

# IN THIS ISSUE

---



## BOOK REVIEWS

---

BURT FEINTUCH AND DAVID H. WATTERS, EDs., *The Encyclopedia of New England*. Gregory Sanford 67

FREDERICK MATTHEW WISEMAN, *Reclaiming the Ancestors: Decolonizing a Taken Prehistory of the Far Northeast*. Linda B. Gray 69

J. KEVIN GRAFFAGNINO AND H. NICHOLAS MULLER, III, EDs., *The Quotable Ethan Allen*. Bill Mares 73

MEGAN MARSHALL, *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism*. Marilyn S. Blackwell 75

BETH A. SALERNO, *Sister Societies: Women's Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America*. Deborah P. Clifford 78

MARY HARD BORT, *Manchester: Memories of a Mountain Valley. A Collection of Columns Previously Published in the Manchester Journal*. Tyler Resch 80

RUSSELL J. BELDING, *From Hitching Posts to Gas Pumps: A History of North Main Street, Barre, Vermont, 1875–1915*. Nancy E. Boone 82

ROBERT N. WEBSTER, *A Capital Upbringing: Coming of Age in the 1930's  
in Montpelier, Vermont.* Reidun D. Nuquist 83

BRUCE COFFIN, *The Long Light of Those Days: Recollections of a  
Vermont Village at Mid-Century.* Helen Husher 85

SUSANNE RAPPAPORT, *Messages from a Small Town: Photographs inside  
Pawlet, Vermont—Neil Rappaport with Nellie Bushee and  
Ella Clark.* Tordis Ilg Isselhardt 87

# BOOK REVIEWS

---



---

## *The Encyclopedia of New England*

---

*Edited by* Burt Feintuch and David H. Watters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, pp. xxiii, 1,564; \$65).

---

**B**y one estimate some 2,000 encyclopedias have been compiled since the ancient Greeks first attempted to “encircle learning.” Because humankind likes to assume that learning is an uninterrupted progression, which not so incidentally makes each successive generation the most knowledgeable, we are fascinated by how much knowledge current encyclopedias encircle. Admittedly we have trouble measuring up to China’s Yu-Hai’s 240-volume encyclopedia published in 1738, but as one reviewer noted, the *Encyclopedia of New England*, weighing in at eight pounds, is no slouch (Associated Press, Beverley Wing, “A treasure trove of New England lore and history,” *Barre-Montpelier Times Argus* 29 September 2005, sec. B, p. 5).

In their introduction the editors explain that the *Encyclopedia* “takes today’s New England as its primary subject; it does not focus comprehensively on history, although New England’s deep historical tradition and remarkably strong preservationist ethos are discussed. . . . We began with the goal of understanding lived realities in this distinctive place, viewing the region as the product of social, economic, and historic interactions among diverse people, communities, and institutions, not as a single, easily characterized place” (p. xvii).

The encyclopedia is arranged topically into twenty-two sections from “Agriculture” to “Tourism.” Each section begins with a broad discussion of the topic that concludes with a bibliography. In some sections additional overviews offer further elaboration on aspects of the topic.

*Vermont History* 74 (Winter/Spring 2006): 67–89.

© 2006 by the Vermont Historical Society. ISSN: 0042-4161; on-line ISSN: 1544-3043

Individual entries on specific subjects follow; these are also accompanied by bibliographies.

This arrangement sets topics within regional and conceptual contexts before addressing specific subjects. That can be very useful, but raises some questions about how and why people use encyclopedias. To the degree encyclopedias are used for quick reference, the elaborate structure of introduction, overview, and subject entries may be a barrier. Though a solid index allows a reader to extract specific information from the various sections and entries, it is labor intensive to pursue multiple index entries, particularly when they reference triple-column pages. The search might result in finding the sought-for reference as part of a list, without any substantive commentary.

For example, the index indicates two pages where former Vermont governor and U.S. Senator George Aiken is mentioned. On the first (p. 751) he is listed along with former New Hampshire governors Meldrim Thompson and John Sununu and others as examples of “New England conservatives” who wielded “greater influence than the electoral power of their respective states.” On page 808, Aiken’s other indexed entry, he is simply cited for naming the Northeast Kingdom. Both entries are within the section on “Images and Ideas.” The first is under the subject “Conservatism” by Michael Connelly; the second is under “Vermont” by Nancy Price Graff. In her broader discussion of Vermont’s image Graff discusses Vermont conservatism and notes the irony of how the “vigor with which Vermonters have practiced their conservatism over the years has made Vermont one of the most politically liberal states in the union” (p. 809). This is a different image of “New England conservatism” than that drawn by Mr. Connelly. It is possible to find references to both discussions by looking under “conservatism” in the index, but not by searching under “Aiken.” This may skew the image the casual researcher might have of Aiken, whose career defies easy characterization as “conservative.”

The encyclopedia’s main audience, however, is not the casual researcher but rather those seeking broader contextual information or pointers to further research. For that audience the book’s layout is useful. The introduction to the “Agriculture” section, for example, provides comparisons by state for the impact on farming of skyrocketing land values and property taxes. A follow-up essay on “Contemporary Agriculture” analyzes and compares the values of farmland per acre and of farm incomes for several New England states, and provides references to the value of specific crops within each state. In the “Folklife” section Vermonters’ reaction to, and stories about, “flatlanders” can be compared to Maine’s characterization of summer tourists as the “Summer Complaint.”

This comparative, regional view is both a wonderful tool and a welcome antidote to the exceptionalism through which each of the region's states occasionally views itself.

Like all encyclopedic efforts this one invites scrutiny about what issues and people were included, as well as what was left out. Why only two entries for Aiken, one of Vermont's and New England's most influential senators from the twentieth century? Vermont artist Mary Azarian also has two entries in the index; Ben & Jerry's has six; Ethan Allen, despite the introductory disclaimer about history, gets thirteen. U. S. Senator Warren Austin, our country's first United Nations ambassador, has no entries, while Governor Richard Snelling only makes it as part of the biographical sketch of Madeleine Kunin.

These are not complaints; this is, after all, an encyclopedia of New England not Vermont. As such it should be a welcome addition to the bookshelves of those who want to understand the region and Vermont's place within it.

GREGORY SANFORD

*Gregory Sanford has been Vermont State Archivist since 1982.*

---

## *Reclaiming the Ancestors: Decolonizing a Taken Prehistory of the Far Northeast*

---

By Frederick Matthew Wiseman (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2005, pp. xviii, 287, \$55.00; paper \$24.95).

---

**F**rederick Matthew Wiseman, chair of the Department of Humanities at Johnson State College, member of the Abenaki Tribal Council, and director of the Abenaki Tribal Museum and Cultural Center in Swanton, has written a book with a mission. He promises the recapture of what he calls “a taken prehistory.” Wiseman, an Abenaki, archaeologist, and paleoecologist whose training centers on scientific analysis of material remains, here addresses the geographical expanse of the proto-Algonquin Wabanaki ancestors—an area that includes present-day northern New England, Quebec, the Maritimes, Newfoundland, and parts of Massachusetts, New York, and Ontario. He distinguishes this region from the neighboring Iroquois and non-Wabanaki Algonquin cultural zones by figuratively inscribing a line on a map, a line which, according to Wiseman, encloses Wôbanakik, the Wabanaki culture area. This is a prehistory of the Wabanaki ancestors, the first of a three-volume series. It is

designed to place the Wabanaki at the center of their vibrant and ever-changing world. Wiseman demonstrates that they are agents of their own history, not merely reflections of other groups or victims of the march of time. In the highly contested academic and social arena of native studies, Wiseman provides an all-encompassing explanatory model founded on the premise that most of the Northeast was the Wabanaki culture zone. This method may seem curious, until we recall that the method is not unlike that of the European colonists, who asserted sovereignty over a region by drawing lines on a map.

Wiseman begins with a review of the literature on Wabanakis and their ancestors. He skillfully addresses the problems and pitfalls in the field of native history. Throughout this book, Wiseman maintains a weather eye on the political storm of Abenaki tribal recognition in Vermont. He eloquently describes the political nature of all information, and how written information about a people can limit their possibilities and has the potential to expunge a culture. In an effort to avoid missteps in this direction, Wiseman conceals some evidence and sources of knowledge from the reader. To his credit, he guards his sources and certain sacred knowledge, but reveals to the reader that he is doing so, and why it is necessary.

Arranged chronologically, the next chapters cover about 1,000 to 2,300 years each, reviewing archeological finds and other known factors such as climate change and glacial retreat. Wiseman devotes considerable space to cataloging stone and shell tools and projectile point finds in the culture area. He also examines evidence from pollen, animal bones, seeds, and manmade artifacts. His expansive region provides the backdrop for a thorough articulation of how the archaeological record can inform the historical narrative.

Wiseman provides a much needed re-visioning of the prehistory of his people. Far from a culture that was derivative of Ohioan, Inuit, or Iroquoian culture as previous scholars have attempted to prove, the ancestors of the Wabanakis of Wôbanakik are described as innovators in such areas as tools, boat making, ground slate, ground-stone tools, toggling harpoons, bone flutes, multifamily architecture, stone masonry, long-distance maritime trade, and ivory and bone working. After listing and situating these finds, he offers short interludes of “historical reconstruction,” set off from the text by italics. These sections are re-imaginings of the beginnings of the Wabanaki people in their culture zone.

This approach presents as many problems as opportunities. Wiseman introduces new definitions, such as Wôbanakik. The book, however, does not include a useful map of this region; the schematic maps that are included (pp. 25 and 59) provide little information, and are not well-

integrated with the text. Particularly because Wiseman's thesis is built on a geographical premise, this book would have benefited from a series of more detailed maps that show topography, waterways, archaeological finds, and settlement/migration patterns. The author and editors settled for a narrative description of the region Wiseman places at the center of his argument.

The logical link from the thorough review of artifacts to Wiseman's narrative prehistory of the Wabanakis is never fully unpacked. The reader is required to take great leaps with the author across deep and unexplained cognitive crevasses. This is a book that is better at describing artifacts than at describing the communities of families who used them. Rarely does it fully describe a site and the activities there; rather, the book discloses similar artifacts from many sites and eras across a wide geographic region.

Wiseman uses deductive reasoning to assert that virtually all archaeological sites and finds in Wôbanakik can be linked to the ancestors of the Wabanakis, the People of the Dawn. He offers two ideologies that buttress this choice of method. The first premise is that he prefers not to divide things and people into categories, but rather to consider the data he finds to be all of one piece, for a more robust, conservative interpretation. Second, he argues that his position as an advocate for sovereignty, or rather, as a sovereigntist, requires this method. This approach places cultural continuity in the foreground, but obscures nuanced changes over time, or differences between regions. The wide net he casts, claiming a huge swath of the Northeast to be the Wabanaki culture area, makes conventional archaeological analysis (which divides groups, shards, and pottery styles based on different finds at different levels in different locations) practically moot. In addition, not all of the evidence Wiseman offers fits his thesis.

When Wiseman encounters outliers—a shard of evidence that does not fit a pattern, or advancement in one region of Wôbanakik and not in another—he restates his premise, that these are all Wabanaki ancestor remains. He finds no single identifier for the Wabanakis, although red paint (ochre) burials help identify the earthly realm of the ancestors. When he encounters different tools in one part of the region than in another, he states that Wabanaki ancestors needed different tools for different environments or for different prey.

To explain similar developments in two widely disparate parts of Wôbanakik, Wiseman proposes an intriguing solution, that the Wabanaki ancestors were a maritime people, and that some were deep-water mariners. According to this theory, they could build boats for ocean seas and travel. Wiseman addresses the possibility of a European

origin for Native Americans, and considers the current controversy about whether they came across the Bering Strait or over the Atlantic from Europe. Here he demonstrates a characteristic willingness to question prevailing assumptions. Noting that one genetic strain (haplogroup X) of native North Americans came from Eurasia, Wiseman imagines that Native Americans took the boats they built to Europe, and brought back a female who began that strain some 15,000-30,000 years before the present. He makes a strong case for these Native American travelers to be Wabanaki ancestors, a conclusion that appears to be at odds with his own statements that most Abenaki descendants do not share this European strain of genetic material. Further, he does not show archaeological or genetic evidence that such a voyage took place.

In other discussions, Wiseman dissects the continuing research on New England's stone cairns, and proposes that these were built by native people rather than Vikings or European colonists. He takes issue with the "Laurentian Iroquois" tag for native peoples in the St. Lawrence Valley just prior to and after contact. He rejects pottery as a marker for these people, claiming that since they are in the zone he has delineated, they are Wabanaki ancestors too.

With his unique perspective as both an archaeologist and an Abenaki, Wiseman integrates the artifactual evidence with Abenaki traditions and with inferences he draws from the evidence. Phrases like "I believe," "I think," and "romantic possibility" pepper this work. Wiseman takes little to no notice of the French records, Gordon Day's work, or Frank Speck's collection of oral histories, and his summaries are generally thin in primary sources and latter-day oral histories, many of which do address native beliefs about prehistoric periods and the creation of the universe. Thus, Wiseman provides both an etic (outsider) and an emic (insider) approach. However, synthesis of his findings is missing: The connections between the conclusions he derives from these two approaches are not clearly drawn.

*Reclaiming the Ancestors: Decolonizing a Taken Prehistory of the Far Northeast* is, as the title indicates, an attempt to settle an old score, and a parry at recent works on the Wabanaki. As such, it is one of the newest contributions to the field of autohistory: histories written by the people about themselves. This field has been most active in relating and reframing the histories of Native Americans, First Nations and indigenous populations; Wiseman's 2001 book *The Voice of the Dawn* also contributes to this literature. Autohistory is characterized by a didactic approach that rejects Eurocentric theories and perspectives while incorporating native values, oral histories and moral lessons. It was heralded in 1987 by the late Michael Dorris, former chair of Native American Studies at

Dartmouth College, in “Indians on the Shelf,” in Calvin Martin, ed., *The American Indian and the Problem of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Examples of this exploding field are the seminal and experimental work by George Sioui, *For an Amerindian Autohistory* (1995), and the highly useful anthologies, Devon A. Mihesuah, ed., *Natives and Academics* (1998) and Jennifer Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, eds., *Reading Beyond Words* (1996).

Wiseman is an ardent advocate for Wabanaki sovereignty, which helps explain why he has consciously and transparently shaped the findings in this work to fit his thesis. His willingness to discard most prior historical research and analysis makes him one of the boldest scholars on the Wabanaki academic frontier. His skill in scientific analysis of organic and inorganic material is his strength. Readers looking for extensive and subtle discussions of prehistoric artifacts in the region will find this to be a useful addition to their libraries. Wiseman’s use of some oral histories, native philosophy, personal reflection, and quotations from native scholars and tribal historians is refreshing and long overdue. However, this prehistory is stitched together by a series of possibilities and, at certain points, explains the way Wiseman would like to believe events transpired. Future native historians, using this volume as a springboard, may indeed find evidence and build a tighter argument to validate Wiseman’s conclusions.

LINDA B. GRAY

*Linda B. Gray teaches history at Norwich University and Vermont history in the Johnson State College External Degree Program.*

---

## *The Quotable Ethan Allen*

---

*Edited by J. Kevin Graffagnino and H. Nicholas Muller, III*  
(Barre: Vermont Historical Society, 2005, pp. 70, paper, \$9.95).

---

I love quotations. I still remember the delight of discovering *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations* as a kid and poring through it the way my buddies sorted their baseball cards. The quotes jumped off the page to compress life’s lessons in punchy enduring form. As I grew older I consulted Bartlett’s to see what people said in their time that we could use in ours. I inserted them in college essays and newspaper articles to burnish my intellectual credentials. With a knapsack full of these literary and historical flash cards, I dropped quotes the way others dropped names. Today,

I have a whole bookshelf of quote books, including one by Paul F. Boller, Jr., entitled *They Never Said It!* (1990) that debunks the sources of many well-known quotations.

“A myth is what never was, but will always be” said Bishop Stephen of Bulgaria in the sixth century. This quote, which I found in Robert Kaplan’s book *Balkan Ghosts*, came to mind as I thumbed through *The Quotable Ethan Allen*, edited by J. Kevin Graffagnino and H. Nicholas Muller. Graffagnino, the director of the Vermont Historical Society, and Muller, a VHS trustee and former president of Colby-Sawyer College, have compiled almost a hundred quotations of Allen from 1764 until a few months before his death in 1789.

Ethan Allen, the Gilgamesh and Daniel Boone of Vermont, has “lent” his name to bowling alleys, shopping plazas, furniture companies, motels, tour boats, and the National Guard. Today he’s probably the best-known Vermonter besides Howard Dean. Allen was no stranger to contradictions. The founder of the Green Mountain Boys and hero of the capture of Ft. Ticonderoga also negotiated with Lord Haldimand to re-join Britain. He thundered against the New York land grants people but was a big land speculator himself. He was a confirmed Deist in a day when Congregationalists ruled the Vermont pulpits, yet he was happy to quote or paraphrase the Bible as it suited him.

So, what do we get from this book? We get a mixture of poetry and bombast.

Yes, Allen did say to the hated Yorkers, “the gods of the valleys are not Gods of the hills” (p. 2). He also said of those Yorkers: “The Emblems of their insatiable, avaricious, overbearing, inhuman, barbarous, and blood-guiltiness of Disposition and Intention is therein portrayed in that transparent Image of themselves, which cannot fail to be a Blot, and an infamous Reproach to them, to Posterity” (p. 5).

We get contemporary observations. For the current debate over evolution vs. creationism, Allen offered, “Reason therefore must be the standard by which we determine the respective claims of revelation: for otherwise we may as well subscribe to the divinity of the one as of the other, or to the whole of them, or to none at all” (p. 22).

We get disarming humor. Reporting on the capture of Ticonderoga, Allen wrote, “The soldiery behaved with such resistless fury that they so terrified the King’s Troops that they durst not fire on their assailants, and our soldiery was agreeably disappointed” (p. 9). At the trial of East-side Yorkers in 1779, he promised, “With my logic and reasoning from the eternal fitness of things I can upset your Blackstones, your white-stones, your gravestones, and your brimstones” (p. 22).

At least as interesting as Allen’s own remarks are those by others

*about* him. For example, “Allen was a profane and ignorant Deist, who died with a mind replete with horror and despair,” wrote Uzal Ogden, a minister (p. 61). In 1778, George Washington wrote of Allen: “There is an original something in him that commands admiration; and his long captivity and sufferings have only served to increase if possible, his enthusiastic zeal” (p. 56). But if Washington had read Sir Henry Clinton’s letter to the Duke of Gloucester, Dec. 14, 1780, one doubts that the commander-in-chief would have been as charitable. “It appears that Ethan Allen has joined the King’s troops. I have been for these two years tempting that chief, and I have offered him what Congress have refused him” (p. 58).

Such was this contradictory man in his own words and in the words of those around him, as reflected in this thin but rewarding volume.

I have two suggestions for the reader. The context for the quotes lies in the introduction and the chronology, not with the quotes themselves. Read those two passages first. Then you can read *at* the quotes as quote books *should* be read. Second, bring your bifocals. The print size is unconscionably small. I couldn’t read the book through without getting a headache.

As Groucho Marx once said, “Outside of a book, a dog is man’s best friend; inside of a dog, it’s too dark to read.” *The Quotable Ethan Allen* is a good book to read . . . in good light.

“Paint me warts and all,” ordered Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector of England. And so in Ethan Allen’s own words have Kevin Graffagnino and Nicholas Muller painted Vermont’s first mythic hero.

BILL MARES

*Bill Mares, the author or co-author of numerous books on Vermont, the Marines, fishing, bees, beer, etc., was a state representative and now teaches history at Champlain Valley Union High School.*

---

## *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism*

---

By Megan Marshall (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005, pp. xx, 602, cloth, \$28.00).

---

With subtle irony, Megan Marshall opens and closes her new biography of the intellectual Peabody sisters of Salem with marriage scenes, mimicking the happy felicity found in many nineteenth-century

novels. The union of the youngest, Sophia, with Nathaniel Hawthorne and of the middle sister, Mary, with Horace Mann ended an era of intellectual fervor and sibling rivalry for the three sisters. These weddings left the eldest, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, who would become founder of the American kindergarten movement, in what some nineteenth-century women would eventually term “single blessedness.” It was not that marriage was a goal, as those older tales would intimate, but in Marshall’s view, an obstacle around which she pivots her story of the famous sisters.

Born in the first decade of the nineteenth century and beneficiaries of the movement to educate young women in the new republic, the Peabody sisters faced a female dilemma of the era: “[W]hat could women of fierce energy, intellect, and determination do with their talents when they could not enter the public realm by any conventional means?” (p. xvii). Their relative poverty forced them to seek ways to earn an income even as they foresaw their future burdened by domestic and maternal functions. Marshall, a writer and expert on women’s and New England history, chose to focus her monumental work on her subjects’ formative years to reveal this struggle. In the process, she opens to view the social world of literary and artistic Boston. While her three subjects struggled to make a living, they cultivated “men of genius” and facilitated the development of an American romantic sensibility.

Marshall’s is not the first biography of the three sisters nor a definitive account of their influence on American society, but it is clearly the most well documented. During twenty years of exhaustive research and reading scores of extant letters, diaries, and journals, Marshall uncovered new and overlooked information that informed her interpretation of their psychological development, their relationships with each other, and their influence on the men they loved and inspired. For example, after investigating the roots of the sisters’ intellectuality, Marshall emphasizes the role of their mother Elizabeth Palmer, who sought to educate her three daughters for independence of mind and self-sufficiency. Elizabeth had been driven to some extent by her youthful outrage at the sexual promiscuity of powerful men like her brother-in-law, Royall Tyler, who could render women helpless. The dramatist and lawyer had married her older sister Mary and become a Vermont supreme court judge. In family letters and Elizabeth’s anonymous account of male seduction, Marshall discovers that Tyler had not only fathered Elizabeth’s younger sister Sophia, but had also sexually abused her as a young girl before marrying Mary and taking her to Vermont in 1796. This information is consistent with what we know about Tyler’s other sexual indiscretions, but it will undoubtedly cast another shadow on the man who is revered for having produced the first American comic play, *The Contrast*.

With her focus on the Peabodys' psychological and intellectual development, the picture Marshall paints is a private one of thoughts and feelings that operated behind the scenes of Boston's intellectual world. The sisters' efforts to achieve "individual self-fulfillment" vied continuously with their desire to act in "disinterested" and benevolent ways. In novelistic fashion, Marshall builds the tensions between the sisters as they sought ideal partners of creative genius, determining for themselves to "shine by borrowed light" (p. xvii). For Mary and Sophia, this quest ended with marriage in their mid-thirties to men that all three sisters helped inspire and bolster through hard times; for Elizabeth, it meant coming to terms with her own prodigious talents and ambition as she resolved to "be myself and *act*" (p. 437). Elizabeth's conversations and contributions to the religious radicalism and philosophical thought of William Ellery Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Bronson Alcott provide new insight into these important intellectuals, who appear to have fed at the trough of her "magnificent philosophical imagination" (p. 295). Marshall notes that Elizabeth originated the term "transcendentalism" in an unpublished essay of 1826. Her translations of the works of European philosophers provided her "men of genius" with intellectual nourishment, while her publishing house and bookstore gave them a place to exchange and communicate new ideas. Marshall has also brought to light the artistic talent of Sophia Peabody, who has been labeled an invalid in other accounts, her pivotal role as a muse for Hawthorne, and the family's appreciation for the emergence of a new aesthetic in American painting.

Marshall is adept at providing readers with the broader social and economic context that circumscribed the Peabodys' world, yet there are a few unanswered questions. With her focus on what the sisters thought and felt, readers may wonder if these young women, two of whom helped support the Peabody family by teaching, ever participated in the mundane tasks of cooking, sewing, or cleaning, or how Elizabeth's publishing business operated. Marshall ends her biography before Elizabeth and Mary made their contributions to education and reform. Readers will need to look elsewhere to discover how their public writings and activities influenced the world outside their literary circles. That said, this is a beautifully written and engaging biography in which the author weaves the threads of her three subjects' lives into a magnificent tapestry that will delight any reader interested in the intellectual history of antebellum New England.

MARILYN S. BLACKWELL

*Marilyn S. Blackwell, Ph.D., teaches history at Community College of Vermont and has written articles on Vermont and women's history.*

---

*Sister Societies: Women's Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America*

---

By Beth A. Salerno (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005, pp. x, 233).

---

In this carefully researched book, Beth Salerno has uncovered more than two hundred exclusively female antislavery societies that were organized in the 1830s and 1840s across the northern United States. This is a far larger number than previously estimated. The main thrust of this volume is to show how women's antislavery activity in these societies moved them away from womanly forms of resistance (such as sewing for antislavery fairs) into the murky male realm of politics. Although Salerno's book has little to say about Vermont, the subject she treats is important for historians of this state.

From the beginning of the organized antislavery movement in the early 1830s, women formed societies independently of men. In doing so, they were drawing on a long tradition of women's benevolent activity and on a public recognition of their responsibility to uphold the nation's moral values. As Salerno points out, this connection between women, benevolence, and moral responsibility increased in the 1820s and 1830s, "as women became more closely identified with religion while men were linked to the expanding political privilege of voting" (p. 4).

A popular form of activism in these female antislavery societies was circulating antislavery petitions. As women went from house to house in their communities collecting signatures, they educated their neighbors about the antislavery cause and often recruited others to form local female antislavery societies.

Salerno tells us that, while only six or so female antislavery societies existed in the northern United States in 1833, over the years the number grew to more than two hundred. When the first Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women met in Philadelphia in 1837, it brought together 175 women, both black and white, representing ten states (not including Vermont). The convention's goals were to raise women's interest in the antislavery cause, and to organize them on its behalf. The greatest success attributed to the convention was the dramatic rise in the number of antislavery petitions sent to Congress by women. In 1837 alone, 164 such documents went to Washington, double the number forwarded the previous year. This mountain of women's signatures so overwhelmed Congress that the lawmakers instituted the first in a series of "Gag Rules," tabling unread all petitions related to slavery.

As long as antislavery women defined their reform work as moral and not political, their activities outside the home were rarely questioned. But, as Salerno points out, this petition campaign, which was clearly an effort to influence how legislators might vote on a given issue, “raised the question of women’s right as citizens,” and “blurred the boundaries between political and moral efforts against slavery” (p. 63).

Disagreements about women’s appropriate role in the antislavery movement grew after 1837 as the men’s abolitionist societies split into factions over a number of issues. When William Lloyd Garrison began denouncing the churches for failing to support his reform efforts, the effect was to drive many church women away from public antislavery activism and back to more accepted female benevolent activities. Others, however, continued to urge their sisters to keep using their voices and their pens, and not just their needles, to bring an end to slavery.

Given that Vermont’s political consciousness had long favored an end to slavery, it came as a surprise to this reader of *Sister Societies* to learn what an insignificant role the women of this state apparently played in female antislavery activism. Out of the two hundred “sister societies” listed in an appendix only five are in Vermont. And of these five, the only one mentioned in the text is the Randolph Female Antislavery Society, founded in the late 1830s as an auxiliary of the powerful Boston Female Antislavery Society. The four others listed were in Cornwall, Weybridge, Waitsfield, and the nonexistent town of Bellingham (see p. 184). Of these the Weybridge Female Antislavery Society is the only one known to have left any written record. Although Salerno does not mention it, the December 13, 1834, issue of the abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, included a brief notice from the Weybridge women in which they pledged themselves to “do all within our sphere of action to wipe out the ‘foul blot of slavery.’” The writers defended their unladylike efforts on behalf of a public cause by claiming that “historical records portray in lively colors the service of females for the good of the state.”

Why do we know of so few female antislavery societies in the Green Mountain State? Part of the answer may lie in the difficulty of finding information on the movement in Vermont. Abolitionists were never more than a tiny minority in any area, and in a largely rural state such societies, if they did exist, were likely to be small and very informal. Although Salerno does not mention it, the Vermont State Archives holds an antislavery petition from Starksboro signed in 1835 by 420 women. Who organized this petition drive? Did any of the women who signed the petition contribute in other ways to the abolitionist cause? Although

Salerno says little about Vermont, her book suggests that local research possibilities exist on this fascinating and important subject.

DEBORAH P. CLIFFORD

*Deborah P. Clifford is the author of several books on nineteenth-century American women, including a biography of the prominent abolitionist Lydia Maria Child, Crusader for Freedom: A Life of Lydia Maria Child (Beacon Press, 1992).*

---

*Manchester: Memories of a Mountain Valley.  
A Collection of Columns Previously Published  
in the Manchester Journal*

---

By Mary Hard Bort (Manchester: Manchester Historical Society and Tucson, Ariz., Marshall Jones Company, 2005, pp. 355, \$25; paper, \$20).

---

**I**t is not always smooth sailing, or reading, to assemble a coherent book from newspaper columns because continuity often suffers. Yet Mary H. Bort's *Manchester* has mined a town truly rich in historical ore and she has crafted a product that mostly overcomes these handicaps.

Occasionally, details could have been clarified. For example, is James L. Taylor, who in 1899 bought land that became the Ekwanok County Club (p. 319), the same James Taylor who, six pages later, as assistant headmaster of Vermont Academy, is credited with conceiving the Long Trail?

Nonetheless, Mary Bort's columns as selected for this book are sufficiently packed with fascinating details that the reader is likely to be riveted. This reviewer's eyes tend to glaze over when the subject of golf comes up, but chapter 60, "The Little White Ball," is so filled with relevant facts—names, locations, dates, events, dollar amounts, quotations, and other substance—that these eyes kept their focus with no problem, in fact with much reward.

*Manchester* is a book in which you are encouraged to skip around. Chapter 4, "Down on the Farm," concisely traces the early evolution of agriculture from potash to sheep to self-sufficient hill farming to abandonment after the Civil War. Mark Skinner, for whom Manchester's library is named, and the son of Vermont Governor Richard Skinner of Manchester (who served three one-year terms from 1820 to 1823), comes to life in chapter 20 as a distinguished nineteenth-century Chicago lawyer, legislator, and judge. The uses of the handsome Greek-revival gold-domed North Shire Bennington County Courthouse are related amusingly in

chapter 15 as a series of squabbles among town, village, and county. The author remembers that Robert Frost spoke at her commencement at Burr & Burton Seminary on June 6, 1944, but she confesses brightly that she didn't recall a word the poet said because that was also D-Day. In several chapters, much useful reportage is offered about individual houses and their various builders, summer residents, and owners.

Taking a few subjects at random, we learn that: the Manchester, Dorset, and Granville Railroad never laid tracks all the way to Granville, N.Y.; the Rich Lumber Company zigzagged its railroad tracks up the slopes of East Mountain in the early twentieth century to cut timber; the Barnumville section of town has a strong heritage of lumber, charcoal, iron, brick houses, milk, and marble; skiing really put Manchester on the map starting in the 1930s. We are also treated to some revelations about the quirky lifestyle of the late Peggy Beckwith, granddaughter of Robert Todd Lincoln and the inheritor of his mansion, Hildene.

One editorial quibble prompted wincing. Many are the *whiches*, which written without commas should have become *that's*. And this writer's own quirk holds that the proper term for the northern sector of Bennington County should be North Shire, not Northshire. The most serious flaw is that the book lacks an index, which minimizes its accessibility as a research source. Without an index, I labored at length to retrieve a classic description of crusty Cyrus Munson, father of one-time state Chief Justice Loveland Munson. Cyrus was such a rigid old Congregationalist that he forbade curtains on the windows or rugs on the floor in his home, and he so opposed icing on cakes that when he spotted such a frivolously laden confection at a wedding party he "threw it in the pig slops." The story emerged in chapter 26 titled "Way's Lane," which describes a neighborhood once known as Marbleville.

Publication of *Manchester* was a joint project of the town's historical society—which Mary Bort served as a central pillar ever since she retired to her hometown after thirty-one years "out of town"\*—and the Marshall Jones Company, whose principals are members of the local society.

In a warm foreword by Nancy H. Otis, coauthor of the bicentennial history *Manchester, Vermont, 1761–1961: A Pleasant Land Among the Mountains*, the author is described as "able to stand strong, thanks to her solid Vermont roots, despite physical problems, family deaths, and the certain aplomb of being close kin to poet Walter Hard." That is indeed true, and this new publication will be a welcome addition to anyone's collection of Vermontiana.

TYLER RESCH

*Tyler Resch is librarian of the Bennington Museum and author or editor of several books of historical interest in southwestern Vermont.*

\*ED. NOTE. *Mary Bort died February 28, 2006.*

---

*From Hitching Posts to Gas Pumps: A History of North Main Street, Barre, Vermont, 1875–1915*

---

By Russell J. Belding (Barre, Vt.: Potash Brook Publishing, 2003, pp. xi, 315, paper, \$24.95).

---

The first thing a reader notices in looking at *From Hitching Posts to Gas Pumps: A History of North Main Street, Barre, Vermont, 1875–1915* is the enormous amount of research undertaken by the author, Russell J. Belding. Mr. Belding appears to have read every newspaper and city directory published in Barre for the forty-year span of the book, meticulously noting references to the buildings and people inhabiting North Main Street during the period. It's the kind of methodological research that is very hard to pursue on an ad hoc basis for single buildings.

The second thing a reader notices is how difficult it is to find the information on any given single building in the 300-page body of the book. Even readers who know Barre well would have benefited from inclusion of a map to get their bearings. An easy-to-use index of street addresses would have been equally valuable. The Rosetta stone for understanding the book's organization is to know that the building entries begin half-way along the street, at Depot Square, and proceed clockwise, down the even-numbered west side of North Main Street, crossing to the odd-numbered east side at Willey Street, proceeding south to City Hall Park, and then crossing back to the even-numbered west side and back to Depot Square.

The book is a treasure trove of minutiae—the location and relocation of businesses, details of original construction and renovations, facts about family structure and changing occupations of building residents, police blotter events, and newsworthy anecdotes like the tale of the cat that jumped off the high back porch of one of the business blocks and landed in the river (and died). The story of each address along North Main Street is well told, but incomplete and therefore sometimes misleading or confusing. Street addresses for buildings that have long since disappeared get equal billing with those of extant structures. Since the stories stop at 1915, the reader may wrongly conclude that an existing building on the site is the same one described in the story.

Sixty-seven photos, mostly well-reproduced historic images from the O. J. Dodge Collection at the Aldrich Public Library in Barre, illustrate the book along with clipped fragments of an 1891 birds-eye map. It doesn't seem enough; more than half of the 138 building entries contain no images.

The book's meager fourteen footnotes can frustrate any user hoping to follow the trail of references about a building. While the author quotes some relevant news articles in their entirety, others are just obliquely referenced, without a specific source or date. A researcher wanting to retrace a fact back to its source is stymied. And there are many tantalizing revelations in Mr. Belding's stories that deserve further exploration and study.

*From Hitching Posts to Gas Pumps* portrays a vibrant community on and above the street. In the details he presents, Mr. Belding paints a rich portrait of downtown Barre and urban life in Vermont in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The effort begs a next step of analyzing and synthesizing the data, of distilling the patterns to be found in all the details.

NANCY E. BOONE

*Nancy E. Boone is the State Architectural Historian with the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation.*

---

## *A Capital Upbringing: Coming of Age in the 1930's in Montpelier, Vermont*

---

By Robert N. Webster (Lincoln, Ne.: iUniverse Inc., 2004, pp. ix, 164, paper, \$15.95).

---

Montpelier carries its mantle as state capital lightly. A stranger standing on the corner of State and Taylor Streets, with his back to the Capitol Complex, might hardly notice its proximity. Looking east from the intersection, toward Main Street, the city looks much like any small New England town. Indeed, Montpelierites take a certain pleasure in informing visitors that theirs is the smallest capital (8,000 residents) in the country; some boast it is the only one without a McDonald's restaurant.

Robert Webster's *A Capital Upbringing*, about growing up in Montpelier in the 1930s and early 1940s, conveys this small-town feeling. His is a keen memory that serves the reader well, transmitting the sights, smells, and sounds of the past. We see skaters on the Winooski River, near the Granite Street bridge, where a horse-drawn wooden plow keeps the rink open. We smell the granite dust paving the streets, and watch it settle on the clothes lines on a windy summer day. We are wakened at four in the morning by Clydesdale horse hooves and the clanking of glass bottles on front steps as the milk is delivered.

But Webster's memories are far from nostalgic. In his first years, "Bobie," as he was called, lived in Barre, close to his father's family who came from Aberdeen, worked in the granite sheds, and still spoke Gaelic. The Websters were hard-working and hard-drinking people. Webster's father had a problem with alcohol, and eventually left wife and children for Canada. After his parents' divorce, Webster, his mother, and brother moved to Montpelier to his maternal grandparents Ewen, also Scots, who lived in a duplex on Foster Street, in the Vermont College neighborhood. The large household also counted four aunts and two cousins.

Webster thus became dependent on adults who, although they were relatives, were not as indulgent or patient with him as a father might have been. Yet he had the security of belonging to an extended family with solid roots. Later, when Webster's mother remarried, he experienced another kind of familial tension, until a truce was reached between the new stepfather and the strapping stepson.

Like today's Montpelier teenagers, yesterday's complained that there was just nothing to do. They performed many chores—shoveled snow, split wood, ran errands, mowed grass—but still had energy to burn. Webster, a sprinter and football player, ran around town out of sheer enjoyment. When he had willing companions (and equipment that worked), he hiked, biked, skied, hunted, and fished: He knew every corner of Montpelier in a way that is unimaginable today.

Boys being boys, Webster played his share of pranks, including at one time lighting large firecrackers in cow plops in Sabin's Pasture, "the object being to sneak up behind someone otherwise occupied and explode one so as to cover said victim with fresh cow manure." Seasonal apple stealing had its own conventions: You did not take from your close neighbors, and pilfering fruit from the rich was a Robin Hood act.

Montpelier had its share of ethnic minorities. The Foster Street neighborhood counted Italian, Greek, Slavic, Swedish, and French families who had come to work in the stone sheds; their names are still around today. Many, including Webster's Grandfather Ewen, died from silicosis. While the author alludes to Montpelier's "provincial sophistication and social caste system," he does not elaborate and his perspective is that of the child and young teen, not the analytical adult. Nor do national and world events, such as the Depression and World War II, intrude much, beyond what he noticed from day to day, such as sugar rationing and young men going off to war.

As an adult, Robert Webster had a long career as a Montpelier pharmacist before he retired to Enosburg Falls.

Natives as well as newcomers will enjoy reading this personal and well-written account of coming-of-age in the capital in the 1930s. My

only quibble is that it will be difficult to find again a reference to an incident, a person, or a street in this self-published book. There are no summary chapter titles and no index; no assistance for the reader. If the book is reprinted, this flaw should be rectified

REIDUN D. NUQUIST

*A former librarian of the Vermont Historical Society, Reidun D. Nuquist retired from UVM's Bailey/Howe Library. She has resided in Montpelier for the last thirty-five years.*

---

### *The Long Light of Those Days: Recollections of a Vermont Village at Mid-Century*

---

By Bruce Coffin (Woodstock, Vt.: The Elm Tree Press, 2005, pp. 237, colophon, \$24.95).

---

**B**ruce Coffin's memoir about growing up in Woodstock in the 1940s and 1950s begins with an inquiry into memory, and describes how a lingering scent in a railway car triggers a cascade of vivid recollections of a long-gone livery stable, complete with its rows of buggies, the sound of muted hoofbeats on sawdust, and the delicate strings of cobwebs in the stalls. Coffin is struck by the fullness and detail of the scene: "Through the glass in the low door of the tack room, I even caught a forgotten but entirely familiar glimpse of Oliver Ferguson [and] Ruth Keck, Fergie's assistant, who was standing at a desk facing the door in her red and black wool logger shirt and dungarees, talking in a loud and assertive voice" (p. 9). The urgency of these memories is a source of wonder, and Coffin devotes the entire first chapter of *The Long Light of Those Days* to parsing the grammar of recollection. He probes its philosophical structure, its tendency to become more meaningful once we pass the fulcrum of middle age, and its possible relationship with displacement and a sense of exile. This is clearly a topic he has explored in some depth but is still a little mystified by. One thing he does seem sure of, though, is that memory "seeks us, and not we it. Such occurrences convince us that the past has some continuing existence somewhere" (p. 10).

This conviction of the continuing existence of the past is what shapes the balance of the book, and allows Coffin to redraw the outlines of a fading world. Oddly, this is not so much a book about Woodstock—although people interested in Woodstock will find it engaging—as it is about the largely unwritten history of unsupervised play. Childhood

is changing, and Coffin reminds us what childhood used to be: that endless round of bike riding, baseball, snowball fights, double-dares, and all those games in the woods that fell under the general rubric of “playing war.” He recaptures the joy of doing something mostly to see if it can be done, or done more stylishly; in a chapter simply called “Bikes,” we are reminded of the many ways to race, skid, stop, and decorate them, and the relative merits of Western Flyer versus J.C. Higgins. Even getting off a bike had multiple permutations, from the simple braking one-legged dismount to “letting it go”: “A boy would come steaming down onto Vail Field, pedaling like mad, and be greeted by a chorus of ‘let it go’ from the boys already assembled there. To comply, he would simply step off the bike as though he had forgotten all about it. . . . It would continue onward, as though with a will of its own and a destination in mind and then, depending on the unevenness of the terrain and the precarious balance produced by the decreasing speed, would go into a series of lunatic wobbles and spastic handlebar and front wheel lurches that brought it to an uproariously slapstick collapse on the grass” (pp. 106–107).

This is a world without play dates, lessons, tutors, au pairs, or any of the other modern impediments to getting scratched and dirty. In a chapter called “Upstreet,” Coffin admires jackknives, eavesdrops on adult conversation, and trades bottles for penny candy; “Pember Inn” is a lingering eulogy for George Pearsons, a close friend who lived in the Pember boardinghouse with his grandmother and died in 1962. Other chapters focus on playing basketball and exploring the slopes of Mount Tom. The result is a graceful argument for freedoms that have since been rescinded, chiefly the freedom to do as you like, provided you are home for supper.

*The Long Light of Those Days* is not without flaws. At times whole paragraphs disintegrate into long lists of names, and while these names clearly have resonance for the author, they are empty work for the reader. At other times, often at the ends of chapters, we are offered a ration of schmaltz—chewy meditations on “visions” of Woodstock, where “we never guessed that the brilliance of that moment would remain with us down through all the years that succeeded it” (p. 199). Since many memoirs fall through this big trap door of telling too much at one time and too little at another, it’s probably enough to say that there are portions of the text that can be legitimately skipped. But it’s also easy to see those parts coming, and they don’t detract much from a mostly pleasurable reading experience.

Driving the book, and acting as its overriding metaphor, is a sense of suspension, an assertion of childhood as a state operating outside the confines of ordinary time. This motif surfaces early on, in a chapter called

“Pleasant Street and Benson Place,” where Coffin describes the sequence of church bells that could be heard while lying in bed: First the bells from the Congregational Church would toll the hour, and then, after a pause, the bells from the Christian Church would offer a “sleepy and reluctant confirmation that, yes, it was ten o’clock. In the listening during the silent interval between those clocks sounding the same hour, there was *no* time. It has long seemed to me that our location there on Pleasant Street between those two churches somehow belonged to that interval, and that its timelessness was something like the true measure of our lives back in those days” (p. 24). This stillness, its duration and its sacred overtones, is a part of childhood that belongs to all of us, no matter where we were raised, and it gives the book its momentum.

HELEN HUSHER

*Helen Husher is author of three books about Vermont, most recently a 2005 memoir, Conversations with a Prince: A Year of Riding at East Hill Farm.*

---

*Messages from a Small Town: Photographs inside Pawlet, Vermont—Neil Rappaport with Nellie Bushee and Ella Clark*

---

By Susanne Rappaport (Middlebury: Vermont Folklife Center, 2005, pp. 135, paper \$30.00).

---

The quality of the image makes the *Messages from a Small Town* cover photograph of Edward Baker cradling great-grandson Christophoro LaBarbera in his arms on Thanksgiving Day, 1976, an inspired choice. But it is even more so because each detail recorded by the photographer rewards careful examination and reflection. So it is with each element in this book, which has been composed to provide rich content and stimulate deep thought.

This book is a tribute to photographer Neil Rappaport, whose work was cut tragically short by his sudden death in 1998. Assembled by his wife and partner, Susanne, now keeper of his collection and guardian of his legacy, the book followed but is more than a catalog of the exhibit that Susanne co-curated at the Vermont Folklife Center in the fall of 2005. It is a next step toward making Neil’s work available to a broader public.

One hundred of Neil Rappaport’s photographs, printed as superb duotones, would have made a splendid volume, but it is clear from the

author's title how much more than a collection of pictures she intends this to be: a representative small town sends messages; the photographs come from inside a specific town, Pawlet; Neil Rappaport and two other photographers have created them. Book format permits more extensive text than the exhibit, including an Afterword of interview excerpts keyed to relevant photographs, and two-page-spread mini-exhibits, an opportunity for the reader to sample and hop back and forth easily, and a permanent resource.

*Messages from a Small Town* tells multiple stories about specific individuals and their families: the work they do, the community they share, what they make of their lives, and how they wish to be remembered. It speaks also of universal issues: of circumstances beyond human control, change and permanence, aging, death, and new life.

Neil Rappaport developed his special approach to portraits as a shared experience with the subject while working at an anti-poverty agency in the late 1960s. For ten years, after he and Susanne moved to Pawlet in 1969, he concentrated on "photographing the work and social environment of his neighbors" (p. 14), especially quarrying and farming. In 1980 he and Susanne invited the citizens of Pawlet and West Pawlet to participate in a Visual Census and an accompanying oral history of the town. Over the next ten years Neil took 700 portraits of individuals, family groups, and community organizations with their guidance. These are displayed in homes, and are archived at the local historical society.

In Neil's portraits the subjects seem to say, "This is who we are; this is the work we do; this is our life." *Messages from a Small Town*, gives us such a picture of Neil and Susanne Rappaport and the rural town they chose to make their home.

Neil explained the importance of his work in 1975 when he said, "Photographs can provide the people involved with a reinforced sense of their own significance. People need to know that progress and obsolescence do not imply that their lives were unimportant or forgettable; photographs act as existential evidence and this has been true since the very beginning of the medium" (p. 60). Because it was clear to Neil that the Pawlet he was documenting was in transition and would soon be transformed in significant ways, he also wanted "to focus the eye of the future" for the community. The last major project Neil and Susanne worked on together was a CD database of the Visual Census and supporting materials.

Nellie Bushee's (1862–1947) and Ella Clark's (1893–1980) historic photographs contribute to the book in two distinct ways: Neil was conscious of continuing the tradition of the community photographer, following in their footsteps, so they provide context for his work in Pawlet.

In addition, the historic images show now-elderly residents as children; the Ice Pond, which is now used for hockey, during an ice harvest; and a slate quarry, which is part of the landscape today, as it was years ago. One chapter is dedicated to the terrain, the working landscape, and the townscape, which are the common stage on which life is lived in Pawlet.

*Messages from a Small Town* is a magnificent narrative tapestry, in which every element has been carefully chosen and purposefully assembled. It is both a thing of beauty that delights, and a documentary record that informs, intrigues, and reveals. Exquisite duotone photographs, poignant commentary on rural life and the human condition, a portrait of small-town life in the mid to late twentieth century, and a process worthy of emulation are in store for its readers.

TORDIS ILG ISSELHARDT

*Tordis Ilg Isselhardt is the Bennington-based publisher at Images from the Past, interpretive publishing consultant, and owner of a collection of historic negatives and prints.*