



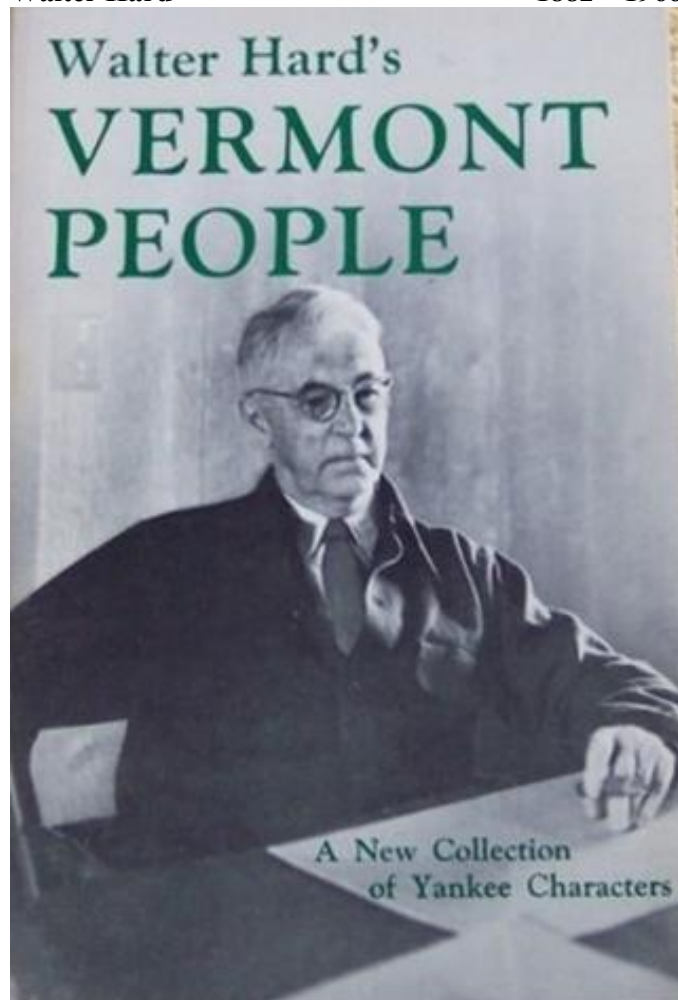
A VERMONT WRITER

BY MARGARET EDWARDS

This column is an offering of The Danforth Library in Barnard and a chance to introduce or further celebrate a Vermont writer who deserves wider renown. A profile of Walter Hard appeared in the June 2021 issue of The Barnard Bulletin, and this further consideration of his work, which intricately describes his beloved native state, extends the original profile.

Walter Hard

1882 – 1966



Book jacket photo of Walter Rice Hard, circa 1950

Some Vermont writers are born elsewhere and come to settle here, either briefly or for the rest of their lives, claiming this land and its people as an inspiration. But Walter Rice Hard belonged to the fifth generation of a family of Vermont settlers who had never left. His writerly claim to Vermont as his sole literary inspiration was inevitable and profound.

Hard had to cut short his education at Williams College in 1903 to become a storekeeper like his father, who was

ailing and needed his son to return to Manchester to take over. Becoming a merchant—reluctantly—was therefore young Hard's fate, but becoming a writer was solely his own doing. He began by writing a newspaper column that described local scenes and characters. His material was drawn from the village and rural life familiar to everyone in the readership of *The Manchester Journal* and *The Rutland Herald*. Hard's aim was to entertain the very people he encountered on a daily basis. His column was instantly popular.

Here is a sample, quoted from start to finish, of what became Hard's preferred form—a titled sketch of succinct prose broken into lines of verse:

Half Prepared

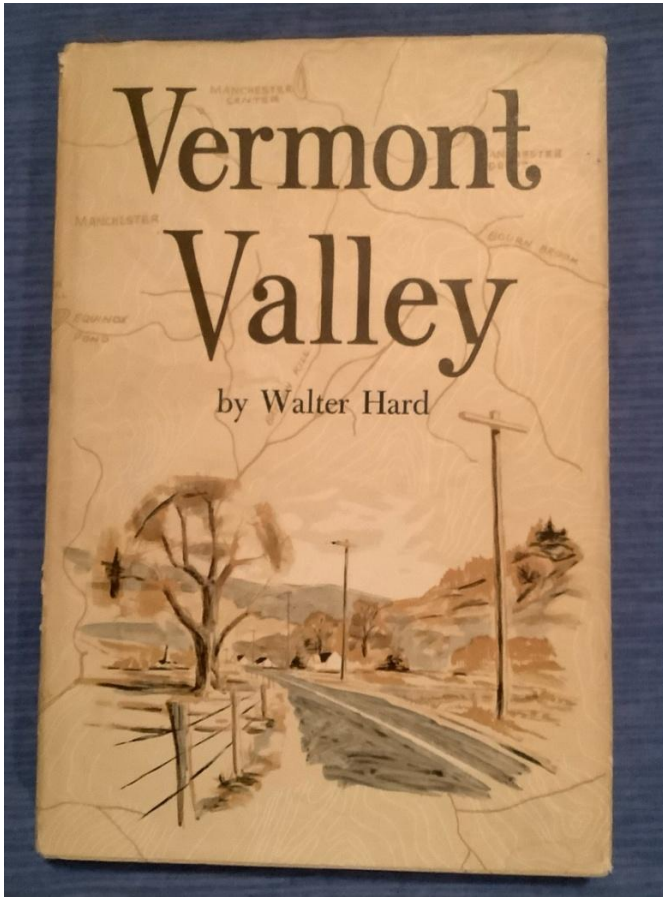
*Morton Tupperton had left the village
When he was in his teens.
He'd clerked it for two years
In Brayley's store,
And then decided to get out into the world.
Folks said he was foolish to leave a steady job
Just on the say-so of a "runner" for a New York
house.
Members of the traveling profession
Were usually looked on askance
By the people in the village.
There was something mysterious about them.

It was only two years later that Morton himself
Was a "runner" for the same house.
He had a section out West for his territory
So he didn't get back to the village.
Now and then some of his relatives heard from him,
And as time went on he sent them presents.
People's ideas of him underwent a change.
He seemed to be amounting to something.*

*He'd been a partner in his firm for some ten years
When the New York paper announced his death.
Later the village was aghast at the fortune
Which reports stated Morton had left.
A large sum was willed to a museum.
Ed Brayley was reading about it in the morning paper:
"I see it says it's t'be spent fer a wing,
T'be knowed as th' Tupperton Wing.
By gosh!"
Old man Sitwell listened with his hand behind his ear:
"A wing?" he asked in a voice that always trembled,
"Wal, mebbe he thought he'd be sure o'one anyhow."*

Most of Hard's vignettes are, like this one, intended to be humorous. They involve an initial set-up neatly describing an aspect of rural life—in this case the

propensity of ambitious youths to leave Vermont to seek their fortune elsewhere. The ending is often a quotation in country dialect, spoken by a character (or characters) well introduced beforehand.



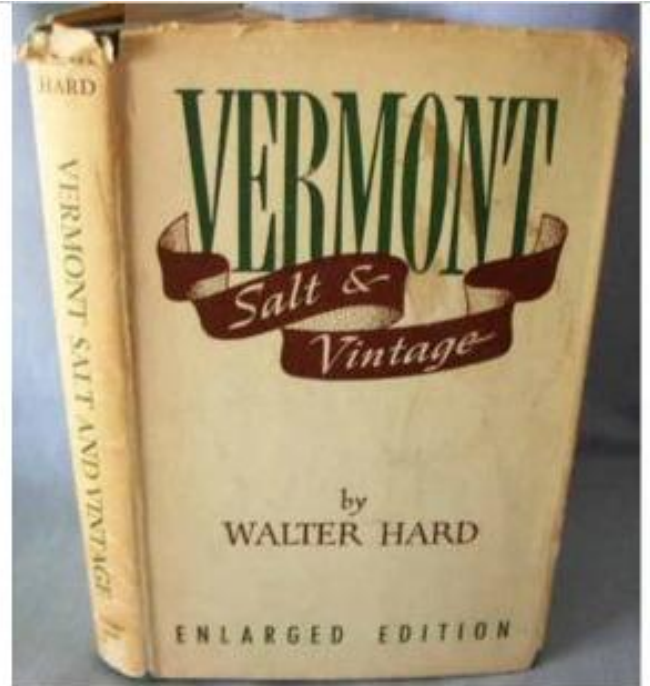
Published in 1937 by Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York. Out of print. Reprinted in 1959 by Vermont Books, of Middlebury, Vermont.

The popularity of Walter Hard's writings continued for all his long life. Over the decades, first as a storekeeper, then as a book shop owner, he never missed a deadline. He liked to call these short pieces "poems," although they showed very little poetic technique beyond being arranged in lines instead of paragraphs. Such prose vignettes, artfully arranged, are clearly written, highly descriptive, and frequently close with a direct quotation in Yankee dialect to make the author's point.

Hard's many pieces, first published in newspapers, were regularly collected in slim volumes with titles such as *Some Vermonters*, *Salt of Vermont*, *Vermont Vintage*, *Vermont Valley*, and *A Matter of Fifty Houses*. These books always sold well to a devoted readership that was, at its start, mostly New-England-based, but later became national.

Walter Hard lived out his life in Vermont, first in his native Manchester and later in Brattleboro. He did more than write. In 1911 he married Margaret Love Steel, and

they raised two children. He served four terms as a senator in the Vermont legislature, and wore many hats—as a trustee, a church deacon, an association director, a society member, an alumni president, and (to quote his obituary) "a leading figure and a patron of worthy causes."



Published in January of 1955. Now out of print.

The sheer volume of Hard's literary output is impressive. His vignettes—or "poems"—usually run between 30 to 45 lines. Within that confined space he manages to convey all manner of drama and humor, with a balance of descriptive flights, well-paced anecdotes, and pitch-perfect dialogue. He sketches characters of every sort who are true to life. His tone can veer from amusement to seriousness, then back again, with ease and balance.

Stereotypes are somehow charming when Walter Hard engages them. The flinty old codger, the too-talkative wife, the shy youngster, the patient workman, etc.—all of them seem fresh, not time-worn, in Hard's careful portraits. Here's another, unabridged:

The Gamble of Matrimony

*The first change Uncle Ezra noticed
In his young nephew was a tendency to dream.
He'd come on him several times
Sitting under a tree gazing into space.
Then one evening, right in the middle of the week,
He appeared after supper in his Sunday clothes.
He was gone from the room
Before Uncle Ezra had a chance to speak.
Uncle Ezra sat there with his paper in his lap,
Looking over his glasses at the hurrying figure.
In a few minutes the nephew drove past the window*

*With the driving horse hitched to the new buggy.
Uncle Ezra didn't get much information
When he spoke about the matter the next morning.
"I just went t' th' village," the nephew said.*

*By late summer Uncle Ezra's calendar
Was all mixed up by his nephew's strange doings.
The sacred rites of Saturday night
And the clothing of the Sabbath
Became parts of almost any evening.
By then Uncle Ezra knew it was love.
He also knew who the girl was.
That meant he knew her entire pedigree
Back to the first settlements in the valley.
As a bachelor of many years' standing,
Uncle Ezra had a certain disdainful attitude
Which he felt he must maintain.
Inwardly he was getting a vicarious joy out of it.*

*A few days before the wedding,
The nephew came in from the field
And sat down to rest on the back porch.
Uncle Ezra sat there in his chair
Shelling peas for dinner.
Without looking up from his pea shelling, he said:
"When a woman gets married she's a cocoon.
They ain't no way o' tellin'
Whether she'll turn out a butterfly
Er a snappin' bug."
He reached for another handful of peas.*

Certainly Hard had a fine-tuned ear for the speech of his fellow Vermonters. And he relished the turns of phrase he transcribed as much as the folk wisdom he encountered. He begins "Lampson's Descent" by setting the scene where two workmen have been working on a steep slope "below Table Rock," cutting in a stand of hard wood. The man named Lampson has managed to join the narrator that morning, having labored heavily "coming up the grade." Even as Lampson was climbing up, he'd suffered a sudden, inadvertent "descent" that forced him to pull himself up twice as hard before he finally arrived, breathless.

The narrator pauses with his ax to wait for Lampson, "puffing and blowing," to catch his breath. Lampson sits to rest, lights his pipe, and reflects on labor unions "allays preachin' / 'Bout hours o' labor." He then delivers the vignette's final soliloquy:

*"They say the Creator made th' Earth in six days
And rested on th' seventh.
Same old story as we hear now:
Time limit set for labor
No matter whether the job's done er only half.
Now as I was sayin', not meanin' t' be sacrilligious,
I'm inclined t' think it might 'a' ben as well
If the Creator had worked another day mebbe*

*On this section o' V'mont
And leveled it off a little mite, in spots."*

This pattern repeats itself over and over. But memorable as each final verbal "zinger" may be, the way in which the author introduces his topic in early lines lets readers encounter adept descriptions of rural life. Here, in the opening of "A Lender," Hard introduces a memorable setting that will soon be populated with focal characters and their dialogue. But in these opening lines Hard is careful. He takes his time, and the set-up is masterly:

*The auctioneer stood by the back door
On the marble step with a slanting trough in the center
Made by three generations of heavy-shod farmers.
On the porch, chairs were piled with small things
To be offered in lots before the crowd had warmed up.
Men were bringing things out from the kitchen,
To be ready as the sale went on.
People were wandering around the house
Looking over the bigger pieces of furniture.
What had been for almost a hundred years a home
Had, since breakfast that morning,
Become a second-hand store open to all comers.
The voice of the auctioneer grew stronger
As the bidding became more active.
By noon the auctioneer had moved to the barn
Where the men had been dragging out the farm machinery.
Wagons, harnesses, plows, hay rakes, were put up.*

This piece goes on to introduce a farmer and his son who wrangle over an item that the older man is insisting on bidding for and buying. The finale is a joke, but the early lines show serious and astute observation.

In only a few of his vignettes does Hard dispense with his impulse to amuse readers or to show off the Yankee dialect and humor he became famous for capturing. Here is an example of a work that revels in sheer descriptive power:

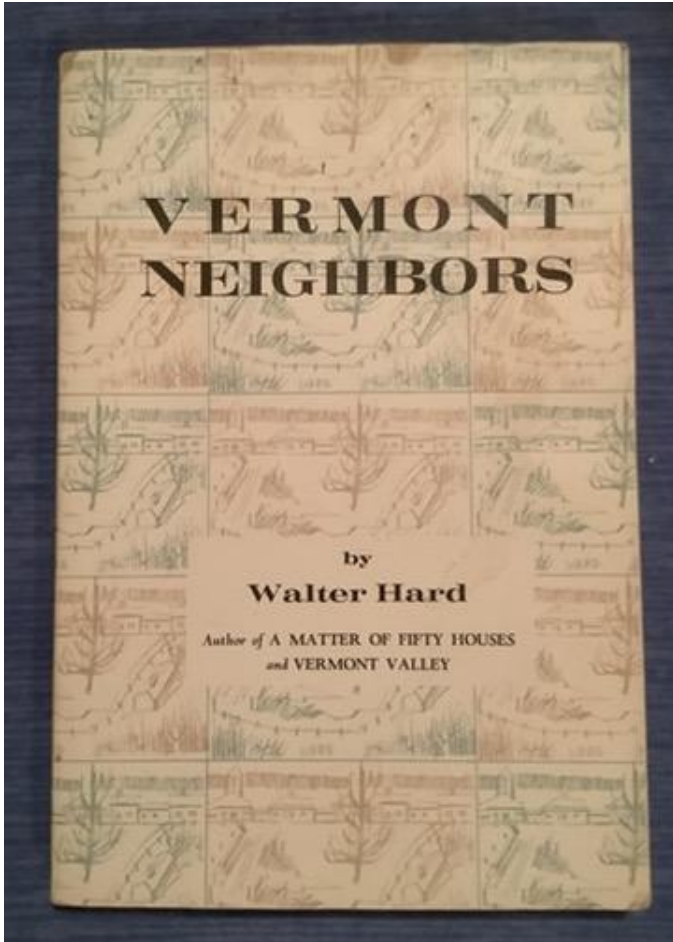
Winter Comes to Tinmouth Valley

*The road wound through the winter woods
Where the shadows of trees lay on the smooth snow.
It dipped down to a small brook
With frost-covered bushes leaning over it.
Uneven stone walls, partly buried in drifts,
Followed it on either side of the hill.
The woods ended and there was the valley,
A white sheet a mile wide, sagging in the middle,
Pinned to the sides of the mountains by scattered trees...*

Hard goes on to populate this valley with farms and barnyards, some cattle and sheep, a horse team and a dog. But no people. The ending's force doesn't rely on the

usual down-home clever saying. Hard seems, for the moment, to trust that his last lines of visual observation will deliver an adequate punch:

*Along the slopes of the eastern mountains
The purple shadow crept up to the last lilac light on
the highest peak—
Hovering cold, and waiting silence.
Winter night had come to Tinmouth valley.*



Published in 1960 by Vermont Books

But Hard preferred portraying people. He shows a knack for capturing the contrasts when city folk meet country folk in “Those Were the Days.” He describes Mrs. Dolph’s boarding house. She rents rooms to the coachmen and servants who accompany “the people of means who employed them.” Then he turns his attention to those “people of means” who

*Stayed at the big hotel and came up from the city by
train.
Amos Sheldon who drove the high-seated express
wagon
Often had to make two trips to the station
To bring up the many trunks full of the proper clothes
To be worn while sitting on the shaded porches
Or playing a discreet game of croquet.
Of course there were some wild young people*

*Who played tennis in the hot sun and even climbed
mountains.*

*Usually around four o’clock the equipages
Would be driven from the hotel stables.*

*Victorias with a coachman and footman on a high box
Would wheel up to the hotel door,*

*And into them would get two ladies equipped with
parasols*

And dressed in frilly gowns and flower-decked hats.

*The horses, their docked tails constantly moving
uselessly,*

*Would rear and prance at the instigation of the
coachman*

*And the footman would clamber up to his seat as they
started off.*

The remarkable aspect of Hard’s literary accomplishment is its cumulative power. In his eighteen published books, his anecdotes and flights of description, his ear for eccentric speech and humor, his steady focus on Vermont and Vermonters in his specific era—the 1930’s, 1940’s and 1950’s—create a world both vivid and credible, as well as strangely exotic. Poet Carl Sandburg was quoted as saying, “I find his Yankees fascinating. I treasure and re-read his volumes.” In *The Christian Science Monitor*, a reviewer praised Hard’s having set down the “humor, pathos and human understanding of the country people of Vermont as no other author has been able to do.”

Walter Rice Hard was almost a one-man public relations wizard. His vision of a beautifully unspoiled rural state full of quirky inhabitants was pervasive and became indelible. Even now, tourists are on the look-out for proofs that Hard’s Vermont still exists.

Of interest is the fact that Hard’s son, Walter Rice Hard, Jr., became the editor of the magazine *Vermont Life*, a publication begun in 1946 that purveyed for decades an image of the state with a similar populist appeal. *Vermont Life* only ceased publication in 2018.



The Hard family stone is near the grave of Walter Hard in the Dellwood Cemetery of Manchester, Vermont.

The Danforth Library of Barnard so far owns only two of Walter R. Hard's books. Both were published by Vermont Books, of Middlebury. Their titles are *Vermont Valley* (1958) and *Vermont Neighbors* (1960). Other volumes by Hard have been recently ordered for purchase.

Charles B. Danforth Library September 14, 2026



Hours

Mondays & Wednesdays, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Saturdays, 10:00 am. - Noon

High Speed WiFi Anytime

New Books

Children

Dr. Seuss. Sing the 50 United States!

A long-lost Dr Seuss manuscript discovered in a university library in California.

Maritime History

Tilar J. Mazzeo . **The Sea Captain's Wife: A True Story of Mutiny, Love, and Adventure at the Bottom of the World.**

Summer 1856. The captain's wife, nineteen and pregnant, is forced to take over her husband's ship mid-voyage. With no training, equipped only with nautical almanacs and how-to guides for sea navigation, and facing a mutiny, she decides to put her cards on the table. The crew responds by anointing her their captain. It is the mid-1800s, and they are sailing straight into a monumental storm.

Biography/Autobiography

Bob Spitz. **The Rolling Stones: The Biography**

Maya Angelou. **The Heart of a Woman**
(Autobiography)

Fiction

Colson Whitehead's **Cool Machine: A Novel** and **Crook Manifesto: A Novel** 2nd and 3rd of The Harlem Trilogy.

Robert Harris. **Agrippa: A Novel of Ancient Rome's Descent into Dictatorship.** (author of "Conclave")

Lázár: A Novel by Nelio Biedermann.

Inspired by the author's own family story—a gothic, intergenerational family saga capturing the rise and fall of an aristocratic Hungarian family against the backdrop of the two world wars.

Caro Claire Burke. **Yesteryear: A Novel**

A traditional American woman, a "tradwife" influencer, suddenly awakens in the brutal reality of 1855—where she must unravel whether this living nightmare is an elaborate hoax, a twisted reality show, or something far more sinister in this sensational debut novel.

John Williams. **Stoner: 50th Anniversary Edition**

This unassuming story about the life of a quiet English professor has earned the admiration of readers all over the globe.

Charles B. Danforth Library, PO Box 204, Barnard, VT 0503
6208 VT Route 12

Phone: 802-234-9408

Email: charlesdanforthlibrary@gmail.com

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

Volunteers: Kayla Thompson, Edythe Wright, and Patricia Attkisson

FALL HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE COLLECTION DAY

Household Hazardous Waste Day will be in the Rochester Town Office Parking Lot located at 67 School Street on Saturday, September 26 from 9AM to 1PM.

Barnard residents can take up to 10 gallons or 10 pounds of household hazardous waste per family at no cost.

ANNUAL PROSPER CHICKEN PIE SUPPER

Saturday, September 26th

Prosper Community House, Route 12
(about 3 miles north of Woodstock)

Takeouts are available from 5-6pm

Dine-in seating at 7pm

For Reservations (dine in or take-out) call Ann Wynia at 802-457-2217

Price: \$20 adults and \$10 children 10 and under

Pam Ahlen
Barnard

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.

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

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.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR, Kassie Hull, <mailto:selectboard@barnardvt.us>, 802-234-9211 x 4. Office hours: By chance or by appointment.

TOWN CLERK office hours are Monday and Tuesday, 8:30am - Noon. Call 234-9211 for an 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.

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

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

MT TOM FARMERS MARKET IS OPEN

Saturday mornings rain or shine 9:30am to 12:30pm until mid-October at Saskadena Six in South Pomfret. Featuring local growers, makers and bakers.

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 = A. The solution is found by trial and error. The CRYPTOGRAM answer is on the next page.

“F OL JNKD HX YS NCT

JFLGMFHFNS BI MFPCN FE NCT

ONLBJGCTKT FE NCT ODNDLE, OJ

FI NCT TOKNC OYJBKYTZ EBET,

OEZ BDN BI NCFJ GKBIDJFBE BI

ZOVVMFEP MFPCN HOLT NCT

ODNDLEOM NFENJ.”

-CTEKS ZOUFZ NCBKTOD,

BHN. 12, 1852

SILVER LAKE SYRUPS FALL HOURS

September-October *

Friday-Sunday
12pm-6pm

*Closing Day: October 12

Sunday September 20th, fresh batch of apple cider donuts, which means the Maple Cider Stack is back.

If you haven’t tried one yet, it starts with a Maple Creemee, gets a splash of apple cider, and is topped with one of our apple cider donuts.

Also available: Maple Creemees, Maple Syrup, Maple Pecan Pies, and Maple Caramel Popcorn.

Sonja Withington
Silver Lake Syrups, LLC
Cell: (802) 345-6795
www.SilverLakeSyrups.com

2026 is a midterm election year.

Please remember to vote on November 3, 2026.

Per state law, Vermont will automatically mail a general election ballot to all registered voters by October 1, 2026.

NEWS FROM BARNARTS

BarnArts Center for the Arts Building Community through Art, building Community through Art.

BarnArts is "Raising the Barn" on a home for art and community in Barnard. Find out more about our exciting capital campaign and consider joining us on this fun new adventure. Contact us if you are interested in getting involved with our Capital Campaign.

FEAST & FIELD MUSIC SERIES, 2026 SEASON!

Feast & Field Music Series is run by BarnArts and the Feast & Field farmers provide locally sourced food and drink, much of which is harvested and produced right in Barnard. The weekly celebration of music, food and community is held in the Fable Farm Orchard in Barnard every Thursday from now thru September.

Sept 24 Equinox Closing Festival w/Sonido Mal Maiz
- psychedelic

Tickets at: <https://feast-and-field.square.site/tickets>

Contact us at info@barnarts.org if you have a donation

All funds support BarnArts free and sliding-scale family programming.

BarnArts 2026

Once Upon a Mattress

Director:
Linda Treash
Music Director:
Parker Eastman
Choreographer:
Lauren Mckeeon

Starring:
Babs Mills
Kyle Huck
Jill Clough
April Lopez
Cady Taylor
Hillary Hunt
Evie Hackett
Killian White
Shu-nan Chu
Evan Landon
Kyra Monsam
Amelia Brame
Albert Falcone
Chelsea Cassady
Elizabeth Linsley
Christina Manero
Dylan Mroszczyk-McDonald

Production Dates
November 6-15

Location
Barnard Town Hall

Tickets available
in October

BarnArts Center for the Arts
Building Community through Art

JOIN US FOR OUR FALL MUSICAL, ONCE UPON A MATTRESS!

Director: Linda Treash

Music Director: Parker Eastman

Choreographer: Lauren Mckeeon

Prince Dauntless cannot marry without his mother's approval. And she has MANY thoughts about who is good enough for her baby boy. Meanwhile, no one else in the kingdom is allowed to marry until Dauntless does, and Lady Larken and Prince Harry have a bit of a deadline coming up...! A desperate Prince Harry goes off on a princess quest and returns with moat-swimming Princess Winnifred! (She swam the moat?) Could a swamp princess be just what the kingdom has been waiting for?

This isn't your great-great grandmother's fairy tale, but it might be your Mother or Grandmother's! Once Upon a Mattress is full of puns, laughs, and heart, and it famously launched the dazzling career of comic Carol Burnett, as the strange but winsome Princess Winnifred!

Nine lead roles plus featured ensemble. Rolls for all ages and experience levels.

Nov 6-15, Once Upon a Mattress, Fall Community Musical, Barnard Town Hall

Oct/Nov, Fall Global Music Residency, Various schools & Venues (tba)

Dec 5, Holiday Cabaret music & dancing, Barnard Town Hall.

Dec 18, Winter Carols, First Universalist Church of Barnard

We couldn't build community through art without your support. Donations let us know you see and appreciate our work in making the performing arts thrive in our rural corner of the world. BarnArts is a 501(c)(3) non-profit and all donations are fully tax-deductible. You will receive a warm thank you and a receipt for your donation. [Online donations](#), donations by check (PO Box 41, Barnard, VT 05031), and securities are all welcome and appreciated!

BarnArts is hiring a year-round, part-time, Music Program Manager. See our website for more detailed info: <https://barnarts.org/work-with-us/>

BarnArts Center for the Arts

PO Box 41

Barnard, VT 05031

www.barnarts.org

info@barnarts.org

802-234-1645 (voicemail)

CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

"I am struck by the simplicity of light in the atmosphere in the autumn, as if the earth absorbed none, and out of this profusion of dazzling light came the autumnal tints."

- Henry David Thoreau, Oct. 12, 1852