



**Montgomery Historical Society**  
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In April of 2023 the Vermont Historical Society (VHS) invited the State's local historical societies to provide a very brief article from their Town's history with one photo for an online exhibit called "History in the 252", for the 252 Cities and Towns in the state. They wanted to display the breadth and depth of local history throughout the State. You can view it at: <https://vermonthistory.org/history-in-the-252>. A physical display was also made for the Statehouse for the benefit of the legislature.

The Montgomery Historical Society selected the Montgomery mills and what follows is an expanded version of what was provided to the VHS.

~~~~~ **Montgomery Mills** ~~~~~

A major part of Montgomery's past involved an explosion of timber related development following the Civil War and continuing into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Abundant forests and water power made development possible. Major production included spools and bobbins supplying Vermont's and New England's woolen mills, plywood packing cases use to ship Victrolas and other finished goods, and, most notably, butter tubs as dairy farming supplanted sheep.

One of the first to develop a process to produce tubs by machine was William Stiles who completed his first tub mill in Montgomery 1852. He would sell his interest in that operation and build another mill, also in Montgomery, eventually retiring from active involvement in 1883. Stiles wrote there was some resistance from creameries to use machine made tubs which they said made the butter bitter. He argued this was because of the wood, not the manufacturing process. Some of those mills used inferior timber from logs that were in water for long periods during drives or while waiting to be used. He explained the soaked wood imparted a bitter taste to the butter and said this was not the case in Montgomery where the raw material was just outside the door, cut and drawn by horse and later machines.

The tub mills, then known as the Hutchins Mill and the Nelson and Hall Mill would see their production increase to nearly 1.5 million tubs a year making Montgomery the largest producer of tubs in the country. They were shipped to every state. The Nelson and Hall mill alone boasted a capacity of 3,000 tubs a day in 1905. Over 250 men were employed and numerous support services also required labor, housing, horses and teamsters, and other infrastructure (like covered bridges). Over half the buildings in town were built and owned by these mills. Workers came from throughout the area including an influx from Quebec. Montgomery's population would swell to 1,800 at the turn of the century and by 1920 it was the 5<sup>th</sup> largest town by population out of the 14 in Franklin county.

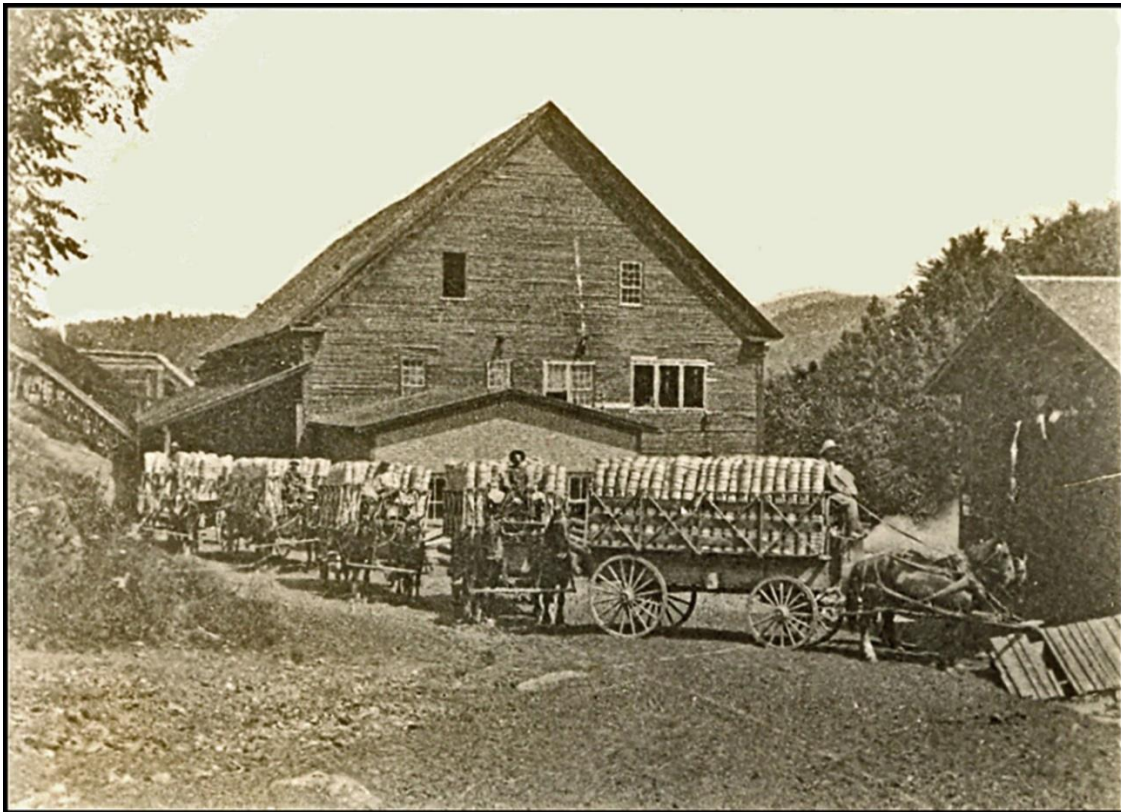
By the 1950s the timber boom had ended and the mills shut down. Major fires at both left few remains. Montgomery would lose population returning to the smallest town by population in 1990 where it remains today. Montgomery has three historic districts, Montgomery Village, Montgomery Center, and the West End of Montgomery Center. The buildings in these districts are a window into our town's, and Vermont's, past.

Sources:

- Montgomery, The History of a Town, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Taylor and Branthoover
- "How To Develop Vermont's Resources" by Ex Gov. Carroll S. Page , (The Vermonter Magazine , January 1898)
- "Our Butter Tub Industry" by William Stiles, January 24 ,1883 (St Albans Daily Messenger)
- Montgomery Historical Society Archival Photos and Real Photo Post Cards



The Nelson and Hall tub mill on Hazen's Notch Rd. (Mill Hill area) circa 1905.  
The company boasted it produced 3,000 tubs a day.



Five wagon loads of Hutchins butter tubs on their way to the train in East Berkshire.  
Note the Hutchins Covered Bridge far right.

Your donations of items from Montgomery's past are welcome.  
The MHS is a 501.c.3 non-profit. Not a member? Why not join us?

The MHS Board is: Patrick Calecas, Bob Cummins, Marijke Dollois, Pat Farmer, Mary Garceau, John Kuryloski, Roger Lichti, Dale Matthews, Bill McGroarty, Patty Perl, Scott Perry, Elsie Saborowski, & Sue Wilson