

Book Reviews

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More About Vermont History

Compiled by PAUL A. CARNAHAN

BOOK REVIEWS



Where the Great River Rises: An Atlas of the Connecticut River Watershed in Vermont and New Hampshire

Edited by Rebecca A. Brown (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press/University Press of New England, 2009, pp. xviii, 263, paper, \$35.00).

As a resident of the Champlain Basin, I write this review as a neighbor. Make that an envious neighbor. Squeezed between the Adirondacks and its wonderful *The Adirondack Atlas* (by Jerry Jenkins with Andy Keal, Syracuse University Press, 2004) and *Where the Great River Rises*, it seems that it is now time for an atlas of the Champlain Basin. But I digress. This current atlas is a project of the Connecticut River Joint Commissions, created by New Hampshire and Vermont in the late 1980s, in collaboration with Dartmouth College and Northern Cartographic, the excellent cartography shop based in Burlington. The atlas consists of thirty-six chapters, fifty-one maps, and dozens of excellent photographs and tables. As one might expect in an atlas, the chapters are typically sketches rather than fully developed narratives on their subjects, organized in eight sections covering natural and human history, from the deep past through the present.

One major challenge for any edited volume, especially magnified in *Where the Great River Rises* with its forty-one authors, is crafting a unified narrative. This book is best read as a series of stories from different perspectives, with the Connecticut River serving as the unifying theme. Among the many interesting essays and maps on natural history and processes, several stood out for me. These included the three essays on

weather and climate; maps illustrating the various subwatersheds within the larger Upper Connecticut Watershed; the maps of the natural communities and forest cover types in the West Mountain wildlife management area; and the essay on forests, accompanied by a series of excellent maps reporting the changing forest composition over time in the watershed.

Turning to the human history of the Upper Connecticut, the story is well told, though most of it is well known. The essays usually contain details specific to the region, but nothing particularly surprising. The essay on native spaces—especially regarding creation stories and place names—is particularly good, as is the one on the industrial era. There could have been more in these essays on the region’s timber industry and its agricultural history (the two agriculture essays cover pre-1850 and post-1970). The essay on the region’s demographics, followed by a set of essays on transportation and the accompanying maps, are also quite informative.

The book has a few shortcomings. First, I think the reader would have been well served by a better discussion of what the Upper Connecticut River Basin is and how it is defined. Second, there is a lack of consistency in the maps. Some include data for all of the Upper Basin, yet others only include information for the Vermont and New Hampshire sections—leaving the Massachusetts and Québec portions of the watershed blank. This is especially curious for an atlas based on watershed rather than political boundaries. Third, some of the chapters focus on just the Connecticut River and its nearby environs, while other chapters cover the entire watershed. Greater consistency on these maps and chapter foci would have made for a more coherent overall volume. Fourth, the lack of a comprehensive map of conservation lands in the watershed—national, state, municipal, as well as lands protected by private groups such as the Nature Conservancy and those protected by conservation easements—is a significant omission.

Like much of the northeastern hinterlands, the Upper Connecticut River Basin has been a place of dramatic natural and cultural change. The region is currently in ecological recovery—unlike much of the United States or the rest of the world. This recovery is rich in ambiguity: Animals and forests are returning, yet human population is growing and consumption is frequently displaced to elsewhere. *Where the Great River Rises* helps us to understand better these changes—through maps, texts, and photos—and the challenges and opportunities presented in the epilogue can help us better prepare for the future.

CHRISTOPHER MCGRORY KLYZA

Christopher McGrory Klyza is Professor of Political Science and Environmental Studies at Middlebury College. He is the coauthor of The Story of Vermont: A Natural and Cultural History (1999) and editor of Wilderness Comes Home: Rewilding the Northeast (2001).

American Homicide

By Randolph Roth (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. xi, 653, \$45.00).

Randolph Roth has completed his comprehensive study of homicide in the United States, and it is altogether intriguing. Roth, professor of history at Ohio State University, is the author of *The Democratic Dilemma: Religion, Reform, and the Social Order in the Connecticut Valley of Vermont, 1791–1850* (1987), has a long association with Vermont history, and is one of the most diligent researchers of our records. During the last several decades, he collected details of homicides from the seventeenth century to the present (2006) in England, five states, including Vermont, seven cities, and thirty-four counties in the United States, and has now produced a serious and important study of how and why Americans kill each other.

Homicide is a death of one person caused by another, and is broader than murder, which is unjustified homicide. Deaths in wartime, for instance, are included in the study. Deaths in every possible way are collated and analyzed here, and the results are fascinating. The numbers reveal interesting trends.

We are the most violent of nations, with homicide rates seven to ten times higher than other countries, depending on the decade. What inspires Roth's greatest interest is both why the numbers are so high, but also why they vary so widely over the years. There is no simple answer, but Roth's central thesis is that murder rates are correlated to the confidence of the society in its government—that there is a direct relationship between the trust and respect the public feels toward its representatives and the incidence of homicide.

Roth explains, “in the twentieth century, homicide rates have fallen during terms of presidents who have inspired the poor or have governed from the center with a popular mandate . . . [and] risen during the terms of presidents who presided over political and economic crises, abused their power, or engaged in unpopular wars” (p. 472). But before we cast blame entirely on political leaders, there are many other culprits. Poverty is at the heart of most homicides, but as most people kill only people they know, simple explanations and simple solutions continue to evade detection.

The research required to compile this book is astonishing. Consider the work done on Vermont, for example. There is no central bank of

records here; no formal or even informal compilations of this data. To find details of homicides Roth and his associates had to review newspapers, county and state court records, and secondary material. Multiply that prodigious work for each of the jurisdictions chosen as representative of different sections of the country, and you can only begin to appreciate the hours and years spent in basic research. Of course, what matters is what Roth does with the data.

The subject is rich. There is spousal homicide, interracial homicide, religious homicide, fratricide, matricide, the killing of bosses by workers; death by the use of poison, tools, guns, knives, and pairs of hands. The availability of guns, the change in the balance of power between men and women, and the relative stability of government at all levels, are but a few of the reasons for the statistically surprising rise in homicides in the United States after 1840, in contrast to Europe and the British Empire. "Everywhere," writes Roth, "and under all sorts of circumstances, Americans, especially men, were willing to kill friends, acquaintances, and strangers" (p. 299).

Putting all these facts together reveals significant differences among various regions. While it is no surprise to find that cultural changes have a major impact on human behavior, especially homicide, there are interesting correlations. For example, Roth reports on the sudden increase in the number of romance murders among unmarried people beginning in the 1830s and 1840s in the U.S., attributing the change in part to the Romantic movement, the increase in magazine articles relating to love, and the idea that each of us is destined to meet and love one special person. Life being what it is, such dreams are often dashed, and murder follows. But this happened rarely in the colonial and post-revolutionary eras.

What people read in the nineteenth century changed their lives, and made them more homicidal, for a completely new reason. What a shocking idea that is. It portends dangerous impacts from the violence of our media and its influence on public and personal safety.

This book is provocative. Its impact builds as you course through the eras of American history and watch how homicide rates and their causes change. You begin to realize that democracy in this vast, tumultuous land came at a great cost. The liberation of the people from the bonds of hierarchy and Old World sensibilities—what to visitors from abroad seemed boorish and wild—created a climate of violence that never ebbed, even as the vacant spaces were filled in and the country became more gentrified, at least on the surface. We are the children of mountain men, pioneers, gunslingers, and gangsters;

and while we can be temporarily persuaded to be good, depending on how secure we feel, the homicidal spirit is right beneath the surface, waiting.

PAUL GILLIES

Paul Gillies is a Montpelier lawyer and historian who writes a regular column about Vermont legal history in The Vermont Bar Journal.

*In Our Own Words: New England Diaries,
1600 to the Present.
Volume 1: Diary Diversity, Coming of Age;
Volume 2: Neighborhoods, War, Travel, and
History*

*Edited by Peter Benes (Boston: Boston University, 2009,
pp. [Vol. 1] 207, [Vol. 2] 180, paper, \$30.00 each volume).*

Established in 1975, the Dublin Seminar has become a New England institution. Its annual summer conference and published proceedings are both respected sources of information on New England material culture and social history. The latest publication, which focuses on the broad topic of New England diaries, consists of two volumes of essays detailing the words of diarists that readers may expect (young college women and travelers of all sorts), as well as less typical diarists, such as young children and crew members aboard whaling and fishing vessels. Taken together, the essays offer both new insights and new examples of known historical trends. Many essays discuss privately held diaries otherwise inaccessible to readers of these volumes, and a few consider multi-textual diaries that paired written text with ink sketches or fabric swatches. The essays vary in the extent to which they contextualize their findings by engaging secondary literature and in the degree to which they ask questions about the nature of diary authorship and audience.

The first of two essays about Vermont and Vermonters is Susan Ouellette's interesting research on Phebe Orvis, a young woman who longed for a formal education and relished her brief enrollment in the Middlebury Female Academy during the 1820 winter term. Ouellette nicely points out that Orvis used the traditional female labor of sewing and spinning to earn money for a formal education. She discusses the material preparations for school attendance; the description of Orvis spend-

ing her earnings on a new wardrobe reminds us that school was both an intellectual and social institution. Though Orvis soon warmed to life at the academy, she initially responded with “‘very disagreeable feelings’”; as Ouellette notes, Orvis’s sense of social isolation and intellectual inferiority as a new and unknown student will undoubtedly be familiar to modern readers with their own memories of adjustment to school (vol. 1, p. 149). Ouellette’s discussion of the evolution of women’s academy curricula left this reader thinking about the analyses of gender, education, and the rural emulation of refinement offered by historians such as Catherine Kelly, J. M. Opal, and Mary Kelley.

Orvis’s family pulled her from school at the end of the winter term; she then used her diary to record her longing to return and her early doubts about marriage. Orvis made an effort to continue her diary after her marriage, but within less than a decade she was too preoccupied by the duties of motherhood and housework to keep it up. Ouellette argues that Orvis’s brief stint at school made a lasting impression on her and colored the way she lived her adult life. Her study of Phebe Orvis is an ongoing project that promises to contribute to what we know about gender and education in northern New England during the early nineteenth century. Readers of Ouellette’s essay undoubtedly will enjoy others in the two sections that address the topic of coming of age, particularly the late Priscilla Brewer’s thoughtful and charming account of college women and courtship during the early decades of the twentieth century.

The other Vermont essay in the proceedings is Cameron Clifford’s community study of diarists in North Pomfret. Clifford uses a total of 323 surviving diaries dating between 1840 and 1985 and representing thirty-eight diarists to offer a quantitative study of the group of diaries that also considers individual motivations for diary keeping, agricultural changes over time, and the relationships between and among the neighbors of North Pomfret. Clifford finds that the most active diary keeping occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century, and that diarists recorded the facts of agricultural life as well as news about one another, a preoccupation that makes sense, not only given the small neighborhood of North Pomfret but also because many diarists were related by birth or marriage.

Equally interesting is Clifford’s own role in preserving the history of Pomfret and nearby towns. As Peter Benes and Mary Montague Benes point out in their introduction to the volumes, there are questions to be asked about the survival of so many diaries. Clifford attributes their collective preservation to “the interplay of geography, family, culture, and luck,” and perhaps doesn’t adequately acknowledge his own role in their preservation (vol. 2, p. 5). Clifford’s account of salvaging a truckload

of diaries and personal papers literally en route to the dump adds a contemporary layer of drama to his narrative and will remind readers familiar with his work as a local historian that this essay is part of a larger project. He calls his privately held collection of primary source materials relating to Pomfret and surrounding communities the Clifford Archive, and in recent years he has drawn from that archive as well as from other public and private holdings to create especially well-done examples of local history.

Clifford's community studies challenge what too frequently are nostalgic assumptions about community mutuality in rural Vermont. His earlier contribution to the Dublin Seminar proceedings (2003) uses similar sources from his archive to tell a less than idyllic story of gendered conflict within families and the larger community during the early twentieth century, while his wonderful 2007 book on Joe Ranger describes a mid-twentieth-century Vermont "character" whose life on the literal and figurative edges of mainstream Pomfret was not without its own injustice, class-based discord, and behaviors that did not fit standards of normalcy. Clifford's work is engaged in complicating the story of small-town Vermont by portraying a community characterized as much by conflict as by consensus.

The Dublin Seminar proceedings are always fun to read. The inclusion of essays from tenured faculty, independent scholars of all kinds, and museum professionals serves as a reminder of the diversity of work being done on New England history. The essays by Susan Ouellette and Cameron Clifford are the latest contributions to the body of Dublin scholarship on Vermont, and both are welcome additions to what we know about Vermont history.

JILL MUDGETT

Jill Mudgett lives in Lamoille County, teaches at the Community College of Vermont and Johnson State College, and has interests in cultural and environmental history.

It Happened in Vermont

By Mark Bushnell (Guilford, Conn.: Morris Book Publishing, 2009, pp. viii, 151, paper, \$14.95).

It is easy to see how a book in a series called "It Happened In"—one for each state presumably—might turn out to be a rehash of the trite and apocryphal. You'll be glad to know it didn't happen here. This book is a gem and, thanks to Mark Bushnell's easy style and his command of

subject matter, all readers, from browsers to scholars, will be entertained and educated.

Text on the front cover announces that the book presents “thirty-two events that shaped the Green Mountain State.” But it does much more. Bushnell, a former newspaper editor, has for the last seven years written a weekly newspaper column called “Life in the Past Lane” for the *Rutland Herald* and *Barre-Montpelier Times Argus*. His talent lies in his ability not only to analyze and synthesize, but to place these accounts in their broader historical and social context, so in addition to being interesting and amusing anecdotes, they deepen our understanding of the events and the times. All with a light touch, a sense of proportion, and a sense of humor.

The book is organized chronologically, starting with the ordeal of French soldiers at Fort Sainte Anne on Isle la Motte during the winter of 1666–1667, and ending with the international celebrity of a few men in a far corner of the state who in 2001 took it all off in the hope of raising a few dollars for a local community center. It is a fascinating selection of incidents, both famous and obscure. Included, of course, are accounts of the Westminster massacre, the year without a summer, the raid on St. Albans, the 1927 flood. Others, whose inclusion might at first seem quirky, are always pertinent and illuminating.

The narratives about the early days of settlement and the Revolution highlight the precariousness of life here, in terms of climate and topography of course, but also in terms of the constant and very personal political animosities between Yankees and Yorkers, Vermonters and the English, settlers and Indians. “The *Black Snake* Affair” is more than a good story about smuggling and skullduggery on Lake Champlain in the early 1800s. It places the event in the context of Vermont’s and the nation’s commercial history in the time leading up to and following the War of 1812. The chapter on Clarina Howard Nichols’s 1852 plea to the Vermont legislature for women’s rights spotlights not only women’s legal status at the time, but also the fact that what she was asking for, what she risked ridicule and insult for, was simply the right to vote at school meetings. Minor, from our vantage point, but earthshaking at a time when, Nichols reminded the legislators, she didn’t even own the dress she wore: “[M]y husband owned it—not of his own will, but by a law adopted by bachelors and other women’s husbands” (p. 63).

Bushnell does not sugarcoat Vermonters or Vermont history. Amid stories of heroism and kindness, some, such as “A Counterfeiting Scheme,” highlight human weakness. “The Trial of Matthew Lyon,” “The Jailing of a Minister,” and “The Novikoff Firing” hammer home the local ramifications of national paranoia. And the 1980 discussion in

“To Dome or Not to Dome,” about erecting a dome over the town of Winooski in the interest of energy conservation, indicates that even flinty Yankees can be seduced by the visionary and impractical.

Instead of retelling the story of the interstate highway, Bushnell tells us about Vermonters’ resistance to and defeat of plans for a parkway that would have run along the sides and tops of the Green Mountains, a decision whose ramifications benefit us still today. And, delightfully, accounts of the 1886 Burlington Winter Carnival and the shooting, in 1920, of Lillian Gish’s ice floe scene from the movie *Way Down East* illustrate the interactions and mutual (mis)perceptions of Vermonters and people from away.

In sum, while an initial glance at the table of contents might raise an eyebrow, these stories, taken together, give a real sense of Vermont’s history and character locally and in relationship to the rest of the world. Anyone looking for a good yarn will enjoy any entry in this book. For those wanting more detail, Bushnell, always conscious of his readers, has included a brief bibliography for each chapter. “Something for everyone” in this case is not a dismissal but a gift.

ANN E. COOPER

Ann E. Cooper is an independent scholar and the former editor of Historic Roots: A Magazine of Vermont History.

The Contrast: *Manners, Morals, and Authority* *in the Early American Republic*

Edited by Cynthia A. Kierner (New York: New York University Press, 2007, pp. 147, paper, \$18.00).

On April 16, 1787, Royall Tyler (1757–1826) of Braintree, Massachusetts, a lawyer with more than the usual literary talents of his professional peers, saw his play, *The Contrast*, a comedy of manners, premier in New York’s John Street Theater, the city’s only playhouse. While other plays besides Tyler’s had been written and performed in the new United States during its first ten years of independence—notably propaganda plays to boost its revolutionary morale during the War for Independence—*The Contrast* was the first by an American playwright to be performed by a professional theater company. Being first out of that exclusive gate has given the play minor celebrity in American theatre history.

For the dramatic subject of his play, Tyler knew from direct experi-

ence that establishing a republic was a contentious affair. In the previous year he had come face to face with conflicting interpretations of republican political values that the young American political experiment had already generated. By the mid-1780s, a lengthy postwar economic recession had drawn cash money out of the rural, agrarian sector of the economy occupied by most Americans. In Vermont, debt and foreclosures bore down heavily, bringing out mobs threatening to shut down several county courts. Mounted militia routed an armed mob at the Rutland court. In western Massachusetts, farmers found their courts and sheriffs too complicit with Boston speculators and merchants by enforcing contracts, exacting payments, and executing foreclosures, a state of affairs that prompted war veteran Daniel Shays to lead an insurgency against state government, which also replied with militia force. Tyler assisted in suppressing Shays's Rebellion in the summer of 1786, and pursued some of Shays's followers into Vermont. In March 1787 he was in New York on a similar mission.

Tyler's experience in these events led to a play that explores the contrasts between republican simplicity and European-style ostentation and duplicity and poses the question whether the rejection of a monarchy in 1776, which was sufficient for American independence, also required rejecting European social forms. Tyler's cast of characters and the dramatic structure of the play prompt the audience to consider the ideals and conduct Americans should value. The main characters are young people, so sex, fashion, and the seductions of the city are the center of their lives. *The Contrast* also explores gender ideals, family relationships, courtship, and marriage.

The Contrast had a four-night run in New York, followed by single performances in New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia between 1788 and 1790. Rarely performed in the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century usually only for college audiences, the play was revived for a five-week run in 2006 at a New York City theater. Addressing some of the most prominent issues in the post-revolutionary debate over how a republican citizenry should conduct themselves in the 1780s, it was a play whose didactic solutions were briefly interesting for Tyler's audiences, but less appealing to later times.

Tyler returned to Vermont in 1790 to settle and practice law in Guilford, one of the two largest towns in Vermont at the time. Ten years later, he was chief justice of the Vermont Supreme Court, where he had the opportunity to initiate a dramatic spectacle that drew an audience probably far beyond the combined attendance at all of *The Contrast*'s performances from 1787 to 2006. In 1809 he presided over the grand jury that handed down an indictment charging the smuggler Cyrus Dean

of Highgate with murder in the death of a U.S. customs agent in the notorious Blacksnake Affair. Dean was convicted and hanged on Court House Square before an audience of ten thousand, 6 percent of the state's population at the time, the largest crowd in Vermont until several rock concerts in the 1990s.

In the early 1970s, when the University of Vermont transformed its ancient field house from the oldest collegiate athletic building in New England into the Royall Tyler Theater, Professor of Theater Edward Feidner produced and directed *The Contrast*. Adding a touch from the then fading Age of Aquarius for timeliness, no doubt, Feidner's version was a musical.

Professor Cynthia Kierner has written an interesting introduction to Tyler's play and its place in an important debate in the 1780s, supplemented by extracts from relevant contemporary documents addressing the central questions of the play and the times, and discussion questions about them as they are also treated in the play. Her book offers a valuable instructional approach to the cultural history of the early American republic.

JOHN J. DUFFY

John J. Duffy of Isle La Motte is emeritus professor of English and Humanities at Johnson State College.

Finnigans, Slaters, and Stonepeppers: A History of the Irish in Vermont

By Vincent E. Feeney (Bennington, Vt.: Images from the Past, 2009, pp. 256, \$19.95, paper).

Any book that sets out to tell the history of a people runs serious risks. It can face criticism for being insufficiently encyclopedic, since it will inevitably omit details that some readers believe should be included. Conversely, it can draw fire for being too encyclopedic. By worrying so much about including every last detail, a writer can get bogged down and forget to make the book actually interesting.

Vincent Feeney finds a middle course between these extremes. His *Finnigans, Slaters, and Stonepeppers: A History of the Irish in Vermont* is the first book to take an in-depth look at the subject, and is therefore an important addition to our understanding of Vermont's past.

The story Feeney tells is gripping and often gritty. For many Irish

Vermonters, life here may have been easier than what they would have experienced in Ireland, but that is not to say it was easy. The book's title hints at the frank history that Feeney presents. "Finnigans, Slaters, and Stonepeppers" refers to a trio of nicknames, two of them rather derogatory, that were pinned on Irish in Vermont.

During the Fenian uprisings of the mid-1800s—a series of raids by Irish-American nationalists into British-controlled Canada from Vermont and other border states—the *Rutland Herald* dismissed the Fenians by labeling them with the common Irish last name "Finnigans." The term "slaters" typically referred to the Welsh immigrants who formed the backbone of the slate industry in western Rutland County. But many Irish laborers also worked in the state's slate quarries, hence the nickname. Feeney notes that the quarries wouldn't have been able to take on so many workers if not for the growth of railroads, which Irish workers played a key role in constructing. The derivation of "stonepeppers" is less clear, but some trace it back to an anti-draft riot in West Rutland during the Civil War, during which rioters supposedly threw stones at military recruiters. (Another version of the story has it that the name came from an incident in which West Rutland fans allegedly hurled stones at a rival baseball team.)

The nicknames are emblematic of the rough-edged existences of many early Irish in Vermont. They faced discrimination from neighbors and visitors alike. Author Nathaniel Hawthorne visited Burlington in 1832 and later wrote a harsh description of the Irish he saw there. Hawthorne reported seeing them "swarming in huts and mean dwellings" by the Lake Champlain waterfront. He described the Irish as "lounging" about, but added somewhat contradictorily that they would "elbow the native citizens" out of jobs.

Other Vermonters often viewed the Irish with suspicion and accused them of bringing all manner of troubles to the state, Feeney writes. When the steamship *Phoenix* burned in 1819, money being carried on board went missing. Newspapers declared that the culprit had been an unnamed Irishman. When smallpox broke out in Royalton in 1842, people again blamed an unnamed Irishman, this one having supposedly come into town on a stagecoach.

Religion was a focal point for Protestant mistrust of the Irish, who were mostly Catholic. In 1842, the *Rutland Herald* mocked the Irish Catholics of Castleton and their rumored plans to start a newspaper. "They have at Castleton, a meeting-house for jabbering mass, a priest to pardon sin and give tickets for a passage to Heaven, and now a Printing Press, with its immense power, to be added to the facilities for building up the Pope of Rome" (p. 44).

Occasionally, Catholics and Protestants managed to find common cause. When the Catholic St. Mary's Church in Burlington burned down in 1838, many suspected arson triggered by religious hatred. Whatever the cause, the Rev. Jeremiah O'Callaghan managed to raise enough funds to rebuild the church. Much of the money came from sympathetic Protestants in the community.

Still, a schism existed between the religions, even among Irish immigrants. Protestant Irish sought to distance themselves from Catholic Irish. Feeney notes that they did so by using code words. Protestants began identifying themselves as "Scots-Irish" or from "North of Ireland" to distinguish themselves from Catholics.

Feeney also delves into the labor strife involving Irish workers, including the so-called "Bolton War," a railroad strike, and the "Ely War" in Vershire, a copper mine strike, both over unpaid wages.

The second generation of Irish immigrants found greater acceptance in Vermont than the first. The *Burlington Free Press* noted in 1869 that members of the second generation were educated at public schools and found better jobs than their parents. Some had assimilated by converting to Protestantism. In general, the *Free Press* wrote, the Irish had begun to "freely mingle with the rest of the community as thoroughly American citizens" (p. 117). "By the 1920s," Feeney writes, "the Irish had been established so long in Vermont that many citizens of the Green Mountains considered them as Yankee as the Yankees" (p. 183).

At a time when two members of Vermont's congressional delegation are of Irish ancestry, it is easy to forget that the path to acceptance for the Irish in Vermont has been a long one. Thanks to Vincent Feeney's new book, we now have a record of that journey.

MARK BUSHNELL

Mark Bushnell writes a regular Vermont history column, "Life in the Past Lane," for the Sunday Rutland Herald and Barre-Montpelier Times Argus. He is the author of It Happened in Vermont, published by Globe Pequot Press.

Searching For Ichabod: His Eighteenth-Century Diary Leads Me Home

By Julie Foster Van Camp (Lopez Island, Wash.: BookSurge Publishing, 2009, pp. x, 231, paper, \$13.99).

Under a Fig Tree: A Family Memoir

By Sandra M. Levesque (Randolph, Vt.: The author, 2009, pp. xi, 223, paper, \$24.95).

We seem to be living in the age of the memoir. Browse through any bookstore and you will find dozens, even hundreds, of memoirs, autobiographies, and barely disguised autobiographical fiction, along with ghost-written books telling the life history of athletes and politicians. Many of these books describe trauma and recovery from alcoholism, sexual abuse, terror, and war. Yet there is another kind of memoir based on a genuine need to discover one's roots and to place family stories in some kind of meaningful context. These two attractive, self-published books represent the second category of memoir and family story. They both describe voyages of discovery and personal searches for ancestors and family history.

Julie Foster Van Camp, in *Searching for Ichabod*, writes about her thirty-year mission to recover the story of Ichabod Foster, her great-great-grandfather. She describes her quest as she searched in archives and town records, explored old cemeteries and census records, checked the Internet, and asked questions of innkeepers and archivists. We even follow her as she drives along back roads in Vermont searching for her ancestor and sometimes for a bed and breakfast. Her big break came when she made contact through the internet with a distant relative who had preserved Ichabod's diary. Much of the book is devoted to her efforts to translate and decode the diary as she traced her ancestor as he moved from Rhode Island to Clarendon, Vermont, before the Revolution, then to Whiting in the west central part of the state, and eventually in 1811 to the Holland Purchase in western New York State. In the process she tries to connect cryptic and sometimes almost unreadable entries to larger historical forces and events. Not only does she reference the American Revolution and the War of 1812, but she also describes ordinary tasks of planting, harvesting, trading, traveling, and the intimate human stories of sickness, death, and childbirth. In the process Van Camp adds new details to the story of the early settlers and their struggle to survive. She uses

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale* to understand the culture of childbirth in Vermont in the early nineteenth century, and she uses other scholarship to make sense out of the diary entries. "When I first came to Vermont," she writes. "I was searching for threads of inheritance that connected me to my past, seeking the earth of my ancestors. Today, that connection has a life beyond land deeds and vital records. A personality flows through the words of Ichabod."

"American History becomes my history," Van Camp remarks. Occasionally she is a little sentimental ("I picture Ichabod's calloused hands touching what I am touching"), and she is always romantic. Yet we become intrigued by her search and we follow her story with anticipation. "Searching for ancestors is like having a disease for which there are no antibiotics, just stimulants that put a smile on my face." The book moves beyond genealogy to family history and makes the process of research in original documents compelling and personal.

Sandra M. Levesque, in *Under a Fig Tree*, describes a different kind of pilgrimage. She travels to Randazzo and other places in Sicily to recover her family history and folklore, then to Ellis Island to recapture her family's immigrant experience. She relates the story of her grandparents, Francesco Paolo and Antonia Delpopolo, who came to America in 1920 and settled in Rutland, Vermont. The result is a fascinating volume filled with many illustrations, old photos, maps, letters, recipes, and much more. Sometimes it seems more like a collection of information than a book, but it is always entertaining.

Under a Fig Tree is about history; it is also about memory. The central figure in the story is the author's grandmother (Nana). "'Nana' spoke in a soothing Sicilian dialect, which bore little resemblance to the classical Tuscan Italian, the language of Dante. I understood and loved her foreign sounding words. She understood English, but would not utter a syllable of it. When surprised, frustrated, or otherwise excited, she broke her usual reserve with arms lifted to the heavens and uttered the all-purpose expletive. 'Madonna.'"

The book is also about the Italian community in the southwestern section of Rutland, about their church (Saint Peter's) and the nuns of the order of Saint Joseph. It is about their food and their festivals, especially the Festival of the Assumption. It is a romantic story. There is little mention of prejudice or conflict here. Some of the men worked in the marble industry, or for the Howe Scale Company. Others ran stores and shops. The men were important, but the women ruled the home and prepared the meals—*la cucina povera* or peasant's cuisine. There are recipes in the book for salt cod, meat balls, chicken stew, pasta, and more. The book lovingly describes the folkways and the foodways of the Italian community in Rutland at a particular time in history, a time that is now past.

These two books (which would be more accessible if they had indexes)

should inspire readers to discover, preserve, and write down their family stories, if not for publication at least for the younger family members who often have little appreciation of their heritage.

ALLEN F. DAVIS

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Our Great War: Memories of World War II from the Wake Robin Community, Shelburne, Vermont

Edited by Louise Ransom, et al. (Shelburne, Vt.: Wake Robin Residents' Association, 2008, pp. x, 357, paper, \$19.95).

There are many voices that tell us of World War Two. Thousands of memories recorded in all media give varied accounts of the complicated event that is total war. Recording those memories becomes even more important as the generation that experienced the war years passes on. Recollections untold are, in the words of Charles Morrissey, “a perishable commodity.”

At the suggestion of Louise Ransom, the residents of Wake Robin community in Shelburne, Vermont, have gathered their war experiences in *Our Great War*. This anthology contains sixty-five vignettes, direct personal stories that range from a half page to more than thirty pages. It groups them within broad topics ranging from actual combat to stateside home front conditions and the experiences of civilians in wartime Europe. Most of the personal accounts are presented in the first person and describe participation in some of the most dramatic events of the war.

The observations are recalled in varying degrees of complexity. While some of them have not previously been recounted, even to family members, most of them are recalled in sharp detail. The intensity of the experiences has given these storytellers memories that in the words of one contributor, “I will carry to my grave.” Some are enhanced by the research of others who were involved in similar experiences. Each is presented with a wartime photo.

The war years are presented from a variety of perspectives: members of every branch of the service, pilots and combat engineers, doctors and nurses, prisoners and refugees, enlisted men and officers, housewives and children. They experienced landings on Pacific islands, medical procedures under fire, being torpedoed at sea, and living under German occupation. They were in London during the blitz, at Normandy and the

Battle of the Bulge, at the liberation of concentration camps, and at the Japanese war crimes trials. They collected scrap metal and “made do” with war-time shortages.

As varied as the experiences, there are some common threads in the stories. The storytellers were all young at the time and their lives were changed by the war. They tell their stories in a refreshing and candid style. Personal credit for bravery and contributions is taken only when deserved, a humility enhanced by the greater sacrifice of compatriots and strangers. Exasperation for stupidity is expressed, especially when it leads to unnecessary losses. The whole range of emotions that war creates is evident: patriotism, anger, fear, hope, pride, disillusion, and dedication.

Amazement is frequently shown at the close calls, the coincidences, the luck as well as the skills and competencies that saved them from capture, serious injury, or death. Lives balanced on chance interactions and happenstance. As is true in most military situations, participants had only a limited knowledge of the larger picture at the time and only in later years did they come to realize they had touched or been touched by some of the most dramatic events of the twentieth century.

Each story ends with an epilogue that chronicles the individual’s post-war experiences. Most of them are not Vermonters by birth. Some came to the state to work and live, whereas others came to retire at Wake Robin. As their postwar careers developed, they become corporate executives, educators, administrators, lawyers, doctors, and homemakers. Some of them are well known for their contributions to the Vermont/New Hampshire community over the past half century and their names will be easily recognized by many.

The project had the advantage of having skilled professionals on hand who played pivotal roles, including experienced editors Ruth Page and Louise Ransom, assisted by Sherry Worrall and Donald Robinson. Their two-year self-described “labor of love” achieved the goal of keeping the voices of the individuals whose stories are told.

The resulting professional-quality product deserves high praise as a model for others who may be inspired to consider such a community effort. Students will find this a useful tool in the study of World War Two.

Our Great War does not claim to be a comprehensive history. It is easy to list groups of participants who might have been included, if the contributors were not limited to the residents of Wake Robin. It does claim to be a “gift” of these select few to “all the future generations who will consider ‘how it really was.’” It is just that.

LAWRENCE L. COFFIN

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Stories from Vermont's Marble Valley

By Mike Austin (Charleston, South Carolina: The History Press, 2010, pp. 190, paper, \$21.99).

Mike Austin's premise in his book is that "historians are intellectual detectives, searching out present-day clues to see how things have come about" (p. 7). I enthusiastically agree. The best historians carry the reader right along in their explorations.

Each chapter heading in the book provides a clue as to what is being researched and written about. Chapters one and two describe how Rutland and its environs became a marble valley. Austin sets the stage for his story by describing the early settlement of the area and the big boom that came with the railroad, which "opened up opportunities for the mining, quarrying, and manufacturing industries" (p. 21). Labor of the new immigrants—Irish, Swedish, Italian, and French Canadian—would be important to growth as well as the integration of the production processes. By 1860, there were fifty quarries in the state and Rutland was the most populous city with 12,000 people by 1880 (pp. 30–37).

Chapter three's question: How did Redfield Proctor become king of the hill? Born in 1831 in Proctorsville, Proctor's career included the mastery of law and being elected state representative, state senator, and governor from 1878–1880. He had considerable political power since he also served as secretary of war under Benjamin Harrison (1889–91) and as a U.S. Senator from 1891 to his death in 1908. Political contacts became helpful as he bought up marble companies, and by 1880 he controlled 55 percent of the marble trade in Rutland. By 1903, he owned the largest marble company in the world and when he created a cartel, they controlled 85 percent of the marble in Rutland County. Proctor lobbied for protective tariffs and lured away Italian carvers. The U.S. consul in Italy did his bidding by restricting marble exports to the United States.

Rutland was to be an extension of Proctor's personality: sober, hard-working, moral, and thrifty, a model of an "industrial community" (p. 87). As Austin tells the story, the Clement family was the "chief political and social rival" to the Proctors (p. 90). Fueled by marble wealth, Percival Clement by 1886 ran the *Rutland Herald* and promoted a "city-oriented vision" for Rutland (p. 92). The Clements favored the village of Rutland whereas the marble workers and Redfield Proctor favored the "outlying districts" (p. 92). Moreover, the Proctors were a positive, paternal force in improving the area through support of churches, civic projects, and libraries. They provided insurance and healthcare for workers.

Once the workers became active, forming a union with the Knights of

Labor in 1886, the Workingmen's Party slate won in Rutland. The elites sought to "divide and isolate immigrant power" (p. 88). Redfield Proctor accordingly supported the division of the town into four political units: Rutland, Rutland Town, West Rutland, and Proctor. (Sutherland Falls became Proctor, named after Redfield Proctor.) The Vermont legislature sided with him when it voided the elections of 1886 since the town was now divided and those "representatives did not fairly represent their new constituencies" (p. 106). Also, bonds need to be posted of \$1,000 to \$5,000 to run for office; workers could not meet this demand. As Austin continues the story in chapter seven, "The Struggle for Control," the workers finally discovered that to have a public voice, they would need to be part of the two-party system and work with the Democrats. Labor strife continued with strikes in 1902 and 1904; and in 1935-36, the Danby, West Rutland, and Proctor employees of the Vermont Marble Company "went out on one of the most bitter strikes Vermont ever witnessed" (p. 143). Radicals dynamited power lines leading to the Danby Quarry and torched a power plant in West Rutland. Now the relationship between workers and the company "degenerated into bitterness and distrust" (p. 152).

In the years following World War II, the towns of West Rutland and Proctor competed for scarce resources. Still the marble industry continued to have some influence on the Vermont economy until the early 1960s. As the railroads declined, however, so did the marble industry, with only 8 quarries in operation today. The focus is now on calcium carbonate and marble slurry rather than construction and ownership of the company is from out of country. Austin's summary of the marble story in his conclusion is worth the price of the book alone, where he encourages a new chapter for the marble valley today.

Austin has provided excellent pictures to illustrate his points in the book. He uses a host of primary and secondary sources, first hand accounts, and newspaper reports. The book is highly engaging with excellent research to give a history student a view of a town in the making. One of my students at the Community College of Vermont gave it a "thumbs up, as chock full of information," but he wanted "to be drawn in by more personal stories." He hoped to read more about the workers' lives and their perspective.

Knowledge of the history of marble in Vermont is long overdue. Vermont's industrial past has largely been forgotten. It took tenacious research to dig through archives to find the story of Rutland's growth and political power. Mike Austin has done the heavy lifting and we should thank him for it.

CYNTHIA D. BITTINGER

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On the Job: The Brattleboro Public Works Department

By Wayne Carhart and Charles Fish (Brattleboro, Vt.: The Brattleboro Area Chamber of Commerce, 2009, pp. 52, paper, \$15.00).

After reading Wayne Carhart's and Charles Fish's concise tribute to the Brattleboro Public Works Department, I decided to conduct a simple experiment at the Vermont State Library in Montpelier. That institution keeps the state's best collection of published annual town reports, dating back to the middle of the nineteenth century. Those reports provide fascinating glimpses of local activities, and I often worry that space- or budget-conscious administrators will decide one day to discard these familiar and irreplaceable research tools.

My goal that morning required the random selection of a Vermont town report from the mid-1800s to learn how much money had been spent on roads and bridges in a single year. Beginning at the middle of the alphabet seemed reasonable, and Ludlow's accounting for 1858 happened to be near the top of a loosely organized box of unbound reports. On page fourteen, the selectmen offered a recapitulation of expenses for the year: \$1,468.45. Of that amount, \$523.24 had been devoted to roads and \$542.06 to bridges, or a combined total of roughly 72 percent of the town's total outlays. I wasn't particularly surprised, but that figure seemed a little too high to be typical, so I investigated Brattleboro's report for 1866, a year when the town's annual expenses reached \$20,459.68. After subtracting more than half that figure paid for soldier bounties, the cost of roads and bridges, \$2,546.63, amounted to about 28 percent of all town expenses.

It didn't take very long that day to verify one of the principal themes illuminated in the Carhart and Fish book: We, as communities, are expensive to operate and require constant maintenance. The danger, as the authors tactfully observe, is that we become so accustomed to essential community services that we no longer see the extent, complexity, and cost of the fundamental structure required to make those services available. More importantly, we become too far removed from the lives of the people who toil to keep that structure in working order. What's more, if those people do their jobs well, we move about our ordinary lives without ever having to think about what makes our daily routines possible.

During an era of near-frantic budget scrutiny, these are important messages. Yet the authors are too astute to state their concerns bluntly

in the form of an argument. Instead, the book provides an informative and richly illustrated study of the extensive buildings, structures, and land features that comprise community civil engineering. Short chapters explain water supply systems, wastewater treatment, and the myriad aspects of keeping transportation networks functioning. I selected roads and bridges in my library experiment partly because I've grown increasingly concerned about our often blind devotion to an unsustainable means of travel, the automobile; partly because that means of travel presents such hazards to one of our most sustainable methods of transport, the bicycle; and partly because five of the nine chapters in the book are related in some manner to highways, an entirely justifiable approach given the astronomical costs of automobile travel to the economy, to the environment, to productivity, and to personal health.

The unusual topic gives the book part of its appeal. Yet the subject shouldn't be a surprising one, for we can explore almost any aspect of public works engineering and discover long and absorbing histories, full to the brim with invention. During post-Civil War decades, in particular, America's progressive engineers garnered international acclaim for their design of high-service, steam-powered pumping engines for water works. Large reservoirs, made possible by these engines and by improvements in the design of dams, dramatically reshaped cultural environments in many cities, a topic deserving further exploration. Communities large and small also integrated park planning and municipal watershed forestry into the designs for these water-supply systems.

The book also points to an underlying truth that frequently becomes lost in the debate about allocation of limited public funds: Often, it is far less expensive to maintain and repair structures and buildings—carefully and regularly—than to replace them. The topic of maintenance is of enormous import for those who are concerned about the conservation of cultural resources. Far too often, the root cause for the loss of historic buildings and structures can be traced directly to a lack of maintenance, and we haven't learned this lesson very well. Let's take the authors' cue and begin focusing greater attention on this important subject.

ROBERT McCULLOUGH

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