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# VERMONT HISTORY



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SAMUEL B. HAND AND STEPHEN C. TERRY

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## Women in Politics

*Times are changing. When I get really excited about this, I feel we are on the cusp of something, that we have passed some kind of a threshold. But we still have a long way to go.*

By MADELEINE MAY KUNIN

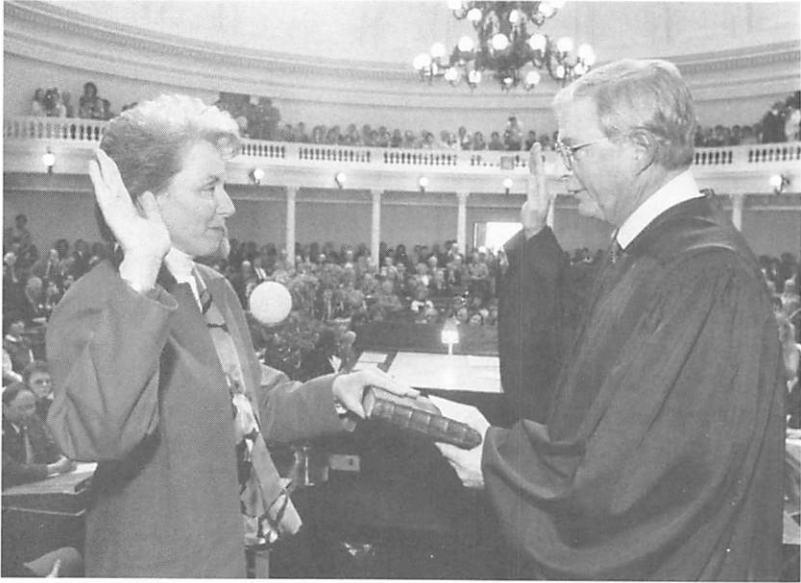
*[EDITOR'S NOTE: On January 24, 2007, the Vermont Historical Society sponsored a program at the Pavilion Building in Montpelier celebrating the life and work of Clarina Howard Nichols (1810–1885). The keynote speaker for the program was Madeleine May Kunin. What follows is adapted from the transcript of Gov. Kunin's remarks.]*

**T**he theme of tonight's program is women in politics. Of course, Clarina Howard Nichols has a big role in that, but having just watched the State of the Union address, I'm going to begin my remarks by talking about Representative and Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi. Wasn't it amazing to see her sitting behind the president on that occasion! Those of us who have watched State of the Union speeches will have noted that the scene at the podium has always been the vice president and the Speaker of the House and the president; and the message that was conveyed by that image was always, "This is a man's world." When we watched Speaker Pelosi, and when the president graciously said "It is my high honor and privilege to be the

.....  
Madeleine May Kunin, the first woman to serve as governor of Vermont, is founder and board president of the Institute for Sustainable Communities, a distinguished visiting professor at the University of Vermont and St. Michael's College, and a former ambassador to Switzerland.

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*Madeleine May Kunin being sworn in for her second term as Governor of Vermont by Frederic Allen, Chief Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court, January 8, 1987. Photo by Sandy Macys.*

first president to call you ‘Madam Speaker,’” something really changed. It was as if a sign that had said “Girls not allowed” had been torn down and a new sign put up that said, “Women are welcome.” And as Speaker Pelosi said, “we are welcoming the president as our guest in this chamber,” it was as if she were welcoming all of us. Women around the United States, regardless of party, and women in many parts of the world felt that they were included; that this is our house, not just their house. That scene tells you about the power of images, the visual power of just being there and of holding the gavel.

Of course, we know Nancy Pelosi would not be there today if it weren’t for all the foremothers who helped pave the way. There is a well-known metaphor that we all stand on each other’s shoulders. I can’t quite do that physically, but it may be equally expressive to say we all hold each other’s hand; we all hand the gavel from one to the other. We are fortunate in Vermont that we have a woman Speaker of the House, Gaye Symington, who also wields the gavel and also is welcoming by her very presence. Person after person, young girls, and young women, who see a woman at the helm, who see a woman at the podium running

the show, have a different view of what it means to be a politician. They have a different view of what it means to be a decision maker.

Gaye Symington is one of four women Speakers in the United States. And here's an interesting fact, which some of you may not know because it hasn't been publicized: the State of Vermont has the highest percentage of women in its legislature of any state in the country. Now that is something to cheer about. I have to add, since I am married to a gentleman from New Hampshire, that New Hampshire is the *second* (a close second to Vermont) in the number of women in the legislature or, to be exact, the percentage of women in its legislature. New Hampshire would win hands down, if it were just a matter of numbers, since the number of people in the legislature is more than 400, but we have to deal in percentages.

Now you know, that didn't just happen. It happened because people like Gaye Symington, people like Deb Markowitz, people like myself, helped recruit women to run; we were role models and encouraged them. The world used to look like this [pointing to a portrait of U.S. Senator Justin Smith Morrill by Thomas Waterman Wood]. These were our leaders and these were our portraits on the wall. And it's only when you see different portraits and different images, whether it's Nancy Pelosi, Gaye Symington, Deb Markowitz, or the women in the legislature, that you begin to think differently about yourself and what you might do with your life.

Times are changing. When I get really excited about this, I feel we are on the cusp of something, that we have passed some kind of a threshold. But we still have a long way to go. You can be either an optimist or a pessimist. The pessimist says, we're not going to be equal—I wouldn't say that's pessimism; I'd say that's justice—we're not going to be equal until 50 percent of all legislative bodies are composed of women (and we're more than 50 percent of the population, so we're really being generous). But things have changed.

As I came in here this evening I met one of the staff members of the Vermont Historical Society who said, "I am glad to meet you. My daughter was in the statehouse when she was nine years old and she looked at all the men, and finally she came to your portrait and she said, 'finally, a woman. It's about time.'" Well, I think that is the attitude today: It's about time.

The political scene today isn't like it was when I first ran for governor, when it was such a phenomenon for a woman to run for high office. When I walked into the executive office and saw all the portraits of ex-governors, I felt the portraits "tilt" as I stepped in and I felt as if they were saying to me, "What are *you* doing here?" But that's no longer the

case. Now we know we belong there. And as we belong there in leadership positions, we represent all women, all young women, all girls, who also belong there.

I was thinking recently about what I would like my granddaughters to know about their future in politics, their future in civic engagement. Well, I'd like them to know a few things.

I'd like them to know about Abigail Adams, who wrote to John Adams when he was in Philadelphia writing the Constitution, "Remember the ladies." She also said something that is less well known. She opined that she would like to have been a rover. She would like to have traveled and seen the world. She couldn't have done that then. We can do that now.

I'd like my granddaughters to know about Clarina Howard Nichols. When I wrote about Clarina in 1970 I was thrilled just to discover her: a Vermonter who was active in the suffrage movement. I found her in a book, *Century of Struggle*,<sup>1</sup> about the women's movement, and she was just a name. I researched her and found her newspaper, the *Windham County Democrat*. She is a person worth knowing and worth reading about because she was one of the first national suffragists. But she got her start in Vermont. One of the stories about her is that she was invited to be the first woman to testify before the Vermont legislature in 1852 about a bill that would have given women the right to vote in school meetings. The women suffragists who promoted this legislation figured that was safe: we don't want too much, we just want a vote because we educate our children. The story goes that she was threatened at that time by the editor of the *Rutland Herald* with being presented with a pair of trousers, because any woman who spoke up about suffrage or any woman who spoke up about women's rights was accused—and it sometimes still happens—of wanting to wear, guess what, the pants. And she retorted: "We will not be after our men's trousers until they give us the right to own our own petticoats." Women then literally did not own the clothing on their own backs; they had no property rights; they had no child custody rights if they got divorced; they were really considered the property of their husbands.

It was also said that Clarina was so nervous speaking to the Vermont legislators that she almost fainted. Now I don't know if that's true, and maybe there was a little editorializing, because she spoke all over the country.

Clarina also spoke at the second women's rights convention in 1851 in Worcester, Massachusetts. There is one phrase in that speech that I find especially beautiful and appropriate. She said, "I commenced life with the most refined notions of women's sphere. My pride of womanhood lay within this nice sphere. I know how it was—perhaps because I

am of mountain growth,—but I could, even then, see over the barriers of that sphere and see that however easy it might be for me to keep within it, as a daughter, a great majority of women were outside its boundaries.”<sup>2</sup> She saw beyond that sphere. She became an agitator, a speaker, a writer, and a newspaper editor.

In the years just before Clarina gave up on Vermont because we were too conservative and went to Kansas to join the fight for abolition, she was the editor of the *Windham County Democrat*, which was published in Brattleboro. She became editor because her husband, who had been the editor and publisher, became sick. She turned the newspaper into a suffragist publication. She wrote a column about “wimmen’s rights,” and that led to her fame.

Clarina raised eyebrows in the town of Brattleboro because she and her daughter walked around in “bloomers”—the prototype of the pants suit. It shocked and amazed the natives that women would walk around in such attire. The suffragists finally gave up wearing bloomers because it detracted so much from what they were trying to say that they decided to go back to long skirts. It was because of women like Clarina Howard Nichols in the nineteenth century that people like Nancy Pelosi and Gaye Symington could wield the gavel in the twenty-first century.

What else would I like my granddaughters to know? I’d like them to know about the women who struggled for the vote. I’d like them to know about the first women’s rights convention, held in 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York, sponsored by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton; and that it took almost a hundred years—they never lived to see it—of lobbying (that would be the contemporary term) for women to get the right to vote. I’d like them to know who Sojourner Truth was, and about her speech at a women’s rights convention that was entitled, “Ain’t I a Woman?” Sojourner Truth was a Black woman who had been a slave; but instead of talking just about slavery she talked about women’s rights.<sup>3</sup>

I’d like my granddaughters to know about Alice Paul, who chained herself to the White House fence, was arrested and force-fed in prison because she and other suffragists protested and tried to get the attention of Woodrow Wilson to pass the Nineteenth Amendment. And I’d like them to know about a nice man in Tennessee, the last state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment. Passage depended on one vote, one man. Just in the nick of time he opened a telegram sent by his mother, and the telegram said, “Be a good boy and vote for suffrage.”

I’d like my granddaughters to know about Margaret Sanger, who fought for birth control, and to make information and the means for birth control legal. I’d like them to know the names of Betty Friedan, and

Bella Abzug, and Shirley Chisholm—the first African American woman elected to Congress and the first African American woman to run for president—and Geraldine Ferraro, and of course, Gloria Steinem. I'd like them to know about the struggle behind the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Rowe v. Wade*; and I'd also like to point out to them that things do turn out differently when women hold the gavel.

Do you remember that when Nancy Pelosi was sworn in, she invited the children and grandchildren of members of Congress to come up to the podium? Had children ever been there before at such an important moment?

I'm not saying that women are perfect. I'd like to think so, but I know better. And we don't all agree: we're Republicans, we're Democrats; we have lots of different views on lots of things. But certain things do connect us, and one of them is our families and children. Women across party lines voted for such issues as civil union in the State of Vermont, voted in greater numbers for child care throughout the country, and voted for health care and environmental issues. It doesn't mean that men don't care about or vote for these issues, but there's a slight margin that women are more willing to extend themselves on these issues. So women can and must make a difference.

Most of all, I'd like my granddaughters—and my grandsons—to know that they not only have an opportunity in this great country of ours to be good citizens, but they have a responsibility to be good citizens. They cannot be bystanders to the events of our time. They cannot be glued to their iPods, the YouTube, or whatever else may come along. They will have to be engaged, involved, and responsible. When young women and men are dying in Iraq, when more are being sent on their way towards uncertain fates, none of us can be bystanders.

Those of us who are here in this room by our very presence have been taught these lessons, knowingly or unknowingly; now we must teach them to our children. What I find in teaching and what I find in speaking to young people is that what they need most is hope; what they need most is optimism; that they need to believe all the best things have not happened in the past; that they are not living in the worst of times; that they can, by their individual energy, passion, anger, and hope, create change. And we must make sure that we encourage them to do that.

I took great pleasure when I was teaching a seminar at the University of Vermont on "Women, Politics, and Leadership," that one of my students ran for the legislature, got elected, and is the youngest member of the legislature.<sup>4</sup> So it can be done. I also took great pleasure in learning that three of my former students worked for Peter Welch in his campaign for Congress and are now on his staff in Washington, D.C.

We've come a long way. In the time of Clarina Howard Nichols, we didn't have rights to property, we couldn't even claim our children after a divorce. We know that things are different today; but we also know that there is much, much more to be done. We still don't have 50 percent of the legislators; we know that we don't have equal power; but we have role models. And in a way, we've catapulted with Nancy Pelosi's election. Women comprise only 16 percent of the Congress, yet a woman was elected to be its leader. We also know that in the year 2007, when a woman announced her candidacy for president, it was front page news and she was automatically the front runner.<sup>5</sup> This has never happened before.

So this is something I would like my granddaughters to know: that the women in the past and the women today have opened the doors for them. There are not the same barriers that were there before. Young women can dream dreams, and it is not only to our sons that we can say, "maybe some day you'll be president"—and fortunately, we still hold the presidency in awe—but it is also to our daughters that we can say, "maybe someday you'll be president." And what's the importance of that? The importance isn't the presidency itself; the importance is the dream; the importance is the imagination; the importance is the vision and the vision of saying to a young person, "you can be whoever you want to be."

There is a history here. There are others who paved the way. Clarina Howard Nichols was one of them; some of the others I've mentioned have been among them; and others I haven't mentioned have been among them: mothers and grandmothers have been role models. The important message is: make an impact; make a difference. Be a whole human being. Do not think of "women's sphere" as they did in the old days. Do you remember the days when we had "help wanted" ads and it was "women wanted" and "men wanted"? We're all wanted today. There is no distinction. Our country needs us and we can respond. And it does make a difference in the world. Women, minorities, and whoever has been left out, are now on the inside.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959).

<sup>2</sup> Clarina Howard Nichols, "The Responsibilities of Woman" (Second National Woman's Rights Convention, Worcester, Massachusetts, 1851). [http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/speeches/nichols\\_responsibilities.html](http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/speeches/nichols_responsibilities.html).

<sup>3</sup> Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?" (Delivered at the Women's Convention, Akron, Ohio, 1851). <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/sojtruth-woman.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Rep. Rachel Weston, D-Chittenden County, District 3-3.

<sup>5</sup> On January 20, 2007, U.S. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-NY, announced that she had formed an exploratory committee to be a candidate for president of the United States.



## “The Paupers’ Removal”: The Politics of Clarina Howard Nichols

*Clarina Howard Nichols . . . was among the few female activists who not only contemplated women’s role in politics in the 1850s but also devised a rationale to justify her entrance into this male sphere.*

By MARILYN S. BLACKWELL

**I**n the mid-nineteenth century, most middle-class white women in America hardly contemplated entering the field of politics. If they held strong opinions about political issues, they were expected to use their influence to shape the votes of husbands, fathers, or sons. In fact, if they considered involvement in politics at all, they quickly concluded that it was not only outside their appropriate sphere of action, but clearly distasteful as well. Politics required an appearance before public audiences, a profession of partisan loyalties, and the possibility of mingling with men at party caucuses, behavior that was inconsistent with nineteenth-century standards of womanly demeanor. Bostonian Mary Livermore, who would become a famous lecturer after the Civil War and campaign for woman suffrage in Vermont, admitted that in the 1850s, “I would have deemed it something terrible, horrible for a woman to come out before the public and talk.”<sup>1</sup> In her diary of 1862, Sarah Morgan of Louisiana wrote extensively about politics but proclaimed, “I abhor politics, and women who meddle with them, above all.”<sup>2</sup>

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*Clarina Howard Nichols  
(mid-1850s). Courtesy of Grace  
Hudson Museum and Sun House,  
Ukiah, California.*

Clarina Howard Nichols (1810–1885), a journalist and reformer living in Brattleboro, Vermont, was among the few female activists who not only contemplated women’s role in politics in the 1850s but also devised a rationale to justify her entrance into this male sphere. She developed her political skills between 1847 and 1853 as she wrote editorials for the *Windham County Democrat* and participated in a series of woman’s rights conventions in the Northeast. Before her involvement she considered politics “degrading” and admitted that “the propriety of woman voting had been . . . a stumbling block; the idea was repelling.”<sup>3</sup> This article reprints one of her columns, outlining how she reconciled politics with her image of womanhood. It also reveals how her conception of women’s role in the polity, coupled with her concerns about injustice to the poor, led to a broader claim for human rights. In “The Paupers’ Removal,” which appeared in the *Democrat* on March 2, 1853, Nichols proposed a state welfare system more than a century before its enactment. The following introduction provides the historical background for the document, and the conclusion explores the basis of her political theory and her benevolence.

#### INTRODUCTION

In the early nineteenth century many middle-class women in the Northeast became involved in civic life through participation in voluntary benevolent associations, stemming at first from their religious affil-

iations. By the 1830s and 1840s, a few women had expanded their activities by supporting reform efforts; they advocated temperance and moral reform, opposed Indian removal, and became active in antislavery societies.<sup>4</sup> Women's involvement in political parties was generally limited to appearances in rallies and parades as standard bearers and symbols of party virtue. A few writers, like Anne Royall of Washington, D.C. and Anna Ella Carroll of Maryland, sometimes labeled "woman politicians," entered the combative field of partisan journalism, unconnected with a community of reformers.<sup>5</sup> Clarina Nichols developed a following as a partisan journalist and also identified closely with the reform movements, particularly temperance and woman's rights.

Known by her readers as the "lady Editress" of Brattleboro and praised as both "sensible and sarcastic," Nichols gained access to political debate through her role as a journalist.<sup>6</sup> Raised with considerable wealth in an ambitious Baptist family in West Townshend, Clarina had received relatively little formal education before she entered a disastrous marriage, which ended in poverty, separation, and divorce. With three children to feed, she returned home, hoping to make a living through her writing. In 1843 she became both editorial assistant and wife to George W. Nichols, publisher and editor of the *Windham County Democrat* since 1836.<sup>7</sup> Writing under her "husband's hat" for the Democratic Party, Nichols campaigned for candidates and participated in partisan debate over the tariff, the national bank, and the Mexican War. Lacing her political commentaries with moral overtones, she expanded readership by employing a polite, genteel style and reprinting sentimental stories, temperance allegories, and homespun advice about family life.<sup>8</sup> On the question of slavery, the Nicholases equivocated at first. Avidly opposed to slavery but tied to the Democratic Party, they eventually broke with the party establishment and joined the free-soil movement, a coalition of former Liberty, Democratic, and Whig men. The shift freed Clarina to inject her moral concerns over the mistreatment of slaves into partisan debate.<sup>9</sup>

By the early 1850s, Nichols was writing under her own name and had become a champion of reform; she advocated temperance, free soil, and especially married women's property rights. Based on her own experience, Nichols recognized the difficulties married women faced when husbands failed to provide support. She argued that mothers, deprived of control over their property and earnings within marriage, needed access to the means to support their children. Partly in response to her columns, Vermont legislators passed a modest reform bill in 1847, which protected wives' inherited property from their husbands' debts and allowed women to make wills.<sup>10</sup> Identifying with other female reformers,

Nichols began attending national woman's rights conventions held in the Northeast, at which they identified issues and developed strategies to improve the status of women. Nichols gave a major address at the second convention in Worcester, Massachusetts, in October 1851, which catapulted her into national recognition.<sup>11</sup>

In her columns for the *Democrat*, Nichols combined her interest in women's issues with a wider reform agenda, including improvements in the poor relief system. During a trip to Pennsylvania in June 1852 to attend another woman's rights convention, she visited the Delaware County Poor House and reported about the efficiency and kindness with which the female administrator supervised ninety inmates. Con-tending that "woman's humane influence" made women far more suited to care for the "afflicted and the suffering" than men, she advocated not only that women needed opportunities for useful work outside the home but also that their participation would benefit society.<sup>12</sup>

To wield political influence in print was one form of doing politics, but Nichols sought more direct participation in the political process. In a departure from her accustomed exercise with her pen—and from women's traditional sphere of influence—in October 1852 she gave a public address to the Vermont Legislature in support of a petition seeking women's right to vote in school meetings.<sup>13</sup> Emboldened by the success of her speech, despite the failure of the petition, Nichols became even more enamored of politics and the potential for women's political action. In the next few months she campaigned diligently both in print and on the lecture circuit in support of a referendum on Vermont's adoption of the Maine Law, which would criminalize the sale and possession of alcohol in the state. Explaining to Susan B. Anthony that all the other editors in the county had "taken to the fence," she insisted that it was "time that women who are the greatest sufferers should be heard to speak of their own sex."<sup>14</sup> Less than a month after passage of this new liquor law, a buoyant Nichols penned an editorial announcing her theory of women's politics and advocating improvements in poor relief.

THE PAUPERS' REMOVAL  
*Windham County Democrat*, MARCH 2, 1853

"It isn't a *woman's* vocation to write politics; her sphere is at home," says one and another, and we always say *amen*. 'Astonished' are you, gentle reader! And did you think that Mrs. Nichols "meddles with politics" because she finds their details congenial with her tastes, or for any reason but that politics *meddle* with the happiness of home and its most sacred relations, with *woman* and all that is dearest to the affections and hopes of a true woman! If you dreamed

that politics have any hold upon our sympathies not strictly belonging to their power over the *homes* of the land for weal or woe—any claim upon our time and efforts not identified with our own home interests, you have done us grievous wrong, dear reader, and we pray you just listen to a brief chapter of state policy which was forced upon our notice, a few days since, and say if women, as the “guardian angels” of the “*sanctity* of home” and the “inviolableness of the home relations,” have not a call to *write* politics, to *talk* politics!

We were waiting, a few days since, at a railroad station in a town some miles north of our home, when the “Overseer of the Poor” arrived, bringing a family consisting of a father, mother and five children. The family had applied to the town for aid, and the town had ordered their removal to another town some sixty or seventy miles distant, as being the legal residence of the father, and, according to the laws of the State, bound to furnish the support. The circumstance of their removal was nothing new or startling; but its very commonness moved our wonder that “men noted for wisdom and virtue” and abundantly familiar with the inhumanities and property waste of such a system, had, year after year, sat in our legislative halls and moved no resolution or order of inquiry after a better way than the present, of removing the sick and infirm and helpless poor from town to town for support. . . . The mother was born and, we were told, had always lived in the town from which they were being sent. She had married a worthless, drinking man, whose capacity for consumption, added to five little hungry mouths, exceeded her ability to provide for, and so she had been obliged to call on the town to assist her in her “*home duties*.” . . . We couldn’t help thinking how, if the authorities who make laws, had secured to her her own earnings, the drunken husband would have been kept sober enough of his time to earn his own rum and food; and she have been saved the necessity of asking, and the town of assisting her in the discharge of the duties of her “*peculiar sphere*.”

But we do not purpose to dwell upon this single and by no means extreme case. We have seen the aged couple, members of a Christian church, warned out of a town where four years residence had won them the esteem of the good; and not because they had applied for aid were they thus rudely warned to return to the town in which they had previously resided, but because it had become morally certain that, “if they didn’t die before” it happened, they *would be unable to support themselves*, and, if not warned out, would gain a residence and become a tax on the town in which they then were. We have seen removals of the sick and helpless from among friends, to the care of strangers, at an expense which would have gone far to make them comfortable where they were, and at the risk of life too. We have seen, year after year, that more money is expended in lawsuits, contesting, or pressing the obligations of particular towns to support paupers, than would suffice to keep said paupers in comfort. And we have wondered at the *impolicy* which continues so heathenish a system—a system which any one of our “wise men” or good would be willing and anxious to have allotted [sic] provisions. There is but a single class in community particularly benefitted by this system, and that

comprises the lawyers, who—Heaven save them—are doomed, poor fellows, to fatten on the leanness and misery of one half of all their clients; and in pauper cases, *all* the subjects of lawsuits.

And now, reader—*voting, lawmaking* reader—in virtue of the fact that a large proportion of the paupers are women and children, those “deities” and “cherubs” which make home the “delightful retreat to which men retire from a troublesome world for rest and soothing”—we ask you to think of our proposition, that instead of *Town* paupers, we have only *State* paupers. . . . An arrangement by which towns should draw monies from the State treasury for the support of the poor, the expense being provided for by a State tax, would dispense with all this removing of paupers, and also with the expensive litigation between towns—of which we have examples yearly in our county courts—as to their legal residence.

Another thing, freemen. As the annual March meeting is close at hand, we put in our annual petition that the poor shall not be *set up at auction!* but have comforts provided for them, as if we, who have every comfort ourselves, were expecting to occupy their berths by-and-by.

### WOMEN IN POLITICS

Throughout her political career, Clarina Howard Nichols sought to uphold her image as a genteel lady, a “true woman” of the nineteenth century, responsible for creating the domestic environment that lawmakers revered. Opening her column with a display of her commitment to the “*sanctity* of home” and woman’s true vocation, she disarmed potential critics, those accustomed to challenging outspoken women. Joseph Barrett of Middlebury, a leading Vermont Whig, had resisted Nichols’s attempt to address the legislature by suggesting she would “make herself ridiculous” and heartily disapproving of her “scramble for the breeches!”<sup>15</sup> To maintain her femininity and simultaneously influence public policy, Nichols linked the “happiness of home” with politics, hoping to show how lawmakers influenced the everyday lives of Vermont women and why they had a right to be heard in political debate.

By exploiting the tenets of the “cult of domesticity”—the ideology dictating a woman’s role in the home—Nichols gained moral authority as a political commentator. In her opening paragraph, she prepared her “gentle” readers to listen to the opinions of a woman of great delicacy and sympathy, who would normally refrain from discussing political issues if it were not for their intrusion into her “home interests.” She hoped not only to convince male readers that she was maintaining gender boundaries but also to educate women, the “guardian angels” of the home, about their connection to politics.

These references to women’s responsibility for domestic happiness reflected the dominant middle-class culture of the mid-nineteenth century,

not the labor many women were performing on farms, in workshops, and in factories. As the development of a commercial and industrial economy separated men's work from the home, a compensating ideal arose for women as mothers and domestic managers. The ideal wife devoted her time to creating a sanctuary of virtue, piety, and affection at home and to educating her children as citizens in the new republic. Nichols's reference to the home as a place of "sacred relations" expressed a conception of marriage and family life elevating the importance of wives and mothers and equating women with home and virtue. Women's isolation from the corruption of business and politics supposedly assured both their superior morality and their social usefulness as moral arbiters of the nation. Despite her distance from the centers of urban life where this ideal emerged, Nichols had lived in New York City and become exposed to this concept of womanhood through her wide reading in evangelical and women's literature. Moreover, by the 1850s, the "canon of domesticity," in a somewhat modified form incorporating the value of women's household work, had thoroughly penetrated the Connecticut River Valley of Vermont.<sup>16</sup> By establishing her feminine credentials, Nichols claimed her position as a woman of integrity and her social leadership as a member of the rising middle class.

Nichols was not alone in her effort to justify her involvement in politics through moral overtones. Since the 1830s female abolitionists had regularly defended their political activities by describing slave mistreatment and their duty as Christians and as true women to defend the downtrodden. Their presence on the lecture podium often stirred controversy from ministers and male journalists who challenged their political opinions by questioning their femininity and their right to speak to mixed audiences. By the 1850s, when abolition had become decidedly more political, causing divisions among northern Democrats and Whigs, a few of these women were seen campaigning for antislavery candidates whom they claimed would purify politics.<sup>17</sup> Reverend Antoinette Brown found politics distasteful, but she resolved to become a "practical politician" by "talking politics . . . both in private and in public." In 1852 she rationalized her promotion of abolitionist Gerrit Smith for Congress in Madison County, New York, by noting that Smith would bring "justice, equity, and righteousness into politics." A year later, Brown found herself excluded from the lecture podium at the World Temperance Convention in New York City because of her sex. Undaunted, she continued to promote the necessity of women's efforts at "purification of the body politic."<sup>18</sup>

As they became involved in partisan debate, women used their reputation for piety and disinterestedness to counter the claim that their

partisanship was corrupting. "*Principle* should be the ground of action," Nichols insisted, "*expediency* should be rebuked and we expect it will be so in the rout of whiggery."<sup>19</sup> Jane Grey Swisshelm, editor of the *Pittsburgh Saturday Visiter* and a supporter of the Free Soil Party, justified her partisan work as a religious calling. "We learned our politics at our mother's knee," she remarked, "with the 23rd Psalm and Shorter Catechism." A staunch Presbyterian, Swisshelm simply noted that the Covenanter Church called "all members to 'meddle' in politics."<sup>20</sup> Like Nichols, Swisshelm had earned a reputation as an accomplished female journalist who maintained her femininity by taking the moral high ground even as she engaged in partisan political debate.

#### WOMEN AND BENEVOLENCE

By addressing the needs of the poor, a problem clearly within woman's sphere, Nichols also reconciled women's roles with their participation in public policy. Charged with upholding the conscience of the nation, women like Nichols were welcomed in benevolent work because of their supposedly innate humane sentiments. Through their charity organizations, urban middle-class women provided asylums, education, and work for orphans and poor women, but they rarely became involved in public policy. Operating outside formal politics and disavowing partisan connections, they used their class position and family networks to lobby and petition for funds for charitable purposes.<sup>21</sup> Women in rural Vermont were less well organized than their urban counterparts, but they also gained a reputation for benevolence through their religious and charitable societies. Brattleboro's Female Friendly Society, organized in 1816, was "marked not only by piety but by a dignity, nobility and courtliness of manner that could not be forgotten," according to one local historian.<sup>22</sup> In conjunction with their missionary work, these elite women supported the local ministry and helped deserving neighbors with food and clothing, which allowed poor families to avoid the stigma of receiving public poor relief. While displaying their social position, benevolent women showed sympathy for their sex, helping to bridge class differences.

When she criticized the overseer of the poor and lawmakers whom she believed had created an unjust system, Nichols crossed an invisible dichotomy in nineteenth-century welfare between this private, largely female-operated system and the public one. Women rarely became involved in public poor relief, a system town fathers operated to serve "paupers," those without family or considered permanently disabled. Vermont towns, which held responsibility for poor relief, relied upon either the selectboard or an overseer of the poor to provide aid or work

for qualifying residents while limiting taxpayer expense. In the 1830s and 1840s, as the poor population grew, many Vermont towns began operating poor farms in an effort to create a more efficient system while relying upon the work ethic, but responsibility for the poor remained at the local level. Vermont legislators also began recognizing the need to improve conditions in prisons and to house specific poor populations, such as the mentally disabled, in new institutions supposedly designed to provide more humane treatment.<sup>23</sup>

A similar impulse drove a broader reform movement to address the condition of the poor and to uncover the causes of increasing levels of poverty prevalent in urban areas in the Northeast. Since the 1820s reformers imbued with a sense of religious duty had sought solutions to the problem of rising unemployment, crime, and public relief. Commercial and industrial development had concentrated workers and immigrants in cities without the social services necessary to support them during economic slowdowns. Most reformers concluded that the poor should be removed from debilitating conditions and rehabilitated through exposure to religion and the work ethic; they advocated the construction of asylums or work houses and discouraged the use of direct relief, which supposedly fostered dependence. In states with large urban populations, such as New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania, county and state governments assumed limited responsibility for the development of asylums and for regulating transients and specific poor populations. Meanwhile the system of local and church-based relief persisted to serve settled paupers with little public support. The operation of asylums, work houses, and larger prisons prompted efforts to separate and educate children, to rehabilitate criminals, and to improve the treatment of the disabled.<sup>24</sup>

Reformer Dorothea Dix of Massachusetts was one of the few women involved in this movement to reform public welfare, which catapulted questions about care of the needy into legislative halls. Dix gained national recognition in the mid-1840s for her critiques of the condition of poorhouses, jails, and asylums for the insane. While she sent memorials to legislators encouraging them to design humane institutions, she also retained her respectability as a woman through her benevolent work. In a similar vein, Nichols alerted her readers to the "injustice and inhumanity" of both the penal and pauper systems after she read a New York report in 1852 about the poor treatment of criminals.<sup>25</sup> Unlike Dix, however, Nichols also championed property and civil rights for women, which threatened to undermine her virtuous image. Dix avoided the kind of criticism heaped upon other female reformers because she not only practiced a form of genteel politics, but also abhorred

partisanship, disdained abolition, and disavowed woman's rights. Nonetheless, by the early 1850s, Dix was deeply involved in politics as she boldly lobbied Congress for public funds to support care of the mentally disabled.<sup>26</sup>

Nichols's reform impulse stemmed as much from her personal experience and family background as from her identification with other female reformers. Raised as an evangelical Baptist, Nichols was thoroughly familiar with Christian teachings about neighborly assistance and the poor relief system as well. She believed that Christians were obligated by God "to have fed the poor and ministered to the needy."<sup>27</sup> Her prominent father, Chapin Howard, had modeled Christian charity as deacon of the Baptist church and selectman in Townshend, where he often supervised poor relief. Nichols remembered seeing "town dignitaries" discussing application of the poor laws and observing her father's frustrations with the law as she sat in a "quiet corner, an indignant and silent listener to revelations from the quivering lips of the poor."<sup>28</sup> For those lacking family support, the town could provide shelter, food, medicine, and especially work for needy residents if able-bodied. In practice, this often meant that officials "hired out" or auctioned the cost of support to the lowest bidder, who would provide poor men and women with board in return for work. Orphans or children lacking parental support were usually indentured to local families, girls until eighteen and boys until twenty-one.<sup>29</sup> In 1794 the town of Townshend had followed this practice when voters "set up Deborah Howe to be bid off . . . to the person that will support her for the lowest sum."<sup>30</sup> Young Clarina observed her "father's moistened eye and heard his regretful replies to the oft-recurring tales of sorrow" while he lamented that the law and town finances limited his ability to provide direct assistance.<sup>31</sup> Having gained a sense of *noblesse oblige* and seen the agony of poor relief administration from her father, Nichols was in a position to express both her empathy for the poor and her desire to reform the system to her readers.

Nichols's complaint "that the poor shall not be *set up at auction!*" reflected sentiments about the inhumanity of this practice at a time when bidding out the poor was still legal but less common. It is unlikely that town officials in Brattleboro actually "auctioned" the poor in the 1850s as Nichols implies, and it is unclear whether she submitted annual petitions to protest the practice. During the first three decades of the century, Brattleboro's overseer of the poor had regularly negotiated annual contracts for boarding the poor with town residents for as low as ten and as high as thirty-four dollars, plus medicine and clothing. Common among wealthier towns, this practice supplanted public auctioning

at town meeting. After the town purchased a poor farm in 1837, where poor residents were housed—supposedly more efficiently—even these contracts were rare.<sup>32</sup> In 1850 the Brattleboro farm housed twenty-four “paupers,” eleven men, eight women, and five children. In addition, the overseer occasionally supplied fuel, rent, medicine, or supplies to poor residents as needed.<sup>33</sup> Despite these changes in the system, Nichols regularly used the image of auctioning the poor as a rhetorical device in her speeches and writings to remind her northern readers about the practice at a time when they were particularly attuned to the inhumanity of slave auctions—especially after passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. In this way, she exploited the sentiments of her middle-class readers, whose sympathy for victims of injustice had been heightened by abolitionist rhetoric.<sup>34</sup>

Nichols identified with these poor, helpless people because of her own experience of poverty, which sparked her interest in the way the poor relief system affected women and children. When her first husband failed to support her, Nichols had tried to earn money to feed her children and maintain her middle-class status by teaching, writing, sewing hats, and even housing boarders. She learned that it was not only difficult for women to earn enough but also that her husband had the right to spend both her inheritance and her wages for his own use.<sup>35</sup> Recognizing wives' economic dependence within marriage and that poverty affected women differently from men, she examined the poor laws with an eye for gender differences to alert voters and lawmakers to hidden inequalities in the law.

Little had changed in the structure of Vermont's poor relief system since 1817, when lawmakers clarified the eligibility rules regarding public welfare. Settlement law, which defined residents' rights to community support, provided towns with the means to disqualify and remove dependents seeking aid to their former place of settlement. As most towns sought to relieve taxpayers of the expense of supporting the poor, selectmen routinely warned newcomers out of town to preempt the possibility of providing them with relief and sought to recover their expenses from towns where paupers retained a settlement. Justices of the peace were empowered to remove anyone without a settlement to their former residence if they sought aid. The law of 1817 instituted new penalties for improper removals, which helped limit the practice, but it also instituted new, long-term residency requirements—either five years (with \$60 or more of assets) or seven years of living independently in a town. The change extended the time when newcomers remained unsettled, and towns continued to remove as many poor people as possible or instigated legal proceedings to recover poor expenses

from other towns.<sup>36</sup> To remove an “aged couple, members of a Christian church” or “the sick and helpless from among friends, to the care of strangers,” Nichols complained, was to defy the obligations of Christian charity and to disregard the traditional practice of neighborly assistance. Appealing to taxpayers’ desire for efficiency, she noted that the expenses of removal largely enriched the legal profession and could easily cover the cost of care. Nichols was particularly biased against lawyers, not only because her abusive first husband became a lawyer and used the law to control her property, but also because she had learned about the fees lawyers extracted from married women seeking a divorce or custody of their children.<sup>37</sup>

Of greater concern to Nichols, however, was the way settlement laws treated married women. Under the rules of coverture, which suspended a woman’s legal existence during marriage, a man was responsible for his family’s support. When he failed to provide, wives and children could become the responsibility of the town where he maintained a settlement.<sup>38</sup> In “The Paupers’ Removal,” Nichols revealed the problem by recounting one of her typical railroad stories, through which she often apprised her readers about victims of injustice. In this case, she recounted the sad tale of a poor woman and her children, tied by marriage and settlement, according to Nichols, to “a worthless, drinking man, whose capacity for consumption, added to five little hungry mouths, exceeded her ability to provide.” Using the power of settlement law, which stipulated that a married woman “shall always have the settlement of her husband” (unless he lacked a settlement in the state), the overseer was planning to ship the family by rail to the delinquent father’s former residence.<sup>39</sup> He had no settlement in the town where the family lived, rendering the mother without a settlement as well, even though she had been born in the town and presumably retained local relatives and friends. Blaming this situation on alcoholism, an argument gleaned from her temperance work, Nichols pressed her point further by explaining that this wage-earning mother could have kept her family out of poverty and saved taxpayer expense, if she had retained control over her own earnings. In this way, Nichols challenged the principle of family unity, which drove poor relief policy, and traditional notions of family support as well. Noting that this mother, not the father, was trying to support her children, she insisted that married women should be treated as individuals under the law.<sup>40</sup> Not only did Nichols alert voters to the inhumanity of a system that could remove a native-born woman from her home, but she also showed the evils of intemperance and suggested a practical solution.

The problem of poor women, children, and the settlement law con-

founded lawmakers and occasionally led town fathers to manipulate the system to their own advantage. In addition to the status of married women, the law of 1817 stipulated that legitimate children gained the settlement of their parents, i.e. the father. If a couple lacked a legal settlement, the town was not obligated to support their children, even if they were born in the town. Illegitimate children, by contrast, held the settlement of the mother. Instituted to resolve conflicts between towns over support for poor women and children, these rules helped regulate poor families in an era of rapid mobility and mounting concern about transients. Cases of separation, remarriage, and out-of-state residents, however, produced unusual circumstances and opportunities for town officials to interpret the law to their own advantage.<sup>41</sup>

Nichols had learned about these problems from observing her father's administration. In 1821 the Howards had received a visit from "a fat, dust-begrimed, sun-burned woman" with an infant in tow, who claimed that Chapin "would take care of me and my baby." A New York resident, she had married the child's father, a mentally disabled Vermont man, at the urging of local authorities, who subsequently removed her to his former residence. Officials in Townshend transported her back to her husband, but as Nichols later explained, this was a fateful mistake; seven years later the couple was returned with four more children.<sup>42</sup> In the interests of family unity and reduction in poor expense, officials often ignored the hardships and restrictions the policy imposed on poor women and the mentally disabled. Pregnant women without husbands presented officials with the specter of a double burden, and could prompt efforts at removal or a hasty wedding. In one case, officials in Moretown found a husband in Middlesex for a poor, old, disabled woman, hoping to relieve Moretown taxpayers of the burden of her support; the supreme court eventually annulled the marriage.<sup>43</sup>

While exposing the problems of the poor relief system, Nichols outlined her theory of social provision. She believed that the majority of the poor were laborers who resorted to seeking relief because of "misfortune, casualties, bereavements, or the infirmities of age." She insisted that the state owed support to these "producers of wealth" because taxes on their labor and commerce had contributed to the public treasury, to "our institutions of government, of education, of religion," and to the "fortunes of the wealthy and influential." Far from radical, Nichols's analysis of political economy stemmed from her exposure to antebellum reform literature and to the rhetoric of the Democratic Party, which championed the working population over aristocratic monopolists, bankers, and lawyers. At the same time, her plea for change was grounded in Christian benevolence and sympathy for those in need.

She criticized policymakers, who would starve the “honest and industrious” but unfortunate pauper by providing only “*revolting and scanty provisions*” as a means to limit relief. “Instead of acting upon estimates of *how little* will keep soul and body together,” she insisted, “it should be the privilege, as it is the *duty* of our freemen to provide . . . [s]uitable employment for the hands that can labor, and abundant occupation and food for the mind, as well as wholesome food and a comfortable home for the body.” Largely ignoring the problem of dependence and erosion of individual responsibility that lawmakers and even many other reformers feared, Nichols sought the comforts of a middle-class existence for the poor. The law should mirror “popular sentiment,” she averred, which is “ever truth-ward, justice-ward.”<sup>44</sup> Once again, Nichols appealed to her readers’ feelings over their reason, partaking in the culture of sympathy and sentimentality prevalent in antebellum New England.<sup>45</sup>

Nichols’s sensitivity to the way the law treated women led her to develop a progressive notion of social provision. She noted that “a large proportion of the paupers are women and children,” not idle laborers, and characterized them as “those ‘deities’ and ‘cherubs’ which make home the ‘delightful retreat to which men retire from a troublesome world for rest and soothing.’” Hoping this concept of home life would resonate with lawmakers, she reminded them that just as they protected their own wives and children, so too they should support poor women and children. Her recommendation that “*State* paupers” replace “*Town* paupers” was based on her complaint that the town-based system created undue hardships for poor people, especially women and children. Economically and legally dependent upon their husbands for support, wives were rarely responsible for their own poverty, she insisted, but victims of an unjust system. If they gained access to their own property and earnings as well as state support when in need, women would be free of dependence on husbands who failed to provide. Moreover, her proposal would improve the efficiency of the welfare system by eliminating conflict among towns and wasteful legal expense.

Nichols’s desire to centralize poor relief appeared at a time when there was considerable frustration among reformers and lawmakers with recent efforts at reshaping public welfare. In Vermont, officials in larger towns that had established poor farms struggled to reduce costs and to manage these institutions while facing an influx of transients and heightened expenses during economic downturns.<sup>46</sup> In more populated states, worker mobility and foreign immigration had thoroughly undermined the concept of local poor relief, overwhelmed the capacity of towns to provide aid, and largely resulted in institutional care in workhouses.

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Sending a poor woman and her children to a poor farm or work house was not the kind of direct state relief Nichols envisioned. Reformers deplored the conditions, harsh regulations, and corruption at local and county asylums while the problem of determining settlement and lawsuits among towns to avoid relief payments persisted.<sup>47</sup> Some states had instituted a form of state aid to ease the local burden of poor immigrants but not state residents. In New York, a state board regulated ships' captains who imported workers and redistributed funds raised from a head tax, but the state fund proved inadequate to satisfy local needs. In both Massachusetts and Rhode Island, a colonial tradition of limited support for transients and immigrants eroded in the first half of the nineteenth century. Lawmakers in Massachusetts redefined eligibility and decreased payment rates, and in Rhode Island they eliminated state aid and instituted regulation of importers and punitive measures to bolster the local system, including fines for illegal transport into the state. Local overseers were empowered to indenture anyone who "lived idly," and after 1851, to confiscate the wages of anyone who "wasted their earnings" and to redistribute them to their families.<sup>48</sup> In an era when local solutions prevailed, state aid was diminishing and inadequate, and experiments in centralized institutional care had failed to improve the system, Nichols's proposal to shift responsibility from towns to the state and to institute a state tax appeared out-of-step with public welfare reform.<sup>49</sup>

To some extent, Nichols's solution to the problems poor women faced was inconsistent with the predominant ideology of the antebellum woman's rights movement as well. Many of her American colleagues, who typically highlighted women's natural rights to citizenship as individuals, focused on expanding women's civic and economic opportunity. While Nichols also promoted women's right to vote and to work, she believed they derived both their rights and their purer moral sentiments from their God-given reproductive function. Women's work of raising children, Nichols affirmed, was as important as men's work to amass property.<sup>50</sup> Her analysis stemmed from her Christian beliefs and the concept of Republican motherhood, a form of citizenship American theorists had developed for the new nation. Based on gender differences grounded in women's roles within the family, the concept elevated the importance of mothers by obligating them to raise and educate citizens in the new republic. Nichols extended the theory by insisting that mothers needed access to the economic and educational opportunities necessary to fulfill these obligations.<sup>51</sup> Jeanne Deroin, a contemporary of Nichols, feminist Socialist, and leader in the French woman's rights movement, employed a similar rationale; she argued for civil

rights based on women's role as the mothers of humanity. Both activists found the basis of women's citizenship in their reproductive obligations to the state; it was not because they were equal, but because they were different from men and had been deprived of the means to raise and train children that women needed access to economic and political opportunities. Derooin believed the state must support all mothers so they could be free of economic dependency on men. Despite their parallel claims, Derooin derived her critique from workers' radical challenge to capitalist economy, whereas Nichols sought to adjust capitalism to the needs of women.<sup>52</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, many American female reformers had adopted a similar maternalist perspective. The vision of a compassionate state protecting women and children from male abuses drove the leadership of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the largest female voluntary association in America in the 1880s and 1890s. In the Progressive era, female reformers participated in the development of the welfare state by promoting programs and aid for women and children as a means to counter the inequities of industrial capitalism. Leaders in the settlement house movement, Jane Addams, Florence Kelly, Julia Lathrop, and Lillian Wald, helped foster Mother's Aid programs at the state level, spearheaded the U.S. Children's Bureau, and inspired their successors to help formulate Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). This federal program succeeding Mothers's Aid in 1935 provided the kind of support Nichols had envisioned. Flowing from the practice of charity organizations, the program of social protection arose from recognition of women's dependence within marriage and their disadvantages in the wage-labor system.<sup>53</sup> Vermont lawmakers instituted minimal state support for widowed mothers in 1917, when they created a state Board of Charities and Probation. Vermont's Mothers' Aid law provided matching state and local funds for worthy widows or deserted mothers with children.<sup>54</sup> With gradual increases in state and federal aid, poor relief improved but remained the responsibility of local officials until 1967, when the state assumed full administration of public assistance.

For Nichols, this was the ultimate goal of the woman's rights movement—to bring women's perspective and their moral sensibilities to benefit public policy. With access to politics and economic opportunity, she believed women could fulfill their "God-ordained responsibilities." In her view, the movement would eventually "emancipate and elevate the race, by opening to it the mother-fountains of humanity."<sup>55</sup> When she began to promote suffrage for women, Nichols argued that, "I want to have this power, because, in not having it, I am deprived of

the power of protecting myself and my children, because I do not possess the power which ought to belong to me as a mother."<sup>56</sup> With equal civil rights, Nichols believed, women would use their superior morality to protect themselves, to purify politics, and to improve the nation. Ultimately, she looked forward to a government in which women and men enacted "Christ's teachings of love and duty as practical rules." Finding hope in the power of individuals and their right to self-government, she referred to "the soul of a Garrison, or the heart of a loving woman" as the fountainhead of moral force to direct public policy.<sup>57</sup>

In 1854, Nichols took her family, her political skills, and her commitment to a better world to Kansas Territory, where she hoped to promote women's rights and ensure freedom for African Americans as settlers battled over slavery. She left "conservative old Vermont" because, she explained later, "it was a thousand times more difficult to procure the repeal of unjust laws in an old State, than the adoption of just laws in the organization of a new State."<sup>58</sup> Putting her Vermont experience to good use, she participated in the Wyandotte Constitutional Convention in 1859. While helping to ensure that married women's property and custody rights were included in the new constitution, she wrote a provision providing women's equality in school affairs. As a result, women in Kansas were some of the first to vote in school elections.

Throughout her career as a public woman, Nichols relished involvement in political debate and the development of strategies that would promote her goals. When political controversy and defeat shattered the hopes of many of her colleagues, she remained optimistic about the prospect for and benefits of women's enfranchisement. In that regard, she remained in the vanguard of political women. In 1886, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joselyn Gage, editors of the *History of Woman Suffrage*, honored Nichols with a bitter commentary: "To Clarina Howard Nichols the women of Kansas are indebted for many civil rights they have as yet been too apathetic to exercise." Despite Nichols's efforts to domesticate politics, many women still abhorred "politics, and women who meddle with them."<sup>59</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Wendy Hamand Venet, *A Strong-Minded Woman: The Life of Mary A. Livermore* (Amherst and London: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 61.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Morgan Dawson, *A Confederate Girl's Diary* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 94.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joselyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage* (Rochester, N.Y., 1881; 2nd ed., 1887), 1: 355.

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Lori D. Ginzberg,

*Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 2–79; Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822–1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, eds., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994); Beth A. Salerno, *Sister Societies: Women's Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005); Alisse Portnoy, *Their Right to Speak: Women's Activism in the Indian and Slave Debates* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 43–86, 193–202. For women's voluntary societies in Vermont, see Marilyn S. Blackwell, "Surrogate Ministers: Women, Revivalism, and Maternal Associations in Vermont," *Vermont History* 69 (Winter 2001): 67–71.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth R. Vron, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 71–102; Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 13–18; Robert J. Dinkins, *Before Equal Suffrage: Women in Partisan Politics from Colonial Times to 1920* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood, 1995), 30–50; Christopher J. Olsen, "Respecting 'The Wise Allotment of Our Sphere': White Women and Politics in Mississippi, 1840–1860," *Journal of Women's History* 11 (Autumn 1999): 104–125; Melanie S. Gustafson, *Women and the Republican Party, 1854–1924* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 10–13. For partisan journalists, see Janet L. Coryell, "Superseding Gender: The Role of the Woman Politico in Antebellum Partisan Politics," in *Women and the Unstable State in Nineteenth-Century America*, eds. Alison M. Parker and Stephanie Cole (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 84–112; Sylvia D. Hoffert, *Jane Grey Swisshelm: An Unconventional Life, 1815–1884* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 104–111.

<sup>6</sup> *Windham County Democrat*, 28 September 1853 (hereafter WCD).

<sup>7</sup> For Nichols's biography, see T. D. S. Bassett, "Nichols, Clarina Irene Howard," *Notable American Women, 1607–1950: A Biographical Dictionary*, eds. Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 2:625–627; Joseph G. Gambone, ed. "The Forgotten Feminist of Kansas: The Papers of Clarina I. H. Nichols, 1854–1885," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 39 (Spring 1973): 12–25 (hereafter KHQ); Diane Eickhoff, *Revolutionary Heart: The Life of Clarina Nichols and the Pioneering Crusade for Women's Rights* (Kansas City: Quindaro Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> C. I. H. Nichols to Susan B. Anthony, 24 March 1852, Clarina Irene (Howard) Nichols Papers, M133, Women's Studies Manuscript Collections, Series 1, Woman's Suffrage, Part E, Reel E35, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. (hereafter Nichols Papers). For development of Nichols's political journalism, see Marilyn S. Blackwell, "Meddling in Politics: Clarina Howard Nichols and Antebellum Political Culture," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24 (Spring 2004): 27–41.

<sup>9</sup> See *Vermont Phoenix*, 23 September, 5 October, 5 November 1847; CIHN to Susan B. Anthony, 30 October 1880, printed in Gambone, ed., "Forgotten Feminist," KHQ 40:448; George W. Nichols to Charles G. Eastman, 3 July 1848, Eastman Papers, Vermont Historical Society, Barre; Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 57–61.

<sup>10</sup> Vermont, *Acts and Resolves Passed By the Legislature of the State of Vermont at their October Session 1847* (Burlington, 1847), 26; *Journal of the Senate of the State of Vermont. October Session, 1847* (Montpelier, 1848), 16, 37, 48, 51, 62, 67; *Journal of the House of the State of Vermont. October Session, 1847* (Montpelier, 1848), 203, 206–207. Clarina I. Howard Nichols, "Reminiscences," in *History of Woman Suffrage*, eds. Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, 172.

<sup>11</sup> C. I. H. Nichols, *The Responsibilities of Woman. A Speech by Mrs. C.I.H. Nichols, at the Woman's Rights Convention, Worcester, October 15, 1851* (Rochester, 1854).

<sup>12</sup> WCD, 7 July 1852.

<sup>13</sup> For Nichols's school suffrage campaign, see Marilyn S. Blackwell, "The Politics of Motherhood: Clarina Howard Nichols and School Suffrage," *New England Quarterly* 78 (Dec. 2005): 570–598.

<sup>14</sup> CIHN to Susan B. Anthony, 16 January 1853, Nichols Papers. See also, WCD, 26 January 1853; [CIHN], "The Next Step for the Freemen of the County," WCD, 23 February 1853.

<sup>15</sup> Nichols, "Reminiscences," 173.

<sup>16</sup> For the ideology of the "true woman" see Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151–175; Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 63–100. For women and virtue, see Ruth H. Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs* 13 (Autumn 1988): 37–58. For the variation of this ideal in Vermont, see Catherine E. Kelly, *In the New England Fashion: Reshaping Women's Lives in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 19–63.

<sup>17</sup> Susan Zaeski, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 42–68, 83–125; Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 80–95; Alice Taylor, "From Petitions to Partyism: Antislavery and the Domestication of Maine Politics in the 1840s and 1850s," *New England Quarterly* 77 (March 2004): 70–88.

<sup>18</sup> Antoinette L. Brown, "A Woman Politician," *The Lily* 4 (December 1852): 100; Elizabeth Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell: A Biography* (Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist Press, 1983), 68, 81.

<sup>19</sup> WCD, 27 August 1851. For Nichols's use of moral arguments as a Free Soil advocate, see Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes*, 60–61.

<sup>20</sup> "Women in Politics," *Pittsburgh Saturday Visiter*, 22 October 1853, 53, quoted in Hoffert, *Jane Grey Swisshelm*, 104.

<sup>21</sup> Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 36–66; Boylan, *Origins of Women's Activism*, 136–169; Conrad E. Wright, *The Transformation of Charity in Postrevolutionary New England* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), 155–157.

<sup>22</sup> [Charles Orrin Day], "The Old Church on the Common: An Address Delivered by Rev. C.O. Day on Sunday Evening, Sept. 2," Miscellaneous clipping, n.d., Vermont Historical Society, Barre. See also Mary R. Cabot, *Annals of Brattleboro, 1681–1895*, vol. 1 (Brattleboro, Vt.: E.L. Hildreth, 1921), 352, 467; Blackwell, "Surrogate Ministers," 71; Randolph A. Roth, *The Democratic Dilemma: Religion, Reform, and the Social Order in the Connecticut River Valley of Vermont, 1791–1850* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 114. For a list of women's charitable organizations in Vermont, see Wright, *Transformation of Charity*, 266–269.

<sup>23</sup> Lorenzo D'Agostino, *The History of Public Welfare in Vermont* (Winooski Park, Vt.: St. Michael's College Press, 1948), 67–92, 201–207. See also Steven R. Hoffbeck, "'Remember the Poor' (*Galatians* 2:10): Poor Farms in Vermont," *Vermont History* 57 (Fall 1989): 226–228; Mary L. Eysenbach, "Caring for the Poor: Thetford and the Baker Family, 1792–1817," *Vermont History* 72 (Winter/Spring 2004): 55–56.

<sup>24</sup> Seth Rockman, *Welfare Reform in the Early Republic: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 12–24; David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 165–189; David M. Schneider, *The History of Public Welfare in New York State, 1609–1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), 235–252.

<sup>25</sup> WCD, 18 February 1852.

<sup>26</sup> David L. Lightner, *Asylum, Prison, and Poorhouse: The Writings and Reform Work of Dorothea Dix in Illinois* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 2–11, 67–68; Thomas Brown, *Dorothea Dix: New England Reformer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 101–122, 138–175.

<sup>27</sup> WCD, 18 February 1852.

<sup>28</sup> C. I. H. Nichols, "To the Editor," *Herald of Freedom*, 17 May 1856, printed in Gambone, ed., "Forgotten Feminist," *KHQ* 39: 249.

<sup>29</sup> D'Agostino, *History of Public Welfare*, 43–44; William Slade, Jr., comp., *The Laws of Vermont, of a Publick and Permanent Nature: Coming Down To, and Including, the Year 1824* (Windsor: Simeon Ide for the State of Vermont, 1825), 370; Hoffbeck, "'Remember the Poor,'" 227; on children, see Eysenbach, "Caring for the Poor," 57–61.

<sup>30</sup> James H. Phelps, *Collections Relating to the History and Inhabitants of the Town of Townshend, Vermont*, Part II (Brattleboro, Vt., 1877), 107.

<sup>31</sup> Nichols, "To the Editor," *Herald of Freedom*, 17 May 1856, printed in Gambone, ed., "Forgotten Feminist," 249. See also WCD, 18 February 1852.

<sup>32</sup> Brattleboro Overseer of the Poor, Record Book, 1807–1844, Town Clerk's Office, Brattleboro, Vt. Other than appointment of an overseer and approval of the town budget, between 1844 and 1853, voters took only one vote in 1852 relating to poor relief: to pay the overseer \$50 for a child he "has taken from the town farm" and adopted. See Brattleboro Town Meeting Records, Book 3, 184, Town Clerk's Office, Brattleboro, Vt. Pauper auctions were illegal in Maine after 1847 and in New York after 1848. See Benjamin J. Klebaner, "Pauper Auctions: The 'New England Method' of Public Poor Relief," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 91 (July 1955): 203–204. For the auction system in Vermont, see Randolph A. Roth, "The Other Masonic Outrage: The Death and Transfiguration of Joseph Burnham," *Journal of the Early Republic* 14 (Spring 1994): 42–43.

<sup>33</sup> Federal Manuscript Census, 1850, Population, Windham County, Vermont, 272–273. For the practice of outside relief, see *Eleventh Annual Report of the Financial Condition of Brattleboro, February 1, 1867* (Brattleboro: D.B. Stedman, 1867), 5–6.

<sup>34</sup> For the culture of sympathy, see Elizabeth B. Clark, "'The Sacred Rights of the Weak': Pains, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America," *Journal of American History* 82 (Sept. 1995): 475–487. For "sentimentalism" in Vermont, see Roth, *Democratic Dilemma*,

284–290. For another example of Nichols's use of the auction image, see Nichols, *Responsibilities of Woman*, 7.

<sup>35</sup> For Nichols's anonymous account of her own poverty, see Annie, "'The Union' and Mrs. Nichols in a New Dress," *Freedom's Champion*, 25 February 1860.

<sup>36</sup> D'Agostino, *History of Public Welfare*, 70–87.

<sup>37</sup> For her comments regarding lawyers, see Nichols, "Reminiscences," 192–194. She procured a divorce from her first husband in 1843 after having failed the prior year.

<sup>38</sup> For poor women and settlement, see Hendrik Hartog, *Man and Wife in America: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 128–130; Mary Beth Stevens, *Stray Wives: Marital Conflict in Early National New England* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), 92–93; Ruth Wallis Herndon, *Unwelcome Americans: Living on the Margins in Early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 16–17, 28–47.

<sup>39</sup> D'Agostino, *History of Public Welfare*, 77–82; quotation on 77.

<sup>40</sup> After 1839, a wife whose husband lacked a settlement in the state could retain her settlement before marriage. The Vermont Supreme Court affirmed the principle of family unity in 1843 when it denied the appeal of a town seeking to remove a wife to her former residence, effectively separating her from her husband who lacked a settlement in the state. See D'Agostino, *History of Welfare*, 82–83.

<sup>41</sup> For examples, see Stevens, *Stray Wives*, 79–82, 92–93.

<sup>42</sup> Clarina I. Howard Nichols, "Editors Journal," *The Woman's Journal*, 5 July 1879, printed in Gambone, ed., "Forgotten Feminist," *KHQ* 40: 435–436.

<sup>43</sup> D'Agostino, *History of Public Welfare*, 83. For other examples from Rhode Island, see Herndon, *Unwelcome Americans*, 28–36.

<sup>44</sup> *WCD*, 18 February 1852.

<sup>45</sup> See Clark, "'The Sacred Rights of the Weak,'" 475–487; Roth, *Democratic Dilemma*, 284–290.

<sup>46</sup> Hoffbeck, "'Remember the Poor,'" 228–233.

<sup>47</sup> Schneider, *History of Public Welfare in New York*, 245–252.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 296–312; Louis J. Piccarello, "Social Structure and Public Welfare Policy in Danvers, Massachusetts, 1750–1850," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 118 (October 1982): 252–259; Robert W. Kelso, *The History of Public Poor Relief in Massachusetts, 1620–1920* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), 59–60, 124, 277; Margaret Creech, *Three Centuries of Poor Law Administration: A Study of Legislation in Rhode Island* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 114–125; quotation on 120.

<sup>49</sup> Six Vermont representatives did recognize Nichols as a benevolent reformer by voting to appoint her director of the state prison after her appearance in the House of Representatives. See *The Lily* 4 (December 1852): 102.

<sup>50</sup> See especially, Nichols, *Responsibilities of Woman*; "Speech," *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention held at the Broadway Tabernacle in the City of New York, on Tuesday and Wednesday, Sept. 6th and 7th, 1853* (New York, 1853), 57.

<sup>51</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 283–288; "A Constitutional Right to Be Treated Like American Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship," in *U.S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays*, eds. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris and Kathryn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 20–27. For women's economic claims, see Reva Siegel, "Home as Work: The First Woman's Rights Claims Concerning Wives' Household Labor, 1850–1880," *Yale Law Journal* 103 (March 1994): 1117–1118. See also, Blackwell, "Meddling in Politics," 43–45.

<sup>52</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 70–74. Nichols would not have supported Deroin's radical critique of capitalism or of marriage, but she may have been aware of Deroin's influence from a letter of support circulated at the Worcester Convention of 1851, when Nichols spoke. See Bonnie S. Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement, 1830–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 160–162.

<sup>53</sup> See for example, Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873–1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 57–116; Kathryn Kish Sklar, "The Historical Foundations of Women's Power in the Creation of the American Welfare State, 1830–1930," in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, eds. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York: Routledge, 1993), 43–93; Barbara J. Nelson, "The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State: Workmen's Compensation and Mothers' Aid," in *Women, the State, and Welfare*, ed. Linda Gordon (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 101–113; Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890–1935* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

<sup>54</sup> D'Agostino, *History of Public Welfare*, 141–145.

<sup>55</sup> *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention Held at Akron, Ohio, May 28 and 29, 1851* (Cincinnati: B. Franklin Book and Job Office, n.d.), 42. See also, Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes*, 92-95.

<sup>56</sup> Nichols, "Speech," *Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention, New York, 1853*, 57.

<sup>57</sup> C. I. H. Nichols, "Christian Civil Government," *Woman's Herald of Industry* 1 (September and November 1881), printed in Gambone, ed., "Forgotten Feminist," *KHQ* 40: 519-520.

<sup>58</sup> Nichols, "Reminiscences," 193.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 171; Dawson, *Confederate Girl's Diary*, 94.

# IN THEIR WORDS

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## “I dont get fair play here”: A Black Vermonter Writes Home

*Edited by* JANE WILLIAMSON

**T**he following letter is one of thousands in the Robinson family correspondence collection at Rokeby Museum. The Rokeby collection is known primarily for antebellum era letters to abolitionists Rowland Thomas and Rachel Gilpin Robinson that document fugitive slaves sheltered by the family. But this letter is of possibly greater interest because it was written *by* a black Vermonter, not about him. It provides the rare opportunity—especially so in Vermont—to hear an African American voice unmediated by white interpreters.

Born in Charlotte, Vermont, in 1828 or 1829,<sup>1</sup> Aaron N. Freeman enlisted in the 54th Massachusetts Regiment in 1864. He was one of several black Vermonters who helped to refill the ranks of the 54th after the losses incurred at Battery Wagner in 1863.<sup>2</sup> The letter was addressed to George G. Robinson, son of the abolitionists, whom Freeman had known since his late teens when they worked together on the Robinson's Ferrisburgh farm.<sup>3</sup>

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April

JacksonVill Florida the 5 1864

Mr. George Robinson i thaught that i wood infarm you how we are treated here i hav work all night and then had to drill all day they make them that have got on [no?] boots go out in thair bair feet in the thistl and drill then they set on thair horses and laf at us that ant right i hant had but one shirt for more then a month when i git my shirt wash i hafto tak it of and let it ~~dr~~ dry then put it on a gain sum times i hafto catch lise sum times they are as thick as the hair on a dog and flease with them to boot cant get eny thing that is fit to eat here then i have had a cold evry sens

[Page 2]

i have ben here i think that we shant get eny money from the government they say that they ant pay but 7 dolars a month that what the Cournal said to they paid to colard troops and he said that we had beter right home and see about it he said that he could not do eny thing a boutit ~~then~~ then i thaught i had beter right home and see what could be done a boutit i dont wanto stay down here and git knathing for it and be killd or git my limes brake then git nothing to help my self with then com on the town i dont want any such i want to hav my pay or get home i dont wan to i dont want wark far nothing

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i want to get home as soon as i can for i dont get fair play here they dont treat this rigment as they do the others rigment they are the poores off far things they dont pay them eny thing they dont want to pay them eny thing i cant stand that i want my pay and i know i shant get it they say it is a fraid under a falce patence that they have got us down here i think ~~if~~ that they cant hold us thair can they i want sum one to find out whather they can or not and get us a way or get our pay i can ~~get~~ sum things then that will make me beter off if i should be sick i should hafter suffer i hafter sufer a nuf know i hant had eny thing fit to eat sense i come down here yours truly Aaron Fr

[Page 4]

please excuse this scribling it is a hard place to right

Aaron N Freeman<sup>4</sup>

Freeman was irate, and for good reason: Living conditions were terrible, the white officers used their authority to ridicule and humiliate the black soldiers, and, to top it all off, they were not receiving their pay. This seemed to gall him above all; one expects to endure harsh conditions as a soldier in wartime, but not to be paid—or to be paid less than others—was not part of the bargain he had made. Freeman was particularly alarmed at the prospect of being injured, rendered unable to work, and having to “com on the town.”

Of course, Aaron Freeman was not the only African American soldier to write a letter of complaint, nor for that matter, the only black Vermonter.<sup>5</sup> Loudon S. Langley, a fellow member of the 54th Massachusetts, also registered his dissatisfaction, but he did so publicly by writing to both *The Weekly Anglo-African* (New York) and *The Burlington Free Press*.<sup>6</sup> The letters make an interesting contrast: Freeman was lodging a personal complaint, and Langley was taking a position. Freeman's letter shows the rudimentary mastery of English that was probably typical of a Vermont district school education, and Langley was eloquent. Freeman also seemed to be following the colonel's suggestion that the men write home to "see what could be done" about their pay and may have written to George Robinson in his capacity as Ferrisburgh town clerk. No record of Robinson's response or other action remains in the Museum collection.

George and Aaron had known each other for nearly twenty years when this letter was written, and this was not the first time they had corresponded. George included a message for Aaron in an 1847 letter to his brother Thomas. George was in Savannah, Georgia, and asked Thomas to "Tell Aaron I could get him a very nice wife, either a little black, a good deal black, or as black as tar, as we have all varieties."<sup>7</sup> This passage suggests that these young men—all in their late teens and early twenties at the time—talked of women, courting, sex, and marriage. George, who did not share his parents' radical views, frequently displayed openly racist attitudes in his letters. (The next sentence in this one describes a "nigger" George found particularly offensive.) George's attitudes notwithstanding, it seems clear that Aaron's poor marriage prospects—given the tiny African American population in Vermont—had been a topic of conversation among them.

Aaron did find a wife. He married Rachel Williams in the Charlotte Congregational Church in August 1857.<sup>8</sup> At 28, he was older than the usual groom, and at 17, she was younger than most brides. They had a son, who died in infancy, and a daughter, and Aaron returned to them when he was discharged in 1865. They lived for a time with her father, Edwin Williams, on his farm, first in Hinesburg and then on land Williams purchased in South Burlington. But Aaron Freeman apparently had ambitions beyond Vermont farm life. He was in New York City looking for work when he died suddenly and unexpectedly of an aortic aneurysm in September 1869.<sup>9</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I have found no record of Aaron Freeman's birth; this is based on the 1850 Census, which listed him as 22 years old, and a marriage record, which gave his age as 28 in 1857.

<sup>2</sup> See the brief history of Vermonters in the 54th in James Fuller, *Men of Color, To Arms!* (Lincoln: University Press, 2001), 120–123.

<sup>3</sup> Transactions with Aaron were recorded in account books from 1847 to 1849, when he worked as a farm hand, and again in 1858. Robinson Family Papers, Farm and Household Accounts, Volume 5, 1833–1892.

<sup>4</sup> Aaron N. Freeman to George G. Robinson, April 5, 1864.

<sup>5</sup> *The Black Military Experience*, edited by Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, series 2 of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1876* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) presents several hundred letters written by soldiers and their families, officers, and eyewitnesses.

<sup>6</sup> Fuller, *Men of Color*, 169–173; James Fuller, “The Letters of Loudon S. Langley,” *Vermont History* 67 (Fall 1999): 85–91. Although the two men shared a rural Vermont background and probably knew each other (Freeman’s wife Rachel and Langley lived near each other), their letters show a marked contrast in worldview and command of English.

<sup>7</sup> George G. Robinson to Thomas Robinson, March 7, 1847.

<sup>8</sup> Their marriage is recorded in the Charlotte Congregational Church Records, Volume 3, begun May 22, 1834, page 228.

<sup>9</sup> Fuller, *Men of Color*, 134.



# The Democrat Who Took Vermont: Victory Messages to Philip Hoff, 1962–1964

*It was the impact that Hoff's 1962 election had upon individuals not commonly tuned into Vermont politics that was most fascinating. A Connecticut resident sent Hoff "congratulations on the most dramatic political victory of the 20th century," and the Vermont election was a front page story in a Seattle newspaper. The Turner Falls, Massachusetts, high school from which Hoff had graduated gave students a period off to celebrate.*

By SAMUEL B. HAND AND STEPHEN C. TERRY

**O**n November 6, 1962, Philip Henderson Hoff was elected governor of Vermont. The election results attracted extraordinary political attention that also elicited emotional responses. It was the first time since the birth of the modern Democratic Party (130 years) that a popular majority of Vermonters voted for that party's candidate for governor, and the first time since 1853 that a Democrat would preside over the state.

.....

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*Governor Philip H. Hoff at the annual meeting of the Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier, 1965.*

Hoff garnered 3,839 fewer votes as a Democrat than his opponent, incumbent F. Ray Keyser Jr., received as a Republican. However, two splinter parties, the Vermont Independent Party (VIP) consisting largely of dissident Republicans, and the Independent Democrats, added over 5,000 votes to Hoff's total.

Hoff's victory came as a surprise to most political pundits; the *Rutland Herald* was caught without any file photographs of the new governor. The owner of WCAX-TV, Stuart T. "Red" Martin, a lifelong Republican and ardent Hoff opponent, was said to have been so surprised and angered by the election results that through clenched teeth he bit off half of the ever-present cigar in his mouth.

But Hoff's victory was seen as possible by knowledgeable Vermont political junkies. Political insiders, including Governor Keyser himself, correctly predicted that if the total vote fell below 125,000, the Democrats could win. Democratic strategists also thought this possible and capitalized on the long-term trend of Republicans voting in far larger numbers in presidential election years than in off-years, while Democratic turnout remained relatively consistent. To further depress any probability of a large Republican turnout, the Democrats mounted their first primary contest for the U.S. Senate. The 1962 primary eliminated former one-term Democratic Congressman William Meyer of West Rupert, a spirited campaigner who hoped to oppose the immensely popular George D. Aiken. Aiken, whose popularity among Democrats and independents assured his reelection, was wont to pursue low key campaign efforts. Although Meyer was no threat to Aiken's reelection, he could possibly arouse the "sleeping giant" into motivating a larger core of his substantial Republican following to participate in the general election and thus increase Republican totals. With Meyer eliminated from the race after his primary defeat, Democrats implemented their "off year" strategy.

Even some Vermonters who anticipated a possible Hoff victory were ecstatic over the outcome. Rutland stalwart Dan Healy had been "working 44 years for the Democratic Party to see a Democrat elected governor of the state. The day is now." W. Robert Johnson of Brattleboro, who had defeated former Congressman William Meyer in the Democratic primary for the United States Senate, "was proud to have had a part in [Hoff's] success," but it is not clear if he fully understood what that part was. His only disappointment was the "brush off I was getting throughout and particularly the absence of any help from the State Committee" in his campaign against Aiken.

Middlebury's Peter J. Hincks, another longtime party stalwart who had run for state treasurer on the 1962 ticket with Hoff and had suffered six state-wide defeats before then, struck a common chord. After offering congratulations on "your wonderful victory," he exhorted the party not to let down. "We will have to keep our organization live and going for the next big battle. You must go back for another term, then to Congress." Hincks seems to have shared with the national press an acute awareness that the Democrats remained a minority party, and some correspondents, appalled that Hoff's election was labeled a Democratic victory, insisted it was a "Victory for Independents. Not a true Democratic victory."

Republicans, except for some Hoff had singled out for criticism during the campaign, wrote in good spirits. The most effusive message was

from former Governor and United States District Court Judge Ernest W. Gibson Jr., who thought “your election is a good thing for Vermont, and I think a breath of fresh air into the musty tombs of our state administration will re-invigorate and put life into our state—perhaps I should say cause a reincarnation.” As suggested, those whom Hoff singled out for criticism were less welcoming. J. Warren McClure, publisher of the *Burlington Free Press*, thanked Hoff “for calling me at 2:10 AM this morning to tell me of your election as governor. . . . Your statement that ‘I won’t take orders from you like Ray Keyser did’ reminded me that ‘flattery will get you everywhere.’” McClure also took the opportunity to pass on some unsolicited advice. He recalled “The Vermont story of the tourist who went into the country store and said ‘I want to order a dozen eggs.’ The Vermonter didn’t say anything. ‘Aren’t you going to give them to me’ the tourist asked. ‘Nope [replied the store owner,] because I ain’t takin’ orders from nobody!’”

John D. Carbine, a Rutland attorney and the state’s most prominent lobbyist, wrote to congratulate Hoff and to ask “what are you and [Fred] Fayette and [Robert] Larrow going to do now that you can no longer refer to me as Governor Carbine?” By 1966 Hoff would learn that Carbine could have his way even against the opposition of the governor, most notably the rejection of a state plan to purchase Canadian hydropower.

Most Republicans were genuinely accepting of the new governor. Fred Smith, another prominent Vermont attorney and president of the Burlington Savings Bank, had apparently voted for Keyser. Although he professed to have roots in the Republican Party “too deep even when individual performances are disappointing,” he was “frankly pleased that you are the Democrat who has the first opportunity to show what he can do for Vermont.” Judge Gibson had offered help if requested and Richard Snelling, at that time a prominent Shelburne legislator, offered to help “unofficially.”

It was the impact that the election had upon individuals not commonly tuned into Vermont politics that was most fascinating. A Connecticut resident sent Hoff “congratulations on the most dramatic political victory of the 20th century,” and the Vermont election was a front-page story in a Seattle newspaper. The Turner Falls, Massachusetts, high school from which Hoff had graduated gave students a period off to celebrate. Former high school teammates and classmates sent their personal congratulations.

Hoff’s huge network of Williams College and Cornell University Law School associates also reconnected. One Cornell graduate wanted to know if his former classmate Philip Hoff was the same Philip Hoff elected governor of Vermont. After writing letters of inquiry to other

former classmates, he saw Hoff's picture in the newspaper. Hoff even received a congratulatory note from Pakistan.

The Protestant Hoff's nomination as the Democratic candidate for governor deviated from a party tradition of nominating only Catholics for that post. Whatever the strategic basis for not nominating a Catholic, it was facilitated by having a Catholic, John F. Kennedy, as president to reassure Catholics that they were not being excluded from party politics. This deviation from tradition was noted more by local than regional or national observers. A Catholic couple wrote that they had no ill feelings against Republicans, "however, felt that we should have a Democratic Governor [and] the Mrs. said many a Rosary for your success throughout your campaign. . . . [O]ne of my best friends is an Episcopalian and she was pleased."

The consensus was that the "remarkable victory" would not have been possible without Hoff's hard work. He was touted by *Life Magazine* as "the Democrat who took Vermont." Keyser had contributed to his own vulnerability by creating pockets of discontent among Republican leaders such as T. Garry Buckley of Bennington and W. Arthur Simpson, of Lyndon Center, and Democrats were able to capitalize on the fact that the incumbent was widely regarded as "a poor specimen for a governor." Nonetheless, it was hard work by Hoff that produced the ultimate victory. The executive director of the Vermont Republican state committee, Carroll Adams, confided to the governor-elect that he "shall never cease to marvel at the vigor and sincerity with which you campaigned. Unfortunately your effort paid off." The narrow victory converted campaign workers who had worked with the candidate on the campaign trail into believers that it was their participation that made the difference and they wrote to share that belief with him. Their exuberance was contagious. Elmer E. Cornwell, Jr., a former Hoff Williams College classmate and then chairman of the Department of Political Science at Brown University, wasn't sure Hoff would remember him very clearly from their days at Williams College, but was sure "you are hearing from a whole host of 'close friends' these days that you did not know existed."

Hoff received ceremonial congratulations from the White House: "Your victory was very welcome news for all of us here today," signed by Larry O'Brien, Special Assistant to the President. The more fulsome and certainly most partisan messages came from those who worked closest with Hoff. Two days after receiving the election results Ben Collins was "still floating 10 miles high. . . . Your success already has cheered thousands of persons in a way that will long serve the state's future. It has given Republicans as well as Democrats a new sense of independence from the inhibiting traditions of the past."

Not all correspondents offering advice did so directly. Robert Aiken, Vermont's Commissioner of Health, devoted his entire letter to the story of a bishop who visited a priest on a very busy day. Late in the afternoon they decided to go into the chapel and pray. As they were kneeling before the altar, the bishop saw the Lord before the altar. Figuring he was having an hallucination he nudged the priest and whispered, "do you see anything in front of the altar? The priest said "yes, the Lord is in front of the altar." The bishop asked "what do you think we should do?" And the priest replied "Look busy."

Hoff sought election to a second two-year term in 1964. Unlike past instances when state and presidential elections coincided, 1964 did not provide Republicans an advantage. The party was badly divided by the presidential nomination of Barry Goldwater and from the campaign's outset it seemed apparent that Lyndon Johnson would be the first Democratic presidential candidate ever to carry the state. Since Hoff would run without splinter party support, political observers outside the state still did not assume that his reelection was a certainty, as under normal circumstances a traditionally overwhelming Republican turnout would assure a Democratic defeat in a presidential election year. Nineteen sixty-four, however, presented new elements. These included a popular Democratic governor with all the advantages of incumbency and a fragmented Republican Party, split over its presidential nominee, that led experienced prominent party members, such as former House Speaker Franklin Billings, to defect to Hoff's cause.

The results were beyond the most buoyant Democratic expectations. The Lyndon Johnson-Hubert Humphrey ticket won in Vermont by over 53,000 votes, and Hoff won by 50,000 over his opponent, sweeping the entire Democratic state ticket into office.

Hoff's political stature had risen during his first two years as governor; but he was propelled into the ranks of national political celebrities by the 1964 election results. The latter best accounts for the dissimilarities in the 1962 and 1964 congratulatory messages. In light of the presidential results a preponderance of communication was from out of state. Furthermore, rather than a perfunctory letter from a presidential aide, in 1964 Hoff received telegrams from both the president and vice president. Lyndon Johnson thought it "an important night for America and the free world. Your election victory is a source of great comfort to me." Hubert Humphrey "rejoiced" in Hoff's victory, adding that, "Vermont has helped inspire the nation." Hoff's mail now included recognition from cabinet secretaries and other administration officials as well as governors and senators from other states.

An almost universal theme in these communications was the sugges-

tion that Hoff was bound for higher political office, presumably the U.S. Senate. To an extent their character can be attributed to the widely held belief that by voting against Goldwater Vermont had helped continue Lyndon Johnson in office and saved the world from a candidate likely to involve the United States in military conflict. Hoff was credited with transforming Vermont from a nineteenth-century political backwater to a state attuned to contemporary political realities.

In contrast with this heightened national image was the relative lack of spontaneity or reference to a personal association with the candidate after the 1964 election as compared with responses to his victory in 1962. This is apparent in the lack of undated handwritten notes obviously written in the euphoria of victory. An exception is a letter from a Granville couple "very glad to be among many who can say we voted for Hoff," who thought the governor "would be interested to know that a Democrat has never been considered a candidate in Granville. On Tuesday we had 89 voters, 40 for Mr. Foote and 47 for you. Until the past two years most of the people here didn't know there was a Democratic Party."

The months following the November 1964 election were in some respects the high point in Hoff's career. He would gain reelection to a third term in 1966 and figure prominently in national party councils, but his impatience with the slow pace of government and his passion for civil rights led him to take initiatives such as the Vermont-New York project that moved him beyond limits acceptable to much of his Vermont constituency, while his opposition to the Vietnam War led to a split with Lyndon Johnson and the further decline in party support. (Hoff later labeled his decision in 1968 to endorse the presidential candidacy of Robert Kennedy and oppose the renomination of Lyndon Johnson as the worst political decision of his career.) In 1969 he left the governor's office to return to private practice, and the following year campaigned for a seat in the U.S. Senate. He was soundly thrashed by Republican incumbent Winston Prouty and returned to his Burlington law practice. He subsequently served as state chairman of the Democratic Party. In 1976 he served for a short time as manager of North Carolina's Terry Sanford's abortive presidential nomination campaign. In 1982 he was elected to the Vermont Senate, where he served three terms as a resourceful and effective member. June 22, 1988, reports in the *Burlington Free Press* and *Rutland Herald* that Hoff would not seek reelection described him as having emerged as "a leading defender of human-services initiatives and . . . a forceful proponent of property tax reform" who had become "his party's spiritual leader in the Senate." He may be gone from the political scene, the *Newport Daily Express* editorialized, but "we expect he will not soon be forgotten."

## SOURCES

The letters and telegrams cited are from the Hoff memorabilia collection preserved by Mrs. Joan Hoff. They are to be deposited along with the other Hoff papers at the University of Vermont archives. The correspondents are identified although their signatures are occasionally undecipherable and their correspondence often undated but obviously within a week after the elections. The dates of newspaper references, almost invariably from either the *Rutland Herald* or the *Burlington Free Press*, are included within the text. The "Phil Hoff will be missed, but not forgotten" quote is from a June 23 *Newport Daily Express* editorial. "The Democrat who took Vermont" is the title of an article by Raul Tunley in *Life Magazine*, November 23, 1963.

# BOOK REVIEWS

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## *The St. Johnsbury Athenaeum Handbook of the Collection*

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By Mark D. Mitchell (St. Johnsbury, Vt.: Trustees of the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum, 2005, pp. 152, paper \$14.95).

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**T**he St. Johnsbury Athenaeum is a national treasure and this new guide to the collection is a welcome and long overdue publication. Printed in full color with 176 illustrations, it is both handsome and concise.

Like any good handbook this is a volume you will want to peruse during a visit to see the collection, and it does not disappoint. It is like a well-ordered meal—substantial but not too heavy. To this reader the most useful sections are a brief overview of the founding of the Athenaeum (“The Lens of History: An Art Collection for St. Johnsbury,” pp. 13–29) and the Catalogue of the Collection (pp. 34–117). There are also short sections devoted to “A Visitor’s Guide to Looking at Art,” “Self-guided Tours,” and “Resources for Teachers.” Additionally, there are suggestions for further reading and a useful index.

The introductory essay is brief but illuminating, and while it may not add significantly to what we know about the Athenaeum or Horace Fairbanks (1820–1888), its founder, it does give a good sense of the importance of his extraordinary gift to the community.

Of course, the most remarkable thing about the Athenaeum collection is that it survives virtually intact. And although almost half of the works of art were gifts of Theodora Willard Best, Fairbanks’s granddaughter, shortly after the turn of the century, all of these pictures are thought to have been collected by Fairbanks himself. A handful of works, including four Works Progress Administration-era murals, came later in

the twentieth century, but for practical purposes the collection is a coherent time capsule of American artistic taste from the 1870s. Somewhat surprisingly, no pictures appear to have been removed over time. Few other institutions can make that claim. And perhaps most important, the collection is still installed largely in the manner of the gallery when it opened in 1873.

Scholars will be disappointed to learn that little information survives on how and from whom Fairbanks acquired his collection. The author argues that Fairbanks accomplished it virtually on his own, by visiting the annual exhibits of the National Academy of Design (New York), through social connections developed by his membership in the Century Club, and when he “regularly visited the artists’ studios, where he purchased significant works even before they were displayed publicly” (p. 26; such as that of John George Brown, p. 53). This is quite an achievement, as one might have expected Fairbanks to utilize the advice and expertise of art dealers or agents.

The collection of 128 paintings, sculptures, and prints consists of American landscapes and genre pictures of the 1860s and 1870s (45), contemporary European paintings (28), copies of Old Master paintings (16), American and European sculpture (15), portraits (6), and a miscellaneous group (18) in other media (murals, prints, and a mosaic). Each of these works is illustrated here with a small color picture and accompanied by a short but informative descriptive text, although indication whether a work is signed, dated, or otherwise inscribed is omitted.

The centerpiece of the collection, both literally and figuratively, is Albert Bierstadt’s enormous (116 × 180 inches) 1867 painting, *The Domes of Yosemite*. The Connecticut financier Legrand Lockwood commissioned it for \$25,000, the most an American painter to that date had received for a single painting. Six years later Fairbanks purchased the picture when Lockwood declared personal bankruptcy. It alone has always been worth a trip to Athenaeum, and one only wishes the author had incorporated a few more tidbits of information about the circumstances of its acquisition. For example, at least one other author has stated that the Athenaeum’s architect, John Davis Hatch, was instrumental in the picture’s purchase by Fairbanks and that after it arrived in St. Johnsbury, Bierstadt visited almost every year to see it (Claire Dunne Johnson, *St. Johnsbury* [1966], p. 25). One can’t help wondering if space could not have been found to include similar relevant facts about some of the other paintings, as well.

But these are minor quibbles. One can imagine Horace Fairbanks leafing through this handbook and concluding that the Athenaeum’s art collection is in good hands today and admired much as he hoped it would

be over 130 years ago. And for those who can't make the trip to St. Johnsbury, this book is a worthy substitute.

RICHARD H. SAUNDERS

*Richard H. Saunders is director of the Middlebury College Museum of Art and Walter Cerf Distinguished College Professor.*

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## *Revolutionary Heart: The Life of Clarina Nichols and the Pioneering Crusade for Women's Rights*

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By Diane Eickhoff (Kansas City, Quindaro Press, 2006, pp. 277, paper, \$14.95)

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Here, at last, is a book-length biography of a figure who can rightly be called Vermont's most notable nineteenth-century champion of women's rights. For readers who are familiar with Nichols's work as a newspaper editor and reformer here in the Green Mountain State, this book provides a full account of her life after she left Vermont in the late eighteen-fifties for the newly settled Territory of Kansas. For those who have never heard of Nichols, Eickhoff has produced a highly readable and sympathetic portrait of this intelligent and caring crusader who put her considerable talents as a lecturer, journalist, and activist to the service of such causes as antislavery, temperance, and the drive to give women economic and political rights.

One of Eickhoff's accomplishments in this book is to show how Nichols was drawn gradually into the world of reform. As a child in the 1820s she overheard her father, then serving as Townshend's Overseer of the Poor, regretfully denying aid to the destitute women who came to him for town support.

Clarina's own disastrous first marriage in 1830 to a feckless and abusive husband only deepened this awareness of women's economic powerlessness. After obtaining a divorce from the Vermont legislature, Clarina continued to ponder the wrongs suffered by women and came to realize that they would never gain real security for themselves and their children unless they obtained economic rights, including property rights.

Beginning in the 1840s, after her marriage to George Nichols, the editor of the *Windham County Democrat*, Clarina used the columns of that paper to air her concerns and recommendations on such questions. While her writings were successful in getting the Vermont Legislature to pass a limited property rights bill in 1847, the measure left unaddressed the

issue of giving wives control of both their earnings and their personal property.

Gradually, Clarina Nichols came to understand that the only way to obtain true economic justice for women was to extend to them the political rights needed to translate such justice into law. Thus, in 1851, she joined the woman's rights movement, making her successful debut as a public speaker at a convention held that year in Worcester, Massachusetts. Nichols's ability to reach her listeners through stories, especially heart-breaking stories about women who had been treated unjustly by the law, was the bench mark of all her speechmaking, and the key to her success. The Worcester speech was published as a tract and widely distributed.

A year later, in 1852, Nichols became the first woman to address the Vermont Legislature, calling on the lawmakers to give women the right to vote in school meetings. While the speech itself delighted the lawmakers, they were not yet ready for such radical reform and voted down the partial suffrage measure.

In 1853 George and Clarina decided to sell the *Democrat* and move to the Territory of Kansas. When asked why she wished to bury herself on the prairie when she'd only just launched her woman's rights campaign in Vermont, Nichols replied that it was far easier to adopt good laws in the organization of new states than to repeal unjust statutes in established ones like Vermont. In 1859 she did play a small but significant role in getting a limited school suffrage measure included in the new Kansas state constitution.

While Eickhoff successfully captures the womanly and generous aspects of Clarina's character, Nichols is more complex than the individual portrayed here. The passionate reformer and lively political debater, for example, are only hinted at in these pages. Eickhoff also underplays the considerable enmity Nichols faced here in Vermont, both as a divorced woman and as a reformer. Lyn Blackwell, in her writings on Nichols, has pointed to her lifelong sensitivity concerning her reputation as a virtuous woman. This surely influenced Nichols's desire to be seen as 'womanly' as much or more than Eickhoff's contention that a womanly approach was more publicly appealing.

In later life Clarina Nichols wrote Abby Hemenway that she would like to be remembered in Vermont "as someone who labored *first and alone* against the reproaches, ridicule and the vile prejudices of many dear to me" (quoted in Joseph G. Gambone, ed., "The Forgotten Feminist of Kansas: The Papers of Clarina I. H. Nichols, 1854-1885," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 40:4 [Winter, 1974], p. 434). Eickhoff does not give this lonely stand for a righteous cause the attention it deserves, especially in the chapters covering Clarina's years in Vermont.

These reservations aside, this book can be recommended as a lively and readable introduction to a remarkable Vermont woman and the age in which she lived.

DEBORAH P. CLIFFORD

*Deborah P. Clifford is the author of several articles and books on nineteenth-century American women, including The Passion of Abby Hemenway: Memory, Spirit, and the Making of History (Vermont Historical Society, 2001).*

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## *Two Vermonts: Geography and Identity, 1865–1910*

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By Paul M. Searls (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2006, pp. 256, \$65.00; paper, \$26.00).

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*Two Vermonts* is a thoughtful, thought-provoking book. According to its author, Paul Searls, Vermonters have not been as united or as secure in their common identity as they might think, because they have long been at odds “over the social and economic consequences of industrial capitalism” (p. 5). The industrial revolution changed Vermont in the late nineteenth century. The state became less pastoral as factories, quarries, and pulp mills dotted its landscape; its population became less homogeneous as workers arrived from Quebec, Ireland, Sweden, and Italy; and its local institutions became less robust as schools consolidated and the state government grew more powerful. The changes did not go far enough to suit the tastes of “downhill” people, who felt that Vermont was “not keeping pace” with the rest of the world in its economic and cultural development (p. 5). The movers and shakers in Burlington, Rutland, and the state’s other principal towns were frustrated: Vermont was the poorest state in New England, the least supportive of higher education, the least able to attract immigrants, and the least willing to commit public funds to spur economic development. But the changes caused by industrial revolution had already gone too far to suit “uphill” people, who lived in Vermont’s hill towns and rural neighborhoods. They felt that the state was going in the wrong direction. Town rule and the state’s democratic traditions were in jeopardy as capitalists and state officials consolidated their power and monopolized resources. “True Vermonters,” who embraced Vermont’s bedrock values—family, faith, community, frugality, and hard work—were an endangered species, overwhelmed by the influx of outsiders and alien ideas.

The disappointment of “uphill” and “downhill” Vermonters was only

partially meliorated by their pride in the state's natural beauty, its "unspoiled" scenery, and its quaint towns; and the differences between uphill and downhill Vermont were becoming all the more clear. In downhill Vermont, "as in the rest of the industrializing nation, localism gradually gave way to centralization, and personal relationships to contractual ones. As the countryside converted to dairying and grew old, meanwhile, uphill Vermont moved in the opposite direction: its communities were increasingly homogeneous, their decisions increasingly driven by consensus, their society increasingly stable." By the late nineteenth century, Vermonters followed "two distinct patterns of life" and struggled against each other for "control of institutions" and "collective memory"—that is, the state's identity (p. 18). The difference corresponded "roughly" to the difference between "village" and "country," but the distinction "was fundamentally about ideology and temperament" (p. 11).

Some political leaders, like Justin Morrill, tried to reconcile "uphill" and "downhill" Vermont. Morrill, as the son of a rural blacksmith who became a successful merchant and national politician, lived in both worlds, and he championed causes that he believed would serve both. Land grant colleges would help small farmers and modernize agriculture; tariffs would help wool farmers and manufacturers; and breaking the slave power would further urban and industrial growth while preserving opportunities for small farmers and shopkeepers in the "free soil" West.

But as the century progressed, Vermont's political leaders found it harder and harder to find common ground between "uphill" and "downhill" Vermonters. When state leaders folded the new agricultural college into the University of Vermont, "uphill" Vermonters cried foul and demanded an independent college that would serve farmers exclusively. In 1892, when the legislature folded local school districts into consolidated town districts, "uphill" voters rebelled and branded the new law "the Vicious Act" (p. 89). When the Vermont Fish and Game League, a lobbying group for the state's tourist hoteliers and wealthy sportsmen, hired a Boston detective in 1898 to help state wardens enforce Vermont's game laws, resistance in the countryside was fierce. One angry deer hunter told a warden that "the Fish and Game League could go to hell" (pp. 92–93). "Downhill" Vermonters, for their part, were upset because "uphill" Vermonters supported prohibition and railroad regulation and opposed women's suffrage, positions that struck "downhill" Vermonters as backward-looking. By World War I, the views of "uphill" and "downhill" Vermonters had "diverged to the point of mutual incomprehension" (p. 49). They had no common identity or purpose. "'Vermont' existed only in the dialogue between competing definitions of it" (p. 81).

*Two Vermonts* is an outstanding book, a timely look at a debate that persists among Vermonters to this day. It would have been nice to hear more from “uphill” Vermonters in their own words, given the number of letters and diaries that have survived from hill towns and remote rural neighborhoods. “Downhill” Vermonters are more fully realized characters in *Two Vermonts* than “uphill” Vermonters. The prohibition controversy of the late nineteenth century could also bear further study. Prohibition was a decidedly “downhill” movement in the 1830s and 1840s. How did it become “uphill”? And finally, why were Vermonters less deeply divided in the late nineteenth century than other Americans, and why do they remain less divided on most public issues than other Americans today? The struggle between “uphill” and “downhill”—or more broadly, “provincial” and “cosmopolitan”—has been far more bitter and politically enervating in Ohio, Kansas, South Carolina, and elsewhere than in Vermont. Relations between “uphill” and “downhill” Vermonters are sometimes tense, but they are civil, and civic leaders of every political stripe are still trying to forge an identity for Vermont that encompasses all citizens, not just a favored few. The majority of Vermont’s leaders stand in the tradition of Justin Morrill. Searls’ study focuses too narrowly on Vermont to explain why. But *Two Vermonts* is an exemplary book, which takes us far toward an answer.

RANDOLPH ROTH

*Randolph Roth is a member of the Department of History at Ohio State University. He is completing a history of American homicide, an interregional study that tries to explain, among other things, why northern New Englanders have been less homicidal than other Americans.*

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### *Jay Cooke's Gamble: The Northern Pacific Railroad, the Sioux, and the Panic of 1873*

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By M. John Lubetkin (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006, pp. xviii, 380, \$29.95).

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This book’s title suggests that it is about Jay Cooke, America’s most respected banker following the Civil War, and his efforts, and ultimate failure, to successfully finance the construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad (NP). It does discuss this subject, but that is just an artistic artifice. The book’s *raison d’être* is the story of the exploration and survey of eastern Minnesota, the Dakota badlands, and the Yellowstone

River Valley, a region that lay astride the railroad's proposed route from the western end of Lake Superior to the Washington/Oregon coast.

Once across the Missouri River into what is now North Dakota, the railroad's route entered unmapped territory. And part of it was through the last remaining significant hunting grounds of the combative Sioux. Chief Sitting Bull was determined to defend these lands from exploitation by the railroad. So, to protect the railroad's survey crews from attack, the U.S. Army provided substantial armed escorts.

As Lubetkin forthrightly tells us in the book's preface, this is the real substance of his story. He is sharing the adventures of survey chief Thomas Rosser, his several survey parties, and their army escorts as they made their way across the Dakota badlands, and into the Yellowstone River Valley in the face of Sioux resistance. It is a rousing tale told with both wit and vigor. The story is supported with an abundance of firsthand diary entries, letters, and other primary sources. Unfortunately, this part of the story, like the rest of the book, is not always clearly articulated.

In many cases reference to the author's sources is necessary to understand the importance and significance of the events he describes. Also, the transitions between paragraphs and between topics are poor. One of the most egregious examples of this problem concerns Col. David S. Stanley's temperance attack on his cavalry's whiskey (p. 194). With no previous indication that alcohol was an issue on the 1873 survey expedition, we abruptly learn that Stanley—himself perhaps the expedition's worst alcohol abuser—ordered the destruction of his cavalry officer's surreptitious whiskey cache. The effect this action had on the expedition, except to increase the already existing tension between Stanley and his cavalry commander, Col. George A. Custer, is not discussed. Also, to add to our confusion, the same paragraph says that Custer hated whiskey and tried to prohibit its availability when campaigning. If that was the case, why did he permit his officers to have a secret supply in the first place?

The availability and placement of maps is another problem. Missing is a map showing the Northern Pacific's entire route from Lake Superior to the West Coast. Readers unfamiliar with the region would find this very useful. Those maps that are included in the book are very informative, but their placement, deep within a chapter, makes them hard to find. Also, the map illustrating the events described on pages 131–147 is located back on page 90.

Closer to home, Lubetkin is harshly critical of the Northern Pacific's early Vermont-based managers and their governance of the railroad's construction. The author has little use for J. Gregory Smith, the railroad's first president, accusing him of mismanagement and pilfering the

railroad's treasury (p. 72 for a typical example). The evidence he offers for these assertions is found in secondary sources, news items, and allusions to Smith's financial manipulation of the Central Vermont Railroad. Readers familiar with Smith's abuse of the Central Vermont will find Lubetkin's condemnation all too reasonable. Yet the author's accusations, as they apply to the Northern Pacific, are not specific and are phrased in terms considerably stronger than those found in the cited sources. Lubetkin adds nothing concrete to our existing knowledge of Smith or his methods. The author's most credible sources on Smith's activities on the Northern Pacific—Paxton E. Oberholtzer, *Jay Cooke*, and Henrietta M. Larson, *Jay Cooke*—both indicate that the expenses Lubetkin is complaining about were valid (although probably inflated) operating expenses. Unfortunately, by 1873 they were stretching the finite financial resources of both the railroad and Jay Cooke.

Lubetkin also finds fault with the Northern Pacific's management of its construction contracts. On page 53 he asserts that "graft permeated the Northern Pacific but after 135 years the only 'proof' lies in the strange contracts . . . shoddy construction and so forth." Unfortunately, while he cites numerous letters written to Cooke complaining of poor construction, neither Lubetkin nor his sources provide examples of those strange contracts or tell us where to find them!

Despite its faults, *Jay Cooke's Gamble* has something to say to readers interested in the history of the territories that became the north central states. It will be less useful for those of us curious about Vermonters and their contribution to the Northern Pacific Railroad's early years.

GERALD B. FOX

*Gerald B. Fox is an independent researcher interested in Vermont's industrial and railroad history. He lives in Essex, Vermont.*

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### *Dateline Vermont: Covering and Uncovering the Newsworthy Stories that Shaped a State—and Influenced a Nation*

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By Chris Graff (North Pomfret, Vermont: Thistle Hill Publications, 2006, pp. 240, \$24.95).

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**D**uring December Vermont Public Television (VPT) invites viewers to choose the top news story of the year from a list of items nomi-

nated by journalists. My choice in 2006 would have been “Chris Graff, Vermont Associated Press bureau chief, fired.” Despite the wide-ranging protests the firing generated throughout the state, it was not nominated. My second choice, Judge Edward Cashman’s controversial sentencing of a child molester, was not specifically linked to Graff’s firing, but the AP bureau chief was prominent in his criticism of a high profile TV network commentator’s version of events, and Graff’s narrative leads one to conclude that it was the cause for his dismissal and not AP’s public reason for his firing.

There is of course, far more than that to *Dateline Vermont*, Chris Graff’s memoir of his career as a journalist covering Vermont news and politics. Chris had worked for the AP for twenty-seven years, much of that time as bureau chief and for the last fifteen years also as host of VPT’s news show, *Vermont This Week*. He came to North Pomfret, Vermont, in 1965 and subsequently attended Middlebury College where an encounter with fellow student Jim Douglas introduced him into news broadcasting. Graff gravitated to print journalism where he emerged as one of the state’s most respected and influential correspondents. For more than a quarter century he reported on Vermont’s elections and the personalities that dominated those events.

Graff makes every effort at evenhandedness, but personal preferences, with which readers may not always agree, occasionally show through his graceful prose.

For example, although Howard Dean was hardly Graff’s favorite governor, he is not among those who assert that the governor distanced himself from personal support for civil unions. That Dean signed the civil unions bill into law in private, surrounded only by his staff, suffices for many critics as irrefutable evidence of his hostility. Graff makes it clear that there is more to the story.

Dean had declared himself opposed to same-sex marriage. However, within an hour after the Vermont Supreme Court issued its ninety-three-page decision that interpreted the state constitution’s common benefits clause to include gay couples, “who seek nothing more, nor less, than legal protection and security to their avowed commitment to a lasting human relationship,” the governor asserted that it was “in the best interest of all Vermonters, gay and straight, to go forward with the domestic partnership act and not the gay marriage act.” In his subsequent state of the state address Dean called upon the legislature to respond to the Supreme Court ruling, “which confirms that all Vermonters, including gay and lesbian Vermonters, are to have equal benefits under the law.” On the afternoon when he signed the civil unions act in the privacy of his chambers, Dean labeled the bill “a courageous and powerful statement

about who we are in the State of Vermont” and declared that “the bill enriches all of us as we look with new eyes [at] a group of people who have been outcasts for many, many generations.”

Implicit in Graff’s account is that one can credit or blame Dean for the Civil Unions Act, but you can’t tar him with indifference.

Other explicit examples of Graff’s personal judgments are included in an appendix that comments on his choice of the top twenty stories and the ten most influential Vermonters of the twentieth century.

*Dateline Vermont* is an easy read and merits inclusion in every Vermonter’s library. Readers easily bored by Vermont politics will take pleasure in Graff’s discussions of Act 60 and school reform, civil unions, and the take back Vermont movement. Readers with no special interest in Vermont may be captivated by an account of Howard Dean’s presidential run or the apparent validity of Graff’s claims that a state as small as Vermont can influence the nation. One small criticism: if the volume should ever be reprinted or issued in paperback, it would profit from an index.

Finally, the testimonials printed on the back cover reveal an unintended facet of the state’s character. Governor James Douglas and Senators Patrick Leahy and Bernie Sanders (writing as then U.S. Representative) all provide endorsements. The book was written before the 2006 elections and this reviewer suspects that had the prepublication proofs been circulated after the election, either of the candidates newly elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, Democrat or Republican, would have signed onto the list. Vermonters are prone to regard as personal matters what others may see as controversies beyond their direct involvement. The outpouring of support for Chris Graff is a case in point. But it is also a tribute to a well-balanced and well-written memoir *cum* history that succeeds in bringing an intimacy to events.

SAMUEL B. HAND

*Samuel B. Hand is professor emeritus of history at the University of Vermont.*

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## Recent Additions to the Vermont Historical Society Library

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### BOOKS

- Call, Eugene, and Mary H. Fregosi, *The Phantom Yell: A History of Proctor High School Boys Varsity Basketball, Proctor, Vermont, 1919–2006*. No publisher, 2006. 132p. Source: Mary H. Fregosi, 76 Park Street Extension, Proctor, VT 05765. List: \$20.00 (paper).
- \* Chase, Harriet M., and Ron Sanford, *Randolph, Vermont, 1777–1927: Its Discovery, Creation & Development, with Emphasis on the Industries & Businesses of Slab City and West Randolph (now known as Randolph)*. Randolph, Vt.: The authors, 2006. 296p. List: \$20.00 (paper).
- \* Dahlstrom, Neil, and Jeremy Dahlstrom, *The John Deere Story: A Biography of Plowmakers John and Charles Deere*. DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005. 204p. List: \$24.00.
- \* Davis, Thomas C., *Beyond Depot Square: More Central Vermont Memories*. Barre, Vt.: The author, 2006. 138p. List: \$15.95 (paper).

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\* Indicates books available through the Vermont Historical Society museum store.

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- Faillace, Linda, *Mad Sheep: The True Story behind the USDA's War on a Family Farm*. White River Junction, Vt.: Chelsea Green Publishing Co., 2006. 324p. List: \$25.00. Sheep taken from a Vermont farm.
- French, Deanna, *Sterling: A Vermont Mountain Town*. No place: Sterling Committee, 2005. 33p. Source: Unknown. List: Unknown. History of Vermont town absorbed by Cambridge, Stowe, Johnson, and Morristown.
- \* Graff, Chris, *Dateline Vermont: Covering and Uncovering the Stories, Big and Small, that Shaped a State—and Influenced a Nation*. North Pomfret, Vt.: Thistle Hill Publications, 2006. 240p. List: \$24.95.
- Hall, John S., *The West Window*. New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2006. List: \$23.95 (paper). Historical novel set on a Vermont hill farm.
- \* Harrison, Blake A., *The View from Vermont: Tourism and the Making of an American Rural Landscape*. Burlington, Vt.: University of Vermont Press; Hanover: University Press of New England, 2006. 323p. List: \$29.95 (paper).
- Healy, Mary Jane B., *Rebels' Reward: Pursuing the Location of the Original Rights Granted on North Hero Island*. North Hero, Vt.: MJBH Publishing, 2006. 60p. Source: The publisher, P.O. Box 104, North Hero, VT 05474-0104. List: \$10.00 (paper).
- Hugo, Ripley S., *Writing for Her Life: The Novelist Mildred Walker*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. 286p. List: \$29.95. Writer who summered in, wrote about, and retired to Grafton, Vermont.
- Kaiser, Linda, editor, *Civil War Volunteers from Waterbury, Vermont & Duxbury*. Waterbury, Vt.: Waterbury Historical Society, 2006. 148p. Source: The publisher, P.O. Box 708, Waterbury, VT 05676-0708. List: Unknown (paper).
- Kreger, Lewis S., *Alburgh, Vermont: The First Twenty Years*. Alburg, Vt.: The author, 2003. 16 leaves. Source: The author, 87 Jobs Pond Road, Portland, CT 06480. List: Unknown (paper).
- \* Maharay, George S., *Vermont Hero: Major General Lewis A. Grant*. Lincoln, Neb.: iUniverse, Inc., 2006. 317p. List: \$22.95 (paper). Civil War history.
- \* Marshall, Jeffrey D., *The Inquest*. Burlington, Vt.: University of Vermont Press, 2006. 271p. List: \$24.95. Novel set in Vermont in 1830s.
- \* Paterson, Katherine, *Bread and Roses, Too*. New York: Clarion Books, 2006. 275p. List: \$16.00. Children's book about a girl who is sent to Barre, Vermont, during Lowell, Massachusetts, labor strike.
- Paton, Todd, *The Rock of Ages Story*. Barre, Vt.: Rock of Ages Corp., 2003. 65p. Source: The publisher, P.O. Box 482, Barre, VT 05641. List: \$7.95 (paper).

- Prairie, Patti, *Lost Vermont Images: The Spirit of a Place, Vermont Art, 1920–1970*. No publisher, 2006. 35p. Source: Weston Antiques Show, PO Box 33, Weston, Vermont 05161-0033. List: Unknown (paper). Catalog for exhibit at the 2006 Weston Antiques Show from the collection of The Vermont Country Store.
- Prince, Cathryn J., *Burn the Town and Sack the Banks! Confederates Attack Vermont!* New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006. 279p. List: \$26.95. History of the St. Albans Raid, 1864.
- Reid, William E., *World War II Memoirs of William E. "Bill" Reid, United States Army*. No place: A.G. Reid, 2006. Various pagings. Privately printed.
- \* Reimann, Liisa, *Burlington Firefighting*. Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia, 2006. 127p. List: \$19.99 (paper)
- \* Swallow, Proctor, compiled by Kenena Hansen Spalding, *Tuf as a Boiled Owl: The Civil War Letters of Proctor Swallow, 7th Vermont Volunteer Regiment*. Bloomington, Ind.: AuthorHouse, 2006. 235p. List: \$14.95.
- \* Verret, Lauretta Morin, *The Bridging of Two Cultures: How One Family of French Canadian Descent, without Compromising Its Heritage, Learned to Live and Cope in the Border Village of Derby Line, Vermont, in the First Half of the Twentieth Century*. Burlington, Vt.: Queen City Printers, 2002. 92p. List: \$12.00 (paper). Morin family.
- Viens, Nancy Fitz-Gerald, *Memoirs of a Country Child*. Denton, Tex.: The author, 2005. 76p. Source: The author, 308 Normal St., Apt. 19, Denton, TX 76201. List: Unknown. Memoirs of growing up in Westminster, Vermont, in the 1930s and 1940s.
- White, Dwight A., *Down of the Thistle—20th Century Ryegate VT: A Sequel to the History of Ryegate, Vermont, by Edward Miller and Fred-eric Wells*. Ryegate, Vt.: The Town of Ryegate, 2006. 247p. Source: The author, PO Box 366, Ryegate, VT 05042-0366. List: Unknown.
- World War II Memories from Home and Abroad: Essays by Marion Cross School Sixth Graders Based on Interviews with Our Neighbors, Friends and Families*. Norwich, Vt.: Marion Cross School, 2006. 136p. Source: The publisher, P.O. Box 900, Norwich, VT 05055. List: Unknown (paper).

#### ARTICLES

- Brophy, Sarah, and Elizabeth Wylie, "It's Easy Being Green: Museums and the Green Movement." *Museum News*, 85, 5 (September/October 2006): 38–45. Includes ECHO at the Leahy Center for Lake Champlain.

- Graffagnino, J. Kevin, "Ethan Allen Said . . ." *Vermont Magazine*, 8, 6 (November/December 2006): 52–55.
- Johnston, Sona, "The Diary of Theodore Robinson, an American Impressionist." *The Magazine Antiques*, 166, 5 (November 2004): 128–137. Artist born in Irasburg, Vermont.
- Winthrop, Elizabeth, "Through the Mill." *Smithsonian*, 37, 6 (September 2006): 19–20. Story of Addie Laird, Pownal, Vt., mill girl photographed by Lewis Hine.
- Wood, Paul, "Tools and Machinery of the Granite Industry." *The Chronicle of the Early American Industries Association*, 59, 2 (June 2006): 37–52 and 59, 3 (September 2006), 81–96.

## GENEALOGY

- Bickford, Daniel N., *Helen "Nellie" St. James and Her Ancestors*. No publisher, 2003. 190p. Source: see entry below. List: Unknown (paper). Orleans County French-Canadian family history.
- , *Newell H. Bickford and His Ancestors*. No publisher, 2004. 206p. Source: The author, 1810 Vincennes Road, Richmond, VA 23229-4237. List: Unknown (paper). Orleans County family history.
- Nichols, Elizabeth, *Blodgett, Bell: A History of Some of My Family in the United States*. Baton Rouge, La.: The author, 2004. 36 leaves. Family from unknown town in Vermont.
- \* Post, Betty Davison, *The Founding Families of Craftsbury, Vermont: A Study of the Relationships between the Proprietors and the First Settlers of the Town*. Lakewood, Colo.: The author, 2006. 375p. List: \$24.95 (paper).
- Robbins, Lawrence G., *The Nicholas Robbins Family: A Genealogical History of the Family through the Eighth Generation*. Baltimore, Md.: Gateway Press, 2006. 369p. Source: The author, P.O. Box 793, Browns Mills, NJ 08015. List: \$40.00. Family of Windham County, Vermont.
- Vermont French-Canadian Genealogical Society, *Baptism, Marriage & Burial Repertoire, St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Enosburg Falls, Vermont, 1872–1946*. Burlington, Vt.: Vermont French-Canadian Genealogical Society, 2006. 1 v. (various pagings). Source: see entry below. List: \$45.00.
- , *Baptism & Marriage Repertoire, St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, Northfield, Vermont: Baptisms 1870–1930: Marriages 1870–1951*. Burlington, Vt.: Vermont French-Canadian Genealogical Society, 2006. 1 v. (various pagings). Source: see entry below. List: \$50.00.

- , *Marriage Repertoire, Central Vermont Parishes, Vermont Catholic Diocese [1857–1953]*. Burlington, Vt.: Vermont French-Canadian Genealogical Society, 2006. 434p. Source: see entry below. List: \$60.00.
- , *St. Mary's Cathedral Baptism Repertoire, St. Mary's Catholic Church, Burlington, Vermont, 1830–1858*. Burlington, Vt.: Vermont French-Canadian Genealogical Society, 2006. 582p. Source: The publisher, P.O. Box 65128, Burlington, VT 05606-5128. List: \$60.00.

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