

HISTORY

CONNECTIONS



Social Security, 1946

Francis P. Colburn (1909-1984), Oil on Canvas

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VERMONT
HISTORY

VOLUME 15 - Number 2

History Connections is published
by the Vermont Historical Society.

The Vermont Historical Society engages both Vermonters and “Vermonters at Heart” in the exploration of our state’s rich heritage. Our purpose is to reach a broad audience through our outstanding collections, statewide outreach, and dynamic programming. We believe that an understanding of the past changes lives and builds better communities.

Executive Director: Steve Perkins
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The Pavilion Building, next to
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COVER:

Artist and humorist Francis Colburn painted in southern Vermont for much of the Great Depression. His realist style evokes the struggle and stoicism of farm families. This portrait, reflecting his later blend of cubism and surrealism, relates compositionally to earlier, darker works depicting the fragility of life on a hill farm. However, with its bright colors, smiling subject, and ordered landscape, this piece expresses a sense of relief brought by the federal social safety net of the New Deal. This painting is part of the newly renovated tourist cabins in the *Freedom & Unity* exhibit at the Vermont History Museum.

Director's Note

by Steve Perkins

As I sit in my home office, dutifully avoiding contact with friends and colleagues, I remember one year ago. VHS staff were excitedly putting the finishing touches on our sold-out Vermont Eats! Italian dinner program at the Old Labor Hall in Barre, regrettably postponed due to the pandemic. How lovely it would be to see all of you again, raising a glass of wine and munching on Vermont Salumi delicacies. In the meantime, we look forward to a set of online springtime programs exploring cultural pathways in Vermont’s food history. If that previous sentence sounds a little too academic – Let’s cook some delicious dishes and make some tasty cocktails!

We continue to offer compelling online programs, meetings, and resources. I’m amazed at the content appearing on our website every day. We recently finished the design work to bring our museum collection online – check vermonthistory.org/catalog often as we are adding about 100 records daily. Our COVID-19 Archive is growing on Digital Vermont (digitalvermont.org) and library staff have added thousands of old paper records to our online catalog. Stay tuned for the new and updated History Explorer site – providing age-appropriate Vermont history content to our elementary-school learners.

Postponed by a year, the *Catamount in Vermont* exhibition will debut in a scaled-down fashion later this spring. Though the physical exhibit will be smaller than initially conceived, planned Vermont State Park programming will remain, along with additional web and video content.

The Vermont History Museum is open and can be visited safely. Please check our website for details. A celebration of local historical societies will anchor the Local History Gallery this spring and summer, along with a reinstallation and reinterpretation of portions of the permanent *Freedom & Unity* exhibition.

We see a light at the end of this long tunnel and are gearing up for in-person programming, events, and celebrations this fall. Until then, be well, be safe, and take care of each other.

Steve Perkins
Executive Director

IN THE GALLERIES

History Museum Special Exhibits

- *Lively & Local: Historical Societies in Vermont*

Vermont’s story is shared, celebrated, and preserved by the over 190 local historical societies and museums found in all corners of the state. This exhibit features photographs, stories, and associated information on a wide variety of those organizations.

April 6- July 31, 2021

- *The Catamount in Vermont*

The catamount has long been a symbol of Vermont. This new exhibit will explore the history of the catamount through the lenses of art, science, and culture. Opening on Memorial Day weekend, 2021.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Visit our calendar at vermonthistory.org/calendar for full event listings and to learn more!

April 3	Virtual Vermont History Day State Contest
April 8	History for Homeschoolers – Parkway and Patriotism
April 9	Virtual Vermont History Day Award Ceremony
April 13	Vermont Eats Virtual Cooking Class: Italian
April 20	Vermont Eats Virtual Cooking Class : Lebanese
April 27	Vermont Eats Virtual Cooking Class : Jewish
May 13	History for Homeschoolers – Back to the Land



STAY IN THE LOOP!

To learn more about upcoming events, programs, exhibits, and resources subscribe to our eNewsletter at <https://vermonthistory.org/newsletter> and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter!

A FACELIFT FOR THE VERMONT HISTORY EXPLORER

By Victoria Hughes

In January, History for Homeschoolers students analyzed letters from Vermont Civil War soldiers. In the virtual session, we examined digitized copies. At the museum, we used prints of scanned copies to replicate the originals, housed safely at the Leahy Library.

These letters from the 1860s are static and permanent, carefully preserved for future historians, but their longevity might surprise the original authors. Charles Bancroft directed his sister Clara “burn this up when you read it for there is nothing of any consequence in it & I don’t want any one to see the last part of this” about “a picture of that little schoolmarm.” As historians, we are grateful Clara did not follow his instructions. As educators, we use these letters with students to share stories of Vermonters in the past.

Another venue for sharing rich, compelling primary sources with students is the Vermont History Explorer website. Originally launched ten years ago, the website is showing its age. Compared to the 160-year-

old Civil War letters, the website is quite young, but in the world of technology, a decade-old website is ancient!

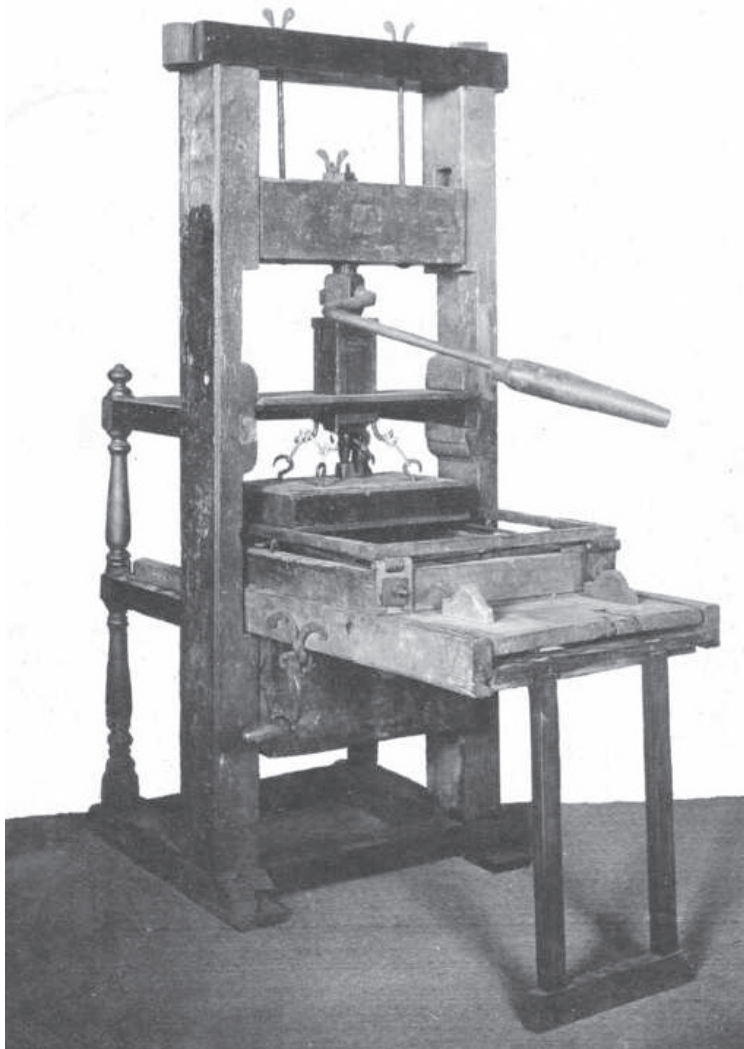
Education staff are working with web designers to refresh and update the site. The new design, coordinated to match the primary Vermont Historical Society website, is modern, colorful, and friendly. The navigation is intuitive while providing multiple entry points, a critical feature for the target audience of 3rd and 4th grade students.



Photograph of Charles Bancroft from Woodbury, Vermont.



1970s tourist sign from the Vermont History Explorer Website.



The website highlights artifacts that help tell the story of Vermont, like the Dresden Press- the first printing press in Vermont.



License plate celebrating Vermont's Bicentennial in 1991. From the Vermont History Explorer Website.

Moving the website from the old platform to the new involves transferring much of the extant content. In a time when the launch of a new website can mean the loss of useful information, this persistence of material is rare.

We are also creating new content for the website. Some of the additions reflect the passage of time. A “generation ago” is now the 1990s, not the 1980s – although both decades are lifetimes ago to a nine-year-old. An expansion of the “Who’s Who in Vermont History” section will show a shift in focus from “Famous” Vermonters to “Significant” Vermonters. When the new website launches, it will include stories from a more diverse selection of people.

We continue to highlight artifacts and primary sources from our collection and use these materials to bring history to life, giving students opportunities to analyze the raw materials of history, think about the past, and make connections to the present.

Thank you to the National Life Group Foundation and Robert F. Cooper Foundation for their support of this project.

You can visit the new website at <https://vermonthistoryexplorer.org/>

COLLECTIONS HIGHLIGHT

by Teresa Greene

With such a wide range of objects, both permanent and ephemeral, filling our lives, it can be difficult to grasp the subtleties of past innovations. This platter is an excellent example of new technology, and its history gives us an idea of how highly prized those advances were.

This large roast platter is transfer-printed in the “Bamboo & Basket” design and is an early example of ironstone china.

Transfer printing technology developed in the mid-eighteenth century. As its name implies, the process involved first printing a design onto tissue paper then transferring the print from the tissue onto the ceramic, allowing the application of detailed designs to cheap ceramic bodies in a more economical way than hand painting. This also meant patterns could be reproduced repeatedly instead of making one-off pieces or shipping examples to a painter for copying.

The ceramic body is made of ironstone china, a heavy-duty pottery straddling the line between earthenware and stoneware. The term “ironstone” is misleading because it contains no iron- it was a marketing term used to illustrate the ware’s strength and durability.

This platter has the earliest mark used by ironstone inventor, Charles James Mason. From 1813 to 1825, he developed the recipe as an affordable alternative to porcelain. Unlike much earthenware, ironstone can be made into massive objects and it can withstand considerable heat. It is also notably stronger.

Both new techniques, transfer printing and ironstone, imitated more expensive goods. And this piece, featuring an Asiatic design mimicking Chinese export porcelain, is no different. Yet this platter was unlikely seen as a “knock off.” This piece was prized enough to serve the Marquis de Lafayette when he visited Montpelier in 1825 as part of his grand tour of the United States.



*Transfer printed platter ca. 1813-1825.
Mrs. Henry L. Farwell. 1933.6. To view this object
in our online catalog, visit vermonthistory.org/catalog*

Do you have some cherished ceramics in your home you are unsure how to use and store? Here are some pro tips from Teresa:

- Pad the shelf you store your ceramics on, but not so much they become unstable and risk falling over.
- Don't pick up ceramic objects by their handles— that is the weakest part of the object.
- If you repair a break in a ceramic piece, it is no longer food safe and cannot withstand heat.
- If your ceramic has any crazing (a network of lines or cracks in the fired, glazed surface) don't use it to serve foods or drinks that stain. They can seep under the glaze and stain the pottery.
- If there is overglaze decoration, including gilding, only wash your piece with a soft cloth. Can't tell by sight if decoration is overglaze? Rub it on your lips. If it's applied over the glaze, you'll be able to feel it.
- Unless you know which pottery type your antique ceramics are, assume that they are not heat safe. Avoid use with boiling water. Cool your tea down by first pouring either cold cream or cold water into your cup.
- Position ceramic objects on a shelf so that if there were a freak earthquake, they'd still land on the shelf instead of the floor.

We Are What We Eat

By Steve Perkins



Chicken Pie Supper at Georgia Plains Church, 1945, VHS Collection

About two years ago, seemingly decades in pandemic time, the Vermont Historical Society started planning a series of food programs titled Vermont Eats! Full disclosure here, we lifted the idea from our friends at the Maine Historical Society who successfully ran a summer of events called Maine EATS! Using food writing from the Federal Writers' Projects of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), we put together dinners and discussions around Vermont foodways of the 1930s.

These original programs provided a spark for exploration of culture and history in a very appetizing way. As we think about telling diverse stories, celebrating the cultures that make up our Vermont experience, and understanding our history for a better future, food becomes a unifying and universally relatable human need.

Initially concerned with documenting disappearing foodways, the WPA writers ended up celebrating unique cultural interplay at the regional level that defined a community.

One of my favorite passages, written by Maine author Kenneth Roberts from the unpublished New England segment, evokes place, time, and emotion through a celebration of food:

Yes, I know the kitchen well; and from occasionally sleeping above it, I became an expert on its intricate and absorbing sounds – not only the rhythmic thumping of the hash-chopper, muffled by the sound of potatoes and corned beef through which it was driven by Katie's tireless arms, and the occasional muted rasp when the scattered mound was reassembled for further chopping. How well I knew the delicate gritting of an iron spoon against a saucepan at the culmination of a successful frosting-making; the faint bubbling which accompanied the manufacture of doughnuts; the soft clanking that announced the removal of the lid of the mincemeat jar! Many of these sounds, of course, left me unmoved, but others brought me hurriedly down the winding back stairs – so hurriedly that I usually fell the last half-dozen steps, having learned that the compassion aroused by such a fall would unfailingly bring me a doughnut, a frosting spoon to lick, or at the worst a slice of new bread, well-buttered and sprinkled with sugar.

The commingling of tradition, ingredient, and place turns the production of food into cultural marker. Today, we often find ourselves talking of the “authentic” food experience without a good definition of authenticity. For much of human history, food production relied as much on place as it did on recipe or technique – one cannot divorce the two without risking a mismatch that sits poorly. Historian David

Hackett Fischer spent much of his professional career looking at cultural pathways, questions of authenticity, and regionality. He defines a region (i.e., Vermont or New England) as “a physical entity formed by terrain, soil, climate, resources and systems of production AND a cultural phenomenon, created by common customs and experiences.”* By this definition, our place changes and evolves with new resources, systems of production, and the assimilation or addition of customs and experiences. We can track this development through food.

Communities who came to live in current-day Vermont brought cooking traditions they adapted to the environment and available ingredients. This includes Abenaki shaping a unique agriculture to the post-glacial landscape, French and English residents mixing a Western European penchant for sauces and puddings with indigenous ingredients, Mediterranean community members bringing sunny dishes to a cold north, Jewish families who maintained a food tradition from Judaea to Lithuania to Burlington, African flavors and textures forcibly filtered through the American south before arriving in the Green Mountains, Asian cooks transforming local produce into incredible flavors and dishes, and many, many more. What are your family food traditions and



Young participants in last fall's Vermont Eats!: Apples cooking class.

how do they fit, inform, or adapt to our Vermont home?

A recently published *Eater* article** laments the loss of the Kansas City taco. The author posited that through a modern push for perceived-authentic Mexican cuisine in local dining, the century-old tradition of the KC taco, a food truly authentic to that place and community, was lost. This simple food, a ground beef taco topped with a liberal amount of Parmesan cheese, evoked the experience of the late nineteenth century Mexican vaquero (cowboy) and his family who drove large herds of beef cattle to the Kansas City slaughterhouses manned by Italian

immigrant households. This dish represents and tells the story of two traditions forging a new culture in the American Midwest. We have many similar stories to discover and tell right here in Vermont.

Studying and celebrating the interplay of food and history is both fun and delicious! We are planning more in-person events in the future, but in the meantime will explore the traditions of Vermonters of Italian, Jewish, and Lebanese descent in our spring online cooking classes. I hope you can join us and learn how Vermont culture is enriched by the experiences, traditions, and foodways of these communities.

* Bégin, Camille, *Taste of the Nation: The New Deal Search for America's Food* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2016), 29.

** Ralat, Jose R., "The Demand for 'Authenticity' Is Threatening Kansas City's Homegrown Tacos" *Eater*, Vox Media, 2019, <https://www.eater.com/2019/4/23/18294269/kansas-city-tacos-origin-parmesan>

MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGH HISTORY

By Amanda Gustin

2020 was one of the most challenging and isolating years of many people's lives. At the Vermont Historical Society, we know that connecting around history has always been a way to build a shared vision for the future – and we are continuing that pursuit despite our physical separation.

Creating programs and exhibits within the pandemic's limitations is a constant learning curve, both exhausting and energizing. We couldn't be more delighted by the response from Vermonters and others around the country.

An early addition to our event schedule proved to be one of our most popular: virtual Vermont trivia. During the first few weeks of the spring lockdown, we transformed our pre-existing pub trivia program into a weekly interactive challenge on Zoom. Hundreds came together to destress, developing inside jokes in the chat room and learning new facts - even about their own towns!

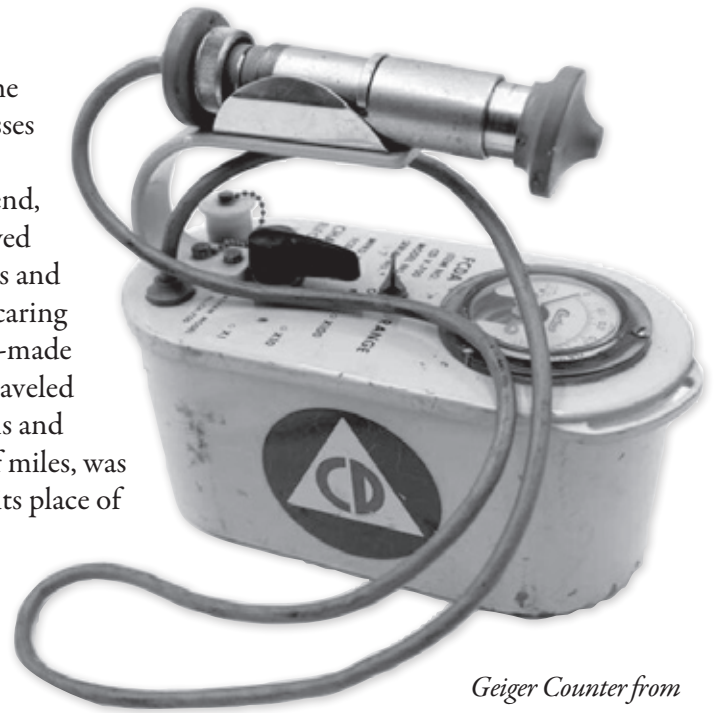
We continued community building with summer genealogy workshops in partnership with the Vermont Genealogy Library. One attendee from across the country, joined by his father in Vermont, held his infant daughter in his lap. Together, three generations connected and learned how to research their family's history.

Every program and class we hosted online saw as much as a quarter of the audience come from outside

Vermont. Our home collections care classes had a sharing component at the end, and attendees showed off beloved antiques and received advice on caring for them. Vermont-made furniture, having traveled through generations and across thousands of miles, was connected back to its place of origin. Wrote one participant, "Gratitude that you put together such lovely presentations under such a stressful time with obvious limitations. Well done!"

Even our classic, in-person series went online successfully. Our Third Thursday lectures connected scholars across the country with Vermont topics, and we are excited for the spring lineup. Blasphemous as it may sound, not all Vermont history research and preservation is happening in Vermont. Now we can bring historians to our audience in a way we could only dream of before.

Finally, our online exhibit presence is rapidly expanding as we explore new tools and formats. Our online exhibit, *When Women Lead: Governor Madeleine Kunin of Vermont*, opened in tandem with the centennial of women's suffrage,



Geiger Counter from Innovation in Vermont. 1957. Gift of Jeneva P. Peterson. 2004.35.1a-b.

takes advantage of the web format and offers deeper and broader access to objects, photographs, and documents from our collections to share the life and career of Vermont's first female governor. *Innovation in Vermont*, another planned in-person exhibition, debuted as a virtual gallery and part of our new online museum collection catalog. As this newsletter goes to press, more and more content is added weekly, both in our existing collections and by converting past exhibits to online formats.

In a year of dark and cloudy skies, we are proud our programming and exhibits revealed a silver lining.

**The digital version of *When Women Lead: Governor Madeleine Kunin of Vermont* can be seen at digitalvermont.org/exhibits/show/kunin/
Visit *Innovation in Vermont* at vermonthistory.org/vt-innovation.**

THE MAGIC OF LOCAL HISTORY

By Eileen Corcoran

The pandemic disrupted so many of our plans last year. While we worked on new strategies for existing programs, we contemplated how to approach our annual LLHSM Achievement Awards. These awards are a highlight of the year, and we couldn't imagine not commemorating the incredible work done by individuals and local history organizations in 2020. A virtual awards ceremony didn't feel right. But then we asked ourselves- can we do it in person? Not by gathering everyone together, but by hitting the road to hand out the awards individually. We got lucky; COVID-19 case counts were low at that time and the weather was pleasant. So, Steve and I headed out on an "Awards Roadshow." We weren't able to see everyone, but the places and people we could visit offered joyful times and a reminder of why community history is so important. We heard amusing stories about amazing individuals. We ate cake. We toured museums. We laughed and smiled (under our masks). At a time when we could all use something to celebrate, we celebrated. As one recipient put it, "I still can't believe the magical time we had yesterday or the magic which you have brought into our lives."



Executive Director Steve Perkins and Carolyn Shapiro of the Barre Historical Society. The Barre Historical Society received an award for their work creating the Rise Up Bakery.

You can view our video of the winners at <https://vermonthistory.org/achievement-awards>.

We're bringing that magic and celebration of local history to the Vermont History Museum in Montpelier with our *Lively & Local: Historical Societies in Vermont* exhibit, slated to run from April 6 – July 31, 2021. Vermont's story is shared,

celebrated, and preserved by the over 190 local historical societies and museums found in all corners of the state. The exhibit will feature photographs and stories from these outstanding organizations, showcase diverse approaches to local history found in Vermont, and illustrate how history (and those who safeguard and share it) are not just "gathering dust."

MYSTERY PHOTO



Several astute readers recognized last issue's mystery photo as Main Street in South Londonderry. Bob Wells, a board member of the Londonderry Arts and Historical Society, wrote: "It's looking westerly with the West River on the left and interestingly, the white building on the right is where 'Sifter John' made up the type for his paper, *The Londonderry Sifter*, started in the 1880s. The house still stands, but the fabulous covered bridge over the West River does not."

No one identified the mystery photo in the late summer issue of *History Connections*, though it also featured a covered bridge in the background.

This issue's mystery photo is one half of a stereoview originally part of a Fairlee, Vermont, collection. Although it lacks context compared to previous mystery photos, we hope someone recognizes this village home so we can file it properly! If you can identify this building, please contact VHS Librarian Paul Carnahan at paul.carnahan@vermonthistory.org or (802) 479-8508.



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