

# IN MEMORIAM

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## Gene Sessions

(September 16, 1937 - April 25, 2017)



Gene Sessions, author and Professor Emeritus of American History, died on April 25, 2017. Sessions had a long career teaching History at Norwich University, in Northfield, Vermont, from 1974 to his retirement in 1998.

Born in Cleburne, Texas, Gene received a B.A. and M.A. from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. He served briefly in the U.S. Army, and then, in 1971-72, was a reporter for the *Del Rio (Texas) News-Herald* and *Waco News Tribune and Times Herald*. While completing a Ph.D. in History at American University in Washington, D.C., where he wrote his dissertation on “American Reformers and the Mexican Revolution: Progressives and Woodrow Wilson’s Policy in Mexico, 1913-1917,” Sessions taught history at the University of Maryland, Moravian College (Bethlehem, Pennsylvania), and Grambling State University (Grambling, Louisiana).

A meticulous researcher who loved to pore over and interpret census data and newspaper stories, Gene also sought out legislative acts and resolves, government reports, voting records, and materials from archives, such as pamphlets and unpublished letters, diaries, and manuscripts. His fascination with and recognition of the importance of archival materials led him to enroll in the Modern Archives Institute at the National Archives, where he obtained a certificate in archival administration in 1981.

Gene brought to his research and writing an interest in labor history and a commitment to record the voices of other, often ignored, individuals and groups. His newspaper work taught him the importance of writing clearly and accurately to help readers enjoy and learn from those stories. He contributed four articles and several book reviews to *Vermont History*. Two of those articles, “‘Years of struggle’: The Irish in the Village of Northfield, 1845-1900” (1987), and “Espionage in Windsor: Clarence H. Waldron and Patriotism in World War I” (1993) received the Ben Lane Award for the best article appearing in those

years' issues of the journal—a rare distinction. He wrote on Vermont's nineteenth-century railroad workers, contributed background essays for “The Green Mountain Chronicles,” a radio series produced for the Vermont Historical Society in 1989, and articles for *The Vermont Encyclopedia* (2003). He co-authored with Michael Sherman and P. Jeffrey Potash *Freedom and Unity: A History of Vermont* (2004), the publication of which he was most proud.

Gene was editor of *Vermont History* from 1988 to 1992, where he used his skills as a researcher and writer to help authors achieve clarity, conciseness, and context. In the years following his tenure as editor, he served on the journal's Board of Editorial Advisors, doing peer reviews of manuscripts submitted for publication in this journal, and on the VHS Research and Publications Committee. He collaborated with Samuel B. Hand and J. Kevin Graffagnino to compile a volume of primary source materials entitled, *Vermont Voices, 1609 through the 1990s* (1999), and edited a collection of essays on the art and history of the Barre granite industry. He was also an Associate Fellow of the Center for Research on Vermont at the University of Vermont and a member of the Vermont Historical Records Advisory Board.

In recognition of all this important work, Gene received the 2014 President's Award of the Vermont Historical Society, honoring “his valuable and lasting contribution to the study of Vermont history.”

## Winn Lowell Taplin

*October 3, 1925 - December 3, 2016*

Winn Lowell Taplin, a former member of the Vermont Historical Society Board of Trustees and president of the board (1989 to 1993), was born in St. Albans, Vermont, on October 3, 1925. He grew up in Vermont, graduated from Bennington High School in 1943, then volunteered for the Marine Corps and was selected for a wartime engineering program, attending Duke University and the University of Michigan. At the end of World War II, he continued his studies in Ann Arbor, receiving degrees in political science and history. He returned to active duty in the Korean War, serving as a First Lieutenant. He re-



ceived a Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts in 1951 at the Battle for Kanmubong Ridge. After leaving the Marine Corps, he returned to Ann Arbor and earned a Ph.D. in History. His dissertation, “The Vermont Problem in the Continental Congress and in Interstate Relations, 1776-1787” focused on Vermont’s brief period of independence.

Rather than embarking on an academic career, Winn joined the Central Intelligence Agency in 1956 as an operations officer focusing on Soviet and East European affairs. His intelligence career spanned twenty-five years and included overseas assignments in South Vietnam, Romania, Switzerland, and Thailand.

Upon his retirement in 1981, Winn returned to Vermont, where he served as a member of the Board of Trustees, vice president, and president of the board. He also taught university courses on the role of intelligence in international affairs, and authored several articles on intelligence and on Revolutionary War-era espionage, including a chapter on Justus Sherwood, at one time a friend of Ethan Allen and later a Loyalist who spied for the British, in the book, *Secret New England: Spies of the American Revolution* (1991); and “We Proprietors: The First Europeans” in *We Vermonters: Perspectives on the Past* (1992). In recent years, he served as president of the Genealogical Society of Sarasota and of the University of Michigan Club of Sarasota/Manatee.