

The Catamount in Vermont



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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
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Vermont History Museum & Store

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www.vermonthistory.org

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Director's Note

by Steve Perkins

In February I had the pleasure of spending a few warm days visiting with Vermont Historical Society ex-pat members and donors in Florida. I found myself with a free afternoon and not really being a beach guy, I decided to check out the museum scene in Fort Myers. The young man running the registration desk at my hotel recommended the Edison-Ford Winter Estate Museum and Garden – so off I went, with blind faith that my car GPS would deliver me at the museum door.

For those visiting the Sun Coast of Florida, I highly recommend this site as it offers a ton of history, beautiful gardens, and rare, early-20th-century, vacation-home architecture. As I do with any museum I visit, I asked if their institution is a member of the North American Reciprocal Museum program (NARM). This reciprocal membership program means that if you are a member of a participating institution, at the appropriate level, you will be provided member benefits at fellow NARM institutions. I was able to visit the Edison-Ford Estate free of charge and receive member discounts in the shop and café with my Vermont Historical Society Membership. For me alone, this saved me a \$30 entrance fee. Had I been travelling with my family, wife and two teenagers, I would have saved \$100 in entrance fees alone!

NARM is one of those wonderful benefits of Vermont Historical Society membership and support. The list of participating museums grows each year and includes over 1,000 institutions throughout the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean. NARM requires that reciprocal benefits be offered to members “above the basic member category,” so a Vermont Historical Society membership at the \$150 level or above receives this great benefit.

If you have a VHS membership or are looking to join, I encourage you to think about supporting Vermont Historical Society at the Associate Level (\$150) or above to access and enjoy the North American Reciprocal Museum benefit.

Steve Perkins
Executive Director

IN THE GALLERIES

History Center Exhibits

- *Icons, Oddities & Wonders*
- *Myths & Legends of the Connecticut River*
Through April 2020
- *The Catamount in Vermont*
Opening TBD

History Museum Special Exhibits

- Local History Gallery: *The Dames and The Sheldon Relic Chair 1884/2018*
Through July 2020
- Calder Gallery: *The History of the Long Trail*
Through April 2020
- Calder Gallery: *WPA Prints from the TW Wood Gallery*
Opens May 19, 2020
- National Life Gallery: *The Vermont Brand*
Through May 2020

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May 13 & 14 1-3pm	History for Homeschoolers: Rainy Days- Water in Vermont History Museum, Montpelier
May 21 12pm	Third Thursday: The Other Franco-Americans UVM, Burlington Speaker: Patrick Lacroix
July 3 10am-6pm	Montpelier Independence Day Celebration History Museum, Montpelier
July 11 1pm	WPA Prints from the T.W. Wood Art Gallery Exhibit Reception & Talk History Museum, Montpelier
July 25 9am-1pm	Barre Heritage Day Vermont History Center, Barre

2020 GENEALOGY PROGRAMS

Calling all family history fans! We're hosting genealogy related programs this summer and fall. We'll have workshops on the Second Saturdays over the summer (June 13, July 11, August 8) in the Library. During those afternoons, our librarians will be available for short (30 minute) one-on-one research consultations. You can also save the date for the VHS Annual Meeting on Saturday, September 12th in Montpelier, which will also focus on genealogy. Stay tuned for more details soon!

PAST AND PRESENT MEET IN THE LOCAL HISTORY GALLERY

For the first time, the Local History Gallery combines two exhibits into one common space. Both exhibits bring the past and the present together to explore personal connections to history.

The Dames is a collection of oral history recordings and photographic portraits created by the Vermont Folklife Center featuring thirteen members of the National Society of Colonial Dames of America in the State of Vermont. The Society is a women's lineage organization founded in Philadelphia in 1892, whose current mission includes preservation and education around our nation's history. The stories of these women bring to light life challenges met with grace and courage, opportunities embraced with pioneering spirit and preparedness, lives lived with a strong sense of purpose—and a coming to terms with aging.

The Sheldon Relic Chair 1884/2018 features an eclectic Windsor-style “relic chair” built by Middlebury historian Henry Sheldon.

Each spindle of the top two tiers of the chair is a “relic,” carved from a fragment of different sites of local, national, and historical significance. In 2018, Middlebury College students constructed their own version, selecting objects and items of significance to them today. This exhibition, created by Middlebury College students and the Henry Sheldon Museum, explores questions of Vermont identity, craftsmanship, and history.

WPA PRINTS FROM THE T.W. WOOD ART GALLERY

The Thomas Waterman Wood Gallery of Montpelier is celebrating one hundred years in existence with a series of coordinated exhibitions around the city. Selections from their remarkable collection of prints by artists working for the Works Progress Administration will be on exhibit in the Calder Gallery of the Vermont History Museum.

On July 11, 2020, at 1:00 pm, join us at the Museum for a talk on printmaking and the WPA by historian Paul Zaloom, followed by a reception in the Calder Gallery.

Save the date also for a printmaking workshop with T.W. Wood Gallery Curator Phillip Robertson on October 10, 2020 at 1:00 pm at the Vermont History Museum.

*This exhibition runs from
May 19, 2020 – October 18, 2020.*



Another Farm by Arnold Blanch

pipe (profile)



pipe (front)



COLLECTIONS HIGHLIGHT

This wood and tortoiseshell pipe was originally owned by author Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936). Though Kipling is famously associated with England and British India, he started his family in Vermont at his house, Naulakha, near Brattleboro. It was here that he created his most famous work, *The Jungle Book*.

The pipe bears unmistakable Irish imagery: the front of the pipe features a dog in front of an Irish harp and a stone tower, and the sides are carved with large

shamrocks. Though Kipling visited Ireland in 1911, he could not have purchased the pipe there, as he gave it to the portrait painter Robert Gordon Hardie of Brattleboro, who passed away in 1904.

Interestingly, Kipling hated the Irish and believed that English rule of the island was the only thing stopping it from descending into savagery.

HISTORY FOR HOMESCHOOLERS

As summer approaches, the 10th round of the popular History for Homeschoolers series comes to a close. Each year, from September through May, students gather at the Vermont History Museum on the 2nd Wednesday and 2nd Thursday of the month to learn about Vermont history topics like weather, hunting and maple sugaring. The students and their families, many of whom return from year to year, get to know the museum and exhibits very well. We use each section of *Freedom and Unity* to enhance the lessons. Some children who started out coming with older siblings years ago have now outgrown the classes! Registration for the next series will begin in August. Check out our website later this summer for details or contact Victoria at victoria.hughes@vermonthistory.org or (802) 828-1413 to be added to the mailing list.

IN MEMORY OF JOHN DUFFY

John Duffy Jr. was Director of the Vermont Historical Society from 1971-1972, having previously served as a trustee. During his tenure he guided the organization as it settled into its new quarters in the Pavilion Building and served as editor of *Vermont History* (1971-1973). A noted professor, researcher, and author, his publications include: *Vermont: An Illustrated History* with photo editor Faith Pepe, *Ethan Allen and His Kin: Correspondence 1772-1819* (chief editor, 1998), *The Vermont Encyclopedia* with Samuel B. Hand and Ralph H. Orth (2003), and *Inventing Ethan Allen* with H. Nicholas Muller III (2014). His final book, *The Rebel and the Tory*, with collaborators Nick Muller and Gary Shattuck, was published by the VHS this spring.



the Catamount in Vermont

by Amanda Gustin

**For thousands of years, catamounts roamed
the mountains and forests of Vermont.**

**Barely a hundred years after European
settlers arrived, they were gone.**

What does the catamount mean today? What role does it play in our lives?

The Vermont Historical Society's newest exhibition *The Catamount in Vermont* will explore these questions and investigate the art, science, history, and culture of Vermont's charismatic cat.

The catamount, *puma concolor*, is one of the most remarkable animals in nature. For thousands of years this animal was one of Vermont's apex predators, alongside wolves and bears. Naturally reclusive and solitary, a catamount's body can reach seven feet in length and weigh up to 200 pounds. They can leap fifteen feet into the air from a sitting position – and thirty feet horizontally. They are one of the most widely-distributed land mammals in the world and are known by over forty different names in English alone – panther, puma, cougar, mountain lion, and more.

Fay's Tavern in Bennington placed the stuffed body of a catamount atop a signpost outside, its teeth snarling west, at New York. This display of rebellion was a rare positive association for the catamount in the early years of the state. For decades, views on the catamount were stridently negative. They were wild animals, to be exterminated and driven from the woods. Although there were no documented attacks on humans, and very few on livestock, the fear remained that the catamount was a danger.

Catamounts and other large predators didn't fit into the new "civilized" landscape of Vermont.

While their population in early Vermont was sparse, they quickly became targets for newly arrived European settlers in the 18th century. Catamounts and other large predators didn't fit into the new "civilized" landscape of Vermont. Hunters killed several each year, cashing in on a state-sponsored bounty, until the last catamount was shot in 1881. Within two generations of the Barnard catamount's death, viewpoints began to shift.



Photo credit: Emmanuel Keller



Zadock Thompson was an author, historian, and naturalist. His 1842 work *History of the State of Vermont, Natural, Civil, and Statistical* featured this illustration of a catamount as one of the animals native to Vermont.



The last catamount in Vermont, shot in Barnard in 1881, has been a beloved fixture at the Vermont History Museum in Montpelier for decades.

In the 20th century, Vermonters – alongside others worldwide – developed a new understanding of the environment regarding the mountains and forests as a cohesive ecosystem. The catamount shifted from a terrifying and dangerous creature to a noble and charismatic one in the public eye.

In the 1920s, both Middlebury and the University of Vermont named their sports teams after the animal, and by the middle of the century people began naming things after the catamount. Businesses, cultural organizations, schools, clubs, and associations adopted the image of the large cat. Now, we see the animal largely in a positive light, and mourn its loss.

Since 1881, hundreds of Vermonters claim to have seen a catamount, but no final scientific proof of their return to the state has yet emerged. Are there still catamounts in Vermont? Should we encourage them to return?

How will Vermont's landscape continue to change?

The future of the catamount in Vermont is uncertain. *The Catamount in Vermont* will trace the timeline of the catamount through Vermont's history – ending in the present day. Exhibit visitors will learn more about the history of Vermont's landscape and about the catamount itself, with interactive features explaining its fascinating and unique adaptations to its environment. Visitors will be invited to share their own catamount stories – sightings, encounters, or favorite representations. Visitors will also explore the wide range of ways in which the catamount has served as a symbol over the years and share their own ideas about what the catamount means to them.

Help us bring this exciting story to life by becoming a sponsor! Visit vermonthistory.org/catamount-exhibit to learn more.

LIBRARY ACQUISITIONS



The library recently received a small donation that documents the history of Montpelier's Heaton Hospital. The collection includes 16 scrapbooks containing newspaper clippings covering the period 1947-1962 and a wonderful album of photographs. Although we have many photographs of the exterior of the building, photographs of the interior of this institution, which merged with the Barre City Hospital to form the Central Vermont Medical Center in 1963, are a welcome addition to our collections.

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Tori Hart, Development Manager
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VHS IN ACTION

LOCAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

In the Summer of 2019, the Vermont Historical Society traveled around the state to host seven Local History Engagement Sessions. These community conversations were aimed at discussing the ways in which VHS can provide direct programs and services to local historical societies. Discussion also focused on how we can all work together to strengthen the history community statewide. A report on the results of those sessions, and an associated survey, is now available. We look forward to using the information and input we gathered to continue our work for these groups under our current strategic initiatives. You can find the report on our website at vermonthistory.org/lhs-engage, or contact Jessie Dall, jessie.dall@vermonthistory.org, (802) 479-8503 to request a print copy. If you have any questions on the report, contact Eileen Corcoran, eileen.corcoran@vermonthistory.org, (802) 479-8522.



Teresa Greene - Collections Manager



Students from Black River High School at the first Vermont History Day in 1983

PASTPERFECT UPDATE

New Collections Manager, Teresa Greene, is in the process of evaluating and updating data on our object collections to pursue upgrading to a cloud-based system. This update will allow us to access our database from either of our locations and remotely from local historical societies. The evaluation is also initiating the standardization of data, which will help us make our collection publicly available online. Teresa has hit the ground running by changing location formatting on over 5,000 objects. Only 20,000 to go!

HISTORY DAY

One goal in the Strategic Plan is to grow and develop Vermont History Day. Though the annual state contest is an important piece, the Vermont History Day program is so much more than one day! Shea Sheridan, our 2020 spring semester intern from Northern Vermont University, Lyndon, is reading through old newsletters and files to research and write a history of the state contest. Knowing the history of Vermont History Day will help us plan for the future! If you have any stories about Vermont History Day, please send them to intern@vermonthistory.org.

STATEWIDE HISTORY POLLING

We're excited to receive the results from our statewide survey in partnership with Castleton University. That survey is now in the field and by the time you hold this newsletter in your hands, we'll have some initial results to review. Keep an eye on future issues for our takeaways – and how they'll shape our planning going forward.

MYSTERY PHOTO

Last issue's mystery photograph was identified by member Henry Pallmerine who grew up in White River Junction but now lives in Missouri. He, and the Hartford Historical Society, recognized the building as the original St. Anthony's Catholic church and rectory on South Main Street in White River Junction. The same picture appears on page 215 of John W. St. Croix's *Historical Highlights of the Town of Hartford, Vermont: 1761-1974*.



This issue's mystery photograph was taken by Newport photographer Harry W. Richardson. We haven't done a lot of research on it, but it was probably taken in the Northeast Kingdom. We especially like the early motor car in the center of the photograph. If you know where this image was taken please contact VHS Librarian Paul Carnahan at paul.carnahan@vermonthistory.org or (802) 479-8508.



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Note from the Editor:

As this issue was going to press, the Vermont Historical Society closed to the public for an unknown amount of time. There's no doubt that many of you have felt the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in some of the same ways as we have at VHS. With the changing nature of this outbreak and the necessary response it demands, we have no idea what will be happening by the time this newsletter makes it into your hands. But, we hope to be able to move forward, as always, by looking to the past. One always is reminded at these times by Calvin Coolidge's moving words:

"If the spirit of liberty should vanish in other parts of the Union, and support of our institutions should languish, it could all be replenished from the generous store held by the people of this brave little state of Vermont."

Please visit our website, vermonthistory.org, for any updates on the programs and exhibits mentioned within. We will hope that many, if not all, will be presented as planned. Thank you for your continued support of VHS and of your Vermont communities. We look forward to being together again sometime soon.