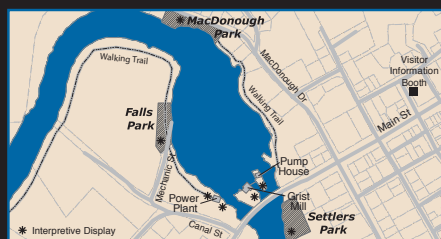


# Harnessing Otter Creek Falls



**City of Vergennes**  
 For information: 802.877.2841  
[www.vergennes.org](http://www.vergennes.org)

## The Monkton Ironworks

The first business below the falls was the Monkton Ironworks Company, established in 1807. It included a water flume, nine forges, and blast and air furnaces. The Company produced iron fittings and shot for the War of 1812 naval vessels built at Vergennes. It closed in 1816 due to severe economic depression after the War.



In 1831, a new owner enlarged its waterpower system with a 250-foot flume that tunneled through the rock bluff. Using flumes from the main raceway, sluice gates, and tailraces, the system directed river water through the Ironworks property. Parts of the rock tunnel and raceway are still visible today.

In 1867, local businessmen and the National Bank of Vergennes founded the Vergennes Water Power Company. It purchased the Ironworks, constructed new buildings, and leased water privileges to manufacturers and a power company below the falls.

## Electricity is Born

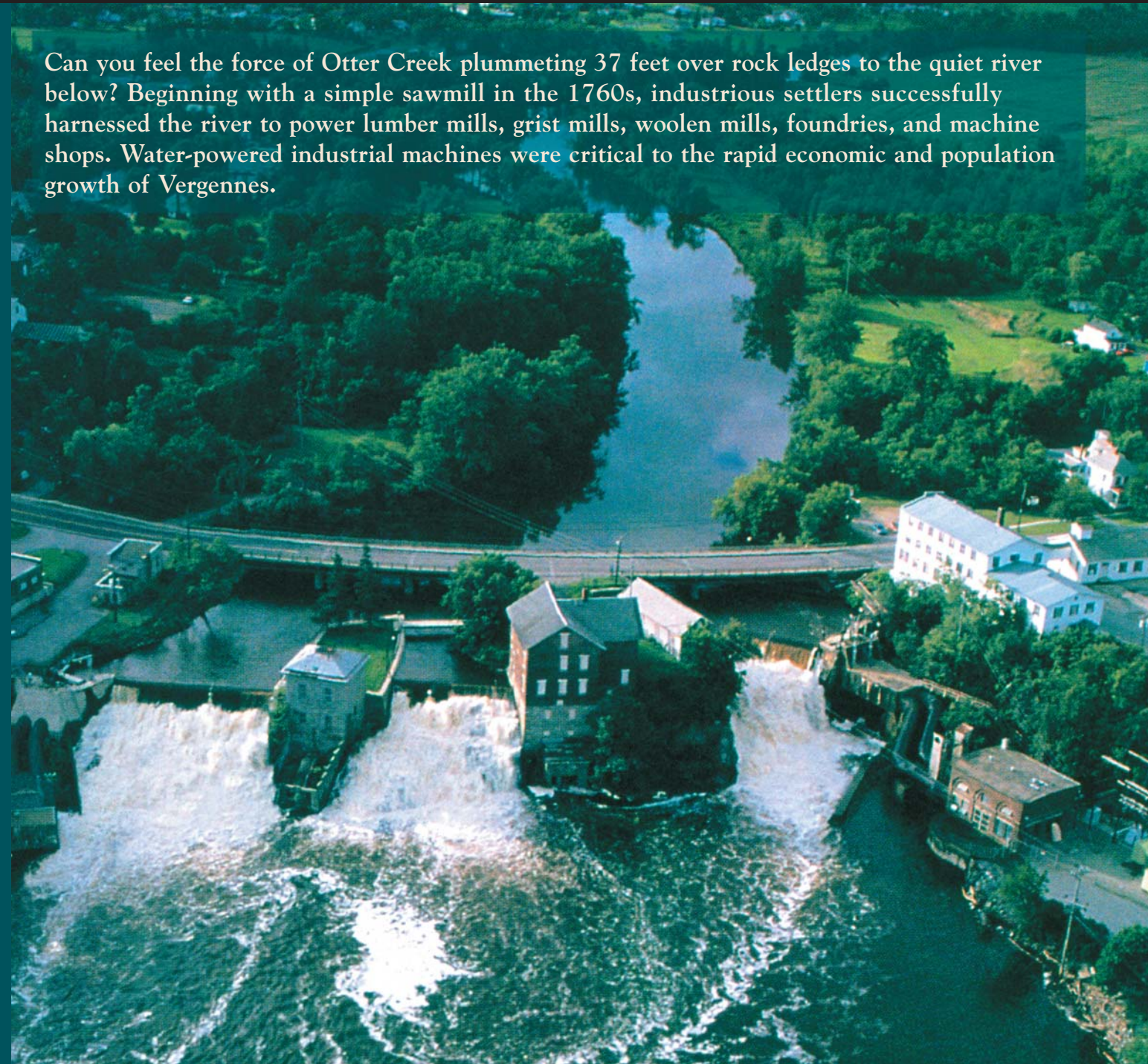
The Vergennes Electric Company began operating the first power plant at the falls about 1895. A brick building housed waterwheels, and a rope drive transmitted power to a 75-kilowatt generator house. The plant generated power for open arc lighting in Vergennes.

The Company built the present hydroelectric station and transmission line for the Burlington Traction Company in 1912 to provide electricity for Burlington's trolley system. The power station was heralded as one of the best and the most modern in New England. The brick powerhouse contains the two original turbine-generators, still in operation.



Burlington trolley, circa 1910-1920. Courtesy of Special Collections, Bailey-Howe Library, University of Vermont.

Can you feel the force of Otter Creek plummeting 37 feet over rock ledges to the quiet river below? Beginning with a simple sawmill in the 1760s, industrious settlers successfully harnessed the river to power lumber mills, grist mills, woolen mills, foundries, and machine shops. Water-powered industrial machines were critical to the rapid economic and population growth of Vergennes.



Aerial view of the falls. © Charles Feil 2000, [viewsfromabove.com](http://viewsfromabove.com).

## Hydro-Electric Power Comes of Age

Peoples Hydro-Electric Vermont Corporation bought the power station and transmission line in 1928, and the company was renamed the Green Mountain Power Corporation (GMP).

Since then it has maintained and upgraded the dams, penstocks, powerhouse, and transmission station. It added a second turbine-generator plant on the opposite bank of the falls in 1943.