



# The Berkshires

Official Visitor's Guide 2006-07

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Massachusetts



## SCENIC VIEWS OF THE BERKSHIRES

Choosing the best views and vistas in the Berkshires is not unlike trying to select the best apples in an orchard—everyone has his or her favorites.

[Click here for a complete listing of scenic views in The Berkshires Official Visitors Guide.](#)

25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee, Barrington Stage Company, Kevin Sprague



## CULTURE

### Miss Adams of Adams: Over Time, Art Becomes Artifact

In 1917, the moving picture was all the rage. A mere babe at ten years old, the industry was spawning imitators. Mr. Theodore Plunkett and Miss Myrtle Adams decided to have ago. Amateur plays and tableaus were popular among young people, but this was apparently the first moving picture made in Berkshire County. It was a full moving picture with a cast of 19 and extras!

What remains is a moving picture of people and places in Berkshire County in 1917. The people are a future State Senator, Captain in the Spanish American War, Postmaster, local druggist, and a Broadway, if not "star," then "working actress." The places are all over the town of Adams and the scenic environs.

They called it Miss Adams of Adams. Not Gone with the Wind, but well worth watching.

[Click here for a complete listing of cultural places and activities in The Berkshires Official Visitors Guide.](#)



Gardens, Hancock Shaker Village, Pittsfield, MA, A. Blake Gardner

## Berkshire Gardeners Gather No Moss

From Pittsfield to Sheffield and points between, there are tours inviting visitors into private gardens. It may surprise some that an area with a relatively short growing season is known for its gardens, but it is Berkshire tradition, rooted first in survival and later in a love of beauty.

From North to South County, the gardens of Berkshire are well worth visiting. In Hancock, the gardens of the Shaker Village are one the most fascinating parts of the tour. These are restored historic gardens, from a time in the eighteenth century when the garden was a source of survival. With homesteads far flung connected only by dark and winding cart tracks, the home garden meant food and medicine.

In the nineteenth century, the Berkshire garden became decorative. At The Mount, Edith Wharton's original formal gardens have been recreated including the "sunken garden," the "red garden" and the "leisurely walk to the house through wood and fern garden." At Naumkeag, there are multiple award-winning gardens — the Afternoon, Chinese, Tree Peony and Rose gardens as well as the Linden Walk.

The Berkshire Cottagers hired professional gardeners who strove for excellence and were very competitive. Horticultural Societies were developed all over the county. There were lectures and pamphlets on methods of growing the most beautiful plants and developing new strains.

Through these societies, expertise was made available to all Berkshire gardeners. Over two hundred and fifty years of Berkshire history, the Berkshire garden changed, evolved, and survived.

[Click here for a complete listing of Gardens & Agriculture areas in The Berkshires Official Visitors Guide.](#)



The Great Josh Billings Runaground, Lenox, MA, Kevin Sprague

## Josh Billings Still Rings Our Bell

Outlanders may wonder why our famous annual sports event—the Great Josh Billings Runaground Triathlon—is named after Josh Billings. Henry Wheeler Shaw was born on Constitution Hill, Lanesborough, in 1818. His grandfather, a doctor, was sent to jail for libeling John Adams, and then sent to Congress for the same reason. His father joined the family business—also entering politics.

Young Shaw attended the Lenox Academy, graduating at age 14. He was sent to Hamilton College, but he did not do as well in college. His penchant for learning was overtaken by his penchant for playing pranks. He shimmied up and removed the clapper from the bell used to signal the beginning and end of classes. Caught, he was returned to Lanesborough without degree and in disgrace.

Once again he returned to Lanesborough in defeat. There he wooed and won his childhood sweetheart, Zilpha Bradford. In Berkshire County, he tried a career in real estate and for the amusement of his friends, he wrote humorous bits. Some encouraged him to submit them as letters to the editor of the Berkshire Evening Eagle. He adopted the nom de plume "Josh Billings" and the persona of a country wit complete with humorous dialect and amusing misspellings.

Shaw was finally on the road to fame and fortune: Josh Billings was a smash hit. Shaw's fame spread from Maine to California.

When Shaw died in 1885, his body was carried by train back to Lanesborough. Mobs gathered at every station to say farewell. In the end his métier was humor not erudition—the bell clapper not the books.

[Click here for a complete listing of Recreational & Sports activities in The Berkshires Official Visitors Guide.](#)

Mepal Manor and Spa, New Marlborough, MA, Kevin Sprague



## Not a New Idea: Long Weekends at the Spa

Strictly speaking a spa is a watering place, preferably with a mineral spring; however, in modern parlance, a spa is a place of rejuvenation, a health resort. In the late 1920s, the founders of the Berkshire Hunt and Country Club, had their own prescription for health and rejuvenation. "Men of large affairs find real relief in spending from Friday noon until Tuesday in the country. That is, providing the country is far enough off to insure a complete change of environment and providing also that the appointments measure up to their standards." In short, a weekend at the Berkshire Hunt and Country Club.

The Berkshire Hunt and Country Club was created by combining three former Berkshire cottages: Cranwell, Blantyre and Coldbrooke. The appointments in these outstanding Berkshire cottages—the rather ironic moniker given to Gilded Age mansions such as these—were likely to measure up to anyone's standards.

The Club was also health conscious. It touted four things available in the Berkshires that would ensure health and renewed vigor: the Berkshire air, the Berkshire climate, food and sport.

"There are entertainments in health-giving sports" such as the "well-kept 18-hole golf course...(and) meandering country roads for cycling and hiking." Happily, the brochure goes on "the Berkshires are noted for its equable climate" and "Berkshire air whets the appetite." The Club's food is "justly famed as excellent and wholesome offering local fruits, vegetables, fish and game daily."

Sounds lovely, and the best part? More than eighty years later, all of these distinctive features are still available at the Cranwell Resort, Spa and Golf Club (of which the Coldbrooke cottage is now part) and at Blantyre.

[Click here for a complete listing of Health Spas/Clubs & Retreats in The Berkshires Official Visitors Guide.](#)

Summer Fun, Jiminy Peak, Jiminy Peak Resort



## Music and a Picnic Still Enchant Young and Old

Gertrude Robinson Smith was the moving force behind the Berkshire Symphonic Festival, the great summer festival that would become Tanglewood. In 1934, America was deep in the Depression. A summer music festival held the promise of immediate work for local laborers and future business for Berkshire inns and restaurants.

Music critics reported that the popularity of classical music increased during the Depression. Some guessed the dramatic and colorful music, like the rich sets and fancy clothes in the movies of the Thirties, were popular as relief from the drabness of the Depression.

What is more astounding than finding the money to launch a music festival in the midst of a depression, is that Robinson Smith & Co. did it in three months: The meeting between Conductor Henry Hadley and Robinson Smith took place on a May afternoon in 1934 and the first Berkshire Symphonic Festival concert took place at 8:30 p.m. on the Hanna Farm in Stockbridge on August 23, 1934.

During the May meeting, Robinson Smith told Hadley she approved the idea but made it clear that only with tangible evidence of support from every part of the local community could plans proceed. She sought to include as many of the local citizens and local organizations as possible.

The first concert of the first summer music festival took place on a Thursday night. Robinson Smith instructed Conductor Hadley to make the next concert, that Saturday, light and pleasing to children as well as adults. She then announced that people should come early, bring their families, and picnic on the Hanna grounds. Robinson Smith, a hard and forceful woman, was responsible for a soft and lovely Berkshire family tradition—food and music in the great outdoors.

[Click here for a complete listing of activities for Children & Families in The Berkshires Official Visitors Guide.](#)



Antique dresser and horse, Berkshire County Antiques & Art Dealers Association

## "Religious Cannon" Leads to Temptation

In 1919, men building a wall at the Catholic Church, Main Street, Lenox, unearthed a genuine antique, a cannon. The church, having no apparent need for a cannon—at least one with two "n"s — gave it to the selectmen. The selectmen proudly placed it next to the monument at Walker and Main Streets. There it stood, benign, until one night curiosity got the best of one or more Lenox residents.

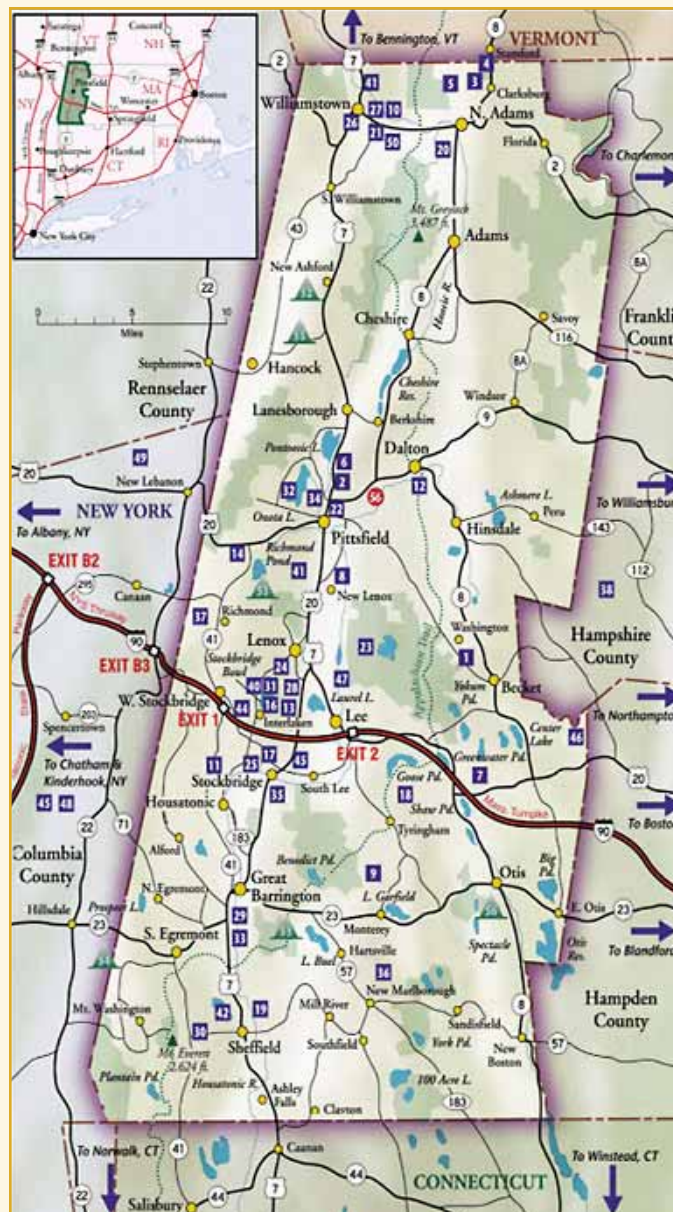
They wanted to know: Was the cannon in working order? The answer was a resounding "Yes!" So exuberant were the experimenters, so packed full of powder was the cannon, that the explosion blew off the front door of the Curtis Hotel and pieces of both ball and cannon were retrieved from porches on Church Street.

No one was ever prosecuted for the offense. In fact, no suspect was ever named. Years later, however, in a deathbed confession, a prominent townsman admitted to the crime. Ed Darrin reports his father-in-law admitted to the deed, aided by none other than the fire chief.

Mystery solved? Maybe, but former Lenox librarian and Lenox historian, Mrs. Peters, refuses to believe it. "I knew them both, and they weren't that type." Proving that they didn't do it, or explaining why they were never suspected?

[Click here for a complete listing of Antique Stores in The Berkshires Official Visitors Guide.](#)

There's also complete listings for Area Attractions, Lodging, Dining, Tours/Travel Services, Meetings/Conference and Special Events Planners, Places of Worship, and Services in our online visitors guide.



## BERKSHIRE VISITORS BUREAU

3 Hoosac Street. • Adams, MA 01220

For lodging reservations  
and info call 800-237-5747

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[www.berkshires.org](http://www.berkshires.org)