

## Destination: Manchester, Vermont

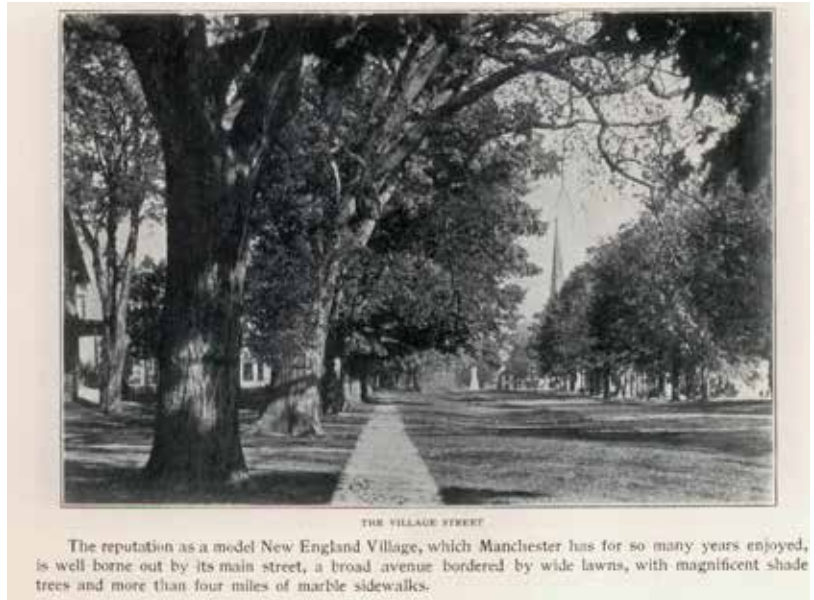
*That Manchester had this business is not so much a matter of luck or location as it is the result of most excellent hotel facilities, fine golf links, and good advertising.*

*manchester journal, 1928.*

As Vermont and the country opens up after over a year of Covid-19-induced lockdown, Manchester is beginning to see visitors return in large numbers. Manchester has a long history as a destination for travelers, as a summer oasis, and later, as a four-season resort. The community leaders, whose decisions and determination made Manchester what it is today, had a vision of what they wanted to create and they worked hard to realize that vision over many decades.

**Here's a brief look at the origins of how our town became a unique and well-loved destination resort.**

One of the first published mentions of Manchester as a destination was by Colonel Jack Graham in London in 1797. In a book entitled *Vermont*, he wrote: "...in summer there is such an equal serenity of weather,



at Manchester, that one has scarce power of wishing for a change; it is neither too hot nor too cold; and even in July and in August, which are here the most sultry months in the year, the kind breezes, which whisper among the trees, and pressed between the mountains, refresh the weary traveler, and rendered this place, if I may venture to use such an expression, the habitation of the Zephyrs."

From its hardscrabble beginnings as a crossroads of merchants and soldiers during the Revolutionary War, Manchester developed into a thriving New England village with its share of doctors, lawyers, business owners, teachers, and farmers. In 1852 the arrival of the railroad brought opportunities for growth and, of course, prosperity. Just a year later Franklin Orvis opened the Equinox House to cater to summer guests and the promotion of Manchester as a destination began in earnest.

Franklin commissioned etchings of the local landscape and placed advertisements in the New York, Philadelphia, and Boston papers extolling the beauty of Manchester. When photography became more widely accessible, dozens of stereoscopic views of the area found their way into mass circulation.

The "summer colony," as it was called, continued to grow. Franklin embraced the changes and welcomed the boom in visitors, continually expanding the Equinox House over the next three decades. He built

*continued next page*



an annex across the street (Equinox Jr. today) and a fishing pond for guests he called Equinox Pond, where they could try out the fishing rods made by his brother Charles.

He also constructed a log house near the peak of Mt. Equinox to shelter hikers, the Music Hall for concerts and other entertainments, a farm to supply his guests with fresh produce, and a modern plant where pure Equinox spring water was bottled for local consumption and export to big cities. His careful attention to his guests extended to overseeing the building of the first Catholic Church in Manchester, St. Paul's on Seminary Avenue, in 1896, so the Irish Catholic staff would not have to take the long trip out to East Dorset's St. Jerome's for Mass and thereby inconvenience his guests.

By the 1870s, the railroads brought annual visitors from up and down the East Coast and from cities as far away as Chicago. Regular Pullman sleeper car service brought families such as the Skinners, Ishams, Prentices, Willings, and many others from the Midwest to Manchester every summer.

The new game of golf made its debut in Manchester in 1894 with a six-hole course behind the Equinox. Two years later, the hotel built a larger course along Union Street, attracting a group of summer visitors who shortly thereafter came together to form the Ekwanok Country Club in 1899, with even grander visions of Manchester as a golf mecca.

In 1901, local businessmen, recognizing the town's unique assets, formed the Manchester Development Association to "further the development of Manchester as a summer resort," and advertise its advantages as a place to

visit and to live. This group coined the phrase "Manchester-in-the-Mountains" as the town's trademark and sent out nearly 50,000 brochures in its first four years, showcasing the attractions and amenities of the area. The membership included summer residents as well as year-round members of the community. Many of the original directors were summer residents and members of the new Ekwanok Country Club, including Robert Todd Lincoln, who had built his summer home Hildene in 1904.

In 1918, a group of over 50 businessmen met in the rooms of the Union Club and formed the Manchester Board of Trade to help with the improvement of roads, sidewalks, and regular entertainment. They soon realized that locals in the off-season would pay to participate in winter activities which became more numerous.

By 1920 the summer colony had become an economic engine for Manchester. In the late 1920s, wages paid to local help for employment by summer residents were estimated at \$750,000 annually (approximately \$11 million in 2021 dollars). In 1928, the *Manchester Journal* reported that approximately \$788,000 had been spent in the previous ten years on Village buildings and repairs (\$11.8 million in 2021 dollars), all for the benefit of summer guests.

Darker days were on the horizon, however, as the country was on the eve of the Great Depression. The summer colony was decimated by the Wall Street Crash of





1929. Louise Orvis had spent thousands of dollars designing and constructing a new golf course and clubhouse in 1927. She had also built an airstrip for plane service in 1928, both of which were in jeopardy by the mid-1930s.

To focus more on the regional and local population, the Outing Club formed in 1935 to promote winter activities, establishing ski trails off Deer Knoll overlooking Equinox Pond, building a bobsled run on Barnumville Road, and flooding the Equinox House tennis courts for ice skating. The Winter Sports Club took over in 1936 and the winter carnival with skiing, dog sled racing, bonfires and dancing was a smashing success. Manchester as a four-season resort began

to gather support, especially from Fred Pabst Jr. who was looking to bring skiing to the masses and was encouraged by the willingness of the town to invest in the concept.

Efforts to attract visitors continued after World War II. In 1941, Manchester's Chamber of Commerce had established a welcome booth at the intersection of Richville Road and Depot Street. In 1954, a larger structure was built at Adams Park to continue the promotion of Manchester-in-the-Mountains as a destination. To be more inclusive of the mountain towns, the phrase was rebranded at this time to "Manchester-and-the-Mountains."

For the next 75 years, the Manchester and the Mountains Regional Chamber of Commerce continued the local efforts to lure visitors to the area. The 1950s saw the beginning of the fall foliage phenomena and the number of visitors increased steadily during this decade. The tale of the years since then is too long for this article. But, happily, Manchester as a destination resort is now once again open for business.

Today, the Manchester Business Association, with its ManchesterVermont.com brand, is the official marketing organization "responsible for selling Manchester and Manchester Village as a premier visitor and conference destination." There are distinctive hotels, lovely inns, and charming bed-and-breakfast awaiting the post-pandemic travelers. Golf is still here and there are numerous sports, recreational and cultural activities for all ages. Franklin Orvis would approve.

## PLANNED GIFTS: CHOOSING A LEGACY

For over 120 years, the Manchester Historical Society has been the only local organization dedicated to saving the history of our community. Would you like to make sure this happens by making a planned gift?

Planned gifts allow you to impact the future of the Manchester Historical Society without affecting your current financial situation.

To honor those who make a planned gift to MHS, we have established the **1897 Legacy Society**. Our new society will be composed of those who share our love of Manchester history and our commitment to making sure our community's stories are available to future generations.

- A planned gift lets you decide what should happen to your assets when you no longer need them.
- A planned gift allows anyone to support MHS after their lifetime in a way that may not have been possible through lifetime gifts.
- A planned gift is a simple way to make certain your values continue to enrich the life of the Manchester community through the Manchester Historical Society.

The simplest way to plan a legacy gift is by including a bequest in your will. Gifts of retirement plan assets (IRAs) or

of life insurance proceeds are also good opportunities for this type of future gift.

Barbara and Mike Powers have stepped up to be our first members of the 1897 Legacy Society. "Barbara and I feel very strongly about making this commitment to help MHS continue to serve the community for many years to come," said Mike. "We are very pleased to include MHS in our estate plans and hope others will join us."

If you would like to know more about how to support MHS through a planned gift, please speak to your lawyer or financial planner, or call MHS President Frederica Templeton directly at 802.681.6662.



# SUMMER PROGRAMS 2021

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
2020-2021**

Frederica Templeton  
PRESIDENT

Kim Rizio  
VICE PRESIDENT

Lisa Wessner  
SECRETARY

Laura Heinel  
TREASURER

Shawn Harrington  
CURATOR

Bill Badger  
Courtney Callo  
Irene Cole  
Mike diMonda  
Brian Marthage  
Katy McNabb  
Michael Powers  
Eric Severance

The mission of the Manchester Historical Society is to collect, preserve, interpret and present the story of Manchester through the research collection, exhibitions, programs, and publications.

## July 15 “Dellwood Comes Alive” Is Back! / 6-7:30pm

Due to popular demand, the Dellwood Cemetery Association and the Manchester Historical Society, together with the Dorset Players, will present an evening with a select number of the resident spirits of historic Dellwood Cemetery.

Come hear the stories of ten remarkable figures from Manchester’s storied past and learn about their lives and passions. This is an outdoor event, so dress comfortably. Please enter through Dellwood’s southern entrance, next to the Hildene driveway, where you will be directed to park in the Pine Lawn section. Transportation will be provided back to your vehicle at the conclusion of the tour. **Rain date is Friday, July 16. Admission is free. Donations are appreciated.** For more information, please call MHS at 802.549.4582 or email [info@manchesterhistoricalsocietyvt.org](mailto:info@manchesterhistoricalsocietyvt.org).

### *Upcoming Virtual Programs in Collaboration with Green Mountain Academy for Lifelong Learning*

## July 13 The Railroads of Manchester / 5:30-7 pm

with Shawn Harrington and Bill Badger

Local historian G. Murray Campbell wrote in 1961: “There was a time when echoes of the whistles of three separate railroads could be heard in the daily life of Manchester.” First was the Western Vermont Railroad, later known as the Bennington & Rutland. The other two have long since become silent. The Manchester, Dorset & Granville (MD&G) ran five miles of railroad from Manchester Depot to the South Dorset quarries. The Rich Lumber Company, which felled large spruce stands up Lye Brook and around Bourne Pond and Bourne Brook from 1914 – 1919, operated a bustling logging railroad with 16 miles of standard gauge track. Material in the Manchester Historical Society archives has turned up a fourth rail operation. Although not a common carrier railroad, a Manchester lumber mill strung some wire and ran a small electric rail line on their property.

To register go to <https://greenmtnacademy.org/program-list/15/history>

## August 31 The Norcross-West Marble Company / 5:30-7pm

with Shawn Harrington and Bill Badger

The Norcross-West Marble Company was formed by Orlando W. Norcross of Worcester, MA and Spafford H. West of Dorset, VT to provide the 500,000 cubic feet of pure white marble needed for the New York Public Library being built on Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street in Manhattan. Operations began in 1901, with hundreds of thousands of dollars spent building the required infrastructure, with a state-of-the-art finishing mill at Manchester Depot and a railroad connecting to the quarrying operations in South Dorset. By 1934, the mill was gone and the rails torn up; today the swimming quarry along Route 30 remains the only visible reminder of this monumental undertaking.

To register go to <https://greenmtnacademy.org/program-list/15/history>

Thank you to our 2020-2021 CORPORATE SPONSORS for their interest in Manchester’s history and their generous support.

If you’d like to become a corporate sponsor and see your logo here, please call us at 802.549.4582



**PROPRIETORS CIRCLE**



**UNION CLUB**

