

## **Shrewsbury's History: A town grows in the mountains**

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Like several other Rutland County communities, Shrewsbury's settlement can be directly linked to Crown Point Military Road.

Cutting through the Sept. 4, 1761, chartered town, it proved the most convenient route for prospective settlers. Rockingham's Capt. Lemuel White traveled the carved path to become Shrewsbury's first settler. Others followed and the town officially organized on March 20, 1781.

While Shrewsbury Center developed around the track of Crown Point Military Road, Cuttingsville started and grew because of the opening of the Green Mountain Turnpike in 1799. The road linked Clarendon to Rockingham. When the Rutland & Burlington Railroad opened in 1849, Cuttingsville expanded as a shipping and commercial center in town. The village received its name from Charles Cutting, who ran a milling operation in the 1820s.

Shrewsbury grew in acreage on Oct. 21, 1823, when the Vermont General Assembly annexed one square mile of Plymouth to be part of the town. This explains the jog in Shrewsbury's southeastern boundary.

Another hamlet in Shrewsbury, Northam (North Shrewsbury), grew because of abundant dairy farms as families opened up pastures on the rocky slopes. Shrewsbury led Rutland County in butter production in 1850. Dairying continued to flourish through the 19th century and to help manage the flow of milk, several creameries and cheese factories opened.

Russellville is located in the southern section of town. Members of the Russell family commenced a lumber and milling business in 1850 and subsequently constructed a cluster of homes in close proximity to the operation. The addition of a few other residences created a small community.

In the late 19th century, residents started extensively tapping another natural resource — the forests. Woodsmen cut down a large volume of trees and Cuttingsville benefited from the industry. It grew as a lumber depot, a boom that lasted into the early 20th century.

One of Shrewsbury's most noteworthy landmarks unfortunately is linked to a series of sad events. The Bowman Memorial that stands in Laurel Glen Cemetery commemorates one man's love for his wife and two daughters. Bowman, a wealthy tannery owner, spared no expense in its construction when he had it built in 1880. One hundred and twenty-five workers spent a year completing the project. When finished, the mausoleum was 17-1/2 feet by 24 feet and 20 feet high. It consisted of 750 tons of granite, 50 tons of marble, 20,000 bricks, 525 barrels of Portland cement, 10 barrels of plaster and 100 loads of sand. The interior contained statuary and mirrors to create an illusion of space. If the mausoleum does not catch the eye of passers-by, a life-sized statue of Bowman stands outside. It features the grieving man ascending the stairs to the entryway "to open the shelter ... where sleep his cherished dead."

One book published in 1883 described the memorial as "one of the marvels of its class on its continent; a gem that will continue to delight the hearts of lovers of the beautiful through countless ages."

Shrewsbury Peak, located in the town's northeast corner, looms over the community at 3,720 feet. Workers with the federal Civilian Conservation Corps carved a ski area on the southern exposure of the mountain in 1935. The slopes opened the following year with a "rustic cobblestone hut with a massive fireplace and indoor toilets" and a 450-foot rope tow. The area closed in the 1940s, influenced by two factors — the development of nearby Pico Peak and the problem of unplowed access roads. The Old CCC Road and the hut are the remaining vestiges of this abandoned ski area.

Another road in town is a link to Vermont's past. Old Shunpike Road cuts through Shrewsbury and Mount Holly. Creative and frugal residents built the road to purposely bypass the tollbooths required for travel on the Green Mountain Turnpike.

Driving on Upper Cold River Road, one will cross the Brown Covered Bridge, which spans the Cold River. The 1880 structure was the last bridge designed and constructed by Nicholas Powers, one of the most renowned covered bridge builders in the nation.

In the fall of 1986, crowds of people streamed into Shrewsbury and the town earned worldwide notoriety. All the attention centered on a lovesick young bull moose who grew attached to a young Hereford cow named Jessica. For 76 days, the moose lingered on Larry Carrara's land, barely disturbed by the throngs of onlookers. The bull eventually ambled off, but became a star in the book, "A Moose For Jessica."

Today, Shrewsbury protects its architectural heritage. Portions of Shrewsbury Center and Cuttingsville have historic districts that are on the Vermont State Register. The areas capture the rich history of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The town maintained a relatively stable population in the 19th century. Census records indicate 1,289 citizens in 1830 and 1,235 in 1880. When the lumber industry declined, so did the population. According to 2000 figures, 1,108 people call Shrewsbury home.

### **Impressions on Shrewsbury:**



Northam



Northam Church



Bear Mountain