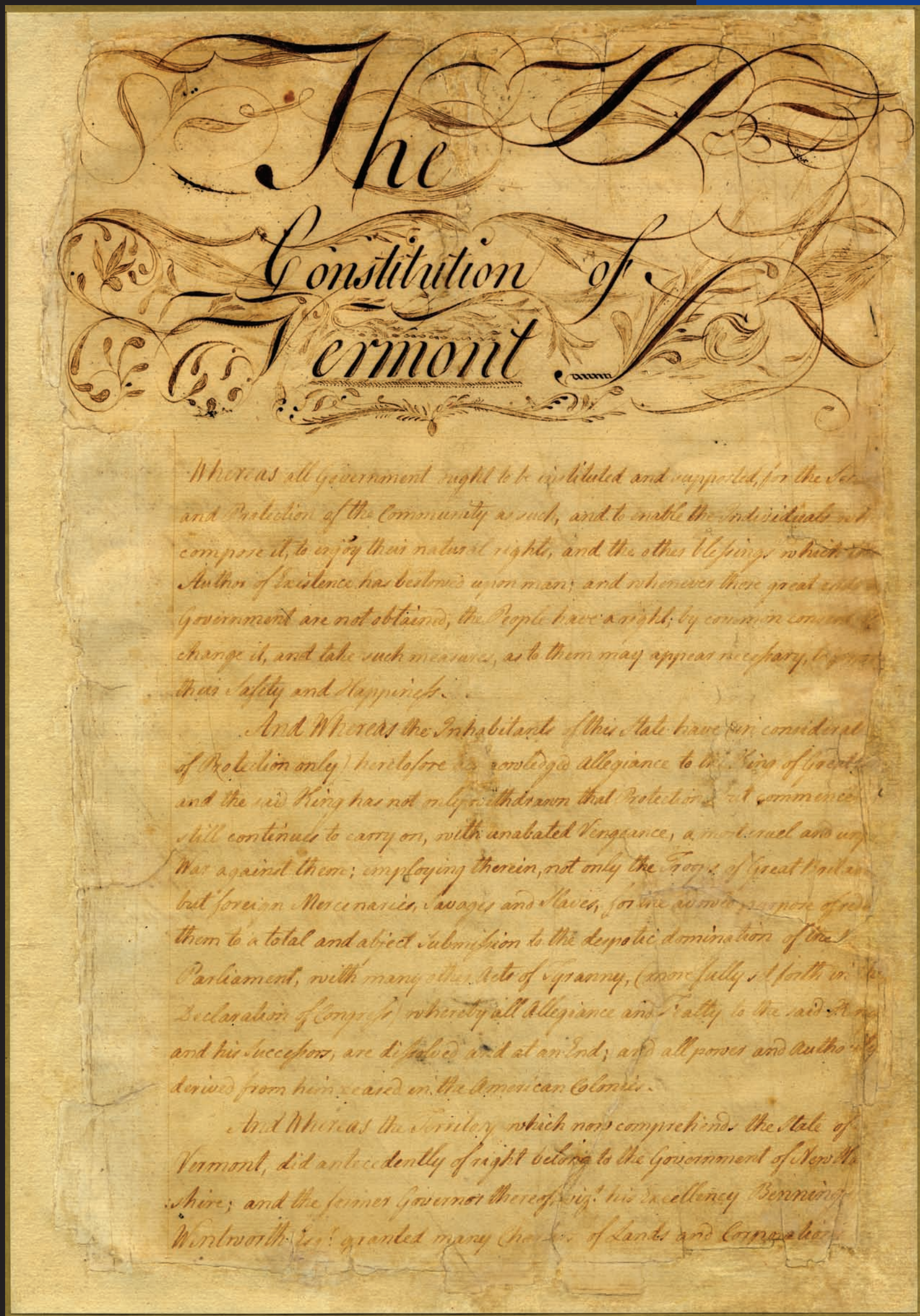


Old Constitution House

WINDSOR VERMONT

Delegates gathered at this simple colonial building, Elijah West's tavern, to write and adopt a constitution for the "Free and Independent Republic of Vermont" in early July 1777. By so doing, they declared Vermont's independence not only from Great Britain, but also from the 13 colonies comprising the other young republic – the United States.

While the governments of New York and New Hampshire disputed ownership of the land sandwiched between them on the western banks of the Connecticut River, residents of the region met in Westminster, Vermont, and made their own decision – to create the separate republic of New Connecticut. When delegates met in Windsor in June 1777, they changed the name to Vermont, derived from the French for "green mountain." One month



Vermont's 1777 constitution was the first in the world to abolish slavery.

Courtesy Vermont State Archives and Record Administration

Delegates to the July 8, 1777, convention gathered around this table to discuss the proposed constitution.

Courtesy Judy L. Hayward



The Old Constitution House, prior to restoration, on its original site at the corner of Main and Depot streets

Courtesy Windsor Historical Society

later, 72 delegates reconvened here to craft the language of the Vermont Constitution. A violent thunderstorm and the alarming news of the capture of Fort Ticonderoga by the British nearly sabotaged their plans. Delegates hurriedly finalized the constitution "amidst a baptism of thunder, lightning and rain!" on July 8, 1777.

Modeled on Benjamin Franklin's Pennsylvania Constitution, the Vermont Constitution had some unique features. It was the first in the country to prohibit slavery, to establish voting rights for all men regardless of income or property, and to institute public education. The "Birthplace of Vermont," as Windsor became known, was the part-time capital from 1777 to 1808. After 14 years as an independent republic, Vermont became the 14th state to join the union in 1791.

In 1914 a group of preservationists moved the tavern, known as the "Old Constitution House," from the center of town to its current location and restored it as a museum and tea house. The Old Constitution House Association operated the building until 1961, when it transferred ownership to the state of Vermont.



Paradise Park

WINDSOR VERMONT

Windsor found generous benefactors and active citizens in lawyer and statesman William Maxwell Evarts (1818-1901) and his descendents. The family's early historic preservation efforts, large-scale landscape design projects, and support of industry and culture had a profound influence on the way Windsor looks today.



William M. Evarts (1818-1901)
Courtesy Vermont Historical Society

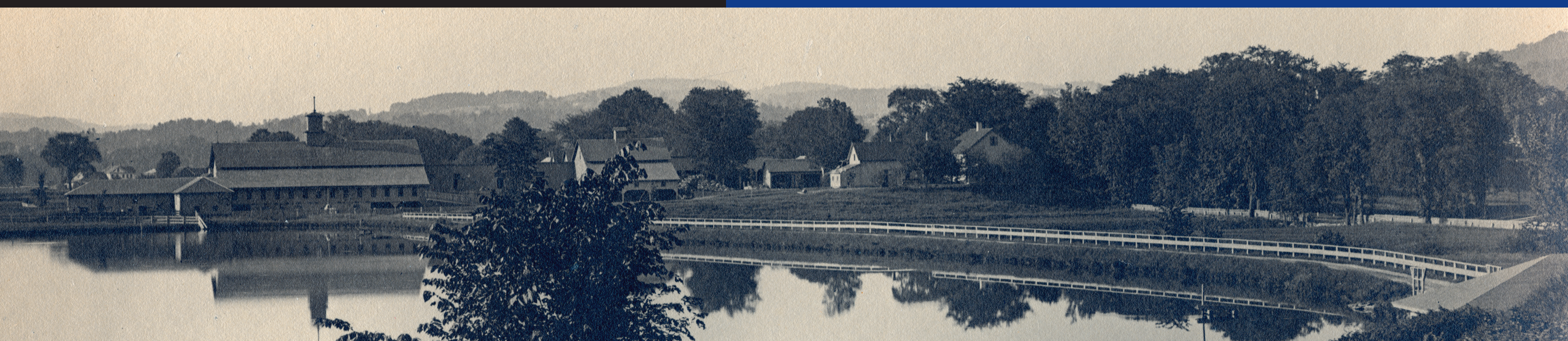
Evarts, who served as attorney general for President Andrew Johnson, secretary of state for President Rutherford Hayes, and as United States senator for New York, began to create a summer retreat for his family in 1846 on several estates and land within the village of Windsor. By 1857 he and his wife, Helen Wardner Evarts, a Windsor native, owned 1,000 acres. The estate included many fine homes on the north end of Main Street, forest, and farmland in both Windsor and Cornish, New Hampshire.



A family camps in the woods of Paradise Park.
Courtesy Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont

In the mid 1800s the part of the estate stretching west of Main Street, visible behind the Old Constitution House, was called "Paradise" for the beauty of its white pine forest. The land contained a low swamp traversed by the winding Pulk Hole Brook. In 1884 the family constructed a granite and earthen dam across the brook to create 63-acre Lake Runnemede, used for swimming, boating, and fishing.

Several of William Evarts's 12 children made significant contributions to the town. Maxwell Evarts financed the Windsor Machine Company, an important industry in the early 1900s. Judge Sherman Evarts was instrumental in saving the Old Constitution House from demolition, moving it onto the Evarts estate in 1914, where it is now a state-owned historic museum. The 119-acre Paradise Park and Lake Runnemede, important both for recreation and as a natural habitat, are under a conservation easement and now owned by the town of Windsor for public use. A trail behind the Old Constitution House leads to the dam and park trails.



Lake Runnemede, looking north along the dam to the Evarts farm operation

Courtesy Windsor Historical Society

