



HARTFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

• HARTFORD, VERMONT 05047 •

HARTFORD • QUECHEE • WEST HARTFORD
WHITE RIVER JUNCTION • WILDER

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May Meeting . . .

Our May meeting will follow the annual pot-luck dinner and business meeting. The topic is the history of the Vermont Historical Society and will be presented by Weston Cate, Jr. Wes is a former resident of Hartford who lived in the Jericho district and taught school in town. He is also a past Director of the Vermont Historical Society and wrote a history of the Society entitled *Up & Doing The Vermont Historical Society, 1838-1970*.

The Meeting will be

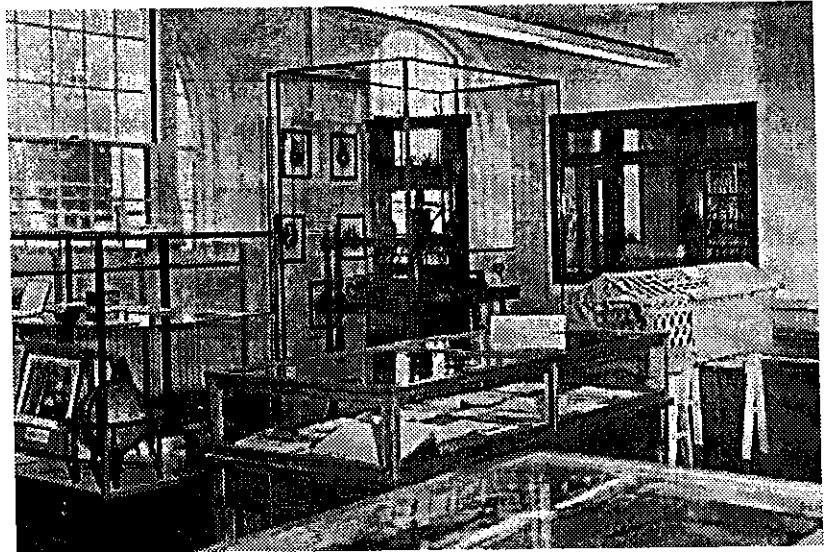
Wednesday, May 8, 7:00 PM

at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ
Route 14, Hartford Village

The pot-luck dinner will begin at 6:00 PM

*A typical display
room at the Vermont
Historical Society (as
it appeared in the
1960s) before they
moved to their
present location.*

Vermont Historical
Society Photo



News of the Collection

A certificate honoring Lucian A. Ryder, member of the famed Civil War Vermont Brigade, dated 1871, was given to us by Mrs. Leon Jacobs, Sr. Mr. Jacobs' grandmother, Anna, was the eldest daughter of Lucian Ryder and his wife Eliza Ann Brockway.

Lucian Ryder, born 1822, is listed in Hartford's 1850 census as a farmer. He enlisted November 15, 1861 at the age of 39 and reenlisted December 1863, serving in Company F, 3rd Regiment, which in 1864 was part of the 2nd. Brigade (This brigade acquired the name the "Vermont Brigade" and was the only one in the army distinguished by the name of the state to which it belonged).

May 5, 6, and 7, 1864 the Vermont Brigade fought in the battle of the "Wilderness", where the 3rd Regiment suffered losses of 34 men killed, 184 wounded and 21 missing. From May 8 to 21 they fought at Spotsylvania, where the 3rd lost 14 men killed, 59 wounded and 12 missing.

Lucian Ryder died May 15, 1864 of wounds received in action. His gravestone is in Center of Town Cemetery along with those of his wife and daughter M. Florence, who died at the age of 9 in 1861.

The 16" x 20" certificate honoring him for "...having borne an honorable part as a Volunteer from the State of Vermont..." is elaborately decorated with flags, names of the battles Vermonters fought in, pictures of Lincoln, Governor John W. Steward and William Wells, Adj. and Inspector General of Vermont, and scenes of family and army life.

The certificate has been carefully preserved for 125 years by Lucian Ryder's family and Mrs. Jacobs has confidently passed the responsibility to us. We have a twofold aim of safely storing and safely exhibiting documents such as this certificate. We purchased a handling folder (\$6.50) made of acid-free cotton fiberboard with a clear mylar cover attached which protects the document from dirt and finger prints and is firm enough to support it. It will be part of the display at our May meeting, please come and see it.

Priscilla Gadzinski, Curator
Pat Stark, Archivist

Notice

If anyone would be interested in putting together the Hartford Historical Society Newsletter beginning 1997, please let us know by writing to H.H.S. Newsletter, Box 547, Hartford, Vt. 05047.

The Hartford Historical Society would like to extend to Cameron Clifford heartfelt thanks.

Since 1994 Mr. Clifford has provided to the Society invaluable services as an organizer of speakers, a frequent guest of the Board of Directors at their meetings and an enthusiastic laborer, both with muscle, head, and pen to make our Society more vital and attractive. Above all, he has edited the Society's newsletter, in the opinion of many one of the finest regularly occurring local historical publications in the State.

Recently Mr. Clifford informed the Society he will be unable to continue editing our newsletter after the completion of the November issue. Constraints of both time and human energy enjoin his pursuit of writing projects focusing on North Pomfret history. The Society wishes him the best of luck in these endeavors and looks forward to news of future publication.

We add a personal commendation: future editors of the newsletter will look to your work as a model of what can be done with the subject of local history. Future readers will remember your work with gratitude and fondness. We tender to you, and also to your family, the most sincere of thanks for an extraordinary job well done.

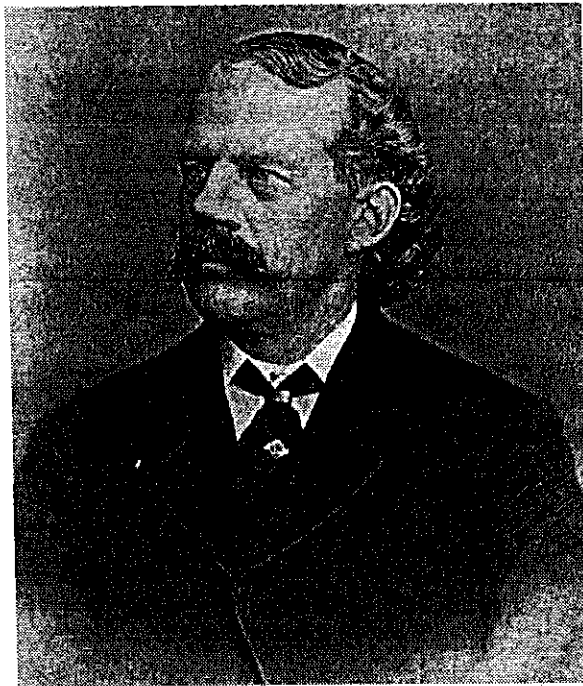
Hartford Historical Society
Board of Directors

William Howard Tucker's *History of Hartford, Vermont*

by Cameron Clifford

In 1889, William Howard Tucker published a history of Hartford, Vermont. In doing so, Tucker was making an individual statement on the history of the town. Tucker was the only nineteenth century publisher of a history of Hartford, but he was far from being alone in his interest in town history. Tucker was one of many dedicated individuals within New England during the nineteenth century who wrote about their towns in celebration of the past and hope for the future. Individual as he was, Tucker was also a part of this larger movement. Thus much of his outlook and writing paralleled others who wrote local history in the nineteenth century. They all sought to highlight aspects of their town which celebrated the past and presented it as a model for a successful future.

The *History of Hartford* was the product of an individual who was born and raised in the Hartford area. Born in neighboring Sharon in 1826, William Howard Tucker moved with his family between Sharon, Norwich, and Hartford during his youth. Tucker's father, Alvin



William Howard Tucker

Tucker was a jack-of-all-trades who pursued house painting, tavern keeping, and manufacturing during his active years in the region. The younger Tucker also followed a variety of pursuits after cutting short his formal education and forgoing college.

William Howard Tucker got involved in the burgeoning expansion of railroads through the northeast in the 1840s and 1850s, acting as assistant engineer of surveys. After a stint in the Civil War, Tucker acted for individuals in settling claims against the Federal government associated with the war. For the next twenty years he dabbled in insurance, pursued an interest in music, did some reporting for newspapers, worked for a White River Jct. lumber business, and later sold safes. Most likely William Howard Tucker was a master of nothing.¹

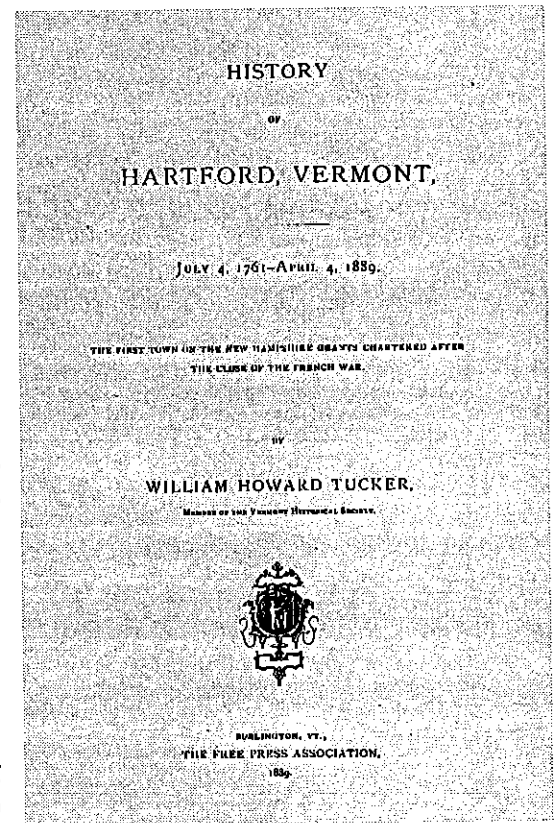
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Tucker not only praised the history of Hartford's expansion of business, but also of the town's war record. Tucker claimed those involved in the Revolutionary War were patriots and the men who fought in the War of 1812 had done their duty, but Tucker's main focus was on those like himself, who had fought in the Civil War. Tucker's emphasis on the war he was a part of was not done merely to glorify his generation, but also because it was the conflict which produced the most extensive records he could draw upon. Nevertheless, Tucker did praise Hartford's war effort stating that "every call for troops was freely and promptly responded to" by the town's citizens. Tucker dedicated sixteen pages in his history to highlighting Hartford's Civil War record. In Tucker's estimation, it had been a war well worth the cost.⁵

Along with the widespread issues of business expansion and the town's war effort, William Howard Tucker also focused on aspects of Hartford which were more esoteric and carried a lot of personal meaning for himself. These subjects touched upon by Tucker included an ice jam, divorce, and cemetery improvement. The account of the 1867 ice jam Tucker included was highlighted in great detail. Tucker had been present during the jam and he inserted a footnote within his history informing the reader that he had provided the means to save one of his neighbors from death in the ice flow. Another personal issue which Tucker included in his history was the issue of divorce. Tucker viewed divorce as a positive force when two people could not get along in married life. Tucker himself was a divorcee. Along with these issues, Tucker was also interested in preserving the memory of the dead. In his section describing cemeteries, Tucker made a personal plea for cemetery beautification within Hartford.⁶

While William Howard Tucker's History of Hartford was individualistic, it also was part of the larger trend in publishing town histories during the nineteenth century. As such, Tucker's history shares much in common with other town histories published at the time.

New England town histories began being published in the first quarter of the nineteenth century in eastern Massachusetts. The publishing of these early histories grew out of a desire to



Title page of the 1889 edition.

preserve facts about those who led the country during the Revolutionary War. From eastern Massachusetts, the publishing of town histories spread. By mid century, town histories were being written in other parts of Massachusetts, southern New Hampshire, and Connecticut. With the end of the Civil War Vermont's towns were beginning to be written about in individual booklength histories. By the time William Howard Tucker published his history of Hartford, the writing of town histories was widespread throughout all of New England, and beyond.⁷

Initially, these histories were brief descriptions or compilations of facts arranged in chronological order. Nathaniel Adams' "Annals of Portsmouth" New Hampshire published in 1825, arranged his history in chronological form beginning with 1621 and adroitly carried it through with descriptions of events right up to 1824. Such a format created a mixture of what was important along with what was insignificant. The result was a awkward balance of information. Some years warranted only a few sentences while others required a few pages to cover the significant events.⁸

As time went on however and more town histories were published, their format was expanded in length and content. John Farmer's 1837 "Historical Sketch of Amherst New Hampshire" arranged in chronological form was also a mere 52 pages. Hiel Hollister's history of Pawlet, Vermont published in 1867 contained over 270 pages including the "Family Sketches" section he added to the history. The 1876 history of Peterbough, New Hampshire constituted 375 pages and Joseph Dow's 1893 History of Hampton, New Hampshire was a whopping 1100 pages. While Tucker's history of Hartford was half the length of Dow's history of Hampton, the trend in New England was toward larger local historical works.⁹

This change in length of town histories published throughout the nineteenth century in New England reflected the growing interest in local history as well as what constituted history. Town histories got lengthier because, quite simply, there was more information in them. One popular development in the expansion of local history in New England was the replacement of the "annals" or chronological town histories by those which were written in a topographical format which consisted of several chapters. These chapters had such headings as "Events prior to settlement", "Ecclesiastical Affairs", "The Revolutionary period", "Schools", and "Commerce."¹⁰

William Howard Tucker's history included chapters dealing with these topics as well as chapters dealing with politics, post offices, population, highways, and genealogy. While some town histories continued to be published in annals form, by the latter half of the nineteenth century most histories such as Tucker's were arranged in topographical form.¹¹

Tucker's history had more in common with the other New England town histories published in the latter nineteenth century than just the length and composition of the works. Tucker's

history and the other histories were written with a common purpose. These authors of town histories openly admitted that the reason for writing their histories was to give a glowing remembrance of the past; to learn from the past and continue on the course the early New England town fathers began. Tucker stated that his history had given him a "sense of having performed a duty by conveying to those who shall come after us...the lives and deeds of the noble men and women" of Hartford. Henry Hazen's "History of Billerica Massachusetts" set the tone as well as anyone when he wrote that he had "learned to honor the founders of this town, and the generations which have builded upon their foundations." For the nineteenth century town historians, the past had been "noble."¹²

If the New England town historians felt secure in the achievements of the past, they were also worried about the future. Through their research, many came to the conclusion that the present generation was not living up to the standards of the past. Thus the future was at risk. William Howard Tucker counted himself among the local historians who felt this way.

The town historians such as Tucker who felt their future at risk presented their histories as lessons and guides for the present and future readers. Tucker stated that in the past the town's residents "earned their bread by the sweat of their faces." He claimed that "Boys were helpful to their fathers" and girls "made good wives and willing helpmates." When married, Tucker related that young couples used to enter "upon domestic life in a quiet, sensible way." Indeed, the saints of the past were described by Tucker as "simple, warm hearted, generous, self-sacrificing, hospitable, outspoken, contentious and honest, cheerful, [and] contented amid...privations." Tucker then asked the haunting question: "How is it now?" In his estimation, the present generation was lacking in all these important traits.¹³

While worried about the future, Tucker and the other nineteenth century town historians were also hopeful. Tucker certainly was when the topic was business expansion in Hartford. Others were even more optimistic. In the introduction to his history of Billerica, Massachusetts, Hartford, Vermont native Henry Hazen wrote of his sense of the future in relation to the past. Although Hazen respected the achievements of the past; "At the same time I have more faith in the assurance that the former days were not better than these [present ones]...The candid and careful student of the...records can reach no other conclusion. The golden age is not in the past." It was in the future.¹⁴

William Howard Tucker's History of Hartford remains today a popular reference for those interested in Hartford's past. While valuable for the information collected and presented, it is sometimes easy to rely on such works as "the word" on the past. However, Tucker and his contemporaries were only human. Their histories were mirrors of themselves both as individuals and as a group. As such, these histories provide valuable insights into the minds of the authors and the aspirations of their society along with the information they present.

Notes to the Article in This Issue

- 1 William Howard Tucker, *History of Hartford, Vermont* (Burlington:1889), 472-4; hereafter cited as Tucker.
- 2 Tucker, 1.
- 3 Ibid., V.
- 4 Ibid., 135.
- 5 Ibid., 315-336
- 6 Ibid., 25-27, 178, 186, 191, 197, 200, 474.
- 7 David J. Russo, *Keepers of Our Past* (New York:1988), 14-15, 21, 27-42, 91-92.
- 8 Nathaniel Adams, *Annals of Portsmouth* (Portsmouth:1825).
- 9 John Farmer, *Historical Sketch of Amherst* (Concord:1837); Hiel Hollister, *History Of The Town Of Peterborough* (Boston: 1876); Joseph Dow, *History Of The Town Of Hampton, New Hampshire* (Salem:1893).
- 10 F.M. Caulkins, *History of Norwich Connecticut* (Norwich:1845), VII-VIII.
- 11 Tucker, VII-XII.
- 12 Ibid., IV; Henry Hazen, *History of Billerica, Massachusetts* (Boston:1883), V; hereafter cited as Hazen.
- 13 Tucker, 96-102.
- 14 Hazen, V.

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HARTFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Herbert Adams, *President*, 802 295-5255 • Priscilla Gadzinski, *Curator*, 802 295-2364

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of March, May, September and November at the Greater Hartford United Church of Christ, Route 14 in Hartford Village.