



KNOWING VERMONT*

By Frank Bryan

Question: Do Vermont chickens produce enough eggs every day to provide one for every citizen of the state?

Answer: It's not even close. They'd have to lay about three times as many as they do. *Question:* In what month of the year in Vermont is the temperature closest to Vermont's yearly average?

Answer: April. *Question:* The largest carp ever taken in Vermont was "landed" by Douglas Bushey of Swanton. What did he use: (a) a 12-gauge shotgun, (b) a cherry bomb inside a ball of hamburger, (c) a bow and arrow, (d) a spear, (e) a fish pole. *Answer:* (c) a bow and arrow. Let's try one more. What is the vegetable that is named after Vermont's mountains? *Answer:* The Green Mountain potato.

"Familiarity," someone once said, "breeds contempt." What a disheartening axiom. Those who hold it are condemned to depression or ignorance. Not to worry. I have evidence that the notion is false. Last year my wife, Lee, and I set out to compile the first and only *Vermont Quiz Book*. It's done now and I've learned several lessons: (1) that there is damn little that is "trivial" about Vermont, (2) that there is almost nothing, however, that is not in some way fascinating, (3) that I, who am a "Vermontist" by life and by heart and by trade know very little about Vermont, and (4) that knowing more about Vermont — becoming more fully familiar with its infinite variety — breeds, not contempt, but a

respect and love that is truly, flat out, overwhelming.

I used to think I could name nearly every Vermont town given a bit of time to mull it over. Then someone asked me to list the Vermont towns whose names match the capitals of American states. Ooops. Growing up in Vermont, my thumb carried me around the state until I figured I had walked every highway at least once and I knew the road system like the back of my hand. Then Lee asked the following: to go from Bentley's Restaurant in Woodstock to Barnard, take: (a) U.S. #4, (b) Vermont #12, (c) Vermont #106, or (d) Vermont #73. (Whenever I get turned around in Vermont these days, she is apt to quip, "Why don't you check the back of your hand?") Do you know where the Molly Stark Highway is? The route from Brandon to Rochester? The highway over Quechee Gorge? The mountain on which the Sky Line Drive is located? Where the most dangerous intersection in Vermont is? Or the route you're on when you go through Hazen's Notch, Granville Gulf or Middlebury Gap?

I teach Vermont politics at UVM yet I had to think a bit before I came up with the answer to this question: Who is the only person in this century of one of the two major parties to lose a general election for Governor in one election and win the general election for Governor in the next? Yep. Madeleine Kunin. And, ironically, the only other person to lose a race for Governor and win it later (but not in

the election following) as a member of the same party is the man who defeated Kunin the first time around, Dick Snelling. I've given "scholarly" papers on Town Meeting all around the country. Then someone asked me: "What's the quorum at a Town Meeting?" Oh, Lord! (It was a nasty trick question — there isn't any.)

And you *learn* so much: That Thaddeus Stevens was expelled from UVM for ax-murdering a cow. That Vermont has a higher homicide rate than New Hampshire. That the State's record temperature drop occurred in 1943 in Bennington on February 14 when it fell from +45 to -32 degrees overnight. THINK about that! That P.T. Barnum once offered a \$50,000 reward for the capture of Champ. That a newborn black bear weighs only three ounces. That a Vermonter discovered laughing gas. And that Vermont was the first state to elect a black to its state legislature. Has Vermont ever executed a woman? What did George Van Dyke and Dan Bosse have in common? What is a timberdoodle? Identify: the "Mount Ascutney Train," "switchel," the "Homer W. Dixon," and the "Witch of Wall Street." Can you tell the difference between a Salem, Lincoln, Boston and Windsor rocker if we provide a picture of each? What's the brook trout limit in Vermont?

Knowing Vermont can be so much fun too. If we supplied the following punch lines, "Not yet," "Not to me it don't," and "Sure it is. But any damn fool knows how to get to Poultney,"

W I N D O W S I L L

could you supply the joke? Or in our chapter on numbers, you are asked to match a number with what it represents. From a list of four choices for the answer to the question "One" is found: "The number of people Dick Snelling believes are capable of governing Vermont." A selection in the multiple choice questions, "The first person ever to migrate from Vermont to New Jersey was?" is (b) "out of his mind."

In questions, of course, are the foundations of viewpoints. Such as: What is the legal limit for trapping otters or beavers or muskrats? How has the ratio of men to women changed in the Vermont legislature? Which state has more people on welfare roles, Vermont or New Hampshire? or, How many dairy farms does Vermont lose every month? Even the question about chickens and eggs leads one to wonder about the lack of diversification in this "farming" state of ours. Or how about the question, How much did it cost Jim Mullin for every vote he received in his 1980 race for the U.S. Senate in the Republican Party: (a) \$.82 (b) \$2.78, (c) \$20.42 or (d) \$78.10. The answer is (d) and he lost the election.

Sixteen hundred and fifty questions after the *Vermont Quiz Book* began, the truth of the old saying that "an educated person is one who knows what they don't know" was never more clear. Setting out to know Vermont completely would be like counting the falling needles of November's tamaracks. Impossible. Yet in that glorious impossibility is one of Vermont's greatest gifts to her people — a gift of scale; a scale that lets us all dream the impossible, a dream that must have resided in the soul of that great chronicler of Vermont, Abby Hemenway, or today in Esther Swift. You can believe it: the deep purple shadows that etch our hillsides in a summer eve's solitude so beautiful it actually hurts are more hurtful still when one is on the trail of truly knowing Vermont. □

**The Vermont Quiz Book has been published in paperback form by the New England Press in Shelburne, Vermont. We think you will enjoy it.* EDITOR