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**AN ECOLOGICAL APPROACH TO HOME OWNERSHIP (1/2005)**

The room I use as my office is within earshot of other rooms used by my staff. Some discussions in those offices may capture my attention like a crying baby gets attention, even from a busy mother. I have empathy for the people who come here for advice, only to be told that, for one reason or another, their plans are not feasible.

Recently, I experienced this kind of distraction and heartfelt compassion. My associate was explaining to a young couple, first time landowners, why the house of their dreams could not be placed on the lot they just purchased. In the tone of the lady’s immediate reaction I sensed strong emotion, “You’re telling me there is no room for the house on our 2-acre lot?” “Yes, but...” said my associate; cut off as she shouted, “That’s absurd!” Soon emotion gave way to reason as the husband and my associate considered placing the chosen house plan on the lot in a “mirror image”. This allowed the house to fit, but it was not without the prospect of costly site work involving ledge removal and excavation. They decided to face higher than necessary costs in site work in lieu of scrapping the chosen house plan.

Having been through such painful relations, as described above, many times in recent years, I have come to accept the fact that a majority of such folks do not understand the process of land development. Usually, they get the “checklist” of necessary steps in the process out of sequence and often put the “cart before the horse”. By the time they seek advice from professionals they have set themselves up for failure and disappointment. The time, effort, and capital they expended on ill-advised pursuits of their dream have usually been futile.

I often wish that I could reach people before they begin home planning (better to advise them before land purchase) and explain how I think they should approach the process. Of course I do not presume that the basic principles of home-site acquisition and development I have adopted are the only ones to follow, or that they should be applied to every situation. However, those in the following list seem to have helped those I have advised from the outset.

**SITE EVALUATION:** This is not the same as a market value appraisal of the property, although that is also important; it is the ecological evaluation of the landscape within the bounds of the property (the property lines and corners of the property should be well marked by a surveyor before the evaluation is done). Some of the professionals that are qualified to assist with this first step include; certified soil scientists, certified wetland scientists, septic system designers, landscape architects, some civil engineers, and some land surveyors.

The landscape features on the property that should be observed include the slope of the land, the soil characteristics, vegetation, presence and location of wetlands, presence and location of ledge and bedrock, presence of drainage swales, aspect (compass direction of the slope exposure), and access to a public highway. The safe sight distance in each direction should be measured from the driveway entry location. The consultant should be able to describe limitations of the site for development and to suggest reasonable approaches to minimizing the limitations, or recommend that the plans be scuttled.

**SELECT APPROPRIATE LOCATION FOR SEPTIC SYSTEM:** The qualified person(s) to consult with in this step are septic system designers (any of the professionals listed above may also be certified to design septic systems). The consultants will consider the soil suitability for disposal of the septic system effluent and the capacity of the lot to safely dispose of the effluent from the proposed daily flow. The daily flow is related to the number of bedrooms in a home. The area of suitable soil required to dispose of effluent from a two-bedroom home is considerably less than the area required to dispose of effluent from a four-bedroom home. The consultant may find only one suitable site for the septic system, or he may find alternative areas on the lot; this would provide more flexibility in placing the house.

The tests normally performed to determine the best site for a septic system include one or more deep soil test pits excavated with a backhoe, one or more percolation tests and several soil probes with a hand operated auger. The results of these tests determine the size of the leaching area and the elevation of the bottom of the leaching area relative to the seasonal water table, bedrock, or impermeable soil layers.

**SELECT HOUSE STYLE OR CUSTOM DESIGN FOR SITE:** It is an unusual house lot that will accept a design out of a catalog without expensive modification of the landscape. Most lots available now are on land that has been previously passed over because of serious limitations to building. My experience has been that homes should be designed specifically for the house site. I believe that homes designed for the site are less expensive to build, particularly with respect to site work costs. To my sense of aesthetics, dwellings designed for the site are more attractive and functional than “catalog” homes built on the same lot. Could this reflect a higher resale value? I think so.

The consultants to engage in this step of the process include; experienced building contractors and architects.

**SELECT TREES TO PRESERVE AND DELINEATE CLEARING LIMITS:** Nearly all house lots created in these times are covered with forest trees. Trees grow best in a community of trees, not as single specimens in a lawn. The reason for this is too complex to explain in this column. Notwithstanding this fact, most folks will select individual trees for shade, natural beauty, and the several other functions they provide for human benefit and enjoyment.

A land-clearing contractor is usually engaged to accomplish tree removal. These people use varying equipment configurations. They also have different levels of competence and ways of doing business. Too often this work results in disputes and disappointment. A contract should list the specific scope of work the firm is to perform and the method of payment should reflect how the value of the trees to be removed is factored into the contractor’s charges.

The best way to contain the clearing activity is to mark the clearing area limits with construction fencing, or at least continuous plastic tape (the heavy duty four inch wide tape is the best). Individual trees, or groups of trees within the clearing boundary, must be preserved by placing construction fencing completely around them at the “drip-line” of the tree crowns.

Not all forest trees are suitable for preservation as landscape specimens. Some trees are sensitive to sudden exposure to the sun; others are very sensitive to changes of ground level around them and will not survive lowering or raising of the ground level near them. The cutting of roots during trenching for cables and conduits

serving the house can be a serious detriment to some trees and the affect may not show for several years. Forest trees that are caused to stand on the forest edge, or alone, by removing surrounding trees are prone to “windthrow”. The last thing homeowners should do is cause a tree, chosen for the landscape, to turn into a hazard to persons and property.

My recommendation is to have a landscape architect, experienced builder, forester, or arborist handle the contracting and supervision of the land-clearing firm. These consultants can assure that the trees are carefully chosen and protected during the clearing operation.

**CAREFULLY PLAN AND EXECUTE SITE WORK:** I believe that the site work should be mostly completed before building construction commences. This is not standard procedure on most projects. I recommend that the septic system be installed from the leach field to the septic tank and the driveway and parking area be brought to subgrade elevations. Finally, the cellar hole should be excavated and the final grade around the building should be established to within about five feet of the cellar excavation.

Temporary seeding and mulching practices must then be applied to all the soil surfaces prepared in the previous step to stabilize them and to prevent erosion. All the remaining surfaces on the site that have been cleared of trees should not be disturbed until the home construction is complete.

At this stage, and not before, the home construction can begin and be completed. Following home construction a qualified firm can be engaged to construct the landscaping. Some people would benefit from the help of a landscape designer or landscape architect to plan and supervise the operation. The final step in lot development is surfacing of the driveway and parking areas.

These are ecologically based principles that I recommend to inexperienced people for use in choosing and developing their land. There are, of course, many other prongs in the process involving real estate agents, financial institutions, appraisers, and lawyers. It is important that qualified consultants be used in each step along the path from purchase to occupancy. I hope this will be of assistance to couples planning to undertake what may be their greatest investment.

### **Keeping Warm (2/2005)**

There was a snow last night; a soft, light blanket sprinkled with tiny mirrors and prisms that, for a few moments, reflected brilliance from the low morning sun. It is a cold morning; eight degrees registered on our post-mounted thermometer dial. I think this is one of only a few mornings this winter when the temperature has been in single numbers. The furnace starts often and runs longer than usual, but I am warm without effort or care. Thankful I am for being able to take for granted the worldwide sources and systems that bring the fuel to my home where it is converted to heat energy that fills, over and over again, these twelve airy old rooms. Suddenly, I was chilled by the recollection that winter mornings of the past in this homestead have not always been this comfortable.

I am inspired by the beauty of the morning landscape and by thoughts of past winters, seemingly much colder than recent winters, during my time here and of earlier times. Winter comfort in this house has not always been taken for granted, nor has it always been without the efforts of me, my wife and children, and of the generations of my family that have lived here since 1814. The words of a poem by Robert Louis Stevenson, that I recently read, come to mind and they reinforce my reminiscence. The words in the poem express much more romantically the thoughts I had in earlier winters while working to provide winter comfort. I also believe the words are not the same as those that passed through the minds of my grandparents and great-grandparents as they struggled, even harder than I, to keep warm. Why is it that portrayals of the hard scabble lives of generations past by poets and artists are so romantic and revered, even by those who have witnessed, or experienced that life?

*2005 “In the Country” by Robert Todd*

The following beautiful lines, an excerpt from Stevenson's poem, are particularly heartfelt because in my memory they draw a picture of my grandmother on a winter morning:

*“Winter-Time”  
“Late lies the wintry sun a-bed,  
A frosty, fiery sleepy-head;  
Blinks but an hour or two: and then,  
A blood-red orange, sets again.*

*Before the stars have left the skies,  
At morning in the dark I rise;  
And shivering in my nakedness,  
By the cold candle, bathe and dress.*

*Close by the jolly fire I sit  
To warm my frozen bones a bit:...”*

Most every day, winter and summer, I would visit my grandmother, eat brownies, and listen to her tell stories. In winter, she lived in three rooms heated by two stoves, one a wood-fired kitchen range that also served as a water heater, the second, a Round Oak brand wood stove in the dining room. Only the deepest chill was kept from her bedroom by the conduction of energy through the door and wall common with the dining room. The rest of the house was completely closed off and unused during the winter. My young eyes were quite amazed to see her bathe with washcloth, soap, porcelain basin, and perhaps a gallon of water heated on the kitchen range. She stood close to the Round Oak stove as she took her sponge bath while the north wind blew snow through the single sash (no storm windows) and left it in small drifts on the windowsill.

Grandma told me the story about keeping warm during winters when she and grandpa were raising their family, four boys and a girl. Often, three or four of grandpa's hired men boarded in the house, in addition to women that taught school in the District 13 schoolhouse across the street. In those years six stoves were stoked with wood to offer some degree of comfort and to keep the chamber pots from freezing. I was told that grandpa had one hired man whose primary job it was to keep the fires roaring during the winter months. I know from personal experience during the few years I lived here with my family under the same conditions, that keeping six fires would have been a full time job. Grandma told me that it was common to burn about 30 cords of wood a year for cooking and heating when all her family was home.

The thirty cords of wood consumed in those years were cut, as a winter chore, on the farm woodlot with axe and saw, bucked to length, split with wedge and mall, and stacked in piles, measured four by four by eight, held by stakes and props, or often against trees. The woodpiles cured in place until the next fall when men and teams of horses returned to the woodlot. The men loaded the wood on wagons or scoots and carted each load to the homestead where it was again stacked in long tall piles to await the saw. In my grandfather's time a one cylinder gas engine powered a cordwood saw rig manned by a crew of three, one to pass on, one to operate the saw table, and a third to take away and pitch the stove length pieces into the woodshed. The workers were eased into their task by the rhythmic “phit, phit, putt” of the engine much as soldiers march to the rhythm of drums. The amount of natural, animal, mechanical, and human energy that went into producing heat energy necessary for life on this farm was phenomenal. The task of heating could not be taken for granted, it was get it done, or suffer the consequences.

While raising my three children in this house, keeping warm required the same tasks, just in smaller increments. The old homestead was then remodeled to include installation of central heat in the form of a huge wood furnace in the cellar, some insulation, storm windows, and new siding. These improvements greatly

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reduced the energy needed to keep us warm. We did not do much cooking over a wood fire, but did use one of the five fireplaces for aesthetic effects mostly. Even with these efficiencies, about twelve cords of wood were needed to heat the house. My entire family worked to cut trees, buck to four feet, split, haul, cut to stove length, and stack in the cellar. Each fall I went into the forest with a chainsaw to select hardwood trees and to cut them into bolts four feet long. The bolts were loaded onto the body of a German made tractor called a Unimog and trucked to the field in back of the barn. Here the wood was unloaded and stacked to dry until the next fall, then to be cut to stove length and thrown into the cellar where it was all stacked for winter use. Keeping warm was a tremendous chore that caused many lame muscles.

Subsequently the house was again renovated and an efficient oil fired furnace installed to replace the wood burning furnace. Now the house is heated with little effort on my part (my back is happy now). Keeping warm requires a lot less work in terms of natural, animal, and mechanical energy. However, I wondered if the heat energy (heat as measured in BTUs) now required has decreased in comparison with my grandfather's time.

I scanned some forestry references in my library for information on the heat value for species of hardwood commonly used for fuel; ash, beech, red maple, sugar maple, red oak, and white oak. Assuming that the heat value of the wood used to heat this house was from these species in equal proportion, and was dried to about 20% moisture content, I calculate that my grandfather's family consumed about 630 million BTUs yearly, generated from wood fires, to keep warm, heat water, and to cook their food. Using the same assumptions I calculate that while my family was growing up in this house we required 252 million BTUs yearly, generated from wood fires, to keep warm. At present, with the improvements made to date, I calculate that the heating system in this house generates about 148 million BTUs to keep us warm (not including the energy used in cooking and water heating). I am pleased with the efficiency that has resulted from installation of a modern heating system and from the few improvements that prevent heat loss from this old house. This has saved a lot of money and improved comfort as well.

Do I miss the feeling of self-sufficiency and the family time together in the woods associated with keeping warm by burning wood? Self-sufficiency is missed- backaches are not. I am concerned, however, with the relatively short supply of fuel oil that will certainly be depleted, some say within 50 years. It pains me to think of the thousands of lives that will be snuffed out in the inevitable wars waged over this diminishing resource. What new energy source will keep my great-grandchildren warm on cold February mornings while they enjoy breakfast among the rays of early morning sun reflected off tiny mirrors and prisms sprinkled on the new fallen snow?

### **MORE HISTORY FROM THE ATTIC (3/2005)**

Because of my occupation and of my close association with generations of my family at the Todd homestead, I am often in contact with many written and material links to the past. Sometimes I feel like my ancestors wanted to tell me a story, but never got to writing it down in one place so that I could pick it up and read it. They put little clues in this closet, that trunk, those cardboard boxes, and wooden chests all over this twelve room house; plus the large attic rooms over the main house and ell, a carriage house, and a barn. Four generations participated in setting up this anthology of heritage that also contains original sources related to town history.

In this column, I propose to tell a story that came to me out of a pine chest that sat in the attic over the ell. The chest is an artifact in its own right, some say it dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is made of thick white pine boards 20 inches wide on the top, sides, ends, and bottom and covered with a rust colored paint. Over the years I have examined the papers that filled this trunk consisting mostly of agricultural periodicals, ecclesiastical papers, and personal correspondence dating back to about 1840 addressed to James P. Todd, my great grandfather. Recently, I had to move this chest to another location because it was in the way of some on going

home remodeling. So, I had to take all the weighty paper out. Amongst the papers was a softbound book that I had seen before, but not really examined. On this occasion I was more attentive to its significance.

I perused the book at length. An immediate question sprang to mind-why is this book in this house? Glued to the gray heavy stock paper cover was a 2½-inch by 6 inch bordered label emblazoned with the warning, "Company Roll Book, Property of the State". The book is 10 inches by 16 inches, folded in the middle, and containing perhaps 50 dog-eared, mouse nibbled pages printed with lines, columns and text. Between two of the stained pages I found several 3" by 6" printed forms signed by James P. Todd, private. The form was decorated with the icon of a militiaman in uniform standing at attention and titled with the words "COMPANY ORDERS". Other text on the document instructed the person to whom the form was directed to appear at the town hall on May 19, 1846 properly equipped for military duty and inspection. One of the orders was directed to John Loring, my great granduncle. The order identified the company as the 9<sup>th</sup> Company of Infantry in the Ninth Regiment and Fourth Brigade of New Hampshire Militia.

Upon reading the first page of this curious book, I was pretty sure I understood what it was. The six paragraphs were titled "Quarter Master General's Instructions". In summary the paragraphs instructed the company officers, non-commissioned officers, and clerks on how to keep the book and to revise it as needed and to present it for inspection at the fall muster. Other text stated that the purpose of the record was in part to make a record of the number of militiamen enrolled and ready for duty statewide so that the state could receive an equitable proportion of arms made available from the national government.

The instructions recited the law then in affect relative to military service requirements. "All able bodied men between the ages of 18 and 45, unless exempted, are required to be enrolled in a local militia company." The soldiers were required to attend drill, fully equipped, and stand for inspection in the spring and again in the fall. Failure to comply subjected the men to fines. The last instruction warned that "Soldiers shall not discharge guns on the morning of inspection... every fouled or dirty gun noted during inspection shall subject its owner to a fine."

I went on to read the names penned upon the lines of the pages. The page dated April 18, 1838 listed Captain David Gregg as the commanding officer. Then the lieutenants, non-commissioned officers and privates were listed. The roll of this date included 135 soldiers with the rank of private, 4 sergeants, and 1 Lieutenant. Most of the names I recognized as souls that lived in town during that time, owned land, and who, literally and figuratively, laid the foundations of this town. I will list a few names that all citizens may recognize because roads and places in towns have the same names attached to them. Among these are: Dane, Dodge, Wason, Woodbury, Whipple, Langdell, Colburn, Hooper, Howe, Cochran, and Christie. I remembered that the Captain was the great, great grandfather of former N.H. Governor and current Senator Judd Gregg and that I am his great, grand nephew by virtue of his having married my great grandfather's sister, Harriett.

I noted that the roll book covers the period in the life of the company from 1836 until 1846. I was surprised from reading the rolls to learn that my great grandfather, James P. Todd, was listed as a private in two company rolls (1845 and 1846). He was then 23 and 24 years old. It was apparent to me that my ancestor was the private ordered to keep the roll and he did not present the book as required. I always considered James to be an honorable man, so why would he have shirked his duty?

About a month ago I contacted Howard Leonard, Clerk of the uniquely famous New Boston Artillery Company, and an expert on early military history, and we talked about the book I had found. He was eager to see the roll book and we met the next week. Howard confirmed that the book was for the local infantry company and he speculated that James Todd kept the book because by 1846 the militia had fallen out of public favor and the institutional structure had fallen apart. So, with no one interested in the records and perhaps with no one to accept the roll, he just kept it himself.

Howard told me the interesting story about how the militia was at first a highly patriotic and serious institution that played an important role in the defense of America, and then how its usefulness and respectability diminished steadily to the time when (about the late 1840's) many questioned its continued existence. The musters had become drunken festivals and sideshows where gambling and rowdiness prevailed. The drills were contemptuous mockeries in contrast to the strict military discipline and company pride that once prevailed at fall musters. Activists in the temperance movement at that time cried out that musters were immoral and petitioned the legislature to end them, or to restore military discipline. I learned from him that the state government did act on the issue and basically gutted the legal requirement for holding musters. Without the requirement, people just did not show up.

I continued to question Howard, "Was there an infantry company separate and distinct from the New Boston Artillery Company?" He answered, "Yes, and it is mentioned in a book by Jack Noon titled Muster Days at Musterfield Farm." He loaned me the book to read. In it I learned that the 9<sup>th</sup> infantry company from New Boston was part of the Ninth Regiment, which included companies from New Boston, Weare, Goffstown, Manchester, Bedford, and Dunbarton.

Since learning of the infantry company at this time in my life, I have been reflecting on other objects I found in this house in the past. I remember finding a bayonet and leather scabbard hanging on a nail in the attic. Also found in the attic was a cracked and stiff leather pouch attached to a leather belt in which there was a wooden insert with ten holes in it, obviously a cartridge box. At that time the value and significance of these items I did not grasp and carelessly disposed of them. Now they are gone and I can only mindfully link them with my great grandfather's required paraphernalia as a militiaman. Lastly, there was a flintlock musket that I took a liking to when I was younger man. I restored the old Springfield to firing order and had fun casting lead balls that I consistently shot through tin cans at 25 yards. Again, I did not understand that this may have been the weapon my great grandfather used in drill with the 9<sup>th</sup> Company at musters of the Ninth Regiment. Long ago I traded it for a hunting rifle. The ignorance of my youth is now mourned.

Reading the Noon book and hearing Howard Leonard's story about military history has been a revelation. This information along with the clues uncovered in my homestead, has given me a lesson about a little known piece of New Boston history. I must find a permanent home for the old Company Roll Book that the ghost of James has handed to me along with this history lesson.

### **Wildlife and Human Welfare (4/2005)**

Ben, my survey crew chief, spends most of his working hours in the forest and on the edge of the forest. He is almost always on the "edge"; a transition zone between one habitat and another, such as field and forest, forest and wetland. These are the places where most wildlife species are concentrated while the animals are feeding, and nesting-not too far away from their usual cover-not too far away from food and water sources. The boundary lines he surveys are also most always located in these transition zones. In this environment Ben has encounters with many wildlife species.

At office briefings, the morning after Ben's wildlife encounters, the entire staff is entertained by his outpouring of humorous stories. His head and heart are filled with details of the event and he is eloquent in his expressions. We all read in his words the excitement and fulfillment these common occurrences bring to his day. Sometimes I think the chance of sighting wild creatures and having that pleasurable feeling that grabs him every time is what he enjoys most about his work.

I listen intently, and with considerable envy, to his stories and I may relate a memory of my own of similar experiences with wildlife. I am also blessed to have had many years in the field when I ventured into those special wildlife habitats and experienced enriching associations with the wild animals. One of my  
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journals chronicles the feelings I have had with wild animals and they describe the circumstances so that I can recall the scene. I read and re-read these words to relive the experience. Why did I keep this journal when I have not written any other of my life experiences? Recently, I have given considerable thought to this “why” question.

The time I walked up on a day-old fawn in the forest and looked into its eyes; the time I picked a live grouse from his resting place in the snow and held it in my hand; the day an ermine climbed my pant leg while I stood at my transit; finding and holding a rare Blanding’s turtle, are some of the sharpest memories I hold. My feelings at those moments are difficult to express and it takes time for me to put down the correct word. Connection- I feel a kinship to the creatures, perhaps because they share birth, life, and death as it is with my existence and my fate. Aesthetic appreciation-the beauty and wonder of all creatures brings awe and wonder to my mind. Peace of mind-a day in the forest and an encounter with one or more species drains stress from my body, restores my energy and sharpens my senses. Spiritual – a walk in the woods with the sighting of one or more of its creatures is the best way for me to get in touch with God and to validate my existence. With a little more time I could express even more feeling that comes from my association with wild animals.

Walt Disney and other cartoonists, I think, have capitalized on human feelings toward creatures. Even though the entire animal kingdom has been “humanized” in the preponderance of movies and literature published by Disney and others, the appeal of stories spun around the interaction of humans and cartoon animals has contributed much to the world economy. Now, there is a television network, Animal Planet, that brings the same warm feelings to viewers. In the “Meet Your Neighbor” column in last month’s issue of this paper it was reported that Charlotte Smith, at age 96, did not watch much television except for the Travel Channel and Animal Planet. I suspect that she also shares the benefit of seeing animals, even if they are images on the television screen.

The animal/human experience unleashes a creative power that has brought fame to some people and a good income in addition. Robert Frost is one revered poet that, I think must have been greatly empowered by nature, particularly by animals. In a quick review of the titles in the book, “The Poetry of Robert Frost”, edited by Connery Lathem (1979) I counted 16 titles that seem to have been inspired by one animal or another. It is appropriate that the Publisher’s, Henry Holt and Company, call their enterprise “Owl Books”. Most of the other titles in Frost’s collection are strongly nature connected. It seems to me that most famous artists have animals, domestic and wild, as subjects.

I have read articles with references to many studies that show that human health can be improved by a relationship, of those in poor health, with animals. Elderly people are uplifted and made attentive when they can see birds and animals from rest home windows. Some entrepreneurs of elderly homes make a point of facilitating such relationships in their establishments.

This paper has featured stories of animal trainers and wildlife rehabilitators bringing animals into New Boston’s school rooms to enrich the students’ understanding of science. A great horned owl in the classroom may stir the emotions of students and inspire their curious minds. I believe that the memory of those occasions will be as richly rewarding as the annual bus trip sponsored by the New Boston school administration of the 1950’s to the Benson Wild Animal Farm in Hudson. I hold those memories more closely than any other of my school days, possibly equaled only by the sports experience.

Our state and federal wildlife management agencies have responded to the public’s increasing need to experience wildlife in a passive, non-consumptive, manner. On the state level, the Fish and Game Department expends much time and energy in promoting the preservation of all species of wildlife. Hunting and fishing license fees support this work. Wildlife habitat preservation and maintaining a diversity of habitat types are focal points of the state programs. The purpose of many state and local environmental protection laws and rules is to maintain wetland habitats, early successional vegetation types, and the transition zones between wetlands

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and uplands. The protection of large unfragmented parcels of land is the focus of regional land trusts and open space protection initiatives at all levels of government. These relatively recent changes in land use and wildlife management objectives reflect the increasing value of wildlife to the human psyche.

I think that the keeping of dogs and cats demonstrates the human need for the animal connection. There may be no closer animal/human bond than that between a family and their pets. These animals are brought into the home, given a name, and are talked to as if they were one of the family members. This connection is not experienced any more intensely as when a pet dies. The bereavement is deeply felt.

Just today, March 18, a story on Channel 9 News hooked my attention. A Siberian Husky pup, named Jenna, had run away from his family and, despite two weeks of searching by the family, they were not reunited. The family sadly moved to Florida and the pup chose a new home with a new family that loved him for a while. This family also moved and the pup was passed on to a second family. Two years passed and the pup matured into a beautiful loving companion. However, the second family also faced circumstances that threatened the Husky's security. Fortunately, a very compassionate police chief heard about the dog and with some careful investigative work was able to contact the original owner. The news story ended with a video of the reunion, in New Hampshire, between Jenna and his first family. It was an emotional scene that even watered my eye.

Legends handed down from generations of Native American cultures show a respect and mutual kinship between the hunter and the hunted. The legends indicate that the hunters participated in rituals that rationalized and justified the killing of animals by understanding the basic needs of the family for food and shelter. The legends say that hunters prayed that the spirit of the slain animal would forgive the hunter and accept his explanation of why the hunter needed the body of the animal to sustain his family. These legends reflect a strong feeling of respect, kinship, and connection between man and nature.

I spend little time, by choice, in the urban environment. But, when I do travel there, sympathy comes over me when I see the plastic deer, wire legged flamingos, and chain saw carved bears set up on front lawns. Perhaps this is an attempt by residents to satisfy an inherent need to replace values once provided by live creatures displaced by the subdivision in which they now live. I wonder, "do the homeowners really experience the same feelings that would have come from occasional visits to their backyard by a doe and her fawn"? I answer with my own feeling that living without the wildlife experience would be unimaginable.

In discussions with friends and colleagues, I detect parallel mindsets. I ponder, "would this acknowledgement of the value of wildlife, by a majority of others, result in a public view that the natural environment is a community first and a commodity second"?

### **HOLDING AND SHARING PROPERTY RIGHTS Part Two (6/2005)**

Last month I discussed the origin of land rights in New Boston and how these rights were passed through generations of families during early settlement. Early farms sustained the generations of families that lived on them and the titles were conveyed mostly by wills. The sharing of land rights in the early days involved easements benefiting mill owners primarily. The remains of many stone and earth dams along New Boston's abundant streams still attest to the importance of easements that allowed mill owners to hold a reserve of pond water on their neighbor's land for use during dry periods. The mill owner regulated the flashboards on his dam to release water into a penstock that directed the flow to his water wheel.

I also described the trend toward more sharing of rights to use the same property. As land rights evolved from the mid-nineteenth century until the present, an owner's "bundle of rights" contain fewer sticks. Today, it is common for a lot in a subdivision to be burdened by easements above ground and underground.

Another trend in the evolution of property rights began in the early twentieth century. Now, the passing of land rights from generation to generation is predominately by deed, not by wills and probate proceedings. It also seems that as time goes on the conveyance of property by deed becomes more and more complicated. The process involves a host of professionals including; realtors, bankers, lawyers, insurance agents, appraisers, land surveyors, home inspectors, tax collectors, and perhaps others of which I am not aware.

The surveyor's involvement in the land transfer business is, of course, the one that I am most familiar with. This is a role that is sometimes humorous and fun, other times frustrating and worrisome. Always a challenge, however, is interpreting deed descriptions and establishing the location of those property lines on the ground.

A friend of mine gave me a copy of a deed description that he found on record at the Hillsborough County Registry of deeds. Although it draws chuckles from those I show it to, the terms, language, and situation are not uncommon and it illustrates what surveyors must interpret. Following is an excerpt from the description:

*"...commencing...south of the partition in the house which is east of the west front door; thence following said partition north at the east side of the stairs till it comes to the north room at the head of the stairs; thence northerly on the west side of said north room to a point north of said partition and four feet distant from the house; thence east 4 feet distant from the house to the east end of the house; thence south by the east end of the house till it strikes the north end of the land conveyed in Book 230, Page 146; and thence west on said land to the point of beginning. Reserving the right so long as I shall live to go through the premises conveyed to get water from the well and wood from the woodshed and to get to the hog pen. I also convey one undivided half of said woodshed, hog pen, and backhouse...and one undivided half of the land upon which said shed, hog pen, and backhouse stands."*

This comedic deed was not meant to entertain us, but was a serious matter between the grantor (the person selling) and the grantee (the person buying). Margaret, the grantor, and Mary, the grantee, were widowed sisters in Goffstown who desired to help and support each other by sharing their earthly resources. Could this 1850 deed have been the first condominium deed in the State of New Hampshire?

That trees are considered real estate until they are severed is a little known and misunderstood property right. Trees that are commercially valuable for conversion to timber products and firewood should only be sold by a written agreement, or by deed. A timber sale agreement is a written contract between a landowner and a timber buyer that specifies the trees to be sold, the terms of payment, and states a limited time period for cutting and removal of the trees. The legal world looks upon these contracts as constructive severance of the trees as of the date of signing and the trees become personal property of the buyer. On the other hand, timber deeds convey a property right and should be recorded like any other deed. Timber deeds convey the growing trees and the timber owner may have many years to cut and remove the trees from the land.

Upon my graduation from UNH, I worked as a forester for Lorden Lumber Company. This company's operation in Milford was the largest lumber mill in the area. While employed there I learned that timber deeds purchased by the company were a very important part of the company's timber procurement plan. Several timber deeds in hand ensured that there would be a steady supply of logs coming to the mill well into the future. Short-term timber contracts, by their nature, did not insure a long-term timber supply. Therefore, the company used contracts to supplement the timber supply, or to acquire timber with certain specifications necessary to fill an immediate order.

In the following paragraphs describing the many methods of sharing land rights, I have referred to a book entitled, "Land Resource Economics; The Political Economy of Rural and Urban Land Resource Use" by Raleigh Barlowe, Prentice-Hall, Inc. (1963).

It may be that the most widespread method of sharing property rights is through one of the many variations of land leasing arrangements. Cash renting of residential units is the most familiar method of sharing land rights so I will pass over that discussion and move to lesser-known methods such as agricultural-share, percentage-share, long-term leases, and oil and gas leases.

In some parts of the United States agricultural leases have been a very important part of the land economy, not so in New Hampshire. Sharecropping on plantations was the mainstay of southern agricultural economy after the civil war. Sharecroppers worked a portion of the landlord's property, usually about 35 acres, and were subject to his supervision. Basically, the cropper and his family provided the labor to grow the crop and some of the production inputs (seed, fertilizer, insecticide) on credit. At the time of harvest the cropper received a certain percentage of the revenue from the crops. The landlord furnished the housing and credit for the cropper's living expenses between harvests. Obviously, this method of land sharing stifled the cropper's ability to improve his situation in life and contributed to wide spread low social class distinction.

Percentage-share agricultural leasing is common over most of the northern and western states where grain crops are predominant. This method is more beneficial to the farmer/tenant because he benefits from his own managerial talent, provides his own capital to produce the crop, and pays a percentage of his crop yield to the landlord. Usually one quarter to one third of the crop value goes to the landlord. This method is also used in the raising of livestock.

Leasing of commercial sites is common in American enterprise. The leasing arrangements are, perhaps, the most complicated, yet flexible, of any property sharing method. Most landlords receive a percentage of the business receipts. Some of these agreements are modified by stipulations setting a minimum and a maximum rent. Many such agreements have a recapture clause to allow a landlord to terminate the lease if the tenant's business fails. On the other hand, the tenant may have the right to cancel the lease if his business proves unprofitable. Another arrangement provides for a sliding scale in which the percentage rate rises or falls with changes in business volume. The best use of this method of leasing is in locations where the tenant's success is related to the location of the leased site rather than to the tenant's managerial skill.

Leasing is generally considered long-term when the term of the lease is for 15 years or more. During the recent past I have noticed a lot of "for lease" signs advertising land for commercial development. I most recently observed these signs two weeks ago when my wife and I went to Las Vegas to celebrate Aunt Alice's birthday. My understanding of this property right sharing method is that it is best suited where land values are very high, as is the situation in Vegas, the fastest growing city in America. These leases usually run for a period of 99 years. Landowners prefer to retain their rights for investment purposes rather than sell and tenants like the "loan" of the value of the landlord's property value. The tenant puts up his own building, pays all taxes, and all operating costs. The rent is based upon the prevailing interest rate of return at the date of lease applied to the current market value of the land. The tenant's improvements to the land may become the property of the landowner upon termination of the lease, or the agreement may provide for purchase by the landowner of the tenant's improvements at the appraised value thereof.

"In the Country" will continue with part three of  Holding and Sharing Property Rights  in the July issue of the NEW BOSTON BULLETIN.

## HOLDING AND SHARING PROPERTY RIGHTS Part Three (7/2005)

In this column, for the last two issues of the New Boston Bulletin, I have told a story about the origin and history of rights in land from the period of settlement until the present. I discussed what appears to have been the prevailing land ownership philosophy during the past 250 years, approximately, and how it has so radically changed. I will, in this final part of my theme, discuss some unique and seldom used ways that property rights are held and transferred. Further, I will try to characterize the prevailing land use philosophy that I perceive from the daily experiences of my life and the trends I see.

There are two special property sharing methods I have not included in my two previous columns that I think are interesting. The first is called a “simple license”. This is applicable in situations where a landowner has a friend, or neighbor-could be one and the same, that he wants to allow use of his property for a short time without conveying a permanent right. The license is authority, usually written, for a person to use land of another. The authority is a personal privilege enjoyed by the licensee and is revocable at the will of the licensor. The fact that a license is only a convenience, pleasure, or benefit to the licensee distinguishes it from an easement.

A few months ago my neighbor called to ask if he could park his unused vehicle in the woods on the back portion of my property. I gave him verbal authority to do so. Although I should have reduced the authority to a written agreement, it is still a license for him to use my land to park the vehicle on my property.

The second property sharing method relates to the old tradition of family burial plot dedications. It is not uncommon for me to find these old cemeteries quietly tucked away on properties I am surveying. I am often saddened by the neglect they reflect. The names on the leaning, overgrown headstones appear to have been long forgotten owners of the property on which the plots are located. The remains of husbands, wives (often first and second wives), and children taken by childhood diseases, in effect make a permanent claim to these small plots of land. I am obliged to show these small plots, most being only 2000 to 3000 square feet in area, on my survey plans. By law the landowners I work for also have an obligation to hold these sites in trust for any descendants of the family interred there.

Often, the owners of land that I survey are unaware of the presence of family burial sites. Their presence is also likely to be unknown to me because, like easements and other encumbrances, gravesites may not be mentioned in the deed to the property. The lack of this reservation in the deed does not trump the fact that the descendants and relatives of the persons buried on a property have the rights to visit the burial ground for the purposes of repairing, beautifying, and protecting the graves and surrounding grounds, and to have a right of way to get to the site from the nearest public highway. Generally, the burial plots are not located on a public highway and they may not have headstones exhibiting their existence as a burial site. Such are the characteristics that cause a lot of worry in the minds of surveyors-the professionals involved in land transactions that are supposed to find all encumbrances.

Several years ago I surveyed a large tract of land in a neighboring town. In the research phase of the project, I had considerable difficulty in tracing the chain of title at the registry of deeds. This led me to research other sources of information including the town history. This was a serendipitous event for me. Not only did the history have a list of the owners of the lots in the original subdivision plan, which helped me considerably, the text also mentioned that remains of one family in the chain of title were interred in a burial plot near the northwesterly corner of the lot they owned. Because the original lot number was mentioned as well, I referred to the original town subdivision plan and determined that the described location was within the property shown on my survey map. I went to the property and navigated through the dense forest to the location described in the history and within a couple of hours of searching I found a small enclosure with some very well constructed stonewalls. I was quite sure this was the site of the burial ground, but there were no visible headstones to

confirm my assumption. I closely examined the ground within the enclosure. The ground revealed several depressions in the surface, spaced systematically, and about 3 feet by 6 feet in dimension. I reasoned that this was enough evidence for me to conclude that this was the burial ground mentioned in the history. I felt weird that I was likely to be one of a few to have visited the site for well over 100 years.

Despite the lack of attention typically given to family burial plots after the passing of several generations since the interment of ancestors, the rights in the burial ground do not revert to the owner on whose land the plot is located. Courts have found that disuse with respect to new burials, lack of maintenance, and visitations not made by ancestors, even for periods of over one hundred years does not constitute abandonment and reversion of the cemetery to the adjoining landowner. However, the New Hampshire Supreme Court determined that abandonment and reversion of the property rights to the adjoining owner is accomplished when the remains are removed to other locations.

My great-grandfather was involved in a landmark case involving reversion of burial ground rights following removal of remains buried therein. Great-grandpa purchased land and buildings from a family that had lived for several generations in the vicinity of Todd's Corner. An enclosure, containing about a quarter of an acre, on the land great-grandpa purchased had been a family burial ground for ancestors and relatives of the family from whom he acquired the land. Shortly after the transaction, the former owners removed the remains in the enclosure to the town cemetery in the upper village of New Boston. Then the former owners began cultivating a garden in the former burial ground to which my great-grandfather objected. However, the former owners persisted with the land use, claiming ownership under the presumption that titles to private cemeteries can not be conveyed. The case went to the New Hampshire Supreme Court and was decided in favor of great-grandfather. The decision stated that the former owner's rights reverted to my great-grandfather when the remains were moved to the New Boston Cemetery.

Public cemeteries, such as the New Boston Cemetery, are owned by the town and, although deeds are issued to individuals, the individual rights are limited to interment of remains and limited rights to erect headstones and installation of memorial plantings.

The last methods of holding property that I will mention are involuntary. One, being an unwritten method, is accretion which results from the gradual and imperceptible loss, or gain, of land by natural processes. The most common kind of accretion in this area results from the change in location of a naturally flowing stream, the stream being the boundary between two adjoining properties. It is generally presumed that land boundaries move with the change in the stream courses. The second method results from adverse possession. Generally, an owner may lose his rights when another party uses his property continuously, even under objections by the true owner, for a period of 20 years.

My experiences with people with different land owning philosophies and working in the ever-changing world of land use regulations brings cause for me to question- what is land ownership? With respect to land, I am on the verge of believing that we have the rights to live on the land, exclusive of others to live on the land. We have the rights to pick the "fruit" of the land exclusive of others to do so. We are more of a tenant, in common with all generations to come, perhaps a steward of the land, holding it in trust for those generations to come. We share these rights with others that may hold easements, licenses, and leases. We share our land with neighbors and members of the public that benefit from water, air, and wildlife that pass freely over, under, and on the land we occupy.

The traditional philosophy that presumes one has absolute possession of the property described in a deed and that one can do anything one wants with the land is passé. I can see a definite trend toward fewer individual property rights and more rights held in common with others-more sharing with others. I also believe there is a trend toward our community rapidly becoming a stakeholder in all properties, particularly focusing on the natural resources on the private lands-a look backward to the tribal lands philosophy.



### **Wings at Dusk (8/2005)**

During the transition from daylight to darkness, that time when the sun appears to hesitate momentarily to take another look at the planet before yielding to the shadows, a host of different creatures, not seen earlier in the day, come to visit my home place. Throughout my years at this home place I have spoken with these creatures and stored the discussions in my memory bank. Those experiences were a comfort and a joy and the creatures were an object of love, even as strong as the love I held for the pets and farm animals that shared my surroundings on the farm during my adolescent years. Over my lifetime nearly imperceptible changes have occurred that make me wonder if my childhood memories of experiences with dusky nature were illusions, or real.

Even though I live in the same place, still listening for the evening conversations familiar to me as a youngster, I do not hear as many of them. I admit that my hearing and seeing faculties are not as keen as they once were, but I believe some of those who spoke to me are not still speaking—they are gone. When I was a teenager I slept during the summer months on a screened porch. Before sleep came over me, I listened to the sounds of the dusk. Tree frogs, foxes, owls, and other voices unknown to me, filled me with wonder and kindled a quest for more discussions with nature that has stayed with me through life. Most loudly heard, nearly every evening, was the voice of the Whip-poor-Will. When he spoke, I raised my head from the pillow to look at my companion perched boldly on the well cover, not more than thirty feet from my bed. I felt as though he had come only to talk with me and that I was very privileged to be greeted by his repetitive story.

I can not remember when the Whip-poor-Will left this home place, but his voice is now only heard when I replicate it with a whistle I repeat over and over just to relive the memory. Perhaps it has been twenty years since he was here and I wonder why he went away. His favorite foods, moths and other insects, are still prevalent at dusk. The field land and woodland here is nearly the same as it was during my youth, therefore I reason that his habitat is not diminished. Rarely do I learn of others hearing his voice. Fondly I shall remember him.

During my youth, I was attracted to the fields on early summer evenings by thousands of bright blinking lights rising just above a blanket of haze over the new mown stubble. My cousins often visited my Grandmother on Sunday afternoons and after dinner the several of us each took one of Grandma's Mason jars and gleefully darted over the stubbly hayfield chasing and capturing lightning bugs. The object of the contest we engaged in was to capture the most bugs and generate the greatest light. In only a few minutes we had so many in our jars that they appeared to be lanterns. At the time we did not know we were interrupting the mating activity of those awesome little beetles that some call fireflies.

Lightning bugs are unique among insects because they attract their mates by producing light flashes. It is theorized by scientists that the light results from a reactive mix of oxygen, an organic compound, and an enzyme. The blinking may be caused by the insect regulating the air supply entering its luminescent organs. We cousins captured the males while they were signaling to the females that were settled on the ground

vegetation. Females respond with their own signal and the communication continues between them until they find each other and mate.

The experience with the lightning bugs was one of delight and fascination. That voice of nature often resonates in my mind. As went the Whip-poor-Will, so went the lightning bugs. I can not remember when the lightning bugs left, but it seems like it has been several years since I have seen their flashing signals over the hayfield. What has changed here to make them go away? Some experts say that insecticide use has diminished their numbers; others say that ambient light has interfered with the signaling between the sexes and mating has been unsuccessful. I wonder if traffic on Route 136 has increased over the years to the extent that male lightning bugs have smashed into car headlights, attracted to them as they were by female light signals. I looked again last night at dusk--they are gone.

Other wings at dusk belong to the bats that have colonized the large barn, the shed attached to the house, and even the attic of the old house. I do not know how many generations of my family have been entertained and benefited by the corresponding generations of the resident bat colony, but bats have been here as long as I can remember. Laura and I frequently sit on the patio after dinner to enjoy the dusk and to watch the bats perform their aerial acrobatics silhouetted against the waning light in the west, some coming so close to us that we could hear the flutter of their hairless skin flaps that serve to propel them and that act as scoops to capture flying insects, their only source of sustenance. One bat can capture six hundred or more mosquitoes in about an hour according to fact sheets we have recently studied.

While flying, the bats locate insects with their echo-location system, organs that resemble, in function, the sonar technology used by man to locate unseen objects. As they approach insects the bat forms one of its skin flaps into a pouch that nets and passes the morsels to the bat's mouth in a fraction of a second. A frequent erratic flight motion can be observed while this feeding activity occurs.

The little brown bat, the species that has been prevalent here for so many years, weighs only about an ounce, and can pass through cracks and crevices only about three eighths of an inch wide. Bats find these passages by sensing air currents coming from the cracks. This is the reason that my attic has been a favored maternity ward for females in the colony. Typically, bats hibernate in caves and ledge crevices. Perhaps they winter deep within the cracks on the ledge face of Joe English Hill where temperatures remain above freezing, then return here each summer to raise their young. I estimate that there have been up to one hundred animals in the colony here.

We realized early this spring that bat life would not be the same as it has been for decades. Dead bodies of our little friends were found on the barn floor, one or two daily for a while, then we began to count the numbers. For about two weeks we found from three to six bodies each day and the total count soon reached about thirty to forty. There may have been as many or more mortalities unseen. At this point we realized that our colony was in serious trouble. Laura made calls to several agencies at the state and federal level that she thought would have a concern about what we perceived as an abysmal situation. People at one agency referred her to another agency. No one of the several she called was interested enough to personally investigate. Laura and I held vigil every evening at dusk for about a week in early June, not one did we see—they are gone.

Our neighbor and naturalist friend, Gordon Russell, discussed with us a reasonable cause of our loss. He thinks that starvation was the cause of death. The bats came here directly from their winter quarters expecting to begin feeding on insects at once and to get on with raising their young. However, the extended cold weather in May upset the cycle. Insects do not fly unless the air temperature is above fifty degrees and it was colder than that for many days. Without insects, the bats could not sustain themselves. Gordon's reasoning was consistent with mine. One biologist from Franklin Pierce College in Rindge called us, how he became aware of our problem is not known, and said the cause could be rabies.

The loss of just these three objects of love for the natural world is a source of mourning, perhaps not as great as when a family pet dies, but it is at least a cause of discomfort and uneasiness. They can not be replaced as easy as buying a new puppy. Perhaps a new bat colony will re-establish itself here in a few years. I am certain the return of the Whip-poor-Will and the lightning bug will not happen. I will not stop speaking with nature, but there will be less nature to speak with.

### **Researching Your Old House (9/2005)**

I am not so presumptuous as to believe that everyone feels the same about their old home as I do about my home, one that has been in the family since 1814. Actually, the meaning of an old home to those who live in them is likely to be as different as our faces. At the very least an old home becomes central to the lives of every successive family that owns it. The walls wrap themselves around the family as soon as they move in. The home awakens to the sound of children laughing, shelters and embraces the loving family, and softens the echoes of mourning wails at time of grief. Like a book, the old home holds the saga of each family, each chapter a chronicle of birth, love, pain, and death. There are as many stories as there are families that have lived in old homes.

Collectively, I believe that old homes are unwritten “story books” that are an adjunct to the written histories of communities in this area. Some historians have recognized this principle and have revealed the latent chapters of such “books” for everyone to enjoy. John R. Schott, author of the 1972 publication by the Town of Frankestown, titled Frances’ Town; A History of Frankestown, N.H. is one of these special historians. On reading the 104 pages he devotes to 104 old homes In Frankestown, I can feel the ambiance of each without even going inside. His work is one of the best in my opinion.

William Little wrote The History of Weare, New Hampshire 1735-1888. He devotes two chapters to the subject of early settlers and town lots. His work is great for finding the location and origin of old homes and the genealogies of the people who lived in them. The style of writing is factual chronicling without the embellishment and feeling developed by Schott. However, the Little history is considered one of the best by general researchers. Helen E. Dearborn authored a subsequent history titled Town History of Weare From 1888, (1959) that is more anecdotal and covers, by chance, the homes and lives of more recent residents.

In Goffstown, the subject of old homes is covered in a very long chapter on the succession of residents from the date of dwelling construction up to 1920 along with a map showing the location of the old homes. This work by George P. Hadley was published by the town in 1924 in two volumes titled, History of Goffstown 1733 to 1920. Hadley’s second volume is entirely devoted to the genealogy of local residents with anecdotal embellishments that capture the reader’s interest.

The History of the Town of Mont Vernon, New Hampshire, Charles J. Smith, 1907 has a genealogy of early residents that contains a few references to old homes to further support the importance of such works to our culture. My last example of the role old homes play in developing and visually portraying community character is a well written chapter (XXXI) in History of Lyndeborough N.H. 1735-1905, Rev. D. Donovan and Jacob A. Woodward (1905). This chapter gives a chronology of many old homes in that town and is written in a style similar to that used by Schott.

What about the history of old homes in New Boston? Elliott C. Cogswell’s History of New Boston, 1864, includes genealogies of families that were members of the Presbyterian Church. These genealogies have snippets of information about where the old homes were and who lived in them. There are also a few lithographs of old homes that can be recognized as those still standing today. The pictures are probably the best contribution Cogswell made to the heritage of old homes in New Boston.

Our Federal Government has established a policy that mandates the protection of our tangible cultural heritage from needless destruction. This policy is embodied in the National Historic Preservation Act (1966) which basically requires a study of sites, including buildings, that are subject to federal permits, or are for development projects funded by the federal government. Permits involving areas with significant historic buildings must avoid destruction if possible, and if not possible, the damage to the site must be minimized. The act was amended in 2001 requiring states to establish a State Historic Preservation Officer to look after the interests of all citizens in the state that may be affected by projects coming under the jurisdiction of the Federal Act.

The result of the 2001 amendment to the 1966 Federal Act has been the establishment of the New Hampshire Division of Historic Resources. The major function of the division is to mirror the federal program on the state level. The division is developing an inventory of properties that are significant in state history and culture. Any state project, or state funded project, must be reviewed by the Division of Historic Resources for compliance with the regulatory standards.

Members of the New Boston Historical Society have observed that old home identification and documentation is woefully lacking in town. The Society members see the unique Victorian style of construction prevalent in the village area, built after the great fire, they also see the old capes and post and beam framed central chimney farm homes situated along the older roads in town, along with a few saltbox style old homes. They recognize that these homes epitomize community character and this heritage is worthy of documentation. Therefore, our Historical Society members have given high priority to two programs geared toward writing the old home “story books”.

The first program is to be accomplished by a committee of four members. This committee is pursuing the goal of identifying old home locations in town by studying the photographs and documents on file in the Society archives. The Committee is on duty every Thursday from noon to 2:00 o’clock in the afternoon and welcomes people from town to come and help identify the location of old homes from the evidence on file.

A second program, closely related to the first, is to involve homeowners in voluntarily identifying their residence as an old home by providing documentary evidence supporting that fact. An application form has been prepared and is available at the Historical Society building during the Thursday hours mentioned above. Satisfactory evidence of old home ownership qualifies the owner to purchase a plaque for \$40 to display on the home signifying its proud status.

I support these Historical Society programs and intend to participate. Recently I provided help to a family interested in finding the origin of their old cape style home on Joe English Road. It occurred to me that the same source information given them would be helpful to others with similar interests. To support the idea and to promote the two worthy programs, I will use the rest of this column to list sources that may yield information on the origin of old homes, one of our non-renewable resources.

The most used and easily researched sources consist of old maps and property records. There are other sources that I can explain in a telephone call to anyone serious about pursuing them.

*Old Maps:* I recommend the Town & City Atlas of the State of New Hampshire 1892, typically referred to as the Hurd Atlas because it was published by D.H. Hurd & Co., Boston in 1892. This bound book contains maps of all the towns and cities in the state with the location of all homes (plus other structures) with the name of the owner as of that date. I have found that the maps and names of each homeowner to be accurate. A copy of this atlas has been a great resource for me in researching land records. There is a copy of this available in the Whipple Free Library.

An earlier map showing similar detail is a wall atlas. One such atlas was published for each county in New Hampshire. The relevant atlas for New Boston owners is titled Map of Hillsborough County New Hampshire by J. Chace, Jr. published by Smith, Mason & Co., Boston in 1858. This atlas is displayed on the wall of the Whipple Free Library and another is on the wall at the New Boston Historical Society building. In my experience, the reliability of the names and building locations shown is excellent. A person interested in the Historical Society's "plaque" program can probably satisfy the documentation requirements of the application by citing one or both of these atlases as showing a home location and owner.

*Property records:* Deeds in the chain of title of old homes can be researched at the Hillsborough County Registry of Deeds on Temple Street in Nashua. There is staff available to show old home owners how to use the index system to view and copy the deed descriptions which usually state that a building is part of the real estate conveyed.

The Hillsborough County Registry of Probate is in the same vicinity as the Registry of Deeds. Anyone can review the records there and read, among other interesting facts, who has acquired buildings and land devised by will, or by operation of the law governing descent.

### **INTRODUCTION TO OPPORTUNITY (10/2005)**

As I hiked through the forest on the Mohan Farm, I scanned the natural features and made notes and sketches for reference. The angle of the sun, noticeably lower these mid-September days, caused the iris in each of my eyes to work hard as I repeatedly passed from the lack of light in the shadows into the brilliant light of the sun's rays. Perhaps, in these ocular adjustments I was missing some signs of wildlife that I was hoping to see. Having passed through the upland forest, I noticed a transition in growth-on my left the forest changed to a saturated depression with a thick cover of forested wetland growth-on my right was an inundated depression with a thicker cover of wetland shrubs. I stood on a slight rise about one hundred feet wide between the two wetlands. I was pleased to see such a varied landscape and I noted this as a special area on the farm.

Just as I slipped my pencil into my vest and continued with my first step along the rise, an adrenalin rush came at the same instant I saw a much used trail at my side. It was the large cloven hoof prints, freshly impressed over older prints in the moist soil that caused it. Moose, I exclaimed to myself out loud! Assessing the situation, I considered my position in the middle of a moose trail (males soon to be in rutting season); my body standing in the way of a large unpredictable animal with huge antlers, and; nowhere to retreat except in the same direction he would most likely be traveling; not good! However, ahead of me I could see a widening of the narrow neck of dry land I was on and I decided to go forward on the rationalization that the chance of encounter was an acceptable risk.

The decision to move on was a safe one and no animals were seen. However, tracks and scat were abundant. I reviewed in my head the other wildlife signs already noted; turkey feathers, deer tracks, bear scat, raccoon tracks, coyote tracks and scat, and beaver cutting; quite remarkable sightings for such a short walk in the woods.

Soon, I came upon an old highway running northwest to southeast through the western portion of the farm. Legs said, "walk there we are getting tired". I treasured my observation of the stonewalls, still neatly and soundly stacked, precisely 4 rods apart on each side of the highway, long discontinued as a public way. Recollections of this highway surfaced. This was a portion of the highway laid out by the County Commissioners in the 1830 decade to connect the Second New Hampshire Turnpike near the Francestown line with the "new road" (now Route 13) connecting Amherst with Hopkinton. A peculiar twist in the history of this road was that New Boston voters refused to appropriate the funds to build the road imposed upon them by the county government. Greenough Marden, the owner of the Mohan Farm at that time, lead the opposition. The 2005 *"In the Country"* by Robert Todd

voters repeatedly defeated articles that would have funded the road construction. Finally, the county threatened the town with a lawsuit if it did not yield to the mandate and the town succumbed.

The walk along the old highway became a bit surreal when I approached a long causeway built over a wetland. Huge blocks of granite formed the support for the traveled way and a thirty feet long box culvert 3' high by 4' wide still contains the stream. Inside of my head there was a rerun of the ancient road construction scene and I heard sounds of men, horses, oxen, hammers, and the groan of stones slipping over other stones and I saw visions of craftsman busy at work. That moment was a thrill and I was filled with respect for the crew that put that great monument in place, a monument that has endured for nearly 175 years. My opinion is that it will cause others to experience the same mind time travel for the next 175 years, especially if Carolyn Mohan's dream comes to fruition.

My walk in the forest that day was a great adventure, but my purpose was to gather insight and information about the Mohan Farm while wearing my Open Space Committee hat. The information I gathered and information gathered by others will be used to follow up on the proposition put to the Open Space Committee (OSC) by Mrs. Mohan. Her stated wish is to keep the home of her heart and soul intact, free of development and protected forever, by a conservation easement. This spunky, insightful woman realizes that selling the farm would cause her and the town great distress and that, on the other hand, giving an easement to the town, or a conservation organization, would cause her economic hardship.

Therefore, the OSC has decided to study the merits of cultural and natural history of the farm and to evaluate the economic aspects of the town purchasing an easement. If such evaluation has a positive outlook, then the OSC will undertake the task of presenting the idea to other authorities in our local government and build a supporting case for the voters to consider at town meeting.

You may have guessed by now that this column is your first introduction to the Mohan Farm being a potential public resource, or alternatively, as our next major subdivision in an area of town that has not yet been subject to development pressure. Our editor has been very kind and generous to me in this issue. In lieu of my usual story telling, she has allowed me to be an OSC member and take on this subject of potential public interest. I thank her for that and for providing more space to include the map that gives a graphical interpretation of some of the Mohan Farm attributes. In my limited word count remaining I will narrate a synopsis of my observations and personal knowledge of this resource.

Location: The Mohan Farm is situated one half mile north of the Mont Vernon town line in the south-central portion of town. It frames a gateway for travelers going north on Route 13 (which passes through the center of the property).

Land Use History: The farm was originally settled and farmed by Greenough Marden. It stayed in the Marden family for nearly one hundred years. The Leach family continued the farming operation for another long period until it was purchased by William and Thelma Mason. I remember the Mason's as a family that literally left their mark on the community. "Bill" Mason was a local contractor, the first to use a power shovel in this area, and with it built, or rebuilt, a lot of roads we now drive on. He was road agent for many years while Thelma carried on the farming operation. The Mohan family purchased the property in 1965 and continued the farming tradition by raising sheep and horses. I believe this history is quite unique in that only four families have possessed the property since it was settled.

Physical Attributes: Mohan Farm has a configuration that approximates a square with some residential out sales in the center. The information currently available indicates that it encompasses about 136 acres available for easement. An evergreen forest dominates the land east of Route 13, except for the pasture across the road from the Mohan farmhouse and barn. A Hardwood forest dominates the portion of the farm west of Route 13 with the exception of another pasture. The productivity of the soils is high on the east side of Route 13 and moderate

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on the west side. The pattern of land use indicated by interior stonewalls reflects the past agricultural use being concentrated on the areas with best soils. An area of steep slopes (greater than 25%) is located on the southwest corner of the property. A study of the map will provide a graphic interpretation of the prevalent wetland areas that function as important wildlife habitats. The plan also shows the view potential and land currently used as pasture.

Alternative Land Use: There is no doubt in my mind that Mrs. Mohan could quickly market her farm to a developer who would, with the same relative speed, convert the forest and fields to residential use. I made a quick assessment of this and can see about 20 to 30 residential lots. Considering a recent trend toward condex development this could translate to 40 to 60 residential units.

I am sure that much more will be said about the Mohan Farm and the acquisition of a conservation easement on about 136 acres available. Perhaps each of you will be asked to determine the future of this property by voting on a warrant article at the 2006 town meeting. In the interim the OSC would be pleased to receive comments and concerns about Carolyn Mohan's proposal to sell a conservation easement.

### **Yellow Jackets (11/2005)**

This is a story about the challenge of working in the forest during September and October. This is when our attitude changes from one of complete enjoyment of natural beauty and the yearning to encounter wildlife to alarm and fear that we will step on, or near, a yellow jacket nest and bear a stinging pain. This experience is not unique to land surveyors, all the other folks who spend most of their working day in the woods can tell the same story. Foresters, soil scientists, loggers, wildlife biologists, and geologists, to name a few, are all distracted during the fall season by a wariness they develop to avoid yellow jacket attacks.

Although I do not spend as much time in the forest as I once did, I have vivid memories of many unpleasant occasions when the little demons tried to drive me out of the forest. I often thought, after being stung several times, that the devil must have placed every yellow jacket nest on the lines that I was surveying. This had to be, I thought, because the random chance of stepping on these "land mines" was less than being struck by lightning, or winning the lottery. Often, it seemed that my own assistant also assisted the devil by driving a stake in the ground over which I was to set up my transit. Driving the stake with a hammer is to a yellow jacket what the bell starting round one is to a prize fighter. My assistant completed his task and moved not knowing he had set me up to the delight of the devil.

Some encounters caused me to chuckle; others caused me to fear, not for myself, but for others with me. Early in my career as a surveyor, I often took my son along to help. Even at the age of 10 he enjoyed being with me and I treasure those memories. One day in mid-October, Robby was holding the range pole on a point to be surveyed and as he stood a yellow jacket nailed him on the ear. He screamed, but did not run, by the time I reached his side there were dozens of yellow jackets circling for a bombing run. I quickly put my jacket over his head, took his hand and slowly retreated. At a safe distance we stopped and I assessed the damage, he and I had each been stung three times. His ear had swollen grotesquely, but he bravely held back the urge to cry as I consoled him. We decided to call it a day and went home.

On another day, several years later, I was working with an employee that had a history of severe allergic reactions to bee stings and he always carried an emergency sting kit that contained a prescription of adrenalin ready for injection. Not until that day had I realized the seriousness of being allergic to wasp venom. He did get stung and as I wincingly watched he administered the medicine and calmly explained that without the injection he would likely go into sudden shock and possibly pass out. I was very happy that he had not left his kit in the truck that morning.

There is one sting avoidance technique that I have learned through repeated incidents similar to the above. Instead of slapping at the insects and thrashing my arms about, I would stand still and carefully put my hands over my face; a sting near the eye is sure to close it by the swelling that comes on fast. After standing still for a moment, until the defending army settled down, I would back away from the nest and take another route. Or, I would wait a long while and slowly retrieve the transit and other equipment I had left near the nest. However, this did not work every time.

When I did get stung immediately after arousing the stinging workers, I usually would be stung several times in quick succession. This was my clue that standing motionless was not the right response. The alternative; run! Expert sources say that venom released in the first sting incites other wasps to attack because the venom releases into the air an “attack pheromone” which is a signal to other wasps to attack whomever and whatever gets in their way.

Surveyors and other people who spend a lot of time in the forest during the fall months predispose themselves to wasp attack. I have always worn a bright (fluorescent) orange vest and usually a cap or hardhat of the same color while working in the forest. This is standard apparel for safety purposes and for visually tracking other workers on the crew. Guess what, the experts say that bright colors help attacking yellow jackets spot their target zones. In the fall we apply to our skin insect repellent to deter other pesky insects; deer flies and mosquitoes among them. Surprisingly, these repellents actually arouse wasps and help them find us in their frenzied attacks.

Often, we wonder why the wasps are so boldly aggressive and antagonistic in the fall when other insects, annoying in other seasons, are diminishing. Yellow jacket biology, I have learned, is the reason for this behavior. The pregnant queens are the only individuals that leave the nest and overwinter in a safe refuge, all the other adults in the nest die when they have served their purpose of feeding the queen and all of the larvae that have emerged from her continuous egg-laying all summer. The population of the nest increases exponentially and by mid-October has reached maximum nest capacity of 1,000 to 3,000 insects. I suspect that the drive to nurture the reproductive adults and get them fit to survive the winter and start a new nest the following spring is what brings on the behavior that so drastically affects our lives in the forest.

It is during September and October that the insects change their diet from high protein sources to high carbohydrate sources. The protein diet, taken during the early parts of their life cycle, is from the insects they prey upon. By preying on numerous flies and caterpillars harmful to plants, the yellow jackets have endeared themselves to agriculturists and horticulturists who are much benefited by this predatory behavior. However, families who take late summer picnics in the park are particularly annoyed by yellow jackets that have changed to a high carb diet. How many times have you had these insects land on your cake just as you were inserting it into your mouth? The diet switch is to build up the fat reserves in the reproductive queens so that they can survive the winter.

The talk in the office during the morning briefing is not about the biology of this highly social insect, but how they can avoid the pain. Some of the solutions bring laughter to the sessions. Ben says that we should provide suits of armor to the crew members. Ken says standard equipment should include flame throwers to “burn” out the soldier wasps like the US Army used them during WWII to clear enemy bunkers and machine gun nests. Rick, after being hit the day before while wearing shorts in the forest, offers the thought of using high explosives to neutralize the nests. I suggested placing a cyanide pill in the entrance hole and in ten minutes they will all be dead. Remembering the words of my college entomology professor as he handed out the cyanide killing bottles we were to use in gathering our insect collections, I reminded all that this approach may be lethal to the crew as well as to the insects.

I try to wrap up the morning discussions by reminding my staff that yellow jackets are a part of a healthy environment and must be tolerated, much as with blackflies, ticks, and mosquitoes. To rationalize further, I said 2005 *“In the Country”* by Robert Todd

that they should be thankful that yellow jackets are not as dangerous as rattlesnakes, tarantulas, and black widow spiders encountered by surveyors in other parts of the country. Lastly, I cautioned those who persist in wearing shorts to put on long pants, long sleeved shirts, a hat, and no after shave lotion. As they listened, I suggested that if they do get stung they should apply Adolph's Meat Tenderizer liberally to the sting and rub it in. This treatment breaks down the components of the venom and reduces pain and swelling. Lastly, I asked them to remember to walk away from a nest quietly and slowly.

I have to admit that after the staff leaves for the field each morning, I feel a little relieved to have office work to keep me busy all day. On reflection, I think these morning talks instill a great deal of respect for the life forces these little insects possess and for the role they play in the circle of life. There is also some twisted humor in observing the humiliating experience of someone being "whipped" by an insect only  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch long.

### **Hiking With Leaves (12/2005)**

Late in the afternoon, on a recent Friday, my focus strayed from the proposal I was preparing. Most distracting was the low angle of the sun that was so brightly contrasting with the blue sky, one of only a few such days this fall in which I have felt the welcome warmth and brightness. Adding to this was the exciting displays of energy just outside the four wonderful windows surrounding my desk. Strong gusts of wind, just now part of my consciousness, were picking up the remains of summer plants and propelling them through the air; leaves tapped against the windows and house siding, various seed pods from the perennial beds were leaving their summertime stations and were rolling across the yard to some unknown resting spot.

A sudden urge to feel this warm energy up close and personal came over me, "I'm going for a walk...have I got time before supper?" I hollered to Laura who was already in the kitchen rattling pots and pans. "Sure, go ahead...you've got about an hour", she said with an understanding tone. I picked a light jacket from the coat rack and out the door I went to enjoy this Indian Summer afternoon. With quick paces I headed for the old John Newton Dodge Road. Before my senses tuned out my world of business and became receptive of all that nature was busily engaged in, I had passed over the bridge near my son's driveway and turned right on to the old highway that has become my favorite hiking trail.

Despite the intrusion of a logging operation in the adjacent forest to which the John Newton Dodge Road provided access, I was now totally engulfed by the sounds, smells, and energy of my preferred environment. The logging was temporary and I knew that in a time soon it would again leave the forest in stillness. I knew the gusty turbulence and the energy imposed on the forest and against my body would not be shunted by the chainsaw and skidder that worked noisily close by.

Soon, I passed the noble foundations of what was the site of one of the most successful farms in town. John Newton Dodge was widely acclaimed for the purebred shorthorn cattle that he raised on this land. As I paused to recall the history of the farm a ghostly image of the buildings appeared in my mind's eye and I savored my feeling at that moment. Continuing up a short climb, usually moderate, was now made more strenuous by the push and pull of the warm gusts against me. Above my head the usually still red oak crowns were swaying one way and then the other. I thought they appeared eager to go somewhere, but not knowing in which direction to take had become frustrated. Their roots held on to the ground, resisting each tug from above while reminding the other parts of the tree that it must stay in place and rest for the winter because that is what trees must do.

The swishing sound of my feet passing through leaves that temporarily accumulated in the shelter of ruts in the road was comforting. Other leaves amused me as they were whisked along in front of me and to my side, energized by the mini-tornadoes that swirled around me. The maple leaves appeared to be frantically running along as though each point in their several lobes served as feet, turning a cartwheel from one foot to the next.

The heavy oak leaves rolled along less swiftly, while the beech leaves did a more complex dance, rolling tumbling, and jumping along like a child at play. To me it seemed that they were in celebration of being released from the trees that they were never really part of. They had worked hard all summer as a nutrient factory; a slave to the tree. Now freed they were happy to be on their own...going somewhere...anywhere to enjoy themselves, not realizing that they were already dead and destined to become soil and mineral by eternal processes and possibly to fill the trees with shade once again.

The spike on the tip of my walking staff had stabbed quite a collection of the celebrants. I stopped, raised the staff to take the leaves off, not in fear that the leaves would deter the spike from preventing me from falling, but in curiosity. I wondered how many different species I would have in this randomly collected sample of the species composition in the surrounding forest. This would be a query made by any forester, but not the correct sampling technique. Perhaps, I thought, I could do some scientific study of this method and publish my results to start a new sampling paradigm for aging foresters. I would be famous.

I identified seven species of leaves on the spike. I thought this was amazing and that it reflects the diversity of our forest that is transitional between the species on the northern fringe of their range and species found on the southern limits of their range. This status is good for the environment, I thought, in light of what may happen due to the effect of climate change that some scientists are predicting. This thought aside, my attention was captured by one leaf, a black birch. For some reason, I chose to hang on to it and examine it. The color was a pale yellow, not the bright yellow it surely had a few days ago, I presumed. I noticed three brown spots, probably caused by a fungus, my perspective turned from the leaf to my hand, on which I noticed similar spots...same size...same color.

Instantly, I was struck by the similarity between the leaf and myself. The black birch has counted another year in its life and has displayed its phenology. (Phenology is the study of periodic processes or the timing of natural processes and phenomena, such as the yearly shedding of leaves in the fall.) The leaf I held was a symbol of time passing and it held a sign of this in the brown spots. I have the same sign of passing time in the brown spots on my hands-- age spots so I've been told. As with the tree shedding its leaves each fall, so is my life marked by the passing of seasons. I am in the fall season of my physical being.

The leaf fluttered in the breeze as I held it by the petiole and the brown spots were very noticeable, lesions left from a fungal attack. I reflected on the several "lesions" on my physical being; arthritis, glaucoma, and partial hearing loss. I kept on with the comparative reasoning. This leaf is the same as all leaves dropped by Black Birch trees since the species became established here after the glacier receded 10,000 years ago and it is the same as every leaf that will fall from that tree for years to come. Physically, I am a leaf that has fallen from the DNA of countless generations of ancestors and that DNA will pass to my similar descendants to come, realizing of course the interaction of genetics. Therefore, thought I, there is a special kinship between myself and the leaves from the forest despite the animate and inanimate distinction between us.

A hill to the west suddenly captured the sun's rays that illuminated the leaves I was observing and I realized that it would soon be dusk and that supper would be waiting. However, I could not resist continuing to the Great Meadow to see the setting sun reflect a reddish orange upon the darkening water. With leaves coming along side, I arrived just in time. Briefly, I reveled in the glory of the afternoon and hung on to the respite I had just enjoyed. The hike back was less noisy and involved senses other than those tickled by the slower paced hike to the meadow. The swishing of dry crisp leaves heard about 45 minutes before seemed muted. In the dusky air hung a different smell; a pleasant musty odor not sensed earlier that reminded me of the odor from my compost pile. I supposed that this change may have been brought on by the dampness I now felt.

My pace quickened as I thought about the apple crisp that Laura had waiting. As I came back to Colburn Road and crossed the bridge over the Piscataquog, I felt warm inside and a closeness with the forest through which I had just hiked. I think that I will always feel this way as long as I can take this hike. I gave a

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silent thank you to the few solitary leaves, still hanging from gray maple limbs, for making the air that I breathe and for providing shade. Just before I turned into my driveway, I think I heard the leaves say, “Thank you for providing us with the space on earth to grow.”