

HISTORIC ROOTS

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Sioux shield showing a battle scene.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

WHY LEARN ABOUT HISTORY?

This is the first issue of a magazine about Vermont history, written for adult new readers. There is a reason it is called *Historic Roots*. If you think about a tree, you know that it rests on roots deep under the ground. Above those roots is a strong trunk that holds up the branches. It gets wider and stronger every year. And every year there is new growth. Sap, the blood of the tree, rises from the roots, through the trunk, into the branches and leaves, and keeps the tree alive.

You can look at time like a tree. The roots and the trunk are the past. They support and feed the branches and the new growth, which are the present, where we live. The present is rooted in the past, just as a tree is rooted in the ground.

History is the story of the past. Actually it is all the stories of the past. Heroes and villains and dates and wars, which many people think are history, are only some of those stories. Others are about how people lived. They tell us how people did their jobs and built their houses and got their food. They also tell us about what people knew and didn't know. They tell

how things got invented. They show us how everything that happened affected what came next.

Through history we learn about the past and about how the present came to be. Not knowing that is like waking up in a strange place with no idea of where we are or how we got there. History tells us where we are. It shows us which paths were useful on the way, which ones led to trouble, and how and why one path was chosen over the others.

Today we have movies and newspapers and television to tell us what has happened and is happening. How do we learn about what happened before they existed?

Even before the invention of writing, people wanted to tell about their lives and to learn about what happened before they were born. Songs and stories were fun to hear, but they also taught about important people and events. Carvings on stones, pictures on cave walls and animal skins, patterns in beadwork were some other ways people recorded the past before they could write. Once they could write, people used words instead of songs and pictures to save their stories. Before there was printing, important books like the Bible were copied many times by hand. This is why we still have them today. We also have old letters and diaries. All these words tell us about the past. So do things left from earlier times, such as old

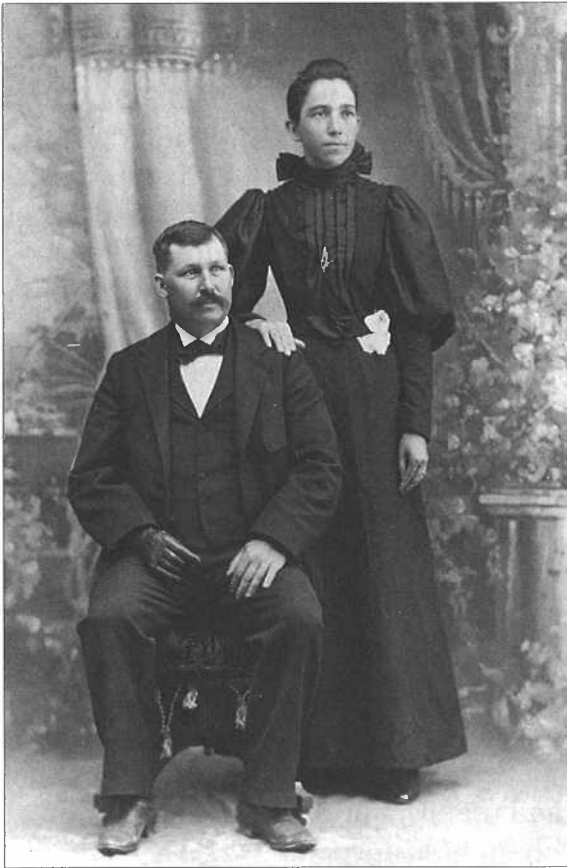
houses, tools, and clothing.

It is important to remember that everything in history happened to real people. What is history to us now was their lifetime. They lived in real houses, had real children, ate real food. The sky was blue in the past, and sometimes gray. The grass was green. The snow was white and cold. Sometimes it rained. Sometimes there was not enough to eat. Some people were rich, some were poor. In many ways the world was just like today.

This is not always easy to remember. People in old paintings and photos had to sit still a long time while they posed. They look as stiff as they must have felt. Old clothing that we find in trunks or see in museums is often shabby and faded. Old tools get rusty, old houses fall apart. It is hard to think of the people in the pictures as being truly alive. It is hard to think of the clothes and tools as being new and useful. But they were. Everything you read about in history was as real and true for the people then as town meeting or our last trip to the store are for us.

“Tell us about when you were little!” most of us have asked our parents or grandparents, wanting to hear how much times have changed. Children or grandchildren may ask you the same question. What you tell them is the real story of your real life. To them, what you tell them is history.

From the Delano Collection of the Sheldon Museum, Middlebury, Vermont.



Because they could not move at all while the photographer took the picture, the man and the woman look as stiff and cold as the man's wooden hand. We don't know who they are or exactly when the picture was taken, but there is a lot to think about in this picture. What can we tell about these people? They are in a studio. She is very young. He has only one hand. Their clothes tell us the picture was taken in the 1890s. It is what we don't know that makes it so interesting. Who are they? Where did they live? Why were they having their picture taken? What else did they do that day? And what on earth happened to his hand?

It is not all of history, of course. There is as much history as there have been people and events. We can't know all of it. We can't even know all of our own history. Each thing we do know is like a little piece of a puzzle. When we put it together with other pieces we have part of a picture of what part of the past was like. It is interesting to learn about, even if we can't know it all. And the more we know about it, the better we understand what is happening now.

This magazine is about the history of Vermont. Before the Revolution, when the colonies belonged to England, the area that became Vermont was fought over by New York and New Hampshire. Vermonters fought in the Revolution, and for a few years after the Revolution Vermont was a separate country, the Republic of Vermont. In 1791 it became the 14th state. Now it is a small part of a super power. Who lived here, what they did and how and why they did it, and how we got to be what we are today are all part of its history. Vermont history is a good story. It is his story, her story, and our story. Let's explore it together.

ANN E. COOPER, *Editor*

JANET CLARK'S FAMILY TREE

Parents

Grandparents

Great-Grandparents

Janet Clark
1933-

James Clark
1886-1959

Margaret Giroux
1893-1989

Luther Clark
1850-1914

Harriet Wells
1854-1939

William
Giroux
1863-1930

Mary Collins
1864-1953

Asa
Clark
1816-1872

Eliza
Allen
1822-1889

Maurice
Giroux
1840-1864

Doris
Smith
1844-1866

John
Wells
1819-1860

Fanny
Kimball
1836-1891

Joseph
Collins
1831-1892

Ann
Lynch
1835-1875

At the end of most of the articles in this magazine you will find a section called "Rooting Around." Rooting around means digging to see what you can find underneath the surface. The questions and ideas in the section are things you might enjoy thinking about. If you don't enjoy them, don't do them, but I hope you'll read them anyway.

Rooting Around

You might want to make a tree of your own family and see how far back you can go. Or you might just think about what you know about your parents and grandparents. Where did they come from? How did they meet? How did your parents come to live where they did when you were born? When you think about your family and its past, you are thinking about history. When you try to find out more about it, you are filling in pieces of the historical puzzle.



If you have an old photograph, think about what you know about the people in it. Even if you don't know the people, what can you tell about them just by looking at the picture?

Just as you can think of history as a tree, you can think of your own family as one too. This is a family tree of a woman living in Vermont today. She can trace her family back a few generations. There is a lot of family she does not know about who lived much earlier. We can think of them as the underground roots of her family, spreading back through history.