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Established 1897

251

A club for all
of VermontBy KATHRYN EDDY
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You can get there from here. For one Vermont club, you must. It's the name of the game.

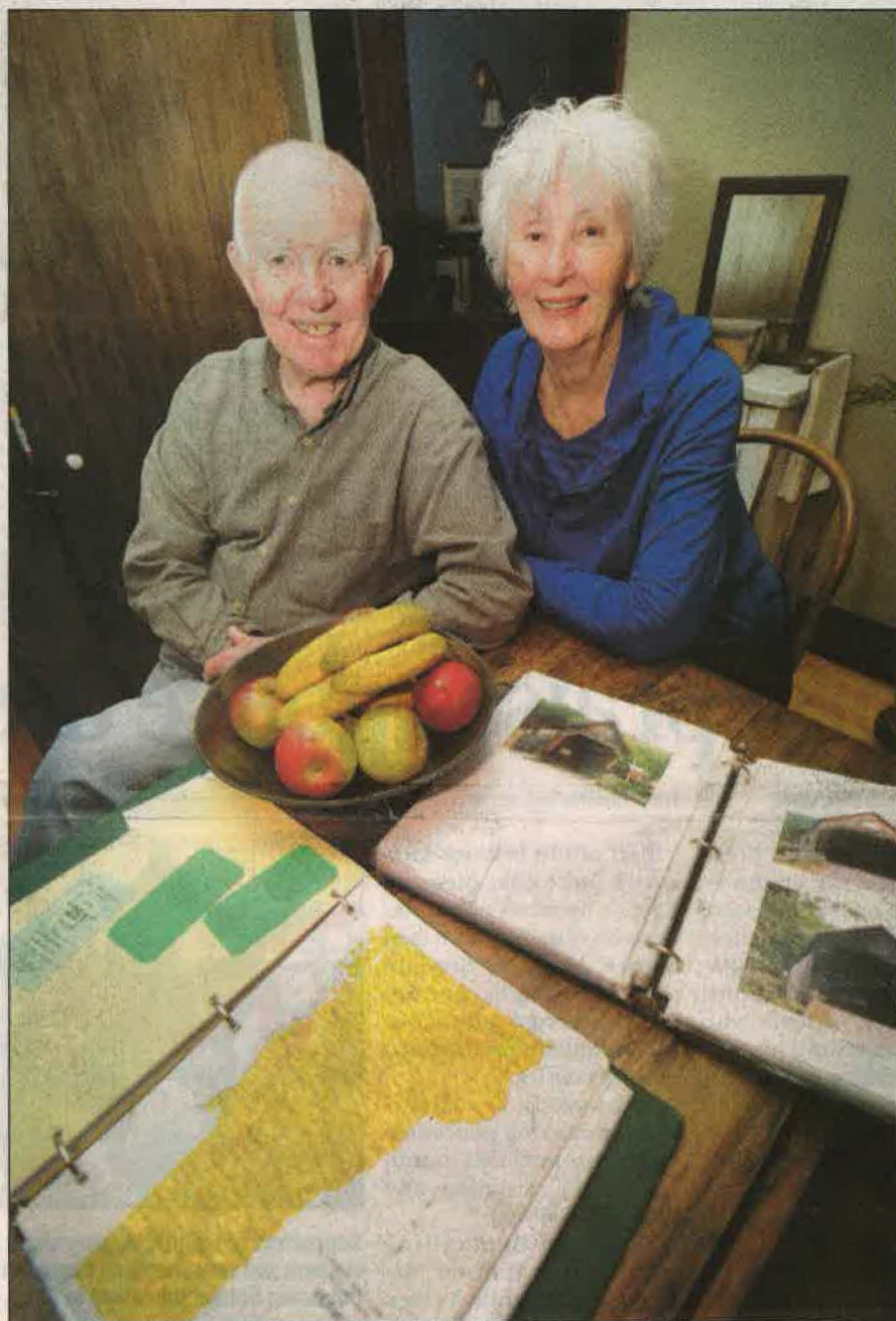
Founded in 1954 by Dr. Arthur Peach, the 251 Club of Vermont is still going strong with 4,000 members, all of whom have made it their mission to visit the 246 "organized" and the five "unorganized" (Averill, Ferdinand, Glastenbury, Lewis and Somerset) towns and cities across the Green Mountain State.

"Peach just had a great love affair with Vermont and wanted to encourage Vermonters to get out and see their state. Putting that in the context of the time — we didn't have the interstate highway, not all Vermonters had cars and people weren't used to traveling that far from home — it was a brave idea," says executive director Sandy Levesque.

Levesque, an author, editor and marketing and public relations consultant, is in the early stages of research for a book about the 251 Club in anticipation of its 60th anniversary in 2014. She joined the club in 2000 and has 58 towns left to visit, which she hopes to do within the next two years.

As director of the Vermont Historical Society, Peach operated the club under the auspices of the VHS until his death in 1956. Peach's idea caught on quickly as he was also an associate editor at the time for the widely circulated Vermont Life and had his own literary column, "At the Sign of the Quill." Peach was Norwich University's first English department chairman, which he served as for nearly 40 years and co-founded the now League of Vermont Writers. Though Peach's tenure as director was short, his legacy continues through Levesque, the club's fourth director since its inception.

According to Levesque, there are about 200 current members who have earned the Plus membership distinction, identifying them as members who have achieved the goal of visiting all 251 municipalities. That number fluctuates



STEFAN HARD / STAFF PHOTO

Don and Joan Carrigan sit at their kitchen table with memorabilia from visiting all of Vermont's 251 towns as members of the 251 Club. The Carrigans have also been visiting all of the state's covered bridges, which numbers just over 100.

depending on whether or not those who have finished continue their memberships, though Levesque says a lot do.

Current Plus members Joan and Don Carrigan of Barre joined in 1998 and completed their quest in 2007, compiling a detailed notebook documenting each visit.

"Our real push to get this through was to do something in every community. We either ate, walked the streets, shopped, visited a museum or library or historical marker and it's all in there,"

says Joan Carrigan.

An important part of achieving Plus status is visiting, not just passing through, and the Carrigans took that idea to heart.

"I can remember when the list came to the house, I said 'you can cross off Richford, I was born there,' but Don said 'no, we're going to do it right, we have to make a special trip'," says Joan Carrigan.

The Carrigans, working at the time, had weekends to visit three or four towns. They started with Newbury in the south and finished with Lewis, a town in the Northeast Kingdom that poses one of the biggest challenges to

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the 251 Club of Vermont you can visit www.vt251.com, or email thevt251club@together.net. Dues are \$8 a year or \$35 for five years and there is a one-time \$5 new membership enrollment fee.

See 251, Page A5

251 members. "You have to drive about five or six miles up an old logging road, which means you can't do it unless the weather conditions have been dry in the days leading up to your visit," Don Carrigan says.

But Lewis wasn't the only difficult town to get to.

"It was quite an adventure. When people in Vermont start talking

about out of the way places, it's always the (Northeast Kingdom) but, jeez, there are some places down near the Massachusetts border, for instance, that are just as out of the way," he adds.

Don Carrigan, also a native Vermonter, born in Proctor, volunteers at the VHS every week, but before retirement he worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and for 35 years had the entire state as his territory. Now that both he and Joan are retired, they've continued to expand upon the 251

Club's mission.

"We just loved doing this and when we finished, we were lost. Then Don thought of visiting all the covered bridges," says Joan Carrigan.

"We kissed in each one," adds Don.

They've now visited, and kept record of, all the covered bridges in the state, driven up every mountain as far as is possible and nearly completed visits to all of Vermont's railway stations.

"We're trying to figure out what's next," says Don Carrigan.

Former Gov. James Douglas of Middlebury, has been a member for a number of years and has been a speaker at the club's annual fall meeting.

"I'm not a plus member. I have yet to trek into Lewis, but I think it's nice to have a goal yet to attain," he says.

Anyone can join the club. According to Levesque approximately 85 percent of the current members are Vermonters, there's no age requirement and no constraints when it comes to the "how" of getting there.

"We've had governors and politicians, artists and authors, we've had people do it by bike, by motorcycle, by canoe, antique car; there are people who have walked it and some are walking it now," says Levesque.

The club is online now since Levesque took the reins in 2010 with an interactive website that members can create personal accounts on and keep track of their progress. They also have access to various informational resources and archived copies of *The Wayfarer*, the club's news-

letter, which Levesque puts out three times a year.

"I devote a lot of time, writing the newsletter and maintaining the database. It's a rare day that there's not new member requests or renewals. It's a labor of love," says Levesque.

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