

# Vermont Research Facilities, Part Three

By Scott Andrew Bartley

The Bennington Museum traces its origins to 1876, when the Bennington Historical Society was chartered, with aspirations to open a museum. The museum itself opened in 1928. It is located one mile west of the intersection of Routes 7 and 9 in downtown Bennington on West Main Street. Best known for the largest public collection of Grandma Moses paintings and memorabilia, it contains many more treasures within its walls. It is one of the finest regional art museums in New England and one of the largest genealogical and historical libraries in the state.

## The Museum

Researchers often come to the museum to discover when and where a piece was made, who used it, or how it has changed over time. Though it is not possible to know the complete history of every object, scholarly research using historical documents and clues found during conservation allow us to better understand the objects from the past and their place in history. The collections receiving the most use (the Bennington Flag, the Cushman Furniture Company, and the parian ceramic collection) have recently been researched by the museum itself.

## The Historical Society

Another part of the museum is the Bennington Historical Society. The Society's goal is to gather information about Bennington's past and share it with the community. The Society collects and transcribes original material that provides insights into life in and around Bennington, such as diaries and letters. Additional Society activities include conducting oral history interviews and presiding over historical research projects.

## The Genealogical Library

Of greatest interest to most of us is the Genealogy and History Library, which was greatly expanded in 2003. Its hours differ slightly from the museum itself – please refer to the end of this article for details. Entrance to the library is free with paid admission to the museum. Museum librarian Tyler Resch and assistant librarian Bill Budde are always at the ready to help you. You may reach them via email at [tresch@benningtonmuseum.org](mailto:tresch@benningtonmuseum.org).

The recently renovated library holds the second largest genealogical collection in the state, only behind the state's historical society. The library boasts over 2,000 published genealogies on New England ancestry. It has complete runs of the major genealogical journals including the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*. The *American Genealogical-Biographical Index (AGBI)* is an early reference work based on the published collections of the Godfrey Memorial Library, in Middletown, Connecticut. Bennington has the complete set of over two hundred volumes. The massive International Genealogical Index from the LDS Church in fiche is another great resource found at the library. About half of the data included in the index is abstracted from published vital records books or culled from the microfilms of original town books.

The collection's focus is on New England and New York, with an extensive collection of materials related to Vermont, including all published town histories. It has the census index to 1850 for all seven states and local federal census microfilm to 1930. Among the many town and county histories are the Aldrich and Child series for Vermont and Hemenway's *Vermont Historical Gazetteer*. There is a collection of military histories up to the Civil War and military rosters up to the Korean War. The index and genealogical columns for the *Boston Evening Transcript* and the *Hartford Times* are here, and the library's collection of Bennington newspapers includes the *Journal of the Times*, 1828-29; *Vermont Gazette*, 1783–1850; *Bennington Banner*, 1841–1899; and a number of others. There are over one hundred atlases, maps, and city directories, as well as the Massachusetts vital records to 1850 series. The library even has Vermont vital records on microfilm for 1760 to 1870 and 1871 to 1908.

Many libraries can have the published material mentioned above. The unique value of a library is the manuscripts it holds. The collection focus here is for Bennington County. Like many good libraries, it has a vertical file for local families and the patron queries that have come in over the last fifty years. There is a card index of thousands of early inhabitants of the area. There is a card index to local cemeteries as well. The Day Papers consist of twenty-five scrapbooks of indexed newspaper clippings covering 1870 to 1916. The Harwood Diaries from 1805 to 1837 are also

indexed and give a detailed view of farm life in Vermont. The library holds the original records for several local churches. The Old First Church records even have a brief account of the Newent Society of Norwich, Connecticut, whose congregation came to this town and formed the Congregational Church in Bennington. There is a special photographic collection of New England covered bridges.

Library patrons will find two microfilm readers. One has a laser printer attached. The library charges ten cents per image for photocopies and twenty-five cents per copy from the digital printer attached to a reader-printer. The library accepts genealogical inquiries via regular mail or e-mail. With the latter, remember to include your mailing address. The response usually includes photocopies of records found. While there is no fee for this service, I would strongly suggest making a donation to the library to ensure this valuable service continues. Donations of money, books, or relevant manuscripts would be a great support for this gem tucked away in the hillside next to the Old Bennington Cemetery. If you have the opportunity to travel in this area, the museum and library are well worth the visit. There is also a small store. The nearby Bennington Free Library has a local history room with a collection similar to the museum's library. Although the collection is not genealogical in nature, it does include many local resources.

The Bennington Genealogy and History Library is open in the winter and spring on Thursday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., from November 1 to May 31. The summer and fall times are Monday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., from June 1 to October 31.

The Bennington Museum is open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., November 1 through May 31, and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., June 1 thru October 31. It is closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas and New Year's Day). Admission is \$7 adults, \$6 students/seniors, and children under twelve are free.

You can contact the museum at

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Website: [www.benningtonmuseum.com](http://www.benningtonmuseum.com)