



Frontiers in Vermont History: People, Places, Ideas

Frontier has a broad range of definitions. It could be a physical or social barrier. It could mean the wilderness or a new discovery. Let us start by brainstorming examples about the ways we can think about frontiers in history.

People As Frontiers

Think of people who accomplished something new, or who challenged or surpassed a limit. Madeleine Kunin was the first female governor of Vermont, as well as the first Jewish woman elected as governor in the entire United States. Lucy Terry Prince, who lived in Sunderland Vermont, was the first published African American poet. John Deere, who was born in Rutland, developed a steel plow and founded a company to sell it.

Places As Frontiers

There are many ways a place could be a frontier. Settlers from New York and New Hampshire moved to the land that would later become Vermont believing it was theirs to take from the Abenaki people who lived in the area for generations. The Robbins and Lawrence Armory and Machine shop in Windsor pioneered the use of interchangeable parts in manufacturing. The Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge has preserved avian habitats for almost 70 years.

Ideas As Frontiers

Ideas come in many forms: artistic styles, laws and politics, religious beliefs, and social stereotypes. Vermont paved new ground with its introduction of Civil Unions in 2000. In the 1920s and 1930s, Henry F. Perkins at the University of Vermont presented Eugenics as a scientific frontier and not the discriminatory, scientific racism that it is. After leaving in Vermont, Joseph Smith founded a new church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

Your project for Vermont History Day does not have to be about Vermont history, but you might want to consider a local history topic. You can use local archives and museums or speak with local experts. You can uncover a Vermont story that is not widely known, and you can qualify for one of the special prizes that are awarded for Vermont history projects. The Vermont Historical Society has plenty of resources to help you begin.

One topic you may come across is the 1970s Counterculture Movement in Vermont. During the 1970s, many 'hippies' quit their jobs in larger cities to move to Vermont. To 'take back the land,' many turned to farming and other sustainable life practices. They also formed communes and cooperatives in order to share new ideas with one another. You could start with a secondary source about the movement, like the magazine article titled [Counterculture in 1970s Vermont](#). For further research, the VHS website hosts a collection of [51 oral histories](#) and many [photographs](#) from people who partook in this



movement. You could explore not just the people, but also the ideas they stood for. What ideas did individuals fight against? What did they hope to accomplish? Thoughts like this could be explored by making an appointment to visit the Vermont Historical Society's library, and looking at the photographs, newspapers, and flyers from this time. Whichever you choose to explore, feel free to look at the extended list of topics from Vermont history.

People

Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys- (1700s)
Justin Morgan and Figure- The First Morgan Horse (1789-present)
Asher Benjamin- Modernizing Architecture (1790s-present)
James Wilson- Created the first commercial globe in the United States (1800s)
Alexander Twilight- First person of African descent to become a state representative (1830s)
Lowell Mill Girls- The Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (1845)
Phineas Gage- The man whose injury began neuroscience (1848)
Clarina Howard Nichols- Frontier Feminist (1850s)
George Perkins Marsh- Man and Nature (1860s)
Snowflake Bentley- Microphotography and snowflakes (1865- 1931)
Mary Annette Anderson- First woman of color accepted into Phi Beta Kappa (1899)
Consuelo Bailey- First female Speaker of the House & first female Lt. Governor (1950s)
Madeleine Kunin- First female governor of Vermont (1980s)

Places

French Fur Trade with Native Americans (1600s)
Vermont Border Dispute (1740s-1770s)
Merino Sheep- From Spain to Vermont (1800s-present)
The Opening of the Champlain Canal- Growth and Commerce (1823)
The St. Albans Raid and the Canadian Confederation (1864)
Scientific Farms- Billings Farm and Shelburne Farm (1890s)
The Long Trail- Getting Back to the Wilderness (1910-1930)
Organic Farms- Across Vermont (1970s-present)

Ideas

Vermont Central Railroad (1848-1995)
Education Revolution (1890s)
Bread and Puppet- Non-profit Political Puppet Theatre (1960s-present)
First Green Up Day (1970s-present)
State Recognition of Abenaki People (1970s-2010s)
Morrill Land Grant College Act- Higher Education (1862)
The Pneumatic Drill- A Granite Industry Invention (1800s-present)
The Interstate Highway (1950s-present)
Act 250- Land use and development (1970-present)
Founding of the Abenaki Self-Help Association (1976-present)
Rise of the Democratic Party in Vermont (1960s-present)
Civil Unions- Paving the road for gay marriage in Vermont (1990s-2010s)