



How many of you are already aware of the 251 Club? How many of you are members? [image is of a pond in Braintree Vermont] Hello and thanks for having me come speak with you. I'm going to tell you a little bit about one of Vermont's best kept secrets, the 251 Club of Vermont, or as we call it here in the state, "The 251 Club" Our motto...

"Hi, I'm..."

# JESSAMYN WEST


*1st attempt 2004 - 2010*



[image is of me in Somerset with arms raised celebrating my last town...] My name is Jessamyn West, I am a board member of the club. I am also what we call a "plus" member, having been to all of Vermont's 251 towns. This is me in Somerset in 2010. I'm actually now going back to all the towns to make sure I have photographs of them (I didn't the first time) and I'm about 70% of the way through that. I pick away at it on weekends, usually when the weather is nice.



[image is a back road in Pownal] The two big things that *have* changed with the 251 club are the fact that we have a web site, if you're into that sort of thing, and that we're celebrating our 65th year. So let me tell you a little bit about where the club came from, what we are, and what we do....



ARTHUR WALLACE PEACH

## ARTHUR WALLACE PEACH

- Born in Pawlet.
- Brattleboro HS and Middlebury grad.
- Lived in Northfield and Montpelier.
- Taught at Norwich 1913-1950 & wrote the school's anthem "Norwich forever!"
- Director of VT Historical Society until his death in 1956.
- Founded the Authors' Guild and was president of Better Library Movement.
- Called himself "a wee bit evangelical" about singing Vermont's praises.

[Image of Peach as a young man in a military looking uniform] It all got started back in 1954, by this guy Arthur Wallace Peach. A native Vermonter (talk about what is on slides) Peach was in his retirement after working at Norwich (in Northfield) and was directing the Vermont Historical society. He called himself "a wee bit evangelical" about his many loves (he founded the state's author's guild, was president of the State's poetry society and was the president of the Better Library Movement which was the impetus for some of our state Library's programs) and the club was born out of his evangelism for his home state.



## ARTHUR PEACH (1886-1956)

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- "How can I come to know the real Vermont?"
- Summer 1954 issue of Vermont Life Magazine.
- "A swift turn from one of our main roads, and you are on your way to the rewarding experience of a lifetime and memories good until the years are frosty."
- "Vermont has [always] been a state of towns and in them and in them ONLY can the real Vermont be found and seen."

[image of an older Dr Peach] He wrote a regular column for Vermont Life magazine which was in its first decade. People would often ask him "How can I come to know the real Vermont?" and Peach's reply was that you had to see and experience it, going up and down all its roads and seeing ALL the towns.



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Years ago, before the auto, I knew men who had never been 50 miles from their village or farm; now, there is no excuse for a Vermonter's saying that he does not know his state from top to bottom.

- *Arthur Peach*

[image of the view from the roadway in South Hero] Before there were automobiles, it might make sense to only be familiar with your own village, or the town it was inside of (I live in "the village" of Randolph, but there are other villages in the town that are fairly remote from one another thanks to the highway going through - we have 4500 people and three post offices, pretty lucky if you ask me) but now that mobility is part of the Vermont experience, Peach felt it should be part of the Vermonter experience.

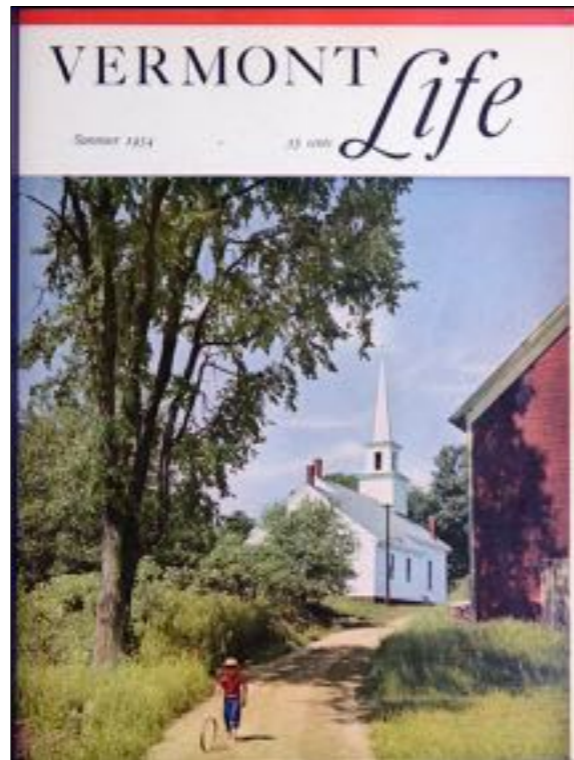


## VERMONT IN 1954

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- Vermont's population 377,747
- More cows than people.
- No interstate highways until 1957 (not done until 1982!)
- S.S. Ticonderoga made its last steamboat trip on Lake Champlain
- Consuelo Northrup Bailey elected first woman lieutenant governor in US

[image is of a border crossing in Franklin Vermont with sign in french and English] Vermont was a different kind of place 65 years ago, though this image from Franklin is only maybe ten years old.



## 251 CLUB IN 1954

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- Visit all towns, not just drive through them.
- Annual meeting in Montpelier each year.
- No "high-domed or long-winded" speakers
- Sharing and comparing stories and photos.
- That's it.
- No seriously. Do it however you want.

[image: Cover of Vermont Life from 1954] When the club started, it was basically Peach and his friend Huntley Palmer from St Johnsbury. It had a few "rules" such as it was, but it was basically just this.



# ONE SHARED GOAL:

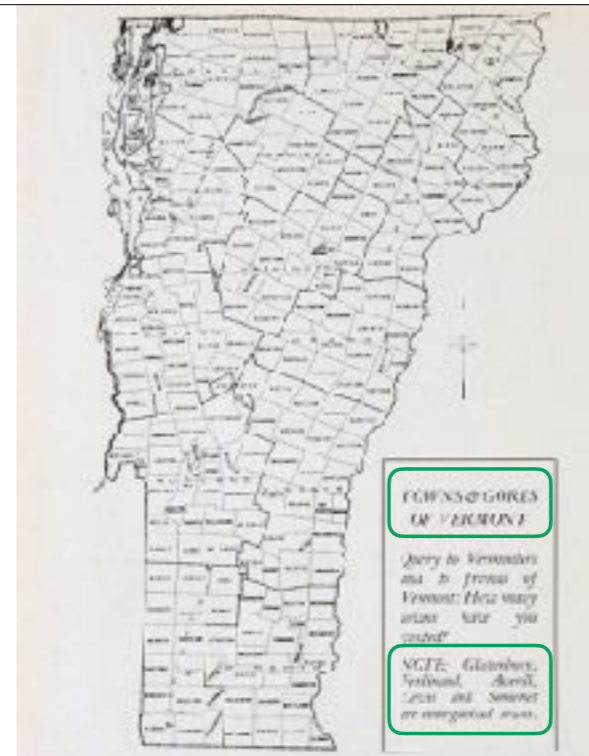
*Visit all of Vermont's 251 places*



[image: A three over five doorway in Cabot.] The one goal is to visit all of Vermont's 251 PLACES

# VERMONT LIFE GAVE YOU A MAP

*of... towns and gores?*



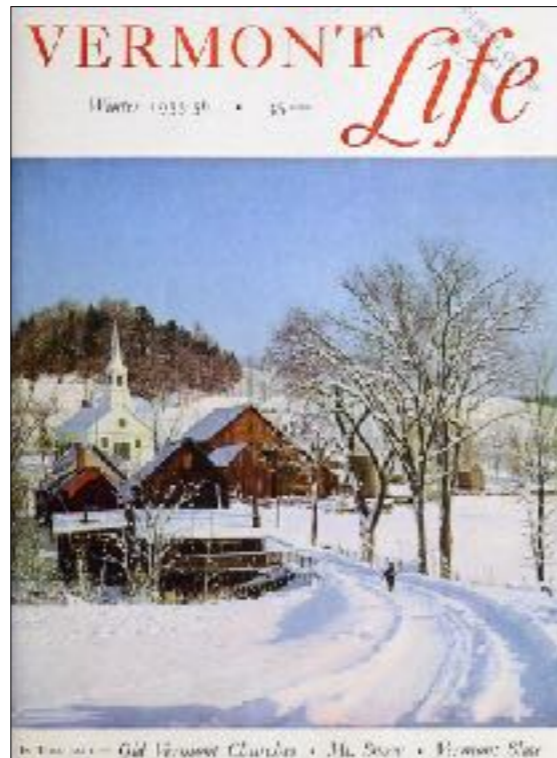
[image of a map of Vermont from 1954 with the key on the side telling you that it's of the towns and gores of Vermont and listing the unorganized towns] How to find those places? Vermont Life would give you a map, if you wrote to them. "A new batch of Vermont maps had to be printed to meet the growing demand while letters from prospective club members rolled in." A map of... towns and gores? But then the map said some of the towns aren't... towns?



[image is a blazing autumn set of trees under a blue sky in Brandon Vermont] Well it's complicated. I guess it's worth explaining 251 of what...



[image of Highgate VT in background, overlapping pictures including the city of Burlington, Buels Gore which is a gore, Sheldon which is a town and Lewis which is an unincorporated town]] So let's talk about these places. There are nine cities ranging from the smallest Vergennes—the third oldest incorporated city in the United States with approximately 2,500 citizens—to Burlington, the state's biggest city of 42,000. One of Vermont's nine cities wasn't a city when the 251 club was founded. Anyone know which? Towns make up most of the state, there's 237 incorporated and five unincorporated (Averill, Ferdinand, Glastenbury, Lewis, and Somerset), average population 2,000. I live in Randolph which is the biggest town in Orange County. There are also Gores (and one Grant) which is a thing you only see in Maine and Vermont, little pieces of land left over when the other land was turned into towns. The Gores and Grants actually bring the number to 255 if you want to get technical. Some members include them in their quests, others don't. You really can do it your way.

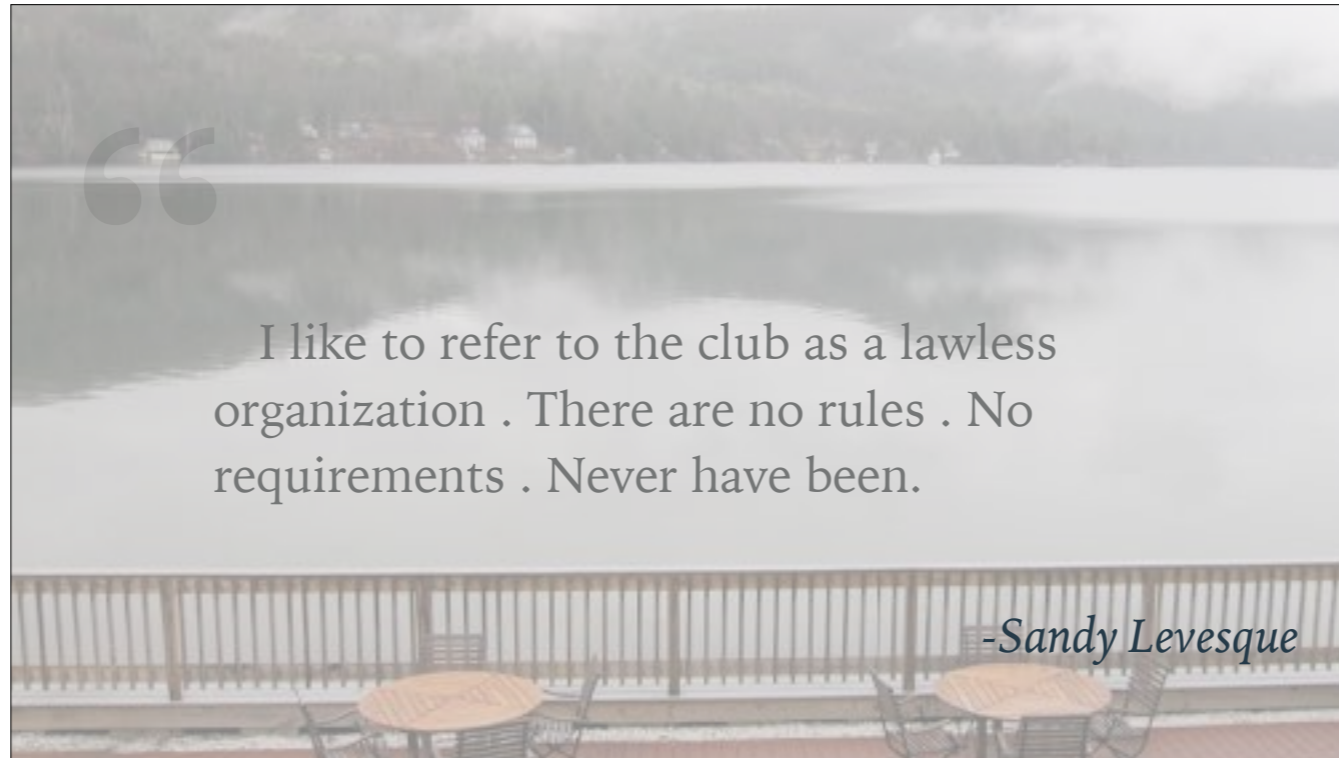


## 251 CLUB IN 1955

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- 50 people at the annual meeting.
- Governor Johnson in attendance.
- Slide show by 80 year old Frank Hartwell from Bolton.
- The Wayfarer becomes the "Official organ of the 251 Club of Vermont "
- Over 100 members.

[image cover of Vermont Life from 1955] By 1955 the club had "caught on." The annual meeting had fifty people, the Governor attended, the program was a slide show and the newsletter which was officially called The Wayfarer were sent to all 100 (and growing) members



[image of Lake Morey, Fairlee Vermont seen from the resort] ... and that's it for rules. The current outgoing director Sandy Levesque has stayed true to the original values of the organization. Do it however you want.



## 251 CLUB IN 2019

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- We now have a website.
- Everything else more or less the same.
- Over 6,000 members. 80% live in Vermont.
- Annual meeting this Sunday! Attendance is capped at 251 members

[image is Alayna Westcom of Franklin, Miss Vermont in 2015] Cut ahead to 2019. Alayna was given her membership by Hannah Nelson Manley who was Miss Vermont 2000. Hannah spoke with 93% of the town clerks in the state as part of her Miss Vermont year.



[image of screen shot from One Town at a Time website] This year's "entertainment" is going to be, not a high domed or long-winded speaker, but this film, One Town At a Time by a local filmmaker who did a 251 club spring one summer in 2006 and came back in 2018 to make a movie about it. The film has been playing around Vermont most of this summer, you might still be able to catch it somewhere.



# PAUL HENNESSEY

*hit golf balls in all 251 towns*



Paul and his wife Paula live in Barre. They and another couple took 14½ years to hit golf balls in every town. They also tried to talk to someone who had lived for a long time in the town with each visit. They compiled their trip into a set of photo albums that they bring around to senior centers



Joe Cook of Dummerston rode his touring bike the full length of every paved road in VT

Corwin Sharp, Director of Program Development for the Billings Farm & Museum in Woodstock and his wife Priscilla Pannell have logged in "over 40,000 happy miles" cruising VT roads

Dorothy Myers from South Burlington pedaled 4,078 dedicated miles to complete her 251 quest

Eric Osgood and Glenda Rose of Johnson, Vermont with Silver Annie, a 1929 Buick "For a town to qualify as being visited and checked-off ... all three of us must be in the town at the same time"

David and Lyn Perrin of Charlotte, Vermont spent 120 days over a four year period floating through Vermont's 251 towns on 116 lakes and ponds, 700 miles of rivers, a few brooks, bogs, beaver ponds, and the length of Lake Champlain.

Douglas Ballou lives in Anchorage Alaska but when he comes to VT he works on his quest with his two year old son Muse



- Ron Thompson of Williston passed through every one of Vermont's 106 official covered bridges.
- Anne and Ben Linehan of Tunbridge, Vermont visited breweries (as much as they could) and released a celebratory brew - 251 (Towns) Golden IPA when they completed their quest.
- Lorinda and Dennis Smith of Morrisville, Vermont also belong to the Vermont 251 Plus 4 Geocacher Club. They found geocaches in every town
- Laurie and Joe Jordan of Essex, Vermont enjoy local history and back road adventures. They customized their quest to explore cemeteries in all 251 towns
- Rita Chartrand grew up in NEK and, with her husband Phil joined the 251 Club in 2007 to photograph as many Vermont wildflowers as they could. They completed their quest in 2015 Rita found her 278th wildflower

# REP. PETER WELCH

*251 in three months!*



"Life can be challenging at the end of Vermont's dirt roads, but there are strong roots in those communities where neighbors help neighbors."



[image of two different years' VT passports] And as for me, I decided to go back and see all of Vermont's libraries (183 of them, the most per capita of any US state) and had so much fun doing it that I got together with some other people in the Vermont Library Association and we created the Passport to Vermont's Libraries summer reading program so that all Vermonters can explore and enjoy what's great about Vermont's libraries.



# WHERE WILL YOUR QUEST TAKE YOU?

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*Thank you for your time and attention*