

VERMONT HISTORY

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About the Covers

International Hockey Tournament in Burlington, 1886

With the passing of J. Brooks Buxton in 2018, the Vermont Historical Society lost a dear friend and patron. Brooks's passion for the history and culture of his home state ran to near obsessive levels, with Vermont's cultural institutions benefiting from his largess. Brooks applied a well-trained eye for art, antiques, and ephemera to his collecting, both personal and on behalf of Vermont Historical Society and others. In almost twenty years of giving, Brooks made a material impact on the VHS museum and library collections with well over 100 items purchased in his lifetime or donated through his estate. These items range from rare furniture pieces to school-girl drawings; contemporary art to rare, early, painted views of our state; as well as the now-iconic white rocking chairs gracing the porch of the Vermont History Museum in Montpelier.



The medal pictured above and on the covers of this issue of *Vermont History* represents Brooks's approach to collecting, supporting his community, and above-all-else, a drive to preserve the Vermont story he held so dear.

After the Civil War, the idea of leisure activities as part of a fulfilling life quickly took hold in the rapidly growing middle class. This included organized sport, rigorous outdoor activities, and intercommunity competition. In the northern tier of the country as well as in Canada, winter sports as we know them today grew and evolved. By the 1880s grand winter carnivals celebrated ice, snow, sport, and social celebration. Close to Vermont's border, the Montreal Winter Carnival distinguished itself as one of the great social and sporting events of the season. By 1886, Burlington decided it, too, could mount a carnival that would bring tourist dollars to Vermont's largest city.

Burlington's winter carnival of 1886 included ice yachting, figure skating, and the thrilling sport of coasting. A precursor to bobsledding, coasting involved a team of people mounted on a travers sled hurtling down an ice ramp and down a steep hill. In Burlington, the coasting track started at UVM and went straight down Main Street, with participants reaching

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speeds of 50 miles-per-hour or more. So popular was this sport that the Burlington Coasting Club stood as the main sponsor of the winter carnival.

Around this same time in Montreal, the modern sport of ice hockey began to take form. Quickly gaining popularity through the 1870s, well-organized club teams began to mount yearly tournaments. By 1883 the annual championship game became a large attraction of the Montreal Winter Carnival. In 1893, this annual tournament received its iconic trophy, the Stanley Cup. In 1886, Montreal experienced an outbreak of smallpox that ultimately cancelled its winter carnival and threw into jeopardy the hockey championship. Burlington's carnival organizers saw an opportunity to bring visitors from the north and grow this first attempt at a winter carnival by inviting the Montreal teams to play their tournament in Vermont.

On February 26, 1886, the Montreal Athletic Association and Montreal Crystals hockey clubs participated with the newly formed Van Ness Club of Burlington in the first-ever international hockey game, played between the piers of the Central Vermont Railroad wharves on the Burlington waterfront. The Athletic Association and the Crystals played a thrilling first match, with the Athletic Association taking the narrow win. Having never played hockey before, the Van Ness team was beaten handily by the Montreal Athletic Association in the second game. The Crystals defeated Van Ness in the third game, taking the second-place medal. The following year, the tournament returned to Montreal and Burlington's winter carnival folded after the 1887 celebration.

In 2012 a trio of researchers working on this all-but-forgotten game found a second-place medal from the Burlington contest up for auction on a hockey memorabilia website. They approached Brooks Buxton about helping them bring this rare and important artifact to Vermont to better tell the story of the first international hockey game ever played. Brooks purchased the medal and arranged for it to end up in the Vermont Historical Society collections. This one small object, this one great story, illustrates how Brooks valued Vermont history and assured the material representation of that history benefitted all Vermonters.

STEVE PERKINS, *Executive Director*
Vermont Historical Society

Front cover: 1886 Burlington Winter Carnival Silver Hockey Medal. Emblazoned with the date 1886, the medal also includes the initials "BCC" representing the Carnival sponsors: the Burlington Coasting Club. A red and blue ribbon supports crossed hockey sticks and puck with the engraved medal below.

Back cover: The image on the medal shows two hockey players with a puck between them. Notice the square puck. It took a few more years for the round puck to be introduced into play.

For color images, go online at: <https://vermonthistory.org/journal/87/1886HockeyMedal.jpg>



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