

“In the Country” by Robert Todd – published in the *New Boston Bulletin* in 2010

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Purr-fect Friendships (1/2010)

It had been just a week since I buried Mr. Hollis at the spot where I stood that day to set his grave marker. It should have been easier to place the stone marker which Laura had purchased to mark the grave of her beloved cat, but it was not; my heart was heavy and my eyes teared up. Mr. Hollis was perhaps the most charismatic and loving cat that I could remember of the perhaps 40 – 50 that have shared this home with me and my family.

He was big in stature and at age 14 carried too much fat under his shiny black fur. He had been the alpha male of the cat clan residing at the Todd Homestead and I supposed he rose to that rank by his size alone because he did not command dominance by bullying or force. I think the other cats just loved and respected him. He would give the head butt greeting to the others with a vocalization that was more like “good morning sweetie” than “bow down lowly subject”. Then he would proceed to groom the other cat with his tongue and then they would both purr. He gave this same loving greeting to Laura and me which with his happy, tolerant personality cemented the bond between us and him.

About 2 years ago Mr. Hollis began to drink excessive amounts of water and to urinate copiously, frequently over the top of the litter box. Laura knew something was wrong and made an appointment for him with Dr. Donna Chase at Town and Country Animal Hospital next door and she diagnosed him to have diabetes. From that day, to the day he died, Laura had to give Mr. Hollis two shots of insulin which he accepted with a vocalization which we interpreted to mean, “thanks”. His blood sugar had to be monitored regularly to keep it under control. Sadly, his health deteriorated and on his last morning Laura and I found him lying on the dining room floor desperately gasping for breath. It being Sunday, we knew Dr. Chase would not be available. We put Hollis in his familiar carrier and drove him to the Veterinary Emergency Center in Manchester. The veterinarians quickly checked him over and took x-rays. It was not more than 5 minutes before they came back with a diagnosis of congestive heart failure and with a sympathetic tone stated that there was no reasonable treatment that would save him. This shocked Laura into a state of hysteria and me into realization that this was it for Mr. Hollis. We said goodbye to the old gentleman while slowly stroking his soft head and then we authorized the doctor to administer the lethal injection.

I stood up at his grave and looked down at the marker I had just set in place to read the words one more time; “Here Lies a Faithful Friend and Companion”. This was an appropriate farewell to Mr. Hollis, I thought,

suddenly many memories of other cats filled my mind for whom the saying was also a truth. I knew Laura did not share similar memories because she was not raised on a farm with lots of cat friends.

At the farm on Todd's Corner where I grew up there were always many barn cats and house cats. While I was in my youth I probably spent more time with my grandparents than I did with my own parents; we were just across the street. Milking time was exciting for me and the cats. I was amused to see as many as 13 barn cats sitting behind the cows in the tie up. They were waiting for Dad to direct a stream of milk in their direction while he did the milking. The older cats were quite adept at catching the stream in their mouth. When Dad weighed up a pail of milk he would pour some in the several dishes lined up along the barn wall. It was a diet of milk and prey, mostly rodents and some birds the cats caught which sustained them. I enjoyed petting the kittens born in the hayloft. I was often saddened by the sudden disappearance of kittens from their nests in the hay. It was not until I was in my teens that Dad told me that tom-cats kill baby kittens so that the mothers would resume their estrous cycle, a brutal part of mammalian ecology the advantage of which I have never figured out.

Grandma had her house cats, though they were let outside where they would be by her side as she tended her flower and vegetable gardens. I remember the cats following her to the vegetable garden and then waited patiently, or chased grass hoppers, at the edge of the garden while she worked. I liked the house cats more than the barn cats because they were friendlier and liked to play. I enjoyed pulling a string with an object tied on the end and watching them exercise their hunting instinct. Gram's cats had their litters behind the woodstove in a box well-padded with old blankets. I happily watched mother cat nurse her babies, as many as 4 or 5 at once, while loudly purring. Then she would groom the baby kittens, nature at its best I thought. Mother cat spent a lot of time in the fields and at the edge of the forest where she often caught mice and even baby rabbits. She brought these carcasses to the door and spoke a loud unique vocalization that meant, I thought, "Come babies, I have food for you". Gram would never let her in the house with the carcass, choosing instead to wean the kittens on table scraps.

Having pet cats was a natural habit for me to perpetuate when I became a parent. My children were raised in the homestead with cats much the same as I had been raised. There were many cats during that period and at family gatherings we often talk about the most memorable of the pet cats that lived with us. The most outstanding of the many was a pure white female the kids named Tri-motor. The name reflected her extraordinarily loud purr that could be heard in the next room.

Although Tri-motor was "fixed" so she would not have kittens, she still exhibited strong hunting skills and often brought home prey that she left at the door after that unique vocalization "come babies I have food for you". Tri-motor amazed the entire family one day by dragging into the yard a rabbit that was nearly as big as she. Our would-be lioness was also fearless in protecting the property from dogs. She literally drove them away by selfless attacks upon their noses and ears; no stand off, just shock and awe frontal attacks.

One memory of Tri-motor's fearless personality was on a spring morning when we were raking leaves from the perennial beds. A neighbor came by on his bicycle with his dog running behind. This dog was known in the neighborhood to be aggressive and down-right unfriendly. From her seat on top of the stonewall where she had been watching us, Tri-motor saw the dog enter the driveway. In a flash she leaped from the top of the wall to the back of the dog's neck into which she inserted claws and jaws full of teeth. The dog yelped and started running toward home with Tri-motor aboard continuing to inflict pain. She finally jumped off and returned to the yard with tail straight up. My neighbor said "gosh, I've never seen anything like that before".

Tri-motor was also a loving companion and lived an exceptionally long life of 18 years. At the end she had lost all of her teeth and her hearing, but she still purred loudly. It is unfortunate that her death was so tragic. It was a hot summer day and Tri-motor was apparently resting in the shade under the family auto. Then my

wife and daughter left to go shopping with my baby granddaughter. A moment later I heard horrifying screams from outside the house. My God! Had the baby been run over? I ran outside and saw Tri-motor's broken body; she had apparently not heard the car start up and had been run over. My wife and daughter could not understand why I sighed in relief while they cried.

There were other cats in our lives that my family remembers with fondness and I could fill another column with stories of those relationships. Humans have loved cats since before 1000 BC according to National Geographic, Animal Mummies, November 2009. The pharaohs had cats mummified to accompany them in the grave as pets for eternity. My family has not taken up mummification, but we have numerous gravesites on the farm, that of Mr. Hollis being the last. It is gratifying to know that people have shared a common love of cats for over 5000 years of documented history.

Hiking On A Memory Place (2/2010)

On a Sunday shortly after that mid-December snow storm I dressed up for a hike to exercise my muscles. My route is the same as that trod many times before, in fact it is my favorite walk. From the yard I headed north along East Colburn Road to the junction of the old John Newton Dodge Road. I headed easterly along the old road on a path compacted by ATV travel. Thus far I had not raised my heart rate so I quickened my pace.

My eyes acknowledged familiar images along the way, stone culverts still working after 200 years, walls on each side of the road that would still contain livestock, and the neat junction of stonewalls at the road leading southerly to the mill site that Benjamin Dodge sold to my great grandfather in the late 1850 decade. That historic mill site is now in the hands of my son, the fifth generation of the family to own the site, and is protected by an easement held by the Piscataquog Land Conservancy. I began to sense that my imagination was getting more exercise than my muscles and that my state of mind had unbridled mindful recall of my life and the life of those whose souls are reflected in the works of their hands left here mostly unchanged for over 200 years. This recall was different for me at this time than it has been before; it seemed to be channeled through my heart.

I paused at the foundations of the homestead site of the first Benjamin Dodge to live here before 1800. His son, also named Benjamin lived here, and then it passed to his son John Newton Dodge. The three generations of the Dodge family were the only occupants of the farm and I presume that it was destroyed by fire. I felt a strange kinship to those souls and actually felt the presence of them gathering with my ancestors to conduct mutually beneficial bartering and just plain socializing. I stepped aside to watch the gathering indulging my rampant imagination before continuing my walk.

I left the old road and trudged through the snow up the steep south slope of the drumlin which was the heart of the Dodge farm. The slope and snow made walking more difficult and now my heartbeat was where it should be for cardio fitness. I had left the illusionary gathering of Todd and Dodge family members back at the farmstead and was, I thought, free of such distractions. This was not to be, for in less than a few minutes my heart was suddenly beating faster because of what my mind was seeing beside me. It was a summer scene on the drumlin and a boy hustled to keep up with the man ahead of him. The boy was an image of me and the man was an image of my father. I had made this same trip many times with Dad to fetch the cows from the four walled pastures on top of the drumlin. Dad rented these pastures from Mr. Follansbee for a number of years while he operated his small dairy farm. When I was a few years older I went to round up the cows by myself pretending I was a cowboy. White pine and grey birch finally choked out the fine grasses that sustained our cattle as it had a century before when John Newton Dodge raised his purebred Devon cattle for sale to farmers near and far.

As I continued along the same path taken as a teenager, signs of wildlife excited me and broke the hold my imagination had upon my senses. I passed through a small grove of red oak trees that had dropped bushels of acorns a month before. Several deer had raked the snow away from under the oaks' wide-spreading branches and dined on the acorns before enjoying a nap in the sun. Rabbit tracks in a thicket of blackberry bushes made me realize that I was a witness to Nature's calendar. My left foot nearly stepped on some coyote scat and I stooped to read its story. The scat was a tight bundle of fine brown fur and bits of bone. No doubt the blackberry patch was rabbit territory and a MacDonald's lunch stop for the coyote. I remembered the walled in fields when they were returning to forest, now I am seeing the cycle being repeated in my lifetime following the intensive timber harvest that removed most of the forest cover here in 2007.

I had hiked through three of the four walled pastures on the crest of the drumlin and began to descend its northeasterly facing slope which is considerably steeper than the ascent I made up its southwesterly facing slope. This is the typical form of drumlins which are clustered in the northwest part of town. Still in the blackberry patch and being tugged on by brambles catching in my pants, I recalled the day that I walked with Theodore, my 12 year-old step-grandson, through this same patch and having to help him through the brambles. He had so impressed me by his keen interest in all that I could tell him about the natural world. Some of his questions were profound, some over my head, but I tried to answer all as best I could. On several such hikes with me Theodore demonstrated a great ability to learn species names and on subsequent hikes he rewarded me by correctly identifying the trees along the way.

Reflecting on Theodore as I walked carefully down the steep slope, I realized how happy it had made me to share a lifetime of experience in the forest with him. In my heart I held on to the image of Theodore as he appeared during those days and hoped that he would not lose his curiosity about the natural world. In my Grandson Tyler I had observed the same interests when he was Theodore's age; now at age 16 he is more interested in music. Some say that music is rooted in Nature.



Because of the excellent grass, the Great Meadow (now mostly an emergent marsh) was subdivided into lots so that each settler had a portion.

Ahead of me just across the John Newton Dodge Road at the toe of the drumlin lies the Great Meadow, said to encompass over 100 acres. This is now mostly an emergent marsh to which it has morphed over the past 200 years from an open meadow dominated by bluejoint grass. This grass was the only native grass available to the first settlers and provided the sole sustenance for the cattle brought with them. The Great Meadow was so important to the first settlers that one of the first roads in town was laid out from the first settlement to this meadow. The meadow was subdivided into lots so that each

settler could have ownership of a portion of the meadow from which he could harvest bluejoint.

Settlers cut the bluejoint with scythes in July and stacked the hay on platforms supported by poles sunk into the muck. The hay was left on the platforms until the ground was frozen and then the settlers loaded the
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hay onto sleds pulled by oxen along the road back to the settlements. My family owned two of the lots in the meadow, one of which was given to the Town of New Boston.

I stood on the John Newton Dodge Road and looked north across the Great Meadow to a large white farmhouse and barns on Bunker Hill Road known by some local folks as the Smith place. My thoughts raced back to my youth when I met Byron Smith and was allowed to have a drink of hard cider with Byron and my father after Dad had sawn Byron's wood supply. I relived that moment as I stood looking toward the old farm.

Byron was the last Smith to own the farm following five generations of his ancestors. Thomas Smith, Byron's great (X4) grandfather, was the first settler in New Boston to build a frame house after he came here in 1734. I walked along John Newton Dodge Road and came to a truck sized boulder dropped here by the glacier, where I stopped to pause again.

My daughter Jackie and I enjoyed snowshoeing to this boulder. She prepared "hobo dinners" for us to carry here on those hikes. I built a fire on top of the boulder and she placed the aluminum packets filled with hamburger, onion slices, and carrot sticks on the fire for about 15 minutes. We ate the tasty meals and pretended we were Indians in the wilderness. I walked the rest of the way home holding tightly to the illusion of Jackie snowshoeing along behind me.

My hike was good for me physically and emotionally. I hope that place never changes and that I can have this opportunity many more times. Should we not all have a place to be with the memory of those we knew personally and those we know only through folk tales and history books?

A Prescription for Healing (3/2010)

Though I have provided land use consulting services to the Crotched Mountain Foundation for nearly thirty years, results of my work are not seen through the hospital windows. My early assignments were primarily boundary surveying and forest management projects on the 1200 woodland acres surrounding the hospital. I never dreamed that my office would be involved physically and emotionally in a project directly related to the mission of the Crotched Mountain Foundation which is to serve individuals with disabilities. On its Greenfield campus Crotched Mountain operates a residential and day school for 115 students, a 62 bed rehabilitation hospital, outpatient clinics and residential services.

When Harry Gregg established the hospital in 1953 he must have been inspired by the natural beauty of the old Russell Farm site because it was on a southerly facing shoulder of Crotched Mountain that he clustered the hospital buildings in full sun and at points of breath-taking views. Perhaps Mr. Gregg also had the vision that is now being manifested on the woodland and wetland which came with his purchase.

My awareness of the healing power of Nature comes from reading about a study done in the mid-1980 decade at a Pennsylvania hospital where a scientist found that surgery patients in a room with a view of trees and birds experienced less pain and were able to leave the hospital about a day earlier than patients in a room with a view to a brick wall. But, how would my engagement in a project beginning in the fall of 2007 incorporate this phenomenon in the mission of CMF?

A vision of creating a handicapped accessible trail through the woodlands and around the wetlands surrounding the hospital campus was explained to me during meetings and phone calls with the CMF staff during the summer of 2007. The trails that Crotched Mountain wanted to build would be available for everyone, both the patients and students at Crotched Mountain and the general public, and so built to "universal

design" standards that everyone will be able to negotiate the trails. My job was to survey and map the trail route and assist in obtaining the state permits for construction.

Until the two days I hiked the proposed route of the 4 mile trail, my mind had struggled to reconcile trail standards with the reality of traversing mountainous terrain with slopes averaging 25% to 35%. I had been told about Peter Jensen; a trail designer and builder with extraordinary skill and long experience working for the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service. Many of his trails were built to accessible standards. This allayed some of my skepticism and doubt.

On the morning of September 25, 2007 Rick and I met with Ray Sebold of the CMF staff at the beginning of the trail laid out by Peter Jensen. We had not gone more than a few hundred feet along the route marked with bright ribbon when Rick pointed ahead and put an index finger across his lips. Ray and I stopped and made eye contact with the large brown eyes of a doe standing broadside across the path not more than 50 feet forward. I was awed by the bright sunbeams passing through the tree canopy to be reflected off her coat in golden rays. She appeared to be more than the usual deer in the forest; I perceived her to be near angelic. Was she a messenger of the spirit of Harry Gregg delivering a dream that he had not the time in his life to manifest? I think it is plausible that Gregg's vision has transcended several Foundation administrations over fifty years to the present.

We went on along the flagged way around tight switchbacks crossing the slopes downhill at not more than 5% so that people in wheelchairs, others with mobility impairments, moms with strollers -- **anyone** -- could safely traverse the route on the finished path. Rick made sketches and hung his own plastic surveyors flagging uniquely colored for future reference while I made notes about special places along the way.

A trail route will bring people out of the forest into an opening on the knoll where they will be enthralled by a view toward three points of the compass. Grooves and striations cut in the exposed rock on the knoll by the passing glacier symbolize the awesome energy of this place by chronicling geologic time. In season, trail users may pick blueberries on the knoll and eat them on the spot.

The trail loop laid out around a large marsh is bountifully endowed with a showcase of flowering emergent and shrubby plants sure to choreograph dancing eyes that will gaze over them from the two boardwalk observation platforms strategically placed in the loop. Hopefully, the moose that left his many footprints we observed in the soft ground around the marsh will feed there and awaken the senses and stimulate the psyche of visitors using this trail. Our time for scoping the surveying work needed to permit this project came to a close that day and we agreed to continue from this point the next day.

The three of us continued our walk the next morning and made way along the east side of the property moving parallel with the contours. This section of the trail is nearly straight for a considerable distance and reveals stone walls resting in the forest. Some may not know that these artful structures once enclosed cattle and sheep before the forest masked them from common view. A short distance further along the way the trail passes within 100 feet of a vernal pool where wood frogs are sure to croak at springtime hikers. The trail directs hikers to an old white oak tree of huge proportions that must have shaded cattle pastured on this hillside about 150 years ago. We spoke to the old tree and it may have been pleased with our telling it about the people that will be soon able to come under its wide spreading branches.

The flagged path led us to the southeast part of the forest before it followed favorable ground bearing in a westerly direction. Along the way we interrupted three beautiful turkeys that were busy scratching fallen leaves off the acorns lying beneath which they planned to have for breakfast. Wouldn't this be a wonderful attraction, I thought.

Terrain before us became steeper and deep sided drainage ways we passed through were sure to be a challenge for our trail-builder. I was thinking bridges with railings as I went down one side of the drainage ways and up the other using arms and legs. Soon we came to an area that I have visited in the past. I remembered the large ledge outcrop with a cliff face overhanging shallow caves with entrances paved with porcupine scat. As I held that thought, Rick shouted "There goes a bear!" A young bear had ambled across our flagged pathway, then broke into a run up the slope toward the ledges. This drew our attention to where we noticed a much larger bear sitting on its hind-side watching us. We knew this was mother bear and we had spooked her baby, but she did not appear concerned. Ray set up his camera and took some of the best pictures I have seen of wild bear. We stood there in a state of excitement and discussed the implication of what we had just witnessed. We agreed that it would be a potential highlight of the entire trail should it be repeated for the intended users.

The sighting of the bear sparked recall of a paragraph in the book titled; Greenfield New Hampshire: The Story of a Town, 1791-1976, by Doris Hopkins that I had read a while ago. The history is relevant because it states that Frank Russell, son of Nahum, killed a bear in his pasture in 1860.

The trail way brought us to its terminus at the Sunset Lake Recreation area. I felt that having seen: the angelic doe at the trail beginning; the glacier tracks and the view at the knoll; the moose tracks; the shrouded stonewalls; the vernal pool; the old white oak; the three turkeys; and then the mother bear with cub makes this the most exhilarating time that I have ever spent on Crotched Mountain Foundation land. I believe these are all great signs and a prophecy for the mission of CMF. There is a reason this place will be the only hospital in the world that has opened its walls to include use of a 4 mile long handicapped accessible nature trail as a prescription for healing. The more patients that can come in contact with the energy of the Earth and Nature by using this trail the better will be their health.

Since the successful permitting of the trail in August of 2008 the expert trail-builder has skillfully laid down nearly half of the proposed trail route. It is truly an expression of extraordinary art and function. The formal opening of the first two trails is scheduled for the summer of 2010.

Preserving History: Then and Now (4/2010)

Friday, February 18, 1916, my grandmother wrote in her diary; "*Cloudy and wet snow some this afternoon. Pa, Jesse, and John went to the depot for the freight (shop stuff, dishes, tea kettle, etc). Laban and I went after Aaron to-night. Dr. Stevens here to have his sleigh repaired and horse shod. He ate dinner here and prescribed medicine for father James. Had fried fish for dinner and apple pie. Oscar Joseph Comery hanged this morning at 12:32 o'clock for the murder of his wife.*"

This entry is the style of writing that my Grandmother Bessie M. Todd scribed in her 46 annual diaries beginning in 1914 and ending upon her death in 1960. These diaries were left in a box placed in the attic of this house. The diaries are not as richly filled with gram's thoughts, impressions, and feelings as they could have been. They are a limited autobiography in the form of day by day chronicle rather than revealing stories about her feelings and characterizations of people with whom she associated. However, I find that the diaries describe how she and her family lived, worked, and enjoyed life. They are more valuable to me as a source of information than they would be to most other people who may have occasion to read them because I shared 20 years of my life with the woman who wrote the diaries, in 10 of those years my legacy was enriched by listening to Grandfather Perley Todd recall stories about the past. The oral history of my family and the families of folks who lived in this neighborhood, stored in my memory, is grounded by what is written in the diaries. I feel intimately acquainted with the people, places, and events penned on those thousands of pages. I

am in the process of transcribing all the diaries and saving the text in word documents for further research when, and if, I ever have the time to write a family history.

There are also stored in the attic many forms of autobiographical information that have dates back to 1830. There are several boxes and baskets containing; disorganized letters received by three generations of my family and the several diaries of Great Grandfather James P. Todd. Of his life I have learned much by listening to Grandparents Bessie and Perley. Much more will be learned when I read and transcribe his diaries and letters.

At the outset of this undertaking I was struck with a disturbing thought; what if digital recording devices had been available to my grand and great-grand parents instead of pencil and paper, would I be reading the stories of their lives today? Or, looking ahead; will my descendants be able to learn about my life 150 years from now by reading Microsoft Word documents generated on my computer and saved on some kind of storage media?

The thought became more perplexing as I reflected on my personal record keeping. I have perhaps 20 floppy disks with biographical records and old articles I have written for this column. There is no computer in this office that can read them! I scold myself for not transferring the digital records to newer technology such as CDs. But, what if Microsoft technology becomes obsolete and more sophisticated software takes over the market, but does not read the obsolescent storage media. Gosh, we have that problem now with the software we use in our office for computer assisted drafting. Drafting software upgrades we purchased from an industry leader will only look back a few versions of their own software for compatibility. Therefore, we better be saving all of our survey data on paper with ink that will not fade.

Mike Pride, columnist for the Concord Monitor, published an article on February 14, 2010 in which he predicts that fewer diaries and letters written by U.S. presidents will dull the hindsight of historians because there will be no record to disclose the how and whys presidential decisions are made. In these times emails are traded back and forth, deals are brokered, directive statements are made, the computer delete button is pushed, and historical perspective vanishes into cyber space.

Recently, my stepson Christopher Decato was visiting and I engaged him in a discussion about this subject as it relates to his field of interest. Chris is a musician and also writes songs which he stores on his computer hard drive with a backup on external hard drives. He admits that he could loose all of his work in the event of catastrophe, such as fire, because the back-up is in the same building. Will his work be as secure as that of the famous composers whose work is stored in humidity controlled museum buildings? He thinks that a modern solution to digital information storage is through private enterprise. There are businesses that store and maintain data files in a secure environment and also ensure that their subscriber's files are continuously converted to files readable with current technology.

For years there has been considerable discussion about the best way to archive the work done by land surveyors. County Register of Deeds offices and the surveying profession have concurred that the best way to store boundary plans is to accept drawings on material that is archival quality. The chosen medium currently used is called Mylar, a plastic material which holds permanent ink securely to its surface, does not rip, nor fade when exposed to light. In addition to the hard copy material required for recording, the registries also electronically scan the recorded documents and maps for safe keeping, presumably in a fire proof vault. Therefore, users of this information can acquire digital copies via the internet, or they can purchase paper copies of the original Mylar copy on file.

Admittedly, I am concerned about perpetuating records that are the grist of history. Having said that, I am also confident that new service businesses utilizing that technology will continually develop methods to

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minimize the losses that authors, writers, historians, and map makers are concerned about. The transition may require disciplined commitment and investment to make it happen. Make history- do more writing!

The Tasty Side of New Boston's Heritage (5/2010)

In a paint-by-numbers picture showing the features defining this community, what numbers would be included in the palette? Certainly the palette would include numbers representing the physical features. The juxtaposition of hills, valleys, and rivers molded a pattern of land use that birthed the unique cultural component of the palette. During the nearly 250 years of settlement in this community many generations have passed to succeeding generations their knowledge, traditions, and their inherent social norms which comprise numbers that represent the heritage component of the palette.

In this column I intend to support a proposition that all the cooks of New Boston, past and present, represent many of the numbers in the palette that make up this community's cultural heritage part of the portrait. My memory bank has clear recall of sensations related to taste; the flavor and smell from foods prepared by community cooks. I have less clear recall related to emotional sensations related to the lessons of life offered by particular elders in town. I remember a particular cook's best main dish or desert, but I have a hard time remembering, or describing, what life's lesson I learned from an elder in the community. I remember the orange muffins that Mrs. Teft taught us how to make during the week of home economics class boys were required to take. In contrast, I can not remember the details of a single lesson learned in Mr. Hapgood's history class.

My Grandmother's diaries record her involvement in planning and presenting the noon meals on town meeting day. During her young life and for many decades prior, the town's business was conducted during the day at the town hall and dozens of good cooks proudly brought their best dishes to feed the citizens. It is plausible that through the serious informal competition provided by those town meeting dinners certain cooks gained a reputation for making the best bread, rolls, stew, beans, etc. I'll bet this show of community spirit brought out the voters.

Church suppers and Grange suppers, were more regular occurring opportunities for the good cooks to build their reputations and to build community heritage. I have heard that some cooks shared their recipes and that others were more possessive of cooking secrets. Other social groups in town held regular meetings where women took turns providing refreshments. I suspect that each hostess accepted the task as an opportunity to compete with other hostesses. Egos were fulfilled as much as the taste buds. These groups included the New Century Club and the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Weddings, funerals, graduations, birthdays, and anniversary parties, plus any other social gathering you can name became proving grounds for the best recipes that cooks could develop for the occasion. Mothers took pride in baking the wedding cake that would be remembered forever by a son or daughter. My memory still holds the appearance and taste of the cake my Aunt Esther Mary made for my grandparent's 50th wedding anniversary in 1950; I was 10 years old!

Most of my childhood was spent in the company of my grandmother and memories of her are centered on cooking, principally the sweets that I enjoyed after school in the dining room of the house where I now live. Her chocolate brownies are still remembered to be so rich in chocolate flavor that they had a shiny glaze on top and a texture so moist that I had to lick my fingers to get off all the chocolate. These were best enjoyed with a glass of cold whole milk. The oatmeal raisin cookies and the turnovers she baked are also part of my heritage. Grandma made turnovers with the blackberries I picked from bushes growing along field edges on the farm.

Recent reads of my Grandmother's early diaries, in which she chronicled baking as many as four pies at once in the brick oven, have caused me to focus on what remains of her kitchen in this house. The most prominent feature is the brick structure that takes up the central portion of the present kitchen and dining room. A Franklin front fireplace and brick oven face into the dining room and two large brass kettles set into bricks over fire boxes face into the kitchen. Lately, when I walk past the oven's soapstone door and lintel, both quarried from a soapstone mine that was located on Bible Hill Road in Frankestown, I imagine puffs of steam coming out of the oven carrying an essence of wood smoke and sweet juice of apples baking within lard shortened crust. My mouth waters some as I yearn to taste the pies Grandma made in the time before electricity came to Todd Corner. I wonder if those pies would have had a different flavor than the pies she baked in the electric oven.

Though my grandmother made good deserts, her donuts could not match those made by Minnie Chandler. I spent many summer afternoons playing baseball in Chandler's cow pasture with five or six of the Whipple brothers, Minnie's grandsons. Richard, the oldest, had the ability to smell the warm donuts Minnie laid out in a tray on the porch rail to cool and he led the raiding party to that objective. Believe me, the donuts never got very cool before they were placed over the fingers of the raiders who made off with nearly all. Actually, I think this was Minnie's plan because as far as I know the boys were never scolded. The taste of Minnie's donuts is still the standard by which I judge donuts today.

When I think of rolls, donuts, and pies I remember Rhoda Hooper. When I saw Rhoda coming to community functions with a basket full of baked goods happiness came over me. Similar memories are etched in my mind about the tasty delights brought to town affairs by Bessie Leavitt. There is no more distinct memory than of the hot July day that Jerry Kennedy, Bessie's grandson, and I enjoyed fresh baked cookies and cold milk that Bessie insisted on serving us in the cool kitchen of the 'stonehouse' she and Burnham owned on Route 13. Arlene Dodge, Bessie's granddaughter, herself a renowned roll baker as was her mother Viola Kennedy, said that J.R. Whipple hired Bessie to cook bread and pastries which he shipped daily on the train to his Parker House hotel in Boston.

In my research for this column I have been captivated by a question: Could it be that New Boston's cultural heritage of good cooking had an influence on the "cooking show craze" that now dominates television show time? The story that I am about to relate seems to indicate that such a connection exists. On a tip from my sister Linda Young, one who approaches cooking with extreme attention to detail resulting in impressive flavor and artful presentation, I called Donna Towne to ask about her acquaintance with Julia Child.

Donna told me that Pat and Herbert Pratt spent summers on South Hill in New Boston near where she and her husband Brian live. The Pratt's home was in Cambridge, where Julia Child and her husband Paul lived, and the two couples were close friends. One summer, Donna said that Julia and Paul came to New Boston several times to visit the Pratt's. On one occasion Donna and Brian were invited to the Pratt's for dinner and Julia was perfecting the preparation of a turkey dinner that she was going to feature on a "Good Morning America" show. Donna said the party was great fun and very tasty.

The part of Donna's story which links this town's culture to what Julia started is the day that she and Brian were invited to Pratt's cottage on Prout's Neck in Maine. Donna agreed to bring a blueberry-rhubarb pie, not aware that Julia and Paul Child were also invited to the Pratt cottage for the same party. Donna said she will never forget the meal which featured a flavorful fish stew. Donna's pie was the featured desert and upon tasting Julia is said to have exclaimed; "This is one of the best pies I ever tasted". Julia renamed Donna's desert 'blue-barb' pie. I wonder if Donna would share her recipe.

Donna told me that Julia enjoyed going to Dodge's Store to buy a slice of cheese that Homer personally cut from the famous big wheel of cheese he kept under glass on the counter. This is one 'Homer Dodge' tale that I have not before heard and it is a good feeling to document this small part of our community heritage.

There are probably dozens of stories about cooks in this community who have added so much to our cultural heritage and I am apologetic that I can not mention all of them in this column. Many members of this community must have their own memories relating to the tasty part of our culture which would result in a very long list of cooks. Perhaps the editor would welcome stories from others to add more flavor to our cultural heritage.

Commencement Opens Doors And Mirrors The Past (6/2010)

Thoughts woven into the fabric of my column this month were conceived during a trip to Harrisonburg Virginia to attend my granddaughter's graduation from James Madison University. Harrisonburg is centered within the region known as the Shenandoah Valley, a strikingly verdant area which is still predominantly agricultural. The University radiates strong vibes heralding the future in contrast to the surrounding small city of Harrisonburg that clings to its cloak of heritage so that it reveals only its cultural roots. I found this contrast similar to life in New Boston for the past seventy years except that our town is casting off the pastoral attire that I once knew it to wear.

At the graduation ceremony I tried to listen attentively to the words of the speaker which was difficult in the tsunami of high emotion surrounding me. He characterized the graduates as being confident, connected "technocrats" with a future as service workers. He predicted that they would be using new and ever-changing technology including GPS, Facebook, solar cells, educational software, and virtual models of the world. In his short speech he asked that their use of new technology be relevant, while warning that statistics often disguise reality. According to the speaker the graduates will become synthesizers and will through unity of knowledge get to know complex systems while their core values will not change. In closing the speaker challenged the graduates to open doors and to step boldly ahead of the times and to be comfortable with technology.

I could feel the excitement welling up in the parents and relatives seated around me when the speaker gave his farewell and the graduates were called by name, one at a time, to receive their diploma. My heart swelled when the speaker pronounced the name of the special person whose graduation we were there to witness: "Brittany Lee Todd". I let out a deep prideful breath when she switched the gold tassel on her mortar board from the right side to the left side.

The gist of the commencement address replayed in my head on the ride home while Laura did the driving. I was impressed with the speaker's message, but there was one point that I pondered a while. It became clear when I realized that the speaker must have assumed the graduates were already invested with the 'core values' he referenced and promised that those held by the graduates would not change. Certainly, I thought, it is good parenting, a well rounded primary and secondary education, religious teachings, and participation in social activities such as scouting, 4H, and many other organizations endowed with exemplary peers that implant core values. My oversight was silly; JMU and most institutions would not accept applications from those who do not demonstrate possession of core values.

Along the way home through the Valley I tried in vain to remember the words of the speaker, or who spoke them, on the day my classmates and I (there were 11 of us), graduated from New Boston High School in 1958. Our speaker may have challenged NBHS grads to become involved in community affairs and to be responsible citizens. I say this because I believe it is reflected in the behavior model demonstrated by all the people I know who have graduated from NBHS during its short 75 years of existence. I believe that core values were an inherent part of each course in the NBHS curriculum. The high school enrollment was always small and it was possible for the teachers and coaches to have a strong influence on character building.

New Boston was slow to take advantage of the 1845 N.H. statute that enabled all school districts to establish a high school. School District 8 maintained a schoolhouse for students in grades one through eight. The building was located at the junction of Mill Street and Meetinghouse Hill Road in the center of New Boston where the fire house now stands. This school was lost in the Great Fire of 1887. Most of the homes and businesses in the central part of the village were also lost and the Town was faced with great expense to rebuild its governmental buildings.

The School District felt this was a good time to construct a central building to serve as a high school for the entire town at the location of the former school house. Joseph Reed Whipple, a successful business man destined to play a major role in the economy of New Boston pledged a donation of \$1000 per year for three years if the town would build a new high school building. The town accepted the offer and by 1892 the high school enrolled its first class. The first graduation was held in 1896 at Valley Hall, the Victorian styled hall with stage on the second floor of what is now Dodge's store.

Bessie M. Hill and her sister Emma Hill (Bessie was my Grandmother and Emma was my Great-aunt) were members of the first graduating class which also included Elsie Warren, a long term librarian at the Whipple Free Library. These women are three of the eight graduates of the first NBHS class. Two more generations of my family graduated from NBHS including my father and his siblings, and in the last generation of my family to graduate are my sister Edith Jennings and me.

During the existence of NBHS the town benefited from the school and the school students learned from participation in community affairs. I believe no one will disagree that since NBHS graduated its final class the culture of New Boston has changed dramatically. This is not to say that the New Boston Central School has not contributed to the community. The many pictures and editorials featured in this paper attest to that fact. However, I believe the minds of grade school students are not yet equipped with the skills needed to function interactively in an adult community where they could participate in real life leadership situations as would a high school student.

Loss of NBHS has changed the cultural landscape for the community in several ways. School events such as organized high school baseball and basketball are missed by those of us that played these sports at the high school level. In our small school practically everyone that wanted to play on a team was encouraged to do so. I do not remember anyone that came to practices and showed an interest in playing that was not offered the opportunity to play. Coaches became the player's closest role model, friend, and tutor in sports and in real life. School plays strengthened ties between classmates and the teacher who coached the players. Lessons learned in high school sports and in play acting developed self confidence and the ability to pursue a goal to successful completion, plus the ability to work together in reaching common goals. These entertainment venues are no longer part of the community.

I think that most of the New Boston High School graduates that one may discourse with will say that the education they received at NBHS prepared them well for their college studies. In fact, most will say they were ahead of most class-mates at the college level. Vocational training was a favorite course of study for most boys and some girls at NBHS. The vocational training program included basic woodworking, metal fabrication, dairy husbandry, poultry husbandry, orchard management, and forestry. These studies were relevant and essential at that time because the local economy was mostly agricultural. The Aggie boys (and girls) even converted a used truck chassis to a farm tractor. I suspect that vocational training at NBHS today, if it still existed, would have much different core courses than when I went to NBHS.

This October many NBHS alumni and teachers will shed their cares of the present and trek to New Boston from all parts of the country. They will pass through the doors of the Mansfield Gymnasium as young people at heart to attend a biennial all-classes reunion. As they exchange greetings they may not see each other as clearly as they once did, but in their mind's eye they will see each other just as they appeared during high school days. Several hours of swapping 'do you remember when...' stories, or 'where is...' questions will bring everyone's mirror of the mind into play and the spirit of NBHS will spring up from their hearts for a day.

Every spring millions of students share life changing experiences when they graduate from high school and college in America. Those that have previously graduated share memories and relive the spirit of their alma

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mater at reunion ceremonies. The sum total of all this is a phenomenon of national character building; locally it is a major part of a community's culture and spirit.

Long Live NBHS!

The CSA Program is Basic to Food Security (7/2010)

Television news stories and newspaper headlines have for too long been spreading shocking stories about tainted foods being distributed to the public and about tons of food being recalled from store shelves and even home cupboards. "Food Security" is a new phrase coined to focus public attention on the danger of a complete disconnect between consumers and producers of our food supply. Lately, I worry about this phenomenon more than ever before due to the catastrophic affect of one failure by an off-shore crude oil drilling rig. The ecological system in the Gulf of Mexico which produced finfish and shellfish products in the past may now be unproductive for decades. Disasters of this magnitude could disable any of our food supply networks.

I have previously written of my concerns about the loss of community based agriculture and the increasing trend of reliance on corporate agriculture and factory farms. Just today, I opened the refrigerator to find a snack food to enjoy while I was writing my column. A bag of green grapes beckoned my grasp and I cut off a bunch, then I read the label and was appalled by the words, 'product of Mexico'. Why did Laura buy these I wondered, probably because they were the only grapes available. Their taste was unappealing, but what bothered me most were my far-reaching thoughts. I felt a chill as I considered, were they picked by child labor; what insecticides and pesticides were used in growing them, and; how much fossil fuel was consumed by the vehicles that transported them from Mexico to Sully's market.

The answer to these questions will probably not satisfy me that our national system of food production and marketing is sustainable nor will it result in a population that is healthy and safe. My answer is to grow, harvest, and prepare as much food product locally as we have the energy and ability to accomplish. This philosophy has resulted in a neighborhood sustainable agricultural (NSA) entity at Todd's Corner. This NSA garden is supported by three families which share equally in the cost, labor, and processing, on an informal basis and the shares of produce are also determined informally. We also cooperatively determine what crops to grow. I realize that this NSA is unique to Todd's Corner. However, there may be a model here that could be replicated in certain neighborhoods in this town.

My interest in community gardening has led me to do some research on the Community Supported Agriculture Program which has been spreading over the country. The program was introduced to New England by Jan VanderTuin of Switzerland about 1984. By 1986 one of two CSA farms in New England was established by the Temple/Wilton Community Farm which I observed during the period of 1987 to 1999 while I was engaged in consulting work for the High Mowing School in Wilton and later while serving on the School's Board of Trustees. What hooked me is that the CSA Program addresses many of the concerns I have about the future of American agriculture and its apparent inability to sustain a healthy nation.

My research to date has not been extensive and I have pledged myself to investigate CSA further and to promote the idea through my consulting work if possible. Much of what I have learned comes from George Hamilton, Extension Educator, Agricultural Resources at the UNH Cooperative Extension Office. One of the documents furnished by Mr. Hamilton is a primer on CSA published in 2006 (a bit outdated according to Mr. Hamilton) by Katherine Adam and published by the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service. The definition of CSA comes out this publication. "*CSA consists of a community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation so that the farmland becomes, either legally or spiritually, the community's farm, with the growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production.*

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Members or shareholders of the farm or garden pledge in advance to cover the anticipated costs of the farm operation and farmer's salary. In return, they receive shares in the farm's bounty throughout the growing season, as well as satisfaction gained from reconnecting to the land. Members also share in risks, including poor harvest due to unfavorable weather or pests."

More than from the published sources is what I learned in an interview with Roger Noonan, Farmer Proprietor of Middle Branch Farm, CSA. I was lucky to convince Roger to allow me to buy his lunch at the Northeast Café on the river last week, otherwise I would have had to ride a motorcycle to keep up with him and have a stenographer to capture his rapid fire delivery of facts about his farm and CSA in general. When Roger was a youngster he was inspired by his grandfather to become a farmer and he has waited long to fulfill his dream. A supporting wife and family, plus some good luck in finding a local farm available that is suited for his use made way for his beginnings, though small at first. Roger's high energy level and willingness to work at least 12 hours a day during the short growing season in New Boston demonstrates his motivation. Roger says that he has stretched the growing season to about 150 days with his practical use of poly blankets and high tunnels to hold heat from the soil, thereby avoiding frost damage. In addition to the 30 to 40 different vegetables, the planting of which is rotated during the season to maintain a maximum variety of vegetables each week, he has also planted root crops such as potatoes, beets, carrots, turnips, and rutabagas that resist frost damage late into the season and are also winter keepers.

While Roger jumped up to answer cell phone calls during lunch I caught up on my note keeping and prepared myself for his next burst of enthusiasm. I asked about his labor pool and he said that he has good luck with interns from agricultural schools; he learns from them and they learn about the intense labor required in this business. His family works hard as a unit and Lori, his wife, does most of the extensive bookkeeping requirements of the hundreds of shareholders enrolled in the CSA and this is in addition to her working a day job off the farm. In all, he employs 10 to 12 workers during the season to manage the 30 acres he has in vegetables. His equipment inventory is complex including a couple of heavy tractors for managing 100 acres in hay production and pasture management and for spring rototilling. Two other specialized tractors used for vegetable management are equipped with several detachable cultivators, equally specialized for specific crops. Roger emphasized, "It's all about cultivation, because I can not use chemical weed killers."

Middle Branch Farm offers meat shares which include broilers, lamb, pork, and beef. These shares, plus maple syrup, storage vegetables, and the potatoes that Roger keeps through the winter round out his seasonal diversity of farm produce. Shares are picked up at the farm during the week and Roger delivers shares to centralized locations in surrounding towns, each on a given day during the week.

Roger believes that the CSA Program has a bright future. In what I have experienced in observation and in some research the following benefits of CSA shine. Community members are given an incentive to reconnect with the land and to learn good stewardship. A CSA will help build communities economically and environmentally. I believe the movement counters the big box retail outlets such as Wal-Mart, a company which is a leader in environmental law violation statistics and in creating high social costs that the company has cleverly externalized. A reduction in fossil fuel consumption and air pollution will occur if food products can be produced locally; not 3500 miles away. Public health benefits can be realized by eating locally grown and locally processed food products. I can see the potential for land use reform whereby agricultural land will be prevented from conversion to other uses. National Security is tied to Food Security and Food Security comes from the close connection between consumers and the land which is only achievable in the CSA model.

Achieving the goal of CSA is not without its challenges, the biggest being a lack of professionals trained to manage such agricultural enterprises and a lack of trained agricultural technicians to do the work. Also lacking is a population knowledgeable about cooking and preserving vegetables. Let's get home economics programs re-introduced into every high school for girls and boys. Perhaps state and national policy statements

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would be helpful, especially if they are tied to some legislation that offers benefits to CSA's in the same proportion as they are offered to large corporate owned agricultural enterprises. Lastly, it seems to me that equipment dealers in New England must ramp up the availability of the specialized equipment CSA managers need to operate.

Growing Local Economy and Local Food (8/2010)

In my previous column I touched on the importance of the Community Supported Agriculture paradigm for growing and marketing local food products. I also discussed family gardens and the importance of these to the wellness of family members. Since then my mind has been even more attentive to the growth of local agriculture, primarily because it has been featured in the press and promoted by our State and Federal governments. So, in this column I will write about two more local food security systems that have inspired me; the New Boston Farmers' Market and the Dodge Farm Stand.

In an interview, Susan Woodward shared with me her experiences over the two years that she has been the Market Manager for the New Boston Farmers' Market organization. I am grateful for her offer to answer my questions during a pleasant hour in her screened summer room. Despite the glorious distraction caused by Susan's perennial flower garden in full view from my seat in the room, I was able to take a couple of pages of notes. Her enthusiasm for the Market was reflected in a wide smile at each response to my questions and that kept me focused.

Susan, a retired English teacher and more recently a curriculum developer, is in her second season as Market Manager. She credited Melissa Harvey for her long tenure as Market Manager and as the driving force in its organization. The Market is incorporated as a 501: C-3 organization and is governed by a board of directors guided by a constitution and by-laws. The Market season runs from mid-June to mid-October and the producers and vendors are required to attend each market day. Market days are every Saturday and it is open for three hours in the morning. Applicants for membership in the Market are accepted by vote of the members. Susan emphasized that if the members feel that an applicant (new vendor/producer) may potentially lower their profit margin by introducing the same, or similar, goods to the market, it is likely the applicant will not be accepted.

I learned that the New Boston Farmers' Market is a modified cooperative market. The producers and vendors pay an annual fee and each has a voice in the management of the enterprise. There are two vegetable producers in the Market now and this is the maximum that it can support, more would create a glut. The producers and vendors set their own prices and each usually offers what the other does not, thereby regulating sales to their mutual benefit. Visiting vendors and producers may be allowed into the Market for one or more market days for a daily fee. In addition to the vegetable crop producers, the Market has members that sell baked goods, homemade confections, plus art and handcrafts.

Susan seemed proud that the Market has special events; typical of which have been weaving lessons and knitting lessons. These are "cottage skills" that are becoming rare in our society. Still smiling, Susan stated that the Market day scene may include cultural attractions. Poetry reading and impromptu musical performances by local and area talent are often heard in the village from the Market location on the Town Common. This location offers a real presence and attractive draw to potential customers. Susan pointed out a fact that had not occurred to me regarding the value of the Market in the town center. She said that Market days offer opportunity to community organizations and functions to promote events and solicit raffle ticket sales. This opportunity would not otherwise exist on a weekly basis in the community. By the end of my interview, I had been affected by Susan's enthusiasm and I clearly understood that New Boston Farmers' Market is a big deal for the economic and social welfare of this community.

I often pick up the “Hippo” tabloid to read what is going on in the area for entertainment, but I was compelled to reach for a recent issue when I saw the huge color picture of a perfect strawberry on the front page (June 24-30). Amazement overtook me when I opened the paper and read two short articles on the subject of agriculture; one titled “UNH food research”, and a second titled “Food Bank garden grows”. Further into the paper there is a piece by Karen Plumley running FIVE pages devoted to local food marketing, particularly Farmers’ Markets. Karen’s introduction provides some statistics that show how the Farmers’ Market movement is growing. She credits the president of the New Hampshire Farmers’ Market Association with saying that he expects 80 Markets will operate this season which is twice the number in operation just ten years ago. I’ll bet this one issue significantly increased the sales at Farmers’ Markets in the area (they were all listed with locations and the business hours). Well done “Hippo”!

The final agricultural food marketing system that contributes to the health and welfare of this community carries the term “Farm Stand”. Typically, this is a local farmer who bears all the expense and risk of growing vegetables, and selling them in a stand, usually on land owned by the farmer. Dodge Farm Stand is the only such enterprise that I am aware of in New Boston. I was fortunate to capture the manager of this farm stand for a short interview. Kim (Dane) Ohlin was watering the patio pots containing the greenest, most thrifty looking tomato plants that I have seen. These pots were set on shelves adjacent to Kim’s new greenhouse in which she intends to raise vegetable and flower plants for spring sale to home gardeners. This facility is sited among the other farm stand attractions which are all managed by Kim. In addition to the popular ice cream stand, there is an interesting display of antique farm equipment on the grounds fronting on Route 77. In back of the ice cream stand there is a fenced enclosure that is the friendly petting farm. Kim says she has seen families come here for ice cream and spend an hour interacting with the animals.

Inside a new addition to the ice cream stand building, I observed tables with early vegetables attractively displayed with hand drawn art work indicating the price and product. Neatly arranged on shelving around the room are arts and crafts, plus maple syrup produced by her father, Sam Dane, and Grandparents, Jim and Wilma Dane at the Maple Butternut Farm.

In the interview Kim told me that she works full time as the farm manager during the season with the part-time help of her husband, Adam, who works full-time at Chappell Tractor. She is a 2007 graduate of UNH with a degree in Zoology. She said that training helps her understand animal behavior, but knowledge of plant science she has had to acquire on her own through on-the-job training for the past four years she has been in business.

The food line offered presently includes; mixed vegetables, eggs, pumpkins, and winter squash. The cropland currently producing totals eight acres of Dodge Farm land. Kim says that her sales include large quantity batches to homeowners that do canning and freezing, but most of her customers are local householders that want fresh healthful foods for the table at a reasonable price. Kim completes the farm stand season with the sale of Christmas trees. Planting and management of the farm’s own Christmas Trees is being considered to add diversity to the farm’s marketing efforts. In the early spring Kim gets involved in maple syrup production at the Dane sugar house on Pine Road and is learning how maple syrup is made.

When asked about the future of her enterprise and of the farm stand method of agricultural marketing she expressed concern about the burden of local and state regulations that may make it difficult to operate profitably. However, she was obviously more positive about the opportunities than negative about the challenges. She loves to work at home and enjoys the quality of life on the farm. As a youngster she always had her own garden and became enthralled by the wonder of planting a seed and the miracle of growth she watched. Her heart is in farm life.

From what I have read and have heard about local food production and marketing systems, I believe that there is a great interest in them and there is potential for increasing demand for local food. Perhaps the maximum contribution of these systems to the Gross State Product will never tally hall of fame numbers, but there will be meaningful benefits to health and economy for the region and the nation. The movement is not without challenges; the greatest in my opinion is preventing land suitable for agriculture from being converted to growing houses. This challenge has to be addressed locally and statewide and then implemented through what ever means society is willing to accept. There will be social costs involved, but the social costs of doing nothing will be much greater than the social costs of not increasing the land base available for agriculture.

Grandma's Life Not All Drudgery (9/2010)

It is anecdotal that my Grandmother, Bessie Todd, spent most of her life toiling in the kitchen and chambers of this old house where she lived all of her married life. At family gatherings I can remember my aunts and uncles talking about how she tirelessly and endlessly toiled to raise the family and to board farm workers, mill hands, and school teachers. These stories made me feel pity, even at age six or seven, for the white-haired woman, then sixty nine or seventy years old. I remembered Grandma and Grandpa working in the garden, the same garden that my family continues to cultivate, and I would work beside them learning how to tell beets from weeds. During these early years of my youth I enjoyed my Grandmother's cooking skills and eagerly picked blackberries for her to make deliciously sweet, though seedy, turnovers.

Later in my youth, after my Grandfather died in 1950, I heard more tales about Grandma's years of never-ending support of her family and her husband's business. When I was about ten years old my father and Aunt Esther told me much of Grandma's life during the nineteen twenty and nineteen thirty decades on the farm. I learned that Grandpa operated a dairy farm in the barn, a horse and ox shoeing service with blacksmithing and carriage repair services in a shop adjacent to the homestead, in addition he operated a lumber business with a portable sawmill powered by steam. In these endeavors he employed several hired hands. This labor force did not commute from home to work; they boarded in the homestead! Grandma had charge of the boarding service. While the District 13 schoolhouse served the education needs of this neighborhood, Grandma also boarded teachers, much to the delight of her four sons.

I can not imagine the amount of cooking, ironing, washing, sewing, and house-cleaning that fell upon Grandma's shoulders. From what I have been told there were at least four hired hands and one school teacher boarding here at the same time. The 'three holer' at the end of the ell must have been a busy place each morning, but of course the schoolmarms had the benefit of chamber pots.

Recently, I have been abstracting my Grandma's diaries and in those books she gives me further insight to her life during the two to three decades of raising her five children and supporting her husband's multi-faceted business. She did have hired help. A neighborhood lady, Mrs. Corliss, came nearly every day to help with cleaning, washing, and ironing. I learned that during the winter months, Grandma had an older man that was assigned the full-time duties of keeping all the stove fires going in the sleeping chambers, parlor, sitting room, kitchen, and dining room. The kitchen range would be fired up most of the time for cooking and the brick oven was heated for cooking most every day. Finally, fires were tended under each of the two huge copper kettles set in a large brick heater. This was the source of hot water for washing dishes, clothes, and persons in the homestead.

Grandma's chore-boy had to be one of the busiest hands on the farm considering that he had to carry all the wood for the house fires from the woodshed to each of the six stoves, water heater, Dutch-oven, and kitchen range. Fire tending during January, when temperatures dipped to 20 degrees below zero, was a twenty four

hour job. This homestead had no insulation or storm windows. He routinely emptied the chamber pots and brought warm water to the school teacher's wash stand set.

Prior to electricity being wired to this house in the mid 1920s, the chore-boy obviously had the added task of cleaning the dozen or more kerosene lamps in the homestead. It is also likely that he had to keep the refrigerator supplied with ice which he would carry from the ice house. This man was employed here for about 10 years and left a box of pencil drawings, mostly cartoons that my Grandmother saved. I think the man entertained the family with his artistic ability.

This story portrays a woman that had little enjoyment in life other than to see her children grow up and the family businesses prosper. However, the diaries also speak about a woman that was socially connected and enriched by good neighbors. In the first quarter of the twentieth century there were several families close by that were populated by my Grandfather's cousins, aunts and uncles. My Grandmother also had family in New Boston because she was a native of the town and was brought up in the village. Nearly every day one or several family members would come to the homestead at Todd Corner to visit 'for a spell'. There are also many diary accounts of neighbors calling for a visit.

Frequent accounts of driving alone or with friends to society meetings in town and adjoining towns appear in Grandma's diaries. I never knew that she drove a car; it was not the subject of stories that I heard. One diary entry mentions that she almost broke her arm while cranking up the Ford. The list of organizations she joined include; the New Century Club, Order of Eastern Star, Daughters of the American Revolution, Farm Bureau, and whist parties. Grandma regularly attended church and participated in activities sponsored by the church, particularly church suppers.

Most surprising of the social subjects in Grandma's diary are the accounts of her going to the city. As early as 1916 she penned notes of attending silent movies at the Palace Theatre in Manchester. According to [Wikipedia](#), construction of the Palace Theatre began in 1914 by Greek immigrant Victor Charas with the help of a local contractor and architect. The structure was designed to be a likeness of a much larger theatre in New York bearing the same name. A grand opening held on April 9, 1915 was chronicled in local press as the grandest social occasion of the century.

This attraction must have appealed to Grandma's hidden romantic self. Her diary entry of January 17, 1917 tells me that Grandpa took Grandma, though I believe it was the other way around, to the Palace Theatre to see "Hulda from Holland". They took the afternoon train from the depot in downtown New Boston to the Manchester Train Station. After the movies they stayed overnight, presumably at the Carpenter Hotel, and went home on the morning train. [Wikipedia](#) lists "Hulda from Holland" as one of 26 films released in 1916 and states that it starred Mary Pickford. It is likely that the film was a silent movie with records of talk and music, playing in the background, synchronized with the moving picture.

Sometimes Grandma and her sister Emma, with whom she was very close, went to the city to view moving pictures at the Palace, one being "Under Cover". They also took the train from the village, stayed over night and came home on the morning train. The diary says Grandpa and Grandma went to Manchester several times to see movies at the Park Theatre. One title was "Experience"; another was the "Heart of Maryland". Their usual trip was an over-night stay away from the toils at the homestead; how romantic this must have been, and especially out of character for Grandpa.

More diary entries tell about Grandma and some of her girlfriends going to Manchester on the morning train, shopping on Elm Street, and eating lunch at Barton's Tea Room. They bought hats, dresses, and shoes from fashionable stores when the central section of Elm Street was the heart of the shopping district in the city.

After a day of shopping for themselves and for home good needs, they took the evening train back to New Boston.

Much of my remembrance of Grandma's social life was at a time when her age made it difficult to carry on a social life. Arthritis was painful and her eyesight was dimmed by glaucoma. Her old friends stood by her and cared for her. Friends came to bring her to the Order of Eastern Star and Daughters of the American Revolution meetings. Sue Wason and other folks whose names have slipped my mind were often taking her to these affairs that so pleased Grandma.

Grandmother Bessie did work hard and worked long to make life at this homestead enjoyable and healthy; for this she deserves great credit and I have come to respect her more over the years than I did when I was a young person. This has come from learning, by reading her diaries, more about how she served her family and community. It is obvious that, somehow, she found the time and means to enjoy life, even in a period when most of us think there was little opportunity to do so. I reflect on my own life and wonder if she did better at this than do Laura and I.

Cemetery Tour Attracts More Than the Living (11/2010)

For months prior to October 2, 2010 the John Stark Scenic Byway Council, a program under the management of the Southern New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission (SNHRPC), has been planning a cultural and historical tour throughout the Byway towns of New Boston, Goffstown, Dunbarton, and Weare. One of the goals in the plan is to stage an event in each town as a demonstration of how local events may bring visitors to the Byway. Lyn Lombard, the Council's Treasurer volunteered to lead this endeavor in New Boston and she promptly suggested a cemetery tour. The idea took off like a kite in a windstorm.

Recently, Lyn defined the tour concept and tactfully generated interest among local historians who agreed to perform roles of some interesting characters among the dead in the village cemetery on the hill. Lyn managed the production by enlisting tour guides, assisting with research, obtaining period clothing for the actors, writing promotional pieces for SNHRPC to use, and by personally leading the cadre during that beautiful October 2nd day.

With the tour date approaching swiftly the living actors turned hundreds of pages in many sources about the lives of the now dead citizens they would portray. Sources included the internet, New Boston Historical Society records, the New Boston Library, old newspapers, personal diaries, letters, and photographs. Director Lyn brought actors together for a dress rehearsal that proved to her satisfaction that the six actors were prepared and animated about their roles.

Meanwhile, in a great lounge in Heaven some of New Boston's dead were gathered to discuss a rumor that Saint Peter had relayed to them; he having heard it from other recently deceased New Boston residents that came to his Gate. The gist of the rumor was that some of the living are preparing to act out the life of residents for whom Saint Peter had previously opened Heaven's Gate. He had been told that the primary purpose of the play acting was to attract visitors to town and to tell them about the history and culture of the community.

Those whose life stories would be told were gathered in Heaven's lounge. The group included: Elsie Warren, Lemuel Marden, Sevilla Jones, James Reed Whipple, William Beard, and James Paige Todd. Additionally, Henry Sargent's story would be told, but he was not among the group due to his being punished eternally in Circle Seven of Hell. The six got excited about the idea of hearing their lives unfold and wanted to go down.

Sevilla Jones was curious about how the living portrayed her violent death at the hands of Henry Sargent and pleaded, "I want to go back there and listen to Lisa Rothman tell the story about how my family, my friends, and how society in general responded to my death...being murdered by Henry's gun-shot, and by killing himself, moments later, with his pistol must have been a traumatic shock to towns-people." Miss Elsie spoke first in her matter-of-fact style, "Yes, it was, you must not go, Sevilla." "It would be a sad day for you Sevilla, the doctor summoned to the scene was so angered by your murder that he would not tend to Henry and so let him die six hours later," said Lemuel Marden.

Miss Elsie Warren spoke quietly without expression, "My career as the New Boston Librarian for 41 years and my life of 95 years has resulted in my acquaintance with most citizens of New Boston, and many are Heavenly neighbors. I want to go down and see the new faces and I must see the new library."

William Beard, a Berdan's Sharpshooter in the Civil War and killed in battle at age 22, spoke with emotion, "I am not going...the dead can see things the living can not...a future of eternal war." William went on, "The living are troubled and in the dark. Why would I want to go back to ignorance and blindness...to hear of more war and killing?" Mr. Whipple offered this advice, "William, when you have been here longer and your mind matured you will understand the good that came of your service and from the mended nation that resulted...it will do you well to hear your story told by Ben and Jane Hampton." Holding his head low, as in respect for Mr. Whipple, William said, "I realize that I am of young mind and there is an eternity to forget the bad, so I am willing to go and hear the good."

James Reed Whipple was next to add his thoughts about going down, "Personally, I wish to go to see how New Boston remembers me and to see if my investments in the community were worthwhile." James P. Todd encouraged Mr. Whipple by saying, "You and I were friends and business associates for decades while living and I think that we should go together. I want to take a look at how well my great-grandson, Robert Todd, cares for the property that has been the Todd homestead since 1814. I also want to hear how well he tells the story of my Gold-Rush adventure."

"I am interested in going down among the living in New Boston to hear my descendant, Jay Marden, tell the story of his family's role in the community," said Lemuel Marden. "There is a lot to tell because of my settling in town well before 1775. I am the only one in the group who was a Revolutionary War soldier, having served as a private under Colonel Frye's Minutemen. My significant endeavors as a stonemason include the Greystone Cottage on the Amherst Road and I also assisted in building the State House in Boston." He went on, "I know that the dead lose interest in the living after a while and we lose hold of the earth. This would give me the opportunity to reconnect with my family and New Boston."

"Then it is agreed, we shall all go down to New Boston on October 2, 2010 and listen to the living tell about us, I will make immediate arrangements with Saint Peter to meet us at the Gate with his key in hand on that morning," said James Todd. The day soon came and the small group responded to Saint Peter's horn calling them to the Gate. "Where is Henry Sargent!" exclaimed Sevilla Jones. Saint Peter announced, "I am sorry Sevilla...Henry is so far down the trail between Heaven and Hell that the Devil rejected my plea and would not release him. He must bear his punishment and not hear any sympathetic remarks that the living may make after hearing Dan Rothman's presentation of Henry's side of the story about murdering you, and then killing himself."

There was a dense fog settled over the Meetinghouse Hill Cemetery that morning and the dead arrived through the pall to position themselves near the headstones over their earthly remains. As the fog lifted, they were amazed at some of the sights. From the hill they could identify some of the images familiar to them. Then they became impassioned when the living storytellers gathered at their respective graves. Soon, among the living actors moved three people holding strange gadgets that were pointed at the actors. "Do they have guns,"
2010 "In the Country" by Robert Todd

Sevilla asked. “No”, replied J.R. Whipple, “I have learned that their equipment is to take pictures and to record voices. They will be showing these pictures to other people on something called television.”

The dead watched and listened in awe as the living actors repeated their roles about ten times each. Over 100 people were guided in small groups to the six gravestones where the actors were stationed for three hours that afternoon. In preparing to go back the dead stood at the site of the first meeting house and looked across the valley over the town they loved. They all had parting remarks.

Sevilla and William showed their emotion by crying some, but said that the living had played their roles beautifully. “However,” said Sevilla, “The living just don’t understand what life is all about and remain troubled.” Miss Elsie added, “That Gail Parker is a gifted writer and actor, she should be proud.” James Todd said, “I was a little embarrassed with the way Robert looked while speaking his piece, my derby was frayed at the brim and it was too small for him, my jacket was also a little too small and there were moth holes in the sleeves and I think it smelled bad. J.R., I think that young Mr. Joyal summed up your life marvelously. How do you feel about the way New Boston has managed the assets in which you invested and about the way the community has perpetuated your identity?” J.R. said, “I am so pleased and proud, but I miss the High School, there is not even a marker to show where the school once stood.”

The group then wisped away on a breeze to meet Saint Peter at Heaven’s Gate.

Appreciation for Red Oak (12/2010)

Red Oak stole the show this fall in the eyes of most who get excited about seeing the brilliant fall colors each year. I am one of those, and I make a point of observing how well the various deciduous trees in our native forest display themselves. Every year natural beauty of the landscape enters into discussions which indicate to me that others make this same assessment, though it may not be taken as seriously by others as it is by me. This fall I can say that most observers were disappointed by the lack of brilliance of reds, yellows, and golds reflected along our byways and on the hillside vistas of our region. Even the favorite shade trees in our yards were dull.

I was particularly disappointed with the faint yellow and red foliage on the sugar maple standing near the west side of my house. Its leaves turned brown and dropped off earlier than usual in the season. The red maples in the wetland east of the house failed to thrill me early this fall with their usual bright red foliage. My lack of passion about Nature’s glory was saved by the red oak community.

On a sunny day in mid October I was driving on Tucker Mill Road and Oak Hill Road to a project site in Weare. As I passed under the canopy of long red oak limbs extending from large trees on each side of the road, my vehicle was pummeled by falling acorns. These hard nuggets of protein hit my windshield and the roof of the cab making such a racket that I was distracted from my driving. I imagined hearing the words, “Hey”!, “Look at us”. I steered to the side of the road, stopped, got out and looked back through the tunnel created by several red oak trees on each side of the road. First, I was greeted by so many acorns on the road side that it was difficult to step without losing my balance when my feet moved involuntarily on the acorns rolling like marbles.

On regaining my balance I changed my gait to a shuffle and safely walked back along the road toward the tree tunnel. Sunbeams pushed through the leafy oak canopy and painted some oak leaves such a deep red that it reminded me of arterial blood. Other sunbeams turned on a rich golden hue as they bounced off the foliage on other oak crowns. I was so impressed with the beauty of the scene that red oaks became the focus of my attention for the next few days.

In other travels to town and surrounding towns, I continued to see red oaks along my way that were more stunning than I ever noticed them to be. Perhaps it was because their cohorts of the forest, sugar maple, beech, birch, and aspen have been lackluster in their fall dresses. In spite of the dull reflection from the usual stars on the fall stage, I noticed that red oaks were drawing more than the usual oooh, aaah, and wow comments. The oak leaves lingered late into October and their foliage changed from mostly gold to a rich-dark bronze, still lustrous in the sunlight. Recently, on a drive downtown to buy convenience items at Dodge's Store, I looked across the village to the forest on Meeting House Hill as my car crested Cider Mill Hill and was treated to a memorable sight. The noon sun emblazoned that bronze hue on a group of red oak crowns that resembled, in color and shape, home-made rolls just removed from the oven.

My experience this fall viewing the wonderful blanket of tree crowns has centered my thinking about the role of the northern red oak species in our environment. I recalled mentally all that I remembered learning about the species and the value it provides in residential landscapes, in forest stands, and to the intrinsic values it adds to the environment. Much has been written about this tree species, however, the knowledge does not often appear in school science curricula or is it generally distributed to the public.

Red oak is one of the most important species as a source of protein for wildlife. Deer, bear, turkey, blue jay, and grouse are the major species that depend on red oak acorns for sustenance. Squirrels cache the acorns for food during the winter months. Inadvertently, squirrels are an important vector in distributing acorns in the forest and actually 'plant' them in the soil, thereby ensuring that future squirrel generations will have a source of protein.

The hardy oak begins to produce acorns when the trees are about 50 years old and reach their peak yield when they are about 18 to 22 inches in diameter. At this stage in its long life, that may span two and one half centuries, a red oak standing in full sun in the forest may produce 14,000 acorns according to a United States Forest Service study. This study represents that 30% of the acorn crop is eaten by insects, 24% of the crop is eaten by the birds and animals mentioned in the last paragraph. Another 36% of the acorn crop, which takes two years to mature on the tree, is eaten by other rodents. That leaves about 1400 acorns that germinate, but only three of those seedlings will grow to be a mature tree. This may seem to be a small proportion of progeny to sustain a population of red oaks in our forest, but foresters have learned how to manage the species successfully.

Red oak acorns were a staple in the diet of American Indians prior to settlement of southern New Hampshire by Europeans. If you have ever tasted a red oak nut, you must wonder how this species could have been a healthful food. The high level of tannin in the nut causes it to have a very unsavory bitterness. The Indians figured out how to make the nuts palatable. They removed the hulls, crushed the nut-meats and then soaked them in multiple baths of hot water. This process leached out the tannin leaving the goodness of the nut in a palatable state.

The red oak is also the 'money tree' in the forests of southern New Hampshire. The strength of the wood and its beautiful grain and color make it a favored raw material for lumber used in furniture, cabinetry, flooring, paneling, and for structural beams in homes and commercial buildings. Even in this period of poor forest economy, red oak is the most valuable species.

The Red Oak species in this area has become a 'measure of time' and an icon of veneration. I always become awestruck and humbled when I come upon one of the few remaining red oaks in the later stages of life, one that perhaps sprouted near the stonewall bordering a first settler's field in the late 18th century. The typical persona of these anchors of history includes the following observations. They have lost most of their main branches leaving large openings to interior cavities, they have a limited amount of foliage and they cast no

acorns. It is not uncommon to see two or three porcupines sitting on one of these great limbs, perhaps members of the 50th generation of porcupines to have done so, as evidenced by a huge mound of composted porcupine scat at the base of the tree. The boles of these giants are usually 3 to 6 feet in diameter and they usually display open seams in their boles which may be the result of lightning strikes that the old tree never mended.

The American Forests organization maintains a national registry of big trees and recognizes champions. Champions are rated by a formula that is the sum of the circumference (in inches) + height (in feet) + one fourth of the average crown spread (in feet). A state champion tree list is maintained by the UNH Cooperative Extension Service of UNH. The state champion red oak in Hillsborough County was measured in Weare. It had a circumference of 20 feet 9 inches, a height of 70 feet, and an average crown spread of 69 feet for a point total of 336. The state champion red oak has a score of 356 and the national champion has a total of 452 points.

During this autumn season the red oaks in our environment have spoken loudly to me lest I fail to appreciate the many attributes of this species which is the most valuable member of the forest population of southern New Hampshire. It scores highest in its contribution to the economy by drawing leaf peepers to the area and it is our most valuable forest tree as a raw material for commodity manufacturing. Acorns provide the fat and protein to fuel migrating and hibernating wildlife. Finally, the red oak contributes significantly to the value of residential and commercial properties by providing shade and natural beauty.