



# HISTORY CONNECTIONS

The Art Issue

Vermont Historical Society News and Notes • Summer/Fall 2024







## VERMONT HISTORY

VOLUME 18 - Number 3

*History Connections* is published by the Vermont Historical Society.

Vermont Historical Society believes understanding the past changes lives and builds better communities. Our purpose is to engage Vermonters and Vermonters-at-Heart with outstanding collections, state-wide outreach, and dynamic programming.

Executive Director: Steve Perkins

### Vermont History Museum and Store

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

Adults: \$9 / Families: \$25  
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60 Washington St. Suite 1, Barre, VT  
(802) 479-8500

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## In The Galleries

### History Museum Special Exhibits



#### *For the Love of Vermont: The Lyman Orton Collection*

A selection from the largest private collection of 20th century artwork by Vermont artists, collected over the past 45 years by Lyman Orton, best known as the proprietor of The Vermont Country Store. This exhibition features more than 80 works of Vermont scenes created between 1910 and 1970. Among the 50 artists in the exhibition are Luigi Lucioni, Walton Blodgett, Francis Colburn, Cecil Bell, Rockwell Kent, Emile Gruppe, Ruth Mould, Mitzi Goward, and Paul Sample.

**On view at the Vermont History Museum through December 2024.**

#### *A Century of Creative Women in Pittsford*

Presented by the Pittsford Historical Society, this exhibition covers a period from 1870-1960 and features the works of artists Martha Wood and her partner Lucia Gilbert, as well as Mary Randall, Hilda Belcher, and Katherine Crockett.

**On view in the Local History Gallery through January 2025.**

### History Center Special Exhibits

#### *Icons and Oddities*

Vermonters have always been keen to reuse and recycle. For this newest iteration of Icons, Oddities, and Wonders, VHS staff sought items from our collections that show hundreds of years of clever adaptation and thoughtful reinvention. **Visit the gallery during Library open hours.**

### Research and Exhibition Gallery

In October, VHS opened the Research and Exhibition Gallery at the Vermont History Center in Barre. This Gallery enables VHS to showcase hundreds of additional artifacts, documents, and paintings from our extensive collection in an accessible manner so visitors and scholars alike can explore our state's rich past.

#### Events

Want to learn more about upcoming events and programs?  
Visit our calendar at [vermonthistory.org/calendar](http://vermonthistory.org/calendar)  
and follow us on social media.

## Adding meaningful art to the VHS

As a young historic preservation student in Baltimore, I was required to take Art History 101. While many of my classmates used the dark lecture hall to grab some extra sleep during this 8:30 am class, I was enthralled. In fact, the experience was revelatory for me – inspiring me to add art history as a major and ultimately leading to graduate school and a museum career.

Art history gave me an insight into life, society, politics, culture, and humanity in ways that traditional history, with its focus on the written word, couldn't come close to competing. It spoke to people, places, and themes that were hidden or lacking in the written record.

While western historians trace their field back to ancient Greece, art history is a relative newcomer to academic thought. For centuries, art and artifacts were used as illustrations for historical works – serving a supporting role to the historian's central research rather than as primary sources in and of themselves. As the young field of archaeology grew during the enlightenment, researchers found they had to use the evidence at hand to interpret a past without written documentation. Many of the techniques gleaned from the study of ancient peoples in the 19th century were adapted to the study of artifacts of our own time in the 20th century.

A product of the 19th century, the Vermont Historical Society holds an impressive library and archive and the growth of our museum collection

came much later. Over the past few decades, the museum collection has grown and expanded to include many artifacts that serve as primary sources worthy of independent research and reflection. As we

install our Research and Exhibition Gallery and work through a comprehensive object inventory, we will continue to refine and add to this meaningful collection.

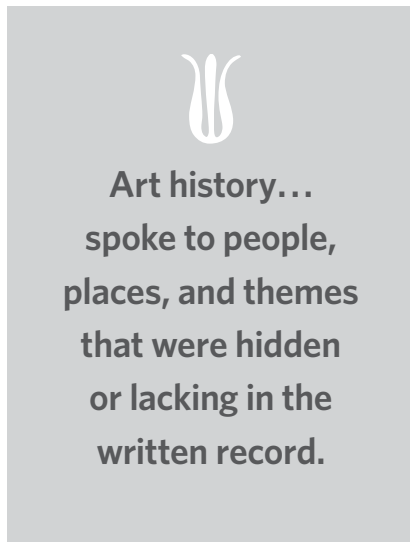
Our fine art collection is very small and mostly consists of portraits of 19th century gentlemen. A handful of landscapes, farm scenes, and still lifes round out the core of the collection. Notable additions such as the Paul Sample mural from National Life, folk art works of Gayleen Aiken, and depression-era visual

commentary have expanded our perspectives on Vermont.

I am very happy to host *For The Love of Vermont: The Lyman Orton Collection* at the museum this year and hope that it will inspire the addition of meaningful art to the VHS collection. I look forward to young historians using our museum collections as primary sources and inspiration for their exploration of Vermont's past and present.



Steve Perkins, *Executive Director*





Montpelier from Col. Jewett's Hill by James Franklin Gilman

# THE VERMONT LANDSCAPE

*There is a tension that exists while living in the midst of a painting.*

By Andrew Liptak

Vermont's landscape is famed for its beauty. For centuries, it's been both a destination and inspiration for artists of all stripes. Seen through their eyes, the Green Mountain State is many things: pastoral countryside dotted with idyllic towns and villages in oil landscapes, riots of color gracing the sides of buildings, and sculptures of stone hewn from the ground. It's a canvas for artists to interpret who we are as a collective body of people living between the mountains and the forests. Understanding Vermont through the eyes of artists throughout the ages helps us to understand not just the physical

dimensions of the landscape, but of how they saw themselves in it throughout the state's history.

Some of the earliest-known artwork in the state can be found along the riverbanks of Bellows Falls and Brattleboro: petroglyphs carved into the rocks by members of the Western Abenaki tribes. In his 2001 PhD dissertation, *The Petroglyph Sites of Bellows Falls and Brattleboro, Vermont*, Dr. Thomas Earl Larose notes that this sort of rock art denoted "such things as sacred sites connected to mythology, crossroads, or historical events," and that these markings were left in places where they were oriented in ways that

travelers could see them, presumably communicating the stories to them as they passed.

When settlers arrived in North America, they sketched the landscape in their own ways. Mapmakers reproduced the coastlines and political boundaries on paper, while others sketched out the landmarks and towns that they saw. “First Bridge at Bellows Falls” and “View of Bellows Falls,” drawn by an anonymous artist in 1805 shows off the buildings nestled alongside the trees and rivers, while another painted a bustling scene in 1825’s “View of Cavendish.”

Born in 1818, Scottish-born painter James Hope explained that the “exquisite scenery and lordly tales of my Scottish homeland sparked a lifelong attachment for reverent delight in Nature so Attuned,” and after arriving in Vermont as a teenager, he demonstrated his skill as an artist from a young age. After injuring himself chopping wood, Hope tried his hand at painting, soon establishing himself as a noteworthy portrait painter. In her 1984 dissertation, *James Hope: nineteenth century American painter*, Elizabeth Theriault Strum noted that Hope settled his family in the Rutland area likely “due to its natural scenery...the beauty of the area and the mineral spa of nearby Clarendon attracted tourists during the summer months.”

Others followed: itinerant, self-taught painter James Franklin Gilman made a living travelling from house to farm, sketching and painting everyday scenes of 19th century Vermont life, prompting biographer Adele Godchaux Dawson to highlight the attention to detail he brought to those pieces: “his quiet assemblage of detail in the foreground, middle ground and far distance gives his paintings a quality of total recall rather than casual observation.”

Italian-born artist Luigi Lucioni began his career in New York City in the early 20th century, but began traveling to Vermont in the 1930s, writing “it was like seeing the mountainsides of my birthplace. I was reborn in this majestic setting and I fell in love with Vermont.” He returned year after year to render Vermont’s landscapes in oil on canvas.

Vermont’s artists didn’t limit themselves to paintings to express themselves. Rockingham’s Burial Ground is home to some of the oldest graves in the state, and it’s a wonder to behold. The slate gravestones feature intricate etchings created by a team of dedicated stone carvers who etched the names and beliefs of the early settlers who passed. Nearly a hundred miles away, Italian and Scottish stone carvers in Barre spent their lives honing their craft on the granite they hauled out of the hillsides, transforming the city into an outdoor sculpture garden with the statues and headstones they created. In 1968

and 1971, Vermont hosted a pair of international sculpture symposiums, with artists from around the world creating abstract and brutalist sculptures out of marble and concrete, showcasing the materials and infrastructure of the state to motorists as they pass by on the highway.

There is a tension that exists while living in the midst of a painting; the desire to maintain the natural beauty that surrounds us and the pressing concerns of everyday life play a role in the way that we have depicted and constructed the shared vision for the Vermont that we see. In his book *Repeopling Vermont: The Paradox of*

*Development in the Twentieth Century*, Paul Searls notes that over the course of the 20th Century, Vermonters “came to see Vermont’s rural character [as] the state’s greatest asset,” and that the state’s “traditional landscapes, physical and human, increasingly distinguished the state amidst a nation growing ever more modern.”

On March 23rd, 1968, Governor Phil Hoff signed the State Billboard Act (10 V.S.A. § 495) into law, which prohibited billboards along Vermont’s roadsides. It was the culmination of decades of work to preserve the state’s scenic landscapes that has attracted so many artists. One piece by Phil Godenschwager, “The Great Wall of Vermont,” part of *For the Love of Vermont: The Lyman Orton Collection*, neatly showcases this tension, featuring the state of Vermont with its idyllic landscape dotted with small towns and farms surrounded by a horror show of skyscrapers, advertisements, and industry, held at bay by a fortified green wall.

Some of the earliest-known artwork in the state can be found along the riverbanks of Bellows Falls and Brattleboro: petroglyphs carved into the rocks by members of the Western Abenaki tribes.





# WHERE ART & ARTIST MEET: PASQUALE SANTO IN THE VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTION

By Katie Grant

In the summer of 2024, I began work on several new acquisitions to our collection that demonstrate the intersection between Vermont's inspiring landscapes and our determination to create usable, beautiful things: the paintings and personal items of artist Pasquale Santo.

Born in Italy in 1893, Santo emigrated to the United States in 1913. After working as a laborer throughout the Northeast for several years, he settled in Bennington where he began to hone his skills as a painter, painting houses, signs, murals, and oil paintings. By the late 1930s, his work attracted the attention of art connoisseurs and dealers in New York, which brought him to international attention, showcasing not only his skill and creativity, but also allowing the world to see, appreciate, and share the beauty of Vermont.

Thanks to the Santo family, the Vermont Historical Society recently accessioned one of the artist's paintings, *Henry Bridge* (1946), along with the easel he used. While I was unable to take the painting and easel down to Bennington and stand in the spot Santo painted, I was excited to bring these two items together for the first time in nearly eighty years to see what else we could uncover about Santo's vision and process.

Standing in front of Santo's easel, one can begin to understand the complexities of painting in the outdoors and how the choice of location to depict a scene has just as much to do with the view of the landmark as it does with the practicalities of painting on-location. Santo chose to stand downriver of the bridge, which allowed him to make several smart decisions about his position: he could explore the movement of the water as it flowed past, the interplay of light and shade in his surroundings, while also using the same shade to give him some relief from the sun.

Santo's easel itself is quite large, featuring a detachable palette stand that gave him an additional work surface if he found himself somewhere more precarious. It would have provided him with a sturdy foundation on which to lay his canvas without having to worry about a sudden breeze jarring his work or a rolling pebble adjusting the angle without his approval, but he would have had to carefully consider his movements with easel, paints, canvas, and brushes before venturing out.

A closer look at Santo's easel reveals just how much he relied upon this tool. The corners and edges of each leg have been worn down over time, while faint dirt stains and chips to the paint reveal its use in the field. Some components, like the palette shelf, have been adjusted off-center over time. As the wooden shelf and metal gromets have aged, Santo made modifications and minor

updates so that his canvas could remain level despite rough Vermont terrain or natural shifting of built wood objects used outdoors in all weather.

Santo is known for his incredible attention to detail, and painting artworks like *Henry Bridge* on his easel

on-location enabled him to focus entirely on the scene at hand.

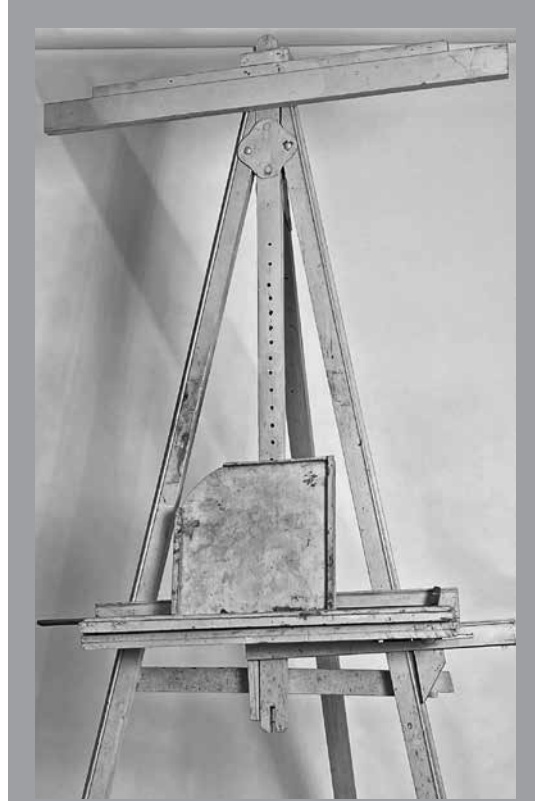
Viewers can see each river rock in the two large bridge supports, while the latticed sides of the bridge call to those angular sections, linking top and bottom of the bridge in a way that blends this human-made conveyance into a natural landscape that has been there for centuries. The pale sky, with just a few wisps and puffs of clouds, contrasts dramatically with the river below the bridge as it rushes over the waterfall and calms to a more sedate pace in the foreground. Other evidence of Bennington's human interaction, from fences guiding travelers up to cross the bridge to a house just peeking through the trees, contrast the built and natural worlds while simultaneously revealing a love and respect for this river.

The painting of *Henry Bridge* is a stunning and comforting depiction of a classic Vermont landmark; along with

the easel he used to create, it becomes a window into Santo's methods and perspective on the state he came to call home. We have thousands of objects in our collection that speak to the power Vermont holds within our hearts, but this pair might be the one I find most compelling. The combined impact of Santo's easel and this idyllic painting remind us that the point of his art is not his role as artist but rather the passion and welcome that Vermont's spaces offer to all Vermonters-at-heart.

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Facing page: *Henry Bridge* (1946) oil painting by Pasquale Santo.



Standing in front of Santo's easel, one can begin to understand the complexities of painting in the outdoors.

# A Century *of* Creative Women *in* Pittsford



Items from the exhibit *A Century of Creative Women in Pittsford*.

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By Pittsford Historical Society

The town of Pittsford sits nestled between the Taconic Mountains to the west and the Green Mountains to the east. It may best be known as an area of marble production, with the boom time of that industry in the 19th and early 20th centuries leading to most of the homes and buildings you see in town today. The exhibit *Creative Women in Pittsford*, curated by the Pittsford Historical Society, offers a glimpse into the work of five women who lived in Pittsford at various points in their lives, and while there drew upon the landscape, people, and events to create paintings, prints, and photographs that reflected the town over the course of one hundred years.

**Martha Wood** (later Belcher, 1844-1930) and her partner Lucia Gilbert (1832-1898) met while working as teachers in Poultney and Castleton. When Lucia's parents returned to Pittsford, Lucia followed them and Martha came along. They set about to bring art to the area, and their first accomplishment was an art camp up in the hills above Pittsford. The *Rutland Herald* recorded an exhibition of paintings by the group at the home of Simeon Gilbert in the fall of 1872. "Two rooms were entirely devoted to the pictures, over one hundred in number, all grouped and arranged with admirable taste and effort." (*Rutland Herald*, December 13, 1872). Martha later spent two years in Europe (1873-5); her return occasioned another exhibition reported by the *Rutland Herald*. She and Lucia Gilbert then set up a workshop copying great masters on slate.

**Mary Randall (later Allen)** was born in Pittsford in 1878 and lived most of her life there. She graduated from the University of Vermont in 1899 and began work as a photographer in addition to serving as the town's librarian and as a correspondent for the *Rutland Herald*. Her images range from portraits of children to landscapes to scenes from community events and even natural disasters, bringing Pittsford of 1895 to 1920 to life one image at a time. The Pittsford Historical Society has a collection of approximately 1,100 of her glass plate negatives and is working on a project to digitize and share those images.

**Hilda Belcher (1881-1963)**, a child of Pittsford and daughter to Martha Wood Belcher, went on to significant artistic success in New York circles and beyond in the period from 1907-1940. She attended the New York School of Art and studied with the likes of William Merritt Chase, Kenneth Hayes Miller, and George Bellows. She was best known as a watercolorist (one of her early works, *The Checkered Dress*, is an early portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe), although during her active career much income came from oil portraits. Belcher also published illustrations, cartoons, and caricatures that appeared in popular magazines of the time. Many of her models were family, friends, and neighbors in Pittsford. She was the second woman to be accepted into the National Academy of Design and a founding member of the Southern Vermont Artists' League in Manchester.

**Katherine Crockett** (later Marnell, 1898-1979) studied art in Boston and New York City. She made greeting cards for personal use and was persuaded to sell them. Around 1929, she found commercial success with a silk-screened Christmas card featuring a Noel design. She moved the business to Vermont in 1951, where she had lived for some time as a child. In 1954, Crockett told *Vermont Life* that her business challenge was to make a good product, "one that is beautiful, original and cheap enough to make people want to buy it" (*Vermont Life*, Vol 9, issue 2). Her designs ranged from traditional to modern and included religious and secular themes. The company was quite successful, distributing some half a million cards annually. It is claimed that the volume of her mail-order business led the USPS to upgrade the Pittsford Post Office and there are still Pittsfordites who recall working for her. Crockett retired in 1966, though her card business continued for a number of years after under different management.

The exhibit *Creative Women in Pittsford* is on view in the Local History Gallery from August 3, 2024 to January 25, 2025. The Pittsford Historical Society's Eaton Hall Museum is located on Rte. 7 in Pittsford. You can find more information on the society at [pittsfordhistorical.com](http://pittsfordhistorical.com)

# Winners of the 2024 LLHSM Achievement AWARDS



Eileen Corcoran presenting the awards during this year's LLHSM Conference in White River Junction

The Vermont Historical Society annually presents the League of Local Historical Societies & Museums (LLHSM) Achievement Awards, which recognize the exceptional individuals and community organizations throughout the state to collect, preserve, and share Vermont's rich history. VHS held this year's conference at Hotel Coolidge in White River Junction, where it honored the following recipients.

## **Award of Excellence**

### **Greensboro Historical Society**

*Saving Land, Saving History:  
50 Years of Land Conservation in Greensboro*

This exhibit was designed to educate the community about the value of conserved land and to honor the contributions of its conservators. It featured 21 oversized panels about key parcels of land in Greensboro, and the society used drone and archival images, conservator narratives, and maps to illustrate the unique stories and contributions of each piece of land.

## **South Hero Bicentennial Museum**

*South Hero in the Centennial Year 1876:*

*A Photo Journey Through South Hero in 1876*

Editor Alice Wells examines the year 1876 to honor the century prior to the founding of the South Hero Bicentennial Museum, drawing on hand-written journals and research to document the lives of the residents of South Hero. The museum created a display to accompany the book *South Hero Back Then*, which features pictures of the houses, stores, and lodgings, arranged as they would have appeared on the roads in 1876.

## **Award of Merit**

### **Bridgewater Historical Society**

[bridgewaterhistory.org](http://bridgewaterhistory.org)

The Bridgewater Historical Society launched a new website to provide the public with accessible information about the history of Bridgewater, which includes a gallery of images, information on its exhibits, collection, newsletters, and space for society members and volunteers to publish new research and updates.

## **Individual Achievement Award**

### **William "Bill" McGroarty**

Montgomery Historical Society

A member of the Montgomery Historical Society for over 20 years, Bill McGroarty has served on the Board of Directors and as Vice Chair for almost that entire time. His leadership has produced an impressive record of excellence including increased ongoing revenue, successful fundraising for historical preservation and restoration projects, writing and publishing the 3rd edition of the Town history in 2014, and organizing programs and events.

## **Group Achievement Award**

**Bob Colquhoun, Jim Lockbridge,  
Ross Mickel, David Schein, Big Heavy World**

For nearly 30 years, volunteers have contributed time and energy to create Big Heavy World's catalog of Vermont-made music recordings, establish a museum of Vermont-made music history, and a licensed community radio station to broadcast that music archive.



*First Branch of the White River, Vermont*, Wikipedia Commons

## EDWARD HOPPER AND HIS TIME IN VERMONT

Vermont has long been home, or at least inspiration to artists of all stripes, from all over the world. One artist attracted to Vermont's beauty was Edward Hopper, best known works like *Nighthawks* and *Early Sunday Morning*. He was born in and spent most of his time in New York, but for two summers, he made the trip up to Vermont and produced a handful of watercolors, which author Bonnie Clause explored in her book *Edward Hopper in Vermont*. We spoke with her about Hopper and his work for our newsletter. Here's an excerpt:

**VHS:** In 1937 and 1938, Hopper spent time in South Royalton, which you cover in your book *Edward Hopper in Vermont*. What drew him to the Green Mountain State?

**B.C.** In the summers, Edward and Jo left New York for their small home in the dunes of South Truro, on Cape Cod in Massachusetts. After some time there, Edward would become restless and unproductive and need a

change of scene. With urging from Jo—who was also an artist—the Hoppers would drive to other areas of New England in search of new subjects to paint.

Their first foray into Vermont was in 1927, when Edward made several small watercolors of barns; on subsequent brief trips, he painted a few landscapes with hillsides and dirt roads. In these works, Hopper seemed to be searching for a compelling subject, and it was in South Royalton in 1937 that he found it: the White River.

The result was a series of seven watercolors of the White River made over the course of two extended summer sojourns. These works show

the White River at diverse locations between Bethel and Sharon, at different times of day and under different weather conditions. They evidence Hopper's ability as a master of observation as well as of watercolor technique.

**VHS:** What was his experience here like, and how did the landscape and people impact his painting style?

**B.C.** The Hopper's experiences in South Royalton were unique for the couple, and the paintings that Edward made there were atypical within his total body of work. This was during the Great Depression, when farmers were seeking to make extra income by renting out rooms to tourists—indeed, tourism was being promoted by the state as a way to build the economy.

Driving on Route 110, just north of the intersection with Route 14, the Hoppers came upon the sign for Wagon Wheels, a dairy farm owned by Robert Arthur Slater and his wife, Irene, who lived there with their seven-year-old son. The Slaters advertised "Guests made to feel at home... Abundance of fresh farm products. Home cooking." The Hoppers boarded there for several weeks in the summer of 1937 and returned again in 1938, staying for nearly a month, until the great hurricane of that year destroyed the landscape.

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To see the complete interview:

<https://vermonthistory.org/edward-hopper-vermont-art-history-bonnie-clause-interview>





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60 Washington St., Suite 1  
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# Vermont History Day 2024

**As the school year gets into full swing, educators across the state are already preparing for the 2025 Vermont History Day. Vermont Historical Society staff members will spend the coming months supporting teachers and preparing for 300 students from around the state to compete on the first Saturday in April. Your donation helps pay for our staff to put their time and talents into fostering the next generation of historians.**

Want to know what else your donation supports? Take a look through this History Connections, attend our programs, click on our website, visit the Vermont History Museum, and check in with your local historical society and museum. Every day, our members, donors, volunteers, and staff members are making history happen together.

Please donate to the Vermont Historical Society and help us keep funding quality educational opportunities for Vermont schoolchildren and outstanding programs for all Vermonters. (<https://vermonthistory.org/donate>)

