

Section 3.

Built Resource Capital

Table 3.1– Northfield Property Valuation & Taxation

Average Residential Value (single family res. on less than 6 acres), 1998	\$85,186
Total Value of Grand List, 2000	\$1,479,723
Effective Property Tax Rate (rate per \$100), 1998	2.26%

Source: Center for Rural Studies/VCGI. 2001. Vermont Indicators Online. <http://crs.uvm.edu/indicators/>

History of Business in Northfield

Almost all of the settlers to Northfield were farmers at first, bartering goods and services. Until about 1814, residents made potash on their farms and sent it to mills in America and abroad. Elijah Paine built a huge woolen mill in 1812 when the demand for Potash began to decline. The mill employed between 175 and 200 workers. For years it was the town's largest employer.

The construction of the VT Central Railroad was completed in 1847. Charles Paine was the President of the Vermont Central Railroad, and his hometown became the railroad's headquarters. For fifteen years the railroad offered jobs to hundreds of Northfield citizens. In 1852, the new president, John Gregory Smith, gradually moved operations to Saint Albans. The town's population, once the highest in Vermont, dropped drastically. It took 25 years for Northfield to recover from this loss.

Norwich University was probably the most influential player in that recovery. Late in 1866, the private military school relocated to Northfield from Norwich, Vermont. The faculty and student body consisted of only four teachers and fourteen students at the time, but would eventually become the town's largest employer.

Slate quarrying and finishing companies employed around 200 men in the 1860's and 1870's. By the 1880's, this industry was also in decline. In 1889 investors built a granite shed followed by several more as the years went by. At the beginning of World War I, over 525 people were employed in the sheds.

Small-scale manufacturing operations and retail businesses prospered in Northfield in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Altogether, these stores and manufactures employed many residents. Nevertheless, due to the mass production of the automobile, many of these businesses failed. Workers no longer had to depend on local businesses for jobs because they could drive anywhere employment was available.

As all other employment sectors declined, the importance of Norwich University increased. The presence of the college has meant economic stability for the community and a social and cultural life Northfield probably would not otherwise have seen.

Since World War II, population growth has been slow but steady. While no large industry has come to town, a number of small businesses have sprung up. However, few employ more than 30 people, and most residents work out of town. Over two centuries, Northfield has evolved from farming, to manufacturing, to a mix of small businesses and a college-town economy.

Table 3.2– Northfield Employment Characteristics

Top Five Industries, 1990

(employed persons 16 years and under)

Educational Services 23.8%

Retail 14.8%

Finance/Insurance/Real Estate 9.5%

Manufacturing (durables) 7.6%

Construction 6.5%

	Northfield Town	Washington County
Unemployment Rate, 2000	4.3%	3.1%
Change in Annual Average Unemployment, 1990-2000	-2%	N.A.

Table 3.2 illustrates the effect that Norwich University has upon Northfield’s employment scheme. At 23.8% the educational sector is by far the largest source of jobs in the town. Nevertheless, Northfield has a higher unemployment rate than the whole of Washington County.

Sources: Center for Rural Studies/VCGI. 2001. Vermont Indicators Online.
<http://ers.uvm.edu/indicators/>
 U.S. Census Bureau. 1990, 2000. American Factfinder.
<http://factfinder.census.gov>

Transportation

Major Automobile Routes

Northfield lies along VT Route 12, which leads about 7 miles north up to Montpelier, the capital of Vermont, and exit 9 on Interstate 89. Route 64 joins 12 in South Northfield and goes east 2 miles to exit 5 on I-89 in Williamstown.

The VT Central Railroad

As stated above, the VT Central Railroad was initially based in Northfield, and it was a major employer. Today the railroad has a more geographic impact, rather than an economic one, as the line still bisects the Town and Village.

Covered Bridges

The covered bridges of Vermont are among its most cherished and symbolic historic resources. Five remain in the Village of Northfield, the second highest concentration in the State.

The Upper Cox, Lower Cox, and Northfield Falls Covered Bridges are located on Cox Brook road over Cox Brook, a tributary of the Dog River. The Northfield Falls Bridge was built in 1872, and it is the longest bridge in Northfield, at 137 feet. The Upper and Lower Cox bridges were built soon after. This group of bridges is the only place in Vermont where one covered bridge can be seen from the portal of another, as is possible from the Lower Cox and Northfield Fall bridges.

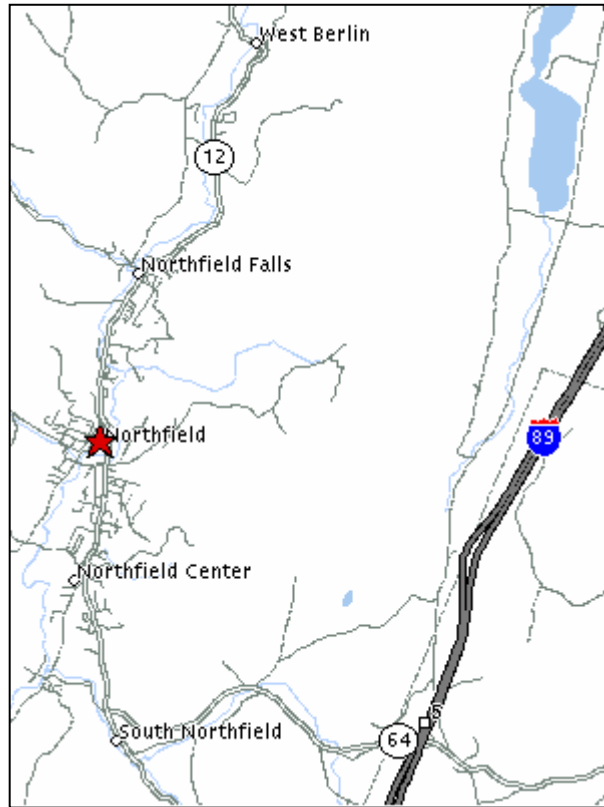
Slightly below the Cox Brook bridges stands the **Slaughterhouse Bridge**, which is the only one in Northfield that has not been structurally altered. It carries only an occasional vehicle across the Dog River to the abandoned industrial site of a local slaughterhouse, after which it is named.

The fifth Northfield bridge, the **Stony Brook Covered Bridge**, was built in 1899, is was the last kingpost truss covered bridge built on a Vermont public highway.

Table 3.3– Northfield Town Local Transportation Behavior

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) for State & US Highways, 1998	37,680.0
Change in VMT for State & US Highways, 1986-1998	7,611.8
Total Number of Accidents, 1997	10
Number of Accidents involving fatalities, 1997	0
Percent Population who Work in Town of Residence, 1990	23.8%
Commuters who Drive Alone, 1990	1,645
Commuters who Carpool, 1990	282
Commuters who use Public Transit, 1990	0

Source: Center for Rural Studies/VCGI. 2001. Vermont Indicators Online.
<http://crs.uvm.edu/indicators/>



[Table of Contents](#)

Next: [Social Capital](#)

Previous: [Human Capital](#)