

Vermont





The Bennington Museum is the first stop — south to north — on the Vermont In the Civil War Heritage Trail. In addition to welcoming “Lincoln Trilogy” statue, they have numerous Civil War artifacts and documentation. COURTESY OF BENNINGTON MUSEUM

Vermont In the Civil War Heritage Trail goes from Bennington to St. Albans

Terry Richards For the Free Press

You don’t hear “Vermont in the Civil War” very often. It just doesn’t sound as natural as “Virginia in the Civil War” or “the Civil War in Georgia.” There was only one battle fought here.

But... Vermont had a huge influence on the American Civil War. In fact, there are many experts who would argue that a man with deep connections to Vergennes started the American Civil War and a Vermont farmer, the ninth of 14 children, effectively ended it with his fateful command to flank Pickett’s Charge at Gettysburg.

The famous abolitionist John Brown did his “trading” in Vergennes from 1849 to 1856. Vergennes was the closest supply and trade center to Brown’s farm and home in North Elba, N.Y. He would take his wagon on the ferry to Arnold’s Bay in warm weather and his cutter filled with most of his 20 children (yes, 20, with four wives) in winter.



The famous Abolitionist John Brown did his “trading” in Vergennes from 1849 to 1856.

Brown is also reported as trying to buy guns in rural Windsor County. His funeral procession, from his hanging in Virginia to his burial in North Elba, came back through Rutland, Vergennes and Westport, N.Y.

Vergennes provided a large reception in his honor. It is not unusual to hear Civil War historians refer to Brown's Raid in Harpers Ferry, or his attacks on slaveholders in Kansas as the sparks that started the American Civil War.

The George Stannard story

George Jerrison Stannard of Georgia is said to be the first Vermonter to volunteer for duty in the Civil War. He telegraphed and sent a letter to then Gov. Fairbanks volunteering his service. Stannard distinguished his command by being the last holdout in a disgraceful, unnecessary surrender at Harpers Ferry, Virginia.

His final triumph was conquering Fort Harrison, Virginia, and defending it against three consecutive attacks by Gen. Robert E. Lee himself. Stannard lost his right arm while commanding a late night/early morning battle. Fort Harrison was the fortification closest to Richmond, the capitol of the Confederacy. This ended the famous Petersburg campaign.

The Battle of Gettysburg is generally acknowledged as the "High Tide" of the Confederacy. The largest battle and biggest artillery exchange in the history of the Western hemisphere happened at Gettysburg, Pa., on July 3, 1863. The extreme losses and absolute destruction of the rebels in the ill-fated Pickett's Charge emphatically ended the Battle of Gettysburg.

Gen. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia left in a large and hasty retreat South. They were never to recover. Just what stopped Gen. George Pickett's huge, well-coordinated, attack (Artillery heard in Pittsburgh, 90 miles away), in his attempt to end the Army of the

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Photo from 2012 shows the moving of the Vergennes Rail Depot where the body of abolitionist John Brown, arrived on its way to burial near Lake Placid, N.Y. FREE PRESS FILE



Hildene, the home of Robert Todd Lincoln, son of President Abraham Lincoln, in Manchester. FREE PRESS FILE

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Potomac? The flanking attack on Pickett's Charge, "Change front forward on First company," ordered by Gen. George Jerrison Stannard, of Georgia, Vermont.

Trail covers western Vermont

There are 15 current sites in a trail stretching south to north on the eastern side of the state of Vermont. The trail closely follows U.S. 7 and Historic 7A. The sites are generally open to the public, with a couple consisting of only state historic site markers. All are of large significance to Vermont and to America's survival in a civil war.

Vermont suffered great loss in the conduct of our Civil War defense. Numbers are difficult to definitively confirm. Official reports show Vermont ranking second to only Michigan in deaths per capita. When casualties are added in, we may be first in per capita losses. Loss of limbs was not unusual. This small, quiet state of Vermont can be rightly proud of its outsize contributions.

As Vermonters we are in a position of "we don't know what we don't know." The Vermont in the Civil War Heritage Trail is here to fix that. A subcommittee of the Milton Historical Society was formed to research and honor our local hero, George Stannard. We sought to stabilize and restore what remained of his local house and farm in Milton.

In research and in communication with other historical societies, we began to notice an interesting pattern: There are a lot of Civil War related sites along the western coast of Vermont. We understand that there are others, like Woodstock, Brattleboro, Windsor, etc. But none are more significant or numerous than those along U.S. 7 and Historic 7A.

Start the trail in Bennington

We begin in **Bennington**, with the Bennington Museum. In addition to the magnificent, welcoming "Lincoln Trilogy" casting, they have numerous Civil War artifacts and documentation. The Vermont Veterans Home was not only our first, in 1887, but also has a graveyard holding the remains of veterans from every Vermont Civil War regiment. William Lloyd Garrison published The Journal of the Times in Bennington, in 1828, before his later voice of the anti-slavery movement, The Liberator, in Baltimore.

Manchester presents the home of Robert Todd Lincoln, "Hildene." Restored, with a rich history and beautiful grounds, "Hildene" welcomes visitors. The Lincoln family was familiar with Manchester as a summer vacation spot. They had vacations at The Equinox Hotel (now The Equinox Resort) in 1863 and 1864. They had to cancel reservations for another vacation in 1865... for the week after the president's assassination.

The Fairgrounds in **Rutland** were the training grounds and home of William Y.W. Ripley's famous sharpshooters. The Bardwell Hotel welcomed many important visitors, in-



*Explore Museums, Historic Sites, Exhibits
and more, defining Vermont's important role
in the American Civil War*

Cover of the brochure for Vermont in the Civil War Heritage Trail. COURTESY



Birthplace of Stephen A. Douglas in Brandon. FREE PRESS FILE



Historic lithograph of Stephan A. Douglas' birthplace in Brandon. FREE PRESS FILE



The Bardwell Hotel in Rutland welcomed many important visitors, including Mary Todd Lincoln, the John Brown funeral procession, and Varina Davis, first lady of the Confederacy. The building has been restored in downtown Rutland. COURTESY

cluding Mrs. Lincoln, the John Brown funeral procession, and Mrs. Varina Davis, First Lady of the Confederacy. Marble quarries in surrounding towns yielded the thousands of Civil War gravestones found throughout America.

Brandon was the birthplace of Great Debater Stephen Douglas, also Lincoln's opponent in the 1860 election. His home now houses the Brandon Historical Society.

Middlebury is home to Middlebury College. Middlebury College graduated the first black university student in America, Alexander Twilight. Twilight later became renowned for constructing the Old Stone House in Brownnington. Also of note was Edward Everett, the commencement speaker, governor of Massachusetts and President of Harvard. Everett was the main speaker at the dedication of Gettysburg National Cemetery, just before Lincoln's address. Public addresses were made here by Frederick Douglass

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and William Lloyd Garrison, at the abolitionist event, The Great Convention, in July of 1863.

Vergennes has already been mentioned as having abolitionist John Brown as an almost “honorary citizen”. Some of the buildings in which Brown shopped are still standing in downtown Vergennes. The return route of his casket to North Elba included a large event here. The Vergennes Railroad Depot, now the oldest depot in Vermont, received the casket.

Panton was the ferry site landing just outside of Vergennes. John Brown’s body was returned to his North Elba farm and home via this Arnold’s Bay ferry. An historic marker stands at the site.

Ferrisburgh has an historic marker noting Frederick Douglass’ speech at the Town Hall in 1843. Ferrisburgh is also the site of a well-documented stop on the Underground Railroad, the Robinson House. It is now completely restored as the Rokeby Museum, with many public events and presentations.

In **Shelburne**, we find the large, varied Shelburne Museum. It is among the most detailed and diverse museums in America. Two Civil War era homes have been moved to the site. They detail the everyday lives of Vermonters in the Civil War. There are many clothing, tool, weapon, and arts exhibits.

Burlington, on Lake Champlain, is the largest city in Vermont. As such, it contains many important sites. Lakeview Cemetery holds gravesites for Generals William Wells, Oliver Otis Howard and George Jerrison Stannard. The Stannard site is a family plot, with the only statue in human form allowed in the cemetery. Such is the honor for Stannard.

Wells was a well-respected command-



Portraits of abolitionists Rachel Gilpin and Rowland Thomas Robinson at the Rokeby Museum in Ferrisburgh. The Rokeby house was a stop on the Underground Railroad during the Civil War. COURTESY OF ROKEBY MUSEUM



Fred Morsell, portraying Frederick Douglass, left, and Vermont Gov. Jim Douglas unveil an historical marker commemorating the anti-slavery orator’s July, 1843 speaking tour through Vermont outside the Wesleyan Chapel in Ferrisburgh.

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Statue of Civil War Gen. William Wells in Burlington's Battery Park.



A detail on the statue of Gen. William Wells in Battery Park in Burlington.

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er, Howard was in charge of Reconstruction and the Freedman's Bureau. Howard University in Washington and Lincoln University in Atlanta were among his achievements.

The imposing homes of Wells, Howard and historian and publisher G.G. Benedict are still around. Battery Park, which has a statue of Wells, was a drilling site for gathering troops as well as Capt. John Lonergan's "Irish Brigade", which later became part of The Fenian movement.

The city of **Winooski**, surrounding the Winooski River, was originally a prosperous mill town. Many water-powered woolen mills produced wool fabric for Union Army uniforms and blankets. The Woolen Museum well explains this.

Milton is the site of General George Stannard's house and farm, from 1866 to 1871. The barns were retrofitted so that Stannard could manage them with but one arm. The barns were lost to fire in 1989. The house, built first in 1839, still stands. In fair condition, it is being restored as a museum to honor Stannard. With no other records of a home from 1866 to 1871, this was his home upon return from the war.

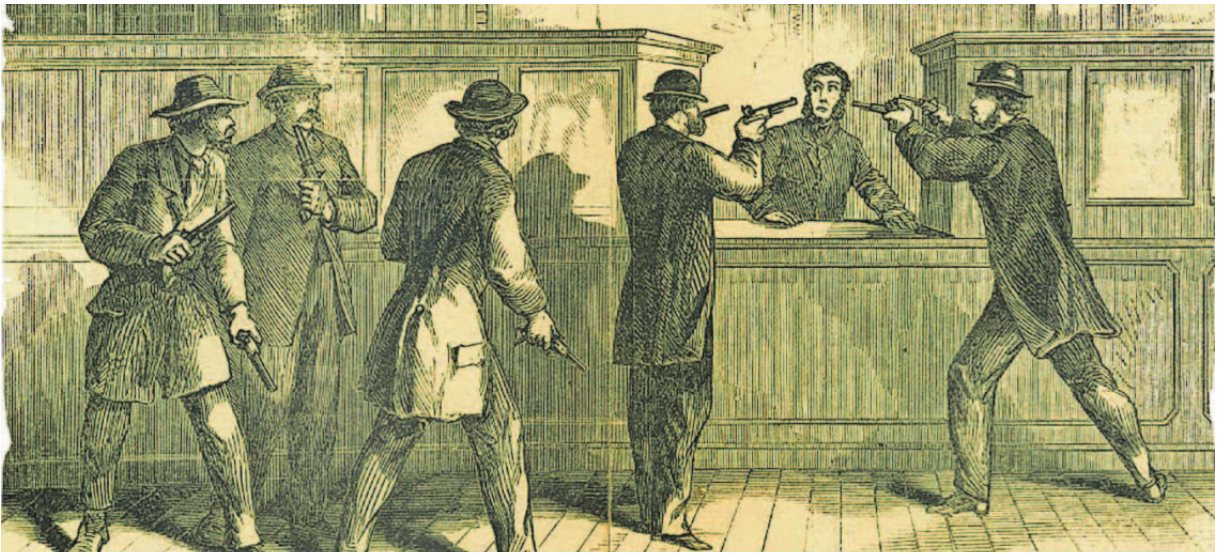
Georgia is the birthplace of General Stannard. The Georgia Historical Society has a photo of his birthplace, now gone, from the early 20th century. Just up the road from his birthplace is a large granite monument erected by the state of Vermont in his honor.

St Albans' Museum and Taylor Park are remarkable in their importance. Taylor Park is the center of the city. The park was where the nearby population was rounded

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A cannon looks out over Lake Champlain from its perch in Battery Park in Burlington. FREE PRESS FILE



Historic drawing of the St. Albans Raid in 1864. The St. Albans Museum features comprehensive exhibits about local and regional history, including the St. Albans Raid, the northernmost land action of the Civil War. COURTESY



A photograph of some of the 15 Confederates who conducted the raid on St. Albans. COURTESY

The gravesite for Civil War hero Gen. George Stannard in Burlington's Lakeview Cemetery. He was born in Georgia and lived in Milton. FREE PRESS FILE



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up during the St. Albans Raid of 1864. A small band of Confederate plotters managed to rob a number of local banks. They got away with much cash to finance the Confederacy. They escaped across the border into Canada.

The Museum itself is in the three-story original city school. Students watched from higher windows as the rebels marched hostages around on the Park Green. The holdings are detailed and extensive, including large railroad displays and the medical miracle of Phineas Gage and his railroad spike.

The members of the Vermont In the Civil War Heritage Trail hope to make Vermonters and visitors alike better appreciate and understand the state's great contributions to the preservation of The United States of America. We are just be-

ginning our project. We have a rudimentary web page, a three-page brochure and the means for public communication through our website. We envision large interpretive signing at central locations/historic sites along U.S. 7. Videos, local access TV series, tours and expanded memberships are in our future.

I would be remiss to not credit the "parents" of our Trail. Prominent Vermont Civil War historian Howard Coffin provided much information, help and inspiration. His books on Vermont in the Civil War, especially "Something Abides" made it all possible.

Some 10 years before that, Coffin co-authored a "Guide to Historic Military Sites and Battlefields- Guns Over the Champlain Valley." He and Will and Jane Curtis laid out a motor tour of often unknown or forgotten enormously important military history. This notion was

also proposed by Vermont Sen. Jim Jeffords.

Our Civil War Heritage Trail has much to offer scholars, history buffs, and tourists. The Trail is funded by its members, with hopes of additional grant funding. With little required from the State of Vermont, we can make many contributions at little cost or additional development. We have just begun.

To learn more about the Vermont in the Civil War Heritage Trail contact: vtcivilwarheritage@gmail.com or see www.facebook.com/vtcivilwartrail.

Terry Richards is chair of the Vermont in the Civil War Heritage Trail Committee, member of the General Stannard House Restoration Committee, and serves on the Milton Historical Society Board of Directors.

