Today on Across the Fence a historical novel that explores the life and times of a former Vermont governor, senator and secretary of war. We will learn about Redfield Proctor and his role in the division of Rutland. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us, I am Judy Simpson. My guest this afternoon has researched and written about many aspects of Vermont life as a freelance writer and reporter. Her first book in 1980 was about Pico ski area, it traced the history and development of the alpine skiing in the United States. Now she's written a book about one of the leading Vermont business and political figures of the late 1800’s. I want to welcome Linda Goodspeed of Rutland; thank you so much for being with us.

Linda.: Thank you Judy.

Judy.: You spent a number of years writing about skiing in Vermont back in the day when there were not a lot of female sports journalists. Tell us a little bit about some of your background.

Linda.: I grew up in Rutland and was a lifelong skier. I went to UVM and I was one of those lucky people that happened to fall into the career that they were supposed to be in. I was a liberal arts major; UVM didn't know really what I wanted to do. I went back home after college and got a job at the local newspaper the Rutland Herald. I realized that was what I was supposed to be doing. A writing career. I ended up being the sports editor of the Rutland Herald for a number of years which is how I got interested in skiing and wrote the book about Pico. That also started working on the Redfield Proctor book. I had learned that Proctor's papers had recently been cataloged and donated to the town of Proctor so I started going over-- I'm also a history buff--and looking through those papers and started taking notes and researching that book.

Right about that time in the late 1980’s I started losing my eyesight. I lost my vision very rapidly I have an eye disease, glaucoma. And at that time it began getting out of control. The medication I was on was not effective and I had a lot of surgery. I lost vision very quickly and had to kick start my life again. I moved to Boston for public transportation because I had to give up driving and I didn't think I could live in Vermont. Anyway, so I moved to Boston and got into healthcare journalism. All my experience in hospitals and doctors' offices made me interested in a healthcare writing career. So I did that and worked at Mass General Hospital and a consumer health advocacy organization and lived in Boston. I continued to work on the Proctor book. I was telling Judy it's been a book that's been in the works for about 20 years now off and on.
When I moved back to Vermont in 2005, I'd taken it down from the shelf once again home and really seriously needed to wrap up the loose ends and was lucky to find a publisher, the History Press of Charleston South Carolina. They did a fabulous job on the book and here we are.

Judy.: Redfield Proctor and the Division of Rutland. Who was Redfield Proctor?

Linda.: He was a very extraordinary man. I knew very little about him when I started working on this project. Like I grew up in Rutland but really had never heard of Redfield Proctor. The Vermont Marble Company had pretty much gone out of business by then or had a very low profile so I didn't know much about him but he was one of the leading business and political figures of the late 1800’s. He started the Vermont Marble Company in 1869 a few years after the Civil War. He took over a bankrupt marble mill. He was 38 years old so he got started a little late in life. He tried farming and didn't like it. He was practicing law and didn’t like that but he really found his niche in 1869 at the age of 38. That a very few short years see a turn that marble mill bankrupt marble mill into the largest marble operation in the world. The Vermont Marble Company. He had an enormous impact on the building of Washington, DC with all of its many marble buildings and monuments.

Judy.: Right; Vermont marble is in many buildings you see there.

Linda.: Yes absolutely. Also he had a political career. He was a governor of the state his two sons were governors and his grandson, so four Proctor governors. A real political dynasty. As the hope he had a national career in politics he was secretary of war, Harrison put him in his cabinet. He was really one of the leading business and political figures of the late 1880’s not just in Vermont but nationally.

Judy.: Tell us about the division of Rutland because that was something that he quarterbacked really. And the reasons behind that too?

Linda.: Yes in 1886 Rutland was the largest town in the state. It was the richest town in the state. Have a largest in terms of population area the center of commerce the center of politics it really was quite a booming town in 1886. In that year Redfield Proctor rammed through the proposal and he really rammed because there was an enormous opposition to this proposal to dividing Rutland into three smaller towns. Why would you want to divide the largest town into three smaller towns? Well of course it had to be and was for political purposes. At that time Vermont was a very conservative state a very republican state. Rutland being the largest town in the state was the center of that influence. A number of governors came from Rutland but largely because of the labor element that Proctor brought in to work his mills and his quarry. Rutland was beginning to slide towards the democrats and opposition parties. And in 1884 the democrats actually succeeded in electing a democrat to the legislature. At that time it was one town one vote so no matter how big a town or how small they had one vote in the legislature. Now all of a sudden Rutland the largest town in the state is being represented by a democrat--heaven forbid so Proctor…

Judy.: This must be stopped!

Linda.: Absolutely. He's a former governor this is his hometown so in 1886 a window of opportunity to divide Rutland. I look at it as very heavy handed form of voter redistricting. Politicians are known to for a voter lines in ways that would have them in their party. This is what Proctor was doing. Keep in mind the two towns and he created Proctor and West Rutland this is where the Vermont Marble Company was located. Most of the people who live in these towns they worked for Redfield Proctor. They lived in his houses as his company houses and shopped in his company stores so these are very much company towns. But dividing them into smaller towns you can control them not only their jobs but also their votes.
Judy.: No one was going to vote against him.

Linda.: No.

Judy.: You wrote the book as a historical novel. Why?

Linda.: A couple of reasons. First of all I really wanted to bring back Redfield Proctor to life. He was a very extraordinary man. Very much a natural politician. He had a real common touch. One of the stories about him was you go into any town the state and know at least one person from the Civil War. Very much and natural politician with common touch that could relate to people have a lot of charisma at the same time highly thought of at the highest level of government. Three presidents came to visit him at his house in Proctor. Harrison Mckinley and Teddy Roosevelt all came to Vermont to visit Proctor. Very much a natural politician. Shrewd businessman to the point of being ruthless. He thought nothing of taking all he could to crush an opponent. I really wanted to bring this man to life I didn't want to just say natural politician shrewd businessman; I really wanted to bring him to life with dialogue and conversation through interactions among the characters and relationships. Bring out its humor and the way he would promote young men.

Judy.: You really added a third dimension to what people would find if they were to read some of his papers.

Linda.: Yes actually a lot of words that come out of Proctor's mouth are really drawn right from his papers. I'd imagine conversations and dialogs and some events in the story both to add interest and also to move the story along.

Judy.: What were some of the resources available to you?

Linda.: The richest resource certainly was his papers. This is just a fantastic trove of papers in the town of Proctor both from his political career and also his business career and they've all been cataloged and arranged and sorted. That was one of the main resources. Also newspaper accounts from the day were great resource. The Rutland Herald just cover this division struggle. Just columns and columns of ink that they wrote to cover this division struggle. Vermont histories and those were the main resources.

Judy.: Was there anything you found that really surprised you?

Linda.: I guess one of the things that really struck me was the fact that the more things changed the more they stay the same. There were a couple of issues first of all immigrants were a big issue back in the 1800s. In the late 18 hundreds America was being flooded by this tidal wave of immigration really affecting voting patterns the workplace and also immigration immigrants is such a big issue today we're still facing the same issue. Also another issue that I was struck by one of the arguments against division back in 1886 was the fact that Vermont was losing its young people they're leaving small towns and moving to major urban centers so we shouldn't be dividing a large town into smaller towns we shouldn't be creating more small towns because we need to keep our young people and this is an issue are facing today, Vermont is losing its young people. So that was interesting. Also just the way politics is practiced very heavy handed back then very heavy handed partisan today.

Judy.: What kind of feedback have you had on your book?
Linda.: Great. I've been so pleased with the way History Press and the job they did with the book. I've had excellent feedback from a number of people. People have ancestors or relatives who worked for the Vermont Marble Company and have more stories to tell me about the Proctors and have told me how much they've enjoyed the book so I've had very good feedback. In fact a writer friend of mine has convinced me to work on writing a screenplay and turning it into a screenplay. We will see where that takes us.

Judy.: That sounds like a lot of fun. You've also talked to some educators maybe about including some of this information in the curriculum because it's pretty local history?

Linda.: Yes, yes. I have a daughter who's a freshman in high school and I can tell from firsthand experience that kids don't relate to history a lot today. It happened a long time ago it happen to somebody else and this is local history about their own community and so I think kids would really relate to that. In fact my book group was discussing the book in Rutland and my daughter came to it and had a lot to say about it. I think kids would relate to it.

Judy.: Was it difficult to get this book published because I've heard from several writers that publishing can be a real stumbling block?

Linda.: Well it took me almost 20 years. I came close a couple times and when I finally did move back to Vermont in 2005 and decided to make a concerted effort that's exactly when the book publishing business started to fall apart. I was lucky that a writer friend of mine suggested I try his publishing company, the History Press and they picked it up and did such a great job with it. It does happen that it was an overnight success after 20 years just all of a sudden happened.

Judy.: So tell us where people can find your book?

Linda.: It's in the local bookstores. I'm not sure about Burlington I know it's certainly south in the southern book stores but here again Korea and gets your bookstores because Brandon just lost a bookstore and one of the two bookstores in Rutland is going out of business so we really need to get out and support our local bookstores.

Judy.: And of course people can get more information on your website?

Linda.: On my website slindagoodspeed.com, the History Press website and Amazon.

Judy.: Terrific. Thank you so much for coming in and talking about your 20 year overnight success.

Linda.: Thank you Judy.

Judy.: That's our program for today. I'm Judy Simpson we will see you again next time on Across the Fence.

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