



NEWSLETTER

JULY 2024



President's Message

Summertime, and no one's in a hurry. Summer's ours; we expect summer hours, soft pants, beach reads, G&Ts.

And yet, herald of all this low-stakes leisure is Memorial Day, arriving in garish array, but somber at heart. Unlike other national observances, Memorial Day lingers on loss.

We remember the men and women who paid for our freedom with their lives, who cannot celebrate Memorial Day with us.

In our July issue, we look at Bennington-ians – and one Philadelphian – who served in war and struggled toward peace. We look also at how we commemorate conflicts and the people involved in them.

Memorial Day, America's herald of summertime and easy living, arrives in garish array, but somber at heart

Past BHS president Bob Tegart offers tribute to the 12 soldiers from Bennington who fought at D-Day, whose 80th anniversary we observed in July.

Bob's piece, and the brief profiles of young people at the very start of their adult lives, reminds us again that so many of the soldiers who entered battle that day were terribly young.

For this month's BHS Reading List, we have esteemed biographer Walter Isaacson's book on Benjamin Franklin. As Don Miller tells us, Isaacson illuminates many facets of the man once called the most loveable of the Founding Fathers.

And finally, Steve Edwards returns with a record of war and peace rendered in intimate scale, but that, as you'll see, carries great poignance.

We hope you enjoy the July issue, wherever the summer takes you.



— Robert Ebert

HARK, THE SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL NEARS!

Three of them are coming to Bennington!

by Jim Thatch

Two hundred fifty years ago, Bennington was the location of one of the first and most crucial turning points in American history, and planning is well under way for a three-year celebration of our history.

The crucial moments to be celebrated in 2025-2027 will be 250th anniversaries of Ethan Allen's capture of Fort Ticonderoga, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the Battle of Hubbardton and, of course, the Battle of Bennington.

Beginning in 2025 and continuing until the end of 2027, the Bennington 250th Anniversary Committee will be telling the story of those well-known events, as well as many not-so-well-known events, in new and unique ways.

This year the Committee is raising awareness for the upcoming celebration. A group of Green Mountain Boys has already been seen around town promoting the 250th Anniversary at local events. On Battle Day Weekend there will be a Liberty Pole raising on Main Street, and later in the day a 250th Anniversary Kickoff Gala Dinner at the Equinox Resort in Manchester.

Courtesy of the Bennington 250th Anniversary Committee



BROTHERS IN ARMS

Committee members Jim Thatch, William Todd, and Jonah Spivak at Bennington's annual bell-ringing ceremony, July 4, 2024

250th Kickoff GALA DINNER

AT THE **EQUINOX**
Manchester, Vermont

Scan for Tickets

Saturday, August 17, 2024
4:30 PM - 8:00 PM

VERMONT 250th ANNIVERSARY

Commemorating the Ideals & Principles that Created Our Nation

Supporting three years of Regional Activities
EVENTS * EDUCATION * ART * MONUMENTS

ENJOY
Hors d'oeuvres and a Four-Course Dinner
18th Century Cuisine with a Modern Flair
Cash Bar with Signature Cocktails

AFTER DINNER PRESENTATION
American Revolution Historic Songs and Anecdotes
with Cosby Gibson & Tom Staudle

ONLINE AUCTION
Sponsored by the Manchester Business Association

Limited tickets available...\$150 per person
To purchase tickets online...visit Bennington250.org
Tickets may also be purchased at the Bennington Museum

This Event supported by the Equinox Hotel and Resort

Courtesy of the Bennington 250th Anniversary Committee

Local schools will present a special Vermont History curriculum, supported by field trips to sites of major episodes leading up to Revolutionary War and after.

These events will be presented with new creative works such as plays, films, reenactments, musical compositions, art and more. A train excursion from the North Bennington Station to the Bennington Battlefield is being planned as well as a mock Catamount Tavern, the Green Mountain Boys' famed meeting place. The creation of new memorials and the restoration of existing monuments will also play an important part of the celebration.

Jonah Spivak, the Chairman of the 250th Anniversary Committee, says this is Bennington's moment on the national stage. We encourage anyone interested to get involved and "Join the Cause!"

RENDERED IN STONE, AND ON CELLULOID

Two upcoming events shine a light on early Vermont

August 3rd, 10am - 12pm, \$20 – \$25

Take a tour of the Bennington Center Cemetery with Bennington Museum curator, Jamie Franklin. Have you ever wondered what stories lie in the cemetery behind the Old First Church? This guided tour starts in the Vermont Rocks! exhibition, where you will learn about Vermont's three state rocks (and frequent headstone materials); marble, granite, and slate.

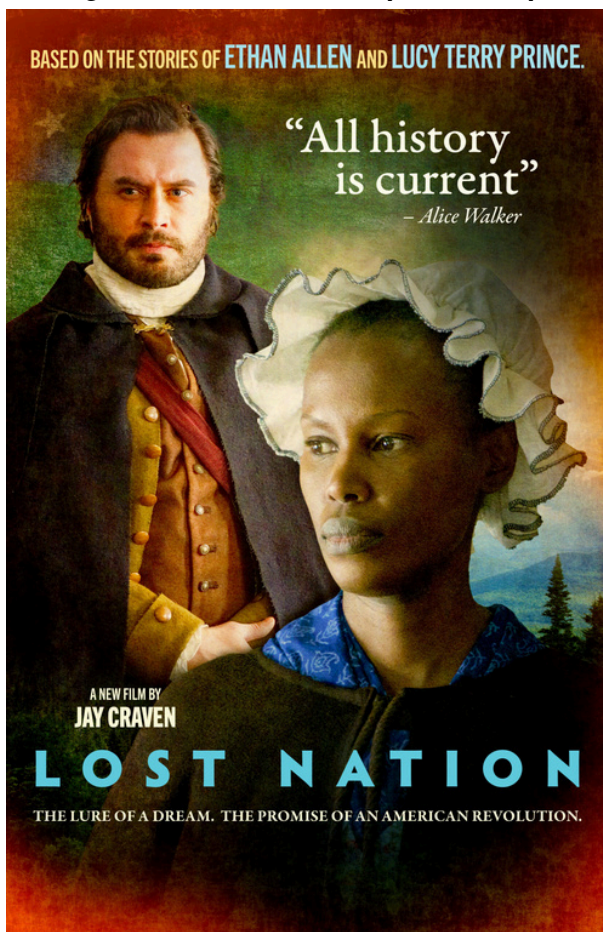


The tour continues in the Bennington Center Cemetery, where Jamie will share the stories of some of the people buried there and introduce you to the works of some of the region's early headstone carvers.

Be sure to wear good walking shoes and be prepared for some uphill walking and uneven terrain. We recommend bringing water to drink and applying sunscreen and bug spray.



August 14th & 15th, 7:00pm - 9:00pm



Advance tickets may be purchased by going to www.kcoppresents.org. Tickets available at the door as space allows.

Jay Craven's new film, *Lost Nation*, is a Revolutionary War-era action drama set in the upstart Republic of Vermont.

The film stars Kevin Ryan (*Copper*, *Harry Wild*) as Ethan Allen, who, spearheading resistance to Yorker land claims, leads the Green Mountain Boys to attack the New York stronghold of Guilford. At every turn, Allen must navigate entanglements with allies, enemies, and family.

Lost Nation's parallel story follows Lucy Terry Prince (Eva Ndachi, *Beautifully Broken*), whose poem "Bars Fight" is the first known work of African American literature. Lucy and her husband, formerly enslaved farmer Abijah Prince (Rob Campbell, *The Crucible*, *Ethan Frome*, *Unforgiven*), settled on a Guilford homestead less than a mile from Ethan Allen's attack.

But like Allen, the Princes soon find themselves embroiled in the American Revolution, reckoning with its perils and potential. Also like Allen, Lucy Prince upsets the status quo by using Vermont's early legal and political systems to win justice in an unforgiving place.

BOVINE INTERVENTION

Your only opportunity to milk a "cow" in the Museum, ever

We're getting our hands dirty this month with some old-time chores. (Don't worry, they'll be **fun** chores) We'll meet Bennita, the Bennington Museum's "cow" (and try milking her too!), churn the butter, enjoy a story and more. Come join us -- you'll be over the moon!

Open to 3- to 5-year-old kiddos and their adult companions.



Museum ABCs
August 10th 10:30 - 11:30am



Museum ABCs is a collaboration between Bennington Museum and the Bennington Free Library, designed for children ages 3 to 5 and their adult companions. Siblings are welcome! Museum ABCs is FREE thanks to funding from The Bank of Bennington. Join us on the second Saturday of each month, April through November, for artwork, stories, and more!



Sponsored by The Bank of Bennington with additional support from Stewart's and Vermont Humanities

EPHEMERA PURSUIT

Century-old circus posters still thrill

One afternoon in North Petersburg, NY, a local teenager took some snapshots of a general store and the barn next to it. That young man was Nicholas Whitman, and he was already a serious, committed photographer. The richly textured photograph he took that day captured the store's gas pumps, porch, and the advertisements affixed to its clapboard siding in soft, raking light.

But the real prize was next door in the barn, under the eaves of an open bay. There, Nick saw a dazzling circus poster of a roaring lion, decayed from exposure and flaking, but still vivid.

Nick took a picture of it. Then he snapped a couple more. From the state of the barn wall, it was clear that many, many posters had been mounted on it, pasted right on top of one another over the years. But who knew how many years, or how many posters?

Nick Whitman went on to become an accomplished fine art photographer, gallerist, and curator. He also stayed in touch with the area he grew up in, and one day in 2000, he stopped back at that barn.

The building had since become an antiques shop, so Whitman went in. The owner confirmed the existence of the circus posters, fragments of which were still visible on the walls. If Nick wanted to see the rest, the proprietor mentioned, they were up in his hay loft.

Whitman came away with armloads of prints, broadsides heralding the imminent arrival of Aztecs, polar bears, Cossacks, "Actual Frontier Life" and indeed "the Amusement Triumph of the Ages."

Trove in hand, Whitman realized the prints were at least a dozen layers thick, a paper slab weatherbeaten nearly to pulp. These artifacts were fragile, and a method to separate the prints from one another proved elusive. So he called paper conservator Leslie Paisley at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center. Could she help him out?

Paisley politely declined. The timing wasn't right, the project too labor-intensive and risky – using an untested method of freeing the top layer could destroy the whole sheaf of pasted-together images.

About 15 years later, Paisley got in touch with Whitman. She had recently retired. She had some time. That circus poster project they'd talked about a while back? Let's do it.

The Circus is Coming to Town (August 29th - December 31st, 2024), reveals what Whitman and Paisley found next. The exhibit also offers a look at turn-of-the-century pop culture, illustrating how Americans' fascination with frontiers — the western one within their own nation, and "exotic" frontiers abroad — were packaged and brought closer through entertainment spectacles like circuses.

In the end, it's these posters' fragile, exuberant beauty that will stay with you. So step right up! An amazing show awaits you!



The Circus is Coming to Town
August 29th - December 31st, 2024

BEARER OF MEMORY

A local artisan carries Lincoln in life, and into posterity

by Callie Raspuzzi

Now on view at Bennington Museum's Vermont Rocks! exhibit (through November 10th), this bas relief sculpture of Abraham Lincoln was created by Charles Niles Pike (1838-1909), the son of a marble quarry owner and sculptor born in North Adams, Massachusetts.

In his youth, Pike followed the tide of young men moving west and joined an Ohio regiment during the Civil War. After the war he returned east and lived in Rutland, Vermont until moving to North Adams in 1877, where he lived the rest of his life.

He supported himself making gravestones and also created a few public monuments. Pike started carving bas relief busts of Lincoln and other prominent people while in Rutland (he preferred the white Vermont marble as it was softer and more transparent than Italian). His busts of Lincoln were popular and continued to be sold over the years locally and in large cities.

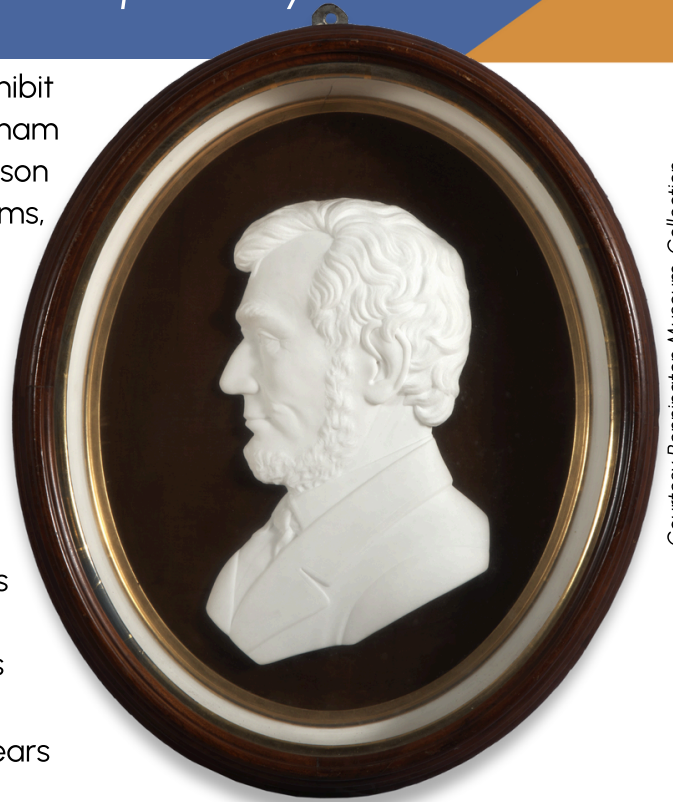
The first was presented to Pike's local chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic, a Civil War veterans' group. The one pictured here was owned by the Bennington chapter of the GAR, and they gave it to the Museum in the 1930s.

But the talented sculptor didn't start out in the stonecutting trade. His first trade was leading a coach-and-four.

Pike had personally met President Lincoln while serving in the Civil War. The future sculptor was assigned the job of driving General McLellan's carriage, and in September of 1862, just one day after the Battle of Antietam, the General came to him and said, "Charlie, sometime next week President Lincoln is coming here and I want you to have your carriage in apple pie order."

The day the President was expected Pike got up early and carefully cleaned the carriage, harness and horses and set out to meet the train at Harper's Ferry, 12 miles away. To his surprise, there were a total of five men to be transported, and his carriage was only meant to carry four. They all managed to pile in and set off, despite Pike's misgivings about the steep hills.

He was just mentioning to his passengers that the brakes would not work with the spring all the way down on the axle, when sure enough the pole gave way and the carriage bumped up against the horses. Fortunately, Pike had the horses under good control and managed to stop and get everyone out of the carriage safely. Then the men tipped the carriage over on its side and assessed the damage. At this point, one of the men took a heavy dirk and started to the side of the road to cut down a sapling for repair. Upon seeing this Lincoln laid aside his beaver hat and said, "Here, you never split rails, give that to me," and cut the tree down himself.



Courtesy Bennington Museum Collection

ROCK STAR

Pike's profile of Lincoln, hewn from Vermont marble, was not his only Civil War-related sculpture, nor the most prominent; Pike also created the Soldier's Monument that stands today in the main square of North Adams, Massachusetts

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The team proceeded to fix the carriage and were soon on their way. Pike served as the party's driver for the three weeks of Lincoln's visit, but that was not his last encounter with our 16th president. In the final days of 1862, after heavy Union losses at the Battle of Fredericksburg, Pike was serving as coachman for General Burnside, and he again found himself driving for Lincoln, this time with his wife and son Tad.



BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS

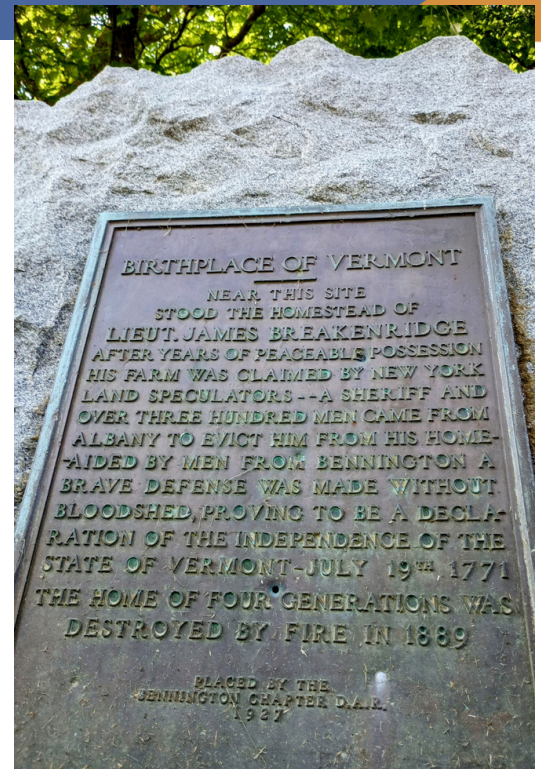
The Birthplace of Vermont marker

by Bill Morgan

A granite marker stands on the north side of Murphy Road, an unassuming byway halfway between Austin Hill Road and the Henry Bridge, declaring that spot to be the "Birthplace of Vermont." In 1771, this was the location of the farm of James Breakenridge (1721-1783), one of the leaders of the settlers protesting the seizure of their lands by New York authorities.

Breakenridge (sometimes spelled Breckenridge or even Brakenridge) came to Bennington in 1761 along with the town's earliest settlers. They had purchased their land in what was then called the New Hampshire Grants, believing that it was New Hampshire Governor Benning Wentworth's land to sell.

Ten years later, their claims were disputed by landlords in the state of New York who believed that they had been given the rights to the land much earlier by the King of England. The king sided with the "Yorkers", and the sheriff of Albany, Hendrick Ten Eyck, was sent to take possession of their property.



NH GRANTS TO NY: DROP DEAD

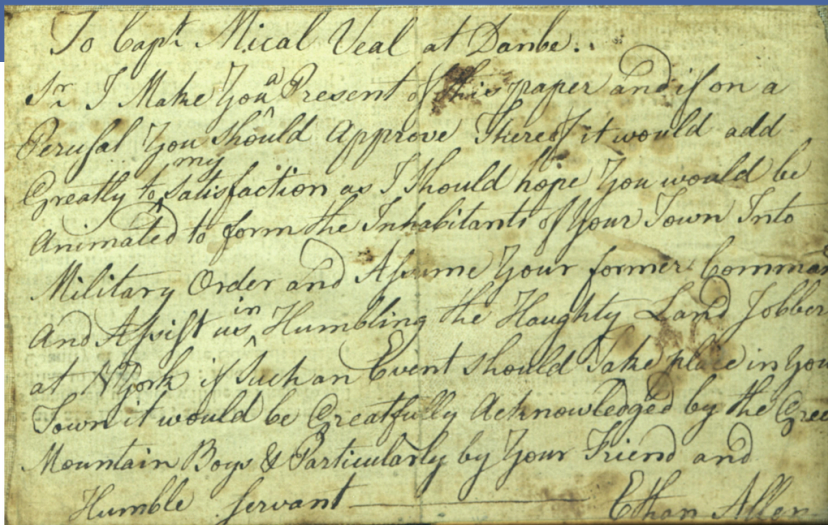
When Sheriff Ten Eyck showed up to claim James Breakenridge's farm with 300 armed men in tow, he never could have expected to be greeted in kind.

In resistance, the settlers banded together into a group that would come to be known as the Green Mountain Boys, pledging to defend any farmer who was threatened with expulsion.

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BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS

continued



"READY TO TAKE A GAME OF SCALPING"

In 1773, New York issued an arrest warrant for the Green Mountain Boys. In a published rebuttal, the GMB pledged to defend the land they'd made their homes on. Ethan Allen sent a copy to a friend in Connecticut. On the back, in characteristically acerbic prose, Allen requests his friend's help in "Humbling these Houghty Land Jobbers at New York".

On July 19th, 1771, a posse of approximately 300 New York men arrived near the Henry Bridge led by Ten Eyck, believing that they would have little trouble forcing Breakenridge off his farm. They were surprised to see a group of settlers gathered in the summer heat, waiting for them. While about 30 Yorkers crossed the river to present their eviction notice, the rest of the posse stayed behind, waiting in reserve.

In the meantime, Breakenridge and 17 other men had fortified his log house, hacking gun slits in the walls and barricading the doors. When Sheriff Ten Eyck approached, brandishing an axe and threatening to break down the door, the men inside shouted, "Attempt it and you are a dead man!"

Just as it dawned on him that this routine eviction had somehow become an armed standoff, the Sheriff glanced into

the surrounding woods and discerned figures there -- men bearing rifles, gathered just past the treeline. A large militia, 250-strong, led by Seth Warner had mustered among the trees, waiting to attack his men if he tried to evict their neighbor.

Ten Eyck wisely retreated with his men back to Albany without bloodshed. This became known as the Breakenridge Standoff, marking the beginning of Vermont's fight for independence against New York landlords, and eventually for full statehood.

The inscription on the bronze marker paraphrases Governor Hiland Hall's 1876 words that the farm was where "the State of Vermont was born" and tells the story: "Birthplace of Vermont - Near this site stood the homestead Lieut. James Breakenridge. After years of peaceable possession his farm was claimed by New York land speculators - - A sheriff and over three hundred men came from Albany to evict him from his home - - Aided by men from Bennington a brave defense was made without bloodshed, proving to be a Declaration of Independence of the State of Vermont - July 19th 1771. The home of four generations was destroyed by fire 1889. Placed by the Bennington Chapter D.A.R. 1927."

It began with a prayer led by Jennie A. Valentine, the state chaplain. Then the local D.A.R. regent, Mrs. Arthur S. Payne, spoke about the significance of the standoff, and a descendant of James Breakenridge, a Mrs. Losee, unveiled the monument. After Philip T. H. Pierson addressed the audience, two poems were read. Mrs. Walter R. White, the chaplain of the local D.A.R. chapter, read one, and then Katherine Hubbell read a poem about Breakenridge by Barbara Young, the pen name of

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BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS

continued

Netta M. Breakenridge, a descendant of James Breakenridge. The state regent of the D.A.R., Katherine Kittredge, addressed the crowd, and the song "America" was sung before the marker was formally given to the Bennington Battle Monument and Historical Association.

The stone is located near the site of Breakenridge's original farmhouse. Unfortunately, the house itself burned to the ground in the winter of 1889, the result of a chimney fire. By then it was owned by James Leonard and although the family was able to save most of the furniture, the house was a complete loss.



THE HOUSE THAT ROARED

This modest stone marks the site of the confrontation from which emerged the Green Mountain Boys, and Vermont as an independent entity. Yet, like the rest of the state -- and very much unlike its western neighbor -- it doesn't draw attention to itself.

the view from the

by Bob Tegart

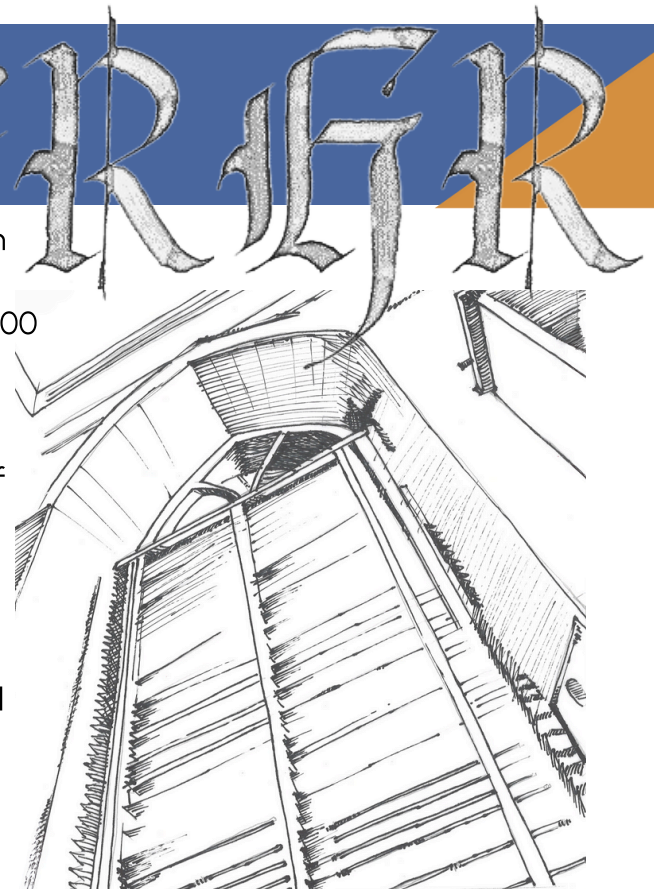
As the fiscal year draws to a close, the Regional History Room can report that we welcomed more than 400 visitors, researched 150 inquiries, put in 1,100 hours, and collected \$2,500 in donations. A rather busy year!

Since Avis Hayden catalogued over 200 family files, we've received multiple inquiries from researchers nationwide, all of whom have found the titles online. Just enter a family name on our searchable online database, or go to Google, and our files appear. We have enjoyed a dramatic increase in such inquiries via email, phone, and in person. Our visitors have spent days at the RHR researching their heritage, and several patrons have requested copies of the files they found, thereby generating income for the RHR.

To offer just one example, we received a visit from a researcher from Arkansas who wanted to study local Revolutionary War commander Samuel Robinson. She presented us with a spreadsheet containing 74 documents, generated from our online database

Collections Manager Callie Raspuzzi pulled the documents and the team dug in, devoting 20 hours over four days to review the researcher's materials. Great teamwork! We pulled together and worked out a schedule for her to complete her work and return to Arkansas. As a result of our support, she donated \$1,000 to the Regional History Room.

July starts our new fiscal year, and we look forward to assisting researchers from around the world!



A TRIBUTE TO LOCAL HEROES

The young men of of Bennington who served on D-Day

by Bob Tegart



Bennington Evening Banner

Anthony Pello was in the Bennington High School class of 1936. He played football and basketball. He was an outstanding center on the Benn High football team, and was mentioned in All State Teams. His two brothers, Michael and Raymond, both served in the Army.

He was working at Bennington Wax Paper Company when he enlisted at age 25 on June 3rd, 1941. After basic training, he volunteered to be a paratrooper.

He dropped into Normandy in the early hours of June 6th. The paratroopers were spread over a

great distance, and many were captured. Initially, his family was told that he was missing in action. Later they learned that he had been captured and held as a prisoner of war. In February of 1945, Pello was liberated by the advancing forces and returned home.

Eighty years ago, on June 6th, 1944, the Allied forces landed at Normandy. This was the largest amphibious operation in history with 185,000 soldiers from the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Free France, and other countries landing on five beaches, brought in by 4,000 landing craft, along with two divisions of paratroops -- about 18,000 men total -- dropping behind enemy lines.

The operation was called D-Day. Here we honor some of the Bennington men who served that day.



Bennington Evening Banner

Emmett Hogan, aged 23, worked at the A&P Market on South Street when he was drafted into the Army in 1942. He was later promoted to Corporal and served as a military policeman. He landed on the French coast on D-Day, and was cited for his actions in directing men and vehicles off the beach.



Courtesy of Maloney family

James Maloney lived at 335 Dewey, worked as bartender at the Fraternal Order of Eagles, and enlisted June, 1942 at age 27. He served as a military policeman with the 9th Infantry Division in North Africa, Sicily, England, and France. He landed at Normandy and fought all the way to Berlin. Returning home in September of 1945, he married his sweetheart that October, and served many years as a Town of Bennington Policeman.

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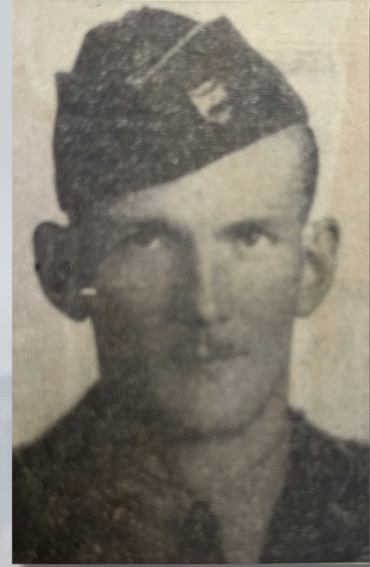
A TRIBUTE TO LOCAL HEROES

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Courtesy Bennington Museum Collection



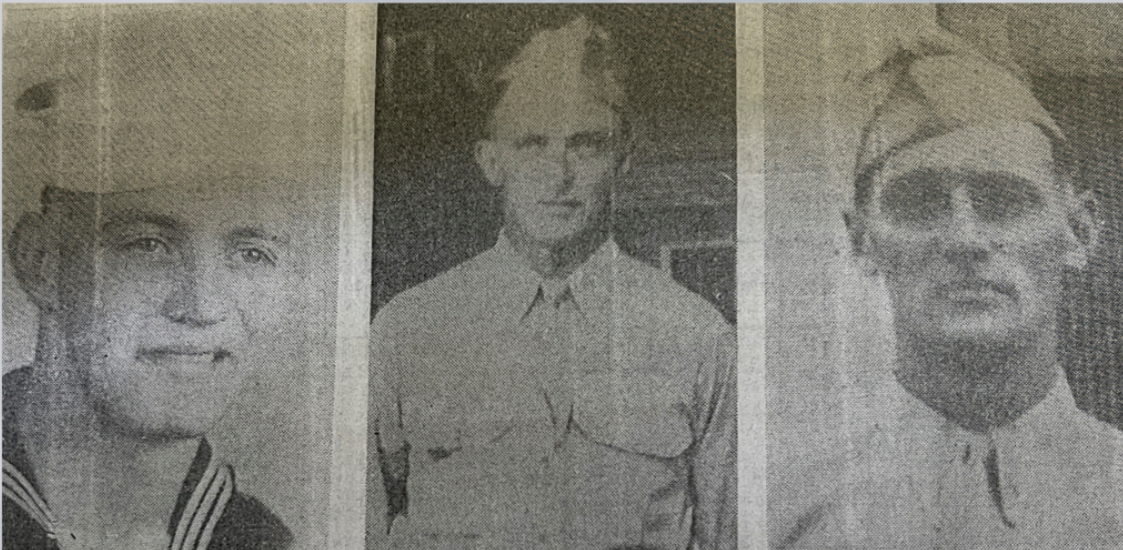
James Lorett, aged 19, graduated from Benn High. He enlisted in November of 1942 and volunteered into the 2nd Rangers, an elite special operations unit. At Normandy, the Rangers were ordered to assault a German gun emplacement at Ponte De Hoc. To capture this position, the unit had to scale 100-foot cliffs against an entrenched enemy. They suffered a 50% casualty rate climbing those cliffs. For his courageous service that day, Lorett was awarded the Bronze Star for bravery.



Bennington Evening Banner

Daniel W McGuire enlisted in the Army Feb 1941, landed at Normandy as a rifleman, and was wounded and evacuated.

Bennington Evening Banner



Cecil Greene (at right), another Benn High grad, was married and working at Eagle Square when he was drafted into the Army in 1943. He landed at D-Day. His two brothers also served; **Raymond** (left) in the Navy, and **Donald** (middle) in the Army.

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A TRIBUTE TO LOCAL HEROES

continued

Courtesy Bennington Museum Collection



Edward Carroll lived on Jefferson Avenue and managed a gas station before the war. He enlisted in the Navy in February of 1942. On D-Day he was a gunner on the USS Texas, which pounded the German position on shore. Later he would serve at Okinawa and Iwo Jima.



Bennington Evening Banner

Wallace Mattison, age 20, son of the local fire chief, left his job at Cooper Mill and entered the Army. He landed at D-day and was later wounded in action in the advance into Germany.

Bennington Evening Banner



James and John Walsh, from Arlington, both served in the Navy on D-Day, supporting the landings. James's ship was sunk within sight of his brother. Happily, both survived and returned home.

Postscript: If a relative of yours not included in our list of D-Day veterans, please let us know, and we'll add them in a future issue. The author can be reached at library@benningtonmuseum.org

"WHAT IS GOLD COMPARED TO HAPPINESS?"

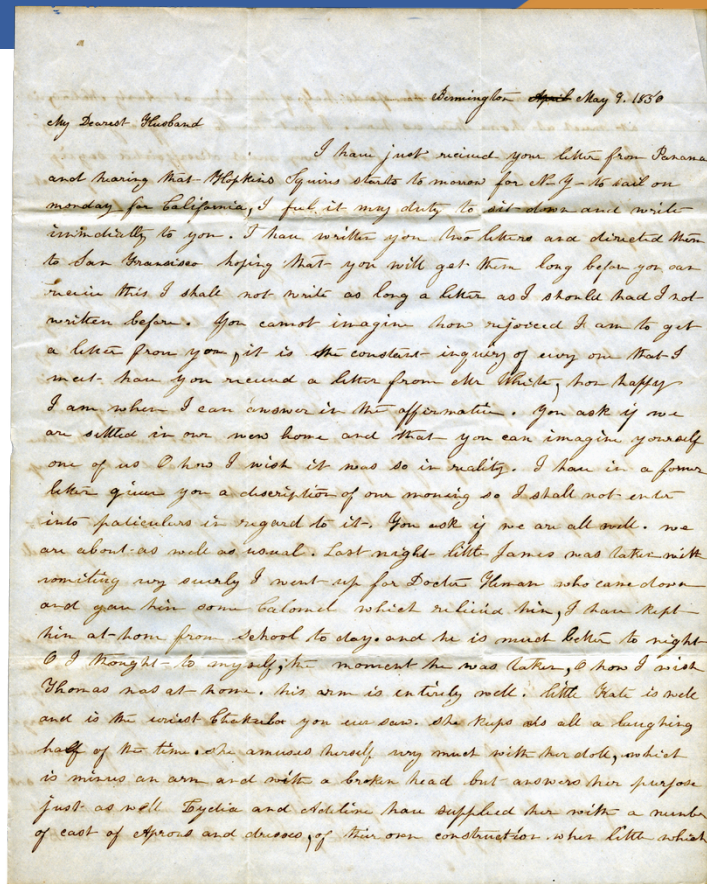
The Correspondence of Thomas White and Ann Maria Hicks White, 1850-1852

by Dave Pilachowski

As we get ever deeper into reorganizing the Bennington Museum's History Room's collection, we're discovering records that bring earlier days in our area to vivid life. This brief note is the first of an irregular series about noteworthy works contained in the Bennington Regional History Room.

This collection of correspondence consists of letters written primarily by Thomas White and his wife, Ann Maria Hicks White, during Thomas's first two years in California in the early 1850s.

Like approximately 11,000 Vermonters, when gold was discovered in California, Mr. White went west in hopes of striking it rich. The Whites lived in Bennington with their two young children, Catherine and James.



Courtesy Bennington Museum Collection

"A CALIFORNIA WIDOW QUITE LONG ENOUGH"

Ann Maria wrote her husband Thomas more frequently. In those letters, detectable behind her accounting of events back home, glows an insistent concern over her husband's welfare and plans.

Unfortunately, the correspondence ends before we know the outcome of the Whites' story. But before it cuts off, we learn a great deal about the difficulties faced by the couple who are separated by a continent. It's safe to assume that their story is not unique, as others surely faced similar circumstances and challenges during the Gold Rush years.

The correspondence begins in April, 1850 as Thomas' ship approaches the Isthmus of Panama. He travels by foot and river across Panama, then resumes his journey by ship to California.

Ann Maria is decidedly the more regular correspondent, with two or three letters to each of Thomas'.

Thus, we learn more about happenings in Bennington than in California. Thomas says little about any success he may have

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Courtesy Bennington Museum Collection

BORN TO RUN

After two years away, Ann Maria asked her husband when he would finally return to their family farm in Vermont. Thomas then mentioned a new development; he was launching a campaign for elected office in California

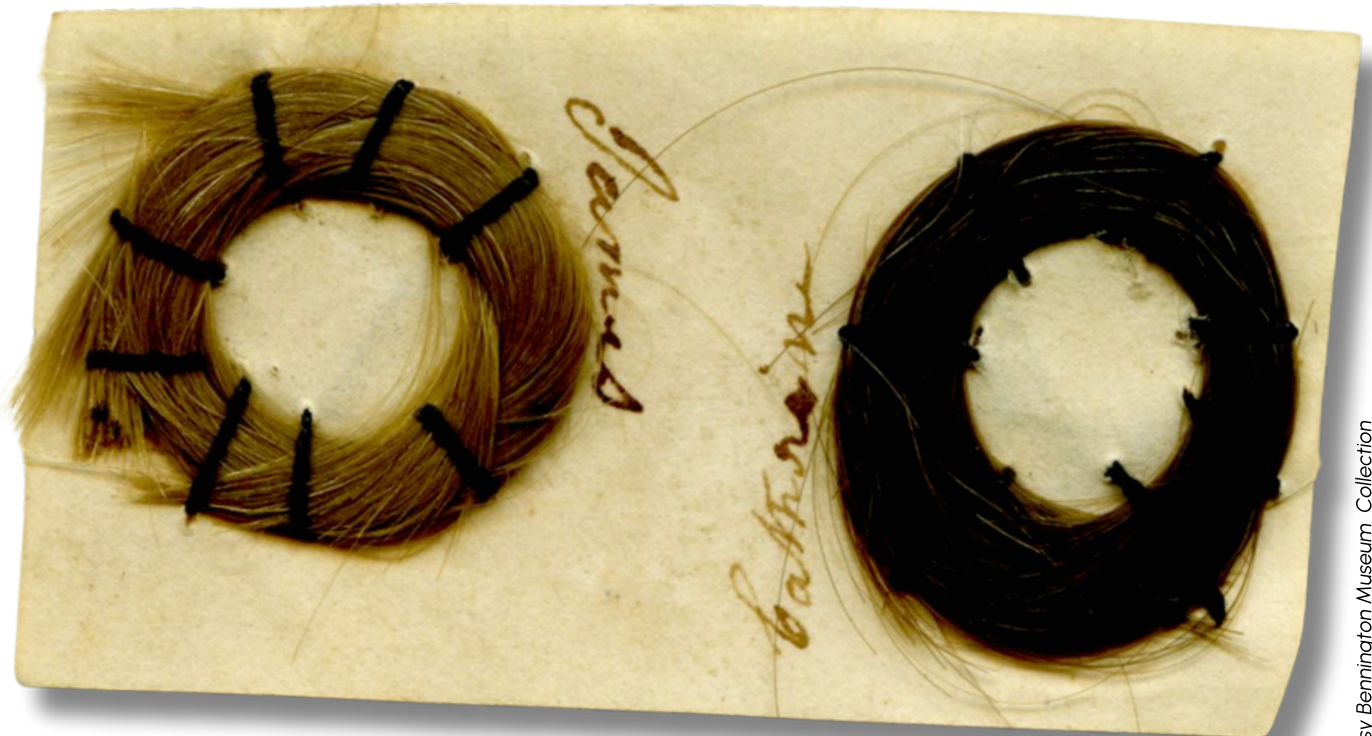
enjoyed in his quest for gold. But he does mention that he will take up another line of work if he does not have success mining. Midway through his first year, we hear that he is pulling up stakes and heading north once the rivers recede. Later that year, he writes that he has accumulated \$700 or \$800 for his efforts, equivalent in purchasing power to \$25,801, in today's dollars.

Thomas struggled well into 1851. In a letter dated July 13, 1851 to Ann Maria, he notes

Bennington area. A Charles Ogden had left the partnership in June. By the fall, Thomas stopped mining and began working for a carpenter, despite partners Elijah and Henry wishing him to remain in partnership.

He continued:

"We (with remaining partners) have rented our house until the first of Nov. to a Gentleman by the name of Land from Painted Post, NY. He had



Courtesy Bennington Museum Collection

LOCKS AND BONDS

When her husband went west, Ann Maria sent him with locks of their children's hair, as a memento of his family in Bennington, waiting for his return

that he is not alone in his frustration that many mining in California are "out of all manner of patience with California because she (California) does not yield from her abundant wealth sufficient to warrant them to return to their families without being laughed at..."

Thomas had two other remaining partners in the mine, Elijah and Henry; it's clear from other comments that he knows both from Bennington, or the

been in this country over a year and last winter sent for his wife and Little Boy who arrived three weeks ago. His Boy is six years old and about the size that James was when I left home. Mrs. Land is very much of a Lady and though rather delicate is rather ambitious for making money and says she intends to remain in California until they are worth \$25,000. I tell her I fear she will be

"WHAT IS GOLD COMPARED TO HAPPINESS?"

continued

like many other Californians whose hopes of sudden and enormous wealth grows beautifully less the better they become acquainted with the chances of obtaining it. But she is not an exception; it is so with almost every newcomer and hence the reason of so many being disappointed with the country. When on the other hand, if they would come with moderate expectations and if blessed with health they could hardly fail of being realized." [spelling and grammar corrected].

Back in Bennington, Ann Maria's family's financial situation deteriorated. In Thomas' absence, Ann Maria had incurred debts at many businesses in town, and she had also had to borrow money from her father, James Hicks.

Thomas sent her \$100 with apologies for not being able to send more. He actually sent two letters at nearly the same time with a check for that sum in each. But he made it clear that he only sent the second letter in case the first was lost; she was implored not to cash them both as he lacked sufficient funds to cover \$200. Ann Maria wrote on September 15, 1851 that her father's situation had become worse:

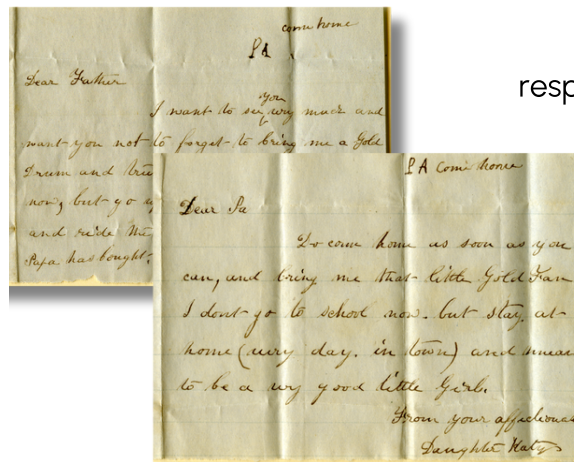
Father's business is so situated that he wishes me to inform you that he cannot be troubled with

me any longer. His property is all to be sold at Auction.."
[emphasis in original]

A constant theme of the Whites' correspondence is the question of when Thomas will return to Vermont. He writes in each letter that he must delay his departure for home for one reason or another. As early as May 25th, 1851, Ann Maria wrote, "what is gold compared to happiness?" The passing of time only increased her dissatisfaction with her husband's continued absence.

Over a year later, Ann Maria began her letter of June 30th, 1852 by complaining that she had waited three months for a response to her last letter. But that is not all that was on her mind:

"Some of my **friends here** begin to **laugh at** me. Because when they ask me when I expect you home I say **next fall**. They say it has been **next fall** or **next spring** ever since you went there. I really hope after this coming **Fall** that I shall not have to **say anything** more about it...I hope before you receive this you will have decided so that in longer **we do want** you to come so badly - I have lived a **California Widow** quite long enough to satisfy me. And the dear children too talk of you coming (home) half of the time."
[emphasis in original]



GHOST, WRITTEN

Addressed simply to "Mr Thomas White, Sacramento City" Ann Maria wrote her husband letters on their children's behalf. Note the letters' heading at upper right.

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While Thomas wasn't hitting paydirt, he didn't lack ambition. He had other reasons for remaining in California. Thomas admitted in fall of 1852 that "he had been persuaded to run for the California Assembly," but lost in a fairly close race. He begged off returning to Bennington in the winter because he did not want to face the cold weather. He has tried to persuade Ann Maria to join him in California, and was still trying in November 1852. She always declined, not wanting to leave her parents and other relatives

At this point, the dated correspondence ends. Curiously, whoever transcribed these letters then placed the longest one, which comes in at sixteen pages, at the end and out of chronological sequence. Although undated, this letter to Ann Maria's father James Hicks was almost certainly written in late 1851, as Thomas notes he wanted to stick with it through another winter.

"Believing you would like to hear something of our wandering in this country, and on looking over my little Journal. I find I have written nothing that would give any idea concerning them, since I left Sacramento City; I now propose to go back to that time and give you the particulars as near as possible up to the present." p. 141

Toward the letter's closing, Thomas states that their mining claim did not cost much beyond three trips to work it and the expense of keeping a man there to ensure no one else would work it. He continues:

"While others have spent their Thousands, and some companies their tens of Thousands are no better off than we are. It is probably that there has never been an instance where there were such high expectations that have resulted in so complete a failure... I have not written a very encouraging letter and perhaps you may think I am discouraged, but such is not the case. Although we have not as yet struck upon any very rich deposits, yet I am persuaded that this is the country to make a fortune and if a man has his health and a fair share of perseverance, he is almost sure to accumulate a moderate one in a few years." p. 156

The correspondence ended here though the White's story did not. We know through research by Museum staff and obituaries that Thomas returned to Bennington in 1852. He and Ann Maria had two more children and Thomas became a well-regarded probate judge. In the end, the lure of home and family won out in the end over his unfulfilled quest for a different kind of fortune in the gold fields.

This volume of correspondence is available in the Bennington Museum's History Reading Room under the call number 920 White.



BHS READING PROGRAM

Benjamin Franklin: An American Life, by Walter Isaacson

Review by Don Miller

The sixth selection in the BHS Book-of-the-Month is *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* by eminent biographer Walter Isaacson.

Our earlier readings traced the European origins of the United States and our founding documents. Now we turn to the men and women who created the American Dream from the fabric of history. We start with Benjamin Franklin.

Franklin was the first great American. Born in Boston, the tenth in a family of 17 children, his parents sent him at age 12 to apprentice with an older brother in the printing trade. Franklin then went on to become a scientist, a philosopher, a community organizer, and a diplomat. His evolution from loyal servant of the British crown to pillar of republican reform helps us understand the transition our nation made from colony to independent republic.

More than the other Founding Fathers, Franklin truly ascended from rags to riches; from printer's apprentice to publisher; from inventor to one of the wealthiest men in America; from Postmaster General to international diplomat; Franklin was a self-made man who vaulted himself into folk hero status. And like Ethan Allen and George Washington, he carefully crafted the image we hold of him today.

The only figure to have contributed to four of the essential documents establishing American sovereignty, Franklin's political contributions to the United States were, of course, numerous and substantial. He helped in the writing of the Declaration of Independence, and later treaties forging the alliance between France and the



Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington

ON THE MONEY

Franklin signed four of the nation's critical documents, founded the American Philosophical Society, served as the first Postmaster General, wrote the first popular American autobiography, and invented bifocals. Plus he walked around Paris wearing a shapeless beaver-pelt hat and made it look tres chic.

United States. He worked on the Articles of Confederation (America's first national constitution), and, as the oldest member of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, helped write our nation's founding document.

As the diplomatic representative for the new republic during the Revolution, he secured not only diplomatic recognition, but crucial financial and military aid from the French government of Louis XVI. Still later, Franklin served as an influential member of the commission that negotiated the Treaty of Paris, under which Britain recognized the 13 colonies as an independent nation.



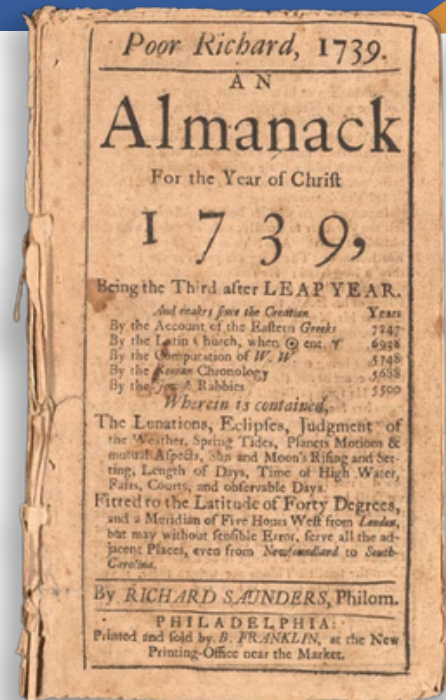
A TRUE VISIONARY

The bifocals Franklin invented; fashioned from silver, they hinged in four places

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Several fine biographers have attempted to take the measure of Ben Franklin. But as with many figures who fought for our new country in its infancy, Franklin's achievements outstrip the telling. Whether you read Isaacson's account or a different biography of this famously industrious polymath, the key is to think about what it took for him to achieve all that he did, the challenges he overcame. Those critical successes reveal how he helped forge the American dream.

For more information on the BHS Reading Program, go to the Program's page on the Bennington Museum website: benningtonmuseum.org/programming-events/bennington-historical-society/the-bhs-reading-program/



Library of Congress Rare Book & Special Collections Division

THIS YEAR'S MODEL BEHAVIOR

Published annually from 1732 to 1758, Franklin's nom de plume for Poor Richard's Almanack was Richard Saunders. A best-seller in the colonies, the Almanack proved so popular that Napoleon had an edition translated into Italian.



A MAN FOR ALL REASONS

Eccentric genius, ladies' man, international diplomat, apostle of financial prudence with a stinging wit, Franklin fulfilled many roles in his lifetime. But nearly as remarkable is the range of ways the figure of Ben Franklin has been adapted since his death. Franklin is the brand name of a popular line of day planners, rappers use "Benjamins" as slang for big money, and in 2015 the Philadelphia 76ers adopted a "Dribblin' Ben" for the basketball team's secondary logo

NO REALLY, BE HONEST

We can take it



Here at the BHS newsletter, we're always trying to do better. So we'd appreciate feedback from you, our loyal readers (and you brand-new ones, too!). Let us know what you think about this issue -- what we got right, what we need to work on, what you'd like to see more of, and less of. Look, if we're asking for anonymous feedback here, we must be eager to hear everything you got for us! So point your phone's camera at that QR code on the left. It'll take you to a webpage where you can get share your thoughts. Thanks in advance for your helpful observations.



Courtesy of Steven Edwards



I found this wonderful drawing on the wall of a barn in Old Bennington. It tells the story of a reconciliation between two children. One boy says, "I don't see how I ever hated you." The other replies, "I think the same" as they link arms in friendship. The barn stands behind the old Holden home — the shingle-style mansion at 130 Monument Avenue. The Holdens were well-to-do owners of the Holden Mill in Bennington. I've dated this childhood event and the drawing to the early 1920's - well over 100 years ago. The boys' suspenders, hats, and toys they hold are of that era. Further, "L.E." must be Leon Eldred junior. Leon senior was the Holdens' caretaker and lived at the home next door, 132 Monument Ave. He and his wife, Blendina (Webster), had a son, Leon junior, born in 1913. By the early 1920's, young Leon would have been a pre-teen, playing, arguing, and making peace with his friend, "G.D.S.", in his neighbor's barn.

I have not been able to identify the second boy in the drawing, "G.D.S." Perhaps someone with knowledge of Old Bennington history can help?

— Steve Edwards

About the BHS

The Bennington Historical Society is volunteer-operated program of Bennington Museum based in the Regional History Room. Meetings take place on the first Monday of every month from 4:00 to 5:00pm, but we encourage you to stop by the Regional History Room during our open hours to say hello and talk about projects that you might like to be involved in.

The Regional History Room is open Monday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday afternoons, 1-4pm (by appointment when the Museum is closed January-March: library@benningtonmuseum.org).



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