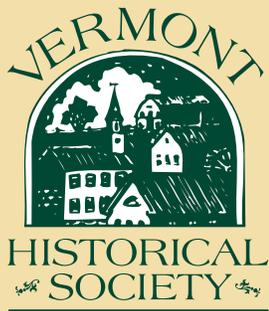


History Connections

Vermont Historical Society

News &
Notes

Summer 2007 / Volume #1 / Number 4



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**More Expo photos
on pages 4 and 5!**

8th Annual Vermont History Expo Got People Here from There!

The weather for Vermont History Expo was the best yet – sunny and pleasant – and made for one of the most successful Expo's to date. This year's theme, "Travel and Transportation: How Vermonter's Got There from Here", brought many first-time Expo attendees to the historic fairgrounds in Tunbridge.

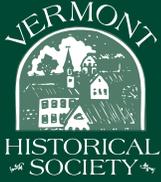
Visitors were treated to a dozen antique cars, a real train simulator, and G-gauge garden trains in an elaborately landscaped display. We had a special appearance of the State Transportation Agency's 1911 V-plow brought out of retirement to push vast amounts of snow in the recent Valentine's Day Blizzard! Calvin Coolidge's 1923 Lincoln made an appearance, as did Cal himself, a.k.a Jim Cooke of Quincy, Massachusetts.

A popular highlight was the newly restored Little State House, a faithful replica of our beloved golden-domed capital built in 1927 for the dedication of the Champlain Bridge. The Montpelier Kiwanis Club dedicated thousands of hours, beautifully restoring her, right down to the carving of the statue of Ceres on top.

Heirloom animals, History on Parade, Clara's Games, genealogical and archival services, living history craft demonstrations, music, food and more delighted the crowds. Still, the stars of the show were the local historical societies themselves. Johnson, the most recently formed Historical Society, showed a display about the lost town of Sterling, Vermont. East Middlebury recreated Palmer's Dairy soda fountain, Fairlee and West Fairlee offered hands-on summer camp crafts, Fayston brought a snow roller, Chittenden County brought bicycles and Bradford brought strawberries. Plainfield told the story of Goddard College's founder, Richmond gave us the early car dealership, and Ryegate told the story of Jack Johnson, a very big dog who pulled a cart for his young master who couldn't walk to school.

The 9th Annual Vermont History Expo returns to Tunbridge June 21st and 22nd, 2008. Our theme is Industry and Innovation: Vermont Ingenuity and we will be adding a highlight to the activities with "Civil War Sunday" featuring exhibits, talks and presentations focusing on our home front during those years. We hope to see you there! *Please see the centerfold of this newsletter for additional photos from this year's Vermont History Expo.*





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History Connections is published four times a year 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.

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From the Director



Vermont’s History Glass is Half Full

Five years ago, when I was Executive Director of the Kentucky Historical Society, I wrote a column about whether Americans are becoming increasingly unfamiliar with and uninterested in history. I started from Michael Crichton’s term “temporal provincials,” which he introduced in his 1999 novel *Timeline*. As Crichton described them, temporal provincials “were convinced that the present was the only time that mattered, and that anything that had occurred earlier could be safely ignored. . . . Studying history was as pointless as learning Morse code, or how to drive a horse-drawn carriage.”

In *Timeline* these “history is bunk” characters appear briefly to annoy the protagonist, then fade from the plot. In real life, they’re not always so obliging. Certain that history is boring and useless, they are disdainful of any effort to preserve our heritage, and that can hamper the work of organizations like the Vermont Historical Society, the teaching of Vermont history in our schools, and the maintaining of our local and state traditions.

But are Americans, and Vermonters in particular, really losing touch with the past? Some of the national evidence seems to say so. When I wrote the Kentucky column in 2002, Jay Leno had just quizzed new college graduates about American history. Depending on your perspective, the televised results were either amusing or depressing. One trio of graduates conferred over a challenging question, then triumphantly announced that the Vietnam War was fought in Korea. Informed to his surprise that the Great Wall of China is in China, a particularly impressive young scholar used that news to form the hypothesis that the Panama Canal is probably in China as well. Other answers were equally misguided, leaving the impression that our collective slide into historical imbecility is a done deal.

But I wondered five years ago, and I wonder now. When I was in school 40-45 years ago, I had many Montpelier classmates who couldn’t identify the century in which the American Civil War occurred, much less the decade. They didn’t know, and they didn’t care. Only a few of our parents dragged us to museums or historic sites during summer vacation, belonged to any kind of heritage organization, or demonstrated any interest in the past. As their own parents had been, the adults of my youth were sure that their kids were disrespectful, sloppy and lazy, as well as ignorant of history, but in retrospect the reemergence of those same attitudes one and two generations later makes them seem more timeless than true.

For my part, I’d rather look at the positive side of things. The thousands of Vermont kids who visit the VHS “Freedom and Unity” exhibit at the Pavilion in Montpelier each year, who participate in Vermont History Day, and who attend Vermont History Expo each June are encouraging evidence that many young Vermonters are quite interested in Vermont’s heritage. On the adult side, there are 197 active local historical societies in Vermont today, up from 150 in 1999. The impact of heritage tourism on the Vermont economy continues to grow at an impressive rate. New books, articles, and media presentations on Vermont history find audiences eager to absorb them. Natives and newcomers alike frequently cite the visible, tangible presence of the past as an important factor in their choosing to live here. Add it all up, and there’s far more reason for hope than gloom.

Even in Vermont the temporal provincials will always be with us, but let’s face that challenge with optimism rather than pessimism. Vermont’s history glass is half full, not half empty, and we can improve that ratio if we try. 

– J. Kevin Graffagnino, *VHS Executive Director*

The Papers of Sylvia Wright Warner of Rupert

The VHS Library recently acquired and processed the papers of Sylvia Wright Warner, a Republican legislator in the mid-1940s and advocate for educational reform, children's rights, and the arts. The collection documents the work of a very active legislator during the reform-filled years following the end of WWII.

Before the legislative reapportionment of 1964, representatives were elected from each town in Vermont to the state legislature. Sylvia Wright represented the town of Rupert in the Vermont House for three legislative sessions from 1945-47. Before being elected to the general assembly, the untiring Mrs. Wright lobbied in Montpelier as legislative representative of the Vermont Congress of Parents and Teachers, Vermont League of Women Voters, Vermont Federation of Women's Clubs, Vermont Conference on Social Welfare, and the Vermont Women's Joint Legislative Council.

After her arrival in Montpelier, Mrs. Wright continued to represent these organizations. In her first term, under Governor Mortimer Proctor, Rep. Wright was clerk of the House Committee on Institutions, which dealt with funding construction of the Brandon State School, the state hospital at Waterbury, and the postwar veterans' housing shortage. Then, in a groundbreaking step, Governor-elect Ernest Gibson created a preinauguration committee to formulate his ambitious reform agenda so that he could "hit the ground running" when the legislature convened in January.

Governor Gibson appointed Sylvia Wright to his committee to study "education and the normal school." Many of the goals of her women's organizations were recognized in the committee's product. The platform, introduced in Gibson's inaugural address, included increasing teachers' salaries, benefits, and training; funding public school transportation to especially serve rural areas of the state so that students could attend high school; and "equalized educational opportunity and distributing the costs as equally as possible among the towns and school districts of the State." With her election as chair of the House Education Committee, Rep. Wright was well-placed to promote Gibson's plan, and much of it was enacted.

In 1947, Mrs. Wright resigned her seat in the Vermont legislature to pursue personal goals. She moved to Washington, D.C., where she was hired by the Central Intelligence Agency, first as an editorial specialist and later as an intelligence officer.

Mrs. Wright's papers at the Vermont Historical Society include 24 folders of

correspondence, notes, reports, and speeches. She also wrote a weekly newspaper column on her legislative activities for the Granville (New York) *Sentinel*, covering her Rupert, Vermont, district. These columns, as well as numerous newspaper articles on the issues she was concerned about, are also part of the collection.

A full finding aid for the collection can be found on the Society's web site at

www.vermonthistory.org/arccat/findaid/wrights.htm



Representative Sylvia Wright, right, participates in a legislative sing-along with (left to right) Bill Schwarz (representative from Arlington), Norton Barber (senator from Bennington), Governor Mortimer Proctor, and Walter Hard (senator from Manchester).



Military History Sought

V

HS member and volunteer Dwight D. Harrington, who serves as the Vermont National Guard historian, is collecting oral histories from men and women who have served in the military at some time in

their careers. Harrington is trying to document the experiences of members of the

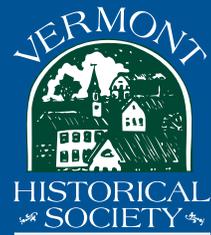
military so they can be used for research as part of the Veterans History Project at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. Copies of the tapes will be stored at the Library of Congress and at the Vermont Folklife Center, the regional repository for the national project. If you would like to be interviewed for the project, contact Mr. Harrington at dwright.harrington@us.army.mil or at 802-338-3483.



Thanks to Our Sponsors:



dry Expo 2007



Staff Changes at the Society

New Development Coordinator Hired



Sara Giacherio

Sara Giacherio has joined the Society as the new Development Coordinator and actually joined our team the hectic week before Vermont History Expo! Sara comes to the VHS with a background in marketing and sales, plus her volunteer work with the nonprofit organization, David's House. Sara grew up in Barre, and having gone to middle school at Spaulding, she is thrilled to be in the Vermont

History Center building again. Sara collects autographed books and enjoys foreign languages. Some of her master's degree work was based on the Rock of Ages granite quarry, and she has a strong interest in history (no doubt inherited from her mother, the family genealogist!). In her spare time, Sara enjoys reading, traveling, and sports.

Community Relations Director Heads to Cabot

Kate Paine, Marketing and Community Relations Director for VHS, left the Society in mid-August to join the marketing team at Cabot Creamery Cooperative in Montpelier. Kate came to the Society in 2005 and worked to build public awareness about the Society's activities, with particular attention to promoting the museum in Montpelier and the Vermont History Expo. She worked closely with the Development department on fundraising initiatives and special events, and served as editor of the *History Connections* newsletter.

Kelly Carbo Joins Society as New Director of Finance and Operations



Kelly Carbo

Kelly Carbo joined the VHS in April of this year to serve as the Director of Finance and Operations. She takes over the position of Ginger Baker, who retired after 37 years with the Society. Kelly was formerly the Director of Finance at the Central Vermont Community Land Trust in Barre, where she worked for eight years. Kelly lives with her family in Berlin and enjoys all sports.

Amy Cunningham Departs

Longtime Education Programs and Outreach Director, Amy Cunningham, left the Society in mid-July to become the new Executive Director of Everybody Wins! Vermont, a youth mentoring reading program based in Montpelier. Amy came to the VHS six years ago from North Carolina. She quickly and effectively learned Vermont history and has been an enthusiastic force behind educational and public programming for teachers and students throughout Vermont. Amy also worked closely with the Society's museum curator in the creation, development, and installation of the permanent exhibit, Freedom and Unity: One Ideal, Many Stories which opened at the Pavilion three years ago. A search committee has been formed to hire her successor.

Join Us for Annual Meeting!

The 169th annual meeting of the Vermont Historical Society will take place on Saturday, September 15, 2007, in Montpelier. Registration begins at 9 a.m. in the main lobby of the Vermont State House. The business meeting will begin promptly at 9:30 a.m. in Room 11 at the State House.

This year's speaker will be H. Nicholas Muller III, a VHS trustee and prominent scholar of Vermont history. Dr. Muller's topic "Changing Styles and Always in Fashion: Five Decades with the Vermont Historical Society" will take an interesting look at his experiences with the VHS.

Then, join the Society's staff and trustees at 12:30 p.m. in the Snelling Room at the Pavilion Building for a buffet lunch. Please note there are two locations during the day. First at the State House and then a short walk over to the Pavilion for lunch. A program and registration form will be mailed to Society members soon. Or find out more information on our website at vermonthistory.org, or by calling the Society at 802-479-8500.

VHS Grounds Improved

Thanks to the donated services by the City of Barre and Pike Industries, Inc., ground improvements were made to the area around the Robert Burns Memorial Statue in front of the Vermont History Center. VHS Facilities Manager Todd Marshall (pictured below) worked with Reg Abare, acting City Manager of Barre and their team, who worked diligently to restore the fence and the cement around the base of the statue. Dick Covey, area manager, Bill Laporte and Joe Stark, from Pike Industries, donated their services to enhance the walkway leading from the Burns memorial to the History Center.

We hope you will stop by and take a look at the new improvements. Many thanks to Barre City & Pike Industries, Inc.



A Civil War Story

“Death was on every side of us...” recalled Daniel Skinner of his experiences during the Battle of the Wilderness on May 5, 1864. The 31 year-old Brownington farmer was a private with Company B, 3rd Vermont Volunteers during the Civil War. Skinner had fired a grand total of only eighteen shots before he was shot in the head himself. He spent more than a year in the hospital before finally being released in 1865.

Skinner returned to the Northeast Kingdom to raise a family and became a valued member of the community until his death in 1911. His great grandchildren, Emily Morley Newcomb, Ann Bicknell Hodgman, and Dr. Donald Skinner Bicknell, have entrusted the society to remember their great grandfather’s story and pass it on to future generations of Vermonters. They have donated the hat he was wearing when he was shot—a treasured family heirloom. Preserved and passed on through the generations, this simple felt hat with its ragged hole remains as evidence of Skinner’s sacrifice for his country. 🇺🇸



Felt hat worn by Private Daniel Skinner of Company B, 3rd Vermont Volunteers. The hole was caused by a miniball that bit Skinner in the head during the Battle of the Wilderness on May 5, 1864.

Development News

Thanks to Our Expo Sponsors

Amid the graceful white tents and old-time costumes at Vermont History Expo, we saw thousands of Vermonters and other visitors—listening to each others’ town histories, reminiscing, reliving historic moments, laughing and learning.

All this was only possible through the generous support of our sponsors:

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Mystery Photo

Last issue's photo was recognized by several members including Brian Rainville, Martha Cowie, Mary Beth Bloomer, and Laurel Stanley, as the Farmer's Exchange store in Franklin. The store was owned by Charles W. Gates, who was Vermont's governor from 1915-1917. It was destroyed in the Great Franklin Fire of 1925. More information can be found in *A History of Franklin, 1789-1989*, by Martha Hanna Towle.

This issue's Mystery Photo is a postcard of a schoolhouse labeled "Freedom's Bulwark."



The postmark is Morrisville, but so far we have not been able to confirm that the building was located in that town. If anyone can identify the location of this building please contact the Society's Librarian at paul.carnahan@state.vt.us or 802-479-8508.

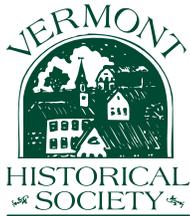
And the Vermont History Expo Raffle Winners Are...

Each year at Vermont History Expo, the Society holds a drawing at the VHS Tent for the book the Society published in 2004, *Freedom and Unity: A History of Vermont*. This year's lucky winner was **Ben Wolfe** of Tunbridge, Vermont.

We also conducted an informal survey to learn what type of visitors and participants attend History Expo each year. As an added incentive to survey takers, a Vermont products gift basket (generously donated by Mountain Cheese & Wine in Stowe) was offered as a drawing prize. The winner was **Susan Plump** of Woodstock, Vermont



During their trip to the National History Day Contest in June, Vermont History Day National Delegates met with Congressman Peter Welch in Washington, DC. They discussed their research and the importance of history education.



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