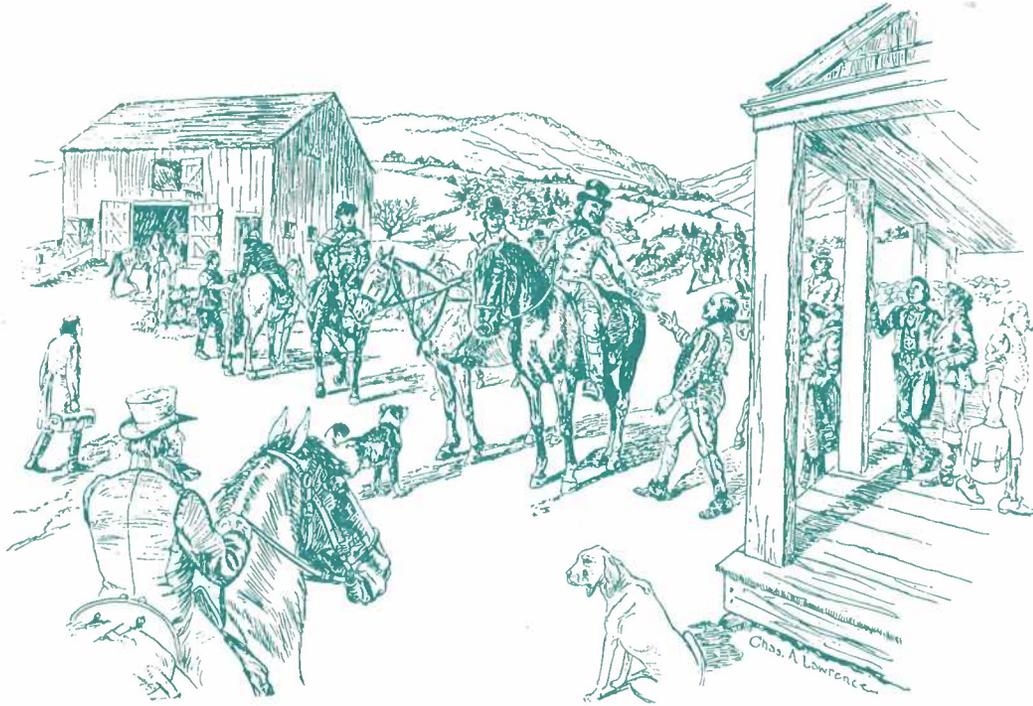


# MOM, THERE'S A LEGISLATOR IN OUR KITCHEN!



State legislators arriving in Danville in 1805.

Imagine the governor and the whole state assembly living in your town. What if some of them moved into your house and stayed a whole month? Where would they sleep? What would your family feed them?

In 1805 the state legislature met in Danville, which had fewer than twenty houses and one small inn. Why was the legislature meeting in Danville? In 1805 there was no state capital. The legislature met at different towns around the state. Most Vermonters wanted a capital, but no one could agree on where it should be. Lots of towns wanted the honor. Some Vermonters thought it was fairer to have different towns take turns hosting the state government.

When the legislature met in Danville, the government was smaller than it is now. Still, there were about

two hundred legislators and council members. Danville's inn would not hold them all. So townspeople took in boarders, who paid for a bed and meals. Henry Little, a Danville boy, was ten years old. When his mother decided to open their home to legislative boarders, Henry had to help out. Years later, Henry wrote about his experiences.

Carpenters had to enlarge the house for the visitors. When they ran out of nails, they sent Henry to the blacksmith for more. Because nails cost so much, Henry bought only a few at a time. He watched the smith hammer out each nail on an anvil.

Soon members of the legislature arrived. They came on foot or on horseback, because there were no carriages or wagons. Henry wrote that the legislators who

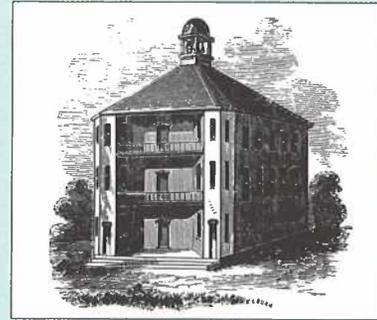
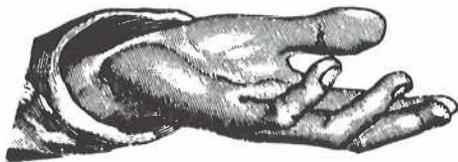
stayed at his house were Methodists and addressed each other as “brother so-and-so.”

The food his family served was good, but simple. There was no fruit except a few apples and currants. The tableware he described would be a great curiosity now. Most people ate with iron, pewter, or wooden spoons, and knives, not forks. People ate from wooden bowls, trenchers, or plates. They preferred wooden to pewter plates because cutting meat on wood did not dull a knife blade. Henry wrote that people liked to keep their knives good and sharp.

The large, open fireplace was the only way to heat the house. Woodstoves did not appear in Danville until some years later.

The floor was wood. Every few days, Henry’s mother covered it with clean, white sand. She decorated the floor by making shapes and patterns in the sand with her broom.

Henry cleared the dinner table, made the beds, brought in firewood, carried buckets of water, brushed boots, held horses, and ran errands. When the assembly came to an end, he wrote, a legislator “. . . succeeded in raising a sum of money which he had been delegated to deliver to me as a testimonial of their high appreciation of my considerate attention to them. Then, O wondrous delight, my hand received a bright silver coin of the value of six and one-fourth cents. I regret to say that I was so overcome . . . that I was wholly unable to offer a becoming response.”



The First Vermont Statehouse built in 1808.

Here are some issues that the 1805 state legislators considered:

Governor Isaac Tichenor urged them to vote to end the slave trade by amending the United States Constitution.

They heard the appeal of a man who was fined one hundred dollars for forging money.

Companies all over Vermont were asking permission to build turnpikes. Turnpikes were roads that people paid to travel on.

They heard a bill that would make it more difficult to get a divorce in Vermont. Some legislators felt that there were too many married couples getting divorces at this time.

The legislature also formed a committee to look into the best place to build a state prison or workhouse. They later decided on the town of Windsor.

The legislature did something else that was important. It decided that Montpelier was the best place for the state capital. In the middle of the state, it was the easiest town for all to get to. Also, Montpelier’s citizens agreed to give land and money for a statehouse. The years of Vermont’s traveling government were over.