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Friends, neighbors, and political allies : reflections on the Gibson-Aiken connection

Samuel B. Hand

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NO. 11

FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, AND
POLITICAL ALLIES

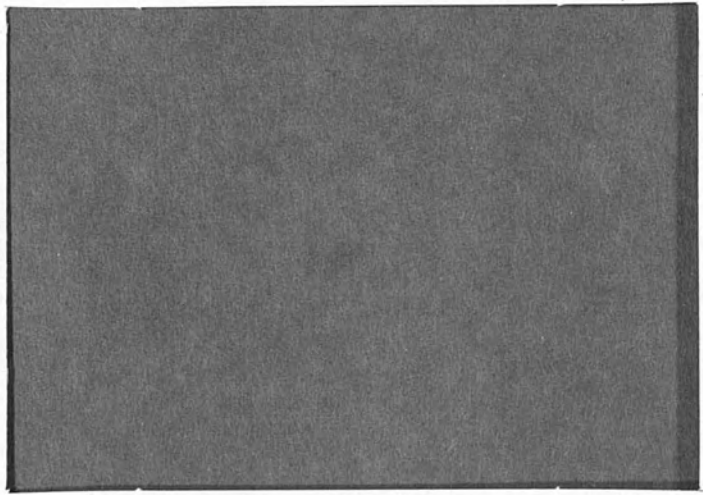
REFLECTIONS ON THE
GIBSON-AIKEN CONNECTION

BY

SAMUEL B. HAND

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

CENTER FOR
RESEARCH
ON VERMONT



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George D. Aiken
Lieutenant Governor of Vermont, 1935.
Courtesy Houston Photograph Collection, Vermont State Archives





Ernest W. Gibson, Jr.
Secretary of the Vermont Senate, 1935.
Courtesy Houston Photograph Collection, Vermont State Archives

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FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, AND POLITICAL ALLIES
REFLECTIONS ON THE GIBSON-AIKEN CONNECTION

Without having the haziest idea of what combat would be, we wanted, in a phrase which sounds quaint today, to fight for our country. Subsequent generations have lost that blazing patriotism and speak of it if at all, patronizingly. They cannot grasp how proud we were to be Americans.

--William Raymond Manchester,
Goodbye Darkness: A Memoir
of the Pacific

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COLONEL GIBSON WOUNDED IN SOUTH PACIFIC

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On July 1, 1942, Franklin D. Roosevelt and presidential assistant William Hassett took to speculating on political futures. Roosevelt asked Hassett, a Northfield, Vermont native, what he thought of Sen. George D. Aiken. Aiken had been in the U.S. Senate since January 1941, and his most conspicuous service had been to oppose the Lend-Lease Bill, a Roosevelt initiative designed to aid the Allied powers with grants of military and other supplies. Although the bill passed Congress in March 1941, Aiken's opposition disappointed the president. Vermont's senior senator, Warren Austin, and Aiken's immediate predecessor, Ernest Gibson, Jr., had been staunch lend-lease supporters. Aware of Gibson's and Aiken's political and social intimacy, Roosevelt perceived their contrary foreign policy views to be a paradox, especially since Gibson, after leaving the Senate, had toured the nation to promote the adoption of lend-lease.

Hassett made no effort to resolve the president's dilemma. He simply "told the President that Aiken had a fairly good record as Governor of Vermont, which justified a more enlightened view of national matters." Roosevelt was not appeased. "I'd like to see young Gibson back in the Senate," he mused. Hassett's diary entry for that day also noted that Gibson, then in the army, "was bound to be an important figure in Vermont if he comes back from the war."¹

Gibson did return and in 1946 confirmed Hasset's prediction by upsetting incumbent Gov. Mortimer Proctor in the Republican primary and winning election as governor. Serving one and a half terms--he was reelected in 1948 but resigned in January 1950 to accept appointment as Vermont's federal district court judge--his administrations left a permanent mark on Vermont government. Journalists depicted Gibson to national audiences as "Vermont's New Dealing Yankee." Princeton political scientist Duane Lockard characterized him as the most effective liberal governor in New England, and Marlboro College historian Richard Judd concluded that "with the inauguration of Governor Ernest W. Gibson in 1947, the social revolution launched by Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal came to full flower in the provincial Republican stronghold of Vermont."²

Gibson's efforts to direct Vermont toward fuller acceptance of New Deal principles involved him in bitterly contested efforts to restructure the Republican state party organization. In this, as in most political ventures, he and George Aiken were closely allied. Indeed, contemporaries referred to their faction of the Republican party as the Gibson-Aiken wing, their opponents as the Proctor wing. While this labeling hardly suggests the individual and ideological diversity among Vermont Republicans, it does underscore the continuing collaboration between Ernest Gibson and George Aiken. Their close association, as Hasset could have told Roosevelt back in 1942, was highly politicized, but it was also shaped by considerations that ran deeper than political

advantage and dated back to a time before either entered politics.

In some respects the Gibson-Aiken collaboration was a family inheritance. Their fathers, both mavericks long associated in local and state politics, passed on an instinct for populist causes and a wide circle of contacts that the sons cultivated into a major political faction.³ Yet even after their associations broadened to include other ambitious and talented allies, none ever challenged the very special allegiance and friendship that existed between Ernest Gibson, Jr., and George Aiken.

Ernest, Jr., born in Brattleboro in 1901, graduated from Brattleboro High School in 1919, and Norwich University in 1923. The following year, his father Ernest, Sr., was elected to Congress, and the family accompanied him to Washington. While in Washington he studied law at George Washington University and in 1926 returned to Brattleboro to practice in his father's law office. His first "substantial client" was George Aiken.⁴ Aiken, nine years older than Gibson, had been born in neighboring Dummerston, and after his graduation from Brattleboro High School in 1909, set himself up as a horticulturalist with a nursery in Putney.

Gibson was the first of the two to win political office; in 1928 he was elected state's attorney for Windham County. He served two two-year terms, from 1929 to 1933. Not so incidentally, while campaigning for reelection in 1930, he helped George Aiken win election to the Vermont House

of Representatives. Although neither Aiken nor Gibson was financially prosperous, Aiken, with a successful nursery, was the more established. Gibson was only just beginning a career, and partly to augment his income (he had married Dorothy Switzer in 1926 and Ernest III, the eldest of their four children, was born in 1927) and partly because he had an insatiable appetite for politics, he secured appointment as assistant secretary of the Vermont senate. In 1933 he did not seek reelection as state's attorney and was elevated to secretary. He chose as his assistant secretary a former classmate at George Washington University and the state's attorney from Caledonia County, Sterry Waterman. At that same session Aiken was elected Speaker of the House, the first stage in a meteoric rise in Vermont politics.

Elected lieutenant governor in 1934, governor in 1936, and reelected in 1938, Aiken, in every step in his rise up the political ladder, relied upon Gibson's support. Apart from a prominent family name (Gibson, Sr., had gone on to the U.S. Senate in 1934), Ernest, Jr., brought enthusiasm, boundless energy, and organizational skills. He was a principal spokesman for the Young Republicans whose support was crucial to Aiken in his first gubernatorial primary, and he served as a member of Aiken's kitchen cabinet. Throughout the 1930s the two men enjoyed extremely close physical proximity. Not only were their respective offices located in the state capitol, but they regularly travelled from Brattleboro to Montpelier together.

A day seldom passed when they were not in each other's presence.

After May 1940, when Ernest Gibson, Sr., died, these circumstances were dramatically altered. Aiken, ambitious to succeed to the Senate, appointed Ernest, Jr., to his father's seat. The Aiken-Gibson strategy was for Gibson to keep the seat warm until Aiken mounted his own candidacy in the September primary. Vermont politics was particularly muddled at this time, but the essential point is that Aiken managed a surprisingly easy primary victory over Springfield industrialist Ralph Flanders and won the general election overwhelmingly.

Aiken's election did not return Gibson to Vermont. Instead, he accepted appointment to succeed William Allen White as chairman of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, hardly an obscure sinecure. Coinciding with a major national debate over lend-lease, the chairmanship propelled Gibson into an even more highly visible role than he had enjoyed as senator. A frequent speaker at public rallies as well as more sedate functions, he was often photographed in the company of other lend-lease supporters, particularly such glamorous movie stars as Madeleine Carroll, Miriam Hopkins, and Constance Bennett. These images appeared regularly in newspapers and movie newsreels.⁵

Gibson served with the committee from January through May, but after lend-lease was enacted in March, the committee's work became largely redundant. In May, at his own request, he was called up from inactive reserve for a year of active federal military service and assigned to the Forty-third Division as a

captain. He reported in June 1941. This was six months before Pearl Harbor, or as some Vermonters prefer to date it, three months before the Vermont legislature declared war on Germany.⁶

Ernest, Jr., was no recent convert to military preparedness. He took great pride in his father's service during World War I as an officer in the Fifty-seventh Pioneer Regiment. And Ernest, Sr., had remained in the reserve, retiring with the rank of colonel. Ernest, Jr., had joined the National Guard in 1922, just prior to his graduation from Norwich University. Echoing his father as a vocal and persistent advocate of the citizen-soldier concept (Ernest, Sr.'s congressional career was largely directed towards assisting veteran interests), Ernest, Jr., planned to spend a year in active service before returning to Vermont.

Aiken was anything but enthusiastic about Gibson's enlistment plans. Lacking military background or inclinations, he at first deprecated the lure of military service. From Aiken's perspective, Gibson, at age forty, with a wife and four young children, had better alternatives than playing at full-time soldier. "In the Army you are only one of ten thousand that can do the work. . . . Back on the domestic firing line you would be worth ten thousand well-meaning individuals."⁷

When in September, Aiken learned that Gibson had taken ill during training, he underscored the contribution Gibson could make on the "domestic firing line" and urged him to

accept an early discharge. "Unless you instruct me not to do so," Aiken wrote, "I shall do what I can to bring this about." He would not "be working alone," he assured Gibson, in a reference to Senate Majority leader Alben Barkley.⁸ Gibson cut these efforts short by replying that "I really think I should serve my year out," and Dorothy Gibson apparently concurred. She had brought the family to Florida to be with Ernest and assured Aiken that her husband "looks fine--is in good spirits--can go without food or sleep without noticing it I find. He has lost his nervous tension thank goodness."⁹ Aiken, of course, acquiesced. In October he wrote that Gibson was "probably right. I expect another six months will be the best thing for you personally and physically. However, any time you feel differently and get the word to me, I will get busy . . . but unless we hear from you, we will let it rest where it is."¹⁰

The Japanese attack upon Pearl Harbor disrupted Gibson's plans. It kept him in the service until September 1945, and for much of that time he and Aiken could communicate only through letters. It was the one substantial period since Aiken had become his "great personal friend and powerful political ally"¹¹ that they were physically separated. Their letters, preserved by Aiken, reveal impressions, sentiments, frustrations, and ambitions that otherwise would have been uttered only in private conversation. For the historian, the Aiken-Gibson letters are a treasure-trove.¹²

Gibson's earliest letters register outrage at preferences given regular army officers over their reserve and National Guard counterparts. The "War Dept.," Gibson noted, "has adopted a policy--in writing--that no officer not a regular army man can hold a key position in a new division." He was irate. "Once again our brass hats are showing a tremendous inability to understand human nature--and to proceed in such manner as will, eventually harm our country."¹³ Such a policy did, of course, delay Gibson's own promotions, but he argued the issue in broader terms. He wanted Aiken to know that "it is dead wrong and dangerous for the good Nat Gd. and Reserve officers to be shoved aside--many times for inferior grades of man and officer. Specifically Gens. Wing and Barker in our division. . . ."

Concerns other than policy denigrating the citizen-soldier also plagued him. He agreed with Aiken that the rubber shortage had come about "because of collusion basically inspired by greed. I don't believe [Lee] Emerson can beat [U.S. Representative Charles] Plumley--the old handshaker. The maritime commission needs a thorough house-cleaning. And Jesse Jones hasn't too good a record in helping the small business man--or in the rubber matter." And Secretary of War Henry Stimson "ought to retire."¹⁴

Gibson's letters were usually handwritten on any available stationery. Aiken's replies were typed, longer, and more detailed. Aiken appreciated Gibson's concern over slow promotions

but wasn't going to do anything about it. The senator had made some discreet inquiries and learned that Gibson's promotion would be coming soon. All he lacked was time-in-grade with the Forty-third Division.¹⁵ On most matters, particularly those involving "business greed," their views were reinforcing. Aiken reported on a telegram he had received from Ralph Flanders as president of the New England Council. Flanders urged full support of Office of Price Administration (OPA) efforts to avoid inflation and to oppose "any attempt to gain advantage for any particular group." Aiken thought that "it is pretty nice for that bunch of cut-throats of the New England Council who have fixed their prices by selling Japan and Italy and Russia in 1940, to now say that all the farmers and little business men should be kept from gaining any selfish advantage."¹⁶

The Aiken-Gibson correspondence also includes candid exchanges of political gossip. The Forty-third Division was made up in part from the old Eighty-sixth Infantry Brigade, a Maine-Vermont National Guard unit. And the large number of Vermonters included in the unit provided Gibson with a constant source of local intelligence. Aiken, of course, maintained his own networks. Throughout the spring and summer of 1942, they speculated on the potential for a successful Republican primary challenge to incumbent Congressman Charles Plumley. Aiken, unlike Gibson, thought Emerson could have taken Plumley, but he was particularly disappointed that Sterry Waterman did not run. "Sterry," Aiken wrote, had "wanted to run . . . but I

guess he didn't have quite enough of what it takes to make his announcement." Aiken thought he would "have won easily, though not without someone saying something mean about him. These fellows who wait for an office until they can get it unanimously will wait a long time."¹⁷ In a subsequent letter Aiken reported that Sam Ogden would run. He "wouldn't do as well as Sterry [Ogden lost by a two-to-one margin] but he will at least put on a colorful campaign and bring a lot of Old Guard faults out in the open."¹⁸

Although Aiken thought it "pretty difficult to say what definite good resulted from World War No. I," he expected "plenty of changes taking place as a result of this one."¹⁹ One of the changes he anticipated with considerable glee was the passing of the Republican "Old Guard." Writing in August 1942, he reported that "I was up home last week. The Old Guard is still operating, but I think weaker than ever. Their courage is pretty good now because there is no one at home to knock them down every morning after breakfast, but once get them into a good campaign and I think they will take the count." The "Hap Masons," Aiken continued (Mason was Vermont's Republican national committeeman), "who get good commissions in the Procurement and Fiscal Divisions will not stand knee-high to the fellows who went into the field, after this is over."²⁰

Anyone who harbors any doubt that Aiken, like Hassett, expected Gibson to become a major force in Vermont politics if he returned, need only read Aiken's letter of October 31,

1942. Gibson was then in the South Pacific, and Aiken reported the "Old Guard happy to see you out of the country, I think and will probably make the most of your absence. However, when you get back I don't think there will be much to it."²¹

Getting back was not all that easy. The Forty-third Division saw heavy action in New Georgia (Solomon Islands) and then in the Philippines. Gibson served as division intelligence officer in New Georgia and after that campaign (officially concluded in October 1943), he was reassigned to the Pentagon. By then he had been wounded, received the Purple Heart, and been awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action.

A few additional comments on Gibson's combat record are in order. The dearth of former United States senators serving in foxholes made Gibson an item of special interest. In addition, Gibson was hardly a shrinking violet. He courted publicity. War correspondents reporting on the Forty-third Division invariably did a piece on "the former U.S. Senator . . . the colonel who succeeded William Allen White as chairman of the Committee to Aid America by Defending the Allies."

Clay Gowran, a correspondent for the Chicago Tribune, supplied a classic illustration. The Tribune was published by Col. Robert McCormick who had been among the most vocal critics of the William Allen White committee, and he and Gibson were known to each other. Gowran reported that on July 4, 1943, during a Japanese bombing raid on Forty-third positions he had been shielded from shrapnel by Gibson. After

the raid he instructed Gowran to "be sure to tell Colonel McCormick that a former senator from Vermont covered the Tribune during the fourth of July celebration at Rendova." This item prominently displayed in the Tribune was also circulated in other U.S. newspapers.²²

The report of Gibson's wound was even more widely circulated. Gibson received a head wound during a July 2 bombing raid, and although it was apparently not life threatening, any head wound is dangerous. Initially refusing evacuation, Gibson continued at his station "until ordered to Guadalcanal for treatment." After a very short stay he returned to the Forty-third "of his own volition."²³

At about the time of Gibson's wound, an International News Service (INS) photographer chanced upon the scene to snap Gibson receiving first aid. This picture with a short caption went out over the wire services.

FORMER SENATOR WOUNDED IN SOUTH PACIFIC
Rendova. . . . Col. Ernest W. Gibson of
Brattleboro, Vt., a former U.S. Senator
from that state, is shown receiving first
aid from Pvt. Albert S. Tamorria of Wash.,
D.C., after receiving a head injury during
a Jap air raid on Rendova Island captured
by the Yanks.

The colonel, who succeeded William Allen
White as national chairman of the



Col. Ernest Gibson receiving first aid after being wounded on Rendova Island, 1943.

Courtesy Gibson Papers, Special Collections Department,
University of Vermont Library

Committee to Aid America by Defending
the Allies, was standing atop a hill
when wounded.²⁴

The picture, almost always accompanied by the caption, appeared in scores of newspapers. Vermont newspapers usually commented that Gibson was only slightly wounded; most out-of-state newspapers used the INS caption. The University of Vermont Gibson collection includes copies of some of the dailies that carried it, among them the Washington Post (half-page), the Washington Star, the Boston Globe, and even the Los Angeles Times. On September 30, Massachusetts Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., had notice of the wound printed in the Congressional Record.²⁵ All this is to note that by the conclusion of the New Georgia campaign, Gibson's war record was widely and publicly documented.

In December 1943, while the Forty-third Division regrouped in preparation for an invasion of the Philippines, Gibson was transferred back to the United States. The Gibson Papers suggest that the reassignment was initiated through Gibson's own promptings. He "sure had," he wrote Aiken, "a rugged experience in the Munda fight." He appreciated Aiken's "commiserating with me about my wound." It might not have been so bad if he "hadn't in an outburst of misplaced patriotism elected to try to stand by my job rather than let them evacuate me." He wasn't going to "make that mistake" next time.

If Gibson's enthusiasm for combat had been tempered by the seasoning of battle, he was no less exercised over the

"policy of professional soldiering." General Wing had done a "wonderful job" and had "earned" promotion to division commander. Others had also performed "many great and self-sacrificing acts," but Gibson had also seen "many grasping-for-power acts at the expense of our country's youth." He was going to send "a detailed analysis of the campaign," giving "names and dates and facts and making recommendations for the future." If Gibson did not make it back, he hoped Aiken "at the proper time, when it would do the most good, [would] have it inserted in the Congressional Record." Gibson apparently never prepared the analysis. Tired, worn, and driven to the limits of his physical endurance, he confided that "after I've served a year over here, I should be perfectly happy to have someone else take over." A few months later Gibson was "ready to return to the USA." What he needed was to "persuade someone with authority that such is necessary to the war effort." If Aiken knew "of anyone in whose ear you can whisper, let go a good loud blast, but of course, it mustn't come from me."²⁶

That December Gibson was furloughed back to Vermont. Appearing at war bond rallies throughout the state to detail the exploits of his Forty-third Division, his impassioned oratory and body wracked by months of jungle warfare left a lasting impression.²⁷ Clearly marked for political preferment, he was assigned to military intelligence and stationed in Washington. The reassignment, placing him back in close physical proximity to Aiken, diminished their correspondence.

Their personal and political connections, however, intensified.

At the war's conclusion, the distinction of being Vermont's premier war hero belonged not to Gibson but to Gen. Leonard "Red" Wing. While in New Georgia, General Wing had assumed command of the Forty-third and subsequently led it in the Philippine invasion. He was presumably the first (and perhaps the only) National Guardsman to command a combat division. Red Wing was tremendously popular; his men elected to call their unit Winged Victory. Wing was not only Gibson's military senior, but he had prior political claims as well. Only fifty-two years old when the war ended, he had been touted for high political office even before the war. He was a partner in Vermont's most prestigious law firm and had served as Republican state committeeman and party treasurer. When after V-J Day he returned to Vermont, however, it was apparent that two years of jungle warfare had exhausted his health. He died on December 19, 1945.

Wing's death ineluctably enhanced Gibson's political prospects. Given the recent political climate, it may be difficult to appreciate the esteem and goodwill the general public extended to returning veterans. Equally important, a fraternal feeling among veterans enabled them to organize and work together for men they could identify as their own candidates. Of all potential candidates, Wing was obviously the most popular. For many Vermont veterans, such as Gibson, he had literally been their leader. Gibson could never have challenged him,

although had Wing been able to run for office, Gibson might still have sought a place on the ballot. Wing's death, however, left room at the top. It cleared the way for Gibson, at Aiken's insistence, to challenge Gov. Mortimer Proctor in the 1946 Republican primary.

Gibson won that primary. It was the first and only time an incumbent governor was defeated in a Vermont primary contest. There were "many times," Gibson confided to Hassett after his victory, "when I myself wondered if the Proctor Dynasty could be overthrown."²⁸ Writing Hassett in April, he alleged that he was "not overly optimistic about my chances of upsetting Vermont tradition and defeating the Proctor name." He thought, however, it was "good for the world to have a few fools that will rush in and stir things up where the angels don't really want to be."²⁹ It was obvious that Gibson would encounter opposition from the state party organization, but like Aiken, he courted that opposition. Writing in 1942, Aiken had counseled on how the "Old Guard" was "weaker than ever" and predicted that in a "good campaign they will take the count." He did not, however, regard victory as automatic. Even support from Gibson's "great personal friend and powerful political ally" did not assure success. The colonel would have to capitalize on his other assets. Republican primary endorsement assured victory in November, but no organization or individual could dictate a primary victory.³⁰ Allegations of "Old Guard" or Proctor omnipotence were always more effective as insurgent propaganda than in delineating the Vermont political scene.

Aiken was confident Gibson would succeed provided he moved in 1946. When Gibson expressed reservations over challenging Proctor and suggested he delay his gubernatorial bid until 1948 when the "new veteran vote" would be better organized,³¹ Aiken insisted otherwise. Nineteen forty-six was a magic moment. Politicians knew this and plugged it into their calculations. For Gibson to take maximum advantage of his veteran status, he must move swiftly. Even 1948 would be too late. By then the homecoming would be stale news, the uniform old cloth, and the opportunities dissipated.

The earliest communication I have encountered proposing Gibson's gubernatorial candidacy is dated December 26, 1945, less than a week after General Wing's death. It was not from a veteran. It was from Robert Mitchell, publisher of the Rutland Herald.

Pressing on unsought advice isn't a practice to which I'm addicted by habit or inclination. But it's more than a matter of personal advice when I suggest to you that if you plan to run for Governor, now is the time to do it.

While I don't like these non-contest primaries, I think if you told Mortimer you wanted to run he would be grateful for the opportunity to step aside.³²

Gibson's reply was a noncommittal yes.

Prior to General Wing's sudden death, I had felt, (a) that General Wing had earned and should be Vermont's next Governor and, (b) that the people of the State would welcome the opportunity to vote for him. While I was not unaware there had been some gossip that I might run, I really hadn't seriously considered it.

Now that General Wing has left us, I have been re-orienting myself mentally and I have come to the conclusion that if I am ever to run for Governor, probably the time to do it is now. The idea has however, lost some of the appeal it used to have.³³

Mitchell's prediction that Mortimer Proctor would "step aside" went unfulfilled. Events conspired so that both Gibson and Proctor sought the nomination, and Gibson was quick to mobilize veteran support. Veterans were his natural constituency, but he was assisted in his efforts by his close military association with General Wing. He assumed, in effect, the mantle as Red Wing's political heir. In his letter to Mitchell, Gibson had reflected on how "General Wing had earned and should

be Vermont's next governor." As the campaign progressed, this sentiment was flaunted as evidence that, had Wing lived, he would have challenged the "Proctor Dynasty," a dubious surmise.³⁴

According to Gibson, Wing had earned the right to be Vermont's next governor and won the hearts of its people through over four years of military service. Mortimer Proctor had earned his claim to the governor's chair by traditional political service. He had served as a legislative leader and as lieutenant governor, a succession tradition also honored by his immediate predecessors. Gibson attacked that tradition. Capitalizing upon the premise that political preferment should not be denied to those who "were away fighting for their country," Gibson argued not merely an affirmative action program for veterans but insisted that it was such "unwholesome" and "outmoded" practices as the gubernatorial succession ladder that impeded "able men at the height of their ability" from seeking high public office. The rule of succession, he alleged, so dominated Vermont politics that a "relatively small clique of people chose governors nearly ten years in advance."³⁵ Although Gibson did not stress the point, of the five governors who served prior to Mortimer Proctor, one was dead, one was ninety-two years old and took no part in the campaign, and the other three, Stanley Wilson, George Aiken, and William Wills, all supported Gibson.

The importance of the popular association of Gibson with Wing is difficult to measure. But we do know that Gibson

cultivated it. Leonard Wing, Jr., a featured speaker at at least one Gibson rally, embodied this Gibson strategy. Also a veteran, he exercised his "first chance to vote" in 1946. Speaking explicitly of Gibson's military service and implicitly of Gibson's service under his father, Wing invoked the main theme of the Gibson campaign. The colonel, he asserted, was a man of superior, and Mortimer Proctor a man of mediocre, ability.³⁶

Mobilizing veterans into traditional politics proved to be Gibson's forte. Since almost the first Vermont primary, Democrats could participate in Republican contests and candidates of all Republican persuasions were wont to appeal for their support. Indeed, much of the primary campaign rhetoric directed against the Republican organization was verbal strategy designed to attract Democratic voters. Democrats were invited to vote against the Republican organization candidate in September and to return to their own party for the general election. Republicans who could retain substantial organization support while simultaneously maintaining an anti-organization profile profited the most. George Aiken was a past master at this tactic; his 1936 Democratic gubernatorial opponent advised his followers to support Aiken in the Republican primary.³⁷ But even Aiken never surpassed Gibson's 1946 performance.

When it became apparent to Mortimer Proctor that he was to be in a primary fight, he followed the good Republican

custom of soliciting votes in Democratic strongholds. Seeking out Russell Niquette, long-time Winooski Democrat, he asked Niquette for Winooski Democratic support in the primary. Niquette had performed similar service in the past, but in 1946 he discovered that the Winooski chapters of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion had already mobilized the city for Gibson.³⁸ In 1944 there had been 107 votes in the Winooski Republican gubernatorial primary. In 1946 there were 842 votes, 633 of them for Gibson.

Aiken noted such developments with approval, but with his own Senate term running through 1950, he was too discreet to participate publicly in the campaign. Everyone knew, however, where his sentiments lay. His periodic forecasts of a Gibson victory, ceremoniously elicited by a compliant press, were regarded as evidence of his Gibson support. But the press, although almost certainly aware of it, did not reveal his more significant covert aid. From his Washington vantage, Aiken monitored federal agencies and reported to Gibson so promptly and in such depth that the candidate was more fully informed of developments concerning Vermont than the governor. Aiken's reports proved especially useful in the Wilder Dam controversy, a hydroelectric development project that threatened to inundate Connecticut Valley dairy land.³⁹ Gibson managed to escalate the Wilder Dam controversy into a prime campaign issue by alleging that Proctor would not stand fast against flooding Vermont soil. Proctor, handicapped by the lack of an intelligence network

comparable to the Aiken-Gibson pipeline, never convincingly countered the charge.

Also to assist Gibson's candidacy, the senator encouraged challenges to other organization candidates: Sterry Waterman ran for the U.S. Senate, and Asa Bloomer, for the lieutenant governor's nomination. Although both men lost, the Gibson-Aiken strategy had dictated they campaign principally to attract votes for Gibson in their own areas of greatest strength, and to that end they succeeded. When some thirty years later Sterry Waterman was asked to reflect on his defeat, he suggested that he had been used as a "sacrificial lamb." But he also appreciated that it was his support for Aiken and Gibson in their gubernatorial campaigns that had prompted Aiken to promote Waterman's appointment to the United States Court of Appeals.⁴⁰

Aiken, when asked to comment years later on the 1946 campaign, chose instead to reflect on the Aiken-Gibson connection. "Possibly Ernest and I inherited our liberal tendencies from our fathers who were ardent supporters of Teddy Roosevelt in 1912." Without Gibson's support, Aiken did not believe he would have succeeded in his own career. "It was not only that Ernest was loyal to me but also that so many friends throughout the state were loyal to him that made our victories possible." In 1969 when Ernest Gibson died, "I lost one of the best friends that I ever had--and one to whom I owed so much."⁴¹

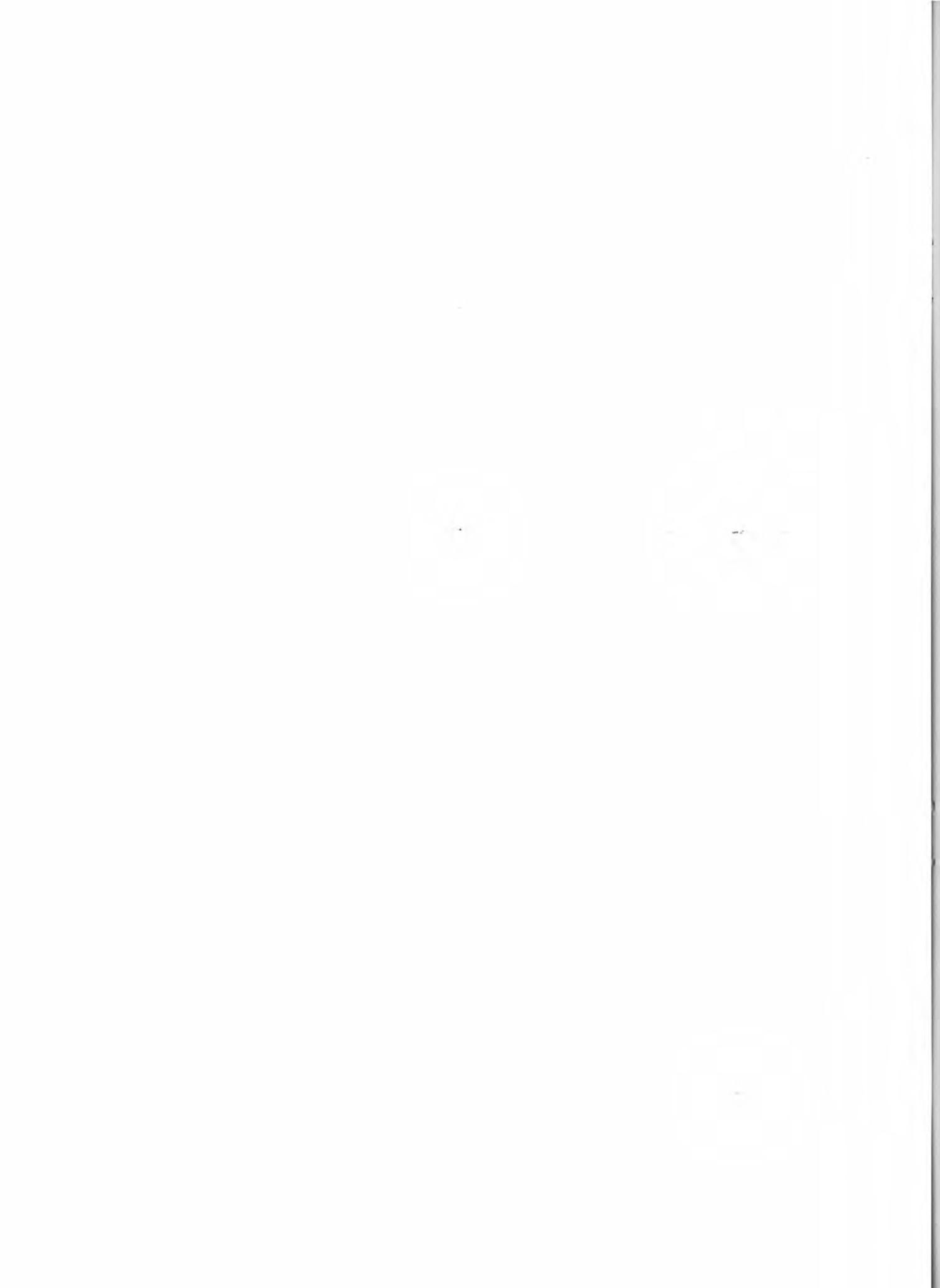
NOTES

1. William Hasset, Off the Record with F. D. R. 1942-1945 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1958), 81.
2. Melvin Wax, "Vermont's New Dealing Yankee," Nation 168 (June 11, 1949):659-60; and William Gilman, "Vermont Goes Radical," Collier's, April 19, 1947. Also see Duane Lockard, New England State Politics (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959), 19; and Richard Judd, The New Deal in Vermont (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 246.
3. Gibson had "always admired" George's father, Edward. In 1943, shortly after Edward's death, Gibson wrote, "If I recollect aright, the first I heard of him was during the old bull moose days when I was a youngster in short pants" (Ernest W. Gibson, Jr., to George D. Aiken, October 2, 1943, Gibson Papers, 3-13, University of Vermont Library [hereafter cited as Gibson MSS]). In 1982-1983, Barbara Mutter, then an undergraduate at the University of Vermont, processed the Gibson Family Papers collection that has been particularly useful to this author.
4. Gibson's reference to Aiken as his first substantial client is from a Gibson Senate speech of August 27, 1940. Most secondary accounts refer to Aiken as Gibson's first client.
5. As a ten-year-old schoolboy in New York, the author won a current events contest by correctly associating Gibson with the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. He must confess, however, that he did not closely follow the preparedness debate and doubtless learned of Gibson from newsreel clips of the former senator with glamorous Hollywood associates.
6. Journal of the House Special Session, 1941, 25. See also Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Assembly 1941, 234, 235. At its regular 1941 session, the General Assembly, reacting to the activation of a Vermont National Guard unit and anticipating a formal declaration of war against Germany, voted a bonus to Vermonters in military service during the war. At a special September session the legislature amended the law to allow a bonus credit to Vermonters already on active duty.
7. Aiken to Gibson, September 25, 1941, Gibson MSS, 3-12.
8. *Ibid.*

9. Gibson to Aiken, October 8, 1941, Gibson MSS, 3-12. Dorothy Gibson's comment is from her postscript to Gibson's letter.
10. Aiken to Gibson, October 25, 1941, Gibson MSS, 3-12.
11. This phrase recurred frequently in news items. See, for example, Boston Globe, October 6, 1940.
12. The letters in the Gibson collection from this period, Gibson originals and Aiken carbons, were initially housed in the Aiken files and transferred by Aiken to Gibson after the war. There are some few remnants of this correspondence in the University of Vermont's George D. Aiken collection.
13. Gibson to Aiken, May 4, 1942, Gibson MSS, 3-12A.
14. Gibson to Aiken, ca. June 1942, Gibson MSS, 3-12A.
15. Aiken to Gibson, May 12, 1942, Gibson MSS, 3-12A.
16. Aiken to Gibson, July 9, 1942, Gibson MSS, 3-12A.
17. Aiken to Gibson, August 4, 1942, Gibson MSS, 3-12A. See also Aiken to Gibson, June 15, 1942, Gibson MSS, 3-12A.
18. Aiken to Gibson, August 5, 1942, Gibson MSS, 3-12A.
19. Aiken to Gibson, June 15, 1942, Gibson MSS, 3-12A.
20. Aiken to Gibson, August 4, 1942, Gibson MSS, 3-12A.
21. Aiken to Gibson, October 31, 1942, Gibson MSS, 3-12A.
22. Brattleboro Reformer, November 10, 1943. The Gibson collection includes newspapers and newspaper clippings.
23. Citation accompanying Silver Star award, January 1944, Gibson MSS, 7-50.
24. Gibson MSS, 7-67.
25. Congressional Record, September 30, 1943, 78th Cong., 1st sess., 8016.
26. Gibson to Aiken, August 23, 1943, Gibson MSS, 3-13; and Gibson to Aiken, October 2, 1943, Gibson MSS, 3-13.
27. Brattleboro Reformer, January 10, 1944.

28. Gibson to Hassett, November 19, 1946, Hassett Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y. A carbon is in the Gibson MSS, 3-35. Gibson-Hassett correspondence is preserved by the Roosevelt, Truman, and University of Vermont libraries. The Truman Library, Independence, Mo., retains important materials relating to Gibson's appointment as federal judge. See also Gibson to Aiken, January 30, 1946, Gibson MSS, 3-20.
29. Gibson to Hassett, April 19, 1946, Gibson MSS, 3-23.
30. For analysis of Vermont Republican primary voting patterns, see Lockard, New England State Politics; also see Frank Bryan, "Saying It with Numbers," in "Vermont's New Dealing Yankee: Governor Ernest Gibson, Jr., of Brattleboro" (Edited transcript of a Center for Research on Vermont research-in-progress seminar, with Samuel Hand, Richard Judd, and D. Gregory Sanford, Brattleboro, Vt., May 28, 1980), 10-20.
31. Gibson to Aiken, January 30, 1946, Gibson MSS, 3-20.
32. Robert Mitchell to Gibson, December 26, 1945, Mitchell Personal Papers, Rutland, Vt.
33. Gibson to Mitchell, December 31, 1945, Mitchell Personal Papers, Rutland, Vt.
34. There is no doubt that Wing anticipated political preferment. In August 1945, amidst rumors that President Truman would appoint Warren Austin to the Supreme Court, Wing announced he would be a candidate for the Senate vacancy. See Wing to Robert Mitchell, August 24, 1945, Mitchell Personal Papers, Rutland, Vt. Deane Davis, later Vermont governor, remembers a 1945 Republican state committee gathering in Rutland at which Wing was offered organization support. Austin, of course, did not receive the Supreme Court appointment. There is no evidence that Wing would have either wanted or needed to seek political office as an anti-organization candidate.
35. Gibson 1946 campaign literature, author's possession.
36. Campaign speeches, Gibson MSS, 9-28.
37. Samuel B. Hand and D. Gregory Sanford, "Carrying Water on Both Shoulders: George D. Aiken's 1936 Gubernatorial Campaign in Vermont," Vermont History 43 (1975):292-306.
38. Russell Niquette, July 14, 1980, Archives of Folklore and Oral History, University of Vermont Library, 11.

39. Aiken to Gibson, April 3, 1946, and Gibson to Aiken, April 9 and 18, 1946, Gibson MSS, 3-23. Public health was another issue on which the Aiken staff kept Gibson constantly informed. See, for example, Aiken to Gibson, May 25, 1946, Gibson MSS, 3-24.
40. Sterry R. Waterman, conversations with the author. See also Sterry R. Waterman, July 13, 1981, Archives of Folklore and Oral History, University of Vermont Library.
41. Samuel B. Hand and D. Gregory Sanford, comps., "Index to Significant Aiken Correspondence, 1936-1939," University of Vermont Library.



NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

SAMUEL B. HAND is professor of history at the University of Vermont and a founding member and former director of the Center for Research on Vermont. Currently president of the Vermont Historical Society and the Oral History Association, during 1986 he received the Harvey Kantor Award for outstanding contributions to oral history and shared the Ben Lane Award for the best article of 1985 in Vermont History. Hand specializes in twentieth-century United States and Vermont history and is the author of two books and numerous articles.

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Occasional Paper No. Five, "Social Service in Vermont: The Community and the State," by Marshall True, 27 pp., 1981. Contains two papers: "Insanity, Society, and the State: Some Perspectives on Mental Health in Vermont" examines attitudes and treatment of insanity and mental health problems in Vermont; "From Relief Society to Mental Health Center: The Changing Role of the Howard in Burlington, Vermont" traces the evolution of voluntary neighborhood charities into highly specialized and institutionalized public agencies.

Occasional Paper No. Six, "The French in Vermont: Some Current Views," by Peter Woolfson and Andre J. Senecal, 39 pp., 1983. Contains two papers: Woolfson's "The Franco-Americans of Northern Vermont: Cultural Factors for Consideration by Health and Social Services Providers" discusses some of the general cultural patterns of Franco-Americans and seeks to assist health and social services practitioners, in particular, to better understand clients who share this heritage; Senecal's "Studies on Vermont/Quebec Relations: The State of the Art," a bibliographical essay, surveys a wide range of works treating Vermont/Quebec relations from a number of different perspectives and disciplines.

Occasional Paper No. Seven, "From Ferment to Fatigue? 1870-1900: A New Look at the Neglected Winter of Vermont," by H. Nicholas Muller, III, 24 pp., 1984. Examines Vermont's history in the post-Civil War era and assesses the historiography of the period, finding its emphasis on decline incompatible with recent evidence; concludes by calling upon researchers to develop greater understanding of a neglected period in Vermont's past.

Occasional Paper No. Eight, "Relationships between School Taxes and Town Taxes in Vermont Local Government," by Leonard J. Tashman and Michael J. Munson, 35 pp., 1984. Discusses how voter tax commitments to school and town budgets relate to each other and to a community's size and wealth.

Occasional Paper No. Nine, "The Life and Legacy of the Reverend Phineas Bailey," by Jeffrey D. Marshall, 26 pp., 1985. Gives an account of the life and times of the Reverend Phineas Bailey (1787-1861), minister, craftsman, and inventor, who is perhaps best known for the system of shorthand he developed.

Occasional Paper No. Ten, "Land Gains Taxation: The Vermont Case," by Thomas L. Daniels, 50 pp., 1986. Finds that Vermont's land gains tax, which was passed in 1973 to curb land speculation and parcellation, has failed to adequately control land subdivision activity and has yielded considerably lower revenues than estimated.

CATALOGUES

University of Vermont Bailey/Howe Library Folklore and Oral History Catalogue, 58 pp., 1981. Provides descriptive listings and shelf numbers for five collections housed in the UVM Archives of Folklore and Oral History: College of Medicine, Institutional, Political, Vermont Landscape Artists, and Folklore; includes index to Folklore Collection.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Focus: Vermont 1975, edited by George B. Bryan, 21 pp., 1975. Presents papers delivered at a March 22, 1975 conference sponsored by the Center on such diverse subjects as music in Vermont, Vermont in maps, and the Vermont Data Bank; concludes with a plea to publish so that Vermonters might become more conscious of their heritage. Out of print; photocopies available for a fee.

Data Collection: Individual Rights to Privacy versus Public Program Needs, edited by D. Gregory Sanford, Mary B. Deming, and Frederick E. Schmidt, 55 pp., 1977. Summarizes addresses and remarks delivered at a November 6, 1976 conference sponsored by the Center and funded in part by a grant from the Vermont Council on the Humanities and Public Issues, and the UVM College of Arts and Sciences.

Vermont's Heritage: A Working Conference for Teachers-- Plans, Proposals, and Needs, edited by Marshall True, Mary Woodruff, and Kristin Peterson-Ishaq, 127 pp., 1983, \$5.00. Incorporates scholars' presentations and curricular projects developed by participants at a July 8-10, 1983 conference partially supported by a matching grant from the Vermont Council on the Humanities and Public Issues.

Teaching Vermont's Heritage: Proceedings of the Second Working Conference on Vermont's Heritage for Teachers, edited by Marshall True, Mary Woodruff, and Kristin Peterson-Ishaq, 150 pp., 1984, \$5.00. Contains scholars' presentations and curricular projects developed by participants at a July 9-13, 1984 conference partially supported by a matching grant from the Vermont Council on the Humanities and Public Issues.

SUPPLEMENT

"University of Vermont Graduate College Theses on Vermont Topics in Arts and Sciences," 30 pp., 1982. Supplement to Occasional Paper No. One; provides abstracts of theses on Vermont topics in arts and sciences completed between Spring 1978 and Fall 1982.