

TRAVELING THE PAST:

# VERMONTERS ON VACATION

## BACK WHEN THE LEISURE INDUSTRY WAS YOUNG

August is traditionally vacation month, but many of us will not be traveling this year. The following article explores how Vermonters of the 19th and early 20th centuries travelled to places far and near and is based on the archival collections found in the Sheldon Museum's Stewart-Swift Research Center.

**E**ven as COVID-19 alters our plans and pervades our thoughts, Vermonters continue to be surrounded by natural beauty, finding refuge in long walks on the Trails Around Middlebury or a swim in one of Vermont's picturesque lakes. Already in the 19th century, tourists flocked to Addison County, extolling its healthful properties and scenic landscapes. While many

BY **ELLERY E. FOUTCH**

Vermonters went on luxurious "Grand Tours" through Europe (as we learned in Glenn Andres's article of last week), city-dwellers often escaped to the Green Mountains, comparing their beauty to the European Alps by referring to the area as an "American Tyrol" (as seen in Julian Ralph's March 1903 article for Harper's Magazine). In 1855, the Boston publication Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion remarked, "The scenery of Lake Dunmore and vicinity is Italian in its character, and is exceedingly picturesque and beautiful. A very large number of visitors last season went up to Lake Dunmore from this city, and we have not seen a single person who was not enraptured at the beauties of the spot." An undated postcard from "Casey" to Harvey Hall of Gloucester, Mass., put it more succinctly: "Am having a great time here, and I would not miss it for a million."

The Sheldon Museum's archives reveal treasure troves of postcards, photographs and hotel brochures attesting to the beauties of Addison County and the summer pleasures experienced here through the decades by both tourists and locals. The Marvel Hotel Corporation, which operated Lake Dunmore Hotel & Cottages, rhapsodized about the region in a 1920s brochure:

"In its perfect purity of health-giving atmosphere, and in the beauty and grandeur of its surroundings stands preeminent among the health and pleasure resorts of America. Lake Dunmore is a perfect mountain lake, unsurpassed in beauty. You may search the Green Mountains, the Adirondacks and the country over, but you will find that this 'Little Bit of Heaven' stands out pre-eminently as the 'One' place for you to spend that vacation of which you have dreamed, but never realized.



Vacationers at Lake Dunmore.

COURTESY OF THE COLLECTION OF HENRY SHELDON MUSEUM

"This beautiful sheet of water lies quietly reposing at a spot amid the Green Mountains, where nature has, with lavish hand, freely given of all her charms. The noble contour of a range of forest-clad summits extending along the eastern shore... Mount Moosalamoo lifts aloft her wild and craggy summit and stands a giant sentinel above the placid waters in her lap, which at noonday and eventide reflects back her own rude image retouched in nature's exquisite colors of the season."

The Hotel itself boasted a variety of amenities, many of which were cutting-edge technology: electric lights, hot and cold water baths, a safety elevator, long-distance telephones, and steam heat. They also celebrated more traditional attractions: open fireplaces, a "well-equipped library," beautifully-furnished parlors and smoking rooms, and "broad piazzas, 300-feet long, well shaded at all hours, [which] provide a never-tiring outlook and afford opportunity for ample exercise during unpleasant weather." Then, as now, Vermont farms provided excellent local fare; Lake Dunmore Hotel promised "our cream, butter, eggs and vegetables will be furnished daily from the magnificent farms in the immediate vicinity."

Browsing the Sheldon archives reveals summer

activities familiar to many readers: in addition to swimming, boating and fishing, the resort hotels emphasized their offerings of tennis, billiards, baseball, croquet, trap shooting and dancing, both at the hotel and at several dance pavilions erected around the lake. The archives feature dozens of photographs of families in elaborate hats and suits picnicking at Waterhouse's, opened by Loyal N. Waterhouse in 1876, with docks, fleets of boats, horse stalls and a dance pavilion.

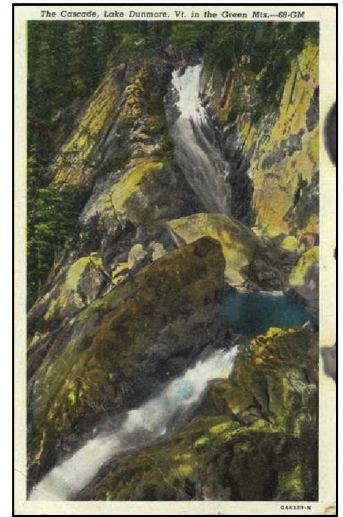
This summer, as we frolic at Branbury State Park, we might wish to thank Shirley Farr of Brandon, who donated the beach area with its dance hall to the state for a public park, giving so many of us access to the beauties of these formerly-exclusive resort areas. We might also consider the generations of Vermonters and families who have indulged in the pleasures of Vermont summers, taking swim lessons at Branbury State Park, or staying at one of the many historic camps in the region.

The Sheldon Archives are full of these stories, too — glimpses into the lives and affectionate exchanges between family members. While the fronts of picture postcards might show us familiar scenes of rowboats on Lake Dunmore,

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or the Falls of Lana, the brief messages scrawled on the backs of the postcards offer insights into the lives of their senders.



*The Cascade, Lake Dunmore, Vt.*

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*Lake Dunmore Postcard, Collection of Henry Sheldon Museum*

A colored postcard of "The Cascade, Lake Dunmore, Vt.," published by C.W. Hughes & Co. is written in a childish hand: "Dear Mama and Papa, I got your candy. Hope to see you. Come on up for sure. Love Tommy."

A beautiful view of a Lake Dunmore dock includes a practical and loving note from a mother to her daughter, residing on College Street: "Dear C I hope you all got back safely S. night. How is everybody. I am starting to work on your skirt and I will send it as soon as it is ready — Love Mother."

This note, postmarked Aug. 20, 1924, especially tugged at my heartstrings, as my own mother has come to Vermont for the summer to help me with house renovations, painting the walls of my new home and hemming curtains — taking up these domestic tasks and labors of love rather than enjoying a lazy turn in the lake. I am so grateful to her and to generations of mothers who have helped their daughters — and to the archives that offer us these glimmers of the past.

*Contributed by Ellery E. Fouch, Sheldon Museum's Research Center Committee member and Assistant Professor in the American Studies Department at Middlebury College, where she teaches courses on the art and material culture of the United States.*



*Lake Dunmore Postcard, Collection of Henry Sheldon Museum*

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