



The Barnard Bulletin

JULY 2021

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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.

Dorothy Canfield Fisher

1879 – 1958



Dorothy Canfield Fisher as a young woman, c. 1900

Because Dorothy Canfield had been born in Lawrence, Kansas, and was brought up to think of herself as mid-Western, and also because she had graduated from Ohio State (where her professor father was president), then had studied languages for several years in Europe, Dorothy Canfield brushed off later being labeled a New England writer. She didn't like the narrow categorization. But she soon learned to claim turf as her contemporary Robert Frost had done. (Frost was born in San Francisco and had reached the age of ten before coming east to Massachusetts). Being associated with New England, and especially with Vermont, was helpful to a writer's literary reputation. Americans admire loyalty to place, and the traditional first question to a new acquaintance ("Where are you from?") is supposed to have a fixed answer.

Dorothy's family owned a house in the town of Arlington, Vermont, and as she was growing up, she spent summers there. When she married John Redwood Fisher, a native of the state, she married her Vermont identity—for the two lived very "happily ever after" in the Arlington farmhouse with sweeping views and a substantial acreage that belonged in John's family. John was the younger of the two, having received his bachelor's degree from Columbia University in 1904 at the same time Dorothy had received a doctorate. They married in 1907.

Dorothy and her husband did not disappear into a "drab" rural anonymity. They were determined to be writers, and their daily routine in Arlington was one of fierce self-discipline. Dorothy's strict allocation of her hours al-

lowed her to write prolifically, as well as to lead an active social and civic life, all while raising two children. She began her career by selling stories to the ladies' magazines, then graduated to serializing her books. She also took on hefty jobs involving translation. The eventual result of her determination was phenomenal. Writer Molly Walsh, in a 2017 *Seven Days* article, put it succinctly:

Dorothy Canfield Fisher was no slouch... [She] wrote 40 books, spoke five languages and received at least eight honorary degrees. When she wasn't writing, the best-selling novelist was leading World War I relief efforts, managing the first U.S. adult education program, and promoting prison reform. Eleanor Roosevelt named her one of the 10 most influential women in the United States.

There was considerable breadth to Dorothy's interests, and her interests, always hotly pursued, became material for her writings. While in Italy in 1912, she met and befriended Maria Montessori, whose theories of education impressed her. Afterward she wrote and published *A Montessori Mother* (1912), *The Montessori Manual* (1913) and *Mothers and Children* (1914), effectively bringing Montessori's methods to the United States.

The town of Arlington often became a thinly disguised setting for Dorothy's fictions. In the 1920s and '30s, her stories and novels examining marriage and family were widely read. In the 1940's and 1950's her attention fastened on a number of causes: environmental and historical preservation, children's education, adult learning, and prison reform. She was eager to address racial equality before the law, even as she worked closer to home to bring more business and tourism to Vermont. She wrote fiction and non-fiction to serve her various ends.

Herein lies the problem of much of Dorothy Canfield Fisher's work, which was very popular in its day but does not command a wide readership now. There are moments to be found in most of her books in which she eloquently belabors platitudes. A reader can sense a woeful didactic impulse behind the fiction. Each narrative presents a relentless display of how to overcome whatever problems have been presented.

Robert Frost once wrote to his friend Dorothy with a mixture of candor and diplomacy about her work's deficiency. He starts with praise: "You doubtless carry round in your head as much of Kansas, Ohio, and France as of Vermont. That's what I am always struck with in your stories—the amount of material you swing." But then he admits, "...I don't always like what you make it come to or seem to prove in the working out." Even so, he goes on to praise her novel *Her Son's Wife* (1926): "I surely like what you make it come to in Mrs. Bascomb." That specific character, he maintains, is admirably complex. "You pack her figure full." (And indeed, *Her*

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Fisher - Cont. from front page

Son's Wife has proved over time to have been one of Dorothy's best.)

Dorothy was not attuned to her flaw of didacticism, the preacher's vice. She prided herself foremost on her *honesty*. She believed all her work was refreshingly stripped of any pretense. She was frank and her prose was straightforward as she intently went about her business of touching her many readers' hearts and stirring their consciences.

A contrast can be instructive. Dorothy's 1920 novel *The Brimming Cup* was published in the same year as Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* created a sensation. Many critics preferred his devastating portrayal of a typical American small town in all its smug provincialism. But Dorothy had her staunch defenders. Her biographer Elizabeth Yates recounts how William Lyon Phelps praised *The Brimming Cup* as "a truly American novel, written with beauty and dignity, and founded on the unshakeable truth of experience." *The Bookman* magazine's reviewer admired "her firm handling of the intimate details of neighborhood life" and her "joyful understanding of the burdens [and] trials...of the American family." The review concluded: "She gives comfort to many persons disturbed by the radical outbursts of 1920."

Dorothy's book became known as "the other side of *Main Street*"—with Lewis cast as the prosecutor and Dorothy as "the most effective attorney for the defense." Biographer Yates, in *The Lady From Vermont*, describes a scene in which Sinclair Lewis was taken by Alfred Harcourt (the publisher) to meet John and Dorothy Fisher at their Arlington home.

Lewis gazed at her shrewdly [and said], "You're the biggest kind of liar."

"You must remember, Mr. Lewis," Dorothy replied, "that I see things in quite a different light than you do."

Indeed, there was a marked difference between them, a difference on which literary history has since passed its judgement: *Main Street* is required reading for anyone interested in studying America in the era of the 1920's; *A Brimful Cup* is forgotten.

Here, as a sample of Dorothy's style, are two paragraphs lifted from "Through Pity and Terror..."—one of her stories set in France in the aftermath of World War I. Dorothy had been there, and her realistic descriptions, she insisted, were based on actual experience:

The kitchen, emptied of all its shining copper and enamel utensils, was one litter of splintered wood, remnants of furniture which had been cut up with the ax for fuel. Madeleine recognized pieces of her mahogany beds there. Through the kitchen window she looked down into the walled space which had been the garden and saw it a bare, trampled stable-yard, with heaps of manure. She looked at all this in per-

fect silence, the children clinging to her skirts, the baby sleeping on her arm. She looked at it, but days would pass before she really believed that what she saw was real.

A woman's voice called quaveringly from the landing: "Madame Brismantier, are you alive? The Germans have gone." Madeleine stepped to the landing and saw old Sister Ste. Lucie. Her face which had always been so rosy and fresh was as gray as ashes under her black-and-white coif. She leaned against the wall. At the sight of the sleeping baby in Madeleine's arms, the gray face smiled, the wonderful smile which women, even though vowed to childlessness, give to a new mother. "Oh, your baby came," she said. "Boy or girl?" "Yes," said Madeleine, "he came. A boy. A nice little boy." For one instant the two women stood there in that abomination of desolation, death all around them, looking at a newborn life—smiling.



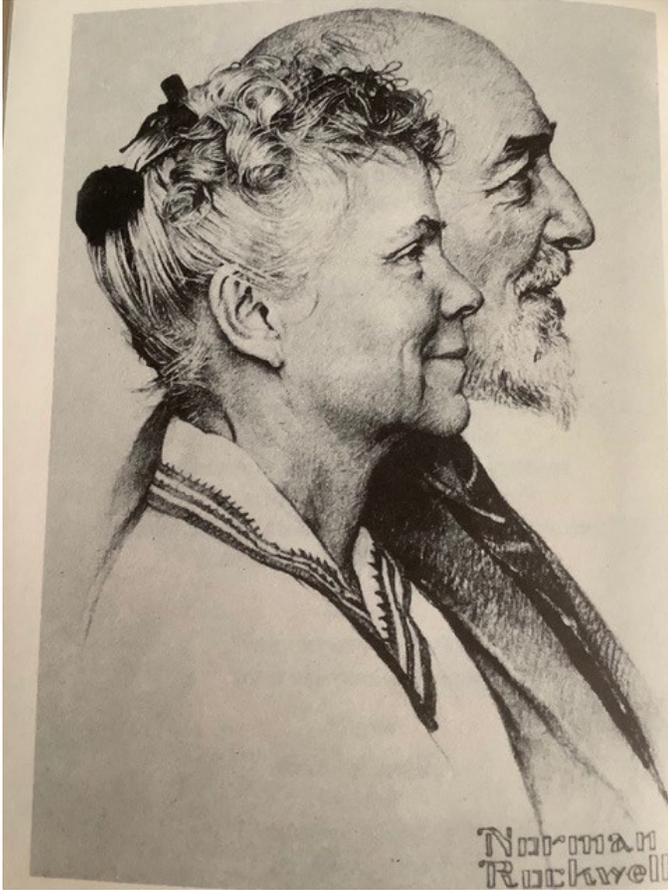
Dorothy Canfield Fisher in 1940

The decades that followed her single confrontation with Lewis brought Dorothy Canfield Fisher great fame. Critics who viewed her and her work in a very positive light continued to heighten her reputation throughout the U.S. Her books began being published in several languages, and invitations poured in for her to appear and speak before an adoring public.

A deafness that had begun to increase and bedevil her shortly after the birth of her children, was later abated by the early, crude hearing aids—and she never held back nor was she reticent about her disability. By the time of her death in 1958, her reputation and influence were assured. She died in Arlington and was buried there, soon to be joined by her husband whose death occurred the next year.

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Fisher - Cont. from previous page



Dorothy Canfield Fisher and her husband were sketched by Norman Rockwell, their neighbor in Arlington, Vermont.

In her honor a dorm was named for her at Vermont's Goddard College. Also the state of Vermont established a popular children's literature award bearing her name:

The Dorothy Canfield Fisher Book Award is a reading program and an award. Annually librarians, authors and teachers volunteer to read some 100 books that are suitable for children in grades 4 to 8. These readers vote on their preferences, and the top 30 are named to Dorothy's List. Vermont public and school libraries stock copies and encourage children to read at least five books. The young readers cast votes for the best book out of the 30, which is then named as the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Book Award winner the next spring.

For almost sixty years this annual Award took place as described. Then, in 2017, an Abnaki educator brought to the attention of the Vermont Department of Libraries her assessment that Fisher had stereotyped French Canadians and aboriginal Americans in her work and had associated with some Vermont eugenicists. Though it wasn't proved that Fisher herself promoted sterilizing Vermonters considered genetically "undesirable," other library officials maintained that perhaps it was time for a name change because Fisher's works were no longer being widely read and her name was no longer famous.

Imagine how stunned the beloved author from Arlington would be to learn that she—the "comfort" of the establishment, the polite but determined feminist, the well-praised writer whose liberal aim was to be ever inclusive of her fellow Americans—yes, that *she* had become no longer worthy of such an honor once fondly bestowed.

Among Dorothy's eloquent defenders was Philip Baruth, a professor of English at the University of Vermont and a Representative in Vermont's State House. "I don't mean to make light of the eugenics movement; it was a horrible thing," said Baruth. "But I've yet to see evidence that Dorothy Canfield Fisher was an active part of that movement or that she campaigned for its goals. Having taught her work, having thought a great deal about her work and also having investigated this controversy," he continued, "I just don't see there's the kind of evidence you would need to say this person is a eugenicist, this person is generally neo-Nazi in her views."

Nevertheless, in 2019 the Vermont Department of Libraries announced that what had been the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award would be receiving a new name for 2020.

Two biographies of Dorothy Canfield Fisher are owned by the Danforth Library and available for readers to check out. They are: *The Lady from Vermont: Dorothy Canfield Fisher's Life and World* by Elizabeth Yates and *Dorothy Canfield Fisher: A Biography* by Ida H. Washington. Several works of fiction by Fisher are on order for the Danforth Library: *The Bedquilt and Other Stories*, *Her Son's Wife*, *Understood Betsy*, and *Bonfire*.

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 X = T. The solution is found by trial and error. The CRYPTOGRAM answer is on the last page.

"U CPUBXSC UWXL Q HIJJSP -
 WQR IWCSP XES ELX HEQCS LB
 GIOV, HSPSWQCSC MV Q
 DUDQCQS OIOOQMV, XL CPLNHV
 -NQPJ CPSQJH LB CUHXQWX
 XEIWCS P."
 -XSPPU FIUOOSJSXH

RACE AROUND THE LAKE WINNERS

The Race Around the Lake was a big success. We had 144 runners & walkers complete the 5k, and 66 runners complete the difficult 10k that goes over Tower Road!

Race Aroud the Lake 2021 — Over all winners:

10k Men

1. Zackary Nolan of Rumney, NH time: 47:27
2. Andrew Spring of Bridgewater Corners 52:14
3. Jonathan Greenberg of Woodstock. 53:47

10k Women

1. Sylvia Baggish of Cambridge, MA 54:25
2. Erin Salcone of Norwich 58:27
3. Eleanor Frost. 59:36

5k Women

1. Hannah Reed of Woodstock 29:28
2. Ayla Pearson of Cornish, NH 29:56
3. Izze Baggish of Cambridge, MA 30:53

5k Men

1. Jesse Vining of Burlington 24:51
2. William White of Bethel 25:59
3. Luke Stockmayer of York, ME 26:47

Also worth noting to our Barnard community:

14 year old Caeden Perreault of Barnard came in 5th overall in the 5k and Cole Little and Sarea Beardsley, both 5th graders at Barnard Academy, won their 12 and under age brackets in the 5k.

Thank you to our Barnard businesses that join our other generous regional sponsors and prize donors each year in making this event a big success:

- Twin Farms - Gold Sponsor plus Beef Chili donation
- Cayer Electrical - Gold Sponsor
- SILO Distillery - Gold Sponsor
- Barnard Rec Department - Gold Sponsor
- Rigali Orthodontix - Gold Sponsor
- Barnard General Store - Gift cards as prizes
- Wood's Family Syrup Co - Maple Syrup as prizes
- Silver Lake Syrup - Maple Syrup and coupons for free maple creamy as prizes
- Fable Farm - Gift certificates plus Apple Cider Vinegar as prizes
- Crystal Garden Herbs - Natural Bug Repellent as prizes
- Cayer's Honey - Honey donation as prizes

Thanks also to the Barnard Volunteer Fire Department for sharing their tents with us and the Barnard Town Garage, Silver Lake State Park and the BGS for graciously sharing their cones.

And thanks to all our RUNNERS and WALKERS who love this event, and our volunteers who make it fun and safe!

The Race Around the Lake is the biggest fundraiser BarnArts does each year and all funds go to our Youth Programming. This summer's Summer Youth Theater will be Fiddler on the Roof!

Linda Treash
Executive Director info@barnarts.org
BarnArts Center for the Arts 802-234-1645 (voice mail)
PO Box 41 802-234-6980 (home)
Barnard, VT 05031 802-558-5354 (mobile)

EAST BARNARD CHURCH RESUMES SERVICES

East Barnard church is resuming services this summer from June 27 - August 29 at 10 a.m., corner of Broad Brook and Allen Hill Roads.

We welcome back Amber Leavitt as Music Director.

This summer, we have invited Jane Huber to lead worship.

Attendees are asked to follow the VT guidelines regarding COVID 19.

Mollie McHugh
Clerk, East Barnard Church

SILVER LAKE PROGRESSIVE CLUB NEWS

SUBMITTED BY JUDY MAYNES

Calling all bakers...

The Silver Lake Progressive Club's Bake Sale (along with the Barnard Fire Department's annual BBQ) will occur this year on Saturday, July 3rd, at the Town Hall parking lot. All proceeds from the Bake Sale will go towards the Progressive Club scholarship that is awarded each year to an outstanding Woodstock Union High School senior from Barnard who is headed for college.

We would welcome donations of pies, cakes, cookies, cupcakes, brownies, quiche, and any other homemade specialties. Please make sure to add a note if your recipe includes nuts. Bring your baked items to the sale table at 9 a.m. that Saturday.

For more information, please contact Michelle Spencer by email: bukashells@gmail.com

Thank you!

The Silver Lake Progressive Club

The Barnard Bulletin is published around the twentieth of each month. On the web at BarnardBulletin.news. Send mail to PO Box 161 Barnard VT 05031-0161

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

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

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

DANFORTH LIBRARY HOURS: Wednesdays 3:00 - 5:00 p.m., Saturdays 10:00 a.m. to Noon. ECFiber Wi-Fi access available .

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

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

ZONING ADMINISTRATOR, Rob Ramrath, zoning@barnardvt.us, 234-2911 x 2, Cell 603-762-5280. 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 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.

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/>

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

CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

"I drifted into a summer-nap under the hot shade of July, serenaded by a cicadae lullaby, to drowsy-warm dreams of distant thunder."

- Terri Guillemets

BARNARD FIREMANS FLEA MARKET AND BARBECUE

JULY 3RD, 2021

Barnard Fireman are scheduling donation pick-ups for the July 3rd flea market beginning on Tuesday, June 22nd. *Pick-ups this year will be limited to Barnard residences only.* Other donations of gently used items can be left at the Barnard town hall beginning June 22nd. Barnard residents can call Fire Chief Scott Mills at 234-9073 or Rob Tracy at 234-9785 to schedule items to be picked up, or for more information.

Please do not bring clothing, bed linens, sheets, towels, or any other soft goods and no appliances please. The flea market will open at 10am and chickens will be ready from the grill by noon. Raffle tickets will be available for a variety of prizes including handcrafted picnic tables and fuel oil or propane among others.

Thank you for supporting the Barnard Fire Department!

DANFORTH LIBRARY NEWS

DANFORTH LIBRARY'S BOOK ROOM REOPENS!

We are pleased to welcome you all back in the building

Wednesdays 3:00 -5:00 p.m.

Saturdays 10:00 a.m. to Noon.

ECFiber Wi-Fi

One Vermont State Park Day Pass and one Vermont Historic Sites pass available for short-term loan.

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



Fourth Of July!