

Stowe: Our Shared Past

Pre-History

For thousands of years before European settlers arrived, the area now known as Stowe, was inhabited by Indigenous peoples, primarily the Abenaki, part of the larger Algonquin-speaking tribes of the Northeast. The Abenaki people relied on the region's rich natural resources for hunting, fishing, and agriculture and moved seasonally, setting up temporary villages and camps to access different resources throughout the year. The fertile valleys, forests, and rivers provided an abundant environment for the Abenaki, who navigated the area through waterways and trails that would later become part of Vermont's landscape.

Vermont's pre-history is shaped by the retreat of glaciers from the last Ice Age, which retreated more than 12,000 years ago. This glacial activity created the valleys, rivers, and mountains that now define our scenic landscape, including Mount Mansfield, Vermont's highest peak. The rich, fertile land and abundant natural resources made the region important for Indigenous peoples and later attracted European settlers to the region. While no known large settlements were established in Stowe before colonial times, the land held great significance for its natural resources, waterways, and biodiversity.

Historic Setting

Until late in the twentieth century, Stowe's development, economic resources and identity were closely connected to the forests of the Worcester Range to the east and Mount Mansfield to the west, as well as to the East and West Branches of the Waterbury River (now called the Little River).

Early Settlement

Chartered in 1763 as part of the New Hampshire land grant, Stow (the original spelling) contained 20,040 acres of mountain slopes, hillsides and two river valleys. Its first inhabitants, the Oliver Luce family arrived in 1794 from Hartland, Vermont. At the first town meeting, in 1797, highway districts were formed, a penny tax imposed for the maintenance of the town and the majority of the adult men were elected or appointed to various positions in the township. By 1800 the population had grown to more than 300 residents and a village that contained a hotel, a school and two shops was formed north of the "Village". South of the Village, surrounding the grist and sawmills, Mill Village (now the Lower Village) grew. It was here that the first post office opened in 1816, the first tannery was built and to which stores from the North Village moved. Further south along the Waterbury River, Moscow Village grew around the sawmill built in 1822.

Weekly postal service from Waterbury through Stow, Morristown, Hyde Park to Johnson via Gregg Hill from the south and Stagecoach Road to the north increased accessibility to neighboring communities. Other transportation improvements were the construction of

Laporte Road (now Route 100) to Morrisville village in 1832 and the Plank Turnpike from Waterbury Center to the southern part of Stowe in 1852.

19th Century Expansion

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Stow's population grew between 300 and 600 people per decade which resulted in increased forest clearing, an increase in the number of district schools to ten, and an increase in the number of saw mills, roads and bridges. The town's acreage grew to more than 39,000 acres in 1848, when part of the township of Mansfield, which was settled in 1800 by Zimri Luce, Oliver's brother, was annexed to Stow. In 1822, part of the township of Sterling was annexed to Cambridge and in 1855 the rest was divided between the townships of Stow, Morristown and Johnson. Stow's land mass grew to 46,425 acres making it one of the largest townships in Vermont. Neither Mansfield nor Sterling had a civic or commercial center when the annexations took place.

The "Travel Experience" movement that was growing by mid-19th century was not lost on the entrepreneurs of Stow. City people seeking the benefits of mountain air and clean clear water began visiting Stow, staying at the Raymond Hotel or the Mansfield House in the Village and going by coach to Mount Mansfield. In 1851 the "Toll Road" was constructed to the Halfway House with a trail to the summit of Mount Mansfield. A few years later the trail [to the summit](#) was improved and the Tip Top House (Summit House) was ~~completed~~[constructed](#).

Between 1861 and 1863 substantial ~~construction~~[building](#) took place in the Village. The first meetinghouse was moved to its current site (Vermont Ski Museum); the Universalist Church (Community Church) was constructed on the site of the first Meeting House; the Greek Revival Village School (Helen Day Montanari Memorial Library and Art Center building) was built; and the 200-room, four-story Mount Mansfield Hotel and Livery was constructed using local resources. The hotel integrated the Raymond Hotel and the Mansfield House and had a footprint of three blocks by two blocks on the south side of Main Street. Stowe (now with the "e" added) became known as "the Saratoga of Vermont".

Theater performances, literature and magazines, music and fashion came to Stowe along with the visitors each summer until 1889 when the hotel burned to the ground, the night after closing for the season. Notables such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Admiral Dewey visited Stowe. The Summit House continued to be popular until the middle of the 20th century when it also burned.

The population of Stowe reached a peak of 2,049 in 1870. It lost about 200 people by 1880 and remained near 1,800 residents until 1903, when it dipped to 1,653. During this time, manufacturing butter tubs, and the packing and shipping of butter, became a major industry in Stowe, along with the manufacturing of other wooden products. By the mid-19th century farmers changed from raising sheep as a cash resource to raising dairy cows. Butter and maple sugar, shipped to Boston, from Waterbury, via the Central

Vermont Rail, became a major source of cash. The Mount Mansfield Electric Railroad chartered in 1894, improved the access to the distant markets. Stowe pledged \$40,000 of town funds, as did Waterbury, and enlisted Boston investors to build the “Trolley” from the Waterbury Railroad Station to the Depot building next to the Green Mountain Inn. For 35 years, passengers and freight were carried on as many as five cars to stop at Waterbury Center, from there the track lay then along the current roadbed of Route 100 to Stowe Lower Village. During this period, Stowe had as many as twelve mills, the most notable being the P.D. Pike Mill, which became the later the G.M. Culver Mill, and then Stoware, producer of domestic wooden products until 1978; the Smith’s Mill and George W. Adams Mill in Moscow (1901-1999); and C.E. & F.O Burt Steam Mill in the Village (1891-1963); and the Raymond/H.E. Shaw mill near the site of the Public Safety complex until 1921.-

By the 1894 Centennial Celebration the south side of Main Street looked much as it does today. Where the hotel once stood, three Victorian homes were built and one of the hotel’s out buildings was moved to become Shaw’s General Store. The Depot Building was constructed three years later.

Stowe Village was incorporated in 1896, permitting public financing of service and infrastructure improvements, including the 1904 installation of a municipal water system, the 1911 installation of electric lights, and village sidewalks by 1930. The Stowe Civic Club was active in the efforts to accomplish these efforts. The 19 district schools were consolidated into one district, a public high school created and housed in the Village School, changing education patterns in Stowe.

Throughout Vermont “Old Home Week” became a call to sons and daughters, who had moved west, to return home and renew connections with their roots and families. In 1903 Stowe’s third “Old Home Week” recorded more than 2,000 people attending the dedication of the Akeley Soldier Memorial Building on the north side of Main Street. Leslie Shaw, a Stowe native and Secretary of the U.S. Treasury, was the keynote speaker.

The Stowe Civic Club brought movies to the auditorium in the Memorial Building, published brochures extolling the virtues of Stowe, including the flora, fauna, and the clean air. It also supported the expansion of the 1896 wagon track through Smugglers Notch to accommodate the new form of personal transportation, the automobile. In 1916 Stowe and Cambridge were connected by a gravel road.

20th Century Changes

In 1911, a Swedish immigrant family introduced skiing to Stowe. Climbing Mount Mansfield and descending the Bruce Trail, a logging trail, in informal ski competitions became popular. In 1921, it the civic club sponsored the first Winter Carnival with ski jumping, toboggan races, and skating competition. At the second Winter Carnival ice sculpture was added. More than two thousand competitors and spectators are said to have attended the events.

Shortly after the beginning of the twentieth century, the demand for liquid dairy products replaced that of butter. Butter tubs and butter shipped from Stowe's farms diminished. Many upland farms were abandoned, causing the ~~distocation-dislocating~~ of many families and the closing of several mills. By 1930, many had left, but many of those who remained farmed in the summer and logged or worked the seasonal mills in the winter and spring. Governor F. D. Roosevelt visited Adams Mill in Moscow shortly before becoming president of the United States, liked what he saw, and recommended that other rural communities develop a similar economic system.

Because there were fewer mills, the logging camps ~~were forced to close~~d. Ranch Camp in the Ranch Valley and Barnes Camp near the Notch Road, both at the base of Mount Mansfield, were reopened in the mid 1930's as hostels for skiers. In 1932, the road from Waterbury to Stowe became Route 100 and was paved, creating easier access by automobile, taxi, and bus. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) began cutting trails on Mount Mansfield as part of FDR's work program of employment in 1932. In 1934 the Mount Mansfield Ski Club began promoting skiing in Stowe, first by sponsoring ski train excursions from New York City, then by sponsoring races against other ski clubs and university groups.

~~By 1937, when the rope tow was installed and a ski instructor hired Beginning in the early 1940's, subsequent to the construction of the single chair lift on Mount Mansfield,~~ ski enthusiasts made Stowe home, converting farmhouses and village houses into small inns, building tourist cabins and opening retail shops that catered to visitors and community members. As the number of ski trails increased, more tourists came and local men and women found work in ski-related business in the winter and construction, and farming during other seasons. Changing tastes of automobile tourists were the impetus for entrepreneurial immigrants to build motels from the ~~mid-1950's~~ ~~early 1940's~~ to the mid 1970's. The completion of Interstates 91 and 89 in the 1960's and the paving of Route 108 through Smugglers Notch in 1967 opened the natural beauty of Stowe to increased numbers of urbanites.

As Stowe's economy grew, so too did its population, ~~as well as and~~ the need for increased community services. By 1950, the town's resident population was once again on the rise, a precursor to rural migration patterns that would substantially alter the town's social fabric over the years to come. In 1954, Stowe's ~~five~~ remaining ~~-one-room~~ schools ~~were~~ closed when ~~the~~ Stowe Elementary School opened in the Village. By this time, all but one of Stowe's covered bridges had been replaced in deference to the automobile and truck, and the village was facing traffic congestion and parking problems that still exist more than a half century later. The Stowe Historical Society was founded in 1956 and the Stowe Reporter, the town's weekly paper, in 1958.

During the 1970's, the reliance on traditional sources of income, based on natural resources, diminished both nationally and locally. The same amenities that had long attracted seasonal visitors brought new residents to town and Stowe's population ~~began to~~

increased. During this time the population returned to that of the 1870 census. In the five decades since, the population has more than doubled. A new high school/middle school opened in 1973 outside the village on a former farm. The Jackson Ice Arena was built in the village in 1975 and cross-country skiing began its rise to popularity. With the addition of snowmaking on the ski trails, the winter experience of visitors and residents became more stable and predictable. ~~The 5.3-mile long Stowe Recreation Path was completed in 1989, offering opportunities for walking, inline skating and biking. Additionally, after several years of interim zoning, permanent Zoning Regulations were adopted on December 9, 1975.~~

~~The 1980s began with the construction of the town's first wastewater treatment plant in 1980 and the rebuilding of the Trapp Family Lodge after a devastating fire. Community and cultural development followed with the transformation of the former high school into the Stowe Free Library and Helen Day Art Center, and the launch of the Stowe Recreation Path and Conservation Commission in 1984. Conservation gained momentum with the founding of the Stowe Land Trust in 1987. Throughout the decade, the town also improved public safety facilities, sidewalks, and recreational spaces, culminating in the completion of the Rec Path and the formation of the Lamoille Regional Solid Waste Management District in 1989. In 1989, the Town also made a landmark investment in its future by purchasing Mayo Farm for conservation, recreation, and community use—including a ±35-acre special events field. The decade's initiatives laid a strong foundation for the Town's continued growth while preserving its natural beauty and community identity.~~

~~The 1990s were a period of growth and transformation for Stowe, marked by developments in conservation, infrastructure, and community services. In 1992, Stowe saw the introduction of the Stowe Trolley System, enhancing local public transportation, while night skiing made its debut, further solidifying the town's reputation as a premier winter destination. That same year, education facilities expanded with renovations to Stowe Elementary School and the addition of a new wing to Stowe Middle-Senior High School. Infrastructure improvements continued in 1993 with the construction of Mayo Connector Road, which was later paved in 1997. Meanwhile, the town invested in public amenities, expanding the library building in 1994 and locally approving wastewater treatment facility and service area expansions in 1995. The community also saw the completion of the Quiet Path on Mayo Farm in 1996, offering residents a scenic and peaceful recreational space. That year also marked a historic milestone with the approval of the Town and Village merger, effective July 1, 1996.~~

~~As the 20th century came to a close, the Town made strategic, community-driven decisions to invest in its future—balancing its evolution into a year-round resort destination with a deep commitment to preserving and enhancing its natural beauty and community character. In 1998 strategic comprehensive planning efforts led to the establishment of the Ridgeline & Hillside Overlay District aimed to protect Stowe's scenic landscape and forested hillsides. Sewer infrastructure improvements were also a focus, with extensions reaching Sylvan Park in Lower Village (1997) and Mountain Road up to~~

Cottage Club Road (1998). The town also acquired the Moscow Ball Fields in 1998, further expanding recreational opportunities, while Copley Woodlands Condominiums opened, providing additional housing options in the village. Voters approved Phase 1 of a water system expansion, which was completed in 1999. That same year, the town secured Act 250 approval for an expansion of the sewer plant, ensuring Stowe's infrastructure could support planned future growth.

The 2000s marked a transformative decade for Stowe, defined by thoughtful investment in the town's future. During this time, the community successfully balanced environmental conservation with vital infrastructure upgrades and enhancements that strengthened the quality of life and preserved the character that makes Stowe unique. The new millennium began with a commitment to environmental stewardship as the Moscow Stump Dump was closed, and the Stowe Land Trust successfully conserved Sunset Hill and Bingham Falls, ensuring these treasured natural assets would be protected for future generations. That same year, history and culture were honored with the establishment of the Vermont Ski Museum in the beautifully restored Old Meeting House, celebrating the town's deep-rooted connection to skiing and outdoor recreation.

In 2001, major infrastructure projects took center stage with the expansion of the wastewater treatment plant and the commencement of construction of new sewer and water lines, ensuring Stowe could support its growing population and tourism industry. The town also took steps to streamline its planning and development oversight. In 2003, the Development Review Board replaced the Zoning Board of Adjustment, while the Planning Commission's role shifted to a long-term visioning and community planning focus. These changes aimed to create a more strategic and efficient approach to guide Stowe's future growth and land use.

Historic preservation gained momentum in 2003 with the formation of the Historic Preservation Commission, underscoring the town's commitment to protecting its architectural and irreplaceable historic resources. The following year, Stowe reinforced its dedication to land conservation by establishing a 25-year easement and management plan for Mayo Farm, ensuring responsible stewardship of these cherished public lands.

Following several years collaborative planning with Mt. Mansfield Company, the Town of Stowe and other interested parties, the Stowe Mountain Resort (SMR) 2000 Spruce Peak Master Plan was approved by the Development Review Board in 2004. The approved Master Plan included the construction of nearly four hundred residential units, new and improved ski lifts and trails, enhanced snowmaking, upscale lodging and dining, and luxury accommodations. Originally approved with a planned build-out of ten years, development of the project slowed during the great recession; the Master Plan was then extended for another ten years and is now nearly complete.

As Stowe entered the mid-2000s, development and investment continued. In 2005, construction began on major improvements at Spruce Peak, enhancing one of the region's

premier ski destinations. To support local economic growth, a one-percent local option tax on rooms and meals was introduced in 2006, generating revenue to reinvest in community needs. In 2007, the town government evolved with a charter change, officially adopting the Town Manager form of government. That same year, the Stowe Land Trust preserved Adams Camp, further expanding protected land for public access, recreation, and conservation.

Community engagement and public investment remained a priority as the decade progressed. In 2008, the Village Vibrancy group was formed to foster a lively and welcoming experience and encourage reinvestment in Stowe village. The following year, Stowe made a significant investment in public safety with the construction of a new \$7.2 million public safety building, while long-awaited repairs to the Helen Day Art Center commenced. The decade concluded with a meaningful tribute to Stowe's history and heritage. In 2010, the historic West Branch Schoolhouse and St. John's Church were relocated next to the Stowe Free Library, creating a permanent home for the Stowe Historical Society. Additionally, the Memorial Park Master Plan was completed, laying the groundwork for future community space improvements.

The 2010s were a decade of progress and resilience for Stowe—a period marked by continued growth, major infrastructure investments, and a steadfast commitment to conservation. These years also celebrated key community milestones that strengthened Stowe's identity and reinforced its vision for a vibrant, sustainable future. In 2011, work began on expanding the vault at the Akeley Memorial Building, preserving historical records for future generations. That same year, the building's rebuilt cupola was placed atop Akeley, restoring a defining piece of its architectural charm. However, natural forces tested the town's strength when Hurricane Irene struck, causing the failure of the Cape Cod Road embankment and necessitating the replacement of the Little River water main. In 2012, conservation took center stage as the Stowe Land Trust purchased Cady Hill Forest, which was then acquired by the Town, securing a beloved recreational and natural resource for the community. That same year, Stowe bid farewell to the historic "Rotary Barn" (1839 Congregational Church), a landmark that had stood for over 170 years. The following year brought both celebration and progress. In 2013, Stowe marked its 250th anniversary while also unveiling the new Stowe Arena, a \$6.5 million facility replacing the aging Jackson Arena. The town also honored its veterans by commemorating Korean War and Vietnam War plaques at the Akeley Memorial Building. Additionally, Marshall Hill, a popular sledding spot, was purchased by the Town, and Cemetery Road underwent reconstruction. Infrastructure projects continued in 2014 with the construction of sidewalks along portions of Mountain Road Village and improvements to the Mayo Events Field and Cady Hill Forest trails.

The momentum carried into 2015 with the adoption of the new Stowe Town Plan, the replacement of the Bridge Street Bridge—dedicated to Giles Dewey—and the completion of the village staircase leading to the Rec Path parking lot. That year also saw the first phase of the West Branch River/Stowe Rec Path Restoration Project and the construction

of new attractions at Stowe Mountain Resort, including the Adventure Center, Zip Tour, and Tree Top Adventure course. In 2016, the Vermont Downtown Development Board designated Stowe as an official Designated Downtown, recognizing its historic and economic significance. The year also saw challenges, as a fire heavily damaged the Parks Department garage, and the historic Stone Hut was restored and reopened a year after another devastating fire. The Quiet Path Bridge was also completed and dedicated to Brenda Ross Winter. A major shift occurred in 2017 when Vail Resorts purchased Stowe Mountain Resort for \$41 million, ushering in a new era for the town's ski and tourism industry. Nature struck again later that year when a powerful October windstorm left much of Stowe without power, damaging roads, culverts, and trees. That year also marked the end of an era as the Antique & Classic Car Meet held its 60th and final event in Stowe. Meanwhile, changes in the village brought a new one-way traffic pattern to Park Street to create additional on-street parking. In 2018, Stowe voters approved the replacement of aging village sidewalks and the undergrounding of utility lines along Main Street. Completed in 2020, our cherished Main Street is now safer, more accessible, and more visually appealing—free from the clutter of overhead utility lines. It offers a welcoming and walkable space where residents and visitors alike can gather, connect, and enjoy the charm of Stowe's historic village.

Life in Stowe, like in many communities across the nation, was profoundly impacted by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The Town faced significant disruptions but responded with resilience, adapting quickly to new challenges while continuing to support the well-being of residents, businesses, and the broader community. The tourism industry struggled with travel restrictions, business closures, and a decline in visitors, impacting local restaurants, hotels, and shops. However, as restrictions eased, the town experienced a surge in domestic tourism, with many visitors drawn to its outdoor activities. To ensure public safety, Stowe implemented state-mandated guidelines, including mask mandates, social distancing, and capacity limits for businesses. Restaurants and retailers adapted by offering outdoor dining, takeout, and curbside pickup. Outdoor recreation, including hiking, biking, and skiing, saw a boost as people sought safe and socially distanced activities. The rise of remote work during the pandemic led many individuals and families to seek refuge in places offering both natural beauty and a high quality of life. Stowe, with its stunning landscapes, vibrant outdoor lifestyle, and convenient access to major metropolitan areas, emerged as a highly desirable relocation destination—resulting in increased demand for real estate and a significant rise in home prices.

As we reflect on the first quarter of the 21st century, Stowe stands proudly as a premier four-season destination and an exceptional place to live, work, and visit. This success has been hard-earned, shaped by a strong sense of community, a commitment to quality, and the enduring appeal of Stowe's natural beauty and active lifestyle. Yet, with this growth comes a new set of challenges. Rising housing costs, infrastructure demands, workforce shortages, and increased tourism are placing mounting pressure on the town's natural resources, workforce, and quality of life. As more people are drawn to what makes Stowe special, the community finds itself at a crossroads. Complex and interconnected issues—

such as amenity migration, climate change, and housing affordability—demand thoughtful planning and bold, collaborative action. This Town Plan update process has offered Stowe a meaningful opportunity to pause, reflect, and come together as a community—to listen, share, and shape a collective vision for the future. More than just a document, this plan tells the story of Stowe—reflecting our shared values, aspirations, and our vision for the future. It is our community-driven roadmap, thoughtfully crafted to guide our growth in a way that is balanced and sustainable for generations to come. It ensures that the values we hold dear today are honored, protected, and thoughtfully carried into 2050 and beyond.