

North Bennington & the Paran Creek

PAST & FUTURE:
1739-2005



North Bennington, Lake Paran & Paran Creek

INTRODUCTION



This publication is for the citizens of our community. It explains the new Lake Paran Conservation Project and discusses some planned uses for this land in the future. It also includes a brief history of North Bennington and describes some of the agencies and institutions, both public and private, past and present, that continue to define it. It illustrates some of the many manufactured products that have emanated from this little village. And it is meant to encourage citizens to build on the Lake Paran project by opening a dialogue about Paran Creek and how to make it more visible, accessible and usable.

The ancient sense of place has become manifest in The Lake Paran Conservation Project, which will preserve for future generations the undeveloped land around the lake's waters for community use. This was a unique effort, completed in December 2004, that involved local organizations, individual citizens, private donations and public funds. The result will have important and long-lasting effects for the communities of North Bennington and Shaftsbury, whose history has been shaped largely by the waters that run through them. For the reality is that Paran Creek – and the system of dams, mill ponds, and water wheels that were built at the “privileges” along the creek – is where it all began*. For many years this creek was the engine that drove the local economy. The first European settlers arrived around 1763, and called their new home Haviland Mills. The first mills ground grain to feed General Stark's army at the Battle of Bennington. Later, other mills produced clothing, furniture, shoes, stereopticons, carpenter squares, and a popular children's toy called the Kiddy Kar.

The waters remain to this day as important elements in the character of the community and the quality of life here. This creek of never-ending power gave birth to our village in the first place, and will continue to shape the character of the community long into the future.

**A “privilege” is a legal term indicating that a person has been allowed to use a public waterway for a private use, generally as a source of power for mills. People who had been granted a “privilege” on a stream could build dams and create ponds to guarantee waterpower for their mills. At one time there were as many as 13 privileges along the creek.*



The dam and mill pond (top), is probably the first location of an overshot or undershot water wheel on Paran Creek in North Bennington. It would have been built in the mid-1700s. Today, it is bordered on the right by a small village park and on the left by the North Bennington Fire Engine House.

(bottom left) The red mill on the left is the old Harmon Square Mill, now McAdoo Rugs. The yellow building on the right was originally built by P.E. Ball as a blacksmith shop. Later it was converted into the first fire engine house in North Bennington.

(bottom right) The hand wheel on the fourth mill pond dam at the Bennington County Industrial Corporation buildings is visible in the foreground. It is used to open the sluice-way gate to drain the pond for dredging and repairing.

North Bennington Time Line
266 Years of European Settlement

- 5000 B.C. to 1500 A.D.**
Native Americans camped on Walloomsack River
- 1739** 🐾 Walloomskoik Patent granted to Joseph Haviland
- 1761** 🐾 J.Haviland house built on West Street; the village was named Haviland Mills
- 1775** 🐾 First burial in North Bennington Cemetery, Lieutenant Perry
- 1776** 🐾 Village name changed from Haviland Mills to Sage's City after Moses Sage
- 1776** 🐾 Haviland Brook renamed Paran Creek
- 1777** 🐾 General Stark camps troops here, day before Battle of Bennington
- 1777** 🐾 Grist mill built at Haviland's dam

(below) Stark Paper Company. One of the original major waterpower "privileges" on Paran Creek, this mill was built circa 1852. Note: Hathaway & Co. store columns in the distance and two-person horse-drawn carriage headed down Water Street.

A SURPRISING
NUMBER OF ASSETS

Within the 2.1 square miles of the Village of North Bennington we have:

A firehouse, four churches, a library, a post office, a railroad station, a college, three nursing homes, 11 stores, a mansion, four schools, three large industrial complexes, two cemeteries, and a bank, not to mention:

An arts exchange, a homeless shelter, a Head Start center, 275 acres of preserved land and hiking trails, two senior-citizen housing units, an art park, two playgrounds, two ball fields, swimming, boating and fishing access on a 35-acre lake, numerous businesses, three architect's offices, a water-treatment system and a symphony orchestra.

{ A Brief History of Near Misses }

North Bennington has always been defined by its waterway. In the 1760s the place was called Haviland Mills and its stream, Haviland Brook. After the first villagers discovered that initial settler Joseph Haviland was a Tory, the name was changed to honor Haviland's son-in-law, Moses Sage. The village became Sage's City, and the stream, Paran Creek.

Paran's waterpower was harnessed by Zebulon and Abigail Allen to run their gristmill in 1783, when Vermont was an independent republic. By 1811, when Vermont marked 20 years as a state, a cotton factory became the first of many industrial enterprises near the confluence of Paran Creek and the Walloomsac River. Early products made or prepared along Paran Creek include flax, paper, textiles, lime, marble, iron ore, lenses, furniture, and carpenter squares. At one time in the early 19th century there were up to 13 "privileges" claimed along the Creek.

When the railroad arrived in the village in the early 1850s, fill used to lay tracks north of the village also served to dam Paran Creek. Its waters spread over a low meadow to create Lake Paran. This new topographical feature sadly awakened the village on February 11, 1852 when the dam burst and rushing floodwaters destroyed all the existing factories and several residences along the creek. A 14-month-old boy perished.

After electricity and steam replaced waterpower, several new prominent businesses developed along the banks of Paran Creek. In the early 20th century these included the Stark Paper Company; Cushman Furniture (which exhibited its "Cushman Colonial" designs in the

family's elegant stone house across the road from the factory); and the H. C. White Company. White made the famous "Kiddy Kar," a children's toy, as well as stereopticons and their 3-D-like photographs showing exotic places world wide.

North Bennington's distinctive character has developed in part by near misses, a series of happy—or even unhappy—chances rather than by grand design.

■ A fire in 1884 destroyed the three-story North Bennington Boot & Shoe factory (located on the site of the J. G. McCullough Free Library) but the row of brick houses built for its workers along Greenwich Street fortunately survives as a living architectural anachronism.

■ The creation of Bennington College itself once hung by a thread. Mrs. McCullough, to get a yes vote, polled her board counterclockwise rather than the other way because she knew the positive votes started on her right. And if the Great Depression had not sapped the Colgate family's fortune, Bennington College would be located in Old Bennington rather than on the one-time estate of the Jennings family on North Bennington's Bingham Hill.

■ Hall Park McCullough, whose family gave so many benefactions to the greater Bennington community, actually favored demolishing his family mansion, thinking no one would be able to afford future maintenance. Luckily, his surviving family and village residents held to their vision of an historic house-museum and formed the Park-McCullough House Association, preserving the great building for community use.

■ Haviland's Privilege, a cluster of quality condominiums framed by Paran Creek, arose from the ruins of the Stark Paper Company. This revival might readily have gone awry but for the inspiration and capital of a few villagers.

■ In the late 1960s, the Vermont Highway Department proposed to construct a new highway through the village for the convenience of travelers to New York. It would have demolished the post office and the Old Railway Depot. The scheme was probably responsible for a decision by the Scott and McCullough families to restore the 1880 depot (then in a state of decrepitude) as an architectural showpiece and for village offices. The train depot's renovation marked a turning point in community attitude and development.

The Governors



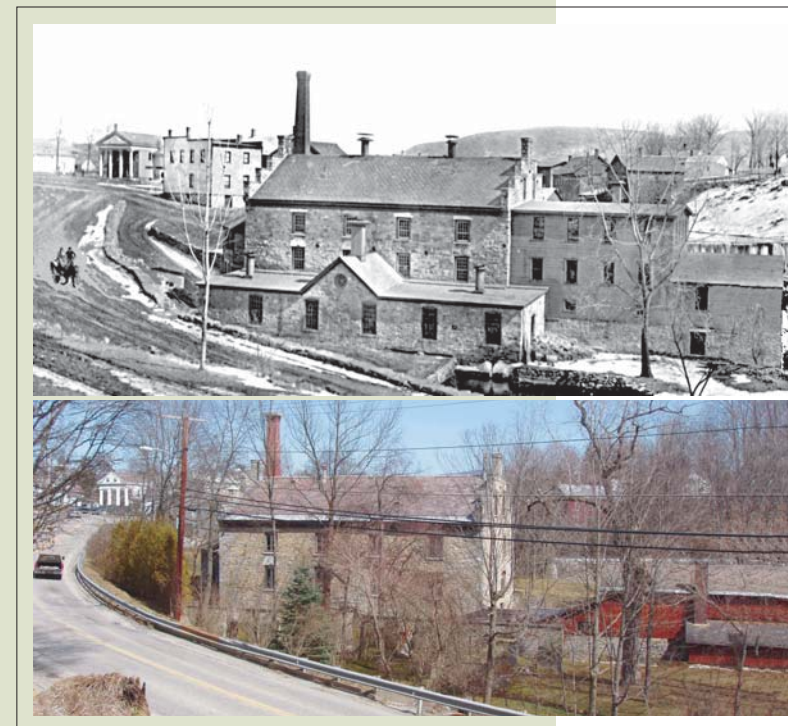
Hiland Hall



John G. McCullough

When North Bennington had a high school of its own, the sports teams were called "The Governors" because the village was so proud to have had two of them. The first was Hiland Hall, who served two one-year terms from 1858 through 1860 after having served five terms in Congress. He's probably best-known as the author of "The Early History of Vermont," in which he argues that New Yorkers claiming property rights in Vermont were wrong about everything. He was also a driving force behind the building of the Bennington Battle Monument.

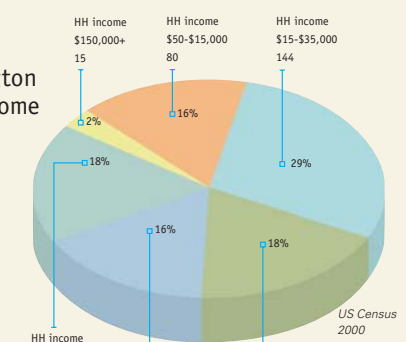
The second governor was John G. McCullough, a native of Delaware whose primary home was in Manhattan. He was elected by the legislature in 1902 after failing to win a majority vote in the general election. (His opponent was trying to end Prohibition in Vermont.) Although his business interests in banks, railroad and steel were based in New York, McCullough was active in Vermont politics because of his summer home, the Park McCullough House in North Bennington.



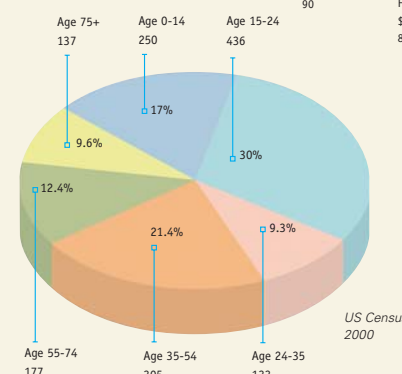
- 1783** 🐾 Zebulon and Abigail Allen Grist Mill built
- 1811** 🐾 E. Z. Waist cotton weaving mill built on present site of Vermont Arts Exchange
- 1812** 🐾 Marble saw mill makes sidewalks by William Cardell at privilege below Haviland's.
- 1812** 🐾 Cordell's mill becomes E. Z. Waist
- 1812** 🐾 Paper mill built by J. Hindsdill, at the southernmost privilege on Paran Creek
- 1828** 🐾 North Bennington Post Office established; village now named North Bennington
- 1833** 🐾 E.M. Welling built large stone mill. Used as saw, grist, and starch mill for over 10 years

(above) Haviland's Privilege Condominiums, 2005. Reconditioned from the old Stark Mill in 1978, Tim Smith, Architect. Note: Powers Market columns and pick-up truck headed up Water Street, Rt. 67A. The Stark factory experienced a serious fire in 1883.

North Bennington Household Income



North Bennington Total Population (1493)



Time Line continued...

- 1833 E.M. Welling built a mill store (now Powers Market, oldest active store in Vermont)
- 1834 First Fire House Company (Vermont's oldest)
- 1836 Old Stone Church built at Hinsdillville by Deacon Hinsdill the Presbyterian
- 1845 Baptist Church built on corner of Park and West Streets
- 1850 First RR trestle built with dam on Lake Paran
- 1852 Paran dam breaks, destroys dams, bridges, shops, houses and 13 mills
- 1852 First train from Rutland arrives in North Bennington
- 1852 First train runs from North Bennington to Troy, ticket \$1.00
- 1853 Newspaper, "The Battleground," begins publication (1853-1855)
- 1856 Carpenter square mill built at first dam, (near present fire house)
- 1856 Paran Creek House built, across from Bank (now gas station)
- 1860 Masonic Order instituted



Jumping from the Paran Recreation dock (above). The boat landing and fishing access can be seen on other side of the lake.

PARAN RECREATION AREA & THE VILLAGE

Lake Paran is one of few lakes in Bennington County. A water body of 35 acres, it is located in three municipalities: the Village of North Bennington, and the Towns of Bennington and Shaftsbury. Paran Creek rises in South Shaftsbury, flows through Lake Paran, and then follows Route 67A to its confluence with the Walloomsac River. (See center fold.)

Since 1850, the railroad has defined the lake's southerly shoreline. For generations, the Stark Paper Company owned the land south of the railroad tracks and along the westerly slopes of the lake. Controlled by the Welling family, the company operated out of its stone mill at Haviland's Privilege in the center of the village. In 1959, Fred Welling (destined to chair the village's board of trustees for more than half a century) let it quietly be known that six acres of land along the Lake Paran shoreline were available for a swimming area for \$8,000. A group of citizens met at the firehouse. The Hon. James S. Holden, Chief Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court and a resident of Mechanic Street, stated that this was a very generous offer and the village should seize the opportunity. After much discussion, Martin Percey proposed that the group go to the local bank to procure a loan. A committee was formed consisting of John McCullough (whose family happened to own the bank), Herb Leonard from Shaftsbury (a former head of the American Machine and Foundry business) and Larry Powers

(a persuasive and well-connected local businessman). This group duly met with Ralph Jones, the bank's cashier. When informed of the group's mission, Mr. Jones said he thought a loan might be arranged if the proper signatures were obtained. John McCullough spoke first. He said he had discussed this opportunity with his father, who agreed to donate \$1,000 and suggested that John and his sister each pledge the same amount. Mr. Leonard said he would like to contribute \$500, and cashier Jones responded by saying he too would like to donate \$500 dollars as well as approve the loan.

A thermometer was placed on the island in front of the bank, and within three weeks \$10,000 was raised. The Elwood Allen Association was hired to design the new facility. Wm. E. Dailey Co. supplied heavy equipment and labor to build the parking lot and grade the site. Sale of memberships for the 1960 summer season began as soon as the snow left the ground, and a hundred were sold on opening day. Jane and Lucien Hanks set up a fund to underwrite the costs for any family that could not afford the \$12 membership fee. "Bud" Leamy, a high school teacher in North Bennington, was chosen as the first director.

With all signs pointing toward a successful start, the organizers purchased \$500 worth of fireworks to celebrate the Grand Opening. The fireworks soared into that clear night sky heralding the arrival of public access to the shores of Lake Paran.

CURRENT OFFICERS OF PARAN RECREATIONS, INC.
President: Bill Budde
Vice President: Jeannie Jenkins
Secretary: Susan Larkin

{ Lake Paran - South Shore }

In the late 1970s, the old railroad dam started to leak. Recalling the devastating break of 1852, crews went to work. Initially they were unable to drain the lake to avert the danger of a catastrophic blowout.

The lake was eventually drained for several years while the dam was rebuilt with state and federal funding. A fishing access point and parking area were constructed on the lake's south side and a new spillway was installed next to the boat launch. This facility is now widely used by fishermen and boaters during the summer, and also provides access for ice fishing and ice skating in the winter. To the south of the boat access the Village of North Bennington maintains two large ball fields. The area is often quite lively on summer evenings when Little League games are in progress.

THE NEW PARAN CONSERVATION PROJECT

While the lake was partially devoted to public recreation, until the conservation project of 2004 most shoreline was in private hands. The shore and uplands from the swimming area to the inlet of Paran Creek has magnificent views of the lake and mountains beyond. Development of this area immediately north of the lake would have forever impaired the open and natural setting of Lake Paran.

A proposal in 2002 to construct houses on a portion of the uplands sparked strong community interest in preserving the rural character of Lake Paran. At the same time, the current owner of the old farm on



Inlet of Lake Paran where Paran Creek feeds the lake from South Shaftsbury. The birch trees are on the slope along the northern shoreline which is now preserved for the public by the Lake Paran Conservation Project.

the north shore, Ted McCarthy, was considering how to preserve his family's farmstead. Meanwhile, another shore owner, Sage City Syndicate, Inc., was considering how it might develop its holding. When David Mance purchased the property slated for development in 2003, the stage was set for a coordinated effort to preserve the shoreline and to open these lands to community use.

Through the leadership of the Vermont Land Trust, the shoreline and lower slope of the lands owned by the Sage City Syndicate, Mr. McCarthy and Mr. Mance were deeded to The Fund for North Bennington, Inc. The Vermont Land Trust retained a perpetual easement to conserve the land from development. The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board underwrote the costs of the project (\$248,787), and Sage City Syndicate donated its land. The protected property consists of approximately 56 acres, including 2,976 feet of shoreline along Lake Paran and Paran Creek. A map of the protected property and more information about the project can be found at www.northbennington.org.

Time Line continues...



North Bennington Boot & Shoe Co. (left), built 1867, burned down in 1884. Employed 135 “men.” Note horse leavings on Main Street and original M. C. Huling residence on the right. In the rear of this building H.T. Cushman set up his first business, manufacturing novelty items including pencil erasers.



John G. McCullough Free Library (left), built in 1921 on the site of the Boot & Shoe Co., capacity 9000 volumes. Plans are in the works today for a library expansion. Note present-day Creedy house (originally M. C. Huling) on right.



Hoosick Falls Street Railway (top), going through Lincoln Square in about 1885. Note: Hathaway & Co. store on right which became Powers Market.



(above) Automobiles going through Lincoln Square in 2005. Note: Powers Market with 2nd floor expansion between columns. Plans are being developed to reclaim the square (note the large water main man-hole) as a village focal point. (See Current Village Improvement Projects.)



(above) North Bennington firemen around 1987, in front of the new (1960) building, located across the street from the original McCollough Fire House. (right) North Bennington firemen of 1903. The early fire-house overlooked the second mill pond located at Haviland’s Privilege.



(left) The North Bennington High School was built in 1871 (photo circa 1904) of brick with marble trim; cost \$12,000. In 1879 the high school graduated four students. After many renovations and additions the school is now a modern facility. The most recent renovation was completed in 1999. The school currently has about 130 students from kindergarten through sixth grade.



- 1867 ☞ Boot & Shoe Co. built (at present site of McCullough Library)
- 1867 ☞ Brick Row, nine tenant houses, Greenwich Street for workers of Boot & Shoe Co.
- 1868 ☞ Hiland Hall book published, “The History of Vermont,” admission to the Union 1791
- 1869 ☞ Trenor Park built RR line to Chatham connecting to Vanderbilt’s Harlem line
- 1869 ☞ One-ring circus created by George Boss, “The Old G. Boss Circus”
- 1870 ☞ First jail (at grist mill), size 5 ft. x 8 ft.
- 1871 ☞ North Bennington Public School built
- 1873 ☞ North Bennington Congregational Church built, Bank and School Streets



- 1873 ☞ H. S. Walbridge Co., stereoscope equipment (at present McAdoo’s)
- 1873 ☞ H. C. White starts business (present site of BCIC building)
- 1875 ☞ Second and last stone jail built (School Street) 3 cells
- 1876 ☞ Stone arch bridge built by Levi Gould (at present McAdoo’s)
- 1878 ☞ J. G. McCullough Fire House built (west side of Paran Creek)

Stereopticon for viewing 3-D slides, H. C. White Co. The four Hall brothers in union suits, E. Z. Waist Co.



OUR TOWN

{ North Bennington Graded School } the core of the community

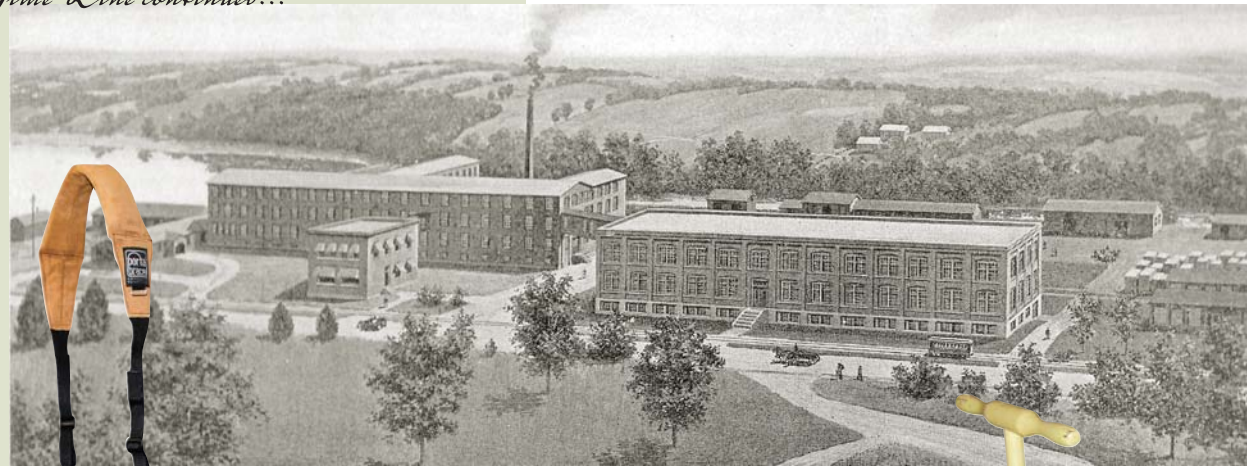
In 1870, North Benningtonians joined together to plan, finance and construct a school large enough to accommodate all the village’s children under one roof. A wealthy and generous citizen, Trenor Park, donated the land and arranged to dig the cellar hole and build the foundation (the original location of North Bennington’s three-cell stone jail was somewhere near this site). C.E. Lincoln arranged to grade the grounds and plant trees and Hiland Hall donated the surrounding fence. The local taxpayers then erected a well-designed and sturdily constructed two-story, four-room school. Total cost to taxpayers: \$12,000.

In 1878 the Town of Shaftsbury voted to send its high school students to the new school. At the first high-school graduation, in 1879, four scholars were awarded diplomas. The system continued to the great satisfaction of the community for the next 87 years.

By the close of the century, increasing student population necessitated changes to the building. A two-classroom building was finished in 1898, joined to the original building on the southeast, and a steam-heating system was installed for the entire building. Student population continued to grow. High school students from Arlington rode down and back on the daily steam train. Arlington students who lived far from the rail station boarded overnight in village homes within walking distance to the school. Then, as now, Shaftsbury students made up about 40 percent of the school’s elementary students.

By the late 1920s, the building had become too small for the student population. Demand had also grown for new programs such as physical education, art, choral and instrumental music, theater, inter-school basketball, school assemblies, study hall and more. In spite of the growing national anxiety about the economy, the village voted to construct a large addition to the school. Four classrooms were joined to the north side of the original building along with a gymnasium/auditorium, doubling the school’s size .

Student population and curriculum demands continued to grow. Kindergarten was added but held in a nearby house, as were home economics and several other classes. Agriculture and shop training were taught in a former blacksmith’s shop located behind Powers Market that was purchased by the school in



Video Camera
Shoulder Case,
Porta Brace Inc.

- 1878 ☞ North Bennington school district annexes Shaftsbury school district
- 1880 ☞ North Bennington passenger train depot built



The North Bennington Train Depot,
houses village offices.

- 1884 ☞ Boot & Shoe factory burns to the ground
- 1886 ☞ Drug store, grocery store and many other businesses burn east side of Main Street
- 1887 ☞ First electric lights on Bennington streets
- 1889 ☞ Fire destroys general store, post office and a tenement (at present Pangaea's)
- 1890 ☞ Clayton Simmons builds factory to manufacture steam boilers (now Redeemed Repair)
- 1892 ☞ North Bennington driving club formed for trotter horses
- 1896 ☞ The "Echo" newspaper published, later called the "North Bennington Times"
- 1898 ☞ Unity Collar & Cuff Co. built on Depot Street; burns four years later

(above) Line etching of the mill of H. C. White Company, incorporated in 1893, the largest manufacturer in the country of stereoscopes and stereopographs for home entertainment and education. White also made the well-known Kittie Kar. This building now houses the Bennington County Industrial Corp. It is also the home of Drill Masters, Bennington Candle, and Porta Brace, the world-reknown case maker for professional video equipment.



Kiddy Kar,
H. C. White Co.



Scented Candles,
Bennington Candle



This mill (top) was once the Paran Creek Manufacturing Company, a textile factory; it was later owned by A.S. Payne, Keogh Bros., and the Stark Paper Company. The E.Z. Waist Co. also manufactured knit waists for children here and employed 200 hands. All of the buildings burned to the ground in 1913. The present studios and head-quarters of the Vermont Arts Exchange (above), built on the site of the old paper mill. The building was rehabbed in 1992.



Croquet season at
the Park-McCullough
House

1936. Football and baseball games were played on a field near Lake Paran owned by the Welling family.

In 1966, North Bennington and Shaftsbury joined with Bennington, Pownal and Woodford to form the Mount Anthony Union School District. The final class to graduate from the North Bennington building included 46 seniors. For the last 40 years the village school has enrolled only elementary students.

In 1997 a new set of improvements was bonded. An elevator was installed so handicapped students could reach all three floors. New, safer stairways and a new entrance were built. The gym ceiling was sound-proofed so the excited shouts of game players would no longer distract students using the library. Office space was enlarged and the roof strengthened and waterproofed. Extra space was made for study and storage. As Principal Ernie LaFontaine observed at the time: "The school building should be fit and available to provide education for another hundred years."

CURRENT GRADED SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Principal: Joy Kitchell
School nurse: Kathy Williams
School Counselor: Tom Hudak
School Secretary: Faye Hardy

{ Bennington College } the big sister to the village

In the beginning there was little thought given to creating a college that would be an innovator in progressive education, and no thought at all about locating it in North Bennington. The Rev. Vincent Ravi Booth, the driving force behind the school, mainly wanted to fill the vacant seats in the Old First Church, which emptied in winter when Old Bennington's summer residents returned to their homes in Troy, Albany, New York, Cleveland and Chicago.

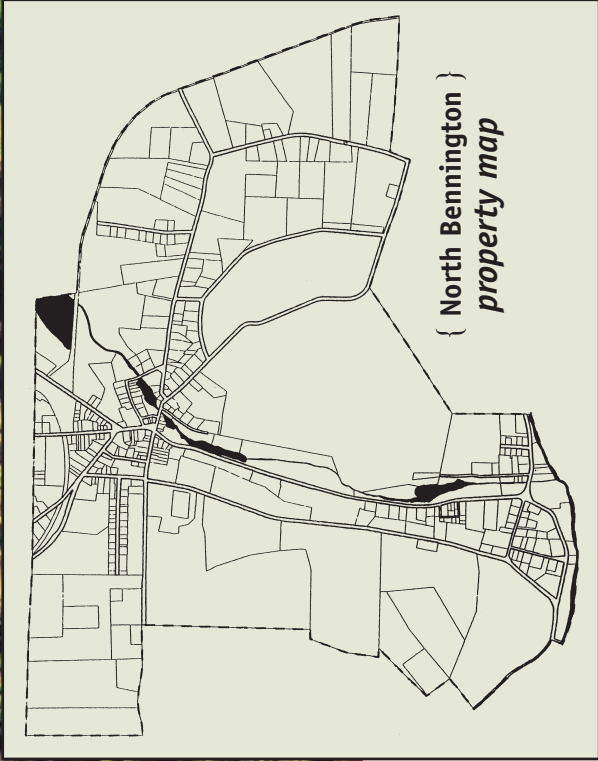
Rev. Booth envisioned a women's college in Old Bennington, on land offered by the Colgate family. The proposed campus would have stretched from the intersection of Elm Street and Monument Avenue west to Mt. Anthony. After a decade of planning, the driving force was no longer Rev. Booth but Edith McCullough and her husband, Hall Park McCullough. Unfortunately, the Colgates decided to withdraw their land offer after the stock market crash of 1929, but Mrs. Frederick Jennings, who was Hall Park McCullough's aunt, came to the rescue, offering 140 acres of her North Bennington estate in its place. CONTINUED

☞ NORTH BENNINGTON & THE PARAN CREEK ☞



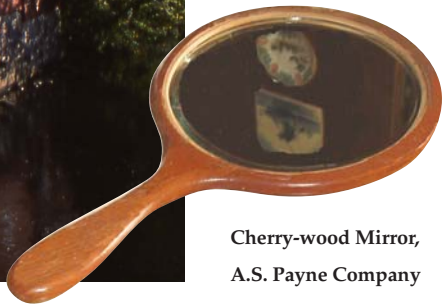
{ MAP KEY }

1. Eagle Square Manufacturing Co., presently Bernstein Display Co.
2. Paran Creek feeds Lake Paran
3. Paran Conservation Project, 56 acres
4. Railroad trestle dam and spillway at Lake Paran
5. 1st dam and mill pond at Fire House
6. 2nd dam and mill pond at Haviland's Privilege
7. 3rd dam and mill pond at National Hanger Co.
8. 4th dam and mill pond at Bennington County Industrial Corporation (BCTC)
9. Paran Creek outlet, enters Walloomsack River
10. Iron red earth on Ore Bed Road
11. Henry covered bridge over Walloomsack River.





This red mill (left) was first built by Bronson Harmon to manufacture carpenter squares. It has seen many uses: as a wagon blacksmith shop, a lens factory, a stereopticon factory, a brush factory, and a wood-working plant. It has also housed the archives of student work for the innovative Prospect School; today it houses the McAdoo Rugs Company, a manufacturer of hand-hooked rugs.

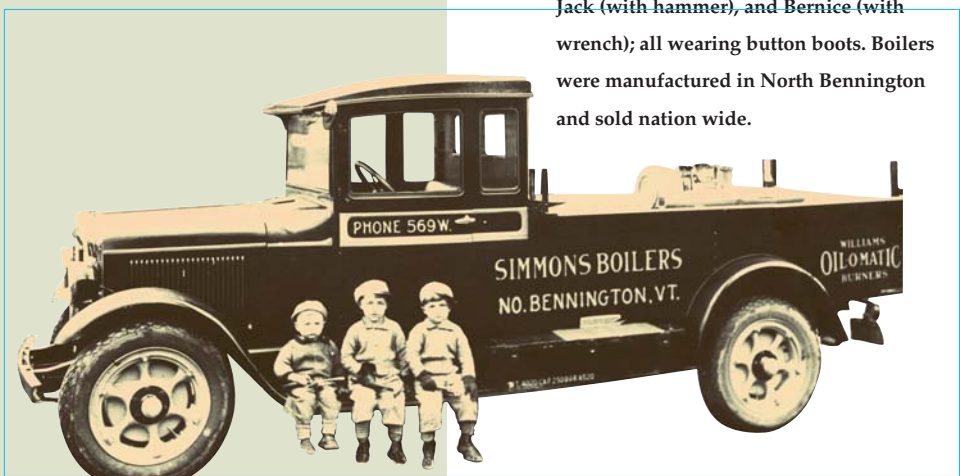


Cherry-wood Mirror,
A.S. Payne Company



Hooked rug, Dominique Roosters,
McAdoo Rugs

Simmons Boilers and Heaters advertised using the Simmons children as models. Pictured are Frederick (with screw driver), Jack (with hammer), and Bernice (with wrench); all wearing button boots. Boilers were manufactured in North Bennington and sold nation wide.



Button boot,
North Bennington
Boot & Shoe Co.



Coat hanger,
National Hanger Co.



Drill Masters, Inc.
specializes in the
manufacture of
deep hole drills.



This picture was taken at the H. T. Cushman furniture mill located at the third dam on Paran Creek. This man, Dennis, is working on a specialized stroke sander used to sand irregular curves on chair parts. Starting in 1867 Cushman manufactured corks, pencil erasers, ink eradicator, wooden roller skates, coat hangers and other things, and finally a full line of birch furniture. The company went out of business in 1980. Photo by Reuben Greene circa 1940.



Dining Chair,
H. T. Cushman Co.

Some recent North Bennington manufacturers



Architectural Fabric
Amphitheater (top),
Chemfab/Saint-Gobain



(above) Micro-electromechanical
systems (MEMS), Bennington
Microtechnology Center

Fiber Optic Wire (left),
Northern Lights Cable

The College opened in September 1932 in the Jennings' red barn, formerly home to cows, chickens, sheep, and pigs. Students lived in white clapboard buildings around a common, designed to look like a New England village. Frank Lloyd Wright, an early visitor, expressed shock that a new and innovative college would be built in such a traditional way.

That was the only aspect of the school that could be considered traditional. From the start, Bennington College was a focus of controversy, in part because it had no set curriculum for students and no academic rank for faculty. Bennington was founded on the belief that the education most worth having is the one that you create for yourself. With the help of teacher-mentors, students shaped their own courses of study.

It was one of the very first liberal arts colleges to make the visual and performing arts an integral part of the curriculum. A great emphasis was placed on having teachers who were both noted and active in their fields. Over the years, students have studied dance with Martha Graham, literature with Bernard Malamud, Edward Hoagland and John Gardner, and poetry with Howard Nemerov and Stephen Sandy. Graduates include Alan Arkin, actor; Kathleen Norris and Bret Easton Ellis, authors; Sally Mann, photographer; and Elizabeth Swados, composer.

The statement that has been read at every college commencement since the first, says, in part, "Bennington regards education as a sensual and ethical, no less than an intellectual, process. It seeks to liberate and nurture the individuality, the creative intelligence, and the ethical and aesthetic sensibility of its students, to the end that their richly varied natural endowments will be directed toward self-fulfillment and toward constructive social purposes..."

BENNINGTON COLLEGE
Present total enrollment: 820
671 undergraduates
Tuition: undergraduate \$38,780
148 graduates
Student/teacher ratio: 9:1
448 female, 223 male

The college encompasses about 18% of the village land area

{ Fire Department } *our trusted protectors*

The North Bennington Fire Department, now 160 years old, is the oldest continuously operating fire department in Vermont. The thriving village needed fire protection from its early days. In 1834, Asa Dota,

Time Line continued...

- 1930 🌀 North Bennington Graded School doubles size, new gym & classrooms
- 1932 🌀 Bennington College opens on Jennings land
- 1948 🌀 Shirley Jackson writes “The Lottery,” one of the most memorable stories of the 20th century
- 1959 🌀 Local residents form a group to buy a portion of the Lake Paran shoreline from Stark Paper Co. for Paran Recreation.
- 1960 🌀 Lake Paran Recreation established



Hotel White (top) was located on the corner of Bank and Main Streets. This prominent hotel was initially the Paran Creek House. It was also the first apartment of Babe and Larry Powers, newly wed in 1945.

(above) Today’s Paulin’s Exxon gas station and Laundromat (Sage City Syndicate, owners), on the site of the old hotel. Note Rice residence to the left, formally S.C. Lewis residence, also visible in the older photograph. A major intersection improvement project at this corner began this year and will include improvements to the gas station.

- 1960 🌀 Hotel White demolished at Bank Street and replaced with gas station
- 1965 🌀 Present firehouse built
- 1972 🌀 State Highway proposes a highway that would go through North Bennington Post Office and Train Depot
- 1975 🌀 Stark Paper Mill converted into a residential complex (Havilands Privilege)
- 1975 🌀 Walbridge Red Mill refurbished for Prospect Educational Center
- 1977 🌀 Paran Acres built by Wm E Dailey Inc
- 1979 🌀 Replacement of Lake Paran dam, spillway, and RR trestle



Paran Recreation swimming dock (above). Photo was taken by Tyler Resch, in 1974. The recreation area was established in 1959 and has served the community ever since. In 2004 the Lake Paran Conservation Project conserved the remainder of the shore around the lake making it entirely accessible to the public.

Management Plan of Paran Conservation Project

The conservation easements set strict limits on use of the 56-acre protected property. The land will be managed principally for conservation and non-motorized recreation. A management plan will be developed to address location of trails, public access, vegetation management and other issues. It is anticipated that the management will call for long-term restoration of natural vegetative communities, at least in most of the uplands outside existing meadows. Public input is welcome. The Fund for North Bennington plans to convene public meetings in both Shaftsbury and North Bennington to solicit ideas about use and management of the property.

For more information visit:
www.northbennington.org,

George Briggs, Nathan Bowen, William J. Watson, William Robinson, Norman Blackmer, Sidney Colvin and others applied to the Vermont Legislature for authority to form and finance a fire department. The legislature approved the request, and appropriated an initial \$1000 for the purchase of equipment.

At the inn of a Mr. Ford, in January 1835, a group met to organize. Fire wardens were elected, and each was given a distinguishing badge. By law, the wardens were empowered to demand assistance from the selectmen of Bennington and inhabitants of the village in extinguishing and preventing fires. They were authorized to remove goods from buildings or tear them down if necessary. Any person who refused to obey the wardens’ orders was subject to a fine. Up to 15 members of the fire company (the number required to keep the “engine in good repair”) were exempt from military duty under the laws of Vermont.

All too soon its volunteers were fighting numerous fires. In his book on North Bennington, Herbert Walbridge states that between 1852 and 1909 “...almost every manufacturing plant was destroyed or partially so by fire.” At first firefighters used the classic “bucket brigade,” replaced later by simple pumping engines which drew water from ponds and streams.

The department’s most disastrous fire occurred in October 1885. A spark thrown from a locomotive started a fire on the Burgess Railroad Bridge, over the Walloomsac River near the New York border. By the time the first village firefighters arrived, the 200-foot long bridge was enveloped in flame. The horses pulling the fire company’s “Black Maria” engine tired, forcing the firemen to finish hauling the engine to the scene. Dense smoke blinded them, and a strong west wind threw water back into their faces. They decided to cross under the bridge to the river’s west side. Just as the engine and its haulers passed beneath, burning timbers cascaded down on them. Three firemen died at the scene, a fourth died soon after. According to a contemporary account in The Bennington Reformer, the engine and a cart were destroyed, and the bridge was a total loss.

Over the years, before and since the Burgess Bridge blaze, the department has saved buildings and lives in the village and its environs. It has also functioned as a quasi-fraternal organization for villagers. Firemen maintained splendid uniforms, attended conventions together, and received awards for their appearance and efficiency. Traditions of service continued through

generations. Martin W. Percey, Sr. was chief in the 1920s, and his son, Martin, Jr., later served as chief for many years. From the 1920s to the 1980s, Louise Percey Dalton—Martin, Jr.’s mother—served as fire dispatcher from her perch in Percey’s newsroom. She activated sirens located in the firehouse and at Cushman’s mill. After sounding the alert, she would stand on the newsroom’s porch and direct firemen to the blaze. A ladies auxiliary was formed in 1964, aiding the department by raising money, painting and decorating, laying tile floors and furnishing equipment.

By the 1960s, the size of new trucks exceeded the capacity of the historic firehouse on the south side of Prospect Street. With generous gifts from the McCullough and Scott families and the support of village taxpayers, a new firehouse was erected on the site of an old gristmill across from the old firehouse. Designed by noted Boston architect Benjamin Thompson, it was dedicated in 1965 at a final cost of \$55,000. Today the North Bennington Fire Department continues its great tradition of service with a roster of 35 volunteer members.

- CURRENT OFFICERS OF
THE NORTH BENNINGTON FIRE DEPARTMENT
- Fire Chief: Ed Myers
 - President: Ken Goings
 - 1st Assistant Chief: Rusty Brooks
 - Treasurer: Edwin Luce
 - 2nd Assistant Chief: Glen Ferguson
 - Secretary: Glen Ferguson
 - Past Chief, 19 years: Marty Purcell
 - Past Chief, 9 years: Gordy Sweet

{ Current Village Improvement Projects }

The village trustees recently procured an Agency of Transportation improvement grant to improve the intersection of Bank and Main Streets. A new green space, safer cross walks and reconfiguration of the intersection to reduce traffic speed are planned. The state’s contribution of \$120,893 is being matched by commitments of land by the Sage City Syndicate and labor by the Village Highway Department. The total project is \$151,893. Construction is planned for 2006.

The trustees are also planning changes for Lincoln Square across from the John G. McCullough Free Library in order to refurbish that center and to establish a pleasing focal point for the village. The project would improve traffic flow and add green space, with benches and perhaps sculptures and a fountain.

There is talk of a project to reclaim the Paran Creek waterway as a community treasure. ❧



(left) The modern entrance to the North Bennington Graded School was added in the 1997-1999 renovation along with long needed upgrading of the structure including a safer stairway, an elevator for the handicapped, and additional instructional, office and storage space.



This building (above) and 140 acres located in North Bennington were given to Bennington College by Mrs. Frederick Jennings. Her gift made possible a new college with a beautiful campus. The land was donated in 1932 when the college was opened. The mansion was added some years later. It now houses the college music department.



More people frequent this building than any other in the entire village of North Bennington. The United States Post Office was built in 1957 by William E. Dailey Sr.

Present Postmaster:
Jacoline Sprague; clerks,
Bruce Niles, Anita Perry

{ BCIC: searching for jobs }

The Bennington County Industrial Corporation (BCIC) offices and Incubator facility are located in the old H. C. White mill at the fourth mill pond and dam on Paran Creek. BCIC was established in 1958 as a quasi-public agency by a group of local business people. The goal of the Corporation is to promote quality jobs by assisting businesses to locate, expand, and prosper in the area. An industrial incubator for new and expanding businesses is run at the Paran Creek factory building.

BCIC has been a steadfast proponent of high quality jobs and clean development by providing a helpful hand in business planning, training, financing, permitting, exporting, and marketing. It also helps to find locations for new and expanding businesses. Recent accomplishments include: the Stanley Tools building taken over by Bernstein Display, the Bennington Microtechnology Center in North Bennington, and the redevelopment of Green Mountain Park in Pownal.

The Corporation has two centers: the Incubator building in North Bennington and the Industrial Park on Shields Drive in Bennington. Both contribute to the support of the organization through rents and real estate sales. The State of Vermont provides a modest 8% of the operating budget. Private donations also help. Today there are about 120 jobs alone in the North Bennington Incubator. The BCIC has been responsible for creating hundreds of local jobs over the years.

CURRENT OFFICERS OF BCIC
President: Dan Maneely
Executive Director: Peter Odierna
Office Manager: Sandy McDonough
Maintenance Manager: Bill Dare
Custodian: Margo Wilson

{ The Vermont Arts Exchange }

The old mill on the creek at the end of Sage Street behind Powers Market has been the factory home of a good number of industries, starting as a cotton factory in 1811, A.S. Payne, Keogh Bros. and The Paran Creek Manufacturing Company. In 1992 the Vermont Arts Exchange transformed the factory into a community asset by adding an energetic commitment to the arts as an essential part of the commercial, social, and intergenerational components of the community.

The Arts Exchange has introduced an amazing number of programs that benefit countless people of diverse populations from the infant to the octogenarian, from the poorest to the wealthiest, and

from novice to practicing artist. The Arts Exchange has also been responsible for the purchase of five historic buildings and two firehouses with 15 low-coast living units for low-income families and studio space for artists.

The influence on our small village and on the greater Vermont and Massachusetts area has been significant. The definition of the arts has been expanded to all kinds of creative endeavors, including singing by firemen, dancing by elders, painting by the troubled, and team sculpturing by young children and their dads.

CURRENT OFFICERS OF
THE VERMONT ARTS EXCHANGE
Executive Director: Patricia Pedreira
Artistic Director: Mathew Perry
Administrative assistant: Polly Macpherson
Office Manager: Bill Nave

{ Paran Acres—Lake Paran Neighbors }

The Paran Acres development is situated just north of the Conservation Project on lands actually located in Shaftsbury. It was created by a subsidiary of William E. Dailey, Inc. of Shaftsbury. Robert G. Maskiell, a professional engineer, developed the final cluster subdivision design in 1977. (A plaque has been erected in memory of General Maskiell, who died while on active military duty in April 2000). There are now 75 homes, accommodating between 250 and 300 residents, located on 38 acres. The balance of the 600-acre parcel is maintained as a common "green" area.

The development is administered by the Paran Acres Homeowner's Association, which in turn is managed by a board of directors elected by the owners. The association addresses problems such as noise levels, barrel burning, leash laws, and speeding traffic. It also initiates projects to beautify the neighborhood. Paran Acres is a close-knit community with a variety of social gatherings, tag sales, and Christmas carolers. Located in North Bennington School District #1, its residents send their children to school (K through 6) in the village.

CURRENT DIRECTORS OF PARAN ACRES
President: James Jackson
Vice Presidents: Ken Desch, Mark Upright
Secretaries: Tara Hogan, Patti Kelly,
Dawn Bushey

- 1997 Construction of new addition to the North Bennington Graded School
- 2002 Krone building built on west side of Route 67A
- 2004 Bank and Main Street intersection, major renovation funded



The Bank and Main Street, Agency of Transportation Improvement Project. This conceptual sketch shows a plan for redoing the intersection to provide a safe cross walk, new sidewalks, and green space with grass and trees. Work should begin in 2005.

- 2004 Lake Paran Conservation Project established
- 2005 Whitman's Feed Store, major rehabilitation and expansion



Looking north from
the swimming area

PARTNERS IN CONSERVATION

The preservation of the Lake Paran shoreline was made possible through the coordinated efforts of two statewide organizations, the Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, and two local groups, The Fund for North Bennington and the Sage City Syndicate.

{ Sage City Syndicate, Inc. } *partner*

The Sage City Syndicate came into being quite suddenly, when in 1968 the Villager Restaurant (now Kevin’s At Mike’s Place III) and four apartments came up for sale. There was community concern that if the building got into the “wrong hands” it could end up, as an early member put it, “the sort of place where they’d have to keep a baseball bat under the bar.”

Lucien Hanks, an anthropology teacher at Bennington College, organized a group and bought the property. He did so almost overnight. His wife, Jane, also an anthropologist, remembered the “syndicat d’initiative” signs that had seemed ubiquitous in France, and suggested that they form a “syndicate” named the Sage City Syndicate.

The plan at the start was to acquire properties in the center of the village that seemed to be falling into ruin or otherwise at risk, and hold them until renovations could be made or suitable buyers found.

In short order the syndicate bought the Panos Block (two stores and two apartments), the Morris building (six apartments), some acreage on Lake Paran and the gas station. Over time most of the properties were rehabilitated (several were beyond repair and torn down) and sold to individuals who had a long-term stake in the village. David Monks said of the original syndicate members, “Whole areas of Main Street would have disappeared or been changed dramatically if it hadn’t been for them.”

The original members were Lucien Hanks, Whit Dickey, Merritt Hewitt, Carl Jolivette, John McCullough, Larry Powers, Bill Scott, Fred Welling, and Art Wickenden. Today there are two-dozen members. The goal, according to Larry Powers, is to assure that North Bennington residents have some modest level of control in preserving the village’s distinctive character. Or, as he put it in his recent book on North Bennington, to help bring the village into the 21st century—“but not too quickly.”

CURRENT OFFICERS OF SAGE CITY SYNDICATE, INC.
President: Jon Traver
Vice President: Bob Howe
Secretary: Jeanne McWaters
Treasurer: David Monks

{ The Fund for North Bennington, Inc. } *partner*

The Fund for North Bennington, Inc. was established in 1992 with an endowment of \$250,000 from Bill and Babs Scott, who hoped to create a means to keep making charitable gifts to the community after they died. “The Fund” has six trustees but no paid employees, and relies principally on donations from the public to support its operations.

Ethel McCullough Scott, known as “Babs”, was a direct descendent of North Bennington’s wealthiest and most politically influential family, and she and her husband had long been active in civil and charitable causes. They had been among the prime movers and principal donors in the effort in the early 1970s to renovate the once-elegant Victorian train station in the village, then falling into ruin. It was a station originally built by her great-grandfather, Trenor Park.

Over the years the Fund had quietly acquired undeveloped land for conservation and public recreation, and helped to fund a wide range of cultural activities and educational projects. The Fund now owns more than 275 acres of woods and farmland in and around North Bennington. Its Mile Around Woods is a popular destination for walking, running, bird-watching and cross-country skiing. Surrounding land is used to pasture horses and heifers so that North Bennington’s agricultural heritage still seems alive although the community has no working farms. The Fund will oversee the perpetual conservation of the 56 acres of Lake Paran shoreline. More details about its grants and conservation projects are available at www.northbennington.org.

CURRENT OFFICERS OF
THE FUND FOR NORTH BENNINGTON, INC.
President: Rob Woolmington
Secretary: Marjorie Manning
Treasurer: Joe McGovern
Other directors: David Aldrich,
Christine Graham, Robert Howe

{ The Vermont Land Trust } *partner*

The Vermont Land Trust was the initiator and coordinator of the Lake Paran Conservation Project. The Land Trust has facilitated conservation projects throughout the state for 27 years. It holds more conservation easements (1,204 and counting) than any other state or regional land trust in the country. Donald Campbell, the regional director for the Land Trust was principally responsible for organizing the Conservation Project.



{ Vermont Housing and Conservation Board } *partner*

The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board funded the Lake Paran Conservation Project. The Board is principally financed by annual legislative appropriations. It makes loans and grants to nonprofit organizations, municipalities and state agencies for the acquisition of land and for the purchase of conservation easements. ❧

Rob Woolmington
(above right), of
The Fund for North
Bennington, with
Jim White, Bennington
County forester, in
a photo taken at the
northern high point
of the conserved Lake
Paran shoreline.



Today

North Bennington can be described today as a working community, a place with proud historic character that has avoided the homogenization and sterility—big-box stores, shopping malls, and fast-food franchises—that mar so many contemporary American communities.

It is a place of earnest casualness not found in larger municipalities. The populace is a mix of young people and retirees, factory workers, trades people and professionals, scholars and teachers, artists, musicians, and writers, commuters and homebodies.



The Future

Think about what the next 50 years might hold for North Bennington. Several broad trends seem clear. The community has moved from an agriculturally based economy through a period of small manufacturing and mills, and then to where we are today—an increasingly service-based economy with some industry. Many residents have jobs that require commutes to farther and farther away places. Telecommunications—the phone, CATV, and the Internet—have changed dramatically in just the past 10 years. More swift changes in technology are inevitable. Life span has increased in our local population as it has nationally; on average, our community is aging.

North Bennington has adapted to changes inside and outside its boundaries—absorbing, adapting, combining and evolving. The village has changed a lot over the years. There was a shoe factory where the library stands. Village meetings are held where train tickets

once were sold. Streetcars and trains have given way to automobiles. An old factory houses an arts center. The village has absorbed all of the changes, yet still retains a distinct and identifiable community character.

North Bennington's special character has not emerged from a philosophy of stopping all growth and preserving the village in amber. Rather, North Bennington's character is a more interesting practical blend of preservation, innovation, adaptation and, above all, constant civic engagement by its residents.

The future of North Bennington is literally "up to us." North Bennington as we know it today was shaped by generations of residents who cared about the quality of life here. They were prepared to volunteer time, money and energy to ensure that the community they passed on to the next generation was finer and stronger than what they found here. It is up to us to do the same. ❧

Facing page:

(left) Flood at Haveland's Privilege in 2005 is reminiscent of the flood of 1852 that carried away most of the old mill waterwheels along Paran Creek, requiring the manufacturing community to begin anew.

(right) A boat landing and fishing access area is located on the south shore of Lake Paran. It is managed by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife and is maintained by the Vermont Offenders Work Program with Community Service work crews.

This publication is a special project of The Fund for North Bennington, Inc. and the Sage City Syndicate

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Images: Inside Cover, falls (top) and mill pond (lower left); Pg. 8 train depot; Pg. 12-13 (spread); Pg. 18 lake view, Pg. 20, falls, lake landing

LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY: Kevin Bubriski, bubriski@sover.net
Images: Cover; Inside Cover, Mill (lower right); Pg. 4, Paran dock; Pg. 5, Creek; Pg. 9, Park-McCullough House; Pg. 12, red mill; Pg. 19, Kyacking, Back cover

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