

# THE BULLET AND THE BATHTUB

On the last day of the Battle of Gettysburg, Joseph W. Hitchcock, a member of the 13th Vermont Volunteers regiment, felt a sudden pain in his leg. A bullet passed through the tin plate resting on his knee, pierced his flesh, and lodged in his leg. When the bullet neared the surface, almost four years later, Joseph Hitchcock removed it with his jackknife. In 1907, Joseph Hitchcock's sister donated the tin plate and bullet to the Vermont Historical Society.

The plate and bullet are in no way lonely objects in the museum collection. Keeping them company are some 15,000 other artifacts including one of Ethan Allen's shoe buckles, several Victorian tear vials (tiny bottles in which ladies saved their tears), a bag of hair, bottles of horse medicine, Mrs. Calvin Coolidge's engagement ring, rag dolls, two tin bathtubs, the steering wheel from the USS Montpelier, cream separators, and a Cross Cracker box with one cracker left inside.



The collection, however, does not end there. More than 40,000 books, 20,000 photographs, 6,000 posters,

1,000 maps, and thousands upon thousands of manuscripts are yet another part of the state historical society's holdings. There are Vermont bumperstickers and postcards, old tickets, diaries, printed programs, letters, and account books. The list goes on and on.



These items, you might think, make an odd collection, and have little in common with each other. But that is not completely true. The buckle, the cream separator, the dolls, even the bag of hair and the cracker tell us about the people who lived here in Vermont, how they worked and played, what they wore and what they ate. All these pieces of information fit together to better reveal the story and history of our state.

People collect things for a variety of reasons. An object's beauty, oddity or value may all be factors in a person's desire to save it. Wanting to remember a place once visited is yet another reason. Souvenirs (French for "remember") help us to do that. Many collections are formed as a result of our and other persons' travels.

Throughout our state and our nation's history individuals have followed their instincts, searched for items, unusual or precious or even just plain ordinary. The Vermont Historical Society's collection and those of other museums in the state are the result of donations from hundreds of such collectors.

Some of us save things without consciously trying to make a collection. A pretty rock, stickers, a necklace charm, stamps or even tea bag tags might be the type of thing we collect. But these things will give future historians a window through which to view our life now just as the Vermont Historical Society's collection does for the past.