

MARRIED WHILE YOU WAIT: HOW THEY PUT THE WEDDING BELLS IN BELLOWS FALLS

Did you know that not so long ago Vermont was known as a great place to come to get married?

“Vermont’s New Industry” and “Married While You Wait” made newspaper headlines in 1916, as Americans from coast to coast found out that the Green Mountain State did not have a marriage law. A marriage law required couples to wait five days between applying for a marriage license and the actual wedding ceremony. This “cooling off” period was to encourage couples to think seriously about what they were doing.

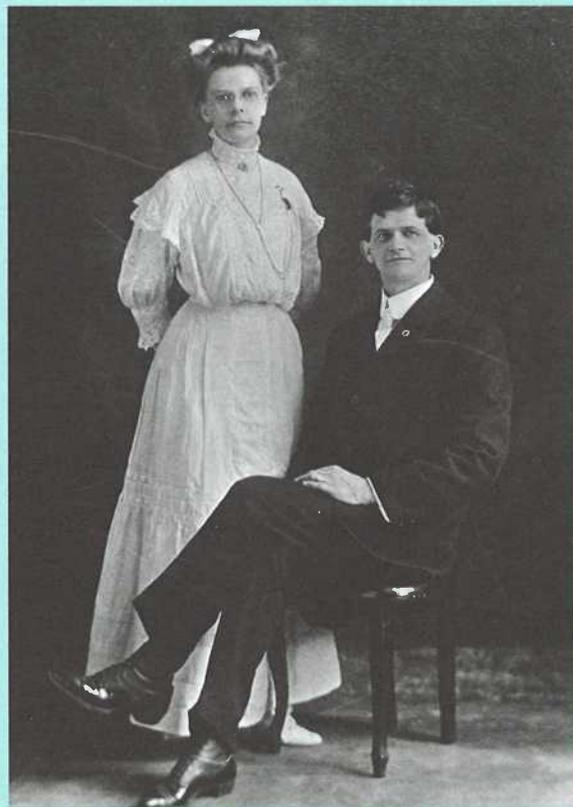
Vermont was the only state in the Northeast without this law on its books. Reporters joked that couples could “come up from Boston on the noon train and leave on the two o’clock, all knots tied in a double bow and everyone happy.”

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a person’s family often had a great deal to say about whom children could or could not marry. Parents might **forbid** their sons or daughters to marry someone who was from a different class or who did not make enough money. But some couples wanted to get married so badly that they ran away to Vermont to do it, especially to Bellows Falls, the easiest city to reach by train from Boston and New York. They bought a marriage license at the city hall, were married by a minister or justice of the peace, and caught the next train out.

Bellows Falls became so famous for weddings that even people who were not **eloping** began to marry there, just for the fun of it. In one month, 107 couples were joined in marriage in the city. Only three were from the area; the rest had decided that the trip to Vermont was the romantic thing to do.

But along with fame came **infamy**. Many people did not think it was proper for young men and women to be married so quickly. Others felt that Vermont was encouraging young people to disobey their parents. The *Boston Globe*, an **influential** newspaper, stated that the Vermont state legislature should “take

the bells out of Bellows Falls.” Many Vermonters agreed. Finally, in the spring of 1917, a bill that required a five-day waiting period was passed by the legislature, and Vermont’s brief period as the marriage capital of the Northeast came to a close.



In 1916, couples like this one came to Bellows Falls to get “hitched.”

VOCABULARY

forbid - not allow

elope - to run away to get married

infamy - bad reputation

influential - powerful