

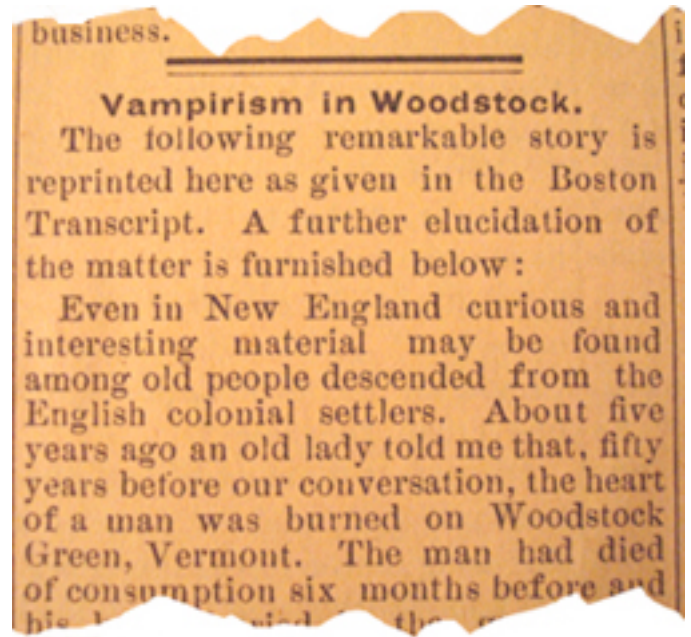
VAMPIRISM IN WOODSTOCK

“Vampirism in Woodstock” the headlines of *The Vermont Standard* reported on October 9, 1890. According to the article, sixty years earlier, in 1830, a young man by the name of Corwin died of “consumption” (now known as tuberculosis) and was buried in Woodstock’s Cushing Cemetery. About six months later, the young man’s brother also became ill with consumption. Not fully understanding the disease’s contagious nature, local doctors—including the Vermont Medical College’s Dr. Joseph Gallup and Dr. John Powers—attributed the second brother’s illness to vampirism, and they advised having the first brother’s body dug up and examined.

The autopsy supposedly revealed that the deceased brother’s heart was un-decayed and filled with liquid blood (a sure sign of vampirism). Subsequently, the heart was removed, boiled in a pot until it turned to ash, placed in a hole ten feet square and fifteen feet deep (a lot of digging), and then buried in the center of the Green. A seven-ton block of local granite was placed on top of the pot and the hole filled with dirt. The freshly-dug earth was then sprinkled with the blood of a bullock (reminiscent of Old Testament rituals). Some of the most influential men in the village, including General Lyman Mower and the Hon. Norman Williams, supposedly attended this “ceremony.”



General Lyman Mower (above) was supposedly one of the people who attended the burning of the heart on the Green. (General Mower’s house was the large brick Federal on the corner of the Green and South Street.)



In 1966 Rockwell Stephens wrote an article for *Vermont Life* in which he noted that some details in the story were verifiable (for instance, the 1890 account accurately lists the names of doctors and citizens who were living in Woodstock in 1830). However, there were other details (such as a Corwin boy dying and being buried in Cushing Cemetery) that he was unable to confirm.

Eerily, some parts of the “vampire” story that may seem fanciful and far-fetched *are* actually similar to documented events in the greater Woodstock area. For instance, in 1817—thirteen years before the vampire incident—the heart of a young man, who had lived in South Woodstock, was burned in a blacksmith forge after he died of consumption. The man’s brother, Daniel Ransom, wrote the following in 1894:

Frederick Ransom, the second son of my father and mother, was born in South Woodstock, Vermont, June 16, 1797 and died of consumption February 14th, 1817, at the age of about twenty.

He had a good education and was a member of Dartmouth College at the time of his death. My remembrance of him is quite limited as I was only three years at the time of his death...It has been related to me that there was a tendency in our family to consumption...It seems that Father shared some what in the idea of hereditary diseases and withal had some superstition for it was said that if the heart of one of the family who died of consumption was taken out and burned, others would be free from it. And Father, having some faith in the remedy, had the heart of Frederick taken out after he had been buried, and it was burned in Captain Pearson's blacksmith forge. However, it did not prove a remedy, for mother, sister, and two brothers died of that disease afterward.



Above is a picture of Woodstock's village Green as it appears today. In Woodstock's early years, the Green was a desolate-looking, rutted area; however, around 1830 it was leveled off and grass and trees were planted.

Source:

Stephens, Rockwell, "...They Burned the Vampire's Heart to Ashes," *Vermont Life*, Fall, 1966, pp. 47-49.