

Section 1.
Town Organization

Table 1.1 – General Town Characteristics

| | |
|--|---|
| Town Name | Northfield |
| County | Washington |
| Date of Town Charter | August 10, 1781 |
| Incorporated Villages | Northfield Village |
| Date Incorporated | November 14, 1855 |
| Unincorporated Villages and Settlements | Northfield Center, Northfield Falls, South Northfield |

Sources: Business Center of Vermont, Inc. 1996. "Welcome to Northfield, VT" <http://www.in-vermont.com/northfield/>.
 Marsland, William. 1962. Northfield, Vermont: A Community Study.

Where is Northfield?

Northfield is actually one of the centermost towns in the state of Vermont, as can be seen by looking at the front cover of this profile. It is located in Washington County on VT Route 12 and shares borders with Moretown, Berlin, Williamstown, Brookfield, Roxbury, Warren, and Waitsfield. It is about 7 miles south of Montpelier, the state capitol.



What's in A Name?

Northfield, Vermont, was probably named for Northfield, Massachusetts, since many of the proprietors came from that area. That town, in turn, was so named because it was the northernmost town in the colony when it was created.

Chronology

Aug. 10, 1784- Original town charter to Major Joel Matthews and associates.

May, 1785- First settlement made by Ames Robinson and others from Westminster.

Jan. 8, 1847- VT Central Railroad put into operation. The tracks divide what is now Northfield Village.

1823- Town inventory: one meeting house, one tavern, two stores, one saddler, one hatter, two blacksmith shops, one tannery, and 17 dwellings.

1866- Norwich University, nation’s oldest private military college, is moved to Northfield from Norwich, VT.

1870- The grade school is built.

1956- The New high school is built. Junior high moves into old high school.

Government

The Town and Village of Northfield are two separate municipal entities, but they share many resources. They operate under the Council/Manager form of government. To operate more efficiently, both the Boards of

Selectmen and Trustees employ one Municipal Manager. The Municipal Building houses the Manager's Office, the Superintendent of Public Works, Bookkeeping, Utility Offices, the Town Treasurer and the Town Clerk. The Village owns the building, and the Town pays rent. The Village Public Works operation pays rent to be housed in the Town-owned Municipal Garage, which also is the headquarters for the Police and Ambulance operations.

Table 1.2– Northfield General Planning Characteristics

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| <i>Vermont Forum on Sprawl Category</i> | 1 – “Traditional Center” |
| Town Plan | March, 2001 |
| Zoning Ordinance | 1972 |
| Subdivision Ordinance | None |
| Septic Approval Process | None |

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

The Public Works Department has been combined between Town and Village operations, creating a more cost-effective system. User fees support the Village-administered utilities (water, sewer, and electric). Currently, the Village and Town have different tax bases.

The Villages

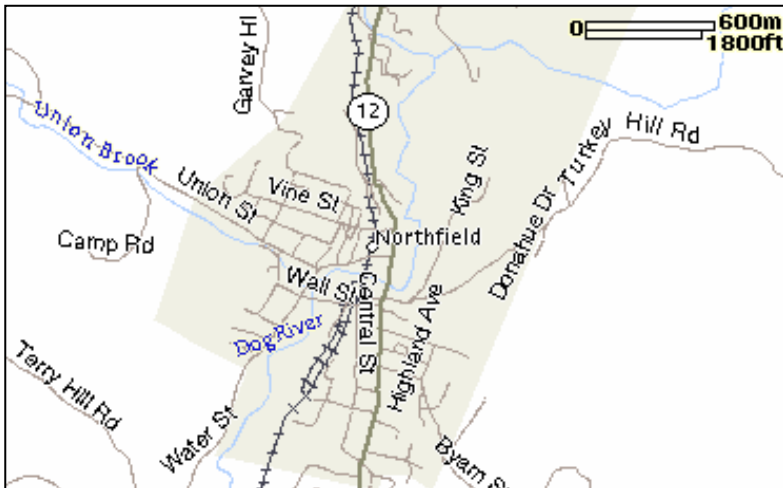
From 1785 to 1825, Northfield’s four villages were developed:

South Village had numerous small businesses and manufacturing operations. It is now known as **South Northfield**.

Center Village is the site of the first post office, town clerk's office, and churches, and it was the social and political center of town for many years. The area is now known as **Northfield Center**.



Factory Village, which is the present **Village of Northfield**, was the next to develop. The area was named for the woolen mill located there. The railroad arrived in Factory Village at Depot Square in the 1840’s. Due to all the new activity, the residents began to request streetlights, sidewalks, and fire and police protection. They also petitioned the legislature to establish a separate Village of Northfield. The Village was incorporated on November 14, 1855.



For the next half-century, Village residents taxed themselves for a variety of services. Sidewalks were laid down, the Water Department was established and the first electric plant was built in 1895. The first sewer lines were laid from 1901 to 1904. At the turn of the century, the Police Department was set up, and the two independent fire companies, which had existed since the 1860's, were turned over to Village control.

Northfield Falls was the last to develop, and by the late 1820’s it was a thriving community.

Section 2.
Human Capital

Table 2.1 – Northfield Population Characteristics

| | Northfield Village | Northfield Town¹ | Town Remainder² |
|--|-------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| Total Population, 2000 | 3,208 | 5,791 | 2,583 |
| Total Population, 1990 | 1,889 | 5,610 | 3,721 |
| Absolute Population Change, 1990-2000 | 1,319 | 181 | -1,138 |
| Percent Population Change, 1990-2000 | 69.8% | 3.2% | -30.6% |
| Persons per Square Mile, 2000 | 1,782.2 | 151.2 | 70.8 |
| Persons per Square Mile, 1990 | 1,049.4 | 146.5 | 101.9 |
| Area in Square Miles | 1.8 ³ | 38.3 ³ | 36.5 ³ |
| Percent Dependent, 2000 (under 18 and over 65) | 26.8 | 31.1 | 36.4 |
| Percent Rural, 1990 | | 100.0 | |
| Percent Rural Farm, 1990 | | 0.3 | |
| Percent Native Born (United States), 1990 | | 97.5 | |
| Percent Reporting French/French Canadian Ancestry, 1990 | | 26.5 | |

¹Town population numbers include Village numbers.

²Remainder equals Town numbers minus Village numbers.

³There is a discrepancy between the town/village area data given by the Census and by the Northfield Town and Village Reports. For the sake of local accuracy, the Town and Village Report numbers are used in this profile. Logically, this also affects the *Persons per Square Mile* and *Town Remainder* calculations.

Sources: Center for Rural Studies/VCGI. 2001. Vermont Indicators Online. <http://crs.uvm.edu/indicators/>
Town of Northfield, VT. 2000. Report of the Officers.
U.S. Census Bureau. 1990, 2000. American Factfinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov>
Village of Northfield, VT. 2000. Report of the Officers.

Table 2.1 shows that the Village contains the majority of Northfield’s population (55.4%). In fact the Town lost 30.6% of its population between 1990 and 2000, while the Village increased by 69.8%. Overall Northfield grew by 3.2%. It is also interesting to note that Northfield possesses significant French and French Canadian roots, common in Vermont, with 26.5% of Census respondents claiming ancestry in 1990.

Many Different Groups...

From the late 18th Century to the early 19th Century, Northfield was settled by people from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and older Vermont towns like Westminister. The Irish arrived in the 1840's, drawn to Northfield because of the availability of jobs working for the railroad. In the 1850's and the 1860's the Welsh came to work in the slate quarries. In the 1890's Italians, Spaniards, and the Scottish arrived to work in the granite sheds. Starting in the 1880's, French Canadians came to Northfield, many buying farms that were abandoned in the decades after the Civil War.

Table 2.2 – Age and Gender Demographic Comparisons

| | Northfield | | Washington County | |
|--------------------------------|------------|------|-------------------|------|
| | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 |
| Percent 0-19 Years Old | 31.0 | 29.3 | 28.1 | 26.4 |
| Percent 20-44 Years Old | 42.1 | 40.1 | 40.3 | 34.8 |
| Percent 45-64 Years Old | 15.6 | 19.0 | 18.8 | 26.0 |
| Percent 65+ Years Old | 11.3 | 11.6 | 12.6 | 12.8 |
| Percent 18-24 Years Old | 25.7 | 27.2 | 10.1 | 8.9 |
| Median Age | N.A. | 29.7 | N.A. | 38.5 |
| Percent Male | 57.0 | 54.9 | 49.0 | 49.0 |
| Percent Female | 43.0 | 45.1 | 51.0 | 51.0 |
| Percent Male (18-24) | 36.8 | 35.6 | 11.9 | 10.5 |
| Percent Female (18-24) | 11.0 | 17.0 | 8.3 | 7.5 |
| Percent Male 65+ | 4.2 | 4.4 | 4.7 | 5.1 |
| Percent Female 65+ | 7.1 | 7.3 | 7.8 | 7.7 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 1990, 2000. American Factfinder.
<http://factfinder.census.gov>

Table 2.2 illustrates the effects that Norwich University has upon town demographics. The amount of young people in Northfield is much higher than in surrounding Washington County, as evidenced by the Median Age (29.7) and the percent of 18-24 year-olds (27.2%). The presence of a college in town bolsters the younger cohorts.

The military nature of the college has an effect upon the gender ratios in town as well. The overall percent of males is higher (54.9%), although this number has decreased slightly from 1990. In contrast, Washington County has a higher percentage of females (51.0%), in keeping with the rest of the nation.

As is common in Vermont, both Northfield and Washington

County experienced a slight decrease in the younger cohorts between 1990 and 2000.

Table 2.3 – Northfield Housing and Family Characteristics

| | 1990 | 2000 |
|--|----------|-------|
| Number of Families | 1,194 | 1,225 |
| Number of Households | 1,682 | 1,819 |
| Average Family Size | N.A. | 2.95 |
| Average Household Size | 2.61 | 2.46 |
| Single-Mother Households | 111 | 182 |
| Total Children in Single-Parent Families | 223 | N.A. |
| Total Housing Units | 1,877 | 1,958 |
| Number of Owner-Occupied Housing Units | 1,168 | 1,244 |
| Number of Renter-Occupied Housing Units | 514 | 575 |
| Median Housing Unit Value | \$82,400 | N.A. |
| Median Rent | \$344 | N.A. |
| Median Gross Rent as % of Household Income | 24.0% | N.A. |
| Percent Increase in Households (1990-2000) | | 8.1 |
| Percent Increase in Housing Units (1990-2000) | | 4.3 |

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

U.S. Census Bureau. 1990, 2000. American Factfinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov>

these trends. It should be noted that much of the 2000 income data has yet to be released by the U.S. Census.

Table 2.3 shows that the number of families in Northfield, including overall households, increased between 1990 and 2000. The number of single-mother households also rose. In contrast, the number of housing units did not keep up with the number of households over the ten-year period with an 8.1% increase vs. 4.3%. This is in keeping with the declining housing vacancy rates in northwestern and central Vermont. The decline in average household size only exacerbates the situation. Perhaps the higher social prevalence of divorces nationwide is having an effect upon

The Famous Paines...

Elijah Paine was born in Brooklyn, Connecticut. In 1781 he graduated from Harvard College. Paine was one of the original Northfield grantees, and in 1784 he moved to the town. He served on the Vermont legislature, and was appointed commissioner to settle New York’s claim to Vermont land.

Charles Paine was Governor of Vermont, and also a railroad official. In fact, Charles financed and built the line of the VT Central Railroad that ran through Northfield in 1847. He is responsible for incorporating the town into the main route of the railroad. Charles was Elijah Paine’s son.

Table 2.4– Town, County, and State Income & Poverty Comparisons

| | Northfield | Washington County | Vermont |
|---|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| Annual Average Wage, 2000 | \$24,015 | \$28,306 | |
| Per Capita Income, 1989 | \$10,455 | \$13,547 | \$13, 527 |
| Median Family Income, 1989 | \$35,364 | \$35,596 | \$34,780 |
| Median Household Income, 1989 | \$29,609 | \$29,623 | \$29,792 |
| Persons for whom Poverty Status was Determined, 1989 | 4,354 | 52,450 | 541,372 |
| Poverty Rate, 1989 | 8.9% | 8.3% | 9.9% |
| Child Poverty Rate (persons under 18 years), 1989 | 15.6% | 9.9% | 11.5% |
| Elderly Poverty Rate (persons 65 years or over), 1989 | 12.9% | 11.9% | 12.4% |
| Percentage of Households with Public Assistance Income, 1989 | 5.9% | 6.8% | 7.2% |

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

Table 2.4 allows the reader to compare the financial situation of Northfield’s residents with the county and state at large. By and large average wages and median incomes are lower in the town than in Washington County and Vermont, except for the state’s Median Family Income. Northfield’s Poverty Rate (8.9%) is higher than Washington County’s (8.3%) but much lower than that state’s. Unfortunately the town’s Child Poverty Rate (15.6%) is the highest all around. It should be noted here as well that the U.S. Census income data for 2000 has not been released yet. Consequently, 1989 numbers are all that can be discussed here, with the exception of the Annual Average Wage.

Table 2.5– Educational Attainment, 1990 (persons 25 years and older)

| | Northfield | Washington County |
|--|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Less than High School | 18.1% | 18.7% |
| High School Diploma | 41.8% | 35.9% |
| Some College | 12.0% | 14.0% |
| Bachelor’s Degree | 11.2% | 15.3% |
| Graduate or Professional Degree | 10.9% | 9.1% |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 1990. American Factfinder. <http://factfinder.census.gov>

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://crs.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.

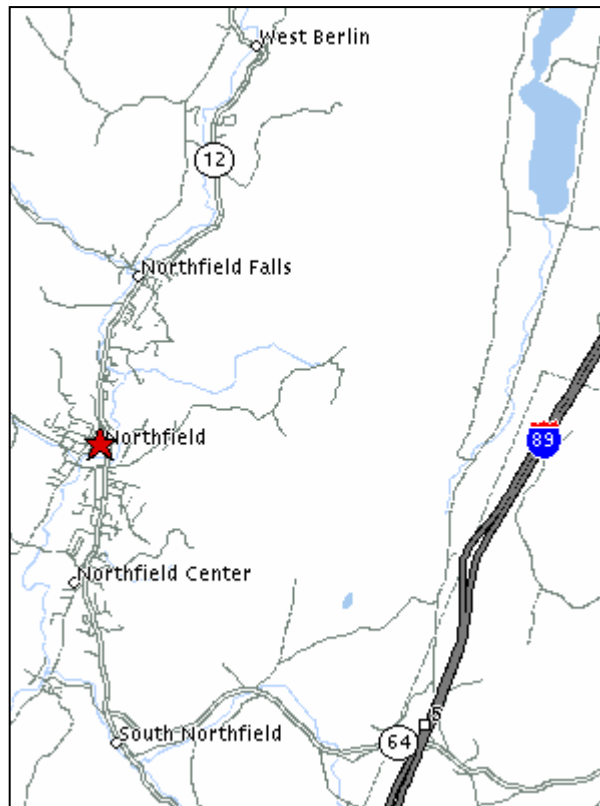
The fifth Northfield bridge, the **Stony Brook Covered Bridge**, was built in 1899, is was the last kingpost truss covered bridge built on a Vermont public highway.

Community Profile – Northfield, VT

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/>



Section 4.

Social Capital

Schools

A school is not just an education resource, but also a great social networking hub for the community. Northfield's school system, which includes the Middle/high School and Comisky Elementary school, ranks fourth out of 23 in the state.

Comisky Elementary School has approximately 371 students from Preschool to Grade 5. Judy Granger is the School Principal.

Northfield Middle/High School recently experienced a glorious moment when the high school girl's soccer team, the Marauders, won their 13th state championship title in a victory over the Arlington Eagles on October 27, 2001. The Middle/High School Principal is Peter Evans.

Norwich University is the oldest private military academy in the United States. The academy moved from Norwich to Northfield in 1866 after the college buildings in Norwich burned down. For many years Norwich was the chief source of horse cavalry officers and engineers, outside of Westpoint. In the 1960's, there were about 1000 students attending the university, with an instructor-student ratio of 1-13. Students who enroll in the Corps of Cadets follow a disciplined military regimen, while the other students lead a more traditional academic lifestyle. As stated earlier in this profile, Norwich is one of the most influential institutions in Northfield's history, as a major source of employment, education, and college culture.

Town Activities

Recreation

Northfield has approximately 36 acres of Park and Recreation facilities including two softball fields, children's playground, and a 350,000 gallon pool. There are many other community based recreational opportunities available, such as the Municipal Swimming pool, the Parks Department Program, the Northfield Country Club, the Northfield/Roxbury Snow Travelers, mountain biking, bicycle touring, fishing the Dog River, hiking Paine Mountain, cross country skiing, and the Northfield Petting Zoo. The Northfield Teen Center was established in 1996 to provide activities for middle and high school age youth.

Annual Celebrations

In 2001, Northfield held its 25th annual weekend-long celebration and the 28th annual parade for Labor Day. The celebration brings thousands of people to the town, providing \$35,000 annually to local businesses and organizations that set up booths in Depot Square. Visitors also spend thousands more at other local businesses in town.

In 2001, Northfield also celebrated its 25th annual quilt festival at Norwich University. The festival is New England's oldest and largest annual quilt event, with over 350 quilts on display in two buildings. In 2000, almost 900 people registered for classes, and there were more than 9,000 total visitors to the show.

Information Media

Newspapers

The Northfield News runs weekly and provides news and information to Northfielders and rare insights into rural Vermont living.

Websites

Northfield has a website at <http://www.in-vermont.com/northfield/>. The site is a great source of pictures and information, and it is apparent that those who maintain the site intend to add more in the future.

Section 5.

Natural Resource Capital

Geography and Layout

Today, the spatial relationship of the Town is influenced by a scattered settlement plan. Many hills and a lot of pastureland encouraged farmers to settle haphazardly. The Village is quite even and spacious. It is divided by the VT Central Railroad tracks and the Dog River, which run parallel and very close to each other. The east side contains the business district and higher class dwellings.

Mountains and Hills

The **Northfield Range** of the Green Mountains is located along the town's western boundary. There are no roads bisecting these mountains within the town boundaries. **Mount Adams**, at 3236 feet, is Northfield's highest peak.

Paine Mountain is located in the northeastern corner of town. This mountain was named after one of Vermont's distinguished early settlers, Elijah Paine.

Turkey Hill serves as a reminder of the bird that once provided food for so many early wilderness travelers. By the early 19th Century, the sight of a turkey would be a rarity.

Rivers

Dog River, a tributary of the Winooski, passes through the center of Northfield. There are two small streams, the **Cox Brook** and **Bull Run**, which are tributaries of Dog River.

The **Northfield Gulfs** are the result of the damming of the normal drainage by glacial drift and the floods of water resulting from the melting ice.

Community Profile – Northfield, VT

Table 5.1– Northfield Town Selected Natural and Geographical Information

| | |
|---|------|
| Land Area (square miles) | 38.3 |
| Water Area (square miles) | 0.0 |
| Percent Conserved Lands, 1999 | 3.6% |
| Change in Forest Land to Developed Land, 1970-90 (acres) | 28.7 |
| Change in Forest Land to Non-Forested Land, 1970-90 (acres) | 5.3 |
| Change in Non-Forested Land to Developed Land, 1970-90 (acres) | 7.1 |

Sources: Center for Rural Studies/VCGI. 2001. Vermont Indicators Online. <http://crs.uvm.edu/indicators/>
Town of Northfield, VT. 2000. Report of the Officers.

Section 6. **Sources**

This Community Profile is an attempt to bring together information from many different sources.

The internet resources used include:

For data:

The Center for Rural Studies Vermont Indicators Online Site at <http://crs.uvm.edu/indicators/>
The U.S. Census Bureau's American Factfinder at <http://factfinder.census.gov>

For text:

Northfield's own website at <http://www.in-vermont.com/northfield/>
As well as: <http://www.vermontquilt.org/>,
<http://www.virtualvermont.com/towns/northfield.html>,
<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/centralvermont/cv14.htm>,
and <http://www.all-links.com/newscentral/northamerica/vermont.html>

For maps:

<http://www.mapquest.com>

The written sources used were:

Marsland, William. 1962. *Northfield, Vermont: A Community Study*.
Town of Northfield, VT. 2000. *Report of the Officers*.
Village of Northfield, VT. 2000. *Report of the Officers*.