

BOOK REVIEWS



Town Founders: Officials, Entrepreneurs, and Settlers in Early New Hampshire and Vermont, 1720-1810

By Cameron Clifford (West Hartford, VT: The Clifford Archive, 2019, pp. xvii, 252, \$20.00).

Cameron Clifford of West Hartford, Vermont, has written and published an exhaustive (and no doubt exhausting) study of the proprietors of the towns of New Hampshire and Vermont, and we can only marvel at what he has done. His book, *Town Founders: Officials, Entrepreneurs, and Settlers in Early New Hampshire and Vermont, 1720-1810*, deserves a place on your shelf, because there is none other like it. In the centuries since the last proprietors' meetings were held, no one before Clifford has looked at the whole subject and poured over all the charters, meeting records, lawsuits, deeds, and other actions of the founders of our towns. Consequently, no one can speak with the authority that Clifford has earned by compiling this study. It is a gargantuan and very important accomplishment.

Proprietors were the first governors of the towns. Charters issued by New Hampshire, and subsequently by New Hampshire and Vermont, gave little direction on how to proceed once the charter fees were paid. The boundaries of the towns were set by surveyors before charters were issued, but the process of subdividing the town into lots and conveying lots to the proprietors was the proprietors' responsibility. They set aside public lands for the church, the school, the first settled minister, and other uses, and sometimes laid out the first roads. Charters sometimes named the moderator for the first meeting, but election of clerks and other officials, the disposition of the lots, and other decisions that established order in the frontier towns of these two states, was the business of the proprietors.

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Town Founders answers the large and small questions that have eluded most scholars in the past about these and many other subjects relative to the founding of colonial-era towns. It frames the quotidian process of land development within the context of the French and Indian War (1756-1763) and the Revolutionary War (1775-1783), the overlapping jurisdictions of New Hampshire and New York, and the struggle for the recognition of Vermont by the United States Congress. By describing the trajectory of both states' origins, Clifford adds a perspective that is sometimes missed by scholars whose work never breaches the borders of a single state.

Speculation in the lands of northern New England was the first crop to be harvested in these states, making fortunes for powerful men and families well before the land was cleared and domesticated. Many proprietors never resided on the plots of land they drew from the hat at the town's organizational meeting; and many who signed the petitions for charters sold their rights for nominal value, allowing a few to accumulate hundreds of acres, which they then sold to the actual settlers of these towns.

You have to marvel at the symmetry of the proprietors' doings from town to town and the choices they made reflecting the need for regularity and security of land titles. Land was everything. Vermont statehood, although it eliminated most of the claims of New Yorkers under land patents granted by that state, did not solve all the problems faced by settlers. It took another generation, accounting for and resolving the complexities of the confiscation of lands of Tories and Yorkers during the Revolutionary War and the regular transfer of titles from tax sales and foreclosures, to sort out who owned what.

Taken together, the development of towns and lots in Vermont and New Hampshire was a vast enterprise, involving thousands of individuals, officials, and speculators. You can only marvel at the complexity and efficiency of the undertaking. You should also marvel at the industry and diligence of scholars such as Cameron Clifford, who has so masterfully, patiently, and lovingly researched and explained this fascinating chapter in history.

We have not reached the end of research. After all this time, you would have expected studies like *Town Founders*, which embrace large volumes of records and the recognition of fundamental ideas, to have been completed years ago; but as Clifford's book reveals, much more work remains to be done in the political, social, and legal history of this era of these two neighboring states. In Vermont, a deep study of the Governor and Council begs to be written. So, too, with the Council of Censors. And we ought to have a general history of the legislature for

this time period. To do those subjects justice, we'll need researchers and scholars with the time, passion, understanding, and stamina that Clifford has demonstrated, to find the detailed evidence in the oldest records and compose a coherent and convincing narrative of these states. History will bless them for their efforts. We can only stand in awe of their accomplishments.

PAUL S. GILLIES

Paul Gillies is the author of The Law of the Hills (2019) and Uncommon Law, Ancient Roads, and Other Ruminations on Vermont Legal History (2013), both published by the Vermont Historical Society.

Repeopling Vermont: The Paradox of Development in the Twentieth Century

By Paul M. Searls (Barre and Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 2019, pp. x, 288, paper, \$22.95).

In his latest work, *Repeopling Vermont: The Paradox of Development in the Twentieth Century*, Paul Searls, professor of history at Northern Vermont University, focuses on the changes that took place in Vermont in the period 1890-1970. For Searls, the great theme running through these years was a struggle between those who sought to protect Vermont's heritage of small farms, small villages, and local control, and those who espoused economic development and big government. Investigating this tension Searls found a paradox: Some of those individuals who most advocated for the older, rural Vermont were inadvertently the catalysts for change. He demonstrates this through the work of two men, Alonzo B. Valentine and Samuel R. Ogden.

In the nineteenth century Vermont was in crisis. Since mid-century Vermont's population had been stagnant. Too many Green Mountain farmers gave up their hardscrabble farms for the fertile soils of the West or the industrial centers of the East. By 1850, Searls reminds us, 40 percent of Vermont's native population lived elsewhere. If not for an influx of French Canadians and Irish, Vermont's population in the nineteenth century would have declined. Vermont seemed to be in a permanent state of stasis.

But for many old-stock Vermonters the influx of these newcomers was as much a problem as was the loss of native Vermonters: The newcomers were not the type of people the old Vermonters wanted. The French Canadians and Irish were members of a despised religion; and,

when toward the end of the century, Jews, Italians, and Lebanese began entering the Green Mountain State, Searls notes that some Vermonters wondered if they were even white. Something needed to be done.

To turn things around, in 1888, Governor William Dillingham appointed Alonzo Valentine commissioner of agriculture and manufacturing. Valentine, a Civil War veteran and the owner of a knitting mill in Bennington, was well connected to Vermont's leadership circles through his membership in the Grand Army of the Republic. To stem the problem of what he saw as "abandoned farms," Valentine sought to recruit the "right kind" of people to Vermont—people from northern European Protestant backgrounds. As Searls writes, Valentine "was not just trying to repopulate rural Vermont. He was attempting to engineer its racial landscape" (pp. 22-23). To this end he successfully enticed a few dozen Swedes to emigrate to Vermont, principally to the remote towns of Landgrove and Peru in Bennington County.

Though a handful of Swedes did relocate to Vermont, the effort was short lived, terminated by the state in the early 1890s as not cost effective. But, in an ironic twist, in publicizing the availability of abandoned farms—many of which may have been unworked but not abandoned—and extolling the natural beauty of the Green Mountains, Valentine's Agricultural and Manufacturing Commission led to an uptick in tourism in the 1890s and a boom in the sale of summer homes to non-Vermonters.

Recognizing the economic benefits that tourists and summer residents brought to the Green Mountains, various state agencies began marketing Vermont as a land of old-time virtues, simple communal life, and unsurpassed beauty. As one government publication in 1915 put it, "Today Vermont is one of the few remaining places where the ideals of our forefathers have a chance to be nurtured and brought to full realization" (p. 89). With its romantic image of a simpler America, this was a message that attracted Americans disenchanted with the complexities of big-city urban life. Repeated over decades, it was a message that helped to transform the older Vermont—Searls's paradox.

One who heard that message was Samuel Ogden, a New Jersey real estate and insurance agent. Disenchanted with what he perceived as an overly materialistic society, Ogden moved his family to Landgrove in 1929. At the time, Searls tells us, Landgrove was almost an abandoned village; in 1930 the population of the entire town was only 104. With only a few thousand dollars Ogden was able to buy most of the buildings in the village.

Ogden then became a leading promoter of an idealized version of Vermont, encouraging a number of his New Jersey friends—the "right

kind” of people—to buy summer homes in Landgrove and in nearby Peru. But while he was enamored of the old pastoral Vermont, in the 1930s he became a strong advocate for Vermont’s nascent ski industry—a recreational pastime that would do much to change Vermont’s character. Here again is Searls’s paradox—a nostalgic yearning for a simpler way of life while at the same time calling for modernization.

Given the class-conscious aspirations of people like Valentine and Ogden, perhaps Searls’s book should have been titled “The Gentrification of Vermont” rather than *The Repeopling*. But all who care about Vermont should thank Searls for his work, for it asks us to ponder the nature of the Green Mountain State and what being a Vermonter means. If we do so, we may discover that Searls’s paradox still lives within us.

VINCENT E. FEENEY

Vincent E. Feeney was a longtime adjunct faculty member of the History Department at the University of Vermont. He is the author of Finnigans, Slaters and Stonepeppers: A History of the Irish in Vermont (2009).

Garden Cemeteries of New England, 1796-2019

By Trudy Irene Scee (Lanham, MD: Down East Books, 2019, pp. xvi, 259, \$29.95).

For those who relish New England history, Trudy Irene Scee’s book, *Garden Cemeteries of New England 1796-2019*, offers an enjoyable read; and for those who love cemeteries, her book will delight you. Scee, who holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of Maine, taught at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick, Canada, and Husson University in Bangor, Maine. She is the author of several books, including *City on the Penobscot: A Comprehensive History of Bangor, Maine* (2010) and *Tragedy in the North Woods: The Murders of James Hicks* (2009).

In this book, Scee has crafted a rich discussion of the hygienic and scientific roots of garden cemeteries and wrapped it in a discussion of notable people and families, the science of horticulture, and respect for loved ones who have passed.

The phenomenon of garden cemeteries began officially with the creation of Mount Auburn Cemetery in 1831, when the Massachusetts Horticultural Society purchased Stone’s Farm on the outskirts of Boston. Scee makes the distinction between Grove Street Cemetery as America’s first planned cemetery and Mount Auburn as its first garden

or rural cemetery. She begins her book with a chapter describing the effort by civic leaders in New Haven, Connecticut, to address overcrowding in increasingly congested urban centers, the sanitary burying of large numbers of corpses resulting from a series of contagious epidemics, and the spiritual need to have quiet places to visit departed loved ones. Their effort led to a state charter in 1797 of the New Haven Burial Grounds, now Grove Street Cemetery. The distinction lies in the intent at Mount Auburn to create a garden within a cemetery and to blend the nation's growing interest in horticulture with the desire to create a "New Eden," a beautiful resting place for the dead, according to the president of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, General Henry A. S. Dearborn (p. 19).

Subsequent chapters delve into the details of several New England garden or rural cemeteries and Albany Rural Cemetery in New York. Scee describes the landscape plans and designs of these burial grounds before the profession of landscape architecture had been defined. Gated entries appear as entrances to eternal life. Landscape designs—including trees, plants, vistas, and considerations for pedestrians, mourners, and carriage drivers—were developed by "engineers" to balance beauty with reverence. As cities grew, so did the cemeteries; expansions often coincided with road development, even in the years prior to the automobile. She traces the evolution of grave markers from simple gravestones to increasingly elaborate memorials and mausoleums as wealth expanded. Her descriptions are excellent, and the inclusion of photographs of many of the most elaborate memorials helps the reader understand the visual and emotional impact of the graves and their settings.

The popularity of garden cemeteries spread as they became noted for being places to picnic and stroll and not just to bury the dead; but visitors did not always visit for beauty and reflection. Scee not only does a great job of documenting burial sites of many of the famous and well-known people and families of New England, but includes a few infamous people, too. For example, the second-oldest garden cemetery in America, Mount Hope Cemetery in Bangor, Maine, became a renowned tourist destination with the burial there of "public enemy number one, Alfred, 'Al' Brady," who was killed in a gunfight with authorities in Bangor in 1937 (p. 51).

Scee devotes a full chapter to Vermont's Green Mount Cemetery in Montpelier and Lakeview Cemetery in Burlington. She writes extensively about the memorial for John Erastus Hubbard (d.1899) and declares it to be "one of the grandest pieces of funerary art in New England" and likely the most "talked-about" site in Green Mount (photo

caption, not paginated and p. 193, respectively). The memorial features an angel and cross, an exedra (low bench), and a bronze figure of death sculpted by Karl Bitter (1867-1915). She concludes that both Green Mount and Lakeview would be beautiful without a single gravestone or memorial given their locations and views. She references Barre's Hope Cemetery, extolling the exemplary craftsmanship of Barre's stonecarvers, but concludes that Hope Cemetery is not a true garden cemetery, and thus, not congruous with this book's focus.

You don't need to read this book from start to finish to enjoy it. After reading the introduction and the first two chapters, one can read each chapter at one's own pace. If you are planning a trip to Providence, Rhode Island, for example, consider visiting Swann Point Cemetery, but read Scee's chapter about it first.

This book will satisfy historians, cemetery enthusiasts, gardeners, tree-lovers, urban planners, and tourists alike. This reviewer looks forward to tucking it into my car when I am headed in the direction of each of the cemeteries profiled.

JUDY L. HAYWARD

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