Bennington Historical Society News

Philip Hoff: How Red Turned Blue in the Green Mountain State

December 20 at 2:45 pm

Re-airing of 2012 program followed by live discussion on Zoom

Philip Hoff was the first Democratic Governor to be elected in Vermont in 109 years, and he modernized the state and was a catalyst for turning a staunch Republican stronghold into one of the bluest states in the union.

Presenter **Tony Marro** is a 9th generation Vermont native who started a career in Journalism with the *Rutland Herald* and worked his way up to the *New York Times*, *Newsweek,* and finally as the editor of the Pulitzer winner news magazine *Newsday*. He co-authored the book *Philip Hoff: How Red Turned Blue in the Green Mountain State*. Tony did this presentation after his book came out in 2012, but it seems timely to rebroadcast it now.

To view the video above and participate in this month's program, click on this link: Screening Room. You can view the video at any time and do not have to wait until the official program time. However, if you want to view the video before the discussion, then start at 2:00 pm. The discussion will begin at 2:45 pm.

Below the video in the Screening Room, you will see a button inviting you to join the Zoom event.
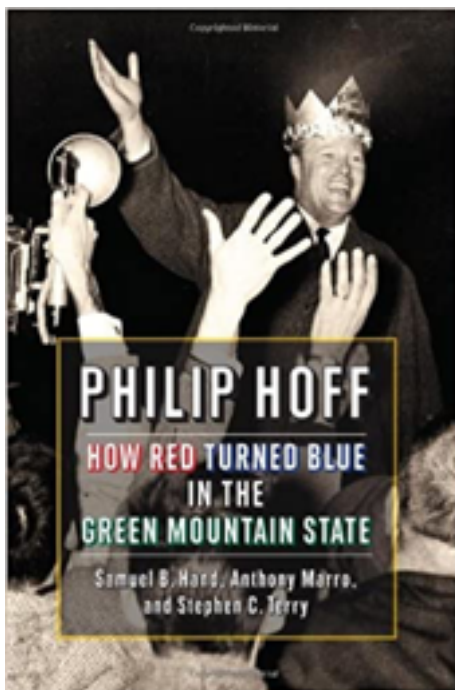
Also In This Issue

Looking "Across the Street" at Downtown Bennington's Rich History

by Jamie Franklin

Would you like to become a time traveler? All you have to do is take a stroll in downtown Bennington! Bennington Museum, in collaboration with the Better Bennington Corporation, the Town of Bennington, and GVH Studio, with support from a Restart Vermont Stimulus Grant from the state, have created a new exhibition featuring 20 historic photographs from the museum's collection mounted on lampposts throughout the downtown commercial district.

These historic photo panels are all located within one block of the intersection of Vermont Routes 7 and 9, commonly called the Four Corners, or Putnam Square for Henry Putnam's large hotel and Opera House. The images record major losses (the Bennington Opera House, which burned in 1959), as well as survivors (the Hotel Putnam, which is currently being rehabilitated). The images are strategically located so that you can literally look "across the street" and see what was there 100-150 years ago, as though you are standing in the photographers' shoes. Seen together, the images tell the story of downtown Bennington's development from its beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century, when the town's businesses moved down the hill from Old Bennington, through the first quarter if the 20th century, by which time the area had come to look much as it does today. Each photo panel has a QR code that when scanned with your cell phone takes you to the online exhibition, where you can read more about the evolution of the sites depicted through time and compare the historic images with photographs taken in November of 2020. The launch of this exhibition, which was installed over Thanksgiving weekend, aligns perfectly with the completion of phase one of the Putnam Block renovations providing visitors to town

and members of the community an opportunity to reflect on our town's progress. Below are a few of curator my favorite images and the stories that I and the museum's collections manager, Callie Raspuzzi, have been able to discover while pulling the exhibition together. You can see the full online exhibition at https://benningtonmuseum.org/across-the-street/

Whitney's Wonderland Theater

Whitney's "Wonderland" Theater, 1908
Glass plate negative, Wills T. White (1874-1956)
Bennington Museum Collection, Gift of the *Bennington Banner*

Bennington's first movie theater, Whitney's "Wonderland," opened in 1907, shortly before this picture was taken. Admission was 5 cents, approximately half an hour's wages for the average worker, and the shows changed every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The program on the day of this photograph, April 18, 1908, included the 1907 Military Tournament at Saumur, "Afraid of the Microbes," billed as "Very Funny & Exciting," "Rescued from an Eagle's Nest," "Tipperary," and a musical number by Mr. E. F. Stannard (baritone). The theater was closed by 1912 and the building was demolished. In the 1910s Benningtonians could attend movies at the

Free Library building, the modernized Bennington Opera House, and John B. Harte's new theater on the south side of Main Street.

Oatman's General Store

A. B. Oatman's General Store, c. 1862
Albumen print photograph, attributed to Calvin Dart (1809-1883)
Bennington Museum Collection, Gift of Mrs. Daisy Smith Bradford

Abraham B. Oatman opened this general store on the corner of North and Pleasant Streets around 1855. Today it is a rare, surviving example of the timber-framed commercial buildings that predominated in what is now downtown Bennington in the mid-1800s, when the commercial center of the town shifted down the hill from Old Bennington. Oatman's dealt in a diverse array of goods, ranging from candy, cigars, and alcohol (though the sale of liquor was prohibited in Vermont between 1852 and 1902) to accordions, dog collars, and fishing tackle. Can you see the fish sitting in the second story window, the creel hanging from the ceiling of the porch, or the large nearly life-sized figure to the left of the door? These were all visual symbols intended to tell passersby the store's specialties (figures of the type next to the door were commonly used during this period to market tobacco products). Oatman was also a taxidermist. He provided a "Green Mountain Eagle" and "Green Mountain Hedge-Hog" to P. T. Barnum's Museum in 1860 and advertised his services to stuff recently deceased pets. The building was one of Bennington village's longest running grocery stores, in operation as such for at least 100 years.

Nichols' Department Store

E.L. Nichols' Department Store Decorated for Bennington Battle Day, c. 1905
Glass plate negative, Lester H. Nichols (1880-1967)
Bennington Museum Collection, Gift of Lloyd Oppenheimer

The building in the center of this photograph was built in 1877 for Edwin Nichols' department store, which specialized in clothing, fabrics, and ornamental goods. The building was originally a two-story wood-framed structure in the Italianate style. This style was popular in the mid-1800s as the United States looked towards a romantic past for inspiration. The heavy eaves supported with substantial, decorative brackets and ornamented pediments over the windows harken back to the medieval Italian villas. The third story, with its two bay windows, was added in 1896 in a similar style.

Lester Nichols took up the popular hobby of photography as a teenager. After graduating from Brown University he went to work in his father's store, eventually taking over. This photograph was likely taken during one of the town's annual Bennington Battle Day celebrations, when stores and homes in town were festooned with patriotic bunting and flags. The building stands today largely as it did in the early 1900s, with the exception of a façade of Rochester green marble on the street level, which was added in 1949.

How Mount Anthony Got Its Name—Part 2

by Bob Tegart

In the October issue, I discussed the origin of Mount Anthony's name. Since there has been a great deal of discussion on the subject since then, I conducted additional research and uncovered more information in an attempt to solve the mystery.

My Continuing Search

An undated newspaper article in the Day Papers, a compilation of historic articles in the Bennington Museum Library, tells of a deed issued on the mountain in 1773. There is no reference to Mount Anthony in the deed. The parcel was on the northwest slope of the mountain, contained 30 acres, and was owned by Joseph Wickwire. The consideration was $25, a pig and two bushels of wheat. The deed begins:

> Commencing at a pile of eleven large stones, a little more than a stone's throw from the Hemlocks where the pigeons rousted last year…

Wickwire acknowledged the authority of the King and the deed was executed in Bennington, Albany County, in the Province of New York. (1)

My BHS article, which I posted on Facebook, resulted in several comments. One was that the Jesuits could not have built a shrine in the area in 1530 as their order was not founded until 1534. But as Spargo told us, there is "not a scintilla of evidence to support this romantic theory." (2)

However, I learned that there were French traders in the area at later dates, most likely accompanied by missionaries. Those priests could have seen the mountain from Hoosick and dubbed it Mount Anthony after St. Anthony of Padua.

Grace Greylock Nile's book, *The Hoosac Valley: Its Legends and Its History,* contains a detailed history of the activities of the Native Americans, Dutch Boers, French Walloons, French fur traders, missionaries, and other settlers in the area prior to the 18th Century.

She writes of the Legend of St. Croix. Jean Allefonsce, a fur trader, settled in the Albany area around 1540 and was

Bennnington Museum 1962.1.12
Postcard picture from Shadow Brook Farm

accompanied by a Jesuit Father. A group of fur traders and the missionary travelled down the Hoosick River to trade with the Hoosac natives. A Chief pointed out The Great Manitou's Swastika (Spirit's Cross) at the juncture of the Hoosick River. The Priest recognized it as "the ancient Egyptian Cross of Good Luck." He blessed the mingling waters and raised the Roman Catholic banner of St. Croix or the Holy Cross. The traders later built a palisaded fort there with a chapel, in the memory of St. Antoine of Padua. It was said that the ceremony was long remembered by the by the Hoosacs long after the traders departed. According to Niles, remains of the fort and chapel were visible to settlers in the early 18th century. She also relates tales of slaves sitting around the hearth during the long winter nights "recounting the Mahican legends of St. Croix." (3) Could the legend have been perpetuated over time? It appears that there was a constant population of both native Americans and settlers who could have done just that. Niles' date of 1540, however, seems a little early for events in the area. Perhaps this event happened a century later.

I also learned that the Abenaki called the mountain"Askaskwigek," meaning "green grass-covered mountain." (4) One correspondent asked if Mount Anthony could be a poor attempt at saying it or an anglicization of that word.

In further exploration, I found that this mystery has been discussed several times over the last 100 years. In 1917, the *Banner* published several articles in which citizens presented their theories. Dr. W.B. Walker of Pleasant Street believed the mountain was named by a priest, using the Grace Greylock Niles book *The Hoosac Valley Its Legends and Its History* as his source. Henry Clay Day, a compiler of the "Day Papers," clippings from the *Banner* which are stored at the Museum, took sharp issue with Walker and retold the story of the hermit Peter Anthony's death on the mountain.

In September of 1955, A.D. Hill of the Bennington Museum raised the issue in a letter to Henry Walbridge, a local businessman. Hill provided Walbridge with a summary of the 1917 controversy and stated that the Museum cannot vouch for the authenticity of the information and that they have found no record of Peter Anthony. He concluded with "The mere fact that it has been taught for 130 years seems like a plausible explanation." Notes on the bottom of the letter indicate that a map of the area had been found dated 1796 was labeled "Mount Anthony." A map with this date could support either theory. (5)

Still further research led me to an undated article in the *Banner* probably written at turn of 19th century that presents another version of the life and death of Peter Anthony.

> Old Ichabod Paddock, who once lived in the last house in the canyon of Mount Anthony… told this writer that Mount Anthony was named after a hunter and trapper named Peter Anthony, who lived in the woods adjacent to the canyon. Once a week or as often as he had money, Peter would walk over to Bennington or down to Hoosick and get a quart of whiskey (or maybe rum) and absorb it over the next day or so. One cold dark rainy night P. Anthony was found dead near the northwest corner of the Town of Pownal.

This version was a little different with no reference to him being a Quaker and his demise not necessarily from a fall while hunting. (6)

The controversy continued with another article in the *Banner* by William Dornbusch, who wrote on the subject on July 5, 1977. He summarizes the theories of Dr. Walker and Mr. Day and concludes that perhaps both are right.

> More than two centuries passed between the visit of the unknown Jesuit missionary and the Peter Anthony incident. With the area unoccupied by settlers until the coming of the Massachusetts colonists in 1761, the name Mount Anthony could have simply been lost in the mists of time. That a peter [sic] Anthony lived and died on the mountain in the 1780s is a remarkable but believable coincidence. (7)

Finally, in July of 1998 the historian Joseph Parks, with the assistance of Tyler Resch, Librarian for the Museum Library, wrote a column in the *Banner* summarizing the theories of 1917 and concluded, along with Day, that the most possible origin of the name was linked to the demise of Peter Anthony. (8)

So, there you have the competing theories on naming the Mountain. Several people have looked into the issue in the last century and found little definitive information. I thought I would bring our modern research and Internet skills to bear to take a deeper look and perhaps uncover more evidence.

Deeper Exploration

I found the book, *Pownal Gravestones in 1910,* by Theodore M. Atkinson, in the Museum Library. It

lists burial stones in all of the cemeteries in the town. I could find no Peter Anthony or Anthony family name listed.

To further investigate, I visited two cemeteries on the mountain one was on Houran Road and one on Skiparee Road. Both had stones dating back to the late 18th century. I did not find any graves bearing the name Anthony; however, many were illegible and there were several spots which could contain an unmarked burial.

Folklore suggests Anthony was a Quaker. Was he really a practicing Quaker? Did he belong to a community? If he did, he would have been buried, per Quaker beliefs, with a very simple or perhaps no headstone. Was there a Quaker community in the Bennington area?

Was he a real hermit who lived completely outside of the greater community? Was he a pauper? If so, he may have been placed in an unmarked grave.

There is no reference to a Peter Anthony in Ancestry.com – the ultimate source for genealogical information.

I also looked into the possibility that Susan B. Anthony is related to Peter Anthony. There was no reference to her coming to the Bennington area in any Vermont papers. She did have relatives in Burlington and Danby, so she could have come through Bennington on the way from North Adams, her family home. I was able to search her personal diaries and papers on line at Radcliff/Harvard University and found no reference to Peter Anthony. She was very interested in her family genealogy, and I did find her work on her family tree. There was no mention of a Peter Anthony in the family research. Perhaps, as it is suggested, she did some research in Bennington in the late 1840's. I am not sure where she would have researched this in that period. Peter could have been a shirttail relative, perhaps a great uncle but there was nothing to confirm this. (9)

So we move on trying to separate the myth from reality. Did Peter exist? If so, why is there no trace of him? Could the Mountain be named after St. Anthony when a Catholic missionary priest accompanying French fur traders looked upon the mountain from Hoosick and named it after the Saint?

Local history is full of myths and folklore which have been passed down for centuries, and as retold over time it evolves, with details added and changed. The early missionary priests, fur traders, Dutch Boers, French Walloons, and later Yankee settlers who populated our area have all passed down legends and myths regarding our surroundings. We just have to accept the naming of Mount Anthony and other place names as an inheritance from those inhabitants and as part of our history passed along by all those who worked to create our community.

Notes:

(1) Day Papers, Bennington Museum, Undated news clipping, c1900.
(2) John Spargo, Unpublished essays in Bennington Museum.
(3) Niles, Grace Greylock, *The Hoosac Valley Its Legends and Its History* GP Putnam, New York, 1912, pp. 14-17, 255, 477.
(4) Swift, Esther, Vermont Place Names, Stephen Greene Press, Brattleboro, 1977, p. 83.
(5) Bennington Museum Library, Vertical File "Mount Anthony."
(6) Day Papers, undated news clipping from 19th century.
(7) Bennington Banner July 5, 1977, hard copy in Bennington Museum Library, Vertical File "Mount Anthony."
(8) Bennington Banner July 17, 1998.
(9) Retrieved from schlesinger.radcliffe.harvard.edu.

The Pawlet Expedition, September 1977

by Don Miller

The Battle of Bennington on August 16, 1777, was a turning point in the Revolutionary War. General John Burgoyne surrendered two months later at Saratoga. The intervening Pawlet Expedition kept General Burgoyne hemmed with no place to turn.

On August 15, General Horatio Gates was posted near the junction of the Hudson and Mohawk rivers. He had arrived there after almost six weeks of constant retreat before British General John Burgoyne's forces in which seven posts had been abandoned beginning with Ticonderoga on 5–6 July.

After the Battle of Bennington, where Burgoyne failed to obtain supplies, he was forced to depend on what he could scavenge from the north.

General Gates and General Benjamin Lincoln held a meeting on September 1, at which the Pawlet expedition was planned. Gates had summoned Lincoln from Bennington where he was commanding the Massachusetts militia. It was decided that these militiamen should remain in Vermont where they could protect the eastern flank. Pawlet was about 35 miles north of Bennington and well to the rear of Burgoyne's main army.

Up until this time, General Burgoyne maintained several posts and outposts in his rear on which he depended for supplies and his line of communication. General Lincoln was given general orders to divide, divert and harass the enemy. General Lincoln was given broad discretion to determine the specific measures under the changing circumstances.

Under the added pressure from General Lincoln at Pawlet, General Burgoyne decided to

1) reduce his forces at Fort George and Skenesborough (present day Whitehall) to mere tokens;
2) evacuate Fort Edward and thereby cutting his communications with Ticonderoga;
3) begin his advance to Albany with only his accumulated supplies in tow.

Pawlet was an ideal location as the base for General Lincoln's operations because
1) The road through the mountains in the northwest corner of Pawlet gave access to points west and north.
2) The narrow pass created a strong defensive position that could be held by a few troops while allowing an easy exit for the forces holding it.

3) The road into Pawlet could carry wagon traffic only as far as Pawlet. A base of operations could not therefore be established beyond Pawlet.
4) Pawlet was approximately equidistant from Ticonderoga and Stillwater. Lincoln's troops could move from there with roughly equal speed to either place, as need might require.
5) The mere presence in Pawlet would compel Burgoyne to either (a) employ large escorts for his supply convoys, thereby reducing the strength of his main army for its advance on Albany, or (b) cut his communications and run grave risks of being surrounded and taken.
6) Lincoln's forces at Pawlet could protect the residents and their provisions while also restraining the Loyalists in the area.
7) Finally, in early September, there was still the possibility that Burgoyne might retreat —he had considered it—and forces at Pawlet could strike at his flank while Gates struck at his rear.

From Pawlet on September 18, 1777, General Lincoln detached three colonels, each with 500 men. Massachusetts militiamen under John Brown would try to recapture Fort Ticonderoga and Mount Independence to attack the bateaux at the north end of Lake George. Benjamin Woodbridge would march to Skenesborough to cover Brown's retreat. Vermont militiamen under Samuel Johnson were to divert the enemy at Mount Independence. General Lincoln himself, with about 600 remaining men, would reinforce Woodbridge.

Then, John Brown attacked the bateaux at the north end of Lake George before sailing south to attack General Burgoyne's outpost on Diamond Island. The small British-German contingent on the island successfully repelled the American attack, and Brown withdrew.

The American Expedition to Pawlet achieved its goals of containing and harassing the army of General John Burgoyne. Isolated with nowhere to go after the Battles of Stillwater, General Burgoyne surrendered his entire Army on October 17, 1777, at Saratoga. From Bennington to Saratoga, the Pawlet Expedition served as an important buffer, containing General Burgoyne forces along the Hudson.

New Book by Dick Smith

Dick Smith has done it again, but better than ever. Dick has written a new book about Vermont, *Vermont Firsta and Other Claims to Fame*, Arcadia Publishing, 2020. There are the expected items like Fort Ticonderoga, the constitution, statehood, and the banning of billboards, but he offers up another 64 unique happenings, many of which you will find surprising.

The first Boy Scout Troop, the first Rotary Club, the author of the 13 th amendment to the U.S.constitution, the first two Presidents of the Mormon Church, the first ordained Africa-American pastor, the first mail-order company, the oldest long-distance hiking trail, the last state to have a Target or Walmart — and much more. Each event is the subject of its own 1-5 page chapter, making an excellent companion to fill in gaps of time in the upcoming long, dark winter.

This is a perfect holiday gift and can be obtained at the Bennington Bookstore.

Family Tales, True Tales, or Questionable Tales?

Do you have any bits of history you can share with everyone? Please submit your historical items about Bennington for the next newsletter. It doesn't have to be long. One paragraph would do. Longer articles are also welcome. Please submit to Ray Rodrigues (raymond_rodrigues@msn.com).