

Celebrating Women's History Month



Highlighting amazing women of the Little City's past!

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Lois Crabtree Noonan

Lois Crabtree Noonan of Addison, Vermont, was perhaps best-known for her many years as Director of the Bixby Memorial Library in Vergennes. She did not claim to be a Vermonter, since she had lived here only since 1937. Born in Gardner, MA on Dec. 15, 1914, daughter of Charles and Anna Sinclair Crabtree, Lois graduated from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where she met and married Frederick W. Noonan. Her husband was a long-time dairy and beef farmer, and a breeder of Morgan Horses. Lois moved to Addison on the condition that an indoor bathroom would be installed.

In 1957 she joined the staff of the Bixby Memorial Library and became Director in 1966, a position she held until retiring after 46 years of service. At her retirement party in 2003 the Mayor declared Lois Noonan Day in Vergennes.

Under her guidance the Library became a friendly community destination, moving from an austere silent reading place to a comfortable gathering center for adults and children alike, alive with her innovations - story hours, art exhibits, book sales, concerts and lectures. She wrote weekly columns about the Library for local papers and spoke regularly on the radio reviewing books and exhibits. Circulation increased, expanding to music, videos, and audio books. The patron loyalty she fostered brought ancillary collections such as Indian artifacts, and increased the budget through donations for memorial books. Facilities for people with disabilities were added, and the Library entered the computer age in her time.

In 1995 the Trustees of the Bixby re-named the Vermont Room, which housed the Library's impressive collection of Vermontiana, in her honor and her portrait hangs there now. After her retirement she continued to volunteer and could sometimes be found in the Lois Noonan Room, putting things in order.



Over the years, Lois was active in many local service organizations: as matron of Addison Juvenile Grange and a leader of the 4-H Club; an officer of the Home Demonstration Club; and helping organize the first Red Cross Blood Drawings in Addison County. She taught Sunday School for many years at the Vergennes Congregational Church, was President of the Vergennes Women's Club, and active in the Vergennes Garden Club. Lois was honored for her service to the community by the American Legion Post No. 14 of Vergennes, by the Addison Northwest School District, by the City of Vergennes, by the Vermont Department of Libraries, and by the Rhoda Forrand Chapter of the D.A.R.

She was, of course, a constant reader, and also traveled extensively, beginning in Europe with her husband and eventually visited over 40 countries after she was 70, climbing the Great Wall of China, shopping in the souks of Damascus and Istanbul, having tea by a Bedouin campfire in the Arabian desert, and viewing the glaciers at the tip of Argentina, always with her son, daughter, and friends. She rode her first elephant at the age of 80, donned trousers for the first time for a safari in Zimbabwe at 85, and traveled by camel cart in Rajasthan at the age of 90. At home she liked to explore and discover the tamer pleasures of Vermont. She remained a favorite of her children's friends from college, London, New York, and Montreal as they regularly enjoyed her hospitality in Addison. Her daughter Ellen, a psychotherapist in London, England, and her husband, Frederick pre-deceased her. Active to the very end, she spent the last year of her life content and well-cared for at the Lodge at Otter Creek in Middlebury with her cat Thai.

Lois died peacefully on March 29, 2010, at the age of 95, or as she would have said, "not even 96."

Source: *Burlington Free Press*, Apr. 7, 2010.

Portrait of Lois C. Noonan (1914-2010), Elizabeth Ehmann, oil on canvas
Photograph: Lois C. Noonan, Robert Mitchell

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Margaret Foley

Margaret Foley, who grew up in Vergennes, became a renowned American sculptor. She was born in 1827 in northern Vermont. She may have attended the girls' school in Ferrisburg Center while her father, Michael Foley, worked for author Rowland Robinson at Rokeby. Margaret finished her education in Vergennes, working for her board at Samuel Wilson's house. She then taught school in the brick schoolhouse at the corner of West Main Street and Hopkins Road (now at the Shelburne Museum). Vergennes residents recalled her carving little statuettes in clay, chalk, and slate to give as prizes to her students.

Margaret left Vermont in 1841 to work in a Lowell, Massachusetts textile mill, which offered better wages and educational activities. In 1853 and 1854, she taught at nearby Westford Academy, and conducted classes in drawing and painting on Saturdays. When her savings allowed, she enrolled at the recently opened School of Design for Women in Boston, which provided occupational training "in the domestic arts" for single women. There she studied "cameo carving in both shell and lava," considered a suitable occupation for women. By 1857 she was recognized as America's foremost female cameo cutter.

Margaret established a studio in Boston where she carved portraits and cameos. Her cameo likeness of Judge John Pierpoint of Vergennes, contributed to her success. Susan Tucker's diary (now in the Bixby Library collection) records Margaret's visit to Vergennes in 1848. The Tucker family were interested in her success, and Mr. Philip Tucker and others in Vergennes and Lowell raised money to send her to study in Rome.

In Italy, Margaret was able to work with larger material, including the famous Carrara marble. She made many friends among the pioneering American women sculptors in Italy, including Emma Stebbins, Harriet Hosmer, Anne Whitney, Edmonia Lewis, Louisa Lander, and Vinnie Ream.

As an artist from a working-class background without many wealthy patrons, Margaret supported herself carving cameos, creating medallion portraits for prominent sitters and writing about art for the *Boston Evening Transcript* and the *Crayon*. At first she shared a studio with Emma Stebbins; and after receiving instruction from sculptor John Gibson, she opened a studio of her own on via Due Macelli.



Margaret's relief medallions, fancy pieces, and cameos appealed to American and British tourists visiting her studio as part of the Grand Tour. As her reputation grew, she created large marble medallion portraits, like a portrait of the poet William Cullen Bryant, and portrait busts in the round, such as those commissioned by Vermont Congressman Frederick E. Woodbridge and his wife who visited her studio in 1871, and the 1877 bust of Transcendentalist minister Theodore Parker.

At the height of her career, Margaret sculpted biblical and historical subjects. Her *Jeremiah* and *Cleopatra* were both exhibited at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. She also exhibited a large fountain at the Exposition's Horticultural Hall, consisting of three children supporting a marble basin adorned with acanthus leaves, now in the Fairmount Park Horticultural Center in Philadelphia. Her "crisply delineated, noble style" was praised.

Margaret carved her own marbles, both to keep costs down and to ensure total artistic control. But in the 1870s, Margaret's health began to fail due to lung damage from marble dust and a debilitating neurological illness. In 1877, she traveled to Austria with her British author friends, William and Mary Howitt. She died of a stroke in Meran, Austria, on December 7, 1877.

Image: Margaret Foley (1827 – 1877), Bixby Library Collection

Sources: Death Notice, *Vergennes Enterprise & Vermonter*, 11 January 1878

Ruth O'Conner, *Margaret Foley, Vergennes Sculptress, Enterprise & Vermonter*, 21 March 1974

[Vergennes to Boston to Rome: A Neoclassical Marble Portrait by Vermont-born Sculptor Margaret Foley – @middartmuseum \(middlebury.edu\)](#) ; [Margaret Foley - Wikipedia](#), Accessed March 7, 2022

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“Captain Phil” - Philomene Daniels



Philomene Daniels was the first woman in the United States to earn a license as master and pilot of a steam-powered vessel. Born in 1843 in Quebec, Philomene moved to Vermont with her parents and siblings in the 1850s, and married Louis Daniels II of Vergennes in 1862. Louis owned the house on North Water Street (now Macdonough Drive) overlooking Otter Creek where he and Philomene raised their sons Fred and Mitchell. For nearly 40 years, Philomene, Louis, their two sons and daughter in law Helen operated the Daniels Steamboat Line out of Vergennes.

Between 1873 and 1877, Louis earned licenses as chief engineer, pilot, and master for small steamboats, and in 1877 he bought and began to operate the 53-foot steamboat *Water Lily* on Otter Creek and Lake Champlain. As demand for passenger service increased, Louis turned to Philomene to work with him offering excursions, towing, and ferry service from Vergennes to Port Henry and Westport, NY.

In 1887, when the Daniels Line acquired its second steamboat, *Little Nellie*, Philomene secured her license as master and pilot, declaring that she was “as good as any man.” The *Burlington Free Press and Times* hailed “Mrs. Daniels of the *Water Lily* the first Woman Pilot in the Country,” stating “For the past ten years she has been at the helm of the *Water Lily* . . . both in calm and stormy weather, and has never met with a mishap.” Mitchell designed and built two more Daniels Line steamboats, *Victor* in 1897 and *Alexander* in 1899, working with his father, “Captain Lou,” and brother Fred.

After Captain Louis Daniels died 1903, Philomene and her sons carried on the Daniels Steamboat Line. With Philomene’s encouragement Mitchell’s wife Helen earned her pilot’s license and joined the family operation. The

Middlebury Register announced: “Mrs. M. H. (Helen) Daniels, wife of Capt. Daniels of Vergennes, and daughter of Judge J. W. Lavigne of Winooski, has been appointed pilot of the steamer *Alexander*. She is 48 years old and has five children. Her mother-in-law, aged 64 years also is a pilot in active service. These two are the only women pilots in the United States known to the [Coast Guard] inspectors, Hold and Goodhue of Burlington.”

In 1908, Philomene remarried Charles E. M. Caisse, a Vergennes blacksmith, and turned over the operation of the Daniels Steamboat Line to her sons Fred and Mitchell. The Daniels Steamboat Line ceased operations in 1916, after 39 years, as passenger ferry traffic declined with the coming of the automobile and growth of railroads. Helen Daniels continued managing the coal yards at the dock on Otter Creek into the 1930s.

When Philomene’s husband Charles Caisse died, also in 1916, Philomene went to live with her son Fred, where she remained until her death on Oct. 29, 1929. She is buried in St. Peter’s Cemetery, Vergennes. To the left of the monument of Charles Caisse, was placed a small, flat stone marker inscribed “Philomene A. Ostiguy, Wife of C. E. M. Caisse, 1842-1929.” A new monument, recently added by members of the Daniels family, now pays tribute to this remarkable woman captain.

Jane Vincent as Philomene Daniels. Photo: Robert Mitchell
Sharing the story of “Captain Phil” has been a labor of love for her great-great-granddaughter, Jane Vincent. Gathering stories of riding on the steamboats from Martin Casey and other surviving family members, Jane launched a research project that brought Philomene and her family into the limelight of Vermont history. Jane hopes that her efforts will inspire others to uncover and share stories from their own families and communities.



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Ruth O'Connor



Ruth O'Connor found many ways to share her love of history with the community where she lived. A lifelong resident of Addison County, Ruth Paige Maxham was born in Ferrisburgh on December 14, 1903 to Amos and Abigail (Paige) Maxham. She graduated from Bristol High School in 1922, then attended Bristol Teacher Training School and the University of Vermont. When she married Carroll Maurice O'Connor, they made their home in Vergennes.

For 44 years, Ruth taught grades 1-12 in Addison County schools including Monkton, Starksboro, and Vergennes. She also supervised student teachers at Castleton Teachers College. While she covered the full range of subjects required for her students in elementary grades, she brought special inspiration to her high school history students.

For Ruth, the history of Addison County was intertwined with family history. She was a member of the Rhoda Farrand and Seth Warner Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), a member of the Mayflower Society, Vermont State Colonial Dames, and the Addison County division of the Vermont Old Cemetery Association.

From 1964 to 1977, Ruth was curator of the ca. 1796 John Strong Mansion in Addison, Vermont, the oldest home on the Vermont side of Lake Champlain, owned by the DAR and operated as a museum since 1934. Ruth's skills and interests were all engaged as the DAR offered tours and educational programs for the public while caring for the mansion itself, its furnishings and gardens, and collections representing five generations of descendants of Revolutionary War patriot John Strong.

After her retirement from teaching, Ruth was recognized as an authority on Addison County history. Her column "In and Around Old Vergennes" appeared weekly in the *Vergennes Enterprise and Vermonter*, making connections between the historic buildings of Addison County, the people connected with them, and the communities they served. She became a trustee of the Bixby Library, and served as a researcher for genealogical and historical inquiries from Vermont and beyond.

Ruth died in January 1999 at the age of 95, and is buried at Mt. St. Joseph Cemetery in Bristol.



SOURCES:

Bixby Library Collection

Vergennes Enterprise and Vermonter, Newspapers.com

(Above: John Strong Mansion, DAR Museum) JohnStrongMansion.org

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Sarah Fishman Gould

Sarah Fishman Gould (1908 – 1996) was dedicated to Vergennes her entire life, as a successful businesswoman, community leader, and philanthropist. Sarah was the eldest child of Max and Carrie (Wolk) Fishman. Sarah's mother passed away in the 1918 Influenza epidemic, so at the age of ten, Sarah took on the role of "mother" to her younger brother Sam and sisters Gertrude (Coen) and Freda (Stroh).

Max Fishman was a strong role model for his four children. Born in Russia in 1879, Max came to the United States in 1905 and settled in Vergennes. He worked on farms, then was able to establish himself as a merchant. His dry goods store was a Main Street landmark for over 50 years, and he served on the Vergennes Board of Aldermen. His children always remembered his appreciation for the hospitality and friendship of neighboring farmers, and his interest in the development and betterment of the city. When Max Fishman died in 1957, his children donated memorial gifts to Porter Hospital to establish a private room in the maternity wing.

After graduation from Vergennes High School in 1926, Sarah enrolled in a stenographic course at Burlington Business School, and worked for Fishman's Department Store, traveling to New York City on buying trips. Sarah played piano, and shared a love of music with Benjamin D. Gould, whom she married in March, 1937. They resided in Barre, where Benjamin was president of Vermont Music Company, and co-owner of a respected music store.

In April 1942, Benjamin Gould sold his interest in the Barre music store, and he and Sarah moved to Vergennes, where both could participate in the management and operation of Fishman's Department store, and in state wide civic and philanthropic organizations. Benjamin became president of Vergennes Rotary Club, served on the Vergennes School Board 1950-59, as

an Alderman 1961-62 and then as Mayor of Vergennes 1962-65. He also served in the state legislature 1966-69. Both Benjamin and Sarah were active in Ohavi Zedek Synagogue in Burlington. Benjamin was president of the Vermont Jewish Council, while Sarah was a member of Hadassah, Rebeccas, and the Order of the Eastern Star, as well as the Loyal Legislative Wives Organization. She was a member of Vergennes Home Forum and Garden Club, and also volunteered at the Sheldon Museum, Porter Hospital, and Round Robin Shop in Middlebury.

In Vergennes, as owner of Fishman's Department Store after Benjamin's death in 1978, Sarah carried on her family's legacy of caring and generosity. The Bixby Library always had a special place in her heart. Sarah was a lifelong learner, and attributed that trait to spending her formative years at the Bixby Memorial Free Library. She had a great fondness for children, despite having none of her own. Throughout her life, she was a great benefactor of the Children's Room, often attending the weekly Children's Story Hour. Over the years, Sarah helped many children along the way.

After Sarah's death on February 11, 1996 at age 87, memorial gifts from her sisters and other family members have continued to honor Sarah's memory and their dedication to the people of Vergennes.



The childhood portrait of Sarah, created while Bixby Library was being constructed, is an especially appropriate and meaningful gift, so Sarah can continue to watch over the children of Vergennes.

SOURCES:

Center Image: Fishman's Department Store interior, Group Photo from *Blue and White Class of 1959* page 68, Bixby Library Collection.
Vergennes Enterprise and Vermonter, Newspapers.com

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Delia Webster

Delia Webster (1817 – 1904) was the first American woman imprisoned for assisting fugitive slaves. Born December 17, 1817 in Vergennes, Delia was one of ten children of Benejah and Esther Bostwick Webster. She attended the Vergennes Classical School, and began teaching there at age 12. In 1842, Delia moved to Oberlin, Ohio, where she enrolled in the first United States college to accept women and African Americans.

A year later, at age 25, Delia traveled into Kentucky with Oberlin clergyman Rev. Spencer and his wife. There they taught painting classes and were asked to open a high school. Delia became co-founder of the Lexington Female Academy, and when the Spencers returned to the North, Delia remained in charge of the Academy.

Soon after, Oberlin alumnus Rev. Calvin Fairbank, an active abolitionist and Underground Railroad “conductor,” visited Delia and asked for her help in transporting an enslaved family to the neighboring free state of Ohio. Renting a horse-drawn carriage, Calvin and Delia picked up Lewis Hayden, his wife Harriet, and their son Joseph. They delivered the Hayden family to a safe house in Ohio, but on their return journey Calvin and Delia were recognized and confronted.

Delia’s landlady had searched her room and found incriminating letters linking her to abolitionists. Delia was arrested for assisting runaway slaves. Calvin was arrested as well. The driver of their carriage, an enslaved man named Israel, was beaten until he admitted what they had done. Fairbank was tried in 1845 and sentenced to a 15-year term, five years for each of the slaves he helped free. In a separate trial, Delia pled not guilty. She was convicted in December 1844 and sentenced to two years hard labor. Fortunately, she was freed after serving only five weeks.

All her life, Delia remained colorful and controversial. Back in Vermont, she published an account of her trial, but said her father pressured her to tone down her abolitionist beliefs. She was active in abolitionist work in New England, although as a lady, she did not address the public, merely sat on the stage with her spokesman, Rev. Norris Day.

Delia then returned to the South. With a group of investors, she formed the Webster Kentucky Farm Association on a six-hundred-acre property, to establish a school and experiment with free labor. She hired freed blacks as farm workers. When enslaved people from the area began to disappear, Delia was suspected, and slave owners threatened her. Her property was attacked, and crops, buildings, and furnishings were destroyed.

In 1854, Delia was ordered to leave Kentucky. When she refused to give up her farm, she was arrested and jailed, but released on a technicality. She escaped to Indiana before they could arrest her. After being captured and jailed, tried and acquitted, Delia returned to New England. Four years later, she returned to Indiana but was again captured and jailed, brought to trial, and again discharged from custody.

During these legal troubles, household goods, equipment, and personal belongings at the farm were stolen or broken. Arsonists eventually burned seventeen buildings, four barns, and finally Webster’s residence. By October 1869, Delia had lost possession of her property.

Delia Webster never married. In her old age, she lived with her sister Martha Goodrich, first in Wisconsin and later in Iowa. After the death of her sister, Webster made her home with her niece Alice Goodrich, the first female graduate of the University of Iowa’s medical school and a prominent doctor.

Delia Webster died in Des Moines, Iowa in 1904 at age eighty-six, at the home of her niece, Dr. Alice Goodrich.



SOURCES: Randolph Paul Runyon: *Delia Webster and the Underground Railroad*
H-net.com: [Delia Webster and the Underground Railroad](#)

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