

HISTORIC ROOTS

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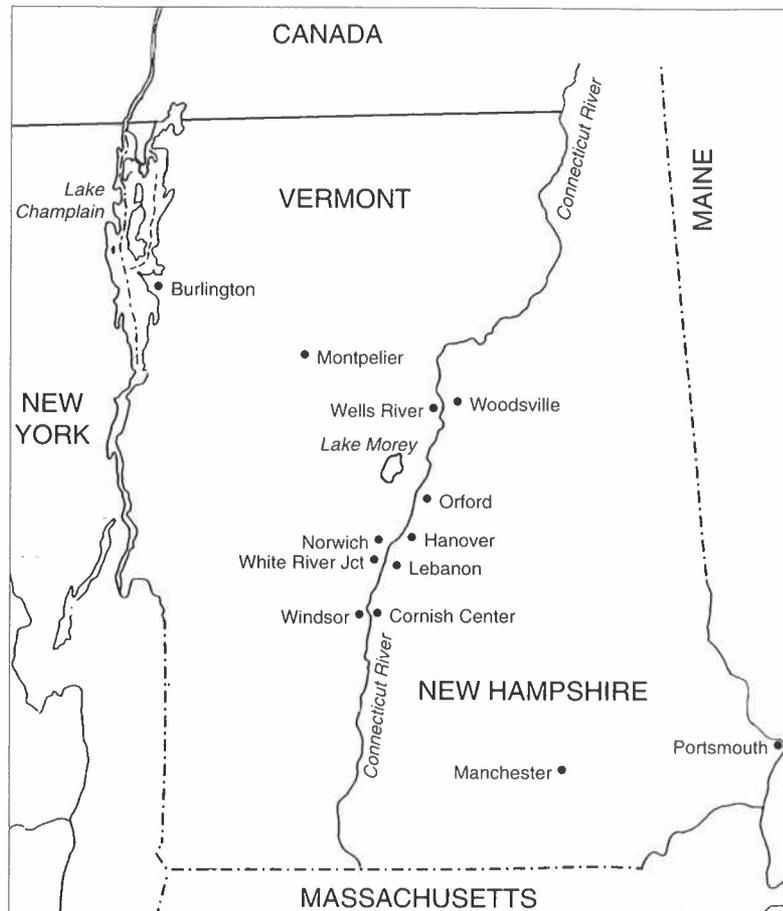
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THE SECRET OF THE UPPER VALLEY

BY TOM SLAYTON

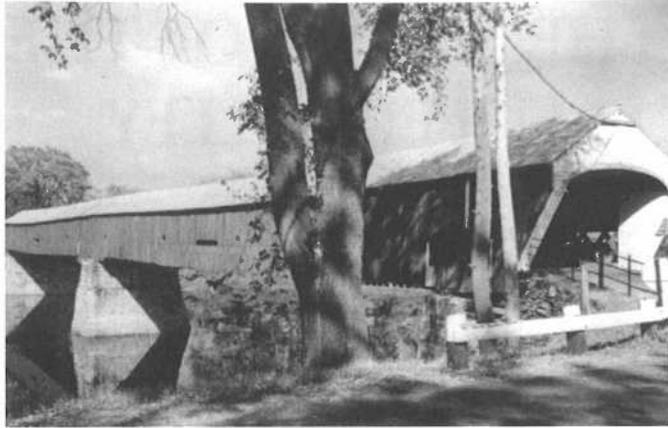


Here's a secret that those who live in the Upper Connecticut River Valley don't tell to most outsiders: the Upper Valley isn't really in Vermont. And it's not in New Hampshire either. The Upper Valley is really a separate community. It is defined by the river, rather than by political borders.

No matter which side of the river they live on, residents of the Upper Valley live their lives in both states. Just try to get across the Ledyard Bridge between Norwich, Vermont and Hanover, New Hampshire at rush hour. The bridge has been under construction for years. People who live on one side of the river and work on the other can spend half an hour waiting to cross it, as traffic creeps along. An urban traffic jam in rural Vermont (and New Hampshire)!

When a river defines a community, bridges become very important. There are about 30 of them linking Vermont and New Hampshire. The longest covered bridge in the country is the Windsor-Cornish Bridge (which they call the Cornish-Windsor Bridge in New Hampshire). About ten years ago, when it was closed

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The Windsor-Cornish (or Cornish-Windsor) bridge between Vermont and New Hampshire is the longest covered bridge in the country.

for repairs, people's lives were disrupted all up and down the valley, on both sides of the river.

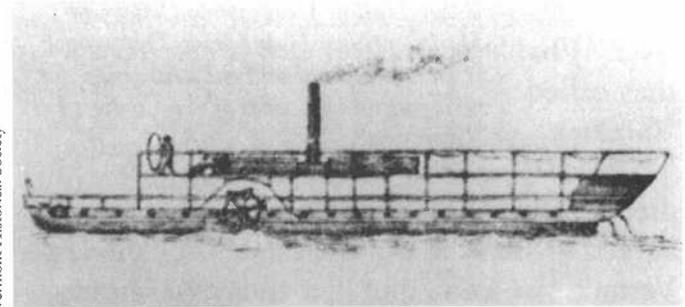
The fact is that the towns of the Upper Valley are much more closely connected to each other than they are to the rest of their own states. Hanover and Orford and Lebanon, New Hampshire are much more closely connected to Norwich and White River Junction, Vermont, than they are to Portsmouth and Manchester, New Hampshire. And though we in Vermont hate to admit it, Windsor and Wells River are much closer in every way to Cornish and Woodsville across the river than they are to Burlington or Montpelier. The region as a whole is more like itself than it is like either New Hampshire or Vermont.



But it's always been that way. Just as people do now, early residents of the Connecticut Valley lived their lives on both sides of the river. Vermont claims the early inventor Samuel Morey as its own. It credits him with the invention of the steamboat. But, in fact, it's clear that Morey owned land on both sides of the river and probably lived most of the time in New Hampshire. Is he a Vermonter or a New Hampshireman? Really he's neither. He's just another Upper Valleyite.

At one point, in the late 1700s, the Connecticut River towns banded together and talked about declaring their independence. Their idea was to create a separate state, called New Connecticut. Its capital was to be at Hanover (then called Dresden), about where

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A sketch of Samuel Morey's steamboat. Morey is thought by many to be the true inventor of the steamboat. It is said that Robert Fulton stole his idea. Morey was said to be so angry that he sank his own boat in the lake that is now named for him, Lake Morey, Vermont. This story may well be true, but the boat has not been found.

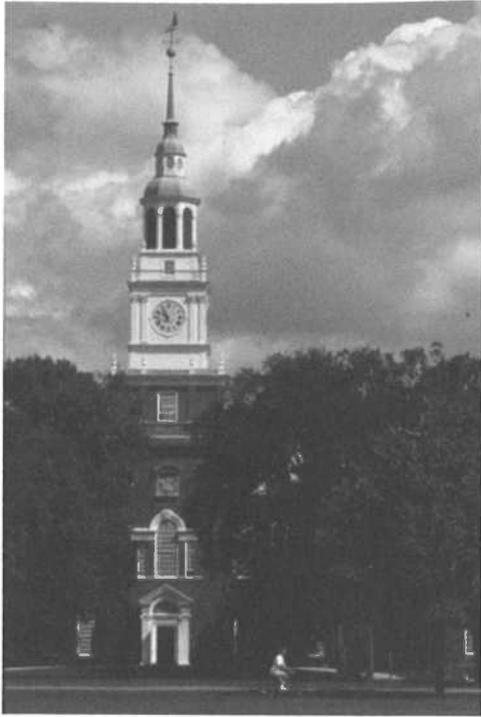
Dartmouth College stands today.

That idea never got off the ground. Nor did the young Republic of Vermont's attempt, in the 1780s, to annex¹ 16 towns on the New Hampshire side of the river. What they called "Greater Vermont"

died when, in 1791, the United States Congress agreed to admit as the 14th state only the lesser Vermont we know and love today. Vermont gave up all claim to the towns in New Hampshire, and the Connecticut River became the state's eastern boundary.

The two states squabbled through the years

¹ Annex means to attach or take over.



Dartmouth College

Baker Hall at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. Dartmouth is an educational and cultural center for residents on both sides of the Connecticut River.

about just where in the river that boundary is. They argued about how much of each bridge each state must maintain. But those disputes were settled a long time ago. Residents of the two states can now fish in the Connecticut River with a fishing license from either state.

Like the river itself, the community that lives on both its banks is a living entity. It is always in motion, always changing, always on its way to somewhere new. Yet it is still the same interesting, independent place it has been since the first European colonists settled there.

Rooting Around

Tom Slayton is Editor of *Vermont Life*, a magazine with articles about Vermont, past and present. It contains a calendar of events, suggestions about places to visit, and beautiful pictures of our beautiful state.

Vermont Public Radio (107.9 FM, Burlington; 88.7 FM Rutland; 89.5 FM, Windsor) also runs interesting stories about Vermont and its history. This article was originally part of its series on the Connecticut Valley.

The Upper Valley is full of history. There are early Abenaki settlements, old houses, Revolutionary War and Civil War monuments. Historical societies on both sides of the river have exhibits about past life in this interesting area.