

“In the Country” by Robert Todd – published in the *New Boston Bulletin* in 2000

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Rare and Endangered Species of Cultural Heritage: Old Buildings (2/2000)

I recently shuffled through some old maps archived under “miscellaneous” in my files randomly searching for a source of data that would help me solve a land boundary case I have been struggling with. A map that I have not seen for quite a long time revealed itself to me as would the ace of spades in the shuffle of a deck of cards. I was immediately and totally distracted from pursuit of my objective and just sat there, awestruck, gazing at a graphic representation of what life in New Boston was like about 60 years ago. The names and places on the map pulled thousands of recollections from my mind- more than I ever realized were stored away for recall. I suppose it is my training and experience that caused a contrast and comparison analysis of the visions in my memories with what I see today on the face of our Town. Wow! What a difference I see in my own lifetime.

The map is titled “Commercial Agricultural Production in New Boston, N.H.” and is dated October, 1938, 27 months before I was born, and was prepared by the New Hampshire Agricultural Experiment Station, Department of Agricultural Economics, Durham, N. H. I suppose this is the forerunner of the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Service now serving our community and others in the state. My eyes traveled each road shown on the map and read the names of more than 65 farm owners at the approximate location of their buildings randomly distributed along the roads. With each name a picture flashed through my consciousness, either a face of each family member, or a picture of the farm was as clearly recalled as my own family farm. With each name and location the map annotated the scope of agricultural endeavor. Cows, hens, vegetables, potatoes, maple syrup, fire wood, berries and fruit were all inventoried.

Most of the farms, represented by small squares on the map, connected with a vivid mental picture of the buildings at each site. These pictures had become chiseled into my memory during my childhood and young adulthood. These images I compared with my observations of what is at each of those locations today. I was amazed at how few of the images bore even a small resemblance to what is there today. Eerily, I noticed that in a majority of my recollections the old farms have vanished completely.

In my comparisons of other recollections with present observations, I could still see the resemblance. What stands today at each location shown on the map is the original house, usually in much better condition than it had been in my recollection- new paint, good roof, tidy grounds, etc. Gone are the accessory buildings that were scattered around the farm. I do not see, or rarely see: woodsheds, corncribs, icehouses, henhouses, pumphouses, open front equipment shelters, sap houses, and the most rare blacksmith shops and hop kilns. Those buildings becoming less prevalent, are dairy barns and silos. These were all necessary to conduct

agricultural pursuits at New Boston farmsteads prior to 1940. Such buildings added much to the character of New Boston and were functionally unchanged from the buildings erected by the first settlers during the mid eighteenth century.



I have lived at Todd's Corner all my life and occupy the farm settled by my great, great-grandfather early in the nineteenth century. The accessory buildings at this farm were in a dilapidated condition when I moved in following the death of my grandmother in the early sixties, so I busied myself with taking them down, except for one or two that continued to meet the needs of my young family before I made major improvements to the old place, such as indoor plumbing. As a young adult I was not sentimentally attached to the old structures and was content to remember them as my grandparents had used them while I was growing up.

The old backhouse here was used with much trepidation and I have previously written in this column about my experience with this functional structure. I used the old woodshed for several years before installing central heat in the farmhouse and I remember helping my dad saw wood to fill the old woodshed so that my grandmother could keep her kitchen range and "Round Oak" parlor stoves stoked- nearly a full time job during the month of January. Wind easily penetrated the loose windows and even violated the integrity of the ancient walls of the ell in particular.

One of the first accessory buildings to disappear from the local farms was the ice house; it was the first one I tore down here. The crude structure was about 20 feet square and had a high roof, probably close to 20 feet. There was no floor and no openings to the outside except for the 3 foot wide opening from the ground to the roof. This opening was closed by placing wide boards in slots on the frame as the building was filled with

ice and they were removed one by one as the ice cakes were removed. I can remember how my dad filled the building with ice each winter. Part of his daily chores around the farm was to remove the thick blanket of sawdust that he had placed tightly over and around the ice to insulate it from summer heat, then split the large cakes into smaller pieces sized specifically for the ice box in grandma's kitchen, the ice box at our home, and the milk cooler in the milkroom off the side of the dairy barn. The fondest memory surrounding this old building is the many times that my grandfather sent me up on top of the ice cakes in the icehouse to chip off ice with a pick for use in making ice cream. This happened each time my cousins came for a visit on weekends during the summer. The treats that came out of that hand cranked "White Mountain" ice cream maker were so delicious!

I remember that the second building I took down was the corncrib. It was built upon four granite posts about 4 ½ feet above ground (the posts are still in place) and was about 10' by 14' in dimension. The walls were slatted and the space between the slats was about 1 inch wide; it had a door, but no windows. A narrow alley way ran the length of the building and on each side slatted walls ran to the roof. I remember that the building was curious, yet had beauty. My dad told me stories about when he was young, working to fill the corncrib with ears of corn harvested from the nearby cropland. The function of the structure was to allow air-drying of corncobs while keeping the grain out of reach from the many hungry rodents that also lived on the farm. The dried grain was taken from the corncrib as it was needed for grinding and used as livestock feed.

The most mysterious structure that functioned at this farmstead was one that I never saw in its original condition. I have only seen the foundation and have heard my father and grandfather talk about it in vague terms. It has been since hearing those stories that I have come to understand from reading deeds and agricultural reports what the old structure was used for.

It was in 1898 that my great grandfather hired George P. Hadley, a surveyor from Goffstown, to subdivide the old Andrews farm that he had purchased in 1868. The surveyor described the premises for the deed to my grandfather and one of the lines went to "a pine tree standing near the old hop kiln". Well, this old deed probably is most important for recording for posterity the existence and location of an ancient agricultural artifact.

Today, the foundation of this old building can be seen as a fine work of stonemasonry about 16 feet long and about 10 feet wide. There is a stonewall dividing the structure into two equal segments. The foundation wall is about 6 feet high in front, the low side, and the side walls run into the steep slope at the rear. In front of each segment on the low side there are two low, parallel walls running perpendicular to the main walls for a distance of about 4 feet.

I have learned from reading old agricultural reports that hops were introduced to this country from Europe in the early 1800's and were grown on local farms for sale to breweries (hops are a main ingredient in beer making). Farmers raised them on high trellis, similar to grape arbors, but much taller. The fruits, resembling cones, were picked and dried in a kiln, then baled for marketing.

I think about the buildings that were common in town within the last half of the twentieth century and are now rarely seen. My thoughts then go on to speculate about what buildings will disappear from the landscape during the next fifty years. Perhaps the great new homes we see constructed now will fade away in favor of a new style of home so drastically different that someone will write a column similar to this to point out things the way they used to be.

A HARD LESSON LEARNED (3/2000)

This is about floods – the super powerful natural force that has been the source of greatest disaster faced by man, on an annual basis, from biblical times. Recent events in my life have caused me to think about the relationship between man's land use habits and this redoubtable force. My awareness of floods and their impacts on our lives, even in New Boston (see Remembering The Past, by Winston Daniels in the last issue of NBB), has been recently enhanced. First, by attending a seminar on flood insurance that was jointly sponsored by the New Hampshire Land Surveyors Association and the Governor's Office of Emergency Management. Second, by recent survey projects undertaken by my office that involved determining the elevation of flood waters relative to house floor levels, and third by a visit to Las Vegas where I heard about a damaging flood that occurred during July of 1999.

The seminar speaker, George Musler, captured the attentiveness of all- not only with his impressive recall of all the rules and regulations of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), but also with humorous anecdotes. I want to add that Claire Dodge, New Boston's former Planning Coordinator, ably assisted Mr. Musler with his presentation. As I understand Claire's responsibilities in her new position at the Office of State Planning, she assists local communities in their efforts to comply with the requirements of Flood Plain Ordinances and the NFIP. I can only highlight that part of the seminar content that I think would be interesting to readers.

The 1936 flood, so dramatically depicted by Mr. Daniels in his column, caused great damage to land and buildings. This economic loss was borne entirely by owners and the town as a whole. It was not until 1968 that the Federal Government established the NFIP and made insurance available to landowners for flood losses. New Boston is one of a majority of New Hampshire towns that has maps, prepared by the Federal Government, showing where flood damage is likely to occur with a probability of once in every hundred years, or a one percent chance of occurring each year. For the gamblers in town, it is interesting to note that these odds could result in such a flood occurring each year. One in one hundred odds are really quite good, certainly a lot better than the odds offered by the casinos in Las Vegas! New Boston participates in the NFIP under authority of the local Floodplain Development Ordinance adopted in March 1990.

New Boston is fortunate to be one of the first in the state to have the Flood Insurance Rate Maps revised and furnished in computer-based format. This will facilitate the analysis of flood hazard impact on individual parcels of ownership. This was prompted by the recent re-study of the downtown flood hazard area boundaries resulting from the loss of the dam adjacent to the Parker residence on Mill Street. Properties upstream from the old dam site will now have a lower 100-year flood elevation.

All New Boston landowners can purchase flood insurance under the NFIP, even if they own land not within the flood hazard areas shown on the maps on file at Town Hall. All owners with land in the flood hazard areas will, sooner or later, be faced with the requirement to buy flood insurance. Private lenders and Governmental Agencies guaranteeing residential and commercial loans all require owners to buy insurance before dispersing money for construction or home improvements. Surprisingly, flood insurance is not available in the usual home insurance policy. Sources state that there are about 100 private sector companies in the U.S. that offer flood insurance. The minimum premium for these policies is about \$300 per year and it goes up from there depending on risks specific to the property.

A River Road property owner recently applied for a home improvement loan and was told he had to purchase flood insurance. The lenders consultant had determined that the location of the property was coincidental with the flood hazard area shown on the map and he advised the lender to require the owner to engage a surveyor to complete a NFIP Elevation Certificate. I did the work and completed the form. The survey confirmed that the lowest floor (basement) elevation was lower than the elevation of the 100-year flood elevation. My report was understandably disturbing to the owner whose property has been owned by family for 2000 "In the Country" by Robert Todd

a long time. He stated that there is no remembrance of flood levels ever reaching the basement, even during the '36 flood.

The owner and I were hoping that my survey would show the lowest floor elevation to be above the 100-year flood elevation. Had that been the case the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), established under the 1968 Federal Law enactment, would have issued, on request, a Letter of Map Amendment. This letter would actually amend the flood hazard area maps at Town Hall by stating that this particular property is incorrectly included in the flood hazard area and the owner is not required to buy insurance.

I recently returned from a vacation trip to Las Vegas, the intent in choosing that destination being to thrust me into an environment so totally different from my daily surroundings that I would purge my head of all thoughts of home. It worked! However, Laura and I did take a day trip out of the city to see the Hoover Dam and some typical Mojave Desert landscapes. We had a thrilling ride in a Hummer. What I learned on this trip relevant to this story is about the extreme storm and flooding that occurred July 9, 1999. Prior to our desert trip I had seen folks in the casino wearing tee shirts with the incantation "I survived the July 9, 1999 Las Vegas Flood" and actually thought it was a joke.

How could a flood possibly occur in a desert region that has four inches of average annual precipitation? During my short trip through the desert I did not see streams and wetlands, the water regimes that I know are subject to flooding in New Boston. What I saw were wide alluvial fans that were obviously scoured by high velocity water flow. Several of these were seen on the outskirts of the city and the downstream direction was toward Las Vegas Avenue, "the strip". Our tour guide parroted the weather statistics for the day of the flood, "The rainfall amounted to three inches in four hours and the flood hit the city within about twenty minutes of the downpour. Mobile homes were lifted from the pads and washed away, automobiles were moved thousands of feet from their parking sites and most roads were washed away". As I visualized this event, I realized how much I appreciated the forest in which I live. Las Vegas has no forest on the surrounding hills to intercept rainfall on leaves and stems and to absorb runoff in the thick layer of organic residue on the forest floor.

For centuries man has made lots of mistakes in learning to live with nature. We seem to forget that we need to stay out of harms way, to keep our dwellings out of floodplains. Our response to these lessons as a nation has been to construct flood control works such as dams, levees, and seawalls, as well as providing disaster relief to flood victims. This approach failed miserably. I believe we have finally, since 1968, come to grips with the problem and understand that the best approach is the one now used here in New Boston under the NFIP.

Community, Nature & Spirit (4/2000)

This title appears on an announcement of a fall conference at my alma mater. The announcement solicits participation in a three-day fall conference and calls for proposals to present papers on this topic. Well, I do not have any intention to send in a proposal, but the challenge captured many moments of thought process. Lots of questions went through my head like traffic by Dodge's store at six thirty o'clock Monday morning. What is the connection among the three words in the title? Is there any harmony in the manifestations of community and nature and the quintessence of spirit, or are they in conflict? And how does it all affect me anyway? These are three of the many questions that I pondered the most. If academia considered this subject worthy of a conference, then I reasoned that I should at least think about it a little and try to resolve my questions.

A community means many things to people. I think of community as a place, space on which to live, set out with political boundaries superimposed upon the landscape of hills, streams, and wetlands- all habitats for plants and animals that know no boundaries. Then there is the human element that has aggregated itself within circles of friendship with neighbors and sometimes in not so friendly circles with neighbors. In our area these 2000 "In the Country" by Robert Todd

aggregations grew spontaneously at the intersection of travel routes whether roads, rivers, railroads or combinations of these various routes of travel. These groupings were, by design, church centered and they also established the means to serve the needs of residents. Blacksmith shops, sawmills, and gristmills, supplied with abundant natural resources played important roles in sustaining communities. Everyone in the community had strong cultural ties and everyone worked the land.

In contrast today's community members have much less dependence upon their community and ties to the land are very weak. The need for persistent services such as highway departments, schools, libraries, banks, recreation departments, police and fire departments remains. However, one hundred years ago there was much more involvement by community members in providing these services as compared with the involvement today. The social connections between community members are diminished considerably from the community of a hundred years ago.

Nature, in this context, is the dynamic interaction of all forms of life on the landscape with the non-living part of the landscape, including water, minerals and the atmosphere (a short definition of ecology). These interactions are powered by the sun, and the laws of physics (gravity, electricity, etc.). The interactions serve up clean water and air plus nutrients to sustain plants, animals, and man. This support of our physical being, although conspicuous to the observant, is largely taken for granted.

The expression of the human spirit can be seen in our individual perceptions of nature. Kellert has classified nine values of nature in his book "The Value of Life". He states that our human fulfillment depends on the opportunities we have to appreciate one or more of the nine values of nature. I agree with his point that man has an inner desire to be in the presence of other living creatures and even plants in the environment. A depravation of this basic need can result in human disorders, psychological and physical.

I have read numerous accounts of research findings about a faster rate of patient recovery in hospital rooms having windows with views to natural landscapes when compared to those patients in rooms with views to brick walls of adjacent buildings. Elderly residents of nursing homes are observed to be happier and healthier in the presence of dogs and cats in the nursing home. Personally, I observe that a walk in the forest always uplifts me. I even have to admit feeling a calming affect when holding my cat.

Kellert's work goes on to show that the enjoyment of nature and the connection to nature is uniquely personal. Culture, education, income, gender, and age all influence our perception of the values of life. Of the nine values classified by Kellert, I have greatest appreciation for three. From the Ecological-Scientific value, I receive fulfillment in gaining knowledge and understanding about ecology. At the same time I enjoy my strong emotional bond to the natural environment- an example of Kellert's Humanistic value. A third value that is important to my fulfillment falls under Kellert's Moralistic label.

The Moralistic value I enjoy is through a spiritual reverence for nature. The mysteries of life and the unknown forces that guide the processes of life are to me, Godly. This feeling started many years ago in a college biology class where I learned that there is a single molecule responsible for the origin of life and which is common to all life forms- DNA. I was awestruck in learning that the DNA molecule that made me a human being is very similar to the DNA molecule that makes an oak tree. These molecules have the same basic structure. They are different only in the arrangement of a few chemical units within the basic structure. Man- that's being connected to nature!

I think I have now got the meaning of community, nature and spirit straight in my head and have confirmed that they are intertwined and inseparable. Now I am ready to plunge into answering my own questions. Yes, there is harmony between the concepts. Yes, there are conflicts. The harmony lies in the obvious continuing human need for the basic values of life. The ecological processes that provide us with food and shelter will remain basically unchanged. The opportunity for appreciation of the values labeled by Kellert

will always be there. The conflicts among the concepts springs from the fact that our communities are changing so very fast that ecological processes are being altered and the opportunities to commune with nature are diminishing.

I understand more completely the conflicting perceptions held among members of the human race toward the natural world since reading “Manifest Your Destiny – The Nine Spiritual Principles for Getting Everything You Want” by Wayne W. Dyer. This author supports the philosophy that man is inseparable from his environment and at the same time is distinct from it. He explains that just as our physical being has a front side distinct from the backside but inseparable from it, so too is the existence of our physical being related to our environment.

Dyer argues that our society has brought us up to believe that we are in dominance of nature and that it stands in the way of prosperity and convenience. This attitude has directed us to destroy lots of natural functions and values to our own detriment. He believes that when man loves his environment as much as he loves himself and understands that it is an extension of himself, then he will cease activity harmful to nature and will sustain himself and his community as well.

What do all these ideas mean to me and to my neighbors? Obviously I am concerned about sustaining the quality of life in New Boston, not so much for myself, but for generations to come. At times I feel that conflicts could overwhelm the harmonies among the concepts of community, nature and spirit. However, I have faith that citizens will react rationally guided by the belief that we are in the trees; we are in the streams; we are the animals, and; we are the air we breathe. My faith is bolstered by the positive actions, by wide margins, on most conservation related articles in the Town Warrant last week. These actions will lead to a sustainable community and a fulfillment of human spiritual needs.

Fire: A Tool or a Weapon of The Devil (5/2000)

Joe Nangle and I waited with some anxiety at the gate of the New Boston Air Station while the security guard routinely issued our pass. Late yesterday afternoon Steve Najjar, Natural Resource Planner at the station had called me and invited the Forestry Committee and the Conservation Commission members to observe his project, a prescribed burn. I had been excited by the prospect and Joe had come along with a curiosity about the science to be demonstrated.

It was nearly two o’clock and I was concerned that Steve would be too busy with preparations to escort us to Roby Hill, the highest point in Mont Vernon, and the site of the burn. I sniffed the breeze to detect wood smoke. Had the fire lines been burned out yet? I looked at the flag and noticed that it was fully extended in the breeze. Then, I thought maybe they would not be burning at all. I remembered reading the 13 burn parameters sent to me by Steve. All of these must be met to comply with the permit to burn. One of these parameters is wind velocity- it must not be greater than 8 miles per hour.

It seemed a long time before the guard directed us to where Steve would meet us. Joe parked his jeep just inside the gate and rode with me. We went past the “giant golf ball” antennae. I chuckled to myself about what I would do if a giant suddenly appeared to “tee off”. Joe interrupted my thought with the statement that the geodesic dome was developed by the famous Buckminster Fuller. This was one of many bits of knowledge Joe dispensed at regular intervals during our periods of waiting that afternoon.

Steve and Mark Rosenthal, an employee of the US Army Corps of Engineers and an experienced burn boss, met us at the end of the paved road. We followed Steve’s pickup, noticeably “squatting” from its heavy load of fire equipment. At Roby Pond we pulled of the jeep trail and parked. Steve set the pickup in position at a strategic position to set the suction line in place. Following the introductions, we were enthralled by the

seclusion and beauty of the natural setting. Mark said he had observed a pair of what he thought were loons in the pond earlier. Joe and I squinted so as to somehow improve our vision across the pond to the two “v” shaped wakes that were reflecting light. Were those the loons seen earlier?

Joe and I fell in step with Mark and Steve to the top of the Hill by way of the jeep trail. I made the mistake of trying to keep up with Mark. He did not seem to breathe deeply, a sign that he was in top physical shape. He was lean as a whip and I knew he was capable of responding to any demand upon him during the burn and the mop up to follow. I did not say much along the hike for fear that I would show my lack of conditioning. Joe and I did not talk about the hike, so I do not know how he felt. He appeared to take it without strain. Is he in better shape than I?

On arrival on the top of the hill, a bedrock knob, we were again struck by our surroundings, this time by the vista. Distant hills, revealed through the few small pines, were visible in a spectacular panorama spanning at least 180 degrees. I observed the vegetation and noted that it was comprised of clumps of small gray birch, red maple, red oak combined with the fewer pine. Under the small trees there were areas of exposed bedrock interspersed with dense low bush blueberry and ground juniper.

In light of the observed plant community, I thought about the day’s objective set forth in the burn plan. Steve has planned the burn to kill the overstory of gray birch and pine, thereby encouraging the growth of blueberry and herbaceous cover. The result being improved recreational amenity and greater diversity in plant growth that will add to the wildlife habitat quality.

We could hear the work of the five men on the fire crew busily clearing fire lines with chain saws. This activity went on for some time and it became clear to us that, despite all the planning and preparation, a two-hour ignition delay was likely. Joe and I passed the time in observation and spontaneous conversation with Captain Kristoff and Sergeant Naughton who arrived to facilitate coordination between the operation and the station commander, whose order to proceed would be required.

Soon, my consciousness left the present and drifted back to a time that ended with the settlement of southern New Hampshire by my forebears early in the seventeenth century. I was thinking about the time when human communities here were represented by the American Indian. I realized how little understanding there is about how the natives drastically influenced plant ecology in our area. Indians had only crude hand tools to work the land, so they developed the skill to use fire.

Indians created glades in the forest by piling wood against the large trees and setting the piles afire. The heat of these fires killed the cambium and the trees died. Bean and corn crops were then planted by the natives in the clearings thus created. This agricultural method continued until soil nutrients were diminished, then the glade was abandoned for a new clearing. Growth on the site succeeded to blackberries, raspberries and blueberries that were gathered by the natives. Great areas of forest were burned each year during spring and fall. As a result the forest took on an open, park-like appearance, dominated by large oak, chestnut, and hickory trees. Under the sparse trees, grasses and herbs flourished on nutrients released by the fire. Each fall the Indians gathered and stored the abundant mast for winter consumption.

Wildlife species were also drawn to these same sources of nutrition. Indians hunted the turkey, deer, grouse, pigeons, and elk for a source of protein. The hides were used for clothing and shelter. These species attracted animals higher in the food chain such as wolves, fox, bear, bobcat, cougar, and lynx. Indians trapped these fur-bearing creatures for clothing. I reasoned that without fire as a tool and without the skill to use it, Indians would not have survived for the thousands of years before the “white” settlement.

The conflict between European land use paradigms and the Indian way was destined to bring an end to the use of fire as a way to sustain life. Europeans overran the countryside and did not develop the skill to use
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fire as a land management tool. Except for a special few, there are not many who use fire today. There are a few foresters and wildlife managers that still use fire in their work. I suspect there are still blueberry farmers using fire to revitalize the fields, especially in Maine. The practice of burning pastures to maintain grasses is no longer considered acceptable and is indeed the object of fear.

My consciousness rebounded to the present when Steve and Mark returned to the top of the hill and announced they were ready for the final checklist. Mark used a sling psychrometer to determine the relative humidity- it met the parameter. Similarly, the wind speed was measured at 4-6 miles per hour, less than the maximum of 8. Steve made calls to the local fire tower, the local fire wardens, the Manchester Airport tower and finally to the station commander. Other items on the checklist were determined to be in place and the word was passed down to the lighting boss to ignite at will. Anticipation peaked – the moment had arrived – the time is four thirty. They were as prepared as a launch crew at Cape Canaveral!

Suddenly, I remembered my promise to Laura. We had a seven o'clock dinner reservation in Portsmouth. I must leave that instant and bury my expectation of seeing the fire run! Reluctantly, Joe and I bid a hasty adieu and trekked down the trail along the hose lay bulging from the water pressure.

As I traveled that evening, I recalled my experience of the day and compared the role of fire in Indian culture with the very limited role it plays in our culture. The results of prescribed burn are the same today as the results of burns nearly 400 years ago. Before European settlement, biological diversity, through causes artificial or natural, meant abundance, stability, and a regular supply of things supporting Indian culture. To a greatly diminished scale, fire promotes biological diversity that provides the same benefit to our lives. The demonstration I saw today convinces me that this tool could and should be used in land management to a greater extent and with the same degree of skill and preparedness exhibited by Steve and the burn crew.

Cranberries, Canals, and Water Rights (6/2000)

Some mysteries take a lifetime to unravel. Such is the nature of this story that begins in my childhood. The wonder and attentiveness of my “child’s” mind, a quality that I wish could have stayed with me in my adult life, combined with a close relationship with patient and caring grandparents, provided memorable clues to a mystery that I have only recently come to understand. This is not an astounding revelation. But, for those holding an interest in historical land use in New Boston, this may add insight about the skills and knowledge of our forbears that were important for their survival and now forgotten.

I spent a lot of time looking in awe at old things hanging on walls and stacked in corners of the several sheds and barns at the old farm where my grandparents lived. I suppose my wonder was mostly in considering how these things could become objects of play. However, as I recall my feelings, there was also much wonder as to how the objects were used. One has to understand the date of origin of these things to fully understand what I was observing. My family first occupied the farm in 1814 and I know that nothing was thrown away – it stayed on the wall, or stacked in the corners, from one generation to the next and I represented the fifth generation to look upon these things.

The two old things that relate to this story are made of wood, one has a long handle and the second has a short handle. To the handle of each is attached a three sided box. One of the sides has long teeth, like a comb. The long handled object I called a “stand up model” and the other a “sit down model”. I always looked upon these tools as works of art because of the gracefulness in their form. I think the current term for this form is “ergonomic”. The boxed part of the tools have curved ends and the teeth also have a pleasing curve. I remember the day my grandmother answered my short questions about these objects. How? What? Why? I consider myself lucky to have a grandmother that not only answered my inquiry – she took me to a place close by to show me how they were used.

It is a short walk from the farm up Colburn Road to a field, now owned by Dan and Maureen Teague, where my lesson was held. At the margin of the field and large meadow there was a patch of delicate vines covering the ground under the grass. On these vines there were thousands of marble sized berries, mostly red, except where shaded by the leaves they were cream colored. She told me these were cranberries. Then she showed me how to pick the berries with the cranberry rakes, the objects of my interest. She and I raked up a whole pail full of the shiny, sour, berries and carried them to her kitchen. I guess I will never forget that lesson, or the sauce and cranberry bread that my grandmother made and shared with me that day.

That cranberry patch has furnished the main ingredient of many types of bread and sauces long since my grandmother passed away. The plants still thrive to this day. The cranberry rakes are still an object of beauty and reverence, even though I do not now use them. My wonder has turned from that of a child to that of an adult. How did the cranberries become established? How important were they to my ancestors and to early settlers? Answers came to me through my work as a land surveyor.

Lots of history is revealed to land surveyors in the old deed descriptions they rely upon in re-establishing old property lines. Some of this information is irrelevant to the boundary location, though the history lessons are filed in the archives of the mind, to be recalled in the future. More clues about my mystery of the cranberry patch came to me in this way. When doing boundary research, early in the 1980's, for a former owner of the Teague property, I found a deed written early in the nineteenth century describing six acres known as the cranberry meadow. This lead to my understanding that the cranberry patch must be a portion of the cranberry meadow nurtured by early settlers in the area, people named Andrews.

A second clue appeared in the same deed. This was a description of a "right to draw water from Haunted Pond (now known as Scoby Pond) in Francestown to protect the cranberries in said meadow". The deed went on to describe, "Also another piece of land in Francestown... situated near the outlet of Haunted Pond and known as the Scoby Mill Lot, containing one acre more or less". At the time I did not understand the connection between Haunted Pond and the cranberries in the Teague meadow. However, I realized that the Middle Branch of the Piscataquog River flowed out of Haunted Pond and ran through the cranberry meadow.

Until recently, I believed that I would not fully unravel the mystery of the cranberry meadow. Last January I was engaged to survey the boundary of the "Hundred Acres" property on Scoby Road at the Francestown line. This property is also privileged to have the Middle Branch of the Piscataquog River running through it and has further amenity as the site of two old watermills. In the course of researching the deeds in the chain of title for the property more surprising clues about the cranberry meadow were revealed.

In the descriptions of early nineteenth century deeds for the property I found evidence that cast further light on how the Teague cranberry meadow is connected to the Haunted Pond. A clause in an early deed states, "Also all of the water privileges belonging to said premises including the canal from said premises to the Scoby Pond, so called, with the use of whatever land is necessary to keep said canal in repair and also all other mill rights, water rights, canal rights, and flowage rights which we may possess..... Expressly reserving however the right therein described of John M. and William E. Andrews to draw water from said Scoby Pond when it is necessary to do so to preserve their cranberries from frost". I remembered that the Andrews were former owners of the Teague Cranberry meadow and now I was certain that I understood how the water was "drawn" from Haunted, or Scoby Pond, to the cranberries. Part of it came through the canal. The remaining flow was in the course of the river. All of it passed through water control devices in at least five mill sites, separately owned, before reaching the cranberry meadow three miles downstream from Scoby Pond.

In doing the reconnaissance work for the survey I was to perform, I was distracted by the presence of the canal described in the old deed. On the "Hundred Acres" property the canal ends at the westerly side of the river just north of Scoby Road, at the remains of a stone structure, which I believe supported one of the water

control devices. (This site is shown as a bedstead factory on the Hillsborough County wall map, dated 1854, that hangs on a wall in my office.) The beginning of the ditch is about four hundred feet downstream from the outlet of Scoby Pond. I reasoned that the Andrews family had the right to open the control structure at this location to “draw” water to the cranberry meadow.

The canal appears today as a dry ditch about 6-8 feet deep and about 8 feet wide at the top. The earth from the ditch is piled on the lowest side of the ditch just as the workers who suffered the hard labor had placed it. The ditch meanders about 1400 feet through the dense forest of today and poses what must be a most curious scene to those coming to it while hunting or hiking. It is difficult for me to imagine the physical exertion expended to excavate this trench through the stony, hard packed till soils on our landscape.

Now that I have seen the canal, have read the deeds describing the water rights and the cranberry meadow, and have enumerated the old mills along the river, I am finally satisfied that I know all that can be learned about this mystery. I am now left with a great feeling of satisfaction and an even greater appreciation for the knowledge and ingenuity of our forebears. Beyond that I have gained high regard for the cooperation among the neighbors who first settled in this area. This cooperation must have been necessary to sustain their lives. What better example could they have given us to follow in dealing with present day land use decisions?

Volunteerism – The Foundation of our Community (7/2000)

On all levels, volunteers in New Boston have distinguished themselves in service to others. Many have made the ultimate sacrifice and they are honored, particularly on Memorial Day. Many have given a part of their life in the governance of this nation, this state, and this town; their efforts have made a great contribution to the quality of our lives. Another group of volunteers has bestowed significant benefits upon our community. Typical profiles of these people are featured each month in Joyce Welton’s column, “Honoring Volunteers”. Joyce seems to find plenty of people to write accolades about in New Boston, but I observe signals indicating a decreasing proportion of volunteers coming from the ranks of our residents.

The group I talk about does not include those elected to a position of volunteerism, or those in the ranks of a formal organization. They are not in formal institutions or fraternal organizations that give special symbols of rank to members performing certain good deeds. I am writing about the people who have followed their hearts in pursuit of a goal they thought was worthwhile. These are the people that I remember most vividly, for they are the ones who have touched my life and filled it with their spirit. Their spirit also sustains our community.

I was fourteen years of age when I learned the meaning of volunteerism. During the summer of that year, I had earned enough money mowing lawns to buy a bicycle and it was like I had sprouted wings- I was as free as a bird. I could ride like the wind and the 2.5 miles from my house to the village took less than 12 minutes. My reward was to be downtown with friends, playing ball on the playground or just hanging out on Dodge’s porch. It was on a typical day in that summer, while on Dodge’s porch, that I began my education on being a volunteer. The lesson came spontaneously from a man I barely knew. He was a husky man and in an equally husky voice, he said, “We’re havin’ a sawin’ bee at the Church on Saturday and we need ya ova’ there t’ help out”. This approach was so direct and forceful that I could only reply in a fearful stammer that I would be there.

The Church sawing bee was a huge success and I even recovered from my humiliation early in the day after I realized what it was all about. Several men hoisted cordwood onto a saw rig, another took chunks away from the saw and chucked them into the cellar where I and a couple of other kids stacked them along the cellar walls. Another crew of several men hauled the cordwood to the Church from some woodlot in town. At noon the work halted. All were invited into the Church to be seated at a huge table where we feasted, family style, on

many dishes prepared by ladies I presumed were rounded up by the same man, using the same method, that brought me.

During that summer, I seized the opportunity to play baseball on a little league team organized by a local man that had a great love for kids and baseball. At the first meeting on the playground, I was told by that man, with a much softer voice than I heard from the first man that recruited me, that we were all going to work before we could play ball. That day we mowed and raked the field, picked up all the trash under the grandstand, repaired the backstop screen, and corrected a drainage problem in right field. We were all too tired to play ball that day. Oh what fun we had the rest of the season!

Through the years the sawing bees continued, the ball field was prepared annually and many other affairs staged, all by the busy fingers and dedicated hearts of volunteers. They sold tickets at the 4th of July celebrations and made preparations for the Hillsborough County Fairs. Through all these callings my friends and I came to understand what the word volunteerism meant. Those soliciting my help, first perceived as threatening and fearsome, became respected mentors and great lifelong friends. Those volunteer leaders set high standards for public service.

At first, I thought that volunteering was something expected of everyone in town and that was the way things get done. The examples I saw demonstrated clearly implied that volunteerism had a higher priority than personal goals. Today, I believe that volunteerism is approached much differently. I am not judging this as poor behavior, but it reflects a change, during the maturation of my generation, in the customs that bind our society.

I believe that many in today's generation, without the volunteer experience, are missing a wonderful reward in life. They are not realizing the personal gratification of accomplishment that comes with volunteer service. They are missing the friendship, self-esteem, camaraderie, and other personal values associated with the experience. On the community level, the mechanisms that roll out functions benefiting all move slower with fewer volunteers. Even though I observe that New Boston has more volunteerism than most small towns in the area, there may be fewer people, by proportion, taking advantage of the volunteer experience. I ask myself-what brings this change I observe?

Perhaps it is because there is no husky, gravel voiced man to "solicit" the help of teenagers on Dodge's Store porch, and then, through example and reward, to condition those teenagers to make a volunteer response repeatedly throughout their lives. Maybe it is because residents are coming from parts of our society that are not accustomed to volunteerism. On analysis, I believe both factors are a force in our community. It is no longer acceptable to summon a young person from the street to do projects involving physical labor without first clearing with parents. Further, many of our residents grew up in large suburban areas where services are delivered by paid staff, not volunteer effort.

What should be done to bring volunteerism back to the important custom it was years ago? I recall reading a letter to the editor some time back (maybe it was in this paper) that had what I believe to be a great approach to my hypothetical challenge. The idea was that some organization in town, possibly the Joe English Grange, would sponsor a forum where town agencies and private non-profit groups would be represented by key members explaining the missions and goals of their respective organizations. The presentations would highlight how people could become involved and who to contact. The audience would include residents personally invited by persons who are active volunteers in town.

Much time has passed since that writer caused me to think about how to nurture volunteerism in New Boston and to now write about it in this media. The subject is brought to mind now by the work of the 4th of July Association. It is this demonstration of involvement that gives me stronger feelings about the power and benefit of volunteerism. I would like to initiate dialog with anybody that has an interest in strengthening the
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foundation of our community and providing opportunity for personal enrichment through increased volunteerism.

ENCOUNTERS OF THE MEMORABLE KIND (9/2000)

I have always looked upon the opportunity to trek into the many habitats on the landscape with eager expectation that I would see the wild creatures that live in those habitats. Most of the time, these adventures in forest, wetlands, and fields are actually appurtenant to a contract that I must fulfill by gathering survey data, or forestry data. My real payoff for the day however, is to encounter an animal. Many animal contacts have given me memories that in recall continue to provide great pleasure. My journal of this relationship with wild animals is quite lengthy now and I enjoy sharing the content with other people. I hope that sharing my experiences will lead others to similar pleasures.

I often think about what makes meeting up with residents of the forest so appealing. I know from talking with others that this value of the natural world varies from person to person and depends greatly on the age, gender, occupation, and cultural background of that person. My feelings about natural values will not be shared by all who read this column, but I hope that this will cause my readers to look within and ask, "How do I value wildlife and how do wildlife encounters enrich my life?" For me the value is in connection to reality and in a feeling of being in harmony with my environment.

The encounters that have provided the most distinct memories are those involving large mammals. For years, I hunted deer and had considerable success. When I was young, I enjoyed the encounter and the taking of the animal for trophy and meat. Then, in my middle age and to the present, I have given up hunting and have valued more the observation of deer behavior than of taking the animal. It is difficult to describe the compassion that wells up in my heart the few times in my life that I have come upon a new born fawn. The species relies on the fawn's lack of scent, stillness, and camouflage to protect the young. The mother deer will not stand to defend the fawns, but will hide close by until danger passes. On such occasions it has been difficult for me not to touch these vulnerable and seemingly helpless creatures. My judgment prevails over passion and I walk away and leave the animals undisturbed, taking only a mental image of the beautiful moment.

As humankind presses upon the habitat of the deer, the species adjusts well to the invasion, changing its habits as necessary to survive. The browse usually provided by the forest landscape is lost in an urban environment and the deer feed heavily upon landscape plants established around new homes. Soon the grand animal becomes a "nuisance critter" in the eyes of most homeowners. A poignant example of this I observed during a trip to Hilton Head in February 1999. The wall-to-wall golf courses with condominiums sprouting in all directions have left no natural habitat for deer. Further, there are no predators or legal hunting on the island. Consequently, an overpopulation of deer is causing frustration and lawsuits. Residents want the animals destroyed, the visitors and animal rights activists want the animal left alone. Each day of my visit I read in the local paper accounts of this episode and thought how nice it would be to avoid those circumstances in New Boston.

A memory that lives vividly in my mind is also my most unusual encounter. I was working on a timber cruise on a bright sunny day in mid-February, the snow from a storm the previous night was deep and as fluffy as a pile of feathers. The trees were tall and underbrush was sparse making the view of my surroundings more encompassing and delightful. I was proceeding along a cruise line following a compass heading and noticed directly ahead of me a dark spot in the snow. There were no tracks on the surface, nor was there an opening from the dark spot to the surface. I could not make out what the spot was until I was directly over it, one snowshoe on each side. I bent over to get a closer look and could make out the form that I recognized as a grouse. On impulse, I reached into the snow and grasped the grouse in my hands. The bird did not struggle much, but looked healthy and vigorous. I held the creature for a while and looked it over well, then opened my 2000 "*In the Country*" by Robert Todd

hands, palms up. The bird stood and immediately took off with a whirr. I have told this story to others and one old timer told me that in very cold weather the bird burrows into soft snow to keep warm.

I observe that the ruffed grouse is becoming much less common than it was during my youth. This is because the preferred habitat is disappearing. The bird requires a habitat characterized by old orchard and early succession forest growth, the plants first appearing in field land following the cessation of agriculture. Suitable habitat for this species can be provided as a side benefit of standard forestry practices. However, large parcels must be preserved to facilitate economically viable forestry practices.

One particular up close and personal encounter with an animal has been a unique experience of mine. This occurred many years ago, although I still carry the thrill of the sighting, while I was marking trees for a timber harvest in Nottingham. I was paying close attention to the task and approached a large hemlock tree I had chosen for cutting, I measured and recorded the diameter, spray marked a yellow stripe across the stem, and sprayed a spot on the root collar. Then I stepped back to estimate the height of the tree in logs, all of this to provide data for estimating the board foot volume of the tree. As I looked up the tree my eyes met the eyes of another creature that had been watching me from its seat on a limb just about six feet over my head. We stared at each other for what seemed like a long time, I into the soul of nature and he into my soul. He/she made the first move, I was too awe struck to move, and with agility belied by its large size, the animal became a shiny black streak as it ascended the tree and disappeared into the top of another tree close by. I gained some composure and validated that the animal was a fisher cat.

Not since this encounter have I seen another of these animals in the woods. Many times while driving at night, I have seen them crossing the road in front of my vehicle. More often I have seen the interesting signs of their presence, long strides of five toe prints left on snow, or the pelt of a porcupine left “spread eagled” on the snow and picked clean of flesh and bone. Fisher cats are the greatest predator of porcupine. An encounter with this speedy creature is unlikely and I treasure mine. The animal is common in large mature forest areas and probably will not acclimate to an urban environment.

My personal experiences with moose and bear have been gained only during the last five years. This confirms the official acclaim that the two species are making their presence known quite dramatically during the past decade. Both of these animals have habitat requirements encompassing huge areas. Urban development in those habitats will unfortunately lead to nuisance encounters and popular demands for controlling the populations of these animals. The NH Fish and Game Department is working to head off this dilemma with a public education program to teach urban residents how to live with bears and to avoid dangerous encounters.

Whoops! I just read my word count on this piece and find it is nearly at my limit. I have only opened the first few pages of my journal and shared a few of my valued memories of the pleasures I have enjoyed in the forest. I wish that I had photographs to add, equal to those appearing on the 2001 New Hampshire Fish and Wildlife Calendar. Most of the impressive photos in the calendar are by Alan Briere, former resident of New Boston and a talented photographer.

I believe everyone in our society enjoys, to some degree, the values I find in the natural world and I believe they are worth perpetuating for the enjoyment of future generations. I also believe that we can be quite successful in this with insightful land use planning at the state and local level. Think about it.

The Importance of Place (10/2000)

Winston Daniels' September column, “*History of Bunker Hill*”, touched on a subject that has been in my thoughts for a long time. His tale reinforced my notion of how a place name, such as Bunker Hill, transcends the lives of those responsible for the name and points out how landmarks and geographical areas can become 2000 “*In the Country*” by Robert Todd

icons of culture. These icons are perpetuated on maps, in documents such as deeds and probate records, and in tall tales spread among people wherever they may congregate. The many place names in New Boston are, in my opinion, chapter headings in the history, mostly unwritten, of this town.

Place names in New Boston are shown on the topographical maps prepared by the US Geological Survey (USGS). These maps originated over 100 years ago and were, at first, compiled by surveyors in the field. These surveyors came into contact with local characters that offered their place names for the surveyors to note and later draft onto plans. These popular names have been carried over to each map revision. Today the map revisions are made from aerial photograph images, or satellite images, not from data gathered in the field. Therefore, it is unlikely that “new” place names will be added to these useful maps.

In my work as a surveyor I rely greatly on old land records that describe boundaries by referring to place names. I often use the USGS maps to find the location of land boundaries on the ground. Without the reference to place names shown on these maps surveyors would have more difficulty in locating properties.

Place names are important references in the course of daily discussion among people. The oral accounts of snowdrifts on Cochran Hill, the new house being built on Meetinghouse Hill, the geese seen flying into The Great Meadow, are acknowledged and understood by all the characters sitting around the bar at the Molly Stark Tavern, or on the “alternative pews” on Dodge’s Store porch. However, the discussions may be meaningless to the new folks that have not studied the maps or have not made a point to learn place names.

Most of the place names reflect the first settlers in the geographical area. In some instances this means that the names have been in common use since the period of 1736 to 1800. For instance, I know from personal research of property records that Hooper Hill is named for Jacob Hooper who settled on Hooper Hill in 1785. His family lived there for about 100 years. It is unlikely that the name of this hill, or any other hill will undergo a name change in the next hundred years. Such would be contrary to the nature of land tenure common today. That even a second generation of a family would stay on a property in these times would be an oddity.

The great exception to the characterization of places with settlers’ names in New Boston is the name “Piscataquog River”. This is the only name appearing among the iconography of New Boston that has its origin in the Algonquin language. Native Americans used place names to identify areas that were critical to their culture and they described these special places in terms of the relationships they had with the place. The watershed was a favored hunting ground for deer, thus they named it Piscataquog, meaning “place of many deer”.

Other place names have been attached to favorite landforms. Several geologic features in New Boston have been so prominent as to gain the distinction of a name. One such feature is Frog Rock, obviously named for its resemblance to a bullfrog. It is curious that once named by the first imaginative observer, all who thereafter come by the boulder see the likeness of a frog. I wonder if that first observer had perceived a dog, would we be calling it dog rock?

The Frog Rock likeness has been on postcards widely distributed during a time when folks came from the city to the country to “summer” in hilltop hotels in the area. The rock’s image on the postcard appears to be “enhanced” to more closely resemble a frog. Roberta Wilkins of Mont Vernon showed me the postcard and then went on to explain that the postcard was used as a promotional piece to lure customers to The Grand, a hotel that once stood on the hill near her lovely Victorian cottage. The *Town and City Atlas of The State of New Hampshire* (1892), (p.62) has a full-page lithograph of The Grand and an inset shows a stylized drawing of the Bullfrog Rock. I suppose this was to show that there was no lack of natural wonders for people to see while staying at The Grand.

Surrounding this lethargic frog is a cloak of Mark Twain style humor. A *New Hampshire Sunday News* (4/25/76) article by John Harrigan enshrouds the “frog” in mystery and makes fun of the possibility that the “frog” has leaped across the town line three times. The source of Harrigan’s article is said to be members of the Hartleb family and Mrs. Hartleb is quoted as saying “Frog Rock has set in three towns but has never moved an inch”. The insinuation from Mrs. Hartleb’s quote is that people, not knowing for sure where the town lines are located, have said Frog rock was in New Boston, then in Mont Vernon, and once in Lyndeborough. This landmark is actually in the southwest corner of New Boston, just northeasterly of the 2nd New Hampshire Turnpike.

A second report that the great Frog “jumped” across the town line appears in a news article dated 9/20/84 (source not known). This article features a picture captioned “Bull Frog Rock in Mont Vernon”. The following week the newspaper has an insertion written by Bill Mulligan (now deceased) of New Boston in which he takes exception to the article and states the facts about the frog’s location. Bill was a staunch member of the New Boston Historical Society and an active member in several other community organizations. (I thank Mrs. Roberta Wilkins of Mont Vernon for the copies of newspaper clippings featuring this landmark.)

A New Boston landform of a much greater scale has the name “Pinball”. This is a distinctive round hill most clearly viewed from the 4H grounds. I do not know the origin of the name, but I suspect it did not become so named until topographic maps were prepared by the predecessor agency of the USGS early in the 20th Century. The ball shape of the hill would not be apparent to observers on the ground, but from a topographic map the rounded contour lines reveal the unusual shape. People in Goffstown should be aware that if the Great Pinball Player hits this “ball” and dislodges it, then it will roll along down through the Piscataquog River valley and end up in Goffstown village scoring lots of points.

Indian Falls is another place name that may have originated in recent times. This is a steeply sloping outcrop of bedrock over which a reach of Bog Brook cascades into a bubbling pool. The soothing sounds and eye appeal at this site have endeared residents to this place. This place is secluded near the eastern boundary of town north of Bedford Road.

Still other places have become named by folks, now unknown, to identify common points of interest, or at intersections of travel routes. Klondike Corner, Gougeville (aka Paper Mill Village), Gregg Station, Sunday Driver Rock, New Boston Village (known earlier as Water Village), and Upper Village are all names that have been part of the vernacular that I came to understand while growing up. I suppose Todd’s Corner could be added to this list since my family has lived there for 186 years.

In addition to places known community wide, each of us has personal places, although of smaller scale no less important to us. Childhood memories are attached to these places and they never disappear from the mind’s eye. Any change in these favored childhood places can be particularly disturbing to an adult. My favorite childhood places include the old swimming hole in the Middle Branch near my great-grandfather’s old mill site. Here, on countless hot summer days, I cast off my raiment of society and cooled my naked body in the shaded waters. Another favorite place is a half circle of boulders at the crest of the rise in the pasture behind the barn. To me this was a fortress where, inspired by the adventures of the Lone Ranger, I defended settlers against constant outlaw attacks. These features, although insignificant to others, are immensely important to me.

It is in times like the present that I truly fear our society will forget the land and its place in our culture. I believe that it is important to maintain a tie to the passions and deeds of the past while making our town a preferred “place” for those that will surely come and settle, even if for only a moment in the context of time. We should realize that the responsibility for preserving “places” rests on the shoulders of all who influence future land use decisions.

MY REVERENCE FOR WOOD (11/2000)

There is a prominent structure in the yard at the Todd Homestead that brightens my day with an image of function and beauty. I view it as a symbol of my heritage and I admire it as a subtle work of art that seems to become more appealing as it ages and as I age. This structure is more a part of me than it is a barn. Every day it serves further to remind me of how deeply I feel about wood and how wood has been such a great friend to man through the history of civilization.

To me the wood siding on the barn is the most interesting portion of the structure. A pleasing composition with coarse textures and colors from a pallet of earthy hues has been brushed upon its four faces by the hands of Nature, wind and precipitation. For the sixty years of my living, the board and batten siding has not changed perceptively. The actual age of the boards may date back to 1854, the year that my great-grandfather built the barn. If that is fact, then the boards have been aging for 146 years. This is a long time for any material to stand against the weather. Wood seems to be the only material used by man that becomes prettier with age.

I often stand in wonder of the colors and then approach the building to feel the surface. The east end of the barn is a consistent warm gray that reflects a silver sheen in intense light. The board and batten is weathered away to a greater extent on this face than is the siding on the faces turned to other cardinal directions. As I run my fingers across the surface of the wide boards I sense the deep furrows in the surface. The early wood, also known as springwood, is composed of cells that are much softer and less durable than the cells composing latewood, or summerwood. The cells in the late wood resist the weather and remain in place longer than the springwood, hence the furrowed surface. Latewood stands up like the crest of waves and early wood is like the trough between the waves. It is this texture that adds greatly to the eye appeal of weathered boards. All species weather with a distinctive appearance and white pine is one of the most beautiful.

The troubling realization coming from my observation is that the powerful northeasters have also eroded the cells on the edges and ends of the boards so that they are feathered at the end and narrower in width. When I stand on the inside of the barn and look out the east end looks like a sieve. This erosion of the boards is the reason that I must soon consider replacing the siding on this end.

I walk to the west end of the barn and notice that the boards are not eroded so as to cause open spaces between them. Perhaps I can enjoy looking at these old boards for several more years. The colors are dark brown with streaks appearing yellowish orange in sunlight. This provides a pleasing contrast to the hues on the east side.

Another study in the artistic affects of weather on pine boards can be seen on the south side, perhaps my favorite perspective. Here, the old boards are textured with furrows as deep as those on the east end, but there are more checks (splits). Amazingly, the boards have retained a yellowish brown patina that reflects a golden hue in bright sunlight. A less dominant hue of dark umber streaks through the yellowish brown in a most interesting pattern. I will lament the time when these old friends must be replaced with new board and battens.

Aside from the beautiful aspects of wood utilization in the Homestead, there are many functional and artful uses of wood that surround me in my daily life. Surprisingly my lack of creative ability with wood has strengthened my endearment to it in the built environment. It is the human hand coupled with an artistic and inventive mind that turns wood into useful and eye pleasing objects, a synergy that I can only envy, not emulate. I treasure the likeness of me that my daughter Jackie carved out of a stick of cedar. I also love the stylistic doves inside an ivy border she carved into the surface of a pine board. Both items are gifts that give personality to my surroundings.

Throughout his entire career my neighbor, Jon Brooks, has crafted from wood in its raw form functional household furnishings, many of which have become museum pieces of great beauty and worth. I observe that Jon's efficiency and classic style relate to his skill in visualizing his final piece in the trunk or branch structure of a tree as he comes upon them in the forest. His work and use of wood has been an influence in my deep respect for wood.

Ever since I was a child I have dreamed of having a birch bark canoe. These dreams have only been fulfilled by making models from the supple bark I peeled from white birch trees. Bark canoes were to the Native Americans what the pickup truck is to current society. European settlers were amazed at the speed and maneuverability of the natives' sleek canoe. Nowhere else in the world has a civilization developed a superior craft for water travel. The skill necessary to construct a bark canoe has nearly vanished. One man, a legend in his own lifetime, has studied and mastered the art of building a bark canoe.

John McPhee, renowned author and columnist, wrote a book titled, Survival of the Bark Canoe. This book features the man I refer to above. His name is Henry Vallaincourt and he resides in Greenville, New Hampshire. Henry creates these canoes in the traditional way. He uses only a curved drawknife and handsaws to assemble the canoe from materials he gathers in the forests as far away as New Brunswick and Quebec. John McPhee tells a story of accompanying Henry and some of Henry's relatives and friends on a trip down the Allagash River in birch bark canoes made by this unique individual. Although I have never met Henry, he is one of my most admired heroes. Every time I go by his house and see him working on a canoe I get a strong urge to stop and shake his hand.

One of the most skillful people I ever met was Henry Friedrich. He could do anything with wood and he knew the characteristics of all the wood species that he used. This man influenced my life greatly and most of what I know about woodcraft can be traced to his lessons and examples. What I learned from him was more an understanding of wood and how it can be crafted than it was a skill in doing the work myself – this I never fully grasped. Henry, in his seventies at the time, was instrumental in converting the Todd Homestead's primitive kitchen and outhouse with no plumbing and central heat into a modern and comfortable dwelling. His work will be evident in my home for as long as it stands.

In his advanced age, Henry busied himself in crafting handy baskets from slats he sawed from short timbers of butternut. He chose this species because it had the qualities of being durable, light and flexible. He signed all of his baskets and several serve a function in my home today, the most practical being a beautiful tall clothes hamper that he made out of butternut. I think this is the largest basket he ever made. Henry also used white oak slats for baskets that he designed for more heavy uses such as gardening.

Tom Speck carries on in the Friedrich tradition of butternut basket making in his shop on Bunker Hill Road in New Boston. His craft products are functional and beautiful art forms in their own right. He is destined to establish his own legend with his craft. It is unfortunate, however, that butternut trees may disappear from the landscape because of the canker disease that is currently decimating the species.

As I think about concluding this column, my eyes flick about my house from one treasured wooden furnishing to another. First, there is my grandmother's beautiful walnut dining table, then the 100-year-old highchair that seated my father and my aunts and uncles up to that dining table. Finally, I focus on the 180-year-old wooden cradle. My great-great grandmother's tireless foot in rocking to sleep my great grandfather and his four brothers and sisters wore down the sides of this cradle. This focus spoke to me. At once I realized that if there is only one thought that I could write about wood that distinguishes it from all the other materials useful to mankind, it is that wood embraces our entire lives from cradle to casket, from birth till death, and every day between.

The Future of Open Space in New Boston (12/2000)

I often muse about the future of New Boston and especially how we can sustain the appealing functional landscape we all desire in the face of suburban development that is destined to occur. Can we expect that private landowners will grant lands and easements to facilitate greenways equal to our River Road? I think this is unrealistic. Sure it will occur to some extent, but when I consider how extensive development has been during the past twenty years and I speculate how much greater will be the change during the next twenty years, it is obvious that private gifting will be insignificant and ineffective. I predict exponential change. I believe that this century begins at a critical threshold for open space land acquisition.

I have probably traveled the River Road from New Boston Village to Goffstown close to 10,000 times in my lifetime. I have hiked, bicycled, driven, and even ridden the Sargent Bus Lines over this winding, often foggy, sometimes flooded, always beautiful link to urban areas and the services available there. During these sojourns I often think about the precious resources surrounding me and the ultra valuable gift they represent.

Overarching the travel corridor from the south side of the road are great specimens of red oak, hemlock, and white pine now reaching maturity as they grow on the Coleman Grove, the Langdell Grove, and the Fellows Grove. These long narrow strips paralleling the road were deeded by visionary benefactors to the Town of New Boston in the decades of 1920 and 1930.

Similar trees on the north side contribute to the cooling of the roadway as they grow on other lands gifted to the Town. More recently the travel corridor and the river corridor have been graced by preserves initiated by the Byam family, the Knowlton family, the Piscataquog Watershed Association, the Conservation Commission, and the Marden family. How very fortunate our community is to have this beautiful corridor, a true greenway, enhanced further by the new bridge linking the two segments of the railroad trail over the Middle Branch of the Piscataquog River. Generations to come will applaud the vision of our Conservation Commission and the other benevolent entities contributing to the greenway. I believe our good fortune must have been divinely guided because it developed without a master plan and without any one coordinating group or agency.

I have relatives that lived in Minneapolis and I had the pleasure of several visits with them. A memorable part of those few visits was the walks I enjoyed through the tree swaths of the park system that intertwines with the residential and commercial matrix of the city and came within yards of my aunt and uncle's home. I remember people walking, jogging, and socializing at the many benches set for the purpose. This image has stayed with me for years.

That city has a great heritage of parkland developed by Horace W. S. Cleveland in the late nineteenth century. This park system comprises nearly 6400 acres and has 58 miles of parkways. The resulting natural beauty and function is, I believe, unsurpassed in any other American city. Our River Road is a mini- replicate of the Minneapolis system. Horace Cleveland could not have done any better than the serendipitous heritage we now enjoy on River Road.

A great first step toward open space planning is underway in our Community. I commend the Planning Board for appointing sub-committees to study the ways and means of attaining some of the goals set forth in the New Boston Master Plan. The focus of the sub-committees will probably be the guidance and regulation of growth so as to protect natural resources from degradation. The adoption of a zoning amendment at the 1999 Town Meeting added a Forest Conservation District. When fully implemented, the provisions of this amendment should moderate the rate of fragmentation of large land parcels. However, the regulation of land use is only one way to sustain the "River Road" qualities throughout the town.

Purchase of land outright, or through purchase of development rights, similar to the fortuitous purchase made this year by the town on the Marvell land, is the most effective way to that end. This method of achieving open space has not yet been organized and planned. We seem to react to random opportunity and in so doing lack clear objectives, resources, and protocol. This results in crisis planning on the part of members of existing committees, overtaxing their energy and diverting them from their mandates. Recent open space tallies of this nature have been championed by dedicated members of the committees in town that deal with natural resources. These committees have missions that are only tangential to achieving the open space goals in the Master Plan. What is the answer to this dilemma?

I recommend that our Planning Board direct the land use sub-committee to coordinate an open space planning and acquisition effort in town. The Planning Board may have to provide staff to the sub-committee and provide a budget of a few thousand dollars. The sub-committee, once mandated by the Planning Board, would embark on the classic planning process: establishing goals and policies; inventorying existing open space resources; analyzing the open space needs of our town; assessing opportunities for meeting the needs, and; developing an action plan. I believe this work is especially meaningful in light of the opportunity presenting itself under the state's program entitled, "Land and Community Heritage Investment Program" that will begin accepting grant applications in the next few months.

A second recommendation that comes to mind is the need for an organization to facilitate open space acquisition. I am thinking about a New Boston Community Land Trust. This entity would be private and non-profit with a quasi-governmental function. Some of the functions I see this organization carrying out include: negotiating land sale agreements; seeking out funding sources; acting on imminent opportunities; and holding lands and interests in land for the short term, pending applications for grants and town meeting votes. The work of the trust would not come to full fruition until the Open Space Plan in town has been completed, but the organization of the trust should begin soon so that it is postured and experienced when the greatest need for its services arises.

The Forestry Committee has taken an initiative to secure a property for the town. The parcel constitutes a critical link in a major greenway comprised of a chain of protected private lands and town owned lands running from the southwestern corner of town northerly to Clark Hill Road properties just one half mile west of the village. The down payment for the land was appropriated from the Committee budget and from the sale of timber from the jewel of the town forest, the Lydia Dodge Lot. This effort was greatly enhanced by the Committee Chair's donation of labor and equipment to conduct the timber harvest. Further, the Committee members have vowed to go way beyond their usual duties, deferring all of the scheduled projects, to work on preparing the case for purchasing this land and presenting all the information about its attributes to the voters in March. This is another reaction to a narrow window of opportunity that would most likely not be available again. The work that the Forestry Committee has embarked upon is a project that a land trust organization is well suited to accomplish.

My involvement in the project described in the paragraph above has obsessed my consciousness and I felt compelled to advocate about open space. The older I become, the stronger I feel about taking determined, positive steps in preserving our heritage. Man's land use decisions in this era of society are mostly irreversible, sharply contrasting with the impact on the land by the European settlers in the 18th century that is today barely discernible.

In addition my comments about open space I am responding in a small way to the challenge posed in last month's editorial by Clif Labree, a helpful mentor during my days as a forestry student. This column illustrates that I have little faith that the exercise of private property rights will protect water quality, air quality, wildlife habitats, and the "River Roads" of our community. However, I do believe that public purchase of private land, not regulatory takings, is the proper means to those ends.