

HISTORIC ROOTS

HISTORIC ROOTS

Ann E. Cooper, *Editor*
Deborah P. Clifford, *Associate Editor*

ADVISORY BOARD

Sally Anderson
Marianne Doe
Robert Lucenti
Meg Ostrum
Marshall True

Nancy Chard
Mary Leahy
Caroline L. Morse
Michael Sherman
Catherine Wood

Publication of *Historic Roots* is made possible in part by grants from the A.D. Henderson Foundation, the Vermont Council on the Humanities, the Vermont Historical Society, and Vermont—NEA.

A Magazine of Vermont History

Vol. 2

December 1997

No. 3

CHRISTMAS AT THE PARK- McCULLOUGH HOUSE

By STAFF MEMBERS
THE PARK McCULLOUGH HOUSE

The Park-McCullough House, off of Route 67A in North Bennington, was built in 1865. Trenor Park built it for his wife and three children as a summer home. They spent winters in New York City and summers in Vermont. But they always came to Vermont for Christmas.

The Park family was very wealthy. Trenor Park, who was born in Woodford, Vermont, had made a fortune in California. The house he built is huge; it has 35 rooms. The ceilings on the first floor are 14 feet high. The doorways, the windows, the size of the rooms on this floor are twice as big as what you find in most homes built today.

The house remained in the family for 100 years. Lizzie Park, the oldest daughter, stayed in the house after she married John G. McCullough. The couple stayed in the same bedroom Lizzie had shared with her sister, Lila.

Lizzie liked the room so much that when President Benjamin Harrison came to Vermont in 1891, to dedicate the Bennington Battle Monument, she insisted that he stay in it.

John McCullough was an important man in Vermont. He was president of the Bennington & Rutland Railroad and served in the state legislature. In 1902 he became governor.

Everything in the house today belonged to the Parks and the McCulloughs. It is so homelike that visitors sometimes feel as though the owners have just stepped out of the room for a minute.



Park-McCullough House

Ribbons, flowers, and greens decorate the dining room and front hall of the Park-McCullough House.



Park-McCullough House

One of three Christmas trees in the Park-McCullough House.

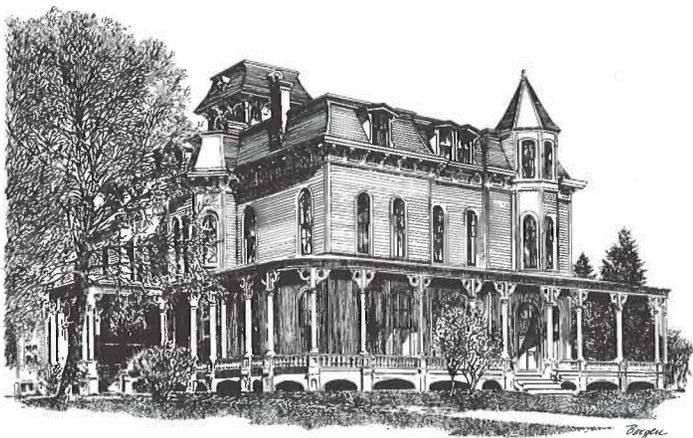
The Parks moved into the house at Christmas in 1865. And Christmas remained a very special time for them. Friends and families came to stay. The house was decorated and filled with gifts, laughter, and good food.

The days before Christmas were busy indeed. It was not possible then to buy the kind of Christmas tree ornaments we have today. It is likely that the family made many of their decorations. Paper angels and chains and American

flags were popular. Ribbons, special cookies and candies, and even small toys may have hung on the tree in the parlor. Larger toys would have been placed around its base.

In those days before electricity, Christmas trees were lit by candles. There was always the danger of fire. With the greenery in the house and the baking of Christmas treats, the house must have smelled as wonderful as it looked.

Christmas is still special in the house. Every year it is decorated to look as it might have at the end of the 19th century. There are three trees. A 12-to-13-footer stands in front of the east doors on the first floor. Another is in the dining room, and a third is in the upstairs hall. Plants, flowers, and pine branches, trimmed with ribbons, decorate the parlor, dining room, and front hall.



The Park-McCullough House in North Bennington.

To visit the Park-McCullough house at this special time reminds us of the ways family and tradition help link us to what came before.

Rooting Around

What can you find out about the ways your family celebrated the holidays in the past? What do you do that is still the same? What new traditions do you have?

The Park-McCullough House is on the corner of Park and West Streets in North Bennington. It is open seven days a week from late May until late October. Tours of the house are on the hour from 10 am until 3 pm. The house, grounds, shop, and carriage house stay open until 4 pm.

In 1997 the house will be open December 11–14. Tours will be given from 12 pm to 4 pm daily. Santa will visit on December 13 from 1 pm until 3 pm. Call 802-442-5441 for further information.