



PHOTO: INGRAM MITCHELL

A Legacy of Stewardship



VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Logging in Vermont, 19th century. 1890, Billings's plan was sustained by three generations of remarkable women, first by his wife Julia and their three daughters, Elizabeth, Mary, and Laura, and then by Billings's granddaughter, Mary French.



A portrait of George Perkins Marsh, painted by G.P.A. Healy, ca. 1820.

Vermont's Green Mountains, with their forested hills, small farms, and picturesque villages, have not always been as beautiful and as green. After the American Revolution, settlers poured into Vermont. By the mid-1800s most of Vermont's forests had been cut down, causing severe erosion and flooding. Vermonters faced their first environmental crisis.

One of the first to respond to this crisis was George Perkins Marsh (1801–1882). As a child on his family's farm in Woodstock, Marsh became a keen observer of nature. After serving several terms in Congress in the 1840s, Marsh traveled the lands of the Mediterranean as an American diplomat and saw first-hand how the actions of humans had "brought the earth to a desolation almost as complete as that of the moon." On his last diplomatic mission in Italy, Marsh distilled his observations into a classic book, *Man and Nature* (1864). His careful analysis of the human impact on nature and his eloquent plea for responsible land stewardship made this book one of the founding texts of the environmental movement.

View from the porch of the Mansion

George P. Marsh

In 1869 the Marsh family farm was purchased by Frederick Billings (1823–1890), a Vermont native who had made his fortune as an attorney in San Francisco during the California Gold Rush. Returning to Vermont he found barren hills, silted rivers, and a devastated countryside.

Billings set out to build a farm that would serve future generations as a model of wise stewardship. He imported purebred Jersey cows, and he developed one of the nation's first programs of scientific forest management, so that, in Billings's words, "many a barren hillside will once more glow with the glorious autumn foliage, and the quiet village will see itself back in its old life and power." After his death in



Frederick Billings, 1885.

Frederick Billings

Laurance S. and Mary F. Rockefeller, 1982.



Julia Billings and her daughters continued to pursue Billings's far-sighted approach to farming and forestry well into the 20th century. Pictured from left: Elizabeth Billings, Mary Montagu Billings French, (mother of Mary French Rockefeller), Julia Parmly Billings, and Laura Billings Lee, circa 1896.

A Vision for the Park

"... there is a mandate to invent an entirely new kind of park. It must be one where the human stories and the natural history are intertwined; where the relatively small acreage serves as an educational resource for the entire National Park Service and a seedbed for American environmental thought; and where the legacy of American conservation and its future enter into dialogue, generating a new environmental paradigm for our day."

—John Elder, Professor of English and Environmental Studies at Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont, from remarks at the park's opening ceremony.

Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park is the only national park to tell the story of conservation history and the evolving nature of land stewardship in America. The park operates in partnership with the Woodstock Foundation, Inc., and the adjacent Billings Farm & Museum. The park interprets the historic home of the Marsh, Billings, and Rockefeller families, their conservation work and stewardship of the forest landscape, and the emergence of an American conservation ethic. The 550-acre woodlands continue to be managed for protection of natural resources, education, recreation, sustainable forestry, historic character, and scenic beauty.



Furniture built by Vermont furniture makers from Billings Forest hardwoods shows how value is added to local products through an association with place and regional craftsmanship, promoting conservation and sustainability.



The Pogue on a brilliant autumn day.

The Conservation Study Institute

The National Park Service established the Conservation Study Institute here in 1998 to foster collaborative conservation as it applies to our nation's natural and cultural heritage. The institute is a forum for professionals to share best practices, cultivate leadership, and maintain a dialogue on present and future trends. Through a wide variety of programs, participants stay current with the evolving field of conservation, enhance partnerships, develop innovative methods of community engagement and place-based education, and plan strategies for the 21st century.



Workshop at the Conservation Study Institute. The Institute furthers the park's educational and outreach initiatives on its primary message of conservation stewardship.

"We must conceive of stewardship not simply as one individual's practice, but rather as the mutual and intimate relationship extending across generations, between a human community and its place on earth."

—John Elder, *Inheriting Mount Tom*, 1997



"Passing the Torch," a Tiffany window in the Mansion, symbolizes an intergenerational commitment to conservation.

Planning Your Visit



Getting Here Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park is off Vt.12 in Woodstock. Take I-89 to exit 1 (U.S. 4). From exit 1, take U.S. 4 west (13 miles) through Quechee and Taftsville to Woodstock. From U.S. 4 in downtown Woodstock, bear right onto Vt.12 north. Cross the iron bridge over the Ottauquechee River, bear right onto River Road, and take the first right into the parking area at the Billings Farm & Museum.

Your Visit Begin at the Visitor Center at the Billings Farm & Museum, next to the parking area. National Park staff are available to answer questions and help plan your visit. Here you can view the award-winning film "A Place in the Land." From the Billings Farm & Museum you can cross Vt.12 to continue your visit at the National Park Carriage Barn Visitor Center.

Tours The Mansion and gardens may be visited by guided tours led by park staff. Tours are offered Memorial Day weekend through October 31. Make advance reservations by calling 802-457-3368 ext. 22. You can also make reservations in person at either the Visitor Center at the Billings Farm & Museum or at the National Park Carriage Barn Visitor Center. Tours are limited in size. Large groups need to call ahead for special arrangements. A tour fee is charged.

Accessibility Limited parking for visitors with disabilities is available near the Mansion and the National Park Carriage Barn Visitor Center. Parking passes and directions are available from the National Park staff at either visitor center. Both visitor centers and the Mansion are wheelchair accessible.

Safety Be alert for traffic when crossing the roads and in parking areas. Trails may have uneven footing. Swimming, wading, and fishing are not allowed in The Pogue. Dogs must be on a leash at all times. Consult park staff for current park conditions.

More Information Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park
54 Elm Street
Woodstock, VT 05091
802-457-3368
www.nps.gov/mabi



The Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller Mansion.



The National Park Carriage Barn Visitor Center.

Things to Do

Visit the National Park Carriage Barn Visitor Center Built in 1895 and rehabilitated in 1999, the Carriage Barn serves as the National Park Service Visitor Center. Featured is the exhibit "Celebrating Stewardship—People Taking Care of Places." The building also has offices for park staff, the Conservation Study Institute, and the New Hampshire and Vermont office of the NPS Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program. The National Park Carriage Barn Visitor Center is open daily Memorial Day weekend through October 31, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Tour the Mansion and Gardens The Mansion was built in 1805–07 for Charles Marsh, Sr., the father of George Perkins Marsh. For two generations the heirs of Billings have kept the 1800s Queen Anne style architecture, furnishings, and gardens intact while adding 20th-century renovations that give the Mansion and grounds their present character and appearance.

The Mansion contains an extensive art collection with American landscape paintings by renowned artists like Thomas Cole, Albert Bierstadt, John Frederick Kensett, and Asher B. Durand. The collection illustrates the influence of 19th-century landscape painting, photography, and writing on the environmental movement.

Visit the Billings Farm & Museum The Billings Farm & Museum is a working dairy farm and a museum of agricultural and rural life operated as a private non-profit educational institution by the Woodstock Foundation, Inc. The park and the museum work in partnership to carry on the Billings tradition of land stewardship. For information about special activities and programs at the museum call 802-457-2355.



Hiking the carriage roads on Mount Tom.



"Cathedral Rock, Yosemite," by Albert Bierstadt, 1870, on view in the Mansion.

Walk the Forest Trails and Carriage Roads Some 20 miles of carriage roads and trails crisscross Mount Tom. Visit The Pogue, a pond tucked in the cleft of the mountain, and enjoy magnificent views of Woodstock and the surrounding hills from the top of Mount Tom. The system of carriage roads can be approached from the park entrance on Vt.12 or from the parking lot on Prosper Road. Detailed trail maps are available at the visitor center. No bicycles or motorized vehicles are allowed. In winter, the Woodstock Ski Touring Center grooms the carriage roads for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Contact the Ski Touring Center in Woodstock, or call 802-457-6674 for trail passes and for more information.

