymouth, although hints of the more white-collared part of his career came through with his chosen attire. The veracity of political folklore is relegated to the sidelines as the image, either by a photograph or story, is emphasized.

We know the story of Truman Chittenden had a successful conclusion because he, along with the rest of his family, returned to Williston after the Revolutionary War and settled on what is now Clark's Riverhill Farm on Governor Chittenden Road. Truman had a distinguished public career as a Justice of the Peace, State Councilor, probate judge, judge in the county court, a member of the UVM corporation, and town representative in the legislature. He and his wife Lucy Jones raised fourteen children in Williston.

Since 2011 the Truman Chittenden house, located at 8939 Route 2, east of the village, has been the home of Joe and Carolyn Weaver and Red Barn Gardens. Some Williston residents remember it as the Tuthill house. The book, *Look Around Essex and Williston, Vermont* (Chittenden County Historical Society, 1973) describes the construction of the house with hand-hewn timbers, walls of thick planks, and hints that the sections of the house were joined together sometime in the past. A visit with Carolyn this past summer confirmed the age and construction of the house. As we walked the grounds, she pointed out the extensive plantings and landscaping done by the Tuthills and mentioned the unique spring that fed water under the interstate highway to their property. One section of the acreage still hints at the amount of fill scooped out to help with the construction of I-89 in the early 1960s. Besides a garden center, the Weavers host weddings, receptions, and other unique events at their residence.