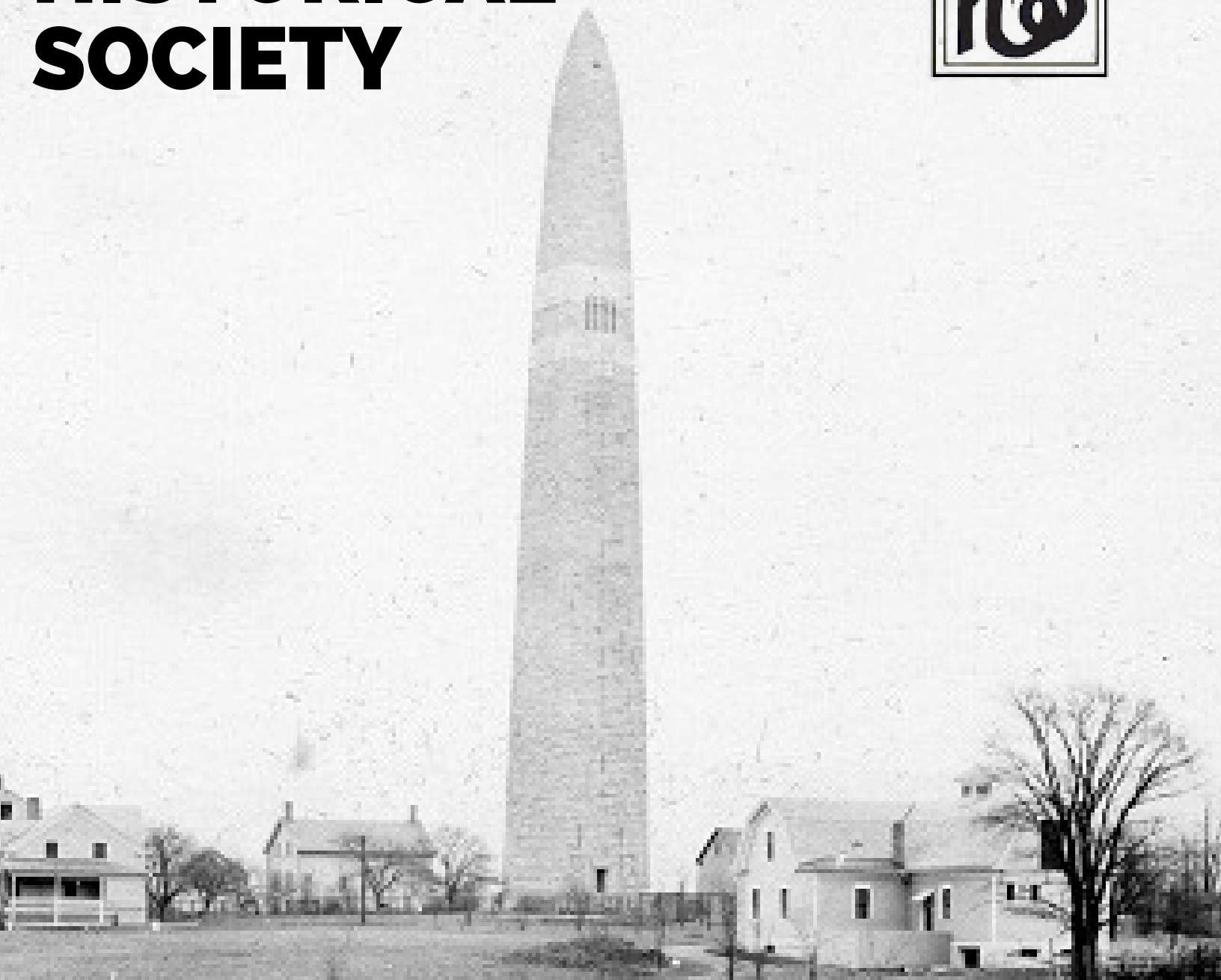


BENNINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2022 ISSUE

**Bennington
museum**

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BOB TEGART

Dear Friends,

The Bennington Historical Society, working with the Museum staff, has taken on the administration of the Regional History Room, formerly the Museum Research Library. We have a small staff of volunteers who are busy organizing the collection and handling the many inquiries that we receive both via email and from walk-ins. This summer, an intern catalogued our collection of maps. Great progress has been made.

We have received more than 50 inquiries from people throughout the United States. The requests range from genealogical questions to house dating, to questions on local events. We have had descendants from the Walbridge, Robinson, Hendryx, Pfister and Breckenridge families asking for information on their ancestor's life and activities. In answering these questions, we have reached out to several other historical societies for assistance.

Several Green Mountain Boy and Battle of Bennington veteran descendants have asked for their ancestors' military records. One person came in to ask about her relative who was a Green Mountain Boy. Within minutes we provided her with his service record and information on the family. She was overjoyed and expressed her appreciation with a nice donation.

Some research doesn't always support family folklore. Isiah Hendryx was thought to be a veteran of the battle of Bennington. We found that he did fight in the war, but did not participate in the battle. A service card that we located added more confusion. Possibly just a paperwork mix-up!

Several people have asked about the history of their homes or businesses. Copies of maps, including the Sanborn Maps, were used to answer their questions. For example, using town directories, maps, and newspaper articles, we were able to trace the various locations of the Bennington Bookstore, founded in 1928, for a prior owner.

Another inquiry was presented by an individual who attended the recent "Voices from the Grave" presentation at the Old Burying ground. She wanted to know who the surgeon was that Mary Dewey gave her horse to so he could ride on the battlefield. After reviewing the literature on the event and contacting a few authorities, we were unable to document who he was or if the event actually happened. We suspect it was just a legend passed down through the generations. Folklore is a big part of local history, and while this story is unverifiable, it presents a view of the mindset and culture of the time.

These are just a few of the adventures we have had. Stop into the History Room on any Monday, Thursday, or Friday afternoon and see what's going on. If it looks interesting to you, we are always looking for volunteers to join in!

Warmly,

Bob

FROM THE REGIONAL HISTORY ROOM

DAVID PILACHOWSKI

Bennington Museum's Regional History Room, aka the Museum Library, has been a busy place since January with volunteers taking on several projects. The Regional History Room is open Monday, Thursday, and Friday from 1-4 PM. We plan to include a short entry about the Room and its resources in each issue of the B.H.S. Newsletter. Here are some highlights of our current services and projects:

Research Assistance: Robert Tegart leads the team of volunteers in responding to in-person, email, and phone inquiries. We have worked with over 200 researchers since April. Remote inquiries are best submitted via email: library@benningtonmuseum.org

Research File Update: Jane Moriarty is finishing phase one of a major two phase reorganization of this important resource. Once completed, the online listing of Research Files contents and the accompanying Index will be updated and available through the Collection/Research tab of the Museum's website.

Genealogy Research Files: Avis Hayden and Robert Tegart are literally in the midst of combining the family and correspondence files to facilitate personal research.

Cataloging the Book Collection: The press of other work in previous years has meant that over 1,600 volumes have not been included in the museum's PastPerfect online catalog. With those books now added to the catalog, some of the previous catalogued books--and particularly the works about Vermont state, county, and town histories, census, and vital records--will receive new call numbers so that all of the Vermont volumes will be in actual call number order.

Walloomsac Review: The complete text of all issues of the Review were added to the website earlier this year and are linked to the Collection/Research tab of the Museum's website. John Kennedy has already updated the Walloomsac Review index from volumes 1-25, which are now also available online. Indexing of the complete 27 volumes of the publication should be available by the end of December.

Please stop in and visit the Regional History Room and/or email your inquiries. We look forward to working with you!

FROM PRESIDENT CALVIN COOLIDGE TO YOU

December 25, 1927.

"To the American People:

Christmas is not a time or a season but a state of mind. To cherish peace and good will, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas. If we think on these things, there will be born in us a Savior and over us will shine a star sending its gleam of hope to the world.

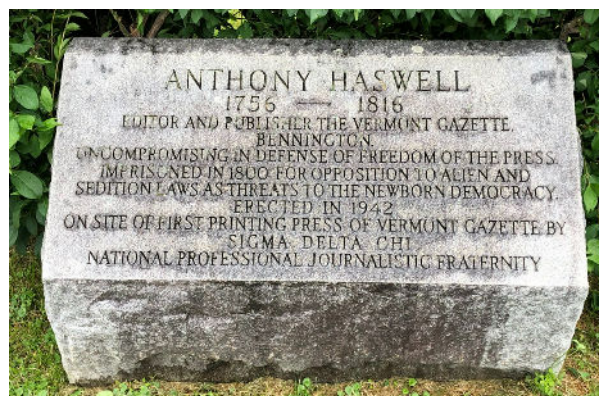
Calvin Coolidge"

This message, handwritten on White House notepaper and dated Dec. 25, was issued far enough in advance to let enterprising American newspapers reproduce it in facsimile on their front pages on the proper day.

BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS: ANTHONY HASWELL MEMORIAL

BILL MORGAN

Hidden behind a bush and often overlooked by visitors to the Bennington Battle Monument is a small granite marker which commemorates the life of Anthony Haswell. It is a few feet east of the monument and is engraved with the following inscription: "Anthony Haswell 1756-1816. Editor and publisher the Vermont Gazette Bennington. Uncompromising in defense of freedom of the press. Imprisoned in 1800 for opposition to Alien and Sedition Laws as threats to the newborn democracy. Erected in 1942. On site of first printing press of Vermont Gazette by Sigma Delta Chi. National Professional Journalistic Fraternity."



It was decided at the 1940 convention of the Sigma Delta Chi fraternity in Des Moines, Iowa, that markers should be erected to honor important newspapermen like Haswell, and as a result the retiring president of the society, Elmo Scott Watson, was sent to Bennington to scout for a location. Early in 1941 he met with John Spargo, the museum's director, and together they decided to place the marker close to the location of Haswell's printing office and home. It was the very first historic site to be named by that professional organization, which is now called The Society of Professional Journalists. Over one hundred sites have been commemorated since Haswell's marker was unveiled.

Anthony Haswell was born in Portsmouth, England, on April 6, 1756. As a boy he came to Massachusetts with his father and brother late in 1769 or early 1770 and was apprenticed first to a potter and later to a well-known printer by the name of Isaiah Thomas. It is believed that young Anthony witnessed both the Boston Massacre and the Boston Tea Party while he was living in that city. After working as a journeyman printer in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, he settled permanently in Bennington in the spring of 1783. He came at the invitation of a committee of the Vermont legislature to establish a much-needed printing office and a newspaper. To supplement his income, they also offered him the position of Postmaster General of Vermont, a position he held until Vermont became a state in 1791.

Haswell was a staunch member of the Democratic-Republican Party and stood in opposition to many of the policies of President John Adams and his Federalist Party. On July 14, 1798, Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts which Haswell strongly opposed. In part these laws made it illegal to criticize government officials. The first person to be put on trial under these Acts was a fellow Democratic-Republican named Matthew Lyon, who, at the time, was Vermont's only congressman. Lyon had written an article accusing the Adams administration of "ridiculous pomp, foolish adulation, and selfish avarice" for which he was fined \$1,000 and sentenced to four months in jail. In defense of Lyon, Haswell published an article intended to raise money to pay Lyon's fine. The article went on to say that Lyon's jailers exercised "usurped powers". For using those words Haswell was tried and found guilty of seditious libel and sentenced to two months in jail with a \$200 fine, a debt which proved to be a heavy burden to him. Most of his prison term was spent in the Bennington jail, from which he was released on July 9, 1800. Most of the townspeople supported Haswell, and they purposely delayed the celebration of the Fourth of July until Haswell was released, his own "Independence Day." 2,000 people celebrated his freedom by firing a cannon and singing "Yankee Doodle Dandy" while marching through the streets. The Alien and Sedition Acts were very unpopular throughout the country and helped to defeat Adams in the next election. The Acts themselves were allowed to expire in March 1801, the same month that Adams left

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BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS

CONT.

office. For the rest of his life, Haswell was celebrated as one of the early martyrs in the defense of the freedom of the press in America. Congress eventually returned his fine money to his family in 1844, long after his death.

During his career in Bennington, Haswell, along with help from David Russell, founded and published the *Vermont Gazette*, the state's first successful newspaper. One small newspaper in the Vermont town of Westminster had already failed by June 5, 1783, when the first issue of the *Gazette* was printed. Haswell's press also printed numerous books and pamphlets, including Ethan Allen's religious tract, *Reason, the Only Oracle of Man: Or, A Compendious System of Natural Religion* and a reprint of one of Thomas Paine's most important books, *The Rights of Man*. Haswell even composed and published dozens of his own ballads and poems from his press in Bennington. Although it is often mentioned, Haswell and Russell did not build the state's first paper mill to supply the needs of their printing company. The honor for the first paper company goes to Joseph Hinsdill, who set up a mill in 1786 near today's Paper Mill Covered Bridge along with two other men, one of whom was named Russell.

At first the Haswell family lived in a house that once stood near the southwest corner of Monument Avenue and Walloomsac Road. On Nov. 4, 1804, it burned to the ground along with a large inventory of books and pamphlets that he had stored there. In the summer of 1805, Haswell decided to build a house in the same part of town, northeast of the present Battle Monument. He purchased the timbers of the Old First Meeting House which was being torn down at the time and used the construction materials for his new house. Later the same house was renovated by Benjamin R. Sears, and that, in turn, was relocated to make way for the Bennington Battle Monument. The house then became the home of Thomas Vail until it too burnt down. Anthony Haswell had 19 children, two of whom were adopted. He died at the age of 60 on May 26, 1816, and is buried in the Old Bennington cemetery along with his first and second wives, Lydia and Betsey. His gravestone states: "Anthony Haswell, a patriot of the Revolution. Printer and founder of the *Vermont Gazette*, 1783. A sufferer in the cause of freedom under the Sedition Act of 1798. Died May 22, 1816, aged 60."

Over the years the *Vermont Gazette* offices occupied different sites near the current battle monument including the kitchen cellar space of the first house that burnt down. Always short on money, Haswell had to move the *Gazette* and printing office several times over the years, including once to a small out-building and then the second floor of the nearby Darius Clark house, which was torn down in 1909. Clark was also to become a printer in Bennington and married Haswell's daughter, Susan.

The dedication of the memorial was planned to be a grand celebration. The officers of the Sigma Delta Chi fraternity hoped that Vice-President Henry Wallace would speak and that many of the country's leading editors and journalists would attend. The marker was set in place but the advent of World War II dashed all their plans for a large gathering. Restrictions on non-essential motor travel were implemented in order to conserve fuel for the war effort, and since the prosecution of the war overshadowed everything else, the unveiling was postponed indefinitely.

The placement of the marker near the Battle Monument prompted the editors of the Bennington Banner to research the history of their founder. In a 1943 article about Haswell, the Banner's editor wrote: "Recently we have seen a number of the books he printed and cannot understand what he did it for. No wonder they put him in jail... [maybe] for printing books so dry and dull that nobody would buy or read them." For some reason they found it difficult to acknowledge Anthony Haswell's importance as a champion of a free press and the legacy he left for them.

THE HISTORY OF THE WALLOOMSAC INN

DON MILLER

The history of the Walloomsac Inn is rooted in the history of Bennington itself. Samuel Robinson left Hardwick, Massachusetts in 1761 to establish a new faith community that would reflect the beliefs of the New Light Separatists. Jedidiah Dewey was recruited in 1763 to be the minister and spiritual leader of this Puritan church.

Samuels' son Moses sold Jedidiah's son Elijah the land just west of the meeting house in 1771. On this site, Elijah built a home which he also operated as a public house. In small towns like Bennington these public houses not only housed travelers, but also served as important meeting places. Government, court, and social functions were carried out in public taverns. Elijah was a Captain in the militia at the Battle of Bennington. After the Battle, his tavern housed some of the prisoners, who were too numerous to be held in the meeting house.

Dewey's tavern provided comfort to important travelers, including Thomas Jefferson and James Madison in 1791. Jefferson and Madison were Republicans visiting the area in search of support to oppose the Federalist John Adams for the Presidency in 1796.

Bennington was strongly sympathetic to the Republicans. Adams won, but Jefferson reversed the results in 1800. When Elijah died in 1818, William Henry purchased the tavern for his daughter Maria and set up her husband James Hicks as the proprietor. The Hicks family was in the stagecoach business, and the tavern became a popular stop along the stagecoach line under the name Hicks' Tavern. Travel from the Hicks' Tavern to New York took four full days, through Pownal, Pittsfield, Danbury, and White Plains. The fare was nine dollars. With the stagecoach business driving the success, Hicks enlarged the building in 1823, adding the third floor and a ballroom on the second floor. A two story, Federal style portico was added to the facade at that time as well.

With the advent of the railroad, the stagecoach business lost its steam. George Wadsworth Robinson purchased the Inn in 1848 from James Hicks. Robinson had been born in Bennington and had moved to New York City where he had been employed as a clerk. Robinson returned to Bennington in 1843 to take charge of General David Robinson's estate. Robinson changed the name to "Walloomsack House" and leased the business to a series of proprietors.

Robinson tried to attract visitors to the Bennington by building observatory towers on Mount Anthony. Unfortunately, the towers frequently collapsed due to the high winds on the mountain and never lived up to expectations. Robinson increased his own financial stress when he built what is now the middle addition to the building around 1860. In 1865 his creditors forced him to sell the Inn. Enter another Robinson. Mary Sanford Robinson purchased the property and continued to take advantage of the booming summer tourist business.

There were other opportunities and challenges. With the coming of the Industrial Age, mills sprang up along the two-mile stretch of the Walloomsac River down the hill. The population growth and commercial success was a boon to the flats on the eastern end of town.



ELIJAH DEWEY, 1798
RALPH EARL (1751-1801)
BENNINGTON MUSEUM COLLECTION,
PURCHASED FOR THE MUSEUM BY
PUBLIC SUBSCRIPTION, A62

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THE HISTORY OF THE WALLOOMSAC INN

CONT.

With nearly three dozen mills by the 1890s, Bennington became a world leader in manufacturing. Mill owners and businessmen built beautiful Victorian and Edwardian homes near the mills. Bennington Centre was left behind. When the courthouse across the green from the Inn burned down in 1868, the town built the new courthouse down the hill, where the economy of the future beckoned. Bennington Centre instead focused on drawing wealthy industrialists from Troy and New York City for the summer months, advertising the fresh Vermont climate and the quaint, historic village.

The dedication of the Battle Monument in 1891 drew thousands, including President Benjamin Harrison and a young Calvin Coolidge. John McCullough, the future Governor, hosted the President and Keynote speaker at a dinner at the Park McCullough House in North Bennington. Mary Robinson sold the Inn to her brother Samuel Sanford in 1888 and he in turn leased the business to Walter Hull Berry, Sr. and his sister Allie Berry in 1891. round this time the building became known by its current moniker, the Walloomsac Inn. Berry purchased the Inn in 1896 and made substantial improvements



WALTER BERRY ON THE PORCH OF
THE WALLOOMSAC INN, CA. 1910
FREDERICK D. BURT (1881-1966)
BENNINGTON MUSEUM
COLLECTION, 2007.112.6

in every aspect of the house. Walter Berry became an influential leader in the community, serving as one of the trustees of Bennington Centre (residents later changed the name to Village of Old Bennington). Berry helped introduce a sewer system into the village in 1901, much to the advantage of his business.

In the early 1900s, the house was supplied with running water which came from local springs, fed from the nearby Green Mountains. Besides being refreshing and invigorating, this water was said to contain many healing qualities. The springs continue to flow strongly today with the town selling thousands of gallons daily.

Walter Berry guided the Inn through the Gilded Age and into the Roaring '20s. He added a large three-and-a-half story addition to the rear of the building. The Inn was equipped with long-distance telephone as well as many other important and expected conveniences. He claimed to serve the best produce and products available from local farms and markets, all cooked in an appetizing manner, at the table of the Walloomsac Inn. All the rooms were neatly and comfortably furnished and were rented singly or ensuite. The house had accommodations for one hundred guests. Their season was from June to November.

The Great Depression and the Second World War brought an end to the prosperity. As late as 1948, Samuel Chamberlain described Old Bennington as one of favorite Six New England Villages. The Inn passed to Walter Berry, Jr. and then his wife Martha. The local economy did not rebound after World War II. The Inn finally closed in 1986, and since then the building has been the private home to members of the Berry family.

HELP US ADD TO OUR COLLECTION

DONATE A BOOK TO OUR REGIONAL HISTORY ROOM

Vermont Almanac: Stories from & for the Land. Corinth VT: For the Land Publishing, volumes 1 and 2. \$30 each. [I really thought I had seen a copy of volume 1 in the RHR but may be mistaken as it doesn't appear in PP.]

Jacob, Piers Anthony and Engeman, Teresa Jacob. **Hilltop Farm: Journals and Correspondence from a Rural Vermont Experiment in Subsistence Living, 1941-1945.** Kennett Square, PA: The Write Place, 2021. 453 pages. Paperback. \$24.95.

Waterbury Historical Society. **A New Century in Waterbury, Vermont: Stories of Resilience, Growth & Community.** Charleston, S.C.: History Press, 2022 286 pp. \$23.99. Focuses on the impact and recovery from Tropical Storm Irene.

Greg Guma. **Restless Spirits & Popular Movements: A Vermont History.** Burlington, VT, Center for Research on Vermont, University of Vermont. White River Press, 2021. 286 pages. Paperback, \$22

Expanded by 100 pages compared to the 2017 digital book Green Mountain Politics: Restless Spirits, Popular Movements.

Beck, Jane C. and Andy Kolovos, editors. **Turner Family Stories: From Enslavement in Virginia to Freedom in Vermont. Middlebury, VT: Vermont** Folklore Center, 2021. 115 pages. \$15.95 (paper)

Clifford, Cameron. **Town Founders: Officials, Entrepreneurs, and Settlers in Early New Hampshire and Vermont, 1720-1810.** West Hartford, VT: The Clifford Archive, 2019. 252 pages. \$20. **Rave review by Paul S. Gillies** in Vermont History, 88, No. 1 Winter/Spring 2020. [listed as unavailable in Amazon; not found in Better World Books]

BENNINGTON MUSEUM IS CLOSED FOR THE MONTHS OF JANUARY, FEBRUARY, AND MARCH, BUT THE REGIONAL HISTORY ROOM IS ACCESSIBLE FREE OF CHARGE ON MONDAYS, THURSDAYS, & FRIDAYS 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!

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

Newsletter Editor: Ray Rodrigues

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