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Hildene

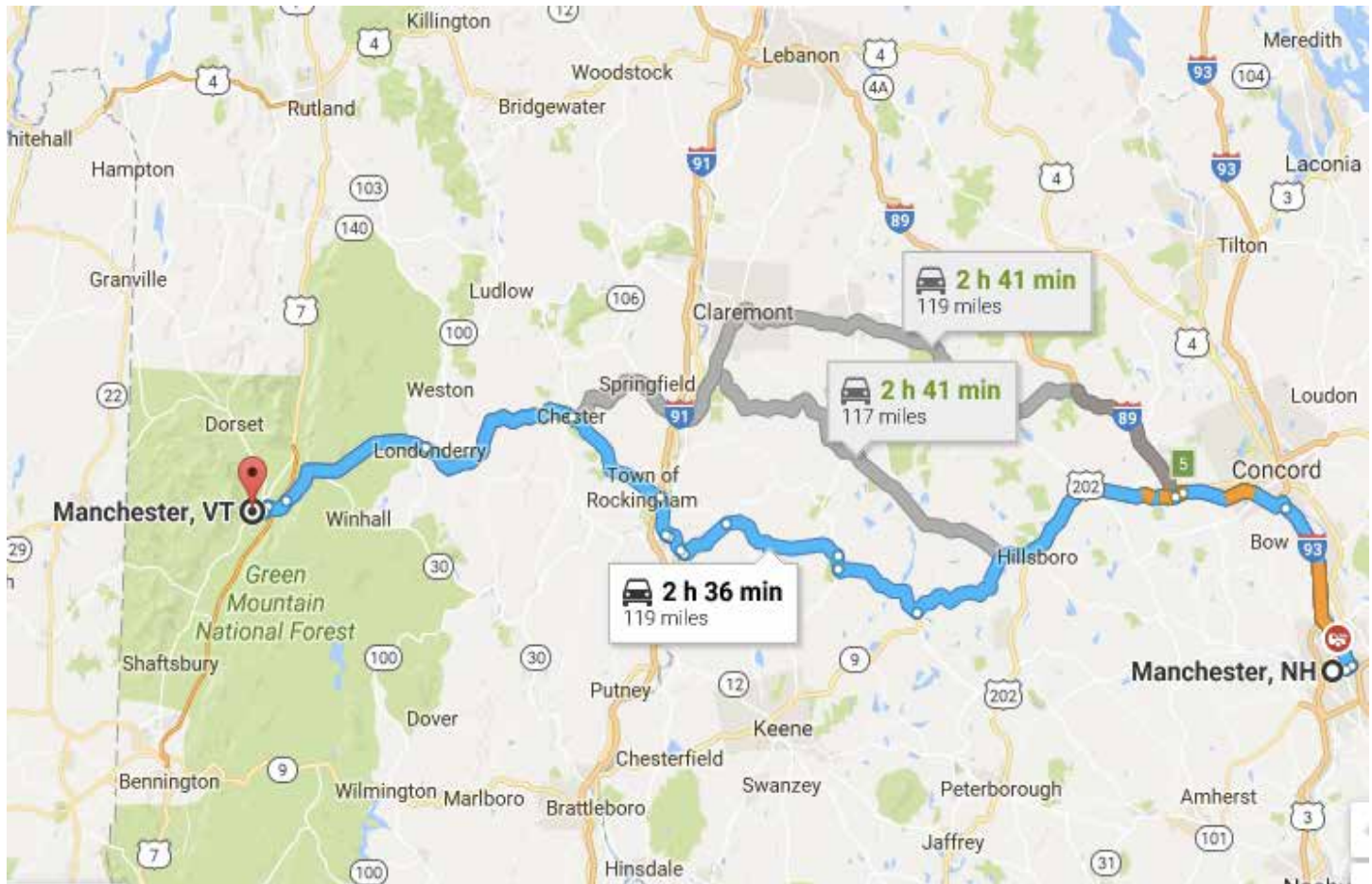
Robert Todd Lincoln Summer Home

by Tom Hart



We flew to the Green Airport of Providence, Rhode Island and rented a car for 2 weeks to see the colorful leaves in the middle of October, all over New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine. We used Manchester, New Hampshire as our main location to make one or two day trips out to specific locations. This one day trip included Robert Todd Lincoln's Summer Home and his private Pullman Coach in Vermont. Robert was Abraham Lincoln's oldest son and the only one surviving to adulthood.

He was a cabinet officer in Washington DC and financial officer for the Pullman Company. When Mr Pullman died he became President of the Company. He built this Summer House near Manchester, Vermont and had an \$11,000 (\$2,500,000 in 2016) organ installed in 1917.



His father was born in a log cabin and called from the humblest rank in life to preside over our nation during the most momentous period of its history. One generation later, Robert Todd Lincoln became Chairman of the Pullman Company, the largest manufacturing corporation at the turn of the 20th century. He built his Georgian Revival mansion in 1905 in the scenic village of Manchester. It became home to only Lincoln descendants until 1975, longer than any other Lincoln residence. It is the Great American Story.

Robert Lincoln built Hildene as a summer home. Robert first visited Manchester as a young man in the summer of 1864 when he came to the Equinox Hotel with his mother and his brother Tad. Some forty years later he returned to purchase 400 acres of land to build what he would call his ancestral home.

When Peggy Beckwith, the last Lincoln descendant to live at Hildene, died in 1975, she left Hildene to the Church of Christ, Scientist - as was her grandmother's wish. The will stipulated that the church maintain Hildene as a memorial to the Lincoln family, but it didn't take long for them to realize they were not in a position to do so, and they made plans to sell Hildene to developers. When local neighbors and community members learned of the church's plans they fought to save Hildene and for the next three years went to court to finally win the right to purchase Hildene. The non-profit Friends of Hildene raised the money to purchase the estate in 1978 and began the long process of restoring the home and gardens.









Hildene's Sunbeam car highlights the fruits of Lincoln's career, but it also offers us new insight into an important chapter in American history: the "Gilded Age" of wealth and industry that followed the Civil War. In the late 19th century, before the advent of the automobile and the airplane, the railroad was the primary means by which thousands of Americans crossed the country, putting down roots as they went. Pullman was the first company to roll out a new model of "sleeper" railcar: outfitted not just with more comfortable pull-down berths, but with stained glass, gleaming wood, and thick carpets as well, and a staff of African American porters to tend to passenger needs. The Pullman car would play a historic role in the African American journey; as the largest employer of African Americans, many of them freed slaves and their descendants, it would give rise to the first established black middle class in America.

The Sunbeam, built in 1888 and reconfigured in 1903 during Robert Lincoln's tenure as president of Pullman, underwent four years of restoration before its shipment to Hildene in 2011.



A long history of service: The Sunbeam once carried President McKinley; later, it carried reporters covering Theodore Roosevelt's 1912 campaign; and in 1945 it was part of FDR's funeral train.

For most porters in those early years, it was enough to be earning a wage and traveling the country. But as time went on and the sub-par conditions, long hours, and low pay didn't improve, labor unrest led, in 1925, to the formation of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters union, which became one of the most powerful African American political forces of the 20th century. For this reason, the Sunbeam has also earned a worthy spot on the newly established Vermont African American Heritage Trail.



