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The James Houston Buggy is the Granville Historical Society's latest acquisition.

A buggy and a tale of romance

The Granville Historical Society has been the recipient of a gift of the James Houston buggy from T. David Price and Robert O'Neill.

This historic buggy belonged to Granville resident James Houston in the mid-1800s. After marrying Granville native Amanda Wilkin, James and Amanda raised their children in the Pittsburgh, Pa. area, but eventually moved back to Granville to be closer to Amanda's parents. They eventually retired in Granville.

While growing up in Granville, Amanda received her education at the Granville Female Seminary,

where she studied astronomy, calculus, the classics and the china painting that proper young ladies learned in those days.

James and Amanda Houston were the grandparents of Elizabeth "Betsy" Eaton, who also grew up in Granville and lived in the house located at 130 West Broadway. Betsy Eaton married John "Jack" O'Neill and relocated back to Granville in the mid-1950s to start a family. Jack and Betsy O'Neill raised five children in Granville and they were very active in the community.

(Turn to page 11)

Watkin Thomas: Local builder



Wat Thomas drives Gov. Cooper in the 1926 Granville Fourth of July parade.

Pillar of the community also among his key roles

by CYNTHIA CUNNINGHAM CORT

Watkin Thomas is a person whom few residents of Granville seem to remember, but he had a great impact on the community in the first half of the 20th century.

As a contractor, he built a number of houses and two prominent buildings on Broadway, and renovated all of the churches downtown. He was the sexton of Maple Grove Cemetery for ten years, he was business manager of the first car repair garage in town, and he served on several municipal committees and the Granville Historical Society board of managers.

What started my quest for information was a simple search for the construction date of the

house my husband and I had just bought in 1992. In finding out that it was built in 1914 (see Winter 2009 issue of the *Historical Times*), I also learned the name of the contractor who built it – Watkin S. Thomas. This made me curious about what else he had done in Granville. This article provides some of the answers.

Watkin Samuel Thomas was born in Granville on Feb. 6, 1877. His father was Benjamin J. Thomas, who had come to Granville from Wales in 1867 when he was 23. Wat's mother was Sarah Ann James, whose family was also Welsh and had come to the United States in 1843, four years before she was born. They



Wat Thomas was passionate about fishing. Here are pictures of him as a young man (below), at middle age with cronies (above, center) and as an older man with his grandson (next page).

were married in 1873 and both lived in Granville for the rest of their lives, into the 20th century, at 119 E. College Street. Their house is no longer standing.

Benjamin was a carpenter and contractor. Two of Sarah's brothers were stonemasons. About 1880, one of them owned the quarry that was at the top of Prospect Street. This quarry sits just below Whisler Clinic on the Denison University campus and was the source for the stone that was used for the Alexandrian Bank Building, now the Granville Historical Society Museum, in 1816.

Wat Thomas went to Granville High School. While he was in high school he worked as a "printer's devil" for the *Granville Times* publisher W.H. Kussmaul. His nickname then was "Little Scotch."

In 1906 he married Pearl Voorhees. They had two daughters, Esther Louise Thomas, born in 1907 and Agnes Pauline Thomas, born in 1911. His address was 227 S. Pearl St.

He died Sept 12, 1964 and is buried in Maple



Grove Cemetery. In addition to his building activities he was passionate about fishing.

I was amused by the following piece which appeared in the *Denison Alumni Bulletin* in March 1929:

You may be a *Saturday Evening Post* fan or you may be devoted to the *Atlantic Monthly*, but if you want a publication that sparkles with wit and wisdom; read *The Stove League*, edited by Harold E. Lamson, '11, and published weekly in the *Granville Times*. This little department epitomizes the conversation and experiences of life as heard round the stove in Lamson's hardware store. A Saturday evening session in this group is part of a liberal education. Homer Price and Fred Williams talk on fruit growing; Doc Clemons holds forth on livestock; Hube Robinson and Wat Thomas tell about fishing trips with Doc Rohrer and Harry Pierce, and the latest *faux pas* of Enoch Johnson is bandied about. *The Stove League* adds much to the social life in Granville. Stop in when in town.

Wat Thomas was also involved in civic volunteer projects. He was a member of the Knights of Pythias, a fraternal organization. For years he was involved in the celebrations held in Granville for the Fourth of July. He was usually on the decoration committee. He was



Wat Thomas and wife, Pearl Vorhees, lived at 227 S. Pearl St. in Granville.



Thomas is pictured with his grandson, Robert Mach.

the coordinator of the entire Fourth of July extravaganza in 1926 when Granville celebrated the sesquicentennial of the United States. He named as his executive committee fishing buddies W.H. Kussmaul, H.E. Lamson and Hubert Robinson. In addition to the parade and carnival, entertainment included a village picnic, a fat man's race, a needle threading contest, a basketball throw for girls, a leapfrog race, a candle race, and running races. Hog callers, horse shoe pitchers, old fiddlers and mouth organ players all had a chance to show their prowess according to the *Granville Times* of June 17, 1926.

For the November 26, 1929 celebration of

the dedication of the John Sutphin Jones viaduct on South Cherry St. the *Denisonian* reported and the *Zanesville Times-Recorder* picked up the story:

This grade crossing elimination is one of the outstanding improvements in the state to be opened to the traveling public, located on state route No. 16, just west of the village of Granville. It will replace the narrow one-way bridge over Raccoon Creek, eliminate a treacherous railroad crossing of the New York Central and a bad curve on a steep hill, any one of which would justify the improvement from the standpoint of public safety and convenience.

The bridge, which is 1,962 feet long, including approaches, is of a very attractive design and ornamental, but the engineering has not been sacrificed to make it pleasing in appearance. Mrs. J. S. Jones and daughters have donated the twelve lighting standards which add materially to its beauty, in memory of the late Mr. Jones.(One of J.S. Jones' daughters was Sallie Jones Sexton, the subject of a recent *Historical Times* article. Mr. Jones owned the Sunday Creek Coal Company and railroad, the Bryn Du mansion, built the Granville Inn and contributed \$10,000 to the construction of the Granville Public Library.)

The executive committee having the arrangements to complete, is made up of four of Granville's Live Wires, namely, W.S. Thomas, Chairman, Dr. J. W. Rohrer, H. E. Lamson, and Postmaster Ed L. Jones. (Rohrer was a local dentist and the fire chief. Harold (Happy) Lamson owned a hardware store on the corner of Prospect and Broadway, purchased by Mike Gregory in 1931 and currently the site of the CVS Pharmacy.)

This was a major event, attended by the Governor, State Director of Highways, State Chief Engineer of the Bureau of Bridges, County



This photo of Wat Thomas was taken around 1915, according to his grandson, Robert Mach, who provided the photo.

Commissioners, a representative from the New York Central RR, the President of Denison and the Denison University band and chorus, which participated. There was a parade and a film was made of the event, a copy of which is in the Granville Historical Society Archives.

In addition there are several newspaper references to Wat Thomas planting trees all over the village to improve the approach from the south on Lancaster Road between the bridge and the depot, and to replace trees which had blown down in a storm.

Marilyn Jung wrote in her article in the *Historical Times*, Winter 1996, about Sugar Loaf Park:

Granville's 125th anniversary passed with less ceremony but did prompt two men described as "The Gold Dust Twins" to take it upon themselves to clean up

Sugar Loaf, as related in a *Granville Times* article of January 22, 1931...The March 5, 1931 *Granville Times*...identified the "twins" as W. S. Thomas, President of Council and Chair of Streets and Park Committee, and S. W. England. They had removed many locust (weed trees) from the south slope, and sold them as fenceposts to help defray clean-up costs. And they had planted many new trees, shrubs, and wild flowers (45 species in all) including 5 persimmon, 2 witch-hazel, 8 euclid bushes and 2 quaking aspirin (sic). Their work inspired a Granville unit of the Licking County Garden Club to form.

Thomas ran for mayor in 1931 after serving as acting mayor whenever H.W. Deming was out of town. He did not win, but in 1938 was appointed to the board of public affairs of Granville Village. This body served the function of the Planning Commission today. He was also elected president of the Business Men's Association for several terms in the 1920s and 1930s.

Wat's older brother, John, sold Delco electrical supplies and later in his life ran a greenhouse. When they were young, he often worked for Wat on building projects. John was also President of the Granville Cambrian Society in 1935.

In the various censuses and on his draft registration for WW I, Thomas referred to



The home of John and Cynthia Cort at 1632 Newark-Granville Road was built by Wat Thomas in 1914.

himself as a carpenter and contractor. Some of the buildings he was involved in are discussed below. The beginning of the 20th century was a prosperous time for Granville and Licking County as a whole. Business was good and the community was growing. The *Granville Times* of March 29, 1906 said, "in 1841 there were only 141 houses in town, while there are now 340. There will be twenty new ones put up this summer." And again in May of 1909 the *Granville Times* reported the building of six new houses, at least two of them by Thomas.

My house at 1632 Newark Granville Road has some characteristics that appear in many early 20th century buildings. Wat Thomas built in brick and stucco, local stone, and wood frame. He built large buildings and small ones. On houses like mine, the details tend to be very simple. The windows are usually one over one double hung with sash weights. This is a late 19th/early 20th century phenomenon. Glass

couldn't be rolled into large sheets in the early 19th century and windows tended to be divided up into six or more lights. Porch columns and window frames are simple. Houses built in this period often have a cross shaped outline and a slate roof. Foundations around here often have a fake stone block on the outside and glazed block on the inside. This glazed material was made in the Hocking Valley at the turn of the 20th century. It was made to be fireproof and occasionally one sees entire houses made of it. There are several such houses in Granville. Mostly, however, it was used for foundations.

These newer houses often included closets and bathrooms, wooden window trim (in place of stone lintels), poured cement basements, and central heat. Standardized millwork was also often a feature. Catalogs were published for contractors to show their clients and allow them to choose details of their houses. The window sashes in my house are stenciled H.E. Lamson, Granville, OH.

The insulation in my house was originally the previous year's (that is 1913) *Saturday Evening Post* stapled across the studs. I discovered this, when I had to remove and replace some siding a few years ago. Ironically two of the pages are about heating one's house with warm radiators and wearing long underwear.

Also discovered in the house, in the attic under the eaves, were three beer bottles from the Consumer Brewery in Newark. These bottles were made in Newark at the Everett Star Bottle Plant as well as being filled locally. The Consumer plant turned to making soft drinks during prohibition so these bottles are further evidence of the age of the house. There is a partial list of projects Thomas undertook at the



Foundations on homes around Granville often have a fake stone block on the outside (top) and glazed block on the inside (directly above).

end of this article.

Thomas also loved cars. In May of 1913 he bought a new Ford touring car. In 1914 he had a Briscoe touring car that he decorated and drove in the Fourth of July parade. The *Granville Times* of February 3, 1916 reported "Watkin Thomas has traded his old Briscoe touring car in on a new Marion." In July 1918, he bought a Winton touring car from C.B. Slack.

In connection with his love of cars, one project of Watkin Thomas's that changed the face of Granville was the area on North Prospect. This included the car repair garage built in 1917, later used as the fire house and replaced in 1972. This first garage was built on land owned by the Whites, which had been the Sinnott blacksmith shop. Charles B. White also financed the venture. The mechanic was George Thompson, who had already been repairing



ABOVE: A molding plane, signed by Wat Thomas, designed to make sculpted molding.

RIGHT: These are Wat Thomas' tools, which are on display in the Granville Historical Museum's collection.



cars for two years in the existing blacksmith shop. Wat Thomas was the business manager as well as the builder. Another adjacent blacksmith shop, owned by Mr. Evans was torn down at the same time but was replaced with a new blacksmith shop, demonstrating that as of 1917, horses for transportation were not quite obsolete yet.

A long article in the *Granville Sentinel*, December 31, 1971 continues the story.

Messrs. White, Thomas and Thompson, in 1921, were succeeded in the building by A.L. Guckert and F. L. McCollum, who continued as the Granville Service Garage, and until 1929, were the agency here for Buick motor cars.

For a brief time in the early thirties the building housed a Plymouth agency, but really didn't see service again until 1938 when Mr. & Mrs. Charles B. White (nee Clara Sinnott) deeded the property to the village, 'for fire department purposes.'

Up until this time, the Granville Volunteer Fire Department's equipment, both pieces, had been housed in the rear of the present municipal building at 128 S. Main (the brick building next to Opera House Park). But with the White's bequest

the Fire Department, working easily with the American Legion, remodeled the building providing for meeting rooms for the GVFD, the Legion and the Boy Scouts, including limited cooking facilities at the same time.

And people, lots of them, beginning with Wat Thomas have, from the beginning, been identified with the 54 year old structure. Thomas, who built the E.S. Schnaidt and John David Jones homes, as well as the structure now occupied by Granville Furniture, was long known for his exquisite carpentry and cabinet-making and his masonry ability.

When the Fire Department moved from its original quarters on Main St. to the new home, the impact was immediate and resounding, lived on for all those years. Hubert D. Robinson and Dr. J.W. Rohrer, the department's first chief, raced to see who would pilot 'Old Betsy.'

As long as the equipment was housed across Main St., Robinson held the edge, although 'Jake' (as the dentist was known,) frequently made it across back lots from his home (now Morrow-Crouse) (in 2016, McPeek-Hoekstra Funeral

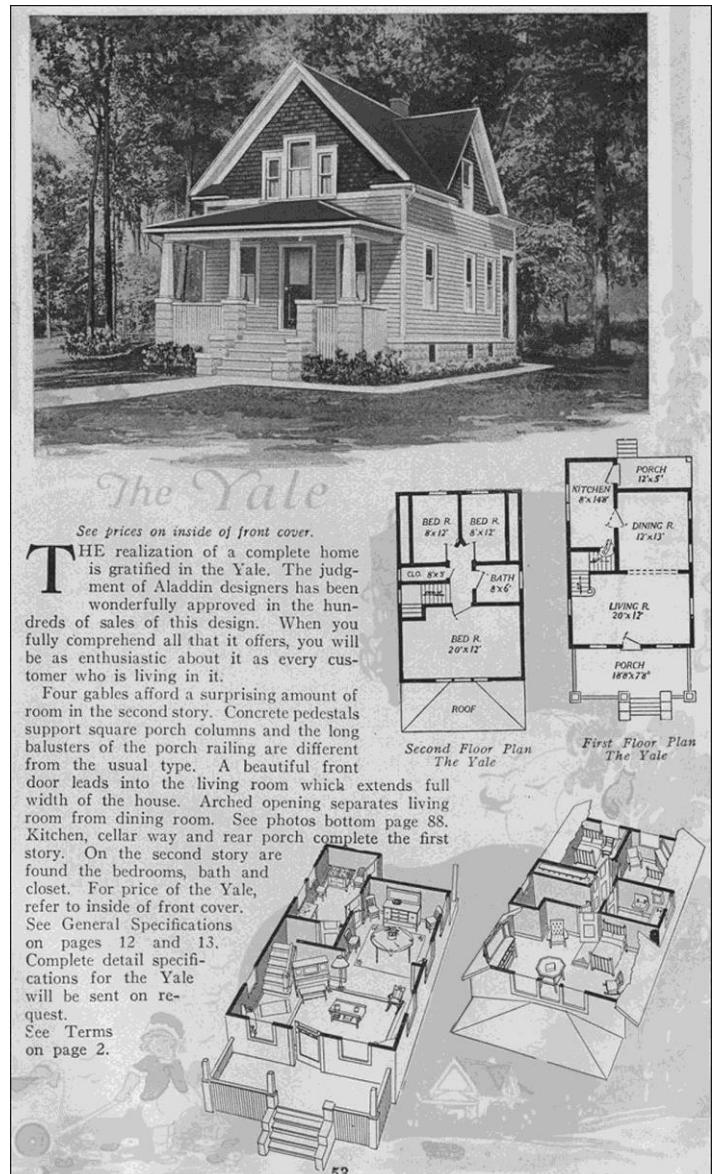
Home) in time to grab the wheel first. Of course Dr. Rohrer had the head start – straight north on Prospect – after the department moved.

In 1924 Clara Sinnett White completed a campaign to raise money for a new public library. She gave the land for the building by moving her father's house off the site. She also gave a considerable acreage of land on Centerville Street (Newark Granville Road) to maintain the library. Frank L. Packard, the Ohio architect, was hired to design the building and Watkin Thomas to build it. It originally held 75,000 books and was described as a colonial sandstone building finished on the inside in mahogany and white.

Also in 1924, Thomas was the contractor for the Ohio Baptist Convention Building on the southwest corner of Prospect and Broadway, now the Village Hall. The building was designed by E. E. Hopkins, the treasurer of the Ohio Baptist Convention and of Denison University. The second floor was entirely occupied by the offices of the officials of the Ohio Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Publication Society. The corner room occupying half of the first floor was occupied by the Granville post office (now Reader's Garden bookstore).

Watkin Thomas was a longtime member of the Board of Managers of the Granville Historical Society. When planning the 125th anniversary of the village, it was reported that:

...the Historical Society committee, cuddling in its solicitous lap that forlorn community foundling, the Old Colony Burial Ground, made an appeal for contributions for the renovation of that historic repository of local tradition. Watkin Thomas, treasurer of the executive committee, astonished the assembly with the statement that he had a nucleus of \$43.46 left from the fund raised last autumn for the dedication of



A typical 1915 house plan advertisement for a house similar to the Cort house (see page 6).

the J.S. Jones memorial viaduct.

(*Granville Times*, April 24, 1930)

In the collection of the Society are a number of carpenter's tools marked W.S.T. or Watkin S. Thomas, and given by his daughter. One plane is also signed by the locally well-known plane maker and carpenter Gerard Bancroft. He was responsible for building the Old Academy building in 1833 and lived in the house just behind the museum. It seemed fitting to me that this plane would have both names stamped into it, showing a continuity of a hundred years of Granville builders. It is a molding plane, that is, one designed to make sculpted molding. There is no evidence that

Structures built by Watkin Thomas

Owner	Date	Address		Note
Mrs. J.L. Lewis	1908	128	E. Elm St.	2 houses, Downer Lots
Rev. C.N. Harford	1909	211	W. Elm St.	10 room frame house
Caroline DeVinney	1909	348	E. Maple St.	6 rm. house, Lot 288, last house n side of street
St. Luke's Church	1909	107	E. Broadway	New steel ceiling
Watkin Thomas	1911	227	S. Pearl St.	North half of both lots 273 & 274.
L.A. Ransley	1912		S. Prospect St.	Bungalow then flats
J.O. Voorhees	1912	316	E. Elm	House, purchased lot from James Fosdick
Robinson Farm	1912		Centerville St.	Newark Granville Road
Julia Watkin	1914	1632	Centerville St.	Frame house on her farm
Clara Sheldon	1914		S. Prospect St.	House adjoining Carter
Elsie Carter	1914		S. Prospect St.	House adjoining Sheldon
Baptist Parsonage	1914		W. Broadway	Remodeling
Clifford Case	1915	327	E. Broadway	House, adjoining Buxton Inn, stucco
Albert Guckert	1915		Centerville St.	Bungalow
Albert Guckert	1915		Burg St.	House
Charles J. Wright	1915		Centerville St.	Brick veneer house on 11 acres,
M.P. Ashbrook	1916	117	S. Plum St.	House, Benj injured falling off scaffold
C.B. White	1916		E. Broadway	Retaining wall around Sinnett hill, \$6.50/cu ft.
Joseph C. Campbell	1917		Lancaster Rd.	Farm house, Union Township
Enterprise Garage	1917	133	N. Prospect St.	Sinnett Blacksmith, later Firehouse, razed '72
Blacksmith Shop	1917	121	N. Prospect St.	Evans Blacksmith Shop
E.S. Schnaitt	1917	334	Cedar St.	House
John David Jones	1917	1075	New.-Granv. Rd.	House
Granville Furniture				House, corner lot, Prospect & Elm
Presbyterian Church	1922	110	W. Broadway	Renovation
Mark Smith	1923	118	W. Elm St.	House
Granville Library	1924	217	E. Broadway	Stone from Thorne quarry
BaptistConventionBldg	1924	134	E. Broadway	2 storey brick office building
Methodist Church	1924	102	E. Broadway	Church enlarged, carpentry by W.S. Thomas
Evalina Robinson	1925	330	Spellman St.	Small modern tile & stucco house
Baptist Church	1926	115	W. Broadway	Heating & redecorating church
Anna C. Smith	1926		S. Prospect St.	House across from the Ransley Flats.
Masonic Building	1927	116	E. Broadway	Repair cornice
Frank J. Van Voorhees	1932		New Castle, OH	House in Coshocton County, repairing
Baker and VanVoorhis	1933		E. Broadway	Ohio oil filling station, built of local sandstone
Old Col. Burying Gr.	1933	300	S. Main St.	Resetting stones
Granville Village	1937			Sewer repair work 22' below grade
Granville Library	1937	217	E. Broadway, rear	Add colonial entrance to Sinnett House

there was ever any molding this fancy in my house, but that's part of the story of changing building methods and styles from the 19th to the 20th century.

Thomas also seems to have been responsible for the Society occupying the Alexandrian Bank building in which we are now situated. In 1972 a letter to the editor of

the *Sentinel* by Arthur Jones includes the following information: At one time Mrs. White planned to have the Society lodged in the Mower house built in 1824, "but her builder Wat Thomas dissuaded her. So her bequest was used to buy the present building." He was on the Board of Managers when the bank building was purchased from the library and refurbished.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

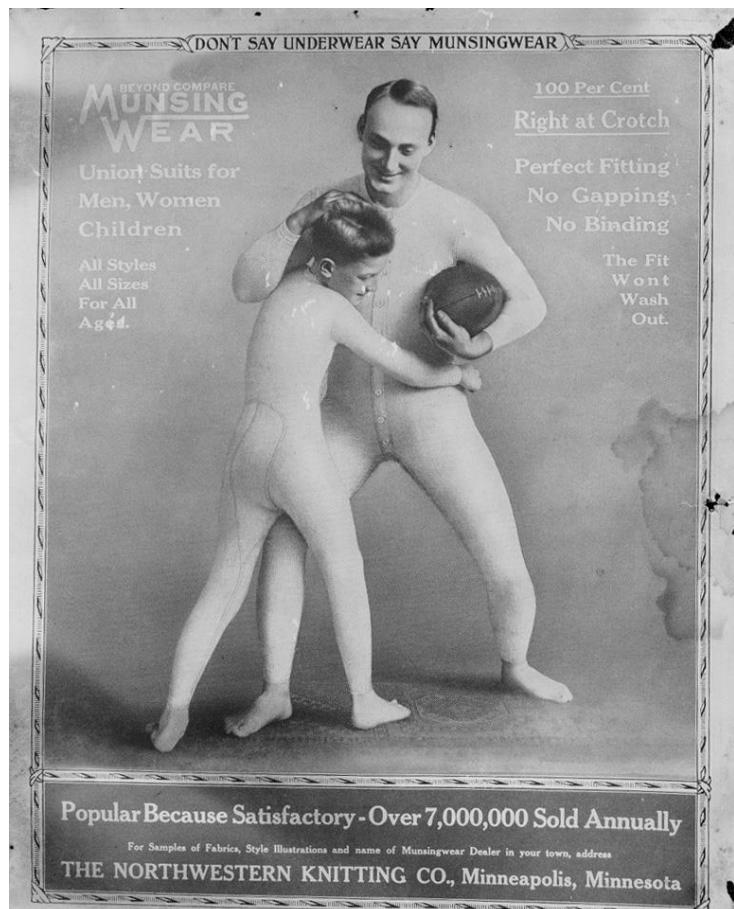
I give my thanks to Ron Sherwood for his photography and to Chuck Young, Bob Young, Sam Schnaitt and Bob and Joan Mach for information and family photographs which I have included in this article. Except as noted, the information contained herein is from the *Granville Times* or the United States Census.

Cynthia Cunningham Cort is the Collections Manager of the Granville Historical Society, has served as president of the Society's Board of Managers as well as being a longtime board member, and is currently secretary on the Society's board of managers.

Buggy

(Continued from front page)

According to Betsy O'Neill, this buggy played a very important and useful role in the courtship between James and Amanda Houston. Her grandparents grew up in strict Methodist families, where most of the social life revolved around the church. In fact, James and Amanda met at a Methodist church summer outing in Lancaster, Ohio. After meeting at this summer outing, a long distance courtship ensued with James driving this buggy from New Lexington, Ohio to Granville as often as possible to visit Amanda. This buggy served him well as he traveled the 35 miles each way from New Lexington to Granville in the mid-1800s.



A page from the November 1913 *Saturday Evening Post* used as insulation for the Cort house.



This photo of Wat Thomas (left) and his brother, John, on Broadway was taken around 1960.

GRANVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The Granville Historical Society is an all-volunteer, non-governmental not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization with membership open to all. Joining the Society is a delightful way to meet people who share a love of and interest in Granville's rich, well-documented history. Monthly programs, quarterly publications, and a museum that is open five days a week during the season are some of the ways that enable Society volunteers to share facets of what makes Granville so fascinating with members and guests. Volunteers are welcome in the Archives and Museum Collections areas, as well as museum hosts.

Please visit Granvillehistory.org for further information about all that we do and how you can get involved.

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