

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BOB TEGART



It has been a busy summer in the Regional History Room. We have been open Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays from 1 – 4 pm, staffed by Bennington Historical Society members and other volunteers. The total number of visitors so far this year has been around 200 people either browsing or coming with an inquiry. We have also received donations amounting to about \$300. A special thanks to our volunteers who are diligently working to create a well-organized research room!

So far this year we have received approximately 235 inquiries through email, phone, mail, or walk-in. We are encouraging people to submit their inquiries via email or mail rather than by phone so that we will have better information to work with.

The cataloging project continues. The collection was examined to determine which volumes were not yet cataloged and searchable in Past Perfect. That process has been completed, and over 1,100 volumes have been added to the catalog so far in 2022. Work is now concentrated on adding books about the New England states and New York.

Our Fall programs are all set, and we look forward to a busy fall. We are thinking of ways to honor the 150th anniversary of the Society and the 250th anniversary of Vermont! Our monthly board meetings take place at 4:00 PM on the first Monday of the month in the Paresky wing and are open to all interested parties. If you have an idea or want to be involved, please feel free to stop by!

## Fall 2022 Programming

**SEPTEMBER 18**

**The Enduring Mystery of  
the Paula Welden Case**

in cooperation with the Bennington Free Library  
Sponsored by Vermont Humanities Council  
with funds from the "Year of Mystery Programs"

**OCTOBER 16**

**The History of the CCC Camps in VT**

with author Marty Podskoch

**NOVEMBER 20**

**The Shaftsbury Quilt**

with Carol Corey-Dziubek

**DECEMBER 18**

**The History of the Mohican People  
of this Region**

with Bonney Hartley,  
Tribal Historic Preservation Manager,  
Stockbridge-Munsee Community

**ALL BHS PROGRAMS TAKE PLACE  
SUNDAYS AT 2pm**

in the

**Ada Paresky Education Center  
at Bennington Museum**

at

**75 Main Street,  
Bennington Vermont**

Free of Charge

BHS PROGRAMMING IS SPONSORED BY



# MYTH OR FACT? "THE LADY OF MYSTERY" AT THE BENNINGTON BATTLEFIELD

BY BOB HOAR

Was a woman killed at the Battle of Bennington? The story about her has persisted over the years. For example, the Battle of Bennington 1927 Pageant publication contained the below poem.

Is this poem based upon a true event or a myth?

About the year 1840, an aging veteran from Massachusetts, Levi Crittenden, visited David Robinson's home, where he related the story of a young woman being killed at the battle. The story stayed with grandson George Robinson. George would be known for his fine assemblage of Battle artifacts and role as a local historian. His artifacts are now a part of the Bennington Museum's collection.



## The Lady of Mystery

*Upon a powerful steed bestowed,  
From out of British lines she rode,  
Like some celestial ranger.  
As if to challenge danger...  
A bearer of dispatches she?  
A herald? No, it may not be...  
What insane errand sends her!  
Upon the eve of battle, why  
Risks she so much, is it to spy?*

*...Or has she with the Patriots brave,  
A lover she would seek and save?  
From fierce Brunswickian foeman...  
Hard by the river banks was laid,  
Their mother, mistress, wife or maid.  
The life that led to history,  
The spy, the Patriot's friend, who knows?  
In everlasting mystery.*

Crittenden reportedly said to George that he was with the American forces on the east side of the Walloomsac stream, near the bridge, awaiting a signal to advance. While there, he watched a woman dressed in white riding a horse, and she crossed the little bridge from the enemy position. She rode around the east side of the stream until someone in Crittenden's unit decided to shoot her. After the battle, Crittenden saw her body lying on the west side of the stream.

The day after the Battle, twenty-year-old Aaron Hubbell, another soldier who fought in the battle, accompanied Mrs. Moses Robinson to the battlefield. There they saw the woman's body on the bank of the river. Mrs. Robinson said to Aaron, "...you remain here, and I will go first and see that her dress is properly arranged; then you can come."

In his 1844 book, *Compiled and Corrected Account of the Burgoyne Campaign*, Charles Neilson states that "The German women who had marched with the troops were kept in a log cabin between the Tory redoubt and the bridge—why so far forward one cannot imagine... Stood a log

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# MYTH OR FACT? "THE LADY OF MYSTERY"...

CONT.

cabin well stowed with women attached to the Hessian army, one of which, on the approach of the Americans, in attempting to flee across the bridge to the Hessian Hill, was killed by a musket ball."

The old soldier, Levi Crittenden, may not have been at the battle, but was on his way there and didn't fight. Having started too late to be at the battle, only a few of his unit did not turn around on the road. His position on the battlefield is consistent with what is known about where the Massachusetts troops fought.

Two days before the battle, the American forces used a house there to prepare for the battle. There was, in fact, a 48 hour standoff between the British and American forces at a bridge before the battle commenced on August 16, 1777. The house near the bridge was later destroyed by cannon fire.

The German surgeon J. F. Wasmus wrote that "The enemy sneaked behind a house that stood on the other side of the river, where they loaded their guns and shot at our leftwing. One cannon was being directed against the house and fired. As the 2nd shot went through the house, the enemy came out at full speed and ran away."

Widow Whipple's house stood about one-fourth of a mile from the bridge and was burned by orders of Governor Skene. Did she survive the destruction of her house and stay with her Tory neighbors, or was she killed by the Patriots? Several houses and barns owned by Hazard Wilcox near the bridge housed Canadian militia, Tories, and possibly native warriors and were used as forward defensive positions. So it is possible that a woman may have attempted to escape the battle and then was killed as she fled.

We may never know exactly what happened, but the story persists, so it gives a reason to believe it may have been true.

## Sources:

Bennet, Charles G. "Did a Mysterious Woman Perish in the Battle?" Bennington Banner, May 19, 1976.

Lord, Philip L. War over Walloomscoick: Land Use and Settlement Pattern on the Bennington Battlefield—1777, New York State Museum, 1989.

Lynn, Mary C. (ed) and Doblin, Helga (translator). An Eyewitness Account of the American Revolution and New England Life: The Journal of J. F. Wasmus, German Company Surgeon, 1771-1783. New York: Greenwood Press, 1990.

Neilson, Charles and Jared Sparks. Compiled and Corrected Account of the Burgoyne Campaign. Charleston, SC. BiblioLife, 2009.

Parks, Joe. "Was a Woman Killed in the Battle?" Bennington Banner, April 1, 1997.

Robinson, George Wadsworth. "Letter to the Editor," Bennington Banner, May 29, 1890.

Anon. Battle of Bennington Pageant 1777-1927. Bennington, 1927.

## SCHEDULE: BENNINGTON BATTLE DAY

### Saturday, August 13

- 10AM to 4PM - Re-enactors at the Bennington Battle Monument
- Noon to 2PM - Moodus Drum and Fife Corps will march and play at the Monument
- 10AM to 8PM - Battle re-enactments at the Bennington Battlefield in Walloomsac

### Sunday, August 14

- 12:30PM Battle Day Parade in Bennington





# THE APPEAL OF HISTORIC MYTHS & LEGENDS

CONT.

for the 1904 Bennington Souvenir. Many of the pieces displayed are now known to have no connection to the Revolutionary War. "Lt. Colonel Baum's Camp Stove" is a Chippendale style plate warmer. The two red coats were worn by American militia around the time of the War of 1812. "Baum's saber" may be from the Battle, but was probably carried by English troops.

The sources that he mentioned in his letter to the editor are highly questionable. The Massachusetts militia member who relayed the tale at his grandfather's table was certainly not at the first part of battle himself, and likely not in Bennington that day at all. His other source, Aaron Hubbell, never mentioned the dead woman's body on the battlefield in his own writings nor in his relation of events to historian Hiland Hall. Neither he nor his female companion had any reason to be there the day after the battle. The description of Mrs. Moses Robinson's prudish insistence that she see that the woman's dress was "decent" before Aaron could approach seems like Victorian fantasy.

So why does this myth persist at all? Women's history was most certainly not of concern to Neilson, nor to George W. Robinson. When Robinson wrote his missive to the Banner, he claimed that some people refused to believe this story because of "a sense of woman's claim to universal protection under all circumstances, because of her sex". Perhaps it was the taboo nature of the story that appealed to him to begin with.

The 1927 poem is very much in keeping with the heavily romanticized version of Bennington's history as depicted in the Historical Pageant, an extravaganza of epic proportions that took place over Battle Day Weekend celebrating the sesquicentennial of the Battle of Bennington and the Republic of Vermont. The poem revels in the mysterious nature of the woman's appearance. In the 1920s there was a rising sense of the importance of women in the historical narrative, but they still tended to be portrayed as caricatures rather than factual people. In this sense, the mysterious woman was a perfect subject for poetic license as there were no facts to be concerned with.

Studying these myths is instructive, but not because they tell us anything about what happened in 1777. They are much more useful in telling us about 1844, 1890, 1927, and today.

## WHAT THE QUILT SAID

BY SOPHIA ANISMAN, CURATORIAL INTERN

It could be said that it's a miracle that any historical objects survive the test of time. We are left with a few lucky remnants of the past, which must be used to find out as much as we can. Something as simple as a quilt can uncover not just the maker's story, but societal values and nuances.

An eight point star patchwork quilt in red, white, and blue was donated to the Bennington Museum in 1956 by Breard Hawks. It was captioned as a "frugal 'crazy' quilt pieced with scraps from worn clothing in colonial American style," but other details are unknown. It's obvious to the trained eye that while the piecing could very well be hand-sewn scraps of colonial clothes, the blocking and the borders were done at a later point from different fabric on a machine.

The theory that Breard's grandmother, Helen Brown Hawks, made the pieces and left them unfinished, only to have a younger relative pick it up years later and finish it is not only believable, but appealing. This multi-generational blanket was also clearly used as a real blanket, as it has the signs of a well-loved existence and a wool batting.

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# WHAT THE QUILT SAID

CONT.



The caption this quilt was submitted with is perhaps one of the most intriguing parts. The words “frugal” and “colonial” highlight the quilter’s intentions, which were perhaps idealizing colonial life. This was a common phenomenon in the early to mid twentieth century. As things turned chaotic in the inter-war period, with the Great Depression and the general feeling of uncertainty that came with it, many New Englanders looked back towards a time that felt safer.

The Hawks family was a pillar of Bennington years before the donation of this quilt. William E. Hawks was a successful and well known businessman, having traveled over one million miles over the course of his career. William and Helen’s daughter, Sara Hawkes Huling, had a legacy of her own, fighting for legislation on child labor laws and an active member of many organizations, such as Daughters of the American Revolution, Daughters of American Colonists, National Society of Magna Carta Dames, Vermont Society of Mayflower Descendants, and many more. This was a family that was very aware of their roots. With the combination of already being very involved in their colonial history and the general idealization of colonial days, anyone in this family in the interwar years could have found this half finished quilt and felt compelled to finish it.

Perhaps it’s a relief to know that the idea of looking back and wishing for the good old days is nothing new. However commonplace an old quilt may seem, its story may show more about the daily lives of those who made and loved it than meets the eye.

## BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS

BY BILL MORGAN

Most people who are aware of the mass grave marker standing in the middle of the Old Bennington Cemetery refer to it as the Hessian Grave. In truth most of the Germans buried there were Braunschweigers. Strictly speaking Hessians are from the German state of Hesse and 13 of the 16 German-speaking soldiers who were buried there were from Braunschweig, or Brunswick, a different state completely. In 1980-81 researchers were able to identify the soldiers and only 2 of them were actually from the state of Hesse. The senior German officer buried here was a lieutenant from Berlin who died a week after the battle, not of a wound but of dysentery. It is believed that two of the German soldiers buried here were killed when they tried to escape from the over-crowded conditions in the old meeting house which was being used as a prison/hospital.

In 1777, immediately following the August 16th Battle of Bennington, most of the soldiers who had been killed were hastily buried near the battlefield in New York state, nine miles away. The wounded soldiers as well as hundreds of prisoners were brought to the town of Bennington and given shelter. Most of the injured were housed in the meeting house that once stood on the plot of land in front of the Walloomsac Inn and in a makeshift log hospital that was built nearby. Some of the prisoners passed away as a result of their wounds and a plot was set aside as a common grave in the Bennington Centre Cemetery. The thirteen Patriots buried in the same area were all New Hampshire men who had come to Bennington with General Stark's brigade to help repel the British invasion.

As early as 1893 an article in the Bennington Banner put the number of "Hessian" soldiers buried here at 33, although the same report stated that others had placed the total as high as 50. The article went on to say that they were buried without coffins and that the descendants of the German soldiers were

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# BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS

CONT.

thinking about erecting a marker on the site at that time. They proposed to build a large monument surmounted by a statue of a German grenadier in full uniform, but no further action seems to have been undertaken.

In 1869 the pastor of the Old First Church, Rev. Jennings wrote that the graves were unmarked and in a place "still kept vacant in our church-yard." Sometime after that the site was temporarily marked by oak posts to delineate the plot which is estimated to be somewhere between 16.5 and 22 yards long by 11 and 16.5 yards wide. It wasn't until 1896 that the Bennington Historical Society moved to erect a permanent monument to recognize both the Patriot and the German soldiers who had been buried in the cemetery a hundred and twenty years earlier. The current monument was officially unveiled on June 23, 1897, but as early as 1887 the Society had expressed their desire to do something to mark the graves. In 1895 the Society's president, President Henry G. Root, formed a committee composed of himself, rederick B. Jennings, Daniel Robinson, A.B. Valentine, and Milo C. Huling to raise funds and direct the work. The focus of the Society's work up until that point had been directed towards the construction of the larger Bennington Battle Monument at the top of the hill, but once that was finished, work on other projects began. The committee decided that the six-ton granite block, which had been designed to commemorate the site of the Catamount Tavern should be transferred to the cemetery and re-carved with a new inscription. Mr. Jennings was asked to make an address at the unveiling ceremony on June 23, 1897, and 5,000 people attended.



*Bennington Battle Soldiers' Grave, sometimes known as the Patriot and Hessian Monument.*

The monument is one solid piece of Barre granite, approximately 3 x 4 x 6 feet. Since 1876 or so it had stood where the Catamount Tavern Memorial now stands. Although unfinished, it had been designated to be the base of a monument dedicated to the tavern, but the designer of the Bennington Battle Monument, John Phillip Rinn, felt that it was out of proportion there. He was instrumental in the re-purposing and moving of the plinth to the cemetery and designing the current pedestal for the catamount.

The first inscription placed on the south side of the block was in raised-letter and read: "Around this stone lie buried many patriots who fell in the Battle of Bennington, August 16th, 1777. -- Here also rest British soldiers, Hessians, who died from wounds after the battle as captives. They were confined in the first meeting house built in Vermont which stood on the green west of this burying ground -- Bennington Historical Society 1896." Nearly a hundred years later in 1981, following the discovery of the names of the soldiers buried here, the Bennington Rotary Club donated the funds to engrave two other inscriptions onto the sides of the marker. The one on the west side reads: "Hessian (Brunswick) Soldiers Believed Buried Here Are: Lt Carl D'Annieres -- QM Friedrich Toegel -- Conrad Falcke -- Andreas Gallmeyer -- Heinrich Gebbers -- Andreas Gieseler -- Andreas Goedecke -- Friedrich Hofmeister -- Christian Jahne -- Zacharias Lampe -- Christian Linde -- Michael Mittendorff -- Wilhelm Rust -- Johann Teissenrodt -- Heinrich Wasmus -- Daniel Wienecke." On the east side, the names of the patriots were added: "American Soldiers Believed Buried Here Are: Maj James Head -- Capt Jeremiah Post -- Ens Andrew Pettingill -- Sgt Philip Eastman -- Joshua Conant -- Archibald Cunningham -- David Harris -- Bernard Hicks -- Thomas Hooper -- Samuel McAfee -- John Moore -- Benjamin Perkins -- Jeremiah Proctor."

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# BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS

CONT.

The most recent interment in this plot was for the Tory, David Redding. His name was inscribed on the north side of the marker, and it reads simply "David Redding Loyalist Executed 1778." John Spargo, the first Bennington Museum director, wrote an entire book on the strange execution of Redding who had been tried and hanged as a traitor that year. His skeleton was used in medical classes before being given to the Bennington Museum. Finally, two hundred years after his execution, his bones were laid to rest at the base of this monument.

In November 1896 several newspapers carried a brief story which said that "Hessian graves at Bennington, Vt., were decorated recently by a 10-year-old girl whose family is summering there. It is said to be the first time that any flowers have been strewn over them." It seems to be a fitting end to the story.

**BENNINGTON MUSEUM IS OPEN EVERY DAY EXCEPT WEDNESDAY,  
10AM-4PM**

**THE REGIONAL HISTORY ROOM IS ACCESSIBLE FREE OF CHARGE ON  
MONDAYS AND THURSDAYS, 1PM-4PM**

**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; Charles Dewey, Secretary

**Committee Members:** Ted Bird, Anne Bugbee, Joe Hall, Scott Maguire, Jackie Marro, Bill Morgan, Beverly Petrelis

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