GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Newsletter

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Vermont's Tiny Historical Societies Have a Big Mission: Preserving the Past

GHS 1840 Peter Paul House

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From Vermont's Independent Voice
SEVEN DAYS *January 10, 2018*
The original print version of this article was headlined "Time Keepers"

(*Condensed with parenthetical additions relating to Groton Historical Society*)

A movie-ready 19th-century drugstore, a hornet's nest, Pectoral Elixir, an accordion, a wedding dress, a camera that belonged to "Snowflake" Bentley, a quilt made by that lifelong bachelor's mother, (*and Jesse Heath's powder horn from the Revolutionary War.*) What do these items have in common? Each is an artifact tended by one of Vermont's historical societies.

Landgrove (pop. 158) has a historical society. So does Tinmouth (pop. 613). In fact, some 190 Vermont towns have one. Size is no deterrent, clearly, to a community's passion for keeping track of itself.

Typically operating on a shoestring budget and stewarded

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by elders, local historical societies — especially the teensy ones — represent a sort of benign fringe element throughout the state. Their members meet on *first Tuesdays*, third Mondays or fourth Thursdays, but not always; many close down in winter or convene when members are able. Historical societies might be headquartered in former schoolhouses or freight stations; at least one is above a police station. Others have no formal location at all.

Like the hyper-local histories they strive to document and archive, town historical societies often lead a precarious existence, dallying with obscurity in both content and form. Though their patchwork archives may read like non sequiturs, and the rewards of collecting may look slim to outsiders, what's at stake is the very identity and continuity of these communities.

The website for the Londonderry (pop. 1,709) Arts and Historical Society puts it like this: "The mission ... is to be a beacon — helping people understand the rich history and culture of our little town."

Eileen Corcoran is community outreach coordinator at the VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY; it's her job to act as liaison between the state and local organizations. She's known some societies to officially disband, as Brandon's did last year, and others to exist in name only. "Some of them just kind of go dormant," Corcoran said. "They might still technically exist; there might be a tiny bit of money sitting in a bank for a couple of years." Historical societies can also be resurrected: Ripton's re-launched in 2013, as did neighboring Hancock's in 2016.

Corcoran described the smaller groups as "great community-based organizations that are doing the work for VHS in a lot of ways." Of Vermont's nearly 200 groups, 60 to 70 percent have some sort of physical location, she estimated. Volunteers, often senior citizens, run most of them.

"The general demographic of historical societies tends to be an older generation," Corcoran acknowledged. "It's always sort

of been that way." Managing or even participating in a historical society requires "spare time," she added, and that's something young professionals or parents of small children tend to lack. (*Exceptions exist — like Alissa Smith in the Groton Historical Society.*)

Corcoran speculated that the impetus for historical society work comes from "starting to see that kids growing up now don't know or recognize the stuff you grew up with, and wanting to preserve and share some of those [things]." Vermont, she noted, is an "old state," referring to its aging population.

It's rare to see a new historical society form in Vermont, Corcoran added, partly because the state is already saturated with them and partly because the traditional models are "not speaking to newer generations." Nationally, many such groups were established in the mid-1970s and '80s, she said, spurred by the 1976 U.S. Bicentennial and countering the trend of widespread urban renewal.

Corcoran suggested one path to kindling new interest in historical societies: "We do have to start talking about the 20th century as history." For many people, she noted, the Victorian and Civil War eras just don't have a lot of pull. Some are already working this line of thought: In 2017, the Milton Historical Society opened "The History of Racing in Milton," harking back to when the town was a hub for stock-car racing, and Norwich Historical Society mounted the exhibition "Mad for Mid-Century Modern" explaining "The early settlement part and the roots of Vermont are important, too. But what happened after World War II has really contributed to what has made this community what it is today." (*The Groton Historical Society summarized Groton's modern history in the 20th century in their Newsletters from 2001 to 2004, but the last decade – 1991-2000 – has not yet been written. The past Newsletters can be read on the GHS webpage and the first half of the century is included in the revised Groton History: Mr. Glover's Groton.*)

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VHS is encouraging local historical societies to provide information on the 20th century. Last April, they introduced a new venue for sharing the work of such groups, the Local History Gallery at Montpelier's **VERMONT HISTORY MUSEUM**, and invited historical societies statewide to submit an exhibition for consideration. At the end of January, the Chelsea Historical Society will be the first to mount its original show, which examines barns from a historical and artistic perspective. Corcoran said she hopes the new gallery will help mitigate the loss of the Vermont History Expo, a statewide history event that ran from 2000 to 2016.

As we enter a new year, we naturally look — hopefully or with fingers crossed — to the future. But it helps to keep a little historical perspective, too. In this first cover story of 2018, we visit some of the people devoted to cataloging and preserving Vermont's ever-accumulating past.**— *Rachel Elizabeth Jones***

(*The story interviewed members of Waitsfield Historical Society, Jericho Historical Society, Stowe Historical Society, Randolph Historical Society, Norwich Historical Society and Community Center, Enosburgh Historical Society and Tinmouth Historical and Genealogy Society.*)

VHS GRAND REOPENING!

Grand Reopening of the Vermont History Museum is on Saturday, April 29 from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Free Admission to explore and celebrate the renovated museum and the new National Life Gallery featuring the impressive Paul Sample mural, Salute to Vermont.

Once in the exhibit, visitors will experience updated and refreshed content that integrates new scholarship, as well as including important history from the last thirty years. In the center of the exhibit is the new Local History Spotlight Gallery, which will showcase rotating exhibits created by some of Vermont's over 190 local historical societies and museums. You'll also find technology upgrades and a new, interactive "comment wall" that encourages visitors to connect themselves to Vermont's story.

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GROTON BRIDGES LOST IN 1973

The 1973 flood in Groton took out four bridges.

The first was the bridge on 302 over the west branch of the Wells River. Its location was just below the Upper Valley Grill. This was the bridge that forced me to go back to Northfield on my way home from Ohio.

The second bridge was the one over the Keenan Brook on Railroad Street that went to the Edward's family place and Snug Harbor, home of Captain Smith.

The third bridge was on the road to the "Little Italy" location. (In early years it was known as Hanchetteville). In this area the Keenan Brook is joined by the East Brook, coming from the area back of the quarry hole where we used to swim. It is also joined by brooks coming from the back side of Pine Mountain and Whitcher Mountain. The Bridge was at the junction of these four brooks.

The fourth bridge was on the road from 302 over to Little Italy, through the railroad under pass, the abutment of the bridge, crossing the Wells River, was destroyed and not repaired; the actual bridge was removed and used to cross the Wells River for the Snow Mobile Club. The bridge was next to the George Vance place. He lived on the old Legare Farm next to the bridge. Ulric Legare's wife, Della Frost, had a sister, Theresa, who married George Vance. His parents lived on Minard Hill, opposite Alan Gandin. Richard Vance, George's son, cut the trees to clear the land on the Kreis property.

N. Dale Brown February, 2005

GROWING UP IN GROTON

The January weather this year brings back memories of the cold days in the 1930's and 40's; walking to school at 20 below with the wind whistling down the Railroad tracks and the Wells River. Often we walked backwards to keep the wind out of our faces. Sometimes we would find "shortcuts" going up Orange Morrison's driveway past his chicken house and cross the Railroad tracks near the For-All Grain Co. feed store. Then down the road past I. N. Ricker place crossing the Wells River on the old iron bridge and going up through Ray Keenan's yard to the village school. It probably wasn't much shorter, but it gave us a break from walking up past the Railroad Station, Hatch Block and past Charlie Bailey's place and up the Mill road past the old horse sheds where the Methodist Church parishioners used to leave their teams during services. And it always seemed like there was more shelter from the wind.

Cold weather also caused more difficulty starting vehicles. My father depended on his 1929 model A for carrying the mail from the Groton Post Office on one of the four rural mail routes. On really cold nights he used an extension cord with a light bulb under the hood and covered the hood with a horse blanket so the car would start easier in the morning. Sometimes on longer cold spells, he would drain the motor oil at night and put it back warm in the morning. Occasionally he would even remove the battery at night and keep it warm so it would have more power to start the car. Later he bought electric heaters to warm the radiator coolant, an electric dip stick to heat the oil, and a hot plate to keep the battery warm. Antifreeze for the radiator was mostly alcohol and cardboard was used on the lower part of the radiator to keep it from freezing. There was no defroster for the windshield so he installed a small fan on the steering column to blow air on the windshield. Before there was a heater inside the car he used the charcoal heater that he had used in

the sleigh to keep his feet warm. Eventually he purchased a gasoline heater for use inside the car. Putting the window down to deliver the mail into 100 or more mailboxes didn't allow the car to get overheated.

I remember one time walking home from a Juvenile Grange meeting at the Rock Maple Ballroom on a cold still night. Going up Charlie Ricker hill my ears seemed to warm up so I put the flaps on my hat up so they would cool off. When I reached home and hit the warm air inside the house, I realized my ears had been frost bitten, and the pain was terrific. I had to put ice water on them and let them warm up gradually to help ease the pain. Although I had my ears, nose, fingers and toes cold many times, this was the only time I remember getting anything frozen and it was painful.

I don't believe we ever missed school for cold weather, that was just normal winter conditions. We wore our winter underwear, woolen clothes, heavy coats, boots with wool socks, hats with ear flaps, scarfs and mittens. In those days we didn't have to worry about being too hot in school, and if we hadn't been dressed for the cold, we probably would have been cold.

Traveling in the winter was more difficult then and we didn't often venture very far from home. I remember the first sleds we got for Christmas in 1933. Our driveway went up to the second floor of our barn where we stored our car in those days, so we took advantage of that for sliding. This was near the end of a transition period from horse drawn vehicles to motor vehicles and we didn't have a garage. We used to ski cross-country in Orange Morrison's field next door with its rolling topography. Water would freeze in the low spots and we cleared the snow from the ice for skating. Our skates were the clamp on type that attached to our boots so we had minimum ankle support and it showed in our skating ability. Later the boys in the neighborhood would get together and have a pick-up hockey game above the dam on the Wells River. During World War II hockey pucks were unavailable, so we cut some pucks from an appropriate size stick of maple firewood. Those were the "good old days". *Willard Benzie*

SOME PAST GROTON PLACES

Atlantic Service Station about 1960 is now Veteran's Park

Henry's Diner in the old Weed Hotel. The restaurant and gift shop was operated by Henry's wife, Alice and Henry Goodine had a barber shop and pool room on the east end about 1950.

Power House on Wells River behind the Baptist Church about 1930

Plummer School house about 1940.

Vermont's granite sculptors

By SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN
For the Burlington Free Press Published Jan. 13, 2018

To make a world-class product you have to have world-class raw materials and a highly skilled workforce. Vermont is blessed with having Barre gray granite, an outstanding rock for making sculptures.

The granite has become famous for its ability to hold finely carved details and to appear strikingly different using various tools. Barre gray granite is made of a well-blended, interlocking mesh of small crystals of gray feldspar, black mica, and gray to white quartz. It glitters in the light thanks to its mica and is given its strength by its feldspar and quartz.

The granite has exceptional strength, hardness, imperviousness, and resistance to weathering, abrasion, and chemicals. These positive characteristics help stone sculptors to explain why their artwork has been placed in tens of thousands of America's cemeteries, public and private spaces, and in countless libraries, post offices, hospitals, and other government and corporate buildings.

Arrival of stone workers

To turn Barre gray granite into a sculpture of beauty, intelligence, and wit requires talented artists and technicians. Between 1870 and 1950, men flooded into the granite manufacturing plants of Vermont communities such as Waterbury, Northfield, Montpelier, South Ryegate, Morrisville, Barre and Hardwick.

The prospect of a good-paying job drew thousands of skilled stone workers, including some of North America's and Europe's best sculptors, many of whom are rarely known in the art world today. Most of these sculptors came to Vermont's granite communities to escape the political, economic, and social crises in their home communities.

Many of Vermont's granite towns were quiet farming communities or way stations for travelers until the arrival of the railroads in the late 19th century. The railroad provided access to regional markets for the granite industry, transforming little farm vil-

lages into small industrial centers almost overnight.

The fame of Vermont's Barre gray granite spread quickly and coupled with the lure of the promised land of America, it resulted in a migration of skilled granite workers from throughout North America and Europe, including Scots from the county of Aberdeenshire; Italians from the northern provinces of Piedmont, Lombardy, Tuscany, and Veneto; Swiss from the canton of Ticino, Spaniards from the province of Cantabria; Swedes from the provinces of Blekinge and Bohuslän; Canadians from the provinces of Quebec and the Maritimes. Many Finns, Greeks, Danes, Lebanese, and eastern Europeans also came to Vermont's granite towns, drawn by the expanding economic opportunities.

Many of the European sculptors emigrated to America, arriving at Ellis Island with a valise containing a change of clothes, passport, family photographs, and a dictionary for translations, and a steamer trunk with sculpture books, carving tools, and plaster copies, drawings, and photographs of their work.

Although some sculptors came directly from European granite and marble centers to Vermont, others came by way of granite and marble centers throughout the Northeast. Dissatisfied with the working conditions elsewhere in North America, they turned to the expanding need for sculptors in Vermont. The lure of steady work and decent wages in Vermont's granite industry also drew thousands of American-born stoneworkers, including sculptors.

Working in clouds of dust

Many of Vermont's early granite sculptors gave their lives to the art that fills America's cemeteries, public spaces, and buildings. The carving of granite involves the shattering of the crystals that make up the rock, which creates a tremendous amount of silica dust that harms the lungs of the stone workers. Sculptors worked in clouds of dust, leaning in close to their work, breathing in that silica dust for hours a day.

Death caused by silicosis was so widespread at the end of the nineteenth century that Saturday night benefits for the families of granite workers were commonplace. The breakthrough in solving the silicosis problem came in 1937 when $300,000 ($24 million in 2016 funds) worth of ventilation equipment was installed

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in eighty of Vermont's granite plants. This funding made dust control practically universal in the industry and essentially eliminated the silicosis problem.

Since the late 19th century, granite sculptures made in Vermont have been done on commission for individuals, institutions, companies, organizations, and governments. That means there is a client with ideas, desires, and expectations that must be met by the sculptor. Since the late 19th century, Vermont's granite sculptors often go through a multiple step process of developing a work of art from the client's concept to a finished sculpture. There are five phases to any sculpting project: 1) conceptualizing, establishing the design of the sculpture; 2) outlining, reducing the block of granite to the basic forms of the sculpture; 3) roughing out, reducing the material until the main volume of the sculpture emerges; 4) modeling, working the surfaces and details; and 5) finishing, creating the final texture to the sculpture.

Examples in Vermont cemeteries

Although the work of Vermont's sculptors is spread across the country, visitors only need to look in Green Mount Cemetery in Montpelier, Elmwood Cemetery in Barre, and Saint Monica's Cemetery and Hope Cemetery in Barre, which boast some of the most outstanding examples of memorial art in America. Cemeteries in other Vermont granite communities are also filled with tributes not only to the deceased but also to the skill of the state's sculptors. Some of Vermont's parks and town greens have sculptures that highlight the work of Vermont sculptors. One of Vermont's finest works in granite is Barre's monument to the Scottish poet and lyricist Robert Burns, regarded as the national poet of Scotland. The figure of Robert Burns stands atop an enormous Barre granite base, intricately carved with bas-relief depictions from Robert Burns poetry. The figure was carved by Barre's Italian-born sculptor Samuel Novelli, the panels by Barre's Italian-born sculptor Elia Corti. It stands not only as a monument to the extraordinary skill of its carvers but also the multicultural artistic cooperation that was at the heart of Barre's granite industry.

Visitors to the Vermont Historical Society in Barre can see the

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Burns Monument this winter as well as the Vermont Granite Museum's exhibition on the history of some of Vermont's granite sculptors. The exhibit reflects on the work and lives of some of the known and unknown men that came to shape commemorative and outdoor public art in America.

Like the past, Vermont's small numbers of granite sculptors are largely unknown by name but Vermont's granite industry is nationally recognized and the products of the state's sculptors are installed across the nation and world.

Scott McLaughlin is director of the Vermont Granite Museum.

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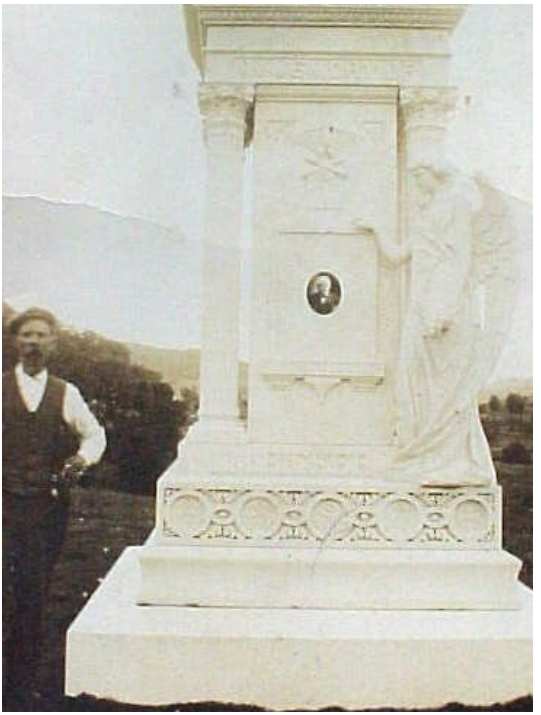
Below is a picture of John Benzie beside Isaac M. Ricker monument in the Groton Village cemetery that was manufactured in his stone shed in Groton. Another example of granite sculptor is the Good Shepherd Statue in the lower Groton Village cemetery.



GROTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Visit GHS on the internet

Email: grotonvthistory@gmail.com
Web page: grotonvthistory.org
Facebook@grotonvthistory

GHS Treasurer's Report for the year 2017

OPERATING BALANCE—1 Jan 2017		$3,306.03
INCOME:		
Membership, Sales and Donations		$5,086.98
EXPENSES:		
Utilities	672.14	
Maintenance	2,113.70	
Publishing, mailing etc.	1,102.52	
VHS dues	50.00	
Insurance	850.00	
Non-profit status	25.00	
Supplies	100.23	
Miscellaneous	6.00	
Total		$4,919.59
OPERATING BALANCE—31 Dec 2018		$3,473.42
CAPITAL FUND (CD)		$9,981.91

Erik Volk, Treasurer

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Annual Membership Dues for 2018 are $10.00 for individuals and $15.00 for families. Lifetime Membership is $100.00. New members are welcome.

The mission of the Groton Historical Society is to maintain and preserve the Peter Paul House and its contents of Groton's historical artifacts, share the history of our town, and have fun doing it. We had a ton of fun making donuts and sugar on snow at the Peter Paul House on April 1st. The Seth Eastman Civil War Journal has been republished and is for sale again. A capital fund raising drive in September was successful and some major maintenance was done on the building and grounds.

The winter party at the Peter Paul House on December 2 was a success with apple pie, hot cider, coffee and organ music for the visitors. GHS 2018 calendars, the reprinted book by Dr. Seth Eastman on his recollections of the Civil War, and the updated history of Groton, *Mr. Glover's Groton,* were available for sale.

Membership dues, donations and sales of books and calendars provided funds, and volunteers made it possible, to complete necessary repairs and maintenance of the Peter Paul House last year.

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Who were your ancestors? What were their defining characteristics? What family values were they entrusted with and how did they pass them along to more recent generations?

Family values shape and define our character. Our past is our future. Connections with older generations provide touchstones to the past. Photographs, diaries, and letters that have found their way to your generation are all integral to the story of your family.

Many Groton Historical Society members and friends have donated collections of their grandparents' historical documents, heirlooms, and pictures to the Society. These collections both honor the donors' families and open the doors for historians, genealogists, and future generations to connect to the past.

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