The Barnard Bulletin
DECEMBER 2023 Vol. XXXVIII No. 12

A VERMONT WRITER

BY MARGARET EDWARDS

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

Catherine Cate Coblentz **1897 – 1951**

Undated photo of Catherine Cate Coblentz

As a young woman of college age, Catherine Emma Cate must have been fiercely determined to see a wider world than her birthplace of Hardwick, Vermont. While the First World War raged abroad, she found herself a job with the National Bureau of Standards in Washington, D. C. By day, she handled appointments for the Civil Service, and by night she attended George Washington University, from which she eventually graduated. Her interest was history. She had a Mayflower ancestor—and perhaps reverence for such a storied ancestor was what originally sparked her fascination with the past. She also liked to write. Even before her move to Washington, she had joined the Poetry Society of America. Her short stories were serious efforts.

Well-balanced and capable Catherine Cate was swept off her feet romantically by an unlikely person, a handsome but never-married bachelor who was 24 years her senior, named William Weber Coblentz. He was a driven man, already distinguished as a physicist, whose contributions in the fields of infrared radiometry and spectroscopy were going to make him very well known. He too worked at the National Bureau of Standards (later retitled the National Institute of Science and Technology). He spent long hours in his laboratory doing research, then retreated to his home to analyze data and write the many scientific papers which he published prodigiously. Somehow these two managed to meet, fall in love, and marry in 1924. She was twenty-seven; he was fifty-one.

Promptly they went on a honeymoon to Flagstaff, Arizona, where Dr. Coblentz spent much of his time at the Lowell Observatory measuring planetary temperatures. (Besides his training as a physicist, he had a keen and abiding interest in astronomy.) His new bride, left to her own devices, wasn't inclined to languish. She began to find her way and to follow her own intellectual pursuits. Eventually she would immerse herself in historical research and write books that combined facts interlaced with fanciful fiction. In her novel *The Beggar's Penny* she drew on her interest in Dutch independence. (She and her husband had taken a trip to Leyden.) Another of her books from that same source was *The Bells of Leyden Sing*. She liked to write adventure stories for children. *The Falcon of Eric the Red* was not as well received as *Sequoya*, the life of the Cherokee brave who gave his people an alphabet.

Catherine Cate Coblentz's best book, by far, was *The Blue Cat of Castle Town.* First published in 1949, it has been reprinted numerous times and was made available in paperback by The Countryman Press of Woodstock, Vermont, in 1993, which was its fifth printing. The book came about in the summer of 1946 when Catherine and her husband visited Castleton, a Vermont town west of Rutland, quite far from Catherine's birthplace in the Northeast Kingdom. Word had reached Mr. Coblentz in Washington that on Grandpa's Knob, a high point of land above Castleton, a giant windmill—or wind turbine—had been built. It had been devised specifically to generate electricity and was something the scientist not only wished to see but to examine carefully. (What a strange preview into our twenty-first century technology he was about to have!)

Catherine's husband spent most of his time among the clever men on Grandpa's Knob. Meanwhile Catherine met Castleton's librarian Hulda Cole at a church supper. The librarian delighted in telling Catherine interesting facts—for instance, how Revolutionary War hero Ethan Allan had set out from this very village to take Fort Ticonderoga from the British. One of Castleton's early citizens, a carpenter, had built what was still considered "the most beautiful church pulpit in all of Vermont."

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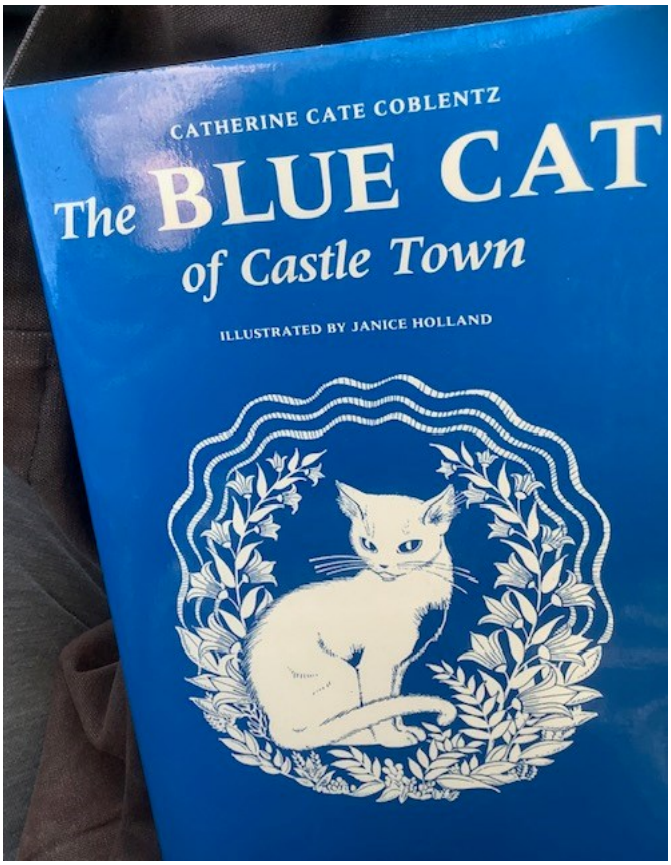
Coblentz - Cont. from previous page

Another villager, a mere girl, had woven a rug so intricate and beautiful that it now hung in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. One of the designs in that rug was somewhat mysterious: a blue cat. Yes, *blue*.

Hulda Cole also revealed that a Castleton schoolteacher, Mary Gerrish Higley, had been assiduous and untiring in collecting and preserving source material of historic importance to the town. There was plenty of it. Soon the Vermont author "visiting" from Washington was being entrusted with this very material, then using it to write a new novel.



Catherine Cate Coblenz always had a keen eye for research. She liked to enliven history with a fanciful, purely fictional story—as if to make what might be dry and dull more enchanting. She wrote a clean, clear prose, and her powers of description were admirable. She set a scene well. Here, for example, is a very convincing barn in *The Blue Cat of Castle Town*:

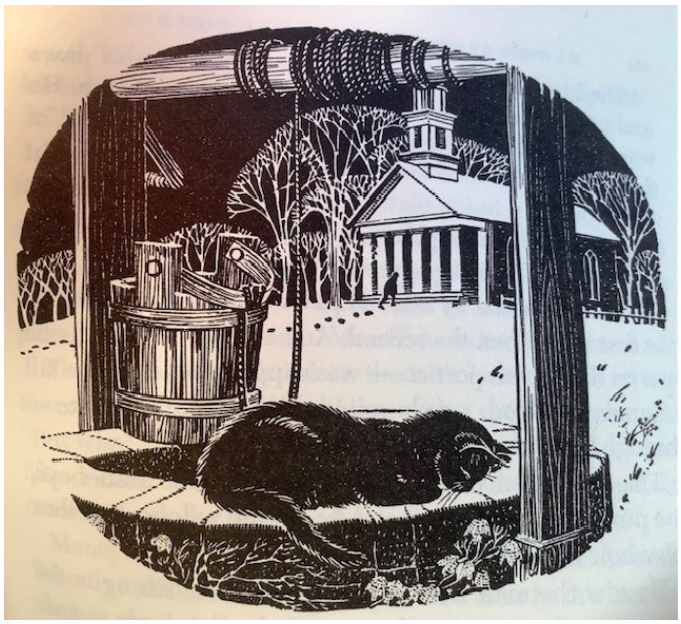
> *He could hear cows in their stanchions stirring and munching at their hay. Some hens were clucking softly. A stream of sunlight coming through a little dust-covered window sifted down warmly upon him. A spider worked at her web. Sweet fragrance from the hay rose all about. Everything in that place was filled with beauty and peace and content…*

Like any born and bred Vermonter, Catherine knew the landscape by heart and so could easily conjure in prose how swiftly the New England autumn becomes winter:

> *Over and over, day after day…the bright leaves fell from the trees. The last asters and goldenrod disappeared, the maples and sumac lost their brave scarlet, the bronze of the fern fronds dulled. The birds flew south.*
>
> *The wind howled and moaned. Then the snow came, flake after flake, thicker and thicker, swirling in gusts, beating at the frost-covered window…sifting in at the door…*

What eluded Coblentz was storytelling vigor. She had little gift for imaginative narrative. Unmoored from historical facts, she tried her best at whimsy—but usually her fancifulness came off as forced or contrived. Her fictional characters, whether humans or animals, often lacked clear motives. In creating dialogues for them, she leaned heavily on sentimental clichés.

What rescues *The Blue Cat*…beyond its many charming illustrations by Janice Holland, is its vivid Vermont setting and the forays the author makes into delineating actual historical figures and describing their accomplishments. The pewterer, the carpenter, and the weaver, among others, are compelling. ("Every person mentioned in the book actually lived in the town" states the epilogue.) On the other hand, the blue cat seated by a river and learning the river's song, then wandering through the town trying to teach the song to various others, doesn't work well as an allegory. It seems arbitrary.



An illustration of the blue cat by artist Janice Holland

The devoted Coblentzes, physicist and children's book author, resided all their married lives in Washington, D.C. Catherine Cate Coblentz died there on May 29, 1951. She was buried in Rock Creek Cemetery near the body of her infant daughter. Eleven years later, William Coblentz joined them there.

His honors were many. He was elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences in 1930. He was award-

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Coblentz - Cont. from previous page

ed the Howard N. Potts Medal from the Franklin Institute (1911), and the Rumford Prize from the American Academy (1937), and the Frederic Ives Medal from the Optical Society of America (1945). The Coblentz Society (named for him, as is the Coblentz Medal) is dedicated to the understanding and application of vibrational spectroscopy.

Her honors were few—in fact, only one: The Children's Room of Washington's Cleveland Park Library is dedicated to her.

The gravesite in Rock Creek Park Cemetery, Washington, D.C.

Barnard's Danforth Library owns a paperback copy of Catherine Cate Coblentz's *The Blue Cat of Castle Town*. This edition is the fifth printing of the original book, published in 1993 by The Countryman Press of Woodstock, Vermont

DANFORTH LIBRARY NEWS

November is National American Indian Heritage Month and we pulled a selection of nonfiction and fiction books for this month's display to celebrate and educate.

For those interested in learning more, below is the website to a collaborative project by the Library of Congress, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Gallery of Art, the National Park Service, the Smithsonian Institution, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

https://nativeamericanheritagemonth.gov

The Danforth Library Trustees

Charles B. Danforth Library, P.O. Box 204, Barnard, VT 05031
6208 VT Route 12
Phone: 802-234-9408
Email: charlesdanforthlibrary@gmail.com
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/charlesdanforthlibrary/

Hours: Mon, Wed, & Thurs: 3-5 p.m.; Sat. 10 a.m. - Noon

Wi-Fi available

Trustees: Berna Donlon, Margaret Edwards, Judy Maynes, Susan McNulty, and Kassie Tibbott-Hull.

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

"F I RIGFDIX XFQDP, OBXS

EAJFEP RIE ABQRIP SJIC

PHAFCP BU QFPXKDXBD FI

XSDFA SBQDP RIE HKRGDP BU

GDKDOARXFBI XB OAFIC CBBE

UBAXJID, HDRGD RIE KBTD."

-RJXSBA JILIBZI

FUNDS STILL AVAILABLE BARNARD HOME ENERGY UPGRADE CAMPAIGN

Snow on the ground makes it real: winter is coming.

If you've been thinking about weatherizing your home, here's good news. There still are funds in the Barnard Home Energy Upgrade campaign for Barnard homeowners who want to take action.

Home energy upgrades can help keep your home at the temperature you want, whatever the season, and reduce your use of fossil fuels. The campaign offers financial support for addressing water in the basement, insulation,

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heat pump water heaters, and cold climate heat pumps for heating and cooling. This is for both year-round and seasonal residences.

The first step is to get a home energy audit with an EEN contractor. More than 20 people in town have done this. Now they are reading the report from that audit, learning what possible improvements they might make to their homes. Some have gone further and scheduled work to be done.

There's still time to get involved. Learn more about the campaign and the financial incentives here in the handout, or pick up a printed copy at the Town Office or the Barnard General Store (thank you, Jillian & Joe!).

Feel free to contact us with questions: BarnardBonus@icloud.com. If there is interest, we can hold an in-person presentation or question-and-answer session in the near future.

Barnard Energy Committee

FALL 2024 PREKINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION

The Mountain Views Supervisory Union is still accepting initial applications for prekindergarten for the 2024/2025 school year. Students must have reached the minimum age of three years old on or before September 1, 2024, to be eligible. The initial application and more information can be found on our website at https://mtnviews.org/prek. The initial application window closes at 4:00 p.m. on December 4, 2023.

Rayna Bishop
Mountain Views Supervisory Union
(f.k.a. Windsor Central)
Woodstock, VT

BARNARTS EVENTS SCHEDULE

BarnArts Chorale & Youth Chorale!

BarnArts Chorale rehearsals began November 13th! All ages and experience levels are welcome to join this free choral training with conductor and jazz musician Michael Zsoldos.

Rehearsal Dates: Mondays - November 20, 27, December 4 & 11 plus dress rehearsal Thurs, Dec 14.

Winter Carols will be Friday, December 15th

The Importance of Being Earnest

Oscar Wilde's comedy of manners pokes fun at every facet of (Victorian) life - names, marriage, family, identity, and where you live. Performances February 9-11 & 15-18 at the Barnard Town Hall.

Contact BarnArts for more information.

A Wassail Weekend Event on December 9th

We are taking our Wassail Weekend music event to the Little Theater for 2023 and turning it into a night of dinner and dancing!

Farm-to-table dinner

Dancing with the Speak Easy Prohibition Band: Bob Merrill (piano), Tim Gilmore (drums), Peter Concilio (bass), Glendon Ingalls (trumpet), Katie Runde Sanchez (saxophone), Grace Wallace (vocals) plus BarnArts guest vocalists Jill Clough & Killian White.

Saturday, December 9th, 6-10pm
Four-course Farm-to-Table Dinner Buffet

Cash bar provided by Fable Farm Fermentory featuring special holiday cocktails, locally crafted cider, wine & beer.

Tickets available here.

BarnArts Center for the Arts	info@barnarts.org
PO Box 41	802-234-1645
Barnard, VT 05031	www.barnarts.org

POTTER'S ANGELS RESCUE 2024 CALENDAR FUNDRAISER

We still have some of our beautiful 2024 calendars available. All the proceeds from this calendar go directly to the animals in the rescue. We have no overhead costs, we are all volunteers here at Potter's Angels rescue. For just $15 you get a beautiful calendar and you help us save the life of another dog.

They make great gifts, and there are some beautiful pictures to look at throughout the year.

Please email me if you would like a copy. I can arrange to meet you or use the link to purchase it online and have it mailed directly to you if you are not in the local area.

https://www.pottersangelsrescue.org/product-page/2024-rescue-dog-calendar

There are also several sponsors that have the calendars available in their locations. Teago General store, Bethel Village sandwich shop, CockadoodlePizza to name a few.

Nutmeg from the Barnard Inn is featured in the month of October.

ARTISTREE

Opening for a part time Events Coordinator

Wanted: Events Coordinator (Part-Time) Position

This is a part-time, hourly position. The standard schedule will be approximately 20 hours per week, with flexibility and some availability on evenings and weekends required

Responsibilities include: Handling all inquiries and communications regarding events and rentals, including space rentals, birthday parties, and other scheduled events; Walking prospective patrons through available event spaces; Handling contracts for events and space rentals; Hosting on-site events, including availability for parties; Providing front-end support for concerts and other performances and special events; Primary point of contact for outside rental of Artistree housing, as required; Primary role in organizing and executing occasional events within Artistree, including periodic fundraising events; Coordinating relationships with vendors to support events and activities; Maintaining rental page and marketing materials on Artistree website; Collaborating with coworkers to achieve Artistree goals through communication, teamwork, and problem-solving; Primary responsibility for managing Events department budget

To apply: Please send a cover letter, resume, and a list of two to three professional references to programming@artistreevt.org.

Artistree Community Arts Center & Gallery
2095 Pomfret Road/PO Box 158
South Pomfret, VT 05067
802.457.3500 ext. 111
www.artistreevt.org

Support Artistree at: https://artistreecommunityartscenter-bloom.kindful.com/

SBA DISASTER ASSISTANCE

The SBA is not just for small Business. There are disaster loans available for other organizations and home owners. These loans include:

Business Disaster Loans
Economic Injury Loans
Home Disaster Loans

Visit: DisasterLoan.SBA.gov/ela for more information on securing a disaster loan.

CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

"In ancient times, both Druids and Romans hung sprigs of mistletoe in their homes and places of celebration to bring good fortune, peace and love."

- Author Unknown

THE PLANNING COMMISSION meets on the Monday prior to the first Wednesday of every month at 7 PM in the Town Office.

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: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, 3:00 - 5:00 pm, Saturdays 10:00 am to Noon. ECFiber Wi-Fi. Contact us: phone: 802-234-9408. Email: charlesdanforthlibrary@gmail.com.

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

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR, Rob Ramrath, selectboard@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 and 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

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 via. Zoom. Contact the clerk of the District. secretary@ecfiber.net, for meeting information or visit https://www.ecfiber.net/virtual-meetings/

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

DELECTABLE MOUNTAIN QUILTERS (DMQ) meet the 1st Tuesday of every month at the Bethel Library from 1-3pm. Contact: Mary Croft 802-763-7074