KIPLING in BRATTLEBORO

IN February of 1892, Rudyard Kipling arrived at the train station in Brattleboro, Vermont with great expectation. Four years later, in August of 1896, he departed from the same station in deep humiliation never to return to America.
 Arguably, he was the foremost celebrity in the English speaking world, although Sherlock Holmes’ creator Conan Doyle, who visited him here, was of near equal prominence. Remember this was almost a generation before the advent of crystal sets and silent films and two generations before television. People read for entertainment.
 Kipling was born in India, had travelled much of the world, and finally settled in London. There he befriended a young American publisher’s representative by the name of Wolcott Balestier. It was a close friendship.
 The Balestiers were a distinguished and wealthy family. Wolcott’s maternal grandfather had been an advisor on international law to the Emperor of Japan. The other grandfather had settled in Brattleboro before the Civil War when Brattleboro was a fashionable watering place that attracted such celebrities as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Francis Parkman, James Russell Lowell and William Dean Howells. Furthermore Wolcott’s father and uncles were wealthy gifted man.
 Kipling and Wolcott lived and worked and played together and together they wrote in collaboration *The Naulakha*. Joining Wolcott in London were his sister Caroline and, for a time, his carousing brother Beatty. But tragedy stalked the frail Wolcott and in December of 1891 he died of typhus. The next month, January of 1892, Kipling married Wolcott’s sister. In February, the newly married couple came to Vermont.
 The Kiplings rented a cottage for a year on a farm next to Beatty’s and soon Kipling purchased twelve steeply sloping acres across the town line in Dummerston from his brother-in-law upon which he would build a home. Despite its severely raked topography, the site provided magnificent views: Mount Monadnock to the east, the church spires in Brattleboro to the south, and the grand sweep of the Connecticut River valley a mere mile below.
 Plans were soon drawn up and the construction supervised by Kipling’s brother-in-law, Beatty Balestier. Beatty would continue after the house was finished to act as bailiff—arranging for deliveries of coal and ice and provisions for which he was paid a modest stipend over the ensuing years. The first artesian well in the area was drilled at Naulakha. This was not to be a conventional home. Brattleboro was full of remarkably handsome homes of the style we call Carpenter’s Gothic and the countryside was replete with homesteads, barns, and sheds recalling Asher Benjamin’s builder’s manuals. Perhaps the closest architectural parallel for Naulakha would be the shingle style houses of H. H. Richardson. Given the difficult site, the house clung to a hillside knoll. Thus it was long and tall and one room wide, the rooms connected by a single corridor at the rear of the building. Visit it today—it is owned by England’s Landmark Trust and was their first American property. You can rent it—you will be impressed that it is not a particularly big house. The workmanship is superb but there is no attempt to impress. It is a home for a family and for a hard- working author. Incidentally, there is only one access to his study—a deliberate architectural oddity intended to ensure Kipling would not be disturbed at work. Like larger homes of its time a stable, barn, and out-buildings complemented the residence.
 Kipling’s presence attracted big-city newspaper reporters who arrived in swarms. Kipling had to remove a window in his study where he wrote to foil annoying reporters peering through it. They all went away frustrated and empty-handed.
 Kipling was a private man but not a recluse. He had but four local friends: the pastor of the Congregational Church on Main Street in Brattleboro, the family physician, and the Cabots—brother and sister. It was the sister who ultimately bought the property when the Kiplings fled Vermont. Additionally, he was affable with the teamster whose services he occasionally employed for family outings and with the baggage master at the railroad station. He rarely came to Brattleboro, but when he did he often stopped at the elegant Brooks Hotel in the center of town to bend an elbow.
 Caroline, his wife and mother of his recently-born daughter, was another matter. Apparently, though a native Vermonter, she brought Mayfair with her when she departed London including the customs and the accent. The house servants were imported from England and the English coachman was attired in top-hatted livery (something no independent self-respecting Vermonter could ever countenance wearing). Her visits downstreet (as Brattleboro is still referred to locally) in her phaeton with tandem horses and coachman were a spectacle. In time, Kipling might have accustomed himself to reticent but friendly Vermonters. His wife, on the other hand, could never unbend.
 His fame was such that the local post office was overwhelmed. Its solution was to bestow an unprecedented private post office upon the author located in a farmhouse belonging to obliging neighbors named Waite. Thus his address changed from Brattleboro to Waite, Windham County, Vermont.
 Kipling was productive despite the on-going harassment of the press and his best known results of these Vermont years were *The Jungle Book*s and *Captains Courageous*. But an unavoidable nuisance was home-grown and on his doorstep—his carousing brother-in-law Beatty Balestier.
 Beatty was the opposite of his austere and arrogant Anglophile sister. He was a hail-fellow-well-met carouser who farmed after a fashion on his land adjoining Naulakha. Although he was the antithesis of his Vermont neighbors who were abstemious, cautious, sober, and reticent, he was well-liked by a few who drank with him and tolerated locally as an amusing and harmless curiosity. The money he had inherited he was well on his way to squandering and poverty loomed in the near distance.
 Kipling and Caroline were alarmed at Beatty’s erratic behavior and his dismal prospects. They hatched a scheme to save Beatty. The mistake they made was that Beatty did not want to be saved, particularly by his rich brother-in-law and his arrogant wife, Beatty’s sister. Beatty was having too good a time being Beatty.
 This was the scheme they presented to Beatty. If he would go away for a year, get a job, and get his life in order, the Kiplings would support his wife and children in his absence until they could re-join the reformed Beatty. It does not take a great leap of the imagination to anticipate Beatty’s response to the insulting offer. Any hyphenated indecency suffices.
 The Kiplings were stunned and annoyed at the rejection of what they considered a perfectly reasonable proposition. Beatty was simply furious and from that moment his resentment of the Kiplings began blossoming into a malevolent loathing.
 The final break came shortly thereafter. Beatty owned a mowing across the road from Naulakha--- a mowing is what flatlanders call a hayfield. The Kiplings wanted to buy it to ensure that nothing ever would be built upon it to spoil their magnificent view. Ever generous Beatty previously had said that they could have it free as long as he could continue to cut the hay off it. But then he heard that Caroline, his sister, had had a landscape architect draw up plans to turn the mowing into a formal garden. Beatty confronted his sister who admitted that, in fact, she had done so. That was the last time they ever spoke to one another.
 Possibly this is the moment to introduce Brattleboro, a handsome town of fewer than ten thousand souls. It built up after the middle of the nineteenth century when the railroad came to town and its architecture reflects that of the second half of the century. Main Street ran north and south paralleling and well above the Connecticut River. At the south end of Main Street was the train station. Midway along Main Street at the corner of the road that led west to Bennington was the heart of the town. On the southwest corner stood the Brooks Hotel with its distinctive mansarded tower. The hotel was the social heart of the town with a restaurant, bar and ballroom. The hotel with its distinctive corner tower has long been a landmark and recently survived a devastating fire and is now transformed into offices and apartments.
 Across from the hotel was the brick town hall which contained the post office, the town offices and meeting rooms, and several small businesses. In 1895, while Kipling was still resident, the town hall was expanded with a nine hundred seat auditorium. Next door to the north and set well back from the street stood the little Episcopal Church. Across from it was the enormous Baptist Church financed with money from the wealthy Estey family who built cottage organs. Further along were the Congregational and Unitarian churches with distinctive spires. Large homes of the prosperous lined the street all the way to the elegant water fountain where Main Street divides at its north end to head both north and west. It was an unusually graceful and handsome town then and still retains today much of its former charm.
 But let us return to the story remembering that we left Beatty livid at his treacherous social climbing sister.
 What finally annihilated Beatty’s fragile self-control was a report he had heard of a conversation between Kipling and Colonel Goodhue in the Brooks House bar. As told to Beatty, Kipling had said “Oh, Beatty is his own worst enemy. I’ve been obliged to carry him for the last year; to hold him up by the seat of his breeches.”
 This humiliating insult—“by the seat of his breeches”--- was beyond Beatty’s endurance. He exploded and on the afternoon of May 6th 1896, Beatty caught up with his famous brother-in-law on the road to Naulakha. He swung his team of horses violently across the road and, to avoid collision with Beatty’s buckboard, Kipling fell from his bicycle and cut his wrist. They glared at one another. What follows is Beatty’s recollection of the ensuing conversation.
 “See hear,” Beatty yelled, “I want to talk to you!”
 “If you have anything to say,” Kipling replied, “say it to my lawyers.”
 “By Jesus, this is no case for lawyers.” Beatty yelled, “You’ve got to retract the Goddamned lies you’ve been telling about me. You’ve got to retract them within a week or by Christ I’ll punch the Goddamned soul out of you.”
 “Let’s get this straight. Do you mean personal violence?” Kipling asked.
 “Yes, by God,” Beatty answered, “I’ll give you one week to retract the lies you’ve been telling and if you don’t, I’ll blow out your Goddamned brains!”
 “You will have only yourself to blame for the consequences,” was Kipling’s retort. He promptly contacted a Brattleboro justice of the peace and a warrant was issued.
 On the following Sunday, the Brattleboro sheriff arrested Beatty. The arrest warrant charged him with “assault with indecent and opprobrious names and threatening to kill.”
 Beatty was promptly hauled before William Newton, justice of the peace and town clerk to face his accuser Kipling and the charges brought against him. Beatty admitted that he had indeed said what the warrant specified and uttered even some extra threats that were unspecified. Justice Newton stated that under the circumstances he must hold Beatty pending a further hearing the following Tuesday. Was Beatty willing to furnish bail?
 He was not. Did the defendant realize, in that case, he would be committed to jail? He did. He seemed eager to go to jail, in fact. Horrified at the unpleasant prospect of having been responsible for sending his brother-in-law to jail and the attendant world-wide publicity attached, Kipling said he would gladly pay Beatty’s bail. Beatty refused to accept the proffered bail money.
 This was verging on high comedy and the enraptured newspapermen in attendance drooled at the prospect of the stories momentarily they would write. However, calm in the justice’s office was at last achieved and Beatty was released on his own recognizance. Telegraph wires began to vibrate nationwide.
 If Kipling previously had been pestered by reporters, now he was besieged—and the press was not worshipful as it had been in the past. Now it was overtly hostile. And Beatty made matters worse carousing with the visiting newspapermen—even taking them fishing.
 Brattleboro instantly became the focus of national and even international attention. Newspapermen descended upon the little community. Ballestier relatives from New York arrived with the intention of trying to reason with Beatty—but in vain for Beatty was having a grand old time being a celebrity. The trial was shifted to the Town Hall, the only building capable of holding the influx of the press and the curious. It was packed.
 The trial lasted all day. The state’s attorney conducted the examination which went smoothly and swiftly. Kipling stated that he believed that he was in danger of his life and that Beatty was insane.
 But Beatty’s attorney began to extract from Kipling embarrassing admissions which lasted the balance of the morning and into the afternoon. Kipling admitted that for the last year he had not supported Beatty, that there had been no gun nor had he ever seen Beatty armed, and that he had said in the Brooks House bar that for the last year he had carried Beatty (which was untrue) and that there he had uttered the phrase about “holding him up by the seat of his breeches.” But Kipling refused to admit he might have been in the wrong and that he should have tried to smooth out the hard feelings. He said, “This is the first time I had had my life threatened. I did not know the precise etiquette in such cases.”
 The hearing ended. Beatty was held in four hundred dollars bail for the September grand jury and another four hundred to keep the peace. However, this was not to be. In August, the Kiplings left Vermont never to return. Kipling had won the battle. But roistering Beatty had won the war.

At the time of the trial, St. Michael’s stood next to the Town Hall where Key Bank is today located. The Town Hall occupied the site where now the rug store sits. When the Town Hall was torn down, its bricks were used in the construction of St. Michael’s rectory.
 Fredrick Van de Water was a noted writer of historical fiction, particularly dealing with the subject of Vermont and a member of this parish. He lived in Dummerston and it was to him that Beatty Ballestier, who always had kept silent about the Kipling episode, first revealed the truth as he knew it.

 ANNOUNCEMENT & GUARDIAN NOTICE

IN February of 1892, Rudyard Kipling arrived at the train station in Brattleboro, Vermont with great expectation. Arguably, he was the foremost celebrity in the English-speaking world. Four years later, in August of 1896, he departed from the same station in deep humiliation never to return to America.
 In 1937, a parishioner of our church learned first-hand the reason for the abrupt departure that had sparked world-wide fascination. The Adult Forum next Sunday will reveal the true story of this sensational incident.
 Should time permit, I will declaim Kipling’s poem “The Betrothed” in which is found the most famous couplet in all of English literature; to wit: “A woman is only a woman/ But a good cigar is a smoke.”
 Come & enjoy!