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# BOOK REVIEWS

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## *A Landscape History of New England*

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*Edited by* Blake Harrison and Richard W. Judd, *afterword by* John Elder (Cambridge, Ma., and London: The MIT Press, 2011), pp. xii, 413, \$34.95).

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This finely crafted collection of essays presents a wide range of impressive recent scholarship on the landscape, geography, and environmental history of New England. The twenty-one clear, focused, brief, insightful, and well-written chapters take the reader on an informative tour of the region. Drawing from multiple disciplines, they offer a sophisticated but entirely accessible picture of how beloved, familiar, and ever-dynamic landscapes have come to take the forms we see every day. This is a significant work of scholarship on New England, but also will make a fine gift for any non-academic reader interested in a deeper understanding of the region's landscape. In addition, it will serve beautifully in college and even advanced high school classrooms as a guide to decoding the human landscape as a document of social, economic, and cultural change.

The authors and editors represent a range of academic fields and methodological approaches. They include geographers, historians, literary scholars, sociologists, natural resource consultants, and planners. Together, they define landscapes as “tangible, visual spaces manipulated by human action and imbued with a variety of meanings across social categories that include class, gender, ethnicity, and race” (pp. 2–3). The book is divided into five sections, starting with concise and impressive overviews of “Landscape, Nature, and Regional Identity,” from Joseph Conforti and Kent Ryden. Other sections follow on “Forests and Mountains,” “Rural Landscapes,” “Coasts,” and “Villages, Towns, and Cities.”

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Five themes unify the essays: social memory, leisure, conservation, work, and diversity.

Of these, social memory, leisure, and conservation represent the more established themes of previous landscape histories, but this work reveals new angles on each, and also shows that each has overlapped with the others in interesting ways. James Lindgren, Scott Roper, Mark Lapping, and Joseph S. Wood, among others, describe the ways in which New Englanders defined themselves by literally constructing ideal landscapes intended to draw on equally constructed shared memories or perceptions of the past. Kent Ryden's analysis of how nature and culture came together to create New England's fall foliage season, and Lindgren's story of the reconstruction of Paul Revere's house in Boston's North End, both capture this process beautifully. All authors demonstrate, in Wood's eloquent words on the New England village, the necessity "not to see only what we are taught by tradition to see" (p. 252).

Leisure, recreation, and conservation as themes connect essays on topics as diverse as back-to-the landers in 1930s Vermont, Cape Cod's transition to a tourist economy, women's roles in protecting Franconia Notch in the White Mountains, and Frederick Law Olmsted's Emerald Necklace in Boston. Conservationists succeeded in protecting working and leisure landscapes from the heights of the Green Mountains to the floor of Boston Harbor, where silt threatened ship channels and thus commercial activity. The theme of productive work plays a role in all of these stories as well, including the labor of innkeepers, farmers, oystermen, and ship navigators. Long Island Sound's environmental history, in Elizabeth Pillsbury's concise account, reflects centuries of labor on land and sea. Catching runoff from a broad swath of New England, the Sound accumulated industrial waste and sewage, which, with overfishing, decimated oyster harvests and fisheries.

Diversity of race, class, and gender, along with labor, constitute newer themes in New England's landscape history. Here authors explore Native American labor and landscape in Maine's lakes region, Irish influence in shaping Peterborough, New Hampshire's public architecture, sardine canning on the Maine coast, the erasure of racial diversity through historic preservation, displacement of poor New Englanders for leisure parks and urban renewal, working-class voices at Lowell's historic sites, and the toxic legacy of metropolitan Boston's postwar technology boom, which disproportionately affects poorer communities.

As the editors gracefully note in their conclusion, no single collection could cover all corners of New England or do justice to every topic. The work here points to opportunities for further research. Readers with particular affection for the Berkshires, New Hampshire's lakes, or Maine's

mountains may be inspired to begin their own investigations. As noted in the editors' conclusion, late-twentieth-century landscapes and labor need further research in particular, from second-home vacation enclaves, to interstate highways, to inner city neighborhoods transformed by waves of immigrants and migrants over successive generations. James C. O'Connell's tracing of Boston's suburban expansion to the I-495 beltway provides thoughtful analysis of the city's twentieth-century transformations; however, the stories of interstate travel to and through Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont await further work. Overall the coverage here is impressive, allowing the reader a new level of understanding of daily New England sights from Route 128 in Massachusetts to the blueberry barrens of Maine. With this book in hand, such landscapes take on deeper and richer meanings, providing the reader with new perspectives on New England's diverse communities and cultures, and the dynamic landscapes they have shaped over time.

KATHRYN MORSE

*Kathryn Morse is associate professor of history at Middlebury College, where she teaches in the history department and the program in environmental studies. She is the author of *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush* (2003).*

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*When the French Were Here . . . . and They're Still Here. Proceedings of the Samuel de Champlain Quadricentennial Symposium*

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*Edited by Nancy Nahra (Burlington, Vt.: Champlain College, 2010, pp. 348, paper, \$27.85).*

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The editor has collected twenty-four texts delivered at a symposium at Champlain College in Burlington to mark the quadricentennial of Champlain's 1609 incursion. Ten presentations focus on Champlain and another three deal with some aspects of the age of exploration. Three authors address questions related to the presence of native peoples, while a few (five) underline the implantation of New France in the Champlain Valley or other aspects of the French heritage of North America (the writings of Lahontan; the time-worn old chestnut of *les Filles du—*not *de—*Roi; the French civil code of Québec). Only two papers deal with the Franco-American heritage, hardly enough to explain the terminal emphasis of the title: . . . *and They're Still Here*. The presentation of Frances Sikola Chevalier on the Rodin effigy of Camille Claudel

as the personification of “La France” on the Champlain Memorial Lighthouse at Crown Point, New York, acts as a modern hors d’oeuvre among this laid-out colonial table. A great many of the papers contain reprocessed or reclaimed material; and not necessarily of findings, facts, or interpretations associated with the presenter. Tempted by this panoply that incorporates several warmed-up dishes, what should the reader scoop up on his buffet plate?

David Hackett Fisher’s *pièce de circonstance* is informed by his recent work. It underlines a new appreciation of Champlain, which presents him as a humanist rather than a Roman Catholic visionary (the traditional French view) or the Pizarro of Vermont (the traditional and persistent Anglo-American reading). Fisher distills essentials from his biography, *Champlain’s Dream: The European Founding of North America* (2008), and some key essays published in *Champlain: The Birth of French America* (2004), the volume co-edited by Raymonde Litalien and Denis Vaugeois. In his definition of the humanism of Champlain, Fisher introduces us to a true explorer, curious and alive to the beauty of new worlds, respectful of other cultures. He also offers tantalizing views of the humanist circles animating the court of Henri IV. These connections are conjectural if plausible; their influence on the mind and behavior of Champlain has yet to be demonstrated.

The piece by Michael Lange, “Naming Places, Claiming Spaces,” leaves us begging for more. His emphasis on “meaning” (What does it mean to name a place?) would have been more complete if he had investigated what it meant to Champlain to name the lake after himself. And more importantly, the reader desperately needs the second (and third) dimensions here. We know when we finish reading this interesting text what the Abenaki “Bittawbagok” means. But what about the Iroquoian “Gateway to the Country”? How does it interplay with “The Lake in Between” and “Lac Champlain”?

The contribution of Lange provides a perfect introduction for a series of texts on the indigenous context, in particular the *mise au point* of Eric Thierry on the relations between Champlain and the Five Nations, a topic often misinterpreted in American scholarship, and Jon Parmenter’s erudite, authoritative, and perfectly balanced review of the indigenous context from 1550 to 1635. This last contribution, resting on a command of the scholarship written in both English and French, reminds us of how much we lost when we began allowing scholars who have no working knowledge of another language to become “experts” in a given field with multilingual documentation.

The study by Richard I. Hunt on the commemoration of the French settlements in Acadia (St. Croix Island and Port-Royal) is notable for its

detailed review of the evolution of what the French call the construction of memory (“la construction de la mémoire”), a development of the last hundred years or so, which began as a search for the actual sites, led to ambitious recreations at Port-Royal, and finally ended with the contemporary compromises at Dochet Island that give free rein to the inventions of modern art. In contrast, the three-dimensional replica near Annapolis Royal tells us a great deal about the romantic revival and enshrinement of the past, of Jamestown, Plymouth, and Williamsburg, where one can hear the trailing echoes of Pugin or Viollet-le-Duc.

Raymonde Litalien’s text, “Historical Antecedents of the Exploration of Lake Champlain’s Exploration [*sic*]: What Stake for France?” promises more than it delivers. The focus is primarily a review of what is known about the European explorations and claims to lands north of Virginia: the stretch of the Atlantic coast known then as Acadia or Norumbega. The analysis does not tie Champlain’s exploration of the Atlantic coast to his discovery of the Champlain-Hudson axis or the fluvial connections to the Great Lakes or Hudson Bay and the North. This is truly Champlain’s greatest achievement and claim to fame. On this geographical Eureka! rests the French gradual penetration of the continent and the outflanking of the British colonies past the western slopes of the Appalachians.

As with most such enterprises, the morsels found in these proceedings vary in importance, if one reads for new facts or trailblazing interpretations. Overall, the symposium contributes primarily to our understanding of the contacts between Champlain and the indigenous populations who frequented the Lake Champlain watershed.

JOSEPH-ANDRÉ SENÉCAL

*Joseph-André Senécal is professor emeritus of Romance Languages (French) at the University of Vermont. He teaches Québec-related courses at Boise State University.*

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## *Meetinghouses of Early New England*

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By Peter Benes (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012, pp. viii, 447, \$49.95).

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**T**his is an important book—for its subject, for its scholarship, and for its comprehensiveness. The meetinghouse is perhaps New England’s most emblematic building type. Of the more than 2,189 houses of worship that the author has documented as built in the region between 1622

and 1830, however, only a fraction survive and, of those, very few have escaped significant alteration. Many were rebuilt because of fire or deterioration, but also because of demands for space, of changing liturgy, and of changing fashion. They gained lean-tos, were cut in half and stretched, changed roofs, added towers, reoriented their entrances, changed their internal configurations, or were sold, moved, and altered for new uses. In documenting the evolving history of these buildings, Benes synthesizes a vast body of scholarship, from nineteenth-century historic accounts through early formal surveys based on rare survivors, to more recent studies of parish documentation, visual records, and framing—much of the more recent material published through his Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife. To assemble his overview, he draws on anecdotes, fragmentary descriptions, facts, and quotations about many particular (often lost) structures. The result can be overwhelming for the sheer number of examples invoked but, like an image built of pixels, a rich and comprehensible picture emerges.

Benes explores the origins and evolution of the form, but not in isolation. He considers Anglican structures as well, to clarify the conceptual differences between the two genres and the process by which the meetinghouse evolved to become more like its churchy counterpart. For the Puritans a church was a covenanted body of people, not a building, and their service was a meeting. Their meeting place, like its models in Huguenot temples and Calvinist preaching houses on the Continent, was intended to gather its community around the preacher for the instructive prayers and sermons that were the focus of the service. It stressed the centrality of the raised pulpit and avoided the church-like longitudinal ceremonial alley from main door to sacramental altar. Unlike the Anglican church, which was deemed a place of God and permanent, the meetinghouse in itself was considered more utilitarian, temporary, and multi-use, serving for the likes of secular meetings and court proceedings.

Benes follows the type from its emergence about 1639–40 through three stages. The “first-period” form was essentially square or broad-sided with a high pyramidal roof topped by a turret. It had doors in multiple facades, box pews, one or two ranks of galleries wrapping three sides, and a raised pulpit beneath a sounding board set centrally against a window (for illuminating sermon notes) in one broad side. The establishment of Anglican parishes in New England beginning in the late seventeenth century introduced an alternative, churchly, format—a gabled roof, round arched (compass-headed) windows, a tower above the entry in one gable end, and a longitudinal plan with a central alley—that influenced the “second-period” meetinghouses of the eighteenth century. These combined a broadside massing under a gabled roof, a main

entrance (perhaps with a porch) in the center of one long face, twin gable-end porches with stairs to access the galleries, often a compass window behind the pulpit, and in very fashionable cases a tower rising over one end porch. By mid-century these buildings were being considered “Houses of God” and becoming more highly embellished in their detailing. By the eve of the Revolution a few congregations began the move to a longitudinal format with a gable end entry tower, signaling the “third-period” type that would dominate the Federal era. Generally shed of their multi-purpose nature, with the disestablishment of church and state in New England (1807–1832), meetinghouses became more exclusively places of worship. Outside of the maintenance of a focal pulpit and a tendency to avoid a single central alley, there was less and less to distinguish them from their Anglican counterparts.

Along with the loss or alteration of the original building forms, there were changes to interior arrangements and finishes. Seating assignments drawn up by committees of elders originally stressed rank in community, separation of men and women, and even exiting priority. Over time, with altered patterns of membership, changing means of financing, changing services, and growing inclusion of music, box pews became a means of showing off patronage and then were replaced by more egalitarian slips, arena-like arrangements became frontal, “promiscuous” seating replaced the separation of the sexes, pulpits were lowered, and sounding boards disappeared in favor of acoustically more favorable coved and domed ceilings. The original forms are now preserved only in a few artifacts—here a canopy hanger, there a pulpit frontal or a pew partition—and in the precious seating diagrams so carefully drawn up.

The changes did not occur uniformly. As Benes stresses, beyond a history of changing fashion, meetinghouse forms and finishes were highly dependent on the history and involvement of their communities or parishes. The social history is made evident in topics he pursues—community, builders, seating, theoretical models, ecclesiology—beyond that of formal architecture. Different communities contemporaneously would build in very different modes, reflecting conservative or progressive decisions ruling liturgy and membership as well as patterns of influence based on geographic propinquities or relationships, which Benes maps. He provides important material for ongoing study and analysis in a rich set of appendices (ninety-three pages) that he has compiled to compare styles and dates, liturgical and singing practices, bell towers, relationship to specific models, enlargements, painting and, perhaps most enlightening, a chronological checklist of all the religious buildings in the region he has been able to document between 1622 and 1830 (noting which are still extant). Of added value to scholars is a link provided

to a website with supplemental annotation and bibliography for all the information on his checklist.

From a Vermont point of view, Benes' text and checklist seem strongest for coastal and lower New England. This is not surprising, for he and his scholarly sources deal most richly with the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and Vermont was settled toward the end of his time period. The checklist includes 121 examples from the state. It cites what appears to have been an anachronistic first-period example: Windsor, 1779, nearly square with a pointed roof. Among second-period examples are Bennington (1763), Rockingham (1787, extant), and Townshend (1790). Third-period citations include the transitional Strafford Town House (1799) and famous examples by Asher Benjamin (Old South, Windsor, 1798), William Sprats (Georgia, 1800, burned 1952), Lavius Fillmore (Bennington, 1804–05; Middlebury, 1806–09), and Peter Banner (Burlington, 1809). But the list is not complete by any means. Much valuable information is still locked within our nineteenth-century community histories waiting for a scholar to compile the story of Vermont's meetinghouses. West Wardsboro (1795), the state's second extant and readable side-entry, second-period meetinghouse, is not cited. Nor is that from Shoreham (1801) with two porches, one rising into an end tower, that in 1846 was moved to Larabee's Point and converted into a wool warehouse. Nor Newbury's similar 1788 second-period meetinghouse with end tower that was sold in 1848 for use as a depot on the Connecticut and Passumpsic Railroad, broke loose while being moved downhill to its new location, and smashed. Examples like these resonate with stories documented by Benes from lower New England. The value of his book is hardly diminished by such lacunae. His exhaustive research and broad insights establish the tools and context for understanding the history of our meetinghouses. It will be up to others to fill in the story for Vermont.

GLENN M. ANDRES

*Glenn Andres is professor of the History of Art and Architecture at Middlebury College and co-author of the forthcoming volume, Buildings of Vermont, in the Buildings of the United States series.*

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*The Battle of Bennington: Soldiers & Civilians*

By Michael P. Gabriel; Foreword by Tyler Resch (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2012, pp. 128, paper, \$19.99).

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*Mount Independence: The Enduring Legacy of a Unique Historic Place*

By Stephen Zeoli (Hubbardton, Vt.: Self-Published, 2011, pp. 62, paper, \$10).

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The history of Vermont during the American Revolution has long been under the shadow of the capture of Fort Ticonderoga, which took place when the war was young and glorious. The Battle of Bennington has its towering monument and an annual state holiday. Mount Independence in Orwell, once an enormous fortification that was key to the defense of the new nation, is a State Historic Site with a fine museum. But neither the battle nor the fort seems to get the attention it deserves. So it is encouraging to read these two short books, which in different ways illuminate their subjects.

*The Battle of Bennington* is a compilation of firsthand accounts, drawn from military orders and reports, pension applications, and the diligence of nineteenth-century historians. Many of these documents are not readily available, and Michael P. Gabriel, a professor of history at Kutztown University in Pennsylvania, has performed a service by bringing them together in one place. He includes a solid overview of the battle that gives context to sources that can at times be disjointed. The book is illustrated, although somewhat disappointingly, with a mix of contemporary and historic photographs and artwork that relate to the battle and the war. A clear modern map would have furthered understanding. As a result of a technological glitch in the printing process, transcribed fractions are rendered as small squares, and a reader must keep the errata slip handy to know whether  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{3}{4}$  was originally intended (pp. 45, 46, twice on 63, 64, 65, twice on 67, and 70).

But in the best of these documents, moments from the battle and the days surrounding August 16, 1777, come to life again.

“Our People behaved with the greatest Spirit and Bravery imaginable,” General John Stark told the New Hampshire Council, “Had they been Alexanders, or Charles’s of Sweden, they could not have behaved better” (p. 35). One old-timer remembered shooting from a side hill at the advancing Germans: “It was like firing into a flock of sheep” (p. 60). Another old man’s clearest memory was the loss of his horse, worth £18

Massachusetts currency, for which he had never been compensated (p. 75). After the battle, an exhausted company slept in a cornfield near where they had fought, using the hills as pillows. “When I waked next morning, I was so beaten out that I could not get up till I rolled about a good while,” remembered Thomas Mellen, a private in Stickney’s Regiment (p. 62).

Revolutionary War accounts from women are rare, and they add much to the story. Hannah Wheeler of Lanesborough, Massachusetts, was ninety-two when she told of her husband’s return from the battle. “It was rumoured that he was killed and when he returned I cried, and he asked if I was sorry but I told him I was crying for joy.” David Wheeler had brought several “Hessian” officers home with him. “I declined shaking hands with them,” Hannah remembered, “but got them victuals” (p. 90).

*Mount Independence* is a personal account of the Mount, its history, and what the site means to one man. Two times, author Steve Zeoli asserts, “I am not a historian” (pp. 11, 59) and then proves himself wrong. Although the book is far from a complete history of Mount Independence, the material it covers is thoughtful, accurate, and enlivened by quotes from Washington, John Adams, Anthony Wayne, and doctors and soldiers who served on Lake Champlain. Zeoli writes in his introduction, “You won’t find any original research here, merely an earnest effort to share a deep enthusiasm for one of Vermont’s—even one of America’s—great treasures” (p. 11).

Zeoli began his association with the Mount in 1979 as a caretaker and interpreter, at a time when the land was still pasture for cows. After two summers, he continued as a volunteer and frequent visitor. Today he is president of the Mount Independence Coalition, the friends’ group that supports the historic site. (Disclosure: This reviewer is also on the Coalition board and believes Vermonters ought to take great pride in Mount Independence.)

In his historical account, Zeoli focuses on the work of engineer Jeduthan Baldwin, who designed the fortifications and kept a journal that is a gem of Revolutionary War writing. Today, the most popular walk on the Mount is named the Baldwin Trail in his honor.

Photos of the terrain and the rocky remains of huts and fortifications support the text. The book includes a heartfelt plea against looting.

Visiting the Mount—where the wooden buildings and the large fort have rotted to nothing and only stones remain—can be a challenge to tourists accustomed to historical reconstructions. Zeoli writes, “I often tell people they need to bring their imaginations along with their other

gear when they visit the Mount” (p. 55). By means of this little book, he has helped stimulate those imaginations.

ENNIS DULING

*Ennis Duling, recently retired communications director at Castleton State College, is a historian and writer, who lives in East Poultney.*

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## *In Times Past: Essays from the Upper Valley. Book II*

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By Larry Coffin. (Bradford, Vt.: Larry Coffin, 2012, pp. 140, paper, \$20 donation to Bradford Public Library, \$24 from author, P.O. Box 490, Bradford, VT 05033).

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As the title indicates, this book contains a selection of chapters about bygone life and times in the northern part of the region called the Upper Valley. Geographically, this is the area bisected by the Connecticut River that includes the towns of Bradford, Topsham, Newbury, Fairlee, West Fairlee, Vershire, Corinth, and Thetford in Vermont, and Haverhill, Orford, and Piermont in New Hampshire.

These essays are updated columns that have appeared in recent years in the weekly *Bradford Opinion* written by Larry Coffin, a teacher and town moderator who clearly enjoys and reveres the subjects he explores. Collections of newspaper columns do not always make a coherent book, but this one succeeds in the sense that it offers intelligent descriptions of “times past” that will surprise many members of today’s younger generations while offering lively nostalgia for their elders.

For example, an especially enlightening and well-written chapter, “Women’s Suffrage: A Radical Notion,” covers the long and unjust era when only men could vote, and it records that change came only gradually and grudgingly. By 1900, to cite an appalling example, “women were allowed to serve as town clerks even though they could not vote for candidates for that office” (p. 109). Coffin cites *The Star That Set*, the history of the state Republican Party written by the late Samuel B. Hand, who recalled that Governor Percival W. Clement, elected in 1918, vetoed the bill to permit women’s suffrage for “fear that suffrage proponents sought the vote as a weapon to reimpose prohibition” (p. 111). But Coffin neglects to mention that it was Clement who with his vigorous “local option” campaign in 1902 lost his race for governor that year but succeeded in 1903 when the legislature ended a half century of state-wide temperance.

On the subject of national Prohibition (1920–33), a key sentence explains much of Vermont’s heritage of lawless rum running that characterized Prohibition and helped spell its demise: “Alcohol sales were legal in Canada and as a result Vermont and New Hampshire were on the frontline of smuggling” (p. 105). So roads in the Upper Valley towns became throughways for the transportation of illicit and often unsafe “hooch.”

A carefully detailed essay on the nineteenth-century outmigration from Vermont analyzes specific local reasons for the often sharp fluctuation in decennial populations of Upper Valley towns (“Upper Valley Exodus,” pp. 44–50) as industries alternately flourished and failed. Statewide, Vermont lost a tiny bit of population during World War One and the Great Depression, that is, in the decades 1910–20 and 1930–40. By contrast, today’s Upper Valley economy virtually glows with health because of the Dartmouth-Hitchcock medical community, Dartmouth College itself, and the transportation linkage provided by Interstates 89 and 91.

The important but mundane subject of Vermont barns is explored (pp. 69–74), including an intriguing description of their diverse architectural configurations, depending on whether they were designed for piggeries, sheep, horses, dairy cows, haylofts, wheat threshing, or silage. Barns have been known also, the author notes, to serve temporarily for funerals, schools, weddings, church services, town meetings, and dances, and of course they were often constructed during community “raisings.”

The mining of the earth’s varied resources forms an important part of the heritage of these Upper Valley towns: soapstone, limestone, granite, whetstones, slate, mica, iron ore, copper, gravel, sand, and crushed rocks, with occasional excitement when small deposits of gold, lead, silver, or zinc were uncovered. The extensive but short-lived copper mining industry in Vershire, Strafford, and Fairlee’s village of Ely may surprise some younger or newer Vermonters. Instead of using footnotes, the author helpfully incorporates many suggestions for further reading into his text, such as the mention in this case of Collamer Abbot’s classic study *Green Mountain Copper* (1973).

My quibbles with this book pertain mostly to its physical and design aspects. Pictures are unnecessarily tiny, many almost postage-stamp size, and often darkly reproduced. There is no problem with the discerning selection of pictures, which must have entailed substantial research, but it seems a shame not to show them to full advantage. The binding has problems because pages tend to fall out. Proofreading could have been improved, and as an editor I wince at every hyphenated adverb. Yet, if this book were to be redesigned with some typographical flair, larger

pictures, good reproduction, a cloth cover, and solid binding, it might qualify for coffee-table status.

Nonetheless, those with an interest in Vermont's colorful past will find in this little volume a great variety of fascinating subject matter and a nostalgic and accurate description of life in northern New England towns well before the twenty-first century.

TYLER RESCH

*Tyler Resch is the research librarian of the Bennington Museum and co-editor of the museum's journal, the Walloomsack Review.*

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## *A Vermont Hill Town in the Civil War: Peacham's Story*

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*Compiled and edited by Jutta R. Scott and Michelle Arnosky Sherburne, with an essay by Lynn R. Bonfield (Peacham, Vt.: Peacham Historical Association, 2012, pp. 218, paper \$25.00).*

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**T**his new book from the Peacham Historical Association is a masterful and meticulous narrative of Peacham's role during the Civil War, told primarily through letters from the battlefield, supplemented by a brief coda on the nurturing role of the women back on the bucolic home front. The work is illuminated by the love, longing, and fears of those at war, and by the love and anxiety of those who awaited their return.

The harrowing centerpiece of *A Vermont Hill Town in the Civil War* is the memoir of Mark M. Wheeler, who enlisted in 1861 at the age of twenty-two and served in the First Vermont Cavalry until the war's end. In July 1864 Wheeler was incarcerated in the infamous Confederate prison at Andersonville, Georgia, where nearly 13,000 Union soldiers died from starvation, disease, or exposure to the elements.

Built in 1864 to hold 10,000 prisoners, Andersonville Prison might at first glance, if seen from high above, have been mistaken for a huge, crowded sports arena; but three fifteen-foot-high stockades encircled the grounds. By August 1864, the prison housed 30,000 captured Union soldiers. As you drew nearer, you would have caught the stench of the human exudates that clotted the stream running across its 26.5 acres. On July 27 and 28, Wheeler wrote of seeing

men lying on the ground alive with maggots [maggots] craling out and in their mouths and ears and eyes . . . you could see the whole 4 acres in mothing [motion] with magets . . . we would avrage from 100 to 150 a day of the dead that use to be carried to the gait . . . the nigroes would take them buy thair legs and arms and swing them into the cart as may [many] as they could get on (p. 131).

Death at Andersonville, although as palpable as the fetid air, was not a certainty. Of the 45,000 Union soldiers who slept on the sodden Georgia soil during the camp's fourteen-month existence, nearly one third died in prison. When Mark Wheeler enlisted, he weighed a hefty 180 pounds. On his return, his wife Lizzie greeted a ninety-pound animate skeleton. Yet he survived his incarceration, recuperated in the Sloan Military Hospital in Montpelier, and settled on a farm in Peacham's East Hill.

Young Turrell Elkins Harriman ran away from home, enlisted at the age of fifteen as a private in the Eighth Regiment, and fought for the Union in Louisiana and Virginia. On August 31, 1862, he wrote to his mother of witnessing a trainload of Union soldiers, wounded and dead, being unloaded at Boute Station, Louisiana. Some sixty combatants lay side by side, the wounded moaning aloud alongside the silent dead. Mortality was much on young Harriman's mind: "[P]erhaps your dear son will never write to you again but . . . know that I die as a hero only should die, for I will never die the death of a coward" (p. 36). Happily, Harriman survived the war, and although disabled in combat and suffering from his wounds for the remainder of his life, he later became the postmaster at nearby St. Johnsbury Center.

Despite its litany of grief and gore, *A Vermont Hill Town in the Civil War* is ennobled by acts of heroism and lightened by moments of humor. Late in the war the Confederates arranged an exchange of Union prisoners in Andersonville for Confederates held by the North. William West was the last Union soldier chosen for release. But West pushed his fellow prisoner, Horace Rowe, ahead of him in the line: "Say your name is West and keep going, I can stand it much longer than you can" (p. 20). In later years, their neighbors back in Peacham called them David and Jonathan.

Humor, understandably, is harder to come by than heroism in these letters written under the stress of battle. But wit unmistakably surfaces in these reassuring words from handsome young Hazen Blanchard Hooker, whose Peacham Academy education may be detected in his prose. He wrote to his anxious family:

[D]o not pitch you[r] letters all on the key of A minor. The major key is what we Soldiers want[:] lively and full of bright hopes of the future. Why need you be so down hearted? . . . *Job was surely afflicted, but he was patient*, and came out all right. So it will be with your son Hazen (pp. 47–48).

Hazen added in a postscript that he would be happy to hear from the folks back in Peacham. But their letters went unopened and unanswered. Hazen Hooker was the first native of Peacham to be killed in action, on May 5, 1864, in the Battle of the Wilderness, Virginia, where he lies beneath an unmarked grave.

*A Vermont Hill Town in the Civil War* is conspicuously enhanced by many finely produced illustrations. The frontispiece depicts an

adolescent Turrell Elkins Harriman, whose middle name is preserved in a historic tavern in Peacham Corner, now a handsome private residence. Turrell stares forlornly at the studio photographer, dressed in a uniform several sizes too large for his slight frame (young as he was, few uniforms would have fit him). A jagged, gaping hole just behind his right hand seems to portend the wounds to come.

The back cover of the volume—a striking panorama of the encampment of the Sixth Regiment at Camp Griffin, Virginia, photographed in 1862 by George Houghton—is itself a remarkable elegy to the Civil War. The regiment fought bravely in several battles and suffered severe casualties. Here we see them huddled in their tepee-like tents, ranged in rows beneath a threatening, preternaturally glowering sky. Just to the right of the encampment, a lone tree, resembling a crucifix, rises above the tents. A scattering of fallen tree limbs litters the foreground and suggests a tangle of bones extruded from the earth. The regiment lies at rest; the camp appears utterly still and all but depopulated. But the storm poised to burst over the regiment was to rage across the nation for four years. Before the war's end, forty-three of those from the tiny hill town of Peacham who fought to save the Union found their resting place beneath such hallowed ground.

Today, rising from a knoll that overlooks Peacham Cemetery and one of the most idyllic villages in all of Vermont, the Civil War monument mutely proclaims the names of those who gave the last full measure of their devotion to preserve the Union.

JOHN D. ROSENBERG

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## *Philip Hoff: How Red Turned Blue in the Green Mountain State*

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By Samuel B. Hand, Anthony Marro, and Stephen C. Terry.  
(Castleton, Vt., and Lebanon, N.H.: Castleton State College in association with University Press of New England, 2011, pp. xi, 197, \$29.95; Ebook, \$18.99).

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Nearly fifty years after Philip H. Hoff was elected the first Democratic governor in more than 100 years of Vermont's history, Samuel Hand, Anthony Marro, and Stephen Terry have provided us

with an account of Hoff's political career that combines contemporaneous journalistic coverage with historical perspective.

Terry, a long-time observer of and participant in Vermont politics, was a reporter at the Vermont Press Bureau during much of Hoff's governorship. The book has its origins in a series of articles Terry wrote for the *Rutland Herald* in 1968, when Hoff's governorship was coming to an end. Terry's articles were fleshed out with subsequent reporting, while Hand, professor emeritus of history at UVM and the dean of Vermont political historians, helped set the Hoff era in a larger context of political change in Vermont and the nation. Marro, a former student of Hand's and a former colleague of Terry's, helped edit the volume and added the fruits of his own reporting.

Books written by multiple authors over an extended period of time can sometimes be disjointed affairs. This book has none of those faults, but is rather a very thorough account of Hoff's political career, the political dynamics of a rapidly changing Vermont in the 1960s, and the implications of Hoff's governorship for Vermont politics and policy after he left office. Castleton State College and its president, David Wolk, deserve credit for helping support this project and bringing the book to publication.

When Hoff was first elected governor in 1962, Vermont was a very different place from what it became later in the twentieth century. The state's economy still depended heavily on dairy farming, logging, granite, marble, and slate. The legislature included a house of representatives of 246 members, one for every city and town. The governor had little control over the executive branch, since most department heads were responsible to boards and commissions whose terms were much longer than the two years for which the governor was elected. Public welfare was provided not by the state, but by overseers of the poor in each town. The interstate highway system had not yet been completed, and Vermont was still seen as somewhat remote by people living in the metropolitan areas of the Northeast.

By the time Hoff left office six years later, almost all of these features of Vermont had been changed, or were well on their way to being changed. Under pressure from the federal courts, the House reapportioned itself into a 150-member body allocated according to the one-person, one-vote standard. The overseers of the poor were replaced by state provision of public welfare services, some of which were substantially funded by federal programs that were part of Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society." The interstate highways connected Vermont with the rest of the Northeast. By making it easier for ski areas to attract visitors from outside the state, and for Vermont manufacturers to ship their

products elsewhere, the interstates had a substantial impact on the state's economic development.

While Hoff was not single-handedly responsible for all of these developments in Vermont state government, he created an environment in Montpelier that was conducive to dynamic change, and in so doing, attracted a new generation of people into state government service. Hoff also set in motion some changes that came to fruition under his successors. He recognized the need to control the growth and development that the interstate roads were facilitating, and he put planning issues on state government's agenda that were later fleshed out by Act 250. He urged the legislature to consolidate the myriad state departments, boards, and commissions into agencies responsible to the governor, a reform that the Republican legislature resisted during Hoff's governorship, but enacted soon after his Republican successor, Deane Davis, took office. Some issues that Hoff advocated in the 1960s, such as school district consolidation, are still on the agenda of state government today.

Hoff will be remembered as much for his role in bringing two-party competition to Vermont politics as for his policies and structural reforms as governor. When Hoff was elected in 1962, the Vermont Democratic Party was in moribund shape, content to elect a few legislators and local officials and to receive patronage appointments when a Democratic administration was in power in Washington. Even though Hoff himself was not elected to the U.S. Senate in 1970 (he lost to incumbent Republican Winston Prouty), he left behind a Democratic Party that was strong enough—and had the voting support of enough new residents who had moved to the state in the 1960s—to elect another Democratic governor, Thomas Salmon, in 1972, and Vermont's first Democratic U.S. senator, Patrick Leahy, in 1974. Hoff, who became visible on the statewide scene when he was elected Burlington's lone member of the Vermont House of Representatives in 1960, also helped develop a strong Democratic base in that city, out of which emerged two other Burlington Democrats, Madeleine Kunin and Howard Dean, who also went on to become governors of Vermont.

Terry, Hand, and Marro are to be commended for offering us this fact-filled and analytically rich account of how Vermont politics and policy changed during the six eventful years during which Philip H. Hoff served as governor.

ERIC L. DAVIS

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## 2011: THE YEAR OF THE FLOODS

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### *Grab Your Toothbrush and a Flashlight! We're Headed to the Neighbors! Stories of Irene, the Great Vermont Flood of August, 2011*

Told by Seventh Graders of Whitcomb High School, Bethel, Vermont (Bethel, Vt.: Spaulding Press, 2011, pp. 79, paper, no price).

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### *A Mighty Storm: Stories of Resilience after Irene*

By Yvonne Daley (Manchester Center, Vt.: Shires Press, 2011, pp. 144, paper, \$34.95).

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### *Voices from the Flood*

By Jeanne Weston Cook (Montpelier, Vt.: Leahy Press, 2012, pp. 80, paper, \$14.95).

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### *When the River Rose: Stories of a Vermont Town's Flood, Recovery, and Rebirth*

Edited by David Goodman; Photographs by Gordon Miller (Waterbury, Vt.: Children's Literacy Foundation, n.d. [2012], pp. 52, paper, \$20.00).

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### *The Wrath of Irene: Vermont's Imperfect Storm of 2011*

By M. Dickey Drysdale, et al. (Randolph, Vt.: The Public Press, 2012, pp. 220, paper, \$39.95).

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### *The Year of the Storms: Vermont's Remarkable Experiences in 2011*

Presented by the Burlington Free Press (Battle Ground, Wash.: Pediment Publishing, 2011, pp. 134, \$37.95).

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Looking at a community, or society, or nation in crisis, can be one way of trying to discover how it works, by focusing our attention on immediate issues that suddenly cannot be ignored, papered over, or put off, as we see how responses to disaster are formulated. To put it another way, let's paraphrase Tolstoy, and say that while flood stories are all alike, whether they take place in Vermont or North Dakota or Mississippi or Bangladesh, each recovery story is different in its own way,

and helps to show us why Vermont (for instance) is not North Dakota, nor Mississippi, nor Bangladesh. Not necessarily better or worse, but different.

Or, for that matter, why Vermont in 2011 is not Vermont in 1927, the year of the Great Flood. Within a few months of its coming in early November 1927, the first books about that disaster had already begun to appear. Among them were three by Luther B. Johnson, editor of the *Herald of Randolph*, whose remarkably complete *The '27 Flood* remains available today, and another by Lloyd Squier of the *Waterbury Record*. Others followed, and in 1928–29, the *Vermont* (ancestor of *Vermont Life*) published several issues giving, if not a county-by-county description, at least regional accounts of the flood.

The books considered here—among them accounts of Randolph and Waterbury, hard hit both in 1927 and 2011—have appeared quickly, and no doubt others are on the way. Of the six, that of Yvonne Daley, written with reporters for the *Rutland Herald*, has the broadest geographical coverage, reaching from southern towns such as Wilmington, which, with its roughly \$13 million in damage, was the worst sufferer in the state, up as far north as Waterbury and Montpelier. The broadest chronological coverage comes from *The Year of the Storms*, published by the *Burlington Free Press*, which starts with the massive snowfall of mid-March 2011, carries on with the serious spring flooding around Lake Champlain, and ends with Irene sweeping through the state. Though that particular book consists mainly of photographs, with little text other than captions, the others combine pictures with text by journalists, witnesses, victims, rescuers, and others. Two of the books deal with regions that were particularly hard hit both in 1927 and in 2011. *When the River Rose* looks primarily at Waterbury and its nearby towns, while Drysdale's *Wrath of Irene* concentrates on the ill-behaved White River and its branches in central Vermont. Cook's *Voices from the Flood* covers Northfield and Roxbury, and stands out, among other reasons, by its omission of color pictures, though (to this reader, at any rate) the sobriety of the black and white photographs adds weight to a somber subject. Finally, in another class entirely is *Grab Your Toothbrush and a Flashlight!* While some of the other books include pieces by schoolchildren and other younger writers, this comes entirely from the seventh-graders of Whitcomb Junior/Senior High School in Bethel, set down with the encouragement of their teachers as a book that (like most of the others here) is being sold to raise funds for disaster relief.

Irene was the seventh costliest hurricane in the history of the United States, and though hurricane-force winds did not reach the state, its rainfall turned it into Vermont's worst natural disaster since 1927. Inevitably

there have been comparisons between the two storms, but though the full extent of Irene's damage remains to be seen, it will almost certainly be well below that of 1927. A much larger storm, Irene took roughly fifty lives—six of them in Vermont—as it traveled from the Bahamas up through the Carolinas and the East Coast as far north as Québec and New Brunswick. Yet in 1927 probably some eighty-four people died in Vermont alone, and perhaps twenty or thirty more outside the state. The flood that year came in early November, as Vermonters were preparing for the oncoming winter, and was followed by periods of ice and snow, while Irene struck in midsummer. Irene left roughly 300 Vermont bridges damaged, some of which were closed for weeks; in 1927 the waters brought down 1,278 bridges. In 2011, the Winooski River rose to nineteen feet at Montpelier, its highest level since 1927; but that year it had reached twenty-seven feet, badly flooding much of the capital. Finally, Irene for the most part spared northern Vermont its worst blows, leaving towns such as Johnson, Morristown, Newport, and St. Johnsbury, all victims of 1927, sodden but not seriously hurt.

And so on, and so on. However accurate aggregate statistics might be, they are cold comfort to those who saw houses, stores, fields, and other properties washed away in August 2011. There are other major differences as well—about which more later. What was similar in the two floods, as these books all show, was the swiftness with which damaged towns set about rescue and recovery, and the ingenuity and courage of the many who turned out to help, from the National Guard and the Red Cross to the local fire and rescue services, and the volunteers, some of whom came from well beyond Vermont. “Over and over,” writes Daley, “Vermonters compared the local response to negotiations in Washington, where elected officials seemed unable to get anything done, remarking how quickly decisions on road reconstruction, distribution of goods, communication, health and human services—all the services normally associated with government—were made with little contention and no adverse impacts, at least as yet” (*Mighty Storm*, p. 90). Or, as an eleventh grader in Northfield wrote later, “we will look back on this storm and remember coming together and making a difference in a way that perhaps Northfield, and even Vermont, never thought would be possible” (*Voices*, p. 43).

In 1927 town emergency committees were quickly established, often with the help of the Red Cross, and again in 2011 no time was wasted before emergency shelters were set up in churches, schools, and municipal office buildings. Volunteers were organized, including, as in 1927, many from schools and colleges, such as Norwich University, Middlebury College, and the University of Vermont. Meals were prepared for

both victims and workers, and tracks improvised to bypass shattered roads to bring in help, often with ATVs, or bicycles, or simply by foot. “Flatlanders may require illumination about the word ‘road,’” writes Tom Hill of the *Randolph Herald*. “Here’s the rule of thumb: if no trees are growing in it that can’t be flattened by a half-ton vehicle moving at 20 miles per hour, it’s a road” (*Wrath*, p. 148). As many as a thousand people a day hiked along a private trail from Killington through Mendon to Rutland and back, when Route 4, which joins those towns to the east, lay in ruins—“the I-95 of wooded paths,” the *New York Times* called it (*Mighty Storm*, p. 95). In 1927, food and medicine were dropped into beleaguered towns by air; in 2011, helicopters often performed the task, and also rescued those needing medical care, taking them to hospitals in towns like Randolph and Hanover. Local ingenuity triumphed over adversity. In 1927, Lloyd Squier of the *Waterbury Record* hitched a belt from his Model-T to the paper’s printing press, to put out news when the power failed; in 2011, as the waters rose around the studios of WDEV, its owner—Lloyd’s son, Kenley Squier—pumped up the power of the station as far as possible. Generators kept the signal alive when electricity failed, and with no email, the news director gave out his cell number, encouraging people to call in about where help was needed and how people were coping. “Like an old-fashioned party line, the whole neighborhood of northern Vermont listened, learned and responded to what came over the airwaves” (*When the River Rose*, p. 17).

Published so soon after the storm, these are not yet the kinds of books to which a reader should go searching for statistics, damage estimates, costs, and the like, although some figures, drawn from newspapers, do appear. Nor, save for those about Northfield and Waterbury, can one go looking in them for accounts of what happened to particular places. Both Daley’s and Dickey’s books do have something of a geographical orientation, but neither has a table of contents or an index that would allow you quickly to find, say, Jamaica, Woodstock, or Rochester, all of which had severe damage. And, of course, it’s far too early for the kind of reflective look back that enables authors (or readers) to know what ramifications there might be for the future. *When the River Rose*, for example, came out when the prospects for Waterbury’s State Hospital and of its flooded state office complex were still highly uncertain, and the months since the emergency have brought worries that the rapid dredging of Irene’s overflowing streams might even have increased the severity of future floods. Today we can see how the recovery from the 1927 flood helped, for example, to alter the state’s political landscape, how it changed the relationship of individual towns to Montpelier, how it helped to modernize Vermont’s primitive highway network (to the great

benefit of the tourist industry, just as the ski craze was about to begin), and so forth. It is not easy yet to tell what will be the lasting effects of Irene.

Finally, any future comparative study of Irene with the Great Flood of 1927 will probably conclude that the greatest single difference lay in the role played by the federal government in recovery and reconstruction. In 1927 there was little machinery in Washington to help in such work, and regions hit by disaster generally had to look to themselves and to the American Red Cross (which spent somewhat over a million dollars in Vermont). In 1928, after some vigorous politicking by the Vermont congressional delegation (and after calls for federal assistance in the great Mississippi floods of the prior spring) President Coolidge authorized an emergency grant of \$2,654,000 to help rebuild the state's shattered highways and bridges, making clear that this was not to be taken as a precedent. In 2011 and 2012, however, millions upon millions of dollars poured forth from federal agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Federal Highway Administration, Housing and Urban Development, and so forth, much of it going to repair the ravages of the spring flooding as well as Irene.

The books considered here, therefore, are not so much history as the invaluable raw materials of history, the sorts of books to which future historians will turn with gratitude, mining them for the immediacy of their pictures, their accounts of different communities, and their people, both refugees and rescuers. Two examples of this kind of immediacy will suffice. Though Irene had been predicted for days, the sudden swerve that took it near the Green Mountains was unexpected. A Bethel seventh grader no doubt spoke for many when she said that, though she heard the warnings, "normally, I don't believe in this kind of talk because when I do, the disaster never hits Vermont." Her house was later isolated (*Toothbrush*, pp. 67–68). And when David Goodman saw the waves of the Winooski rising over downtown Waterbury, he turned on the television news, only to be assured that Irene, now downgraded to a tropical storm, had missed New York, and therefore all danger was past. "To the outside world, Vermont didn't exist. We were on our own" (*When the River Rose*, p. 3).

NICHOLAS CLIFFORD

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