

Introduction from *Images of America Stowe* by Wendy Snow Parrish

"There is future in Stowe because of such a strong past."

"Stowe's history dates back almost as far as the history of the United States, to 1793 when Governor Wentworth of New Hampshire granted a charter to 64 men for the purpose of establishing the town. The first settler, Oliver Luce, arrived in 1794 and was soon followed by other settlers. By 1850, the townspeople numbered 1,771. Then, as now, the town depended on its natural surroundings.

The forest supported the settlers in the early 19th century. According to Bigelow's History of Stowe, by 1883 Stowe had 3 butter tub shops, 7 lumber mills, 5 shingle mills, 1 stave mill, 1 broom handle mill, 3 planing mills and 4 sawmills. Supporting these enterprises were 9 blacksmiths, 5 shoemakers, 15 carpenters, and 5 lawyers. As forests were cleared, farming gave rise to dairying and the production of butter and cheese.

But even then, there was another highly important local industry: tourism. The earliest of settlers lacked the time or energy to enjoy the beauty of the mountain and spectacular vistas from it. Not until the early 1800s did men and women enjoy traipsing through the woods, often ruining their clothes, to climb Mount Mansfield, Vermont's highest peak, for the sheer pleasure of enjoying its beauty and the spectacular views it afforded. Thus began the tourist industry when in 1850, Stillman Churchill traded his farm just north of Stowe village for Peter Lovejoy's house in town, turning it into the first hotel, the Manfeild House (where the Green Mountain Inn now stands). For his guests, he had the first trail to the summit of the mountain cleared. With a need for financial backing, he partnered with W.H.H. Bingham, a wealthy lawyer. Seeing the mountain's potential as a resort destination, Bingham deeded all his land about the tree line to the University of Vermont on condition that it would never be commercialized. He convinced the town to build a road halfway up the mountain and constructed there a resting place called the Half-Way House; it included a barn for the ponies and a small building for the caretaker. From this point, travelers could ride ponies up a trail to the summit. Eventually, a road suitable for carriages was built to the top.

Seeing the need for overnight accommodations, Bingham convinced the university to deed him back 20 acres; he then built the Summit House, which opened to the public in 1858. This in turn created the need for larger accommodations in town. Nine capitalists from Boston, New York, and Montreal joined him to form the Mount Mansfield Hotel Company. Their huge hotel opened with a grand ball celebration in June 1864, attracting tourists from the entire East Coast. Some families even came for the whole summer.

Rooms and amenities were added to keep up with the demand. In 1878, Col. E.C. Bailey, from Concord, New Hampshire, bought out the stockholders to become the sole owner of the Mount Mansfield Hotel, the old Mansfield House, the Half-Way House, the Summit House, and another small accommodation, the Notch house, located in Smugglers Notch.

In 1889, the Mount Mansfield Hotel burned to the ground, but the original portion of the Mount Mansfield Hotel survived. The tourist momentum could not be stayed, however, and in 1893 the hotel remnant was purchased and renamed the Green Mountain Inn. Photography helped spread the appeal of the town to new and wider audiences of vacationers. Hiking became a popular pastime; in 1920, Elihu Taft from Burlington presented to the Green Mountain Club a hut that now bears his name.

Beyond the mountain itself, tourists came to visit Smugglers Notch, a deep pass between Mount Mansfield and Sterling Mountain, formed in a great upheaval in prehistoric times. Its 1,000-foot cliffs, huge boulders, and caves have lured explorers and evoked names from inspired and imaginative lookers: the Singing Bird, Elephant's Head, the Hunter and his Dog, the Smugglers Face. Where the old Notch House used to stand is the Big Spring, where the water flows at a rate of 1,000 gallons per minute at a constant temperature of 43 degrees, supposedly fed by Sterling Pond, atop Sterling mountain. On the other side of town is Moss Glen Falls, a long series of steep cascades and pools. The Pinnacle, a rocky knob on the western side of the Worcester Range, provides an easy hike and a spectacular view of Mount Mansfield and the village of Stowe in its valley.

As fashions changed, Stowe has remained the center of this spectacular setting. Today, it enjoys its reputation as the "Ski Capital of the East". Befitting its origin as an outdoor-oriented town dependent on nature, skiing in Stowe began as a utilitarian method of transportation in the deep winter snows. In 1921, the Civic Club created a Washington's Birthday celebration, which began the Winter Carnival tradition, where every year about 1,000 people enjoyed ski-jumping, tobogganing, skating, and other fun winter activities.

In the early 1930s, work began toward development of the recreational skiing industry. The famous Nose Dive trail was cut by Charlie Lord, who was then in charge of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) group. He was also responsible for the Bruce Trail, the first racing trail on the mountain. He surveyed the lift lines on Mount Mansfield and was in charge of the lift building 1940. Frank Griffin, president of the Mount Mansfield Ski Club, built the first rope tow and developed the Ski School. He brought Sepp Ruschp to manage it, and it became the model of ski schools.

As skiing increased in popularity, new needs developed: transportation and housing for the visiting skier, a ski patrol, increased capacity (more trails and lifts) on the mountain, and better trail maintenance. These fueled entrepreneurial enterprises in town, a burgeoning of hoteliers and eateries, and special events to get the tourists there. Stowe soon became a summer resort destination as well.

To accommodate residents, schools and roads were built and maintained. Social clubs became an integral part of a family's life. To celebrate the town's roots and retain a live connection to its character, in 1900 the state had established Old Home Week, which became today's yearly celebration with parades, events, and reunions.

For all that Stowe has changed, it remains true to its roots. The photographs herein offer a peek into the hard work that build Stowe, the love of town and family that sustain its people, and a Yankee spirit that has survived everything from bad weather to the toughest economic times. There is future in Stowe because of such a strong past. "

For more information and historic photos -

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