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The Significance of Stonewalls (1/2004)

During the period 1750 to 1830, about three generations on a human scale, farmers plucked stones from fields and pastures and piled them thigh-high in a network on the landscape of New Boston. This mammoth effort was not unique to this town, and when one considers the replication of this, during various periods of settlement, over all towns in New England, except for northern Maine, the undertaking becomes awesome. Most of us are aware of the benefits stone walls provided to our forebears and the influence they have had on poets and artists. I will reiterate the most well known influences in this column, but will also touch on the less obvious influences stone walls have on our lives.

Fall-from leaf drop until heavy snow cover; spring-from snow melt to leaf out, are the two seasons of the year when stone walls are most visible to casual and formal observers. Surveyors, one group of formal observers, usually measure walls as property line evidence without any more conscious consideration than that given by the farmers when they built them. In the fall season just passed I have observed walls as a land surveyor, but many thoughts stayed with me relating to how important they are to our culture. Perhaps, as I mature, I look at things in a broader frame of mind. In addition, my thinking has been influenced greatly by authors of two recent publications. The first is titled, Reading The Forested Landscape: A Natural History of New England, by Tom Wessels, The Countryman Press, Woodstock, Vermont (1997). The second is a book by Robert Thorson entitled Stone By Stone, published by Walker & Company, New York, (2002). These books have greatly increased public awareness of the significance of stonewalls in the minds of many that do not have the same day to day relationship with walls as do land surveyors and other formal observers-foresters, soil scientists, farmers, poets, and artists.

In the Thorson book (page 1) I read that there is estimated to be 240,000 miles of stone walls in New England. Immediately, I asked myself, how many miles of wall are in New Boston? Probably this question has not come up in local cocktail parties, or even in the minds of the most inquisitive. So, I set out to answer my own question.

The blister rust maps for New Boston were the source for my study. With a pair of dividers I stepped off the total length of walls depicted on a randomly selected sample of maps in the set covering the entire town. Expanding from this sample, representing 16% of the township area, I estimate that there are 318 miles of walls

over hills and through valleys. Then I used the 1856 Atlas to scale the total number of miles of road in town. I chose the Atlas on the assumption that the map would include roads laid out during the period when stone walls were being built and before new roads were added that were unlikely to be bounded by walls. I also estimate (actually an experienced guess) that 60% of the road length would be bounded by walls. Using my source and assumptions I calculate that there are 111 miles of stone walls along the road system. Adding these two estimates, I came to a total of 429 hard-bitten miles of walls in New Boston.

I felt sympathetic pain when I thought about the ruptured disks and hernias that may have been suffered by hardscrabble farmers building those walls. I calculate that a ton of stone was lifted and placed for every five linear feet of wall. Therefore, our forebears hefted 453,000 tons, a remarkable feat. Looking at this effort in a different way, I calculate that, at the rate of one rod per day, a bit of folklore I remember from some source, it would have taken 137,280 man-days of labor, plus an equal quantity in gallons of hard cider, to build the walls in town. Thorson says that on a New England wide basis, "The mass of stone used in those walls is greater than that from all the remaining ancient monuments put together."

The early farmers realized several obvious benefits from wall building. Perhaps the most important was to hold livestock, another would have been to mark boundaries of estates. A practical benefit lies in understanding that the farmer needed a place to store the stone strewn by the glacier over his best soils. The farmers found their work to be most efficient when there was a stone wall within two hundred feet of where they loaded the stone boats. This could explain why there is an abundance of walled enclosures on the landscape containing 3 to 4 acres. These enclosures were the croplands that sustained agriculture in the early days. Walls enclosing tillage are typically wider than and comprised of smaller stones than the walls surrounding pasture and woodland components of the farmsteads.

It seems that all interest in stone walls waned for more than 75 years following the exodus of farmers from the New England landscape. Then came a rural revival in the early 1900's. Attention again turned to the benefit of stone walls on the landscape-not from a utilitarian view, but from the subjective view of art and literature. Landscape impressionists created thousands of images of old, weathered farms with stone walls everywhere. This impressionism was most notably portrayed in the Currier and Ives publication of many prints showing sanitized early farm life with stone walls as an essential background. I find it amazing that the stultifying labor of building walls could be transformed into a gestalt of cultural romanticism in one hundred years.

Henry David Thoreau, Robert Frost, Walt Whitman, and most recently, Eric Sloane all wrote about stone walls. Their works collectively brought stone walls into the American consciousness, indeed starting a period of worship of these cultural symbols. Currently, there is a wall preservation movement emerging. Thorson asks his readers to join the Stone Wall Initiative to help increase the appreciation, investigation, and preservation of stone walls and solicits participation through a web-site <stonewall.uconn.edu>.

There are several little-known ecological influences of stone walls. These influences are understood more by the technical professions than by the population as a whole. However, ecological understanding is becoming more mainstream than ever before. Stone walls as habitat comes to mind first. Without these features on the landscape wildlife dynamics would be much different. Woodchucks use the walls on field borders for cover and burrow entrance sites. I see weasels, red squirrels, chipmunks, gray squirrels, and rats using walls as highways to get from one place to another with the security of knowing they can instantly disappear into the stone matrix when alerted of approaching predators. On the other hand I see turtles come up against walls and turn to travel parallel. Frequently, I see foxes trotting along stone walls seeking the mammals using the walls as highways. Snakes also are fond of traveling on the stone highways, especially in the spring after the sun has warmed the stones.

Hydrology is also altered by the presence of walls on the landscape. Often we see where a wall spans a flood plain. In this location the wall holds back flood flow when the voids become filled with leaves and soil. This ameliorates down stream flooding somewhat. The wall barriers also induce the flood water to drop its sediment load. I have also noticed where walls have intercepted sheet flow from the landscape and directed it as concentrated flow along the up-hill side of the wall. This creates streams where nature had not intended there to be streams. Groundwater flow, especially on hardpan soils, can also be intercepted and redirected by the affect of stonewalls. The weight of the wall compresses the soil and closes pores. The groundwater flow, thus arrested, seeps to the surface above the wall, creating habitat for vegetation favored by turkeys, grouse, deer, and other animals.

Biodiversity is another ecological parameter that stonewalls have influenced. Each walled enclosure has been put to a land use unique to that enclosure. At the termination of that land use, natural plant succession takes over and creates a forest with a different species composition from that on adjoining walled enclosures. The walls tend to keep the fruit from heavy seeded trees from migrating to the other side of the wall, thereby perpetuating a division between forest types. Walls also serve as firebreaks for slow burning ground fires. This also tends to aid biodiversity.

Stone walls have had a profound affect on our culture and ecology and I have a great respect for the heritage they represent. When I touch a stone on top of a wall I feel like I have touched the hand that placed it there. When I reflect on my survey career, during which I have surveyed an estimated 750 miles of wall, I realize this is a lot of connection with the past. I also feel satisfaction knowing that stone walls and the people who made them are memorialized each time a property plan depicting surveyed walls is drafted by my office.

Solving the Mystery of “The Plains” (02/2004)

The New Boston Historical Society, at its January meeting, received a long-awaited report from the Sargent Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. The Society chose the Sargent Museum from among other interested consultants to provide it with an assessment of the several old foundations that are known to exist in the First Settlement Area of New Boston and to make a recommendation for protecting them.

Although the location of these early building “gravesites” are well known to members of the Strong family, owners of the majority of the land where the sites are found, other citizens are unaware of their existence. Most are also unaware of the amazing stories of human privation related to living on the frontier in the early eighteenth century. In the recent past the Strong family spoke about this folklore and pleaded for its protection when a development was planned on an adjoining property a short distance from the legendary cultural remains. Soon the Historical Society took on the responsibility of protecting the sites from destructive human influences.

Wesley Stinson, the museum’s principal archaeologist, and his staff, worked for the past year to assess the evidence centered on two distinct sites. One site was determined to be on land already protected from development and this was not given high priority attention. The second site is on private land and most likely to be disturbed by future development pressure. Their effort culminated in documenting the visible site features by photographing, measuring, and mapping their juxtaposition on the site. This documentation was reported to the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources so that authority is now aware of this sensitive area.

In addition to the fieldwork at the sites, Mr. Stinson directed his staff to research the New Hampshire based sources of records that might provide inferences of the dates of human activity in this area and names of the brave settlers that persisted in living at the sites. The records they found were from various primary and 2004 *“In the Country”* by Robert Todd

secondary sources on file at several state and private institutions, libraries, and archives. Stinson copied the records significant to his assessment and appended them to his report.

I reviewed the Stinson report several times, then I visited the sites on a recent morning, with temperatures in single digits, and now some of the mystery surrounding the building “gravesites” has been cast from my mind. The words I read and the whispers I “heard” while viewing the sites for the first time stirred my emotions. I became attached to the spirituality of the landscape and respectful of the intrepid people who attempted to build a community at this location. I do not expect this story to influence all my readers to the extent that I have been touched. However, my hope is to impart some reverence for the land and the first settlers.

The seed for New Boston was planted in the decade of 1690 when the Massachusetts Bay Colony sent an army to Canada to fight the French in retaliation for attacks they had perpetrated with their Indian allies upon the English coastal settlements. The campaigns of the colonial militiamen were disastrous and not effective in deterring the French attacks. However, surviving “Canada” soldiers and heirs of deceased veterans petitioned the Massachusetts authority for grants of land as a reward, or payment in part, for their services in that war. The petition was approved and 16 “Canada” townships were granted, all to be six miles square and to contain 60 proprietors. The Cambridge Canada grant became chartered as New Boston in 1736.

The first New Boston Proprietors diligently set to work on satisfying the conditions of their grant which required building homes, clearing land, constructing a mill, and building a meeting house (church). In 1736 a surveyor was appointed to lay out the sixty lots for farmsteads, a contract for building a mill was also executed, and in 1738 there is a record of payment by the proprietors to workmen that had built 60 homes. A representative of the General Court of the Bay Colony was sent in 1740 to New Boston to check on the settler’s compliance with the grant conditions. He reported successful compliance on all counts.

All appeared to be well with the development of the fledgling community on the “Plains” of New Boston (about 500 acres of glacial outwash landscape bounded on the west by the Middle Branch of the Piscataquog River, on the north by East Lull Place Road, Riverdale Road, and Parker Road to Howe Bridge, and on the southeast by the South Branch of the Piscataquog River). Then, records of good fortune turned into tales of woe.

The first ominous account reports the chilling experience of Thomas Smith, one of the most likely owners of the second site studied by Stinson. The report states that Smith observed fresh moccasin tracks in the field that he was clearing. Fearing the Indians may be preparing to ambush him on the trail that he would be taking that day back to Chester, his home at the time, he made his way back to the small cabin that served as his temporary home, grabbed his rifle and headed back to Chester, but not along his usual route. The report went on to say that his judgment saved him much trouble, possibly his life, because that night a man living in a cabin at what is now Parker’s Station in Goffstown was taken prisoner and escorted to Canada where he was held for ransom.

I presume other members of the infant community shared experiences similar to that of Thomas Smith in the years from 1740 until 1748. The records indicate that settlers in adjacent towns abandoned their settlement attempts and returned to the safety of their mother-towns; New Boston proprietors undoubtedly did the same. The Indians were emboldened by the absence of guards and armed men on the frontier. I suspect that the English attack (1744) on the French fort at Louisburg on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia deprived the frontier towns of their armed men. During this same period another event disheartened the New Boston settlers, this was the boundary dispute between the Bay Colony Province and the New Hampshire Province.

The 1741 settlement of the boundary dispute between the provinces was settled in favor of New Hampshire. The settlement resulted in land title complications for the settlers on the Plains because the colony was no longer the sovereignty with the power to grant and defend lands. The Masonian Proprietors, the new owners of most of the southern portion of New Hampshire, including New Boston, were wealthy merchants from Portsmouth. They, being reasonable people, considered the plight of Thomas Smith and his contemporaries and, following negotiations with Smith and others, agreed to allow the 60 titles to stand undisturbed by the new granting of the township in 1752.

The first settlers returned to their lands, but, having found their dwellings and meetinghouse burned, looked for new opportunities in the “new town” being settled by grantees of the Masonian Proprietors. This was a wise move by the settlers because the new town had a different pattern of development and the center was to be settled where the upper village of New Boston is located today. To resettle a separate community on the “Plains” would have brewed acrimony between the first settlers and the new establishment.

Thomas Smith sold his first lot, probably soon after 1742, and moved to the Great Meadow area where his descendants resided until 1950. Other first settlers also moved away from the old pattern of development and the new pattern completely changed the old. It is still visible on the original lotting plan, but the early land pattern is not distinctly visible on the ground today. I believe that the change in development pattern is primarily responsible for Stinson’s finding that the 18th century farm complex has features of high integrity and worthy of protection. In essence, the site has, amazingly, not been disturbed since 1753.

Stinson’s report goes on to praise the New Boston Historical Society for ... “demonstrating a commendable commitment to local historical resources”. He says that ... “the site has the potential to be a very significant historic resource from scholarly and educational perspectives”. Most importantly he advises ... “important pieces of New Boston and New Hampshire history will be lost if these resources are not preserved...”. I am certain the rest of the Historical Society members believe much as I do and will heed Mr. Stinson’s advice.

In closing I reflect on the historical events that transpired in the colonies during the first settlement era and realize that, although the first granting of this town was well intentioned, the timing was bad. I also realize that if those deleterious events had not occurred to defeat the first settlement, New Boston would look entirely different today. I wonder if the original land use pattern, with a village on the “Plains”, would have resulted in a better community. From a landscape suitability perspective, I think the “Plains” area was certainly better suited for development of a central business district than the area supporting our present village. This is because soil conditions are better there and no steep valley walls exist to constrain development.

Eggs and a Lesson in Ecology (03/2004)

No one has built a henhouse in the neighborhood since the Elliott Brothers, Milt and Bib, built in 1948 the largest poultry farm in New Boston. They woke me up nearly every morning with the steady ring of hammers and saws. At my bedtime the same medley lulled me to sleep.

Last April, the Kohler family, who are my neighbors and also relatives (niece, nephew, and two grandnephews) took up hammer and saw and filled the air with that old familiar song. I observed no less exuberance in the construction of the Kohler hen house than I witnessed with the Elliott Brothers project – there was just a great difference in scale. The Elliott poultry farm had 25,000 birds in the buildings and on the range during summer. 13,000 laying hens were wintered in the massive houses. In contrast, Rick built the Kohler poultry house, an 8-foot by 8-foot edifice to house only 16 birds in a few days after work.

The Kohler chicken project actually started in January 2003 with a trip to the Barnes and Noble bookstore where they purchased Living With Chickens, a publication on the fine points of raising poultry. The staff at Goffstown Hardware provided other pointers as the Kohlers placed orders for the chicks and all the equipment and supplies needed to raise them up to laying hens. The family had resolved to have a project that would add rural character to the neighborhood as well as provide fresh eggs. Rick and Lori intended that my grandnephews would do the chores, learn responsibility, and get connected with nature. None of them realized how complex their connection would become.

May 1 was an exciting day for the Kohler family, they received a call that the chicks had arrived at the store and should be picked up right away. Kids and parents were the same age when it came to adoring the chicks they brought into the house and placed in a plastic laundry basket with heat lamp attached. Daily, they held the fuzzy creatures against their cheeks and talked to them.

My grandnephews shared equally the naming responsibility with their parents. Esther, Zoe, Little Bit, Mabel, and Claire were names given to the most easily distinguished chicks. Of course the rooster received the most attention and Rick had the privilege of naming him Leroy after the arrogant, ego-burdened, Rhode Island Red rooster cartoon character.

The chicks grew fast with the constant care they received and by June 1, Rick introduced the chicks to their permanent home in the field next to the tool shed and also quite near the drainage swale that runs across the field to a culvert under Route 136. The Kohler family was inattentive to the presence of the swale, a feature that would be prophetic in events to follow.

Soon members of the flock impressed the family and challenged Rick by flying over the fence he had skillfully erected around the chicken yard. Twice he raised the fence – finally containing the hens with a fence 8 feet tall. The entire family, including me, had considerable amusement watching the young flock respond to the cucumbers, tomatoes, beans, and lettuce from the garden that were tossed into the range fence. The birds first feared the morsels, and then became greatly excited with the offering. Their behavior reminded me of the game “steal the bacon” that I played as a boy. A chicken would cautiously approach a piece of vegetable, pick it up in his beak, and run away under chase by several others.

For some time Rick focused on keeping the chickens happy, checking anxiously each day for that first egg in the nests of straw. During this same time Leroy also focused on perfecting a cock-a-doodle-do so that one day he could do his share to keep the chickens happy. Zoe laid the first egg on August 8, a day to be memorialized. That egg did not get scrambled; Rick carefully pierced each end with a drill and blew out the white and yolk. Lori dated the shell with a marker and placed Zoe’s trophy on the shelf.

My grandnephews, from that day forward, were watchful for other noteworthy eggs. They measured the longest and the one with the biggest girth (ouch!) and prepared them for a place of honor on the shelf with Zoe’s first egg. Gavin showed me the largest egg on November 12, and in December the whole family participated in decorating dozens of eggs with a holiday motif for Christmas presents.

However, above the celebration there was a cloud that would soon darken the Kohler enterprise. This was the arrival of several disgustingly sneaky rats that were probably attracted by the generous portions of grain handy for the taking. Rick noticed that his chicken feed was disappearing faster than it should. He also noticed the burrows under the tool shed adjacent to the hen pen. Despite his attempts to “pound sand in the rat holes”, the tunnels were open the following morning. Rick was heard to exclaim, “@#%*^+.”

The Kohler family tolerated the rats for several weeks until suddenly their presence was no longer apparent. However, their fate was soon revealed. One morning Rick noticed one hen was missing and while
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searching came upon a heartbreaking sight. At the entrance of one of the tunnels under the tool shed was the body of his missing hen. He pulled it by the foot and winced at the bloody headless remains held in his hand. Something had killed the hen and attempted to pull it under the shed.

Rick came to work at our office the next day and immediately the discussion centered on the chicken problem, not on the usual work briefing. The consensus amongst the employees was that a weasel was the villain and was also responsible for the disappearance of the rats. After work Rick confirmed the latter by cutting an opening in his shed floor. He saw a cache of assorted rattails and paws. He realized that when the rats were eliminated, the weasels preyed upon the hens.

We all suggested that Rick contact the one person in the area that could surely help, the legendary trapper and hunter, David Whipple. Immediately, Rick called David who came right down and scoped out the situation. David provided Rick with some small traps and instructions on how to use them. Rick set the traps and the next morning he noticed one trap tether chain pulled under the tool shed, with quickened pulse he knelt and pulled the trap out of the tunnel. In the jaws of the trap was the paw and foreleg of a weasel. David had told him that a weasel has a strong will to survive and often will chew off a leg to free itself.

Rick was now more determined to kill the chicken thief. Impatiently he waited after resetting the traps...then with long strides, armed with a 22-caliber rifle, approached the chicken house. He heard thumping and rattling of chain as he approached, then he saw that a tether chain was being pulled from under the shed-he grabbed the chain and pulled back-his effort was countered with a strong tug on the other end. He readied his weapon as he steadily pulled a trapped animal into sight; then he fired. The chain went slack...he was sure he had killed the predator, but when he pulled the trap completely out of the hole he was dismayed to see that the animal in the trap was nearly half consumed...he had shot a weasel killed by whatever creature was under the shed.

A few days had passed when Rick told me that he had lost another chicken and had possibly spotted the predator, a dark brown animal, larger than the weasel loping across the field to the culvert under Route 136. I suggested that he again contact David Whipple about this. That day Rick was on his way to Francestown and saw David at his home. Rick stopped and David greeted him while unloading several beavers from the back of his vehicle. Rick described the animal he had seen loping away from his henhouse and asked what it was. David scanned his stock of recently trapped furbearers and like a store clerk pulled one from the several species in the stack and said, "Did it look like this?" Rick replied with astonishment that it did and David told him it was a mink.

David went to the scene of the crime a second time, set his traps, and was soon successful in capturing two minks with prime coats. David and Rick joked about the situation and speculated about what animal, higher in the food chain, would appear next.

Thankfully, the saga has ended. I think, as a result of the experience, my grandnephews, even my niece and nephew, have learned more than what is written in Living with Chickens. In addition to the lesson in responsibility provided to the youngest, they all learned about "the circle of life". The most important principle of which is to not put your chickens next to a drainage swale...for weasels and mink a wet swale is Route 93 and a henhouse is a KFC at exit 1.

Land-Supported Churches in New Boston (04/2004)

There is a strong connection between the land and many human endeavors; religion is high on that list. The connection between early inhabitants of our town and its landscape is not unique because the settlement of most towns in New England complied with conditions similar to those set forth in our township grant by the Masonian Proprietors in 1751. This connection has, however, written some interesting pages in our town's history and has resulted in some unique circumstances. In this column I will bring some of these pages to light.

The 45 Masonian Proprietors, mostly businessmen from the Portsmouth area, granted the township in which we now live to people eager to venture into the wilderness and build a community. Although the Masonian Proprietors were land speculators motivated by profit, they realized that the community they were promoting must be closely knit and capable of self-government. Self-evident was the axiom that - if the community failed, then their investment would fail. Religion and education were keys to that principle and the proprietors willingly provided two lots in the subdivision plan of the town for the benefit of the ministry and one lot for the benefit of the school.

Lot number 36 was given by the proprietors to the inhabitants of the infant town for the purpose of supporting the ministry through proceeds received from land sales and lot 61 was given to the town for the home site of the first minister. Both of these lots are located in the western part of the town very near the Lyndeborough town line. Near the center of town the proprietors gave lot 53 for the support of the school through land sales. The inhabitants soon realized that settling the minister on lot 61, three miles from the meetinghouse, was impractical. The first meetinghouse was erected in what is now the cemetery. The inhabitants petitioned the Masonian Proprietors to allow them to switch the purpose of lots 53 and 61 ... settling the minister on lot 53 would put him within a mile of the meetinghouse.

The proprietors granted the settlers' petition and the first minister, Reverend Solomon Moor, built his house on lot 53. Reverend Moor lived there until his death and his widow stayed there until she, or her heirs, sold the land about 1820. Recently, it was one of nine areas inventoried by the Planning Board and Southern New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission in the Regional Environmental Planning Program (REPP) study. The parcel ranked high for its historical and cultural resource attributes. The parcel is the only property in town that has evaded fragmentation - it has never been subdivided. Further, the only family to live on the property is that of Reverend Solomon Moor.

Apparently, the town saw no need to dispose of lot 36 to support the ministry during the tenure of Reverend Solomon Moor. This may be due in part to subsidies from the Masonian Proprietors in the early years of the town. Typically town proprietors contributed money to help the town pay the minister's salary. However, in 1804 the town meeting voted to appoint a committee to subdivide lot 36 and to give the committee authority to sell the lots to the highest bidder. This was about the same time that Reverend Bradford took over as the Presbyterian Church minister.

Lot 36, situated with the junction of Lyndeborough Road and the 2nd New Hampshire Turnpike near its southwest corner, contained about 150 acres, the nominal size for all lots in the second division, so called. It is likely that the lot supported a magnificent stand of virgin white pine timber, free of the King's domain since 1776. I believe this land would have been a huge attraction on the auction block. Indeed it must have been, because the History of New Boston (Cogswell, 1864) states that the town received \$7000 from the sale of lands in the Ministerial Lot. This may seem to be a trivial amount today, but in the early 1800's it was significant. I estimate that \$7000 in 1810 would be equal to between \$750,000 and \$850,000 in today's dollars, depending on the computation method - appreciation in the value of labor, or appreciation in the value of land, respectively.

From a different perspective, the land sale value would have been about 60% of the total town budget in 1804, including schools. I observe that 60% of the total town budget today would be about \$6,000,000.

A recent boundary survey engagement by my office has put me in intimate contact with lot 36, the Ministerial Lot. My findings in researching the 1804 deeds from the town committee to the buyers greatly peaked my curiosity. Several of the transfers were leases with a term of 999 years. This posed an immediate inquiry in my mind. Does this mean that in 799 years the land reverts to the town and can be resold? I wonder who at town hall is tracking this! I think I will ask around the next time I am at the town office ... just for chuckles.

I have to mention, with due respect, that the committee, consisting of Jacob Hooper, Daniel Dane, and Robert Clark did a terrible job in subdividing the property. They did not record the subdivision plan and the tracts are poorly described. My survey project would have been much easier if there had been a planning board to approve that early subdivision. I can only hope that my reconnaissance of the property, after the snow melts, will recover the stone posts and stakes and stones that, according to the deed descriptions, mark the lot corners. Hopefully, the spirituality associated with the land has afforded some heavenly protection from disturbance to the corner markers during the past 199 years.

The Ministerial Lot has other unusual attributes that set it apart from most lands in town. First, there is only one house upon the entire 150-acre lot (the Red Fox Farm, so called), in this it is similar to the Solomon Moor lot. Secondly, the land has not been intensively managed for any purpose in the 199 years since it was subdivided. Lastly, it is unlikely that the majority of the old Ministerial Lot will ever be developed because it is encumbered by conservation easements.

The proceeds from the sale of land in the Ministerial Lot benefited religious life in town for at least another fifty years. This speaks volumes for the ability of early town government to frugally manage money. The proceeds were, at first, placed in a "Ministerial Fund", separate from the general fund of the town and managed by a special treasurer. The treasurer apparently dispersed monies to the Presbyterian Church in accordance with the vote of town meetings.

Soon, the Calvinistic Baptist Church was established in town and it shared in the fund distribution in proportion to the assessed value of properties held by members of that church. This proportion was small in comparison with the Presbyterian Church share. Eventually, a third religious group, the Universalist Society also shared the fund. My guess is that the task of managing the Ministerial Fund became so onerous that management of it was turned over to the town treasurer. Even after the law changed to prohibit governmental support of church affairs the town meeting still voted to do so. The selectmen refused and merged the remaining Ministerial Fund with the general fund, thereby closing the book on this era in New Boston's history.

I find the connection between land and religious life to be an interesting aspect of this town's history. I have gained respect for the Masonian Proprietors' vision regarding the settlement of the towns granted by them. They were all business, yet benevolent and compassionate. The early town fathers that took over the reins of New Boston's settlement cared equally well for our infant community and for over fifty years supported religious life in New Boston.

Town History From A Bus Window, Part I (5/2004)

Had someone told me, let's say 20 years ago, that the New Boston Historical Society and the Whipple Free Library Perspectives Program would cosponsor a bus tour of historical sites in town, I would have guffawed heartily. Had that someone gone on to predict attendance by two busloads of people, plus a waiting list long enough to fill another, I would have then seriously suggested he seek psychiatric evaluation. Even more ridiculous is that I would be a narrator on such a tour. What a stretch that this far-out idea transcended into reality on May 18, 2004.



Eagerly boarding the first bus were 47 local residents and surprisingly, a few from out of town. This inspired me to overcome the stage fright that had been plaguing me for days. My sweaty palms fumbled over the cue cards I had prepared to tweak my memory on what to say about at least 40 features over the 27-mile route.

A lot was to be seen from the town hall parking lot; particularly striking is the similarity of architectural style of all buildings south of the river. All were built about the same time to replace the 29 structures that burned in the great fire of May 1887. This makes the village unique among towns in the region with colonial style villages. Behind the bus I pointed out the baseball field and grandstand built in 1922 by 200 volunteers organized by Reverend Louis Swanson. This effort may have started the grand tradition of New Boston volunteerism, but even more amazing is that the creation took only one full day.

On cue from my coach and time keeper, Gail Parker, the driver charged up the big bus and headed around Mill Street, past the grist mill, now the home of Gail and Randy Parker. Gail took the lead in telling all about the mill history, beginning with its importance as a gristmill through to its last commercial use as the Merrimack Farmers Exchange Store. The little freight depot building was spoken of next, formerly operated by Paul Saltmarsh. My recollection of the depot as a boy was picking up the fireworks I ordered for the Fourth of July. Across the street rests the Good Neighbor Café, which in recent times has been a restaurant. I told of its use as a busy Clover Farm Brands store that was also noted for its fine meats and a jolly round-bellied man that I remember. At the stop sign I spoke about the Wason Memorial Building that houses the Whipple Free Library, attributed to local philanthropists that the bus trippers would hear much more about. The Church on the right, built after the great fire to replace the smaller chapel that formerly stood on the lot, is little known for the 1415 pound Revere bell that has rung-in worshippers for over 178 years.

Straight ahead across the intersection, Dodge's Store grabbed our full attention. I told the 94 attentive ears that there has been a store on the site since about 1820. Tewksbury, Gregg, and Atwood were names in the line of early storekeepers. After the fire, J. R. Whipple built the present structure to serve as his office, but he rented the street level to Solomon Atwood. However, Clarence Dodge purchased the building from the Whipple Corporation in 1920 and it has been Dodge's Store ever since. Joshua Dodge was the last family member to operate the store after the death of his father, Homer. Above the store is a beautiful room called

Valley Hall that looks much as it did in 1920. The first New Boston High School graduation was held there in 1895, my grandmother and my grandaunt were in that class.

To the right and up the steep Meetinghouse Hill Road our bus, in low gear, carried us to the upper village. This was the center of business until the commercial activity in the lower village drew the development to the river valley. Here stood the second meetinghouse from 1823 until it burned in 1900. Until 1839, the time of separation between Church and State, the meetinghouse served as the house of government and the house of worship. It is fateful that the Revere Bell of the second meetinghouse was reinstalled during 1892 in the new church downtown, otherwise it would have been destroyed.

With some difficulty our driver made the sharp turn and steep ascent onto Cemetery Road past the ornate fence and gate keeping folks from leaving the cemetery. I pointed out the cast iron fountain, now over 100 years old that memorializes the location of the first meetinghouse in the town. I had to clarify this statement by saying that this meetinghouse location is the first under the New Hampshire provincial charter. Next along the route on Hooper Hill Road we passed the former Mansfield family farm purchased in the late 1940's by Roger Babson, famous locally for his Gravity Research Foundation headquarters and summer lectures. He believed New Boston was the safest place for his enterprise in the event of an atomic bomb attack on Boston. He purchased about a dozen homes in the village and left them vacant for years ... it looked like a ghost town. This was bad for the community. He also purchased thousands of acres of land through his agent, Ethan Alan Beals. This was good for New Boston because the Babson land was eventually purchased by non-developers who protected most of it with conservation easements.

Our driver had to put more weight on the brakes as we headed down Hooper Hill Road, with passengers straining their necks to see the best views in town, past the 18th century Nathaniel Cochran home, to where the road levels out near the Jacob Hooper homestead. This large colonial was held in the Hooper family for 4 generations and it is beautifully restored to show off its antique interior. Then to the stop sign at Route 13- passengers braced themselves against the seat in front as they felt the roller-coaster effect.

Our next stop was at the Graystone Cottage, a place name that has stuck since the home was used as a summer guesthouse in the 1890,s. This is the only stone house in town and was built by Lemuel Marden, in 1785. It later became the home of James Hill, a well-known landscape artist. I remember this house as the farm home of Bessie and Burnham Leavitt. I went there on a hot summer day by bicycle with their grandson and my friend, Jerry Kennedy. The old house impressed me most by its cool damp atmosphere that contrasted markedly with the outdoors that day in July, even more impressing were the milk and brownies served up by Bessie.

“Hurry along, don’t talk so much”, was the advice I got from Gail as we headed along Route 13 to Meadow Road. My first comments on Meadow Road attempted to capture the mystique of seeing the house believed to be the oldest in town. The house is reported as dating to 1756 in a “Meet Your Neighbors” column in the New Boston Bulletin featuring the current owners Anne and Immo Christoph. The Christophs moved the house from its original location on the opposite corner of the intersection of Meadow Road and Joe English Road to the present site and joined it with a larger structure without destroying the character of the first home. At this same intersection I told of the original district schoolhouse, and it is red, that is 1 of 17 that facilitated the education of neighborhood children. Nona Poole now lives in the schoolhouse believed to be one of four converted for residential use.

What does New Boston have in common with Franconia Notch? “No, we do not have a profile,” said I to the one that responded to this question I posed to the group as the bus paused in full view of Joe English Hill. I told my captive audience that the geologic landform of this hill is the same type landform that held the Old Man of The Mountain. It is called a roche moutonnee, meaning sheepback rock. Basically, it is an old granite

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hill that was reformed by the last glacier that passed over it. As the glacier moved southeasterly over the old hill it plucked the rock from the southeast end of the hill and strewed the rubble on the ground for miles as the ice moved along. Since this is one of my favorite places in town I spent time explaining the legend of how it was named, the appeal it has to rock climbers, and also the rare habitat that is provided by the steep rock precipice.

At this point in my dialogue, I am only one third of the way through the tour. The journey continued to Bedford Road for a stop at the New Boston Air Station, then backtracked to Klondike Corner, then on to Sunday Driver Rock. The route took us over many other roads in town by other historic features. Those on the tour saw where this community has been, now understands how it got here, and perhaps they can see where it is going. I will have to continue this story another time.

Town History by Bus, Part II (6/2004)

Although it has been a month since my writing about the bus trip to many of New Boston's historical places, the story now continues from where it left off with the legend of Joe English and the vision of the most spectacular landscape in town. At this point in the tour I sensed that the people on board had mentally gone from perception of the immediate environment, the luxurious vehicle we were in, and had become time travelers. They were riding the backward scrolling calendar pages of time. I believe they were also eager to feel history; perhaps this emotion was more important to them than to know history.

Along Joe English Road and McCurdy Road the tourists could see hidden clues of several old farms that dominated the foreground - once fields and orchards that are now resting in the shade of pine, maple, and oak forest. Another early Marden home, beautifully restored by the current owners, Don and Patty Grosso, was passed, then on to the Wason Homestead with its' gigantic red barn. The Wason name is dominant in town history and now memorialized by the Wason Building, home of the Whipple Free Library. The early McCurdy homestead, commonly known as the Black Horse Farm, affords a view of the north slope of Joe English Hill. The home is perhaps the largest brick house in town and it drew much attention. Abundant stonewalls bordering the road give distinct character to the still rural setting observed along the way.

Our tracing of history on the landscape lead us next to Bedford Road and soon to the saltbox style homestead of another dominant family in town. I always knew it as the Chancey place, in recent times it was owned by Horton Foote, a playwright noted for his stage adaptation of "To Kill a Mockingbird". There are a number of place names that were hung up by former residents and Klondike Corner is one that has stuck. Clifford Dawson lived at the junction of Bedford Road and New Boston Road during the latter part of the 19th century. In 1896 he was struck by gold fever and hurried to the Klondike region of Alaska. The success of his adventure is not known, but he named the corner to memorialize the experience.

Our time travel calendar then stopped momentarily on the March 1942 page. As the bus turned around in the wide entrance to the New Boston Air Station, once known as the U.S. Army Air Force Bombing Range, I spoke of the impact of this facility on town history. The Department of Defense appropriated 2873 acres of land in New Boston, Mont Vernon, and Amherst for training combat pilots stationed at Grenier Field in Manchester, now the Manchester Airport. I recounted some bizarre experiences of residents during WWII. Machine gun fire, bomb explosions, and aerial maneuvers of P47 fighter planes were exciting daily sights and sounds. Plane crashes, wildfires, and errant bombs dropped on private land were unpleasant experiences of this era. The station now has a peaceful mission of tracking communication and navigation satellites and is a good community neighbor. A fully equipped fire station has been made an adjunct to the New Boston Fire Department by the U.S. Government.

Backtracking from the Air Station to Bedford Road our driver stopped briefly opposite a huge roadside boulder inscribed with the only graffiti in town that is tolerated. In contrast to the fate of unwanted graffiti, the words, “You Sunday Driver, You Stop To Think, You Think To Stop”, are periodically repainted. The sage warning to motorists, now a famous landmark is attributed to Clarence Chancey who was noted for his poetic lyrics. Chancey lived in the family homestead nearby.

The route through New Boston’s history continued along Bedford Road toward Wilson Hill Road passing the homestead owned by the Baker family for several generations. The old farm and orchard, barely visible from Bedford Road is now the home of Dick and Betsey Moody. Dick is president of the Historical Society and an expert on Civil War history. He frequently participates in battle reenactments and has played the role of a cavalry soldier in two movies. Wilson Hill Road was transformed from a gravel road with a grass center strip to a paved highway in a relatively short time. Along this road and along Byam Road the trippers saw the most abrupt and dramatic land use change in recent times...from forest to tract development in about 15 years.

The bus with its air suspension carried us smoothly back to eras past. Unfortunately, River Road was not traversed for more than a few hundred feet from where we left Byam Road before our driver turned right on Gregg Mill Road and stopped at Lang Station. However, at this stop I had to mention the significance of the River Road Groves established in the 1930 decade through the insightful persuasion of Rev. Swanson and a few other citizens. The work of Swanson and his followers set the stage for more conservation achievements forty years later.

I went on to discuss my strong feeling that the Lang Station area is the center of gravity for conservation work and a historical nexus in New Boston. This is at the confluence of the Middle and South Branches of the Piscataquog River; it is on the Railroad Trail, on the southern anchor point of the Lang State Forest, and in the area of first settlement of the town during the Massachusetts Bay Colony era. I attempted to ignite similar feelings in my audience as I highlighted each of these features. In 1975 the town purchased the B&M Railroad bed with a grant from the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. The purchase was the first effort by the fledgling Piscataquog Watershed Association (PWA) to protect the river. On behalf of the PWA, Randy Parker successfully negotiated with the railroad. Recently, the Conservation Commission built a footbridge spanning the abutments of the original railroad bridge so that the trail can be hiked from the center of town to Route 114. Lastly, I stated that the Lang State Forest, a property conveyed to the State of N.H. by Dot and Jay Marden, protects the Middle Branch of the river for considerable distance upstream.

I had a difficult time closing my mouth at the Lang Station stop, but time was pressing and I fell into my seat before I was ready when the bus lurched ahead toward our next feature, the Gregg homestead site. The Gregg family (ancestors of our Senator Judd Gregg) was the first to settle where the Mardens now live. Some Gregg descendants still live in town, my son married one and others are in the family of Bib and Verna (Gregg) Elliott. The first mill in town was situated just upstream from the former Gregg homestead.

While bussing along on Lull Road to our next point of interest I passed on some general historical points I gleaned from the many articles authored by the late Rena Davis. Without Rena’s long standing interest in New Boston history and persistent documentation there would be little readily known about our town since the 1864 work by Elliott Cogswell, History of New Boston, N.H. (copies available from the Historical Society). I mentioned that the Gregg mill was one of about 33 in town that were critical to the economy and quality of life of early residents. Associated with the mills are at least two hand-dug canals that intrigue people that wander across them on the landscape. I went on to say that the marvelous stonework remaining at the mill sites is a great example of early ingenuity and a tribute to backbreaking work. The products of the mill industries included: lumber, ground grain, chairs, beds, carriages, piano boxes, matches, paper, doors, toys, boxes, hosiery, tanned leathers, wire, cloth, axes, rifles, and cooperage.

I pointed out that our tour along Lull Road and along Saunders Hill Road traces a portion of one of the original roads in town. This old highway connected the area of first settlement with the Great Meadow, a feature that we would soon be passing by. In the 1730's there were no open lands where grass could be harvested to sustain livestock over the winter months. The Great Meadow, in that era, was not flooded as it is today and upon its fertile flats bluejoint grass grew abundantly. Many settlers owned a small lot in this meadow on which they harvested cattle fodder. The hay was carted over the ancient highway back to the first settlement in late summer, or in winter, was hauled on sleds from the stacks on the meadow. I ended by saying that few realize the importance of the Great Meadow and this ancient highway to the survival of early settlers.

I will continue the tour next month. In closing, I urge readers to obtain a copy of the book that was put on sale right after this tour by the Historical Society. The book is titled, Images of America: New Boston, Arcadia Publishing, 2004. This is a pictorial history of the town and shows many of the places seen on the bus tour. The book is available from the Historical Society for \$19.99.

Town History by Bus, Part III (7/2004)

This story will complete my narration of the "Town History By Bus" tour conducted on April 18 by the New Boston Historical Society and the Whipple Free Library Perspectives Program. My last two columns recounted the historical points of interest through about 80% of the route tracing 90% of the featured sites in the southeast and northwest portions of town.

The two busloads of newcomers, long-term residents, and locally born appeared to be on a quest to find the roots of this community. I felt that they were well along this quest and getting to know the town by listening, but mostly by seeing and experiencing. Perhaps, I thought, they will end the day with considerably more of what they need to live more fully in this town and to have more passion about contributing to the future of the community.

Continuing now from a place that speaks out about the past, perhaps more than any other I know in town, by its use and by the people that lived here. This is the Smith homestead, with its' large colonial home and various farm buildings resting now from the intense agricultural use of the past, all beautifully set on the crest of a small hill jutting into the northerly margin of the Great Meadow. Thomas Smith, removed from his first home on the Plains to this location about 1750. About six generations of Smiths were raised here, spanning over 200 years. Byron Smith was the last and I knew him as an old man when I was a child - to me he seemed like a page from ancient history. In 1950, Byron sold to the Hersey family under whose stewardship the farm recapitulated the agricultural function it provided under the Smith tenure. The Hersey family operated it as a successful dairy farm. The beautiful view from this farm overlooking the Great Meadow and the meandering Buxton Brook has been afforded protection, in part, by the donation of a conservation easement to the Piscataquog Watershed Association by the Hersey family.

The air suspension system in the bus disconnected any sense of contact with the road and made it feel like a true time machine as it carried us quietly westerly along Bunker Hill Road to the Daniels homestead, another of the few all brick homes in town. George Daniels operated a dairy farm on the drumlin landform that dominates the landscape at the site. Colin Daniels and his wife continue the Daniel's tenure that I believe is approaching 100 years. George pastured his dairy animals on the steeply sloping east face of the drumlin and it is said that his cows developed shorter legs on one side than on the other so that they could graze without tipping over. Shortly before his death, George donated a conservation easement over all except about three acres surrounding the buildings so that the farm will stay as it is for perpetuity.

Across from the Daniels homestead farm, there is one of five outlying graveyards in town that now come under oversight of the New Boston Cemetery Committee. These old cemeteries were established to serve the families that resided in the area. Three of the five are situated in the northwest portion of town. In addition, most of the long-standing family homesteads and farms are located in this general area.

At the moment we turned left at the end of Bunker Hill Road onto Route 136 the feeling of being in an earlier time ended abruptly. Our minds had, for the last few miles, been held in the past by images of narrow winding gravel roads with overarching branches of large oaks and maples guarding the close in stonewalls, and of open fields and pastures anchoring the pastoral past. The scene ahead - traffic, paved roads, and new development - yanked our thoughts into the present. But wait, we soon approached West Colburn Road on the left and I pointed out a quick glimpse of the Colburn homestead that stayed in the Colburn family for over two hundred years. Robert and Olive Colburn were the last of the family to operate a dairy farm that continued until Robert's death. Olive sold the farm in 2001, ending what was the longest held family farm in town.

In about a mile we paused at Todd's Corner, a site that belies the present and harks back to the past. This is my family's home and I am the fifth generation to live here since my great, great grandfather bought the land and original home, dating from 1790, from Thomas Smith in 1814. I hope to be here when it celebrates its' bicentennial as a Todd homestead in 2014. The original home was a saltbox design. My great grandfather, James Todd, rebuilt the house to the present style and added the barn. However, corner beams, wide pine board wainscoting, and wide pine floors cut from old growth white pine are reflections of the earlier construction. The remodeling was done in 1854 after James returned from the California gold rush to which he, along with seven other New Boston men in his company, had been lured. Agriculture has been the primary pursuit of generations past until my father quit full time farming in his mid life.

Across the street from the Todd homestead there is a dwelling house that was converted from the original District 13 one-room schoolhouse in 1937 by my father. This is another of the few schoolhouses that were converted to residential use. The boys growing up in the Todd homestead welcomed the fact that my grandmother offered room and board to the lovely young schoolteachers that taught in old District 13. My Dad dated several of the teachers and married the sister of one.

Our driver paused at the junction of Route 136 and 77. Here nearly all of the images before us were part of a significant chapter in our history. The name James R. Whipple is connected with all of them. The cider mill building set into the hill with a wide door opening near the Route 136 side and a basement level opening to ground level at the other end is now the home of Eileen Belanger. In the lower level the old cider press stands by to do its' traditional task, once a year, of pressing the tangy juice from bushels of local apples. This machine is the only equipment from the J.R. Whipple Co. farm that is still in working condition.

In the junction of the two roads is the stately yellow home of Wayne and Cathy Daniels. This was originally the home of J.R. Whipple, a native of New Boston, who has probably influenced the history of this town more than any other I can name. Across the street lies the cement barn, a huge stucco finished structure with fading green trim. This was one of the dairy barns that the farm operated.

Whipple employed several hundred men and women to operate his farming operation that encompassed over 2500 acres. The operating departments included the dairy, hennery, piggery, horse barn, creamery (now the home of Apple Barn owners, Geoff and Cindy Katz), and cider mill. The purpose of the farm was to provide provisions for the three Boston hotels that Whipple owned, Young's Hotel, The Parker House, and Hotel Touraine. The produce was shipped to Boston on the train and the garbage was hauled back on the train to feed the hogs.

Mr. Whipple died in 1912 and the corporation was run by his son-in-law for a time, but was auctioned off in 1920. This devastated the economy of the town and left people in financial and psychological depression. Prophetically, Louis Swanson, a young minister, came to town and pulled the community up by its bootstraps. He started the tradition of our annual fourth of July celebration in 1922, we will have the 82nd annual celebration this year two days after this column hits the streets.

Our final pause was closely connected with the Whipple farm historic feature. This is the old depot at the foot of Depot Street. Not only is this a unique building in town, it is an icon of the only era in our history related to railroading. Its partial field stone veneer, field stone chimney, and stucco siding detailed with curved boards accenting a columnar window on the gable ends give it a harlequin appearance. The depot was constructed shortly after J. R. Whipple and other New Boston businesspersons brought the railroad to town in 1893 only two years after the state legislature authorized the railroad line to be laid from Goffstown along the river to the village. The success of the railroad was limited to the duration of the Whipple Farm, after the demise of which there was little justification for its existence and the last whistle was sounded in 1930.

The tour ended at the depot and the bus returned to the center of town. I cannot speak for all, but my impression from this experience is that it is impossible to separate the present from the past, our lives encircle the past, and the past encircles our lives. Since being involved with the event I embrace the past with remembrance and the future with longing as suggested in The Prophet by Kahlil Gibran.

CIVILIZATION AND THE WATER CYCLE (8/2004)

The clouds thickened and turned ominously dark in the western sky and the humidity suddenly increased. Sensing imminent rain, I hurried along the property boundary, perhaps not seeing some of the barbed wire fence remnants marking the line, trying to finish flagging of the evidence so that my survey crew would be sure to see it. Having only one line to finish on the property that afternoon, I was compelled to stay in the forest and not beeline back to my Pathfinder. It was inevitable that I would lose the race when I heard the soft whooshing sound of a shower moving fast. The sound was considerably louder before I had picked out a tree that would shelter me.

I hunkered up against a hemlock tree with thick branches. Within seconds the shower was directly overhead. I had already noticed the water running down the tree trunk in the bark fissures before any drops fell through the foliage to plop on my wide brimmed felt hat. The water streamed down the tree trunk to the root collar where it left golf ball sized gatherings of bubbles before it disappeared in the duff on the forest floor. During my interlude under the sheltering hemlock I had many thoughts about the water cycle and about how it has been affected by man.

Had I been an Indian hunting in the forest at this location before the coming of the European settlers my concerns about the watershed would have been basic. I reasoned that an Indian living in this area had water resources in the right quantity and quality to transport his canoe, to sustain the plants he depended on for food, and to provide healthy wetland and aquatic habitats needed by the fish and fur bearing animals that nourished and clothed him. Stream banks were stable; no dams had yet been built to impede the naturally regulated flow. The Indian disturbance of the land was insignificant in this part of the country; they had little effect on the water cycle.

In the pre-colonial period, a shower like this would have been intercepted in part by the foliage of old growth trees. Some of the water would have returned to the atmosphere by evaporation from the foliage. The surface area of foliage and woody tree parts exceeded the ground area under trees by at least a factor of two.

In that era the rain that avoided interception by plant surfaces flowed softly on to the forest duff, there to enter the spongy three to six inch thick organic mat. More evaporation occurred and some passed through bodies of numerous organisms living in the surface layer. Water passed slowly through the organic layer to infiltrate the complex and thirsty world in the soil mantle.

The top layer of soil, with a depth averaging 18", was and still is the metropolis of the natural world. Just one handful of the soil contained untold thousands of microscopic plants and animals. The soil was the habitat for many more species of creatures, some of which were too big to hold in your hand. All of the biota used considerable water from the cycle for life processes. However, most was taken up by plant roots and returned by transpiration to the atmosphere as water vapor. The hemlock now serving as my umbrella is 10" in diameter and is capable of removing from the soil fifty gallons of water per week. A forest stocked with similar trees would capture a rainfall of 0.36", perhaps the full equivalent of the shower now passing over me. The pre-colonial old growth forest would have extracted much more water from the cycle.

The minor portion of precipitation that did pass through the mantle of soil entered the ground water flow. Eventually, the water was discharged from springs and into streambeds where it continued its journey to the ultimate sink, the ocean.

During the pre-colonial period only minor fluctuations in the water cycle and they resulted primarily from natural causes, fire, beaver, floods, and hurricanes. The water cycle functioned with relative stability and integrity.

The storm still trickled through the hemlock boughs over my head as my mind traveled to the early seventeenth century when white settlement drastically changed the landscape even where I now stood. The land was cleared of trees, then; stonewalls, roads, and dams were constructed. In that epoch, sheep by the thousands were pastured on the same steep hillsides that I had traversed early this afternoon. Some say that 90% of the land area was cleared for agriculture between 1750 and 1840. What an enormous affect this human activity must have had upon the water cycle. My first thought was that there would have been few trees to intercept raindrops from summer storms. But, this was minor in light of other effects caused by man at that time.

Flooding! This was the second thought that came to mind and a chill came over me as I envisioned the situation. Trees were removed and sheep closely cropped the hillsides. Rainfall from showers ran off the steep hillsides into streams like water poured from a teapot. The run-off peaked quickly and overflowed streambeds, scoured the banks, and eroded the channels to lower levels while they struggled to adjust to the new hydrologic conditions.

In my minds eye, I could look back to that time and see the creation of many more stream channels caused by the increased runoff from the cleared hillsides. Roads and stonewalls intercepted the runoff and caused it to channel. Sheet flow over treeless ground changed to concentrated flow much quicker than it did before white settlers came. Tension came to my mind as I now thought about how romantically the settlement period landscape had been depicted by portrait artists. I could not reconcile that ardor with the picture I now had in my mind of the water cycle being so damaging to the landscape as an effect of civilization. But, I looked around me and was comforted by the observation that nature, over a period of 164 years, has now restored this landscape and the functions of the water cycle, as near as possible, to what it was before settlement. However, I lament that the water cycle has reached the pinnacle of its state of repair and that it will never again attain this level of integrity.

A ray of sunshine pierced the hemlock canopy and struck me in the face-the shower was over-my thoughts left the past. I looked at my watch and calculated that I had time to complete my objective and make it
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back to the office for scheduled phone calls. After a thank you to the hemlock tree, I stepped from under its still dripping boughs and hastened along the line of stonewall put there by the civilization that had been the subject of my reflections a few moments before.

My movements through the shrubs and low hanging branches thoroughly wet my blue jeans and cotton shirt, though the sun was shining brightly now. This was not as uncomfortable as the troubling thoughts that stayed with me all the way back to the office. I knew that the property I worked on today would soon be converted to residential use like so many others in the watershed. Results of recent studies about the affects of development upon the water cycle, particularly related to runoff from urbanizing areas heightened my concern. Is our civilization on the cusp of another land use shift comparable to the one during the settlement period?

Recently, I had learned statistics published by state and federal agencies that answered my own question. First, the area of forested landscape in the southern part of New Hampshire peaked in the decade of 1980 to 1990 and has since declined steadily. During that time 134,500 acres of forest (2.7%) have been lost to commercial and residential conversion statewide. Second, each two-acre lot that is developed typically results in 12% impervious surfaces (rooftops, driveways, pools, etc.). Third, several studies on the affects of urbanization in watersheds demonstrate that levels of imperviousness ranging from 10% to 20% results in damage to streams and wetlands.

In my mind I applied the newly published trends and studies to speculation about the probable irreversible effects of development on the water cycle and the property I am working on. The stream and wetland on the west side will respond to the increased high flows and diminished low flows following development. The stream banks will erode and widen and the streambed will erode to a lower level resulting in an unsightly appearance. Associated wetlands will become shallower from sediment deposition and the diversity of vegetation will decrease-purple loosestrife will invade. More troubling is the cumulative influence of this phenomenon upon the watershed as a whole. Similar development is occurring throughout at an alarming rate.

I am convinced that our civilization is irreversibly affecting the water cycle to the detriment of our well-being. But, there are ways to minimize the threatening changes that will alter the water cycle. Can we encourage acceptance of these alternatives throughout the watershed before it becomes no more than a bucket with a hole in it?

SWINGING DOWN A SWATH (9/2004)

Earlier this season I was walking over my grounds at the homestead and suddenly realized that I was losing a battle in a war against verdant insurgents. Unwanted plants were invading my space! Rough looking orchard grass and witch grass, backed up by harder stemmed milkweed and pokeweed, had breached my perimeter and were quickly taking my ground. Thorny raspberry and blackberry soldiers were ready to hold ground even if I should be able to push back the advance of the first force. The thorn bearers had at their side masses of nettles to deter any counterattack I may make. A final force of multiflora rose was holding steadfast to any ground that the faster moving invaders may lose in my counter attacks. From my early observations I feared that I did not have the resources to counter the invasion.

My compound contains 6.2 acres and 4.5 acres are field land that is mowed each year for the hay. About 1.7 acres surround the buildings, driveway, gardens, and lawns. The interface between the fields and the home grounds is the staging area where the invading plants have become entrenched. For years I have held my ground and had a neat looking perimeter. Two or three times a year I used my gas powered rotary weed and brush cutter to re-establish my authority over the early invaders. I asked myself, how did I lose so much

ground? I remembered that each year I mowed just a little less area and the perimeter closed in imperceptibly. Now I have a real problem.

So, I started to shop around for equipment to use in overpowering those persistent invaders. I needed a new weed and brush saw to wipe out the smaller advancing plants and a chain saw to cut down the larger woody plants that were the rear guard for the advancing front. Hurriedly, I went off to the nearest lawn and garden equipment center to be supplied with weapons that I could use in my counterattack. As it is with a nation at war, I soon discovered that the costs added up to more than I expected. I elected to purchase only a small chain saw, the least expensive weapon in the arsenal. I figured that with the chainsaw I would be capable of a rear assault and wipe out the most powerful invaders. I thought the “shock and awe” effect would then wilt the softer front line-wrong.

As I planned my strategy I reflected on how my Dad kept the area around the house neat and free of invasive plants. He used a scythe to do this at least twice a year. He also used the scythe to mow green feed for the few cattle he raised. Also, the grass left around the edge of the fields after the hay was harvested was cleaned up by use of his scythe. I had the job of gathering the hay he mowed using the bull rake. It was called a bull rake because it was a “bull to pull”. This old-fashioned farm equipment allowed my father and grandfather to keep the place looking neat and weed free all summer. As a youngster, although I admired the pleasing rhythmic motion inherent with use of the scythe, I had shied away from becoming too familiar with the tool. I did use it just enough to learn the basics, but anything that smacked of real work got in the way of being a teenager.

I decided to reacquaint myself with the ancient tool and inspected the readiness of my Dad’s old snath (the gracefully bending wooden connection between the two short handles attached perpendicularly and the 28-inch bowed, sword like blade). I picked up the old worn snath and discovered that the neb (the metal sheathing at the end to which the blade is attached) was loose. I looked this deficiency over closely and became despaired. The device was worn too much to work well and I did not want to face the enemy with faulty arms. I gave the snath a last longing gaze and hung it where I found it. I remembered my Dad telling me that scythes came to this country from England in the hands of colonists and they used them to harvest salt hay on the coastal marshes, later they were used to harvest native bluejoint grass on the inland marshes before field land had been cleared for growing upland grasses brought from England.

More recollections from my early lessons about the scythe came to mind as I left the barn. I had been told that the snaths were commonly made from ash saplings that were heated in steam baths and then placed in a jig to form the curves preferred by the user. After the sapling had dried it held its shape forever and only a little final shaping with a drawknife was needed to finish the snath that some would consider an artful creation. Dad loved to lecture me especially when I demonstrated curiosity. Questions I asked have been forgotten, but answers he gave are remembered.

Dad used to tell me about a crew of three to five men that used scythes to mow all the fields on the farm. They would “swing down the swath” paralleling one another. The best scythe man would go first to set a pace that challenged the others that followed him. In their back pockets the crew carried whetstones that were used to keep the blade sharp. Most of the mowing was done in the early morning because the grass stems cut with less effort when wet with dew. He said that experienced men could put down from one half acre up to three acres a day.

I pondered my recollections and figured that even with my inexperience I should be able to use a scythe to recapture my humanized habitat without the expense of other gas-powered equipment. But could I remember the lessons Dad gave me? I resolved to try and as I went across the yard I practiced the effortless motion that I had admired while watching my father with the old scythe that still hangs in the barn. I repeated his instruction

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in my mind: place your right foot forward as you swing the blade back; shift your left foot up even with your right foot as the blade swings into the cut. I must have looked foolish in this hesitating walk across the lawn while turning my body right to left. “Swing from your waist, not from your arms, this is more efficient and less tiring” he had told me. I was confident that I remembered the basics and set out to buy a new snath and scythe blade.

Little did I realize that this equipment would be so hard to find. Three farm equipment retailers were visited before all the items were gathered, including the necessary scythe stone (sharpening stone for the blade). Some of the younger assistants at the stores did not know what I was talking about when I asked for a scythe blade and snath.

Several weeks have passed since I assembled the new scythe. Each week since, I have practiced with the tool and now I am pleased with my decision. Most of the grassy invasion has been defeated. At first, my arms, shoulders, and back tired quickly, but soon the rhythm came to me and it now seems effortless and actually enjoyable. The mowed grounds look neat and groomed, some areas are ready to mow again. At the start, I was also clumsy with whetting (sharpening) the blade, so I stopped and tried to remember how Dad did it. He held the tip of the snath on the ground at his side, held the top of the blade with his left hand, and with his right hand ran the long narrow whetstone along the blade edge, stroking forward on one edge and backwards on the other edge. No wasted motion with this method. After I practiced this technique twenty five to thirty times, it became second nature.

I believe that the invaders of my space have been put down to the roots of their origin and the outlook for the future is that I can live not in threat of reinvasion, but in harmony with plants on my homestead. Additionally, I have enjoyed other benefits from this battle. The exercise has toned my body. Several large piles of grass hay have been put up for use next spring as garden mulch in place of so much black plastic.

Worth much more are the spiritual and emotional benefits I enjoyed. Each mowing session was a time immensely appreciated-breathing deeply the fresh air untainted by exhaust fumes-hearing only the rhythms of the mowing. Only a soft whisper, “whoosh”, was heard with each slice of the blade through the plant stalks, even the musical tones of the whetstone on the blade were pleasing. Putting grass down in a neat windrow seemed as satisfying as stacking wood straightly and uniformly in the woodshed. Intimate contact with the plants and the homestead grounds rekindled a heartfelt relationship with nature and family legacy. Particularly, this experience has put me in touch with my Dad and I think he would be happy to look down from heaven and see me “swinging down a swath”.

BAKED ALASKA

The lights dimmed in the two-tiered dining area of the cruise ship “Infinity”. Suddenly, on a drum roll cue, a parade of waiters appeared from a stage entrance on the lower dining level and from the fore end of the level on which Laura, myself, and thirteen other members of our entourage were seated. Each waiter wore a white tuxedo and white gloves. On one gloved hand each waiter carried a huge Baked Alaska, *en flambé*. As they sashayed flamboyantly into the great dining room where nearly two thousand patrons waved large white linen napkins, like helicopter propellers, over their heads. Thousands of previously unnoticed mirrors on columns, walls, and dividers reflected the flaming deserts and relighted the massive dining area.

This occasion was the second formal dinner of a vacation cruise to southeast Alaska with my wife, Laura, her cousins, and in-laws. We had embarked from Vancouver five days before on this, over 900 feet long, vessel with eleven decks. I had come to feel that it was on a scale comparable to the landscapes and

spaces we had seen during the week on the Inside Passage and through the fiords of the unique Alexander Archipelago area.

At first, the size of the ship and extent of the natural world I observed were difficult to comprehend. In New Boston our environment is quite humanized; filled with human scale objects such as fences, houses, and utility poles. Alaska is the opposite extreme because there are few human scale objects in sight and precipitous, cloud-piercing mountains, that seem to rise from water's edge, offered no dimensions to which I could relate. Distances that seemed like a few hundred feet were actually a mile-the horizon was actually 5000 feet to 15,000 feet above sea level when I sensed it to be less. This orientation problem affected all of us.

Coming aboard Infinity was like moving to a new city. We scurried around, like cats in a new home, to find all the places on ship that would; entertain, pamper, exercise, educate, and sustain our bodies and minds. These places were staffed by courteous and helpful young people. They made us feel immediately comfortable with their warm greetings, "How are you today sir (or ma'am)"? The bustling activity of the first day at sea was countered by the second day. My mind and body became totally at rest, the anxieties associated with travel and of leaving work behind drained through the soles of my feet. I was calmed by the ageless human link, water and meditation. Even the thunderstorm during the second night could not rouse me from sleep.

On the second morning, Laura and I greeted our cousins in staterooms fore and aft by leaning over the rail of the balcony; that gesture would become a daily ritual. Then we peered through the fog to the port of Ketchikan, a small town with a temporal appearance, clinging to an inner island of the archipelago. We anticipated the excursions we would soon enjoy, Laura was to take a flight-seeing tour to watch bears gorging on salmon, I was to take a jet boat tour into a long fiord. Following a quick breakfast in the cafeteria we stood in line to board one of the ship's tenders that would take us to the dock where the tour guides waited.

At the dock, Laura and I parted. My tour bus went north along Tongass Drive, the one main road through Ketchikan, passing small areas of housing, to Salmon Lodge. On the way I was surprised to see a roadside sign reading "Whipple Creek". I remembered that my old friend, George Whipple, spent a lot of time in Alaska. I wondered if this creek was his namesake. Salmon Lodge is a modern fishing lodge, constructed of spruce logs, providing guiding and boarding services to salmon fishermen. I soon joined others in the group in boarding a jet boat that skimmed over the water about thirty-six miles per hour as it headed northeasterly into the fiord and the back country that surrounds it.

I craned my neck so as not to miss new sights through the splash streaked jet boat windows. Eagles, in flight and perched on water's edge, were common; salmon schools along side; solitary homesteader farms, accessed only by boat or float plane, and; schools of jelly fish etched images in the memory chips of my mind. The highlight of the trip was a pause at the end of the fiord where a fresh water river cascaded over steep ledges to mix with the salt water. We watched in awe as hundreds of salmon ascended the ledges against the current on their migration to lay their eggs in the streams where they were spawned.

After my tour the bus returned to the dock just in time for me to board the last tender leaving for the Infinity. Eagerly, I hurried to our stateroom to hear Laura's story of seeing bear. I was surprised to find her there quietly reading a book. "Tell me about your trip", I said hesitantly. She sadly stated, "The bus took us to the floatplane dock...we anxiously waited around a few minutes, finally the pilot came and said, 'the plane has a mechanical problem...the part has not come yet and I am very sorry...I have to cancel the tour'". Knowing this was the one excursion she really wanted to go on, I told her I was sorry. However, the day finished well for her at the dining room where our entire group exchanged the events of the day while enjoying roast beef and wine, and wine.

The following morning the huge vessel moved through a cool fog that appeared to close tighter as the hours passed. The ship's speed slowed and its foghorn sounded. The scene mesmerized me. Soon, we saw our ship passing through lots of ice blocks. During the night and morning hours our ship had coursed northwesterly paralleling the Fairweather Range toward the town of Yakutat, entering Yakutat Bay about breakfast time. When we began to see the ice blocks the ship had entered the thickening, eerie fog in Desperation Bay. A muffled voice on the intercom system assured us that the ominous implication of the bay's name, the thickening fog, the colder temperature, and the ice blocks should not concern us, it was all part of the experience of viewing Hubbard Glacier.

We strained to look through the fog for a glimpse of the attraction. Ghostly, it appeared as the ship passed beyond the fog cloud, jackets were donned as still cooler breezes were felt. Thunderous booms echoed off the ship's steel sides and it took me a while to realize what it was. "The glacier is calving-the 'bergs' are falling in the water and a few seconds later we hear the sound of them striking the water", I exclaimed. Laura gave me that look as if to say, it took you long enough to figure that out. In its position the ship turned 360 degrees so everyone could see the full six-mile long, 400 feet high, front of the glacier, a river of ice beginning at Mt. Seattle 76 miles northeast. I now think of this scene as the most spectacular sight of the trip.

Laura and I awoke early the following morning eager to do Juneau, the next port of call. Laura and I traveled together today, first by bus to Mendenhall Glacier, a let down compared to the Hubbard Glacier we visited the previous day, but it had a beauty of its own. The second part of the tour was on a whale watch boat that took us southerly into Stephens Passage. We were soon thrilled by the show staged by a cast of characters including: humpback whales, orca whales, eagles, stellar sea lions, and harbor seals. The tour narrator stated, "This was the best show I have seen for quite a while".

The final port of call was Sitka where Infinity had the good fortune to tie up at the dock. Again, Laura and I took separate excursions; I was the first to check in with the tour guide for a daylong 8-mile nature hike into the rain forest, along the Bay Shore, through a muskeg bog and along a stream. This was an enjoyable look at new plants and big trees that I have not seen before, but we did not see any bears. Bears were close by however! I spotted a fresh mud bath with bear tracks in the muskeg bog, probably made that morning. The most memorable sight was offered by thousands of salmon, bruised, scraped raw, and hook-jawed, charging the shallow currents of the stream. Compelled and persistent, they tried again and again to reach their spawning grounds, undeterred by the sight and smell of tons of dead salmon lining the stream banks, now rotting and returning their energy to the ecological system that generated them.

This short piece can only feebly communicate my impression of this great experience. Although at the time of its purchase in 1867, for \$0.02 per acre, Alaska was considered an inexhaustible supply of natural resources to be looted for the benefit of our nation, I believe that it is much more than that now. Laura and I have "looted" a portion of what it has also become, a seemingly dimensionless source of wonder and spiritual renewal. This was our experience to treasure for a lifetime.

Remembering a Shady Era (11/2004)

There has been no New England tree that has meant so much to the lives of our ancestors as the elegant elm. This American native distinguished the landscape of villages and homesteads from the time of settlement until a diminutive beetle vectored the sticky spores of Dutch Elm Disease (DED) fungus that invades the twigs, limbs, and stems of the largest of the native trees in the eastern United States. The fungus mycelium causes death by clogging the water transporting cells (vessels) in the tree and by producing a toxin. The disease was first diagnosed in Europe in 1922 and soon it spread to the United States by the importation of elm logs. During the next four decades the disease pummeled the urban forests, running east with the wind from the Midwest, 2004 *"In the Country"* by Robert Todd

and obliterated all but the most remote solitary trees. The economic and psychological damage to our society was immeasurable. However, the legacy of the grand tree lives on.

Our community was not spared loss and our citizens suffered personal trauma from loss of many “bridal pair” elms, including my family. On the edge of my driveway, in two places, there are depressions in the pavement. These became noticeable a few years ago and now cause annoying jolts when I forget to steer my vehicle to avoid them. These “potholes” are not really the way I want to remember the old elms that graced the yard of the Todd Homestead, but they do cause daily recall. The potholes are the result of decaying elm stumps that were over three feet in diameter. After the trees had succumbed during the early 1960’s, my dad and Lester Houghton put them down using a chain saw equipped with a four foot long bar. As the giant buttress roots decayed over the past forty years, the soil filled the void and my driveway slumped at the same location.

I clearly remember these trees and several others in the yard. As a youngster, I frolicked around the massive trunks and hid behind them while playing with cousins. I joined my grandmother in watching the beautiful Baltimore Orioles fledge their young in unusual basket nests swinging from the most pendulous of branches 30 to 40 feet above the yard. The high crowned trees hung over the rooftops and gave the buildings a pleasing scale as well as comfort from their shade. The trees I have nurtured to take the place of the elms fall way short of providing the same feelings and values provided by the old elms.

New Boston, like thousands of other small towns, showed strong affection for the elm. Typically, the species is easy to grow and it is quite tolerant of urban conditions that thwart the growth of other common shade trees. Further, it is long-lived; some individuals have been documented to be over 300 years old, though a more common life expectancy is 150 to 200 years, making them a living link between past and present. Surely, most readers will remember the monster elms that articulated the common, plus the church and former high school grounds. I remember the coolness under them on a hot July afternoon. I remember the shade and the secure feeling of this outdoor room formed by lines of elms along River Road and Meetinghouse Hill Road. The overarching crowns high overhead made a lofty ceiling held up by straight trunks resembling columns in a great building.

I do not know the origin of the village elms, but I gained some understanding of their genesis and significance when looked through the book recently published by the Historical Society, Images of America: New Boston, Arcadia Publishing, Portsmouth, 2004. A series of pictures in this interesting little book tell me a story about the life of the village elms. One image is of the village immediately after the fire that flattened most of the structures south of the river in May of 1887. In this I saw the loss, but I also saw the survivors, about 12 evenly spaced elm trees in a line bordering the common beginning at the Town Hall parking lot and running along the Meetinghouse Hill Road to River Road and along River Road to the road leading to the playground. By comparing the size of those trees to the size of images of horses and people standing near them, I estimate that the trees were 12” to 14” in diameter and 50’ to 60’ tall, being at that time about 50 years old. This tells me that our town fathers had the foresight to plant the village elms as early as 1830 to 1840.

Other pictures showing the high school and the church, rebuilt after the fire, have images of several elms possibly 5” in diameter and 15’ to 20’ tall. My favorite is a picture of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the township in 1913. Where else would such a gathering be held, but under the shade of the village elms lining the common and Meetinghouse Hill Road? The buildings are elegantly adorned with flags and banners and the street is mottled with patches of shade and sunlight filtered through the even more elegantly decorated branches of the same trees that had survived the fire 26 years before. Hundreds of people (and several horses) are shown gathered in the shade of this small esplanade; a shade that may be attributed to the foresight of some of the same people that were involved in obtaining the charter celebrated on that day in 1913.

In 1963, the 200th anniversary of the New Boston charter was celebrated, in part, under the shade of these same great elms while they were showing dead limbs and many “yellow flags”, not as festive decoration, but as a sign of doom. Yellowing leaves on small branches at the tip of the crown is the first visible sign of DED infestation. This was the last community wide gathering that I can remember taking place in the village “outdoor room”.

Our nation waged a valiant battle to save America’s most cherished tree. The United States Department of Agriculture took the lead. The Civilian Conservation Corps provided a labor pool of over 300,000 men. The state departments of agriculture and natural resources pitched in when the disease hit their jurisdictions. Towns and cities battled the disease on the front line. Pruning of infected branches and the removal of whole trees was the principle mode of defense. The control of the bark beetle by hydraulic spraying of tree foliage was a second defense. Despite the expenditure of untold millions of dollars at all levels of government and the deployment of many thousands of men and women and fleets of equipment the loss continued.

There were several political and natural events that destined the effort to eventual failure. First, the 1938 hurricane caused the epidemic to leap forward due to the diversion of funds and people to higher priority clean-up efforts. The hurricane also favored the spread of the beetle by providing more abundant breeding places in the damaged and down elm wood. Second, the beginning of World War II completely took away funds and labor. Third, the public became aware of the environmental disaster that could result from spraying barrels of DDT over every village in the natural range of the American elm. Rachel Carson, in her book Silent Spring, warned that it would be less damaging to lose the elm than to lose the functions of our entire ecosystem. The use of DDT was discontinued in the DED defense effort.

DED control in New Boston is documented in the Town Reports for 8 years between 1956 and 1963. The town meeting records do not express the emotion that must have been heard within the walls of the town hall those years during the discussion on the motions to raise and appropriate the money to save the village elms. \$300 was appropriated for spraying the trees during the few early years of the DED eradication program. In contrast, the next few years included \$300 for spraying and tree cutting around the common. The final appropriation of \$250 in 1963 reflected the frustration of the situation in that the funds were to be used for cutting and removing dead trees.

Harold “Bo” Strong was serving his first terms as Selectman during this period and he told me in a telephone conversation that he accompanied the Bartlett Tree Company during the DED control years. He said, “We had to meet the truck at 5:00 in the morning to guide them to the trees to be sprayed. This was because there was no wind that early and the spray would not blow all over the place”. He went on to say that, “The town cooperated with individuals that wanted their trees sprayed at the same time. We went all over town to spray those trees”.

I sorely miss the legacy of the elms in the yard of the Todd Homestead and of the village elms. However, within sight from my office window there is a substitute elm tree that I watch annually for signs of DED, so far there is none. Perhaps its isolation from other elms will save its life, or perhaps it is resistant to DED, only time will tell.

NEIGHBORHOOD MUTUALITY; PAST AND PRESENT (12/2004)

Those calls keep coming! Somehow the callers are clever enough to break through the screening protocol I thought was smart enough to divert them from my ear. Those most successful say “I have some business for Mr. Todd”, or “I just need to verify Mr. Todd’s subscription information”, another that seems to work is “A friend of Mr. Todd’s asked me to call him today”. Nearly every day at least three of these calls steal my time, distract me, annoy me, even anger me, and never result in any satisfaction. Most disturbing about these experiences is that I have learned how to be very rude and disrespectful to people that are only trying to make a living at telemarketing. I do not like this about myself and I do not like that method of soliciting business. In thinking about my feelings I realize that they have come upon me only during the past few years.

There was a time in my life when most of my transactions were with neighbors, people that provided goods and services benefiting my family and myself. The neighbors also benefited from the transactions, usually consummated by passing cash from my hand, with a smile on my face, to theirs, received with a smile on their face. Although that community of neighbors included some in surrounding towns, the sphere of mutual dependence was quite small, and beautiful. I still remember the faces and the good feelings that surrounded those transactions. Laura and I try to sustain mutuality by seeking services from neighborhood businesses; Mattison Contracting, King Plumbing and Heating, Cramb Electric, Daniels Garage, A.J. Gomes, and Duke’s Excavation, to name a few.

In these times, aside from a few personal services and from the businesses mentioned above that contract to improve my home, or provide services to my professional endeavors, I feel that I am losing the mutuality of benefit with my transactions. I am grateful that the work I do, for the most part, benefits the local community and landowners personally. However, most of the benefit of my purchases of goods, with the money I earn locally, goes to huge corporations with no heart or face, most of the benefit may leave the country causing the great “whooshing sound” foretold by Ross Perot over a decade ago.

I reflect on my parent’s lives and I believe theirs was perhaps the last of the era when communities thrived on the exchange of goods and services between neighbors. It is true that, as consumers and producers, settlements were made with cash, but the cash mostly stayed in the community. Dodges Store, Daniels Garage, Marshall’s Market, Hall’s Clothing, Boulter’s Building Construction Co., Barss Construction Co., Saltmarsh’s Cider Mill, and the several local farms in town were some of the principle neighbors that drove the local economy. These neighbors enjoyed a satisfying standard of living by producing and consuming and they facilitated a satisfying standard of living for my parents as consumers. Mom and Dad did, however, in their younger years, fulfill the role as producers as well as consumers. Mom was a private practice nurse and Dad was a farmer and vendor of land services in this community.

It is quite likely that my father and his neighbor, George Daniels, represented the very end of true neighbor mutuality. George and Dad continued part time farming until age diminished their strength. George and Dad shared labor and equipment during the haying season each summer for decades and filled the barns on each farm with hay they sold each winter to supplement their incomes. Although each knew the cash value of their input, they did not exchange cash, just labor and equipment, and if there was inequality at the end of the season they settled by swapping hay. Dad would cut the hay with his tractor, when the hay was dry he raked it using his tractor to pull George’s rake. George followed with the baler, laying the bales in lines on the ground. Dad drove his flat bed truck by the rows of bales while local teenaged labor, paid for by the old farmers on a fifty-fifty basis, picked up the bales and stacked them on the truck.

I witnessed the beautiful, mutually beneficial, economic system that George and Dad practiced. Their relationship was a true throwback to the system used exclusively in a much earlier period in our community. Of course I was not around when my grandfather and great grandfather lived on this farm, our present home, but I
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am indirectly aware of their role in a neighborhood of mutual dependency by reading the journals I found in the attic in which they kept daily records of their transactions as producers and consumers. The journal pages are headed by names of the persons or companies they did business with. On the lines they kept a dated record of debits and credits between the two parties. To keep these records for every transaction must have been a tedious and time-consuming effort.

A typical page in James Todd's personal journal has the heading, "Mrs. Colburn, Dr", (I assume that Dr means debtor because he has other pages with the heading "Todd Cr" which probably means he was the creditor in other transactions). On one line, dated June 13, 1865, was the note, "to fixing plow \$0.35, to shoeing horse, \$0.50". He noted on June 18 "received of Mrs. Colburn- one bushel of apples, paid in full up to this date". This transaction indicates that Mrs. Colburn benefited from James's skill as a blacksmith and James benefited from Mrs. Colburn's orchard produce; a mutually beneficial and dependent relationship.

Apart from his personal accounts with neighbors, James Todd kept a journal of his accounts with the town of New Boston. James was the surveyor of highways for District 13, a district that had the same boundaries as did the School District with the same number and of which he was superintendent. With respect to highways, all residents in the highway district were assessed a tax by the town. Traditionally, the residents in the district would work off their tax by providing labor to improve the roads in the summer and to pack the snow in winter at a certain rate per day. Others would provide teams of oxen or horses to haul gravel and move rocks at a set rate per day. Those residents that could not work or provide teams and equipment would pay their tax in cash and the surveyor would use the cash to pay labor costs for work on roads in the district.

Similarly, my great grandfather's journal as school superintendent for District 13 accounts for running the school. Payments to teachers were in cash, whereas other needs were met by residents working off their school tax assessment by providing fuelwood, labor for repairing the school building, and for providing room and board to the teachers. District 13 was a community within a community. Perhaps 15 to 20 families lived within it and they were dependent upon each other to educate the children.

A book in my library entitled, Mathew Patten's Diary, by the Town of Bedford, Rumford Printing Company, Concord, NH (1903), is a chronicle of Mathew Patten's life in Bedford from 1744 to 1788. Mathew was a judge, justice of the peace, land surveyor, legislator, and farmer. Because he was a surveyor I took particular interest in his writing. His life was in a time when there was very little cash and what cash was in circulation was from several sovereignties, provincial and foreign national. Exchange rates were difficult to calculate in these times and neighbors chose to use bartering, or "notes of hand" (these are I.O.U's) in their transactions. In reading this old diary, one thing that impressed me was the role of rum as a medium of exchange.

An interesting entry in the Patten Diary on June 2nd 1758 reads as follows:

On the 2nd I went to Litchfield and got 4 bushel of corn from James Underwood and gave him a Johanna and allowed him to buy me corn with the overplus being 6 dollars and got a hat which John Parker brought from Portsmouth for me and I bought a horse from Widow Russel in Litchfield and a Bridle for 20 ½ Dollars and I pd her the ½ Dollar and gave her my note of hand for 20 Dollars of Old Tenor equal thereto on or before the 24th of October next.

Whew, this is a lot of transactions in one day and a lot of recording. I really do not understand what it all means, however I do understand how complex personal accounting was in that era of our history.

Trust, respect, strength, mutual benefit, and satisfaction are words that I think characterize life in neighborhoods and communities where transactions take place between real people. Neighbors that are producers and consumers in small economic circles show these qualities; transactions with telemarketers and huge corporations are not likely to do so.