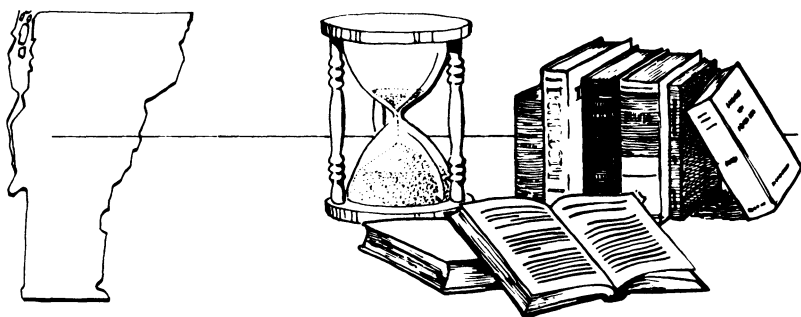


## A Vermont Bookshelf:

### *Vermont Books in Review*



### Families and Children: The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings 1985

*Edited by Peter and Jane Montague Benes* (Boston, Mass.: Boston University, 1987, pp. 160, \$8.00).

This collection of essays views domestic life and childhood in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century New England from multiple perspectives. In keeping with the Dublin Seminar's goal of providing a forum where scholars, students, and committed amateurs can exchange ideas, *Families and Children* brings together the contributions of history professors and museum professionals, plus one local historian and high school teacher—all participants in the June, 1985, conference.

The essays are scholarly and readable. They deal with a wide range of topics including courtship, breast-feeding, infant clothing and nineteenth-century New England district schools. Part of what keeps *Families and Children* lively is the diversity of sources its contributors have used. Traditional written sources (diaries, town records, genealogies, and district school records), as well as unusual artifactual sources (infant clothing and family trees decorated with apples, blossoms, or entwined roses), provide clues that illuminate unexpected and previously unexamined aspects of family history.

David Courtwright's introductory essay provides an overview of the social and demographic changes that caused the New England family to become smaller, that transformed multi-generational households into

nuclear families, and that eventually worked to loosen parental authority over children.

Jane Nylander's essay on infant clothing between 1740 and 1850 quickly dispels any notion one might have held concerning egalitarianism in dress in the New Republic. The accompanying photographs show that early nineteenth-century infant clothing styles ranged from functional and unadorned to lavishly decorated and embroidered, depending on the economic level of the parents. Although few readers will have given much thought to how their ancestors were diapered and dressed, Nylander's disclosure that, prior to the invention of safety pins (circa 1850), babies often had as many as ten straight pins embedded in their clothing, may give rise to some discomfiting speculations. One can't help wondering, for instance, what effect early childhood pinpricks had on the formation of the New England character. Similarly, were those infants whose freedom was restrained by tight infant bands more likely to grow up to become revolutionaries, abolitionists, or straitlaced conformists?

In "Nursing and Weaning in an Eighteenth-Century Household," Ross Beales explores a commonplace aspect of life that most likely would have been ignored before the 1960s when social historians turned their attention to investigating the everyday lives of ordinary men and women. Although Beales bases his investigation on the diaries of the Reverend Ebenezer Parkman, an educated and articulate minister who could in no way be considered "ordinary," editors Peter and Jane Benes point out that the minister's first and second wives came from the "largely silent middle levels of New England society." Parkman's journals provide a detailed record of the nursing and weaning patterns of his sixteen children. Each child was breast-fed by its mother, with exchange wet-nursing used only in emergency situations. The Parkman children were weaned by means of abrupt separation, a custom that seems to have been prevalent in eighteenth-century New England. Beales speculates that the abrupt withdrawal of "nourishment, warmth and comfort" may have "contributed to the development of a pervasive character type of the sort Philip Greven calls 'evangelical' in his study of *The Protestant Temperament*."

In his essay on "The Politics of Patriarchy in Shays's Rebellion," Gregory Nobles focuses on the controversy stirred up by the proposed execution of Henry McCulloch, one of the principal participants. Nobel examines defense arguments that suggest the rebellion against patriarchal authority extended far beyond the family. In McCulloch's case, those who pleaded for leniency expressed "a conception of justice that used the mutual relationships and responsibilities of the family to soften the severe patriarchal authority of the state." The petitioners' success in influencing the Massachusetts government to grant McCulloch a last-minute reprieve,

Nobles argues, demonstrates that republican family ideology had already undermined traditional patriarchal authority.

One of the most enjoyable essays in this collection draws on the diary of Abner Sanger, a Keene, New Hampshire, bachelor who delighted in reporting on the various forms of courtship in which he and his neighbors participated. Sanger's revelations concerning the comings and goings of his rivals are humorous, terse, and frustratingly ambiguous. Authors Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Lois Stable do their best to decode the precise meaning of such terms as "staying with" and "girling of it," but Sanger's description of what went on inside Keene houses leaves much to the imagination. The diary suggest that some form of bundling ("staying with") frequently took place in eighteenth-century Keene, but the details of such arrangements remain obscure. Sanger's diary clearly presents evidence, however, that "[m]easured by the standards of their Puritan ancestors . . . eighteenth-century New Englanders were permissive."

Peter Benes's well-documented study of decorated family trees from late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century coastal New England should appeal to readers with an interest in genealogy, art history, or folk traditions. This illustrated article discusses the iconography of painted or embroidered genealogical trees and vines, rooted in paired hearts, which originated in folk traditions going back as far as the fourteenth century. Benes mentions that the Tree of Life emblem on the Park family gravestone in Rockingham, Vermont, derives from this tradition, and includes among the paired heart family trees he discusses one by Lucretia Janes of Cornwall, Vermont. Benes's study, however, reveals that most of these decorated family records were the work of southern New England maritime and farm families.

The essay on early nineteenth-century district schools, by Mark Sammons, takes a more traditional approach to its subject. Sammons's descriptive study of what went on in pre-1830s district schools is well researched and creates a convincing picture of the overcrowded, chaotic conditions in one-room schoolhouses before nineteenth-century reformers introduced the methods that remain the basis of elementary teaching to this day.

Vermont historians have only recently begun to look at family history. We need to know more about courtship customs, as well as how family ideology, legal restrictions, economics, and physical hardships shaped the lives of married Vermonters. How have child-rearing methods changed over the years, and what factors have contributed to the closeness or disintegration of Vermont families? How has the Vermont family been influenced by "hard times," war, illness, and old age, and what solutions to these problems have been found at different times in history? The essays

in *Families and Children* suggest new approaches to these and other areas of family history.

FAITH LEARNED PEPE

*Faith Learned Pepe is a local historian who has written articles and produced exhibitions on the history of women in Vermont. She is a trustee of the Vermont Historical Society and teaches at Landmark College in Putney.*

## A Plan for Improving Female Education

By Emma Willard (Marietta, Ga.: Larlin Corp., facsimile reprint, 1987, pp. 48, paper, \$3.95).

A reprint of what has been called "The Magna Carta for Higher Education for Women in America," a pamphlet out of print since the 1920s, ought to be on every high school history reading list, particularly here in Vermont. Authentic plates remain from Emma Willard's original version, printed in Middlebury in 1819, so that this booklet looks and feels like the era from which she speaks, in language, passionate and ornate. And since Emma Willard's plan for women's education, radical for her time, seems old-fashioned and restrictive by today's measure, any reader must be brought up short by this reminder of the constriction of women's past.

This newest reprint is of the second edition, originally issued on the booklet's centennial, in 1919, to mark Willard's accomplishments and her ties to Vermont. The biographical sketch of Mrs. Willard's life in Middlebury by Ezra Brainerd, LL.D, president of Middlebury College from 1885-1908, contains lively descriptions of the town that was a considerable influence on the reformer. Twenty-year-old Emma Willard, then Hart, arriving in 1807, found herself associated there with a class of educationally progressive men, as preceptress of the "Female Academy," one of the first institutions of its kind in the country.

The young teacher also met and married Dr. John Willard. This meant giving up the Female Academy after two years despite her having built its reputation. But Dr. Willard was a man who delighted in his wife's enthusiastic interest in his medical library and permitted her to continue her studies in areas usually forbidden to women. Yet the relative freedom she enjoyed must have added to her inner conflict.

When she undertook the study of Euclid's geometry, for instance, she had serious misgivings about the incapacity of "the female mind," an un-

challenged assumption of the day. Her nephew, then living with the Willards while he attended Middlebury College, agreed to test her. Only when he pronounced her answers correct did she begin to trust her own perception that she understood the subject.

What a tightrope she must have walked! One sees it in her text, arguing for all women what she had struggled to get for herself – a higher education – and for an additional step that she still lacked – an education publicly recognized. How carefully she words her arguments to stay within the neatly roped-off area defined as “woman’s sphere,” how canny she is in her persuasiveness!

She immediately grants to her male audience, the members of the legislature of New York, this beginning: “. . . the absurdity of sending ladies to college, may, at first thought, strike everyone to whom this subject shall be proposed.” But she hastens to observe that the Female Seminary (not Female College, as that would alienate her audience with presumption) would be specially suited to the female character, since “The business of the husbandman is not to waste his endeavours, in seeking to make his orchard attain the strength and majesty of his forest, but to rear each, to the perfection of its nature.”

Emma Willard was a woman with a mission, but one who knew which side of the bread gets buttered. Evident throughout this essay is the impressive political skill, thrust and parry, of a reformer who was always aware of her audience and of her disadvantage. Eventually it won her the public support she sought.

In a letter from Mrs. Willard, quoted on the contents page and not part of the original edition, we glimpse a slightly less guarded view of what compelled her to fight against such odds. One imagines her looking out her window at the college from which she was barred, or reduced to listening secondhand to what her nephew was encouraged to freely learn, as she writes this of her memories of Vermont: “My neighborhood to Middlebury College made me bitterly feel the disparity in educational facilities between the sexes.”

No bitterness shows in *A Plan for Improving Female Education*. Her spirit must have been hard-pressed, her inner struggles dark and dangerous-seeming. Yet writing and rewriting over a period of three years, weighing every word, Emma Willard distilled her pain into pragmatic courage and strength of argument.

RICKEY GARD DIAMOND

*Rickey Gard Diamond, founding editor of Vermont Woman, a statewide monthly publication on women’s issues, is at work on new writing projects. She continues as contributing editor of that journal.*

## Spirit of the New England Tribes: Indian History and Folklore, 1620-1984

By William S. Simmons (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1986, pp. xi, 331, \$14.95 paper, \$25.00 cloth).

Students of the southern New England Indians have long been frustrated by the scarcity of information about their folklore and the dubious quality of some of that which is in print. It seemed to exist only in scraps scattered through early historical writings, travelers' journals, and obscure periodicals, all too often presenting a problem about what to attribute to an Indian narrator and what to the white writer. An anthropologist who did not specialize in the region could not lay hands on enough valid texts to permit comparison of the mythology with that of other Algonquian tribes. As a consequence, the authors of existing studies have bypassed the region.

There is a good historical reason for this situation. Already by 1676 the English had destroyed or dispersed most of the natives from the region, the remainder surviving as "an almost invisible minority around the edges of the American farming villages, seaports, mill towns, and commercial centers that sprang up in the Indians' original territories." English pressures on the original Indian folklore came early and were unremitting. When anthropologists began in this century to study the culture of the survivors, only one legend could be recorded in the native language of the narrator.

Professor Simmons's book seems to do all that is humanly possible under today's circumstances to remedy this frustration. With immense industry he has examined early colonial documents, newspapers, magazines, diaries, local histories, anthropology and folklore publications, a variety of manuscript sources, and conducted field research among living Indians, putting together a collection of some 240 texts.

The original tribes of southeastern New England are known to us under the names of Pawtucket, Massachusetts, Pokanoket or Wampanoag, Nauset, Narragansett, Niantic, Pequot, and Mohegan, but most of the folklore in this collection comes from the Mashpee and Gay Head Wampanoags, the Narragansetts, and the Mohegans. Also included are one Nipmuck text, one item each from the Pocumtucks and the Housatonic Mahicans, and some observations on the Long Island Montauks by Samson Occum.

After chapters that treat the history of the tribes and their world view, the texts are presented in chapters according to key themes—the arrival of the Europeans, Christianity, shamans and witches, ghosts and the devil,

treasures, giants, little people, and dreams—plus an appendix of texts on miscellaneous subjects. Within these chapters, the texts are presented in the chronological order of their recording. Each text is presented verbatim with commentary on its source, validity, and significance. The whole is fitted out with notes, a comprehensive up-to-date bibliography, and an index that, though largely confined to proper names, should fill most needs.

Simmons's analytical approach to this material is that of a folklorist. Lacking a native classification for the tales, he classifies them as memorate, legend, myth, and folktale, and an index of folklore motifs is provided. Although it may be impossible at this late date to distinguish the contributions of the several tribes after 300 years of shared experiences, he attempts to rescue the seventeenth century baseline of the common Indian culture in order to identify the indigenous elements in the folklore of later centuries. Although obviously the absence of certain traits from this corpus is not proof that they were absent from the original folklore, those traits that are identified will be gratefully received by Algonquian folklorists. Simmons's careful attention to identifying the indigenous elements, the results of innovation and borrowing, constitute in my opinion the major scholarly contribution of the book.

His own appreciation of this body of folklore is this: "The present collection is unusual. It represents one of the oldest continually recorded bodies of Indian folklore known in North America and is the longest-term historical study of oral narratives that I am aware of in the anthropological, historical, or folklore literature . . . We have recovered the voice of a people who lived through the whole of American history and now will listen to the private and indirect way in which they told their story." The reader will subscribe to this evaluation, and it seems unlikely that future scholarship will be able to add much more.

The author's interest is less in what we regard as purely historical information than in the influence of known historical events on the folklore and what the folklore tells us about the symbolic life of the Indians. Nevertheless, a student so-minded could mine the same information, now that it is available, for the data of oral history. My superficial impression is that, if the southern New England Indians had a strong tradition of oral history, as did the Western Abenaki, it somehow became submerged a century or more ago.

All in all, this is a splendid book, and the only negative thing I can find to say about it is that the title is misleading. The coverage is not the Indians of all New England but only those of southern New England,

especially those coastal Indians between the Saco and Connecticut Rivers.

GORDON M. DAY

*Gordon Day is a native Vermonter and by training a forest ecologist. For more than thirty years he has been conducting anthropological research on the northeastern Indians under the aegis of Dartmouth College and, since 1964, of the Canadian Ethnology Service where he is now active as Curator Emeritus.*

## More About Vermont History

### Recent Additions to the Vermont Historical Society Library

*Addison County Heritage: Historical Studies from the Library of the Sheldon Museum*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1987). Middlebury, Vt.: Sheldon Museum, 1987. Pp. 36, illus. New occasional publication.

Benson, Ann Giles and Frank Adams, *To Know for Real: Royce S. Pitkin and Goddard College*. Adamant, Vt.: Adamant Press, 1987. Pp. 278, ports. \$20.00 hardcover. Autobiography based on interviews.

Brookfield Historical Society, *The History of Brookfield, Vermont*. Brookfield, Vt.: Brookfield Historical Society, 1987. Pp. 283, illus., ports., maps.

Crisman, Kevin J., *The Eagle: An American Brig on Lake Champlain during the War of 1812*. Shelburne, Vt. and Annapolis, Md.: New England Press with Naval Institute Press, 1987. Pp. 276, illus., maps, diags. \$22.95 hardcover.

Fisher, Harriet, *The Darling Family and Its Contributions to the Northeast Kingdom*. Lyndonville, Vt.: The author, [1987]. Pp. 11. T. N. Vail Commemorative Lecture delivered at Lyndon State College, 16 August 1987.

Nimke, R. W., *The Rutland: 60 Years of Trying*. Vol. 2: "The Hub—Rutland, Vermont." Walpole, N.H.: The author, 1987. Pp. 200, illus., diagr. \$34.50 hardcover.

Resch, Tyler, "Vermont's Place in Black History," *Blackfax*, [1987]: 7, 8, 13.



- Roth, Randolph A., *The Democratic Dilemma: Religion, Reform, and the Social Order in the Connecticut River Valley of Vermont, 1791-1850*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Pp. 399.
- Russell, George A., *Early Masons of Arlington, Vermont: History of Newton Lodge from 1799 to 1830*. Arlington, Vt.: Martha Canfield Memorial Free Library, 1987. Unpaged, illus. \$5.00 paper.
- The Vermont Experience: In Words and Photographs*. Text selected and ed. by Susan Bartlett Weber. Montpelier, Vt.: Vermont Life Magazine, 1987. Pp. 156, illus. \$29.95 hardcover.
- Whitson, Peggy Hanford, *Once Upon a Rowboat: Adventures on Lake Champlain, or Weather or Not*. Colchester, Vt.: Whithaven Enterprises, 1986. Pp. 95, illus., map. \$8.95 paper.
- Willard, Emma, *A Plan for Improving Female Education*. Printed with Ezra Brainerd, *Mrs. Emma Willard's Life and Work in Middlebury*. Marietta, Ga.: Larlin Corporation, 1987. Pp. 47. \$3.95 paper. Facsimile reprint.
- Wuerthner, George and Millie Yoneko Matteson, *Vermont: Portrait of the Land and Its People*. Helena, Mont.: American Geographic Publishing, 1987. Pp. 103, illus. \$15.95 paper.

NOTE

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