



SAMUEL B. HAND  
1931–2012

**B**y the time he died this past June, Samuel B. Hand had three titles, used so often together that they seemed almost to be part of his name: professor emeritus of history at the University of Vermont; former president of the Vermont Historical Society; and dean of Vermont historians.

A member of the history faculty at UVM for thirty-three years, Sam was a fabled teacher, whose popular courses in American history and especially in Vermont history were the training ground for many of Vermont's scholars, teachers, writers, lawyers, and leaders in government and civic life. Honored by the university with the Graduate Faculty Teaching Award (1994) and the University Scholar Award (1989)—UVM's highest award for scholarship—Sam served as chairman of the history department during the 1970s and was one of the founders and the first director of the university's Center for Research on Vermont, which awarded him its Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003.

Sam's influence and activity ranged beyond UVM. He was president of the Oral History Association, was the founding editor of its journal, the *Oral History Review*, and was awarded the Harvey A. Kantor Memorial Award for Outstanding Achievement in Oral History in 1986. For many years he was a member and for several years chair of the Vermont Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights.

Sam's long service on the Vermont Historical Society's board of trustees culminated with his years as president of the Society from 1985

to 1989. For countless audiences at the Society's annual meetings and special events, at public libraries, and at local historical society meetings throughout the state, Sam was the personification and voice (with his unmistakable New York City accent, admittedly not a typical voice) of the Society. His wit, his gift for storytelling, and his deep knowledge of Vermont political history made Sam a trusted and much sought after speaker and commentator on our shared past and its usefulness for understanding contemporary issues and events. In later years, Sam continued to contribute to the VHS by serving on the *Vermont History* editorial advisory board, offering his knowledge and experience to evaluate and improve manuscripts submitted for review and publication in this journal.

Most important, Sam shared much of his knowledge in print as well as at the podium; and it is here that Sam's work will have an enduring effect on our understanding of and approach to U.S. and Vermont political history. In addition to his book on Samuel I. Rosenman, a member of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's inner circle of advisors, Sam was the author, co-author, editor or co-editor, and contributor of an almost countless number of books, articles, book reviews, short commentaries, compilations of documents, and encyclopedia entries on Vermont history. Some of these, such as his book *The Star That Set: The Vermont Republican Party, 1865–1974*; his articles (one with Lyman Jay Gould) on the "Mountain Rule" in Vermont political history; his article with co-authors Jeffrey D. Marshall and D. Gregory Sanford on the "Little Republics" and the effect of town-centered local control on Vermont politics; and most recently, his book with Stephen Terry and Anthony Marro, *Philip Hoff: How Red Turned Blue in the Green Mountain State*, were the results of deep familiarity, close examination, and careful analysis of a dazzling array of primary and secondary resources: archives and public records, manuscripts, letters, election returns, newspapers, political ephemera, monographs, autobiographies, memoirs, oral history, and anecdotes. The hallmark of Sam's writing was his insistence on going beyond received wisdom and traditional interpretations of Vermont's history to find a more complex, more accurate, and ultimately, more useful way to understand Vermont's past. He studied and wrote political history because, as he once told me, that's where you see how what's important to a society gets played out in practice. Sam rarely hesitated to think about the impact of history on the present, but he refused to think about history simply as a key to the future. He often invoked his own cryptic aphorism: "Historians are not good at predicting the future; they are good predicting the past." This was his sly way of suggesting that, while we can have no certainty about the future,

if we can get a firm grasp on the past, we may better understand the present, and that might help us make at least informed choices about the direction we take as we move ahead.

Sam Hand was a good friend, a good colleague, a witty and engaging companion, as likely to burst into song from a Broadway musical or launch a long, convoluted story about his service in the army during the Korean War as to discourse on George Aiken's voting record in the U.S. Senate or the end of Kake Walk at the University of Vermont. His enduring gift to all of us, epitomized in those three titles that became permanent appendages to his name, was a deep commitment to thinking carefully and seriously about the past in order to be better informed and thoughtful participants in the present.

MICHAEL SHERMAN, *Editor*