

# VERMONT HISTORY

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- ❖ *"Among the Mountains and Valleys of Vermont": The Life of Eri L. Barr, Religious Pioneer*  
By Benjamin Baker

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## About the Covers

### Leahy Commemorative Dish, 1974

As our longest-serving US Senator, Patrick Leahy has become a household name in Vermont. With an active career spanning the presidencies of Gerald Ford through Joe Biden, many are familiar with his accomplishments. What may have been forgotten, however, is the significance and surprise of his initial election.



The election of 1974—“the one that really, really counted,” Leahy recalled to Vermont Historical Society Librarian, Paul Carnahan—did not look promising for the future Senator. At thirty-four, he was younger than anyone Vermont had ever elected to the Senate, and a Democrat had not represented Vermont in the US Senate since before the Civil War. However, the Watergate Scandal that resulted in President Richard Nixon’s resignation set the national stage for a shift in power between political parties.

On the local stage, things did not look promising for Leahy’s campaign. Not only was Leahy’s base of support limited to the Burlington area, but a well-publicized Chittenden County poll also showed Leahy trailing his main opponent, Richard Mallary, who was an established politician, by a significant margin. Leahy maintained confidence with the media, despite the election seemingly being called before voting even began. However, in an upset so surprising that leading local Democrats actually chided Leahy for it, he decisively won the state.

This commemorative coaster tray, one of the Vermont Historical Society’s newest acquisitions, came out of that surprising win. During the course of his campaign, Leahy held a fundraiser at the house of David and Gloria Gil, owners (and designers) of Bennington Potters. In December, after his momentous victory, the pair presented him with a box of the dishes celebrating his win.



The trays, or plates, are glazed with the Leahy campaign's official shade of blue. (Rather than being chosen by focus group, the shade was picked because it was, and still is, Leahy's favorite.) The molded design of Leahy's name in raised letters radiating from the central year effectively illustrates the excitement his victory caused in his supporters. The reverse is impressed with the inscription, "Commemorating Vermont's First Democratic Senator Elected November 5, 1974." The name of the company, Bennington Potters, is also impressed onto the back, but spacing required dropping a letter to the next line, clearly showing it was given second priority compared to the celebration of Leahy's win.

After receiving the trays, Leahy stopped by the pottery to personally thank the workers for making them. He distributed a number of these trays to his supporters, with this one going to John Carnahan of Brattleboro. He did, however, keep at least one of the trays for himself and told the Vermont Historical Society that he still uses one on his desk in the US Capitol as a coaster for his daily coffee, right under framed copies of the headlines, "Poll Dooms Leahy" and "Leahy Unexpectedly Wins."

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*Front cover: Leahy Commemorative dish, 1974, obverse. Ceramic, Bennington Potters, 1974; diameter: 4 3/4 inches. The year 1975 marks the beginning of Senator Leahy's first term in office.*

*Back cover: Leahy Commemorative dish, 1974, reverse.*



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