

IN MEMORIAM



Michael A. Sherman

1944–2025

Michael Sherman's contributions to Vermont history, first as director of the Vermont Historical Society (1985–1995), later as editor of *Vermont History* (1995–2025) and for forty years as historian and scholar, were, like Michael himself, quietly and thoughtfully insightful and always exemplary.

Michael Sherman was born in the Bronx to a working-class family; his father worked as a bookkeeper for wholesale meat merchants. His intellect was nurtured at the High School of Music and Art in Manhattan, and he earned BA and PhD degrees from the University of Chicago, the latter with a concentration in European Renaissance art history under the tutelage of Hanna Holborn Grey. After working for the Wisconsin Humanities Council, Michael sought to become the director of the VHS in 1985. His selection marked a sharp contrast to that of his immediate predecessor, Wes Cate, a native Vermonter who was self-trained and had a penchant for local and folk history. Michael used to tell the story about his interview with Sam Hand for the directorship of the VHS. At one point Sam asked whether Michael had ever been to Vermont. Relieved by a softball question, Michael enthusiastically said yes, he had visited Fort Ticonderoga. Sam gently suggested that the Fort was in New York. Michael moved to Montpelier with his wife Nancy and two sons.

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What he lacked in his initial understanding of Vermont history, Michael quickly acquired through dedication and intellectual curiosity. But he was not satisfied with treating Vermont history as filiopietistic or antiquarian. He was interested in investigating untapped stories, including the gender, racial, and ethnic history of Vermont. In 1987, Michael assembled an eclectic team—comprising historians, an anthropologist/folklorist, and two media specialists—to create a unique series of fifty-two five-minute oral history programs for radio. These covered lesser-known topics including the Green Mountain Parkway, the Civilian Conservation Corps in Vermont, the Novikoff case, and the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918–19. Michael conducted the initial research and identified interviewees for the latter. The “Green Mountain Chronicles” remains a remarkable and enduring achievement. Later, with Vermont’s bicentennial in 1991, Michael further expanded our understanding of the complex themes of statehood in his edited collection *A More Perfect Union: Vermont Becomes a State, 1777–1816*. So, too, in celebrating the 150th anniversary of VHS, he solicited provocative presentations (and later articles) from young historians Randy Roth, Jeff Potash, and Bill Gilmore. Striving to familiarize Vermonters with their past, Michael oversaw a series of lectures, presented across the state, on topics that included Vermont women, education, and other understudied topics.

With ever-present fiscal demands always nipping at his heels, Michael chose in 1995 to resign his directorship and become editor of the journal *Vermont History*. Once again, Michael’s fervent dedication to encourage and foster new ideas, coupled with his Chicago-engrained insistence that the journal uphold high standards, has rendered the journal an instrument for inspiring and cultivating meaningful scholarship. He also frequently exercised his editing skills in works such as *Vermont State Government Since 1965* (1999), *The Political Legacy of George D. Aiken* (1995), and *Imagining Vermont: Values and Vision for the Future* (2009), to name a few. During these years Michael also served as a professor at the Adult Degree Program of Vermont College, and as dean of academics at Burlington College. In 1996 he began working at Manghis’ Bakery in Montpelier, a passion he followed until shortly before his death; he liked to joke that it was one of the most important “rolls” he ever took on.

But it will be as an historical scholar that Michael should be best remembered. His fascination with discovering and pursuing historical penchants include articles on the Spanish Flu, Civil War hospitals, World War Two conscientious objectors, and Vermont historiography, among others.

In 1995, Michael joined Jeff Potash in imagining a single volume, all-inclusive Vermont history to be funded by a prominent Vermont founda-

tion. Each of them prepared and submitted a sample chapter of Vermont's earliest history, however, the funding source opted not to follow through with the project. Michael remained determined, and four additional chapters were prepared. When Jeff was unable to contribute further, Michael wrote a fourth chapter and solicited his dear friend, Gene Sessions, to write the three remaining chapters. Bringing to bear his editing skills to tie together the three authors' different narrative voices, Michael shepherded *Freedom and Unity: A History of Vermont* to publication in 2004, when it won the Award of Excellence from the American Association for State and Local History. In 2014 Michael received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Center for Research on Vermont at the University of Vermont.

Michael Sherman brought incredible energy, integrity, and wisdom to each and every project he pursued. He was defined by his seriousness, dry wit, and unwavering work ethic and commitment to excellence. Those who had the privilege of working with him knew that he would bring out their best. And it goes without saying that our understanding of the richness and complexity of Vermont history has been significantly advanced by his contributions over the past forty years.

—*With contributions from P. Jeffrey Potash, Marilyn Blackwell, and Gregory Sanford*