

HISTORY

CONNECTIONS



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VOLUME 13 - 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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Vermont History Museum & Store

Pavilion Building, next to State House
109 State Street, Montpelier, VT
Tuesday–Saturday 10am to 4pm
(802) 828-2291

Families: \$20; Adults: \$7
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Leahy Library
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Wednesday 9am to 8pm
Second Saturdays 9am to 4pm
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Library admission:
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COVER:

Sketch of Ceres III
courtesy of Matthew Johnson

Director's Note

by Steve Perkins

After a year of dreaming, conversing, and planning, your Vermont Historical Society is excited to present a strategic plan that both honors the good work we continue to undertake and looks to a future that best stewards, preserves, and presents Vermont’s history. For the next five years we will focus on the following four broad goals:

1. Provide Vermonters and Vermonters-at-heart the resources to access Vermont’s rich historical collections from anywhere in the world.
2. We will recognize and support local history efforts, understanding that local societies are an integral part of sharing and preserving Vermont’s story.
3. Vermonters will increase their knowledge of our state’s past and understand how their unique experience impacts and shapes this ongoing narrative. Guests will enrich their visit through deeper understanding of Vermont and its people.
4. To build resilient and connected communities, students will understand Vermont’s history and its place in the broader world.

We look forward to sharing strategies such as improved and robust digital access, increased support and special programs for local societies, insightful exhibitions and programs with state-wide reach and impact, and the continued advocacy for, and growth of, history education in our schools. I’m excited for our plans and look forward to sharing them with you in more detail throughout the spring and summer.

Steve Perkins
Executive Director

IN THE GALLERIES

History Center Exhibits

- *Icons, Oddities & Wonders*
New objects on display in September 2019
- *Anything for Speed: Automobile Racing in Vermont*
Through March 30, 2019
- *The War of Ideas: Propaganda Posters from the Vermont Historical Society Collection*
Opens April 15, 2019

History Museum Special Exhibits

- Local History Gallery: *Big Heavy World: Vermont Music Far and Wide*
Through July 2019
- Calder Gallery: *Seeds of Renewal*
Through April 2019
- Calder Gallery: *Sports in Vermont*
Opens May 2019

INFLUENCING AMERICA

FROM WARFRONT TO HOMEFRONT

Our newest exhibit at the History Center, *The War of Ideas: Propaganda Posters from the Vermont Historical Society Collections* will showcase a century of wartime posters from the Civil War to World War II. In examining these posters across time, visitors can explore the similarities and evolution of messages about recruitment, production, the homefront, relief efforts, and more. The exhibit will be up through October 25. Admission to the *The War of Ideas* exhibit is by donation.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 30	Anything For Speed: Automobile Racing In Vermont Exhibit Closing Event Vermont History Center, Barre
April 6	Vermont History Day State Contest University of Vermont, Burlington
April 18 12pm	Third Thursday: The Tool and the Tool-Maker: Wheelwright Samuel Morison Vermont History Museum, Montpelier Speaker: Nora Rubenstein
May 16 12pm	Third Thursday: The History of the Vermont Supreme Court Vermont History Museum, Montpelier Speaker: Paul Gillies

CERES

Vermont's (Third) First Lady



The completed Ceres II statue as installed on the State House dome in 1938.

A detail of the head of the original Ceres statue, showing the effects of some 80 years' worth of exposure to the elements.



Dwight Dwinell carves the head of Ceres II in his workshop behind the State House in 1938.

If you traveled through Montpelier this past summer, you may have noticed something a little different downtown. The gold dome at the State House was getting a makeover and in the process was missing our most important resident - the statue of the allegorical representation of agriculture, referred to as the Roman Goddess Ceres, who has graced its pinnacle since 1859. But what you might not know is that she was the second version of Ceres to stand guard atop the dome, replaced this past December by a third. The reason? Perhaps surprising in a state known for its amazing stone, all three were made of wood.

The impetus for the first Ceres started in 1857. As work progressed on the reconstruction of the recently burned State House, the appointed commissioners approached a young Brattleboro sculptor, Larkin Goldsmith Mead, to envision a statue to crown the new wooden dome.

Mead corresponded regularly with the commissioners on the design and placement of the statue. These letters include sample drawings and descriptions; today these drawings are the best idea we have of the look of the finished statue, as the original was mostly destroyed during its removal in the late 1930s (the few pieces that remain of are now in the collections at VHS).

Lamenting the low commission (\$400) for the piece, Mead wrote that he would engage a “talented German ship-carver” to execute the statue to scale. Although we don’t have any direct evidence, it’s probable that the carver was a German immigrant employed at the Estey Organ Company named Johann “John” Henkel. Henkel later helped produce Brattleboro’s Civil War monument and is listed in census records as a carver with the organ company.

When the State House was completed in 1859, the finished statue received such acclaim that the Vermont legislature voted to double Mead’s commission and to hire him to create a heroic statue of Ethan Allen to greet people as they entered the porch of the new building. Mead went on to have a long and celebrated career. His work graces many state capitals, art museums, and public buildings. In addition to his statues, his best-known work is Abraham Lincoln’s tomb in Springfield, Illinois.

As with all outdoor, wooden sculpture, the original Ceres was ephemeral. By the 1930s, the state realized the statue was failing, succumbing to rot and the elements at a rapid rate. The legislature appropriated funds for a new work; however, in the midst of the Depression, Vermont frugality prevailed. The 87-year-old sergeant-at-arms Dwight Dwinell convinced Governor George Aiken that his carving skills were up to the task of replacing the statue at a fraction of the appropriated amount.

Working in a shop behind the State House, Dwinell carved what can be called a lovely folk-art interpretation of Larkin Mead’s allegorical sculpture. Dwinell focused on the head while two State House maintenance men, Dean Bancroft and Gordon Yeaton, glued ponderosa pine lumber together and roughly carved the body. Certainly not as refined and delicate as the original statue, Dwinell’s self-christened Ceres II got the job done, and once installed in 1938 became beloved by a new generation of Vermonters.

But 80 years of Vermont winters and summer rainstorms took its toll, necessitating a retirement of sorts with a new statue commissioned for her place. The result of a design competition, Jerry Williams’ and Chris Miller’s interpretation of Mead’s original concept is carved from tropical mahogany and stained white with a pigmented linseed oil for durability. Ideally this statue will last 100 years, 20 more than either of her big sisters; all the while endearing herself to generations to come.

Currently drying out and being stabilized, Ceres II awaits a new home as part of the VHS collections. The original hope was that it could be installed at the History Museum in Montpelier, next door to its original perch. But, as no record of her actual height was kept, it wasn’t until she was taken down that complete assessments could be made. Too tall to stand up inside, further evaluation and work will be completed to determine how best to preserve and exhibit this essential artifact celebrating Vermont’s artistic past.

Meanwhile, photo documentation of Dwinell’s carving process joins the remaining pieces of Mead’s statue as part of our collections. Recently, the Dwinell family donated Dwight Dwinell’s tool chest, along with his carving tools, to the museum as well.

MYSTERY PHOTO



This issue's mystery photograph is of a pedestrian suspension bridge in the winter. It came to us in a collection of many other Vermont postcards, yet it does not contain any identification. Does anyone recognize this bridge or the building in the background? If so, please contact VHS Librarian Paul Carnahan at paul.carnahan@vermonthistory.org or at (802) 479-8508.



Debbie Dufresne McPherson and Scott Harrington, both from the Manchester Historical Society, identified the location of last issue's mystery photo as the Manchester railroad depot. Scott identified the event as transportation of the granite base for the town's soldier's memorial by the W. H. Fullerton Granite and Marble Works in 1896; the gentleman standing next to the wagon is Fullerton himself.

EYEWITNESS TO HISTORY

Calvin Coolidge had spent his adult life in Massachusetts and Washington, DC, but he was at his boyhood home in Plymouth, VT, on August 2, 1923, when the news came that President Warren G. Harding had died. Coolidge's chauffeur, Joseph M. McInerney (staying in nearby Bridgewater), received the late-night telephone call from California and rushed to Plymouth in the vice-presidential limousine to inform him. He found the Coolidge household already awake, having been informed of the news by the local switchboard operator.

McInerney tells the story of this unique turn of events in a typescript recently purchased by the Vermont Historical Society's Leahy Library. The unusual document was offered to the library by a 1960s pen pal of Mr. McInerney. She wanted the document to reside in Vermont after being in private hands for over 50 years.

According to McInerney's account, he was one of the six people who witnessed the kerosene lamp-lit administration of the Presidential oath of office to Calvin Coolidge by his father, Col. John Coolidge, early in the morning of August 3. The others were Grace Coolidge, Congressman Porter H. Dale, L.L. Lane (a friend of Dale's), reporter Joseph H. Fountain, and Erwin C. Geiser (Coolidge's secretary). McInerney claims that all eight people present signed three copies of the oath, none of which survive.

The exact make-up of the small group who witnessed the legendary swearing-in ceremony has been debated for decades. Coolidge himself tells of the ceremony in his 1929 autobiography and leaves out two people known to have been there. Reporter Fountain wrote an account in 1950, claiming that McInerney and Lane were on the porch at the time the oath was given. A third eyewitness account, written by Dale in the 1930s and published in *Vermont History* in 1994 (vermonthistory.org/journal/62/CoolidgeInauguration.pdf), also leaves McInerney on the porch.

McInerney's account becomes the fourth eye-witness narrative now available to the public. It doesn't resolve the question of who exactly witnessed the oath, but it



Joseph M. McInerney stands next to the vice-presidential limousine in Bridgewater, Vermont, the day that Calvin Coolidge became president.

does provide another primary source on the excitement surrounding the transfer of power in a remote Vermont village.

McInerney writes about the drive from Plymouth to Rutland later that morning, "In those days all the roads in that part of Vermont were narrow, winding and like riding over a washboard. A thirty or more-mile trip was considered a long one." He also tells of a car tailing the president's car during the drive, blowing its horn continuously. "Finally, the President said: 'Slow down Joseph, and let this crazy man get passed.'" It turned out that the car contained two Secret Service agents from Springfield, Massachusetts, who had been driving all night to try to catch up to the new president to provide him with a security detail.

McInerney's account of one of the most famous events in Vermont history is entitled "As I Remember." It now has the call number MSA 852:07 and is available to the public and scholars at the Vermont History Center in Barre and online at vermonthistory.org/documents/digital/McInerneyJosephMRemembers.pdf.

VERMONT HISTORY DAY MOVES TO BURLINGTON

Vermont History Day, the long-standing student history contest, is growing and moving to an exciting new location for 2019. On Saturday, April 6th, students from across the state will gather at the University of Vermont Davis Center in Burlington to share their research projects with judges.

In addition to having more space for student presentations, the change in venue has created opportunities to collaborate with colleagues at UVM. Librarians at the Howe Library and Special Collections offered a Help Day in January to support students with research in a university library. Colleagues at the Center for Research on Vermont, the UVM Historic Preservation Program, and the UVM History

Department are helping to facilitate the move and provide judges for the competition.

During the contest day, students will have a chance to attend an information session with representatives from the UVM Admissions Department, visit the Fleming Museum, and explore the campus and other Burlington attractions.

We look forward to hosting even more students than in previous years as Vermont schools continue to focus on project-based learning and personalized learning. Visit vermonthistory.org/historyday to volunteer to be a judge or to see which students qualify to represent Vermont at National History Day in June.

IN MEMORIAM

Reidun D. Nuquist, 1940-2018

We are saddened by the passing of former Vermont Historical Society Librarian Reidun Dahle Nuquist, who died at her home in Montpelier on November 26. Reidun, a native of Norway, was hired as assistant librarian of the VHS in 1971. She became librarian in 1983 and retired in 1990, passing the position on to current Librarian Paul Carnahan.

During Reidun's tenure as librarian, the VHS Library made the transition to using personal computers to create catalog cards, and she also spearheaded efforts to reduce cataloging backlogs. In addition to her regular duties as librarian, Reidun also compiled the annual indexes to *Vermont History* and indexed several VHS books.

Reidun's life was a balance of outdoors and cultural activities. She was a mainstay of the Green Mountain Club, leading trips, serving on the board and committees, and writing books and articles on the history of the organization. Reidun was honored at a well-attended celebration of her life at the Green Mountain Club



Librarian Reidun Nuquist introduces the VHS staff to the recently reconfigured vault in the basement of the Pavilion Building, 1985.

Visitor Center in Waterbury on December 15. Former VHS Director Michael Sherman spoke at the gathering, calling her “a true inheritor of the energy, strength, and endurance of the Norse gods and goddesses.”

WAVING THE CHECKERED FLAG



Beaver Dragon celebrates a victory at Thunder Road. From the Cho Lee Collection. Courtesy of Lloyd Hutchins.

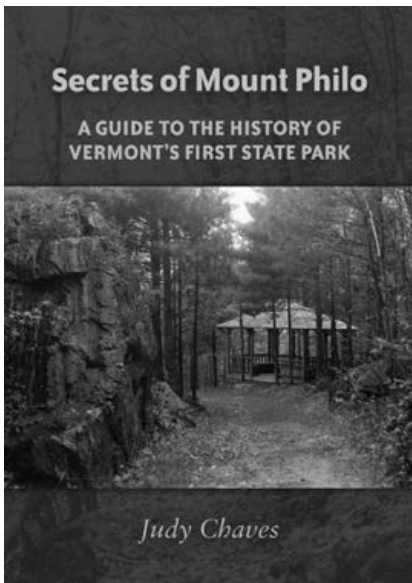
The year flew by fast, and it's almost time to close our much-loved exhibition *Anything for Speed: Automobile Racing in Vermont*. On the way we've visited nearly every corner of the state for track walks, trivia games, television spots, podcast recording, and some of us have gotten far more into racing than we ever thought possible.

The exhibition closes on March 30. You can visit during regular open hours, Monday-Friday from 9am to 4pm. We'll also host a special Open House on the very last day of the exhibition, Saturday, March 30. Doors will be open from 9am to 4pm for your last chance to soak in 115 years of racing history, beat your best time on the simulator, and listen to the voices of some of the state's biggest racing personalities.

At 2pm that day, we'll also host a special discussion with some of those same racing personalities.

We can't possibly thank everyone who helped with the exhibit enough – from the collectors who opened their attics and barns, the racers and mechanics who opened their homes, the fans who made sure we were talking about their favorite moments, and also our sponsors who provided the resources to make everything come to life: Local 22/Local 44 News, Vermont Automobile Enthusiasts, North Star Leasing, Noyle W. Johnson Insurance, Shearer Chevrolet Buick GMC Cadillac, Benoit Electric, Thunder Road International Speedbowl, and WDEV Radio Vermont Group.

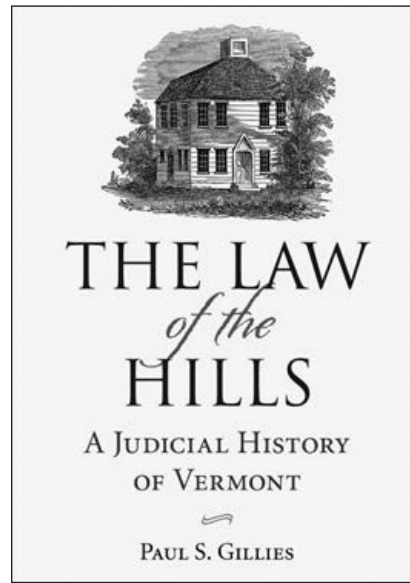
SPRING READING LIST



Secrets of Mount Philo: A Guide to the History of Vermont's First State Park by Judy Chaves

A true guidebook to the past and present of Mount Philo, site of Vermont's oldest state park. Full of detailed information with photos and maps in a convenient take-along size.

Paperback, 113 pages. 2018. \$19.95



The Law of the Hills: A Judicial History of Vermont by Paul S. Gillies

The first general history of the judicial branch in Vermont, from the tempestuous early days when Ethan Allen roared at the judges and mobs took over the courts through its evolution over the next 250 years.

Paperback, 313 pages. 2019. \$24.95

Other Great New Publications

Backroads and Byways of Vermont: Drives, Day Trips and Weekend Excursions by Christina Tree, Lisa Halvorsen, and Pat Goudy O'Brien

A new guidebook with drives that take you to every corner of the state, with recommendations for lodging, dining, walks and swimming holes. Clear navigation, easy to read maps and beautiful photography make this a must-have resource.

Paperback, 244 pages. 2018. \$21.95

From Barre to Montpelier by Paul Heller

These are collected essays of Paul Heller, many previously published in the Times-Argus newspaper. There are some wacky but true tales of local characters, events, and places, with lots of photos.

Paperback, 200 pages. 2018. \$15.00

Those Turbulent Sons of Freedom by Christopher Wren

The story of Ethan Allen and the much-loved Green Mountain Boys of Vermont and their role in the American Revolution – the myth and the reality. A rare look at a lesser-known aspect of the conflict and a truly eye-opening look at the participants.

Hardcover, 320 pages. 2018. \$26.00

Seven Sisters: Ancient Seeds and Food Systems of the Wabanaki People and the Chesapeake Bay Region by Dr. Frederick M. Wiseman

A study of the ancient agricultural systems of the Wabanaki people, their agricultural ceremonies and calendar. A compilation of heirloom seeds and their origins is included with photographs and descriptions.

Paperback, 280 pages. 2018. \$22.00

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