

# IN MEMORIAM

---



NEIL R. STOUT

*1932–2023*

Neil R. Stout, a professor of history at the University of Vermont for nearly forty years, died at his home in Hardwick, Vermont, on February 3, 2023, six months after his ninetieth birthday.

Born in 1932, Neil grew up on a small family farm near Lowell, Ohio, that had no electricity or indoor plumbing until 1945 and no telephone until 1963. He learned to drive a tractor at age nine, barely wore shoes except in school and church, and learned organizational skills in 4-H and the Junior Grange. Having no brothers to play with, he believed he was never as good at team sports as a lean farm boy who would grow to be 6' 3" might have been; instead, he became a lifelong bookworm.

At school, Neil excelled in academic and extracurricular activities, including theater, debating, yearbook, and varsity track as a hurdler. In 1950, Harvard College opened its classes to boys from public high schools, and Neil entered on a full academic scholarship. Always fascinated by the American Revolution, he graduated in the Class of 1954 with a degree in history. He joined the army, and spent eighteen months in France, during which he traveled all over Europe. He returned home in 1956, married Marilyn (Mainey) Blumenstiel, a Simmons College

.....

student from Ohio whom he met his first week at Harvard, and begin his graduate work at the University of Wisconsin. He finished his PhD in History in 1961.

After three years at Texas A&M, Neil joined the UVM History Department in 1964 and remained there until 2001. Although he specialized in colonial America, he taught a wide range of courses, helped to found UVM's historic preservation program, and directed the university's program in cultural history and museology.

Neil wrote two books, *The Perfect Crisis: The Beginning of the Revolutionary War*, and *The Royal Navy in America, 1760-1775*, and many articles on topics ranging from Revolutionary War spies to the early history of baseball. His guide for students, *Getting the Most Out of Your U.S. History Course: The History Student's Vade Mecum*, became so popular that a large textbook company bought it and packaged it with history textbooks. His final publication appeared in November 2022, "The Curious Affair of the Horsemwhipped Senator: A Diplomatic Crisis that Didn't Happen" <http://commonplace.online/article/the-curious-affair-of-the-horsemwhipped-senator/>.

Neil served as president of the New England Historical Association, 1979-1980, was editor of *Vermont History*, 1993-1994, and wrote numerous book reviews for this journal and others. In retirement he served on the board of trustees of the Fletcher Free Library in Burlington.

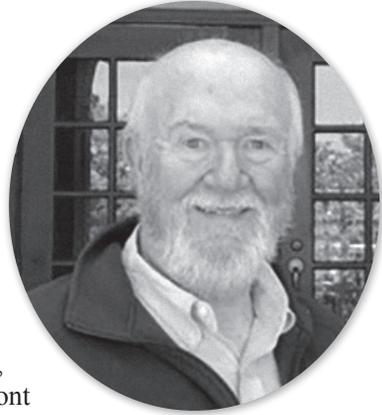
Over his long life, Neil had many interests and passions. Once an avid photographer, he took the iconic picture of his colleague, Sam Hand, holding his pipe in his mouth and emphasizing a point with his jabbing finger. Feeling out of shape in his 40s, Neil started running with a labored lap around the cul-de-sac where he lived. Within a year, he completed a marathon, and he remained an avid runner and biker for two decades. He took up yoga in his 70s and was young at heart till his final days.

Neil was as good a person as I have ever known. While highly educated, broadly read, and well traveled, he remained at heart a friendly, helpful, and generous farm boy who wanted to do the right thing.

ELIZABETH H. DOW

## DAVID ALAN DONATH

1951–2022



Joyful, humorous, optimistic, vibrant, wise, even-keeled, generous, uncompromisingly decent, honest, humble, and a cheerleader of Vermont history are a few of the words with which friends, colleagues, and family describe David Alan Donath. A passionate Vermont historian, nationally recognized museum visionary, and nonprofit leader, David passed away too early at the age of seventy-one on November 25, 2022, at his beloved home on Lake Groton, Vermont. He crammed a lot of living into a short time. Of his many passions, he loved his family above all else.

Although not born in Vermont, David fell deeply in love with this state during his teenage years in Burlington and undergraduate and master's-level years at the University of Vermont. History classes with H. Nicholas Muller, in particular, and working as first mate on the Lake Champlain ferries during his college years planted the seeds for David's love and knowledge of Vermont's rich history.

Brimming with boundless energy, a keen intellect, and enormous curiosity, David leaped into hands-on history preservation and museum work in Wisconsin during graduate work at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, then headed back east with his family to lead the Strawberry Banke Museum in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. There he continued to gain appreciation for the fundamental role of archaeology in filling in the enormous gaps in the historic record. In 1985, Laurence Rockefeller astutely and wisely saw David's potential and recruited the thirty-four-year-old to manage and grow the two-year-old Billings Farm & Museum in Woodstock, Vermont. In 2018, the farm was "ranked among the finest outdoor agricultural museums in the country" (<https://www.vnews.com/Donath-retires-from-Woodstock-Foundation-18528219>). In 1997, David took on the additional role as president of the Woodstock Foundation, owner of the Billings Farm & Museum and operating partner of the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, Vermont's only national park.

David's standard biographical notes do not reflect the extraordinary

.....

contributions he made to the historic preservation, museum, and non-profit arenas. As his wife Cathy Donath put it, David was interested in everything, curious about everything. Together with his enormous energy and intellect, these traits found him sitting on, and often chairing, a wide range of national and state-wide boards. Into each room he entered, David brought warmth, humor, and a huge smile that served to bring people together and get great work accomplished. He loved stories, he was full of stories, and—a rare gift—he knew their power to bring people together, illustrate ideas, and create community.

A few of us were privileged to have known David from his important but little-known twenty-five years of service on the Vermont Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), established by law in 1975 to help advise the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation across a broad array of legally mandated work. From his seat at the ACHP he passionately championed Vermont's rich and varied historic resources; he had a special love for our threatened historic barns and archaeological resources. Now-retired State Architectural Historian Nancy Boone captured a quick glimpse of David's intellect and exuberance: "As the designated historian on the ACHP his expertise and insights helped illuminate the stories that historic buildings and places tell, especially the stories of everyday life in Vermont. David always reminded us that history belongs to all of us. He savored driving his green [and much beloved!] Mazda Miata top down, when Council meetings were held in far-flung corners of the state, always arriving with excitement about what he had seen on the way." Darlyne Franzen, one of David's closest friends and a colleague of thirty-five years, added, "He was committed to doing the 'right thing,' despite the inconvenience or potential fallout his decisions might cause."

David Donath was a supremely nice and joyous man and maybe that was his greatest gift of all.

The American Association for State and Local History is developing a scholarship in David's name, which will be awarded annually to small historical societies and students in underserved communities majoring in history or museum studies. For further information, please contact [www.aaslh.org](http://www.aaslh.org).

GIOVANNA PEEBLES

*Giovanna Peebles thanks Nancy Boone, Darlyne Franzen, David Lacy, and Kris Peterson-Ishaq for their reflections about David. She is especially grateful to David's widow Cathy for sharing many memories and stories about him.*

PETER BARRANCO AND FRED FAYETTE  
EXPLORERS OF LAKE CHAMPLAIN'S CULTURAL LEGACY



*Peter (left) and Fred next to the RV Neptune, 1991.*

In less than a month, Vermont and Lake Champlain lost two of its most effective and devoted historical researchers: Augustine Peter Barranco Jr. (1937–2023) and Frederick Fayette Jr. (1942–2023). Combined, they contributed more than one hundred years of dedicated effort to document our lake's cultural heritage and share it with the public. Peter and Fred, along with our team members—Pat and Tom Manley, Fred's sister Kathy Baumann, an army of volunteers, nautical archaeologists, student interns, and I—successfully implemented the first “Whole Lake Survey” of the entire bottom of Lake Champlain.

During this multiyear effort, we surveyed 2,954 individual track lines with sonar and traveled over 6,350 miles. I take great pride in observing that Peter plotted every track line and Fred was at the helm of the RV *Neptune* for every mile. This landmark decade-long effort resulted in inventorying a collection of more than 300 shipwrecks on the bottom of Lake Champlain. This includes the Revolutionary War gunboat *Spitfire*, one of the most significant national shipwreck discoveries in modern times.

Our methodology for inventorying the lake with sonar developed another breakthrough: the use of this same data set to capture the lake's bathymetry. Blending these two distinct research tasks, one cultural and the other geophysical, made history. Peter and Fred empowered our oceanog-



The Missing Gunboat Found [Spitfire],  
by marine artist Ernie Haas (1997).  
From a private collection.

raphers, Drs. Pat and Tom Manley, to produce results that exceeded all our initial expectations.

The origins of both Peter's and Fred's love of Lake Champlain came early in life but from different directions. Peter grew up on Long Island and spent summers in the North Country. He met the legendary lake explorer Colonel Lorenzo Hagglund and became his apprentice. Hagglund, himself an accomplished salvage engineer, had previously recovered the gunboat *Philadelphia*, which had fought the British under Benedict Arnold at the pivotal Battle of

Valcour Island in 1776. Peter became a tour guide at the colonel's lakeside property, interpreting *Philadelphia* to the public. In 1954, Peter assisted Colonel Hagglund in the recovery of the remains of the *Vermont I*, the lake's first steamboat.

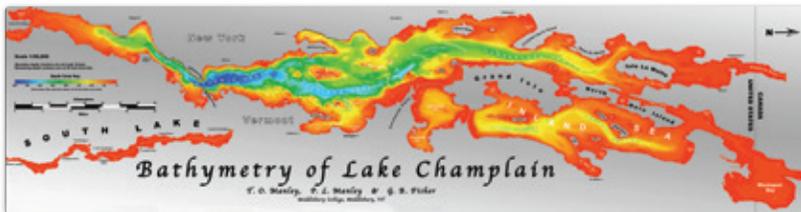
Peter honed his navigation skills working for the US Coast and Geodetic Survey mapping program. He moved to Vermont in 1970 and to Montpelier in 1973, where he and his wife Jane raised their family. A brilliant engineer, Peter became the engineer for Vermont's Dam Safety Program. His passion for Lake Champlain generated an exhaustive database of maritime history and shipwrecks. This encyclopedic archive was donated to the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum to serve future generations of students and lake researchers.

At almost the same time, young Fred, the third of eleven children, was exploring the lake in a small powerboat. Fred was a naturally gifted mariner and mechanic, and Lake Champlain became his passion. This love of the lake found new meaning when Fred Sr., a revered Vermont state senator from Chittenden County, purchased Juniper Island in 1956. The island, just west of Burlington, was a strategic location for the lake's first lighthouse when the Champlain Canal was constructed in 1823, connecting Lake Champlain to the Hudson River.

Fred became the caretaker, steward, and family representative to the island affectionately known as the “Kingdom of Juniper.” When he returned from military service in the elite Naval Air Reconnaissance program, he enrolled at the University of Vermont and became an accomplished ski racer. This began Fred’s decades-long career as a beloved volunteer cross-country coach for the UVM ski program. It was also through skiing that Fred met his future wife, Susan.

Fred was never far from Lake Champlain and in the early 1970s, he and his brother Dave became the proud owners of the Marble Island resort in Mallet’s Bay. It became the base of operations for their expanding lake exploration activities. This talented pair were able to locate several deep-water shipwrecks and invented an underwater camera system that could descend to more than 300 feet. Their pioneering work at deep-water documentation was well ahead of its time.

After years of working together, Fred, Peter, Pat and Tom Manley, Kathy Baumann, and I, responding to the new threat of zebra mussels, initiated the Whole Lake Survey. Peter’s research suggested that a gunboat from Benedict Arnold’s 1776 fleet might still be in Lake Champlain, and we hoped to discover it. On June 6, 1997, our team located the gunboat *Spitfire* intact in the lake’s deep waters. The momentous discovery of the last unaccounted-for American warship from the Battle of Valcour Island was announced to the world by US Senator Patrick Leahy.



Bathymetry of Lake Champlain. *This map of the depth contours of Lake Champlain was created from the sonar data gathered during the Whole Lake Survey. Tom and Pat Manley, G. B. Fisher, and Middlebury College.*

In addition to their technical skills, both Peter and Fred were such wonderful people, devoted to their families and to their quest for knowledge, that it always made the long, complex, and often intense days of survey a joyful experience. Peter’s dedication to research and Fred’s master-mariner skills have made incalculable contributions to Vermont and American history.