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Local Schools, Rural Communities:
Consolidation and Community in Central Vermont

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the shifting cultural and social functions of local schools in rural communities. Focused on five small, traditionally-rural towns in central Vermont, this study uses a combination of interviews with long-time residents and analysis of roughly ten years of newspaper records to better understand how the consolidation of schools impacts small towns and changes the nature of rural life. Ilvento (1990) and Peshkin (1978), among many others, note the importance of local schools for rural identity. Relying on this inherent connection between local schools and community identity, this study explores how the geographic location of schools influences the formation of place identity and how that influence affects local residents, specifically those who once attended the one-room schools of the past. From one-room schoolhouse to union high school, this study explores the driving forces of consolidation on both the national and local scale as well as discusses a few of the clear repercussions of the modern school system. The paper concludes by suggesting future action and a future mentality within the case study area and, more generally, for other rural communities that are grappling with the issue of school or district consolidation. Ultimately, the study determines that economic and political pressures often overshadow any understanding of cultural or community-oriented loss associated with rural school consolidation.

Local Schools, Rural Communities:

Consolidation and Entering the Modern World in Central Vermont



Illustration 1: An archetypal schoolhouse in Berlin Corners taken in the early 1900s.

There is perhaps no greater symbol for the American Republic than the one-room schoolhouse. Schoolhouses, carved into the remote landscapes of the sprawling United States, reflected a resolute determination. No matter how geographically removed—no matter how inconvenient—children of the republic would receive an education. This determination drove private citizens to come together, to build together, and to organize together. The local school was their creation and their responsibility. Through mutual interest, the school district became a pure democracy and a powerful unit of rural organization (Hanifen, 1916; Guilford, 1984). Thus emerged a mosaic of districts figuratively carved into the American landscape. At the heart of each district was the local schoolhouse—the center of educational, political, and, often, religious life. The rural district school thus became a pillar of the early American republic (Kaestle & Foner, 1983).

This quaint ideal of the district school is far from the reality a great majority of rural school children experience today. The new reality is the consolidated school—a school that,

because of modern technology and enhanced infrastructure, serves geographic areas far larger than previously possible.

The purpose of this study is to understand how the social and cultural role of the school has changed over time and space, specifically in regards to this consolidation. In essence, the aim of the study is to identify how residents of a rural community value their local school and how that feeling of value helps create a sense of place and attachment to the community. In particular, this study looks at communities of the past and compares them to today's communities in order to determine where the school fits: What did it do? What does it do? Why did it change?

In order to limit the broad scope of these questions, the study focuses on a specific case study area. The towns that serve as the case study area include five towns that border the City of Montpelier, Vermont. These towns include Berlin, Calais, East Montpelier, Middlesex, and Worcester, Vermont. Much like any other place, the case study area is deceptively complex and is the result of centuries of rich cultural history. As a native of the area, however, much of this knowledge was acquired before the initiation of the study. This, in part, was a reason for selecting this case study area. The other is the archetypal nature of the area in representing the shifting nature of rural life and, in particular, of consolidated schools.

Ultimately, four themes will emerge from the evidence collected throughout the course of this study. The first will examine the role of the changing rural psyche as the result of an increase in international competition during the Cold War. The second will examine the changing rural demographics both before and after consolidation. After these, two sections purely on the repercussions of consolidation are presented focusing on the shifts in social and cultural life in the area. The first focuses on the school as a symbol for the community and the resulting consequences. The latter focuses on the shifting scale of life and the resulting effects

on social capital development. These four themes span many topics—from social capital to population demographics—but they are all bound by the idea of identity and the role schools play in determining that identity.

It should be noted that, in terms of influencing school policy, this study will prove to be rather inconsequential. Rather, the purpose of this study is to look at consolidation and the local school and analyze the relationship between the two from a different perspective. Consolidation has been covered by sociologists, economists, educators, and the like. Seldom is the issue analyzed from the perspective of the cultural geographer. Through understanding the sometimes incalculable social and community benefits of the rural school, debate regarding rural school consolidation will become better informed. In addition, certain findings will be of interest on the local level as the case study area is, once again, in the midst of grappling with the prospect of consolidation. How helpful this will be on a policy level on a larger scale, though, is unknown given the role locality plays in any consolidation argument.

Literature Review

Consolidation is, in itself, an ambiguous term. A simple definition will be used to standardize the vocabulary of this work with others in the same vein. Consolidation in this paper will refer to both school consolidations—often the combining of many smaller schools into one central school—and union consolidations—often the combining of many smaller administrative units into one central administrative unit. It is possible for a community to go through school consolidation without any union consolidation—this often occurs at the elementary level. It is less likely for union consolidation to occur, however, without school consolidation because often a new, central school is necessary to accommodate a larger student body population. For clarity, consolidation will be used as the general term for either of these phenomena. Any explanation

necessary to the nature of consolidation will be discussed as needed. This definition will permit the best crossover between this work and others.

In terms of other work, scholarly work on consolidation is reemerging from a period of relative silence. Rural consolidation is an educational and political phenomenon that tends to occur in waves. The latest wave occurred in the 1960s following a rise in international competition and education standards. Following this period, consolidation abated, albeit briefly. A new wave of consolidation is occurring now, leading to a recent renewal in interest. At the time of consolidation, research tends to focus mainly on the immediate concerns of the community—notably the economics of consolidation (Duncombe & Yinger, 2005; Valencia, 1984; Andrews, 1974). Other studies tend to focus on the immediate administrative concerns, such as transportation (Howley & Shamblen, 2001). While research completed during prime periods of consolidation tends to focus on the more immediate needs of communities—economics and transportation—research in the interim and shortly after focuses on the community-based repercussions of consolidation.

The recent interim in school consolidation has coincided with the rise of academic work in the area of social capital development. With the initial publication of Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, social capital has become the focus of much analysis. Much of this analysis has been focused on how to create institutions that help rebuild social capital in a society that seems to be gradually losing it. Schools, though, are only a small part of Putnam's analysis. Initially, Putnam argues that schools were important centers of social capital development as well as human capital development. Over time, though, the balance has shifted to where schools focus more on human capital at the expense of social capital. That there is an intrinsic connection—perhaps even an overlap—between these two types of economic capital and schools is an old

idea. This connection, in fact, finds its roots in the seminal work that created the concept of social capital. L.J. Hanifen, a rural school administrator, wrote a paper about the successful integration of community-building in a rural school district (Putnam, 2000). Hanifen's work suggests that through the integration of community activities and community-based learning, schools can create valuable social connections among a community (1916). That community then finds itself more capable of resolving shared problems the community may have to face.

Yet, despite an increase in research pertaining to consolidation and a rising interest in the importance in social capital, only a small amount of work exists at the intersection of communities and schools. Nonetheless, some research has emerged between education and community that has helped provide the framework for this study. Ward & Rink, in a case area study utilizing qualitative interviews with local residents, aimed to define the local stakeholder opposition to school consolidation in an Illinois community (1992). In this study, fierce localism was determined to be a driving force behind opposition. Despite demographically similar populations, residents of the area grouped themselves into three distinct units with different cultural identities. The major findings suggested that "the theme of loss throughout consolidation resistance data does not focus so much on the loss of local control as it does on loss of identity" (Ward & Rink, 1992, pg. 15). This idea of identity as defined by the community's local school is a recurrent theme when discussing the closure of local schools. Works such as Peshkin's (1978) two year study of a rural school district denote the school as the last preserver of community identity once all else has left. Others, such as Deyoung's *The Life and Death of a Rural American High School: Farewell Little Kanawha* (1995) details how the rise and fall of rural communities are intrinsically tied to the status of the community's schools. All of these studies have tended to identify an intrinsic link between schools and identity.

The most recent and relevant work to analyze the social and cultural effects created by consolidation is Jeanne Surface's (2011) *Assessing The Impacts of Twenty-First Century Rural School Consolidation*. An interview study conducted in three distinct case study areas of rural Nebraska, this study analyzes the perceived decline of communities that have gradually lost their schools. Perceived decline, according to Surface's findings, all began at the beginning of consolidation. The beginning of consolidation began the gradual wearing of social capital in the community on the local level. Surface's work, in essence, corroborates the findings of many of the studies mentioned, but is unique in that it focuses on the long-term effects of consolidation.

All of these works share the common idea that local schools are an important part of the rural community economically, socially, politically, and so on. They also all share a qualitative nature. Fortunately, some work has been completed in quantifying the value of a school to a community. Thomas Lyson's *What Does a School Mean to a Community?* (2002) uses census data and Department of Education records to determine the social and economic benefits of schools for rural villages. Overwhelmingly, the analysis reveals that rural communities with schools are, economically and socially, better off than communities without a school. This is important, Lyson states, because money saved through consolidation could be lost through the decline of communities in the area (Lyson, 2002). Lyson's approach gives quantitative evidence supporting the assertions of earlier qualitative studies suggesting the social and economic role of the rural school.

Thus far we've seen that consolidation is a broad topic invoking the study of many disciplines. Between economics, geography, and education, consolidation presents ample societal change for analysis. This study will focus not on the quantitative approach used by Lyson. Rather, it will take a qualitative approach towards understanding how the forces driving

consolidation are perceived by residents who witnessed the process. Unique to this study is the duration of local change. Aforementioned studies have tended to focus on the immediate changes of school consolidation and local change, often taking place in communities where the wound of the lost school is still very much present. While still of the same nature, this study focuses on change occurring over an entire generation to see the long-range cultural shifts associated with consolidated schools.

Consolidation in Context

A comprehensive history and analysis of consolidation comes from Bard, Gardener, and Wieland (2006), which looks at all of the historical forces on the national scale leading to rural school consolidation. Their work was the starting point for this summary; many of the sources were found through their references. This is not to say that this is merely a shorter summary of their work. Rather, while the references found through Bard, Gardener, and Wieland (2006) comprise the scaffolding for this summary, information from other research is added that may have direct linkages to the case study area or supplement gaps in their exhaustive summary.

The history of consolidation is very much a history of control over public education. As early as the 1800s, larger schools were thought to deliver a better education, but large scale efforts to consolidate were not possible until proper infrastructure and transportation technology was available. In 1930, for instance, there were 128,000 school districts in the United States containing over 238,000 schools. Fifty years later, in 1980, there were only 16,000 schools districts containing less than 61,000 schools (Deyoung & Hawley, 1990). This sharp decline in the number of districts and schools also coincided with an increase in student enrollment (Bard, Gardener, and Wieland, 2006; Stephens & Perry, 1991). Particular attention was given to rural areas and their schoolhouses. From 1910 to 1960, there was a 90% decline in one and two-room

schoolhouses (Deyoung & Hawley, 1990). The reasons for this consolidation are plentiful, but they can be divided into two separate categories: the changing times and the changing power.

First, the period in which consolidation occurred was a tumultuous one. From the mid-1800s to around 1930 most schooling was done on a local level with community-run institutions (Surface, 2011). This period still adhered, at least in rural areas, to that romantic image of the one-room schoolhouse nestled in the country. Mass consolidation began in the 1950s and then continued to accelerate until the 1970s, with much consolidation in the case study area and elsewhere occurring in the 1960s.

Despite the cost of new buildings and transportation, school consolidation prevailed because it solved a lot of problems for a cheap price. Notably, the “corruption” of city schools and the “parochial” nature of rural schools could be done away with when consolidation occurred (Berry & West, 2008). Consolidation was a convenient disinfectant, but it also was in line with the prevalent ideas of the time. For example, consolidation was in harmony with the rise of industrial thinking at the turn of the century. Orr’s work (1992) suggests that the school became somewhat of a factory in the eyes of educational administrators. Determining how to produce the best product with the least cost was the goal of education officials. The ability to offer graded classrooms, specialized instruction, and elective courses were all present in the consolidated school; they weren’t in the one-room schoolhouse.

How to produce the best product, however, went from a desire to a necessity for the national psyche on the onset of the Cold War. The 1950s and 1960s reflected a rise in international competitiveness which drove education officials to provide the best they could for the nation’s students. Ravitch’s work (1983) indicates that schools in the era were not perceived to be developing enough human capital to assure international competitiveness. Larger schools

were deemed more efficient and effective in bestowing a proper education. This notion was confirmed by many education officials, including Harvard University president James Conant, whose study and following book, *The American High School Today*, dictated that every graduating high school class should have at least 100 students (1959). Schools smaller than this were, according to Conant, were unprepared to deal with the soviet threat. Conant's work is widely regarded as a highly influential force behind school consolidation (Bard, Gardener & Wieland, 2006; Smith & Deyoung, 1988). In framing public education as a national defense asset, "bad" public education consequently became a national security threat. Consolidation was thus a matter of national security.

In terms of ideology, the stage was set to persuade the general public that consolidated schools were necessary. However, obstinacy on the part of community residents was expected when faced with losing their cherished local schools, many of which had existed since the dawn of public education. To many small, rural communities, the schools became the last pillar of identity (Ilvento, 1990; Peshkin, 1978). Fortunately, though, for proponents of consolidation, control over education for the past century had slowly been centralized at the state level—especially in Vermont. This centralization of this power can be accounted to economics. With the state beginning to provide more and more funding, the economic necessity of reaching state standards was enough to persuade even the most removed and traditional of residents to join in on consolidation.

With the ability to control state aid, the professional educators tended to win (Surface, 2011; Monk & Holler, 1986; Peshkin, 1982; Tyack, 1974). Wining came at a societal cost, however, as citizens were relinquished of the day-to-day activities that used to bind them to their schools (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

The most concise look at what was happening on the ground in the period comes from a 1962 editorial published in the local newspaper that covers the case study area:

Social and economic changes contributed as much to the consolidation of school districts as any special campaign directed at reorganization. Improved roads made traveling to a more distant school possible; the dwindling rural population left many small schools almost vacant; rural people, with their own vistas broadened by military service and modern communications, began to see the deficiencies of small school offerings and the necessity for their children to complete high school; teachers have been harder to hire for small schools; and as state aid has increased, uneconomical school districts have been urged to consolidate. The progress toward reorganization has now reached a point where the biggest stumbling block left is community attachment, sentimental and financial, to its traditional small school district.¹

Methodology

The case study area was chosen for two primary reasons. First, having been born and raised in the area, I have a certain degree of knowledge that a summer-long researcher could never gain in a short period of time. Given the duration of the project, using a familiar area seemed logical and ultimately saved much time that would otherwise be spent locating research participants and knowledgeable community leaders. Second, the case study area presents an archetypal view of rural school consolidation. They developed rather independently. They only shared town borders and the high schools for which they paid tuition. Strong inter-town connections did not begin to develop until the union high school—which is comprised of the five towns—was built. Each town also elected—individually—to construct a central elementary school in the same period. This history allows for analysis of schools on the town and regional scale as well as the elementary and secondary level. In order to complete this analysis at both levels and scales, two primary methods of research were used.

First, a discourse analysis was completed from August of 1959 to December of 1969 in the local newspaper that served the case study area. For the most part, this period of time reflects

the peak pressure on schools to consolidate. In this approximately ten-year time period, all decisions were made that put the towns on pace to build an individual central elementary school in each town and one single union high school that they would share. For this period, every article or editorial relevant to school consolidation, educational control, or school-related politics was collected. These articles, which totaled 951, were grouped into six sections. These sections were divided into two categories—articles and editorials. Articles were used primarily to better understand the timing of consolidation and establish a pattern of events that leads to community decisions. Editorials were used to understand the community reaction to those events. While articles were helpful in developing a historical context, editorials were invaluable for analyzing how communities connect to their local schools—the primary goal of this study. Any article that contained information regarding consolidation or education in the case study was kept. Articles on the regional and state scale were kept as long as they were deemed relevant or had some effect on the case study area. Of course, determining whether a regional or state article had sway in the case study area was a rather subjective venture. Without being on the ground at the time, a certain degree of “judgment” calls were necessary.

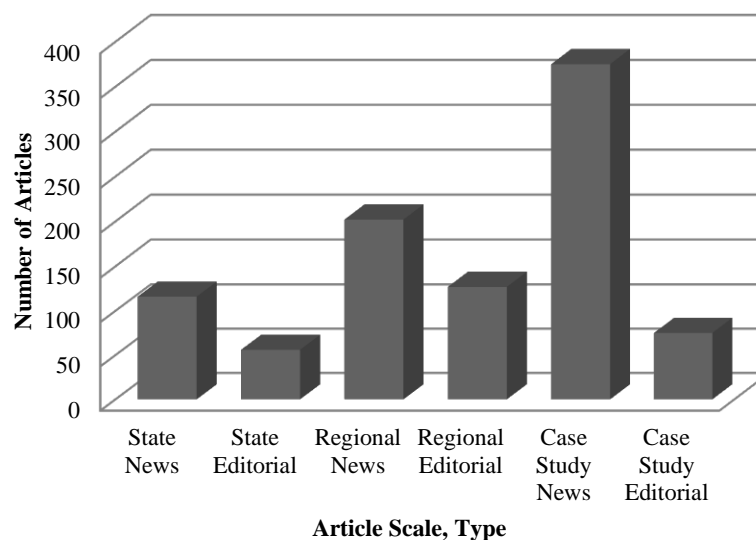


Figure 1. The number of articles in each combination of scale (case study area, regional, and state) and type (news or editorial). News articles were more common than editorials, especially those relevant to the case study area. Data for this bar graph comes from the compiled list of articles coded as part of the newspaper review.

To supplement the limited quantity of editorials pertinent to some towns in the case study area, qualitative interviews were conducted with long-time community members. These loosely structured interviews revolved around fourteen questions and lasted anywhere from fifteen to forty-five minutes. Research participants resided in the case study area and had grown up there—some, however, had left for a period and had since returned. Particular emphasis was placed on interviewing willing participants that attended some of the no-longer existing one- and two-room school houses in the area. For this reason, identifying ample participants proved rather difficult because of the age of the target population. To begin identifying participants, the presidents of town historical societies were contacted and asked to suggest the names of people that may be of interest. From this, snowball sampling and referrals were used to identify more participants. In all, 13 interviews were conducted. The age of interviewees ranged from mid 60s to late 90s, and at least one resident from each town participated. These interviews were then transcribed word-for-word and analyzed for recurring trends, metaphors, and themes.

Together, these two methods allow a comparison between past and present to understand the shifting role of local schools in the community. The data from these two methods can consequently be divided into two sections: objective and subjective. Certain minor archival research (school records, town histories, etc.) and newspaper articles form the objective base of this work. They depict a picture of the events as they transpired; they were the news. The subjective data—editorials and interviews—will comprise a majority of the findings for this

study as they are more pertinent to the research question. The data resulting from both of these methods was then coded for recurring trends and placed into tentative categories. These categories, if substantiated through multiple pieces of data, became the major themes for this study. Representative excerpts were then chosen for the purpose of display in this paper.

History and Town Profiles of Case Study Area

History

No respective history of schools for each town is included in this paper. This is because, dates aside, the general pattern for all of these towns regarding the history of schools is virtually equivalent. Rather than recount the same tale five times, a general history of schools and school consolidation is provided below. This general pattern is broken into four distinct periods. Each town, for the most part, experienced all four stages of this pattern; any exceptions will be noted in the respective town's profile in the following section. Note, also, that dates for each period are approximate. Dates, while important to local history, are of little consequence to this study. Including them would only add complexity where complexity is not necessary. Most of the information comes from archival research and articles from the newspaper review. Any subjective detail (i.e. general impressions of a town, perceived town organization, etc.) is taken from either newspaper editorials or participant interviews. If a town's experience of a stage in the pattern deviates greatly from supplied dates, this will be noted in the town's respective profile as well. An archetypal image is included where helpful. These four stages are mainly a framework to contextualize the community arguments discussed later on. These four stages are as follows:

The District Schools (-1892)

As discussed briefly already, the district school was the earliest form of education in the new America. This was no exception in central Vermont. With no other means of transportation,

students needed to be within walking distances of schools at all times—translating into anywhere from 8 to 12 schools per town. This is why schools were, literally, built by the residents in any given district. School expenses were paid collectively by residents. Teachers were hired by a prudential committee (comprised of one or three members) and boarded in the houses of residents that had students in the school. This was known as “boardin’ around” (Guilford, 1984). Key to this period was that there was no higher control over school administration above the district residents. Districts, in this regard, were autonomous; they could organize a school however they wished and pay accordingly.

The quality of education was a recurring problem in this period. In terms of teaching, small school sizes meant only one teacher would teach grades one through eight. Limited availability of teaching materials made educating difficult, particularly with a lack of textbooks and basic materials difficult to find in such rural areas. Aside from materials, many teachers themselves proved to be rather ill-equipped for teaching. Teachers, themselves, were often young individuals lacking experience in formal teacher training. Among other issues, the conditions of schoolhouses were, in some cases, utterly deplorable. Often constructed of crude materials and on land with very little value, most one-room schoolhouses appeared dilapidated.

Despite their rather ramshackle nature, district schools were often the center of district life for rural residents. Used for education primarily, schools also served as religious and social centers. Holiday pageants, school plays, and evening dances were often held at the district school, and, consequently, the school was a community center for both those parents of children in school and other residents who may not have children. Not just a place of education, the district school was a place for the entire community.

Students, if capable, attended local high schools on a tuition basis. Often, students were forced to board with a family closer to the high school if they chose to attend. Before motor vehicles, this boarding was a necessity because of transportation limitations on rural families.



Illustration 2: Taken between 1880 and 1940, the image depicts the East Road School in Berlin, Vermont. The architecture and the location are representative of the old district schools.

The Town Schools (1893-1960s)

The second period, physically and visibly, was very similar to the first period. The primary difference between the two is control. In 1892, debate began in the Vermont legislature over whether to move control of the schools from the district to the town. This meant more funding for schools from the state, but it also meant a sharp decline in local control over community schools. Nonetheless, the bill passed and was enacted despite the outcry of rural residents. For rural residents, the law became known as the “vicious act of 1892” (Searls, 2006). As a result, all rural districts were consolidated into town units. Despite the loss of the rural districts, schools in this period were still generally the same in terms of location. Towns, with no way to afford transportation costs or desire to enrage the rural population, still kept multiple schools operating in the town. Often, these units were the same as the historic districts.

Some changes were made, however. Slowly, one-room schools gave way to two- or four-room schools that served greater areas. The slightly larger schools became centered in villages while the more rural schools closed. Depending on size, some classrooms may have spanned fewer grades, becoming grades one through four instead of one through eight. While the schools primarily looked the same, the benefits of having fewer grades per teacher made a tremendous difference. Stemming from this change in teacher responsibility was the first visible pattern of consolidation—smaller, rural one-room schools closing as village schools grew room-by-room.

The catalyst to this new transition was new teacher regulations and training that produced better educators. A small handful of teachers' colleges sprung up around the state, and, in order to teach, teachers needed to pass basic requirements, including completing coursework at an accredited teacher's college. Undeniably, educational results increased in this period of time because of better teachers and graded classrooms. As teachers became better prepared, though, they were increasingly focused on teaching fewer grades at once. This meant, eventually, the well of one-room teachers would dry up, leaving no "certified" instructors for the one-room schools. This, in addition to increasing legislation requiring the redistricting of schools and an increase in educational accountability, accelerated the process of consolidation. In some cases, the forces requiring change were moving too fast for change to occur in time.



Illustration 3: Taken in 1913, this photo depicts the Berlin Corners School and the two classes at the time. Once a one-room school, a second room was added on once the town obtained educational control over the districts. The second room replaced the school of a neighboring district and children walked a longer distance to attend this school.

School Cross-Transportation (1960s)

As the need for one-grade classrooms continued to rise, some communities suffered from education whiplash. Luckily for many towns, this period was but a blip, lasting one or two years only. By this point, many of the one-room schools in the area had closed and been replaced by two or four-room schools. Still, however, it was impossible to teach eight different grades in four classrooms. Towns that had not yet built a central school, then, began to cross-transport the entire student population. This meant that a certain number of schoolhouses still existed around the town in village areas—usually two, three, or four schools per town. In order to put the entire student population in graded classrooms, each school would be assigned a number of grades in accordance with the number of classrooms. School 1, a two-room schoolhouse for example, would serve grades one and two. School 2, a three-room school house, would serve grades three, four and five and so on. At this point, where a student lived had very little impact on where that student attended school. Age and grade were the only determining factors.

On a community level, this system was a prelude to what was coming. The schools were still located in the important parts of the town, but the connection between the surrounding community and the individual school was no longer as strong because the school served a far larger population. For example, if a student lived right across the street from one of the schoolhouses and had attended, say, grades one through four there, that student would have to be bused across town once cross-transportation began. That is, unless the school across the street

happened to serve grade five. With this system, the town district was a central school composed of multiple campuses.

The result was a transportation nightmare. Enacting this system meant that much of the community-school connection had been broken and consequently was no longer standing in between a town and a new central school. Once that connection had been broken, the realization of the immense complexity and futility in constantly cross-transporting students became apparent. The development of a new central school, however, became a logical answer.

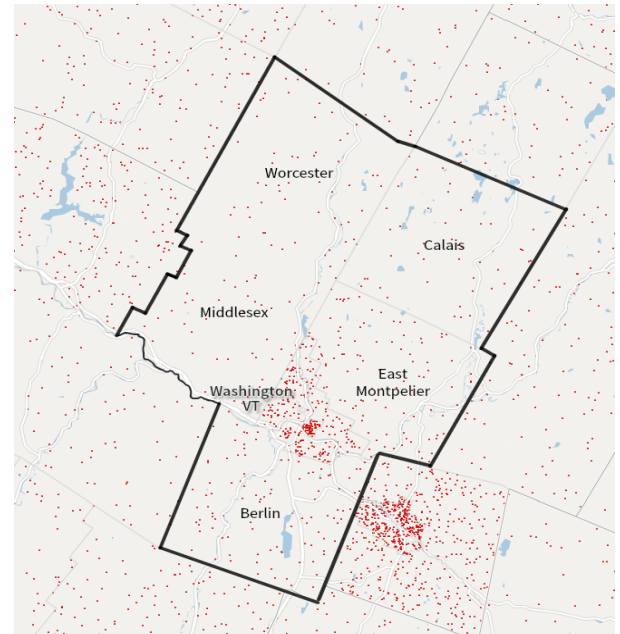
The Central School (1960s-Present)

Once school cross-transportation had taken place, the construction of a central school was soon to follow. Maintaining one school opposed to three was both logistically—transportation—and economically advantageous. Ultimately, every town constructed and now runs a central elementary school. These elementary schools are located in varying locations relative to the population. These schools serve kindergarten through grade six, and grades seven through twelve attend the union high school—built in the same period as the elementary schools.



Illustration 4: Above is an image of the entrance to one of the central schools in the case study area. Most of the central elementary schools are similar in size—containing around ten or more rooms and featuring a library, kitchen facilities, and gymnasium.

Town Profiles



Illustrations 5 & 6: Illustration 5 (left) depicts all of the towns in Washington County, Vermont. Illustration 6 (right) was created using Social Explorer and presents total population with one dot the equivalent of 25 persons. The two clusters are Barre and Montpelier, east and west respectively. Black lines indicate the exterior district lines. The district excludes the city limits Montpelier.

Town # 1: Berlin

Characterized by its geographic proximity to the cities of Montpelier and Barre, Berlin is a more urban area when compared to the other towns in the case study area. As of the 2010

census, Berlin had a population of 2,887. The population was spread out over an area of 36.27 square miles, resulting in a population density of 79.6 persons per square mile. The median household income is \$59, 154. The population is spread over two areas in the eastern half and western half of the town; the population is divided between the interstate, Interstate 89, and a strip of highland conservation running the length of the town. The eastern portion of the town, specifically in the northeast, is dominated by commercial property. Berlin is home to the area's only regional airport, hospital, and shopping center. The commercial nature of Berlin has become a large part of its identity, which has often been resented by the residents of the town. The town history, entitled *Berlin, Vermont: A Place To Pass Through*, states, "[Berlin residents] have been alarmed by their town's reputation as a place where anything is for sale, even as they beg to differ with that conclusion. They don't like being victimized. They insist on full respect for their identity as a community" (Berlin Historical Society, 1993, pg. 5). The implication that there is only one community, however, is incorrect. For most of Berlin's history, tension has existed between the two halves of town. Historically, the division of east and west is reflected in an 1873 district map, which indicates that no district traversed the middle of the town except for District No. 5, the area of which is no longer part of the town. In the recent past, this tension was quite clear when determining where to put the central school. It is currently located in the middle of the commercial and industrial area in eastern Berlin.

Town # 2: Calais

One of the more rural towns in the case study area, Calais has developed in relative isolation because of its geographic isolation from urban areas. As of the 2010 census, Calais had a population of 1,607. This population was spread over an area of 37.95 square miles, resulting in a population density of 42.3 persons per square mile. Despite its economic and geographic

isolation, Calais' median household income is \$58,875. The population is geographically spread out, anchored around a series of villages that developed independently and at different times. These villages include, among other smaller villages, Maple Corner, Kents Corner, North Calais, East Calais, and Adamant. These villages are the anchor of social and community life, but certain town divisions still exist. The town history, which happens to be written by a former executive secretary of the Vermont Education Association, states, "As a result of geography and travel limitations of the farmers, areas of the town were quite genuinely separated one from another, an isolation in a somewhat diluted form that exists even to the present day. Many people on the east side of town would know only a few names of folks living on the west side of town and vice versa" (Cate, 1999, pg. 14). Cate's citation for this assertion is merely as follows: "During a meeting of the Calais Historical Society in East Calais in 1985 it was suggested that the following meeting be held at the community building in Maple Corner. Several People present asked how to get to Maple Corner" (Cate, 1999, pg. 213). Despite the relative isolation of the individual unincorporated villages, Calais still remains bound together by its villages. Currently, despite the one central school, the villages of Calais still are the dominant unit of organization.

Town # 3: East Montpelier

Once the rural outskirts of the Town of Montpelier, East Montpelier was founded when the City of Montpelier petitioned to be separated from the town. East Montpelier had traditionally been the agricultural area of the town. Currently, East Montpelier strikes a balance between an agricultural and a commercial economic base. The population of the town is 2,576, and the town's area is 31.87 square miles. The resulting population density is 40.8 persons per square mile. The median household income is \$62,092. Following the division of the Town of

Montpelier, East Montpelier's development occurred in tandem with that of Montpelier. The town history, *Across the Onion*, states the following:

As time passed the people of East Montpelier began to realize that that there were compensating benefits in being detached from the village. The new town still held the majority of the land area, including the prime farmland, and its share of prominent men and leaders. The town could now devote its attention to its own bridges, roads, and schools without having to take into account the needs of the city. Its representative in the legislature, coming from a farm districts, would better serve rural interests. In the next century it spent its revenues on paved roads, street lights, water mains, and sewer systems, projects that the farmers of East Montpelier were certainly not interested in supporting (Hill & Blackwell, 1983, pg. 132).

Despite the division between the City of Montpelier and East Montpelier, East Montpelier's identity has been influenced by its once-close relationship with the city. Currently, East Montpelier has developed its own town center, which is not far from the elementary school. Overall, East Montpelier remains one of the more balanced communities with agriculture, residential and commercial area—it does, still, have quite a bit of agriculture, though. The elementary school is located about 1.4 miles from the village center. The school is surrounded by farmland.

Town # 4: Middlesex

Middlesex, more than other communities in the case study area, lacks a defined town center or a system of well-established villages that organize the town. The population of Middlesex is 1,731 with a total land area of 39.57 square miles. This results in a population density of 43.7 miles persons per square mile. The median household income for the town is \$68,047, the highest of any town despite a lack of much commercial development. While primarily a residential town, there is still some industry. A majority of the industry for the town is located in the south on the other side of the interstate, which serves as a boundary between the residential

and agricultural portion of the town and the industry. In terms of community, Middlesex has no defined town center. There are three distinct communities in the area and several others that once existed but are no longer the center of local residents' lives. The system is reminiscent of the development of Calais, but the village centers did not persevere after losing their schools. Even when consolidation was inevitable, the east and west portions of town were so divided that two identical schools were built to placate both sides. Eventually, one school was established, but it is located in the geographic center of town with no immediate proximity to a village center.

Town # 5: Worcester

More so than any other community, Worcester has a defined town center with a local community school. The most rural of all the other towns by far, Worcester has a population of 998 and an area of 38.83 square miles. The resulting population density is only 25.8 persons per square mile. The median household income for the town is \$63,125. In part, a strong sense of community inherent in Worcester comes from the resulting topography in the area. As can be seen from the town school district map, the heart of Worcester—Worcester Village—was, and still is, located in the southeastern corner of the town. Going out from the village center are a series of roads that go further and further into the mountain ranges that dominate the western half of the town. These mountains create a natural boundary that limits the development of a town center to the current location of the village. Development in the western part of town is limited to residential homes due to the mountainous topography that is not suitable for industrial or commercial development. For all people in the town, including those in the mountains, the only possible town center was the village. The village, thus, became the magnet for consolidation. As one-by-one the schools in Worcester began to close, the central school in the village became

larger and larger to accommodate incoming students. Eventually, in the late 1960s, the central school was the only elementary school in the town. It is located in the heart of the village.

Findings

Presented below are the findings from both the interviews and the newspaper review completed in the case study area. These findings are broken into four major themes. These themes, in some cases, are interconnected. The first theme will focus on the rural psychology that contributed to consolidation. The second theme will focus on demographics, notably the shifting demographics leading up to consolidation and the related post-consolidation demographic shifts. The last two will focus on post-consolidation community repercussions. Excerpts of evidence are primarily taken from case study editorials or from community interviews. Where applicable, some editorials or news from regional schools—also covered by the newspaper but not directly in the case study area, usually neighboring towns—will also be used where appropriate and effective. Citations for any excerpts taken from newspaper sources are included in a separate section following the references section. Any excerpts taken from community interviews are denoted by a small caption to the lower right of the passage. The four themes are as follows:

Entering the Modern World

Apparent in both the reflections of research participants and the contents of newspaper editorials is the notion that school reform—school consolidation—is largely a result of fear from a changing world. This change, wide in scope, always seems simplify down to the following common denominator: the world was becoming more modern. Meanwhile, increasing availability to communication technology was linking the rural realm to the urban realm, effectively eroding any protective layer of rural innocence just in time to fully witness the atrocities of two world wars and a great depression. Ultimately, these world events trickled down

into the small towns and villages of rural America. The connection between this new-found modernity and the need for comprehensive school reform did not emerge, however, until the onset of the Cold War. During this period “all of the fears, animosities, and social tensions of a chaotic era [were] being projected upon the public school” (Meyer, 1952, pg.380).

Vermont was no exception. Suddenly, there was a significant price to pay in order to prepare children for this tumultuous world. Faced with the immense rise of modern technology, the small schoolhouses that represented centuries of rural tradition were no longer adequate in assuring the well-being of the nation’s future. The price of adequacy was to irrevocably change the rural experience. In order to maintain a grasp on the future, a new school system was necessary. While a very high price to pay, a majority of rural residents at the time was willing pay it:

There will be those who will harken back to the “good old days” and the one room school house and compare this with the modern facility we are voting on. They will cry about extravagance, about increased taxes and how we must go slow in building a new school. But how in this day can we slow the world down so that my John doesn’t have to prepare for a future filled with atomic science, interplanetary missiles, communication satellites, airplanes that travel 2,000 miles per hour and even more that I cannot comprehend today. Today the problems of the smallest countries and their people affect us in ways we could not believe just 20 years ago. Thank God that many were prepared then to deal with today’s problems. We must strive to prepare our children so that they can deal with the future that they will face.²

I will always remember the joys, heartbreaks, and learning that the old edifice (so familiar as part of the passing scene) contributed to my early education [...] I would not want in any way to impede the impetuous onslaught of progress. For my children I want all that this modern age has to offer. I desire for them to be fully equipped to be a part of this atomic era. To recall and ponder on our unhurried days of our childhood and school days is a priceless possession that I shall always cherish. My children will never have these memories. It is a bit sad, but of course if the choice was theirs to make, they would not choose to trudge to this antiquated and outmoded way of life. Progress is their destiny and I would not have it any other way. But memories have their place in this busy space-minded way of life we all love and have so much confidence in.³

Can we not do the things that must be done to enable our community to keep pace, and do them without being prodded by the state? Our children will grow up and compete for jobs

in a world that is much more complex than that which we knew 25 or more years ago. They must be provided the necessary educational facilities to equip themselves to succeed in **their** world.⁴

For taxpayers that shared this view, the school became an immensely important institution for the rural psyche and consequently dominated much public attention. The local schools became a psychological tool in preparing for an uncertain and an increasingly complex future. As institutions of learning, schools were entrusted in preparing the future generation and, consequently, preparing the entire nation for what was to come. In other words, while parents may not know what was ahead, their son, “John,” must be prepared for it. An important theme emerged, then, denoting the school as a reflection of the society it served. Good schools ensured a good future. This connection was promptly touted by local officials urging school consolidation:

We are a critical and skeptical people. We love to find fault, and too often we search for scapegoats. At the same time we try to be fair. And if we are to be fair, as we think about our public school system, we must honestly face the fact that our schools—good, bad, indifferent—represent and reflect society. If we are to improve the schools, then we must improve society, develop new goals, seek higher aspirations. Our schools are but mirrors of our society.⁵

What made a “good” school then became a question of increasing importance. If a good society required good schools, then community-wide standards as to what qualified a good school were necessary. As covered above, larger schools were favored to smaller ones, and consequently consolidation occurred. Just as important as the quality of education, though, was the physical manifestation of schools. Comforting one’s self in the quality of local education could be difficult, but a new school building was more tangible. This connection between the physical state of the school and the future state of the nation emerged at a convenient time. New schools, in other words, became an important symbol for the nation’s future. Even communities that did not feel the need for a consolidated school often became enamored with the prospect of

alleviating all school problems in one fell swoop. Much debate occurred, then, over how intricate schools for the modern era should be designed. Among school reformers in the area, the prevalent opinion was quality schools required quality architecture and amenities:

If the United States expects to keep up with the world around it, the nation's schools must begin to change drastically—now... School buildings mirror our educational concepts. America has a predilection for straight lines, rectangles, squared-off blocks, and nowhere is this more true than in the usual schoolhouse.⁶

We protect our children's physical health by teaching them good health habits, giving them a proper diet and making sure they have annual checkup. We encourage our children's spiritual growth by seeing that they attend their church or synagogue as often as possible. But what about their mental growth? Are we cramming them into a school so small and outdated that we're stunting their growth? Are we forcing their teachers to work under nearly impossible handicaps? How do our high school students compare with students who attend roomier, more efficient, and more challenging schools. New schools are springing up in smaller and poorer towns all around us. We are responsible for the mess our schools are in and we can do so something about it.⁷

From this transition to the modern came new schools with new curriculum. Both these new buildings and their new graded classroom went a long way in ensuring the public that their schools would be adequate in preparing the nation's future. This was what towns were set out to buy; a modern education to prepare for the modern world. The price the towns needed to pay, however, was rather high. Despite the drive to build better schools and improve curriculum offerings, there were those who believed the status quo was suitable. To reformers, these people stood in the way of progress. For the so-called stalwarts of the time, school consolidation and the myriad of benefits it promised to bring was but a passing fad. In particular, the construction of new school buildings seemed frivolous:

It is quick and easy to buy bricks and stone and flooring and plumbing to build a structure, but it is a hard and unending task to acquire the best in education, You will not find this written into the specs for your new building and it is extremely doubtful if you will get it as a by-product. For anyone to glibly assume that a fine new structure will somehow bring with it educational excellence is to delude oneself with wishful thinking. It would be very unfortunate for education in the town of my youth if excessive zeal during the heat of battle were to cause you to neglect the far greater challenge for which your new buildings is only the shelter.⁸

We in America have recently become concerned with the lack of educational opportunities for our youth. However, in the mad scramble to improve them, with frightened glances over our shoulder at Russia, we have gotten the word opportunity confused with facility. Since the big panic in 1957, colleges and universities all over the country have embarked on huge construction programs. Consequently today one walks into a bright gleaming new classroom, fully confident that education has really improved and becomes completely disillusioned after the first few classes.⁹

Some of us are accused of not wanting to better the education of Williamstown's young people. I cannot believe that the most expensive building or the highest salaried teachers insure a better education. Education has been defined as "a log with a teacher on one end and a pupil on the other." Let us not become so intent on providing a plush-covered 'log' that young property taxpayers cannot afford to give their children proper food, clothing, and living conditions.¹⁰

Dissension towards new school buildings was only a small portion of this backlash towards modernity in education. The construction of new, frivolous buildings was merely a symbol for this position. For opponents of education reform the primary concern was in preserving the benefits of a small, local education. Proponents of local schools favored the school's connection with the surrounding community. For these residents—traditionally long-time residents—the price for a modern education was in no way worth it. In fact, it was perverse, giving up something great for a mediocre, temporary frill. Inherent in the beliefs of these individuals is the notion that a one-room education was just as good as in the consolidated schools:

It was much better because the small towns, all the towns, controlled their own education. And consequently you got a much better education than you get today. Probably, I knew more when I graduated in the eighth grade than kids who graduated from U-32 today. [...] You got a better education in the smaller schools because I think that there were—I don't know, you know, Maybe it was because of discipline. I think so. We were put to the task when we were put in school. There was no fooling around. A kid could get a licking. The kids were pretty much told by their parents that if you got a licking at school than you'd get a harder one at home. It worked out well. I think kids paid attention more in school than they do today.

Research Participant

I think so. Everybody learned from everybody else. If you had somebody who had a high IQ or was of a high learning ability, they would cling to the sixth grade class and learn things from that class. I don't know how the teachers handled all these classes but, but there was a lot of learning going on. When I was in the eighth grade, I was learning my stuff, but I was also acting as a teacher's aide. It was a whole lot different than when you have one grade in a room.

Research Participant

If the cost of new school buildings or the loss in educational quality were not fiercely argued, the resulting loss of community was argued to the bitter end. Reformers tried to “stay with the times” and build an educational system which reflected their desire to control the uncertain future. Those against reform maintained that these changes were frivolous and costly, ultimately resulting in perverse consequences that couldn’t be easily taken away. The last two themes take a look at the largest price small towns would need to pay: the perceived loss of the school as a center of social and community activity.

The Changing Community

Education in the State of Vermont has always been a contentious issue. Central to the recurring tension is that the issue of education cuts across polarized populations with polarized ideologies. The urban versus the rural, the modern versus the traditional, and the farmer versus the town resident all reflect this uniquely Vermont dichotomy. Paul M. Searls’ *Two Vermonts: Geography and Identity 1865-1910* presents the dichotomy of citizens he refers to as “uphillers” and “downhillers” (2006). Uphillers traditionally represented the more rural and parochial population of Vermont. These residents were often long-time farmers and the descendants of many previous generations of uphillers, nearly all of which were traditional farmers. Downhillers, in contrast, were a relatively new addition—as of the late 1800s—to the Vermont population. These residents were perceived as urban and cosmopolitan in comparison to their uphill counterparts; they reside in the towns and were more associated with non-agricultural work. Often, these residents came to Vermont because of its rural and ingenuous allure. Yet, often, downhillers were also those who drove social change that attempted to slowly but surely bring Vermont into the modern age.

Even now this distinction between those “from” Vermont and those merely “in” Vermont is quite contentious. More commonly referred to as “flatlanders” by those born in the state, outside residents compose a majority of Vermont’s population. In contrast, long-time Vermont residents are commonly known as “woodchucks”. While the influx of migrants into Vermont undoubtedly brought with it economic benefits, old-time residents still resented the wearing way of local identity and tradition that came with it. The issue then became “the right to Vermont”. Who determines what happens in terms of policy and identity—the woodchuck or the flatlander? Rural school consolidation was contentious for this reason: it tangibly and adamantly cataloged the rise of the flatlander in local politics. Often, flatlanders rejected the notion that they were not “real” Vermonters in the eyes of long-time residents:

I was under the impression that Vermont was part of the United States. The way Mrs. Cookson feels it is a state for native-born Vermonters only. [...] I wonder if the other 49 states express the same feeling when native-born Vermonters leave their state and live elsewhere? How long is a person supposed to keep one’s mouth shut about important matters pertaining to stat affairs? Does she have a special formula for non-natives? Mrs. Cookson says, “If we don’t watch out Vermont won’t be Vermont anymore”. I would like t hear Mrs. Cookson’s answer to this question: “Just what is Vermont supposed to be, other than being for the native-born Vermonter?”¹¹

For non-native Vermonters, efforts to consolidate schools seemed logical and perfectly reasonable. When traditional “uphill” residents continued to fight these efforts, modern Vermonters “shook their head in disbelief” (Searls, 2006, pg 68). For these non-native Vermonters, providing the best education for children was necessary and consolidation was the best way to do it—it was more economical and educationally effective. To make their argument in the 1960s, non-natives tried to point out the hypocrisy of rural farmer’s actions and obstinate attitudes toward consolidation:

It was stated by one of the delegation, who is a farmer by occupation that he wanted his children to get best education possible and he was convinced that the present system is the best for his children; the present system he reffered to is a one-room elementary rural school and then on to Woodsville High [...] Now then, are these famers or business men who haven’t any training in these matters

going to have the say whether or not we need a new school or not? These same farmers or business men have modern equipment on their farms or in their business, can find money to finance the purchases but are objecting to financing a public school where their children spend six hours a day, nine months a year.¹²

Many of these farmers who cannot see their way clear to improve the conditions of our schools have not hesitated to improve the working conditions of their cattle. Nearly everyone today manages to get another car when the old one wears out. We don't drive horses today because they were good enough for our fathers.¹³

That native, conservative farmers had taken measures to maximize their productivity through machinery and modern agriculture yet refused to support the funding for better schools to maximize the efficiency of their children baffled non-native residents. Unfortunately, much of this argument did not take place in the newspaper, a traditionally “downhill” institution that had very little to do with the rural farmers (Searls, 2006). Still, however, the native-Vermont opinion is apparent when actually talking to these residents. For these people, it was not just a matter of better schools; it was a matter of tradition. The small local schoolhouse was the way things had always been done and there was very little desire to change. Any instigation on the behalf of wealthy “flatlanders” invoked resentment:

I think a lot of the reason is that Vermont, especially, has been taken over by what we call flatlanders. A lot of people come, they're trust fund people, they have all kinds of money, okay, and they don't have to worry. They go to town meeting and they vote in everything that is on the list. They have no idea; taxes don't mean anything to them. Consequently, it carries over in to the school and into the education. The kids get everything they want. And it's not my belief, in a general statement, this whole area, this whole state is as far too liberal. And that's what's happening. [...] The people that came in weren't satisfied. They couldn't accept who we are, our everyday life. They had to change it.

Research Participant

Economics [is the main reason], although the new consolidated school cost a lot more but people probably demanded more. As people moved in from other places, the first thing they do is declare that your schools aren't good enough. They wanted them to be better. They have a lot of money. I call them—I shouldn't say it—I call them trust funders. They get money from another place, from where they came from. They don't have to earn every penny like we do. They want the school to be absolutely perfect, they want it big, and they want a teacher that can teach everything they can possibly think of. They want the driveway paved instead of gravel. They want full busing. All that stuff. [...] The first thing they do is join the school board so they can pressure people to do what they want.

Research Participant

Of course, this perception that out-of-state residents came into Vermont with more money than the native population is relative to the observer. Overwhelmingly, however, participants noted this distinction. Yet, not all participants noted that this was a negative. For instance, economically, the influx of out-of-state residents has coincided with historical periods of economic success for Vermont (Searls, 2006). Temporary out-of-state visitors—tourists—also have become the base of much of Vermont’s economy, providing over 1.7 billion dollars in direct spending to Vermont businesses in 2011 alone (Belluck, 206). Even the participant in the latter excerpt above—a long-time farmer and owner of an extremely successful tourist-oriented farm and country store—know the importance of out-of-state residents and the money they bring:

Now I shouldn’t say a word against people that came from somewhere else because in 1792 all my relatives came from Massachusetts. All of our people, if you go far back enough, came from Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island. So who am I to say anything bad about the people that move in? Without them now, where would we be here? We need everybody. And there’s no going back.

Research Participant

Other participants also noted the positives of out-of-state migrants in the revamping of a decaying village life:

Today in this village there are probably 10 or 12 young couples that have bought houses here, who are raising their kids here because Calais has a really good school system. They want their kids to go to Calais school, and they’re really interested in the village. Always come and ask me things about their house and the village. And it’s really great to have these new people here. I’m the only one left of my generation in the village [...] but I stayed around.

Research Participant

Undeniably, though, there was a near consensus among research participants that the changing times and changing population were symbolized by the consolidated school. Whether this change was a positive or not was far from consensus. Regardless, the notion that Vermont is a different place than it once was is widely regarded as true. A once rugged, agricultural state has

become, stereotypically in some cases, a more gentrified, liberal state. Census data from 2010 indicates that the Vermont of today is much different than the sparsely-populated, agricultural state of the past.

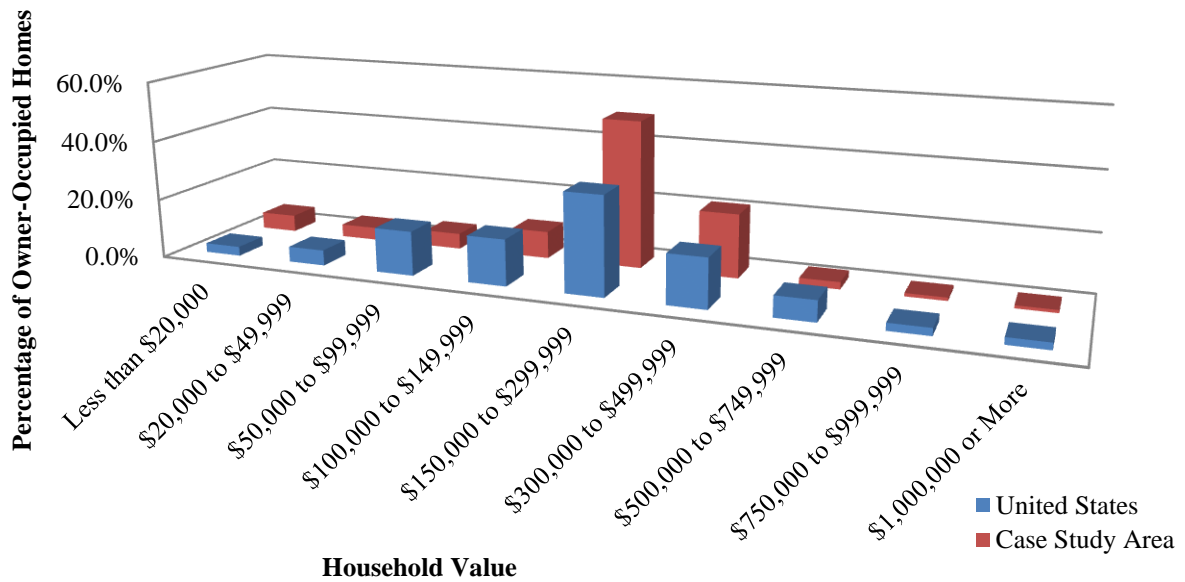
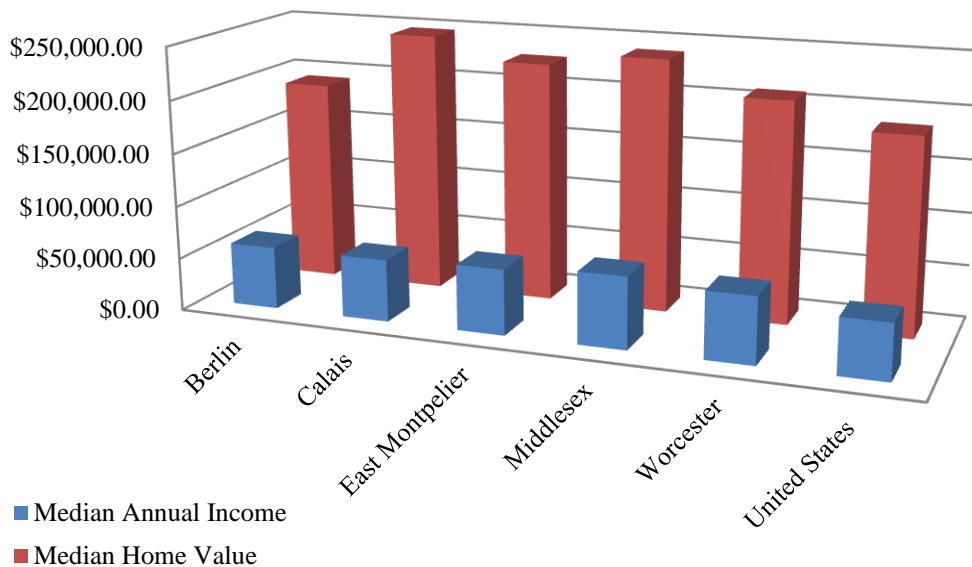
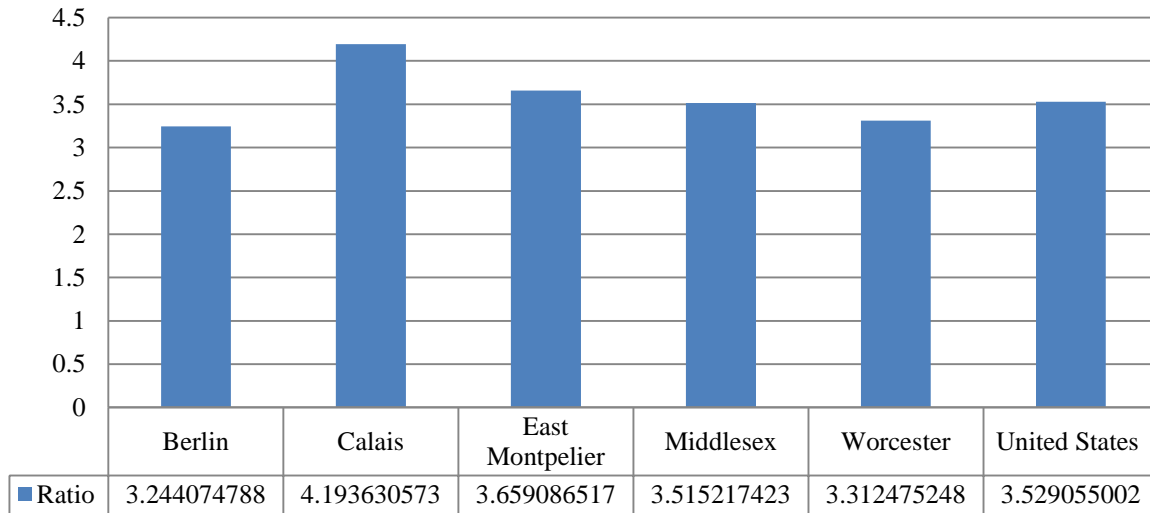
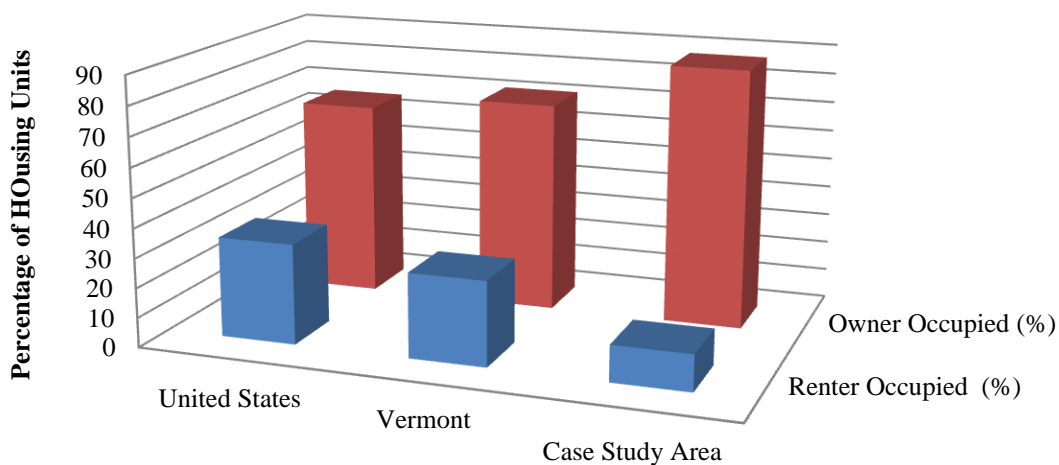


Figure 2: Household values as a percentage of owner-occupied housing units. This data, taken from the ACS Community Survey (2011), reveals that home values tend to be more concentrated in the 150,000 to 499,900 range in the case study area than the entire United States. They also reveal that there are fewer \$500,000+ homes percentage-wise than the national average.



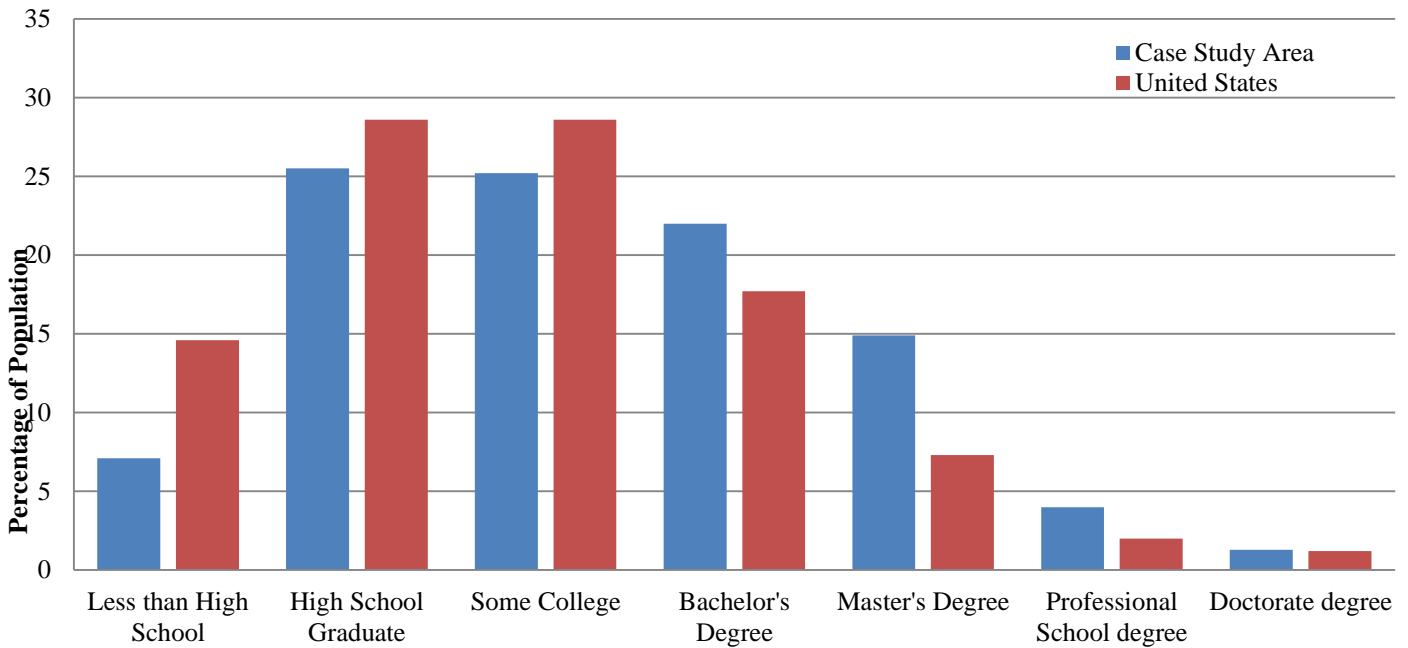


Figures 3 & 4: Figure 3 depicts the Median Annual Income and Median Home Value for all towns in the case study area and the United States from the American Community Survey 2011. Figure 4 depicts the ratio of Median Home Value to Median Annual Income for each town and the United States. Two towns—Calais and East Montpelier—have a higher home value to income ratio than the national average. Other towns—Berlin and Worcester—have a slightly lower ratio. Middlesex’s ratio is nearly identical to the national average.



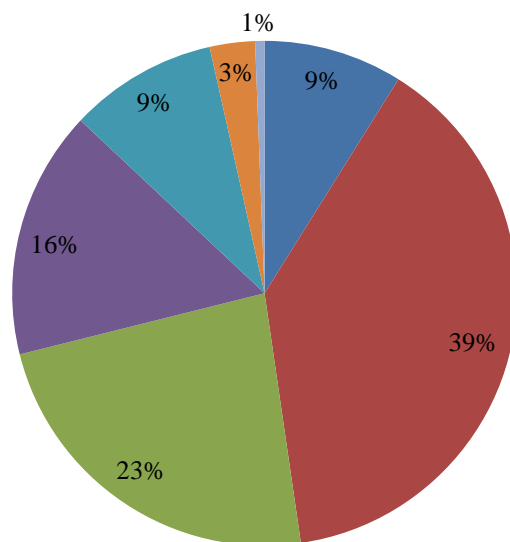
	United States	Vermont	Case Study Area
■ Renter Occupied (%)	33.9	28.6	12.3
■ Owner Occupied (%)	66.1	71.4	87.7

Figure 5: Tenure for housing units in the case study area, the state, and the nation. The percentage of ownership of housing units is much higher in the State of Vermont than the national average. Rates of ownership are even higher in the case study area. This is likely due to the rural nature of the case study area.



Figures 6: Educational attainment for population over age 25 by percentage of the population for both the case study area and the United States. Data are from the American Community Survey (2011). Slightly higher education rates are observed in the case study area.

- Berlin**
- Dark Blue- Less than High School
 - Red – High School Graduate
 - Green- Some College
 - Purple- Bachelor’s Degree
 - Light Blue- Master’s Degree
 - Orange- Professional Degree
 - Gray- Doctoral Degree



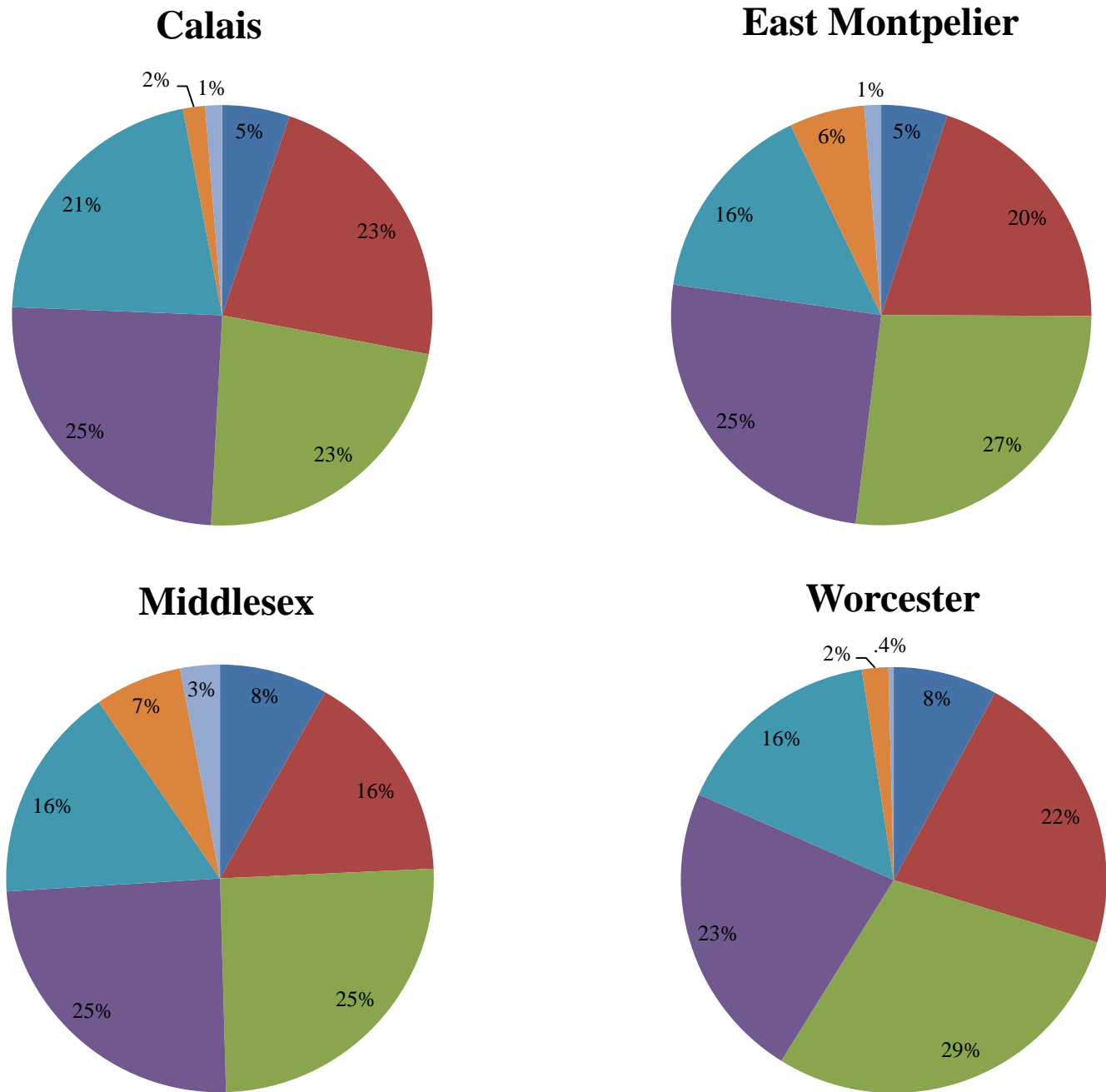


Figure 7: Breakdowns of educational attainment in each town in the case study area using data from the American Community Survey 2011. The data reveal that educational levels vary from town-to-town. Towns such as Middlesex, Calais, and East Montpelier have a much higher concentration of advanced-level degrees than Berlin and Worcester. Overall attainment for the case study area seems to be much higher than the national average.

The data presented thus far reveals that, on average, the case study area has higher education rates, median home values, and median annual income than the national average. Also indicated in the data is that rates of ownership for housing units are far higher in the case study area than both the state and national average. Locally, this brief analysis betrays differences in demographics from town-to-town. Calais, for instance, has much higher rates of education and a much higher median home value to median annual income ratio than any of the other towns. The same is true, albeit less so, of East Montpelier. Middlesex falls near the national average, except for its high education rates. Alternatively, in terms of income and home values, Berlin and Worcester fall below the national average. Overall, however, the Vermont of present is not like the place of the past that research participants describe. Consolidated schools, for the research participants, are a symbol of this new Vermont and the new people who control it.

In addition to revealing the triumph of non-native Vermonters in influencing the course of Vermont government, school consolidation reveals, if not has caused, another distinct demographic change in rural communities. This is the flight of youth in Vermont—otherwise known as a brain drain—and there is a concern over the future economic effects that this migration could cause. In 2006, the former governor of the state stated, “There’s an exodus of young people. It’s dramatic. We need to reverse it. The consequences of not acting are severe” (Belluck, 2006). Figures featured in the New York Times in 2006 indicate that 57 percent of Vermont college students attended college out of state. Since 1990, the total population between the ages of 20 to 34 has shrunk by 19%.

This demographic change is not directly linked to school consolidation, but for “uphill” residents the two were intrinsically connected. Uphill Vermonters saw the preservation of the rural country school as synonymous with the preservation of the traditional way of life (Searls, 2006). School consolidation, a phenomena directly linked to an increasing complexity in the

modern world, was a threat to this rural lifestyle. This threat is covered well in Peshkin's work which explores the conflict between the school as a reflection of the community at present with the needs of the nation in the future (1978). The primary question becomes whether a school exists to serve the surrounding community or whether it is to serve the nation as a whole. Should schools prepare students for a small town, agricultural life in central Vermont? Or should they prepare a student to be a part of something larger? One leads, at least in the perception of old-time residents, to the preservation of the rural lifestyle through cultivating appreciation for the area. The other leads to a mass exodus through encouraging youth to leave for better, more modern opportunities. According to Searls, historically, "Such Vermonters were well aware of the correlation between the quality of education received and the likelihood of emigration. As farmers saw it, a modern education was the best guarantee that a child would turn away from farming; downhill school reform would exacerbate the exodus of the young that they hoped to stem" (Searls, 2006, pg 41). New, larger schools reflected an increasing scale associated with modern life. The small agricultural village no longer was the basis of life even for the most rural of residents.

This shift in scale is the focus of the final theme: Scale and Social Capital. In order to display the demographic repercussions of this shift, the following population pyramids are included. On account of data availability, population pyramids reflect the population of Washington County—the county containing the case study area. One pyramid is included for each of the four periods of consolidation above: District Schools, Town Schools, Cross Transportation, and Central Schools:

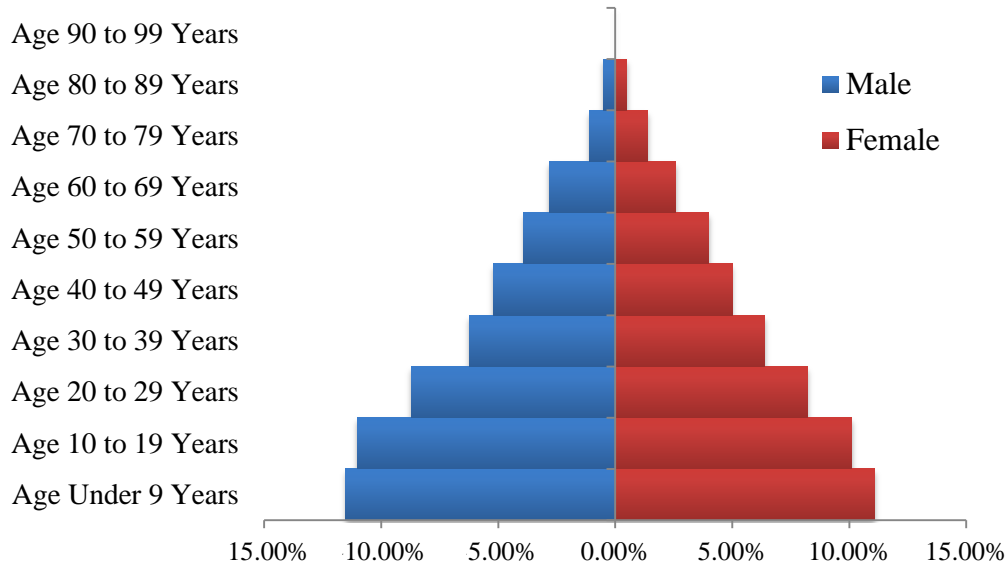


Figure 8: The District School (~1892). A population pyramid featuring data from the 1860 decennial census. The pyramid reveals a relatively normal distribution with a wide base. Note that, because of available data, the scale of this pyramid differs from the scale of those following.

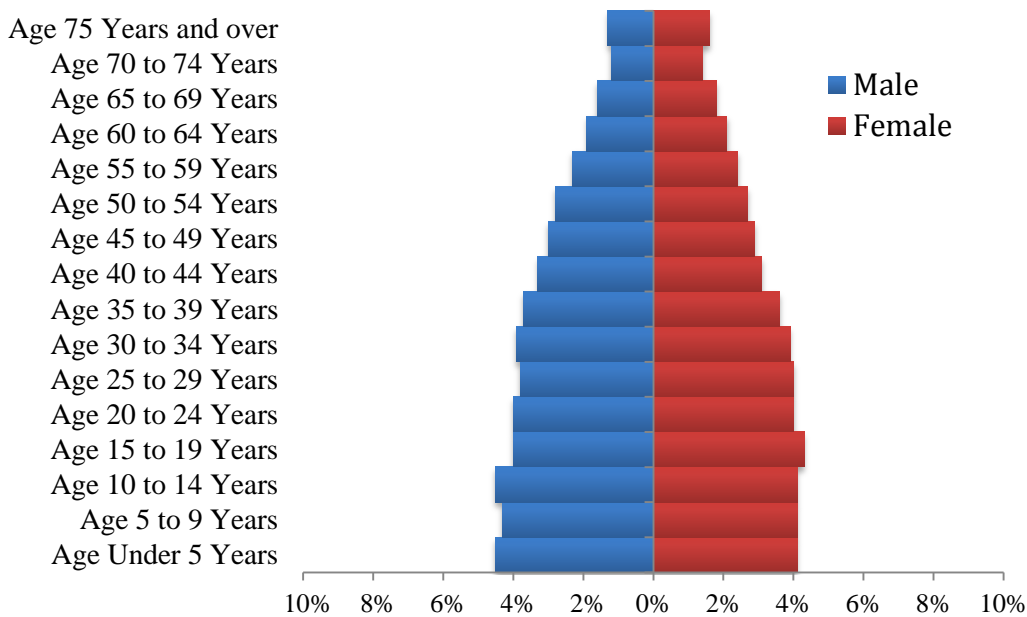


Figure 9: The Town Schools (1893-1960). A population pyramid featuring data from the 1940 decennial census. The pyramid reveals a relatively normal population distribution. No significant population bulges or deficiencies are present.

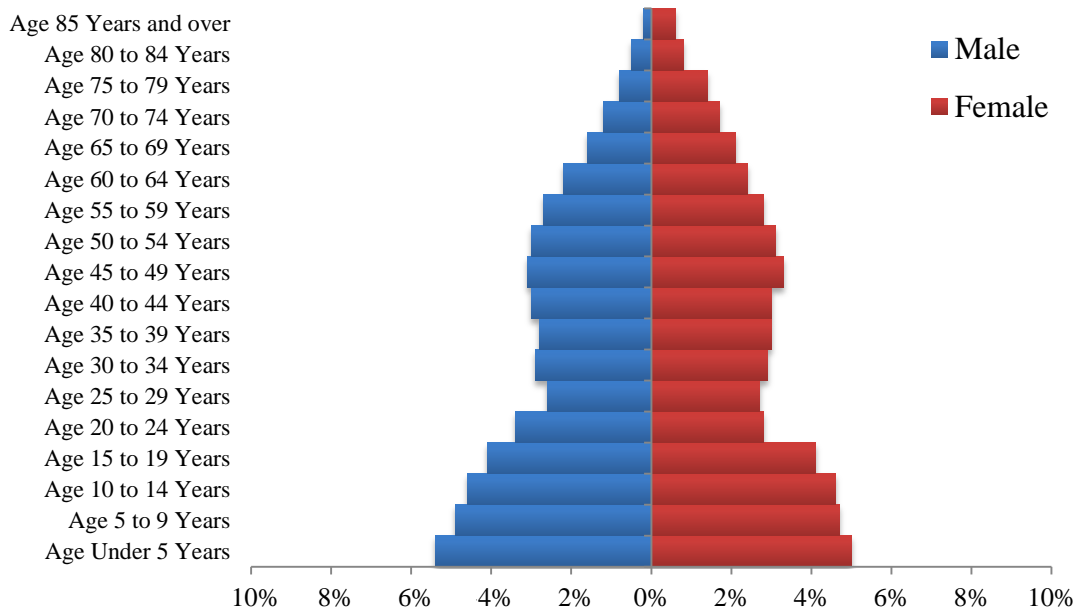


Figure 10: School Cross-Transportation (1960s). A population pyramid featuring data from the 1960 decennial census. The pyramid shows the initial birth of the baby boom generation relative to the contraction in the pyramid of birthing-age individuals. The sudden baby boom is part of the reason towns were caught off-guard and turned to new school buildings in the mid-to-late-1960s.

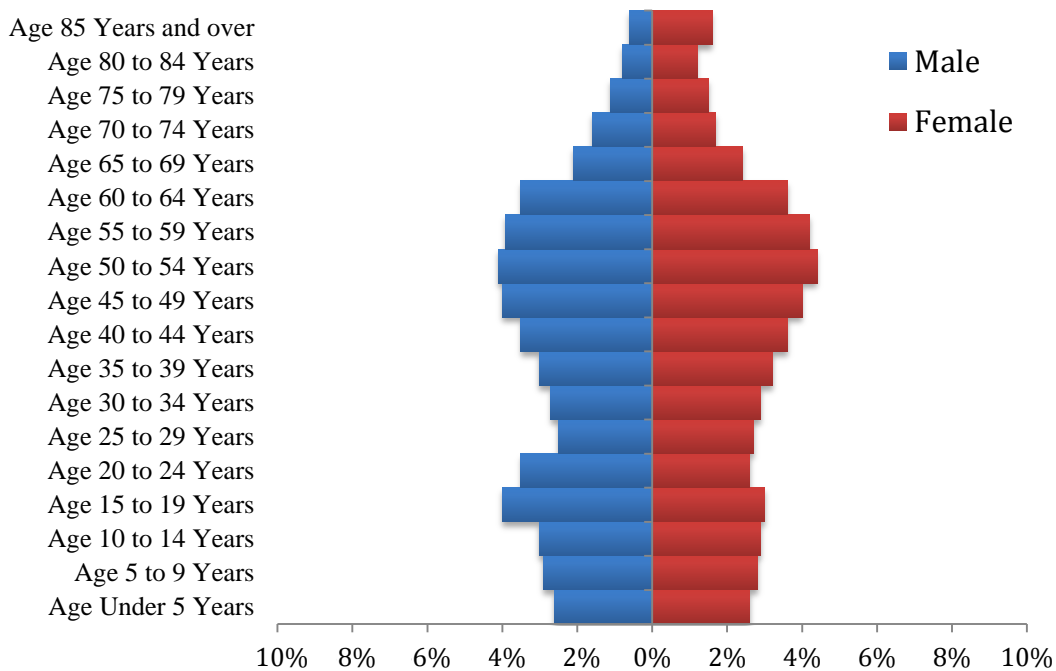


Figure 11: The Central School (1960s-present). A population pyramid featuring data from the 2010 decennial census. The pyramid clearly shows the contraction of youth relative to the 1960 population pyramid as well as the overall aging of the population.

The population pyramids are but a glimpse at this demographic shift that is widely known in Vermont. School consolidation coincides with this trend and may appear, to many old-time Vermonters, to have caused it. This study cannot affirm this direct connection, however. There are a number of factors that at play in to the flight of youth. School consolidation, if at all directly related, appears to be a very small part. The catalyst could be the lack of adequate opportunity in the state, a lack of attachment among the new population, etc. Certainly, however, the wide-focus of the union school does not help in alleviating the problem. Not to argue that a consolidated school should do so, however, for the purpose of the school is not necessarily to teach students skills that will keep them on the land. Nonetheless, research participants seemed to attribute the union school's more professionalized and centralized influence in the community as a reason for this shift. In other words, the schools may fail to cultivate an attractive community identity that keeps youth in the area.

The Community School

Both newspaper analysis and participant interviews reveal that there is a distinct link between the local school and community identity, the finding of many previous studies. Discussed briefly in the literature review, identity has been proven to be both heavily influenced by and influential on the local schools (Ward & Rink, 1992; Deyoung, 1989; Peshkin, 1978). Much of this work has focused on consolidation as it requires a shift in either schools or governance, both having tremendous effects on community identity (Reynolds, 1999). Both of these shifts are apparent in the case study area. The designation of "The Community School"

invokes different responses for different people, but three common themes emerge from the discourse and interview research. These themes will progress from *influenced by existing* to *influential in determining* community identity.

First, inside the school, social patterns tend to reflect the geographical patterns of the area the school serves. In this way the identity of the community influences how the social interactions and activities organize within the school. Historically, before the construction of a union high school, this influence was apparent in the sending of rural students to city high schools. Rural students, usually tuition students whose tuition was covered by their home towns, were limited in their ability to connect with the high school because of transportation limitations and other limitations (academic, social, etc.), both because of their rural nature:

We were out-of-towners. So yes there were [activities], but it was difficult if you wanted to join a sport or something; you had to be concerned about how you were going to get transportation to and from there. [...] The students that went to Montpelier had access to a gymnasium growing up and everything. We had no such thing in Worcester in my age. We now have a gymnasium. We didn't when I was growing up.

Research Participant

But we had to find our own ways. It was difficult for those of us that were involved in extracurricular activities. I pretty much had to limit mine to meetings I could attend right after school. One of my friends that lived in maple corner was in the football team. He stayed for practice and he would find a ride home or walk home after practice.

Research Participant

That was a place where it was hard for the people from East Montpelier to participate in the sports even if they had the talent because of the transportation. Most didn't, I think I can remember a boy from Middlesex who got in. He played football.

Research Participant

It was really challenging. I didn't think about it so much until afterwards, but for almost the full 8 years of elementary school I had just one other student in my class, so, and he wasn't an outstanding student so that he had a high bar for me to follow; we were pretty evenly matched, so yeah, I think when I got to high school and faced some really bright kids who had come through a larger school with probably better background. Well, I did alright in high school.

Research Participant

Depending on the availability of transportation or the family's financial situation, some families even needed to send their high school-age children to board with families or friends close to the high school:

There was a while in high school where I boarded with a family in Montpelier so my dad didn't have to drive every day. [...] It was 8 dollars a week which was pretty small. They were friends of some friends of my parents. [...] and they were wonderful. I called them my grandparents.

Research Participant

The geographic separation between the home and school created transportation difficulties, which made getting involved in school activities and events much more difficult for rural residents than it was for the students already living in the city. City students also had access to more services (organized sports, graded elementary schools, etc.) than their rural counterparts. Often, country students entered at a different level—athletically, educationally, or socially. The geographic removal, however, was also a part of something far larger—identity. The towns surrounding the city high school were all primarily agriculture-based. The city, meanwhile, was more industrial and commercial. Cultural differences eventually led to a perception of exclusion on behalf of the rural students towards their city school; country students felt like “outsiders”. In addition to exclusion, most felt looked down upon. Still, however, kids from the country tended to bond together:

Coming from outside, all the kids that went to elementary school in Montpelier already knew each other. And then we had about five or so sending towns that. And I was the only one going from the eighth grade from my school. It was very lonely and hard to get acquainted with people. But the ones I did seem to get acquainted with all seemed to be from the small towns. They didn't know anybody either.

Research Participant

My father was on the school board for 30 years so I spent most of my childhood doing homework at the table listening to him talk on the phone trying to convince them. I felt like it was sort of the haves and the have-nots. There was this general feeling that Montpelier was Italy and that the outside towns were the farmers and the call-workers. Not so true anymore, but I think that's how the buildings got built the way they did.

Research Participant

Absolutely, we were going to a city school and maybe were looked down upon because we were outsiders, but we still did quite well. And now, 75 years later, the people that maybe didn't respect me have higher respect for me. Of course, a lot of them are dead.

Research Participant

I went to high school in Montpelier at Montpelier High School. Which was a big transition. I was a country kid along with many others and so when we went to Montpelier high school we were integrated with kids, with people that had grown up together in Montpelier. We were outsiders. [...] But fortunately I had classmates and friends from surrounding towns like East Montpelier, Worcester, Middlesex. Particularly East Montpelier went there. I already knew those people from 4-H or church and things like that, but it was a difficult, we talk about it now, and it's like a *whooo*, but it was difficult.

Research Participant

The differences between the insiders and outsiders had a tremendous effect on how school districts organized. At first, it may seem odd to have all five towns that surround a small city join in a union district without the city, but cultural differences made any union between them nearly impossible. Newspaper articles from the time betray that, for much of the time the union was organizing, the city had planned to be a part of it—in fact; it had been one of the founding towns. Nonetheless, the city withdrew at one point and, when it reconsidered and asked to be accepted into the union again, the surrounding towns voted to exclude the city from rejoining. This is the reason two high schools, which, when combined, serve over a hundred square miles, are located not three and a half miles from one another.

Still, however, there was a brief period of time before the city had decided to withdraw from the union that both the rural towns and the city were going to look past their cultural differences and join together. Ultimately, the agreement fell through because of disagreements over control. While not insurmountable, the cultural divide was deeply rooted. Far from being merely a divide between rural and urban, the country and the city were also required both to come to terms with decades of tradition. As tuition-paying towns, the surrounding towns had

very little, if any, control over school affairs at the city high school. The prospect of a union school meant that the towns would equally share power with one another, including the city. Relinquishing this control proved undesirable for too many city residents. Be it the formation of a union high school or the construction of a consolidated elementary school, geographic area plays a large role in the degree of control a community has over its school. Often, many residents are of the opinion that if the high school leaves the area they will lose autonomy—a loss that residents are often willing to pay more to avoid:

Now we have our choice to make, We can either have a fine school right here in our own town—one that will compare well with any secondary school and cost a lot less money, or a school four or five miles out in the woods located in and run by another town, a school over which we have no control.¹⁴

The need for local control is a significant part of feeling ownership and connection to the local school. For this reason, many advocates of local schools in Vermont in the 1960s were part of the Home Rule Association, a group dedicated to the construction of smaller, more local schools for rural communities. Whenever a town was considering—in particular—forming a union high school district, advocates of Home Rule would dominate public meetings and organize get-out-the-vote efforts. Such was the case for years in many of the small towns surrounding the case study area. However, “Home Rulers” were not as dismayed with the horizontal loss of power—power lost to or shared with more residents—as they were with the vertical loss of power—power given to state education officials. Still, though, with the additional funding the state offered at the time, consolidation and union formation were economically advantageous. The price for state aid, however, was a loss of local control:

And over my lifetime the funding of schools has changed so drastically that in the one-room school period, the teachers, I mean during my period, my involvement, the teachers were paid by the town and some basic level of educational material was provided, but many times the extra things in the arts, the money was raised by a parent organization and was raised on a local level. Parents and neighbors involved in with that particular school and then when you went to the

central school, you got the same neighborhood support but the neighborhood became larger. And I think it kind of tailed off; it was more common that there was more state than town participation in the funding. And I think that made some difference in people's attitude. If you're raising the money the hard way from knocking on doors, then you certainly have this feeling of local control. And you may maintain that control with someone else paying the bills but it isn't quite the same. But I think clearly to have some equity of education throughout the state you have to have the broader funding. It doesn't matter whether it's school or what it is if you take money from the state you have to expect that state is going to exert some control of how you spend that money. There's no point in resenting it; it's just the way it is. Whether it's state or federal funding, there's always going to be someone looking over your shoulder.

Research Participant

[The] Commissioner of Education has dedicated his term of office (soon to expire?) to the destruction of the small, academic high school in favor of the big union or 'life adjustment' institution. His Board of Education recently decided to turn down the 'state aid' formula as proposed by its special committee. Why? Partly because any such fair and just refunding of state-collected taxes would bolster the finances of many a small high school town, thus enabling it to retain its own high school over the policies of which it, rather than the Department of Education, has complete control.¹⁵

The general premise supporting local control is that it involves the surrounding community more, making the local school a more effective community asset than a union high school that is shared among many communities. The primary tension was between two similar designations: "The Community School" and "The Community's School". Home Rule advocated argued the latter; they believed schools should be operated by and for the community in which they were located. State education officials argued that the one-community scale was too inhibiting. Rather, a large union of many communities was necessary to provide a thorough and adequate education. Yet, for Home Rulers, the scale of the consolidated school was too large to cultivate any meaningful community connection. Exactly how the local school may differ from a union school in terms of its connection with the community is discussed in the final theme of findings, Scale and Social Capital.

Thus far, the community's relationships with the school as defined by social organization and control have been defined. The last relationship between the school and the community

differs slightly from the first two; it is more tangible. All consolidation arguments deal in abstractions until it comes time for the actual idea to manifest itself in a school building. The physical structure—the school—is incredibly important in terms of demarcating the center of a village or a town or a district. Benson, Harkay, Johaneck, and Puckett (1999) highlight the significance of school placement through history. Apparent from their work is the American tradition of placing schools in the heart of the community. Up until the period of consolidation in the case study area, this, too, had been the case. It became impossible when schools began to consolidate, however, to choose a center for many of the towns in the case study area. Often either divided in two or composed of villages, most of the towns never had a distinct center. When building a school and consequently demarcating the center of the town— plus the complication of finding flat land in a mountainous area—most towns engaged in fierce argument. Ultimately, three patterns emerged for the placement of central elementary schools in the towns:

#1: The Village School

Worcester is the primary example for this pattern. Aided by topography that naturally creates a town center, Worcester experienced a relatively peaceful transition from many schoolhouses to one central school. No editorials appeared in years leading up to consolidation and respondents reported only a modicum of dissension amongst the community even when the final schoolhouse was closed:

Not really. How do I want to say that. It was necessary to close the white school for children. Not really contentious except it costs money. [...]But sure, people would get really upset because the school on Minister Brook was the last small school. We used to have nine because everyone had to be within walking distance. When they closed Minister Brook, yes, the people who went there were close knit and to bring them down to Worcester was a little bit uneasy.

Research Participant

Most of the tension involved in closing the last schoolhouse was more because of tradition than because of actual disagreement in the validity of the decision. There was little dissension over where the central school would go as the central school in the village had slowly been taking in more and more students over time. It had become quite apparent, then, that the central school would go in Worcester Village—the already existing town center. That is where the school was built and where the center of the town remains. The school’s location—in the center of town—clearly reflects that the village was and is the center of the town’s social and cultural life.



Illustrations 7 & 8 (left and right respectively): Photographs taken of the elementary school in Worcester. The photographs show the Village of Worcester (left) as viewed from the front of the school and the barn-styled schoolhouse (right).

The other town in this category is East Montpelier, which managed to locate the school reasonably close to defined community centers. This town, too, showed little dissension when choosing the location of the local school. Located only mile and a half mile from East Montpelier Village,—the larger of two major town centers located near one another—the school is relatively close to the center of town.

#2: The Outside School

Middlesex best fits the description of this pattern. Divided geographically and socially among a few distinct parts of town, Middlesex lacked an agreed-upon center. Rather, a handful of villages were the center of life for most early residents. Nonetheless, Middlesex was one of the first towns to try their hand at consolidation when the town schools became crowded in the 1950s. The initial attempt was a failure. Too divided to choose a central school location, the town built two schools, identical in architecture and construction, on opposite sides of town. Eventually, the town closed one school in order to expand on the other. Located a distance from the nearest village or hamlet, the school they added on to remains geographically removed from any of the current or past villages. This is significant because it clearly shows that a compromise needed to be made between the village lifestyle of the past and the educational needs of the future. It also shows that no one village ever became a defined center for the entire town.



Illustrations 9 & 10: Photographs taken of the elementary school in Middlesex. The photographs show the road and surroundings (right) and the school itself (left).

Calais is the other town that fits this description. Spread out among a handful of villages, Calais placed its elementary school at a central geographic location not in close proximity to any

of the villages. Nonetheless, Calais remains a village community, each village with a strong sense of identity.

#3: The Divided School

Of all the towns in the case study area, Berlin was the most divided going into the period of school consolidation. Following the formation of a school study committee in 1962, the new elementary school took more than five years to plan and another to build. This constant delay—consisting of numerous petitions, injunctions, and special meetings—was a result of tension over the identity of the town. As discussed in the town profile, Berlin had long been split between east and west. Both sides had a distinct center, but only one central school was to be built. Up until the mid-1960s both halves of town had been served by separate schoolhouses.

Ultimately, the brunt of the delay in school construction was choosing the site. In all, more than seven sites were considered, several on both sides of the town. The eastern half of town contained half of the population at the time, but it was also poised to become a commercial center. Many at the time saw this as a positive:

It is obvious to anyone that Berlin is going to grow and its major growth, will-nilly, will be in, or around, the Corners. The town has a chance to have 12 acres right in the center of this for a school. Now there is a setup, any town, except possibly Berlin would love to have! We, the town, are in on the ground floor of one of the biggest real estate booms Washington County ever will see.¹⁶

The school was eventually built in the eastern half of town—the Corners—mainly because the land was offered by a school board member and was available for a lower-than-market-value cost. Consequently, the school is located neither in the population core of the east nor the population core of the west. Since construction, West Berlin—once a village known as Riverton—has fallen into decline and, with the loss of the schoolhouse and construction of a new interstate route, lost its once-defined center. The school is located not a mile from interstate entrance ramp and across a highway from multiple commercial establishments.



Illustrations 11 & 12: Photographs taken of the elementary school in Berlin. The photographs depict the brick school building (left) and the view across the highway from the school's main entrance (right).

Union Schools

Beyond the elementary school pattern, much can be learned from the construction of the union high school. As there is only one high school, comparing patterns is not possible. However, certain themes emerge looking at the history of high schools for residents of the area. Before the formation of the union high school between the five towns, each town offered to pay tuition for its high school students to any high school in the area. Consequently, each family could determine on their own which school the children would attend. This choice often stifled many community relationships among students and parents. According to many respondents, classmates they had come to know in elementary school would disperse to varying high schools:

I think [the elementary school] helped down the road once it happened. Instead of being three separate districts, mentally, we became one single district. But once that happened we still had to go to other high schools and we were all on the other side once again. Like you know we're Northfield; they're Montpelier; we are Spaulding; they are Montpelier, you know.

Research Participant

See, but at that time there was no U-32. We had choices of where we could go to high school. It could have been Spaulding. Some on the East side of town went to Plainfield. Some went to Lyndon Institute. We had a choice, but the majority of us went to Montpelier High School. [...] Montpelier was closer, I'd say. Particularly on the west side. See, this town is split into the west side of town and the east side of town (indicating on an invisible map. The people on the west primarily went to Montpelier. [On the east side,] some did go to Montpelier, some went to Plainfield, I'm not sure...some went to Spaulding I guess. Some of my friends on the east side of town went to Lyndon Institute.

Research Participant

Of course, the primary factor in determining which high school a student would attend was convenience. Getting around was not always easy, so students would go to whichever school they could find a reliable ride to. The consequences in terms of the community were profound on individual families. For families, the high school their child attended, for a time, was the institution their lives revolved around. Often, because of the distance, families would tend not to become as involved with the high school. If they did, they would find themselves secluded from the families of students who attended a different school. Only seldom would the social gravitational fields of the schools collide. This dispersion made it difficult to establish a sense of belonging with the school, hence rural students always felt like “outsiders”. This dispersion of students ended with the formation of Union District 32. The union high school, from its opening, offered busing for all students—and all students needed it—which alleviated the transportation concerns of the past. The construction of the school created a social connection center that linked the outside towns together in a way they had never been connected before. The union school gave the outsiders a new home.

Scale & Social Capital

This new home became a critical center for social capital development. As discussed in the literature review, the role of the school as an institution for social capital development has been a ripe topic for academic work, most notably Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, which

argues that schools are vital in the development of social connections in a community and those social connections are of great value to both the individual and the community (Putnam, 2000). A large focus of this study was to understand how the potential of schools to serve as centers of social capital development changes with their size and geographic location relative to the population they serve. Indicated by participant interviews, modern consolidated schools are still very much effective in organizing community social interactions. However, this effectiveness is within a more narrow scope than the one- or two-room schoolhouses research participants once attended. In this way, the nature of the school has changed. As schools become more geographically removed from the citizens they serve, the school's ability to serve as a social organizer for all community members decreases.

Important in the previous statement is the phrase "all community members"—this phrase raises the important question of who it is the school serves. Research participants provided a unique perspective in this regard. Initially, all participants were students in the old schoolhouses. Now, however, they are community members in towns with modern schools. The transition between these experiences is the focus of this theme. How, in other words, did the schoolhouses differ in terms of social organizing from the modern schools? Initially, though, participants were asked to describe the general types of social events they once attended in the communities:

Well, there's the town hall used to have minstrel shows and talent shows. That's still town hall. And back then we used to have card parties. You'd go house to house. Like say this Friday night we had a card party here. Next Friday night it would be at the neighbors. It used to be like, oh, maybe about, six tables of four 24 or 25 people. We did that mainly in the late fall, winter, and early spring. That was a going thing back then. Now they don't do that.

Research Participant

The store. You would go visit the store and hang out around the stove. There was the Maple Corner Community Center, they sometimes had plays. I remember they bought a projector and once a month they had a movie. All the movies were old movies. I remember all the movies were from World War I. I remember my dad taking us when the roads were bad on skis for a mile and

a half to see a movie. It was a wonderful life. It was great. I left there when I was 14 and I moved here.

Research Participant

Well, there was the grange hall. The grange was a big thing back then. My gram was one of the charter members of the grange in maple corner, so there were things like that, in the winter they would show movies, old movies, which was local entertainment and that was a very good thing to go to. Otherwise, of course, there was church, and back then, town meeting was a big event. Everybody went; we had the day off, and I can remember at a very young age going to town meeting.

Research Participant

The most common social organizer, aside from the school, was the church for many participants:

Well, for us in this neighborhood there were some church events but more for the children; there was a fairly active Sunday school. Church services were pretty unusual in the winter. Heating the church was a problem. A little more common in the summer. Depending on the availability of ministers and the availability of church members to be a minister there was no church, but those were the two places/. There was in East Montpelier village a sizable hall they referred to as the Town hall and there were some men who had a lot of musical talent that used to organize musicals here and so forth. I know there were dances but I don't think young people went very much. Let's see... that was about four miles from here so it had got to be something unusual for me to go. Sometimes, if my parents went. I don't remember going with friends.

Research Participant:

In addition to these church- or town-oriented events, the school served a special purpose for school-age children. Respondents reported an excitement in putting on plays and pageants and felt valued because of the widespread community attendance. The notion of the school as a center of the community has always been present since the era of district schools, where schools served as centers of educational, civic, and religious events. While the all-encompassing role of the school had diminished, respondents still regarded the school as an important center of events. Even residents of the district or local community surrounding the school would attend the events, even if they didn't have children in the school:

Everything we did was as a community. We knew everyone in the community because it was so few families and they were all farm families that lived near the school. And we had, we put on plays. That was part of our learning. I remember one time we did the Christmas Carol. Which was quite an undertaking for a school of 15 kids. At Halloween we'd have party and we'd put on a play. And wed have a box social where everyone brought in a decorated box, the girls did, and then men bid on them. You know, we had all those kind of community activities. [...] Everyone in the district went, even if they didn't have kids in the school.

Research Participant

Well, every year the teachers would make Halloween a big event. They'd make memorial day a big event with little plays and things like that. The teachers would make sure there were certain things throughout the year. In terms of sports, during the recess and in the nice weather, we'd run around maybe play softball outside the school. In the winter, there was a furnace room downstairs, we burned wood downstairs, and we'd toss a basketball around own there. Nothing ever organized.

Research Participant

Significant from these accounts is the deep connection that the surrounding school community had with not only the involved population—students and their parents—but also the surrounding population—all community members—that had little connection with the school aside from their proximity. The defining characteristic that led to this was scale. At the time, the village was both the center and the boundary of everyday life:

It was always a very, very busy village. There were things going on with suppers and fairs, because this was it, this was your environment. You never went outside of the village; you never went anywhere. And so, everything was here. The church was the big place with things going on, and the school. They'd have plays and musical things. There was always something going on. [...] We never got out of the village. We had 3 stores growing up. Whatever you got, you got it at the store.

Research Participant

Oh yeah, all, everybody knew everybody else. It was a small community, mostly agricultural. But, uh, nobody ever gave it a thought to what it would be like somewhere else. Most everyone was firmly rooted, wasn't about to leave, you just didn't think about people having it better or worse somewhere else.

Research Participant

Given the village scale of life, an intrinsic connection emerged between the community and the surrounding school. With schools in every village and every center, the population was much closer to their local schools. Without the linkages to other social centers outside the

village, community members would default to the school as a jack-of-all-trades social center. Everyone used the school. The community was perceived as “a family,” and the school as merely a part of the community. Everything was shared from school discipline issues to the students’ germs. It was a strong sense of community, in part, anchored by the local school:

Back then it was really different. I mean, you’ve got to remember, that was the 60s. Where you went to school and you got in trouble at school you got in more trouble at home because mom and dad or Granma and granddad did not want to hear that you were acting up in school. Not acceptable. So other than that and graduation time, everything was run by the teachers in the school. Nobody was the principle; we didn’t really have a principle. Teachers in our school at the time, they were part of the community, they would decide on the curriculum and what was going to happen. Each school [in town] did its own thing pretty much.

Research Participant

Oh yeah, all, everybody knew everybody else. It was a small community, mostly agricultural. Let me tell you an interesting thing, when I started school there were one-holers outside the school, one for the girls and one for the boys; in the morning, two people would be assigned to get a bucket of water and everybody would clean their hands in the same water and then drink it. I don’t think they’d allow that now. That was only a year, then they dug a well and we had toilets and running water.

Research Participant

That scale of life has changed irrevocably, and participants were very well aware of this. The consolidation of schools into larger, geographically isolated structures was merely a reflection of this changing scale. Even before the period of consolidation in the late 1960s participants had a taste of this scale when they attended the local city school. When asked of the differences between the social center of the elementary school and the high school, participants noted that the high school had very little of the social connection the elementary schools shared with their home community. Now, most participants that no longer have connections to the school are feeling the results of that shifting scale. No longer, according to residents, are the schools for the entire population. Schools, now, serve a more specific population because of their

more professionalized and centralized nature. As a result, older residents have begun to feel excluded from their community school:

It's become a broader picture. In comparison to my life—it was centered around Maple Corner School—and with that, in my perspective, it contained more of a sense of a community. There still is that, I guess, but it's just different.

Research Participant

And that I think is partly true in Vermont because of distance, the larger they get the less likely you are to jump in the car on a frosty cold night and drive for a distance to the school if it's just down the road. No question that you lose some of that feeling that “yeah, this is my school”. Once our children have led the school we have gradually withdrawn more and more. I don't personally know any students that play basketball for instance, though I like basketball, it's not the draw that it was when my son played or the kid next door played. I don't think—it's really a feeling that it's not our school.

Research Participant

I know that when they have an event down here [at the local elementary school] the cars are lined up and down the road, but I don't go. I don't have any children or grandchildren, so I don't even know when they're going to have a concert or anything. I could because it's in the little newspaper we get, but I think there's less involvement by the people who do not have children in the school right now.

Research Participant

The primary designation between the local schoolhouse and the consolidated or union high school is the scale they operate on and the resulting specialization in the populations they attract. Research participants that no longer have connections to the school—as teachers, parents, school board members, etc.—no longer share the connection with a schoolhouse people of their age may have had in the past. In other words, while research participants shared little connection to the modern schools, people of the past in their position may have maintained a sustaining relationship with the local schoolhouses. Nonetheless, most participants reported a strong connection when they had children in the modern schools. As that connection diminished over time, however, participants seldom found themselves attracted back to the school.

Still, though, many participants were clear to state that schools were not worse as community centers than the schoolhouses they once attended. Rather, schools now catered to a

different population living in a different time. In terms of serving this new time, many participants agreed that schools do what they can:

Teachers are working hard at it. And this is just my personal opinion, but probably half to a majority of the families have a really hard time with school, have a hard time with coming here, feeling comfortable here. We have a lot of have-nots and a few serious haves and not a whole lot in between. We have some kids that are homeless. We have a lot of stuff like that. We try, like we had a science fair night and family game night. The thing that brought the most families in, and I want to expand on it, was after Hurricane Sandy, we had a food shelf and that brought A LOT of families in.

Participant 1009: Berlin

Yeah, there are more things that happen at like [the union high school], and I think that schools are becoming more open. I think the schools are becoming more open to letting people use the school. It used to be; when school was done the school was done. There might be summer school but that would be it but I don't remember much for summer school. Now more groups come in and do more things than ever but back at that point there just wasn't much there. If there was something on they were going on in the city. Montpelier would have different things going on for different groups but it never came into the high school. It was kind of, I don't want to say it was sacred ground, but it was separate from what would happen from in the city.

Research Participant

The same respondent went on to say of the school changes:

In terms of our district, it's changed it a lot. The dynamics of the community have changed. Berlin itself has become—one section becomes more farming one becomes more commercial, but I find people are more willing to move around than they used to. Moving students around used to be a big concern now not so much and with all of the activities, your drama, your theatre, your sports, the musicals and everything it's like a lot of people don't seem to mind doing that. Back before that happened and this became a commercial area, people were more stay at home. You know they didn't want to get up and truck somebody off to school at 6 at night and not have to pick them up around 9 or 10. That stuff never happened, everybody wanted to be in bed at nine.

Participant 1003: Berlin

Comparing the social capital development potential of old schoolhouses to modern consolidated elementary schools and union schools is like comparing apples and oranges. Based on the notion in the prior section indicating that schools are a reflection of the community around them, these findings suggest that the loss of social capital potential in schools among all members of the community they serve is not in any way the fault of modern schools. Rather, the less-socially-inclined schools we see today are a reflection of the communities that made them.

For a new population living in a different time and operating on a different scale, the schools provide everything they need and are expected to. While research participants noted a certain degree of nostalgia for the loss of the local schools, much of this nostalgia was aimed at something larger—the loss of a better time.

Conclusions

The paper started with a place and a specific societal institution—central Vermont and the school—from which emerged four themes ranging from community demographics to community identity and the geographic locations of schools. While interconnected, these themes stand alone. When combined, however, they form a framework for how to view the role of local schools in a given community. Rather than overreach and attempt to generalize these findings, the conclusions in this section will focus on the case study area and its future. One fact underlies the following suggestions, however: There is no going back. While great nostalgia for a simpler time permeates among many residents, so, too, does the notion that a different world has arrived and that it is here to stay.

The Future of Consolidation

Currently, the case study area is facing a familiar situation that it faced in the 1960s. With a state trying to once again coerce district reorganization, the case study area is once again contemplating—albeit quite generally at this time—consolidation with the city schools to form a new union high school. Recall that this consolidation effort failed once the city backed out and was barred reentrance in the late 1960s. Unlike the situation in the 1960s, however, it is the city schools that are facing declining enrollment and lacking an adequate tax base. The economics of the situation have become aligned with the political persuasion towards larger districts. Still, though, little has come of these conversations as of yet. Regardless, the situation is beginning to

look more and more like it did fifty years ago. As discussed in the theme of *Entering the Modern World*, consolidation resulted because of a loss of faith in the local schoolhouses and the rise of international competition. Much like then, the cost of maintaining schools is once again growing, as is international competition due to globalization. History, despite the cliché, is repeating itself, albeit in a minor capacity. The findings of this research suggest that a different outcome than the 1960s will occur sometime in the future—but not necessarily in the near future. In other words, should certain variables remain constant, the consolidation of the case study area with the interior city schools is inevitable and will occur in good time.

Returning to history, prior negotiations between the neighboring schools and the city fell through more because of cultural difference than because of economics. Negotiations were characterized, first, by an inequality in power based on tradition. For decades—if not centuries—the city schools had been the stable educational institution. The neighboring towns would send students on a tuition basis, as if renting an education. Local power, in this structure, was centralized in the city. If the city had joined the union agreement, a geographic expansion of that once-centralized power would soon follow. As discussed in *The Community School* theme, local control was an important factor in school and place attachment. City residents consequently chose to maintain their local control over their school system.

Beyond control, however, there was a schism in identity that prevented the neighboring towns and the city from joining in a union. As discussed in *The Community School*, so often the “outsiders” were made to feel excluded because of both their geographic removal and because of their more rural, agricultural identity. Reconciling the urban and rural into a school—an institution of identity—required too much sacrifice on the part of both populations. That a school for the insiders—in the city—should exist not three and a half miles from a school for the

outsiders—secluded on top of a hill, in a forest—is such a perfect manifestation of the cultural conflict that prevented them from once joining together.

Although, this research suggests that the schisms between power and identity may not be nearly as vast as it once was. Initially, consolidated schools were built because of shifting community demographics that were leaving the traditional residents behind. Still, though, the shifting demographics were enough to keep the outsiders and the insiders separate. The flood wall between them, though, may not be so thick now. As discussed with the census data in *The Changing Community*, even the rural community is beginning to look less and less like it once did, with only 3.4% of the employed population working in agriculture where it once the assumed profession. This change in lifestyle—to a more connected and slightly suburban life—is much more in line, culturally, with the city. No doubt because of the changing rural economy and the influx of wealthy residents, this change could also be attributed to a new generation with much less outside-inside stigma. Since the central school for outsiders is, literally, just outside the “inside,” the division between their lives—the new “rural” youth—and those in the city are not so different. This, in addition to the fact that the city is now the community with economic struggle, balances the once uneven power dynamic established by decades of educational tradition. With a quickly diminishing schism between power and identity, the cultural divide will soon no longer stand between the inside and outside forming a union school.

Culture and identity are only part of the argument, of course. The political and economic forces are beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, it’s worth noting that while political and economic forces are often regarded as those that matter most, culture and identity do hold a certain sway, especially in community dialogue. Politics and economics certainly suggested that the rural towns and the city join together in the past, but the dam dividing the two sides was too

strong. This prediction does not claim that the dam has diminished in its entirety. Rather, given trends in rural culture and identity, there will soon come a time where the dam will diminish to a point where the current—economics and politics—will break through. It is then that the consolidation of the inside and outside will occur.

The New Social Centers

The final theme presented in this essay, *Scale and Social Capital*, reflects the price communities pay for adequate schools. The removal of the school from the village and the decline of the rural lifestyle are all a part of that price. This research suggests, however, that even consolidated schools may have an important role to play in bringing communities together.

Consolidated schools do serve as important community centers for specific populations. However, because of their increased size, they have become more centralized and professionalized, meaning they only serve a certain sector of the population—namely school-age children and their families. This transition has not occurred in isolation; many community centers have become more professionalized and centralized as well, serving specific populations. Examples of this include senior centers, legions or clubs, and interest societies. This specialization has had a grouping effect on the community at large; people with different interests occasionally cross paths but otherwise operate in a certain specialized community. While natural, the specialization of community organizations creates a degree of stratification in the community between interests and demographics. Notably, there exists a degree of stratification in age, with those above the age of having children in school slowly becoming less and less connected with the consolidated schools.

This specialization of community organizers and resulting stratification among communities was not possible in the era of the district school because each territorial unit did not

sustain large enough a population to organize, say, a senior citizen center. As discussed, the car and improved infrastructure have enlarged that scale and made that territorial unit far larger. Schools were once a jack-of-all-trades, organizing the life for all members of a community; they are a jack-of-trades no longer.

Yet, schools still benefit from a certain role in the community unparalleled by many social institutions. Schools still have at least some connection to every member of a community—even if only an institution people pay for with their taxes. Schools, in this regard, affect every member of the neighboring town or community. This puts schools in a special position to “stir the water” and decrease community stratification.

Fortunately, many schools in the case study area—with a specific look at the five elementary schools—use this special position to their advantage. Research participants in towns that placed an emphasis on community-wide events noted—if not more involvement—more awareness of the school and related events. Notably, most residents in each town attend Town Meeting each year, which is usually conducted in the respective elementary schools. Other types of events included everything from sporting events to community fundraising concerts. All of the successful events, though, featured some connection to the town and all of the people in it. Fundraising concerts for shared trauma, such as Tropical Storm Irene, attracted large numbers of people, as did events such as the building of a local community garden:



Illustration 13: A photograph of a local community garden at one of the elementary schools. Community gardens both bind together people of all ages and educate residents in the rich agricultural history of the area.

Determining and executing events that bind the community together help create a sense of place, and schools are in a unique position to orchestrate those events. This research suggests that, in order to better bind together communities, schools emphasize events and programs that are inherently connected to the surrounding villages and towns. More generally though, as discussed in L.J. Hanifan's work (1916), teaching the value of place and local history is also an important part of developing social capital in a rural community. Schools are able to do so but lack a certain degree of authenticity characterized by the district schools of the past. Rather than try and force community on a town or regional scale, it would be logical for schools to support the already-existing infrastructure at the village level. For towns where a strong village life exists—or even a cross-town phenomenon, school-related or school-sponsored events on the village level would help solidify the meaning of village life and institute a more organic sense of place based on the built environment residents exist in.

That the consolidation of schools was necessary is quite certain. That the geographic repercussions of consolidation have trickled down into the community life of these towns is also quite certain. Also, certain, though, is that well-run schools and well-planned places—even the most rural—can be a viable substitute to the rich, vibrant community life that the district school and village once facilitated. Pretending that a central school, located in some cases a half-hour drive from town residents, can be the sole center of a large geographic community is a flawed notion. Any reconciliation of the conflict between the love of the rural good life and need for a modern education must manifest itself in a way that does not sacrifice community involvement.

For any community grappling with the idea of consolidation, identity and culture—in most instances—are just as important as economics and politics. Too often, this study finds, citizens give up or change their schools without a full understanding of what it will mean. Identifying what will be given up—be it a rich village life or merely local control—may be a matter based on locality and specific circumstances. Regardless, it is a matter of great importance for all residents. Residents of communities have a large degree of agency in determining how their place will be formed. Schools are a part of this formation; they are place-makers. Understanding this unique and subtle role of the rural community school is an important first step in analyzing the possibility of future loss and the following consequences.

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