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Charlotte's Agricultural Inheritance Preserved

A new park with lake and mountain views and walking trails and a plan to keep land in farming to the east of Route Seven

Travelers on Route 7 in Charlotte marvel at the view of Vermont's mountains, the lake and the Adirondacks. One of them had the inspiration and the capacity to insure that these vistas would be preserved for future generations. Now 250 acres lying to the west of the highway over to Greenbush Road are designated "The Charlotte Park and Wildlife Refuge." To the east of the highway, 583 acres are preserved with plans to keep them in agricultural use. These two parcels were assembled by the Demeter Fund Charlotte Project working with the town Selectboard and several State of Vermont agencies. In July of 1999, the town received the park land as a gift along with entitlements to protected farm acreage.

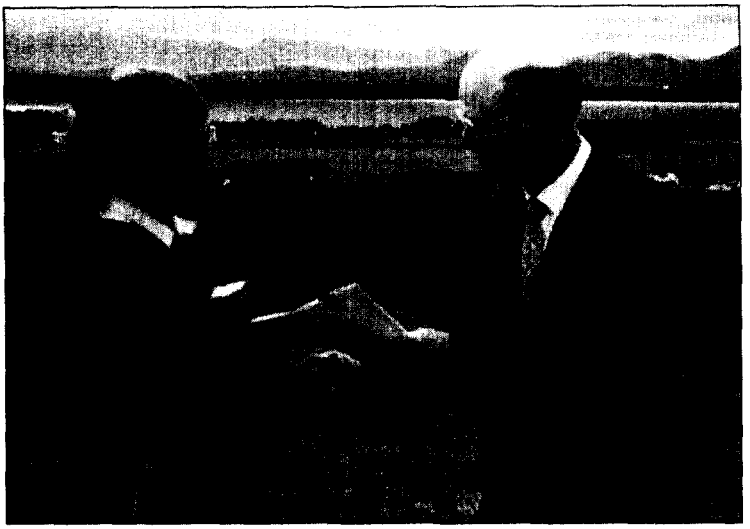
In 1995, in a speech to townspeople gathered in front of the new Town Hall, Steven C. Rockefeller reflected on the Charlotte project which he initiated.

During the 1970's I occasionally drove back and forth between Middlebury and Burlington. I was immediately struck by the grandeur and the beauty of the vistas to the east and to the west from the Charlotte hills. I knew the area should be protected and became concerned as I watched development spread south from Shelburne. When I shared these concerns with Pat Noonan and Douglas Horne from the Conservation Fund, the Charlotte project began to move from a dream to action. With Doug Horne doing the negotiating with land owners, we began to acquire the property that is now the Demeter Fund.

The objectives are as beautiful as the property: to provide public access for walking, jogging, horse riding, cross country skiing, picnicking, birding, nature study and the enjoyment of the landscape. Ordinances state that plants and trees are to be left untouched and they also prohibit pets, fires, alcoholic beverages, overnight stays, camping. There is an experimental nature to all this as the Selectboard adjusts to this new responsibility under a management plan.

The acreage east of Route 7 has land that will be kept in farming. The name "Demeter" refers to the Greek goddess who was first worshipped as mother Earth. She was later identified with the fertility of agricultural fields.

Working with these kinds of inspired goals, there are many other conservation efforts in Town. Back in 1972, an effort begun by one resident and quickly supported by others raised money locally to buy 25 acres at the top of the hill to the west of Route 7. Near the lake, just west of South Greenbush



Selectboard chair Marty Illick accepts the deed for the new Charlotte Park and Wildlife Refuge from Steven C. Rockefeller. July 10, 1999.

Photo courtesy of P. Frank Winkler

Road the Nature Conservancy owns 25 acres commonly known as "Williams Woods." The Charlotte Land Trust is a private, non-profit land conservation organization. The trustees, all local residents, use technical expertise and their financial resources to purchase or accept as a gift the development rights and easements on private land. Their statement: "to ensure that the lands are used and maintained in conformance with established conservation guidelines - forever."

The legal complexities are many but appear solvable. Now, with the work completed on this newest project, more than 2,200 acres in Charlotte are protected from development in various ways. Mr. Rockefeller closed his 1995 speech to Town residents with wide-ranging thoughts on environmental issues:

I see this new ecological awareness as part of the deeper meaning of the mystery and beauty we all enjoy when on that landscape. To realize and embody these ideas and values in our lives and institutions is one of the great challenges of this moment in history and the next century.

A town clerk with a dedicated interest in local history wrote loving descriptions of the town's earliest years

Charlotte had its own chronicler, William Wallace Higbee (1842 - 1911). He caught the rural, unspoiled nature of things much of which has not changed thanks to a series of near miracles in land use. His newspaper columns, starting in 1874 and covering the next thirty years, are in print, once again, in a hard

cover book, ***Around the Mountains***, where 300 illustrations capture nineteenth century life to its fullest.

. He stands alone as a contemporary recorder of those formative years providing the only window readily open to the public. The book, prepared and published by the Charlotte Historical Society, had its coming out party on March 4, 1991, the date of Vermont's Bicentennial.

The projected celebrations for a big bang on the 2000th, are an odd contrast to the end of the nineteenth century which had almost no mention in the ***Burlington Free Press***. Those hundred years back, Charlotte had neither a newspaper nor electricity nor paved roads. The population count was 1,200, many of them dairy farmers and orchard growers. Communications were done in old-fashioned ways; only a fortunate few had Bell telephones.

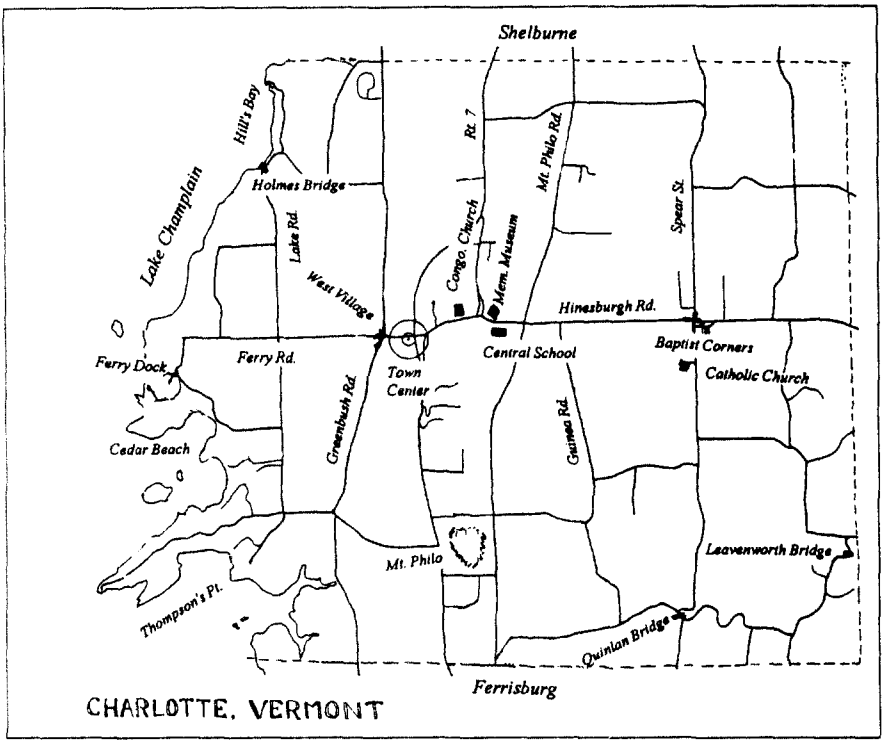
Those dusty, yellowed newspaper columns in the ***Vergennes Enterprise and Vermonter*** plus a few in ***The Burlington Free Press*** recorded the first 140 years of Charlotte history. Although there are great changes in the townscape, primarily coming from residential construction and the town's roads and highways adapting to the automobile age, the town's basic layout has not been altered. The beauty of the present landscape comes from that early agricultural Charlotte which Town Clerk Higbee so lovingly described.

Early settlers found a climate and soils well suited for their needs and the town was quickly preeminent in horticulture and farming

The powers of Ceres, the Roman goddess of Agriculture standing atop the State Capitol in Montpelier, surely reach Charlotte where land riches are way above average. Fifty percent of the town is covered by prime agricultural soils. Compare this with an average of twenty percent for all of Vermont's towns. The soils have been evaluated for texture, color, structure, and mineral materials. Favorable growing factors include wide spread drainage, and the all-important temperature moderating influence of the Lake. Charlotte with 25 working farms has more agricultural enterprises than most of the towns in Chittenden County. Dairying accounts for seventeen of these with the remainder producing widely known varieties of berries, vegetables and flowers..

A highly visible barn on the west side of Route 7 close to the crest of the hill area holds the history of agriculture in its walls. The components were made in many ways and in different places, reassembled and moved many times. Much of the integrity of the barn and its surroundings come from Henry Thorp's skills in acquiring land just before the Civil War. He consolidated four properties and created a 260 acre farm which remained intact for the next 120 years. Continuity in ownership created the present landscape.

The north section is an English style hay barn built in the 1790's, validated by the discovery in the sheathing of hand-wrought nails made in the 1780's. It has drive-through doors of great proportion. Early farming had many



Beers Map, 1869.

aspects and the barn met diverse needs for the storage of grain, corn, spring wheat, oats, barley, rye, buckwheat, potatoes, peas and beans. It also housed farm implements. The south section was added when the sheep craze swept over the Champlain Valley, built in Quaker style, probably between 1830 and 1850. Child's Gazeteer lists Henry Thorp as "a breeder of fine blood Atwood Merino sheep' and notes his residence as '2 miles from depot." The sheep fever was intense. Even Garden Island in Converse Bay was used to support a flock of 300 sheep.

Preservationists have not determined just when the north and south sections of the barn were joined; scribe rule markings (1800) in the northern section and square rule markings (1860) in southern bays guided builders in the original construction. Structural features include high transom windows and a loft ladder supported by two full posts.

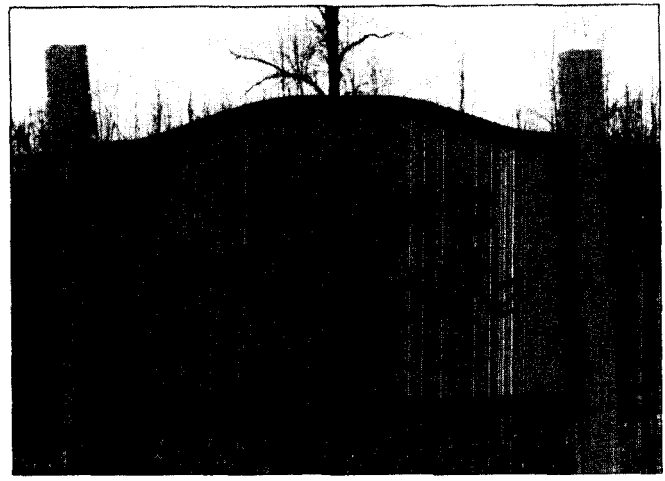
The west portion of the barn was built when sheep raising collapsed under competition from ranches out West. The owner turned to dairying to save the family farm. Beginning about 1900, barns and landscapes all over the state changed to accommodate the black and white cows that have become a logo for Vermont. With the need to house a herd, sanitation practices were crucial. The addition on the west side of the barn had a concrete floor under the 57 stan-

The Thorpe barn in the Charlotte Park and Wildlife Refuge.
Artist Jennie Cole

chions that held the cows almost immobile. To make winter less of an ordeal, the owners installed a very deep well in the barn, close to the cows and out of the weather.

The last of the Thorp owners sold this dairy operation to Auguste Roberts in 1916; his family kept the whole thing together until 1965. The original dairy herd was small but almost fifty years later it had grown to 100 head of milk cows. Small, too, were the batches of cheese, butter and cream made for family use. Ice cream making was the king of treats but only a sideline. The land was excellent for alfalfa and corn crops; the milk produced was shipped to the Boston market every day. The scenic outlines of the barn have only one modern component, the silo, which was built in the 1930's. All the rest has mellowed to bucolic perfection in a time frame that claims dates in three centuries.

"The apple is king of our fruits" With near perfect conditions down by the Lake, apples grew untended in an early natural cider apple era. Commercial orchards and the introduction of named varieties in the 1840's made growing a more scientific, serious business. John Holmes, doing work recognized throughout New England, planted 5.000 trees covering more than one hundred



"Welcome" signs provided by the Charlotte Grange and posted at every major road entering town.

acres on his lakeside property. He was marketing to many US cities and even to far away London using stencils, stamps and boxes from New York City. By 1910, Charlotte accounted for ten percent of the county's apple production. With Champlain's waters nearby, Charles T. Holmes created an irrigation system for his trees and fields by building a spray pump.

Around 1850, with the town population at its zenith, 'Intemperance was a scourge. The town was cursed with three distilleries and about a dozen taverns, all flood gates of rum and ruin.' The Temperance movement was strong with widespread consequences including calls for social justice and the abolition of slavery. The period 1830-1860 was one of social ferment; the Selectmen authorized the use of town stocks and a whipping post that stood at Charlotte Center to make a public example of offenders and so deter others from taking the same path. Hard cider was under attack.

All agriculture requires pollination, bees and birds the carriers. Cyrus Guernsey Pringle of Charlotte was one of the first to use artificial pollination in his landmark hybridization trials. As a botanist, he traveled to find new species. As a collector, he gathered more than 150,000 specimens now at UVM's Pringle Herbarium.

Charlotte is home to Vermont's oldest nursery, Horsford's, now proudly in its 106th year. An older cousin of Cyrus Pringle, founder Frederick Horsford did hybridizing and studied botany. In time, he and his wife established the nursery adjacent to Route 7 which has evolved to include landscaping service, selling of native plants and community-minded demonstrations in tree planting. Illustrations in the earlier catalogues feature the lilies developed and sold here

Apple orchards near Lake Champlain about 1910.

Charlotte Memorial Museum collection

and in Europe. Lilacs are now the leading crop with 20,000 in various stages of development. Another early nursery, Root & St. George, won praise for its lily "The Pride of Charlotte."

The Charlotte Berry Farm is a magnet for pickers who turn out when strawberries or blueberries are ripe. Pelkey's on Greenbush Road offers blueberries, too, and a few growers have raspberries available in an early and a late harvest. A great horticultural talent was Lyman Wood who founded Garden Way Research and spread his own philosophy about the relationship of man to the earth. His program, "Gardens for All," inspired hundreds of small gardening plots.

One remnant of much earlier times is another old barn still visible at the start of the Thompson's Point property which was used for the Town Poor Farm. The town purchased this large tract of 230 acres from Hyder and Naaman Barnes in 1839. Here was a way to house the indigent and the transient, and have them pay for their keep with assigned chores. Mostly they worked the land but sometimes performed chores for nearby summer residents. After 100 years of this effort, the number of farm residents was reduced by 50 percent. A new state welfare system in 1967 took over the town responsibilities. In the revised thinking about these matters, later marine maps for the lake refer only to "Town Farm Bay" eliminating the stigma of "Poor."

A variety of business enterprises call Charlotte "home," many professionals live here and work somewhere else.

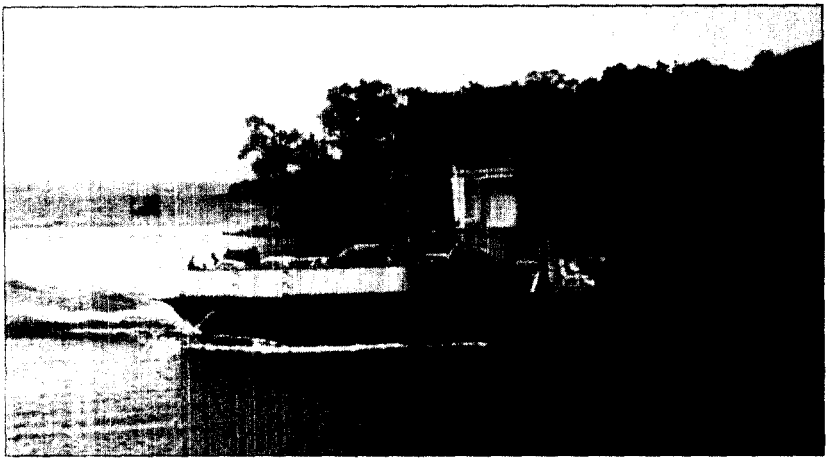
From Webb, Derrick, to Web sites is the condensed history of making a living in Charlotte. In the little over two hundred years since the first serious settler, farmers moved from a majority to a minority in town. But it is still a "farmer's town." If you live in Charlotte, you have to leave town to go to a bank or a restaurant. You can't see something made at an industry, or catch or meet a train, or see anything of a military nature, except for Veterans monuments and graves with flags. It is difficult to find a really famous native son, a US Senator or Congressman. One cannot visit a bar or tavern, buy a new car from a dealer, see a farmer deliver milk to a cheese factory or creamery, or go to a supermarket.

About 3,500 people live here and they outnumber the cows now as is true in all Vermont towns. The once standard punch line about more cows than people is in the past. Charlotte is an average size town with 58 enterprises listed on the tax rolls two years ago. Rather usual are: a creeme stand, car repair places, a used auto parts supplier and a gasoline station. Most special is the Old Brick Store at the corner of Ferry and Greenbush Roads, long the heartbeat of local shopping, but no longer a General Store. When owned by the Williams family, it was the local "talk show" starting at four a.m. with a wood stove going when needed, donuts and coffee served. A neighborhood store continues at Baptist Four Corners as of long standing, but Hart's which stood at "the Charlotte Centre" in Beers 1869 map is no more.

A well-staffed health center and therapists serve townspeople well. The giant strides of tourism made The Vermont Wildflower Farm a destination spot complete with walking paths and specimen gardens. "Authentica" markets African art and "Needleworks" has tons of supplies for handicrafters. A "Flying Pig" bookstore landed on the site long occupied by the old Post Office. With services for cats only, an animal hospital provides veterinary care, grooming and vacation shelter.

Lake Champlain is home for Point Bay Marina and the nearby Darling boat works which cater to mariners' every need. Exterior refurbishment and engine repair continue in all seasons; springtime is launch time for the fleet held captive in winter storage. An extensive set of docks and buoys come alive in high season; channel markers are in place. Charlotte's is one of only two marinas on the Lake that provide free pump out and so contribute to the better health of the Lake.

Trade with Canada is the "international" connection, now augmented by "globalization." A striking example is New England Over Shoes of Charlotte which cuts the U.S. made fabric for overshoe uppers in Pennsylvania and ships it to a plant in Guang Zhou, China, allowing for the import of that part of the overshoe duty free.



The *Juniper* at McNeil cover, 1965.

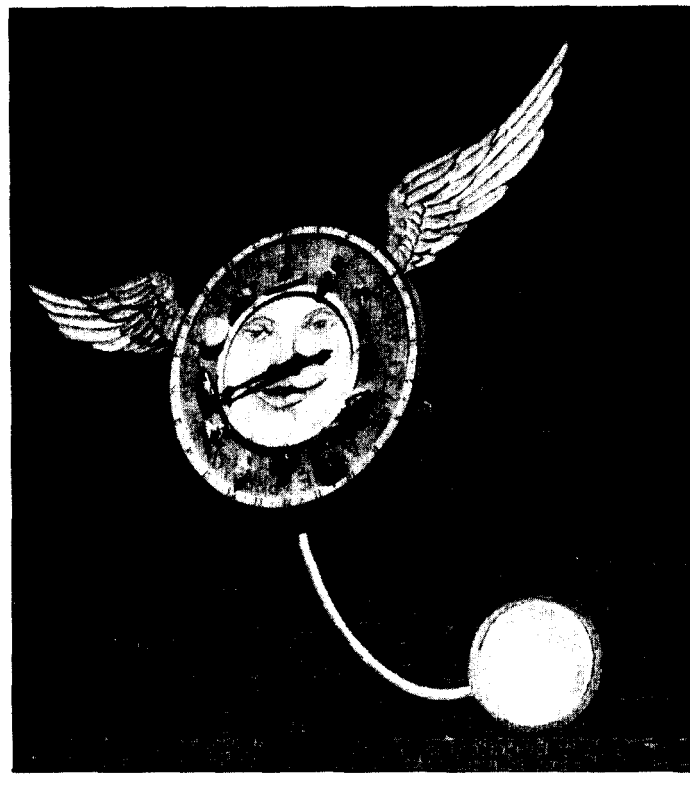
Photograph by Lynn Bottum, coutesy of ***The Charlotte News.***

Charlotte is highly connected to all the world. The first telephone service to reach town came in 1888 when the Selectmen granted permission to erect a line of poles along the old stage road between Vergennes and Burlington. Computers and the Internet are now commonplace and elementary children know all the seconds from nano through to pico and atto. The bites of farm life have become the bits and bytes of the new world office. Downloading is less taxing, or at least less back breaking, than uploading hay into barns.

Yet the inheritance of the riches of land continue and is not altered by any kind of shopping mall. Horsford's offers an horticultural mall where gardeners find the pleasure of a botanical high. The work of internationally famous landscape architect Dan Kiley makes headlines; this creator of enhanced natural spaces is a prophet winning honors in his own town

Many of the town's enterprises give us the gift of open space. With 3000 acres in farming and even some land where a herd of buffalo roam, Charlotte is still "rural." The town was spared a cruel transformation from agriculture into a scene of urbiculture. Eight out of ten Americans live in urban areas much of which is far from being in touch with natural beauty. Charlotters don't dwell on what is not here because of all that is here especially land and space in abundance.

The town is alive with the sounds of numerous meetings and the activities of many organizations of very different kinds



"Town" clock at the Old Brick Store.

Photograph MGL

Charlotte was populated with confident folks right from the start. A fine example: in 1784, Betsy Chittenden who declared "she was for three months the handsomest woman in town because she was the only one." Settlement boomed in the fifty years after the Revolution and the town had 1702 residents by the year 1830. In those years, Charlotte grew faster than any other town in Chittenden County and was first in the value of its Grand List. But the next hundred years were a vastly different story. It is hard to comprehend the changes that caused a decline in the population of almost seven hundred persons by 1930.

But not to worry! The superior farm lands and the easy access to transportation on Lake Champlain created a vibrant town even in that long ago decline. Charlotters built schools and churches, founded organizations and created a place for newcomers. In the seventy years that bridge the Great Depression, World War II and Vermont's present growth spurt, the town grew to its present head count of approximately 3,500.

The new Town Center on Ferry Road right next to the "Charlotte Four Corners" of a previous century, shows its age. Very young, that is! This seems the pulse of Charlotte with the new Post Office (1992) , the Town Hall (1994) and the Charlotte Library (1998) , all erected in a grand building flourish marking the end of the century.

The space created by this center hosts town events of all kinds. All three of these buildings had one or more earlier versions. The literary history goes deep, from a "Charlotte Social Library" (1826) to a "Charlotte Young Men's Literary Club "(1842) and a "Sherman-Horsford Library" all in East Charlotte. A group of Charlotte ladies formed the Breezy Point Library Association incorporated in 1902. They bought the former Methodist church to house a collection of 700 books. The 1950 hurricane ruined it all and the damaged building went to the Shelburne Museum where it became the Charlotte Meeting House. Some of the Breezy Point books after years of storage in the Baptist Church in East Charlotte were added to the collection of the school library at its inception in 1969.

Today's library began service in February of 1998, financed with public monies, direct large gifts, and contributions from more than 550 families. Beautifully run, with a professional librarian at the helm, it houses a modest but growing collection and is in the Chittenden County cooperating libraries group. Highlights are a book discussion series, Saturday programs for children with readings and performances, local artists' exhibits on the wall spaces, all of this enabled by townspersons' assistance.

The walls of the restored Quinlan school echo old-fashioned educational themes with materials like original McGuffey's Readers. Now nestled in the Town center, the old District School # 7 was removed from its second site to a new home. The schoolhouse was a derelict but is now restored and furnished through the efforts of "Friends of the Quinlan School." One corner displays the original plastered wall construction. Donators of money and labor made this restoration possibility come true. Plans for the building include tours for school children who can vicariously experience an old time one room school and its amenities. The preservation of materials from the other 13 district schools is also on the agenda. By mutual consent, the schools in their day took on the name of a prominent family in the district (e.g. Emerson, Palmer, Kingsland, Smith). John Quinlan would be honored to know that "his" school house has been returned to a useful life after a history that included burning, replacement, and falling into ruin after use as a storage shed.

Dedicated to preserving, exploring and disseminating local history, the Charlotte Historical Society is housed in the Charlotte Memorial Museum founded in 1943 in an 1853 town hall. During open hours on summer Sunday

The Town Center: Fire and Rescue, Town Hall, Quinlan School, The Charlotte Library. View from the south.

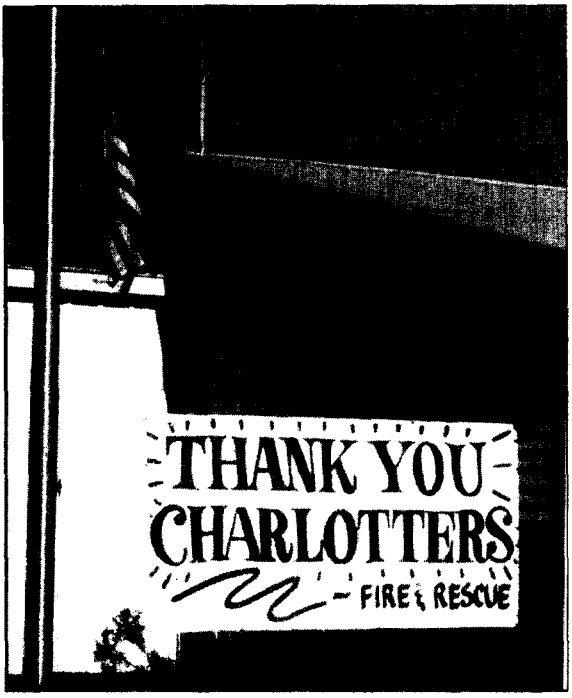
Photograph MGL

afternoons, visitors can see the collection of articles from Charlotte's past: photographs, paintings, some furniture, farm implements. From donations the museum has an outstanding collection of Native American baskets and other articles made by an Abenaki family, the Obomsawins, who lived at Thompson's Point. Summer programs include speakers and at Christmas, whatever the weather, an open house party with a gingerbread laden tree for young potential historians.

All seems to go well most of the time in town. But there are emergencies and then the efforts of Fire and Rescue save the day. Off- hours and all-hours duty is the standard working mode for members of the Charlotte Volunteer Rescue Squad as they respond to emergency calls which numbered 270 in the last year reported. The Charlotte Squad's ambulance service shares coverage with all the contiguous towns plus Vergennes, Addison, Huntington and Richmond. The launch and success of the E911 emergency dialing systems gives these services an even more miraculous quality. Services extend to water and ice rescue, with special equipment for the latter.

The other part of this partnership, the Charlotte Volunteer Fire Department holds regular meetings and is on the ready for unscheduled work. The twenty volunteers responded to more than 100 calls in the last reported year. The town really loves these folks. A special vote in November of 1997 gave Fire and Rescue Services the money to rebuild their headquarters. Recently, a new ambulance rolled into town. The headquarters are in the town center, close to Route 7 and Charlotte Central School.

The town Recreation Committee does a different kind of volunteer work. Their goal, "to provide safe and pleasant places for the people of Charlotte to relax and have FUN." Comes winter, the skating rink behind the school is



"Thanks" from Fire and Rescue for a favorable 1997 bond vote. Flag at half-mast for Rep. Jerry Krasnow.

Photograph: MGL

flooded, shoveled, supervised and ready for extensive use. Comes summer, the town beach is open and staffed, offering a tennis clinic, a horseshoe pitching club, the kids' playground and games at the ball field, all the stuff of happy times. At the beach, swimming and lessons from the Red Cross pair the fun of cooling off with the need for safety instruction.

Recreation of a merry kind comes to life with Senior Citizens Having Fun. The prospects for their future activities received an enormous boost from a one half million dollar bequest for a senior center. What a pleasant surprise for the seniors who already know how to do these things but will find it much easier. Planning is in high gear.

With an historic building - a former lyceum - for its home the Grange provides its members with programs in the Grange tradition of service to the community and to its members. An hospitable spirit has set out countless strawberry ice cream socials in June. Annually, one citizen, a non-Grange member, is honored at a special open meeting for his/her contribution to the town.

Lights! Notebooks! Cameras! It takes all that and more, like a professional staff and a corps of helpers listed in the masthead of The Charlotte News to produce 23 issues a year. Thursday is publication day and the "news" goes out. This essential service is in its 41st year as a non-profit done for the community.

Shirley Bean distributes prizes for the dress-a-zucchini contest sponsored by the Grange. Town party, 1998.

Courtesy of The Charlotte News

The Charlotte Congregational Church owns and sponsors the paper allowing the staff to enjoy sunny office space and housing for a quantity of superior telecommunications equipment.

Working with the agricultural inheritance and ecological treasures of the Town, the Charlotte Conservation Commission has its work laid out in a beautiful way. Commission projects are sometimes taken on by a sub-committee, often in combination with like-minded groups in Charlotte and neighboring towns. Environmental issues lead to the sponsorship of workshops on water quality, herbicide use and aquatic nuisance plants. A Wildlife Tracking and Habitat project indexes and surveys all town lands, providing the Planning Commission, the Charlotte Land Trust and landowners with valuable data.

Looking after the town's green ecological store is an everyday pleasure for the town Tree Warden with inspection and compliance a large part of the work. The present incumbent compiled a roster of the Big Trees of Charlotte, engaging folks all around town to get out tape measures and record the girth of their trees. Great botanical competition is still ongoing. Up at Charlotte Central School, an annual Arbor Day festival cultivates learning with the active fun of tree planting.

Green-Up Day collection crew.

Photograph: MGL

With several miles of Lewis Creek in town, Charlotters have worked with five neighboring towns to revitalize the whole natural area. Now in its tenth year, this inter-town volunteer group has effected river bank stabilization, monitored water quality and worked in classrooms to teach land and water use. The Lewis Creek Association sends out a "Kingfisher" newsletter to more than 500 interested folks and has raised funds to purchase land and conservation easements. Bird counting and tracking trips bring out the best in member's field skills and add to the towns' wildlife inventories.

All of the above and more proves this a vibrant town with residents of all kinds and all ages getting together to make this a better place to live.

An English queen still exerts her influence over a Vermont town situated a whole ocean away from royal courts

Bearing a royal name from its chartered birth, the Town of Charlotte has displayed peacock qualities ever since. The 1762 name, bestowed by Governor Benning Wentworth, in honor of his sovereign's Queen Carlott, carried the proper English pronunciation - accent on the last syllable - and it endures to this day.

Portrait of Queen Charlotte by Thomas Gainsborough

The original survey map titled "Township of Carlotta in New Hampshire" which hangs in the town clerks's office uses the "a" ending. Over time the "a" was dropped, but the accent remains unchanged.

This verbalized loyalty, which survived through vast changes including, of course, the Revolution, is a tribute to a sixteen year old from the German state of Strelitz-Mecklenberg. Carlotta left home to marry the reigning English monarch whom she had never met. She never learned much English, knew conversational French and found it fortunate that her husband George, of Hanoverian descent, could speak German.

Somehow the language of love prevailed. She gave birth to fifteen children, nine boys and six girls, and was thereafter all wrapped up in domestic life of a royal kind. Queen Charlotte was not active in the life of the Court, preferring the gardens and easier life of Kew Gardens in season, but her example of faithfulness and decorum won the hearts of her subjects. George was a forceful ruler until the last twenty years of his reign. when he lost his mind. An Oscar-winning movie, "The Madness of King George," captures the tragedy of his final twenty years. Sumptuous costumes and portrayals of sweet children running around the palace make the Georgian period come alive. On this side of the ocean, we still pay our respects to those times. Say shar-LOT and give a bow or curtsy to 'her majesty, the Queen.'

Charlotte was once larger than Burlington with a population at a peak in 1850. This remained the same for one hundred years

Arriving at Charlotte's beginnings via written history is not an easy task. Thanks to the extensive diaries of Sieur Samuel de Champlain of Brouage, we have great records about the lake to which he modestly gave his name. That great waterway and its tributaries was the feasible approach to our territory during the 150 years of early colonization. Once the Revolutionary War was over, everything moved fast. The town population was 635 in 1791, the year of Vermont's statehood. The population trebled in the next forty years. There are almost no contemporary early histories.

Derrick Webb has traditionally been credited with being the first settler of Charlotte. Abby Hemenway's ***Vermont Gazeteer*** gets credit for this local lore along with characterizing him as a German. His first attempt to settle was in 1766. Because the Webb name in Shelburne is well known and because Derrick settled very close to the Shelburne town line, a connection seems probable but not proven.

Webb's Charlotte farm may have encompassed what is now the town beach and recreation area. His neighborhood was home to wild specimens, bears, deer, moose, some of whom were at once friend and foe. The creatures in the the Lake, otters and muskrats, were in contrast, easy sport. Fish were plentiful, just for the catching, including choice salmon and trout. Natural plenty made outdoor Charlotte a happy hunting ground. (Note: reports of a Champlain Monster sighted in the deepest waters of the Lake are numerous. True believers can recite the particulars of head, mid-section and tail. Samuel Champlain wrote of a "sea serpent," launching a legend which continues to challenge maritime searchers.)

View from the Town Beach on Lake Champlain near where William Webb built his cabin.

Photograph: MGL

Much of the hill and mountain land in Vermont had dense forest but the lakeshore had little growth. This shoreline openness and the inland access provided by lake tributaries created natural highways for arriving pioneers. Settlement came fast and wood was the raw material of progress. Trees fell to make arable land, to provide logs for houses and to serve as the supply for the making of potash. The Williams tract just west of south Greenbush Road is a remnant of the forest at the time of the European invasion, holding a variety of large size trees, some more than 250 years old. A walk through the woods creates the feeling of the poetic forest primeval.

"The beautiful Champlain washing its Western boundaries gives it great facilities for trade, " from Zadock Thompson writing about Charlotte. Trading was the lifeblood of the newest state in the union and John McNeil was in business by 1791 on the lake at the cove that bears his name. He took up this strategic location for his ferry boat service over to Essex, New York. Charlotte was receptive to McNeil although he had been a British sympathizer which allegiance cost him the lands he held in Tinmouth.

The town population had doubled by 1800 and the ferry business boomed. But winds were not reliable in this boating business, requiring McNeil to add a newfangled horse ferry in 1820. Six horses did the work, three harnessed together on each side of the deck sending the power directly to the wheels through treadmills. The course was uneven in spite of the helmsman's efforts. The key to a straight course was the long whip of an "engineer" who sat in one of the passenger's buggies.

Engines replaced these kinds of 'engineers' and the golden age of steamboats began. The paddleboat Vermont entered service in the spring of 1809, launched less than a year after Fulton's voyage on the Clermont In the next hundred years, twenty-eight steamboats were built for Lake use, some used by the Charlotte - Essex ferry. The present owner, the Lake Champlain Transportation Company, holds the record for the longest ferry operation in the United States.

Overland transport history begins with powerful horse-drawn vehicles. Much of the goods destined for Charlotte and Burlington came from the upper Hudson valley. Drivers stopped for the comforts offered at Hezikiah Barnes place (now the Stagecoach Inn at the Shelburne Museum) and Nathaniel Newell's brick tavern. The stage would arrive at the intersection of Church Hill and Hinesburgh roads only to struggle up a steep grade. Roads to the ferry on the town's flatlands developed quickly in contrast to progress through the easterly foothills. The surveying of a post road from Vergennes to Charlotte was completed by 1797 but roads from Charlotte to Hinesburgh and Shelburne were not constructed for another forty years.

The Rutland Railroad arrived just in the nick of time. Transport, human and commercial, stopped when sleet, snow and mud made a mess of the "regular" roads. The Iron horse was a blessed alternative as it had its own bed. The train ran to Burlington from its home town, making regular stops for freight and passengers in Charlotte. One very old timer reported working on the railroad when there were twenty-four trains a day. The Rutland's service started in 1849; its boom and bust history parallels that of other American railroads. As the millennium ends, plans are once more in place to run the trains for though the roads are no longer impassable with mud, they are choked with vehicles. A great amount of through traffic notes Charlotte as only a dot on the map.

Derrick Webb would find the mountains, lake and skies the same. Everything else is different. Changes can be drastic and changes can be close to imperceptible but any noticeable alteration, whether building, barn, tree, flowers or mail box, causes immediate comment. Charlotters are protective of their neighborhood scenes with affections that create easements, though they are not of the legal variety.

Change is also comparative as in this paragraph about Charlotte written exactly fifty years ago. This from the Historic Records Survey in Montpelier:

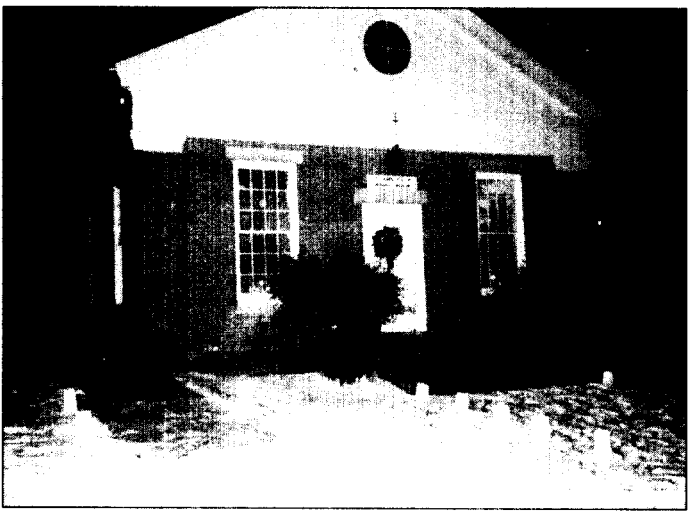
There are today in this community two general stores, a Sheffield milk plant, two garages, and a summer inn at Mt. Philo. The social life centers around the two active churches, two small libraries, and the town meeting house. The Rutland Railroad has a station on the outskirts of West Charlotte and there is regular bus communication along the Rutland-Burlington highway.

What change is in the air now? Look around. And look ahead.

The town charter of 1762 became the working document for town government just after the Revolution. The site and the powers of town government changed overtime

"...Town meeting stands there for what it is- human beings acting together for the needs of all, " Dorothy Canfield Fisher wrote in Vermont Tradition. Her words are a perfect summary of what starts in February when Charlotters receive a good-sized annual report and the Warning for the town meeting in March. The organization of Charlotte's government is similar to that of its sister towns. In Vermont, each town has only those powers granted to it by the State but the room for discussion within those powers is great as demonstrated when residents a.k.a taxpayers assemble.

The first Charlotte town meeting ever was held in Dutchess county, New York, a meeting of the 70 proprietors who received land in the original charter



Charlotte Memorial Museum, the former Town Hall with luminaria for the annual Christmas party.

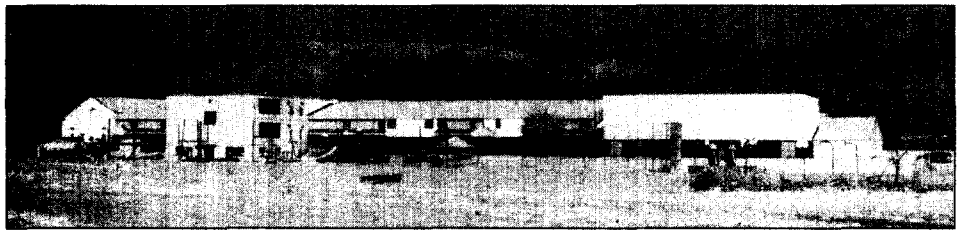
Photograph MGL

Since none of them ever lived in Charlotte, this was not a typical bunch of land owners. Those who purchased lots from them, however, brought town government traditions with them. In the early 1800's, town meetings were held in the Congregational Church building. After a fire and ensuing controversies, a site near the village pound was chosen, a town hall built.

The architectural plan that evolved was a hybrid: the size was that of the Hinesburgh town hall, thirty by forty feet; the design came from the Williston Town Hall. The Greek Revival building at the corner of Old Museum and Church Hill roads was first used in 1850 and last used in 1939 for its original purpose as a town hall. Next came four years of high risk for the structure: marksmen used it as a target range, a farmer stored hay and talk came out in town meeting of taking out the ends to provide storage space for road equipment.

Finally John Spear mustered interested people to create a Memorial Museum dedicated to the World War II service people in town. For thirty-five years, a committee collected eclectic local items. All of the contents were turned over to the newly formed Charlotte Historical Society in 1978. The town owns the grounds and the building. The Historical Society supervises the property along with collecting and cataloging archival materials and artifacts.

The building of the first Central School made the old town hall obsolete in 1939. Town meetings moved to the school gymnasium; the town clerk's office settled into part of the lower floor of the school. Now, finally, the new town hall on Ferry Road provides the working staff with adequate office space. Just as important, the new quarters give the Selectboard, their audience and town organizations a comfortable meeting place. Concerned citizens can say a fond farewell to the little round stools in the school cafeteria, though they are still the seating for the lunch served on town meeting day. The roster of town officials no longer has an Overseer of the Poor or a Sealer of Weights and Measures. The disappearance of an inspector of Leather, an inspector of Lumber and Shingles or a Weigher of Coal marks the shift away from a farming to a business culture.



Charlotte Central School complex viewed from the south.

Potograph MGL

Voters still cast ballots to fill sixteen offices. Twenty-three positions are filled by appointment. The town report has been recognized for excellence by both the State and UVM's Extension Service which evaluates Community Resources. For some colorful pictures and useful information including the weather report, try the Charlotte home page on the internet (www.Vermont-towns.org/Charlotte).

Fourteen district schools provided education until a gradual process of consolidation created a Central School

"Another clause of the Vermont tradition proved to be a solvent more universal than our forefathers dreamed ... This was the institution of the free public school." Again, this is from Dorothy Canfield Fisher. Pupils in the school houses of the town's fourteen school districts ranged from ages 4 to 18 placing a burden of versatility on the teacher in the one room schools. Some students went to nearby towns for secondary education. The records for 1935 show scholars enrolled in Burlington, Shelburne, Vergennes and Hinesburgh. The town would pay part of the expense of attending the agricultural school in Randolph. In 1939, Charlotte Central opened but high school students continued in neighboring communities until Champlain Valley High School opened in 1964.

A Female Seminary was built in 1836, run by the Methodist church. Fire destroyed the building in 1880 but voluntary subscriptions quickly replaced it with

Students from the days of Charlotte District Schools.

Charlotte Memorial Museum collection. Gift of Hazel Gove Hoskam.

the Lakeview Seminary. John Dewey, a native of Burlington, was the first principal in this new building, serving in the winter term of 1881-1882. This was the last stop in Vermont for the twenty-three year old. He went on to larger podiums, a quiet but persuasive educator-philosopher who revolutionized American educational norms. Lakeview, now a private home on Greenbush Road, was part of the town public school system until Charlotte Central was opened.

Capital improvements to the Charlotte Central building have created feelings of spaciousness and light. School needs evolve, presently the board of five directors states "Continual improvement of academic achievement for all students is an overarching goal." They also work at maintaining a safe and nurturing environment including playgrounds and school lunches. Most valuable is the help of parents with dances, craft fairs, pancake breakfasts, bazaars and an artist-in-residence, sponsored for two weeks to explore making art.

Just after an adjourned town meeting and lunch, the annual school district meeting is convened. The budget of slightly over four million dollars is almost four times that of the town's operating budget. Activity at Charlotte Central is intense measured by the last reported count: 535 "kids" and a staff of more than 100. The annual report lists the teachers and the staff and their grades.

Champlain Valley Union High School, now in its 35th year, holds its own annual meeting a month before the town meetings of its constituents. The budget

Music in the air with the Charlotte Central School band. A Champlain Valley High School production of "Working" by Studs Terkel. 1998

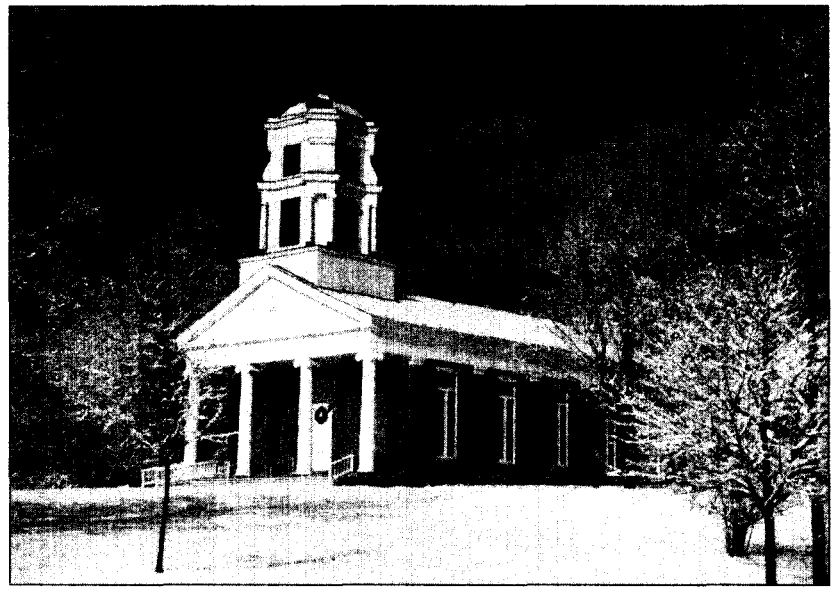
Courtesy of The Charlotte News

and money matters of the Union School are done by Australian ballot in the four member towns at each of their annual meetings. School busses are the order of Champlain Valley school days; Charlotters have long been accustomed to traveling to a high school that was out of town.

Religion was essential to settlers' lives, creating the organization of Congregational, Quaker, Baptist and Methodist churches

The original charter from George III via Benning Wentworth included a share for a church. It would have been for the Church of England, however settlers organized a church of their own Congregational persuasion. It continues to this day on, appropriately enough, Church Hill Road. Church life was a vital need, settlers put their religious beliefs into immediate action. Congregationalists were organized by 1792 and because its leaders were in the majority in town, their church accommodated both religious and town meetings. The present building was dedicated in 1858.

Methodists were organized by 1801 and they built on South Greenbush Road, their replacement church survives in the Shelburne Museum as the Charlotte Meeting House. Note that In real life, it was a church and a library and even a theater but not a meeting house!



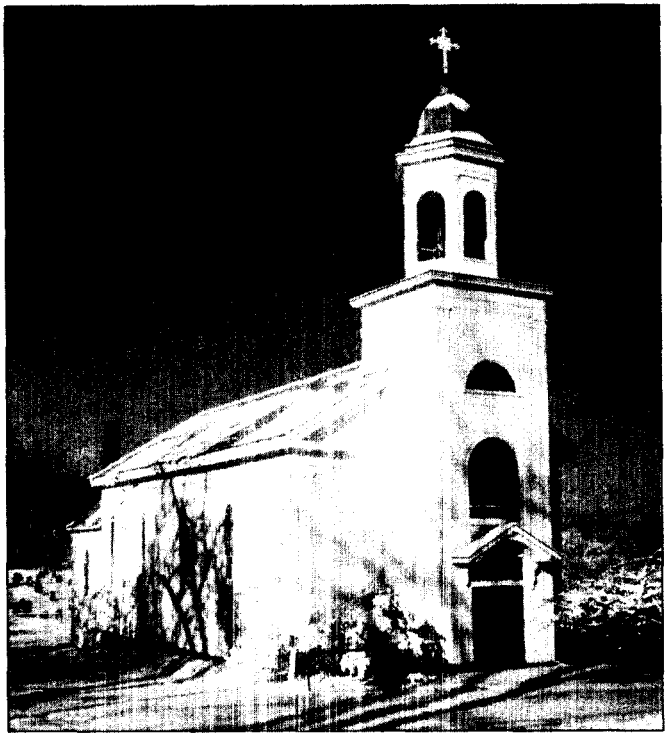
The Charlotte Congregational Church.

Photograph MGL

Joseph Hoag, a minister among the Pennsylvania Quakers, came to town in 1780 to join three other families of like calling. Although he was clearly eligible, he turned down the free plot of land set out in the charter for "the first settled minister of the gospel." The south-east corner of town was Quaker territory. The Society of Friends kept their meeting house up the hill from Quaker Corners, the junction of Roscoe and Lewis Creek Roads. Their passion for social reform and equality left a lasting imprint even though no Friends' structures remain in Charlotte.

Baptists were organized by 1807. True to form elsewhere, the town meeting used church buildings in alternation moving between the Congregational and Baptist Churches for a time. The Baptist members could not sustain their building at Baptist Corners in East Charlotte, the lovely church with its handsome stained glass windows is now a private residence.

By 1830, the Catholic religion came to town with visiting priests to hold services for French-Canadian and Irish settlers. After thirty years, the communicants bought a former Quaker meeting house in Starksboro and moved it to East Charlotte. Bishop DeGoesbriand blessed the cornerstone in of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in 1858.



Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church.

Photograph MGL

This combination of observing religious beliefs, establishing a known kind of government and providing for public education right from the start shaped the character of the once and future Charlotte.

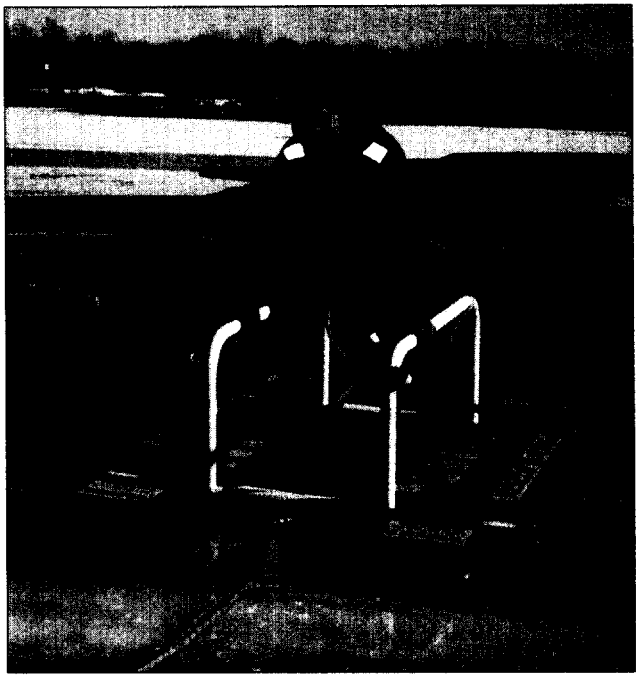
Recreation is year-long with the winter the longest season Snowy terrain and the frozen lake provide the playgrounds

Some say "Vermont is nine months of winter and three of getting ready for it." Thanks to fun-filled spirits and the perfect outdoor locale, winter in Charlotte is possibly the greatest season-long, beautiful, ready for adventurers. Sled lovers have steep hillsides with runs reminiscent of early 1900's tobogganing down Church Hill Road. Back then, the giant sleds, packed with brave souls, came down at high speed, crossing Route 7, ending at the railroad tracks. This is no more, automobiles the obstacles, but sledders always find good runs. Skating is multi-generational fun at the rink behind the Central School. McNeil's Pond on Greenbush Road was, earlier, the rink of choice with high energy lighting adding to the zest. In the mid-eighties, the Charlotte Skating Club decided to install a hockey rink including dasher boards to keep the puck where it belonged. Albert LeBoeuf, a legendary helper in the Town did most of that work using his black-smith, wheelwright and iron working skills.

The elegant skating lantern in the Charlotte Museum, with its small oil wick and shiny brass handle, recalls ice skating times before electricity and flashlights.

Nineteenth century brass skating lantern and period ice skates.

Charlotte Memorial Museum collection. Photograph MGL



Andrew Thurber, member of Charlotte Resuce Squad, training on ice rescue sled.

Courtesy of The Charlotte News

On the frozen bays, Town Farm, Converse and McNeils's, ice skaters cut wide swaths. The rescue squad is prepared should enjoyment plans end with an unexpected testing of open water. The smaller coves and shoreline waters freeze hard but the broad lake freezes clear across only in the coldest winters. A rare sight is mountain bikers cycling across to New York, checking out the shoreline and then heading home to Charlotte dismounting only once for the pressure ridges formed during freezing.

For "soft water" sailors, who want to chase the wind in all seasons, the frozen Lake offers a chance to get around with steel runners on the ice and one person aboard the craft. There is ice boating (sail boats) and ice boarding (wind surfing) and both of these rev up to usual speeds of 35 to 50 miles an hour but can manage 65 at times. One person aboard is the rule and the kind of ice boat is almost always a "Detroit News." Lake Champlain has been host for the International Ice Boating Competition, amazingly competitors will hustle over to any part of the entire country that promises the right ice conditions.

For the ultimate outdoor pleasure there is just one choice for ice fisherman. To find "where they are biting," hardy souls move up and down the lake, searching out the good spots. A house for this purpose always has a heating device in

addition to the possibly present bottled spirits to keep up morale. Visiting is the order of the day as the shanties create their own villages. A good mess of smelt may go home to the family table. The commercially inclined can sell to local grocers and restaurants.

Cautionary note: Ice can be treacherous as two dozen local fishermen found out in March of 1988. They set out from "Whiskey Bay" on the north shore of Thompson's Point. Unexpectedly, they were on the proverbial "thin ice" and then on ice floes which broke away to be driven by high winds into the broad Lake. Their ice islands were decreasing on all sides and the ice shanties were going below. Help from above came when helicopters from Plattsburgh and Burlington arrived. The work went on just as darkness neared. As some were lifted, the rest could only hope that time allowed for them to be lifted, too. The dramatic rescue was a success.

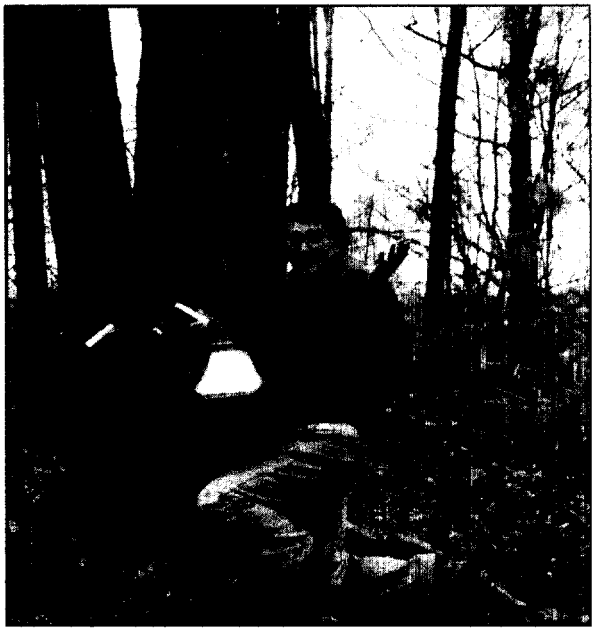
The medical facts about winter waters are terse: five minutes in the water and the muscles of an immersed person don't work too well. A few minutes later, the mind weakens, a desire to drift off to sleep takes over. Fifteen minutes after going into wintry cold water most people die.

The easiest and nicest of winter pastimes, some say, is Indoor sociability. Ours not to document the tables of bridge, scrabble, rummy and poker that carry gamesters through that darker season and so insure a good 'coming out' with the Groundhog when winter is almost ended. The Christmas season shines with lighted houses and decorated trees, a human contribution to nature's snowy wonderland.

In contrast, "snow bird" residents depart not long after the avian fly-over. They may go on silvery wings, in well laden cars or in good-sized boats to get away. Those who stay at latitude 44 North know that all those palm trees and flowering bushes are just salve to relieve the pain of leaving Charlotte for a few months.

Life continues ultra civilized in winter as utilities purr, roads are cleared, and the weather man guides our travel paths. Charlotte has many miles of roads. Residents identify the night sounds of the snow plow as a reassuring melody. The school buses usually can keep their rounds, commuters do succeed, homes are warm with a variety of fuels and even wood stoves have a modern garb.

There was a very great exception to the usual kind of wintery challenges in January, 1998 when a massive ice storm arrived, unannounced. It has been called "the storm of the century." The dubious may ask "compared to what?" and "who is around that remembers those other 97 years?" The archives have old newspapers and weather records and nothing seems to compare with the 1998 reports. Trees all around town were severely damaged, especially those at



Greg Cluff with a new sugaring technique reading for springtime production.

Courtesy of the The Charlotte News

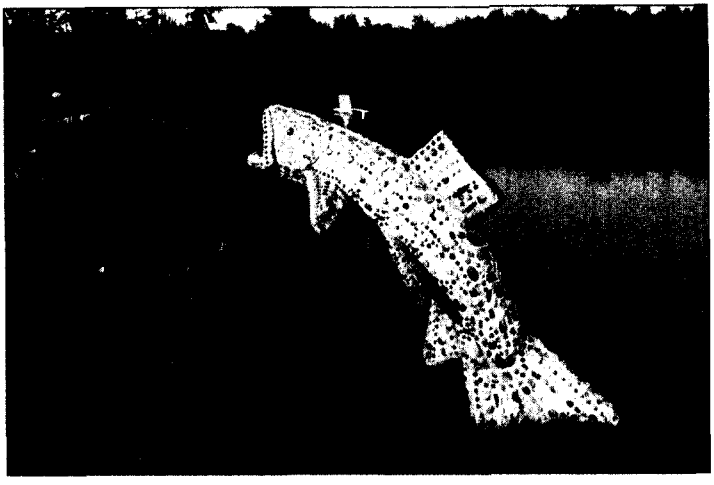
higher elevations. Trees are one thing, people are another as those who went without power for up to seven days can attest. All this would be a chilling experience at any time but is especially unnerving as we approach the possible complications of Y 2K.

Summer in Charlotte is more than moonlight and June The town beach and recreation area opens its gates

"Garden, Pickett, Cedar Isle — Spangled with glints of starlight golds..."

These islands and several others come alive around Memorial Day when Converse and Town Farm Bays are repopulated. Home owners return to Cedar Island and Garden Island with its elegant main house and satellite rental units. A ferry boat motors to and fro a landing dock on the north shore of Thompson's Point All the stuff of summer living is plainly stacked on the open deck, the Ferry bell sounds and its Garden Island, Ahoy!

Pickett, a.k.a.Dead Man's Island just off Cedar Beach, is the rendezvous for suntanners. Sloop Island, way out from Wing's Point, looms so large on the



"Flying fish" on Lake road.

Artist Shirley E. Reid. Photograph courtsey of Jessie Bradley

horizon that it fools boaters at a distance just as it fooled the British in the War of 1812 who shelled it as an enemy sloop. Dean's Islands, three of them way over in Town Farm Bay, are in plain view of Point Bay Marina and the approximately three hundred boats that are in use.

July 4th weekend is the peak date for getting out on the Lake. A survey at the Marina in the early 1990's showed one boat, either in or out, every three minutes on the Fourth. Sail boats are the clear majority of the larger boats. Small craft go from quiet kayaks and wind-surfers to motorized ski-dos which, say the fishermen, ruin the lake.

Champlain has been called "The Lake of the Presidents." A boyish Franklin Delano Roosevelt steamed up and down past Charlotte's shoreline when his father ran the steamboat company. President Theodore Roosevelt spent a night at Thompson's Point in the summer of 1902. Japanese lanterns were strung, speeches were made and "Teddy" retired to the cottage owned by his Secretary of the Treasury Lucius Shaw. Over on Garden Island, William Howard Taft was a guest when he was Secretary of War. Local lore has it that the oversized bath tub in the main house was installed to accommodate Taft. In that same era, tycoon Henry Putnam owned Garden Island and gave President McKinley a lake tour on his yacht. Mr. Putnam is well known to law students. When one of the of the legendary maritime Ploofs sued him over a wrecked vessel, Ploof v. Putnam went into law books on torts. The opinion, a victory for Ploof, carries the name "Garden Island, Charlotte" far and wide.

Recreation committee chairman Jessie Bradley assembling equipment at the town recreation area.

Courtesy of The Charlotte News

One-sixth of the town's population is "summer people" who enjoy Charlotte in season but then return to their real homes

"Things will get back to normal in September when all those crazy people leave." Each year in May some 500 summer residents come to town to 'open camp' and ready for another season. Most of them are repeating a previous generation's love for two favorite places, settling in at Thompson's Point or Cedar Beach.

Enjoyed as rough camping sites by several generations of settlers before the formalities of real estate ownership set in, each has its own well recorded history. Similarities abound. Hunting and fishing were a way of life for the settlers and doubtless for the centuries previous when the first native Americans lived off the natural bounty. Both summer resorts got started in the late 1800's with elaborate tent shelters. Rather quickly, the reality of cleared woods, new roads and a nearby train stop, led to the building of houses.

First constable Hugh W. Lewis, Sr. better known as "Cowboy." Inter alia, Director of traffic at town parties and the person who closes the gate evenings at the town beach.

Courtesy of The Charlotte News

The settlements shared a growing stage when docks were constructed to host the great lake steamers that chugged up the Lake from Burlington, then went to ports on both sides before returning north. "The Old Ti Dock" still has its broken concrete remnants at Thompson's Point. The Cedar Beach dock, with its distinctive canopy , was host to the steamers which always supplied a joyous "whistle salute."

Thompson's Point

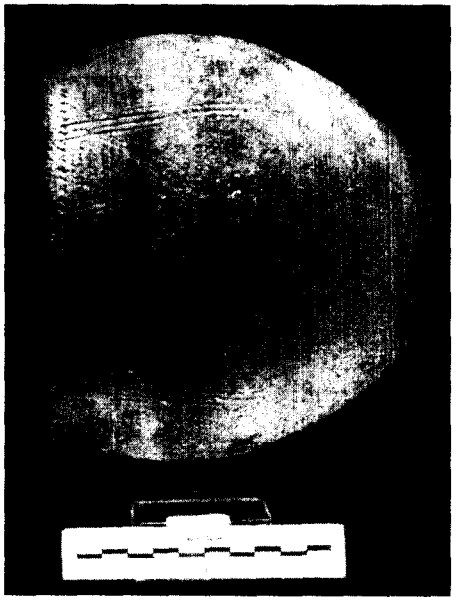
"In the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy, the following named persons (eight listed: four from Charlotte, four from North Ferrisburgh) for that purpose of Amusement, Recreation and pleasure conceived the idea of "camping out" as ***a very sensible way*** of accomplishing the object in view. Accordingly in the month of August A.D. 1870 they met with one accord and decided upon Thompsons Point in the town of Charlotte as their ***camping ground*** and forthwith erected a ***board tent***."

The original scene is much altered with Victorian style dwellings, about 120 camps, in view. Yet lakeshore,woods and meadowland still dominate the 230 acres of this property which has been owned by the Town of Charlotte since 1839. Some of the land is in farming. An Abenaki Indian family, a branch of the

Odonaks, had a camp on the south shore, living there until 1950. All were in the family of Simon "the great Obomsawin," who is still in the living memory of some Pointers. In his rounds as caretaker for the Point, he lit the kerosene lamps along the lakeshore path, an evening rite.

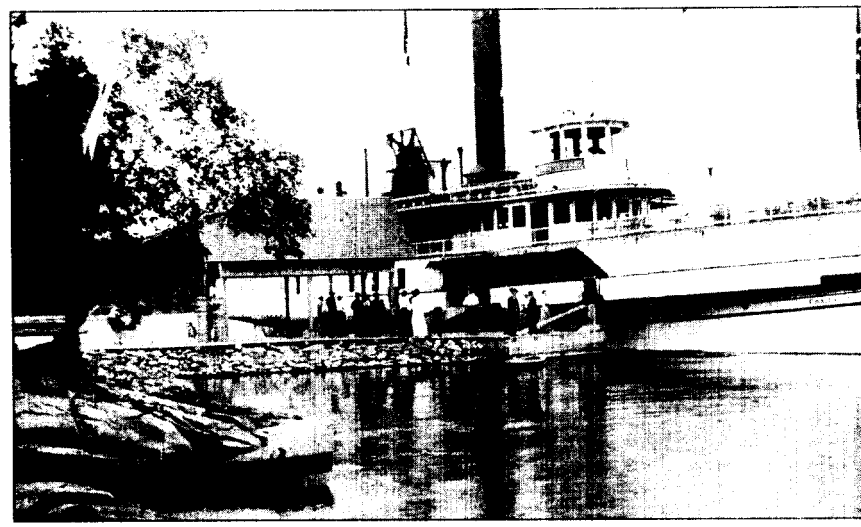
Through the decades, Charlotters have been searching out arrow points and small weapons of Indian origin, the collection of the late William Horsford probably winning top honors. But in 1997, there was an astonishing find of a different kind. Two divers in fifty feet of water off the south shore of Thompson's Point recovered an antique jug which has been examined and conserved with top priority care. The ceramic vessel is between 1600 and 2,200 years old and has some surface adornments. The dating was done by Dr. Jim Petersen, professor of anthropology at UVM, who evaluated size, shape and decoration. It is in perfect condition.

Sportsmen enjoyed the point as a free-for-all once the road was passable. Next a system of leases to individuals who wished to build was created, starting in 1874. Lease provisions grew to an enormous size, spelling out the rights of the town, the owner, and the cottage owner who does not own his land, only his



Ceramic jug found off south shore of Thompson's Point.

Photograph courtesy of Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, Chimney Point State Historic Site



The *Chateaugay* at Thompson's Point. The steamer was built in 1887.

Photograph courtesy of Laura and William Carrol

house. The lease is for a fifteen year period but the rent is adjusted within that time as the Selectboard sees fit.

The summer houses take up 50 acres of Lake frontage. Lease restrictions are detailed and well observed: no cutting of trees without the Tree Wardens permission; no occupancy from October to May. The first lessees were local people; now 55 percent come from out-of-state. Both colonies are on the State Register of Historic Sites and a pleasant turn-of-the-century air prevails thanks to being in a seasonal management zone. To assist with rising costs, owners now rent and the turnover is constant, a dramatic change from years of having the same neighbors.

But mostly the Point does not change because the enjoyments are the same. The parade on the Fourth of July starts at noon at the Club house, a walk down Colby Path accompanied by the noise of banging cooking pots, the waving of flags and a grand commotion until the parade's end at the Old Ti Dock. There, where the grand steamers of the Lake tied up, the festive Pointers listen to a speaker (one of their neighbors), then sing "American the Beautiful" and exchange winter's news. Another summer season has just begun.

Classic view of Cedar Beach and the Jolly Club. Post card circa 1910.

Charlotte Museum collection

Cedar Beach

"On the evening of June 7, 1873, eleven gentlemen met in Burlington for the purpose of forming a company to erect a cottage on McNeil's point in Charlotte as a place of resort during the summer ....at this meeting some rules and regulations were adopted, officers were elected and the name 'Jolly Club' was selected...the Grand Opening was held on July 8 when about 175 invited guests of the members, with the Queen City Band, visited the place making the trip from Burlington on the steamer Williams."

These earliest "Jolly Club" members built and furnished a cottage that served as a clubhouse with overnight shelter available on the second floor. Men's, women's and children's sleeping areas were separated by cloth hangings. Later, with the advent of indoor plumbing and larger sleeping accommodations, some houses had wood walls built in to take the place of the cloth hangings. Much of this is all in vain. Even when they were added, walls and ceilings in sleeping quarters did not keep out noise and evening camp commotion from card games, slamming doors, and visiting grandchildren. Trying to get a good night's sleep continues to be a familiar part of the summer experience.

Reading about that grand social start, we learn the good news that when an error was found in the original leasing arrangement, the members corrected it in a wise way. They bought the property outright when the opportunity came along in 1874 which was just ten years after the founding. A great dock one hundred feet long was built in 1888 to take care of the Lake steamers. The campers had early on built an ice house and in time two boathouses each of which held eleven boats.

After a period of growing pains, the extant groups incorporated as "The Cedar Beach Association" in 1883 Several organized activities changed. The Cedar Beach Electric Company was disbanded in 1933 when all cottages agreed to patronize Green Mountain Power. The icehouses which served so well, stocked with blocks cut in the dead of winter, are now relics of yesteryear. In the steamboat heyday years, groceries came up from Burlington by boat. Later, local suppliers and Stanton Williams' Old Brick Store delivered milk, vegetables and groceries. None of that survived the great automobile invasion and now even the mail arrives on wheels, unlike the days of the Cedar Beach post office which closed in 1956. There is plenty of work to be done at these summer houses. It does, somehow, get done. Because the scramble for help is productive each year, the beautiful summers continue for the "summer people."

Mount Philo, Vermont's first state park, offers easy or other ways to ascend and views that live forever

A fifty foot tower, once complete with a flag that could withstand gusts and gales, stood on Mt. Philo, the highest point in Charlotte. Even without the tower, the panoramic views of the valley and the lake are spectacular. Visitors now numbering 850,000 have come to enjoy this scene since the State started keeping records in 1936. This, the first State Park in all of Vermont, is popular with hikers, bikers, strollers and horseback riders. Many simply enjoy the "climb" via a winding paved road fit for all kinds of vehicles, but used mostly by automobiles.

The Park is a gift from the James Humphreys, a couple with a profound love for the entire area. Just one hundred years ago, Mr. Humphrey, who had been a guest at the Cold Spring House, later the Mt. Philo Inn, decided the mountain should belong to the Inn. He bought 27 acres including the mountain top, then he bought a farm on the western slope. Once weather allowed warmer ground for construction, a road was built on the south slope. James' brother Charles shared his affection for this place and donated an enclosed glass case to hold data about weather and visitors. Humphrey's sister Anna signed on by providing money for the three story observation tower. In time, after a series of real estate transactions, James' widow gave what is now 160 acres to the State of Vermont.

Classic view from Mt. Philo State Park.

Reopening celebration in May, 1999 with Susan and Tom Little, Shelburne representative, and Hazel Prindle, former Charlotte representative.

Photograph MGL

The creation of the Park was very good politics in action: Frank Lewis who owned the Inn sponsored the bill in the Legislature that created the present entrance to the Park; the road was built in 1930 when Frank's brother, Solon Lewis, was the road commissioner; and in 1933 Civilian Conservation Corps men built the return road creating a one way traffic plan which added ease to the trip. Now cars line the access road that comes off Route # 7 and plans for a much needed parking lot on the Mt. Philo Road at the base are coming along.

Clambering over the rocks of striking red and purple colors at the Overlook is a treat for visitors. Caution is the keynote. The "mountain" (900 feet high) is also a geology student's work area. The rocks were weathered for some 300 million years, so that the glaciers that covered everything 'only' 70,000 years ago

are really modern phenomena. In its recent geologic past, Mt. Philo was an island surrounded by the Champlain Sea. Very visible deposits of marine beach gravel suggest that the Lake came up some 500 feet, leaving the rest of the slumbering mountain to raise its proud summit above water.

On Mt. Philo, the ice storm of January, 1998 created havoc. Hundreds of tree limbs and tops had been shorn off, the damage was great enough to be visible from distant places. The clean up work required heavy equipment which in turn ruined the roads. The park was closed for recreational use all through the summer and fall seasons.

The long awaited reopening came in May of 1999, a date which is also the 75th anniversary of the State Park system. Everything is once again open for public enjoyment: picnic facilities with stone fireplaces, water, sanitary facilities, a variety of trails, and some convenient benches. The State Parks and Recreation department provides a supervisor. The old Inn and its outlying cabins are no longer a mountainside resort for city dwellers nor a home for the communal group resident in the sixties, but enjoyment continues albeit in different ways.

Are we really transported above the clouds while up there? Is it possible that the view to the West is just an artist's rendition of the shoreline with the Adirondacks towering in the distance? Charlotte's mountain has its own special magic One fact is certain: the panorama is the most photographed scene in Vermont. This is a very special place, once visited never forgotten.

Charlotte's own "Road Show" and the naming of the roads

When elected to the Board of Selectmen in 1973, Frank Thornton continued his study of how the town operates. With a lawyer's skills in research, he found old records of actions taken in town meetings and by the Selectmen which affected town roads. He collected his findings and made a report on the roads of the town, how they had been moved and named and changed.

He found and photographed abandoned road beds, made maps with overlays to show the changes. From all this material came a program he calls his Road Show. He completed the project with a report that provides a history of our roads: "Charlotte Road Statistics: their Location and Widths as Recorded in the Charlotte Town Records." The report showed many streets and roads with names in use.

Although this seems a study which might have been made in many Vermont towns, no other has been found even though roads are a very important part of local government activity. Occasionally someone from out of town finds this report, asks why his town has none, but little comes of the question. However,

when the E911 program had to be put in place, Thornton was a natural to see that Charlotte met the requirements for inaugurating the system. Pressures to keep on a strict time schedule to synchronize with the state system and other towns had local repercussions.

Naming the roads created challenges of many kinds including vociferous comments from residents about selections. Frank Thornton kept the names which were in common use where possible. One problem that led to unexpected changes in custom came where roads bent onto themselves or had significant jogs at an intersection. Each road had to have a distinctive and exclusive name. House numbers had to be assigned. They were derived by distance measurements from central points. The familiar numbers of RFD origin are no more. Homes have lost their pleasant rural anonymity as we all have street names and numbers just like city folks. Yet in many parts of Charlotte, a road map is still a necessity. The nice part is that the roads have names.

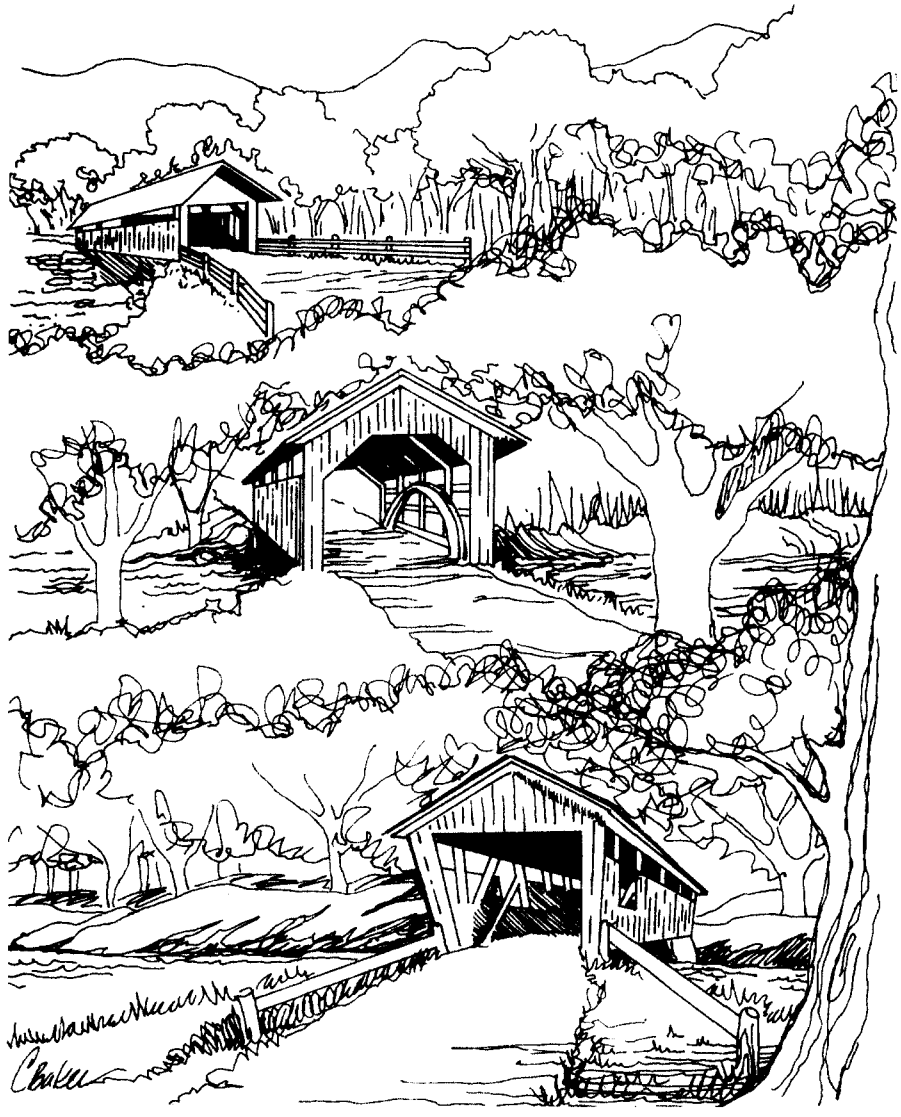
The Bridges of Chittenden County

Chittenden country has three covered bridges still in use. All of them are in the town of Charlotte. Two are on the east side of town and cross Lewis Creek, one is beside the lake on Lake Road and crosses Holmes Creek. All three bridges are named for families that lived nearby.

The smallest, Holmes Creek bridge, sits on the edge of the town recreation area. The bridge was built using the kingpost style. Later arches were added to strengthen the structure. In 1994 the bridge, damaged periodically by outsized vehicles and by accidents, was rebuilt. When one arch was found to be broken, both were replaced. Many other parts were also replaced including the floor. A great deal of the original siding was still useful and reattached after the restoration of the frame was completed. One of the arches, cut into two pieces, decorates the gable ends of the town hall's center meet ing room. Several photographs of the repair work add some explanation for the strange looking artifacts mounted high on the gable walls nearby.

The Quinlan bridge is on Lewis Creek Road at its intersection with Spear Street Extension. It is of the multiple kingpost style with Burr arch, built in 1849. It has been repaired as needed in the past but will soon have a major restoration. Before the bridge was built teams of horses brought saw logs from the north to Scott's mill just upstream from the present bridge at a ford. The Scott dam still exists.

The Leavenworth bridge is on Lewis Creek Road up stream from the Quinlan bridge and very near the Hinesburgh border, south of where the road intersects with Prindle Road. This bridge was built in 1850 in the kingpost style



Barn Bridge Sketch.

Artist Cathy Baker

with Burr arch and has been extensively repaired in recent years. the Leavenworth mill was above this bridge but nothing remains of its buildings or the dam. The bridge is also referred to as the Sequin bridge.

The two bridges in the east part of town inevitably were called the lower and upper bridges. Both of them have been maintained throughout the years in spite of occasional controversies. Citizens have indicated they preferred to keep them and to save money at the same time. All three bridges appear in a collage painted on the door of the town vault. The rendition in this town history by artist Cathy Baker highlights these unique Charlotte structures that go over the rivers, giving us a way to get around town on historic routes.

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This year, working to provide the history of Charlotte, we want to thank all those who assisted us and without whom we could not have completed these pages. We well know the problem of omission, hope it hasn't happened, apologize if it has.

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About the co-authors

Mary G. Lighthall, a two-way sixth generation Vermonter born in Morrisville, has had various careers starting as an editor of a chemical journal, than a grantee researcher in bio-chemistry/plant physiology, a housewife and mother, a computer programmer of sorts, volunteer editor of a local history, many years editor of a family genealogical quarterly. She has lived in Charlotte since 1962 and is an active member of the Charlotte Historical Society.

Mary Lighthall

Katherine Teetor, "Kay", lives in Middlebury. As residents of Thompson's Point, for more than thirty years, her family enjoyed Lake Champlain. Co-authorship of a Point history, an ongoing hobby of collecting mermaids, and concerned citizen work on Lake issues were all inspired by those summers. Husband Paul's residence at The Arbors, an Alzheimer's facility, have darkened the golden anniversary years. Bright lights are their two "Boomers" children, spouses and five grandchildren. She is an active member of the Charlotte Historical Society.

Katherine Teetor