

## Book Reviews

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### More About Vermont History

*Compiled by* PAUL A. CARNAHAN

# BOOK REVIEWS

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## *Champlain: The Lake Between*

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By Caro Thompson, filmmaker (Colchester, Vt.: Vermont Public Television, 2008, DVD/CD-ROM, \$19.95).

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The release of this documentary was timed to coincide with the 400th anniversary of Samuel de Champlain's arrival on the banks of Lake Champlain. Its maker, Caro Thompson, is a veteran of many educational and documentary films, a number of which were made for Vermont Public Television. *Champlain: The Lake Between* is among her best work. It will continue to find audiences, especially in elementary and secondary classrooms, for many years after Champlain's quadri-centennial celebrations are a distant memory.

*Champlain* tells a multicultural story. Its central actor is Samuel de Champlain, portrayed as a highly competent explorer and diplomat who, through sheer will and determination, built a French empire in Canada. Such actions as encouraging Native Americans to become French citizens paint him in a sympathetic light. On the other hand, some of the movie's commentators depict Champlain as having transformative goals; dismissive of Natives' traditions and philosophy of sustainable land use, Champlain is described as on a mission to "build an empire" and "subjugate the people" he found there. While the movie paints a portrait of Champlain as a complex man, his disruptive impact on the region's political balance is made clear. The movie explores the changes Champlain brought to the traditional conflict between the Iroquois and the Montagnais. On the famous 1609 battle between war parties from those two nations, the commentators' consensus is that Champlain misread the event by seeing it through European eyes: Champlain took the Iroquois

offer of battle at face value rather than as a ritualistic show of force that would be resolved in negotiations between chiefs. Champlain's lethal musket shots marked the beginning of a new era in the region's history.

The film goes on to explore the history of the French at Lake Champlain over the following century and a half, but its story is as much about the indigenous people who lived on both sides of Lake Champlain as it is about Europeans. The central dynamic of the movie is French impact on the conflict between the Montagnais and their allies on the east side of the lake, and the Iroquois nations on the west side. According to the movie, Champlain's arrival marked "a turning point" in the lives of these people. The movie lingers over the paradoxical nature of Champlain's attempt to build amicable relations with the Montagnais: Such acts of friendship required him to make war with their enemies, with tragic consequences for all sides. New France's later alliances with the Abenaki to the south of Québec are explored, as well. Situated precariously close to the edge of New England settlement, the Abenaki are described by one commentator as unfairly not accorded a "similar heroism" for resisting New England's expansion as history has given New Englanders for defending their frontier settlements.

As much as disruption, however, the movie explores how traditional Native American lifeways persevered long after Champlain's arrival. Perhaps the movie's greatest educational value is in its exploration of Native American culture and practices. Through historical reenactments in dress and technology accurate to the era, *Champlain* examines Native practices in such areas of life as agriculture, the construction of long houses, and child rearing. The differences between the traditions and habits of the Abenaki, Mohawk, and Montagnais are also explored. Dartmouth Professor Colin Calloway is one among the many commentators who emphasize the differences between Native nations, calling Indian-to-Indian commercial interaction "truly international exchanges." Much also united them, however: The movie's narration describes Indian use of the land as operating on a "regular, nature-driven schedule." To European eyes, however, their land was an "uninhabited, untouched wilderness," and the movie points to the voracious European appetite for beaver pelts as the primary engine in the disruption of traditional relations between Native American nations surrounding the lake.

Thompson chose her on-camera commentators superbly. The academics to whom she turns for both detail and sweep come from a variety of disciplines, and from both sides of the American-Canadian border. The region's historical sites and museums are also well represented. Particularly moving is the commentary provided by contemporary representatives of the region's Native American tribes. These tend to refer to

the Natives of the historical times as “we,” giving a sense of how these long-ago events still resonate among the descendants of those who experienced them.

The movie is accompanied by a CD-ROM titled “Lake Champlain Voyages of Discovery: Classroom Connections.” This CD contains excellent learning resources that will be useful to educators from the elementary to the collegiate level. Among these resources are a set of maps, a variety of educational activities for different learning levels, and recommendations for field trips, books, and websites for further research. *Champlain: The Lake Between* received a number of airings on Vermont Public Television in 2009. Those who saw it were fortunate to have experienced the well-rounded, fair, and nuanced depiction it gives of the history of New France and the Native peoples who experienced the changes European contact wrought. The movie’s enduring value is likely to be in the classroom, however. It tells a complex yet easy-to-follow story, and is often a true visual treat; students are especially likely to find its battle scenes compelling. *Champlain* is highly recommended for a place on the shelves of classrooms throughout Vermont, New York, and Québec.

PAUL SEARLS

*Paul Searls is an assistant professor of history at Lyndon State College. He is the author of Two Vermonts: Geography and Identity, 1865–1910 (2006).*

[*Editor’s note:* In 2009, Caro Thompson received an Emmy Award for Historical or Cultural Program in the Boston/New England Region for *Champlain: The Lake Between*; she also received the Vermont Historical Society’s Richard O. Hathaway Award, given annually to an individual who is recognized for making an outstanding contribution to the field of Vermont history.]

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## *Lake Champlain Voyages of Discovery: Bringing History Home*

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By Giovanna Peebles, Elsa Gilbertson, Rosemary A. Cyr,  
Ellen R. Cowie and Robert N. Bartone (Vermont Division for  
Historic Preservation, 2009, pp. 56, \$5.00 for shipping and handling  
or free on the website [www.voyages.vermont.gov](http://www.voyages.vermont.gov)).

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**M**any bright children catch the history bug through reading colorful accounts of the adventurous archaeologists who unearthed the

treasures of Egypt or revealed the tragic site of Pompeii. How cool would it be to live in some dusty country where there are thousands of years of artifacts to uncover? A lucky few might stumble upon a projectile point or a nineteenth-century bottle dump in their own backyards; but for most, archaeology is something that happens far away. Why bother to look here in Vermont?

The Champlain Quadricentennial served as a great stimulus for re-opening questions about what archaeology and history might have to tell us about earlier lives lived along Lake Champlain. One of the most exciting projects to come out of this renewed interest was a joint venture called *Lake Champlain Voyages of Discovery: Bringing History Home*, the brainchild of Vermont State Archaeologist Giovanna Peebles, Regional Historic Site Administrator Elsa Gilbertson, Historic Sites Operation Chief John Dumville, and partners too numerous to name. Funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and other agencies, the project engaged archaeologists from Vermont and the University of Maine at Farmington, local teachers, and over a hundred volunteers in one of the largest citizen-archaeology projects ever attempted in the region. The call for volunteers went out in the summer of 2007, firing the imaginations of scores of people who never thought they would have a chance to roll up their sleeves and go on a dig. The goal was “to reveal the unwritten shoreline history” of the DAR State Park, on the shores of Lake Champlain in Addison. Under the careful tutelage of the professional team, they spent three weeks carefully sifting through a site that had been home to indigenous people, the French, the English, and the Americans over many centuries.

The results of their efforts—and much more—have been published in this attractive little volume. The history of the lake from geological time to the early nineteenth century is told in a clear, quick, and entertaining manner, lavishly illustrated by full-color drawings, maps, and photographs on almost every page. In fifty-six pages the authors manage to provide an entertaining and informative look at what we know about life on the lake before Champlain, along with a running commentary on how we know it.

The narrative races through the Ice Age and the global warming that followed, through the peopling of the Champlain Valley and the three great periods of Native life (Paleoindian, Archaic, and Woodland), stopping long enough to share Abenaki creation stories and clear accounts of stone tool making.

Once Champlain arrives on the scene, adding to the richness of the historical record, the narrative gets down to its real purpose: a detailed examination of life on the Addison shoreline of the lake from 1609 to

1830, focusing on Chimney Point and DAR State Park. Casual readers of Vermont history have long been intrigued by stories of the French seigneuries, the long strip lots Louis XV granted to his faithful *intendants* to encourage French settlement and control of Lake Champlain. Most accounts briefly mention these French settlers and the burning of their homes in the 1759 evacuation following the English defeat. (The remaining French chimneys provided the current name of Chimney Point.) This booklet tells the fascinating story of how the French lived and died here in more detail than has been readily available previously.

The final section of the narrative describes the citizen archaeology project, bringing us along as the team excavated two cellar holes in DAR State Park, long thought to have formed the original sites of the first log cabin dwellings of the John and Agnes Strong family, whose next-door mansion is still maintained by the DAR. It is a fascinating story, enriched by the wonderful historical account of the Strongs recorded in Abby Hemenway's *Gazetteer*. Many questions have long been raised about these cellar holes. Were they originally the sites of French cabins, burned and rebuilt by the English? Did the Strongs really live here? What can we learn about the daily lives of these early settlers—their households, the food they ate, what they wore? Through the efforts of this dedicated team of amateurs and professional archaeologists, many of these intriguing questions are answered here.

The book is a delightful read for the general public as well as a solid, engaging resource for teachers. The cover features a stunning photograph of the Champlain Bridge, which will be gone by the time you read this. It serves as a valuable reminder that our heritage can be lost forever through underfunding. State historic sites, like Chimney Point, are not only tourist destinations—they are extraordinary cultural resources that we hold in trust for the future. This book reminds Vermonters of all ages of the rich legacy left by those who came before us. Let's rededicate ourselves to protecting it for their sakes and for our children.

JAN ALBERS

*Jan Albers is the Executive Director of the Henry Sheldon Museum in Middlebury and the author of Hands on the Land: A History of the Vermont Landscape.*

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## *A Century in the Mountains: Celebrating Vermont's Long Trail*

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*Edited by Tom Slayton (Waterbury Center, Vt.: The Green Mountain Club, 2009, pp. 192, \$38.95).*

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Many who read books about Vermont history will be familiar with the 1985 illustrated history, *Green Mountain Adventure: Vermont's Long Trail*, by Jane and Will Curtis and Frank Lieberman. And many who have hiked any portion of Vermont's Long Trail will be familiar with the beauty, challenges, and sense of history that one encounters along its length. *A Century in the Mountains: Celebrating Vermont's Long Trail* provides Vermont historians and trail enthusiasts with a wonderful contemporary companion to *Green Mountain Adventure* as well as an attractive and thoughtful collection of photographs and essays, all of which capture some measure of what it feels like to stroll through the beauty of the trail and the depth of its history. This book was a joy to review and it will prove to be a pleasure to own for years to come.

*A Century in the Mountains* is edited by former *Vermont Life* editor, Tom Slayton—for decades, one of Vermont's leading observers and commentators—and it contains ten essays by eight different authors, including a foreword by environmental writer Bill McKibben and an afterword by Green Mountain Club executive director, Ben Rose. Together, the book's authors blend history with contemporary issues and experiences to create a volume that transcends the categories of "illustrated history" or the sometimes denigrated "coffee table book." The book's ability to do this—to mix past and present in both word and image—is perhaps its greatest strength. In one of its most moving passages, author Katy Klutznick captures this neatly, writing, "The one thing I know about the Long Trail is this: the human hands that created it one hundred years ago reach out and touch those of us who cherish it today, making us all feel that much more connected, that much more alive" (p. 106). One cannot help but walk away from this book feeling this connection and feeling fortunate to be a part of it, either as a hiker or as a casual reader of Slayton's edited collection.

The book begins with a very brief foreword by McKibben in which he suggests the value of experiences along the trail to the growth and perpetuation of environmental stewardship. Following this, Tom Slayton provides as succinct a summary as one is likely to find of the trail, its builder and steward (the Green Mountain Club), and the distinctiveness

and importance of the Green Mountains. Among other insights, Slayton's essay emphasizes the environmental ethic that has developed in conjunction with the trail's history, at the scale of both the trail itself and the state of Vermont.

Slayton's introduction is followed by a chapter by Reidun Dahle Nuquist chronicling the history of the Green Mountain Club (GMC). Nuquist's chapter is organized sequentially from the club's beginnings in the 1910s to the present, including a section on the post-1980s history of the Long Trail Protection Fund—a history that today's Long Trail hikers benefit from but may know less about than the trail's more distant and storied past. Subsequent chapters include a lively and informative chapter by Slayton examining the routines, food, equipment, ethics, and hiking styles of Long Trail hikers past and present; a short chapter on women hikers by Laura Waterman, co-author of the well-known history of northeastern hiking, *Forest and Crag*; and a personally inflected set of thoughts by Katy Klutznik on the meanings and emotions motivating many hikers on the trail. Following these are two delightful chapters on the lives and work of GMC shelter caretakers and trail keepers (both by Val Stori, who writes with the benefit of experience in both); a perhaps more traditional, yet still very enjoyable chapter on the natural environment of the trail; and a detailed account of late-twentieth-century conservation and co-operative stewardship/management initiatives on the trail. The book ends with Ben Rose's afterword, in which he lays out some of the future challenges facing the trail and the GMC.

Some historians, including those familiar with the key insights into GMC history outlined by Hal Goldman in the 1990s, may find *A Century in the Mountains* entirely uncritical, both in the literal and academic sense of that word. But the book makes no pretense at being anything other than a celebration (as its title suggests). And while there is certainly a place for critical self-reflection and academic critique in historical writing and contemporary non-fiction, there is also a place for celebration, particularly when it relates to something as treasured and well loved as the Long Trail. For this reason, there will certainly be a welcome place on the bookshelves of many Vermont historians and Long Trail enthusiasts for this celebration of Vermont's footpath in the wilderness.

BLAKE HARRISON

*Blake Harrison teaches in the Department of Geography at Southern Connecticut State University and is the author of The View from Vermont: Tourism and the Making of an American Rural Landscape (2006).*

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*If Stone Could Speak / Se la pietra sapesse parlare*

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*Directed by Randy Croce (Minneapolis: Labor Education Service, University of Minnesota, 2007; DVD, appr. 67 minutes, English and Italian with subtitles, \$20.00).*

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The story of the Italian stoneworkers in Vermont around the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth constitutes only a small part of the history of Italian migration to the United States, but, as is often the case with small stories, it is rich, compelling, and evocative. In his documentary, *If Stone Could Speak*, Randy Croce, coordinator of Labor Education Services at the University of Minnesota in the Twin Cities, gives the viewer a comprehensive overview of the story of the Italians in Vermont and presents many of its captivating facets, allowing us to bridge the distance between then and now.

Starting in 1884, a steady flow of Italian stone workers, coming for the most part from the foothill communities of Piedmont and Lombardy and from the towns around the marble quarries of northwestern Tuscany (of which Carrara is the most famous), migrated to Vermont to work in the booming stone business. As Croce points out, during the second half of the nineteenth century the railway system was completed, connecting Vermont and its quarries and sheds to the rest of the country and its markets. Redfield Proctor, an energetic and entrepreneurial lawyer and politician from Rutland, was at that point owner of virtually all of the marble in Vermont. He had the stone, the means of transportation, and big ambitions for his Vermont Marble Company. What he lacked, he realized, was a highly qualified labor force. Through business partners in Carrara he headhunted the first Italian stoneworkers, who were attracted to Vermont to teach their skills. These first men paved the way for many other Italian stoneworkers, the *scalpellini*, who migrated to Vermont from Italy or from quarry towns within the United States to work marble, mostly in Proctor and Rutland, and granite in Barre.

*If Stone Could Speak* focuses on the latter and, through beautiful images, video clips, and interviews made in the United States and in Italy, explores what this migration has meant not only for the receiving end, Vermont, but also for the people and the communities in Italy that these migrants left behind. Croce touches upon many topics that on the one hand are specific to the story of the Italian stoneworkers in Vermont, and on the other are shared by all migrants: The sense of the value of one's skills and work; the importance of political ideals and involvement; the enriching and challenging process of creating, both physically and affectively, a new home; and the issue of identity for first-, second-,

and third-generation Italian Americans. These elements are, naturally, all connected and provide us with a rich and three-dimensional picture.

One of the protagonists of the documentary is Angelo Ambrosini, son of a *scalpellino* who, like so many others, died in his forties of silicosis. This lung disease was caused by the inhalation of silica dust that filled the sheds, especially after the introduction of pneumatic tools in the 1890s. He made his wife promise that their son would never become a stone-cutter. After the Second World War, however, Ambrosini decided to follow his father's footsteps. (In 1938, with the introduction of suction devices in the sheds, the problem of silicosis was solved overnight.) He was taught by Angelo Bardelli and Orazio Marselli, part of a new, smaller migration wave of Italian *scalpellini*. In the 1950s they had received special visas to come to Vermont, where the number of skilled stonemasons had been dwindling. Ambrosini, in turn, mentored Gary Sassi, whose family owned a finishing shed. In an engaging interview, Sassi recounts how he had always dreamed of becoming a sculptor and, one day, own the Celestial Memorial Sculpture Studio, his family's shed. When he was nineteen he decided to go to Italy for three years to study art. He speaks eloquently about how important it was to be there, to breathe in art at almost every street corner, and then to come back to Vermont and work alongside Angelo Ambrosini. Thus Croce shows how, across decades and continents, in constant communication and exchange between Italy and the United States, the skills that pushed the first Italian stonemasons to leave their hometowns are still part of the fabric of Vermont.

The material presented in this documentary is so compelling and fascinating that one would want *If Stone Could Speak* to last longer, and to touch, for instance, also upon what happens in the same years on the other side of the Green Mountains, in Proctor, the heart of the marble industry. That town was involved in the same kind of business as Barre, but had a markedly different migration and integration story. This, however, is not really a criticism as much as a regret for the constraints of time. Croce is clearly fond of his protagonists, and this infuses the documentary with warmth and heartfelt sympathy that, though never over-romanticized, make the viewer feel close to these migrants and their story.

ILARIA BRANCOLI BUSDRAGHI

*Ilaria Brancoli Busdraghi is an historian who wrote her thesis on the Italian stonemasons in Vermont for her Laurea from the Seconda Università di Roma, Tor Vergata. She teaches in the Italian Department at Middlebury College.*

[Editor's note: Randy Croce was co-winner, for his film, *If Stone Could Speak*, of the Vermont Historical Society's 2008 Richard O. Hathaway Award, which recognizes an individual who makes an outstanding contribution to the field of Vermont history.]