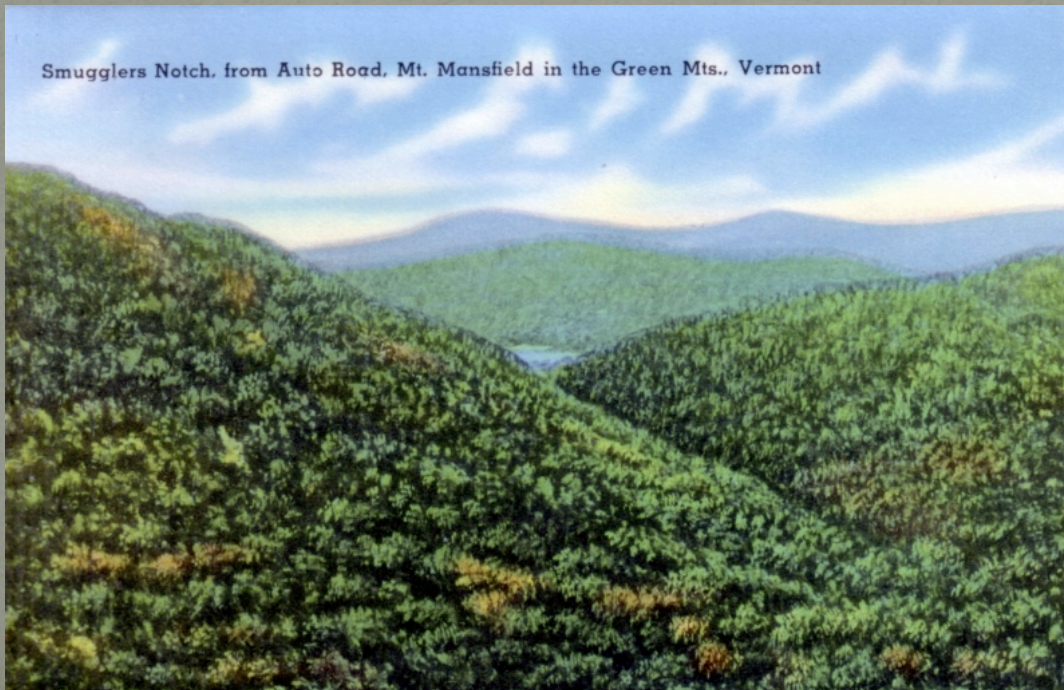


The Forests of Vermont: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow

A history of Vermont's Forested Landscape
By Kyle Adelman

Today's Vermont Forests

Currently encompassing 4.6 million forested acres, Vermont's land is 78% forests making it the fourth most heavily forested state in America. 82% of Vermont Forests are privately owned.



LS11475 Shows a 1915 postcard of the heavily forested Smuggler's Notch in Stowe.

But it hasn't always been like this...

In the 1760s, estimates propose that 90% of Vermont land was covered in pristine forest.



LS00797 Drawing of Lake Memphremagog 1700 - 1800.

Once There Was Virgin Forest

The forest at the time included many tree species, some of which were six feet in diameter, as tall as a thirteen story building, and more than 300 years old.



LS06457 Taken in 1913 shows a picture of a large and healthy old Chestnut tree in an unknown town. These were once a common sight in the Vermont landscape, but due to logging and blight these trees are now a rare in Vermont.

Native American Impact

The Abenaki Native Indians were the first humans to impact Vermont's forests clearing river and lake sides with fire to create land for dwellings and crops.



LS03538 This 1875 stereoview image depicts the Black River and cleared slopes. The Abenaki called the Black River Elligo-sigo which means “a good place to plant crops or return to them”.

Clearing for Farmlands

European deforestation in Vermont began in the Champlain Valley. Farmers cleared forests to create fields, and loggers cut giant softwoods for out of state resale.



LS10788 Image was taken in 1958 in an unknown town. It depicts a clear cut field.

Booming Industry

By the mid-1800s logging overtook agriculture as Vermont's main industry. Around this time Burlington was considered the third largest lumber port in the country.



LS10343 Shows the Burlington waterfront with train tracks and stacks of lumber between 1860 and 1880.

Clear Cutting Consequences

The landowners of these times did not consider how to renew their timber resources; neglectful clear cutting left the land susceptible to soil exhaustion, loss of wildlife, erosion, flooding, and increased fire danger.



LS03011 Shows an 1875 clear cut slope with soil erosion occurring along the shore line in the town of Barnard.

Deforestation

Prior to the 20th century an estimated 70% of Vermont's lands were clear cut and deforested.

LS00411 Presents a clear cut slope with slash debris in New Haven in 1875.



Abandoned Field Regrowth

As westward expansion gained in popularity, Vermont's economy began to suffer. Farmlands began to be abandoned and the price of farms dropped dramatically. The rate of Vermonter migration was extreme and by the year 1870 over 1/3 of residents moved out of state.



LS08595 Image shows Camel's Hump Mountain from an unknown town. Taken in 1968 this image has an abandoned clear cut field in the center which is experiencing regrowth of small bushes in the foreground.

A New Breed of Forest

After all of the extensive forest cutting that occurred, the forests of Vermont rebounded but in a different form. Before any cutting took place, Vermont was largely a softwood forest, the natural regeneration of abandoned logging areas and farms brought Vermont a new forest population



LS07428 Depicts Table Mountain with a cleared hillside that is experiencing regrowth. This photograph was taken in Stockbridge in the year 1897.

Regrowth

Much of the deforested land has been allowed to return to a healthy forested state.



LS00878 Shows the Montpelier State House in 1870 with a cleared hill side in the background.



LS11203_001 Depicts the State House in 2007 with a reforested hill side.

Sustainable Harvesting

- Today the lumber industry functions much more conscientiously and massive clear cutting has stopped. Now loggers make their cuts with the future in mind, and areas are often planted with seedlings to ensure the forest will be renewed.



LS08895 Lumber being cut in a 1955 in an unknown town.

Conclusion

- Vermont's forests are among the states' most valuable resources. The land has experienced a long history of natural successional growth, interrupted by the clearing and logging efforts of men. It is important for people to understand the history of the land they live on, in order to comprehend how and why it developed its current appearance.



LS05850 Planting Trees
in Royalton in 1939.

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