Like many—perhaps most—of us here, I found Sam Hand to be a great role model and mentor. He hired me for the Center, and although he was Director for only two of the thirty-plus-years I was at the Center, he remained deeply and substantively involved. Indeed, there is barely a corner of the Center’s activities where Sam did not play a significant role from definitive research on Vermont through NEH and other grants to publications to Research-in-Progress Seminars to conferences to two NEH-funded humanities series, each of which included 64 presentations and eight exhibits. George Bryan’s history of the Center lists Sam no fewer than 27 times (the most of any individual). In all of these endeavors, Sam gave generously of his time and attention. He could be impatient and his linguistic perambulations were challenging—I am proud to claim the equivalent of a master’s degree in Samese—but I think that was because he was usually thinking fifteen minutes ahead of everybody else. Above all, he was fair-minded, and he went out of his way time and time again to support and encourage other people, especially scholars new to the field. He believed 100 percent in the interdisciplinary nature of the Center. He would attend every presentation with genuine enjoyment and his own research would benefit from the insights of other disciplines. Sam had no patience for research silos or scholarly isolation and pretension; collaboration and collegiality came as naturally to him as breathing.

I think many of us absorbed his beliefs—perhaps by osmosis. Sam was very clear that the Center was not in the business of “celebrating” Vermont. We were to promote and encourage research that examined the state and painted a realistic portrait, warts and all. Nor did he think that the Center should promulgate its own research agenda; that smacked of arrogance. Instead, researchers should come up with the questions they wanted to pursue and the Center would support them in whatever way it could.

I could go on to describe Sam’s puckish sense of humor, his terrible puns, his love of musical theatre. . . . However, I will end here by saying how much I have enjoyed working on this project with Nick, Richard, and Kevin—we wish he could be here with us tonight—and Louis and Molly, the great students who helped us so much. Most of all, it has been tremendously meaningful to hear Sam’s voice again and to contemplate the fruits of his research. I am very grateful to the Center, especially Richard, for the opportunity and for this publication.