

Vermont Environmental Report

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE VERMONT NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL, A NON-PROFIT CITIZENS' CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION SUPPORTED BY MEMBERSHIP DUES AND CONTRIBUTIONS. VNRC, 26 STATE STREET, MONTPELIER -- VERMONT, 05602; (802) 223-2328. CHAIRMAN: DAVID R. MARVIN; EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: SEWARD WEBER; EDITOR: NATHANIEL FROTHINGHAM.

GETTING A START IN FARMING: Do Young Vermonters Have A Chance ???

A succession of research papers, government reports, and commission findings verifies what is clear to the naked eye: Vermont agriculture, the family farm, the survival of rural values and rural life, -- these things, are under siege.

This process, called in the language of the literature, "the decline of the family farm," is happening around us, not as a sudden, apocalyptic event, but by degrees, in stages. The results of this process are no more acutely measured than by their effects on a new generation of young farmers, young men and women who are looking for ways of making a life on the land. In the words of the Governor's Food Commission: *"In the long term, the major problem facing Vermont agriculture is this lack of new farmers."* (Our italics)

Statistically, this is the situation as it has changed over time, as set down in Benjamin Huffman's June, 1973 report on *The Vermont Farm*.

The number of operating farms in Vermont has declined at a rate greater than that for the decline of land area under farm ownership, due mainly to a consolidation of smaller farms into a fewer number of larger individual operations.

In 1969 a total of 6,874 farms were in operation in Vermont, 4,850 of which were defined by the **Census of Agriculture** as "commercial" farms, -- those with sales of farm products amounting to \$2500 or more in 1969.

In 1949 the total of operating farms was 19,048, in 1959 the number was 12,099. The total number of farms declined between 1949 and 1959 by 37 per cent, and between 1959 and 1969 by 43 per cent. At the same time, the average size of Vermont farms steadily increased, from 185 acres in 1949, to 243 acres in 1959, to 279 acres in 1969.

In the May and June issues of the **VER** we shall examine the prospects facing the young Vermont farmer, or would-be farmer. We shall attempt to define the problem as it was described to us by informed agricultural observers and practising farmers. Then we shall talk to federal farm credit managers, and finally to young people who are planning to enter farming or who have just entered farming.

FARMING & YOUTH

From every quarter, this is the observation, almost a litany, "Yes, there is a problem."

From Ron Albee, the newly-appointed Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture: "I think the State feels there is a problem (with the entry of young farmers.) I think everyone you talk to will say there is a problem."

From Newton Ryerson, Director of the Placement Office at Vermont Technical College (VTC) in Randolph Center: "The number of farms is declining. The cost of land, the cost of a registered herd, is going up. The guy that leaves here and actually farms a farm is less and less. The guy that leaves here that can step into a farm is less and less."

From Deacy F. Leonard, Executive Secretary of the Vermont State Farm Bureau, these words: "There has always been a problem, --probably always will be a problem. It used to be that an older farmer moved into town and leased his land to a young fellow. If a young fellow took over one of these farms, if he raised heifer calves, at the end of the year, they divided the herd. Then a young man had built up equity. He could use this cattle as a security for a loan. Today if a man retires, he gets out of it completely. The number of farms available for lease is quite limited."

While there is wide agreement about the difficulties of getting started in farming there seems to be some confusion about the "young farmers" themselves, -- who they are, what they want to do, and whether they are willing to work hard at what is clearly hard work.

Newton Ryerson at VTC talks about the nature of the agricultural students at VTC and what they would go on to do. "More and more of our agricultural students do not have a farm background. People are coming up from New Jersey and taking the agricultural course." And yet, reports Ryerson, "Jobs have not grown as fast as the number of students." A lot of young women are taking the agricultural program. They are thinking of going into biological work, or they like working with animals.

Ryerson has conducted an Alumni Survey of students who left VTC ten years ago. The engineering students, by-and-large, have stuck to their profession. But the agricultural students have tended to be diverted from the main issue. They are doing different things. They have gone into the Peace Corps, or into teaching, or they are selling lawn mowers and seeds, or like the ex-VTC-student who was farming near the Connecticut River, -- now he has his own agricultural equipment business. And as Ryerson observes, "He could leave farming entirely."

There seems an eagerness on the part of farmers, particularly, to draw a line between those who are interested in farming and those who are **seriously** interested in farming. John Lee, who has a place in Marshfield, who was raised on a farm, who is a part-time university student, a part-time fertilizer salesman, and who does some farming, is just as hard on himself as he is on others. "If I was going into business next year," he says, "I would have to mortgage an arm and a leg. I do not think that there are that many people who are seriously interested in farming. The back-to-the-land thing is not farming. Self-sufficiency is one thing. When I say 'farming' I mean production for the market. I do not consider myself a farmer. By my definition I am not."

Is there a renewed interest in farming, and if so, what does it mean? The confusion persists. There have apparently never been so many young men and women looking for farm work. Inquiries are pouring into Extension Offices and farms from young people both in Vermont and from out-of-state. When you talk to practising farmers, today's young people come off pretty badly. You hear instances, over and over again, of young people who were brought up on farms, who know the life, and want no part of it. At the same time, given the choice, a practising farmer will always hire the young man or woman who has lived on a farm and who knows first-hand the rigors of farming life. Get around, talk to farming people. There is a new sense of the importance of farming. It is as if outsiders had suddenly re-discovered the enterprise of farming.

The old scorn that used to be associated with farmers and farming, the tendency of city people to look down on farmers and deride their intelligence, (a scorn and an arrogance that hurt farming people deeply), -- well, this scorn is gone. There is instead a growing interest in the land and a respect for land occupations.

Would farming disappear... Is it possible that farming would disappear?

There are two kinds of farming in Vermont: dairy farming, which accounts for 90% of all farm activity, and everything else. Clearly if the old, family farms are to be turned over to a new generation, most of that passing on of land will have to occur in dairy farming.

Albert and Jean Conklin and a hired hand run a small dairy operation outside of Woodstock, Vermont. It is a small farm in a valley equidistant from two ski area developments, Mount Tom and Suicide Six. The Conklins have 40 milkers, and Mr. Conklin has a breeding operation as well. There is no such thing as a typical farm. But the Conklin's place is widely representative of the remaining farms in the Woodstock area, one of the handful that are left from the scores of family enterprises that used to thrive in the valleys and uplands in this portion of the State.

"What about breaking into farming?"

"There are a lot of kids that would be farming," replies Albert Conklin. Of course there were situations of children who had grown up on farms and who were not sure they wanted the life.

"But is it possible?"

"It is next to impossible. We have a young son here," says Conklin, talking about his hired hand, "He wants desperately to farm. There is not enough equity for anyone to risk the capital

on him. He is trying to build up his own herd. He has put his own wages back into it."

Conklin and his wife talk gently about what has happened to the area. "I do not think any of us saw what would happen when the Interstate came," Conklin talks about the land around Quechee, now a large, second-home development. "These were good, usable farms."

"What about Central Vermont, the future of family farms?"

It is a painful question. The land, the farmhouse, that family and that valley have been one for generations. "Would farming disappear? Is it possible that farming would disappear?"

There is a pause and then an answer. "It is inevitable."

Then Albert Conklin takes up the conversation. "A farm with 30 or 40 cows can make an income of \$8000. Who can make a living on an income like that?" It was all economics, and the economics wasn't there. There was just not enough land, and the land was selling in Woodstock for \$1000 an acre. Conklin concludes, "It is not fair to think that a young farmer can justify starting a farm in this area."

To be continued. This was "Part One" of a two-part series on the subject of "FARMING AND YOUTH."

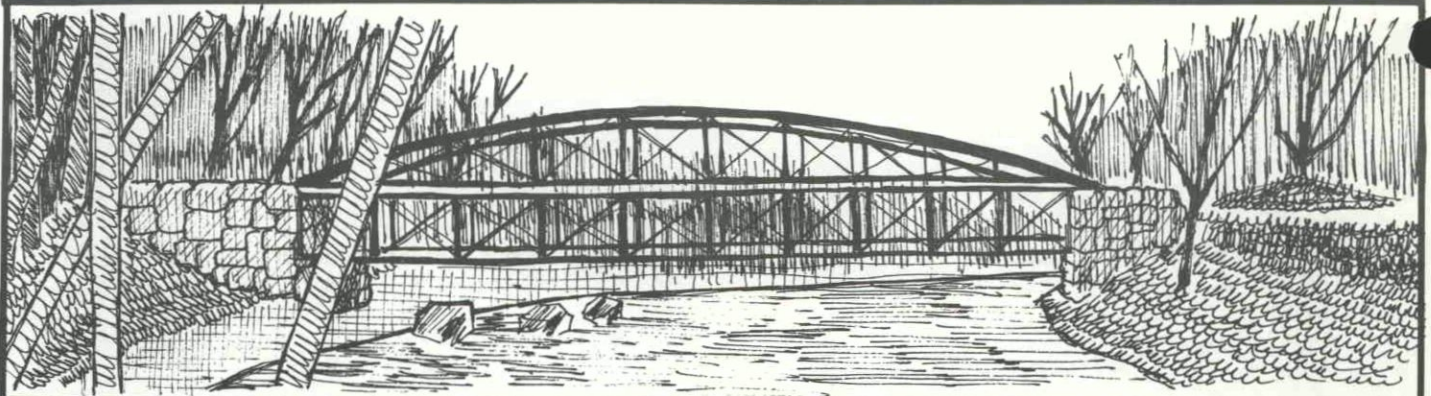
ENERGY INFORMATION NOW AVAILABLE

An increasingly large number of resources is being made available to the public to provide information on energy questions.

FILMS:

The Vermont State Energy Office, State Office Building, Montpelier, VT., 05602; tel. (802) 828-2768, has two films available for loans to interested groups:

- (1) **When The Circuit Breaks** -- a 16 mm. 27½ minute color film that examines past, present and future supply and demand patterns, that looks to new sources of energy that will free America from its heavy reliance on oil.
- (2) **Energy: Critical Choices Ahead** -- a 16 mm. 27½ minute film that graphically demonstrates the magnitude of our energy problems and sets forth the tasks to be accomplished in meeting our rising energy needs through the year 2000.



CITIZENS IN WOODSTOCK FIGHTING TO SAVE HISTORIC BRIDGE IN TEST OF LAW

"ONE OF THE HEAVIEST STORMS AND MOST DANGEROUS FLOODS EVER KNOWN IN THIS SECTION OF THE COUNTRY, VISITED US MONDAY, CARRYING DISMAY TO THOUSANDS AND WORKING THE MOST FEARFUL DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY."

Vermont Standard, October 7, 1869

Battle lines appear to have been drawn over the fate of a historic iron bridge in Woodstock, on Route 12, that crosses the Ottauquechee River.

As a yellowed copy of the October 7, 1869 **Vermont Standard** reminds us, the historic "Elm Street Bridge" is not the first structure to span the Quechee River at a point between Woodstock village and the farmlands to the north of town. It is not the first structure, but it is probably the most controversial. It was constructed in the spring of 1870. It was built to exacting specifications. The words of the motion introduced by Charles P. Marsh tell us that. In his motion approved by a meeting called together after the October flood, Marsh instructed the Selectmen "to erect an iron bridge over the Quechee River at the foot of Elm Street," and said Marsh, pointedly, "it shall have sidewalks on both sides."

So it stands today, more than a hundred years later, an iron bridge, with two sidewalks, supported by a "Parker-Patent" modified bow-string truss. It was built to carry horses and carriages, and people on foot. The roadway is eighteen feet wide. Today it is accommodating automobiles and trucks. It is listed in the **Historic American Engineering Record**. And it is a key feature of the Woodstock Historic District.

What is at issue in the controversy over the Elm Street Bridge is what Richard Carbin, Executive Director of the Ottauquechee Regional Planning and Development Commission sees as a "classic conflict," — a test of two bodies of law, and a struggle between road builders and preservationists.

The first body of law is the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. This Act calls on federal authorities to carefully consider any alteration to the environment that would disturb a historic site. The Elm Street Bridge is a historic site.

The second body of law is the regulations flowing from legislation that created the "Special Bridge Replacement Program," a program that is supervised by the Federal Highway Administration. Under the provisions of this legislation, funds from the Special Bridge Replacement Program can only be used for the construction of new bridges, and these new bridges must conform to Federal Highway Administration safety specifications, or "geometric standards."

Here is the problem with the Elm Street Bridge. It is two-fold. First, the structure of the old bridge is badly deteriorated. Just how badly no one seems to know at this time. At the very least it will have to be repaired. And it may have to be replaced entirely. The second part of the problem is money. If the bridge qualifies for

assistance under the Special Bridge Replacement Program the Town of Woodstock will receive federal and state monies amounting to 95% of the cost of the work. If a new bridge is needed it could cost as much as \$400,000. That is a lot of money. Under the Special Replacement Program, Woodstock would only have to pay five percent of \$400,000 or \$20,000.

Citizens in Woodstock who want to save and repair the Elm Street Bridge have argued that it is a historic site, that it deserves special consideration, that normal safety specifications ought to be waived, and that money for its repair and restoration ought to be made available under the Special Replacement Program. This is the gist of their reasoning. "It is our opinion that the Elm Street Bridge is an integral part of the Woodstock Historic District serving as an entrance into the Village center and functioning to slow traffic speeds compatible with the scale and feeling of a New England Village." These citizens have taken their case all the way to Secretary of Transportation, William T. Coleman.

The Secretary's response is clearly spelled out in a letter dated March 12, from H. A. Lindberg, and Administrator for the Federal Highway Administration. (The Federal Highway Administration is an arm of the U. S. Department of Transportation.) According to Lindberg, the Elm Street Bridge does not qualify for funds under the Special Bridge Replacement Program. The purpose of the program, Lindberg explains, is to replace bridges, not to maintain or repair them. Lindberg goes on to comment on the safety questions raised by this controversy.

Safety is a very compelling reason to build a roadway at least 30 feet wide. We cannot, in good conscience, waive the requirements that this bridge be built to current geometric standards. It is not just a bureaucratic rule or a legal technicality that is in question; it is the safety of the several thousand people using the bridge each day.

In ordinary circumstances it might be imagined that a decision from the Office of the Secretary of Transportation would be final, that the issue would be closed. But these are not ordinary circumstances, it appears, and events, soon to be set in motion, may, in fact, reverse the Secretary's ruling, and create a precedent of national significance.

This is what is happening. First of all, the Town Manager of Woodstock, Robert Horne, is preparing a request to Highway Commissioner

Gray for Special Bridge Replacement funds. This application for federal funds will initiate a typical review process, called an "A-95" review. As part of an A-95 review all concerned bodies of state and local government may submit comments on a given project. The Ottawaquchee Regional Planning and Development Commission of Woodstock has indicated that it will submit such a comment, and that it will request that the application for federal funds be tested under the guidelines of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

Here is the collision of road builders and preservationists. According to Richard Carbin, of the Ottawaquchee Commission, under the guidelines of the National Historic Preservation Act, all of the alternatives to a given project that would disturb a historic site must be explored. This search for alternatives has never been undertaken. "We will know," says Carbin, "for the first time what will be the cost of preservation versus the cost of replacement."

Carbin seems excited about the prospect of finally resolving the issues raised by the Elm Street Bridge controversy. For a long time the Town of Woodstock has been under pressure to act, or lose the Bridge Replacement funds. Now the alternatives can be examined. If a deadlock develops between the Federal Highway Administration on one side, and the preservationists on the other, there is a clear way out. According to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, a National Advisory Council on Historic Preservation can be brought in to arbitrate the dispute. If the Advisory Council is brought in, they will hold hearings in Woodstock, and their recommendations will be final. According to Carbin there is a real chance that the Advisory Council could decide in favor of waiving the federal highway bridge specifications, and could insist that Special Bridge Replacement funds be made available to repair and renovate the Elm Street Bridge.

The impact of such a decision could have precedent-setting national consequences. There is a project in Michigan to save the oldest and longest wrought-iron bridge in that state, at Grand Rapids. A ruling that favors the renovation of a historic bridge in Woodstock could have national repercussions. It could do something else; it could inspire changes in the legislation that established the Special Bridge Replacement Program. It could inspire changes that would require as a matter of course that federal monies be made available to repair and restore all bridges that are unique and historic.

CSSV TO SPONSOR CONSERVATION SCHOOL

The Conservation Society of Southern Vermont (CSSV) has announced the opening of its tenth season of outdoor conservation sessions at its Summer Conservation School in southern Vermont. The program for this summer will begin on Sunday, July 4th. The Conservation School is located at CSSV's West River Valley Greenway, a 3,000-acre natural area in South Londonderry and Jamaica.

This year's summer program will consist of seven consecutive five-day sessions for children between the ages of 7 and 13. Sessions are broken down into age groups, 10 to 13, and 7 to 9, which alternate weekly. In addition, there will be a four-day session for adults beginning on Thursday, August 26. The Conservation School will be directed again this year by Eloise Clark of the Antioch Graduate School of Environmental Education. For additional information and registration forms, write CSSV, Box 256, Townshend, Vermont, 05353, or call 365-7754.

ROBERT KLEIN PRESENTS FULL REPORT

On Wednesday, April 28, Robert Klein formally presented his completed Technical Report of the Vermont Natural Areas Project (Phase II) to the Agency of Environmental Conservation. The "Technical Report" of the Natural Areas Project runs for 112 pages and is the full statement of Klein's six-month study of Vermont Vermont's natural areas. This Technical Report is accompanied by a nine-page "Summary Report" which offers a condensed presentation of the project's findings and recommendations. VNRC members may obtain a copy of the "Summary Report" by writing to the Council.

LETTERS

To The Editor:

I would like to comment on the statement on page six of your recent newsletter in which you quote Mr. Whitey Bluestein, Executive Director of VPIRG, concerning his views as to the bill to ban fluorocarbon aerosol containers.

As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources, I cannot accept Mr. Bluestein's statement that lobbyists for the DuPont Corporation "sweet talked the Senate Natural Resources Committee into not acting." This bill came to us in the last week of the session at which time we were under very heavy pressure considering other pieces of legislation. We received testimony not only from many other citizens of Vermont, including representatives of Vermont industry and the Vermont public. We did not consider in the view of the large amount of testimony and technical information which was necessary to digest with regard to this bill that we had time to adequately give it consideration. We further felt that in view of the fact that the National Academy of Sciences was due to publish a report on the subject this spring, it would be well to have this report available before we made our final decision on the legislation. To say that we were influenced solely by lobbyists of one corporation with regard to this bill is a totally inaccurate statement.

Our Committee was simply not willing to take action on this very complicated subject in the very limited time period under which they were operating.

You will note that the Committee did authorize a study of the subject over the summer which would include an evaluation of the report by the National Academy of Sciences.

Sincerely yours,
Arthur Gibb, Chairman
Senate Committee on
Natural Resources

To the Editor:

To do as Mr. Parker suggests in his letter in the April **Vermont Environmental Report** would be the best way I can think of to "kill" VNRC and make it ineffective and put it out of business! Because of its present impartiality and concern with the **Vermont** environment, you draw strong support from all concerned citizens, be they conservative or liberal, but who are vitally interested in the future of Vermont. You cannot be all things to all people. Don't try to be another VPIRG. You must aim for the support of a large body of generally conservative Vermonters to be effective and survive!

Sincerely,

Andrew Titcomb
Perkinsville, VT.

VNRC Forest Management WORKSHOPS

Are you one of the 70,000 people who owns a piece of Vermont's forestland? Have you ever wanted to manage that land in order to make it more productive, more pleasing aesthetically, and a better home for wildlife? If you have considered "forest management" but were uncertain about where to begin, this announcement may be of interest.

The Vermont Natural Resources Council will be sponsoring five forest management workshops in June and early July in different locations throughout Vermont. If these workshops prove to be popular, a second round will be scheduled for late summer.

The VNRC workshops are designed specifically for the small woodlot owner who is interested in forest management but who may have had no formal training in forestry or silviculture. Each workshop will consist of two parts: a short classroom session and a field session. Participants will learn how to evaluate a forest site, how to decide upon a forest management plan, and what techniques may be used in forest management.

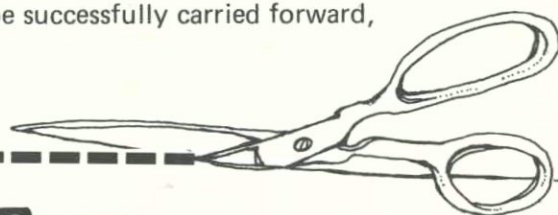
Workshops will be limited to a maximum of 12 to 15 persons. Registration must be made in advance and participants will be accepted on a "first-come, first-served" basis. We will try to schedule additional workshops later in the summer for those who may wish to participate but for whom there is not enough room in the first series of workshops.

The schedule for the workshops appears below on the Registration Form. If there is room at the workshop which you want to attend, we will confirm your registration and send you details about the exact time and place, together with instructions on how to get there.

Vermont's woodlands hold much promise. They can provide jobs, energy, and raw materials. They protect our wildlife. Yet today this resource is in poor shape. A recent report of the Governor's Wood Energy Task Force reported that Vermont's forests have excessive numbers of trees that are poorly formed, rotten, or of an undesirable species. If these trees could be "weeded out" the annual growth of quality trees would increase by three to five times.

The key to the future of Vermont's woodland resource is in the hands of private landowners. They own over 90% of Vermont's forestlands. And two-thirds of these lands is owned not only privately, but by private individuals. If forest management is to be successfully carried forward, they will have to do it.

AND THE COUNCIL WOULD LIKE TO HELP THEM TRY !



--- Registration Form ---

(For VNRC's Information -- Fill Out/Circle)

I OWN _____ ACRES OF FOREST LAND IN
_____, VERMONT.
THIS LAND (circle) (IS) (IS NOT) (IS ONLY
PARTIALLY) UNDER FOREST MANAGEMENT.
I (HAVE) (HAVE NOT) HAD ANY EXPERIENCE
AND/OR TRAINING IN FOREST MANAGEMENT.
MY INTEREST IN FOREST MANAGEMENT IS
PRIMARILY FOR: (circle) (a) Aesthetics;
(b) Wildlife; (c) Improved Timber Production;
(d) Wildlife; (e) Other (please specify)

(DATES and AREAS of VNRC WORKSHOPS)

(please check)

- ____ SATURDAY, JUNE 19, MANCHESTER, VT.
Foresters: James White and Charles Stewart
- ____ SATURDAY, JUNE 12, MONTPELIER AREA
Foresters: Alan Turner and Norman Hudson
- ____ SATURDAY, JUNE 19, JOHNSON, VT.
Forester: David Marvin
- ____ SATURDAY, JUNE 26, WOODSTOCK AREA
Forester: Richard Brett
- ____ SATURDAY, JULY 10, BURLINGTON AREA
Forester: Paul Harwood

NAME _____

TELEPHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

ZIP _____

Announcements...

GMC AND U.S. FOREST SERVICE TO SHARE COSTS OF APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSTRUCTION

The Green Mountain Club of Rutland and the U. S. Forest Service have announced a cooperative agreement to share costs of relocating two sections of the Appalachian Trail in the Green Mountain National Forest. The Club's Long Trail Patrol aided by other members will do the construction, with the Forest Service paying 80% of the estimated \$21,300 cost. The relocations are designated to provide better trail routing primarily on National Forest lands.

SPEAKERS BUREAU:

The Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA) in Washington, D. C., has established an ERDA Speakers Bureau that will make arrangements for qualified persons to discuss energy issues before regional and local organizations and groups. Arrangements for ERDA speakers can be made by contacting the ERDA Speakers Bureau, Office of Public Affairs, 20 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D. C., 20545, or by telephoning, (202) 376-4075.

ALL-DAY CONFERENCE SET FOR NORWICH "ALTERNATIVES TO MILITARY SPENDING"

The St. Johnsbury Peace Team - CALC and the American Friends Service Committee have announced plans for a conference on this subject: Social Alternatives to Military Spending. The all-day event will begin at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, May 22. It will be held at the Congregational Church in Norwich, Vermont. Organizers of the conference hope that it will provide an opportunity for those who are working on a wide range of social issues, in housing, health, land, food, and energy, to meet and exchange ideas.

COMMONER'S BOOK AVAILABLE MAY 18

Barry Commoner's book, entitled, **THE POVERTY OF POWER: ENERGY AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS**, a book that was brought to the attention of VER readers in the April issue will be published on May 18 by Alfred Knopf. It will sell in the hardcover edition for \$10.00.

VNRC

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