

EARTH DAY CELEBRATION

Vermont's Native Forests

As of 2017, Vermont state was over 76% forested. That's about **4.5 million acres of trees!** That number may seem staggering but it's not nearly as astonishing as the fact that in the 1800 and 1900s, **Vermont lost 80% of its forested land.** This left barren ground where sheep farmers raised their flocks and loggers capitalized on the timber industry.

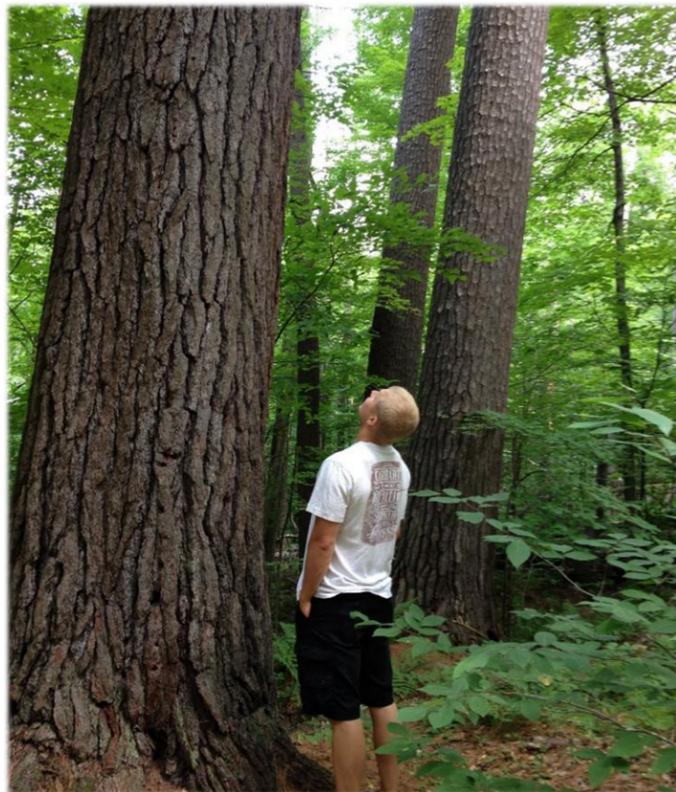
Merino sheep farming was booming in Vermont in the mid-1800s. Farmers bought land, logged it for profit, and raised stone walls to keep sheep. Merino were prized for their exemplary wool and relative ease of care. However, in the late 1800's, the railroad reached the Midwest and many farmers either moved west with their flock or sold off their animals. The Midwest offered something Vermont could not—flat, grassy land, perfect for sheep. The wool industry left the state.

The lumber industry picked up steam in the mid to late 1800's and became a huge business for Vermont. However, the state couldn't sustain the massive quantities of lumber harvested.



View of Billings Farm c. 1900

Today when you walk through the forests of Vermont, you'll probably see some big trees, but on average most trees are 6-15 inches in diameter. Some old growth trees reach more than 40 inches in diameter and are **over 200 years old.**



Fisher-Scott Memorial Pines

We can count ourselves lucky that the sheep and timber industries didn't last too long in Vermont. As these industries left, our forests grew back on their own.

Although Vermont's forests suffered a serious decline, there were pockets left untouched. Today you can find these "pockets" of old growth forest all over the state. However, the amount of old growth forest totals less than 1,000 acres.

The Fisher-Scott Memorial Pines is a 22-acre plot of land in Arlington, VT where some of the largest white pines in the state live. It was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1976. This patch of forest is tucked away off Old Route 7 on a steep hill next to Mill Brook. It's a peaceful and awe-inspiring place to stand.

But how did these trees survive? Likely, it was luck. Farmers of the 1800 and 1900's had massive pieces of land to manage and often never completely finished logging their land.