

VERMONT



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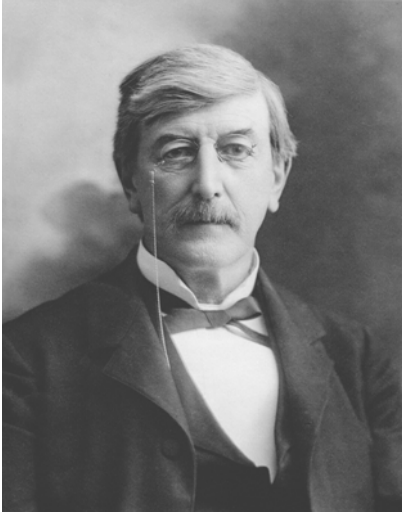
Clay model, bust of Hiram A. Huse, 1903

Hiram A. Huse (1843–1902) was an influential resident of Montpelier during the second half of the nineteenth century. He was state librarian for thirty years, from 1873 until his death in 1902. Simultaneously he was an editorial writer for the *Green Mountain Freeman*, practiced law with prominent partners, represented Montpelier in the legislature for one term, and served as the Vermont Historical Society’s librarian for two periods totaling ten years (1873–74 and 1881–90).

Such prominence in state government and Capital City affairs warranted a substantial memorial. Soon after his death, Huse’s law partners Fred A. Howland and U.S. Senator William P. Dillingham, along with his friend Vermont Governor John G. McCullough, discussed how best to honor the prodigious Mr. Huse. They rejected an oil portrait in favor of a bronze bust and considered William Frederick Pope of Boston, J. Massey Rhind of New York, and others for the commission. By November 1903 the committee had settled on Charles Albert Lopez, a young sculptor born in Mexico and living in New York City, who had just won the commission to create a sculpture of William McKinley for the City of Philadelphia.

Family and friends of Mr. Huse endorsed the selection of Lopez after seeing the clay model. Howland wrote to Lopez in 1904, “The bust is so satisfactory in every way that it would be a dangerous thing to attempt any modification of it.” In a separate letter to Gov. McCullough, Howland confided that “As a whole I think the work is admirable. Much more satisfactory than I had expected it could be.” Howland was so pleased with the model that he asked Lopez to provide six more photographs of the bust from the side view, presumably similar to the one that appears on the cover of this issue of *Vermont History*.

The completed bronze bust was installed in Montpelier on September 16, 1904. The next day Governor McCullough wrote to Howland saying, “I am pleased to learn that the Huse bust is suitably placed in the library, and that the same is eminently satisfactory to all who have seen it.” The larger-than-life-size bust was placed on a pedestal in the State Library with a plaque honoring Huse as “A profound lawyer and an ideal citizen.”



*Studio photograph,
Hiram A. Huse, state librarian
and attorney. No date.*

The volunteers and staff of the Vermont Historical Society library recently finished processing an extensive collection of papers of four generations of the Huse family of Montpelier and families related by marriage, of which Hiram A. Huse is the most prominent member. The collection, which has been given the collection number Doc 556, is housed in thirteen archival boxes and seven oversized folders in the Vermont History Center in Barre, making it one of the library's largest.

Although there are a few documents in the collection from the early 1800s, the bulk of the collection is the letters that Hiram A. Huse wrote to his family from 1854 until his death in 1902. As Priscilla Page writes in her finding aid to the collection, "H. A. Huse began the habit of penning careful, literate letters to his family at an early age." These early letters began when Huse was apart from one or the other of his parents as a child. Later he wrote letters to his own children when they attended camp, private school, or college. Page writes, "Although he often used black ink on his law firm's letterhead stationery, the formal appearance of these letters belied his affectionate tone and their informal content."

There are only brief glimpses of Huse's professional activities in the collection, but those can be significant. The 1885 proposed addition to the State House for the State Library and Supreme Court, for example, generated both the architect's specifications and correspondence about the project that are now part of the family papers.

The Huse family collection casts a wide swath of family history. The collection contains records of four generations of the direct Huse line. In addition, Mr. Huse and his daughter-in-law, Ruth Brooks Huse,

collected papers of families related to the Huses by marriage. These include the Blodgett, Smith, and Woodbury families of Randolph; the Vail, Brooks, and Bancroft families of Montpelier; and the Angier and Swasey families of North Haverhill, New Hampshire.

The collection also sheds light on individuals who wrote to Mr. Huse. For example, Huse saved a series of witty, light-hearted letters from Hugh Henry McIntyre (b. 1844), a distant cousin from Randolph. These letters span the period when both young men were finishing their education and embarking on their careers.

For less obvious reasons, the collection includes the “Daniel Baldwin Railroad Papers,” concerning an 1840s controversy over the location of the Central Vermont Railway’s tracks between Burlington and White River Junction. In spite of the opposition of Baldwin and others, ex-Governor Charles Paine’s plan to route the railroad through his hometown of Northfield prevailed. Huse had no direct role in this controversy because he was a youth living in Wisconsin at the time. He may have collected these from one of the participants in his role as a lawyer and as a librarian with a strong interest in history, business, and government.

The collection contains five separate groupings of Civil War letters. Hiram himself served in the 12th Vermont for a nine-month enlistment. He spent the winter of 1862 doing guard duty and fighting boredom, but got so ill that his father was compelled to come visit him in the spring of 1863. Other Civil War letters include letters to Melzar Woodbury of Randolph from Lyman Woodbury and Elliston Waterman; a letter to Clara E. Smith of Bethel about the death of her brother, Private Lucius B. Smith; letters to Nathaniel Swasey of Haverhill, New Hampshire, from members of the 11th and 12th New Hampshire Volunteers; and the correspondence of Thomas Rea of Malone, New York, a volunteer in the 98th New York Regiment.

Unexpectedly, the collection also documents the California Gold Rush. In 1849 and 1850, Joel M. Angier, who married into the Swasey family, which was Ruth Brooks Huse’s mother’s family, wrote a series of letters to the Swaseys describing his journey to the California gold fields via the Isthmus of Panama and his success on arrival. According to Page, “His letters are long, detailed and literate.”

The Huse Family Papers, though focused on one family, are expansive in scope, documenting many people and activities that touched on individuals and historical events outside the immediate family. As such, the collection contains much fodder for historical exploration.

PAUL CARNAHAN, *Librarian*

Editor’s Note: The bronze bust of Hiram Huse may be found at the Vermont Department of Libraries in the Pavilion Building behind the VHS museum at 109 State Street, Montpelier. The complete finding aid to Huse Family Papers may be found online at www.vermonthistory.org/documents/findaid/huse.doc.