

HISTORY AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

Starksboro's History

Formation and Early Settlement

Starksboro, chartered November 9, 1780 by the Republic of Vermont, was named in honor of Brigadier General John Stark. The first permanent settler George Bidwell along with Horace Kellogg, received a deed of land in Starksboro on September 12, 1787.

The area of the Town has twice been increased by Act of the Legislature. In 1797, a mile wide strip lying east of Hogback Mountain, extending from the Bristol line north as far as the stonewall north of Floyd Shepard's house on Route 116, was annexed from Monkton. Another strip, one-half mile wide, extending north from the stonewall to the Hinesburg line was added from Monkton in 1909.

When the first United States Census was taken in 1791, the Town as chartered, had nine families living within its bounds, a total of 40 people. All settlement was in the Lewis Creek Valley.

In the years just before the Civil War, Starksboro had the second-largest population of any Town in Addison County.

Population Centers

Although most of the Town's population is now centered in and around Starksboro village on Route 116, in earlier times there were many other villages and hamlets:

- ◆ Brownsboro, named for the Brown family;
- ◆ Little Boston, a small industrial center located in the southern part of Town where Route 116 now crosses Lewis Creek;
- ◆ Hillsboro, named for Samuel Hill who settled there from New Hampshire in 1805; and

- ◆ Jerusalem, the factories and hotel that used to be there are long gone. Located on a mountain road in the extreme southeastern part of Town, it still retains some of its individuality, with a small school, that closed in 1968, a cemetery and cluster of houses.

Abundant waterpower was available in every section of Town. As settlers continued to arrive, small industrial centers grew up in several areas. As early as 1797 there were mills operating along Baldwin Brook in Starksboro village. By the early 1800s, the Town was home to a variety of mills and manufactures.

By 1860 the Town had a record population of 1,437. Though the population had declined somewhat by 1886, the village then boasted a foundry, two stores, a carriage shop, a hotel, a gristmill, a sawmill and a butter tub factory. A grist mill and saw mill operated at the Great Falls of Lewis Creek. South Starksboro had a post office, gristmill, a stave mill, a rake factory and butter tub factory.

Community Facilities

Schools were among the first concerns of the settlers. The earliest school record in Starksboro, dated 1805, states, "the scholars numbered and found to be one-hundred-eighty-nine." By 1816 the number had increased to 382.

At Town Meeting in 1832 the Town was divided into 17 school districts. By 1927 the number had been reduced to eight. In 1941, Starksboro Village School, constructed as a one-room building in 1892, was enlarged into the two-room Robinson School. In succeeding years schools were closed in various parts of Town and the students transported to the village or to Jerusalem School.

When Mt. Abraham Union High School opened in the fall of 1968 with accommodations for grades seven through 12, Jerusalem School, the last one-room school in Town, was closed and all elementary students were transported to Robinson School. The elementary school population has grown rapidly since that time making necessary three additions to the building between 1978 and 1996.

The first house of worship in Town was the Quaker Meeting House built in 1812 in the north part of Green Mount Cemetery. The building was sold and moved by ox team to Charlotte in the winter of 1858-1859 where it became the nucleus of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Roman Catholic Church.

South Starksboro Friends were, during the early years of their history a part of the Lincoln Friends Meeting. In 1826 they built the present South Starksboro Friends Meeting House. Enlarged in 1870, it is the oldest operating Friends Meeting House in the state.

The Starksboro Village Meeting House was completed in 1840 and served three denominations as well as providing accommodations for a Town Hall in the basement.

A Methodist Episcopal Church was constructed near the present Clifford tenant house in the north part of Town about 1840. It served the people in the north part of Starksboro and nearby residents of Monkton and Hinesburg. The building, sold to a neighboring farmer for a horse barn, has since been demolished.

Agricultural Heritage

Starksboro has always been primarily an agricultural Town. In the early 1800s the small local iron industry and the Monkton Iron Works in Vergennes, provided a ready market for charcoal. Settlers clearing land for farming were

thus enabled to convert unwanted trees into cash.

With the coming of railroads in the mid-1800s dairying began to be an important source of income. Many farmhouses boasted a “cheese room” where the farmer’s wife made large wheels of cheese. Butter was also made on the farm. Buyers went from farm to farm purchasing these products for city markets.

Toward the end of the century cheese factories were established. The McDonough farm in Hinesburg (now owned by the Hinesburg Sand & Gravel Company, Inc.) operated a plant that provided farmers in the north part of Starksboro with a market for their milk.

A small cooperative creamery in South Starksboro manufactured and sold butter for several years. Green Mountain Cold Spring Creamery in Starksboro village was incorporated in 1898 for the purpose of manufacturing butter, buying, selling, and dealing generally in milk and milk products. With the increased use of trucks for transportation, markets for fluid milk in the large industrial centers of southern New England became accessible to farmers in northern Vermont.

In 1929 Silverman Brothers, then owners of the creamery began to process whole milk. By 1935 the plant, then known as Mountain View Creamery, had become a very successful business enterprise providing employment for several local people. It continued to be the most important industry in Town well into the 1960s. Changing economic conditions resulted in the closing of the plant in the early 1970s.

When the first Town Plan was adopted in 1973 there were 19 operating dairy farms in Starksboro. Presently, there are five.

Maple products have always been important to Starksboro agriculture. Individual farmers

usually built up a market for their product both in and out of the state. For many years maple syrup that was not sold in cans or made into maple sugar was put into large casks and hauled by wagon to the railroad in Bristol.

It is interesting to note that one farm in Town has remained in the same family, generation after generation. In 1807 James Kinsley, Sr., a native of Scotland, purchased 100 acres of land in Starksboro. That land is now part of the farm owned and operated by his seventh and eighth generation descendants, Arthur and Eric Clifford.

Population Change

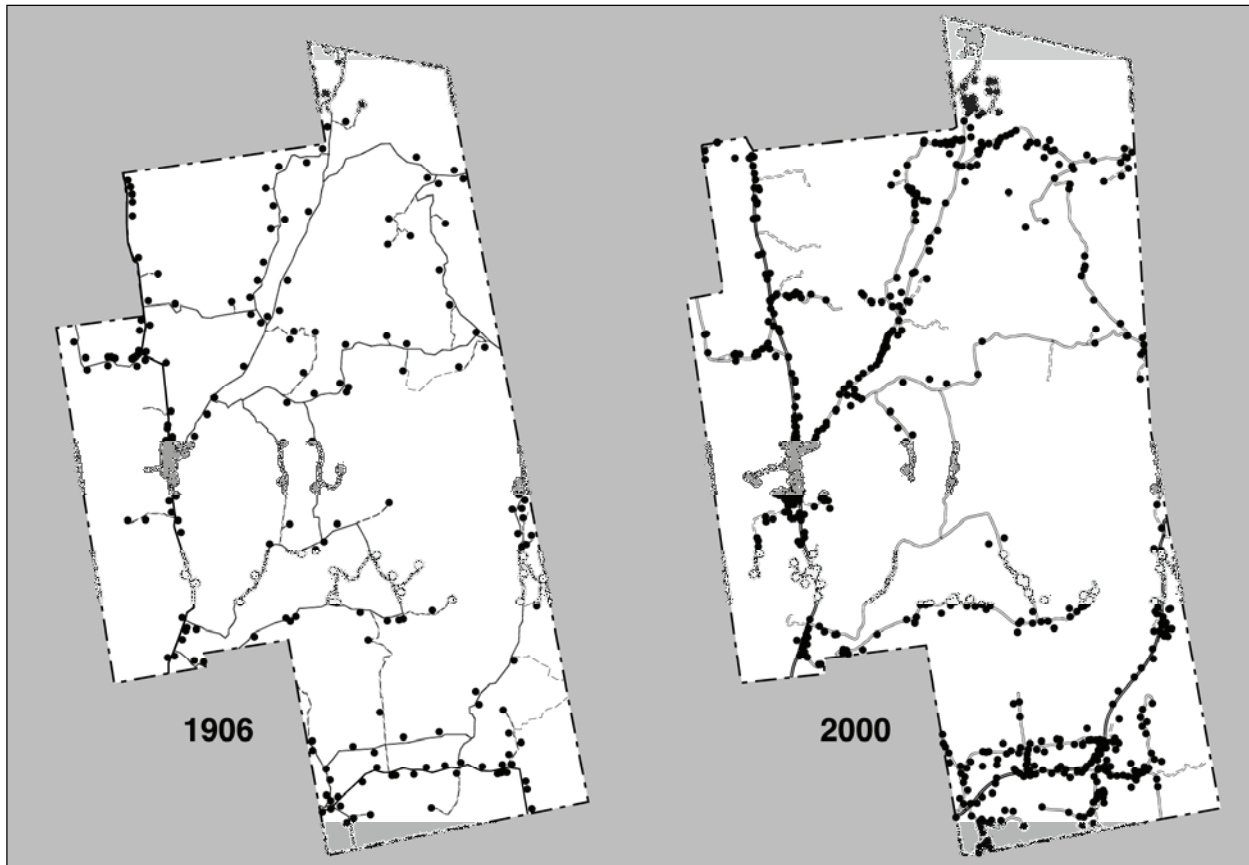
Between 1860 and 1960 westward migration and changing economic conditions causing the

abandonment of hill farms and the loss of small business resulted in a steady decline in population.

In 1960 there were only 502 people living in Starksboro. By 1973, when the first Town Plan was adopted, Starksboro was already rapidly changing from an agricultural community with a few small businesses to a quasi-suburban environment. Proximity to the rapidly developing northwestern Vermont industrial center has since resulted in unprecedented growth. The 2000 census lists our population at an all time high of 1,898 residents.

Beers' Atlas, originally published in 1871, provides a unique point of reference in considering how Starksboro has changed over the last century. Starksboro village and South

Figure 1: Starksboro's Settlement Pattern 1906 to 2000



*Source: Early 1900s Edition of the U.S.G.S. Topographic Maps and 2000 Vermont E-911 residential points.
Note: Boundary of Starksboro as drawn on the early 1900s map is not accurate.*

Starksboro were the more densely developed hubs of economic activity in that time and they continue in that role today.

However as seen in Figure 1, development is now less dense on what had served as connecting roads in earlier days. These areas of Town are now predominantly forested and dotted with seasonal camps.

A significant percentage of the houses listed in Beers' Atlas are still here and provide some of the most attractive housing in Town. This is particularly true of Starksboro village where almost every building shown in the atlas is still standing.

Historic Resources

Many old houses and remaining commercial and business structures in Starksboro have both local historical significance and architectural merit.

The Hoag Grist Mill and the Knight House Complex at the Great Falls of Lewis Creek, the South Starksboro Friends Meeting House built in 1826, and the Starksboro Village Meeting House completed in 1840 to provide a meeting place for Methodists, Free Will Baptists and members of the Christian Church as well as a basement to be used as a Town hall, have been listed in the Register of National Historic Places.

The State Register of Historic Places includes many more Starksboro buildings, as well as the Starksboro Village Historic District. The maps of State Register sites are from "The Historic Architecture of Addison County" by Vermont Division for Historic Preservation. See that publication for a detailed description keyed to the numbered circles.