

SHELF LIFE CULTURE CLASH

The striking black-and-white photographs collected and commented upon in this book document a fragile moment in Vermont's 20th-century history: the postwar period when a tiny community in southern Vermont welcomed — at least for a time — the first urban newcomers into their midst.

Pikes Falls, in Jamaica, Vermont, was, without knowing it, about to enter the modern era. It was 1950 and traditional Vermont — self-sufficient, hard working, poor in money but rich in other ways — came out to meet the first of the outsiders who later came in droves.

Photographer Rebecca Lepkoff was one of those outsiders. She documented the longtime residents of Pikes Falls and the newcomers, including back-to-the-land trailblazers Scott and Helen Nearing, as they worked and played. Lepkoff recorded what amounted to the meeting of two different cultures, one urban, idealistic and politically radical, the other backwoods rural, pragmatic and politically conservative.

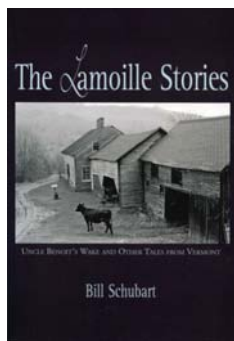
Ultimately, the differences proved too much to overcome, and the meeting of the two groups ended in conflict and bitterness. But for a brief moment in 1950, there was acceptance and an attempt at understanding. Lepkoff's beautiful, haunting photographs document that moment and the people who were trying, with all their hearts, to build a life together.

"Almost Utopia" is a very touching and insightful book about an overlooked aspect of Vermont history.

• **"ALMOST UTOPIA: THE RESIDENTS AND RADICALS OF PIKES FALLS, VERMONT, 1950"**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY REBECCA LEPKOFF, TEXT BY GREG JOLY; 110 pages, paperbound, \$32, hardcover, \$42; Vermont Historical Society, Barre

— Tom Slayton



SHELF LIFE FRAMING LAMOILLE

The rough-and-tumble world of deepest Lamoille County emerges piece by piece in these tales by Bill Schubart. The 22 stories collected here frame life in this predominantly rural part of northern Vermont from the schoolyard to the graveyard, and include a cast of characters that the author knows well from his days growing up there in the '50s and '60s.

Several real-life Vermont figures are mentioned: Baroness Maria von Trapp of Stowe via Austria; radio station WDEV owner Ken Squier; and Crazy Chase, the brilliant dance fiddler with a passion for cross-dressing. (Yes, Virginia, there really was a Crazy Chase!) One of the stories, "Mr. Skiff's VW," was the winner of the 2003 Ralph Nading Hill Literary Prize, co-sponsored annually by *Vermont Life* and Green Mountain Power.

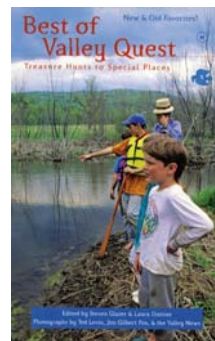
Schubart, who grew up in Morrisville, went on to found Philo Records, a company that recorded many of Vermont's important folk artists from the 1960s and '70s, and later, Resolution Inc., a digital and video duplication/production company in South Burlington. The Lamoille stories are, in a sense, a return to his roots.

And we, as readers, are the beneficiaries of that return. His tales have the gritty aura of truth about them and are fun to read, often laugh-out-loud funny. They are, in effect, Schubart's tribute to the Vermont he and many of the rest of us grew up in, and are a witty and wondrous monument to that past time and place.

• **"THE LAMOILLE STORIES: UNCLE BENOIT'S WAKE AND OTHER TALES FROM VERMONT"**

BY BILL SCHUBART, 200 pages, paperbound, \$15, White River Press, White River Junction

— Tom Slayton



SHELF LIFE SEARCH PARTY

A spiral-bound guidebook designed to be used outdoors, "Best of Valley Quest" is a collection of 70 treasure hunts modeled on the 150-year-old English rural pastime called "letterboxing."

About half the "quests" around the Upper Valley lead the reader to locations in Vermont and half to places in New Hampshire. At the end of each hunt the successful quester will find a "treasure box" containing a rubber stamp, a sign-in journal and a pencil. The adventurer then signs into the journal and uses the stamp to record in their own scrapbook, marking successful completion of the quest. That's the basic idea.

But the real reward is the quest itself, which invariably leads to a place of historical or natural interest, and proceeds through some interesting, perhaps even beautiful territory.

On the Grafton quest, for example, questers learn something about the natural environment of Vermont's hill country and a lot about the history of Grafton. The same is true of quests from Barnet and Newbury down to Woodstock and Plymouth. There are probably several years' worth of intriguing walks outlined here.

The school children, teachers, land-owners and others who designed these quests have performed a genuine service and given something of real value to their communities. Their book is, in effect, a vital treasury of experiences.

• **"BEST OF VALLEY QUEST: TREASURE HUNTS TO SPECIAL PLACES"**

EDITED BY STEVEN GLAZER AND LAURA DINTINO; 256 pages, paperbound, \$24.95, Vital Communities, White River Junction

— Tom Slayton