Celebrate

The 43rd Rockingham Old Home Days!

113th Year
Celebrating the Pilgrimage
at the Rockingham Meeting House

Rockingham Old Home Days

Join us as we celebrate our 43rd year of Rockingham Old Home Days with fireworks, food, music, games, and lots of fun hosted by the Great Falls Regional Chamber of Commerce before the fireworks over the Connecticut River. The event celebrates and commemorates the 113th annual pilgrimage to the Rockingham Meeting House.

Friday, 8/2

SIDEWALK SALE –

The Bellows Falls merchants will offer specials and sales inside their stores and on the sidewalk. Hours vary by business. Archbridge Books will have free books outside the store. Canal Street Gallery will feature "New Art for your Old Home" and their summer group show. The Rock & Hammer celebrates their 30th anniversary. The Threaded Trunk Boutique & Katie's Jewelry and Gifts celebrates their grand opening.

Mary Tolares Noyes will present her book "Sicily, A Heart's Journey" at Village Square Booksellers at 6 p.m.

ICE CREAM SOCIAL –

The United Church of Bellows Falls, 8 School St., will host an Ice Cream Social from 4-8 p.m. Assorted toppings will be available for vanilla and chocolate ice cream and raspberry sherbet. All proceeds are earmarked for the Comtois Family Scholarship Fund, established in memory of longtime church members, Richard and Barbara Comtois. The event will be held rain or shine.

Face paint, bounce house, and fun Friday, from 6-9 p.m., and all day Saturday.
STOCK PHOTO

FARMERS MARKET –

Greater Falls Farmers Market offers local produce and crafts at Hetty Green Park from 4-7 p.m.

FIRST FRIDAY SUPPER –

First Friday Supper at the First Baptist Church in Bellows Falls, 9 Church St., from 5-7 p.m., will be a barbecue fundraiser to benefit the Evans Family. Bring the family out for an evening of good food and fun while supporting your community.

ROCKINGHAM REC CENTER CARNIVAL –

From 6-9 p.m., there will be a bounce house, games for prizes, food and drinks, face painting, clowns, and lots of fun for all ages.

Saturday, 8/3

Come down to The Waypoint Center, 17 Depot St., in Bellows Falls for an afternoon and evening of food, music, games, and good old-fashioned fun with the fireworks over the Connecticut River at dusk.

MAIN STAGE –

7-8:15 a.m. Registration at the Waypoint Center for the Bring It Home 5K

8:30 a.m. Bring It Home 5K

12 p.m. Activities at Waypoint Center begin. Bob Osborne, WOOL Radio, will provide updates, music, and interviews throughout the day.

12 p.m. Donut Eating Contest with Allen Brothers Farm Market

1 p.m. Pizza Eating Contest with Athens Pizza

1-4 p.m. Cheryl the Clown

1:30-2:30 p.m. Keene Idol performs

2 p.m. Ice Cream Eating Contest with Dari Joy

2:30-3:30 p.m. Karaoke with Aimee Thoreau

3-4 p.m. Southern Vermont Nature Museum presentation

3-7 p.m. Nimble Arts performers

3:30-6 p.m. The Little Big Band

6-9 p.m. Road Trash Band

DUSK Fireworks over the Connecticut River

Avoid the traffic and hassle of parking in Bellows Falls and let us take you! Ride the train for the Old Home Days Fireworks show from Chester to Bellows Falls. Enjoy free parking at the station. Go to www.rails-vt.com/oldhomedays.

PHOTO PROVIDED

FOOD VENDORS –

Athens Pizza, Chesley's Fried Dough, Jamaican Jewelz, Kona Ice, Loyal Order of the Moose, Smokin' Bowls, Sumkimbop Korean Food, and Great Falls Regional Chamber with homemade lemonade, popcorn, and bottled water.

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES –

The Roaming Railroad; bounce house; water games; Rockingham Rec children's games; Friends for Change children's activities tent; face painting; Touch a Monster Truck; Touch a big rig truck, fire engine, and police car; Jaws of Life demonstration; Southern Vermont Nature Museum.

VENDOR BOOTHS –

Great Falls Regional Chamber of Commerce, Golden Phoenix School of Martial Arts, Chase Woodworking, Pampered Chef, US Cellular, Westminster Women's Fellowship Quilt Raffle, BFUHS Class of 1980, Designs by Nola, Paparazzi Jewelry, Dog Bites, ZEM Open House, Jamaican Cottage Displays, New England Mineral Museum, and so much more.

Street vendors will be selling children's toys, novelties, and glow sticks in the Square, at the Waypoint Center, and on Rockingham and Westminster streets.

BRING IT HOME 5K –

A road race has been part of Rockingham's Old Home Days since the very beginning. Registration is from 7-8:15 a.m. at the Waypoint Center. The race starts at 8:30 a.m. This year's race is hosted by the Bellows Falls Rotary Club. Bellows Falls Union High School student Tim Salter Roy is planning the event

Dari Joy

Kids Ice Cream Eating Contest

Saturday, Aug. 3rd at 1:00 p.m.
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Events Schedule August 2-4

Saturday, Aug. 3 is the last chance to see the zero energy modular home at the Waypoint Center before it moves on to Rutland.

PHOTO PROVIDED

Don't miss the fireworks show at dusk on Saturday!

STOCK PHOTO

as his senior project this year. The course starts and finishes at the Great Falls Regional Chamber of Commerce office at the Waypoint Center, 17 Depot St. in Bellows Falls. Preregistration is available at www.stillmiling.com/rockingham-old-home-days-bring-it-home-5k.

ANTIQUE TRUCK SHOW –

Green Mountain Chapter of the American Truck Society will host its 21st annual Antique Truck Show from 8 a.m.- 2 p.m. at the Bellows Falls Union High School. No admission fee for spectators.

ZERO ENERGY MODULAR HOME TOUR –

Ever wondered how healthy, comfortable, and resilient a new zero energy modular home could be? Come tour an all-electric ZEM home that makes as much energy as it uses. See solar and battery storage in action and learn about associated affordable housing opportunities here in Vermont. The model home features a ramp for accessibility.

Saturday is the final day for folks to get a first-hand look at the ZEM home before it moves to another town. Super-efficient and cooled by a cold climate heat pump, the ZEM home is a perfect place to take a break from the hot weather. Learn more about the state of the art of energy efficiency, and talk to Efficiency Vermont staff about programs available to make your home more affordable and more comfortable too.

SIDEWALK SALES IN THE SQUARE –

Shop 'til you drop at all the stores in the Bellows Falls Square. The merchants are all offering specials and great sales during their regular business hours.

Village Square Booksellers hosts strategy games Magic the Gathering and Pokémon, from 1-4 p.m.

BELLOWS FALLS HISTORICAL SOCIETY –

The Bellows Falls Historical Society will be open in their new location at 31 Westminster St., Saturday 1-3 p.m. Stop in and explore our area's history on display.

The Adams Grist Mill will be open for a walk back in time Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m. -3 p.m., courtesy of the Historical Society's volunteers.

VOTER REGISTRATION –

The Rockingham Vermont Democratic Town Committee will have a table set up under the awning at Village Square Booksellers for voter registration from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

TUG-O-WAR –

Before dusk, come to the bridge to see Bellows Falls Fire Department take on North Walpole and Walpole Fire Departments in tug-o-war. Cheer on your favorite department!

GREEN MOUNTAIN RAILROAD FIREWORKS TRAIN –

Avoid the traffic in Bellows Falls and take the train from Chester to the Rockingham Old Home Days fireworks show. Enjoy free parking at the Chester Depot and a reliable and enjoyable commute to Bellows Falls. The train departs Chester at 7 p.m. and arrives in Bellows Falls at 8 p.m. There will also be boarding at the Bartonsville covered bridge at approximately 7:15 p.m. After the show, the train departs Bellows Falls at 10:15 p.m. and arrives in Chester at 11:15 p.m. For more information about tickets, go to www.rails-vt.com/oldhomedays.

FIREWORKS –

The fantastic fireworks display over the Connecticut River by Brent Lisai and the ROHD committee takes place at dusk. Donate to the Fireworks Fund. Send donations to Great Falls Regional Chamber of Commerce, 17 Depot St., Bellows Falls, VT 05101. Look for volunteers collecting funds on the street prior to the fireworks.

Sunday, 8/4

Finish the weekend celebrating the 113th annual pilgrimage at the Rockingham Meeting House at 1 p.m. on Meeting House Road off Route 103 in Rockingham. Steve Perkins, director of the Vermont Historical Society, will host the activities with the theme "Vermont Eats." Food and fun follows at Rockingham's National Historic Landmark. Vegetables provided by Harlow's Farm Stand.

The Great Falls Regional Chamber of Commerce would not be able to offer all of these fun-filled activities without the generosity of our sponsors and community volunteers. A special thank you to all of our sponsors: The Vermont Country Store, Best Septic, Halladay's Florist and Harvest Barn, Chroma, Hennessey Electric, Savings Bank of Walpole, and The Shopper. Thank you also to our contributors: The American Truck Society – Green Mountain Chapter, Silver Forest of Vermont, Village Square Booksellers, The Bellows Falls Rotary, Athens Pizza, Dari Joy, Allen Brothers, and Cota & Cota.

For more information, contact the Great Falls Regional Chamber of Commerce at 802-463-4280 or info@gfrcc.org. Find us on Facebook.

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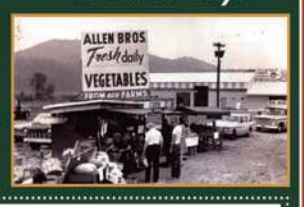

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Enjoy Rockingham Old Home Days!

About Our Town and Our

A view of Bellows Falls looking toward Fall Mountain (or Mount Kilburn), probably early 1900s. The Wells Street School and playground is seen lower left, and the large sand hill in the center is where Williams Street is today.
PHOTO PROVIDED

The town of Rockingham is located in southeastern Vermont on the banks of the Connecticut River. In population and in its impact on the region, it is the second largest community in Windham County. About 40 square miles in area, Rockingham is predominantly rural and forested but also includes densely settled residential neighborhoods, commercial centers, and several industrial areas.

Of approximately 5,300 residents, about 4,000 live within two incorporated villages, Bellows Falls and Saxtons River. Many others live in or near the small hamlets of Bartonsville, Brockways Mills, and Cambridgeport. ("Hamlet" is another word for an unincorporated rural village.) All of the town's settlements are located on the Connecticut River or one of two tributaries to the Connecticut, the Williams and Saxtons rivers.

The balance of the town not included in the geographic areas listed above is referred to as Rural Rockingham.

The area encompassed by the town has a rich and varied history, which is highlighted in this paper.

Rockingham Town

Until about 1825, the now-quiet hamlet near the Meeting House was the principal village of the town in business and inhabitants, and the town offices were located there. The settlement took form at the base of the small hill where the town meeting houses were located. Development in Bellows Falls in the 19th century shifted the focus of the town, and a fire in 1909 destroyed the stores and post office. The Rockingham Meeting House, constructed 1787-1801, is now operated by the town as a museum. It has been declared a National Historic Landmark.

Indigenous people inhabited the Connecticut River Valley for some 10,000 years. It is believed that for several thousand years they gathered here at the Great Falls on the Connecticut to harvest migrating salmon and shad.

The first European settlers tried to establish homesteads in this area during the first half of the 1700s, when the land was still occupied by Native Americans, the Abenaki, who joined the French in conducting a war against English intruders. Bedrock near the Great Falls retain stone carvings known as petroglyphs that are believed to have been created by Abenaki at least 300 years ago or more, during a period when their villages and burial grounds were set out here on the banks of the Connecticut in present-day Vermont and New Hampshire.

Rockingham was chartered in 1753 by Benning Wentworth, the colonial governor sitting in Portsmouth, N.H. Since then, a Selectboard whose members are elected by registered voters of the town has governed it. After the conclusion of the French and Indian War in 1763, settlement began in earnest. Many new inhabitants came from previous homes in Massachusetts and Connecticut. They cleared land and established homesteads scattered throughout the town. The Rockingham Meeting House was erected in roughly the geographic center of the town in the hamlet that still bears the name of Rockingham. However, industrial and commercial development after the Civil War produced a concentration of population and activity in Bellows Falls, where it remains today.

Rockingham takes pride in its local history and traditions and seeks to improve its economic condition, cultural, and educational outlooks, and quality of life, through community collaborations and creative approaches.

To read more of the history of Rockingham, consult the two town history books:

- "History of the Town of Rockingham 1753-1907" by Lyman Simpson Hayes, published by the town in 1907.
- "History of the Town of Rockingham, 1907-1957" by Frances Stockwell Lovell and Everett C. Lovell, published by the town in 1958.

Bellows Falls Village

The village of Bellows Falls is the largest population center (about 3,500 residents) within the town of Rockingham and has long served as the civic, commercial, and cultural hub of the community. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the local topography of the Connecticut River inspired the construction of a canal system, bridges, and mills that took advantage of hydropower and plentiful water. As a transportation hub and manufacturing center, Bellows Falls became the "market town" for the regional agricultural economy. It has been the seat of town government since 1869. The village itself was incorporated in 1909 and since then has been overseen by a Board of Trustees elected by residents of the village.

Today, the tall clock tower of the brick Town Hall rises above a vibrant downtown that's gained a regional reputation for arts and antiques, live music, and innovative bricks-and-mortar projects that combine economic development and historic pres-

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Neighboring Communities

A colored postcard of the new Arch Bridge, Bellows Falls.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE BELLOWS FALLS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Rockingham Meeting House in 1911. Constructed in 1787, repaired in 1907. Also pictured on the cover.

PHOTO PROVIDED

ervation. Within a short walk of downtown are residential neighborhoods that include many gems of Victorian-era architecture known as "painted ladies."

At Bellows Falls, the Connecticut River long ago created a series of level terraces adjacent to a long and narrow gorge known as the Great Falls. The short distance between shores enabled the construction of the first bridge (1785) anywhere on the entire 410-mile-long river, making Bellows Falls an important river crossroads. At a time when travel by river was more practical than overland, a series of eight locks on the Bellows Falls Canal (1791-1802) lifted boats a height of more than 50 feet around the gorge. It was one of the first transportation canals constructed in the country and was completed more than two decades before the famous Erie Canal.

In 1849, two railroad lines converged in Bellows Falls, making the village a railroad hub. The railroad stimulated the growth of local industries like the Vermont Farm Machine Company, which manufactured farm and dairy equipment, and the Bellows Falls Cooperative Creamery, which processed and distributed milk from farms in the region. After the railroad arrived, the transportation canal became a system of flumes that directed water to one of the largest papermaking complexes in the world. The company that in 1869 was among the first to use wood pulp for making paper was later one of 13 consolidated to form the International Paper Company in 1898.

All of this industrial activity promoted the growth and evolution of a downtown commercial district and nearby neighborhoods. Three historic districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places encompass industrial, commercial, and residential areas.

Saxtons River

The village of Saxtons River is the second largest population center (about 500 residents) within the town of Rockingham. Several falls on the Saxtons River provided opportunities in the early 19th century for water-powered mills that stimulated the growth of the village. Among the early businesses were woolen and saw mills, a gristmill, tannery, distillery, clock manufacturer, and hotel. In 1820, the town established boundaries of the village, and in 1905, the village of Saxtons River was incorporated and since then has been overseen by a Board of Trustees elected by registered voters of the village.

From 1900-1924, the Bellows Falls & Saxtons River Railroad, an electric train system, linked Rockingham's two villages. The company created Barber Park east of Saxtons River to which summertime crowds took the trolleys to baseball games and amusement rides.

Located just outside the village boundaries – but a strong influence on the character and economy of Saxtons River – is Vermont Academy, a private, co-educational high school founded in 1876. Vermont Academy established an annual Winter Carnival early in the 20th century, contributing to the creation of New England's winter recreation culture. Student enrollment is around 250.

The commercial core of the village is formed by a general store, an inn, and a restaurant and is surrounded by a residential neighborhood that dates back to the 19th century and historic mill sites. The village center is a National Register Historic District.

Bartonsville

This hamlet near the Williams River drew its name from Jeremiah Barton, who erected the first mills for sawing lumber and grinding grains for humans and animals about 1840. In about 1852, these were rebuilt into a paper mill, and the community grew to include two paper mills, a gristmill, blacksmith shop, store, post office, and railroad station. However, a flood in 1869 changed the course of the Williams River, leaving the village and mills some distance away, and the mills were moved to Bellows Falls.

Brockways Mills

A high gorge on the Williams River was the site around 1800 of an unusual water-powered mill, which ground flour at one end and lumber at the other, and for a time also served as a tannery. The sawmill included a woodworking shop, which manufactured spindles for the pews when the Rockingham Meeting House was restored in 1907. Like Bartonsville, it was once a stop on the Rutland Railroad.

Cambridgeport

Located on the town line with Grafton, a portion of this hamlet lies in each town. A drop in elevation of the Saxtons River once furnished waterpower to woolen, saw, grist, and soapstone mills. Only one mill remains, as a ruin. The hamlet was named after J.T. Cambridge, who opened a clothing business in 1825.

Celebrate the history of the

The Rockingham Meeting House, also known as Old North Meeting House and First Church in Rockingham, is a historic civic and religious building on Meeting House Road in Rockingham, Vt. The Meeting House was built between 1787 and 1801 and was originally used for both congregational church meetings as well as civic and governmental meetings. Church services ceased in 1839, but town meetings continued to be held in it until 1869. It was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 2000 as an exceptionally well-preserved "second period" colonial-style meetinghouse.

"Ye Olde Rockingham Meeting House, Rockingham. Constructed 1787. Repaired 1907."

PHOTO PROVIDED

Interior of the Rockingham Meeting House circa 1920.

PHOTO PROVIDED

The Rockingham Meeting House is set on the north side of Meeting House Road, on a parcel of land about 4 acres in size that it shares with the town's original burial ground, whose oldest marked graves date to 1776. Meeting House Road is the location of Rockingham's original town center laid out after the French and Indian War ended in 1763.

The building is a large two-story timber-frame structure, with a side-gable roof, clapboard siding, and a granite foundation. The main facade is five bays wide, with a symmetrical but slightly irregular placement of windows around the center entry. The main entrance is flanked by pilasters and topped by an entablature and triangular pediment. Enclosed two-story gable-roofed stairwell ells extend from the each side of the building, with a similarly decorated south-facing entrance. The main entrance opens into a central hallway, through a floor filled with box pews to the pulpit area, which features the original sounding board. The second-floor gallery, which wraps around three sides of the building, is also lined with box pews. The elevated pulpit area is 7 feet wide and is accessed by stairs on its left side. The pulpit is one of the few unoriginal elements of the building, having been restored in 1906. The only other significant alterations have been to replace windows.

Another look at Hetty Green, the

That Hetty Green hoarded her vast Gilded Age fortune and lived like a pauper, there can be no doubt. That she was as bad as people say is open to question.

Nicknamed the "Witch of Wall Street," she amassed a fortune worth as much as $3.8 billion in today's money. She always wore an old black dress, walked blocks to buy broken cookies in bulk, and once spent hours looking for a two-cent stamp.

According to the most damning story about Hetty Green, she wouldn't pay for a good doctor when her son injured his leg in a sledding accident. Doctors later amputated his leg. Here's something else, though:

The Hetty Green residence in Bellows Falls, no longer standing.

PHOTO PROVIDED

She loved her son and took him to many doctors to mend his leg. Like many of the stories about her, the tale of her refusal to pay for good medical care for her son was an exaggeration. And the stories about the good things Hetty did were rarely, if ever, reported.

Perhaps her greatest sin in the eyes of the world was living her life boldly on her own terms. People weren't used to a woman who carried a gun and used salty language picked up on the New Bedford docks. Nor were they used to a woman who managed her investments spectacularly well at a time when women weren't trusted with money.

Hetty Howland Robinson was born Nov. 21, 1834 in New Bedford, Mass. She was the only child of Edward Mott Robinson, a well-to-do businessman who married Abby Howland, heiress to a whaling fortune. As a young girl, Hetty read the financial news to her weak-eyed father, who was astute enough to get out of whaling before the industry collapsed.

When she turned 20, her Quaker father bought her a closet full of expensive, fashionable dresses so she could snag a wealthy husband. She sold the dresses and bought government bonds with the money. Her father left her $7.5 million when he died in 1864.

She married Edward Green. They moved to London, where they had a son and a daughter, Ned and Sylvia. Eventually, the family returned to Edward's family home in Bellows Falls, Vt. It was an odd match: Green was a wealthy silk and tea merchant. He dressed well, enjoyed clubs, appreciated fine food, and tipped generously. When he squandered his own fortune and cost her some of hers, she packed her bags and their children and walked out on him. She set up shop in an office at Chemical Bank, where she built her fortune. She developed a strategy of investing for value, which made her the richest woman in the world.

Hetty Green didn't buy stocks on margin. She invested in real estate and bonds, railroads and mines. She bought cheap, sold dear, and kept her head during financial panics. In 1907, she bailed out the city of New York when the banks wouldn't.

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Rockingham Meeting House

Rockingham Meeting House and cemetary.

PHOTO PROVIDED

An old storage crypt-vault in the Rockingham Meeting House Cemetary.

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The town of Rockingham was first settled by white settlers after the French and Indian War ended in 1763. Discussion around the construction of a meetinghouse began in 1771 and culminated in the construction of a building at this site in 1774. That building remained in use until the construction of this one, which was approved by the town meeting in 1787. Documentation is unclear about when the building was completed: the first recorded town meeting was held in this building in 1792, at which time it was not complete. The town in that year approved use of the building by local Christian congregations for services.

The various church congregations built their own buildings over the ensuing years, with the original congregational group ending its services in 1838. The building continued to be used for town meetings until a new town hall was constructed in Bellows Falls in 1869. The original pulpit was removed about 1850, and most of the original benches lining the pulpit area were removed. Although the building was vacant for many years, its exterior was maintained. The interior was subjected to vandalism and the theft of artifacts, including door hardware and hand-cut nails.

After being unused for many years, it was restored by the town in 1906 and the first Old Home Day and Pilgrimage to the Meeting House was held in August 1907. It narrowly escaped the fire, which burned much of the adjacent Rockingham village April 14, 1908.

The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 and was declared a National Historic Landmark in 2000. It is an extremely well-preserved example of a "second period" colonial meeting house, in which the principle entrance was on the long wall and is placed in a setting reminiscent of how it would have appeared at the time of its construction. Its landmark designation includes the building, cemetery, and receiving tomb.

Witch of Wall Street

2017 Hetty Green reenactment.

PHOTO BY MARY ELLEN

Hetty Green.

PHOTO PROVIDED

Her Quaker upbringing taught her that a gift to be bragged about is not a gift in the eyes of the Lord. She loaned money at below-market rates to at least 30 churches. According to her son, she secretly gave many gifts to charitable causes and supported at least 30 families with regular incomes.

Toward the end of her life, Hetty Green reconciled with her husband, nursing him through his final illness. He died March 19, 1902 in Bellows Falls. She lived for 14 more years, dying July 3, 1916. Before she died, Hetty Green converted to the Episcopal faith. That allowed her to be buried next to her husband in the Immanuel Episcopal Church cemetery in Bellows Falls.

Source: "Hetty: The Genius and Madness of America's First Female Tycoon" by Charles Slack. Photographs courtesy Library of Congress. This story about Hetty Green was updated in 2018.

Firework donations

On Saturday, Aug. 3, the Rockingham Old Home Days fireworks will begin around 9:30 p.m. Volunteers are needed to help collect funds beginning at 8 p.m. Anyone wanting to donate to the firework fund, send to Great Falls Regional Chamber of Commerce, 17 Depot St., Bellows Falls, VT 05101.

PHOTO BY BRANDY PATTERSON

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