

HISTORIC ROOTS

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Publication of *Historic Roots* is made possible in part by grants from the A.D. Henderson Foundation, the Vermont Council on the Humanities, the Vermont Historical Society, and Vermont—NEA.

A Magazine of Vermont History

Vol. 3

December 1998

No. 3

THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF CHANGE

Change happens. Sometimes it happens so slowly that we don't notice. But if we look back, which is what history is all about, we can see the difference between what used to be and what is now.

It is not always easy to remember change. We get used to new machines and new ways of doing things very quickly. But if we think about it, we can see how change has affected our lives. Look around your town, for instance. Isn't the new chain drugstore on land that used to be a cornfield? What happened to the old motel? The drive-in movie? Remember when that field was full of cows, not condos? The town looks different now.

Such changes affect more than appearance. They affect the life of the town, and people's lives as well. What happened to the farmer who owned the cornfield? Where do you go to the movies now? Is the old drug store still in business? What's traffic like with all those new condos?

Change is like throwing a stone into a pond. There's only one place where the stone goes in, but the ripples it causes can fill the whole pond.

Stone-splash! Stillness ends
Ripples, motion flow outward
Nothing is the same

If small changes can cause ripples, imagine the effects of change that happens worldwide. Such changes have always occurred, starting with the discovery of fire and the invention of the wheel. Nowadays, they just happen more often, and the ripples move more quickly.

Take the computer, for instance. Only forty years ago, or so, there were very few computers. They were used only in large businesses and for scientific research. They took up whole rooms. The rooms had to be air conditioned. Workers wore gowns and gloves, to keep dust out of the machines.

Computers now sit on desks, with papers, people, and coffee cups all around. Now computers are so important to the way we live and do business that we are worried about what may happen to our own lives if they can't deal with the change in date from the year 1999 to the year 2000.

Computers have many uses in the home. You can use them to write books, letters, and reports. You can do bookkeeping and figure out your taxes. You can write checks, play games, and draw pictures. You can send e-mail. On the internet, you can read newspapers, shop, chat, and look for houses or jobs.

The computer developed from older machines, such as the telephone, television, the typewriter, and the adding machine. We take most of these for granted now. But they were

new once. And they, too, changed people's lives in ways no one could have imagined, just as the computer and the internet are doing today.

When the telephone was invented, for instance, people understood that it would be easier to keep in touch with friends and families. They could see that it would be easier to do business. But who would have imagined the amount of time we now spend on the phone? Back then, many households shared a phone line. It was hard to call beyond the local area. Who, then, could have imagined businesses and homes with more than one phone line? Who could have imagined fax machines that send documents over phone lines to places all over world? Who could have imagined e-mail?



Sheldon Museum

A parade down Main Street in Middlebury, around 1895. The telephone poles show that the phone had already become an important part of life in Middlebury.

Smaller changes have had great effects too. Sixty-five years ago, in this country, if people wanted to ski, they first had to climb a hill. Now skiers ride up mountains, sometimes in heated cars. Skiing has become a major industry.

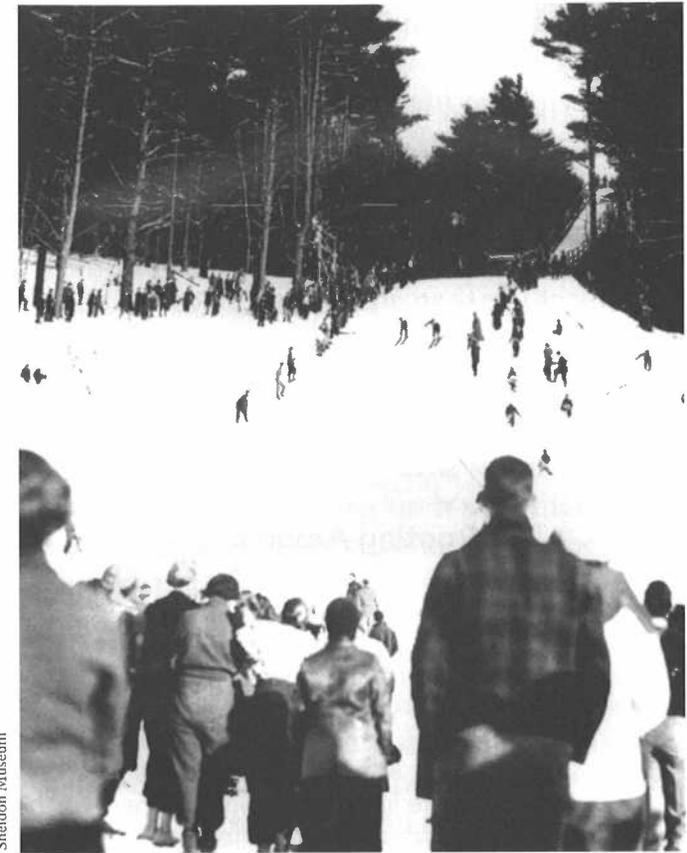
Skiing and telephones, along with all the other developments, have changed Vermont in ways no one would have anticipated.¹ Vermont used to be a farm state. Outsiders used to joke that there were more cows than people here. Because of the mountains and poor roads, it was hard to get around. To the outside world, Vermont was like a time warp. It was old-fashioned and quaint. Because of that, only a few people came to Vermont, and many Vermonters left.

Vermont's image has changed. Today it is known as a great place to visit, to live, to do business. Interstate highways and modern airports allow goods and people to flow in and out. There are more people here now, but still lots of cows. While there are fewer farms, the landscape is mostly green and undeveloped. Tourists come in summer and autumn. Skiers come in winter. People retire to Vermont or move their offices here. Thanks to airlines, computers, and faxes, executives, consultants, and writers can live in this beautiful state and do business with the world. How will these

¹Anticipate means to foresee, to expect.

changes affect Vermont's future? We have no way of knowing.

There is much else we do not know. If global warming continues, for instance, will there even be a ski industry in fifty or a hundred years? What would be the ripple effect if people started to do most of their reading on



Sheldon Museum

A 1936 ski jump competition on Chipman Hill in Middlebury. Skiers had to climb up the hill to reach the jump.

the internet? Would cutting down fewer trees for paper mean that forests would spread? Would closing paper mills make for cleaner water? What would happen to all the workers? What would happen to the book stores? How would Vermont change? We cannot know. All we know is that change will happen. The future will be different, and in ways no one can foresee.

As hard as it is to imagine what the future will bring, it is almost as hard to imagine, or remember, what life in the past was like. An important part of the study of history is to try to bring that past to life. Through history we can go back to times when what is now old—like the telephone or the ski lift—was new. We can look at life then and see its effect on the present. We can look at what was new and see how it became history.

ANN E. COOPER, *Editor*

Rooting Around

You might want to ask someone older—a parent or friend or neighbor—about how they did without some of the machines or services we have now. Or, if you are older, you might talk about what you remember of earlier days with someone else: a friend or child or grandchild. What was life like before, without these inventions? How would life be different now, without them? What has been gained by the change? Has anything been lost?