



Bennington Historical Society News

“Dorothy Canfield Fisher in Arlington”

Presented by Bill Budde

11/18/20 at 2 pm in the Ada Paresky Educational Center
(masks and social distancing expected)

For many years Dorothy Canfield Fisher was Vermont’s best known woman of letters. A prolific writer with an international reputation, she was an ardent promoter of Vermont life and values.

Born to James and Flavia (Camp) Canfield in Kansas on February 17, 1879, Dorothy Canfield never lost her connection with her Canfield family heritage in Arlington, Vermont. This relationship to her heritage and the values of rural life was expressed through her personal life and writing.

This presentation will look at Fisher’s relationship with her neighbors through some of the small, daily events that took place there, and how they reflected her relationship with the world in many ways. She promoted the Montessori method of raising children and served on the Vermont State Board of Education. Fisher died in 1958 and is buried in Arlington.

Bill Budde is curator of the Russell Vermontiana Collection in Arlington, author of the history of Arlington—*Arlington, Vermont: Its First 250 Years*, historian for the 363-year-old Scots’ Charitable Society, and a professional genealogist. A flat lander from western New York, he lives in Arlington.



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How Mount Anthony Got Its Name

by Bob Tegart

Mount Anthony, rising to a height of 2300 feet, overlooks the Bennington Monument and is the backdrop to the Town of Bennington. The 23-room mansion of Edward Everett, a local entrepreneur, was built at its base in 1911. The Colgate family also built their home at the western base. The mountain, bordered by Route 9 and Monument Avenue, offers multiple hiking trails for the community to enjoy.

There are several theories regarding the origin of the name, Mount Anthony. On September 25, 1917, Frank E. Howe, editor of the *Bennington Banner*, posed the question, “Who knows how Mount Anthony got its name?...The rank and file do not seem to know.” (1) John Spargo, founder of the Bennington Museum and first director of the Bennington Museum, and other local historians over the years have offered various explanations for its name.

Some historians believe it was named after General Anthony Wayne, a revolutionary war general. However, in researching Wayne, Spargo could not find that he had any connection with the area.



In Spargo’s unpublished writings he also looks at the speculation that it was named after Anthony Haswell, who lived in Old Bennington for a short time and began the *Vermont Gazette* there in 1783. But this does not hold since the mountain had its name before he was well-known. (2)

Another hypothesis put forward was that it was named after St. Anthony of Padua. In response to the *Banner*’s request for information, Dr. W.B. Walker of Pleasant Street offered the explanation that it was named after Saint Anthony. His theory went as follows. French traders travelling through the area from Canada stopped at the junction of the Hoosick and Walloomsac Rivers. They were accompanied by a Jesuit priest, Father Jean Alfonses. At the junction “the big medicine man of the Haasacs pointed out to him the sacred swastika or sign warding off evil forces by the junction of the two rivers.” In 1530 a small fort was built there and a shrine was erected to St Anthony of

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Padua. He looked at the mountain protecting the shrine and called it Mount Saint Anthony. (3) Saint Anthony was a great orator and is known as the patron saint for lost articles and is credited with many miracles in finding lost people. Later settlers, having no use for saints, shortened the name to Mount Anthony. On November 27 another article appeared in the Banner titled “Name of Mount Anthony due to Tragedy, Traced to Death of an early Pioneer.” H.A. Day presented another version stating that Mr. Walker’s explanation is “far out of line with generally accepted facts.” (4) Spargo, writing in the late 1940’s, echoed the same thoughts when he wrote that there is “not a scintilla of evidence to support this romantic theory.” (5)

Day stated without hesitation that “it has always been understood that the mountain was named after Peter Anthony.” Peter Anthony was a hermit who it is said to have lived alone and made his home on the western slope of the mountain. According to the legend that Spargo and Day recorded, he was a Quaker and lived a hermit-like existence in a hut on the mountain. He went out hunting one March day in 1788, slipped from a rock ledge, and fell, breaking both of his legs. He then died of either shock or starvation. His body was found many days later, mangled, and frozen stiff. It seemed to make a profound impression on the local inhabitants, and since the mountain had no formal name at the time, it became known as Mount Anthony. Day accredited his theory to authorities in the community who could verify the facts, including Hiland Hall, Henry Hall, George Robinson and Hiram Waters, although these verifications would have been handed down from the prior generation.

A search of Ancestry.com provided information on a Peter Anthony who served in the 1st New York Regiment from 1781 – 1783 and was at Saratoga in June of 1781. However, no reference to his life, death or burial could be found.

It is said Peter Anthony was related to Susan B. Anthony who was born in Adams, Massachusetts, and came to Bennington around 1855 to research her family history. There is no record of her coming to Bennington. (6) The Anthony family moved to New York State in the 1840s, and she graduated from the Canajoharie Academy in 1849, so she would not have reached celebrity level by this time and could have passed unnoticed.

All of these fascinating theories are merely folklore and legend and have no solid documentation. And so further research continues. Perhaps we will never know for certain how it got its name and the mountain will continue to look down on Bennington with its secret.

Notes

(1) *Bennington Banner* September 25, 1917

(2) John Spargo, Unpublished essays in Bennington Museum

(3) *Bennington Banner* September 27, 1917

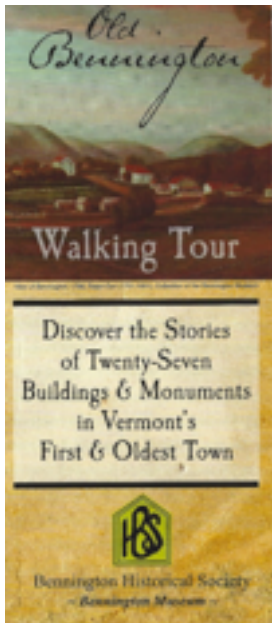
(4) *Bennington Banner* November 27, 1917

(5) Spargo, Notes.

Walking Tour of Old Bennington

by Bob Tegart

The Bennington Historical Society has published a Walking Tour Brochure of Old Bennington. With it you can discover the stories of twenty-seven buildings and monuments in Old Bennington, Vermont's oldest chartered town.



The brochure was published in August, just in time for Battle Day. The idea was initiated and organized by Bob Tegart. After numerous reviews and design work by Jonah Spivak, the brochure was distributed to several businesses around Bennington, including the Chamber, Better Bennington Corporation, The Bennington Monument, and the Bennington Museum. QR readers to follow the tour on your phone are also in place on historical markers on Monument Avenue, on the Monument, and at the Museum.

Group Tours can be provided. If interested, please contact the Historical Society.

Battle Day Walk

Forty copies of the brochure were handed out to the more than 60 people who showed up for a Guided Walk on Battle Day, led by Jane Radocchia. Scheduled for 45 minutes, the group reached the Catamount Tavern at the one-hour mark. At that point, most of the crowd elected to disperse, but Jane offered to continue the tour on the Green in front of the Old First Church. Approximately half of the people took her up on the offer. The tour concluded after an hour and a half.

Many kept track of where they were by reference to the map in the brochure. Neighbor Betsey Woods joined the group, pointing out her house formerly owned by Hope Graves. Janice Lerrigo noted with surprise that John Robinson had been elected Governor in 1853 as a Democrat. It would be the last Democrat elected Governor of Vermont until Phil Hoff in 1953.

Old First Church docents have commented that they often see people walking up and down Monument Avenue, map in hand, stopping along the way to observe the points of history. Several docents noted that the brochure was beautifully done, better than all previous versions.

Dorothy Canfield Fisher's Children's Book Award

by Don Miller, President, Bennington Historical Society

The State removed Dorothy Canfield Fisher's name from a prestigious Children's Book Award beginning in 2020, with the official, but limited explanation that the name was no longer relevant to today's young people. Since 1957, the State has presented this Award annually to one new American children's book selected by the vote of Vermont schoolchildren. The Award has been temporarily renamed the "Vermont Middle-Grade Book Award".

The controversy began when Abenaki educator Judy Dow criticized Fisher's ties with the Vermont Commission on Country Life, which promoted "better breeding," a phrase that is associated with eugenics. Dow also accused Fisher of disparaging American Indians and French Canadians in some of her writings. Others argued that evidence of Fisher's connections to eugenics were nonexistent or inconclusive.

Fisher was an educational reformer and social activist, who strongly supported women's rights and racial equality. Eleanor Roosevelt called her one of the ten most influential women in the United States. She was influential in attracting artists and authors to Bennington County and encouraging their works. She should not be blamed for every thought that these artists and authors ever had. Indeed, as change occurs as it surely should, not every new idea will stand the test of time. Some ideas, once explored, will be rejected and form the foundation upon which a new, better direction springs. Our society steadily improves through trial and error.

With over 40 books to her credit, about half fiction and half nonfiction, Fisher was one of the best-selling American authors in the early decades of the twentieth century. Moreover, she brought the Montessori method of child-rearing to the U.S., and she presided over the country's first adult education program. She shaped literary tastes by serving as a member of the Book of the Month Club selection committee from 1925 to 1951.

If Dorothy Canfield Fisher is no longer relevant to young people, then shame on us for not doing our job.

Bennington Historical Society

A volunteer-operated program of the Bennington Museum

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