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Compiled by Paul A. Carnahan

BOOK REVIEWS



Print Town: Brattleboro's Legacy of Words

By Brattleboro Words Project, Michael Fleming, ed. (Barre, VT: Vermont Historical Society, 2020, pp. 247, Paper, \$40).

The genre of the Vermont town history has never been a subject of much study. I have overseen and read many of these tomes while I was the librarian at the Bennington Museum, and even written a few. The Vermont town history is sometimes written by a paid researcher and writer but usually by an earnest resident or small committee, and organized either by chronology or topic. Brattleboro's grand and informative *Print Town*, which was assembled by a substantial committee, breaks the barriers of orthodoxy by presenting a virtual deluge of fascinating detail on one topic—what the committee calls the town's "legacy of words".

When I was a writer and briefly acting editor of the *Brattleboro Reformer* in the late 1960s, I remember describing book publisher Stephen Greene as a person who helped make Brattleboro a lively place. "Lively" is still the primary adjective to describe *Print Town*, a handsomely designed, lovingly crafted volume of 247 extra-large pages that respects and records and reports in so many ways the astonishing literate-literary-linguistic heritage of this Vermont town.

The Brattleboro Words Project considers *words* in every manifestation of that little word, which includes the typefaces themselves, their design, methods of assembling them, ways to print them and to disseminate them, and their strong impact on a receptive community. Brattleboro is a town of only 12,000 population with five bookstores today, and can boast about having had more than thirty bookstores in its 225-year history. In a series of short chapters, the reader of *Print Town* develops a strong sense of a community that has united uncommonly around literacy, and therefore civility.

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A key player in the publication of this book has been Stephanie Greene, daughter of the lively publisher Stephen Greene and his equally literate wife Janet. She credits her father's success as having "hit a vein of appreciation in the reading public that would be found all over the country" (p. 135). Her chapter about the Stephen Greene Press (SGP) was a highlight of the book for me because I had such a fond relationship with her parents and such respect for the books they edited and published. The titles of a few SGP books will reflect the vein of appreciation: *The Morgan Horse*, *The Cross-Country Ski Book*, *The Venison Book*, *Over Their Dead Bodies*, *Covered Bridges of the Northeast*, *A Book of Country Things*, *Yankee Hill Country Cooking*, *36 Miles of Trouble*, and *Putting Food By*.

A few samples will be needed to convey the wide variety of subject matter covered by this book produced by Brattleboro's legacy of words. A lovely esoteric essay on "The Living Art of Letterpress" by Julia Ferrari goes to the basic art of constructing a form, or page, of type in metal. It will be appreciated by those who refuse to "modernize" with cold type or offset printing. A similar story is related by Jim Brisson, who has designed more than 3,000 books (including this one) and confesses his love of books since early childhood as he continues to work from a home studio in the small village of Williamsville.

Judy Ashkenaz writes a heartfelt memoir about herself and her husband as ex-urbanites who made it the hard way in a small town while they gradually followed a trail of the technology of typesetting and set up business in various buildings in Brattleboro before finally returning to the Boston area.

Not all of the town's bookish history has been upbeat. John Rice Hooper, a grandson of *Brattleboro Reformer* founder Howard C. Rice and son of *Reformer* publisher John S. Hooper, writes a chapter about the unfortunate demise of the once-legendary Stephen Daye Press. That imprint, named for the first printing press in the American colonies, was sold during World War II to one John Gainfort, who, after a couple of successful years, was convicted of financial fraud and avoided a seven-year sentence at Sing Sing prison by agreeing to be deported.

Hooper also candidly narrates the gradual demise of the Book Press, once "the largest player in Brattleboro's mix of major employers in the printing and publishing industry" (p. 125). By 1965 the Book Press, with 250 well-paid craftsmen, was printing eighteen million books a year. After a change of ownership in the late 1970s, the business carried on, producing many *New York Times* best sellers. But tumultuous times were in store during a depression and with yet another new owner. Hooper finally blames the brutal escalation of costs in equipment, real estate, skilled union labor, and materials—most prominently, paper itself. He

reports that the end at least coincided with a time of tight labor and low unemployment, with the result that few jobs were lost. He concludes, “We got over it and moved on” (p. 130).

There is so much more in this book that cannot be detailed in a review: the complex workings of the linotype machine itself; the local background of authors Rudyard Kipling, Royall Tyler, and Saul Bellow; a series of newspapers that began in 1797 with Benjamin Smead’s *Federal Galaxy*.

Even Brattleboro’s famous Wesselhoeft’s Water Cure (1846-47) has a literary angle because Harriet Beecher Stowe stayed there for nearly a year before she wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was a patient there when he wrote his poem “Rain in Summer.”

In *Print Town* I was pleased to find no hyphenated adverbs and no sentences that begin with the tedious “However,.” Stephanie confessed to me that one typo survived but I couldn’t find it.

Brattleboro’s rich literary heritage has been deeply probed and beautifully presented for the ages in an oversized book that will dominate any shelf of Vermont town histories.

TYLER RESCH

Tyler Resch until recently was the Bennington Museum’s librarian and editor of its journal, the Walloomsack Review. He is the author of town histories of Dorset and Glastenbury, and The Rutland Herald History, among other books.

Vermont’s Ebenezer Allen: Patriot, Commando and Emancipator

By Glenn Fay Jr.; Foreword by Former Governor James Douglas
(Charleston, SC: History Press, 2021, pp. 174, paper, \$21.99).

Few Vermonters are as deserving of a biography as Ebenezer Allen, pioneer, Green Mountain Boy, Revolutionary War officer. Author Glenn Fay Jr. clearly enjoyed doing his research and writes about Allen with great enthusiasm. He once lived on Allen’s property and tells readers, “I swam on his beach, walked his paths and imagined his tavern next door” (p. 15).

Ebenezer may be best known in traditional accounts for Ethan Allen’s visit to his home in South Hero for a load of hay. Ethan, Ebenezer, and other Green Mountain Boys “swapped old war stories, and some drank into the wee hours” (p. 134). In the early morning on the way home, Ethan suffered a stroke and died a few days later.

In too many histories of Vermont, Ebenezer only appears as Ethan and

Ira's cousin, as if he was little more than an adjunct to the famous Allens. In fact, Ebenezer was a third cousin and his own man. Fay writes in his relaxed style, Ebenezer "arguably recorded more military and public service accomplishments than Ethan, and he managed to make an honest living and leave life with a full piggy bank" (p. 21).

Born in Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1743 and baptized by Rev. Jonathan Edwards, Ebenezer was an early and active Green Mountain Boy. He was a founder and settler of Poultney in 1771, Tinmouth in 1774, and South Hero in 1782. He was a member of the expedition that seized Ticonderoga, and he served as a lieutenant in Seth Warner's regiment during the invasion of Canada in the fall of 1775. He was first captain in Samuel Herrick's Rangers. His actions at the Battle of Bennington helped to assure the American victory. During John Brown's raid on British-held Ticonderoga in September 1777, he seized the outpost atop Mount Defiance overlooking the forts on the lake. Later in the fall, as the British retreated to Canada, Allen captured an enslaved woman, Dinah Mattis, and her child and set them free: "I being conscientious that it is not right in the sight of God to keep slaves" (p. 96). It was a ringing declaration in a war for liberty that seldom extended human rights to Blacks.

In the confusing years from 1778 through 1780, Major Ebenezer Allen was the most active Vermont officer on the northern frontier. As a tavern owner in South Hero, he hosted Prince Edward Augustus, Duke of Kent and future father of Queen Victoria, and his mistress. From 1800 until his death in 1806, he was a tavern keeper in Burlington.

There are tall tales about Ebenezer. Once after the war, he was challenged to a duel by a British officer in Canada. Under the rules of affairs of honor, Ebenezer could name the time and place. He was said to reply, "Here as we now sit! I will take your pistol in my mouth, and you shall take mine in yours, and we will both fire at the word of command, by the Jeez!" (p. 67).

Readers will be intrigued by questions that Fay raises. Was the killing of Loyalist John Irish of Tinmouth by Ebenezer Allen and Isaac Clark murder or an unfortunate consequence of war? What happened to Dinah Mattis and her daughter Nancy after they were freed by Ebenezer? What really occurred in a confusing incident in which a man named John Gregg or Griggs reportedly drowned while under arrest and in Allen's custody? Fay comments, "This story is a conspiracy theorist's gold mine" (p. 144).

Fay's admiration for Allen occasionally leads him to exaggeration. He insists that Ebenezer, as a devout Calvinist, "kept his lingo clean" (p. 26). But Lemuel Roberts, whose memoir was published by Anthony Haswell in Bennington in 1809, remembered his friend as a "profane man" (*Memoirs of Captain Lemuel Roberts*, p. 9). As noteworthy as the freeing of

Dinah Mattis was, Ebenezer was not “the first White man known to publicly emancipate enslaved people in the American colonies” (p. 23).

Fay’s biography is written for those who are largely unfamiliar with the people and events being discussed. Longtime readers of Vermont and Revolutionary War history may find themselves wanting more specifics. At times Fay could have pursued his research further and found sources that contradict his account or add interesting shadings. The disagreements between Ethan and Ebenezer might have been explored in greater depth. Although often perplexing, the topic sheds light on both men and on Vermont’s negotiations with the British in Canada.

Fay realizes that there is more work to be done. After raising several issues, he ends the book with the comment, “Hopefully, this biography will help renew interest in [Ebenezer] Allen and inspire deeper research to answer these questions and more” (p. 154).

ENNIS DULING

Ennis Duling of East Poultney has written about Vermont and the American Revolution for Vermont History, Historical New Hampshire, and the Journal of the American Revolution. He is the author of Thirteen Charges Against Benedict Arnold, published in the summer of 2021.

Vermont Heritage: Essays on Green Mountain History; 1770-1920

By H. Nicholas Muller III and J. Kevin Graffagnino; edited by Kristin Peterson-Ishaq (Burlington, VT: University of Vermont, The Center for Research on Vermont, 2020, pp. xx, 404, cloth \$50.00).

Vermont has been blessed with many talented historians and historiographers throughout the centuries, up to and including the present. Among the best are H. Nicholas Muller III and J. Kevin Graffagnino, whose new collaboration places a fitting bow on two remarkable careers.

Vermont Heritage is a “Best of Nick and Kevin,” a compilation of a sampling of their essays on topics and people who have defined our state’s illustrious history. This is hardly a forced marriage, as these authors have worked together professionally and collaborated on numerous volumes over the years.

The book begins with each writer’s brief autobiography, interwoven to reinforce their long association. They met at the University of Vermont (UVM), when Nick was a young history professor and Kevin an even younger undergraduate student. After earning his master’s degree in history, Kevin worked for his alma mater for seventeen years at the Special

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Collections Department at the Bailey/Howe Library, concluding his tour of duty in the mid-1990s. In a decision that struck many of us as inexplicable, the university declined to appoint him to a faculty position in the History Department, so he followed the advice of Vermonter (briefly) Horace Greeley and went west.

Despite his (and our) disappointment at the time, it may have worked out for the better. Kevin's career converged with that of his mentor, Nick, and neither lost his love for or touch with the state that gave him his start. They both had opportunities to experience life and history beyond our borders, no doubt broadening their horizons and, by extension, ours.

While I became acquainted with Kevin during his tenure at UVM, I had met Nick earlier, as he recounts in the introduction. The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tim O'Connor, appointed me to a vacancy in a legislative slot on the state's Bicentennial Commission. It was a privilege to help plan Vermont's celebration of our nation's 200th birthday and to serve with a distinguished company of Vermonters, among them Commissioner Muller. Though his professional life was nomadic, he maintained his connections to the Vermont Historical Society (VHS) and other local entities, through which I encountered him regularly.

I confess to my role as a co-conspirator in the successful effort to lure Kevin home to assume the role of executive director at the VHS. After the acquisition of the new headquarters building in Barre, its finances were strained, but Kevin's Rolodex and powers of persuasion paved the way for a more sustainable future; its budget is now, at long last, in the black, under the able stewardship of Executive Director Steve Perkins. The authors present a strong case for the value of the Vermont Historical Society and the Center for Research on Vermont at UVM, institutions that, I'd be remiss not to note, always benefit from additional voluntary support.

One might be tempted to characterize the relationship between these gentlemen as akin to that of Socrates and Plato. Unlike Socrates, however, Nick wrote plenty and, together with Kevin, offers in *Vermont Heritage* a sumptuous presentation of selected essays.

The offerings they've chosen relate to historical events and personages of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. You'll learn about Vermont's historians of the past, the likes of Samuel Williams, Hiland Hall, Abby Maria Hemenway, and John Spargo; you'll read of Charles Phelps, who did his best to ensure that the new state would never survive; you'll enjoy accounts of the Ejectment Trials, the Dresden Press, and Vermont's contributions to the nation. The book offers insights into Vermont's path to statehood, its role in the War of 1812, and Zadock Thompson, "the pre-eminent nineteenth-century student of Vermont," in Kevin's words (p. 305).

Spoiler alert: Nick and Kevin are not fans of Vermont's iconic founders, Ira and Ethan Allen, a view that has permeated their scholarship for some time. Just what were those rascals up to when they engaged in the Haldimand Negotiations?

These two writers have demonstrated once again the unique features of the Green Mountain State's history, its richness and its value to the place that we call home (except Nick, who can at least see Vermont from his house). I hope that this isn't their valedictory; such fertile and experienced minds ought to be encouraged to continue to explore and present Vermont's storied past for as long as possible. Rather, *Vermont Heritage* serves as an enlightening milepost along their journey.

JAMES H. DOUGLAS

James H. Douglas served as Governor of Vermont from 2003 to 2011. He is the author of The Vermont Way: A Republican Governor Leads America's Most Liberal State (2014).

Hidden History of Franklin County, Vermont

By Jason Barney (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2021, pp. 160, paper, \$21.99).

As a unit of historical interest, the county in Vermont is perhaps less significant today than it was in the nineteenth century. People's horizons are broader, travel is easier, and commercial activity tends to reach well beyond the dozen or so communities anchored to a shire town. Yet Jason Barney makes a good case that some counties retain a unique character worthy of historical treatment. In his *Hidden History of Franklin County, Vermont*, divided into twenty short, topical chapters, Barney gives somewhat cursory service to the schools, churches, and other institutions to which earlier county histories devoted much attention. Most of the chapters deal with topics of special significance, from the purely local (such as the disastrous Swanton fire of 1970) to the international (such as the uneasy settlement of Loyalists along the poorly defined Canadian border after the Revolutionary War and the construction of Cold War military sites in Swanton and St. Albans). All of this, the author admits in his introduction, falls far short of completeness, yet as an instrument to intrigue and entertain the casual reader, his approach works well.

A teacher at Missisquoi Valley Union High School and native of Franklin County, Barney is a former state representative and currently the president of the Swanton Historical Society. His devotion to making history meaningful to ordinary people shines through the *Hidden History*. The roughly chronological arrangement of chapters ties local events

to the bigger picture, as in the chapter on Prohibition. Although Barney presents the story of alcohol enforcement efforts along Franklin County's international border as a series of anecdotes (mostly gleaned from the local newspapers), he notes that it was the county's proximity to Montreal, Boston, and New York that made it a smuggling hotspot. Still hidden, he writes, is the extent to which organized crime syndicates were involved in Vermont's border smuggling, as well as the quantity of liquor that passed through undetected.

The penultimate chapter, on Franklin County's communes in the 1960s and 1970s, is the only one in which Barney relies to some extent on personal interviews in addition to published accounts (a bit more of the firsthand experience would have been welcome in this and several other chapters). Many of the young newcomers to Franklin County worked hard to build lives on hardscrabble farms, and many stayed, contributing to their communities as teachers, social workers, and artisans. The reception of these newcomers with their alternative lifestyles was (as elsewhere) mixed. Much to his credit, Barney does not gloss over one of the darkest moments of this era, when dozens of young "members of the counterculture" in Franklin County were framed for drug crimes by undercover narcotics detective Paul Lawrence. The drug arrests seemed to confirm the worst suspicions of those who were intolerant of the counterculture. With Lawrence's eventual conviction on perjury charges, Barney writes, "the small-town bias against the hippies had been embarrassingly exposed" (p. 127).

Well illustrated, with endnotes and a useful bibliography, *Hidden History of Franklin County* is one of a series of "hidden history" titles published by Arcadia Press under the History Press imprint. Overall, these histories are perhaps less hidden than they are marginal. But it is in the margins, after all, that ordinary people experience the important events of their times, and draw meaning from them. In a recent New American History blogpost, historian Ed Ayers writes, "Just as all history is local, so is all history regional, national, and international. Every county is unique, but every county is part of a pattern" (<https://medium.com/new-american-history/all-history-is-local-be096696291b>). Jason Barney helps to establish this contextual perspective on Franklin County history in a very readable and enjoyable volume.

JEFFREY D. MARSHALL

Jeffrey D. Marshall is a special collections librarian and former director of the Silver Special Collections Library at the University of Vermont. He is the author of A War of the People: Vermont Civil War Letters (1999) and The Inquest (2006).

*By the Wand of Some Magician: Embracing
Modernity in Mid-Nineteenth Century Vermont*

By Gary G. Shattuck (Amherst, MA: White River Press; Burlington: University of Vermont Center for Research on Vermont, 2020, pp. 439, paper, \$25.00).

Gary Shattuck's new book is a prodigiously researched account of Vermont in the 1850s. This is something of a forgotten decade in Vermont history. Some major works on antebellum Vermont end in 1850, while other historians simply note that the decade saw "stagnant growth" in the state's population, and then quickly move on (p. 26). By contrast, Shattuck depicts the 1850s as a pivotal decade in Vermont's history, when its people and government had to confront "modernity," and especially the public health challenges that came with it.

To frame the book, Shattuck cleverly uses the 1857 legislative debates over whether to move the capitol to a new location, after the existing building in Montpelier suffered a devastating fire. Those debates reveal how fundamentally the arrival of railroads changed the state. The railroad altered Vermont's sectional dynamics and made new places, namely Rutland, contenders to be the new capitol site. Chapter two takes us back to the 1840s and narrates the legislature's decision to charter two railroad corporations, Rutland's rise as a result, and the legislature's failure to regulate railroads in the 1850s. Shattuck carries the latter theme into chapter three, which examines growing conflict about railroads and social divisions that developed around them. Chapter four focuses on scientific agricultural improvement and the significance of hay to Vermont's economy. It is an important subject, but the least integrated into the overall narrative.

In chapter five, Shattuck picks up the main thread of his story about the challenges that modernization posed and the legislature's failures to reckon with them. Vermonters imagined that trains could swiftly bring disease from cities into their rural communities. Railroad work was dangerous, and brakemen died terrible deaths all too frequently. Workers took to alcohol, which fueled a new, and this time successful, round of temperance reform. Prohibition became state law in 1853. Disease and ill-health was also a major concern, independent of the railroads, as deaths from consumption spiked. Shattuck indicts the legislature for their failure to regulate the medical profession and to provide for Vermont's public health generally. It neither enforced prohibition nor responded to the simultaneous opiate epidemic (the subject of Shattuck's previous book). The legislature intervened to protect Vermonters' health only in the most ineffectual of ways, relying on

school district commissioners to collect health information. All the while, legislators “dismissed the assessments of knowledgeable medical men” from the Vermont Medical Society (p. 227).

Shattuck turns next to the rise of infanticide and increased clamor about “criminal abortions.” For Shattuck, this was symptomatic of how the “technological and capitalist-driven modernity of the 1850s succeeded so completely it overwhelmed a complacent, farmer-oriented legislature hesitant to intrude into [Vermonters’] private lives” (p. 231). The final chapter ties up the debate over the capitol site. Here, Shattuck reinforces the argument that Vermont let down its most vulnerable citizens. He then gestures ahead to important future reforms, namely an 1874 requirement that doctors receive state licensure.

Shattuck marshals a stunning amount of detail, but how it all supports his larger arguments could be clearer. For one thing, modernity is the overriding theme of the book, but Shattuck never defines it. Modernity seems to stand in for whatever happened after the railroad arrived, for better and especially for worse. Shattuck writes that “legislators first noted the effects of modernity with alarm” in 1851, when they realized how much state funding went to the justice system. They chalked up these expenditures to the railroad and Irish immigration. Yet Shattuck also says that concerns over reproductive health emerged because of modernity, but the issue already consumed the Vermont Medical Society’s attention during the 1840s, and Vermont passed its abortion law in 1846. By that point, the legislature had only just chartered the railroads, which were still being built. Was the railroad symptom or cause of modernization?

Shattuck’s other big argument, that legislative complacency led to Vermonters’ ill health amid modernization, also seems too simple. Legislators, of course, represented constituents. Shattuck avers that the legislators hesitated “to intrude into the lives of resistant residents who persisted in their pursuit of Jacksonian independence” (p. 208), a faith “that the ‘common man’ possessed the innate ability to care for himself” (p. 184). In other words, Jacksonianism undercut deference to medical professionals and disincentivized public health legislation. Again, Shattuck does not explicitly define his terms. “Jacksonian” seems to stand in for the small-government, anti-expert, “libertarian” (p. 42) philosophy of Andrew Jackson and his Democratic Party. This is puzzling. Vermont exorcised Jacksonian politics more completely than any other state, and did so by 1850.

That takes us to a bigger issue: Vermont’s Democratic Party was the first casualty of the state’s widespread acceptance of antislavery politics, a subject Shattuck mostly avoids. But that political transformation seems relevant to explaining the state’s lackluster response to the chal-

lenges that Shattuck so evocatively narrates. Perhaps those issues were just not front of mind for many Vermonters *because* they were consumed by the politics of slavery. It is an old chestnut among social historians that the coming Civil War “sidetracked”—to use Alan Dawley’s phrase from his Bancroft Prize winning book, *Class and Community* (1976, p. 238)—many northern communities from confronting local problems. Randolph Roth offered a version of this argument for Vermont in *The Democratic Dilemma* (1987, p. 294). This seems like a more plausible explanation of Vermont’s failure to manage the challenges of “modernization” and public health than the ideology of a dead (Jacksonian) political movement.

By the Wand of Some Magician falls short, then, of entirely reorienting the historiography of mid-nineteenth century Vermont. Nevertheless, Gary Shattuck’s doggedly researched, if episodic, ethnography leaves no doubt that the 1850s was a difficult and disorienting decade for Vermonters. All historians of nineteenth-century Vermont must read this book.

MARK BOONSHOFT

Mark Boonshoft is the author of Aristocratic Education and the Making of the American Republic (University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

Vermont’s Woodstock Railroad

By Frank J. Barrett Jr. (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2021, pp. 171, paper, \$21.99).

Taken as a whole *Vermont’s Woodstock Railroad* is a worthy successor to Edgar Mead’s thin 1967 book, *Over the Hills to Woodstock*, about the same rail line. Like its introduction, most of Mr. Barrett’s book is well written, creative, and full of warm personal remembrances, indicating the author’s personal knowledge about his subject. Sadly, for this reader, the first two chapters were wordy and disappointing.

Chapter One begins with Woodstock’s colonial past. It continues, at length, with the local region’s transportation history until 1849, when Vermont’s first railroad, the Vermont Central, reached the neighboring town of Hartford. Following this is the sixteen-year story of the town’s mostly fruitless struggle to obtain, and then successfully act on, an initial legislative charter for a rail connection with the Vermont Central. Unfortunately, a mixture of verbose Victorian hyperbolic newspaper promotional prose and the legalistic language found in early legislative railroad charters made for rather dull reading.

Happily, the chapter ends on an informative note with a collection of

mini-biographies about the less well-known members of the first board of directors. These are refreshing in a genre in which one seldom sees biographical information for anyone other than railroad presidents.

The second chapter describes some efforts by Portland, Maine, to use railroads to funnel European-bound traffic from Montreal and the Great Lakes to its year-round deep-water port. One proposal was a possible extension of the Woodstock westward to Rutland, as part of a speculative trunk line from Portland to Chicago. Doomed by the topography of Vermont's intervening mountains, the idea never aroused much interest. This reader wondered why this chapter was necessary at all.

Finally, early in the third chapter the author regains his footing and his writing improves. An 1847 legislative charter promoted some preliminary surveying work documented by Hosea Doton. Creator of the 1856 map of Windsor County, Doton was a major mid-nineteenth-century, upper Connecticut River Valley technical luminary. The author does his readers a service by including a long biographical paragraph about him.

Functioning as the chief supervising engineer, Doton was a constant force during the construction of the railroad from its preliminary survey until its last spike was driven. When the 1847 charter expired fifteen years later, a willing legislature granted a second charter in 1863. It took three years, but the new board of directors hired Doton again, this time to identify the most feasible routes between Woodstock and White River Junction. At this point Barrett's pen is up to track speed and the rest of his tale has all the zest and enthusiasm that he demonstrated in the introduction. He details the cautious negotiations with the original contractor and the excitement during the early years of construction. The suffocating paralysis that followed early in 1870, when both the contractor and the railroad ran out of money, is palpable. Work was joyfully restarted in July 1874 and about a year later the glorious bridge across Quechee Gorge was completed. Scheduled operations began September 29, 1875.

The railroad was an almost instant success. And to its benefit, Woodstock became a celebrity destination during prosperous times around the turn of the twentieth century. For many years the railroad paid generous dividends to its shareholders.

Trite but nonetheless still true, all good things come to an end. After World War I, automobile and truck traffic began to impact the railroad's balance sheet. On April 15, 1933, the Woodstock Railroad ran its last train—a sad event for the town and all those involved with the railroad. This is well handled by the author. One can feel the sweet sadness of those last days in the book's pages.

Despite this reviewer's problems with the early chapters, most of the book is a story well told. Chapter Four has maps showing the trackage in

each village plus an abundance of photographs. For those not steeped in the history of railroads, there are rudimentary histories of civil engineering, bridge building, and the growth of the national highway system. The only reason to quibble with anything in the book's last three chapters is Barrett's account of the fire of 1930 that destroyed three of the railroad's four passenger cars. Curiosity cries out for details of this mishap.

Once Barrett gets into his subject, he succeeds with his amplified version of Mead's slim 52-page book. Although at times wordy, *Vermont's Woodstock Railroad* is a satisfying read.

GERALD B. FOX

Gerald B. Fox is an independent researcher interested in Vermont's industrial and railroad history. He lives in Essex, VT, and is co-chair of the Essex Community Historical Society's collections committee.

A Lawyer's Life to Live: A Memoir

By Kimberly B. Cheney (Montpelier, VT: Rootstock Publishing, 2021, pp. x, 249, paper, \$16.95).

A Lawyer's Life to Live by Kimberly Cheney goes far beyond times remembered and events experienced. It's really a history, an inside look at many important political and social events that occurred in Vermont over the last fifty years. The spice of memoir Cheney adds is his great desire to understand how he became the person he is amidst all this. His writing is direct and honest, and he does not recoil from admissions of failures along with successes.

Formed by a family background of privilege, educated at St. Paul's School in Concord, NH, and Yale, steered by skills and habits learned in the Navy, and connected to people who pointed him to Vermont and helped him land his first job here, Kim (as he is usually known) Cheney led the life he said his parents had set for him—to be smart, skillful, and tough of mind so he could succeed “in a male-dominated world” (p. 15).

A number of opportunities Cheney pursued were created by circumstances of the time, often political. His first Vermont job was at the state Department of Education. He held a new position, in-house attorney, created largely as the result of school reform efforts pursued by the progressive Democratic governor of the 1960s, Phillip Hoff. The state's education laws were a jumble of poorly written statutes. Cheney was told to clean them up, which he did through a major revamping of Title 16 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated. Years later, Cheney still considers the education law clean-up one of his major achievements, delighting in

quoting a former education commissioner who said she “really enjoyed reading Title 16, because unlike most laws, it was clear and easy to follow” (p. 49).

In many ways, that first position created a pattern for Cheney’s work that carried through his long legal career in Vermont. Seizing an opportunity before him, Cheney applied his significant intellectual and legal skills and developed a path forward through whatever complicated issue he encountered: teachers’ right to strike, child custody and support determinations, adoption laws, divorce laws, and access to public records. Even if you haven’t known Kim Cheney personally, you have almost certainly been affected by any of a number of laws, procedures, or protocols he wrote or shaped.

His political successes came quickly. A new opportunity was created by yet another reform pushed by Hoff—professionalization of the office of county prosecutors. State’s attorneys’ jobs were made full time in 1968, moving away from private attorneys picking up the work part time. Cheney decided to run for Washington County state’s attorney and won election handily.

Four years as state’s attorney was like a ropes course on criminal law. He had to deal with shoplifters, check forgers, drunks, burglars, and a growing drug scene. A spate of murders in Washington County “generated statewide publicity” for him (p. 126). And just like that, another opportunity appeared—the office of state attorney general. The incumbent, Jim Jeffords, was aiming for higher office. Cheney, running as a Republican, emerged from a three-way primary with 36 percent of the vote, the highest share of any of the candidates and enough to win the primary. In the general election, Cheney won 58 percent of the vote, a safe margin over his Democratic opponent. Thirty-six years old, Cheney was a rising star.

Then his luck in politics changed. He became a victim of the Paul Lawrence affair, unable to act quickly in stopping and unmasking a crooked cop who had set up numerous young people for fake drug buys. Lawrence’s undoing came through a sting operation organized by Chittenden County State’s Attorney Patrick Leahy and carried out by the Burlington Police Department. For Leahy, the prize was election in 1974 to a U.S. Senate seat he still holds. For Cheney, the punishment was losing his attorney general reelection bid to Democrat Jerome Diamond (by 571 votes).

Cheney writes that his “sense of self-worth temporarily evaporated” after that loss (p. 195). He would not hold elected office again. He went into private practice, where he remained the rest of his professional life. His legal work may not have been as “center stage” as before, but he became more grounded in the lives of everyday people and their everyday

problems. He himself went through two divorces and is now married a third time. His children are clearly dear to him.

Cheney's life was defined by his work. We see the man largely through this lens. There were stumbles that clearly hurt his career; his disappointments were based mostly on naïveté or the deceptive actions of others (as in the Lawrence case), and only rarely because of lack of his own intelligence. He strove to live life to the fullest. Vermont is a better place for the work Cheney did during his professional life and for the stories he tells in *A Lawyer's Life to Live*.

ALLEN GILBERT

Allen Gilbert has been a journalist, teacher, and executive director of the ACLU-VT. He is the author of Equal Is Equal, Fair Is Fair: Vermont's Quest for Equity in Education Funding, Same-Sex Marriage, and Health Care (2020).

Small Town Rep.: My Personal and Political Journey to and through Vermont's State House

By Dave Larsen (Manchester, VT: Shires Press, 2018, pp xii, 672, paper, \$26.95).

A point of pride for many Vermonters is its “citizen legislature,” the General Assembly that draws individuals from all walks of life to join the 150-member house and the 30-member senate. Like Vermont town meeting, the General Assembly, populated and directed by “regular people,” looms large in fact and imagination in Vermont culture and history.

Author Dave Larsen, in his 684-page memoir, *Small Town Rep.*, self-effacingly shares his singular but representative experience: “I am merely one of the many hundreds of rank-and-file Vermont lawmakers who have cycled through the halls of Vermont's State House during the past two centuries” (p. ii).

Larsen moves quickly through his early life. By age twenty-four he's discovered his life-long vocation as a public school teacher of social studies in Wilmington, Vermont. There, his interest in local politics emerges, including becoming a justice of the peace, and by age thirty-nine, Larsen's appetite for politics motivates him to run for the Vermont House of Representatives, where he served from 1987 to 1997.

In an amiable and energetic fashion, Larsen leads us on a tour of the myriad aspects of his legislative life, beginning with his sweat-equity-funded door-to-door campaign and post-victory legislator orientation through a deep immersion in the people, politics, and process of serving as a lawmaker during the State House sessions, which generally span from January through May. Larsen provides “accounts of my involvement in a

variety of bills and the minutiae of my daily legislative routines, the exhilarating and the mundane, the stimulating and the boring, and everything in between” (p. ii).

In addition, the author also addresses the less often discussed but essential role as a representative back home, where he works year-round with individual constituents, school boards, selectboards, and many other organizations to be responsive to their concerns and needs as well as to share with them what’s going on in Montpelier.

And finally, Larsen provides a view of the challenges of maintaining a nonlegislative job while also serving. While Larsen is able to gain an annual leave of absence from his middle-school teaching job throughout his time in office, he is such a motivated teacher that he never steps entirely out of the classroom, even during sessions. It’s a juggling act that he masters, though not without some personal wear and tear.

The book is chronologically organized, and its core consists of ten chapters, one per legislative session. Larsen provides both a broad-brush picture of the entire session and a more detailed portrait of committee work in education, Larsen’s clear passion.

Larsen served his first eight years on the House Education Committee (including four as vicechair and two as chair), and his final term on Appropriations, where he was responsible for the education portions of the budget. Larsen’s work reveals just how evergreen education issues are. Contemporary readers will find the discussions of the 1980s and ’90s highly familiar: equity in education quality; education funding, including the tension between local and state-level taxation; “weighting” (the funding formula’s budgeting to account for the variations in teaching costs for students of differing circumstances and grade levels); teacher contracts and strikes; student and teacher evaluations; and even the appropriation practices underlying current-day pension challenges.

Larsen arrived the year that Governor Madeleine Kunin introduced the Vermont Foundation Plan, to replace the existing Morse-Giuliani education finance plan, which was faulted by some for doing too little to ensure an equitable education funded by equitable taxation throughout the state. In fact, the hardworking Larsen’s entire decade in the house is dedicated to working to create such balance and equity, and the foundation plan remains center stage: first at the root of debates and struggles to pass this legislation, and subsequently to amend its policy, programming, and funding components.

A particular highlight is Larsen’s recounting of the effort led by Speaker Ralph Wright, with the support of Governor Howard Dean, to create a statewide teachers’ contract and a more diversified statewide education funding strategy using, in part, the income tax. While this “radical” solution eventually fails, it is an instructive tale.

As the author also notes, only a month after he left the legislature in 1997, the Vermont Supreme Court, in *Brigham v. State*, handed down a decision compelling further work on educational equity for students and school funding:

In this appeal, we decide that the current system for funding public education in Vermont, with its substantial dependence on local property taxes and resultant wide disparities in revenues available to local school districts, deprives children of an equal educational opportunity in violation of the Vermont Constitution. . . . [T]he Court's duty today is solely to define the impact of the State Constitution on educational funding, not to fashion and impose a solution. *The remedy at this juncture properly lies with the Legislature* (*Brigham v. State*, 166 Vt. 246 (1997); quoted at <https://law.justia.com/cases/vermont/supreme-court/1997/96-502op.html>; emphasis added).

Though Larsen's service ended more than twenty years ago, many of the same issues are still being discussed, debated, and legislated.

Leavening the more dense discussion of legislative details, such as committee action and bill development, are innumerable vignettes that provide a window into the nature of interacting with the other 179 members of the legislative "family." And just as in our own families, much of what happens is based on relationships. Readers may be surprised, perhaps pleasantly so, to see the relatively modest role that partisanship plays in the legislature's work.

The book may frustrate more scholarly readers looking to it for a fuller contemporaneous record of legislative history, because the author has chosen—through the use of pseudonyms and anonymity—to avoid revealing the names of his colleagues, other than the state's six constitutional officers (governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, treasurer, auditor, and attorney general). This decision, while showing kind discretion, occasionally makes the recounting less vivid. Understandably, given this choice, the book has no index. In addition, the book includes no photographs, also a regrettable omission because of their value to convey the spirit of the times and places. All that said, the author does not spare himself close inspection, and he is unafraid to share with his readers not just his successes but also his gaffes and foibles.

The strength of *Small Town Rep.* is accurately reflected in the book's subtitle: "my personal journey to and through Vermont's State House." Dave Larsen, a natural storyteller, shares his own experience, but in such a way that readers will come away with a heightened understanding of the workings of, and possibly an appreciation for, the Vermont General Assembly. There is much to enjoy in this book, for citizen and legislator alike.

CHRISTOPHER A. BRAY

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