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Dear Educator:

Enclosed you will find the teacher packet you requested for the Old Constitution House State Historic Site. It contains a variety of pre and post-visit activities. The “Windsor Word Search” and “Constitution Crossword” are designed specifically as pre-visit exercises. They will introduce concepts about early Vermont and its Constitution, and are best used along with the short story, *Seven Days in Windsor*. (This story is based on the known facts surrounding the creation of Vermont’s Constitution and refers to artifacts in the museum’s collection such as Windsor’s 1772 town charter, Aaron Hutchinson’s sermon, and Mr. Ely’s cartridge box. Most of the characters are historical figures, but the young hero, Jon, is fictional.)

The “Fill-ins and Essays” is a post-visit exercise that reinforces key concepts and allows students to use information they learn during their visit to Old Constitution House. The “Themes for Further Discussion” will provide a few ideas that may be explored during or after your site visit.

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There should be one adult to accompany every six children when you visit, and reservations are required. Please call the Division’s regional office in Plymouth Notch if you have any questions. We look forward to your visit and hope you enjoy this packet!

Sincerely,

William W. Jenney
Regional Historic Site Administrator

SEVEN DAYS IN WINDSOR

By

William W. Jenney

Jonathan sat rather uncomfortably on the hard meetinghouse bench and looked slowly around the room. Here was the most impressive gathering he had ever seen. Some of the delegates were finely dressed – a few wore white powdered wigs, and one even had a gold watch chain hanging from his silk vest pocket! But most of the men were simple farmers, wearing their “Sunday best” to be sure, but nothing too fancy.

Today he had turned twelve years old, and Jonathan knew that he was the luckiest boy in Windsor. To celebrate his birthday, his father, who was one of the delegates to the “Grand Convention,” had asked him if he’d like to come along to the opening meeting. Jonathan – most of his friends called him Jon – had jumped at the chance. Jon noticed that he was the youngest boy in the room, and he managed to sit up even straighter. He wanted to make sure he heard everything about this new republic that had been declared a few months earlier.

That was back in January “in the year of our Lord 1777” (as the preacher liked to say). Jon had listened to the lively discussions at the supper table ever since. Not many men involved their wives in political matters, but Jon was proud that his father was more open-minded. He saw it as a sign of the great respect his parents had for each other.

That respect had certainly helped the family through some rough times. Things hadn't been easy those first few years after they moved up from Connecticut. Jon was only six years old when his father purchased land in the New Hampshire Grants, as much of the region was then called. The Royal Governor of New Hampshire, Benning Wentworth, had granted charters for 138 towns. Many of these towns were just names on paper – most of them were wilderness, and no one actually lived in them yet. Even Windsor, which was fairly easy to get to because of its location on the Connecticut River, still had large forested areas in 1777.

Jon's parents worked hard to improve their small farm, and their efforts had paid off. Jon's father was now regarded as one of Windsor's most successful citizens. In fact, he had been elected as a delegate to the current convention because of his high standing in the community. Most of the other delegates had similar stories and represented towns from all over the Vermont Republic.

The pounding of a gavel quickly brought Jon back to the present. The speaker was calling the meeting to order. Silence fell over the room, and Jon could tell that this man was someone very important. The distinguished gentleman then declared that the convention "to form a constitution for the State of Vermont" was officially convened. The date of July 2, 1777 was entered into the record.

The Reverend Aaron Hutchinson was the next to speak. The Reverend was minister to several of the surrounding towns. Jon had heard Mr.

Hutchinson speak on other occasions and knew that sometimes his sermons could be a little boring.

But on this special day, Jon did his best to pay attention. The Reverend had a long list of complaints against New York and Great Britain. Jon remembered his father talking about the problems with New York. It all started back in 1764 when King George of Great Britain decided that the New Hampshire Grants really belonged to the colony of New York. The New York governor then ordered the settlers to purchase new charters for their towns. This upset many settlers because they had already purchased their land from New Hampshire. Large landowners simply could not afford to buy their property a second time. Led by Mr. Ethan Allen, some of them formed the Green Mountain Boys to protect their interests. Jon had heard about the fights between the Green Mountain Boys and the “Yorkers” – those who believed in the King’s new decision in favor of New York. Many of the Yorkers lived in the southeastern part of the Grants. Indeed, Jon’s own town of Windsor had taken out a second charter from New York in 1772.

Mr. Hutchinson went on to talk about the problems with Great Britain. Jon was always interested to hear about the Revolution, ever since the Westminster Massacre. Westminster was a small town south of Windsor. Back in March 1775, a group that opposed New York took over the Westminster courthouse. (The American Continental Congress had encouraged such actions because the courthouses were symbols of royal authority.) Some New York officers shot into the courthouse, and two men inside were killed. The men who died in Westminster became known as

“the first martyrs of the American Revolution” when war broke out between Great Britain and the colonies just a few weeks later.

The Americans had some early victories against the British, and some of these battles were close to home. In 1775 the Green Mountain Boys captured the British strongholds at Ticonderoga and Crown Point on Lake Champlain. An American fort called Mount Independence was quickly constructed on the Vermont shore just opposite Ticonderoga. This fort complex was key to preventing the British from separating New England from the other colonies. So far, this American strategy had worked. But Jon had recently heard some disturbing rumors that the British were hoping to recapture Fort Ti.

Jon’s thoughts drifted back to the day when some of the local men marched off to fight the Redcoats. He remembered the beautiful leather cartridge box that Mr. Ely had carried.

The Reverend’s sermon was going on and on, and Jon could feel his eyelids getting heavy. Finally, the preacher concluded his remarks. Someone asked that a copy of the sermon be published for those citizens who could not attend the meeting. Everyone agreed.

For Jon, the next few days were pretty much routine. Chores started at 4:00 each morning, and after breakfast he helped his two older brothers with the haying. Jon had some free time, too. He liked to go down to the creek to test his skills against the big brook trout that lurked under the rotten log just out of reach.

Jon's father, busy with convention business, was rarely at home during this time. Committees had been formed to help write a constitution for the new government. The delegates had received some good advice from their friend in Philadelphia, Dr. Thomas Young. It was Dr. Young who had suggested that the new republic call itself "Vermont" (and not "New Connecticut" as it had originally been named.) Young also recommended that the Vermonters use Pennsylvania's constitution as a model for their own. And so far, the draft for the Vermont Constitution was very similar to Pennsylvania's.

However, there were some men at the Windsor Convention who believed that the Vermont Constitution should be special. They managed to include sections to prohibit slavery and to give all men the right to vote. There was even a part to establish a system of public schools. (Jon wasn't too sure he liked the school idea!) No other constitution in America included such provisions.

Committee sessions would last for many hours, and so it was usual to end the day at Mr. Elijah West's tavern across the road. The tavern's many rooms were perfect for small gatherings. There, the delegates could continue discussions while sipping some of Mr. West's refreshing cider and ale. The tavern had always been a meeting place, not just somewhere to stay overnight or to enjoy a cooling drink. News from the outside world would often arrive first at the local tavern.

By July 8, much of the Constitution had been written, but a few small details still needed to be worked out. The convention once again adjourned to Mr. West's tavern. Just for something to do, Jon and his best friend Caleb decided to walk into town. The afternoon was very hot and muggy, and a storm could be heard in the distance.

Suddenly a horse and rider raced past the boys and stopped in front of the tavern. The man stumbled into the building, nearly colliding with a lady who was standing near the doorway. Jon and Caleb ran to see what all the excitement was about, and they arrived just in time to hear the rider deliver his message – the British had invaded Vermont!

Stunned, they heard the details. The British, under the command of General John Burgoyne, had captured Fort Ticonderoga and Mount Independence and has chased the American army into Vermont. Just the previous day, July 7, the American general, Arthur St. Clair, had delayed the British advance with what was called a “rear guard action” at Hubbardton. But the British were still somewhere in Vermont. The rider had seen the Battle of Hubbardton from his nearby farm and had traveled all night in order to get the news to the honorable representatives now meeting in Windsor.

Jon could see that the delegates were greatly alarmed by this report. Some of them were from towns not far from where the British were last seen. One gentleman declared that he was leaving immediately to protect his family and farm. Another said that the Constitution must be finished

before anyone left. Most of them knew it would be very difficult to get all the delegates back together again. No one could decide what to do.

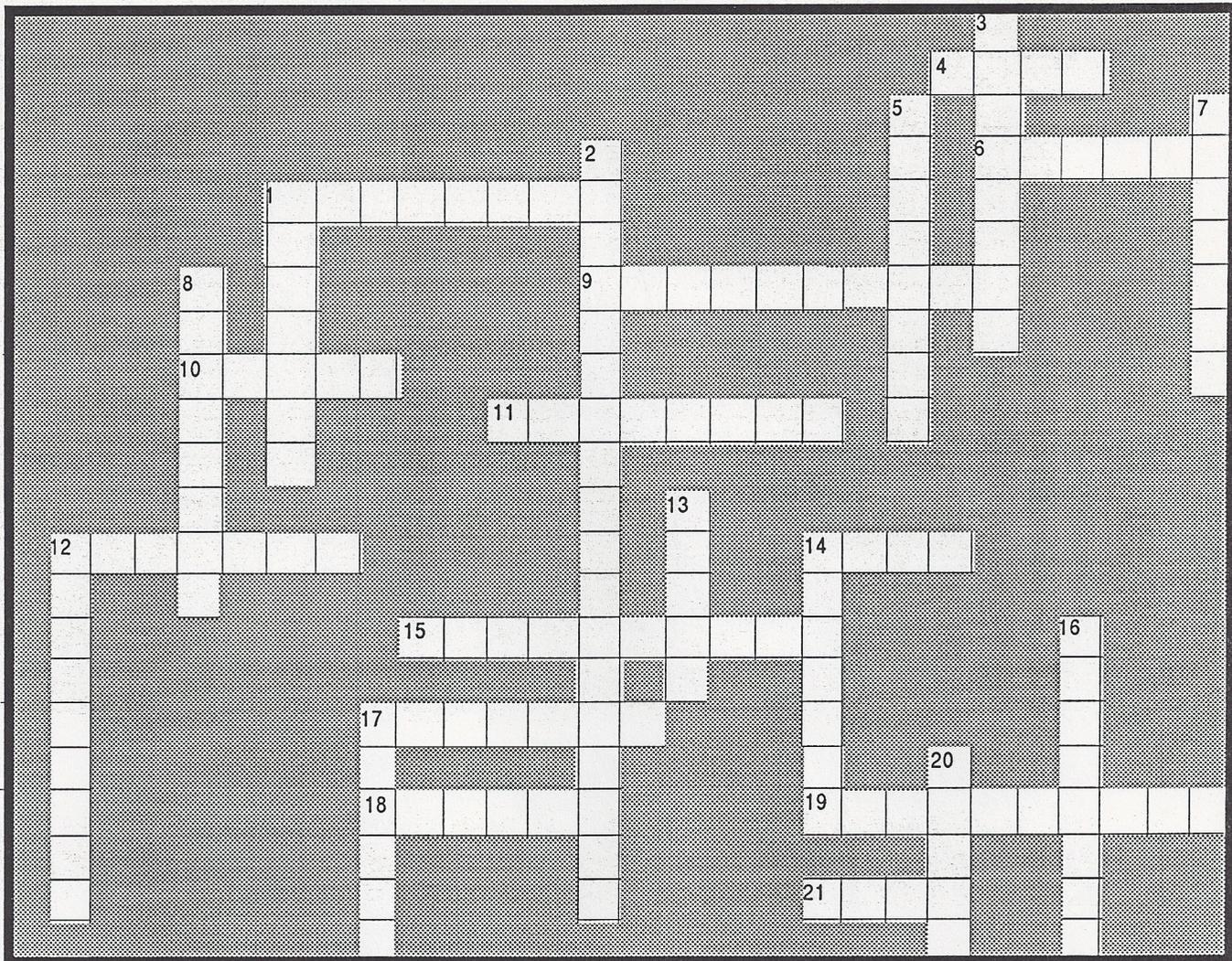
But the matter was taken out of their hands. A tremendous thunderstorm suddenly hit the town. The violent lightning and heavy rain made it impossible to leave the tavern. The delegates decided to make the best of things and get back to work. And so, in a “baptism of thunder, lightning and rain,” they concluded their business and adopted the new Constitution for Vermont right there at Mr. West’s tavern. Jon knew that he had witnessed an extraordinary event.

Epilogue

The Vermont Republic existed for fourteen years, independent of the other American states. Vermont finally became a state itself in 1791, the first after the original thirteen. Jon’s great-great-great grandson – who lives in Windsor today – still enjoys many of the rights and principles established by the Vermont Constitution more than 225 years ago.

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Constitution Crossword



CLUES

Across

1. The right to vote
4. Month when the Vermont Constitution was adopted
6. King of Great Britain
9. Only Revolutionary battle on Vermont soil.
10. Vermont became a _____ in 1791.
11. Vermont became a _____ in 1777.
12. New York granted Windsor's town _____ in 1772.
14. Windsor tavern keeper.
15. A meeting, such as the one in Windsor
17. Ethan Allen's opponent
18. Inn
19. War between Great Britain and the colonies
21. "Baptism of thunder, lightning and _____."

Down

1. American general
2. Before independence, Vermont was known as the _____.
3. British general
5. Major geographic feature in Vermont.
7. Pioneer
8. William French & Daniel Houghton died in the Westminster _____.
12. Lake on Vermont's west border
13. Ticonderoga & Independence
14. Location of Old Constitution House
16. Vermont was a republic for _____ years
17. A united country
20. Strong supporter of Vermonters in Philadelphia

Fill-Ins and Essays

1. "A Free and Independent _____."
2. Vermont became the _____ state in 1791.
3. The Vermont Constitution was the first in America to prohibit _____ and to establish _____ and _____.
4. Not all Vermonters supported the goals of Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys. Charles Phelps and William Shattuck were among those who supported New York's claim to the region. These New York sympathizers were popularly known as _____.
5. Vermont's state officers, such as the Governor and the Legislators, are elected every _____ years.
6. The new Republic's government was soon regarded as the first reliable authority the settlers had experienced. List three things that the Vermont government did for its citizens.
7. When Vermont declared its independence in 1777, many Vermonters wanted to join the thirteen American states. The American Congress wouldn't let them. Why?
8. What was the Council of Censors?
9. In 1791, the U.S. Secretary of State wrote to Governor Chittenden informing him of Vermont's admission to the union. Name this Secretary of State. (Hint: He became our country's third president.)
10. Before Montpelier became Vermont's capital in 1805, the state capital changed location every year. Why?
11. The Old Constitution House operated as a tavern until 1848. What happened to it after that?

Windsor Word Search

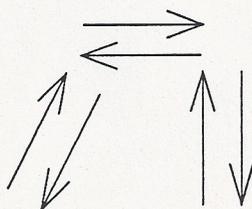
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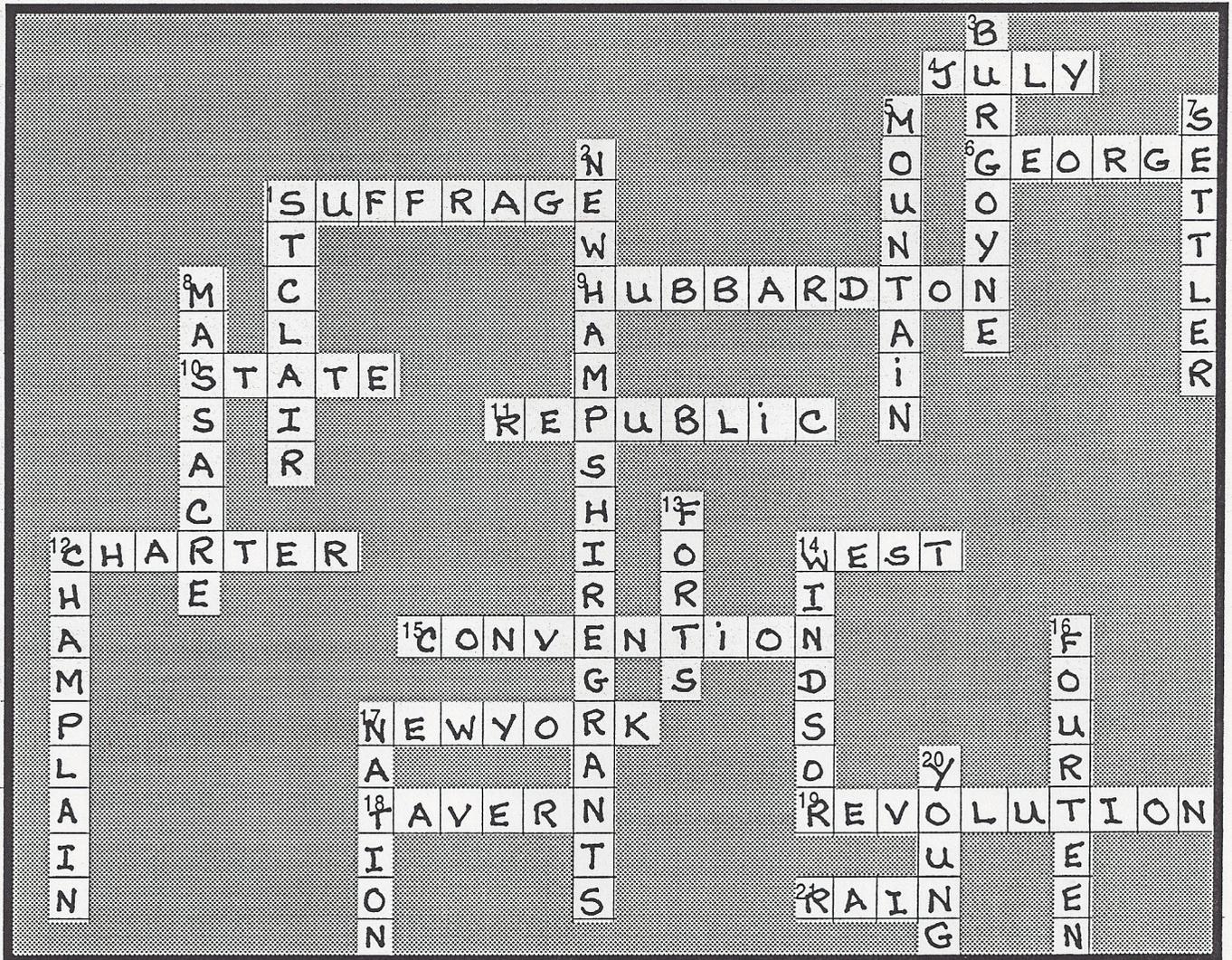
River
Vote
Green Mountain Boys
Delegate
Public School
Governor

Constitution
Statehood
Vermont
Wentworth
Storm
Independence

And ways to look:



Crossword Solution



Fill-Ins and Essays Answers

1. State
2. Fourteenth
3. Prohibited slavery; established universal manhood suffrage and system of public schools
4. Yorkers
5. Two
6. Protected property, issued currency, established postal system and militia
7. Primarily because of New York's objection. New York's good will was vital to the war effort.
8. The Council of Censors met every seven years to determine whether the executive and legislative branches had properly performed their duties and whether any revisions in the Constitution were necessary. The Council was abolished in 1870.
9. Thomas Jefferson
10. To satisfy the different factions on the east and west sides of the Green Mountains. Montpelier, approximately in the center of the state, was a good compromise.
11. It was used for retail merchandising and small manufacturing shops. Converted into a tenement house in 1870, turned into a warehouse around 1890. Moved and restored in 1914. In 1961, it was added to the state-wide system of historic sites, operated by the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation.

THEMES FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

The following themes are suggested for the classroom or for when you visit the site.

EARLY TAVERN

- Integral part of 18th/early 19th century American village.
- Welcome refuge from the elements and the discomforts of travel.
- Overnight lodging, dining, public bar (with separate entrance).
- Place for meetings, to hear the latest news.
- Multi-purpose rooms, dormitory sleeping arrangements.
- Ladies would always travel in the company of their husbands, would have separate accommodations.

REPUBLIC vs STATEHOOD

- The debate — to remain independent or to join the United States?
Pros and cons for each position.
- Was the decision to become a state a good one?

FOLK ART

The Old Constitution House has some fine examples of American folk art in its collection. What is folk art? Who made it and why?

Examples on exhibit:

- Mrs. Shute's watercolor drawing of the "Hill of Science."
- Mary Robinson's theorem (stencilling on velvet), made when she ran an academy for young ladies in the building in 1826.
- Memorial watercolor dedicated to someone who died in the 1814 Battle of Plattsburgh. (The tradition of memorial images.)
- Several examples of human hair decoration — popular during the Victorian period.

Answers

Windsor Word Search

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