



Hands on the Land: A History of the Vermont Landscape

By Jan Albers

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In this book Jan Albers examines the history -- natural, environmental, social, and ultimately human -- of one of America's most cherished landscapes: Vermont. Albers shows how Vermont has come to stand for the ideal of unspoiled rural community, examining both the basis of the state's pastoral image and the equally real toll taken by the pressure of human hands on the land. She begins with the relatively light touch of Vermont's Native Americans, then shows how European settlers -- armed with a conviction that their claim to the land was "a God-given right" -- shaped the landscape both to meet economic needs and to satisfy philosophical beliefs. The often turbulent result: a conflict between practical requirements and romantic ideals that has persisted to this day. Making lively use of contemporary accounts, advertisements, maps, landscape paintings, and vintage photographs, Albers delves into the stories and personalities behind the development of a succession of Vermont landscapes. She observes the growth of communities from tiny settlements to picturesque villages to bustling cities; traces the development of agriculture, forestry, mining, industry, and the influence of burgeoning technology; and proceeds to the growth of environmental consciousness, aided by both private initiative and governmental regulation. She reveals how as community strengthens, so does responsible stewardship of the land. Albers shows that like any landscape, the Vermont landscape reflects the human decisions that have been made about it -- and that the more a community understands about how such decisions have been made, the better will be its future decisions.

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Editorial Review

Review

The fascination of *Hands on the Land* lies in its beautifully orchestrated build-up to the Vermont of today.

(Tom Hotaling, *Architecture Boston*)

Jan Alber's provocative book walks the reader through the fascinating geography and history of Vermont. Throughout, she artfully captures the events contributing to the shaping of the land, thus giving a history of the people and communities who have creatively lived and worked against the backdrop of one of the most remarkable and gently preserved landscapes in the world.

(Thomas P. Salmon, Governor of Vermont, 1973-1977, and President of the University of Vermont, 1991-1997)

Jan Albers has captured the essence of Vermont, showing us how inextricably linked are its land, its people, and its way of life. In chronicling the changes time has brought to Vermont's land and economy, Albers prompts us to look anew at how inevitably the decisions of today will determine the Vermont of tomorrow.

(Jean Hocker, President, The Land Trust Alliance)

Jan Albers's wry, sympathetic portraits of immigrants, farmers, entrepreneurs, scientists, politicians, and eccentrics combine with a remarkable sequence of illustrations to make *Hands on the Land* feel like a family album for Vermont. This is a book of illuminations and delights.

(John Elder, Middlebury College)

The unique character and timeless appeal of Vermont are rooted largely in the look of the land itself. In *Hands on the Land*, Jan Albers offers a lively and insightful study of the geological factors, the social and economic trends, and -- perhaps most compelling -- the human dreams and schemes that have shaped the landscape and in the process made Vermont one of America's truly special places.

(Richard Moe, President, National Trust for Historic Preservation)

What an exciting book! Jan Albers is eloquent and expert. This is an important work both for its historical perspectives and considerable foresight. Opening it, I'm invariably absorbed.

(Edward Hoagland, author of *Walking the Dead Diamond River*)

About the Author

Jan Albers received her doctorate in history from Yale University. She has taught at Yale, the University of

Sussex, and Middlebury and St. Michael's Colleges in Vermont.

Users Review

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Travis Ralls:

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