

## Margaret Gibson McCoy

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**From:** Sarah Waring [cfv@sover.net]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 12, 2009 3:32 PM  
**To:** 'Michael Levine'; 'Margaret Gibson McCoy'; 'Paul Costello'  
**Subject:** Graff's piece in VT Biz Magazine:

# The 'Future of Vermont' could be history

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A Summit on the Future of Vermont is scheduled for May 11 (yesterday) at the University of Vermont. The summit is the final step in a nearly two year long effort by the Vermont Council on Rural Development to take the temperature of today's Vermont and plan for tomorrow's Vermont. VCRD created the Council on the Future of Vermont to accomplish this task. I was one of the members and truly enjoyed the opportunity to listen to Vermonters talk about Vermont. The Council heard from some 4,000 Vermonters in one form or another.

The experience reminded me of a comment by Supreme Court Justice Wendell Phillips Stafford when he spoke before the Commission on Country Life in 1931: "It is always a perilous thing to let a Vermonter get started on the subject of Vermont."

If we learned one thing in our 18-month journey it was that Vermonters love Vermont and have some very strong feelings about their state.

Our Council was not the first such group to undertake an assessment of the state and try to map a route to a brighter future.

Such efforts have come in all shapes and sizes; some focused very narrowly. Most have been reactive, responding to an issue of the moment. Some are well known, such as the Gibb Commission, created by Governor Deane Davis in 1969 and chaired by Arthur Gibb, officially called the Governor's Commission on Environmental Control, which gave us Act 250.

Some are long forgotten - like the Commission to Investigate State Institutions, established in 1904, or the Commission to Investigate the Taxation of Public Utilities in 1931 - or the Little Hoover Commission, created by the Legislature in 1957 to try to bring sense to state government. That commission was headed by Deane Davis, who delivered the report to a joint session of the General Assembly in 1959.

There are a number of other commissions and groups that were created to look at the issues of the moment - but there are three studies over the years that were more on the scale of what the Council on the Future of Vermont has done - and were designed to look at a distant horizon - and help chart the way there.

The most comprehensive and famous - and in some ways infamous - was the Vermont Commission on Country Life, which was organized in 1928 and was chaired by former Governor John Weeks. More than 300 Vermonters served on 16 committees that provided comprehensive assessments of a wide range of topics.

Controversy tainted the work of the commission because of the involvement of University of Vermont Professor Henry Perkins, a supporter of Eugenics, who believed that Vermont would be best served through selective breeding. As the report on the committee on the human factor asked, "What of the seedlings? How can Vermont stock best be conserved and made to continue to provide its share of leaders for the nation and builders for the state?"

But to focus on Perkins' part does an injustice to the significance of the commission and its report. The recommendations in many areas set the agenda for Vermont as it recovered from the 1927 flood. One line from the report seems almost timeless: "The deepest yearnings of the Vermonter are for things which money cannot buy."

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The second major study came in the Hoff administration. The report was called Vision and Choice: Vermont's Future, and it was produced in 1968 by the 11-member Vermont Planning Council, which was chaired by Governor Hoff.

The focus was growth – and the theme was summed up in the preface: “The people of Vermont acting together can and must shape the future. Despite the tremendous forces of change, it is within the power of Vermonters to choose the courses they wish their state to follow. The idea that undesirable consequences of change and growth are inevitable and inexorable must be rejected.”

The statement of goals adopted by the Council could easily be adopted today:

“Every Vermonter must have the opportunity for the full realization of his aspirations and abilities. Access to a superior education is the first essential. A broad range of productive employment opportunities is the second. He must have the further promise of spiritual and cultural fulfillment in an atmosphere of social and political freedom and an environment of natural and creative inspiration, an environment which contributes positively to healthful individual and family living. Throughout his life he must be assured of a guarantee against poverty and deprivation.”

The third and final major study was one many would still remember today – The Governor's Commission on Vermont's Future, which Governor Madeleine Kunin created in September 1987 and charged with soliciting the opinions of Vermonters on the goals and principles to guide decisions on growth and development.

The 12-member commission, known as the Costle Commission, worked under a very tight deadline: They held 11 public hearings and submitted their report to the governor in four months.

The chairman, Doug Costle, wrote in his report, “The people of Vermont care deeply about the future of their state; and, while they are very proud of what it is today, they are also very troubled about what it may become.”

Much binds together all of these reports – because at the heart of each study, each commission, is a state we all love.

I would invite you to read the final report of the Council on the Future of Vermont. It can be found online at [www.futureofvermont.org](http://www.futureofvermont.org).

Chris Graff, a former Vermont bureau chief of The Associated Press and host of VPT's Vermont This Week, is now vice president for communications at National Life Group. He is author of, *Dateline Vermont: Covering and uncovering the newsworthy stories that shaped a state - and influenced a nation*. He writes The Graff Report monthly for Vermont Business Magazine.

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