

WALLOOMSACK REVIEW

BENNINGTON MUSEUM



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The *Walloomsack Review* is a publication of the Bennington Museum. Its purpose is to present a wide range of articles about the history and culture of Vermont and neighboring New York and Massachusetts. We invite submission of scholarly articles and of books to be reviewed. For author guidelines and submission deadlines please contact the editor Tyler Resch at tresch@benningtonmuseum.org.

The *Walloomsack Review* is generously underwritten
by Robert and Cora May Howe

On the cover:

Mount Ascutney from Cornish, New Hampshire, 1957,
Francis W. Brackett
Courtesy of Warren F. Broderick

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Editor's Notes

Vermont's Act 250 is defined by the Secretary of State's office as "a unique statute containing ten criteria, the purpose of which are to ensure that large-scale development projects go forward without burdening the environment, local services, or Vermont's taxpayers."

Bruce Post's article in this issue offers informative environmental and political background to this historic legislation. The fact that it was a Republican governor who was appalled by some unregulated second-home developments in southern Vermont makes a fascinating story. Post has been a witness to the particular series of events that led up to Act 250, and has been acquainted with the colorful personalities who were involved.

Warren Broderick's article about Francis W. Brackett is more than just about the life of an artist; it is a detective story that shows the results of a good deal of sleuthing as Broderick attempted to unearth information about a "lost" artist, who moved around the Northeast frequently before finally settling in Shaftsbury.

Neil Manganiello reviews the book *The First Frontier*, which is full of six-syllable Native American names, reminding us that the name of our journal, the *Walloomsack Review*, derives from Dutch attempts to spell and pronounce an Indian name. Just to be contrary, we use one of several spelling variations, adding an extra k to the way the river is spelled.

Anthony Marro, who has been co-editor of this journal since its beginning, has now asked to step aside from that position. We will miss his direct involvement but his decision is understandable in view of the series of activities that keep him more than fully occupied in retirement. Among several other duties, he chairs the board of Bennington's Oldcastle Theater and is involved in the Putnam-Greenberg project that expects to revitalize downtown Bennington.



The *Walloomsack Review* sadly notes the passing of one of our early supporters and subscribers, Abbott Lowell Cummings. Known as a leading authority on early American architecture, Abbott was raised in Bennington, attended the Hoosac School, and went on to a distinguished career. He was born in St. Albans in 1923 and lived in Bennington from 1925 to 1948 when his father, the Rev. Stanley Cummings, was minister of the Second Congregational Church. In retirement he lived in South Deerfield, Mass., and died there May 29 at age 94.

Abbott earned a B.A. at Oberlin and in 1950 a doctorate at Ohio State, then one of the few universities offering American architectural history. He taught at Antioch, was assistant curator of the American Wing of the Metropolitan, then was executive director during the 1970s and '80s of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, now known as Historic New England. At Yale from 1984 to 1992 he was the Charles F. Montgomery Professor of American Decorative Arts, and in early retirement he taught at Boston University and UMass-Amherst. -- Tyler Resch

Contributors

Bruce S. Post pursues his special appreciation for Vermont's mountains in his article in this issue, which offers new perspectives on the state's history as well as a statement of opposition to wind turbines on those high ridge lines. He wrote about the 1936 proposal for a Green Mountain Parkway in the *Walloomsack Review* Vol. 9, autumn 2012. He also chairs the Vermont State Board of Libraries.

Warren F. Broderick is emeritus archivist at the New York State Archives who received B.A. and M.A. degrees in American Studies from Union College and devotes much time to fine art and ceramic history research. He has been active in land preservation in Rensselaer County, has written five books, edited or contributed to ten others, and has written on natural history, art history, American ceramics, and on literary and local historical subjects. He resides in Lansingburgh.

Tom Fels is an independent curator and writer who lives in North Bennington. His previous articles for the *Walloomsack Review* include a review of a new biography of Shirley Jackson, in last spring's issue, and an interview with the late musician Lionel Nowak in autumn 2016.

Jane Griswold Radocchia is a Bennington resident and an architect who works with old houses, and describes herself as a vernacular architectural historian. She also volunteers in the Bennington Museum's research library. Her website is www.janegriswoldradocchia.com.

Neil Manganiello is a history graduate of Southern Vermont College and volunteers in the library of the Bennington Museum. He lives in Sunderland.



State Senator Edward Janeway of Londonderry speaks at the 1961 grand opening of the Putney exit of Interstate 91, marking an era that brought new demographics, economics, and ideas into Vermont.

A Cautionary Tale, Part 2

The Dear Little State Among the Dark Green Hills: Vermont's Environmental Spring

“When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.”
-- *Matthew's Gospel, 16:2-3*

By Bruce S. Post

Images provided by the author

Bill Schmidt knew his scripture, but as he gathered with the crowd for the dedication of Putney's new Interstate exit 4 in December 1961, even he may not have been able to interpret “the signs of the times.” The newly minted pastor of the Putney Federated Church was in

for quite the civic baptism. Having moved to Vermont a month before, Schmidt now mixed not just with neighbors and parishioners but with politicians, one venerable, the other vulnerable. U.S. Senator George D. Aiken wore an overcoat and fedora against the December cold; thirteen years remained in his already long career. Vermont Governor F. Ray Keyser Jr. stood next to him hatless, his bald head unprotected against the chill. By the time the Interstate reached Exit 6 in Rockingham, Keyser would be gone after one term, replaced by a young, energetic Democrat in tune with Vermont's rapidly changing times.

The times changed Bill Schmidt, too. Exposed to a new era of possibility – a Great Society, an activist governor, and an evolving church in a tumultuous world – Schmidt would trade the robes of the pastor for the rulers of the planner, eventually becoming executive director of the newly formed Windham Regional Commission in Brattleboro. Even then, he retained the instincts of a good shepherd, and in 1969 he would help another governor, Deane C. Davis, understand how Vermont needed to change. By then, he had learned to read troubling signs of the times.

After a century-long slumber, post-World War II Vermont had awakened with a bang. The swords of war had been beaten into the plowshares of peace. Dynamite replaced artillery; bulldozers supplanted tanks. Instead of convoys of jeeps, trucks, and troops moving slowly over chewed and muddied earth, streams of automobiles, buses and tourists would soon speed along the smooth ribbons of asphalt unwinding across Vermont. The beckoned were finally coming to the Beckoning Country.

Peter Martin, a key aide to Davis, who was governor from 1969 to 1973, recalls the upheaval of the period from the mid-to-late '50s until the mid-1990s: "That is the most intense growth that the state has gone through since the 1840s. That is, of course, the period of the big, huge change – economically, socially, culturally"¹

A new Vermont was emerging, much like a butterfly poking out of its chrysalis, yet its defenses were weak. Then, many Vermonters were negotiating a jarring transition to modernity, too preoccupied with their own priorities to concern themselves with ecological matters. The laws the state relies on today to – ostensibly – protect the environment were

The lumber giant Weyerhaeuser shocked Vermonters when it blew a 600-foot hole in Jay Peak. This photo ran in the Newport Daily Express on July 28, 1966.

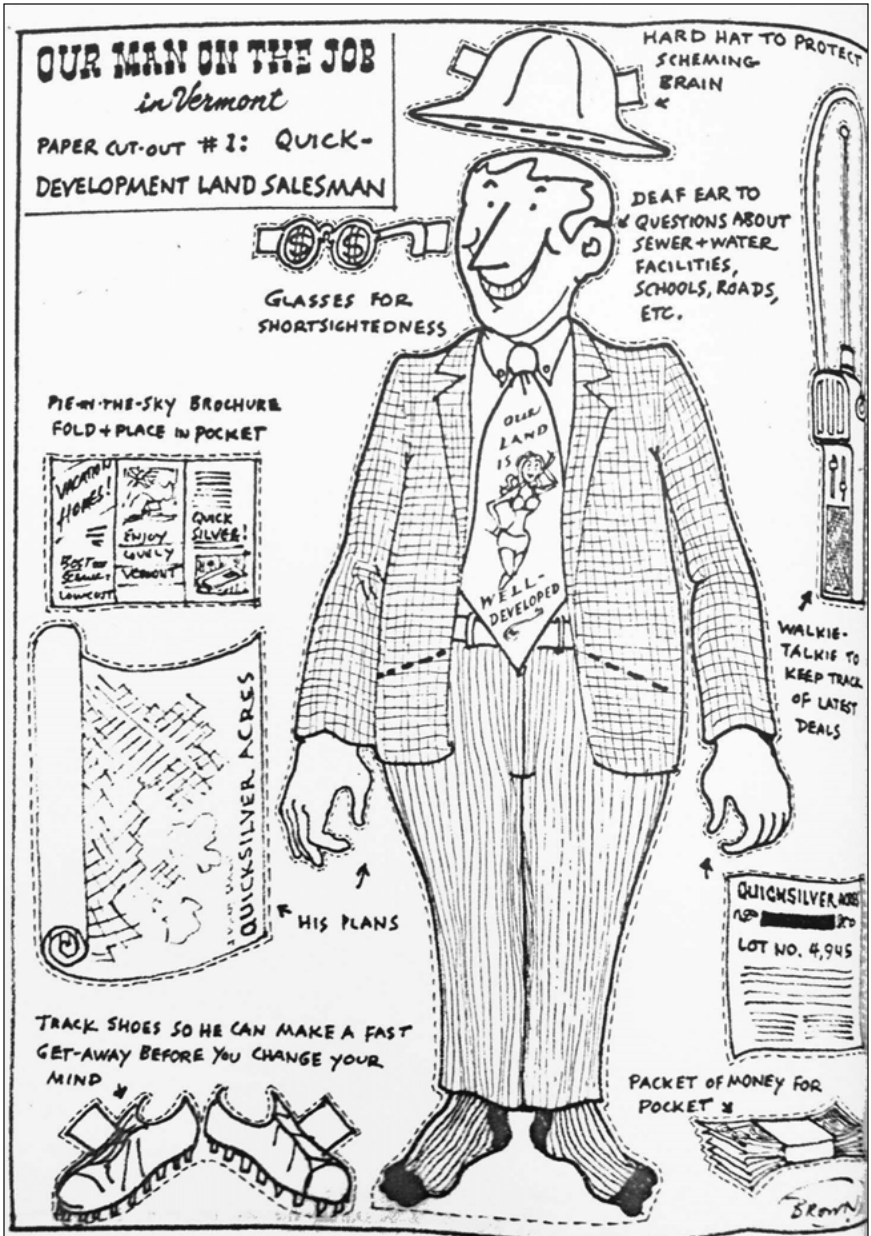


unwritten. Soon they would be, but not before Vermonters learned a harsh truth: “America’s whole history could be read as one continuous real-estate transaction.”²

Vermont’s environmental spring

The progress that was promised by the new Interstate highways proved, Janus-like, both blessing and curse. Vermont became a salt lick for crazy ideas.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers planned to blast and bulldoze the summit of Mount Mansfield to erect a missile-control facility to protect against the Russians. Ski entrepreneur Walt Schoenknecht conjured up an explosion that, had it occurred, might have been heard from Dover to Derby Line: the detonation of an atomic bomb beneath Mount Snow to reshape the mountain for better skiing. Forest industry giant Weyerhaeuser, unbothered by the Lilliputians in Vermont, did not need an atomic weapon; it used its own dynamite to excise a thirty-foot divot from Jay Peak’s summit for the foundation of its tram house. The ubiquitous Corps of Engineers, almost predatory in its appetite, savored Victory Bog in the Northeast Kingdom and Lake Champlain in the Champlain Valley: the bog to be dammed for hydroelectric power and the lake to be dredged for ocean-going cargo ships. Camels Hump, the last of the Green Mountains’ major peaks to remain undeveloped, had to repulse the threat of a ski area and high-altitude chalets.



Southern Vermont land in the 1960s was reputed to be peddled by slick salesmen, as satirized in this cartoon by Jane Clark Brown published in the Suburban List of Essex Junction.

Shirley Strong, the first woman president of the Green Mountain Club, summed up the mania of destruction:

“I do think that period between 1966 and about 1970 were just, everything was -- fell apart. Things were happening, too many pressures, too much development, too much big money from outside. It was really falling apart.”³

Vermonters fought back; 1962 was a pivotal year. Nationally, Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, ice-cold water thrown in the face of a population mesmerized by new gadgets and lifestyles. Closer to home, a General Electric employee named Bob Spear prompted the formation of the Green Mountain Audubon Society, whose conservation committee became a pioneering environmental advocate. Across the state, small coalitions formed to defend specific sites and larger regions. In 1963 the Vermont Natural Resources Council was born. The first shoots of Vermont’s environmental spring peeked through the winter snow.



Many Vermonters worried that legislators were not moving fast enough to control land developments, as expressed in this Suburban List cartoon by Jane Clark Brown.

Four major struggles helped shape Vermont's emerging ecological conscience: defending Victory Bog; "keeping a promise" to Camels Hump; protecting Green Mountain highlands; and cooling feverish, Florida-style land development in southern Vermont. Together, these were the four movements of a major symphony – the Green Mountain Spring – that would climax in a crescendo orchestrated by an "impossibly old"⁴ Vermonter with little ambition other than saving his state.

Movement No. 1: Victory Bog

After the disastrous 1927 flood, Vermont was an important participant in two significant attempts to control flooding. The first was to create water storage reserves in Vermont to prevent a re-occurrence of a massive flood. The second was President Franklin D. Roosevelt's proposal for a multi-state flood-control compact to lessen damage throughout the Connecticut River watershed. Putney's George Aiken, first as a freshman state representative, then as governor and later as a U.S. senator, helped scuttle these plans. But ironically, by the early 1960s, Aiken himself became a major booster of at least one dam, up in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom.

Victory Bog, in the small town of Victory, east of St. Johnsbury, was a precious 1,250- acre wetland. A plan to dam the bog for flood control and hydroelectric purposes had lain dormant since FDR's failed effort in the 1930s. In 1960, however, the U.S. House of Representatives resurrected the dam idea and appropriated funds for its construction. Aiken, concerned about excessive water drawdowns for hydroelectricity, stopped the legislation in the U.S. Senate.

Aiken's initial opposition was only temporary. He later secured support for a Corps of Engineers study regarding flooding the bog for conservation and recreation purposes, and the Corps' subsequent report identified the recreational potential of a 20,000-acre area. Aiken had also enlisted the National Park Service to plan a national recreation area that would include 2,800 acres of flooded bog lands.

The tussle over the dam continued into the late 1960s. Gov. Philip Hoff supported the plan, and his spokesman Arthur Ristau controversially told a Connecticut River Basin group, "The preservation of all bogs and



Let's send some horse sense to Montpelier this fall.

Maybe a horse doesn't have the smarts to run a computer or design a fancy land plan but it is noted for its good old common sense. It's called Horse Sense. Lately we've been ignoring this plain horse sense and if you don't believe it, just look at the mess things are in right now. Let's get things straightened out. Let's make this a year of common horse sense—and send Bruce White to Montpelier to represent us.

Voters of Windham-1 Towns of Newfane, Stratton, Townshend, Brookline, Windham & Wardsboro

READ AND HEED

Tuesday, September 10th, is primary day. We will be asked to choose a candidate to represent our district in the state legislature for the next two years. There will be official returns for all of us here in Vermont. Vermont is on the threshold of an economic crisis. We have an unemployment rate about 10 per cent higher than the national average. State government is absolutely bankrupt in the red. Tax, an historically an already overburdened with one of the highest tax rates in the nation, and the individual burden will increase as the number of unemployed grows.

We must send a representative to Montpelier who is knowledgeable and responsive to the particular problems and needs of this area. We have in Windham-1 one, for the most part, working people. We should be represented by a working man, someone who understands the real and the important life in our area of Vermont. We need someone who can come up with some concrete sense answers to the problems facing his constituency. That someone is Bruce White.

Bruce understands the problems of southern Vermont. He is presently chairman of the Board of Selectmen of the town of Newfane. He is a carpenter and builder's working man who can understand working man's problems. He has been an asset to his town as a selectman and can be an asset to his district as its representative.

We, the undersigned organizations, representing a large segment of the working people of Vermont, hereby endorse Bruce White as representative of Windham-1 in the primary election.

Green Mountain Boys, Newfane, Vermont **Southern Vermont Home Builders Association** **Vermont State Home Builders Association**

Bruce White for Representative

Windham-1

GET OUT AND VOTE THIS TUESDAY. IT IS YOUR PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY


Filed for by William G. Shatt Jr., Green Mountain Boys

In this political ad, developers targeted Rep. Royal Cutts of Townshend for his central role in creating Act 250. He was defeated in a primary in 1974 but won re-election as an Independent.

Davis is saving our water.

By calling for the toughest water pollution control bill in the U.S., and providing the plan to fund it, the Governor is assuring clean water to drink, clean water to swim in by 1980.

Davis is saving our state



This re-election ad for Governor Deane C. Davis helped him win in 1970.

natural areas in the state can't be the concern of the Hoff Administration. . . . (Sen. Aiken) has said that it is no longer a question of whether a dam will be built at Victory, but when.”⁵

“When” never came. Over time, individual conservationists, the Conservation Committee of the Green Mountain Audubon Society (GMAS), and even elements within Vermont state government raised objections. Bob Spear, then chairman of the GMAS Nature Center Committee, began an exchange of letters with Aiken, letters that, even though written in 1968, typify contemporary debates over natural resources preservation and exploitation. In an editorial in the GMAS newsletter *The Hermit Thrush*, Spear poked both Aiken and the Corps over the dam. Aiken responded by letter on March 11, 1968. Employing numerous arguments for the dam, Aiken, sounding similar to so many of today's politicians, wrote:

“It would mean an influx of permanent population just as has happened in my own County of Windham. It would mean a lot more jobs and a lot more income for the area just as the ski development has done. . .

Personally, I think one of the most beautiful sights is to see a man working at good pay which will enable him to raise, educate, and keep healthy a growing family.”⁶

Spear, believing conservationists must act as “gad-fly to the state,” parried back in what could be read as an epistle on behalf of Vermont’s environment. In it, he wrote: “Is Senator Aiken trying to lull us into a false sense of security? Ski runs do desecrate mountains. Does he imply that because skiing is profitable, ski runs should be limited only by their possibilities without other considerations? . . . I agree that ‘one of the most beautiful sights is . . . a man working at good pay’ etc. But must this worthwhile objective be accomplished by destroying a world, an environment that nourishes the psychological well-being of so many others?”⁷

Opposition crescendoed throughout 1968 and rolled on into the next year, when the state of Vermont, after legislative and gubernatorial action, bought the bog from the New England Power Company on June 18, 1969. The bog that was to be both dammed and damned remains today, owned by the people of Vermont and managed by the state as the Victory Bog Wildlife Management Area.

Movement No. 2: Camels Hump

People in the estimated 26,000 vehicles that, on average, pass daily between the Waterbury and Richmond exits on Vermont’s I-89 can try, but they will never see a ski area on Camels Hump. It did not have to be that way. It is because of a more than half-century struggle – from 1911 to 1969 – that has preserved Camels Hump as the only one of Vermont’s five 4,000-foot mountains to remain unspoiled by ski areas and their amoeba-like real-estate sprawl.

Joseph Battell had started that ball rolling in 1911. A distinctive blend of eccentric and prophet, the Middlebury newspaperman, writer, horse breeder, and philanthropist, made Vermont an offer it could not refuse: “. . . In consideration of One Dollar to me in hand paid and in consideration of the love I bear my native state, I do give, grant, bargain, sell, convey and confirm to the State of Vermont for a state park, a



*Shirley Strong's gravestone
in Craftsbury Common.
The words defined her life.*

mountain called 'Camels Hump.'"⁸

Battell's gift, while generous, was decidedly diminutive: 500 acres including the summit. Certainly it was no Louisiana Purchase, but the link between Camels Hump and public ownership was forged. Another link was added in 1940 when retired professor Will Monroe willed his Couching Lion Farm to the state for preservation. The state, though, was not a good steward. The Forest and Parks Department, under the leadership of its longtime director Perry Merrill, had a different vision than Battell and Monroe, and treated Camels Hump as "just another woodlot."⁹

In 1962, after the Vermont Forest and Parks Board rejected a plan to lease Camels Hump as a ski area, the mountain became a *movement*. In 1963, Bob Spear proposed that Camels Hump be preserved as a mountain park. In 1964, UVM botanist Hub Vogelmann, acclaimed later for his pioneering research on acid rain, publicized the importance of the area. In 1966, Governor Hoff climbed the mountain with U.S. Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall and others to dedicate a plaque proclaiming Camels Hump as Vermont's first official natural area.

Any illusions that the Couching Lion, as Camels Hump had once been

called, could recline in peace were shattered in September 1966 when a major lumber company was rumored to be ready to sell its Camels Hump land, which would be converted into high-altitude chalets serviced by a cable car. “Save Camels Hump” became a slogan and a campaign that October, when the GMAS conservation committee initiated its effort to either buy the lands or promote the establishment of a state or national park. A year later, the group’s report, “Camels Hump Park – A Proposal to Keep a Promise to a Mountain,” called for establishing an ecological reserve, a forestry zone, a multiple-use zone and a rural museum.¹⁰

The campaign gained momentum and despite the passive resistance of Perry Merrill, who called it “that pile of rocks,” the promise was kept. Camels Hump became a State Park and Forest Reserve in April 1969.

Movement #3 – the Green Mountain Wildlands

Walk into the Craftsbury Common Cemetery, across from Vermont’s Sterling College, and you will find Shirley Strong’s grave. Pharaohs left pyramids. Ex-presidents built multi-million dollar libraries, monuments to ego. Shirley Strong left behind a thin granite headstone. Sculpted into it in bas-relief are the symbolic testaments to her life: the high peaks and low hills of the Green Mountains; fiddleheads, ferns and conifers; a flying bird; and a signpost for the Long Trail. Etched into the stone were words that defined her: “Lover of Mountains and their Trails.”

Perhaps, for most people that is all they need to know, but when a definitive environmental history of Vermont is written, they will know this as well: Shirley Strong was a force of and for nature. A participant in most of the prominent environmental debates of the 1960s and ‘70s, her signal accomplishment was to sound the alarm as Vermont’s mountains fell, one by one like dominoes, before the bulldozer’s advance:

“So here was Killington having a problem and trying to grow fast. . . . Jay Peak was, had just had a problem. . . . Bolton was coming into being, Sugarbush was coming into being. Mount Mansfield was pushing to get the gondola in. And they said first the gondola wouldn’t be open – it wouldn’t be operating in the summertime and then, of course, (it) got opened. So all these things were happening and there wasn’t any long-range plan.”¹¹

Using Atomic Bomb

Mount Snow Plans Smashing New Slope

By J. TYLER RESCH

WEST DOVER — The use of a nuclear explosion to enlarge his ski facilities is still the determined goal of Walter Schoenknecht, president of the Mount Snow Development Corp.

"The A.E.C. (Atomic Energy Commission) has not turned thumbs down on the idea," the ski tycoon said yesterday. "In fact, they've been very cooperative and very interested."

Schoenknecht has already started to develop the north slope of Mount Snow by building an access road, and he expects to gouge out a new ski area there fully as large as the existing one which faces northeast, and which is already billed as "the world's largest ski area" with nine double chairlifts and 40 trails and slopes.

He says he is negotiating with the AEC to consider this kind of massive earth movement as a new peaceful and practical use of atomic energy.

"If we cannot do it with an atom bomb, then we will do it mechanically," he says.

Schoenknecht wants to dredge up a huge crater out of the foot of the mountain's north slope, where he says there is potential



WALTER SCHOENKNECHT

for an expert ski area. (Most of the existing trails are in the novice or intermediate category.) A natural handwall exists on the north side, and the atomic blast would increase the vertical drop from the mountain top to the foot. He says he wants to install a gondola type lift to serve the new area.

To ease the fears of Vermonters who might have a doubt or two about a radioactive mushroom cloud over their state, Schoenknecht refers to a nuclear test carried out in Nevada last summer. An atomic bomb was set off 750 feet below the ground, he said, resulting in a crater 347 feet deep and 1,400 feet in diameter.

He claims the AEC learned that 97 per cent of the radiation remained trapped under the ground. The test, he contends, actually duplicated the conditions of the Mount Snow project, though the blast was never connected publicly with the ski area earth moving project.

No Mass of Rubble

But the best part of the test from Mount Snow's viewpoint, Schoenknecht adds, was that it left a silicon-like sand surface which would be ideally suited to a ski area. There was no great mass of rubble because the nuclear blast disintegrated everything.

"This is something big," Schoenknecht said excitedly. "The AEC says it's five to 10 years

See MOUNT SNOW
Continued on Page 16

Was Mount Snow's Walter Schoenknecht serious? His proposal surely made news and created an environmental stir.

Where the state lacked a plan, Shirley Strong had one. In 1966 she formed the Green Mountain Wildlands Profile Committee with Vogelmann, Spear, and Roland Wilbur. In June, the committee submitted its plan to the Vermont Forest and Parks Department.

Strong and her collaborators first made a diagnosis: "The natural beauty of the mountains is steadily disappearing and the availability of mountain wildlands is dwindling rapidly. More and more of the state and national forests lands are being leased and opened up for development."¹²

To counteract this deterioration, they prescribed tough medicine, a "Wildlands Profile Strip . . . to preserve a strip of wild lands along the higher elevations of the Green Mountain Range. It would include most of the land above 2,500 feet in elevation. . . ."¹³

By today's compromised environmental standards, Strong's committee's recommendations must seem radical and naive. They suggested that "all future encroachments which would destroy the mountain wilderness and disturb the ecological balances within these areas should be prohibited."

These included prohibitions or severe limitations on building, roads and towers and added, “Additional ski developments should definitely be discouraged.”

Ultimately – and unsurprisingly – Shirley Strong’s committee fell short of its major objective, the creation of a mile-wide, end-to-end wildlands strip the length of Vermont. It succeeded in other areas. Its emphasis on planning would be reflected in the eventual passage of Act 250. The 2,500-foot demarcation also stuck. Even here, however, political pressures quashed good ecology.

Vogelmann would recount: “. . . we talked about how low can we put the line to protect the high elevations. In other words, could we put it down to 2,000 feet, anything above 2,000 feet? And we thought that was pushing it too hard . . . You know, it was some politics involved in all of this. In other words, how far can you push on something like this”¹⁴

Strong kept pushing but she died too soon. Today, if she could lift her head from her resting place and look west across the valley, she would see Lowell Mountain, scarred by a 21-turbine wind project that destroyed the ridgeline of one of the Green Mountains she loved. Why did it happen? That is another story, but just maybe, it was because Shirley Strong was no longer there to help.

Movement #4: Windham County, Deane Davis and Act 250

Laid on its side, Vermont State Route 9, the Molly Stark Trail, is like a Bell curve with a deep dimple in the middle. Linking Bennington and Brattleboro, it starts in one valley and ends in another, traversing the highlands of the southern Vermont plateau. Folks call it “the Banana Belt,” and to many who live in Vermont’s two southernmost counties – Bennington and Windham – it is “out of sight and out of mind” to the dominant political milieu of northern Vermont. In the late 1960s, Bill Schmidt made sure it was on everyone’s mind.

Schmidt, the preacher who stood near George Aiken at the Putney exit dedication in 1961, was in May 1969 the first executive director of the Windham Regional Commission, the first regional planning commission



Restore Our Wild Green Mountains

www.sierraclub.org/vt



These two images, of a Sierra Club bumper sticker and heavy-duty construction for wind turbines at Lowell, demonstrate how some environmental groups who once defended the mountains now tolerate mountaintop destruction for renewable energy.

in Vermont. He spent considerable time traveling throughout Windham County and also to Montpelier. Along the way he could see an approaching stampede of pillage-and-run land-development schemes.

One of the first big ones – the proposed Whitingham Farms – covered Whitingham and Halifax and part of northern Massachusetts.

“Three guys from Connecticut came up. They didn’t have any money, and bought 2,200 acres from the Carthusian Foundation. . . . They were pretty slick in their advertising,” Schmidt recalls, pointing to a photograph of the Harriman Reservoir that they called “Your Vacation Home.” (The false advertising drew the objections of Vermont’s attorney general.)¹⁵

On visiting the Whitingham site, Schmidt asked an employee of the developers, “Gee, this is pretty neat. Where did this land come from? Who did you buy it from?”

“The crustaceans,” the befuddled salesman replied, oblivious to the difference between the monastic Carthusians and the aquatic crab, lobster, and shrimp family. That was an ill omen for the eventual failure of Whitingham Farms.

Farther up Vermont Route 100, things were not nearly as humorous or slapstick: “Wilmington and Dover are on the edge of disaster. The second-home invasion threatens to engulf them, destroying as it goes. A few will benefit at the expense of many. Perhaps a thousand new permanent households and ten thousand new vacation homes!”¹⁶

Bill Schmidt may have divined the signs of the times, but Deane Davis, Vermont’s new governor, could only dimly perceive them – at least in the Banana Belt. Schmidt set out to change that. Having attended the May 14, 1969, Governor’s Conference on Natural Resources at the Vermont State House along with some 500 other Vermonters, he thought something was missing: a proper emphasis on land development.

Sometime between May 14, when Davis named his new environmental control commission, and Davis’s scheduled Governor’s Day visit to Brattleboro on May 28, Schmidt got through to the new governor and invited him to have breakfast with members and staff of the regional commission. To Schmidt, that meeting still resonates: “If I had to identify one meeting that . . . really stands out in my memory as the meeting, it would be that breakfast. . . . It was absolutely fascinating watching this man open up. He asked a few questions to start with and then [it went] back and forth . . . for almost two hours. He just really said, ‘I had no idea this was going on. . . . I’ve got to see this for myself.’”¹⁷

Davis came back twice within a month. First, Schmidt and others took the governor on tours of Wilmington and Dover. Up on Wilmington’s Chimney Hill development, Davis told Schmidt to stop their car, “Let’s stop here. Look at that house. Where is its sewage going? It’s on a hillside! And there’s another house right below it. Where do they get their water? How does the school bus get up here?”

When he returned to Brattleboro a third time late in June 1969, Davis told the regional commission’s annual meeting, “I’m going to instruct my new environmental control commission to put land development control right up alongside water issues.”¹⁸

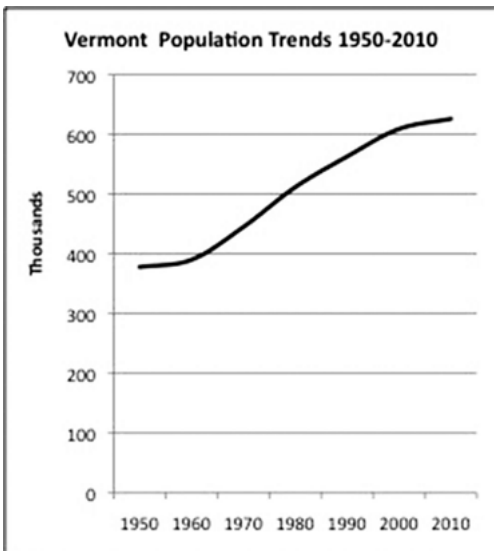
Like Saul on the road to Damascus, Deane Davis experienced his epiphany on the roads of Brattleboro, Wilmington, and Dover. Unusual for

a governor, he began the 1970 legislative session with four major addresses, one solely dedicated to environmental control. It carried a stark warning:

“We have only to travel some sections of Vermont to know that we are already losing the battle to the developer and the growth [of] our State is already out of balance. But if we are to strike a balance for the rest of the State and enjoy the fruits of economic growth, then we must have the legislation that I have outlined to you here today. There is no other answer.”¹⁹

By January 18, the environmental commission, popularly known as the Gibb Commission after its chair, Representative Arthur Gibb, delivered its recommendations. By April 4, Vermont’s new land-development legislation became law – Act 250.

Now, in the gauzy, golden glow with which many Vermonters view their state’s environmental history, passage of the Gibb Commission’s various recommendations seemed assured, almost foreordained. One claim: “Their report . . . was taken up immediately by the legislature and passed with strong support.”²⁰ Yes and no. Davis himself remembered numerous substantial obstacles that stalled not only the creation of Act 250 but a slew of other environmental proposals he had made. He later recounted that, with the end of the session three weeks away:



Graph shows the Vermont population growth curve after Interstate 91 opened.

“Opponents were having much success in setting up roadblocks, and in addition to the central acts of 250 and 252, bills were languishing that would limit pesticide use, restrict development at elevations higher than twenty-five hundred feet, and create zoning for floodplains and lake shores.”²¹

Deane Davis prevailed, due in no small part to his threat to extend the legislative session if necessary and his resolve to call a special session to pass the environmental legislation if the Legislature failed to act.²²

Upon leaving office in 1973, Davis looked back with pride but also recalled his disappointments. “The greatest,” he wrote, “was my inability to complete the passage of the statewide Land Use Plan that had been proposed in Act 250.”²³

Peter Martin reflected on why. First: “. . . the agricultural economy in the state was collapsing. You had these folks who had land, and they could not make a go of it any more agriculturally, which was all dairy. . . . You put in zoning; what does that do to the value of that land that they need to sell in order to fund their retirement? It was a very visceral issue in many of the rural towns.”

Second, he fingered another challenge – complexity: “One level was just the sheer technical difficulty. This was before geo-information systems, before satellite data. There may have been some really crude satellite stuff but I don’t think so. So technically, how did you do it?”

They did not. The contemplated land-use plan had been the lynchpin going forward. Without it, Act 250 was hobbled almost out of the gate. For want of a nail, a shoe had been lost. Vermont’s environmental spring was over.

Then. Now. Tomorrow?

“. . . if we can widen the range of experience beyond what we as individuals encountered, if we can draw upon the experiences of others who’ve had to confront comparable situations in the past, then – although there are no guarantees – our chances of acting wisely should increase proportionally.”

- John Lewis Gaddis, The Landscape of History

Looking back, Vermont's environmental spring was figuratively akin to the so-called democratic "spring" movements that rise up from time to time in autocratic nations. In those, the early shoots of democracy emerge only too often to be stamped out when sinister forces strike back. The hope is that the early growth establishes hearty roots before it is trampled.

In Vermont, the environmental spring lasted long enough to the sow the seeds of future success. Fortuitously, as Hub Vogelmann later pointed out, ". . . the lobbyists hadn't gotten their act together."²⁴ Soon, they had, and ever since, plenty of boots have attempted to stamp down much of the environmental flora that took root.

After a half-century of body blows, Act 250 is bruised and battered, still standing but hardly thriving. Legal historian Paul Gillies calls it Vermont's "crown jewel . . . the crystallization of an environmental consciousness and conscience."²⁵ Now it is a tarnished gem, and some scholars question the prospects for significant improvement.²⁶

Of course, programmatic fixes and accomplishments do not flow *sui generis* from the pens of those who craft legislative language. Instead, they reflect the underlying philosophy, perceptions and values of the culture in which environmental laws are considered. It is here that fundamental problems lie.

Philosophically, a central flaw in Deane Davis's reasoning was this: that "the latest science of ecology and the improved knowledge concerning effective government organization" would enable Vermont to build a future that would "assure development without destruction."²⁷ In other words, we could have our cake and eat it, too.

Perceptually, too many of us deceive ourselves about the "inexhaustibility" of our land. Norwich author Noel Perrin ascribed the eighteenth-century conception of a "forever-virgin" America to ignorance: "At that time 'America' was a strip of land 300 miles wide, going south from Maine to Georgia. In the absence of airplanes, satellites, and so forth, no one knew exactly how much more land there was west of the frontier."²⁸

Today, despite advances in technology and geographic information

systems, one prominent renewable energy proponent defends Vermont's proliferating wind and solar installations by writing, "there is plenty of land to go around, for preservation, conservation, and economic uses."²⁹ Vermont, at least in his mind, is still forever-virgin.

Value-wise, it is hard to imagine a greater contrast between the 1960-'70s – Vermont's environmental spring – and the 2010s – Vermont's "new energy landscape" of wind turbines and solar panels – than between the words and actions of two governors: Deane Davis and Peter Shumlin.

In 1970, Davis told the Vermont Legislature and all of Vermont: "Humans are indeed an inescapable part of an intricate system of life and growth that begins with air, soil, and water, and includes myriad forms of life and activity upon which we are mutually dependent."³⁰

In 2013, Peter Shumlin pronounced: "Birds, bats, and bears are expendable in the effort to 'keep the planet safe.'"³¹

And yet, we are entranced. We celebrate Vermont's reputation as the Great and Emerald Oz, a place unspoiled and uncorrupted. To many who visit, Vermont indeed seems an oasis, a life-affirming space of verdant mountains, pure waters, and quiet peace. We brag on our Vermont Difference as if a "better-than-environment" is good enough.³² It is not.

In 1981, historian Charles Morrissey described how Vermont had begun to resemble too many other spoiled places in America. He questioned our self-centered sense of superiority, "Vermont is different? The question is asked sardonically. The trouble with Vermont is that Vermont is not different enough."³³ Since then, Vermont, as with the rest of the nation, has further defaced the land, despoiled the waters and denied the inexorable consequences.

Now Vermont readies itself to celebrate, in 2020, the fiftieth anniversary of Act 250's enactment. Legislative studies are planned for Act 250's next fifty years.³⁴ Speeches will be written, delivered, and forgotten. We will relive what Paul Gillies calls "our creation myth. Repeating how Vermont turned back a wave of unwelcome, unplanned subdivision development just in time allows us to revive our inspiration."³⁵

If we can justifiably draw on the past for *inspiration*, we also might reasonably use it for *imagination*. A story about the end of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 provides an example. Then, a woman approached Benjamin Franklin, one of the delegates, and asked, “Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?” With no hesitation Franklin responded, ‘A republic, if you can keep it.’”

Now imagine a Vermonter approaching Deane Davis back in 1970, immediately after he signed Act 250 into law. “So, Governor,” they would ask, “What have you left us?” And “the impossibly old man” would answer, “A beautiful state, if you can keep it.”

And keeping it is up to us. □

- 1 Peter Martin interview with author, January 7, 2016.
- 2 Wallace Stegner, *Marking the Sparrow's Fall: The Making of the American West*, (New York, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 260.
- 3 Shirley Strong interview, August 29, 2000, Vermont Folklife Center, Shirley Strong/TC2000.2023, Green Mountain Club/2000.0002.
- 4 Martin interview.
- 5 Frederic O. Sargent, “The Victory Bog Controversy,” *The Green Mountain Audubon Society and the Greening of Vermont*, (Huntington, Vermont: Birds of Vermont Museum, 1997), 73.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 66.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 68.
- 8 Sargent, “Establishing Camels Hump State Park,” *The Green Mountain Audubon Society and the Greening of Vermont*, (Huntington, Vermont: Birds of Vermont Museum, 1997), 89.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 90.
- 10 Sargent, “Camels Hump Park - A Proposal to Keep a Promise to a Mountain,” (Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Vermont, October, 1967).
- 11 Strong interview.
- 12 Letter of Shirley Strong et. al., titled “Green Mountains Wildlands Profile,” December 1, 1966.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 H.W. Vogelmann interview, August 3, 2007, Vermont Folklife Center, Conservation Stewardship Project/VFC2007.0007, 46.
- 15 William H. Schmidt interview with author, April 1, 2016.
- 16 “An Ecological Planning Study for Wilmington and Dover, Vermont (1972), *To Heal the Earth: Selected Writings of Ian L. McHarg*, eds.: Ian L. McHarg and Frederick Steiner, (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1998), 319.
- 17 Schmidt interview.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Deane C. Davis, *Environmental Control Message to the State of Vermont*, January 8, 1970.
- 20 Elizabeth Courtney and Eric Zencey, *Greening Vermont: The Search for a Sustainable State*, (Vermont Natural Resources Council and Thistle Hill Publications, 2012), 45.
- 21 Deane C. Davis, with Nancy Graff, *Deane C. Davis: An Autobiography*, (Shelburne, Vermont: The

- New England Press, 1991), 260.
- 22 Ibid., 260.
- 23 Ibid., 312.
- 24 Vogelmann interview.
- 25 Paul S. Gillies, "The Evolution of Act 250," *Uncommon Law, Ancient Roads, and Other Ruminations on Vermont Legal History*, (Barre and Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 2013), 302.
- 26 The book *Mountain Resorts: Ecology and the Law*, eds. Janet Milne, et.al., (Ashgate Publishing, 2009), identifies a critical shortcoming in Vermont's Act 250: failure to evaluate "the cumulative impacts of development on the ecosystem." Yet the authors label the prospect of inserting such language in Act 250 as "wistful." p. 328.
- 27 Davis, *Environmental Control Message*.
- 28 Noel Perrin, "Forever Virgin: The American View of Vermont," *On Nature: Nature, Landscape, and Natural History*, ed. Daniel Halpern (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987), 15.
- 29 "Vermont's New Working Landscape," *The Vermont Political Observer*, www.thevp.org/2015/08/25/vermonts-new-working-landscape, (retrieved 10/1/2015).
- 30 Davis, Deane C., *Environmental Control Message*.
- 31 Liisa Kissell, "What has changed in a year?" *The Commons*, filed July 31, 2013 (retrieved 10/11/2015), www.commonnews.org/site/site05/story.php?articleno=8045&page=1#VpppWIVUvY8.
- 32 In its summary of Act 250, Vermont's Natural Resources Board explicitly speaks to this environmental relativism: "The effects of Act 250 are most clear when one compares Vermont's pristine landscape with most other states." See: <http://nrb.vermont.gov/act250-program>
- 33 Charles T. Morrissey, *Vermont: A History*, (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company and Nashville: American Association of State and Local History, 1981, 1984), 105.
- 34 For background see: [http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/ACTS/ACT047/ACT047%20Act %20Summary.pdf](http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/ACTS/ACT047/ACT047%20Act%20Summary.pdf)
- 35 Gillies, 302.



Francis W. Brackett as a young man

Francis W. Brackett (1886-1977)
Rediscovered Landscape Artist

Warren F. Broderick

Photographs courtesy of Diana Brackett Ramsdale

Francis W. Brackett, a prolific landscape artist, had such first-class connections in the art world that it's curious that he became lost to history, only to be rediscovered living in retirement on Sycamore Lane in Shaftsbury. He is not even listed in *AskART*, a website archive of tens of thousands of international artists, both influential and forgotten.

Brackett studied under a prominent landscape artist whose work is featured at the Smithsonian. He was a member of the prestigious Salmagundi Club in New York City and exhibited there for nearly twenty-five years, as well as in Vermont and Pennsylvania. He served on the adjunct faculty of a major eastern university. He oversaw art collections and artistic

efforts for state properties in a region of New York State for more than twenty years, creating significant public art as part of his job.

So why did he become lost to history and how was he rediscovered?

Francis Wardwell Brackett was born in Lynn, Massachusetts, on October 4, 1886, to parents named Harry and Helen (Young) Brackett. As a young man he worked as a laborer and school bus driver, then became a school art teacher. He is said to have briefly taught art in public schools in suburban Acton, Massachusetts, but that has not been documented. In the 1890s and early 1900s, the family resided for a few years in St. Paul, Minnesota, prior to returning to Lynn. There, he attended Classical High School and also Boston Normal School, a state teacher's college.

Known to many as "Ward," he received formal art training at Columbia University and the School of Fine and Applied Arts in New York City (now known as the Parsons School), studying under Theodore M. Dillaway of Boston and Philadelphia, and Canadian-born landscape artist Emile Walters, among others. As a member of the Salmagundi Club he exhibited coastal and rural landscapes from Pennsylvania, Long Island, and coastal Connecticut, regularly between 1916 and 1940. After moving to Vermont he exhibited at the Southern Vermont Art Center in Manchester and other places, including a large solo show at the Chester Art Guild in 1966. At the latter exhibit his work was so well received that some works sold prior to the show opening. One newspaper account stated that he only exhibited watercolors but that claim is questionable because most of his works were oils. His landscapes could be described as either Expressionist or Representational Impressionist.

In 1910 he married Florence Taylor, a young mill-machine operator from England, and after her death in 1916 the following year he was married, in Niagara Falls, to Charlotte Ehricht, a school teacher from North Tonawanda, New York. In the summer of 1916 he joined the faculty of State College, now Penn State University, to teach in the summer session, and is understood by his descendants to have exhibited there as well. His World War I draft registration card described him as being tall and slender, with brown hair and brown eyes. He soon became a resident of Greenwich, Connecticut, and was head of the art department of the

The artist dedicated this photo to his son William.



Greenwich public schools. Brackett joined the Salmagundi Club in New York City and exhibited at the Connecticut Society [Academy] of Fine Arts and the Greenwich Society of Artists. He is listed as a member of the latter organization between 1923 and 1931 and exhibited there in 1923 and 1929.

His second marriage was short lived, and he next relocated to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, where he married again, on May 21, 1927, to Eva Clark, a young teacher from Milo, Maine. Brackett was hired as head of the art department at nearby West Pittston public schools, and during his tenure at that position frequently presented for civic organizations and school functions on specific aspects of art, but often on the importance of art education in schools. He insisted that artists and art teachers seek enjoyment in their work and give it priority over financial remuneration. Prior to leaving the area in 1934 he executed an impressive mural for the West Pittston High School, which inspired incoming students by showing them the variety of scholastic activities that would encourage them to graduate and find a better future than the coal mining industry.

The Bracketts lived in the nearby town of Forty Fort, Luzerne County, and while his favorite subjects were peaceful autumn scenes of the Wyoming Valley that featured trees in red foliage, his artistic interests were far more

diverse. One of his better known paintings depicted the historic Israel Putnam Cottage at Greenwich, Connecticut, in winter moonlight. Said to be equally impressive was a rendering of “Coal Breaker #14” at Port Griffith, Pennsylvania, surrounded by haze. “Breakers” were tall, imposing, dangerous structures used for sorting coal into various sizes, owned by companies notorious for their use of child labor. An impressive large seascape, “Gulls in Morning Mist,” is still owned by his descendants.

Typically, Brackett began with small detailed pencil sketches, but then, rather than using them as the basis for large finished works, he created small finely detailed oil paintings, where most artists, he noted, would have employed other mediums. In 1928 he won a player piano as an award in a contest sponsored by a local department store by writing the name of the store an amazing 2,058 times in a 3-by-4-inch area, if for no other reason than to demonstrate his appreciation of detail. In October 1929 some of his small detailed oil paintings were exhibited along with his popular large works in his first solo show, held at the Isaac Long Department Store in Wilkes-Barre. While in Pennsylvania he also gave private lessons in “drawing, printing and lettering.”

Brackett next moved to Long Island, in 1934 or 1935, living in Hempstead and Bellmore, where he secured the position of art manager for the Long Island State Park Commission. His duties not only included creating paintings and posters for special events but also overseeing the décor of historic structures at Jones Beach State Park. Three of the ten or more of these works have been located at Jones Beach: a view of the Robert Moses Bridge, a portrayal of a stage show, and an Impressionist scene of bathers on the beach. A view of Captree State Park, probably his work as well, has also been located. Another Jones Beach bathing scene is owned by his granddaughter.

In 1957 he retired and moved to a house on Sycamore Lane in South Shaftsbury, where he continued to create works on commission for State Parks on Long Island. His sister-in-law, Bertha (Clark) Leonard already lived in the same neighborhood with her husband, Herbert Leonard, a retired manufacturing executive and prominent town resident. His sister, Susan Randlett (1894-1981), moved to Shaftsbury with her husband in 1961. Some time following the death of his wife, Eva, in 1974, Brackett moved to

Ramsey, New Jersey, where he died at the home of his son, William, on April 18, 1977. Francis and Eva Brackett are interred in the Shaftsbury Center Cemetery. His son William (1913-2004) lived and died in Wilkes-Barre while his other son, Harry (1915-1999), removed to California.

Brackett's most recent subjects were now primarily Vermont scenes. An autumn scene bearing a 1957 gift inscription from the artist on the back was identified by a later owner as depicting Mount Ascutney and Chase Island in the Connecticut River as sketched from Cornish, New



Brackett in a studio photograph

Hampshire. His works that were exhibited at the Southern Vermont Art Center between 1959 and 1972 included views of Plymouth, Vermont, and Hapgood Pond in Peru, but also some coastal scenes and a red barn in Orford, New Hampshire, along the Connecticut River.

He also exhibited at the annual Cracker Barrel Festival in Newbury and at the armory Northfield, Vermont, during his later years, the details of which have not yet been identified. Brackett's talents not only extended to the creation of striking poster art but also a variety of decorative art objects including tall wrought-iron candle sticks, an engraved glass tray and boldly styled silver jewelry.



Francis W. Brackett is not listed in any artist dictionaries or other reference works, such as *Who Was Who in American Art, 1564-1975: 400 years of Artists in America* (1999), or any internet art reference web site. (Another artist, also known as Ward Brackett, is listed in *AskART*, but is not related.) The most any auction or sale listings for his works have explained is that he was "believed to have worked in Massachusetts and Vermont." While artist dictionaries and similar works remain an important source for art history research, the information they contain is not always

complete and accurate. In addition, *Who Was Who* is the primary source of biographical information contained in a number of popular subscription internet databases. If a deceased American artist is not found in either place he or she might as well not have existed in the eyes of the art auction and sale community.



A non-traditional kind of art history research was used to compile biographical information on this artist. Francis W. Brackett was identified by searching *Library Ancestry.com* and locating a person of a reasonable age with an occupation of “artist” or “art teacher.” *Ancestry* also located him in a street directory covering South Shaftsbury in 1960. Two interviews with the artist in the 1960s were found in the *Bennington Banner* by consulting an index at the Bennington Free Library, where film of the newspaper was then consulted. Once he was located living in the Wilkes-Barre area for a significant part of this life, newspapers from that region were consulted online using *Newspapers.com*. Internet searching also revealed descendants of the artist living in the state of Washington. The Bennington Museum library’s necrology files disclosed Brackett’s residence near his sister and her prominent husband, Herbert Leonard, in South Shaftsbury, along with their grave sites.




Exhibition catalogs from the Southern Vermont Art Center, some found at the Bennington Museum, revealed twenty-five exhibitions of Brackett’s work over a fourteen-year period. SVAC exhibition records are now being digitized by myself and two colleagues. Similar records are missing for the former Chester Art Guild, and exhibition venues have not been identified for Northfield, Newbury, or State College. Exhibition records for the well-known Salmagundi Club are found in two published volumes. Because of Brackett’s long-term position with the state of New York, the state’s Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation was helpful in locating his works held by Long Island state parks.

Francis W. Brackett works exhibited at the Southern Vermont Art Center, from exhibition catalogs:

- 1959 NY&NE Autumn Glory
- 1959 Autumn Bronze
- 1959 Invitation to Tranquility
- 1959 January Thaw
- 1960 Winter Brook
- 1961 January Thaw
- 1961 Red Barn, Oxford [sic: Orford], N.H.
- 1961 Winter Pastoral
- 1962 Gulls in Morning Mist
- 1962 Lubec, Maine
- 1963 Drying Sails – Rockland, Maine
- 1963 Early Snow
- 1964 fall Perkins' Cove
- 1964 fall Plymouth, Vermont
- 1964 Home Port, Block Island
- 1965 Desolation
- 1966 Hapgood Pond
- 1967 fall Old Jelly Barn
- 1967 Gathering Storm
- 1968 The Followers
- 1969 fall Through the Fog
- 1969 Behind the Mill
- 1969 Old Ferry Boat Landing
- 1970 Valley Farms
- 1971 On the Way Home
- 1972 Winter's Silence

ART GUILD GALLERY, OIL

2-5 P.M. THUR. SEPT. 1 AT THE CHESTER



PAINTINGS WILL BE ON DISPLAY

FRANCIS W. BRACKETT

YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND

Brackett created this poster to go with an exhibit held in Chester, Vt., in 1966.



The Harmon Inn, photographed as it deteriorated in 1904. It was built in 1773 and closed by 1794.

Bennington Museum collection

An Architectural Analysis

The Harmons, Their Inn, and the Times

Jane Radocchia

The Harmon Inn on Vail Road in Bennington was about to be torn down in 1904 when Henry Clay Day sent a letter about it to the *Bennington Banner*. He mentioned the photograph of the house in the newly published *Souvenir of Bennington* and wrote about its innkeeper, Daniel Harmon, who had fought in the Battle of Bennington. Day also described the house: how its winding staircase, substantial doors, and handsome moldings had been taken away by “relic hunters.”¹

The photograph shows a two-story house, one room deep, two rooms wide, with a centered front door, consistent with its construction date of 1773. In Bennington before the American Revolution, fireplaces were built

around a central chimney, which came through the roof at the ridge above the front door.² Chimneys placed near the gable ends of the house, as in this picture, were not built in this area until around 1800.³

The Harmon Inn closed in 1794. The next year Daniel Harmon and his wife, Lucretia, moved to Vergennes. By 1797, sons Argalus and Calvin had joined them, becoming merchants and distillers. Vergennes recorded two other children, Daniel and Lucretia, as active in the community.⁴ It is unlikely that Daniel Harmon remodeled the inn before he and his family moved away.

Houses are often updated after a life-changing event such as a death, a marriage, or an increase or decrease in income. So for this house the renovation came when it was no longer an inn and had new owners. They were probably Daniel Harmon's relatives because the house was labeled "Harmon" on the 1835 Hinsdill map of Bennington.

Day mentions that the inn closed due to lack of business, and that its location was not on a well-trafficked route. The main road past the inn was Vail Road, part of the route west from Bennington Centre (Old Bennington) to the ford across the Walloomsac River where the Henry Bridge is today, and then to Hoosick and the Hudson River. The other road cut across to Pleasant Valley and south through Breese Hollow toward the Mohawk Trail, now Route 2. West Road, now N.Y. Route 9, did not exist past Houran Road. Several crossings of the Walloomsac existed closer to the town on the hill and the new industries locating along the river. And there was the disagreement about whether the location was going to be in New York or Vermont, which was not resolved until 1790. All of this could have contributed to reasons why Daniel Harmon closed the inn in 1794.

When the later Harmons decided to update the inn they did not need to look very far to see the latest fashion. The fashionable Vail House, circa 1805, about a quarter mile east of the Harmon Inn, had – and still has – end chimneys, a decorative front door, corner columns, and a frieze with matching window casings, and a broad staircase.

The Harmons also would have known the Palladian windows in Bennington's Old First Church, built in 1805. Similar high style,

neo-classical windows were also in new and remodeled houses in Bennington County as well as neighboring towns in New York. The inspiration came from English designers like James Gibbs, William Pain, and Abraham Swan, whose “pattern books” – books of designs for buildings and ornaments – were available in the States. Asher Benjamin, a New Englander, began publishing his pattern books in 1797. All these books showed Palladian windows.⁵

What else was updated at the Harmon Inn? The windows were enlarged and the door embellished. The close spacing of the windows on each side of the door is a geometric rhythm often used in this area before 1790. But the sash are larger than was common in early construction, and the front door is also too ornate for a house built before the Revolution. The door is similar to circa 1820 doors in nearby Washington County, New York.

Therefore this house, begun unadorned in Colonial times, was reimagined forty years later for a new era. Then its style fell out of fashion while heating, lighting, and plumbing advances in Victorian times made it obsolete. With no purpose it was abandoned, then dismantled and torn down. The written record and the history of vernacular architecture, added to the photograph and Day’s recollections, give us a more nuanced, richer look at the Harmons, their inn, and their times. □

Notes

1. *Bennington Souvenir*, Melvin H. Robinson, Ed., Troy times Art Press, 1904; p. 11, photo by Wills T. White; *The Henry Clay Day Papers*, Y9, 1904, Bennington Museum Research Library, Bennington, VT
2. The exception is a house with stone walls; for example: the Robert Frost Stone House, Shaftsbury, VT, c.1769
3. See James Garvin, *Building History of Northern New England*, University Press of New England, Hanover and London, 2001, p. 99 for a discussion of chimney placement.
4. *History of Addison Co. Vermont with illustrations*, H.P. Smith, Ed., D. Mason & Co., Syracuse, NY, 1886
5. James Gibbs, *A Book of Architecture*, London, 1738; William Pain, *The Practical Builder, or Workman’s General Assistant*, London, 1774; Abraham Swan, *The British Architect*, London, 1758; Asher Benjamin, *The Country Builder’s Assistant*, Greenfield, MA, 1797



Reflections upon *A Painting by Pat Adams*

Tom Fels

When my family moved to Bennington some sixty years ago, so that my parents could join the administration of Bennington College, one of the first new objects to enter our house in those early days was a painting by Pat Adams of the college faculty, an untitled work from about 1960. It struck an immediate chord with me and has ever since. Currently, it hangs in one of the public rooms of my own house where I see it every day.

To someone raised, up to that point, with a traditional view of the arts, our new home among mid-twentieth century modern artists, writers and musicians represented a radical change. Where my parents' few artist friends had occupied the fringes of their world, those now around us occupied the center, and where the paintings I was used to had been tasteful, figurative and realistic, what I now saw was abstract, non-objective and bold. It was as if I had moved from the staid world of the traditional salon to the wild forest of the Fauves.

For me, the small, elegant oil on paper by Pat Adams helped to bridge this gap. Contemporary but not alarming, colorful but not aggressive, mysterious but not obfuscatory, demanding in an inquiring way, it helped to ease me into the esthetic and intellectual world I would inhabit for the rest of my life. Nearly sixty years on I continue to be part of that world, and sixty years of her painting later I would have to say that Pat Adams's early works have proved a good guide to the oeuvre that was to come.

The striking qualities that drew me to this small painting are relatively easily expressed: a loose, unspecified, but naturalistic background resembling landscape, and a foreground with qualities of foliage, are overlaid with tightly controlled but rhythmically undulating bands of solid color. In this simple combination one has, it seems, nothing – nothing specific – and everything – everything one might care to contemplate visually, intellectually – set out in its simplest possible form.

Its specifics are harder to describe, but here is an attempt. The ground, with its somewhat “overall” quality, and the cloud-like foliate forms, while preponderantly green, are on closer inspection a complex set of layers – underpainting with light, scumble-like washes over it, sometimes thick, sometimes very thin, composed of a mixture of colors, often earth tones and orange, with occasional accents of red. The undulating bands of color that overlie the ground have a lively, almost springing motion; their rhythmic coordination gives them a quietly insistent quality. The delicate prominent band is composed of parallel stripes of purple, orange and different shades of green.

These varied elements seem to be at play both with each other and against each other. In the mystery of the layers lies a latency, a sense of depth

suggesting that there might be more to be revealed. In combination with the more disciplined lines, a viewer experiences precision and its opposite at the same time, an unusual achievement in such a small, non-objective space.

One's first reaction to this diminutive painting as a whole is a sense of the oriental, as if influenced by Indian, Japanese, and Chinese painting translated into abstraction. Given Adams's wide intellectual and artistic interests any or all of these may obtain. Over the years, though, the clear conclusion I've reached is that whatever influences underlie Adams's paintings, in the end her work could be by no one else.

Recently I had a chance to compare notes with Adams. I brought the painting over to her house and we looked at it and discussed it.* Though I see it daily and she hadn't seen it in over half a century, she immediately focused in on aspects of it that had escaped me. She identified resonances of shape and pattern invisible to me without her guidance, and noted techniques she had used that had been covered by later brushwork. She described in general terms the process by which a painting like this would have taken shape, a working method I could easily see translated in other works I knew. Our conversation didn't necessarily confirm what I had seen in the painting, which was, after all, an outsider's view of another's work, but it went a long way toward clarifying it.

Long after 1960, in 1984, I reviewed one of Pat Adams's shows at the Zabriskie Gallery, her longtime venue in New York.** What I saw there was what I had seen in the Adams painting I had been looking at for the past twenty-five years: inspired use of materials, by then including the delicate applications of mica and sand for which she had become known; mottled backgrounds that suggested depths of nature and space; carefully plotted lines in various configurations – a visual vocabulary, I noted, often defying easy verbal description.

But this is the point of Adams's work. These were features that, applied in her unique style, quoting Adams, drove “matter to mean,” resulting in “matter mattering” – an open question or set of observations to be explored. Words were not necessary. The goal of this complex effort was to attract, hold, and then satisfy an inquiring viewer, an experience through which he or she might share in the processes and insights that inspired the work. I

concluded:

What is exciting about Adams's work is that it is a constant reminder that good painting is possible. Adams is refreshing because, though knowledgeable she does not retreat through the abstruse to areas inaccessible to common understanding. Rather, she uses her knowledge to inform. If important painting is work which reveals something universal through the vision of an individual, Adams's work seems important. Indeed, such acts of positive energy, deliberation, decision and action are – whatever we may think of them ourselves – important by nature.

I would say the same today. □

* Conversation with Pat Adams, February 22, 2017

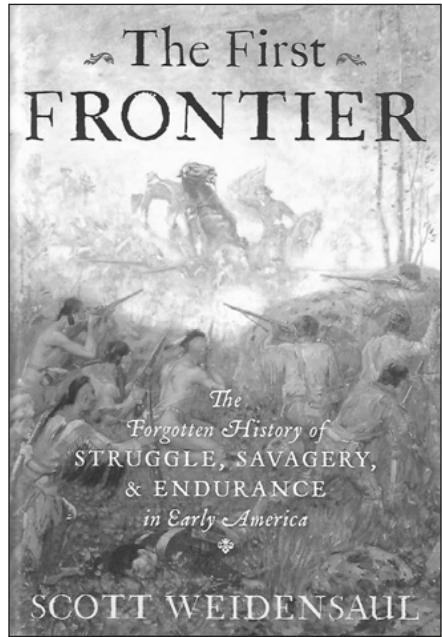
** "Pat Adams," *Arts*, New York, Summer 1984

Book Reviews

From the First Contact to the American Revolution

Reviewed by Neil Manganiello

T*he First Frontier: The Forgotten History of Struggle, Savagery, & Endurance in Early America* covers the historical evolution of North America from the very first pre-Mayflower contacts to the American Revolution. It is a fascinating read about how Native Americans and the competing colonizers interacted with each other.



Author Scott Weidensaul uses recent research in the first of the book's three divisions, titled "So Many Nations, People, and Tongues," to debunk the myth that the North American continent was a vast wilderness with no population or civilization. Explaining the varied tribes and their complex relationships with each other, the author also points out similarities between the ways in which Europeans and natives developed technology and political systems. The impact of European influences on the native populations was not based solely on a conflict of ideas but on every aspect of life from economics to the environment. The Europeans' influence radiated from coast to interior, from the intended impact of trade to such unintended consequences as disease. The author touches upon the Native Americans' influence on new crops and ideas on the European continent such as the introduction of potatoes and tobacco.

The second major division of the book, "Let Us Not Live to Be Enslaved," covers the push of European settlers as they encounter political and cultural conflicts. The natives had to deal not only with the influx

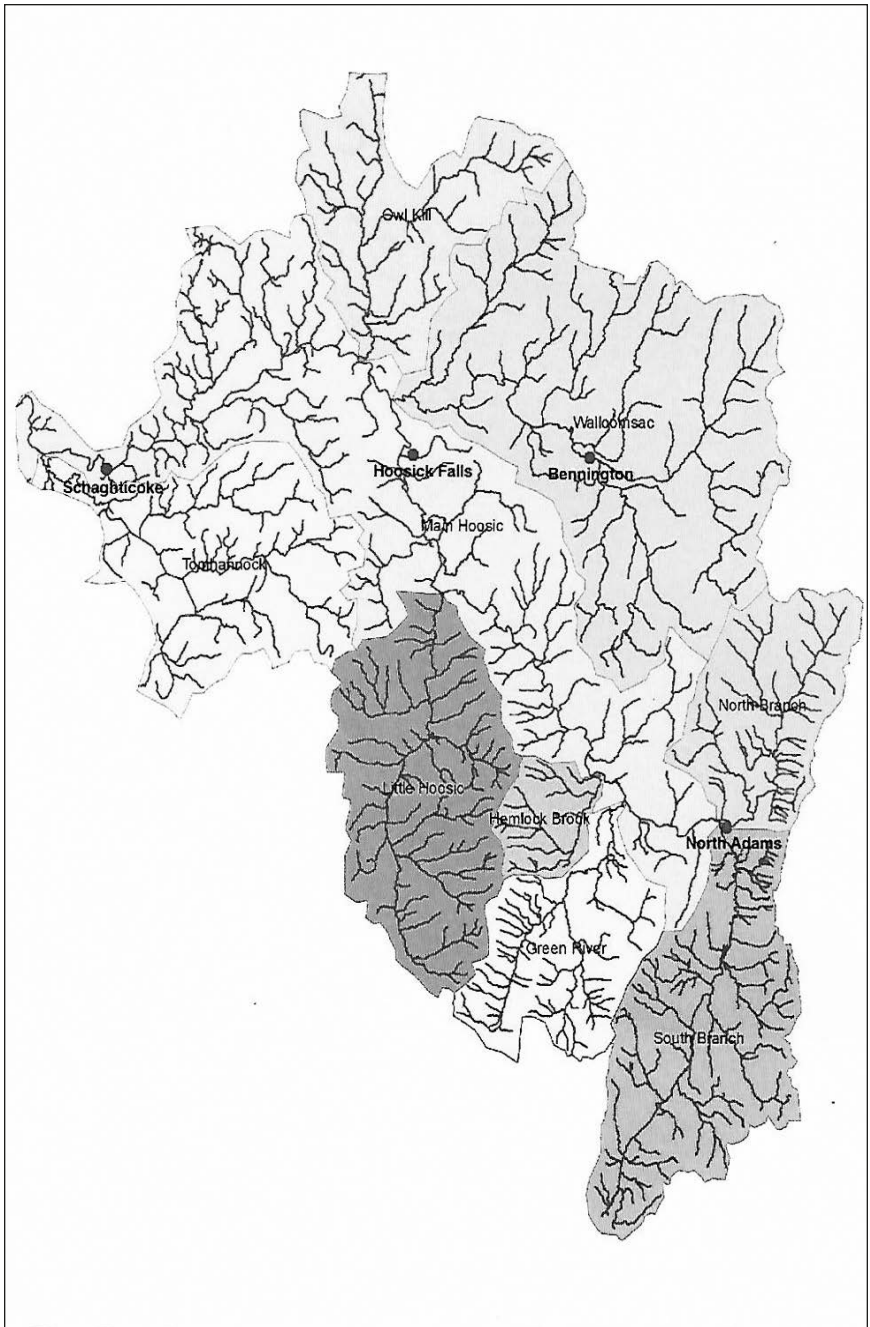
of large populations of European settlers but also with the influence of European politics on their settlements. Both natives and colonizers played on each others' differences and conflicts to gain favorable trade and military alliances for the betterment of their own people. Good examples include the Iroquois Nation's exclusive trading rights with European settlers, their influence on more interior tribes, and their subjugation of smaller tribes within a region. Weidensaul explains how influence-peddling trade routes and raiding parties were used by both sides to advance their political and economic objectives. The use of proxy states by both major Indian tribes and European powers breathes a more complex picture of North America than is traditionally taught in history classes.

"We That Came Out of This Ground," the book's third part, examines the continuation of conflicts and trade deals that consolidated North America into the hands of the European powers. Finally, the dominant powers, those of England and France, influenced and pushed out other contenders such as the Dutch or Spanish from establishing competing colonies. From the perspective of the Native American population, this section describes the desperate attempts to preserve their culture and lifestyles in the face of a never-ending stream of European ambitions. In particular, the author shows how the native powers realized the threat to their culture far too late.

The author describes, as an example of this erosion, the effect the French and Indian war had on pushing the once-powerful Iroquois Nation into the background. The Native American population essentially lost control of their destiny when they lost control of the land.

Overall, it is a most interesting read to understand how, from first contact until the American Revolution the Europeans slowly eroded the power base and suppressed the cultural influence of the native inhabitants on their own land. Both sides acted abysmally toward one another when it came to attempting to achieve their particular goals in promoting or preserving their national and cultural identity. This book offers a better understanding of the ingrained hostility that the natives and colonizers had for each other. It was a tragic misunderstanding of two cultures that failed to listen to one another and that obsessed over the accumulation of power through trade or political influence. □

The First Frontier: The Forgotten History of Struggle, Savagery, & Endurance in Early America, by Scott Weidensaul. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.



This map of the subwatersheds of the Hoosic River was drawn by Richard Schlesinger, a Williamstown native, retired from the U.S. Forest Service.

The Unifying Hoosac River Valley Revisited

Reviewed by Tyler Resch

A 584-page book of presumed regional history titled *The Hoosac Valley* was written by an energetic woman named Grace Greylock Niles, and was published in 1912 by G. P. Putnam's Sons. It was a grand attempt to report on the traditional tales and happenings in the three-state region covered by the watershed of the Hoosic River. To identify herself with that region and its highest mountain peak, the author changed her middle name, originally Stoddard, to Greylock. But the trouble with *The Hoosac Valley* is that much of its content appears to have emerged from the author's imagination. At the Bennington Museum's library, all references to her book bear the caution: "This is a highly unreliable source."

Grace Greylock Niles was especially interested in tales of Native American, or Indian, history in the region, and some of it is probably true. She is known to have relied heavily on James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, a work of fiction. Her pages of traditions and events lack any attempt to provide sources, so the reader must remain skeptical. Her report that George Washington visited Bennington in August 1790 was thoroughly debunked in 1977 by Charles G. Bennett, then the Bennington Museum's scholarly librarian.

Grace, poor dear, was not entirely in her right mind and served out her last days in the Brattleboro Retreat, where she died in 1943.

All this is background to the good news that a modern history of the region covered by the Hoosic River watershed has been published by, of all organizations, the Hoosic River Watershed Association. The author is Lauren R. Stevens, the well-known author, columnist, teacher, and dean at Williams College. Stevens may have been contemplating for many years writing a sequel to the Niles book because I ran across a clipping dated September 10, 1966, in which he reviewed it and offered more details about Grace's departure from reality. In his new work he writes, "Given that some contemporary historians consider [Niles] unreliable, and given that one hundred years have passed, it is time to take another look at Hoosuck – sic – sac - sick history." Of Niles, he suggests, "As she practices the art [of

writing], she does not place a premium on separating legend from history.”

Stevens’s new work is in booklet format, 70 pages of text with a few illustrations. The content is of a quality that deserves to be a real book because he covers so much varied subject matter, ancient and recent, as he lifts the state boundary lines from Massachusetts, New York, and Vermont. It also deserves a better title than *Dispatches from the Beyond Place*. I would recommend calling it *The Hoosac Valley Revisited*. It needs an index and a better selection of photos, yet it offers a most interesting read.

Much attention is given to the late Richard Babcock (1934-2014), known as “the barn man” who studied, saved, dismantled, and reassembled barns he identified as German, Dutch, Scots-Irish, and English in origin. Babcock used Grace Greylock Niles’s book for clues to the origins of a barn in Breese Hollow in Hoosick different from any other, and believed to be French. Niles had written of an early Dutch settlement where the Walloomsac River empties into the Hoosic, and where ruins were found of Indian hunting grounds between 1540 and 1542 (she wrote) and a settlement known as St. Croix, corrupted as “Sancoick.” The community was said to include a forest chapel in memory of the missionary St. Antoine of Padua, hence one of two possible origins of the name Mount Anthony. Interesting stuff, but there is no documentation to back it up.

Stevens touches on the Mahican confederacy of five tribes who had as many as forty villages; the many archaeological sites between North Pownal and Hoosick Falls; and the digs that took place when Route 279, the Bennington Bypass, was being constructed. He tells how the unifying Hoosic River provided an early navigation route and footpath; the construction and rebuilding of Fort Massachusetts in 1745 and 1748; the first settlement of West Hoosac in 1753, which came to be known as Williamstown; and an explanation of the origin of the name of Indian Massacre Road; and so much more.

So many other subjects are covered that it could make a tedious list. Here are some: the jurisdictional dispute between Vermont and New York; the arrival of Ethan Allen and formation of the Green Mountain Boys; the battles of Hubbardton and Bennington; the mills of North Adams and Pownal that used the river’s power; Chinese strikebreakers in North Adams;

the Walter Wood Mowing and Reaping Machine Company that gave a huge but brief economic boost to Hoosick Falls; hydropower generation in Schaghticoke; the evolution of Sprague Electric to MassMoca; mankind's historic treatment and mistreatment of the Hoosic River; Williamstown and its college and its theatre festival.

“The Hoosic Valley has a fabled past perhaps but it can wake into a real future,” Stevens concludes, “. . . Perhaps consulting our history will awaken us to the natural congruity of North Adams, Bennington, Hoosick Falls, Schaghticoke, and the towns and villages in between, as strung together organically by the Hoosic. For all of us, the Hoosic is our watershed.” □

Dispatches from the Beyond Place: Tales of the Hoosic River, by Lauren R. Stevens with John Case and Wendy Hopkins. Published by the Hoosic River Watershed Association. 70 pp booklet format. Copies available from the association at P.O. Box 667, Williamstown, Mass. 01267.

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