

The Rockingham Meeting House: Settling, Governing and Worshiping in a Vermont Town



On a hillside overlooking the quiet village of Rockingham sits the Rockingham Meeting House. The Meeting House was built over 214 years ago by the Town's earliest inhabitants. This building is two and a half stories tall, it rests on the original stone foundation, the outside walls are clad in white wooden clapboards, and the roof is covered by slate shingles. The building's interior remains the same today as it did when it was built in 1801; it still has its box pews, the minister's pulpit, and carved graffiti from generations of bored youngsters. The Meeting House is surrounded by the Town's first cemetery, which features headstones dating back to 1782.

The history of most towns in New England shows that one of the first matters to be discussed by the early settlers was the construction of a town meeting house and the establishment of religious worship. The town of Rockingham, Vermont was no exception. After building their homes, Rockingham's early settlers constructed a small, temporary meeting house in 1774. When the town could afford it, they replaced this building in 1801 with a larger meeting house, which has survived for over two centuries.

Because of the Town's dedication to preserving historic buildings, the Rockingham Meeting House stands today as the earliest public building remaining in Vermont in nearly its original condition. According to the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, "The Rockingham Meeting House, cemetery and the surrounding acreage is one of the more important visual documents of early town life in Vermont." A visit to the Meeting House will take visitors back in time to experience the lifestyles of the Town's earliest inhabitants.

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II. About This Lesson

A. General Citation

This lesson is based on the National Register Historic Landmark Registration File, *The Rockingham Meeting House*. Most of the text in this lesson was adapted from “The Old Meeting House and First Church in Rockingham, Vermont” by Lyman Simpson Hayes. Other information came from Town maps and photographs, as well as from the following local and regional publications: “The History of the Town of Rockingham” by Lyman Simpson Hayes; “Bellows Falls and Vicinity Illustrated” by the Town of Rockingham; and “A Space for Faith” by Paul Wainwright and Peter Benes. The suggested reading (#2)—“A Time to be Heard”—was written by the Vermont Historical Society for public use. This lesson was written by Christy Hotaling, the Certified Local Government (CLG) Coordinator for the Town of Rockingham. This lesson was funded in part by a CLG grant from the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation.

B. Where it Fits into the Curriculum

Topics: This lesson can be used in units relating to the life and culture of colonial America; specifically to the settlement, governance and religious worship of Vermont’s early settlers.

Time Period: Mid-18th century to present day

Relevant United States History & Social Studies Standards for Grades 3-4

- H&SS 3-4: 8
- H&SS 3-4: 9
- H&SS 3-4: 10

C. Objectives for Students

1. Describe the historical significance of the Rockingham Meeting House, including its significance to the history of Vermont’s settlement and town government. (H&SS 3-4: 8)
2. Examine how industrialization in Rockingham/Vermont/United States has affected the community, including how it affected the Rockingham Meeting House. (H&SS 3-4: 10)

3. Describe ways that life in the community and in Vermont has both changed and stayed the same over time (i.e. town meeting, meeting houses, separation of church and state, etc.). (H&SS 3-4: 8)
4. Construct timelines of the significant historical developments in the community. (H&SS 3-4: 10)
5. Understand the importance of historic preservation on our community's built environment and our ability to interpret the past. (H&SS 3-4: 9)
6. Use Maps, Photos and Readings to reconstruct the history of Rockingham (H&SS 3-4: 9)

D. Materials for Students

The materials listed below can either be used directly on the computer or can be printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students.

1. 2 readings regarding colonial New England meeting houses and the practice of New England town governance
2. 3 maps showing the Rockingham Meeting House, the village of Rockingham and the Town of Rockingham
3. 3 images of the Rockingham Meeting House

E. Visiting the Site

The Rockingham Meeting House is located in the town of Rockingham in Windham County, Vermont. The Meeting House is on Meeting House road off of Route 103; 1 mile west from Interstate 91 exit 6 southbound, and 1.9 miles west from exit 6 northbound. The Rockingham Meeting House is owned and maintained by the Town of Rockingham and is open 7 days a week from Memorial Day to Columbus Day. During this period the Meeting House is staffed with a local docent to assist visitors. The building is also available for wedding and event rentals. It is important to note that the building does not have heat or electricity so events and visits should either be made during the period from Memorial Day to Columbus Day or before the first heavy snow! To schedule a guided field trip of the Meeting House please contact Certified Local Government Coordinator, Christy Hotaling! For more information, please contact the Rockingham Historical Commission at 7 The Square, Bellows Falls, VT 05101, or call (802) 463-3964 ext. 110 or email clg@rockbf.org

III. Teaching Activities

A. Getting Started



(Photo courtesy of the Rockingham Free Public Library's Cataloged Photograph Collection)

Inquiry Question:

What purpose might this building serve?

B. Setting the Stage:

“The Historical Roots & Evolution of the Town of Rockingham”

In the year 1752, Governor Benning Wentworth of New Hampshire issued a colonial town **charter** to the town of Rockingham. This was one of the first town charters to be granted in what is now known as Vermont. At the time of the charter, Vermont was still mostly wilderness, occupied only by Native American tribes. By the year 1756 the region had erupted in the violence of the **French and Indian War**. This war was fought over territory disputes between Great Britain and France. In the words of local historian, Lyman Simpson Hayes, *“Vermont was uninhabited territory, lying between the two opposing peoples, English and French, who were often at war...The Connecticut river was the main artery through which most of these parties passed.”*¹ During the war, the French and their Native American allies led attacks on settlements in the northern American colonies. Because of these attacks, settlers were afraid to move north of the more populated colonies in Massachusetts and Connecticut. When the war ended, in 1763, the fear of Native American attacks also ended. This resulted in the increased settlement of the town of Rockingham and other nearby towns.

Most of Rockingham’s first **settlers** were born in North America and moved north from Connecticut to Vermont in search of land to clear, to grow crops and to build their new homes. These early settlers first traveled north to Rockingham via the Connecticut River, which runs from Connecticut through Massachusetts and along the eastern border of Vermont. Rockingham was chosen for settlement both because of its close proximity to the established colonies of New Hampshire and Massachusetts and for its location on the Connecticut River, which made travel easier. By 1771, according to the first town census, the population of Rockingham had reached 225.

After clearing their land, building primitive log cabin homes, and planting food crops, the settler’s next task was to build a **meeting house**. The meeting house would be used for town meetings and for religious services; it would be the center of the new settler’s social, religious and political lives. In 1774, the town built a small, temporary meeting house, which was 35 feet long by 25 feet wide. The settlers planned to build a larger meeting house when they were able to afford it. By 1787 the Town was able to afford to build a larger meeting house. The location they choose to build the new meeting house was in the exact geographic center of the town.

¹ Hayes, Lyman Simpson. *History of the Town of Rockingham, Vermont*. Bellows Falls, VT: Town of Rockingham, 1907. Pg 4

According to Town records, on April 10, 1787, the Town “*Voted that the Committee Build the town House just as Large as Charlestown Meeting House as to the Square of it. Voted to Build two porches one at each end. (They) voted to have the plan of the inside of said House agreeable to the inside of the Meeting House in Charlestown.*” The master builder of the new meeting house, General Fuller, was a prominent resident of the town. According to Historian, Lyman Simpson Hayes, Fuller lived on a farm “*about a mile north of Rockingham Village, on the top of the hill a short distance south of the Proctor and Wiley farms.*”² Construction of the new meeting house was completed by 1801.

Around 1800 settlement slowly began to spread away from Rockingham’s village center towards what would become the villages of Saxtons River and Bellows Falls. Both of these villages were located at the waterfalls of large rivers. Saxtons River village was located at the falls of the Saxtons River and Bellows Falls village was located at the “Great Falls” of the Connecticut River.

The second half of the nineteenth century (1850-1900) was a period of rapid change for all Vermonters. This period is known as **Industrialization**. During this period, many people shifted from living on their rural farms where they grew their own food to working in an industry to earn wages and purchase their food. This meant that people often moved to economic centers, like Bellows Falls, in order to work. In Vermont, the largest industries developed natural resources, which included: marble, granite, slate, and timber. During the last third of the nineteenth century the paper-making industry expanded rapidly to become the predominant industry in Bellows Falls.

Since the Town’s population had shifted away from the village of Rockingham, the Meeting House was no longer the center of the Town’s social, religious and political life. Because of this the Town decided to build new churches and a large Town Hall in Bellows Falls. The last record of a church having regularly scheduled services at the Meeting House was on September 16, 1840. Town meetings continued to be held at the Meeting House until 1869, after which they were moved to the newly constructed Town Hall in Bellows Falls. After 1869, the Rockingham Meeting house no longer served the town for town meetings or religious worship. Today, the village of Rockingham is a small, quiet residential village, which includes 14 homes and the Meeting House.

² Hayes, Lyman Simpson. *History of the Town of Rockingham, Vermont*. Bellows Falls, VT: Town of Rockingham, 1907. Pg 143

Vocabulary

Charter—A document which declares that a town, school, or business has been established

French & Indian War—“The French and Indian War was the North American conflict in a larger imperial war between Great Britain and France known as the Seven Years’ War.”³ The war began in 1754 and ended in 1763.

Settler—“a person who goes to live in a new place where usually there are few or no people.”⁴

Meeting House—“When built in the 1700s, colonial meeting houses were the center of both religious and civic life. Many were built with tax money, and their simple, undecorated architecture reflects the desire of early puritan settlers to live simple lives apart from the Church of England.”⁵

Industrialization—“The process in which a society transforms itself from a primarily agricultural society into one based on the manufacturing of goods and services.”⁶

³ “French and Indian War.” *history.state.gov*. US Department of State, Department of the Historian. Web. June 2015

⁴ “Settler.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, 2015. Web. June 2015

⁵ “Meeting House.” Wainwright, Paul. *A Space for Faith: The Colonial Meetinghouses of New England*. Portsmouth, NH: Jetty House, 2009

⁶ “Industrialization.” *Investopedia.com*. Investopia, 2015. Web. June 2015

C. Locating the Site

Map 1: *Settlement of Vermont*

Please see **Attachment A (Map 1)**.⁷ This is a blank map, which shows Vermont's towns.

Questions for Map 1:

1. Color in the Towns that you think were settled first. Why do you think they were settled first?
2. How did settlers reach Rockingham? Label and highlight main travel route(s)
2. Why was Rockingham one of the first town's in Vermont to be settled?

Map 2: *Beers Atlas of Rockingham, 1869*

Please see **Attachment B (Map 2)**.⁸ This map by F.W. Beers shows what the villages of Saxtons River and Rockingham looked like in 1869.

Questions for Map 2:

1. How does the village of Rockingham compare to the village of Saxtons River? What's similar and what's different about them?
2. What resource(s) do the more populated areas have that others do not? Why are these resources important to people?
3. Can you find the Meeting House on this map?

⁷ "Vermont Town Boundaries." Vermont Center for Geographic Information. www.vcgi.org

⁸ "Atlas of Windham County, VT." F.W. Beers & Co. New York, 1869

Map 3: *Lithograph of Bellows Falls, 1886*

Please see **Attachment C (Map 3)**.⁹ This map gives us a detailed Birdseye view of the village of Bellows Falls in 1886! When you look at this image, you are seeing Bellows Falls from atop Table Rock (mountain) which is in Walpole, NH. Many of you have probably hiked up to this spot!

Questions for Map 2:

1. Describe what you see! How has Bellows Falls changed and/or stayed the same since 1886?
2. Based on what you've learned so far, what do you think the buildings in the front were used for?

⁹ "Bellows Falls, VT." L.R. Burleigh. Troy, NY: L.R. Burleigh, 1886. www.loc.gov

D. Determining the Facts

Reading 1: *What is a Colonial Meeting House?*

The center of every colonial New England town was the meeting house. The cost of constructing a town's meeting house was paid for by **taxes** that were gathered from the town's residents. The Meeting house served as both the town hall and the community's church. It was here that the community held their town meetings as well as their church services.

The town meeting form of government was first developed in the colonial meeting houses of New England. In this form of government, all the town's residents met regularly to vote on all town-made decisions; this form of government is still used in New England towns today.

The early residents of Rockingham were primarily of the **Puritan** faith, so it was natural for the entire town to support the church through taxation. It wasn't until 1820 that states began passing laws for the **separation of church and state**, this ended the practice of town's supporting the church through tax money. After this, meeting houses were used only for town meetings and separate church buildings were built for religious worship.

The simple architectural style of Colonial meeting houses is very similar throughout New England. According to historian Peter Benes,

*"Most were almost square, with a rather steep pitched roof running east to west. This placed the long wall toward the south for better light, and warmth in winter... There were typically three doors: the one in the center of the long south wall was called the "Door of Honor," and was used by the minister and his family, and any honored out-of-town guests. The other doors were located in the middle of the east and west walls, and were used by women and men, respectively. A balcony would usually be built on the east, south and west walls, and a high pulpit would be located on the north wall. Box pews were provided for families, and single men and women would typically sit in the balconies."*¹⁰

¹⁰ Wainwright, Paul & Peter Benes. *A Space For Faith: The Colonial Meetinghouses of New England*. . Portsmouth, NH: Jetty House, 2009

Most of the Colonial meeting houses that are still standing today have been renovated to meet the needs of their towns and have been modified so much so that they no longer resemble meeting houses. The Rockingham Meeting House, however, has not been substantially changed at all. It provides us a rare and exciting glimpse into the early history of our town and the lives of its residents. The Rockingham Meeting House remains in excellent physical condition for two reasons.

The first reason that the meeting house is in excellent physical condition is because it was unused for a number of decades. Because of the separation of Church and State, by 1839 church services moved to newly established church buildings in Saxtons River and Bellows Falls. By the end of the 19th century the town's population had shifted to Bellows Falls due to the economic opportunities available at the paper mills. In 1869 the Town built a "modern" Town Hall to replace the meeting house. Thus, the meeting house was no longer necessary for religious or civic services. Because the population shifted to Bellows Falls, the meeting house was not modified or expanded to meet the Town's changing needs; it was simply not used.

The second reason that the meeting house is in excellent physical condition is because of the Town's commitment to the **historic preservation** of this historic building. In 1906, after decades of abandonment and vandalism, the town voted to restore the meeting house to its original condition. Because of the Town's efforts, the Rockingham Meeting house stands today as one of the finest examples of colonial meeting house architecture remaining in New England.

Vocabulary for Reading 1:

Taxes—“An amount of money that a government requires people to pay according to their income, the value of their property, etc., and that is used to pay for the things done by the government.”¹¹

Puritan—“A Protestant group in England and New England in the 16th and 17th centuries that opposed many customs of the Church of England.”¹²

Separation of Church and State—The U.S. Constitution promotes freedom of religion and prohibits the federal government from preventing its citizens’ ability to worship as they wish.¹³

Historic Preservation—To protect old buildings in an effort to tie a place's history to its population and culture. This is accomplished through: “the ongoing maintenance and repair of historic materials rather than (their) replacement and new construction.”¹⁴

Questions for Reading 1:

1. Who was responsible for building the town’s meeting house?
2. What purpose(s) did the meeting house serve the community?
2. Describe an architectural element that was typical of New England’s colonial meeting houses.

¹¹ “Tax.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, 2015. Web. June 2015

¹² “Puritan.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, 2015. Web. June 2015

¹³ “Separation of Church and State.” *Teachinghistory.org*. Teaching History, 2015. Web. June 2015

¹⁴ “Historic Preservation.” *Nps.gov*. National Park Service, 2015. Web. June 2015

Reading 2: “A Time to be Heard”

“A Time to Be Heard” was developed by the Vermont Historical Society to help teachers creating lesson plans pertaining to Vermont history. This reading may be found on their website (link below) or see Attachment D (Reading 2).¹⁵ Questions to accompany this reading may be found below!

<http://vermonthistory.org/images/stories/articles/greenmountaineer/atimetobeheard.pdf>

Question for Reading 2:

1. What is the origin of the Town Meeting form of government?
2. How has Town Meeting changed and/or stayed the same since the first settlers arrived in Vermont?
2. How is Town Meeting different from our State and Federal democratic government?
4. What happens at Town Meeting?
5. Is Town Meeting Day still practiced today? Where?
6. Have you ever been to a Town Meeting? Describe your experience!

¹⁵ Vermont History Explorer. *A Time To Be Heard*. Vermonthistory.org. Vermont Historical Society

E. Visual Evidence



(Photo courtesy of the Rockingham Free Public Library's Cataloged Photograph Collection)

Photo 1: Annual Pilgrimage at the Rockingham Meeting House - July 30, 1911

Questions for Photo 1:

3. Describe what you see.
4. Compared to a photograph of the Rockingham Meeting House today what, if anything, has changed about the physical appearance of the meeting house?
5. Since this photo was taken in 1911, how has life changed and/or stayed the same in Rockingham/Vermont/New England? (Note the horse drawn carriages!)

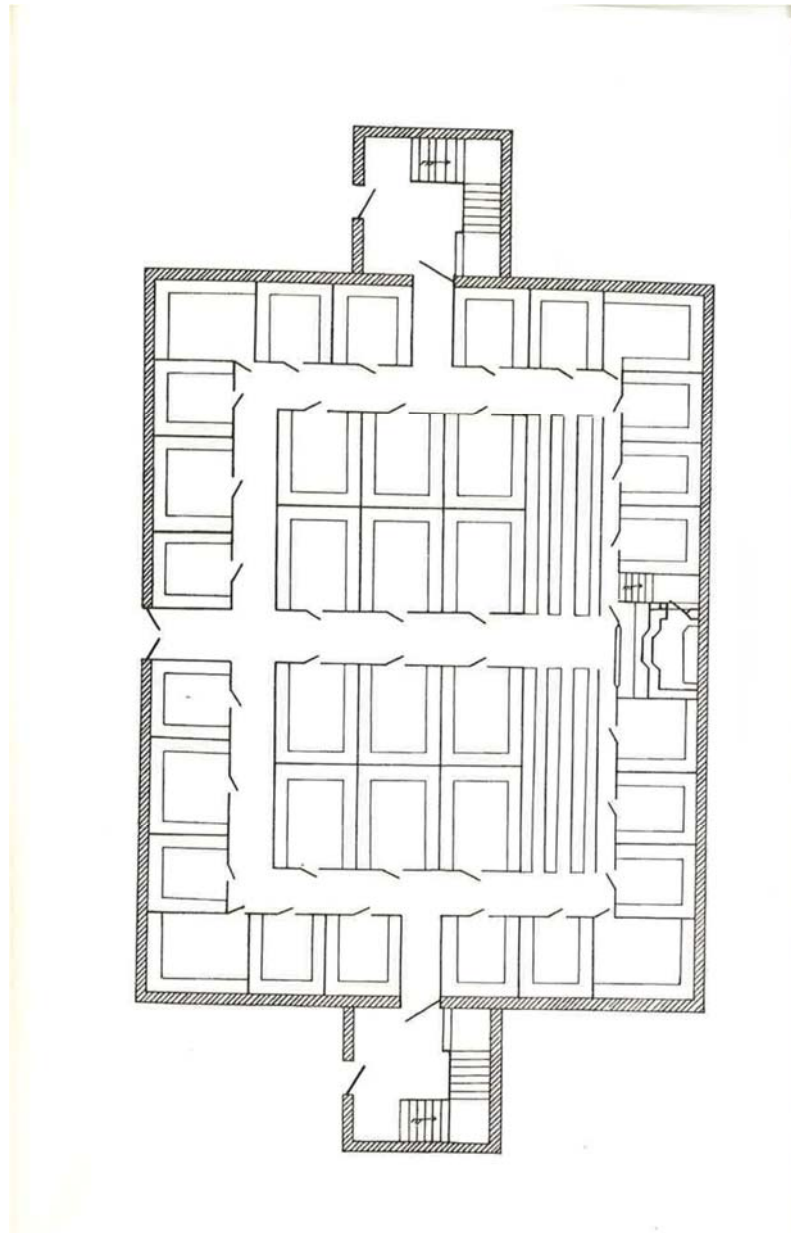


(Photo courtesy of the Rockingham Free Public Library's Cataloged Photograph Collection)

Photo 2: Village of Rockingham c. 1911

Questions for Photo 2:

1. Describe what you see.
2. If you visit the Meeting House - How has this view changed or stayed the same?



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Photo 3: Floor Plan of the Rockingham Meeting House – Box Pews

Questions for Photo 3:

1. How is this floor plan unique/different from what a church or town hall assembly hall typically looks like?
2. Based on the readings, who would sit in these “box pews”?

¹⁶ Hayes, Lyman Simpson. *The Old Meeting House and First Church in Rockingham, Vermont*. Bellows Falls, VT: Town of Rockingham, 1907. Pg 75

F. Putting it All Together

Activity 1: Visit the Rockingham Meeting House

Bring students to the Rockingham Meeting House so that they can experience the site in person and explore the grounds from the inside out! Students can: hold a mock town meeting, examine the historic architecture up close, and explore the historic cemetery; perhaps recognizing persons of local historical significance and/or their own ancestors.

Activity 2: Research Your House!

Have students research the history of their own home. Provide students with the National Register of Historic Places documents for Saxtons River, Bellows Falls and Rockingham and assist them with finding property deeds located at the Rockingham Town Hall. Students should try to answer the following questions: How old is your house/ when was it built? Who built your house/who lived in your house? Describe what your house looks like (how many stories tall, color, materials, etc.). Are there any interesting architectural details? Photograph or draw them!

Activity 3: Rockingham, VT History Timeline

Provide the students with a partially completed timeline of US history including events significant to Vermont and Rockingham. When did settlers first arrive in Rockingham? When was the Rockingham Meeting House built? When did Vermont become a state? etc....

Activity 4: Endangered Sites

Have students contact their local historical society or local government to find out if there is (or was) a particular historic place in their community that is (or was) endangered. What measures are being taken to save the place? How does this compare to what happened with the Rockingham Meeting House? If the historic place is endangered at the present time, is there a way your class can get involved to help? Contact the person organizing the preservation efforts and design a project that will allow students to participate in the process.

The Rockingham Meeting House—Supplementary Resources

By studying *The Rockingham Meeting House* students will learn about the history of a meeting house in southeastern Vermont; how it endured two centuries and how its function has changed. Those interested in learning more will find that the internet offers a variety of interesting materials.

National Park Service National Historic Landmarks Program

Working with citizens throughout the nation, the National Park Service's National Historic Landmarks Program guides the nomination process for new Landmarks and provides assistance to existing Landmarks. National Historic Landmarks (NHLs) are nationally significant historic places designated by the Secretary of the Interior because they possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States. Today, just over 2,500 historic places bear this national distinction. Visit the NPS website to find and learn about National Historic Landmarks, as well as to nominate a property! <http://www.nps.gov/nhl/>

Vermont Division for Historic Preservation Online Research Center

The Vermont Division for Historic Preservation keeps hundreds of years of history alive and vital, engaging people of all walks in Vermont's past through collecting, preserving and discovering a shared priority and value for the human spirit that preceded us. The Division's programs support the continued use of our historical assets, and the integration of our history into our future planning and growth, job creation and communities' culture. Through grants, review and compliance, and the operation of a statewide system of State-owned historic sites, the Division fosters protection, research, education and interpretation of Vermont's historic resources. Visit the Division's Online Research Center to view documents related to historic preservation activities throughout the state since the 1960s, including: National Register of Historic Places, State Register of Historic Places, Historic Sites and Structures Survey, Town Reports, Town Files, etc. http://accd.vermont.gov/strong_communities/preservation/online_research_center

Vermont Historical Society: Vermont History Explorer

The Vermont Historical Society engages Vermonters in the exploration of our state's rich heritage. Their purpose is to reach a broad audience through our outstanding collections, statewide outreach, and dynamic programming. The VHS believes that an understanding of the past changes lives and builds better communities. Visit the VHS Vermont History Explorer to research a topic for a report or simply to find interesting articles and activities! <http://vermonthistory.org/index.php/explorer>

Library of Congress: Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS)

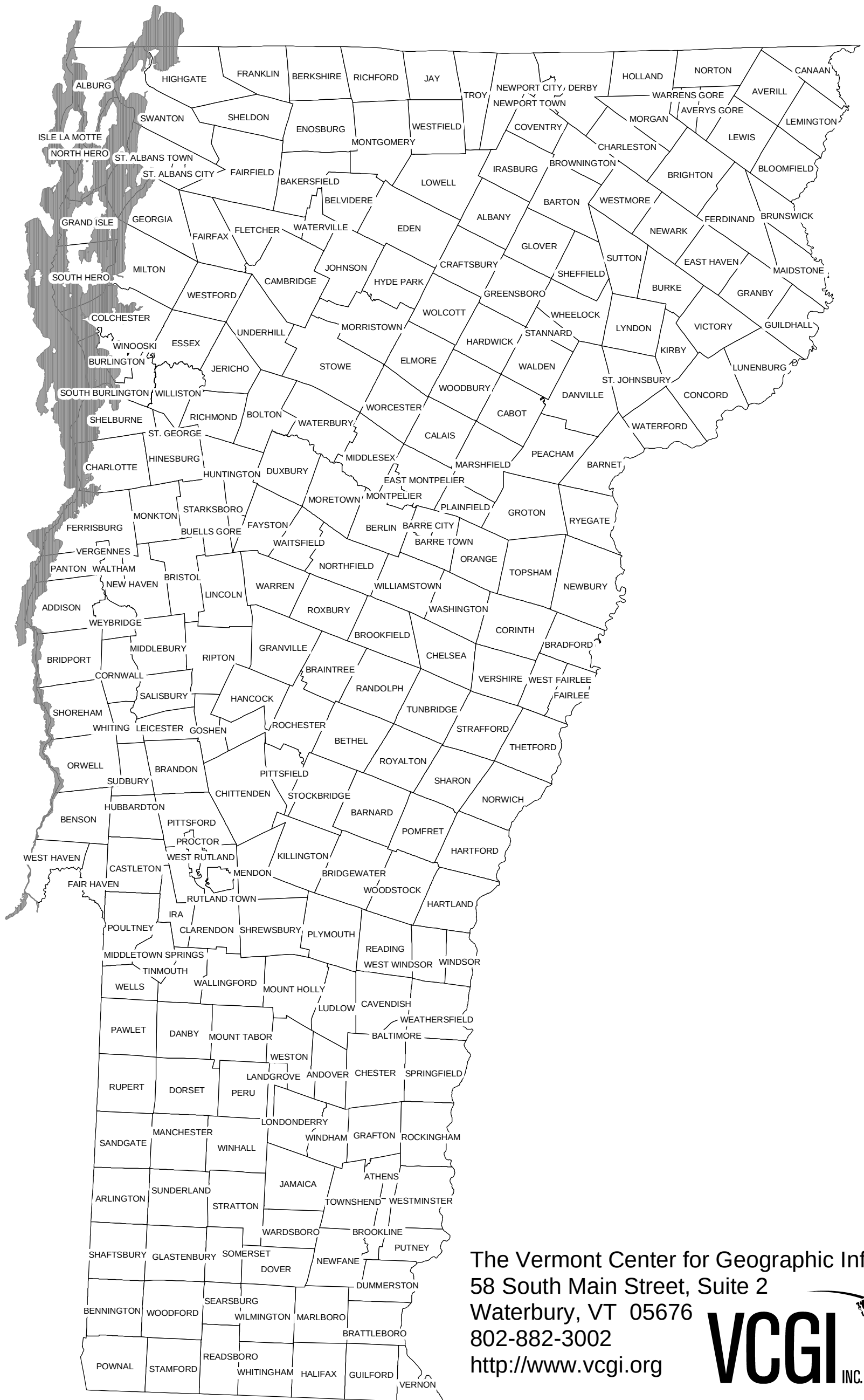
Search the HABS collection for detailed drawings, pictures, and documentation of their survey of the Rockingham Meeting House and other buildings! HABS is a division of the National Park Service.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/item/vt0004/>

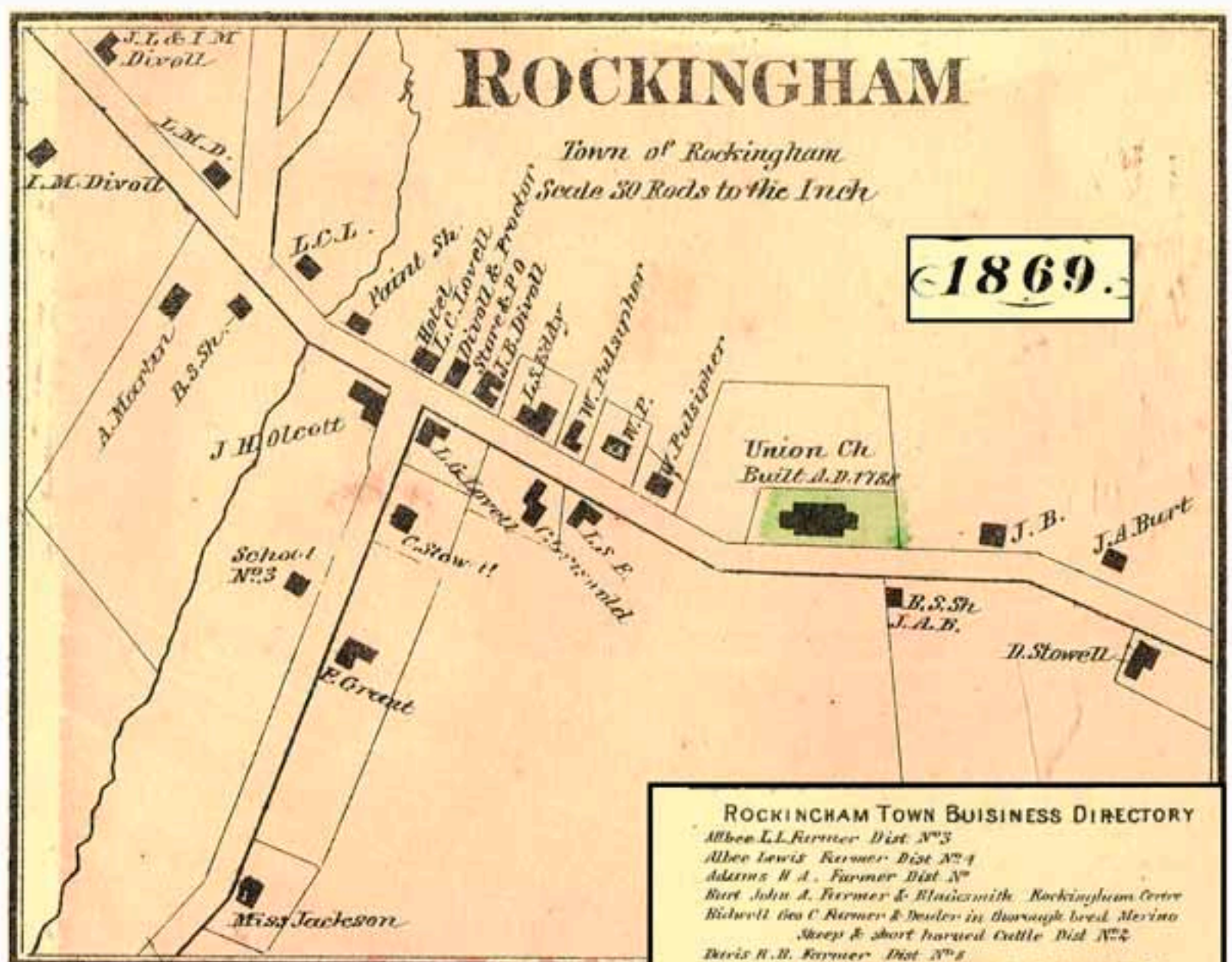
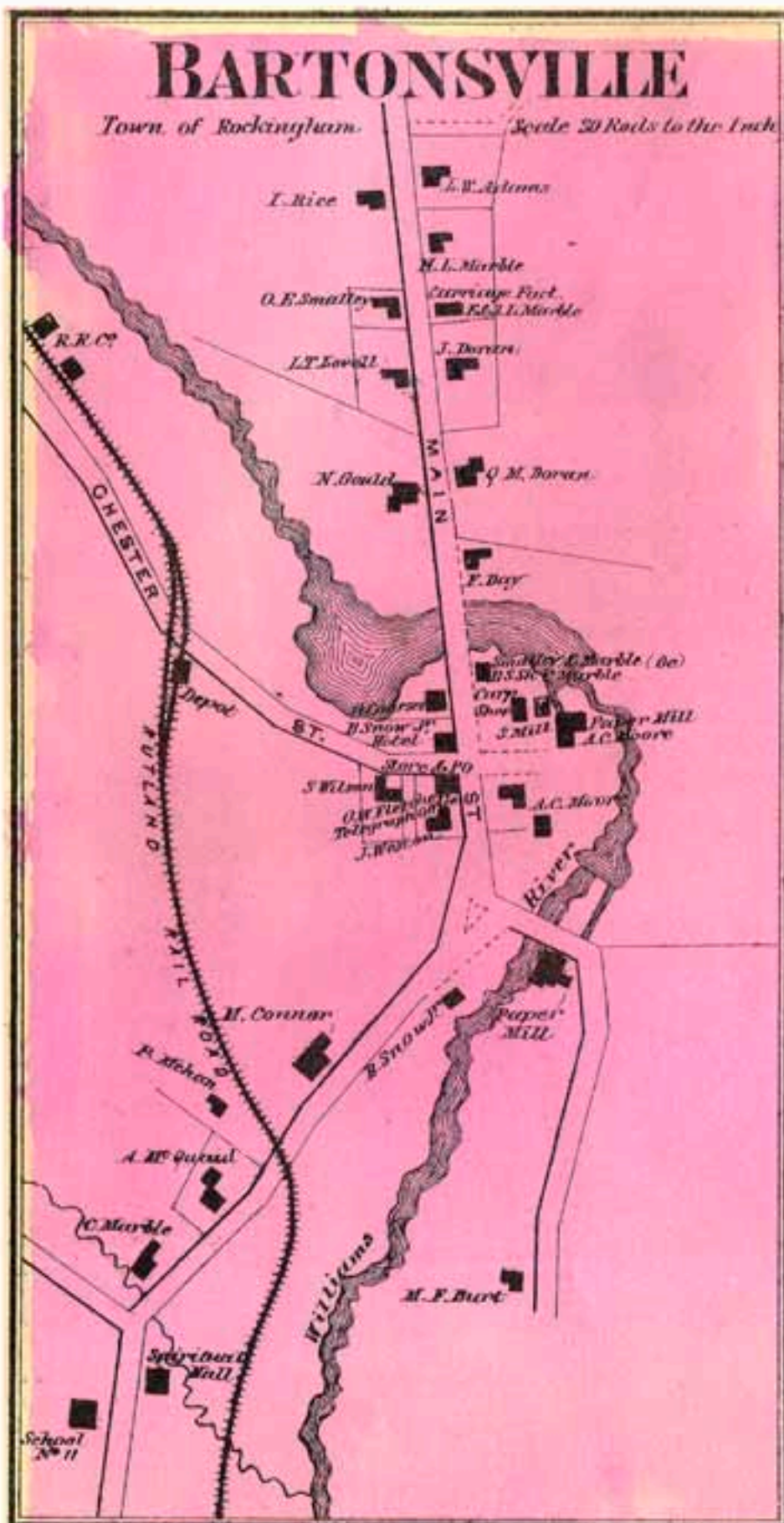
Town of Rockingham

Visit the Town of Rockingham's website for more information about the town, its villages and hamlets and its historic resources! www.rockbf.org

Vermont Town Boundaries



The Vermont Center for Geographic Information
58 South Main Street, Suite 2
Waterbury, VT 05676
802-882-3002
<http://www.vcgi.org>



BARTONSVILLE BUSINESS DIRECTORY

Adams L.W. Tel. Station & Express Agt.
Burt M.F. Farmer
Fletcher O.W. Dealer in Dry Goods, Groceries, Hardware
Ready Made Clothing, Boots, Shoes, Grain.
Flour &c also Post Master.
Marble E. & J.L. Mill & Carriages, Sleighs Job Work done
to order.
Moore A.C. M^r of Wall & Manila Wrapping Paper
Marble C. Farmer
Smalley & Marble Horse & Ox Shing & Genl Jobbing

ROCKINGHAM TOWN BUSINESS DIRECTORY

Albee L.L. Farmer Dist N^o 3
Albee Lewis Farmer Dist N^o 4
Adams H.A. Farmer Dist N^o
Burt John A. Farmer & Blacksmith Rockingham Centre
Biswell Geo C. Farmer & Dealer in thorough bred Merino
Sheep & short horned Cattle Dist N^o 2
Davis H.B. Farmer Dist N^o 8
Divoll & Proctor Dealers in Dry Goods, Groceries &
Hardware, Medicines, Hats, Caps, Boots, Shoes,
& Rubbers, Ready Made Clothing &c Rockingham Centre
Eddy L.S. Cattle Broker Rockingham Centre
Gilson Geo F. Farmer Dist N^o 11
Lake C.S. Farmer Dist N^o 10
Lawrence M.R. Dist N^o 5
Lovell L.C. Prop^r of Rockingham Hotel
Lovell L.T. Farmer Dist N^o 2
Nourse & Cogswell Millers & Dealers Flour, Graham
Flour Mill Feed & Corn Meal, Sausage Mills Dist N^o
Oakes S. Farmer Dist N^o 8
Proctor Jno. Farmer & Dealer in thorough bred Merino
Dist N^o 8
Proctor Nathan Farmer Dist N^o 2
Sterlin M.L. Farmer Dist N^o 9
Stowell C.O. Farmer Dist N^o 3
Wiley M.W. Farmer Dist N^o 8
Wiley J.S. Farmer Dist N^o 8
Willard Chas. Machinist Dist N^o 6
Way D.R. Farmer Dist N^o 4



SAXTONS RIVER DIRECTORY

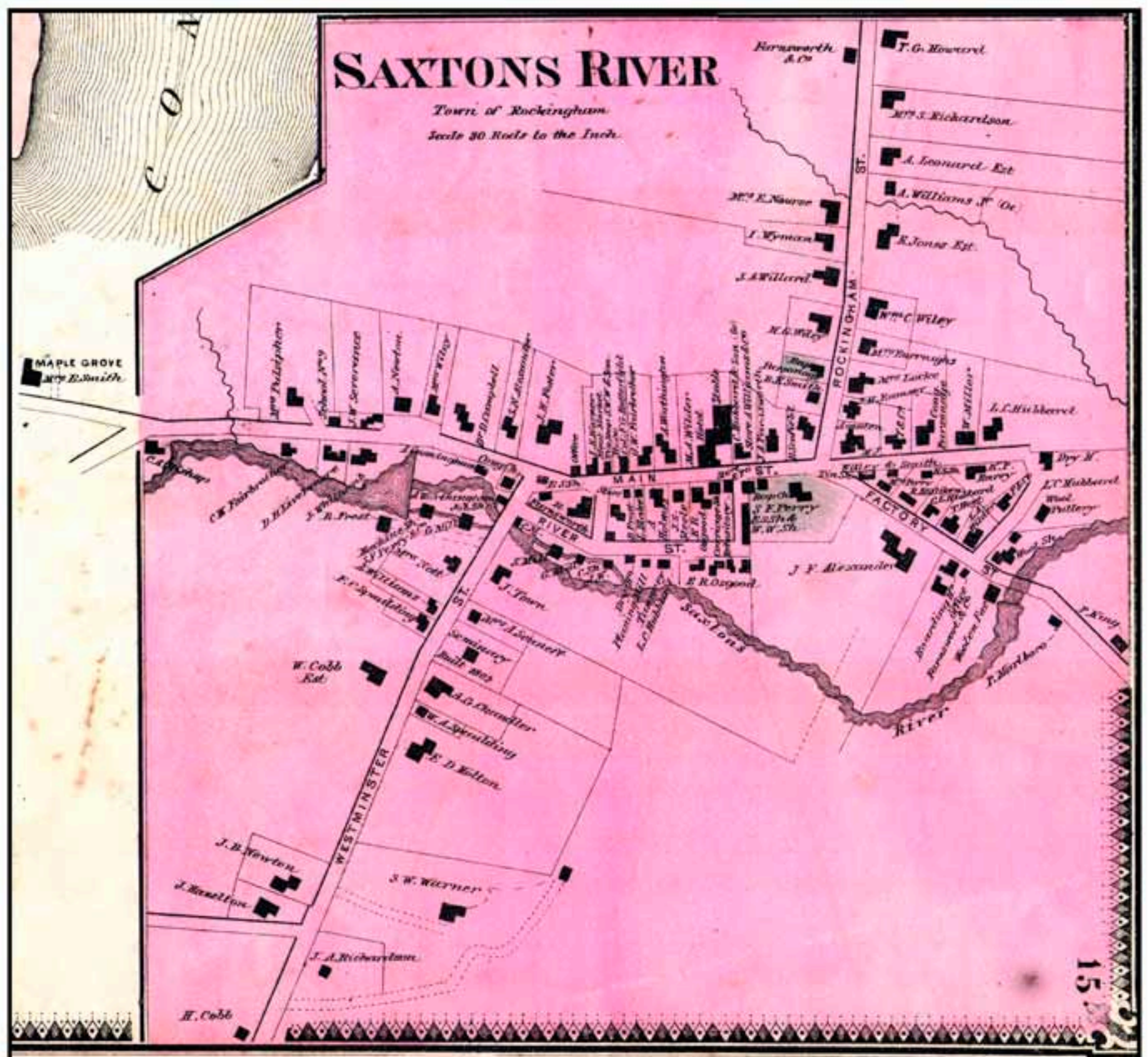
Physicians
Campbell D. Physician & Surgeon
Pettengill E.M. Physician & Surgeon

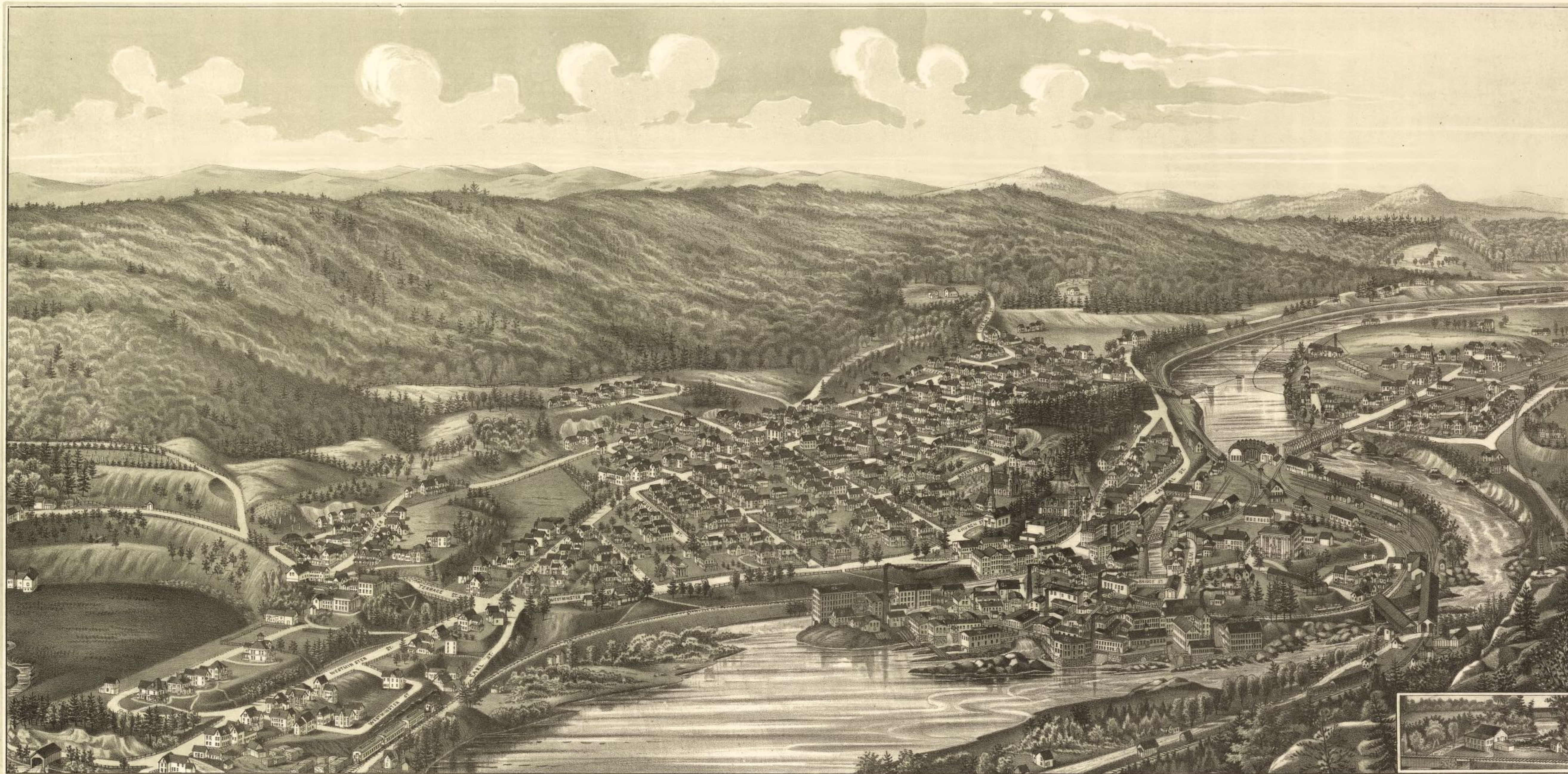
Hotels
Saxtons River Hotel M.A. Wilder Prop^r

Manufacturers
Farnsworth & Co. Man^r of Woolens
Osgood E.E. Man^r of Carriages & Sleighs

Merchants
Butterfield F.O. Dealer in Dry Goods, Groceries, Hardware
Crockery, Boots, Shoes, Ready made Clothing, Gent's
Furnishing Goods &c. Main St.
Grinwald L.D. Prop^r of Meat Market & Dealer in
Poultry & all kinds of fresh & salt Provisions, Canned
Meats &c.
Osgood E.E. Dealer in W.C. Cords & Groceries
Williams A. & Co. Dealers in Dry Good, Yankee Notions
Boots, Shoes, Ready Medicines, Books, Stationery
Hardware Groceries &c.

Miscellaneous
Ansdon M.F. Man^r of Boots & Shoes Main St.
Bishop D.A. Ornamental Painter
Bishop C.A. House Painter
Hubbard L.C. & Son Wool Pullers, Tanners & Dealers in
Hides, Calf Skins, Wool &c.
Livermore D.B. Resident
Perry S.F. & Co. Millers & Dealers in Grain, Flour & Feed
Smith M^r B. Resident
Severance J. Carpenter & Builder
Worthington A. Agt for Wood & Singsers Sewing Machine
Co. Inventor & Man^r of the best Sewing Machine
Binder for Leather in the World, Meerschaum Pipes
Mounted & Repaired to Order





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75-696618

1. Methodist Church.
2. Universalist Church.
3. Roman Catholic Church.
4. Episcopal Church.
5. Baptist Church.
6. Congregational Church.

7. St. Agnes Hall.
8. Public Schools.
9. Commercial House.
10. Town's Hotel.
11. Island House.
12. R. R. Station.
13. Fall Mountain Paper Co.'s Paper Mills.

BELLOWS FALLS, VT.

14. Moore, Arms & Thompson's Paper Mills.
15. John Robertson & Son's Paper Mills.
16. Willard Russell & Co.'s Paper Mills.
17. Wyman Flint & Sons' Paper Mills.
18. John T. Moore's Paper Mills.
19. Grist and Flouring Mills.
20. Flaming Mills.

21. Ogden & Barker's Machine Shop.
22. Vermont Tann Machine Co.
23. Derby & Ball's Stryke Snath Factory.
24. Bellows Falls Steam Laundry.
25. North Walpole Saw Mill.
26. North Walpole Roman Catholic Church.
27. Town Hall.

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A TIME TO BE HEARD

Visions of mud, heavy, wet snows, sugaring season, the first signs of spring, and one of Vermont's state holidays - Town Meeting Day - come to mind when one thinks of March in the Green Mountain state. But there is more to Town Meeting than just getting the day off from school, although that is a nice spring bonus. It is a day for community residents to get together at the town hall, school, or church. It is a chance to socialize with neighbors and discuss issues that will affect residents.

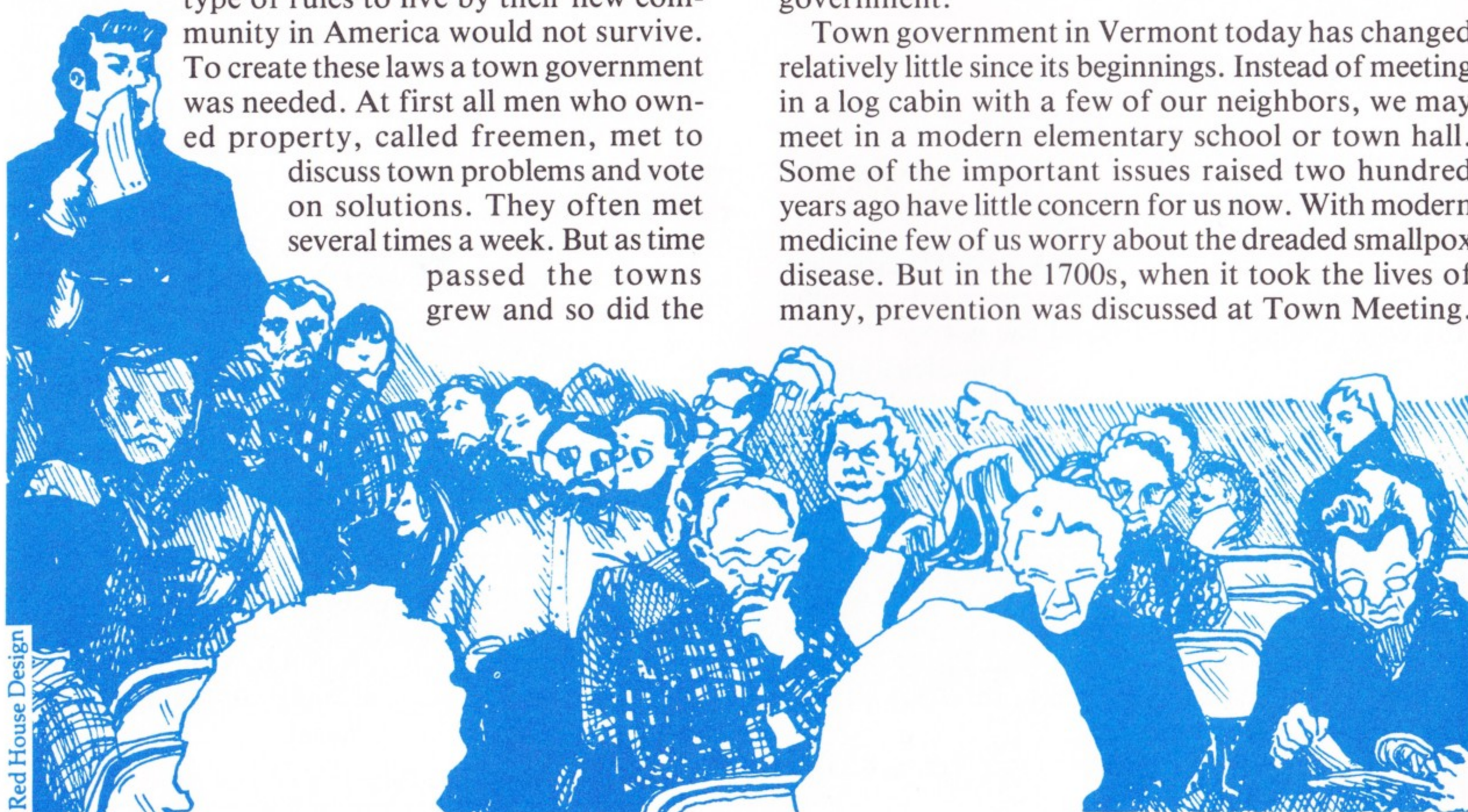
Vermonters have gathered to discuss and solve their community problems for well over 200 years, longer than Vermont has been a state. Town government was not **unique** to Vermont. In the 1600s Massachusetts Bay colonists found that without some

type of rules to live by their new community in America would not survive. To create these laws a town government was needed. At first all men who owned property, called freemen, met to discuss town problems and vote on solutions. They often met several times a week. But as time passed the towns grew and so did the

amount of work needed to run them. The freemen, tired of their frequent meetings, selected a small group of men to conduct the work that the large group had been doing. These men, like our selectmen today, took care of the town business between meetings. More and more time passed between these meetings until eventually Town Meeting came only once a year.

This form of government spread throughout New England. As persons moved to new lands they brought this tradition with them. And so it came to the Green Mountain state. Between 1749 and 1764, New Hampshire Governor Benning Wentworth granted well over one hundred charters in the area that would later become Vermont. In these charters, Town Meetings were **designated** as the form of government.

Town government in Vermont today has changed relatively little since its beginnings. Instead of meeting in a log cabin with a few of our neighbors, we may meet in a modern elementary school or town hall. Some of the important issues raised two hundred years ago have little concern for us now. With modern medicine few of us worry about the dreaded smallpox disease. But in the 1700s, when it took the lives of many, prevention was discussed at Town Meeting.



Towns voted to build trails through the woods, a horse stable near the town common, or another sawmill on a nearby brook. But whatever the issue, now as then, many people feel that Town Meeting is still the big event of the year.



Huntington Town Meeting 1972

Now Town Meeting in Vermont always falls on the first Tuesday in March. It is described as pure **democracy** in action because everyone has the opportunity to speak and be heard. In this way Town Meeting differs from our state and federal democracy where we vote for other people to represent us at the assemblies and law-making meetings. At Town Meeting we do it ourselves. Neighbors discuss problems and listen to others express their opinions. Then we vote and by doing such make those opinions law.

About two to four weeks before Town Meeting, a Warning must be posted for town residents. The Warning is a public notice that states the time of the meeting and lists all the items to be voted on. A Checklist is also posted which lists the names of all the registered voters in town. It is the residents' responsibility to make sure their names are on the list before town meeting. To vote in Vermont, one has to be a state resident, at least 18 years old, and have taken the Freeman's Oath.

At 10:00 a.m., or thereabouts, March Meeting, as Town Meeting sometimes is called, gets underway. For some towns the first order of business is the election of officers, beginning with the moderator whose job it is to **preside** over the meeting.

Then the town clerk is elected. It is his or her duty to take the **minutes** for the meeting as well as to record all births, deaths, marriages, real estate sales, and legal licences for the town during the **ensuing** year. The election of other officers follow. In towns where the secret or Australian ballot is used, the officers elected during the previous year's Town Meeting run the meeting. Those elected during the current meeting's secret voting will do so next year.

After the officers are elected, the meeting follows the schedule laid out in the Warning. Most decisions concern **finances**. Questions are raised, articles are argued, discussed, and argued over gain. Young and old take part, voicing their opinions on town taxes, roads, schools, and **zoning** regulations. The more money a project may cost, the longer and more heated may be the debate.

By noontime everyone is ready for a break. Perhaps a lunch of beans, brown bread, hash, salad, pie, and coffee, prepared by women in the town awaits the crowd who continue their discussions over the meal. The meeting then resumes, finishing up in time for the farmers present to get home to milk their cows.

Now only in the New England states is this old and democratic form of government still commonly practiced. It remains the one area in this country where the average citizen can contribute directly to the making of policy in his or her town. It is the duty of every Vermonter to take advantage of that privilege.

VOCABULARY

unique - original

designate - specify or select

democracy - government by the people

preside - to act as chairman

minutes - official record of proceedings at a meeting

ensuing - following immediately afterward

finances - money

zoning - town or city rules regulating what people can do with their land