

# BOOK REVIEWS

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## *Picture Rocks: American Indian Rock Art in the Northeast Woodlands*

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By Edward J. Lenik (Lebanon, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2003, pp. 267, \$60.00; paper \$29.95).

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This book attempts to describe and document the petroglyphs and pictographs from forty-eight known sites in northeastern North America, as well as some decorated stone objects from several archaeological sites. Lenik begins with a short chapter on how petroglyphs and pictographs were made, followed by another on interpretation and dating. The latter is a bare bones, “minimalist” presentation. Chapter 3 completes the introductory material by presenting a short outline of northeastern culture history. This suffers from its brevity and some errors; for example, Lenik suggests (p. 16) that long distance social, political, and trade networks developed in Middle Woodland times (ca. 0–1000 CE), when in fact these declined after an Early Woodland peak and before a resurgence in the Late Woodland.

The “meat” of the book is in chapters 4–13 in which Lenik systematically reviews material from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey. The book ends with a three-page chapter: “Reflections on Picture Rocks.”

Readers of this journal will be most interested in the chapter on Vermont petroglyphs. The bulk of it—a bit over sixteen pages—is devoted to the Bellows Falls site. Lenik carefully reviews past references to the glyphs, including pictures and drawings going back to 1789, so as to understand how the images have been altered over the years. This, of course, is necessary to understand the original nature of the “art.” He also

reviews the various interpretations that have been made, concluding that the glyphs mark a “power site” where Indian shamans came to make contact between the “everyday” and “supernatural” worlds. With this interpretation, few anthropologists, myself included, would disagree. Still, there is room for debate. Lenik rejects the dots surrounding the heads as entoptics, seeing them instead as traces of eyes, mouths, and noses of now-disappeared faces. My own examination of the site fails to support this. Yet, Lenik does recognize (p. 101) the importance of the trance experience to shamans, and an inevitable part of the trance experience is the generation (by the central nervous system) of entoptics—luminous, pulsating dots, grids, etc. So while Lenik would see the heads inscribed on the rock as shamans, executed in an attempt to make contact with spirits, I would see them as after-the-fact portrayals of spirits seen by shamans while in trance.

The Brattleboro petroglyphs receive a much shorter, though reasonably adequate, discussion. Lenik rejects the suggestion made by Marjorie Power and myself that the figures represent shamans’ animal helpers. Instead, he sees them as attempts on the part of shamans to contact thunderbirds (and some sort of quadruped). Perhaps so, but whoever of us is right, the production of these images would be associated with shamans entering altered states of consciousness. One omission here is Lenik’s failure to note that entering trance frequently brings with it a somatic sensation of flight. Could this have anything to do with the prominence of birds at the Brattleboro site?

Other Vermont sites discussed are one in Guilford, another in Woodbury, and a third in Jericho. The Guilford site is notable for an inscribed head not unlike the ones at Bellows Falls, as well as two crescents and several pits or “dots.” These Lenik accepts as entoptics, contrary to his earlier rejection of that interpretation of the dots at Bellows Falls. The Woodbury images are the two sides of a right hand and a pair of feet. The hand Lenik sees (probably rightly) as a recent Euramerican production; the feet (much more weathered) he accepts as Indian. According to local tradition, they have been known since ca. 1800, and Lenik notes the Indian belief that shamans had the ability to sink their feet into rocks. But when all is said and done, we can’t be sure of the Indian origin of these particular feet. The Jericho glyphs are even more problematic, accompanied as they are by the letters RAY carved into the rock. The other “glyphs” are hard to identify, but some might resemble some from Peterborough, Ontario. Who knows?

One last item discussed is a “thunderbird” with accompanying geometric designs on a tubular pipe from the “Hempyard Site,” an Early Woodland cemetery in Swanton. Lenik is correct that the site dates between 2,000 and 3,000 years ago, but does not mention a radiocarbon

date of 425 BCE for one feature. The pipe could be a bit older or younger than that date. One of the design elements, a triangle, suggests to Lenik the triangular decoration on pottery vessels from two other Early Woodland sites. He does not note that triangular elements are common entoptics (fragmented zigzags), but does resurrect an old idea that these tubular pipes were used by shamans to effect sucking cures. What he overlooks is that residue from a similar pipe at the Boucher site, dated at ca. 300 BCE, shows that they were used to smoke tobacco. In the Americas, one (not the only) use of tobacco (which was considerably stronger than today's commercial product) was to induce altered states and their attendant visions.

Overall, this book is a useful inventory, but the descriptions tend to be general and many of the pictures are poorly reproduced. Those with a serious interest in this "rock art" will need to go back to original sources. They will also need to familiarize themselves with recent work on shamanism, altered states, and their connection with rock art elsewhere; subjects on which Lenik is not entirely up to date.

WILLIAM A. HAVILAND

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### *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of the American Myth*

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By Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (New York: Knopf, 2001, pp. 501, \$35.00).

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**I**n her current book, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of the American Myth*, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich imagines how a history of New England might have been conceptualized if its authors had started with a group of domestic objects as their sources. How would New England's history be told, if, instead of royal proclamations and colonial charters and the implicit rights and privileges, other stories of people and their daily encounters take center stage? The subtext, of course, is whether the Indian population would have fared so badly if the colonists had held a different understanding of the implications of living together on the margin of the Atlantic world.

Ulrich has chosen fourteen objects for her in-depth study and, in recovering their "lost stories" (p. 66), she is able to tease from them a new

version of New England's history from 1676 to the present. They include Indian-made baskets now in museum collections, banished spinning wheels, a celebrated carved cupboard, embroidered pictures and bed coverings, a tablecloth, and a stocking with balls of yarn abandoned on its knitting pins. Ulrich notes the resonance these bygones held for antiquarians, whose view of the past was often influenced by the patriarchal and patronizing view of New England's pioneers offered by Horace Bushnell and his peers. While appearing to acknowledge the physical labor of both women and men that undergirded the region's prosperity, this view privileged the settled homestead, the cleared farm, and the account-book economy.

Ulrich offers a different perspective on New England. One chapter is cued by an object from Vermont that can be dated to around 1821, when the state was experiencing a spike in population. Vermont was served by a number of newspapers, the settled farms provided a market for Indian basket makers to peddle their wares, and the growing sheep economy offered a measure of prosperity to those taking part in it. But as Ulrich shows, Vermont was much like the rest of New England, a locale where racial conflict and the impulse toward gentility were inextricably bound. A woodsplint basket lined with an issue of the *Rutland Herald* dating from 1821 that bears the name of the subscriber, an M. Goodrich, opens a discussion of this region that was also inhabited by western Abenaki. Joined by Mahicans and Pocumtucks from southern New England after King Philip's War, their stable links with French Canada were cut off by the peace treaty in 1763, just as settlers were establishing farms and villages in the Abenaki homelands. Their protests showed their lack of power and the Indian population either moved to Canada or "learned to live on the edges of white communities" (pp. 140–141). Those who stayed were part of the labor force and known to the white settlers, whose contacts might include hiring them or purchasing their colorful baskets. In instance after instance, Ulrich describes how the colonists considered the Indians' mobile lifestyle a lack of steady habits (implying that whites had steady habits), but what was the basis for that judgment? One imagines how the decorated basket might have looked among the household possessions of transients like the Goodriches. Did they have other new and colorful objects? Ulrich invites her readers to consider the similarities between Indians and Yankees on the margins: Moses Goodrich and his wife appear to have been passing through Rutland because of their inability to put down roots. In unpacking the stories, often of conflicts, buried in the objects, Ulrich is as likely to find evidence of disorderliness as the aspiration to gentility among the Yankee households.

One might be thinking at this point that Ulrich offers a tough accounting

of Vermont's history, but this is not entirely so. In the opening of the chapter, she is careful to note William Gilmore's conclusion in *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life*, a contemporary classic that suggests a more genteel Vermont in the early Republic. And it should be observed that this is only one chapter of a broad and deep study of New England life. The chapter that describes higher education and the world for which genteel women were being educated in the eighteenth century deconstructs an embroidered picture in the decorative arts collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Through a close reading and by moving out into the wider circles it suggests, Ulrich discusses allegories of liberty in embroidered pictures and a charity event organized by women for the relief of the poor in juxtaposition to the empty-handed return of Governor William Shirley from London in 1753 and Massachusetts' own administration of policy toward the Wampanoags. Another chapter is a brilliant reading of diary fragments and other letters and papers from 1775 to 1780 against a group of well-known museum textiles and events in Connecticut.

Ulrich has studied each object to learn about its production and engaged a formidable range of sources to inform this recovery of the roles of race, class, and gender in the evolution of New England. For this reviewer, the challenge of writing about this book has been to avoid forms of such words as weave, color, embroider, thread, and piece to describe Ulrich's achievement.

CAROLINE F. SLOAT

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*A Favorite Place of Resort for Strangers:  
The King's Garden at Fort Ticonderoga*

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By Lucinda A. Brockway with the staff of Fort Ticonderoga  
(Ticonderoga, N.Y.: Fort Ticonderoga, 2001, pp. 128, paper, \$29.95).

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Lucinda Brockway and the staff of Fort Ticonderoga have collaborated in the production of a highly engaging and thoroughly researched account of the evolution of the military garrison garden at one

of America's most historic sites. This work is, however, far more than an offering of horticultural history: *A Favorite Place of Resort for Strangers* also involves landscape history, the history of tourism, and preservation history. Connecting and unifying these various perspectives is the story of the multigenerational effort of the Pell family to preserve the Ticonderoga garrison site.

The French started to construct Fort Carillon in 1755 and before long established a vegetable garden nearly six acres in extent on a site located between the defensive works and Lake Champlain—the first of a long succession of gardens and orchards on the site. After the French abandoned Fort Carillon in 1759, a British engineer who drafted a map of the fortifications styled the French garden as the “King’s Garden.” The fortress, now called Ticonderoga, was subsequently captured by Patriot forces in 1775 and remained under American control until 1777 when the British destroyed it and left a melancholy ruin.

By the early nineteenth century an increasing number of travelers and artists were attracted to Ticonderoga for the impressive views of the crumbling walls of the devastated fort and the wild Adirondack Mountain scenery. One such person was William Ferris Pell, a New York City merchant, who saw the prospect of creating a country estate. After purchasing the 546-acre garrison site in 1820, Pell built his first house replete with gardens and an orchard. It burned in the mid-1820s and was replaced with an imposing Greek Revival house called the “Pavilion.” Pell also took steps to stabilize what was left of the walls of Fort Ticonderoga, thus establishing the family tradition of stewardship of what would become one of the nation’s most treasured historic sites.

After Pell’s death in 1840 the Pavilion was leased to a series of hotel managers. The fortress and the extensively landscaped Pavilion were popular attractions on a fashionable itinerary that was part of what travel promoters called the “Northern Tour.” After the Civil War, however, Fort Ticonderoga began to lose its luster as a tourist attraction. By the late nineteenth century the Pavilion and gardens had fallen into decline and in 1889 the Ticonderoga property attracted the interest of a developer who wanted to establish a residential subdivision and a golf course.

Happily, a sale did not take place and interest began to mount for preserving Fort Ticonderoga. The future of the site was assured when Stephan H. P. Pell and his wife, Sarah, acquired control of the property and launched a restoration effort. The reconstructed fort opened in 1909 and the Pells sought the advice of architect Alfred C. Blossom and landscape designer Marian C. Coffin to develop a comprehensive preservation plan for the entire property.

After supervising the reconstruction of the fort, Blossom guided the restoration of the Pavilion as a summer house for the Pell family, including a plan for a formal garden loosely based on the eighteenth-century plan for the French garrison garden. The design of the “King’s Garden” reflected the then popular Colonial Revival aesthetic promoted in books by Alice Morse Earle and the ideas of landscape designer Charles A. Platt. A nine-foot high brick wall sheltered the formal garden and defined its limits beyond which lay a vegetable garden and orchard.

The walled garden was substantially redesigned in 1920 by Marion C. Coffin. One of the first women to gain prominence as a professional landscape architect, Coffin emphasized classical symmetry in the Pavilion garden. The centerpiece of her design was a *tapis vert* (green carpet) with a reflecting pool at its center. Narrow garden beds flanked the lawn, geometrically arranged in quadrants, with floral color tones arranged in such a way that the softer pastels located near the house effectively contrasted with the deeper and more vibrant colors of the plantings in the distance. The King’s Garden, often called the “oldest garden in America,” became widely known in the 1920s.

After Stephen Pell’s death in 1950, his son John Pell became president and director of the Fort Ticonderoga Association. In his first two decades of stewardship John Pell devoted much of his attention to improving facilities to accommodate the steadily increasing stream of visitors. The King’s Garden evolved as Pell’s wife, Pyрма, shifted the color scheme to white and pastels, introduced a more “chaotic” (English) organization of plant varieties, and replaced trees and shrubs with new varieties.

Since John Pell’s death in 1987, the Pavilion and the King’s Garden have become more accessible to the public. The Pell legacy, including all of the historic structures and 2,500 acres around the Fort, has benefited from the application of modern museum standards and conservation practices. A Historic Landscape Study in 1995 recommended that the King’s Garden be restored to Marion Coffin’s 1920 plan. The restoration of the “masterwork garden” involved a number of public and private agencies and was implemented over a four-year period with the assistance of a large cadre of volunteers.

*A Favorite Place of Resort for Strangers* is a celebratory piece prompted by the completion of the restoration of the King’s Garden and the adjacent grounds. The generously illustrated and fully annotated work is calculated to delight and inform readers. It succeeds in both respects, a credit to the book designer, Christopher Kuntze, and to Virginia M. Westbrook, who skillfully edited the 1995 technical report by Lucinda Brockway upon which the work is based. No doubt many readers will be

inspired by *A Favorite Place of Resort for Strangers* to follow in the footsteps of visitors of preceding generations by visiting this “great American garden.”

GARY T. LORD

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### *The Battered Stars: One State's Civil War Ordeal during Grant's Overland Campaign*

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By Howard Coffin (Woodstock, Vt.: The Countryman Press, 2002, pp. xxii, 415, \$30.00).

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Steven Spielberg in *Saving Private Ryan* redefined the basic theme of the Hollywood war movie from glory to sacrifice. Howard Coffin has done the same with *The Battered Stars: One State's Civil War Ordeal during Grant's Overland Campaign. From the Home Front in Vermont to the Battlefields of Virginia*. General Ulysses S. Grant's 1864 overland campaign marked the beginning of the concept of total war, neither bestowing nor beseeching quarter, with the resultant sacrifice in blood. Coffin ably tells of Vermont's toll in that sacrifice, both in terms of front-line casualties and the grieving over the dead and the concern for the wounded back home, using official military records, period newspaper accounts, and diaries and letters of the participants in this tragic drama.

By 1864, the Confederacy was still a formidable foe, and its goal of independence remained viable. The North's treasury was waning, and the number of its dead and wounded was waxing. Abraham Lincoln legitimately feared that the failure to subdue the South would cost him the presidency in the November election. The victory the Confederacy could not win on the battlefield appeared to be within grasp at the polls if it could maintain a military stalemate as it had done successfully in the war's eastern theater for the past three years.

Lincoln's selection of Grant as supreme military commander was premised on Grant's personal strategy to advance all of the North's armies even if they won no battles. Based on the numerical superiority of the North's population, the meat grinder of war would exhaust the Confederacy's military manpower while the North had soldiers to spare. Coffin

transforms casualty statistics into real Vermonters who were husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, friends, and lovers. In doing so, he shows the true spirit of Vermont, not only in the words and deeds of those who did and did not survive the spring of 1864, but also in his own exploration of the lives of those who were condemned to live (and also die) in those interesting times.

Coffin first takes the reader into the winter encampments of the Vermont units of the Army of the Potomac that participated in this campaign: the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 10th, 11th, and 17th Vermont Infantry Regiments, Company F of the 1st U.S. Sharpshooter Regiment, Companies E and H of the 2nd U.S. Sharpshooter Regiments, and the 1st Vermont Cavalry Regiment, bivouacked nearby. The 2nd through the 6th, joined eventually by the 11th Regiment, were all a part of the "Old Vermont Brigade," one of the very few Northern brigades comprised of all regiments from the same state. It already had a reputation as one of the best in the Army, hence, generals used the Vermonters in the hottest spots on the battlefields, with the resultant cost in dead and wounded. By tracing the footsteps of the Vermont Brigade in and out of combat during the spring of 1864, and periodically checking on the cavalry, other regiments, and sharpshooter companies from Vermont, Coffin is able to provide the reader a credible overview of the entire campaign.

On the first day of combat during the campaign, May 5, 1864, the Vermont Brigade found itself positioned in a gap that had developed in the Army of the Potomac spread out along the Brock Road leading south snaking its way through a jungle of second-growth forest called the Wilderness. They and two other brigades were all that stood in the way of an attack by a third of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia to cut the Northern army in two. To slow the Confederate threat to his forces until reinforcement could close the gap in his lines, Grant ordered an immediate attack.

Coffin's description of the slaughter of a third of the Vermonters of the Old Brigade in the resultant engagement with over twice their number of the enemy is both the best and most bloodcurdling of his writing: "The bullets struck everywhere, smashing faces, disemboweling, shattering arms and legs, ripping through lungs, destroying hands, feet, private parts. Men who had only recently discovered the joys of learning lost their powers of reason to a bullet in the head. Lads who worked dawn to dusk on the farm suddenly became cripples for life. Boys who loved to watch a pink sunrise of a golden sunset over the hills of home suddenly were without sight. Husbands and fathers, young lovers, in an instant, were made eunuchs" (p. 113). Had the Vermonters failed, and each divided part of the Army of the Potomac been defeated, the chances of

continuing the war to reunify the Union could have been slim to none. The blood of over a thousand Vermonters saved the Union that spring afternoon.

At the Bloody Angle at Spotsylvania and between the trenches at Cold Harbor yet more Vermonters were killed and wounded in the thickest of the fighting. The total number of Vermont casualties during the entire campaign eventually swelled to almost 3,000, close to one percent of the state's entire population. Coffin does not limit his discussion of the impact of the devastation to the front lines. He tells the reader about Vermont's governor organizing more than a dozen doctors to travel to Fredricksburg, which became one huge hospital for Grant's wounded and dying soldiers, along with wagons of supplies provided by the Vermonters back home. The refusal of Vermont's citizens to leave the responsibility to care for its wounded sons to the national government undoubtedly saved countless lives that would have been lost without that medical attention.

Coffin provides other insights to the Vermont character. One of the Vermonters he introduces who lived in Vermont during the spring of 1864 was a veteran of the 3rd Regiment who returned to civilian life upon the expiration of his enlistment and now worked at the Fairbanks scale manufacturing enterprise. Through his diary Coffin provides the reader with a view of not only civilian life in Vermont during that spring, but also the emotional impact on learning of the deaths of close friends with whom the diarist served in the Old Vermont Brigade. This story has a surprising twist, which I leave to the readers to discover for themselves. It also underscores Coffin's skills as a writer. He uses his prior experience in bringing Vermont's involvement in the Civil War to life to give some of his best descriptions of combat in this third, and one hopes not his last, book on the subject.

The book does have a few distractions, including the placement of pictures of events and participants pages away from their references in the text, and the necessity of an errata sheet to correct errors missed in proofreading or editing. However, none of these minor faults detract from the overall excellent work in this book. Coffin does not disappoint a contemporary generation of both Vermonters and non-Vermonters who have come to expect from him an introduction to the almost incomprehensible sacrifices that past generations of Vermonters made in assuring that the United States would be one nation, free and indivisible.

CHARLES S. MARTIN

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*Manufacturing the Muse: Estey Organs & Consumer Culture in Victorian America*

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By Dennis G. Waring (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2002, pp. 371, \$70.00, paper \$24.95).

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Dennis Waring has written a rich and provocatively ethnomusicological history of the Estey Organ Company of Brattleboro, Vermont. The introduction and part I of the book examine the historical and social-cultural contexts of the crafting of musical instruments, particularly the reed organ. Part II covers the life of Jacob Estey (1814–1890), the precursors, founding, and phenomenal growth of the Estey Organ Company, Jacob’s successors, and the demise of the company in 1960. One hundred fifty-two pages of end material include a substantial set of musical and technical appendices, expansive footnotes, and an extensive bibliography and index. Finally, the book comes with a delightful CD recording of several accomplished reed organ artists playing typical music on vintage instruments, some as accompaniment to sweet songs. It should be apparent already that this book is a find for scholars and amateurs alike.

The book clarifies at the outset that the term “reed organ” refers to a class of keyboard instruments “whose sound is produced by freely-vibrating reed tongues [rather than columns of air contained in pipes] . . . and activated by air under either pressure or suction” (p. 1). An introductory sketch of the slow-starting production of musical instruments in America observes that keyboard instruments were by far the largest part of the enterprise that developed between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and then announces, “The reed organ was the answer to Victorian America’s craving for aesthetic enrichment and social status through acquisition of manufactured goods” (p. 8). Roughly the first third of the book is devoted to fleshing out this thesis.

Waring artfully employs drawings and photographs of Estey organ cases, Estey advertisements, catalogs, sheet-music covers, parlor-song texts, and the like to demonstrate Estey products’ conformity to Victorian ideals of opulence, embellishment, revived Rococo, Gothic, and other period styles for decorating possessions well beyond what was strictly useful, to provide “expansive associations and maximum emotional response” (p. 21) at costs not exceeding what the middle class could afford. The reed organ as a link between church and home, and as a medium for expression of an idealized feminine role, suggested domestic gentility. The generally simple style of reed organ music, however—renditions of popular songs, hymns, and simplified classical music—

presents somewhat more of a conundrum for Waring. Not finding Victorian elaboration and ornament in the music itself, he notes that “endless variations on themes of innocence, love, and death were metaphorical musical equivalents of the hundreds of styles of Victorian bannisters, wallpaper, drapery, and doors. Just as rapid construction methods and inexpensive cookie-cutter architectural millwork provided access to fashion that appeared upper class, songs of formulaic construction imbued with predictable fervor gave musical aspirants the feeling of cultivated, genteel accomplishment” (p. 68).

Up to this point, Waring’s argument has been persuasive, but here some might see the interpretive overreach that so tempts writers of socio-cultural analysis. (The renowned Harvard professor of American literature, Perry Miller, famously remarked, “Remember, *Moby Dick* is first of all a story about a whale.”) In his thorough and fascinating appendix, “Sound Production with Free Reeds,” Ned Phoenix characterizes the American reed organ as “a folk instrument, designed and built by common folk, to look, play, and sound appropriate for music made in common places by other common folk” (p. 234). This, too, is interpretive, but particularly as the parts of the book describing the people who worked at Estey suggest, Phoenix’s remark is a valid counterpoint to Waring’s Victorian theme. Indeed, Waring himself supplies less speculative but sophisticated reasons for the popularity of the reed organ in the few passages from his pen that discuss the instrument’s musical qualities *per se*: that free-reed timbre “blends well with voices,” giving the reed organ a “warm vocal quality that cannot be matched by the more percussive [though higher status] piano” (p. 54), and that “the organs were designed [through their various stops and swell capacities] to make simple arrangements of popular sacred and secular music sound complex yet emotionally satisfying” (p. 168). These qualities are beautifully revealed in the CD recording that accompanies the book.

Jacob Estey’s life and the career of his company are splendidly recounted from a trove of primary and secondary sources, including interviews with former employees still alive. Originally, reed organs were made one at a time, but by the 1890s they were being turned out assembly-line style at a rate of more than 1,500 per month, though still requiring an artisan’s skill. A constant stream of inventions and modifications was contributed by several generations of craftsmen. Jacob Estey himself was neither a musician nor an organ craftsman. Rather he began to abandon an expanding trade as a plumber when he became in 1852 a co-owner, salesman, and eventually manager of a small reed-organ firm that by twists and turns morphed into the Estey Organ Company. Waring cites Brattleboro chronicler Mary R. Cabot for the fact that during the

time that Estey was shifting his career, the old methods of making pipes and pumps “were being replaced with newer techniques,” a possible factor in Estey’s moving out of plumbing (p. 93). What Waring does not note is that these newer techniques featured the use of machines to produce interchangeable parts, beginning with “interchangeable pumps” manufactured by the National Hydraulic Company in Windsor, Vermont, founded in 1828 by gunmaker and inventor Asahel Hubbard, whose machines have been recognized as “real antecedents of today’s line-type production” (Wayne G. Broehl, Jr., *Precision Valley: The Machine Tool Companies of Springfield, Vermont* [1959], p. 4). Some fourteen pages later in Waring we read about Estey’s 1865 purchase of “a highly specialized machine that could mass-produce organ reeds” (p. 107) from its inventor, Josiah Davis Whitney, then of Fitchburg, Massachusetts, but who, we must add, had earlier spent seven years in the manufacture of organs in Springfield, Massachusetts, where was located the Springfield Armory, a firm that during the early nineteenth century had as a leading goal the interchangeability of gun parts, and that exercised a wide influence on the many artisans in the region who wanted to do business with it. One Sam Colt visited the armory before inventing the gun credited with greatly boosting the move of industry to interchangeable parts. The manufacture of the Colt commenced in Hartford, Connecticut, at one end of the “Precision Valley” that stretched along the Connecticut River from Hartford past Springfield, Massachusetts, Brattleboro, and Springfield, Vermont, to Windsor. Waring does portray a Brattleboro network of inventive makers of “melodeons” or early reed organs, but the larger geographic and technological context of the evolution of the reed organ begs for further historical investigation.

A reviewer is bound to look for lacunae in the material presented, but the truth is this reviewer found *Manufacturing the Muse* extraordinarily interesting and informative. He learned much about his own 1883 Estey organ and unsuspected dimensions of his enjoyment of it, about the history and people of Brattleboro, about a remarkable man whose contrast to too many present-day CEOs could not be more striking, and about a company that had few Vermont peers, past or present, for worldwide enterprise and reputation. Our few demurrers are but exceptions to what is overall a meticulously researched and lucidly written book. Persons of a variety of vocations and avocations will want to read it.

JOSEPH C. GRANNIS

*Joe Grannis’s wandering career includes majoring in American history at Harvard College, teaching sociology of education at Teachers College, Columbia University, and, currently, serving as organist and choir director at a church in Chester, Vermont.*

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*Roots of the Blackthorn Tree: The Irish Heritage*

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By Basil S. Douros (Rancho Murieta, Ca.: Five and Dot Corporation, 2002, pp. 232, paper, \$15.00).

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What is one to make of this book? Basil Douros set out to record some episodes about Shelburne's Barrett family—to which he is related by marriage—and ended up mixing ancient Irish history and family anecdotes, complete with fictional characters and imagined conversations. Indeed, in the preface Douros calls his work a novel rather than a family history. In fact, it is something between history and fiction, but it contains too much factual material to be described simply as historical fiction.

This criticism aside, there is much to commend to a Vermont audience in this slim volume. Through his many conversations with family members, Douros collected stories detailing the travails and successes of an Irish immigrant family in Vermont. We learn, for example, that the Barretts and Breens, neighbors in Ireland, fleeing the distress of the Great Famine of the 1840s, came to America together and settled in Underhill, where the Breens had a relative. At the time, Underhill Center had a large Irish community. Even today traces of this community remain with place names such as Irish Settlement Road, Casey Hill, and the Irish Cemetery. Douros gives us glimpses into the everyday life of the nineteenth-century Underhill Irish: the making of hard cider in the fall and winter, fixing a broken wagon axle at Fitzsimonds's blacksmith shop, and family ploys to get the younger generation married and settled.

In the 1880s the focus of the Barrett family shifted from Underhill to Shelburne, due to the carpentry skill of Luke Barrett, a grandson of the original immigrants. Having gained a reputation for designing and building bridges, he was hired by the owners of the Lake Champlain Transit Company (LCTC) and the Shelburne Shipyards to teach the basics of boatbuilding. Eventually, he became the foreman of the shipyards.

Mr. Douros's Shelburne anecdotes are more grounded in fact than his earlier stories, for his wife is the granddaughter of Luke Barrett and he must have heard numerous tales about the early days in Shelburne from the old folks at family gatherings. He tells us, for example, of the old Irish wedding custom known as "horning," in which friends of the bride and groom kept them exasperated on their wedding night by constantly banging on pots and pans outside their honeymoon retreat—a custom still popular at Barrett weddings in the early part of the twentieth century.

The book includes vignettes about Captain George Rushlow, one of

LCTC's legendary steamboat captains; references to "Doc" Patrick McSweeney, Burlington's resident healer to the Irish American community; glimpses of Father Jerome Cloarec, longtime pastor of St. Joseph Church in Burlington; and stories of life in and around Shelburne and the shipyards.

A section dealing with early Irish history is the weakest part of the book. Mr. Douros apparently wanted to tell the reader that the Barretts were of Norman-Irish stock. He devotes a quarter of the book to explaining who the Normans were, how they came to be in Ireland, and how the Barretts came to settle in County Wexford. For family members unaware of their ancient lineage, this background material might be useful, but to the average reader it is unnecessary. Moreover, he has some basic facts wrong. For example, he states that the Romans invaded Ireland in 50 B.C. and suggests that they stayed for 500 years. In fact, the Romans never got as far as Ireland, although they did give it the Latin name *Hibernia*.

But, in Mr. Douros's defense, he is not a trained historian, and his purpose in writing this book is to tell his family something about itself. This he did, if somewhat awkwardly. Had he done nothing at all, professional historians would be without much material that sheds light on daily life in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Vermont.

VINCENT FEENEY

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## *Postcards from Vermont: A Social History, 1905–1945*

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By Allen F. Davis (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2002, pp. xiii, 326, paper, \$24.95).

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**I**n *Postcards from Vermont*, Allen Davis has made available for enjoyment, research, and instruction a glorious array of over 360 very well-reproduced postcards—30 in color—drawn primarily from the author's collection with a few borrowed from library, museum, and historical society archives. The images are accompanied by text, ranging from one-line captions to essays, that provides both information and historical

context. Davis invites the reader to share what has been his passion since 1983 when he “first got interested in postcards as history quite accidentally.” As a self-described “addicted collector,” he enthusiastically communicates what he has learned about postcards and, in the process, about Vermont.

The book is both more and less than the title suggests. As Davis himself remarks: “This is a book about postcards and about Vermont, but it is not the usual book about either. It uses postcards to tell various aspects of the social and cultural history of Vermont from about 1905 to 1945, but in no sense is it a comprehensive history of the state during that time” (p. vii). In the epilogue Davis writes, “Most of the postcards in this book come from the ‘golden age,’ 1907 to 1915, but I also have included many from the 1920s and 1930s as well as a few from the 1940s” (p. 314).

Publishing *Postcards from Vermont* has been a monumental undertaking; the result is a fine book, which will serve several publics well. Vermont still shows ample evidence of its past, so visitors can buy this book as a souvenir that will provide context for what they have seen, and residents can use it to learn about layers of their local and state history to add to what they have experienced and heard about. Libraries and archives can make it a valuable addition to their reference collection for use by both patrons and staff. Postcard collectors will find useful information about Vermont cards, interesting historical information about deltiology, and an example from a fellow “addict” on how to put your collection to productive use.

Davis’s excellent thirteen-page introduction includes: photographers by name, and the history of photography; the role of postcard manufacturers—many of whom are also named; and the history of postcards, especially during the golden age. The introduction to a chapter titled “The Postcard as Photojournalism” offers practical clues about dating postcards, and impresses upon the reader the value of postcards as sources of new information or confirmation for what is already known.

The main body of the book is organized into sixteen chapters. Each begins with an essay of from one to five pages, followed by an “exhibit” of fourteen to thirty-six postcards, one or two to a page, which are accompanied by both two-page mini-essays and individual captions of varying length and style. The introductory essay for the country store section of the “Country Stores and One-Room Schools” chapter gives the reader a particularly good context for the images that follow. The “Farm and Factory” essay is very interesting, although there is little in it after 1900. The railroad era boasts especially good pictures and the twenty-five images in the “Men at Work” chapter are simply spectacu-

lar! Individual captions range from mere identification to more substantial comments. At their best, the captions set an image in context and teach the reader skills for future use. On occasion, however, in a distracting change in style, the author asks if the reader recognizes the building or the family, or notices the photographer's technique. Sometimes Davis makes reference to his own father or grandfather, who ran the country store in Hardwick, where Davis still lives.

Geographic coverage of the state is quite good and an extensive index allows the reader to locate images by place as well as by proper name and subject area. Chronological coverage, however, is uneven. Almost half of the postcards are dated 1905–1915, and several of the approximately one-third that are undated may also be from that golden age of the postcard. Of the thirty-nine dated in the 1920s, fifteen are of Charles Lindbergh and *The Flood of 1927*.

Where Davis provides dates, a consistent explanation would have been welcome, i.e. “mailed on” (a certain date); “1910” if printed on the card; “estimated to be . . .” (with a rationale). Dates are especially sparse in the color section, even when correspondents had included them in their messages. Although *Postcards from Vermont* is organized thematically rather than chronologically, and dates are not indexed, more dating would have provided yet another way to use the book.

One of the author's goals is to help dispel the image of Vermont as a world in harmony and “pretty as a picture.” He says, “Throughout the book I try to relate the myth to the reality, the ideal to the real” (p. viii). Readers will agree that, “Postcards don't tell us everything about Vermont history in the first decades of the twentieth century, but they do reveal a fascinating time, an era of paradox and contradiction” (p. 13).

*Postcards from Vermont* is doing good work revealing the layers of our state's history, demonstrating the importance of postcards when studying the changing landscape and changing styles, and motivating ourselves and future generations to keep on collecting.

TORDIS ILG ISSELHARDT

*Tordis Ilg Isselhardt, president and publisher of Images from the Past, Inc., is also a preservationist and collector who focuses on regional and cultural history.*

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## *Vermont Air: The Best of the Vermont Public Radio Commentaries*

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*Edited by Philip Baruth and Joe Citro (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2002, pp. 208, paper, \$14.95).*

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**R**uth Page. Jules Older. Willem Lange. If you are a listener to Vermont Public Radio, you not only just identified each of the preceding individuals, but also conjured up a voice and, perhaps, a phrase or tag line. VPR regulars and those who enjoy short, tightly written essays will take delight in *Vermont Air*. That said, how should one review *Vermont Air* for *Vermont History*?

In terms of format and context, *Vermont Air* is an interesting challenge as a historical tool. The essays are hybrid documents containing elements of both written and spoken communication. Under VPR guidelines the commentaries must be written in a conversational style, covering a topic within approximately three minutes of speaking time. The essays may be edited by VPR and then recorded by the commentator. *Vermont Air* completes the loop by returning the broadcast commentary to written text.

To VPR listeners it is impossible to read an essay without hearing a voice. Therefore, it would have been interesting if the publisher had included with the texts a CD of the actual broadcasts. Moreover, we respond to those voices with our own perspectives and knowledge of the commentator. Do we respond to the public persona, as much as to the words, of such noted commentators as Allen Gilbert, Ron Powers, John McClaughry, or Jeff Wennberg? In at least one case I found that reading, rather than listening to, a commentator left me with a different impression of the person's perspective. Will future historians, unfamiliar with the personalities and voices of these commentators, interpret the essays differently? Is our understanding of the commentaries further shaped by when or where we hear them (while driving or doing tasks around the house), as opposed to some future researcher engaged in the conscious act of reading them as essays?

In her introduction Betty Smith compares the commentaries to a "vast New England Town Meeting." This suggests a more orderly sequence of point-counterpoint within a defined (warned) topic than is present in *Vermont Air*, which is arranged alphabetically by author. It would be an unusual town meeting where a citizen's comments on school size (Peg Devlyn, "Big Box Schools") elicited a response on a "passion for art" (Lois Eby).

Perhaps the better analogy would be snatches of overheard conversations. The speakers are self-selected, articulate, informed, and opinionated, but they are not, on the surface, talking to or debating with one another. They are talking to us, occasionally to persuade, or as often, simply to share reflections on anything from cockroaches and the weather to Vermont character and characters to the national debate du jour.

And yet in reading the essays as a whole, rather than listening to them over the course of days or months, dialogues and patterns do emerge that can inform historians seeking to understand Vermonters and their perspectives. Like all of us, many of the commentators reflect on the weather. When Cheryl Hanna, a lawyer, encounters black ice, she frames the experience within the context of Vermont's Good Samaritan law. Mathematician Don Rockmore's black ice experience leads to speculations about the "geometry of life." Willem Lange, driving through a snowstorm, comments on the hyperbole of forecasts, observing that "flourishing in this climate is such a good, moral thing to do."

Will Curtis's offerings on his (non-Vermont) memories of celebrating the Fourth of July and Christmas or of sugaring, touch on our nostalgic longings, while Nick Boke's sketch of rural democracy ("Confessions of a Vote Counter") recalls the paintings of Norman Rockwell or the poems of Walter Hard. The number of commentators who offer reflections on the natural world (whether Vermont's or elsewhere) suggests that VPR's listeners share environmental interests and concerns. It is notable that three essays touch on gardening but only one, and that a humor piece, comments on agriculture. Given the public dialogues of the past few years, it is not surprising that educational issues are a frequent subject. The civil union issue, however, is only discussed in two essays, Allan Gilbert's on "Profiles in Courage" and Cheryl Hanna's very personal account of a gay friend. Both add dimensions that can help understand at least one side of the debate (the limited number of civil union essays is because VPR limited the selections to 2000–2001).

Bill Seamans's comments on the "chatterati" ("Lexicon") not only contributes a perspective on the state of public discourse, but also offers a framework for considering the *Vermont Air* commentaries. Arguably the commentaries as a whole offer a left-of-center view, but there are hints of the larger Vermont dialogue. Peg Devlyn's commentary on a liveable wage or Ellen David Friedman's thoughts on globalization can be juxtaposed with John McClaughry's observations on government policies as barriers to local business ("Vermont's Coming Crony Capitalism"). As a compilation of written texts, *Vermont Air* occasionally suggests alliances that may not be apparent from the on-air com-

mentaries. Thus, one can draw a line from Ron Powers's celebration of one woman's efforts to embrace "problem kids" ("The Youth Problem") to McClaughry's fear that government programs are replacing individual responsibility ("The Rise of the Nanny State"). But then both essayists must contemplate Tom Slayton's "Peacham Tragedy," which recounts how even our celebrated Vermont humanity can be withdrawn with fatal consequences.

Is *Vermont Air*, then, an appropriate subject for review by *Vermont History*? Yes. It is a snapshot, perhaps more narrowly cropped than we would wish, of who we are as Vermonters. It touches on our humor, our observations of the world around us, and our hopes and fears. Indeed, one hopes that VPR will consider publishing a collection of earlier commentaries to complement those drawn from the 2000–2001 broadcasts covered here. Such a publication could broaden the snapshot back to 1988, before Act 60, civil unions, and other events reshaped our dialogues and self-understanding.

This is Gregory Sanford in the State Archives, the Soul of the Nanny State. I better get back to work.

GREGORY SANFORD

*Gregory Sanford is, as he said, the Vermont State Archivist. He writes his own commentaries for Opinions, the newsletter of the secretary of state, and for Vermont Public Radio, and is frequently quoted in Vermont media on issues in state government.*