

HISTORIC ROOTS

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THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Vermont is a land of great beauty. People come here to look at the bright color of our autumn leaves. They come in the summer to enjoy our mountain trails and lakes and streams, our cool nights. In the winter, they come to ski. All year long, they buy maple syrup and take pictures of our old barns, white churches, and covered bridges.

But, as we know, life here is more than beautiful scenery. From earliest times, people who lived here have left Vermont. The reasons are not hard to find. Native Americans left when colonists began to move in. Making a life here was not easy for the colonists either.

Most the first white settlers were farmers. Some made their homes in the Connecticut River Valley and the Champlain Valley. The land there was good for raising cattle, sheep, apples, and other crops. The hills, however, were covered with forests. There settlers had to clear the land before they could farm it. They cut down trees and burned them. They pulled stumps out of the ground. One historian says it took one man a month to clear three acres of land.



Collection Gagnon, Bibliothèque Municipale de la Ville de Montréal

This watercolor of an Abenaki couple was painted in the 1700s.

John P. Dunville, Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, Montpelier, Vermont



The Hyde Cabin in Grand Isle, built in 1783, may be the oldest log cabin that is still standing in Vermont.

Even then, conditions were not ideal for farming. Vermont soil in many places is clay or full of rocks. Winters are long and cold. Springs are damp and muddy. The growing season is short. There are floods and droughts and flies and mosquitoes. And, in the early days, Vermonters were isolated. Although goods could be shipped to market by water, it was hard to travel by land. In more recent times, electricity and the telephone were late in coming. Settlers started moving out of Vermont in the 1770s and never stopped.

The coming of the railroad in the 1840s made it easier to move on. More and more people left Vermont for better farmland and new opportunities in the west. Historian Lewis D. Stilwell thinks that by the start of the Civil

War in 1860, about half the people born in Vermont had moved elsewhere. Most who left were young, and most of them never came back. While valley farms remained successful, many of the hill farms were abandoned. Their fields became woods again.

But even when they left, many people still thought of Vermont as home. In the 1870s, there were Vermont clubs in cities like Worcester, Massachusetts and Chicago. Members sang songs and told stories in honor of the state they had left. Here's a verse from one, the "Green Mountain Song."

*Ah! Other bright scenes may entice us away;
In other lands oft we may roam:
Yet still will the heart ever beat with delight
At the name of its own mountain-home.*

Today young people still leave. But some come back. And others move in. Instead of losing population, Vermont is now gaining it. Why is this so?

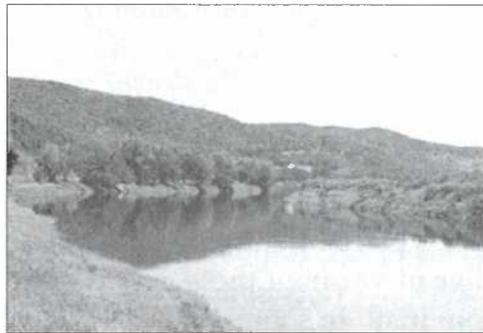
The beauty of the scenery, the slower pace of country life are attractive to people tired of life in the city or suburbs. Vermont reminds them of earlier times, when life was simpler. They think Vermont is a good place to bring up children or retire. But to live in Vermont these days is not to get away from it all. In some ways, we have everything here that other places have.

We have art exhibits, theaters, and concerts. We have schools and colleges. Faxes and modems and the world-wide web connect us to the rest of the world. We've got crime and prison crowding. Political debate is as intense here as anywhere else. Just as people do everywhere else, we worry about pollution, health care, taxes, the quality of education, of water, and of life.

And yet Vermont really is different. The difference can be found in our history and our environment and in the way they interact to form part of our everyday lives.

Although there are fewer and fewer farms, Vermont is still a farm state. Farm machinery shares the road with 18-wheelers, and there are more pickup trucks than luxury cars. Whether we are farmers or work in a store or office, we worry about getting in the hay and look to see if the corn is indeed "knee high by the Fourth of July."

Our cities are growing, but most of us still live in small towns and villages. Our landscape is



The Connecticut River at Newbury.

Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing



Images from the Past, Bennington, Vermont

The Bennington Monument celebrates an important battle of the American Revolution.

dotted with cows, sheep, and horses. We can't go anywhere without seeing mountains and fields, lakes and streams. That countryside is part of our lives as we work, commute, hike, ski, hunt, and fish.

Vermont's history surrounds us too and is part of the landscape. There are ancient camp-sites where we can find artifacts of early Abenaki settlers and their ancestors. Revolu-



Kathleen McKinley Harris

The memorial in Newbury to Joe, an Indian guide during the Revolutionary War.

tionary War forts and battlefields and Civil War monuments on town greens remind us of Vermont's important role in the formation of the United States. Historic sites show us where and how Vermonters lived and worked. Woods that were once fields are full of the foundations of forgotten houses.

When Vermont was settled, it was on the frontier. For a while, it was even a separate country. Those who came here lived simply. They thought for themselves. They had to be strong and independent to survive.

We have kept many of their ways. Our local legislature is still the town meeting, where everyone can speak and vote. We are proud of the fact that our governor lives at home, not in

a mansion, that he drives around in a car, not a motorcade. More of us wear jeans and boots than dress for business. We have elected a Republican, a Democrat, and an Independent to represent us in Washington.

It is the combination of history and environment, of beauty and tradition in our everyday lives that gives us the strength and independence of character of which we are so proud. It is this that attracts others and keeps most of us here.

It's good to get away sometimes, to see new places and learn how others live. But for quality of life, you can't do better than Vermont.

ANN E. COOPER, *Editor*

Rooting Around

Look around your town and see what there is that reminds you of the past. Are there monuments? museums? old houses? graveyards? The more you look, the more you will see how much of the past is still with us and how much we can all learn by opening our eyes.

You might want to make a list of all the things that Vermont has that cannot be found in cities or suburbs. Another list might contain things that Vermont does not have. Which list contains the things that are most important to you?