

the Annual Meeting Presentation
of the
Center for Research on Vermont

“Old Fields, Forests, and Farmland:
Using Historic Photographs to Show
Changes in Vermont’s Landscape”

By Jens Hilke

Landscape Change Program, University of Vermont

Thursday, May 6, 2004, at 7:30 P.M.
Memorial Lounge, Waterman Building

University of Vermont

The Landscape Change Program at the University of Vermont (UVM) uses paired historic and current photographs to show changes in Vermont’s landscape. The program’s staff work with teachers to design curricula that use the photographs and integrate cultural and natural history. Schools are matched with local historical societies and loaned scanners and computers to capture historic images. Students are then given GPS units and digital cameras to retake the scanned photographs. They upload the image pair accompanied with location data and descriptive text to the Landscape Change Program Web site at <www.uvm.edu/perkins/landscape>. This is used in the classroom as visual proof of Vermont’s history and integrated into class units from a variety of disciplines. The program seeks to involve communities across the state by encouraging Vermonters to submit historic photographs of their own and to search the database as a means of connecting with their region’s history.

The archive contains thousands of images portraying Vermont from the 1860s to the present. It contains dramatic evidence of changes in Vermont’s physical landscape, showing landslides, erosion, floods, reforestation, development, and much more. The archive also links the cultural and natural history of Vermont. Just as topographic and geologic factors have affected cultural decisions, such as where settlers might homestead, cultural decisions of land and resource use affect the face of the natural world. In the sense that Vermonters’ choices for land use reflect our relationship with the natural world, the Landscape Change Program archive chronicles how the relationship has changed over time.

Jens Hilke is the program coordinator for the Landscape Change Program. He works with teachers across Vermont to design place-based curricula that integrate natural and cultural history using historic photographs of Vermont’s landscapes, and he works with local historical societies and townspeople to find these images. He has taught ecology, earth science, and biology. His research has included work on invasive species management and cliff management. An ecologist by training, he is a graduate of UVM’s Field Naturalist Program.

The talk is free and open to the public. For more information, please telephone the Center for Research on Vermont at 802/656-4389 or email <crv@uvm.edu> or visit the Center’s Web site at <www.uvm.edu/~crvt>.