



Bennington Historical Society News

What We Could Build: Architecture as Technology

A Virtual Interactive Presentation on Zoom

April 18 from 2:00 pm to 3:00 pm

<http://bit.ly/BHSarchitecture>

Using Bennington's architecture as examples, Jane Radocchia will explore what was built between the 1760's and the 1920's, looking at how new technology offered new choices which allowed us to build in new styles.



Jane Griswold Radocchia

Jane Radocchia is an architect specializing in old houses and an architectural historian. Through her work on houses built before 1710 and after 2000, she has learned how we built, and then as our needs changed, how we updated our buildings using new materials and new technology.

*She has a blog with many posts related to architectural history: Jane Griswold Radocchia:
www.janegrismoldradocchia.com/*



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That Red Hudson

by Charles Dewey

Guy Johnson, a retired executive of Standard Oil Company, came to Bennington in 1906, and he bought a house on Monument Avenue near the Monument. In 1910 he bought a red Hudson roadster.

Chelsea Harrington found the Hudson in a ditch. He bought it and repaired it.

Chelsea was a rural mail carrier, and he lived in North Shaftsbury on Depot Road with his parents and sister Janie.

Janie was the postmistress. She would walk to the railroad station, which was just down the road, and bring the mail back to her home where one front room was the post office.

Chelsea delivered the mail, and in his spare time he would go courting with the red Hudson.

In the spring of 1912 he married Edith Lyons, an art teacher, who lived with her parents on County Street in Bennington.



Chelsea and Edith Harrington in their red Hudson. Photo courtesy of Charles Dewey

Chelsea and Edith went on their honeymoon in their Hudson to Lake St. Catherine. Later, in 1931, the Hudson was used to lead the parade of cars at the opening of the new paved highway, now Route 7, from Pownal to Manchester.

The red Hudson still exists. ↕

Upcoming Program

On May 19 at 7:00 pm. Shawn Harrington will present the history of Manchester, VT. Harrington is an officer in the Manchester Historical Society and has served as its curator.

Manchester was chartered in 1761 by the governor of New Hampshire, Benning Wentworth, and was first settled in 1764. In its early history, raising sheep was a major part of the economy. Later, iron mines, marble quarries, mills, and lumber became important to its economy.

To register, see the Bennington Museum events page: benningtonmuseum.org/events-and-programs/

The Fourteenth State: Two Quirky Views of 18th-Century Vermont

by Tyler Resch

Editor's Note: This column was originally published in the *Bennington Banner* on May 26, 2015. This column is intended to revisit some of the books, past and present, that tell the history of Vermont. Used with permission.

Wouldn't it rewarding to have a detailed description of Vermont in the late 18th century, a town-by-town itinerary that gives a sense of what life was really like back then?

There are two such descriptions, but each comes with a catch. Best known is the work of one of the state's first lawyers, John A. Graham, who was born in Connecticut and had the rare experience of having sailed to England in the 1790s. Graham visited many Vermont towns, listing prominent citizens and commenting on matters ranging from architecture to agriculture. The catch is that he was motivated to be exceedingly optimistic, even euphoric, about everything and everyone he saw.

In Vermont, he had plunged into politics, church affairs, and business. He served as aide-de-camp to Governor Chittenden and once persuaded the Legislature to give him a monopoly on smelting all gold, silver, copper, and lead ore in Vermont — a benefit he never used.

Graham's chief motivation was to offer an inflated opinion of Vermont to persuade wealthy Englishmen to invest in the state's "interprizes," as he spelled it. Of Bennington he wrote, "The houses are magnificent and elegant ... The soil is excellent and raises vast supplies of wheat, Indian corn, red and white clover, and herd's grass." Pownal is "beautifully diversified with hill and dale, yet it yields great crops of wheat, corn, rye, oats, pease, and beans." But he was dubious about the residents, whom he found "rather bigoted, excessively particular, and absolutely wedded to their own forms and ways."

Shaftsbury was "a rich and flourishing town," Sunderland had "prodigious" crops, Dorset's meadows had "excessive crops of hay and good pasture," and Manchester's large stream yielded "vast quantities of salmon trout (sic), and almost every kind of small fish."

The late Noel Perrin, a Dartmouth professor, took an interest in Graham and wrote a biographical essay that analyzes half a dozen motivations on Graham's part. In the Dartmouth College library Perrin found a specially annotated copy of Graham's book that obviously had been written by Graham's bitter first wife, whom he had abandoned in 1795. Perrin wrote about it in "Vermont History" in 1975 with an article titled "So Good Bye, You Jackall: An Annotated copy of John Andrew Graham's Descriptive Sketch of the Present State of Vermont (1797)."

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Background on the Bennington Museum's Library

Below is a document written by Tyler Resch in 1997 that Bob Tegart found in the Museum Library files. Things have changed a bit since then. This historic article about the Bennington Museum's research library was written by our recently retired librarian Tyler Resch almost 25 years ago. In 1997, the Internet was in its infancy and anyone who wanted to do genealogical research had to actually visit the places their ancestors were from in order to find records. Between 1993 and 2019, visitation to the Museum Library dropped 81%. Research requests dropped 53% between 2010 and 2019. Now we are actively looking at ways to make the Library more relevant in today's world. This article reminds us of what rich resources we have available and why people across the country are interested in Vermont. If you would like to volunteer to work in the library for a few hours a week, send an email to Bob Tegart (rttegs@gmail.com)

With an abundant collection of genealogy, Vermont history, and military material, the Bennington Museum's library has existed in its current location -- at one end of the Church Gallery -- since 1958. In the 1990s, the the library got 1,500 visitors annually. In 1996 the library responded to some 350 written queries

Largely due to greatly increased interest in genealogy, many people schedule Vermont vacations that include several days devoted to genealogy.

This library is historically important because of the patterns of migration followed by early inhabitants. Though no Europeans settled here until 1761, population boomed after statehood in 1791 and into the 1820s. (Vermont was an independent Republic from 1777 until it became a state.)

These new Vermonters were descendants of the early immigrants to America who landed along the shores of Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, who gradually moved inland. Then, starting in the 1830s, this state's population virtually stagnated for more than a century as Vermonters went West to settle the new American continent. The outmigration has been astutely documented in Lewis D. Stillwell's *Migration from Vermont*. The roster of Vermont natives who became prominent in other states as political figures, creative artists, or inventors has become part of the state's legend. Consequently, the Bennington region has become a sort of genealogical breadbasket, and each year the library greets hundreds of people from all over the United States and elsewhere who return here to look for ancestors. Success is never guaranteed in such detective work, but in an extremely high number of cases, early inhabitants can be traced, or else the library can direct the visitor to one of several excellent facilities nearby where a collection complements ours. ·

The first librarian of the Bennington Museum was a diligent genealogist, Allen D. Hill, who was succeeded by Charles G. Bennett, a Bennington native and reporter for the New York Times, who devoted his retirement of some fifteen years to this institution. Both contributed in prolific fashion to our Historical Family files and they greatly enriched a correspondence file that goes back to the 1950s. In more recent times the librarian was Joseph W. R. Parks, author of a history of Pownal, who was researching and writing a first history of Bennington. From October, 1995 [until 2020, the librarian was Tyler Resch] a former editor of the *Bennington Banner* who has written or edited a dozen books on aspects of regional history, heritage, or photography.

From the Library's Files:

Bennington Museum: History and Genealogy Library

Steps to take in tracing the history of a house or building

I. Trace the legal record of real-estate transfers. This can only be done at the town clerk's office of the town in which the building is located. It gives you basically a list of names and dates, so you know something about the people involved.

II. Do physical detective work on the house itself, its construction and architecture.

Example: You might find newspapers used as insulation; these papers would give you some dates.

III. Check out the people. See museum library's page of "twenty-three ways to locate people in the past," which includes the Day Papers, Hemenway index cards, family history files, correspondence, Jennings, Bahan, and cemetery records. Look at narratives that describe National Register nominations, some at the museum, others in Bennington town office.

IV. See maps. These are, in order of antiquity:

1. Walbridge's re-creation of first Bennington land ownership records, in museum library.
2. Hinsdill 1835 first complete map of the Town of Bennington
3. Presdee & Edwards map of Bennington Village 1835
4. Rice & Harwood 1856 wall map of Bennington County, the first real cadastral map (a map of real estate property) of the county and each of its towns and villages. Individual images are available in a box.
5. F. W. Beers *1869 Atlas of Bennington County*, a gem that discloses incredible detail of post-Civil War ownership and land uses.
—Birdseye view of town in 1877 and 1888.
—Miller 1894 map of entire town; not graceful but has great detail
Sanborn insurance maps from 1896 to 1925.

V. Check census records to pick up individuals and some detail about them. The formal census began in 1790, and continued every decade. We have full census for Vermont in 1790 and 1800; then census indices for 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850; and some full censuses on microfilm for Bennington County 1860, 1870, 1880. Nobody has 1890, destroyed in a fire in D.C. in the 1920s. The 1850 census began to give names of members of each household, with ages and place of birth. Thus, if you see names of three young unmarried females all born in Ireland, you might suspect that the family had servants, which might jibe with a back stairway or a house addition for servant quarters.

VI. For businesses, check city directories starting in 1870s and E. P. Walton registers before that.

Books Worth Reading

Below are some excerpts from three books about Bennington that are worth reading:

Bill Morgan. *Bennington and the Civil War*. The History Press. 2013.

Morgan discusses Bennington's connections to the Civil War from the moment war was declared to the soldiers who died in the conflict:

"The Bennington Powder Works had been awarded a large government contract and was producing up to one thousand pounds of gunpowder a day. In June 1863, the company expanded and erecting a new building for manufacturing saltpeter, one of the ingredients used in gunpowder. Once again, disaster struck. On January, 1864, an even greater explosion wiped out five of its buildings. It was said to be the "most terrific powder mill explosion to ever occur in the area." (FN) . . . Residents of Troy heard it, and Manchester's buildings shook. . . ."

Joseph H. Hall. *Bygone Bennington*. Inkspot Press. N.D.

Joe Hall recorded 116 episodes for broadcast by WBTV. All of them are included in this book, along with many photographs:

"The Bennington & North Adams trolley line had larger and fancier cars than the Bennington & Hoosick Valley line. One was the "Berkshire Hills," which was 40.5 feet long. The trolley car was built in 1903 by the Wason Car Co. of Springfield, Massachusetts at a cost of \$20,000. It was the ultimate of luxury. The interior had Santo Domingo mahogany paneling and woodwork, beveled glass mirrors between the windows, three ornate ceiling lamp fixtures, thirty-two electric heaters, a wall-mounted water cooler, plush blue carpeting, dark blue velvet drapes, a carved mahogany desk, an in-floor icebox, and twenty-eight upholstered wicker chairs to provide a comfortable ride for its patrons In 1932, it became the Berkshire Hills Diner on West Housatonic Street (Route 200) in Pittsfield It is presently in very sad condition at the Seashore Trolley Museum in Kennebunkport, Maine."

Joseph Parks. *The History of the Old Burying-Ground in Old Bennington, Vermont*. Bennington Centre Cemetery Association. 1976. Updated by Charles Dewey, 2019.

This booklet tells the story of the Old Burying-Ground from its creation to the burial of Robert Frost in 1963.

"The history of the old burying-ground really starts in 1762, the second year of the settlers' arrival. The first year they had been preoccupied with clearing fields and building cabins, too busy to decide where their burying-ground would eventually be located. It was assumed that it would be located next to the church, wherever that might be built. In February 1962 a decision was made to locate the proposed meetinghouse near the northeast corner of Land Right 27, which today would be near the Fairdale Farms property, west of Gypsy Lane near Walloomsac Road. Had that plan been carried out, the cemetery would have been located about a mile west of its familiar location."

For something completely different, consider "A Narrative of a Tour Through the State of Vermont from April 27 to June 12, 1789" by the Rev. Nathan Perkins of Hartford, Conn. The "catch" with his work is that he was moralistically negative and cynical about almost everything and everybody. He found Governor Chittenden a "low, vulgar man, clownish, excessively parsimonious."

Perkins found the road between Williamstown and Bennington "exceedingly unpleasant" and people in Bennington were "proud, scornful, conceited & somewhat polished." In Sunderland Col. Timothy Brownson treated him with hospitality and his family was "kind, but destitute of all taste & polish." Manchester was "a loose town," Dorset's Rev. Mr. Sill was "extremely poor — poor looking family — poor land ... "

Perkins was especially displeased by Pownal, where he found "poor land — very unpleasant — very uneven — miserable set of inhabitants — no religion, Rhode Island haters of religion ... "

These two visitors leave us with a lesson that you must be skeptical about what you read. ✦

Bennington Historical Society

A volunteer-operated program of the Bennington Museum

Officers: Don Miller, President; Bob Tegart, President-Elect; Bill Morgan, Immediate Past President; Charles Dewey, Secretary.

Committee Members: Anne Bugbee, Beverly Petrelis, Joe Hall, Ted Bird, Jackie Marro, Scott Maguire, Ray Rodrigues.

Newsletter Editor: Ray Rodrigues

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