



## Symposium Dedication

**W**e begin this conference by invoking the name Thomas Day Seymour Bassett. During the second half of the twentieth century Tom Bassett was an extremely productive author, collector, and bibliographer of Vermontiana. He was also accessible to just about anyone who professed an interest in Vermont, whether casual researchers or serious scholars. He mentored a generation of mentors.

I wrote a remembrance of Tom Bassett for *Vermont History* shortly after Tom's death. It elicited a larger number of responses than I am accustomed to receiving. Some writers shared one or more of Tom's particularly idiosyncratic moments, but most provided accounts of how Tom had come to their aid. All provided testimony to the esteem in which he was held. Yet when personal memories of Bassett have faded, I suspect his 1981 *Bibliography of Vermont*, compiled for the Committee for a New England Bibliography series, will endure. It is likely to be his most enduring contribution.

The volume lists just under 6,500 entries, every printed title Tom could locate on Vermont that was published prior to December 1979. I emphasize published. The early guidelines set by the Committee precluded the inclusion of unpublished items such as masters theses. I hasten to add, however, that occasionally Tom would sneak in a proscribed item he thought particularly important.

This symposium, "The Future of Vermont History in the 21st Century," will implicitly deal with how the literature of Vermont has developed since Bassett's 1981 bibliography. I am going to use a few minutes to touch on some of the historical and practical pressures and influences that have directed the development of that literature. There can be no doubt that Vermont history has thrived during the past twenty years.

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One preeminent development has been a widespread movement to include life stories of others in addition to great white men. Researchers have increasingly documented the experiences of ordinary lives and commonplace circumstances. Much of Tom's work well before 1981 was in this direction, as his Ph.D. dissertation on Vermont's urban villages and his articles on labor unrest attest. The impetus toward this so-called "underside" of history has since been nourished by students guided by training and temperament further in that direction. In 1999 I was co-editor of a book of documents, *Vermont Voices*, and a sizable number of post-1981 titles celebrating the commonplace are included in our bibliography. Most (not all, but most) have relied, as Tom did, on traditional manuscript sources. There are numerous examples to draw upon.

One recent example is Deborah Cliffords's biography of Abby Hemenway, the woman who more than any other person captured what was ordinary as well as special in Vermont's past. *Roxanna's Children* by Lynn Bonifield and Mary Morrison also illustrates the point. Roxanna's claim to fame derives from her extensive correspondence with her family. Much of that correspondence has been preserved. The letters reveal details about the life of a Vermont family spreading west that have proven fascinating reading to our generation. But a female accounting of quotidian events likely would not have found a publisher fifty years ago. Women's studies and Vermont's high nineteenth-century literacy rates, along with spacious attics of course, made it possible to pursue this form of history. I want to underscore that it was possible to produce this history using the historian's traditional tools, written manuscripts. Jeff Marshall has done something similar with Civil War correspondence.

Dealing with preliterate societies, the Abenaki in particular, poses other problems. Earlier researchers tended to rely exclusively upon accounts by European authors describing contact with the Abenaki. Who among us hasn't read Samuel de Champlain's account of his sail up the lake he named for himself? (Available in Bassett's *Outsiders Inside Vermont* and also anthologized in *Vermont Voices*.) What red blooded Vermonter hasn't read Robert Rogers's account of his raid on the Abenakis at St. Francis or in Kenneth Roberts's novel and its film treatments? More recent studies have incorporated Indian perspectives on these events through the work of ethnologists, geographers, folklorists, archaeologists, anthropologists, and genealogists. The tools of those disciplines have become increasingly relevant to historians. And what is true for preliterate societies applies with at least equal vigor to studies of areas prior to their earliest human habitation.

By becoming more multidisciplinary, history has also become subjected

to a greater variety of perspectives. One set of influences is the celebration of history as national and state outpourings. Commemorations are cases in point. The Center for Research on Vermont administers a Vermont Studies program that involves over thirty faculty members from a variety of disciplines. It serves as a University of Vermont academic minor. Its long overdue adoption as an academic minor received impetus from the 1987 United States Constitution bicentennial and the 1991 celebration of Vermont's admission as the fourteenth state. Both events had major impact on historical writing about Vermont and by Vermonters. Scholars from out-of-state have also contributed significantly to our understanding of Vermont's past. For example, Peter Onuf tells us that during the debates over the design of the Constitution, Vermont played a prominent role without being present. Its stubborn insistence on independence from New York and New York's opposition gave rise to the provision in Article Four that no new state could be formed from within the jurisdiction of any other state without the consent of the legislature of that state. In another vein, many of the historical videos produced for public television in the past two decades were stimulated by national and state bicentennials. Bicentennials have even provided incentive grants. If I am not mistaken the 1776 bicentennial celebration provided the initial incentive for the Vermont Historical Society's state history to be published in the near future. The 1991 statehood bicentennial generated renewed interest in our own founding fathers. Two publications that immediately come to mind are the two-volume *Letters of Ethan Allen and His Kin* with John Duffy as chief editor, and Frank Smallwood's biography of Thomas Chittenden.

Dealing with Vermont in a national context can reorient one's sense of magnitude. For the past two decades the great flood of 1927 has been a centerpiece of my thinking and writing about the modernization of Vermont. I have also promoted it as the state's most celebrated natural disaster, causing 84 deaths and over \$30 million in damage (in 1927 dollars). Vermont piggy-backed on federal legislation enacted to assist southern states even more devastated by a Mississippi River flood; receiving a \$2,600,000 appropriation to assist in reconstruction. A 1997 study, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America*, by John M. Barry reported southern states suffered over 1000 deaths and 900,000 people homeless.

Population figures underscore the immense significance numbers can have on writing and publishing. The fact that Vermont is the second least populated state in the union is a matter of tremendous marketing significance. It is one of only eight states with a population of less than a million. There are at least fifteen cities in the United States with a

larger population than Vermont. A California history textbook adopted by the City of Los Angeles school board has a potential market six times larger than the total population of Vermont. And I should quickly add that California hosts three other cities with populations larger than Vermont. Mainstream commercial publishers are particularly wary of works directed principally to Vermont audiences. Since the appearance of Bassett's 1981 bibliography financial pressures have led the University of Vermont to withdraw from the University Press of New England consortium and *Vermont History* to drop from four to two annual issues. Vermont publications have nonetheless continued to thrive in ways I will suggest.

The tape recorder and the computer have become essential tools for the historian and both have influenced the directions historical writing has taken. Oral history is so pervasive in our state that it needs no elaboration. And since the audiotape has been wedded to the videotape it has become both a research tool and a form of popular entertainment. Our bibliography for *Vermont Voices* lists six videotapes shown on public television, all from the 1990s. If we were to update that bibliography we could add an additional half dozen. One wag suggested we conduct a search to locate any Vermonter not yet interviewed.

The computer is another matter, especially when it comes to statistics. Vermont writers are more likely to use the computer as a word processor than for regression analysis or to compute Pearsons "r" or chi squares. One reason is Vermont's small population. Given the slim numbers, especially at the town level, it is often more efficient to present raw data than to extrapolate the data as representative or random samplings of Vermont. Having said that I believe that broader use of selective statistical tools can enhance our understanding of Vermont's past. I must also note that updates from the Committee for a New England Bibliography are now on line, but I will leave it to our state archivist, Gregory Sanford, to comment on the use and abuse of the World Wide Web.

After Tom Bassett completed *The Gods of the Hills*, a history of religion in nineteenth-century Vermont, he volunteered to write some entries for a Vermont encyclopedia. John Duffy, Harry Orth, and I are editing the encyclopedia. Tom took on a sizable number of entries and a very ambitious schedule. He died before he could complete all he had hoped to do. But when the encyclopedia appears in late 2003 it will include many of his entries. I suspect he would refer to those entries as posthumous efforts. And I will conclude by noting that the encyclopedia, like this symposium, will be dedicated to Tom Bassett.