

IN MEMORIAM

John Joseph Duffy, Jr.

1934-2020

After persevering for three years through a combination of incurable diseases, John Duffy left us in February. He also left his daughters, his grandchildren, and Barbara, his wife of nearly six decades who provided steady, dignified, and loving care during his fight. John left a long list of Vermont colleagues as well. We appreciated him as a warm and gentle companion, blessed with a quiet sense of humor, sparking blue eyes and a mischievous smile, and we admired his rigorous discipline to finish what he had started and his perceptive scholarship that made a positive and indelible imprint on our understanding of Vermont.



After earning a bachelor's degree from Georgetown University in 1957, John came to the University of Vermont to pursue a M.A. in English, which he received in 1958. A year in Burlington made him eager to return to the Green Mountains when he could. After a year as the Third Form (ninth grade) English Master at Mercersburg Academy (Mercersburg, PA), John entered the doctoral program in English at Syracuse University. With brief appointments teaching at Rider University (Lawrence Township, NJ) and Syracuse University, he received a Ph.D. in 1964. His doctoral study and interest in the literature of England, Ireland, Canada, and the United States and its cultural contexts gave John a broad perspective that brought a special nuance to his approach to history. After leaving Syracuse, John taught briefly at the University of Maryland (College Park) and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute before accepting an appointment as an Assistant Professor of English at the University of New Hampshire. But the needle on John's compass pointed to Vermont, where he and his wife established a residence in the Champlain Islands.

When the Vermont Historical Society offered John a two-year position as interim Director in 1971, he accepted without hesitation. At the

VHS John began to dig into Vermont's past as editor of *Vermont History* and head of the state's leading historical agency. When John's interim appointment ended in 1972, he became Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences at Johnson State College. He spent the rest of his academic career at Johnson State, where he retired as Professor of English and Humanities in 1990.

As John pursued research, writing, and teaching, he never lost touch with events around him. He served as a side judge in Grand Isle County, led the unionization of the faculty and staff of the Vermont State College System, served as president of the Vermont Federation of Teachers, and in the early 1980s chaired the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board.

John gave a lasting legacy to Vermont through the many articles in scholarly journals and the books he published. During the 1970s he edited *Coleridge's American Disciples* (1973) and *Early Vermont Broad-sides* (1976). In 1982 our mutual interest in antebellum Vermont resulted in a collaborative volume, *An Anxious Democracy: Aspects of the 1830s*. Three years later John published *Vermont: An Illustrated History* which resulted in a second edition in 2000. In 1998 his two-volume *Ethan Allen and His Kin: Selected Correspondence, 1772-1819* (with three sub-editors) joined documentary collections like *William Slade's Vermont State Papers* and E. P. Walton's eight-volume *Records of the Governor and Council* as important sources for students of Vermont's early history. John then enlisted colleagues Samuel B. Hand and Ralph H. Orth to join him as sub-editors of *The Vermont Encyclopedia*, published by the University Press of New England in 2003.

Several years later I sent John a draft of an article on the events and mythology that attended the accounts of Ethan Allen's death and burial. I asked John for his opinion, as I considered him the leading expert on Allen. He responded that the draft should become a chapter in a book. After four years working together, we published *Inventing Ethan Allen*, which the VHS recognized with the 2015 Richard O. Hathaway Award as the year's "best contribution to the understanding of Vermont." *The Journal of the American Revolution* ranked it as one of the hundred best books published to date on the era. In 2017, as John and I discussed the outline of another book, he posed a logical and seemingly simple question that led us to locate the previously unseen court records and other primary sources on the Ejectment Trials that Vermont's historians for over two centuries have regarded as the starting point of the movement that led to independence and statehood in 1791. Unfortunately, John did not live to hold a copy of *The Rebel and the Tory: Ethan Allen, Philip Skene, and the Dawn of Vermont* (published earlier this year by the

VHS) that his question had initiated. Gary Shattuck and I completed the book that should revise the perspective of Vermont's formative decades, unless the ingrained mythology John exposed in *Inventing Ethan Allen* stubbornly rejects it.

When John Duffy began to lead the VHS, the serious scholars concentrating on the history of Vermont could have held a convention in a telephone booth. Over the next half-century, John's work on the state's past and his collaboration with others vastly helped expand their numbers. The Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences elected him a Fellow, and the Center for Research on Vermont presented him with its Lifetime Achievement Award. They recognized John's many accomplishments, insights, publications, and congenial nature. John's contributions to Vermont historical endeavors will, I firmly believe, influence the work of others for generations. As I lament his passing, I treasure our five decades of friendship and collaboration.

H. NICHOLAS MULLER III

Photograph by Caitlin Balón, John's granddaughter, 2011, taken after a day together on Lake Champlain.