



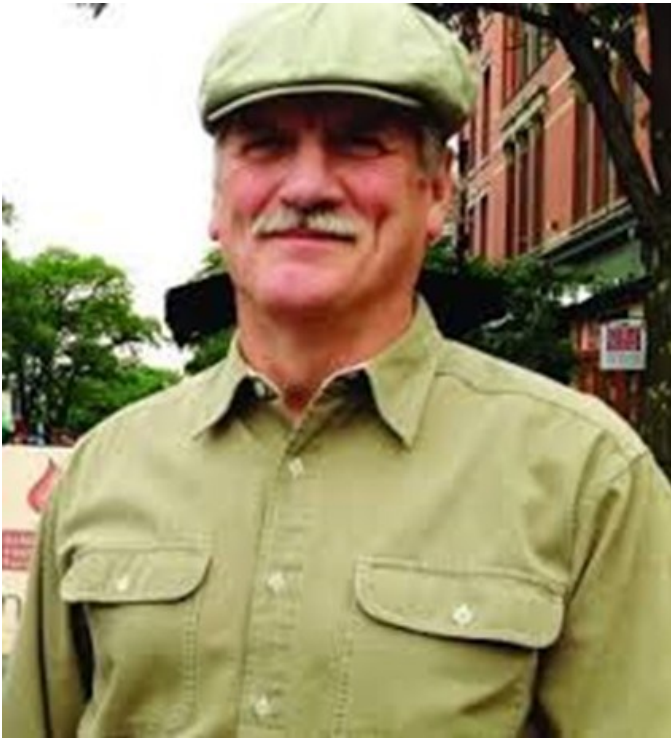
A VERMONT WRITING

BY MARGARET EDWARDS

This column, usually called A VERMONT WRITER, is an offering of the Danforth Library in Barnard. Its original purpose has been biographical: to introduce to readers Vermont writers from the past who deserve wider renown. But this month's essay, in a nod to the season, quotes a few poems by Vermont poet Leland Kinsey, whose 2017 book on becoming "winter ready" bears that title.

Leland Kinsey

1950 – 2016



Leland Kinsey lived and farmed and wrote his poems in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, in the village of Barton. He made the best of a short life—dying of lymphoma at the age of sixty-six. His dedication to the everyday tasks of farming made him something of a jack of all trades, and his careful observations of what is involved in all sorts of work give testament to subjects not usually the focus of poetry.

Kinsey's fascination with physical labor was a driving force in his poems gathered and published a year after his death in *Winter Ready*. In one of his last interviews, he said, "I'm writing about the work of preparing for winter, but that can take on wider, deeper connotations. I would hope people would see that these things still exist in this state and recognize this [work] is of the place in which they live."

In Woodstock, the Norman Williams Public Library is currently undergoing a thorough pointing of its stonework. A reader will take more notice of such a labor-

intensive project after coming across this poem by Kinsey:

Pointing the Chimney

*I climbed to the three-story rooftop
of my house; tried to keep
my balance on the ladder hung
by rope from the old antennae base
left standing like a ship's rusted spar.*

*With the ogee of the trowel blade
I pushed the stiff mortar far
into the crevices from which old mortar had fallen
both onto the roof and ground, and down
inside the unlined flue.*

*In places I could see completely through
to the darkening well of light
more than four stories tall
from the basement floor.*

*When I'd opened the ash-pit door
and begun the annual cleaning,
I'd noticed pieces of grout clinking
against the shovel amidst the soot
and creosote debris. To keep
the chimney from going to wrack*

*I carefully pointed and packed
each crevice, bed joint, head joint,
between course after course of common bond,
tucking carefully by flashing and cricket.
I scraped mortar from the board
until it lay even with each stretcher's face.*

*After it dries for a time, I'll place
the trowel's curved edge against
each grout line; using it as a float,
I'll run it hard for a concave finish.*

*The lime in the concrete will not diminish
the strength too greatly. Without it
the mortar would be much harder
than the old bricks and its expansion
would cause them to fracture or spall.*

*I'll be careful not to let anything fall,
or me, from my odd high perch,
when I finally climb to mould a crowning rim
of wire-reinforced grout daub by daub,
my awkward form
bent to the day's work.*

A remarkable, sensuous feel for each detail is captured by the careful use of words specific to the task. This poem challenges a reader's vocabulary. The poet can assume words such as *spar* and *creosote*, *flue* and *daub* are known. But what of *ogee*? That's a molding with a profile in the shape of an "S." And *stretcher*? (in "each stretcher's face") A stretcher in this case turns out to be a brick or stone laid with its length parallel to the face of

Cont. next page - Kinsey

Kinsey - Cont. from previous page

a wall. What about *spall*? (mortar that “would cause [the bricks] to fracture and spall”). To spall means to break off in chips, scales or slabs.

Kinsey’s use of the word *cricket* seems unusual in the poem’s fifth stanza. However, given the context, a cricket is a small, false roof or canted part of a roof that’s been created to throw off water from behind an obstacle (such as a chimney).

In another poem about work, Kinsey honors the annual, industrious ritual of another man, a Vermonter like himself. His neighbor, elderly and ailing, is a heroic figure, never complaining, only intent on what he’s doing.

Leaves for Raspberries

*My neighbor is gathering leaves
from all over town in large
appliance boxes, and carting them home
in his ancient Saab. Both he and the car
wheeze at work. He fills the boxes that barely fit
the car; mounds the maple, ash, elm, willow
leaves beside his large raspberry patch;
walks scuffling and kicking with rake in hand
to move the leaves among the canes
to suppress weeds and mimic
their natural domain of forest clearings,
humus. He eases other’s work
and loads it on himself.
He’s pruned the canes to four feet tall,
and when the leaves almost top the tips
he calls it quits, except for the dressing
of pine needles he throws on.
These he’s collected from a local estate
where huge white pines stand as a road-front hedge.
He raked the needle fall from the right-of-way
into a windrow of sorts, then drew a large carton along,
boxing it up to re-spread at home.*

*The needles will keep the leaves
from flying away in autumn winds
until rain and freezes and snows
settle them, a dense weed barrier
and soil builder, the needles adding
a little acid to the mix.*

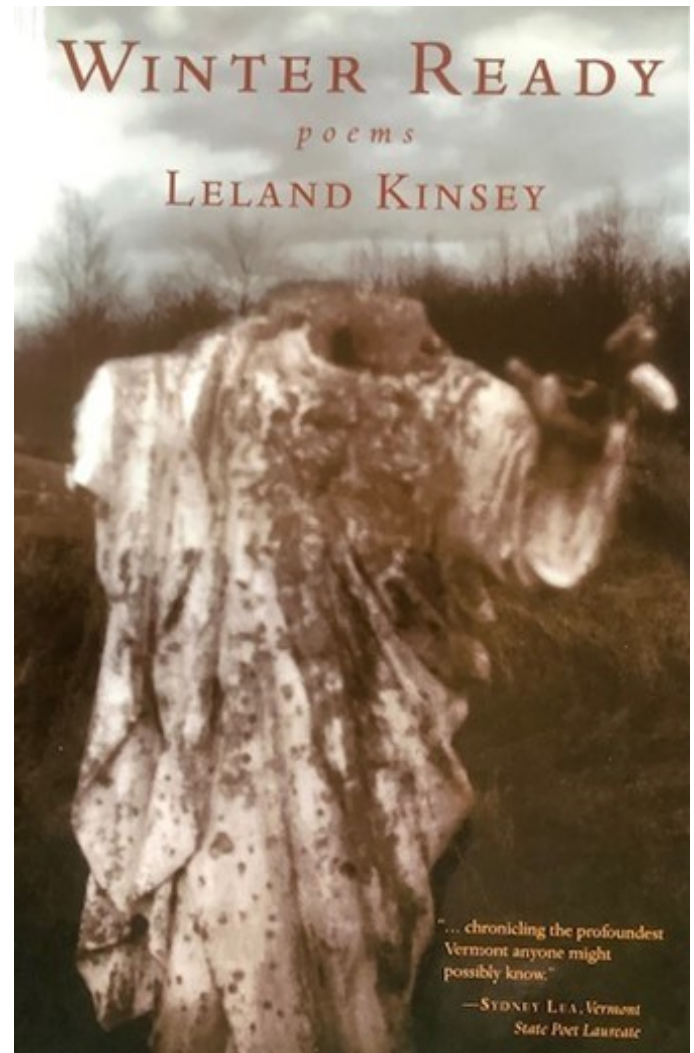
*In the coming summer he will often be on his knees
in the rich mulch, picking berries
from the under-story by the gallon.*

*He’s done this all the years of marriage
and widowhood, a rotund figure
with a sharp tongue, whose ritual
is the town’s ritual, whose berries
become the town’s berries
as he gives away his wife’s favorite,
which he will eat a few of.*

Kinsey recognizes here how the solitary work of this old man, a widowed, sharp-tongued loner, creates a valuable social connection. By carting away the leaf piles, “[he] eases other’s work/ and loads it on himself.”

His berries “belong to the town” since he gives away all of the ripe fruit he so carefully cultivated, except for a very “few” of his wife’s “favorite”—which he eats perhaps just in memory of her.

What is clear is that this industrious neighbor isn’t, himself, all that fond of raspberries. His wife was. Thus his arduous annual labor is a poignant labor of love. By describing the neighbor’s work in great detail, Kinsey reinforces the power of the image he creates of a person engaged in a profound act of remembrance for a lost love, while reaching out to his community.



This book was published by Green Writers Press in the year following Leland Kinsey’s death. The cover photo was taken by the author.

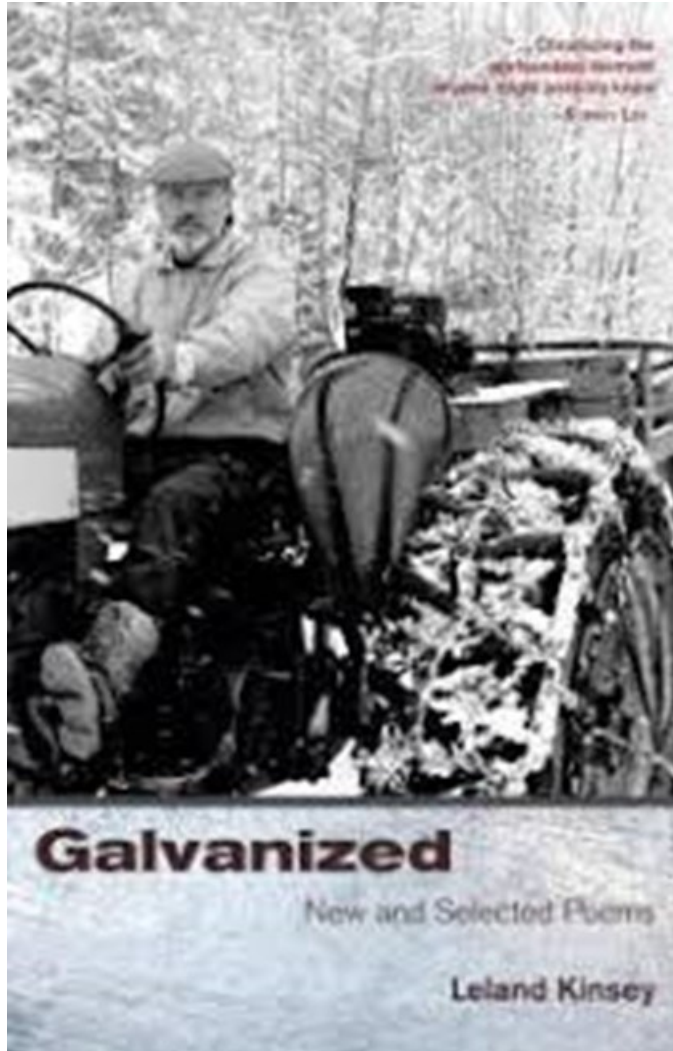
The poet’s pointing of his chimney is a work that must be done during warm, dry days in summer or fall. Otherwise the chimney would be in use. And the work isn’t optional; it must be done “to keep/the chimney from going to wrack” (*wrack* means to wreck beyond repair), risking a fire that could destroy the house. By contrast, his neighbor’s seasonal labor with raspberries isn’t essential to physical survival. But even so, it is work no less essential, for the neighbor’s nurturing of his late wife’s berry bushes aids his *emotional* survival in a life full of loss and pain.

Kinsey - Cont. from previous page

This aspect of work—its profound relationship to the worker’s psyche—is more clearly defined in one of Kinsey’s short poems.

Single Stone

*Only steps from a cellar hole
that was the basement of his life,
now filled with saplings,
the child’s grave lies amid stone wall rubble
and larger trees. A small burial
in a neighboring tree line
of someone unknown to me,
or known only by name and dates
made readable as I clear lichen
from the letters and numbers.
I also clear the vines, roots, encroaching canes
from the short mound,
just because it needs doing,
just needs.*



The cover photo shows the poet on his tractor.

A life with a high content of physical labor is the lot of a farmer. And farm work “needs doing.” When produce is ripe, its harvest is not optional. It “needs do-

ing.” In “Single Stone” the poet makes clear that a work that “needs doing” can transcend the physical to become a psychological necessity.

Yet another aspect of farm work that Kinsey portrays in certain poems is its sometimes communal nature. A long poem, “Picking Stone,” describes how friends and neighbors of an ailing farmer spend an afternoon together. They are doing him a favor by picking up stones from a field he hopes to plow and tossing them on a discard pile. The stones of all sizes must be cleared away so that his farm machinery won’t get ruined. It’s hot work that is hard on the hands and back—and the farmer, laid up and too ill even to help, is grateful. Such shared work for the stone pickers reinforces their bonds in their small, rural community.

Most of the work so carefully described in *Winter Ready* is work done in solitude. The poem’s voice is that of the poet. He is his own taskmaster in “Cider,” “Corn Cutting,” “Double-Digging the Garden,” “Felling the Elm” and “Wrapping the Pears.” But “The Spawning Hole” speaks of “we”—the poet and a companion go fishing together.

The Spawning Hole

*Because an older friend of his would mention it
but never reveal location,
my friend found the river’s major brook trout
spawning hole for at least the second time
by walking the alderly reaches; field meanders;
rocky rapids; and marshy spans;
greenstone and granite defiles
too narrow to fish; boulder-strewn flats;
slate-bedded runs;
sand- and gravel-tailed pools,
over the course of several falls.
One mist-defined October morning
he walked up on the older man
frying two trout beside a lively curve
and race ear beaverwork.
“It’s taken you a while.
I’ve cooked one up for you.”*

*Only once or twice a year
do we drift our weighted flies
out beside overgrown banks,
over twig and leaf deposits
heading the clear gravel run.
We quickly land and release
all females; and the largest males,
crook-jawed and shimmering
with muscle and color
giving them the weight
feel and shine of an ingot.
But we keep one or two
medium males apiece
because our families like to eat trout,
and to keep it all from being
just sport*

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Kinsey - Cont. from previous page

Can fishing be work? In this poem, the effort is being prized over the pastime (“just sport”). All work, for Leland Kinsey, was honorable in a way that no mere enjoyment could ever be.



A line-up of published books of poetry by Leland Kinsey

A profile of Leland Kinsey appeared in the [March 2021](#) issue of *The Barnard Bulletin*. Most of the books of this remarkable Northeast Kingdom poet still in print are now on order for the Danforth Library: *Winter Ready*, *The Immigrant’s Contract*, *In the Rain Shadow*, *Sledging on Hospital Hill*, *Not One Work*, *Family Drives*, and *Farmer’s Almanac*. Also published after his death, along with *Winter Ready*, is a collection of Kinsey’s letters entitled *Last Correspondence*.

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

“O A Z E I F X T M K N Z O P Z N T M I F
 O E I J N F M I N . O D S S N Z ’ O H T M M S
 B P I F O T E S A M I N R N Z V L N Z Z P J N .
 L B N F P Z U N I N Z ’ O X N N L U Z P F P
 H E L M I L B N U D O L V A P L B P I U
 L B N B E I F N E I B E O H P J W E O
 X D T T M X J Z N P W O . ”
 - T M D E O N O N V S M D Z C M I N O

**BARNARTS 2024
 FEAST & FIELD MUSIC SERIES**

2024 FEAST & FIELD MUSIC SERIES

Sept 26 Dance Party DJ

Doors open & food is available at 5:30pm

Music Starts at 6pm music with another set at 7:30p

Feast & Field features locally sourced food and drink from the Feast and Field Farmers and our hosts: Fable Farm, Eastman Farm & Kiss the Cow.

BarnArts Center for the Arts

PO Box 41

Barnard, VT 05031

www.barnarts.org

info@barnarts.org

802-234-1645 (BarnArts voicemail)

The 2024 Presidential (General) election is scheduled for Tuesday, November 5, 2024.

Please exercise your right to vote in November, in person at the Town Hall, or by Absentee Ballot.

CHARLES B. DANFORTH LIBRARY

This Fall at the Barnard Danforth Library

Sunday, September 29, 2024, 4 pm

How Your Town Government Works

Richard Lancaster, Selectman

Come learn about our local government, how it has evolved, and how it works from Selectman Richard Lancaster, multi-generation Barnard resident and town government leader.

Sunday, November 3, 2024, 4 pm

The Vermont Movie

Director Nora Jacobson

If you haven’t seen The Vermont Movie, a collaborative and ground-breaking 6-part series about the culture and history of the iconoclastic State of Vermont, made by several dozen award-winning Vermont filmmakers, now is your chance! Watch one of the segments and hear about how the film was made in a talk by lead director, Nora Jacobson.

Sunday, December 1, 2024, 4 pm

Danny Dover,

Vermont poet

Bethel’s own Danny Dover will read from his third collection, “Flamingo Nation: New & Selected Poems”. From Kathmandu to Ireland and back, all in a single afternoon....

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/>

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

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 first 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 and Wednesdays 3:00 – 5:00 PM; Saturdays 10:00 AM to Noon. Phone: 802-234-9408. ECFiber Wi-Fi. Email: charlesdanforthlibrary@gmail.com.

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

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR, selectboard@barnardvt.us, 234-9211 x 2. By phone at any time, or by appointment. Office hours coming soon

ZONING ADMINISTRATOR, zoning@barnardvt.us, 234-9211 x 2. By phone at any time, or by appointment. Office hours coming soon.

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

2024 FALL GLAD RAGS SALE

Friday Sept. 20, 2 PM - 6 PM

Saturday Sept. 21, 9 AM - 2 PM

Sunday Sept. 22, 10 AM - 1 PM (everything half price)

We recommend bringing your own shopping bags.

For more information about the sale, please visit our website at <https://www.gladrags.org/>

For the latest information join our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/145529065206>

ANNUAL PROSPER CHICKEN PIE SUPPER

When: Saturday, September 21, 2024

Where: Prosper Community House, Route 12 North, Woodstock, VT

\$18 per dinner, children 10 and under \$10 per dinner

Take- out dinners available 5 pm-6 pm

Two Seatings for dinner: 6 pm and 7 pm

Reserve for take-outs or dining-in at 802-457-2217

Crafts and handmade goods for sale

AT ARTISTREE

Saturday September 21 at 12pm: Aristree's September ArtFest Community Open House! Fun for the whole family with art projects, face painting, live music, cooking demonstrations and MORE! FREE - reserve your spot at: bit.ly/4dLBdc6

Sunday September 22 at 3pm: The Champlain Trio performs in the Hayloft! Tickets \$20 at: <https://bit.ly/4gf4a2s>

Artistree Community Arts Center & Gallery
2095 Pomfret Road/PO Box 158
South Pomfret, VT 05067
802.457.3500 ext. 129

Support Artistree at <https://artistreecommunityartscenter-bloom.kindful.com/> and www.artistreevt.org

Upcoming National Hollidays
Columbus Day, October 14, 2024
Veterans Day, Monday November 11, 2024
Thanksgiving, Thursday November 28, 2024

CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

“Spring flowers are long since gone.

Summer’s bloom hangs limp on every terrace.

The gardener’s feet drag a bit on the dusty path
and the hinge in his back is full of creaks.”

-Louise Seymour Jones