

A SALUTE TO
GREEN UP DAY

FAVORITE
MAPLE RECIPES

SPRING DAY TRIP
TO GRAFTON

YANKEE

Our Vermont

SPRING 2022



*Celebrating the people, places, and traditions
that make the Green Mountain State so original*

Spring in My Step

We each step into spring in our own way. For some, it might be seeking trout in Vermont's fabled fly-fishing rivers. Others may opt to tramp along the riverbeds in search of wild fiddleheads. Or it may be when bikes emerge, and skis and snowshoes get tucked away. For me, I always knew spring had arrived when grass first poked through the snow, and the baseball gloves that my two sons and I oiled and massaged during winter came out of hibernation, and the sound of ball smacking against leather filled the air.

Vermont writer Rowan Jacobsen knows spring by other distinctive sounds. He lives in a village some 15 miles northeast of Montpelier,



and his family's 19th-century farmhouse, like many in the north country, stands on land surrounded by woods. In his essay "Early Risers" [p. 31], he writes that when the days warm, he walks through his woods and stops to listen to spring peepers: *At dusk, it begins. From the fen, a single, short eep, like a creaky old door. Then another, a few seconds later. It sounds both enthusiastic and unoptimistic, like the SETI folks beaming their message to extraterrestrials.* Is there anybody out

there? *The peeper continues for half an hour as the sky darkens and a fine mist falls, and then, miracle of miracles, somebody answers. There's another peep, and another....*

Just as the peepers announce the season's shift, so, too, maple sap awakens and rises, and is collected by countless taps across Vermont before it flows through miles of tubing and into the sugarhouses that dot the land. I find it almost a guarantee that when I leave the highways and drive on quiet back roads in March, I will see smoke from the sugaring shacks drifting upward, as inside the sap boils, a steady murmuring of its own.

Maybe because my son Josh was born on April 22, Earth Day, I have always paid close attention to communities that come together around the ideal that, yes, we can make a difference. Vermont's Green Up Day is one of the best such statements I know, uniting a spring welcome with environmental purpose. In "Bagging Rights" [p. 34], you will learn how a cause grew from humble beginnings on April 18, 1970, to thousands upon thousands of volunteers who spread out across their local roads on the first Saturday in May. Their mission? To fill thousands of compostable bags with litter and, at the day's end, to make a statement as memorable as Rowan's spring peeper: It sings to all who will listen that right now, this is the place to be.

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YANKEE

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*On the cover:
Lilacs burst into bloom
alongside a weathered barn
in South Woodbury.
Photo by Alan L. Graham*

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Quiet Time

Poised between winter and spring, the landscape catches its breath.

This is no spring day. If the sun is warm, the shadows are cold. The land stands revealed in its true scale: a large scale. The hills lie like great sea creatures resting on a beach. Their colors are brown, tan, yellow—every quiet color, pale and washed. That gray moraine lying along the margin of the woods is snow. Not a spring day at all, but another kind of day.

In this part of the country at the foothills of the southern Green Mountains, these not-spring days make up a little season of their own. It arrives sometime in the month of March. It's a still, quiet passage in the year, but its quiet is not the muffled hush of deep winter. It's the quiet of absence and inaction. The life of other seasons is suspended.

Sugaring is over. The maple trees have quit working for the sap-gatherers and have begun working for themselves. There is little to do in the fields and gardens. The ground is either still frozen and too hard, or so recently unfrozen that it is too soft.

The days of not-spring are a silent time, comparatively. That's partly because they are a somewhat birdless time: The migrants from the north have left; the migrants from the south haven't yet returned. There are robins about, but they haven't much to say. Even the crows are subdued.

The wind at this time of the year hasn't the edge of a winter wind, but it has new purpose. It blows clouds across the sky quickly. Their shadows pass over the bare hills like hurrying riders. In the woods the wind bears on the trees, but it scarcely bends them because the trees have no leaves.

Distances stretch out in not-spring; vision stretches. You seem to see farther than you can in winter and

you seem to see more. The pied landscape of forest and farm, valley and hill invites the eye as the long white perspectives of winter do not. In a way, the dun, leafless landscape of not-spring gives a western feeling to the New England hill country. You might almost be on the plains, where they begin to rise and roll toward the Rocky Mountains.



"Spring Sky," part of the ongoing series "A Day in Vermont" by Middletown Springs artist Peter Huntoon.

But no trick of light or weather that would turn the state of Vermont into a dry, bare country can be held for long. The not-spring days don't last. The season is a kind of shim slipped in between winter and spring to complete the year and is sized according to the changing dimensions of the longer seasons. It may last a day. It may last three or four days. It will not last a week.

There will come a couple of foggy, wet days or a couple of sharp, cold days or a late snowstorm—and when the weather settles again, the year will have turned. The maples on the hillsides will show the sap blush, the skunk cabbage will be up in the ditches, the peepers will be chorusing, the first songbirds (are they orioles?) will be doing the same, the geese will be aloft. The brief, empty, in-between time will be over. It's not the spring, but it means the spring.

—Castle Freeman Jr.

The Golden Rule

Everything's better with Vermont maple syrup—as these tasty recipes prove.



Maple & Rum-Glazed Pork Roast

We love how the rum-flavored sauce in this dish cooks down to a silky glaze, scented with maple, mustard, and cinnamon.

- 1 3-pound boneless pork loin roast, tied at intervals with kitchen twine for even shape**
- 2 teaspoons plus 1½ teaspoons kosher salt**
- 1 cup Vermont maple syrup**
- 3 tablespoons Dijon mustard**
- 3 tablespoons apple-cider vinegar**
- 1 tablespoon dark rum**
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**

Preheat your oven to 375° and set a rack to the lowest position. Sprinkle the pork with 2 teaspoons of salt and let it sit 10 minutes.

Now make the glaze: In a medium bowl, stir together the maple syrup, mustard, cider vinegar, rum, cinnamon, pepper, and remaining 1½ teaspoons of salt until blended.

Place the pork, fat side down, in a 9-by-13-inch roasting pan, and pour the glaze over the meat. Transfer to the oven and cook 30 minutes, basting halfway through.

Remove the meat from the oven, turn it fat side up, baste, and return it to the oven. Cook, basting every 15 minutes, until the meat reaches 150° when an instant-read thermometer is inserted into the center, 30 to 40 minutes more. Remove the meat from the oven and let it rest 10 to 15 minutes. Slice and serve with additional glaze on the side.
Yields 4 to 6 servings.



Spinach, Feta & Grape Salad with Maple-Soy Vinaigrette

This delicious maple-infused dressing is adapted from one by Charlie Menard, former longtime executive chef of the Inn at Round Barn Farm in Waitsfield. We love it with spinach, feta, and grapes, but it also pairs perfectly with fresh spring strawberries and chèvre or, in the fall, with blue cheese and pears.

8 ounces baby spinach leaves
1½ cups halved red grapes
5 ounces crumbled feta
1 cup roughly chopped walnut halves, preferably toasted
¼ cup Vermont maple syrup
2½ tablespoons soy sauce
2 tablespoons red-wine vinegar
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon minced shallot

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

First, make the salad: Layer the spinach, grapes, feta, and walnuts in a large salad bowl. Set aside.

Now, make the dressing: In a Mason jar or other canister with a tightly fitting lid, combine the maple syrup, soy sauce, vinegars, shallot, and

mustard. Shake well. Add the oil and shake until blended. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Drizzle the salad with about a third of the dressing and toss gently to coat. Taste a leaf of spinach and add more dressing if desired. Note: The remainder of the dressing can be stored in the refrigerator for a couple of weeks and used for additional salads; just be sure to bring it to room temperature before serving. *Yields 4 to 6 servings.*



Chewy Maple Nut Bars

The combination of sweet brown sugar, crunchy pecans, and pure maple syrup in these chewy maple nut bars is tough to beat. Pecan pie lovers in particular will go nuts for these maple nut bars—the handheld variation of the popular dessert.

For the crust:

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup unsalted butter, softened
 $1\frac{1}{3}$ cups all-purpose flour
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup ground pecans
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup brown sugar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt

For the topping:

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup maple syrup
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup brown sugar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup salted butter
2 tablespoons heavy cream
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups chopped pecans
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup whole pecans

Preheat the oven to 350°. Grease or line an 8-inch square baking pan with foil and set aside.

Put the crust ingredients into a bowl and use a handheld or standing mixer to combine. Press evenly into the prepared pan and bake for 20 minutes or until golden brown. Set aside to cool.

For the topping, combine the maple syrup, brown sugar, butter, and cream in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat and simmer, stirring, until thickened and the mixture coats the back of a spoon, about 5 minutes.

Remove from heat and stir in the chopped pecans and vanilla. Pour over crust, then scatter the top with whole pecans, lightly pressing to set.

Bake for an additional 20 minutes, then transfer the pan to a wire rack to cool for 1 hour before cutting into squares. *Yields 9 servings.*

Indian Pudding Panna Cotta with Maple Whipped Cream

This delightful twist on a New England classic yields a dessert that's sweet and rich, but with a unique texture.

2½ tablespoons powdered gelatin
1 cup cold water
3 cups milk
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus more for ramekins
1½ cups cornmeal
2 tablespoons molasses
½ cup plus 1 tablespoon maple syrup
¼ teaspoon table salt
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 large egg, beaten
1 cup heavy or whipping cream
Freshly grated nutmeg, for garnish

Grease six 8-ounce ramekins with butter and set aside.

In a small bowl, pour the powdered gelatin over 1 cup of water and let it soften. Set aside.

In a 4- or 5-quart saucepan over high heat, bring the milk and 2 tablespoons butter to a simmer. Whisk in the cornmeal and reduce the heat to low; simmer, whisking continuously, until it begins to thicken, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and whisk in the molasses, ½ cup maple syrup, salt, cinnamon, egg, and prepared gelatin. Pour into the ramekins and refrigerate until set, at least 1 hour and up to overnight.

To serve, beat the cream with 1 tablespoon maple syrup until soft peaks form. Top the pudding with whipped cream, add a pinch of nutmeg, and serve. *Yields 6 servings.*

Maple Toffee Popcorn with Salted Peanuts

The only trick to making toffee is employing a candy thermometer and keeping a close eye on the temperature as you cook. Once you do that, you'll find it's even simpler than making caramel.

**¼ cup popcorn kernels
1 cup salted peanuts
1½ cups (3 sticks) unsalted butter
1 cup packed light brown sugar
½ cup maple syrup
1 teaspoon table salt
¼ teaspoon baking soda (sift out any lumps)**

Pop the popcorn according to the package instructions. Let cool.

Line a rimmed sheet pan with parchment and lightly spray with nonstick cooking spray. Sprinkle the popped popcorn and peanuts in an even layer onto the parchment.

Set aside. Set a 5-to-7-quart heavy-bottom pot over medium-high heat and melt the butter. Add the light brown sugar, maple syrup, and salt. Stir constantly until the sugar has melted completely. Clip on a candy thermometer and continue stirring over medium heat until the temperature reads between 295° and 301°. Remove from heat, immediately dust the baking soda evenly over the toffee, and quickly stir until completely incorporated.

Pour the toffee evenly over the layer of popcorn and peanuts, and allow everything to cool until firm, about 30 minutes. Break the toffee into small pieces and store in zip-top bags. If well sealed, the toffee will keep at room temperature for up to three weeks.
Yields 8 to 10 servings.





Crisp and Fluffy Waffles

There may be no better showcase for Vermont maple syrup than these tried-and-true waffles. Adding cornstarch helps lighten the batter, while beating the egg whites separately, then folding them in, produces the fluffiest of waffles.

**1½ cups all-purpose flour
 ¼ cup cornstarch
 2 tablespoons granulated sugar, divided
 1½ teaspoons baking powder
 ¾ teaspoon kosher salt
 2 large eggs, at room temperature, separated
 1½ cups milk, at room temperature
 5 tablespoons mild olive oil
 Cooking spray (preferably coconut oil spray)
 Maple syrup and salted butter**

Preheat a waffle iron according to the manufacturer's instructions. Preheat the oven to 180° and have a large sheet pan at the ready.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, cornstarch, 1 tablespoon sugar, baking powder, and salt. In another bowl, whisk the egg yolks with the milk and olive oil. Add to the dry mixture and use a spatula to just combine. The mixture should be mostly smooth, but a few lumps are fine.

In a large bowl, using a handheld or standing mixer, whisk the egg whites with the remaining 1 tablespoon sugar to form soft peaks. Working in two batches, gently fold the whites into the batter with a spatula.

Spray your heated waffle iron with cooking spray and cook the waffles in batches according to the manufacturer's instructions. At a setting of 375°, the waffles take about 5 minutes to cook. As the waffles are done, lay them on the sheet pan and keep warm in the oven. Serve with maple syrup and salted butter. *Yields 16 waffles.*

Making the Grade

Maple syrup gets a heady new role in the world of craft brewing.

Given its relatively small size, the Green Mountain State punches far above its weight in the craft beer world. It's not just that Vermont is home to more breweries per capita than anywhere else in the country—the quality of those craft brews has also earned distinction.

"Vermont has always been forward-thinking," says Kevin Kerner, longtime brewer and co-owner of Montpelier's Three Penny Taproom, a pub known as a specialist in local and regional craft brews. "And some of the brewers in this state have moved well beyond their peers in the scope of what beer could become."

That includes the ingenious incorporation of Vermont's other beloved export: maple syrup.

"Beer has been made with just about anything that carries some sort of sugar in it," explains Kerner. "But when maple is used in the process depends on what result you'd like out of it. Maple syrup is a complete fermentable—and yeast loves it—but if you add it too early in the process, the flavor won't be present and you're just basically making food for yeast. Later on in the process will give you both flavor and aroma."

Any kind of beer can utilize maple, but some offer a better marriage than others. "Brown ales, Scotch ales, stouts, porters, and imperial stouts—those beers will generally have earthy and nutty, if not sweet, qualities that you can enhance," Kerner says.

This being Vermont, of course, good brewers only use the real stuff. That means locally produced, darker-grade syrup to access those deep maple flavors. What are some favorites? Kerner was kind enough to share a few of the craft pours he likes best.

■ **Maple Breakfast Stout** (*14th Star Brewing Co., St. Albans City*). Kerner calls this "a clean, no-nonsense stout whose roasted and toffee aspects are fairly subdued." The maple, meanwhile, takes center stage in what is otherwise a fairly delicate beer, he says, adding, "They also do a version in a nitrogenated format, which just furthers the creamy and smooth accents and is definitely worth seeking out." 14thstarbrewing.com

■ **Maple Triple** (*Lawson's Finest Liquids, Waitsfield*). "I know no one in the state that utilizes maple in the way that Lawson's does, and picking one seems like a disservice to the others that they produce," Kerner says. "However, I truly believe their Maple



Local maple syrup partners up with cold-brew coffee and a generous helping of oats in the popular Maple Breakfast Stout from 14th Star Brewing Co. in St. Albans City.

Triple tops them all. Maple is used in every step of the process, and because of the 'tripple' [a play on *tripel*, a type of strong ale] nature here, the yeast is only enhanced by the earthy aspect from the syrup itself." lawsonsfinest.com

■ **Small Town Brown** (*Good Measure Brewing Co., Northfield*). Made in partnership with Brownsville Butcher & Pantry, this brown ale is alive with earthy tones. "Drinking this beer is like taking a walk in the woods," Kerner says. "The maple adds to the 'woods' feeling, making the beer an experience rather than a straight victual." goodmeasurebrewing.com

■ **Maple Red** (*Bent Hill Brewery, Braintree*). As Kerner puts it: "chuggable syrup." A red ale typically isn't a hugely complex or overwhelming beer, he explains, "so the maple will take forefront, allowing the woods and bark to come through, along with this ale's caramel malt and crisp finish." benthillbrewery.com

■ **Beyond Good & Evil, Maple Version** (*Hill Farmstead Brewery, Greensboro Bend*): This popular imperial stout is aged in bourbon barrels that previously stored maple syrup. "The unfermented residual sugars left in the barrel only add to the body of this beer," Kerner says, "so it sticks to your ribs and makes you feel like you're wearing Carhartt lined coveralls." hillfarmstead.com —*Ian Aldrich*

That's a Wrap

Elevate your Easter brunch with this elegant, easy-to-make braided loaf.



Of all the holidays that inspire us to gather friends and family for a feast, Easter stands out as a twofold celebration. Marking the day with a festive brunch (or lunch, or dinner) not only brings us together with loved ones, but also signals that spring has truly arrived. After all, Vermont's snowiest month, March, has passed, and even a few more flakes in April can't dampen our rising spirits.

It'll look as though you spent hours making this eye-catching Easter brunch recipe, but in truth it's really just scrambled eggs, veggies, potatoes, bacon, and Vermont cheddar folded into dough. And the secret to the fancy presentation? Four simple steps, that's all. It's certain to fill up your guests—but that doesn't mean they won't come back for more!

STEP-BY-STEP RECIPE

Braided Easter Brunch Loaf

- ¼ stick (2 tablespoons) unsalted butter**
- 1 russet potato, peeled and cut into ½-inch cubes**
- 1 small yellow onion, finely chopped**
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and diced into ¼-inch pieces**
- 4 strips cooked bacon or ham, chopped**
- 1 dozen eggs**
- 2 scallions, finely chopped**
- 8 ounces cream cheese, cut into small pieces**
- ½ cup shredded mild Vermont cheddar**
- 1 egg white**
- 1 teaspoon water**
- Flour, for surfaces**
- 2 sheets frozen puff pastry, defrosted**

In a large saute pan over medium-high heat, melt butter and cook potato cubes 5 minutes, or until they begin to soften. Add onion and pepper and cook 8 to 10 minutes, or until onion becomes translucent, flipping ingredients with a spatula occasionally, being careful not to break up potato. Add bacon. Lower heat to medium.

In a medium bowl, whisk together eggs and scallions. Add to saute pan. Fold in cream cheese and cheddar and scramble gently until just set. Remove to a separate bowl and cool to room temperature.

Heat oven to 375°. In a small bowl, whisk together egg white and water. On a lightly floured work surface, roll one sheet of puff pastry into a 10-by-12-inch rectangle. Then, braid the loaf:

- 1** Trim pastry by cutting off the top corners and cutting 6–7 angled strips, each 1 inch wide by 2½ inches long.
- 2** Spoon half of the egg mixture into the center, shaping it into a loaf. Fold the bottom flap up and over the filling.
- 3** Braid the dough by folding the strips alternately toward the center, overlapping them as you go.
- 4** Brush with egg wash. Transfer to a parchment-lined baking sheet.

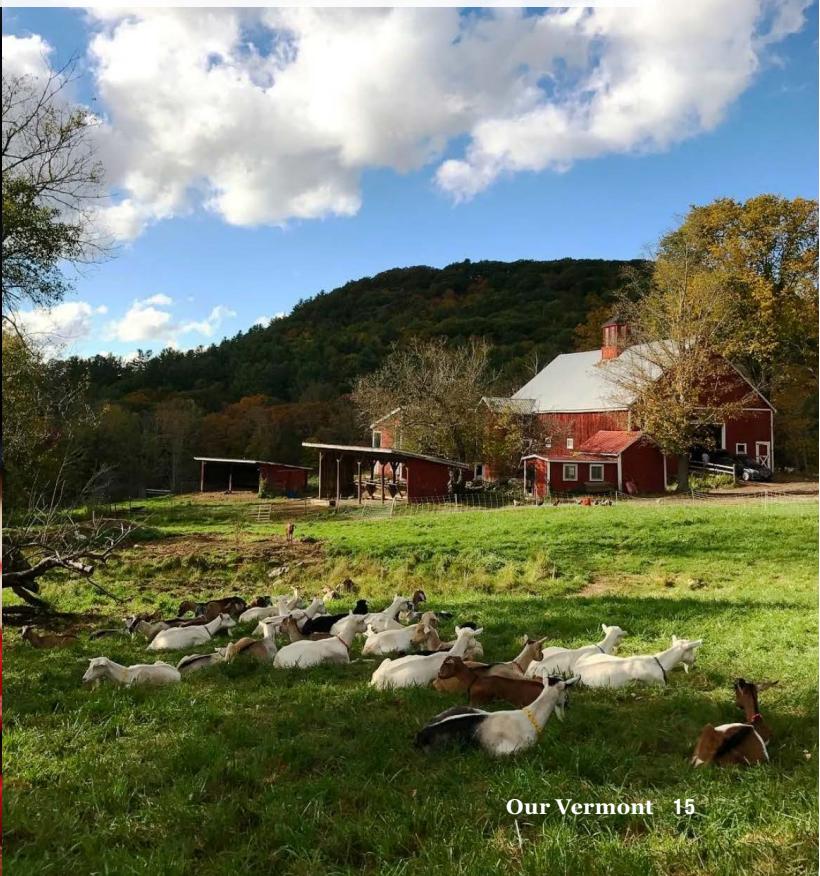
Repeat the process with the other pastry sheet, then bake 25–30 minutes, or until browned. *Yields 2 loaves.*





Big Picture Farm

As part of an ongoing series, we meet up with small producers bringing the bounty of Vermont to our tables.



When Middlebury College alums Louisa Conrad and Lucas Farrell began farming in 2010, they knew two things: They wanted to work with goats, and they wanted to bring their creativity to it (she was a photographer and visual artist, he was a poet and creative writer). They started out focused on goat cheese, “but then the caramels just took over,” says Louisa, referring to the sweets that have put Big Picture Farm, their hillside dairy and creamery in Townshend, on the map. Dressed up in whimsical packaging designed by Conrad, the caramels have won national accolades, including *Yankee*’s annual Food Awards; other Big Picture Farm products include chocolates, goat-inspired apparel and accessories, and, yes, even a bit of goat cheese. We recently caught up with Louisa to learn more about her family’s sweet life on the farm. —*Ian Aldrich*



Big Picture Farm owners Louisa Conrad and Lucas Farrell with daughter Maisie. Also joining in for the photo: a family sheepdog and, of course, some friendly goats.

What inspired the name Big Picture Farm?

My husband is the “word guy,” and he came up with it. I was making a lot of pictures at the time, and we wanted pictures to be central to what we do. But there was also the big-picture idea of everything we wanted to do: how we wanted to live, how we wanted to farm, how we wanted to eat. We also wanted the farm to help promote small-scale agriculture, to be a place where you can have names for all the goats and know what they eat and treat them as well as you can.

What's it like to work with goats?

Where to begin? For starters, they’re the best. They’re magical and mystical—they’re more like dogs than sheep. Which means they’re smart, so they’re also a pain in the neck. But they’re super-friendly and have goofy personalities. I also think they’re extremely beautiful creatures. They’re a nice size. They’re very manageable to work with. Our farm is on a rocky, bony hill, with fields littered with rock piles from previous farmers. It’s not something you could do a lot with, but it’s perfectly suitable for goats.

Compared with the caramels many of us ate as kids, what's different about what you're making?

Those other caramels use corn syrup and butter; there’s no milk. Which presents challenges for our version. It isn’t shelf-stable, so we can’t use large distributors. Mostly mom-and-pop shops carry our caramels.

Also, we wanted to tell the story of goats. So we include a booklet that describes our goats, and you can go to our website and find out what the goats were eating on the day your caramels were made.

Why is offering your customers that kind of experience important to you?

I want people to think about where their food comes from, so when they pick up one of our caramels they go, “I didn’t know you could make caramels from goat milk.” Even with something like a candy, your assumptions can change. I want people to be aware that what you’re buying comes from somewhere, where there are animals involved in making it, and there is labor and love that went into creating it.

What's next for Big Picture Farm?

We’ve been opening up to agritourism, which has been a lot of fun for us, especially when people stay at the farm. You can come for a tour and go visit the goats, and that’s lovely—but to wake up here and really breathe the air, to hear the roosters in the morning, it’s very satisfying. For the first five years we worked so hard to build our business, we just had our faces to the ground nonstop. And so to look up and engage with the community, that’s been very special for us.

For more information about where to find Big Picture Farm products, or to learn about booking a farm stay, go to bigpicturefarm.com.



Scene from Above

Vermont photographer Caleb Kenna takes a bird's-eye view in sharing the beauty of his home state.

For Caleb Kenna, photography is a tool for not just seeing the world, but engaging with it.

"There's an excitement of going out with a camera and having this excuse to meet strangers, or going out into a landscape and making a connection," he says. "It can be quite powerful."

A good number of those connections for Kenna have been made right here in Vermont. Raised in Brandon, Kenna cut his teeth as a photojournalist at newspapers including the *Rutland Herald* and the

Addison Independent before he struck out on his own as a freelancer in 2000. Over the past two decades, his Vermont-centric photography has been featured by such notable publications as the *New York Times*, *National Geographic*, the *Boston Globe*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, among others.

ABOVE: "Sometimes it's really nice to have a person in the shot ... and sometimes I happen to be the only person around!" says Kenna, an avid paddler who took this photo of himself via drone while floating among a carpet of water lilies on Lake Hortonia.

Destinations

Kenna, who lives in Middlebury with his wife and their young son, has an eye for all the different angles of his home state: gritty scenes from a local railyard, joyous eruptions on a town basketball court, the serene, placid waters of the Champlain Valley. But in recent years Kenna's work has taken on an elevated status, thanks to his explorations in drone photography.

For someone who has long loved gazing out the windows of airplanes to see the land below, the ability to create images from several hundred feet in the air has revealed his home state in ways both familiar and fresh. Kenna's aerial images are breathtaking, almost painterly, in their abstract representations of everyday landscapes.

"I've always loved pictures that make you stop and think, *Whoa, what is that?*" says Kenna. "Just to see something anew is really exciting, whether it's a view on a town or a pattern on a field or a lake—to see how the land is shaped or how we've shaped the land is fascinating. Even something like a field of solar panels can be interesting."

And that kind of transformation can be deeply



Caleb Kenna

meaningful, says Kenna: Just a simple change of perspective can alter not just our view of the world around us, but also our relationship to it. That hit home with him early on, during a visit to the town of Rupert, where he spotted a barn surrounded by fields of corn.

"I pulled over and launched my drone," says Kenna, an FAA-certified drone pilot since 2018. "Only from above did I realize the great texture of the slate roof, and the rows of corn making a pattern around the barn. Looking straight down, without the horizon, revealed a simpler yet more mysterious image."

Kenna's work is gaining notice. Two years ago the *New York Times* showcased 17 of his Vermont aerials in its pandemic series "The World Through a Lens," and later this year Schiffer Publishing will release a book of his work called *Art from Above: Vermont*—a fitting tribute to a subject that means so much to him.

"I love Vermont," Kenna says. "And because it has all this unregulated airspace, you can fly in so many different places and get all these different kinds of photos to show its beauty." —Ian Aldrich

To see more of Caleb Kenna's photography, go to calebkenna.com. And look for his book, Art from Above: Vermont, coming this fall from Schiffer Publishing.



While Kenna was focusing on this classic farmscape in Waltham, with Snake Mountain in the background, a flock of birds suddenly swooped into view. "I generally try to stay well away from birds" when flying the drone, he says, "but this was a fun surprise that really pulled the composition together."



LEFT: Cloud reflections make a mesmerizing pattern on the surface of Sugar Hill Reservoir in Goshen. Part of the Moosalamoo National Recreation Area, it's one of Kenna's favorite places to be on the water. "It's incredibly peaceful. There's an island right in the middle, and sometimes you'll see deer swimming across the reservoir. It's a pretty special place."

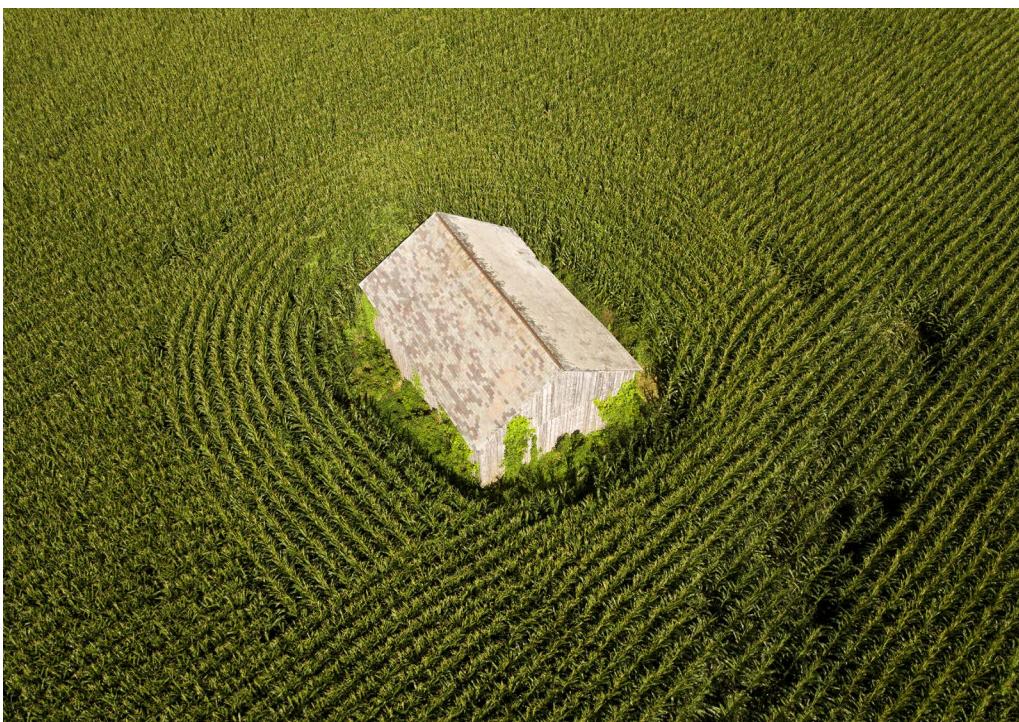
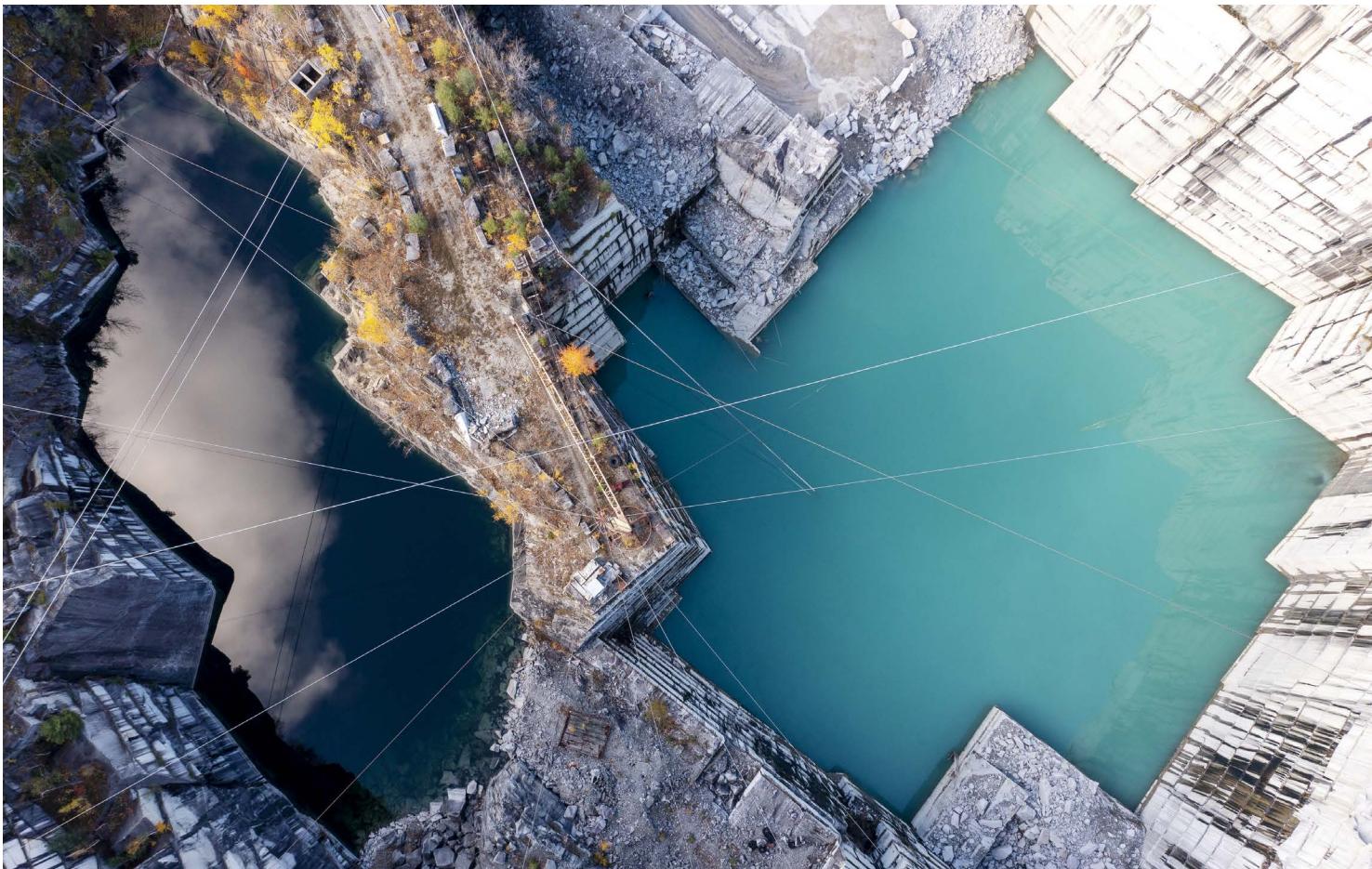
BELow: Kenna, who occasionally uses his drone for real estate photography assignments, says he was wrapping up "a fairly standard job" at a farm property in Shoreham when he spotted what would become one of his personal-best photos. "The fence at the bottom and all the shadows and all the spring green—it just made for such a cool abstract image."



Destinations



"I've done a lot of pictures for the Vermont Land Trust over the years, and I love the idea of conservation and photography together," says Kenna, who captured this image at a vegetable farm located on the VLT's Brewster Uplands property in Jeffersonville.



TOP: Permission to shoot at Rock of Ages in Graniterville gave Kenna the chance not only to photograph the world's largest "deep hole" granite quarry but also to pay tribute to Vermont tradition. "Whether it's marble or granite or limestone, we have a lot of quarries here, across the state and even around my home in Middlebury. It's definitely an important part of Vermont's working landscape. So that was pretty great to be a part of."

LEFT: Among the early photos in Kenna's drone portfolio is this shot of a farm in Rupert. "It was sort of an a-ha moment for me, because I saw something that was working better than all the other thousands of photos I'd taken from 400 feet up that didn't really have a focus," says Kenna, adding, "I've tried going back to this barn several times, but never have I gotten another photo that works quite as well."

Fun for All ‘Ages’

Take a ride from Victorian times to the environmental era—and beyond—at the Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium.

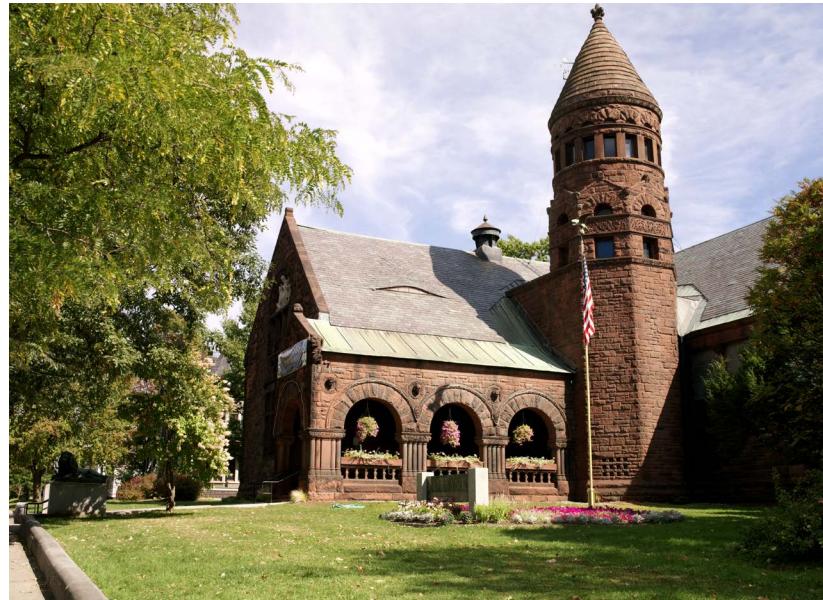


Though it was first opened in 1891 and still channels the ornate and often quirky beauty of the Victorian Age inside and out, the Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium is hardly gathering dust these days. And definitely not this past January, as staffers bustled around during the St. Johnsbury museum's annual pre-spring cleaning, polishing the original cherry wood display cabinets and tending to a natural history collection that famously includes thousands of taxidermied birds, mammals, and reptiles, with many specimens over 100 years old.

Keeping the "cabinet of curiosities" gifted by founder Franklin Fairbanks in tip-top shape is only part of what was happening, though. New installations for 2022 were sprouting up, such as an expanded exhibit on Vermont's own Wilson "Snowflake" Bentley that connects his ingenious microphotography of snowflakes to the study of glaciers and ice formations today. The kid-friendly Exploration Station got some fresh hands-on fun with the new interactive Conte Corner, created in partnership with the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge.

Among the updates to this venerable institution, one stands out as being truly ground-breaking: an exhibit on mass-timber construction that not only looks at the environmental benefits of building with wood, but also previews a landmark in Fairbanks history.

"The museum hasn't had an addition, a new physical structure, since it was first opened," says Anna Rubin, director of external relations, before catching herself with a chuckle. "Well, actually, I should say there's only been one. About a year after opening, Franklin Fairbanks realized



it wasn't quite large enough to hold his collection, so he did make one small addition to it. But since then, nothing new."

Fast-forward more than a century, and that's about to change, as the vision for the Tang Science Annex takes shape. The planned 6,000-square-foot, three-story addition to the Fairbanks will be Vermont's first-ever mass-timber structure, constructed with an innovative, sustainable laminated-timber technique and utilizing wood from local forests. As Rubin sees it, the science annex will be "setting the standard for the environmental profile of buildings in the future."

Planning and fund-raising continues for the new addition, which was delayed but not derailed by the pandemic. "This project has been in the works for a long, long time," Rubin explains. "It's been talked about and thought through in so many ways, and it has tremendous community support." And there's a lot of excitement about what it will bring: more room to display museum artifacts, new interactive stations focused on astronomy and earth and atmospheric science, and even an elevator to bring people to the museum's second-story balcony, which has never before been wheelchair-accessible.



Top: Built in a style known as Richardsonian Romanesque, the Fairbanks Museum building is distinctive for its 75-foot-tall tower, intricately carved arches, and red sandstone facade gracing St. Johnsbury's Main Street.

Left: Balcony exhibits include shells, meteorites, feathers, eggs, and artifacts collected by museum founder Franklin Fairbanks and his family during their travels.

PREVIOUS PAGE: A view of the magnificent main hall, crowned by a 30-foot-high barrel-vaulted ceiling made of quartered oak.



LEFT: Mark Breen, voice of VPR's "Eye on the Night Sky" and director of the museum's Lyman Spitzer Jr. Planetarium.
ABOVE: Among the Fairbanks's natural history displays harking back to the Victorian era are bird trees, which would group different specimens together for comparison and contrast.

Taking on a cutting-edge project like mass-timber construction is very much in keeping with the Fairbanks of today, which is as much a home for up-to-the-minute science as it is the relics and curios of yesteryear. In 1961, it opened the first and only planetarium in Vermont; recently renovated and now equipped with a digital projector, it regularly screens National Geographic films on things like time and space, dinosaurs, and extreme weather. But the live astronomy presentations are what really set it apart, says Rubin.

"There's just a richness of knowledge here about the night sky," she says, giving as an example Mark Breen of VPR's "Eye on the Sky" and "Eye on the Night Sky" (which are produced at the Fairbanks), who often leads presentations. "You really tap into that when you take an astronomy program, because you're going to be with somebody who's truly passionate about stars and constellations and planets and space travel."

The Fairbanks also connects visitors to big news events in space and astronomy, from launches to eclipses, through special programs that might involve, say, a live-stream with a NASA engineer. And while they couldn't capitalize on the Christmas Day launch of the James Webb Space Telescope, Rubin says the staff is very excited about the Webb and "as soon as images start coming back from it, we'll be putting them up and talking about them!"

For visitors whose interests are more down to earth, there's a dazzling array of flora and fauna to explore in the main museum. In the courtyard is a seasonal butterfly house where monarchs, red admirals, and other northern New England natives flit between wildflowers, but the real menagerie is, of course, inside. Look a polar bear in the eye, marvel at a musk ox, and

see if you can spot all 131 hummingbirds among the array of Victorian displays and dioramas—which are a wonder in themselves, says Rubin.

"A number of the exhibits made in the late 1800s and early 1900s are full-habitat dioramas, which often show several generations of a species in a habitat, along with what they might eat and with different other animals and insects around them," she says. "You're not just looking at a specimen, you're actually invited to come into a different world."

When it comes to choosing personal favorites among the museum's collection, Rubin admits she has a few but singled out a display of small dinosaur models made in the mid-19th century, created after early paleontologists had begun uncovering bones and teeth but before they really understood how to put them all together. The artist's models include details that modern science has shown to be inaccurate, she says, "but they're the first time anyone tried to imagine what these creatures may have looked like, which to me is pretty cool." And which proves that even in its artifacts, the Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium can show a bit of cutting-edge flair. —Jenn Johnson

FAIRBANKS MUSEUM & PLANETARIUM

■ Open 10 a.m.–5 p.m. daily, excluding major holidays; see website for ticket pricing and current Covid safety guidelines.
1302 Main St., St. Johnsbury; fairbanksmuseum.org

■ To learn more about the Tang Science Annex or to make a donation, go to fairbanksmuseum.org/explore/science-annex



Small-Town Flavor

Award-winning cheese is just one of the rewards of a springtime day trip to picture-perfect Grafton.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WINDHAM FOUNDATION

Walking through the village of Grafton, a community of about 700 residents tucked into the mountains of southern Vermont, is a little like exploring a lovely time capsule of New England history. Its proudly crafted clapboard and brick houses date from the early 1800s, a time of village prosperity, when Grafton perched at the junction of major stagecoach routes. Then travel routes shifted, and the railroad passed it by—leaving Grafton to make its way into the 20th century with much of that earlier era still intact, including its rural beauty.

Grafton's attractiveness today owes as much to the Windham Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated

to preserving Vermont's rural way of life, as it does to nature. Established in 1963 by a wealthy family with ties to the town, the foundation bought up most of the central village, buried the power lines, and renovated the imposing three-story Grafton Inn. And it not only brought the local cheese-making tradition back to life, but also put it on the path to greatness: Grafton Village Cheese is today known for crafting gorgeous, creamy, nutty-tasting cheddars that rank among the best in Vermont.

The Windham Foundation is credited with bringing back Grafton's small-town New England greatness through its preservation efforts, open-land stewardship,



As co-owners of MKT: Grafton, June Lupiani and Ali Hartman (left) revitalized the town's longtime general store, whose brick-red 1841 building still anchors Main Street today (right). It's also the local go-to for an array of handmade cheddars and other milk cheeses from Grafton Cheese (below).

and financial support. Today the town is small and quiet but also thriving—and it's that combination that makes Grafton so special. Within its few streets, visitors will find a surprising amount to savor, especially once they adjust to its laid-back pace.

Historical Home Base

If you have time to linger, consider spending a night or two at the **Grafton Inn**, formerly the Old Tavern at Grafton. Originally a stagecoach inn dating back to 1801, it's one of the oldest operating inns in America and has welcomed such famous guests as Ulysses S. Grant, Theodore Roosevelt, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. With the emphasis here on "unplugging," none of the 45 antiques-appointed rooms (11 in the main inn, the others in guesthouses) have TVs, but free Wi-Fi is available throughout the property.

The inn is also a popular spot for visitors looking for a memorable meal. The farm-to-table restaurant, **1801 Tavern**, offers candlelit ambience, while the recently renovated **Pine Room Bar** makes for a cozy cocktail spot (complete with working fireplace for chilly nights). Rounding things out is the **Phelps Barn Pub**, serving up food

with frequent live entertainment in a relaxed setting. graftoninnvermont.com

Foodies' To-Do List

Located just steps from the Grafton Inn is the former Grafton Village Market, a central gathering place dating back to 1841. When its then-owner decided to close in 2015, a pair of entrepreneurial newcomers named June Lupiani and Ali Hartman jumped in to keep the community hub going as **MKT: Grafton**. Their welcoming grocery and café is the place to stock up on Grafton Village Cheese (see below) but also carries a tasty array of other specialty and local food items, pantry essentials, and handmade gifts. Plus, it serves breakfast and lunch daily and offers a changing lineup of dinners to go. mktgrafton.com

Arguably the town's biggest claim to fame is the award-winning **Grafton Village Cheese**, a modern continuation of the Grafton Cooperative Cheese Company, founded in 1892 by area dairy farmers. The original cooperative was destroyed by a fire in 1912, but by the mid-1960s the Windham Foundation had restored the company and relaunched it as



Grafton Village Cheese. The company operates a wine and cheese shop in Brattleboro; in Grafton, you can get the goods at MKT: Grafton and also watch through a viewing window as the cheese is made at the company's production facility just down the road. graftonvillagecheese.com

To satisfy sweet-tooth cravings, head to **Plummer's Sugar House** for maple candy, maple cream, maple sugar, and (of course) 100 percent pure Vermont maple syrup. If you visit during sugaring season, in late winter and early spring, you can actually watch this third-generation Vermont producer turn maple sap into liquid gold. plummerssugarhouse.com

Village Highlights

History buffs might begin by whetting their appetite with a peek inside the 1811 Butterfield House—listed on the National Register of Historic Places and now the stately home of the town library—before moving on to the **Grafton Historical Society**. Celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2022, this little gem's collection spans more than two and a half centuries of life in Grafton. Meanwhile, the **Turner Hill Interpretive Center** shares the story of Alec Turner, a formerly enslaved man who found his “journey’s end” in Grafton, as told by his daughter, renowned Vermont poet and storyteller Daisy Turner. The center is part of Vermont’s African



American Heritage Trail. graftonhistoricalsociety.com; turnerhillgrafton.org

For art lovers, the **Jud Hartmann Gallery** is a favorite stop. Known for its founder's bronze sculptures of Native American peoples, the gallery (which has a second location in Blue Hill, Maine) is open by chance or appointment from November to Memorial Day, and daily during foliage season. judhartmanngallery.com

Kids won't want to miss the **Nature Museum**, with its hand-painted dioramas, mounted specimens, and nifty exhibits such as live honeybees at work in a glass hive. Outside is the museum's new Magic Forest Playscape, as well as the trails of the Village Park, nice for a leisurely walk in the woods. For something a bit more active, the nearby **Grafton Trails & Outdoor Center** calls to adventurers with skiing and snowshoeing into March; and mountain biking, disc golf, and hiking starting Memorial Day weekend. nature-museum.org; graftoninnvermont.com/graftron-trails



ABOVE: Spanning more than 2,000 acres, the Grafton Trails & Outdoor Center opens in late spring for hiking, biking, and more. TOP: A laid-back evening at the Grafton Inn.

GRAFTON: IF YOU GO

- Before making travel plans, be sure to check online or call to get the latest information on Covid protocols and operating hours of the places you'd like to visit.

- To learn more about things to do in Grafton, and to see a handy town map, go to visitgraftonvt.com



The author and his son Rye gather sap on the family's Northeast Kingdom homestead.

A Fine Sugaring Season

First published nearly a decade ago, this essay by Vermont homesteader Ben Hewitt—presented here in a slightly abridged form—remains a Yankee classic.

By the time March rolls around, it seems as though winter will never end. In one sense, there's nothing unusual about this; in northern Vermont, there always comes a time when it seems as though winter will never end. But in another sense, this March truly is different. Already, we've awakened to find the thermometer on the cruel side of zero enough times that it no longer seems remarkable.

The snowbanks along the sides of our quarter-mile driveway tower high above our heads. Our Subaru squeezes between them, but just barely, a life-size slot car. One more storm and I'll have to use the tractor to widen the path, an hours-long task I do not covet.

The storm comes, of course, and it's the biggest of the season thus far, delivering another 16 inches of snow. I spend three frigid hours on the tractor and don't finish. The snow is followed by yet another series of 10- and even 20-below mornings that are no colder than so many previous mornings but somehow feel that way, if only because we know what the month is capable of. Where is

the sun? Where is that day that portends the season to come, the sound of melting snow dripping from the eaves and the exuberant sense of the world awakening?

And where, oh where, is the first sap run? We'd hung our 60 buckets in late February, remembering how we'd missed the first good runs both seasons prior. The old adage of being "tapped in" by Town Meeting—the first

The energy of the season is everywhere. New lambs cavort in the barn, bouncing in the way that only lambs can bounce, as if the world were a trampoline.

Tuesday in March—is no longer reliable, because in the 21st century, the season may be halfway over by the time Town Meeting rolls around. So we tapped the last week of February, and I felt awfully smug about it. "It's nice to be ready in time," I remarked to my wife, Penny. "We'll definitely get the first run this year."

Then came a gusting wind, and we trudged down the field on snowshoes to take the buckets down so that they didn't end up blown to places we wouldn't find until long after the season was over. Even on snowshoes, we struggled through the snow, leaving deep, sunken tracks. After the wind, we hung the buckets again, but then came another storm and still more wind. This time we didn't take the buckets down, and they blew off the trees; though we didn't lose any, we cursed our laziness and trudged down the field to hang them yet again.

Finally, sugaring season arrives. It's early April, a full month later than normal, and the sap flows reluctantly, as if the trees are struggling to awaken from a deep sleep. The first run is modest; when we reach the buckets, they're only a third full, each drip from the tap isolated by a long silence while the next drop collects at the end of the spout.

The snow is still deep, and I pull the gathering buckets in the sled across the soft swells of pasture. My son Rye comes with me to stabilize the sled from behind; without his help, it would tip over in the deep trough left by my snowshoes. By the time we arrive at the evaporator, there's sweat on my brow and I can feel oxygenated blood pumping

through my limbs, like sap rising in my body.

Rye and I pour the contents of the gathering buckets into the pan atop the old backyard evaporator that we bought many years ago from a fellow who'd come to his senses and chosen to divest himself of all his sugarmaking apparatus. "It's an awful lot of work for not much return," he told me, only after he'd secured in a back pocket the fold of \$20 bills I'd handed him. He shook his head and repeated himself: "An awful lot of work."

He was right, of course. It is a lot of work. Maybe even an awful lot of work.

But standing by the evaporator with my family, as the fire crackles and the first tendrils of steam rise from the heating sap, I'm grateful for the effort necessitated by our simple operation. I know that in the morning I'll feel it in my muscles and I'll like how it feels. It feels honest. It feels human. It means that when spring arrives and suddenly every day there's more to do than the day can possibly accommodate, we'll be ready. Or at least more ready than we'd be if we hadn't sugared.

Rye and I have gathered only 25 gallons of sap, but it's sweeter than normal, and our haul produces nearly a gallon of finished syrup. Later, a friend tells us that when the season is compressed, as this one will be, the trees make up for it by producing sap with a higher sugar content. I don't know whether that's true, but there's no question that it's sweeter this year than any in memory.



We drink it straight from the sap buckets and later from the evaporator pan, drawing it off into an old enamel cup that holds permanent residence on a nearby stump. If there were no other reason to sugar—no finished syrup, no muscles strengthened, no quiet evenings by our unsheltered evaporator, noticing how each day is now longer than the preceding one—drinking warm sap with

my family as the returning geese hurtle through the sky just above our heads would suffice. A man could want for more, I suppose. But that would be greedy.

There's no roof over our evaporator; there are no walls around it. The four of us sit on stumps as we boil. The boys carve wooden bows, and Penny whittles a spoon. I play my guitar or work on one of the chainsaws; every so often one of us rises to stoke the fire with the slabwood stacked nearby. From our vantage point, we can see the pond, and we note the progression of spring in the ice's retreat. One day, Rye throws a block of wood onto the ice and it doesn't break through. The next day, the wood is gone, the ice beneath it having succumbed.

The sap runs again a couple of days later and a couple of days after that, but, like the first, they're halfhearted runs. Still, our stash of syrup slowly grows: a gallon, then a gallon and a half, then two. Our first heavy run comes in late April, but by then the sap has gone "buddy," and the syrup has that distinctive, almost bitter, taste of a late-season crop. We'll use it for baking.

The buddy sap brings an end to our season, but we're happy, because buddy sap means budding trees. It means that we'll soon see a color we've seen little of for nearly seven months: green.

We pull our taps, having made just over four gallons of syrup, less than half our usual total, and we're happy that Rye has boiled a half-gallon of his own from trees he tapped deep in our woods. He boils in a big pot over an open fire, an arrangement that requires long hours of tending and of hauling firewood from the stacks he made last summer. But now he's running low on wood, and when Penny and I suggest that he combine his sap with ours, it's as if we've offended him. "No way," he says. "This is *my* syrup." He turns back to his pot, the sweet steam rising all around him.



Jars of fresh maple syrup bask in the spring sunshine.

The energy of the season is everywhere. New lambs cavort in the barn, bouncing in that way only lambs can bounce, as if the world were a trampoline. The cows begin shedding their thick winter coats, and tufts of hair drift across the lawn like miniature tumbleweeds. The grass is going to come in late; we count and recount the bales of hay that remain, dividing them by the number

of days until we can turn the animals out to pasture. We think we'll make it, but it's going to be tight. It always is.

As happens every spring, there comes a morning when the remaining snow has frozen hard enough to support the weight of the boys on their bicycles, and they take off across the field, whooping in the cold. As I did last year, I promise myself that after chores I'll join them. And like last year, I don't, which leads to another promise: that next year I will. The boys are 12 and 9; they'll be gone before I know it. I'd better act on my promise soon.

The snow shovels go back to the basement, and our porch fills with seedling flats, little shoots of green in a world that's still brown. There's mud everywhere: in the yard; on our shoes; on the cuffs of our pants; under our fingernails. I can trace the progress of Daisy, our bluetick coonhound, across the living room floor. The boys kick off their boots and mud splatters against the wall. There's mud in the kitchen and even in the bathroom. After lunch, we mop it up, but by dinner it has returned.

Now the trees are leafing out in full. Now the tadpoles emerge. The boys catch them and hold them in their palms, before releasing them back to the spring-cold water. They do this over and over again, partly for the thrill of the chase, and partly to feel that slippery new life tickling their skin.

We take down the sap buckets and cart them across the snowless field to be cleaned and stowed away. We pull taps. We rinse and dry the hauling vessels. We scrub the evaporator pan and empty the arch of ashes. The winter that only a month ago seemed as though it would never end is over. The spring and summer that will surely seem as if they end much too quickly have begun.

Four gallons of syrup. It's not much. I could say that it wasn't a very good season and I wouldn't be lying. But the truth is, it was a fine season. It always is. —*Ben Hewitt*

Early Risers

A walk in the Vermont woods reveals the fleeting beauty of springtime's first heralds.

PHOTO BY BRYAN PFEIFFER

Tonight is the night. After months of thin winter air, a warm breath has blown in from somewhere south, thick with moisture, and the land starts to unfold. The maples flush the faintest scarlet, and in the woods behind our farmhouse the spring ephemeral wildflowers are up: trout lily, trillium, bloodroot, spring beauty, Dutchman's breeches.

At dusk, it begins. From the fen, a single, short *eep*, like a creaky old door. Then another, a few seconds later. It sounds both enthusiastic and unoptimistic, like the SETI folks beaming their message to extraterrestrials. *Is there anybody out there?* The peeper continues for half an hour as the sky darkens and a fine mist falls, and then, miracle of miracles, somebody answers. There's another peep, and another, and soon the night is filled with them, a squeaky jam session.

Spring peepers! We pad across the backyard, no lights, and follow the trail to the fen. We've been waiting for this, toeing the party line about how wonderful winter is, keeping a stiff upper lip through the March mud, when really all we wanted was *stuff happening*. And now it is.

We keep quiet and still, but the closest frogs sense our presence and clam up. Farther out in the fen, though, from every reed and willow, they are peeping like mad. The sound rattles around your brain until you think you might go mad yourself, but it's a happy spring madness, a bacchanal of mud and blissed-out organisms. It sings to all who will listen that right now, this is the place to be.

That's how we felt when we moved into the old farmhouse 18 falls ago. We arrived just in time to watch the hillsides oxidize bronze and gold, then hung on tight through the dark and cold until spring came. Suddenly there were peeps in the fen and mysterious flowers in the woods. We felt like newbies at an old New England summer colony. The Maples and the Robins and the Birches had been here for generations. *This is how we do it*, they seemed to be saying. The house itself had seen



Among the bouquet of spring ephemerals that come to life when Vermont's woodlands thaw are yellow trout lily (above), Dutchman's breeches (below), and hepatica and bloodroot (previous page).

175 summers. We just tried to fit in.

The peeps pipe down at dawn. We follow the trail past the fen, listening to the *churr* of red-winged blackbirds—always one of the first arrivals—camped out on last year's cattails. In

the woods, we search for spring ephemerals, the tiny ground-huggers that make the briefest of appearances. With no leaves in the canopy, the mossy ground glistens with light. We stoop to examine trout lilies, their leaves speckled like brookies. Here's a patch of pink-veined spring beauties, intensely perfumed if you get your nose right down next to them. We even spot some Dutchman's breeches, whose puffy white petals everyone compares to pants hanging on a clothesline, but remind us of pantalooned acrobats in mid-split.

Let's face it: A month from now, when lilacs and crabapples are drenching the landscape in scent and color, these pipsqueaks wouldn't merit a second glance. But right now they are the only game in town—which, of course, is their whole plan. These little forest flowers live their entire life cycle—sprout, flower, get pollinated, go to seed, disappear—before the trees have even leafed out. The sun is all theirs, as are the few bugs. In a few weeks, we'll never know they were here.

The ephemerals have always seemed like the weirdest residents of the summer colony: Arrive when it's still nasty out, and then vanish just as things are getting nice. Why not stay all summer like the robins and the roses? But the more springs I get to know them, the more I learn the lesson they have to teach.

As we climb the muddy trail through the woods, signs of time are everywhere. Old cellar holes. Centurion apple trees. Slate-lined springs dug by some determined soul. From the top of the hill, we look down on our house and fields. Anywhere I dig in those fields, I come up with cans, wires, and old tools. We live atop the ruins of an earlier culture.

Heck, when we bought the place, the flagstone basement was filled with the knickknacks of that earlier culture. For decades the house was occupied by a couple who ran the local hardware store, and they were serious pack rats. They hoarded the tools and trinkets that flowed through their store, and they also bought up the houses and land around them. Quirky and colorful, they were a local institution, the character of the place ... and then they were gone, their reign as evanescent as this year's spring beauties.

Beneath a stand of ash we discover a carpet of white bloodroot blossoms, their leaves wrapped around their stems like capes. When I see these pioneer plants pushing their noses up through the last bits of frost, I picture the New England of 12,000 years ago, when a warming world thawed the glaciers and released the land. For 90,000 years before that, there wasn't much going on around here. This place was dead.

When the first humans arrived, chasing the caribou that were chasing the tundra, there were still no trees, just rocks and sedge. We predate the forest. Hike the White Mountains above treeline and you'll get a sense of *that* landscape. The first trees—cold-loving spruces and firs—didn't arrive for millennia. Hike the White Mountains a thousand feet lower and you'll get a sense of that landscape. Keep dropping toward the valley floor and you'll be fast-forwarding history as the birches and aspens arrive, then beech and maple, and finally oaks.

Sometimes I play that history in my mind, the mile-high rivers of ice bulldozing the earth, then retreating in a gush of silty meltwater, the first shrubs popping up and the caribou herds flowing across the land, human hunters behind them. Then, as the sun and moon whir overhead and the snows come and go, but mostly go, the first trees pioneer the tundra, and soon the new forests march up the river valleys and over the hills, all

the species of the mixed woods swirling together and jockeying for territory, water welling up through bedrock to form the fens, frogs flickering in and out of existence like specks on an old movie reel, and then, late in the film, the settlements come up the same river valleys, men with axes clacking like windup toys, grasses and sheep chasing the forests back to the most inaccessible slopes, towns edging out from the rivers, until, in the last few seconds of the film, the men with axes disappear, the sheep disappear, the old houses melt into the earth, and the forests come flowing back down the hillsides and over the cellar holes.

And here we are, the latest arrivals to this wild interglacial happening. Like all recent arrivals, we assume that everyone else has been here forever. But we're all newbies. Us, the old hardware couple, and the honeybees and dandelions before them. Even the birches. These forests are still jockeying for the best plots, and they will continue scrapping as the climate warms. They're still making up the rules as they go. The methuselah maple near the farmhouse died last year; the oak tree had its first acorns. With its craggy granite peaks and

weathered farmhouses, New England can feel ancient, but it is eternally new. We are less an old summer colony than a sudden summer party.

The next night is even warmer, and the chorus intensifies. The peepers start raging at twilight, joined by clucking wood frogs and a piping thrush. We hover on the muddy edge of it all, wishing we had a tent. It feels like the beginning of something important, but it might just as easily be the end of something sweet and brief, the kind of thing I'll report to my perplexed grandkids years from now. "Hey, man," I'll say, "I heard the blackbirds and the peepers. I was *there*." The point, as the spring ephemerals teach, is to keep your perspective. We may be stardust, but we aren't frozen right now.

In weeks, the peepers will have gone silent and the spring beauties will again retreat into the earth. Not so long after that, we'll follow. Things will keep changing, and the next generation to arrive will look around the place and assume what is, is. And they'll be wrong. It's never been like this, and it never will be again. —Rowan Jacobsen



With its craggy granite peaks and weathered farmhouses, New England can feel ancient, but it is eternally new.



Bagging Rights

Even before the first Earth Day, Vermont's Green Up Day was already on the road to being an environmental game-changer.

Among the more unusual items that Vermonters collected on their state's roadways during the very first Green Up Day, on April 18, 1970, were \$150 in cash, a bathtub, two safes, a fishing pole, a sleeping bag, and a stolen purse belonging to a woman in Boston.

That represents just a fraction of the day's haul, as more than 40,000 cubic yards of trash—enough to fill 4,000 garbage trucks—were removed from interstate, state, and local roads, representing what's been called the largest statewide, voluntary, unified citizens' effort ever organized in Vermont.

Born from an idea by a *Burlington Free Press* reporter named Bob Babcock and launched by recently elected Governor Deane Davis, that first Green Up Day made a splash in more ways than one. "It was a bit of a rebel act," says Kate Alberghini, executive director of

A young trash-collecting volunteer makes his contribution to the inaugural Green Up Day, April 18, 1970. By that evening, in the words of then-Senator George Aiken, 'Vermont was undoubtedly the cleanest state in the nation.'

Green Up Vermont, recalling how Davis shut down federal roads so that volunteers, including busloads of schoolkids, could scour them for three hours that day. "It was, I think, an 'ask for forgiveness' type of plan. Certainly we wouldn't be able to get away with that in this day and age. And then the governor was flying around in his helicopter and landing to encourage groups of volunteers that he saw from the air. So not only did he bus people onto the interstate, he landed on it with his aircraft!

"So it's pretty hysterical but it's also very 'Vermont,' in the sense that we tend to do something that's edgy that really makes a lot of sense, too."

Put another way, Green Up Day was in the vanguard,



debuting just two years after Vermont's first-in-the-nation ban on billboards and helping to inspire the 1972 bottle bill. But keeping this landmark event going every year has called for another Vermont trait, Alberghini says. "In a word, I would say: perseverance. From 1970 until this very day."

In 1979, the organizing of Green Up Day shifted from the state to citizen volunteers, who formed the nonprofit that would become Green Up Vermont. The fledgling group endured "some pretty tough years," Alberghini says, before hiring its first executive director, Melinda Vieux, in 1995—a turning point that helped get things back on track financially. In 2014, for example, Vieux got the state legislature to add Green Up Vermont as a charitable giving option on the state income tax return.

Community support has also sustained Green Up Day, says Alberghini, who succeeded Vieux in 2019. "Even though you're out there picking up litter, it's a festival type of event for many of our towns—with potlucks or breakfasts for all the volunteers, face-painting in the town park, and so on. And while through the pandemic we've had to curtail the celebratory part, the tradition of Green Up Day is simply embedded in many Vermonters. It's something they've passed

down to their kids and their grandchildren."

Businesses of all stripes have pitched in, too, from waste services company Casella to Subaru of New England to sock maker Darn Tough—a wide-ranging group of partners, but each with its own environmental story to contribute, Alberghini says. "Because it's not just about money, it's about having the conversations and telling stories that are really important for our environment. We want our residents to know that this isn't just about one day, that we don't just collect money to do this one day."

Toward that end, Green Up Vermont has been both building on—and going beyond—its signature event. It works to promote other green-minded initiatives

around the state, for example, including helping the Burlington Parks Department launch a volunteer clean-up program for its parks and beaches. Last year saw Green Up Vermont receive a nearly \$80,000 grant to install refillable water bottle stations in schools and other municipal properties; Alberghini also recently applied for an EPA environmental education grant that could allow Green Up Vermont to expand its initiatives in schools, teaching about reusing and recycling.

"Ultimately, I would love to work myself out of a job," Alberghini says, "with no litter on our roadsides, and people understanding that trash not only affects the landscape, it affects our waterways, our wildlife. It's about really taking care of the whole environment for the long term." —Jenn Johnson

GREEN UP DAY: HOW TO GET INVOLVED

■ PARTICIPATE: Green Up Day will be held this year on May 7. Go to greenupvermont.org to look up the specific information for your town, including contacts for local coordinators. There's also a link for the Green Up App, which helps users build teams, track routes, set challenges, and more.

■ SUPPORT: Make a donation or purchase logo T-shirts and water bottles right on the Green Up Vermont website. Other ways to give: buying reusable shopping bags at Shaws in April and May, participating in the Amazon Smile program, and designating a donation on line 23 of your Vermont tax return.

Made in Vermont



Positive Growth

*By tending to people, planet, and profits,
Gardener's Supply Company sows the seeds of success.*



When you walk into a Gardener's Supply Company retail center, you'll find trowels and tomato cages, seeds and houseplants, pots and planters of every size and shape—basically, whatever's needed to transform anything from an apartment patio to a multi-acre spread into your own personal bit of Eden. What you won't find, though, are chemicals. There are no insecticides or herbicides here, not even Miracle-Gro; instead there's a bevy of garden experts on hand to help put green thumbs on an all-natural, organic path to success.

The message is clear: How you grow is important as what you grow. And it's a value that this Burlington-based company itself embodies. Founded in 1983 as a mail-order business by Will Raap and a group of fellow gardening enthusiasts, Gardener's Supply today is regarded not only as one of the largest online and catalog gardening retailers in the world, but also as a company that puts the well-being of its employees, its community, and the environment front and center.

Little wonder, then, that Gardener's Supply inspires folks to put down deep roots. Cindy Turcot, president and CEO, has been with the company since day one.

"I started in data entry. At the time, I just needed a job—I had no idea that I was going to walk into such an amazing company," she recalls. "It was very much about culture. We were extremely close-knit. And our founder, Will Raap, was inspirational from the start, in wanting to spread the joys and rewards of gardening."

She also credits Raap with nurturing the careers of his employees, not the least being her own. As the company grew, Turcot took on roles in customer service, business and office management, and then HR and finance, before becoming chief financial officer in 1991 and then chief operating officer in 2003. Named president in 2018, she added CEO to her title last year.

All told, Turcot has spent almost four decades at Gardener's Supply, rising from data entry and answering phones to becoming its top executive. Today she is also nationally known as an expert and advocate for the company's employee-ownership model, called an ESOP (Employee Stock Ownership Plan)—something she sees as being at the core of their success.

"When Will started Gardener's Supply, he had a very strong philosophical reason for putting it on the path to employee ownership. It was about



Cindy Turcot, president and CEO

us having a stake in the business that we worked for, and knowing that if we did well, we would be rewarded," says Turcot, noting that the ESOP was launched just four years after the company's founding. "But he also deeply believed in wealth equity, sharing the wealth. In our cash profit-sharing plan, a portion is paid

out equally to all employees, acknowledging that it's harder to live at the lower end of the pay scale than the high end."

In addition, being 100 percent employee-owned (a benchmark that Gardener's Supply reached in 2009) is a safeguard against the company's being bought and relocated. "Our distribution center is in Vermont, our call center is in Vermont—if we were sold there's no way they'd keep those here," Turcot says. "So it's also about preserving jobs in the community that we live in."

Even though it has opened retail centers beyond Vermont's borders in recent years (one each in New Hampshire and Massachusetts), Gardener's Supply is deeply embedded in the Green Mountain State. Most of its 230 year-round employees and 350 seasonal hires live here. Its flagship retail center is in Williston, while



In 2013, Gardener's Supply founded a "company farm" outside its Burlington headquarters, where employees grow food crops to donate to local hunger-relief organizations.

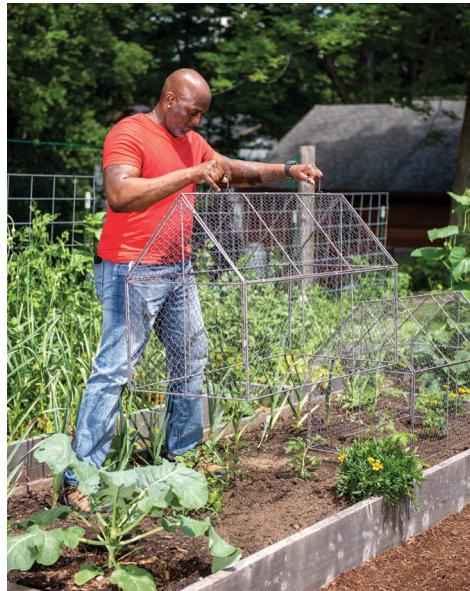
Made in Vermont

Burlington is home to the corporate headquarters, call center, and original garden center. A number of signature Gardener's Supply products are made in Georgia, Vermont, such as raised beds and garden carts; certain other products come from manufacturers in Arlington and Montpelier; and distribution flows through a warehouse in Milton.

Community connection goes beyond jobs, though. A certified B Corp and a founding member of the Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility, Gardener's Supply donates 8 percent of its profits to programs and organizations that use gardening to improve the world. Its employees volunteer to help clean up school and community gardens, for example, and to glean leftover farm crops to be donated for hunger relief.

Underlying much of this work is a belief in the importance of locally grown food, Turcot says. "Back in the day, Will talked about how in the late 1800s almost 100 percent of your food was grown in the place where you lived. And then by the 1980s, here in Vermont, it was only about 20 percent. He always had this vision of, *How do we get more food grown locally?* And I think we want that for every community."

And then came the pandemic, giving new urgency to the issue of food insecurity ("You can imagine what it was like when people went into the grocery stores and couldn't find the food that they needed," Turcot says). So Gardener's Supply launched its "Harvest Hope" program, allocating 1,600 volunteer hours and donating \$50,000 to nonprofits working to stamp out hunger and promote mental wellness through community gardening programs.



Gardener's Supply stands out for offering a number of exclusive products for gardens big and small, such as the Chicken Wire Crop Coop, aimed at keeping hungry critters at bay, and the highly compact Titan Tomato Self-Watering Grow Bag & Trellis.



For retail locations or to shop products and explore a wealth of online gardening information, go to gardeners.com.



Green thumbs from across the state flock to the company's retail flagship, which opened in Williston in 2008 as the largest garden center in Vermont.

The pandemic has rippled through the company itself, which has had to deal with everything from supply-chain backups and cost increases to the use of prepackaged whoopie pies for the annual "share a piece of the pie" event for its customers (held on the winter solstice, it marks the anniversary of when Gardener's Supply became 100 percent employee-owned).

But there have been significant upsides. From greenhouses and composters to houseplants and indoor decor, Covid kicked off a surge in customer buying,

Turcot says—and by the looks of things this past January, when she was interviewed for this article, the enthusiasm continues. "We're selling record levels of seed-starting supplies, seed packets, raised beds—they're already going out the door," Turcot says. "People are excited for spring. They want to feel growth and life. And I think that's what we're offering, both on our website and in our catalog but especially in our retail stores: places where you can come in and just feel positive." —Jenn Johnson



At Hildene in Manchester, the restored Pullman car Sunbeam offers visitors a trip through a landmark era in black history.

Wheels of Time

How a train car called Sunbeam is helping bring black history to light.

On June 4, 2011, a 1,000-mile trek came to an end amid cheering crowds as a pair of flatbed trucks carried Sunbeam, a 1903 Pullman Palace train car, through the streets of Manchester. Touted as the finest example of a restored wooden Pullman car in the world, it had traveled from South Carolina to Vermont, where it would go on permanent display at Hildene, once the home of Robert Todd Lincoln, the eldest son of President Abraham Lincoln.

But in many ways, Sunbeam had just begun its journey. Today its presence at Hildene not only adds depth to Robert Todd Lincoln's personal history, as former president of the Pullman Company, but also helps to tell a broader and more complex national story in the accompanying exhibit "Many Voices."

It was on Pullman's famously luxurious sleeper cars like Sunbeam—outfitted with stained glass, gleaming wood, and thick carpets—that many formerly enslaved African Americans and their descendants found work as porters. As the largest employer of African Americans at the turn of the century, Pullman helped give rise to the nation's black middle class.

Yet at the same time, the Pullman porters were subjected to long hours, difficult working conditions, and low pay. Labor unrest led, in 1925, to the formation

of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters union, which became one of the most powerful African American political forces of the 20th century—and cemented the Pullman porter's place as, in the words of author Larry Tye, "the most influential black man in America for the 100 years following the Civil War."

Visitors can explore that same era—from the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation to the 1963 March on Washington—at the Sunbeam exhibit, whose vivid storytelling befits its status as part of the Vermont African American Heritage Trail. The "many voices" of the exhibit include the Pullman Company, the wealthy passengers, and the porters, but also those who come to Hildene today, who may be inspired to raise questions and start their own discussions.

As Hildene docent Jesse Keel noted in a recent interview with *Manchester Life*: "I think it's incredibly fitting that the 'Many Voices' exhibit is on a [train] platform, because it truly has become a platform for conversation." —Jenn Johnson

*To plan your visit to Hildene and the Sunbeam exhibit, go to hildene.org. For more on the history of the Pullman porters, check out *Rising from the Rails*, by former Boston Globe reporter Larry Tye.*

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