UPCOMING EVENTS

Finding Your Family History – Veteran’s Day Special
Regional History Room, Bennington Museum
Saturday, November 13, 1pm - 4pm, Free

Discover Bennington Museum’s Regional History Room and how to use its resources to learn about your family’s veterans.

Robert Tegart, Administrator of the Regional History Room, will show you how to uncover the story of your family veteran using Internet sources, books, and local hard copy resources. Learn the details of their service including where they entered the service, their unit, where they went and what they did upon return. Whether they served in the evolutionary War or modern conflicts, their story can be traced. Bring documents, photos, or other information you already have about your veteran, and we will help fill in the blanks.

Drop in between 1:00 and 4:00 PM on Saturday November 13. No reservations needed. This program is a project of the Bennington Historical Society, a volunteer-run program of Bennington Museum.

Bennington in World War II by Tony Marro
Bennington Performing Arts Center—Home of Oldcastle Theatre
November 14, 2pm-3pm, Free

The American Association of University Women Bennington Branch (AAUW) and the Bennington Performing Arts Center (BPAC) are co-sponsoring this Veteran’s Day program on November 14 at 2 pm. The talk will feature Marro reading from his recently-published book Bennington in World War II, published by The History Press. Images of the veterans referred to in the talk will be displayed on the screen, accompanied by music from the wars years. The event is free. Proceeds from the sale of the book are being donated to the Bennington Museum Historical Society.

The book was built largely around the "Letter From Home" columns that were published in the Banner all during the war years and a series of interviews with veterans that were conducted by the Bennington Historical Society in 2000. The columns -- which are contained in a scrapbook in the museum library -- give a vivid picture of how the war impacted the Bennington area and of the many extraordinary things done by Bennington men and women at home and abroad. It also will discuss some of the long-term changes brought about by the war, including many women taking jobs in factories and on farms that previously had been held mainly by men and the great many veterans who were able to attend college because of tuition and other benefits provided by the G.I. Bill of Rights.

Love, Marriage and Divorce
Paresky Education Center, Bennington Museum
Sunday, November 21, 2pm - 3pm, Free

In her talk, Callie Raspuzzi explores the highs and lows of love and heartache, from Victorian wedding gowns to scandalous tales of sexual harassment.

Marriage isn’t what it used to be, but what did it really used to be? In Colonial America, marriage was largely a matter of property and reproduction. Romantic love as we know it today was not considered necessary to wedded bliss until the Victorian era. Some same-sex couples quietly cohabited in the Green Mountains in plain sight during the nineteenth century, although their relationships were not recognized as “marriage” until a century later. Domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and scandal have been tabloid fodder since the earliest days of Vermont’s statehood. Despite changing social customs, we may find that human nature has changed very little over the years, although the nature of marriage continues to shift.

About the Presenter
Callie Raspuzzi has been the Collections Manager at the Bennington Museum for 16 years. She attended Colgate University and has a Master’s degree in Museum Studies from George Washington University.

This program will take place in person. A recording will be available for later viewing. Bennington Museum requires the use of a face mask that covers both the mouth and the nose at all times while inside the building. Thank you for helping to keep all of our visitors and staff healthy.
I heard about the existence of a round school house somewhere in the Brattleboro area, but had no town, address or proof it really existed. Using my membership in the 251 Club and Rudyard Kipling’s house as a lure, I talked a couple of family members into exploring this area with me. In the town of Brookline (between Brattleboro and Newfane), hugging the side of the road, opposite the Town Offices, was a small round brick building with an attached barn. We had found the school house, but what was its story?

The town of Brookline lost its wooden school house in a flood that occurred in 1820. Not only did they need a school house, but also a teacher. There was a newly arrived Scot in the area, and the Town Fathers approached him and asked him if he would be willing to teach for the year. His name was John Wilson. He agreed, but only on the condition that the new school be built to his specifications—it must be round. The construction is similar to the watch houses found in Scotland and England, which is reverse post and beam. A support beam, from a barn washed away in the flood, was reused as the support beam with the upright sticking through the conical roof which is strapped to it. It gives the appearance of a large and tall wooden chimney. Windows on all sides give light and ventilation. The school opened in 1821 with John Wilson as head and only teacher.

After his year of teaching, John Wilson became a doctor. He lived in Newfane and practiced medicine for a number of years. However, it became known that, when he lived in Scotland, John Wilson was a highwayman known as “Captain Thunderbolt” and had a price on his head. Captain Thunderbolt had a partner--“Captain Lightfoot”--who remained in Scotland and was captured and hanged. Ironically, there seems to be no concern in Brookline that the town doctor and former teacher was a confirmed highwayman.

Why did John Wilson design a round building? Some thought it was so he could see out the windows and be warned if any law men were approaching. But that theory doesn’t hold water because one side of the building is built against a very steep bank. My conclusion is that it is question of accessibility: no one was blocking the view of the teacher, everyone had equal access to the heat, and, finally, since students sat in one circle against the wall, no one was spreading germs on the person in front of them. Dr. Wilson was a very savvy Scot.

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THE MUSEUM REGIONAL HISTORY ROOM

BY ROBERT TEGART

The Bennington Historical Society, working with the Museum staff, has taken on the administration of the Regional History Room, formerly the Museum Research Library. We have a small staff of volunteers who are busy organizing the collection and handling the many inquiries that we receive both via email and from walk-ins. This summer, an intern catalogued our collection of maps. Great progress has been made.

We have received more than 50 inquiries from people throughout the United States. The requests range from genealogical questions to house dating to questions on local events. We have had descendants from the Walbridge, Robinson, Hendryx, Pfister, and Breckenridge families asking for information on their ancestor’s life and activities. In answering these requests, we have reached out to several other historical societies for assistance.

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Several Green Mountain Boy and Battle of Bennington descendants have asked for their ancestor's military records. One person came in to ask about her relative who was a Green Mountain Boy. Within minutes, we provided her with his service record and information on the family. She was overjoyed and expressed her appreciation with a nice donation.

Some research doesn't always support family folklore. Isaiah Hendryx was thought to be a veteran of the Battle of Bennington. We found that he did fight in the war, but did not participate in that battle. A service card that we located added more confusion.

Possibly this is just a paperwork mix-up!

Several people have asked about the history of their homes or businesses. We used copies of maps, including the Sanborn Map, to answer their questions. For example, using town directories, maps, and newspaper articles, we were able to trace the various locations of the Bennington Bookstore, founded in 1928, for a prior owner.

Another inquiry came from an individual who attended the recent "Voices from the Grave" presentation at the Old Burying Ground. She wanted to know who the surgeon was that Mary Dewey gave her horse to so he could ride on the battlefield. After reviewing the literature on the event and contacting a few authorities, we were unable to document who he was or if the event actually happened. Perhaps it was just a legend passed down through the generations. Folklore is a big part of local history, and, while it may be unverifiable, it presents a view of the mindset and culture of the time.

These are just a few of the adventures we have had. Stop in to the History Room on any Monday or Thursday afternoon and see what's going on. If it looks interesting to you, we are always looking for volunteers to join in!

BENNINGTON'S CATAMOUNT TAVERN MONUMENT

One of Bennington's most beautiful monuments depicts a wild catamount standing atop a large granite base on Monument Avenue. It commemorates the Catamount Tavern which stood near that site for a century before it burned in 1871.

The famous inn was built by Captain Stephen Fay and was originally called the Green Mountain House or Fay's House or even "Landlord Fay's" before it became the Catamount Tavern. This was where many of the important events in Vermont's early history took place.

Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys met here and hatched their plans to capture Fort Ticonderoga on May 10, 1775, the first victory of the patriots over the British during the Revolutionary War. Earlier they had met here to form a group to defend their New Hampshire Grants against the claims of New York State. In the course of those protests, a stuffed catamount was placed in front of the tavern facing west toward New York as a defiant warning to the "Yorkers." General John Stark and Colonel Seth Warner held a council in the tavern before the Battle of...
Bennington, and meetings to create the State of Vermont were held in the tavern’s Council Room. When the building burned to the ground on March 30, 1871 it wasn’t long before a group of citizens organized to erect a monument.

The current monument was not the first one to be erected however. Planning for a monument began in 1876, just five years after the fire. The Battle Monument and Historical Society president, Gov. Hiland Hall, asked Truman Howe Bartlett, a sculptor and Dorset native, to create the monument. He planned to erect a large monument with engraved scenes from the tavern’s history on each of the four sides. They hoped that sometime in the future there might be a crowning statue, but they didn’t have money for it at the time. A six foot tall Barre granite pedestal weighing over six tons was placed along Monument Avenue on top of building stones which had been salvaged from the tavern. It stood completely unmarked until 1891 and as a result was referred to locally as an "oversized horseblock." It was never intended to be left blank, but since the Society was involved in building the Battle Monument they just didn’t get to this smaller project. Finally they allocated $75 to polish and inscribe the blank stone. A.L. Perry and Henry A. Harman composed an inscription which read: "In enduring honor of that love of liberty and of their homes displayed by the pioneers of this commonwealth. Opposite this spot stood the Catamount Tavern, erected A.D. 1770. Within its walls convened the Council of Safety, A.D. 1772-1778." They didn’t appear to strive for accuracy because the Council of Safety (Vermont’s only form of government before statehood) wasn’t formed until 1777, and there are many conflicting views on just when the tavern was built.

This pedestal stood in place until 1895 while Truman Bartlett worked in Paris on a bronze casting of a catamount using a stuffed catamount as a model, but he never finished the job. A new committee was formed in 1895 with Henry G. Root and Major A.B. Valentine as co-chairmen. They consulted with Olin L. Warner, another sculptor who felt that Bartlett’s original design should be followed, but John Phillip Rinn, the Boston architect of the Battle Monument objected, fearing that it would detract from his monument at the head of Monument Avenue. Rinn himself took over the project and was awarded $2,500 for the work, the money to be raised by public subscription. The first pedestal was reduced in size, the inscription was removed, and it was moved to the village cemetery to mark the site of the graves of Hessians and Brunswickers who fought in the Battle of Bennington.

A new, nine-ton pedestal was commissioned, made of polished Ascutney granite with a shorter, raised inscription: "Site of the Catamount Tavern 1767." Giuseppe Moretti, an Italian sculptor from Siena then working in America, was selected to create the bronze catamount. Moretti, who had a studio in New York City, went to the Central Park Zoo to find his model for the catamount, but he appears to have used a female African lion instead.

The new pedestal and sculpture were put in place in October 1896 and formally dedicated on June 23, 1897. In the meantime the town cut down trees that obstructed the view of the monument.

That led to a court battle since many of the people on "The Hill" were upset about losing their trees. In a few weeks, on Jan. 1, 1897, Bennington Center officially separated itself from the Village of Bennington so they could control their own public works. After the statue was unveiled, Vermonters complained that true catmounts did not have a tufted tail, and so in Dec. 1897 the tail was altered to solve the

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Now I know part of it. New York and Vermont agreed to have the border run along the Taconic crest as a natural boundary between the two states. So the border follows the crest until the end and then turns back toward the "Twenty Mile Line," which the two states had agreed upon earlier. The "Twenty Mile Line," approximately twenty miles from the Hudson, had been agreed upon when New York recognized New Hampshire's claim, before Vermont broke away.

I don't know why they agreed upon it, but if anyone knows, I'd like to learn.

Note: To view the talk, see "A Visual History of Pownal" (benningtonmuseum.org/programming/bennington-historical-society/video-presentations/)

POWNAL'S CROOKED BORDER
BY RAY RODRIGUES

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