



## A VERMONT WRITER

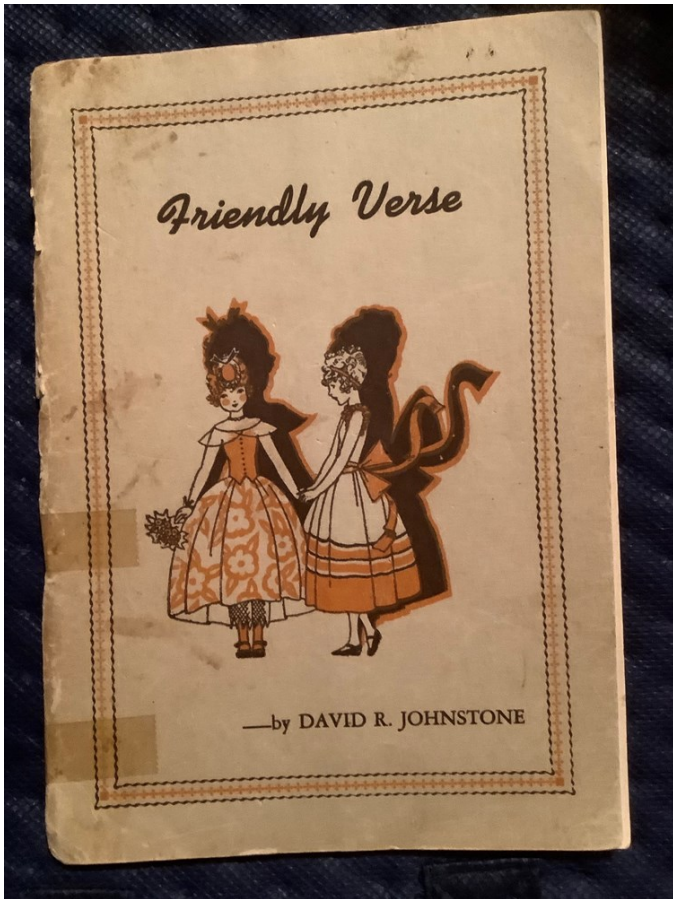
BY MARGARET EDWARDS

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

*This is the first of two parts. The second part will be published in next month's Bulletin.*

David R. Johnstone

1906 – 1957 ?



### PART 1

All that exists in the public domain to prove there ever was a Vermont poet—or versifier—named David R. Johnstone is the small chapbook pictured above. *Friendly Verse* was privately printed by the Roy L. Johnson Company of Randolph, Vermont, without a publication date. David R. Johnstone does not appear in any books celebrating Vermont writers of the twentieth century. He is not to be found in Wikipedia. There is no available photograph. His dates are speculative.

Johnstone's introduction to his chapbook (which he dedicated to his wife, Anna, and step-daughter, Ida) makes clear he wrote these poems "mostly for the pleasure of my friends" with no thought of publishing them at the time of their writing. "Several of them were written as letters to friends in the hospital. All were written since the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 1941."

A reader quickly understands that the poems were produced during the years of World War II and thereafter, and that the writer was not a young man subject to the draft, but in fact infirm and somewhat elderly.

"On account of my being blind," he says in his introduction, "I have had to depend on my wife to do all my writing for me. I owe much to her willingness to drop everything at a moment's notice and devote her time to writing my verses for me as I composed them. My step-daughter, Mrs. Arthur Thomas, has been a great help, as also have my friends, and I thank them for their encouragement and appreciation."

The first poem in the collection is this one:

### Vermont

*Sometime I lie awake and dream  
Of other lands with beauty blest,  
And wonder how it came to pass  
That Old Vermont has all the best.*

*The winding road between the hills,  
With fertile farms along the way,  
The little stream beside the road  
Where hidden speckled beauties lay.*

*The pastures filled with gentle cows,  
The fields with corn and clover hay,  
The wooded side-hills for a park  
Where the deer and rabbits play.*

*The sugar maple in the Spring  
Produces sweets of golden bliss  
That have no rival in the world  
Except a Vermont maiden's kiss.*

*So why leave home for other climes,  
Since we have all that man could want.  
Besides, it's just a waste of time,  
For back you'll come to Old Vermont.*

And the second poem in the collection describes where this *Bulletin* originates:

### Barnard

*A country village, small in size,  
Where Nature's beauty still abounds.  
A haven for the weary folk  
That come from many miles around.*

*A pretty lake, with water clear,  
To tempt the bathing lad and lass.  
The angler tries with plug and bait  
To catch the wily small-mouth bass.*

*Cont. next page - Johnstone*

*Johnstone - Cont. from previous page*

*Two churches, each upon a hill,  
Where Sunday service may be heard.  
Each, in its own respective way,  
Brings excerpts from the Savior's word.  
Nearby we find a beauty spot  
Where a famous writer now resides.  
Miss Dorothy Thompson is the name,  
One of the early summer brides.  
The town has several thrifty farms  
That show results of careful plans,  
For Barnard has the grade of milk  
The city dweller now demands.*

David Johnstone follows these with verses about Randolph and Bethel and South Royalton—all towns we can infer are near where he lived. Randolph—"a model town/ Not too large, nor yet too small"—is praised for its flourishing newspaper *The Randolph Herald*, for its "busy" Gifford Memorial hospital, and for its "many clean and well-kept stores."

The poem featuring Bethel describes a town "protected by its wooded hills/ Where once the granite business boomed" and mentions the Peavine railroad, Bethel Mills ("known far and wide" for grain), the town bank as "one of those that stood the crash," and Mr. Graham's hardware store. It's no surprise that nostalgia rules the conclusion:

*I often think of former days,  
The old friends that I used to meet,  
It brings the sadness to the heart  
When I fail to find them on the street.*

The poem "South Royalton" begins with praise of its "pretty park" where band concerts are "oft" heard. And those concerts remind Johnstone of being a boy and hanging out with his friends there, listening. Since then, Johnstone laments:

*So many changes have been made  
In both the owners and each store,  
I have to stop and ask myself,  
Was I ever here before?  
But still I find things up-to-date—  
South Royalton never was behind.  
Last year the programs on the air  
Told where to go and what you'd find.  
I wish that I might go there more  
And meet the folks I used to know,  
But somehow I fail to get around  
As I used to thirty years ago.*

Generally the poet doesn't stray from traditional sentiments—he is devoutly Christian and patriotic. He prays,

"God bless our boys that face the foe./ May their brave hearts with freedom glow." And he concludes:

*Lord, thou alone can hear our prayer,  
And guide our boys while over there.  
May they in peace and victory share.  
Thy will be done.*

Johnstone fears Hell, abhors his "sins" (unspecified), and hopes for Heaven. Conventionally, too, he loves his dog: "A friend that looks you in the eye/And never lets you down" ("Our Best Friend"). And in verses constructed as "A Letter" to his step-daughter, he refers to his dog by name: Ginger. It's only when he describes his experience fishing—memories drawn, no doubt, from years when his sight was good—that he reveals himself as an individual.

### **Goin' Fishin'**

*Did you ever go "a-fishin'"  
With no time to dig the bait,  
All the while you were "a-wishin'"  
The other feller would be late?  
Have you rushed along the highway,  
Helter skelter for the brook,  
And then discovered, someday,  
You had only brought one hook?  
You didn't have no matches,  
Your tobacco, too, was low.  
On the fence your coat tail catches,  
On a rock you stub your toe.  
Then you reach your destination.  
With your ardor still uncooled,  
You begin your occupation  
In hopes the big ones can be fooled.  
And then you work a plenty  
As you try to find a worm.  
By now you should have twenty,  
And the cold rain makes you squirm.  
But at last you are rewarded,  
Place it firmly on the hook,  
Then you feel your plans are thwarted  
As you tumble in the brook.  
Then you drag your pole behind you  
As you scramble up the bank,  
Undecided what you will do,  
When there comes an awful yank.  
How your face lights up with pleasure  
As you start to haul him out,  
And you find by actual measure  
That you've caught a two-foot trout.*

Slowly a portrait of the elusive David Johnstone emerges from his poems, but a reader has to be on the alert for

*Cont. next page - Johnstone*

*Johnstone - Cont. from previous page*

clues. From “Memories” one learns that the poet was once a schoolboy in a one-room schoolhouse “on Hatch’s Hill” under the tutelage of a teacher named Cal Sleeper, who courted a girl named Grace and married her. The celebration that followed their wedding was an oyster supper to which the schoolchildren were invited.

*Sure our appetites were good.  
We could eat as well as play.  
And oysters weren’t so plenty then  
As what they are today.*

Hints in the early poems abound that Johnstone lives on a farm. He sells milk—which means someone is milking a cow or cows—and his meals are prepared and served by his ever-compliant wife. Both of them dote on a neighbor’s two-year-old child. The poem “Sandra Jean Joy” describes how she comes by the house almost daily:

*We see her nearly every day,  
And would like to see her more.  
She calls a cheery, “Hi, there, Dave,”  
When she comes in through the door.  
She brings the money for the milk  
And counts it in my hand,  
And if she doesn’t count just right,  
Of course, I understand.  
When Anna puts the supper on,  
This little lady, fair,  
Comes and takes me by the hand  
And leads me to my chair.*

From “My Wife” readers discern that energetic Anna, Johnstone’s steady, “old-fashioned” friend, is a petite brunette who likes to grow flowers, keeps a neat house and can fine-tune her husband’s radio. He admits that “sometimes” they “have a little scrap/ Just to pass the time away,” but any conflict between them is soon over. “The sun comes out again next day.”

Another poem, “Our 25<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary,” celebrates their marriage on January 20, 1917. In a poem written a year later, on their twenty-sixth anniversary, he’s more specific:

*I remember how we went to town  
With Kit hitched to the sleigh.  
I got the license from the clerk—  
It was a bright and sunny day.  
Remember, it was almost noon  
When we reached the parson’s house.  
Rev. Simmons tied the knot  
And you became my spouse.*

The minister’s full name was Clarence Simmons. The couple raised Anna’s daughter, Ida, from her previous marriage, yet they never had more children together, a chief “heartache” to which they’ve become reconciled:

*But life would not be worth the while  
If all we had to do was smile.  
As salt gives savor to the meat,  
So must the bitter prove the sweet.*

In Johnstone’s “A Letter,” sent to friends named Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Amsden, we learn that the poet as a boy once lived with his father “upon the hill” near the Amsdens. He recalls how they used “to go to Grange” along with the Woodwards and the Morgans, and would find there the “Worthy Master” Albert Thayer. Another memory the poet shares with the Amsdens is a local disaster described in history books:

*Remember the ’27 flood,  
When the road went down the brook as mud?  
To fix that road we dared not fail  
For fear that we should lose our mail.*

In “My Dad and I” Johnstone makes his family history clear. His father and grandparents came from Scotland, specifically Glasgow, in 1864. They spent their first years in upstate New York, then moved in 1896 to Revere, Massachusetts. Johnstone’s father came to Vermont only in 1902. Here he married, and his six children (four girls and two boys) were born here.

David Johnstone lost his mother when he was five: “Although we found it hard at first/ We managed to survive.” The poem makes clear that he and his father enjoyed a steadfast, untroubled “friendship ever true” that lasted until his father died.

The poet wrote his tribute titled “My Father” for his first cousin Maurice. Readers learn that John Johnstone, born in 1869 in Burke, New York, was the fifth child among nine. He left home at the age of 21 and went to work with his brother Will in Troy, New York. There he “joined the L.O.L.” and “knew the Erie tow path well,” towing boats “between Cohoes and Buffalo.” In 1898, at age twenty-nine, John moved to New Hampshire, became a farmer in Lyme, and married. The couple lived in Lyme for four years, then moved to Royalton, Vermont, in 1902.

*They moved about from place to place  
For years while in this town,  
Always looking for a home  
In which to settle down.*

The Johnstone family—the parents and their six children, with David among them—eventually “settled down / In a place they call Broad Brook” to farm. The father farmed and “cut wood by the cord” to earn extra money. He also had musical talent. These are the final five verses of “My Father”:

*He played upon his violin  
The tunes of long ago,  
And some times at a kitchen “tunk,”  
And all of us would go.*

*Cont. next page - Johnstone*

*Johnstone - Cont. from previous page*

*In Twenty-One [1921] he sold this home  
To move upon a hill.  
It was in the town of Barnard,  
Close beside his brother, Will.*

“My Dad and I” makes clear that John Johnstone bought “the Angell place” “up on Hatch’s Hill” and farmed it. David Johnstone, living decades later in what must have been the same place in Barnard, admires how well his father managed.

*I often think of how he planned.  
He did the best he could.  
There was always flour in the bin;  
Our shed was filled with wood.  
He always left the job well done,  
Was never known to shirk.  
Perhaps that is the reason why  
He was never short of work.  
In Nineteen Thirty came the end;  
My father’s form was still.  
He’s buried as he liked to live,  
Close by his brother, Will.*

To be continued. Here ends Part 1 of this profile. The concluding Part 2 will appear in the June issue of this publication.

Determining the dates of David R. Johnstone’s birth and death involves pure guesswork, but it’s clear he was too young for conscription in World War I, and he makes no allusion in his poetry to that conflict. His parents married in 1898, and if David was among the last of their six children, he might have been born any time after 1905, well out of a war spanning 1914-1918. Had he been born around 1906, his age would also have disqualified him to serve in World War II. In 1941, not only was Johnstone blind, but he would have been 35, the cut-off age for conscription.

In 1921, David’s father had sold his Royalton farm to buy a farm in Barnard, closer to his brother Will, which seems a natural move for an unmarried widower with children. John Johnstone lived to the age of sixty-one. Assuming his son David lived as long, David would have died in 1967. However, the poet’s allusion to advancing heart disease—the fast heartbeat and dizzy spells mentioned in his “Letter” to the Lombards—suggests he might have met an earlier death, perhaps a decade earlier, around 1957 at the age of fifty-one.

Somewhere in a cemetery in Barnard, there must be gravestones with the name Johnstone inscribed on them. It would be interesting to know the resting places (and the official dates) of John, Will, David, and Anna.

And will a gravestone solve the mystery of the “R” in David R. Johnstone’s name?

The Danforth Library treasures its sole copy of his small chapbook *Friendly Verse*. It is a very fragile artifact, protected in cellophane, and it does not circulate. But it can be seen and admired as perhaps the most thorough poetic document of life in this town, produced here in Barnard, Vermont, during the twentieth century.

## Danforth Library News

*April 15, 2024*

**JOIN US on Sunday April 28, 2024  
4:00 p.m. at Danforth Library  
in honor of Poetry Month**

### Poetry Reading with Local Poets

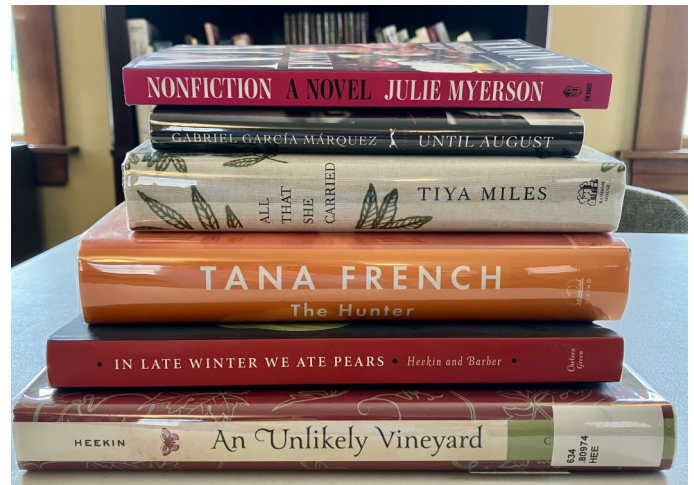
*Danny Dover*

*Jim Reiman*

*Geza Tatrallyay*

refreshments to follow

### New books have arrived!



**Contact us:** [charlesdanforthlibrary@gmail.com](mailto:charlesdanforthlibrary@gmail.com)

**Phone:** 802-234-9408 (during open hours)

**Trustees:** Berna Donlon, Margaret Edwards, Judy Maynes, Susan McNulty, and Susan Salter Reynolds

### GLAD RAGS SALE — SPRING 2024

Friday. April 26, 2 PM to 6 PM

Saturday. April 27, 9 AM to 2 PM

Sunday. April 28, 10 AM to 1 PM

(Everything is half price on Sunday)

SPRING SALE LOCATION

MASONIC LODGE

30 Pleasant St, Woodstock, VT 05091

PUBLIC WARNING

Notice of Hearing and Site Inspection Discontinuance of Cootey Road (T.H. 99)

Pursuant to a petition for the discontinuance of Cootey Road (Town Highway No. 99), received on March 5, 2024, the Selectboard of the Town of Barnard hereby gives notice to the petitioners and to persons owning or interested in lands and rights that may be affected by a decision of the Selectboard to discontinue Cootey Road (Town Highway 99) in its entire length from Lime Pond Road (Town Highway 37) to the road termination.

The Selectboard will meet at the intersection of Cootey Road and Lime Pond Road at 6:30 PM on June 5, 2024 to inspect Cootey Road and thereafter meet at the Barnard Town Hall at 115 North Road, Barnard, Vermont, at approximately 7:00 PM to conduct a hearing and receive testimony on the question of discontinuing Cootey Road.

As required by 19 V.S.A. §709, 30 days' notice of this site inspection and hearing is being provided by certified mail to the petitioners and to each of the persons owning or interested in lands through which this highway may pass or abut, listed below, as well as the Barnard Planning Commission, and the Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Forests and Parks. A copy will be posted in the office of the Barnard Town Clerk, and published in the Valley News not less than 10 days before the time set for the hearing.

Dated at Barnard, Vermont this 17th day of April 2024. Rock Webster, Chair, Bob Edmunds

PUBLIC WARNING

Notice of Hearing and Site Inspection Discontinuance of the Class 4 portion Masterson Road (T.H. 95)

The Selectboard of the Town of Barnard hereby gives notice to owners or persons interested in lands and rights that may be affected by a decision of the Selectboard to discontinue the Class 4 portion of Masterson Road (Town Highway No. 95) in its entire length from the intersection with Class 3 Masterson Road (Town Highway 8) to the to the intersection with Old Mount Hunger Road (Town Highway 24).

The Selectboard will meet at the intersection of Class 3 Masterson Road and Class 4 Masterson Road at 6:00 PM on June 5, 2024 to inspect Class 4 Masterson Road and thereafter meet at the Barnard Town Hall at 115 North Road, Barnard, Vermont, at approximately 7:00 PM to conduct a hearing and receive testimony on the question of discontinuing Masterson Road.

As required by 19 V.S.A. §709, 30 days' notice of this site inspection and hearing is being provided by certified mail to each of the persons owning or interested in lands through which this highway may pass or abut, listed below, as well as the Barnard Planning Commission, and the Commissioner of the Vermont Department of For-

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Dated at Barnard, Vermont this 17th day of April 2024. Rock Webster, Chair, Richard Lancaster, Bob Edmunds

BARNARD MATTERS 2024: SILVER LAKE PROGRESSIVE CLUB SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Barnard's Silver Lake Progressive Club's tradition is to award scholarships to Barnard and East Barnard students who are continuing their education beyond high school. Since 1986, the club has awarded \$39,500 dollars to 50 deserving recipients. Community support during our 2023 campaign allowed us to award two scholarships. Please consider donating to this decades-long commitment to our students.

The GoFundMe fundraising campaign is now active and the link is https://www.gofundme.com/f/barnard-matters-2024-scholarship-fundraiser

If you prefer, you may send a check (payable to the Silver Lake Progressive Club) to:

Silver Lake Progressive Club
c/o Barbara Kelley
3134 Stage Road
South Pomfret, VT 05067

All proceeds go to fund the Silver Lake Progressive Club Scholarship(s) presented on senior awards night to an outstanding student/s from Barnard and/or East Barnard.

Contact Barbara Kelley for more information: 802-457-2719 or bKelley321@gmail.com

With many thanks,
Members of The Silver Lake Progressive Club

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

"XRL LMTXWQ CUYUT... VDE
ODWR JEXRU HWDN NKBR XR XL
VDE OD NBWR, AER XR GELR
CBXTIV FBHUL VDET KUBTR
BPKU, VDE NBWR XR LD!"
-FBTH RNBXW

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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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



SUNDAY, MAY 19

## SILVER LAKE STATE PARK

The in-person race will be in Barnard, Vermont on the trails around Silver Lake! Start/Finish is preliminarily scheduled at Silver Lake State Park, pending new State rules. An alternative Start/Finish area is available, if needed.

### Event Schedule

Registration/Check-in begin - 9:00am

10K Run - Begins at 10:30am

5K Run/Walk - Begins at 11am

Post-Race: Chef's Table, Live Music - 11:30-12:30

Awards - 12 Noon

Early Registration Fees (through May 9)

5k Adults: \$35

10k Adults: \$45

12 & under: \$25 (Automatic age-based pricing.)

Race routes circle Silver Lake on town roads, dirt roads and single-track wooded trails with intermittent views of the lake.

Sign up by April 30 to receive a Race Around the Lake T-shirt with your registration.

Post-race activities include a Chef's Table lunch, awards and live music along the lakefront

Awards will be given to the top 3 finishers in each race, plus the top finishers in age categories.

There is also a Virtual 5k or 10k. See <https://runsignup.com/Race/VT/Barnard/BarnArtsRaceAroundtheLake>

for more information on the virtual event or to register for the in-person run.

## AT ARTISTREE

### Acoustic Jam Session

Now thru May 15, 2024

Play with other musicians. Bring your instrument and a few songs or tunes to play. This is not an open mic – all acoustic and all group participation. Come down and give it a try. For more information in these and other events, go to <https://artistreevt.org/artistree-events>

## CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

It's spring fever... You don't quite know what it is you do want, but it just fairly makes your heart ache, you want it so!

- Mark Twain