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**The Early Days...**

The story of Dorset cannot be told without the early history of this vast wilderness we now call Vermont. Because of threats to all of the original land grants, Dorset claims a significant place in history, as it became the meeting place for growing the seeds of independence.

What we know now as Vermont might have been retained by New York were it not for the audacious Benning Wentworth, Royal Governor of New Hampshire, who boldly appropriated New York lands by taking tactical advantage of the temporary complacency of the Acting Governor of New York, Cadwallader Colden.

By 1763, Cadwallader Colden, still acting Governor of New York, had tolerated two years of the land-grabbing Wentworth and attempted to reclaim all land west of the Connecticut River. He filed a complaint against Wentworth and petitioned the British Crown for resolution. As the dispute between the governors raged on, the settlers, focused on clearing the land and survival of their families, pledged no allegiance to either colony. New York then demanded that the settlers repurchase their land as if they had never owned it.

This moment in the history of the charters was perhaps the catalyst that propelled Vermont toward independence. Fueled by the threat to their tentative security, the settlers were ripe for brotherhood, and reacted with passion to the organization of a bold enclave of volatile rebels who called themselves simply "The Green Mountain Boys."

Dorset and the Cephas Kent Tavern on what is now West Road, played a key role in the establishment of Vermont's independence. It was here that the Green Mountain Boys held conventions to take steps to organize the State of Vermont.



Wedding Party in Dorset, Vermont



**A Beautiful Home**

Ruth Martin is seeking to create a small village within the village of Dorset. As the centerpiece for this small village, she has created A Beautiful Home, an Interior Design Studio and gift emporium of unique home furnishings and unusual collectables.

With four or five other businesses joining in this small village atmosphere, Ruth expects to create a place of charm and history. "With a touch of an English garden complimented by a Vermont feeling of calmness," Ruth sees treating visitors to the joy of a shopping heaven.



"We will do our best to bring you new and different products and ideas," says Martin, who has an Interior Design Degree from San Diego Design Institute. "We offer interior design services, custom products that will amaze you for your home or office. We are also proud to offer you 'European Excursions,' a cottage collection of fine furniture inspired from the quaint villages around Europe, manufactured by Highland House, a half century old furniture company.

Delightfully remodeled and restored, A Beautiful Home is located in a wonderful building that has had many lives and memories. Once known as the light and cheery Dr. Michl's Office, previously as the offices of Josiah Allen Real Estate, a magazine publishing office and a grocery store, in the 1940's one would have found Jones' Garage, a car repair shop. "We were surprised to discover this was the original location of J K Adams, the kitchen store and manufacturer of wood products. The company was here until 1944, when it moved to their new plant in Dorset."

We welcome you to A Beautiful Home where you can enjoy strolls through the village, bringing you back to an enchanting time. Come visit us in Dorset where we can help you create your dream of a beautiful home. 3057 Route 30, Dorset Village, 802-867-4006.

**Marble**

A majestic range of mountains divided the original grant, making Dorset unique among the early settlements. The presence of the mountains led naturally to the current arrangement of the villages of North Dorset and East Dorset on the east (now Route 7A) and Dorset Village and South Dorset on the west (now Route 30).


As settlers took residence, their daily needs demanded goods and services. A grammar school was organized in 1804. Barter among the inhabitants was the typical form of payment in those early days, with the Dorset Union Store (now Peltier's) recognized as the earliest recorded co-op in the area. Diversity paralleled growth, and tradesmen and farmers complied with products from their farms and orchards, sawmills, tanneries, potteries, a blacksmith shop and a shoemaker shop. When these hardy souls weren't totally consumed with matters of survival, a glance to the mountains challenged their pioneer curiosity. There, conspicuous amid the green forests, were prominent expanses of contrasting white rock, their existence demanding investigation. The discovery of marble began the most significant period in Dorset's history.

Continued on back >




C. 1905 Norcross West Quarry~ Popular Swimming Place on Rt. 30

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continued from front >

Quarrying for marble propelled Dorset's population to its peak in the 1870s, with more than 2000 people living in long-gone hamlets which sprang up in the marble heyday. Although many of the local folk survived by working farms and orchards, grist mills, lumber mills and iron foundries, the mountains and their 28 quarries of marble became the industrial and economic focus of Dorset for over 130 years. Dorset marble was used in the New York Public Library and the library of Brown University, elegant 5th Avenue residences and Gettysburg grave stones. Today, marble from Danby Quarry, the only remaining working quarry, is often used for restorations or additions to the original marble structures.

In the late 1800s, the railroads brought those wealthy enough to afford to take summer vacations away from their urban homes. Prominent ministers from large New York and Boston churches found refuge in the summer mountain retreat. Soon, the backdrop of Vermont's lush and exquisite mountains beckoned artists and writers. Drawn by the solitude and simple life, inspired by the beauty, they had found a womb in which to nurture the seeds of their creativity. Thus began the steady flow of like-minded souls who took room and board at local homesteads and farms.

By the early 1850s, increased numbers of travelers required accommodations, and a hotel, then called the Barrows Hotel, (not connected to the current Barrows House) was opened in East Dorset near the railroad. Close to the turn of the century, its name was changed to The Wilson House, and there, in 1895, Bill Wilson, co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, was born.



28 men are photographed on the M.D. & G. with one of the 43-ton monoliths bound for the mill after being turned and fluted to serve as one of 13 columns for the D.A.R. building in Washington, D.C.

The demand for living quarters was met with the expansion of private homes and farms, giving rise to larger hostleries, inns and bed and breakfasts that are Dorset's accommodation lineage.

### Dorset Playhouse

In Spring of 1927, Dr. & Mrs. Edward Goodman kindled the idea of producing a play in the village. "39 East" was presented at Dorset Town Hall and enthusiastically accepted despite the size and room limitations of that venue. This lively interest led to the formation of The Dorset Players.

The tenacious little theatre group began to feel confident that the Dorset Players could support their own space and the Dorset Playhouse officially opened on July 2, 1929.

Off to an auspicious start, the first five years were a whirlwind of shows, but in the ensuing years, Dorset Playhouse and the Dorset Players intermittently experienced impediments to their growth — insufficient material, controversy between an early director and the players, the untimely death of the theatre catalyst Dr. Goodman and World War II.

In 1948, John Herrick contracted with the Caravan Theatre Group of Westchester, NY, under the direction of Fred Carmichael, Patricia Rose (now Carmichael) and in the early years, Dee Stempf. The highly energetic and innovative troupe spelled success for theatre in Dorset, Vermont.

In 1976 John Nassivera and Jill Charles took over the theatre, founding a nonprofit organization now known as American Theatre Works and Dorset Theatre Festival.

Various improvements were made to the theatre in the 50s and most recently, in 2001, while preserving the old structure and integrating the three original barns, the playhouse was refurbished completely.



C. 1900, The Dorset Marble Company, East Dorset, VT

### The Dorset Historical Society

Similarities may be found in the histories of the towns in Vermont, but each community's individuality, its cast of characters and how they relate to their environment, set it apart and make it unique.

Dorset's rich past has been admirably preserved by a group of interested denizens who pooled their energy and tenacity and in 1963 organized the Dorset Historical Society. The DHS meets at the society's museum in Dorset Village, Bley House, where the fruits of their discoveries are displayed and protected. The society's most successful project to date was also its most ambitious — a scholarly and authoritative history of Dorset, *Dorset: In The Shadow of the Marble Mountain*, by Tyler Resch, which is available for purchase at the Museum.

Though every modern convenience can be found in today's Dorset, its planners have not sacrificed authenticity to progress. They have met head-on the threat of rapid growth with a firm resolve to retain the tradition and simplicity that are Dorset's legacy.

Ruth M. Rasey Simpson in *Hand-Hewn in Old Vermont*

Ester M. Swift's 1977 *Vermont Place Names: Footprints of History*

Tyler Resch, author of *Dorset: In The Shadow Of The Marble Mountain*

The Dorset Historical Page is sponsored by the Wilson House, birthplace of Bill Wilson, co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. The restored Wilson House, a non-profit foundation, was built as a hotel in 1852. Today, The Wilson House is a place for people in recovery and their families to gather for educational seminars, meetings, and fellowship. Being an integral part of the local community is an important function of the Wilson House of East Dorset.

Historical Photographs provided by Terry Tyler~ Text by Patti Smith and Ruth Martin



C. 1900, Dorset Village, Route 30 looking North

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