

# FREEDOM & UNITY:

## The Vermont movie



**Thoughts on Making *Freedom & Unity: The Vermont Movie* — One state. Many visions.**

“A state has boundaries, a central government, state laws. These factors give it unity. My challenge as editor was to find the unity, the common threads in all of our stories. The result, we hope, is a story about Vermont that is also universal.”

– Nora Jacobson, Project Director and Editor, *Freedom & Unity: The Vermont Movie*

In a traditional documentary, the filmmaker delineates the topic in advance and chooses a mode of inquiry, a list of questions, people to interview. Our film was constructed in a different way. We wanted it to have a unifying thread, but we also wanted it to be collaborative, a combination of different topics, styles and voices. We wanted our method to be organic—to combine both chance and intent—not unlike the evolution of a state, shaped by geography, climate, and other physical factors, but also by the individual desires and circumstances of the people who live there.

We chose as our guidelines the themes that we think run through Vermont’s history: compassion and tolerance; resistance and rebellion; stewardship for the land; grassroots democracy; and creativity. Then we did research. We read many books about Vermont and spoke with many people who have done scholarly research. We also spoke with non-academics who have an abiding interest in the state. And we listened to the stories of people who live here, many of whom go back several generations in Vermont, and some who came here to create a better life for themselves.

We created a twenty-two page document with some of the events and people throughout Vermont’s history that illustrated our five themes. We sent this document to our first twelve filmmakers so they could choose a theme to explore in a short film segment. They chose a theme, and occasionally suggested one that was not on our list. Word about the film got out, and other filmmakers contacted us. Soon we were 24 filmmakers, then 49! Who would think there were that many filmmakers in Vermont?

Vermont’s motto is **Freedom & Unity**. We chose that as our working motto. The filmmakers were encouraged to work in their own style, with their own voice and vision. Today we have twenty-five filmmaking teams and approximately 70 people creatively involved in telling the story, whether directors, camera people, editors, animators, composers, scholars or writers. Together, we are telling a story of Vermont. It is not “the” story, but rather the story of Vermont that these people at this time chose to tell. We also feel that we are telling a universal story, a human story, a political story, a story about land and community. As it turns out, it is also at times a circular story. For “history”, as we see it, does not move forward in a neat chronological order, but sometime loops back on itself. Our sense is that, indeed, the past lives on in the present, and contains the seeds of the future. Vermont was built from small, interdependent communities. In this new “global” economy and world, we see the value of returning to “small” and “local”. Many in Vermont are working toward this goal. This is what Vermont can model to the world. It is also how we end *Freedom & Unity: The Vermont Movie*.

— Nora Jacobson