

# EDITORIAL

## Keeping History Alive

Few people who grew up in the 1950s, '60s and '70s were bereft of knowledge of World War II, from its horrors to its heroism. More than likely, the children of those decades had an older sibling, a father, mother, aunt, uncle or other relative who was involved in the war effort, and, of course, all had knowledge of family, friends and relatives who lived through the war years of the 1940s, whether on the battle fields or the home front. World War II left a vivid memory for those who knew it or its years first hand and was a point of knowledge for those born during or a few years after it ended. Everyday conversations included references to the war years, literature abounded, movies and television shows glamorized it, kids played "war" and its veterans were honored. As the years passed, however, and first Korea, then Vietnam and then the first Gulf War and now the Iraq War became the focus of attention, World War II was pushed into history books with few living memories holding sway. The war and its years became "dry" and students found its dates just one more war to memorize as they slogged through the long list from the French and Indian Wars to the present. The war, relegated to history books, has lost its staggering enormity: the tens of millions who died, the tens of millions who served, the billions of dollars spent and lost, the destruction rendered, the legacy of the Holocaust and atomic warfare... Children today do not have the benefit of those everyday conversations that have World War II as a benchmark, who understand that a reference to "the war" in conversation in the 1950s and 1960s referred to that war.

Does it matter that World War II recedes into distant memory for many people? Will the lack of a personal knowledge of that era and that war affect the worldview of the current crop of youngsters who will come of age in this decade or the next?

The questions can be posed to sixth graders from Hardwick Elementary School Saturday. They have been studying World War II this year and learned the war is not "ancient" history as a result of interviews they conducted with town residents who knew the 1940s and the war first hand, and articles they collected from that time. The students took what they gathered and learned and created an exhibit, as well as made audio and video tapes of their interviews. They will have them on display at the Hardwick Historical Society open house at the Depot from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. The event is part of the 25th anniversary of the society and the official dedication of the depot as the society's new home. Local residents, state officials and the governor will be there, and there will be music to go with the history, too. It's an historical event that should not be missed.

**R.C.**