

BENNINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2023 ISSUE

**Bennington
museum**

250TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS: BOOK-OF-THE-MONTH

DON MILLER

The United States will celebrate its 250th anniversary in 2026. Vermont will celebrate its 250th in in 2027.

The BHS is making available a four-year “Book-of-the-Month” program designed to enhance understanding of the history surrounding the founding of our nation and state.

In January of 2024, the Book-of-the-Month program will begin with *Seeds of Discontent: The Deep Roots of the American Revolution—1650-1750* by J. Revell Carr. Then in February, we will trace Vermont’s heritage back through New England’s relationships with its Indigenous neighbors in *God, War, and Providence* by James A. Warren.

After a review of our founding documents, the program will look at the founding fathers who shaped the American Dream. Even before the Declaration of Independence, the cause of freedom was championed by Thomas Paine and Ethan Allen in the colonies and Vermont respectively.

But the real architects of the new country and its government were the men engaged in the give-and-take economic and social struggles from 1775 through 1800. Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Madison crafted the fabric of society into a viable whole.

Here in Vermont, Ethan Allen was at the center of the turmoil and chaos that shaped the region from 1769 to 1791 in the face of hostilities from the Yorkers, the British, and even the Continental Congress. Allen was much loved, and much maligned, as the rough and tumble folk hero that helped form the Vermont tradition. The program ends 2024 with a look at *Vermont Tradition* by Arlington resident Dorothy Canfield Fisher, herself much loved and much maligned.

Throughout our history, some people have been disappointed with the progress toward the American Dream. Some would say the United States was flawed from its beginning; some would say the United States has been an evil force in the world. Some would tear down monuments and images of our “heroes.” But the American Dream has always been a work in progress, holding out hope for a better tomorrow.

In creating this Book-of-the-Month program, we will not ignore the failures or shortcomings that our nation and state have endured. We acknowledge the roadblocks to achieving racial and gender equity and take pride in our hard-earned progress. The suggested readings trace the rocky road to fulfilling the American Dream. We hope progress will continue. Indeed, we hope that the Book-of-the-Month will contribute to that progress.

The program will explore the 250th anniversary of the events of 1775, 1776, and 1777, along with the subsequent challenges to achieving the American Dream in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, respectively.

250TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS, CONT.

In 2025, the 250th anniversary celebrations kick off with the capture of Ft. Ticonderoga and the Battle of Bennington before moving on to the elimination of slavery through the eyes of Harriet Beecher Stowe, John Brown, Stephen A. Douglas, and Abraham Lincoln.

In 2026, the 250th anniversary celebrations include the events surrounding the Declaration of Independence and the Crossing of the Delaware. Moving to the 20th century, we focus on the culmination of the struggle for women's suffrage. With a glance back at the 19th century, we focus on the evolving dream of our revolution and the economic and social obstacles encountered by Theodore Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge, and Franklin Roosevelt.

In 2027, the 250th anniversary celebrations move to the Battle of Bennington, and the subsequent surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga.

Moving to the 21st century, the program reviews the ideals of John F. Kennedy and the hopes of Barack Obama. We will devote time to advocates for a racial reckoning in America, from James Baldwin to Nikole Hannah-Jones. Alongside these challenges, we conclude with the work of highly respected historians Nathaniel Philbrick, Jon Meacham, and David McCullough.

The "Book-of-the-Month" reading list, and a description of the program, will be available on the Bennington Historical Society tab of the Bennington Museum's website.

Just a reminder – this is a list of suggested readings; it is not a club. If you want to start a club to discuss the readings, go for it. We would be interested to hear about your progress in whatever reading you do. More details next month.

Don Miller, Administrator

WHO LET THE CAT-TV IN? BOB TEGART DID!

In the second installment of a four-part investigative series, CAT-TV's Karson Keisinger brought her detective skills to the Museum's Regional History Room. And who'd she ask to lend a hand? Why, the BHS's very own president, Bob Tegart. Tegart and Keisinger (Reference and Adult Services Librarian at Bennington Free Library) are actually co-hosts of CAT-TV's Know Your History program. Together, they make adept use of the maps, insurance records, and public directories in our collection to solve a mystery; what once occupied the site where the CAT-TV's Main Street offices currently sit? Hint: it wasn't always a local television station. Check out the video at [youtube/sxbbgUZnyyo](https://youtube.com/sxbbgUZnyyo) to see what these two history sleuths reveal.

By the Wand of Some Magician: Embracing Modernity in Mid-Nineteenth Century Vermont by Gary G. Shattuck. Center for Research on Vermont, University of Vermont, 2020, paperback, 439 pp.

Reviewed by Tyler Resch

Vermont's beautiful classical Statehouse was heavily damaged early on the frigid evening of January 6, 1857. A wood fire in the cellar had been stoked for the comfort of delegates to a constitutional convention. A worker, evidently conserving wood, closed an exterior vent, causing the fire to intensify so it soon spread up to the floor of the House. The blaze quickly went out of control, though the library and several offices were saved.

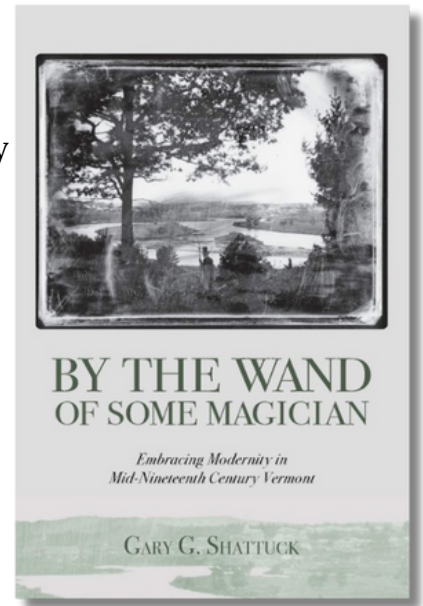
Even before the embers had cooled, leaving mostly a marble exterior standing, a series of statewide conversations had begun. Should the Statehouse be rebuilt? If so, should it be in a city other than Montpelier?*

The dramatic destruction of Vermont's Statehouse symbolized a time of powerful change for the state's citizens and their lives, land, farms, businesses, politics, and medicine. The modernity referred to in the book's title is heralded by the arrival of the railroads and the invention of telegraphy. In a word: "modernity" had arrived in a backward and isolated state, and its consequences have been interpreted and adroitly narrated by Gary Shattuck in a book that carries the useless title "By the Wand of Some Magician." The subtitle, at least, explains its contents: "Embracing Modernity in Mid-Nineteenth Century Vermont."

Transportation and communication came abruptly to a small, isolated, unprepared, state whose population was stagnating. The 1850s had been marked by a "laissez-faire caveat emptor attitude" that "allowed the railroads free reign to operate in a virtually unregulated environment during the decade, interrupted only by the vociferous calls of moralistic temperance societies opposed to the presence of alcohol . . ." p. 176.

Yes, Vermont was a temperance state at the same time it allowed widespread use of opium in many forms, including remedies to settle infants and relieve women's bodily complaints.

The transformation was worth analyzing not only for its own sake but also because the mid-nineteenth century time frame has often been overlooked by historians. Shattuck concludes that ". . .while modernity provided welcomed technological advances at first, it could not overcome the parochial views of many in positions of authority unwilling to upset tradition." p. 310.



Author Shattuck is an attorney and retired federal prosecutor who also served as a supervising officer for the Vermont State Police for many years. He has written extensively on the widespread use of drugs, especially opium and morphine, in early Vermont. He has repeatedly chastised the legislature for its tolerance of “quacks” and its refusal to establish professional standards for physicians.

Shattuck benefits greatly here from the fruits of another 19th century invention; sociology as a scientific pursuit. In the 1850s, Vermont’s government administrators began gathering demographic data about Vermont residents. As a result, in the key year of 1857, Vermont produced the state’s first “registry” of births, marriages, and deaths, a volume of factual data that has proven a great gift to historians. Using some of these figures, for example, Shattuck is able to chart the escalation of business in Rutland as a railroad center before and after the Civil War in fascinating detail.

Shattuck devotes a great portion of the book to abortions, criminal and otherwise, and infanticide – another subject rarely touched on by historians. It was no surprise to learn that abortion was handled in mid-nineteenth century Vermont with as much angst and inconsistent policy as it is today. He offers lugubrious details about the state’s first serial killer and provider of illegal abortions, William Henry Mansfield Howard. He comments: “Despite the actions of Howard and others like him in the 1850s, the barbarous aspects of abortions that Vermont women engaged in continued into the following decades and deserve further attention to appreciate the state’s slow embrace of modernity.” p. 23.

I found it convenient that all footnotes appear chronologically, from one to 902, avoiding the need to check back on chapter numbers or headings to find a particular note. The author has a bad habit of referring to people as that instead of who. The book’s obtuse title itself is unfortunate because it will cause this worthy scholarship to be overlooked in the book trade. Many illustrations were well selected, but then were printed so small on the page as to seem pointless. As for copy editing, readers will be annoyed by the hyphenated adverbs as well as the word Vermonters in the possessive, either without an apostrophe or one misplaced.

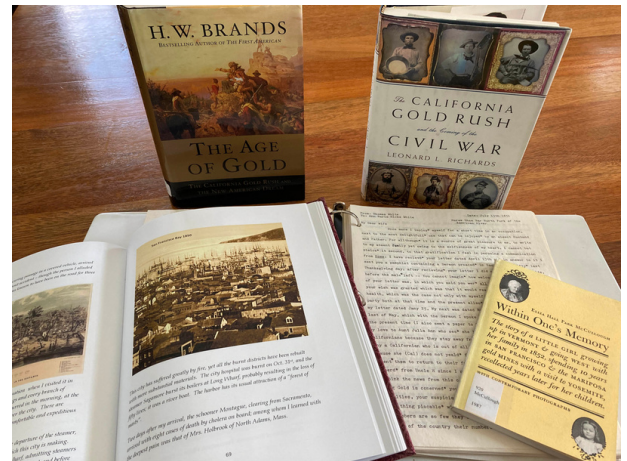
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* The big decision to rebuild the Statehouse was finally made by the Legislature on Feb. 26, 1857, and they decided, not unanimously, to keep it in the central city. Voting results in the House were: Montpelier 116, Burlington 67, Rutland 35, Bellow Falls 8, Middlebury 1, and Northfield 1. The Senate preferred Burlington with 15 votes, with Montpelier second at 13, and Rutland 1.

BENNINGTON AND THE GOLD RUSH

CALLIE RASPUZZI

In 1849 the Gold Rush hit Bennington as hard as any town in the nation, and resources in the Museum's archival collections and the Regional History Room provide ample material for studying this time period. Trenor Park was among the most successful Bennington boys who made the journey, returning to build the mansion that is now the Park McCullough House in North Bennington. Other less successful men included Edwin Robinson, Daniel Hall, James Hicks Walbridge, John C. Haswell, and NB Squires.



Thomas White, Henry Van der Speigel, and Elijah Dewey Waters left together for the gold fields in the spring of 1850, and the letters of both White and Van der Speigel have been preserved: typescripts are available in the Museum's Regional History Room. The White collection is particularly interesting as it also includes the letters that his wife wrote back to him. Both were good writers and included interesting details about what was going on in their lives. Thomas relates his travels across the isthmus of Panama and adventures in California. Ann's letters talk about the couple's two small children and relate news about the health of family, friends, and neighbors. She also mentions business and social issues that affect the family, the railroad being built (she rode one of the first cars to Rutland), George Robinson's closing the Walloomsac Inn for a season in 1851 (he still owed money to Ann's mother Maria Hicks, who had owned it previously), and famous tenor Henry Squires' final concert in Bennington before he left to tour Europe. The letters are interesting in terms of the historical events happening around the two and their intimate family concerns. The original letters were given to the Museum by a descendant in 1976 and transcribed by a scholar a few years later, making them easily readable for your researching pleasure.

Edwin Robinson, who had published the Vermont Gazette before catching California Fever, wrote a series of letters to the editor of that paper. He was among the first Bennington men to leave in February of 1849 and traveled across the country by land. Laurey Robinson Lee, a descendant, self-published two books about the family, including his columns from the paper and background information about the family. On a recent visit to Bennington, she generously donated copies of her books to the Regional History Room collection.

Some of the Bennington men in California were joined by their families. Eliza Park McCullough was brought to California by her parents and wrote about the experience from a child's perspective in *Within One's Memory*.

Vermonters tended to gather together with other Vermonters, so the letters can be cross referenced for details and different perspectives of the same events. Thomas White mentions meeting with Edwin Robinson in California, and Henry Van der Speigel writes about White getting seasick (something he did not mention in his own letters!).

BENNINGTON AND THE GOLD RUSH, CONT.

For background context on the national scale, the Regional History Room has *The Age of Gold: the California Gold Rush and the New American Dream* by H.W. Brands; *The California Gold Rush and the Coming of the Civil War* by Leonard L. Richards; and *The California Gold Rush: an Informal History* by Donald Barr Chidsey.

The archival collections in the Museum offer more scattered letters, which can be pulled with advance notice. Use the online database to find more: bennington.pastperfectonline.com

In the Regional History Room:

Within One's Memory: Recollections of My Family & My Early Days, by Eliza Hall Park McCullough, 920 McCullough 1987

Correspondence of Thomas White, 1850-1852, 920 White

Edwin Robinson 1811-1875: His Life, His Stories and His Search for Gold, by Laurey Robinson Lee 929.2 Robinson 2023

The California Gold Rush: an Informal History by Donald Barr Chidsey, 917.94 CHI

California Gold Rush and the Coming of the Civil War by Leonard L. Richards, 979.4 RIC

The Age of Gold: the California Gold Rush and the New American Dream by H. W. Brands, 973.64 BRA

In the Archives:

Two letters from Elijah Dewey Waters in San Francisco, California to George Wadsworth Robinson of Bennington, Vermont. A3366, 2012.305

Thomas Hall Related Letters, 2012.300

Eliza Walbridge Letter, 2016.22.13

Letter from J.C. Haswell in San Francisco, California requesting certain pottery wares be shipped for resale, 1852. Specifies what forms and sizes will and won't sell. Two letters from N. B. Squires regarding the shipment to California. Includes typescripts of letters from Henry Van der Spiegel written from California during the gold rush. 2012.328

BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS: NUMBER 10 BENNINGTON RESERVOIR MONUMENT AND MARKERS

BILL MORGAN

A stone shaft in a park on Burgess Road that has gone unnoticed for decades commemorates one of the most important contributions ever made to the town of Bennington.

When we turn on the water taps in our homes, we rarely think about where the water comes from. Usually, we take it for granted that it has always been there and that it will always be there when we need it.

This was not always the case, however.

Early settlers got their water from the pure springs and mountain streams that crisscrossed our community, and they dug wells to provide water during times of drought. As the region's population increased and local industry grew, the dependability of safe drinking water became less certain. Increasingly, our streams and wells suffered from pollution which continues to this day. By the time of the Civil War, it was obvious that townspeople would have to find a solution, but instead of cleaning up the pollution, they began looking further afield for new sources of clean water.

As early as 1882, wealthy Bennington resident Henry W. Putnam (1825-1915) saw the need for clean water as a business opportunity and hired local well-diggers like H.P. Burr to find new sources. They had little luck finding enough water close by to supply the town's needs, so in July 1885 Putnam turned to a water-system expert named Moses Joy Jr. He proposed that, instead of drilling more wells in town, a large 13 million gallon reservoir be constructed east of town on Burgess Road.

The reservoir idea appealed to Putnam, so he incorporated the Bennington Water Company in October of 1886, naming himself President. He invested \$60,000 in the initial construction and later increased that figure to \$75,000. Putnam and Joy used iron pipes to run the water the nearly two miles into the center of the village – this was in the days before the health danger of lead pipes was known.

Over the years, as the town grew larger, the water system had to be expanded many times. In 1894, for instance, Putnam hired what the newspaper called a "gang of Italians" who tapped into the water of the Roaring Branch in Stamford, seven miles east of town.

Thanks to the extensive research of Tyler Resch for his book Deed of Gift, we know a good deal about the establishment of Bennington's water system. By 1895, the town began to explore the possibility of buying Putnam's company for a public utility, but without success. Ten years later, in 1905, they weighed the merits of building their own water system to compete with Putnam's private company, but the proposal was found to be too expensive. Fortunately, Henry Putnam proved to be a very civic-minded philanthropist, and on Nov. 29, 1912, he deeded the water company to the town, with the understanding that profits from the sale of the water would be used to establish and maintain a hospital for the town. This became the Putnam Memorial Hospital, now the Southwestern Vermont Medical Center. At that time, most of the drinking water for the system was being drawn from Ryder Springs and Sucker Pond.

cont. on page 8...

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BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS, CONT.

Other gifts to the system followed. In 1923, Irving F. Gibson (1846–1927), who began as the town baker and went on to become a prominent business owner as well as the president of the Bennington County Savings Bank, donated the Malachi Lot Spring to the town. It is uncertain whether that spring was ever tapped for town use since it is several miles away on the side of The Dome. The town was also given five springs and the land for a four and a half million gallon enlargement to the reservoir system in 1929, by the industrialist William H. Bradford (1854–1929).

Since those days, several more expansions and additions have been made to the Bennington water system. In 1939, the Sucker Pond Dam was constructed to provide additional water year round. In 1967, the town changed its main source of water to Bolles Brook and a new filtration plant was constructed in Woodford. More recently, Morgan Spring, a deep-water aquifer on Gage Street was added to the system in 1992.



Although each of the early donations had been memorialized separately, on October 13, 1942, the town consolidated three bronze commemorative plaques onto one vertical stone plinth which is now located in the Bradford–Putnam Wetlands park on Burgess Road. The marker, quarried in Woodford, weighs an estimated four tons and was set in concrete. One marker commemorates the gift of Henry Putnam and, although damaged by vandals, it still reads: "Henry W. Putnam gave to the Village of Bennington its water system January 1, 1913. This memorial is erected by a grateful people." The second plaque states: "A Gift to the Village of Bennington by William H. Bradford, July 1, 1929, adding these five springs and the land for this reservoir." The third plaque is now missing and appears to have been stolen, but at one time said: "Irving F. Gibson gave to Bennington Village January 15, 1923 the Malachi Lot Spring."

New signage was added to the 14-acre Bradford–Putnam Wetlands park when the reservoir was closed and attempts were made to restore the land. The Bradford Springs located here were disconnected from the system in 1978 and their accompanying cisterns were removed. The wetlands have been allowed to return to their natural state. This was all done in order to compensate for the wildlife harmed by PCB contaminants at the Bennington Municipal Sanitary Landfill, a Superfund Site.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Crash to Creativity: The New Deal in Vermont September 17 @ 2:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Bennington Museum curator, Jamie Franklin, will examine the role the New Deal had in shaping Vermont—both literally and in the mind’s eye.

In the early 1930s, as the United States endured the hardships that followed financial collapse and agricultural crisis, frugal Vermonters—already used to pinching pennies—are claimed to have asked “What Depression?”

But the reality is that Vermont’s economy was cut in half during the first three years of the Depression, which began with the Stock Market Crash of 1929. This was a period of desperation in Vermont—and yet also one of enormous creativity. Federal New Deal programs sponsored creative projects that were wide and varied and helped create the popular image of Vermont as a place of idyllic towns, untouched farmland, and skiing.



Shirley Jackson’s Local Legacy October 15 @ 2:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Shirley Jackson, perhaps the greatest writer of the horror/gothic fiction genre in 20th-century America, lived and worked for most of her renowned literary career, from 1945 until her untimely death in 1965, in North Bennington.

She rose to national prominence in 1948 with the publication of her chilling short story “The Lottery,” about which she explained, “I suppose I hoped, by setting a particularly brutal ancient rite in the present and in my own village, to shock the story’s readers with a graphic dramatization of the pointless violence and general inhumanity in their own lives.”

Jackson’s eldest son, Laurence Hyman, has recently gifted a large collection of Jackson’s writings and personal effects to Bennington Museum. This presentation will feature Jamie Franklin, Bennington Museum’s Director of Collections and Exhibitions, and Laurence Hyman, in a conversation about Jackson’s literary legacy, focusing on items from the collection and her local ties.

**BENNINGTON MUSEUM &
THE POWNAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
INVITE YOU TO**



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**JOIN US TO DEDICATE A MARKER IN HONOR OF WIDOW KRIEGER
WHO ESCAPED DROWNING WHEN TRIED AS A WITCH IN 1785**

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1PM
STROBRIDGE PARK, 0 DEAN ROAD, NORTH POWNAL VT**

**Witches Walk! Meet on the west side of the Dean Road bridge,
across from the park, at 12:45. Witch Costumes Encouraged.**

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:

Avis Hayden, Bill Morgan, Bob Tegart, Cianna Lee, David Pilachowski, Jane Moriarty, Jill Fortney, Jo-Ann Irace, Joe Hall, John Kennedy, Kristen Marcoux, Michele Pagan, Rick Caswell, Suzi Youatt, Tyler Resch

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

Robert Tegart, Administrator, Regional History Room
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.

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

RHR and BHS programming is made possible in-part thanks to support from:



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!

75 Main Street, Bennington, VT 05201
benningtonmuseum.org