

Keeping Appraised

Newsletter of the Vermont State Archives & Records Administration

Office of the Vermont Secretary of State

Raising Spirits: Spooky Stories from Vermont Public Records

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Each year in October we celebrate American Archives Month to highlight the importance of archives and the work of archivists. The theme for Vermont Archives Month this year was *Spirits in the Archives*. On Thursday, October 11th the Vermont State Archives & Records Administration (VSARA) archivists guided attendees on an historical ghost tour through the vaults. Guests met spectres from Vermont history whose stories have been captured in public records.

The stories we told were inspired by true events researched at VSARA. State Archivist Tanya Marshall began the tour with details about a true cold case. In 1935, three unidentified skeletons were discovered in Middlebury, and the case remains unsolved. Using newspaper reports and state vital records, Marshall discussed the research behind what happened to these victims, and how people today can help solve the case.

correspondence of the Board of Railroad Commissioners helped detail the tragedy of one of Vermont's deadliest rail disasters.

Deputy Secretary of State Chris Winters regaled guests with a history of spiritualism in the state, including the story of famed medium Luvia Lafirira, his own great-grandmother. He told the history through legislative records, corporation records, and licenses from the time when fortune tellers were required to be licensed and registered with the state.



Stories come to life from archival public records. [Courtesy VSARA staff]

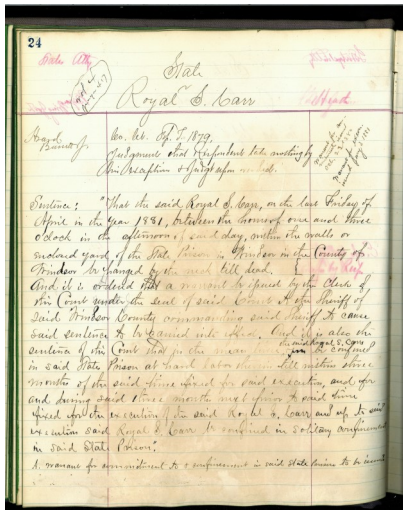
The attendees were led further into the darkened vaults to hear the spooky tale of five mysterious disappearances at Glastenbury Mountain. While this area is famed for its missing people in the mid-20th century, this version of the tale was told using maps from the Agency of Transportation and from the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation.

The final story involved a tale of true crime – of a murder most foul, and the last execution by hanging in the state. The storyteller used Governor's records, records of the State Prison, and a deathbed statement from May LaBelle, the 19-year-old victim. Many of the story's quotes were pulled directly from her statement, and the transcripts of witness testimony.

Next, attendees heard the tragic tale of the West Hartford Bridge Disaster of 1887. On a cold night in February, a train on the Central Vermont Railroad derailed from a bridge and into the icy river below, just a few miles from White River Junction. Thirty-seven passengers were killed, and another fifty were injured. Newspaper accounts, agency reports, and

Participants had a very warm reception to the event, and the storytellers and tour guides had a great time bringing these stories to life. If you'd like to research a spooky tale yourself, please contact the Reference Room at sos.archives@vermont.gov or (802) 828-2308.

State vs. Carr: Researching a Murder



Docket entry for *State v. Carr*, Washington Supreme Court, 1880. [Courtesy series SUPR-WA-001]

On October 25, VSARA held its final Archives Month event, a presentation by historian Dr. Jill Mudgett entitled “Murder, Mystery and Indigenous Mobility.” Mudgett is a cultural historian interested in the connection between people and the environment of northern New England. Vermont is the traditional homeland of the Abenaki people, and Mudgett examined the story of one indigenous

resident, William Wallace Murcommack. He was neighbor to the Carr brothers, and was murdered by Royal Carr in a remote area between Calais and Worcester. Through painstaking research, Mudgett was able to discover the victim’s identity as William Hazard, son of a Native physician from Connecticut. She traced his difficult early life in institutions, to his brief service in the military, to his eventual life selling baskets in Montpelier. Throughout the talk, Mudgett showed how the media and officials treated the murder of an indigenous man, and she demonstrated how court records can be just the beginning of a story.

The lecture was preceded by tours of the facility and an exhibit entitled “The State vs. Royal Carr: Documenting Murder.” The exhibit highlighted the wide range of material available at the Vermont State Archives for researching a murder, including newspapers, prison registers, court records, supreme court briefs, and legislative journals.

Addison Court Records Find New Home at VSARA

On September 7th, VSARA archivist Bethany Fair and Laura LaRosa of the Court Administrator’s Office met at the Mahady Courthouse in Middlebury to appraise and package records for transfer to the State Archives in Middlesex. With support from Addison County District Court staff, Bethany and Laura spent the day in the vaults and rooms of the courthouse basement, sorting through old record books, loose papers, and stacked boxes in search of archival records.

The Mahady Courthouse was constructed between 1995 and 1996 to replace the historic brick courthouse on 5 Court Street. When opened, a variety of records from court proceedings across Addison were sent to the new building for storage in the spacious basement vaults, including probate records from the now defunct New Haven Probate District which merged with the Addison Probate District in 1957. These probate records, along with several other significant and historic court records collections, were transferred to the Vermont State Archives in October. Records include cases from both New Haven and Addison probate districts, Addison Supreme Court record books, Addison Chancery Court record books, and

Addison County Court record books. Given the large scope and breadth of records transferred, records are expected to be made available to researchers by January 2019 at the earliest. For help researching court records in the state archives, see our [online guide](#).



Materials waiting to be transferred from the Mahady Courthouse. [Courtesy VSARA staff]

Bon Voyage! Kathy Watters Retires

This October, VSARA bid farewell to long-time and irreplaceable employee Kathy Watters. Kathy worked with the Secretary of State's Office for thirty years and



A smiling Kathy Watters cuts her cake on her last day! [Courtesy VSARA staff]

witnessed a great deal of change and growth in that time, including the creation of the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration in 2008. Often the first face to greet people at the door, Kathy worked the front desk, provided assistance in the State

Archives' reference room, helped manage Vermont's notaries and state filings, provided innumerable certifications and apostilles, and more.

Most of Kathy's employment was spent under State Archivist Emeritus Gregory Sanford, who offered these words: "I have many wonderful memories of the years I was privileged to serve as the state archivist, including, of course, the kaleidoscope of staff who showed me the different patterns within our work and service. "Staff" is inadequate term, since so many of my co-workers became friends as well as colleagues. Kathy Watters exemplifies this in myriad ways. When she was hired, she was an intern in the Secretary's business office. Over time, Kathy grew professionally and personally, becoming notary supervisor for Vermont, research archivist, and compiler of records for "Continuing Issues." Her many contributions are too extensive to enumerate. Crucial, to me, was her willingness to explain when my reach was exceeding the office's grasp. Whatever Kathy did, her constant gift was that she cared. Over time she became a dear friend, beloved by my family, and was there to help whenever she could. I was, and remain, proud to call her a treasured colleague and, especially, friend."

With a quiet gathering and a last-day cake, we sent her off to her new adventures. Kathy has left her mark on the Vermont State Archives, and she will be missed!

Vermont Receives Emergency Preparedness Grant

The Vermont State Archives & Records Administration, in collaboration with the Vermont Arts Council, has been awarded a \$15,000 grant to develop a statewide emergency preparedness and response network for Vermont-based performing arts and cultural heritage organizations. Funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation through the Performing Arts Readiness Project, the grant will be administered by the [Vermont Historical Records Program](#) (VHRP).

Performing arts organizations can be especially vulnerable to disasters and emergencies of all kinds, resulting in destabilizing or catastrophic loss of income and assets. The [Performing Arts Readiness Project](#) helps organizations nationwide learn how to protect their assets, sustain operations, and be prepared for emergencies.

"Vermont's performing arts and cultural heritage organizations play a vital role in the promotion and

preservation of our unique history and cultural institutions," said Secretary Condos. "We're grateful for this opportunity to work alongside our partners to ensure we have the preparedness measures in place to help prevent the loss of these valuable assets in a worst case scenario."

Vermont native and accomplished arts management consultant Mary Margaret Schoenfeld will lead the effort and work with various organizations to develop the network and services offered, as well as a sustainability plan. The statewide emergency preparedness and response network is anticipated to be introduced at a forum next summer.

For more information about VHRP or the statewide emergency preparedness and response network, contact VHRP Coordinator Rachel Onuf at rachel.onuf@vermont.gov or 802-828-2204.

Upcoming Events at VSARA

NOTICE: Winter Holiday Closures

The Vermont State Archives Reference Room will be closed on the following dates. Please plan accordingly:

- Tuesday, December 25—Christmas Day
- Tuesday, January 1—New Year's Day
- Monday, January 21—Martin Luther King Day
- Monday, February 18—Presidents' Day
- Tuesday, March 5—Town Meeting Day

Keeping Up with VT's Roving Archivist!

Follow along with Rachel Onuf, Coordinator of the Vermont Historical Records Program, on Twitter [@rovingarchivist](https://twitter.com/rovingarchivist)!

VPR producer Matthew Smith tagged along on a visit to the Pownal and Manchester Historical Societies in early December, hearing stories about archival treasures and meeting some of the people who care about and share Vermont history.

On December 10, Rachel gave a workshop on "How to Think Like an Archivist" to a dozen members of the Norwich Historical Society.

From the Vault _____



Vermont Governor F. Ray Keyser (1961-1963) receives an apparent holiday gift of a large decorative Santa Claus from Illinois Governor Otto Kerner (1961-1968). This image, taken in either 1961 or 1962, comes from the Department of Tourism and Marketing photo series (A-078) which spans several decades of publicity and promotion in the state.

On This Day in History

This issue looks at the birth and death dates of some of Vermont's former governors.

1860 (Dec. 3) - Former Gov. William A. Palmer (1831-35) dies in Danville. The only Vermont governor officially aligned with the Anti-Masonic party, he failed to get a majority of the votes and was thus elected by the General Assembly.

1935 (Jan. 16) - Former Gov. Franklin S. Billings (1925-27) dies in Woodstock. Among many previous positions held, Billings had been a member of the Commission on Conservation of Resources. He was also the nephew of Frederick Billings, whose Woodstock home would become a national park in the 1990s.

1799 (Feb. 18) - Among some of the earliest of Vermont-born governors, Ryland Fletcher (1856-58) was born on this day in Cavendish, where he also died. Besides his term as governor, Fletcher was also a farmer, teacher, and served in the state militia and Vermont legislature.

Contact Us

Have research questions?

Contact the VSARA Reference Room!

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<http://www.sec.state.vt.us/archives-records/state-archives>

Find us on Twitter: [@VTStateArchives](https://twitter.com/VTStateArchives)