

Newcomers to Vermont mostly come from New England

January 5, 2012 – *Burlington Free Press*

Ever since Kathy Stockman was a girl growing up in Maplewood, N.J., a bedroom community of New York City, she wanted to live on a farm, especially after attending an overnight camp at a small dairy in Rome, Pa., owned by her kindergarten teacher.

Stockman still remembers the sights and smells from her teacher's farm. That she was willing to leave her parents for the night tells Stockman how strong the appeal was.

"Maybe in a past life I was a farm girl," she said recently.

Eventually — after city life near Boston — she became one. Following her grown daughter, Stockman, 64, moved in 2005 to Shelburne, where she settled with her husband on 12 acres of the former Bushey-Senesac farm on Pond Road.

"When we drove down Pond Road, I was just immediately taken by the beauty of this area," Stockman said. "Shelburne Pond there, view of Mount Mansfield there, a fabulous view of the Adirondacks there, sunsets to die for, and a view of the Green Mountains through the saddle in the back."

Stockman and her husband are emblematic of Vermont's neighbors who feel the draw of the state and then relocate here. In just one year, thousands of people move to Vermont, mostly from New York and the New England states, according to the 2010 American Community Survey, a part of the U.S. census.

The largest migration to Vermont in 12 months prior to the 2010 survey came from New York, followed by Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Florida and Connecticut. According to the American Community Survey:

- About 4,000 people came to Vermont from New York.
- 3,600 came from Massachusetts.
- 2,700 arrived from New Hampshire.
- 2,000 relocated from Florida.
- 1,300 moved from Connecticut.

Stockman's story

Despite Stockman's early experience on that Pennsylvania farm, she wound up a city girl. She met her future husband, Rad (short for Radcliffe) Romeyn, 24 years ago on a blind date in Cambridge, Mass., when she was a graduate student at Harvard University. It would be her second marriage and his third.

Stockman's only daughter from a previous marriage, Rebecca Ann, had grown up in the cosmopolitan hubbub of Harvard Square, but she decided to attend the University of Vermont, where she would meet her future husband.

After graduation from UVM, Rebecca Ann moved with her husband to Breckenridge, Colo. When their thoughts turned to starting a family, Breckenridge seemed too transient a place.

The couple first looked at moving back to Cambridge, but after finding it prohibitively expensive, they settled on Shelburne. Stockman and Romeyn came to visit — and they knew they would be moving to Vermont.

“Even though I visited quite a bit when she was at UVM, and I knew it was beautiful up here, we fell hook, line and sinker for Vermont, especially the Shelburne area,” Stockman said.

In 2005, Stockman and Romeyn moved to 12 acres of the former Bushey-Senesac farm on Pond Road in Shelburne.

Surveys and studies

Jane Kolodinski, director of the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont, warns that the migration numbers in the American Community Survey are rough estimates, with large margins for error. The survey, she said, is based on a sample, not an actual count such as the census.

But there is confirmation of the survey's numbers in another study done by the Public Assets Institute, a nonprofit think tank in Montpelier.

Public Assets has been keeping track of who is coming and going from Vermont using numbers from the Statistics of Income Division of the Internal Revenue Service. In February 2010, the organization issued a report titled “Migrants to Vermont Have More Income Than Those Who Leave.”

Author Reenie De Geus wrote that in 2008, 40 percent of the new arrivals to Vermont came from New York, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Some 36 percent of the people leaving Vermont went to one of those three states.

De Geus wrote that according to IRS data, 15,028 people moved into Vermont in 2008, and 16,551 moved out. That would mean about 6,011 came from New York, New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

The report stated that fewer people moved into Vermont than out of the state, “but those who moved in had more income per person than those who left the state or stayed put.” That followed a trend of the past 15 years, wrote De Geus, who no longer is at Public Assets.

The average income of the immigrants was \$32,862, while the average income of those who left the state was \$28,806.

The report’s conclusions closely track the 2010 American Community Survey, suggesting that things haven’t changed much in the past several years.

Historical divide

Behind the numbers of people coming and going from Vermont is something else — something less grounded in the cold sheen of statistics and more in the heat of emotion —the long-running friction between the natives and those who were born elsewhere.

Native Vermonters are known for tracking the number of generations their relatives have been here, with many families’ roots stretching back to the 18th century. Sometimes that obsession is combined with criticism, light-hearted or otherwise, of those who have relocated to the state.

Few people know more about the interplay between native and non-native Vermonters than 70-year-old Frank Bryan, a professor of political science at the University of Vermont. He’s the author, along with non-native Bill Mares, of “Real Vermonters Don’t Milk Goats,” the definitive treatise on how “real” Vermonters behave. The book was published, tongue-in-cheek, in 1983, at perhaps the height of the culture war between natives and outsiders.

“These two paradigms really clashed in the 1980s; that was the high point of difference,” Bryan said in a recent interview.

Bryan was born in West Stewartstown, N.H., in 1941, and grew up in Newbury, Vt. In a 1984 profile in Vermont Life magazine, Bryan joked that he himself wasn’t a “real Vermonter” because of where he was born, saying, “It’s on my birth certificate, and I can’t get it off.”

But Bryan is a genuine native for sure, raised by a single mother in the village of Newbury, working on the local farms and in the woods from a young age.

“I wasn’t raised on a farm, but by the time I was a junior in high school I spent the winter logging in the forest,” Bryan said. “You didn’t escape because you were in the village.”

Although “woodchuck” and “flatlander” — terms applied to natives and non-natives, respectively — have become “terms of endearment” today, Bryan said, there was a serious issue behind the division, having to do with money.

“It really was about class status; it didn’t have much to do with where you were born,” Bryan said. “For most who graduated from high school with me, it was hard living; it was tough. Seeing people coming in and buying these farms, and they’d clean it up like we wished we could, with no junk cars around, all clean and pretty. All of a sudden it was beautiful, and they named it ‘Birdsheel Farm,’ or whatever it was. They had to name it of course. So these kids are trying to get jobs working for people living in homes they envisioned in their dreams, but never could afford.”

Natives also were annoyed, Bryan said, by the way those who moved here considered themselves instant Vermonters.

“It’s a mindset that’s insulting to us: ‘We can come to this godforsaken place and be like you without any effort just by dint of being here,’” he said.

You can become a real Vermonter, Bryan said, but it takes time, and effort.

“I think you got to survive 20 winters without moving to Florida or committing suicide,” Bryan said. “If you can do that, you’re a real Vermonter.”

'Here forever'

Kathy Stockman was well aware of the “flatlander” label when she and her husband moved to Vermont, but she dismisses it as irrelevant, even though at first, she said, it contributed to preventing the couple from getting their financial feet on the ground.

When they moved here in 2005, Stockman and her husband thought they would pick up their careers where they left off in Cambridge. Kathy was consulting for corporations in Boston’s financial district, teaching “technical stuff” such as computer skills. Romeyn was in real-estate development in the Boston area and in Rhode Island, doing historic renovations of residential properties and housing developments for older adults.

Both were doing well financially. It all came to a screeching halt. Being an outsider didn’t help, especially in Romeyn’s case, Stockman said.

“He tried so hard for 18 months to get development going here, and he invested a lot of his own money and a lot of investors’ money in projects that just didn’t go because he was a new kid on the block,” Stockman said.

Romeyn encountered “great resistance” in the areas he was trying to develop, Stockman said, and it “just didn’t happen.”

“Even though so many of us are in Vermont, unless you’re born here, you’re always an outsider,” Stockman said.

As for her profession, Stockman had to kiss it goodbye.

“I thought, ‘I’ll have no trouble coming up to Vermont, especially the Burlington area, and be able to find training consulting,’” Stockman said. “Absolutely nothing. Zero bites, anywhere.”

Facing the abyss, the couple started a business, Go Green Recycling LLC, removing waste material from construction sites and recycling it. Romeyn does the cleanup himself, hauling a trailer behind his Isuzu Trooper, while Stockman keeps the books.

“Rad is very resourceful and willing to do whatever it takes to be able to survive, even though he was brought up in a boys’ boarding-school atmosphere and has no background in manual labor at all,” Stockman said. “Having been familiar with the construction industry he knew how much waste comes off construction sites, and it was huge.”

Stockman and Romeyn also have renovated the large 1960s-era dairy barn on their property, some 200 feet long, into a space for 11 artists’ studios, where they charge a reasonable rent. Stockman teaches stone-carving, a skill she picked up in Cambridge, in another of the farm’s outbuildings. And two days a week, the couple’s two young grandchildren spend the afternoon.

“I do love to go back and visit Boston or other cities, but this is home, and this is where the heart is,” Stockman said. “I expect to be here forever.”

Contact Dan D’Ambrosio at 660-1841 or ddambrosio@burlingtonfreepress.com.