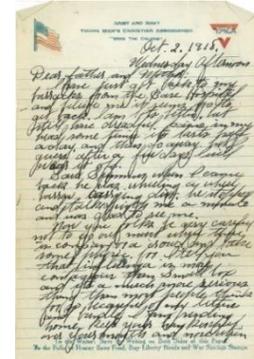




## Communication in Vermont History: The Key to Understanding

A project for Vermont History Day involves a lot of communication – discussing topics with group members, emailing teachers for feedback, designing a project that shows off your research and analysis. In this way, communication is part of the process. And in 2021, *Communication in History: The Key to Understanding* is also the theme. Thinking broadly about communication and understanding can help you find a topic that fits with your interest and the theme.

Communication happens in many ways. It can be written or spoken; public or private; formal or informal; old-school or high-tech; understood or mis-understood. But your History Day project needs to be more than a report about the invention of the telegraph or a description of letters about the 1918 Spanish Influenza pandemic (like this letter from George Angell to his family).



A research project for Vermont History Day challenges you to investigate the reason for communication and the impact of that exchange of ideas or information. You will need to examine the **historical context** of the communication (why it happened when it did) and the **significance** of the communication (the big “so what?”). Consider the impact of the understanding (or mis-understanding) on the direct participants and on others. That’s a lot to cover in 500 words or 10 minutes! Narrowing your topic can help you focus on a specific event or person in history and enable you to make theme connections in your thesis and your argument.

For Vermont History Day, your project can be about world history or US history – but you might want to consider a Vermont or local history topic. To investigate systemic racism through the lens of local history, you could research the Eugenics Survey in Vermont. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Eugenics Survey targeted groups of Vermonters, especially Abenaki citizens, French-Canadians and poor residents, and caused lasting harm through forced sterilizations and disruptions of families and traditions. How did the Eugenics Survey communicate systemic racism in Vermont? How did Vermonters understand the messages in the survey reports?

For this topic, you could start your research with a secondary sources, like the journal article “[From Degeneration to Regeneration: The Eugenics Survey of Vermont, 1925-1936](#)” written by Kevin Dann in 1991. The website “[Vermont Eugenics: A Documentary History](#)” (a secondary source) has links to primary sources, documents from the time period. You might be able to find other primary sources online. What language did the Vermont Commission on Country Life use to communicate their ideas about Vermont, as shown in the 1931 book “[Rural Vermont: A Program for the Future](#)”?

You could also make an appointment at the Vermont Historical Society Library or the Vermont State Archives to read [Annual Reports of the Eugenics Survey](#) or examine the records from the [Eugenics Survey](#) and the Vermont Commission on Country Life. As you read these documents, you might research how some Vermonters were describing the state and communicating ideas about Eugenics. Can you find evidence of racism in the language used in the records? What were the short-term and long-term impacts of the survey on the [Abenaki community](#) in Vermont?

For Vermont History Day, YOU get to be the historian who develops a thesis, analyzes primary and secondary sources, and uses evidence to support your argument, whatever your topic is. All areas of history are appropriate, but there are several special prizes for projects about Vermont topics!

## Vermont topics for the theme: Communication in History: The Key to Understanding

- Clarina Howard Nichols – first woman allowed to speak before the Vermont State House
- Merci Train – a “thank you” message from France after World War II
- Bread and Puppet Theater – protesting through art
- Matthew Lyon – Vermont congressman convicted of sedition in 1798
- Civil Unions legislation and “Take Back Vermont”
- Austine School for the Deaf in Brattleboro
- Vermont newspapers, radio stations, TV stations
- Western Abenaki language – revitalizing the indigenous language
- Letters from [Civil War soldiers](#) from Vermont
- The Vermont Brand – communicating an image
- Jeffrey Brace – author of “The Blind African Slave: Memoirs of Boyrereau Brinch”
- General store/post office as a hub for communication & the change to Rural Free Delivery
- Theodore Vail – president of American Telephone & Telegraph (AT&T)
- Public health communications – during and after the 1918 Spanish Influenza pandemic
- President Calvin Coolidge – using the radio to communicate with voters
- Grace Coolidge – teacher at Clarke Institute for the Deaf
- The Raid on St. Francis – three different versions of the [story](#)
- The Capture of Fort Ticonderoga – three different versions of the [story](#)
- Lucy Terry Prince – communicating through the courts
- Snowflake Bentley – communicating science through photographs
- George Houghton – Civil War photographer
- Green-Up Day or Act 250 – communicating priorities to protect the environment
- The Haldimand Affair – diplomatic communications between Vermont and England
- Luigi Galleani and the [Cronaca Sovversiva](#) – the anarchist newspaper from Barre
- Vermont Commission on Women – communicating about the status of women since 1964
- The sermons of Lemuel Haynes – an African American minister in Vermont, 1788-1818
- The 1935 Vermont Marble Company Strike
- The UVM Extension Service – communicating with farmers
- Town Meetings
- Alexandr Solzhenitsyn – Soviet dissident and author, living in Vermont, 1976-1994
- Debates at the Vermont State House: [https://youtu.be/NZyGe\\_hgOWQ](https://youtu.be/NZyGe_hgOWQ)