

## WELCOME TO BRANDON

Chartered 1761 and first settled in 1772

Your tour begins at the Brandon Museum and Visitor Center located in the Stephen A. Douglas Birthplace, near the junction of Routes 7 and 73W, next to the Baptist Church. The Museum and Visitor Center houses a complete selection of local and state brochures and maps as well as a museum showcasing Brandon's history. This self-guided walking tour takes approximately an hour to walk and is less than two miles in length.

1) You are now leaving the Stephen A. Douglas Birthplace. Douglas was born on April 23, 1813. He was known as "The Little Giant," standing at only 5' 4". He is best known for the debates that he held with Abraham Lincoln while both were running for the senate seat from Illinois in 1858. This race Douglas won, only to lose against Lincoln in the presidential race two years later. Built about 1800, the Douglas Birthplace is one of the oldest standing buildings in Brandon.

2) Turn right as you leave the Museum to the next building, the Baptist Church. It was built in 1832 and was the center of the Abolitionist Movement in Brandon. Though it lost its steeple to a hurricane in 1950, the steeple was replaced in 2000 after several years of community fund-raising.

### Brandon Baptist Church, c. 1875 - 1880

3) Face away from the Baptist Church and cross to the island where you will see the marble monument in memory of Stephen A. Douglas. It was presented to the town in 1913 on the centennial of Douglas' birth by Albert G. Farr. The front bronze tablet has a bas-relief portrait of Douglas. On the back is a

replica of the Douglas monument at the University of Chicago.

4) Cross back to the Baptist Church and cross Route 73 (Champlain St.) and look at the south side of the brick house on the corner. It was built as the home of Benajah Douglass, grandfather of Stephen A. Douglas. When this house was built in 1829, buildings were sometimes built on the property line to allow for as much open space as possible on the opposite side. Since the property line is not perpendicular to the street, the south wall intersects the front wall at an acute angle.

5) Stay on the sidewalk and head down (south) to 3 Pearl Street, next door to Benajah Douglass' house. It is one of the oldest documented houses in Brandon that comprises the rear portion of the existing structure. Josiah Parmenter, an early settler, built this portion of the home in about 1799. The front part was built later in the 19th century.

6) As Parmenter's wealth increased he built the adjacent brick house, 5 Pearl St., in about 1820. Many of the early, or first generation, homes were small and simply built and were replaced by larger dwellings after a few decades. Fortunately, in this case, Parmenter kept the old house in which one of his daughters and her husband, a doctor, lived.

7) Notice 9 Pearl St., a rambling three-gabled, wood-shingle house that is actually three small dwellings that were moved together more than 100 years ago.

8) 11 Pearl Street, known as the Marsh House, is one of the most ornate Greek / Roman Revival homes in Brandon. Completed in 1852, it took two years for Rodney V Marsh to build it. Marsh, a lawyer, was an ardent abolitionist and served in the Vermont legislature from 1856-1858. The home remains a private residence.

*A tour option here is to walk down Pearl Street and enjoy the shaded street. If you skip Pearl Street, continue reading after entry 9.*

As you head toward the railroad bridge, notice various brick and wood Federal-Style homes which date between 1805 and 1832. 21 Pearl St, a beautiful Federal Style home, was built in about 1827. Later, in 1833, it was purchased by Nathan Sprague, Sr., who was a farmer and banker in town,

and also the father-in-law of Rodney Marsh.

9) 29 Pearl St., to the right, just on the other side of the railroad bridge, is the Farrington homestead, built in 1799 by John Conant for Gideon Horton. This is one of the oldest and most elaborate (for its date) remaining houses in the village.

*Walk back on Pearl Street towards town. When you reach the top of Pearl Street, turn right and head (east) towards town.*

10) Past the post office and to the right, 30 Conant Square, is a large white-painted-brick building, c. 1820, which had been known as "The Town House" and accommodated overnight guests. The front entryway has etched glass windows, sidelights and a transom light. It is now senior housing but was originally built as the home of John A Conant, a son of John Conant, who was an early settler, builder, and industrialist.

11) 8 Conant Sq., the Briggs Carriage building, was moved here before 1869 by Sumner and Henry D Briggs, carriage makers. Judging from early maps and datable elements of the building, it was located elsewhere and probably was part of the iron works. This is one of the few buildings remaining from Brandon's industrial past. Down Furnace Street and behind the Briggs building is an old blacksmith's shop, also once part of the iron works.

12) 4 Conant Square (with the large windows), was built in the 1920s, in part, on the foundations of the J. L. Cane Flour & Feed Mill, which was the original grist mill built by John Conant in 1816. First used as an auto showroom, it now houses a retail shop.

13) Look over the river to the other side of the falls. You will see the former generating station, now a private dwelling, of the Hortonia Light and Power Co., which first owned this building in the 1890s. A water turbine, the flume pipe for which came from the dam across the street and still can be seen, generated the electricity. Electric-arc street lighting was introduced to Brandon in 1889. Also, down along the right side of the river was located the iron works begun by the Conants in the 1820s, and later incorporated into the Brandon Iron & Car Wheel Co., and the Howe Scale Company. These early industrial buildings no longer exist.

14) Built in 1889, the Smith Block replaced a previous building, called the Simond's Block, which was of the same size and plan, and which had been destroyed by fire. The second and third floors at one time housed the Masons, the Grange, a dentist's office, and a dance studio. The cast-iron store front remains from the earlier building.

#### **Smith Block, c. 1890**

15) The Congregationalists organized in 1785 and built this church in 1832. The church tower houses the Town Clock. The small side chapel, known as Fellowship Hall, was built about 1860 and added to around 1900. The Brandon Town Cemetery land was established in 1788 and is next to the church. Here lie early Brandon settlers and veterans of the Revolutionary War. Near the front of the cemetery are the Douglass' graves: father, grandfather, grandmother, and aunt of Stephen A. Douglas. (Douglas dropped the last "s" of his name in the 1840s.)

16) Continue around the green with its bandstand and walk in front of the Methodist Church. This church was designed and built by Clinton Smith in 1876, at a cost of \$17,500. It is of a nineteenth century eclectic style. About 1900 the steeple was lost and in 1934 the church edifice was badly damaged by fire.

17) The real estate office building, next to the church, was built in 1877 and originally was used as the Methodist parsonage.

Now cross Franklin Street (Route 7). South on Franklin Street are a number of early houses dating from the first third of the 19th century.

18) The Brandon Free Public Library, built in 1832, was known later as the Parmenter Block and housed a store and warehouse. It was acquired by the library in 1907. The house at the end, 35 Park St., was built in 1828 as a district school and became George W. Parmenter's home in 1874.

Walk up Park Street. The houses you are passing mostly were built in the 1830s.

19) Built in 1833, 39 Park St. was the home of the Briggs family for more than 70 years. Both Sumner Briggs and his son, Henry D, were carriage makers and their carriage shop you have passed earlier, (11) in the tour. Henry Briggs added the corner turret in about 1895.

20) 49 Park Street was built in 1837 by Barzillai Davenport, an attorney and for many years town clerk, on the foundations of an earlier house. John Howe, who started the Brandon Iron and Car Wheel Co., and then the Howe Scale Company in Brandon, lived here with his wife, Emma, and their four children. Emma, a local girl, was the daughter of Dr. Anderson Dana who also lived on the street. Walk to the next building.

21) The Lilac Inn at 53 Park Street was built in 1909 as a summer residence for Albert G. Farr who grew up in Brandon but made his fortune in Chicago. The house was passed to his daughter, Shirley Farr, in 1913. The Farr's philanthropy over the years gave Brandon the monument honoring Stephen A. Douglas, an observatory on Mount Pleasant, as well as our current sewer system. The Farris also donated the land to create Branbury State Park, located on Lake Dunmore. Over the years the building has been a home for the elderly as well as a country inn.

Continue walking down Park Street and notice the different styles of houses. 57 Park St. is in the Greek-Revival style and dates from 1847. As you walk down the street the styles change to Italianate, 69 Park St., a bed & breakfast, and other styles of the later nineteenth century. James Knapp, a carpenter and joiner, built the house on the corner of Park and High Streets, 73 Park St., about 1870, in the Italianate style.

22) Diagonally across Park Street, on the corner of Marble and Park Streets, is the Theodore Cary

farmhouse that was built about 1825. It now houses a real estate office.

23) Cross Park Street. At the corner, 74 Park St. serves as the parsonage for the Congregational Church. It was purchased by Dr. Anderson Dana in 1843, but was built about 1830 in the Greek-Revival period with later additions.

Continue walking on the north side of Park Street toward the Civil War monument. Fabulous Victorian-era homes line this street. Notice marble details in the curbs and hitching posts. Many historic preservationists have thought Park Street the most beautiful street in Vermont. One of the things that creates this image is the lack of aerial wires on the street. Can you see the wires running along the rear property lines?

24) 42 Park St. was built in 1842-43. On the site of this Greek-Revival house stood the earlier Baptist Meetinghouse that had served the Brandon congregation from 1800 to 1832. After the construction of the new church seen at the beginning of this tour, the earlier meetinghouse was used as a seminary until it was sold and the present house was built on the site. (What happened to the meetinghouse is unknown.) When this house was sold in 1852, the owner removed the east wing over to adjacent land and, with additions, made it his home. Later in the twentieth century, this wing-made-house was moved to Rossiter Street where it stands today. All that is left of what was the east wing is the cast-iron hitching post that once stood in front of this twice-moved home.

25) Jedediah Holcomb, a leader in the Brandon abolitionist movement, built 28 Park Street in 1823, one of the oldest houses remaining on Park Street. From 1915 to 1922 it was the office of the Ayrshire Breeders Association. A concrete vault 6' x 10', with double vault doors with the association name on them, is in the rear of the house. The home is now a bed & breakfast inn.

26) Now housing business offices, the Carpenter-Gothic house at 24 Park Street was built about 1851. It was once the home of Ebenezer Ormsbee who served as a Captain in the Civil War, a lawyer, a State Senator, and Vermont Governor in 1888.

this whole portion of the block, which included buildings earlier used by the Howe Scale Co. Fires also destroyed major parts of the town in 1918, 1936 and 1943. Continue walking down the street.

30) Kennedy Park offers a commanding view of Brandon's man-made Neshobe Falls. The Brandon Mill and Lumber Company once owned the buildings across the Neshobe River. The word Neshobe possibly has its origins as an Abenaki word for "double-pond" and was the name of the town for 23 years, before changing to Brandon. As a name for the river, Neshobe is 20th century, for during most of the 19th century the river was called Mill Creek or Brandon River.

31) 37 - 45 Center St., the commercial structure next to the barber shop, is a long, two-story brick building, and the oldest structure in the downtown. Built by the Conants about 1820, it once housed a harness shop and the post office. As you walk along the front of the building, notice the change in the pattern of the brick bond in the wall. The building was once lower, and has been raised and extended to the west.

32) 49 Center St. is an 1829 Greek Revival period building and one of the oldest commercial buildings in the village. It was the early site of the First National Bank, located here in 1868. The building now houses the Brandon Town Office and the old bank vault continues to be used by the town clerk.

#### **Town Hall, Fire Station, & Bank, c. 1895-1900**

33) The Brandon Fire Station, built in 1888, served as the town's fire house until 1998. A tower and decorative bargeboard along the gable and the tower

eaves characterize the building in the Romanesque style. It now houses a credit union.

34) Brandon's beautiful Town Hall was built in 1861 under the direction of John A Conant. It served as a recruiting place during the Civil War and for many years housed the town-militia armory, the gun racks for which still remain. A capital campaign to preserve the Town Hall and bring it back to full use is underway and the building is seasonally used for arts and entertainment events.

35) Past the gas station is the Episcopal Church built in 1863. This is an excellent example of Gothic-Revival architecture. The architect, John Henry Hopkins, was the first Bishop of Vermont. Daniel C. Roberts, the priest here in 1876, wrote the hymn "God of Our Fathers" for that year's July 4th centennial celebration.

36) 23 Conant Sq., the painted brick house on the corner, was built by one of the wealthiest men in Brandon, John Conant, in about 1832, replacing an earlier 1802 dwelling. Conant came to Brandon in 1796, at the age of 23, and his family led Brandon's business community for the next 80 years.

37) 27 Conant Square is an 1849 Greek-Revival styled house made from local marble and owned by Chauncy W Conant, one of John's sons. The marble was cut and finished at a small quarry one mile from the village and drawn to the site by oxen.

38) 29 - 35 Conant Square used to serve as a hotel but was never as fashionable as the Brandon Inn. It now houses apartments.

39) Bearing right, walk past the two gas stations heading north on Grove Street. 21 Grove St., built in 1839, was the home of J.W. Hale, one of Brandon's early abolitionists.

Walk back to the Museum and Visitors' Center. As you return to the Visitors' Center notice 8 & 10 Grove St., on the west side. These two houses were built by John Conant as rentals and became known as "Conant's Twins." Owing to later changes, they are no longer identical.

*We hope you enjoyed your tour of Historic Brandon.*

#### **Civil War or Soldier's Monument, c. 1890**

In the center of Park St. is a Civil War Monument with a replica eight-foot high soldier, which pays homage to the 54 Brandon soldiers killed in action or who died in service. It is made of Barre, VT granite and was erected in 1886.

27) 22 Park St. was built by William Field in 1847 as his home. William's son, Henry, married Annie Howe, daughter of John Howe, and became a banker and Treasurer of Vermont. The Greek-Revival house was acquired in 1910 as an annex for the Brandon Inn. The building now houses an antique shop and ice cream parlor.

28) The Brandon Inn is perhaps the oldest continuously running Inn in Vermont. The original tavern, probably built by Jacob Simons in the early 1800s, was replaced by William Field in 1847. Called Brandon House, it was destroyed by fire in 1890. The present Brandon Inn was built in 1892 in the Shingle Style, which was prevalent at that time.

29) 2 Park St., at the corner of Park and Center Streets, was built in 1919 after a fire destroyed buildings at the corner. The First National Bank and the Brandon National Bank were both incorporated in 1863. The two merged in 1952 under the name First Brandon National Bank, and set up business in this building.

Around the corner, on Center St., across from The Smith Block, are buildings of 20th & 21st century construction. Over the years, Brandon had its share of devastating fires. In July of 1922, a fire destroyed



## **BRANDON YESTERDAY**

Chartered in 1761, Brandon rapidly became an important mill town with both saw and grist mills operating at more than 20 sites. Abundant local iron ore led to the production of stoves and other iron products. With the arrival of the Burlington-Rutland Railroad in 1849, Brandon became a center for the manufacture of railroad cars. While it was once a major area for marble quarrying, there are no active sites today.

Brandon's layout is unique with two village greens and the Neshobe River flowing between them. During the boom years of the 1800s, many fine homes were built, and most of them are still occupied today.

Park and Pearl Streets were laid out in a fashion suitable for militia training: broad and tree-shaded streets with deep front yards were the result. The entire village of 243 buildings is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

## **BRANDON TODAY**

Today's visitor to Brandon will find comfortable, modern amenities set among the many historic homes and buildings in the village. A stroll through town reveals a variety of eateries, shopping options and lodging options.

On the outskirts of town, the outdoor enthusiast will find an abundance of opportunities to hike, bike, canoe and kayak, cross-country ski, or snowshoe. Nature lovers will find a national forest waiting to be explored. Arts and antique lovers will find galleries and shops within the village core. Lake Dunmore, with the mountains as a backdrop, is a few miles from downtown Brandon and provides an unforgettable summer respite.

An easy drive to all points in Vermont and western New York makes Brandon an ideal spot for vacationers. Please enjoy our town.

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# **BRANDON HISTORICAL VILLAGE self-guided WALKING TOUR**

Stephen A. Douglas Birthplace, c. 1904

Currently the  
Brandon Museum & Visitor Center  
4 Grove St. (Route 7 & 73 West)

**Brandon Area  
Chamber of Commerce  
PO Box 267 Brandon, VT 05733**

**802-247-6401  
info@brandon.org  
www.brandon.org**