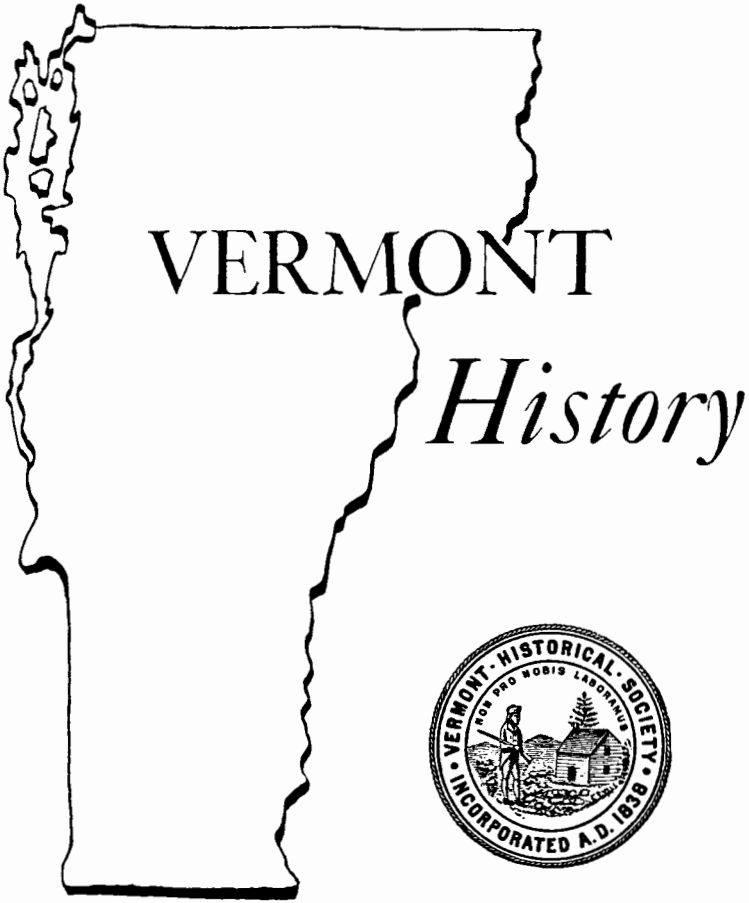
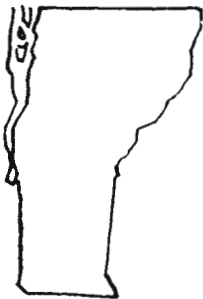


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“ . . . the concerns and duties of one era
have been replaced by the different worries
and occupations of another period.”

Peacham, Vermont Fifty Years of Economic and Social Change 1929-1979

By SHEPARD B. CLOUGH AND LORNA QUIMBY

In 1929 just before the Great Depression introduced great changes, Peacham had many of the characteristics typical of a Vermont farming community.¹ It had 29,579 acres and a population of 620. It was a place rich in civic pride, in community spirit, and in traditional ideals. It could look back to a time when its people enjoyed an economic prosperity reflected in substantial homes. It possessed an Academy which had sent generations of young people on to careers of distinction, and it had a religious establishment which had set the tone for a high level of public behavior. It was a homogeneous community whose citizens generally shared common values and similar experiences. Only a few Catholics diluted the solid Protestant majority. Most of the inhabitants lived on or near the place of their birth. The small transient population consisted mostly of seasonal workers in the woods, farm laborers, and summer visitors.

By later standards the community was remarkably, but not entirely, self-reliant. In fact, the town met nearly all its expenditures. Welfare was a local affair, and the annual *Town Report* identified recipients by name and the amounts spent in their behalf. The *Report* for 1939 indicated that “during the past year 96 cents out of every dollar available to the Old Age Assistance Department was paid in benefits to eligible elderly persons and only 4 cents was used for administration. The cost to the State for administration was 1.6 cents and 2.4 cents was paid by the Federal Government.” In addition, the town received small sums to encourage the hiring of accredited teachers and to help cover the expenses of certain roads.

The local constable enforced law and order. His most onerous task was escorting belligerent drunks home from the dance hall in East Peacham. Fish and Game law violations were the most serious "crimes" in town. Incidents involving theft were frequently solved by the victims going to the culprit and advising the return of the object in question by a certain time "or else." Vandalism was nonexistent, and assaults on persons were not recorded. The residents regularly left their doors unlocked. In some cases there were no locks.

Although the mainstay of economic activity in Peacham in 1929 was dairying, some other activities produced modest incomes. Thirty-five maple syrup operations supplemented farm revenues. Lumbering, carried on mostly in the winter time as an adjunct to farming, produced some income. In addition to logging, the town had two small sawmills; one was in Green Bay, owned and operated by Orin Jennison; the other was in Ewells Hollow, owned by the Allen Family and operated by the capable Edith Allen, who sawed many of the shingles used in town. Peacham loggers "exported" some of the timber to neighboring towns and sent pulp to paper mills in the vicinity.²

Six or seven carpenters, three of whom plied the trade fulltime, found employment, most doing repair work. The town had five stores (two at Peacham Corner, two in South Peacham, and one in East Peacham), one blacksmith shop (horses still provided most of the power for traction), one barber shop, one church, one dance hall (the Brookside Hall in East Peacham), and two boarding houses. There was no resident doctor or lawyer, but the people of Peacham could obtain medical and legal services from neighboring towns.

The boarding houses played a role of particular importance. They brought to the town "people from away," who spread the word about the beauties of Peacham and some of whom eventually settled in the town. Elsie Choate ran the most active of these establishments. Her Choate Inn catered to enough people to fill one house and a smaller "annex." A little later, Clarence and May Edsen opened the Elms just outside the Corner, and certain farmers took in summer guests. These places provided jobs for the local girls and places to live for teachers or boarding students at the Academy.

The possibility of owning a cottage at one of the town's three ponds or at nearby Harvey's Lake also attracted people to Peacham. Many of these camps were crude shacks which provided little more than slight comfort to the occupants. There were four places at Ewells Pond, eight at Martins Pond, and twenty-one camps or lots at Peacham Pond, then known as Onion River Pond. In 1929 these properties contributed little to the tax income of the town.



Miss Elsie Choate ran Choate Inn in Peacham Corner. Courtesy of Peacham Historical Association Archives.

The key element in Peacham was dairying just as it had been in the latter part of the nineteenth century. At the end of the 1920's farm holdings remained small (on the average 180 acres); the amount of tillage per farm amounted to about 50 acres; and the average number of cows per farm producing a cash income was 25.³ Methods of field husbandry would have been familiar to farmers of fifty years before. Traditionally milk produced in Peacham was separated and churned into butter at the farm. The farmers then sold the butter commercially in both local and distant markets, even as far away as Boston. They fed the buttermilk to poultry and swine which, in turn, provided marketable products.

With the establishment of local creameries the pattern of dairying changed. To ease the burden of separating milk and churning butter, farmers began daily to haul their milk to the creamery, and they returned home with the buttermilk. This system solved one problem and created another—hauling milk took time which the farmers needed to perform urgent tasks. Soon after World War I, Peacham farmers, especially the young ones, turned to the gasoline-powered trucks and, occasionally, automobiles. The gasoline engine helped change dairying in Peacham, and it revolutionized the local economy and life in general. The first automobile owned in Peacham was purchased by the local physician, Dr. A. J. Mackay, in 1910; George Partridge, a farmer and itinerant butcher,

purchased the second.⁴ By 1930 Henry Ford had produced over one million of his Model T's, and the price had fallen to such an extent that an operable secondhand vehicle could be had for as little as \$35.00, well within the means of most Peacham farmers.

In addition to making it easier to carry fluid milk the automobile forced the improvement of the roads. In 1929 all the local thoroughfares were dirt or gravel, adequate for horses and buggies but not as suitable, unless well maintained, for cars. In winter the snow was rolled to make a firm platform for sleighs and sleds, but these roads became quagmires when the snow melted and frost came out of the ground. For at least four months in winter and spring roads were practically impassable for the new-fangled machines. The Selectmen, who were farmers themselves, realized that the town had to perform more "road work." More road work meant larger expenditures and higher taxes. Furthermore, the town as well as the farmers had turned to motorized equipment. At first the town hired trucks from local residents to haul gravel and tractors to pull the grader to smooth and shape the roads. In 1931, however, the town bought a tractor and snowplow. In the next year the town used some tar on its roads, and in 1936 it applied Tarvia to the highway from South Peacham to the Barnet line. Snow rolling continued on several of the back roads to as late as 1936.⁵

The revolution in the transportation of milk brought with it a myriad of other changes. The increased use of milk as a drink led to health laws to protect the consumer. Creameries had to insure a low bacteria count and a minimum of butterfat in their milk. By 1925 state health laws required area testing of cows for bovine tuberculosis and the destruction of animals found infected. In 1931 the laws mandated pasteurization of milk. These demands, and the mounting pressure from more discriminating customers for high quality dairy products, required large investments for equipment and for cows which would meet the new standards. Many farmers who had peddled milk to local customers could not or would not make the necessary outlays. They sold out to entrepreneurs who would, or they shipped their milk to large processors in metropolitan areas.

Another source of added expense was the farmers' increasing concern for the quality of their herds. The Vermont Dairymen's Association, the first in the nation, organized in 1869 to agitate for herd improvement, and dairymen formed cow testing associations to check on the production of individual cows. Vermont had only two testing associations in 1909, but the number had increased to twenty-three by 1930. With information which testers provided a farmer could eliminate "robber cows" from the herd. One local farmer reported at the Peacham Historical Association



Farmers hauling milk to the creamery in East Peacham later known as the "Brookside Dancehall." Courtesy of Peacham Historical Association Archives.

shortly after World War II that one of his cows produced as much milk as twelve of his father's cows had done at the end of the nineteenth century. Peacham farmers had introduced Holsteins on a large scale because of their high production and low butterfat, and these black and white animals took their place alongside Jerseys, for a long time the favored breed. In fact one local farmer remarked that the only legal way of watering his milk was to own Holsteins. Herd improvements cost money. A cow which produced annually 4,100 pounds of milk and cost \$65.00 was being replaced in 1979 by cows giving 15,000 pounds and costing from \$1,000 to \$1,200.⁶

Such improvements in the local herds constituted an investment which had to be treated with great care. Cows could no longer be turned out on stoney pastures to wear out their teeth, nor be fed poor hay, if they were to produce to their full potential. Consequently, farmers had to have better forage crops and better hay or silage for stable feeding. They spent considerable sums to build silos (trench silos became common in the 1960's), to improve pastures with better grasses and fertilization, and to buy all kinds of machines including tractors, mowers, rakes, wagons, and field choppers.

Another change in dairying came with the introduction of electricity.

Electric refrigeration of milk kept the bacteria count in milk much lower than was possible with ice. Electric power also freed the farmer from the onerous task of cutting ice in local lakes and ponds, hauling it to ice houses, packing it in sawdust, and then hauling it out again and washing it for use. Not until 1911 did the Stevens Valley Electric Company incorporate to serve Peacham, Barnet and Ryegate, and the first house in Peacham, Dr. Mackay's house, was not wired until the next year.⁷ Only some thirty years later did electricity reach outlying farms, primarily because of the prohibitive cost of building lines to serve a few scattered customers, especially for a company which had from the beginning suffered from under-capitalization.

Continued attempts to extend electric service in Peacham ultimately met success when, after several efforts to sell the Stevens Valley Company failed, the Green Mountain Power Company finally acquired it in 1928. Green Mountain Power undertook new lines in 1936, and the Rural Electrification Act (REA) made possible financing electric lines to remote areas. In 1944 the Washington Electric Cooperative, organized under the REA, brought its first line to Peacham. Another line from West Danville in 1946 provided electricity for twenty-two farms and camps in Peacham. Subsequently a hundred more connections were added to the line from West Danville so that nearly everyone who wanted electricity could have it.⁸

Electricity in a rural Vermont community not only provided better refrigeration, but also made possible the use of a great assortment of amenities and labor-saving devices. Lighting in homes and barns was improved and made much safer than the kerosene lamp and lantern or the awkward carbide gas systems it replaced. Milking machines run by electricity, which were more efficient than the gasoline-powered vacuum systems used previously, came into general use in Peacham by 1950. One person milking by hand could only milk six to eight cows an hour, whereas two machines could milk twenty or thirty cows an hour, and a system with six machines working in a milking parlor, which came into use in Peacham soon after World War II, could attend to sixty or seventy cows an hour. The electric cooking stove, much more convenient than the wood stove, especially in hot weather, helped Peacham housewives. Electricity provided the energy to spark oil furnaces, which by the early 1970's had to a large extent replaced wood for heating, although the oil embargo and subsequent escalation of fuel costs reversed this trend after 1973. Electricity was used to saw wood, to heat water, to run washing machines and vacuum cleaners, to heat irons, to wash dishes, to run sewing machines, to toast bread, to turn mixers, and to operate radios and televisions.

The telephone also brought change to Peacham. By 1929 the Molly's

Falls Telephone Company served most of the houses in the town. The telephone made possible appreciable savings in time in organizing work with others, and it brought a new dimension to the social life of the isolated farmwomen. The "central" operator monitored a considerable portion of the conversation, and she became a mine of information. She could spread the word quickly in case of fire, could call an ambulance on her own initiative, and could call the constable or state police in case of some disturbance of the peace.

The introduction of the automobile and the truck, the improvements to the roads, the shift from making butter on the farm to shipping milk to metropolitan areas, the improvement of herds, the mechanization of field husbandry, and the introduction of electricity all required large investments. The greater the investments which a farmer made and the greater the proportion of his milk which was marketed in distant and impersonal markets, the more he became dependent upon purchases to satisfy his needs and wants. Peacham farmers lost much of whatever was left of self-sufficiency and increasingly relied on the market for money to acquire supplies and food and to pay for acquisitions.

The increased use of currency as a medium of exchange brought into ever sharper focus the importance of the relationship of prices for various classes of goods. During World War I, and immediately afterward, the relationship between the prices of what farmers received for their produce and what they paid for industrial goods favored the farmers. These advantageous conditions encouraged them to invest in changes and hastened their full participation in the market economy. The index of wholesale prices for all commodities doubled from 1913 to 1920, which made it possible for farmers to pay off debts in "cheaper" money. When prices broke downward in May, 1920, the prices for agricultural goods fell faster than did those for industrial goods. This movement put farmers in a price squeeze. Taking the relationship of agricultural prices to industrial prices in the 1910-1914 period as "parity," the parity ratio worked to the disadvantage of farmers in the brief depression of 1920-1921 and remained against them during the entire decade. The downward course of prices and the differences between what farmers paid for their purchases and what they took in from the sale of their goods continued until 1932. In that year, they hit the bottom. By then farmers were forty-five percent worse off in this relationship than they had been in the 1910-1914 period.⁹

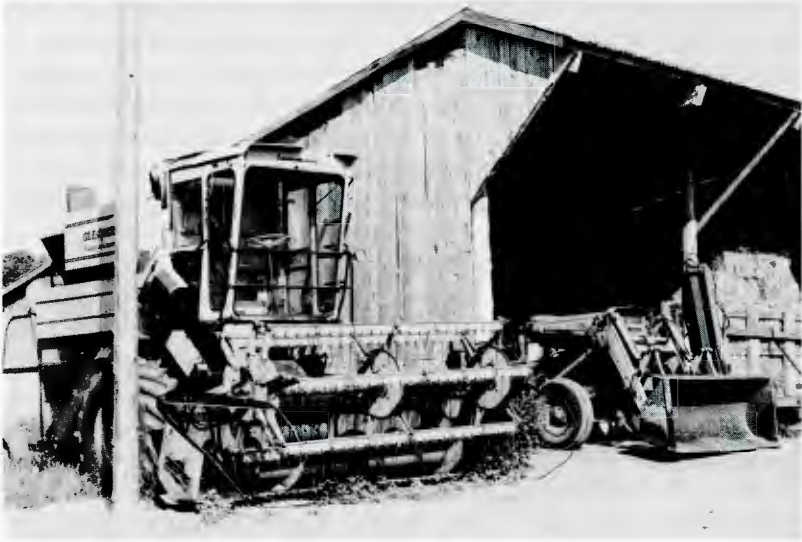
Farmers managed for a time to withstand the pressures of the unfavorable cost-revenue ratio. Dairy farmers, particularly, had a hard time, for the price of milk proved to be elastic—it fell by more than half from 1920 to 1932, its low point. In 1920 farmers on the average received

\$3.22 per 100 pounds of whole milk at wholesale prices. The price had dropped to \$1.28 by 1932 and had only climbed back to \$1.69 in 1939. The effect of this collapse of prices was increased because the drop came at a time when the milk industry was in the throes of the revolution which required high capital investments to increase efficiency in production and to replace the vanishing labor force with machinery.¹⁰ At the same time, farmers faced the growing demands of their families to share in the myriad of new consumer goods — a demand fueled by expectations of men who had seen how others lived when away at war or war work and by massive advertising campaigns in that golden period of magazines and the dawning age of the radio.

During these years, Peacham's farmers pursued remarkably conservative policies and displayed enormous restraint. Purchases were meager. Loans were obtained for only basic equipment. In 1939 the principal of the Academy bought a refrigerator, the proprietor of one of Peacham's boarding houses bought a washing machine, a farmer bought a few registered cows—the first time this item appears on a chattel mortgage. Otherwise the transactions were for replacement cows, a few horses, and one or two secondhand cars.

Under similar hard times farmers had formerly turned their efforts to producing other things than milk to augment their income. Once they could have gone to lumbering, especially to cutting pine for wooden boxes, but corrugated and other cardboards had largely replaced wooden boxes. Nor did they have much of a demand for construction lumber, for building was at a standstill. Some farmers did more maple sugaring than was their wont, but some sugarbushes had been cut to reap a quick profit, and many were destroyed by the hurricane of 1938. Some farmers tried diversification. Most were as self-sufficient as possible. County Agents encouraged diversification of farm products in the 1930's, a theme to which they returned in 1980.

Many farmers turned to poultry as a supplement to milk production. Frank Dubois, a "book farmer" from Lynn, Massachusetts, began one relatively large poultry farm in about 1926. Marsh Byington bought the operation shortly thereafter, and Byington, in turn, sold to Clifton Schoolcraft and moved to a larger farm on Lake Champlain. Schoolcraft's enterprise grew steadily through the 1950's and 1960's and at its peak employed six people on a full-time basis. By 1979, however, further development of this business required considerable new investment, not justified by the low return, and the enterprise was abandoned.¹¹ Several other farmers maintained flocks of from 200 to 500 hens, and in the 1960's poultry business experienced another small boom. In general, however, farmers in Peacham discovered that they could not compete with the huge "broiler factories" of the Middle West, many financed by large grain



Farmers made new investments to meet new challenges such as the harvester/combine and storage bin to utilize Peacham-grown barley for forage supplement. Courtesy of Matthew Kempton.

companies. Vermont poultrymen faced certain disadvantages: they had to pay for the transportation of grain from the Middle West; they did not have large enough volume to lower the cost of marketing eggs; and they did not have adequate facilities for marketing dressed poultry on a scale to satisfy metropolitan markets.

One strategy for farmers to ride out their financial storm was to mortgage their properties. Farm mortgage debt for the whole nation went from 29.1 percent of the value of farms in 1920 to 42 percent of their value in 1925, to 50.3 percent in 1935.¹² Peacham farmers did not closely follow the national trend. Town land records show a remarkably small volume of mortgage indebtedness either on real estate or on collateral. Apparently people in Peacham chose a lower standard of living rather than a heavy debt burden. Those people in Peacham who did mortgage their property preferred to deal with individuals rather than banks, the ratio between the two having been eight to three both in 1929 and 1939.¹³ The bank mortgages were more restrictive than those of individuals, who were also less apt to foreclose. A typical bank mortgage provided "that the mortgagor shall not cut or sell any timber without written consent of the bank and shall feed out all hay and grain grown upon the mortgaged premises." In several cases the mortgagee had owned the property and had sold it in order to have a regular income during his retirement.

Much of the New Deal dairy policy worked to establish milk prices which would enable dairy farmers to stay in business and continue to supply milk at reasonable prices to buyers. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration (1933) aimed at controlling the supply of goods which went to market by making payments for reductions in production. When the Supreme Court declared the Agricultural Adjustment Administration unconstitutional, the government tried to attain the goals it sought by making payments for acreage not put down to certain crops and by making loans under advantageous terms to farmers through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (1932), the Farm Credit Association (1933), and the Resettlement Administration (1935). Furthermore, the New Deal endeavored to make the marketing of milk more orderly by means of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, as amended by the Marketing Agreement Act of 1935. These acts strove to prevent surplus milk from one area being dumped in another and to have producers agree on prices to be charged in the "milk sheds." Inasmuch as the highest prices were paid for fluid milk of high quality, the measures taken contributed toward its production and thus to the concentration of output on ever larger farms. In like manner the policies adopted encouraged the processing of milk in ever larger and better equipped creameries. In Peacham one creamery after another changed hands and then merged with others. The South Peacham Creamery, incorporated in 1893, became part of the Consolidated Dairies in 1934, the New England Dairies in 1946, and then the New England Producers Association. Finally in 1953 an individual purchased the plant and the land it owned. In 1979 only four creameries remained in the area near Peacham to which farmers could sell their milk: H.P. Hood, White Brothers, Yankee Milk, and Cabot Creamery. Within a year the number had declined to two: Agramart, a fusion of Hood and Yankee, and Cabot. This situation was not entirely satisfactory from the farmers' point of view, for all cases of duopsony (only two buyers) place sellers at a disadvantage as they cannot shop around for good terms. On the other hand, concentration allowed a reduction in transportation costs and in overhead expenditures connected with "signing up" farmers for their milk, in the inspection of barns, and in other areas.

The hauling of milk to creameries again presented a problem. Drivers were loath to collect milk on outlying farms because of poor roads and small loads. By the late 1950's the problem of hauling milk was at least partially solved by storage of milk in refrigerated bulk tanks at the farm and the collection of milk by bulk tank trucks every other day. This procedure lessened the work of the farmer, but high cost of the bulk tanks drove some farmers out of business.

The continuing lure of urban areas in Vermont and beyond reinforced the dropping and then the disappearance of the farm labor pool in the 1920's and 1930's. Wages for farm laborers fell to the point where a young man could no longer work for a farmer and save enough to go into business for himself. Before and for a time after World War I a man in Peacham had been able to engage in this informal type of apprenticeship—he gained his skills and built up capital at the same time. During the Great Depression of the 1930's and again in the 1950's, this procedure came almost to a complete halt. The local young man found farm wages so low that he had to go elsewhere—to the larger farms of Massachusetts and Vermont—to acquire the capital for getting started in farming. Even that venture did not necessarily make it possible to go into the dairy business, for the capital required to begin a farm operation climbed enormously from 1929 to 1979, reflecting rising land values and the introduction of new techniques. By the 1940's young men in Peacham got their agricultural education from accredited teachers at Peacham Academy or at other schools, from organizations like Future Farmers of America or 4-H Clubs, from contacts with farmers from other areas, or from the agricultural colleges to which some went. The disappearance of the farm labor pool in turn accelerated the movement toward the mechanization of farming. Farmers accustomed to carrying on with many hands had to turn to operations based on capital-intensive methods. This shift not only aided the decline of the number of dairy farms in Peacham, but also led to a change in all kinds of living patterns.

The decline in dairying during the 1930s was immediately reflected in the finances of the town's government. The surplus of 1929 became by 1939 a deficit of \$9,641.43, when 55 delinquent taxpayers owed a total of \$2,314.86 and 11 individuals lived at the expense of the town. During the period from 1929 to 1939, the total appraised value of property in the town, the Grand List, declined slightly from \$576,778.00 to \$563,170.00.¹⁴ The hard times worked their decay on Peacham farm property. When a barn burned, the unfortunate owner seldom rebuilt a whole set of buildings, particularly on marginal farms on East Hill or in the vicinity of Martin's Pond.

People of "back" farms also sold out and moved to better places. Sometimes the buyers were people from "away." Crane Brinton, a Harvard University historian, acquired the farm of Mark Abbott on Penny Street; Herbert W. Schneider, a member of the Philosophy Department at Columbia University, bought two adjoining places on Cow Hill, one from Will Sanborn and the other from Vernon Lamb; and Hamilton Slight, a Vice-President of the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York, bought the farm of Wilbur Blodgett on East Hill after the barn burned in 1938.



The Stevens Farm in 1929. A house of fourteen rooms with running water and inside plumbing brought only \$1,800.00. Courtesy of Peacham Historical Association Archives.

Some of those who put their places on the market did so not because they were having a hard time making both ends meet but because they “daughtered out,” as the local saying puts it. They had no sons to carry on, but possibly six or seven daughters they had produced in the hopes of getting a male. Then there were others who were getting to an age when they could not do farm work and wanted to retire. In no instances of these sales had young men come forward as purchasers; they were “down country” accumulating the capital which, in the late 1940’s, would enable some of them to return to Peacham. Some of the youth preferred to move away to other realms and demonstrate they were among “the energetic and enterprising ones of the community.”

Those who purchased Peacham properties in the 1930’s mostly came from the academic segment of society, with secure, tenured positions, and within that group they came primarily from Columbia and Harvard Universities. Neither New York nor Cambridge had an attractive summer climate, especially to those with children to raise or serious contemplative work to do. Hitherto few professors could afford country places of their own, certainly not on Long Island or on Cape Cod. Now with depressed prices for farms they might acquire a place in Peacham for sums they could



The Stevens Farm in 1979. Courtesy of Matthew Kempton.

readily amass. One farm in Peacham, for example, with 125 acres, a house of 14 rooms, with inside plumbing and running water and a barn which could tie up 25 cows was sold for \$1,800 in 1937. This bargain was not exceptional. Crowding the market in 1939 were three places which had been foreclosed and four others for sale by administrators of estates who wanted to move their properties to satisfy the claims of inheritors. These rural homes were attractive because the automobile made them more accessible and provided a way of getting children to the country cheaply. Some of the earliest buyers in Peacham were those acquainted with the region. Some had stayed at one of the inns or boarding houses of the town. Some found Peacham from lists of farms for sale provided by the state or by some large real estate agency.

In the "in-migration" which took place, as in all migrations, pioneers blazed the trail and others, frequently their friends, followed. For example, Professor Schneider, who bought two places as early as 1929, had attracted fifteen of his friends to the area by 1939. Similarly the first of the Harvard group had brought in a like number in the first ten years after the Depression began. These newcomers were for the most part learned; their presence resulted, it was said, in the town's having the highest proportion of its population in *Who's Who in America* of any place in the entire

nation. But then, at this time, Vermont itself had a larger population in that volume than any other state of the union.¹⁵

The in-migrants influenced the local society in many ways. As Van Wyck Brooks wrote about a similar group, they "straightened the winding lanes that were better before . . . and went on to improve the natives."¹⁶ They established a discussion group, the "Meeting of the Minds," where the minds never met, but which gave the "talkers" a chance to voice their opinions on a great variety of subjects—from the nature of the cosmos, the existence or non-existence of God, trouble on university campuses, to the excessive permissiveness of modern parents. They urged the hiring of a seminary-trained minister for the local church without considering whether or not he might fit into the mores of the community. They endeavored to raise the intellectual level of Peacham Academy, although their own children went elsewhere to school. They participated in the founding and operation of the Stevens Valley Men's Club, patterned after the Rotary Club. They assisted in the building of a new Town Library, when the existing facility, the Thaddeus Stevens Library, named after one of Peacham's prominent sons, burned in 1959.¹⁷

To a considerable degree these in-migrants were not integrated into the life of the town. They did not intend to be aloof, but they did stand apart. The two segments of the town's society divided in many ways. While professors "were accustomed to telling people in a pontifical way how things were," the natives were brought up to be reticent in giving their opinions. The in-migrants were on vacation and had considerable leisure, while the permanent residents kept busy with summer farm work, especially haying, one of the farmer's most onerous chores. Professors' wives socialized among themselves, while wives of the local people kept busy with their gardens, canning, and cooking or as extra farm help. Professors' children spent their summers swimming, riding, or "helping farmers," while local children waited on tables, made beds, baby-sat for professors' wives, hayed, or did other farm work. The in-migrants of this early time played little role in school affairs, nor did they participate in the political life of the town. They were not "residents" in a legal sense. They did not attend Town Meetings, as they were rarely in Peacham the first Tuesday of March. They took little interest in some of the usual items of concern of Town Meetings. They showed no interest in the condition of the roads during mud season or during the winter, unless they belonged to the small number who had taken up skiing, and they limited their concerns in summer mostly to the roads they used. They sometimes complained that they were the victims of taxation without representation and, further, that their properties were appraised for tax purposes at higher values than others.

The Thaddeus Stevens Memorial Library, which burned in 1959, with the Mary Mackay house attached, circa 1929. Courtesy of Peacham Historical Association Archives.



Peacham was, on the eve of World War II, a hill town in which dairy farming, traditionally the town's main occupation, had declined and was continuing to decline and in which newcomers, especially from the academic profession, had bought up many places for part-time occupancy. Clearly the population had become much less homogeneous in its interests than at the beginning of the Great Depression and was being subjected to a whole set of factors inducing change.

World War II did not produce a dramatic or drastic effect on Peacham. It temporarily interrupted the decline in the dairy industry as prices became more favorable. The "parity" price ratio rose from 80 in 1940 to 117 in 1945.¹⁸ This change encouraged dairymen to stay in business and allowed them to pay off some of the debt they had amassed modernizing their farm operations. The War did not produce a great exodus from the land in Peacham due to men going off to fight, because farmers, farmers' sons, and farm workers received an exemption from the draft. Those young men who did leave for the services or went into war work often earned enough to acquire a farm or machinery to make the home place pay. Those "who saw Paree" and who in spite of that returned to Peacham did so because they liked the life there. They felt that those who left the town for good gave up more than they gained. The opinion that the "enterprising and energetic ones" went away from Peacham began to wane. For the most part "people from away" absented themselves from the town during the conflict. Many of them were called upon to do war work of various kinds, and the women had difficulty coping with the family's country place, especially with a short ration of gasoline and other items.

Although Peacham remained on an even keel during World War II, the pre-war decline showed signs of resuming by the middle of the 1950's. The price structure for milk and its products began to turn against the farmer, as the parity ratio fell from 107 in 1951 to 82 in 1957.¹⁹ The use of electricity for many appliances and the substitution of tractors for horses as the chief power source for farm work set off a new wave of rapid change in agriculture. The first tractor for private use was purchased by an enterprising man, Leon Snow, as far back as 1918, but as late as 1944 only ten units were in operation in the town. By 1979 every working farm had at least one and some two. Even the operators of the smaller farms could afford a secondhand machine, which sold at prices as low as \$300.00. Tractors had distinct advantages over horses: when not working, they consumed no energy; they could work all day without tiring; and, at that time, they ran on inexpensive and abundant gasoline. In 1930 Peacham farms had 265 horses; in 1980 there were only 10.²⁰

The passing of the horse meant also the passing of many colorful occupations and individuals. By 1929 the blacksmiths of the town had disappeared, their shops no longer seen under the spreading chestnut trees. Even the chestnut trees succumbed to blight. Although general blacksmithing disappeared from Peacham, it was continued in the neighboring town of West Barnet by a native of Peacham, Ben Thresher, who did repair work on farm implements and built truck bodies and watering tubs. Thresher kept away from horse shoeing, which in the late 1970's came into demand because of an increase in riding horses. For them a "farrier" came to fit horseshoes and pare hooves.

With automobiles, tractors, lawn mowers, and chain saws, logic would have dictated that Peacham should have had a garage, but such was not the case. Temple Paye once operated an automotive repair shop in the old grist mill in South Peacham, but when the floor caved in at the end of the 1930's, he closed the shop. Similarly, Irving Hobart did small repairs for a short time in the 1920's in a building adjacent to his house in Peacham Corner. Not until 1979, when Allen Thresher opened a small repair shop, did Peacham have a place of its own for automotive and other mechanical work. Residents went to West Barnet, Danville, or St. Johnsbury for major repairs.

The mechanization of farming and ever more capital-intensive ways of dairying continued apace. Farmers discarded older implements for more efficient ones and adopted new methods for doing most everything. They purchased new refrigeration units to keep milk, installed water heaters and washing facilities in separate milk houses, purchased new field choppers for the harvesting of hay and corn and machines to spray manure

on the fields. They also built new barns for pen stabling of livestock and manure pits for storage.

The increasingly high cost of farming forced more consolidated operations capable of amortizing the cost of equipment. Farmers had to have more cattle per farm. By 1978 farms in Peacham which sold milk for income had an average of 51 head, but the larger ones had between 90 and 120 animals.²¹ The improvement of herds continued. Milk inspectors insisted upon better hygiene in barns—whitewashing of stables at frequent intervals, the installation of better facilities for “cleaning up” after each milking, stainless steel pails, strainers, and tanks, and, sometimes, cement stables. Penalties to farmers through “points-off” to non-conformists in calculating milk checks and new state regulations strengthened the inspector’s power, and these measures resulted in important improvements in the health of cows. Between 1950 and 1980 bovine tuberculosis and brucellosis (undulant fever in humans) disappeared in Peacham.

The continuing changes in dairying involved the farmer ever more completely in the price system. Again milk prices proved elastic. The efforts to stabilize milk prices at the parity prices in existence in the 1910-1914 period, when the farmer was considered reasonably well off, did not succeed. The parity price with its base of 100 fell to 80 in 1940, rose to 117 in 1945, went down to 107 in 1951, and 82 in 1957. By 1975 it rose to 127, only to fall to 90 in 1977.²² Prices for milk were held up, in part, by the price support programs of the Federal Government under policies adopted in 1949.

The blend price for a hundred weight of milk in the 21st Zone of the Boston milk shed, in which Peacham was placed, behaved in much the same way as the parity price index. The Peacham price per hundredweight went from \$4.46 in 1938 to \$4.43 in 1965, to \$6.12 in 1970, and then, with higher rates of inflation, to \$8.80 in 1975 and to \$13.95 in 1980. In Zone one, the Zone near the largest markets, the price went to \$14.78 in the latter year, illustrating the amounts which went for the transportation and processing of milk. In 1980 the farmer received less than half of the price which consumers paid for their milk. Had the price of the parity period (1910-1914) been maintained, the price for a hundredweight would have increased 9½ times to \$15.20 in 1980.²³ Even at existing prices in 1980 farmers in New England could turn a profit.

Price support represented only one of several measures which the government took to help farmers. It also assisted in buying fertilizers, in bringing water supplies to pastures, and in teaching the techniques of contour plowing. Still another program, the Soil Bank, provided subsidies to those who took land out of cultivation in order to reduce supplies. These pay-

ments induced some people from away to buy land which was then not used and some local farmers to plant trees in hay fields.

In Peacham some farmers took their own land out of cultivation, for they could use for nothing, or almost nothing, all the land they wanted from summer people or from others who had bought farms but did not themselves work the land. Several farmers had access to as much land in this fashion as they themselves owned. Frequently they cut hay on others' land as long as it was profitable, and then abandoned the fields when they ran down, or had been mined, as the saying went. Such abandonment of "free land to use" increased after the drastic increase in the price of gasoline in the mid 1970's. Once thrown up, the fields soon filled with goldenrod, then hardhack bushes, juniper, yews, poplars, or scrub birch. Others were set out to Christmas trees, used for tree farming, or were seeded from neighboring forests. As heating oil became more expensive, the owners considered the land in question a possible source of firewood and gave more attention to selective cutting in wood lots.

In spite of the aid of public agencies and others, the number of farms in Peacham declined from fifty-three in 1929 to thirteen in 1980. Of those remaining only four or five provided an adequate income for the occupants. The number of cows per farm increased, but the total number in Peacham fell by a half during the period from 1950 to 1980. Dairying no longer provided the major source of income for Peacham. By 1980 non-residents paid seventy-five percent of the town's taxes on property.²⁴

A tremendous rise in the price of land, ironically, accompanied the decline in the importance of agriculture in the economy of Peacham. The situation in Peacham mirrored Vermont as a whole. During the 1960's and 1970's, economists and investment counselors recommended land investments as a hedge against inflation. Speculators bought farms in Peacham, fixed up the houses, and resold them at a profit. The number of land transfers, which included camps, lumber lots, and pastures as well as farms rose from thirty-six in 1950 to forty-nine in 1979.²⁵ A few of the earlier in-migrants who realized that they could not cope with Vermont winters sold out; the increase in the price of heating oil sent others scurrying to warmer climates; some farmers transferred land to their children to keep them from going away; and the high cost of gasoline which diminished Peacham's attractiveness as a weekend or commuting town encouraged others to sell.

Those who wanted to sell found a ready market. Some of the buyers were people who had been raised in Peacham or in towns similar to it and wanted to spend their last years in the environment of their youth. Others wished to raise their children in what they believed to be a safe, sane, and healthy *milieu*. Some speculators expected an increase in the value of

their purchases, while others escaped to Peacham hoping to avoid the violence, crime, congestion, and juvenile delinquency associated with large metropolitan centers. Still others came to buy summer cottages at one of Peacham's lakes and ponds.

Those who bought property from 1950 to 1980 were more likely to become year-round residents than those who had come during the Great Depression of the 1930's. The new in-migrants were a heterogenous group composed of doctors, nurses, writers, artists, lawyers, engineers, businessmen, workmen, salesmen, musicians, teachers, and even a caterer. Some were retirees from New York, Burlington, and Boston, who owned winter homes in warmer places and remained in Peacham only during the summer months, but the great majority of them were businessmen or workmen, who plied their respective trades in nearby towns, especially St. Johnsbury, but also Montpelier and Morrisville. (One hardy individual went daily to the Burlington area at a distance of some seventy-five miles each way.) Peacham gradually became a "sleeping, bedroom, or satellite" town.

The newcomers, as with those before them, found things they wished to rectify. They did not want to alter the basic character of the place, but they did want to "better" it. As a large group in the midst of a declining native population, these people played an active role in Peacham affairs. They paid a large share of the town's taxes. Some were experienced businessmen who expected to be heard, and they wanted town matters handled in a businesslike fashion. They were impatient with decisions which were apparently not reached in a systematic manner and with "chalk on the barn door" record keeping. The newcomers became members of the School Board, which accounted for over one-half of the expenditures of tax money; they frequently held positions of Selectmen; they rebuilt old houses or constructed new ones; and they strove to maintain property values.

The economic changes which have taken place in Peacham and the in-migration of new elements since World War II were accompanied by alterations in the life style of the town generally, for the in-migrants brought a different kind of social behavior than was traditional in the Northeast Kingdom. The new elements brought with them, and the older elements picked up from their new neighbors and the media, different ideas about manners, philosophies of life, customs, and attitudes than those which had predominated. In matters of religion Peacham now harbored people with ideas other than the traditional Protestant beliefs. The town now included Catholics, Jews, sceptics, atheists, and even Buddhists (in Barnet). In matters of architecture structures appeared which ran all the way from A-frames to geodesic domes, from ranches

to modulars, from lean-tos and mobile homes to imposing town houses. Carpenters or architects remodeled existing buildings with oversized gables, eaves which lacked traditional proportions, and out-structures which belonged elsewhere.

By the late 1960's many residents reached the conclusion that growth needed to be controlled. In 1970 the voters adopted a zoning regulation over the opposition of people who argued that "a man's home was his castle." Late in the 1970's the town residents strengthened this first simple ordinance. They feared that the three villages in Peacham might become blighted by piles of junk, trailer parks, refuse dumps, fast food shacks, or industrial development. The voters adopted new rules in December, 1980, which spelled out in detail what people could or could not do with their property in specified parts of the town.²⁶

The zoning rules indicated a growing attitude of impersonal relations among the population which had replaced much of an older type of friendly consensus. The wealthier elements in Peacham expected services such as mowing lawns, house-cleaning, and weeding gardens. They demanded dust-free roads and increased law enforcement, while the less affluent believed that many services, like caring for the poor, providing medical services, and helping the victims of calamity, should be rendered by some governmental agency. Such attitudes led to a lessening of self-reliance and to a trend to lean on agencies far away with intrusive and bureaucratic tendencies.

The move toward more impersonal relationships among people was furthered by a growing practice among Peachamites to do their major shopping in stores "far" away rather than in local retail establishments. The latter became more and more service or convenience stores handling basic products and a few perishable items. Of the five stores which existed in 1929 but one general store continued to operate in South Peacham, and a speciality store, *cum* catering, remained at Peacham Corner.

Along with changes in building and merchandizing came changes in Peacham's educational system. A new and up-to-date elementary school was built in 1969 which replaced the one-room rural schools. These older buildings, when placed on the market, attracted buyers from away. Only one rural school building remained intact (in the South Part) in 1979 to show how children had once been housed while learning the "three R's." Most of Peacham's students had traditionally attended Peacham Academy, officially the Caledonia County Grammar School, dating back to 1795. This institution had played an important part in Peacham's life. It tended to unify various elements in the population. Its teachers brought cultural gifts to the community and married into local families, and it was a major employer of the town.



Peacham Academy, 1929. Courtesy of Peacham Historical Association Archives.

As with many small schools of its kind, the Academy fell on hard times in the 1940's. The population of school age children declined. Some families sent their teenagers to boarding schools or to St. Johnsbury Academy hoping their young would benefit. People in neighboring towns had their own high schools, and the Academy lost this important source of students. Then, in the 1950's, the difficulties were compounded as the Commissioner of Education for the State of Vermont and the State Board of Education favored the creation of union schools with expensive facilities for vocational training. New regulations which required small schools to provide, for example, specific amounts of space for domestic science and mechanical arts, presented demands which local resources could not reasonably satisfy.

To meet the crisis in the late 1950's the Trustees of the Academy established a boarding department for students from relatively distant parts, added dormitories, constructed a Science Building, and acquired a headmaster's house and a gym. Under the headmastership of Sumner Dole, the Academy enjoyed a revival. The school provided, once again, employment for many people. The influx of boarding students had, however, many unforeseen results. Local youth came face to face with values and

modes of behavior quite foreign to them. In a broad sense homespun values represented by thrift and hard work met head on those more anomalous values of the welfare state and of the large cities. In this confrontation the native standards did not always come out victoriously.

By the late 1960's, as private schools throughout the Northeast faced declining enrollments and the resulting financial pinch, the marginal establishments suffered the most. Overwhelmed by the requirements of the state, burdened by debts incurred in the expansion program, and faced with diminishing enrollments, the Academy closed its doors in 1969. After that students from Peacham went to different schools around the area for their secondary schooling. In 1971 a group of concerned parents and others established an "alternate" school with a leaning for unstructured education in the Academy's complex of buildings. This new enterprise, known as the Peacham School, had a modicum of success, but the main building burned to the ground in 1976, and shortly after that sad event, in 1979, the Peacham School, afflicted by many of the same forces which had plagued the Academy, went out of business.

In the past half-century the small town of Peacham has undergone major changes. Some of them were peculiar to Peacham; some of them were common to dairying hill towns of Vermont; and some were part of the changes taking place in the entire nation. Much of the fabric has endured and remains recognizable, but, at the same time, the physical changes, the growth of houses, the decline in the care of the fields, the disappearance of the old barns, the spreading woodland, and the transformations in the less visible aspects of existence describe a different society.

The mutations through which Peacham has gone in the last fifty years stemmed from the internal combustion engine. This technological innovation came into existence because of a myriad of elements in a complex set of circumstances. It exerted its pressure for change in a continually revolving kaleidoscope of economic, social, political, and intellectual forces. The truck made possible the transportation of Peacham's main commercial product to distant and larger markets, which set off a variety of other changes. The automobile allowed people from Peacham to commute to neighboring places for employment and permitted people from away to come to town as summer vacationers. The tractor was an important factor in the mechanization of field work and hence to more capital-intensive operations—to larger herds, to larger farms, to larger investments, and to ever more labor-saving devices.

In the gasoline age people came to Peacham with other interests and values than those nourished by the local population; and current magazines, movies, television shows, and newspapers spread information about new ways of doing things and raised ideas and standards foreign to

traditional ways. The internal combustion engine destroyed the isolation and parochialism that had existed previously. The automobile provided means for shopping at other-than-Peacham stores, for getting to know on a regular basis a wider area than had been possible by horse and train travel, to seek entertainment outside the community, and to reach places where one attained complete anonymity free from the restraints upon one's behavior provided by the family, school, or church. It also contributed much to changes in the role of women in Peacham society, for it gave them a mobility to seek employment off the farm, to have more social exchanges than had existed previously, and, with electricity, to be free of or to perform more easily many household tasks of drudgery. Unfortunately, it also allowed the criminal and delinquent elements in the population easy access to and egress from Peacham farms and houses, particularly the more isolated ones.

During the last half-century, the sense of community in Peacham has declined, for a larger proportion of the population than formerly is composed of transients, people who may live in the town for a few years and develop no local ties, no commitment to the place, and have little feeling of "belonging." The local church still provides a point of focal interest for a small part of the community, but for a much smaller portion than in 1929. Schools after the sixth grade no longer constitute a center around which the activities and spirit of the youth revolve. Community activities like card parties, square dances, and box lunch socials, once an on-going part of the life of Peacham, have almost completely disappeared. Town basketball and baseball teams no longer exist, and the local sports field is seldom used, except for Fourth of July fireworks. Current recreational diversions tend heavily toward the individual type—hunting, fishing, watching television, or roaming in automobiles. Burglaries and vandalism, once almost unknown, have increased alarmingly. The victim no longer has any direct recourse, and the culprits, or those responsible for them, exhibit little remorse.

From a place with a high degree of homogeneity in its economic, social, political, educational, recreational, and religious life, Peacham has become diversified in nearly all respects. Peacham is now composed of many divergent groups, divided by income, interests, religion, and politics. One person may belong to only one unit, but more usually actually belongs to two or more, depending upon the issue under consideration at any moment. There are now clearly more differing attitudes toward morals, patriotism, religion, the work ethic, and education than fifty years ago. The assessment of the change in the quality of life in Peacham over a half-century depends upon the values placed on two different ways of life, one more family and community centered, the other clearly

more mobile and more affluent. It is certain, however, that the concerns and duties of one era have been replaced by the different worries and occupations of another period.

NOTES

¹ This article is part of a larger history of Peacham to cover the period from 1929 to 1979. It is a sequel to Ernest L. Bogart's *Peacham. The Story of a Vermont Hill Town* (Montpelier, Vermont: The Vermont Historical Society, 1948 and reprinted in 1981 by The University Press of America of Washington, D.C. for the Peacham Historical Association).

Our contribution to this history deals largely with economic life, but, it also touches upon almost all phases of human activity. Also, as will be seen from the text, we describe and analyze the major changes which have taken place in Peacham in the last half century.

We have endeavored to document our findings so that our readers and other researchers may check our sources and find corroboration for our conclusions. This is often difficult, for local records for such data as the price of milk, the extent of logging, or the production of maple syrup are not always available to the researcher. The Town Clerk's Office is, however, a mine of information. There the researcher finds tax records, land records, and vital statistics. The archives of the Peacham Historical Association are another source for lore about the town.

We suggest that those interested in local history consult: D.D. Parker, *Local History*. Social Science Research Council; New York, 1944; Bulletin 54 of the Social Science Research Council, *Theory and Practice in Historical Study* (1946); Bulletin 64 of the Social Science Research Council, *The Social Sciences in Historical Study* (1954); Davis S. Landes and Charles Tilley (eds), *History as Social Science*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971; and also some of the many community studies such as Robert S. & Helen M. Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary Culture*. N. Y.: Harcourt, 1929.

² Lots went to Danville, Barnet, and St. Johnsbury. Pulp went mostly to the paper mill at nearby East Ryegate. Later large trucks carried the pulp to mills within a radius of fifty miles.

³ See the Grand List for 1920, Peacham Town Clerk's Office.

⁴ Automobile registrations, Department of Transportation, Montpelier. Also Diary of Mary Blair Mackay, 1910.

⁵ Road expenses, Annual Town Report of Peacham for 1936.

⁶ Testimony of local farmers. See also Peacham Chattel Mortgage Records, 1939, Peacham Town Clerk's Office.

⁷ From the diary of Mary Blair Mackay, unpublished.

⁸ Information furnished by the Washington Electric Company, East Montpelier, Vermont.

⁹ When the New Deal undertook to reestablish a parity position for agricultural and industrial prices, it used as its goal the restoration of the relationship of prices which had existed in 1910-1914.

¹⁰ For prices, see *Historical Statistics of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1978) and the various publications of the Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Prices for milk and feed are from figures furnished by the Market Administrator for the New England Order Market, Boston, Mass.

¹¹ From testimony of Clifton Schoolcraft, Jr.

¹² *Historical Statistics of the U. S., 1980* Series K162-172.

¹³ Land Records of the Town of Peacham.

¹⁴ From Town Reports and records in the office of the Town Clerk.

¹⁵ Stewart H. Holbrook, *The Yankee Exodus* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), p. 297 footnote.

¹⁶ Van Wyck Brooks, *New England: Indian Summer* (The World Publishing Company: Cleveland and New York, 1940), pp. 346.

¹⁷ Personal observations of the authors.

¹⁸ *Historical Statistics of U. S., 1980*. Series K122-128 and 1195.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Caledonia County, Basic Facts and Figures*. Vermont Agricultural Extension Service. In all Vermont, there were 52,000 horses on farms in 1929 and 8,488 in 1978. *Census of Agriculture, Vermont Preliminary Report*. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1980.

²¹ Raymond H. Tremblay, *Dairy Farm Business Analysis*, Cooperative Extension Services of the Northeastern States, 1980. Also see Lyle P. Schwartz and others, *Another Revolution in Farming* (Washington: Dept. of Agriculture, 1979), pp. 141-142.

²² *The Market Administrators Review*. New England Marketing Area. Nov., 1980. p. 7.

²³ *Ibid.*; and the *Historical Statistics of the U. S.*

²⁴ Information furnished by Edward L. Rowe from the Peacham Grand List, May, 1981.

²⁵ Land Records of the Town of Peacham.

²⁶ *Peacham, Vermont. Zoning Regulations* (1980).