

BENNINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2021 ISSUE

**Bennington
museum**

BENNINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

AN INVITATION TO EXPLORE HISTORY TOGETHER

UPCOMING EVENTS

Voices from the Grave

***A Theatrical And Historical Experience at The Bennington Centre Cemetery
Saturday, September 25 and October 2***

\$10 • bpacvt.org/tickets • 802.447.0564

Pre-register for a specific time.

Tour groups of 10 visitors will depart every forty minutes, beginning at 10am.

Last tour at 4:20pm

Last January, Ingrid Madelayne from the Bennington Community Theater contacted the BHS and enlisted our help. She proposed the idea of having Bennington Community Theater actors portray historical figures buried in the Bennington Centre Cemetery, and subsequently, organized a series of monthly Zoom meetings (inviting representatives from the Museum, the Monument, and the Bennington Centre Cemetery Association along with Museum supporters in the area to join in). With so many decades of history and so many prominent individuals to choose from, deciding which historical personalities to include was not an easy task! Beginning with over forty suggestions, the group winnowed the list down to the following thirteen: Mary Tilden Dewey, Elizabeth Park McCullough, Norman Puffer, Heinrich Wasmus, Bridget Harwood, Mary R. Sanford, James Colby Colgate, Charles Cresson Jones, Robert Frost, Elinor Frost, Elijah Dewey, David Redding, and Richard Henry Green.



Ethan Allen and his Contemporary Folk Heroes

Paresky Education Center, Bennington Museum

Sunday, October 17, 2pm - 3pm, Free

Ethan Allen was many things to many people. This presentation by Don Miller will focus on his role as a folk hero. Allen's initial contact with Vermont was as a frontiersman, exploring the land in the late 1760s. As a hunter and trapper, he lived in the wilderness, beyond the bounds of the early settlements. The knowledge of the land and settlers he met along the way paved the way for later land speculation, settlements, and governance. The Ethan Allen we know today reflects a larger-than-life image, based in part on truth, legend, and hyperbole, i.e., the "folk hero" of the 14th State.



Ethan Allen at Ticonderoga: John S. Davis, woodcut print

Don will compare the folk heroes from the 15th, 16th, and 17th states, from Daniel Boone to Davy Crocket. What do the contemporaries have in common? How are they different? What role does the folk hero play in our story? Don Miller is an active student of history, past President of the Bennington Historical Society, and currently a Board member of the Vermont Historical Society.

Rosie's Mom: Forgotten Women of the First World War

A Vermont Humanities Council Presentation

sponsored by AAUW Bennington at the UU Meetinghouse

Saturday, October 23 at 2pm

One hundred years ago, a full generation before Rosie the Riveter, women rolled up their sleeves and entered war industries where they had never been welcome before. They ran powerful machinery, learned new skills, and faced the sullen hostility of the men in the shops.



In this illustrated lecture, historian Carrie Brown reveals their courage and their hard work, and explores how these women helped shape the work that their more famous daughters would do in the next World War. Free and open to the public.

LEFT IN ANDOVER: SOME HEROES DON'T WEAR CAPES

BY SUSAN LEADER ©2020 TELEGRAPH PUBLISHING LLC

Reprinted with permission, *The Chester Telegraph*: chestertelegraph.org

When I was little, my family made frequent trips to Bennington from Andover to visit our aunts. We developed various rituals coming into town including who could catch sight first of the Bennington Battle Monument. Then, yelling “keppel” (Yiddish for head), we ducked our heads in unison as Dad’s farm truck barely slipped under the low hanging railroad bridge at the bottom of Harwood Hill. After that came a picnic at the deer park on the grounds of the Soldiers Home. We rarely, if ever, caught sight of the human residents.

In more recent times, the Vermont Soldiers Home was renamed the Vermont Veterans Home. Female veterans and veteran spouses were welcomed. My older sister recalls visiting one of our aunts in the late 1980s when she resided there, receiving excellent end-of-life care. The home was established in 1887 on the 200 acre grounds of a former private estate. Its original mission was to provide a homelike environment for any Vermont veterans in need, including the last surviving Civil War veterans.

In his novel *The Heroes*, published in 1939, my Uncle Millen Brand, husband of Dad’s sister Pauline, explored the psychology of the all male WWI veteran residents of the Soldiers Home. Many were what was then called “shell shocked.” Today this condition has become better understood under the category of PTSD – posttraumatic stress disorder.



Herb Leader, left, with Uncle Millen Brand

A powerful scene occurs when George, the one-armed hero of the novel, realizes his comrade Hrubes is missing from the Home’s recreation room during an electrical storm. He races to the sleeping quarters where he finds Hrubes in a semi-conscious state on his bed. George lies down beside him:

“He waited, fearing with the body beside him the coming of the next lightening flash ... The sight of death looked out of Hrubes’ eyes, out of his torn face, his wounds seemed new. There was sweat on his forehead and it ran in bright lines down his cheeks ... Hrubes reached for his hand.”

Unwilling to become a burden to his family after he lost his job in fictional Leedsville, Vermont, George Burley has checked himself into the Soldiers Home, 90 miles away. Despite his disability, he is young and fit. Entering the Home entails a major loss of personal freedom. He begins to lose his sense of identity and purpose.

During the Great Depression, when the novel takes place, George, along with many other residents, is institutionalized not just because of his disability. The lack of economic opportunity in the capitalist system is what dooms him. George applies for jobs at the town’s many factories almost daily during the 18 months of his stay in Bennington, with no luck. Ironically, had he managed to get one, he would have been required to leave the home. Against all odds, George meets a strong willed factory girl, Mary. He dares to dream of a return to normal life on the outside with her. She is unusual in not stigmatizing George as a disabled vet from the Home, but as a whole man worthy of her love.

cont. on page 3

When Millen Brand turned his attention to the inner world of the Soldiers Home, he was already the best selling author of the psychological novel *The Outward Room*, published in 1937. That book explores the inner life of a woman confined to an insane asylum and her subsequent rehabilitation. Lauded by Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis, it achieved spectacular popular success as Book-of-the-Month pick for May 1937.

Perhaps the ambiguously titled *The Heroes* was doomed from the start by Uncle Millen's Marxist outlook on wage slavery and war. A book with this title might be seen as a challenge to actual war heroes. The book was, indeed, a commercial flop. But it endures as an early study of PTSD and quasi-historical Vermontiana.

In one of its most charming chapters, Millen reaches into his childhood as the son of a carpenter for inspiration. George, demoralized by his inability to get a job, volunteers days of labor at a local Bennington woodworking shop, just to prove to himself he is still a man. In the end, it is the promise of starting an independent cabinetry business in his hometown of Leedsville that gives cover for George and Mary to escape to a heroically normal, independent life together.

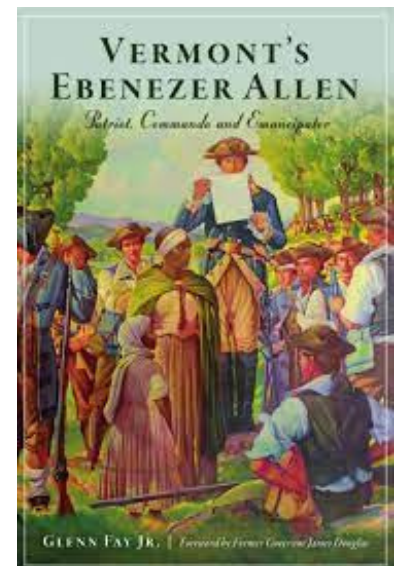
In his own way, Uncle Millen was forced to grapple with the apocalyptic motto "Live Free or Die," which an aging General Stark toasted Bennington with in 1809, 32 years after the battle. Millen took his own heroic stand in defense of constitutional freedoms in 1953, when, during the Red Scare, he refused to comply with an order from Sen. Joseph McCarthy to testify against fellow members of the League of American Writers. As a defense, he cited his constitutional Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination. Nonetheless, Millen was blacklisted in Hollywood, where he had won an Oscar nomination for Best Screenplay in 1948. At his moment of truth, this everyday hero did not hesitate to do the right thing.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BOOK REVIEW

Glenn Fay, Jr.'s new book *Ebenezer Allen Vermont's Ebenezer Allen, Patriot, Commando and Emancipator* was reviewed by Phil Holland in our last Newsletter. Glenn Fay has responded and Ray Rodrigues, our editor, has recommended that we print the response and invite our readers to consider the exchange. There is much to consider.

Part of our BHS mission is to encourage historical research and to share that research. Disagreements about the telling of history is not unusual. Vermont History is fraught with controversy, both with the story itself or the way it is told. Sorting out fact from fiction and unraveling an author's personal style are a part of the challenge. Let the reader dig in and enjoy.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

RESPONSE TO REVIEW OF VERMONT'S EBENEZER ALLEN: PATRIOT, COMMANDO AND EMANCIPATOR

Last month, a review of my book, *Vermont's Ebenezer Allen: Patriot, Commando and Emancipator*, published by The History Press was printed in the Bennington Historical Society Newsletter. I am open to constructive criticism but am concerned about the many inaccurate and immaterial claims that were out of scale in the review.

As a descendant of a Green Mountain Boy, Daniel Champion, who served in Warner's Regiment, I take my research, writing, and reviews very seriously, so much so that I insisted that my publisher include extensive endnotes to cite my work throughout the text. The endnotes and bibliography validate and defend my findings for anyone who will read them.

As a museum board member myself, I would be concerned if a review such as this was printed in our publication for a number of reasons. At the very least, the significant misstatements need to be corrected.

Ebenezer Allen was a Massachusetts native who not only was a Green Mountain Boy in Warner's Regiment but also distinguished himself on the battlefield and in many militia and commando activities. He founded several towns, served as a town clerk and an assemblyman in Tinmouth and South Hero. But he also was one of the first, if not the first man to publicly emancipate enslaved people on American soil. The book unravels Allen's life and the very complicated context in which he lived.

Here are my objections to the review:

1. Contrary to the reviewer's statement that there is no citation for the cover image artist in the book, WPA artist Robert Belaski is cited as the artist on the inside title page. Since the mural, which once adorned the Rutland Federal Building, was recently moved into storage, the best available photograph I could find, and get permission to use was from Ruxana, at Ruxana's Interiors, and as the reviewer noted, she is a blogger, but that fact is immaterial to the quality of the book.
2. The emancipation transcript that is printed and cited on page 96 does not match the original handwritten emancipation image by Allen on page 97. Historians know that before electronic copiers and digital cameras were invented, documents were often copied by hand several times and errors and changes were commonplace. Both versions are cited with endnote sources in the book.
3. The reviewer takes issue with me describing the present-day magnificent ambiance of Allen's Point and contrasting that with the settlers finding dense forest with wild animals in the 18th century. This complaint is indefensible and immaterial.
4. Contrary to the criticism that says General Stark didn't plan for months, multiple sources show Stark planning for the Battle of Bennington in June, months before the battle on August 16th. The reviewer also states that the Battle of Bennington was a series of accidents. No one historian owns history and different historians have different views and

semantics on past events and this battle was no different. Seth Warner's men were often claimed to have arrived late to the battle by some historians, but other historians contend that Warner's men were purposely rested and saved till later in the battle by General Stark, to be used for reinforcements and strategically attack and turn the tide of the battle, which they did. That was no accident.

5. Contrary to the reviewer's statement, many historians have identified the German Hessians and Brunswickers as mercenary soldiers.

6. The reviewer states that the Bennington battle artillery gunners were mistakenly labeled British, not Hessian. On page 84 I clearly state that Allen's detachment faced Colonel Baum's German artillery. On page 85 a quote from witness Colonel Clark states that Allen faced British artillery. To be clear, Allen did face Hessian artillery soldiers who were fighting for General Burgoyne's British Army. So it is understandable why Colonel Clark would call it the British artillery.

7. The reviewer questions the quality of my Bennington battle sources: As stated in the text, endnotes, and bibliography, the sources used included the *Walloomsac Review* (Bennington Museum), Robert Selig's research published by the New York Parks documents, *the Journal of the Vermont Historical Society*, and several other excellent sources, including primary sources.

8. In questioning my reference to old town Bennington, the reviewer says "there is no such burg." The BHS Newsletter in fact mentions the Old Bennington walking tour. This is another example of an immaterial statement that has no bearing on the story of Allen's life or the quality of the book.

9. The reviewer faulted me using what he calls "slang" as in, Ira Allen was a "high roller" and dehydrated soldiers "sweating buckets" on the scorching battlefield. The publisher caters to and is successful with a general audience, not an academic audience. In order to relate to my audience, I intentionally used modern language and colloquialisms in some places.

10. The reviewer fails to note any value in the book whatsoever. There is no mention of the deep research into Allen's legal troubles, business ventures, emancipation questions, connections to other events, or the complex context interwoven with his times. How could this possibly be considered a balanced review?

The reviewer notes errors such as Thomas Mullen, instead of Mellen, as it should have been. It is possible that during the editing process, Mellen was inadvertently changed to Mullen. This is a problem and it will be corrected. Warner's Continental Regiment began with the Continental Congress charging the regiment to the Colony of New York and it served in the Colony of New Hampshire. But the reviewer is correct, the correct name was Warner's Continental Regiment, as I stated elsewhere in the book. These and other author or editor errors are vexing and accuracy is of utmost importance to me. The errors are duly noted for review and corrections for a second printing if and when it is warranted.

cont. on page 6

The pattern of erroneous statements and immaterial criticisms in the review, without any balance, raises questions about the validity of the review. It is very difficult to correct negative information once it has been printed and digested by readers. Plenty of other readers have loved the book and found it to have strong research content and interesting writing that adds to the history of Vermont and the American Revolution. Hopefully, they will share their reviews of the book.

Yours Truly,
Glenn Fay, Jr.

A MORE COMPLETE HISTORY OF BENNINGTON

CALL FOR INPUT

This past month, the BHS Committee realized the need to update the "Brief History of Bennington" available on the BHS program page, (see benningtonmuseum.org/programming/bennington-historical-society). The white settlers who came to Bennington in June of 1761 were not the first people to live on this land.

Don Miller, President of the Bennington Historical Society, has begun a draft reaching back 10,000 years to describe the area's earliest inhabitants, and follow the paths of indigenous peoples into the modern Abenaki tribes still present and active in this region today.

If you are interesting in assisting with research, or otherwise contributing to this updated account of human activity in the Adirondacks and Green Mountains, please get in touch with program director, Deana Mallory: dmallory@benningtonmuseum.org.

Resources can be found here:
mohican.com
elnuabenakitribe.org

And visit Berkshire Museum for a fabulous exhibit on these native peoples,
Muh-he-con-ne-ok: The People of the Waters That Are Never Still
On view through January 9, 2022
berkshiremuseum.org



Jeanne Morningstar Kent. Alnôbai, 2019, Gourd, depicting an Abenaki creation scene from the exhibit ***Askwa n'daoldibna iodali: We Are Still Here*** on view at Bennington Museum through December 31

MAKE A GIFT TO THE BENNINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
TODAY AND HELP TO KEEP OUR PROGRAMMING AND
NEWSLETTERS FREE AND FREQUENT THIS COMING YEAR!

VISIT
BENNINGTONMUSEUM.ORG/SUPPORT/
CALL

802-447-1571 X202

OR MAKE A CHECK PAYABLE TO
BENNINGTON MUSEUM
75 MAIN STREET
BENNINGTON, VT 05201

Please write "BHS" in the note section

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.

BENNINGTON MUSEUM IS OPEN

THURSDAY- TUESDAY

10AM-4PM

THE LIBRARY IS OPEN MONDAYS

1PM-4PM

CLOSED ON WEDNESDAY



Bennington Historical Society

A volunteer-operated program of 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

benningtonmuseum.org