

## The Fourteenth State

### **The earliest Green Mountain Boys history**

*Tyler Resch*

In February 1841 Hiland Hall of North Bennington was about to begin his fourth term as one of Vermont's five elected members of the U.S. House of Representatives. Hall was a staunch Whig, and he and a band of political allies were distressed about the ridicule directed at them by the *Vermont Gazette*, a Democratic weekly.

So they formed a new Whig newspaper and called it the *State Banner*. It was Whig to the core and the new publishers were especially pleased that their national standard-bearer, William Henry "Tippecanoe" Harrison, had been elected president in the Log Cabin and Hard Cider campaign of 1840; but he had not yet taken office. Sadly, when the new president died after only a month in office, the *State Banner* published a "turnrule" edition that featured black mourning strips between the columns. It uneasily welcomed Tippecanoe's running mate, John Tyler of Virginia, as president.

But the focus here is not about the politics of the new weekly paper. It's about the admirable efforts Congressman Hall made to fill space in it. He became, in effect, a columnist. Under the bland headline "Historical Readings" he wrote a short historical essay every week for roughly the first 24 weeks. Retrieved many years later, these yellowed clippings form a charming early history of the founding of Vermont, of Hall's town of Bennington, and of many lively details about the Green Mountain Boys' activities during their jurisdictional feud with the detested New York colony.

Each little chapter carried a descriptive headline such as "Standoff at the Breakenridge Farm," "Men Conscious of Their Dignity," "A Rejoicing of Brief Duration," and "Animosities with the Yorkers Deepen."

The longest chapter, "An Episode of Severe Punishment," tells of the harassment of Benjamin Hough of Clarendon, a New York justice. In January 1775 the Green Mountain Boys, a.k.a. the Bennington Mob, captured Hough at his home, drove him by sleigh to Sunderland, bound and guarded at swordpoint. Accused of being a New York magistrate, he was subjected to a "trial" by prosecutors named Ethan Allen, Seth Warner, Robert Cochran, Peleg Sunderland, and others. Found guilty, Hough was stripped and administered 200 lashes, then given "a free and unmolested passport" signed by Ethan Allen, to New York City "or westward of our Grants."

Hough complained bitterly and petitioned the New York Assembly, telling of “the outrageous cruelty and oppression of the Bennington Mob.” His affidavit was published in a New York newspaper, which was quoted in Hall’s column.

The series concludes with a chapter titled “Battle of Lexington Ends the Dispute” and mentions the very final session of the provincial New York Assembly. The start of the American Revolution on April 19, 1775, ended the unruly agenda of the Bennington Mob.

One can speculate that Hall, a studious lawyer-historian, might have been motivated, or provoked, by the publication in 1839 of a book of fiction, “The Green Mountain Boys: A Historical Tale of the Early Settlement of Vermont” by Judge D.P. Thompson. This book was in fact a fulsome novel filled with speculative quotes of the author’s imagination. Hall later expanded his “Historical Readings” into the serious 500-page *Early History of Vermont*, published in 1868 nearly a decade after he had retired as governor.

Hall’s 24 “Historical Readings” have never been published again but they are accessible online at the *Fund for North Bennington* website (click “stories” and then “Hiland Hall”) where they have been renamed “Ruffian Democracy.”