The Barnard Bulletin

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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. Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century writer Thomas Green Fessenden made his livelihood mostly as a journalist; and his "occasional verse," though clever and popular in its day, was dismissed by the larger world of literature. Even so, recent scholars have pointed out that Fessenden's work had an acknowledged influence on such famous American poets as William Ernest Henley and James Russell Lowell.

Thomas Green Fessenden **1771 – 1837**

An engraving of Thomas Green Fessenden in middle age.

Thomas Green Fessenden doesn't fit neatly into the category of "a Vermont Writer." He was first associated with New Hampshire, where he was born in Walpole to clergyman Thomas Fessenden and his wife, Elizabeth (Kendal) Fessenden. The first of their nine children (five boys, four girls), young Thomas went to grammar school in New Hampshire and worked on his family's farm. Then at age 21, he enrolled at Dartmouth College. Only after his graduation in 1796, at age 25, did he move to Vermont.

In Rutland, Fessenden studied law with a man named Nathaniel Chipman, and after passing the bar, in partnership with Chipman, he started practicing law. At about this time, he made his start as a writer, occasionally publishing original poems and prose essays.

In 1801, Fessenden gave up his fledgling law practice and left Vermont to "hop the Pond" and live in London. There he worked for various businesses, eventually meeting Benjamin Douglas Perkins, whose metal tractors inspired Fessenden to write a discourse in verse titled "Terrible Tractoration," published in 1803. The poem became popular in England and was republished in New York in 1806 as "The Minute Philosopher." The success of this long poem inspired Thomas to return to the United States—first to Boston in 1804, and then to New York City where he edited a publication called *The Weekly Inspector* for eight years.

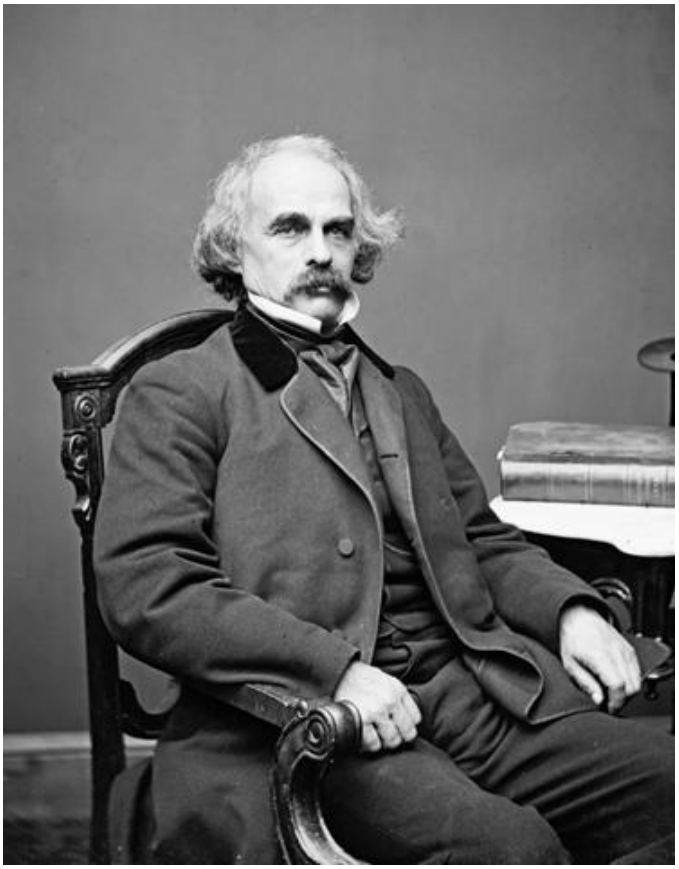
In 1812, however, at the age of 41, Thomas returned to Vermont. He moved to Bellows Falls to resume the practice of law. Soon after, he met Lydia Tuttle (1785-1866) of Massachusetts. They were engaged, then married in September 1813. Two years later, the couple moved to Brattleboro, where Thomas worked as the editor of *The Brattleboro Reporter* for three years; then they moved back to Bellows Falls so he could manage *The Intelligencer*.

In 1822 Fessenden's connection to Vermont came to an end. He and Lydia, a devoted couple who never had children, moved to Boston where he founded a publication called *The New England Farmer*. Fessenden eventually wrote several books on gardening and farming topics. He had no formal training in such subjects but was adept at finding facts published elsewhere and weaving them together. There is also no evidence that Fessenden had much scientific knowledge of bird life, though his poetry shows that he was at least conversant with the song of the "bob-o-linkhorn." Even so, as editor of *The New England Farmer,* he quickly made his periodical a forum for promoting the value of protecting birds.

While he was living and working in Boston, Fessenden also edited *The Horticultural Register* and *The Silk Manual.* For a short while he served as a state senator until his death at age 66 on November 11, 1837, in Boston. His grave is in the Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The young writer Nathaniel Hawthorne befriended Fessenden in 1836, late in the older man's life. An astute reader of Fessenden's various works, Hawthorne wrote a posthumous assessment and, in it, commended his departed friend for his "deeply felt anxiety for the welfare of his country" that gave "an impressive dignity to his thoughts and style." Though Fessenden aimed to be a

satirist, Hawthorne dismissed such a notion: "Nature never meant him for a satirist." He lacked the "ferocity… which fastens upon the throat of its victim." Instead, Hawthorne greatly admired the man for his "poet's sensibility" and such "a mind inexhaustibly fertile in ludicrous ideas."



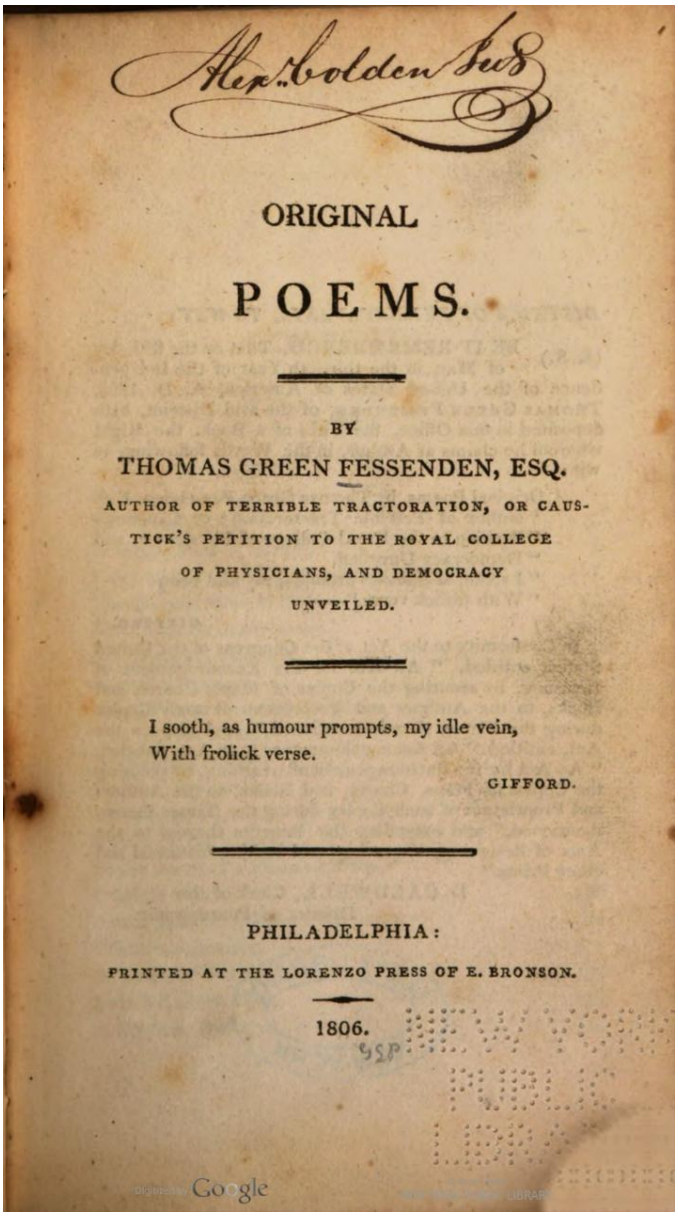
Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 – 1864)

One of those "ideas," not so ludicrous, had been Fessenden's invention of a portable steam and hot-water stove, which was heating the house of its inventor when Hawthorne came one day to pay a visit. Hawthorne composed an excellent description of Fessenden as he recalled him upon their first meeting:

> *His image is before my mind's eye at this moment; slowly approaching me with a lamp in his hand, his hair gray, his face solemn and pale, his tall and portly figure bent with heavier infirmity than befitted his years. His dress, though he had improved in this particular since middle life, was marked by a truly scholastic negligence. He greeted me kindly, and with plain, old-fashioned courtesy; though I fancied that he somewhat regretted the interruption to his evening studies.*

Hawthorne took a careful inventory of the surroundings, as well:

> *I had leisure to glance around at his study, which was very characteristic of the man and his occupations. The table, and great part of the floor, were covered with books and pamphlets on agricultural subjects, newspapers from all quarters, manuscript articles for The New England Farmer, and manuscript stanzas for "Terrible Tractoration." There was such a litter as always gathers around a literary man. It bespoke, at once, Mr. Fessenden's amiable temper and his abstracted habits, that several members of the family, old and young, were sitting in the room, and engaged in conversation, apparently without giving him the least disturbance.*



Alex. Golden Esq.

ORIGINAL

POEMS.

BY

THOMAS GREEN FESSENDEN, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF TERRIBLE TRACTORATION, OR CAUSTICK'S PETITION TO THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS, AND DEMOCRACY UNVEILED.

I sooth, as humour prompts, my idle vein,
With frolick verse.

GIFFORD.

PHILADELPHIA:

PRINTED AT THE LORENZO PRESS OF E. BRONSON.

1806.

To choose a sample of Thomas Green Fessenden's writing is to choose among many light-hearted pieces—prose and poetry—much of which is captivating. The verse quoted below shows an insistent humor and fellow feeling behind

a take-down of the typical romantic paean to the beauty of the poet's lady love. Its satire has a bite that doesn't wound; Hawthorne would be quick to notice how happily silly are every one of its comparisons. And surely an actual woman named Tabitha Towser never existed:

Tabitha Towser

Miss Tabitha Towser is fair,
No guinea-pig ever was neater,
Like a hakmatak slender and spare.
And sweet as a musk-squash, or sweeter.

Miss Tabitha Towser is sleek,
When dress'd in her pretty new tucker,
Like an otter that paddles the creek,
In quest of a mud-pout, or sucker.

Her forehead is smooth as a tray,
Ah! Smoother than that, on my soul,
And turn'd, as a body may say,
Like a delicate neat wooden bowl.

To what shall I liken her hair,
As straight as a carpenter's line,
For similes sure must be rare
When we speak of a nymph so divine.

Nor the head of a Nazarite seer
That never was shaven or shorn,
Nought equals the locks of my dear
But the silk of an ear of green corn.

My dear has a beautiful nose,
With a sled-runner crook in the middle,
Which one would be led to suppose
Was meant for the head of a fiddle.

Miss Tabby has two pretty eyes,
Glass buttons shone never so bright,
Their love-lighted lustre outvies
The lightning-bug's twinkle by night.

And oft with a magical glance,
She makes in my bosom a pother,
When leering politely askance,
She shuts one, and winks with the other.

The lips of my charmer are sweet
As a hogshead of maple molasses,
And the ruby red tint of her cheek,
The gill of a salmon surpasses.

No teeth like hers ever were seen,
Nor ever described in a novel,
Of a beautiful kind of pea green,
And shaped like a wooden shod-shovel.

Her fine little ears, you would judge,
Were wings of a bat in perfection;
A dollar I never should grudge
To put them in Peale's grand collection.

Description must fail in her chin,
At least till our language is richer—
Much fairer than ladle of tin
Or beautiful brown earthen pitcher.

So pretty a neck, I'll be bound,
Never join'd head and body together,
Like nice crook'd neck'd squash on the ground,
Long whiten'd by winter-like weather.

Should I set forth the rest of her charms,
I might by some phrase that's improper,
Give modesty's bosom alarms,
Which I wouldn't do for a copper.

Should I mention her gait or her air,
You might think I intended to banter;
She moves with more grace, you would swear,
Than a founder'd horse forced to a canter.

She sang with a beautiful voice
Which ravished you out of your senses;
A pig will make just such a noise
When his hind-leg stuck fast in a fence is.

Hawthorne described being instantly attracted to Fessenden, despite their wide difference in age and temperaments. "I loved the old man because his heart was as transparent as a fountain; and I could see nothing in it but integrity and purity, and simple faith in his fellow men and good will towards all the world." Hawthorne declared he knew at once that he would meet such "a rare man" only a few times in his life. "His character was so open, that I did not need to correct my original concept of it."

2025 FEAST & FIELD

BARNARTS MUSIC SERIES

Sept 25 Equinox Closing Festival

OTHER BARNARTS EVENTS

Haunted Village Theater, October 18, Village of Barnard

Fall Global Music Residency, October and November, dates to be announced, at Various Schools & Venues

Holiday Cabaret dinner & dance, Wassail Weekend, December 13, Barnard Town Hall

Winter Carols December 19, First Universalist Church of Barnard

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

AT ARTRISTREE

Wednesdays Music on the Hill Summer Concert Series

Free Admission. Join us September 24th at 6:30PM for the last series event with Ben Clark.

Charles B. Danforth Library News

October 2025

"My favorite color is October."
– Unknown

Open Hours

2-4 p.m. Mondays & Wednesdays
10 a.m. – Noon – Saturday
Free Membership

Join us on Sunday, October 19th at 4:00 p.m.

Danforth Library
Storytelling + Quilted Art + Inspiration
with Linda Ramrath

New Books

Picture books:
The Wild, by Zadie Smith
Mister Dog, a classic Golden Book by Margaret Wise Brown

Novels:
Peter May's, The Chessmen and The Black Loch
Daniel Silva's The Inside Job
Gaynor's Before Dorothy (Ever wonder about Dorothy's Auntie Em?)
Hazel Heart Lamp, by Banu Mushtaq (2025 Booker Prize). Twelve stories of the everyday lives of women and girls in Muslim communities in southern India.

Non-Fiction:
Garrett Graff's The Devil Reached Towards the Sky: An Oral History of the Making and Unleashing of the Atomic Bomb.
Rick Winston's Red Scare in the Green Mountains: Vermont in the McCarthy Era 1946-1960

***Trustees**: Paula Audsley, Margaret Edwards, Judy Maynes, Adelaide McCracken, and Susan Salter Reynolds*

***Contact Us**: charlesdanforthlibrary@gmail.com*
802-234-9408

MVSU REGIONAL HUB BUILD WORKING GROUP

In July, the MVSU Board reactivated the Regional Hub Build Working Group and drafted a strategy to bring a new rebuild proposal to voters in March of 2026. The proposal will focus on effectively addressing (1) voter feedback from the first bond vote, (2) State Education Reform passed this Spring and (3) the urgency to rebuild our failing infrastructure.

To support this process, ensure it is inclusive, has representatives from the districts' seven towns and members with skills and time to address the tasks ahead (detailed here), we are soliciting volunteers interested in being members of the Regional Hub Build Working Group.

Interested residents should please email seth.webb@mtnviews.org by September 1 with a short description of why you are interested and what area of the working group strategy you can support. We hope to have volunteers from each of our communities, Killington, Pittsfield, Plymouth, Bridgewater, Woodstock, Pomfret, Reading and Barnard.

The working group will be focused on the following four areas (1) Policy, (2) Construction & Finance, (3) Communications & Community Engagement, and (4) Lobbying, Coalition Building & Fundraising. The MVSU Board will review and appoint members to the Regional Hub Working Group at its September 8th meeting.

Seth Webb, Chair, Regional Hub Build Working Group

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

"D H Q R H C G H L Y N W D N L H F H L H,

S U R F D I C C H L' D G H D R M B

S H N R F H L, N A Y N I R I C A' D G H D R

M B O F H H L."

- F H T H A F I A R K N O J D M A

THE PLANNING COMMISSION meets on the second Monday 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: Monday & Wednesdays 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.; and Saturdays 10:00 a.m. to Noon. ECFiber Wi-Fi. 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, Kassie Hull, mailto:selectboard@barnardvt.us, 802-234-9211 x 4. Office hours: Tuesdays and Fridays 8am to 11am, and by appointment.

ZONING ADMINISTRATOR, Robert Ramrath, mailto:zoning@barnardvt.us, 802-234-9211 x 2. Available by email and phone during business hours Monday through Friday. In person meetings at the Town Office available by appointment only.

TOWN CLERK office hours are Monday and Tuesday, 8:00am—3:30pm. 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

CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

"September days are here, With summer's best of weather, And autumn's best of cheer."

- Helen Hunt Jackson

WOODSTOCK YOUTH HOCKEY

Do you love the sport of hockey, and like teaching youth how to grow in the sport? Are you thinking about how you can make a meaningful impact on youth from the Woodstock area? If so, we have the perfect opportunity for you!

Woodstock Youth Hockey Association is looking for a head coach to lead our girls division this upcoming season at Union Arena.

Please reach out to me personally if you are interested or have any questions at 06dana.kaye10@gmail.com.

The Woodstock Youth Hockey Association is also proud to offer hockey to anyone interested in the sport from ages 4-18.

For the youngest ages we are proud to partner with The Boston Bruins and Vermont State Amateur Hockey Association to offer the Bruins Academy Learn to Play Hockey Program! This program helps aspiring, youth hockey players develop their skills. The program is available to boys and girls ages 4-9 who have never played organized hockey.

Register your child for the best deal on head-to-toe hockey equipment to keep and get instruction from local coaches and athletes!

Sign up at:
http://ltpbruins.leagueapps.com/events/4701112-woodstock-youth-hockey

Get an extra 4 weeks of instruction by signing up for our FREE Learn to Play Session 1 Program at:
https://www.woodstockyouthhockey.org/page/show/8714424-ltp-2024-2025-

Please reach out to me personally if you have any questions regarding youth hockey in Woodstock.

Dana Kaye
WYH President
Pomfret