

Thomas H. Johnson (1902-1985)
Description of Readsboro, Vermont, in 1921
MSA 441:03

My day has begun (Aug. 21, 1921). I have never seen quite such a place as this before. The hotel boards about 6 people a day on the average and the proprietor's wife does all the work. Every person I have seen so far is a bit different. Mr. Howe talks – about everybody – everything. He lives next door to the Hotel in a little house (all the houses are little) with four women – one of them crazy. So he says. He thinks it's outrageous that there is a woman on the school board. He says the men do tone her down occasionally.

The country is magnificent here; as rugged as land was ever made - & yet arable. I am waiting for the woman of the school board to come out of the little school. I don't know what to think of the place yet. Thru the window I see the room, with chairs of all sizes – several double seats. There is a picture of Wilson in the rear – one of Harding at its front; a stove in the center. Outside everything is woods. The building is just over the brow of the hill. It won't be as windy here in winter I think. The houses round here are very much scattered. Many seem to be but single rooms, double at the most. Passing one I heard a woman screech, "Get down off of there or I'll lick you good on your pants." Then a bit of a wail from the kiddie inside. The sleeping dog, sunning on the stoop, rose and barked as I passed. Then it came over to sniff at me. It was very fat & lazy looking. The woman, in the shadow of the door sill called, "Bessie, come back here, come, come back." The creature went & the woman snatched it thru the casement. Then she stared at me. I came on and met a Pole dressed for church – or equal to that, driving a saw-ribbed nag. I asked him if I were on the right road to the school house & he said in broken English that I was. I walked on when another wagon jogged up to me. "Want a ride?" I did. He was an unshaven farmer from Searsburg and said he hadn't been over this road for 15 years. He, like all the rest, seemed to be bounded by Searsburg on the N. E. S. & W.

Everyone speaks unusually highly of Mr. & Mrs. O. Carpenter. They seem to be a very dear pair. She has never taken boarders. "But we shall be lonesome in the winter." Why she did know whether they would take me or not. She would have to talk it over with her husband. The Darby & Joan type.

All I can think of when I look at this school building – "a ragged beggar swimming."

Note: Thomas H. Johnson briefly attended Dartmouth College in 1920-21 and, after a year of teaching in Readsboro, Vt., started over again at Williams College, graduating with the class of 1926. He received his Ph.D. in English from Harvard University in 1934. He joined the faculty of the Lawrenceville School (New Jersey) in 1937, serving as chairman of the English Department there from 1944 until he retired in 1967. He was the author of *The Oxford Companion to American History*, is credited with discovering the Puritan poet Edward Taylor (1664?-1729), co-edited the *Literary History of the United States* (1948, 3 vols.), and was the editor of six volumes of Emily Dickinson's poetry and letters. His last work was *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretative Biography*, published in 1955. His papers are at the Vermont Historical Society (MSA 441 and MSA 780) and at Princeton University (C0468).