



The Barnard Bulletin

MARCH 2021

Vol. XXXVI No. 3

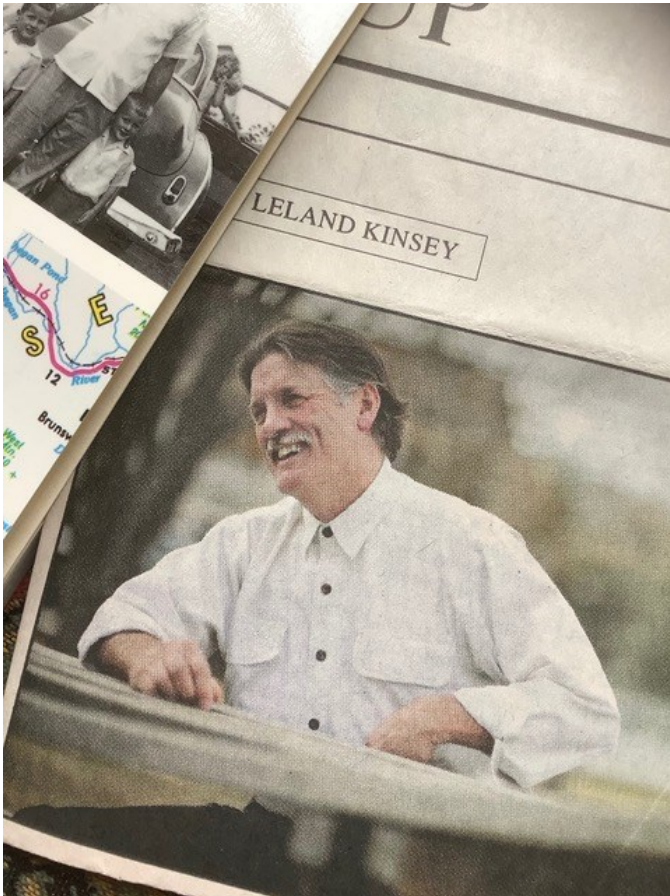
A VERMONT WRITER

BY MARGARET EDWARDS

This column is an offering of The Danforth Library in Barnard and a chance to introduce a Vermont writer who deserves wider renown.

Leland Kinsey

1950 – 2016



Leland Kinsey, 2014

The Northeast Kingdom, as it's called, is a quintessential part of Vermont encapsulated inside the larger whole. People who move here to the more popular, populous parts of the state eventually come to understand that a more hardscrabble, tougher, frontier-like region — the “real” Vermont — exists to the north and east. The best poet of the Kingdom to date was native to it. Leland (Lee) Kinsey was “seventh generation,” shorthand for rural aristocrat.

Lee (to his close friends and family) or Leland (to his grandmother and strangers) returned to his roots after college and settled in Barton, Vermont. There, over four decades, he somehow managed to make a living for himself, his wife and three children with farming and writing poetry. Those two avenues of endeavor are not likely to bring fame or riches; and both require very hard work; but anyone interested in the best contemporary poems being written in the Northeast Kingdom knew just who Leland Kinsey was and sought out his latest publications.

Kinsey was the second of five children who grew up on a farm in South Albany, Vermont. His Scottish forebears had carved out the Vermont communities of Albany, Glover, Craftsbury, and Greensboro. His early education (that he described in a private letter) was in a proverbial one-room schoolhouse, the same his mother had attended. “It had two front doors, one for boys and one for girls—18 students in eight grades when I began. I was fairly keen, and Mother wouldn’t allow them to skip me ahead (she had been skipped ahead 3 grades). So by January or February of each year, I was done all my work and running wild outside.”

That “running wild outside” may be what gave Kinsey an education that counted for a lot in his poems. He published seven books of poetry while he lived, and two more were published posthumously. When Kinsey died at age 66 of lymphoma, every person who had known him mourned the passing of “a Renaissance man,” a phrase that echoed through every effort to memorialize him.

His fellow writer Howard Frank Mosher said of him, “He was really the essential Vermonter who could do anything. He could milk a cow, he could fix a broken tractor, he could give a lecture at Harvard on modern poetry... His like will not be seen again.” Kinsey was hailed as a farmer, a sugar maker, a logger, an ornithologist, a consummate fly fisherman, and a journeyman teacher of poetry in Vermont’s public schools (as part of an Arts in the Schools program).

After graduating from Lake Region Union High School, Kinsey braved “the city” of Burlington, where he studied as an undergraduate at the University of Vermont. One of his professors who taught creative writing was stunned by the high quality and originality of such a young person’s poems and showed this work to fellow professors—who shared the awe. The question “But can you actually teach creative writing?” is a common one, the underlying assumption being that poetic genius is beyond pedantry. The come-back is usually, “Anyone can learn to write better—so, yes, it can be taught.” But Leland Kinsey’s early work seemed to be rising up, fully formed, from the soil, the flora, the fauna, and the farm life of the Northeast Kingdom. It was immediate.

After his college graduation, Kinsey earned a Master’s degree in the study of poetry at Syracuse University. This was probably a useful credential, but his work was already being recognized as unique and superlative. Everything he wrote was wrested from firsthand experience. And the hardscrabble farm life he knew was not being prettified or minimized by a romantic back-to-the-land ardor. In “Small Wounds and Minor Ailments,” he catalogues what has not been imagined but lived:

*I chased my brother through a pasture
until he ran into
a barbed wire fence that opened*

Cont. next page - Kinsey

Kinsey - Cont. from front page

*his cheek and neck.
I had not meant to hurt him
like that, but was going to fetch
him a few if I caught him.
I helped him home and caught
a few myself. Cold compresses
and carefully cut bandages
to pull the edges together
left only thin long scars
visible.*

Later in the same poem, Kinsey makes clear that a farm is an unforgiving environment where physical and mental challenges inevitably toughen those who must work the land to make a living:

*Building fence, pulling staples,
I drove a hammer claw
almost through my hand.
I looked at it and almost fainted
then hid it from my father,
he did not take our injuries well.
The rest of the day was hard work.*

Farm accidents—in all the poems—are brutal and mutilating. Often luck plays a role in the outcome, with the child who heads down a grain chute, first hitting a pile of empty feedbags before his skull hits cement, and he lives. But the poet's grandfather, so strong he could heft a full-grown pig's carcass over his shoulders, is killed when pinned to the ground by an overturned tractor.

In Kinsey's poems, nature is meticulously observed, with an eye to its utility—not just its aesthetics. In a long poem, "Winter Ready," the poet walks through a peat bog. He's already passed the "bottle gentian, asters, nettles/ last blooms of the late bloomers" when he surprises a feeding bull moose. It startles, then strains to find purchase in the muck and lumbers off.

*I noted the occasional leatherwood
shrub in case I need to peel one
in my winter treks, to use the impossibly
resilient bark as repairing thong
for snowshoe or toboggan lash.
I've had to work my way alone before
and still decline to be at the end
of any electronic leash, though
signals here would be distant and poor.*

His knowledge of his region's flora means that with remarkable verbal economy, Kinsey can wheel a poem through the seasons, as he does here in "Erratic Lunches":

*Month to month, we watch
daphne and rhodora give way
to bluet and yellow rattle, which fade
to hawkweed and steplebush.*

In this same poem, the poet enjoys an outdoor picnic lunch with his daughter, trying to stay within the moment of their sharing the grand view from the rock

they've climbed before sitting to eat. "I concentrate on just this place/ and what she and I are doing in it,/ and try not to know too often/ how my words will echo/ through every landscape of her life." He knows his words will echo for her, even as his deceased father's and mother's words echo for him.

Many of Leland Kinsey's poems have an "ancestral" quality, meaning they are ever mindful of those who came before and those who will follow after. Here, in "One Life's Work," he quotes from his grandmother's laconic journal entries:

*Her diary states of her first child
of eight: "Baby born."
Her noctuary, several babies later,
"My children do not sleep.
I am worrisome and fumble,
but he comes and holds them only a little
while and they are quiet,
seem made well for a time if sick.
No child of ours has died (yet?),
I will not think it."*

*And later. "He likes to watch
me take my hair down
and brush it almost to the floor.
It is starting to turn grey.
He is as strong as ever in every way.
Will my children have to care for me
as we do my parents now?"*

In many of Kinsey's poems, the present is knit to the past even as it hurtles toward the future. One senses that, at times, the compaction can be stifling, and some wonderful poems are written in sheer exuberance, when the poet lets his appreciation of an intense present overwhelm him. This is a section from "Ferrying Tractors":

*I used to enjoy the break from work.
I knew the road's ruts and washboards,
every frost, and culvert, heave;
summer and winter the deepest ditches
from which I'd pull the odd traveller;
the steepest hill where I would kick
the tractor out of gear loaded or not
and let it run down full tilt,
life or death be damned for the thrill;
the tractor's front end danced around
and lifted on that same hill as I hauled
overloaded corn trailers, the rear wheels spitting
and grabbing as they chewed—
the brakes wouldn't hold if I stopped—
and me pulling back on the steering wheel
as if to aide the pull,
ready to jump and pretend I could make it
if the tractor finally seemed it would not.
I knew every shady copse,
every brook, and each would draw
my eyes away from what immediately mattered,
the chatter of wheels on gravel
or chains on ice,*

*Kinsey - Cont. from previous page
the sense of speed in all
the world that I knew passing.*

Leland Kinsey, in this poem as in many of his others, acknowledges that life in the world is “passing” all too swiftly—and he wrote this well before he received any dire diagnosis. All of his poems are wise in how they record with honesty and a great depth of detail the way a life is lived richly, in full awareness, before its end.

Anyone who reads the encomiums to this poet, written in genuine anguish after his death, becomes aware of an interesting truth. Many poets are forgiven their hubris, ambitiousness, narcissism, thoughtlessness, ungoverned lust, etc.—because their work is so movingly expressive that it makes up for their flawed personalities. But in Leland Kinsey’s case, his work seems the outgrowth of his magnificent spirit. His kindness and attentiveness to other people matched his sensitivity to the natural world and his fine attunement to the complexities of Vermont. This was such a good man who deserved to be such a good poet.

Most of Leland Kinsey’s books of poetry are still in print: *Winter Ready*, *The Immigrant’s Contract*, *In the Rain Shadow*, *Sledding on Hospital Hill*, *Not One Man’s Work*, *Family Drives*, *Farmer’s Almanac*. Published after his death was *Last Correspondence*. If you wish to borrow any of his books, please write to the Danforth Library, P. O. Box 204, Barnard, VT 05031, Attn: Trustee Margaret Edwards.

LOCAL CRYPTOGRAM

A cryptogram is a code in which one letter is substituted for another. For example, the word “Church” could be written BWMSBW. The letter B would be the letter C and would be so throughout the entire message. In this message J = N. The solution is found by trial and error. The CRYPTOGRAM answer is on the last page.

“GC FQH UMK UW CXUHK DQOTX
NQBH FXKM CXK HRM HXGMKH
XUC QMN CXK FGMN ZJUFH
TUJN: FXKM GC GH HRDDKO GM
CXK JGIXC, QMN FGMCKO GM
CXK HXQNK.”
-TXQOJKH NGTEKMH,
IOKQC KVLKTCQCGUMH

PREKINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION

The Windsor Central Unified Union School District is accepting applications for the next school year. Please visit www.wcsu.net for more information, or use this [Application Form](#).

DANFORTH LIBRARY NEWS

Curbside service: Wednesdays from 3-5 p.m. and Saturdays 10 a.m. to Noon.

Call 802-234-9408 for pickup in the foyer. Masks required.

Please put returns in the outside book-return slot.

Our high-speed, ECFiber Wi-Fi is available from outside the building at any time.

New Books: *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* and *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (to fill in our series).

The Weather Story with Frances Fox, by Cyrena-Marie Arnold, a N.H. meteorologist. Kids 4-6.

Memoirs: Nell Painter’s *Old in Art School: A Memoir of Starting Over*. At the age of 64, historian Nell Irvin Painter leaves a chaired professorship at Princeton to go to art school.

Megan Rapinoe’s *One Life*. Olympic gold medalist and Women’s World Cup champion.

Non-Fiction: Glenn Adamson’s *CRAFT: An American History*. Former director of the Museum of Arts and Design in New York examines the unsung artisans who built the country literally by hand — from Indigenous and enslaved populations to today’s “maker” movement.

Fiction: For word lovers, a novel by Elie Williams: *Liar’s Dictionary*, by Elie Williams.

Better Luck Next Time, by Julia Claiborne Johnson. A story of friendship and love set in late 1930s Reno on a Divorce Ranch.

Poems: Richard Blanco. *How to Love a Country: Poems*
Elizabeth Alexander. *Crave Radiance: New and Selected Poems 1990-2010*.

Stay safe and well,

From all of us at Danforth Library

Trustees: Margaret Edwards, Judy Maynes, Ellen Miles, Susan McNulty, and Edythe Wright.

BARNARD VILLAGE SCOPING STUDY

The Barnard Village Sidewalk Project seeks to link the village center at the Barnard General Store and the “community beach” at the Silver Lake dam with Barnard Academy (the local elementary school), the Post Office, Danforth Library, the Community Church, the Town Hall, and Silver Lake State Park.

Please join us for the first public meeting of the Barnard Village Scoping Study (as it is formally called). Come share your concerns with the Village Center area and your ideas for the future of mobility, safety, and aesthetics along Route 12, Stage Road, and North Road.

Please go [HERE](#) for all the details.

THE PLANNING COMMISSION meets on the first Monday of the month at 7:00pm at the Town offices.

ECFIBER Governing Board meets the 2nd Tuesday of the month at 7pm in 012 Oakes Hall, Vermont Law School. More information at <https://www.ecfiber.net/>

BARNARD CONSERVATION COMMISSION meets the second Monday of the month, 7:00pm, Town Hall.

ZONING ADMINISTRATOR zoning@barnardvt.us, 234-9211. By appointment only, no standing hours during due to the COVID-19 restrictions. After hours cell 603-762-5280.

BEEES MEETINGS are held at 6:30pm on the 2nd Thursday of each month in the library at the school.

DANFORTH LIBRARY HOURS: Wed 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. and Sat 10:00 - Noon. Curbside only. Please call 802-234-9408 with requests. Mask required for pick up. Wi-Fi access available from outside the building.

SELECTBOARD meets the first and third Wednesday of the month at the Town offices at 7:00pm.

SELECTBOARD ASSISTANT, Rob Ramrath, 234-2911 x 2, Cell 603-762-5280, selectboard@barnardvt.us. By phone at any time, in person by appointment.

ZONING ADMINISTRATOR, Rob Ramrath, 234-2911 x 2, Cell 603-762-5280, zoning@barnardvt.us. By phone at any time, in person by appointment.

TOWN CLERK office hours are Monday & Tuesday, 8:00am-3:30pm. Public access is restricted. Call 234-9211 for an appointment.

THE DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD meets the third Thursday of the month at 7:00pm at the Barnard Town Hall as necessary.

THE BARNARD ACADEMY SCHOOL BOARD meets at 6:00pm at the school on the third Monday of each month.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY Programs to be announced. Questions? Email: historicalbarnard1761@gmail.com

BARNARD LISTERS listeners@barnardvt.us, 234-9576. Office hours, except holidays: Wednesday 9:00am - 11:00am; by appointment; or anytime a Lister is in the office.

THE BARNARD ENERGY COMMITTEE meets on the 2nd Tuesday of the month, 7:00pm at the Town Hall

YOGA CLASSES offered at Danforth Library, Mondays 9:00am - 10:30am with Amanda Anderson. Classes are by donation; for more information contact Amanda@innerliftyoga.com. Yoga Classes are also offered on Thursdays from 9-10:30 with Beth Umba. Contact Beth at: bethumba@gmail.com.

BARNARD GENERAL STORE, Monday-Saturday: 7am-7pm, Sundays: 8am-6pm. <https://www.facebook.com/barnardgeneralstore>

BARNARD LISTSERV: to subscribe please send an email to: barnard-subscribe@lists.vitalcommunities.org

RECYCLING Click [here](#) for Hours and Regulations

THE BARNARD INN is running a "Feeding Neighbors & Sustaining Community" campaign. Purchase an e-Gift Card and in turn the chefs will feed neighbors. Whole chicken dinners (serves 4-6) and individual sized meals to help feed Vermonters in need. Thank you and please stay safe. E-Gift Cards are available at www.barnardinn.com.

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WINDSOR CENTRAL UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT

The legal voters of the Town of Barnard, are invited to attend an **Informational Hearing** that will be held via audio/video conferencing pursuant to Act 92, on Thursday, February 25, 2021, commencing at 6:30 P.M., for the purpose of explaining the 2021-2022 proposed budget.

You may join the meeting from a PC, Mac, iPad, iPhone, an Android device or by phone. For the video link and phone number information, please visit the WCSU Calendar page at https://calendar.google.com/calendar/u/0/embed?ctz=America/New_York&src=wcsu.net_sg95u4berfjnthoj8g1c726rlo@group.calendar.google.com&pli=1 and select (click) the February 25th entry on the calendar.

Pursuant to Act 162 of 2020, the legal voters of Barnard are to vote by Australian Ballot on Tuesday, March 2, 2021 at the Barnard Town Hall between 10 am and 7 pm.

Please see page 3 of the [February issue of the Bulletin](#) for the full text of the warning.

CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

"It was one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade."

- Charles Dickens, Great Expectations

ANNUAL BARNARD TOWN MEETING

The Municipal portion of the Barnard Town Meeting will **not** be held on March 2, 2021, as would normally be required by State Law. The Vermont Legislature has taken action to allow the meeting to be postponed to a date later in the year. The laws regarding the warning of the meeting set certain time limits as to when a warning can be published. It is expected that the official Municipal Town Meeting warning will be released in April, and if so, will be printed in the May issue of the Bulletin.

The School Meeting vote will be by Australian Ballot on March 2, 2021, from 10am to 7pm at the Town Hall.