

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BOB TEGART

Dear Friends,

Spring is here, and the Museum and the Regional History Room have reopened! Be sure to visit both – remember there is no admission charge to visit us in the History Room. We are open Monday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 1 – 4 pm! Stop in and conduct research, browse, or chat with us about history!

Our spring program season opened on Sunday, April 16 at 2 p.m. in the Paresky Education Center. Our speaker was Steve Perkins of the Vermont Historical Society, and his presentation was entitled “A Loose Confederation of Villages: A Historical View of Vermont Democracy.” Check online for a recording soon.

We are always looking for volunteers to assist the Bennington Historical Society – we need a refreshment committee for our programs, helpers in the History Room, authors to help with research and many other things. Interested? Contact me at [rttegs@gmail.com](mailto:rttegs@gmail.com).

Stay tuned for our May and June programs and other activities over the Summer.

Warmly,  
Bob

## Mark Your Calendar

### A BUS TOUR OF HISTORIC SITES

Mark your calendars for **October 22**, when the Historical Society will have a bus tour of historic sites. More information will follow in future news.

### WALLOOMSAC INN VIDEO PRESENTATION

If you missed Callie Raspuzzi’s presentation on the history of the Walloomsac Inn, it is available on YouTube: “The History of the Walloomsac Inn.”

## **When did Old Bennington become Old?**

The reference to “Old” Bennington first appeared in 1911. On January 12, 1911, the Vermont General Assembly recognized that the “village of Bennington Center...shall hereafter be named and designated as Old Bennington.” Bennington Center, itself a corporation, had been established in 1896 (see General Assembly act 154 of 1896). So, the village of Old Bennington is a relatively new governing entity.

The villages of Bennington and North Bennington both predate Old Bennington. Today, North and Old Bennington continue to function as villages, but the village of Bennington is gone.

## **Was it Center or Centre?**

Apparently, both terms were used interchangeably locally. The cemetery was incorporated (act 145) in 1886 as the Bennington Centre Cemetery Association. In 1896, a later General Assembly (in act 154) referred to “Bennington Center itself a corporation...established in 1896.”

## **Why was Bennington Center formed?**

The village of Bennington Center was formed in 1896 to preserve the history and ambiance of old Bennington. The village was formed after the population and commercial center shifted down hill to the flats along the riverbanks. These flats were generally referred to as east Bennington but became the village of Bennington in 1849, exactly 100 years after the town of Bennington had been chartered. More than a century after that in 1970, the village of Bennington merged into the town of Bennington (pursuant to enabling act No. 83 of 1966).

Bennington Center retained its significance as the situs of our first permanent settlers in June of 1761. These settlers were Separatists from the Congregational tradition who moved from Hardwick, Massachusetts to establish a faith community that included a church at the hub and supported by both a local government and schools. This was the first fully functioning settlement in what is now Vermont.

## **But wasn't the town of Bennington established in 1749?**

Does a town exist if nobody lives there? Dictionary definitions of “town” usually require a population base or a government or both to be considered a “town.” Between 1749 and 1761, Bennington had neither.

The town of Bennington was chartered by New Hampshire Governor Benning Wentworth in 1749. The 36 parcels, laid out in perfect squares, were sold to his friends and associates who did not settle on the land. They were more interested in land speculation than in moving into a frontier wilderness. Bennington and the other towns chartered by Wentworth west of the Connecticut River were referred to collectively as the Hampshire Grants.

## Were settlers in the Bennington areas before 1761?

Between 1749 and 1761, a few families from New York moved into Pownal and in what is now central Bennington County (Shaftsbury and Arlington). Most of the families in Pownal were tenant farmers, working the land of the Lords of the Manor in New York. They did not own the land and their legal rights and loyalties flowed through New York. Many left the Pownal area after the settlers from Massachusetts and Connecticut arrived.

Most of the families in Shaftsbury and Arlington had received their land titles through the New York authorities. After 1761, these families found themselves in potential conflict with those holding titles under the Hampshire Grants. Some stayed to challenge those claiming ownership under the Grants. These challenges culminated in the Ejectment Trials held in the Albany courts in 1770, which ruled in favor of the New York claims. The defeat in the Albany courts led to the formation of the Green Mountain Boys under Ethan Allen, to further defend the titles under the Grants.

## UPCOMING PROGRAMS

All programs take place Sundays at 2pm in the Bennington Museum's Ada Paresky Education Center

### April 16

*A Loose Confederation of Villages: A Historical View of Vermont Democracy*, with Steve Perkins. Originally developed for UVM Extension's town officer training program, this talk will explore the formation and implementation of Vermont's democracy from independent republic to the 21st century.

### May 21

*Vermont's Highways*, with Paul Searls. Paul Searls is professor of history at Northern Vermont University. He will discuss how the debate over what to do with southwestern Vermont's major roads between the 1950s and the 1990s is, in many ways, a metaphor for the transition Vermont as a whole underwent in those decades.

### June 25

*Lucy Prince of Sunderland*, with Avis Hayden. Lucy Prince is best known as America's first African-American poet. This presentation will cover Lucy's years in Sunderland, her fight to keep her land, and stories about her children and grandchildren. Avis Hayden has published five research articles and has presented at the New England Historical and Genealogical Conference. She volunteers at the Bennington Museum Research Library and with the Russell Collection of Vermontiana.



# BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS:

## BENNINGTON CIVIL WAR MEMORIAL

BILL MORGAN

By the late 1920s very few veterans of the Civil War were still alive in Bennington. By then many other New England towns had erected monuments to honor their hometown soldiers, but nothing permanent had been done to commemorate the service of native Benningtonians. In 1929 members of the local American Legion Post 13 met with John Spargo, the director of the newly created Bennington Battle Monument and Historical Association Museum, to correct this void in the town's history. They formed a committee headed by Spargo who then commissioned a young California-born sculptor by the name of William Gordon Huff (1903-1993) to design a suitable memorial. Huff had trained in Berkeley under the well-known Italian artist Beniamino Bufano before continuing his studies in New York and Paris. In late 1928 or early 1929 Huff first visited Bennington where Eliza Hall Park McCullough had hired him to do portrait medallions of her family. With work to do he set up a studio in the Cone Block on Main Street where he created the reliefs of the McCulloughs and many other prominent citizens. These were usually in the form of round, plaster medallions. In April 1930, he signed a contract to create the large bronze Civil War plaque which was to be his first major commission. Even before the contract was signed, he set to work on the project and quickly completed it that summer.

The following year Huff was asked to design a bronze relief to honor the Massachusetts soldiers who fought at the Battle of Bennington. That marker was unveiled on August 15, 1931 at the Bennington Battlefield in New York State and is similar in style to Bennington's Civil War marker. In the few short years that Huff lived in Bennington, he even found time to create the Bennington Marionette Theater and made most of the puppets for their productions himself. It was in the Cone building that Huff met his future wife, Doris MacIntosh, who was working at Noveck's music store and they married in 1931. For their honeymoon, the newlyweds drove to California to visit Huff's family and when he found plenty of work out there, he never bothered to return to Bennington. As a result, his work is much better known throughout the West.

The bronze Civil War bas relief is mounted on an eight-ton rough-hewn base of Vermont granite. The 41x71 inch plaque is inscribed with the words "United by a purpose to perpetuate the Union and liberties of the people." On such a monument one would expect to see a tablet with a long list of soldiers' names commemorating their service, but this is more subtle. One of the more interesting things about Huff's design for this relief is that it contains a nearly secret list of all the men who served in the war from the town of Bennington. Surrounding the picture are laurel leaves, and if you look closely you'll see that each leaf bears the name of a Bennington veteran, some 337 names in total. The soldiers who died in the service are designated by a star beneath their names. By the time the memorial was unveiled on August 16, 1930, only a few of the veterans honored were still alive. The last Civil War veteran living in Bennington is reported to have been Moses J. Knapp, who died in 1934 at the age of 94. It is said that some of the models used for Huff's portraits were Bennington men.

Depicted on the monument are four mounted officers reviewing their troops as they march off to war. Huff used photographs of these men in order to achieve accurate likenesses. They are identified from foreground to background as:

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# BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS

CONT.



1. General George Stannard (1820-1886). One of the most important of Vermont's commanders, Stannard was born in the Vermont town named Georgia, and grew up in nearby St. Albans. In June 1861 he was elected lieutenant colonel of the 2nd Vermont Regiment, was later made brigadier general, and retired as brevet major general.

2. Brigadier General Edward Hastings Ripley (1839-1915) of Rutland. He left Union College in Schenectady, NY, to enlist as a private but by 1864 he had risen to the rank of brigadier general. Ripley was given the honor of leading the victorious Union troops into Richmond at the close of the war.

3. Colonel Wheelock Graves Veazey (1835-98) was born in Brentwood, NH, but spent most of his adult life in Rutland. He was selected to be included on the Bennington monument in large part because he was the only Vermont man to be elected commander of the G.A.R., a fraternal group of Civil War veterans. Veazey won the Medal of Honor at Gettysburg, then returned to Vermont to practice law, eventually becoming a judge on the bench of the Vermont Supreme Court.

4. Colonel James Walbridge (1826-1913) of Bennington led Bennington's Company A of the 2nd Regiment during the war. He was born in a house that still stands near the Paper Mill covered bridge. He enlisted at the beginning of the war and saw fighting in twenty-eight battles including Fredericksburg and Gettysburg. In 1864 he was forced to resign his command due to spinal difficulties.

The memorial stands on a mound placed above the parking lot in front of Bennington Museum. Originally it was under the care of the American Legion as the plaque on the back of the monument describes, but later was transferred to the safe-keeping of the museum. In 2021 the bronze was cleaned and restored with funds from the museum, the American Legion Post 13, and the Robert Fleming and Jane Howe Patrick Foundation. That preservation work was carried out by the Williamstown Art Conservation Center at a cost of approximately \$6,000. Memorials to Bennington veterans of later wars are found in front of the Vermont Soldiers' Home on North Street.

## **VOLUNTEERS IN THE BENNINGTON MUSEUM'S REGIONAL HISTORY ROOM**

A number of our members have provided help in reorganizing the Regional History Room (RHR), which benefits all who use its resources for their research. For their generosity, we thank them:

**Bob Tegart** -- has overseen the work and is available when the Room is open.  
**Avis Hayden** -- genealogist, worked on family/correspondence files  
**John Kennedy** -- indexed the Walloomsack Review  
**Cianna Lee** -- helped to catalogue materials  
**Jane Moriarty** -- worked on subject files  
**Michele Pagan** -- transcribed documents  
**David Pilachowski** -- catalogued and organized the collection  
**Tyler Resch** -- provided research support  
**Suzi Youatt** -- catalogued family histories  
**Bill Morgan** -- catalogued various items  
**Rick Caswell** -- catalogued various items  
**Jill Fortney** -- catalogued various items  
**Kristen Marcoux** -- catalogued various items  
**Joe Hall** -- provided research assistance  
**Jo-Ann Irace** -- provided collection and shelving capacity expertise

### **For more information about using the RHR or to volunteer, contact:**

Robert Tegart, Administrator, Regional History Room  
Bennington Museum  
802-447-1571 x 210  
Library@benningtonmuseum.org

## **THE BENNINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETS ON THE FIRST MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH FROM 4PM - 5:15PM AT BENNINGTON MUSEUM.**

All BHS donors will receive a copy of the newsletter and other BHS announcements via email, and are invited to attend these monthly meetings.

Make a gift to the BHS today to help keep our programming and newsletters free and frequent this coming year!

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### **Bennington Historical Society**

A volunteer-operated program of Bennington Museum

#### **Officers:**

Bob Tegart, President; Don Miller, Past-President; Bill Morgan, Secretary; Robert Ebert, President-Elect

#### **Committee Members:**

Jackie Marro, David Pilachowski, Ray Rodrigues, James Thrash, Anne Bugbee, Joe Hall

**Associate Members:** Rick Caswell, JJ Williams      **Emeritus Members:** Charles Dewey, Bev Petrelis

**Newsletter Editor:** Ray Rodrigues

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