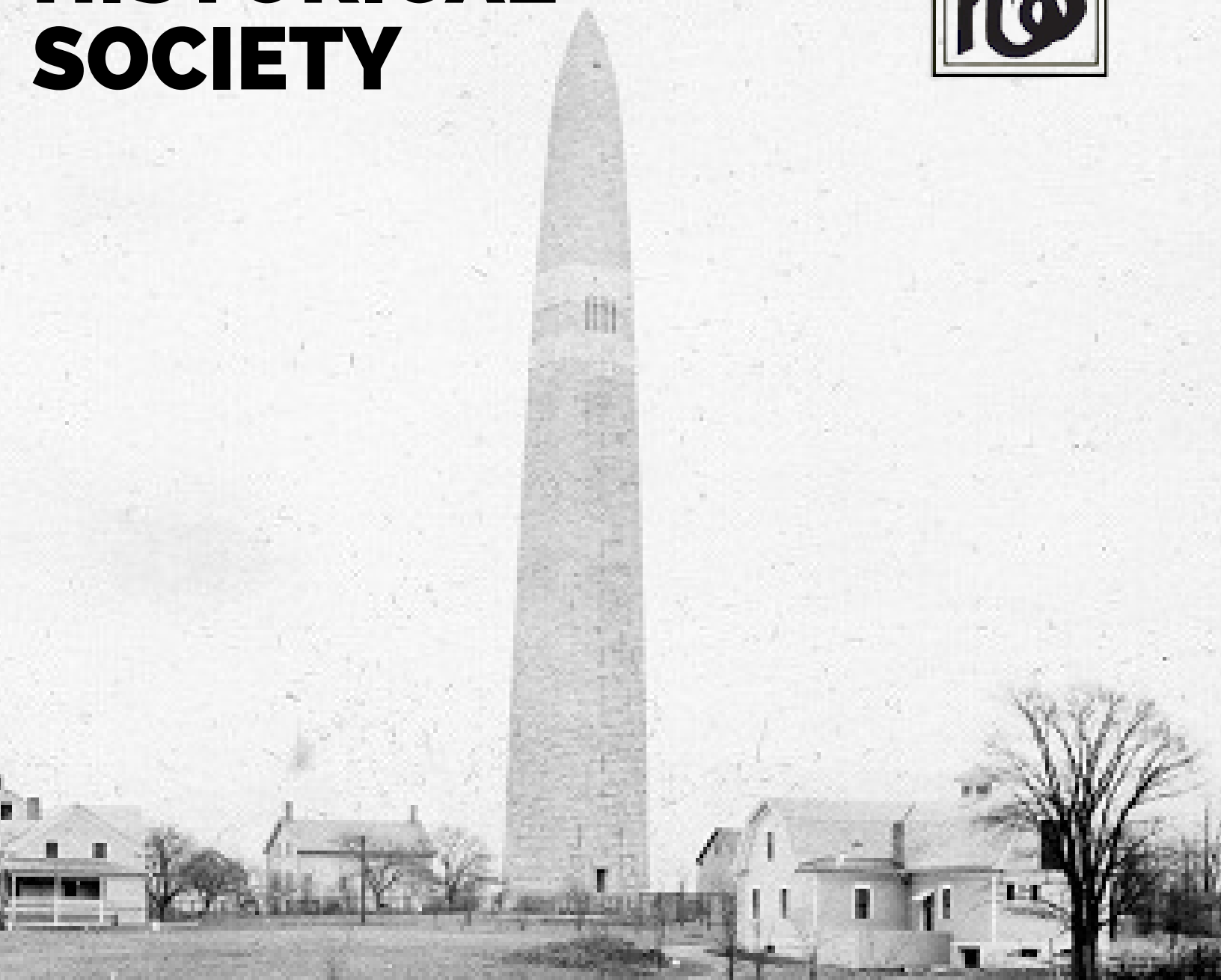


BENNINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

MAY 2023 ISSUE

**Bennington
museum**

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BOB TEGART

April was a busy month: we had a great program by Steve Perkins, and the Regional History Room reopened. On May 21 we will have a presentation on “How Route 7 Explains 20th Century Vermont” by Paul Searles.

The Regional History room has been busy with about 50 visitors and 18 inquiries handled! We had several interesting inquiries this month--one on the last hanging in Bennington and another on the origin of the name of Silk Road.

Archibald Bates was executed in 1839. He lived on a family farm in Shaftsbury and was angry that his younger brother with his wife Harriet and three children had control of the farm. He made threatening remarks against his brother. Finally, he approached the farmhouse and shot Harriet through the window as she nursed her child. She was found covered in blood. The child was taken away, but died soon after. Archibald was captured, tried, and convicted after the jury deliberated 15 minutes. The proceedings of the trial and the verdict were published in the Vermont Gazette. This was the last hanging in Bennington. Hanging would go on in Vermont until it was abolished around 1914.

What was the origin of the name of Silk Road? We found several articles in the Banner by Joe Parks which answered the question. It became Silk Road when James Silk bought a house on the road in 1868 and lived there for many years. It was previously named Robinson Road since Samuel Robinson lived near the bridge.

Those are just a couple examples of the interesting inquiries that we receive.

Stand by for our June presentation by Avis Hayden on “Lucy Prince of Sunderland, and Her Family: The story of an Early Black Vermonter” on June 25 – note the change in the date!

Regional History Room Open for Research

We hope you will visit Bennington Museum’s Regional History Room which is now open from 1:00 to 4:00 PM on Monday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. We welcome ideas on programs we might offer as well as suggestions for books that we should consider adding to the collection. Museum leaders and volunteers would also like to create small single display case exhibits that would highlight RHR and archives collections. Please let them know if you have ideas and/or would be willing to assist with creating an exhibit by emailing me, Bob Tegart, at Library@benningtonmuseum.org or David Pilachowski, at david.pilachowski10@gmail.com.

UPCOMING HISTORICAL SOCIETY PROGRAMS

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

Sunday May 21

Our Highway Deficiencies: How Route 7 Explains 20th Century Vermont

In 1957, Governor Joseph Johnson promised the citizens of southwestern Vermont that the state would rebuild the region's main north-south highway, Route 7, "to standards comparable with the interstate system." In the two decades that followed the question of what to do with Route 7 became a topic of bitter dispute. Supporters of a new road hoped that the conversion of Route 7 to a divided, four-lane, limited-access highway would stimulate the region's economy. Detractors of a new road saw it as an existential threat to the way of life enjoyed by the region's residents.



Rutland Daily Herald Fri Mar 11 1966

The conflict over Route 7 pitted different kinds of southwestern Vermonters, and different kinds of southwestern Vermont towns, against each other. The conflict embodied the tensions that pervaded life in Vermont in the second half of the twentieth century, as Vermonters throughout the state wrestled with the competing allures of progress and development on the one hand, and preservation and tradition on the other. In this presentation, Paul Searls 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. A discussion will follow in which audience members are encouraged to share their memories and feelings about the history of the area's major roads, and the evolution of southwestern Vermont as a whole.

Presenter, Paul Searls is professor of history at Northern Vermont University. He received his Ph.D. from New York University. His most recent book, *Repeopling Vermont*, was published in 2019.

Sunday June 18

Lucy Prince of Sunderland, and her Family: The story of an early Black Vermonter

Lucy Terry Prince was born in Africa and brought to the colonies as a slave when she was five years old. When she was 70 years old, she moved to Sunderland, Vermont with some of her children. At that time only 0.2% of the people of Bennington County were Black. She struggled to obtain land that she felt was rightfully hers. Eventually many of the townspeople came to accept this loquacious woman, who 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.



Louise Minks
Lucy Terry Prince

Presenter, Avis Hayden has been a hobby genealogist since 1990. After retiring from her career in health care, she delved deeper into that field, completing a program in Genealogical Research from Boston University in 2016. She 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.

Mark Your Calendar: A BUS TOUR OF HISTORIC SITES

Mark your calendars for **October 22**, when the Historical Society will have a bus tour of historic sites. More information will follow in future newsletters.

SPRING PARTY

Join Museum members and Historical Society volunteers at the Museum on Saturday, June 3, from 3:00 to 5:00 pm to celebrate the new spring season and to honor Bob Tegart with the Arnold Ricks service award for his dedicated work in the Regional History Room. Light refreshments will be served, with music by the Arlington Memorial High School Jazz Ensemble.



RSVP by May 15 at
[benningtonmuseum.org/
product/spring-party/](https://benningtonmuseum.org/product/spring-party/)

or by calling
802-447-1571 x200

\$5 members
\$20 not-yet-members

Saturday, June 3rd,
2023

3pm - 5pm

3:30pm
awards ceremony

4:15pm tour
A History of Bennington



Light refreshments will be served
Music by the Arlington Memorial High School Jazz Ensemble
Bennington Museum 75 Main Street, Bennington Vermont

PAST PROGRAMS

BY RAY RODRIGUES

A Loose Confederacy of Villages

On April 16th, Steve Perkins, current director of the Vermont Historical Society and former director of Bennington Museum, discussed “A Loose Confederacy of Villages,” telling how Vermont’s founding influenced the way the State governed itself for years and how vestiges of that continue today.

When Vermont was first created, proprietors—or owners of the land—wrote the original governance rules, even if they did not live on the land they owned. Since there was no central government when Vermont was created, towns became the governing bodies. Their inhabitants met regularly, both in church and in town meetings, and governance developed through those meetings.

As the State government developed, the towns sent their representatives to the State congress, with each town sending one representative. The result was uneven representation since town populations varied. In 1890, for example, there was one school district per town, regardless of population, with 246 towns represented. In 1965, as a result of court cases exploring representation in governments, the House voted to reapportion itself, and every 10 years, following the statewide census, the reapportioning would happen again.

To view this and other past presentations, visit the [Bennington Historical Society’s web page](http://benningtonmuseum.org/programming-events/bennington-historical-society/video-presentations/) at benningtonmuseum.org/programming-events/bennington-historical-society/video-presentations/

Walloomsac Inn Video Presentation

If you missed Callie Raspuzzi’s presentation on the history of the Walloomsac Inn, it is available on YouTube: “The History of the Walloomsac Inn.”

IN SEARCH OF THE MOHICAN AND ABENAKI

BY RAY RODRIGUES

In trying to learn more about the history of the Mohican and Abenaki in our area, it appears that we have more information about their prehistoric history than their post-contact history. So we are turning to our readers in hopes of learning more about Indigenous people in the Bennington area after Europeans arrived here until the present.

A prime example of what we do know is what was learned about the Cloverleaf Site in Bennington. This site, in the area of the Bennington bypass, was excavated in 1997, with artifacts and cultural features indicating an occupation time of 2070-1860 B.C.

But after Europeans arrived here? We know that many Abenaki moved north, and many of their descendants settled at and remain in the Missiquoi area, with headquarters at Swanton Village. We know that the Mohican established a community in Stockbridge, MA, later relocating to Wisconsin. But did any of either group remain in the Bennington area?

If you know anything post-contact Indigenous history in the Bennington area, please contact the Bennington Historical Society so that we can start to fill in what is now a gap in our history.

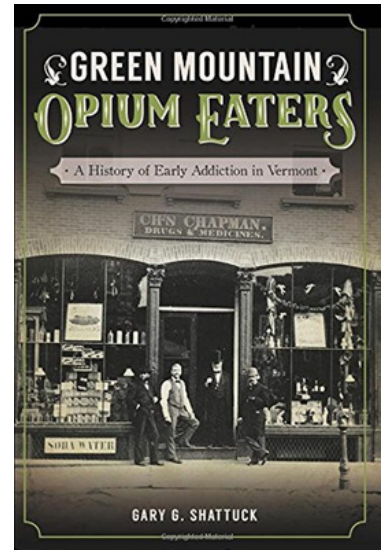
A BOOK REVIEW: GREEN MOUNTAIN OPIUM EATERS

BY CALLIE RASPUZZI

A fascinating and terrifying book was recently acquired by the Bennington Museum's Regional History Room. Gary Shattuck's *Green Mountain Opium Eaters*, published in 2017, traces the history of opioid addiction from the early days of white settlement to the early 1900s. The story of addiction has obvious relevance today. There are remarkable similarities between the rise of addiction in the nineteenth century and the twentieth, including profit-hungry drug companies, complicit doctors, and tragic results.

The Museum's current exhibit "A History of Vermont" includes a section on addiction in Bennington, and this book was an invaluable resource. One of the objects in the exhibit is a letter describing the horrific suicide of Saxton Pickett, a shopkeeper in Bennington. Doctor Noadiah Swift prescribed opium to treat Pickett's delirium tremens. Such a treatment is unimaginable to us today, but as Shattuck describes in his book, it was common within the medical world of the 1830s. Also included in the exhibit are a variety of advertisements for patent medicines. Paine's Celery Compound, manufactured in Burlington, contained lots of opium, but very little celery. Even when doctors tried to curb their patients' habits, patent medicines were available from peddlers and local drugstores.

Exhibit labels cannot come close to giving all the nuances that go into such a complicated issue as opioid abuse. This book was recently purchased for the Museum's Regional History Room by an anonymous donor, and we highly recommend that you stop by when the RHR is open and learn more.

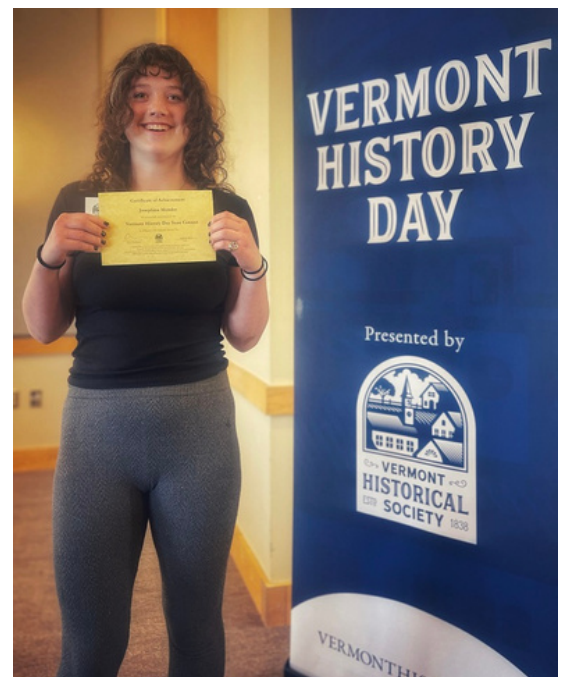


VERMONT HISTORY DAY

On Saturday, April 8, Bennington Museum was pleased to present our \$250 Southshire Award to senior Josephine Monder (Josie) from Long Trail School. Of the 220 students who participated in this competition, her excellent paper, "A New Experience: The Public and the Vietnam War" was inspired by the Vermont History Day theme, "Frontiers in History: People, Places, Ideas".

We hope that this award will encourage Josie to further explore historical topics in future academic studies, and to share her interests and findings with friends and colleagues. We are proud that this young historian from Southern Vermont has done such great work in contextualizing this pivotal conflict and connecting events of the past to the present day.

You can find Josie's research paper as an attachment to the latest BHS email.



BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS: NATIONAL HUMANE ALLIANCE FOUNTAIN

BY BILL MORGAN & JOE HALL

It has probably been a long time since a horse has stopped for a drink of cool water at the trough on the village green where Monument Avenue intersects Route 9. At one time it would have been a welcome break for horses who had climbed the hill from downtown to Old Bennington. A bronze plaque on the fountain reads: "1906. Presented by the National Humane Alliance, Hermon Lee Ensign, Founder."

Hermon Lee Ensign (1849-1899) made his fortune in New York City as an advertising man and inventor before founding the National Humane Alliance in 1897. The purpose of the organization was to instill "ideas of humanity both to the lower animals and to each other." He bequeathed his money to the society in order to provide drinking fountains for animals in any city that requested one. Although he died in 1899, before any of the fountains were set up, his foundation fulfilled his dream and produced more than 130 watering troughs between 1906 and 1912. Each one was estimated to have cost about \$1,000. Any community could apply for a fountain free of charge if they promised to place it at a point of heavy traffic where it could be reached from all sides. Each town pledged to keep its fountain in good repair and provide a constant water supply.

The polished granite fountains were made on Vinalhaven Island, Maine, by the Bodwell Granite Company. Not all of the fountains they produced were identical, but they all have elements of one or two basic designs. The Bennington one is the smaller of two sizes, but still six foot tall. It featured bronze lion-headed spigots from which the water flowed. A dedicatory plaque was placed on the front of the column. The water filled a large basin four feet in diameter for the horses and smaller bowls were set into the bottom for dogs. The fountain weighs approximately five tons and was shipped in pieces and assembled onsite.

Bennington's fountain was secured for the town through the efforts of Fannie Loring Bingham. She was the wife of Henry Stephen Bingham who owned the Bennington Paper Box Factory then at 709 Main Street, now the site of the old Stewart's Shop at the intersection of Safford Street. The couple lived in a house on Silver Street just above the Christian Science Church. Mrs. Bingham had heard about the fountain program from Lewis M. Seaver of Williamstown, VT, who was a trustee of Ensign's estate and secretary/treasurer of the Alliance. On November 20, 1905 she applied to the Alliance, and shortly thereafter Mr. Seaver visited Bennington to help select an appropriate site for the fountain. On August 29, 1907 the fountain was unveiled. The irony is that it was the end of the horse and buggy era and the gasoline engine soon took over transportation, making the fountains obsolete.

Originally the fountain stood in the center of the street, making it convenient for the horses, but a hazard for motorists. Now it is surrounded by a small triangular shaped lawn on an island between the branches of the street. Over the years the fountain had been vandalized, and the water was turned off. In 1991 the town decided to refurbish the trough and make it into a public drinking fountain for humans. They commissioned Vermont artist Elaine Franz Witten to make bronze lion heads to replace the missing originals. Although the heads look antique and are somewhat similar to the originals, they were not designed to be identical replicas.



Drinking Fountain,
Old Bennington, Vt. Published by
A.C. Bosselman & Co.
Gift of Charles E. Marchant

VOLUNTEERS IN THE BENNINGTON MUSEUM'S REGIONAL HISTORY ROOM

A number of our members have provided help in reorganizing the Regional History Room (RHR), which benefits all who use its resources for their research. For their generosity, we thank them:

Bob Tegart -- has overseen the work and is available when the Room is open.
Avis Hayden -- genealogist, worked on family/correspondence files
John Kennedy -- indexed the Walloomsack Review
Cianna Lee -- helped to catalogue materials
Jane Moriarty -- worked on subject files
Michele Pagan -- transcribed documents
David Pilachowski -- catalogued and organized the collection
Tyler Resch -- provided research support
Suzi Youatt -- catalogued family histories
Bill Morgan -- catalogued various items
Rick Caswell -- catalogued various items
Jill Fortney -- catalogued various items
Kristen Marcoux -- catalogued various items
Joe Hall -- provided research assistance
Jo-Ann Irace -- provided collection and shelving capacity expertise

For more information about using the RHR or to volunteer, contact:

Robert Tegart, Administrator, Regional History Room
Bennington Museum
802-447-1571 x 210
Library@benningtonmuseum.org

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; Bill Morgan, Secretary; Robert Ebert, President-Elect

Committee Members:

Jackie Marro, David Pilachowski, Ray Rodrigues, James Thatch, Anne Bugbee, Joe Hall

Associate Members: Rick Caswell, JJ Williams **Emeritus Members:** Charles Dewey, Bev Petrelis

Newsletter Editor: Ray Rodrigues

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