The Barnard Bulletin

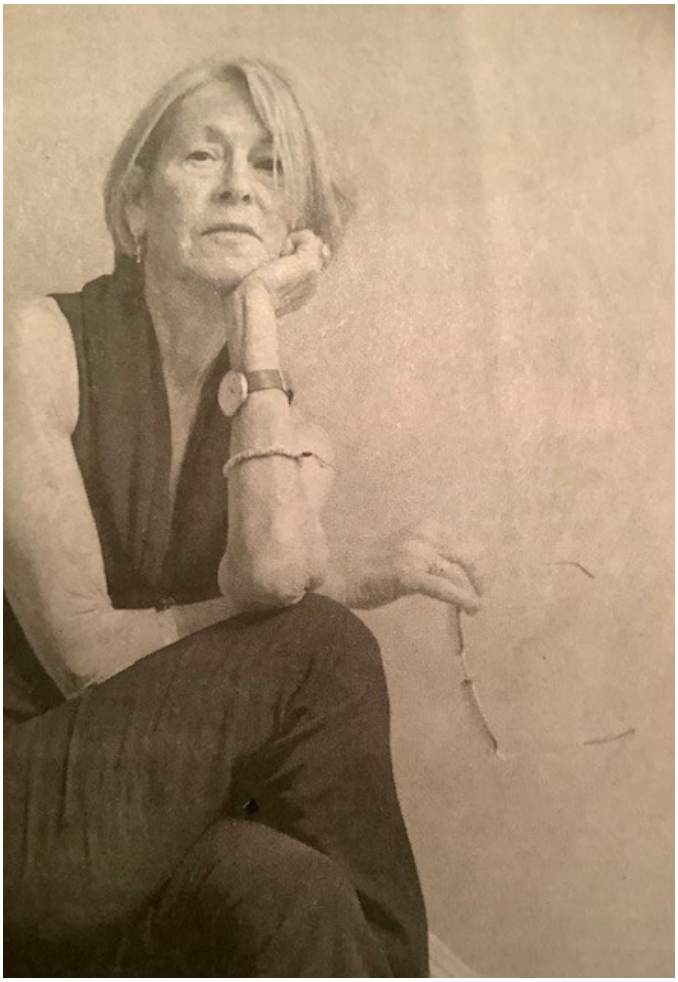
FEBRUARY 2024 Vol. XXXIX No. 2

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.

Louise Glück **1943 – 2023**



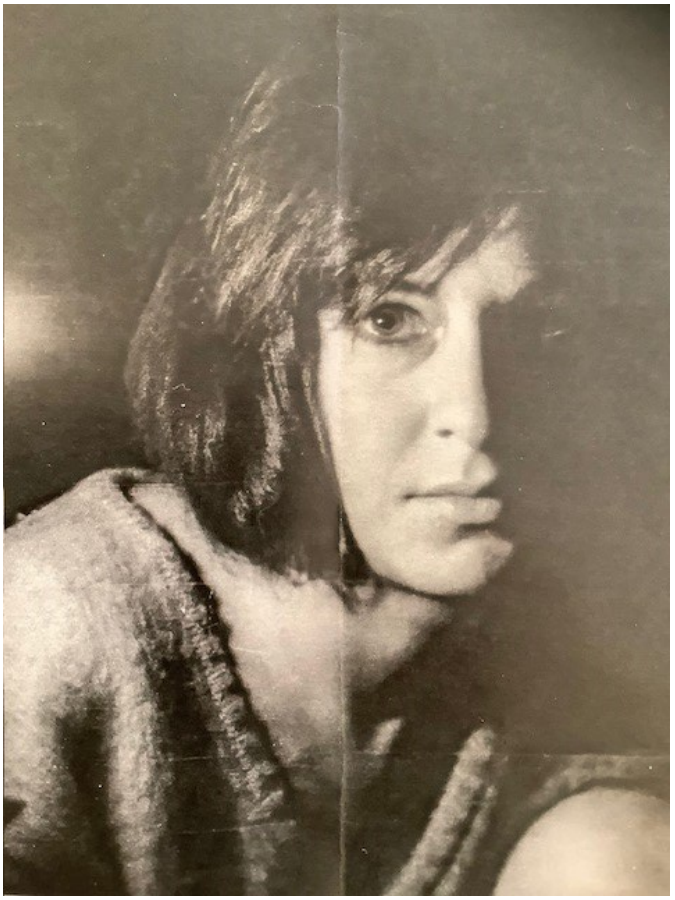
Louise Glück in 2020

This poet's surname immediately calls for a note on its pronunciation: it rhymes with *click* not *cluck*. And since Louise Glück was born in New York City and raised on Long Island and didn't come to Vermont until after she had attended two urban colleges—Sarah Lawrence and Columbia—how does she deserve a place among Vermont poets? Especially since her poems' imagery rarely reflects a world specific to Vermont or its people.

But consider this: Louise Glück lived in Plainfield, Vermont, for many years, where she taught poetry classes at Vermont's Goddard College. Some of her best early poems were written here. When she won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2020, she said she hoped the money that came with the prize might allow her to give up living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and return to Vermont. In other words, her claim on Vermont was one of personal preference. Vermont was undoubtedly the place that made her feel most comfortable, most creative. This was the place she most missed when she lived anywhere else.

Glück came to Plainfield in 1971, when she was twenty-eight. Two years later she gave birth to her only child, her son Noah, fathered by her then-partner Keith Monley. Her earlier marriage to Charles Hertz, Jr., had ended in divorce. She remarried in 1977, to the author John Dranow. The two of them teamed up with Plainfield residents John Voight and his wife, the poet Ellen Bryant Voight, to found the New England Culinary Institute. As a private, for-profit college, the institute prospered, and Vermont cuisine was all the better for it.

Louise Glück's first book of poems, *Firstborn*, published in 1968, was scorned by critics as derivative—one called her "an anxious imitator of Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath." Glück's second book of poems, *The House on Marshland*, published in 1975, was full of poems written in Vermont. Many consider it to be Glück's "breakthrough" into a poetry written in the voice and style that would be hers throughout her long career.



Louise Glück in a photo from the 1960s

Examine closely the poems in *The House on Marshland* and you will discover that the influence of Sylvia

Cont. next page - Glück

Glück - Cont. from previous page

Plath's influence is still discernible. Here is so-called "confessional" poetry derived from the poet's experience of life—a reliance on private events that have had a deep emotional impact but are never explicitly described. As in Plath's work, you'll find a consistent, masterful narrator, one whose severe tone and supreme self-confidence make compelling reading. A reader almost forgets to ask: *What is this about and what does it mean?*

Here is Glück's poem that gives her second book its title, with the image of a marsh growing up around her childhood home:

For My Mother

It was better when we were
together in one body.
Thirty years. Screened
through the green glass
of your eye, moonlight
filtered into my bones
as we lay
in the big bed, in the dark,
waiting for my father.
Thirty years. He closed
your eyelids with
two kisses. And then spring
came and withdrew from me
the absolute
knowledge of the unborn,
leaving the brick stoop
where you stand, shading
your eyes, but it is
night, the moon
is stationed in the beech tree,
round and white among
the small tin markers of the stars:
Thirty years. A marsh
grows up around the house.
Schools of spores circulate
behind the shades, drift through
gauze flutterings of vegetation.

Glück's poems often begin as if they are about to reveal the complexity of a relationship. So begins "For My Mother"—and its first lines, "It was better when we were/ together in one body," are vaguely humorous. But soon confusion sets in: what is the significance of "thirty years" and does the mother die? The moon and moonlight are significant, but how so?

American poet Sylvia Plath (1932 – 1963), whose meteoric career ended in suicide when she was thirty-one, primed readers in her influential book *Ariel* to listen to the compelling tone of her voice and shrug off mere meaning. To make this point requires a poem from *Ariel* be quoted entire. Here is a sample:

Poppies in October
by Sylvia Plath

Even the sun-clouds this morning
cannot manage such skirts.
Nor the woman in the ambulance
Whose red heart blooms through her coat
so astoundingly—

A gift, a love gift
Utterly unasked for
By a sky

Palely and flamily
Ignoring its carbon monoxides. by eyes
Dulled to a soft halt under bowlers.

O my God. what am I
That these late mouths would cry open
In a forest of frost, in a dawn of cornflowers!

The narrator seems in the grip of something horrific, but wholly unspecified. Other poems in Plath's collection make clear that the poppies were a gift to the poet when she was a patient in a hospital. But even when that fact is known, the full meaning of this poem is elusive—and perhaps deliberately so?

In a blurb *The New York Times Book Review* reprinted on the back of *The House on Marshland*, a reviewer praises Glück's style as "new" and "commanding" with "a very peculiar power." This power is specifically related to her poetry's "indifference to current modes." In another blurb, American poet Stanley Kunitz, who had taught Glück in college, praises her "rare and high imagination" and declares that her poetry's "intimacies" are (somewhat implausibly) "rooted in landscape and weather."

Later critics would praise Glück's "control" and "exactitude," her "spare and condensed language." She wrote, one said, "a kind of absolute poetry, a poetry with no gimmicks, no pandering to fads or trends." Her words were "pared down…sculpted," and sometimes "oracular." Critics often seemed to gloss over any difficulties with interpretation—*what does she mean?*—by saying only that her work was "candid and uncompromising."

Here is another poem in which Glück positions herself as a dreamer, or an observer, whose visions are hard to summarize or interpret:

The Fortress

There is nothing new. To learn
the lesson past disease
was easier. In God's hotel I saw

Cont. next page - Glück

Glück - Cont. from previous page

my name and number stapled to a vein
as Marcy funneled its corrective air
toward Placid. I can breathe
again. I watch the mountain under siege
by ice give way to blocks of dungeons,
ovens manned by wives. I understand.
They coil their hair, they turn their
music on as, humming to herself, the night-
nurse smoothes her uniform. This is
the proper pain. The lights are out. Love
forms in the human body.

This is not to say that all the poems in her second book, written in Vermont, were enigmatic, difficult poems. When Glück was willing to be forthright, she could create a lyric like this one—about a failed love affair—that is perfectly crafted and perfectly clear:

Here Are My Black Clothes

I think now it is better to love no one
than to love you. Here are my black clothes,
the tired nightgowns and robes fraying
in many places. Why should they hang useless
as though I were going naked? You liked me
well enough
in black; I make you a gift of these objects.
You will want to touch them with your mouth, run
your fingers through the thin
tender underthings and I
will not need them in my new life.

The supreme confidence in this voice, feminine and resolute, brimming with an anger barely suppressed, is very much like the voice Plath made famous in poems that raged against a husband's betrayal.

In her many later poems, Glück confirmed her wide range of cultural reference. Her ease with world history, folklore, and various mythologies surfaced at the start. In this early poem, Joan of Arc is speaking:

Jeanne d'Arc

It was in the fields. The trees grew still,
a light passed through the leaves speaking
of Christ's great grace: I heard.
My body hardened into armor.
Since the guards
gave me over to darkness I have prayed to God
and now the voices answer I must be
transformed to fire, for God's purpose,
and have bid me kneel
to bless my King, and thank
the enemy to whom I owe my life.

Gluck's themes are usually dark: isolation, sadness, betrayal, trauma, fractured family relationships, marital discord and dissolution. The following poem is uncharacteristic in that it is hopeful and features light and love. Its imagery falls into place as soon as a reader grasps the poet's reference to the biblical tale of Moses among the bulrushes:

The Undertaking

The darkness lifts, imagine, in your lifetime.
There you are—cased in clean bark, you drift
through weaving rushes, fields flooded with cotton.
You are free. The river films with lilies,
shrubs appear, shoots thicken into palm. And now
all fear gives way: the light
looks after you, you feel the waves' goodwill
as arms widen over the water; Love,

the key is turned. Extend yourself—
it is the Nile, the sun is shining,
everywhere you turn is luck.

In her best poems that rely on a complex allusion, Louise Glück manages to convey the power of the original conceit while simultaneously giving it an exquisite, inventive twist. This next poem revisits the story of Hansel and Gretel, and the reader hears Gretel's voice addressing her brother:

Gretel in Darkness

This is the world we wanted.
All who would have seen us dead
are dead. I hear the witch's cry
break in the moonlight through a sheet
of sugar: God rewards.
Her tongue shrivels into gas…

Now, far from women's arms
and memory of women, in our father's hut
we sleep, are never hungry.
Why do I not forget?
My father bars the door, bars harm
from this house, and it is years.

No one remembers. Even you, my brother,
summer afternoons you look at me as though
you meant to leave,
as though it never happened.
But I killed for you. I see armed firs,
the spires of that gleaming kiln—

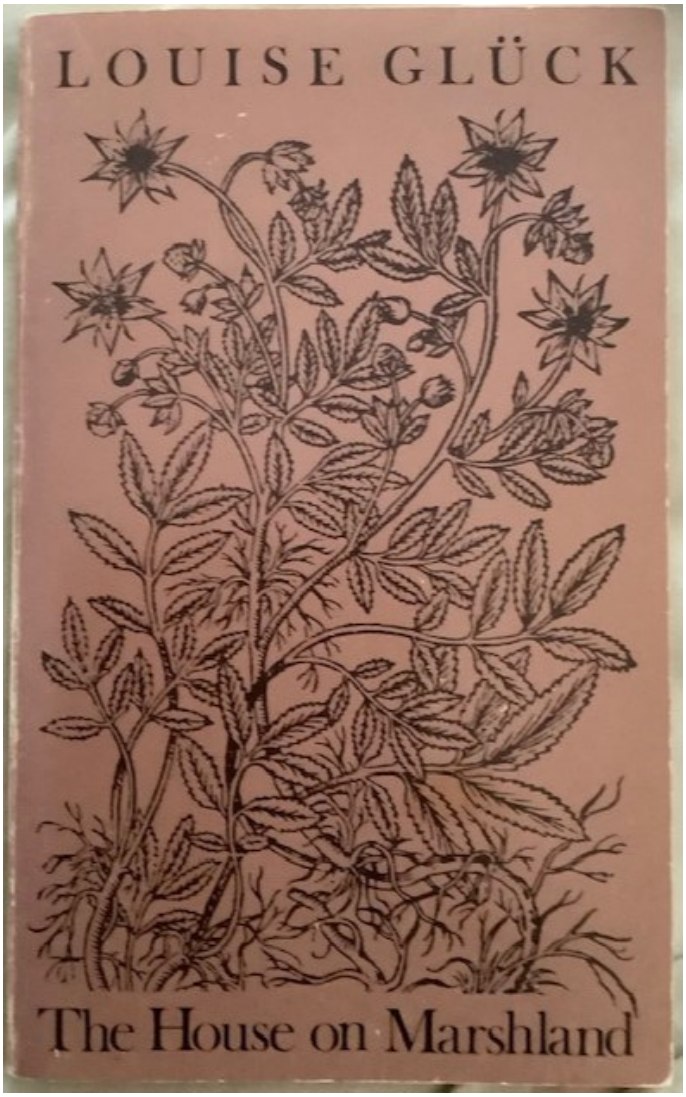
Nights I turn to you to hold me
but you are not there.
Am I alone? Spies
hiss in the stillness, Hansel,

Cont. next page - Glück

Glück - Cont. from previous page

we are there still and it is real, real,
that black forest and the fire in earnest.

Unable to break free of her memory of killing the witch, Gretel accuses her brother of hiding from the truth of their shared, dreadful experience. Is she suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder? That modern-day label might reduce the poem's impact. Gretel is seeking reassurance years after a shared trauma, and we sense Hansel is getting tired of consoling her. Glück's manipulation of the familiar folk tale, remaking it to serve her own psychological purpose, lends mystery to the source of the poet's desperation and anguish, even as it strengthens the poem's hold on the reader.



Louise Glück's second book of poems, published by the Echo Press of New York in 1975. Cover art by Loretta Li.

Louise Glück's honors over the years were many. Aside from the 2020 Nobel Prize, her work won a Pulitzer Prize, a National Book Award, a National Book Critics Circle Award, and a National Humanities Medal. She eventually taught at many other schools besides Goddard, including Stanford and Yale. She was named Poet Laureate of the United States from 2003-2004. She lived to the age of eighty and published twelve books of poetry, writing very much in the public eye even as she perfected literary strategies that guarded her privacy. We can be proud she was a Vermonter by choice.

The Charles B. Danforth Library at present does not own any volume of poems by Louise Glück, but plans are taking shape for the Library to acquire some.

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 O = V. This month there are three short quotes using the same encryption. The solution is found by trial and error. The CRYPTOGRAM answer is on the last page.

"F T I J L P I O Q A D C I T C D' M K Q Z,

W D G X P Q X Z F L P A K G D... F D A A,

H Q C P Q X Z."

- H T S B Q W W T B Q C

"W D G X P Q X Z T M S D X D A Z Q M

A L C B Q M T M C D D K D K I L U Q M M

I J D I T S D P C I T A S Q X N J."

- H. X. M I L N E I L C

"W D G X P Q X Z T M M J L X I Q C K

O D X Z M F D D I."

- N J Q X S Q T C D H. W L X K D

ON DIRT ROADS & WEATHER

Barnard has over 56 miles of roads to be plowed in the winter and just over 41 miles of dirt road to be graded in the summer. Barnard currently has a three man road crew, and is still actively seeking a fourth. Paving dirt roads can cost in the neighborhood of 100,000 per mile and will require resurfacing about every ten years. Repair of dirt roads requires access without damaging the roads further. All of this contributes to the dificulty of maintaining dirt roads when the weather turns the roads to mud.

Remember, maintaining dirt roads costs money, paving roads costs even more, the demand on our road infrusture and crew is steadily increasing with our residential population, and the weather is not under our control. These are the facts that Barnard residents must deal with.

BARNARTS EVENTS SCHEDULE

Performances on:
February 9, 10, 15, 16, 17 - 7pm
February 11 & 18 - 2pm.

At the Barnard Town Hall, 115 North Rd, Barnard

Tickets available at barnarts.ludus.com/200447578
Adults - $20, Students - $15

Oscar Wilde's beloved satire comes to Barnard this February just in time to laugh away the winter blues and cozy up for a bit of romance. Absurd situations abound as two gentlemen traverse the realities of having multiple identities while falling in love in an age of ideals…not to mention family intruding at every turn. Join us for wit and whimsy that will surprise and delight new and old fans of this classic comedy!

Join BarnArts in supporting Ukraine through Art!

Local arts & youth at Hanover HS are raising funds for Ukraine with an original translation of I'm Fine by Nina Zakhozhenko

February 1-3 at the Hanover High School Auditorium

Race Around the Lake 2024 registration is now open!

This fundraiser for BarnArts Youth Programming will be held Sunday, May 19 at the Silver Lake State Park in Barnard, VT. Includes a 10K Run, a 5K Run/Walk and a Virtual 10k & 5k. The 10K Race begins at 10:30am and the 5K Race begins at 11am.

Early Registration Fees are: 10K Adults: $45, 12 & under: $25; 5K Adults: $35, 12 & under: $25; Virtual 10K & 5K: $25 & $15

Sign-up by April 30 to receive a free Race Around the Lake T-shirt!

The Race begin and end at Silver Lake State Park, with courses encircling Silver Lake on town roads, dirt roads and single-track wooded trails with intermittent views of the lake. The challenging 10K route pops out of the woods on Royalton Tpk and loops back to the state park via Tower Rd. After-Race activities along Silver Lake include a Chef's Table lunch free to all racers, live music and an award ceremony. To Race Virtually or register for the in person events, go to: https://runsignup.com/Race/VT/Barnard/BarnArtsRaceAroundtheLake?remMeAttempt=

If your business is interested in being a race sponsor, please contact us at info@barnarts.org.

Contact BarnArts for more information.

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

ARTISTREE UPCOMING EVENTS

Acoustic Jam Session

Now thru May 15, 2024

Here's a chance to play with other musicians. Bring your instrument and a few songs or tunes to play. We go in a circle and everyone gets a chance to call the tune (and a key!) and all of us join in the playing and singing. This is not an open mic – all acoustic and all group participation. Come down and give it a try.

Upper Valley Partner Dance Night

Friday, February 9, 2024 - 6:30 PM EST

Come on down and dance the night away to all types of partner dance music: two-step, swing (east coast and west coast), waltz, cha cha, tango, salsa… maybe even a line dance here and there. If you're taking the beginning two-step series on Monday nights, here's your chance to put what you learn to good use!

It's Amazing Animals! at Artistree for February Vacation Camps!

February 20, 21, & 22 Artistree hosts half-day morning and afternoon camps for children ages 5-7 and 8-12!

Sign up at: https://artistreevt.org/vacation-camps

For more information in these and other events, go to https://artistreevt.org/artistree-events

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/

CHANGE THE WORLD KIDS FUNDRAISING EVENTS

Change the World Kids will be beginning weekly anti-cabin fever dinners next Tuesday at the North Chapel Unitarian Church in Woodstock. Dinners will be at 6pm.

Next Tuesday's dinner will be prepared and served by Change the World Kids and will consist of a beet soup, with beets from the food justice garden, a perogi and broccoli main dish with potatoes from the food justice garden and a honey babka for dessert.

Reservations are encouraged and can be made by calling 646-708-1780 or emailing: changetheworldkids@gmail.com

Dinner is $20/person. Any profits will go towards supporting the work of Change the World Kids.

Change the World Kids— www.changetheworldkids.org

2024 GLAD RAGS DATES

Happy New Year from Glad Rags!

This month begins our Saturday donation dates. They are:

January 27th

February 10th and February 24th

March 9th and March 23rd

From 10AM to 1PM at the Simmons House (lower level), adjacent to the Health Center

Also: by appointment, please call Kitty at 802-457-2182

2024 SPRING & FALL SALES:
SPRING: APRIL 26, 27 & 28 ~ FRI - SAT - SUN
FALL: SEPT 20, 21 & 22 ~ FRI - SAT - SUN

PUBLIC MEETING REMINDERS

SELECTMAN'S MEETING SCHEDULE REVISION

1/17/2024 moved to 1/24/2024

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

1/24/2024 at 7:00, PM Barnard Town Hall

CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

"Without Valentine's Day, February would be... well, January."

- Jim Gaffigan

"February is merely as long as is needed to pass the time until March."

- J.R. Stockton

"February is short and very sweet."

- Charmaine J. Forde

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