

BENNINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2022 ISSUE

President's Message

Bennington Museum and its Regional History Room re-opened on April 1st. When you stop in, you will see new exhibitions set against newly painted walls and new floors! The Museum received quite a "spiffing up" over the winter.

We have a great lineup of Spring programs including Bill Budde presenting *A History of Arlington* in April, Michelle Pagan discussing how to research and preserve your home in May, and our own Tony Marro speaking on the life of John Spargo, the founder of the Museum, in June.

In the Summer months, we hope to move outside with walking tours and other events, including the installation of a marker as part of the "Stopping Stones" project to mark locations in Bennington where enslaved black Americans resided.

Reorganization of the Regional History Room continues with the cataloging and organizing of the collection. If you are interested in helping, please call or stop by!

~Bob Tegart, President of the Bennington Historical Society

Upcoming Events

The History of Arlington: April 10th, 2pm

Bill Budde, Curator of the Russell Vermontiana Collection at the Martha Canfield Library in Arlington and author of *Arlington, Vermont: Its First 250 Years*, will discuss the history of Arlington at Bennington Museum.

Arlington was chartered by Benning Wentworth in 1761 and, at one point, was the capital of the Vermont Republic. Remember Baker, who was the topic of our February program, and who was Town Clerk, built the first gristmill there in 1764. During the Revolution, Arlington's citizens were divided among the Loyalists and Patriots. Among well-known people who have lived there have been Dorothy Canfield Fisher and Norman Rockwell.



How to Do House History: May 15th, 2pm

Michele Pagán, will present the process for researching the history of one's own home, or office building – no matter how old it is. Michele Pagán, and her husband, John, have bought and restored 7 homes during their marriage and during John's career as a submarine officer for the US Navy. Michele will present information, based on her personal experience of researching their most recent and present home here in Vermont, using all the primary documents which she was able to find. She will share information from the State of Vermont, which allows private home owners to get their home registered with the State, even if it is not within a designated State historic district. All are welcome to attend and bring their questions.



FROM THE YEAR WITH NO SUMMER TO CLIMATE CHANGE

BY RAY RODRIGUES

At our March meeting, historian Howard Coffin told us about “Eighteen Hundred and Froze to Death,” the year 1816. In 1815 Mount Tambora in Indonesia erupted in what has been described as the most destructive eruption in recent history. An ash cloud spread around the world.

The 1815-16 winter was fairly mild, with most of the snow gone by early March. In April there was a heat wave, with temperatures in the 80s. Then, in early June, a blizzard. Cows were driven to the woods to eat leaves. Then, in mid-June, temperatures returned to the 80s. But then, in the first week of July, scattered frost arrived. In mid-July, more scattered frost. No rain fell. Frost appeared again on September 10th, and no rain fell. To make up for the frozen crops, people turned to fishing. In some spots, frost appeared every month. Religion made a recovery. Coffin noted that the “winter” was world-wide. In Germany, for example, the year has been referred to as “the year of the beggar,” for all the people displaced by lack of crops and food.

In closing, Coffin noted the danger now posed by climate change, and warned us that “Eighteen Hundred and Froze to Death” shows us how critical the environment is and how long-lasting change may lead to results far worse than “the Year without a Summer.”

BENNINGTON'S "OTHER" MONUMENTS: CAPT. SAMUEL ROBINSON MARKER

BY BILL MORGAN

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



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ferociously trying to get inside. Bravely, Marcy picked up the red-hot firebrands from the open hearth and opening the door, charged the wolves. They fled off into the forest, never to return, or so the story goes. As a devoutly religious woman she was also the host for prayer-meetings held every Sunday at noon in their cabin in the early days before the first meeting house could be built.

In 1910, the Bennington Battle Monument and Historical Association decided to erect markers for five historic sites "to preserve their identity for future generations." They were inspired by the work of George W. Robinson who had called their attention to the sites, and the association appointed Dr. Henry C. Day, Elijah Dewey, and John V.D.S. Merrill to coordinate the project. Dr. Day wrote the inscriptions for the markers. The first location to be designated was on the site where Capt. Robinson first camped as a soldier during the French and Indian War. That marker was placed on the west side of a bridge that once spanned the Roaring Branch below the current Vermont Soldiers' Home. The inscription read, "Capt. Samuel Robinson, who commanded a company in the French and Indian War, encamped with a small body of soldiers on this spot in 1756. About five years later he became the pioneer settler of Bennington." By 1923 the markers had become badly weathered, and a new attempt was made to permanently remember the early settlement. A descendant of Capt. Robinson, Samuel L. Robinson, stepped in to provide the funds necessary to honor his founding ancestor and suggested that the appropriate place for the memorial would be on the site of his first log cabin. On August 16, 1923, the current monument was dedicated with U.S. Senator Frank L. Greene delivering the keynote speech.

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

This marker is just a short walk from the older cenotaph which is just to the left of the entrance to the Old Bennington Cemetery. A cenotaph was a marker more common in earlier days and there are several in Bennington's cemeteries in honor of people whose bodies are elsewhere. Robinson's white marble marker was paid for by David Robinson, Jr., Samuel's grandson. The long inscription on that six-foot tall stone reads: "In memory of Capt. Samuel Robinson, the pioneer in the settlement of Bennington. He was born in Cambridge, Mass., in 1705, married to Marcy Leonard, and removed to Hardwick, Mass., in 1728, became a Captain in the King's forces and served as such in the vicinity of Lake George during the French war that resulted in the conquest of Canada by the English. On his return from Lake George, mistaking the Walloomsac for the Hoosic river, he came to this place and encamped with his soldiers. Pleased with the country, which he called The Promised Land, he applied to Gov. Wentworth, secured the township, sought for settlers and commenced its settlement in 1761. Capt. Robinson was the acknowledged leader of the settlers of the New Hampshire Grants in their trying controversy with New York, and in October, 1766, at a convention of the towns, was appointed agent to represent their case to the crown. He immediately repaired to London where by his exertions, he obtained the well known order of the King in council, dated July 24, 1767, prohibiting the Gov of New York from making farther grants of the lands in controversy. He died in London, October 27, 1767, and was buried in the church yard of the Rev. Mr. Whitfield."

The facts as outlined on the monuments are fairly accurate. Most sources now give Robinson's birthdate in Cambridge as April 4, 1707, although some say April 1 and others April 19, but not 1705 as they originally thought. Some references give his wife's name as Mercy Leonard of Southbury, MA, although Marcy seems to be more frequently cited. No known drawings of the cabin exist and the plaque was designed more than 150 years after it was torn down, so it is probably based on the typical log cabin of the period.

Bunhill Cemetery in London is frequently given as his place of interment, but research shows that

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

BENNINGTON MUSEUM IS OPEN THURSDAY- MONDAY, 10AM-4PM

**THE REGIONAL HISTORY ROOM IS ACCESSIBLE FREE OF CHARGE ON
MONDAYS AND THURSDAYS, 1PM-4PM**

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

All BHS donors will receive a copy of the newsletter and other BHS announcements via email, and are invited to attend these monthly meetings.

Make a gift to the BHS today to help keep our programming and newsletters free and frequent this coming year!

Bennington Historical Society

A volunteer-operated program of Bennington Museum

Officers: Bob Tegart, President; Don Miller, Past-President; Charles Dewey, Secretary

Committee Members: Ted Bird, Anne Bugbee, Joe Hall, Scott Maguire, Jackie Marro, Bill Morgan, Beverly Petrelis

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