



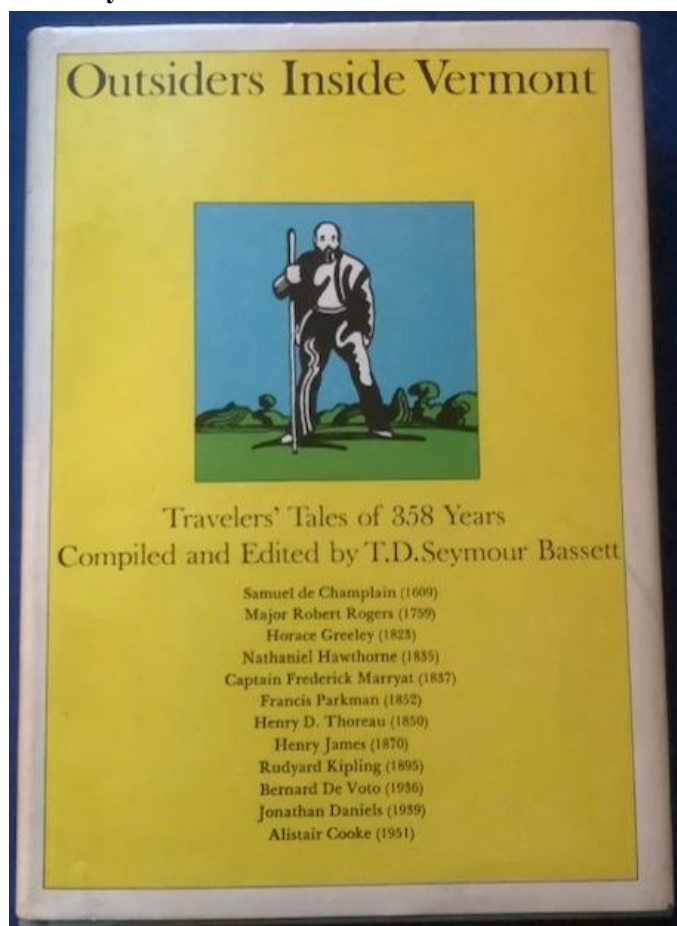
A VERMONT WRITER

BY MARGARET EDWARDS

*This column, an offering of the Danforth Library in Barnard, usually introduces a Vermont writer who deserves wider renown. This edition, however, features a Vermont editor who made significant contributions to preserving writings about Vermont. Native Vermonter T. D. Seymour Bassett (known more widely as Tom Bassett) was a professor of history at the University of Vermont and a chief archivist in its Bailey Howe Library. He gathered and selected thirty pieces into a 1967 anthology titled *Outsiders Inside Vermont*. This essay will be composed of quotations from Bassett's book of the impressions set down by various writers from elsewhere who "traveled" to and through our state.*

T. D. Seymour Bassett

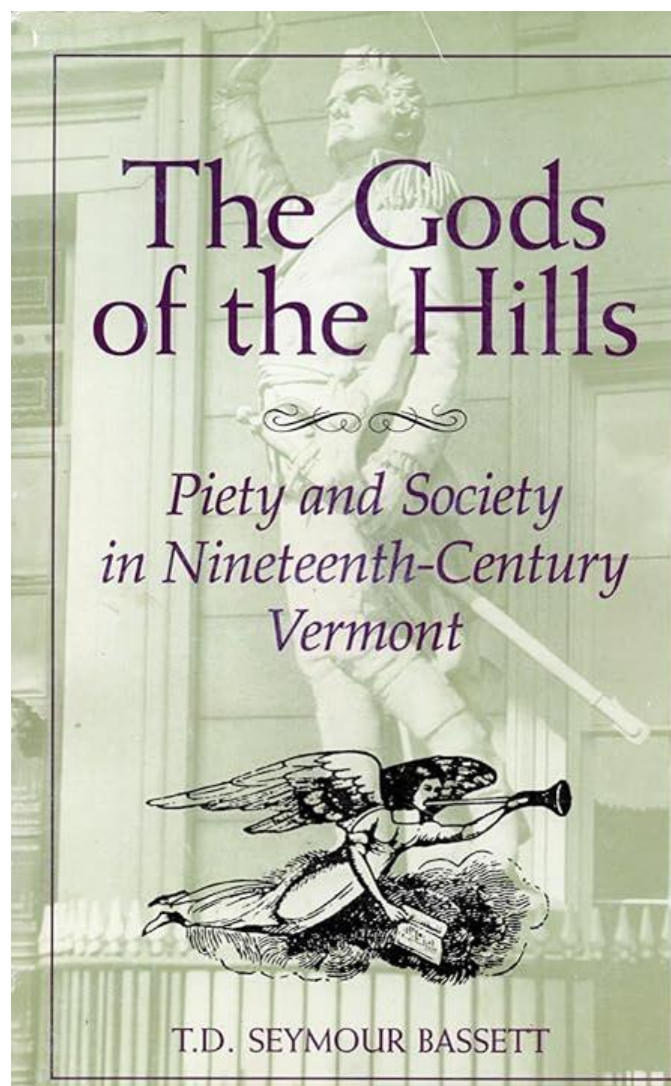
1913 – 2004



His name was Thomas Day Seymour Bassett, and if he had insisted on being called Seymour (the name he placed on his books' covers), Professor Bassett might not have been the popular fellow he was. But he was known universally as Tom, and among his colleagues at the University of Vermont (UVM) in Burlington were many friends. Profiles of him describe a man "tall, jaunty, and

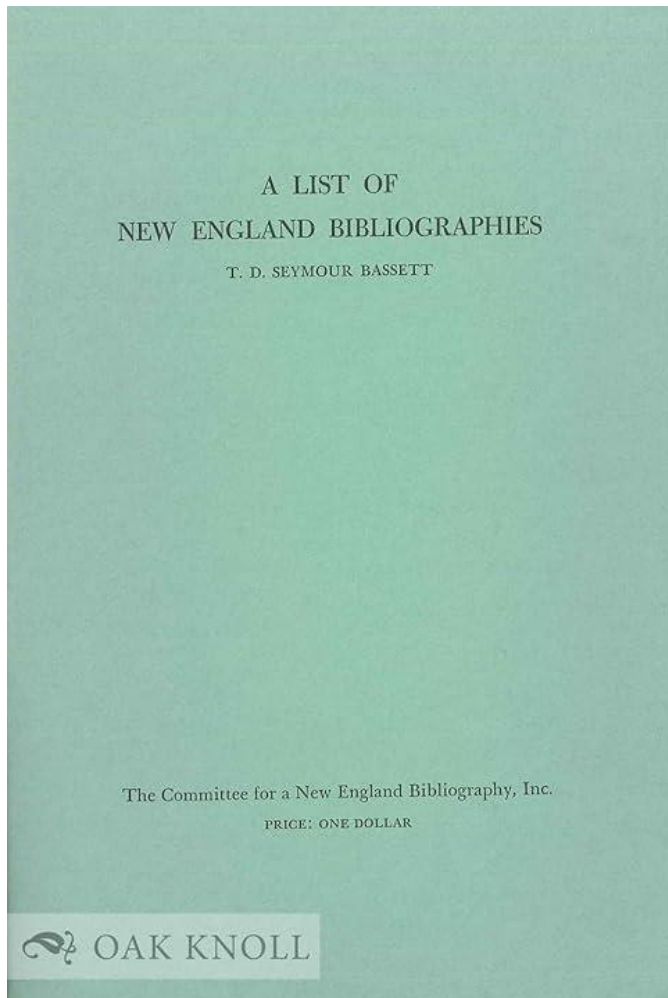
thin," who came across to everyone as the stereotypical, individualistic, idiosyncratic Vermonter—which he was.

Born in Burlington, Vermont, he grew up as a "faculty brat," since his father, during Tom's childhood, was a UVM professor of classics. Tom's later inclusion as faculty at the same institution where his father had taught might seem like nepotism, but Tom was trained at Harvard under the direction of famous historian Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. Tom had landed his job on his merits.



Tom Bassett was devoted to all things Vermont and became an "archivist," curating the University's Wilbur Collection of Vermontiana. He was committed to collecting material "that documented the everyday lives of common citizens"—according to an obituary of Bassett written by UVM professor Sam Hand. His commitment to archiving such sources, now commonplace, was rare at the time, according to Hand.

Bassett, as a Harvard graduate student of history, had chosen as his dissertation topic a study of early politics in Vermont. The shocking lack of any such material on Vermont politics that he might have used for his research doomed this thesis. Bassett would eventually see to it that this dearth of source material was remedied. Instead, his dissertation topic became the urban impact on Vermont's villages from 1840 to 1880. In other words, from his earliest years of scholarship while in graduate school, Bassett began his life-long focus on Vermont.



In 1967, Tom Bassett (as Seymour) published his book entitled *Outsiders Inside Vermont*, an anthology of what he called “traveler’s tales” that spanned 358 years, beginning in 1609. That earliest “traveler” Bassett quoted was the explorer Samuel de Champlain, who at 42 had joined an Algonquin and Huron party raiding the Iroquois in the south, territory that included the lake he named after himself. Here Champlain marvels at a fish taken from the lake:

Many kinds of fish are in great abundance; among others, one the local savages call chaousarou. I saw one 5 feet long, thigh-thick, its head as big as two fists, a beak two and a half feet long, with a double row of sharp, dangerous teeth. Its body is like a

pike’s, but its scales are so tough a poignard cannot pierce them. It is silver-gray. The savages gave me the head of one, saying that when they have a headache, they bleed themselves by scratching the spot that hurts with this fish’s teeth, and the pain immediately leaves them.

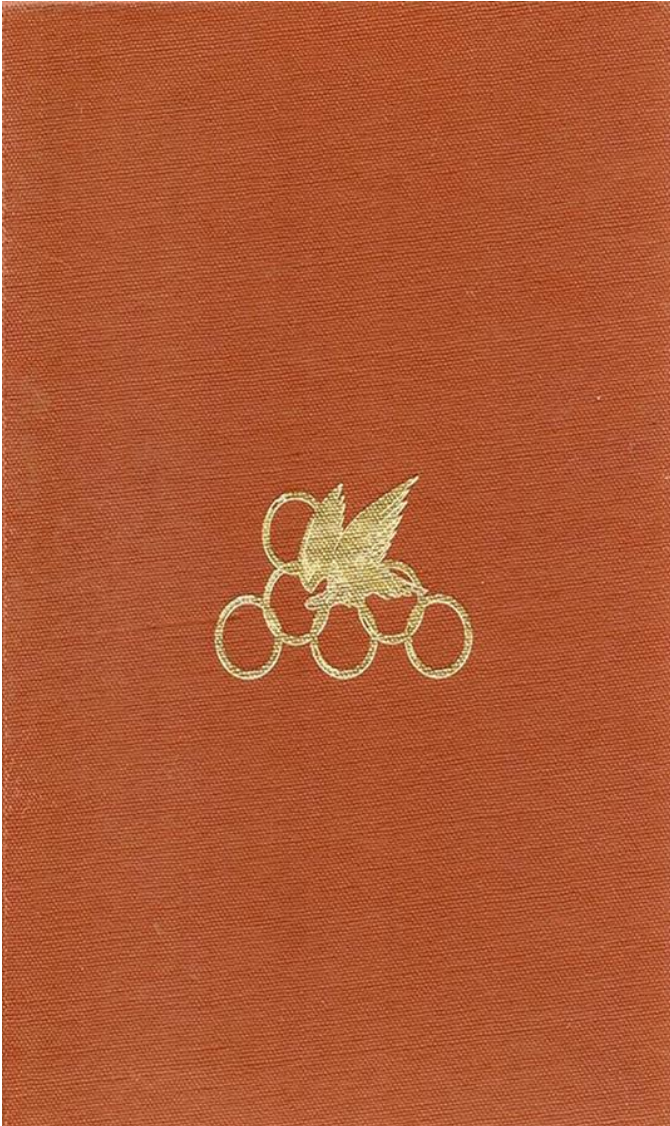
The most contemporary writer Bassett quotes, whom he positions as the last voice in the book, is a Dartmouth professor from New York City, Noel Perrin. Professor Perrin had moved to Vermont and lived in Thetford (not far from Dartmouth’s Hanover). Certainly by Bassett’s definition Perrin was an “outsider” through and through, yet Perrin in prose seems as horrified as any Vermont native by the encroachment of the “outside” on the state’s “last-stand” rural life. “In the last five years,” Perrin wrote in 1964, “the balance has perceptibly tipped in favor of modernization. Most people agree that the last stand is likely to end in about one more generation. What will happen then? Let me present my admittedly partisan view.” In the following paragraphs, Perrin gives his imagination free rein:

Most of Vermont will look like—well, it will look like central New Jersey with hills. Where there are now fields and meadows, there’ll be scrub woods mixed with frequent tree plantations. Every now and then there’ll be an automated concrete “farm.” Around each lake will be a ranch-style summer resort. The entire state will be linked by superb highways. In more rugged sections, these highways will take most of the valley land there is. (Right now a four-lane highway built to Federal interstate specifications consumes forty acres out of every square mile it goes through, or one-sixteenth of the whole square mile.)

There will, to be sure, be three or four villages left in which last-stand life goes on. Two of these, I guess, will be commercial ventures, and two will be owned by the state. All four will be pure fake. If you drove into one—I’m going to call it Old South Strafford Village—first you’d see a wooden barn with four live cows in it, and a man specially trained to milk them. Then you’d notice a grove of maples next to an old-fashioned sugarhouse. Probably the maples will have to be made of plastic, with electric pumps inside, since the main tourist season begins in June rather than March, and since there’s no way to keep a real maple from budding until June. But it will be genuine maple sap that the electric pumps draw up from a refrigerated tank under the sugarhouse.

Tom Bassett’s choice and arrangement of his material is a bit short of inventive. He organizes the quotations chronologically, and on the “contents” page he sets out these categories: Indian Days (1609-1759), Frontier Days

(1772-1791), Stagecoach and Steamboat Days (1819-1842), Railroad Days (1850-1895), Automobile Days (1919-1964). Somewhat disturbing to today's reader might be the fact that among the thirty authors quoted, there are no women—none. But the lessons of the 1960s hadn't yet taken hold in Vermont, at least not among traditionalists like Professor Bassett. Nonetheless, his selections are invariably fascinating.



Some of the compelling titles Bassett gives to the quotations catch a reader's eye. One that reads "Wretched in Woodstock" heads up an account of how, in August of 1782, young Elias Smith moved with his "father, mother, brothers and sisters" from Lyme, Connecticut, to the new home his father had purchased in a heavily wooded section of South Woodstock. Years later, Elias writes that he didn't mind the first part of the trip, walking beside the ox cart, and he liked South Woodstock, where his mother and sisters stayed temporarily. But he was not pleased with what was waiting at their ultimate destination. He and his brothers accompanied their father to inspect the

dwelling in the woods. After a two-mile uphill pull, along a crude path that required cutting away logs and stumps so that the ox team could pass, the party arrived:

...My father pointed us to the house, about forty rods ahead, the sight of which struck a damp on my spirits, as it appeared to me only an abode of wretchedness. After going to it and taking a general view of the house and land around, before the team came up, I determined within myself to return to Connecticut; thinking it better to be there to dig clams for my living than to be in such a place. I was disappointed, grieved, vexed and mad. Though I was some over thirteen years, I cried.

Young Elias rushes downhill past the ox cart, determined to leave, but his father calls him back sharply, asking where he thinks he is going. Reluctantly Elias halts and returns.

The dwelling place stood on the north side of a very large hill, half a mile from any house. Around the "house" (as it was called) there were twelve acres of land. The trees were cut down and lay in different directions, excepting a small place where the house stood. There was no way to look, to see far, without looking up, as the trees around prevented seeing any house or cleared land in any direction whatever.

The house was made of split bass-wood logs, locked together at the corners. There was no floor to the house, nor was there any roof to it. The grass had grown up within these wooden walls, and there was one large stump in the middle of the house, which, to heighten my trouble, my father said would do for a light stand.

We made a fire by the side of a log, cooked some dinner, and let our horse eat down the grass in the house before we prepared it for a lodging place for a night. My father had prepared boards for a chamber floor, and shingles for a roof, but had not time to put them on before he returned [to us in Connecticut.] The shingles consisted of brown ash bark, eight feet long, and from four to six feet wide. We corded up our bedsteads on the ground, and before night, placed over our heads several of those large pieces of bark, and without any floor but the ground, having no door, with a few pieces of bark over our heads to keep off the dew, we lay down to sleep and all rested quietly till morning.

The quotations above are the first of a series of selections—a Part I—from Bassett's *Outsiders Inside Vermont*. For more of them in subsequent issues of A VERMONT WRITER, please stay tuned.

The Danforth Library has a single copy of *Outsiders Inside Vermont* by T. D. Seymour Bassett. It is a rare book kept in the rare book section and doesn't circulate. But it is a hardcover copy in good shape and can be perused in the library itself. Though sections of it will be quoted—as they are here—in subsequent issues of *The Barnard Bulletin*, many sections well worth reading will inevitably have to be omitted. So come have a look inside the book itself.

BARNARTS EVENTS

Sameer Gupta is our Fall Global Music Residency Artist. Sameer Gupta, jazz musician and tabla player extraordinaire, will be spending next week at Barnard Academy, Woodstock Elementary, Prosper Valley School, Sharon Elementary, Hanover Ray School, Union Elementary, and Zack's Place!

He'll share his cultural knowledge and talent with the tabla (a North Indian hand drum), guitar, and violin, and teach about Hindi culture and language.

Don't miss his public performance

Saturday, October 25th, 7pm

North Chapel UU

Sliding Scale Tickets! \$5-20

Sameer will be joined by friends Arun Ramamurthy (violin) & Ben Tyree (guitar) for an evening of classical Indian music!

Tickets Now Available at

https://barnarts.ludus.com/index.php?show_id=200499622

Join BarnArts Chorale!

Singers of all ages are welcome to join BarnArts Chorale as we prepare for Winter Carols on Dec. 19.

Weekly rehearsals begin the evening of November 17th with Michael Zsoldos at the First Universalist Church & Society in Barnard.

Youth rehearsals are at 5:15, Adults at 6

Join us for free choral training and priceless community building!

Email info@barnarts.org if you're interested

BarnArts Center for the Arts

PO Box 41

Barnard, VT 05031

www.barnarts.org

info@barnarts.org

802-234-1645 (voicemail)

AT ARTISTREE

CONCERT: CLASSICAL GUITAR

William Ghezzi performs on Sunday, Oct 26 at 3pm. Ghezzi has performed extensively with orchestras, chamber ensembles, choruses, dance companies, in

theater and opera, and for films, radio and television. Suggested donation \$10.

<https://artistreecommunityartscenter.thundertix.com/events/250726>

Artistree Community Arts Center | 2095 Pomfret Road | South Pomfret, VT 05067 | (802) 457-3500

Support Artistree!

<https://artistreecommunityartscenter-bloom.kindful.com/>

www.artistreevt.org

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

"PR RJZDFUDN, KWD KNDDE

GND EKGRMPRA GQQ EKPOBE

GRM UJRDE. HPKWJTK KWDPN

QD GZDE, WJH QJZDQX KWDX

GND, EINDGMPRA KWDPN GNFE

QPBDMGRODNE. KWDX BRJH

PK PE KPFD KJ UD EKPQQ."

- OXRKWPG NXQGRK,

PR RJZDFUDN

The Union Arena Skating Club Open House at the Union Arena Community Center in Woodstock Vermont on Wednesday, Oct 22nd, 4:20-5:20 pm.

Available to anyone. We are asking for a suggested donation of \$10 for the Open House. Skate rentals will be available at the rink. Lessons for the regular season begin on Tuesday, October 28th, and take place Tuesday and Wednesday evenings. RSVP at

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/uasc-open-house-tickets-1757447134689?aff=oddtcreator>

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

"In November, the trees are standing all sticks and bones. Without their leaves, how lovely they are, spreading their arms like dancers. They know it is time to be still."

- Cynthia Rylant, In November

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