

## PART I. SHELBURNE: THE PAST

The Town of Shelburne was chartered on August 18, 1763. In that year, Governor Benning Wentworth of the New Hampshire Colony granted charters to thirty-seven towns. Controversy had developed between the New Hampshire and New York colonies over sovereignty of the Vermont Territory, and the outcome was in doubt. Since Wentworth stood to lose a great deal financially if it were decided that the lands were not his domain, he quickly disposed of much of his land in 1763.

The Town of Shelburne was named for the Earl of Shelburne, a member of British Parliament who had championed the claim of New Hampshire to lands between the Connecticut River and Lake Champlain.

The Town was originally granted a total of 23,500 acres. However, when a survey was completed, a large portion of this land was found to overlap land claimed by Burlington. Since Burlington's charter was a month older than Shelburne's, its claim took precedence. Burlington's claim originally included part of Shelburne Point, but in 1794 the State Legislature returned that land to Shelburne. In 1848 an additional portion of land was given to the Town of St. George, reducing Shelburne's size to its current 14,272 acres (roughly 60 percent of the size of the original grant).

Of Shelburne's sixty-five original proprietors, only John Potter was to actually live in the Town. Potter settled at Shelburne Point in 1768 with Thomas Logan, and the two became associated in transporting oak timber rafts to the Quebec market. On returning from a delivery to Quebec in 1775, they were murdered by two escorts assigned to provide them protection. Potter and Logan, however, are credited with opening the lumber trade with Canada during the preceding seven years.

Although Potter and Logan were Shelburne's first known settlers, Lyman Thayer, the nineteenth century town historian, has stated that an Indian village and burying ground were located at the head of Shelburne Bay, near where the LaPlatte River and Cogman's Brook converge.

By the time of the American Revolution, about ten families had settled in Shelburne near the Lake. However, the unrest caused them to leave for points south. The Town did not begin to see resettlement until 1783. By the time the first town meeting was called in March of 1789, twenty-four families resided in Shelburne. By 1791, the United States Census recorded a Town population of 389 people.

The earliest settlers were farmers. Eventually, as support services developed, more concentrated patterns of human settlement emerged. Lazell Hatch constructed the Town's first sawmill east of the present Shelburne Inn in 1784, in the area now known as Shelburne Village. However, with the construction of a log bridge across the LaPlatte River in 1785, Shelburne Falls became the Town's first major activity center. A dam was soon built and a sawmill was located on the south side of the river. In 1786 a dam was constructed on the lower side of the Falls, and was followed by the construction of a grist mill in 1789.

In 1789, the public road from Middlebury to Burlington (now U.S. Route 7) was opened by Captain Benjamin Harrington. The access provided by this road created a locational advantage for the Village area which ultimately became the dominant village center.

In the 1790's, the settlement pattern was less clear. There were two distinct settlements -- one taking advantage of water power at the Falls, and one capitalizing on the convergence of two main roads. In 1796, Benjamin Harrington built a hotel



just north of the potash factory, and this helped to establish the pattern of the Falls as the manufacturing center and the Village as the center of commerce.

There were, of course, other smaller centers throughout the town; most often at crossroads marked with a school (there were thirteen school districts in Shelburne in 1840). Two such centers found on maps dated 1857 were located at Barstow Road, and at the four corners of what is now Southern Acres Farm.

In 1835, the saw, grist and woolen mills in Shelburne Falls were supplemented by the addition of a tannery and shoe shop on the west side of the river, and a blacksmith and triphammer shop on the east side. The Village had also experienced growth, containing at this time two stores, a tannery, and a shoe shop, as well as the potash manufactory. The White Church (congregationalist - completed in 1807) was used for Town Meetings.

Shelburne's farmers were active in a variety of agricultural endeavors. In general, the western part of Town (which enjoyed the moderating influence of Lake Champlain, was known for its fruit orchards, while the eastern part of Town specialized in grain production. Figures from the year 1840 (found in the 1842 edition of Thompson's Gazetteer of Vermont) indicate the following output: 1,768 bushels of wheat, 772 bushels of barley, 11,545 bushels of oats, 944 bushels of rye and 462 bushels of buckwheat. Also produced were 35,281 bushels of potatoes, 2,158 tons of hay and 1,220 pounds of sugar. In that same year, the Town's 17,376 sheep produced 36,677 pounds of wool. This period marked the height of the Merino Sheep raising in Vermont. Shelburne's location on Lake Champlain and its connections to outside markets helped the Town shift from self-sufficient family farming to commercially oriented farming.

In 1849 the Rutland Railroad began to stop in the Village. In turn, the railroad opened a far greater market for the Town's farming community. The farms gradually changed to dairy farming, producing cheese and butter for export. A very successful cheese factory was constructed as early as 1871 south of the Village on Falls Road. Another cheese factory served farmers in the northeast corner of Town. In 1879, New England's first butter creamery opened in Shelburne.

In the 1880's, the Shelburne Flouring Mills were still in operation, as was the sawmill which did custom work at a volume of about 150,000 board feet annually. Large fruit shipments were made from the Town's 27 orchards (17,749 fruit trees). Baldwin and White's Refrigerator Manufactory employed between fifteen and twenty men. The manufacture of steamboats continued, as it had since the 1820's, at the Shelburne Shipyard on the eastern shore of Shelburne Point.

Although the Town's population declined between 1870 and 1880, the number of dwellings in the Falls and Village areas seems to have doubled. Each area contained about 30 dwellings. This suggests that fewer people were working on the farms and opting instead to work in Shelburne's manufactories and shops. This is borne out by an examination of houses in the Village and Falls. The dominant architectural style dates from the late 1870's and 1880's. On the other hand, most existing farmsteads appear to date from the 1810 to 1850 period.

During the period 1880 to 1890, Shelburne's population increased from 1,096 to 1,300. This increase reflects the impact of Shelburne Farms. In 1866, Dr. and Mrs. W.S. Webb began purchasing farms on the western side of Town, eventually acquiring a total of 3,800 acres. On this estate, the Webbs constructed an impressive array of farm and residential buildings. The high point of construction activities was reached in about 1890, and accounts for the increase in population (even though most of the previous owners of the farms left Shelburne). When construction was completed (at about the turn of the century) the Shelburne Farms



operation provided less employment than did the construction period, and the Town's population dropped to 1,202 in 1900.

The establishment of Shelburne Farms considerably altered the agricultural base of Shelburne. Dairying and fruit production were of less importance on the large estate than they had been on the smaller family farms. In a sense, over one-fourth of Shelburne's prime land was removed from what had been conventional agricultural production.

With the increased industrialization of America in the twentieth century came the ready availability of mass produced goods. Many of the support services previously found in small farming communities were no longer needed. Burlington developed as a regional center for Chittenden County, meeting many of Shelburne's needs. Much of Shelburne's local manufacturing and commerce disappeared.

In light of Shelburne's changed farming status and its inability to foster commercial growth, it is easy to understand why its population remained small. From a figure of 1,202 in 1900, it dropped to 997 in 1920, and hovered around 1,000 until the 1940's. During that time Shelburne continued to be primarily an agricultural town with its population limited by the available farmland. The post World War II economic growth in Chittenden County, and the increased popularity of suburban or country living, placed the Town in a markedly different context. Shelburne's growth became more and more related to that of the Burlington region and less and less tied to its original agricultural activities.

Suburban life brought with it higher density land uses and the complications of a fast growing population and its increased demands for services. Problems associated with growth seemed compounded when their solutions seemed at odds with those qualities which had long been identified with the Town.

Time has not eased this dilemma. Shelburne has continued to grow rapidly - indeed, more rapidly than the surrounding region until 1980. The conflict between continued development and the Town's agricultural heritage is ever more intense. It is the intent of this Town Plan to address this conflict, and to establish some guidelines by which Shelburne can accommodate additional growth while preserving its established Village Center, respecting its heritage, and providing for the needs of its present and future residents.

## HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF SHELBURNE

The official history of the Town of Shelburne begins on August 18, 1763. On that day Governor Benning Wentworth of New Hampshire signed the charter establishing the town. "The name was chosen to honor the Earl of Shelburne, a celebrated nobleman of the British Parliament.

It was supposed to 23,500 acres in size, but when the boundaries were established there was not a six mile square, so Shelburne has six miles of lake shore frontage, but it narrows back in a triangular shape and has only 14,272 acres.

It was not until 1786, five years after Governor Wentworth signed the Charter that the first recorded settlers, Thomas Logan and John Potter arrived. It is believed they lived on Shelburne Point. About ten families had settled in Shelburne prior to the Revolution. They lived in the west part of town along the lake. The only one of whom anything is known is Moses Pierson. He had a farm of 1,000 acres which he bought in 1769. This land was later in the Meech family and is now owned by Dunbar Bostwick. In the fall of 1776 Mr. Pierson left because of the threat of Indians, and later left for the safety of Orwell, Vt.

After the Revolution many families from southern New England made their way to Shelburne. The first homes were log cabins, very small and fenced by the stumps that were cleared. Because most of these men came from Conn and western Mass., they had four ideals in common. They believed that farmers should be allowed to own the lands they farmed; they believed in the form of town government by town meeting, they believed in the importance of free education for all children; and they believed in the importance of religious freedom.

Dr. Frederick Maeck, Shelburne's first physician came in 1786-88 and practised medicine here for nearly forty years. He died June 30, 1826 and has several direct descendants still living in Shelburne. In 1791 Shelburne's population stood at 389.

The first efforts of the settlers were directed toward clearing the land and establishing farms. But at that time the demand for a certain by-product of land clearing was very great, and these people were quick to take advantage of it. Thus it happened that as the land was cleared, the great trees were burned, water filtered through the ashes, and the water evaporated, the end product being potash, a material required in the finishing of woolen cloth, and the making of glass. This business was such a thriving one that the people engaged in it were loath to let the sloops used to transport the product be appropriated when the War of 1812 threatened.

After this War was over, commerce on the lake was revived. At first the new steam boats were built in Vergennes, but this was not ideal. The search for a more suitable location led to the establishment of the Shelburne Shipyard in about 1820.

After the potash boom, another boom was in the making. Sheep were already numerous in Shelburne. Then in 1811 a few Merino sheep from Spain arrived in Vermont, and this superior breed with its oily heavy fleece caused a tremendous spurt in sheep farming. In 1840 Shelburne with a population of 1,089 had 17,636 sheep and produced 36,677 pounds of wool. The sheep boom in Vermont died out in the middle of the nineteenth century because of the open lands in the West.



Around the middle of the eighteenth century marble quarries were opened in the east part of town. They operated only briefly, however in the past few years, the marble is being quarried again and crushed for stone.

The Civil War marks the halfway point in the history of Shelburne. Strong feelings were aroused on the subject of slavery. The people were generally opposed to slavery, and helped many runaway slaves escape to Canada by means of the Underground Railway. In Shelburne the house now owned by Harry Clayton next to the Post Office is said to have been a stop on the Railway and there is supposed to be a concealed room in the basement. A total of 91 men from Shelburne are credited with having served during the course of the war.

After the war Shelburne in the early 1880's was very much a typical Vermont town. It had its rich, also its poor; its famous and its humble citizens. It was very nearly self-sufficient, lacking only those things more common to a city than a town, such as law offices, banks, and a newspaper, and these things were readily available in Burlington which was easily reached by train.

In 1887, the Webb family purchased 1800 acres of land on Lake Champlain in Shelburne and built a large home, developed extensive gardens and green-houses.

Many changes have taken place in the past years. In 1939-40 the water system was put in. From 1950 on we have had several new housing developments start. The population in 1960 was 1805, in 1970 it is estimated to be about 4,000. The continuing growth of Shelburne is tied to general population growth in the State and the growth pattern of Greater Burlington. Shelburne serves as a pleasant and convenient location of homes of people employed in the commercial and industrial or education complex of Burlington and can be expected to continue adding citizens so long as new homes are needed in the area and attractive building sites are available in town.

Shelburne has a village school for children kindergarten to third grade, and a new Middle School for fourth grade through eighth. We are members of the Champlain Valley Union High School District.

We have several motels here in the town, Shelburne Industries, Shelburne Harbor Ship and Marine Co., Harbor Industries, Shelburne Museum, many fine restaurants, two banks, a new shopping park with drug store, super market, liquor store, laundromat, 4 doctors, 2 dentists and many other fine features.