

THE REAL VERMONTER: THE USE OF MYTH IN SUMMER HOME  
PROMOTION AND RURAL REFORM IN VERMONT, 1890-1940

A Thesis

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by

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## ABSTRACT

From the 1890s through the 1930s, the Board of Agriculture and Bureau of Publicity in the state of Vermont released many publications promoting the state as a summer home destination. The salability of native Vermonters, a unique and enticing feature of life in the Green Mountains, was an integral component of this promotional literature. The following thesis explores this myth of the Real Vermonter, defining the myth itself as described in promotional and popular literature, examining its historic precedence and the implications of its uses in the early twentieth-century by state agencies as a tool for improving rural communities through summer home development.

In order to lay the groundwork for an understanding of the use of myth in state promotion, the study begins with an examination of the Vermont during the nineteenth century. The changes occurring with the state are highlighted, including the evolving agricultural industry and burgeoning tourism industry, the growth of immigrant populations, and the steady loss of native-born residents contributing to the decline of many rural communities. Upon this foundation, the myth of the Real Vermonter is explored through a study of primary documents, ranging from pamphlets to newspaper articles and political speeches. Real Vermonters are defined in a simplistic and romanticized way as independent, Protestant, Republican, hardworking and honest farmers in the old-line American tradition, an appealing portrayal for potential vacationers.

Once the myth is defined, it's role in rural reform movements is examined, largely through the literature of the Eugenics Survey of Vermont and the Vermont Commission on Country, two initiatives that sought to protect and improve the life of desirable native rural Vermonters while alienating many immigrant groups,

particularly the French Canadian farmers. Summer residents, mainly middle-class professionals, artists, writers and teachers, were encouraged to move to Vermont and set up summer homes, clean up the landscape with their neatly kept farmhouses, patronize local businesses, and be good role models for downtrodden locals. An exploration of non-fiction novels and personal accounts by both native Vermonters and summer residents provides insight into the impacts part-time residents had on locals, how their presence helped support rural institutions and businesses while simultaneously fostering tenuous relationships between native and newcomer.

Ultimately, the myth of the Real Vermonter is shown to be a major feature in promotion of summer homes and the growth of summer colonies and a powerful component in shaping the perception of Vermont for both natives and outsiders. The impact of its use yielded both positive and negative results in rural communities. On one hand, the social fabric of rural communities and a sense of personal ownership by locals over their land and homes may have been undermined, and ethnic tensions intensified, by the use of the myth. On the other hand, a sense of tradition and continuity was established, ensuring the protection of historic and scenic landscapes and agricultural pursuits in Vermont. The myth of the Real Vermonter was used as a tool to promote social change and preserve tradition in Vermont, and it has helped shape the nature of rural communities throughout the state for well over a century.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Erin O'Grady was born and raised in the town of Essex, Vermont, where she developed a lifelong love of her home state. Erin attended Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts where she majored in History, with minors in Anthropology and English. After graduating with her B.A. in 2007, she sought a practical application for her history degree, and decided to pursue the field of Historic Preservation Planning and attend Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. This thesis is the culmination of both her academic interests and her personal infatuation with the state of Vermont, its history and people. Erin is looking towards the future following her 2009 graduation from Cornell, excited to begin her professional career and see where life takes her.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the role of myth in the state of Vermont, emphasizing the myth of the “real” Vermonter and the influence of this concept on the development of summer home colonies. As much as any other state, Vermont has developed a reputation as a state set apart from all others. Sometimes this “otherness” is defined by rural and pristine landscapes, sometimes by her stubborn, down-to-earth Yankee offspring. The demarcation of what it means to be a “real” Vermonter, so integral to defining the state as a whole, has reached the status of a well-crafted myth. While the term myth carries many meanings, within the context of this thesis, it represents an iconic image, an idealized reality, and a commonly held conception adhered to by many state residents themselves, other Americans, and the state agencies promoting Vermont as a travel destination. These images of the “real” Vermonter that comprise the myth are as common in popular culture today as they were a hundred years ago, and they still function in much the same way, as a mechanism to lure tourists to the state.

Promises of an “authentic” experience living among rural Vermonters has been a major part of the promotion of summer homes since such campaigns began in the 1890s. This study examines this use of Vermont myth in state promotion of summer homes from the 1890s through the 1930s. These dates were selected because they represent the height of the early summer home industry, before the state’s booming ski industry changed the face of the Vermont landscape and tourism mid-twentieth century. The focus is limited to summer home promotion because this form of tourism, which invites part-time state residency and encourages property ownership could, and often did, result in the colonization of rural communities. It thus has a more far-reaching effect on the state than short-term tourism.

Around the turn of the twentieth century it was the hope of many Vermonters that summer residents would have a positive impact on their state. Though not alone in her desperate situation, Vermont was in the thick of a changing agricultural economy, population stagnation, and the lasting effects of several prior decades of farm abandonment. By the 1890s, many of Vermont's leaders felt that the rural population was in trouble, they were fewer in number and older in age, not to mention that some undesirable immigrants were watering down the good old Vermont stock. Threats to the state fueled the desire to bring in new residents, particularly educated and prosperous families who could refurbish abandoned farmsteads and return the properties to the tax rolls. It was believed that this process would help regenerate "good" stock and reduce the influence of undesirables while simultaneously preserving the Vermont landscape and cultural identity. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the development of the myth of the Real Vermonter, how it differed from the changing realities facing residents through the 1930s, and the implications for rural communities with developing summer colonies.

Although Vermont's lakeside communities and abandoned hilltop farms were the major tourist draw in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, an examination of the materials below suggests that all the state's regions were impacted by the development of the summer home industry. Promotional literature targeted the entire state, and refurbished farmhouses were seen throughout Vermont, not merely in the most popular vacation colonies. For this reason, this thesis examines the phenomena of myth and semi-permanent tourism across the entire state.

Historic context for the study was formed through the exploration of popular newspapers and agricultural journals published throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including the *New York Times*, *The Independent*, *Prairie Farmer*, and *Colman's Rural World* among many others. Articles, advertisements and

editorials from these sources were among the first resources consulted in order to create a broad understanding of events and cultural attitudes free from outside interpretation. Once this framework was established, writings of historians, recent journal articles, and other recently published books served as secondary sources to further understand state development and history. The contemporary works of Blake Harrison, Jan Albers, and Harold Meeks all presented concise and current interpretation, while classic books by Edward Conant, Charles Crane and Dorothy Canfield Fisher offered useful historical perspective. The Vermont Historical Society's journal, *Vermont History*, contained articles relevant to nearly all aspects of this study, dating from the 1930s through the present.

The myth of the Real Vermonter was defined through a review of promotional literature from the 1890s-1930s, most of which was published by the Vermont State Board of Agriculture, the Vermont Central Railroad Company, and the Vermont Bureau of Publicity. The dates of cited publications ranged from 1891 through 1934, with the most sources dating from the periods of 1891-1895, 1905-1923, and 1929-1931. Publications were often extremely similar, or identical, within any 2 or 3-year period, and of the estimated 30 to 40 brochures examined in total, there were only roughly 18 examples of distinct content within all the brochures reviewed. Additionally, the speeches and notes of government officials intended to pique the interest of potential vacationers and property buyers were examined, including gubernatorial speeches dating from 1779 to present and the 1931 radio addresses of Governor Stanley Wilson. To flesh out an understanding of the myth and how it was understood by residents of the time, popular literature and poetry was also examined. These materials ranged from the poetry of Robert Frost to novels by Vermonter Lewis Hill, and included the written and transcribed oral accounts of ordinary individuals living in summer vacation colonies such as Cecil Dyer and S. Whitney Landon, and

books published by people who made Vermont their second home, including Alice Herdan-Zuckmayer and Helen and Scott Nearing. The review of popular literature aided in balancing myth and historical reality.

The Cornell University libraries contain many of the resources used in this study, including many of the historical books and novels, meeting minutes, and extensive volumes of *Vermont History*. Most newspaper articles and historic journals were found through the Cornell articles database. Additional journal articles, U.S. Census Bureau information, and digitized copies of recent *Vermont History* publications were also found online. The Vermont State Archives and Records Administration contain all the Inaugural and Farewell Addresses of former state governors. The Vermont Historical Society Leahy Library located in Barre, Vermont contains dozens of promotional pamphlets on farms and summer homes for sale, data sets on tourism, documents on farm real-estate values, and first-hand tourist accounts. Approximately three-quarters of the promotional brochures examined were found in the Leahy Library, with the remainder found in the Cornell libraries. The Saint Michael's College library, located in Colchester, Vermont, also provided narratives, primary documents published by the Vermont Commission on Country Life, and additional secondary sources.

Chapter one sets the stage for the study with an examination of the state of Vermont leading up to and during the period of focus, 1890-1930s. The chapter begins with an explanation of the geographical variation within Vermont and the implication of the divide between the east, west, and mountainous middle regions. The evolution of agriculture throughout the nineteenth century is also examined, focusing on the traditions of subsistence and specialty farming and the later development of the dairy industry. Chapter one also looks at the implications of the shifting economy, including rural depopulation and the abandoned landscape. Finally,

the growing number of immigrants are addressed with a close focus on French Canadians, the most numerous and contentious new population.

Chapter two delves into the earliest examples of promotional literature to unravel the notion of the Real Vermonter. The chapter begins with a look at the various sources of promotion. A content overview reveals the many levels of appeal Vermont offered, including its advantages for gentlemen farmers and others seeking an agricultural lifestyle, scenic wonders, good roads and ideal location, and the benefits offered by a life in the country. Finally, chapter two defines the myth of the Real Vermonter by picking apart the promotional literature and exploring other timely discussions of Vermonters. The notion of tradition, character and Puritan values, the role of women, and the independent and democratic traditions of the state are among the qualities addressed.

Chapter three continues to explore the issues surrounding myth and reality in Vermont, setting these within the context of rural decline in the 1920s and 1930s and statewide efforts to eradicate poverty and sickness among the most rural residents. The Country Life Movement provides one lens through which to explore these problems, and the controversial Vermont Eugenics Survey is given careful attention as one impetus for the formation of the Vermont Commission on Country Life, a major leadership body pushing for summer home development as a means of rural reform. Some publications by the VCCL are assessed, including *Rural Vermont* and Dorothy Canfield Fisher's "Summer Homes" published by the Bureau of Publicity, to facilitate an understanding of the beliefs and perspectives of summer home promoters and their objectives in pursuing rural rejuvenation.

Chapter Four is devoted to understanding the effects and implications of summer colonies in Vermont. A number of personal narratives are explored, some written by native Vermonters who lived near summer colonies and some written by

the owners of summer homes. Each has unique stories and perspectives on the matter of semi-permanent residency in rural Vermont. Greensboro is profiled through the use of two personal narratives describing growing up in the community, one written by a tourist and one written by a native. Chapter four also addresses the contents of the previous three chapters in order to understand how the myth of the Real Vermonter played out in summer communities and affected real individuals through the challenges and pleasures they experienced in their lives.

The myth of the Real Vermonter continues to play a powerful role in shaping state identity. This thesis will explore the earliest uses of this myth for summer home promotion and rural reform from the 1890s through the 1930s, seeking to identify how created definitions of natives differed from the reality, and the implications of summer colony development in rural communities. The power of mythology and invented “authenticity” has a long and complex history in Vermont, one worthy of consideration and elaboration.

## CHAPTER 1

### SETTING THE STAGE: VERMONT IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Vermont in the nineteenth century was a state of slow transition. There were expanding transportation networks and small industries, evolving agricultural practices, a modest tourism industry and a slowly growing immigrant population. Compared to the rest of the United States, or just the rest of the North East, Vermont was a relatively staid place. The majority of Vermonters worked the agricultural sphere throughout the century. The young and most entrepreneurial spirits tended to leave the state in pursuit of greater opportunities, leaving rural hill communities to struggle with population loss and crumbling social fabric. This chapter will explore the realities of life in Vermont in the nineteenth century, from agricultural changes to population loss and tourism, and explore the impact of persistent change on the state.

#### *Regional Geographies*

In 1845, a man known only to history as M. R. G., arrived in Burlington and wrote home to his lady in Haverhill, Massachusetts, describing the beauty and favorability of the Vermont scenery he encountered along his journey:

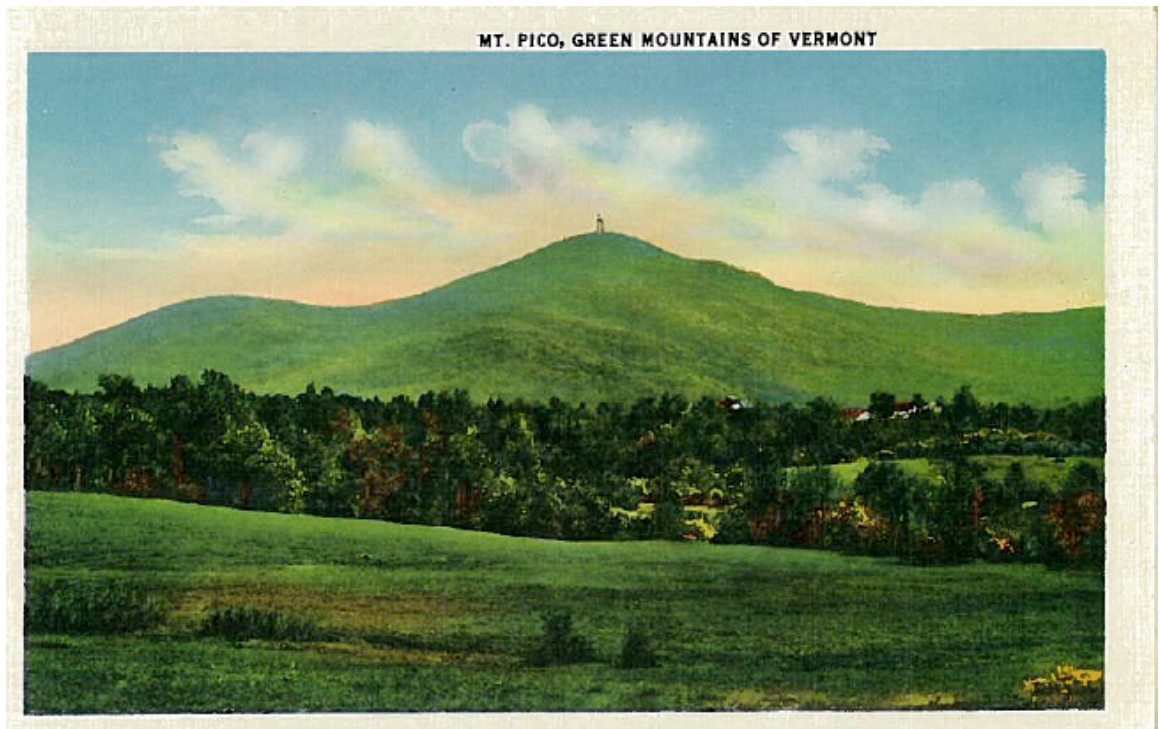
We were in the vicinity of the Connecticut river, and, as the prospect expanded to our view, every object assumed increasing beauty. The rocky hills on the height of the land, were left behind for others to traverse, while we were wending our way through a beautiful country of rich pasturage, fertile meadows, gently undulating hills, interspersed here and there with neat farm-houses of the inhabitants. We crossed the river about sunrise, and, as we were in an open stage, had a delightful view of its romantic scenery.<sup>1</sup>

The image he created is reflective of the state's diverse topography. Vermont has six distinct regions within its 9,135 square miles of land and 430 square miles of water.<sup>2</sup>

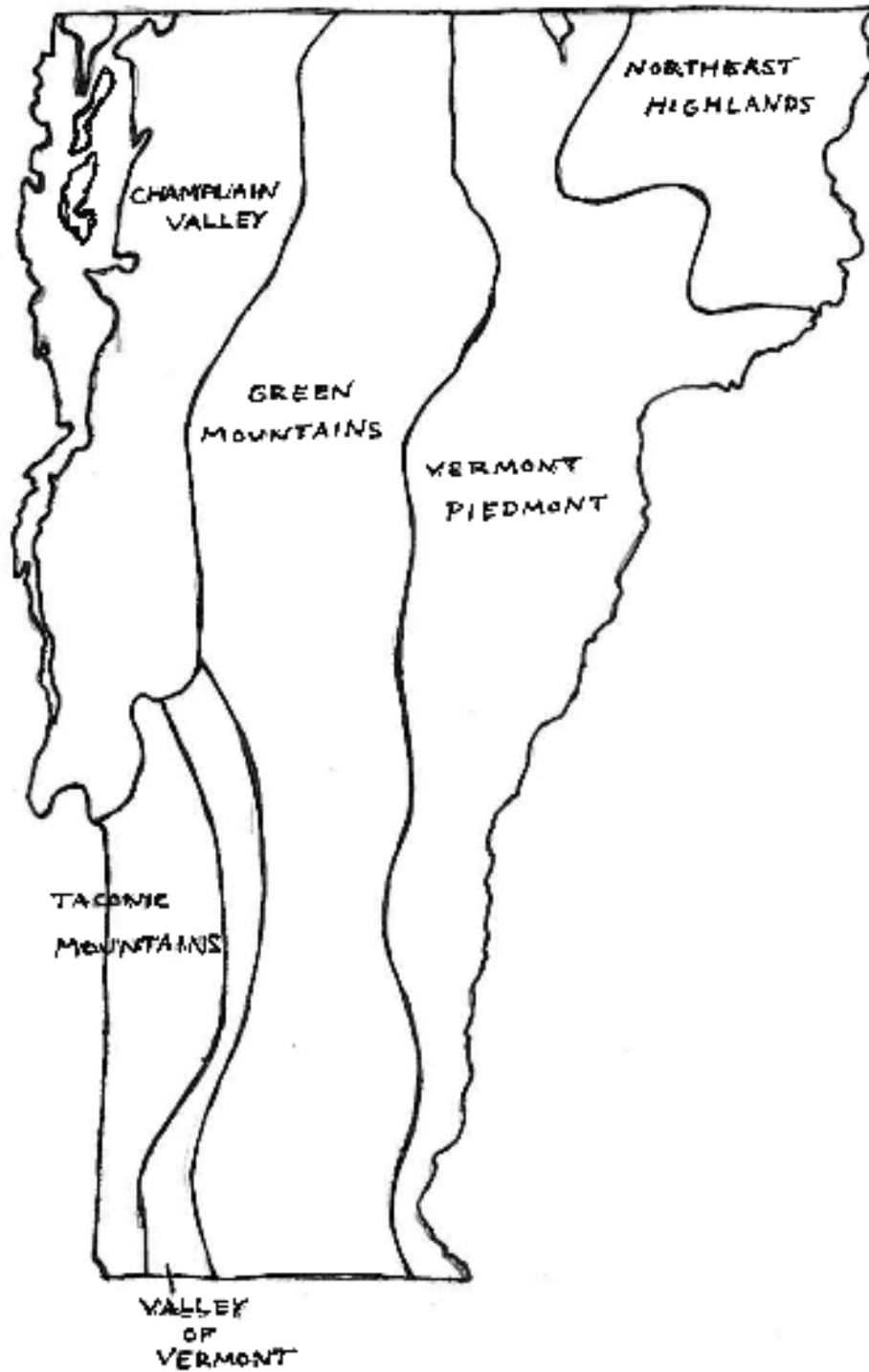
The most iconic of these regions are the Green Mountains. Running north to south through the center of the state and covering two-thirds of the total land area,



they create a division between the eastern and western portions of the state.<sup>3</sup> With thin, sandy soil and high altitudes that magnify the effects of cold temperatures, creating a growing season of only 100-110 days, the Green Mountains are ill-suited for agriculture.<sup>4</sup> Running parallel to the Green Mountains in the southwestern corner of the state bordering New York are the Taconic Mountains. With rough soil and a growing season only about 30 days longer than that of the Green Mountains, the Taconic's were never good for farming, but rather served as a source of marble on the eastern slope and slate on the western slope.<sup>5</sup>



**Illustration 1.** Postcard image of Pico Mountain in Killington, Vt., part of the Green Mountain Range, 1937.



**Illustration 2.** Regional geographies of Vermont.  
Source: Jan Albers, *Hands on the Land*.

A small strip of land running north to south between the Green Mountains and Taconic Mountains is known as the Valley of Vermont. The Valley served as an early travel route from southern New England to western Vermont and has fertile farmlands, though it is most well known for copious marble quarries. The Champlain Valley, which runs the length of Lake Champlain on the western part of the state, has low hills and flat land with the most fertile soils in the state and the longest growing season. It is the best region for farming, but also contains Chittenden County, which houses the largest human population in the state.<sup>6</sup>

The Vermont Piedmont region runs the length of the state on the eastern side of the Green Mountains, bordering the Connecticut River on the New Hampshire border. The environmental conditions in the Piedmont vary drastically, with some areas along the Connecticut River offering decent farmland. The granite quarries of Barre are the region's most valuable resource. The Northeastern Highlands, or the Northeast Kingdom, is an extension of New Hampshire's White Mountains. The region offers extremes in temperature and exceptionally poor soils, resulting in its sparse population.

### ***Agricultural Traditions***

When M. R. G. traveled across Vermont, it was replete with hillside farms and pastures. The terrain defined by hills, valleys, and small rivers in between, facilitated the growth of small human settlements where small-scale farming was the most practical and economical. The inhabitants of M. R. G.'s picturesque "neat farm-houses" were part of an agricultural system built on prevalence and diversity. Nearly all Vermonters were farmers, roughly 85% of the population of 23,966 in 1820, each growing multiple crops and raising a variety of livestock.<sup>7</sup>

In Harold Fisher Wilson's 1936 book *The Hill Country of Northern New England*, he describes the earliest years of Vermont's statehood, 1790-1830, as the "Age of Self-Sufficiency."<sup>8</sup> This era was largely defined by subsistence farming in which families provided for all their needs by use of their own hands and land, depending very little on outside resources or income. The typical family could use timber from their own wood lot to build a house, barn and fence, as well as fuel their daily fire. Pastures supported cows, oxen, sheep and colts. Hogs, turkeys and other fowl were frequently kept for meat. Fields cultivated some combination of hay, red and white clover, wheat, oats, barley, flax, potatoes, Indian corn, peas, turnips, and beans. Orchards contained apple trees and maple trees for syrup production. The great diversity of crops was like a safety net for farmers, who didn't rely too heavily on one source of income, which was subject to a bad season or fluctuating outside markets. The diversity also meant that only a small amount of each crop could be raised each season, and a small amount of livestock kept. There was usually enough to support the family, but little surplus product to sell for extra income.

The most difficult lands to farm were those in the hill country where soil was stony and infertile, particularly Essex and Caledonia counties in the Northeast Highlands, Lamoille and Washington counties in the northern Green Mountains and Franklin county in the northern Champlain Valley. The fate of subsistence farms in such areas, where "men wear away their lives with small reward," was bleak, and necessitated hard work and persistence just for mere survival.<sup>9</sup> The most successful farms were those in the Champlain Valley region and Orleans County in the northern Vermont Piedmont, where richer soils allowed for easier growth of crops, and in turn supported larger quantities of livestock. Farmers in these fertile regions were able to sell surplus products and earn a slight profit. They were also able to pursue specialty

farming, focusing energy on one product to create the greatest surplus for a high profit.

Specialty farms focused on a wide variety of products. Apple orchards were most successful in Grand Isle County, the large island in Lake Champlain, and the coastal Champlain Valley. Hops production was an important pursuit; with Vermont comprising 8 percent of the national hops market in 1850.<sup>10</sup> Some farmers specialized in raising poultry or animal breeding. The most famous horse breeder was Justin Morgan of Randolph Center, who began breeding his prized horses, which still bare his name today, in the 1790s. Probably the most iconic of specialty farm pursuits is that of maple sugaring, which was a crucial income generator for hill farmers with access to a sugar bush and few other advantages. Vermont became the nation's leading maple producer by the end of the nineteenth century, and the importance of sugaring to the state identity and reputation has not subsided since.<sup>11</sup>



**Illustration 3.** Pig farming in the Champlain Valley, 1940s.

Source: Anne O'Grady

One of the most popular specialty pursuits in Vermont was sheep farming. Merino sheep first arrived from Spain in 1811. Amidst the unrest of the Peninsular War, American consul William Jarvis convinced Spanish royalty to sell him 400 of Spain's prized merino sheep, as well as a Shepherd and a shepherd dog, to raise on his Weathersfield property.<sup>12</sup> The sheep did exceptionally well, developing thick and desirable fleece. Jarvis sold breeding stock to farmers around Vermont and sheep quickly became the primary livestock of Vermont farmers, and wool production the main pursuit of manufacturers.<sup>13</sup> Labeled "merino fever" and "merino mania," farmers were quick to embrace sheep, which required less attention than other livestock and could graze on hilltops that were useless for most other agricultural purposes. The sheep craze reached its height in the mid-1830s and Vermont was respected as one of the nation's top wool producers. In 1840, 1,681,000 sheep lived in Vermont, outnumbering the human population six-to-one.<sup>14</sup>

The impact of sheep farming was significant for Vermont's landscape and farmers. Since even the worst of soils could support merinos, hills were deforested throughout the state to make room for pasture. By 1850 about 75 percent of Vermont's land was cleared.<sup>15</sup> Naturally, the vast deforestation only expedited the soil erosion. However, the downfall of Vermont's sheep industry was not caused by depletion of environmental resources, but rather by economic factors. The decline in sheep farming was partially the result of a reduction of protective tariffs in the 1840s, which lowered the price of wool. Competition with farmers in the West, who could raise sheep at a fraction of the cost to farmers in the East, also contributed to the decline.<sup>16</sup> Canal systems also meant faster transport of product for Mid-western

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<sup>1</sup> In 1835, wool sold for 57 cents a pound. The rate was lowered to 25 cents a pound in the late 1840s after the removal of protective tariffs. The average annual cost of keeping a sheep in the East was between one and two dollars a head, as compared to 25 cents a head in the West.

farmers and a further disadvantage to Vermont farmers, as the main lines of the Rutland and Burlington Railroad and the Vermont Central Railroad were not constructed until 1850. Sheep were no longer a means to prosperity.

As the profitability of sheep declined, attention turned toward the potential of dairy cattle. The move to cows as staple livestock was already in swing by mid-century, especially in the northern counties, which transitioned to dairying more quickly than those in the south. The Vermont Board of Agriculture (VBA) encouraged the shift, and in its 1868 annual report demonstrated the difference by comparing the gross annual income from keeping five cows or forty sheep, assuming that the amount of feed, land and housing required for each group of animals were equal:

**Table 1. Gross Annual Income—Five Cows vs. Forty Sheep**

<b>Sale of calves</b>	<b>\$40.00</b>	<b>Sale of lambs</b>	<b>\$120.00</b>
<b>Cheese manufacturing</b>	<b>\$250.00</b>	<b>Wool production</b>	<b>\$90.00</b>
<b>Butter manufacturing</b>	<b>\$67.50</b>		
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$357.50</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$210.00</b>

Source: Vermont Board of Agriculture, Annual Report, 1868.

Published in Harold Meeks, *Time and Change in Vermont: A Human Geography*

The transition to specialty dairy farming was not simple for farmers. Sheep were much easier to care for than cows, as they could graze all day and require little attention or care. Cows graze all day, but also consume hay and corn for feed, and they need to be milked twice a day, everyday. One cow requires the same amount of

land and feed as about five sheep.<sup>17</sup> While the commitment of additional time and financial resources was significant, the task was manageable for farmers previously accustomed to growing a range of crops and raising a variety of livestock on a single farm.



GROUP OF AYRSHIRE CATTLE.

**Illustration 4.** Scottish Avershire dairy cattle

Source: Central Vermont Railroad, “Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont, and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain,” 1894

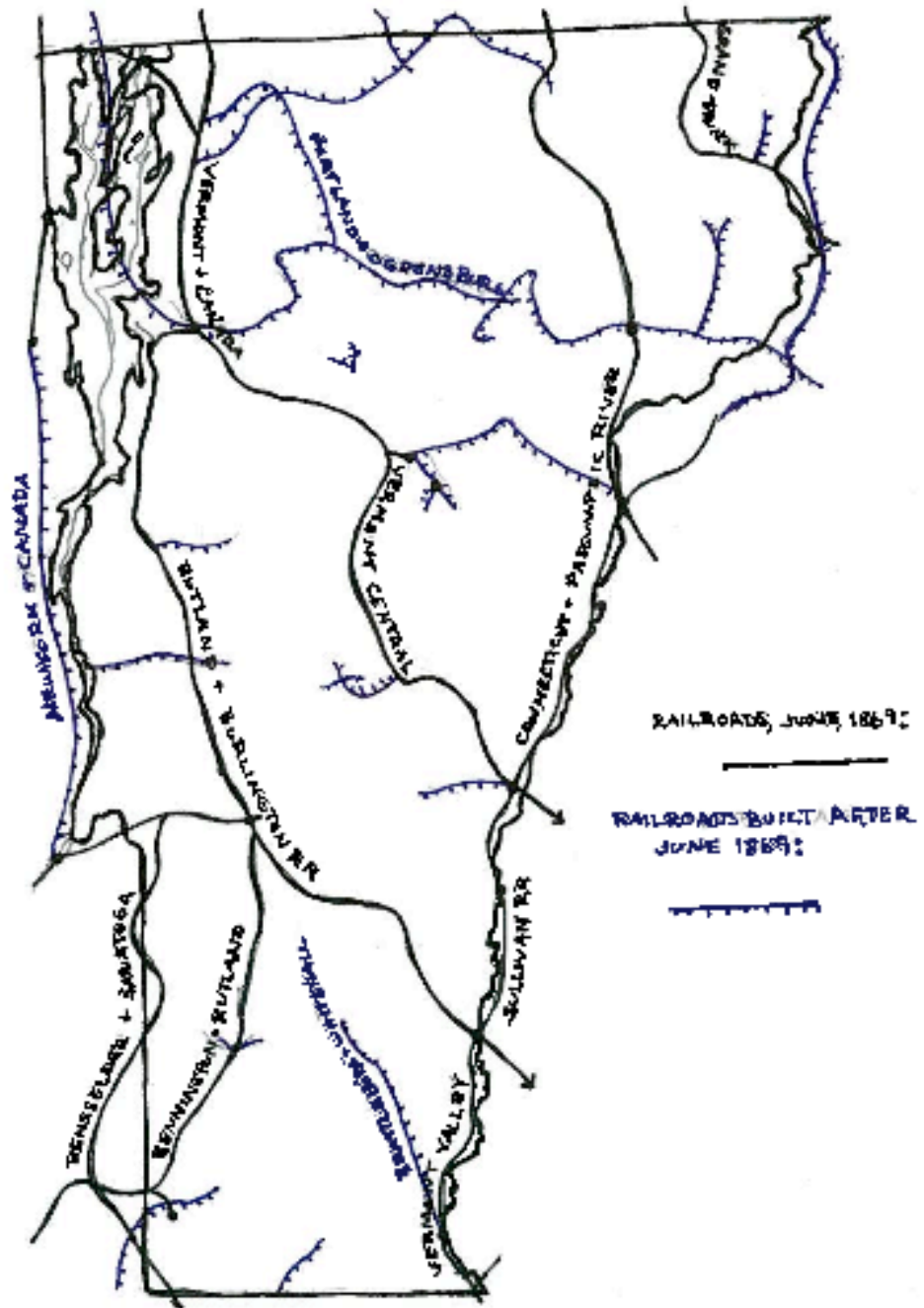
The high return on dairy products was a major incentive for farmers, who stood to make a good profit on raising dairy cows. The demand for Vermont’s dairy products was high in the industrialized Eastern cities of Boston, Providence, Hartford, and New York. The growth of the railroads in Vermont helped provide farmers with access to these southern markets. The main lines of the Rutland and Burlington Railroad and the Vermont Central Railroad were constructed in 1850 and continued to grow until 1870, after which smaller connecting lines were added to increase access to major routes.





**Illustration 5.** Jersey cattle

Source: Central Vermont Railroad, "Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont, and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain," 1894



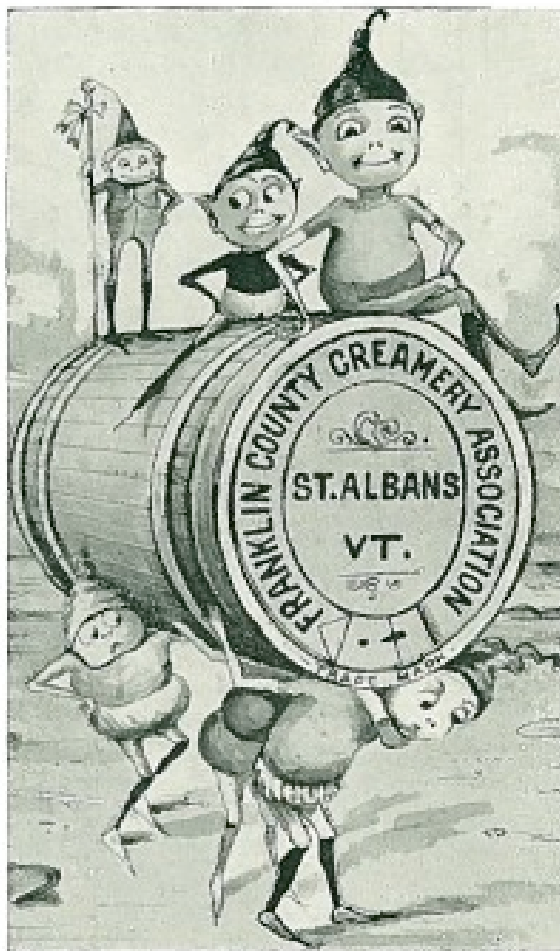
**Illustration 6.** Vermont railroads as of June, 1869 and railroads constructed after June, 1869.

Source: Harold A. Meeks, *Time and Change in Vermont: A Human Geography*

As indicated in the previous VBA chart from 1868, butter and cheese were the first dairy products shipped to urban markets, because they transported easier than fluid milk. Farmers formed cooperative creameries to reduce the labor required in making butter or cheese at home. The first of such butter creameries in New England was opened in Shelburne in 1879.<sup>18</sup> By 1900, there were 180 butter creameries located throughout the state.<sup>19</sup> Butter could last about six days in transport without refrigeration, so it was limited to relatively close markets, and so farms in southern Vermont primarily served the cities of southern New England. Cheese, however, could last almost indefinitely, so more farmers in northern portions of the state could ship the product. Cheese making, like butter making, was a traditional pursuit of the subsistence farm family. Cheese was produced in higher gross quantities in the private homes in the state from the early-to-mid-nineteenth century than through the factory production of the latter half of the century. Factory production of cheese reached its peak in Vermont in 1900 with 66 factories located throughout the state, a modest quantity when compared with factories in other states, such as 1,227 in Wisconsin, 1,150 in New York, as well as higher numbers in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan.<sup>20</sup>

Fluid milk shipment began in the 1880s, when refrigerated rail cars made the shipment of fresh milk possible from northern Vermont to southern cities in the “Boston milkshed.” About 75 percent of milk was shipped under the “leased-car system,” in which milk dealers paid a low annual rate to lease entire refrigerated cars from the railroad.<sup>21</sup> Under the leased-car system carriers could charge more for shipment of milk by the can than for larger quantities, and single cans were kept in baggage areas without proper icing.<sup>22</sup> These factors, combine with high tariffs on freight shipments with separate rates issued by each carrier, made it difficult for small independent farmers to afford shipping fluid milk. Pressure from state governments

CAPACITY 25,000 POUNDS DAILY.



THE LARGEST IN THE WORLD.

**ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE TRADE.**

**T**HE MANAGEMENT of the Franklin County Vermont Creamery Association beg to announce to the trade that they are now prepared to furnish the best grades of Creamery butter, put up in prints, 5-lb., 10-lb., 20-lb., 30-lb., and 50-lb. tubs, to suit customers. Our facilities, for butter making include all the most modern and improved appliances for the rapid manipulation of milk and cream, the maintenance of cleanliness in all of the operations necessary in the process of manufacture, and the securing of the finest quality in the product. Our facilities, too, for Cold Storage, and for final shipment, are the best attainable, and such as to warrant the prompt and satisfactory filling of orders. Correspondence is solicited, in full confidence that the product of our establishment will prove all that the most exacting taste can demand. All orders to be sent direct to

**Franklin County Creamery Association,**

**ST. ALBANS, VERMONT.**

**Illustration 7.** An 1894 advertisement for the Franklin County Creamery Association promoting the sale of their butter.

Source: Central Vermont Railroad, "Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont, and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain," 1894

# "IT'S TOO BAD TO WHIP THE BABY SO,"



But the Interests of the Public Demand it.

The dairymen must be supplied with the BEST apparatus, and when they recognize the U. S. SEPARATOR as such and give it their preference over the De Laval "Baby." "Mamma De Laval" is terribly agitated for her "child," and seeks to stop the castigation by an old trick of hers, which is proving as unavailing now as it has proved when she has tried it before.

This scheme of the De Laval Co. of unearthing an unused patent upon which to sue a purchaser and user of our machine who called down their wrath upon himself by discarding their No. 2 "Baby" Separator for our No. 5 U. S. Separator, is too transparent, and although bolstered up by an alarming array (?) of legal lights, it will not have the desired effect.

This patent, which is on the gearing, has but one claim, a combination of fifteen elements, and is too cumbersome for even the De Laval Co. themselves to use, and we certainly would not. The U. S. dairy size Separators are beating the De Laval "Baby" Separator in every contest on the merits. This shows why the De Laval Co. are so anxious to stop its sales that they resort to such methods in attempts to scare the dairymen; but U. S. keeps on Whipping the "Baby" just the same.

We guarantee to protect all purchasers  
in the peaceful use of our Separator.

Send for Pamphlets containing Full Particulars and Description of the Machine.  
**VERMONT FARM MACHINE CO., Bellows Falls, Vt.**

**Illustration 8.** Advertisement for the Vermont Farm Machine Co. "U.S." separator. In the midst of fighting a law suit filed by the De Laval Co. of Poughkeepsie, NY, the Vermont Farm Machine Co. advertises their superior, and patriotic, cream separators to dairymen across the nation.

Source: *Ohio Farmer*, April 20, 1893

eventually drove carriers to reduce the cost of shipping single cans and provide icing for all milk, and the decision in the New England Milk Case of 1916 reduced tariff rates and abolished the leased-car system, making the shipment of fluid milk much more economically feasible and widespread.<sup>1123</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed discussion of the leased car system and the influence of railway rates on the dairy industry in New England and New York, see Chapter 6 in *Railroads: Rates and Regulation* by William Zebina Ripley.

The growing emphasis on the dairy industry, augmented by the transition to fluid milk shipment, had profound effects on the nature and size of Vermont farms. Over several decades following the beginning of fluid milk shipment in the 1880s, the number of farms in Vermont decreased, but the size of these remaining farms increased. A chart from the United States Census of Agriculture published in 1945 highlights this trend:

**Table 2. Number and Size of Farms in Vermont, 1880-1940**

Year	Number of farms	Average acreage per farm
1880	35,522	138
1890	32,573	135
1900	33,104	143
1910	32,709	143
1920	29,075	146
1930	24,898	156
1940	23,582	156

Source: United States Census of Agriculture 1945, Volume II. 1950 Census of Agriculture (Preliminary).

Published in Phd thesis by Robert Prindle Story, *The Finance and Management of Vermont Dairy Farms*

The most profitable of dairy farms survived the consolidation trend and these were mainly located in fertile valleys where cows could easily graze and soils supported greater crops of grains, hay and corn for feed. Examining national trends in farmland values reveal the successes of these larger dairy farms in relation to farms in poor agricultural regions of Vermont. In 1910 the average value of farmland in the U.S. was \$32.40 per acre. In most of Vermont the value was between \$10 and \$25, with values of less than \$10 in the Northeast Kingdom and Connecticut River Valley.<sup>24</sup> By



1920 the average farm and building value in the U.S. was \$69.38 per acre. Most of Vermont's land was between \$25 and \$50 per acre, maintaining the same ratio to national land values as in 1910. However, the wealthy and fertile Champlain Valley and North Western portions of the state averaged between \$50 and \$100 per acre, representing a large relative increase in the value of farmlands in this region compared to all others in the state. In the Northeast Kingdom, Vermont's weakest agricultural area, farmland was still valued at less than \$25 per acre, marking a stable ratio with national values but showing greater disparity with Vermont's most valuable farmland.<sup>25</sup>



**Illustration 9.** The Yandow family tending to a calf on their dairy farm in Essex, Vermont in the 1950s.

Source: Photo courtesy of Anne O'Grady

The general shift toward dairying introduced a major change in the state's appearance and landscape. At the height of the sheep craze, hilltops were grazed over to look like lawns, and vast quantities of land were deforested. Dairying introduced a landscape of flat cow pastures located in valleys, punctuated by large barns for cattle and hay, and silos to hold the Indian corn used as feed. The state government encouraged the reforestation of the Green Mountains. As trees returned to the hilltops the shepherd's landscape disappeared, and the iconic dairying landscape of Vermont emerged.

The trends of farm consolidation continued well into the twentieth century as new technology improved efficiency on larger farms with the means to afford it. The gasoline powered tractor of the 1890s, milking machines at the turn of the century, and the early twentieth century introduction of homogenization and pasteurization, all revolutionized the dairying industry. Despite the importance and prominence of dairy farms, specialty farming in the form of sugaring, apple orchards, crops, and animal breeding remained an important component of Vermont agriculture. The evolution of agricultural tradition in Vermont over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century reshaped both livelihood and landscape throughout the state, but these transitions were not as fluid or painless as a simple review of agricultural trends may suggest. Many other changes were occurring simultaneously in Vermont, perhaps the most significant being the shifting size and nature of the population.

### ***Out-migration and Immigration***

While many of Vermont's farmers were able to adjust to shifts in agricultural practice, some finding success and others just getting by, much of the population was struggling for mere survival. The hardest hit farmers were those in the hills regions, whose poor soil barely supported a small subsistence farm, let alone a larger



commercial farm like those prospering in the valley regions. Agricultural opportunities in the American West and job possibilities in industrialized cities lured many Vermonters out of state, particularly younger generations. Out-migration was a persistent phenomenon after the 1840s, with an average of roughly 40% of those born in Vermont living outside the state from the 1850s through the turn of the century.<sup>26</sup>

**Table 3. Numbers of Native Vermonters Living Outside Vermont and Percentage of Emigrants, 1850-1900**

Year	Natives of Vermont residing in the U.S.	Natives of Vermont residing outside Vermont	Percentage of emigrants
1850	377,741	145,655	38.6
1860	413,852	174,765	42.2
1870	420,978	177,164	42.1
1880	430,041	178,261	41.5
1890	422,359	172,769	40.9
1900	416,672	168,542	40.4

Source: Harold Fisher Wilson, *The Hill Country of Northern New England: Its Social and Economic History 1790-1930*

While the situation appeared desperate, the exodus Vermont experienced was typical of older agrarian communities. All of Northern New England was experiencing similar patterns of out-migration, though in smaller portions relative to population. The flight of youth and other able-bodied workers left behind more “staid, uniform, and uneventful” rural communities.<sup>27</sup>

While social stability has its strong points, Vermonters, like everyone else, wanted and needed their towns and villages to prosper. Where collections of family subsistence farms had once supported small schools and other institutions,

depopulation left these smaller communities unable to sustain themselves. Abandoned farms were scattered throughout the state, and the earliest settled communities were often the first to be vacated. Magazines and newspapers around the country popularized conceptions of Northern New England featuring abandoned communities. In an 1866 edition of the Chicago-based publication *Prairie Farmer*, one man wrote about the appearance of the Vermont landscape that, “[a] western man notices the old, dilapidated appearance of everything he sees, the building, fences, orchards and—yes, so many old, gray headed men with patches on their knees.”<sup>28</sup> Two decades later, the same conversations were still taking place. “In the old counties of Bennington, Windham, Windsor and Rutland, [were found] plenty of evidence of deserted farms and decaying towns along either side of the mountain range, and these deserted farms were not being reoccupied by any returning wanderer.”<sup>29</sup>

Noticeable in the mid-to-late nineteenth century discussions on farm abandonment was the lure of the prosperous West. John Quincy Adams’ quote, “Westward the Star of Empire takes its way” remained the mantra of the day. The popular press recognized the value of western agriculture and the resourcefulness of Vermonters who chose to remain in their native state. “Against such progress here in the West...Vermont...has stood still, or perhaps retrograded, in everything but intellect and sterling merit.”<sup>30</sup> The consensus, however, was that most Vermonters had no choice but to desert their increasingly depressed surroundings in search of a better life. “...[T]he always rough, and now worn, out hills of New England...warrant the young and enterprising but poor man, or the rich one if he chooses, to look west for an improvement of his fortune.”<sup>31</sup> Other papers insisted that, “ambition often leads to the abandonment of a small yet sure thing for something greater, better in imagination.”<sup>32</sup> The press dually acknowledged the quality of Vermonters, both those who remained in their state and those who left. These public statements of admiration

toward the ambitious Vermonter would lay important groundwork for later campaigns promoting the resettlement of abandoned farm buildings.

Though out-migration, a virtually stagnant population and an increasingly abandoned landscape presented major issues for Vermont, the state was not without some new arrivals. Immigration, while occurring at a significantly lower rate than in all other New England states, did bring some new ethnic groups to Vermont. Irish were among the early immigrants, with large numbers working on the construction of the railroads beginning in 1849. In 1850, about half of the 10.5 percent of foreign-born Vermonters were Irish.<sup>33</sup> Italians were another major ethnic group in the state, arriving in the highest numbers around the turn of the twentieth century to work in granite and marble quarry towns such as Barre, West Rutland and Proctor.

However, French Canadians were by far the dominant new ethnic group in Vermont in the nineteenth century. There were three major waves of French Canadian immigration. The first took place before 1830, the second after 1840, and the third after 1880.<sup>iii</sup> The three migrations each settled immigrants in the northern industrial towns of the Champlain Valley. However, French Canadian migration was unique from other ethnic movements because there were large numbers of people drawn to rural farming communities in addition to the more populous industrial areas.

French Canadians came from a longstanding farm tradition. Agriculture in New France had been based on the seigneurial system, a type of feudal order in which *habitants*, or farming tenants, worked and paid taxes on land belonging to the

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<sup>iii</sup> The first migration before 1830 was mainly the result of the dwindling availability of farmland and poor harvests in Quebec. The second migration was spurred by the 1837 Papineau Rebellion, the result of increasing tensions between English and French in Quebec. Vermont offered a safe refuge to displaced French political agitators. Migrants following 1880 were attracted by the opportunities afforded by Northern mill towns and nearby farmlands.

landlord, or *seigneur*. The system was in place from 1627 until its abolition in 1854, though some rents were collected for decades afterward. The traditions of this early agricultural system remained strong in French Canadians, whose farms followed the seigneurial field pattern. All land lots were long, narrow strips with access to a water source; in Quebec this was primarily the Saint Lawrence River. Land was passed down equally to offspring, and so over time lots became thinner in order to allow easy access to water for all farms. Much like Vermont farmers of the early to mid-nineteenth century, French Canadian farmers were skilled in self-sufficiency. They grew wheat and other grains, kept cows for butter, cheese and milk, raised poultry and pigs and hunted meat for protein, grew a variety of fruits and vegetables, and were just as fond of maple sugaring as Vermonters. Naturally, French Canadian immigrants were drawn to agricultural activities in Vermont, and were as comfortable settling on farms as in industrialized towns. By 1930, two-thirds of Vermont’s foreign-born rural residents were French Canadian.<sup>34</sup>

**Table 4. Growth of the French Canadian Population in Vermont, 1887-1900**

Year	French Canadian Population in Vermont	Total Rural Population of Vermont	Total Population of Vermont
1887	29,000		
1890	33,000		332,422
1900	55,000	267,810	343,641

Source: “The Franco-Americans in Vermont” in *Vermont History* Vol. XXVII No. 1 (January 1960) by Robert L. Picher. and the U.S. Census Bureau

The French Canadian story is an important one in Vermont’s history. Their gravitation toward rural areas changed the nature of these isolated communities,

slowed the devastating effects of depopulation, and challenged the conventional myth of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant Yankee Vermonter. In the early twentieth century, Catholic French Canadians were often portrayed as a deviant social group, both as a threat to the values of good Yankees and to other ethnic minority groups trying to make a living in the state. For example, one Italian man in an interview describing the 1922 Barre strike in which granite quarry owners arranged for poor French Canadians to replace union workers, referred to the French as “a bunch of squawkers and suckers.”<sup>35</sup> Such language was mild, compared with the comments about hereditary inferiority and criminality that established community leaders would make in the 1920s and 30s during the quest to improve the quality of “real Vermonters.” While Catholic French Canadian immigrants were unenthusiastically welcomed to Vermont, tourists and out of state visitors were encouraged to come make Vermont their summer travel destination.

### ***The Origins of Tourism***

Vermont’s tourism industry of the mid-nineteenth century was comprised mainly of mountain hotels and mineral spring resorts. Similar types of vacation destinations were popular throughout the eastern United States, and Vermont was merely a small part of a much larger national trend. Americans of the mid-nineteenth century had high expectations for vacation locales; they were particularly attracted to wilderness areas where steep mountains and dense forests evoked an almost religious sense of awe and wonder. Such “sublime” landscapes drew the most visitors, and areas such as the White Mountains of New Hampshire, which are far more dramatic than Vermont’s comparatively demure Green Mountains, and the rocky seacoasts of Maine, were major competition for Vermont’s tourist industry. Generations of urbanites still felt too connected to their agrarian roots to desire a vacation in the countryside, so



**Illustration 10.** Vermont's highest peak, Mount Mansfield, depicted on a 1937 postcard.



**Illustration 11.** Close to the sublime, Smugglers Notch on a 1937 postcard.

despite Vermont's great variety of scenery, the pastoral nature of the Green Mountains failed to attract some vacationers. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, popular sentiment favored the picturesque landscape of rural farm life, and Vermont was viewed as a much more desirable vacation spot.

Vermont's mineral springs managed to attract visitors, despite the relatively tame appearance of the Green Mountains. The spring water was believed to provide many medicinal benefits through the consumption of the dissolved "mineral matter" in the magnesian and sulphurous springs.<sup>IV</sup> While the actual healing powers of the mineral springs are unverified, the ritual of socializing, seeing and being seen at the resorts was very much a part of American society. The wealthiest patrons probably stayed in Saratoga Springs, New York or Poland Spring, Maine, but Vermont was part of the resort network, albeit a more modest part.<sup>36</sup> The springs were discovered early in Vermont, with Clarendon's spring the first in 1776, Newbury in 1782, and Sheldon in 1783.<sup>37</sup> Many others were recognized before 1850 and by the late 1800s there were 131 named mineral springs in the state.<sup>38</sup>

Some minor spring resorts were constructed before 1850, but it was not until after that year, when the main lines of the Rutland and Burlington Railroad and the Vermont Central Railroad were complete, that the number of prominent resorts grew. By the 1880s, when other rail lines were completed, 85 percent, or twenty-five of the springs with associated resorts were located within five miles of a railroad.<sup>39</sup>

Transportation development helped boost the resort industry. The spring resorts began to decline in the 1860s due to the loss of southern patronage during the Civil War, the

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<sup>IV</sup> For an interesting discussion of the curative properties of the mineral spring water, including the practiced methods for consumption, see Meeks, *Time and Change in Vermont: A Human Geography*, chapter 6, pages 140-156.



high level of competition with neighboring states' resorts, and the evolving tastes of the public who were increasingly favoring more urban vacation destinations.<sup>40</sup>



**Illustration 12.** Highgate Springs, located on the Canadian border in Franklin County, was a popular tourist destination.

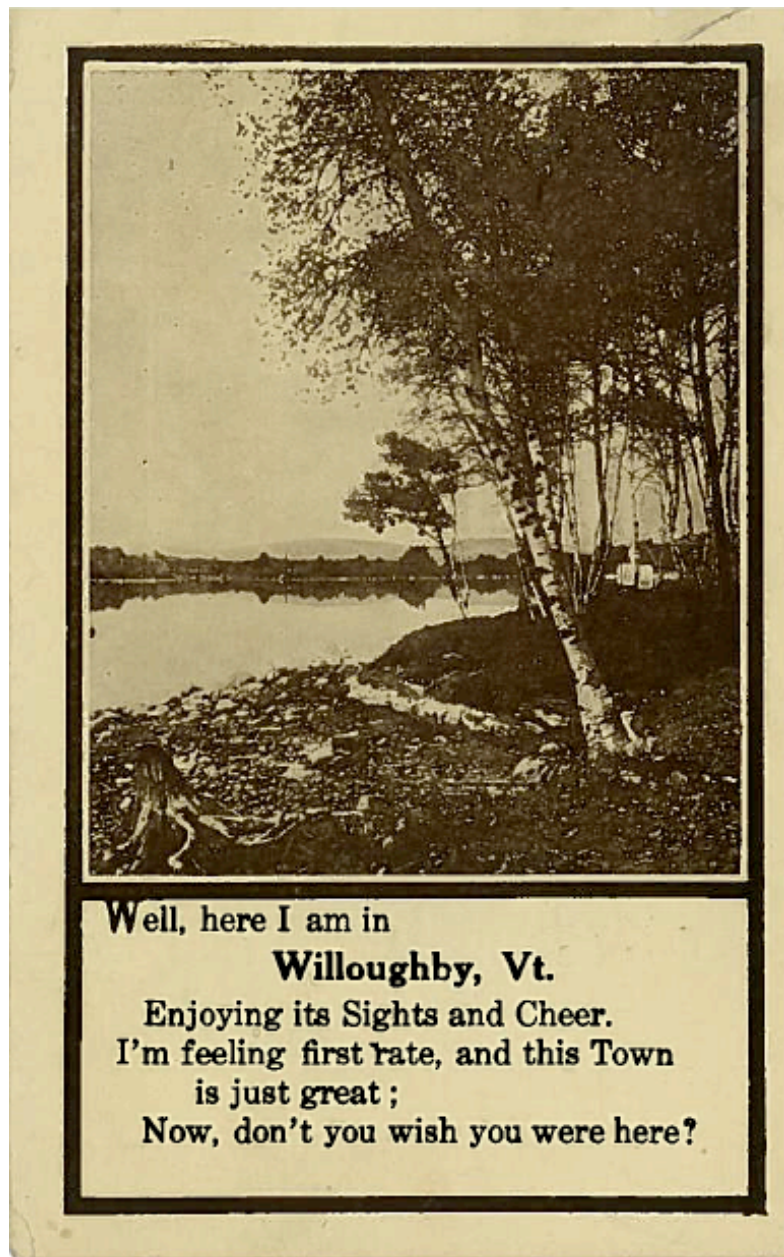
Source: Central Vermont Railroad, "Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont, and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain," 1894

Mountain hotels were more resilient than the mineral spring resorts, and they continued to prosper into the early decades of the twentieth century. The Willoughby Lake House was one example of a large resort whose patrons arrived on the railroad for a lakeside summer vacation, attracted by both the sublime and picturesque qualities of the varied landscape. Cecil Ballard Dyer, who as an adult wrote about his childhood visits to Willoughby in the 1890s, described a vacation spot typical of the experience of summering in Vermont. Dyer focused heavily on the roles of different social networks, or communities, in his retelling. One community consisted of the locals



who staffed the Willoughby Lake House and depended on income from summer visitors. Dyer was more interested in the community of visitors, the group to which he belonged as a young boy. He described the regulars at the resort as “very much one large family.”<sup>41</sup> The typical guests were, “a clientele of cultured and usually charming people, who savored their close association...School principals and teachers, business and professional men and their families from New York and New England.”<sup>42</sup> The Willoughby Lake House burned in the early 1900s, a fate shared by many of the large and aging resort buildings at the time. Despite the demise of many of the most opulent resorts, their model for the type of guests attracted and the distinct social networks established between visitors and native workers persisted in the Vermont tourist industry for several decades.

While the grand resorts helped shape Vermont’s image as a vacation destination, a parallel industry of farm boarding—in which families paid a nominal fee to live, and sometimes work, with a farm family—was an increasingly popular tourist activity in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Farm boarding was popular with middle-class vacationers following the national trend in favor of “picturesque” rural landscapes over the rugged sublime. Americans of the 1880s and 1890s were longing to experience, however briefly, the life of the yeoman farmer. Farm boarding offered families a nostalgic look at America’s rural past, the Jeffersonian Ideal still remaining in Vermont’s pastoral countryside. It was an opportunity to both rest in the country and “work” at farm chores, activities which benefited the body, mind and soul. Children were also said to benefit from the fresh air and small town atmosphere. Farm boarding was a means for vacationers to feel a greater sense of authenticity in their Vermont experience, living, working, and socializing with the natives as though they themselves were real farmers.



**Illustration 13.** A poetic postcard sent from Willoughby Lake in 1910. The back reads, “Dear Louise, I’m having a nice time here, With Love, Ida.”



VIEW OF ONE OF THE HOMES FOR SUMMER BOARDERS.

**Illustration 14.** A farmhouse used for boarders.

Source: Central Vermont Railroad, “Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont, and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain,” 1894

Farm boarding intensified the social issues raised by the resort industry, further focusing the pressure on individual families and small communities. Vermonters who took in guests put their lives on display, playing the role of both old-fashioned farmer and host to out-of-towners. Though shared living quarters brought people together in a physical sense, the dichotomy between locals and the visiting middle class was apparent. The experience was potentially disheartening for farm families who, growing increasingly dependent on tourist dollars to supplement meager incomes, exposed their private domestic life to strangers. Ultimately, the farm boarding experience helped shape Vermont’s campaign for vacationland status, centering on the notions of rural character and timelessness.<sup>v</sup>

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<sup>v</sup> For an excellent discussion of farm boarding, nostalgia, and the social implications of this early form of tourism, see: Harrison, *The View from Vermont*, chapter 1, pages 22-29.

## ***Conclusion***

Chapter one has described the state of Vermont in the nineteenth century, a period of growth and transition tempered by ties to rural tradition and scarcity of industry. Vermont was always something of a dark horse, with little chance of competition with the quantity of farms and the transportation capacities of New York State, the industry of Massachusetts, or the grandeur of the scenery of New Hampshire and Maine. Nonetheless, the story of Vermont is one of change and quiet growth. Agriculture blossomed from the practice of subsistence farms into a livelihood with potential for growth in the dairy industry or specialty operations. Modest resorts capitalized on the seclusion and beauty of landscape, qualities that hindered industrial expansion but set the stage for future growth of a tourism industry. Immigrants worked to improve rail infrastructure, work in the quarries and operate farms. Progress came to Vermont, but it was hardly ostentatious.

At the same time, many Vermonters struggled throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Prosperity was illusive for most of the population and comparatively small for those who managed to achieve it. Commercial success was not easy for farmers, much of Vermont's beautiful landscape was ill-suited for expansive agricultural production and transportation networks were poor relative to other states. As in much of Northern New England, depopulation, farm abandonment and the collapse of rural communities plagued the Green Mountains. Vermont in the nineteenth century was in a transitional state, growing and adapting beside larger national changes, but often lagging behind. By the turn of the twentieth century, Vermont's slowness and quaintness would prove to be one of her most powerful assets.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE REAL VERMONTER IN SUMMER HOME PROMOTION

In the latter half of the nineteenth century many of Vermont's oldest hill towns had reached a point of crisis. The agricultural and economic shifts of the century had depleted populations in the counties where poor soils, a constrained growing climate, and their remote location made the sites unsuitable for adjustment to the new dairy economy. The abandoned farms left a scar on the landscape of Vermont. They were visible reminders of once prosperous hill farms, and silent monuments to an esteemed tradition of independence, now quickly being reclaimed by the land. Vermont's Board of Agriculture launched a campaign in the 1890s to utilize abandoned farm properties for modest agricultural purposes and summer residences. In the following years, the Bureau of Publicity, with additional help from state governors and railroad companies, continued the campaign. Chapter two explores the promotional literature of these agencies and the speeches of influential politicians. The first half of the chapter reviews the content of these early publicity efforts, focusing on their appeal to agriculturalists and those in need of accessible and beautiful scenery. The second half of the chapter looks at the image of the Real Vermonter presented in promotional literature, examining the origins and appeal of these mythologized stereotypes.

#### *Selling Vermont*

*"If the world were to begin anew in these latter days, the Garden of Eden could be pleasantly located in almost any part of the State."<sup>43</sup>*

-Vermont State Board of Agriculture, 1903

In 1891, the Vermont Board of Agriculture created its first pamphlet titled “Resources and Attractions of Vermont.” The pamphlet, and subsequent releases, was meant to bring visitors into the state to invest in worthy properties. Early publications focused on the sale of inexpensive farmland for agricultural purposes and for summer home development. Potential buyers were encouraged either to buy an existing farm house to renovate or to build their own summer cottage, usually on lakeside property. Other agencies, such as the Vermont Central Railroad, issued similar pamphlets appealing to vacationers. By 1903, the Board of Agriculture’s pamphlets expanded in breadth, including such titles as “Vermont, Its Opportunities for Investment in Agriculture, Manufacture, Minerals, Its Attraction for Summer Homes” and 1905’s slight variation on the same theme, “Vermont Farms for Summer Homes and Opportunities Offered for Investment in Agriculture, Manufactures and Minerals.”

In 1911, the duties of the Board of Agriculture were supplanted by the Vermont Bureau of Publicity, operated in the office of the Secretary of State, which published similar pamphlets touting both the resources and summer home offerings of the state. From 1916 onward, most booklets focused exclusively on farm and residential properties for sale. The Bureau of Publicity played an important role in creating an image and reputation for the state and politicians were aware of the sway the Bureau held over potential visitors. In gubernatorial addresses from the era nearly all governors called for improved roads to help travelers reach the state more easily, but many also increased the budget of the Bureau to research and advertise Vermont’s resources. Governor Prouty’s 1908 Inaugural address was the first to include a section explicitly titled “Advertising Vermont,” and by 1927 Governor Billings was suggesting an increase of the Bureau’s budget to \$25,000 up from \$10,000 in 1925.<sup>44</sup> The publications of the Board of Agriculture, Bureau of Publicity, formal gubernatorial addresses, as well as the many newspaper classifieds listing properties

for sale around the North East all present a precise, cohesive and masterfully designed portrait of Vermont.

**Table 5. Number of Farms Sold in Vermont by County, 1891-1892<sup>45</sup>**

County	1892	1891
Addison	133	129
Bennington	56	129
Caledonia	127	125
Chittenden	68	84
Essex	86	46
Franklin	172	130
Grand Isle	4	2
Lamoille	95	67
Orange	213	218
Orleans	231	159
Rutland	106	93
Washington	184	199
Windham	144	168
Windsor	295	288

Source: Vermont State Board of Agriculture, 1893

The Board of Agriculture was an appropriate organization to initiate the summer home trend because abandoned farms were plethoric and held great potential to draw investors. Beginning with their 112-paged pamphlet in 1891, the Board surveyed state residents yearly to gather a comprehensive list of abandoned or

unwanted properties for sale. These represented an estimated half of the total abandoned properties in the state. Published in their 1893 pamphlet, Table 5 represents the number of farms sold in each county during the first two years of publications.

Unfortunately, there is no formal study on the actual number of farms-turned-summer homes in the state. However, certain regions were more prone to becoming residential than others during the early years of promotion. The southernmost portions of Vermont, including the Connecticut River Valley on the west and Bennington County on the east were the earliest to develop a strong summer-home market. Close proximity to urban centers such as Boston and New York State certainly made these areas more desirable. Manchester, Dorset, Arlington, Peru, Wilmington and Woodstock were all popular summer communities. Lakeside communities that could be accessed by rail lines were also developed early on. Areas such as Greensboro on Lake Caspian, Lake Bomoseen, Lake Dunmore, and Lake Willoughby all supported large summer colonies in the 1890s.<sup>46</sup> The more remote areas of the state were repopulated as roads and other transit improved in the early 1900s. While some areas of the state were more notorious for summer people than others, virtually every community had some summer residents and properties for sale listed in the Board of Agriculture's brochures. Every Vermont town, village and city had a stake in the way the Board and others went about promoting summer homes.

Since it was widely known many Vermont farmers abandoned their land to move to the more profitable west, the Board of Agriculture also undertook a campaign to disprove the assumption that Vermont's hill country was useless for farming. It was generally accepted that abandoned hillside farms were to be sold to tourists for summer homes. Visitors were not encouraged to buy farms in more fertile areas that could still be used for agriculture. As stated during a meeting of the Vermont





**Illustration 15.** Postcard image of Lake Bomoseen hotels, 1937.



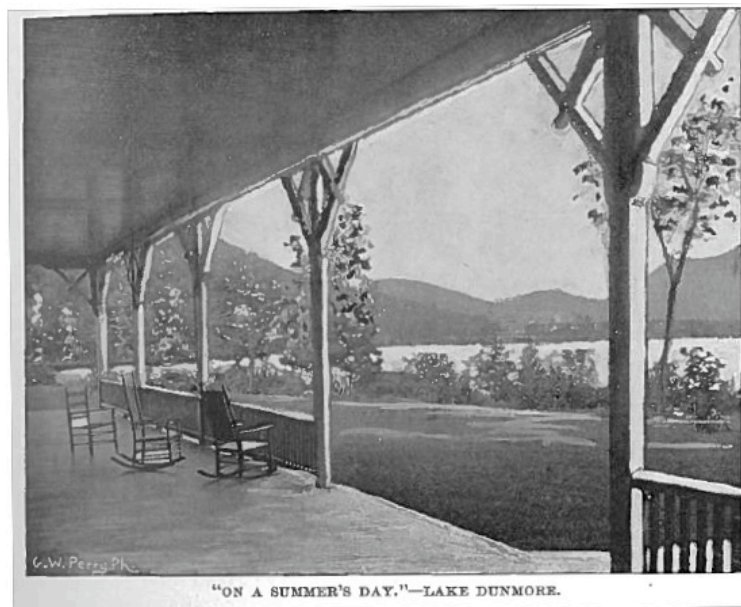
**Illustration 16.** A photo of Lake Dunmore in the early 1890's shows lakeside development.

Source: Central Vermont Railroad, "Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont, and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain," 1894



**Illustration 17.** Advertisements for Lake Dunmore highlight the rustic and natural qualities of the area.

Source: Central Vermont Railroad, “Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont, and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain,” 1894



**Illustration 18.** Relaxing on the “piazza,” the front porch of a hotel, was a popular summer pastime.

Source: Central Vermont Railroad, “Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont, and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain,” 1894

Commission on Country Life in 1931:

The state has never encouraged people to buy fertile farms for summer homes. There are cases when wealthy people do buy fertile farms and make a fine estate out of them. Later, when these people die or sell, this last stage is worst than the first.<sup>47</sup>

The entire function of a second home industry in Vermont was to provide economic and social benefit to support the main agricultural economy, not supplant it.

Nonetheless, the Board of Agriculture made a case for even some of the worst land being usable for farming. The 1891 pamphlet's section on Orange County, which had one of the largest numbers of farms changing hands in 1891-92, explained that "[t]he general surface of the County is quite hilly, but the hills are not so high as to render them unfit for farming purposes, and in many sections the richest farming land is found on the height of land....Where by reason of being rough or stony it is unfit for tillage, it affords excellent pasturage."<sup>48</sup>

Promotional literature aimed to undo Vermont's reputation as "a rough and stony little State," by disproving the myths of North Eastern depopulation and western immigration.<sup>49</sup> Sometimes rumors of depopulation were dismissed outright, with claims that "there are very few abandoned farms in Vermont. Our farmers were never more prosperous or more contented."<sup>50</sup> The content of these pamphlets suggest the fallacy of this statement. In the booklet "Vermont Farms and Residential Properties FOR SALE 1916," three out of five properties listed in the mountain town of Rochester in Windsor County were listed as abandoned. Descriptions for these abandoned properties, which were 232 acres, 145 acres, and 86 acres, included the caveat, "good roads but steep hills."<sup>51</sup>

Brochures were more truthful in their claims about Vermont's advantages as an older, thoroughly settled areas as compared to the open west. Despite its rural character, many urban conveniences were available to farmers. By 1930, 72% of Vermont's farms had running water, 25% had water piped to the bathrooms, 62% had

telephones, 64% had automobiles and 19% had trucks.<sup>52</sup> Most farmers and rural residents had access to town on “improved” roads, usually graveled if not paved. These percentages of comforts and conveniences were all high above the national average for 1930. Even decades before 1930, farm for sale brochures highlighted the creature comforts afforded to farmers living in Vermont:

Why should an American home-seeker brave the isolation and discomforts of the far-away Canadian Northwest, incident to pioneer life, when he can have all the advantages of a settled community in Vermont. Life is better worth the living in Vermont than it is under an alien flag in a remote region, well up toward the frost line, and where practically all is staked on a single crop.<sup>53</sup>

The diversity of crops and livestock opportunities, the basis of the subsistence farming tradition, was another consideration for the agriculturalist. Among the pursuits advertised were corn, barley, buckwheat, dairying, butter, sheep, Morgan horses, apples, maple sugar, and forestry. Dairying and fluid milk sales were the backbone of



**Illustration 19.** A photographer from the Farm Security Administration captures native Vermonters collecting sap to make maple sugar in North Bridgewater, 1940. Maple sugaring was an attractive pursuit for newcomers who stayed year round.

Source: Scott E, Hastings, Jr., and Elsie R. Hastings, *Up in the Morning Early: Vermont Farm Families in the Thirties*





**Illustration 20.** Haying season in Vermont, a necessity of the dairy farm.

Source: Photo courtesy of Anne O'Grady

the agricultural economy of the time, yet for the out-of-towner with resources, free time, and an interest in trying something new, Vermont did offer a variety of interesting opportunities.

Many men were lured to Vermont by the prospect of a simple farm life. Some of these gentleman farmers, or “fancy” farmers, were interested in attempting agricultural pursuits in a leisurely fashion. Others hired farm hands to tend their land as they watched, and some merely liked the idea of owning their own farm, no matter how operationally challenged. Land was inexpensive and conveniently close to the urban centers of the East, though actually running a farm could be quite costly, it was a showy and entertaining activity for the well-off. In a 1903 newspaper article on the subject, one gentleman farmer was quoted as telling his visiting guests, “Gentlemen, I offer you champagne or milk; they cost me just the same.”<sup>54</sup> Years later, author Sinclair Lewis, one of the many literary figures famously attracted to rural Vermont, summed up the notion of the gentleman farmer as it related to his own life. “It’s no fun being a dilettante farmer, if you have to farm, any more than it’s fun being a dilettante writer, if you have to write.”<sup>55</sup>

The rise in such dilettante farmers was probably aided by the literature of the Board of Agriculture and Bureau of Publicity, which highlighted both the cheapness and fertility of Vermont land. The gentlemen farmers, who were often more interested in play farming than real farming, presented an interesting quandary to those working to rejuvenate rural Vermont. These men certainly brought new wealth and blood to the state, something all communities needed in some form. However, these men bought working farms, farms that could be put to better use by actual farmers who would make a living off the land and help boost the state’s important agricultural economy. It was said that “[the fancy farmer] reclaims the land and its structures for a

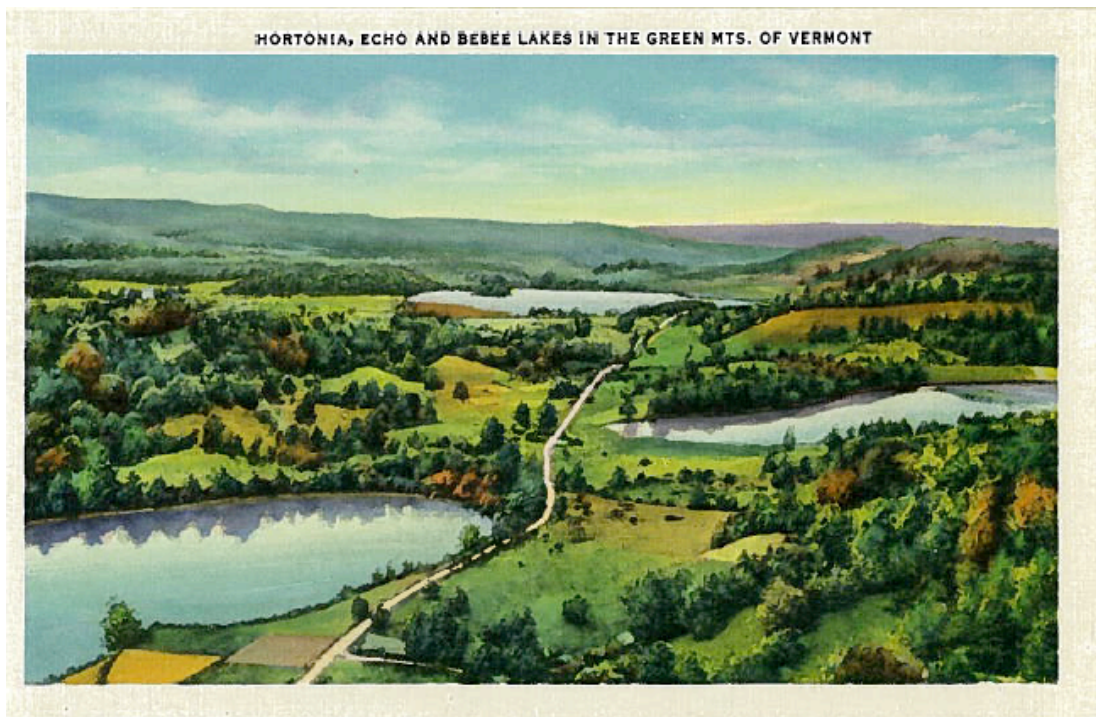
new farm heritage, and as a pioneer of the refluent tide of wealth flowing to New England's picturesque country sites he is at least of value as a symptom and symbol."<sup>56</sup>

Many members of the "refluent tide" were not attracted to Vermont by the prospect of owning a working farm, but rather by promises of scenic vistas and relaxing natural spaces. The concept of America's wilderness and the need to preserve rugged, awe-inspiring natural places was growing in popular sentiment in the early decades of the twentieth century. The young National Parks system, combined with the vocal advocacy of environmentalists such as John Muir and his Sierra Club, brought environmental concerns to public consciousness. It was Vermonter George Perkins Marsh who, in *Man and Nature*, first warned of the destructive habits of mankind and the debilitating effects alteration of landscapes can have on natural systems, or what are now known as ecosystems. Though Marsh wrote extensively on problems in foreign lands, he was certainly influenced by the deforestation and overuse of land he witnessed growing up in Woodstock, Vermont. Marsh advised:

The establishment of an approximately fixed ratio between the two most broadly characterized distinctions of rural surface—woodland and plough land... would thus help us become, more emphatically, a well-ordered and stable commonwealth, and, not less conspicuously a people of progress.<sup>57</sup>

Vermont publicity campaigns used the increasing national interest in nature to their advantage. There was generally more interest in Wilderness landscapes than pastoral ones, but Vermont was blessed with a variety of scenery and a new reforestation campaign that made the agricultural landscape appear slightly less docile. As one Woodstock Inn advertisement put it, "[t]he charm of Vermont scenery is like that of a beautiful face, of which one never tires."<sup>58</sup> Governor Stanley C. Wilson, who made a series of radio addresses in June of 1931 encouraging visitors to summer in Vermont, made frequent comparisons to one of Europe's most favored landscapes.

“Vermont has been called the Switzerland of America. She presents without doubt the greatest variety of scenery in a small area of any part of America.”<sup>59</sup> Brochures explained that “[t]he scenery of Vermont is so varied that almost any demand for location can be satisfied. Quietness and seclusion may be secured without remoteness from good roads and the conveniences of modern life.”<sup>60</sup>



**Illustration 21.** A 1937 postcard displays Vermont’s wide variety of scenery.

Good roads were essential to the Vermont summer home and tourism industries. Every Governor addressed the issue as central to bringing visitors and their dollars into the state. In 1912, Governor John Mead spoke on the need to “open up some of the beauty spots of the state around our lakes and mountains.” In 1927, incoming Governor John Weeks explained that “as a public investment, and as a means of attracting summer visitors who may become permanent residents, good roads are no longer a luxury but a necessity.”<sup>61</sup> Nearly every promotional pamphlet



reassured visitors that road travel was easy in the state. The Central Vermont Railroad pamphlets advertised both the ease of driving and riding the rails. By 1928, it was estimated that on Vermont federal and state roads, most of which had gravel surfaces up until 1923, about 35.6 percent of passenger-car traffic was from out of state vehicles.<sup>62</sup>

The notion of variety was central to the promotion of Vermont as a summer home destination. Variety of scenery, activity and access were all important. The 1911 pamphlet, “Vermont: Designed by the Creator for the Playground of the Continent” explains the quest for variety best:

To the tourist, whether by automobile, on foot, by carriage or train, to the camper, the fisherman or the hunter, the mountain climber, the scientist, the seeker for natural curiosities, the artist and the photographer Vermont offers wondrous scenery, clear air, pure water, healthful conditions, a delightfully equable climate, good roads, and opportunities for varied amusements.<sup>63</sup>

Of course, all the variety in the world does little good for a vacationer who is not relaxed. Vermont’s rural quality was celebrated as a means of escape for busy city dwellers. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, one of Vermont’s most famous and influential writers of the early twentieth century, and whose substantial impact on the summer home industry is discussed in chapter three, was a strong proponent of the purity of rural Vermont life. In *Hillsboro People*, she quotes *Pritchell’s Hand-book of Economics*, “only in Hillsboro and places like it can one have ‘deep, full life and contact with the vitalizing stream of humanity.’<sup>64</sup> The “peace and comfort” and “rest and relaxation of the mind and body” afforded by secluded Vermont was a major selling point.<sup>65</sup> Urbanites were encouraged by the Board of Agriculture and Bureau of Publicity to view Vermont countryside as quaint, natural and peaceful.

A summer home nearing completion. The owner says: "We wanted a cozy, quiet place in the great out-of-doors where we could be assured of peace and quiet and enjoy a good view in this beautiful section of Vermont. The picture gives the reason for our having chosen the spot."



**Illustration 22.** A promotional photo emphasizes the “peace and quiet” of the Vermont countryside.

Source: Dorothy Canfield Fisher, “Summer Homes: An Open Letter,” 1932

The difficult and varied agricultural past of the land was acknowledged, as seen with phenomenon of the gentleman farmer, but Vermont’s landscape was overwhelming presented as a scenic wonder rather than an economic cornerstone. As one reporter wrote in 1937, “many approach Vermont with the sense that ‘they have escaped from sophistication, ambition, speed, crowd and all the complexes of urban civilization; that here they are in the presence of a dear old spinster State.’”<sup>66</sup>

Promotional literature routinely called upon the hardworking businessman to come relax in the quaint country, implying that rural environments were not suited for such important work:

Ye dwellers of the sweltering city, toilers of the counting-house, devotees of the club, or the drawing-room, fly, if you may, for a while to these pure and undefiled altars of nature, and ask, and receive renewed physical, mental and moral life.<sup>67</sup>

Such language represents a cataclysmic shift in the perceptions of Vermont's farmlands and hillsides. This shift from a working landscape to a leisure-based landscape had consequences for the Vermonters, who found their relationship to the land being "renegotiated." Those whose ancestors worked the land, and those Vermonters who still did, became a selling point for the state. It presented an interesting paradox, where Vermonters were categorically different from the city folk being encouraged to visit, but not so different that the two groups wouldn't enjoy or benefit from each others company. In defining Vermont's scenery and healthful surrounding, promotional literature also navigated the tricky ground of defining what it meant to be a Real Vermonter, presenting natives in the best light possible in order to pique outside interest and reassure potential visitors of the quality of their new neighbors.

### *The Real Vermonter, Defined*

The definition of the Real Vermonter is woven from many separate threads, ranging from cultural identity to personal convictions. Words such as real, true, authentic, traditional or typical are often used interchangeably by sources discussing the nature and character of Vermont residents. The term "Real Vermonter" is used in this thesis to represent the uniform set of ideas and notions that distinguish the Vermont native from other Americans. Writers and historians past and present commented on what defines a typical native, and promotional literature for visitors have presented a similar picture of typicality in hopes of resonating with potential visitors. The underlying "correctness" of defining a Real Vermonter is obviously debatable, in the words of Jael Kent, "[t]here is only one quality that could be called 'typical' of the Vermonters I know. That is their extraordinarily irritating way of not conforming to any type."<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, there are some clear ideas on what ethnicity,

religion, work ethic, and political affiliation, to name just a few factors, are common to Real Vermonters.

Before parsing the details that make up the image of the native Vermonter as reflected in the work of the Board of Agriculture, Bureau of Publicity and other promotional efforts, it is important to acknowledge the greatest common denominator of all Vermonters, state tradition. In 1953 Dorothy Canfield Fisher published *Vermont Tradition: The Biography of an Outlook on Life*, solidifying the idea of a distinct state tradition in the minds of the American population. Fisher examined the earliest white settlers, historical figures and leaders such as Ethan Allen, even the economic and emigration shifts occurring in the state in order to understand and define a unique way of life. Or how, in her own words, it is that the population has “become united in Vermontism.”<sup>69</sup>

Vermontism is probably just another way of saying “living the Vermont tradition,” but it raises an interesting set of issues about what makes a Vermonter partake in state tradition. Is a person defined by the location where they are born and grow, or does the location in which a person comes to live grow to define them? In Cora Cheney’s *Vermont: the State with the Storybook Past*, a grandfather tells his inquisitive grandson that a Vermonter is,

...a person who chooses to live here and take part in the community...Something about the Green Moutains makes the people who live here get to be a certain way...The people who move here don’t change Vermont, but instead they change to Vermonters.”<sup>70</sup>

Other authors offer a contradictory opinion, such as Marguerite Hurrey Wolf who moved from New York to Vermont with her husband who served as Dean of the College of Medicine at University of Vermont. Wolf lamented that she would never be accepted as a real Vermonter because she was not born there. When she asked a neighbor if her young children, who looked, acted and dressed just like the other kids, could ever be real Vermonters the neighbor replied, “[i]t’s this way. You’ve heard it a

hundred times. If the mother cat had jumped into your oven and had these kittens in the stove, you wouldn't call them biscuits, would you?"<sup>71</sup> Although Vermontism and the Real Vermonter are defined by a set of similar values and actions, there is no definitive answer as to how essential nativity is to being a Real Vermonter. Even Fisher, who famously defined Vermont tradition, was actually born in Kansas. In examining promotional literature, it's suggested that other factors such as integrity and a good work ethic are central Vermonter identity; however, these values are usually described as if they are intrinsically linked to native birth.

One of the essential qualities of Vermontism, or Vermont tradition, is good character. Character is an amorphous term, using no definitively prescribed measures to evaluate the quality of a person, mental and moral. There are several layers to the definition of character in the context of turn-of-the-century rural Vermont, and religious and ethnic affiliation is one of the most essential and easily defined. Most native Vermonters fit into the category of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, and this is in turn is evidence of good character. Generally, the Connecticut River Valley to the east of the Green Mountains had more conservative Congregationalist populations, while the west and Champlain Valley tended toward "more freewheeling sects."<sup>72</sup> *Conant's Vermont*, a text book first published in 1890 to teach Vermont children about history, geography and government, conformed to the notion of Vermont's homogenous, high quality, population. Chapter X begins, "[t]he home is an Anglo-Saxon institution...it was brought to America by Pilgrims and Puritans, a high-minded, liberty-loving, and God-fearing people..."<sup>73</sup> Pages later, young readers are ensured that "[t]he inheritance from the Puritans and the Pilgrims of unswerving allegiance to conscience and duty gave to the early settlers of Vermont the foundation of their sterling character."<sup>74</sup> The sentiments present in *Conant's Vermont* are echoed in some of the early literature promoting summer homes, which made the same

equations between moral goodness and Puritanism. “[Vermonters] have great respect for moral or intellectual superiority, and would be considered as somewhat Puritanic in the views and tendencies, and rightfully so, as having, in the main, descended from that honored stock.”<sup>75</sup>

The majority of literature published by the Board of Agriculture and Bureau of Publicity did not overtly use ethnicity or religion as a mark of character, but rather relied on descriptions of work ethic and neighborliness as evidence of moral goodness. These descriptions often had obvious Anglo-Saxon Protestant undertones, but did not singularly define Real Vermonters ethnicity in plain language. A 1907 description of the people of Orleans County explains the character of natives:

They are prosperous, law-abiding, public-spirited and generous to a fault. In a word they are genuine and typical Vermonters. They do not, and never have, tolerated the open saloon. They are staunch supporters of schools and churches. Even the slightest sneer or scandal has never been cast against this county.<sup>76</sup>

Other qualities of Vermonters defined in print ranged from “energy, industry, stick-to-itiveness,” to “hardy, independent, liberty-loving, brave and individualistic.”<sup>77</sup>

In 1937, James P. Taylor, secretary of the Vermont State Chamber of Commerce, passed along a survey questionnaire issued by a *Boston Herald* reporter to some Vermont residents and leaders. The survey was intended to define the typical rural Vermonter, and the results of the survey were strikingly similar to the qualities mentioned in promotional pamphlets and literature. Vermonters were described as ideal models of American “individualism,” “independence,” “self-reliance,” “thrift,” “honesty,” and “ruggedness.”<sup>78</sup> All these positive remarks reflect a consensus about the character of Real Vermonters indicative of moral and behavioral goodness, yet still in-line with the values of America’s early Puritans.

Such discussions of Vermonters as the embodiment of historic American political and moral principles were reflective of much larger national trends of

nativism. Anti-immigration movements had a long history in New England, the first political mobilization was by the anti-Irish Catholic Know-Nothing Party of the 1840s and 1850s, later called the American Party, which lost its momentum by 1860.<sup>79</sup> National resurgences in nativist sentiment followed the depression of 1893, which again targeted Irish Catholics, and in strict country-of-origin quotas for immigration passed by Congress in 1921 and 1924, which limited Asians, and Eastern and southern Europeans from entering the country. Though the targets of nativism expanded over time, it was Catholics that elicited much of the fear in Americans, both for their papal ties and perceived disinterest in assimilation.

In Vermont, the large numbers of Catholic French Canadians were the most troubling immigrant group. Massachusetts experienced similar problems with large numbers of both Irish and French Canadians, and the reaction was to cling to the rich colonial and Revolutionary period history to define state identity.<sup>VI</sup> The same phenomenon was happening in Vermont, and language inspired by nativist movements depicting Vermonters as puritanical and decidedly patriotic appear repeatedly in promotional literature. Additionally, the state's rural landscape and surviving agrarian tradition were visible remnants of the Jeffersonian ideal and helped reinforce Vermont's position as the seedbed of America's independent spirit. Though Vermonters shared much of the national fears of Catholic domination, the state was not altered as remarkably as those with larger immigrant populations, and so depictions of Real Vermonters that evoked historic American morality seemed more authentic.

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<sup>VI</sup> For an in-depth look at French Canadians in Massachusetts around the turn of the twentieth century, see Ronald A. Petrin's *French Canadians in Massachusetts Politics, 1885-1915*. Discussions on the role of nativism can be found in chapter three, "Naturalization, Officeholding, and Voting."

The reputation and character of Vermont's women was an important part of state image, one distinct from that of the men, but no less steeped in idealized Puritan tradition. Rural, picturesque landscapes such as those found in Vermont were traditionally associated with the feminine, while the rugged sublime of wilderness and harsh urban landscapes were associated with the masculine. Families searching for summer homes in the country were naturally seeking safe, homey environments where women could spend time with their children. Such comfort was particularly important for wife and children who remained in the country while husbands commuted back and forth to the city for work during the summer months. Women were, after all, the leaders and caretakers of the home, and the promise of a rural residence in an area with a tradition of good wives and mothers was appealing to home seekers.

Promotional and popular literature highlighted Vermont farmwomen as "notable housekeepers!" who were often found "neatly attired in a crisp gingham dress."<sup>80</sup>

There was also a strong reputation as homemakers and cooks. In 1909, an article in *The Washington Post* told of New York City women vacationing in Vermont who grew so attached to the bread in their host's farmhouse that they planned to return just to learn the recipe.<sup>81</sup> Grace Hutchinson, a farmer's wife, explained her own experience, "You know, people back then [1930s] had an awful lot more skills. I've taught a lot of young women how to make bread and those kinds of things...It was hard work but it added a certain quality to life."<sup>82</sup> Real Vermont women had good character, and their reputed skills in cooking, housekeeping and childrearing were as valuable and appealing as the man's sterling Puritan character and strong work ethic.

Belief in "independence," "individualism," and other creeds of the Republic was as important an attribute of Vermontism as high moral character and bread-making skills. Promotional literature showed Vermont as a nativists' paradise, where American ideals were held in the utmost respect, a model for all other states. One





**Illustration 23.** Mrs. Gaynor, the wife of a Farm Security Administration client in Fairfield Vt., does the ironing in this 1941 FSA photograph.

Source: Scott E. Hastings, Jr., and Elsie R. Hastings, *Up In the Morning Early: Vermont Farm Families in the Thirties*

Central Vermont Railroad document explained, “[Vermont] has stimulated the virtues of patriots and grown a stalwart race of men familiarly known to those who have never felt its life-giving breezes or measured its sons in their own home.”<sup>83</sup> The reputation for liberty and patriotism was eloquently described in the Board of Agriculture’s 1892 release, “The Resources and Attractions of Vermont”:

Vermonters are peculiar in many ways, but is nothing is their disposition more marked than in their intense love of liberty and equal rights, of liberty of thought and action, so long as it does not infringe upon the rights of another. In defence of this principal, the history of the State and nation has occasion to record on many of its pages the deeds of courage and valor that have been necessary to maintain it. As believers in equal rights, the proof is found in the absence of anything akin to aristocracy. The lowest and the highest, the rich and the poor, meet on equal terms in all the walks of life, neither realizing that any gulf is between them. No people have a higher respect for law and good citizenship than Vermonters, and no people will more strenuously insist on the punishment of offenders.<sup>84</sup>

Vermonters were depicted as true models of citizenship, not only freedom loving, but also law-abiding and orderly. Rooted in familiar nativist sentiments that many immigrants were criminal or untrustworthy, portrayals of native Vermonters as supporters of democracy and equality, as well as “the punishment of offenders,” was a testament to their true patriotism and a draw to like-minded tourists.

Vermont’s love affair with grass-roots democracy was nothing new in the 1890s, nor did the Board of Agriculture or Bureau of Publicity concoct it to give the state an appealing identity to outsiders. Vermont’s history as an independent republic, which fought for American independence as such and remained independent until its admission as the fourteenth state in the union in 1791, resonated with Vermonters. In a 1932 address, Governor Wilson appealed to nativist sentiment by mentioning Vermont’s finest historical figures, among them, “Ethan Allen and Ira Allen, Seth Warner and others of the Green Mountain Boys.”<sup>85</sup> Ethan Allen’s Green Mountain boys remain, even today, symbols of Vermont’s tradition of individualism and self-

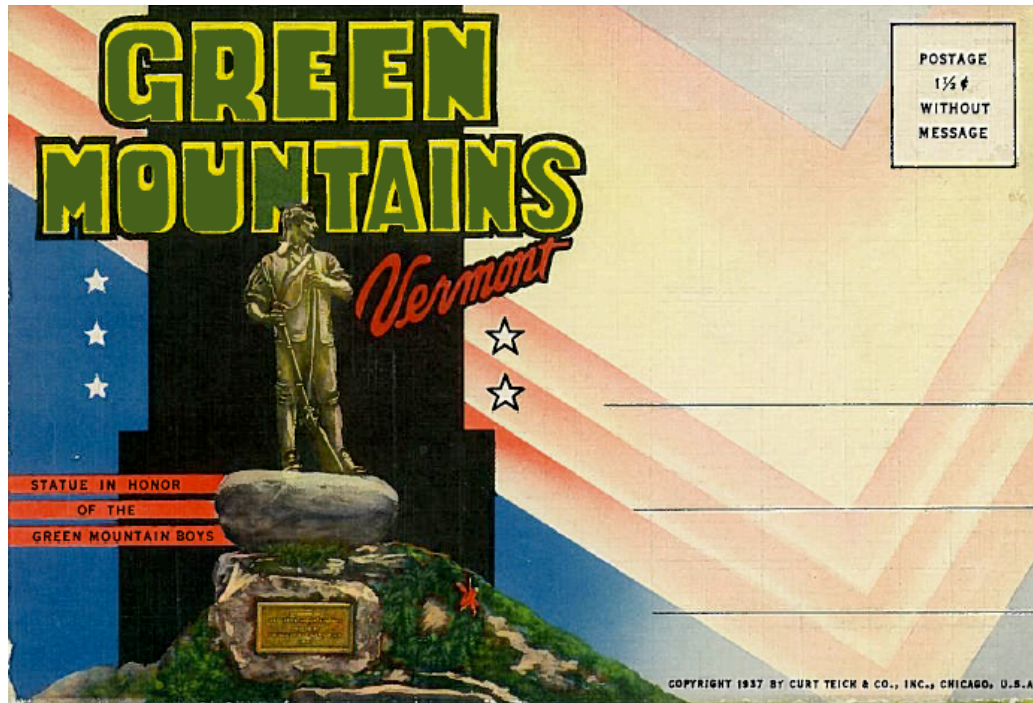
government. Some of the most famous words spoken by Allen, “the gods of the valleys are not the gods of the hills,” continued to resonate with rural Vermonters over a century later. Allen supposedly uttered this phrase after the Ejectment Trials of 1770, when New York landholders challenged the ownership rights of Vermont farmers in Bennington and Shaftsbury living on lands titled under the New Hampshire land grants. Ethan Allen’s words communicated the independence of rural farmers on the hills of Vermont and their unwillingness to accept rules and regulations imposed upon them by outside governments in which they had no say.

A defining feature of Vermont’s political development was the rural nature of the landscape. Since the state’s rural hill towns are clustered in small communities, neighbors are closely bound, whether they like it or not. This small-town lifestyle creates a “*habit* of mutual aid” and “breeds a patience with the human condition that is fundamental to a successful democracy.”<sup>86</sup> The iconic town hall meeting is a product of the closeness of rural people, their interconnecting lineages and mutual dependence on one another for survival. As rural, small-town Vermonters are raised to voice their opinions and have a say in community life, it is only a natural extension of these traditions that they distrust outsiders and “big government.” As one rural man,

Edward Clay, explained how traditional Vermont politics had changed in the 1970s:

Of course, they’re taking orders out of Montpelier. You know how things are today. They’re a more centralized government. Be it good, bad, or otherwise. That’s the way the trend is going. Some different than it was forty, fifty years ago. Once, you didn’t like somebody, you’d tell them to go to hell and that was it or you’d punch him in the beazer.<sup>87</sup>

Such physical and personal politics was distinctly Vermont in tradition, and translated into widespread support for the Republican Party. Rural Vermonters voted Republican, only newcomers and foreigners voted Democratic. In a 1980 interview, Winooski City attorney Russell Niquette, who assumed office in 1935, summed up the



**Illustration 24.** A 1937 postcard booklet features a statue of Ethan Allen honoring the Green Mountain Boys.



**Illustration 25.** A 1937 postcard from the above book shows an aerial of the Bennington Battle Monument, commemorating the Revolutionary War battle.

nature of politics in his largely French Canadian city, “My father and folks were all Democrats and to my way of thinking it was just like a religion. I’m a Catholic and that was just another religion I belonged to—the Democrats.”<sup>88</sup> Likewise, Real Vermonters belonged to the religion of the Republicans. In *Fetched-up Yankee*, Lewis Hill writes of his boyhood in Greensboro and the rural communities outlook on politics:

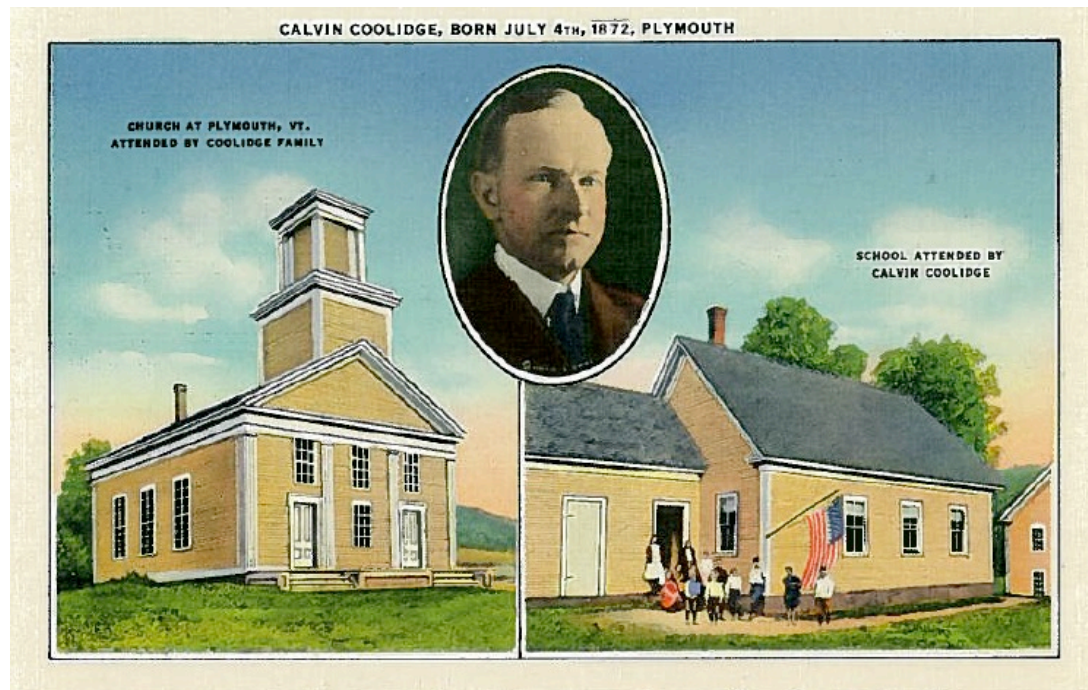
“Republican” we were made to understand early in life, “is synonymous with virtue, hard work, honesty, thrift, and behaving one’s self,” whereas “Democrat” meant “waste, laziness, welfare, drunken revelry, crime, and probably godlessness.” Furthermore, there were three kinds of Democrats: the out-and-out rascals, the feather-brained intellectuals, and the millions of not-too-bright ordinary citizens whom Mr. Roosevelt, their leader, consistently managed to fool by making them think he was on their side.<sup>89</sup>

Hill explains that there were actually two Democrats in his town who turned out to be “pillars of the Congregational Church” while several Republicans began sneaking into taverns following the repeal of prohibition. Nonetheless, the stereotypes of Yankee Republicans were strong and lasting. It was not until 1962 that Vermont elected its first Democratic Governor since 1853, Philip Hoff, and in 1964 Vermont elected its first ever Democratic presidential candidate, Lyndon B. Johnson. Of course, by the 1960s the state’s population of “flatlanders” was growing, and the political influence of the rural towns was in decline. Today, the Republican roots of the Real Vermonter seem a distant memory for many in the state.

At the turn of the century, the Board of Agriculture and Bureau of Publicity wove the many threads of Vermont identity into an elaborate work of tourist promotion known as the myth of the Real Vermonter. Some portrayals of Vermont values had heavy Christian and Republican undertones, such as in a 1957 article on the state constitution which cited “[t]hat frequent recurrence to fundamental principles, and a firm adherence to justice, moderation, temperance, industry, and frugality, are



absolutely necessary to preserve the blessings of liberty and keep government free.”<sup>90</sup> Most promotional literature, however, emphasized the ideals of democracy and individualism and other typically “American” doctrines, as well as the hard-working, honest and moral character of the good old stock.



**Illustration 26.** A 1937 postcard commemorating the life of President Calvin Coolidge, the Vermont-born Republican who served from 1923-1929.

### *Conclusion*

Chapter two has outlined the origins of the summer home movement in Vermont from 1890 through the 1930s. The Board of Agriculture and later the Bureau of Publicity used promotional literature, as well as newspapers and vocal politicians, to create a unique and enticing image of the state. Much of the focus was on the physical attributes of Vermont, her agricultural and scenic potential as well as convenient location to nearby major cities. The other principal focus was on Vermonters themselves. Promotional tools used an idealized conception of the

traditional Vermonter to lure people to the state to set up a second home. “Real Vermonters” were moral, independent, family-oriented and honest. They were also white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant and had a long line of Vermont-born ancestors. The sterling images comprising the myth of the Real Vermonter were in striking contrast to the realities facing many Vermonters. Certainly the love of independence, traditions of Republicanism, and the commitment to hard work had some basis in fact. However, the earliest settlers of Vermonters were typically quite poor, relying on meager subsistence farms for survival, and living in rural areas without many of the educational opportunities of more urban locations. Throughout the nineteenth century, as discussed in the previous chapter, Vermonters continued to face the challenges of an agricultural economy, meager industry and transportation, depopulation and community collapse, and the arrival of immigrant populations and new ethnic tensions. The realities of life in Vermont were not nearly as ideal as myth in promotional literature suggested.

These images and conceptions of Real Vermonters crafted for public consumption are important for uncovering other aspects of the quest to repopulate rural Vermont, including the formation of the Vermont Commission on Country Life and associated groups, which is discussed in chapter three. These early promotional tools offer a look at the kind of Vermont that social reformers will try to recreate in the 1920s and 1930s through the use of the summer home industry.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE PROMISES OF RURAL REFORM

In the early twentieth century, civic leaders around America formed the Country Life Movement to address concerns over conditions facing rural areas. Vermont's stake in the Country Life Movement was through Henry Perkins' Eugenics Survey and the Vermont Commission on Country Life (VCCL), both of which assessed the condition of the state and made suggestions for rural rejuvenation. The VCCL embraced ideas earlier expressed in popular summer home campaigns as a means toward reform, utilizing the myth of the Real Vermonter to attract desirable summer residents, often alienating "objectionable" native residents in the process. Chapter three discusses these efforts at rural reform, and the benefits and consequences of inviting summer residents into Vermont with the expectation that they would positively influence natives, support rural institutions, and perpetuate an idealized vision of the Real Vermonter.

#### ***The Country Life Movement***

The problem of rural flight that left so many of Vermont's hillsides empty was not exclusive to northern New England. Urban professionals and intellectuals who had previously been concerned with the effects of city life on individual morality, were beginning to ponder the issues of rural depopulation on a national scale by the 1890s. The shift of rural peoples to industrialized urban centers elicited many worries among social critics. Among them was Josiah Strong, an influential Protestant cleric who addressed concerns about migration patterns and the effects on both urban and rural regions. In his 1893 book *The New Era*, Strong described "the tide of population which is settling so strongly from country to city, and which is depleting one and



congesting the other, to the detriment of both.”<sup>91</sup> Fears grew that rural areas would face the collapse of social institutions, ranging from schools to local governments and acceptable Protestant churches. The remaining inhabitants were believed to be of supremely low quality, among them “the superannuated, the feeble, the dull, the stagnant rich who will risk nothing, the ne’er do-wells who have nothing to risk.”<sup>92</sup> In short, the remaining rural populations would be inactive burdens on society, marking the death of the noble yeoman farmer and the Jeffersonian ideal.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the alarmist cries of social critics began diminishing. The newly formed Country Life Movement was comprised of mostly well-educated, young, middle class Americans, often professors, schoolteachers and clergy members, who downplayed harsh criticisms and concerns over rural degenerates and focused their efforts on constructive social reform. The loose-knit group of activists fit under the umbrella of the expansive Country Life Movement, which was formally institutionalized on a nation level under President Theodore Roosevelt’s Commission on Country Life in 1908. The Country Life Movement used surveys as a means of quantifying rural problems to implement effective solutions based on the efficient urban model. Activists within the movement focused on issues of socialization concerning among other things, the rural church and rural school system. They published papers and held conferences to discuss their findings, though their ideas often met resistance from the very groups they attempted to reform. By the close of World War I, the Country Life Movement dwindled alongside other Progressive politics. However, the academic discipline of rural sociology gained increasing attention, with college students using the survey and conference format of the Country Life Movement to develop a science-based understanding of rural phenomenon.<sup>VII</sup>

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<sup>VII</sup> The Purnell Act of 1925 provided federal funding for the study of rural social

### *The Eugenics Project*

The influence of the Country Life Movement was not very apparent in Vermont's early summer home industry. By 1925, Vermonters were catching onto the trends of scientific survey and analysis as a means of address rural issues and Henry F. Perkins, creator of the Eugenics Survey of Vermont, was leading the way.<sup>VIII</sup> Perkins was born in Burlington in 1877 to an affluent Congregationalist family. He was raised with an understanding of his ancestors as "good old New England stock," those distinguished individuals who built the Republic and embodied the American ideal. Perkin's developed a strong interest in restoring his home state's historic glory, that of the Real Vermonter, through scientifically defining the social and economic problems plaguing rural areas.<sup>93</sup> In 1902, Perkins became professor of zoology at the University of Vermont, where he continued to expand upon his interests, eventually developing the Eugenics Survey of Vermont, which spanned from 1925 through 1931. These scientific surveys were released in annual reports. Early on, the surveys concerned the mentally ill and abandoned children, later developing into a study of the "notorious" and "degenerate" families of rural Vermont and a campaign for legalized sterilization. By 1928-29, the surveys became an investigation into hereditary factors of degeneracy.<sup>94</sup>

Perkins wrote extensively about his survey, insisting that eugenics, which had not yet developed the sinister reputation that would come by association with the Nazi Party, was the way of the future for Vermonters hoping to maintain the quality of their state. His written language closely mirrored that of state promotional and popular literature in speaking of the "splendid traditions of pioneer days."<sup>95</sup> Unlike the

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conditions by Agricultural Experiment Stations.

<sup>VIII</sup> A comprehensive discussion of Henry F. Perkins and the Eugenics Survey of Vermont can be found in . *Breeding Better Vermonters: The Eugenics Project in the Green Mountain State*, by Nancy L. Gallagher.

sanitized literature of the Board of Agriculture and Bureau of Publicity, Perkins openly acknowledged the “running down hill” of Vermont’s population. He subscribed to basic nativist thought, attributing the decline in quality to the migration of Vermont’s best-bred youth to the cities and the new arrival of an “unfit” population of “dependents and criminals.”<sup>96</sup> For Perkins, Vermont tradition was not rooted necessarily in how one made a living on the farm, one’s political ideals, or even one’s Vermont born ancestors. Rather, Perkins wrote that:

If Vermont is to be a safe place for Vermonters, indeed if she is to be the mother of statesmen and presidents and other national leaders, the “good stock” must be increased. There is no need of its being the “good *old* stock” providing the additions that are made are of the right sort. Good blood, from whatever country, added to and mixed with the good Yankee blood which is to be found in every community, makes for better communities, a better Vermont.<sup>97</sup>

“Good blood,” according to Perkins and a long list of venerable native Vermonters, was most accurately defined as “not French Canadian and not Catholic.” For decades, the most populous group of Vermont immigrants were demonized as degenerate devices of the Catholic Church. In 1892, famed Vermont historian Rowland E. Robinson wrote about the “insidious and continuous invasion” of the French Canadians into Vermont.<sup>98</sup> Though Robinson briefly acknowledged the immigrant’s acumen for farm work and devotion to family, he more frequently addressed the Canadians as “an inferior class” of “baggy-breeched and moccasined habitants” which “infested” the state.<sup>99</sup> Even the attempts of French Canadians to assimilate into American society, their tendency to trade their French last names for their literal English translations, was downplayed as despicable by Robinson:

No great love for their adopted country can be expected of a people that evinces so little for that of its origin as lightly to cast aside names that proudly blazon the pages of French history for poor translation or weak imitations of them in English, nor can broad enlightenment be hoped for of a race so dominated by its priesthood.<sup>100</sup>



**Illustration 27.** Farmers of French Canadian descent, the Yandow's and Quimet's in Essex, 1946.

Source: Photo courtesy of Anne O'Grady

Dorothy Canfield Fisher, popular writer, social activist and member of the VCCL, was less harsh when she wrote about French Canadians, but no less questioning of their abilities to fit into Vermont society. According to Fisher, French Canadians' close proximity to their native lands and non-English speaking relatives slowed their assimilation into society. She wrote in *Vermont Tradition* that they were “singularly noncombative citizens, sticking to many of their old ways, but in a peaceable, non-aggressive manner.”<sup>101</sup> These perspectives are part of her insistence that everyone who comes to Vermont will eventually become “united in Vermontism.” Despite her generally positive outlook on the ability of state to absorb newcomers, Fisher's descriptions of one undesirable, drunken resident in *Hillsboro People* eerily echoed Perkin's language. She describes the “tragedy of heredity” and the “hateful thicket of inherited weaknesses” that cause a violent man to drink, behavior that is

certainly despicable to the Puritanical, Republican Vermonters so devoted to the temperance movement.<sup>102</sup>



**Illustration 28.** Moses Yandow, Vermont-born, Catholic, and French-speaking, working on the woodpile.

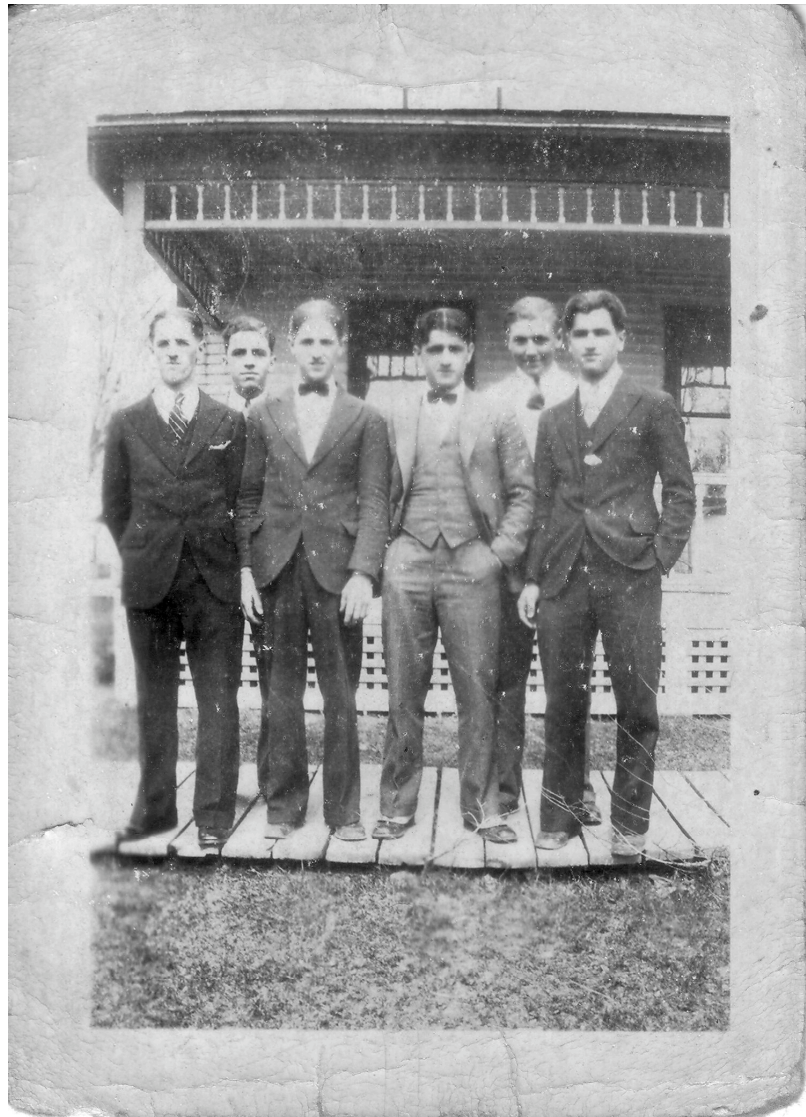
Source: Photos courtesy of Anne O'Grady

The growing prominence of the Catholic Church in Vermont posed a significant threat to old-line residents who viewed Protestantism as a necessary qualifier for being a good Vermonter. A 1903 report released by the Vermont State Agricultural Commission called *The Status of Rural Vermont* explained that about 25 percent of the state's population, or 70,000 people, were identified as Catholics in that year. Meanwhile, the number of Protestant Churches in the state had increased only 5 percent since 1890.<sup>103</sup> The complexities of the immigrant problem is clearly defined in a passage from the report:

Not all of the best native stuff has emigrated. Moral and social stagnation hold too large a part of the once best original stock. A part of the incoming element is being assimilated and becoming the most enterprising and industrious members of some of our communities. But on the whole the swapping of inhabitants had tended to create a lower average character status for rural Vermont.<sup>104</sup>

Perkins had long been interested in the question of French Canadian “degeneracy” and had intended to carry out a survey devoted to answering the question of whether or not the displacement of native Vermonters by foreigners had increased rural decline, though he was unable to secure support and funding for the project. Eventually he conceded, “the incidence of subnormalcy was almost exactly the same among families of foreign origin as amongst those of native stock.”<sup>105</sup> Nonetheless, the long held prejudices against French Canadian immigrants complicated the issues of defining rural problems. While it was easy to blame foreigners who seemed the antithesis of the Real Vermonter in terms of their religion and ethnicity, many social critics had to consider that some of the mythologized natives were themselves part of the rural problem. Many were also able to look past conversations about heredity and degenerate bloodlines to see Vermont's rural problem as the result of deficiencies in infrastructure, which was inadequate for providing medical, social and educational services to rural populations.<sup>106</sup> Still,

Perkins and his contemporaries helped maintain the myth of the Real Vermonter and asserted the need for good new stock to supplement the old. As it had for the Board of Agriculture and Bureau of Publicity, the image of the Real Vermonter would play an important role in the VCCL's efforts to entice new summer residents.



**Illustration 29.** French Canadian Vermonters all dressed up.

Source: Photos courtesy of Anne O'Grady

### *The Vermont Commission on Country Life*

Far less stigmatized than the Eugenics Survey became in its closing years, the VCCL played an important and visible role in Vermont's rural reform movement. The VCCL was also the brainchild of Perkins, who believed a comprehensive survey of rural life addressing such factors as education, religion, recreation and health, would augment his own eugenics work. Years later in 1955, Perkins downplayed the link to his earlier contributions and described the Country Life Survey simply as a way "to see if anything could be done to better the living conditions in which so large a part of our population is born and grows up."<sup>107</sup> The introduction to the 1931 report *Rural Vermont* similarly states, "[i]n the work of the Vermont Commission on Country Life, 'the starting point and the objective point is man.'"<sup>108</sup>

Comprised of about 300 hundred 'progressive' citizens forming sixteen committees, with Perkins as Executive Secretary and chaired by former Governor John E. Weeks, the VCCL was very much a product of the Country Life Movement, holding the people and ideals of Vermont as the real concern of the study. Though the VCCL held meetings to share the work of individual committees and released newsletters to alert the public to their progress, the Country Life Survey culminated with the 1931 release of the report, *Rural Vermont: A Program for the Future by Two Hundred Vermonters*. The volume was issued to public libraries free of charge, part of the VCCL's campaign for community betterment. The need to attract summer residents was just one of the areas of focus of the VCCL in *Rural Vermont*, but it was of significant interest. The economic benefits of summer homes were addressed, but not given the same attention and rhetoric as the social benefits afforded by new residents.

Some of the language found in *Rural Vermont* is clearly derived from the Eugenics Survey and upholds the notion of the Real Vermonter as Anglo-Saxon



Protestant and native born. Real Vermonters were encouraged to celebrate their family histories, reproduce with other Vermonters or people of comparable ethnicity and prowess, and educate the public on their concerns about inheritance, according to the recommendations of the VCCL:

1. That Vermonters be encouraged to keep and study their own family records with a view to arousing their pride in the achievements and high qualities of their ancestral stock so that this pride may in turn stimulate their better efforts and guide them in their choice of mates.
2. That the doctrine be spread that it is the patriotic duty of every normal couple to have children in sufficient number to keep up to par the “good old Vermont stock.
3. That public opinion be strengthened in regard to the importance of heeding those laws of nature which affect human inheritance. This can be done only by educating that public opinion. The circulation of the best library books on eugenics, population and heredity....are among a means to this end....<sup>109</sup>

The majority of *Rural Vermont*, however, is not as steeped in the language of eugenics, but centers more on the notion that the right kind of summer residents would become involved in their seasonal communities, thereby elevating local institutions. Patronizing local businesses, employing local workers, purchasing produce, milk and other goods from farmers, and getting involved with school activities or the library were all considered by the VCCL to be marks of the desirable summer resident. One rural Vermonter quoted in *Rural Vermont* explained, “[t]ourists help the whole community. Since they began to come, a community club has been organized, street lights have been installed, and a schoolhouse has been built.”<sup>110</sup>

Involvement with the rural church was especially desirable and tourists were considered a “distinct benefit” to the general church-going community. One member of the VCCL expressed his favorable opinion of summer residents during the October 1929 Committee meeting, “Our attendance increased about 10% this summer. We held open air services this summer and they were largely attended by visitors at Malletts Bay. My opinion is that people accustomed to going to church will go

A century old, yet ever new, is this distinguished home on a broad and shaded village street. The owner is MRS. COLE of Castleton.



**Illustration 30.** A summer home located in the Village of Castleton; many summer residences were located within small urban or suburban community rather than isolated in the rural countryside.

Source: Dorothy Canfield Fisher, "Summer Homes: An Open Letter," 1932



FIG. 3. The farm home plays a vital part in "a richer and more satisfying rural life."

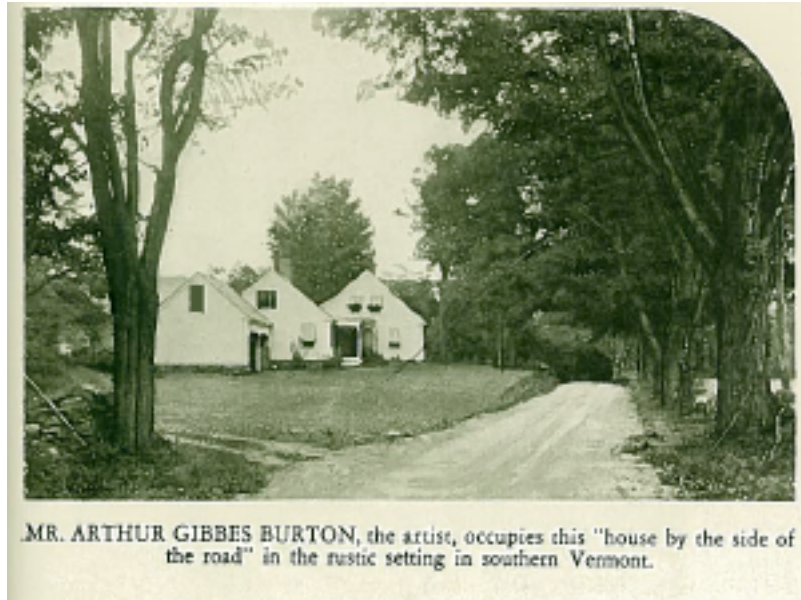
**Illustration 31.** Farmhouses were described in texts and promotional literature as essential elements of any rural community.

Source: Central Vermont Railroad, "Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont, and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain," 1894

wherever they happen to be.”<sup>111</sup> The worship of native and summer residents together in rural churches created a communal space and provided additional resources for the church. On one hand, the rural church experience allowed tourists to feel they belonged to a traditional Vermont community. It was a means of socializing with locals and “experiencing” the real Vermont. On the other hand, the VCCL hoped that dual participation would reinforce religious participation among native Vermonters whose churches were revitalized with new members.

The involvement of summer residents with local institutions was one means for summer residents to help increase community resources and set good examples of behavior that might “rub off” on their rural Vermont neighbors. “[T]eachers in schools and colleges, clergymen, lawyers, artists, authors, and other persons who are a distinct asset to any community...their influence is wholesome and helpful. The community is stimulated and benefited by their presence.”<sup>112</sup> Much of the social benefit received from interaction with summer residents was intangible, but these effects were still considered significant by the sociologically oriented VCCL. In the October 1929 meeting it was stated that several mothers noted, “the fine influence on their children gained by mingling with children from other sections of the country and by listening to the tales of trips told by tourists.”<sup>113</sup> In a survey of farm families who took in summer lodgers, many people responded that meeting travelers helped socialize their children and expose them to stories of far-off places. Many viewed their guests as “cultured,” “refined” and offering of “hints as to clothing and manners.”<sup>114</sup> These Vermonters, located in both rural and urban areas of the state, had more direct contact with tourists than those who merely lived in communities with many summer residents. Among farmers and rural residents near summer colonies, interactions varied widely, from those suspicious of outsiders to those who developed

working relationships. The variety of interactions and their representations in popular literature is discussed in detail in chapter four.



**Illustration 32.** The renovated farmhouse of an artist

Source: Dorothy Canfield Fisher, "Summer Homes: An Open Letter," 1932

Beyond the realm of social change, the arrival of summer residents altered the appearance of the towns and villages they came to inhabit. The renovation of abandoned farmhouses and the reclamation of pastureland to forest were welcomed by the government and the VCCL. The dilapidated buildings were a continual reminder of the consequences of depopulation and rural decline, and summer residents purchased abandoned buildings for renovation they helped to revitalize the appearance of these communities. Stories such as one offered by a Miss Lamson during a Committee meeting were common:

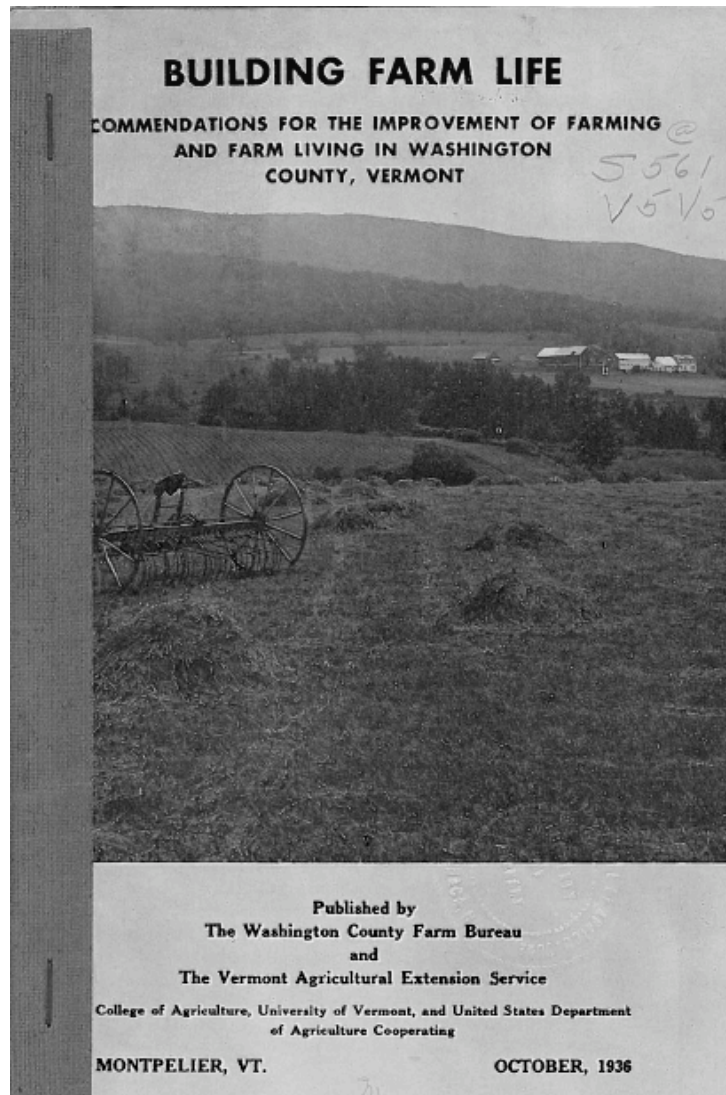
There was a large farm settled by a family. The father built his house, then he built a house for his son, and a similar one for his daughter. The land on this farm is being used for farming, but there were some extra farm buildings which were not being used and which have been taken up by summer people. In this particular town, I know of four professors who have taken buildings, and improved them for summer

residence. This is a case where farm property has been improved. It is a splendid thing to have the buildings so economically used.<sup>115</sup>

Other stories told of the neat and clean appearance of summer residences, as well as tourist homes, where improvements were made to interiors and exteriors, additions added to accommodate more visitors, and grounds improved. On the whole, women became more interested in interior decoration when surrounded by summer people or keeping a tourist home. *House Beautiful*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *The Flower Grower*, *Good Housekeeping* and *Women's Home Companion* were some of the popular publications Vermont women began using for inspiration in redecorating their homes.<sup>116</sup>

The rehabilitation of traditional farm buildings was viewed by the VCCL as a means of preserving a sense of place for visitors, who come to Vermont expecting to see, “old-time meeting houses with steeples, colonial houses, painted white with green blinds, and other characteristic features associated with New England villages and farms.”<sup>117</sup> *Rural Vermont* stated quite clearly that it was “patriotic duty” and “entirely compatible with the idea of modern progress” to preserve Vermont’s iconic architecture.<sup>118</sup> Farm families were encouraged to keep up the appearance of their properties both for the viewing pleasures of visitors and the health of the families themselves. A 1936 publication by the Washington County Farm Bureau and the Vermont Agricultural Extension Service entitled “Building Farm Life” offered a series of recommendations to farmers living in the wake of the Depression that echoed the messages of the VCCL. The guidelines of the Home Conditions Committee ranged from, “that the general attractiveness of the home grounds be maintained” and “that attention be given to keeping all buildings in repair,” to “that each family take a daily newspaper, a farm magazine, a home magazine, and a children’s magazine” and “that every home have a radio.”<sup>119</sup> The appearance of farmsteads and rural homes was an

extension of social betterment for suffering communities, a simple, visible means of measuring rural reform and the survival of the Real Vermonter.



**Illustration 33.** The publication “Building Farm Life” offered farmers in Washington County tips on caring for their homes and family.

Source: The Washington County Farm Bureau and The Vermont Agricultural Extension Service





FAMILY HOME SCENE.

**Illustration 34.** An ideal Vermont farm scene, the likes of which the VCCL sought to recapture.

Source: Central Vermont Railroad, “Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont, and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain,” 1984

### *Placing the VCCL in Context*

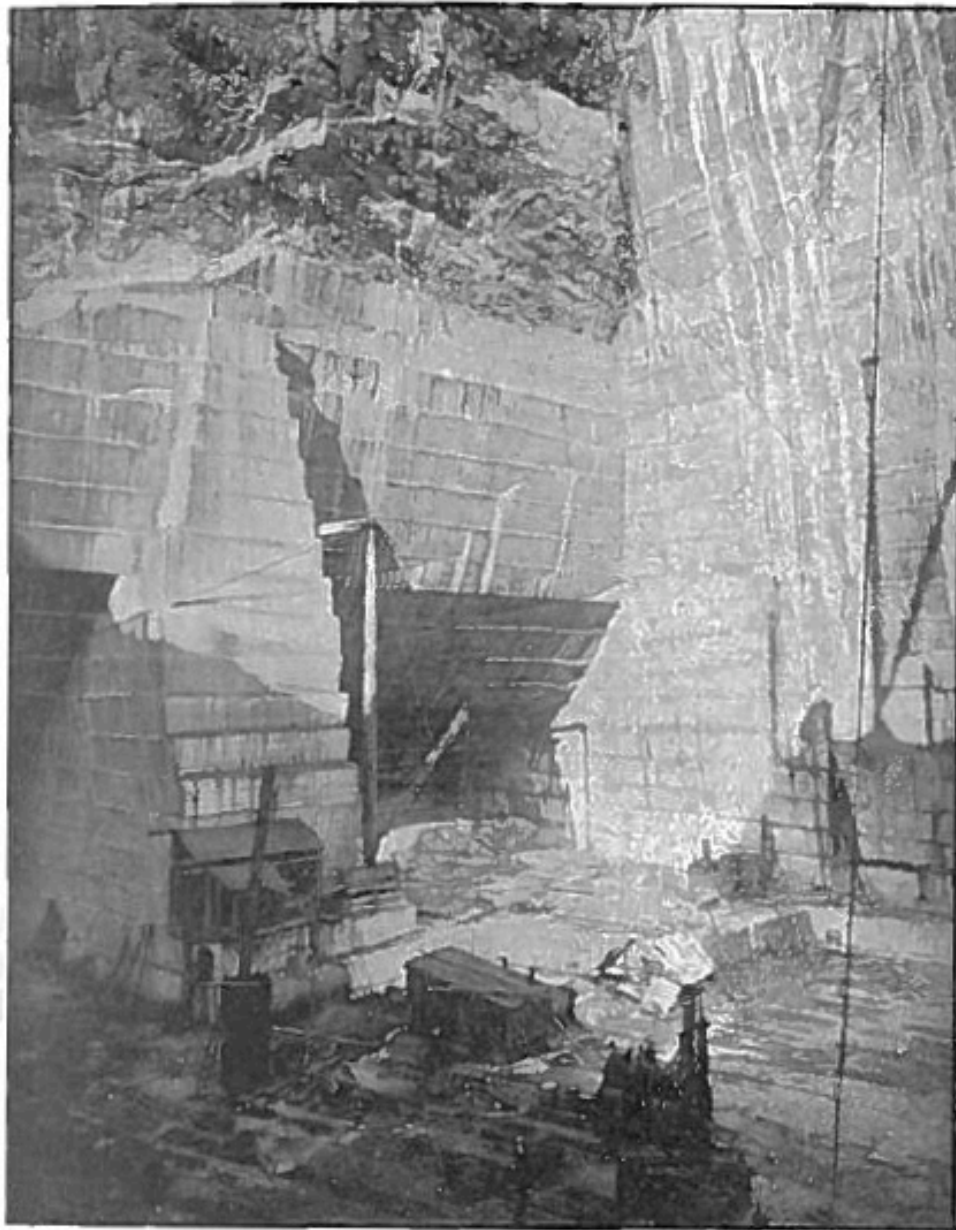
The publication *Rural Vermont* and all efforts by the VCCL were set against a backdrop of the intensified economic and social turmoil of the Great Depression. The effects of the Depression were rather subdued in Vermont, largely because the standard of living had always been so low compared with the rest of the country. Perkins and other reformers had expressed concerns over the state’s suffering education and health systems for years before the Depression raised national concerns, particularly after Vermont was found to have the poorest health and literacy rates of all New England states during the drafts for the First World War.<sup>120</sup> Other hardships occurred, including the infamous flood of 1927, which paralyzed many communities and wiped out critical transportation networks, requiring federal aid and the efforts of

the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to prevent further devastation in the hard-hit Winooski Valley.

During the years of the Depression, industry and manufacturing saw a sharp drop in the state. While this decline had begun in the mid-twenties, the number of manufacturing jobs decreased nearly 50% between 1929 and 1933.<sup>121</sup> For those fortunate enough to keep their jobs, there was a drastic shift in the attitude toward industrial labor. Like many rural areas, Vermont was traditionally anti-union, but the Depression ushered in growing awareness of workers' right and unionism previously restricted to urban areas. There were two notable industry strikes; the 1933 Granite strike and the VT Marble Company strike of 1935-36. Both represented growing divisions between union men and their rural opponents, as well as the rising ethnic tensions between the largely Italian union quarrymen and the French Canadian strikebreakers brought in to replace them.

Much of Vermont's concerns continued to center on agricultural practices, as about one-third of Vermonters still lived on farms in the 1930s.<sup>122</sup> The struggles of many farm families, as well as the landscape of eroded hilltops and abandoned farms, were documented through the photography of President Roosevelt's Farm Security Administration. As discussed in chapter one, Vermonters had a history of subsistence farming and surviving on meager resources, so the Depression was not as devastating an event as many parts of the country. Dairy farmers faced many challenges, as they were highly susceptible to fluctuations of the Boston milk market, which received roughly 75% of the state's milk supply.<sup>123</sup> Many dairy cooperatives were formed in an effort to gain control over the market, and dairymen eventually made headway in extending the benefits of Roosevelt's Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 (AAA) to the Boston milk market and federal control of prices. Vermonters, raised on the traditions of independence, self-sufficiency and small government, slowly opened up





MARBLE QUARRY—PROCTOR, VT.

**Illustration 35.** A photo of Proctor's marble quarries in Rutland quarries.

Source: Central Vermont Railroad, "Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont, and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain," 1894

to the idea of federal intervention in the milk market when it became the only alternative to economic collapse.

Vermont's farmers benefited from a number of federal programs through the New Deal, all of which challenged the state's traditional opposition to government intervention. Assistance supported a variety of programs, including crop production, mortgage loans, production control payments, drought relief, soil conservation payments, insect control, rural rehabilitation loans, purchase money for surplus commodities, and efforts to fight bovine diseases.<sup>124</sup> Farmers were not the only ones to benefit from New Deal programs, as the efforts of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), National Youth Administration (NYA), and Works Progress Administration (WPA) improved public services and infrastructure around the state. In 1943, the year WPA funding ended in Vermont, a number of projects had been completed, among them:

- 1,628 miles of highway improved
- 584 bridges constructed or rebuilt
- 3,803 culverts built or rebuilt
- 11 new schools constructed
- 107 schools remodeled or improved
- 40 new public buildings constructed, (excluding schools)
- 221 public buildings remodeled or improved
- 15 parks, 30 playgrounds, and 3 swimming pools constructed<sup>125</sup>

New Deal programs had a significant impact in Vermont. Beyond the vast physical improvements, Vermonters attitudes toward the federal government and collective action, including labor unions and farmer cooperatives, began to warm. Stalwart independence was no longer the defining feature of the Real Vermonter, though the myth was slower to change than the reality.

### ***Summer Residents, Defined***

The VCCL's publication *Rural Vermont* was released in 1931, during the darkest days of the Depression when milk prices reached an all-time low in the Boston

market, before the promising development of the AAA and New Deal programs. Years of rural decline combined with the onset of the Depression created a desperate situation in Vermont, one which the VCCL aimed to resolve. The Commission's efforts to attract summer residents to the state who could invigorate rural communities by restoring abandoned properties and supporting local institutions centered on finding the right class of newcomers. For the most part, the origins, economic background and professional interests of vacationers in the 1930s remained similar to those attracted to Vermont before the creation of the VCCL.

Vermont's tourists did not travel far to reach the Green Mountain state. Most came from nearby, with over 82% visiting from the Northeast or Middle Atlantic regions in 1936.<sup>126</sup>

**Table 6. Origin of Summer Vacationers in Vermont, 1936**

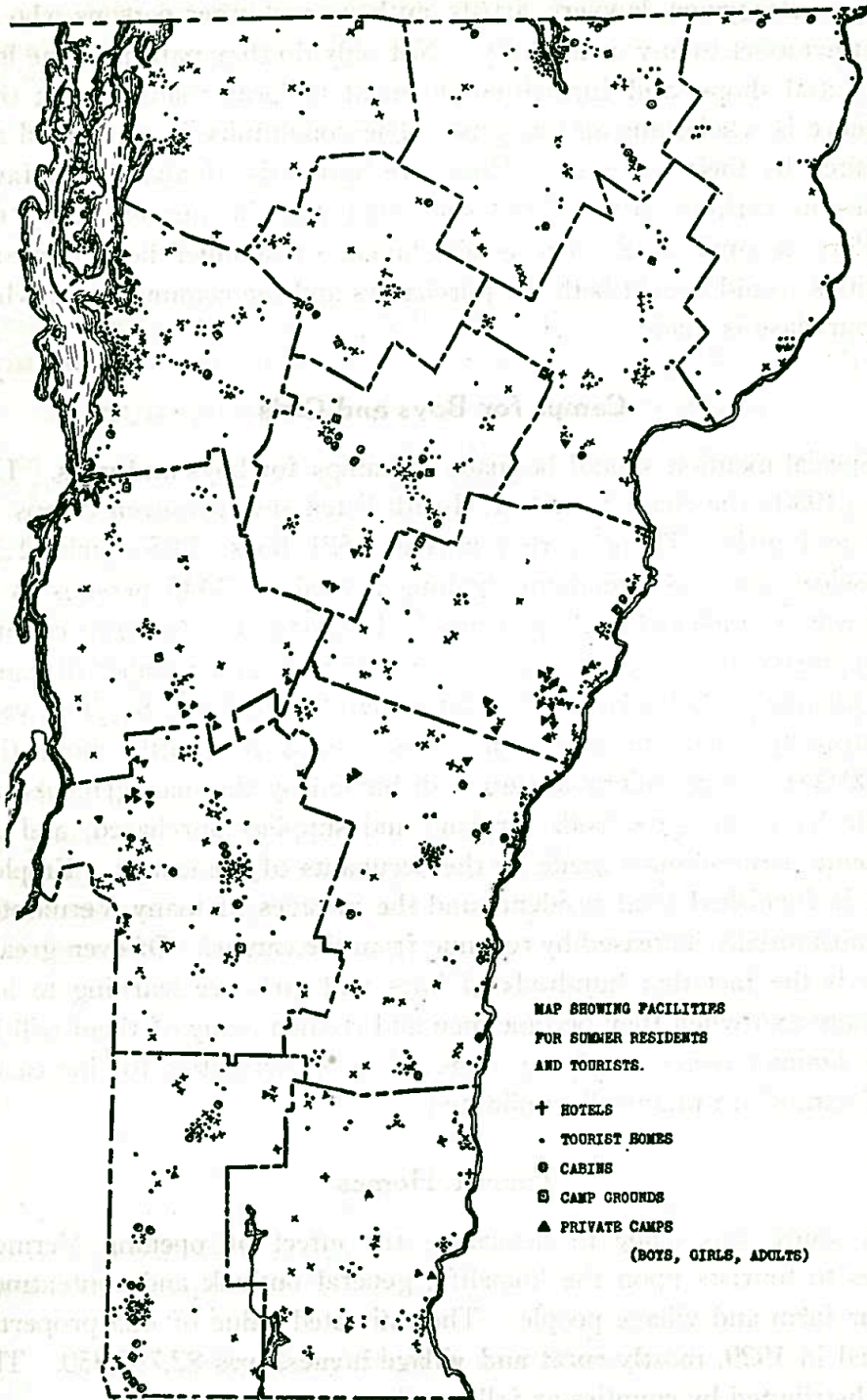
State or Region	Percentage Distribution
Maine	1.9
New Hampshire	6.2
Massachusetts	21.6
Rhode Island	3.2
Connecticut	7.4
New England	40.3
New York	27.6
New Jersey	7.8
Pennsylvania	7.2
Middle Atlantic	42.6

Source: Vermont Development Commission, 1958

The majority of vacationers in the 1930s were middle class professionals, the same type of people who had been visiting the state for decades.<sup>127</sup> Promotional literature of the Bureau of Publicity, infused with the language of the VCCL and guided by the efforts of their leading personalities, released brochures that catered to this audience. In 1932 the Bureau published a pamphlet written by Dorothy Canfield Fisher, a member of the VCCL's Committee on Traditions and Ideals, entitled "Summer Homes: An Open Letter," which contained several photos of rehabilitated farmhouses owned by reputable summer residents. Fisher explicitly addressed the letter as an invitation to, "those men and women teaching in schools, colleges and universities; those who are doctors, lawyers, musicians, writers, artists—in a word those who earn a living by a professionally trained use of their brains."<sup>128</sup> These sorts of individuals were certainly attracted to Vermont, and they tended to cluster in colonies, forming close-knit communities of summer people. Greensboro, for example, became famous for its proliferation of Ivy League professors, while Arlington was well known for a population of authors and artists, including Canfield Fisher. The perpetuation of such colonies depended on the efforts of promotional agencies to spread knowledge of their existence and attract like-minded newcomers.

Part of luring in the right citizens was to establish Vermont not merely as a state built on tradition and independence, but as a welcoming and open community. Fisher did so in "Summer Homes" by writing from the collective perspective of herself and all Vermonters, using the pronoun "we" to inscribe a sense of unity between those like herself, the educated reform-minded middle class, and the rural Vermonters who summer people would call their neighbors. Her language also appealed to the sentiments of Americans living in the depths of the Depression, when even those in financially stable situations were seeking to live a more modest and thrifty lifestyle. Fisher employed the myth of the Real Vermonter to align the

## SUMMER RESIDENTS



**Illustration 36.** A map from *Rural Vermont* displays the wide variety of tourist facilities clustered throughout Vermont in 1931.

Source: Vermont Commission on Country Life, *Rural Vermont*

solid values of natives with those held by potential visitors:

In many ways Vermonters will seem like country cousins of yours, sprung from the same stock. At least on our side we have what seems to us a family liking for summer people of your kind. We approve of and are proud of many of your ways that some Americans find odd—such as the fact that you prefer to buy books and spend your money educating the children rather than to buy ultra chic clothes and expensive cars. That makes us feel natural and at home with you...In other words *we like you*. And when a Vermonter admits that he likes somebody, it means a good deal.<sup>129</sup>

By reaching out to the reader in such a way, Fisher reinforced perceptions of Vermont as static, steeped in tradition and good old stock, yet her brochure shoed the images of the pristine vacation homes of newcomers rather than the farms of real, struggling Vermonters.



Partly screened by evergreens and maples, this hillside home of MR. and MRS. JOE DEXTER of Philadelphia forms a beautiful place among beautiful surroundings.

**Illustration 37.** A photo from Fisher’s “Summer Homes” shows two types of houses, a scene commonly found in rural Vermont.

Source: Dorothy Canfield Fisher, “Summer Homes: An Open Letter,” 1932

With a class of summer residents quite different from native Vermonters, there were bound to be conflicts and disagreements between the inhabitants of vacation

colonies and working rural farmers. The anticipation of these tenuous relationships was mentioned only briefly in Fisher's work, with the disclaimer:

Vermont communities are like other groups of human beings, made up of all kinds of people, shading from the reliable and responsible down to the unreliable and irresponsible...don't reach out at random to the first people you see...they *may* be those "wrong ones to ask" of whom every community has specimens.<sup>130</sup>

This brief passage is reflective of the Commission's origins in Perkin's Eugenics Survey. The text infers that a small population of "wrong ones," or social deviants of questionable heritage, plague the majority of good Vermonters, who welcome summer residents to make the state their "home." This type of social commentary is unique to promotional literature produced after the creation of the VCCL. The assertion that summer home growth and frequent personal interaction would foster mutual benefit for both native communities and newcomers alike represented a shift in the nature of tourism as a tool for rural reform.

### ***Conclusion***

Vermont was shaped by the phenomena of social reform in the 1920s and 1930s. Henry Perkins' Eugenics Survey reflected the dichotomy between traditional Vermonters and the immigrant population, mainly of French Canadians, as well as the issues surrounding "degenerate" rural residents and the remaining "good" stock. Heredity was one convenient means of addressing rural decline, but social critics and reformers did not ignore the role of access to education, medical care and other institutions in bettering the lives of rural residents. The Vermont Commission on Country Life aimed to address many of the issues plaguing rural areas, and part of the plan was to attract desirable summer residents to the state. By using the myth of the Real Vermonter, the VCCL sought to lure newcomers of a middle-class professional background, those who would provide positive lifestyle examples for natives and

breath new life into rural institutions. Attempts at reform had consequences, and the arrival of newcomers who did not work the land or adhere to local customs further reduced the agricultural use of land and increased the dependency of native farmers on the seasonal patronage of summer residents. The Depression also altered Vermonter's attitudes toward workers' rights and the role of the federal government in agricultural markets, and to the importance of tourism to the state economy. The 1920s and 1930s were decades of significant advances in rural reform, which further distanced the realities of life in Vermont from the myth of the Real Vermonter.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE SUMMER COLONY EXPERIENCE IN POPULAR LITERATURE

The story of Vermont's summer homes and vacation colonies was not limited to the idyllic experiences published in promotional literature of the Board of Agriculture, Bureau of Publicity or the Vermont Commission on Country Life. First hand accounts written by outsiders relocated to the countryside, renovating abandoned farmhouses, participating in necessary hard work, playing with fellow vacationers and mingling with the natives, were common throughout the twentieth century. Readers were fascinated with stories of city folk trying their hand at country living, as well as works written by native Vermonters such as Lewis Hill, who published several accounts of his typical Yankee life.

The plethora of narratives about life on the New England farm displayed the enthusiasm of vacationers eager to share their experiences, and the public interest in reading these accounts. Often filled with stories about the struggles and joys of rural life and the stubborn, reticent old farmers who become a part of the summer residents, daily experiences, publications ranging from novels, nonfiction accounts, magazine and newspaper articles, also helped perpetuate myths of the Real Vermonter. This chapter will explore some of the most popular narratives, covering themes such as the tumultuous relationships between locals and summer people, the implications of outsiders' perceptions of rural inhabitants, and the effects of New Deal programs on the lives of locals. The expansion of summer colonies was linked to many changes occurring within Vermont. Personal narratives are one means of exploring the small and large-scale challenges that faced the state as it developed a reputation as a vacationland.

### *A Tale of Two Greensboros*

The town of Greensboro, located on Caspian Lake in Orleans County, is one of Vermont's most iconic summer vacation destinations. By the early 1890s, the summer colony was attracting numerous fishermen and by 1896 it had a firmly established reputation for welcoming Ivy League educators and other intellectuals. The 1892 publication of "Resources and Attractions of Vermont" described a Greensboro where "[t]he scenery is beyond description, and is always varied at every turn, and the turns are numerous....It is simply superb." The pamphlet advertised "15 or 20 cottages on each the southern and northern borders of Caspian Lake, or Lake Beautiful" available for summer residents.<sup>131</sup> Both fishermen and intellectuals were attracted by word-of-mouth and promotional efforts, with the beauty of the rural lakeside location as the major draw. The summer colony also offered visitors a chance to socialize and relax with their like-minded peers. However, there developed a clear dichotomy between the summer residents who remained in the village and along the lake and the native farmers who lived far outside the perimeter of the settled village. The story of Greensboro exists in the experiences of both groups. The narrative of S. Whitney Landon describes the joyful experiences of vacationing children in the early 1900s, while the stories of author Lewis Hill describe the same locale through the eyes of a young native growing up in the 1930s.

S. Whitney Landon described his experiences as a child summering in Greensboro with speeches on a few occasions between 1972 and 1974, as well as in a print article in *Vermont History* in 1975, and a supplemental pamphlet, *Early Memories of Caspian Lake*, also published in 1975. Landon describes himself as a Greensboroite, having been born in Burlington but having ancestors who settled in Hardwick, just outside of Greensboro, in 1798. Despite the pedigree, Landon was a summer visitor, first visiting from Burlington in 1896 at only three months old, and

continuing to make the trip years later by train from his home south of Trenton, New Jersey. Landon prefaces his personal stories with an explanation of the types of visitors. His own father was a high school principal in Burlington, and his family spent summer vacations with their minister, Reverend Peter Myles Snyder, and his family. A textbook salesman had sold Landon's father their campsite, and he traveled New England selling similar properties to his many clients. Consequently, Greensboro was populated with teachers. Many Yale professors, chairmen, and administrators also began arriving around 1898, attracted by word of mouth. A number of ministers and a smattering of other professionals also joined them.



CAMP LIFE ON ISLANDS OF LAKE CHAMPLAIN.

**Illustration 38.** Canoeing was a common recreational activity for tourists.

Source: Central Vermont Railroad, "Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont, and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain," 1894



CAMP LIFE.

**Illustration 39.** Summer residents, often called “campers,” enjoying a rustic lakeside picnic

Source: in the Central Vermont Railroad, “Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain,” 1894

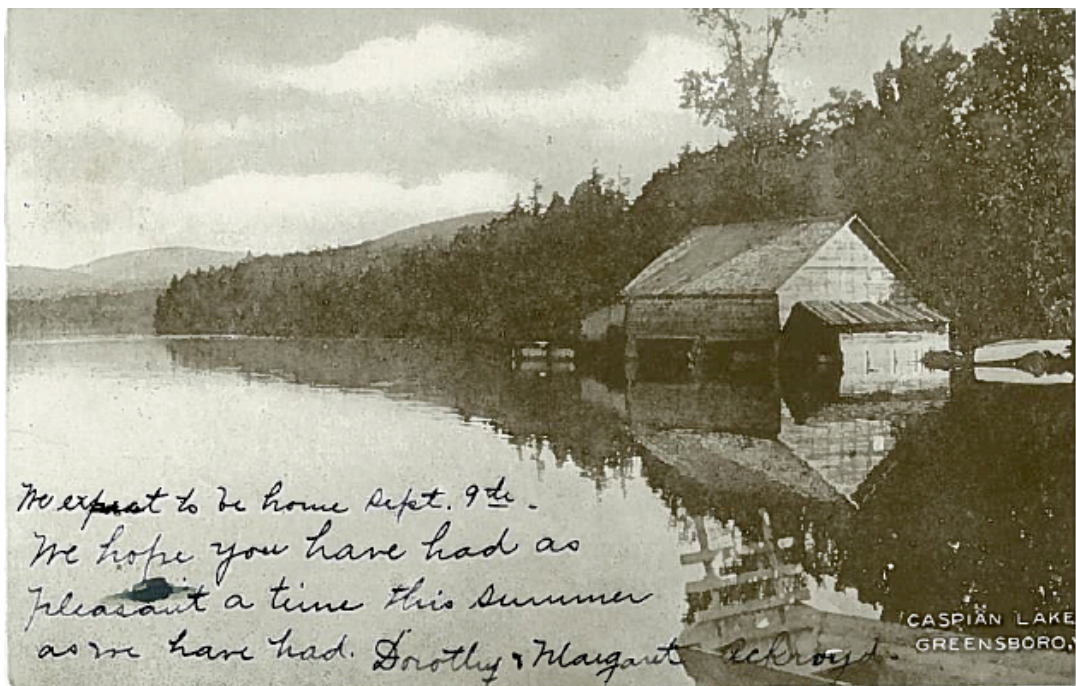
Landon explicitly describes the visitors’ admiration for their native neighbors, particularly the visitors’ desire to leave the area as it was when they arrived. He wrote, “we summer people did not make Greensboro, we took it as we found it, and our only virtue is that we had the good sense and wisdom to leave it as we found it.”<sup>132</sup> He also described the “rock-bound qualities of Vermonters” of “the calm and kindly way of life, the through and through integrity, the lack of show and bombast.”<sup>133</sup> Landon concludes his narrative by reminiscing, “I think, the best of all, somewhere along the way, we’ve absorbed, unknowingly, some of the wonderful Vermont attributes of these local people: honesty, honor, cheerfulness, strength—all the great

things.”<sup>134</sup> His words are similar to that of summer-home promotional literature, praising the Real Vermonter and asserting that these good qualities benefited the visitor.

Landon’s stories are as cheery as his ruminations about natives, describing everything from picnicking, outdoor concerts and watching Fourth of July fireworks to jumping in hay bales and selling sand door-to-door for charity. The pure joy of his experiences somewhat obscures the underlying realities of the situations described. For one, Greensboro was certainly changed by the arrival of hordes of summer guests. Golf courses and tennis courts, along with less intrusive sailing and baseball leagues are some of the recreational activities that physically altered the landscape as well as social dynamics of the community. Only summer people participated in certain elite activities, particularly membership in the Golf Club or use of the tennis courts laid out by the same men who made the Yale courts, which further divided the pleasure seekers from the farmers. There is a hint of tragedy in some of Landon’s stories. One local man, Mr. Calderwall, destroyed his right hand and one eye after using dynamite to remove a maple tree from the middle of the kids’ first tennis court. The farmer Mr. Tolman was another tragic figure. He allowed the kids to play in his barn with the caveat, “[l]ook out for the old ram; he’s kind of mean,” and was himself killed by a ram years later in his own barn.<sup>135</sup> While these stories are isolated incidents, they present an underlying reality: the summer visitors socialized and played, while the locals continue to work for a living without rest, a necessity of rural farm life.

Many local farmers sold goods to the summer people, which made the distinction between work and play more visible. There were only two small stores in Greensboro, so milk, chickens and eggs, vegetables, and cookies were bought from local farmers and their families, with meat and fish delivered by one man and another resident delivering ice. The income from summer patrons was welcome by locals, and

the extra money was beneficial and necessary for some. However, the transactions also established the locals as subservient to summer people, at least in the sense that farmers became more and more dependent on seasonal business to supplement their income. Landon never mentions any ill-will or condescension toward the locals, and he verbalizes his admiration for their hard work, but from the perspective of natives, the necessity of a summer colony was less than desirable.



**Illustration 40.** Postcard image of a summer camp on Caspian Lake, Greensboro.

Lewis Hill, the author whose family lineage in Greensboro dated back to the original proprietors in 1791 and first school teacher in 1794, was a local farm boy growing up in the 1930s with a perspective on the summer colony quite different from Landon's.<sup>136</sup> In his book, *Fetched-Up Yankee*, Hill describes his early childhood experiences and observations about the tradition and belief system of his home community. Hill writes with wit and humor about his town's "straight-laced tradition"

and presented an image of rural isolation and poverty that, although taking place in the vicinity of one of the state's most successful summer colonies, was typical of Vermont farm communities.<sup>137</sup> He describes schoolbooks in geography that were "preWorld-War- I vintage" and history books ending at the Spanish-American War.<sup>138</sup> Few homes had radios, and those hardly received signals, so adults relied on the early telephone "party lines," which connected multiple homes on one phone line, for word of news events and the opportunity to eavesdrop on others' conversations. Vermont had a high percentage of car ownership relative to other areas of the country, 64% of the states farms had a vehicle.<sup>139</sup> In Greensboro, most every family owned a car but rarely drove it more than once a week because vehicles were viewed as an unnecessary luxury. Some old farmers treated their cars like horses, giving them rests every few miles, covering them with blankets when it was cold, and even using a horsewhip when one refused to start.<sup>140</sup> Hill's descriptions are of a typical rural Vermont farm community, learning to slowly adapt to new technologies but hanging on to tradition with all their strength.

In describing Vermont tradition, Hill emphasized the importance of work: What constituted real work was clearly defined, and in numerous ways it was pointed out that those who taught, sold merchandise, lent money, or otherwise worked with their brains and mouths were to be held in far less esteem than those who did hard physical labor.<sup>141</sup>

Hill wrote that Real Vermonters were those that did physical work, and that academics, intellectuals and other people who worked with their "brains" were less admirable. This conflicted with Dorothy Canfield Fisher's message in "Summer Homes," which openly welcomed all "who earn a living by a professionally trained use of their brains" to come live in Vermont among their "country cousins."<sup>142</sup> According to Hill's assessment of the native Greensboro mentality, the farmers' welcome was not extended as openly as that of the Vermont Commission on Country Life or the Bureau of Publicity would have the public believe.





**Illustration 41.** Many of Vermont's farmers owned their own vehicles, though they were viewed as a luxury.

Source: Photo courtesy of Anne O'Grady



**Illustration 42.** Technology was an integral part of farm life.

Source: Photo courtesy of Anne O'Grady



Hill's stories of encounters with summer people reveal some of the tensions between the two groups. Often, the lack of interaction was telling, "[s]ometimes the summer folks vacationing at the lake in the village drove along our road, looking for a place to fish, a landscape to paint, or perhaps some natives to observe, but they seldom spoke to us."<sup>143</sup> In one instance Hill stopped to chat with some summer men out hunting and offered them advice on where the most deer were to be found, only to be ignored without thanks and told that country kids are not hunters. What particularly hurt Hill was the hunters use of a map of the woods, and how they "were acting as if it were their own."<sup>144</sup> Hill explained that farmers were often resentful of summer people who killed deer, because it was the farms which fed the deer all year long and locals felt that the herds belonged to them.<sup>145</sup> In this particular case, the local sense of ownership over land and resources, and their apparent abuse by temporary summer residents, was an important theme in the lives of natives, who felt they were losing control over their own communities.

The loss of control increased as the 1930s progressed and the intrusion of outsiders increased. The appearance of Community Conservation Corps (CCC) and Works Progress Administration (WPA) boys brought one wave of change to the community. When some boys conducting a survey told Hill's school class that they hoped it would rain so they would not have to work, the teacher began to repeatedly remind her students of "the evils that lurked in the ways of the flatland intruders," which was most evident in their sloth.<sup>146</sup> Much of the animosity stemmed from the community's almost universal devotion to the Republican party and distrust of all things Democrat. Hill creates a striking image of the kinds of agricultural changes affecting his community:

By the late 1930s the New Deal had moved into our lives, and long after it was too late, the Yankee farmers discovered that they, too, were entangled in the political system they hated so intensely. They were buying lime and fertilizer at below-market prices, collecting parity and

subsidy checks and letting the government set the price of their milk. Federal experts were now telling them how to manage their farms. The proud farmers, once as independent as the west wind, now stood meekly by as well-dressed milk inspectors from Boston ordered them to clean up their manure spread, and put in refrigeration—or else the neat little license to produce and sell milk that was tacked to each milkroom would be taken away.<sup>147</sup>

Although not the result of the summer colony, the changes associated with the New Deal intensified those changes already occurring within Greensboro thanks to summer residences, increased technology and communication.

Landon and Hill present two very different sides to the summer colony of Greensboro, and each reflect the opinions of their companions rather well. For the summer resident such as Landon, the words of the Board of Agriculture and the Bureau of Publicity rang true, and rural Vermont was the perfect place to enjoy nature and a sense of community for the summer months. For natives such as Hill, the summer people felt like intruders into their traditional lives, viewed with suspicion and apprehension as forbearers of more seemingly inevitable change.

### ***The Green Mountain Parkway Debate***

Lewis Hill wrote extensively about the role of Vermont tradition in his upbringing and how, as the 1930s progressed, the country's changing political and economic atmosphere began to wear on even the most stable farm communities. In 1936, the Green Mountain Parkway was proposed, and the ensuing debate over its construction revealed the depth of the ideological rift occurring within Vermont. The Parkway project called for the creation of a highway using federal funds allocated to the National Park Service and the Bureau of Public Roads, with the cooperation of the Vermont Bureau of Public Works, which would run atop the crest of the Green Mountain Range, essentially dividing the state in two along a north-south axis. The

debate created tensions among many and, while Democrats tended to favor the project and Republicans tended to object, there were numerous exceptions to this rule.<sup>IX</sup>

Those in favor of the Parkway gravitated toward economic justifications. For one, they argued that Vermont was paying its share of the tax burden and it was only right for the state to accept funds for a project that would inevitably stimulate local businesses rather than allow that project money to be given to another state. There was also the call to open up the scenic vistas and make the state easily accessible for tourists, as Ernest H. Bancroft wrote in the *Vermont*:

[Visitors] will stay at the hotels and roadside camps and many of them will eventually purchase summer homes. I believe that a very large number of the abandoned farms of Vermont would be developed as summer residences by these people, thereby increasing the grand list of the back towns and sharing to a substantial extent, the burden of the over-taxed farmer...<sup>148</sup>

Supporters of the Parkway were not concerned about maintaining the rural quality of landscapes that made Vermont seem unique and attractive to outsiders. There was also little concern expressed over what negative impacts, such as the subtle but pervasive social problems of communities like Greensboro, might occur due to an increased transient population.

Those opposed to the Parkway had many of the same goals in mind as supporters, but had a different opinion on the appropriate means by which to lure in visitors. They feared commercialization of the scenery and attractions as well as the ease with which tourists could drive quickly through the state without ever stopping to explore and spend money. Arthur Wallace Peach explained, “Vermont can easily become the great summer home state of the east, and do it without cost if the state will follow its traditional lines of growth, not the lure of some spectacular project, golden

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<sup>IX</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the Green Mountain Parkway vote, see chapter five in: Bryan, Frank. *Yankee Politics in Rural Vermont*. Hanover, NH: The University Press of New England, 1974, 202-233.

in promise and not much else.”<sup>149</sup> Much of the objection to the project was rooted in the traditional frugality of the Vermonter. Edward Crane explained in *Let Me Show You Vermont*, “[t]hrift is one of the Vermont traditions kept alive by force of circumstances, for money doesn’t come easy in Vermont except by Federal largess...”<sup>150</sup> For Peach and others opposed to the Parkway, the idea of a massive spending project which would pave over the state’s most prominent natural feature was both shortsighted and an affront to state tradition. “[T]he Parkway scheme [is] a threat to [the] state’s well-being; its individuality, its fine old spirit of independent living, its peace and charm, and other assets that have come to be known as “Vermontish.”<sup>151</sup> Opponents were not opposed to the arrival of summer residents or tourist dollars, but they were concerned with the overt destruction of the landscape and the increased role the Federal government would play in decision-making concerning state lands.

The Green Mountain Parkway Project was defeated, but the debate put a face on the growing conflict between different types of state residents and the tenuous nature of the myth of the Real Vermonter. Favor for and opposition to the project came from all sides. For example, though support was strong amongst Vermont’s heavily Democratic and Catholic urban populations, some traditionally Republican towns of the North East Kingdom and southwest Orange County also voted in favor of the parkway.<sup>152</sup> Likewise, traditionally Democratic rural townships in the Barre Watershed barely voted in favor of the Parkway and one largely Democratic town in the North East Kingdom voted no. Many summer residents rejected the plan because of the damage it would cause to the mountain scenery as well it’s potential for bringing in more outsiders such as themselves, which would destroy what their own authentic Vermont experiences. Many rural natives also shared these concerns, as they were already aware of the changes summer people brought, good and bad. Other

rural Vermonters, however, viewed the potential economic upturn as wholly positive, increasing access to scenic vistas without actually destroying their attractiveness.

For decades, summer home promotion commodified the image of the Real Vermonter and his native setting in order to attract new residents and affect change. The Parkway debate was an extension of similar issues in a new time and political environment. The project had shared many of the same goals as the Board of Agriculture and Publicity Bureau to attract newcomers, as well as the VCCL's aim for social benefit in the early 1930s. The Parkway was partially an attempt to make rural Vermont visible and accessible by utilizing Federal dollars, and its opposition by the majority of Vermonters is emblematic of the resistance to the commodification of the Vermont tradition, both the environmental tradition and the rural culture. The overexposure of Vermont's most attractive qualities, her rural tradition and scenery, threatened to destroy these features which made the state unique. The rejection of the Parkway, although certainly influenced by a number of complex factors, is reflective of attitudes toward changes within the state and individual communities, changes largely driven by the arrival of new residents.

### ***Communities In Flux***

The results of growing numbers of summer residents manifested themselves in a variety of ways in rural Vermont communities. Some people took fulltime jobs at summer resorts. Families changed their lifestyles to accommodate summer boarders, and farmers provided milk, produce and other services to residents for cash. Other changes were smaller, marked by altered names of residences and landmarks. Longstanding rural tradition dictated that homes were called by the last names of previous owners, some who had been gone for generations. It was a matter of continuity and collective memory that communities remain branded by their original

or most memorable owners. Summer people commonly purchased abandoned farms and fixed up the properties, landscaping the yard and creating cozy country escapes. Part of the process of claiming homes as their own was assigning quaint names to the properties, such as “Mt. Spring Home,” “Maplewood Farm,” “The Prospect,” “Lunenberg Heights,” and “Grand View Farm.”<sup>153</sup> The renaming process asserted the ownership of summer residents and their stake in the community, while validating their recreational use of the land. Farmers whose homes were functional, work-based properties, had no use for frilly titles. In resistance to the changing dynamic of their native communities, some old timers refused to comply with the idiosyncrasies of summer residents. An anecdote titled “Not in the Purchase” appearing in a 1892 newspaper describes the tensions created by the Vermont tradition:

Many New England farms are known to the people in the surrounding country by the name of former owners, who perhaps moved away or died many years ago. To the true people this is a simple matter of course, and a man by the name of Perkins is not at all disturbed by the fact that his farm is known throughout the region as the “Stebbins place,” although he bought it of a man by the name of Williams, who in turn had bought it from a Maynard, who had lived on it for some ten years after “Stebbins” died.

This time-honored custom is, however, not only rather confusing, but decidedly objectionable to a certain class of men. Martin Baker, who came from “York State” to live on a fine old Vermont farm, was a person of this class.

He painted a sign for the barn, which announced to all beholders that this was “Mountain View Farm,” but to his disgust he heard his new property spoken of on every hand as “th’ old Batchelor place.”

His patience was greatly tried by this fact, and at last he broke out in a rage one day, when a farmer who lived a short distance from him was explaining to a new-comer that he, Martin Baker, was a man who was “fixin’ up th’ old Batchelor place, an’ cal’lated t’ hev it known th’ kentry raound.”

“I aint calculatin’ to have it known as the ‘Batchelor place,’ though, I can tell you!” blazed Martin Baker, turning upon his petrified neighbor.

“Haven’t I lived on th place over a year now? Didn’t I buy it, and pay hard cash for it? Didn’t I buy the stock and the pasture land

and the woodlots and the meadows, and everything that ever belonged to the Batchelor? My cousin didn't own all the land, but *I* do. I've bought every inch of it, and paid for it. What is there I aint done in the buyin' line in regard to that farm, and why don't the folks call it by the name I've given it? It mads me!"

"I see it doos; I see it doos," replied the farmer, calmly. "Ye see, friend Baker, ther's jest one way ye've over-spec'lated a grain. Ye ain't bought all of us old folks's rec'llections; an' I'm afeard ye won't be able to f'r a year or so, t' put a low figger on it. I cal'late it's one o' them few cases wher' time shows for more'n money!"<sup>154</sup>

The challenges afforded to newcomers by stubborn old farmers were reflective of resistance to change among many rural residents. Popular accounts and personal narratives, such as those of Landon and Hill from Greensboro, were produced throughout the mid-twentieth century. The stories fascinated the public, and the image of urbanite taking on the quaint country life sometimes read like an ethnography of a foreign and primitive culture. Other books were more anecdotal and lighthearted in commentary. Every genre, however, created an image of the Real Vermonter consistent with the mythologized version.



**Illustration 43.** "Fairview Farm" in Essex. Summer residents were not the only people to name their farms, this property was owned by a French Canadian family.

Source: Photo courtesy of Anne O'Grady

*The Farm in the Green Mountains* was an account by Alice Herdan-Zuckmayer, a German writer who fled to the U.S. in 1939 with her husband Carl Zuckmayer, a famous German playwright, and their two daughters. Herdan-Zuckmayer was friends with journalist Dorothy Thompson, who lived in Barnard with her husband Sinclair Lewis, and was encouraged to move to Vermont by Thompson. *The Farm in the Green Mountains* is a charming and witty account of country life, but it also contains many important observations about the family's adopted community. Herdan-Zuckmayer describes the abandoned farms she observes throughout Vermont as "a strange feature of America" that "have in their basic architecture the material to become beautiful houses."<sup>155</sup> The rural people seem to match their environment, as she writes of the "queer, strange inhabitants" that unsettle newcomers with their "mistrust and reserve."<sup>156</sup> Herdan-Zuckmayer speaks very favorably of her neighbors, saying she never encountered the "whimsical and obstinate," "narrow-minded and reactionary" Vermonters most other Americans warned of.<sup>157</sup> Instead, she astutely addresses the way in which reputation had intensified the alienation of Vermonters from the rest of the nation. She describes Vermont's reputation as:

That state which has overdeveloped individualism to eccentricity, that produces odd characters and is woven about by a complete cycle of stories whose main theme is indestructible independence and the will to do things in one's own way, even when the approaches are ever so unconventional.<sup>158</sup>

Although Herdan-Zuckmayer finds many statements about Vermonters to be overgeneralizations, she does admire their "inclination toward tradition."<sup>159</sup>

This inclination often made the transition to life with modern technology and new neighbors difficult. Just as Hill described the older farmers treating their new cars like horses, rural residents accepted the conveniences of technology but sometimes misinterpreted their use. Herdan-Zuckmayer describes one old farmer's wife who, once her house was hooked up to the telephone "party line" with several





**Illustration 44.** “Eccentric Vermonters,” David and Madeline Yadow pose in front of the Fairview Farm silo.

Source: Photo courtesy of Anne O’Grady

other neighbors, spent her days listening in on and criticized others' conversations. Eventually she became so intrusive that workers had to remove her phone from the house and place it on a tree in her yard, making it available only for emergencies. The woman, shocked at losing her new line to the outside world, beat the phone down with a Civil War rifle before threatening the workers for taking away her right to speak her mind. The story, which is both quite funny and somewhat sad, is reflective of the isolation of rural individuals and the difficult adjustment that must be made when access to the outside world is made more readily available. While rural areas across the country were experiencing the new availability of technological communications, rural Vermonters were shocked by new developments, both because of their tendencies toward reticence, previous physical isolation, and the increasing arrival of new neighbors with very different lifestyles.

### ***“Living the Good Life”***

Helen and Scott Nearing were two outsiders who moved to Winhall, Vermont from New York City, bringing with them a way of life that was both shocking and illogical to native Vermonters. Unlike the Zuckmayer's, who attempted to raise animals and participate in some of the Vermont “way of life,” the Nearings were well-known socialists and critics of the growing American “plutocratic military oligarchy.” They arrived in Vermont in 1932 in search of a simple and satisfying life and to escape from the effects of the Great Depression. The Nearings were not attracted by the promotional rhetoric of the Real Vermonter, in fact they held very little regard for the qualities of Vermonters, such as independence, Republicanism and Puritanism, that many other people found endearing. The Nearings were attracted to Vermont because of its “Old World,” “pre-industrial” qualities and its potential as a “laboratory” in which to carry out their experiment in subsistence homesteading.<sup>160</sup>

These intentions vary greatly from those of most summer residents, who wanted to emerge their families and themselves in Vermont tradition and charm, enjoying the comforts of modern life in a quaint setting. However, many Americans read the Nearings' stories, and their opinions and impressions of the state undoubtedly helped shape how outsiders viewed summering in rural Vermont.

The image of Vermonters presented by the Nearings' accounts, which include several books and newspaper articles, were often less than favorable. In one article they write of their choice to live "like peasants" in the wilderness.<sup>161</sup> In their most famous book, *Living the Good Life*, they critiqued the actions of Vermonters, from eating cakes and pies made with white flour and working on a relaxed schedule, to the keeping of live animals on farms. The Nearings purposefully tried to live their lives in Vermont "un-Vermontishly." While agreeing to be non-confrontational with their native neighbors, the couple attempted to promote collectivism in their Pikes Fall valley community. Ultimately, their social experiment in community integration failed because, "Vermonters were strong individualists...the population was thin and widely scattered, and all the major Vermont traditions emphasized the individualism of the Green Mountain folk..."<sup>162</sup>

During their two decades in Vermont, the Nearings rehabbed or built a total of nine buildings for their farm on which they sugared for a living. Ironically, the Nearings left Vermont for Maine in the 1950s, when they felt their rural isolation was being compromised by development. "When big investors came in to our remote valley and threatened our quiet simple way of life with huge ski lifts, hotels, golf links, swimming pools and \$40,000 chalets, we realized we must seek another wilderness area."<sup>163</sup> By the mid-1950s, the summer home industry in Vermont was expanding from small lakeside colonies and rehabilitated farmsteads into mountaintop ski complexes, which brought in more visitors and visibly altered the landscape to a



**Illustration 45.** Wood chopping in Essex, Vermont, an activity the Nearings also pursued in their Pike's Valley community.

Source: Photo courtesy of Anne O'Grady

greater extent than had any previous tourism. The Nearings had come to Vermont for the isolation and simplicity it offered, and the portrait of the state their writings offered perpetuated rural Vermont's reputation for quiet staidness, but the attention and admiration the state received only expedited changes toward commercialization. Popular literature was one means of augmenting the promotional literature released by the state, piquing interest in visiting Vermont to an unsustainable degree.

### ***Conclusion***

The development of summer colonies in Vermont raised many complex paradoxes. On one hand, they can be credited with hastening the collapse of rural communities by bringing in newcomers, which alienated natives, altered the appearance of the landscape, and made small-scale farming without additional income increasingly unsustainable. On the other hand, summer people brought money, interest

and economic and social activity to already depressed communities while also keeping alive the notion of a distinct Vermont tradition through their storytelling and praise. In many ways, the interest in the tradition of rural Vermont and her people helped prevent harmful projects such as the Green Mountain Parkway or the proliferation of ugly billboards along roadsides that appeared in other states. This interest in scenery preservation and environmental awareness continues to this day. For some natives, however, the power of stake-holding “flatlanders” to prevent large development projects which may harm the environment is seen as an unfair damper on economic opportunities desired by the rural poor. For some, tourism, which holds the state captive to an antiquated concept of tradition, is not the industry of choice. Others capitalize on the mythologized Real Vermonter as a means of preserving those traditions, many of which were lost over the course of the twentieth century, at least in part to the changes brought about by the arrival of new populations to the state.

## CONCLUSION

The myth of the Real Vermonter has been a contributing factor in public perception for over a century, shaping the way in which both natives and newcomers view Vermont's unique character, history, and residents. As keepers of the agricultural tradition and the Jeffersonian ideal of the yeoman farmer, natives were routinely depicted as a static bunch, bound by state custom and American lore. The quest to understand the development and use of this myth and its implications was the driving force behind this thesis.

There are both great consistencies and incongruities between the myth of the Real Vermonter, as described in promotional literature from the 1890s through the 1930s, and realities of life in the state leading up to and during that period. While the agricultural tradition of the subsistence farmer was strong in Vermont, life on the family farm was not a peaceful existence in the pastoral landscape. The experience was one of struggle and hardship that led many to abandon the state and seek greener pastures out west or opportunities in industrial regions by the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Furthermore, the agricultural practices of the state were hardly static or uniform. As described in chapter one, Vermonters pursued a wide variety of activities on farms of all sizes, from small family operations to specialty commercial ventures and the now iconic dairy farms growing at the turn of the century. With the influx of immigrant populations, largely French Canadians, rural depopulation and a burgeoning tourist economy, the realities of nineteenth-century Vermont were quite different from the mythology of unchanging tradition.

The Real Vermonter myth was more based on a variety of perceived positive attributes, such as the ingrained love of independence, stalwart patriotism and reserved nature of natives with a propensity for hard work. However based in reality these

depictions seem, sterling moral character and honesty are not uniformly applicable to any population. The growing French Canadian population surely did not feel the same reverence for the Republican, Protestant tradition, and endured criticism by nativists such as Henry Perkins of the Eugenics Survey, for their apparent inferiority.

However, many brought abandoned or failing farms back into agricultural use, and by doing so helped to preserve this piece of the agricultural tradition. While the depictions of Vermonters in promotional literature published by the Board of Agriculture and Bureau of Publicity were often grounded in some form of reality, they were ultimately simplistic, romanticized, nativist depictions of state life.

Ultimately, these sanitized images of the Real Vermonter became a tool by which to “improve” rural areas and their residents. The Vermont Commission on Country Life made active attempts to solve the problems of rural decline, which were exacerbated by the Depression, by attracting desirable outsiders. They targeted middle-class professionals with college degrees—artists, writers or educators—who it was hoped would positively influence the communities where they spent their summers. These visitors were expected to lead to improvements in rural institutions, including churches, schools and medical facilities; to support local farmers by purchasing goods; and, in general, to rejuvenate rural areas. The results of this process were mixed. The mere presence of summer people, who often clustered in exclusive colonies separate from locals, drastically altered the fabric of rural communities. While these areas often became more prosperous or financially stable, the very nature of the communities changed as natives were made spectacles for public consumption, dependent on the patronage of outsiders. The potency of the myth of the Real Vermonter, in its relationship to reality, was often diminished rather than preserved as the presence of summer colonies infringed upon small rural communities.

There were many tensions in summer colonies between natives and newcomers, as well as many friendships formed. It is impossible to conclude whether the use of the myth yielded positive or negative results in these communities, for the outcome was mixed. It is certain, however, that Vermont continued to change and evolve throughout the years of rural reform in the 1920s and 1930s. The Depression and resulting New Deal programs created a state climate increasingly open to government intervention, albeit out of necessity, that was previously taboo in the state. Concern over workers' rights, farming cooperatives protecting agriculturalists and the consideration, and ultimate rejection, of the Green Mountain Parkway all signaled a changing climate in Vermont. Despite all these changes, none of which were the direct result of summer colony development, the myth of the Real Vermonter persisted. Though the use of the myth may have undermined the social fabric of rural communities, it certainly helped protect other aspects of state life, such as the protection of scenic vistas and historic landscapes and the need for a strong agricultural basis in the state.

In the end, the myth of the Real Vermonter was used as a tool to preserve the favorable aspects of state life iterated within the myth. Some efforts were rather successful at achieving their goals, though they seem contentious today, such as the Eugenics Survey's charges of hereditary inferiority towards immigrants or the VCCL's attempts at changing the native population while patronizingly praising them. Other aspects of the campaign have instilled a sense of tradition and continuity that set Vermont apart, ensuring a thorough protection of landscape and agriculture in all regions of the state. There is a value in the mythologized Real Vermonter, one that has shaped change and growth in rural communities and throughout the state for centuries.



This thesis was created within a limited time frame of about nine months, and with a small amount of time allotted for research and writing, many pertinent subjects were not explored. Had there been more time available for travel, a more comprehensive look at summer home and colony development in specific areas would have been possible with visits to individual town and village historical societies. There are few truly complete sources of information about summer homes in rural areas of Vermont located outside each immediate region. Since Vermont is such a small state with a relatively uniform population it was possible to construct this study as a statewide survey; however, more thorough focus on individual regions would undoubtedly benefit the work. Another limitation of a survey focusing on over forty years of history is the inability to fully explore any one topic as it related to the overarching theme of the myth. For example, the role of the VCCL extends beyond that discussed in chapter three, rural depopulation was an extensive phenomena, and the effects of the Depression in Vermont have elicited entire dissertations. The issues are so complicated and far reaching that it is impossible to fully do them justice in such a short amount of time.

Consequently, there are many potential topics waiting to be explored. The history of French Canadians has become a topic of interest in Vermont in recent years, but an extensive study of their contributions and the interaction with the myth of the Real Vermonter would be very interesting and timely. As briefly discussed in this thesis, French Canadians were both the antithesis of the myth of the Real Vermonter and keepers of the rural agricultural tradition, juxtapositions worth being explored. A more comprehensive exploration of Vermont's popular literature, a rich and varied collection, would also be an interesting means of analyzing myth and state tourist promotion. Likewise, examining the role of landscape and scenery in developing state identity would add a new spin on defining the use of the myth in Vermont tourism. A

case study of summer colonies would be a valuable contribution to the study of Vermont summer homes. Looking closely at individual communities would further parse the difference between reputation and reality, and the impact of both, on an understandable scale. Finally, an exploration of the further development of the myth in the years following 1940, how the concept of tradition may have evolved and further impacted the state, would be a valuable resource in understanding contemporary identity in Vermont.

In conclusion, this thesis has explored the intricacies of the myth of the Real Vermonter during the development of the early summer home industry. Mythology and cultural identity, based in reality, fiction, and a highly romanticized past, has played a powerful role in state history. It has lured in tourists and summer residents, intensified ethnic tensions and downplayed the importance of “nontraditional” residents, and been used as a tool both to promote social change and to preserve tradition. The myth of the Real Vermonter is persistent and consequential, having shaped the very nature of communities throughout the state for well over a century.

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