

From Mills to
Main Streets

ON THE CONNECTICUT RIVER BYWAY



Come explore the legacy
of the industrial revolution in
the historic downtowns of
Vermont and New Hampshire.



CONNECTICUT
RIVER
BYWAY

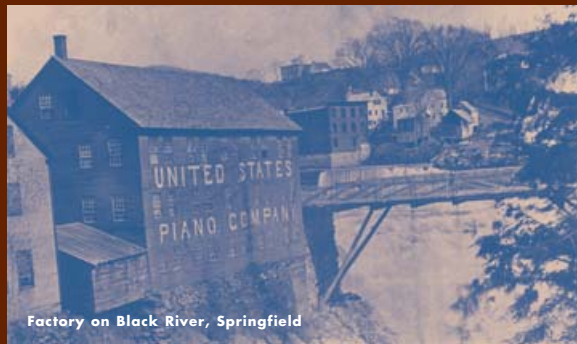
www.ctrivertavel.net

From Mills to Main Streets



From engraving of Robbins & Lawrence Armory in Windsor, circa 1851

Our region's downtown shopping and dining districts are direct descendants of an industrial era that boomed from about 1870 to 1930. Local economies energized by the railroads and manufacturing companies produced our classic American Main Streets. Today you can experience that era in the mills that survive as museums or shops, and in the downtowns that remain the cultural and civic centers of our communities.



Factory on Black River, Springfield



St. Johnsbury depot

Eighteenth century towns and villages along the Connecticut River formed where waterfalls and cascades offered opportunities for mills that sawed lumber or ground wheat and grains for people and farm animals. As the population increased, bridges and crossroads enhanced these locations along the Connecticut and its tributary streams and brooks. By 1850, railroad tracks were laid along the river valleys, and overnight trains soon linked this rural area to New York, Boston and Montreal.



Hubbard & McClary workers, Windsor



St. Johnsbury . White River Junction . Claremont

Windsor . Springfield . Bellows Falls . Brattleboro

In the early 1880s, the Industrial Revolution was kindled in small workshops on both sides of the



Workers at Ascutney Shoe factory, Windsor

Atlantic Ocean. Inventors came up with new ideas about how to make things, and make more of them quickly. This concept of mass-production took root in the Connecticut River

Valley over the succeeding decades, and was applied many different ways. Machine tool companies became renowned for “precision manufacturing.” Other factories in our region made paper, farm equipment, textiles, and a host of other products for the emerging American “consumer economy.”

All these new industries provided jobs that attracted more people and stimulated the creation of commercial downtowns and residential neighborhoods. Mills and stores and homes were frequently clustered together in what level ground was available between the river and the steep hillsides.

Built on a wonderful human scale, these are the walkable downtowns and historic districts you can find up and down the Connecticut River Byway.

Our communities still stand in a special relationship to the natural environment, and retain the physical imprint of the era when they were created, when local industries transformed rural villages into urban towns.



White River Junction

[www.hartfordvtchamber.com]

Early 18th century bridges stimulated the creation of several little crossroads communities. Between 1847 and 1863, five new railroad lines converged on the banks where

the White River joins the Connecticut, turning the rural farming villages into a railroad hub for the region. The village retains the flavor of its railroading history, particularly in the downtown square where the stately Hotel Coolidge seems to conduct a conversation across the tracks with the historic train station.



White River Junction

Springfield

[www.springfieldvt.com]

In the early 1800s, a machine shop was built near four other mills where the Black River drops 110 feet in one eighth of a mile. Over the next century, an innovative machine shop culture evolved, putting Springfield in the forefront of "precision manufacturing." The machine tool industry boomed into the mid-20th century, contributing to America's efforts in two World Wars. In the downtown shopping district, one is never far from the sound of falling water.



Springfield



Main Street and Estey building, Brattleboro



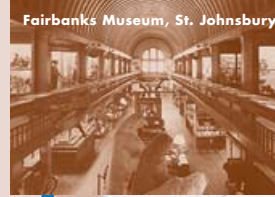
St. Johnsbury Athenaeum



St. Johnsbury

[www.nekchamber.com]

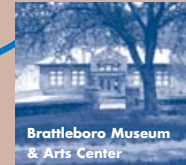
The Fairbanks family and their several industries in the 19th century created a thriving village that became the cultural and commercial center for Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. They developed the first commercial platform scale and employed a thousand workers in various shops, forges and foundries. Starting in the 1850s, the entrepreneurial family also developed several connecting railroads. Their imprint remains visible in a vibrant downtown and what has been described as "an acropolis of St. Johnsbury public buildings" on the hill above.



Fairbanks Museum, St. Johnsbury



Howard Block, Bellows Falls



Brattleboro Museum & Arts Center

VERMONT

BRATTLEBORO

Our communities are easily reached from Interstate highways 89 & 91, as well as Routes 5 & 12. Amtrak stops daily in White River Junction, Windsor, Claremont, Bellows Falls, Brattleboro.

ST. JOHNSBURY

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Brattleboro

[www.brattleborochamber.org]

The Whetstone Brook offered many mill opportunities where it tumbles into the Connecticut River at Brattleboro. One that took advantage was the Estey Organ Company. It grew to become the largest organ manufacturer in the world in 1880, employing 500 men and women, and producing more than 250,000 reed organs. Brattleboro's long, linear Main Street is marked by a variety of church steeples, and parallels the Connecticut across from magnificent Mount Wantastiquet.

EZRA DISTLER



American Precision Museum, Windsor

Windsor

[www.windsorvt.com]

The Robbins and Lawrence Armory and Machine Shop sped up the Industrial Revolution in 1850 when they mass-produced rifles with interchangeable parts, much faster than Eli Whitney had a half-century before. Then they invented machines that shaped and milled metals, and those parts were assembled into more metal-processing equipment, greatly enhancing the production capacity of many manufacturing processes. Among the architectural gems that line Windsor's Main Street is Old South Church, designed by Asher Benjamin and erected in 1798.

Claremont

[www.claremontnh.com]

The tumbling Sugar River was the site of Monadnock Mills, a textile company established in the early 1800s that soon became the largest in the region. The mill processed the thick wool of recently-imported Spanish Merino sheep, millions of which transformed New England's rural landscape and economy. Claremont's many historic mills are being transformed for new uses just a block from a downtown square dominated by the imposing Claremont Opera House.

Jones & Lamson Co., Springfield



Exner Block, Bellows Falls

Bellows Falls

[www.bellowsfalls.org]

A half-mile gorge funnels the Connecticut into a series of cascades river boats could not traverse in the late 1700s, so a transportation canal with six locks was built to carry the boats around. The railroads put the canal out of business in 1850, and since then the canal waters have been diverted to mills and, today, a hydroelectric generating station. In the early 20th century, Bellows Falls was one of the largest papermaking centers in the world. Visitors say the downtown Square, anchored by Town Hall's tall brick clock tower, has a distinctly European feel.

Come explore The Byway.

The Connecticut River Byway runs through 53 communities, features 10 waypoint centers, and stretches over 500 miles of roads on both sides of the river in New Hampshire & Vermont.

It was designated a National Scenic Byway in 2005.

(For more information please visit www.ctrivertravel.net.)



Thanks to these organizations for underwriting the design & printing of this brochure.

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