

WINDSOR VERMONT

Towering over the landscape at 3,150 feet, Mount Ascutney – visible beyond the trees at the back of the cemetery – influenced the economic, social, and cultural life of the town. As early as 1808, granite quarries operated on the mountain, providing stone not only for Windsor, including the massive foundation of the state prison, but buildings nationwide. The rocky peak of this ancient volcano has attracted hikers for almost 200 years. Two stone huts below its summit – the first built in 1858 and its replacement in 1904 – were the site of picnics, camping trips, and celebrations. In 1938 a New Deal project funded construction of a hard surface road, parking area, additional trails, and campgrounds. The mountain was a recurrent theme in the work of artists of the Cornish Colony across the river in Cornish, New Hampshire, and continues to inspire artists today.



A hiking party gathers at Mount Ascutney's second stone hut, built in 1904.

Courtesy Windsor Historical Society

The Cornish Colony, so-called for its exceptional concentration of artists, musicians, and writers at the turn of the century, has more than a geographical connection to Windsor. Its first major property owner, Charles Beaman, was the son-in-law of William Evarts, a prominent New York City lawyer and politician, whose family owned a sizeable estate in Windsor and actively promoted its development.



Windsor's location in the shadow of Mount Ascutney has influenced its history, providing recreational, economic, and artistic opportunities.

Courtesy Paul Sanderson, Our Town Films, Inc.

Beaman first acquired property in the 1870s and invited artists and writers to buy or rent from him. The renowned sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens was the first "colonist." Others quickly followed, attracted by the beauty of the landscape and the vibrant community of artists and patrons. Wealthy industrialists, financiers, and politicians, joined by artists, playwrights, poets, editors, composers, and singers, called Cornish home for some portion of the year. Their parties, gardens, and theatrical and musical performances were legendary. "Little New York," as it was known, flourished from 1885 to 1935. From 1913 to 1915, President Woodrow Wilson brought his summer White House to Cornish, where he rented the home of writer Winston Churchill, set up an office in the courthouse above the post office in Windsor, and rented rooms at Windsor House for his staff.



Cornish Colony gatherings were lavish affairs, often held with Mount Ascutney as a backdrop. In this 1892 image, Annie Lazarus (*back to camera*) entertains guests at her estate High Court, designed by noted architect and landscape designer Charles Platt in 1890.

Courtesy U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site, Collection of Elizabeth E. Gunter