



Equinox Mountain is the tallest peak in the Taconic Mountain Range, which is part of the Appalachian Mountains. They were bulldozed to the earth's surface when Europe collided with North America half a billion years ago. Geologically, they are an enormous chunk of ancient Cambrian seabed, composed of slates, shales, and schists, stranded in the midst of surrounding mountains made of granite and marble. Their unique composition is responsible for the Battenkill River's ideal environment for brown trout.

In the Shadow of Equinox

BY SHAWN HARRINGTON, CURATOR

No feature looms larger in the Manchester landscape than Mount Equinox, the tallest peak in the Taconic Mountain range, rising to 3,848 feet above sea level. While the origin of its name is not documented, the most likely source is connected with Captain Alden Partridge's visit to Manchester in September 1823, during the autumnal equinox.

Partridge and a troop of cadets from the American Literary Scientific and Military Academy (known today as Norwich University) came to Manchester at the invitation of Vermont Governor Richard Skinner, a resident of

Manchester, to take barometric readings. The troop of 30 was joined by 20 locals who guided them on their two-hour ascent to the summit where their measurements calculated the height at 3,807 feet, within 50 feet of the actual height. On their return to Manchester Village, they were introduced to the Governor, camped in his orchard, and departed at 9 am the following day.

The mountain has been a vibrant natural resource and recreational destination for over 200 years. Stone walls from

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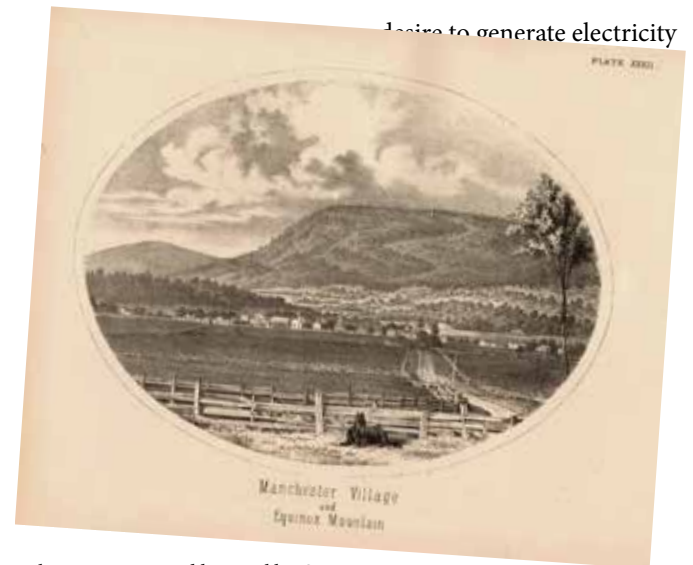
the agricultural era are still evident, crossed today on the miles of wooded trails of the Equinox Preservation Trust. The slopes have been harvested for timber needed for building and heat beginning in the years before the American Revolution. The beauty of the valley was heavily promoted by Franklin Orvis, who established the Equinox House in 1853. Orvis would create Equinox Pond in the late 1850s for guests of his summer resort and construct the “summit house” near Lookout Rock approaching the highest point of Mt. Equinox in 1875. The original road to the summit came up through the Beartown Notch along the northern ridge. In 1941 Dr. Joseph George Davidson started construction on a road from Sunderland. The 5.2-mile-long road was delayed due to World War II and completed in 1947. Today, Skyline Drive is the longest private paved toll road in the United States.

Dr. Davidson and his wife Madeline bought their first tract of land in October 1939: 1,600 acres encompassing Southeast Corners, an abandoned 19th century farming community at the intersection of the towns of Manchester, Sunderland, Arlington and Sandgate where he built a summer residence. Davidson was vice president of the Union Carbide Corporation, and then president and chairman of board of Union Carbide Chemical Company Division. Eventually, Davidson owned nearly 11 square miles (about 7,000 acres), encompassing most of Mt. Equinox’s eastern and western slopes. While he had “retired,” his ambitious undertakings on Equinox were numerous, some which came to fruition—while others did not.

The Skyline Inn, which opened in 1949, was constructed primarily of plastic materials at a cost of between \$250,000 and \$300,000. Davidson built his own hydroelectric infrastructure by creating Lake Madeline. The system he brought online in 1959 is still keeping the mountain facilities powered 60+ years later.

Other projects he considered included a cable-driven railroad between today’s Southern Vermont Arts Center and the summit, which would transport sightseers via a funicular rail system. This idea proved too costly and was scrapped. He built a lodge on the western slope while considering the development of a ski area (he ended the project after discussing the risks with Bromley founder, Fred Pabst). The lodge, however, found another purpose in 1960: it became a temporary charterhouse for a group of Carthusian monks... a relationship with the mountain that endures to this day.

The Carthusians first came to the United States in 1951 and settled on a 550-acre farm in Whitingham, Vermont. Their



Etching commissioned by Franklin Orvis, 1861 from a small stream on the farm

led to a meeting with the Davidsons in the late 1950s. Davidson became so intrigued with the Carthusians that he offered to convert the ski lodge into a temporary charterhouse, transfer a parcel of land to the order, and build them a permanent charterhouse. The monks moved to Mt. Equinox in 1960, and by 1967 construction on their \$2 million charterhouse was underway. The design called for 2,400 blocks of Barre granite in its construction, each measuring 9 ½ feet by 3 ½ feet and 18 inches thick, which would last 10,000 years. It

A Day in the Life at Skyline Inn

BY COURTNEY CALLO

took 800 trips using a custom-constructed rig by William. E. Dailey Company, to move the granite up Bentley Hill Road from a railroad siding built for the project off the Rutland Railroad line in Sunderland.

As part of the establishment of the Charterhouse of Transfiguration, in 1964 the Davidsons began transferring land to the Carthusians, starting with 4,000 acres surrounding the



Skyline Inn, mid-1950s



Carthusian Monastery, early 1980s



Courtney with her father Peter Mutz in 1967

new monastery, with the remainder of the 7,000 acres to be given over the next nine years, or upon his death. In the event that he died first, his widow could remain in their home, Windswept, located off the toll road, until her death. Davidson died in October 1969, just as the construction was nearing completion. His wife Madeline died in 1995.

The Skyline Inn eventually closed in 1992. The 20-room inn and restaurant reopened for a time as the Equinox Mountain Inn, but by 2002 had closed, and all other efforts to reopen it failed. In 2012 the new Saint Bruno Scenic Viewing Center opened on the site of the former inn.

Most kids open their bedroom door each morning to their family routines of breakfast, pets and planning the day. When I emerged from Room 6 at Skyline Inn, I was greeted by the world. A bustling establishment filled daily with all walks of life. Each day brought a different adventure and the opportunity to make new friends.

My home for the first ten years of my life was located at the highest peak of the



View from the top of Mt. Equinox, 1968

Taconic Range in southern Vermont. My parents came to Manchester in 1966 to become innkeepers and brought me to the top of Mount Equinox as a newborn. I was immediately surrounded by our guests, our employees and the countless number of people who drove up Skyline Drive every day to see the scenic view or dine at our inn.

Every summer and on weekends, I spent my days helping our chambermaid clean rooms, taking numerous treks out to Lookout Rock with our Siberian husky Schultz von Mutz, and engaging in a number of activities with our guests. They would invite me for lunch, to work on puzzles in our lounge, or to go for longer hikes on the Red or Yellow Trail on the mountain. It was the 1970s, before parents overscheduled their children with camps and playdates, and frankly, the life skills I developed on that mountain top as a child have benefitted me for life.

To get to Manchester Elementary School, my dad had to drive me down



Visitors map, 1950s

our 5.2 mile “driveway” to meet the school bus each morning. These trips were cherished. He prepared breakfast for the two of us while the inn still slept and then we headed out. What I learned years later was that he was operating most days on five hours of sleep. Peter Mutz was Skyline Inn’s chef and prepared breakfast, lunch, and dinner seven days a week. He also made the daily run to town for all of our supplies, fed our pigs and chickens next to the old monastery, ran the front desk and other inn duties when needed, and always headed up to the bar at the end of the night to entertain guests and relieve our bartender. When people recognize my intense work ethic today, I share that I had a great role model.

Discovering that I’m an only child, people are often surprised. I’m a social person and enjoy being with all sorts of people—a direct result of my upbringing. In addition to our inn being filled with guests, eight of our employees lived with us full-time. They

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were between the ages of 18 and 24 and came from many different backgrounds. We even had a few international college students who decided to spend the summer and not head home. My parents weren't much older than some of these young adults, but definitely filled a parental role for them, and they in turn filled a sibling role for me. I learned how to appreciate different personalities, perspectives, and values.

My folks have been gone for over 25 years, but I still marvel at their courage to move to the top of a 3,855 foot mountain with a new baby and launch a brand-new business. They were young pioneers who recognized the importance of not being consumed by the rat race. My childhood was certainly not conventional, and it gave me a love of family and community, the importance of being in nature, and the value of having a strong work ethic.



Today, my bedroom window looks out on Mount Equinox and I gratefully reflect on both its incredible beauty and its powerful influence on who I am.

2020 Exceptional Service Award

The Manchester Historical Society Board of Directors voted in December to honor two important contributors to MHS with its annual Exceptional Service Award for 2020. "We are very proud to honor the late Robert Fowler and his wife Ruth Stone Fowler for their outstanding service to the Manchester Historical Society and to the preservation of Manchester's history," said MHS President Frederica Templeton.

Bob Fowler was born in 1923, the youngest son of Earle and Helen (Read) Fowler. He graduated from Burr and Burton in 1943 and worked for his father's poultry farm at the crest of the hill on Highland Avenue, in the shadow of his grandfather Joseph Fowler's Victorian home with its distinctive turret. He is fondly remembered by a generation of Manchester school children as their bus driver. For twenty years he served as a rural mail carrier for the post office. In 1952 he was elected president of the newly revived Manchester Historical Society and served until 1959. Bob married Ruth Stone on August 30, 1944, in East Dorset following her graduation from Burr and Burton. Bob died in 2018 at the age of 95, with his wife of 74 years at his side.

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