



## Bennington Historical Society News

Next Program: "Finding Your Veteran"

November 15 from 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.  
A Virtual Interactive Discussion

Register at [http://bit.ly/BHS\\_Veteran](http://bit.ly/BHS_Veteran)

### Finding Your Veteran

Learn how to uncover the story of your family veteran using Internet sources, books and local hard copy resources. Find out the details of their service – where they entered the service, their unit, where they went, and what they did upon return. Whether they served in the Revolutionary war to present conflicts, their story can be traced.

Robert Tegart will lead you in this virtual Zoom discussion to discover all these family stories to honor our veterans.

**About the Presenter:** Bob Tegart recently moved to Vermont from Central New York. He is past President and Administrator of the Clinton Historical Society, Clinton, NY. He also held positions as President of The Landmarks Society of Utica, New York, and Chair of the Village of Clinton Historic Preservation Commission. Bob studied history at the University of Rochester and the Graduate School at SUNY Geneseo. He taught at the Mohawk Valley Institute for Learning in retirement, and has given numerous historical presentations in schools and to community groups. He was a contributor to the book *With Courage and Honor – Oneida County in the Civil War*, edited by James and



**Capt. James Tegart, brother of Robert Tegart**

Cheryl Pula. One of his major points of interest is the social impact of modern warfare on small communities. He is currently working on the impact of the First World War on Bennington. He and his wife, Beth, live on Elm Street in Bennington.

To Register for this program, [click here](#) or go to [http://bit.ly/BHS\\_Veteran](http://bit.ly/BHS_Veteran)

### In this Issue

"Finding Your Veteran"	1
"Gateway to Freedom"	2-3
Proposed Bike Path	3
Spanish Flu	4
Local Programs of Interest	5
VHS Programs of Interest	6

## Gateway to Freedom

by Don Miller, Bennington Historical Society President

Since 1761, Bennington has been the Gateway to Vermont and to freedom. Settled by Congregational Separatists, this Gateway opened with the intent to establish a faith community and remained open for all who sought freedom and dignity.

Consider the examples of Jeremiah Evarts and Alexander Twilight. Evarts was the spark that created Middlebury College and the fire that fought against President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830. Twilight was the first black man to graduate from Middlebury College and the first to be elected to a state legislature.

The James Evarts family moved to Bennington County from Salisbury, Connecticut in 1761. Jeremiah, son of James, was born in Bennington County in 1781.

Seth Storrs moved to Bennington and met the Evarts family in 1784. He moved to Middlebury in 1794. James Evarts called on



Credit: Oil on canvas painting by Samuel Morse.

Seth Storrs in 1798, while enroute to Yale

with his son Jeremiah. Long into the night, James and Seth lamented the fact that Vermont boys seeking higher education had to seek it in other states. The discussion led to the idea of founding a college in Vermont.

Middlebury College was chartered in November 1800, and Seth Storrs was made one of the trustees. Even before the charter was granted, Storrs deeded a sizable acreage on the west side of Otter Creek for use by the college.



Credit: Orleans County Historical Society

After graduating from Yale College in 1802, Jeremiah Evarts studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1806. But his fame came in his fight for freedom and dignity. Evarts was the editor of a religious monthly magazine from 1805 until 1820 (*The Panoplist*) in which he published over 200 essays, twenty-four on the rights of Indians.

Jeremiah became one of the leading opponents of removing the Cherokee from the Southeast. He unsuccessfully opposed President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830, i.e., the Act that led to the "Trail of Tears"—forced

"Gateway," continued on p. 3

## “Gateway,” continued from p. 2

relocations of American Indians.

Jeremiah encouraged the Cherokee to take their case to the Supreme Court of the United States, and they did in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*. When he died in 1831 of tuberculosis, historian Francis Paul Prucha said, “the Christian crusade against the removal of the Indians died with Evarts.” Jeremiah did not win the battle, but he started the everlasting war for the dignity of Indian nations.

Alexander Twilight was born on September 23, 1795 in northern Vermont. As a child, Twilight toiled on a farm in Corinth, VT, while learning to read and write. He saved enough money to enroll in Orleans County Grammar School in Randolph at age 20. Alexander enrolled in Middlebury College almost six years later in 1821. Alexander Twilight became the first known African American to graduate from college in the United States. From there, he bounced around in New York State before landing at the Grammar School again — this time, as the principal. Twilight simultaneously served as the acting pastor at the nearby congregational church.

Twilight led the school during a period of immense growth, which led to the need for a co-ed campus dormitory — complete with a kitchen, parlor, and rooms — named Athenian Hall. That structure now houses part of the current-day Old Stone House Museum in Brownington, Vermont. In 1836, Twilight became the first African-American to serve in a U.S. state legislature, the Vermont General Assembly. 56 years after the Vermont Constitution abolished slavery and 36 years after Middlebury College was founded, Alexander Twilight’s leadership proved that the Gateway was still open. “Freedom and Unity” remains Vermont’s motto.

## Proposed Bike Path

The trolley line from Bennington through Pownal and on to Williamstown is being contemplated as a bicycle path. The proposed path follows the line of one of the Berkshire Street Railway lines—the Bennington and North Adams Street Railway Company, which provided trolley service from Bennington to Williamstown from 1907 to 1929.



The proposed bicycle route “stretches south from the area of Main Street between Morgan and Beech streets in Bennington. It moves through the town-owned Greenberg Headwaters Park east of

Morgan Street, then into Pownal to Peaks Pine Road and toward the historic red trolley powerhouse on Route 7 near the Barber Pond Road intersection; then down the ridge toward Route 346 and to Church Street; then south toward the existing railroad line just east of the Hoosic River, past the former Green Mountain Race Track property and into Williamstown.” See BCRC presentation: [Trolley Line Scoping Study](#)

The idea for the trolley line was first suggested by Mark Anders, BCRC Regional Planner, after he attended a Bennington Historical Society talk by Joe Hall on the various trolley systems, including the Berkshire Street Railway system. See Bennington Historical Society Presentation: [“History of the Bennington Trolley System.”](#)

## The Spanish Flu in the Bennington Area

by Raymond Rodrigues

The H1N1 Influenza A virus was popularly known as the “Spanish Flu.” From 1918 to 1920 it killed about one-third of the world’s population. In 1918 here in Vermont, 35,954 cases had been reported, with 1,772 deaths. By the time it ended, approximately 50,000 Vermonters had contracted the virus. Businesses and schools were closed down. People wore masks.

Reading the *Bennington Evening Banner* from that period provides some interesting and, today, sometimes humorous information. The virus was first reported as sickness on Oct. 1, 1918. Dr. H. L. Pache of the State Board of Health called it “old-fashioned grip.”

On Oct. 4<sup>th</sup>, the newspaper reported that Carl Emmons had died from the sickness. Sampling subsequent newspapers, we learn, for example, on April 12, 1919, that:

Mrs. I. B. Harbour is ill.

William Shaw is confined to the house by illness.

Mrs. Phillip T. H. Pierson, who has been ill of influenza, is on the gain.

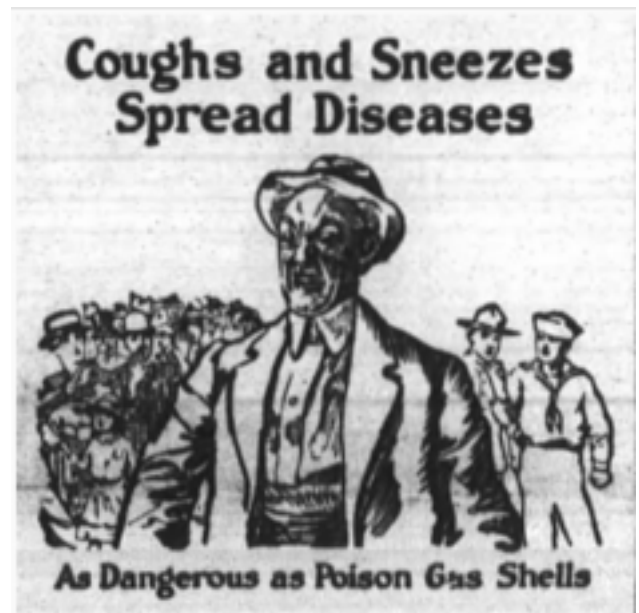
Robert Cummings, who has been ill of the grip, was able to be out Friday.

Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Harmon and son, Floyd, who have been ill of the grip, are able to be out again.

It’s not clear whether “grip,” “influenza,” or “illness” refer to the same disease. For example, the *Banner* reports on Nov. 1, 1920, that “3 year old Gladys Holton died of the flu.”

There is good news in the advertisements: Nuxated Iron builds red blood strength and endurance; Parisian Sage prevents baldness; and Pape’s Cold Compound cures “the grippe.”

Bennington fared better than most of Vermont during the pandemic. Between September and November, 1918, there were only 599 cases and 30 deaths. The low incidence of disease may be related not only to the strict quarantine that was in effect for two months, but also to the opening of the Putnam Hospital in 1918.



Credit: *Bennington Banner*, 1918

For more information about the Spanish Flu in Vermont, see: [Bennington County History Forum on Facebook](#) ; [A Brief History of Pandemic/Epidemics in Bennington](#) ; and “Awful, Awful”: The Spanish Flu in Vermont, 1918-1919 by Michael Sherman, in *Historic Roots*, April 1998, Vol. 3 No. 1.

## The Great Rebellion—Bennington in the Civil War on Veteran’s Day

The Bennington Performing Arts Center—Home of Oldcastle Theatre presents “The Great Rebellion—Bennington in the Civil War.” This original play about the Civil War was written by Bill Morgan and directed by Robert Ebert. The script is based on Morgan’s book *Bennington in the Civil War* (History Press, 2016). This is an in-theater event at Bennington Performing Arts Center—The Home of Oldcastle Theatre Company, 331 Main Street. Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$5 for children under 18. **Tickets for veterans are free.**

Although Bennington is best known for the Revolutionary War battle on the Walloomsac, many more soldiers from Bennington fought and died in the Civil War. This fictionalized account is based on historical letters written between the characters in the play during that time.

Among the people discussed in their letters back and forth are Lt. Col. Newton Stone, Capt. Ransom Gore, drummer boy Norman Puffer and Capt. Hamilton L. Shields.

**Bill Morgan** is known nationally for his many books about Beat Generation figures. Since coming to Bennington a decade ago, he became interested in local history and served as president of the Bennington Historical Society.

**Robert Ebert**, who moved to Bennington from Texas, is the co-founder of Bennington Community Theater and was also a former president of the Bennington Historical Society.

## A Woman, Ain’t I—A Vermont Humanities Council Event, sponsored by the Bennington Branch of AAUW

A re-enactment of Sojourner Truth’s story in her own words, speeches, and songs, this event, originally scheduled as a live performance at the Bennington Performing Arts Center last March, has been re-scheduled as a Zoom event.



**Kathryn Woods**, who portrays Sojourner Truth, lives in Boston. She had actually purchased her bus ticket to Williamstown last March and was looking forward to staying in Bennington and spending some time visiting. Instead, Kathryn has kindly agreed to use her living room as a stage and to visit us on Zoom. After the presentation, she’ll be happy to take questions from the audience.

Date: Nov. 14, 2000

Time: 2:00 to 3:15 pm

Free of Charge

Registration: <https://bennington-vt.aauw.net/>

## Vermont Historical Society Programs Coming Up

1. Investigate the history of Vermont's settlement and how it became a state. History for Homeschoolers programs are recommended for children ages 7 to 12. Space is limited; pre-registration is required. \$8.00 per child or \$6.50 per child for VHS members and families with 3 or more participating children.

Also available as a virtual class. For more information, contact [education@vermonthistory.org](mailto:education@vermonthistory.org) or call (802) 828-1413.

2. **“The Rebel and the Tory: Ethan Allen, Philip Skene, and the Dawn of Vermont”** with authors Nick Muller and Gary Shattuck. November 19, 2020: The Rebel and The Tory shines a fresh light on the long-accepted origin story of Vermont, which has remained static for about 200 years. The Ejectment Trials of 1770, when settlers and leaders of the New Hampshire Grants turned from petitions and court proceedings to violent resistance against legitimate New York authority, are considered a critical inflection point by many historians. No historians have ever read the transcripts of the Ejectment Trials—until now. The reality of the Ejectment Trials turns out to be markedly different from their portrayal for the past two centuries. The authors also restore Philip Skene, a principal player scheming with Ethan Allen and other revolutionaries to create a new colony with the capacity to resolve the Grants controversy, to his rightful place at the center of Vermont’s founding.

This new publication from the Vermont Historical Society is also available for sale through the VHS Bookstore. Register at: <https://form.jotform.com/202236287378057>

**Note: At this time, there are no new Bennington Historical Society Programs planned for December or January. However, the Bennington Museum plans to put past programs online.**

### **Bennington Historical Society**

*A volunteer-operated program of the Bennington Museum*

*Officers:* Don Miller, President; Bob Tegart, President-Elect; Bill Morgan, Immediate Past President; Charles Dewey, Secretary.

*Committee Members:* Anne Bugbee, Beverley Petrelis, Joe Hall, Ted Bird, Jackie Marro, Scott Maguire, Ray Rodrigues.

*Newsletter Editor:* Ray Rodrigues

*Thank you for your donation to Bennington Museum in support of  
Historical Society programs.*