

## Book Reviews

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### More About Vermont History

Compiled by PAUL A. CARNAHAN

# BOOK REVIEWS

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## *We Go As Captives: The Royalton Raid and the Shadow War on the Revolutionary Frontier*

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By Neil Goodwin (Barre: Vermont Historical Society, 2010, pp. xxii, 294, paper, \$24.95).

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Neil Goodwin's full and detailed study of the Royalton Raid has been published by the Vermont Historical Society in a professional yet accessible edition that will inform all future work on this formative event from the fourth year of the Vermont Republic. The author's original research in primary sources adds nuance to the story told by the raid's most famous captive, Zadock Steele, whose first-person "captivity" narrative was published in 1818, thirty-eight years after the raid (the 1815 publication date on p. 243 is clearly a typo).

Many will recognize the not-so-noble savage as a hoary myth, a stock figure typical of this "captivity" narrative, that uniquely American genre of morality play popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This was the final raid on the New England frontier by the dreaded Indians (Steele's other word for "savages"). Goodwin happily avoids "Native Americans" here, as political correctness would be anachronistic. When a Cornell University dean asked my friend Ron Lafrance, the Mohawk director of the American Indian Program, to rename it, replacing the taboo I-word with "Native," Ron simply refused, saying that it was common usage and not felt to be racist (I would add, how would Columbus's supposed navigation error derogate Indians? And he did find them in the Indies, after all).

Another stock character is Zadock Steele himself; but Goodwin shows him to be a forerunner of the free-thinking Vermonter, quoting

his less-than-racist assessment of blame for the raid: “the destruction of Roylton . . . may with less propriety be attributed to . . . the savage tribe than to . . . certain individuals of our own nation” (p. 205).

Goodwin notes that Steele goes further, like many other captives, in his admiration of the unexpected humanity of his captors: “Scarce can that man be found in this enlightened country who would treat his enemy with as much tenderness and compassion as i was treated by the savage tribe” (p. 204).

We are introduced too briefly (pp. 54–55) to one man who could well be crucially responsible for this humane vision of his Kahnawake captors, namely the warrior, Thomas Orakwenton, who took charge of Steele as his personal captive. Goodwin (inexplicably) omits him from his extensive *Cast of Characters* (pp. 235–241), and (more understandably) repeats earlier misreadings of his name, as Thomo (for Thoma) and Orakrenton (for Orak8enton, with the standard digraph 8 [=ou] for modern w). He is presumably named in Steele’s pension application, which Goodwin references but does not quote, alas; but he does quote the terse anonymity of Steele’s introducing him in *The Indian Captive*: “The chief who came up to me could talk English very well—he became my master” (p. 54).

Where Goodwin’s narrative excels is in his account of the signature drama of the raid, the plea of Hannah Handy to spare nine vulnerable boys, and British commander Lt. Richard Houghton’s acquiescence to it, referencing both Steele and the oral tradition of Handy descendants (p. 41).

Witnessing this dramatic scene was Houghton’s friend, Thomas Tehoragwanegen Williams, grandson of Eunice Williams. Her story is more fully told in two of Goodwin’s secondary sources, fully cited on pp. 232–233 of his valuable fourteen-page bibliography (pp. 221–34): John Demos, *The Redeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America* (1994), and Evan Haefeli and Kevin Sweeney, *Captors and Captives: The 1704 French and Indian Raid on Deerfield* (2003). TTW’s presence is poignantly telling, as Goodwin does not fail to point out: “When Eunice had been carried to Canada 76 years earlier, her captors had brought her up the White River past the very spot where Hannah and Lt. Houghton were now facing off while Eunice’s own grandson looked on. Quite possibly, he was aware of the irony in witnessing a situation so like the one that had brought his own grandmother to Canada” (p. 41).

Incidentally, a missing index reference to TTW (not on p. 243, but p. 241) led me to an inconspicuous errata slip which corrects a whole series of typos in the index: all index references to pages 237–282 should

deduct 2, giving correct pages 235–280. [*Editor’s note:* This is true only for the first printing; the index was corrected for all subsequent printings.]

An appealing feature of Goodwin’s narrative is the number of unanswered (or unanswerable) questions he poses, giving the reader both food for thought and a better sense of what a professional historian really does. Goodwin lets his guests into the kitchen, and the feast is all the tastier for it.

ROY A. WRIGHT

*Roy A. Wright, ethnohistorian and etymologist, has been translating Jesuit mission records from Latin, French, and Mohawk for the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake. Trained in astronomy and linguistics at Harvard University, he has taught at McGill University, University of Toronto, Trent University, University of New Brunswick, Cornell University, Université Laval, Marlboro College, &c.*

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*Frontier Feminist: Clarina Howard Nichols  
and the Politics of Motherhood*

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By Marilyn Blackwell and Kristen T. Oertel (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010, pp. 344, \$39.95).

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Clarina Howard Nichols was a surprisingly modern woman, born to the generation of families living just after the period of migration from coastal and eastern New England into the New Hampshire Grants and the American Revolution. Perhaps it was the revolutionary experiences of her grandparents’ generation that influenced Nichols’s interests, although Nichols wrote that she was drawn to political activism because she felt a strong desire “to cheer the despairing, to warn the headlong and speed the errand of mercy” (p. 55). Her nearly lifelong pursuit of women’s rights and social justice is certain proof of this commitment, but, as co-authors Blackwell and Oertel have clearly demonstrated, her life was not without its ironies.

Aiming at a respectable, if prosaic, middle-class marriage, Nichols initially embarked on her adult life with a man whose errant sensibilities caused her anguish, embarrassment, and ended in a painful divorce. Her influential family facilitated her eventual return to respectability by legal machinations in the Vermont legislature, public rhetoric, and solid financial support. The life lessons garnered in her first disastrous marriage seem to have put Nichols on the path toward feminist activism based on her own harrowing experiences of spousal mistreatment and the fear she would lose her children to her negligent husband.

While her first marriage taught her the vulnerability of women, even of the middle class, in American society, her second marriage to a respected newspaper editor, George Nichols, opened the door to a new world filled with activist possibilities. Nichols never looked back. With her new husband, Nichols began to connect through her writing and travels with like-minded people, especially other women whose ideas and activities inspired her to ever greater involvement in political and public activism. Although reluctant at first to engage in public lectures on her developing repertoire of political motherhood, eventually Nichols overcame her reluctance to do public speaking and developed both skill and stage presence. Her newfound skills became an asset to the constituent advocates of women's rights, abolitionism, and temperance. These were heady associations for Nichols (Stanton, Anthony, Stone), who tried to temper her public association with the most radical impulses surrounding her by not committing to costume changes (bloomers) or radical legal proposals (easy divorce laws).

In fact, it was her congenial, somewhat reticent, and feminine demeanor that made Nichols attractive to men like Sherman Booth of Wisconsin, who invited her to lecture on a paid tour intended to promote the prohibitionist Maine Law in his state. She accepted with the zeal and energy of a missionary and later recalled the experience as one of her highest achievements. The trip also whetted her appetite for adventure and for western migration.

Nichols's western adventure began inauspiciously with the death of her father. His loss and the demise of the family newspaper set the stage for Nichols, her husband, and her children to remove to the Kansas territory in the midst of the Kansas-Nebraska debate. The process of transplanting her family and her politics to Kansas cemented her women's rights activism to the Free Soil agenda. From this, Nichols expanded her political influence in local, state, and national stages, although never straying from the pragmatic approach to "natural [civil] rights grounded in women's reproductive role" (p. 269).

The irony of Nichols's success as an activist was that it seems to have come at the expense of the very values she expressed in her lectures. Once launched in her professional career as a suffrage/temperance lecturer, her children lived at home with her family in Townsend or were in boarding school. Her daughter, Birsha Carpenter, acted as the surrogate to her younger half-brother George, while Birsha's brothers lived for extended periods with Nichols's parents. When the rest of the family made the move out to Kansas, it is not clear why Birsha remained behind in New Jersey, but perhaps she meant to avoid being drawn into her mother's household as an unpaid laborer again. So, while mothering

was the work of women like Nichols and that work was the rationale for having equal citizenship, Nichols did not always walk in the path she prescribed.

Over all, Blackwell and Oertel have created a solidly grounded, careful, and useful biography of a fascinating and genuine member of the Stanton and Anthony “noble band of women.” Wherever possible, they have used her very words. At other places they have skillfully placed Nichols into a larger background of major historical events in a truly tumultuous time in American history. Readers may find that Nichols is not always drawn as finely as they might have wished, but the paucity of material for certain times of her life made a more nuanced rendering difficult. Finally, this study of Nichols is a solid contribution to the growing body of scholarship on feminism, suffrage, and nineteenth-century activism; at the same time this work also exposes some of the contradictions that are often rife in individual people’s experiences.

SUSAN M. OUELLETTE

*Susan Ouellette is professor of history and American studies at Saint Michael's College in Colchester, Vt.*

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*New England to Gold Rush California:  
The Journal of Alfred and Chastina W. Rix,  
1849–1854*

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*Edited with commentary by Lynn A. Bonfield (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011, pp. 400, \$45.00).*

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**H**istorians are eager to access private journals from the past, for these sources provide a good sense of the pulse of everyday life in a particular time and place and often serve as a window into the emotional world of the author. Given the private nature of diaries, it is unusual to find one that includes the perspectives of more than one person, but that is just what Lynn Bonfield has found and carefully prepared for readers’ consumption. In 1972, as curator of manuscripts at the California Historical Society, Bonfield began exploring a journal housed at that archive that chronicled the five-year odyssey of a young married couple from rural, northeastern Vermont who moved to a bustling California city during the gold rush. Alfred and Chastina Rix began their joint diary on their wedding day, July 29, 1849, in Peacham, Vermont, and penned their last entries as a married couple in the spring of 1854. Their

journal captures their work as teachers in small-town Vermont, their perspective as educated professionals on both local and national issues, and their evolving understanding of marriage and family relations. It also relays how their lives changed when first Alfred and then Chastina and their young son Julian moved west in the early 1850s.

Bonfield's attraction to this family journal may have stemmed from the fact that the gold rush forms its narrative center. While Alfred Rix was running the Peacham Academy, dabbling in the law and local commercial endeavors, and adjusting to life with his bride, other young men from the area were heading west in search of gold. In fact, Chastina's brother-in-law was one of the first local men to reach the goldfields of California and return home safely with his own little fortune. After hearing tales of adventure and success from others who had ventured to the far west, it became difficult for Alfred to resist the temptation to go. Tiring of the political scene in Peacham, he decided in September 1851 to leave his wife and infant son to travel to California. By October, he had organized a band of twenty-four other men from northeastern Vermont to join him in the journey. For the next sixteen months, the family journal was Chastina's alone to fill, while Alfred was away. The couple was reunited in February 1853, but not upon Alfred's return to Vermont, as both had expected. Instead, Alfred settled in San Francisco after an unsuccessful search for gold. He found work quickly as a teacher in the bustling city and, over the course of several months, persuaded his wife to say goodbye to her kin and make the difficult trip to the West Coast with their little boy. When Chastina prepared to travel to California, she packed up the couple's journal and their other valuable possessions in a box and sent them on a steamer around Cape Horn. When the journal reached San Francisco a few months later, the happy couple resumed their daily practice of writing in it.

At the heart of this tale is the drama of family separation and migration. The commitment of this nineteenth-century couple to keeping their journal makes it possible for readers to understand the whole bitter-sweet process of charting new courses and saying goodbyes. It provides a clear picture of the before, during, and after—of their experiences together in Vermont, Chastina's struggles as a lonely wife and mother both at home and abroad, the new opportunities they encountered as city dwellers in San Francisco, and the marriage's tragic end.

Bonfield has made it easier for readers to digest this long, detailed journal. She has divided it logically into twelve chapters, and the background information she provides in the general introduction to the journal as well as at the start of every chapter is valuable for understanding the issues that concerned this couple (education, temperance, antislavery),

the turning points in their story, and the numerous people who came in and out of their daily lives. She deepens our knowledge of the Rix family by incorporating useful information from family correspondence and other relevant materials from both California and Vermont. Bonfield's work also adds a new dimension to Vermont's local history, giving due attention to the interest that Vermonters had in the gold rush and the impact that this distant phenomenon had on families here in the East. Finally, while Alfred Rix may have charted the course for this particular family history, Chastina has as much if not more of a presence in this journal as her ambitious husband. Students of nineteenth-century social history will appreciate reading the perspective of this educated, professional woman who also took on (single) motherhood, a daring journey, and new work in a faraway place.

AMY F. MORSMAN

*Amy Morsman is associate professor of history at Middlebury College. She is the author of The Big House after Slavery: Virginia Plantation Families and Their Postbellum Domestic Experiment (2010).*

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### *Williamstown, Vermont, in the Civil War*

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By Paul G. Zeller (Charlestown, S.C.: The History Press, 2010, pp. 191, paper, \$19.99).

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Those interested in the sesquicentennial of the War Between the States and those who would create a written record of their town's involvement in the Civil War should carefully examine Paul G. Zeller's effort to do that for Williamstown, Vermont. Combining detailed biographical data from primary and secondary sources with anecdotes, letters, and pictures, Zeller has produced a treasure trove for both Civil War buffs and genealogists. Included are soldiers who enlisted at Williamstown, natives who served in the units of other states or the regular army, and even veterans from other places who settled in Williamstown after the war, 173 individuals total. The index of family names is comprehensive.

The material is well organized, following Vermont's brigade and regiment divisions. A brief history of each unit, condensed from George Benedict's *Vermont in the Civil War*, precedes each section. Sources utilized for each individual are cited by chapter at the end of the work. Zeller has consulted military service and pension records from the National Archives, town records, newspapers from the era, the *Revised*

*Roster of Vermont Volunteers and Lists of Vermonters Who Served in the Army and Navy of the United States during The War of The Rebellion, 1861–66* (1892), pertinent websites, and many additional sources to portray each soldier. A brief history of the construction of the local soldiers' monument and a poignant story recalling the last two Civil War veterans in Williamstown are included.

Those who desire an understanding of the Williamstown home front will be disappointed. In that sense, the title is misleading. Zeller's work is about the soldiers, most of whom performed ordinary service. He makes that reality very clear in the introduction. "These were common, ordinary men. Some were heroes and some were not, and most were somewhere in the middle" (p. 9). The heroic deeds of a few, such as Henry H. Rector and Francis H. Staples, are the exception. Zeller ponders if one veteran, John E. Clough, may have been suffering from what is commonly known today as post-traumatic stress disorder when he committed suicide by slashing his throat with a large jackknife. He relates at length the interesting saga of Major Isaac Lynde, who was dismissed from military service in 1861 following the surrendering of his post at Fort Fillmore, New Mexico, his one-day reinstatement in 1866 prior to retirement and, finally, a correction to West Point's *Register of Graduates* in 2010 regarding the nature of his surrender.

Zeller makes no effort to analyze or summarize the material, which he presents in a detailed and complete manner. Aside from pointing out that seventeen men who gave their lives for the Union cause have their names engraved on the Williamstown soldiers' monument, he does not attempt a broader picture of the cost of the war to the citizens of this Orange County community. Of the 173 men described by Zeller, seven were killed in action, ten died from wounds, and fourteen died from disease. It is unusual that more died from battles than died from diseases. Among those who survived, forty-two suffered wounds, several more than once. Twelve soldiers were discharged because of those wounds. Twenty-seven men were hospitalized from disease, and eighteen were discharged due to their illness. It is significant that nearly half of all the men suffered substantial harm as a result of their service. Six men deserted their duty, eight were captured by Rebels, and at least thirty-three veterans drew pensions for disabilities originating from their military service. Williamstown had a population of 1,377 in 1860. The fact that more than 10 percent of the population of the town performed military service is significant. Information regarding the bounties paid by Williamstown and the number of men who paid commutation are readily available and could have given the reader a broader understanding of Williamstown's role in the Civil War.

Although there is a plethora of data in the book, there are a few questionable facts. Was Martin Burnham really fourteen when he married Martha Martin in Williamstown in 1853 (p. 53)? And George Edgar Bruce's first wife, Sarah Seaver, died in 1870; however, it was his second wife, Malona R. Hanks, who died on January 29, 1904 (pp. 67–68). These are minor corrections when one considers the vast amount of information presented.

Williamstown is the fourth community in the last five years that has been the subject of a treatment of its Civil War soldiers (the others are Cabot, Waterbury, and Worcester). Each represents a different approach and all merit examination by other communities considering a similar project. Paul Zeller's work benefits the Williamstown Historical Society, as well as all Vermonters who wish to remember and honor those who served in America's most costly conflict.

J. DAVID BOOK

*J. David Book, a retired educator, is an author of books about Civil War soldiers in Cabot and Worcester, Vermont.*

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## *The History of Brookfield: 2010 edition*

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By Brookfield Historical Society (Brookfield, Vt.: Brookfield Historical Society, 2010, pp. 272, paper, \$40).

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First printed in 1987, this updated history of Brookfield opens with a condensed version of E. P. Wild's *History of Brookfield, 1779–1862*. It's a surprisingly thrilling start: The first section, "Geology," begins with a hanging and ends with an earthquake.

Wild was a native of Brookfield, a graduate of Middlebury College, a preacher, schoolteacher, and the legislative representative from Craftsbury in 1872, but this history was written in his early twenties, while recovering at home from an illness. This youthfulness may explain the sporadic mischievousness and choice of detail: People in Brookfield collide with bears, natives, and each other; they sometimes drink too much and earn a comeuppance on their vanity. We even learn a lesson in land values: "Amasa Hyde," Wild reports, "bought a farm of fifty acres . . . at the novel price of a single gun" (p. 29). Sometimes sober and sometimes sly, Wild recounts the town's general history, religious history, and the founding of public assets like the library and the schools, and closes with brief biographies of the town's early settlers.

Part two, "More Brookfield History," has been revised and updated

by a stable of local authors who bring both knowledge and affection to their work, so that, for example, a detailed history of the town's roads includes the pranks the crew members played—these invariably seem to involve lunch boxes—and even a first-person assessment of road quality in the 1920s: “[S]pongy and pleasant to walk on in bare feet, except for an occasional stone. We would mark out a hopscotch diagram and play, usually without any traffic bothering us” (p. 47).

Other offerings include a survey of building styles, individual houses, and the stories behind the evolution of Brookfield's schools, post offices, churches, farms, cemeteries, organizations, industries, businesses, entertainment, state park, and (of course) the town's unusual Floating Bridge. Kit Gage—a past principal at the Brookfield Elementary School—opens this part of the book with an account of a heavy truck forcing the bridge down into the water of Colt's Pond: “Whereas most of us remember getting our tires wet, not many of us ever saw water five feet deep on the bridge” (p. 82). Apparently the truck made it most of the way across before the bridge turned over and deposited its unwelcome load into the water. “Even though the bridge was submerged and then rotated sideways until nearly perpendicular,” Gage says, “the state highway engineers could find no serious damage . . . It proved to be as tough and sinewy as the people who conceived of a floating bridge” (p. 83).

The final part of the book follows Wild's example and focuses on specific family histories, some of them extensive and richly detailed, others tending more toward a recitation of begats. Collectively, though, these family narratives give access to a sturdy rural culture, one that has maintained an oral history of community singing, swimming, store and inn keeping, farming, and marching off to war—the state and the country's history woven into the background tapestry of a single place.

*The History of Brookfield* is also full of historic and contemporary photographs—it's rare that a page doesn't have at least one, and often three or more, that link directly to the text. This makes the book more valuable and certainly a lot more fun, and has the curious effect of reminding the reader that, someday in the distant future, a digital picture taken in 2010 will be as resonant as the Civil War-era prints from glass negatives are today. And, with luck, there will also be an updated version of this engaging book, assembled by a new generation of inhabitants of Brookfield.

HELEN HUSHER

*Helen Husher is the author of three books. She lives in Montpelier.*

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## *Castleton Vermont: Its Industries, Enterprises & Eateries*

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By Donald H. Thompson (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2010, pp. 160, paper, \$19.99).

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Donald Thompson tells a very interesting story about Castleton, Vermont. It's like taking a walk through the town and meeting the people who were responsible for its existence. Thompson interviewed an impressive number of people in his quest for information. He states in his introduction that the more he learned about Castleton, the more he wanted to know.

Thompson informs the reader of the grant of a thirty-six-square-mile tract of land in 1761 by Benning Wentworth, governor of New Hampshire. The journey of Colonel Amos Bird, Noah Lee, and a "colored servant" from Connecticut, who set out to survey the land in the spring of 1767, is quite an interesting story. After finally arriving in Castleton in June 1767 they built a log cabin.

On page 12 in the last paragraph, Thompson notes that before Bird and Lee came, the only humans in the area were the Abenaki Indians. This is unlikely. In their *History of Rutland County, Vermont, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (1886, reprinted 1993), editors H. P. Smith and W. S. Rann include the following account of the native people inhabiting the area:

Commencing on the east side of the outlet of the lake, following the shore around, the various points of interest are as follows: The "Indian Fields" is a plateau of over twenty acres of sandy land, about ten feet above the level of the lake, on which many Indian relics have been found. This was the site of an Indian village, of which tribe we have no authentic record, yet some of the older settlers remember seeing Indian families return in the summer season to visit the homes of their childhood. The specimens were all upon the surface. (p. 40)

They noted that "the Mohegans possessed the territory in the Champlain and Otter Creek valleys" and "the territory also has been claimed by the Caughnawagas, a branch of the Mohawks" (Smith and Rand, pp. 46–47).

By 1770 other families began to arrive and in 1771, Amos Bird and nine men erected a sawmill at the outlet of Lake Bomoseen. As more settlers came, more businesses and shops were established to accommodate the growing community.

In the 1790s, two dams were constructed at the outlet from Lake Bomoseen to provide waterpower to run a forge and ironworks. In 1803, mills for various industries were built on the Castleton River. Sheep production, ironworks, and plow manufacturing were among the many industries in Castleton's past.

Amos Bird had died at an early age in 1772. Noah Lee became an outstanding community leader. He had fought in the French and Indian War, then joined the Continental Army and achieved the rank of captain. Returning to Vermont, he was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1791. He died at the age of 94, having witnessed the growth of Castleton from a few settlers to 2,000 by 1840.

The building of the railroad encouraged the growth of the marble and slate industries as well as bringing visitors to area resorts. Apple production became an important venture for Castleton, and the author presents some interesting views of the businesses.

Thompson tells us that as early as 1786, a schoolhouse was erected for teaching and instructing, but it burned down in 1805. Other schools followed and the present Village School was built in 1952. In 1818 the Castleton Medical Academy opened, later called the Medical College. It closed in 1862. The Castleton Seminary opened in the 1830s, evolved to a normal school and finally to the present day Castleton State College.

Continuing the walk through Castleton, Thompson introduces the reader to the tragedy of many fires that consumed a great number of businesses. The pictures that accompany the text give the reader a view of businesses that once existed and the author describes which businesses survived or what replaced them.

The chapters on country stores and eateries really catch the reader's interest, as they bring the various owners to life through tidbits of various occurrences. Again the pictures are well selected. The treatment of the eateries along routes 4A and 30, however, was a bit tedious to read. The descriptions of the interiors and their entrees seemed repetitive, although the stories of the people involved kept the reader's interest.

Thompson nicely covers the recreational activities surrounding Lake Bomoseen throughout the years. He takes the reader from fishing to regattas and boating to the businesses that helped make everything happen.

In the final chapter, the author points out the difficulties of keeping Lake Bomoseen safe from pollution. Residents and officials alike are working to keep invasive plant life and development from overtaking their beautiful lake.

The acknowledgements and bibliography in this book are extensive and well organized. Thompson has succeeded in bringing the town of Castleton to life. Readers will find they will want to know more about Castleton.

HELEN K. DAVIDSON

*Helen K. Davidson is the author of a weekly column, "Tidbits from Then and Now," in Sam's Good News. She is secretary and research chair of the Rutland Historical Society.*

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## *A Brief History of St. Johnsbury*

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By Peggy Pearl (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2009, pp. 158, paper, \$19.99).

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The author's goal in *A Brief History of St. Johnsbury* is to celebrate the town's past rather than examine it. An enthusiastic air of boosterism runs through the book. It is organized into a mixture of chronological and topical chapters, beginning with an account of the settlement of St. Johnsbury. Ethan Allen named the town after French diplomat Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, adding "bury" to distinguish it from the numerous other towns named St. John. The town's founder, Rhode Island native Jonathan Arnold, arrived in 1787. Arnold settled on the St. Johnsbury Plain, a flat expanse elevated above the town's rivers that is now the site of Main Street and the St. Johnsbury Academy. The author's immense interest in where prominent townfolk are buried is established in this first chapter; she notes that next to the Arnold family plot in Mount Pleasant cemetery is the grave of a slave who had stayed with the family after Rhode Island abolished the institution.

The 1790 census showed that St. Johnsbury was considerably smaller than such nearby towns as Danville and Peacham. But the town sits at the conjunction of three rivers: the Sleeper, Moose, and Passumpsic. With plenty of waterpower, it was well situated to become a manufacturing hub, and there were a number of Early Republic manufacturing ventures. The history of St. Johnsbury only truly begins, however, with the arrival of the Fairbanks family in 1815. Pearl devotes the book's third chapter to the ancestry, immigration, successes, and philanthropy of the Fairbanks family, while detailing the rise of their company into one of the world's leading scale works. Readers looking for a critical examination of the Fairbanks family's century-long domination of St. Johnsbury will not find it here. The author wants the memory of the family to be

glorified. She describes each of the three Fairbanks brothers who founded the company—Thaddeus, Erastus, and Joseph—as possessing “sound values, good work ethics and compassion for those who worked for them” (p. 39). The family’s legacy, she writes, has “beneficial roots for all to enjoy now and into the foreseeable future” (p. 43).

As ensuing chapters make clear, St. Johnsbury was only a bit removed from being a classic nineteenth-century company town. The remaining chapters are organized topically, on such subjects as “Houses of Worship” and “Fires and Floods.” The wealth and power of the Fairbanks family is the common thread that runs through each of them. Other factories thrived in town, but a remarkable number of them were dependent on the E. & T. Fairbanks Company for survival. In many ways the town remains a material tribute to the Fairbankses, which is clear no less in the chapter on education than in the one on “Crown Jewels of St. Johnsbury.” Many of the photographs scattered throughout these chapters will be a delight to those who already know St. Johnsbury, more for how little has changed from a century ago than for how much.

The author’s account of some topics can be disappointing. The only material specifically on the town’s Catholic population is confined to the section on churches. In other places the book is usefully informative; St. Johnsbury residents would be well served to read the chapter on schools, and thereby better understand the roots of today’s educational issues. The book lacks a town map, which would have been a nice addition: Even those who are familiar with St. Johnsbury may not know where, for instance, the falls of the Moose River are.

There is a different book about St. Johnsbury waiting to be written, perhaps. The back cover of this book describes the town as “truly one of a kind.” In fact, in many ways the story of St. Johnsbury is similar to that of the many other de-industrialized mill and factory villages that dot the landscape of New England and upstate New York. Largely on the basis of a single corporation, St. Johnsbury once prospered on a moderate scale. The main corporation declined, however, and the town’s economy has come to depend largely on service industries and medicine, its ornate Victorian houses and proud public institutions attesting to that more prosperous past. In that way, St. Johnsbury’s story is an instructive example of the evolution of its region. But that kind of appraisal was not Pearl’s goal. Those seeking basic historical information on the geography, prominent buildings, important institutions, and significant citizens of St. Johnsbury will find this volume perfectly satisfying.

PAUL SEARLS

*Paul Searls is an assistant professor of history at Lyndon State College.*

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*North Williston: Down Depot Hill*

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By Richard H. Allen (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2011, pp. 157, paper \$19.99).

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North Williston, as author Richard H. Allen points out, is a community of a few dozen residents living in a handful of houses clustered near the Winooski River in the northeast corner of Williston town. In some ways it is a place that time forgot, for as other areas of Williston town have rapidly morphed into Burlington suburbs and a “big box” retail center, the handful of old houses that constitute North Williston remain a place apart, somewhat insulated from the forces of change by its riverside boundary on the north, its potential for flooding, and its distance from the interstate.

Thus in some ways a book on a hamlet that probably never had as many as seventy-five inhabitants may seem a curious subject for investigation, but Richard Allen, a retired teacher, shows us that from the 1860s to the 1930s North Williston was economically the most important section of town, its fortunes inextricably tied to the railroad. When the Vermont Central Railroad passed through North Williston in 1849, it made the little riverside community a freighting center, connecting markets in southern New England with industrial and agricultural interests in the Winooski River valley. Freight that once traveled by horse-drawn wagons through Williston village along the Winooski Turnpike (present-day Route 2) now moved by rail; and a number of industries found it convenient to locate their operations not in the village, but closer to the railroad line. North Williston was never populous enough to have its own cemetery or church, but as long as railroading remained important in Vermont it was a center of commercial activity.

Through extensive research in land records, old maps, and personal interviews, Allen has brought to light a picture of daily life in North Williston in its boom years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The mosaic he paints includes descriptions of Roswell Brown’s General Store, which functioned as the community’s social center and post office; the old two-lane covered bridge that crossed the Winooski into Jericho and was destroyed by an ice jam in 1923; and of how parents of school-age children took turns preparing hot lunches each day to be brought to the little North Williston Schoolhouse. But perhaps more important than his vignettes about small village life is his documenting of the industries that the railroad spawned there. Chief among them was the Smith Wright Cold Storage Company.

Much of Allen's book functions as a biography of Smith Wright, a Williston farm boy with an entrepreneur's restlessness. As a young man in the 1840s through the 1860s, Wright farmed and then successively owned two general stores. These twin experiences showed him the utility of creating a cold storage facility where poultry, eggs, and cheese from local farms could be stored before being shipped by rail to market. In 1876, the Smith Wright Cold Storage facility was housed in a large building served by a siding of the Central Vermont Railroad. Under Smith Wright's untiring energy the business grew rapidly. At one point in the 1890s the North Williston facility was said to contain 750,000 pounds of butter, 150,000 pounds of antelope meat (where did that come from?), and many thousand dozens of eggs. So large did the company become that it had storage and distribution facilities in Iowa and Minnesota.

Wright's storage operation spawned other businesses in North Williston. The Chapmans, who owned a farm along the Winooski River, harvested ice each winter to supply Wright his refrigerant. There was also a cheese-making plant in which Wright was a principal; and in 1899 the Winooski Valley Dairy Cooperative opened there. All conjoined to make North Williston a busy place through the 1920s. But, just as the coming of the railroad had given North Williston a unique opportunity to prosper, the demise of railroading in the 1940s and 1950s relegated it to its former sleepy tranquility.

Thanks to Richard Allen, we now know of the once important role played by North Williston in the industrial and agricultural history of the Winooski Valley. I have just one bone to pick with his book, and it has nothing to do with the author or his work. Rather it concerns the publisher, The History Press. This South Carolina company is the spin-off of an English press that has found a niche in putting out books on local history and genealogy. But they do it on the cheap. Authors receive almost no editorial help—and it shows. To keep production costs down the books are kept brief, even when the subject deserves greater elucidation. Moreover, their layouts have a sameness about them that suggests mass production. Still, this must be considered a quibble, for without The History Press and Richard Allen, we would not have learned so much about North Williston.

VINCENT E. FEENEY

*Vincent E. Feeney is a retired businessman. His most recent book is Finnigans, Slaters and Stonepeppers: A History of the Irish in Vermont (2009).*

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## *Headline Vermont*

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DVD, produced by Daniel J. Lyons (Colchester: Vermont Public Television, 2010, run time 56:46 minutes, \$19.95).

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**A**t a time of great challenge for the newspaper industry, Vermont Public Television has produced a lively hour-long history of Vermont newspapers, available on the competing medium of DVD. The subject offers its own challenges, because to treat it fully would require a series of several installments. One overall impression that remains after watching this program a few times is the very minuscule and local nature of the newspapers of Vermont, the next-to-smallest state, composed of a large number of small towns.

The program touches interestingly upon three important aspects of newspaper journalism in this state: substance of the news being covered, relationships of journalists to their sources, and mechanical processes of typesetting, printing, and distributing the product. Much attention is paid to issues of slavery and racism. Chauncey L. Knapp's *Voice of Freedom*, published in Montpelier, is retrieved for all to admire from the 1830s, an era when dozens of antislavery societies existed in Vermont. A 1968 incident of racial violence at Irasburg, and how it was handled—notably by the *Rutland Herald*—becomes a central focus of the program. The subject brings back the sense of discomfort that such an episode could take place in tolerant Vermont and acknowledges that certain editors and reporters admirably faced up to it. But regrettably the program neglects to note that other major papers worked with state police to discredit the black minister in question.

Eighteenth-century newspapers, whether in Vermont or elsewhere in America, require some interpretation for today's readers. The program explains why newspaper front pages in the 1700s offered reports from faraway places such as Paris, Naples, or Austria, plus much fiction and poetry, while minimal local news was buried inside. The explanation is that in Vermont's small communities, most everyone knew what was going on locally in an era without electricity, but people were starved for news from beyond their borders. The opposite is the case today, as the program points out with its emphasis on the very local *Commons* of Brattleboro, a paper based on the premise that people are inundated with national and international news and therefore need local news.

The viewer is reminded of one newspaper feature that is totally forgotten today, the personal column, a phenomenon that only disappeared some fifty years ago—well within my memory. Who visited whom for

the weekend, who “motored” recently to Troy, N.Y., or who is recovering from whooping cough: These were the kinds of brief personals from every town that filled thousands of columns of type in Vermont newspapers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An amusing episode is recalled when competing Rutland papers vied for the most personal items, even to the extent of being caught stealing them from each other.

The evolution of the process of setting type itself, from hand-set letters to computers, is well documented. Particularly relevant to this reviewer were scenes (between 30:58 and 32:40) that demonstrate the workings of a linotype machine, a complicated mechanical marvel that drove inventor Otto Mergenthaler crazy but also revolutionized printing of all kinds by the turn of the twentieth century. I can relive memories of myself as a six-year-old watching, hearing, touching, and smelling the three hot, clattering linotypes in the shop of my grandfather, Alvin H. Resch, who owned a twice-a-week newspaper, *The True Republican*, in Sycamore, Illinois. The Vermont program also follows long leaps in mid-nineteenth-century newspaper technology with the development of railroads, telegraph, and steam-powered rotary presses.

The shifting nature of the relationship between journalists and politicians is examined. There was a gregarious time in the 1960s when Montpelier was perhaps the most intensively covered state capital, but the mood changed after the Irasburg affair to a more formal, even adversarial, environment, followed in the early 1990s by a scaling back of coverage and resources. Several journalists active in earlier decades are interviewed, including Howard Coffin, Nick Monserrat, Tom Slayton, Ham Davis, and Chris Graff. Historian Paul Searls and other non-journalists add important context.

To a large extent the program reflects an anti-Banana Belt bias. While it touches base south of Route 4 by showing in detail how the weekly Brattleboro *Commons* covers its very local news, the film never mentions Anthony Haswell of Bennington, his Anti-Federalist *Vermont Gazette*, which began in 1783, his jailing for violation of the Sedition Act of 1798, or the paper that finally put the *Gazette* out of business after some seventy-five years, the *Bennington Banner*, which began as a Whig weekly in 1841. These papers were published throughout the entire history of Vermont statehood, while the one Bennington paper that gets attention is that of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, whose *Journal of the Times* lasted barely six months in 1828 and 1829. The *Brattleboro Reformer* is mentioned only once in passing. The *Rutland Herald* is mentioned often, but its distinguished heritage as America’s longest-running family-owned paper in continuous operation is overlooked. The *Herald*

was launched in 1794 as a Federalist weekly by Samuel Williams, who also wrote the first history of the state that year—worth noting in any history of Vermont newspapers.

The complex subject of a state's newspaper history is a daunting one and, while useful, this attempt to cover it in less than an hour necessarily leaves out an enormous amount.

TYLER RESCH

*Tyler Resch is the research librarian at the Bennington Museum, edited the Bennington Banner for a dozen years, and has served in editorial capacities on other southern Vermont newspapers.*

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## *Scenes along the Rails. Rutland Railroad: Rutland to Bellows Falls*

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By John W. Hudson, II and Suzanna C. Hudson (Loveland, Ohio: Depot Square Publishing, 2010, pp. xvi, 128, \$44.95).

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Let's say you have a time machine. Whenever you step out of it you find yourself in Rutland, Vermont, on some random day between 1890 and 1940. You spend the day enjoying the town and chatting with the friendly locals. That evening you have a hearty dinner at one of the better hostelries in town; tonight, perhaps, the Berwick Hotel. The next morning, after a good night's sleep and a country breakfast, you go down to the Rutland Railroad station and catch the morning local to the next stop east, North Clarendon. Once there you repeat yesterday's scenario. And so on at each hamlet along the line, all the way to Bellows Falls.

*Rutland to Bellows Falls*, a volume in the series, *Scenes along the Rails*, is that time machine, although it does not start out that way, since the book is both a history lesson and a period travelogue. The book's introduction is a rather long but well-written history of the railroad. It covers the 1842 Waltham, Massachusetts, railroad convention that mapped out a rail line from Boston, through Waltham and Fitchburg, across Vermont via Brattleboro and Rutland, and then on toward both Montreal, Québec, to the north and also the Great Lakes to the west. This is followed by a summary of the line's construction and early financial woes, and bits about the periods when the railroad was under the control of the Central Vermont, New York Central, and New Haven railroads. Lastly, there is at least one paragraph about each addition to the original 1849 main line.

Following that, the authors visit each station along the railroad,

offering the reader a trove of clear, crisp photographs and well-written captions brimming with interesting local history and enjoyable anecdotes. Many of the photographs are being published for the first time. The annotated bird's-eye photographs of the Rutland railroad yard, (p. xiv and p. 1), Bellows Falls railroad yard (pp. 78–79), and the Bellows Falls paper factories (pp. 96–97) are a brilliant touch.

Still, despite the best efforts of the Hudsons, the book has a few imperfections. A weakness in the history of the railroad is the introduction's reliance on Fitchburg Railroad history and the January 1842 railroad meeting to introduce the Rutland's charter and construction. Clearly the 1842 Waltham, Massachusetts, railroad meeting was relevant to the formation of both the Fitchburg Railroad and its Vermont extension, the Rutland & Burlington (R&B).

However, Vermonters had their own enthusiasm for railroads and their own conventions. In terms of the organization of the Rutland & Burlington, the Montpelier, Vermont, meeting of October 6, 1830, was at least as important as the later Waltham meeting. It inspired the state's first railroad charter issued in 1835, although as events turned out, the charter was a decade premature and the rail line stillborn. Nevertheless, because the charter's wording about crossing the Green Mountains was vague, it received huge support, being acceptable to all of the groups advocating for the various river systems connecting the Connecticut River and the Champlain Valley. Thus it generated enormous interest in railroad construction. Listed in this initial charter are the names of men who would later become R&B directors.

One puzzlement in the book is the use of a photograph of the Vermont Central Railroad's 1866 Burlington station (p. iv) over a caption that begins with a discussion of the Rutland & Burlington Railroad's first station. This is without a doubt a wonderful unpublished photo. But why highlight the depot of the R&B's arch rival? There are at least three bird's-eye views of Burlington that show the Rutland & Burlington depot. Admittedly it is not a photograph, but why not select one of those, make an enlargement of just the depot building, and use that?

The absence of endnotes was this reviewer's most serious difficulty. The idea of learning a lot more about the "blatant profiteering committed between 1898 and 1902 by former directors of the Rutland" (p. xiii) is very tantalizing. Someone needs to pursue this story.

But enough of this nitpicking. *The Rutland Railroad: Rutland to Bellows Falls* is a fine addition to the all too small list of Rutland Railroad titles. Both the rail fan and the local historian will appreciate this book.

Oh yes! Before leaving Bellows Falls and returning to the present, for an extra 15¢ you can take the Bellows Falls & Saxtons River Street

Railway to the delightful village of Saxtons River. While you are there, have Frank Taft take your picture on one of the trolley cars. Your grandchildren will love it.

GERALD B. FOX

*Jerry Fox is an independent researcher working in the areas of nineteenth-century Vermont industries, transportation, and town history. He lives in Essex, Vermont.*

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## *Lost Ski Areas of Southern Vermont*

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By Jeremy K. Davis (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2010, pp. 159, paper, \$19.99).

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**I**n his pictorial overview of now defunct ski areas in Vermont's four southern counties, Jeremy K. Davis provides a synopsis of skiing's evolution in Vermont. From the first rope tow (and now a lost ski area), The White Cupboard Ski Way in Woodstock, to larger ski areas with multiple lifts and modern amenities such as Maple Valley, Snow Valley, and Dutch Hill, the proliferation of ski areas reflects skiing's popularity as a recreation and sport and its importance as a community activity and economic engine. Davis attributes the closing of areas to "overinvestment, poor snowmaking, local competition, widely variable weather from season to season, changing skier habits, insurance costs and sometimes just plain bad luck" (p. 9). As he traces the rise and fall of ski areas in southern Vermont, he touches on the greater social impact of how losing these small ski areas affected the local community.

Davis defines a lost ski area as any area that offered lift service, organized skiing, that closed for good, and where skiing has been abandoned. Outlining the history of the seventy-four lost ski areas in Windsor, Rutland, Bennington, and Windham counties with chapters dedicated to hybrid and surviving areas, he begins each chapter with a list of ski areas not addressed in detail and then highlights five to eight areas with pictures, trail maps, and modern-day views of them.

There were two waves of ski area development: the 1930s and 1940s when Americans "discovered" skiing, and then the 1950s and 1960s when technological improvements made skiing easier and more accessible. Operated and maintained by individuals, families, schools, volunteers, or towns, the majority of areas used rope tows and offered some sort of ski school. However, the terrain, the skiers, the events, and the buildings gave each area its own distinct personality, well captured by Davis.

Each area had a colorful cast of characters, many of whom have contributed to this book and to Davis's website, [www.nelsap.com](http://www.nelsap.com). Much of the content of [www.nelsap.com](http://www.nelsap.com) has been generated by Vermont skiers, a testament to the role these smaller ski areas played in developing lifelong skiers and ski industry professionals, in stimulating the local economy, and in providing entertainment for locals and visitors. A prime example is Bill Jenkins, who started in Vermont as Green Mountain College's ski program director in 1948. He then managed High Pond Ski Area in Hubbardton before founding Birdseye in Castleton in 1961, which he planned to run as the Vermont Mountain Park in the summer. He resigned in 1967 when snowmaking was not added to upper trails. Over his long career, he collected many images found in the book. *Lost Ski Areas of Southern Vermont* contains secondary stories of people, landscape change, fashion, and technology that will appeal to skiers and non-skiers alike.

The pictures taken in the last five years, interspersed with the historic images, stress that the story of skiing is still unfolding. The fourteen existing ski areas in southern Vermont are home to some of the state's most well-known skiers and snowboarders and most prestigious competitions, and to year-round recreation. Luckily, Davis is a young man (he graduated from Lyndon State College in 2000), because ski area development could shift again in response to the same pressures of weather, economics, and luck. Here's to the next fifty years!

MEREDITH SCOTT

*Meredith Scott is the director/curator of the Vermont Ski and Snowboard Museum, Stowe, Vermont. Along with volunteer Dick Collins, she spearheads the museum's lost ski areas project, which compliments Davis's work by focusing on partnering with local historical societies and collecting oral histories.*

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## *To Life! A Celebration of Vermont Jewish Women*

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*Compiled and edited by Ann Zinn Buffum and Sandra Stillman Gartner (Manchester Center, Vt.: Northshire Bookstore, 2009, pp. 135, paper, \$18.00).*

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“*L’chaim*,” “To life,” is a Jewish toast of celebration, used at weddings and on other joyous occasions. This book is a celebration of the lives of twenty contemporary Jewish women in Vermont, one of whom died before the book was published. A pioneering effort to depict and record the lives of Jewish women in the state, the book is the product of

five years of oral history gathering and a project of Davar: The Vermont Jewish Women's History Project, founded by the authors. It accompanied an exhibit of the same name, mounted at the Vermont Historical Society's museum in Montpelier for the first six months of 2010 and at the Slate Valley Museum in Granville, New York, from July until the end of 2010.

The women, who come from all over the state, were interviewed between 2005 and 2009 and ranged in age at the time of their interviews from twelve to ninety-seven. The oldest, June Salander, who was 101 when she died in May 2010, was famous for her apple strudel and was instrumental in founding the Rutland Jewish Center. Elora Silver, of Windsor, was interviewed when she was 12 and preparing for her *bat mitzvah*.

Some were the wives or children of immigrants who arrived here in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries as merchants, peddlers, or tailors. Some are the daughters or granddaughters of Holocaust survivors. Some are converts, some are in or are the products of mixed marriages.

Most of the women chose Vermont as a place to live and feel nurtured by its beauty and its culture of independence and strength. Coming from different backgrounds as they do, all chose to acknowledge and celebrate their Jewish identity. But they also express a sense of isolation in a state where Jews are few in number and scattered geographically. This has, perhaps, intensified their desire for Jewish community and their need to educate themselves and the broader community in the traditions and culture of Judaism. The result has been, as Penina Migdal Glazer of Hampshire College points out in her concluding essay, an ability for the different branches of Judaism to get along in ways not typical in areas where there are more Jews. Another result in some places has been the integration of Jewish practices into broader community life. In some towns, for instance, the Passover seder has become a community event, with groups writing their own script for this celebration of liberation and an immanent God.

Most of the women, of whatever age, are active in their secular communities as well as in their religious ones. Some, like Madeleine Kunin and Deborah Markowitz, are known throughout the state and beyond for their work in government service. Hinda Miller, a feminist and activist, is the inventor of the Jogbra. Diane Rippa is a family doctor. Susan Leader is a farmer and a potter. Each woman portrayed here exemplifies in her own life the "Jewish imperative" of *tikkun olam*, the need to repair the world. Zeesy Raskin, a member of a community of traditionally observant Jews in Burlington, reflects the outlook of all when she commits

herself to educate and nourish “people who can give to the world, make a difference in the world, make a change in the world” (p. 70).

It would be wonderful to have the space to introduce all twenty women, but I suggest, instead, meeting them in this book.

The book devotes one chapter to each woman, starting with an essay by the editors and then organized, using brief quotations, by the topics the subjects themselves chose. These quotations, along with the vintage and contemporary photographs that enrich each section, bring an immediacy and intimacy to the text.

*To Life!* is rich as oral history. Still, I would have liked a bit more information about method. How many women in all did the project directors interview? How did they select these twenty? How did they edit the interviews? Why did they allow the women to decide what topics to talk about? Do the subsections in the chapters correspond to those topics, or was there another rationale? And I want to know more about each of the women portrayed. In their rich variety, their devotion to the “imperative” of *tikkun olam*, and the joy they take in affirming their tradition and their faith, these women are indeed a celebration of Life.

ANN E. COOPER

*Ann E. Cooper is an independent scholar and the former editor of Historic Roots: A Magazine of Vermont History.*