

History Connections

Vermont Historical Society

News & Notes

Summer 2013 / Volume #7 / Number 4



Since 1838

Vermont Historical Society
60 Washington Street
Barre, Vermont 05641-4209

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**Uncommon
book signing
August 20
4:30 to 6:30 pm**

Get your copy
autographed by
Paul Gillies
at the
**Vermont
History Museum**
109 State Street
Montpelier
(802) 479-8519

Uncommon thoughts for common Vermonters . . .

A new VHS book ruminates about Vermont ancient roads and more!

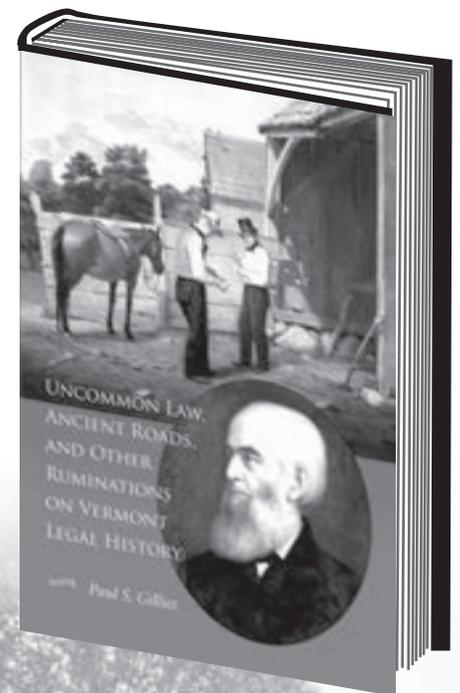
Vermont was born in conflict and existed as an independent political community until becoming the 14th state in 1791.

During those early years Vermonters had to chart their own course in matters of law. From these unique origins, the history of law in Vermont traces the evolution of social and economic developments over time and provides a fascinating lens for understanding the history of the Green Mountain State.

As author Paul Gillies says, "All important issues wind up in court. If only courtrooms could speak, they could tell stories about people and their concerns more lurid, more complicated, and more interesting than you would expect, meeting the people on the street. Public and private turmoils stir up controversies that show us the character of the parties and the integrity of the judicial system, and give us the ability to capture a moment in history otherwise lost to memory."

Gillies is a prominent Vermont attorney and our premier interpreter of the state's legal history. His 25 essays collected here examine the foundations of legal thought in Vermont: historical issues ranging from log drives to the keeping of sheep to blue laws, the state's legal luminaries, and contemporary issues including ancient roads and Act 250. Whether you're a learned legal member of the Bar Association or just want to learn more about Vermont's ancient roads, this book will captivate.

Come see Paul Gillies at the premier book signing at the Vermont History Museum on August 20 from 4:30 to 6:30 pm. You can call (802) 479-8519 for more information.



**UNCOMMON LAW,
ANCIENT ROADS,
AND OTHER
RUMINATIONS
ON VERMONT
LEGAL HISTORY**

BY *Paul S. Gillies*



Since 1838

Summer 2013

Volume #7 / Number 4

History Connections is published four times a year 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: Mark S. Hudson
Editor: Julie Nelson
Printing: Stillwater Graphics

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

Vermont History Center
60 Washington Street, Barre, VT
(802) 479-8500

• **Vermont Heritage Galleries, Offices & Book Nook**
Monday–Friday 9am to 4pm

• **Leahy Library**
Tuesday–Friday 9am to 4pm
Wednesday 9am to 8pm
Second Saturdays 9am to 4pm
(802) 479-8509

• **Library admission:**
Non-members: \$5
Members and students: Free

One admission fee gives access to both the Vermont Heritage Galleries & Vermont History Museum:
Families: \$12; Adults: \$5
Students, children, seniors: \$3
Members & children under 6: Free
Student school groups: Free
(802) 828-2180

www.vermonthistory.org

vhs-info@state.vt.us

From the Director

A dispatch from the front at Gettysburg

As I write these words, smoke is rising from the fields before me where moments ago fighting concluded around Little Round Top and Devil's Den. It is the second day of the bloody battle and the third day of the 150th anniversary reenactment being held at a farm north of Gettysburg. Amid the heat, crowds, and chaos of this event, I have found a moment to reflect upon the meaning of Gettysburg, as both a historical and commemorative event.

On a scale that is unmatched in American history, Gettysburg demonstrates how a single moment can be seared upon our collective memory for generations. Landmarks on the battlefield—the Peach Orchard, Wheatfield, Devil's Den, Round Tops and Cemetery Ridge—conjure vivid images of a landscape that was scarred by the violent struggle they witnessed more than a century and a half ago. The cast of characters—Lee, Pickett, Custer and Chamberlain—continue as subjects of study and emulation. And, of course, the memorable prose of Lincoln, distilling the meaning of this lethal event into 270 words that still echo among the graves of Gettysburg.

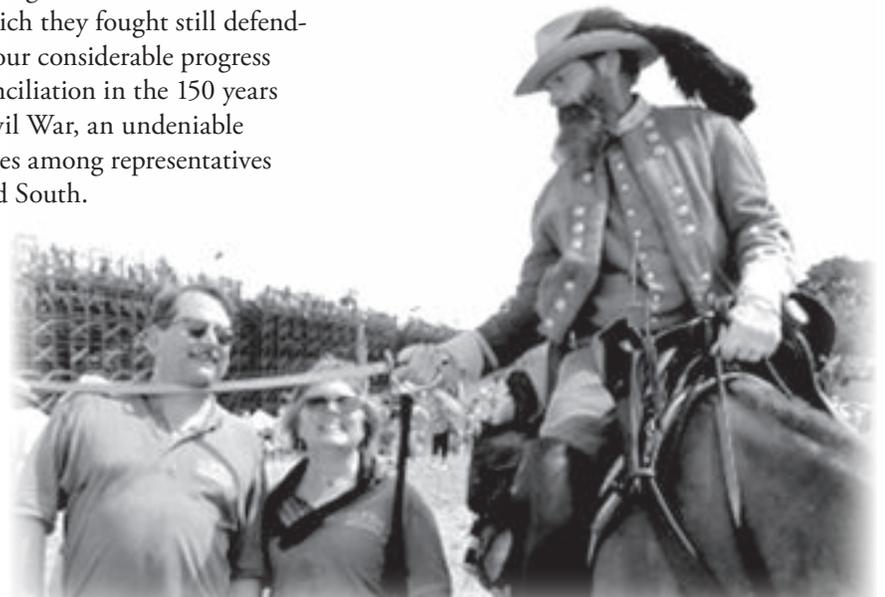
More than ever I have been struck by the curious idea that leaders of a failed rebellion are regarded as heroes and the cause for which they fought still defended. Despite our considerable progress toward reconciliation in the 150 years since the Civil War, an undeniable tension resides among representatives of North and South.

Here that tension is revealed playfully, with each side cheering the outcome of mock battles as if at a college football game, scornful comments delivered with a wink and a smile, or members of the Vermont Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission feeling the cold steel of J.E.B. Stuart's blade.



For many of the people who stopped by the Commission's booth at the reenactment, Vermont's presence was intriguing. We relished the opportunity to share the important role our state played in supporting the Union through men and material, to tell the story of the unusual military action that occurred at St. Albans, and to laud the bravery exhibited by members of our Second Brigade on the right flank of Pickett's Charge in the closing moments of the battle—"the pivotal moment of the pivotal battle of the war."

During these sultry days in early July 2013 I have realized that Lincoln was right. The world "can never forget what they did here." So too, will I long remember being part of the battle's sesquicentennial commemoration.





Elaine Ransom, pictured at her Rutland home in 2001, reads one of the 4,000 letters she and her husband Robert exchanged during World War II. Ransom, who died in 2012, bequeathed the correspondence to the Vermont Historical Society. Photo by Vyto Starinskas, Rutland Herald/Barre-Montpelier Times Argus.

World War II letters tell a story of romance

In October 1940, 16-year-old Elaine Spencer wrote her first letter to Robert Ransom, a 19-year-old Rutland man who had caught her eye at a local swimming hole. He responded five days later. The couple started their courtship through letters and continued the exchange until February 1946 when Robert was discharged from the Army. Along the way they wrote 4,000 letters—and saved them all. In June of this year, five plastic boxes filled with this remarkable exchange were brought to the Vermont History Center to join the archival collections of the Vermont Historical Society.

The collection contains the story how two Vermonters maintained their relationship over five years and many thousands of miles through the written word. When the courtship started, Elaine was still in high school; Bob was out in the world working. He did not have a telephone, so the ups and downs of their young relationship were recorded by the written word. After Bob was called to military service, they had no choice but to communicate through the mails.

Two years to the month after the correspondence began, Bob boarded a train in downtown Rutland for Army training at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Elaine wrote of her emotions to Bob: “Oh, darling, when that train started to pull out it was just as if someone was tearing my heart out of me. When your face was out of sight, I will admit I began to cry.”

By the time Bob sent Elaine a telegram on Valentine’s Day 1944, Elaine had graduated from high school and was working in a war production plant in Springfield; Bob was playing his guitar in an army band in Alabama. The time was near for Bob to be shipped overseas and he proposed that they be married. Elaine got on a bus and headed south. On March 1, they were married by an army chaplain and in a few weeks Bob boarded a train for the West Coast and service in the

continued on page 4—

This is the third in a series of vignettes to help celebrate our 175th anniversary.

I remember when ...

Mary Labate Rogstad is the Vermont Historical Society Registrar. We interviewed Mary about her work at VHS.

Q: When did you start work at VHS?

A: I began my career with VHS when I was an intern for 2 months in 1978. In 1979, Weston Cate asked me to apply as registrar since his wife was retiring from the position.

So in 1979, I became a full-time employee and part of what Wes termed the “VHS family.”

Q: What is a registrar?

A: Each institution has a unique job description for registrar. Here at VHS, I spend massive amounts of time cataloging collections, researching objects—filling in the gaps in their history in order to have a complete record on file. I also work with our volunteers to match their skills with ongoing projects.

Q: What do you recall as highlights over the years?

A: Well, I was the first person to arrive during the 1992 flood in Montpelier. At first things were fine but soon ankle deep water became a worry. But we were able to save collection items.

We had two different moves through the years. One was for the asbestos abatement in 1988 and I was one of the staff who became a certified asbestos handler. The second move



Mary Labate Rogstad

continued on page 6—



Second Saturday series highlights the Galleries

On July 13, Paul Zeller began the Second Saturday series with a talk about *Vermonters at Gettysburg*. His interactive discussion featured examples of ammunition and maps of the battlefields. Be sure not to miss the August 10 Second Saturday program, when L. Diana Carlisle will continue the series and share the history of the Champlain Glassworks Company.

The galleries will be open from 1:00 to 4:00 pm, and talks will begin at 2:00 pm each second Saturday.

Programming is free with admission—which means it’s free for VHS members! Remember, the Leahy Library is open to researchers all day on each second Saturday, so you can come for research in the morning and enjoy a gallery talk in the afternoon. Please call (802) 479-8500. 

When interns come to VHS, we all learn

Since the end of May, interns Elissa Portman and Curtis Hill have been hard at work moving and re-housing VHS collections formerly used at the Kent Museum in Calais. Elissa just finished her first year at the University of Vermont’s Historic Preservation master’s degree program and before that worked at the National Park Service’s Northeastern Historical Archaeology Lab in Massachusetts.



Elissa Portman at top;
Curtis Hill at right.

Curtis graduated this past spring with a history degree from the University of New Hampshire. Last summer he interned at the Museum of the White Mountains at Plymouth State University, in New Hampshire.

To date, they have handled over one thousand artifacts, updated collections records, and reorganized storage areas for more efficient use of space at the Vermont History Center. They have even helped with programmatic activities when needed and marched with the staff in the Montpelier 3rd of July parade. Their work on the project continues through early August. 



Facilities manager knows the ropes



Dan Lord has joined the VHS as Facilities Manager. Dan has worked as a service technician for Vermont Heating and Ventilating; was an entrepreneur owning two country stores and was a Heavy Equipment Mechanic with the Vermont Army National Guard. He has easily transitioned into his new role since he worked on our mechanicals in the past.

Dan can be reached at (802) 479-8526 or dan.lord@state.vt.us.

Letters . . . Continued from page 3—

Pacific theater.

Throughout the war, the two Vermonters shared their love for each other in daily letters. They had developed a code to communicate some basic information that censors would not permit, but their letters mostly contained the feelings of longing that they felt for each other. On February 4, 1946, Robert Ransom returned home to his bride of two years and their new life together. The letters that they saved during their time apart remind us of the human reaction to separation caused by war, emotions that in the era just before the invention of telecommunications devices were recorded on paper to be saved and read by future generations. 

Archives Month is filled with hands-on activities

Vermont archives—preserving the past and planning for the future

October is Archives Month throughout the United States. In celebration, the Vermont Historical Society and the Vermont Historical Records Advisory Board (VHRAB) are sponsoring three events dedicated to the theme: *History Thrives in Vermont Archives—Preserving the Past and Planning for the Future*.

Genealogists: The VHS library staff is offering a webinar just for you! Librarians Paul Carnahan and Marjorie Strong will present *Beyond Ancestry.com: Using Archival Collections for Genealogical Research at the Vermont Historical Society*, featuring an array of “hidden” genealogical manuscript collections at the Leahy Library in Barre. These resources will be useful to genealogists who have exhausted the standard sources available online.

The online workshop will be held Tuesday, October 1 at 2:00 pm. Participants will be able to interact with the VHS librarians online and ask questions about genealogical resources at the Leahy Library. Watch the VHS website for details.

Professors, librarians, and interested members of the community: The Leahy Library will host an open house for all who would like to learn more about its archival resources. Professor Jill Mudgett will speak about how she has used VHS collections with great success in college classrooms. Several collections will be available for browsing to give attendees ideas on how they might be used for instruction and research.

This event is designed for educators, academic librarians, and anyone who would like to learn more about using the VHS archival collections. The open house will be free and will take place on Tuesday, October 15, from 5:00 to 7:00 pm. Light refreshments will be served.

Archivists and Collections Managers: The VHRAB will host a half-day, hands-on workshop using Omeka, a free, open source web-publishing platform for the display of library, museum, and archival collections and exhibitions. This workshop is intended for intermediate-level collections managers who want to try their hand at putting archival collections online. The workshop will be held on Tuesday, October 22, at St. Michael’s College and will be led by UVM librarian Amber Billey. Contact Liz Scott at escott@smcvt.edu or (802) 654-2540 to register.

For additional information on these events, contact VHS at (802) 479-8508. 



Winners Kelsey Rupe and Celeste Gander.

Two Vermont students win at National History Day

Celeste Gander from Milton High School was one of 14 finalists at National History Day in College Park, Maryland, in the Senior Individual Documentary category. Her entry was entitled “Bar Code: Advancement in Supply Chain Accuracy and Efficiency.” Celeste also won the Best of Vermont, Senior Division award. Her teacher is Jason Gorczyk.

The winner of the Best of Vermont, Junior Division award at National History Day was Kelsey Rupe from Poultney Elementary School. Kelsey’s Junior Individual Website was “Brown v. Board of Education and Integration of American Schools.” Kelsey’s teacher is Keith Harrington.

In June, 33 Vermont students participated in the National History Day contest at the University of Maryland College Park. These students qualified by winning at Vermont History Day, the state contest sponsored by the Vermont Historical Society. During trip to Nationals, students also met Senator Patrick Leahy, attended a major league ball game, and visited museums. 



SAVE THE DATE!
June 21 & 22, 2014

Contact Amanda Gustin
for more information
at (802) 828-2180
or amanda.gustin@state.vt.us

.....
Artists and Artisans: Vermont’s Creative Heritage
.....

Annual meetings, movies & more!

On July 3rd, VHS hosted Clara's Games on the State House lawn.



The third of July parade in Montpelier included this giant birthday cake (Happy 175th to us)! Back row: Jackie Calder, Fred Pond, Paul Carnahan, Elissa Portman. Front row: Claire Gilbertson, Jane Campbell, Polly Bentley and her horn, Diane Campbell, Amanda Gustin, and Curtis Hill.

League of Local Historical Societies & Museums Annual Meeting November 1st in Barre

BUILDING ON A STRONG FOUNDATION

We took a good hard look at what makes a successful historical society—building great programming, community outreach, educational exhibits balancing on top of a strong foundation of institutional policies for collections management, long-range planning, and a safe, secure environment for collections. This became the inspiration for this year's meeting.

Terry Davis, President and CEO of the American Association of State and Local History, will be our keynote speaker at the League's annual meeting on November 1. Workshops will focus on both the fundamentals as well as the bells and whistles that are possible when you already have a strong base.

We are planning workshops throughout Barre, tours of Barre architecture, tours of the Vermont Heritage Galleries, as well as ways to maximize online presence. Watch for more info to come or call Laura Brill at (802) 479-8522. 

I remember when . . . Continued from page 3—

came in 2003, when we moved to Barre. We constructed custom-made boxes for oversize artifacts and glass items went into lots of bubble wrap! The most difficult thing to move was clothing. As you know from moving your own household, there is no easy way to handle clothing. When we got to Barre it was a bit of chaos because we had to re-assemble the shelving before anything could be put into place. The other event that no one at VHS remained untouched by was the sudden death of curator Philip Elwert.

Q: How do you keep track of everything during a move?

A: The software program PastPerfect has been a lifesaver. One volunteer fed six racks of index card information into the program in order to bar code all collection items.

Q: How would you describe the collections today?

A: Collections have increased hugely—one notable gift included 700 items! That's a lot to record and document. Our storage methods are more sophisticated and fine-tuned.

Q: What is the earliest recorded artifact?

A: The first recorded object was an musket given in 1860.

Q: What do you look forward to most in your 35th year?

A: I am really looking forward to photographing our costume collection—that means period clothing. Our earliest dress is from the 1700s and the newest is a Vermont-made post-2000 Salaam dress. 

Who can tell the story of Vermont better than its people?



That's the concept behind *Freedom & Unity: The Vermont Movie*, a multi-part documentary exploring the history and contemporary culture of the Green Mountain State. Created by a team of more than 30 Vermont filmmakers and edited by Norwich film-

maker Nora Jacobson, *Freedom & Unity* looks at Vermont through the eyes of residents past and present: Abenakis and settlers, runaway slaves and dairy farmers, historians and politicians, recent immigrants and back-to-the-landers. Until now, no film has embraced such a broad vision of what Vermont means to its people and the world.

Part I of the six-part film will premiere at the Barre Opera House on September 27, followed by Part II at the Vermont History Center on September 28 at 10:30 am. Screenings of the remaining parts will be shown at Montpelier's Savoy Theater. 



Annual meetings, movies & more. Oh, my!

Colleges, Communes & Co-ops

in the
1970s

Their Contributions to Vermont's Organic Food Movement

Ever wonder about Vermont's alternative lifestyles in the 70s?

By the late 1970s, Vermont was home to an estimated 100 communes. Though the inhabitants of the communes were almost universally identified as hippies, there was great variety in size, organization, and philosophy of these groups. Some retreated to Vermont as a refuge from radical political fights of the late 1960s and early 1970s, others saw Vermont as ripe for a political takeover, and still others escaped from the cities to live simply and closer to nature. Many arrived with no purpose other than to participate in the communal experience. During the same period, educational innovations focusing on ecology and sustainability began around the state, creating new institutions or building on existing college programs. Several of Vermont's food buyers and food growers' cooperatives, many organized by commune members, also began during this time period.



Photograph by
Rebecca Lepkoff

At this year's annual meeting we'll examine the connections between the colleges, communes and co-ops of the 1970s and their members' contributions to the development and success of the organic food movement in Vermont and beyond. Watch our website for more info to come or call Amanda Gustin at (802) 828-2180. 

Events

Tuesday, August 20 from 4:30 to 6:30 pm

Vermont History Museum, 109 State Street, Montpelier

Uncommon Law: A book signing with Paul Gillies

Come hear about the latest Vermont Historical Society publication and get your book signed by the author.

Sunday & Monday, August 25 & 26 overnight

Bus trip to Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Finding Wentworth

We look forward to seeing the historic homes of Benning Wentworth and visit the outdoor history museum Strawberry Banke. Join us next time, this year's trip has been booked!

Saturday, September 7 from 1:00 to 4:00 pm

Vermont History Center, 60 Washington Street, Barre

People and Pottery: An Intimate Relationship

Demonstrations and lectures with traditional Native pottery expert Charlie Paquin and modern potter Robert Compton. Part of Vermont Archaeology Month and sponsored by the Vermont Archaeology Heritage Center and the VHS.

Sunday, September 8 at 2:00 pm

Vermont History Center, 60 Washington Street, Barre

First Women's Voices

Hear four Native American women speak about their experiences as first women of Vermont. Part of Vermont Archaeology Month and sponsored by the Vermont Archaeology Heritage Center and the VHS.

Saturday, September 14 at 2:00 pm

Vermont History Center, 60 Washington Street, Barre

Italian-American Stoneworkers in Vermont

Second Saturday Gallery Talk featuring Middlebury College Professor Ilaria Brancoli-Busdraghi. This short talk can be augmented by visiting *The Granite City* exhibit.

Saturday, September 21 from 8:00 am

The Pavilion, 109 State Street, Montpelier

Communes, Colleges & Co-ops

VHS annual meeting (learn more at the left)

Saturday, September 28 at 10:30 am

Vermont History Center, 60 Washington Street, Barre

The Vermont Movie 2013 Barnstorming Tour

Be among the first to see Part II of *The Vermont Movie*. Co-sponsored by the VHS, Vermont Humanities Council, and the Vermont Arts Council.

E-NEWS

Don't miss a thing VHS!
Sign up for enews today:
www.vermonthistory.org



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Vermont Historical Society

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From last issue . . .



Mystery Photo

Last issue's mystery photo was identified by member Mary O. Davis of Rochester, who celebrated her 90th birthday in July. The photograph was taken on the ball field in Rochester. The spire of the Federated Church, which burned in 1944, can be seen in the background. The event taking place may be a ceremony to honor Civil War veterans in 1905.

You can participate in identifying mystery photographs between issues of *History Connections!* Become a friend of the VHS on Facebook. *Try guessing!*

[www.facebook.com/
VermontHistoricalSociety](http://www.facebook.com/VermontHistoricalSociety)



This issue's mystery photograph has been sitting around the library for several years while we looked for a home for it. It came from a Vermont antiques dealer but he did not know the location. Does anyone recognize this town?

You can get a closer look at it on our website at www.vermonthistory.org/mystery. If you know where this scene was taken, please contact VHS Librarian Paul Carnahan at paul.carnahan@state.vt.us or at (802) 479-8508.

Do you recognize this?

