8. More Apples

Cider was the most common drink in Vermont in the early days of settlement and is still popular today. Up until about 1900, more apples were used for cider than for eating or cooking. Cider was also used to make jelly, vinegar, and brandy. Apples, especially valued as a source of vitamin C, were consumed in some form throughout the winter until spring fruits such as strawberries became available.

Robinson described the look of abandoned apple trees in pictures and words:

> *The apple trees, that for half a century have had no care, have not lost all characteristics of civilization, but show a manner of growth very different from the wild trees… The wild tree of the pasture is more like its neglected brethren of the orchard, scrubby and beset with sprouts, but with no such mark of the pruning saw as may be seen on these trees where the square-cut stumps of limbs jut from the trunk, their ends almost overgrown with bark and each with a branch of later growth curving upward therefrom, shaped like a monstrous teapot spout.*

Look around you and see if you can find examples of apple trees that have grown up since the orchard was abandoned and those still showing signs of pruning.

9. Succession

Landscapes are altered by a variety of disturbances: weather, fire, flood, and human activity all interrupt the natural process. The orchard you passed through was created by human "disturbance" and maintained for approximately 100 years. Once abandoned, succession began and the former orchard became a habitat to new plants and animals. The first plants to colonize are called pioneer plants — they are extremely hardy, grow quickly, and reproduce before other species come in. The pioneer plants in this area are golden rod, asters, dogwood, and multi-flora rose. Gradually they will be replaced by a new community of plants, including green ash, gray birch, and poplar.

10. Field Barn

An aerial photograph from the late 1930s showed us the location of this old field barn. You can still see the field stones that formed its foundation. By locating a barn near his field, a farmer could spare his horses the work of transporting heavy loads of hay on hot summer days. You can see the field, which is still producing hay, further up the trail.

There is a clue here that would tip us off to the barn's existence even if we didn't have the photograph. Can you guess what it is? It is the elm stump. Elms were very popular in the late 1800s and were often planted near buildings. These towering giants provided precious shade and a homey touch.

11. Changes in Agriculture

Robinson's drawing Haying Old and New Methods demonstrates how the hay in this field was first cut by hand with a scythe more than 150 years ago. During Robinson's lifetime the "new method" was with a horse-drawn mowing machine. This field is still hayed today, using modern equipment.

12. Pond/Old Field Succession

This small man-made pond was probably used for watering livestock as it is situated on former pasture. Remember that less than 100 years ago this area was all open grazing land. The area surrounding the pond is a prime example of old field succession. How does succession work? First, the types of plants found in any area are determined by the amount of available light, moisture, temperature, and soil type. As these conditions change, so do the plant communities. Once this pasture was abandoned, it was quickly invaded by pioneer plants. Eventually, these plants changed the growing conditions, making it more hospitable for intermediate species. In time, young sun-loving trees such as white pine and ash took hold. This is the stage of succession you see today. Eventually, these trees will create a more inviting habitat for shade tolerant trees, such as hickories and oaks.

13. Hickories

You have just entered a community of mature shagbark hickory trees. The forest you are walking through contains a number of other trees as well, including beech, sugar maple, white ash, and hophornbeam. These trees are climax species and indicate that the process of succession is complete. As you walk through this forest, think about the miles and miles of virgin woodland that greeted Vermont's first white settlers. Imagine traveling for days and weeks and never emerging from the forest cover. Does it help you understand why the early pioneers saw Vermont's wooded hillsides simply as a source of livelihood and as an endless resource? One hundred years after the first white settlers came to Vermont, Robinson spoke out about the need to protect Vermont's forests.

> *The Yankee, with his proverbial thriftiness and forecast, appears entirely to lose these gifts when it comes to the proper and sensible management of woodlands… It breaks the fierceness of the winds, and keeps the springs from drying up, and is a comfort to the eye, whether in the greenness of the leaf or the barrenness of the bough, and under its protecting arms live and breed the grouse, the quail and the hare and in its shadowed rills swim the trout.*

14. Waterfall

This delicate waterfall flows only seasonally, fed by melting snow and spring rains. The purplish blue bedrock you see is Crown Point limestone. One can easily imagine the Robinsons hiking up for the view and a picnic. Robinson might have been describing just such an outing when he wrote:

> *A day in the woods or by the streams is better for mind and body than one spent in idle gossip at the village store, and nine out of ten better for the pocket, though one come home without fin or feather to show for his day's outing.*

The guided portion of our trail ends here, but we hope you will use the information you have learned to look for more clues about this landscape as you return to the museum. There are stories all around you! If you are interested in reading some of Rowland Evans Robinson's works, his books are available at the Museum gift shop or may be found at your local library.

- *Hunting Without a Gun,* Forest and Stream Publishing, 1905.
- *In New England Fields and Woods,* Houghton, Miffin, 1896.
- *Silver Fields and Other Sketches of a Farmer-Sportsman,* Houghton, Miffin, 1921.

Rokeby Museum is a National Historic Landmark that connects visitors with the human experience of the Underground Railroad and with the lives of the Robinson family, who lived on and farmed this land for nearly 200 years.

Rokeby is open 10 to 5 daily from mid-May to the last Sunday in October. The house, however, is not open every day. It may be seen by guided tour only, with tours at 11:00 and 2:00 on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday.

Admission is $10 for adults, $9 for seniors, and $8 for students; children younger than 5 are admitted free. Admission to the exhibit, *Free & Safe,* is free on Tuesday afternoons from 1 to 5. Admission to the Museum includes all of the following:

Free & Safe: The Underground Railroad in Vermont

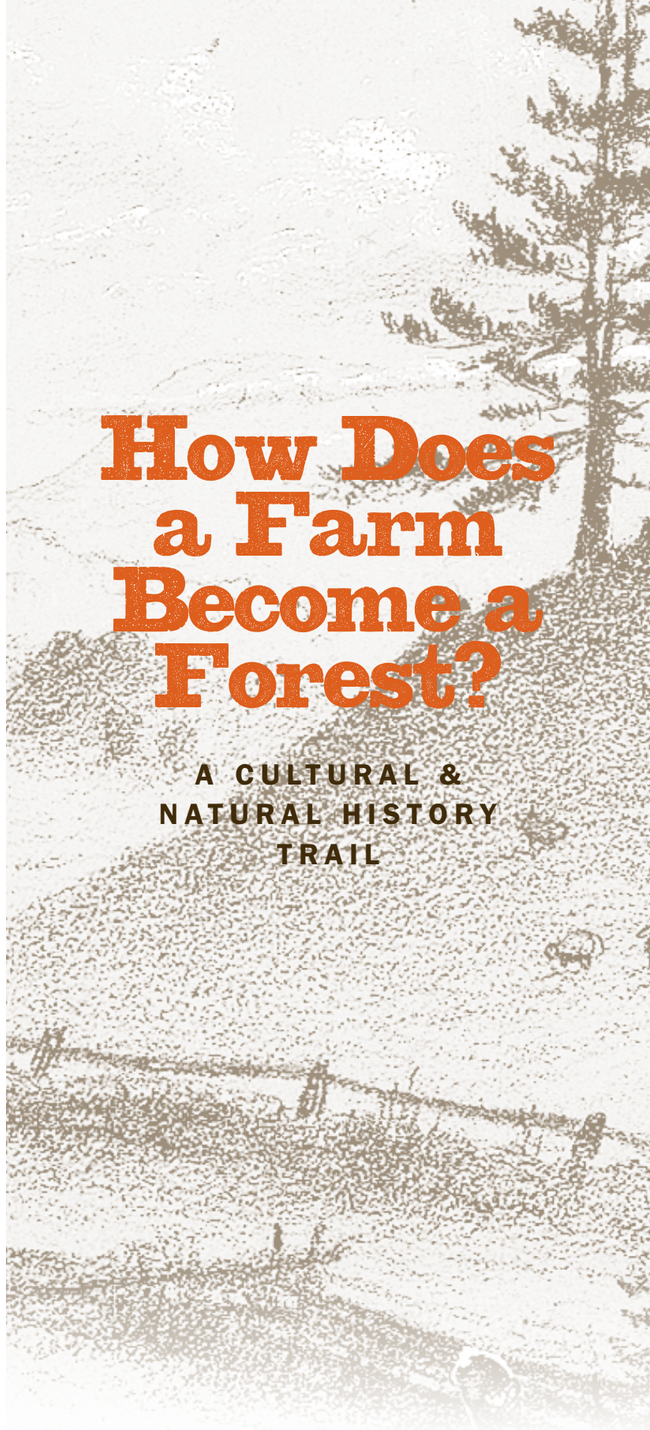
This 2,500 square foot exhibit will introduce you to Simon and Jesse — two fugitives from slavery who found shelter here in the 1830s. It traces their stories from slavery to freedom, introduces the abolitionist Robinson family who called Rokeby home, and explores the turbulent decades leading up to the Civil War.

House Tours

You may see the fully furnished house by guided tour only. Tours are Friday through Monday at 11:00 and 2:00, last about 45 minutes, and begin at the Other House.

Grounds and Outbuildings

The Museum's grounds and nine historic farm buildings are open daily from 10:00 to 5:00 during the season. A site map of the grounds and outbuildings is available at the reception desk. Picnic tables in the yard behind the house are available for lunch.



How Does a Farm Become a Forest?

A CULTURAL & NATURAL HISTORY TRAIL

ROKEBY MUSEUM

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Welcome to Rokeby Museum's Natural and Cultural History trail. We invite you to take a walk through a landscape that has been shaped over time by both human and natural forces. This guide will help you search for the clues that unlock its secrets.

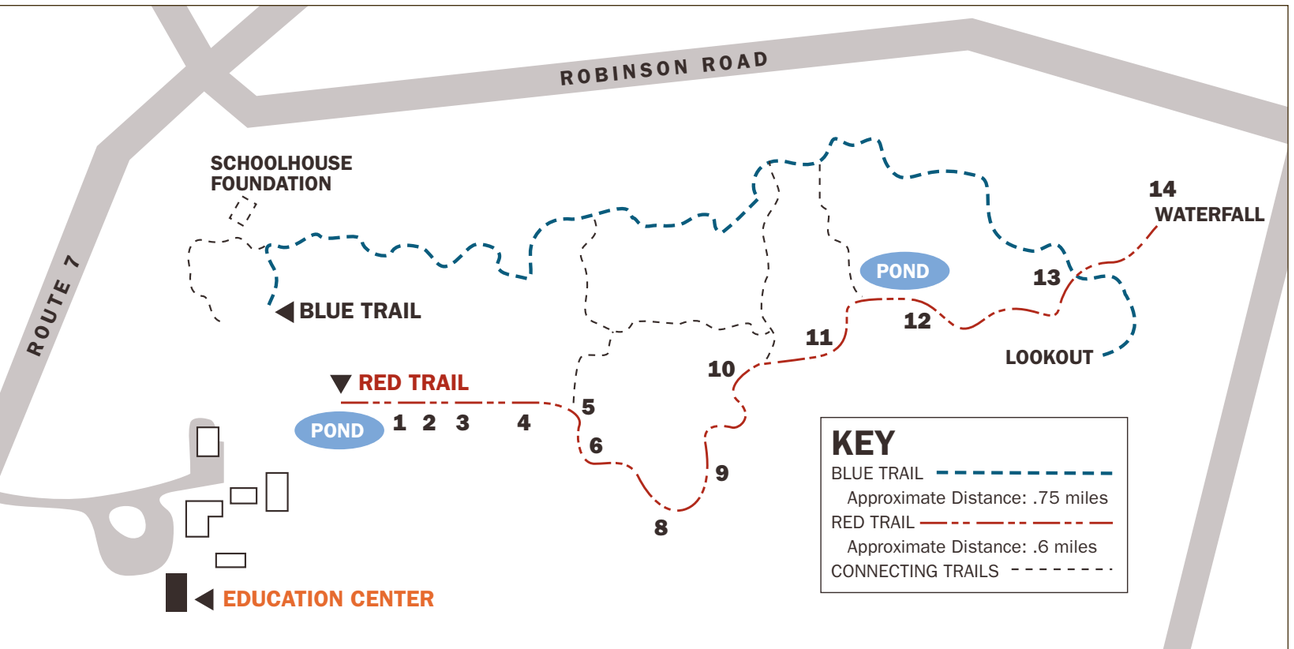
The Robinson family first came to this property in 1793, two years after Vermont became a state. For more than 150 years, this family of Quakers lived and worked here as farmers, artists, writers, naturalists, and social reformers. Today you will walk down paths that once led flocks of sheep and dairy herds to pasture, through orchards previously ripe with fruit and fields where grains once grew in abundance. You will see how one family settled and worked the land, and how much of the farm has reverted to forest as nature has taken over those parts of the landscape left untended.

Rowland Evans Robinson, in whose memory Rokeby Museum was originally founded, was born in 1833 in the family homestead, and died here 67 years later. First as an artist and later as a writer, he captured in pictures and words both the natural beauty of Vermont and many 19th-century agricultural practices. An avid naturalist, Robinson took to the fields and woods often and felt strongly about man's role as caretaker of the land. Throughout this guide we will share his sketches and descriptions of the world in which he lived.

The .6 mile interpretive trail (red trail, see map below) takes approximately 30 minutes to walk. You may return by the red or the blue trail. **Enjoy your walk!**

TRAIL GUIDELINES

- The trails are open during daylight hours and are restricted to foot travel only.
- Please help us to protect our trails by leaving only footprints and taking only photographs.
- Pets must be leashed.
- Rokeby Museum maintains this 90-acre property through public donations and memberships. Your contributions are greatly appreciated.



1. Clearing the Forest

In the years before white settlement, Vermont was almost completely forested. In 1793, the year the Robinsons came to Rokeby, the sound of the axe echoed through the woods, as Vermont's virgin forests were cut to clear the land. Years later, Robinson reflected back on this period:

> *Wherever civilization and improvement have, for a hundred years or so laid hands upon the country which God made and man for the most part spoils, there is but little woodland left but that of second growth, and this is yearly dwindling, as some new industry arises and calls for trees of size and kind before of little value. Such woodlands, if they have not the grandeur and solemnity and mystery of the primeval forest, have beauty and their seasons of silence and some secrets of their own to keep from the world at large.*

By the 1870s, 80 percent of Vermont's forests had been cleared, primarily to open the land for farming. The forests also provided the means for building houses and barns, for making tools and household implements, and as a source of fuel for heating homes during Vermont's rugged winters. Two centuries have passed since the early days of settlement. The forests that were cleared during the 19th century have returned as farmlands continue to be abandoned and Vermont is once again 80 percent forested.

2. Stone Walls

After the forests were cut, the job of clearing a field was only half done. In order to grow crops, stumps had to be pulled, and then the back-breaking and tedious task of stone removal began. To your right you can see the remains of an old stone wall. It served two purposes: first, as a place to pile stones removed from the field, and second to create a fence to keep livestock from grazing in the newly planted field. How many years do you think it took to clear the field just beyond the stone wall?

3. The Merinos Arrive!

In 1810, the Robinsons imported some of the first Merino sheep to Vermont. This was the beginning of a prosperous time, not only for the Robinson family, but for Addison County as well. By the mid-1840s, Addison County boasted 373 sheep per square mile, the highest concentration of sheep in any US county. The path you are walking was once a farm road that led the sheep to pasture. Close your eyes and imagine the sounds of hundreds of Merinos bleating as they scramble along the path, anxious to reach the lush pastures beyond. As Robinson described:

> *From old Fort Dummer to the Canada line one could hardly get beyond the sound of the sheep's bleat unless he took to the great woods, and even there he was likely enough to hear the intermittent jingle of a sheep bell chiming with the songs of the hermit and wood thrushes, or to meet a flock driven clattering over the pebbles of a mountain road.*

4. Field or Pasture?

Historians and archaeologists often take on the role of detectives as they search for clues to the past. They actually "read" the landscape to determine how the land was used by early settlers. With a little help you can too. Step into the corridor on the right side of the trail between the farm lane and the field. Notice how the tree canopy (tops of the trees) slopes down toward the field. Each year, as the farmer plowed, he stayed slightly inside the edge of the field to protect his equipment from damage. As nature took her course, shrubs and small trees slowly invaded this strip of land. Even though this field is still in use today, the succession of growth along its edge confirms how it was used in the past.

The other side of the trail tells a different story. How would you describe the tree growth to the left of the farm lane? Here, the trees are all about the same age. This indicates it was once pasture land. Sheep or dairy cows would graze right up to the edge of the pasture, preventing any young shrubs from surviving. When it was abandoned, the plants and trees all grew up at once.

5. Hills and Valleys

As you walk the next section of the trail, notice how the ground rises and falls ever so slightly, creating a succession of tiny hills and valleys. Can you guess what created this terrain? The tiny hills and valleys provide us with a clue that we are entering an orchard. Apples need well-drained soil, so each row was planted on a slight rise with a valley for drainage in between. The neat rows of trees are gone now, but the contour of the land persists.

Many of Vermont's early farmers raised apples, brought with them from southern New England. Used primarily for family consumption, apples thrived in Vermont's climate and soil.

6. Old Well

When you find an old well, it usually means that a building is not far off. In this case we can find no evidence of any structure nearby. That and the rough construction of the well suggest that it was used for agricultural purposes, such as livestock or orchard watering. We often picture 19th-century farmers carrying water with a yoke and pails. The Robinsons used a method that may surprise you. One farm account describes a water pipe that was made from a bored log and buried in the ground. The log connected the well to a location on the farm where the water was needed. The account book recorded the exact locations of holes in the log where you could "shove in lead pipe" and bring the water to the surface. An ingenious method to save the physical labor of carrying water by hand.

7. Apples

The prosperous sheep industry began to decline in the middle of the 19th century. Fruit farming, practiced by many Vermont farmers on a small scale, was one alternative to raising sheep. The Robinsons committed to this new venture, and in the spring of 1849, they planted 76 varieties of apples and 63 types of pears. Plums, currants, gooseberries, and raspberries were also grown. They carefully recorded each variety, row by row in a special orchard journal. The fruit trees you see today are mostly self-seeded and not the original stock. Just off the trail you can clearly see a ring of "suckers" grown up around a central stump, which may have been planted by the Robinsons. The portion of the orchard you are passing through now was abandoned years ago and is in the early stages of succession *(see section 9)*.

Name of Apples

1. *Bellflower*
2. *Northern Spy*
3. *Esopus Spitzenburgh*
4. *R.I. Greening*
5. *Baldwin*
6. *Roxbury Russett*
7. *Peck's Pleasant*
8. *Summer Queen*
9. *Dow'sWinter Pippen*
10. *Swaar*
11. *Yellow Siberian Crab*
12. *American Golden Sweet*
13. *Porter*
14. *Yellow Bellflower*
15. *Famuse Pomme de Neige*
16. *Newtown Pippin*
17. *Strawberry*
18. *Maiden's Blush*