

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BOB TEGART

Dear Friends,

As we come out of the Winter season into the “Mud season,” we continue to work in the Regional History Room. Our volunteer corps is working diligently to catalog and organize the contents of the library. We look forward to a reopening in April – more news to follow!

We look forward to another exciting year of programs starting with “Requiem - The Life & Death of Mary Mabel Rogers” on March 19.

Vance Aubrey Savage has been writing screenplays for twenty years. Working in the entertainment industry, Vance released a number of independent albums, and was a DJ in the Albany, NY area. He also enjoyed writing for Vermont & Stratton Magazine. In 2017 Vance began to speak professionally concerning his great aunt, Mary Rogers who, in 1905, became the last woman to be executed in Vermont.



Steve Perkins
Past Curator and Director
of Bennington Museum

On April 16th Steve Perkins past curator and director of Bennington Museum will present “A Loose Confederation of Villages: A Historical View of Vermont Democracy”.

Originally developed for UVM Extension's town officer training program, this talk will explore the formation and implementation of Vermont's democracy from independent republic to the 21st century. What was the “mountain rule”? What was the role of the “overseer of the poor”? When did paper ballots start to supplant the voice vote? How did Vermont navigate as a single-party state for 100 years? From comical to serious, Vermont's history forms our political life today.

A lifelong Vermonter, Steve Perkins' professional career has led him on a path of preserving and celebrating Vermont's unique history and iconic landscape. Steve lives in his family's 1805 farmhouse in northern Vermont and is inspired by the landscape and history surrounding him each day.

After undergraduate studies in historic preservation, art history, and theater, Steve finished his studies with a degree in Early American Material Culture from the Winterthur Program of University of Delaware. After brief stints at Hampton National Historic Site and Winterthur Museum, Steve returned to Vermont with his wife Galen and took up residency in Bennington.

Steve served as the curator and then director of the Bennington Museum. Since 2015, Steve has been the executive director of the Vermont Historical Society. Besides his job, two active teenagers, ongoing repairs to a very old house, and maintaining a farm keep him very busy.

In addition to preparing for these upcoming programs, we are working on the 250th Anniversary of the founding of Vermont and some other exciting items. We will keep you posted!

Warmly,
Bob

FROM THE REGIONAL HISTORY ROOM

DAVID PILACHOWSKI

Bennington Museum's Regional History Room (RHR), aka the Museum Library, has been a busy place since January with volunteers taking on several projects. In April, when the Museum re-opens after winter break, the Regional History Room will be accessible for free to the public Monday, Thursday, and Friday from 1-4pm. We plan to include a short entry about the RHR and its resources in each issue of the BHS 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 and will be answered beginning in April in the order in which they were received.

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.

We look forward to working with you!

MANY TRAILS OF THE STOCKBRIDGE MUNSEE MOHICANS: THE HISTORY OF THE MOHICAN PEOPLE OF THIS REGION

On December 18, 2022, Bonney Hartley, the Tribal Historic Preservation Manager, helped us understand the recent history of the Munsee Mohicans.

In 1856, a treaty established the Stockbridge Munsee community in Wisconsin, but by 1934 only about 100 acres remained, the rest having been sold to pay taxes. Today their area is about 24,000 acres, with approximately 1,800 people enrolled as members. Their goals include protecting cultural sites and repatriating artifacts from their past, as well as identifying cultural sites. One such site is Monument Mountain in Great Barrington, Mass.

For more information, go to: www.nativeamericantrail.org and look for the Stockbridge walking tour. On Facebook, look at Stockbridge Munsee Cultural Affairs.

--Ray Rodrigues

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

All programs take place Sundays at 2pm in the Bennington Museum's Ada Paresky Education Center

March 19

Requiem – The Life and Death of Mary Mabel Rogers, with Vance Savage. On December 8, 1905, 19 year old Mary Mabel Rogers was executed for the murder of her husband. Her story starts with an unhappy childhood and young marriage, and includes the death of her infant child, love affairs and life insurance. Vance Aubrey Savage, the great-nephew of Mary Rogers, shares the tale of the last woman to be executed in Vermont during this Historical Society presentation.



MARY, MARCUS AND THEIR BABY

April 16

A Loose Confederation of Villages: A Historical View of Vermont Democracy, with Steve Perkins. Originally developed for UVM Extension's town officer training program, this talk will explore the formation and implementation of Vermont's democracy from independent republic to the 21st century.

May 21

Vermont's Highways, with Paul Searls. Paul Searls is professor of history at Northern Vermont University. He will discuss how the debate over what to do with southwestern Vermont's major roads between the 1950s and the 1990s is, in many ways, a metaphor for the transition Vermont as a whole underwent in those decades.



June 25

Lucy Prince of Sunderland, with Avis Hayden. Lucy Prince is best known as America's first African-American poet. This presentation will cover Lucy's years in Sunderland, her fight to keep her land, and stories about her children and grandchildren. Avis Hayden has published five research articles and has presented at the New England Historical and Genealogical Conference. She volunteers at the Bennington Museum Research Library and with the Russell Collection of Vermontiana.

BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS:

CAPT. SAMUEL ROBINSON MARKER

BILL MORGAN

In the middle of the white fence just north of the old brick Academy Building on Monument Avenue is an historical marker that is often overlooked. For nearly a century a four foot tall granite block with a bronze tablet has commemorated the site of Captain Samuel Robinson's first log cabin. In the spring of 1761 Capt. Robinson led a group of settlers from Hardwick, MA, to land he had purchased in Bennington, then a part of the New Hampshire Grants. He divided the land and resold sections to the settlers. Those who originally came here were all part of a Congregationalist group called the "New Lights." Like Robinson himself they cleared the land and built homes throughout the area. As the self-appointed leader of the group, Capt. Robinson's cabin was probably one of the first to be built. The following winter he was officially made the town moderator at the first proprietors' meeting held on Feb. 11, 1762. A few years later when the time came for the people of Bennington to plead their case over land disputes between New York and New Hampshire, the townspeople sent Robinson to London to petition the King. Unfortunately, Samuel Robinson died in London in 1767 while he was on that mission and was buried there. Although his body was interred in England, his family placed a cenotaph for him in the Old Bennington Cemetery where it still stands today.

One story centered around this cabin tells of the courage of Samuel's wife Marcy Leonard Robinson. After Samuel had left for England, Marcy and three of their eleven children; David, Jonathan, and Anna, were in the house when a pack of wolves attacked, ferociously trying to get inside. Bravely, Marcy picked up the red-hot firebrands from the open hearth and opening the door, charged the wolves. They fled off into the forest, never to return, or so the story goes. As a devoutly religious woman she was also the host for prayer-meetings held every Sunday at noon in their cabin in the early days before the first meeting house could be built.

In 1910, the Bennington Battle Monument and Historical Association decided to erect markers for five historic sites "to preserve their identity for future generations." They were inspired by the work of George W. Robinson who had called their attention to the sites and the association appointed Dr. Henry C. Day, Elijah Dewey, and John V.D.S. Merrill to



coordinate the project. Dr. Day wrote the inscriptions for the markers. The first location to be designated was on the site where Capt. Robinson first camped as a soldier during the French and Indian War. That marker was placed on the west side of a bridge that once spanned the Roaring Branch below the current Vermont Soldiers' Home. The inscription read, "Capt. Samuel Robinson, who commanded a company in the French and Indian War, encamped with a small body of soldiers on this spot in 1756 About five years later he became the pioneer settler of Bennington." By 1923 the markers had become badly weathered and a new attempt was made to permanently remember the early settlement. A descendant of Capt. Robinson, Samuel L. Robinson, stepped in to provide the funds necessary to honor his founding ancestor and suggested that the appropriate place for the memorial would be on the site of his first log cabin. On Aug. 16, 1923, the current monument was dedicated with U.S. Senator Frank L. Greene delivering the keynote speech.

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BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS

CONT.

On the tablet beneath an artist's rendering of a log cabin is an inscription that reads: "Near this spot in 1761 Captain Samuel Robinson the pioneer settler of Bennington, the first magistrate in what is now Vermont, and during his lifetime, the acknowledged leader of the settlers of the town built his first log cabin. Captain Robinson was born in 1705, at Cambridge, Mass. came to Bennington in 1761 after much service in the frontier wars. He was at the head of his company in the Battle of Lake George. He died in London, England, October 27, 1767, while on a mission to the king in the interests of the people of New Hampshire grants. Erected by his great great grandson Samuel L. Robinson as a tribute to the pioneer and patriot, and his distinguished sons, who rendered great service to the state. 1923."

This marker is just a short walk from the older cenotaph which is just to the left of the entrance to the Old Bennington Cemetery. A cenotaph was a marker more common in earlier days and there are several in Bennington's cemeteries in honor of people whose bodies are elsewhere. Robinson's white marble marker was paid for by David Robinson, Jr., Samuel's grandson. The long inscription on that six-foot tall stone reads: "In memory of Capt. Samuel Robinson, the pioneer in the settlement of Bennington. He was born in Cambridge, Mass., in 1705, married to Marcy Leonard, and removed to Hardwick, Mass., in 1728, became a Captain in the King's forces and served as such in the vicinity of Lake George during the French war that resulted in the conquest of Canada by the English. On his return from Lake George, mistaking the Walloomsac for the Hoosic river, he came to this place and encamped with his soldiers. Pleased with the country, which he called The Promised Land, he applied to Gov. Wentworth, secured the township, sought for settlers and commenced its settlement in 1761. Capt. Robinson was the acknowledged leader of the settlers of the New Hampshire Grants in their trying controversy with New York, and in October, 1766, at a convention of the towns, was appointed agent to represent their case to the crown. He immediately repaired to London where by his exertions, he obtained the well known order of the King in council, dated July 24, 1767, prohibiting the Gov of New York from making farther grants of the lands in controversy. He died in London, October 27, 1767, and was buried in the church yard of the Rev. Mr. Whitfield." The facts as outlined on the monuments are fairly accurate. Most sources now give Robinson's birthdate in Cambridge as April 4, 1707, although some say April 1 and others April 19, but not 1705 as they originally thought. Some references give his wife's name as Mercy Leonard of Southbury, MA, although Marcy seems to be more frequently cited. No known drawings of the cabin exist and the plaque was designed more than 150 years after it was torn down, so it is probably based on the typical log cabin of the period.

Bunhill Cemetery in London is frequently given as his place of interment, but research shows that he was buried in the Whitefield Tabernacle Cemetery which has its own confusing history. It seems that George Whitefield, the Methodist preacher of the church, established the cemetery on unhallowed ground and as a result it was not protected by British law. As a result, over the years it has been occasionally dug up and used for commercial purposes and of the thousands buried there only the graves of three people still exist, none of them our Samuel Robinson. Whitefield's church records still exist and they state that "Samuel Robinson, buried or died October 29, 1767, aged 60 years." Whitefield is mentioned on Robinson's cenotaph because, although he is little known today, he was perhaps the most famous religious figure of the eighteenth century in the opinion of *Christianity Today* magazine.

**BENNINGTON MUSEUM IS CLOSED FOR THE MONTHS
OF JANUARY, FEBRUARY, AND MARCH**

**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

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