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Written by Stephen Perkins, executive director
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VERMONT HISTORY

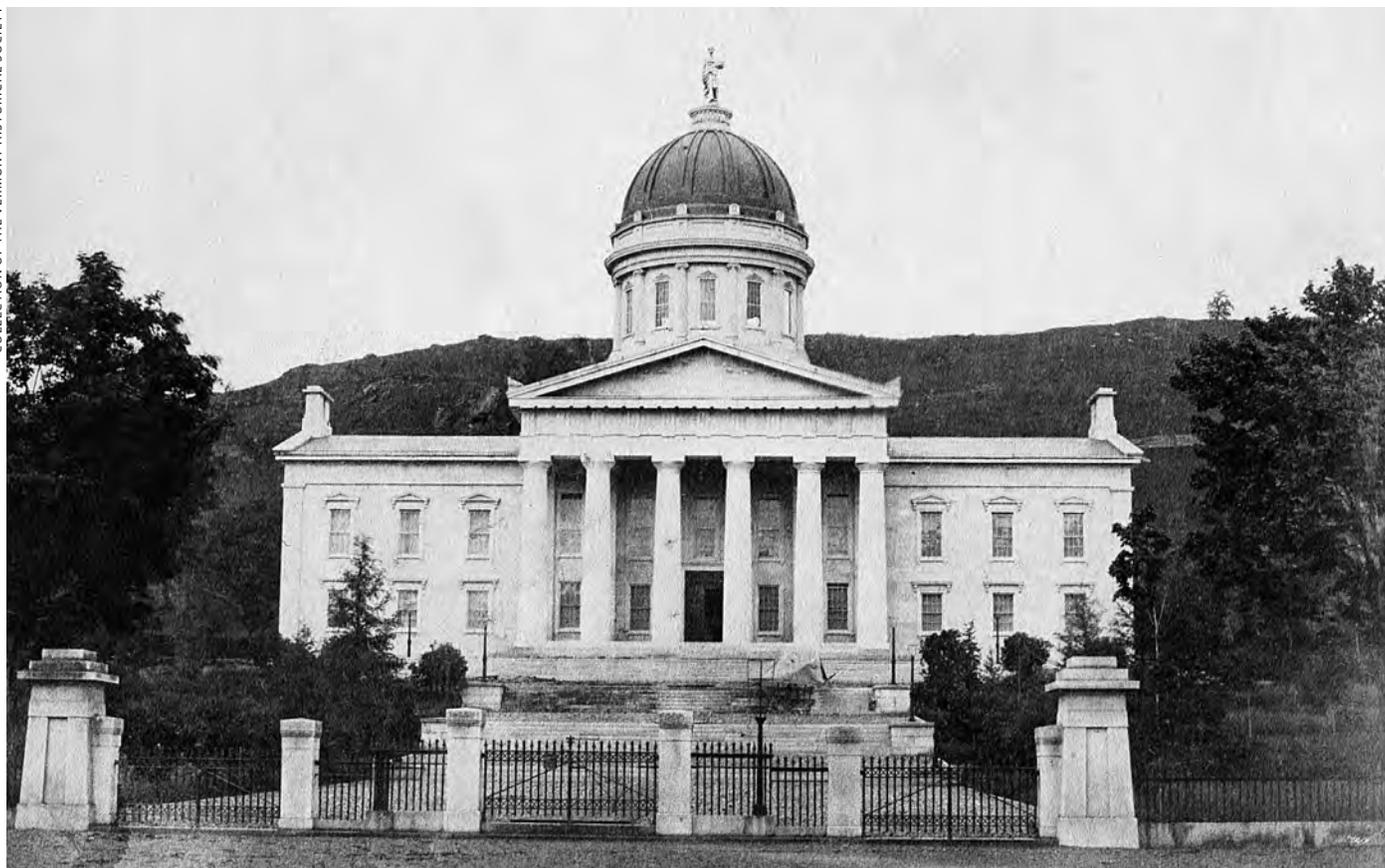
Saving Ceres

Replacing the storied statue of Ceres atop Vermont's State House dome invokes an appreciation of the building's extensive history.

ON AN OVERCAST MORNING IN APRIL 2018 a large crane slowly lifted a tightly wrapped goddess from atop the golden dome of the Vermont State House and gently lowered her to a waiting crowd

in the side parking lot. After a few photos, the carved, wooden statue, the embodiment of agriculture, again rose briefly into the sky before she slowly reclined onto the bed of a waiting flatbed truck.

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A view of the Vermont State House shortly after Larkin Mead's sculpture was installed.



The completed *Ceres II* statue as installed on the statehouse dome in 1938.



This bas-relief sculpture (Larkin Mead's *The Triumph of Ceres*) graced the pediment of the Agriculture Building at the World Columbian Exposition in 1893. Mead's brother, William, of McKim, Mead, and White designed the building.



What remains of the original Mead statue's torso stands in Dwight Dwinell's workshop, with the head of *Ceres II* on the right. Below, Dwinell stands beside his work, giving a sense of perspective as to the statue's size.



Dwight Dwinell carves the head of *Ceres II* in his workshop behind the statehouse in 1938.



Unlike other classically inspired public buildings, the Vermont State House dome and the accompanying statue are made of wood. This lightweight and less costly construction served the state well for many years; however, as all of us who own wooden houses know, regular maintenance must take place or the building will quickly deteriorate. In 2018, the dome received new paint and new gilding. While clad in scaffolding, this offered the perfect time to remove and assess the existing statue atop the dome.

As suspected, the statue showed the effects of time and many Vermont winters and summer rainstorms, necessitating a retirement of sorts with a new statue commissioned for her place. This allegorical representation of agriculture, often referred to as the Roman goddess Ceres, is not the first statue to grace the statehouse dome; in fact, she is the second version, with a third in the works.

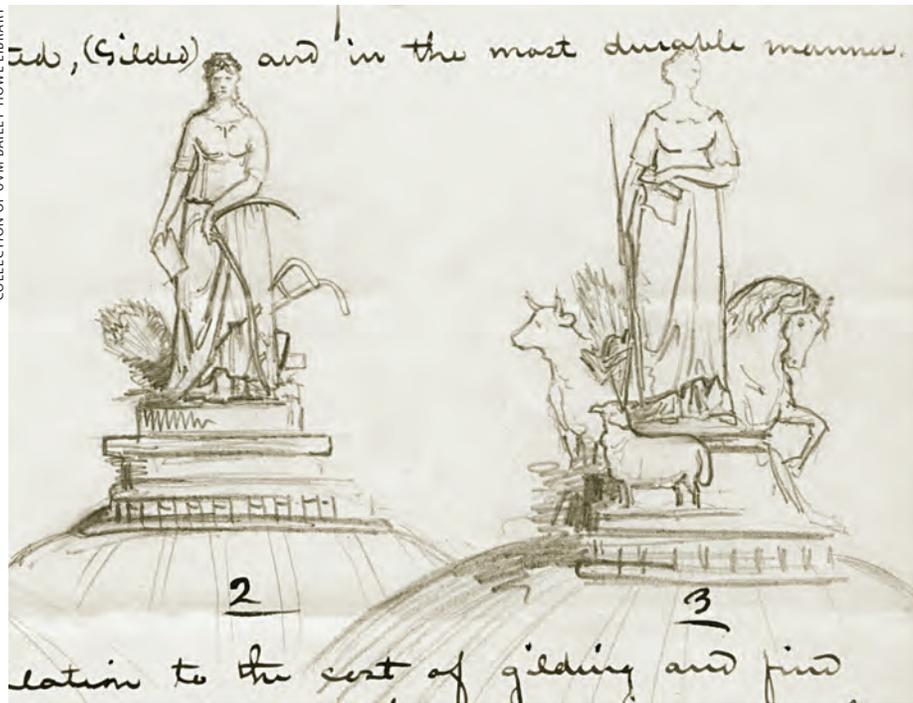
In 1857, as work progressed on the reconstruction of the recently burned statehouse, the appointed commissioners approached a young Brattleboro sculptor, whose recent snow and ice sculpture captured the community's imagination, to envision a statue to crown the new dome.

Larkin Goldsmith Mead, son of a prominent Brattleboro lawyer of the same name, showed an early aptitude for art and was soon apprenticed to the studio of the noted neo-classical sculptor Henry Kirke Brown in New York. Returning to Brattleboro in 1856, Larkin opened a small drawing school and trolled for commissions. In what can only be described as a publicity stunt, Larkin and some of his buddies spent the overnight hours of New Year's Eve sculpting a massive snow-and-ice sculpture at the intersection



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The second iteration of Ceres (dubbed *Ceres II* by Dwight Dwinell) atop the statehouse dome in 1938. Worthy of note is the crown of lighting rods that was added.



Sketch concepts (above) for the statehouse statue by Larkin Mead (below) included in a letter to Commissioner George Perkins Marsh. Notice the reference in the text to “gilded” and “gilding.”



of North Main and Linden streets. Working in the classical mode that defined his era, he created a massive imagining of the “Recording Angel,” waiting upon time, making her record at the close of the year. The especially cold weather of January 1857 allowed the work to last several weeks, with citizens traveling far and wide to view the installation. A commission from Nicholas Longworth of Cincinnati, Ohio for a marble version of the statue proved the success of the stunt. Word of this installation as well as the influence of a well-respected father most likely led to a \$400 commission for the statehouse statue.

Larkin corresponded regularly with the commissioners on the design and placement of the statue. Many of the letters exchanged with commissioner George Perkins Marsh survive in UVM’s special collections. These letters describe the early conversations about statuary on the dome in general and then the specific needs for a single monumental work. It’s interesting to note that George Perkins Marsh originally wanted a series of sculptural figures to surround the tympanum of the dome, either on ledges or in niches. The architect, Thomas Sillo-way of Boston, after much back-and-forth, put his foot down and insisted that the dome was too small for such work and that a single statue atop the building would much better serve the overall impact of the design.

Larkin’s letters to George include sample drawings and descriptions of the allegorical statue of agriculture. 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. At one point Larkin and George explored the possibility of gilding the statue and changing the tradi-



A 1930s view of Larkin Mead's marble statue of Ethan Allen, on the porch of the Vermont State House. A copy now stands in the same location.



The original Ceres statue, showing the effects of some 80 years' worth of exposure to the elements, as it was removed from the dome in 1938. Below, a detail of the head of the original Larkin Mead statue.



Larkin Mead's original statue atop the statehouse. Notice the unglilded dome (the gold dome we know and love today wasn't created until 1906).



tional sheaf of wheat carried in her left arm to corn. We must remember that the proposed dome was to be painted a Roman red, so a gilded statue would stand out quite nicely (the gold dome we love today wasn't created until 1906). As far as we can tell, the wheat never transformed into corn and budgetary constraints necessitated a white-painted statue.

Lamenting the low commission amount, Larkin wrote to George 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. Johann later helped produce Brattleboro's Civil War monument and is listed in census records as a carver with the organ company.

When the statehouse was completed in 1859, the finished statue received such acclaim that the Vermont legislature voted to double Larkin'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. Finished in 1860 and constructed of more durable marble, this statue lasted for years at the statehouse before replacement by a 20th-century replica. After a harrowing-but-brief stint as a Civil War artist, Larkin translated the fame from these public works into new commissions and relocation to the 19th-century sculptural center of Florence, Italy. Later in life he produced a second statue of Ethan Allen for the sculpture hall of the United States Capitol where it can still be seen today. His brother, William Mead of the architecture firm McKim, Mead, and White, commissioned a bas-relief installation for the pediment of the Agriculture Building at the 1893 Columbian



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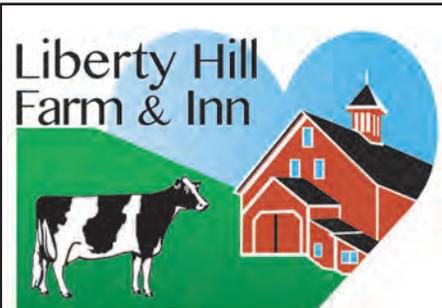
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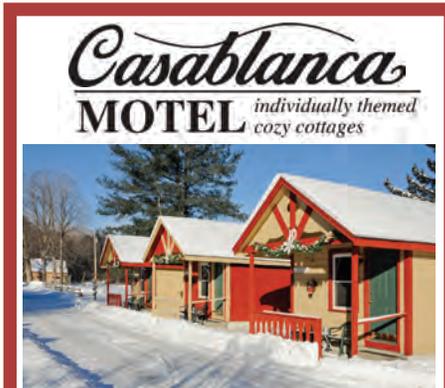


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PHOTO BY STEPHEN PERKINS



Taking shape; sculptors Jerry Williams and Chris Miller show Governor Phil Scott the progress that has been made on the full-size *Ceres III* statue.

PHOTO BY PAUL CARNAHAN



A scale model of *Ceres III* created by artist Jerry Williams.

A rare 1850s photographic view of the second Vermont State House. Notice the short dome, later destroyed by fire in 1857.



Exposition in Chicago. Larkin's design, entitled *The Triumph of Ceres*, features the familiar form from the Vermont State House at the center of the pediment. Near the end of his career, in one of the most prominent places possible, he revisited the form of agriculture that solidified his fame.

Larkin Mead died in his adopted home of Florence, Italy in 1910 after a long and celebrated career. His work graces many state capitals, art museums, and public buildings. In addition to his statues of Ethan Allen, Ceres, and Columbian Exposition architectural decoration, his best-known work is Abraham Lincoln's tomb in Springfield, Illinois—consisting of a statue of Lincoln, sculptural U.S. Coat-of-Arms, a naval group, infantry group, cavalry group, and artillery group. A study bust of Lincoln for the tomb installation can be found in the lobby of the Vermont State House.

As with all outdoor, wooden sculpture, the Larkin Mead-designed statue 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.

Well known throughout the state, Dwight Dwinell served the state-house for 38 years. He joined the maintenance staff in 1902 as a cabinetmaker and mechanic, and was promoted to deputy custodian in 1913. Elected as sergeant-at-arms in 1917, he served in that role until his death in 1940 at the age of 89.



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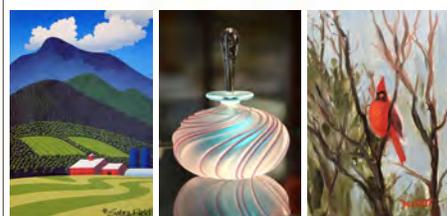
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Detail of Montpelier from Col. Jewett's Hill, 1891, by James F. Gilman. Notice the statehouse's red tile roof and Larkin Mead's white statue rising above its red-painted dome.

During Dwight's time, the sergeant-at-arms also served as the chief custodian of the statehouse and it wasn't rare at all for him to personally clean and repair the building.

Working in a shop behind the statehouse, Dwight carved what can be called a lovely folk-art interpretation of Larkin Mead's allegorical sculpture. Dwight focused on the head while two statehouse maintenance men, Dean Bancroft and Gordon Yeaton, glued ponderosa pine lumber together and roughly carved the body. Although art historians would consider the statue folk art, it definitely exhibits sleek aspects of 1930s art deco modern styling in its columnar body and drapery, the pared-down facial structure, and the star-surmounted crown. Certainly not as refined and delicate as the original

statue, Dwight's self-christened *Ceres II* got the job done, and once installed in 1938 became beloved by a new generation of Vermonters.

The remaining pieces of Larkin Mead's sculpture along with photo documentation of Dwight's carving process became part of the Vermont Historical Society collection. Recently, the Dwinell family donated Dwight's tool chest, along with his carving tools to the museum as well. Ideally, Dwight's *Ceres II*, once stabilized and the rot mitigated, will join her sister at the Historical Society museum in celebrating Vermont's artistic past.

By December 2018, a third statue will find her way to the top of the statehouse. The result of a design competition, Jerry Williams and Chris Miller's interpretation of Lar-

kin 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. ▼

Stephen Perkins is the executive director of the Vermont Historical Society.

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