

The background of the cover features a wide-angle photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there's a large, vibrant green field with a winding dirt road. A red barn with a blue metal roof stands prominently in the middle ground. To the left, a blossoming tree with white flowers is visible. The background consists of rolling green hills and a variety of trees, some with yellow and orange leaves, suggesting early autumn or a transition season.

A Celebration of
All Things Maple

Remembering
Robert Frost

Spring Getaway
in Bennington

YANKEE

SPRING 2019

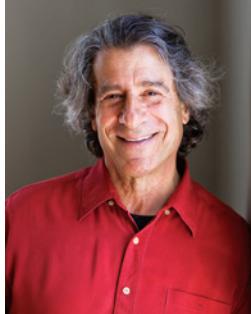
A
SPECIAL
EDITION

Our Vermont

*Yankee's favorite stories of the people, places,
and traditions that make southern
Vermont so original.*

Signs of Spring

The warming of the land, the lengthening of the days—this happens beyond our control. But what we do with the land and the light is up to us. Spring is when all things start to grow again, to rise from cold to warmth, and for Vermonters the new season gives its first hint of turning even while snow still lingers at Okemo and Killington, giving the gift of soft April (and even May!) runs to skiers and snowboarders.



Early spring is the sweet time for sugaring, bringing a buzz to places like the Robb Family Farm in West Brattleboro, whose maple syrup legacy of more than a century continues with the descendants of the original farmers. April quickens the pulse of fishermen, who follow the timing of insects hatching on the legendary Battenkill River. By mid-May ravenous trout are feeding on a banquet of spring hatches, and anglers from around the country descend on the riverbank from East Dorset to Manchester.

The spring migration brings birds to the forests and hillsides by the tens of thousands, and the southern Vermont birding hot spots attract birders, who can spend hours listening to some of the sweetest warbler sounds anywhere, while hawks fly watchful overhead.

Hikers swap out snowshoes and begin to plan for their trek on the Long Trail. Called Vermont's "footpath in the wilderness," it is the oldest long-distance hiking trail in the country, stretching some 272 miles along the spine of the Green Mountains from the Massachusetts-Vermont line all the way to the Canadian border. On a late spring day, when the mud has dried, the roughly 3½-mile path on the Long Trail up Harmon Hill a few miles from Bennington not only gives a lovely view of the town, but also is full of wildflowers and birds (and, as a bonus, dogs on leash are welcome).

Trees are budding, and in May apple blossoms turn hillsides pink and white. We fill our bicycle tires with air; we plan days around our children's baseball and softball games. All around us is greening. Like the birds, whose instinct is to come here to nest, we feel there is no better place to be than right here, right now.

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*On the cover: Springtime at Sleepy Hollow Farm in Woodstock, Vermont.
Photograph by Jon Olsen.*

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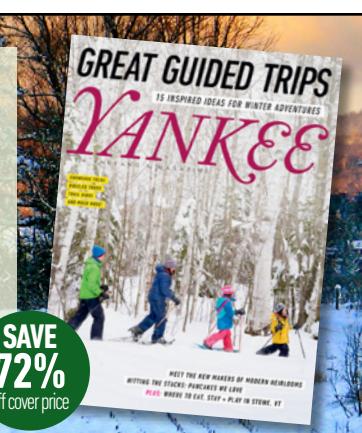
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Mad About Mud

A tongue-in-cheek guide to surviving Vermont's soggy season.

In northern New England there are really five seasons. Some would say Indian summer and January thaw, too, which add to the rhythm of most years, but they're inconsistent and ethereal. Mud season, though, is real, its own thing—and it's felt especially keenly in Vermont, where more than half of the state's 15,000 miles of public roads are dirt.

Sometime after the last winter nor'easter but before the first warm days of late spring, the air turns soft and the roads turn soft, and Vermonters find themselves once again sinking into mud. Cars bog down. Shoes get mucky. Mud-rooms live up to their name.

After taking some time to observe how the folks in his small Vermont town managed to get through this unique season, writer Kerry James O'Connor compiled the following helpful suggestions for anyone facing a muddy road this spring.

- Keep moving. As long as you keep moving, you're alive.
- Feign indifference. If the mud senses you're afraid, you're doomed.
- Take pride in small accomplishments. Calmly negotiating a road that resembles a mud slide while a child is crying in the car and you are trying to find a station on the radio takes talent.
- Travel in packs, in the event of emergency or attack by the dreaded Highwaymen of April.
- If you have to travel alone, take along a mature beaver or a large dog that you can send off for help in an emergency.
- Scare the mud—tell it you have summoned the legendary African mud whumpers.
- Don't take any dirt roads you've never been down before. There is a generally shared suspicion in New England that certain roads are one-way in every sense of the phrase. Those who take them are never seen again.
- Try swinging from tree to tree. (This is difficult with groceries.)
- Tie a bright orange cloth at the top of your car antenna. People can use this to spot and rescue you in the event you sink completely out of sight.
- Hire a hound. The hounds found sleeping on the front steps of country stores are often descendants of a highly refined delivery system. Don't let the sleepy appearance fool you. Ask the store owner if his dogs are "working dogs" and if you can enter into an agreement to have one of his canine representatives deliver your groceries during mud season.
- Remember that mud season is God's way of letting New Englanders know they haven't got to heaven yet.
- Call up your grocer and ask him to bag up your groceries, being sure to include two extra six-packs of beer. Now call in and report that your house is on fire and ask the firemen to pick up your



groceries on the way. The beer, of course, is a reward for the firemen.

- Do the Big Muddy (like a cake walk, but faster). Back in 1737 there was a town in Vermont affectionately known as Big Muddy that sank, or to be more proper, settled into the mud until it disappeared altogether. A city slicker coming up from New York or Boston was told that he hadn't lived until he'd been to Big Muddy. Since by then Big Muddy was no longer on the map, the town took on mythical proportions similar to Atlantis, but in need of a faith.
- Grow older quickly. Mud and kids have a natural attraction to each other. As you get older, mud is much less attracted to you as an individual. Why the mud is bored by adults and enjoys the company of children isn't clear.
- Realize you are just playing out one small part in the machinations of the universe, and if you fail now, the whole thing is going to come unraveled.
- Hibernate for seven weeks.

Green (Mountain) Thumb

*This is the year of
your greatest garden ever.*



Spring is coming. (No, we promise: The snow will soon be gone.) And it's time to start thinking about your garden, if you haven't already. But what to plant? Fortunately, the southern Vermont climate (predominantly USDA plant hardiness zones 4b and 5a) allows for a surprisingly wide array of options.

Digging In

Let's start with veggies. And to do that, let's begin with the soil. The key is that it must be warm enough for even cool-weather crops to get going—cabbage and spinach, for example. In most areas of Vermont, late April is optimal planting time for such plants, say the experts at the University of Vermont Extension.

"To prepare the soil, the first criterion is to make sure that it isn't overly wet," write professors Vern Grubinger and Leonard Perry in *The Green Mountain Gardener*, a UVM Extension publication. "You'll be able to tell by scooping up a small handful. Squeeze to test. Does it fall apart or clump together? If the latter, then be patient. It's still too wet to work the soil. Doing so can cause compac-

tion and lead to poor drainage and weak root growth later in the season."

Among the first plants you can sow in spring are peas. They thrive in cool, moist conditions like Vermont's climate in early spring, which means earlier plantings actually produce a greater yield than later ones. Cauliflower, broccoli, lettuce, and leeks can follow.

As the weather and the soil heat up even further, you can diversify your plantings. Maybe you'd like to try watermelon for the first time. Southern Vermont also plays nice with cantaloupe and sweet potatoes. Basil, bell peppers, parsley, and tomatoes all thrive here, as do a number of berries—full-sun, perennial favorites such as raspberries, strawberries, and blueberries are delicious options.

Expert Picks

Taste and beauty can go hand in hand, as shown by the sumptuous veggie varietals recommended for the Northeast by the pros at *Fine Gardening*. Their top pick is the

Jump-start a robust tomato crop this spring by beginning your seeds indoors roughly six to eight weeks before the average last frost date.



‘Turkish Orange’ eggplant, an heirloom variety free of the kind of bitterness that can show up in other eggplants. “The plants are diminutive, only growing 18 to 22 inches tall, but they yield a surprisingly large harvest,” according to the publication.

Tomato lovers will gush over ‘Mountain Fresh,’ which “reliably produces big, flavorful red tomatoes weighing in at 8 to 12 ounces.” For more of a snacker, consider ‘Aunt Molly’s’ ground cherry tomato: “surprisingly sweet, tasting like a cross between a pineapple and a strawberry, with just the right amount of tang.”

No gardener ever went wrong with green beans, and the one tapped by *Fine Gardening* is ‘Savannah,’ which can be snacked on fresh or harvested for canning and pickling. “With this variety, you can expect to harvest loads of exceptionally dark green, straight, small-seeded, crisp green beans.”

Flower Power

Outside the garden and around the yard, there are any number of native plants available to dress up your landscape. One sturdy favorite is the black-eyed Susan, which blooms from summer into fall and lends itself nicely to mass plantings.

Add a splash of color with purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*). Its attractive, rugged blooms easily draw butterflies and songbirds. Another beautiful option is bee balm, also called wild bergamot. Blooming in red, pink, purple, or white, it likewise attracts bees, along with hummingbirds and butterflies; in fall and winter, the seed heads draw wild birds.

Known as one of the “stars of the fall garden,” New England asters can brighten a yard when other plants go dormant for the season. Best of all, these flowers thrive with minimal care.

And there many more to consider, including steeplebush, *Potentilla*, meadowsweet, Jerusalem artichoke, and Virginia rose. For all the options and great gardening information, plus a planting calendar, visit our friends at *The Old Farmer’s Almanac* (almanac.com). —*Ian Aldrich*

PLANT MANAGERS

SOUTHERN VERMONT GARDEN PROS
TO HELP YOU GET GROWING.

Equinox Valley Nursery

A green oasis in downtown Manchester filled with flowering shrubs, fruiting plants, unusual conifers, and more. 1158 Main St., Manchester. 802-362-2610; equinoxvalleynursery.com

The Garden Center

A go-to for trees, shrubs, and perennials, plus yard art, bird baths, and landscaping supplies. Don’t miss the antiques barn and the paintball target shooting. 4 Catamount Lane, Wilmington. 802-490-6690; on Facebook

Glebe Mountain Gardens & Landscaping

A family-owned nursery with vibrant flowers, trees, and shrubs, plus two greenhouses full of veggies and herbs. 3714 Rte. 11, Londonderry. 802-824-3956; glebemountaingardens.com

Mettowee Mill Nursery

A full-service garden center with a broad array of plants, nursery stock, and supplies, not to mention an eclectic gift shop. 4977 Rte. 30, Dorset. 802-325-3007; mettoweemillnursery.com

Morning Star Perennials & Nursery

Over 500 kinds of Vermont-hardy perennials, shrubs, and trees. Morning Star also sells its own organic fruit and honey. 221 Darby Hill Rd., Rockingham. 802-463-3433; morningstarflowers.com

Reading Greenhouse Farm Market

Greenhouses filled with annuals and perennials, including hanging baskets, as well as a farm store offering fruits, veggies, flowers, and local beers. 786 Rte. 106, Reading. 802-484-7272; facebook.com/GreenHouseinReadingVT

Sunshine Acres Nursery & Garden Center

The Okemo Valley’s largest greenhouse/garden center. At the holidays, look for prime Christmas trees, wreaths, and poinsettias. 1824 Rte. 11 E., Chester. 802-875-4911; on Facebook

Walker Farm Garden Center

A 30-acre nirvana that draws green thumbs from miles away. Look for the certified organic vegetable plants (125 tomato varieties, 57 kinds of hot pepper, etc.), plus rare trees and shrubs and 1,000-plus varieties of perennials and annuals. 1190 Rte. 5, East Dummerston. 802-254-2051; walkerfarm.com



Spring Takes Wing

Birds returning from their winter homes bring a “kaleidoscope of sights and sounds” to southern Vermont.

The birds sense it first from their distant wintering grounds: the promise of coming warmth far to the north, the invisible promise of a greening beneath late winter snow. What the birds know by instinct we can never truly understand—we can only, instead, appreciate the resulting wonder of spring migration.

Birds will travel hundreds, even thousands of miles to find where they will breed, nest, and raise their young. And the habitat in southern Vermont beckons like a spa retreat, with its forests of hardwood and conifers, rivers and ponds and cattail marshes, hills and mountaintops and pastures. This landscape is largely rural, and there are no urban sprawls to gobble up huge tracts of nesting places. And here is a community of people who love nature and the outdoors, people who nest here themselves *because* of nature, not despite it.

Chris Rimmer, executive director of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies in White River Junction, says there's a pattern each spring that bird watchers anticipate. "The vanguard of migration actually begins in late February," he says. "These will be red-winged blackbirds and common grackles." By mid-March,



With its clear, lilting song and warm orange breast, the American robin, left, is an ideal species for beginning birders. A bit less common is the Eastern bluebird, above, which is a great prospective tenant for nest boxes.

he continues, the robins and killdeer come back to barnyards. (These are not long-distance migrants, but rather species that winter over in southern New England and the mid-Atlantic states.) This is also when waterfowl appear again on the waterways.

When the first buds start bursting on trees, the mid-April-to-May procession is in full-throated birdsong. “You can hear the sparrows singing,” Rimmer says. “The more birds sing, it stimulates their hormones. You hear them all around. Just a joyful indication of things to come.” And when the meadows green up and the insects hatch, “the floodgates open—the orioles and warblers and thrushes,” he says. “On any given day, it’s a kaleidoscope of sights and sounds. It’s magical if you are paying attention.”

Vermont is home to some 387 species of birds, and bird lovers find that spring is the best time to visit southern Vermont’s hot spots for seeing scarlet tanagers and cedar waxwings in flight, and swallows circling the lowland marshes to feast on the newly hatched insects. And then there’s the Vermont state bird, the hermit thrush,

which Vermont Fish and Wildlife migratory birds biologist John Buck calls “the Mozart of the bird world, with one of the most melodic sounds.”

One of the best times for bird watching is after a rain, followed by clear skies and a south wind, a tailwind to stir the birds northward in the night, what birders call a “pulse.” At dawn following a pulse, trees may be as crowded as a Monday morning subway commute in Manhattan. Go to one of these spots favored by spring arrivals. Sit and look around. Be patient. There may be no better way to shed winter and greet the new season.

Retreat Meadows

This Brattleboro wetlands area near the confluence of the West River and the Connecticut River is known as prime birding territory, thanks to its shrubs and cattails and shallows. You’ll see waterfowl, sparrows, wrens, mockingbirds, and more in a landscape known for its variety and surprises.

Herricks Cove

This Rockingham spot is considered one of the state’s birding treasures. Situated at the confluence of the Williams River and the Connecticut River, it offers a mix of marsh, forest, uplands, and meadows. More than 225 species have been spotted here. Lovers of warblers and thrushes know that the cove is alive with their song in May.

Gale Meadows

Spreading over 700 acres in Londonderry and Winhall, this wildlife management area hosts more than 100 bird species. You may well see loons, herons, and other waterfowl on the pond, while hawks fly overhead. —*Mel Allen*

To Learn More

Vermont Fish & Wildlife

The website for this state agency is full of good, basic information, from tips on getting started in bird watching to checklists of species to look for. You’ll also find details on top wildlife management

areas for birding, including southern Vermont’s Pomainville, Birdseye, and Gale Meadows. vtfishandwildlife.com/watch-wildlife/bird-watching

Audubon Society

Southern Vermont boasts three

Audubon Society chapters, all offering great online resources as well as bird walks, field trips, and other events. Depending on where you live, check out the Southeastern Vermont chapter in Brattleboro (southeasternvtas.blogspot.com); the Ascutney Mountain chapter in Springfield (amasvt.org); and the Rutland County chapter in Rutland

(rutlandcountyaudubon.org).

Vermont Center for Ecostudies

In addition to providing a great overview of the birds that it studies, this wildlife research nonprofit group has a number of volunteer programs for beginning to expert birders. vtecostudies.org/volunteer

How to Sugar on a Shoestring

Words of wisdom for backyard sugarmakers from a seventh-generation Vermont pro.

Maple sugaring, as Burr Morse will tell you, doesn't require fancy stainless-steel boilers and gravity-fed tubing—simple firepits and recycled milk jugs work just fine, too. Morse should know: His family claims sugaring roots stretching back nearly two centuries, and today Morse sugars from the same trees his granddad once tapped. Come March, his Montpelier farm, with its country store and farm-life museum, is a destination for maple lovers from far and wide. But if you're a DIY type, read on for his pro tips on making your own maple syrup inexpensively.



Drill, Baby, Drill

You'll never suck enough sap from a tree to kill it, but you can injure it if you don't vary your drill spots each year. Also, if you live in an area that gets big winters, drill as low as possible. "If the snow melts, you don't want to be reaching up for your buckets at the end of the season," Morse cautions.

Recycle, Reuse

You don't need those postcard-perfect metal buckets to collect sap. Morse says plastic milk jugs serve the same purpose. Just drill a small hole into the side opposite the handle to hang the jug; when it's filled, you'll have something to grab.

Quick Time

Reduce boiling time by sticking your sap in a freezer, long enough so that its outer edges begin to freeze solid. The solid stuff is excess water and can be removed; what remains is the sweet stuff you want. "You often average 2 percent sap, but this way you might be able to get it up to 4 or 5," says Morse. "It may take only 10 gallons to make a gallon of syrup, not 40."

Hot and Heavy

The hotter the fire, the better, says Morse, who recommends soft-wood slabs to feed the flames. "Simmering is not a friend of maple syrup," he notes.

When the sap threatens to boil over, throw in a pat of butter to calm the froth.

Closing In

To see if your syrup is almost done boiling, stick a clean straight edge into your pan—a wide knife, say—then lift it out. If the liquid doesn't drip but instead rolls off in a sheet, you're ready for the final stage.

Insider's Touch

Syrup reaches the right sugar concentration when it's boiling at 7° above its initial boiling point, which in most areas is 212° F. For small batches, Morse advises, head indoors to finish it off. Pour it into a large pot and crank up your kitchen stove, making sure the syrup's at least an inch deep to avoid scorching. Then after it hits that 219° (and no higher, to avoid crystallization), maintain at least 190° as you filter it through cheesecloth into sterilized mason jars.

"Quality Boredom"

Keep a good book nearby; learn to whittle; turn on the radio. Why? Sugaring introduces a lot of downtime. "My dad would start smoking, and I'd find gum wrappers all over the sugarhouse," says Morse. "One time I accused him of being bored. He didn't want to admit it. Finally, he just said, 'Well, it's a quality boredom.'" —*Ian Aldrich*

GUIDE TO MAPLE SYRUP GRADES

For years, pure maple syrup was graded using three letters: A (light), B (dark), and C (very dark, and only sold commercially). Perhaps confused by their school days, many people tended to believe that this meant Grade A maple syrup was better. In fact, the quality of the syrups was exactly the same.

The differences had to do with color and flavor. Syrup made from sap collected early in the season has a lighter color, while syrup made when the weather is warmer is darker. The darker the syrup, the stronger the flavor.

In 2014, Vermont—the state with the highest production rate of maple syrup—introduced a less confusing system. In short, all syrups would be lettered “A” but have descriptive names as well. And sure enough, the USDA adopted the system the following year.

Here's a look at the four “new” maple syrup grades, along with the comparable “old” grades.

NEW

Grade A | Golden Color and Delicate Taste

OLD

Grade A Light Amber (aka Vermont Fancy)

The lightest of the new maple syrup grades. Highly recommended for drizzling over pancakes or ice cream.

NEW

Grade A | Amber Color and Rich Flavor

OLD

Grade A Medium Amber, Grade A Dark Amber

Works well for cooking and baking.

NEW

Grade A | Dark Color and Robust Flavor

OLD

Grade A Dark Amber, Grade A Extra Dark, Grade B

Best for recipes that require a heavy maple flavor.

NEW

Grade A | Very Dark and Strong Flavor

OLD

Grade C

Very strong. Suitable as a substitute for molasses and for making maple-flavored candy.

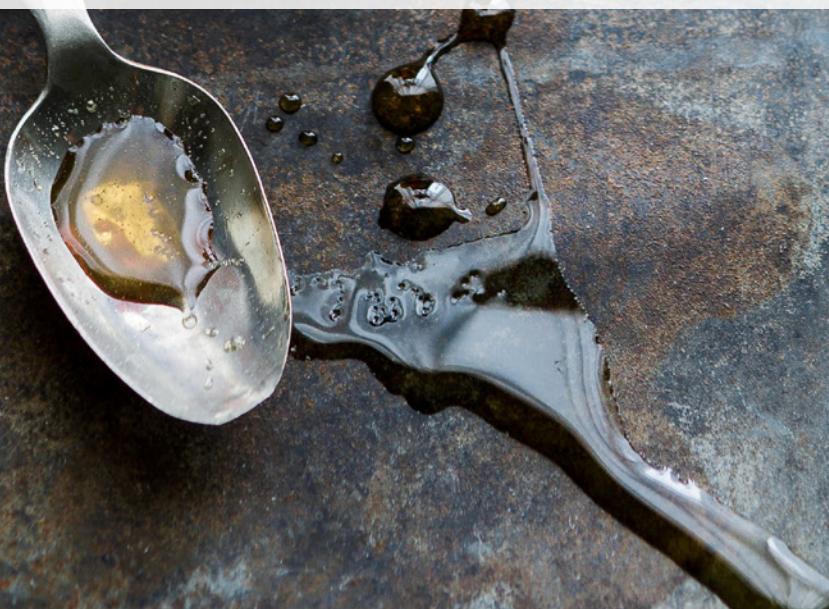


The Sweetest Season

Celebrate the return of spring with Yankee's favorite maple syrup recipes.

It's impossible to oversell the importance of maple season to Vermonters, and not just the farmers who make (or subsidize) a living from their acres of sugarbush. Even for the rest of us, those initial trickles of amber syrup represent the first meaningful sign of spring. The sight of a sugar shack billowing clouds of steam into the sky is enough to revive the most winter-weary soul.

To help home cooks make the most of this sweetest of seasons, *Yankee* senior food editor Amy Traverso has compiled some of the best maple-inspired recipes around. (And no, she didn't forget about the slow-cooker beans!)



CORRY HENDRICKSON



Whole Wheat Maple-Cranberry Scones

Maple syrup gives these scones their sweetness, while cranberries bring a welcome tartness.

For the scones:

- 1¼ cups whole-wheat flour
- 1¼ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon table salt
- ½ cup (1 stick) cold unsalted butter, cut into small cubes
- ½ cup maple syrup
- ½ cup whole or 2% milk
- 1 cup frozen cranberries

For the maple glaze:

- ¾ cup powdered sugar
- 1½ tablespoons water
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup

Preheat oven to 425° and set a rack to the middle position. In a large bowl, whisk together the flours, baking powder, and salt until combined. Using a pastry cutter or fork, work in the butter until it forms pea-size bits; then use your fingers to rub the butter into the flour, creating a blend of powder, flakes, and some remaining small lumps of butter. Pour in the syrup and milk, and stir well with a fork. If needed, add another tablespoon or two of milk to form a dough. Use a spatula to fold in the cranberries.

Turn the dough out onto a baking sheet lined with parchment paper, and, with well-floured hands, press into an 8-inch circle. Cut into eight equal wedges (no need to separate them). Bake until puffed and golden brown on top, 20 to 25 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a small bowl, make the glaze: Whisk together the powdered sugar, water, and maple syrup until smooth.

Let the scones cool until barely warm, then drizzle with glaze. Serve with butter, jam, or whipped cream. *Yields 8 scones.*

Maple-Pecan Oat Pancakes

Made with oats and buttermilk, these flapjacks are surprisingly light. The maple syrup and pecans add a nutty sweetness.

- 2 cups old-fashioned oats**
- ½ cup chopped pecans, plus extra for garnish**
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour**
- 1½ teaspoons baking soda**
- 1 teaspoon baking powder**
- ½ teaspoon kosher or sea salt**
- ½ cup maple syrup, plus extra for serving**
- 2 cups buttermilk**
- 2 eggs**
- 4 tablespoons (½ stick) unsalted butter, melted, then cooled slightly, plus extra for skillet**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla**
- Chopped pecans, for garnish**

Toast oats and pecans lightly in a large (14-inch) skillet over medium heat, stirring frequently until aromatic and barely brown, 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer to a large mixing bowl and let cool. Add flour, baking soda, baking powder, and salt.

In a medium-size bowl, whisk together syrup, buttermilk, eggs, melted butter, and vanilla, until just mixed. Add buttermilk mixture to dry mixture; stir until blended. Let batter sit 15 minutes to soften oats.

Meanwhile, preheat your oven to 200° and preheat a skillet over medium heat. When batter is ready, add about 1 teaspoon butter to the skillet. Use a quarter-cup measuring cup to pour pancake batter onto skillet. Reduce heat to medium-low. Cook pancakes until bubbles form along the edges and toward the top, 3 to 4 minutes. Flip and cook until golden brown. Transfer pancakes to an ovenproof plate and keep in the warm oven until serving.

Repeat with remaining batter. Garnish with pecans and serve with maple syrup. *Yields 16 pancakes.*



MICHAEL PIAZZA

Mildred's Maple Glazed Ham with Maple Mustard

Coated with a mixture of sweet maple syrup and spicy mustard, this ham becomes infused with moist flavor as it cooks over a pan of hot water.

For the ham:

- 1 (8-pound) bone-in smoked ham
- ½ cup whole cloves
- 2 cups pure maple syrup
- ½ cup maple mustard or Dijon mustard, plus more for serving

For the maple mustard:

- ¼ black mustard seeds
- 6 tablespoons dry mustard
- ⅔ cup apple cider vinegar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons dark brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup

First, preheat the oven to 300 degrees, and prepare the ham. Trim away gristle, keeping skin and fat on. Bring a kettle of water to a boil. Set a roasting rack in a deep roasting pan. Pour the boiling water into the pan so it comes to just below the rack, about 1 inch up the sides of the pan. Place the ham, fat side up, on the rack, making sure it does not touch the water. Insert an ovenproof meat thermometer into the ham at a slight angle or through the end of the ham so the tip is in the center of the thickest part and does not touch bone or fat.

Bake for 45 minutes. Meanwhile, make the maple mustard: Combine all ingredients in a pint-size jar, cover, and shake vigorously.

Remove the ham from the oven and remove the skin, keeping the fat intact. Score the fat, cutting ¼-inch deep strips on an angle to create a decorative crosshatch. Press a whole clove into the corners of each crosshatch.

In a small bowl, stir together the maple syrup and the maple mustard. With a pastry brush, rub the ham with half the mustard mixture. Return the ham to the oven and bake for 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and coat with the remaining mustard mixture. Return the ham to the oven and bake for 15 minutes, or until the thermometer reads 135 degrees. Remove from the oven, tent with foil, and let stand for 10 minutes before transferring to a carving platter. Serve with maple mustard. Serves 12.

*From *The Vermont Country Store Cookbook*.





Coleslaw with Maple-Cider Dressing

This easy, tangy coleslaw recipe gets its slightly sweet lift from maple syrup.

- 1 small head (about 1 pound) green cabbage, shredded**
- 3 carrots, peeled, then grated**
- ½ red bell pepper, seeded and diced**
- 1 tablespoon freshly minced onion**
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 3 tablespoons apple-cider vinegar**
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup**
- 1 teaspoon celery seeds**
- ½ teaspoon kosher or sea salt**
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

Toss cabbage, carrots, and red pepper in a large bowl. In a small bowl, whisk together onion, olive oil, vinegar, maple syrup, celery seeds, salt, and pepper. Pour dressing over salad and toss well. Serve immediately. Refrigerated, slaw will stay fresh up to three days. Yields 6–8 servings.



Slow-Cooker Maple Baked Beans

This recipe originally ran as "Bertha Robb's Home-Baked Beans" in the March 1981 issue of Yankee. We've adapted it for the slow cooker.

- 1 pound dried yellow eye beans**
- 1 teaspoon baking soda**
- ½ cup granulated sugar**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- Dash pepper**
- 2 teaspoons ground mustard**
- 4 tablespoons maple syrup**
- 3 tablespoons molasses**
- Piece of salt pork**

Wash beans and soak them overnight. Parboil for about 20 minutes and add baking soda (beans will foam up). Drain beans and run under cold water in a sieve. Put beans in slow cooker and barely cover with boiling water. Mix remaining ingredients except salt pork and pour over beans. Place sliced salt pork on top of beans. Cover and cook on high until beans are tender, 7 to 9 hours (time varies depending on your slow cooker), stirring periodically. Season to taste and serve.



Maple-Walnut Layer Cake

This towering maple-walnut layer cake filled with sweet maple frosting is a delicious old-fashioned treat.

For the cake:

- 1½ cups walnut halves, plus extra for garnish**
- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened, plus extra for pans**
- ¾ cup granulated sugar**
- ¾ cup firmly packed light-brown sugar**
- 3 large eggs**
- 3 egg yolks**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 3 cups cake flour, plus extra for pans**
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder**
- 1 teaspoon kosher or sea salt**
- ¾ teaspoon baking soda**
- 1 cup maple syrup**
- ½ cup milk**
- ½ cup sour cream**

For the frosting:

- ½ cup maple syrup**
 - ½ cup (1 stick, or 8 tablespoons) unsalted butter, softened**
 - 8 ounces (1 package) cream cheese, softened**
 - 4 cups confectioner's sugar**
 - 1 tablespoon heavy cream**
 - 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- Garnish: walnut halves**

Preheat oven to 350°. Butter and flour three 8-inch cake pans.

First, prepare the walnuts: In a medium-size skillet over medium heat, toast nuts lightly until light brown and fragrant, 5 to 7 minutes. Cool nuts; then pulse in a blender or food processor until nuts have the texture of bulgur. Set aside.

Next, make the cake: In a large bowl, cream butter and sugars with an electric mixer until light and fluffy. In another bowl, beat eggs and yolks lightly with vanilla; then add to butter mixture and beat until incorporated.

In a separate bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, salt, and baking soda; set aside. In a fourth bowl, whisk together maple syrup, milk, and sour cream; set aside.

Add one-third of the dry ingredients to the butter/egg mixture and stir until just moistened; then add one-third of the maple and sour cream mixture. Repeat until all ingredients are combined. Gently fold in walnuts. Divide batter among the three prepared cake pans. Bake 30 minutes, or until cake springs back to the touch.

Meanwhile, make the frosting: Put syrup in a small saucepan over medium-high heat and simmer, uncovered, until reduced to 2 tablespoons, 15 to 20 minutes. Set aside to cool. Cream together butter and cream cheese; then add sugar and mix well. Add cooled reduced syrup, cream, and vanilla; beat until smooth.

When cakes are done, cool them in their pans 30 to 45 minutes. Then remove from pans, layer, and frost. Garnish with walnut halves. *Yields 12 servings.*

Tap into Trivia

We take an up-close look at the humble sap bucket.

Nearly two million gallons of maple syrup were produced in Vermont in 2018. Collecting enough sap (at 2 percent sugar content) to produce that much syrup would require more than 16 million five-gallon buckets.

The first sap buckets were most likely the birch-bark containers that Native Americans would place on the ground beneath notches in maple trees. They then concentrated the sap by letting it freeze several times and boiling it by dropping hot rocks into the container.

Was the original sap bucket never intended as such? According to Native American lore, there once was a chief (most often Iroquois Chief Woksis) who hurled his tomahawk at a maple tree, causing sap to drip into a stray container on the ground. Later, his wife, believing the liquid was water, used it to cook venison, and maple syrup was "discovered."

Europeans refined the process by drilling holes into the trees and attaching wooden spouts. They used buckets for collecting the sap and huge iron boiling pots to concentrate it into syrup or sugar.

Metal sap buckets came into use around 1875, following the advent of sheet metal. Before that, heavy oak and pine buckets were commonly used.

In 1924, President Calvin Coolidge invited three titans of American industry—Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, and Harvey Firestone—to his family home in Plymouth Notch, Vermont. While there, Coolidge gave Ford a sap bucket that had been in his family for generations, and all the guests signed it. "The old Coolidge sap bucket" now hangs in historic Longfellow's Wayside Inn in Sudbury, Massachusetts.

These days most sap is collected not by buckets, but by plastic tubes that carry it from the tree to a central container, or even all the way to the sugarhouse. The first such system was patented by Nelson Griggs of Montpelier, Vermont, in 1959.

In 2013, a crew at the Saugeen Bluffs Maple Festival in Ontario fashioned what might be the largest sap bucket ever: a 1,000-liter (264-gallon) giant that unofficially bested the previous record of a 594-liter (157-gallon) bucket, unveiled at the Elmira (Ontario) Maple Syrup Festival in 2000. —Compiled by Joe Bills



STICKY BUSINESSES

If you can't get enough of all things maple, swing by a southern Vermont sugarhouse.

Each year, sugarhouses across the Green Mountain State throw open their doors for Vermont Maple Open House Weekend, inviting the public to come take a behind-the-scenes look at how maple syrup is made. This year's event is set for March 23–24; however, if you can't make it to your local sugarhouse that weekend, don't worry! A number of sweet spots welcome visitors throughout the year (though calling in advance is always recommended).

Here is a sampling of the many options in southern Vermont; for more, visit vermontmaple.org.

Baird Farm

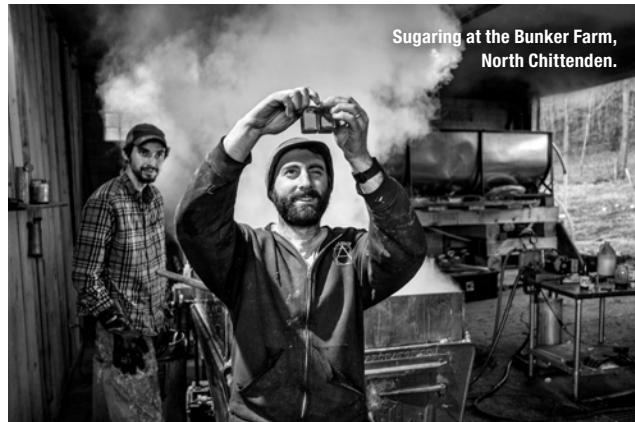
Maple syrup has long been produced on this land, but the Baird family (fourth generation) is running a modern certified-organic operation that turns out maple syrup and a number of distinctive products (maple ketchup, spruce-tip-infused syrup). Visitors are welcome anytime, but tours should be requested in advance. *65 West Road, North Chittenden. 802-558-8443; bairdfarm.com*

The Bunker Farm

Wood-fired maple syrup gets an extra kick at this farm's sugarhouse, thanks to its bourbon barrel-aged iteration (using barrels from Brattleboro's own Saxtons River Distillery). The farm is open Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, and in addition to its maple offerings it has sustainably raised meats for sale. *857 Bunker Road, Dummerston. 802-387-0223; thebunkerfarm.com*

Green Mountain Sugar House

Owners Doug and Ann Rose invite visitors to stop in for tours during sugaring season, but their



sugarhouse and gift shop is open year-round, too, stocked with everything from maple syrup and fudge to Vermont crafts and gifts. *820 Rte. 100 N., Ludlow. 802-228-7151; gmsh.com*

Green's Sugarhouse

Calling on six generations of maple sugaring expertise, Richard and Pam Green produce all grades of maple syrup and a long list of related food treats, including maple granola and maple spices. Complimentary tours offered year-round. *1846 Finel Hollow Road, Putney. 802-287-5745; greenssugarhouse.com*

Harlow's Sugar House

This Putney institution was reopened in 2018 by Todd, Brian, and Frank Harlow, all great-great-nephews of the founder. In addition to maple treats, the sugarhouse shop also sells things like Crowley cheese and the Harlows' own seasonal fresh-pressed cider. *563 Bellows Falls Road, Putney. 802-387-5832; on Facebook*

Hidden Springs Maple

In addition to producing its own certified organic maple syrup,

Hidden Springs sells maple syrup from other Vermont farms (Black Bear Sugar Works, Major Maple, Sidelands Sugarbush, etc.) at its farm store, which is filled to bursting with every kind of maple delight you can think of, including maple creemees. *162 Westminster Road, Putney. 802-387-5200; hiddenspringsmaple.com*

Mahar Maple Farm

Learn how award-winning maple syrup is made and taste-test the results at this sugaring operation run by the Durfee and Mahar families. Among the farm's many delicacies: maple cream, maple peanuts, and maple lollipops. *9 Mountain Road, Middletown Springs. 802-235-9368; maharmaple.com*

Mitch's Maples

A Chester sugarhouse whose syrup is proudly touted on the menu of the beloved Country Girl Diner just down the road, Mitch's was started by Donald Mitchell in the 1940s and continues today under grandson Mark Mitchell. The shop is open daily, and weekend tours are offered during sugaring season. *2440 Green Mountain*

Tnpk., Chester. 802-875-5240; mitchsmaples.com

Paradise Farm Sugarhouse

Yes, there's maple syrup, cream, and candy made on-site, but also vying for your attention are home-baked pies, pastries, and other baked treats, including standout maple doughnuts. Shop open daily except Wednesdays. *828 Marlboro Road (Rte. 9), West Brattleboro. 802-258-2026; paradisefarmsugarhouse.com*

Robb Family Farm & Sugarhouse

At this 350-acre farm, six generations of Robbs have been producing maple syrup the traditional way, by boiling the sap with a wood-fired arch. Taste the results at the farm store, which offers many maple products as well as grass-fed beef. *822 Ames Hill Rd, Brattleboro. 802-258-9087; robbfamilyfarm.com*

Smith Maple Crest Farm

For more than two centuries the Smith family has farmed this land, and today grass-fed beef and maple syrup are the star products. For visitors seeking the full farm experience, there's an on-site B&B. Farm store open weekends or by appointment. *2450 Lincoln Hill Road, Shrewsbury. 802-492-2151; smithmaplecrestfarm.com*

The Sugar Shack

Open March to late December, the Sugar Shack sells maple syrup produced on-site, a variety of Vermont food products and gifts, and baked treats. Don't miss the exhibit and short film about Norman Rockwell, a former local resident. *Sugar Shack Lane (Route 7A), Arlington. 802-375-6747; sugarshackvt.com*

Soaring above the landscape, the 306-foot Bennington Battle Monument commemorates the 1777 Battle of Bennington, a turning point in the Revolutionary War.



Monumental Appeal

As southern Vermont's largest town, Bennington enlivens the region with its artistic vibe, rich history, and natural beauty.





New England's always been great for stirring nostalgia. Some long-ago dweller walked this path, tilled this soil, moved that rock. We're always stepping where someone stepped before.

In Bennington, the odds of that happening seem greater. Partly because it's the largest town in southern Vermont, boasting some 15,000 residents. Partly because it's rich in history: This is Ethan Allen and Green Mountain Boys turf, and lest anyone forget this, the 306-foot Bennington Battle Monument points a solemn finger skyward.

This land has also long been associated with artists and writers—most notably the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Robert Frost, who is buried in a starkly beautiful cemetery behind the Old First Church. The Bennington Museum, meanwhile, is home to the largest public collection of paintings by the world-famous folk artist Grandma Moses.

Bennington is made up of a trio of districts whose personalities are as different as any siblings'. Downtown Bennington is home to a mix of independent shops and cafés

as well as the galleries and performance venues that compose the Cultural Arts District. Old Bennington is an imposing enclave of historic homes, anchored by the battle monument and the Old First Church. North Bennington is a village favored by artists and Bennington College professors, its hub dominated by Powers Market (since 1840).

Among the permanent exhibits at the Laumeister Art Center is a deep collection of Native American and Southwestern art.

The Arts

Situated right on Main Street in Bennington is the **Oldcastle Theatre Company**, a professional troupe founded in 1972 and made up of actors, writers, directors, and designers who have staged more than 300 shows through the years. The **Laumeister Art Center** at Southern Vermont College is Bennington's one-stop destination for all things cultural, thanks to its seven galleries, a 315-seat theater, numerous studios and classrooms, and the Vermont Covered Bridge Museum. Back downtown, **Fiddlehead at Four Corners** is a con-

The Old First Church began in 1762 as the first Protestant church in the state of Vermont. The current building dates to 1805.





temporary crafts and fine arts gallery filled with glass, ceramics, jewelry, and other handmade pieces by artists from across the country.

The Outdoors

In an approximately 3½-mile round trip, you can take in some terrific views of Bennington by climbing the **Harmon Hill Trail**, which—with its steep rock staircases and switchbacks—requires some effort, but it's worth it. **White Rocks**, otherwise known as Bald Mountain Trail, is a moderate four-mile round trip that leads to an outlook with expansive views. For those who prefer less elevation, the **Norman and Selma Greenberg Conservation Reserve** has 96 acres of meadows, wetlands, and wooded hillsides, with open trails to walk. In North Bennington, the **Robert Frost Trailhead** extends two miles to a farm once owned by Robert Frost.



FROM LEFT: A detail of the cozy common room in the Four Chimneys Inn; shelves stacked high with the rustic stoneware of Bennington Potters, a local institution.

Drinking and Dining

A converted 1945 rail car with booths, stools, and jukeboxes, the **Blue Benn** is a beloved local institution that offers classic breakfast and diner food. On the upscale side, there's **Pangaea**, which serves a seasonally updated menu of elevated fare (think Vermont boar and Brie Wellington with fresh basil). And if you're looking to scope out the southern Vermont craft beer scene, head to **Northshire Brewery**, where both classic beers and innovative new brews are on tap.

Looking west from atop the Bennington Monument. Today's peaceful vista includes land that was once a Revolutionary War battlefield.

Destinations



Uniquely Bennington

At the **Bennington Battle Monument**, built in 1891 to commemorate the August 16, 1777, clash with British forces that marked a turning point in the Revolutionary War, you can take in a view of three states from the observation deck, plus tour the grounds and check out the gift shop. The **Park McCullough House** is a 35-room Second Empire mansion (c. 1865) that's considered one of the best-preserved Victorian mansions in New England; it's open in the summer for tours and public viewing. (While you're there, be sure to go for a ramble in the **Mile-Around Woods**, where you'll find more than six miles of farmland trails.) And it's not a trip to Bennington without a stop at **Bennington Potters**, which has been turning out stoneware pottery by hand since 1948. —*Annie Graves and Cathryn McCann*

JULIE BIDWELL

When You Go

Eddington House Inn: Three-room historic B&B in the heart of North Bennington with many activity packages (skiing, cycling, etc.) 802-442-1511; eddingtonhouseinn.com

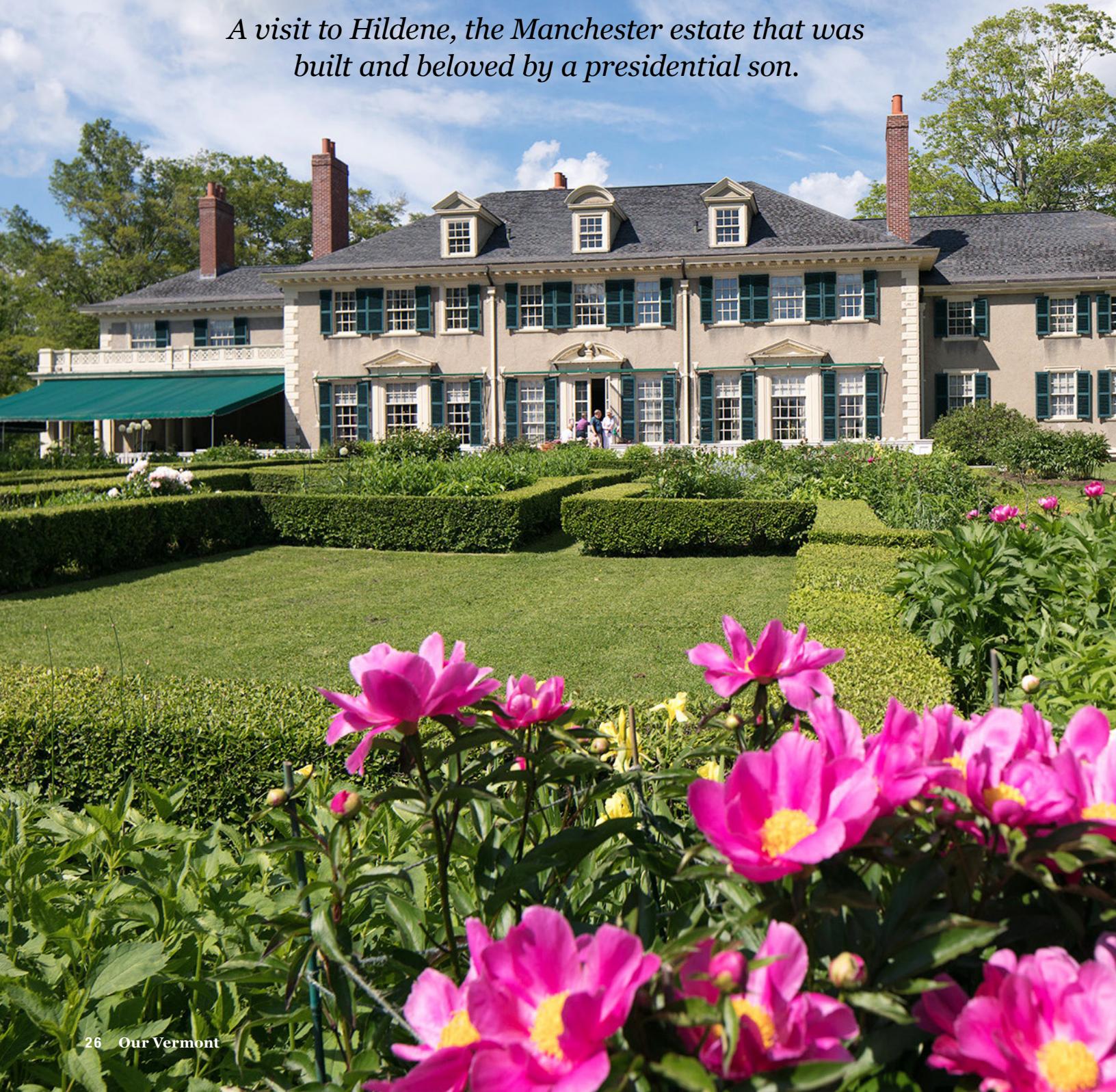
Four Chimneys Inn: Eleven-room B&B set on an 18th-century estate near the Old First Church, and specializing in romantic getaways. 802-447-3500; fourchimneys.com

The Harwood Hill: Close-to-it-all motel with a refreshingly modern, artsy vibe. 802-442-6278; harwoodhillmotel.com

Safford Mills Inn: Three guest rooms in c. 1774 building with many historic touches; dinner club and lounge next door. 802-681-7646; saffordmills.com

At Home with the Lincolns

A visit to Hildene, the Manchester estate that was built and beloved by a presidential son.



Tucked into the Green Mountains of southern Vermont, the town of Manchester has it all—from the classic New England charm of steeped churches, historic inns, and an old-fashioned country store to the bustle of big-name retail outlet shopping and dozens of cafés and restaurants. But among the finest feathers in its cap is a place like no other: Hildene, the Lincoln family (yes, *that* Lincoln family) summer home.

In the summer of 1864, First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln traveled to Manchester with sons Robert and Tad to trade the stifling heat of Washington, D.C., for cool mountain breezes. They stayed at the Equinox Hotel (still in operation today) and enjoyed it so much that they made plans to visit again the following summer, this time with the president. Alas, it was not to be, as he was assassinated the following April.

Still, the beauty and tranquility of Vermont must have stuck with Robert, who would be the Lincolns' only child to live to adulthood. In 1902, he purchased nearly 400 acres here and built a summer home for his family. While the property stayed in Lincoln family hands for three-quarters of a century, today it's owned and maintained by the nonprofit Friends of Hildene, which has painstakingly restored the home and its gardens.

A visit to Hildene begins in the historic carriage barn, which holds the welcome center and a museum gift shop where visitors can purchase, among other things, cheese made from Hildene's very own goats.

The Lincoln family home is just a short stroll away, but if you'd like to start by exploring one of the estate's lesser-known gems, head out onto the Farm Trail to visit Sunbeam, a restored 1903 Pullman car that serves as a memento of Lincoln's time as president of the Pullman Company.

There are a number of walking trails surrounding Hildene, in fact, and on a beautiful spring day you might be tempted to lose yourself in the pristine woodlands and wetlands. Responsible picnicking is allowed, and you can even pay a visit to the goat dairy and cheese-making operation.

But the main attraction is impossible to ignore: a 24-room Georgian Revival mansion, whose grandeur is emphasized by a series of bricks set into the lawn that outline the humble dimensions of Abraham Lincoln's original log cabin.



ABOVE: Visitors to Hildene can explore a 1903 wooden Pullman car and the related exhibit "Many Voices," which tells the story of those who worked on Pullman cars as well as those who rode in them.



LEFT: A Hildene guest room that was once reserved for use by President Howard Taft, a family friend.

Inside Hildene you can explore a collection of carefully preserved rooms—bedrooms, the dining room, the kitchen, the library, etc.—that showcase original furnishings and family possessions. Among the must-see relics are a 1908 Aeolian pipe organ and one of only three stovepipe hats belonging to Abraham Lincoln that are known to exist.

Behind the house is the formal garden, which from late May to mid-June erupts with thousands of blooming peonies—most purchased from Paris by the family in 1907. The view of the surrounding mountains is stunning, and you can see how easy it must have been for Robert Lincoln and his descendants to sit and simply soak up the view. —Aimee Tucker

When You Go

Located off Main Street (Route 7A) just south of downtown Manchester, Hildene is open 9:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. daily, year round. General admission is \$23/\$6 children ages 6–16. For more information, call 800-578-1788 or go to hildene.org.

Out and About

As winter gives way to spring, we round up events in southern Vermont that are worth the drive.



Jack Jump
World Championships

MAR. 2-3

BRATTLEBORO

Circus Spectacular

Step right up for this amazing high-flying gala hosted by the New England Center for Circus Arts at the historic Latchis Theatre, featuring students from the local program performing alongside guest artists from circuses around the world. 802-254-9780



40 years. 800-245-7669;
mountsnow.com

MAR. 9

BENNINGTON

Southern Vermont Winter Homebrew Festival

Over 40 homebrews, a food competition, and live music make this downtown festival the perfect antidote to cabin fever. Enjoy samples of beer, mead, cider, braggot, and wine, and vote for the



MAR. 16
BENNINGTON

Kat Edmondson

Part of the Vermont Arts Exchange's basement music series at the Masonic Hall, this evening showcases an acclaimed singer-songwriter who has wowed audiences at Tanglewood, the New York City Jazz Festival, and the Montreux Jazz Festival in addition to touring with Lyle Lovett and Chris Isaak.

802-442-
5549; vtartxchange.org

MAR. 16

BRATTLEBORO

Russell Malone Quartet

Jazz guitarist Russell Malone has worked with the likes of Harry Connick Jr., Wynton Marsalis, and Diana Krall and released more than a dozen records of his own. And when he and his quartet hit the Vermont Jazz Center,

you won't want to miss it. vtjazz.org; 802-254-9088

MAR. 16

LUDLOW

Sugar Daze

When the sap starts running, Okemo Mountain Resort taps into some sweet sounds with its free concert series, highlighted by this outdoor music extravaganza in the Jackson Gore courtyard. 800-786-5366; okemo.com

MAR. 16

PERU

Rando Race

Bromley Mountain plays host to the New England Rando Race Series, a one-of-a-kind skiing competition that harks back to the pre-chairlift era. Racers start at the base of the mountain, ascend it, then descend

it, as fast as possible, over multiple laps, up to 6,000 feet cumulative vertical. 802-824-5522; bromley.com

MAR. 16

STRATTON

Wild & Scenic Film Festival

The Stratton Mountain School invites you to experience the adrenaline of kayaking wild rivers, climbing the highest peaks, and trekking across the globe with this touring showcase of

MAR. 3

WEST DOVER

Jack Jump World Championships

If you've never witnessed the homegrown Vermont sport known as jack jumping—in which participants hurtle themselves downhill while seated on single ski, and with no poles for balance—head over to Mount Snow to see a lot of great racing (and some spectacular wipeouts) in an annual competition that goes back nearly

best wings in the region. bennington.com/homebrew

MAR. 10

BRATTLEBORO

NRBQ at Stone Church
NRBQ (New Rhythm and Blues Quartet) offers a rollicking blend of everything from rockabilly to Beatles-influenced pop to jazz. Their fans include Elvis Costello and R.E.M.; plus, they served as the unofficial "house band" for *The Simpsons* in seasons 10–12. stonechurchvt.com



Southern Vermont Winter Homebrew Festival



adventure films from around the world. 802-297-1886; gosms.org/summit-series

MAR. 16-17

STRATTON

24 Hours of Stratton
The ski lifts at Stratton Mountain operate all night long as hundreds of skiers and riders rack up runs in this annual fund-raiser for the Stratton Foundation, supporting programs providing food, housing, and heat. 800-787-2886; stratton.com

MAR. 23

WOODSTOCK

Maple Madness

At this celebration of all things maple-sugared, you can bid on handpainted sap buckets, sample culinary treats at the Maple Taste-a-Round, get crafty with kids' activities, and partake in maple-themed fun runs and bike races. woodstockvt.com

MAR. 23

STRATTON

Taste of Vermont

Some of Vermont's best restaurants, chefs, and bakers will gather at the Main Base Lodge at Stratton Mountain Resort, where you

can sample their favorite creations and pick up some new recipes. 802-297-2096; strattonfoundation.org

MAR. 23-24

STATEWIDE

Maple Open House Weekend
Celebrate the maple syrup season by visiting a sugarhouse to learn about Vermont's first agricultural crop of the year. Check the

Maple Open House Weekend



website for an open house near you. 802-858-9444; vermontmaple.org

APR. 6

LUDLOW

Slush Cup

Come see costume-clad competitors try to skim across an 80-foot long, man-made slush pond at Okemo Mountain Resort without falling in. 800-786-5366; okemo.com

APR. 13

KILLINGTON

Pond Skimming Championships

Are they brave or just crazy? Either way, skiers and snowboarders will put their skills to the test as they attempt to sail across the pond. Competitors will be judged on skim, costume, splash and crowd response. killington.com

APR. 19-20

WOODSTOCK

Baby Farm Animal Celebration

Visit Billings Farm this weekend, and you can take a wagon ride, learn about heirloom seeds, and tour the historic 1890 farmhouse—but save plenty of time for the lambs, chicks, and calves, who are the stars of this show. 802-457-2355; billingsfarm.org

APR. 20-21

QUECHEE

Earth Day Celebration

Join the folks at the Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS) during this weekend in honor of Earth Day.

Come make a fairy house, investigate vernal pools, see a live raptor program, catch a movie, and much more.

802-359-5000; vinsweb.org

Get Set for Green Up Day

The Green Mountain State takes being green seriously, which is nothing new. In fact, less than a week before the dawning of the first Earth Day, Vermont had already launched an environmental day of its very own: On April 18, 1970, Governor Deane Davis closed interstate highways from 9 a.m. until noon for litter pickup, and declared the first-ever Vermont Green Up Day.

Green Up Day is still going strong today, drawing an average of 22,000 volunteers of all ages—roughly 1 out of 28 Vermonters—who “celebrate” the event by cleaning up their communities. Their efforts result in the collection of about 200 to 300 tons of trash from some 13,000 miles of roadside and other public spaces.

Every community in Vermont takes part in Green Up Day, which is now held on the first Saturday of May (this year's event is set for May 4). For details on how to participate in your town, visit greenupvermont.org/town-contact-list, find your town, and click on “View Details.”

A Walk with Robert Frost

*Strolling the woods and fields with one of
America's most celebrated poets.*

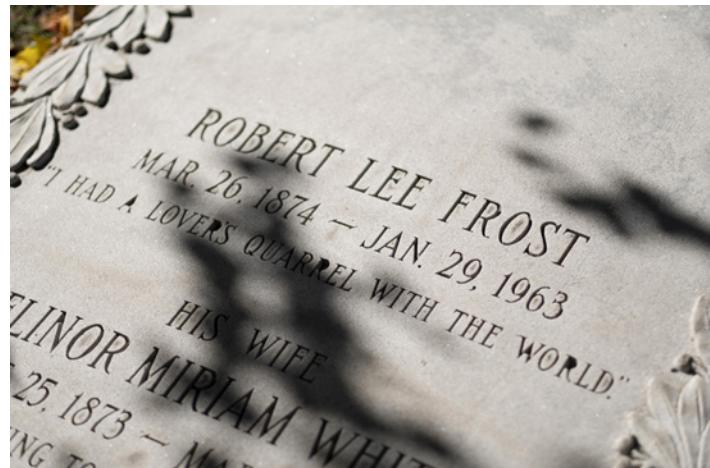


HEATHER MARCUS

Reginald L. Cook was a graduate student at Middlebury College when he first met Robert Frost in 1925, as the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet was teaching at the Bread Loaf School of English. Cook would go on to become an English professor at Middlebury and in 1946 was appointed director of Bread Loaf—all while continuing a close friendship with Frost. The two men would often go for walks near Frost's seasonal home in Ripton, and in this abridged 1955 essay for Yankee, Cook shared with readers what that experience was like.

In our country Robert Frost is a seasonal recurrence. Each year he arrives shortly after the green grass. This has been happening for 15 years and he is now in his 80s. A kneeler at well-curbs; a stopper by woods on snowy evenings; a subduer of birches; a mender of walls; a further ranger, he is indeed one well-versed in country things. But above all else, like Thoreau, he is a "home-cosmographer" who sees the world in the local habitation. At present it is Ripton, Vermont, where, during the summer and early autumn, he lives in a cabin on the Homer Noble place. It is upper-range country, and no matter in which direction you turn, friendly Green Mountain peaks are within eyeshot.

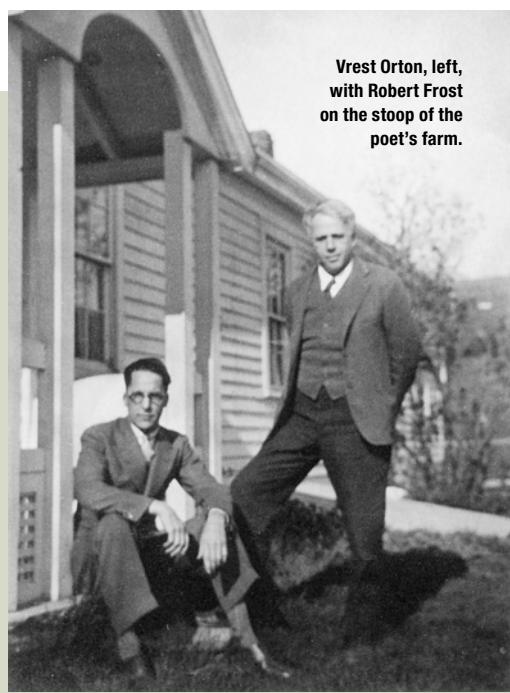
Invariably, when he invites you into the snugly built cabin, he stretches out in an old Morris chair and ambles on a talkathon with the relaxed gaiety of a guest at his



ABOVE: Robert Frost's gravestone, which is engraved with a line from his poem "The Lesson for Today."

OPPOSITE: A portrait of Frost sits on a windowsill in his former Shaftsbury home, now the Robert Frost Stone House Museum.

own party. Habitually quotable, he says things you can lay to heart, and the way he says them is a natural, easy spending, like fumbling in the pocket for coins to make the exact change at the counter. He talks about Morgan horses, tung oil, spun glass fishing rods, but mostly about people, education, politics, and, of course, poetry in a seemingly reckless pouring out of stuffs that ought to be saved for the poetry. You think: "What will be left?" Yet there is always another time when the talk will be just as casual, fresh, and prodigal.



Vrest Orton, left, with Robert Frost on the stoop of the poet's farm.

In the Company of a Legend

Long before he became known as the founder of The Vermont Country Store, Vrest Orton started out in the New York City publishing industry. It was a career that would see him cross paths with everyone from H.L. Mencken and Dorothy Parker to Sherwood Anderson and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

But of all the literary greats Orton encountered, it was Robert Frost who made the most lasting impression. Though the two met in New York in the mid-1920s, their friendship didn't begin in earnest until 1930, when they were both living in Vermont: Orton in Weston, and Frost in South Shaftsbury. Orton got into the habit of going to visit Frost, and the two would talk for hours.

Vermont Afternoons with Robert Frost, published in 1971, is Orton's tribute to that time. It's a memoir like no other: Half is a foreword describing their 25-year friendship and quoting from the letters they exchanged; the other half is a collection of poems inspired by their long afternoons of conversation. "I suppose it may be said," Orton writes in the foreword, "that those were afternoons I did not spend ... I saved them up."

Vermont Icons



When we went outside in the woods and fields, he proved as deliberately deviable a walker as a talker. We commonly started from his Ripton cabin, picked up two walking sticks, and entered the woods with Gillie, a border collie, hugging our heels. Mr. Frost would lead the way along narrow trails, like a fox nimbly picking its way over tree trunks and boulders. He walked like an Indian, keeping straight ahead, relaxed. He never seemed anxiously bent on seeing something nor grimly determined to revel in the open air. He was completely naturalized, and the inflections of his voice drifted slowly back to me. The talk ran from subject to subject—baseball, General Grant, the pre-Socratic Greeks, Lamarck's theory of acquired characteristics. It is apparent that in two or three hours Mr. Frost ranges a good deal of ground in the fields of human knowledge.

On this walk, we were in search of orchid stations in the high swamps. The rain of the night before left the swamp lands wetter than yesterday, so we took off our shoes and rolled our trousers to the knee. About

25 yards in, we came to the orchids—a grand show, a whole bog full of tall lovely queen slipper orchids. We looked around thoroughly, and Mr. Frost poked into all the nooks and crannies of the swamp, searching for different kinds of orchids, and as he went he bemusedly hummed a jingle.

Later, after we had left the swamp and pushed along the trail to Silent Cliff, we leaned against the trees and talked. Was poetry his first and only devotion? When did the idea of poetry as a vocation first occur to him? He turned these over in his mind during the rest of the walk but he spoke up. No, writing poetry wasn't a matter of any forced or imperative choice. He hadn't taken a stand to die or fall by poetry. As a young man he had simply turned from one thing to another. There was nothing heroic in his

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE:
Scenes from the Robert Frost Stone House Museum in Shaftsbury, which preserves the poet's first residence in Vermont. After buying it in 1920, Frost wrote to a friend that "if I have any money left after repairing the roof in the spring I mean to plant a new Garden of Eden with a thousand apple trees."



attitude. It was catch-as-catch-can, take your chances, try this and try that. He turned from professions or occupations before they swallowed him up. When he started to write he remembered his grandfather, William Prescott Frost, saying, "I give you a year" (that is, to see the light and quit the poetry nonsense and turn to something else). "And I said [Mr. Frost said this vigorously], 'Give me 20.'"

As for his attitude toward life, he said, "I make my place in life; I am part of it. I take it as it is. I try to make little bits of clarity in it as I see them! ... Life's good-bad, light-shadow, bitter-sweet, but it's fifty and one-third good to forty-nine and two-thirds bad." The margin is that fine. Then I remarked that his success was in part attributable to imagination. "Yes," he said, "and in making turns of phrase. Memory, too." He told me, "I learned that it is better to read not a thousand books but one book a thousand times. That's why I remember so well."

Botanizing and ruminating, we were far away from the fumes of carbon monoxide and the sound of tires hissing on asphalt, although we were strafed violently by the short, fiery attacks of no-see-'ems and wood flies. From the cliff's edge we looked off at the green hills folding range into range through the heavy midafternoon haze, to the obscure outlines of the poet's farm a few miles below. The deep green woods smelled good, the air tasted fine, and while a strong sun in a clear blue sky had warmed us while walking, now rising thermals cooled us off.

Mr. Frost, looking bigger than ordinary in his jumper and overalls and blue canvas Keds, did most of the talking, drawing me into the slipstream of his ruminations. He is a readily conversable and inquiring man, the complexity of whose sophisticated temperament is belied by deceptive simplicity.

Seeing the bog full of orchids in the summer sunlight had been one of those occasions he singles out as "nature favors." As he says, "there is the image and the after-image." We were both still in a daze of after-imagery.

As I left him at the farm he remarked: "I've still got the sight of them in my eyes."

A TOUCH OF FROST

FOUR SOUTHERN VERMONT SITES THAT HARK BACK TO A FAMOUS RESIDENT.

Robert Frost Stone House Museum

Dreaming of being an apple farmer, Frost bought this seven-acre property in 1920 after leaving a teaching post at Amherst College. At various times over the next nine years, he and his family lived in the c. 1769 Dutch Colonial stone house, where he wrote many of the poems for his Pulitzer-winning 1923 collection *New Hampshire*, including "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." (And yes, he tended an orchard, too.) The home opened as a museum in 2002; today it's overseen by Bennington College, which acquired it in 2018. 121 Rte. 7A, Shaftsbury. 802-447-6200; bennington.edu

Robert Frost Farm ("The Gully")

In 1929 Frost bought a second home, in South Shaftsbury, a 1790 farmstead on 153 acres; this would be his primary residence for the next decade. While living here, he won his second and third Pulitzer Prizes (for *Collected Poems* and *A Further Range*). The property remained in the Frost family until 1963 and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1968—although sadly that designation was withdrawn in 1986 after one of the farm's later owners, the television producer Norman Lear, made alterations that destroyed important historic elements. Note: *The Gully* is not open to the public.

Robert Frost Farm and Cabin

After his wife, Elinor, died in 1938, Frost looked north, to Ripton, for a seasonal home in the Green Mountains. He settled on the Homer Noble Farm, a 150-acre spread that included a 19th-century farmhouse and a rustic cabin (which is where he often stayed). Until his death in 1963, this is where he spent most of his summers and autumns, as he taught at nearby Middlebury College. The college now owns the property, and the buildings are not open to the public. However, visitors are welcome to explore the grounds and stroll the mile-long Robert Frost Interpretive Trail. *The Homer Noble Farm lies about three miles east of Ripton and about half a mile north of Route 125.*

Robert Frost Gravesite

After his death in 1963 at age 88, Frost was laid to rest in the cemetery next to the Old First Church in Bennington—just down the road from the poet's first Vermont home, in South Shaftsbury. Also buried here are family members including his wife, Elinor, and four of their children. 1 Monument Cir., Bennington. oldfirstchurchbenn.org

Town Meeting

*UVM's Frank Bryan
on speaking up
in the 21st century.*

Frank Bryan is a prolific author and a beloved UVM professor emeritus best known for his ideas on town meeting. We caught up with him a while back at the Vermont History Center in Barre, to chat a bit about this New England institution.

"I graduated from high school in 1959, in Newbury, Vermont. There were seven of us. I graduated in the top three, at about a 72 average, the highest of the five boys.... I got in trouble a few times, but I was protected by the community. If you did something bad, everyone knew your circumstances, so they could cut you some slack—or not. That has the benefits of 'small' but also its biases."

"Most of my professional work has been involved with the relationship between size and policy, size and politics."

"To be a conservative used to mean you were for 'small is beautiful' or states' rights ... but in Vermont it also meant being for town meeting, town control, and local politics. So I was always on the outs in Vermont, because that wasn't a time when town meeting was appreciated much, and everyone thought it was old, silly, archaic 'little town' stuff. But it affected me a lot."

"Without my students I couldn't have written my book

(*Real Democracy: The New England Town Meeting and How It Works*). Every year I sent 40 to 100 students to town meetings all over Vermont. They had to count the number of people who were there: how many women, how many men. They wrote down who spoke, if they spoke again. That kind of research had never been done before. The students loved it. Two-thirds were from out of state, and when I sent them from Burlington to way-up-there Vermont, they'd come back with stories. They really got a kick out of it. And they learned that pure democracy isn't as pure as the word, and it's real."

"People call me a romantic on town meeting, but if you read my stuff there's nothing romantic about it. I would say spending a couple of hours a year at town meeting shows more commitment than voting. Voting is so easy. You go into a booth; nobody can see what you're doing. But get up in front of 75 to 100 people, and everybody can see you. They can see your face. It's a great socialization of democracy." —Interview by Kelsey Liebenson-Morse

The Uncommon Cracker

How a New England staple was rescued before its legacy could crumble.

For the June 1981 issue of *Yankee* magazine, the editors had prepared a culinary obituary of sorts. Called “Death of a Cracker,” it opened like this: “The auctioneer’s hammer has finally, after 152 years, put an end to the Cross cracker, also known through the years as the Montpelier cracker, the St. Johnsbury cracker, and, to non-New Englanders (when Yankees would let ‘em have any), the Vermont cracker.”

The story was a lamentation for what was also known simply as the common cracker, created in 1828 by the Cross brothers of Montpelier. Made of flour, water, shortening (originally lard), salt, soda, yeast, and not much else, it quickly became a staple of cracker barrels at New England general stores.

Crumbled into a bowl of chowder, these fat little biscuits served as the perfect thickening agent. Another popular way of eating them was to split them in half, to provide “a firm foundation for all the good things that needed to be spread on something,” as *Yankee* put it.

The cracker remained with the Cross family until the early 20th century, when the Cross Baking Company was taken over and, later, moved to New Hampshire. By 1980, though, the business had fallen on hard times. It filed for bankruptcy that summer, with its assets to be sold at auction—seemingly marking the end of an era.

But then something remarkable happened as *Yankee* was going to press with its cracker memorial, inspiring the editors to end the article with a last-minute note titled “The Orton Family of Vermont to the Rescue!” In it, they described how Vrest Orton’s Vermont Country Store had purchased the special equipment needed to make the crackers and would henceforth be turning them out under the patented name “Vermont Common Crackers.”

Of the purchase, Orton said that since a barrel of crackers had long been the symbol of the country store, “it seems most fitting that the first restored country store in rural America should be making crackers.” —Jenn Johnson



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