

HISTORY

CONNECTIONS

Vermont Historical Society News and Notes
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VERMONT HISTORY

VOLUME 14 - Number 3

History Connections is published
by the Vermont Historical Society.

The Vermont Historical Society engages both Vermonters and “Vermonters at Heart” in the exploration of our state’s rich heritage. Our purpose is to reach a broad audience through our outstanding collections, statewide outreach, and dynamic programming. We believe that an understanding of the past changes lives and builds better communities.

Executive Director: Steve Perkins
Printing: Accura Printing

Vermont History Museum & Store

The Pavilion Building, next to
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www.vermonthistory.org

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IN THE GALLERIES

History Museum Special Exhibits

- *When Women Lead: Governor Madeleine Kunin of Vermont*
July 2020 - January 2021
- *WPA prints from the T.W. Wood Gallery*
August 17, 2020 – January 9, 2021

*Please visit vermonthistory.org
for virtual exhibits coming soon!*

UPCOMING EVENTS & PROGRAMS

The Vermont Historical Society is committed to providing you outstanding virtual programs and classes during these uncertain times. We remain responsive to unfolding events and are working to adapt and create content to connect you to Vermont’s history. Please visit vermonthistory.org/calendar for a complete schedule and more information on upcoming events and virtual exhibits.

Director's Note

by Steve Perkins

When we put the statement, “reach Vermonters in their own backyards” in our strategic plan two years ago, we never imagined a scenario in which we could ONLY reach Vermonters via remote means. The strategic plan outlined ways to serve researchers, schools, local societies and small museums, and the public in new, digital ways. The COVID-19 pandemic, though regrettably canceling all our in-person operations, allowed staff to focus on developing and prototyping many forms of virtual connections to Vermont History.

Your participation in, and use of, these programs, activities, and resources was outstanding. Programs that regularly drew a handful of people in person instead drew hundreds of participants virtually. Folks from Vermont and throughout the country utilized Vermont Trivia competitions, lectures, book discussions, seminars, roundtable meetings, workshops, and even a museum studies class.

Our collections and library staff are re-thinking how the public accesses our rich resources. We migrated our museum catalog to a new cloud-based platform to eventually allow full online searches of our 25,000+ museum collection. Library items only found in our various card-catalog search indexes are being retroactively converted to our online catalog system. Primary source documents, especially those documenting the role of Black Vermonters in our history, are being scanned and made fully available on our digitalvermont.org archive site. The Vermont Women's History Database was rebuilt and updated on a new platform with the Vermont Black History Database following soon.

Our COVID-19 crowd-sourced archive is gathering images, documents, stories, and videos of this extraordinary time. This robust online tool allows the uploading of digital resources and proper archiving at the

point of submission. The submissions immediately become part of the ongoing database and discoverable for public viewing.

Support for local societies and small museums increased during this time. Regular roundtable meetings on topics of great concern to these groups helped drive programming and resources such as workshops, classes, and curated web content. Increased public communication via our newsletters highlighted and promoted the good work these organizations continue to do throughout the state.

Vermont Historical Society has always provided abundant resources to schools through our in-person programs and the Vermont History Explorer website. Now over ten-years-old, that website is undergoing a redesign and update to serve Vermont students as they return to school in a completely new learning environment. Learning materials highlighting the history and experiences of non-white Vermonters will be emphasized.

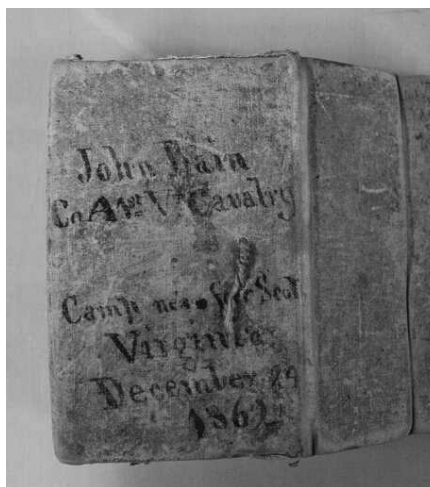
We reprinted Elise Guyette's *Discovering Black Vermont* (formerly produced by the now-defunct University Press of New England) and published both this title and *The Problem of Slavery in Early Vermont* by Amani Whitfield as eBooks for broader distribution.

Thank you for your participation, your feedback, and your support. Now is a critical time for arts and humanities organizations throughout our country. Our work uses the past to understand and create a just and equitable future.



Steve Perkins, Executive Director

COLLECTIONS HIGHLIGHT by Teresa Greene



This document box, which was possibly shipped unwrapped, is addressed to “John Bain, Co. A, First Vt. Cavalry. Camp near Fort Scott, Virginia, December 24, 1862.” Fitting snugly within is a small book, now missing its cover, that many would call a dictionary. This book, however, contains no definitions. The introduction details how to read out loud, including tips for both pronunciation and performance. Following the introduction is an alphabetical list of words without pronunciation guides or definitions. Utilizing this guide, readers familiarized themselves with the words to

confidently read aloud, a popular way to spend evenings in the time before radio and television. Books like these were common Christmas presents. The date on the box, December 24, 1862, may indicate the book was a holiday gift sent to the front.

John Bain was born in Elgin, Scotland in 1809. After marrying Margaret Vessie, the pair emigrated to Canada, and then to Vermont. Following the war, Bain worked in Burlington as a customs inspector, and presumably, spent many evenings reading to his family.

THE HISTORY COMMUNITY IS APART, TOGETHER

by Eileen Corcoran

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a particular challenge for our work with local historical societies around the state. Some organizations were immediately impacted when the state closed down in March, but we were just starting to think about spring cleaning and seasonal openings. Our original plans called for a spring workshop and regional meetings around the state throughout the summer, however we quickly realized a need to pivot - both for our health and safety, and for the opportunity to stay in communication with our history community as we navigated the uncertainties of the pandemic.

We quickly corralled some great friends and colleagues to help present Virtual Roundtables on everything from collecting COVID-19 stories to deaccessioning. We moved our Active Collections workshop to a virtual classroom space in a bold, but very successful, experiment.

Our E-newsletters featured the exciting and innovative digital offerings of local history organizations - such as the Norwich Historical Society’s podcast driving tours and the Saint Albans Museum’s “DIY Museum” activity kit - as an alternative to the in-person events and programs we usually promote. Reopening guidelines and experiences were created and shared by many, and plans are afoot for creating a more direct communication hub (such as a listserv) for our local history community.

Overall, at a time when history is at the forefront, and resiliency is essential, our local historical societies continue to serve as excellent community resources. We look forward to getting together in late October for our annual LLHSM Conference, though in a different way than usual, and navigating together what the future holds for historical societies and museums around Vermont.

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

By Amanda Kay Gustin

If you want to make improvements on something, you must first measure it – and that is exactly what the Vermont Historical Society did over the last year.

We partnered with Castleton University to ask some essential questions about Vermonters' relationship with state history. We needed to understand how Vermonters think about history, appreciate history, and how history relates to other areas of their lives. Specifically, we wanted to test a phrase from our mission statement: "We believe that an understanding of the past changes lives and builds better communities."

In 2019, after a series of meetings with VHS staff, Rich Clark and Amanda Richardson at Castleton University presented a class with our queries. During the fall semester, Public Program Manager, Amanda Gustin, visited the students several times as they learned about survey methodology and statistics while working with our request. The students proposed questions, tested the survey, analyzed initial results, made edits, and finally, stuffed the envelopes.

A random sampling of several thousand Vermonters received the survey in January 2020. Three months later, Rich Clark presented the survey's findings to VHS staff.

The results are exciting and continue to guide us as we plan programming for the remainder of 2020 and beyond in an uncertain climate.

Among the findings: a strong correlation between an interest and appreciation of history and community involvement. For example, respondents who indicated they frequently visit local historical societies and museums, are 50% more likely to reply that staying informed about community issues, volunteering in their communities, and providing financial support to charitable organizations is very important.

Similarly, the higher a respondent's self-reported interest in history, the more empowered they feel to make a difference within their communities. These respondents reported concrete actions taken to improve their communities, such as volunteering their time, attending town meetings, contacting elected officials, giving money to local organizations, and voting.

To better meet their needs, we also asked respondents how they engage with history. The most popular actions, by far, are watching videos and reading books or articles. The Vermont Historical Society has a robust publishing program and regularly publishes articles but had not focused on sharing Vermont history through videos until the summer of 2020. Thanks to the survey's data, we have a clear path forward with virtual programming. As you read this newsletter, several short videos highlighting collections objects and essential topics in Vermont history are available to watch on our YouTube channel, with more content in the works.

We are still digging into the data, using it to drive our strategic planning and outreach, with much more to come. We look forward to continuing our efforts to measure and improve the ways we connect you to your state's story.

VHS LAUNCHES COVID-19 DIGITAL ARCHIVE

by Paul Carnahan



*The marquee of the Flynn Theater in Burlington after closure reading, "be safe, be kind, be hopeful."
Contributed by Sally Blanchard-O'Brien on March 22, 2020*

Some archival collections arrive at the Vermont Historical Society fully formed; others are assembled over many years with pieces from different sources. On rare occasions, the staff builds a collection as an event occurs. The latter was the case as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded across Vermont in the spring of 2020.

Our state-wide digital archive began as a project recording our own institution's response to the coronavirus. On March 19, just two days after VHS closed to the public, a message circulated among Vermont archivists asking how they were documenting the crisis. Librarian, Paul Carnahan started a simple timeline of national headlines, state actions, and VHS responses.

In early April, a message on the New England Archivists e-mail list showed how American institutions were handling the pandemic. VHS was already using an open-source digital asset management program called Omeka for our Digital Vermont archive when Paul

spotted a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee project using the same program. Assistant Librarian, Marjorie Strong, discovered that the University of Virginia developed a template for community archival contributions during the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, and made it freely available to other Omeka users.

Paul immediately set to work customizing the "Charlottesville Rally Theme" for COVID-19 in Vermont, increasing functionality and consulting with UVA library staff members to remove Charlottesville references from the public forms.

Meanwhile, VHS Public Program Manager, Amanda Gustin, was brainstorming how to encourage Vermonters to record their pandemic experiences. Paul and Amanda, along with VHS Community Outreach Manager Eileen Corcoran, developed goals to guide the project: collect the experiences and insights of Vermonters during COVID-19, share that



The Norwich Farmers Market opens with new rules for vendors and customers, including a mask requirement. Contributed by Bonnie Clause on May 23, 2020.

Free homemade mask "kiosk" in Brattleboro created and contributed by Diana Todd on April 19, 2020



documentation with the public, and preserve those documents for the education of generations to come.

On April 15, exactly a month after Governor Phil Scott declared a state of emergency in Vermont, VHS launched its COVID-19 digital archive. We spread the word through social and broadcast media, and encouraged people to contribute photographs, essays, poems, mailings, videos, and PDFs of websites to our digital archive found here.

Since launching, the site has collected materials contributed by the public, including photographs of an empty waiting room in a medical clinic in April, deserted downtown streets, retail establishment signage, Zoom meetings, students distance learning, and mask-making. Vermonters also contributed creative writing about feelings of isolation and explorations of nature during quarantine. VHS staff added state government documents and news stories to show a complete picture of the crisis.

The VHS repository is not a comprehensive archive of these materials, but a sample of documents highlighting the pandemic's pivotal moments. By the middle of July, we amassed 295 submissions.

In mid-May, volunteer Nancy Remsen suggested adding obituaries of coronavirus victims, and we created a separate section for those tributes in response. Despite challenges ascertaining names, we have assembled information for around two dozen people who died of the virus in Vermont, all drawn from published sources.

The COVID-19 archive is a community project with much nurturing from VHS staff. We will transfer digital items in this archive to new storage media as technology changes and evolves. When utilized by future researchers and curious members of the public, this archive will provide a source for understanding the 2020 pandemic and its impact on Vermont. Visit [covid-19.digitalvermont.org](https://www.digitalvermont.org) to contribute to the archive or view past submissions.

EDUCATION GOES VIRTUAL

by Victoria Hughes



Students from Lyndon Town School received their Vermont History Day ribbons in a small, outdoor ceremony.

At the start of the second week of March, the Vermont History Museum was buzzing with activity. All seemed normal as students from Fayston Elementary School toured the exhibit and participated in a Hands-On History school program. Later in the week, as the anxiety level about COVID-19 increased, parents distributed hand sanitizer for their children attending our monthly History for Homeschoolers class. On Friday, a CCV class canceled their museum visit, and Governor Scott held a press conference declaring a state of emergency. By Saturday, the museum officially closed to the public and would remain closed for three and a half months.

Like many organizations worldwide, we adapted to the sudden changes, finding ways to teach about history in a safe and physically distant manner.

We moved our final sessions of History for Homeschoolers online and sent slideshows and activities for the participating families to complete at home. In May, students shared their Champ puppets on Zoom and worked together virtually to make a silent movie about the 1927 flood.

It was comforting and inspiring to see their smiling faces online and continue our long-standing monthly classes, but it is challenging to teach Hands-On History lessons through a screen. We hope to welcome students and families back to the museum for small, on-site sessions, following new safety protocols this fall.

A spring highlight was the Virtual Vermont History Day contest, an online version of the annual event. Instead of gathering at UVM, students took photographs of exhibits, recorded their performances, and submitted video interviews. Judges followed links to Google Folders, met with team members on Zoom, and filled out judging forms online. The event culminated in the virtual awards ceremony, streamed on Facebook Live. The flexibility of all involved allowed the students to share their projects and get recognized for their outstanding work. According to one teacher, “Doing history day with kids has been a bright spot in this whole thing!”

Forty-nine students represented Vermont at the virtual National History Day contest. The “Best of Vermont” award for the senior division went to Abigail Hunter from Poultney High School for her performance *From the Osage Tribe to Prima Ballerina: How Maria Tallchief Broke Artistic Barriers*. The junior division winners were Alara Kohn, Ella Averbeck, Hazel Green, Maggie Kords, and Somerset Pierce from Main Street Middle School for their documentary *Katherine Johnson and Mae Carol Jemison: Breaking Barriers in NASA*.

It is too early to tell what Vermont History Day 2021 will look like, but whether the contest is in-person or virtual, we look forward to seeing a new round of student projects next April.

WHEN WOMEN LEAD: GOVERNOR MADELEINE KUNIN OF VERMONT

by Amanda Gustin



Madeleine Kunin is sworn in to her second term in office. Photo credit: UPI



Vermont waited over a half-century post women's suffrage before a woman achieved the highest political office.

Madeleine Kunin accomplished many firsts throughout her career, culminating in 1984 with her election as the first female governor of Vermont. A new exhibition at the Vermont History Museum explores Kunin's career in the Green Mountain State and showcases another pioneering moment: for the first time, a Vermont governor, not a first lady, wore a gown to an inauguration ball.

Governor Kunin recently donated her three inaugural gowns (from 1985, 1987, and 1989) to the Vermont Historical Society. They are part of a new exhibit in the National Life Gallery at the Vermont History



Lieutenant Governor Madeleine Kunin campaigns alongside Marcela Leahy and Joan Mondale in 1980. Photo credit: UPI

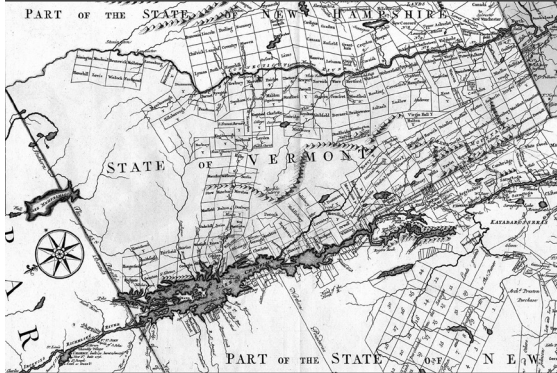
Museum in Montpelier, exploring Kunin's Vermont political career.

Clothing and textiles can be rich, symbolic objects, and Kunin's gowns are no exception. Clothing worn to public events by female politicians is still a subject of intense interest and debate. Kunin put it succinctly: "When women lead, they have to think about what to wear."

The exhibit, *When Women Lead: Governor Madeleine Kunin of Vermont* opened on July 25 and is on view through January 2021.

FEATURED VHS PUBLICATIONS

THE REBEL AND THE TORY ETHAN ALLEN, PHILIP SKENE, AND THE DAWN OF VERMONT



JOHN J. DUFFY
H. NICHOLAS MULLER III
GARY G. SHATTUCK

THE REBEL AND THE TORY

By John J. Duffy, H. Nicholas Muller III, and Gary G. Shattuck

This year marks the 250th anniversary of the Ejectment Trials of 1770, when a boundary dispute between New Yorkers and the settlers and leaders of the New Hampshire Grants turned from petitions and court proceedings to violent resistance. The Ejectment Trials are considered a critical inflection point in American history, but no historian has ever read the transcripts—until now. *The Rebel and the Tory* shines a fresh light on Vermont's 200-year-old origin story and captures the nuance often missing from the tale. The authors also restore Philip Skene, a principal player scheming with Ethan Allen to create a new colony, to his rightful place at the center of Vermont's founding.

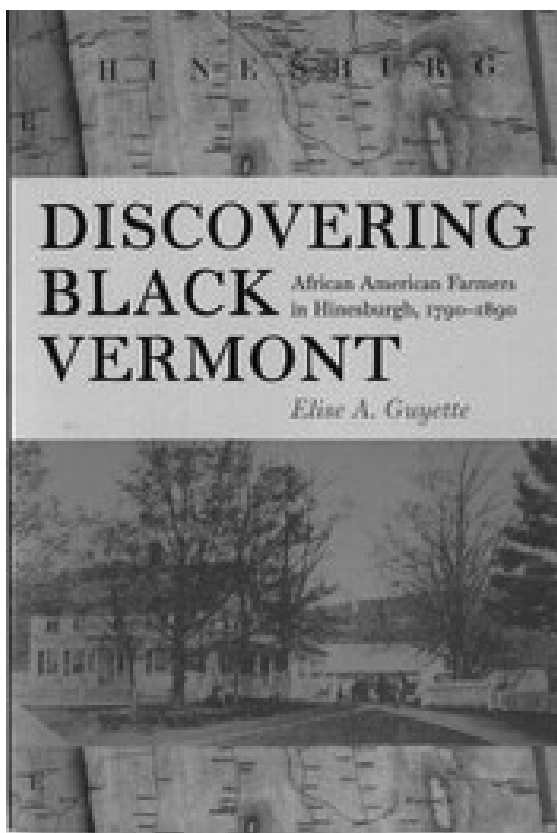
The Rebel and the Tory received a 10/10 review from Gene Proknow of the *Journal of the American Revolution*. He writes, “I enthusiastically recommend this book to a wide variety of people (....) For historians, the authors provide a treasure trove of new documents and posit fresh lines of valuable research. For all, the authors’ work demonstrates the perils of not investigating and weighing all sides of a controversy before forming a point of view.”

DISCOVERING BLACK VERMONT

By Elise A. Guyette

Discovering Black Vermont tells the story of three generations of free African Americans building a life and community in northern Vermont in the years following statehood. By piecing together fragments of historical information — tax and estate records, journals, diaries, and the like—the author recovers what is essentially a lost world and establishes a framework for using primary sources to document a forgotten past. The book is an invaluable resource for those conducting local history research and will serve as inspiration for high school and college students and their teachers. Originally published in 2010 by the University of Vermont and University Press of New England, it was reprinted in 2020 by the Vermont Historical Society.

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MYSTERY PHOTO



We purchased this issue's mystery photo because of the interesting configuration of the building. The back of the photograph reads "My childhood home near Burlington, Vt." It shows a typical residence with a small shop attached. If you recognize this structure or last issue's mystery street scene, please notify our librarian, Paul Carnahan, at paul.carnahan@vermonthistory.org or 802-479-8508.

Last issue's mystery photo of an early automobile driving past a typical New England church elicited no suggestions from our readers. We are hoping that reprinting it here might stimulate some possible identifications from our readers.





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