“We’re going where?”: Experiential Learning and the Landscape of History in Vermont  
Susan Ouellette

The Power and Pedagogy of Place: St. Johnsbury Academy’s Freshman Humanities Capstone  
Denise Scavitto

Experiencing History Where It Happened: Living History and Re-enactment as Public History Tools  
Daniel P. O’Neil

Ira, Vermont: Early Years of Family and Town  
Charles Fish

Local History and the Vermont Borderlands, 1790-1820  
Jacqueline B. Carr

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Thanks to the generosity of J. Brooks Buxton, a member of the Vermont Historical Society Board of Trustees, the VHS recently acquired and conserved a rare set of Vermont furniture: a sideboard with matching cellaret. Until sold at auction, these pieces resided in the dining room of the Middlebury house for which they were originally designed. The stylish house was built for Horatio Seymour between 1817 and 1819 and stood as a testimony to his prominence and wealth. Seymour, a lawyer and U.S. Senator (1821-1833), lived the rest of his life in the federal style home. It remained in the hands of his descendants, the Battells and Swifts, who donated it with furnishings to the town where it is known today as the Middlebury Community House.

Dining rooms, and the furniture made specifically for use in them, were not seen in America until the late 1700s except in the homes of the very wealthy. The sideboard displayed serving pieces on top and stored linens, silverware, and glasses inside. The cellaret had compartments for holding wine and liquor bottles. Vermont-made sideboards rarely came with matching cellarets. A costly addition, practical Vermonters seemed to prefer sideboards, or half sideboards called lockers, with bottle drawers. The maker of this set of furniture is not known but there were Middlebury cabinetmakers who advertised the latest urban styles. Documented examples of their fine craftsmanship survives and indicate that they could have made this set that was more in keeping with Seymour’s sophisticated taste.

Color photos of the sideboard and cellaret may be viewed at: www.vermonthistory.org

Jacqueline Calder, Curator


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