My discovery of Edward Hopper’s Vermont works coincided with my discovering Vermont, a place I’d never seen until Mike Hogan took me there, not long after we’d met. Both relationships clicked—Mike’s and mine, and ours with Vermont—and in 2005 we built a second home there, on a hillside in the small town of South Royalton, off a dirt road that runs north from Route 14 and the White River.

Searching on eBay for Vermont artwork to decorate our new home, I found a long-out-of-print poster from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York: Edward Hopper’s *Barn and Silo, Vermont*. I was surprised to learn that Hopper, a favorite artist from my college days in New York City, had painted a Vermont scene, and I turned to Gail Levin’s monumental Hopper biography and the *Catalogue Raisonné* of Hopper’s *oeuvre* to find out more.

This initial research revealed that some three dozen Hoppers, watercolors painted between 1927 and 1938, were associated with Vermont. Even more surprising, the majority and the best of them portrayed scenes in South Royalton, within just a few miles of our new home, painted during the Hoppers’ summer sojourns on Wagon Wheels Farm. It seemed almost magical that the same views that touched me with their quiet beauty had found resonance with my favorite artist some seventy years earlier.

I found more reproductions of Hopper’s Vermont watercolors in old books, including some large enough to frame and hang on our walls. The more I looked at these pictures, the more I saw, not only in the paintings but also in the landscape around me. Hopper’s watercolors opened my eyes to Vermont. I began to see the nuances of Vermont’s distinctive colors—the myriad blues and greens, some soft, some dazzling, the yellowed greens of early fall, the blue shadows of the hills in late afternoon—through Hopper’s eyes, through his paintings. What I noticed in his work I would then see around me, looking out over our hillside to the mountains beyond, or driving along the river at the end of the day, tree shadows stretching across the road. Hopper reminded me to take the time to look, to simply see what was there.

Visitors to our South Royalton house were treated (whether they liked it or not) to a tour of our Hopper “gallery” and regaled over dinner with the latest...
chapter of the unfolding story of Edward Hopper in our neighborhood. With the help of John Dumville, the town historian, and Theresa Harrington, then the town clerk, Mike and I located the Slaters’ farmhouse and property and found “Bob Slater’s Hill” and the sugar house, the subjects of two of Hopper’s paintings. Through Theresa’s mother, Katherine Boardman, I made contact with Robert Alan Slater, who was just seven years old when the Hoppers boarded with his family, and we had the first of many conversations about his recollections of Edward Hopper and his wife, Josephine, who was also an artist. I began my research in the Hopper Research Collection at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and other libraries and archives, and every week I garnered new details linked to the Vermont story.

It rapidly became apparent that the paintings that Hopper made in Vermont were virtually unknown, not only to me but also to others in Vermont and New England. Talking to local people in South Royalton, I encountered no one who knew of Hopper’s paintings of the White River, and I met only a few old-timers who had vague recollections that a “famous artist” had stayed on the Slaters’ farm in the late 1930s.

In June 2010 I had an opportunity to further test reactions to the Vermont Hoppers, when I was asked to do an exhibit for the Royalton Historical Society at the Vermont History Expo, a biennial event with statewide representation, held on the grounds of the Tunbridge World’s Fair. My exhibit of Hopper reproductions—in an area of Horticultural Hall generally reserved for prize-winning sunflowers and giant zucchinis—generated a level of enthusiastic attention far beyond my expectations. From local farmers who’d never heard of Edward Hopper to sophisticated “flatlander” Hopperphiles with ties to Vermont, everyone responded with delight and surprise to the “paintings,” even seen as plates removed from books and copies downloaded from the Internet and inkjet-printed, displayed with reference to fair use. I was thanked for exhibiting images that Vermonters and those who love Vermont found beautiful. Of course, the thanks belonged to Edward Hopper, but they strengthened my resolve to bring his Vermont watercolors to brighter light.

Hopper’s Vermont works also remain relatively unacknowledged among art historians. Some reasons are obvious. The paintings are few in number, and they are watercolors, generally considered to be minor pieces within an oeuvre that includes major oils, works that were more important to Hopper
as well as to the critics. The Vermont watercolors are scattered nationwide—some in museums, others with private collectors—and some have disappeared for decades at a time, out of sight for viewing of any kind, much less for critical appraisal. Seven of the paintings remained in Hopper’s studio after his death, although the meaning of his not releasing such paintings for sale is open to interpretation (see chapter 6). As watercolors, they are fragile and susceptible to damage from light, and thus even those owned by museums are infrequently displayed. With few exceptions, these watercolors have rarely been published. Painted during the summers, they are sometimes dismissed as Hopper’s “vacation paintings.” Perhaps their distinctive regionality—the aspect that makes them so appealing to Vermonters—removes them from more general interest. Finally, some critics may simply rank these works as inferior within the full spectrum of Hopper’s achievements. Such caveats aside, my hope is that this study will help to remove Hopper’s Vermont works from art history oblivion. Such a result would be gratifying to me, and I like to think that Edward Hopper would also be pleased to see these works revived.

This volume includes twenty-one of Hopper’s known Vermont watercolors, published together, without intervening works, for the first time. Two additional works, tentatively identified by Levin as Vermont scenes, are not included here; both are unsigned and appear unfinished. To Levin’s Vermont identifications I have added one watercolor, Country Bridge, probably painted in 1935, based on locating the existing structure near East Montpelier, Vermont. I have confirmed another tentative identification, that of Landscape with Tower, tying it to a specific locale in Bethel, Vermont. I have also been able to update the provenance information for a number of the watercolors, including one, White River at Royalton, which moved from private hands to the Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University in 2008; it has subsequently been exhibited, for the first time in more than fifty years. This information is presented in chapter 6, which details the ownership of all the Vermont watercolors, from initial sales through the Rehn Galleries up to the present day.

This sequential presentation of the images facilitates seeing how Hopper’s vision of Vermont developed between the time of his first visit, in 1927, and his last, in 1938, as well as within the duration of each visit. His views of the White River, in particular, can be seen as a remarkable series of variations
on a theme: the river landscape as observed and interpreted by Hopper in many different ways. These watercolors record the topographical variations in the natural landscape from place to place along the river, as well as the more subtle effects of weather and time of day, expressed in the color and texture of trees, water, and sky, the shape of the clouds, and the nuances of light and shadow.

Hopper’s perspective was always carefully selected, as Mike and I discovered when we searched for the sites in the watercolors, seeking to replicate them in photographs. We drove along the White River with Xerox copies of the paintings taped to the dashboard, Mike behind the wheel and me in the passenger seat, shooting pictures with my digital camera. I could imagine the Hoppers tracing the same path, Edward driving and Jo beside him, sketching what caught their eyes as potential subjects for paintings. We were able to find and photograph a number of Hopper’s places—though rarely from his exact, particular perspective—allowing me to claim that the places he painted looked just as they did in 1937 and 1938, a tribute to the apparent persistence of the pristine Vermont landscape, virtually unchanged since Hopper’s time.

Alas, this claim can no longer be made. In September of 2011, the flooding associated with Hurricane Irene turned the White River from the peaceful watercourse of Hopper’s paintings into an unrecognizable, raging torrent. The banks of the river were stripped of vegetation, with trees torn up and washed away or tossed as dead skeletons onto islands and gravel bars. The river banks and surrounding meadows were left as barren expanses littered with mud, silt, boulders, and debris, the landscape that was once green or golden now turned to monochrome gray.

The destruction of Hopper’s views is surely minor compared to the flood’s economic and human toll, but it is a loss nonetheless, of a small part of the scenic beauty that is one of the great joys of being in Vermont, and certainly of living in South Royalton. This loss, of course, gives Hopper’s paintings new meaning. Made in 1937, ten years after the flood of 1927, Hopper’s watercolors show the White River in the colorful glory of late summer, fully recovered after what is still considered the worst disaster in Vermont’s history. Hopper’s paintings are a reminder of the White River Valley at its best, a reassurance that the loss is temporary, that nature will do its work, and that the beauty will return.
My deep gratitude is extended to Robert Alan Slater, son of Irene and Robert Arthur Slater, for sharing with me his recollections of the Hoppers’ visits to his family farm. The Hoppers knew the younger Slater as Alan, but he is now known as Bob, like his father. Both Bob and his wife, Thelma, spent many hours on the phone with me, talking about Bob’s parents and the family’s great interest in Edward and Jo Hopper, as well as about my work in attempting to rediscover Hopper’s Vermont. Bob also sent me materials to peruse from his family scrapbook, provided the photographs of the farm and his family that grace chapter 4, and granted permission to publish Jo Hopper’s watercolor portrait of himself as seven-year-old Alan. I also thank Bob’s daughter, Barbara Slater, and granddaughter, Heather Knudson, for scanning and copying family photos for my use.

Some years ago, Bob Slater sold his family’s Hopper memorabilia, including two drawings of the Wagon Wheels farmhouse that his parents attributed to Edward Hopper, letters to Irene Slater from Jo Hopper, and the farm’s guestbook with Edward’s signature. With Bob’s help, I was able to locate Robyn Dunn Schwarz, who now owns these items. They document the regard that both Edward and Jo Hopper had for Irene and Bob Slater, as well as the friendship between the couples that was maintained through correspondence over the years. I am grateful to Robyn and her husband, Andrew, for their generosity in granting permission to publish them.

John Dumville, Royalton town historian (and chief of historic sites operations for the state of Vermont), has my heartfelt thanks. He has been engaged with and enthusiastically supportive of my project since its inception, brainstorming with Mike and me about finding the sites that Hopper painted, identifying local residents for us to talk with, and generally filling us in on town history as a lifelong resident of Royalton and second-generation Vermonter.

John also invited me to mount exhibits at the statewide Vermont History Expo in 2010 and at the 2011 White River Valley History Fair in South Royalton. On both occasions I had the opportunity to meet and talk with local residents, including Paul and Marion Whitney, George and Donna Ellis Rigby, and others who had known Bob and Irene Slater. Other local people
examined the Hopper reproductions, identifying species of trees and other details, commenting about the White River paintings and speculating about their locations and the changes in the riverbed over time. I thank Cora and Ralph Eddy and Joshua “Bushrod” Powers for their help at the expo, and Nancy Wooley, of the Rochester Historical Society, and Nick Nicolaidis, of the Bethel Historical Society, for their work in organizing the fair. Nick also agreed that Hopper’s *Landscape with Tower* was most likely painted in Bethel, and that the “tower” is the steeple of Bethel’s Brick Church.

Kathleen James, then editor of *Vermont Magazine*, gave me the first opportunity to tell my Hopper story to a wider audience, through publication of my article in the May–June 2010 issue of the magazine. Kathleen, many thanks. This publication was an important credential for me as I sought permissions to publish Hopper’s paintings. It also prompted communications from readers, such as Ann Knight, a former South Royalton resident who wrote to me with details about her family’s relationship with the Slaters and Irene Slater’s many accomplishments.

For examining a reproduction of Hopper’s *Barn and Silo* and writing a description of the structure and its function, I am grateful to Thomas Visser of the Historic Preservation Program at the University of Vermont. Thanks also to Joshua Phillips of the Vermont Barn Census, who scrutinized Hopper’s paintings at the White River Valley History Fair and is on the lookout for the structures, if they still exist.

Robert L. McCullough, another expert with the University of Vermont’s Historic Preservation Program, examined a copy of Hopper’s *Country Bridge*, confirmed that I was right to suspect that Three Mile Bridge was probably the structure that Hopper painted, enlightened me about the bridge’s pony truss, and provided a copy of the historic photo of the bridge. His detailed e-mail messages and answers to my questions are much appreciated. I also thank Scott Reilly of the Vermont State Archives and Record Administration, depository for the records of the Vermont Agency of Transportation. Norbert Rhinerson of the Berlin Historical Society was helpful in identifying the probable predecessor of the steel truss bridge, through a postcard from the early twentieth century that shows a covered bridge in the same location. Norb also photographed Three Mile Bridge after the 2011 flooding associated with Hurricane Irene, confirming that the structure had survived.
I thank the staff of the Aloha Foundation, especially Marisa Miller, Laura Gillespie, and Kathy Christie, for their help in researching Jo Hopper’s 1920 stint at the Aloha Hive camp in Fairlee, Vermont.

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In New York, Kristen Leipert of the Whitney Museum of American Art provided patient and invaluable assistance during my many days of research in the Edward and Josephine Hopper Research Collection. At the Whitney, I met and talked with Elizabeth Thompson Colleary, an art historian and Hopper scholar who was generous in sharing her insights about Jo Hopper and the Hoppers’ relationship, the focus of her research and a forthcoming book.

The majority of materials in the Hopper Research Collection are the legacy of Gail Levin’s painstaking research in preparing the Catalogue Raisonné as curator at the Whitney during the 1980s. Levin’s published works, listed in the bibliography, are essential resources for any study of Edward Hopper, as attested by the many citations to them in this volume. Levin’s Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography and the Catalogue Raisonné provided the starting point for my study of Hopper in Vermont, as well as the basic background documentation for each of the Vermont watercolors. I have also drawn on the work of other Hopper scholars, in particular that of Carol Troyen, curator emerita of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and Virginia Mecklenburg, senior curator at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Their fine studies of Hopper, listed in the bibliography, have been instructive and enlightening to me, as someone who is not an art historian. The publications of Deborah Lyons, on the Hopper Ledger Books, and Avis Berman, on the Whitney Studio Club, have also been invaluable. Finally, the essays of Troyen, Kevin Salatino, and Diane Tuite in Salatino’s Edward Hopper’s Maine have been particularly useful in providing a framework for interpreting Hopper’s Vermont works.

Anita Duquette, the Whitney’s manager of rights and reproductions, warrants special thanks for her support and assistance, which has not been
limited to handling my permission requests. Anita located a publication-quality photograph, otherwise unavailable, of one of the Vermont paintings, and she also tapped into her vast network to help with my search for certain works that were difficult to find. I am grateful for her help, as well as for the Whitney’s permission to publish nine of Hopper’s Vermont works—seven watercolors and two drawings—from its collection, as well as four relevant pages from the Hopper Ledger Books (Artist’s Ledger).

Martha J. Fleischmann, of the Kennedy Galleries, Inc., and Lisa Peters, of the Spanierman Gallery, LLC, provided assistance in searching for several of Hopper’s privately owned works. Lisa kindly loaned me a transparency of one of the watercolors.

In gaining permission to publish Hopper’s Vermont works, and in locating relevant documentation, I sought and received assistance from the staff of various archives, museums, and libraries. With appreciation, I acknowledge their help: Alicia G. Longwell and Sam Bridger Carroll, Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York; Laurel Mitchell, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Carin Johnson, Frankel Gallery, San Francisco, California; Nancy E. Green and Elizabeth Alexandra Emrich, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University; Linda Sanns and Jenine Culligan, Huntington Museum of Art, Huntington, West Virginia; Mandy Young, Smithsonian American Art Museum; Catherine Foster, Christie’s, New York; Jessica Murphy, the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Maureen Melton and Stephanie Stepanek, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Suz Massen, Frick Art Reference Library, the Frick Collection, New York; and Patricia Magnani, Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, New York.

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Michael J. Hogan, my partner in all senses of the word, deserves more appreciation than I can ever express. The search for Hopper in Vermont has been not just mine, but ours. Without Mike’s keen eye, whether for maps or for landscape, I would not have found Hopper’s sites, and Mike’s observations, ideas, and comments have always freshened my perspective. Finally, he has been boundlessly enthusiastic, endlessly patient, and unfailingly supportive through the very long time it’s taken me to write this book. I am a fortunate woman, Mike, and you have my deepest thanks.