

Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS



Renegade Yankees: The Antinomian Tradition and Agrarian Resistance in the Colonial American Northeast, 1636-1809

By Donald A. Smith (2010, pp. 943, eBook, \$29.95).

Readers of *Vermont History* may remember the seminal article by Donald A. Smith published in the journal just over twenty years ago, “Green Mountain Insurgency: Transformation of New York’s Forty-Year Land War” (volume 64, Fall 1996, available online in two parts at <http://vermonthistory.org/journal/misc/GreenMountainInsurgency1.pdf> and <http://vermonthistory.org/journal/misc/GreenMountainInsurgency2.pdf>). That article was an extension of Smith’s dissertation work. The book under review here is the product of Smith’s twenty-five years of research into the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political and religious radicals who helped shape the character of the British colonies in the northeast and the emergent United States. A mammoth undertaking, *Renegade Yankees* offers a fascinating interpretation of the settlement and demographic evolution of the colonial northeast. That story culminates in the rebellion of the New Hampshire Grants against New York and the establishment of the independent state of Vermont in 1777. For readers particularly interested in Vermont history, the book reveals the methodology and deep background that underlay Smith’s “Green Mountain Insurgency” article and thereby provides greater context for understanding the people who created the state of Vermont and the character of their enterprise.

“Green Mountain Insurgency” presented a collective profile of the Green Mountain Boys—in other words, the men who participated in acts of resistance and rebellion against the New York authorities and their allies who were attempting to impose their jurisdiction over the Grants.

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Smith examined the biographies and socioeconomic status of all the people he was able to track down in the records, compared the attributes of Green Mountain Boys with other men whose actions defined them as pro-Yorker or pro-Vermont, and concluded that the “highly motivated economic, political, and religious activists . . . formed their defining traits in the crucibles of religious and political controversy in eastern Connecticut and southern Massachusetts” (p. 198) before migrating to south-eastern New York and participating in a lengthy land war against the manor lords of that region. Nearly 80 percent of these men who settled in western Vermont in the 1760s and early 1770s were religious radicals—New Lights, Separate Baptists, and other dissenters from Puritan orthodoxy whose ranks were boosted by the Great Awakening of the 1740s. Most important to the narrative of Vermont’s founding, according to Smith, is that these men were already present in the Grants and, as veterans of the New York land war, already actively challenging New York authority when Ethan Allen arrived on the scene in 1769 to defend settlers being evicted from their property. Allen, Smith states, was “not the prime mover but merely an instigator and expediter of intensified radical measures against New York” (p. 223), and he supports his claim with an examination of “the Green Mountain Boys organization.”

Renegade Yankees traces the roots of this story all the way back to late-fourteenth-century England and the anti-clerical dissidents known as the Lollards. Followers of John Wycliffe, the Lollards were the original antinomians—Christians who believed that faith alone was necessary for salvation and were therefore exempt from complying with religious law. Wycliffe’s ideas influenced Martin Luther and anticipated the Protestant Reformation. Smith compiled an extensive database of Lollards and their family members and compared it with a similar database of “anyone and everyone who got in trouble with the Puritans for religious and interlinked political reasons from the early 1620s to about 1710” (pp. 3-4). He also compared it with another database of other English religious radicals, including Anabaptists and Quakers. Smith concluded that family names appeared and reappeared consistently, and that “the Lollards were found to have initiated and conveyed an Antinomian frame of mind that animated sect after sect of English radicals all the way up to the Civil War era in both England and America’s north-east. They were the source of the Antinomian tradition; they were the ancestors of English and American religious and political radicals alike; and their descendants were the ‘Renegade Yankees’” who continuously challenged religious and political elites throughout the colonial and early national history of the U.S. and were persecuted as a result (“Renegade Yankees” website: <https://gmbtrust.wordpress.com>).

The bulk of *Renegade Yankees* traces the diasporic migrations of these dissenters from the Massachusetts Bay Colony throughout the American northeast as they fled persecution by the authorities and established outposts in one frontier region after another. As they moved, these groups carried with them not only their dissenting religious beliefs, but also corresponding radical views about land tenure and the natural rights of property holders grounded in English common law. Smith describes in detail the evolving oppositional culture characteristic of these people. Ultimately these views erupted into the three major land wars that Smith is interested in explaining: in southern New York, the Wyoming Valley of northeastern Pennsylvania, and Vermont. Along the way Smith views a number of well-known episodes through this analytical lens, including King Philip's War, the Salem Witch Hunt, and Shays' Rebellion. Readers generally interested in New England history will find Smith's arguments about these events worth pondering. Readers primarily interested in Vermont history, however, will want to focus their attention on the latter chapters of the book, which examine the New York land wars, the conflict in the New Hampshire Grants, and the Shaysite conflict that inflamed western Massachusetts (some of whose leaders fled to Vermont).

Smith's collective biography approach, girded by prodigious research, yields compelling insights into the nature and process of the rebellion in the Grants against the authority of New York and the subsequent founding of Vermont. But while his detailed narrative build-up to that story offers much interesting food for thought, his central thesis tracing the genealogy of religious and political dissent in colonial North America is not as persuasive. Smith seems to have left no stone unturned in his effort to verify the links and relationships between thousands of individuals across two continents and several hundred years based on their family surnames, given names, and identifiable religious backgrounds. Still, it takes something of a leap of faith to accept the full weight of his argument since, as Smith acknowledges, "English surnames ... had a wide commonality over many disparate locations in Britain" (p. 7). Recognizing the evidentiary shortcomings of his methodology, Smith pleads for a larger, sympathetic understanding of his work: "the overall argument is not for individual factual absolutes but, rather, in behalf of the overwhelming preponderance of evidence presented in its entirety... In this manner, the theory obtains the necessary and sufficient explanatory impact to provide it with a more than probable historical authenticity. It need only be highly probable, credible, and convincing" (p. 8).

Readers can certainly decide that for themselves. By any measure,

however, *Renegade Yankees* is an impressive work of history, if somewhat daunting in its heft. Note that it is available only in eBook form, and can be purchased and downloaded here: <https://www.lulu.com/shop/view-cart.ep>. The Vermont Historical Society library in Barre holds a printed copy. In addition, note that the New England Historic Genealogical Society has recently initiated a migration database project based on Smith's work, "Early Vermont Settlers to 1784": <http://www.americanancestors.org/databases/early-vermont-settlers-to-1784/about/?rId=0&filterQuery=databasename:vermont>

ALAN BEROLZHEIMER

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*For a Short Time Only: Itinerants and the
Resurgence of Popular Culture in Early America*

By Peter Benes (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016, pp. 528, \$49.95).

The title of *For a Short Time Only* happily misleads: The book ambles at leisure through a lost and fascinating world. Peter Benes's engaging and scholarly study presents itinerants in the mainland British colonies and early United States from about 1685 to 1825, many of whom originated or spent time in Vermont. Early American communities appear in a new light. Taverns were performance venues where ropedancers strung their skinny stage to accommodate the low ceiling. College commencements blossomed into regionally festive occasions with elephants, waxworks, and acoustical devices on display for a week. Proprietors of brick-and-mortar museums doubled as impresarios for traveling performers, competing to book lucrative acts like the impressive "Pig of Knowledge," and sometimes hit the road toting portable museums.

This book will serve as a resource for scholars in numerous historical subfields. Historians of visual culture, painting, sculpture, and photography will appreciate the treatment of traveling panoramas, miniature and portrait painting, physiognotrace and other portraiture machines, wax-work museums, and magic lantern shows, subtopics to which this book gives special emphasis. Itinerants hawking puppet shows, pantomime dramas, traveling menageries, ventriloquism, mechanical music, dancing

lessons, psalmody, and instrumental music instruction will draw readers interested in music, theater, and dance; in fact, Benes demonstrates that itinerants taught Americans to sing. Historians of medicine will value strolling “Indian” doctors, medical electricians, traveling cancer curers, cataract surgeons, pharmaceutical sellers, and showman-dentists. Optical spectacles, fireworks, ascension balloonists, and clever automaton shows will intrigue students of physics and engineering. Rope flyers who jumped from church steeples, wirewalkers and posture-masters, fencing teachers, equestrian performers, and roving boxing instructors belong in studies of sport and exercise. The broader context of itinerancy also provides a new angle on itinerant preachers and camp meetings.

Historians of education, too, have much to learn from this book. It tells a modern story of disruption from below as subscription lessons in French, penmanship, and visual and performing arts were later adopted as mainstream subjects in schools. It also argues for the important educative function of itinerant performers: Transparencies could dramatize news events in less than a week, and a waxwork Hamilton-Burr duel was produced within two months. Traveling shows exhibited works of high art before most Americans could see them otherwise, and rural communities often met their first foreigners when strollers came to town. American commerce and advertising seem almost fragile as Benes traces shifting marketing strategies and outlines the dangers facing peddlers. The diversity of itinerants’ portfolios measures not just their fakery, as the famous scene in *Huckleberry Finn* suggests, but the powerful drive to sell and perform. Benes tracks families with children, women, immigrants, people of color, and people with disabilities in various itinerant trades. Advertisements for runaway servants and slaves often mentioned that the fugitive possessed—and might try to sell—skills such as fiddling and tumbling, a keyhole into lives in servitude. Anyone writing a local history of an American community settled before 1826, and scholars of American migration and immigration, the Atlantic world, transportation, print, the late colonial and early republican into antebellum periods, and the cultural impact of the American Revolution will also benefit from (and enjoy) this fertile book.

Benes’s investment of time in this labor of love was well spent. He seems to have collected all relevant text and advertising from every newspaper published over a century and scoured every diary, house and shop inventory, city directory, broadside, and handbill. When he declares that a particular itinerant was the first or only one engaging in any activity, he has earned the reader’s confidence. Benes pursues his itinerants wherever they traveled, from Europe to New Hampshire to New Orleans. Two superb tables categorize 4,200 individual itinerants by nearly

three dozen types, arranged by quarter-century and by national origin, revealing that as many as two-thirds were foreign-born. In some fields, the number of strollers was not large, but this book shows that itinerants left a wider cultural footprint, or at least more of them, than their numbers imply. Case studies, dots connected, and unheralded numerical calculations deepen the text, as does Benes's fine sensitivity to advertising language and imagery. Sixty-five pages of notes, a twenty-five-page bibliography, an excellent index, and one hundred thirty-four black-and-white illustrations add to the book's value, especially since almost none of itinerants' material culture remains. Multi-tasking strollers appear in several thematic chapters, but Benes's lively writing dodges repetition. The book is a treat to read from start to finish.

With a study grounded in theories of folk culture, Benes's debt to an earlier era of European social historians such as Peter Burke and Carl von Sydow is manifest. The work of Richard Bushman and Lawrence Levine would have dovetailed well with this book. Benes's overarching thesis is that much European popular culture did not survive the Atlantic crossing and early community formation. It returned gradually around 1750, thanks largely to itinerant "culture-bearers." After about 1790, itinerant offerings became more varied and plentiful, pushed farther inland, and found markets in smaller towns. He also argues that this cultural "resurgence" proceeded from the bottom up in the new United States, again via itinerants, rather than passing from "great culture" to "little culture" as Burke and others found in Europe. The thesis is subtle, a common trait of detailed books, and the handling of social class seems fuzzy, with terms like "rank and file" going undefined. At times the language is larger than the argument, and attention to change over time is thin. Hostility toward itinerants from town officials and laws could use more systematic treatment. Although Benes makes claims about "North America," the book tilts toward the northeast and especially New England, no surprise given its origin at the Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife.

Reading this book is a far more pleasurable stroll than most itinerants experienced. Beyond its monumental documentation, it leaves behind a vivid and quirky imprint, from the Talking Fish to the image of early America's 1,500 waxwork figures silently filling New England's largest meetinghouse.

REBECCA R. NOEL

Rebecca R. Noel is Associate Professor of History at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire. Her book in progress is Save Our Scholars: The Quest for Health in American Schools.

Valiant Ambition: George Washington, Benedict Arnold, and the Fate of the American Revolution

By Nathaniel Philbrick (New York: Viking, 2016, pp. 427, \$30.00).

The second book of prize-winning Nathaniel Philbrick's potential trilogy on the American Revolution, *Valiant Ambition*, follows the 2013 publication of his well-received *Bunker Hill: A City, A Siege, A Revolution*. In *Valiant Ambition*, he focuses the lens of analysis on the activities and the very different characters of George Washington and Benedict Arnold from the spring of 1776 though Arnold's treason in September 1780. Philbrick tells an engaging and highly readable story, weaving together letters, diaries, orders, and other contemporary information into a richly textured account that presents the history almost as a pageant.

Philbrick makes particularly good use of the narrative of the ubiquitous Joseph Plumb Martin, who first enlisted in 1776 and saw action in many critical fights, from the Battle of Brooklyn in 1776 to the British surrender at Yorktown in October 1781. He also wintered with Washington at Valley Forge in 1778 and saw John Andre hanged as a spy for his role in the Arnold treason. The well-written observations of this educated but common soldier, published in 1830, provided Philbrick with a thread that runs through much of the narrative. But he relies too heavily on the recollections of the self-serving James Wilkinson, an officer who never won a battle or lost a court-martial, for his account of Washington's struggle with Congress and Horatio Gates for supreme command. Philbrick also relates the much less germane but interesting story of eccentric inventor David Bushnell's failed efforts to blow up Admiral Howe's flagship in New York harbor with an explosive device carried by a one-man submersible, and his later release upstream of fifty large barrels of gunpowder designed to explode when they drifted into British ships secured on the Delaware River at Philadelphia. These incidents do little, if anything, to elucidate Washington or Arnold, but they do enliven the narrative.

Through Washington and Arnold, Philbrick discusses what he regards as factors that threatened to derail the Revolution. He devotes much of that discussion to an ineffectual Continental Congress riven by political ambition, financial weakness exacerbated by not having the power to tax, sectional divisions and rivalries, and until late in 1780, unable and often unwilling to support an army in the field or resist the temptation to

dabble in the politics of command. The Congress mostly gathered in Philadelphia, a city that itself indulged in the problems of Congress while at the same time housing political, legal, and armed fights among rival Pennsylvania factions. Philbrick discusses badly divided or wavering loyalties of Americans, differences among the thirteen colonies, and the difficulty of melding the various state militias into a Continental Army that even when formed generally continued to function in state units. After the war, he asserts, “no one” who lived through it “wanted to remember how after boldly declaring their independence they had so quickly lost their way; how patriotic zeal had lapsed into cynicism; and how just when all seemed lost, a traitor had saved them from themselves” (p. xv).

Those interested in actions directly concerning Vermont will find Arnold’s important action at Valcour Island on October 11, 1776, and especially the subsequent two-day running naval fight that ended with the burning remains of the American “mosquito” fleet at Arnold’s Bay in Pantong, well told. Arnold’s forcing Carleton to build a Lake Champlain navy in 1776 delayed the British move south on Lake Champlain to the Hudson River by a year, contributing to their disaster at Saratoga a year later. By following Arnold from Valcour Island to Saratoga and to Philadelphia, Philbrick carries the Vermont contribution to the Revolutionary War south, where it impacted events in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Other Vermont activities that did not involve Arnold receive little or no notice. Philbrick confines the Battle of Bennington to five sentences separated by eight pages. He employs three of those to point out that because of Congress’s bungling, Stark resigned his Continental commission and fought there at the head of a New Hampshire unit. The other two refer to the news of the battle leaving Washington “upbeat” (p. 136) and boosting New England morale, thus helping to lure New England troops to two critical battles at Saratoga, where Arnold performed effectively, even heroically. Seth Warner’s rearguard action at Hubbardton receives no notice. Herein rests a central difficulty of an analysis of the Revolution through Arnold and Washington at polar opposites of a trope.

In *Bunker Hill*, Philbrick chronicled a year from the fighting at Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, to the British evacuation of Boston on March 17, 1776. Though thin tendrils reach back for brief accounts of activities before 1775 and after the evacuation, the effective narrative concentrates on that single year. *Valiant Ambition* spans a bit over four years, from Washington’s crushing defeat at New York City in the summer of 1776 through Arnold’s defection in September 1780. To keep within his organizing theme of the two central actors, Philbrick eliminates or inadequately addresses critical elements of the Revolution four years after Washington lost New York. He ignores important events and

gives others too little exposition to provide an interpretation of the Revolution and the foundation of an American republic.

In the Washington-and-Arnold construction, Washington, always composed, deferred to civilian authority, remained incorruptible and dignified, served from the beginning to the end of the war, and saved a revolution. He lost more battles than he won and frequently gave into his aggressive personality. Philbrick contends that because of his reversals in 1776, Washington “finally committed himself to fighting a defensive war” and “not get drawn into battle” (p. 104). But Washington abandoned that strategy at Brandywine, Germantown, and other actions including his itch in 1780 to squeeze the British in New York between his army and the French fleet.

Arnold, the brilliant battlefield tactician—perhaps the best America fielded—could not constrain his temper or his libido, or resist quarrelling with civilian authority or spending money he did not have. Badly injured, believing that Congress had ill-treated him, in need of money, newly married to a beautiful young woman who abetted his deceit, he planned to turn over West Point to the British, a move that, had it succeeded, Philbrick argues, might have lost the war and the Revolution. His treason instead, the author argues, provided the incident that greatly assisted Washington’s ability to rally the Congress, the country, and win the war. Philbrick describes the treason and the activities of John Andre as well as any part of this very readable work—but did Arnold’s treason provide Washington the leverage to win the war?

Despite the quality of the research, Philbrick falls victim of the persistent tyranny of Mercator’s late-sixteenth-century projection that put north at the top and south at the bottom of maps. In his treatment of Arnold on Lake Champlain, he has Carleton retreating to Canada going up the lake instead of down. He consistently repeats the same up-lake and down-lake misdirection. Mercator notwithstanding, the abundant, excellent maps throughout the text very much enhance the understanding of the events Philbrick describes.

In *Valiant Ambition* Nathaniel Philbrick has offered a highly readable account of aspects of the American Revolution from the spring of 1776 through the fall of 1780, buttressed by the deft use of research to tell a good story. His description of events and his analysis through Washington and Arnold as an organizing theme at once recommends the book but also constricts the focus of his lens.

H. NICHOLAS MULLER III

A student of Vermont’s past, H. Nicholas Muller III has written about the state in the period of the American Revolution most recently with John J. Duffy in their book, Inventing Ethan Allen (2014).

1777: Tipping Point at Saratoga

By Dean Snow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. xii, 440, \$34.95).

In the summer and fall of 1777, the young self-declared State of Vermont was tested by an invasion from Canada led by John Burgoyne. Vermonters reinforced forts Ticonderoga and Mount Independence, fought in the rearguard action at Hubbardton, played a decisive role at the Battle of Bennington, helped to surprise British-held Ticonderoga as part of Brown's Raid, and then joined with New Hampshire militia to cut off Burgoyne's retreat. So any new book about the campaign that ended with the surrender at Saratoga should interest readers of Vermont history, even if Vermont's role is not the focus.

Author Dean Snow is professor emeritus in anthropology at Penn State University and past president of the Society for American Archaeology. Earlier books include *The Iroquois* (1994) and *Archaeology of Native North America* (2009). In the 1970s as a young professor at the University of Albany, he oversaw excavations at Saratoga National Historical Park.

In an article at the online History News Network ("What We Can Learn When an Archaeologist Writes a History of the Turning Point in the American Revolution," <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/164083>), Snow praises Richard Ketchum's *Saratoga: Turning Point of America's Revolutionary War* and John Luzader's *Saratoga: A Military History of the Decisive Campaign of the American Revolution* as "fine works." He writes, "Their books freed me to concentrate on writing a more intimate story of what happened over the course of just thirty-two autumn days on a small patch of upstate New York." Snow sees himself as bringing the skills and attitudes of an archaeologist to the task of writing history. "Archaeologists tend to be detail people and compulsive about record keeping. . . . We are also detail people because we see the details left by the lives of people long gone."

Snow breaks his narrative into sections of a few sentences to a few pages in which events are seen largely through the eyes of one participant at a single time and place. He is able to feature people and incidents that might not stand out in a more traditional presentation. When this method is successful, it gives an immediacy to the account. Here are a few such moments:

American commander Horatio Gates fears momentarily that a wounded British officer taken prisoner is his wife's nephew.

Sir Francis Clerke, Burgoyne's secretary, who is wounded and a prisoner, argues the politics of independence with Gates and then calmly turns to a doctor and says, "I do not like the direction of my wound and I am desirous of knowing whether it is mortal or not" (pp. 278-279).

An American spy carries a dead sheep into the German camp and is trusted.

Patrick Henry's son John walks the battlefield, which is littered with corpses. He breaks his sword and throws the pieces to the ground.

Readers will find their own moments that reveal surprising aspects of the events that took place along the Hudson River from Stillwater to the village of Saratoga, today's Schuylerville, New York.

Snow's account is most effective away from the pitched battles of September 19 and October 7 and from the well-known quarrel between Gates and Benedict Arnold. Generations of historians have picked over and debated these topics, leaving little room for Snow to add much that is fresh. But when he discusses scouting expeditions and skirmishes in no man's land and focuses on the lives of obscure figures, the story of Saratoga becomes far more than two intense days and the dispute between ambitious men. Snow is always conscious of the setting of the sun and the rising of the moon. His account is shaped by fog and frost as the seasons change.

He includes occasional references to archaeological discoveries. What is the story behind the skeleton of a woman unearthed in the British Belcarres Redoubt? Why were the remains of British General Simon Fraser not found where they were thought to be buried? Disappointingly, these discussions, based on Snow's expertise, are too few and are sometimes consigned to the endnotes.

The book is rich in maps depicting the entire campaign as well as the Saratoga area. Eighteen battlefield maps show regimental positions, sometimes on an hour-by-hour basis. Unfortunately, these do not include topography, distance, or arrows to indicate troop movements. Modern roads, which snake through the national historical park, are nearly the only features to appear.

Like the maps, Snow's narrative provides a wealth of detail, but does not always succeed. Although he works at supplying context, he can lose sight of the big picture and seldom admits that Saratoga has its share of contradictory and unreliable sources. He paraphrases documents at length, even when an apt quote from a letter, journal, or memoir would reveal more of a participant's thinking than any amount of analysis. And at times it is difficult to tell whether he is summarizing or giving his own interpretation of a participant's thoughts and emotions.

In the final section, "The End Game," Snow relies heavily on official

records of the negotiations and on the writings of Baroness Riedesel, wife of the German commander, and James Wilkinson, a self-serving aide to General Gates, both of whom had a flair for telling a good story. The result is a conventional account of the surrender.

Vermont readers may be especially disappointed by *1777*. Snow's discussion of events east and north of Saratoga is frequently unclear and sometimes inaccurate. Most disturbingly, he insists five times that New Hampshire's John Stark was a Vermonter commanding Vermont militia (three times he gets it right). An error on such a basic fact of the Saratoga Campaign raises the question of how much more incorrect information is in the book.

Readers who are unfamiliar with Saratoga will first want to read other works before turning to *1777*. Those with a solid background in the American Revolution may find reasons to be wary of some of Snow's presentation. However, *1777* contains good material and moments that are memorable.

ENNIS DULING

Ennis Duling of East Poultney studies and writes about the American Revolution and Vermont in the nineteenth century. He is on the boards of the Mount Independence Coalition and the Poultney Historical Society.

Vermont Prohibition: Teetotalers, Bootleggers & Corruption

By Adam Krakowski (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, pp.144, paper, \$21.99).

As Vermont vies with Oregon to be number one in craft breweries per capita; and as craft cider and distilling operations spread across the state, it's hard to imagine times when these now ubiquitous drinks were illegal. Well yes, most of us have read (in fact and fiction) of the motorized races during national Prohibition, when liquor-laden—and armed—speedboats and heavy-chassis roadsters and trucks fled revenue agents on Lakes Memphremagog and Champlain and through the backwoods.

Now comes Adam Krakowski, in *Vermont Prohibition: Teetotalers, Bootleggers & Corruption*, to give us a lively and much fuller history of Vermont's 200-year-long moral and political conflict between excess, prohibition, and moderation. Krakowski, a fine arts conservator from

Quechee, comes to the task having completed in 2014 with Kurt Staudtler their book, *Vermont Beer: History of a Brewing Revolution*.

Early Vermont settlers acquired a taste for alcohol (in cider, beer, and liquor) well before Ethan Allen's era at the Catamount Tavern in Bennington. They drank cider on the farms and woodlots for carbohydrates, to hydrate, and because the available water was often unsafe. By 1820 there were 200 distilleries in the state. One Daniel Staniford even built a combined brewery and distillery a short distance from the University of Vermont in Burlington.

As consumption grew, so did the resulting human costs and pathologies of addiction and crime. In dismay and anger, local temperance groups merged with abolitionists and the Protestant Second Great Awakening revivalists to form a Vermont Society for the Promotion of Temperance.

Spurred on by passage of a prohibition law in Maine, Vermont enacted its own law against distilled spirits in 1852. There was no prohibition against hard cider because it was considered too difficult to police and as having value as a nutritional supplement. Wine for religious purposes also remained legal because it was, in the words of a mid-century temperance convention, "the divinely chosen emblem of Christ's body" (p. 43).

Vermont's subsequent fifty-two years of state-legislated prohibition, 1852-1904, would preview the difficulties and social damage of national Prohibition, 1919-1933.

It brought tragedy, most notoriously in Bristol, where a druggist substituted wood alcohol for grain alcohol in pint bottles and thirteen people died.

It brought comedy. In 1876, as beer tastes changed nationwide, and the much lighter, less-alcoholic lager beer spread across the states, Vermont authorities, wanting to know if the new drink was legally intoxicating, put a barrel of it on trial. After five doctors testified in the beer's defense, the jury, in five minutes, found the beer "Not guilty."

And it brought politics. In 1899, the famous anarchist Emma Goldman visited Barre to give four lectures. Before she completed her last lecture, she was thrown out of town, not for incendiary remarks but because, her Italian host said, "You caught the Mayor and Chief of Police in Mrs. Colettis' kitchen dead drunk" and had "seen their stakes in the brothels" (p. 66).

Eventually, in 1902 the people and their elected representatives tired of this broad hypocrisy and the loss of tax revenue. Led by Rutland businessman and gubernatorial candidate Percival Clement, they pushed for local option, where towns could decide for themselves.

Clement lost his race but local option passed and dozens of “wet” versus “dry” battles followed, town by town. Seventeen years later, in 1919, Clement found himself on the *wrong* side of social history when, as governor, he vetoed Vermont’s vote in favor of women’s suffrage because he believed that women were the backbone of the prohibition movement. That same year, the nation voted in the “noble experiment” of Prohibition. As in Vermont seventy years earlier, one set of evils replaced another, and forty-eight states descended into dark and often violent criminality.

To be sure, Vermont got federal attention and human resources to carry out the law, but even they were often out-manuevered by gangs and crime syndicates sending hundreds of thousands of gallons of booze through Vermont to the big markets of Boston and New York.

One peculiar way Vermonters evaded the law was in so-called “line houses” that straddled the Canada-Vermont border. Canadian hooch haulers carried the goods into the buildings and Americans removed the same liquor on the US side and skedaddled for their markets. The most famous line house was a combination brothel and hotel in Richford run by Lilian Miner, or “Queen Lil.”

The law allowed the production of up to 200 gallons of wine for home consumption. In Barre, a group of granite-worker families came together “by one great compelling thirst” to form The Company of Amateur Brewers to share experiences and recipes (p. 111).

Krakowski tops off his book with an appendix about Prohibition-era cocktails, laced with fruits and syrups to mask the flavor of young and raw liquor. Then he offers recipes from present-day Vermont bartenders, with their own versions of speakeasy favorites.

I have a few quibbles. I actually wanted more on the origins of the temperance movement in Vermont. The illustrations were good, and well chosen, except that some of them bled into the reverse pages. Some of the direct quotes are overly long and too discursive. But these are nits. The book is well laid out, with a good mix of social and political history, vivid illustrations, and lively anecdotes. I read it at one sitting.

BILL MARES

Bill Mares, a former teacher and legislator, is author or co-author of numerous books, including Making Beer. He has been a homebrewer for over forty years and is co-owner of the Burlington beer blendery, the House of Fermentology.

Farming & Feasting with the Robinsons

By Jesse Natha; drawings by Rowland Evans Robinson (Ferrisburgh, Vt.: Rokeby Museum, 2015, pp. 48, paper, \$15.00).

The Rokeby estate in Ferrisburgh looms large in many Vermonters' minds as a bona fide stop on the oft-mythologized Underground Railroad. Rokeby—now a museum, and on the register of National Historic Landmarks since 1997—was home to Rowland Thomas Robinson and his wife, Rachel Gilpin Robinson, nineteenth-century Quakers and abolitionists who gave shelter and employment to runaway slaves in several well-documented cases.

But Rokeby was first and foremost a working farm, and home to four generations of Robinsons. A thriving sheep farm in the early 1800s, Rokeby later diversified to include dairy production and apple cultivation. It is this face of Rokeby that is chronicled in *Farming & Feasting with the Robinsons*, published by the museum in 2015.

Fortunately for posterity, the farming and the feasting at Rokeby during the 1860s were well chronicled through the extraordinary pencil drawings of the Robinsons' son, Rowland Evans Robinson, and in a cache of family letters and diaries. These documents were mined for publication by Vermont freelance writer Jesse Natha for a series of seasonal essays (originally published in *Vermont's Local Banquet* magazine) and paired with Rowland Evans's drawings. The book, which also served as the catalog to the museum's 2015 exhibit—*The Farm: Drawings of Rowland Evans Robinson, 1850-1880*—chronicles life at Rokeby.

In well-crafted prose laced with excerpts from primary sources, Natha's essays capture the rhythm of the seasons and of farm life in the late nineteenth century. But it is Rowland Evans Robinson's drawings that are the highlight of this book. Working from his Rokeby home, Rowland E. was a regular contributor to both *Moore's Rural New Yorker* and *American Agriculturist*, prominent journals of his day. Drawn to fit a one- or two-column format of only a few inches in width and height, his renderings—which are enlarged for publication—depict the workings of the farm: sugaring, washing and shearing sheep, herding cows, haying and threshing. Despite the diminutive format, the artist captured extraordinary detail in each scene: individually rendered stones in a wall seen through the opening of the barn's "gangway"; the tines of a rake tossed aside by a worker who has set to threshing; a chicken's tail feathers; strands of hay spilling from a pitchfork; a kitten investigating a milk pail as a woman churns butter nearby.

The drawings, as Rokeby's Executive Director Jane Williamson points out in her introduction, are framed by the irony that Rowland Evans Robinson was not a happy (or particularly willing) farmer. He had left Vermont for New York City in the 1850s, eager to, in his own words, "*be somebody*" (p. 6), but was quickly reduced to selling cartoons to the comic papers. Disgusted by the low humor and low pay, he wound up back in Vermont within a few years. According to Williamson, he resented his role in the shadow of his older brother, which as he described it, was that of "a sort of privileged 'help' who can work . . . but whose opinions concerning the management of affairs are never consulted" (pp. 6-7). But by the late 1860s he was back in New York making contacts, and soon was traveling frequently to the city while ensconced on the family farm: drawing, hunting, and fishing as frequently as possible, and obviously observing—if not cheerfully participating in—the rigors of farm life.

The point of the farm was, of course, to produce goods: those for sale (wool, butter, apples) and those for consumption by the humans and animals in residence. Thus much of the chatter—at least that chronicled in letters, diaries, and other documents—is about food. Rowland Evans Robinson's wife, Anna Stevens Robinson, recorded in her 1873 canning log that she had put by 20 quarts of cherries, 22 quarts of blueberries, 16 quarts of tomatoes, and three bushels of sweet corn. She chronicled her fourteen-year-old daughter's success at squirrel shooting ("we are cooking six of her game today," p. 38).

Ann Robinson Minturn—sister to Rowland E. and brother George G. Robinson—wrote frequently about food and food preservation from her home in Waterloo, New York, advising her brothers on the best methods of pickling cucumbers and making currant jelly ("it would be very useful in sickness," p. 29), and noting her dread of the "mess and grease" of the butchering season (p. 45).

Mentions of berries—cultivated and wild—pears, apples, black walnuts, milk, butter (the Robinsons got their cheese from neighbors), root vegetables, melons, tomatoes, beans, corn, cider, fish, and meats—fresh, smoked, and salted—are abundant.

Home cooks interested in trying the four seasonal recipes included in this volume should be aware that they are best used more for inspiration than followed as precise formulae. (One caution worth noting: The paraffin method of canning currant jelly is not in accordance with modern food safety practices.) But these are quibbles; it is enough for most of us to imagine the fragrance of an apple cake baking in the Robinson kitchen, or the tot of rum enjoyed by the fire.

"Nothing is so good as that which comes from Vermont," a homesick

Ann Minturn wrote to her brother George in January 1863 (p. 48). *Farming & Feasting with the Robinsons* goes a long way to confirming that sentiment.

MARIALISA CALTA

Marialisa Calta is a food journalist and cookbook author based in Calais, Vermont. Her work has appeared in The New York Times and many other newspapers, and in food magazines such as Gourmet and Saveur.

Seven Years of Grace: The Inspired Mission of Achsa W. Sprague

By Sara Rath (Barre: Vermont Historical Society, 2016, pp. 454, paper, \$24.95).

Sara Rath has created something special with *Seven Years of Grace*. Although this is a work of fiction, it is also an incredibly well-grounded history of an important slice of nineteenth-century American life, especially for women. The story of Achsa Sprague (1827–1862), told from the perspective of her sister, Celia Sprague Steen, reveals all the turmoil and contradictions of female life in that era. Indeed, the unfolding story of the parallel lives of the two sisters traces the range of prospects and expectations of actual women of the time. Sprague’s experiences are more eccentric and unusual. After a long bout of painful illness as a young girl, her “miraculous” cure eventually positioned her to become an itinerant lecturer who addressed audiences on topics as varied as Spiritualism, Abolition, religious fervor, and women’s rights. She also was a kind of entertainer who performed on stage as a medium whose lectures were often delivered in a trance. This unusual trajectory reveals a central conundrum of women’s lives in the nineteenth century: They were expected to be compliant, nurturing, and were considered naturally (physically) weak. At the same time these qualities were seen as feminine virtues that perfectly positioned them as the spiritual and emotional backbone of their families and communities. Purity made them spiritually more qualified than men; their nurturing disposition made them the appropriate defenders of the sacred hearth of home. While this was not the intention, some women embraced the supposed superiority of female virtue and used it to assume greater power and authority within their families and, even more bold, outside in their communities. But it was a difficult balance to maintain. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for instance, had to maintain the superficial appearance of mid-

dle-class gentility even though she purposefully pursued a radical feminist agenda that included suffrage and women's property rights.

Sprague's life as a celebrity was no less difficult. She railed against the constraints of conventional femininity: "woman must either be a slave or a butterfly" because in her opinion, women were simply never allowed to be more (p. 92). Indeed, she went on to observe that women (like herself) were in fact capable of more than demure behavior and chaste thoughts. She asked: "When will woman learn what it is to be true to herself?" (p. 92). Sprague's peripatetic lifestyle and its complications provide insight into the struggle of women who chose to "act out of the beaten track marked centuries ago for her to tread" (p. 92). And it was a precarious existence. While her popularity as a speaker and medium was celebrated by many and seemed to support her, it was also just as vociferously decried by others. She was regularly exposed to ridicule and sometimes worse treatment by her detractors.

Another facet of Sprague's story is the tension between her outspoken denunciations of the "free love" philosophy espoused by some Spiritualists, even as she eventually engaged in exactly that kind of illicit relationship with shipping magnate and fellow traveler John Crawford. Underlying all of the story is the constant struggle with ill health that lent credence to her abilities as a medium, but also made her life extremely difficult.

Although the narrative provides less extensive descriptions of her life, Celia Sprague Steen is a perfect contrast to Achsa Sprague. Despite Steen's admiration for her sister's feminist philosophy, she followed a more conventional path. Steen explains this by casting herself as the plodding sister with somewhat dull wits. Yet, she is the principal narrator of the novel and we learn much of her sister's story in her voice, interspersed with Sprague's own writings. At the same time, Steen tells her own tale in an understated, but curiously vivid contrast. Urged on by Sprague to pursue the life of freedom they both desired, Steen left her sister and their childhood home for the wider world beyond Vermont.

As a young unmarried woman, Steen made her way through itinerant teaching positions. Social conventions required her to live with an established family to maintain her respectability, and likely because she would not have been able to live on her own with the meager wages paid to young female teachers. Over time, she boarded with several families who treated her as an extra daughter needing guidance. One such family, the Adamses, eventually convinced her to join them when they moved west. Through them, she found her way to Wisconsin and her eventual marriage to Morris Steen. This event connected her to the kind of life that many nineteenth-century women expected. Steen's life on

the Wisconsin farm and the devotion of her husband seem to have left her with a feeling of mild shame; she settled for what her beloved sister eschewed.

This attitude comes across in the way that Rath has shaped Steen's observations in the text. Steen avoided revealing her more orthodox impulses to her sister—her fascination with several beaux, for instance. Moreover, rather than being scandalized by Sprague's outlandish life, she seems to have been embarrassed by her own conservative choices.

Rath's depiction of the lives of Achsa Sprague and her sister Celia Steen in novel form is firmly rooted in the historical background of the period. This is because the author creatively yet meticulously developed the entire story out of a rich collection of materials left behind by the two sisters. Through the Sprague/Steen correspondence, the letters of fans and critics, published and unpublished poetry and writings, genealogical data, and other careful research from Vermont to Wisconsin, Rath has provided the framework that brings together a coherent and compelling story. Wherever possible the text draws on the written words of Sprague, Steen, and others such as John Crawford. This attention to historical detail and their actual words is also coupled with a masterful use of language that evokes the speech patterns and linguistic customs of the time. For those who like a good story, well told, with a foundation in solid research, *Seven Years of Grace* is an appropriate choice.

SUSAN OUELLETTE

Susan Ouellette is Professor of History and American Studies at Saint Michael's College. She is the author of several books, including the forthcoming An Extraordinary Ordinary Woman: The Journal of Phebe Orvis (2017).

The Sleeping Sentinel. Songs of Vermont, vol. 4

By Dan Lindner (2016, compact disc, \$17.00).

Over the past forty years, Montpelier-based musician “Banjo” Dan Lindner has made a name for himself as one of the featured performers in Banjo Dan and the Midnight Plowboys, Vermont's longest-running bluegrass combo; as one of the first accomplished bluegrass-style banjo pickers in the Green Mountain State; and also as one of a very select group of Vermont musicians who specialize in writing songs about well-researched local history topics. *I'll Take the Hills*, Lindner's first recorded collection of Vermont history songs, was released in 1987, and among the many recordings he has produced with the Plowboys and as a member of the Sky Blue Boys (a duo act that also features his

multi-instrumentalist brother Willy) are three more “Songs of Vermont” recordings: *The Catamount is Back* (1994), *Mysteries and Memories* (2006), and the just-released CD, *The Sleeping Sentinel*, which is the subject of this review, and, according to Lindner, the final release in his Vermont history series.

The first nine tracks on *The Sleeping Sentinel* are concerned with a single episode in Vermont history: the story of William Scott, a Groton farmer and a private in Company K, Third Vermont Infantry. Scott became one of the most famous Vermonters who served in the Union Army by being sentenced to death in 1861 after being discovered fast asleep while on sentry duty, and then by being pardoned by President Lincoln at the very last minute. Scott immediately rejoined the ranks, and died in battle a few months later while trying to rescue some of his wounded comrades at Lee’s Mills, Virginia. He is commemorated as a hero in his home town of Groton. An impressive granite monument commemorating Scott’s service to the Union was dedicated in June 1936 by the Grand Army of the Republic, and can be found on U.S. Route 302 about five miles west of Groton Village, close to the site of Scott’s farmstead.

There are many “St. J.” connections in Dan Lindner’s *Sleeping Sentinel* project. Some of these connections may just be coincidence, but it would be difficult to find a more apt match of story and place: William Scott was a member of a Vermont militia mustered out of St. Johnsbury, and St. Johnsbury is also the home of Bob Amos, a talented bluegrass instrumentalist in his own right. Amos co-produced the recording with Lindner, and also recorded, mixed, and mastered the album at his Stork Brook studio in St. Johnsbury. Amos also sings lead on some of the album’s songs, including “The Last Log Drive,” a catchy Lindner composition about the “good old days” of logging and the townspeople gathering at the riverbank to watch the loggers float logs downriver to Vermont sawmills one last time. Banjo Dan’s sparkling banjo work and the lovely “family harmony” singing of Amos and his daughter Sarah (another member of the great Vermont bluegrass band, Catamount Crossing) make this number one of the most memorable tracks on *The Sleeping Sentinel*.

Lindner’s musical tableau narrating the tale of William Scott’s service in the Union Army features a wide variety of musical styles. His original material (with an adaptation of “Battle Hymn of the Republic” thrown in for good measure) ranges from the upbeat and rollicking marching song “Company K” to mournful harmonica solos, recitations with guitar accompaniment, and a classic bluegrass-gospel-style composition, “When the Toil is Over,” that features, once again, the lovely

vocals of Bob and Sarah Amos and other members of Catamount Crossing. Lindner never ceases to impress the listener with the many types of instrumental and vocal music he has mastered over almost fifty years of performing and composing.

Although the musical tale of William Scott takes center stage on this recording, there are many good reasons to focus on the other seven tracks of *The Sleeping Sentinel*. The pieces of music on “Side B” of this disc are subtitled “More Vermont Tales,” and include, in addition to the “Last Log Drive” mentioned previously: fiddle tunes; a ballad about an unexpected and unexplained explosion that occurred in Berlin (Vermont) in August 1932; a sentimental look back at growing up in St. Albans in the 1950s; “Ascutney Launch,” a bluegrass instrumental dedicated to Lindner’s love of hang gliding; a remembrance of nineteenth-century horse-powered boating; and, for good measure, another Civil War tale concerning a murderous confrontation between Vermont Lieutenant A. L. Sanborn, the commander of a regiment of black Union troops, and Dr. David Wright, a Norwich University graduate who was a secessionist through and through. Many of these compositions are framed by the six necessary musical ingredients of classic bluegrass: five-string banjo, fiddle, mandolin, flattop acoustic guitar, standup bass, and high harmony singing. The result is both educational and a joy to listen to.

One of the most poignant story-songs included on *The Sleeping Sentinel* is the tragic saga of Romaine Tenney, a proud and stubborn farmer from Ascutney who died in flames in 1963 after he set fire to his barns and lifelong home rather than be displaced during the construction of Interstate Highway 91. In relating this sad tale, Lindner succeeds by inspiring some big-picture reflection, honoring Tenney and his obstinate ways while at the same time gently reminding the listener of the many Vermonters who have been forced out of their homes in the name of “justifiable progress,” whether the goal was the construction of a new road, urban renewal, or some other “improvement.”

Lindner ties up this musical project neatly with another lovely song and an accompanying “last waltz.” “Green Mount” accompanies the listener on a contemplative walk through Montpelier’s Green Mount Cemetery, one of Vermont’s most picturesque burial grounds. In this musical tale, Lindner describes the narrator as “an old man walking with his memories,” who stops to reflect before a gravestone that will someday mark his own resting place. Brother Willy Linder takes it home with a mandolin waltz, and fiddler Phil Bloch echoes the melody as the song and the album ends.

The Sleeping Sentinel is a masterwork of Vermont songwriting and

musicianship. Whether or not this ends up being Dan Lindner's last "songs of Vermont" project, he has reason to be proud.

ROBERT J. RESNIK

Robert J. Resnik is an outreach and reference librarian at the Fletcher Free Library in Burlington. He is also the longtime host of "All the Traditions," a weekly folk and world music program on Vermont Public Radio, and is the author of Legendary Locals of Burlington, Vermont (2013).

My Vermonters: The Northeast Kingdom, 1800-1940

By Roger Lee Emerson (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Grimsay Press, 2016, pp. xxviii, 387, paper, \$30.00).

Roger Lee Emerson is a retired academic specializing in the Scottish Enlightenment. His published works include *Academic Patronage in the Scottish Enlightenment: Glasgow, Edinburgh and St. Andrews Universities* (2008) and *An Enlightened Duke: The Life of Archibald Campbell, Earl of Ilay, 3rd Duke of Argyll* (2013). His current book, *My Vermonters: The Northeast Kingdom 1800-1940* is a departure from his previous publications. Indeed, it is a quirky, highly personal book of essays based on the collection of primary source materials from Vermont's Northeast Kingdom that Emerson accumulated over the years. Some of the essays are about his family, some are about their neighbors, and three odd chapters are about acquiring possessions, naming practices, and the meetings of the Georgia, Vermont, GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) post.

Emerson was born in Barton, Vermont, in 1934. His uncle, Lee Emerson, was governor of Vermont from 1951 to 1955. Emerson's father was also politically active in the Kingdom until his untimely death in 1939. It is the female members of his family, however, who played the most prominent role in the author's life, and he highlights their stories and experiences in the book. Emerson became a part-time Vermont resident after 1946, and later came back to the Kingdom every summer to visit. While visiting, Emerson spent time with family (his mother lived until 1994) and toured the local roads, occasionally stopping at yard sales. It was at these yard sales that he picked up the diaries, ledgers, and account and meeting books, which, added to his family's extensive archive, provide the material for the present book.

As Emerson says in his book, he spent years wondering what to do with this collection. He wanted it to be institutionally preserved even-

tually, but in the meantime, pondered writing something based on it. He knew he wanted to create “a personal statement of sorts, a reflection of people and...what I would like remembered” (p. xxv). After a false start, he decided in 2012 to write “about members of my own family, their friends, and a few others” in order to “explore some of their lives and to put them in a wider perspective” (p. xxiv).

Emerson wants to avoid the hagiographical shortcomings he perceives pervading much local history. So, instead of celebrating, Emerson seeks to highlight the “quiet, untold miseries and disappointments” of life in the Kingdom (p. xxiv). He attributes much misery to family dynamics—his own. “Not all my folks were nice. Not all were admirable, few notable,” he declares (p. xxv). Emerson’s book attempts to come to terms with the outcome of his parents’ unhappy marriage and the untimely death of his father when Emerson was five.

Emerson tries but ultimately fails to convey a sense of acceptance with the legacy of his childhood. We learn much about the tyrannical rule of his paternal grandmother over his parents and his mother’s disappointments and depression. There is also much on the circumstances and immediate aftermath of his father’s death. We do not, however, learn much about the author affected by these events. Instead, Emerson leaves us with a vague summary and the observation that he has often wondered what kind of a man his father would have become had he lived, and, Emerson adds with pathos, “what I might have become” (p. 328).

Emerson ruminates on family dynamics at the beginning and the end of his book. Chapters 1, 2, and 12 provide the details. Chapter 3 is pertinent, as it examines the material culture and socioeconomic standing of his ancestors. Chapter 4, “What’s in a Name?” is, however, a very odd essay exploring naming patterns and is a jarring departure from what has been presented thus far in the book. In chapters 5 through 10, Emerson shifts the focus to four nineteenth-century Kingdom residents. Jabez Page was a wool and clothier entrepreneur; Leonard Watson was a “Rail-hand, farmer, and Jack-of-all-trades” (p. 135); Page’s granddaughter, Mary Abby Tenney, was a teenager immersed in the educational and social activities of her Civil War-era community; and Robbie Rogers, Emerson’s great-uncle, made his way through childhood and into early manhood only to die at age twenty-six. Emerson tries to integrate these biographies into his story, but they do not contribute to the real story he seeks to tell. They are an interlude. The only common connection among these chapters is kinship and that they are Kingdom based. They act as filler.

Chapter 11 is another extraneous essay, but is a little gem, illuminating

how a small-town GAR post functioned. Years ago, Emerson bought the minute book of meetings of Glover, Vermont's, GAR Post No. 16, and his essay based upon it is superb. Anyone interested in the legacy of the Civil War on small-town life in Vermont should read it. It is unfortunate Emerson did not rework this chapter and submit it as an article to *Vermont History*, as its appearance in his present book will limit its dissemination.

In sum, Emerson has done an admirable job of collecting an archive of primary source material upon which to base a book. His delivery of the result, however, is disappointing. Many of the chapters are material-driven. The primary sources control the narrative instead of supporting developed themes. Emerson has a habit of interjecting commentary on present-day concerns into the text and he includes too many Scottish examples and experiences, which seem out of place in a book about Vermont. *My Vermonters* would have benefited from a heavy editorial hand helping to shape it. Emerson presents us *his* Vermonters in his own way. As such, it will be a difficult read for others.

CAMERON CLIFFORD

Cameron Clifford, an independent scholar living in West Hartford, Vermont, has written two books and three articles on Vermont topics.

John H. Burdakin: Railroader

By Don L. Hofsommer (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016, pp. ix, 110, \$29.95).

Railroads have a long and fabled history in the United States and Canada, but they have experienced a dramatic decline since the 1960s. The postwar boom in automobile and air travel has reduced passenger rail travel to a mere shadow of its former self. Freight trains are far greater in abundance, but they too have suffered and their number has shrunk over the past half century. The massive switch of the economies of North America from heavy industry to a service-based activities and competition from trucking firms have forced a strong reduction in freight by rail. The decades of the 1960s and 1970s saw the greatest crisis facing the railroad industry, as corporations like Penn Central went bankrupt, freight and passenger services, diminished and organizations like Amtrak and Conrail came into being.

Don. L. Hofsommer, an oft-published railway historian who teaches at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, has chronicled the difficult

times facing the railway industry and its bitter struggle for survival through a comprehensive biography of one of the leading railroad executives of the late twentieth century, John H. Burdakin (1922-2014), one of the most successful and respected railway executives of his era.

John Burdakin had a long and distinguished career in railroading. After military service in World War II and graduating from MIT in 1948, he served as a young executive with the Pennsylvania Railroad. His distinguished service there led to his appointment as chief manager of the Panama Canal Railroad in the Canal Zone in 1960 and 1961. He later served as president of the Detroit-based Grand Trunk Corporation from 1974 to 1986, before retiring as vice chairman of the Grand Trunk Corporation in 1987. The Grand Trunk Corporation is the subsidiary holding company for Canadian National Railway's properties in the United States. It is named for CN's subsidiary, Grand Trunk Western Railroad, which controlled the Vermont Central Railway for much of the later twentieth century.

The focus of the book is on the work and personality of John Burdakin. He was very much a hands-on type of manager who was always in the field, constantly visiting all of the railroad's properties to assess the mood of the workers, the quality of the rail cars and equipment, and the need for changes and upgrades. "He would labor to create an atmosphere of encouragement, innovation and ingenuity that over time would motivate subordinates to become problem solvers willing to attack large apparently intractable problems" (p. 25). He saw problems before they arose and was able to adopt reforms and make innovative moves before the problems grew out of hand. Hofsommer says that Burdakin was a true agent of change who modernized his railway network and made it far more efficient and cost effective. Other rail lines either shrunk their operations or went out of business, but Burdakin saw his operations grow and thrive, a rarity in railroad circles.

One of the Grand Trunk Western Railroad's most troubled lines was Central Vermont. The main problem was that the economy of New England had changed by the 1980s and the number of traffic-producing businesses was increasingly scarce. By late 1982, Burdakin concluded that CV had become "a negative value from both an earnings and cash-flow standpoint" (p. 87). CV had recorded a \$28.9-million-dollar loss that year. Burdakin put CV on the market for \$5 million, but even at that bargain price he received only three bids, none of which had much promise. Burdakin decided that the Grand Trunk Western Railroad should keep CV. He and his colleagues organized an innovative overnight "Rocket" service as early as 1978 to move goods between Montreal and the Boston region, which lasted through 1984. Other innovations were

attempted that improved CV's business prospects briefly during that time period.

Attempts at fully reviving CV after Burdakin retired in 1987 brought moderate success, but after the Canadian National Railway became a private company in 1995, it sold the CV property in an attempt to streamline operations. Today, most of the former CV trackage remains in use as the New England Central Railroad, part of Genesee & Wyoming's family of short lines.

Don Hofsommer has produced a well-written and deeply researched biography of John Burdakin and his times. Burdakin entered the rail business during the "dark days" of the 1960s and 1970s, his tenure extending through the periods of deregulation and industry consolidation that followed. Burdakin's story is also the story of railroading during this most difficult period. Hofsommer's scholarly work is more than just a study of one man, albeit an important individual. It is also the history of American and Canadian railroading at this difficult time.

DANIEL A. MÉTRAUX

Daniel A. Métraux is Professor Emeritus and Adjunct Professor of Asian Studies at Mary Baldwin University in Staunton, Virginia. He has written numerous books and articles on Japanese and East Asian history, politics, and religion. He was founding editor of the Hazen Road Dispatch, the journal of the Greensboro (Vermont) Historical Society.

Vermont Moments: A Celebration of Place, People, and Everyday Miracles

By M. Dickey Drysdale (Montpelier, Vt.: The Author, 2015, pp vii, 180, paper, \$16.00).

Living at some distance from the center of Orange County, I seldom ever saw an issue of the *Randolph Herald*, much less read the elegant prose of M. Dickey Drysdale. After sampling his wares in *Vermont Moments*, I regret that, very much. Drysdale was the editor and publisher of *The Herald of Randolph* from 1971 to 2015, fulfilling a legacy that began with his namesake and grandfather, Maurice Dickey, editor of *The Springfield Union* in Massachusetts. Newspaper ink is genuinely in his blood—both his father and grandfather were editors. Many of the pieces in *Vermont Moments* were published in *The Herald* and elsewhere. Some have never before been in print. They include editorials, essays, reviews, and poems, and all are worth reading.

Drysdale's eulogy for Harold Farr and his rope tow evokes powerful memories of a time when all Vermont kids could go skiing during a winter school vacation. A town ski hill with a rope tow powered by the power take-off of a farm tractor was common and responsible for shredding countless mittens and gloves, but ensured that local kids could enjoy a pastime for which Vermont is justifiably famous. The piece is evocative without being sentimental. With over forty years as a journalist, it is no wonder that Drysdale's work reminds one of the furniture produced by an expert craftsman. It seems effortless in its clean lines and spare beauty.

There are some joyful surprises here, such as Drysdale's report on the day in 1972 when the future electronic music pioneer Laurie Anderson found herself in Rochester, Vermont. The twenty-five-year-old purveyor of the avant-garde organized an experimental concert of automobile horns conducted on the village green. Music maven Drysdale reports it all with wit, intelligence, and a fundamental appreciation of the flamboyant spectacle:

No less curious than the audience was the music. Written especially for the tonal capabilities of the exact autos represented, it was limited to seven notes; and because Fords all tooted in thirds, the harmonic construction was limited.

Laurie Anderson, in particular, by her two offerings, has been catapulted to recognition as the world's foremost composer of works for automotive orchestra.

In a particularly stunning touch, her "Concerto for Landrover with Six-Cylinder Back-Up" ended with a full chorus of pitch, rising to a dramatic crescendo—an effect with which city residents may be familiar but which in the verdant Vermont setting achieved startling drama.

His account of the music-savvy crowd at Marlboro, preferring to honor genius over celebrity, is also wise and poignant. In 1967, discerning concert-goers at the famous Vermont music festival paid homage to cellist Pablo Casals while expressing relative indifference toward Hubert Humphrey, the vice president of the United States. Drysdale's understated reporting wryly expresses approval at the audience's perceptive judgement.

But it is his eulogies that are especially well wrought. Drysdale knows this terrain very well and is able to write affectionately about his subjects without seeming maudlin. In fact, I found myself pining for people I had never met, especially the eccentric Charley Spooner, who died on his farm in Bethel in 1988. Charley Spooner, in his 89 years, had never spent a night away from home. "Whether it was literally true that Spooner never in 80 years slept off the farm property is not certain, but it might well have been. Spooner liked to tell of attending his brother's funeral in St. Albans and hurrying back to Spooner Road to keep his record intact."

Drysdale writes with obvious affection for the characters that populate his narratives and his life. This collection extols the small wonders of Vermont in a delightful way.

PAUL HELLER

Paul Heller writes local history features for the Barre-Montpelier Times-Argus newspaper.

Organic Revolutionary: A Memoir of the Movement for Real Food, Planetary Healing, and Human Liberation

By Grace Gershuny (n.p.: Joes Brook Press, 2016, pp. 251, paper, \$16.00).

Grace Gershuny brings a Vermont perspective to the growth of the organic food movement in America, as she spent most of the period from 1970 to the present—the time span covered by this book—in Vermont. The book is an informative account of the movement from a very personal perspective. Many of the events and people she chronicles will be familiar to those readers who have been involved with what the author calls the “modern organic movement.” For readers who are less familiar yet curious about this history, Gershuny’s narrative should prove informative and thought provoking.

Since Grace Gershuny was involved in some critical moments and efforts in the movement’s evolution, her observations are historically meaningful. Gershuny states that she does not intend the book as an academic treatise, and it is not. It is a well-organized chronological account of her personal journey in the organic movement, including a detailed discussion of the development of the national organic certification program by the United States Department of Agriculture, in which Gershuny played a key role. *Organic Revolutionary* provides a thoughtful introduction to the ecological, legal, and philosophical substantive issues involved in the development of the organic movement and organic certification standards. The annotated bibliography and list of relevant websites provide a good guide for readers who wish to further pursue the topic.

Early in the book, Gershuny provides a succinct introduction to the early-twentieth-century roots of the organic movement in Europe and the United States, including such figures as Rudolph Steiner, Sir Albert Howard, and J. I. Rodale. Anyone wishing to understand the organic

movement fully will benefit from a discussion of these origins, and the book provides a nuanced overview. Throughout the book Gershuny clearly establishes her commitment to and belief in the organic movement, but she does not shy away from pointing out some of the philosophical contradictions and conceptual problems of the movement's origins and history. An example is Gershuny's discussion of "organic's little-known eco-fascist roots" (pp. 17-20), where she states that the "political and social tributaries of the modern organic movement in North America also spring from some peculiarly American forms of religious fundamentalism and anti-intellectual . . . sentiment" (p. 19).

The author chronicles her participation during the late 1970s and early 1980s in the development of the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) and her involvement with the New Alchemy Institute and the Institute for Social Ecology at Goddard College, among others. These experiences provide a first-hand account of the impact the thinking and programs of these organizations had on the developing organic movement.

One of the most valuable contributions of Gershuny's book is her description of the various debates, conflicts, and policy controversies that developed as the movement progressed. For example, in Gershuny's discussion of the beginnings of the "Organic Industry" in the mid-1980s, when groups of small organic farmers recognized they were becoming an "industry" with all the complexities and angst this realization produced, she identifies several important debates. Two of these were the question of laboratory testing and the origin of materials versus agronomic responsibility. Of the first debate she states, "as a result, nobody in the industry would again advocate for the use of product quality criteria as a requirement for organic certification. The 'organically produced' label would thereafter be explained, not as a guarantee of safer, more nutritious food, but as a description of how the product was produced" (p. 84). Of the second debate on the origin of materials versus agronomic responsibility, she writes that it "finally and irrevocably moved the emphasis of organic away from the level of soil health, human health, and ecosystem health and into the realm of consumer perceptions" (p. 85). Gershuny's discussions of these various debates on criteria and principles of the organic movement are the strongest elements of the book, and she identifies and frames the issues that had to be addressed as the movement evolved.

The latter half of the book deals with the development and early implementation of the National Organic Program at USDA from 1994 through the early 2000s. The Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 created the National Organic Program that Gershuny joined in 1994, after

the Clinton Administration finally provided funds to begin organizing and implementing the program. Gershuny's role was to help draft the regulations for the National Organic Program. Through the prism of her personal perspective and journey one gets a realistic feel for the bureaucratic process, conflicted points of view, and the myriad organizations and businesses that made up the mix of forces engaged in the effort. And she provides important information on the scientific and agricultural production questions related to developing the organic standards.

One strength of Gershuny's approach is the engaging observations she makes on the conflicts and her own self-reflections regarding her involvement in the process. For example, the purpose of the organic legislation was market regulation. The legislation, "while it does help protect the public from misrepresented products . . . is not there for the purpose of protecting public health and safety, but rather to protect the industry being regulated from 'substandard' goods entering the market" (p. 130). Coupling this intent with the need to define what was "organic" created the basis for much conflict, and Gershuny forcefully describes the angst this process caused her as well as the attacks from the organic community that she experienced. "I was plagued for a long time by the question of why people with whom I shared a commitment to the bigger picture [of] organic values had launched such an extreme attack on my work. For the most part I wrote it off to a general arrogance, coupled with ignorance about how government works and a sort of ideological blindness that is common to both left and right. They believed whatever their personal news sources told them; there was virtually nothing out there to suggest it might be otherwise. . . . Of course, if I had thought that the USDA was actually proposing to do what the leading activists claimed, I would have been outraged too" (p. 161).

While Gershuny's life narrative often reduces the clarity of the organic movement discussion, the personal perspective sometimes does add nuance to the complexity of the movement's history as well as the larger societal context. Much of the personal story may only be of interest to the reader who knows some of the personalities discussed. And the unrelated personal facts and descriptions of life's problems add little to the historical narrative. Nonetheless, *Organic Revolutionary* is a helpful addition to the growing literature on the organic movement and is of particular interest to those who view it through Vermont eyes of the 1970s and 1980s.

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