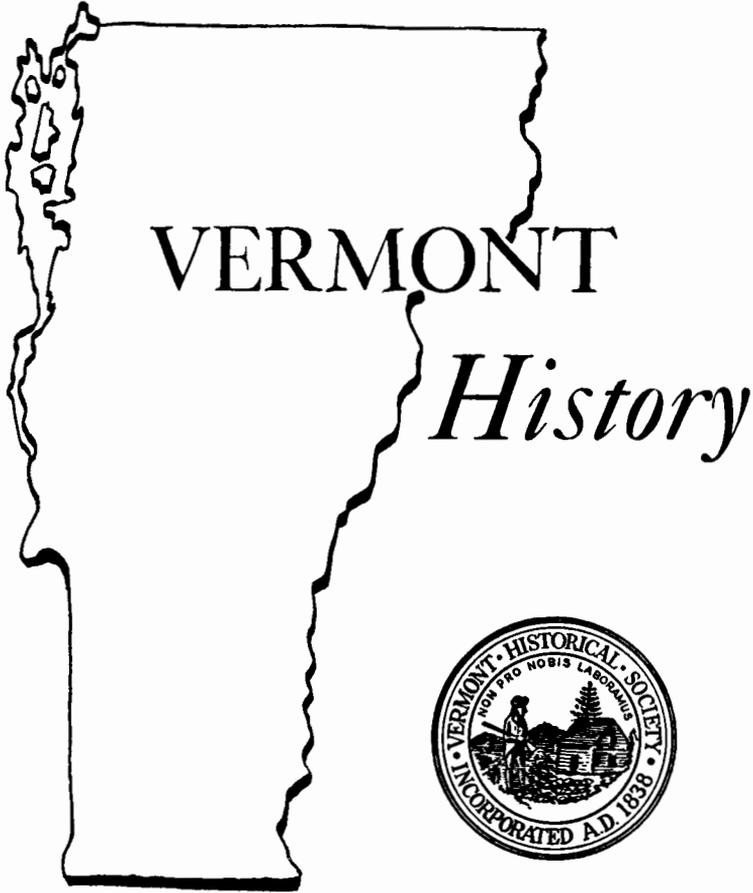


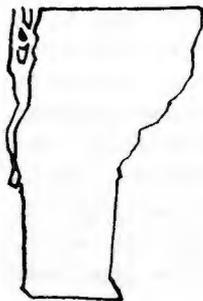
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Vermont was more popular with vacationers before mid-century than afterwards

Vermont as a Resort Area in the Nineteenth Century

By LOUISE B. ROOMET

VERMONT'S history as a resort area during the nineteenth century divides itself roughly into three periods. From the first decade to the middle of the century the state's resorts were numerous, increasingly successful and economically stable. As Vermont then stood on basically equal terms with other states in the nation, its resorts accepted their national reputation easily and without self-consciousness.

Between 1850 and 1875 its resorts continued to attract visitors from a wide geographic radius, but they became more self-conscious about their role. They changed more often and more perceptibly than during the first half or last quarter of the century.

Between 1875 and 1900, Vermont was outside the national mainstream. As a state and as a resort area, it was atypical. Not totally agricultural nor quite industrial, it was neither popular as a resort area nor unpopular. It occupied a strange limbo.

I

Vermont Resorts Before 1850

Vermont's earliest resorts were literally watering holes. According to the first owner of the Clarendon Mineral Springs, George Round, a dream led him to these springs in 1776. In 1798 he replaced his log-home hostelry with a frame hotel capable of accommodating 100 visitors.¹ Clarendon

1. Edna Faith Connell, "Clarendon Springs," *The Vermonter*, vol. 44, no. 10 (August 1939) p. 254.

flourished. The early nineteenth century visitor couldn't seem to get enough of its health-giving water (20 glasses per day was the recommended dose). In 1835, an elegant brick "boarding house" replaced the frame hotel, and within a few years the Springs were known nationally. The new hotel's owner, Edward McLaughlin, proclaimed himself "prepared for the receipt of company . . . individuals and families — the val-etudinarian, and parties of pleasure,"² but it is doubtful that he was prepared for the five hundred visitors who reportedly came each season,³ many of them for the entire summer. No doubt the overflow found rooms in numerous nearby inns or in local homes.

A number of other health resorts shared Clarendon's success. If anything, the Sheldon and Highgate Mineral Springs were even more popular. The waters of Sheldon, claimed *The American Botanist and Family Physician* (1824) would "promote digestion and prove diuretic . . . cure the itch and other cutaneous eruptions" as well as restore hair, and relieve problems of the blood and the liver.⁴

Those who went to Sheldon were well housed. The earliest of Sheldon's elegant hotels, the Missisquoi, consisted of 100 rooms, furnished at a cost of \$35,000.⁵ It is difficult to determine exactly how many hotels operated simultaneously in the area during the 1830s and 1840s,⁶ but undoubtedly the Missisquoi had competition. In 1870, hardly the heyday of mineral spring resorts, Sheldon had five. By 1880 one had disappeared; and by 1890 the number had dropped to two.⁷

Highgate Springs' Franklin House, constructed about 1818 by S. S. and S. W. Keyes, grew with the popularity of the springs. It was reconstructed by many proprietors and ultimately enlarged to a final capacity of 125.⁸ The Keyes brothers had selected a particularly advantageous spot. Their land included not only the springs but the junction between the post road

2. *Rutland Herald*, 1835, from Walter Hard, "Green Mountain Post Boy," *Vermont Life*, vol. 4, no. 4, (Summer, 1950) p. 1.

3. Zadock Thompson, *History of Vermont, Natural, Civil and Statistical* (Burlington, 1842), p. 8.

4. David Maunsell; Lawton V. Crocker; Dorman B. E. Kent, *Gazetteer of Vermont Heritage* (National Survey, Chester, 1966), p. 77.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 77. The *Gazetteer* describes the Missisquoi as "a hotel of 100 rooms," however, hotels tended to list their capacity rather than the number of rooms. Hence, it is quite possible that the Missisquoi was originally half this size (50 rooms). The hotel burned in 1870, supposedly at the hand of an unhappy employee.

6. Before 1870 neither *Walton's Vermont Register and Farmer's Almanac*, edited by E. P. Walton nor the *Vermont State Business Directory* (Boston, Symonds, Wentworth & Co.) carried complete lists (seldom any lists) of hotels. Occasionally, however, hotel keepers included advertisements in the publications. Through these advertisements, and the various travelers' accounts and newspaper editorials, one might be able to arrive at an estimate. The fact that the directories in the first half of the 19th century did not regard hotels as true "businesses" is, perhaps, further evidence of their unique positions within communities (see below).

7. *Vermont State Business Directory*, 1870, 1880, 1890.

8. Florence Beebe, "The Franklin House," *The Vermonter*, vol. 46, no. 5 (1941) p. 113.

and the ferry; their facilities included the warehouse and the dock. Stage horses were changed here as well.⁹

While the health resorts centered on mineral springs at Clarendon, Highgate Springs, Sheldon, Middletown and Brattleboro enjoyed national patronage, smaller watering holes scattered through Vermont served a more modest public. The list is long: Brunswick, Burlington, Canaan, Chelsea, Newark, Newbury, Plainfield, Whitingham, and others. It suggests that the building of a hotel upon discovery of a spring was considered a logical step.

The role of physicians at the health spas is not precisely clear. In some cases, as in Burlington, they had title to the spring and/or owned the hotel.¹⁰ But in the great majority of hotels they seemed to have been present as working or paying guests. As the mineral spring hotels proliferated, the testimonials and case histories published by the doctors became their best advertisements. Reports appeared in the early medical journals, as separate brochures, in popular magazines and newspapers, and occasionally as a monthly magazine published by the hotel itself, such as *The Green Mountain Spring* from the Brattleboro Hydropathic Establishment — circulation 30,000!¹¹

The health spa's chief source of income was room and board. Since most doctors warned visitors that only minor and temporary benefits could be realized in less than three weeks of treatment, most guests stayed at least that long. Many, especially those who had come great distances (some were well-to-do Southerners) stayed the entire season. In addition, the hotels bottled great quantities of water for guests returning home or to sell outside Vermont. To some extent, the early manufactured medicines such as "Dr. Guild's Green Mountain Asthmatic Remedies," a Vermont elixir produced in Rupert, were outgrowths of the bottled water business, capitalizing on the same widespread concern with health as the resorts.

Were Americans in the first half of the 19th century hypochondriacs or valetudinarians? Did people really go to the mineral spring resorts for their health, or has our perspective been distorted by what the advertisers wrote? Were the resorts merely products of a fad? Many 20th century writers have seen them as such and, as a result, depicted them lightly as one of our ancestors' amusing obsessions. There is no doubt that the promise of pleasure

9. Both Highgate Springs and Sheldon had still another, unforeseen advantage against the changing times and fickle tastes of resort business. Long after the springs had been forgotten, during prohibition, 20th century guests could easily scoot over the Canadian border for the necessities.

10. Timothy Bigelow, *Journal of a Tour to Niagara Falls in the Year 1805*, (Press of J. Wilson & Son, 1876) p. 111.

11. D. Mark, ed. "The Green Mountain Spring," (Brattleboro, Brattleboro Hydropathic Establishment. 1846).

was one of the attractions of the resorts, but the promise of better health seems to have been the most compelling. To look at the mineral springs from the vantage point of 20th century medical knowledge, and consider them as nothing more than gimmicks or fads, is unfairly critical.¹² The health problem was very real. One only had to consider the odds against reaching adulthood in sound health without the aid of sanitation systems, preventive medicine and modern drugs, to understand why the early 19th century citizen was preoccupied with his health. If our perspective is warped, the fault lies largely in the language of the literature publicizing the resorts — the advertisements and physicians' testimonials. In small doses, it is amusing; in larger quantities it begins to convey the desperation its readers must have experienced. Its phraseology, its exaggerated claims, and its sensational appeals mark it with a fervor typical of the writings of the reform era. Health was one of the issues reformers adopted and the mineral springs should be viewed within a context which included revivalism, temperance, abolitionism, prison reform, education and women's rights. Hotels reflected these aspects of the movement as well. During the 1840s a number of Vermont establishments included some reference to temperance in their names.¹³ Most outstanding was the way in which the water cures resembled revivalism:

Unlike most methods of cure this calls upon the patient with constant and unrelenting importunity, "Work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling! Work! From early morn to early rest, the Water-cure patient must work to bring on the necessary reactions after sweating, plunging, douching, drinking. . . ."¹⁴

Like other manifestations of social ferment, health as an issue was real and serious, and the movement too persistent to be dismissed as a fad.

The promise of better health was a prime attraction, but other inducements brought guests to these resorts. The climate was cooler. They socialized with other guests. Staying the entire season, they made lasting friendships, business deals, business partnerships or marriages. They had reason to return year after year.

Who came? The census of 1850 estimated one-third of all Americans to be "displaced" — that is, residing outside the state of their birth or having been born abroad.¹⁵ As a foreign observer remarked, "It can be easily conceived what a network of relationships this makes all over the Union,

12. Especially in light of the fact that as late as the 1950s, thousands of American families fled the cities every summer to avoid polio.

13. *Walton's Vermont Register and Farmer's Almanac*, 1842. See listings for Manchester and Middlebury.

14. "The Green Mountain Spring," vol. 1, no. 1 (1846) p. 1.

15. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans — The National Experience*, (New York, Random House, 1965) p. 144.

and how much traveling to and fro this must give rise to, especially among a people in whom the domestic affections are so strong as the Americans.'"¹⁶ Very likely a good portion of Vermont's guests were out-of-staters who had included a resort vacation in their itinerary for a family visit somewhere in the northeast.

The fact that a large percentage of Vermont's resort patrons were well-to-do Southerners is not as surprising as this might initially appear. Southern planters often had business partnerships in the northeast. In fact, Newport, Rhode Island, owes a significant part of its history as a resort to the planters who came up each spring on the ships bound for Fall River where they procured nitrates and fertilizers. Bringing their families, they would stay at Newport until the ships returned again in the fall to deliver the plantations' crops to Fall River's mills.¹⁷

II

Vermont Resorts, 1850-1875

The profusion and popularity of the mineral springs between the 1820s and 1850s represent Vermont's greatest resort era. While these hotels continued thereafter to operate — some well into the 20th century — as early as 1845 they began to reflect the rapidly developing changes in the nation and in the interests and demands of its citizens. Superficially, they appeared very much the way they did during the first half of the century, but in fact they were undergoing many changes. More importantly, the mineral spring resorts were no longer the only attraction for out-of-state visitors. During the middle period, roughly 1850-1875, city hotels — in Rutland, Montpelier, Bellows Falls, Burlington, and St. Johnsbury — boomed. They attracted vacationers as well as traveling businessmen. Furthermore, this middle period saw the rise of numerous village hotels (or often the adaption of older inns into vacation hotels) which began to take a greater share of vacationers and to draw a clientele — the middle class family — which was to become most typical of all Vermont vacationers in the latter part of the century.

These aspects of the second phase of 19th century Vermont as a resort area — the diminishing interest in mineral springs and water cures, the subsequent diversification of attractions and clientele, the increased role of city and village hotels — are evident in several ways. At many resorts fishing, boating, billiards, walking paths and carriage roads began to share

16. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

17. Cleveland Armory, *The Last Resorts*, (New York, Harper & Bros., 1948) p. 19.

and eventually overshadow the billing of the mineral springs. Their registers reveal increasing numbers of guests staying anywhere from a few days to two weeks as well as "seasoners." But in this period, the word "resort," as indicating a hotel which is opened only in the summer or which offers some special recreational or health facility, becomes misleading. Mid-19th century Americans, in search of a place to spend summer vacations, frequently did not distinguish a resort from a hotel. Therefore, in order to view the resort in its proper perspective it is necessary to examine the 19th century hotel.

Not only was the local hotel the way-station and destination for travelers by stage, steam, road and rail, but it also served as the civic, business, political and social center of 19th century America. Most of the institutions and technological innovations imported from Europe were altered to meet American needs; few were transformed more than the hotel. Originally, of course, it was the New World version of the 18th century European inn. But by the end of the 18th century it had absorbed so many other functions beyond that of the inn that a new name was necessary. "Hotel," the Frenchman's flexible term for either a nobleman's house or one that was special for its civic role (Hotel de Ville, Hotel de Dieu, etc.) suited the evolving institution admirably.¹⁸

Most significant was the term's emphasis on the institution's civic role. With the scarcity of buildings in a frontier town, the hotel naturally assumed the multiple duties of tavern and town hall as easily as inn. Vermont is typical of many states in that it counts a number of hostelries among its important historic sites — the Catamount Tavern, for example, and Elijah West's Tavern (The Old Constitution House) in Windsor. Even as the community grew and town meetings and offices moved to their own buildings, the hotel maintained importance. As a center for travellers and a stage stop, it served as the local news bureau, often as the post office, and later, almost invariably, as the community's first telegraph and telephone office. It was the predecessor of the public library and the gentleman's club. By mid-century most hotels contained reading rooms where a variety of national newspapers were available — gratis to guests, and at a small annual charge to local patrons.¹⁹ Increasingly, it became a business center as well.

By the 1850s the railroad had arrived in Vermont. The routes it laid out, the new industries it spurred (particularly marble and granite), the concentration of old businesses into a few cities, and the fact that the railroad

18. There is some dispute as to when the term was first adopted. Boorstin (*The Americans — The National Experience*, p. 135) claims it was widely used during the Revolution; Dorsey and Levine (*Fare Thee Well*, p. 32) cite New York's City Hotel, which opened in 1794, as the first to use the name.

19. Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans — The National Experience*, p. 104.

created a thoroughfare between New York and northern New England, realigning economic ties from a north-south to east-west axis, brought an entirely new clientele with new needs to Vermont hotels. The 1864 register for Rutland's Bardwell House²⁰ provides a sample: the majority of guests were out-of-staters: those from Montreal, New York City and Boston stayed the shortest time, (1-3 days on the average), indicating they were there for business reasons. Guests from New York state, Massachusetts, and states as far away as Colorado tended to use the hotel as a resort, with a usual stay of 12 days. Among the prominent vacationers that summer were Mrs. Abraham Lincoln with her two sons and her maid. The register reveals another trend. Many parties, varying in size from 1 to 15, were entered as dinner guests, but assigned to a single room. Presumably dinner was served at mid-day, and the guests employed the room as a business office, or, in the case of pleasure parties, as a sitting room during the afternoon.

That the local hotel was a community concern is revealed by the festivities their improvements occasioned and the attention they received in newspapers. Cornerstones were set with great ceremony, frequently on the 4th of July. The opening of a new hotel was a civic occasion. A public ball and dinner marked the opening of Brattleboro's Vermont House (1850), "outstanding" citizens sent a notice of endorsement to newspapers throughout the state and Burlington's *Free Press* published a laudatory editorial.²¹ A "liberal sprinkling [of guests] from Keene, Brattleboro, Rutland, Greenfield, Springfield and Boston, not to mention Burlington" celebrated the completion of a new Dancing Hall at Bellows Falls' Island House in November, 1851.²²

Newspaper editors constantly urged better hotels. "It is in respect to Hotels alone that our growing and prosperous village is behind the times. . . ." wrote a Burlington *Free Press* editor in 1849.²³ But when they were finally satisfied, their praise was lavish: "We congratulate the traveling public on the opening . . . of the Mansion House [Burlington] ". . . and we are under obligation to Dr. Durand [the owner] for contributing to bringing it [the standard] up."²⁴ Occasionally the papers went so far as to guarantee the bill if a guest did not find an establishment up to their report.²⁵

Standards were generally high. The public was well acquainted with the merits of the best hotels in the country, through the press if not personally.

20. *Bardwell House Register*, (Rutland, 1864), Vermont Historical Society Collection.

21. *The Free Press*, (Burlington, Vt) 7:31:1850 (2,2).

22. *Ibid.*, 11:25:1851 (2, 2).

23. *Ibid.*, 5:21:1849 (2,3).

24. *Ibid.*, 5:21:1849 (2,3).

25. *Ibid.*, 7:12:1851 (2,5).

In 1829 when the Tremont House, the most modern hotel in the world and, for decades, the model for every large hotel in America, opened in Boston, its facilities were discussed throughout the country. When it was renovated twenty years later, it was still receiving editorial space in Vermont newspapers.²⁶ Local editors served as civic overseers of hotel standards by spurring competition between neighboring establishments. “Our friend, Col. Hyde, of the Bellows Falls House, will doubtless ‘look to his corners’ and not permit them to be ‘turned’ even by our sagacious friend Shurtliff [owner of the newly opened Island House at Bellows Falls],” the *Free Press* commented in 1849.²⁷

Perhaps the best indication of the importance of hotels for 19th century citizens were the buildings themselves. European visitors frequently commented that American hotels outshone government buildings and, indeed, every other building in town. “With us,” wrote Alexander Mackay, an English visitor, “hotels are regarded as purely private property, and it is seldom that, in their appearance, they stand out from the mass of private houses around them. In America they are looked upon more in the light of public concerns, and generally assume in their exterior the character of public buildings.”²⁸ “Palaces of the Public,” the *National Intelligencer* called them in 1827 — referring to both their appearance and role. But if hotels in Boston, New York and Philadelphia resembled palaces, those in Vermont better represented still another important function of the hotel — its role as home away from home, only slightly more elegant. In larger communities, Vermont’s hotels resembled mansions, rendered more public by porches heightened to two stories, piazzas broadened to 15 or 20 feet, and carriage houses expanded to liveries. Many, such as the original Island House at Bellows Falls and the Mansion House in Burlington, were converted mansions. Correspondingly, hotels in smaller villages often resembled farmhouses, but sufficiently larger and more elegant so that no mistake could be made as to their real purpose.

In one sense the location was important: almost every hotel was either in the center of town, on a principal road, or extremely close to the train station. Even when advertising the natural beauty and peacefulness of their environments resorts counted railroad tracks within sight as a real asset. At first this attitude arose from the novelty of trains — arrivals at the station were major events; only later was it seen as a matter of convenience. In still another sense, the centrality of the location meant very little. Almost every town in Vermont had at least one hotel. The *Vermont Business Directory*

26. *Ibid.*, 8:23:1849 (1,5).

27. *Ibid.*, 8:25:1849 (1,5).

28. Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans — The National Experience*, p. 135.

for 1870 lists 323 hotels, excluding private homes which took in guests. These were widely distributed; only Bennington, Brattleboro, Burlington, Manchester and Rutland list 5 or more; no town had more than 7.²⁹

In addition, colleges and seminaries opened up to vacationers during the summer. The Ripley Female College in Poultney advertised itself as:

A Summer Resort. Where Home Arrangements and Comforts, Reasonable Rates, Pure and Dry Air, Mountain and Lake Scenery, Good Roads, and Exemption from Causes of Diseases, can be found in combination which is rare. . . Which is Open for Summer Boarders From the middle of June to the middle of September. . . .³⁰

This statement is an indication of the increasingly self-conscious role the hotel-resort was playing. In the first half of the century, resorts seldom advertised themselves. The medical reports, magazines, newspaper articles and letters to the editor which did publicity for them varied mainly in the particular disease for which their waters were effective or the degree of solicitude of the proprietor. By the 1850s and 1860s more attention in the advertisement was paid to the building itself, its facilities and setting. Newspaper editors and their readers were equally concerned about the background of the proprietor (such as other resorts where he had been employed) and the other guests.³¹ Most significantly, city and village hotels were no longer passively serving as summer homes for city boarders; instead they were advertising themselves as resorts. This increasing self-awareness and emphasis on physical assets and social climate are important in examining the late 19th century resorts.

III

1875-1900

By the 1880s and '90s, the heyday of American resorts, every New England state except Vermont and Connecticut had at least one main attraction. Maine boasted Bar Harbor; New Hampshire, the White Mountain resorts; Massachusetts, the Berkshires and Nahant. Rhode Island flaunted not only Newport but also Narragansett Pier. New York offered Saratoga Springs and the Adirondacks, and New Jersey had Cape May and Long Branch. Both Vermont and Connecticut had resorts, but in the race for public attention, they were far behind.

29. *Vermont State Business Directory*, 1870-71, pp. 93-97.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

31. For examples, see *Free Press*, 7:27:1850 (2,1); 6:8:1850 (2,2).

A number of factors suggest that Vermont's hotel industry was in trouble. While hotels burned at an amazing rate throughout the century (the Island House had to be rebuilt twice in 1849-50 before it reopened to the public), after 1870 they were replaced less often. Vermont lost two of her better known resorts in this way — The Missisquoi at Sheldon in 1879 and the Mt. Mansfield House at Stowe in 1889. Business was slowing: in 1840 the Clarendon House register averaged 19 entries a day; in 1880 the number had dropped to 9. There were 21 more hotels in Vermont in 1890 than in 1870, but their overall distribution is puzzling. 73% of the 26 towns which had had three or more hotels in 1870 had less than three in 1890. At the same time, there were 13 towns with three or more hotels in 1890 that had less than three in 1880. Whether or not the number of hotels in a town is an accurate measure of its appeal as a resort, these figures indicate that the business was not altogether stable.

What had happened? Traditionally the Civil War has been blamed for ending the flow of Southerners to the northern resorts. But this explanation is too simple. The resort public had begun to shift as early as the 1850s, and it is doubtful that Vermont hotels would have continued to attract wealthy Southerners in the '80s and '90s when it was having trouble attracting wealthy Northerners. Vermont's economic problems played a part, but its role was secondary to a more pervasive and less tangible cause.

By its very nature the 19th century resort was a peculiar institution. It had to create its own image. In terms of reality, this involved physical problems — the setting, architecture, furnishings, etc.; in the abstract, it involved projecting a distinctive style. At the same time, it had to deal with all the expectations of its potential public and to incorporate some portion of its competitors' promises into its own image. Establishing a successful balance between these two extremes — the distinctive and the expected — was by no means a guarantee of success. Factors outside the owner's or proprietor's control had considerable influence on the success of his business. Of all these variables — the weather, the economy, who came, who followed — the most important was the least visible: the general attitude of the vacationing public.

By 1875, when European and American artists' and critics' obsession for the aesthetic of "the picturesque and the sublime" was waning, the terms took root in the popular culture of the United States. This aesthetic, focused largely on landscape, offered a ready-made framework at precisely the moment of birth of the nation's first large-scale advertising agencies — the Passenger Departments of the railroad companies. Grabbing hold of the late 18th-early 19th century concept of the European Grand Tour, which had been nourished by the same aesthetic, they applied it to this nation.

The American resorts fitted admirably into the scheme. Those, such as Saratoga, paralleled the baths and spas which had drawn the aristocracy of Europe; and since the mineral waters were no longer a primary attraction, the suggestion of high society would serve. Resorts which had no background as health centers — Newport and Bar Harbor — were employed as substitutes for the great cities of the Grand Tour — Vienna, Rome, Paris. The parallel was natural. What is surprising is the degree to which the public accepted these appeals, and the different effects this attitude had on the various resorts of New England.

Reading railroad guides from the 1870s to the turn of the century reveals that the theme developed almost exactly as Europeans had taken it. Late 18th century Frenchmen and Englishmen had been fascinated by the power a locale or building possessed to convey the spirit of the past through association. In the 1870s Americans responded similarly to historic sites of their own past. Guidebooks reminded visitors to associate the Glen Falls area with characters in Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*,³² or that "The battlements of Ticonderoga first bore the flag of independence. This circumstance should of itself render this ruin, so fine in other associations, interesting to the traveler."³³ In terms of historical association, Vermont simply did not make the grade. It was not rich with revolutionary battlefields, or with imposing fortress ruins, or with heroes noble enough to satisfy the passion for the grand and terrible.

Following their European model, the guidebook writers increasingly shifted the focus to the countryside. American cities were beginning to show the unpleasant effects of rapid growth — yet the appeal they offered lay not in the "country" but in a particular type of landscape. Originally, as an aesthetic, "sublime" was applied to those visual experiences which provoked a sensation of mystery, awe or terror in the beholder. In relation to landscape, it applied best to towering mountains coupled with dramatic changes in the weather, or, to a lesser degree, expansive views. The White Mountains, the Adirondack range and the peaks and cliffs of Mt. Desert Island embodied sublimity. The degree to which Vermont was still scarred by lumbering in the early 19th century is difficult to determine, even from the existing photographs. No doubt the scrubby overgrowth on recently abandoned hill farms did not suggest beauty. But even without these drawbacks, Vermont's topography did not measure up to the ideal in comparison to New York, New Hampshire, or Maine. The somewhat defensive

32. *Lippincott's Illustrated Guide to the Principal Summer Resorts of the United States*, (Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott, 1876) p. 70.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

tone of a guidebook published in 1913 when the public's taste was experiencing a shift, sums up the problem:

The Vermont mountains are friendly mountains, with few exceptions, being clothed with verdure from base to highest peaks, mountains that invite the visitor to close acquaintance. Their summits are not capped with eternal snows. They are not stark, jagged masses of barren rock. The tourist does not court death by attempting to scale their highest elevations. They induce admiration and affection rather than awe and terror.³⁴

Vermont was too agricultural, too rural, too familiar to vacationers who were often one generation or less "off the farm" themselves. Her "thrifty" farmland, "dotted with white houses" (white was out-of-fashion in the second half of the 19th century) was barely picturesque. And for late 19th century American popular taste, which dwelled on the sensational and the grand, the picturesque was definitely secondary.

It is too easy to underestimate the pervasiveness of this attitude. On the maps in the railroad guidebooks Vermont has no mountain range — only three peaks (Camel's Hump, Mansfield and Jay).³⁵ Even in the guidebooks put out by the Vermont Central Railroad, advertising only Vermont, the term is "The Green Hills."³⁶

Other major resorts lacked dramatic physical assets. At Saratoga Springs "There is nothing very remarkable about the situation or topography of the town, nor is its scenery or that of its immediate vicinity attractive. It owes its exceptional popularity . . . to the attractions of the brilliant society which gathers here in the season."³⁷ Vermont resorts could claim a few socially prominent names — older guests and cottagers, hanging on to the bygone days of Brattleboro, Manchester, Bellows Falls, and even Clarendon. They hardly made up a "brilliant society."

Who patronized the 354 hotels in Vermont in 1890? One Central Vermont Railroad publicity man put it in this way:

To the invalids, the tired and worn out school teachers and business men and women of our cities, the sportsmen, artists, and men of leisure and all who are seeking recuperation and quiet enjoyment during the summer months, we would say that Rutland . . . offers attractions such as few places, even in this "Switzerland of America" can claim.³⁸

34. Guy Bailey, *Vermont The Land of Green Mountains*, (Essex Junction, Vermont Bureau of Publicity, 1913) p. 6.

35. Moses F. Sweetser, *Here and There in New England and Canada*, (Boston, Passenger Department, Boston and Maine Railroad, 1889).

36. Passenger Department, Central Vermont Railroad, *Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain*, (St. Albans, Central Vermont Railroad, 1895).

37. *Lippincott Illustrated Guide to the Principal Summer Resorts of the United States*, p. 64.

38. Passenger Department, Central Vermont Railroad, *Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain*, p. 36.

It is no surprise that high society stayed away from Vermont resorts.

A group of letters during the 1890s to Charles W. Thurber, proprietor of Thurber's Hotel in Danville, paint the portrait more personally and suggest that the railroad author knew his audience: middle class families, often with a maid or nurse, and just as often, leaving husband and father at home, single men and women, mostly from eastern cities. Previous guests wrote to check on who else would return the next season, new guests inquired about (and occasionally haggled over) prices. One potential guest knew so little about the place that he wrote to the town postmaster, authorizing him to "hand the correspondence to anyone keeping a *first class* Hotel or country home."³⁹ Private homes, by the mid-1890s, were quite popular and were listed in the guidebooks with the hotels.

Thurber's rates were comparable to other small hotels (adults \$8 per week during July and August). In some of Vermont's city hotels, the price was more than double (Burlington's Van Ness House charged \$20.25 per week for adults).⁴⁰ These rates reflected those in other New England states — the larger the hotel, the higher the price. Vermont resorts may have been less glamorous, but they were not significantly cheaper. On the whole, they charged about \$1 less per week than those hotels of the same size in New York, New Hampshire and Maine.

By the first decade of the 20th century both the composition of the vacationing class and public taste had again begun to shift. As the size of the urban middle class grew, the clientele that had patronized Thurber's Hotel in the 1890s began to represent an increasing proportion of the vacationing public. As interest in sports — walking, driving and, particularly, water-sports — began to overshadow the appeal of a glamorous or socially exciting vacation, Vermont gradually began to rebuild its position as a resort area on a somewhat different footing.

39. Letters to Charles Thurber, Danville, Vt., 1892, Collection of Peter King, Burlington.

40. Passenger Department, Central Vermont Railroad, *Summer Homes Among the Green Hills of Vermont and Along the Shores of Lake Champlain*, pp. 104-111.