CHITTENDEN COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BULLETIN

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New Historical Marker Dedicated in Hinesburg

On Sunday, September 26, 2010 a new historic marker was unveiled in Chittenden County. It is dedicated to early black settlers who came to Hinesburg in the 1790s from Connecticut and Massachusetts. About fifty-five people gathered at the bottom of Lincoln Hill Road to witness the dedication. Elise Guyette, president of the Chittenden County Historical Society and author of *Discovering Black Vermont: African American Farmers in Hinesburgh, 1790-1870*, gave a brief speech. She outlined the joys and hardships of the Clarks and Peters, who eventually became eight extended families with successful farms, middle class status, and church membership in the local Baptist church. Along with many townspeople, descendants from Vermont and Massachusetts attended. Several spoke movingly about their ancestors and their pride in these early pioneers who overcame hardships on the hill, became voting members of the Hinesburg community, and sheltered people who had escaped slavery. After the unveiling, Guyette led a tour of Lincoln Hill Road that included sites of the old Peters and Clark homesteads and the abandoned black cemetery at the top of the hill.

Richmond's Checkered House

by

J. Brooks Buxton

Courtesy UVM Special Collections.

Richmond's Checkered House, a handsome Federal brick house with distinctive end walls of Flemish Bond brickwork and a second-story Palladian window, was most probably built 1800-1815. The house has been known variously for nearly 200 years as the Checkered Brick House, the Chequered House, and today simply as the Checkered House.

The Checkered House is propitiously located just back from the northern bank of the Winooski River at the important intersection of two main arterial roads that have linked the towns of Jericho, Williston and Essex with Richmond since the late eighteenth century. The Williston Turnpike (now U.S. 2) from early settler days went through the lush river bottom meadows known as Richmond Flats and ended at the Winooski River just opposite the Checkered House property across the river. The river was too wide and too deep to ford easily and a ferry was utilized until a wooden covered bridge was built around the 1820s. The covered bridge, known through the centuries as the Turnpike Bridge, Howe's Bridge and Conant's Bridge, was replaced by a steel structure built slightly downstream in 1928–1929.

The property where the Checkered House is located was originally in the southern part of the town of Jericho, but on October 27, 1794,

Checkered House Bridges, circa November 1929. Courtesy UVM Special Collections.

the General Assembly of the State of Vermont established "a new town of Richmond from the parts of Jericho, New Huntington (Huntington), and Williston." Early Richmond town records indicate that the land on which the Checkered House would be built was originally owned by Amos Brownson, one of Richmond's first settlers. Brownson sold the property to Jacob Spafford, who sold his property, Lot 120 and part of Lot 119 totaling 303 acres and 29 rods of land, "the whole part of the farm on which I now live," to Martin Chittenden of Jericho on November 14, 1810. Spafford had purchased part of this 303 acres, Lot 28 consisting of 39.52 acres, from Truman Chittenden of Williston, Martin Chittenden's younger brother.

Martin and Truman were sons of Thomas Chittenden, who served as governor of Vermont for 19 terms from 1778 until his death in 1797. After his marriage in 1749 to Elizabeth Meigs, he moved to Salisbury, Connecticut where his father had purchased a small farm for the new couple. He soon prospered, becoming one of the largest land holders in Salisbury and active in town affairs. In keeping with his position, he built an imposing brick manse for his large family which is still standing today in remarkable condition in Salisbury.

According to a story handed down in the Chittenden family, during the 1760s Colonel Chittenden, as head of a Connecticut militia regiment, led an expedition to rescue several captured residents who

had been taken north to Canada. After freeing the captives, the men camped on their way home in a valley on the Winooski River near Mount Mansfield. Family legend has it that Colonel Chittenden remarked, "This is a paradise. If I can get title to land here, I will build my house and settle it with my sons around me."

Chittenden's faithful wife bore him ten children and in 1773 the "Chittendens decided to move their family north, where land was abundant and the prices still cheap." Continuing to quote from Frank Smallwood's *Thomas Chittenden: Vermont's First Statesman*, "on May 17, 1773, he and his two colleagues signed a bond binding them to purchase land in the township of Williston from the Onion River Land Company." Eventually Chittenden's holdings would total 5,253 acres, with Jonathan Spafford and Abijah Pratt, his two Salisbury friends as original partners, holding a few hundred acres.

In 1787 Thomas Chittenden built another large Federal-style brick house for his family above his beloved Onion River in Williston. Sadly for posterity, his brick house burned down in 1926, but its original wooden ell remains on the Chittenden-Clark farm. Thomas and Elizabeth's oldest son, Col. Noah Chittenden, built a Federal-style brick house too across the Onion River in Jericho just opposite his younger brother, Martin, who was given his newly built splendid Flemish Bond brick house as a wedding president by his father in 1797. Martin Chittenden was elected governor of Vermont in 1813 and again in 1814, and served as a U.S. Congressman from 1802 to 1813. He was obviously living in his splendid manse in Jericho when he purchased the Richmond property in 1810. Perhaps even from Washington, D.C. while he was serving in Congress, he could still focus on more land holdings in Jericho, and yet perhaps another brick house.

Giles Chittenden, the Chittenden's third son, was also given a very large commodious brick house with an upstairs ballroom by his father; it was located above the Gov. Chittenden home farm in Williston on what is now known as the Gov. Chittenden Road. A brick set in its gable indicates the date of its construction was in 1797. Alas, Truman Chittenden, their fourth son, had to settle for a lovely large wooden frame Federal house which he built in 1792 on French Hill on the Williston Turnpike.

Now back to the north bank of the Onion River in Richmond and those forgetful Brownson and Spafford folks and their descendants whose deeds, land records, letters, journals or diaries, or oral family

history, if ever existed, fail to mention or to describe the Flemish Bond brick house in question. Did the Spaffords in trying to keep up with the Chittendens build their Flemish Bond brick house before it was sold to Martin Chittenden in 1810? Martin and his wife would have had children old enough to live in and to manage the Spafford property by 1810. The Chittenden family penchant for brick houses with ballrooms could perhaps be an obvious reason for his desire to purchase the subject house. Of course its convenient neighborhood location, just a mile or two east down the Onion River Road, could have also been another strong reason for Martin to acquire the Checkered House in Richmond.

Could Martin Chittenden have possibly cased an originally framed house, newly purchased from Spafford, in brick patterned after his own Flemish Bond brick manse down the road? This to me is unlikely with his Congressional obligations in Washington, D.C. Also, it had been 13 years since his own Flemish Bond brick house had been constructed, and its builders, carpenters and master masons may have died off or moved to another town.

Brick houses laid in patterned Flemish Bond are rare in Vermont, with perhaps the most noted example being its neighbor on the Onion River Road, the Chittenden-Hasbrook house in Jericho. There are other examples in Arlington, Middlebury, and the Gen. John Strong Mansion built in 1791 in Addison facing Lake Champlain; "it is a fine house inside and out built of brick burned from his own clay-pits and laid in patterned Flemish Bond." A few other Flemish Bond brick houses can be seen in the southeastern part of the state in the Connecticut River Valley.

Similar late eighteenth or early nineteenth-century Flemish Bond brick houses, though generally on a larger scale, are found also in the Hudson River Valley and in Pennsylvania. The bricks for some of these houses were shipped from the Netherlands, hence perhaps the name. However, architectural historians and preservationists now apparently agree that in Vermont the bricks were made locally in an onsite kiln. If some of the headers were selected from bricks whose ends were blackened or glazed in the kiln, then the pattern became much more striking.

The first seminal survey of old Vermont houses was done by Herbert Wheaton Congdon in the late 1930–1940s, an outgrowth of the Old Buildings program initiated by the Robert Hull Fleming Museum,

University of Vermont, and sponsored by the James Benjamin Wilbur Library Fund. This unique survey of Vermont houses up to 1850 was one of the first historical architectural listings in the country. Vermont brick houses were, Congdon wrote, a practical desire for permanence and low maintenance in colonial Vermont's rough seasons. Of course, "a mild ambition for a house fitting for its owner's social standing sometimes entered in to these matters, although permanence is a quality that appeals to deep-rooted feelings in our people." Congdon's 1940 book, *Old Vermont Houses*, describes in detail the Chittenden-Hasbrouk house in Jericho, but unfortunately does not mention the Checkered House in Richmond. In 1975, the Checkered House was listed on the Vermont Historic Sites and Structures Survey.

Martin Chittenden sold the Checkered House property to Joshua and Lucretia Whitcomb on January 27, 1830. Lucretia was widowed at an early age and it appears that she opened a small hotel or a stage coach stop and tavern with a ballroom upstairs with her daughter and son-in-law, William Freeman, in the 1840s. The property was then sold to Giles Howe in 1876 and four generations of the Howe family owned the property until it was sold to Roger Streeter in 1982. Tourist cabins were built on the property by Harry and Caroline Howe in 1932; a motel was added later. The main farm barn was sold to the Shelburne Museum in 1949. The timbers from this barn and 11 other Vermont barns were dismantled and re-assembled to build the Horseshoe Barn on the Museum's grounds. Subsequently the property was sold in 1986 to Forrest Cochran, who opened the Chequers Country Restaurant. Cochran sold the property in 2002 to Steven and Lara Atkins, who after considerable renovations, opened The Kitchen Table Bistro restaurant on February 27, 2003.

Two external events have had a direct impact on the Checkered House property. Firstly was the construction of the Central Vermont Railroad from Montpelier to Burlington in 1846-1847 which crossed and split up the property. Secondly was the construction of the Interstate 89 and the official opening of the Richmond interchange Exit 11 on October 30, 1964 which further bypassed the property.

Today the widow Lucretia Whitcomb could no longer genteelly stand in her handsome front doorway and watch the oxen pulling wagons or teams of horses with their dust passing by on the Onion River Road nor on a Sunday graciously be seen greeting the guests as they drove up the long drive to the house. Would she have heard from

local oral tradition, from her father or her grandfather, the names of these master builders, framing and finish interior carpenters, and brick masons who built these Chittenden houses, several large enough to have an upstairs ballroom. Surely the sites of the clay banks and the brick kilns for the Checkered House would still have been known even in the 1840s.

One oral tradition concerning the Checkered House can be substantiated and refuted. There appears to be no record of the house serving as a way station for the Underground Railroad for runaway slaves traveling through Vermont to Canada. Harriet Riggs, in *Richmond, Vermont, A History of More Than 200 Years*, concluded after careful research that Judge Briggs and his son-in-law Edward Stansbury were the two contacts in Richmond for fugitives traveling on the so-called Underground railroad. Briggs and Stansbury were not associated with the Checkered House.

Speculation whether in historical coincidences or in land is a constant theme of this paper. It has been a challenge to research and to attempt to determine accurately which member of the Brownson or Spafford families, father or son, actually built the Checkered House and its exact year of construction. It would appear likely that Martin Chittenden, the owner of the house from 1810–1830, was not the original builder. The Checkered House has remarkably survived and stands today as a living testament of the vision of the early settlers. Despite the inroads of the Central Vermont Railroad and the interstate highway system in their respective centuries, the Checkered House continues to serve and to delight the many new settlers who live and still farm—some for many generations—in these towns through which Thomas Chittenden's paradisiacal Onion River flows.

Acknowledgments: J. Brooks Buxton of Jericho would like to thank the following people for their help: Linda Parent, Town Clerk, Town of Richmond; Harriet Wheatley Riggs, Richmond Historical Society; Jean Burks, Shelburne Museum; John P. Dumville, Vermont Division of Historic Preservation.

Sources: Please contact the *Bulletin* editor if you would like a list of the sources consulted.

Report to the Taxpayer

by

Stephen Hitchcock

Stephen Hitchcock, a Burlington High School graduate, wrote this article after he attended his 1946 class reunion around 1986. It was among papers saved by Steve's track coach, Holland "Dutch" Smith. Thanks to Nancy Tracy for sending it to us.

Any resident of Burlington who is 70 years of age or more has been paying school taxes for a long, long time. Was all this money well spent? The answer is now available for the money you gave some 40 years ago. The Burlington High School Class of 1946 recently held a reunion and surveyed the comings, goings and doings of their classmates over the past several years.

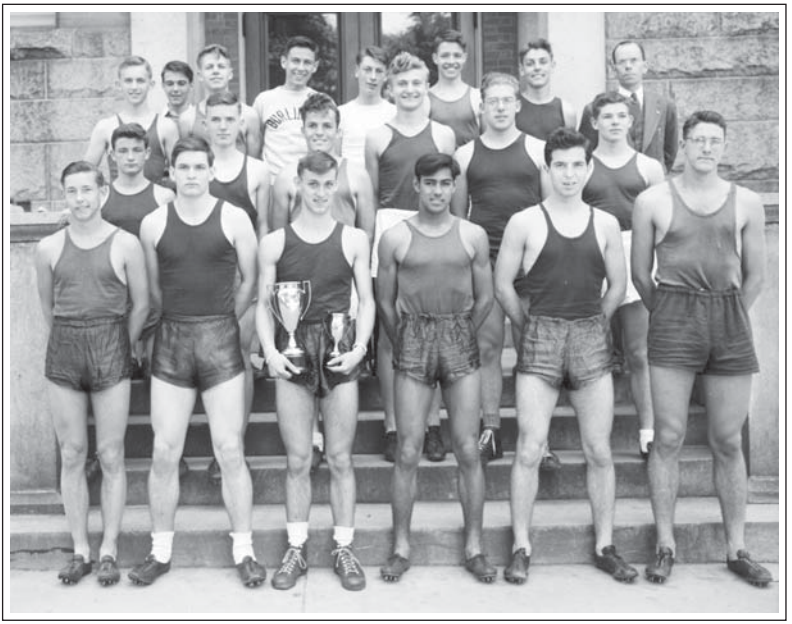
Of the more than 180 graduating seniors, 17 had died, including a life lost in the combat of that almost forgotten war in Korea. From the addresses of 155 people who responded, we learn that 26.4% are still in the Burlington area, 19.4% are elsewhere in Vermont, 14.2% elsewhere in New England) mostly Massachusetts and Connecticut), and 38.1% are in other states and countries (mostly New York, Florida and Texas). Of all the money you spent on our education, therefore, 52.3% of it went to enrich other parts of this country. These exiles include more then 60% of the boys who graduated that year. Curiously, a goodly number of these expatriates are now starting to drift back to Vermont, either to work or to retire. What they will find is a bit startling for anyone who has been away for four decades.

In 1946, Burlington, despite the influence of UVM, was not a sophisticated town. It had just emerged from the Depression and World War II. Its downtown was perhaps in retrospect a bit shabby, but it was the only shopping area we knew except for a small cluster of shops on North Street. Change was possibly on the way because a Howard Johnson's restaurant was being built on Shelburne Road to the consternation of the neighbors.

It was a safe town. Children rode their bicycles all over the city—from Waubenakee Golf Course on Shelburne Road to Ethan Allen Park on the north. St. Mary's hill was there for sledding in the winter and numerous lots were available for football or basketball with nary a thought to injuries, lawsuits or dangerous strangers. Warm

spring evenings lasted forever for children playing "Kick the Can" under the street lights until one by one the players were called in by their parents.

It was a walking town. You walked to school, to work, and to shop, and in high school you walked with your date on Saturday night. A young man from the north side walked two miles to the south side to pick up his date and together they walked a mile back to town to attend a movie at the Flynn, the Strong or the Majestic, or if things were really desperate, a B movie from Monogram pictures at the State. Afterwards, a coke at Brown's Pharmacy was sipped to the envious sniggers of one's less socially fortunate friends. Another mile brought them back to the young lady's front door where after interminable internal debate, the young man would loose his nerve and not try to kiss her. She, disappointed, would go inside and he, berating himself for a coward, would walk two miles back home. With all this walking, no wonder we were state track champions in the spring of 1946.



Burlington High School track team in 1946. Coach Smith is in the back row on the far right. Can anyone identify Steve Hitchcock and the other team members?

At some point, we must have overcome these social inadequacies for our class has some 3.23 children per graduate. Considering our age, perhaps that would be better expressed as averaging about three per person. Already 268 grandchildren have checked in. It must be the good Vermont air.

And where are we? Including retired persons (11% of the class) as holding their last jobs, it falls out like this:

11.3%	are in education as high school or college teachers or administrators;
10.4%	are working with social or medical programs;
13.2%	are homemakers;
2.8%	are in the financial world;
8.5%	are in business for themselves;
34.9%	are employed by private industry or commerce;
15.1%	work for local, state, or federal governments (including 3.8%) in the armed forces); and
3.8%	work for nonprofit organizations.

Well, Mr. and Mrs. Taxpayer, did you get your money's worth? If you educated us to provide a sturdy cadre for Burlington's future, then your money was wasted, for less than one-third of us remain, although those that stayed did well as merchants, doctors, politicians, teachers, and workers.

If looked at in the broader context of providing an educated and socially aware citizenry, then it was well done indeed. It was not until we began to earn our way in a world far removed from that small city on a lovely lake up near the Canadian border that we realized what our high school and indeed the town had given us.

The Burlington of forty years ago will never return and it is, of course, "A common delusion of mankind that the times that were, are better than the times that are." An yet, even though ugly urban sprawl reaches out almost to Shelburne, Church Street is still alive. And in spirit, the new Church Street is perhaps closer to the Burlington we once knew on any Saturday shopping night than the young people in jeans and running shoes will ever guess.

Burlington, *ave atque vale!*

Champlain's Dream: A Review

by

Sylvia Bugbee

Some historians are born to write "blockbusters," if I may use such a term to describe a scholarly book. David Hackett Fischer is one of these: his Champlain's Dream is a sweeping epic of the life of Samuel de Champlain, the first European to travel down the lake named after him. Fischer's peers have raved about *Champlain's Dream*, calling it one of the greatest biographical works of all time. How can we of the Champlain Valley, for whom Champlain is a comfortable icon who stands alongside Ethan Allen and other great historic figures of early Vermont, assess this work from the perspective of our own relationship with Lake Champlain and its history? For myself, I can say that I thought that I knew about Samuel de Champlain and his influential role in shaping the history of the Champlain Valley. After reading this book, I realized that I did not; but now I think I do.

The book is a tour de force of the historian's craft, exhaustively researched both in Canada and France—nothing short of a comprehensive early history of France in the New World and of Champlain's struggle to create his vision of a sort of utopian New France, peacefully co-existing with the Native Americans, who would participate in a mutually beneficial trading partnership with the French settlers. Fischer's eloquent and fluid style makes the book beautifully easy to read in spite of its length. The reader experiences the author's intense identification with Champlain that translates in the text to a portrait almost from the inside looking out. One reviewer characterized Fischer as being in "that ethereal category of biographers who can climb into the soul of his subject, look out of that individual's eyes and report back on what he sees."

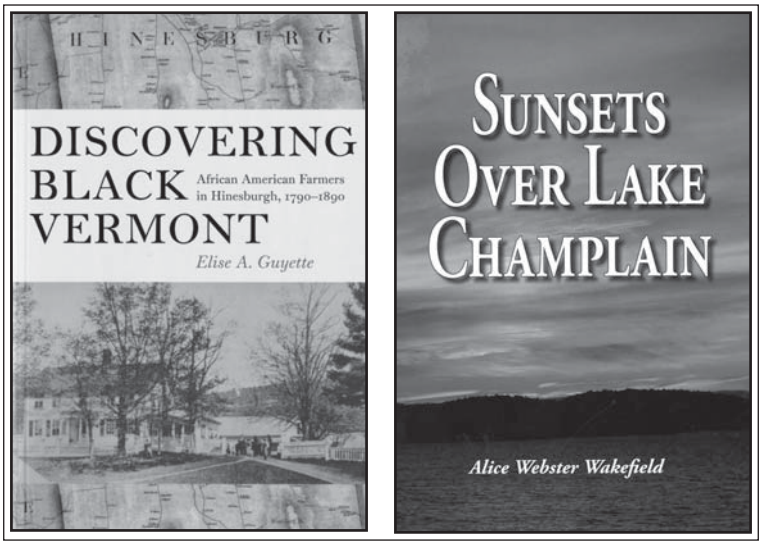
Champlain was a far more complex personage than mere voyageur. He was a brilliant tactician, always finding a way to advance his cause in the midst of changing regimes and administrators in the French court, some of which were not friendly either to him or his vision, drawing upon the cultural strengths of his native Brouage in the old province of Saintonge on the west central coast of France: toughness, independence, and practical-mindedness. Truly, Champlain was single-minded in his quest for this dream, spending much of his adult life crossing the Atlantic in support of his vision in France and

New France. His voluminous diaries and travelogues written during his voyages to the New World provided a valuable insight into sixteenth-century exploration, but rarely revealed his own personality. Fischer may come as close as anyone can to illuminating the person of Samuel de Champlain.

The question arises of what was Champlain's relationship to, and effect on, the Native American tribes with whom he dealt. Fischer refuses to identify with either the traditional view of Champlain as the heroic explorer who brought religion to the Indians, or with the revisionist focus on the cultural damage Europeans inflicted on the Native Americans with whom they came in contact. Instead, Fischer sees Champlain as a seeker of harmony and mutual respect: neither a "great white man" nor an early modern revolutionary/free thinker, but a man at least ahead of his times in that working peaceably with Native American tribes made pragmatic and economic sense to him. Yet one of Champlain's goals was certainly to convert to them to Christianity: his vision of a perfect relationship between Europeans and Native American tribes had to include a religious unity that would bind the two allies together and allow the latter full membership in the European way of life. As Fischer notes in the book's conclusion, Champlain was principally responsible for the unique character of French settlement in North America; and long after his death, he was remembered by the descendants of the Native Americans with whom he collaborated as a peaceful and honorable ally.

Fischer's monumental earlier work, *Albion's Seed: Four Folkways in America*, engendered an entire new field of debate on the origins of regional diversity in British North America to be found in the regions of England from which settlers came. Perhaps *Champlain's Dream* will do the same for the study of the early history of European settlement in the North Country and French Canada.

New Titles on the Book Shelf



The History of Shelburne Farms: A Changing Landscape, an Evolving Vision. Erica Huyler Donnis, foreword by Tom Slayton. Vermont Historical Society, 2010.

Erica Donnis's 343-page book, *The History of Shelburne Farms* significantly, expands the story of Shelburne Farms presented in the much slimmer *Shelburne Farms: The History of an Agricultural Estate* edited by William Lipke in 1979. Donnis, a Burlington resident and former curator of collections at Shelburne Farms, chronicles the evolution of Shelburne Farms from a model nineteenth-century estate to the non-profit educational resource that today promotes conservation and practices sustainable farming. The book is richly illustrated, and will be of particular interest to anyone who has visited the spectacular lakefront property and wondered how it came to be.

Discovering Black Vermont: African American Farmers in Hinesburgh, 1790-1890. Elise Guyette. University of Vermont Press, 2010.

CCHS President Elise Guyette's *Discovering Black Vermont* joins Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina's *Mr. and Mrs. Prince* (2008) and Kari Winter's *The Blind African Slave* (2004) as books that help us

understand the complex story of African Americans living in Vermont during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While Holbrook Gerzina and Winter unraveled the story of individuals, Guyette's research focused on a small rural community of black families who were linked to other blacks throughout central and northwestern Vermont. In the absence of personal accounts, Guyette mined all sorts of official records to recreate the lives of the Peters, Edwards, Waters, Clark, Langley, Williams and Freeman families who settled and thrived on Lincoln Hill in Hinesburg in the decades before the Civil War.

Sunsets Over Lake Champlain: The Good Old Days in the Queen City of Burlington, Vermont. Alice Webster Wakefield. Wakefields Meadowbrook Farm, 2009.

In Sunsets Over Lake Champlain, Alice Webster Wakefield takes us back to the city of Burlington as she experienced it growing up during the 1950s-1970s. The book, which covers a variety of topics in 21 sections, presents a chronological tour of a time that Wakefield fondly remembers as "the good old days in the Queen City." Through Wakefield's memories, the reader experiences many aspects of daily life and some of the defining developments of the period, such as television, the interstate highway system, and urban renewal. There are photographs on all but a few of the book's 132 pages, and many include Alice and other members of the Webster family. Readers who lived in Burlington when Wakefield did and those who have come more recently will appreciate this book, inspired by the author's strong bond with the city where she grew up.

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Chittenden County
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