



# BENNINGTON

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## September 2024 Newsletter

# President's Message



Can someone please tell me where this summer has gone?

Every year summer seems to go by more quickly, but this year it has flown by at a dizzying pace.

That pace is likely to increase as we race towards

the presidential

election in

November. I find

it hard to believe

that, at this stage

in the game, we

can still have

"undecided

voters" among our electorate. The contrast

between the two candidates could not be more

striking; the stakes for our nation could not be

higher, nor the consequences more dire.

A phrase I am sure most of us have heard in the past is "history in the making." Often this phrase

is used to advertise the big blow-out sale at the mattress store, but make no mistake, on November 5th, 2024, no matter who will have won the election, history will be made.

Someday, your children, grandchildren or even great grandchildren may ask you where you

were and what you were doing on January

20th, 2025, when history was made again as

the forty-seventh President of the United States

took the oath of

office. And those

same descendants

might also ask

you what part you

played in these

historic events.

Now might be a

good time to consider how you would like to be

able to answer that question.

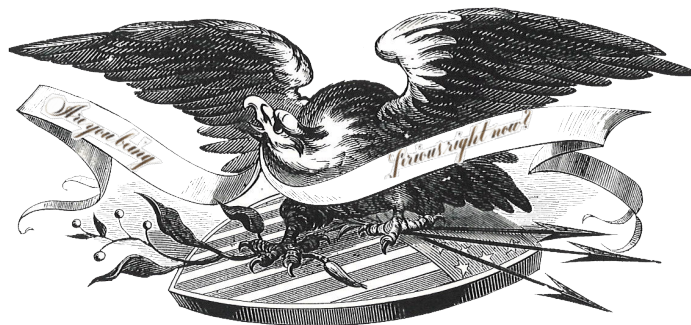
As you ruminate on these upcoming days of

future past, now might also be a good time to

delve a bit into our history to see what lessons

and insights may be found there.

***I find it hard to believe that, at this stage in the game, we can still have "undecided voters" among our electorate. The contrast between the two candidates could not be more striking; the stakes for our nation could not be higher, nor the consequences more dire.***



Where better to begin that journey than at your Bennington Museum? In the upcoming months, the Museum will be offering

presentations and exhibits on far-ranging topics, including the art and legacy of Vermont's geologic resources, a local cemetery tour, and Edith Roosevelt's visit to Bennington in 1894.

The Bennington Historical Society has its own busy season of captivating programs, all free to the public. In October, we'll be hosting a history of Elm Street, and we'll close the year with a discussion of the Norman Rockwell mystery in December.

When you stop by the museum, be sure to drop in to the gift shop. Store manager Jasen Fredricksen has made some terrific changes there. And, if you are not already a Museum member, please consider joining us. You'll find information about the benefits of membership, as well as all the amazing programs, exhibits, and guest speakers the Museum has to offer at [benningtonmuseum.org](http://benningtonmuseum.org).

- Robert Ebert



Photo courtesy of James Thatch



**FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE**

Contemporary Green Mountain Boys (some of whom you may recognize) prepare to fire a musket salute at the Bennington Battlefield Commemoration Ceremony on August 16th, 2024

# Upcoming Events

## Elm Street: What We Dreamed of 100 Years Ago

*The architecture of a Bennington neighborhood*



**October 20 @ 2 - 3pm**

It's 1924. A new neighborhood is emerging on Elm Street, from Dewey Street to Monument Ave. It has up-to-date houses in the latest designs: bringing modern living to Bennington. The dramatic mansions on the eastern end of Elm Street were aging, pre-World War I. The new houses being erected were in the new Colonial Revival style. Their layouts, services, and features assumed technologies barely known in 1900. Today, 100 years later, Elm Street is still one of our vital neighborhoods even as our lifestyles and expectations have evolved.

This presentation will include historic pictures of the houses on Elm Street, as well as the books, articles, and advertisements of the era. Jane Radocchia will share some of what we dreamed and the homes we built between World War I and World War II.

Jane Griswold Radocchia is an architect and an historian.

## Edith Roosevelt Comes to Bennington

*A Vermont tourist in the Gilded Age*

**November 17 @ 2 - 3pm**

In 1894 Edith Roosevelt, wife of Theodore who was then a US Civil Service Commissioner, visited Bennington. She was accompanied by her sister-in-law, Bami Roosevelt, a maid and five children, aged six months to ten years old. They rented three rooms at the exclusive Walloomsac Inn and stayed for three weeks, quickly becoming a part of the social scene in Old Bennington. In this program, Bob Tegart will share some of the details of their stay in town.

Recently moved to Vermont from Central New York, Bob Tegart is past president of the Bennington Historical Society and administrator of the Bennington Museum Regional History Room.



Photo courtesy of Harvard Library

# Bennington's "Other" Monuments

## The Harmon Tavern Marker

by Bill Morgan

The small historical marker on Vail Road at the intersection with Airport Road is easy to miss. The tiny sign commemorates the location of the Harmon Tavern, one of several area inns built around the year 1771. Although the exact date of the Harmon's establishment is uncertain, dates as early as 1765 had been noted in local newspapers. More recently, Bennington Museum has suggested a construction date of about 1773. Suffice it to say that in those days, the newly created town of Bennington needed visitor accommodations.

The inscription on the plaque is the same on both sides and reads: "Two hundred feet west of this marker stood the tavern of Captain Daniel Harmon, built about 1771. General John Stark had breakfast in the tavern, August

14, 1777. Daniel Williams Harmon, noted Canadian explorer, was born in the Tavern, February 19, 1778. Marker erected by Bennington Battle Monument and Historical Association, 1950. Lake Shore Markers Erie Pa. Blue Bronze."

Although legend has it that General Stark ate here before the battle, that has been difficult to document. It seems probable that Stark did dine here at some point, but establishing a precise

date has thus far proven impossible.

We have a fuller picture of the tavern owner. Originally from Suffield, Connecticut, Captain Daniel Harmon (1747/49?-1805) fought at the Battle of Bennington with the local militia under Captain Elijah Dewey, a man who was his wife's cousin. Harmon came to Bennington around 1767 and moved to Vergennes in 1795. He died there in 1805 at the age of 55 and was buried in the

local cemetery. He was a devout Christian and is said to have been converted around the time he arrived in Bennington. After Harmon left town, the inn closed and became a private residence.



Photo courtesy of Bennington Museum

### "ONE OF THE PRETENTIOUS BUILDINGS OF THE TOWN"

*The Harmon Tavern, photographed in the early 20th century. Though by then the inn had been abandoned and picked over by scavengers, in its glory days the Banner deemed it "pretentious" — high praise for the time.*

What is known for certain is that Capt. Harmon's son, the great

explorer Daniel Williams Harmon, was born in this inn on Feb. 19th, 1778, six months after the famous battle. The young Harmon spent nearly twenty years exploring Western Canada for the North West Company and developed the fur trade with Native American and French trappers. Harmon wrote extensively about his discoveries on the frontier, and the publication of his diaries was instrumental in opening up that region to development. Eventually he became a partner

in the North West Company which was rivaled only by the more-famous Hudson Bay Company. While in Canada, he married a woman from the Cree tribe and returned to live with her for the rest of his life in Coventry, VT. In spite of his earlier success, Harmon's later life was marked by poverty and poor health, and he died of smallpox in 1843.

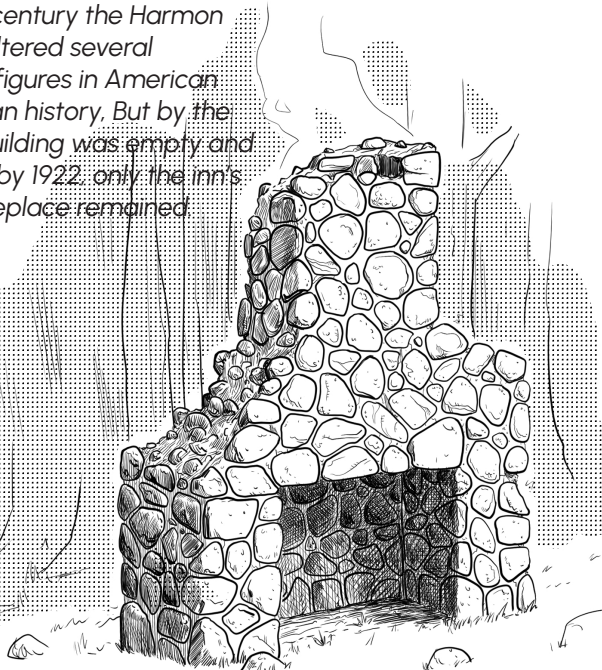
In his 1869 book *Memorials of a Century*, Isaac Jennings wrote that "the Harmon tavern, kept by Daniel Harmon [is] now the old yellow building west of Henry Baker's residence." The *Bennington Banner and Reformer* of August 11th, 1904, reported on the terrible condition of the building when it was fast going to ruin and was being used to store an old truck. They said that the original "tavern was one of the pretentious buildings of the town. The doors were handsome and substantial. Moldings were in several rooms and the winding staircase was beyond the ordinary." The writer of the article used the word pretentious as a compliment to indicate its extravagant outer show, like the

beautiful Palladian

**BURNED INTO MEMORY**

In the 18th century the Harmon Tavern sheltered several prominent figures in American and Canadian history. But by the 1910s the building was empty and crumbling; by 1922, only the inn's massive fireplace remained.

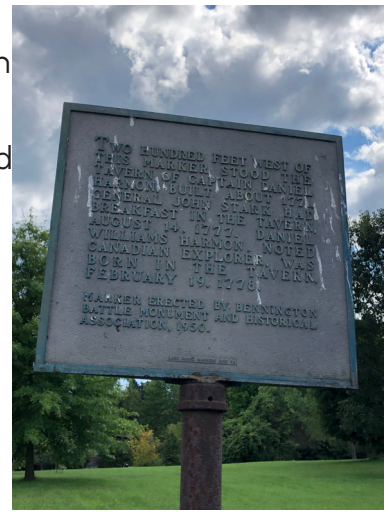
Illustration by Jason Mathis



window above the main door. The house was abandoned entirely, and eventually scavengers dismantled the isolated edifice and "took relics and pieces of the building." "It took only a few weeks before there wasn't much left of the Harmon Inn," said the *Banner*. Later, local historian Olin Scott pledged \$200 to start a fund to save the inn, but his plan languished.

Evidence suggests that it was still standing in November 1910 when a group headed by Dr. Henry C. Day placed the first historic marker here. The local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution funded that sign, which said: "West of this spot stands the building known as the Daniel Harmon hotel, built about 1770. It is claimed Gen. John Stark and staff ate dinner there August 14, 1777, while on their way to the Bennington battle field." Because it says "stands the building," it seems only fair to assume that it was still standing at that time.

It may have remained here in an increasingly dilapidated condition until as late as 1922, when the *Bennington Evening Banner* reported that the building had collapsed and the rubble had been taken away. The newspaper reported that "only the fast disintegrating remains of a huge stone fireplace remain to remind one [of the inn]." Some remnants of the huge foundation beams and the old well were also mentioned. Nothing remains of the building today.



**A TWICE-TOLD TALE**  
This sign, erected in 1950, replaced a marker that the Daughters of the American Revolution funded in 1910.

Photo courtesy of Bill Morgan

# BHS READING PROGRAM

## Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power by Jon Meacham

by Don Miller

Born in 1743, Thomas Jefferson was one of the youngest of the Founding Fathers. Jefferson was the son of a Virginia planter who depended on slave labor. His father, Peter, died in 1757, and his estate was divided between his sons Thomas and Randolph. Thomas was 14 when he inherited the approximately 5,000 acres and he assumed full legal authority over the property at age 21.

Jefferson entered the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1760, at the age of sixteen. At William & Mary, he encountered the ideas of the great British thinkers of the time: John Locke, Francis Bacon, and Isaac Newton.

When he was only 32, Jefferson served in the Second Continental Congress that was called in 1775. At age 36, he became the Governor of Virginia (during the Revolutionary War).

At age 42, Jefferson was named Minister to France from 1785 to 1789 under the authority of the Articles of Confederation. When George Washington became the first President under the U.S. Constitution, Jefferson became the first Secretary of State.

In the early 1790s, Jefferson and fellow Virginian James Madison organized the Democratic-Republican party to counter John Adams and Alexander Hamilton, who formed the Federalist Party. Washington discouraged the formation of political parties, most famously in his farewell address.

Thomas Jefferson as a Virginian and John Adams

from Massachusetts were naturally political rivals, representing the interests of the South and the North, respectively. But over a 40 year period, each learned to work together for the good of the whole.

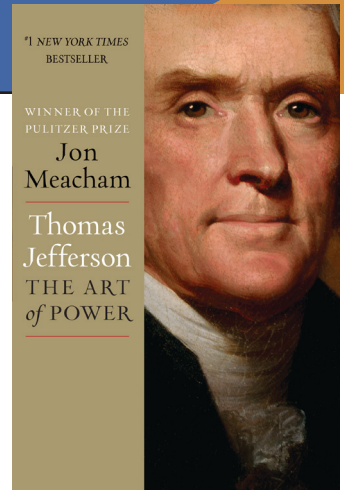
In the 1796 election for President, John Adams was elected to succeed Washington, a Virginian. Jefferson was second in the vote for President. Under the electoral laws of the time, Jefferson became Vice President under John Adams.

Four years later, in the presidential campaign of 1800, Jefferson and Adams faced off again. This time Jefferson won the Presidency. In 1804, Jefferson was reelected to a second term.

The campaigns between Jefferson against Adams had been bitter. But over time, the two mended fences, engaging in a life-long correspondence, each dying on July 4, 1826.

Jefferson was one of the most productive presidents of the era. He engineered the Louisiana Purchase, sponsored the Lewis and Clark expedition, managed a working plantation, and created the University of Virginia.

As an advocate of individual liberty, Jefferson was one of the fathers of the American Dream. Jon Meacham's *The Art of Power* enables the reader to contemplate the blueprint of the American Dream.



# Mr. Hall's Opus

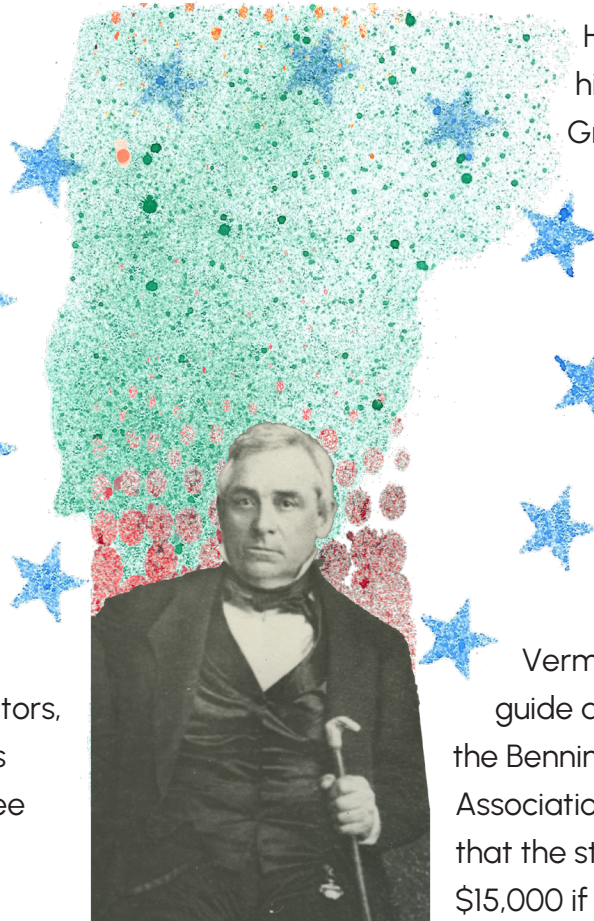
*After a lifetime in leadership, Hiland Hall had one more fight in him*

by Tyler Resch

*These final pages from Tyler Resch's biography of Hiland Hall, The Meticulous Advocate, tell the story of the hard-wrought victory for his long-term vision of the "massive and lofty" Bennington Battle Monument.*

In November 1875, at the age of 80, Hiland Hall shifted his historical interests from the state to the local level. He was elected president of the new Bennington Historical Society, the logical person to be so honored. A pamphlet the following year listed the organization's ambitious goals and numerous officers. There were 32 vice presidents, a board of 24 directors, a corresponding secretary, treasurer, recording secretary and secretary to the board of directors, three auditors, seven members of a genealogy board, and three members of a committee on printing and publishing.

Photo courtesy of Bennington Museum



## A MAN APART

*Son of a scarcely literate Bennington farmer, Hiland Hall went on to write a 500-page history of Vermont, and helped found the newspaper now known as the Bennington Banner.*

The grand purposes of the new society were "to form a starting point for the centennial celebration of the Battle of Bennington of August 16, 1777," to publish a town history, to designate "historic localities," to construct a society building, and to erect "a soldier's monument" to those who served

in the American Revolution. Of the centennial of the battle the pamphlet stated, "Already the attention of the state has been turned in this direction in the expectation that the event will be celebrated with more than the usual eclat." These goals were mostly fulfilled except for the publication of a town history.

Hall had written a sketchy history of Bennington and the Green Mountain Boys that was printed in installments in the weekly newspaper he co-founded, the *State Banner*, in 1841, but either no one remembered it in 1876 or else it was considered of insufficient import to be published in book form. In the fall of 1876, Hall attended a session of the Vermont General Assembly to guide a bill that would incorporate the Bennington Battle Monument Association. The legislation promised that the state would appropriate \$15,000 if another \$5,000 could be raised through public solicitation; and

the states of New Hampshire and Massachusetts, but of course not New York, would be invited to contribute official funds. (Later, the U.S. Congress would add \$40,000 to the cause.) For the elaborate centennial celebration of the Battle of Bennington in August of 1877, which was attended by

continued from page 7

President Rutherford B. Hayes, Hall prepared a full description of the battle, and it was widely circulated.

On December 2nd, 1884, the "committee on design for the Battle Monument" issued a report that was lengthy, erudite, and as it turned out, volatile. The committee was composed of four distinguished members: Hall's old friend E.J. Phelps, a prominent lawyer who had succeeded him as Second Comptroller of the Treasury, who served as president of the American Bar Association, and who was to be President Cleveland's minister to England; Hall's grandson-in-law, John G. McCullough, who had succeeded Trenor Park as president of the Panama Railroad and who would be elected governor of Vermont in 1902; Alexander H.H. Rice, the governor of Massachusetts; and Benjamin F. Prescott, the governor of New Hampshire.

The report contemplated various monuments through the ages, including the Egyptian pyramids, Pompey's Pillar at Alexandria, the Nelson Monument and Duke of York's column in London, and the towers of the new Brooklyn Bridge, which were then at 265 feet the tallest structures in the city of New York. "It is obvious," intoned the design committee, "that the choice must be taken between the purely architectural structure of large and imposing dimensions and little else, and the smaller monument which tells its story and expresses its

sentiment principally through the genius of the sculptor." The report unanimously recommended a design proposed by Professor John H. Weir of Yale University for an "artistic" monument 20 feet square on the ground, 50 feet high on a mound 10 feet high, with four bronze allegorical statues each eight feet high, all to cost an estimated \$85,000.

The report specifically rejected the "monumental" approach and concluded that "... such monuments... have failed of their purpose... They tell us no story; they appeal to no memory, and to no sentiment: their lips are silent; rather they have no lips and no voice."

If he had been slapped in the face, Hiland Hall could not have been more stunned by such a recommendation — grandson-in-law or not, distinguished political colleagues or not. In January 1885, a petition citing "an honest

difference of opinion" asked the Bennington Battle Monument design committee to withhold its final decision. The petition

was signed first by former Governor Hall, followed by 73 other names, including those of all the selectmen of Bennington, prominent clergymen, lawyers, bankers, judges, and doctors.

Hiland Hall, wintering with his son Charles



**STELLAR WORK**

*This brass star and limestone base, models for the final version atop the Monument today, were made by blacksmith Frank A. Wahlquist, a Swedish immigrant who came to the US in 1887.*

Photo courtesy of Bennington Museum



in Springfield, penned a lengthy dissent to accompany the petition, addressed it to the Honorable Luther R. Graves, treasurer of the Bennington Battle Monument Association, and had it published in full in the January 12th edition of the weekly *Bennington Banner*. Hall favored the "monumental" approach, and he favored it strongly and persuasively. He disparaged the design committee's arguments for an "artistic" monument and said that no conclusive reason had been advanced to justify that alternative.

"The object of a monument in commemoration of an important event need not be, and can not be, to give its history," he said, "for that, in this intelligent age and so long as civilization shall be perpetuated, will be found, a thousand times more full and complete during this and all succeeding generations, in written language and pictorial representations, than can possibly be communicated by any conceivable artistic structures whatever. Art in marble or bronze may form a desirable appendage to a commanding monumental structure. . . but any attempt to elevate it into a substitute for

intelligent history must necessarily be a failure."

He wrote that the committee failed to prove that any "artistic" monument to a great event had ever been met with approval and success, that such an untried experiment would be doomed to insignificance. "I can not believe that a monument to commemorate the important battle of Bennington, that is not of sufficient size and height to tower above its surroundings and to attract the attention and excite the admiration of the distant beholder, will command the approval of the public of either of the three States that contribute to its erection, or the people of the vicinity."

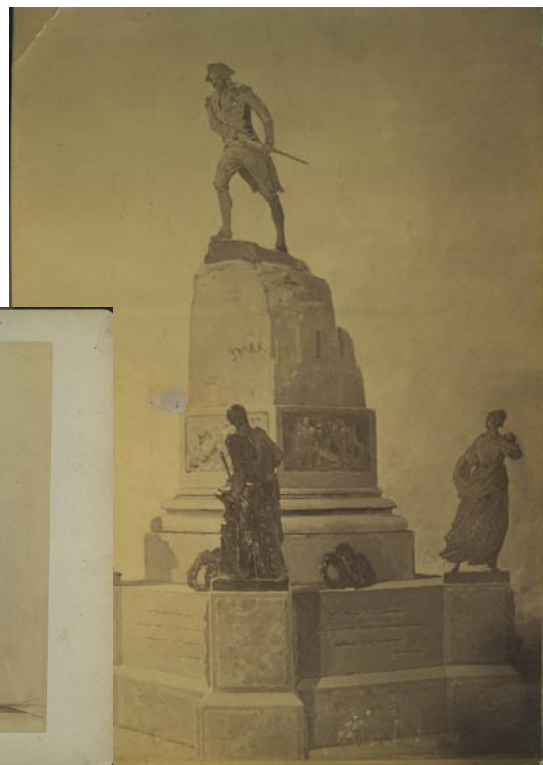
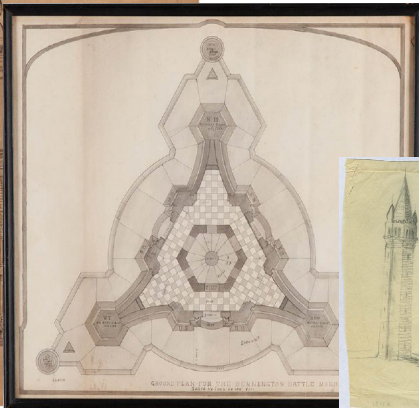
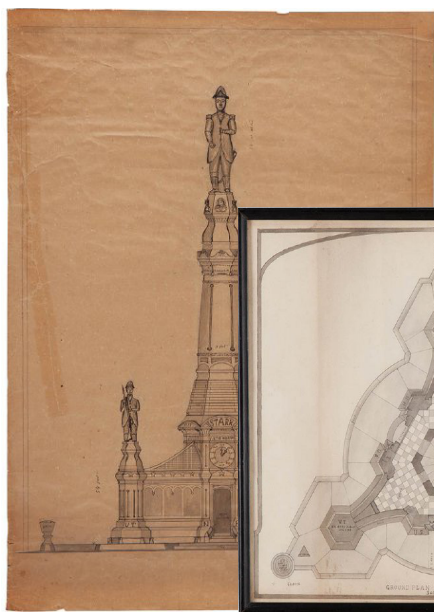
Hall concluded, "A monumental structure after the fashion and size of that at Saratoga, having its foundation on the brow of the high hill where stood the old revolutionary storehouse that General Burgoyne sought to capture. . . would be seen and admired for its beauty and grandeur

by many thousand residents of the vicinity, and by a much greater number

**HILAND, WITH THE HIGH HAND**

*While many designs were submitted for the Bennington Battle Monument, Hall expressed particular dissatisfaction with the one proposed by John H. Weir, a professor at Yale, whose design (right), featured John Stark mid-stride, hand on sword hilt. Sadly for the monument's design committee, Weir's was their "final" selection. But Hall's campaign to have that design replaced had just begun.*

Photos courtesy of Bennington Museum



of travelers from abroad on the many miles of railroad that the monument would overlook. Such a monument I can not but hope will in due time adorn our old State Arms Hill, though I can not reasonably expect to live to see it." With the exception of its reference to the short-lived railroad line through the town, this vision proved uncannily accurate.

Whatever else might be said about the Bennington Battle Monument, now owned and operated as a tourist attraction by the Vermont State Division of Historic Sites, it is situated on a dramatic height of land and can be seen for many miles, including — on a clear day — from the Bennington Battlefield State Park about six miles away in Walloomsac, New York, now maintained as a picnic site by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation.

On April 14, at a meeting of the Bennington Historical Society, an advisory committee of not less than forty members was named to bring before the annual meeting on August 12 the opinions of engineers, architects, and builders on the cost, durability, and stability of "a massive structure of commanding height, built of stone of this vicinity." With Hiland Hall himself presiding, the advisory group met and named a "working

committee" (which included son John V. Hall) and also a finance committee, with the intention of locating such a monument on the site in Old Bennington of the old continental storehouse.

The site itself, at 283 feet elevation above the Walloomsac River, beholds a panoramic view of the countryside for many miles. The scene for 180 degrees to the north encompasses the Taconic Mountain range extending to Mount Equinox and beyond toward the north and northwest, the Green Mountain range stretching from Glastenbury and Stratton mountains toward the north and northeast, and in between them the grand basin of settled, fertile valley land that constitutes most

Photo courtesy of Bennington Museum



**"MASSIVE AND LOFTY TO COMPORT WITH THE MOUNTAINS SURROUNDING"**

*Though he served as a leader in politics and business for decades, Hall's final act concerned aesthetics and public memory. He envisioned a tribute to the Battle of Bennington that used no words, numbers, patriotic motifs, or even human figures. Instead, he chose an austere epitaph to survey the hills and towns. Hall was in his 80s when he he seized on the idea. In conceiving a monument equal to the battle itself, the man was surely pondering his own legacy.*

of Bennington County.

"The site," declared the new

committee, "is therefore on a hill between two ranges of mountains and commands so extensive a view that a monument erected on it, of the height proposed, will be a most conspicuous feature of the landscape for miles around." The monument should be able to withstand winds of more than 100 miles per hour and would be more stable than either the Bunker Hill or Washington monuments, the committee declared.

On June 1st, Hall addressed the members of the Bennington Battle Monument Association "as the

time for the final action approaches" (the annual meeting would be on August 12th) and reported that \$80,000 had now been raised — from the legislatures of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, from the U.S. Congress, and from private subscriptions. He still expressed the concern that a small artistic monument "would remain unknown to the world and would dwindle into an obscure art gallery." He faulted the design committee for "rejecting magnitude and grandeur of dimensions," reiterated that the Washington Monument "speaks for itself," and envisioned a structure that would "stand in a village of less than a thousand inhabitants, where people are not accustomed or expected to resort to find any thing of the kind . . ."

He concluded, "We are now confronted with the experiment of attempting to dignify a great event by a small monument." The full text of his address goes on and on for 18 pages of the cramped, tiny handwriting that became smaller and more difficult to decipher as he aged. But progress, from Hall's point of view, was being made rapidly, for on July 9th the new advisory committee to the Bennington Historical Society recommended a design that "ought to be massive and lofty to comport with the mountains surrounding the site." This committee "strongly and unanimously" approved Design Number 1 of J. Philipp Rinn, "an artist and architect of Boston," who proposed a granite shaft 301 feet high, tapering to a point from a base 37 feet square.

Hall had assembled an advisory committee of several distinguished persons no doubt to balance the prominence of members of the original design committee. These included, besides himself, A.L. Perry, a professor at Williams College; J.B. Walker, vice president of the New England Historical-

Genealogical Society for New Hampshire; H.A.P. Torrey, a professor at the University of Vermont; former Vermont Governor Horace Fairbanks of St. Johnsbury; and John W. Stewart of Middlebury, another former Vermont governor who had also served as Congressman from the First District.

On July 20th, at a family reunion at the home of his granddaughter, Eliza Hall Park McCullough and her husband, John G. McCullough, Hiland Hall's 90th birthday was celebrated. The party was attended by 51 descendants and was reportedly much enlivened by humorous remarks from the governor himself. On July 28th, at another meeting of the Bennington Historical Society, favorable opinion was recorded of a design for "a lofty monument."

At the climactic August 12th annual meeting, with the incumbent governor of Vermont, Samuel E. Pingree, presiding, a victory for monumentalism was finally and fully achieved when it was voted unanimously to approve the Rinn design. There would be, after all, a lofty monument. But the association also agreed, after receiving reports from builders and engineers, that another \$25,000 would be required for construction.

Thus at the age of 90, after meticulous and persuasive preparation and argumentation, Hiland Hall had won a satisfying, clear-cut, and very public victory in his final dispute. It was as if he would be able now to die in peace.

#### **TOWER TO THE PEOPLE**

*Architect J. Philip Rinn's final design, seen here in profile and cross-section, incorporated stairs to allow visitors to ascend the monument.*

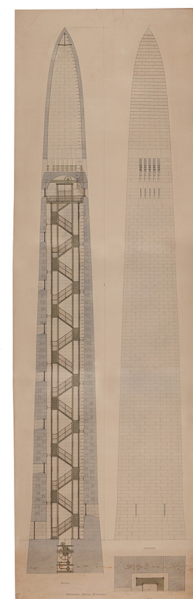


Photo courtesy of Bennington Museum

# 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 to 5pm, 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, and Friday afternoons, 1-4pm (by appointment when the Museum is closed January-March: [library@benningtonmuseum.org](mailto:library@benningtonmuseum.org))

# Officers & Council



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