



# BENNINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

AN INVITATION TO EXPLORE HISTORY TOGETHER

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Across the Street Walking Tour Thursday August 12 at 5:30 pm

Have you ever walked through the “Four Corners” area of Bennington and wondered what the buildings around you looked like in the past? Join Bennington Museum curator, Jamie Franklin, for a 90 minute guided tour of historic Bennington structures. For tickets and additional information, click here: [benningtonmuseum.org/product/across-the-street-walking-tour](https://benningtonmuseum.org/product/across-the-street-walking-tour)

### Walking Tour of Old Bennington August 15 at 2:00 pm

Join local architect Jane Radocchia for a walking tour of Old Bennington, focusing on the architecture and history of Old Bennington and its evolution from being the center of town to a residential/historic neighborhood. The tour, sponsored by the Bennington Historical Society will be held on Sunday, August 15 at 2 pm. Meet at the Bennington Monument.

### Phyllis Chapman as Molly Brown August 15 at 2:30 pm

Phyllis Chapman will present the “Unsinkable Molly Brown” at the Old First Church Barn. Take a journey as Molly Brown tells us of her fortunes (in mining) and misfortunes (as a passenger on the Titanic). The cost is \$10.00.

**Note:** The Walking Tour and the Molly Brown event are part of the Bennington Battle Days Celebration. (See page 2 for more events.)



1981.61

View of Bennington, 1798 (detail)

Ralph Earl (1751-1801)

Bennington Museum Collection, Museum Purchase



2016.19.59

Hotel Putnam, Bennington, Vt., 1927

Hand-colored postcard published by E. T. Griswold, photographer unknown

Bennington Museum Collection, of Gift of Charles E. Marchant

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# UPCOMING EVENTS, cont'd

## Bennington Battle Day Events August 13-15



*Photo Credit: Phil Holland*

### Opening Events August 13

The Battle Day events begin on August 13, with the traditional hot dogs, hot sausage, and burgers lunch from 11 to 2 pm at the Fire House on River Street. The same food items will be available later that day during the annual Battle Day Car Cruise, which will be held in the lot behind the former Bennington Railroad Station.

The Annual Chicken BBQ will be held at the Fire House at 4 pm Friday and will be for takeout only. Tickets must be purchased in advance and are available at the fire station.

### Celebration of the Battle of Bennington August 14 and 15

Re-enactors will set up an 18th century military encampment near the Monument on Friday night. The re-enactors will provide living demonstrations of life, technology, and customs of the Revolutionary War era. The Monument will be open and elevator rides to the top will be allowed!

### 16th Annual Battle Day 5K Road Race Saturday August 14: at 9:30 am.

Sponsored by the Friends of the Monument, the Battle Day 5K race starts and ends at the Monument. The course is slightly rolling. In keeping with the Battle Day activities. Following the 5K race is a 1/2 mile Kids fun Run, an easy race for children. Registration forms are available at the Monument Gift Shop.

There will be prizes for male and female overall and age group places. The 5K race will start at 9:30 am.

### Battle Day Parade August 15 at 12:30 pm.

There will be at least eight marching bands, eight or more floats, and emergency vehicles in the parade.

### Walking Tour of Old Bennington August 15 at 2:00 pm

Join local architect Jane Radocchia for a walking tour of Old Bennington.

### Phyllis Chapman as Molly Brown August 15 at 2:30 pm

Phyllis Chapman will present the "Unsinkable Molly Brown" at the Old First Church Barn.

### More Events:

- Kids Day events will be held at the rear parking lot of the firehouse from 10 am to 1 pm.
- The Annual softball game between the Bennington Fire Department and the Bennington Rural Fire Department will be held at 6 pm at Willow Park.
- A pot luck dinner for the re-enactors is scheduled for 6 pm at the Barn of the Old First Church.

## UPCOMING EVENTS. cont'd

### Highlights from Pownal History September 19 at 2:00 pm Paresky Education Center

Where is the oldest house in Vermont? What Pownal mill girl had her photo on a United States Stamp? What two presidents taught in one room schools in Pownal?

Raymond Rodrigues will answer these questions while relating key events in Pownal History, noting differences as well as commonalities with the history of Bennington. Rodrigues co-edited the Arcadia photo book *Pownal* with Charlotte Comar and Wendy Hopkins. With Dawn Rodrigues, he edited an updated edition of Joe Parks' *Pownal—A Town's Two Hundred Years and More*.



1988.7.473  
Pownal, Vermont, 1946  
Richard A. Hunt (b. 1908)  
Bennington Museum Collection, Gift of Richard A. Hunt

### Voices from the Grave

September 25 & October 2

Tours start at 10 am on each Saturday at the Old First Church Cemetery. Registration is required.

Co-sponsored by BHS, Bennington Museum, Bennington Centre Cemetery Association, and Bennington Performing Arts Center (BPAC)

Tour groups of 10 people each will depart every forty minutes, each Saturday, starting at 10:00 am. Reservations are required. Actors will portray memorable people such as Elijah Dewey, Bridget Harwood, and Robert Frost who rest in the beautiful burial grounds in Old Bennington. Members of the Historical Society have researched and drafted the 4-minute monologues that will be performed by the actors, who will be dressed in period clothing. These dramatic and compelling stories will make history come alive, literally!

**Tickets will be available at the BPAC website: [bpacvt.org](http://bpacvt.org).**



1988.7.177  
Old First Church Cemetery Entrance, 1941-1947  
Richard A. Hunt (b. 1908)  
Bennington Museum Collection, Gift of Richard A. Hunt



# THE CIVIL WAR MEMORIAL RESTORATION

BY PHIL HOLLAND, BHS MEMBER

Prominently placed on the Museum grounds just above the parking lot is a memorial to the Bennington men who served in Union forces in the Civil War. Until late July the bronze tablet on the front side on the memorial looked like this:



Then conservators from the Williamstown Art Conservation Center got to work.



This is what it looks like now.



Bennington will always be connected to the War of Independence and to the battle which bears its name, but it was no less involved in the events of the Civil War. Three hundred forty-seven men from the town served out of a total population of 4,400; not all returned alive. Bennington men fought in many of the war's most important and bloodiest battles, including Gettysburg, Antietam, and the Battle of the Wilderness. Meanwhile, Bennington women stitched uniforms and sent supplies to the soldiers, and Bennington factories turned out gunpowder and other manufactures for the use of Union forces. The Civil War was a total town effort to defeat slavery and preserve the Union. Yes, there were a few local Southern sympathizers, but the vast majority of Bennington residents supported the Union cause.

The move to create a memorial to Bennington's participation in the war took shape in the late 1920's, when the last of the town's veterans were still living, but later than most other towns in the state.

A committee led by John Spargo, the first Director of the Bennington Museum, and members of the BHS and Post 13 of the American Legion chose a young sculptor from California, William Gordon Huff, then living in Bennington, to create the memorial. It was Huff's first major commission. He was only 26 years old, but already an accomplished artist. The committee evidently recognized the talents that enabled him to produce the remarkably designed and executed bronze bas-relief tablet that has been mounted on a piece of Vermont granite outside the Museum since its dedication on August 16, 1930.

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Huff returned to California (with a Bennington bride) two years later and had a distinguished artistic career, mostly on the west coast.

The tablet shows four mounted Vermont officers reviewing troops as they march to war. The names of the Bennington men who served are inscribed on the fringe of laurel leaves that surrounds the tablet, with a star next to those who died in service. Bill Morgan's *Bennington in the Civil War* (2014) supplies details on the officers depicted and much else about the town's involvement in the war. You may recall, too, that the Museum mounted a Civil War exhibit in 2013.

Alix Jones (the Museum's Director for Advancement) asked me to write about my personal involvement in the project. It had bothered me for a number of years that such a beautiful and important work of public art was so visibly suffering from the effects of time. I saw something; I finally said something, to curator Jamie Franklin when our paths crossed in front of the memorial one day last fall. I was not the first person to raise the matter: restoring the memorial had evidently been on the Museum's to-do list for some time. For me, the events of January 6, during which a Confederate flag was carried into the Capitol, gave the memorial fresh and urgent meaning. The museum decided to make the restoration a priority. An estimate of the cost was prepared by the professional conservators with whom the

Museum regularly works. Conservation doesn't come cheap: the cost would be almost \$6000. '

Alix was successful in landing a grant from the Robert Fleming and Jane Howe Patrick Foundation for half the cost. Having worked with a member of Post 13 of the Legion last year on the Battle Day commemoration, I reached out to them (with Alix's blessing). Alix and Interim Executive Director Dave Pilachowski made a pitch to a member of the Legion board at the memorial itself. Post 13 has now pledged half of the remaining funds and is appealing to the Vermont Legion organization for the balance. The Legion footed the bill in 1930, and the memorial was dedicated during the state Legion convention that was held in Bennington in August of that year, as the tablet on the back side of the memorial records. (See bottom of page.)

In these fraught times, Civil War monuments across the country are getting a close and often critical look. Bennington can be especially proud of its own memorial, both for the patriotism it expresses and for the outstanding work of public art that it is. I hope the attention our memorial has been, and will be, getting will renew interest in a chapter of Bennington's history that also bears on the present state of the nation. I encourage my fellow members of the BHS to make a contribution-- today!--to enable the Museum to finish off this worthy project in the style it deserves.

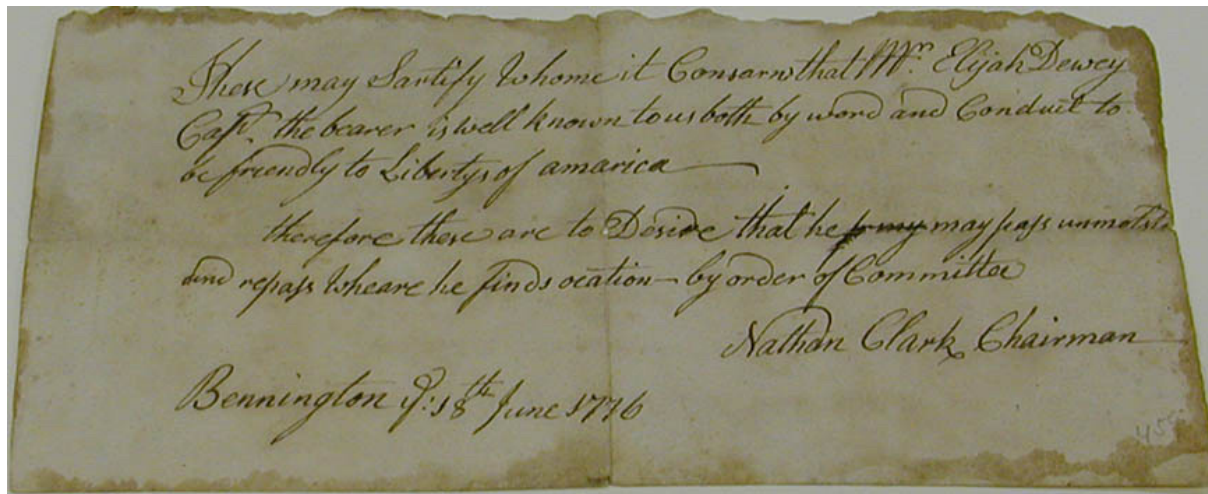




# THE BENNINGTON MUSEUM ONLINE COLLECTION

The Bennington Museum staff have posted on-line images and information on much of its collection, located at [bennington.pastperfectonline.com](http://bennington.pastperfectonline.com).

If you are looking for documents or photos from Bennington and its environs, this is an excellent place to start. Then, if you find something you want to actually examine, you know what to ask for before your visit. Here, for example, are two items from the Museum's collection with the Museum's description:



2006.108

Committee of Safety Pass for Elijah Dewey, 1776 Bennington Museum Collection

Editor's Note: This permit for Captain Elijah Dewey to pass unmolested where he finds occasion to be as a well-known friend of liberty by order of the Committee. Signed by Nathan Clark, Chairman.

A3131

Bennington Battle Monument

Design Sketch

Olin Warner

Bennington Museum Collection,

Gift of Mr. John Spargo

One of three sheets of sketches

made by Olin Warner as

suggestions for modifying Rinn's

"big tower"--a phase of the

evolution of the design. Pencil

sketches on tracing paper; one has

three monument designs, the other

two have two.



# VERMONT'S EBENEZER ALLEN: PATRIOT, COMMANDO, AND EMANCIPATOR

REVIEWED BY PHIL HOLLAND, BHS MEMBER

Glenn Fay Jr., with a foreword by former Governor  
James Douglas  
The History Press, 2021, \$21.99

I was looking forward to reading this book, but I'm afraid that I cannot recommend it. The publisher should withdraw it from public sale to save its own reputation and spare unsuspecting readers from being imposed upon.

That's a shame, because Fay's subject, an often overlooked member of the Allen clan who was a distant cousin of Vermont luminaries Ethan and Ira, is worthy of a modern biography. Born in Northampton, MA., in 1743, Ebenezer Allen moved with his family to Bennington in 1768, then to Poultney (which he co-founded) and Tinmouth, later to "Two Heroes" (now South Hero, again as one of the first settlers), and lastly to Burlington, where he died in 1806. He was one of the Green Mountain Boys who took Ticonderoga from the British in 1775, he fought with Herrick's Rangers at the Battle of Bennington in 1777, and later that year led a daring and successful assault on the British garrison at Mount Defiance. He held numerous town and state offices, speculated in land, operated a ferry, bought and sold goods, and kept taverns in South Hero and Burlington. He exemplifies the energies and strategies that created Vermont as well as any of the state's 18th-century founders.

A grandson who had known Ebenezer in his last decade wrote a brief biography in 1852, and there have been several small-scale treatments of his career since. For one reason in particular, this is — or could have been — Ebenezer's moment. In October of 1777, General Benjamin Lincoln sent Allen on a mission to pursue the British Ticonderoga garrison retreating northwards in the wake of Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga (which Allen witnessed). Allen, who had already proved himself a resolute and resourceful leader,

re-commanded a detachment of forty militiamen on the west side of Champlain. They caught up with the British force near Essex, New York, taking fifty prisoners. Among those taken was a Black woman named Diana Mattis and her daughter Nancy, who had been enslaved by a British officer. They became Allen's to do with as he saw fit. He freed them. He travelled to Bennington to record a declaration of manumission with the Town Clerk. He prefaced his act of emancipation with the words, "I being conscientious (sic) that it is not Right in the Sight of god to Keep Slaves ...." Adult slavery had been outlawed in the fledgling independent state of Vermont at the Windsor Convention in July of 1777, but, as Harvey Armani Whitfield showed in *The Problem of Slavery in Early Vermont* (2014), the prohibition was not always observed in practice. Allen, who had been a delegate to the Convention from Tinmouth, went to some trouble to make sure there was no doubt in the case of Mattis and her daughter.

In 1937, Bellows Falls artist Stephen Belaski painted the imaginary scene of Allen proclaiming his declaration in the presence of Mattis, Nancy (now transformed to a child a six or so), and a throng of admiring Green Mountain Boys. The scene is one of a series of murals Belaski executed in 1937 for the Rutland Public Library. It's a vivid painting, with Allen, perched on a rock, rising to heroic height as he reads his proclamation, and it adorns the cover of Fay's book. Readers will not learn inside or outside the book where the cover comes from, however. The image is simply credited to "Ruxana's Home Interiors and the Works Progress Administration" (Ruxana is a blogger who has written about the murals). Allen's hand-written declaration itself is reproduced inside Fay's book, with what purports to be a transcription on the facing page. Anyone who compares the two versions will find that

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the transcription is not accurate. Instead of “to Trade and to Traffick for her Self and Child,” we read, “no trade and no traffic for herself and child.” The 18th-century script is quite clear. And the document is clearly signed “Ebenezer,” not “Evenezer” Allen, as appears in the transcription.

Abby Maria Hemenway transcribed Allen’s declaration accurately in 1871; Harvey Amani Whitfield accurately reproduced her transcription in 2014; there is simply no excuse for a corrupt version to be printed in 2021.

Allen fought at the Battle of Bennington as a member of Col. Samuel Herrick’s Vermont militia. The Battle, we are told, “was a big event that was months in the planning. Thousands of soldiers from each side gathered at the battlefield in mid-August.” Anybody who has ever read about the Battle knows that it was not a planned event like a sporting contest at a stadium; in fact, it was full of accidents and surprises. Stark did not “spend months” procuring supplies: he had exactly one month to prepare his troops. The “Brunswikker” troops were not mercenaries, but auxiliary units whose services were contracted for by their princes. The artillery crews were Hessian, not British. It was Thomas Mellen, not Mullen, who related the account of the Battle that Fay quotes from at length; Fay has evidently confused Mellen with Jerry Mullen, who maintains a website dedicated to Seth Warner’s Continental regiment (which Fay mistakenly calls Warner’s Colonial regiment). Where did Fay get his information about the Battle? Evidently not from the standard modern accounts (Ketchum’s, for example), none of which appears in his bibliography, or from Gabriel’s collection of primary sources, also not cited. Disclaiming liability for errors, Fay and his publisher aver that “the information in this book is true and complete to the best of our knowledge.” No one is going to sue them for negligence, I suppose, but I think the plaintiffs might have a case. There is certainly pain and suffering in reading of “Old Town Bennington”

(no such burg exists) and that the Green Mountain Boys “lived in Bennington or neighboring towns, such as Arlington, Manchester, and Windsor.” Windsor, of course, lies on the Connecticut River, on the other side of the Green Mountains. On one page it seems that the “enchancing light, abundant wildlife and fertile soils of South Hero all conspire to create an alluring place to prosper.” Five pages later the island consists of “dense forests of hardwoods infested with wild animals,” and there is a lack of provisions, especially meat. Nor is there pleasure in reading Fay’s prose. History can be written in a popular vein without recourse to slang and cliché, but that is not Fay’s style: “...the official government, which was an idea a bunch of guys made up based on their convictions, did not yet really exist.” Tories “hang out.” Ira Allen is a “high roller”; so is Henry Knox. Mullen-Mellen “sweats buckets” at the Battle. Allen is often busy with “side hustles.” Sentences labor under needless repetitions and non-sequiturs. Lapses of grammar, capricious capitalization, and erratic spelling disfigure the text. Fay duly thanks his editor and copy editor at the History Press for their help, but I see no evidence of editorial oversight in this book.

Fay’s “Epilogue” goes off the deep end. “Perhaps Ebenezer Allen’s Teflon-coated invincible charisma played a role in keeping him safe.” Perhaps this book should have come with an action figure. “And maybe he had guardian angels guiding and watching over him.” Maybe, and maybe not. The History Press publishes nicely printed volumes on subjects of local interest by authors who may or may not be professional academics. The results are often worthwhile. Michael Gabriel’s *Soldiers and Civilians at the Battle of Bennington*, Tyler Resch’s *Glastenbury*, and Bill Morgan’s *Bennington and the Civil War* are good examples among Vermont-related subjects. By issuing a book like *Vermont’s Ebenezer Allen*, however, the Press risks debasing the coinage of its brand.



## BHS PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Don Miller receives the legislative resolution.  
Photo by Bill Morgan

Dear Members,

The Governor has appointed a Vermont 250th Anniversary Commission to commemorate the events of 1777, including the Battle of Bennington and formation of the Republic of Vermont. Let the celebrations begin!

Serving on the Commission will be Jonah Spivak and Steve Perkins, former Executive Director of the Bennington Museum. The Commission will have broad representation from throughout Vermont. The idea is to make it a statewide celebration. The hope is that the Commission will support a multi-year buildup to 2027. Locally, we have already begun to celebrate On July 18th, the public was invited to McWaters Park at the Henry Bridge to recognize the Breakenridge Stand-Off as the "Birthplace of Vermont." A ceremony, led by emcee Michael Chapman, recounted the events of the day. Mary Morrissey read a legislative resolution, which was presented to the Historical Society.

Living Historians performed a brief skit that closed with cannon and musket fire. Over 200 people braved the threat of rain and an occasional drizzle to attend the event and learn about the history of the Breakenridge Stand-Off.

In 1771, a posse of about 300 New Yorkers arrived at the Breakenridge Farm on Murphy Road to execute ejectment papers on James Breakenridge. Over 100 Green Mountain Boys lay in wait, setting an ambush for the Yorkers. When the Boys revealed themselves by waving their hats on the ends of their muskets, the posse quickly lost interest and retreated. The Stand-Off is recognized as the birth of the Green Mountain Boys--today's Vermont National Guard.

After the ceremony, the public browsed tables set up by supporting sponsors, including the Bennington Historical Society and the Bennington Museum (thanks to Scott McGuire, Joe Hall, Charles Dewey, and Deana Mallory). T-shirts listing several events leading up to 1777 were available for purchase. Guided Tours were provided by historian Bob Hoar and BHS's Bob Tegart.

Bob Hoar is credited with inspiring the idea of the celebration. Jonah Spivak provided valuable leadership as event Chair.

The next event on the schedule is a celebration of Remember Baker's encounter with the Yorkers in Arlington in the spring of 1772, date to be determined. .

Get ready, the celebrations have begun!  
Don Miller, President

### Bennington Historical Society

A volunteer-operated program of Bennington Museum

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