

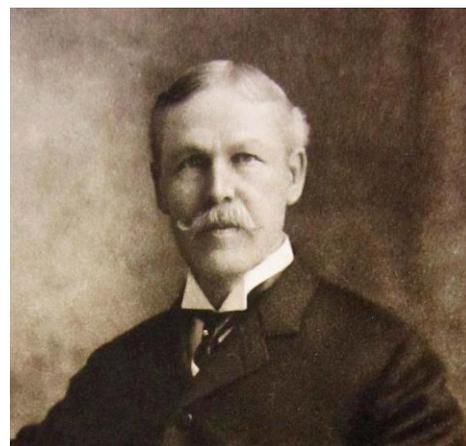
## The Agent's House at 7 Orchard Street in Rockville Connecticut By Dr. S. Ardis Abbott

(Editor's Note: The following document was prepared by Dr. S. Ardis Abbott, Vernon's Municipal Historian, to support the successful nomination of the house at 7 Orchard Street as a Local Historic Property.

The house at 7 Orchard Street, Rockville was built between 1869 and 1875. Built by the Hockanum Company, a manufacturer of woolen goods on land adjacent to their mill, the house was intended for the use of their recently hired superintendent, George Sykes.

Hired in 1866 to manage the Hockanum Mill, George Sykes set out to improve the mill, expanding capacity and installing new machinery that would produce a higher quality product and increase profitability. This new product, known as worsted menswear, proved to be a great success, and eventually allowed the company to takeover and consolidate the Rockville woolen mills into the Hockanum Mills Company.

Rockville soon became a thriving mill town, but one with two problems. The new woolen product required a more highly skilled and experienced labor force. Previously the labor force consisted of young men and women from the surrounding rural area who lived in boarding houses and went back to the farm when they were no longer needed. The new labor force consisted of experienced wool workers, many of them coming from England and Germany and accompanied by families.



*George Sykes*



The village soon experienced an acute housing shortage. The *Rockville Journal* noted the lack of rental housing and estimated that forty new tenements could probably be rented immediately. The editor also suggested that “men of means” might consider providing “a few more dwelling houses for their workers.” Apparently the Hockanum Company took this appeal seriously and began the development of the west side of Orchard Street. Number 7 Orchard Street,

the first of these houses, remained the home of the superintendent. Other houses built on Hockanum land were rented to workers with managerial positions in the mill.

Number 7 Orchard Street, locally referred to as “the agent's house”, was inhabited by Louis Schlaf, the last agent (or superintendent) of the Hockanum Mill. Schlaf had moved into the house in 1936 and remained until the mills were sold in 1952. The Stevens Company, which owned the mills at that time, sold the house to Mr. Schlaf. He and his wife continued to live there until they passed away. The house was left to their daughter Doris Schlaf Bixby. Mrs. Bixby lived in the house until her death in 2011. She left the property to the Vernon Historical Society in the hope that it could be preserved as a local historic property reflecting the lives of those who had labored for a century to make the Hockanum Mills Company a renowned manufacturer of high-quality woolen fabrics.



*Louis Schlaf*