



Vermont Movie Topics

First Contact

The relationship between Europeans and Native Vermonters has always been an uneasy one. Samuel de Champlain set the pattern for French interactions by traveling in a canoe with Indian war parties. Filmmaker Dorothy Tod's ancestors, Col. Benjamin Bellows and Susanna Johnson, lived in Connecticut River towns and struggled against the Abenakis as they tried to form towns and raise families. But an Abenaki man, Holly Greenslit, served as a mentor to Tod, teaching her the skills needed to live here.

After centuries of keeping their traditional culture largely in hiding, Abenakis in Vermont are working to renew it. Like many Abenakis, Jesse Larocque blends ancient traditions with modern life, using splints of ash to make Abenaki baskets while earning a living as a computer technologist.

Settlement

Before the mid-18th century, Vermont represented a dangerous frontier for intrepid French explorers, missionaries, and traders from the north and colonial adventurers from the south. It was not until after the British forces prevailed at the Battle of Quebec in 1760 that the disputed area between New Hampshire and New York became relatively safe. Restless and ambitious young homesteaders, mostly from Connecticut and Massachusetts, ventured into the Green Mountain to settle, seek their fortunes, and form communities.

Surveyor John Dutton leads filmmaker Nora Jacobson along old paths and roadways, describing Colonial settlement patterns, while Abenakis Judy Dow, Donna Roberts Moody, Nate Pero, and Bea Nelson explain the impact on Native American life this intrusion represented. Filmmakers also compare the methods and lifestyles of early settlers and farmers to today's local, organic, and sustainable agriculture movements thriving in Vermont. Andy Reichsman and Kate Purdie focus on an old Vermont family using sustainability to revitalize their traditional farm.

Some of the first European settlers came to Vermont to escape restrictions imposed in the other New England colonies. Sam Mayfield shows how this independent spirit is expressed today by a new wave of settlers, who are living "off the grid." In 1932, Scott and Helen Nearing came here in search of a renewed relationship with the land. Nora Jacobson documents how their back-to-the-land philosophy soon attracted other like-minded pioneers, (including Jacobson's father) who brought old traditions and new ideas along with them. Later, in the 1960s and early 70s, Vermont

was a refuge for a wave of young people seeking a tolerant environment in which to experiment with new ideas and lifestyles, including communal living. Archivist Roz Payne brings her collection of home movies and Newsreel films to illuminate these adventures.

The Vermont Republic

New Hampshire Royal Governor Benning Wentworth and New York Lieutenant Governor Cadwallader Colden issued competing land grants in the territory between the Hudson and Connecticut Rivers that became the state of Vermont. Many of these grants evolved into fledgling townships in the years leading up to the American Revolution. Ethan and Ira Allen secured many of the New Hampshire grants, and Ethan formed the Green Mountain Boys to defend those properties against the holders of New York grants.

With the outbreak of war in 1775 and the capture of Fort Ticonderoga, the Green Mountain Boys--seen by some as outlaws and called the Arlington Mob-- joined the fight for independence. Lake Champlain played a critical role in war; control of the lake by Continental forces helped stave off invasion by British forces from Canada, allowing the Continental Army to escape destruction. In 1777, Vermont declared itself an independent republic. Its constitution was notable for outlawing slavery, establishing public education, and emphasizing individual liberty. Thomas Chittenden became Vermont's first governor, and 14 years later, after exploring alliances with British Canada, Vermont successfully petitioned to become the young nation's 14th state.

Vermont's Early Years Vermont's independent spirit was evident from the beginning. Firebrand Matthew Lyon picked a fight with a Federalist on the floor of Congress in 1798, and later went to prison after being convicted of treason under the unpopular Alien and Sedition Acts. Today's socialist U.S. Senate Bernie Sanders, who cites Lyon as an early mentor, carries on this firebrand tradition.

In Vermont's early years, transportation was a major challenge, and governance mostly focused on local issues. Town meetings played a crucial role in this context. Freedom and Unity, the state motto, is pertinent here, as local town residents worked out a balance between individual liberty and rights and the needs and welfare of their community. Grassroots democracy which had existed among the native inhabitants, took root with the Yankee settlers and its long and enduring legacy has manifested itself throughout Vermont's history to the present day.

The documentation of Vermont town meetings is a group effort. Our filmmakers shot footage at town meetings over many years, and several of our consultants provided valuable input. Lead archival researcher Nat Winthrop poured over many repositories of Vermont images and texts, including the Vermont State Archives, museums, community historical societies, and archival collections. The Vermont Historical Society and Bailey Howe of the University of Vermont provided critical support.

Vermont Comes of Age As the new democracy coalesced, so did a number of political factions. Former outlaws like the Allens became establishment figures, against whom new splinter groups rebelled. In the early 1800s, the Freemasons, a secret fraternal organization to which many businessmen and politicians belonged, became a target of hostility and suspicion. Nowhere did anti-Mason sentiment—closely allied with anti-slavery impulses—hold more sway than in Vermont. Here, the Anti-Masonic Party flourished, representing early threads of

Vermont's anti-establishment, anti-hierarchical tendencies. Vermont was the only state that Anti-Mason presidential candidate William Wirt carried in 1832. Filmmaker Rob Koier takes a look at the fascinating tension between the Masons and Anti-Masons.

The two founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, Dr. Bob Smith, and Bill Wilson, both hail from Vermont. Is this a coincidence—or did the public discussion of issues airing in Vermont Town Meetings set the stage for one of the world's largest and most influential self-help movements? Filmmakers Eleanor Lanahan and Orly Yadin look at these AA pioneers, as well as early temperance movements and rum running during Prohibition.

Tolerance and Intolerance

Vermont prides itself on outlawing slavery, harboring fugitive slaves on the underground railroad and opposing the Fugitive Slave Act. However, race relations in this mostly white state have not always been harmonious. Filmmakers Jay Craven, Olivia Jampol, and Rob Koier examine the complex truth about race in Vermont, defined by a legacy of tolerance, the sting of racism, and the growing diversity that is challenging and changing our state's culture.

A notable example of racism in Vermont was the **Eugenics movement**, examined by Nora Jacobson. Nancy Gallagher, Judy Dow, Alan Berozheimer and Greg Sanford are our lead narrators for this topic. In the 1920s, Henry F. Perkins conducted a survey of “degenerate” Vermonters that focused largely on poor and mixed race families. The survey provided support for a 1933 sterilization law that was designed to “raise the standards of civilization,” but left a legacy of fear and distrust instead among the native people of Vermont.

Newcomers and their families from all over the globe—from the northern reaches of the former Soviet Union to Eastern Europe and Africa—are today changing the face of Vermont. Welcomed into their communities by those who have come before, these immigrants and refugees still face critical challenges. Filmmaker Mira Niagolova, a native of Bulgaria, tells the stories of refugees from other nations who have made Vermont their home.

Civil War

Howard Coffin describes Vermont's disproportional contributions and sacrifices during the War Between the States. Storyteller Daisy Turner speaks of the war from a slave's perspective. Louise Michaels takes a closer look at the Morgan Horse, which was a loyal companion to many soldiers and played an important role in the war effort.

Innovators and Visionaries

Innovation in Vermont was not limited to the Vermont republic's groundbreaking constitution. John Deere got his start here. So did precision machinery, used to make automatic guns. Jill Vickers and Kathy Wheatley document this tradition of innovation by profiling farmers and entrepreneurs using creativity to advance technology, sustainability and agriculture.

Education was a critical part of the vision of Vermont's early founders, and the state gave birth to several educational innovators. Born in Burlington and educated at the University of Vermont, educator and philosopher John Dewey inspired one of America's most innovative institutions of higher education, Goddard College. Filmmaker Linda Leehman examines Dewey's influence on Goddard, Bennington College and the Putney School.

The hills of Vermont have been home to many other visionaries: Joseph Smith was born in Vermont, as was John Humphrey Noyes, founder of Perfectionism. While the Perfectionists were eventually forced to leave Vermont due to their peculiar view on marriage, Vermont provided refuge to many iconoclasts, from Daniel Shays and his followers and escaped slaves on the Underground Railroad to 1960's era anti-war activists. One of these anti-war activists is Shoshanna Rihn, friend of filmmakers Alan Dater and Lisa Merton. They tell her story of living underground and finally finding a home in Vermont.

Just as Vermont was a magnet for unconventional thinkers, it also attract countless artists, writers and, yes, filmmakers, inspired and nurtured by its beautiful landscape and welcoming communities. Artists, in turn, have had a significant impact upon the landscape and culture of Vermont. Filmmakers Susan Bettman and Nora Jacobson take a look at how Vermont's landscape affects artists—and how they affect Vermont – by profiling Peter and Elka Shumann of the Bread & Puppet Theater, author Grace Paley, and playwright Nicholas Biel Jacobson.

Natural Resources and Labor Organizing

Vermont marble, quarried from its western mountains, can be found in simple country graveyards, art museums, legislative halls, and even the pillars of the U.S. Supreme Court. Filmmakers Dina Janis and Sue Reese document the marble industry's profound impact on Vermont's people, history, and economy.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Barre, Vermont's granite quarries drew skilled stonecutters from all over the world. Filmmaker Louise Michaels shows how these new immigrants brought their politics with them, helping make Barre—home to the historic Socialist Labor Party Hall—a hotbed of radical thought and action.

Environmental Leadership

Considered by many to be America's first environmentalist, George Perkins Marsh wrote eloquently about the impact of human activities on the landscape. Cinematographer Michael Sacca documents how Marsh's work and collaboration with railroad tycoon Frederick Billings established a legacy of stewardship that endures in Vermont today. Vermont's scale, and its land, are crucial elements in the story of our state. Cinematographers Matt Bucy and Ben Silberfarb lend their eyes and lenses to exploring Vermont's mountains, fields and rivers.

Filmmaker Robin Lloyd and historian Greg Guma tells the story of how, in the early 1930s, politicians proposed the construction of a highway along the spine of the Green Mountains. Vermont-style democracy intervened, and a 1934 town meeting referendum defeated the proposal, preserving some of Vermont's most treasured landscape. The Green Mountain Parkway was a precursor of the movement to market Vermont as “The Beckoning Country” to tourists. The movement picked up considerable momentum with the opening of the Stowe Ski School in 1934 and the wave of ski resorts that sprang up after World War II.

Filmmaker Jeff Farber demonstrates that the remarkable preservation of Vermont's land and its authentic rural character owes much to Act 250, the landmark land use and development legislation passed in 1970 in response to rapid and often reckless development that accompanied the building of the Interstate highways in the 1960s. Filmmaker Patrick Cody profiles Romaine

Tenney, an Ascutney farmer who burned his house down with himself inside rather than moving off his family farm to make room for I-91. Today, Act 250 remains controversial, yet no one can deny its impact.

People come from all over the world to visit Vermont. What they won't see is billboards, banned by a 1968 law designed to keep the Green Mountains free of large-scale advertising. With help from computer graphics artist John Douglas, filmmakers Bill Stetson and Larry Robins document the impact of this critical piece of legislation as well as other important environmental legislation. Vermont's lakes, rivers, and underground aquifers provide water for drinking, agriculture, industry, and recreation. Today, these sources of water are threatened by development, pollution, and invasive species. Filmmakers Holly Stadtler and Dorothy Tod, with the help of cinematographer Peter Kent, examine whether we have done enough to protect and preserve our precious liquid assets.

Vermont's Liberal Republicans and the Rise of Democrats and Progressives

Prior to the election of Democratic governor Phil Hoff in 1963, Republicans held a virtual lock on Vermont politics for over a century. Filmmaker Rick Moulton looks at the unique brand of Republicanism—which combined fiscal responsibility and social tolerance—that played a critical role in this longstanding hold on power. From the 1930s through the 60s, George Aiken personified this kind of Republicanism. In 2001, Jim Jeffords shook up Washington when he bolted from the Republican Party, which he said had veered too far to the right, and declared himself an independent.

The Democratic Party's rise in Vermont began with the help of French Canadian immigrants. Filmmaker Kenneth Peck profiles Yvan Plouffe, a Vermont farmer of French Canadian descent, and former Governor Phil Hoff, who meet together to talk about this unusual partnership. Later Governors Madeleine Kunin and Howard Dean carried on Hoff's legacy. Filmmaker Louise Michaels and editor Michael Couture explore the influence of French Canadians on Vermont industry, farming, culture and music.

Modern Activists

Vermont is the only state to allow its legislature to decide the fate of nuclear power plants. As documented by filmmakers Sam Mayfield, Patrick Cody, Nora Jacobson and Alan Dater, the Vermont Yankee nuclear plant has become a lightning rod in the debate over the future of nuclear energy. Filmmakers Meghan O'Rourke and Dan Higgins shows how grassroots media activists have used Vermont Public Access Television to reveal critical issues like nuclear power to communities throughout Vermont.

Since Vermont's founding, activism and community connections have played a large role in the state's culture. Filmmaker Anne Macksoud shows how a Woodstock-based organization run by teenagers, Change The World Kids, is spawning young activists around the world to work on projects that are both local and international.

The passage of Vermont's Civil Union law in 2000 marked a watershed moment in the civil rights movement for gays and lesbians. But several years earlier, Vermont became only the sixth state to enact anti-discrimination legislation that protected gays and lesbians. That law passed with the support of Ronnie Squires, Vermont's first openly gay legislator. Nora Jacobson tells Ronnie's story, with help from his mother Shirley, filmmaker John Scagliotti, and Verandah

Porche. Michael Kusmit shares video shot during the debates over civil unions in the Vermont legislature. Richard Waterhouse and Dan Butler, filmmakers originally from Los Angeles, complete the circle by telling their own story of forging a marriage together in Vermont.

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