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# HISTORY



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“Will’s Panther Club”:  
Reverend William J. Ballou,  
The Irrepressible and  
Uncompromising Order of  
Pantherites, and the Chester, Vermont,  
Catamount-Sighting Controversy,  
1934–1936

*“Nothing since the last national  
election has stirred such a flood  
of conflicting opinions as has this  
panther controversy”*

By THOMAS L. ALTHERR

Claims about a catamount sighting in March, 1934 propelled Chester, Vermont to the center of a controversy about whether panthers had returned to the state’s wilds. For the next three years panther backers, “pantherites,” and skeptics argued pointedly, and often humorously, over the matter. The debate drove the *Bellows Falls Times* to declare on May 10, 1934, “Nothing since the last national election has stirred such a flood of conflicting opinions as has this panther controversy.” At the end of the story, the paper went into more detail: “Men, and women too, throughout this section of Windsor county have risen in violent support or denial of the existence of a panther. Scores of people report having seen the animal in Chester, Reading, Cavendish, and Weathersfield. Others are just as certain that these people saw a bobcat, or perhaps a large dog. But those who have seen and heard panthers just won’t be denied.”<sup>1</sup>

This lively dispute had arisen over a Chester Congregationalist minister and scoutmaster, some of his Boy Scouts, and their plaster cast of

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a suspicious large feline pawprint. Panther advocates received a big boost in 1934, when Reverend William J. Ballou discovered what he claimed were catamount tracks in that southeastern Vermont township. The find and ensuing debate prompted Ballou's backers to form an organization, the Irrepressible and Uncompromising Order of Pantherites; induced the Rutland *Herald* to offer a one hundred dollar reward for proof of the animal, and drew a Boston newspaper into the fray. Experienced hunters and outdoorsmen challenged the official assumptions of scientists and game department personnel that the panther was extinct in Vermont. Supporters of Ballou recounted their own brushes with catamounts, recent and past, and regaled readers and listeners with previous hunts of the notorious beast in Vermont history. Intraregional friction, much of it good-natured, surfaced among Vermont newspapers and between Bostonians and Vermonters. Some critics and wags blamed overzealous bureaucracy of the New Deal for the sighting fracas. But worries about the effects of a real panther on tourism also emerged, reflecting anxieties over environmental and cultural changes affecting Vermont in the 1930s. Even though the fuss about a Chester panther faded by 1937, the argument had already outlined the dimensions of the debate for future sightings controversies and demonstrated the significant emotional appeal the catamount had for Vermonters.

The controversy was hardly new in twentieth-century Vermont. Long a symbol of the rugged wilderness qualities of Vermont and ferocity of its early settlers, the actual catamount, however, was the target of relentless campaigns to rid the agricultural countryside of this and other predators. Bounties from the 1770s onward induced hunters to shoot any of the felines on sight. After the Civil War, three major catamount hunts, in Weathersfield in 1867, West Wardsboro in 1875, and the most celebrated one, in Barnard in 1881, captured public attention. For reasons still unclear, Vermonters and state officials convinced themselves that the "Barnard Monster" was the last one within the state and settled on a complacent assertion that the panther was extirpated.<sup>2</sup> Sporadic claims of catamount sightings, however, peppered the period since the death of the "last" one in 1881. For example, Carl Kelley and a group of St. Albans hunters allegedly shot a catamount in 1914 in Belvidere Basin, but sold the hide to a St. Albans fur dealer, who likewise was unaware of the supposed extinct status of the species.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Perk Angwin, a longtime outdoors writer for the *Barre Times*, claimed to have killed a catamount at East Orange in 1923, but he buried the decomposing carcass without thinking twice that the occurrence was unusual. "At that time I did not realize that it was rare in Vermont," Angwin later wrote.<sup>4</sup> These killings remained unverified or escaped the press attention that



*William Ballou and his Boy Scouts, 1934. Photograph by William J. Ballou, courtesy of Hubbard and Patricia K. Ballou.*

the Barnard hunt had enjoyed. No one, no governmental agency, zoologist, nor newspaper, raised the issue for serious investigation. Naturalists concurred with the game department opinion that the species was absent from the state and New England in general. Whatever fond memories the catamount had for Vermonters who recalled Stephen Fay's Catamount Tavern in Bennington, Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys, or other earlier renditions of the animal's image, the feline seemed mostly out of sight and out of mind during the fifty years after the Barnard shooting.

Then during the mid-1930s, with the nation sunk in the depression, the prospect of free-roaming catamounts resurfaced. On March 24, 1934, Ballou, a scoutmaster, was hiking with some of his Boy Scout troop near Steadman Hill, a 2,308-foot peak in the northwestern part of the township of Chester. The party spotted tracks of some large feline species and, with some difficulty, made a plaster cast. Ballou, who had lived in Wyoming in 1883 and encountered cougars on his father's cattle ranch there, was certain that he and his scouts had just found the tracks of a catamount. Whether or not Ballou himself or his scouts knew of the "official" claims of the cat's absence is unclear. The minister dropped a casual remark about the tracks to a friend, who then relayed the news

to the Associated Press.<sup>5</sup> Stories of the alleged discovery popped up in several Vermont newspapers and the *Boston Evening Transcript* on March 28th and 29th. "Panther Tracks as Large as Horse's Hoof Marks Found" announced the St. Johnsbury *Caledonian Record*. The other papers noted that the tracks were ten to twelve feet apart, remarked that this was the first panther in memory for many of the area's residents (although some recalled the panther shot at nearby Downers in 1867), and speculated that extreme cold had driven the beast down out of the hills.<sup>6</sup> On the 29th and 30th, papers in neighboring Bellows Falls, Windsor, and Springfield delivered a bit more detail, adding that the scoutmaster had loaded his .32 six-gun "for he had an idea that a pussey [sic] of that size would not be satisfied with a diet of mice."<sup>7</sup> Vermonters were already on edge about wildcats. Just that week tales of wildcat depredations near Barre and St. Johnsbury had flooded the state, but the *Brattleboro Reformer*, with a touch of the acerbic, reckoned that the Chester panther was more exciting: "Chester is now ahead of St. Johnsbury in wild animal stories. What are a few wildcats compared to a panther that makes tracks as large as a horse's hoof, with a distance of 10 or 12 feet between leaps?"<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the paper worried that these "wildcat tales" would fuel "the wild and woolly ideas people outside the state acquire about Vermont."<sup>9</sup>

Controversy was not long in coming. The *Boston Herald* quickly expressed doubt about the find, and, throughout the spring of 1934, some Vermont hunters and outdoorsmen chimed in with their own reservations. The remarks rankled Reverend Ballou, who protested that his experience was genuine. He emphasized his boyhood encounters with the animals in Wyoming, his outdoor skills as an adult, and his long service as a scoutmaster. Supporters for Ballou responded with testimonials about the minister's veracity and expertise. Many added their own recountings of sightings or reminded readers of previous catamount hunts. But only more evidence, preferably a verifiable track or photograph, or the cat itself, would solidify the case.

Perhaps in anticipation of such criticisms, Ballou and his supporters attempted to secure more proof of the panther. On Saturday, April 7, he and Harold Murray, his best Boy Scout "gun toter," took a tape measure up Steadman Hill. Deep, soft snow hindered their trek and the original tracks had probably melted away. All they found were bear tracks.<sup>10</sup> Emphasizing the need for certainty, the *Rutland Herald* published a bounty notice on April 25: "\$100 REWARD! The Herald offers \$100 reward for a panther, alive or dead, captured and killed in Vermont during 1934 and not imported for the purposes of this reward. Suitable proof of these facts will be required."<sup>11</sup> The reward soon became a focal point for jokes

and raillery, as some editors sought to soft-pedal the catamount debate or take jibes at the Rutland daily.

What Reverend Ballou thought of the jokery is unclear, but he held steadfast in his claim about the catamount. Ballou's brother, Henry, who was also a Congregationalist minister in Chester, jotted in his diary for April 28: "Will's panther controversy is still on. A woman over in Windsor has written a letter as the last thing."<sup>12</sup> A week later, at a Rotary meeting at the newly-opened Fullerton Inn in Chester, William gave a talk, "Did I See the Tracks or Did I Not," about his celebrated encounter. His "explanations caused considerable merriment," but the minister remained firmly convinced. He announced that he was organizing a gathering of "all those who have seen Vermont panthers, panther tracks, and those who have heard their crys [sic], into Chester in a few weeks for the purpose of sympathising [sic] with each other and backing up each other's stories."<sup>13</sup> His Scouts were still believers, so much so that they placed a panther image on their troop flag.<sup>14</sup> Emboldened by the support and perhaps nettled by the criticism, Ballou called for a convocation of believers on May 18 in Chester in "the midst of the area most pregnant with panther stories."<sup>15</sup> The minister reserved the Fullerton Inn and arranged for the stuffed Downers panther, the one shot in Weathersfield in 1867, to be on display. He sent out an invitation letter to newspapers, proclaiming the worthy aims of the get-together: "Wealth, social position, office and genealogical trees do not count here. Nothing but panther contacts admit you or a friend of your's [sic] who is still loyal." With good fortune, the inn would become a "second Catamount Tavern," where Vermonters would defend, not their land grants this time, but their integrity.<sup>16</sup> He also posed for a photograph with it. "Will is all woke up over the panther racket, was off today having his picture taken with stuffed one over at Downers," Henry Ballou penned in his diary for May 14.<sup>17</sup> Just in the midst of the fray in mid-May, Sherman Howe of Hammondsville rushed in with a fresh report of seeing a catamount on the road midway between West Windsor and Felchville, and two veteran Pawlet hunters, Ivan and Frederick Morey, reported finding enormous cat tracks on Okemo Mountain.<sup>18</sup> Writers in Burlington, Barre, and Brattleboro challenged Howe's account, questioning his night vision and comparing the claim to those about a sea serpent in Lake Champlain.<sup>19</sup>

Undaunted by such skepticism, and following that characteristic American penchant for conventions and forming into associations that the French visitor Alexis de Tocqueville had noted as far back as the 1830s, nearly one hundred believers gathered at the Fullerton Inn on May 18th. Of the assemblage, twenty-six maintained they had seen a catamount, another sixteen claimed to have heard one, and yet another eleven vowed

**PANTHERITE**

NAME *Mrs. H. A. Farrar*

Address *Chester, Vt.*

**I saw him.**

**I heard him.** X

**I saw his tracks.** ✓

*Pantherite tag of Mrs. Harry Farrar of Chester, Vermont, at the first Pantherite meeting, May 18, 1934. Courtesy of Peter Farrar.*

they had seen panther tracks.<sup>20</sup> To swing the crowd into a jubilant mood, Ethel Creaser led the singing of a fight ditty, "The Pantherites Song," and Mrs. Waldo Stevens wrote some verses strung together as "Panthers and Vermont."<sup>21</sup> Arminala Severence, who played the organ at the gathering, remembered the atmosphere as very convivial.<sup>22</sup> To solemnize the occasion, Reverend Harry Farrar of Chester, Vermont, said a prayer that "asked that the integrity of the pantherites be guarded and that disbelievers be shown the light." Three great-grandsons of Josephus Streeter unveiled the stuffed Weathersfield panther, and Ballou showed off a plaster cast of the tracks he had discovered. Several persons recounted their personal encounters with catamounts. Hermon M. Guild, one of the more elderly participants, recalled that, in addition to a 1906 encounter, in 1866 he had seen what at first he thought was a yellow dog, but then recognized firmly as a panther. Lloyd Martin told of his hair-raising, horse-scaring incident in the winter of 1918. Mr. and Mrs. Frank Blake, Leon Bolster, Elbert Stevens, Edward Parmenter, and Mrs. Raymond Kiniry all added their testimonies of recent panther sightings.<sup>23</sup> The meeting adjourned with the hopes that the next meeting would be "to celebrate the killing of a Vermont panther." So charged, "the hunters stole out to their cars and drove home through the night's sinister shadows ever on the alert for new evidence of panthers in Vermont."<sup>24</sup>

Responses to the meeting were mostly positive. Henry Ballou wrote in his diary for May 19: "The panther banquet at the hotel proved a success. P. [his son Paul] & G. [Paul's wife, Grace] attended. Between 90

& 100 present and Will was vindicated to his heart's content"<sup>25</sup> The *Vermont Journal* thought that anyone who heard the accounts at the meeting would be "convinced that in the majority of cases the stories rang true" and believed that "if some one will bring down a panther in these parts," those accused of vivid imaginations would have good reason to crow.<sup>26</sup> The *Rutland Herald* printed photographs of Ballou and some of his Boy Scouts standing with the Weathersfield panther and looking at the spot where it met its demise, as well as one of the plaster cast of the track.<sup>27</sup> The disbelievers and the scoffing newspapers, such as the *Boston Herald*, remained silent. After all, the burden of proof still lay with the pantherites who hungered to produce a live specimen.

The believers thought that they had their animal when in early June, they heard stories of a cattle-killing catamount in Mendon township near Rutland.<sup>28</sup> Wendell Pike, a state game warden, wavered on pronouncing the marauder a panther: "No, I am not sure of it, but I do not see what other animal of the cat kind could have made such a big track." The *Boston Herald* attempted to ridicule Pike and make it seem there was a rivalry between the Mendonites and Chesterites.<sup>29</sup> Back in Chester, Harold Murray, Ballou's "gun-toter" Boy Scout, had a run-in with a bear, but the mountain lion continued to elude discovery.<sup>30</sup> Vermonters had to be content that summer with stories of other sightings, which poured out in the wake of the pantherites' meeting. Apparently, Ballou encouraged banqueters at the Chester gathering to write down their stories and send them to him. He may have also sent out a general call, verbally or even by letter, for other accounts. In mid-June 1934, several Vermonters responded with a variety of catamount sighting accounts and retellings of the lore of previous confrontations.

Throughout the rest of 1934, the panther issue simmered. In late October the *Boston Herald* snickered that the *Rutland Herald's* reward still went unclaimed, but noted, probably also sarcastically, that "the pursuit continues relentlessly." It also seemed that the Vermonters might lose the one hundred dollars to an out-of-stater. A hunter from Michigan, Ralph Beebe, reported that he had spied a half-grown juvenile in Weathersfield and sparked hope that an adult or two must be lurking there, too.<sup>31</sup> In November, local hunters spotted what they claimed were catamounts. Ed Roys of Perkinsville fired three shots at what he saw as a panther chasing deer near Downers, the site of the 1867 hunt, and Mr. and Mrs. Adin Houghton of Springfield chanced upon one while they were driving near West Townshend.<sup>32</sup> The *Windsor Vermont Journal*, reporting on these events optimistically—"Panther Stocks Soar"—still admitted to some embarrassment: "But until some enterprising hunter succeeds in getting one where it can be photographed, we stand convicted of gullibility with

the rest of the believers in panthers."<sup>33</sup> But even Beebe, who had fired at one on October 24th and seen "unmistakeable signs of the presence of panthers" in southern Windsor County, gave up and returned to Michigan. In an interview with the *Vermont Journal*, however, Beebe offered his opinion as a naturalist that although catamounts are wily beasts, some definitely called Vermont their home. "I saw them on three other occasions and tracks almost daily," he said. "The testimony of persons who lived in the vicinity was overwhelming. Whether we believe it or not, there are panthers in Vermont."<sup>34</sup> So also thought John Hastings of Perkinsville, who ran across what he reckoned were catamount tracks in late December.<sup>35</sup> Ballou himself obtained a plaster cast of a track and prepared to send it off to New York with his banker son, William, for verification at a reputable museum. Henry Ballou made a terse notation on December 22: "Will got a cast of panther tracks."<sup>36</sup>

The new year brought some renewed hope. In mid-January, 1935, Reverend Ballou received some scientific legitimization of his find. Robert T. Hatt, an assistant curator at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and four other staff members pronounced the plaster cast track indeed that of a mountain lion. Ballou and his backers found this heartwarming in contrast to the cold shoulder the previous spring from Boston's natural history museum. News also spread that William E. Green, a veteran big game hunter and guide from Fairlee, would bring his pack of dogs to the Chester area, set up camp, and hunt down tangible proof of the panther's existence.<sup>37</sup> Ballou and Green investigated some tracks in the Grafton Gulf area, but apparently Green and other hunters had no luck in tracking down the cat.<sup>38</sup> A couple of weeks later came reports of panthers across the Connecticut River in Charlestown.<sup>39</sup> The Chester Boy Scout Panther Patrol planned to camp out in the Smokeshire district just north of Steadman Hill and search for catamount evidence.<sup>40</sup> In early March, Chester residents discovered a big track where carnival trucks had been parked and made a plaster cast of it.<sup>41</sup> But still no capture of an actual cat occurred.

#### THE PANTHERITES

Disappointed only slightly, Ballou and the believers planned to regather in Chester in April, 1935. On April 15, a committee at "Pantherite Headquarters" sent out an invitation to any and all pantherites to crowd into the Fullerton Inn again on April 26. The committee estimated that there were sixty pantherites in Chester alone. William Green would be the guest speaker, informal storytelling would punctuate the festivities, and the pantherites would found a more formal association: "Some permanent form of organization will take place as there appears to be need

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of such action." The previous year the group had christened themselves the "Irrepressible Order of Pantherites."<sup>42</sup> Ballou himself warmed up for the meeting with talks before the Springfield Rotary Club and Methodist church in mid-April.<sup>43</sup> John Spargo of Bennington, president of the Vermont Historical Society, a pantherite himself who would later publish a pamphlet on Vermont catamounts in 1950, agreed to speak, adding some more dignity to the dinner, and as if on cue yet another catamount sighting claim sounded, this one from nearby Amsden, on April 25.<sup>44</sup>

Somewhere between sixty and seventy-five backers convened over dinner at the Chester inn. Spargo had to go to Washington and Green's wife went into childbirth, so they were unable to attend. Nevertheless the mood was happy, as the pantherites chanted, "Get that panther— Hold that panther" and listened and recited their accounts of encounters. Mr. and Mrs. Albert Westney, the couple who had seen the panther in Amsden, repeated their tale to the crowd. E. H. Bancroft of Barre, president of the Vermont Association of Fish and Game Clubs, and Charles Hazen of Chester each underscored the biological possibility that the increase in abandoned farms had led to an increase in deer numbers that, in turn, attracted the panthers. The Irrepressible and Uncompromising Order of Pantherites organized, complete with a slate of officers. They anointed Reverend Ballou as the "Grand Puma," and reaffirmed their intentions to find a catamount in Vermont "to silence, once and for all, the up-the-sleeve giggles of allegedly pseudo naturalists who have been pooh-poohing the idea for months." In addition to seeking vindication, the organization promised also to preserve and study panther lore and meet when it warranted to discuss and disseminate that lore. A junior auxiliary, the "Wild Cats," would also form, charging the children twenty-five cents dues.<sup>45</sup> The *Bennington Banner* joked that the Irrepressibles might become just another civic organization, although one with "subterranean" inclinations, but the *Rutland Herald* warned that it was just a matter of time before "Panther Hunter Green is going to nick a big cat and put a stop to the kidding of the anti-pantherites."<sup>46</sup>

But the big cat remained uncooperative despite the efforts of Ballou and his Boy Scouts, his "Wildcats" who scoured the Pine Hill area of Weathersfield that May.<sup>47</sup> Rumors of sightings in Chester and West Springfield arose, but overall interest subsided; a wolf kill in Windham in June even upstaged the hunt for the catamount.<sup>48</sup> Reverend Ballou, however, remained convinced. That autumn he spoke on the felines to the Wallingford Rotary Club. Henry Ballou recorded it in his diary for October 28: "Anna has taken Will to Wallingford where he speaks at the Rotary club on Panthers. It is ladies' night and Burnie [?] wanted him."<sup>49</sup> That next January, the pastor delayed attending his son's wedding to go

off and check on a panther-sighting rumor.<sup>50</sup> That May, the pantherites met for a third time, this time at the Congregational Church. The 1936 meeting suffered a delay of a week due to a conflict over the meeting space and the Ladies Aid Society came through with a good chicken dinner, even though the duty may have surprised some of the women. Henry Ballou confided to his diary on May 20th: "Will's Panther club is to be fed by our Ladies' Society the evening of Friday. C. [his wife Carrie] had chickens brought to her to make into a pie with no previous notice"<sup>51</sup> The Irrepressibles went through the motions of re-electing officers, but the interest focused more on the guest speaker, "Broncho Charlie" Miller, a Western friend of Ballou's who had been a Pony Express rider in his youth.<sup>52</sup> Henry and Carrie Ballou enjoyed the talk, as he recorded in his diary for May 22: "C. & I. attended the Panther supper. 'Bronco Charlie' was the attraction. He spoke interestingly."<sup>53</sup>

Thereafter the zeal of the Irrepressible and Uncompromising Order of Pantherites faded, even though the *Rutland Herald* congratulated it for becoming "an authentic society."<sup>54</sup> That September, Reverend Ballou and his young great-nephew, Hubbard, freshly back from China, investigated a report of catamounts in Newfane. Henry Ballou wrote in his diary for September 9, "Hubbard went off with W. & Dr. Bugbee to look after panthers that have been killing deer near New Fane. He didn't get back until after nine o'clock."<sup>55</sup> Apparently, the panther club did not meet again in 1937, despite new reports of a panther in Cold River, New Hampshire, across the river from Bellows Falls, or thereafter.<sup>56</sup> The failure to produce an actual catamount or at least a photograph of one probably deflated a number of the pantherites and kept the public skeptical. It may have been another case of the boy crying wolf, or, in this case, panther, even if the predator didn't arrive to gobble up the sheep. William Ballou's death on March 4, 1943 in Boston also probably deprived the movement of its charismatic spark. But in the mid-1930s, Ballou and his followers stirred up people on both sides of the debate. Well could Charles Edward Crane write in *Let Me Show You Vermont* in 1937, "Vermont is not divided alone between Republicans and Democrats, but between Pantherites and Non-Pantherites."<sup>57</sup>

#### VERMONT OUTDOORSMEN AND BOSTONIANS DEBATE

The 1934–1936 Chester catamount controversy reflected a conflict between the experience of outdoorsmen such as Reverend Ballou and the claims of urbanity, science, and game management. Offended by the *Boston Herald*'s remarks in the spring of 1934, Ballou declared that his experiences were credentials enough to establish his credibility. "I have always hunted and enjoyed outdoor life the year round," he wrote in a letter

to the Boston editors, "For 18 years I have been a scoutmaster, and have taught my scouts to read tracks and trails in summer and winter, for the tales they tell are full of interest. I know the tracks of all animals about there, including bobcats. I have lived in Vermont for the past 26 years, and in Chester for 14 years, and know my state, its history and its animals." He advised the editors to come discuss panthers with a local man who maintained he had seen a catamount three times within the previous fourteen months and whose son had shot at and wounded one.<sup>58</sup> A week or so later, still defending himself, Ballou told the *Rutland Herald*, "I would just as soon have it broadcast through[out] New England that I was a fool as to have it intimated that I did not know the difference between a panther's track and a bob-cat's. A person who can't tell the difference between 2½ and 5 inches ought to be put in an asylum."<sup>59</sup> On April 12, Guy Blood, a hunter from Walpole, New Hampshire, added his views: "As a leader among men, as a citizen of the highest type, Mr. Ballou has a standing that is unquestionable. I feel certain he should know more, or at least as much about wild animal 'tracks' as an office born editor, who in all probability never saw any animal tracks larger than those made by a wharf rat."<sup>60</sup> Even hesitant supporters still appealed to the weight of experience. As the aptly named Edward Wild of Newfane put it, "some of us who know our native Vermont very well, are reluctantly compelled to admit that it is at the present time an exceedingly 'catty' state."<sup>61</sup> The Boston paper, however, stuck with science. "Chester, Vt., or the Boston Society of Natural History—which is correct on its pantherology?" the *Herald* asked on April 17. After noting the recent claims by Vermonters, the editors retorted sarcastically, "What do academic judgments on Vermont carnivorous fauna amount to, as against these witnesses? All that's needed now to complete the Vermont case and confound the Boylston Street experts is a dead panther!"<sup>62</sup>

In the ensuing tussle over the catamount sighting, some of the defense of Reverend Ballou centered on his personal character. Edward Wild testified to Ballou's "high standing, both in Chester and throughout Vermont," calling him "one of the ablest, best beloved and most influential Congregational ministers in the state" and citing his eminence "in Masonic circles."<sup>63</sup> The *Vermont Journal* in Windsor and *Springfield Reporter* also rushed to Ballou's side, arguing that his "integrity is so great, that were he to tell us he saw a white blackbird, we should be inclined to believe" him.<sup>64</sup> The May, 1934, Congregationalist monthly, *Vermont Missionary*, noted about the controversy: "Chester residents stoutly maintain the veracity of their pastor."<sup>65</sup> Occasionally the matter bordered on tongue-in-cheek humor. "If I didn't know Rev. Ballou was a gentleman of sobriety and temperance, I'd think that repeal [of Prohibition in

1933] had already done the deadly work charged against it!" ran one quotation in late April.<sup>66</sup> Despite these testimonials, the character issue still persisted into May. The *Bennington Banner* accused the organizers of a hoax, "a publicity stunt, a ballyhoo, or some similar scheme to work the papers for free advertising." "The astonishing thing about the whole affair is that this graft seems to be worked by the clergy," the editor intoned and reprinted a letter from Ballou advertising the Fullerton Inn gathering.<sup>67</sup>

But much of the argument that April and May rested on competing notions of just how wild the Vermont landscape had become and differing assumptions about the natural history of catamounts. For their part, the local outdoorsmen in Rutland were mostly skeptical. George L. Howe, a "veteran bear and deer hunter," figured that Ballou and the Boy Scouts had chanced upon a bobcat or a lynx with big paws. George H. Ross, denouncing the story as "absurd and not founded on facts," ascribed the screeching sounds some Chesterites heard to owls; Henry R. Adams concurred. Fred I. Osgood, a mammalogist, withheld firm judgment "without personal investigation" and listed the only "authentic records" he could find of panthers in Vermont: "Bennington, 1850; Cavendish 1867 [the hunt actually took place in Weathersfield]; Wardsboro, 1876 [actually 1875]; Barnard, 1881."<sup>68</sup> Much more pointed queries came from Birney C. Lynds of Bridgewater Corners on April 23. Like an attorney in cross-examination, Lynds attacked Ballou, Mrs. Miller, and Frank Blake, calling into question their eyesight, judgment, and common sense. For example, Lynds asked, "How could Mr. Ballou tell whether the panther broke through the crust every jump it made or not?" He accused the Chester residents of taking something to "see such things" and of telling whoppers. Lynds had seen the stuffed cats in museums and some live circus ones, but he doubted strenuously that Vermont was wild enough to support "such horrible animals."<sup>69</sup> Charles Earle, of Peru, Vermont, reminded readers that the sun's rays on the animal tracks may cause them to enlarge through melting and refreezing. Ballou might have seen nothing more than bobcat or lynx tracks so enlarged.<sup>70</sup>

Ballou's backers responded with their own assessments of Vermont's wilds and the panther's habits. Frank Blake, a farmer residing near Steadman Hill, told of seeing a catamount in that area on several occasions within the past year; and several other local men speculated that the "extensive, heavily wooded section" there could have harbored a panther that "might easily have worked down from the far north."<sup>71</sup> Walter F. Burbank, another Rutland sportsman, was inclined to accept the reports. "I believe that it is probable that the Chester panther is a reality. There

is a vast wilderness in Vermont.” Burbank claimed to have seen a stuffed catamount that hunters had killed in Massachusetts near the Connecticut line many years back.<sup>72</sup> R. J. Flint of Bethel maintained that while he had not actually seen one during his thirty or so years as a surveyor, he knew “from indisputable evidence that years ago some of these creatures were roaming our mountains.” Catamounts were elusive animals, but they would, according to Flint, “frequently follow on the tracks of a man for hours, being very careful to keep out of sight.” Ballou’s encounter with the tracks, then, didn’t surprise Flint at all. The catamounts might be strays from the north, but Flint thought that it was “much more likely that they are natives of the Green Mountains, having their homes and breeding places in the wilder sections seldom visited by man.”<sup>73</sup> A. A. Roberts of Dorset, who had spent sixty years in the state and the Adirondacks as a trapper, hunter, timber cruiser, and game warden, was just as forthright. “I think that today we have some of all the game in Vermont that was native of the eastern states,” he declared. “How many readers . . . know that there was a wolverine killed in Rupert ten or 12 years ago and an opossum [sic] caught last year in Rupert?” Roberts made a similar point about fisher, marten, otter, and beaver: “Because people don’t see them on the trails or on the farms they think they are gone but I am thankful that they are not.” The same applied for catamounts, Roberts thought: “I could tell you a good many things about our wilds but some of your readers would think that I was given to romancing. But if they wish to come and see me I think I can convince them that we still have panthers in Vermont.”<sup>74</sup>

B. Hall of Ludlow tried to refute Birney Lynds’ sharp questioning with a narrative of his own “face to face” confrontation with a catamount a few years previously. Hall maintained that panthers make different striding motions depending on whether they are chasing game or not and that the width of the paws would occasionally have a snowshoe effect, stopping the cat from breaking through crusted snow. Thus a catamount could have made the tracks in Chester.<sup>75</sup> Charles Hubbard of Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, wrote to the *Boston Herald* to support Ballou’s find with stories of his and his brother’s sightings in New Hampshire since 1915.<sup>76</sup> John Spargo of Bennington took that town’s paper to task for casting aspersions on Ballou and the panther believers. Spargo asserted that publicity was the last thing Ballou sought and urged readers to keep an open mind about the possibility of such cats existing in the state: “I am not a very credulous person, but I have lived long enough and [have been] sufficiently awake to learn that ‘impossible’ is a very dangerous word to use about life. About panthers I know nothing except that I am confident that the bronze one [commemorating Stephen Fay’s

.....

Catamount Tavern] on the pedestal which I can see from my window has made no nocturnal visits to Chester.”<sup>77</sup>

#### CAT TALES

Some of the strongest support for Ballou's stance came from numerous Vermonters who related their own stories of catamount encounters. Mrs. Dwight Miller and Frank and Charles Blake started this trend with recitations about recent panther-sightings near Chester in an April 11, 1934 *Rutland Herald* article.<sup>78</sup> Soon thereafter Guy Blood took on some of the doubters, recounting his hunt after what he thought were bears in the spring of 1933 in Grafton: “When we located the tracks we were surprised to find that these bears had made jumps of from ten to fifteen feet. We then knew that the bears we were after were of the CAT family, and not cats or BOB cats, but PANTHERS. Their foot prints in the snow were about six inches in diameter.” Blood had no doubt that catamounts presently roamed Vermont.<sup>79</sup> A. A. Roberts of Dorset averred that two panthers had lived at Mount Tabor nearly all winter in 1879, and that in 1880 he saw tracks on several occasions.<sup>80</sup> Stories poured in about more recent encounters in Londonderry, Grafton, and Weston.<sup>81</sup> Mrs. Raymond Kiniry of Windsor narrated her recent encounter with one near Mount Ascutney. On February 2, she made what she declared a positive identification of a panther. The next day she hung up some calf meat for bait and waited with two loaded rifles. The cat did appear, but she was unable to get a clear shot, only wounding it.<sup>82</sup> Charles C. Foster of Chester entered his own evidence of an encounter in the Adirondacks, in which the tracks matched those Ballou and the Boy Scouts found.<sup>83</sup> Sue Hapgood Millington of Woodstock told of hearing a panther scream while her family was camping in Peru township, and Mrs. George Pratt of Cavendish thought she remembered hunters capturing a catamount on the Billings estate near Woodstock, but that another had escaped, suggesting at least one cat still may roam Windsor county.<sup>84</sup> Edward C. Parmenter Jr. of Belmont claimed that he saw tracks and heard from hunters stories “of an animal and its actions which spelled Panther and nothing else I know of.” Parmenter believed that there was “at least a pair of these animals in our forest reserve and woods south of the Mt. Holly-Wallingford line,” but that they were very wary and not likely to be “brought in for some few years yet.”<sup>85</sup>

The May 1934 pantherite meeting triggered a new round of tales. In addition to the narrations at the Fullerton Inn that evening, Ira Belknap and Leon and Nellie Bolster of Cavendish, Mrs. Harry Farrar of Chester, Blanche Howard Foster of East Wallingford, Philip VanBebber Jr. of Belmont, Annie Sherwin of Manchester Depot, Elbert Stevens of Bridge-

water Corners, and Hermon Guild and Waldo Stevens of Chester all corresponded with Ballou in mid-June about their own panther sightings. Belknap recollected his own experiences with the Weathersfield panther in 1867, a couple of others detailed encounters that occurred at the turn of the century, and several related more recent confrontations during the 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>86</sup>

In the spring of 1934, while Ballou was searching for evidence and doubters and believers traded quips, several Vermonters took this opportunity to remind current state residents of the previous Vermont panthers. C. C. Perry, a doctor from West Rutland, recalled the 1881 Barnard hunt.<sup>87</sup> E. P. Perkins, of Bridgewater reminisced of his actual experiences that day with the Barnard hunting party. "I think I could take anyone to the very spot now where he was killed," Perkins wrote.<sup>88</sup> A "Pantherite" noted that Josephus Streeter, the great grandfather of three of the Scouts along with Ballou, had been one of the men who killed the Weathersfield panther in 1867, and Ira Belknap of Cavendish told of seeing the cat alive at the base of Pine Hill the day of that hunt.<sup>89</sup> Will C. Withington of Bennington sent in the excerpt of the kill from the Windsor County history.<sup>90</sup> The *Randolph Herald and News*, citing the recent excitement, pulled its December 1, 1881, story of the Barnard shooting from its archives and reprinted it.<sup>91</sup> Elbert L. Miller of East Barnard recalled his childhood memories of that famous hunt for the Rutland paper's readers, and Elbert Stevens of Bridgewater Corners listed encounters in December, 1891, and November, 1924, to supplement the tale of the Barnard panther.<sup>92</sup>

The *Rutland Herald*, the Vermont newspaper most vociferous about the Chester controversy, played an interesting, moderate role in the debate. The daily offered the one hundred dollar reward for proof of the catamount and often pleaded for certainty and calm. The paper reckoned that it would be worth springing for the one hundred dollars to provide the paper's readers with genuine information on a real, current catamount in the state.<sup>93</sup> On April 7, the *Herald* took note of the "mortifying and veracity-impugning" Boston article and reckoned that the testimonials on Ballou's behalf were "about the next best thing to producing the panther," something that "might happen, most any day."<sup>94</sup> An editorial in the April 12, 1934, issue suggested that an expedition to Chester, an examination of the evidence, and an exhaustive search of the woods might erase the doubts among sportsmen and naturalists, with whom the paper had "considerable sympathy." Until then the story was fanciful: "The notion of a panther in Vermont, in this year of grace, is almost as fascinating as the Conan Doyle story of the inaccessible plateau where dinosaurs and prehistoric mammals still lived."<sup>95</sup> Indeed, the next day, the

Rutland paper detailed its caution in an editorial. Pointing out that reports of a moose tromping through southern Vermont the previous year had proved to be true, the *Herald* wondered whether or not the Chester panther would be a repeat: "It is difficult to reconcile the current evidence about the presence of mountain lions in Vermont with their habitat history of recent years, but so was it difficult to believe in the presence, if only temporary, of a moose in this state." Adhering to its self-proclaimed conservative tradition, the paper promised it would content "itself for the time being with merely presenting the evidence pro and con as it is received" and urged "local naturalists, big game hunters and others of expertise" to shed light on the controversy.<sup>96</sup> The same number of the paper contained a natural history article on the panther, assuring readers that, contrary to legend, the cat was a timid, nocturnal animal, hardly a danger to humans, but definitely one to large game and livestock.<sup>97</sup> When a writer to the paper suggested that there might be a stray catamount, just as a wolf from the Adirondacks had showed up in a Vermont trap, the Rutland editor mused: "If this were going to be a long session, we'd have a panther evening and get somewhere in this anthology of revived and revised zoological lore, as applied to Vermont."<sup>98</sup> In May, with Ballou's pantherite conference approaching, the *Herald* reprinted a story apparently from 1834 about a father shooting a panther that was mauling his son in the Adirondacks, and, in the same issue, included a long letter from Fred A. Emery of Washington, D.C., who listed several of what he considered verifiable instances of catamounts all across Vermont since the 1860s and advised Vermonters not to pet the cat whenever they located one.<sup>99</sup> In some instances, however, the *Herald* gently ridiculed the pantherites. In May, 1934, the *Herald* published a folksy letter from an anonymous East Wallingford reader, who claimed that a panther had made their old mare so wild and "pantherish" that they had had to shoot it in July, 1933.<sup>100</sup> The scheduled pantherite meeting also prompted some mild satire. After joking about just which hunters would be eligible to attend the "panther party," the Rutland daily chuckled, "If Rev. W. J. Ballou has his way, Fullerton Inn will be another Catamount Tavern before the week's out."<sup>101</sup>

On occasion the *Rutland Herald's* interest in the topic was in rejoinder to jibes from other papers around the state. When, that April, the *St. Albans Messenger* supposed that Middlebury College's black panther mascot was off-limits for the reward and the *Brattleboro Reformer* reckoned that the Rutland daily had made a safe bet with its one hundred dollars, the *Herald* did take some consolation among all the negativism: "And even if panthers may ultimately take their place in storybooks with fairies and jabberwocks, it's pleasant to know that once upon a time,

at least, there were panthers in Windsor and Bennington county and we have the stuffed hides to prove it."<sup>102</sup> In May, *The Burlington Free Press* ribbed the Rutland paper that its anxieties might come to a close soon if noted hunter Frank Buck arrived. Moreover, the *Free Press* commented, Buck could help out Rutland County gubernatorial candidates by giving them the panther as a campaign attraction.<sup>103</sup> The *Herald* responded that the Burlington paper should "produce its third candidate and turn him loose on Rutland county candidates -- and panthers."<sup>104</sup> The Rutland daily warned Frank Buck not to bring his own panther along to collect the reward in response to a *Brattleboro Reformer* taunt that the "Chester panther, if he really does exist, had better take to the tall timber and lie low" if Buck arrives to hunt it down.<sup>105</sup> The *Free Press* returned with a barb that the federal agents currently investigating in Rutland county might just be panther hunters in disguise trying to cash in the *Herald's* bounty.<sup>106</sup> Regarding the upcoming pantherite convention that May, the *Herald* thought that a large hunting party might form at such a meeting and "drive out a panther in this territory, if there be any."<sup>107</sup> The *Montpelier Argus* took the opportunity to sting the Rutland paper, hinting that the panther seekers would do well to look under the editor's desk at the *Herald*. The Rutland editor fired back that the Downers panther, which would be on display at the meeting, was "much better than the stuffed carcass in the state museum" at the capital.<sup>108</sup> Some additional smirking from other Vermont papers appeared in 1935. Noting that the panther advocates were about to restage "a revival and a restatement of their creed," the *Burlington Free Press* thought it detected some excess fervency: "India has its sacred cows. It begins to look as though Vermont is developing a cult for the publicizing of panthers."<sup>109</sup> The *Brattleboro Reformer* jibed that the Rutland editor might yet have "to fork over the [reward] money."<sup>110</sup>

Indeed much jollity attended the catamount controversy. In late April, 1934, Rose Holden of Chester Depot chipped in with a mock heroic poem, in which the "panther" stalking a boy and his uncle turned out to be the family dog, and another fragment of verse poked fun at "how he killed one four feet tall/With his own trusty parasol."<sup>111</sup> A joke making the rounds had an old-timer believing the panther stories because he had lived with one -- i.e., his wife -- for forty-four years.<sup>112</sup> In May, Dorset folk poet Mark Whalen dashed off a humor piece on his worries about the *Herald's* panther bounty: "Supposing some one comes along and shoots my pet panther!" he wailed.<sup>113</sup> Bob Hascall, who was complaining about the "dangers" of summering in Vermont, thought he saw a correlation between panthers and Prohibition repeal and speculated that panther hunting might be profitable -- for his wife, who would get the reward money, if he bagged the cat, or his insurance money, if the feline got him.<sup>114</sup> Gertrude Bryant

Jubb of Reading penned some light verse spoofing panther hunters and the Rutland editor's reward offer.<sup>115</sup> The *Woodstock Vermont Standard* and *Manchester Journal* treated the announcement of the pantherite gathering somewhat whimsically.<sup>116</sup> Even the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* got wind of the news of "the barbaric feast to be spread in the town of Chester." This humorous piece pleaded Vermont's case, maintaining that there is a panther, not hordes of them, roaming the state's woods: "That is Vermont's position and she will not recede from it, though Massachusetts shrug an incredulous shoulder, New Hampshire lift a supercilious eyebrow, and Maine keep an accusing silence." But, the St. Louis paper thought, Vermont might as equally become home to African exotic game species as become the "big game paradise of the Western Hemisphere," drawing economy-boosting "mighty hunters" who would trek in to chase the beasts.<sup>117</sup>

Unwittingly or not, the St. Louis article touched another major area of humor and bantering, intraregional potshots between Bostonians and Vermonters. Ever since the *Boston Herald* challenged Ballou in late March, 1934, a friendly but pointed interchange had followed. That first editorial sympathized with Vermonters that the winter had been a hard one, but thought that Reverend Ballou and his Boy Scouts "were being overly pessimistic." "The wild animals may be upon New England," the Boston paper declared, "but it is quite certain that they are two-legged ones, not four-legged." The *Herald* went on to acknowledge the stuffed panther in the state Capitol in Montpelier and the one killed in Wardsboro, Vermont in 1875 [the paper had the date wrong as 1872], on display at the Boston Museum of Natural History. But as for panthers in the present, the *Herald* pronounced them "virtually extinct," that it "would take a cold winter indeed to revive them." Perhaps, the paper suggested, the Chester group had run across tracks of a bay lynx or bobcat.<sup>118</sup> But Vermonters resented the attack by the Bostonians. J. W. Brown of Chester defended Ballou and told the *Herald's* editors "that Vermonters are perhaps better judges of real panthers than a Bostonian, even with his superior intelligence" and that the newspaper had best "stick to your beans and codfish."<sup>119</sup> Guy Blood offered to escort the "city editor" into the Chester woods, "for I am sure I would enjoy showing him some 'Tracks' providing he is not too timid or 'panther minded.'"<sup>120</sup> Boston writers might express incredulity given the rarity of the animal, but just because "one has not been sighted in the vicinity of Boston Common or around Bunker Hill monuments should not be grounds for Boston editors' going off half-cocked." "Unusual thing[s] do occur occasionally beyond the realm of the Boston city hall," averred the Vermonters, who may not have known what to make of the discovery yet, but would brook no snobbish com-

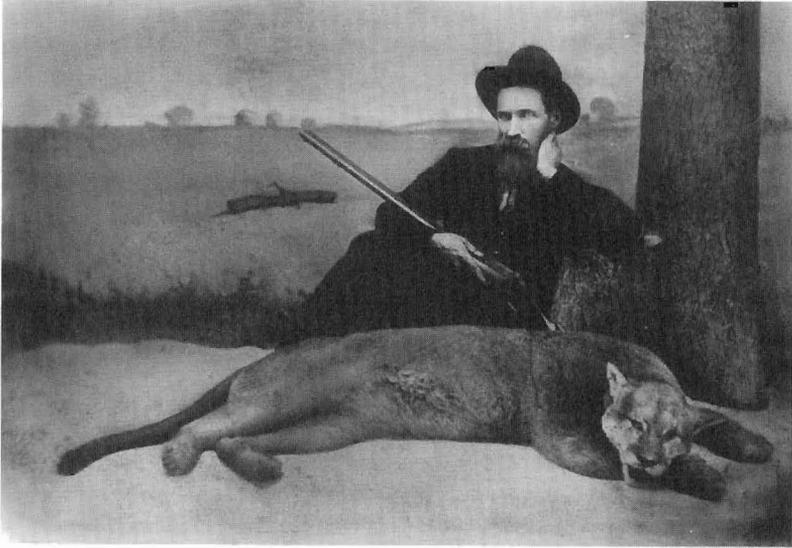
mentary from the Hub.<sup>121</sup> When the Boston paper tried to enlist science to trump Ballou's claims, the Rutland paper fired back in kind. Boston may have "multifarious activities" to impress the visitor, "but nowhere within the limits of the city of Boston have we observed terrain or cover suitable for the habitat of panthers." Thus Bostonians should not presume to "speak authoritatively on the subject of panthers."<sup>122</sup>

When the *Boston Herald* learned of the announced pantherite meeting, the editors rejoined the argument. "The pantherites, pantherists, panthermaniacs or pantherphiles have been summoned to meet and eat in Chester next week, to swop pantherology and thus confound those who doubt their word," chirped the *Boston Herald*. "Anybody is eligible to attend who has the price and has seen or heard a beast or found its spoor." After speculating that perhaps a "gigantic bobcat" was roaming southern Vermont or that a New Deal agency had "stimulated the growth of these feral beasts," the Boston paper delivered another dig at Vermonters: "If and when the panther is found, he will have that superiority over non-Vermont panthers which Vermont maple syrup, butter, cheese, eggs, apples and marble, to say nothing of men and women, have over all competitive products from outside the state." The Boston newspaper kept on tweaking the Vermonters: "Stubborn folks, those Green Mountaineers. Sensitive, too. They have pride in their eyes and ears. They insist that there are panthers in Vermont, and are nettled by the doubts of city slickers who work in natural history museums and newspaper offices."<sup>123</sup> The Vermonters made no rejoinder, believing perhaps that silence now was the better part of valor in this age-old regional rivalry.

Some of the odder commentary came from would-be humorists who thought they saw the hand of the Roosevelt Democrats behind the catamount issue. Three Massachusetts writers harped on this theme. Austin S. Hale of Weston took a jibe at the New Deal, which had been in full sway for about a year: "Don't forget this is the era of the new deal. Anything is liable to happen, and this is simply a newly resurrected animal." Hale asked the editors to travel to Vermont to investigate and bring him some maple syrup on the way back.<sup>124</sup> Similarly Samuel L. Abbott of Framingham envisioned some more "alphabet soup," a "V. P. T. A.," a "Vermont Panther Tamers Association," in which "overworked brain trusters" could harm only the lion.<sup>125</sup> B. T. Prince of Westfield consoled the *Boston Herald* editors that they should not have to be experts on panthers any more than on social economics.<sup>126</sup>

#### CATAMOUNTS AND TOURISTS

Frivolity aside, the Chester catamount dispute forced some Vermonters to focus on questions of tourism and state self-image. At least one



*Alexander Crowell of Barnard shot this panther, November 24, 1881. It is on exhibit (with his rifle) in the Vermont Historical Society Museum, Montpelier.*

writer from Chester, under the pen name “Orthie Dox,” touched on the sensitive issue of the possible effect real catamounts could have on summer tourism. After affirming belief in the current panther stories and asserting that wild places such as Steadman Hill promoted the existence of panthers in Vermont, “Orthie Dox” zeroed in on the tourism matter: “I might tell my experience on Steadman for I know a panther was there, but it is no use to tell you as it is plain where the shoe pinches—summer guests—and in your effort to laugh it off, you have spread it well.”<sup>127</sup> Another *Herald* reader asked, “Why keep up this panther business? Are you trying to scare everybody away from Vermont this summer?” The Vermont paper responded, trying to turn the question inside out. It would be likely that the controversy and the one hundred dollar reward might just draw more tourists and hunters. With perhaps a little bit of P. T. Barnum-style hokum in mind, the editors reminded “objectors to our panther hunt” that “one of the surest ways to attract visitors is to advertise some thaumaturgy, like a sea serpent, a plesiosaurus or even a petrified man.” But even if there were actual catamounts, their timidity should inspire little fear. “So family reunions, class festivities, Old Home weeks and tourist conventions may be planned with the utmost confidence,” the *Herald* declaimed.<sup>128</sup> Bob Hascall, a former Vermonter and *Herald* re-

porter then living in Sayre, Pennsylvania, wrote in joking about his fears about spending his annual vacation in the Green Mountains. He demanded a census "to see how many of these savage animals are roaming the wilds" and wondered if he could outrun such a cat. The *Herald* told him to get a gun and some buckshot and come up to try for the reward.<sup>129</sup> While it was at it, the Rutland paper sought to calm any fears among the livestock rearers. When Sister Sevilla Trudo offered an opinion that it might have been panthers that destroyed flocks of sheep in early Vermont, not wolves, the editor retorted, with possibly some zoologically incorrect information, that catamounts roam singly, that "one lone panther could hardly annihilate a flock of sheep."<sup>130</sup> It was sufficient for the near future to calm possible fears: "For the sake of summer boarders it may be said that the panther appetites appear to be satisfied with rabbits and deer. Vermonters do not worry about them."<sup>131</sup> The May 1934 *Vermont Missionary* noted that Chesterites were "reassuring prospective summer boarders by stating that panthers prefer rabbits and deer for a diet."<sup>132</sup>

During the 1930s, Vermonters watched forests overtaking abandoned farms and worried about the future effects of this transition. Would expanded tourism take up the slack in the state's economy? Or would the re-emergence of wilderness, replete with such predators as the panther, frighten away summer boarders and leaf peepers expecting a pastoral idyll? The alleged return of the catamount helped to crystallize some of these fears. Vermonters had spent over a century and a half attempting to eradicate the panther to make agriculture safer. Tales of terrifying cats assaulting or stalking humans and livestock descended from the days of Ethan Allen; nineteenth-century accounts of panther hunts reinforced this negative perspective. Although the catamount seemed to have vanished in Vermont after 1881, at least according to officials, little had happened by the 1930s to counter the fearsome portrait of the predator. Protection on an endangered species list was still four decades away. Undoubtedly some Vermonters, perhaps Reverend Ballou among them, took pride in the prospect that the catamount might be back. The animal, for some, symbolized the spirit of ferocity and enterprise that had fortified Vermonters from the time of the Green Mountain Boys. A familiar emblem would always be a welcome anchor in trying times of transition. Ballou himself did not comment on these anxieties, but the level of debate that his find provoked revealed that ambivalence over a changing Vermont was lurking right below the surface.

Despite the failure of Reverend Ballou and other Chesterites to produce firm evidence of the panther in the 1930s, throughout the 1940s and succeeding decades, the catamount-sighting controversy in Vermont remained lively. Starting with a sighting in Braintree in May, 1941, there

have been hundreds of claims of sightings and other encounters throughout the state, including one in Chester in 1952.<sup>133</sup> Harold Hitchcock, a biology professor at Middlebury College, started his lifelong interest in tracking down the cat around 1949, and Aldo Merusi, a reporter for the *Rutland Herald*, reactivated the paper's one hundred dollar reward and wrote occasional columns under the soubriquet "Panther Pete," keeping the issue alive until his retirement in 1971. Such was the spirit that drove Ballou's son William and Elizabeth Johnson of Chester Depot to organize a fiftieth-year commemoration of the Irrepressible and Uncompromising Order of Pantherites in 1984.<sup>134</sup> On June 7, about forty-five enthusiasts met at the Chester (formerly the Fullerton) Inn to celebrate the event Reverend Ballou had orchestrated fifty years previously. Arminala Severence, then eighty years old, was the only person in attendance who had been at the original meeting. Others who convened were more recent converts, some of whom themselves had seen what they maintained were catamounts. Hitchcock, by this time the dean of the panther advocacy movement, and Ronald Lewis of Brandon, Vermont, the founder of the New England Bigfoot and Black Panther Research Alliance, both gave talks on the catamount, holding that the changes in Vermont's natural landscape augured well for the cat's survival. "There is no reason why a panther couldn't live pretty handsomely today," Hitchcock said.<sup>135</sup> A decade or so later, however, the case is still open. Articles in magazines and newspapers continue to mull over the prospects of the cat's return, and the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department now has a "Catamount Sighting" form to keep track of the reports. But despite some interesting discoveries near Craftsbury in 1994, the big cat, long so symbolic of Vermont's own self-identity, remains elusive.<sup>136</sup> Sixty years later Reverend William Ballou and his pantherites still await complete vindication.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Meeting At Chester Will Attempt To Prove Panthers Do Exist In Vermont," *Bellows Falls Times*, 10 May 1934, 5.

<sup>2</sup> For an interpretation of the catamount in Vermont before 1900, see Thomas L. Altherr, "The Catamount in Vermont Folklore and Culture, 1760-1900," in Jay W. Tischendorf and Steven J. Ropski, eds., *Proceedings of the Eastern Cougar Conference, 1994* (Fort Collins, CO: American Ecological Research Institute, 1996), 50-91.

<sup>3</sup> "A Panther Story," *Burlington Free Press*, 11 December 1950, 6.

<sup>4</sup> P[er]k] G. Angwin to Harold B. Hitchcock, November 8, 1949, in Hitchcock Collection, Vermont Historical Society, Doc. 290, Folder 1, "Letters and Interviews, 1904-1988."

<sup>5</sup> "Evidence Points To Panthers In Vermont," *Rutland Herald*, 11 April 1934, 1-2.

<sup>6</sup> "Panther Tracks as Large as Horse's Hoof Marks Found," *St. Johnsbury Caledonian Record*, 28 March 1934, 1; "Panther Tracks Seen in Chester," *Brattleboro Reformer*, 28 March 1934, 1; "Panther Tracks Near Chester, Vt.," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 28 March 1934, 1; "Panther Tracks Seen in Chester," *Montpelier Evening Argus*, 28 March 1934, 1; "Tracks of A Panther Seen Near Chester,"

*Barre Daily Times*, 28 March 1934, 3; and "Tracks of Panther Seen Near Chester," *Bennington Banner*, 29 March 1934, 6.

<sup>7</sup> "Chester," *Bellows Falls Times*, 29 March 1934, 10; the same story appeared as "Track Of Panther Seen On Stedman [sic] Hill In Chester" in the *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 30 March 1934, 1, and the *Springfield Reporter*, 30 March 1934, 1.

<sup>8</sup> "Wardens Discount Wildcat Stories," *Brattleboro Reformer*, 26 March 1934, 2; *Burlington Free Press*, 26 March 1934, 6; and *Brattleboro Reformer*, 30 March 1934, 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Brattleboro Reformer*, 26 March 1934, 2.

<sup>10</sup> "Chester," *Bellows Falls Times*, 12 April 1934, 10. The same column also was in the *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 13 April 1934, 10 and the *Springfield Reporter*, 13 April 1934, 10.

<sup>11</sup> "No Panthers in Boston," *Rutland Herald*, 25 April 1934, 8.

<sup>12</sup> "Diary of Henry L. Ballou," 28 April 1934. Much appreciation goes to Patricia Ballou of Chester and Carol Ballou Smith for making Henry Ballou's diary available.

<sup>13</sup> "Inter-City Rotary Meeting Opens Fullerton Inn," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 4 May 1934, 11; the same story also appeared in the *Bellows Falls Times*, 3 May 1934, 15.

<sup>14</sup> "Chester," *Springfield Reporter*, 4 May 1934, 10.

<sup>15</sup> "Panther Club' to Have Banquet at Chester on May 18," *Rutland Herald*, 8 May 1934, 6.

<sup>16</sup> "To Vermont Pantherites Wheresoever Dispersed," *Woodstock Vermont Standard*, 17 May 1934, 2.

<sup>17</sup> "Diary of Henry L. Ballou," 14 May 1934.

<sup>18</sup> "Huge Panther Seen By Hammondsville Man on Highway," *Rutland Herald*, 18 May 1934, 11; "Reading Man Knows That Vermont Has Panthers Now," *Woodstock Vermont Standard*, 24 May 1934, 2; "Full Grown Panther Surprises Men in Reading Township," *Springfield Reporter*, 25 May 1934, 1; and "Panther Tracks Seen on Okemo By Pawlet Men," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 11 May 1934, 6; the same story also showed up in the *Springfield Reporter*, 11 May 1934, 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Burlington Daily News*, 21 May 1934, 4; and *Brattleboro Reformer*, 19 May 1934, 4, and 24 May 1934, 4.

<sup>20</sup> "100 Sit Down to Supper at Chester to Swap Yarns of Panthers in Vermont," *Rutland Herald*, 19 May 1934, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Typescripts of "The Pantherite's Song" and "Panthers and Vermont" in the Hitchcock Collection, Vermont Historical Society, Doc. 290, Folder 4. "Vermont Panther Ballou- Copies of Clippings 1934-1984."

<sup>22</sup> Arminala Severence, conversation with author, Chester, Vermont, January, 1995.

<sup>23</sup> Lewis Hammond, "Panthers Seen, Heard, Felt; Vermonters Exchange Facts," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 19 May 1934, 1 and 3; and "Convincing Testimony Heard At Unique Meeting At Chester Supports Belief Of Existence Of Panthers In Vermont," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 25 May 1934, 1 and 5.

<sup>24</sup> "100 Sit Down to Supper at Chester to Swap Yarns of Panthers in Vermont," 6.

<sup>25</sup> "Diary of Henry L. Ballou," 19 May 1934.

<sup>26</sup> "The 'Panther' Meeting," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 25 May 1934, 2.

<sup>27</sup> "100 Sit Down to Supper at Chester to Swap Yarns of Panthers in Vermont," 6.

<sup>28</sup> "Mendon Cattle Killer Believed to Be Panther," *Woodstock Vermont Standard*, 7 June 1934, 7.

<sup>29</sup> "The Panthers Again," *Boston Herald*, 5 June 1934, 12.

<sup>30</sup> "Chester," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 20 July 1934, 10.

<sup>31</sup> "The Vermont Panther," *Boston Herald*, 31 October 1934, 14.

<sup>32</sup> "Panthers Stocks Soar As Springfield, Perkinsville Men Sight Big Cats," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 16 November 1934, 1 and 5.

<sup>33</sup> "A Challenge To Panther Hunters," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 16 November 1934, 2.

<sup>34</sup> "Mich. Naturalist Thinks Panthers Live In Vermont," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 30 November 1934, 19.

<sup>35</sup> "Perkinsville Man Finds Panther Track," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 28 December 1934, 2.

<sup>36</sup> "Diary of Henry L. Ballou," 22 December 1934.

<sup>37</sup> "Ballou's Faith In Panthers Wins Support Of American Museum," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 18 January 1934, 1 and 4; the same story appeared in the *Springfield Reporter*, 18 January 1935, 1 and 4; and "Big Game Hunter To Seek Panthers In Chester Area," *Rutland Herald*, 14 January 1935, 9.

<sup>38</sup> "Chester," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 25 January 1935, 13; the same account was in the *Springfield Reporter*, 25 January 1935, 13.

<sup>39</sup> "Panthers Heard And Seen In Hemlock District Near Charlestown," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 14 February 1935, 12.

<sup>40</sup> "Chester," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 28 February 1935, 12.

<sup>41</sup> "Chester Panthers Still Prowling About Woods," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 7 March 1935, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Typescript of April 15, 1934 letter in "Panther," Miscellaneous File #1032. Vermont Historical Society; and "New Panther Evidence To Be Heard In Meeting At Chester Inn April 26," *Windsor*

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<sup>43</sup> "Ballou Tells Rotary Vermont Has Panthers," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 18 April 1935, 4; and "Methodist Brotherhood Hears Panther Lore," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 25 April 1935, 1.

<sup>44</sup> "Spargo to Speak at Panther Rally in Chester Friday," *Springfield Reporter*, 25 April 1935, 12; "Panther Seen At Amsden Wednesday," *Springfield Reporter*, 25 April 1935, 1; and "Vermont News of the Week," *Randolph Herald and News*, 2 May 1935, 3.

<sup>45</sup> "Pantherites Elect Ballou Grand Puma," *Rutland Herald*, 27 April 1935, 3; "Pantherites Meet and Reassure Themselves Cats Range Vermont," *Brattleboro Reformer*, 27 April 1935, 1 and 5; "Ballou Elected Grand Puma," *Bennington Banner*, 29 April 1935, 5; and "Pantherites Re-Affirm Faith In Big Cats Despite Reverses; Elect Rev. Ballou Grand Puma Of Order," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 2 May 1935, 1 and 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Bennington Banner*, 30 April 1935, 2; and *Rutland Herald*, 27 April 1935, 8.

<sup>47</sup> "Chester," *Springfield Reporter*, 9 May 1935, 7; and "Chester," *Springfield Reporter*, 16 May 1935, 16.

<sup>48</sup> "Chester," *Springfield Reporter*, 30 May 1935, 17; and "Windham Wolfers One Up on Chester Panther Hunters," *Springfield Reporter*, 13 June 1935, 16.

<sup>49</sup> "Diary of Henry L. Ballou," 28 October 1935.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Andrews, "Irrepressibles' May Gather Again," *Rutland Herald*, 23 November 1983, 7.

<sup>51</sup> "Diary of Henry Ballou," 20 May 1936.

<sup>52</sup> "Pantherites To Gather Again Despite Failure Of Supporting Evidence," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 23 April 1936, 1; "Pantherites," *Brattleboro Reformer*, reprinted in *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 7 May 1936, 2; "Panther Club Speaker Last Express Rider," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 7 May 1936, 1; "Panther Meeting To Be Held at Church," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 21 May 1936, B4; "Chester," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 21 May 1936, C1; "Panther Society Meets At Chester," *Rutland Herald*, 23 May 1936, 2; "Chester," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 28 May 1936, C6; and "Figures From The Old West Live Again At Panther Club Meeting," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 28 May 1936, 1; the same story was in the *Bellows Falls Times*, 28 May 1936, 1.

<sup>53</sup> "Diary of Henry L. Ballou," 22 May 1936.

<sup>54</sup> *Rutland Herald*, 25 May 1936, 8.

<sup>55</sup> "Diary of Henry L. Ballou," 9 September 1936.

<sup>56</sup> "Cold River Panther Shatters Peaceful Night With Hair-Raising Human Screams," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 8 April 1937, 1; and "\$25 For Cold River Panther," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 8 April 1937, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Charles Edward Crane, *Let Me Show You Vermont* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1937), 99.

<sup>58</sup> "The Vermont Panther," *Boston Herald*, 3 April 1934, 12; and "A Panther in Vermont," *Bellows Falls Times*, 5 April 1934, 2.

<sup>59</sup> "Evidence Points To Panthers In Vermont," *Rutland Herald*, 1.

<sup>60</sup> "A Slant on the Recent 'Panther' Controversy [sic]," *Bellows Falls Times*, 12 April 1934, 2. The same letter also appeared in the *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 13 April 1934, 2 and *Springfield Reporter*, 13 April 1934, 2. The *Rutland* paper reprinted it, too, as "N. Hampshire Man Supports Pastor's Panther Adventure," *Rutland Herald*, 16 April 1934, 9.

<sup>61</sup> "A Catty State," *Boston Herald*, 21 April 1934, 14.

<sup>62</sup> "Panthers?" *Boston Herald*, 17 April 1934, 12.

<sup>63</sup> "A Catty State," 14.

<sup>64</sup> "There Must Be A Panther," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 6 April 1934, 2; and *Springfield Reporter*, 6 April 1934, 2.

<sup>65</sup> *The Vermont Missionary*, v. 46, n. 5 (May 1934), 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Rutland Herald*, 21 April 1934, 8.

<sup>67</sup> "Panther Hunters Attention!" *Bennington Banner*, 12 May 1934, 2; the *Burlington Free Press* reprinted the editorial in its 17 May 1934 issue, 6, and the *Rutland Herald* excerpted part of it as "The Pantherists," 15 May 1934, 8.

<sup>68</sup> "Some Hunters Think 'Panthers' Were Bobcats, That Owls Emitted Screams," *Rutland Herald*, 12 April 1934, 7.

<sup>69</sup> "Questions about the Panther," *Rutland Herald*, 23 April 1934, 8.

<sup>70</sup> "Bob-cat Versus Panther Tracks," *Rutland Herald*, 27 April 1934, 8.

<sup>71</sup> "Chester Residents Rally To Support Of Panther Story," *Springfield Reporter*, 6 April 1934, 9.

<sup>72</sup> "Some Hunters Think 'Panthers' Were Bobcats, That Owls Emitted Screams," 7.

<sup>73</sup> "He Believes in Panthers," *Rutland Herald*, 17 April 1934, 4.

<sup>74</sup> "Has Seen Panther Tracks," *Rutland Herald*, 20 April 1934, 8.

<sup>75</sup> "How The Panther Stalks Its Prey," *Rutland Herald*, 30 April 1934, 8.

<sup>76</sup> "To End the Discussion," *Boston Herald*, 8 April 1934, 10B.

- 77 "Believer in Panthers," *Bennington Banner*, 15 May 1934, 2.
- 78 "Evidence Points To Panthers In Vermont," 1-2.
- 79 "A Slant on the Recent 'Panther' Controversy [sic]!" 2.
- 80 "Has Seen Panther Tracks," 8.
- 81 "Londonderry Panther," *Rutland Herald*, 27 April 1934, 8; and "2 Men Say They Saw Panthers in State," *Springfield Reporter*, 27 April 1934, 7.
- 82 "Here's New Tale About Them Thar Pesky Panthers," *Rutland Herald*, 28 April 1934, 5.
- 83 "Saw A Panther's Wet Footprint," *Rutland Herald*, 2 May 1934, 8.
- 84 "Why Panther Screamed," *Rutland Herald*, 3 May 1934, 8; and "Panther in Woodstock," *Rutland Herald*, 3 May 1934, 8.
- 85 "He Believes in Panthers," *Rutland Herald*, 3 May 1934, 8.
- 86 Ira A. Belknap to William H. Ballou, 16 June 1934; Leon S. and Nellie E. Bolster to Ballou, ? June 1934; Mrs. Harry A. Farrar to Ballou, ? June 1934; Blanche Howard Foster to Ballou, 18 June 1934; Philip F. VanBebber Jr. to Ballou, 2 July 1934; Annie Sherwin to Ballou, 25 June 1934; Elbert S. Stevens to Ballou, ? June 1934; H[ermon] M. Guild, ? June 1934; and Waldo M. Stevens, ? June 1934, typescripts in the Hitchcock Collection, Vermont Historical Society, Doc. 290, Folder 4, "Vermont Panther Ballou—Copies of Clippings 1934-1984.
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- 88 "Story of Panther," *Bellows Falls Times* 19 April 1934, 2. The same letter appeared in the *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 20 April 1934, 2, and the *Springfield Reporter*, 20 April 1934, 2.
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- 90 "More About Panthers," *Rutland Herald*, 19 April 1934, 8.
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- 92 "Story of Panther Hunt," *Rutland Herald*, 25 April 1934, 8; and "Believes Panther Stories," *Rutland Herald*, 26 April 1934, 8.
- 93 "Panther Cats," *Rutland Herald*, 9 May 1934, 4.
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- 99 "What, No Panthers?" *Rutland Herald*, 12 May 1934, 8; and Fred A. Emery, "Man Who Knows, Says 'Be Gentle With Panthers,'" *Rutland Herald*, 12 May 1934, 11; the same letter also appeared in the *Randolph Herald and News*, 17 May 1934, 1.
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- 102 "Taken During 1934" and "May Start The Hunters," *Rutland Herald*, 27 April 1934, 8; and "Tale Of A Panther," 26 April 1934, 8.
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- 104 "Wild Animal Campaigning," *Rutland Herald*, 5 May 1934, 8.
- 105 "Buck Better: Not Bring One of His Own," *Rutland Herald*, 8 May 1934, 8.
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- 107 "'Panther Club' to Have Banquet at Chester on May 18," 6.
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- 109 "The Panther Cult," *Burlington Free Press*, 24 April 1935, 6.
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- 115 "Panther Cats," *Rutland Herald*, 9 May 1934, 4.
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- <sup>123</sup> "The Pantherists," *Boston Herald*, 8 May 1934, 14.
- <sup>124</sup> "One Cat Not Enough," *Boston Herald*, 7 April 1934, 14.
- <sup>125</sup> "More Scrambled Initials," *Boston Herald*, 9 April 1934, 10.
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- <sup>127</sup> "He Believes in Panthers," *Rutland Herald*, 1 May 1934, 4.
- <sup>128</sup> "Who's Afraid of the Big, Bad Panther?" *Rutland Herald*, 3 May 1934, 8.
- <sup>129</sup> *Rutland Herald*, 5 May 1934, 8.
- <sup>130</sup> *Rutland Herald*, 8 May 1934, 8.
- <sup>131</sup> "Chester," *Windsor Vermont Journal*, 6 April 1934, 10.
- <sup>132</sup> *Vermont Missionary*, May, 1934, 3.
- <sup>133</sup> Keyte McPeck, "Don't Look Now, But . . . Vermont Panther Rides Again," *Bellows Falls Times*, December 23, 1952, 2.
- <sup>134</sup> Andrews, "'Irrepressibles' May Gather Again," 7.
- <sup>135</sup> Richard Andrews, "Pantherites No Less Certain After 50 Years," *Rutland Herald*, 11 June 1984, 6.
- <sup>136</sup> See, for example, Ed Barna, "The Panther Paradox," *Vermont*, v. 2, n. 1 (January 1990), 60–64, 66; Stephen Mease, "Has the Cat Come Back?" *Vermont Life*, v. 47, n. 2 (Winter 1992), 30–34; Harold B. Hitchcock, "Positive Glimpses of Vermont's Controversial Cat, The Panther," *Vermont Sportsman*, v. 23, n. 1 (April 1992), 20–21; John Lazenby, "The Cat Is Back," *Vermont Life*, v. 49, n. 2 (Winter 1994), 20–23, 25; "Catamount Questions Continue," *Vermont Woodlands* (Winter 1994), 8; and Ted Levin, "Of Catamounts and Panthers," *Vermont Life*, 51, no. 3 (Spring, 1997), 22–25.