

Our Vermont

FALL 2020

YANKEE

TASTY VERMONT
CHEDDAR RECIPES

SLEEPY HOLLOW:
A FARM MADE
FOR PHOTO OPS

THE SNOW GEESE
ARE COMING!

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

Water Ways

When I think of summer, it's the days that never seem to end that I remember most, the daylight ebbing slowly, weekends by a lake with long swims and a cooler perched by the chair. But to me, autumn has always been a time of doing. The cooler days put a spring in my step. Time to split wood, rake leaves, pick apples.

Most of all, fall invites day-tripping—whether for a mountain hike or a bike journey, or simply to leave the familiar to discover what might lie around some distant curve. It has always been that way for me in this state, so trim in width and so manageable in length that you can take in more beauty in a weekend than anywhere else I know.

And these days, my thoughts more than ever have returned to the Vermont treks that have lingered in my memory, especially the ones where color and water converge. Here are four places in Vermont to see now, or down the road, that will help you understand why it seems as though the Green Mountain State invented the convergence of fall foliage and water views.

■ The Northeast Kingdom is the least populated corner of the state, as well as one of the loveliest. And there, Lake Willoughby may be the sweetest sight of all, with Mount Pisgah and Mount Hor framing the glacier-carved waters. If you come away feeling as though you've viewed a magical Norwegian fjord, you'll not be the first.

■ On Route 4, less than eight miles east of Woodstock, you find the tumbling waters of Quechee Gorge, a favorite spot for my family. When my boys were young, we kept watch as they easily maneuvered down to the large flat rocks in the river, where we followed, picnic in tow.

■ Lake Champlain washes the shores of Burlington, with the Adirondacks rising to the west. To sit on a bench at Battery Park—seagulls circling above, sailboats gliding over the water, waves lapping against the banks—makes sunset an occasion each day.

■ Drive north from Burlington and you come to the Champlain Islands, which stretch along the lake for some 30 miles, from South Hero to the Alburgh peninsula. You'll encounter farm stands, a vineyard, narrow roads that end where lake meets land, country lanes bordered by cottages, and enough French accents to make you want to find a baguette and cheese and just sit awhile. There are no towns, really, just a string of villages, and on clear nights the sky will seem to bloom with stars.



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YANKEE

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*On the cover: A fall landscape along Route 7 south of Rutland, Vermont.
Photograph by Mark Martins*

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The Color Red

That splash of crimson never fails to draw our attention to fall.

Red enters our surroundings in a million ways, but wherever, however it occurs, it is never quite prosaic, never entirely innocuous, never completely without its pointed associations. All things that are truly red are exciting and cause excitement: cardinals, fire engines, certain roses, ripe tomatoes, and (by no coincidence at all) the flags of many, many states and nations. You don't ignore these things. Consider a village street where each house has a wash of laundry drying on the line. You'll pass down that street a hundred times and hardly notice where you are. But if you pass on a day when one line has a suit of red long underwear flapping in the breeze, your heart will be lifted up.

I think we are alert to red because in nature it's not that common a color, at least not in its most powerful, fire-engine manifestation. Understand, now, that the color I am celebrating is no equivocal, hesitant red. This is no ambitious pink, no overreaching orange, but scarlet—a true, unmixed red. In my neighborhood it is mainly the property of two songbirds, neither of them plentiful; two wildflowers (the scarlet bergamot and one of the lobelias); certain varieties of apple, well ripened; and—most abundantly—the dying leaves of hardwood trees. In this last guise, of course, the color has become famous, rising to the status of a regional institution. Every fall, people come to this little corner of the country from all over the world to see leaves, red and otherwise.

Even in composing the vast and complex spectacle of the autumn leaves, however, nature uses true red sparingly. The principal color maker in a Vermont valley is the sugar maple, and of these trees a hundred will turn lemon yellow and two hundred will turn some shade of orange for every one that turns scarlet. The

leaves of blueberry bushes reliably turn an honest red (at least mine do) and so do the leaves and fruits of the sumac; but in the symphony of the fall colors these are soft and subtle tones. The colors that sell the tickets and fill the galleries are the oranges and yellows.

Nevertheless, if red is a color that autumn is apt to withhold, still it has its role there, an essential role—indeed an inevitable role, it seems to me, if you consider the meaning of red, its ring of warning. For I have, over many years, noticed how the very first leaves to

turn, often before fall has properly arrived, are likely to turn red.

In the wooded fencerow near where I attempt to grow vegetables is a tree that turns early. It's not at all a big tree: 30 feet tall, no thicker than your leg. I think it's a swamp maple. It grows in a clump with three other trees of like kind and size and is remarkable in no way until around the middle of the last week in August. Each year at that same time the leaves of this little tree turn precisely that hard scarlet I have

tried here to praise, the red of rubies. The tree seems to turn in a single night. In the morning I spot it at once. All around it, near at hand and far off, the woods hold their midsummer green untroubled. They will hold it for another three weeks, maybe longer. Against their cool uniformity this sudden red is like a jar of paint dashed across a billiard table. It leaps out from the quiet morning like a shout, like a bugle note.

What warning could be more seasonable? By the time that little tree turns, we've all gotten pretty slack. We need to hear its universal admonition. The afternoons won't always last forever. Your ice cream won't always melt in the dish. The bees won't always buzz among the flowers. Look out—something's coming, that red slash says. You better get ready. —*Castle Freeman Jr.*





Making the Cut

For these favorite Yankee recipes, only Vermont cheddar will do.

As long as there have been cows in the Green Mountain State, farmers have been using a portion of their milk to make a kind of delicious cheddar that we still know and love today (the name “cheddar” comes from the village in Somerset, England, where it was invented). Among cheese aficionados, Vermont cheddar is known for its sharper edge compared with, say, Midwest cheddars. It’s also made without food coloring: That’s why plain supermarket cheddar is often orange, while Vermont cheese runs the spectrum from cream to buttercup, depending on whether the cows were eating grass or grain at milking time. Those seasonal variations remind us that cheese comes from the land, a delicious distillation of a time and place, and—as the following recipes show—a great foundation for all kinds of cooking. —Amy Traverso



Winter Squash Tart with Cheddar Custard

In this recipe from the Woodstock Inn, colorful winter squash, fresh herbs, and a creamy cheddar custard are the basis for a simple, delicious tart.

For the crust:

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for rolling
- ¼ teaspoon table salt
- 12 tablespoons (1½ sticks) cold unsalted butter
- 1–3 tablespoons cold water

For the tart:

- 1 pound winter squash, such as kabocha, butternut, or red kuri, peeled, seeded, and diced
- 1 large onion, thinly sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary, stemmed and chopped
- 4 sprigs fresh thyme, stemmed and chopped
- 2 sprigs fresh basil, stemmed and chopped
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1½ cups heavy cream
- 3 large eggs
- ⅛ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 6 ounces cheddar, shredded

First, make the crust: In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour and salt. Cut the butter into dice and sprinkle over the

dry ingredients, then work it in with your fingertips until the dough looks like cornmeal with pea-sized lumps of butter. Add 1 tablespoon of the cold water and stir with a fork just until the dough comes together. If the dough is very crumbly, add the remaining water. Gather the dough into a ball, press it into a disk, then wrap in plastic wrap and chill for at least 45 minutes and up to 2 days.

Meanwhile, prepare the filling: Preheat your oven to 350° and set a rack to the lower third position. In a large bowl, toss together the squash, onion, garlic, herbs, and salt, then drizzle with ¼ cup olive oil and toss again. Arrange mixture in a single layer on a baking sheet and roast until tender, 20 to 25 minutes, then let cool to room temperature.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the cream, eggs, and nutmeg. Set aside.

Remove the dough from the refrigerator, then roll out on a lightly floured surface to a circle about 14 inches wide and ½ inch thick. Transfer to a 12-inch tart pan with removable rim, press down into the edges, and trim away the excess crust. Set the tart pan on a baking sheet.

Sprinkle half the shredded cheese evenly over the crust. Top with the roasted squash mixture and sprinkle with the remaining cheese. Pour the egg mixture over all. Transfer to the oven and bake until the tart is golden brown and cooked through, 30 to 40 minutes. Let cool, then remove the tart from the mold and serve.





Rosemary Cheddar Twists

Making your own cheddar twists is easier than you might imagine. Here we rely on store-bought puff pastry brushed with a quick rosemary-pepper oil and sharp cheddar cheese. Keep the pastry well chilled, or it will be sticky!

For the flavored oil:

½ cup olive oil

**2 tablespoons fresh rosemary leaves,
roughly chopped**

Coarsely grated black pepper, to taste

For the twists:

Flour (for work surface)

2 sheets frozen puff pastry (1 pound total)

**1 tablespoon plus 1 tablespoon finely chopped
fresh rosemary**

½ cup plus ½ cup grated sharp cheddar

Cayenne pepper (optional)

First, make the flavored oil: In a small saucepan, heat the olive oil, rosemary, and pepper over low heat until just simmering. Remove from the heat and let cool. You can make this oil several days ahead of time.

Next, make the twists: Preheat your oven to 400°. Remove the pastry from the freezer and thaw until it's pliable but still chilled. Lay the sheets on a well-floured surface and brush with flavored oil. Now take 1 tablespoon rosemary and ½ cup cheddar and sprinkle them evenly over both sheets of pastry. Gently press the toppings into the pastry. Flip the pastry over and repeat with the remaining oil, rosemary, and cheese.

Using a pizza cutter or a small, sharp knife, cut the pastry lengthwise into strips about ½ inch wide. Flour your hands lightly, and, holding a strip at each end, twist to create a spiral. Place the twisted strips on ungreased cookie sheets, pressing the ends lightly to keep them from untwisting. Sprinkle very lightly with the cayenne, if you like. If the pastry has gotten warm and looks limp, return it to the refrigerator for about 15 minutes.

Bake on the middle and top racks for 8 minutes. Gently flip the twists over and bake until golden brown, 5 to 7 minutes more. Remove from the oven and let cool. Serve warm or at room temperature.



Vermont Cheddar-Ale Dip

This recipe for cheddar-ale dip combines some of our favorite classic Vermont flavors. In choosing an ale for this recipe, know that the darker brew you choose, the stronger the flavor will be. Also, avoid using pre-shredded cheddar, which is coated with an anti-caking agent that will make the dip very thick.

- 3 tablespoons salted butter**
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour**
- 12 ounces blond or brown ale**
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard**
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce**
- 1–2 canned chipotle chilies in adobo sauce, chopped, plus 1–2 teaspoons sauce**
- 1½ teaspoons brown sugar**
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- 20 ounces extra-sharp cheddar, shredded**
- Chopped scallions, for garnish**

Melt butter in a big skillet over medium heat. Whisk in flour until smooth. Cook, whisking continuously, about 1 minute (don't let mixture brown). Add ale very slowly, still whisking, then add mustard, Worcestershire sauce, chilies and sauce, brown sugar, and pepper to taste. Cook over medium heat, whisking continuously, until mixture is thickened and bubbly, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat. Add cheese, whisking until melted. Top with scallions, if desired, and serve with tortilla chips or crusty bread.

Best Easy Macaroni and Cheese

This easy version of mac 'n' cheese is made with lots of extra-sharp Vermont cheddar, a pinch of red pepper flakes, and a crispy topping made from panko bread crumbs.

- 7 tablespoons salted butter, divided**
- ¾ cup panko bread crumbs**
- 1 8-ounce package ziti, macaroni, or your favorite pasta**
- 4 tablespoons all-purpose flour**
- 2 cups milk**
- ¼ teaspoon kosher or sea salt**
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 pinch crushed red pepper flakes**
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard**
- 8 ounces (about 2 cups) extra-sharp Vermont cheddar cheese, shredded**
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese**

Preheat oven to 350°. Melt 3 tablespoons butter in a large, heavy skillet. Add bread crumbs and stir until coated; set aside.

Cook pasta according to package, stopping 2 minutes shy of suggested cooking time. Drain and set aside.

Meanwhile, melt remaining 4 tablespoons butter in a large, heavy saucepan over low heat; whisk in flour until smooth. Cook, whisking continuously, about 1 minute; don't let mixture brown. Add milk gradually and cook over medium heat, whisking continuously, until mixture is thickened and bubbly, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat; add salt, pepper, red pepper flakes, mustard, and cheeses, whisking until melted.

Add pasta, then spoon into lightly greased 2-quart casserole or four lightly greased 2-cup baking dishes. Sprinkle with bread crumbs. Bake 20 to 25 minutes, or until bubbly.



Vermont Cheddar Soup

Under the pen name Mrs. Appleyard, Louise Andrews Kent wrote witty tales, bookended by recipes, of life in Calais, Vermont (look for them in used bookstores—they’re terrific reads). This recipe comes from 1957’s The Summer Kitchen; it’s a proven classic that’s even more delicious the next day.

- 5 tablespoons salted butter**
- 1 stalk celery, diced**
- 1 large carrot, peeled and diced**
- 1 small (or $\frac{1}{2}$ large) onion, diced**
- 5 tablespoons all-purpose flour**
- 2 cups reduced-sodium chicken stock**
- 3 cups milk**
- 1 cup light cream**
- 10 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, grated**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- Common or oyster crackers**

Melt the butter in a 5- or 7-quart pot over medium heat. Add the celery, carrots, and onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until translucent, about 6 minutes. Sprinkle the flour over all and stir 2 minutes. Add the chicken stock a bit at a time, whisking as you go, until you have a smooth base. Add the milk and cream and stir to combine. Puree the mixture in batches in a blender (or use an immersion blender) until smooth. Return to the pot over low heat and sprinkle the cheese over the liquid, a handful at a time, stirring continuously until smooth. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and serve with common or oyster crackers.





HEATH ROBBINS

Chicken Potpies with Cheddar-Scallion Biscuits

It's hard to imagine a more comforting combination than savory chicken potpie filling topped with cheesy biscuits.

For the filling:

- 3 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 3 medium-size carrots, peeled and diced
- ½ butternut squash, peeled, seeded, and diced
- 4 tablespoons salted butter
- 1 large celery rib, diced
- 1 medium-size yellow onion, diced
- 1 teaspoon kosher or sea salt
- 1 cup roughly chopped white button mushrooms
- 5 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 cup milk
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons minced flat-leaf parsley
- 3 cups chopped cooked chicken
- ½ cup sweet peas (frozen is fine)

For the biscuits:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for surface
- 2 teaspoons baking powder

- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon table salt
- 5 tablespoons cold salted butter, cubed
- ⅔ cup grated sharp cheddar cheese
- 2 scallions, green parts only, thinly sliced
- 1 large egg
- ⅔ cup buttermilk
- Milk (for brushing biscuits)

First, make the filling: In a medium-size saucepan over high heat, bring chicken broth to a boil. Add carrots and squash. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until vegetables are tender, 5 to 7 minutes. Drain vegetables, reserving broth. Set aside.

Melt butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add celery, onion, and salt; cook until golden, 10 to 12 minutes. Add mushrooms and cook until they release most of their liquid, 5 to 7 minutes. Add flour and cook, stirring, about 2 minutes. Add milk slowly, whisking as you do; then add reserved broth, whisking until smooth. Cook, stirring often, until sauce thickens, 8 to 10 minutes. Season with pepper.

Add parsley, chicken, reserved vegetables, and peas. Divide filling evenly among 6 ramekins or 8- or 10-ounce ovenproof bowls, leaving about a half-inch at the top for biscuits. If you have extra filling, put it in another ramekin.

Preheat the oven to 425°. Make the biscuits: In a large bowl, whisk flour with baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Working quickly so that the butter stays cold, use your fingers to smear the butter into the flour mixture until it resembles coarse meal, with plenty of lumps. Stir in cheddar and scallions. In a medium-size bowl, whisk together egg and buttermilk; add to flour mixture. Stir with a fork until a shaggy dough forms. Don't overmix.

Divide dough into two balls. On a lightly floured counter, press dough out to a half-inch thickness. Using a floured biscuit cutter or rim of a glass, cut out 2-to-3-inch rounds. Gather dough again as needed and press out again. Repeat with second dough ball. Divide biscuits among ramekins, overlapping as necessary. Brush tops with milk, and set ramekins on a baking sheet lined with foil. Bake until crust is nicely browned and filling is bubbling, about 20 minutes.



HEATH ROBBINS

Apple Pie with Vermont Cheddar Cheese

Nothing says New England like apple pie with a big slice of cheddar cheese. Rhode Island Greenings, Roxbury Russets, and Cortlands are among the traditional Yankee cooking apples. That old familiar McIntosh is plenty good, too.

For the crust

1½ cups all-purpose flour
½ cup cake flour
½ teaspoon salt
½ cup lard (or vegetable shortening)
6 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into 6 pieces
5 tablespoons ice water

For the pie:

4–5 cooking apples, depending on size
3 teaspoons nutmeg or cinnamon (optional)

¾ cup plus 2 teaspoons sugar, divided
1 tablespoon milk
Aged Vermont cheddar slices, for serving

First, make the crust: In the bowl of a food processor fitted with a metal blade, combine flours with salt and pulse a few times. Let sit a moment so dust can settle. Divide lard in half; add to bowl. Pulse until mixture resembles fine meal. Add butter pats and pulse to chop them to the size of lima beans.

With the motor running, add water in a steady stream. Process just until dough begins to clump around blade.

Turn mixture onto a work surface and press it together gently with your hands. Don't knead it; overworking makes for a tough crust. It should hold together but still be on the dry and crumbly side. Divide

dough in half, and form each half into a disk. Wrap tightly in plastic and chill at least 1 hour.

Bring dough to room temperature before rolling out. Rolling will "glue in" any last independent floury lumps. Dough will keep in refrigerator up to 3 days. It also freezes well.

Heat oven to 400°. Pare, core, and slice apples. Add to a large bowl and toss with nutmeg or cinnamon (if you like spice) and ¾ cup sugar. Roll out 1 piecrust disk and line a 9-inch pie tin.

Arrange apples. Cover with second piecrust disk. Make several slits in the top for escaping steam and crimp edges firmly. Brush top crust with milk and sprinkle with remaining sugar.

Bake 10 minutes. Reduce heat to 350°, and bake 50 minutes longer. Serve hot with sliced cheese.

Patch Work

How a childhood fascination with a certain orange squash became one Vermonter's calling.



MONICA DONOVAN

Snug Valley Farm in East Hardwick is home to row upon row of "Ben's Pumpkins," a patch that has been lovingly nurtured by Ben Notterman since the tender age of 6.

Ben Notterman,
photographed
at his pumpkin
patch in 2015.

The Pumpking”—that’s what Ben Notterman’s parents call him. Because, after all, here he is on their lawn at dawn, the blue-eyed, freckle-faced, bearded monarch, decked out in his vestments—sweatshirt, grubby jeans, and a crown, a ball cap smushed down on his sleep-tousled hair—as he dismounts his ATV to inspect his loyal subjects: 6,000 pumpkins, arranged in tidy rows, like a royal court packed with orange faces. Consider also that Ben has been the reigning squash king of East Hardwick, on a lovely dirt road called (so appropriately) Pumpkin Lane, for more than a quarter-century, growing his business since the ripe old age of 6.

Admittedly, it was his dad’s idea. One day after Ben and his mom had returned home with a trunkload of store-bought pumpkins, Ben’s father asked, “How much did all this cost?” Upon learning the truth, he replied, “I think we’ll grow our own.” So the same year that Ben’s teacher taught him simple arithmetic in school, he also learned that if he planted a 50-cent packet of seeds, tended his seedlings into thriving plants, and then sold his harvest of 24 portly squashes for a dollar apiece from the front lawn, he’d make what we grown-ups call a great rate of return.

But Ben’s lessons in financial literacy weren’t always so gratifying. When he was 8, he and his father made a sales call. Ben’s dad waited in the truck as Ben hopped out with an armload of inventory; he returned minutes later with a soda in one hand and a candy bar in the other, a triumphant grin all over his face.

“How’d it go?” Ben’s father asked.

“Oh, it went great.”

“Well, if you add up the cost of those pumpkins and compare it with the cost of what they gave you ... Think about that.”

Ben did the math. “Whoa!” he blanched.

By fourth grade, Ben was discovering how to keep calm and carry on in customer satisfaction. In the weeks leading up to Halloween, Ben (dressed as Zorro) had seen many of his classmates sob whenever they dragged their parents over to buy the biggest (hence most prohibitively expensive) specimens. So Ben began arranging his product in clumps: the \$2 pumpkins here, the \$12 pumpkins there. But the clumps lacked majesty, and so, since fifth grade, he’s gone linear, organizing them into nice, even price rows—rows that he shifts forward and mows around as the grass grows up around his



tractor, which he drives at unruly speeds, accomplishing everything in third gear, which is why his father also refers to The Pumpking as “Mr. Vroom-Vroom.”

By middle school, Ben had mastered the tractor and thereby expanded his enterprise from a patch to a field to several fields. Then, as he entered high school and hit his growth spurt, his business did, too. Raising almost 3,000 plants on nearly five acres, Ben’s production surged beyond his personal capability, so he began hiring additional labor to help transplant, weed, and reap the harvest. Now he was earning a king’s ransom; the orange paper-lined “honesty system” cash box, with its “Pay here, thanks,” was always brimming by day’s end.

Most of Ben’s profit went straight into a savings account, but some was spent on the kinds of things young men dream about. Whereas the pumpkin magically afforded Cinderella’s carriage to the ball, the proceeds of Ben’s pumpkins yielded his first snowmobile (royal blue) and then his first four-wheeler. Then, when he graduated from high school, his pumpkins funded much of college: courses like environmental science, forestry, and (of

course) finance. However, while acquiring his higher education, Ben missed four sales seasons. In his absence, his mom and dad threatened to rename their front lawn “Wholesale: Ben’s Parents’ Pumpkins.” “But am I going to get royalties?” The Pumpking asked, incredulously.

Now more than 20 years after his business sprouted, Ben teaches forestry at the local tech center.



He lives near his parents, surrounded by hayfields and cattle pasture, and his backroad business is still sovereign. What has changed, however, is that these days, Ben’s scepter is his omnipresent cell phone.

When I catch up with him this foggy morning, he’s scrolling through text messages while simultaneously rolling up the ghostly row cover that protects the pumpkins from increasingly chilly nights. Soon the lawn is revealed: a silent crowd of orange faces, 20 kinds, ranging in size from the fist-sized ‘Jack Be Little’ to the chunky ‘Howden’ and ‘Long Island Cheese’, right up to the hassock-sized monsters of ‘Dill’s Atlantic Giant’. There’s enough raw jack-o’-lantern material here to gratify every kid in Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom.

Ben pockets the phone as he stoops to inspect his squashes for soft spots. Aha ... Upon finding a few, he clenches each one and, swiveling toward Hunger Mountain basking in the distance, pitches the punky orb across the road to a group of the family steers, black-and-white Holsteins who wait hopefully in their corral for treats. Soon there’s bright-orange pulp stuck on their dark muzzles as they leer back at him, The Pumpking’s jesters. —Julia Shipley

Ben’s Pumpkins at Snug Valley Farm is slated to open the first week of October. For updates, go to benspumpkins.com/bens-pumpkins.

MONICA DONOVAN

Got Pumpkins?

The following is just a sampling of the many Vermont pumpkin purveyors you can visit this fall; before heading out, though, be sure to check in advance for the most up-to-date information on operations and visiting guidelines.

■ **Equinox Valley Nursery, Manchester:** Whimsical scarecrows and autumn displays are all part of this “Halloween fantasy” pumpkin patch, where you can PYO or buy pre-picked. Take a hayride, try the corn maze, feast on pumpkin ice cream, and more. equinoxvalleynursery.com

■ **Green Mountain Orchards, Putney:** Although apples remain the main crop at this 106-year-old orchard, there’s also a fun PYO pumpkin patch. Don’t miss the fresh cider and cider doughnuts. greenmountainorchards.com

■ **Hathaway Farm, Rutland:** At this third-generation farm, the 13-acre corn maze will still be going strong as the pumpkins ripen in the PYO patch. Grab a hot dog or a snow cone at the snack shack. hathawayfarm.com

■ **Lincoln Farm, Randolph Center:** The Lincoln family offers hayrides to its big PYO pumpkin field, and sweetens deal with free mulled cider in the farm stand afterward. You can buy pre-picked specimens, too, as well as an abundance of winter squash. lincolnfarmproduce.com

■ **Parker Family Farm, Williston:** One bite of this farm’s famous pumpkin spice fudge, made with its own pumpkins, and you might forget why you came (hint: an impressive, pre-picked array of unusual pumpkin varieties). parkerfamilyfarmvt.com

■ **Sam Mazza’s Family Farm, Colchester:** Hunt down your perfect jack-o’-lantern in the fields of the Mazza family’s 350-acre farm, then hit the farm market/bakery/greenhouse to load up on fall goodies, visit the corn maze, and check out the petting zoo. sammazzafarms.com

■ **Whitcomb’s Land of Pumpkins and Corn Maze, Williston:** If you like your pumpkins big, you’ll love Whitcomb’s, which grows varieties including the famed ‘Atlantic Giant’ (which can reach 200 pounds). The four-acre corn maze is a customer favorite. whitcombslandofpumpkins.com

■ **Winslow Farms, Pittsford:** In addition to a five-acre u-pick patch, there’s a restored c. 1840 barn filled with pumpkins of all colors and sizes, gourds, mums, ornamental corn, and other autumn essentials. winslowfarmsvt.com

Local Flavor

A Pit Stop for Pie

*Baked in a farmhouse and sold on the honor system,
Poorhouse Pies' offerings are pure Vermont.*

OPEN EVERY DAY
HOURS OF OPERATION:
DAYLIGHT

Self-Service



Jamie, left, and Paula Eisenberg at the shed where visitors choose their pies and leave their cash (and, often, thank-you notes).

Underhill, Vermont, is the home of Richard Phillips, the merchant mariner whose 2009 encounter with Somali pirates inspired the Tom Hanks film *Captain Phillips*—but if you're ranking on popular appeal, that's only the town's second-greatest claim to fame. The first can be found just off the main drag in a modest yellow farmhouse with a red sandwich board reading "Pie Today."

This is Poorhouse Pies, so named because in its early days that's where Jamie and Paula Eisenberg figured this venture would land them. They operate entirely on the honor system: You help yourself to a pie and drop the money into a box. And, barring emergencies or extended vacations, there really is pie every day, a rotating menu of fruit and cream pies in flavors such as apple, blueberry streusel, OMG (berries and lemon curd in a shortbread crust), and, around holiday time, "raisin hell" (raisin and cranberry).

The bakery began in 2009 when Jamie, a former New England Culinary Institute instructor, was laid off from a café management position. She found another teaching job at a local nonprofit but decided to start her own business on the side. Her wife, Paula, a professional baker with a full-time job, agreed to make fruit pies while Jamie tackled the chiffons and creams (banana, coconut, chocolate), the inventions (creamsicle), and wholesale cakes and cookies. "We've both been in food service our whole lives," Jamie says. "This wasn't just a whim."

The plan was to sell to local markets as well as offer pies for sale at a small shed on their property. They turned their living room into a tidy commercial kitchen and stocked it with refrigerators, cooling racks, flour bins, and a basic electric range. If they arrange the pies just so, they can bake 12 at a time.

Out by the front door, they installed an insulated pie box made by their neighbor, Bob Martelle. It holds a dozen pies, with just enough extra room for the lockbox that functions as the payment system—because this is Vermont, and they'd rather lose a few pies than have to stand behind a cash register. "If someone comes and doesn't have any checks or cash, I say fine, take the pie and send us a check," Paula says.

In warm-weather months the sales operation, such as it is, moves to a walk-in shed, which is just large enough

for two refrigerators and has soft wood walls on which customers tack up love notes. *Took a bike path in rain, one reads. Came from Stowe! In rain!* Looking around the space, Jamie points to the gaps in the wood where daylight seeps through. "We might have to go more upscale if it sinks into the ditch," she muses. A couple of years ago, she and Paula installed a motion-sensitive light on the shed after spotting predawn flashlights on the lawn. "If a pregnant woman needs a pie in the



Alongside blueberry, pumpkin, and other classics, there are decadent creations such as chocolate-peanut butter in an Oreo crust.

middle of the night, who are we to get in the way?" Paula says.

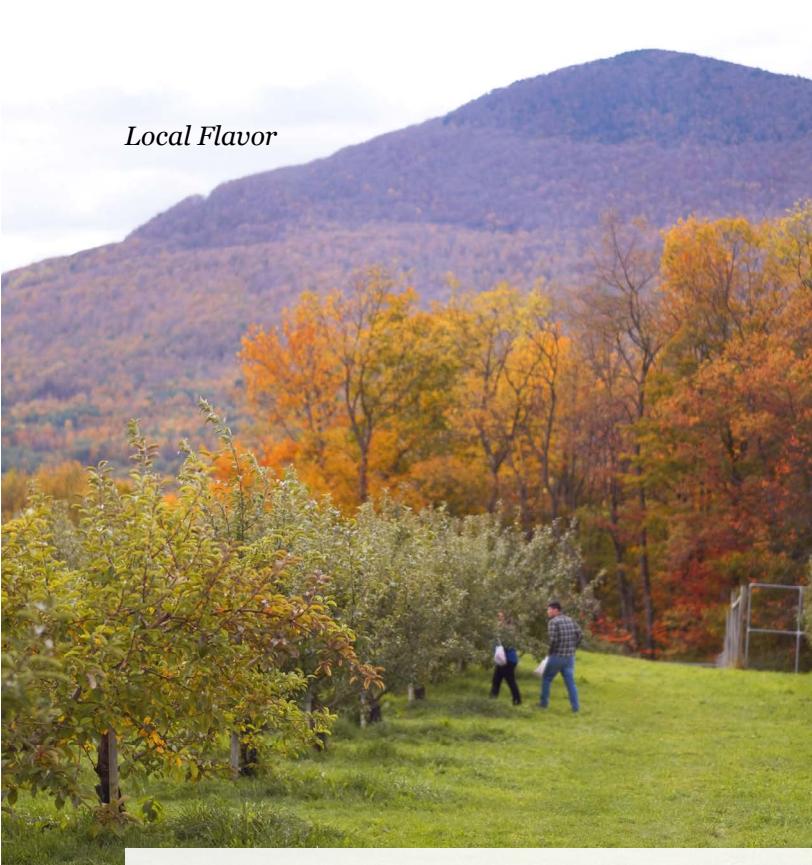
On holiday weekends, they make doughnuts—about 800 of them in 16 to 20 varieties—which nearly kills them every time. "I get up at 1:30 so I can start rolling out the dough, and we're still sold out by 9:15," Paula says. "There's only so much the two of us can do."

But even after an appearance on PBS nearly doubled sales, allowing them to quit their day jobs, they are certain that what they have is exactly what they want: the cash box, the free rhubarb traded for pie, the predawn visitors. "We're never gonna get bigger," Jamie says. "I've been in this house for more than two decades. Before we started the business, I barely knew my neighbors. Now we know everyone. We've become a hub of the community, and that's what I've always wanted."

—Amy Traverso

To see the Burlington-area retailers that carry Poorhouse Pies, or for information on the pie shed schedule, go to poorhousepies.com.

Local Flavor



Mad Tom Orchard

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



It's not often that a retirement project involves taking over a family apple orchard and putting in 60-hour work weeks. But that's exactly what Tom and Sylvia Smith did more than two decades ago when they moved to Vermont from Atlanta, Georgia, to take over the farm that Tom's parents owned in East Dorset. In the years since, the couple have turned Mad Tom Orchard into one of Vermont's best pick-your-own apple spots. Framed by the southern Green Mountains, the Smiths' fruit trees spread across eight acres and feature 14 different varieties, including many modern favorites. We chatted with Tom, a retired engineer, at the orchard as he was gearing up for another banner apple season. —*Ian Aldrich*



Tom and Sylvia Smith

Tell us a little about your operation.

We're celebrating the orchard's 80th anniversary this year. It began in 1940 and was run by another family, and then in 1962, my father, who already owned two other orchards up north, bought it. He ran it as a 40-acre commercial orchard. My wife and I took over the business in the late 1990s and it's now an eight-acre orchard, all pick-your-own.

My father only grew McIntosh and Cortlands. We still do have those, but we trimmed things back to only the 100 best trees and then added another 1,200 to grow new varieties like Ginger Gold, Sansa, Honeycrisp, Northern Spy, and others. When we first started out my wife and I were generating probably 700 bushels of apples a year. Today, we produce around 2,500.

Which varieties do your customers seem to enjoy discovering most?

Zestar is a great late-variety apple. It's got a spicy flavor, which makes it a nice pie apple, but it's also good for just eating. Northern Spy is another late variety that I like. Both apples keep very well, too. We just put them in the refrigerator. They're good for a long time.

What do you like most about your work?

Meeting the people is always nice. This year may be different, of course, but we generally see visitors from all over the country. And a lot of those folks are returnees—travelers from Georgia, Texas, Tennessee.

I'm also working the same land my father and farmers

before him did. At one point Vermont was mostly farms, and on our land you can find a lot of old cellar holes. There's a nice legacy here that I'm helping to continue.

Given everything that's happened this year, what kind of season are you expecting?

Well, the apples aren't affected by the virus—they just keep growing. I also think apple picking is a safe thing you can do and still maintain social distance. On a good fall weekend day we'll get 1,500 people visiting. It's a pretty economical entertainment that can involve the entire family.

Finally: How did the orchard get its name?

As the story goes, there was an old timer who lived around here who liked to hit the sauce. The road was named after him, and it's a 200-year-old road. People will ask me if the orchard was named after me. No, I say, I'm not 200 years old—I just happen to also be named Tom!

If You Go

■ **Mad Tom Orchard** in East Dorset is open for apple picking in September and October. For details and updates on visiting this fall, go to madtomorchard.com.

■ For more information about Vermont's apple orchards, farm stands, and cider makers, go to vermontapples.org.

The Spans of Time

*Cruise into yesteryear on the roads of Montgomery,
the covered bridge capital of Vermont.*



Ask most people to describe covered bridges, and the word you'll often hear is *romantic*. But what makes them quintessentially New England is their utility: Maintaining a roof is cheaper than repairing a bridge that's been left open to the elements. "Covered bridges weren't built to star on calendars," writes author Howard Mansfield in his 2016 book, *Sheds*. "They weren't built to be pretty," but rather to be practical.

It's no surprise, then, that in covered bridges' 19th- and early 20th-century heyday, nearly a thousand would crop up across New England. Many still survive today, most notably in Vermont, whose 100-plus bridges represent the highest density per square mile of any U.S. state. (Vermont is also home to the world's first and only museum dedicated to this kind of structure, at the Bennington Center for the Arts.)

If you travel through the Green Mountain State, odds are you'll never be too far from a covered bridge. For the true "bridger," though, a detour to Montgomery is a must: This town of 1,200 souls in the shadow of Jay Peak, 10 miles from the Canadian border, has no fewer than five covered bridges within its borders—and most locals also claim another one, just over the line in Enosburgh, built by the same Montgomery brothers who erected the others. Add in the Hectorville Bridge, which is currently in storage, and that gives Montgomery a total of seven, the most in the state and reputedly the nation.

Montgomery is laced by rivers and streams—the Trout River and its South Branch, West Hill Brook, and Black Falls Brook. In order to stitch a community fabric out of the farms and mills of 19th-century Montgomery, a number of wooden covered bridges were thrown across these waterways. Sheldon and Savanard Jewett were the town's master covered bridge builders. Between 1863 and 1890—assisted at times by their brothers Braman, Giles, Oscar, Samuel, Alfred, and William—they fashioned at least nine bridges using hemlock from their own sawmill.

Of the ones that remain, the most lyrically rural may be the **Creamery Bridge**, aka the West Hill Covered Bridge. Like Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, this little span has the audacity to leap across a waterfall: Built in 1883, it still keeps hold onto either side of the



Among the covered bridges dotting the landscape in and around the town of Montgomery are the 91-foot-long Hopkins Bridge (above), and the 49½-foot Fuller Bridge (previous page), both of which were overhauled and spiffed up a few decades ago.

steep natural flume through which West Hill Brook sluices into a neat round pool. In the forest nearby are the remains of the creamery that inspired the bridge's name. Similarly, the **Hutchins Bridge**, built the same year over the South

Branch in Montgomery Center, leads to the remnants of the butter tub factory it once served.

By contrast, the **Fuller Bridge**, built in 1890, is a tidy white-front bridge in Montgomery Village that fits in as just one of the buildings in the neighborhood. Completely reconstructed in 2000, it crosses Black Falls Brook not far from the village post office. From there it's just a short hop to the **Comstock Bridge**, which—like its neighbor, the **Longley Bridge**—crosses the Trout River. The Comstock Bridge boasts frame-latticed open windows, which were originally meant to let travelers see who was approaching on the bend, and now afford a pleasant look up and down the river.

The longest bridge built by the Jewett brothers is the c. 1875 **Hopkins Bridge**, a 91-foot span over the Trout River in Enosburgh. Though it once carried traffic to Enosburgh and neighboring Berkshire, that road has been abandoned, and today the Hopkins Bridge serves just one farm. But it has utility—and for a covered bridge, that is enough. —Bill Scheller with Jenn Johnson

To download a guide to Montgomery's bridges, go to montgomeryvt.us/about/bridge.



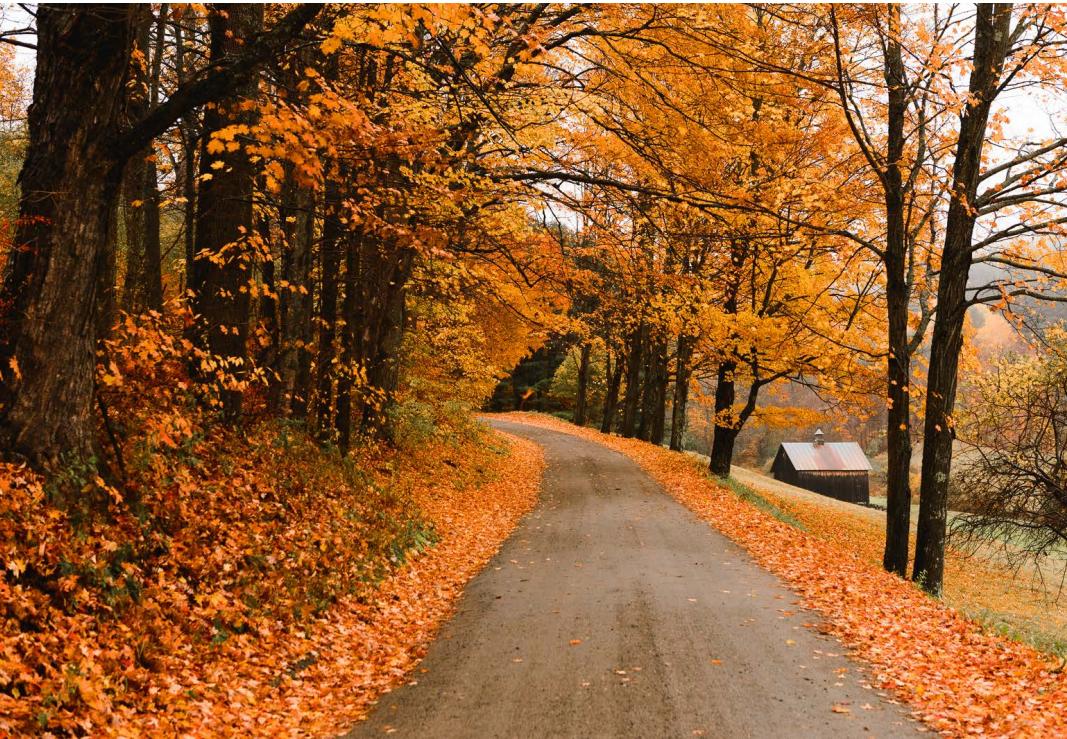
The Legend of Sleepy Hollow Farm

How a humble Vermont homestead became an Instagram icon.

If you have even a passing interest in New England fall photos, you've no doubt already seen pictures of Sleepy Hollow Farm. Located in Pomfret, just outside the all-things-autumn town of Woodstock, Sleepy Hollow sits off a winding dirt road lined with stately maples and restored farmhouses. With its big barns, late-1700s Cape farmhouse, and knack for catching the light just right, Sleepy Hollow is catnip for

photographers. In the morning or early evening, the narrow road to the farm might be lined with as many as 20 cars, as shutterbugs hunker down with their tripods.

During my own fall visit to Sleepy Hollow, I arrived just before 6 a.m. It was still dark, and I figured I'd be the first visitor. I was so naive. Lin Go, a biologist from China who had been living in Boston during the past year, was already walking the road to study the setting,



LEFT: Cloudland Drive, the road leading to Sleepy Hollow Farm, has inspired many photos on its own. **BELOW:** Fred Doten and his wife, Nancy, in the kitchen of their home, which sits next to the farm.



waiting for first light. He had left Boston at 3 in the morning to see the farm at sunrise.

"There is nothing like this in China," he said. "The colors. I had to get these pictures before I head home."

Soon, others came. A man from Pennsylvania who got ribbed for wearing an Orioles jacket in Red Sox country. A group of Vietnamese photographers from southern California. A young father who'd driven from Los Angeles with his wife and their three children.

At one point, as many as 25 people crowded around the top of Sleepy Hollow's drive to photograph the landscape.

It wasn't always this way, of course.

•••

The story of Sleepy Hollow Farm goes back to the late 1780s, when two young brothers from Connecticut, Samuel and John Doten, left the family farm for a new life in central Vermont.

They were not pioneers in that regard. The area that would come to be known as Pomfret, Vermont, was chartered in 1761, and nine years later Bartholomew Durkee, a native of Pomfret, Connecticut, became its first settler. Over the next few years, others from Durkee's hometown followed him, including the Doten brothers. Not surprisingly, they called their new home New Pomfret; it was later shortened to Pomfret.

When the Doten brothers arrived in Vermont,

they built neighboring farms. Samuel constructed a farmhouse on a rise of land, with views of the nearby hills and the growing town of Woodstock. John built his place on a stretch of land that sat just below the road and his brother's home.

Over the next century and a half, both Doten farms remained in the family. There was little demarcation between the two properties. The lands were connected by pastures, and Dotens played and worked together.

"When it was time to hay, we'd head over to our cousins' place and help load up the wagons and fill the

**"In every possible way, it's perfect.
It's what you think of when you think of Vermont."**

silos," recalls Fred Doten, Samuel's great-great-great grandson, who resides in the same house and works the same land that generations before him did.

His older cousin, Edward, and his wife, Elsie, owned the farm that John Doten had built. They had a milking herd and a large flock of chickens. Doten eggs were delivered to homes around Woodstock and Pomfret.

But in the 1950s, Edward and Elsie, both well into middle age, decided to leave farming. Maybe they were just tired of the work, says Fred, or perhaps they sensed that small farms like theirs were on borrowed time: Several decades ago eight small working farms lined



Cloudland Drive, but today only two remain.

Edward and Elsie moved on to work for Laurance Rockefeller, the famous philanthropist and conservationist who had deep ties to Woodstock. Edward took care of the grounds of the Rockefeller home, while his wife managed the house.

And their former farm—which would come to be known as Sleepy Hollow—passed through the hands of a few different owners over the next few decades.

•••

The current owner of the farm is also its most well-known. Several years ago Aerosmith guitarist Joe Perry and his wife, Billie, made Sleepy Hollow their Vermont retreat. The property consists of 115 acres and includes the original Cape and a heated six-stall barn with loft/studio that's connected to the house, as well as a pond, a guest house and a log cabin that rests on a ridge with fantastic views of the surrounding hills. In 2015 Perry put the place on the market for \$3.1 million before changing his mind and deciding to keep it.

Fred Doten says that it's only been in the past 10 to 15 years that Sleepy Hollow has become such a magnet for photographers. The advent of mobile photography and the rise of Instagram have certainly played a part in its popularity. But for many people looking to shoot a classic Vermont scene, it also checks a lot of boxes.

"There's the ease of access," says Yankee's foliage

Shutterbugs gather at the edge of the Sleepy Hollow property as morning light begins to filter into the valley where the farm buildings sit.

expert, Jim Salge. "You can shoot it from the road. It has this long, sweeping driveway that winds down to the property, giving you a perfect angle from above, of the barns and house. You've also got the ponds, which in the morning has mist coming off them and the hills behind it. In every possible way it's perfect. It's what you think of when you think of Vermont."

Fred Doten, however, is a bit bemused by the mystique surrounding Sleepy Hollow. "You can't believe how many photographers visit—and it's year-round, not just in the fall." He laughs and adds, "But I can't say the views are all that good. You can see a lot more of the area from our place."

That's not to suggest he wants his farm to gain the kind of notoriety that Sleepy Hollow has, though he admits: "We like it when they stop at our farm stand to buy our maple syrup." —*Ian Aldrich*

Sleepy Hollow Farm is in South Pomfret, about 10 minutes from Woodstock. If you go to see it, please remember that it is a private residence; being quiet and respectful while getting your photos will ensure that Sleepy Hollow's admirers are continued to be welcomed here.

Where Past Is Present

Home to “ordinary people doing extraordinary things,” Rokeby tells a historic tale that resonates today.



A portrait of the last generation of Robinsons to live at Rokeby, Elizabeth and Rowland T. "Rowlie" Robinson (painted by Rowlie's sister Rachael). When Elizabeth Robinson died in 1961, she left the property and all its contents to be operated as a museum.

The year 1963 marked a watershed for the civil rights movement, as some 250,000 people gathered in the nation's capital for the March on Washington—the largest rally for human rights that America had ever seen. It was a year of turning points and tragedies, from the protests in Birmingham and desegregation of the University of Alabama to the deaths of Medgar Evers and JFK.

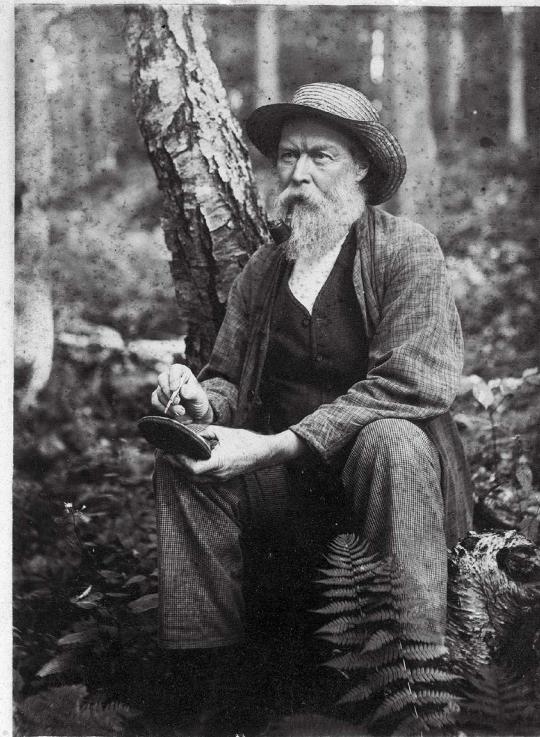
It was also the year that saw the opening of a museum in rural Vermont, hundreds of miles away from the cities at the heart of the civil rights struggle, whose window on the past would also shed vital light on the present.

Located in Ferrisburgh, in the historically fertile farmland of the Champlain Valley, the Rokeby Museum is rooted in the preserved home of four generations of the Robinson family, which included farmers, artists, a well-known writer, and most famously, abolitionists. The family first settled in Vermont in 1792, when Thomas and Jemima Robinson, well-to-do Quakers from Rhode Island, moved to the Ferrisburgh area and later bought the property they would call Rokeby (a name inspired by a Sir Walter Scott poem).

But it was their son, Rowland Thomas Robinson, and his wife, Rachel, who would put Rokeby on the map, literally, as part of the network that formed the Underground Railroad, giving shelter to fugitive slaves. And it was for that role that Rokeby was designated a National Historical Landmark in 2001.

"The term 'Underground Railroad' conjures up what we all learned in school," says museum director Catherine Brooks, "but Rokeby's story is really deeper and more expansive, in that it focuses on the members of the family who lived here who saw slavery as an 'abominable sin.' ... The Robinsons and other radical abolitionists believed slavery wasn't something to be dismantled slowly and carefully—it needed to end immediately."

To help tell this deeper story, the Rokeby Museum has augmented the historic buildings on its 90-acre campus with a modern education center anchored by the exhibit "Free & Safe: The Underground Railroad in Vermont." Filling six galleries on the second floor, and bringing the past to life through listening stations and



ABOVE: Among the generations to live at Rokeby was Rowland Evans Robinson (shown c. 1889), a naturalist and devoted conservationist who was also one of Vermont's most beloved 19th-century writers. BELOW: The main house, built in the late 1780s but expanded after Thomas and Jemima Robinson bought it in 1809. It has been carefully preserved—so much so that "it can feel as though the family has just stepped out," says museum director Catherine Brooks.





ABOVE: A portion of the cornerstone exhibit, “Free & Safe: The Underground Railroad in Vermont,” which tells the stories of two fugitives from slavery who ended up at Rokeby. **RIGHT:** *Woven Fence*, part of artist Carol MacDonald’s 2020 exhibit “Mending Fences,” which revolves around simple and profound acts of repair.

theatrical tableaux, this permanent exhibit follows the journeys of two fugitives from slavery, Jesse and Simon, who actually came to Rokeby in the 1830s.

The center also hosts changing exhibits that aim to connect history with current events and sensibilities, perhaps most strikingly through art. And the current exhibit, “Mending Fences,” couldn’t be more timely: By finding creative ways to “repair” museum artifacts (wrapping red cord around a sagging split-rail fence, turning damaged garments into monoprints bearing hand-sewn repairs), Colchester artist Carol MacDonald suggests how what is fragmented can be made whole. “It elicits thought and discussion about what needs to be repaired today,” Brooks says, “from the environment to working for social justice.”

It’s an especially fitting exhibit for a museum that in recent years has put social advocacy at the fore, opening itself up as a platform for exploring a variety of issues through talks, workshops, and other programs (last winter, for instance, it hosted a book discussion on the best-seller *The Hate U Give*). As Brooks puts it, “The Robinsons stepped out of their comfort zone in 1830, and they stood up for their principles, and the museum feels it’s important that we do too.”

The 2020 season has been a challenging one for Rokeby, which delayed its typical spring opening till



July and has closed the Robinson family home to the public (air circulation in a centuries-old home being a tricky business). But with its thought-provoking exhibits, a slate of outdoor tours, a museum shop filled with such in-demand books as *How to Be an Antiracist* and Isabel Wilkerson’s *Caste*, and a beautiful property ideal for hiking and picnics, Rokeby has much to offer these days. And it is also pivoting to a larger online footprint, finding new ways to share its resources and connect the community.

“When you learn about the Robinson family, you find that they were ordinary people doing extraordinary things. And the inspiration is, we’re all like that,” says Brooks. “We all have our challenges, and we can all do great things.” —Jenn Johnson

If You Go

■ **Rokeby Museum** in Ferrisburgh is open daily until Oct. 25, and by appointment after that. Admission is \$10 general, \$9 seniors, \$8 students (on Tuesdays, admission is free from 1 to 5 p.m.). For information on visiting or to see online offerings, go to rokeby.org.

Back Tracks

Ride along on a journey into the hidden world of freight trains.



MARK FLEMING

Six thousand horsepower, and we were still having trouble getting traction.

Engineer Rod Smith and conductor Ty Kahler were also having a hard time agreeing on the beauties of late autumn in Vermont. "This is my favorite time of year," Ty said. "With the leaves down, you see things you don't see anywhere else." Rod had a different take on the season: "Fall is the worst time of year for an engineer—the leaves on the track are like grease."

You might agree with Rod about fall if you, too, are in command of nearly three million pounds of rolling steel.

This was on a graying afternoon in early November 2017; leaves covered the rails. Rod was perched behind his engineer's console as we trundled along just west of Ludlow. Ty and I sat on the other side of the cab. We were riding shotgun on the lead unit of three diesel-electric locomotives, 2,000 horsepower each. Train 264, the Vermont Rail System's daily freight out of Bellows Falls, was bound for Rutland. But first we had to get over the leaves.

We New Englanders hear the sounds at night and at odd times of the day, especially if we live along the valleys where some of the first tracks in North America were laid: the almost melancholy note of the horn, the rhythmic pounding of steel on steel. We likely know it isn't Amtrak's Vermonter or Ethan Allen Express, or the Massachusetts-to-Maine Downeaster, but we seldom tie those sounds to freight moving, unless we're waiting, usually impatiently, at a crossing.

But freight does ride the rails, and much of New England's economy rides with it. "The railroads," a VRS engineer named Rick Wool told me, "are the cheapest way of getting stuff around in bulk."

Train 264 consisted of 30 covered hoppers, traveling to where they would be filled with commodities like crushed limestone, talc, and cement; there are also two carloads of flour for Westminster Bakers, the cracker company, in Rutland. As freights go, 264 wasn't a particularly long one. Rod Smith's personal record is a nearly mile-and-a-half train of 118 cars.

Putting a freight train together is an exercise in planning and precision—"an organized ballet," Vermont Railway executive James Mattsen told me, using an unlikely metaphor for an industry that is anything but light on its feet. Even its sounds and smells are heavy: the throb of diesel engines, the steel slam of couplers, the thick creosote aroma of Georgia pine ties warming in the morning sun.

"Where else could we possibly go to work where we get paid to play with trains?"



Engineer Rod Smith,
at the controls for
the run from Bellows
Falls to Rutland.

I'd started my day at a place called the Interchange, on the outskirts of Bellows Falls, where every day the Rutland train's complement of cars is assembled. "We never know what other railroads will be giving us until it's almost time to make up the train," said Mattsen. This morning, the New England Central had given us empty covered hoppers; we left empty fuel oil cars for one of its trains. As I rode in a switching locomotive with Rick Wool and his conductor, Tim Dumont, we passed cargoes of plywood, cedar siding and shingles, and snaky sheaves of rebar. A lot of it had come a long way, all by rail. "See those cars?" Rick said as he pointed to a siding. "Two or three days ago they were somewhere up in Canada."

Tim, who minutes earlier had emerged from the

engine compartment with a foil package containing an early lunch he'd heated on the diesel, set about the conductor's job of checking off the cars we were picking up. "That one there must be ours," he said to Rick, pointing at the lead hopper behind us. "I think it's an empty."

"Lift it up and see," Rick joked.

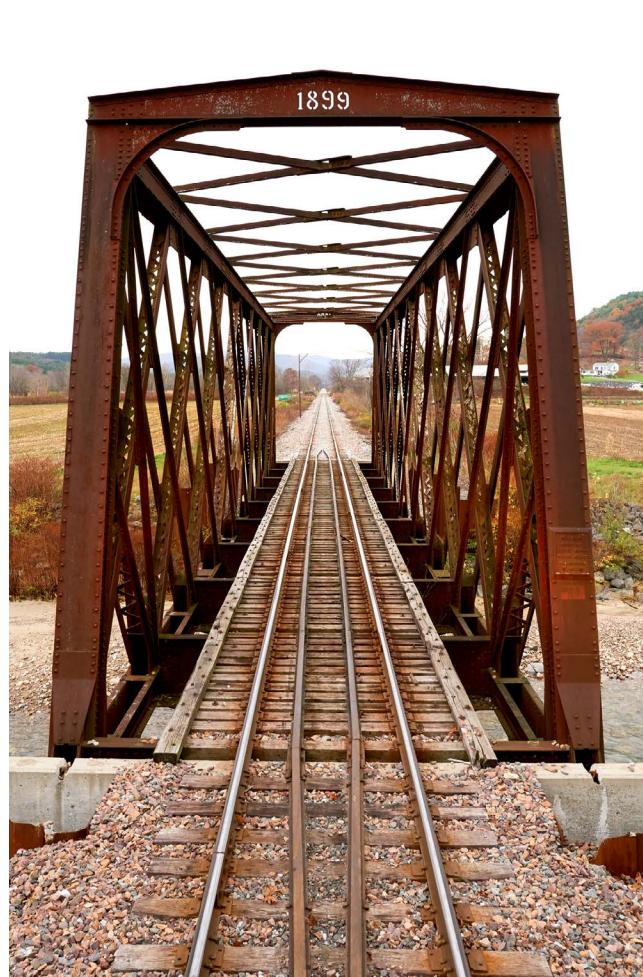
The steel ballet was finished by early afternoon, and Rick lumbered off in his switcher. Now 264 belonged to Rod and Ty, and to the three locomotives that would take us to Rutland. Rod slowly opened the throttle as Ty finished his radio report to the VRS dispatcher, rattling off information with the speed of an auctioneer.

Ty was in his mid-20s and wore a neat chinstrap beard. He'd been with the railroad for just 16 months and said this was "the best job I've ever had." Rod had a few more miles behind him. Trim and just past his middle 60s, with a big gray mustache that would have done a Victorian railroader proud, he, too, started out as a conductor—but only after a career as a different sort of engineer. "My degree is in chemical engineering," he told me as we eased out of Bellows Falls. "I spent over 16 years setting up pulp mills all over the world, and training people to run them. When I retired from that job, I thought I'd try the railroad for a while. That was 12 years ago.

"As we say around here," Rod added, "where else could we possibly go to work where we get paid to play with trains?"

Work or play, it's a big job in a small room. The cab of a locomotive is a gritty little office, roughly ten feet wide and eight deep. Climb the narrow steel steps and head through the door, and you're standing almost nine feet above the rails. The cab is spartan but surprisingly homey, with a good heater and, usually, a small fridge. An exterior walkway leads to the even-bigger space where the 16-cylinder diesel and generator are housed.

The engineer stays at his console, but freight train conductors are "our eyes and ears," as more than one engineer told me. That means getting out and guiding backups and stops via radio, as well as setting flares at road crossings if the gates aren't in operation. At ungated crossings, the train whistle gives the warning.



ABOVE: This through-truss bridge over the Williams River near Chester was built in 1899 but shored up with new concrete abutments after Tropical Storm Irene destroyed the original stonework in 2011.

TOP: Pulling into the Chester depot.



A Vermont Rail Systems freight train rolls past the Williams River in Bartonsville.

Train 264 broke 10 mph only after we left the yard. The design speed for freights on Vermont Railway track tops out at 25 mph, except for two stretches of welded rail where trains can hit 40 if conditions allow. The rest of the system operates over “stick rail,” whose small gaps give the wheels that classic clickety-clack.

At Smithville, we dropped off a hopper at a talc plant. Talc is a bread-and-butter item on Vermont rails, as is salt; 60-to-70-car salt trains are not uncommon as winter sets in.

And then there are the odd cargoes. For Rod, the most unusual was a shipment of wind turbine blades, so long that they rode twin flatcars. “They were secured at one end and held in a sling at the other, so we could make the turns,” he recalled.

A couple of miles west of Ludlow, Rod announced that “this is the only railroad in the country that goes through a ski area.” Sure enough, we were soon passing an Okemo chairlift, and ducking under an overpass that carries a ski trail.

In a few miles we saw a doe and fawn browsing alongside the rails. “Moose, bear, turkeys, coyotes—

we see a lot of wildlife,” said Rod. The deer kept a safe distance, but many animals aren’t so cautious. Wildlife and livestock can make for nerve-wracking encounters—as can humans who think they can share the track. Rod recalled an ATV rider heading toward him and, another time, a Jeep. Fortunately, the freight’s slow speed and a good line of sight ahead kept things from playing out badly.

We won the fight with the greasy leaves and reached a place called the Summit, in the town of Mount Holly. This is the height of land on the route. From here, our progress would require Rod’s fine touch on the brakes rather than the throttle. “Train handling is all in the brakes—and knowing your terrain,” Rod told me.

“The leaves are bad enough,” he maintained, “but some of the diciest situations involve winter weather. Years ago I was working this route as conductor. It was snowing, and the brakes weren’t grabbing on the way down from the Summit into Bellows Falls. When you get deep, fluffy snow blowing around the wheels and brake shoes, they cool down and you lose braking ability.

"The speedometer showed us doing 28 in a 10 mph zone. Snow was blowing all around us, and we couldn't see. I knew we'd be OK, though, when we stopped picking up speed. When we hit flat track, the brakes caught and we started to slow."

It grew quiet in the cab except for the thrum of wheels on metal. East Wallingford, Shrewsbury, and Clarendon slipped by, and dusk had turned to darkness as we slid into the Rutland yards.

Two-thirty a.m. is a beastly time for a wake-up call, but the northbound freight run to Burlington was leaving at 4. After I climbed into the warm cab, engineer Aaron Hahn drew back the throttle, and we started off in a light rain, passing the sleeping Amtrak Ethan Allen as we inched out of the Rutland yards. Rob Silva, our conductor, was at his flip-down desk, doing paperwork by the light on his hard hat. Rob was a 19-year VRS veteran, while Aaron had just passed 20 years of service—"This is one of those jobs where once you do it, you don't want to do anything else," Aaron said.

An owl coasted low above the track ahead, seeming to pilot us as we left Rutland. We picked up speed through Proctor, and at Florence, we stopped so Rob



ABOVE: Employees at VRS's Green Mountain Railroad car shop inspect one of the two wheel sets in a "truck," the assembly on which a railcar rides. LEFT: Repairman Ethan Lawrence at the roundhouse in Burlington.

could throw a switch, letting us back in to drop off more than a dozen of our empty railcars at the OMYA plant. OMYA, the railroad's biggest shipper, produces calcium carbonate from Vermont marble. An average of 30 to 35 railcars a day enter and leave its Proctor plant.

I asked Aaron what happens to all that calcium carbonate. He answered that it "goes everywhere"—as a calcium additive in baked goods, in polishes, and as a slurry that gives a glossy coating to the kind of paper these words are printed on.

Clearing Middlebury, we were on a welded section of track where we could run at 30 mph. We even hit 40, zipping through farmland near the border of Chittenden and Addison counties. We slowed as we slipped behind the Shelburne Museum, tracked through suburban South Burlington, and slid alongside Burlington's bike path on the approach to the yards. We had finished the run.

As Aaron and Rob decoupled a car, I walked over to the locomotive repair shop. Imagine a garage that makes your car mechanic's place look like something out of Legoland: Here are 35-ton jacks, four of which can lift a train's body, cab, engine, and generator off the tracks. I saw pistons the size of wastebaskets, wheels over a yard in diameter. A young welder named Ethan Lawrence explained that engines are rebuilt after burning through a million gallons of fuel.

I last saw Ethan standing alongside one of his locomotives, like a proud stableman with a big coach horse. Smiling, he left me with a remark that explains why this hard, heavy, vital world keeps working. "Every day," he said, "is a good day on the railroad." —Bill Scheller



A swirling flock of
migratory snow geese at
the Dead Creek Wildlife
Management Area.

Flocking into Fall

*When snow geese fly south for the winter,
thousands make a spectacular stopover in Addison County.*

Beginning in early September, the world's most vivid fall colors wash over the northern New England village where I live. Middlebury is the shiretown for Addison County, whose numerous dairy farms and orchards make it one of Vermont's prime agricultural regions. The brilliant sugar maples of the Green Mountains rise around a world of ripening cornfields, reddening apples, and other fulfillments of the season.

JEFF NADLER

For me, the most exhilarating marker of fall is the appearance of wild geese in the skies above our town. Addison County is on a major flyway, with thousands of these spectacular birds pausing to feed and rest in the fields and wetlands of the 2,858-acre wildlife sanctuary to the northwest of Middlebury, the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area.

Most years there are geese here from late September through early November, with the greatest



Though snow geese pass through Vermont in the spring, too, that visit is shorter and the flock is more dispersed as they hurry to their northern breeding grounds.

concentrations around the third week in October. Canada geese arrive in majestic wedges, en route from northern Quebec and Labrador to Chesapeake Bay, their muted brown and gray plumage and the black-white-black of their heads and necks making an elegant pattern against the fields of bleached stubble.

But it's the snow geese that present an even more amazing spectacle, as they arrive in a disorderly, gabbling profusion while making their way southward on a 5,000-mile journey from Ellsmere and other Canadian islands north of Hudson Bay. The feathers of these birds are pure white except for a stark band of black at the tips of their wings, and when the geese rise out of these Vermont fields for their morning and afternoon fly-abouts, the sky fills with the scintillating light of their wings and echoes with their calls.

Decades ago, snow geese were a virtual blizzard on the local landscape, with as many as 15,000 alighting here as the weather cooled. Changes in fall migration patterns have shifted much of that population west, to New York state. Yet a sizable number still return to Dead Creek every autumn—and with it, a flock of eager birdwatchers.

When I was teaching at Middlebury College, I especially liked going to see these geese with my students. It's a phenomenon that never ceased to amaze them and engage them in the seasonal tides that sweep around their college town. Invariably young people respond in a strongly personal way to the odyssey of the geese: At this time in their lives,

If You Go

■ The Dead Creek visitor center is closed this fall, but you are welcome to observe wildlife in the refuge from the **Route 17 viewing pavilion**, one mile west of Route 22A. Its elevated vantage point is excellent for viewing the geese, with late mornings and late afternoons being the best times to see large groups taking off and returning.

■ If the geese are gathered at the back of the refuge property, another viewing option is to return to Route 22A, drive about one mile south, then head west on **Gage Road** to its end. Just be sure not to walk past the orange gates or enter the refuge at any point.

■ For more information on the **Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area**, go to vtfishandwildlife.com/watch-wildlife.

■ For updates on the **2020 snow goose season**, check out "The Snow Goose Scoop" blog by local writer and field naturalist Bryan Pfeiffer, at bryanpfeiffer.com/the-snow-goose-scoop.

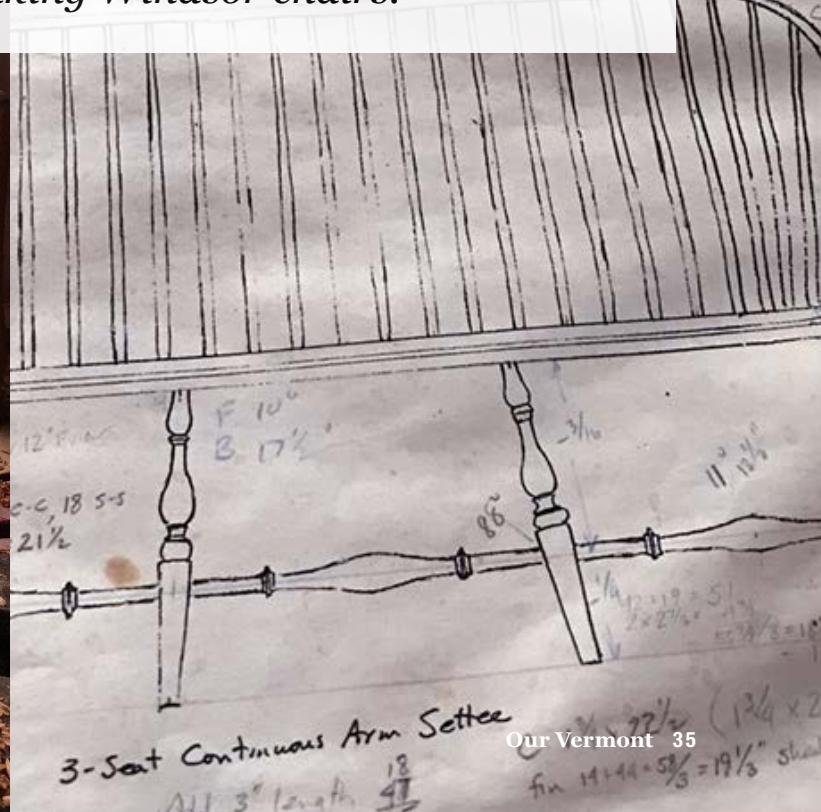
especially, their imaginations rise up with these birds of passage. As the semester begins and Vermont's fall gathers toward harvest in the fields, they know that they, too, are at one crucial staging point in a long journey. —John Elder with Jenn Johnson



Made in Vermont

A Legacy of Beauty

In the woods of Vermont, George Sawyer continues a family tradition of hand-making Windsor chairs.



3-Seat Continuous Arm Settee

Our Vermont 35

Inside the creaky workshop tucked behind a no-nonsense 1860s farmhouse in Woodbury, dust motes drift over old wooden tools, workbenches, and bits of carvings. Strong, honest lines carry their own poetry, and here, where the ceiling is decked out in random chairs and slung with cobwebs, George Sawyer is building on his father's legacy of simple beauty: the art and craft of fashioning Windsor chairs.

"It feels like home to me," George says, his nod encompassing the stuff dangling from beams; the artful calipers, chisels, and hand drills; the lathe that dozes in the corner.

George lives a mile down the road, but this house has been in the family of his mother, Susan, since the early 1930s. His father, David, converted the living room (once a woodshed) into a workshop in the mid-'70s. "Dad was primarily self-taught," he says. "There was a group of folks doing green woodworking then. He was making pitchforks, ladderback chairs—that's how he got started."

The art of making chairs from green wood goes back centuries—moist wood is kinder to hand tools than, say, kiln- or air-dried.

George quickly teases out the first inklings of a spindle by splitting a fresh piece of ash with a brake and a froe, tools that allow him to guide the split. With the rough piece in hand, we cross the workshop to the shave horse—a kind of cobbler's bench—where he scrapes the wood from four sides to eight, then to 16. "The first thing I teach is how to read the grain," he says, referencing the chair-making classes he leads. Day one is making spindles. "I don't care if the piece is straight or not—it's more important that it be strong."

By 1982, David Sawyer had decided to make something more complicated than pitchforks. "He moved on to Windsor chairs," George says. "That was the year I was born." George grew up hearing the sound of metal scraping on wood, playing in piles of wood shavings that flew off the lathe as it turned chair legs, and sitting in a Windsor child's chair that his father made.

Still, apart from helping out in the workshop as he grew up, George headed off in his own direction: first to the Rhode Island School of Design, then working at an architecture firm and designing ski helmets, and moving around the country. But in 2012, "my dad started to talk about retiring," he remembers. "I couldn't picture this shop without somebody building chairs in it."

By that time, George had moved back to Vermont. He started learning from his father, working with him part-time. "He's very patient. And pretty hands-off," George



Second-generation
Windsor chair maker
George Sawyer in his
Woodbury workshop.

says. "He would show me, and then go take a nap. And let me struggle. And then come back, and give me pointers." He laughs. "And go away again."

The first five or six chairs were a challenge, but George stuck with it. "And I still ask him questions. The chairs are complicated. And there are a lot of different styles." He opens a drawer and pulls out his father's drawings: exquisite renderings of each chair, "to give you an idea how much thinking goes into it. He was a draftsman—he figured out every last angle, every last dimension. I still work off of these."

But it's not until George starts explaining the chair seat—with its elegant pommel—that one begins to fully appreciate the complexity of making something so beautifully simple. There are angles for drilling leg holes (19 and 20 degrees), and sight lines to consider, and bevel gauges to contend with. "Finding this sight line when you're designing a chair is a bit of trigonometry, like wizardry," he says.

Ask where his childhood chair is, he admits he doesn't know, and pauses. He and his wife, Erin, have a young son, Theo. If that chair doesn't resurface.... "Oh, I'm planning on making one," he says. "Every kid should have their own chair, right?" —Annie Graves

For more information, go to sawyeremade.com.

The Rake's Progress

A brief history of tackling the autumn cleanup detail.

It's been estimated that there are approximately 12 billion hardwoods in New England. With all those trees, of course, come all those leaves, about 416,000 dump-truck loads' worth. And for as long as humankind has had to move leaves, we've had a rake at our side. (Or, OK, maybe a leaf blower...)

DOING IT BY HAND: The word *rake* comes from the Old English *raca*, from a German root meaning "to scrape together." The first "rake" was almost certainly the human hand. (Eventually, some of our ancestral geniuses realized that they could save some wear and tear on their fingers by using a stick or a branch to move leaves around!)

BRANCHING OUT: As farming became more standardized, the rake evolved from a found item to a manufactured tool. At first, sticks were split into forks, with bits of wood wedged between to spread the tines. In time, forked branches gave way to wooden pegs fitted into drilled holes. A version of this wood-peg rake was used in China in 1,100 B.C.

A TOOL TO TREASURE: In colonial America, rakes were expensive and custom-made, making them a highly important family possession—and a target of thieves. During the Revolutionary War, when men left home to join the fight, they often buried their garden tools to protect them.

FAN BASE: The flexible fan rake was first brought to the U.S. from Japan by entrepreneur George McGuire in 1919. American shopkeepers were unimpressed, feeling that this bamboo tool was too flimsy. When they didn't sell, McGuire gave his rakes away. The strategy worked, and fan rakes have remained a household staple ever since.

POWER PLAY: The gas-powered leaf blower was created after innovative consumers in the 1950 started removing the chemical tank

from their insecticide sprayer and using the powerful blowing unit to disperse leaves. Before the end of the decade, several manufacturers had brought leaf blowers to market, and by 2010, leaf blower sales were topping \$500 million annually.

POWER PLAY II: The more-muscular sibling of the leaf blower, the leaf vacuum, was first popularized by the New England-based company Giant-Vac in 1966.

HAND IN GLOVE: In 1997, George Eric Laughlin of Ohio patented the world's first "glove rake": a work glove with tines attached to the fingers.

A ONCE AND FUTURE RAKE? In 2008, a college student named Ryan Jansen put a new spin on the traditional rake with his "Rake n Take" design, which would not only move leaves around but also clutch them for easy lifting. The innovation won a Dyson Award, sponsored by none other than bagless vacuum inventor Sir James Dyson.

—Joe Bills

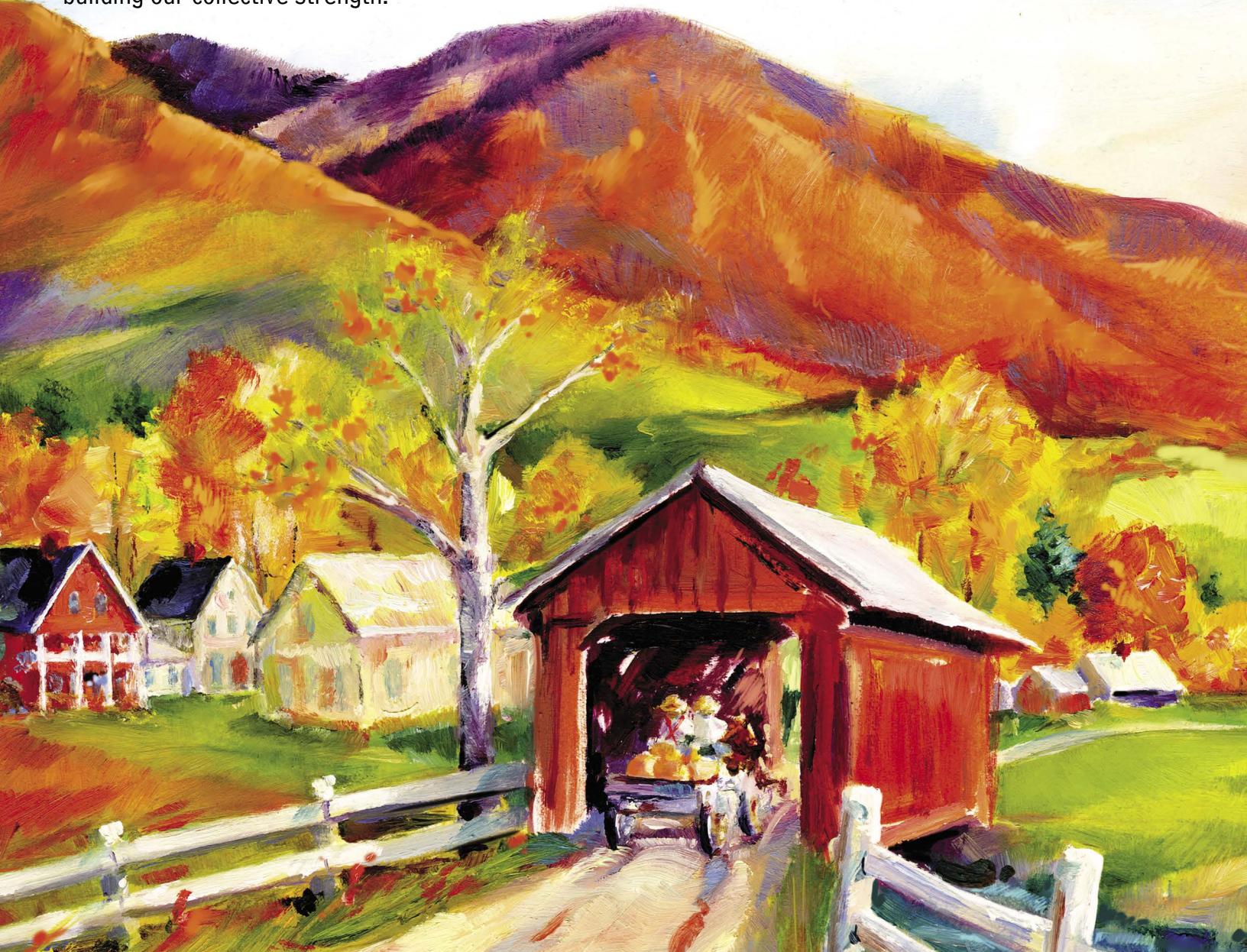


NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS isn't just a quaint idea, it has been a way of life for generations in our small, tight-knit community in Vermont and in many communities across America. When so much is out of our control, we turn to one another, bridging the real and imagined distance between us and building our collective strength.

It doesn't take much to get started, just an idea, some conviction and action. So, do what you can to help someone today.

Do something more tomorrow. Before long, you'll find the distance has disappeared, replaced by a connection that lasts longer than our troubles will.

Bridging the Social Distance



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