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The character of Vermont : twentieth-anniversary reflections

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OCCASIONAL PAPER #19

THE CHARACTER OF VERMONT

**Twentieth-Anniversary
Reflections**

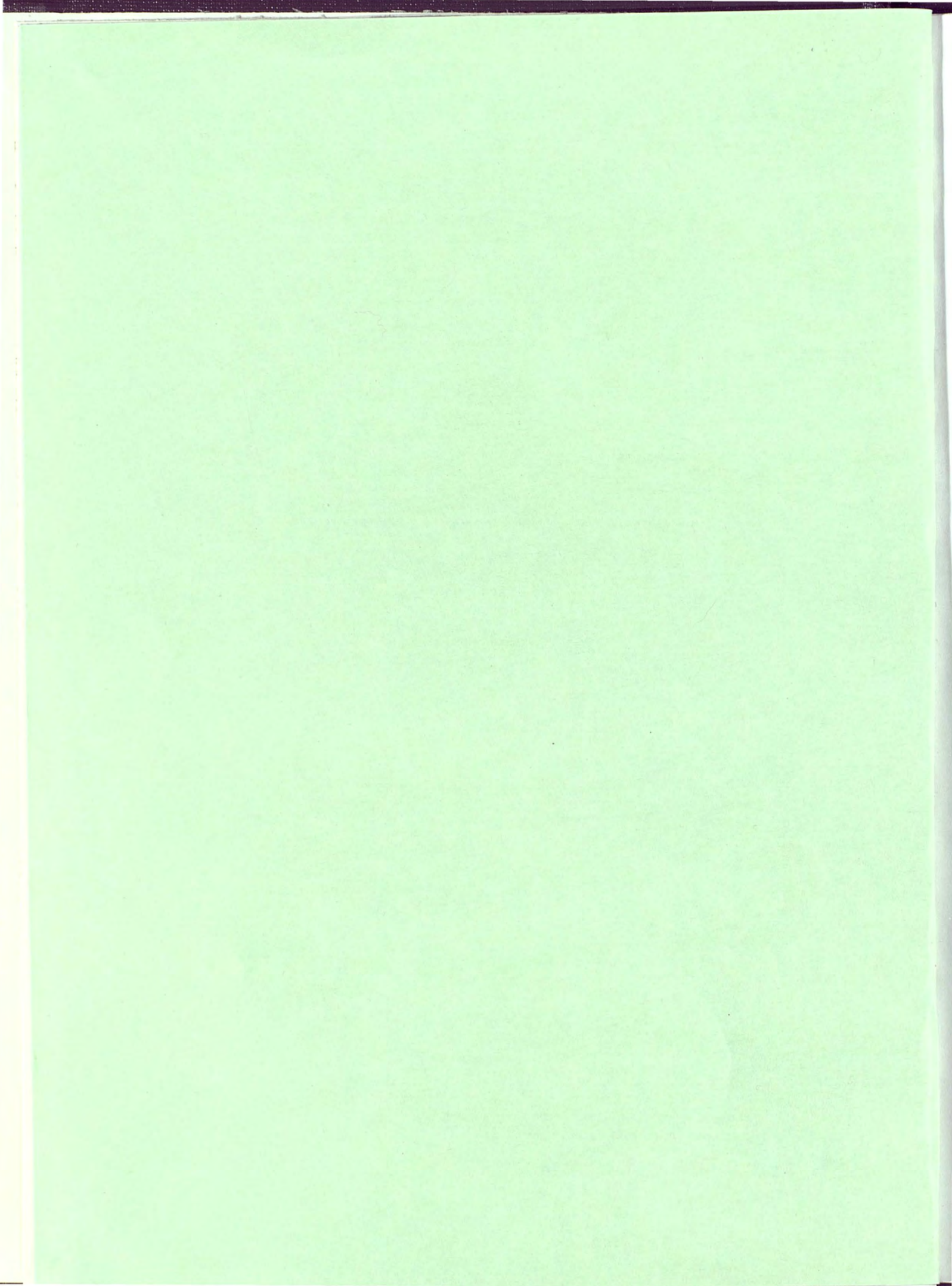
by

**MICHAEL SHERMAN
and JENNIE VERSTEEG**

**SAMUEL B. HAND
and**

PAUL GILLIES

**CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON VERMONT
UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
BURLINGTON, VERMONT**



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Reflections**

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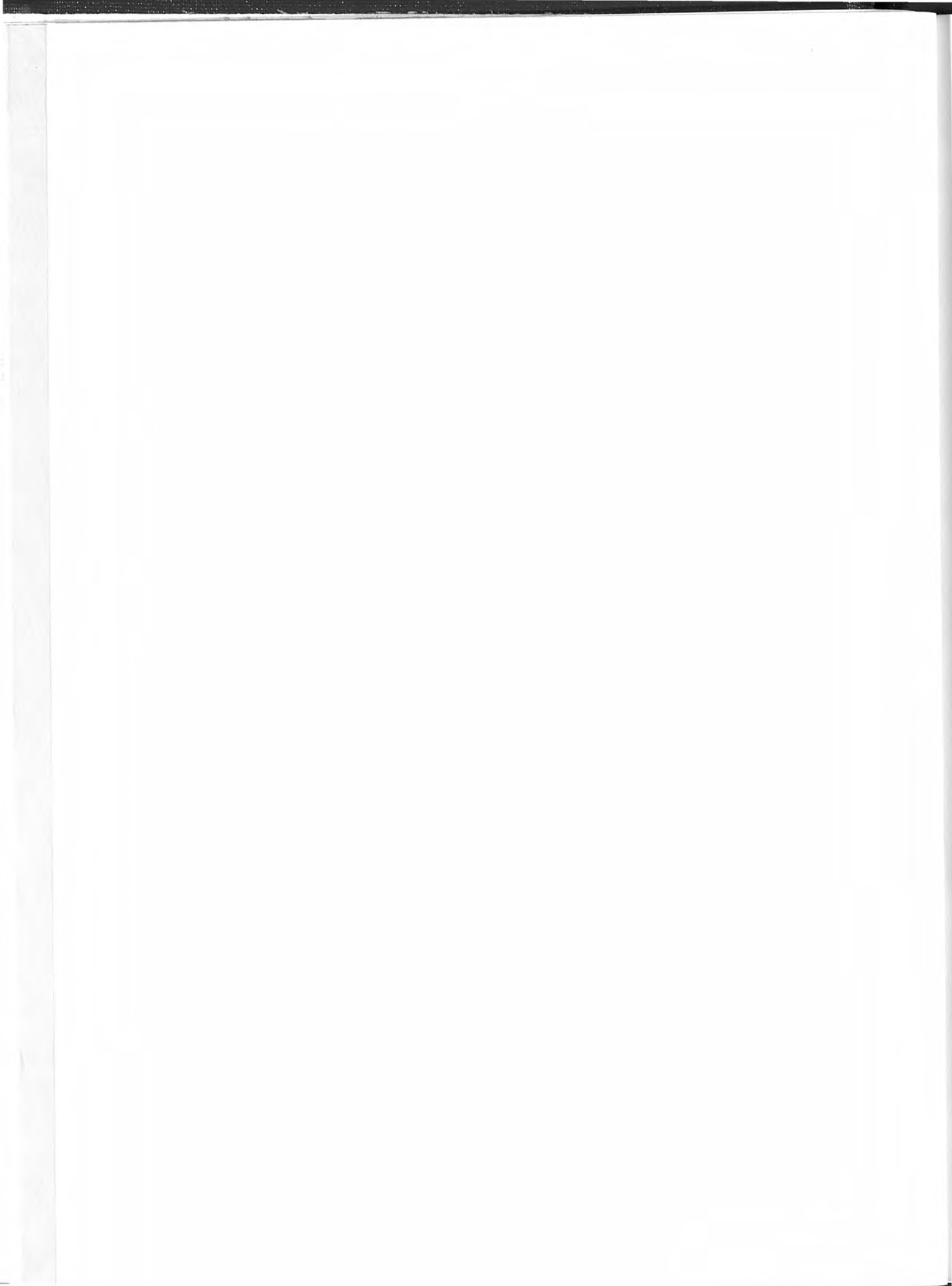
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Foreword

As the Center for Research on Vermont enters its third decade, we are gratified to present the latest in our ongoing series of Occasional Papers. The Center commissioned the research survey work and the personal essays contained in this volume to mark the twentieth anniversary of its establishment in the University of Vermont's College of Arts and Sciences. What better way to celebrate this milestone than to ask a question that gets at the heart of our common research efforts: What characterizes Vermont and Vermonters? At the same time, this occasion offered the opportunity to reflect on how far we have come as a Vermont research community and to consider what work still needs to be done.

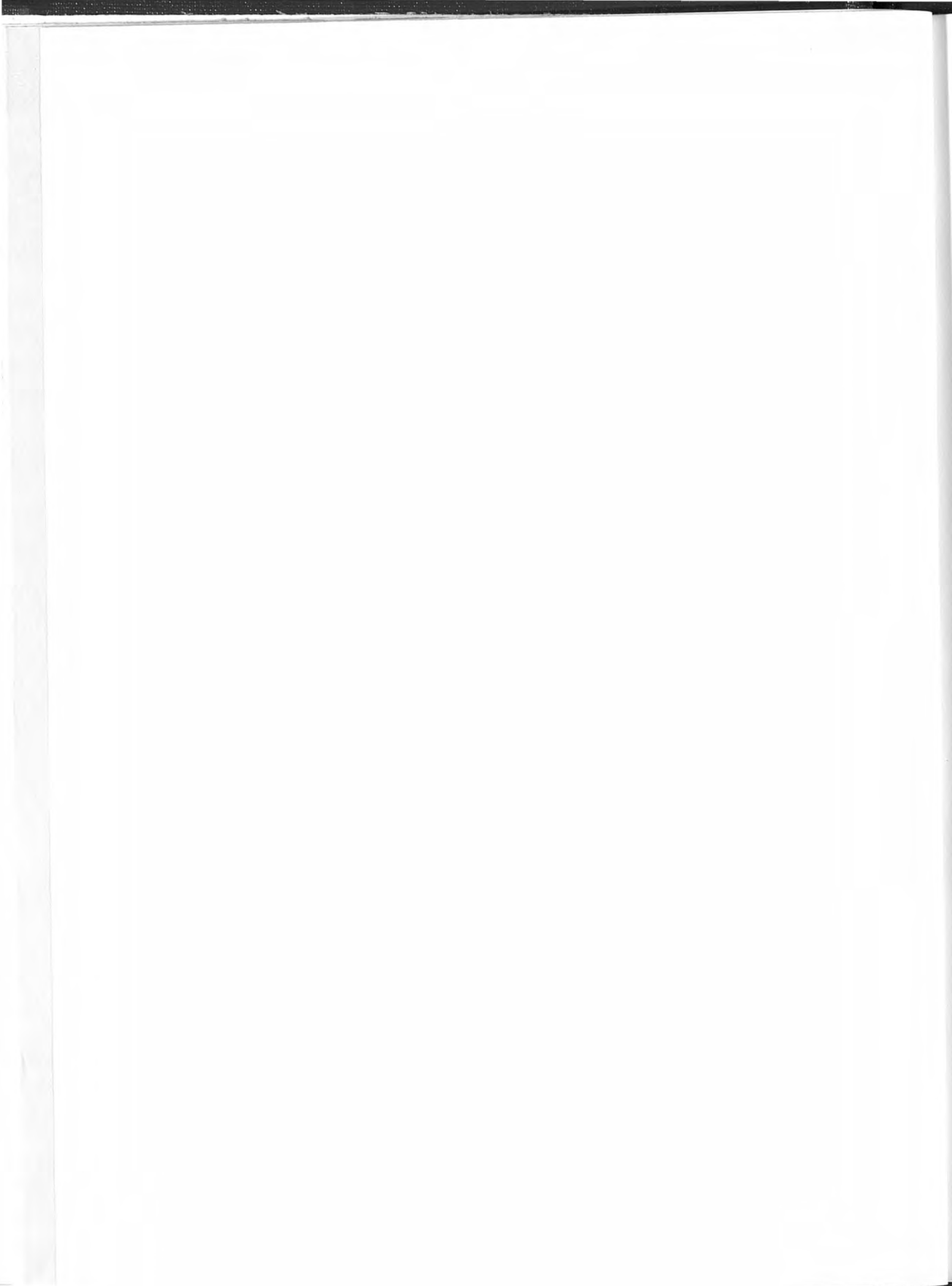
This publication consists of two parts. In part 1, Michael Sherman and Jennie Versteeg examine perceptions of Vermont as revealed in a 1937 survey and more recently in a survey of Center for Research on Vermont members completed as an anniversary project. Twenty years ago, in the preface to a new edition of Rowland E. Robinson's *Vermont: A Study of Independence*, I suggested that "anyone long associated with the state of Vermont is impressed by its marked individuality." Even though Robinson himself believed that "the quaint individuality of the earlier people is fast dissolving into commonplace likeness," outsiders continue to perceive Vermont and its people as distinctly different. But what is it that makes Vermont and Vermonters distinctive? To investigate whether attitudes about the Vermont character have changed over time, Sherman and Versteeg duplicated a 1937 survey of prominent Vermonters and sent it to Center members to ascertain their opinions about the distinguishing features of our state and the people who choose to live and work here.

Part 2 of this volume speaks to research on Vermont and complements the history of the Center published by George B. Bryan as Occasional Paper #18, *The Light of Other Days* (1995). This section consists of two individuals' reflections not only on the nature of research relating to Vermont but also on the forces and personalities that have motivated and propelled this research forward. "Present at the Creation" is Samuel B. Hand's address to the Center's membership on the occasion of its twentieth anniversary in May 1995. Hand—one of the founders of the Center—discusses the academic, political, and economic environment in which the Center was established and the importance of its role as a catalyst for encouraging state and local research while upholding sound academic standards as embodied in the call to "research locally and publish nationally."

This volume concludes with Paul Gillies's essay, "The State of Vermont Research in 1995." Some readers may recall that, on the occasion of the Center's fifteenth anniversary, Gillies discussed the state of Vermont research at the annual meeting. Here he picks up that theme again. His entertaining yet thoughtful essay presents two markedly different perspectives on the outlook for Vermont research as the field makes the transition to the twenty-first century.

It is our hope that this Occasional Paper will stimulate additional discussion of ourselves as Vermonters and our continuing efforts to examine and explore this place called Vermont.

PAUL ESCHHOLZ
DIRECTOR



Part 1

The Character of Vermont

Then and Now

by

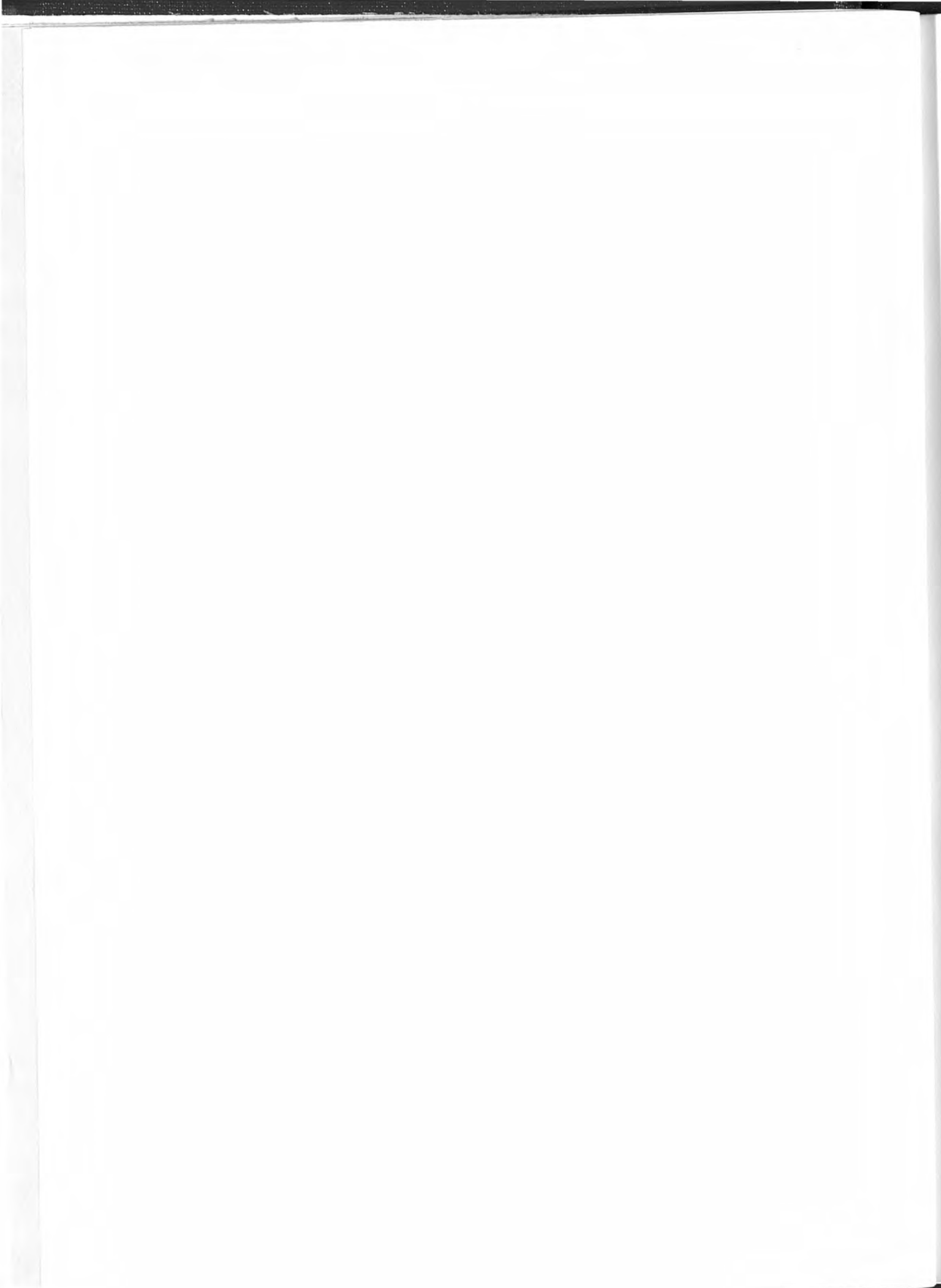
Michael Sherman

and

Jennie Versteeg

We raise deep questions concerning our own humanness when we explore the meaning of our homes. We probe the nature of our being when we seek to understand our sense of place.

—Yi-Fu Tuan, "A Sense of Place"



The Character of Vermont Then and Now



nyone who drives the interstate highway or even a Vermont back road during foliage season has occasion to reflect on the license plates of the various states. In this age of sound bites, license plate slogans are effective ways to evoke characteristics and images about a particular place. "We're the Constitution State," announces the Connecticut plate. "We're the Garden State," claims New Jersey. "Live free or die," says New Hampshire. Maine is the country's "Vacationland," Illinois "the land of Lincoln," Minnesota has 10,000 lakes, and North Carolina was "First in Flight." Since 1986 Vermont's plates have read "The Green Mountain State." Before that they simply said "Green Mountains" (1977-1986), an indicator of state identity that replaced the "See Vermont" message of the 1957-1977 period.¹ If we wish to see how outsiders characterize the states of the Union, we need look no further than U-Haul trucks. Instead of a corporate logo on the side panels, U-Haul vehicles present pictures of each of the states. Someone at U-Haul International, Inc., headquartered in Phoenix, Arizona, working with state tourist organizations, creates what the company calls a Super Graphic,SM a more or less obvious image to convey to all travelers, for example, that Illinois "is" Abe Lincoln, that fishermen are what Arkansas is about, that a sailboat captures the identity of Wisconsin.

For the marketing people at U-Haul, and thus for every driver who passes one of their trucks, Vermont is now encapsulated in a picture of cross-country skiing. "Tourism, it was found out, is Vermont's second largest industry. With the state boasting 30 alpine ski resorts and nearly 60 cross-country ski touring centers, it's no wonder the state has been dubbed the premiere state for winter recreation in the East. Hence, cross-country skiers were chosen as an accurate and active representation of Vermont."²

Slogan-bearing license plates and illustrated U-Haul trucks suggest interesting and complex questions about how insiders and outsiders think of home. These blurs on the highway connect to deep-seated needs for identity, for belonging, and for a sense of place.

¹Prior to 1957 and in 1967-1968, Vermont license plates simply said "Vermont" or "VT." Before settling on their current green and white, plate colors rotated among the colors of the various institutions of higher education in the state. Information on Vermont license plates comes from Vermont State Archivist D. Gregory Sanford, who asserts that New York's slogan, "The Empire State," indicates that Ethan Allen's rage against land-grabbing New Yorkers is still appropriate.

²October 18, 1995, communication from Media and Public Relations Specialist Molly Bland of U-Haul International, Inc. Bland indicates that the company's trailers also bear Super GraphicSM decals and that these reflect city themes. Stowe, for example, is honored in this way with an image of sledding.



The State of Vermont, captured in a Super Graphic.SM
Photograph courtesy of U-Haul International, Inc.

Some aspects of these questions will be touched on as this paper explores elements of the Vermont character as seen by many insiders and a few outsiders. This project had its inception several years ago in Michael Sherman's serendipitous discovery at the Vermont Historical Society of a folder in the James P. Taylor Papers marked simply "Questionnaire." The folder contained a 1937 letter from an out-of-state journalist asking for information about the character of Vermont, together with a collection of questionnaires providing such information. The questionnaires, submitted by a dozen elite Vermonters, formed a key source of information for a subsequent *New York Times* article telling the world about Vermont. "Vermont is different," the article stated, "and means to stay that way."

In the following pages, we tell the story of those questionnaires and reproduce the 1938 article to which they contributed. We also provide a context for thinking about the question of state character and show how this question resurfaces at regular intervals. Finally, we consider

how a group of people in Vermont today answered the same questions that were posed almost sixty years ago and assess the differences between these responses and those from the Taylor papers.

In the end, our conclusions about Vermont now-in-1995 versus Vermont then-in-1937 reveal few surprises. Instead, perhaps, they form a tribute to the state's enduring self-image and suggest some questions about that image which others may wish to explore at greater length. Our efforts also represent a tribute to the Center for Research on Vermont, which for twenty years has encouraged research on all aspects of Vermont, whether they be specific, measurable, and quantifiable features of the state or value-laden intangibles like the nonscientific questions of identity posed in this paper.

THE 1930S: TAYLOR'S SURVEY

On December 13, 1937, *Boston Herald* reporter F. Lauriston Bullard, who also served as a stringer for the *New York Times*, wrote to H. Nelson Jackson, publisher of the *Burlington Daily News*. Bullard had just published a small piece in the *Times* about Gov. George D. Aiken. The *Times* wanted more—more about Vermont—and Bullard sought some help from a fellow journalist. “Out of your experience,” he wrote,

I wish you would write or dictate some notes. . . . May I suggest: 1) leading characteristics of Vermonters and why? 2) Are they changing? 3) Is the State backwards, or going forward? 4) Are the people ‘awful sot,’³ hard to move, cautious about enterprise and expenditure? 5) Is the legislature an able, discriminating, intelligent body, as a rule? 6) Why, oh why, is Vt always Republican? Will it ever be otherwise? 7) Of what are the people most proud? 8) What of industry, abandoned farms, community churches, group schools?

Not in too much of a hurry for a journalist, Bullard suggested that “any day before Xmas would be in time.”

Jackson hurriedly passed this inquiry to James P. Taylor, secretary of the Vermont State Chamber of Commerce and an active promoter of tourism, recreation, good roads, better town reports, and dozens of other projects designed to improve civic life and the economy of Vermont. Taylor had been the guiding genius behind the Long Trail and in 1936 had worked hard but unsuccessfully to win support for the Green Mountain Parkway. Extraordinarily well-connected throughout the state of Vermont, Taylor considered himself a progressive and a student of the Vermont personality.⁴

Taylor's response to Bullard's request for information was to send the reporter's questions to two dozen of Vermont's leading businessmen, political figures, and writers. “Please for the

³The authors have determined that this means “set in their ways.”

⁴Hal Goldman, “James P. Taylor's Progressive Vision: The Green Mountain Parkway,” *Vermont History* 64, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 158–79.



James Paddock Taylor, ca. 1931-1933. Photograph by William Chandler, St. Albans, courtesy of the Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier.

good of Vermont," he wrote in his cover letter, "cooperate with him and with us." Half of his sample responded.

On December 23, Taylor sent Bullard copies or typed transcriptions of the completed questionnaires he had received. Bullard wrote back on January 14, 1938, expressed his gratitude, and announced that the article was completed and sent off to the *Times*. He also correctly guessed two of the respondents. "My own notions about Vt. are confirmed by the results [of the survey], and some new views brought to my attention."⁵ Bullard's article appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* on October 16, 1938.⁶ We reproduce it here, starting on page 9, because it serves as a base line for our own survey almost sixty years later and because it is interesting reading in itself—a view of Vermont and Vermonters as seen through their own eyes and interpreted by an admiring, perceptive neighbor.

Whatever the information or opinions Bullard might have brought to his article, he had a formidable and interesting list of commentators to help him analyze Vermont and its people. Taylor was a very thorough record keeper, so we know to whom he sent his questionnaires (see appendix 1) and, for the most part, from whom he received responses. When he forwarded the questionnaires to Bullard, he did not include names; consequently, it is difficult to identify some of the writers. However, he did try to characterize each of the respondents, and some we can also identify from his notes. (See appendix 2 for Taylor's thumbnail sketches of Correspondents 1–12.) In addition to the questionnaires, Taylor sent Bullard some information from the Chamber of Commerce, presumably of Taylor's own writing.

Independent, economical, conservative: those are the characteristics that Bullard's respondents emphasized in their answers to his questions. The origins of the state—as a refuge for landless, younger sons; restless seekers of the frontier; and, to some degree, outlaws from Massachusetts and New York: people outside the colonial structures and for a while outside the new nation of the United States—contained some of the seeds of its people's enduring irascibility, independence, individuality, and refusal to be governed or led by fashion and fads in politics, economics, or cultural change. Industrialist Ralph Flanders wrote, "This was the chosen promised land of men from the older colonies who were too individualistic to fit into the social, political, and religious pattern which they came from." M. G. Clark, a retired public utility executive, was more emphatic, if somewhat less accurate, in his history: "Independence dates from the period 1776–91, when Vermont defied both New Hampshire and New York, maintaining her separate identity and harboring the outlaws from the thirteen original states. Vermonters still defy all law and precedent that fails [*sic*] to conform to their own ideas."

Geography and topography, the commentators noted, have put Vermonters on the fringes of settled America and made them wrestle continually with the elements. Vermont, wrote Correspondent 6 (probably Charles E. Crane, author of *Let Me Show You Vermont*), is "generally

⁵Bullard's correspondence with Jackson and Taylor and the questionnaires are included in the Taylor papers at the Vermont Historical Society, DOC T-10, folder labeled "Questionnaire."

⁶F. Lauriston Bullard, "Vermont Is Different—and It Means to Stay So," *New York Times Magazine*, October 16, 1938, sec. 6, 16, 22.

rural and mountainous, an environment which breeds usually a hardy, independent type of people." The rigors of rural and agrarian life in a harsh climate with a hard soil and many mountains have given back little for the many hours and years of hard work it requires to eke out a living. They are thrifty, concluded one anonymous correspondent on an unnumbered response form, "from necessity of grubbing a living from a not too kind soil." "Most of them like to own something and most of them like to pay their debts," wrote Correspondent 11—possibly Mortimer Proctor or Leon Gay—described by Taylor as "a man in one of the largest business enterprises." Thus, drawing from the responses to Taylor's survey, Bullard concluded, Vermonters have learned to hold on to what they have, not let their reach exceed their grasp, value the gains of hard and steady work, and live without extravagance and excess.

Many of the respondents to Taylor's questionnaire expressed ambivalence about Vermont's position in industrial society. Few writers embraced the promises of economic prosperity—thrown into doubt in any case by the Great Depression—and some disparaged industrial growth as a plague on the land and its people. "Industry is valued and welcomed," wrote Correspondent 1, possibly Walter Myers, an advertising executive from Burlington, "but most Vermonters do not regard the state as a large-scale industrial region, now or in the future." "The picture is a mixture," wrote Ralph Flanders, president of Jones and Lamson Machine Company, one of Vermont's major companies, which served a national market. Correspondent 5, whom Taylor identifies as "a dominant figure with Vermont Farm Bureau Federation"—possibly Arthur Packard, the foremost political power broker of the period—was doubtful: "The less industry we leave here the better—this is and should be [an] agricultural state. Farming does not mix well with industry or 'country gentlemen.'" Banker A. Vail Allen was even more emphatic: "It never will be, nor wants to be, an industrial state," he asserted.

At the same time, the respondents noted with approval a new source of income for Vermont. Responding to Bullard's question, "What of abandoned farms?" all asserted that only unproductive hill-farm properties were being bought up by wealthy out-of-staters, who used them for summer or second homes. One anonymous correspondent noted that \$1 million worth of land transactions for such properties had taken place in 1937. "Don't worry too much about abandoned farms," advised Correspondent Packard. "The good ones are not being abandoned. Summer residents are picking up a lot of mountain farms. A better development than big tourist booms!" All agreed that this was also a better use of poor agricultural land than leaving it to go completely wild and that fewer unproductive farms would boost market prices and help those who operated viable ones.

Vermonters are cautious about government, these observers reported. They expect no miracles, easy answers, or facile solutions to knotty problems. Moreover, they distrust them. Living in small communities, Vermonters have learned how to govern themselves and how to share political power and responsibility. Their institutions are as small as their communities, and this, in the minds of most of the writers, creates a mixture of respect for, experience with, and healthy skepticism about, direct democracy. State government, they observed, merely reflects the

institutions of town meeting,⁷ and the legislature, most felt, was filled with people who were, by and large, honest, practical, and eager to do their best. Ralph Flanders wrote, “[The legislature] and the whole political framework of the state [are] practically free of graft but by no means devoid of ‘politics.’ On the whole, the members try to do the right thing; but occasionally they run up against their own prejudices and self-interests, ‘even as you and I.’” Crane expressed a similarly cautious endorsement with the comment, “The Vermont Legislature is as able, discriminating and as intelligent a body of law-makers as is necessary for the good government of the State,” whereas the response on an unnumbered questionnaire was that “the Vermont local town meeting and legislature are models of successful democracy (spelled with a small ‘d’).”

Having developed their institutions and principles over time, Vermonters are not eager to change them, so they accept change but do not favor experimentation; they settle for minor adjustments rather than embrace new ideologies. This accounts for the state’s persistent adherence to the Republican party, even in the face of the Democratic tidal wave of Pres. Franklin Roosevelt’s second-term election; its reluctance to adopt wholeheartedly the New Deal; and its equally well-known differences with the “old guard” Republicans, personified in the maverick Republicanism of Gov. George D. Aiken. In answer to Bullard’s question, “Why, oh why, is Vermont always Republican?” Flanders wrote, “To date Vermonters have seen nothing better. When something better appears, judged by Vermont standards, there will be no hesitation about shifting from the Republican Party. . . . I think it safe to say that in 1936 Vermont bet one way and voted the other.” Packard was less philosophical: “Habit. Will slip out of the rut someday.” Others suggested, more mildly, that it was the force of tradition—that Vermont had helped found the party of Lincoln and was not quite ready to abandon it. And still others saw Vermont’s adherence to the Republican party in 1936 as tantamount to taking a stand on old principles of self-reliance and small-scale government. Public utility commissioner Ellsworth B. Cornwall explained Vermont’s vote in the presidential election as its expression of “dislike [for] the hairbrained [*sic*], ill-thought out scheme of [the] present administration,” while A. Vail Allen answered bluntly, “Because Vermont is conservative. It never will be as liberal or radical as the . . . New Dealers.”

However, some respondents saw signs of change. Correspondent 11, possibly Proctor or Gay, wrote: “Vermont farmers have been educated to think that they enjoyed a better standard of living because of the Republican Tariff. They believed that they enjoyed a Tariff equal to Industry. Some of them now realize that they are the victims of Monopolies which [have] been built and greatly helped by Tariff.” Charles E. Crane saw a subtle picture of shifting political currents in the state and nation: “The recent pronouncements of Governor Aiken indicate that Vermont Republicanism is not . . . a sure bet in the future unless the party realigns itself in some matters.”

Bullard faithfully recorded these opinions and observations in his article. When he asked, “Of what are the people most proud?” he got back answers very much like Crane’s: “Their

⁷None of the writers voiced concern over the disproportionate power of rural communities in the one-town-one-vote arrangement then current in the Vermont House of Representatives.

state's natural attractions, and their own independence." Bullard concluded that the Vermonter "is just an old-fashioned American, justly to be charged with some derelictions, perhaps, in the scheme of progress, while setting an example that many of his critics might profitably emulate."⁸

The original 1938 Bullard article appears in full, beginning on page 9, reprinted with permission of the *New York Times*. The authors note that the original *Times* byline read "Lauriston F. Bullard," rather than "F. Lauriston Bullard."

ANALYZING VERMONT, THEN AND NOW

Bullard was not the first, of course, nor the last to inquire about the character of Vermont. Vermonters themselves have had a two-century-old obsession with analyzing and describing their own "exceptionalism," a localized reflection, one could argue, of the American obsession with analyzing and describing its character and difference from the "Old World" nations. This tendency to self-reflection and self-description seems, however, to have appeared in spurts and perhaps for differing reasons at different times. In the 1830s, for example, "Vermonters doubted their accomplishments as a people and feared that their once-vaunted independence was gone," and this "identity crisis" gave rise to self-examination.⁹ In the 1930s, the shock of the Great Depression was no doubt a major catalyst. In any case, the 1930s produced an abundance of essays like Bullard's.

A year before Bullard published his thumbnail portrait of Vermont with the aid of his dozen or more local commentators, another journalist for the *New York Times* wrote an equally interesting sketch of Vermont and Maine—the two holdouts against FDR in the 1936 presidential election.¹⁰ Robert L. Duffus was a Vermonter by birth who learned his trade as a newspaper man in Waterbury before moving on to the *New York Globe* where he became chief editorial writer. Later he worked as a freelance writer for magazines and newspapers. His novel, *Roads Going South*, is set in a Vermont village and, in the words of reviewer Arthur Wallace Peach, "traces the reaction upon [the main character, Joe Chapin] of the environment of the village in its physical, mental, and spiritual phases."¹¹ Duffus was also a frequent visitor to Maine. His article was, therefore, the product not of a survey but of his own observations, familiarity with the places and people he wrote about, and personal interviews with citizens of the two states.

Like Bullard, Duffus emphasized the impact of the mountains and rural, agrarian life on the culture, politics, and economics of Vermont. "Vermont's population is 77 percent rural," Duffus

⁸Bullard, "Vermont Is Different," 22.

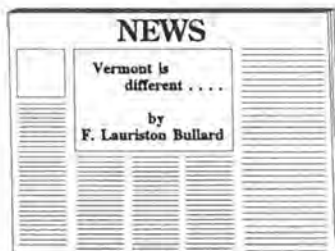
⁹Randolph Roth, "Why Are We Still Vermonters? Vermont's Identity Crisis and the Founding of the Vermont Historical Society," *Vermont History* 59, no. 4 (Fall 1991): 197–211.

¹⁰R. L. Duffus, "Old Maine and Vermont—There They Stand," *New York Times Magazine*, May 30, 1937, 6–7, 16.

¹¹Arthur Wallace Peach, "Vermont Writers," *Vermont* 30 (1924): 35–36.

VERMONT IS DIFFERENT—AND IT MEANS TO STAY SO

By Lauriston F. Bullard



ONCE more Vermont, stronghold of Republican individualism, has taken the individualist's stand. Her Governor, George D. Aiken, who in the past has uttered sharp words in criticism of his own Republican party, laconically announced that Vermont was ready to accept Federal help in flood-control work only if it did not require "the surrender of the ownership and jurisdiction over natural resources."

The stand taken was precisely what might have been expected. It was in keeping with Vermont tradition, the tradition of a persistently sovereign State. Independence is ingrained in the soil and sinew of Vermont. It is a State which reminds itself that for fourteen years prior to entering the Union in 1791 (an event whose sesquicentennial will be celebrated in 1941) it was a sovereign entity, at first called the Independent Republic of New Connecticut, with power to grant citizenship, coin money and correspond with foreign governments.

No bred-in-bone Green Mountaineer ever forgets that. Vermonters may seem to lack a good many things, but they try to stand on their own feet. Nothing less than such an overwhelming disaster as the flood of 1927 can compel them to apply for outside help.

For a century they have lived contentedly, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot," exporting ambitious boys and keeping at home those who love the soil too much to leave it. At intervals they put on the national canvas a picture that will not fade—long ago the foray that won Ticonderoga, only a few years ago a Presidential oath taken under the glimmer of an oil lamp at Plymouth.

Individualistic and Republican to the Core, Green Mountain State Prefers Its Old Ways

IT is difficult for the outsider to understand Vermonters, who to many seem the best example in the country of "contemporary ancestors." But after studying them one finds that their qualities are traceable, in good part, to the topography of the State, its secluded situation, its climate, the absence of large cities and the heritage of the people.

Vermont is a beautiful domain, and the people know it. The Green Mountains divide it, "East Side" and "West Side," with a thousand peaks 2,000 feet high and seven of these

*Copyright © 1938 by The New York Times Company. Reprinted by permission.

more than 4,000 feet. Forests, lakes, streams, quiet villages, covered bridges, white steeples against green foliage, stone and stump fences, old houses with hardly a gingerbread confection among them and many without ordinary conveniences, no cities of any size, cattle everywhere, people courteous but reserved—this is Vermont. Off the main lines of travel, always somewhat remote and in Winter really isolated under a heavy white blanket of snow—this also is Vermont.

To see the people at their best one should visit them in early Spring, when the winds blow warm from the south, when the brooks run full from melting snows, when the shut-ins are released from their Winter bondage and the maple sap begins to run. Many come down from the hills to the towns and small cities wearing fur coats worn smooth. Some of them drive Ford cars so ancient that Henry Ford offers to swap the best new car he can make for the old ones as museum pieces. They refuse to trade.

They are not an uncouth people, but their Green Mountain scenery is no more picturesque than are they as examples of human nature without much gloss. To fastidious city folk some of them no doubt look queer. But Vermont has many educated and traveled citizens, good schools and several excellent colleges.

Vermont was settled by descendants of the Pilgrims and Puritans who moved westward in Massachusetts and into Connecticut and then northward to the "Grants" over which the settlers fought a protracted little war with New York. The region became a Canaan, a promised land, for people not satisfied

with conditions in the older colonies. The "Grants" were the frontier of New England and their occupants passed their pioneer characteristics on to their posterity.

In no other State is the present population so much like that of a century ago. The population of the United States increased fivefold between 1850 and 1930; that of Vermont only 14½ per cent. Almost two-thirds of the population of Vermont is of native parentage. For forty years the foreign-born groups in Vermont have been about constant in size and derived in the main from Canada.

VERMONT has always been an agricultural State, though Vermont marble and Barre granite are well known and there are some sizable industries scattered along the margins. Nobody appears to mind what seem hardships to city folk. For generations Vermont farmers extorted a living from a grudging soil and their present-day descendants rather think they can take care of themselves. They are a rugged lot, as their ancestors had to be.

But the agriculture of the pioneers is vanishing. The Vermonters have come to experiment with casein, the soy bean and flax. The staples today are milk for the New York and Boston markets, McIntosh apples for neighboring States, and maple syrup for the nation.

And there is a difficult hill-town problem. Much of the land never was well adapted for farming. The stony soil could not compete with the valley farms. While hundreds of abandoned farms have been transformed into

Summer homes for vacationists and increasing numbers of people from the cities are settling in them for good, there are many more such farms, especially in the north, yet to be taken over. Meantime the State must furnish the hill dwellers who cling to their land with roads and schools.

Vermonters watched the growth of the recreation and Summer home business for a long time before accepting it as an asset of high value. Some believe the Green Mountain State should become the Switzerland of America, and the income would all be "new money," brought in from the outside.

THE people on Vermont's farms and in its villages are wary, shrewd, deliberate. Just where lies the line that divides thrift from parsimony is for each individual to decide. That not a few deprive themselves unnecessarily of common comforts is probably true, but then, are they not living the way their fathers lived?

Visitors always report that the average Vermonter is not a good spender. Jubilee Jim Fisk was born in the State, but the folks back home think of him as a sport and not a specimen. They have had too extensive contacts with poverty and hardship not to know the value of a dollar.

There is some warrant for calling the Vermonter the American Scot. Like the Caledonian, he is frugal, honest and accumulative. He adds a few dollars every little while to his savings deposits and invests often in bank stocks. The typical Vermonter sometimes owns a dozen bank books. A man who has

piled up a few thousands is a capitalist. That other man who owns no property by middle age is considered either a victim of circumstances beyond his control or as some way defective in the fundamental virtues. The genuine Vermonter likes to own something and keep out of debt. Nobody can rush him into extravagance.

The State, like all others, has its financial problems to consider. Students say that "no agreement ever has been reached as to the proper way to compute the State debt." However, the State Chamber of Commerce offers evidence that had it not been for the flood of 1927 Vermont could have paid all its indebtedness and had \$2,000,000 to spare by 1937. The State has weathered that calamity well, but payments continue, and the people are beginning to demand new services, so that in eleven years the annual costs of government have gone up 75 per cent. Six times in these years the State has finished in the black, five times in the red. In the 1937 fiscal year it paid all bills and borrowings, reduced the State debt by a half million, and finished with \$1,700,000 in cash on hand.

No State strives harder to pay as it goes. That's Vermont. Former Governor Scott Wilson [Stanley C. Wilson, Vermont governor, 1931-1935] spoke for the whole people when he said: "I do not believe in spending money we haven't got to build things we don't need."

VERMONTERS are by nature individualistic. They think for themselves, founding their opinions on personal

contacts with facts. If they are perplexed these days by numerous economic problems it is partly because the State does not afford a sufficient field of experience from which to derive the data necessary for solutions. However, they do less guessing than most.

The independent judgment of the people is reflected in their political institutions. Politics is practiced in every community, but professional politicians are rare. When as a frontier State Vermont entered the Union it was the most democratic of all the States, the only one having straight manhood suffrage and operating with a unicameral Legislature, which was much like an enlarged town meeting. There are two chambers today, and the lower house has 246 members. Every town, no matter how small, is entitled to one Representative, and, except in the cities, these are selected as a rule with slight regard for party. Membership is passed around among the community's "deserving" citizens.

VERMONT is the only State that has always given its electoral vote to the Republican party. Republican policies naturally appeal to this people, removed as they are from the industrial turbulence of many other States. Moreover, Vermont has always been an avowed foe of slavery; in its original Constitution, adopted in 1777, it outlawed that "peculiar institution," and it hailed the party of Lincoln for its stand on this question.

The policies of the founders of the party suited Vermont in 1856 and the voters have not "seen" anything better since. They rather enjoy nowadays the

reputation they have acquired as the one and only absolutely dependable Republican State.

They know their State is "different" and want it to stay so. They feel that it is up to them to preserve the historic traditions of New England. The industrial strife over the line in Massachusetts and across the river in New Hampshire alarms them. They think common sense is a good poultice for economic ills. In 1936 the average Vermonter bet one way but voted the other.

The typical Vermonter does not brag much. He is not voluble. He listens well and meditates a good deal. Yet he is proud of his State and he is not much impressed by the criticisms of cursory tourists. He is just an old-fashioned American, justly to be charged with some derelictions, perhaps, in the scheme of progress, while setting an example that many of his critics might profitably emulate. What seems willful perversity is "just Vermont."



reports, “[its] largest city has about 25,000 inhabitants, 152 of its 246 townships have 1,000 or less.” And he concludes that “[i]t is the outlook and habits developed on farms, and retained even by Vermonters and Down Easters who no longer work the soil, which stamps these two states. More precisely, it is an outlook and it is habits born of a hard life but not of degrading poverty.”

At the heart of the character of Vermont and Maine, according to Duffus, is individuality. This is not necessarily a genetic trait, although he points out that 65.2 percent of the population was native born—far above the national average of 39.3 percent—but it is a characteristic that reflects the realities and daily contests between man and nature in agrarian life. “Individualism, backed up by hard work, frugality and possibly a bargaining instinct, really does work pretty well for a farmer in the region and perhaps only a little less well for those dependent indirectly on agriculture—small business and professional men, lawyers, editors, and the like.”¹²

But it was not just outsiders in the 1930s who were looking at Vermont and musing on its character. In 1928 the Vermont Commission on Country Life began its work of dissecting and analyzing every aspect of Vermont life and culture. Adapting information collected between 1925 and 1928 by the Vermont Eugenics Survey, the Country Life Commission outlined a broad agenda of social and institutional reform with an emphasis on preserving, purifying, and revitalizing the “old stock.”¹³ Newcomers were suspect, and “[t]he substitution of foreign race elements for the native stock is being studied from the standpoint of its effect upon the quality of life of the Vermont town and upon the ideals which have made the name of the Green Mountain State respected and loved throughout the nation.”¹⁴

Some of the commission’s conclusions and recommendations are unsettling in the context of the later twentieth century, which has had so much bitter experience with genocide and racial conflict. However, the commission’s 1931 report, *Rural Vermont: A Program for the Future*, contains a detailed analysis—intermixed with the theories of eugenics—of natural resources, economic activity, politics, social and medical services, education, religion, arts, and traditions.¹⁵ The report proposes many institutional reforms and recommendations concerning Vermont’s economic, social, and cultural life that have since become agenda items for our own time. The “two hundred Vermonters” who sat on committees to prepare the report represented, in their professions and social lives, a sample closer to Taylor’s two dozen correspondents (and, incidentally, closer to the sample of Center for Research on Vermont members surveyed in 1995)

¹²Duffus, “Old Maine and Vermont,” 16.

¹³See Kevin Dann, “From Degeneration to Regeneration: The Eugenics Survey of Vermont, 1925–1936,” *Vermont History* 59, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 5–29.

¹⁴Henry C. Taylor, “The Vermont Commission on Country Life,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 12, no. 1 (January 1930): 165.

¹⁵Vermont Commission on Country Life, *Rural Vermont: A Program for the Future by Two Hundred Vermonters* (Burlington: Free Press Publishing Co., 1931).

than Duffus's on-the-road interviews with government officials, farmers, and town clerks. But similar results emerged.

In a country that had become increasingly urban, industrial, racially and ethnically heterogeneous, politically divided, and, above all, economically stratified, Vermont in 1931 continued to look like the repository of some archetype of a lost and longed-for American character: rural, homogeneous, frugal, resourceful, stubborn, vigilant in protecting individualism and independence. The Commission on Country Life had a far more ambivalent attitude toward that image than either Bullard or Duffus. To a considerable extent, the two hundred Vermonters who helped draft the report worried that Vermont had become too ingrown and isolated. While old Vermont had much to treasure and to teach the nation, perhaps it had fallen too far out of step with the rest of the United States. For the Country Life commissioners, as well as for journalists like Bullard and Duffus, by the 1930s Vermont was becoming an icon of American nostalgia. As an object of study, veneration, and curiosity, it came to signify a society frozen in time.

No document more clearly encapsulates the general drift toward nostalgia and Vermont's role in that and the ambiguities which that evoked than Dorothy Canfield Fisher's essay, "Vermonters," written for the Vermont volume in the American Guide Series, a product of the Federal Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration (WPA).¹⁶ Fisher is an obvious link among the various analyses of Vermont. She was one of the respondents to Taylor's questionnaire for Bullard, she served on the Country Life Commission, and her essay introduced the WPA volume. The essay reiterated what we have seen in Bullard and Duffus: Vermont is rural, rugged, poor, somewhat isolated, small. That has made its people independent, self-reliant, modest in their wants and expectations, mindful of community, slow to change or adopt fads and fashions, and rooted in their past. Fisher quoted her godfather who moved to Kansas from Morrisville, and became a very successful lawyer but continued to consider himself as being "in essence a Vermonter." "What ought to be done with the old State,' he would say meditatively, 'is to turn it into a National Park of a new kind—keep it just as it is, with Vermonters managing just as they do—so the rest of the country could come in to see how their grandparents lived.'"¹⁷ Vermont is in favor in 1937, Fisher added, because the depression has taught the rest of America a harsh lesson about progress, the consequences of reliance on a complex, industrial-based, abstract financial system, and the limitations of urban society in times of crisis. Vermont has never fully known any of those ways of modern American life, she said with some exaggeration, "so all we can do, when our opinion is called for, is to remind the rest of you of the standards, ideals, judgments, and decisions that were the rules when your father was a little boy. And since it was on those standards, ideals, judgments, and decisions that America got to where she is (for

¹⁶Dorothy Canfield Fisher, "Vermonters," in *Vermont: A Guide to the Green Mountain State*, Federal Writers' Project (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1937), 3–9.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 3.

good and bad), we may possibly be performing a small useful function in the national economy by the reminder."¹⁸

Fisher was obviously not alone in the belief that Vermont represented something important about the American past that could be useful for shaping the present and future of America in the 1930s. Both Bullard and Duffus wrote their pieces with similar concerns about the shape of American society and institutions in the wake of the Great Depression, hence their interest in the condition of the Vermont economy and Bullard's admiring report that "six times in [the past eleven] years the State has finished in the black, five times in the red. In the 1937 fiscal year it paid all bills and borrowings, reduced the State debt by a half million, and finished with \$1,700,000 in cash on hand."¹⁹

But another factor in American life in the 1930s also lay behind the interest in Vermont. By the late 1930s, the rise of fascism and communism were causing writers and journalists to examine America's commitment to its institutions and to democratic principles. Sinclair Lewis's novel, *It Can't Happen Here*, set in Vermont, presented a grim picture of a small community gradually sacrificing individual liberties and slipping almost imperceptibly into totalitarian conformity. Other observers saw Vermont differently. Responding to Taylor's survey for Bullard, R. S. Boynton wrote, "[Vermonters] are not easily led by mass psychology," while C. E. Crane stated, "They are not easily stampeded." Duffus went further, seeing in the Vermont character and history a promise for American institutions: "Of all the States . . . Maine and Vermont are perhaps the most completely individualized. It is no accident that political and economic innovations are frowned upon in both States. It is no accident that neither is fertile soil for mass movements. If it is to be supposed, for the sake of argument, that either fascism or communism could gain control of the United States, Maine would be one of the last States to yield, Vermont certainly the last."²⁰

Standing at a crossroads in history in the 1930s, with the ravages of the depression and their implications for the institutions of capitalism and democracy on the one side and the rise of mass movements such as fascism and communism on the other, Americans looked about them for models from their past to shape their future. Vermont stood out as one such model.

If the postdepression days were a time of crisis and self-reflection on the successes and failures of capitalism, industrialism, and urbanization, so, too, were the post-World War II days when the nation experienced a population boom, rapid industrial and economic expansion, and a general feeling of prosperity, power, and progress. At the same time, of course, Americans responded to the anxieties of the developing "cold war" and questioned once again the meanings and dangers of patriotism and nationalism. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the debate about the Vermont character renewed in the 1950s. A short-lived magazine, *The Vermont Town Meeting*, edited by Mark O'Dea and published between March 1950 and April 1951, provided

¹⁸Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁹Bullard, "Vermont Is Different," 22.

²⁰Duffus, "Old Maine and Vermont," 6.

a monthly forum for discussing some of the most unsettling issues facing Vermonters in the postwar era. Among them were familiar topics: "Are Summer Residents a Menace to Agriculture?" (March 1950), "Does Vermont Face an Economic Crisis? Whither Vermont Industrially?" (May 1950), and "Shall Vermont Go Forward?" (March 1951). Several articles on the meaning of patriotism and "Combatting Communism in Vermont" are also a sign of the times. Some of those who had participated in James Taylor's survey on Vermont character turn up in the pages of *Vermont Town Meeting*—Arthur Packard, Charles Smith, and Ralph Flanders. Other frequent contributors to the magazine included Samuel R. Ogden of Landgrove, chairman of the Vermont Development Commission; Bernard G. O'Shea, publisher and editor of the *Swanton Courier*; Howard C. Rice, publisher and editor of the *Brattleboro Reformer*; and U.S. Sen. George D. Aiken.

The debate on the value of summer residents became a discussion of the impact on Vermont of a new wave of part-time and full-time residents "from away." The Vermont Farm Bureau, through its sixty Neighborhood Clubs, heard from farmers who objected to the Development Commission promoting the sale of abandoned farms. Don Elbertson, director of education for the Vermont State Farm Bureau, summarized the arguments at Neighborhood Club discussions and drew a thumbnail portrait of Vermont in his comments. Elbertson noted that farmers saw themselves in "cultural conflict" with the newcomers.

Vermont society as a whole is very democratic. It is slow moving and deliberate in its decision. Any man is as good as the next one. Anyone can go in and talk with the Governor. Our representatives in Congress are always very close to their constituents. Men of wealth mingle with those of modest incomes at town meetings, forums, etc. This greater equality in Vermont tends to make people fight against the master-servant relationship which is brought in with some of those who can afford to pay exceptionally good prices for farms.

. . . being more aggressive, [some newcomers] seem to feel that it is their special destiny to bring the benefits of their kind of society to the "backwoods" of Vermont. . . . This "looking down" upon Vermonters by newcomers probably accounts for more antagonism than do the economic reasons, yet the two are very closely related. It is very infuriating to have your way of life looked down upon, particularly when you have a great regard for it.²¹

Speaking for industrial interests, Theodore F. Kane, executive vice president of the Associated Industries of Vermont, painted a different picture of Vermont. Kane argued that "economically speaking, it is inaccurate to call Vermont an 'agricultural' state. Only 23% of the State's gainfully employed work on farms, and only 14% of total income received by individual Vermonters is derived from agricultural sources." Farmers, he suggested, were the only people interested in keeping newcomers out of Vermont; many other Vermonters were eager to bring in new people. As had happened so often in the state's past, Kane argued, Vermont was in the midst of a crisis of declining population. "[F]rom a population standpoint, Vermont has made

²¹"Are Summer Residents a Menace to Agriculture?" in *Vermont Town Meeting*, March 1950, 5. We are indebted to Weston A. Cate, Jr., for calling this publication to our attention.

the worst showing in all New England, and . . . we are almost on the verge of losing population.” To prove his point, Kane cited some census statistics:

Between the 1940 census and July 1, 1949, . . . Vermont has had a gain of 2.6%, whereas other New England states had the following gains: Maine, 7.3; New Hampshire, 10.7; Massachusetts, 9.2; Rhode Island, 4.1; Connecticut, 18.1. The national gain was 12.9. We cannot afford to stand still. Next we would be going backward.²²

Richard E. Dana, a young dairy farmer from Pomfret, challenged the traditional images of Vermonters: “I’ve read many articles about us ‘quaint natives,’ our silences, our laconic remarks, our strange sense of humor, our shrewdness and all that. . . . Most of it is just fiction. In reality, many of us natives are gabbers, just like other people all over the world. . . . We Vermonters may be a bit different, but we’re not all hill-billies. . . . We’ve been around the country; some of us even around the world.” Unfortunately, Dana did not go on to describe what makes Vermonters “a bit different.”²³

The debates in *Vermont Town Meeting* show a Vermont under stress. Commentators struggled to define the benefits and hazards of economic progress and social change that had taken place between the depression and the postwar boom times. Trying to come to terms with a new economic and social reality, Vermonters in 1950 also renewed their efforts to understand what, if anything, made them different from their neighbors elsewhere in New England and the rest of the country.

The postwar years also brought a new political reality. To illustrate: A letter in the August 1950 issue of *Vermont Town Meeting* challenged the very concept of a “Vermont character” and called on Vermonters to surrender localism and regionalism in order to solve problems that exist on a national scale. In his letter West Brattleboro resident Peter Docili, who had come to Vermont from California, scoffed at the idea of local or regional character:

. . . as for the cliché “silent and thrifty” so often given to Vermont men, I find it completely erroneous. Men talk just as much in these green mountain valleys as elsewhere, if not more, and I’m sure thrift is not something peculiar to Vermont men alone. . . . Let’s not write as if Vermont is an island unto itself. I’m for people in any town, village or city having pride in their environment, children, institutions, but let’s not wave the flag too much. It’s time for Americans to grow up (Vermonters too) and realize that we are one people, Americans, and not Vermonters or Texans or Californians.

. . . Too much patriotism and nationalism breed wars, give people false estimates of themselves, separating them from others, setting them apart instead of drawing them

²²Ibid., 7.

²³Ibid., 8.

together. . . . Please let's not set Vermont up as a granite symbol of "it can only happen here."²⁴

Docili's attack on Vermont exceptionalism brought a predictable mix of reactions. Dean H. Perry, publisher and editor of the *Barre Daily Times*, responded with a sly article that in part agreed with Docili and in part used his letter to reflect on both the benefits and drawbacks of Vermont's insularity:

We may think we have a far-flung name and reputation but it might come as a shock to many of us to learn how few people outside of New England know very much about Vermont and our "way of life." . . .

We are a backwater, cut off from the most populous centers by our hills and streams. Our economy has changed very little over the years—we are not subjected to the fears, strange ideologies, and urgent competition that undermine the security of other states. The great swells of social change and foreign wars that rock the foundations of our cities are mere wavelets and lapping ripples when they reach our doorstep and we grumble peevishly at those who wish to drag us into deeper waters.

. . . Our virtues and our shortcomings are intermixed, for our detractors would say that our independence and devotion to the old ways are less virulent manifestations of our suspicion, inflexibility and resistance to progress. We hope that our detractors are wrong.²⁵

Samuel R. Ogden, writing—according to the editor—as “an individual, not as Chairman, Vermont Development Commission,” was outraged by Docili's comments on philosophical as well as perhaps chauvinistic grounds.

Implied in [Peter Docili's] letter is an intellectual attitude which is characteristic of the “liberal” point of view. To my way of thinking it is an attitude which is completely unrealistic.

Actually this attitude is a basic part of the materialistic philosophy which our civilization has accepted and from which it cannot be separated.

. . . in reality we live in a world of differences. . . . Family groups, communal groups, national, racial and cultural groups, as they exist, are actual realities, necessary in human relationships and are an essential part of man's nature.

To insist that they do not exist is to be guilty of a perversion of truth which proceeds from a maudlin optimism, a necessary part of the self-deception which materialism forces upon us. To insist that they can be and should be eliminated is to inflict upon the world further misery and suffering. . . .

All human relationships are immediate and personal and if these relationships are conducted with love and understanding, with kindness, tolerance and good taste, with wisdom and complete

²⁴Peter Docili, Letter to the editor, *Vermont Town Meeting*, August 1950, 29–30.

²⁵Dean H. Perry, “Vermont . . . ‘The Best State in the Union’: Are We Too Smug and Sentimental?” *Vermont Town Meeting*, October 1950, 10–11.

acceptance of the golden rule, the need for a resident of Brattleboro to hope for the day when Vermonters would be undistinguishable from Texans would disappear.

In fact it would be unthinkable that such a hope could ever arise.²⁶

This debate, which clearly had larger political overtones related to postwar urban growth, internationalism, and the emerging cold war, raises interesting issues about the relationship between identity and place. Americans, long committed to the ideal of their country as a "melting pot" of nationalities, have nonetheless recognized and clung to cultural and regional differences for a variety of political and ideological purposes. The shifting value placed upon sameness and difference is a dilemma deeply rooted in American culture.

Some of the *Vermont Town Meeting* debates of the 1950s—and even a few themes dating back to the 1930s—persisted in discussions that took place in the 1970s after Vermont had witnessed rapid population growth, but the tone was also considerably changed: "Being on the side, [Vermont] has not been homogenized into the mainstream of the United States way of life—but instead has for many generations lagged a bit behind that stream, though less today than yesterday."²⁷ The policy outcomes also were different. Whereas, for example, the Commission on Rural Life ended up promoting tourism, 1960s growth patterns and the early 1970s discussions of identity led us to adopt Act 250.

Since the mid-to-late-1980s, Vermonters have engaged in a wave of self-examination. In 1987, the Windham Foundation sponsored a conference on "Vermont: Who Are We Becoming?" at which a select group of invited participants noted that "Vermont is at risk of losing its character over the next decade [because, participants believed,] of the forces of rapid growth and change and because of governmental institutions that are not structured properly to cope with those forces." The group advocated "creation of a commission, patterned after the Commission on Rural Life of the 1930s" to "function as a think tank with respect to Vermont in the next decade and the next century."²⁸

Motivations for self-examination were again rooted in economic unease and included the fear of becoming polarized into two Vermons. There was "near unanimity" at the conference "that we [and government] must look to the future in order to preserve that which we value most from our past," but now the Vermont identity or "mystique" emerged almost as a source of complacency, an obstacle to be overcome so that Vermont could take action and regain "control over its destiny."²⁹

²⁶Samuel R. Ogden, "Unthinkable," *Vermont Town Meeting*, October 1950, 11.

²⁷Matteson Associates, *Challenge and Opportunity—Development to Intermingle Old and New—1975 to 2000* (Montpelier: State of Vermont Planning and Communities Services Agency, 1971), 2.

²⁸"Vermont: Who Are We Becoming?" Report of the Twelfth Grafton Conference, July 19–21, 1987 (Grafton, Vt.: Windham Foundation, 1987), 7, 8.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 13, 4.

The Vermont mystique is a blend of fact and fiction, conception and misconception, reality and wishful thinking. It says that Vermont is, at heart, an agrarian society in which the environment is adequately protected by a land-use law. . . . It says that Vermont is a society in which citizens share common values and common goals for themselves and for their state. And it says that Vermont will always be this way.³⁰

An effort akin to that of the Vermont Commission on Country Life of the 1930s was, in fact, undertaken. This was the Governor's Commission on Vermont's Future, which issued a 1988 report: a summary finding based on statements taken at eleven public hearings and from hundreds of letters and written testimony.³¹ In establishing the commission, Gov. Madeleine Kunin hoped to respond to, and in some measure shape, public debate on Act 200—legislation she introduced to assist, promote, entice, or require (depending on your point of view) local and regional planning for development and land use. As the commission laid the groundwork for the planning process, it held hearings to collect opinions from Vermonters throughout the state. It began its report on this testimony with an effort to describe "Vermont values."³² The description is remarkable for its congruence with earlier observations, including those of Taylor's respondents. "Vermont is a village culture," wrote the commissioners as they identified the value of "community." "It began as a state of frontier settlements and remains a small world where people know and care about one another." Vermonters value agriculture: "Farming has shaped our beliefs and attitudes as well as our countryside," and work on the farm has taught generations of Vermonters independence and self-reliance. The commission also noted the fears of some that, with the disappearance of small farms, rural Vermont was becoming only a place, a museum-like artifact, perhaps merely a playground or "theme park," the fulfillment, perhaps, of Dorothy Canfield Fisher's godfather's prophecy.

The commission suggested some new themes even as it reiterated old values. "Vermont remains committed to a strong environmental ethic," it stated. "The state's environmental laws have kept it intact despite enormous and growing pressures, and yet they have allowed growth and change." This is an interesting twist on an old theme. Commentators in the 1930s spoke lovingly of the landscape and pragmatically about mountains as barriers as well as natural features that endow cultural attitudes. But an environmental ethic, with a few notable exceptions like George Perkins Marsh, is a new feature in the Vermont character description, a marker of the generation that has grown increasingly aware of environmental degradation and alarmed about the impact of economic and demographic growth on the landscape and natural resources. When the Commission on Country Life looked at the state's natural resources and their use in the late 1920s, one of its main areas of concern was the declining productivity of agricultural land and

³⁰Ibid., 4.

³¹"Report of the Governor's Commission on Vermont's Future: Guidelines for Growth" (Montpelier: State of Vermont, 1988).

³²Ibid., 6-7.

forests and the decline or abandonment of "submarginal" agricultural lands. The commission's recommendation to promote the sale of these lands as second homes and tourist facilities and the apparent success of this strategy created a new set of environmental problems and issues.

The fourth value identified in the commission's report was "opportunity," found "in our tradition of small scale entrepreneurship," which is "appropriate to our resources." Throughout its history, Vermont has had an abundance of both small- and large-scale industries, yet not until recently have they played a significant role in shaping the image of the state. Now in the late twentieth century, Vermont is being promoted as a land of opportunity—as it was in the late eighteenth century—and smallness, appropriateness, and historical precedent are again important. We can hear the familiar refrain of Vermonters as an ingenious and resourceful society. Did we mean to be exemplars of Ernst Schumacher's phrase "small is beautiful," or did it just happen that way?

In the 1990s, Vermont and America seem to have come to another crossroads, prompting us to look inward at our institutions, culture, and ideological commitments. Once again outsiders are examining Vermont, as well, although now it seems more often in puzzlement than in search of a model. As the rest of the country—indeed the world—followed with astonishment Vermont's retention of political incumbents in the 1994 national elections, Vermont's "ancient reputation for going its own way" seemed intact. Or, as one writer put it, "Vermont is an untypical corner of the United States."³³

National headlines touted Vermonters' decisions to reject Wal-Mart—"What is so rare as a mall in Vermont?"—yet noted Vermont's ambivalence about growth, along with possible polarization. "Vermont debates the value of saving a rural image," said one July 1993 headline, while another noted, "[b]ut they smile when their state lures mobs of skiers and tourists." "Two nations co-exist uneasily in Vermont," opines the *Economist*, "oldtimers and newcomers."³⁴

Thus, in the late twentieth century, Vermonters struggle with and against their myths and images of what the state is and is not and what it should be.³⁵ The government plays a part as we have seen. The business community takes its own initiatives in the form, for example, of the "Pulse of Vermont" study which the Vermont Business Roundtable commissioned to understand

³³"The Contests in Vermont: Incumbentophilia," *Economist*, October 29, 1994, 30.

³⁴"What Is So Rare as a Mall in Vermont?" *New York Times*, January 22, 1995, 26, 27. Based on a quick survey of the National News Index, the Wal-Mart debates are the most frequent reasons for Vermont's being mentioned in major national newspapers over the last few years. Sara Rimer, "Vermont Debates Value of Saving a Rural Image," *New York Times*, July 4, 1993, 10, 14; David Kansas, "But They Smile When Their State Lures Mobs of Skiers and Tourists," *Wall Street Journal*, June 23, 1993, B1; "Vermont v Wal-Mart," *Economist*, February 4, 1995, 27.

³⁵See Charles T. Morrissey, *Vermont: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981); and Nancy Price Graff, ed., *Celebrating Vermont: Myths and Realities* (Middlebury, Vt.: Middlebury College Christian A. Johnson Memorial Gallery, 1991).

better the "quality of life" issues that seem to drive Vermont's growth.³⁶ The public at large also reexamines its past. In 1991, as Vermonters celebrated the bicentennial of statehood, they thronged to a series of public debates on the question, "Should we have joined the Union?" thereby examining—in terms that were only thinly disguised as irony—the merits and consequences of federalism after a half-century of the New Deal, the New Frontier, the Great Society, the New Federalism, and more recently, the Contract with America and its thrust to dismantle large sectors of federal authority and activity. In 1995, as once again many are economically pressured to "make do," Vermonters ask what, if any, constructive lessons are contained in an analysis of the Vermont character and Vermont's past or whether, indeed, Vermont is still "exceptional."

As some respondents said in their answers to the 1995 Center for Research on Vermont survey discussed below, perhaps Vermont is no longer so different from the rest of New England and America. If that is true, where would it leave us? Moreover, why do we care? What is the cultural and psychological function of localism and local self-scrutiny in an age of global markets, global communication, and global culture?

A SENSE OF PLACE

"If you don't know where you are," says Wendell Berry, "you don't know *who* you are."³⁷ With that homage to one of his favorite regional writers, Wallace Stegner, part-time Vermonter, part-time Californian, and perennially self-conscious westerner, opens his essay "The Sense of Place."³⁷ He reminds us that American culture is built on the tension between mobility, transitoriness, and change, on the one hand, and nostalgia for times gone by, places left behind, and settledness, on the other.

Much of U.S. history and many of its most memorable literary and historical figures embody and extol the courage to move on, forge into the wilderness, and shun the ties and routines of settled society. But our humanness, Stegner argues, is based on finding in ourselves a sense of place, a sense of belonging. That sense of place is built up over time, "by slow accrual, like a coral reef," he says; other writers on the subject agree that we know a place not by visiting it or passing through it but by living in it, working in and with it, learning and following its daily and seasonal rhythms, speaking the language of the place and its people.³⁸

³⁶"Pulse of Vermont: Quality of Life Study" (Burlington: Vermont Business Roundtable, 1990). This study, conducted by the Saint Michael's College Center for Social Science Research, was based on a scientific sampling of Vermonters; an update is currently under way.

³⁷Wallace Stegner, "The Sense of Place," in *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs: Living and Writing in the West* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 199–206.

³⁸See Stegner, *ibid.*, 201; Yi-Fu Tuan, "A Sense of Place," unpublished ms., 1988; and Gretchen H. Schoff, "Place: A Condition of the Spirit," unpublished ms., 1988. These essays were written for a 1988 conference, "A Sense of Place," in Madison, Wisconsin, which was sponsored by the Wisconsin Humanities Committee.

So a place isn't a place until it has a history, and we have no sense of the place until we understand and live in its history. It is a reciprocal relationship, as most geographers and historians agree. A place, fully understood and fully lived in, imposes itself on its inhabitants. And the knowledge gained by adapting to the place changes the person.

People, of course, can do much to change a place. We can irrigate deserts; build roads across, around, or through natural barriers to connect separated parts; clear forests to make farms or cities; abandon farms to allow forests to return. And human beings have done all these things. American culture was built in significant measure on the idea that nature was an enemy to be conquered and subdued; the wilderness, a barren place to be tamed and cultivated. The struggle between nature and culture, the wilderness and civilization, has been the great dichotomy of our history and our art. With the occasional dissenting voice or counterexample, the sense of place in American consciousness has been submerged beneath the heavy weight of a homogenizing culture, localism suppressed in favor of cosmopolitanism.

Since the 1950s writers and social critics have stimulated intellectual and political interest in a sense of place. The environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the ubiquitous reexamination and questioning of the effectiveness and desirability of centralized government, the resurgence in many parts of the globe of political and cultural ethnicity, and self-conscious efforts to revive traditional arts and crafts or sharpen the outlines of "regional" literature have all contributed to a new appreciation of the sense of place. As geographer Yi-Fu Tuan notes in his essay on this topic, "We raise deep questions concerning our own humanness when we explore the meaning of our homes. We probe the nature of our being when we seek to understand our sense of place."³⁹

A TWENTIETH-ANNIVERSARY SURVEY

Given the importance of this sense of place and our disquietude in the face of global, national, and statewide changes, it was not idle curiosity that prompted us to ask Vermonters in 1995 to characterize the people among whom they live and the place where they live. As others who have described Vermonters demonstrate, even the most unscientific effort to identify first principles, strongly held beliefs, and long-maintained traditions about our place is important—as a starting point for action, a record for the future, and an examination of continuity with the past.

Not surprisingly, Taylor's informal survey of his contemporaries' insights had long intrigued the Vermont Historical Society and the Center for Research on Vermont's Executive Committee and piqued an interest in its replication. Questions of methodology, however, kept the idea on the back burner for several years. For one thing, it may have seemed obvious to Taylor who the Vermont luminaries were who ought to be polled to provide a definitive statement on the character of the state. It is not so easy in contemporary Vermont, especially if one wishes to construct a survey comparable to Taylor's. How can a small number of individuals represent the greater diversity of the state's economic base, ethnic composition, and so on? What other female

³⁹Yi-Fu Tuan, *ibid.*, 1.

respondents would Taylor have included, had he insight into today's power structures? Similarly, what would be comparable questions now, almost sixty years after the Taylor original?

For several years, a proposed 1990s update of Taylor's survey languished—floundering largely on these methodological issues—until the twentieth anniversary of the Center for Research on Vermont called for a now-or-never effort. Abandoning any pretense of scientific sampling, we decided to conduct a survey that would replicate the spirit of Taylor's effort and use his questions as faithfully as possible.

In lieu of the "two dozen prominent Vermonters" queried by Taylor, we sought the insights of all two hundred members of the Center for Research on Vermont. Wherever they lived—far or near—all received questionnaires. What better way to celebrate twenty years of sustained interest in Vermont topics and how better to honor the many individual researchers who have helped make the Center a success than to query them in this way?

While Taylor's respondents were mostly people prominent in industry, the 1995 survey respondents predominantly had academic backgrounds. They are listed, with brief identifications, in appendix 3. Some have been active in politics and civic affairs; others are accustomed to the role of opinionmaker; these characteristics, however, are not true of all. One nonacademic, for example, indicated that he was grateful for the opportunity to comment on the character of Vermont. He wrote that "it is seldom that anyone asks my opinion. Sometimes my wife does but ignores my reply." Lack of an attentive audience would not likely have been the fate of any of Taylor's survey respondents!

A total of fifty-one questionnaires were returned, of which forty-eight were usable, although not every questionnaire contained answers to every question. Needless to say, this is hardly a representative sample of Vermont opinion. Instead, as one respondent put it, these thoughtful contributions "have a non-scientific specificity." Respondents were predominantly male (male: 36; female: 12; sex unknown: 3); they were middle-aged and up, with only three respondents under 40 years old; 24 were in the 40–65 range, and 21 were over 65. Chittenden County is home to 23 respondents; 20 live elsewhere in Vermont; 4 live out-of-state (place of residence unknown: 4).

Just seven respondents indicated they were Vermonters "by birth." Among the others, however, were those who had lived here for up to fifty-five years. As always, then, what defines a "Vermonters" is an interesting and loaded question in and of itself. One respondent noted in seeming exasperation, "Oh, how I wish you wouldn't use the term Vermonters!" Another suggested that "there is no such thing as a Vermonters" but spoke in terms of the character of the state. Taylor's questions, in fact, at times ask about Vermonters and at times about Vermont, a distinction most, but not all, of our respondents made. While a few people indicated they simply could not adequately complete the questionnaire—we appreciated their honesty—others attached lengthy, typewritten commentaries.

And to what were they responding? After considerable thought and discussion, with the input of members of the Executive Committee of the Center for Research on Vermont,⁴⁰ we

⁴⁰The authors especially thank Reidun Nuquist for generously contributing her time.

developed a questionnaire which to a considerable extent simply duplicated Taylor's question set, augmenting it with clarifying questions but retaining the original language as much as possible. The 1995 questionnaire, which is included as appendix 4, sought to elicit responses to a range of subjects from leading characteristics of Vermonters to feelings about pride of place, perceptions of change, and politics.

When respondents were asked, first of all, to characterize Vermonters, just one indicated that "I don't think there is a single Vermont character. I don't think there ever was, nor will there ever be." Others readily generated a wide range of adjectives to describe Vermonters, "despite the growing homogenization of American society generally." They did so, first and foremost, by stressing "independence" and related characteristics such as "self-reliance" and "love of liberty." Almost half of all the surveys included these traits. Generally the characteristics were offered without much explanation, but a few respondents attributed the perceived independence of Vermonters to such things as geographic isolation, historical tradition, "our years as an independent republic," and the "largely agrarian" tradition of the state. As one person commented, "With its long and difficult birth, first as an independent nation then as a state, Vermont's political history has differed from that of its neighbors. It is more willing to go its own way without following the fashions of the federation, and its citizens are more independent."

Several replies suggested that what was valued was an *appearance* of independence from big government and/or from the opinions of others. This may be linked to what respondents described as Vermonters' beliefs that they are "special" or "different" (two mentions) or to their perceived "stubbornness" or even "cussedness" or "contrariness" (which one person suggested might be a response to insecurity), deliberate or otherwise (six mentions). One person felt that "Vermonters-by-birth try to exude a certain 'independence' so they can appear to be 'superior.'" More on Vermonters-by-birth versus Vermonters-by-choice follows below. Among the numerous other adjectives used were "helpful" and "giving" (two mentions), and especially "respect for the land and/or nature" (six mentions). "Common sense" appeared five times. "Thrift" appeared just twice, a notable contrast to Taylor's findings.

When asked "of what are the people in Vermont most proud?" "independence," "resistance to being categorized," and similar responses again emerged most strongly (16 out of 43 usable responses), with one respondent referring to "alleged independence." Another and largely separate group of respondents answered using terms of pride in Vermont's heritage, its mythology, and some of its ancestors (e.g., George Aiken and Ethan Allen), which one described as a "heritage of independence." These nine respondents seemed to be stressing past evidence for independence, whereas the others focused on contemporary manifestations. One person pointed out that "the traditional characteristics probably serve mythic purposes, rather than provide meaningful models" and mentioned as an example of self-contradiction the so-called "self-reliant independent farmer" who is in reality controlled by national and international markets and national and state legislation.

Along with independence, pride of place emerges very strongly in references to Vermont's natural beauty, the landscape, scenery, etc., including pride in the governmental programs that preserve this valued environment. With fifteen mentions, environmental features rivaled independence-related traits as prominent aspects of pride in Vermont. When asked later in a

separate question to identify what "Vermonters like the best about their state," the scenery, rural environment, low level of development, and natural beauty of Vermont emerged overwhelmingly (30 mentions out of 43). Indeed, one respondent suggested that appreciation of "rurality" was possibly the only common value among Vermonters and that "beyond that, one cannot generalize because of factional groups with their own agendas." It was suggested that this diversity and factionalism breed "a lack of pride of 'place'" in today's Vermont.

In listing characteristics of Vermonters, survey respondents were specifically asked to reflect on possible differences between Vermonters and other New Englanders and between "Vermonters-by-birth" and "Vermonters-by-choice." They had very little comment about the former question; when it came to the "birth" versus "choice" question, however, much could be written about what they said. Any interpretation of their responses must, of course, bear in mind that, while most of our correspondents have lived in Vermont for a considerable length of time, very few are in fact themselves "Vermonters-by-birth." One respondent went so far as to say that Vermonters by birth "tend to live out-of-state."

Responses ranged from no differences—newcomers "don't linger very long" unless they adopt the culture of the birthright Vermonters—to slight differences, e.g., "some Vermonters have their own particular accent," to "everything" is different. Some view newcomers as changing things—"Vermonters-by-choice moved here for what Vermont is, then try to change it to conform with what they think it should be"—while others see them as a force for preservation and continuity—"Vermonters by choice seem to want to protect the environment, the barns, what was, the reasons for coming to Vermont." One person reflected explicitly on these contradictions:

Two general, and somewhat conflicting, arguments are—newcomers want to bring the full range of services they enjoyed in their perhaps more urban state, regardless of whether our town or state tax bases can support it—or, newcomers, having fled the problems of more populous states, want to keep Vermont as it is, even at the cost of services and economic opportunities enjoyed by other states.

Some people suggested that all Vermonters "tend to value the same things" but simply express this differently. "Vermonters by choice tend to wax enthusiastic about them; Vermonters by birth to enjoy them by understatement." Others pointed to specific areas of difference, e.g., "natives are more politically conservative; newcomers more liberal." Several questionnaires described tensions arising from disparities in income and wealth between newcomers and the rest of the population, the "two Vermonts" theme. However, the scientific survey done by the Saint Michael's College Center for Social Science Research for the "Pulse of Vermont" found that, on all major issues examined, suspected differences between "natives" and "non-natives" disappear when controls for differences in education and income level are included.⁴¹

When the questionnaire asked, "Are the major characteristics of Vermonters changing?" respondents overwhelmingly concluded that they are. Not surprisingly, perceived changes are attributed to communications and the media, which foster national homogenization and a

⁴¹"Pulse of Vermont," 1.

convergence of Vermont attitudes and opinions with national norms and behaviors: "Today's teenagers are more likely to copy the dress of television personalities in California than dress according to Vermont weather." This suggestion of an identity moving toward national norms is, of course, not unique to Vermont. It is evident, for example, in international surveys attempting to establish "how parochial or cosmopolitan publics are," something discussed briefly in the next section.

Increased travel and personal mobility expose Vermonters to new ways of life, and the arrival of new Vermonters is seen as critical since the newcomers are, for example, "more cosmopolitan" and expect more of government. Respondents note an appearance of youth and prosperity, increased interest in individual economic gain with less community interdependence and more polarization, and so on. While many speak in terms of losses—of farms, community, self-reliance, etc.—others see gains in the form of greater diversity and tolerance. Some note stability, even in the midst of change, as "respect for environment, inclination of independence, sense of humor and civic responsibility seem to thrive." One respondent commented that "we have assimilated vast numbers of outsiders, most of whom seem to appreciate the Vermont character much more than the natives." While this integration tends to preserve what are seen as special Vermont traits, "there's no question that the quintessential Vermonter is going the way of the dairy industry."

The "debate" among the Center's survey respondents continued as one questionnaire stated that "Vermonters by choice now dominate most of our political, economic and urban cultural life and impose their values on Vermonters by birth," while another suggested that Vermont "seems to be able to change those who come here more than they change Vermont." The few dissenters who asserted that there was no real significant change would probably agree with the latter. One person indicated that "the basics don't change. The environment, the economy, the climate, the smallness make the character." Another suggested that change was imperceptible and that "a Vermont-style stability prevails" with "a kind of balance, almost magical," for example, in the political mix of "conservatives, centrists and radicals."

More disagreement was generated by the question of whether the state is seen as "backward, or going forward," although many answered in terms of both forward and backward movement: "Forward or not going backward as much as the rest of the country"; "Two steps forward, one step back." Some suggested they were "not sure which is which these days" or noted that "this is a matter of philosophy" or objected to the question ("relative to what?"). The possibility of different interpretations of what-is-forward, what-is-backward was also revealed in one person's reply, "Would that we were going backward." Independence again emerges as a theme: "What is considered forward in Vermont (like care for the Vermont environment) may not be considered forward by people in other states," and "Vermont is going forward at its own deliberate pace." Where some view progress in terms of scenery and environmental preservation, others see a loss of rural character and physical beauty. For some, being "forward" means we have not yet caught up with other areas "in terms of crime, drugs, impersonality, bureaucracy, but we're going that way, too."

Turning to politics, the 1995 questionnaire echoed Taylor's question, asking "Why, oh why is Vermont always Republican?" but followed up with a quick "or is it?" To these were added

questions on whether "government at the state and local level in Vermont" was seen as meeting "the needs of Vermonters" and "How is the ideology of Vermonters likely to change?"

The question on Republicanism drew some predictably dismissive answers ("It is obviously not"), several references to Samuel B. Hand's work on the history of the Republican party in Vermont,⁴² and recitations of non-Republican politicians, such as Gov. Howard Dean, U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy, Congressman Bernard Sanders, and so on. It also generated the remark that, indeed, we are "all still Republican, whatever we call ourselves. By 'republican' we mean fiscally conservative, socially liberal and progressive until it gets expensive." Or, as another respondent put it, "Small local control of our many small towns is inherently part of the Republican ideology."

This question also brought to the surface additional comments on Vermont's independence: "I'm not sure that Vermont Republicans are really comfortable with many national Republicans. Vermont Democrats are probably equally wary of national Democrats." "Vermont Republicans would not be recognized as such elsewhere." Vermont "is independent, cussed, if you like. It looks as if Vermonters would go on working out new ways of doing things, arguing over policies . . . but still working out solutions, as time and process permit." "When you look at the traditions of self-reliance, love of liberty, etc., it isn't hard to understand why Vermonters identified with the Republican party." "Vermont always tends to be out-of-step with the nation, and this is one of its most attractive features."

Do respondents see continuing ideological change as likely? No, replied some. "Change is not likely . . . we have new orators for the end of this century, yet a Vermont-style stability prevails." "Vermonters will always be conservative Progressives." "In their sensibility and compassion, Vermonters are likely to keep treading a moderate course." "The only thing I see changing is Vermonters are getting a little more talkative." Others said yes. "The political climate is (and will continue to become) less predictable." "Vermonters are as desperate for change as all Americans." "With the recent influx of wage earners and minorities that identify with Democrats, the ideology of the state is slowly changing." "Influx of out-of-staters will bring about change, not necessarily for the better." "[E]xpect Vermonters to become more tax wary and less caring"; "getting more greedy all the time"; and "with today's instant communication, Vermonters' ideology will become more and more like that of the rest of the country."

Yet a third group took a wait-and-see approach: "Ideology has changed . . . but I also suspect, as the baby boom escapee generation ages, and as we have less in migration, Vermont again may become more conservative in its political and social philosophy." Several references were made to Vermonters' preference for bipartisanship: "Vermont is one of the most pleasantly mixed and least rancorous political environments one could imagine." Others cited increasing partisanship.

⁴²L. J. Gould and S. B. Hand, "A View from the Mountain: Perspectives of Vermont's Political Geography," in *Growth and Development of Government in Vermont*, ed. Reginald L. Cook, Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences, Occasional Paper #5 (1970), 19-24.

But is government at the state and local levels in Vermont seen as meeting the needs of Vermonters? Again respondents split in their opinions although the "yea" votes appear to have it by a fair margin. The state's smallness often is credited for this: "One—anyone—can reach our legislators and policy makers with suggestions or complaints." "In a small state like Vermont, it is a great advantage to know the politicians personally." "Those who deliver services are not part of a faceless bureaucracy." "For the most part, government officials have to be accessible in this state or they're out the door. Everybody can participate in government, as long as they're prepared to take the heat."

State [government] people are Vermonters, too, often. It shows. You know half the people you see on the television. If you had a reason to, you could call them up on the telephone. If you went to see them, you would expect them to be genuinely considerate; mostly they would be. Mostly you don't call or visit; no reason to. But you know you could. When you walk by the Statehouse, you know it is your Statehouse. Local town government people are just your neighbors doing their best in original ways.

Those who generally feel that government is not meeting needs or is not responsive cite voter apathy but also "unmanageable responsibilities" and "increasing complexity of regulations and technologies" now facing local government. For a number of respondents, local government "is central to Vermont's identity," and there is fear that it is being undermined. They complained of lobbyist influence, bureaucracy, and the slowness of the legislative process at the state level; some suggested that "most federal programs haven't helped"; and several respondents described fears of shrinking resources and increased taxation.

Some resentment of the influence of newcomers showed up in answers to the government responsiveness question. "The state government is now dominated by parties and flatlanders," complained one respondent. "Basic Vermont culture is being lost at [the] government level." Another person said, "Government at state and local levels are both being taken over by Vermonters-by-choice, and, as such, are little by little changing the nature of the state. Everyone has a different definition of what Vermonters need, and in the process, the needs of the majority of Vermonters go unanswered."

More specifics were elicited in a final set of questions about perceptions of "the most critical issues facing the State at this time." While answers were clearly colored by particulars of the then-ongoing legislative debate (questionnaires were completed in the winter/spring of 1995), they also revealed broader unease regarding ability to fund desirable programs of whatever type and concern about increased partisanship ("Too much 'us versus them' rhetoric"). Growth versus the environment and, generally, the achievement of balance between affordability and expansion of services also loomed large for the respondents, whether their concern lay with education, the environment, or health care.

Preserving Vermont as a special place is an underlying current as respondents fear a "loss of distinctive heritage" and perceive "pressures toward Americanization," especially as outside interests "see money to be made in 'opening up' Vermont's natural beauty"

(Wal-Mart, urban sprawl, etc.). "The fragile Vermont environment, like California, can only support so much civilization. We're full!" These responses point to the need for planning and continued reflection on who we are: "While recognizing that trends outside of Vermont will continue to have an impact on who we are, we must make a conscious effort to find ways to define who we are as individuals and as a community of individuals."

CONFIRMING SURVEY FINDINGS

By way of rounding out and amplifying the conclusions of the 1995 anniversary survey and to test responses against a broader set of opinions, the Center for Research on Vermont sponsored a public Research-in-Progress Seminar on September 12, 1995.⁴³ This session ran longer than most Center seminars, and its attentive audience generated considerable discussion of items related to the "character" of Vermont, Vermonters' continuing pride in the state, and perceived changes. As evidence that the character of Vermont remains a matter of broad general interest, the survey received front-page treatment in the *Burlington Free Press* the following day⁴⁴; the *Free Press* also called for reader responses to several of the survey questions (1, 2, 3, 5).

Generally, the audience's responses on September 12 confirmed and echoed the comments of survey respondents. Participants cited the Vermont landscape and the state's physical beauty, Vermonters' independence, "cussedness," toughness, and pride in their ability to handle adversities—winter and mud being offered as examples. Audience members discussed native wit as well as Vermonters' tendency toward understatement. Adaptability and tolerance also received mention, with an emphasis on adaptation as being essentially a response to necessity: "to maintain ourselves. . . . Why, we even voted Democratic." On the other hand, adaptation in many cases was seen as involving a continuous strand of fundamental identity that did not change over time.

This audience did not see Vermonters as being unwilling to change, "backward," or changing only under duress. In fact, it was suggested that Vermont is a leader, with its bottle bill, health reform, and sign laws cited as examples. Whereas in Taylor's day, the stubborn Vermont refusal to follow what were seen as perhaps dangerous national and international trends (fascism, socialism) made it a model the *New York Times* found worth examining, today Vermont is still a model, albeit in a different way.

The identity of Vermont was viewed as vulnerable, however, especially in the face of physical, environmental change and, specifically, because of the speed of change in today's world where, for example, "one Wal-Mart can instantly change the nature of a community." Communications, greater product availability, and ease of travel to large urban centers such as Boston and Montreal have contributed to Vermonters' becoming more like the American

⁴³The session was videotaped for Channel 17 Town Meeting Television; a videotape is available from the Center for Research on Vermont.

⁴⁴Sam Hemingway, "'Vt. is Different': Does '37 Adage Still Hold?" *Burlington Free Press*, September 13, 1995, 1A, 14A.

mainstream and, in terms of tastes and consumption patterns, more “sophisticated.” Audience members pointed out, however, that this convergence toward national tastes, consumption patterns, and identities is not unique to Vermont. Indeed, we see this clearly in national marketing trends as “America’s Heartland Acquires Global Tastes.” Lest you think the transformation of Vermont supermarkets in the last few years has been unique, consider that “[t]oday, in the kitchens of the small cities and towns of America’s heartland, there are chicken burritos, pasta primavera and grilled salmon. Sauteed shark with ginger and rosemary and chicken satay appear on local menus. Fresh cilantro and shiitake mushrooms line supermarket shelves.”⁴⁵ This shows up as well in people’s feelings about their basic geographic identity. Survey data presented in the table below show, for example, that between 1981 and 1990, there was a nationwide trend toward greater public identification with the country as a whole and a decline in the portion of United States’ respondents who said that they “first of all” belong to a state or region of the country. There was, likewise, a decline in the portion of the population identifying with their town or locality and a greater sense of world citizenship.⁴⁶

How “parochial” or “cosmopolitan” are people in the United States as a whole?

“Which of these geographical groups would you say you belonged to first of all?”	1981	1990
The locality or town where you live	52%	38%
The state or region where you live	19%	12%
The country as a whole	20%	30%
North America	2%	4%
The world as a whole	8%	17%
<i>Source: 1981 and 1990 World Value Surveys. Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.</i>	100%	100%

⁴⁵Kathleen Deveny, “America’s Heartland Acquires Global Tastes,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 11, 1995, B1.

⁴⁶Based on data from 1981 and 1990 World Value Surveys. Survey results are discussed, for example, in Neil Nevitte, “Bringing Values ‘Back In’: Value Change and North American Integration?” in *Toward a North American Community*, ed. Donald D. Barry, et al. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995), 185–209.

An interesting paradox was brought out at the September Research-in-Progress Seminar: It was stated that the trend toward "homogenization" with national norms in Vermont coexists with the emergence of greater ethnic/racial and cultural diversity within the state. On the other hand, it was also suggested that more diversity existed before than we sometimes realize, albeit in an uneasy relationship (for example, Abenakis) and often very locally (for example, French-Canadians in Winooski; Italians in Barre, Welsh in Fair Haven, Irish in Northfield). For Bullard, being a Vermonter meant being a Vermont Yankee, whereas today it is a territorial concept. Vermont is a geographic place, and as soon as we come within its boundaries, stated many of the seminar participants, we know we are "home."

One theme that provoked more tension than others during the discussion was the question: "For whose benefit is the Vermont image of independence, environmental purity, and so on maintained?" Are the examinations of Vermont's identity driven by external marketing needs? How do these needs coexist with Vermonters' day-to-day lives and changes in the state? As one audience member put it, "There's a very slippery slope here. What's the difference between trying to find out who you are as a community and as an individual and trying to find out who others want you to be so you can sell yourself to them?" While these issues were only introduced and not really explored, they are basic to the discussion. It would seem that they have also not escaped notice by outsiders. For example, a recent *Economist* article on Vermont's bovine growth hormone labeling law and surrounding controversies referred to Vermont as "this most self-consciously wholesome of states" and, thus, an appropriate place to fight "the first serious skirmish" over genetically engineered food.⁴⁷

The Research-in-Progress Seminar ended with a question from the audience about whether other people in other states agonize or obsess over their identity as much as Vermont residents seem to. "In how many other states would a group of people spend an evening defining who they are and what makes their own sense of place and how they feel about that place?" In a nutshell, the answer is that similar discussions seem to occur repeatedly all over the country. For example, they take place at meetings and conferences sponsored by historical societies and humanities councils. The Schoff, Stegner, and Tuan references cited earlier in this paper come from a conference held in Wisconsin to discuss the idea of sense of place. This audience member's question, thus, provides an opportunity to reiterate the importance of a sense of place to all of us.

The obsession with defining America as different from somewhere else—from the Old World initially—is something that emerged almost instantly in American history. Then, as the states became more powerful as political entities, there was a tendency to think about whether anything beyond the politics, beyond the border, defines the lives of the people within those states. The questions of identity and character are important because we want to feel that we belong somewhere. That belonging is already partially defined for us, because we are born into a political system that not only recognizes the importance of place but also gives it political status through institutions like Congress and presidential primaries. We may well ask, then, if the sense

⁴⁷"Food Labelling: White, Wet, and . . ." *Economist*, September 16, 1995, 35.

of place is also culturally meaningful in the context of the larger American experience, which for over two hundred years has been dominated by the theme of its own difference, its being somehow set apart from the world.

CONCLUSIONS

In the end, few surprises emerged from the Center for Research on Vermont's 1995 survey on the character of Vermont. There was substantial continuity of opinion with the responses to James Taylor's 1937 survey regarding Vermont's independence, self-reliance, and the importance of that independence as a source of pride. Now as then, these traits are rivaled only by pride in the physical beauty and natural environment of the state. Follow-up discussion sponsored by the Center in September 1995, further solidified this conclusion. Since the 1930s, "thrift" has disappeared as a major perceived characteristic, and Vermont and Vermonters are no longer "backward." They are neither set in their ways nor are they trying to catch up with the rest of the nation. Changes in political ideology have occurred, and some 1937 questions such as "Why, oh why is Vermont always republican?" have become historical curiosities although politics remains an area in which Vermonters consider themselves independent and different from the rest of the country.

Along with the predictability of most of the responses comes a strong affirmation of the enduring significance of questions about the fundamental nature of a sense of place, identity, character, change, and the sources of Vermonters' pride in their state. Vermonters, like other Americans, remain interested in who they are and how their home state's geography, history, and traditions shape their individual identities and lives. They are interested, too, in understanding how an awareness of the sense of place can help sustain their communities and help them plan for the future.

In contrast with the consciousness of local identity—and perhaps in conflict with it—is the growing awareness of a cosmopolitan, even global, community and the growing homogenization of the American experience that attacks local identity at its roots. Vermonters insist on their love of liberty, their spirit of making do, and their quest for simplicity. But is there a state in the Union that would characterize itself in any other way? Is there a state that would describe its citizens as servile, spendthrift, and sybaritic?

The fact remains that most Vermonters choose to be here. Having made that choice, they want to know what, if anything, unites them in their commitment to this place and the ways of life Vermont permits them or to which it confines them. "Character" may be too large a concept, imply too much homogeneity, or even be too mechanistic in its implications for late twentieth-century Vermonters or even Americans, who, first and foremost, insist on their individuality and freedom to act and choose for themselves. But as one respondent commented, "We want to explain ourselves to ourselves, and we want to learn to get along with others who are here and with whom we have *something*, at least, in common."

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Appendix 1

Taylor's "Sample" of Vermonters

An undated draft of James P. Taylor's cover letter includes a complete list of the individuals to whom he sent questionnaires. The authors have provided some biographical information about each up to or around the year 1937, when Taylor contacted them.

A. Vail Allen. Banker; President, Allen National Bank, Fair Haven.

Robert C. Boynton. Co-owner, with A. J. Boynton, Hotel Berwick, Rutland.

Elbert Sidney Brigham. Vermont Commissioner of Agriculture, 1913-1924; U.S. Representative, 1925-1931; President, National Life Insurance Company, 1937-1948; Owner, Brigham Farms, St. Albans, 1913-1962; Member, Committee to Study and Report as to the Present Milk Situation, 1937.

Joseph Carrigan. Dean, College of Agriculture, University of Vermont.

Malcolm G. Clark. Head, American Petroleum Institute; Member, Vermont Board of Rural Electrification.

Ellsworth B. Cornwall. Member and President, Vermont State Farm Bureau; Professor of Political Science, Middlebury College; Member, Vermont Public Service Commission, 1937-1945.

Albert A. Cree. President, Central Vermont Public Service Company, Rutland.

William Field. Publisher and Editor, *Rutland Herald*.

Dorothy Canfield Fisher. Author; Member, Vermont Board of Education; Member, Book-of-the-Month Club Selection Committee.

Ralph Flanders. Businessman and Engineer; President, Jones & Lamson Machine Company, Springfield, 1933-1944.

K. R. B. Flint. Professor of Political Science, Norwich University; Founder, Bureau of Municipal Affairs, 1921.

- Walter Benton Gates.** City Editor, *Burlington Free Press*; President, Free Press Printing Company.
- Leon and Olin Gay.** Owners, Gay Brothers Woolen Mills, Cavendish. **Leon Gay** was also: Member, Vermont House of Representatives, 1931–1935; Vermont State Senator (Windsor County), 1937–1941; Chairman, Senate Finance Committee, 1937.
- George Gorham Groat.** Professor of Economics, University of Vermont.
- Fred A. Howland.** Attorney; Vermont Secretary of State, 1898–1902; President, Board of Directors, National Life Insurance Company, 1916–1937 (becoming Chairman, Board of Directors in February 1937).
- L. Douglas Merideth.** Assistant Professor of Economics, University of Vermont, 1927–1935; Vermont Commissioner of Banking and Insurance, 1934–1935; Financial Officer, National Life Insurance Company, beginning in 1935.
- Isaac Miller.** Co-owner, Charles Sterns & Company, Rutland.
- Walter A. Myers.** President and Treasurer, Hays Advertising Agency, Burlington.
- Arthur Packard.** Member, Vermont House of Representatives, 1923; President, Vermont Farm Bureau since 1928.
- Mortimer Proctor.** Vice President, Vermont Marble Company, 1935–1952; Member, Vermont House of Representatives, 1933–1939; Speaker of the House, 1937–1939.
- Howard C. Rice.** Publisher and Editor, *Brattleboro Reformer*; Member, Vermont House of Representatives, 1933, 1937; Chairman, House Appropriations Committee, 1937.
- Esme A. C. Smith.** Manager, New England Telephone, Rutland; Member, Vermont's 1939 World's Fair Commission.
- John M. Thomas.** Educator; former President, Middlebury College, Pennsylvania State University, and Rutgers University; Acting President, Norwich University, 1937–1939.

Appendix 2

Taylor's Respondents

This list of James P. Taylor's correspondents is based on the questionnaire numbers that he assigned to them and his descriptions of them in his correspondence with F. Lauriston Bullard. Identifications of the respondents—following the descriptions—are given in brackets. Some of the individuals can be clearly identified because they signed their questionnaires. Most, however, remained anonymous; in these cases, the identifications are tentative.

1. A writer in close touch with Vermont affairs for many years. [Possibly **Walter A. Myers**]
2. Ex-President, long-time President, of one of the two or three greatest of Vermont's business establishments. [**Fred A. Howland**]
3. An industrialist, who is also an economic thinker and publicist of National reputation. [**Ralph Flanders**]
4. A prominent Hotel man. [**Robert C. Boynton**]
5. A dominant figure in the Vermont Farm Bureau Federation. [Probably **Arthur Packard**]
6. Author of one of the best interpretive books on Vermont, formerly a newspaper man. [Probably **Charles Edward Crane** of Montpelier: Publicity Director, National Life Insurance Company, since 1931; Publisher and Editor, *Middlebury Register*, 1917-1921; Editor and Columnist, *Brattleboro Reformer*, 1921-1931; Author, *Let Me Show You Vermont* (1937). Crane responded for Elbert Sidney Brigham.]
7. A man prominent in State Chamber of Commerce work. [Possibly **John M. Thomas** or **Walter A. Myers**]
8. An author of national reputation, who has studied Vermont and been active in Vermont affairs for years. [**Dorothy Canfield Fisher**]
9. A man prominent in public utilities. [Probably **Ellsworth B. Cornwall**]

10. A retired Public Utility man now in state-wide organization work. [**Malcolm G. Clark**]
11. Man in one of the largest business enterprises. [**Mortimer Proctor** and/or **Leon Gay**?
There are two questionnaires with the number 11 in Taylor's file.]
12. A Banker interested in town affairs and in agriculture. [**A. Vail Allen**]

Appendix 3

1995 Survey Respondents

Center for Research on Vermont

Name	Identification
anonymous 3x Bandel, Betty	Professor of English Emeritus, University of Vermont
Bassett, T. D. Seymour Bolduc, Vincent L.	Archivist, Retired, University of Vermont Professor of Sociology, Saint Michael's College
Brenneman, Mary G. Campbell, Karen Stites	Social Scientist; Hillfarmer Reference Specialist, Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont
Carlisle, Lilian Baker Clark, Jr., Clifford E.	Author and Historian Professor of History and M. A. & A. D. Hulings Professor of American Studies, Carleton College
Daniels, Robert V.	Professor of History Emeritus, University of Vermont; Vermont State Senator, 1973-1982
Davis, Forest K.	Professor of Philosophy and Religion Emeritus, State University of New York, Empire State College
Doherty, Prudence	Archaeologist/Historian, Consulting Archaeology Program, University of Vermont
Dorsey, Frank C.	Director of Biometrics, FIDIA Pharmaceutical Corporation
Eschholz, Paul Farrow, Steven S.	Professor of English, University of Vermont Teacher, North Country Union Junior High School
Flynn, Brian S.	Associate Director, Office of Health Promotion Research; Research Associate Professor of Family Practice, College of Medicine, University of Vermont
Gallagher, Connell	Director of Research Collections, University of Vermont Libraries
Gilbertson, Elsa	National Register Specialist, Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

Name	Identification
Gillies, Paul S.	Attorney; Former Vermont Deputy Secretary of State
Goat, Leslie G.	Bibliographic Control Specialist, Dartmouth College
Hand, Samuel B.	Professor of History Emeritus, University of Vermont
Hill, William C.	Vermont Supreme Court Associate Justice, Retired
Jennison, Peter S.	Author; Former Publisher, Vermont Countryman Press
Johnson, Robert E.	Visiting Professor of Molecular Physiology and Biophysics, University of Vermont
Kernstock, Elwyn N.	Professor of Political Science Emeritus, Saint Michael's College
Konkle, James F.	Management Consultant
MacArthur, Margaret	Folksinger and Collector of Traditional Music
McClaghry, John	President, Ethan Allen Institute; Member, Vermont House of Representatives, 1969-1972; Vermont State Senator, 1989-1992
McCorison, Marcus A.	President Emeritus, American Antiquarian Society
Mallett, Peter S.	School Administrator, Retired
Manning, Robert E.	Professor of Natural Resources, University of Vermont
Marshall, Jeffrey	Archivist and Curator of Manuscripts, University of Vermont
Meeks, Harold A.	Professor of Geography Emeritus, University of Vermont
Miner, Donald J.	Historian
Morselli, Mariafranca	Research Professor of Botany Emerita, University of Vermont
Munson, Michael J.	Planning Consultant
Nuquist, Reidun D.	Document and Maps Librarian, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont
Partridge, Sanborn	Geologist and Educator; Member, Vermont House of Representatives, 1961-1968; Vermont State Senator, 1969-1980
Rolando, Victor R.	Research Associate, Vermont Division for Historic Preservation; U.S. Forest Service Vermont State Archivist
Sanford, D. Gregory	Director, Center for Rural Studies; Sociology Professor, Community Development and Applied Economics Professor, University of Vermont
Schmidt, Frederick E.	Chief of Interpretation, Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site
Schwarz, Gregory C.	Chief of Interpretation, Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site

Name

Identification

Frank Smallwood

Nelson A. Rockefeller Professor of Govern-
ment Emeritus, Dartmouth College;
Vermont State Senator, 1973-1974

Stetson, Frederick W.

Writer and Consultant

Teachout, Peter R.

Professor of Law, Vermont Law School

Teetor, Katherine

Charlotte Historical Society

Walker, Margery

Former Dean of Rural Education, University of
Alaska

Wallman, Lester

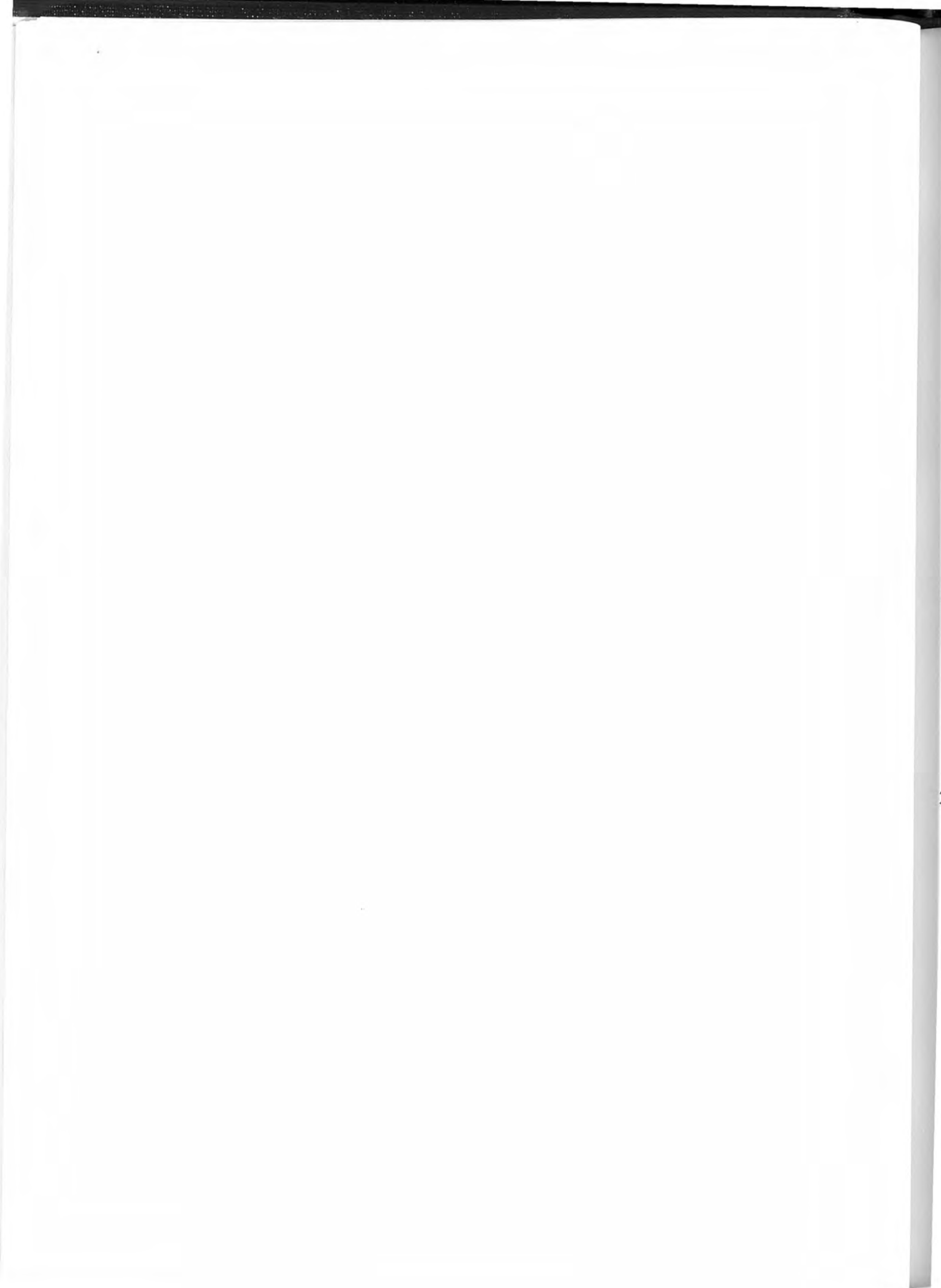
Professor of Neurosurgery Emeritus, University
of Vermont

Washington, Ida H.

Professor Emerita of German, University of
Massachusetts, Dartmouth

Williams, John A.

Editor of Vermont State Papers, Retired



Appendix 4

The 1995 Questionnaire on the Character of Vermont

Please give us your thoughtful answers to the questions on both sides of this sheet. Feel free to attach additional pages if you would like to elaborate on any or all of your answers. Your identity will remain confidential when we report on the results of this questionnaire.

*We have deliberately preserved the unscientific vagueness of the original 1937 questions, which are distinguished by their **bold type** from our follow-up questions. This, we think, will give you maximum freedom to interpret the questions and shape your answers as you wish.*

1. **What are the leading characteristics of Vermonters and why?**

—What, if any, differences do you see between Vermonters by birth and Vermonters by choice?

—What, if any differences do you see between Vermonters and other New Englanders?

2. **Are the major characteristics of Vermonters changing?** Please explain.

3. **Is the State backward, or going forward?**

—What do Vermonters like the best about their state?

—What do Vermonters like the least about their state?

4. Does government at the state and local level in Vermont meet the needs of Vermonters? Please explain.

5. **Why, oh why is Vermont always Republican?** (or is it?)
How is the ideology of Vermonters likely to change?

6. **Of what are the people in Vermont most proud?**
7. What do you see as the most critical issues facing the State at this time?

Please comment on the following issue areas or on any others you wish (the alphabetical ordering is for convenience only!)

cultural issues?
 economic issues?
 environmental issues?
 political issues?
 social issues?
 other issues?

8. Finally, could you let us know who you are:

age (or age group, if you prefer) _____

gender ___ F ___ M

occupation/profession
 (or previous profession if retired) _____

How long have you lived in Vermont? _____ since birth
 _____ since _____

In what county do you now live? _____

We would appreciate it if you would you please sign here, so that we can keep track of respondents.

We plan to quote selectively and anonymously from questionnaire responses. If you do not wish your responses to appear as direct quotes, please check here: _____

Thank you very much for your help! Like most of us you'll probably be curious as to how other Center members' responses compare to yours. Stay tuned and you'll find out. . . .

Part 2

**Vermont Research
and
The Center for Research
on Vermont**

Twentieth-Anniversary Essays by

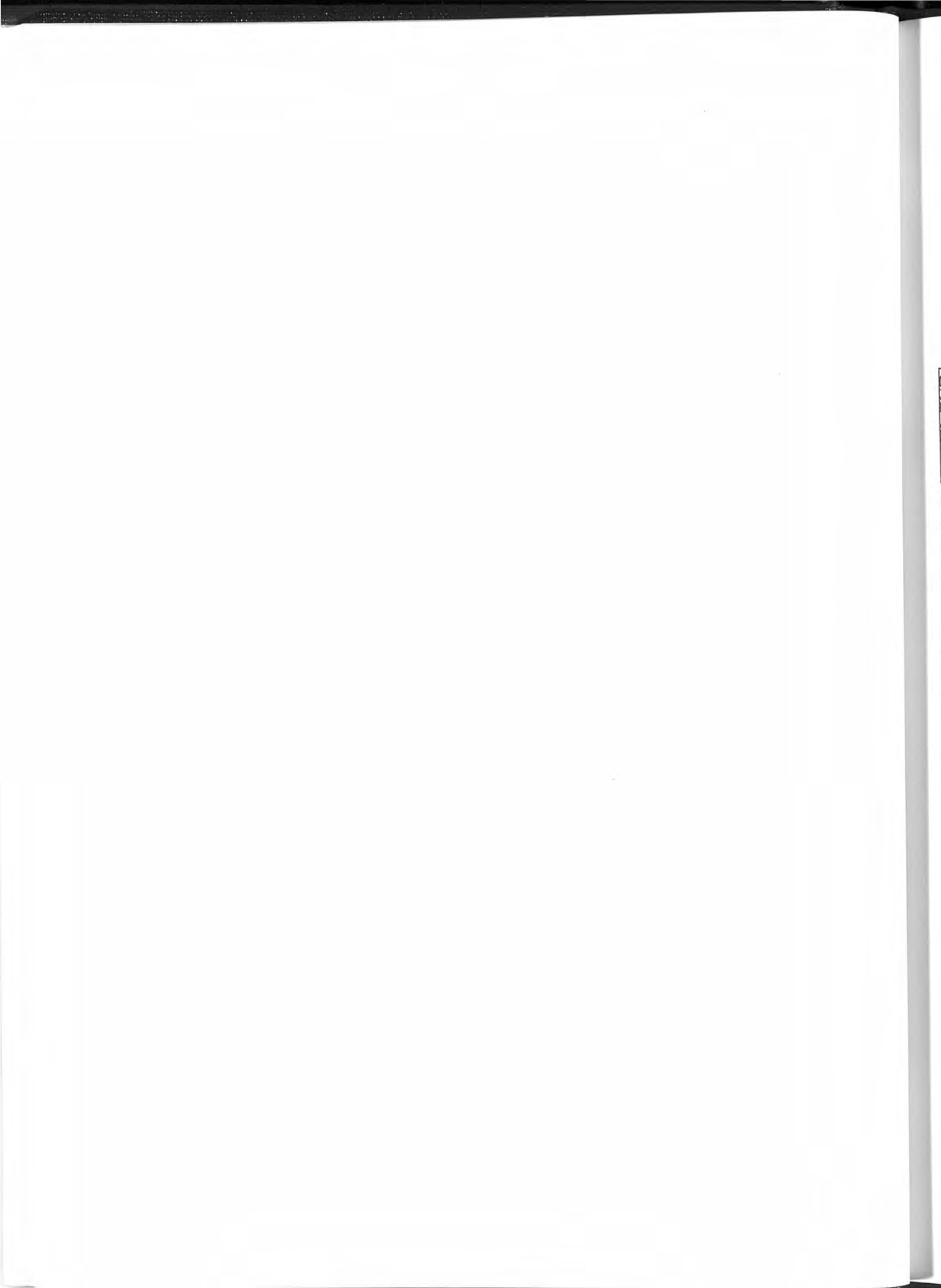
Samuel B. Hand

and

Paul Gillies

We saw the Center as a catalyst . . . as a vehicle to encourage, facilitate, and disseminate state and local research while retaining sound academic standards.

—Samuel B. Hand



Present at the Creation

Establishing a Center for Research on Vermont*



George B. Bryan, one of the first members of the Center for Research on Vermont and a former director, has prepared a detailed history of the Center, based on Center files, other printed sources, and interviews. He has shared parts of his manuscript with me. Those of us involved in founding the Center (at least those of us still around to boast of it) are generous in accepting credit. George has documented Garrison Nelson's recommendation of a Vermont publications program. I remembered publications as *my* idea. Nick Muller, who is currently director of the Wisconsin Historical Society, was also present at the creation. In the course of a long conversation we had this past winter, I alluded to the Center's publications program. Nick proceeded to recall how *he* was responsible for it.

I don't want to demean individual contributions to the Center's development, least of all my own. But the crucial factor in explaining the evolution of the Center was that many of us were thinking along the same lines at the same time. George has referred to this as "collective wisdom." I like that.

This evening I want to speak to the academic, political, and social climate in which the Center was nurtured. It will be autobiographical. But first some warnings. The first: as Wallace Stegner has noted, autobiography is part recollection and part invention. The second: I probably won't refer to most of you in the audience by name. To read about your own contributions, you will have to read George's history.

I arrived at the University of Vermont in January 1961. I knew at the time that Burlington had a population somewhere under a million and that Vermont, along with Maine, had been one of the only two states not to vote for Franklin Roosevelt in 1936. But there wasn't much else I could tell you about Vermont. There wasn't much else I cared to know. I assumed to advance professionally I would have to teach and research national history or some other "real scholarship." A colleague in the history department, Robert V. Daniels, dabbled in politics as chairman of something that became known as the State Democratic Policy Planning Commission. He was soon to receive tenure, but he taught and published Russian/Soviet history. His first book had been reviewed in the *Sunday Times Book Review*. It was far removed from partisan Vermont state politics.

*Samuel B. Hand delivered this paper as the Center for Research on Vermont's Annual Meeting Presentation, University of Vermont, May 4, 1995.

The history department had a Vermont history course on the books since 1953. After 1958, when Tom Bassett arrived on campus, he taught it fairly regularly, but Tom's responsibilities were primarily with the library. He was never a full-time history department member. I hasten to add that Tom's collection policies have provided the basis for what has become one of the largest, if not *the* largest, Vermontiana collections. His own publications are legendary, and he has been a loyal and valued member of the Center since its inception.

Another campus character was John C. Huden. He was in the education department and worked primarily in educational testing. His avocation was the Abenaki Indians. In the 1950s he challenged the conventional wisdom that, prior to European settlement, Vermont had been a no man's land, largely uninhabited by Indians. He did this through a series of articles in *Vermont History* and elsewhere. Huden was not a trained anthropologist, and his work has since required substantial revision, but it remains important for what it started. And, of course, in 1965 Gordon Day thoroughly exploded the no man's land myth. Nineteen sixty-five was also the year William Haviland, the Mayan scholar, arrived at the university. He subsequently published, with Marjory Power, *The Original Vermonters: Native Inhabitants, Past and Present*, which further destroyed the traditional view.

Within the University of Vermont College of Arts and Sciences, the partisan political powerhouses, as I perceived them, were all in the political science department. There were three senior members, all Republicans. Andrew Nuquist, chairman of the department, had lost a congressional primary contest in 1946. He had campaigned with Ernest Gibson (read "liberal") against the party's conservative faction. He never again sought political office. He taught state government and administration, and in 1966, with his wife Edith, he published the classic *Vermont State Government and Administration*.¹

A second member of the triumvirate was Robert Babcock. In January 1961, Bob returned to the university after serving a term as lieutenant governor and before that as secretary of Civil and Military Affairs. In 1960 (and again in 1964), he lost the Republican gubernatorial primary. He was to remain active in elective politics, but also for a time he taught state and local politics. He literally wrote the textbook.²

Rolf Haugen, also a full professor, directed the Government Clearing House, which was basically a library that serviced students and state and local government officials. Rolf himself was often sought after as professional staff for state fact-finding commissions. His service as executive secretary of the state's Little Hoover Commission is a case in point.³

¹Andrew E. Nuquist and Edith W. Nuquist, *Vermont State Government and Administration: An Historical and Descriptive Study of the Living Past* (Burlington, Vt.: University of Vermont Government Research Center, 1966).

²Robert Babcock, *State and Local Government and Politics*, 2d ed. (New York: Random House, 1962).

³Commission to Study State Government, *The Operation of Vermont State Government: Report to the General Assembly on the Results of Its Studies and Its Recommendations*, January 1959. Andrew Nuquist and Milton Nadworny were members of the commission's advisory committee.

I admired all these men (and there were only men) though I suspected they violated academic protocol by explicitly advocating public policies. Perhaps such behavior was less inappropriate for political scientists than historians or anthropologists. In any case, they held the monopoly on Vermont studies, *and* as far as I and most of my colleagues were concerned, they could keep it.

I'm going to spend the next few minutes suggesting how University of Vermont faculty (and, by extension, the faculties of other universities) abandoned such attitudes and came to view state and local research as appropriate academic activity. Irrespective of what the Center for Research on Vermont has become, it was initially conceived by its founders, all members of the College of Arts and Sciences, as a means to encourage research on Vermont by members of the College's humanities and social sciences departments. Our awareness of the arts was yet to come.

We were political junkies who wanted a piece of the action. The College of Agriculture, the Extension Service, and the hard sciences already had access to federal funding—although some had come to it more recently than others. It was in 1965 that a major Lake Champlain study that included Arts and Sciences College zoologists was first instituted.

The significance of federal grants cannot be overestimated. They became more available after the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) were established in the 1960s. Some of us who had been weaned on preparing National Defense Education Act grant applications turned our skills to preparing grants for Vermont-related projects. The Center did well by these. Some projects directly funded Center activities. Others provided the Center resources to support member research. In all instances, the university gleefully gathered up the generous overhead that accompanied the grants. Indeed, one of the most effective arguments we used for setting up a center was that it would endow state and local NEH and NEA applications with the appearance of greater institutional support.

In practice, funding agencies preferred interdisciplinary projects. In the years prior to the Center's founding, the physical locations (read "cramped quarters") of the various departments facilitated interdisciplinary fellowship. Political Science, English, and Economics were all located in Old Mill. When UVM hired a geographer, he was attached to the political science department. Waterman housed History, Classics, Philosophy, Religion, Sociology, Anthropology, and the foreign languages. My office mate was a philosopher. We didn't have to schedule encounters. We couldn't avoid them.

I might note that not only was the faculty smaller but it also published less per capita. After Milt Nadworny published an article on the Estey Organ Company of Brattleboro, we not only read it, we spent the lunch hour discussing it. I remember that article for two reasons. One is that I have since come to appreciate that the Estey Organ Company was a major player in post-Civil War Vermont politics; Milt brought the story only to 1866. The other is that it was published in the *Business History Review*, a harbinger of the "research locally and publish nationally" phenomenon that could elevate state and local research to academic status.⁴ We will return to that shortly.

⁴Milton Nadworny, "The Perfect Melodeon: The Origins of the Estey Organ Company, 1846-1866," *Business History Review* 33 (Spring 1959): 43-59.

Next, I want to comment on the Hoff administration, reapportionment, and the interstate highway. For my immediate purposes, they are inextricably linked in having attracted many of us to attempt our first research projects on Vermont subjects. Prior to the interstate, the conscientious legislator often found it necessary, especially if he or she lived as far from Montpelier as Burlington, to find housing in Montpelier. In 1961 a bipartisan collection of first-year legislators, the Burlington representative Phil Hoff, the Woodstock representative Franklin Billings, the Fairlee representative Richard Mallary, Proctor's Sandy Partridge, and others, forced by logistics to make Montpelier their winter quarters, banded together a few evenings a week to design a legislative program, plan strategy sessions, research issues (they used the Montpelier archives), and socialize. Referring to themselves as Young Turks, they elevated the level of debate but had virtually no other discernible effect on the legislative session.

When the legislature convened in January 1963, however, Hoff was governor, Billings was House Speaker, Mallary was chairman of the appropriations committee, Sandy of education, and so forth. The Young Turks were all in place.

So were portions of the interstate highway system. By facilitating motor travel in Vermont, the interstate made affiliations such as those of the Young Turks less likely. Legislators returned much more frequently to their homes after the day's session. The other side of the coin was that Montpelier was now only thirty-five minutes from the Old Mill or Waterman Building.

Hoff entered office without a legislative program and welcomed input from all sources. You couldn't pass five minutes in Montpelier without brushing against faculty from UVM and other institutions. Milt Nadworny took a year's leave to serve as a Hoff economic advisor. Bill Daniel's chairmanship of the Policy Planning Committee enhanced his status as party ideologist. He became the Nikolai Bukharin of the Vermont Democratic party—I am pleased to be able to report that he met with less catastrophic personal consequences than Bukharin did. Jay Gould⁵ and I both dabbled in studies of judicial selection. Once Governor Hoff proposed reform of the judicial selection process for the Vermont courts, we were designated experts.

With reapportionment in 1965, the number of representatives from the Burlington area increased exponentially. And for a time both state representatives and members of the University community anticipated the faculty would serve as the research arm of the legislature. Visions of the Wisconsin model frolicked through the corridors of Waterman. But not for long. The university did beef up its state research resources, but most of us were not equipped by temperament, training, or professional motives to become an applied research arm of the state.

This is not the time nor the place to present a brief for or against applied research. Nonetheless, even for those who regarded legislative support services as the ultimate service a Center could provide, there were practical difficulties. One is that the legislative and academic calendars overlap. The legislative session peaks around the time of final exams. A second problem is agreeing to what should be researched. Historically, legislators had fewer research resources than either the executive or judicial departments, and they most often requested current

⁵L. Jay Gould was the Center's first moderator; he taught constitutional law in the political science department at the University of Vermont.

census or statistical data. This not only excluded us nonnumeric types, but it also involved research not associated with traditional academic scholarship—and I should add it was not geared to the traditional academic reward system.

There was another problem. If done properly, academic research would *allegedly* provide a solution that almost all but the most obtuse legislators could agree on. It took time for us to realize this was utter nonsense—even if we had had the capacity and inclination to come up with verifiable results.

An effort to raise the state cigarette tax serves as an illustration. How many fewer packages of cigarettes would be sold in the Connecticut River Valley? The presumption was that, if Vermont raised the cigarette tax, Vermont towns along the Connecticut would lose business to New Hampshire towns. How much would they lose? Would the gain in the sin tax offset the loss in other tax revenue? It seemed obvious that, if Vermonters crossed into New Hampshire, they would buy more than just cigarettes. Keep in mind that in 1969 Vermont imposed a sales tax and New Hampshire had none. What, in addition to cigarettes, might they buy? And so on. Would fewer cigarettes be smoked? In the view of one legislator, if only one less pack was sold in either state, it would justify almost any economic cost.

Experiencing a process such as this suggested value-free research was a delusion. It also confirmed what more experienced colleagues such as Andy Nuquist had long contended. Even the most well conceived and carefully executed research activity would ultimately be perceived as politically partisan.

I've told you more than you've ever wanted to know about tobacco sales in the Connecticut River Valley because I believe it sets the context for the formal proposal to establish a center. In a memorandum initially submitted to the UVM Vice President for Academic Affairs in 1973, we suggested the Center would "focus primarily on pure as opposed to applied research." We also specified that the Center would "not be an information bureau for the Legislature or State agencies."

You can read this as a disclaimer. We felt it necessary to assure existing university units that we would neither overlap nor compete with their existing functions. We were thinking like administrators. All but one of the six individuals who signed this original Center prospectus were either department chairmen, former chairmen, or exercised other administrative responsibilities.⁶

More important, we had come to believe that members of the Vermont community (and beyond) possessed important local and state scholarly research interests with no immediate practical application. We knew this was so. A State Archaeological Society was formed in 1968. In 1969 the Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences sponsored a symposium on "irrelevant" Vermont topics ranging from forestation to State House architecture to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century politics. The proceedings were published in 1970.⁷ In 1971 the university gave its first

⁶This group of individuals, who formed the Ad Hoc Committee on Vermont Studies in August 1973, included Robert V. Daniels, L. Jay Gould, H. Nicholas Muller III, Milton Nadworny, Garrison Nelson, and the author.

⁷Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences, Occasional Paper No. 5 (1970).

course in historic preservation. At about the time the Center was organized, Historic Preservation, with the help of federal funding, would become a graduate program. Between 1963 and 1975, state appropriations to the Vermont Historical Society more than tripled, while local and county historical societies increased in number and vitality. Keep in mind the reference to history in these society titles did not limit their activities to that discipline. By 1975 the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) reinterpreted national interest so that grants were made available to preserve and organize manuscript collections that would not have been considered eligible ten years earlier. In 1968 the NHPRC advised us against submitting a proposal to organize Vermont gubernatorial papers because they would lack national interest. In 1976 we received an NHPRC grant to catalogue and microfilm early Vermont State Court records.⁸ In 1971 a group of individuals from various New England universities and other organizations banded together to form the Committee for a New England Bibliography. Still operating, the CNEB, with support exceeding \$1 million from the National Endowment for the Humanities and I don't know how much from private donors, has published bibliographies of printed sources for every state in New England and updated them almost to the present.

The establishment of the University Press of New England was another crucial development. This is neither the time nor the place to discuss the economics of publishing, but Vermont, with its ca. half-a-million population, does not offer a market comparable to other states. This is but one of the reasons the University Press has been so important. Not only does it publish and distribute Vermont books, but being a university press, it bestows academic credibility on its publications. In 1973 the press published Arthur W. Biddle and Paul Eschholz's *Literature of Vermont: A Sampler*, and in 1974 Frank Bryan's *Yankee Politics in Rural Vermont*. Frank, incidentally, was not then a member of the UVM faculty. Both these important works sold well, but I wonder if they would have been published at all or circulated as widely without the auspices of a university press. In the absence of a university press, Andy Nuquist's *Vermont State Government and Administration* was published in a limited printing by UVM's Government Research Center. In the 1970s it had become easier to research locally and publish nationally. It was national exposure that gave Vermont studies academic respectability. It might, some of us speculated, even be possible to promote one's professional career through Vermont research.

All of this begs a basic question. State and local studies flourished. They were nourished by resources made available to their practitioners. Some practitioners were even attracted through the resources. What were the forces that mobilized the resources? What was there in the public and professional environment that stimulated this commitment? State history certainly acquired an element of academic prominence it had not previously possessed. Bicentennial celebrations lent Vermont a new relevance. Nineteen seventy-five marked two hundred years since the American Revolution and the capture of Fort Ticonderoga, the first American victory of the Revolution. Its commemoration heralded the reemergence of Ethan Allen as a national hero. The year 1977

⁸The Center later published a report on this project by the author, with P. Jeffrey Potash, entitled *Litigious Vermonters: Court Records to 1825*, Center for Research on Vermont Occasional Paper #2 (Burlington: University of Vermont, 1979).

marked the bicentennial of the birth of the Republic of Vermont. We could celebrate the republic until 1991, and then celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary of Vermont being admitted into the Union as the fourteenth state. Vermont's status as an independent republic, incidentally, fostered a spate of research among political scientists and historians that substantially revised portions of American constitutional history.⁹

The national environment was so charged with energies directed towards preserving our historic and natural environment that preservation requirements were enacted into state and national law. Even other-worldly archaeologists and historic preservationists had become relevant and were sought after as contract consultants. Vermont even appointed a state archeologist.

And then, of course, there was Richard Nixon. During the presidential campaign of 1968, Nixon made it clear that he intended to appoint justices to the United States Supreme Court who would take a less expansive view of due process under the U.S. Constitution than justices of the Warren court had taken. This would, by illustration, make searches and seizures easier for the police. The response in some state criminal trials was to rely less on federal protections and to argue that state constitutions and state practices provided broader guarantees. A Vermont Supreme Court ruling even required attorneys to support such allegations with evidence. This not only raised interesting academic questions but also enhanced the relevance of historians, sociologists, and political scientists. The concept of a New Federalism (symbolized by block grants to states) added additional importance to aspects of local research.

This brings me to what I initially expected to speak about this evening, the manner in which recent technology has altered the practices and subject matter of academic disciplines. In terms of the Center for Research on Vermont, I think the two most important have been oral history, as embodied through the cassette tape recorder, and quantification via the computer.

Oral history was initially designed to collect the reminiscences of participants in large events: cabinet members, corporate executives, senators, and the like. But its potential for dealing with nonelites was almost immediately apparent, and that is what has redefined research projects. The tape recorder made it possible to capture directly the thoughts of individuals unlikely to generate memoirs or other personal printed records—those less likely to be the movers and shakers and more likely to be the acted upon. When linked to the civil rights movement, it gave voice to populations heretofore largely excluded.

The computer made it possible to manipulate discrete bits of data so quickly and simply that previously inconceivable calculations became standard operations. At the time the Center was being organized, we were more into designing databases than interpreting the data. However, the significance of this movement was so apparent that Ph.D. programs, including some in such traditional disciplines as history, substituted statistics and one foreign language for the customary two foreign languages requirement.

This, then, was the academic, political, and economic climate during the time the Center was first proposed. Although we can view it in a clearer perspective today than we could then, all six

⁹See, for example, Peter Onuf, *The Origins of the Federal Republic: Jurisdictional Controversies in the United States, 1775-1787* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

of us who originally signed the proposal for establishing a Center for Research on Vermont understood and were stimulated by the climate. We had our own personal agendas, and in some instances they differed in detail, but we saw the Center as a catalyst, not producing its own research but as a vehicle to encourage, facilitate, and disseminate state and local research while retaining sound academic standards. One way to do this was by bringing students of the Vermont experience together and exposing them to one another's work.

It took a while for us to find our way. We are still searching. From my personal perspective, however, a defining moment occurred during the Center's fourth year. I had just returned from a sabbatical when the Arts and Sciences Dean John Jewett called me into his office. He suggested I take a second tour as director of the Center. (I had been director—in those days we called it "moderator"—before my sabbatical.) Jewett was a chemist who had been at UVM for about a year and who impressed me as someone not particularly sympathetic to local research. Not only did he hope to continue the Center, but he expected to expand its resources. I remember thinking, "If this guy wants to continue the Center, it must be doing something right."

I believe that in the past twenty years the Center has vindicated the faith that was initially invested in it by achieving an enviable record of successes. Our current goal is that these successes be exceeded by those of the next twenty years.

The State of Vermont Research in 1995*



aniel Pierce Thompson hoisted his leg over the bottom of the picture frame, then climbed carefully down onto a file cabinet and dropped to the floor. He straightened his jacket and tie, as befitting one of the founders of the Vermont Historical Society. This was his library, as much as anyone's, and his demeanor showed it.

He walked gracefully to my table and sat down across from me. I was just coming out of one of those dazes that attends the forced reading of something old and dark brown. It took me a minute to focus. I almost swooned. Here was one of my heroes, suddenly corporeal. I was in the presence of Daniel Pierce Thompson, the author of *Green Mountain Boys*, the historian of Montpelier, the. . . . I blinked.

"I see much from up there," he said, throwing his head somewhat stiffly toward the wall he had just left. I noticed there was nothing in the frame. "But, of course," I thought, "he's down here now." The explanation seemed quite reasonable to me at the time.

He went on. "And I know how bad things are for Vermont, not just for its people, but for its heritage, its heart." His eyes were sad and watery. "I am sorely troubled by the state of Vermont today.

"There is a restlessness about Vermont today. Everybody is so busy. Nobody has time to stop and remember anymore. They are in danger of forgetting where they came from and who made this state possible." His eyes burned with an anger long in building.

"Mr. Thompson," I said, somewhat timidly, "I don't understand. What makes you judge us so harshly?"

"Let me tell you what I see. I see a state that is in danger of losing its identity. I see it in the people and in the changes of recent years. I saw it in the legislature this session. I fear for the lack of consensus and good leadership. I fear for the loss of a Vermont that knows where it is heading.

"I know this by knowing Vermont's past. Vermont is here because of those who built on what came before them. The farmers prospered because the first settlers fought to make this state free. Manufacturing grew because of the industry and ingenuity of the farmers. Today the people drive on two-hundred-year-old roads, past cemeteries filled with people who lived hard lives to make their homes here. History is all around present-day Vermonters, and they do not

*Paul Gillies prepared this paper for the twentieth anniversary of the Center for Research on Vermont, which was celebrated in May 1995.

see it. They are the first generation to ignore their past, and I fear they will pay a harsh price for their ignorance.

"The Vermont story needs to be told anew for each generation. Fortunately, for each generation until now, people have come forward to meet that need. They were men and women of stature—Ira and Ethan, Zadock Thompson, Hiland Hall, Abby Hemenway, Walter Crockett, Ralph Nading Hill. Most of them have been volunteers. No one has ever made any real money at it. They have worked at other jobs, while their real work was done at nights, mornings, and weekends. Some were teachers. Some were lawyers. Some were journalists and newspaper people.

"This room is a testament to their diligence and artistry. It is filled with studies and stories, manuscripts of men and women who wrote until their eyes gave out, trying to put down on paper what they cared about most—Vermont. But the great ones are gone now, and no one of equal stature is here to take their place."

I brought him a glass of water. A hundred years of dry canvas can work up a thirst, and I could see that he was far from finished.

"Thank you," he said as he put down the cup and wiped his mouth with a linen handkerchief that he pulled from a side pocket. "I apologize for sermonizing. I care very deeply about this state, and I am very troubled."

"Troubled about what?" I asked. "What makes you feel this way?"

"Let me show you the symptoms," he said as he folded the cloth neatly on the table. "Sam Hand has retired from UVM. I'm sure I don't have to say that Sam is the leading Vermont scholar. No one has higher stature or more experience. He was the President of the VHS for years—and did extraordinary things for this institution. He led the Center for Research on Vermont for many years. He raised students who became scholars in their own right—and stimulated a whole generation of people with Vermont history. He has been a feature of every seminar and lecture, a critic of every book about Vermont, a fiery, demanding Nestor of the community of Vermont scholars.

"I am sorry to see him go, although I know he will not stop working just because he is retired. He probably has a dozen projects in the works, books he hasn't finished, but he is no longer at UVM, no longer holding the Vermont History chair in the Department. I mean no disrespect to any other scholar, but when Sam left, there was a shift in the firmament of Vermont research."

Mr. Thompson looked down at the book I was reading and then back at me, and I felt a little nervous thinking he was judging me. But I read him wrong. He was gearing up for another speech.

"Now I hear Kevin Graffagnino is leaving the state for Wisconsin. Kevin's loss is as great a blow, maybe more so, than Sam's, because Kevin is the crown prince, and he has chosen to leave Vermont. It isn't just the money. It's the lack of opportunities for making a career in Vermont. How familiar a feeling to see him leave. It is the Vermont experience. Generations of Vermonters have left and prospered in other places, leaving other family here to wonder why the best could not stay.

"Kevin's contributions have been just remarkable. His books, articles, and lectures have enriched the field of Vermont research. He is so talented. He has so much potential. And he is leaving for the Midwest. We don't realize what we've done, letting him leave."

He sighed. "The VHS is in trouble, too. My precious institution is beginning to use the principal of its endowment because of a lack of funding. Hard times for places where our basic sources are kept is the story of the age. Look at the state of the State Archives—full to capacity and not enough money to build a proper building. And the libraries, oh the libraries. How can the state and regional libraries continue without a book budget? They will become mausoleums, not libraries. It is such a sad story everywhere. This is not a good time for any institution that relies on public sources of income. There is no public support for history or for Vermont as a subject of study. The governor and the legislature ought to know better. The people ought to demand it.

"The private money isn't there, either. People don't give the way they used to. These are not generous times. And what suffers as a result of all of these money and space problems? We lose our best people. They give up research on Vermont to earn a living and go into other lines of work. Those who stay learn to live with less each year. Projects are canceled. Programs are delayed. Important collections remain unexamined. Books that ought to be written never get published.

"There is a manuscript in a drawer in this library that was to be the hope of this generation. It was to be this generation's testament to Vermont. Nick Muller worked on it. So did Kevin. It is abandoned now. This generation of Vermonters cannot produce a general history of the state. That is the greatest condemnation of it. It cannot write that history, because it does not know what to say.

"This is a dark and cynical age. This generation is not in love with Vermont. It is in love with itself, with things, and it no longer finds the old stories important."

His eyes were sad and filled with disappointment. We had failed him and his vision of what the future would hold for his Vermont.

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My eyes caught a shadow in the stacks, moving out into the light. It was Abby Hemenway herself, with her hair in a tight bun and a surprising crispness to her walk.

"Now just a minute there, mister," she said to me. "This sour old man is not going to have the last word today. You need to hear another perspective."

I wasn't surprised. The encounter with Mr. Thompson had been strange enough, but I had become used to the idea that a man who died just after the Civil War could sit and tell me his troubles in the reading room of the Vermont Historical Society on a Wednesday afternoon, without anyone else noticing or telling us to be quiet. Now the opportunity for a conversation with the greatest compiler of Vermont town history didn't seem unusual.

She was busy even before she sat down next to Thompson, ignoring him as much as she could. She moved the books that were piled in front of me, arranging them by size and pushing

them to one side so they wouldn't get in the way. She folded her hands in front of her on the table, looked at me sharply, and began to speak.

"Yes, Mr. Hand is retiring and Mr. Graffagnino is emigrating, but this is natural. Things change. That is what has always made Vermont so interesting. Hard times for libraries and museums? When have there been good times? There has never been enough to go around in Vermont, but we do the best with what we have, that's the idea.

"Mr. Thompson condemns this generation of Vermonters and Vermont scholars for losing faith in the Vermont ideal, but he is plainly wrong. He cannot adjust to modern ways of thinking. He fears diversity and the influence of outsiders. His intolerance is a familiar Vermont trait. His trouble is he never left his home town. He sees the world from Main and State streets in Montpelier, and lately from this wall, looking up at the State House. This is a part of Vermont, but it is not all of Vermont.

"I know. I still travel from county to county, looking for sources of local history, and I can tell you the spirit is alive and flourishing out there. Local historical societies are always busy. So many towns are working on or thinking about a new town history or a book of photographs. Every town has taken account of its historic buildings. You may sit here and sulk, but out beyond this building is a fervor that makes me feel redeemed.

"Yes, the leadership of Vermont research is in transition, but look at who is coming up the stairs—Art Cohn, Jeff Potash, David Donath, Julie Bressor, Polly Darnell, Connell Gallagher. Maybe the next era won't have a Sam Hand, but that doesn't mean there won't be good people leading the way, inspiring scholars, making Vermont accessible to us."

I never expected Ms. Hemenway to be so fervent. I always imagined a plain, quiet woman, but clearly Mr. Thompson's words had angered her.

In the next seat, Mr. Thompson was in shock. He had turned his head slightly toward Ms. Hemenway, but he could not bring himself to look directly at her. More color seemed to be returning to his cheeks as she spoke.

"There is no crisis," she continued. "Instead of wringing our hands, we should celebrate the richness of what we have been blessed with in this generation. If anything, these are the best of times for Vermont scholarship. Never in our history have there been so many varieties of ways of looking at our state. Never have so many scholars been involved in the writing and teaching of Vermont, not just its history, but its natural science, its political geography, its anthropology, sociology, folklore, poetry, and biography.

"How can you condemn a generation that produces books like Randolph Roth's *Democratic Dilemma*, William Gilmore's *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life*, and Michael Bellesiles's *Revolutionary Outlaws*?"

Mr. Thompson could not take it any longer. "My point exactly!" he shouted, rising from the table. "Roth is at Ohio State, Gilmore in New Jersey, Bellesiles at Emory in Atlanta! Where are the Vermonters to tell their stories?"

"Where would you like to start," Miss Hemenway answered firmly. "Shall we talk about the career achievements of Betty Bandel? Shall we discuss T. D. Seymour Bassett's contributions? Frank Bryan's?"

Thompson was apoplectic with rage. "Drop all the names you like, ma'am, but this age has yet to produce writers of stature that will rank with the classics of Vermont scholarship!"

"Such as?" she challenged him.

He threw down the names of Zadock Thompson and Edward Hitchcock like a gauntlet.

She answered right back: "Charles Johnson, Kevin Dann, Marjory Power, and William Haviland."

"G. G. Benedict?" he charged.

"Howard Coffin's *Full Duty*," she responded, almost with a flourish. "The point is, Mr. Thompson, this age has nothing to be ashamed about. Its writers and teachers are as dedicated to the state of scholarship on Vermont as any previous generation. More important is the rise of a marketplace for these writings. Every bookstore has a Vermont section. Vermont authors sell pretty well. Wolfgang Mieder's aphorisms. Tyler Resch's editing of Bob Mitchell's editorials. Joe Citro's ghosts and grisly stories. Chris Bohjalian's *Water Witches*. The novels of Howard Frank Mosher. Nancy Price Graff's work. Tom Slayton's *Sabra Field* . . .

"Look at the number of new books your own VHS librarian adds to your collection every year. The output is amazing, and the interest in Vermont, which to you seems scattered, commercial, and out of focus, is more a maturing of the science and art of Vermont than a demoralization.

"The new writers dare to threaten the old order," she said. "Maybe that is your problem. Ethan Allen is an ambiguous figure, and his inconsistencies need to be brought to light. Abenaki culture was forgotten by our historians and writers for almost two hundred years, reflecting how we regarded these original Vermonters. Our history has always included certain blind spots. Vermont is richer for knowing about the Eugenics Survey and its sterilization program. Vermont is more honest with itself if it acknowledges that Vermonters, in addition to being heroic, have at times been cowardly. If there is a fault, it is with history itself for not being more candid with us.

"Such candor does not take away from the beauty and the diversity of life in Vermont in these so short two hundred years or the thousands of years before that when people lived here. Vermonters have not lost their heart, but they have been willing to see beyond the simplicity of the Vermont ideal to a deeper understanding of the state, its weaknesses, and its strengths.

"Too much has been written over the years about Vermont by those unwilling to state the obvious about the high cost of living here, the inhospitable nature of the land and the climate, the frustrations of not having enough to go around, the limits of place that force so many to move away, and the loneliness of those who remain.

"A pretty picture book about Vermont still sells better than a less charitable view of the Green Mountains, but that is changing. Vermonters at the end of the Twentieth Century are less naive. That may to Mr. Thompson appear cynical, but it is the temper of this age that it must celebrate ambiguity and revisionism in order to move to a new understanding of the subject it studies, which is Vermont."

Thompson grew calmer and even attempted a smile. "I will agree that the times are not as shallow or as nonproductive as I argued earlier. But you have not yet addressed the lack of

leadership and consensus at the heart of the community of Vermont research. We lose our best people, and what are we to do about it?"

Miss Hemenway was quiet for the first time since she emerged from the stacks. She closed her eyes as if to gather her thoughts and then slowly responded.

"At UVM this year the Center for Research on Vermont celebrates its twentieth anniversary. It is the one institution that links all of the various people who research, write, and lecture on Vermont—all the disciplines, all the varieties of scholars, all the various ways that people see and report about this state. Like all institutions, it has never held a meeting where everybody who was a member turned out, but it has a core following and a strong heart, and it promises to continue for years to come.

"It has a director. At first there was Jay Gould and Sam Hand. Then Harold Meeks, Fred Schmidt, Marshall True, George Bryan, and Dick Sweterlitsch. Now there is a vacancy. Choosing the next director won't be easy, because of the quality of those who came before, but it will be done. And that director, while he or she will be the closest person Vermont's community of scholars will have to a leader, won't really lead. The new director will introduce and host seminars-in-progress, run meetings, edit manuscripts, and cajole people into doing their best while trying to continue the progress of the Center.

"Vermont scholarship does not have a leader, and it never really has had one. People do what they do, often without regard for what others think of their products, sometimes even in spite of what others think. It is a community to be sure, and it can be as unorganized and dysfunctional as almost any family. There is and always has been jealousy, greed, competition and intolerance among the family. There have been notorious fights, mostly civil and mostly academic, although often personal and emotional, all the same. Young scholars tear down older ones to prove their own worth, while older ones reel from the encounter and judge the young impetuous and not fully reasoned. Academics tear into popular writers; popular writers condemn academics for writing the unreadable.

"But there is another side to it, too, and that's the inspiration and stimulation that people give to and get from that community. Just to know there is a community makes all the difference, not like when you and I, Mr. Thompson, first started out, all alone in the field and uncertain of how to proceed, with no standards to follow.

"Imagine having a forum where you can take your work-in-progress and talk to a group of others, maybe not even people with any knowledge of your subject, and learn what you missed and what you could include in your work? The Center does that for its members. In twenty years, it has held over one hundred of these seminars. It has also published papers and celebrated good work on Vermont wherever that can be found. More importantly than its functions or its products, however, is the idea of the Center, the idea of the community.

"Research and writing is a lonely occupation, as you know. Most of the several dozens of scholars and writers who contributed the canon of works on Vermont, spread out here behind us on the shelves, did not think of themselves as part of a community. They seldom enjoyed any public acclaim. They had to endure the limitations of access to sources, the difficulties of getting material published, and ultimately the fear that all their hard work would be forgotten some day by an ungrateful public. If they knew or met another Vermont scholar, it was a rare event.

“That is no longer true. The sheer number of works-in-progress today relating to Vermont subjects is amazing. The number of students and scholars who dedicate their limited research time to Vermont is larger than at any time in our history. New faces are arriving daily. Vermont is a fit subject to study, and when your study is done and written, there is an audience waiting to read it.

“Vermont is still a very small and poor state. Vermonters still face daily struggles to survive, to make a living, to find time to appreciate their state, but nobody who lives here is confused about what state it is. While many of our people do not have a full understanding of our history, the message of the Vermont experience, told a hundred different ways, is common to everyone who lives here, whether native or not.

“The vision is expanding. Vermont is not two-dimensional. It contains contradictions. If, as you say, Mr. Thompson, Vermont is in crisis, it is in no greater crisis than at any other time in its history. People care. This, too, shall pass.”

She finished and he remained silent. She returned to the stacks, he to his picture frame on the wall, I to my research—all in silence. After a few minutes, I stopped working and looked up at Mr. Thompson’s portrait. He was not smiling, but I thought I caught a wink. I could be wrong.



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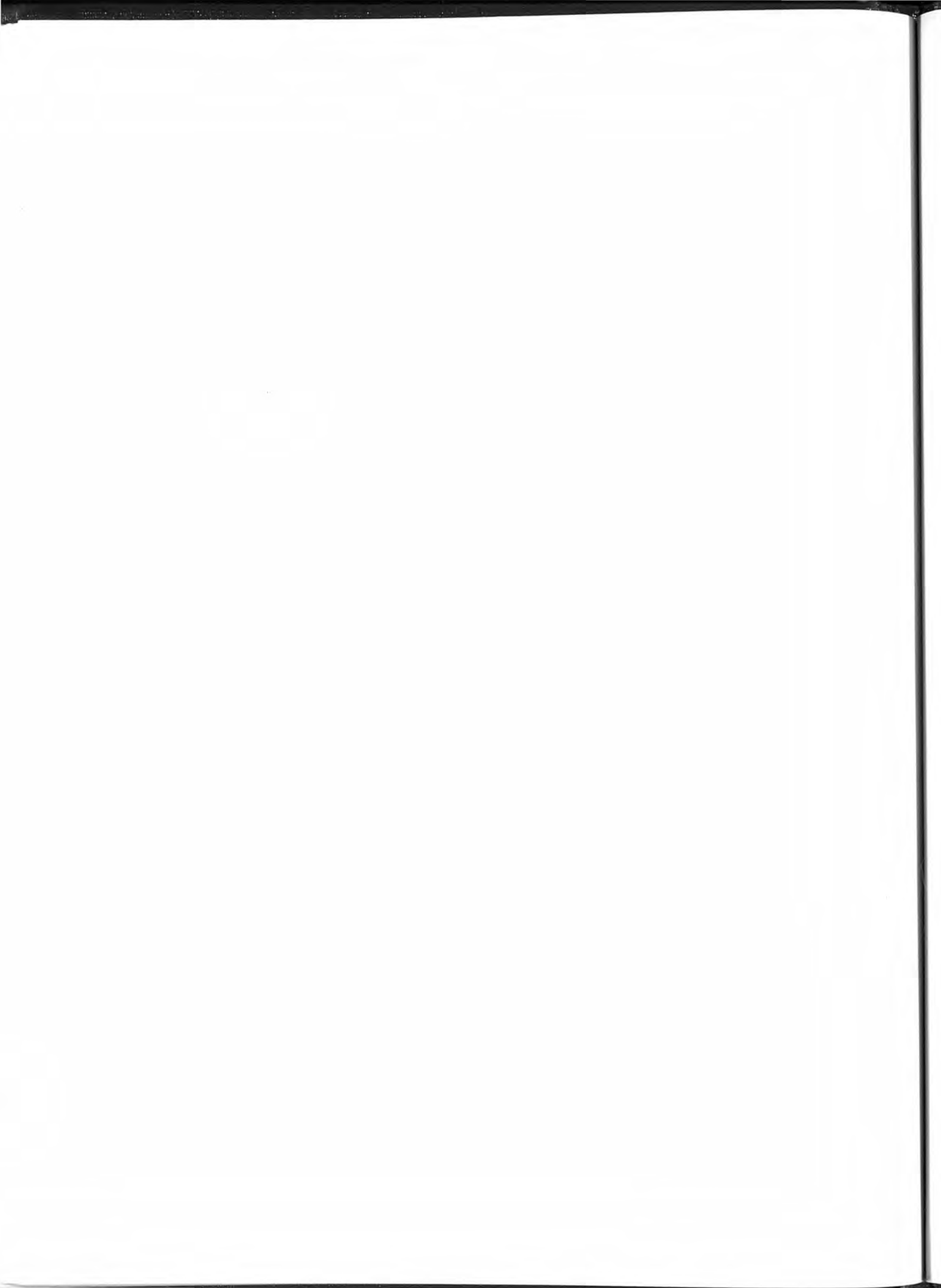
Contributors

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SAMUEL B. HAND is University of Vermont professor of history emeritus. He arrived at UVM in 1961, and taught there until his retirement in 1994. In 1989 he was named University Scholar, and he received the UVM Graduate Level Teaching Award in 1994. He was one of the organizers of the Center for Research on Vermont and has served it as both Moderator and Director. He is past president of the Vermont Historical Society and past president of the Oral History Association which presented him with the Harvey Kantor Award for outstanding contributions to oral history in 1986. The author of numerous books and articles, he specializes in twentieth-century United States and Vermont history.

MICHAEL SHERMAN is editor of *Vermont History*. Currently he is general editor of the forthcoming publication, *Vermont State Government, 1965-1995*, which is cosponsored by the Center for Research on Vermont and The Snelling Center for Government, and co-author, with P. Jeffrey Potash, of a one-volume history of Vermont, in process. From 1985 to 1995, he was director of the Vermont Historical Society. A member of the Center since 1986, he currently serves on its Executive Committee. With Jennie Versteeg, he co-edited *We Vermonters: Perspectives on the Past*, published by the Vermont Historical Society, in cooperation with the Center for Research on Vermont, in 1992.

JENNIE VERSTEEG is professor of economics at Saint Michael's College. Her article, "Not Your Ordinary Sleighride: Two Early-Nineteenth-Century Winter Travelers on Lake Champlain" (*Vermont History*, Winter 1995), resulted from her overlapping Vermont and Canadian studies interests, which continue in current work on change and continuity in the Derby Line, Vermont-Rock Island, Quebec, community. A longtime member of the Center for Research on Vermont, she has served on its Executive Committee and as Editorial Board Chair of the Occasional Papers Series. As noted above, she coedited, with Michael Sherman, *We Vermonters: Perspectives on the Past* (1992).



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