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# ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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## From Degeneration to Regeneration: The Eugenics Survey of Vermont, 1925-1936

*One eugenical scheme to purify the  
state's polluted protoplasm was to  
bring in a better class of  
Vermonters—tourists and summer  
home owners.*

By KEVIN DANN

**O**n January 19, 1927, Henry F. Perkins gave an address entitled "Lessons from a Eugenical Survey of Vermont" to legislators attending the Vermont Conference for Social Work in Montpelier. Perkins, Professor of Zoology at the University of Vermont, was director of the Eugenics Survey of Vermont, which he had founded in 1925. "Eugenics" was the term coined by Charles Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, to denote the science of improving the genetic condition of the human race. Its proponents believed in the existence of racial stereotypes, accepted the myth that certain peoples (particularly those of northern Europe) possessed a monopoly of desired characteristics, and thought that human differences were invariably caused by heredity and thus were resistant to modification. The theme of Perkins's address was the threat to Vermont posed by certain families in the state, in particular those he referred to as the "pirate," "gypsy," and "chorea" families. The "pirates" lived "in the utmost squalor and destitution," were "the terror of people . . . because of their thieving habits," and parented diseased and feebleminded children. Perkins characterized the "gypsy" family as thieves who were "looked upon with wholesome fear" and whose members included seventy-eight paupers. The "chorea" family, afflicted with the

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“dreadful form of insanity known as Huntington’s Chorea with its degeneration of mental powers and loss of muscular control,” accounted for twenty insane persons over seven generations. These three families were among twenty-two that had been studied extensively whose “depravity, immorality, [and] loose living” made them “a constant menace to the safety and welfare of the community.” Perkins declared that everyone in Vermont knew of such “degenerate” families; in fact, he asserted, whenever he had given public addresses his audiences came forward with testimony of even greater degeneracy and criminality.<sup>1</sup>

The “one great lesson” of the survey’s study of these and other defective families, according to Perkins, was that “‘blood has told,’ and there is every reason to believe that it will *keep right* on ‘telling’ in future generations.”<sup>2</sup> To keep better track of this blood, Perkins suggested that a standardized system of record-keeping be practiced by the Bureau of Vital Statistics and town clerks. This was especially important with regard to marriage certificates, and he hinted that State’s Attorneys should begin a crackdown on common law marriages. His other recommendations to the legislators included increasing the size of the Vermont State School for the Feeble-minded and the Vermont State Industrial School, instituting at least twenty special education classes throughout the state, extending the offering of psychiatric clinics for children, and, finally, the passing of a law providing for sterilization of the “socially inadequate.” Indeed, he predicted that such a bill would appear during the upcoming legislative session. Having helped to draft the bill himself, it was a prediction he could make with great confidence.

Although it took the legislature four years to pass the sterilization law, by the time it was approved the Eugenics Survey of Vermont had expanded its work from identifying the state’s “dangerous” families to a variety of other projects. These included mental-testing of inmates at two Vermont institutions, population and migration studies of select Vermont towns, and the 1937 publication of *We Americans*, a community study of Burlington, Vermont’s largest city. During its eleven-year tenure, 1925-1936, the Eugenics Survey moved from exhorting social change in Vermont in the harsh, hereditarian language of eugenics to a broader “gospel of efficiency,” which still contained a core of eugenic ideas. A fascination with degeneration was transformed into a rhetoric of regeneration via the program of the Vermont Commission on Country Life (VCCL), whose 1931 report, *Rural Vermont*, outlined an agenda that was in many respects followed by subsequent generations of social reformers in Vermont.

The fundamental social anxiety shared by both eugenicists and rural reformers was the concern over declining population and economic stagnation.



*Henry F. Perkins, Professor of Zoology at the University of Vermont, founded the Eugenics Survey of Vermont in 1925. Courtesy of Robert Hull Fleming Museum.*

tion in many of Vermont's rural communities. During the late nineteenth century, urban periodicals carried articles that lamented rural decay, and that lament was given formal expression in the early twentieth century in the agenda of both the country life and eugenics movements. One of the first historians to closely examine the meanings of this rural decline for a particular Vermont community was Hal S. Barron, whose *Those Who Stayed Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century New England* (1984) used quantitative data for the town of Chelsea, Vermont, to show how limited is our understanding of this "winter" period in Vermont history, and how little the rhetoric of rural decline matched the reality of at least one Vermont village. Barron, however, devoted an entire chapter to the country life movement without identifying the representatives or reforms specific to Vermont and concluded that the zeal for rural reform died along with the rest of Progressive causes shortly after World War I. That he overlooked the Vermont Commission on Country Life is understandable, as there has been very little written about it. Richard M. Judd, in *The New Deal in Vermont: Its Impact and Aftermath* (1979), recognized that a significant number of New Deal programs were directed toward ends previously anticipated by the Vermont Commission on Country Life, but he overlooked the role of the Eugenics Survey in preparing the way for the VCCL. An understanding of both organizations is needed to clarify how they presented the rhetoric of degeneration and regeneration to Vermonters and how the two were ultimately linked to one another.<sup>3</sup>

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The Eugenics Survey had grown out of Perkins's undergraduate course in heredity at the University of Vermont (UVM). A member of the zoology department since 1902, Perkins had taught courses in general zoology, comparative anatomy and embryology, and an occasional seminar in bird biology. Though he taught no course on genetics or evolution, Perkins did lecture briefly on heredity in his embryology class. In 1922, he wrote to C. B. Davenport, director of the Carnegie Institution of Washington's Station for the Experimental Study of Evolution at Cold Spring Harbor, New York, to ask for ideas for student research projects on heredity. Davenport suggested work on eye color, height and weight, and color blindness, and added that "family histories of local orphanages will reveal very interesting data of great social, if not biological, moment."<sup>4</sup> He also invited Perkins to send his students to Cold Spring Harbor to continue their work.

In 1924 Perkins began teaching a course devoted to human heredity and channelled students to just the sort of projects Davenport had suggested. Students also wrote reports on fingerprints, twins, and the pedigrees of various royal families.<sup>5</sup> The following year, Perkins found a patron for the eugenics program he was building at UVM; Vermont native Mrs. Emily Proctor Eggleston of Berkeley, California, gave five thousand dollars for a "eugenical survey of Vermont." Mrs. Eggleston presented the funds to UVM, after which they were disbursed to Perkins. University of Vermont president Guy Bailey acted as intermediary in soliciting this sponsorship; he knew Mrs. Eggleston from her support of the Vermont Children's Aid Society (VCAS) of which Bailey was treasurer. Mrs. Eggleston, daughter of former Vermont governor Fletcher Dutton Proctor and granddaughter of U.S. Senator Redfield Proctor of Vermont, had been an early supporter of the VCAS. During the Eugenics Survey's first year of operation, Mrs. Eggleston gave another \$2,500, and then Perkins found a continuing source of support in another VCAS sponsor, Shirley Farr. Daughter of a Brandon native who had become a lawyer and then banker in Chicago, Farr made her summer home in Brandon and became a VCAS trustee in 1924. Farr's annual contribution of five to six thousand dollars to the Eugenics Survey continued through the Depression years until 1936.<sup>6</sup>

Stating its purpose as "to gather information, as full and accurate as possible, that can be used for social betterment in Vermont," Perkins envisaged the Eugenics Survey's scope as including research on "hereditary trends" in Vermont, cooperation with social agencies and state institutions in eugenic methods, and promoting legislation having eugenical objects. The earliest efforts of the Eugenics Survey were modeled on the work of the Eugenics Record Office (ERO), which had begun operation

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in 1910 under the direction of Harry H. Laughlin.<sup>7</sup> Like the ERO, the Eugenics Survey's foremost mission was to gather information about the inheritance of human traits, primarily for the implementation of "negative eugenics," i.e., marriage restrictions, permanent custody in institutions, and sterilization. In a response to the first professional query sent from the newly opened Eugenics Survey office about the practicability of a sterilization law in Vermont and the establishment of mental hygiene clinics, Laughlin replied:

I think your survey could well make a study of all custodial institutions, both the state and the local; that it could get in contact with the courts; that it could aid the establishment of clinics, and that it could back the enactment of a model sterilization law. Finally, as its principal service, it could recommend a definite policy for maintaining the permanent survey which would comb the state for defectives, and after finding them, would act as an executive agent in bringing to the courts the defectives for disposition in institutions or sterilization, according to the demands of the particular cases.<sup>8</sup>

In a second letter to the Eugenics Survey, Laughlin reiterated the investigative function of the survey, recommending that information be gathered on the racial descent of the "inadequate's" four grandparents, his "place or habitat," occupation, schooling, and family history. Laughlin suggested that state and county institutions could collaborate in this effort, along with the public schools, state charities, and community organizations.<sup>9</sup> He also stressed the importance of a fieldworker visiting the homes of the families being studied. In its first two years of operation, the Eugenics Survey carried out precisely this agenda, even organizing its data along the same lines as the ERO, using the same cross-indexed file system and elaborately enumerated pedigree charts. Perkins hired Harriet E. Abbott as fieldworker. Abbott was a graduate of the University of Chicago's School of Civics and Philanthropy (later the School of Social Service Administration), who had been employed since graduation as an investigator for the Illinois Children's Home and Aid Society, agent for the New York State Charities Association, and as director of the Peoria Children's Bureau and the Children's Home and Aid Society. Since 1920, she had served as "district agent" for the Vermont Children's Aid Society, whose headquarters, like the Eugenics Survey office, were in Burlington.

Working in just the manner outlined by Laughlin, by the end of 1927 Abbott had gathered information on sixty-two families, including some 4,642 people. Twenty-two of these families had been studied intensively, so that pedigree charts and family history profiles had been completed for them. The extent to which information was gathered depended on a number of factors: the availability of existing records, the willingness

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of informants to talk with Abbott, and the personal interests of Perkins and Abbott. For example, pedigree #1, the "chorea" family of the Eugenics Survey's *First Annual Report*, basically a transcript of Perkins's address to the Vermont Conference for Social Work, seems to have been selected for study because of the extensive family history records already gathered by the ERO for Davenport's studies on Huntington's Chorea. The family was centered in Colchester, the town just north of Burlington, so it was easy to supplement the ERO data with interviews conducted by Abbott. The other two families of the *First Annual Report*, the "gypsy" family (a composite drawn from two families, pedigrees #2 and #4) and the "pirate" family (pedigree #3), were first identified from the records of the Vergennes Industrial School.<sup>10</sup> Since these families lived almost exclusively in the Champlain Valley, Abbott was able to interview many family members, who sometimes shared information with her under the mistaken impression that she was writing a book about them.

In the case of the "gypsy" family, Abbott had received a letter from the town clerk of South Burlington suggesting that she speak to Mrs. Stephen Myers of Burlington, who could tell her all about the "gypsies," as she had lived with them when she was young.<sup>11</sup> Abbott then used Mrs. Myers as an introduction to other informants, who led her to still others. After a certain number of interviews, Abbott could present herself as a relatively intimate family acquaintance. Unwittingly, her informants opened up their homes and hearts to her, completely unaware of the real purpose of her research. Occasionally, Abbott's research benefitted from family feuds; members of one branch of the family were eager to speak of the misdemeanors—real and imagined—of the other branch. Not everyone, however, was eager to share family details with Abbott. Daniel O'Brien of South Burlington recommended that Abbott speak to P. L., a "gypsy" woman who had occasionally worked for him as housekeeper. He thought that Abbott might have to pay her to talk, but P. L. was suspicious and refused to have anything to do with the survey.<sup>12</sup> Others took the opportunity to play havoc with Abbott's work, some telling her what she wanted to hear, others making up stories as they went along. Abbott had her own interpretation of such stories: "With the L.'s the information was very hard to get. It was like going into ancient history as the people are illiterate and the information they give is embellished by stories of things that never happened (as with all primitive people)."<sup>13</sup>

The three families portrayed in the Eugenics Survey's *First Annual Report* were in a sense thumbnail sketches of the form that had long been a foundation of the popular presentation of eugenic ideas—the family study. One of the most widely known of such studies was *The Hill Folk* (1912) by the ERO's C. B. Davenport and Florence Danielson; Harry

Laughlin had sent Abbott a copy along with his response to her initial query letter. More a literary genre than a scientific approach, the family study shared with eugenics the belief that social problems were not only biologically based but also biologically linked. Many eugenicists believed in what they termed "cacogenesis," a sort of generalized deterioration in certain human groups that was responsible for a host of social ills. According to Nicole Hahn Rafter, the family study authors "conceptualized cacogeneity as a kind of core rot, a degeneration of the germ plasm which might manifest itself in any one of a number of forms."<sup>14</sup> This was certainly true of Abbott, who included in her summary charts for each family the following sorts of "defects": illiterate, illegitimate, insane, thief, queer, pauper, immoral, dishonest, rape, sex offender, had syphilis, untruthful, epileptic, twin, stillborn, dependent, alcoholic, speech defect, not just right, harelip, a little odd, sloppy, light-fingered, smoked and chewed at age twelve, wild, wanderer, cruel, deserted husband or wife, had only one eye, tuberculosis, poor memory, breach of peace, shiftless, degenerate. The presence in any individual of more than one of these "defects" was seen as confirmatory of that individual's overall "degeneracy." This subjective language was the same that was used in public presentation of the Eugenics Survey data.<sup>15</sup>

A dominant theme of all family studies, including the Eugenics Survey's, was the degeneracy of country life despite the authors' tendency to romanticize rural living. Harriet Abbott's fieldnotes reflect this dichotomy. Pickle making was a charming pursuit, but moonshine distilling was not. Flowerboxes or pretty curtains could redeem the spare country home of an elderly couple. Traditional rural occupations such as spruce gum collecting, ferning, berrying, trapping, fishing, and hunting were rendered either romantically or gothically, depending on other aspects of a family's domestic life and "moral character." Cooking and housekeeping skills were invariably duly noted, and though the physical appearance (clothing, hair, physique, etc.) of both men and women was described, the level of description jumped when the informant was a pert woman who wore makeup or dressed smartly. Abbott often seemed to demand from her informants the mastery of both city and country ways. She was in this respect no different from the rural reformers, who, although charmed by certain vernacular behavior, insisted that it not get in the way of modern improvements. A family might have a strong tradition of ballad singing or folk-fiddling that endeared its members to a proponent of rural electrification, but that did not mean that they should not enjoy the pleasures of radio. The one-room schoolhouse, intimate and convivial as it might have been, needed up-to-date heating, lighting, textbooks, and a certified teacher if real learning were to take place there.



Rafter has pointed out that most of the literature on Progressive reform movements has overlooked the scorn for country life as a manifestation of the reformers' membership in an emerging class of social control professionals.<sup>16</sup> The notes of Abbott and other Eugenics Survey fieldworkers document the fact that eugenicists always found the degeneracy for which they were searching, no matter how tenuous the evidence. One family of supposed "cripples" is revealed by the fieldnotes to consist of a group of malnourished children suffering from rickets. An ancestor known to have been hanged as a witch in Watertown, Massachusetts, in 1658 was assumed to have had Huntington's Chorea, since "at her trial people testified to her violent temper, convulsive movements, and supernatural powers." Another deceased family member was subject to "mental moods and physical reactions . . . [and] was a ventriloquist." She, too, was assumed to be choreic. Such assumptions were critical because they helped establish the hereditary nature of the various undesirable traits.<sup>17</sup>

In 1928, a fuller family study narrative was published in the *Second Annual Report* of the Eugenics Survey. Entitled "An Expensive Luxury," it told the story of the "Doolittle" family of southern Vermont, who were "known to have been a moral, social and economic drag on town and state." The Doolittle "tribe" was characterized as successive generations of "paupers, sex offenders, and feebleminded inadequates" who had cost the state \$15,870.62. To reinforce the "scientific" appearance of this "typical survey history," a "clock-dial" style chart was included in the report. Perkins hoped to publish complete family studies for all of the families studied by the Eugenics Survey and chose this format because it reduced the unwieldy, six-foot-long pedigree charts in the survey files to compact, foldable references. Perkins qualified the accuracy of the chart by saying that where information was not gathered about a specific individual, no symbols were used to indicate defects. He cautioned that this did not necessarily mean that they *were not* defective, since "a more thorough investigation would unquestionably increase the number of defective persons belonging to this tribe." It is hard to believe that anyone would have bothered to try to decipher these confusing charts, but they served Perkins's purpose in that they gave an appearance of scientific objectivity and the impression that "defectiveness" was hereditary.<sup>18</sup>

The Doolittle narrative, authored by Harriet Abbott, was originally entitled "The Results of the Matrimonial Ventures of Four Degenerate Offspring of the Fourth Generation of the Dumston Family." Except for the change of the title and the family pseudonym, and a few minor editorial changes that invariably worsened the picture presented of the family, Perkins published Abbott's manuscript verbatim. Abbott and later Eugenics Survey fieldworkers rarely received any credit for their work.

Like the majority of fieldworkers, Perkins's assistants were invariably women, drawn into eugenics from the various "helping" professions by the prospect of professional advancement. As Nicole Rafter has pointed out, eugenics field investigation provided new opportunities while at the same time consigning women to traditional gender divisions of labor. Women were perceived by their male superiors as uniquely suited to eugenic fieldwork for which intuition, politeness, and an eye for detail were thought to be essential.<sup>19</sup> The reports of the fieldworkers clearly reflect their effort to foster cordial public relations, and they also reveal that the family history information came through what was almost exclusively a female network. The principal and best informants were women.

Though the majority—and in Vermont, all—of the eugenics fieldworkers were women, their attitudes toward their female subjects differ very little from those of their male supervisors. The Doolittle narrative focuses on a woman named "Maggie Simpson," characterized as "insane at times, as well as feeble-minded." Maggie's salient fault is that she is "loose morally, and as she is a rather attractive young woman, has a way of getting by." In 1930 the Eugenics Survey published a study of women at the Rutland Reformatory, which concluded that "sex offenses" were the outstanding crimes committed by the inmates, and the same report contains a sketch of "Mary, a potential sex-delinquent." The Vermont eugenicists believed wholeheartedly in the stereotype of the "bad woman," and when such women had children, their "immorality" was always ascribed to the aberrant sexual behavior of their mothers. Nicole Rafter suggests that by restating the sexual dangers of the "bad woman" in genetic terms, eugenicists elevated her to the status of a major social menace. In Vermont, as elsewhere, the gender bias of eugenicists was most baldly revealed by the application of sterilization laws. The victims of sterilization were overwhelmingly women. A 1936 publication of the American Neurological Association reported the following data on the number of sterilizations performed in the New England states: Connecticut—372 women/19 men; Maine—78 women/7 men; New Hampshire—170 women/29 men; Vermont—65 women/32 men. Dr. Donald Grout, Superintendent of the Vermont State Hospital, in his endorsement of Gov. John A. Mead's proposed 1912 sterilization law, said that sterilization should be applied to "chiefly those of the female sex."<sup>20</sup>

The family study also served to reinforce the widely-held notion that "pauperism" was hereditary. That such studies focused on the rural poor is significant; though Vermont was overwhelmingly rural, sizeable populations of the state's poorest citizens lived in large towns, particularly Burlington. Rafter attributes the focus on the rural poor to the fact that such people were not subject to the social controls of the urban environ-

ment and the industrial workplace in particular.<sup>21</sup> No people represented a mobile, uncontrolled social group in Vermont better than the first two subjects of the Eugenics Survey investigations – the “gypsy” and “pirate” families. Principally of Abenaki and French-Canadian ancestry, the “gypsies” moved freely about a wide part of the state, almost entirely outside mainstream economy and society. The “pirate” families were equally mobile, taking their canal-barge houseboats to points up and down Lake Champlain where they might live unmolested.

The Doolittle narrative continued the principal theme of the Eugenics Survey’s first report – the cost of poor relief and institutional care to Vermont citizens. However, the Doolittle narrative concluded with a slight capitulation to the possibility of environmental causes of poverty and inadequateness: “In some cases good environment seems to have done much towards making several of the offspring respectable citizens. Possibly if the state were to pay more attention to the education and environment of such children . . . before the time when they become dependent and delinquent, some of these conditions might have been avoided.”<sup>22</sup>

This sentiment was reflective of a general shift in the hereditarian attitudes of the Vermont eugenicists. Although work continued on indexing and expanding pedigree research, the Eugenics Survey beginning in 1928 turned its attention to the study of “better branches of delinquent and deficient families.” Its future plans – an area (i.e., community) study, a study of demographic change (i.e., the decline of Vermont “hill farms”), and a before-and-after study of an area affected by the November 1927 flood – all suggested the incorporation of “euthenic” thinking, that is, modifying social conditions via the environment instead of heredity.<sup>23</sup> While the late nineteenth-century family study authors, in portraying the many faces of rural degeneration, had proposed both environmental and hereditarian explanations, the trend in the eugenical literature since the rediscovery of Mendel’s laws of inheritance had been toward increasingly biologicistic explanations. Despite Perkins’s training in genetics, he never employed its language to support the Eugenics Survey family studies; they were nonetheless strictly hereditarian. By the mid-1920s, criticisms from geneticists of the eugenicists’ faulty grasp of the mechanics of heredity tempered such explanations, and there was a shift back to the belief in the interactive effects of heredity and environment. Within the Eugenics Survey of Vermont, such a shift seems to have been more the product of Perkins’s young fieldworkers than any change in his own thinking.

The following year the eugenics fieldwork was carried out by Frances Conklin, who had replaced Harriet Abbott as fieldworker. Conklin focused her efforts on the B. family, twenty-five members of which had lived in Readsboro, Vermont. The aim of her study was to determine if

there were a relationship between this one “defective” family and the history of the town. She followed the same methods as her predecessor, summarizing her observations in a narrative entitled “The ‘Kent’ Family—A Study of the Transmission of a Neuropathic Taint.” Once again, Perkins lightly edited the narrative, changing Conklin’s “Kent” family into the “Rector” family and eliminating the title in favor of “Study of Better Branches—The Rector Family.” Along with the narrative were charts and graphs comparing “degenerate” and “better” branches of the family, the “better” branches equating with individuals who were businessmen, professionals, or social workers. Published in the Eugenics Survey’s *Third Annual Report*, the Rector narrative concluded that “good” traits were as likely to perpetuate themselves as “bad,” that there was no differential fertility (a grave concern to most eugenicists) of the two branches, and that the “harm done by one group is . . . to a considerable degree offset by the benefits contributed by another of the same ancestral origin.” It also admitted that there were “good” individuals in the “bad” branches and vice versa. This admission was surprising in that it was one of the principal arguments of anti-eugenicists against the rationale of sterilization. Anticipating such a response, Perkins dismissed this objection in characteristically cavalier form: “This is not to be taken as offsetting any arguments advocating measures for the restriction of propagation by defectives. It is probable that no competent board of examiners would have recommended these people in the better branches for sterilization.”<sup>24</sup>

That the program of the Eugenics Survey was still largely a racist hereditarian endeavor was betrayed by the first section of the *Third Annual Report*, which was a list of English corruptions of French names. Such corruptions, especially those whose spelling changed through successive generations, “might throw one off the track for a long time.”<sup>25</sup> Seemingly an allusion to the difficulty that the Eugenics Survey fieldworkers had with French names in their genealogical detective work, the publication of the list, accompanied by the statement that the Eugenics Survey had a cross-index of ninety such names, was clearly intended to alert readers to the ethnic background of third and fourth generation Vermonters of French-Canadian descent whose ethnicity might not be apparent by their surnames. Indeed, one of the names in the list was that of the family upon whom the Rector narrative was based. A strong current of anti-French-Canadian bigotry runs through the work of the Eugenics Survey. A range of typical stereotypes held about French Canadians is revealed by Perkins’s own attitudes:

You cannot believe a thing they tell you . . . They are a pretty genial folk but many have a pretty low I.Q. . . . The French are a complacent people; it would be impossible to have a French Mussolini for instance. That kind of drive is lacking . . .

As a people they have a daintiness, a delicacy and liveliness that is not to be found in the older Yankee or Irish. Their poetry has an unusual charm and humor. Many of the traits of the French are superior to that of at least the Irish. They are always more friendly and genial and kindly and make better neighbors than the Irish. There is of course another class of French who is the voyageur and lumberjack who is roistering and callous but is nevertheless full of song.

Yet with all this appreciation of the French race and of their very fine qualities . . . socially of course they will never be recognized . . . They are a fine people—at a distance.

Paul Moody, president of Middlebury College, once told Perkins that “the whole of the French Canadian population could be wiped out of Middlebury and no one would miss it.”<sup>26</sup>

The blame for Vermont’s decline was not laid strictly at the doorstep of the French, though. The second narrative of the 1929 report is that of a Quaker family called the “Furmans,” many of whom had moved west. Their story was meant to illustrate the deleterious effect of out-migration, which had become an important part of the progressive lament about the degenerating condition of New England hill farm communities. The *Fourth Annual Report* followed up on this with a report about six “old” families in a town that had experienced a population decline, and a study of another Quaker family. Fieldworkers were now largely mining Harriet Abbott’s work for these studies. Frances Conklin had resigned in 1928, and her successor Martha Wadman left after less than a year. Elin Andersen, who began working for the Eugenics Survey while Wadman was still there, continued the migration studies. Though some of the old rhetoric was still present (e.g., in “Sylvania,” one of the fictitious towns of the *Fifth Annual Report*, “some people are ‘queer,’ with peculiarities hardly necessary to describe”), the landscape, not the inhabitants, had now become the ogre. Sylvania was “hardly an ideal place to spend a lifetime . . . [because] there is lacking in the environment the stimulus that is necessary to bringing out the best inherent capacities of the citizens.”

The report presented a strange inversion of the frontier myth, recommending that some people should stay put in order to preserve the unique Vermont character. It encouraged people who lived in fertile areas and “really loved the land” to stay, while those living in infertile areas should leave for more “progressive communities, lest deterioration in the quality of the stock of future citizens occur.” It went so far as to suggest that the state should encourage such a migration by taking over all marginal land. According to the report: “Deterioration can take place only in poor isolated communities where the potential capacities of the people are not challenged into use. If then Vermont wishes its future citizens to have the same fine qualities of character that marked the early builders of the

state, it must . . . provide a social environment that will continue to bring out all the fine qualities in the character of its people.”<sup>27</sup>

The agrarian myth of rugged yeomen carving farms from the forest and being transformed by the struggle was jettisoned for a country life myth in which the ideal farmer was the gregarious, cooperative, educated individual who did not have to struggle too much with an unfriendly environment. It was no longer the physical, but the *social* environment upon which the individual was honed. Such conceptions, later amplified in the work of the Vermont Commission on Country Life, presaged the policies of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, whose Rural Rehabilitation Division in 1935 began efforts to persuade the Vermont legislature to adopt their plan for retiring “submarginal” lands and resettling hill farm families. The scores of Vermont hill farmers who appeared deprived and depraved to Perkins and the Washington bureaucrats could be saved only if they renounced their rugged individualism for the communitarian life of the village. Many hill farmers themselves saw things quite differently.<sup>28</sup>

The seeds for the change in emphasis in the Eugenics Survey publications had been sown as early as 1926, when Perkins, through Joseph L. Hills, Director of the Vermont Agricultural Experiment Station and Dean of the School of Agriculture, had sent a proposal for a research project on “Rural Subnormalcy” to E. W. Allen, Chief of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Office of Experiment Stations. Perkins hoped that he might get research funds for the Eugenics Survey through the Purnell Act, which had been passed the year before and made available to experiment stations money for research on economic and social problems of agriculture. Perkins’s proposal was straight eugenics—“to make a study of school children with the idea of finding the extent of mental and physical defect and the relation of these to the school grade, behavior, race, social and economic status of the family, language spoken in the home, and if possible . . . to the mentality of the parent.” Perkins proposed giving group psychometric tests to two thousand children, then individually testing those with an I.Q. below 75. This same group would be given physical and dental exams and studied as to “environmental and home conditions, race admixture, mentality, and anti-social behavior of parents, fraternity and so forth.”<sup>29</sup> Allen, who had served as executive secretary of President Theodore Roosevelt’s Country Life Commission, was not against the proposal, but was uneasy about its not being primarily concerned with an agricultural population. His counter proposal was for a study of how the “mentally defective are able to be self-sustaining and become good citizens under farm life.”<sup>30</sup>

A year later Perkins was in New York looking for other sources of support. He received encouragement from the Social Science Research



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Council, which granted \$84,000 for a three-year "comprehensive survey of rural Vermont." Funding came from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Fund, one of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s, philanthropic foundations; it was stipulated that the source should remain anonymous.<sup>31</sup> As in his earlier solicitation of support from Mrs. Eggleston and Miss Farr, Guy Bailey made the official grant application. Bailey was Perkins's continual supporter in his eugenic endeavors, granting Perkins a year's sabbatical (1927-1928) to organize the survey.

The organization created to carry out the comprehensive survey, christened the Vermont Commission on Country Life, was to be directed by Dr. Henry C. Taylor of the Institute for Research in Land Economics and Public Utilities at Northwestern University. At the time of Perkins's proposal to the Social Science Research Council, Taylor was also chairman of the council's Social and Economic Research on Agriculture Committee. An early leader in the professionalization of American rural sociology, Taylor was an enthusiastic supporter of the "survey" approach of the sort envisioned by Perkins.<sup>32</sup> Though the country life movement, based on a loosely organized group of rural reform notions inspired by a combination of nostalgia, humanitarianism, and the desire to make agriculture as efficient as the factory, had largely died out by the time of the VCCL, rural sociologists like Taylor continued to promote the sorts of reforms embraced by the movement in American life. These reforms often shared aims and methods similar to those of the eugenics movement. Like the eugenicists, the first generation of rural sociologists were almost uniformly male, white, Anglo-Saxon, and native-born, and raised on a steady diet of Social Darwinism. Taylor's 1905 textbook, *Agricultural Economics*, was built around the law of natural selection, and he attributed much of his own intellectual debt to such Social Darwinist writers as Herbert Spencer, Lester F. Ward, and Henry Drummond.<sup>33</sup>

The creation of the VCCL transformed Perkins's small but fervent eugenics effort into a high profile public campaign. Despite Perkins's efforts, the Eugenics Survey had never captivated the attention and support of the Vermont public. The Eugenics Survey was not unique in this dilemma, which plagued all the national and state eugenics organizations. The VCCL, however, immediately generated tremendous interest among a wide variety of civic-minded Vermonters. Three hundred progressive citizens, chaired by ex-governor John Weeks, were organized into dozens of committees whose task it was to study everything from recreation and education to hygiene and agriculture and suggest answers to the seminal question of the commission: "What is happening to the old Vermont stock?"

Both Taylor and Perkins helped the VCCL to maintain high visibility, speaking to community organizations around the state about the work of the commission. Along with state and local press coverage, their publicity efforts garnered attention in Boston, New Haven, and New York as well.<sup>34</sup> An effort was made to secure at least one member from every town in the state; many of those solicited were the town clerks, ministers, or physicians who had served as informants for the Eugenics Survey family study research.<sup>35</sup> A close association was continually made between the Eugenics Survey and the VCCL, not only by Perkins but by Taylor. Eugenics Survey activities were reported in the VCCL newsletters, which were edited by Perkins, Secretary of the Commission. He even enclosed reprints of "Heredity Factors in Rural Communities," an address he had given to the American Eugenic Research Association, in one mailing of the newsletter. A lion's share of the VCCL budget went to eugenic activities as well. Along with the six thousand dollar annual budget of the Eugenics Survey (still being funded by Farr), four thousand dollars went to the Commission for the Study of the Care of the Handicapped; the Committee for the Human Factor, essentially a continuation of the Eugenics Survey population studies, received \$4,200. The committees concerned with agriculture, forestry, and community life, on the other hand, ran entirely on volunteer labor. Finally, when the funds for the VCCL were exhausted, the Eugenics Survey took over administrative functions, responding to inquiries, filling orders for the VCCL publication *Rural Vermont*, maintaining its files, and, most importantly, continuing to advocate its mission.

Expanding the Eugenics Survey into a wider reform effort via the VCCL was in some sense a logical extension of Perkins's earlier attempts at legitimation. As Garland Allen and other authors have observed, eugenics provided middle-class reformers, particularly the academic "experts" like Perkins, an opportunity to enhance their careers and personal status. At UVM, Perkins, while chairman of the zoology department, had no tangible professional domain as there was only one other person in the department. Perkins had begun his scientific career in experimental biology, studying under W. K. Brooks at Johns Hopkins University. He continued his work in marine invertebrates only briefly, before going on to sporadic research in Lake Champlain for the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries.<sup>36</sup> By 1920, he was virtually inactive as a professional scientist; his scientific community centered in the Vermont Botanical and Bird Club. He did some banding of gulls on islands in Lake Champlain, but apparently had far greater enthusiasm for photography than ornithology.

Perkins had even greater enthusiasm for social reform. Four of the five addresses that were given at his 1898 UVM commencement spoke

to the realms of science and nature study, while the fifth, delivered by Perkins, was on "Education and the Labor Problem." Despite his reformist inclination, separating himself from his father's legacy was hard. His father, George Henry Perkins, had come to UVM in 1870 as Professor of Botany, Geology, and Natural History, and was the best-known naturalist in the state, serving as state entomologist, state naturalist, and state geologist at various points in his career. He was also an institution at UVM, where he taught all of the natural sciences, as well as serving as curator of the University Museum and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. In 1917-1919 he was acting president of the university.<sup>37</sup>

Since 1885, George Perkins had also taught anthropology, the second such course taught for credit in an American university. His view of human evolution, not surprisingly, was decidedly hierarchical and ethnocentric. Paleolithic peoples were brutes with little intelligence; small stature was equated with racial inferiority; flat noses or tibia with "degraded races." The Celts were "impetuous, narrow in their religions . . . not given to profound investigation"; Slavs were "the least civilized of any people, fond of barbaric shows . . . warlike," but "great linguists"; the Finns and Lapps were "simple-minded," their idea of religion being that "when in danger they are very devoted to the Scriptures and Hymns"; the Chinese had "no ability to invent." Teutonic people, however, "lead the races and in a sense control the earth."<sup>38</sup> Such was the anthropology imparted to the younger Perkins, along with generations of other UVM students.

Though he was more interested in sociology than biology, Henry Perkins, like other eugenicists trained in biology, often invoked his natural science training when presenting eugenics to the public. Commenting on the work of the Eugenics Survey, Perkins remarked: "This investigation happens to be under the direction of a laboratory-trained biologist. He looks upon the rural community as a biological organism, its heredity and its environment show numerous parallels to the kindred processes in plant or animal."<sup>39</sup> Henry Taylor also claimed expert status: "The immediate purpose of the Commission is that of scientific planning for action towards higher goals. Scientific planning consists in gathering facts, sifting them, and meditating on them until their significance is seen in their true relation to the everyday life of a forward-looking people."<sup>40</sup> As the work of the VCCL drew to a close, more emphasis was placed on its mass appeal than its scientific rigor. In June 1931, commission members came to Burlington for three days of public meetings. To help draw a large audience, the commission had organized a pageant and parade, which succeeded in bringing out a sizeable pre-Independence Day crowd. Two thousand people gathered at Centennial Field to watch a performance of "Coming Vermont," Sarah Cleghorn's vision of farm, school, and

church life in Vermont half a century in the future. Along with the pageantry there were talks by Vermont writers and political figures, who invoked the names of Ethan Allen, Seth Warner, and other Vermont heroes to rally support for what was portrayed as a supremely patriotic endeavor.

The fostering of patriotism was the specific task of the VCCL's Committee on Tradition and Ideals, which included some of Vermont's leading writers—Sarah Cleghorn, Zephine Humphrey, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Walter Coates, Bertha Oppenheim, and others. At the core of their agenda of creating local museums, preparing bibliographies and biographies, collecting folksongs, and studying Vermont poetry was the perceived threat of biological and social decline:<sup>41</sup> “The old stock is here still, in greater proportion to the total population than in any other commonwealth of the north. The old spirit is by no means dead. All we need is organization, the power and habit of working together for a fixed and determined purpose. And all we need for organization is leadership—leaders who see the goal plain, and who will consecrate themselves to its attaining high patriotic devotion.”<sup>42</sup>

These were the closing words of *Rural Vermont: A Program for the Future*, the VCCL manifesto that was published shortly after the June 1931 final meeting. The book opens with a summary of the history of the Eugenics Survey and then goes on to recapitulate the themes of rural decline developed in its annual reports. Authored by the Committee on the Human Factor (chaired by Middlebury College's Paul Moody), the chapter made recommendations that reinforced the eugenical tone of the volume: Vermonters should be encouraged to keep and study their family records to arouse “pride in the achievements and high qualities of their ancestral stock so that this pride may in turn stimulate their better efforts and guide them in their choice of mates”; the doctrine should be spread that “it is the patriotic duty of every normal couple to have children in sufficient number to keep up to par ‘the good old Vermont stock’”; and public support for eugenics should be strengthened.<sup>43</sup>

There followed a long inventory of recommendations aimed at making Vermont agriculture more competitive. The Committee on Agriculture listed methods of raising yields of hay crops, marketing milk more efficiently, and strengthening cooperative organizations and agricultural education. The Committee on Forestry suggested reforestation of abandoned farms, state acquisition of scenic forest areas, and increasing funding for forest protection, while both the Committee on Fish and Game and Preservation of Wild Life and the Committee on Summer Residents and Tourists believed strongly in the creation of a state police force. The latter committee, the only other one besides Perkins's with the resources

of paid field workers, had the most elaborate ideas of all. Its members wanted to enlarge the State Bureau of Publicity, establish a series of tourist information booths, improve hiking and horseback-riding trails, and ban billboards. The committee suggested state licensing of tourist cabins, wayside stands, and summer camps, and encouraged the purchase and building of summer homes. A key to the reinvention of Vermont as a recreational haven was the improvement of state highways, including the envisioning of two scenic highways that would run the length of the state—one along the crest of the Green Mountains, the other through the Champlain and Taconic Valleys. (The latter—Vermont Route 7—was subsequently built; the “Green Mountain Parkway,” one of the most controversial legislative proposals in Vermont history, was eventually defeated.)

To an astonishing extent, the recommendations of the VCCL committees prophesied the direction that the state would take in the next half-century. From banning billboards (an idea that had currency in Vermont for over a decade and was added to the VCCL agenda by Shirley Farr) to the enactment of a statewide land-use law, many of the developments ultimately increased the state’s economic dependence on the tourist industry. Tourism was consistent with the eugenic aims of improving the overall “stock,” since the overwhelming majority of tourists who eventually stayed in the state (even if only for the summer) were economically successful and hence biologically “fit.” One of the most enthusiastic proponents of such a scheme was Dorothy Canfield Fisher. The week before the VCCL meeting in Burlington, she had addressed the state chamber of commerce, telling it that Vermont should select its summer people, preferably teachers, ministers, doctors, librarians, and college professors. She suggested that the chamber use college catalogs as mailing lists for sending information about Vermont. They should also hire some “young college man” to visit college campuses, where he could give slide shows, answer questions, and distribute information about farms for sale in the state. Fisher was concerned that the types of people she was hoping to attract were “not accustomed to bargain for things”; she recommended that the state set up a board to scrutinize land sales to protect the prospective summer folk from any sharp dealing on the part of the hard-bitten hill farmers.<sup>44</sup>

But was this the endpoint of Perkins’s eugenical scheme, to purify the state’s polluted protoplasm by bringing in a better class of Vermonters—tourists and summer home owners? If Perkins’s enthusiasm for such a program of “positive eugenics” as the VCCL outlined had grown, it was not at the expense of his fundamental belief in negative eugenics. Just three months before the VCCL parade and pageant in Burlington, the

state legislature had passed a sterilization law. Vermont was the twenty-fifth state to enact such a law since Indiana's law went into effect in 1907. The Advisory Committee of the Eugenics Survey had gone on record in favor of such legislation in October of 1925, a month after the survey had begun operation from an office in Burlington.<sup>45</sup> It was not the first time such a bill had been considered. In 1912, Senator Elmer Johnson of Franklin County had put before the Committee on Public Health "An act to authorize and provide for the sterilization of imbeciles, feeble-minded, and insane persons, rapists, confirmed criminals and other defectives."<sup>46</sup> The committee, headed by Senator William H. Dyer of Addison County (later Commissioner of Public Welfare and member of the Eugenics Survey Advisory Committee), reported in favor of the bill's passage, which had been proposed by outgoing Governor John A. Mead. The bill passed both the House and Senate, but was vetoed by Governor Allen Fletcher on the recommendation of his attorney general, R. E. Brown. Brown found the bill to be unconstitutional in a number of respects; it discriminated against those already confined to institutions, women under age forty-five (the act applied only to them), and those people with a "confirmed criminal tendency," which Brown interpreted as meaning an uncommitted hypothetical future crime. He also noted that the "machinery" for carrying out the act made no provision of due process for those identified for sterilization.<sup>47</sup> Despite Brown's objections, the Senate passed the bill over the governor's veto. The bill died, however, when the House refused to override.

Although many Vermont leaders favored a sterilization law, it was fifteen years before another one was proposed. With Perkins paving the way, the Senate again passed a sterilization bill in 1927, but the House rejected it. Perkins's efforts did not go unnoticed; in the next Eugenics Survey annual report, he defended the survey against criticism that sterilization was their sole concern.<sup>48</sup> Once the VCCL had been organized, Perkins was more careful about his overt activism on behalf of a sterilization law. In January of 1929 he sent a memo to Advisory Committee members: "The Vermont Commission is in the position of needing active support from every quarter. It is important that nothing should be allowed to arouse suspicion among any important group, social, economic, political, or religious. In order to secure as complete cooperation as possible it may be better for the Eugenics Survey to avoid antagonizing some people who have strong convictions on the sterilization question. This would not hamper any of you, but perhaps I had better keep out of it."<sup>49</sup>

Perkins and the Eugenics Survey, like other proponents of sterilization in America, had come under increasing fire from the Roman Catholic church, which had officially opposed sterilization as early as 1895. In 1930,

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Pope Pius XI had condemned sterilization in an encyclical on Christian marriage, and a number of local Catholic organizations in Vermont protested against the bill when it was introduced again in 1931. Governor Stanley Wilson lent his support to the bill, and this time Perkins was much better prepared. The bill as finally drawn was revised by U.S. District Court judge Harland B. Howe and was reviewed by Perkins, the governor, and the attorney general before being introduced. Perkins (along with Eugenics Survey Advisory Committee members Steele, Stanley, and Allen) testified early in favor of the bill before a joint committee; Judge Howe and eleven others gave testimony favorable to its passage at a later hearing. Prior to the House consideration of the bill, Howe circulated eugenical literature to House members, which helped fuel bitter debate.<sup>50</sup> Both houses of the legislature passed the bill, which Governor Wilson signed on April Fool's Day.

Although public opposition toward sterilization was never widespread, neither was public support.<sup>51</sup> As with a marriage restriction law, which Perkins helped pass in 1929, it took the sustained efforts of some institution to promote eugenic legislation.<sup>52</sup> The Eugenics Survey, representing the coalescence of the interests of social welfare professionals, the medical profession, and a small group of eugenic "experts," filled that institutional niche. Although fostering public support for eugenics had always been one of Perkins's goals, in the end he only needed to convince legislators, who often represented the same sorts of interests as the eugenicists.<sup>53</sup> He had particular help in this effort from physicians; six doctors testified in favor of the bill (and none against), and the two physicians in the Senate, one of whom was the chairman of the Committee on Public Health, voted for the law. Governor John A. Mead, who had first proposed a sterilization law in 1912, was a physician. Four of the Eugenics Survey Advisory Committee members were doctors, three of whom held positions as directors of institutions for the insane or "feebleminded." Besides Guy Bailey and two of Perkins's fellow academics, the balance of the Advisory Committee during the tenure of the Eugenics Survey was made up of social control professionals—prison directors, the Commissioner of Education, and the president of the Vermont Children's Aid Society.

The collective call for regeneration in the committee reports of the VCCL and the insistent warning by Perkins of degeneration sounded in *Rural Vermont* reinforced one another. The threat of degeneracy lent an immediacy to the VCCL's agenda, while the forward-looking proposals of educators, extension agents, and writers presented the eugenic proposals in a palatable context. Few readers of *Rural Vermont* (which was sent to every library in the state) would miss the eugenical argument that ran through it. In his introduction, Henry Taylor posited among the ques-

tions that drove the VCCL effort: "Are there pockets of degeneracy hidden among our hills?" The Committee on Citizenship advocated the restriction of suffrage to those who passed an intelligence test; the Committee on the Care of the Handicapped called attention to the recently passed sterilization and marriage restriction laws; Perkins inserted the Eugenics Survey chart of defects of fifty-five "degenerate" Vermont families along with a strident call for Vermonters to "wake up" and listen to the advice of eugenicists, so that their "children's children will be less hampered by the social and economic drag of avoidable low grade Vermonters." No matter how upbeat a "program for the future" the VCCL offered, it was inextricably linked to the dark side of the Vermont landscape.<sup>54</sup>

Most historians of American eugenics see the 1930s as a decade of decline for the movement. By the late 1920s a number of geneticists had brought forth arguments that seriously challenged the scientific credibility of eugenics. This challenge had little or no effect in Vermont, where there was virtually no one with any training in genetics except Perkins and his students to publicize such arguments. Nonetheless, the tempering of the hereditarian rhetoric of the Eugenics Survey publications between 1925 and 1931 is consistent with the national trend toward a eugenic philosophy, which acknowledged that environment played a significant role in human behavior. Scientific criticism had affected organizations like the ERO, whose philanthropic supporters (particularly John D. Rockefeller, Jr.) sought to disengage themselves from what had come to be perceived as controversial. Eugenists trying to raise funds for the Third International Congress of Eugenics (whose proceedings were edited by Perkins) found it difficult to attract sponsors.<sup>55</sup> Within the movement, even its most ardent proponents became disaffected. Perkins, who had become president of the American Eugenics Society (AES) in 1931, received a letter from Henry H. Goddard in 1934. Goddard, whose *The Kallikak Family* (1912) was perhaps the best-known book in the American eugenical literature, wrote:

I have your appeal for the Eugenics Society. Why not drop the whole works? I am getting tired of helping people who do not want to be helped. We have carried on now for several years and what have we accomplished? It was good fun as long as we could afford it, but now it is a different matter.

If Hitler succeeds in his wholesale sterilization, it will be a demonstration that will carry eugenics farther than a hundred Eugenics Societies could. If he makes a fiasco of it, it will set the movement back where a hundred eugenic societies can never resurrect it.<sup>56</sup>

In Vermont, Perkins's own efforts reached closure in 1936, when Shirley Farr discontinued her financial support. Perkins's attempt to transform

the Eugenics Survey into a popular reform campaign had failed. Despite appointing an official spokesman for the commission and moving to a paid membership basis, the VCCL quickly died after the Rockefeller funds were expended. Much of the reform agenda moved forward via other special interest groups in concert with state government, but it did so without Perkins and the Eugenics Survey. Perkins retreated to UVM, where he taught his course in eugenics until his retirement in 1945, and where his student, Paul Moody, continued to teach eugenic principles in his zoology courses into the 1960s.<sup>57</sup> In 1951, asked about a report in the *American Journal of Mental Deficiency* that estimated that 210 people had been sterilized in Vermont, Perkins said that actually more people had been sterilized, and he maintained that the sterilization law was "one of the most important and progressive measures on the statute books."<sup>58</sup> Four years later, the editor of *Vermont History*, who optimistically believed that the VCCL had had "a lasting effect on the destiny of the state," asked Perkins to tell its story. Perkins was hardly so sanguine about the results of the commission, confining his discussion to the success of the regional bookwagon system and the publication of the *Green Mountain Series*, four volumes of Vermont biography, poetry, prose, and folksong.<sup>59</sup> By that time, Perkins was a bitter and unhappy man whose life had acquired an ironic dimension similar to that of his eugenical compatriot Henry Laughlin. Laughlin in his later years suffered increasingly from epilepsy, a neurological disorder, which had been one of the traits that he and other eugenicists had wanted to eliminate from the population. Perkins, whose Eugenics Survey publications had labeled alcoholism as one of the prominent "traits" of defective Vermont families, spent his last years as a bedridden alcoholic before dying of liver failure in 1956.<sup>60</sup>

#### NOTES

For critical readings of the original version of this essay, the author wishes to thank Tom Bassett, John Gillis, Nicky Rafter, James Reed, and Greg Sanford. Although their comments have been extremely helpful, they would not all necessarily agree with the interpretation presented here.

<sup>1</sup> [Henry F. Perkins], "Lessons from a Eugenic Survey of Vermont," *First Annual Report of the Eugenics Survey of Vermont* (n.p.: Eugenics Survey of Vermont, 1927), 8-11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> Hal S. Barron, *Those Who Stayed Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth Century New England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 48; Richard M. Judd, *The New Deal in Vermont: Its Impact and Aftermath* (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1979).

<sup>4</sup> C. B. Davenport to H. F. Perkins, 13 February 1922, Department of Zoology Papers, University Archives (UA), University of Vermont.

<sup>5</sup> Student reports in Department of Zoology Papers, UA, University of Vermont. Perkins occasionally sought publication for some of this research, for which he also claimed co-authorship. See Henry F. Perkins and L. P. Bliss, "Fifteen Pairs of Twins: A Study of Similarities," *Eugenics* 2 (1929): 22-26, Henry F. Perkins and F. E. Conklin, "How Large Families Do Feebleminded Parents Have?" (abstract), *Eugenical News* 13 (1928): 92-93. One of the most curious types of eugenic research was the study of historical personalities, in which eugenical (i.e., hereditarian) explanations were given for the exploits of everyone from J. S. Bach to Henry David Thoreau. Perkins gave a Founders Day address in honor

of Ira Allen that is an example of this type of endeavor. See Henry F. Perkins, "Arnold and Allen: A Comparison and Contrast," *The Vermont Alumnus* 17 (1938): 223-224.

<sup>6</sup> Henry F. Perkins to Guy Bailey, 8 May 1925, President's Papers, UA, University of Vermont. Both Farr and Webster served for a number of years on the Eugenics Survey Advisory Board.

<sup>7</sup> For an introduction to this extremely important institution in the American eugenics movements, see Garland E. Allen, "The Eugenics Record Office at Cold Spring Harbor, 1910-1940: An Essay in Institutional History," *Osiris* 2 (1986): 225-264.

<sup>8</sup> Harry H. Laughlin to Harriet E. Abbott, 24 September 1925, Eugenics Survey of Vermont Papers, Public Records (PR), Middlesex, Vermont.

<sup>9</sup> Laughlin to Abbott, 8 October 1925, Eugenics Survey of Vermont Papers, PR.

<sup>10</sup> Minutes of Eugenics Survey Advisory Committee Meeting, 28 October 1926, Eugenics Survey of Vermont Papers, PR. C. B. Davenport, director of the ERO, had published a number of papers on Huntington's Chorea based on the information in ERO files. Although the Eugenics Survey records clearly record the actual identities of the individuals discussed under fictional titles in Eugenics Survey publications, none of these names will be given in this paper in the interest of respecting their privacy. Where names are necessary to preserve the sense of the narrative, initials are used.

<sup>11</sup> W. S. Heath to Abbott, 18 January 1926, Eugenics Survey of Vermont Papers, PR. Abbott's correspondence with town clerks, ministers, school personnel, and other officials records the extent of racist and hereditarian attitudes throughout the state. In response to Abbott's query about a "gypsy" woman, Burton Kent, town clerk of Pantton, replied: "She was considered ignorant, and immoral, yet *can* read and write. If you are interested in 'Evolution' you won't have to trace . . . M. L. back very far before you find the Missing Link." Burton Kent to Abbott, 19 May 1926, Eugenics Survey of Vermont Papers, PR.

<sup>12</sup> "L. General History," Eugenics Survey of Vermont Papers, PR.

<sup>13</sup> Minutes of Eugenics Survey Advisory Committee Meeting, 28 October 1926, Eugenics Survey of Vermont Papers, PR. It is an extremely difficult task to tease fact from fiction in Abbott's reports, considering the nature of these interviews. Part of the problem lies in Abbott's filtering the information, but perhaps an even larger difficulty is in understanding the points of view of her informants. Some had been subjected to the oppression of poor farms, foster homes, prisons, and other institutions of social control in Vermont and may have had a measure of fear at the appearance of Miss Abbott. The "stories of things that never happened" may in part be folklore, which would have struck Abbott as incredible.

<sup>14</sup> Nicole Hahn Rafter, *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies, 1877-1919* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 5-6. Rafter's book includes reprints of eleven of the most important family studies of the period, with introductory commentary and a thoughtful analysis of both the literary devices of the family studies and their underlying ideology.

<sup>15</sup> "Summary of Defects, Institutions, etc.," Eugenics Survey of Vermont Papers, PR. For an excellent discussion of the methodological problems of eugenics, see Allen, "The ERO at Cold Spring Harbor," 242-245. For an equally thorough discussion of the presentation of eugenic "data" in the family studies, see Rafter, *White Trash*, 17-26.

<sup>16</sup> Rafter, *White Trash*, 12-17. "Social control," while an objectionable term to many historians, was the term in common currency with Progressive-era reformers. Robert Bannister points out that the term was popularized at least in part by E. A. Ross's *Social Control*, published in 1901. According to Bannister, "behind the term's various uses lay the common assumption that since society was a jungle, more systematic controls were demanded. Supplementing an older humanitarianism, there developed an ideal of rule by experts in the interest of efficiency." Robert C. Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 165.

<sup>17</sup> Notes, draft manuscripts, etc., of Harriet Abbott, Eugenics Survey of Vermont Papers, PR.

<sup>18</sup> [Henry F. Perkins], *Second Annual Report of the Eugenics Survey of Vermont*, (n.p.: Eugenics Survey of Vermont, 1928), 13-14. It was common practice in the family study genre to give the families fictitious names, ostensibly to protect the identity of the real families. However, it also served to obscure the fact that the "families" were often composites drawn from many unrelated families. Such an admission would severely undermine the hereditarian argument of the authors. Along with obviously derogatory pseudonyms like "Doolittle," the family studies used such cacophonous names as the Jukes, Nams, Kallikaks, Dacks, etc.

<sup>19</sup> Rafter, *White Trash*, 21. Genieve Lamson, who worked for the Eugenics Survey / VCCL in 1929 doing research on migration, accused Perkins and Taylor of stealing her work. Lamson to Taylor, 1 June 1931, Vermont Commission on Country Life Papers, PR.

<sup>20</sup> [Perkins], *Second Annual Report of the Eugenics Survey of Vermont*, 16-19; Nicolas Hahn [Nicole Hahn Rafter], "Too Dumb to Know Better: Cacogenic Family Studies and the Criminology of Women," *Criminology* 18 (1980): 3-25; Committee of the American Neurological Association for the Investigation of Eugenical Sterilization, *Eugenical Sterilization* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 10-15; "Twelfth Biennial Report of the Trustees of the Vermont State Hospital for the Insane," *Vermont Public Documents, 1911-1912* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle Co., 1912), 9.

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- <sup>21</sup> Rafter, *White Trash*, 16.
- <sup>22</sup> The extent to which the Eugenics Survey had incorporated environmental explanations is evident in Frances Conklin's proposal for the Readsboro research in which she uses "continuous environment" as a synonym for heredity. [Frances Conklin], "What the B. family has done to Readsboro," *Eugenics Survey of Vermont Papers*, PR.
- <sup>23</sup> [Perkins], *Second Annual Report of the Eugenics Survey of Vermont*, 17-18.
- <sup>24</sup> "The 'Kent' Family—A Study of the Transmission of a Neuropathic Taint," *Eugenics Survey of Vermont Papers*, PR; [Perkins], *Second Annual Report of the Eugenics Survey of Vermont*, 10.
- <sup>25</sup> [Henry F. Perkins], *Third Annual Report of the Eugenics Survey of Vermont* (n.p.: Eugenics Survey of Vermont, 1929), 5.
- <sup>26</sup> [Harriet Abbott], "Dr. Perkins re: French Canadians," *Eugenics Survey of Vermont Papers*, PR.
- <sup>27</sup> [Henry F. Perkins], *Fourth Annual Report of the Eugenics Survey of Vermont* (n.p.: Eugenics Survey of Vermont, 1930), 73-78.
- <sup>28</sup> For a sense of what the rural response was to such schemes, see George Aiken, *Speaking From Vermont* (New York: Frederick Stokes Co., 1938). Aiken, lieutenant governor at the time, led the fight in the Vermont legislature against the resettlement plan.
- <sup>29</sup> MS in *Eugenics Survey of Vermont Papers*, PR.
- <sup>30</sup> E. W. Allen to J. L. Hills, 21 April 1926, *Eugenics Survey of Vermont Papers*, PR.
- <sup>31</sup> Rockefeller money had been a mainstay of the American eugenics movements since at least 1910; see Allen, "The ERO at Cold Spring Harbor," 260-264, and Garland E. Allen, "The Role of Experts in Scientific Controversy," in *Scientific Controversies: Case Studies in Resolution and Closure of Disputes in Science and Technology*, ed. H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., and A. L. Caplan, (New York / Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 183-196.
- <sup>32</sup> On Taylor's ideas about agricultural surveys, see H. C. Taylor and Anne Dewees, *The Story of Agricultural Economics in the United States, 1840-1932: Men—Service—Ideas* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State College Press, 1952). For Taylor's role in rural sociology, see Harry C. McDean, "Professionalism in the Rural Social Sciences, 1896-1912," *Agricultural History* 58 (1984): 378-392.
- <sup>33</sup> Henry C. Taylor, "The Development of Country Life Studies at the University of Wisconsin," *Rural Sociology* 6 (1941): 195-202.
- <sup>34</sup> Newsletters of the VCCL, 1929-1931, Vermont Commission on Country Life Papers, PR.
- <sup>35</sup> The "advance work" done by the Eugenics Survey had some other unanticipated uses; in 1932, Perkins supplied Bernard Bloch, a linguist conducting fieldwork for the *Linguistic Atlas of New England* (LANE), with names of contacts and potential informants from a number of Vermont towns; Bernard Bloch to Henry F. Perkins, 22 December 1932, Vermont Commission on Country Life Papers, PR. The LANE project was in a sense a late manifestation of the country life movement conviction that authentic rural New England life was endangered. In their attempt to record the diverse dialects of the region, LANE linguists sought older, rural residents whose speech was assumed to bear a resemblance to that of earlier generations of New England residents. The brief biographical summaries of the *Handbook's* informants reflect a class-consciousness and romanticization of certain aspects of Vermont rural life that was also characteristic of the Eugenics Survey.
- <sup>36</sup> Henry F. Perkins, "Double Reproduction in the Medusa *Hybocodon prolifer*," *American Naturalist* 38 (1904): n.p.; "Notes on the Medusae of the Western Atlantic," *Carnegie Institution of Washington Publication #102* (1905): 133-156.
- <sup>37</sup> Kevin Dann, "The Natural Sciences at the University of Vermont, 1870-1940," ed. Robert V. Daniels, *The University of Vermont: The First 200 Years* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, forthcoming).
- <sup>38</sup> Lecture notes of May Boynton, UVM Class of 1893, UA, University of Vermont.
- <sup>39</sup> Henry F. Perkins, "Hereditary Factors in Rural Communities," *Eugenics* 3 (1930): 287-292.
- <sup>40</sup> [Henry F. Perkins et al.], *Rural Vermont: A Program for the Future* (Burlington, Vt.: Vermont Commission on Country Life, 1931), 2.
- <sup>41</sup> Four books, known collectively as the *Green Mountain Series*, emerged from this committee's work: Walter H. Crockett, ed., *Vermonters: A Book of Biographies*; Helen H. Flanders, ed., *A Garland of Green Mountain Song*; Walter J. Coates and Frederick Tupper, eds., *Vermont Verse: An Anthology*; A. W. Peach and H. G. Rugg, eds., *Vermont Prose: A Miscellany*.
- <sup>42</sup> [Perkins et al.], *Rural Vermont*, 384-385.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.
- <sup>44</sup> *Burlington Free Press*, 17 June 1931, 6; 18 June 1931, 6. The *Free Press* heartily endorsed Fisher's plan. The paper also reported as front page news the fact that the director of the VCCL himself hoped to make his summer and retirement home in Vermont. *Burlington Free Press*, 18 June 1931, 1.
- <sup>45</sup> In 1925 the Advisory Committee consisted of the following individuals: Guy W. Bailey, President, University of Vermont; Professor A. R. Gifford, Professor of Psychology, University of Vermont; Dr. C. F. Dalton, Secretary, State Board of Health; Professor K. R. B. Flint, Norwich University; R. H. Walker, Superintendent, State Prison; Dr. E. A. Stanley, Superintendent, State Hospital for the Insane;



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Charles W. Wilson, Superintendent, Vermont Industrial School; Dr. Truman J. Allen, Superintendent, Vermont State School for the Feeble-minded; Lena Ross, Superintendent, Riverside Reformatory; Clarence Dempsey, Commissioner of Education; Dr. Horace Ripley, Superintendent, Brattleboro Retreat; William H. Dyer, Commissioner of Public Welfare; Perkins, and Harriet Abbott, his assistant.

<sup>46</sup> *Journal of the Senate of the State of Vermont* (Montpelier, Vt.: Capital City Press, 1912), 138.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 1004. In his final address to the joint assembly of the legislature, Mead had also recommended that it adopt more restrictive marriage laws; *ibid.*, 617-619.

<sup>48</sup> [Perkins], *Second Annual Report of the Eugenics Survey of Vermont*, 4.

<sup>49</sup> Henry F. Perkins to Eugenics Survey Advisory Committee, 4 January 1929, President's Papers, UA. Perkins reiterated his concern in a letter to Guy Bailey: "I shall be glad if you will let me know if you heard any criticisms or if you feel that any of the activities that we are engaged in are open to question." Perkins to Bailey, 13 February 1929, President's Papers, UA.

<sup>50</sup> C. C. Ihm, *The Papal Encyclicals, 1903-1939*, vol. 3 (n.p.: McGrath Publishing Co., 1981), 400-401; *Vermont Senate Journal*, 1931, 646; *Burlington Free Press*, 21 March 1931, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Judith K. Grether, "Sterilization and Eugenics: An Examination of Early Twentieth Century Population Control in the United States," (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 1980), 64-66.

<sup>52</sup> This law forbade clerks from issuing marriage licences to a wide range of individuals: a) males under twenty-one and females under eighteen without parental consent; b) "expectant" males under eighteen and females under sixteen; c) any one judged "non compos mentis"; d) persons under guardianship without written consent; e) town paupers without the written consent of selectmen or the overseer of the poor; f) all expectant females under age fourteen and males under age sixteen. *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Assembly of Vermont, 1929* (Senate Bill 59).

<sup>53</sup> Support for sterilization had always been stronger in the Senate than the House, whose members often came from the working class. In 1931, there were no Catholics in the Senate, while there were twenty in the House. Only one of the Catholic representatives voted in favor of the sterilization bill.

<sup>54</sup> *Rural Vermont*, 4, 32, 295.

<sup>55</sup> Grether, "Sterilization and Eugenics," 81.

<sup>56</sup> Founded in 1923, the AES was closely tied to the ERO and was the movement's principal propaganda organ. While Perkins was president, the AES was run almost entirely by Leon Whitney, the paid secretary. See Garland E. Allen, "The Role of Experts in Scientific Controversy," in *Scientific Controversies: Case Studies in Resolution and Closure of Disputes in Science and Technology*, ed. H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., and A. L. Caplan, (New York / Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 198; Goddard to Perkins, 27 January 1934, Eugenics Survey of Vermont Papers, PR.

<sup>57</sup> Moody Papers, Special Collections, UVM. Moody was no relation to Middlebury's Paul Moody.

<sup>58</sup> *Burlington Free Press*, 9 November 1951, 6.

<sup>59</sup> See note 41.

<sup>60</sup> Henry F. Perkins, "The Vermont Commission on Country Life," *Vermont History* 23 (October, 1955): 335-340; Allen, "The ERO at Cold Spring Harbor," 254.