

## HISTORY OF LINCOLN

### The Founding of Lincoln, Vermont

The settlement of Lincoln began when the original territory was chartered to Colonel Benjamin Simonds and 64 associates on November 9, 1780. The Colonel was well thought of in Vermont because of the assistance he and the Massachusetts militia had rendered at the [Battle of Bennington](#) against the British three years earlier. Colonel Simonds' new town was named in honor of his commanding officer, Major General Benjamin Lincoln (1733-1810), who had played a vital role in getting the militia to Vermont and is credited with having prepared the way for the American victory at Saratoga by cutting Burgoyne's lines of communication with Canada. Although relatively little known today, General Lincoln was respected and liked by his contemporaries. Like George Washington, he was a farmer, and after the war he returned to farming at his home in Hingham, Massachusetts, though he was called into service several more times before his death.

Lincoln, like [Ferrisburgh](#) and several other Addison County towns, was settled by members of the Society of Friends, or Quakers. The first Quakers settled in the area on upper Quaker Street around 1795, where a small park commemorates the first town meeting in 1803. As time went by and other Quakers joined the original group, the area became known as Quaker Stand. The meeting house is gone along with the Society, but Lincoln's town center is located on the junction of River Road, running along the New Haven River, and the original Quaker Street.

In 1800, the population stood at 97, comprising nineteen families, mostly small homesteaders. The early settlers lived in one room cabins built from local timber. Many farmers supported themselves by selling the charcoal from their cleared trees. The earliest products of the local economy were potash and timber, an industry which gradually evolved to include iron works and mills stretching along the New Haven River.

By the 1880s, at the height of its industrial prosperity, Lincoln, comprising Downingsville, West, South and Center Lincoln(s), was a significant and self-sufficient community, with a population of 1367, the largest ever recorded. Fifteen mills operated along the river, largely devoted to lumber and by-products such as shingles and clapboards, but at least one gristmill was among it number as well. More than 100 men were then employed in the mills. In 1890, the Lincoln Lumber Company built a large, two story mill, to produce barrel staves and butter tubs. The mill site, under various owners, and manufacturing a variety of wood products, survived until 2007. In 1890, there were 25 men on the payroll of the Lincoln Lumber Co. and a number of Lincoln buildings, such as a boarding house, currently The Old Hotel, across from the mill site, and several of the houses on Creamery St. were built at that time.

Lincoln Center, the geographic heart of the 44 square miles comprising the modern villages, boasted two churches, the store and a post office by the 1860s. From 1835, Lincoln had postal service, and then regular delivery from the 1860s. The last Postmaster, Lindley B Bicknell, who had served since 1919, officially closed the Lincoln post office in 1968.

Agricultural enterprises, especially dairy herds and potato crops, were a significant part of Lincoln's economy, involving two creameries in the early 1900s. Five dairy farms were left in 1980; the last dairy herd left Lincoln in 1992.

Lincoln was once served by three general stores. The first one was opened in Lincoln Center in 1828 and continues in operation. Burnham Hall, the gift of a native son, Walter S. Burnham of West Lincoln, was built in 1920, on the site of the former bandstand which hosted concerts by the local cornet band during the 1870s.

The three communities had twelve school districts, accommodating 285 students, in 1884. The last one-room school house closed in West Lincoln in 1956. By that time, education had been consolidated in the Lincoln Center School

Social activities were then, as now, centered on the churches, athletics (the contemporary version is Lincoln Sports, Inc., active since the 1960s) and service to the community, such as the pre-school and primary schools, the library, the volunteer fire dept., and the Historical Society. The United Church of Lincoln, originally Methodist and Baptist, is the current version of

organizations which can be tracked from the 1840s. The Church organized the non-profit Weathervane United, comprising ten senior apartments in three former homesteads in Lincoln Center.

From the turn of the twentieth century until at least the 1990s, the population of Lincoln remained under 1000. This was due in part to the contraction of local industrial and agricultural enterprises in the years following World War II especially. The New Haven River, the source of early jobs and wealth for Lincoln's inhabitants, has not been particularly kind to Lincoln Center, which has suffered catastrophic floods on at least five occasions in the 200+ years of its existence: 1830, 1869, 1938, 1976 and 1998. On each occasion, Lincoln has rebuilt and survived perhaps with a stronger sense of community. The 1998 flood resulted in the construction of the remarkable Lincoln Library, now, with Burnhall Hall, a hive of local activity.

The 2010 census lists the population of Lincoln as 1271, a surprising turnaround which began after 2000. Nestled on the west side of the Green Mountain range, Lincoln has acquired a reputation for its tranquility and communality. The hills are dotted with agricultural and artisanal production, such as Danforth Pewters, and Maple Landmark which began life in Lincoln in the 1980s, and other locally based, globally connected enterprises, as well as non-profit organizations such as Zeno Mountain Farm, and Lincoln Sports Inc. The latter group organizes the annual Hill Country Holiday weekends. While most working-age adults must commute to jobs outside Lincoln, a town commitment to continuity means that more than a handful of local families are represented by multiple generations on communal properties.

For more information on the history of Lincoln, see *Lincoln Vermont History 1789-2007*, available at the Historical Society

<http://lincolnvermont.org/about/historical-society/>  
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