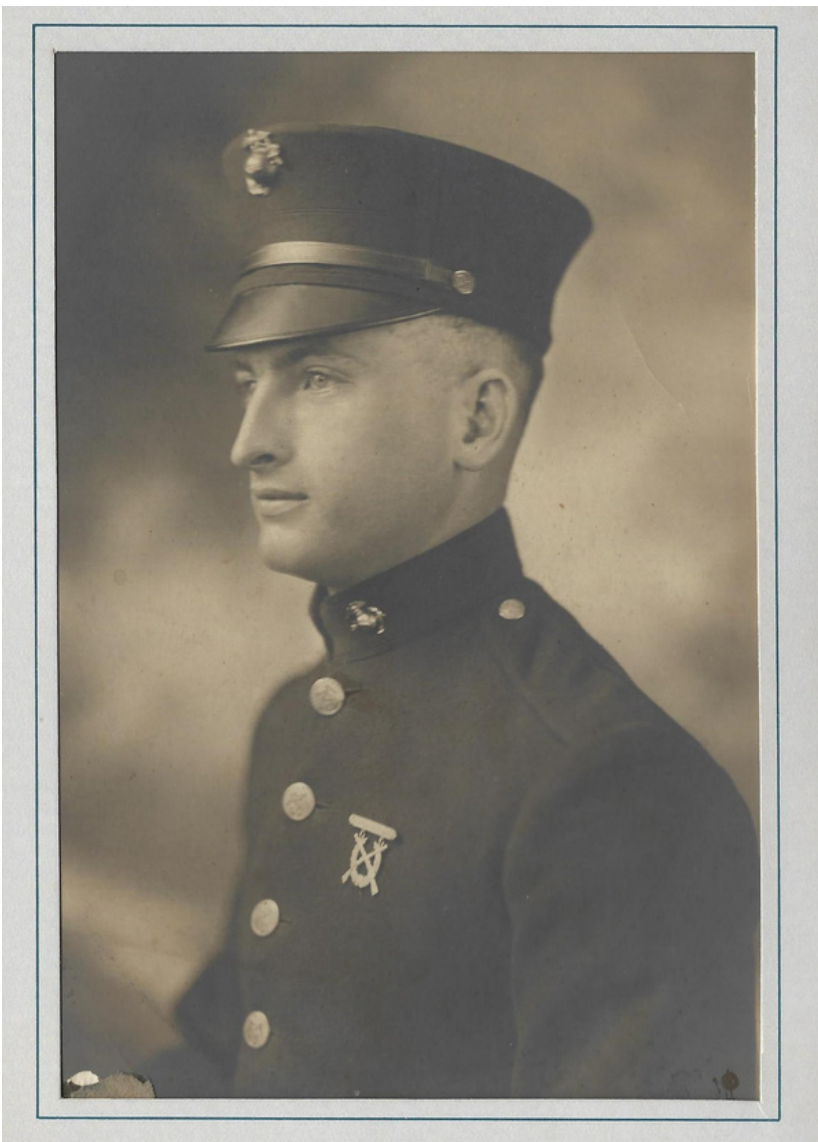




VETERAN'S DAY WORKSHOP

Discover the history of Veterans in your family.



Saturday November 11, 2023 from 1 to 4pm in Regional History Room of the Bennington Museum, the Bennington Historical Society will present an opportunity to help you find your Veteran's History. We will show you how to uncover the story of your family veteran using both internet sources, books, and local hard copy resources. Find out the details of their service – where they entered the service, their unit, where they went and what they did upon return. Whether they served in the Revolutionary war to present conflicts their story can be traced. Bring what documents, photos, or other information you have on your veteran and we will fill in the blanks.

Robert Tegart, Administrator of the Regional History Room will help you to discover the history of your veteran.

The Bennington Historical Society is a volunteer-run program of the Bennington Museum.

CELEBRATING 250 YEARS: THE AMERICAN DREAM REVISITED

DON MILLER, READING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

Celebrating 250 Years: The American Dream Revisited is a reading list supporting the 250th Anniversary of Vermont. Organized as a book-of-the-month, 4-year reading program, beginning in January of 2024 and culminating in 2027, the list roughly reflects our state and national development.

Each reader decides what to read, and when. Individual participants will select which books to read, in whole or in part, based on personal interests and energies. Some might choose to read 4 books a year; some will read all 48. A reader may start a book, but then decide to skip parts, or to stop reading that book altogether; it's the reader's choice.

As the texts in our reading list will bear out, the new United States' founding principles were lofty, and needed time to evolve. Time and again, political, social, and economic tensions tried our patience, frustrating our desire for instant gratification.

And the Vermont experience did not develop in a historical or cultural vacuum. Ethan Allen and the Battle of Bennington played defining roles not only in our statehood, but our notions of Vermont's true character. But these are hollow events unless properly contextualized alongside the battles of Bunker Hill and Saratoga. So too, Calvin Coolidge and Dorothy Canfield Fisher reflect Vermont's uniqueness in the context of our national history.

Biographies will dominate. Founding fathers like Alexander Hamilton and James Madison created our government, but it was later leaders who shaped it. Men like Washington, Lincoln, and the Roosevelts solved important social and economic issues as they arose. The Executive branch led, but the Legislative and Judicial branches served as checks on the power of the Presidents.

Minorities fought for their rights from the beginning, from indigenous peoples to African Americans, and many more. From King Philip's War to Frederick Douglass, their voices resound. More recently, James Baldwin, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Michael Eric Dyson have challenged our commitment to the Dream. Great literature offers insight into many of these challenges, including *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *Animal Farm*.

Towards the close of each month, a summary article about that month's book will appear, in the BHS newsletter and on our webpage (benningtonmuseum.org/programming-events/bennington-historical-society/).

For each book read, participants will be asked to complete a short form which will serve as an entry to an annual lottery drawing (one entry per book read).

The winner of the annual lottery wins a prize. Lottery prizes will include trips to the Vermont Historical Society Museum, Fort Ticonderoga, Saratoga Battlefield, and Calvin Coolidge's homestead. In 2027, when the program concludes, those who read the greatest number of books will be recognized and have their names entered in a drawing for a grand prize.

That said, if you choose to delve into the "Celebrating 250 Years" reading list and don't win the prize drawing, simply immersing oneself in Vermont's history offers its own enduring rewards.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

The 250th is Coming!

November 19th @ 2:00 - 3:00 pm

Bennington is a town with a proud Revolutionary-era history, and it has been a center for patriotic commemoration since Revolutionary times: from the observances of the first anniversary of the Battle of Bennington in 1778, to the dedication of the Bennington Battle Monument in 1891, to the annual parades organized by the Bennington Fire Department since 1963. The commemorations held almost a century ago are also worth mentioning: 100,000 people came to Bennington to celebrate over the course of one week in August 1927. The 2020 commemoration, held during the pandemic, stands out as a recent example of the importance of historical memory to our lives in the present, and of the town's determination to honor them.

America's 250th birthday arrives on July 4, 2026. Here in Vermont, we will be celebrating the 250th of Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys' taking of Fort Ticonderoga in May of 2025. Then in 2027 we will celebrate both the Patriot victory at the Battle of Bennington and the creation of the independent state of Vermont.

The Bennington 250th Committee is a group of local citizens who have come together to help plan and coordinate commemorations in Bennington County during those three anniversary years. Members of the Committee will discuss their approach and their plans – still in the beginning stages – and ask for feedback from members of the audience.

Inside the Battle of Bennington

December 17th @ 2:00 - 3:00 pm

The overarching theme of the commemorations honoring the 250th anniversary of the founding of both America and Vermont, is inclusion, especially inclusion of the stories and voices of individuals and groups who have been omitted from, marginalized or misrepresented in past commemorations. This is not a new idea: the 1976 Bicentennial also aspired to inclusiveness, and the past 50 years of scholarship and cultural exhibitions have greatly broadened our views of the American past. The 250th gives us an opportunity to reflect on our famous battle and to reconsider who and what should be included when we tell its story.

Phil Holland is a graduate of Bennington College and holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of London. He's the author of *A Guide to the Battle of Bennington and the Bennington Monument* and *Robert Frost in Bennington County*, as well as articles and reviews for the *Walloomsack Review*. He directed an audio project for the Bennington Battlefield last year, and has written monologues for the recently performed historical dramas "Voices from the Grave" and "Voices of the Fallen" presented with the Friends of the Bennington Battlefield, in association with Bennington Community Theatre. He lives in Pownal, Vermont.

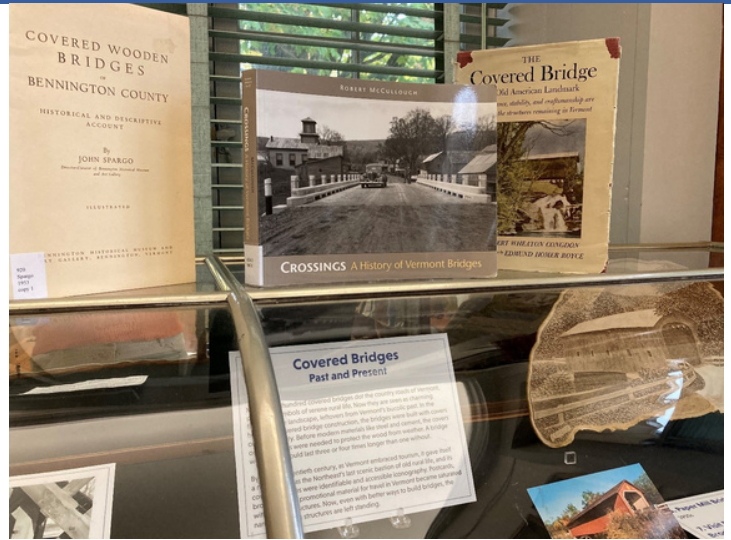
The Bennington Historical Society is a volunteer-run program of Bennington Museum. The BHS offers its programs at no charge with support from Nexus Consulting. You can support the efforts of the BHS to share the history of our region by making a donation.

REGIONAL HISTORY ROOM RESOURCES, COVERED BRIDGES

THOMAS SCHEETZ, CURATORIAL INTERN

Now on view in the long-empty case in the corner of the Regional History Room is *Covered Bridges: Past and Present*, a small exhibit on the covered bridges of the Bennington vicinity.

Five bridges have stood the test of time in Bennington County, along with a few more just over the border in Washington County, NY, but prior to the disasters, floods, and changing traffic dynamics of the early twentieth century, dozens more stood across the area.



These bygone covered bridges are just as much a focus of the exhibit as the ones still standing, with memorabilia from several featured prominently in the exhibit. A gradual but stark shift in the way the public viewed covered bridges is the main focus.

Through the objects in the exhibit, we see that people of the nineteenth century viewed covered bridges simply as a part of life, admiring them only for their effectiveness in allowing the crossing of rivers.

But from our vantage point in the current day, we see that, as time progressed, the bridges gained reverence as charming, iconic features of the landscape.

For further reading on the subject of covered bridges, the Regional History Room has about a dozen books on the subject. In the 1950s, R.S. Allen, one of the leading preservationists and experts on covered bridges of the twentieth century, compiled an inventory of nearly all the covered bridges standing at that time in the eastern half of the United States. Organized by region and spanning several volumes, his exhaustive survey provides summaries and photographs of most bridges.

The Covered Bridge: An Old American Landmark, published in 1946 by local architect Herbert Wheaton Congdon, is almost entirely focused on Vermont covered bridges. Given that it was published nearly 80 years ago, the book is especially interesting because many of the photographs in it depict bridges that are now heavily altered or no longer exist.

Robert McCullough's *Crossings: A History of Vermont Bridges* deals with the engineering of many different types of bridges; its chapter on wooden bridges focuses mainly on covered ones.

Covered Bridges of Vermont by Ed Barna organizes all of Vermont's covered bridges into regions and driving tours, while providing short histories and fun facts about each.

Especially relevant to the Bennington area is *Covered Bridges of Bennington County* by Bennington Museum founder John Spargo, the second half of which is very informative on the histories of all of the thirteen covered bridges that have ever stood in the county, and the fates of the eight that no longer stand.

If a single moment can be said to have decided the fate of Bennington College, that day was Wednesday, Sept. 3, 1930.

A high-level meeting on that early autumn afternoon proved decisive in the arduous, nine-year-long development of what soon became a nationally recognized educational institution.

On that day the trustees, meeting in the Old Academy Library in Old Bennington, were asked to vote one way or the other – to continue planning for a new progressive college for women, or to submit to economic reality and forget the whole idea.

The very idea of a “new school for girls,” which evolved into a progressive college for women, was first suggested in 1923 by Rev. Vincent Ravi Booth, pastor of the First Congregational Church of Old Bennington. His simple motive was to counter his disappointment that the winter population of his congregation had dwindled to only about 150, and the village needed to be enlivened. Though Booth’s ideas about higher education were more traditional than progressive, his continued hard work for the cause kept him on the board of trustees until near the opening of the college in September of 1932.

The financial impact of the Great Depression had proved so nearly catastrophic that some on the board concluded it was time to abandon their careful plans to launch a new liberal college that would focus closely on the student, and integrate the visual and performing arts.

The trustees, straining under a virtual smog of bad economic news, included Morton D. Hull, a Chicago congressman, lawyer, and summer resident of Old Bennington, whose wife was a member of the Bingham family. His position was the most severe, for he confided to McCullough: “Maybe we best let the old cat die.” Hull also withdrew his \$100,000 pledge.

Others, chiefly both Hall Park McCullough and his wife Edith Arthur VanBenthuisen McCullough, wished to carry on regardless of the difficulties. Historian Thomas P. Brockway carefully narrated these details in his 1981 book *Bennington College: In the Beginning*.

The trustees had already hired Robert Devore Leigh from Williams College to serve as the college’s first president. But then, nearly a year after the stock market crash of October, 1929, they expected him to lower the fund-raising goal to \$1,250,000 from \$2,500,000; it had already been lowered to \$4,000,000 from an original goal of \$5,640,500. They had also reduced the proposed number of students from 325 to 240 and postponed the grand opening of the college, from the fall of 1931 to the next year. More tough news came when an important backer, James Colby Colgate, withdrew his offer to donate 45 acres for a campus at the western end of Elm Street.

To the trustees' great good fortune, a better offer soon followed – 140 acres in North Bennington from Mrs. Frederic B. Jennings, nee Laura “Lila” Park, the younger daughter of Trenor W. Park. The new location had a more plentiful water supply, thereby offering a great benefit over the Old Bennington site, with its higher elevation.

Still, the decision on the campus's location prompted Henry W. Putnam Jr., son of the founder of the community's Putnam Memorial Hospital, to withdraw his \$100,000 pledge. (Ultimately, he would bequeath \$3,000,000 to the hospital's endowment.) And while a modest \$25,000 grant had come to the Bennington trustees from the Carnegie Corporation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and the Commonwealth Fund had all politely declined to help.

In a significant way, this was an example of the college's innovative plans costing them advantages they might have enjoyed, had they followed a more orthodox approach. The trustees had spurned advice from many, including the Carnegie Corporation and the presidents of Yale and Smith College, to locate their proposed campus closer to urban areas, where more cultural advantages would be available. Proposals to pool resources in various ways had been explored with other colleges including Sarah Lawrence, Russell Sage, Mount Holyoke, Reed, and Wells, and had been rejected.

The decisive September 3rd trustee's meeting was chaired by William H. Kilpatrick, a professor of the philosophy of education from Teachers College, Columbia University, who had been closely involved in the plans from near the beginning. Before the crucial vote, Kilpatrick agreed with McCullough's proposal that each trustee would state his position informally. Wisely, Kilpatrick decided to start around the table to his left, where favorable views would be heard first, rather than with the doubters on his right.

When the vote was counted, it was 8 to 3 to proceed, despite all the difficulties. Two of the three members who voted against, including Hull, resigned immediately. Author Brockway commented: “McCullough was convinced that the vote might have gone the other way had it not been for what he called Kilpatrick's quick thinking.”

Edith “Artie” McCullough's influence was another key factor in the positive outcome. Brockway quoted Leigh's secretary, Polly Bullard Holden, who recalled that it was her “spirited and courageous fight talk that won the day.” In addition to participating in this crucial vote, she had taken a leadership role, usually as board chair, throughout the entire process of establishing a new college during a national economic depression.

McCullough admitted that while chances were not bright for success, he was convinced that they should “carry on and if necessary go down with all flags flying.” If they quit now, he said, it would set back the liberalizing of higher education for years. Thanks to Hall and Edith McCullough's resolve, and the devotion of several essential supporters, Bennington College took root and flourished in the town whose name it bears.

KRIEGER WITCH TRIAL DEDICATION

JAMIE FRANKLIN

The following comments are from my introduction at the dedication of the historic marker in North Pownal. The overwhelming interest in the story of the Krieger Witch Trial is a moving testament to the fact that the life of someone who lived near this site more than 250 years ago, and the unfortunate actions of her neighbors, can still hold lessons for each of us.

When I first started working on this project last year and Joyce Held, of the Pownal Historical Society, who will be telling us about “Widow

Krieger’s life and her many names shortly, informed me that the Pownal witch trial likely occurred in the mid-to late 1780s, I was quite surprised by just how late that was, historically speaking. I had no idea that we were still subjecting people to torturous, traumatic witch trials well after the Revolutionary War and American Independence, fought and won, supposedly, so that everyone, no less than a widow of one of this small town’s early colonial settlers, could pursue life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

We’re all familiar, at least by name, with the Salem Witch Trials, a real-life social hysteria resulting in the execution of 20 women and men, which occurred in eastern Massachusetts between 1692 and 1693. In fact, the Salem Witch Trials have become one of New England’s foundational historical narratives. However, they were only the best known of dozens of recorded instances in New England throughout the 17th and 18th centuries where women, and occasionally men, were accused of witchcraft and put through incredible trauma, often with little to no evidence. In the 20th century, New England’s historical persecution of witches came to be used as a cautionary tale about the dangers of extremism, false accusations, and lapses in due process. In 1956, with the Cold War still going strong, Shirley Jackson, the famed author of gothic fiction, who lived just 30 minutes north of here in North Bennington, wrote a book about the Salem Witch Trials intended for elementary school readers, ages 8-12. The lessons to be learned were thought to be so important they were being imparted to young children.

I provide this historical context, which is featured in Bennington Museum’s current exhibition, *Haunted Vermont*, on view through the end of the year, to help us all better understand why Vermont’s only recorded witch trial still has relevance to us today. Of course, the term “witch hunt” is bandied about a lot these days in the media. Regardless of our personal political leanings, I hope we can all agree that the dangers of extremism, false accusations, and lapses in due process are as dangerous today, whether on a personal or national level, as they were some 235 years ago.



I'll end with a similar sentiment from 222 years ago, a quote from an article published in the *Vermont Gazette* on May 4, 1801, the local paper in this corner of the state at that time, on what the author saw as a decrease in witchcraft during his 35 years: "When a boy I well remember, that scarcely a week passed without hearing some tale of recent witchcraft. . . In those days if a man was taken out of his warm bed, and ridden a hundred miles through the air, it was certainly some old witch who did it; now it is turned off upon a dream, a disturbed imagination, or at best, the night mare. . . I hereby declare it as my opinion that this decrease is owing to [the fact that]. . . 'Every generation grows wiser and wiser;' I will add, better and better--and---not a word more."

So today, in dedicating this marker to commemorate the trial of "Widow Krieger," we seek to remind ourselves and future generations of the dangers of seeking to harass and harm our neighbors, literally and figuratively, simply because they may be different from us. Let us be wiser and better than those who came before us.

THE BENNINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETS ON THE FIRST MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH FROM 4PM - 5:15PM AT BENNINGTON MUSEUM.

Bennington Historical Society

A volunteer-operated program of Bennington Museum

Officers:

Robert Ebert, President; Bob Tegart, Past-President; Bill Morgan, Secretary; James Thatch, President-Elect

Committee Members:

Anne Bugbee, Rick Caswell, Joe Hall, Jackie Marro, Don Miller, Ray Rodrigues

Emeritus Members: Charles Dewey, Bev Petrelis

Newsletter Editor: Ray Rodrigues

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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!

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