Robert Samuel Smith
Born June 15, 1920
High Maples Farm

Morrill Street School (grades 1,2)
Gilford Avenue School (grades 3-6)
Laconia High School, 1938
Cornell University, 1942

U.S. Army 1944-1947

Cornell University, PhD, 1952

Married Mary Jean Morgan
June 20, 1942
Buffalo, NY

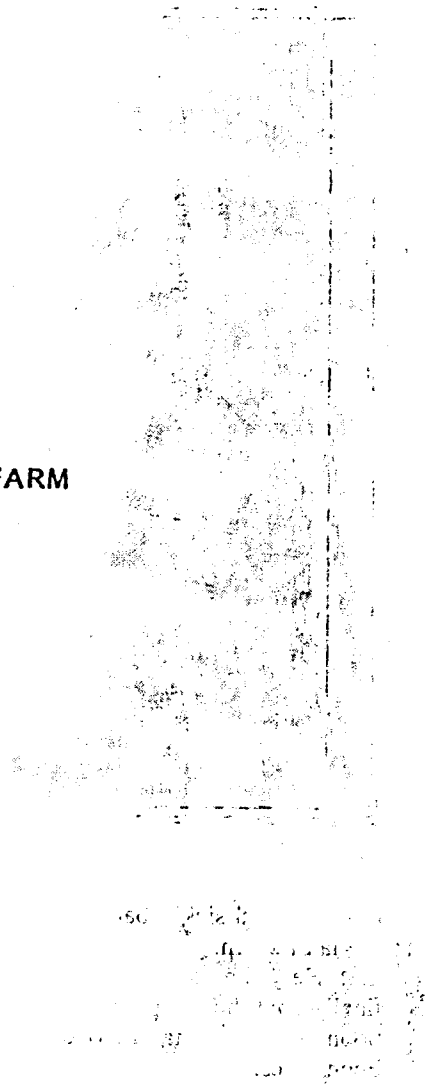
Children: Patricia Winifred, 1944
Peggy Paige, 1947
Morgan Scott, 1949
Sharon Anne, 1951
Starlee Jean, 1957 B

Robert was a sickly baby and his sisters claim that he owes his life to his great-aunt Jessie, sister of his grandmother, Lydia Sanborn. Jessie, who was an old maid, had time to go where she was needed. Robert participated actively in farm life. He had a pair of oxen, Hokum and Hoey, which he trained, took to fairs, and used to rescue cars from ditches. He finally sold them to raise money for college. He graduated from the School of Agriculture, Cornell University in 1942. Soon thereafter, he married Mary Jean Morgan, who was a year behind him at Cornell, in the School of Home Economics.

After their marriage, Bob was a county agent in Livingston County, NY. Two years later, his career was interrupted by World War II. Bob joined the Army and served in Germany with the Occupation Forces. After the War, he moved back [illegible] brother Royal's footsteps as county agent in Belknap County. In 1949, Bob moved into [illegible] Agricultural Economics. Mary

GROWING UP ON A NEW HAMPSHIRE FARM

IN THE 1920's & 1930's



ROBERT S. SMITH
Professor Emeritus, Cornell University
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For Seth Naylor, July 1, 2004

JWB

OLD FARM STORIES MY FATHER TOLD ME

My father, Samuel W. Smith, was raised on what he called Meredith Hill. The Smith farm there was cleared from woods and first settled some time after 1800. The family had moved up from the seacoast town of Hampton to Sanbornton and then to Meredith Hill. Father and his 3 brothers and one sister grew up there, and numerous relatives lived and farmed in the general area, about 12 miles from Laconia.

In 1900, the Meredith Hill farm was essentially abandoned as a farm. Like many other poorer New England farms cut out of woodland in the late 1700s and early 1800s, the fields went back to woods in not much more than one hundred years. In the year 1900, Father and Mother were married and bought the Gilford farm where they lived and farmed for the rest of their lives. Grandfather William Smith moved down to Gilford with them and eventually bought a house in Laconia.

Many of the stories Father told us children about the "old days" had to do with Meredith Hill, Sanbornton Bay, and Chemung. The latter loosely described a large backwoods area between the northern end of Lake Winnisquam and the old Smith farm on Meredith Hill.

For some years after moving down to Gilford, cattle were summer pastured back at the old Meredith Hill farm, and wood and lumber was cut on the old farm and from other woodlots where Father and relatives bought standing wood and timber.

Cutting wood and timber and getting it to market in Laconia across or around Lake Winnisquam produced all kinds of adventures. One winter Father and Uncle Charlie Smith were cutting firewood up in Chemung and

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living during the week in a rough woods camp. The low loft over the camp living quarters was filled with hay and straw, which attracted rats and mice. Father liked to tell us about how skilled Uncle Charlie became at reaching up with a butcher knife and slicing off a rat's tail as it hung down through the straw.

Wild cats or bobcats were relatively common then, and there were still some panthers. One day at dusk when the men were returning to the woods camp, the team of horses showed reluctance to come near the camp, and soon the men heard a great commotion within the living quarters. A panther had come around during the day, forced the door to get at the hanging meat inside, and then got trapped when the door swung shut behind him. As Father approached, the big cat panicked, racing around the inside of the camp and finally leaping out through the one window. Although he had ruined all the meat, smashed up the camp furniture, and broken the window, Father reported that was a small price to pay to get the cat out of the camp.

Father got his "schooling" at New Hampton School. That school still operates today and is a highly regarded private preparatory institution. I believe that in Father's time - the late 1800s - it offered its better students something superior to today's high school academics. New Hampton is perhaps seven miles from the old Smith farm on Meredith Hill, too far for daily commuting by horse or on foot. Father did commute weekly, taking a horse and buggy when one could be spared from the farm and boarding the horse and himself in New Hampton for the week. When the horse was needed at home, he walked. The lonely country road led down to New Hampton through a notch in the hills then referred to as "the

saddle." Sunday night trips down through the saddle and Friday night trips back were very lonely and pretty scary even for a tough farm boy. Father could always vividly recall and describe those trips and the screams of a bobcat that each week seemed to come when he approached the darkest part of the forest in the Saddle. Just his telling of the story would send shivers up the backs of us children, and we wondered how anyone would want to go to school badly enough to make those trips every week.

Wild animals were really not much of a menace in the late 1800s, but were often a nuisance. Father fascinated us with the story of how his mother had trouble keeping the bears out of her garden corn patch. She would march boldly to the garden gate when a bear attacked the ripe corn, and could usually scare the bear away by rattling the gate and shouting.

I never saw a bear in the wild all the time I was growing up. I do remember Father pointing out bear fur on a barbed wire fence along the road "down back of the mountain" near what is now the Belknap Recreation Area. He said it was fur from the bear that had earlier killed sheep in the Cobble Mountain pasture. That small pasture was used by a family who had a son, Georgie, who was very slow witted. Georgie found the bear with a sheep he had killed and demonstrated he wasn't slow afoot by running home in record time and in terror to report his find. Father said my Uncles Nelson and Roy Page then staked out a pig on the mountain to lure the bear back where they could shoot him. Something went wrong with the plan and the bear escaped without the pig.

Father also told about the same Georgie being so quick and stealthy that he could sometimes catch a woodchuck with only a stick for a weapon.

When asked to explain this unusual feat, Georgie would say "Got tween him and the hole." But being slow of wit and tongue, he would often get confused and say he got tween me and the hole!" Whatever, everyone who has hunted woodchucks knows that they always have more than one hole to jump into, and Georgie's success in catching them remains a mystery.

Mother's best large animal story was about a mountain lion in the town of Gilmanton that developed a strong liking for lamb and veal. After a number of farmers lost livestock and losses became clearly attributable to the one big cat, a large posse of them was formed to hunt him down. With the help of dogs, they finally treed and killed the animal on Grant Mountain - off what is now the Middle Road in Gilmanton. My recollection is that it was Mother's grandfather Daniel Page who took part in that hunt.

Father had a great liking for a good team of oxen, and many of his stories had to do with ox teams. Before electric refrigeration, great quantities of lake ice were harvested in the Gilford-Laconia area and shipped to Boston for use there or as refrigeration on ships sailing from Boston harbor and other Atlantic ports. Many of the huge ice warehouses were still standing on the sandy shores of Winnipesaukee and Paugus Bay as late as the 1930s. The ice was loaded on railroad cars at sidings beside these icehouses. Father greatly admired a big yoke of white oxen that were used at the Paugus Bay ice house for a number of years. To avoid tying up a steam locomotive, the ox team was used to move rail cars up to and away from the ice house doors. Pulling the empties up the siding was a cinch, but starting the fully loaded car away was a different story. The bearded old ox teamster would hitch the cattle to

the loaded car, let them get a good toe-hold on a cross tie, then crack his short whip over their backs, give one loud "Wah-heish" and the team would really "lay into" the yoke and start the loaded car. Once it got rolling, the cattle had to be unhitched or could be run down.

Father had an ox teaming friend over at Bristol, New Hampshire who had a yoke of oxen that Father said were trained to teeter on a teeter board. Even as a youngster, I knew how difficult it is to get an ox to answer even the simple commands to "whoa, waheish, gee or haw." Seeing that I found it hard to believe oxen could be made to teeter, Father took me over to Bristol and got the man to do the trick. Sure enough, he had a very large plank secured in the middle, blocked up about one foot off the ground on each end. He would drive one ox up on each end, facing each other, move one ox ahead to take the weight off one end and kick the block out. Then he would get the ox on that end to back up, the other to walk ahead, and the plank would "teeter." Reversing the steps, it would "teeter" back. Of course, neither ox was ever more than a foot off the ground. But even so, I still think it a remarkable achievement, and done with only commands in a low voice.

There was for years a colorful ox teamster who usually won the ox pulling contests at the Plymouth Fair. He came from Berwick, Maine and always had a very big yoke of shorthorn oxen, beautifully matched and trained. Father admired his showmanship as well as his teams. Ox teams commonly respond to commands of "whoa" for stop and "Wah-heish" for go. The Berwick teamster trained his in reverse, and when he really wanted the best pullout of his team in the contest, he would roar "whoa, whoa, whoa" in a voice that could be heard from Maine to Vermont. He also

frequently tampered with a bow in the yoke before the first pull, so that it would break when the ox started to pull heavily. It made the ox feel very powerful, greatly entertained the audience, and often intimidated the opposing teamsters.

Father told one ox story that was supposed to be based on the truth, but which was most likely largely fabricated. Partially trained oxen are likely to want to pull apart when given the opportunity. The wooden bows that hold them in the yoke are loose fitting because it is the yoke itself and not the bows that stand the weight and the pull. If the pair turn their heads down and inwards to face each other, and at the same time push their rear ends away from each other, they may duck their heads completely under the yoke and end up facing back the way they came, with the yoke <u>under</u> their necks and only the bottom of the bow on top of their necks. They are still hooked together, but the yoke is in a useless position, banging against their knees. We called that maneuver "turning the yoke."

Father's story was that he once hired an ex-sailor who said he know how to drive oxen. Father had him yoke up a pair of half-trained steers and sent him to the woods to skid logs. The sailor was back without the steers in an hour and in great excitement ran to Father crying "Sam, Sam, the starboard ox is on the larboard side, the larboard ox is on the starboard side and the yoke has gone under the prow! The ship will never make port in that shape!"

WHERE FARM KIDS USED TO PLAY

The big commercial farms I visit these days are equipped with buildings that usually appear to be very functional and all business. The livestock barns are full of livestock, the equipment sheds full of equipment, and the silos and grain storages are sealed tight. I wonder where farm kids play these days? When I was a kid, there were all kinds of great places to play around our farm buildings.

The barn at home was about 36' by 90'. That is just a fraction of the size of the bigger structures on dairy farms today, but it was big for its time. It was made with hand hewn timbers and mortise and tenden joints, pinned together with wooden pins. It sagged in spots and gradually slipped down hill inch by inch. Still, it served us well, housing all the livestock and all the hay we harvested. It was three floors high and provided lots of places to play and hide. All our hay was put in loose, never baled. We tunneled through the hay, slid from the top floor down into the hay mows, and climbed up and down the single stairway and the ladders reaching from the main floor to the upper floors. The "barn floor" or drive-in floor was 12' wide and ran the length of the barn. Parts of it were filled at times with grain and hay ready to feed, but almost always there was lots of open clear space for playing.

That old barn floor was really the center of all farming operations as well as a great place to play. Sister Edna used to tell the story about Forrest, when quite small, falling out of the 2nd floor and landing head first in a pan of cucumber peelings which rested on the seat of the express wagon parked on the barn floor. The ten foot fall did him no

harm at all, because his sisters said, he landed on his head.

The barn floor was the scene of several corn husking bees sponsored by the Mt. Belknap Grange in Gilford. Not much corn got husked, but there was a fiddler for square dancing and lots of cider to drink (sweet cider in the barn, hard cider out back for a privileged few), and Father made sure red ears of corn were stashed where all of us brave enough to kiss a pretty girl could find one at the right moment.

The young bull calves we wanted to train to work were first yoked on the barn floor where they could be easily managed, and that was a fun job in cold weather. At hog butchering time, the dressed carcasses were left hanging for several days over the barn floor. We raised more than enough beans for home consumption, and Father thrashed out the beans the old fashioned way, with a flail, right there on the barn floor. In haying time, all loads of hay were hauled right into the barn and parked on the big floor until unloaded with the fork lift that lifted the hay clear to the ridge pole and along the track to be dropped at either end of the third or top floor.

On stormy days in fall, winter, or spring, the barn was the place to play until Father thought up stormy day chores to "keep the boys out of trouble." Such chores included cleaning out calf pens, currying the horses, and minor repair jobs to barn or equipment.

Sometimes we got to play in neighbors' barns, too. The Vincents farmed just a half mile away and for several years we played basketball, with one basket, in one end of the Vincent barn floor. Their barn floor was smoother and cleaner than ours. Uncle Charlie Smith farmed a half mile away in another direction, and occasionally we played in his barn

with Smith cousins.

In cold weather the big barn with heat from the cattle was the only farm building warm enough to play in. But in warmer weather the woodshed was a favored place. The woodshed had a scaffold overhead on which was stored an old sleigh and other horse drawn equipment no longer in use. We used to climb up over the many cords of wood to play in and around the sleigh. And it was a nice place to hide when we knew Father would be assigning odd jobs and chores. After we built the big sugar house in 1929, the old sap house located just off the front yard of the main house became headquarters for playtime in all but the coldest months. In summer months we boys slept out there.

The "Red Shed" which nephew Bob Weeks moved and has restored on his place, did not figure much in our playing, but was regularly visited. It sat at one corner of the barn yard, and attached to the back of the Red Shed was an outhouse. Even in coldest weather, it was often much more convenient to use it than to trudge through the house with dirty boots to use the one indoor bathroom. And many of Father's odd jobs were avoided by ducking into the outhouse at a critical moment. We often prolonged our visit to the outhouse by adding to the Sage Graffiti on the walls of the old two-holer, or by studying the previous year's Sears & Roebuck catalog which always found its way there.

The Red Shed itself was used to store small tools, seed, and fertilizer. A high shelf or scaffold was used to store ox yokes, often more than a dozen. I often think how valuable they would be now as antiques.

The attic or third floor of the house was not used much for play

until Father "finished off" a room in the attic in the thirties. For a time a hired man slept up there, even though there was no heat. With a room in the attic, it became a more inviting place to play and later, a place to read and study.

Outdoor play opportunities were unlimited. It was just a short walk over the fields to either the cow pasture, the sheep pasture, or Uncle Charlie's pasture. The latter was entirely wooded and stretched from just above our barn to where nephew Bob Weeks now lives. The cow pasture was the favored outdoor play area, with its thick stands of pine and hemlock, a small brook, and steep slopes where we used our crude ski equipment in winter. The brook was large enough to contain a few trout. Sister Ellen took me to that brook to catch my first trout. On that memorable occasion Ellen stayed home to take care of me while the family went in a body to Grandfather Page's funeral at Gilmanton Iron Works.

Saltmarsh Pond was little more than a mile away up the Liberty Hill Road. Harold Graeme and I would go there for perch and pickerel on rainy days if we could get away before Father assigned work. But we had no boat and fishing from the shore seldom resulted in many fish.

We played games, tricks, and worked up home made competitions that kids today would think were pretty "square," but which were exciting to us. One practice which disappeared long ago was that of hoarding apples in the fall. Each of us kids would collect the best two or three apples of each variety we could find and hide them somewhere around the farm where hopefully the others couldn't raid our hoard. Of course, the hiding place had to be dry and preferably cool. I had success one year with a hoard in the woodshed, where I pulled out five sticks of wood from the

tall neat stack and piled the apples behind in the loose wood. The five sticks in front could then be inserted back in place, completely concealing my hiding place. My hoard was never found, but the prize was nothing more than bragging rights.

Not only has the game of apple hoarding disappeared, but so have most of those old apple varieties we guarded so zealously. Nowadays, where do you find a porter, pound sweet, winter banana, king, or Ben Davis? Come to think about it, who wants to find those varieties when today's are so much better?

MY END OF THE CROSSCUT SAW

Farm work on our Gilford, New Hampshire farm in the 20s and 30s was mainly of three parts - barn work, field work, and woods work. Because milking and feeding went on every day all year, work in and around the barn was the most time consuming. I liked cattle, liked milking, and the old barn was a great place to play. So most of my memories of the barn and all the hours we spent there are good memories. Haying was a long, slow, usually hot and often frustrating job. As it was by far the biggest part of field work, and I never liked it, I don't remember much that was fun or pleasurable about work in the fields. Work in the woods was something else. Everything we did in the woods was hard work, often we were cold or wet or both, but to me it was all very satisfying and brings back the best memories of all about growing up on the farm.

If you put together the time we spend in maple sugaring with getting out fuel wood and occasional logging operations, we really spent about as many days and hours in the woods as we did in the fields. And you can add to that the spring days fixing fence, and the odd hours hunting for cows that failed to come home out of the woods when they were supposed to, and quite a lot of playing time in the woods of the old cow pasture as well.

The sheep pasture of about 75 acres was west over the fields from the farm buildings, and the cow pasture, twice as large, was east. Most of our woods work was in the cow pasture. Sometime in the late 30s we acquired the John Swain pasture, another hundred acres, but Father hired most of the logging done on that lot.

The cow pasture had

The cow pasture had perhaps 40 acres of open pasture and the rest was covered with mixed hardwood and softwood. There were several thick pine and hemlock stands. Forrest once had a leanto made of pine boughs in a nice clump of pines where he allowed all of us to play.

My interest in the woods and the work there started when I was very young. One early woods experience is easily remembered because it entailed one of the few real scoldings Mother ever gave me. Before I was old enough to go to school, but old enough to be allowed outside to play in the snow and the barn alone, Father was hauling wood with oxen from far up in the cow pasture woods, probably a mile from home. Mother let me out to play and I immediately set off to find Father and the ox team, which I did simply by following the well-used sled tracks through the deep snow. Father was so shocked to see me coming that he rushed the cattle home with less than a full load of wood, and Mother was very, very upset. She had not told me not to follow Father to the woods, nor had I asked if I could. It was only much later that I understood why it would upset her to have a five year old take off alone in zero weather through deep snow following a sled path into the deep woods.

Work in the woods went on from December through February. In late February or early March, through much of April maple sugaring took all the time and attention we could spare away from the barn. The ox and horse teams we used in the woods when there was enough snow for hauling wood or logs. All of our woods hauling was on sleds.

For hauling logs short distances with the horse team, we used a scoot, a very simple and cheap sled with wooden runners. The runners would wear out about twice each season. Father then would "shoe" the

scoot by cutting two hornbeam or beech saplings about four inches in diameter, chipping off one side of each with an adze or ax, bore holes in each with a 1 1/2" auger, and pin the new scoot shoes on with wooden pins. There was really very little metal in the scoot. The bunks holding the runners together and upright were bolted in, and the tongue to which the horses were hitched was cross-chained to the front of each runner. Otherwise, the whole rig was wooden. It was about eight feet in length, but would accommodate 12 to 14 foot logs loaded, of course, lengthwise. For sugaring season, a plank platform was placed on the scoot to hold a tank for the sap.

For hauling wood or logs with the ox team, we used either an ox sled or a dray. The sled was about as primitive and of the same size as the scoot, but did have metal runners. Fuel wood was always cut in four foot lengths and moved from the woods in that form. The wood was loaded crosswise on either the ox sled or the scoot.

The dray is best described as a slight improvement on the old Indian travois. The oxen were hitched to a short sled with runners about three feet in length and a single bunk across these runners. We called this sled a "bob." On the bob was mounted a rack of two timbers about twelve feet in length, and four to six inches in diameter. The backend of these timbers dragged on the ground. Two stacks of wood, one behind the other, were loaded lengthwise on this rack. As oxen have trouble holding back a heavy load which is pushing them down a steep hill, the dray worked well with oxen because the dragging timbers kept the rig from gathering too much speed down hill, even in "good sledding."

For hauling wood with the horses we usually used a "double-bob" sled. That is two short sleds hitched in tandem with a rack reaching lengthwise across both. The four-foot wood was then loaded crosswise. This rig pulled much easier, the horses could usually hold back a heavy load except on very steep hills and very slippery trails, so the double bob was much preferred to haul wood or logs longer distances. Where woods roads were icy and fast, on the steep grades, we had to help the horses hold back the load with a "bridal chain." This was a short chain around one runner of the rear bob sled. The braking effect of the chain would slow the rig down the steep hill, and then would be knocked off at the bottom.

Pictures you find of the big logging jobs in the era before tractor power will show two and four horse teams hitched to the double bob rig I describe, with huge loads of logs. Before my time, it was this rig that Father and Uncle Nelson Page used to haul wood across Lake Winnesquam ice from Chemung to Laconia. And it was at that time that Uncle Nelson went through the ice and drowned while skating back alone to Chemung across the lake.

While the double bob with rack was, in its day, the most efficient way of horse-hauling wood, the rig offered the potential for some interesting accidents. If you got off the woods trail on a side hill, the whole load would slide off on the ground as quickly as a load of hay would slide off a hay wagon. The back bob was attached to the front bob with a short tongue. On one memorable occasion, I was trotting the horses on a smooth snow trail and a full load of wood when the tongue on the back bob came loose and stuck into the ground. The effect was to

lift the front of the back bob up into the middle of the load of wood with great force. Sticks of wood went high in the air, some falling forward on me and the horses. Luckily, I was able to stop the panicked team before serious damage to them or to me. But it was a long job to reassemble the rig and dig all the wood out of surrounding snow banks.

Scoots, drays, double bobs, and ox sleds were the "big" items of woods equipment. Before we could use them, we had to get the logs or wood down and ready to haul the old hard way. Crosscut two-man saws, good sharp axes, a splitting hammer, splitting wedges, a saw wedge, and a peavey or "cant hook" were all we had. We took a lot of pride in those hand tools and in keeping them sharp. Father bought me a light 2 lb. axe when I was about thirteen which I proudly kept long after I was big enough to use a heavier one. I remember well the trip to the big Thompson and Hogue hardware in Concord when he bought the axe and ox shoes for my ox team of Hokum and Hooey.

For a day of winter work in the woods, we would leave as soon as milking and barn chores were finished after breakfast, usually Father and two or three boys and a hired man. On cold days, and those are the only kind I remember, Father would take the job of building a fire to keep the saw wedges (and himself) warm, would notch or scarf the trees for felling, but seldom if ever would take one end of the crosscut saw, or wield the splitting hammer. Those heavier jobs he always assigned to us boys. In my advancing age I have finally realized why Father then took the easy jobs. When I was fifteen he was already sixty, and rightfully saw no reason to try to keep up physically with younger men.

The winter of 1934 was one of record cold for the whole Northeast. It was that winter that hundreds of apple orchards were destroyed and never replaced. We worked in the woods every day during Christmas vacation, and for more than a week the temperature never got above 30 degrees below zero. Coming home across the open fields, icicles would form on the chins of the ox team and blowing snow would nearly blind them and me. For some reason, I don't associate that cold with pain, but only as a great accomplishment to work under those conditions.

Father was skilled with woods tools and careful with boys and teams. As a result, we never had any serious accidents or injuries. The worst I can recall was slipping on the ice while carrying my axe. The axe went up in the air, and the blade came down on the back of my right hand, cutting clearly through to the palm. Sister Jessie was at home and insisted I have a doctor stitch up the cut. I had such faith in her as a nurse that I just had her bandage it up. It healed readily and after fifty years the scar is hard to identify.

What I remember best with so much pleasure is the song of the crosscut saw as it cut steadily through a big hemlock and the ring of a sharp axe on a cold crisp morning.

Most of the logs we cut were softwood—pine and hemlock. We hauled them only to a point near a road where a truck could take them to a local sawmill. Some came back as sawed lumber for use on the farm, and Father usually depended on the slabs - waste from sawing logs - for much of the fuel to boil maple sap. In fact, we used much more slab wood than what came from our own logs.

When I watch men today work with heavy duty modern logging equipment, moving logs with giant mechanical lifts, I marvel at what we used to do with peaveys and cant hooks. The main idea then was never to lift a log, but always roll it, with leverage, positioning, and gravity on your side.

Fuelwood or cordwood as we called it was cut for both home fires and for sale. The big house was heated entirely with wood for many years. I would guess we burned as much as 30 full cords - 4 feet by 4 feet by 8 feet - each winter. And, of course, Mother's kitchen cook stove burned only wood too.

The winter's wood supply was hauled out of the woods and stacked in long piles during the weeks of good sledding, when woods roads were snow and ice covered. The four foot sticks were later cut to stove or furnace length with a stationary saw powered by a one cylinder gasoline engine. That old Fairbanks Morse engine was the only mechanical power used on the farm before we had electricity in 1928,and was still in use for some years after that.

A Fairbanks-Morse engine exactly like ours was used by engineering Professor Riley at Cornell for years and years to teach the principle and function of the internal combustion gasoline engine. Professor Riley made a whole career using it as a teaching tool, and will forever be remembered by all his students as Gas-Engine Riley.

The distinctive putt-putt-putt-cough-cough-putt of the engine's rythm is never forgotten by one who has heard it. We kids believed it produced the old rhyme that goes like this "Gene, Gene, made a machine; Joe, Joe, made it go; Frank, Frank, turned the crank; his mother came

out, gave him a spank and sent him over the sand bank!" And we grew up to learn that if you are not careful when you turned the crank, it could "kick" and break your arm.

Sawing up the four foot wood with that rig is really a three-man job. One man "feeds" or carries sticks to the saw table, a second "saws," or pushes the table with the stick against the saw, and the third "takes away" or grabs the piece cut off as the saw cuts through and throws it back to a growing pile. The man who "takes away" has the dangerous job, and some have lost a hand to the saw. Niece, Joan Bailey tells me that just this year she had the "take away" job in sawing their fuel wood. I'm sure their power source was not an old one cylinder gas engine, but I'm also sure the take-away job is still dangerous.

WHEN MAKING MAPLE SYRUP WAS A LOT OF FUN

Some of the hardest work, but surely the most enjoyable work I've ever done was at sugaring time when I was growing up. When we were tapping trees and gathering sap, the days were never long enough, the sap never ran fast enough, and our only concern was whether it would get cold enough at night and warm enough the next day to start the sap running from the trees again.

What is the earliest thing in your life you can really remember? For me, it is riding on an ox sled in a box brother Royal fixed just to fit me. I must have been three or perhaps four years old. It was sapping time and my box was in front of the sap tank on the sled. The yoke of white faced oxen had white tails and the box was so close to their back ends that a white tail would switch in front of my face. I specifically recall Royal telling me to sit still when the cattle pulled the sled up in front of the sheep pasture bars. There was a big maple at the bars and Royal stopped there first to pick up sap from that tree, which had three or four buckets. I also recall being a little frightened when the sled crossed the sheep pasture brook, for fear we'd get stuck in the stream. Of course, that brook was then and is now only a tiny trickle.

Our sugaring operations grew as I grew up. Through most of the 20s our sugar house, or sap house, as we called it, was the little building still located at the edge of the front lawn by the old farm house. We tapped some maples in what we called the sheep pasture, where Nathan Smith now sugars and more trees in the cow pasture, around where the

Gilford Methodist Church now stands. I suppose we had no more than 100 taps in the early and mid twenties. Father never allowed anyone to cut a sugar maple for wood, or to clear pasture land. Thus young maples grew and the sugar business expanded as they grew. I believe it was 1929 when we built the sugar house near where the Methodist Church now stands. From that time on through the '30s, the operations grew each year. I think we hung 1600 buckets at the time I was finishing high school and starting college. We rented perhaps three hundred trees in Sleeper's Woods, later owned by John Weeks, and in a lot a mile up the main road to Gilford village from our sap house.

Until after I went to college, all the sugaring work was done with one yoke of oxen and one team of horses, a great deal of "boy" help, and usually one hired man. Brother Forrest did about all of the boiling of the sap from the time we built the big sugar house until I was through college. During most of those years he was farming on his own, but made some financial arrangement with Father to be our expert in syrup making.

We boys were always in a hurry to get sugaring started, but Father's judgement on weather was good, and he held us back until just the right time to catch the first days of warming temperatures and with them the first run of sap.

The snow was sometimes very deep in the woods when we tapped. Often we would haul out the buckets on a toboggan and get them on the trees before we had to break snow trails with the teams. We had snowshoes but usually preferred to wallow through the drifts without them. When the first run came and we had to get a team through the sugar orchard to collect sap, we usually broke trail with the oxen. Cattle with just a

yoke on can be coaxed through deep snow easier than can harnessed horses. Anyway, for years our near horse was a gray mare who had an aversion to deep snow and would frequently fall down and get tangled in harness if the snow was deep.

Tapping always has been a most satisfying job for me. There is something special about picking out a good looking unscarred spot on the trunk of a sugar maple, turning the 3/8" bit into the sapwood, yanking out the bit, and then marvelling at the first trickle of sweet sap that appears. I think it is pure nature at its best.

Our sugaring equipment represented a big investment for Father, even though it was modest even by standards of the 1930s. Sleds and scoots drawn by the teams for gathering were the same as those used for other woods work. The evaporator, the gathering tanks, and the holding tank at the sap house were all of use only for sugaring. The evaporator was by far the most costly. I guess when new it equaled the price of eight to ten cows. The sixteen hundred buckets, bucket covers, taps or spiles, were all acquired gradually over a period of years, many second hand, and all carefully cared for, mended, and made to last. The fuel for boiling the sap was pine slabs - waste from local mills - acquired for about the cost of trucking it in to the sap house.

Over the years, we developed a retail market for syrup and sugar which grew fast enough to easily take care of our expanding operations. Much of the syrup was sold in Laconia, but a lot was shipped to long standing customers out of town and out of state, usually in one gallon lots. Father fashioned wooden crates to fit the gallon tins, and shipped

by railway express from Laconia. I think he liked the crating and shipping as much as any part of sugaring.

Some time in the early thirties, sister Edna got really involved in making and selling maple sugar, and maple cream. At one point, she was purchasing a significant amount of syrup from others in addition to using a lot of our production. In the process, she gained wide recognition in the maple trade. She also hosted "sugaring off" parties at our sap house on Saturdays and Sundays during the season, entertaining for groups as well as the general public. It was a lot of fun to show off for those city slickers from Boston and points south with my ox team of Hokum and Hooey.

We consumed an unbelievable amount of syrup and sugar at home. Until Father developed diabetes, he regularly consumed at least one dish of syrup with donuts to top off an already full breakfast. Mother used the darker or late run syrup to make "damp sugar" which she used in quantities for cooking. I remember Father telling me late in his life that at one time we used as much as thirty gallons of syrup annually at home in one form or another.

Certain it is that cash income from maple products that was tremendously important for our family over most of the period that the ten of us children were growing up. And maple season is remembered as the best part of all the farm work.

For the past few years, I've fooled around with friends Bob Story and Max Brunk tapping 100 trees at Max's Berkshire place. Our equipment is even more primitive than we used at home in the 30s. But I must say sugaring is still just as much fun. I guess it's true that you can take

the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy.

FENCING - A SPRING RITUAL ON THE HOME FARM

Pasturing cattle isn't what it used to be. Growing up, we couldn't wait for Spring to bring enough green grass in the pasture to allow us to get all the cattle out of the barn. Pasture season was from about the first week in May until after Columbus Day in October. During that period the cows in milk were in the barn overnight between milking, out all day. Nowadays, all the big dairy herds are kept in or around the barn all year.

Pastures for us were all acres that were not tillable. That is, too rocky, hilly, or wet to cultivate for crops. In practice, we fenced in all outdoors owned which were not suitable for crops, and called everything inside the fences pasture. Many of those acres were wooded and provided little or no feed for the livestock that roamed over them. The maple sugar orchard was all inside the pasture fences, as was the wood lot where the winter fuel supply was cut each year.

To keep cattle within the pasture boundaries for five and a-half months, fences had to be maintained. Every spring, before cattle were "turned out," the job was to tour the entire boundary of each pasture "fixing fence." That was always that first outdoor work following the maple sugar season. As soon as the sap buckets, sap tanks, and other sugaring equipment was washed up and put away, Father began planning for fencing. He liked the job, because it gave him a first hand review of all the property he owned. As he worked his way around the pastures and thus the entire farm, he was in effect, "Lord of all he surveyed." Further, late April and early May in Gilford was and is a great time to be outdoors and see things start to grow.

Much of what I know about trees and plants was learned from Father while we were fencing. I recall his stopping by a big yellow birch near the cow pasture fence, making a small cut with his axe, watching the sap spring from the cut, and telling me to sample the sweet birch sap with my fingers. Then he explained that unlike the sugar maple, birch sap would flow only briefly and in small amounts, and therefore was of little commercial value. Fencing was an occasion to visit the best springs in the pasture and to stop and drink the clear cold water.

Across the northwest corner of the cow pasture ran an old wagon road leading out of the Harriman property where an abandoned stone quarry had furnished stone for building the library in Laconia. Fencing across that old road, I used to wonder how that granite was cut and how it was moved.

The fence around our pastures was a combination of old stonewall and barbed wire strung on posts or on trees that happened to grow in the fenceline. Many farms at that period had solid stonewalls around most of the pastureland and fields. Father never built any stonewall, but kept up those that were there. One strand of barbed wire was sufficient atop most stonewall to keep in cattle. And for a single strand posts could be some distance apart and fencing was easy. Where there was no stonewall, three or four

strands of wire were the rule. Barbed wire lasts a very long time. As evidence, walking through abandoned farmland one often finds barbed wire still in place. Behind our house in Ithaca there is still barbed wire on the ground and in trees where no cattle have been pastured for many years.

For fence posts we used mostly oak, cut and split from woods near the fence as we went along. If no oak was nearby, we used pine or whatever was available. These posts lasted some time, especially the white oak, but each year a few had to be replaced. Sometimes barbed wire stands needed patching or splicing and wire needed stretching. In general, though, fencing went fast, even though a day of fencing had to fit between morning and evening milkings. A week was usually enough time to fence the two pastures at home and the pasture away from home where young cattle were pastured.

Our cattle seldom got out of the pasture and had to be chased down, and seldom did they get into our corn or hayfields. I have to think Father kept pretty good fences, and that as poor as our pasture grass was, what was on the outside of the fence wasn't enough better to excite our livestock about jumping fence.

We boys seldom went off fencing by ourselves. Father liked to fence, and if he sent us off by ourselves, we were out of his sight and likely to be having more fun than sticking to the job. On one occasion, Harold Graeme and I were fencing the sheep pasture. At a point near where Nathan Smith's sugar house now stands we could see all of the Oscar White farm, and we saw Oscar arrive with a truckload of small pigs. Oscar and the truck driver were well "oiled up." They attempted to back the truck up to an outdoor pen, drop the truck tailgate and let the pigs fall or jump off into the pen. In their inebriated state, they didn't get the truck positioned right, and as a result most of the pigs dropped off outside the pen. Oscar and his helper were in no condition to give chase. Harold and I quickly decided chasing pigs was more fun than fencing. After more than an hour of that exercise, we arrived home late for dinner with little fencing progress to report. As usual, Father's wrath was directed more at Harold than at me, but I got my share too.

On one occasion, Father found fencing was a way of stretching farm boundaries. At what we called the back of the cow pasture the fence ran through thick pinewoods on a line which ended up near the road which runs past the "flying diaper" church to Gilford village. The area was a long way from our farm buildings or anyone elses. Because the woods were dense, the area was seldom visited by cattle or people. Perhaps fifty yards deeper into the woods another fence ran parallel to ours. There was no evidence the area between the fences had been used by anyone for anything for many years. Father arbitrarily decided to knock down pieces of our fence and use the fence beyond to contain our cattle. I don't believe he knew who owned the property between the fences. From that point on, however, he considered that area in question <u>ours</u>, and because we thus used it for years after, I believe it was ours under the law of adverse possession. In over simplification, that law says that if one uses real property as his own for a period of years, and no one objects, it becomes the

property of the user.

Like all our other farm equipment, fencing tools were simple. We usually started off as a two or three man and boy team, on foot. We carried claw hammers, pliers and wire cutters, fence staples, one or two good sharp axes, an iron bar to start holes in the ground to drive wooden stakes into, and a sledge hammer or maul to drive in the stakes. Sometimes a boy would be sent home to get part of a roll of barbed wire to mend fence, or for a crosscut saw and splitting wedges to cut down some oak to split and make posts. But usually we made stakes and found wire to use for splicing as we went along.

Fencing was a job I didn't mind at all. Looking back, I realize it was among the best of the time I spent with Father. He was really very knowledgeable about all outdoors, and he was even better in the woods and pastures than he was in the crop fields. It would have been good if I had then known enough to appreciate what he had to teach me and how much he enjoyed doing it.

July 1993

From Strawberries to a College Degree

In round numbers, total cost for four years at Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences today runs around $50,000. Of course, many of this year's class of 1988 have spent far less than that due to scholarship assistance, work study and student loans. I am sure many have spent more than the $50,000. I cannot believe any of this year's graduating seniors have gone the route without a very significant input of cash from parents, relatives, or some outside source and incurring very heavy debt that will be a financial burden for a long period of time to come. When I entered Cornell in 1938, sale of the whole New Hampshire farm would have brought a small fraction of $50,000.

I didn't really give a lot of thought to where the money would come from for my college education until my junior year in high school. Even then, I figured on attending the University of New Hampshire at low cost, and perhaps with a football scholarship. In looking back, it is obvious that older brothers and sisters were preparing me. They expected me to go to college and were prepared to help in various ways with the cost. Father and mother, too, knew I was going to college but were not able to place a high priority on saving directly for the cost. Eight older brothers and sisters already had the equivalent of a college education. I have never been clear on just how that was accomplished financially, but I know it was with minimal cash assistance from parents and a great deal of

work and doing without by each of the eight. They all had a part in making it easier for me.

Income from sale of strawberries provided the bulk of the modest savings I compiled before entering Cornell in 1938. Strawberry beds for "Rob" were planted in 1936-1938 and berries harvested in 1937-1939, with income set aside for my college education. Size of the beds was less than a quarter acre and I can well remember where each of the three beds were located. As I recall, my total savings for the first two years was about $300. I do know that when I left for Cornell in the fall of 1938, after paying the enrollment fee, buying a few clothes, and taking a little cash with me, my bank balance was $250.

It is just impossible now to picture for my grandchildren how much hard work went into getting $300 in that way. Cash costs were almost nothing. Father bought the plants and of course prepared the ground with horse equipment. Cultivating, hoeing, weeding, fall mulching, was all hand work. Little if any fertilizer was used and no insecticides or pesticides. Baskets for the berries were the only cash expense. Selling the berries door to door downtown was no cost to me because father allowed use of the one family motor vehicle, and a sister drove while I knocked on doors. Prices per quart, delivered at the home, was from $.15 to $.35 but most commonly were $.20 or $.25.

Of course, the big operation was the picking. Sisters Jessie, Edna, and Ellen picked and picked. They were all much faster than I was. Father liked to pick from time to time,

perhaps because he liked to see the harvesting of a good crop of anything, maybe because he liked to participate in all the talking that went on among the pickers. I don't know why my sisters were so diligent, determined, and persistent in their part in "Rob's strawberries." I can only hope that the satisfaction they felt was half as great as the importance of the help they provided.

How far did the beginning bank balance of $250 stretch? When I started at Cornell, I had a non-resident tuition scholarship covering full tuition of $250 a year. I had a job waiting tables which provided three good meals every day. I soon found other ways to earn cash. A depression era government work program for students, National Youth Administration, paid $.30 an hour, and I landed such a job working for the beef cattle herdsman at Cornell, and earned $15 to $25 per month. In addition, I picked up odd hourly tasks at the University which paid the same rate -- $.25 to $.30 an hour.

My main cash outlay was room rent -- $4 a week at Mrs. Whitmans on Westbourne Lane for a room shared with Henry Little from Portland, Maine. Wages from my beef barn job more than covered that. Little cash was paid out for two trips home during the year. I either hitchhiked or caught rides with other New England students, often being met part way by a sister or brother. A sister would once in awhile send a $5 mail order. When one of those arrived, I thought I was really rolling in money. As a result of all this, when I came home at the end of my first year, my savings was the same as when I started -- $250.

After my freshman year, money didn't seem to stretch as far. I did wait tables all four years for just about all of my food costs. After Mary and I started dating, we ate out a few times. But we waited tables together for extra income at G.L.F. (now Agway) functions in downtown Ithaca, and made more than we spent on dates. I continued to work at the beef barn during my sophomore year, but after that did office work for my N.Y.A. government job.

There was more strawberry money to start sophomore year, but for the last two years of college, the money from home came mostly from other sources. Christmas vacation sophomore year brother Forrest paid me for skidding logs from his woods with the ox team. The next summer after we finished haying, Dennis Randlett hired me to help him on his haying, using our horses and haying equipment. My recollection is that I earned about $35 for each of those tasks. Of greatest importance, though, was the sale of my cattle. Father sold a Jersey cow that had been my first 4-H project, and I think the sale price was $75. She never was much of a milker. The only grand thing about her was her registered name -- Greyburn Gayboy's Golden Kip Jewel. I was very pleased to get the cash. During my junior year at Cornell, Hokum and Hooey were finally sold, as they had simply become too old, and were replaced with a fine matched pair of white-faced cattle, the last yoke of oxen father was to own. Sale of my ox team brought about $250.

To the best of my recollection, I have listed all the significant sources of income used to get me through four years of college. I left Cornell on April 1st of my senior year to take a job as Assistant County Agent in Livingston County, New York. Even though I finished only half the last term, I was granted my degree by Dean Ladd because World War II was in progress. I left owing no money. Looking back, it seems incredible that a college degree could have been had with such a modest outlay of cash. At the time, it just was not that unusual. Many of my college friends had no more than I did, and came from families that had less and were much less supportive.

The strawberry beds were a family project to get "Rob" through college. Although not nearly all the cash came from the berries, that project provided the big push. After the family strawberry effort set the pattern, there was no way I could have backed down or left college before graduation thereafter.

THE MOUNTAIN PASTURES, GILMANTON AND GILFORD

Driving the super highways and main roads of Central New Hampshire today, one sees mostly wooded lands and only occasionally open fields and growing crops. Even for those of us who grew up in the area a half century ago, it is difficult to remember that thousands of acres now wooded were fields and pastures much less than one lifetime ago. Driving the back roads where the old stone walls are closer to the road provides visible evidence that much of the land now covered with pine and hardwood was once field and pasture.

Much of Central New Hampshire was cleared and settled in the late 1700s and early 1800s by descendants of families who had farmed in the coastal towns for a century or more before. And much of the land thus cleared and farmed was allowed to return to woodland a century and a half later.

All during the period that these generally shallow and rocky soils were farmed, the farming units were mostly made up of small fields with limited capacity to produce hay and fodder to keep livestock through the long winters. Not only were the acres suitable for hay and other crops at a premium, but yield per acre was modest because the soils were largely thin and acid, and commercial fertilizer was not in use.

In order to increase livestock numbers which could be supported on modest production at the home farm, and to make some use of the large areas of nearby land not suitable for even hay crops, a common practice was to pasture livestock away from home for the summer months. Often all the cattle except cows in milk, working oxen, and calves were driven off

to a mountain pasture in early May and left there until just before first snowfall in October.

The mountain pastures were usually miles from the home farm—sometimes more than a dozen miles. Driving the cattle to pasture in the spring and home again in the fall was a great adventure for the family, and for the cattle as well. In those times all the cattle were confined in stanchions all winter, and when turned loose on the road were frisky, contrary, and hungry for the first green grass of spring. Their natural inclination for the first few miles of the trip was to leave the road at every open gate into field or woods at a dead run. The chasing to get them back on the highway was done on foot by the young and fleet members of the family. The roads, woods, and topography did not favor driving cattle on horseback western style, nor did most New England farms have the kind of horses, training, or equipment to do so.

At our farm in Gilford, it was common to start the drive to pasture in early morning, harnessing a horse to a wagon, leading the cattle to make the trip out in the road, and aiming the procession in the right direction. Boys, girls, and hired man, if available, would start the cattle, and Father would follow with the horse and wagon, bringing fencing materials and picnic lunch. The wagon on rare occasions had to be used as an "ambulance" to haul a younger animal that couldn't keep up or a younger child who got tired out from chasing cattle. Mostly, however, the wagon provided a seat from which Father could direct operations by shouting at cattle and kids whenever either strayed or lagged.

Father's voice was loud and strong, and was sufficient to exert his authority over both his children and his livestock without use of cuss words. He never physically disciplined us children, and seldom allowed his considerable temper to cause him to strike an animal. The drive to pasture, though, provided a severe test for his bullhorn voice, as cattle and kids often strung out for a quarter mile along the road.

We usually started from home with thirty head of cattle or more, and picked up more from neighbors with smaller farms who each had a few to go along to the common pasture. After the first mile or so the cattle settled down and did not as frequently leave the road, but if it was a very warm spring day, they would often tire after five or more miles and again try to dodge away at every chance. Kids seemed to tire at about the same rate, and by midday or early afternoon, the whole outfit-including Father's voice, were approaching exhaustion. During my early years, we drove to pastures only four, five and six miles from home. My older brother and sister, Esther and Royal, recall driving 12 miles. The six mile drive was more than enough excitement, and the trip over and back took the whole day.

During the summer, trips were made to the pasture about once each month to check cattle numbers, fences, grazing conditions, and to salt the animals. Cows expecting to calve or with a young calf born at pasture were sometimes driven home alone in mid season, as were steers who had grown big enough or fat enough to sell. These mid summer excursions often were difficult. Animals had lost some of their tameness and might be hard to separate from the herd and fractious to drive home on the road. Newborn calves had to be carried in a wagon. I remember

one experience well which will illustrate the difficulty. We were pasturing that year in the Steam Mill pasture, some six miles from home. Father decided in August that a pair of two year old steers should come home. As I recall it, he had a buyer for the steers and Father had described them to the buyer as "well matched and half-handy," meaning that they were look alikes in size and color markings and were partially broken to the yoke and to work. Like all good traders, he stretched the truth. They were well matched but had never had a yoke on. His idea was that he could catch up the steers in the pasture, yoke them there, have two of us boys drive them home in yoke, and upon reaching home after six miles, they would be "half-handy." With some difficulty we caught the husky steers, yoked them with more difficulty, and started chasing them up the road towards home. Whereupon, Father took off for home and left us boys with the steers. Of course, each steer had his own idea of the best route to follow. As a result, they continually tried to part company and take opposite sides of each roadside tree. Fortunately, the stout yoke withstood their efforts. But a large number of mail boxes along the six mile route were left flat or sent flying as the steers took opposite sides of the boxes. We boys simply hurried the steers along faster each time a mail box went down to get away before the farmer or his wife appeared. Father seemed very unconcerned when we reached home with the steers and the story of the fallen mail boxes. But I did remember that in the fall when we came along that road with the rest of the cattle, he did less of his usual visiting at farms along the way.

Esther tells another story about yoking steers to drive home from pasture. In that instance, as soon as yoked, the steers broke away on a

dead run, took opposite sides of a big tree at full speed, and broke the yoke in two. Only the few of us still around who have yoked a pair of big steers for the first time can fully appreciate the spectacle. I'm sure the steers went their separate ways with satisfied grins. There must have been lots of bellowing and bawling - not from the steers but from Father over loss of the yoke. And Esther and all other spectators would have laughed all the way home at site of each steer hauling half a yoke.

My brothers and sisters could add any number of stories about those spring and fall cattle trips. Esther and Royal, as the oldest, remember well the years around 1910 when our cattle were still driven from the Gilford Farm to my grandfather Smith's farm in Meredith. The Smiths left that farm around 1900, and it was used only for pasture in the next decade or two. The drive from Gilford to the old Meredith farm was through Laconia, across the bridge at Lake Winnisquam outlet up through Sanbornton Bay to Meredith Hill, a distance of over 12 miles. Esther and Royal recall a year when the bridge was being replaced at Winnisquam, and crossing was on a little ferry which would accommodate a horse and wagon, but not cattle. As a result, that year the cattle had to be driven around the north end of the lake, through Meredith Center, up through, what is known as Chemung to the old farm, a much longer route. That fall Esther's role was to drive the wagon following the cattle home, with a young colt which had been summer pastured with the cattle tied to the back of the wagon. Somewhere in the wooded area of Chemung, the cattle bolted from the road, chased by all the men, leaving Esther alone with the wagon. She must have been only twelve or thirteen, it was already

getting dark, the men were a long time getting the cattle back out of the woods, and on to the road. She still vividly recalls being awfully scared and alone on that little dirt roadway in the dark woods of Chemung.

Royal also has one vivid and unpleasant memory of those cattle trips to Meredith Hall. After getting the cattle up there in the spring, Father loaded the wagon for the return trip with a big wooden watering trough which had no further use at the old Meredith Farm, but which he needed at the Gilford Farm. Royal, being pretty small and very tired from the drive up, laid down in the tub to ride home, and remembers being very sick by the time they reached Winnisquam to cross on the Ferry. He still associates getting sick with sleeping in the trough, but like the rest of us, remembers the cattle trips as high points of the spring or fall events on the old farm.

Usually it was only the cattle that were summer pastured away. Horses were needed at home for summer work and the farmers who had sheep commonly pastured them at or near home because they were subject to predators if not where they could be watched. Brother-in-law John Weeks does remember a year his father drove their flock of sheep across the town of Gilmanton from the Weeks farm near Loudon Ridge to the Grant mountain pasture, probably about six miles. Cattle were seldom bothered by wild animals or dogs in our experience, although we did lose a pair of steers one summer when we were using the Will Harris pasture. That pasture included the acres now developed as the Belknap Recreational Area. Father thought he found evidence that the steers had been killed and eaten by a bear, although it is more than possible that they were

stolen. The loss was a particular blow to me because I had yoked them and played with them as calves, and they truly were more than "half-handy" and would have been ready for woods work that winter.

I well remember a spring fencing trip around the Steam Mill pasture with Father when we came upon the floating carcasses of two horses in the mountain pond. That pond can be seen from the top of Mt. Belknap and was at that time in what Father called the Willard pasture. Father speculated that the horses had been left in pasture too late the previous fall, that the pond had frozen, and the horses had come onto the thin ice to get to the water, and had broken through the ice and couldn't swim back to shore because of the ice.

But the losses of livestock in these summer mountain pastures was usually light or nonexistent, and they generally came back in the fall looking much better than when they went up in the spring. Even if the grazing was thin, it was often better fare than cattle were provided during the winter barn season. Winter feed for young stock consisted almost entirely of timothy hay or native marsh hay, cut very late and overly cured. That diet kept the cattle alive through the long winters, but didn't add many pounds or a lot of growth.

An unexpected early October snowfall sometimes found cattle still on mountain pastures. When that happened, all other tasks were set aside and we went for the cattle without delay. In the mid and late 1920s, we were pasturing cattle on Liberty Hill, only about four miles from the Gilford farm. In either 1927 or 28, when I was six or seven, there was an early light snow. Our cattle were pastured with Uncle Charlie Smith's cattle. The older children were in school or otherwise not available,

and the cattle had to come home that day, so I was elected as the chief chaser. Uncle Charlie had a voice even louder than Father's, but he was even less inclined to do any chasing. As a result, the trip home with the cattle from Liberty Hill in a light snow was accompanied by a great deal of hollering from the wagon seat by Uncle Charlie and Father, and a great deal of running by little me. Fortunately, it is mostly downhill from Liberty Hill to our old place in Gilford and the cattle behaved unusually well. Perhaps they were anxious to get into the barn out of the snow.

The Liberty Hill pasture was the site of the only serious accident I recall relative to summer pastures. In the summer of 1924, all ten of us children were still more or less at home. We pastured cattle on Liberty Hill, and included in the lot was a big Hereford bull. In mid summer, his services were needed at home and Father, brother Forrest, and some others went to the Liberty Hill pasture to catch him and lead him home behind horse and wagon. At age 4 I was too small to go. Father succeeded in getting a rope on the bull, but in some way got tangled in the rope and was dragged some distance. Forrest, about sixteen and always very strong, was able to overtake and extricate Father from rope and bull. But not before Father suffered broken ribs and other serious injury.

Imagine if you can the effect on a family of ten in having what most of us thought of as an indestructible Father brought home semiconscious and unable to work for several weeks. I still recall the pall that hung over the usually noisy home for many days, and the worry and foreboding that temporarily replaced the usual sense of total security the family

enjoyed. Esther, Royal, and the other older children finished up the haying and took over the milking and barn chores. Happily, Father was his usual healthy self by fall. But I do believe he was always there-after more careful in handling herd bulls.

The mountain pastures of the towns of Gilford and Gilmanton were mostly clustered about the Belknap Mountain range. Those our family used were in that group, with the exception of the old Smith farm in Meredith. In Gilford we pastured at Liberty Hill, west of Mt. Belknap, and later on the east side of the mountain in the Will Harris pasture - where the Belknap Recreation Area is now located, and the Steam Mill pasture, further south along the east side of the mountain range. The well-known Gilmanton pastures included the Grant and Plummer pastures and the Kelley and Jail pastures. The first two were located adjacent to the Middle Road which goes from Rt. 107 South of Laconia to Gilmanton Iron Works. The Kelley and Jail pastures were in the extreme northern end of the town of Gilmanton, right up against the Belknap range, and off the old Durrell Mountain Road, now open to travel for only a portion of its length.

The Jail pasture was so named because it was fenced by ledges and mountain cliffs on two sides, requiring man made fence only on the other two.

I don't believe any of the pastures I mention were more than five hundred acres. That is postage stamp size compared to the vast grazing areas of the Southwest and Mountain states. But to a boy searching for a new born calf well hidden by its mother, the pastures seemed awfully big.

Much of this pasture land came out of forest, was used only as pasture, and much of it had gone back to woods by the 1940s. Some

pastures contained several hundred acres, only part of which were cleared to provide grazing. Portions of some of the pastures - such as the Will Harris pasture - had once been farmed.

The fencing was primarily stone walls, laid up by hand, sometimes high enough to alone contain cattle, but usually topped by a single strand of barbed wire, or by poles and brush. Today it is difficult to comprehend the expenditure of back breaking labor used to lay up stone walls to serve as cattle fence. George Durrell, of the Gilmanton family for which Durrell Mountain and the Durrell Mountain Road were named, was reported to have been responsible for laying up forty miles of stone wall during his lifetime. A large portion of that endures along the borders of the old pastures, roads, and fields of the town.

The mountain pastures were often owned by others than those who used them. Father and Uncle Charlie Smith owned the Liberty Hill pasture together, but Father rented the Will Harris and Steam Mill pastures and paid the modest rental in cash or in cattle at year end.

In the 20s and early 30s, John Swain farmed on Union Avenue in Laconia - now in the middle of the city. He was limited in acreage there even then, and pastured cattle in what we called the John Swain pasture, less than a mile up the road from our farm in Gilford. For a time he even pastured his milking cows there in the summer months, going to the pasture twice a day to milk. With no refrigeration at the pasture, probably limited facilities at home, and sale of raw milk delivered door to door in town, it is interesting to speculate about milk quality.

Father purchased the John Swain pasture in the mid thirties, thus providing young stock pasturage close to home. That ended forever our

experience with mountain pastures and the great adventures of the spring and fall cattle trips. And by then most of the old mountain pastures were going back to woods. For about a century, they played an important role in the agriculture of New England and in the lives of the farm families of that era.

Making Hay the Old-Fashioned Way

An author named Klingenborg has written a book recently about haying. Klingenborg is a Fordham University professor who spent his early years on a farm in northern Iowa. He tells a very good story about haying today in northern Iowa, and in the high altitude ranching country in Montana and Wyoming. The process of making hay anywhere in this country today bears little semblance to the way we did it 50 years ago in New Hampshire. And, after reading Klingenborg's good book, I'm moved to reminisce about how we did it back then.

Klingenborg cloaks haying in an aura of rural romanticism, but I don't remember anything about haying that was fun. It was an all-summer job accomplished largely by "bull strength and ignorance." It lasted from about July 1st until sometime in September. It never had a certain ending date because father's decision about taking a second cutting on some fields depended on what that year's growth happened to be, how much first crop was in the barn, and I suspect to some degree, on how fed up father himself was with haying.

We needed hay to winter about fifty head of cattle and a team of horses. I suppose we put between 60 and 80 tons in the barn each year. Anyway, we always filled the barn but never stacked any outside, and I never remember any being sold or bought. There was always at least one "bay" left in the Spring at the end of the barn. Father's old story about the great hay crop year when they stacked all there was room

for outdoors and put the rest in the barn was certainly a tall story and nothing more.

By today's standards, our hay was of poor to very poor quality. It was predominantly timothy, a few acres of red clover, and usually a very few acres of oat hay. Oats were planted as a cover crop for new grass and clover seeding, cut in the milk stage, and dried for hay. It was all cut so late in the season that it was stemmy and of very poor quality. Today, farmers in the Northeast want to be through with first-crop haying by June 15th. We didn't start until July, and were still cutting first crop into mid to late August every year. Even so, it was the only feed for all the growing cattle and dry milking cows from late October, when they came off pasture, to early May, when they went back to pasture. Milking cows got the best of the hay, corn silage from two small silos, and purchased grain concentrate. Horses and working oxen got a little grain with the hay as did the calves.

As with all other field work on our farm, everything was done with horse, ox and man labor. And the horse-drawn equipment was even modest by standards of that day. Mowing was done with a two-horse mower, five foot cutterbar and of course no rubber tires. Hand scythes were extensively used to "mow out" fence lines and "runs," that is, swampy areas too wet and rough even in August to support a team of horses and a mowing machine. Probably the equivalent of twenty man days a year went into hand mowing.

Hay was raked with a one-horse dump rake into windrows. Usually, those windrows had to be turned by hand with a pitchfork at least once before the hay was dry. After that, the hay was heaped from the windrows and left in the heaps to cure slowly. The heaps -- 50 to 100 lbs. piles or stacks -- supposedly reduced spoilage in inclement weather, and hay was heaped only when it was clear that the hay could not be dried and put in the barn before rain came. We boys hated the heaping process because it added one more arduous time consuming dimension to the whole process of hay making.

The three-tined pitchfork was the universal implement for moving hay around in the field and in the barn, but there were others. In addition to the horse-drawn dump rake, we had a horse-drawn tedder to kick hay up out of the windrow to speed up drying. Father seldom used it, I think, figuring that the boys help in hand heaping windrows was about as inexpensive and more effective in the drying process. Also extensively used was the infamous "bull" rake and the inoffensive "hand" rake. The bull rake is a four foot wide wooden toothed affair with a bowed handle, pulled by hand, along a windrow. It quickly piles up more weight in hay than a strong man can readily handle. A boy of 12 or 14 doesn't manage a bull rake, it manages him.

The hand rake is about the size of a garden rake, but again with wooden pegs for teeth. Father usually had that rake in hand while the rest of the crew of men and boys was sweating and grunting with pitchforks and the bull rake. In

father's hands, the hand rake was a management tool used to point and direct, and to clean up "scatterings" as hay was pitched onto the wagon.

All our hay was hand-loaded and pitchforked onto old fashioned New England hay wagons. We never had a mechanical loader to load loose hay, and a hay baler never appeared on our hay fields until after I had finished college. Our wagons were iron tired: the horse-drawn wagon, four-wheeled and the ox-drawn wagon, two-wheeled. It took skill for the man or boy on the load to build a load of loose hay of even one ton which would hold together for the trip to the barn over rough fields and dirt roads. I believe even the real big loads were less than two tons. But when a load wasn't well built and slipped off, pulling the lost load apart and pitching it back onto the wagon seemed like pitching ten tons. Father never got madder nor shouted louder than when we lost a load. The man or boy who built the lost load was the object of his ire, and the butt of jokes from the rest of the crew.

When a load of hay reached the barn, the team pulled it onto the barn floor at ground level. A horsefork attached by rope and pulleys lifted the hay in 100 to 200 lbs. forkfuls to a track in the ridge pole of the three story barn, where it was pulled along the track to the desired spot, dropped on the third floor, and shoved by hand into a mow on the north or south side of the barn. Power to lift the horsefork was a single horse or a yoke of oxen when the horse was occupied

elsewhere. To draw the forkload to the top of the barn and then to one end required the horse or oxen to pull clear across the public road fronting the barn. That was no problem, as traffic in those times was minimal. But that task required a boy or a girl to ride the horse out and back for each forkload, or to drive the oxen out and back. Unloading took a man on the load to pull the fork back by hand and set it for the next load, a man on the third floor to shove the hay into the mow, and finally a man in the mow to level continuously. If not leveled by then, it was more difficult to do so later when a whole load was piled up in the mow.

There were haying jobs to fit everyone in the family, and as I grew I took my turn at all of them. One of the first tasks was turning the grindstone while father or older brother Forrest sharpened hand scythes and the mowing machine knife. The wheel turned very easily, even when Forrest put weight on the wheel to take out a big nick in the knife. But the job was very tedious for a small boy. Thankfully, Forrest rigged a small electric motor to turn the grindstone soon after electricity came to the farm in 1928, and hand turning was done.

At six, we were considered old enough to ride the horse for unloading hay and by seven or eight had a pitchfork to help turn windrowed hay. Very heavy clover would often clog the mowing machine, and a boy of eight or ten was required to follow the horse-drawn mower with a fork, to pull matted

clover off the cutter bar when clogging occurred. Jobs for small boys father could manufacture out of thin air. Giving water jugs to the men; minding a standing team while it was resting; running to another field to relay an order to the hired men; bringing the milking cows in from the pasture in late afternoon so the men could stay in the field for another load of hay; lugging the grease pail from wheel to wheel as wagon wheels were jacked up with the old wagon jack and greased; going to the toolshed for a new whetstone when one was broken whetting a hand scythe. The list went on and on. In father's eyes, all those tasks were important, so we too believed they were and shared the burden of haying.

At 14, I took over most of the "machine" mowing with the team, and thus never did get to be a real expert with the hand scythe. I was good enough, however, to astonish an Israeli farmer many years later on a visit to a cooperative farm in Israel. Thinking to stump a modern agricultural expert from America, the man handed me the scythe he was using to cut green millet for the farm's small dairy herd. I took two turns around the small field, cutting cleaner than he had been, and stopping once to whet the scythe in a professional manner just to rub it in. That was one of the few times in my whole year of work with Israeli farmers when I was able to impress.

Mowing with a horse-drawn mower cutting a five foot swath, it takes an awfully long time to lay down much hay, where the yield is less than two tons per acre. But it was

about the best of a poor lot of haying tasks. Father was not much of a horseman, and never had a really good matched team, but always had horses that were pretty easy to handle. Even with the steel wheels, the mowing machine seat didn't ride too bad. Once you put the cutter bar in gear and the team in motion, you really couldn't hear much except the regular clicking sound of the pitman rod geared to slide the knife back and forth at a rapid rate behind and between the fingers of the bar as they traveled slowly through the standing grass. You kept a sharp eye out for boulders that had to be detoured and didn't really do anything except in turning sharp corners, where you stopped the team, backed up a little, and started the team off in a new direction. There was a lot of time to dream about going swimming after milking, or Lefty Grove's last outing with the Red Sox, or how you could get father to let you try out for football when school started. When you stopped the team for a rest on a sunny July afternoon, you could look out over the overripe waving timothy heads and listen to the bobolink. And more than a half century later, the song, "Bobolink, bobolink, spink spank spink," still echoes when I think about haying.

I took my turn at building a load of hay and got to where I could do a passable job. I do well remember losing a load or two. Forrest was the best, and after he left home, the hired men and boys who followed never achieved his level of skill. Given a choice, I usually elected to "pitch on" rather than "load." It carried less responsibility, more

bull strength and gave you a feeling you had more control over how fast you could get out of the field and the hot sun. If two were pitching on, you could get ahead of the man on the load and he could get upset enough to heave a big forkful back on your head. On one occasion, John Chapley, loading, and Charlie Corliss, pitching on, got into a furious shouting match. Charlie yelling, "Come down here, and I'll stick you with this fork!" John replying, "Come up here, and I'll stick you and bury you in the load!" Neither had any intention of moving. I got to laughing so hard at the silly picture, and it was so hot and sweaty that pretty soon we were all laying flat out laughing. Father soon arrived to restart the loading process.

Most of the hay was hauled with the horses, but several summers Hokum and Hooey were brought home from summer pasture and put to work hauling with the two-wheeled hay rig, and pulling the hay fork rope to unload. Even in the late 1930s, there couldn't have been more than a dozen yoke of oxen used in haying in all of New Hampshire. The summer after my sophomore year at Cornell, 1940, Bill Slaight, beef herdsman at Cornell, stopped in August at the Gilford farm to visit briefly. I think he really came just to see me hauling hay with a yoke of cattle. It was that much of a curiosity, and is an indication of how outdated we were for those times. Father and I were the only ox teamsters. Hired men drove horses, not oxen.

There were some things that made the hot, sweaty, scratchy tedious job of haying the old-fashioned way bearable. Sisters were the biggest plus. Ellen, Jessie, and Edna were around for part or all of my haying summers, keeping thirsty men and boys supplied with cold drinks, lending a hand leading a horse to unload hay, running errands to save hours, worrying about a brother's sun-burned back, scolding about overdoing, making a boy feel more like a man. It was just very welcome then, only now do I understand how important it was.

In my high school years, there was transportation to go swimming at Paugus Bay or later Gilford Beach on nights after haying. That was a highlight. About 1939, father installed an outside cold water shower down by the cellar door. That I remember with as much pleasure as the swimming. After the last load was in the barn, a quick cold shower before milking, washing off the dust, chaff and sweat was worth more than the price of a Broadway musical today.

I enjoy painting father as a hard taskmaster. But he did a lot of things he didn't have to do to make haying bearable. Sending the boys to work in the fields, he would often go to town for some shopping, and come back with a treat. It is hard to beat the taste of cold melon cut in the hayfields after a few hours of work in the hot sun. I can still savor the taste, and clearly picture the look of satisfaction on father's face as he sliced it up.

and camp. The building was rough, but did have a stone fireplace and chimney and slept four or more. There was no inside plumbing.

The shoreline was rocky and muddy, and swimming was all from a raft. The only boat was a row boat made by father and Forrest, put together on the barn floor at home. It was very sturdy and lasted for years but rowed hard.

I learned to swim from the raft, simply by being pushed or thrown off by Forrest and Harold Graeme so many times that I got tired of crying for help and decided I had better thrash my own way back onto the raft. None of the other boys or men could swim well, and I suppose that is my excuse for never being anything but a side-stroke survivor in the water.

Fishing was the main activity in summer and winter. Pickerel, yellow perch, and horned pout were all quite plentiful. Fishing for brook trout at the outlet and down through the Hermit woods was slim pickings. I do remember father catching a 16-inch speckled trout at the outlet. If I remember it correctly, you can figure that the trout were mostly scarce and small.

Pickerel fishing was the most exciting, even though father did all the fishing. We boys rowed the boat along the shore, father casting in shore with a long bamboo pole, and skipping the bait back along the water toward the boat. Father sat or stood in the front of the boat, one boy paddled from the rear seat, another one or two dangled a worm hoping for a perch as the boat moved slowly along. Father's bait was the white of

the Perch belly, with two red belly fins attracting pickerel feeding inshore.

I don't believe I ever saw father catch a pickerel more than two feet in length, but one that size makes a loud splash when he hits bait on the surface. Father would get pretty excited and get all of us as excited when he had a strike. The best show I remember came with Del Page in the back seat, a big and lively pickerel on father's line, father shouting for help as he steered the fish toward Del's end of the boat. Just as father got the fish out of the water over the boat, the hook came out and the pickerel landed back in the water followed by Del. Both the fish and Del disappeared in four feet of water and Del reappeared holding the pickerel in both hands. Father exclaimed, "Godfrey, mighty boy, I never saw anyone move that fast in my life!" I'm not sure I ever did either. Father always enjoyed Del's company, and Del father's as well.

For a number of years, we made ice fishing trips to the pond. I think we only caught pickerel through the ice. Each of us was entitled to six tip-ups, but father usually stayed in camp and kept the fire in the fireplace going while we boys skated up and down the pond tending the lines. Bait was minnows purchased in the store at Mosquito Bridge in Winnisguam. With the wind blowing down the pond and the temperature below 20 degrees, the fishing holes would freeze over in 15 minutes unless the new ice was regularly broken and the hole cleaned regularly.

The fish I remember was the one that got away. I had a big pickerel on the line and up to the hole, but couldn't get him up through the small opening before his jaw caught on the ice and he broke free. All I was left with was a good fish story as a subject for the English assignment due in my junior high school class on Monday. Of course, the fish got a lot bigger between Sunday and Monday, and I got an "A" on my English paper.

Somewhere else I have recorded the story of Harold Graeme and his old Essex Touring car that he rolled over in the road on the way up to the pond one Sunday morning in July. There were no injuries to Harold and little damage to the car, and that was just another episode in the long saga of Harold's accidents.

On a number of occasions under Forrest's leadership, we set out to "line bees" at Robinson pond. That is a procedure whereby you attempt to follow wild honey bees to their home -- a hole in a tree -- and then steal their honey. Our attempts always started out well. Bees were easily found on goldenrod blossoms and enticed into a small box set on a four foot pole in the ground. The box contained honey or sugar and we would sight along the line the bee flew when he left the box and moved the box 50 to 100 yards along that line. Somewhere along that line as we moved the box closer to where the bee tree was supposed to be, either we would lose the bees or they would lose us.

After I reached high school, other interests took over, and fishing at Robinson pond didn't seem so attractive. With Forrest's permission (not mother and father's), the camp at the pond was used for some after high school games of boy and girl parties that we considered quite the thing.

The fishing trips to the pond provided wonderful Sunday relief during haying season for a number of years and were an important part of growing up. During those years, that activity was about the only recreation shared with my father, the importance of which is apparent to me now, but of course was not at the time.

OLD HOME DAY

Did you ever attend an Old Home Day? Unless you grew up in a rural setting, or now live in a small town or village, you probably never have. Sometimes a derogatory connotation is attached to the term "Old Home Day" or "Old Home Week," as in association with backward people and backward times. Well, for many of us rural old timers, Old Home Day brings back warm feelings. It was a day when little work as possible was done on the farm and all day and evening was given over to various fun activities and visiting at the village.

I suppose Old Home Day in Gilford was a regular summer activity long before I was born. Certain it is that my fond memories of the affair go back to early childhood. I was especially pleased when I was old enough to play in the baseball game.

The day's festivities usually started with a parade, followed by the ball game. The Mt. Belknap Grange always served dinner in the Grange Hall from noon until all were fed. That was followed with a speaking program of some sort, which I never remember attending. For many years a play was put on in the evening in the Town Hall.

In the 30's Gilford was still a very small village. The Sawyer farm occupies about all the acreage between the big Brick house on the East Side of the Main Street and the Cemetery, and the farm covered all the flat ground on the West Side. It was in Sawyer's field that the ballgame took place. Usually it was married men against the single men. The game was very informal with more talk than play, a lot of the play was "horse play." It started when enough men and boys had showed up to get going, and ended when everybody began to be concerned about how many of their favorite pies would be left down at the Grange Hall. Those of us who had agreed to wait table or wash dishes left the game earlier.

I don't recall that we ever put much effort into preparing for the parade, but I did drive a yoke of oxen over to the Village for more than one parade, usually just hitched to a cart and no effort put into making a float. In later years, the Weeks family put a great deal of work into parade preparation, building floats, and driving or riding horses and ponies.

The dinners were always well patronized, with just a great deal of good food, always including baked beans, brown bread, ham and pies from all the best cooks in the Grange. I liked the Grange dinners after I got old enough to serve tables and wash dishes. There was always good looking girls and young women to work with. Cousin Minnie (Page) Bacon was especially fun. As I joined the Grange in Gilford (Mt. Belknap Grange No. 52) at age 14, and paid dues for 50 years, I was a full-fledged member of the clan.

One highlight of Old Home Day was an evening stage performance featuring local talent put on in the Town Hall. This usually took the form of a play chosen with an eye to the limitations of the talent and props available. I had minor involvement for several years and a major role on a couple of occasions. The last was after my freshman year at Cornell. The annual stage production went on over a considerable period of years. I believe brother Royal took part before or while he was in College in the 20's, and brother Garder was involved after I finished.

There were not too many times I visited the Town Hall. I was too young to attend annual town meetings. and it was not used for many occasions where young people were involved. I thought at the time it was a pretty big auditorium. I suppose it seated about one hundred and fifty, on the long wooden benches Mary calls Grandfather benches. Of course the floor was flat, and we could play a small scale basketball game when the benches were cleared. The stage was raised about three feet, and there was enough space behind the stage for some movement of props and cast.

The summer of 1939 I played the lead in the play, but cannot recall what it was about. I do remember how much fun we had rehearsing for three weeks. Sister Edna was really the main organizer, as she was for several years. In 1939 we had a "professional" director. A man named Frank Pashley, a W.P.A. employee, worked with us. For that summer, the Gilford Old Home Day play was his full time job. Because there were so many Government make-work jobs in the Great Depression, we thought little of it at the time. But Father thought it was a terrible way to spend government money. Looking back, I have to agree. I think Edna knew more about play directing than he did. And besides, Frank was a real pain in the neck.

Though I don't recall anything about the play, I do recall that in spite of all the rehearsing and directing, we rally hammed it up. I even went on stage between sets to tell a story I had heard at Cornell. I do remember most of that story, now with embarrassment, for it is indeed corny. At least no one else remembers it after more than half a century.

On whatever August Saturday, Old Home Day occurred, it really signalled the beginning of the end of Summer. Haying was mostly done, and it was time to think about getting ready for school.

July 1993

MY ONE ROOM COUNTRY SCHOOL

On a recent trip to Pennsylvania, I noted that a one room country school there was inviting tourists to visit. It's well known that such schools are now so rare that they are a curiosity. But from my long ago experience, I think the teacher and the children have enough distractions without tourists visiting.

My first and second grade school years were spent in the little school house located within the boundaries of our farm and only some 200 yards from our house. It wasn't really a one room building, because in addition to the one "classroom," there was a hallway which separated the classroom from the woodshed and from the little boys' room and the little girls' room, which were just outhouses attached to the main building.

The classroom had the teacher's desk up front and a round oak wood stove near the front. First grade was in the front rows, working up to eighth in the back rows. As I recall, we had about twenty students in all, and some grades had none. The school yard was not very big, perhaps one quarter of an acre, but the outside play area was almost unlimited. Our cow pasture gate was right beside the school, and kids could roam over that pasture and our fields at lunch and recess.

My first grade teacher was Dorothy Hill from Belmont. Her brothers Arthur and Robert worked for Father on the farm from time to time. Dorothy Hill was stern enough to discipline the big boys from Stark Street, but Miss Adams, who came to teach second grade, had some difficulty with them.

I recall much more about what the higher grades were doing at that school than about what I did or didn't learn. I suppose it is natural that a first grader would be impressed with the ability of older kids to do the arithmetic problems on the blackboard and to recite, and to remember the teacher scolding Billy Hawkins and Dan Dockham.

We did have a lot of copying, reading aloud, and reciting of poetry. I was so fascinated with Longfellow's "The Village Blacksmith" that I can still recall some of those lines from memory, and as a 2nd grader, I wasn't even required to memorize it. The lines I liked best were "The Smith, a mighty man is he, the muscles of his brawny arms stand out like iron bands. His brow is wet with honest sweat, for he earns what'ere he can. He looks the whole world in the face, for he owes not any man." You see, in that time it was not very honourable to be in debt. That's the way the world was, and the way Mother and Father thought, in the day of the country school.

I can remember that we had time each school day to sing together. And I especially remember the Civil War songs, "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "Tenting Tonight." Why we learned those instead of World War I songs, I'm not sure. I suspect it was because the popular World War I songs were too robust and ribald for the teacher's taste. I'm sure Miss Hill didn't know "Mademoselle from Gay Paree."

The first athletic event I ever entered was in 2nd grade. The teacher arranged snow shoe and ski races as part of a modest winter carnival. I won the ski race, which was some 200 yards. I should have been disqualified, because my skis fell off and I had to pick them up and run with them for the last part of the race. A country boy's ski's then

were held on with just a leather strap over the toe of the kid's boot, and a strip of inner tube rubber from that strap around the boot heel.

The wood stove had to be fired regularly, and one of the bigger boys was always assigned the job. Because the wood was stored inside the building, it was a good chore and was given as a reward rather than a penalty or punishment. Seats near the stove were in demand, as it was pretty cold near the windows on many winter days. I remember a tea kettle always sat on top of the stove, but I don't remember what the hot water was ever used for. Of course there was no water piped into the school. Water could be hauled up out of the well out front, or carried up from our farm house down the road.

Perhaps sister Esther could tell when the school house was built, and I suppose town or county records would show when the school house lot was deeded off the farm property and when Father bought it back on. Not all ten of us Smith children attended school there. It closed after my second grade year and brother Gardner had not yet started school. It must have been closed for a period at an earlier date, because sister Ellen, who did go there, still believes her education was not as good as older sister Edna's, who she says had her early schooling in Laconia.

During my two years in the country school, about all the students came from Stark Street. Most of the Stark Street families, even in those days of modest incomes, were lower income families. Even though located in the town of Gilford, some were as close or closer to Laconia's Mechanic Street School in Lakeport as to our country school.

The school was closed permanently in 1928, after my 2nd grade year, I'm sure because it was cheaper for the town of Gilford to pay tuition to send the kids to Laconia schools. Stewart Vincent and I were sent to Gilford Ave. School, about a mile and half down the road from our house. The rest of the kids went to the Mechanic Street School in Lakeport.

Even though the Gilford Ave. School was not far to walk, the change was very difficult for me. No change in my life since then has been so hard. I was a little farm boy who had been pampered and favored by family and teachers, and I still recall third grade as the unhappiest year of my life. I had a very strict teacher, was behind the other kids in learning, and had no friends from the country school in my grade. Everything was wrong, including the lunches Mother sent. In the country school, I had always come home to lunch. My eating habits were terrible, and about the only sandwiches I would eat were peanut butter and jelly or fried egg. I've hated fried egg sandwiches ever since.

After a year or so I caught up in the class room and decided school in the big city wasn't so bad. Having enough kids for a baseball team helped. Also, having a French Catholic School over the school yard fence made school more interesting. They were the "bad guys": and throwing rocks and swearing back and forth made us feel better about our own school.

It's hard to realize that the town of Gilford now has a full fledged central school system with a high school enrollment in about the same size class as Laconia. In my 1938 graduating class at Laconia High School, I believe there were only four of us "Gilford townies" in the class of about one hundred fifty.

Our country school house remained unused for some time. There was a short period when a splinter religious sect used it as a meeting house. We called them "Holy Rollers." We kids believed they actually rolled on the floor during their meetings. As their leaders were respected farmers in Gilford, Father approved of that use for the building. I'm not sure whether he purchased the building before or after it was used for church meetings.

In 1947, I was discharged from military service, and took the Belknap County Agent's position that brother Royal was leaving. Mary and I then decided to make the old school house into our first post-war home. We spent all of $3,000 remodeling, including a heating and plumbing system. Peggy and Scott were born during the two and a half years we lived there.

Unlike Ellen, I don't hold any thought that my stay in a country school permanently shortchanged my education. By the time I graduated from Laconia High School I was already educated beyond my intelligence. I didn't wake up to that fact until after I had three degrees from Cornell University, and by then it was too late to do anything about it. It's fun to be able to brag about the good old days of the one room country school, but I'm thankful my children had and grandchildren do now have educational opportunities that are so far superior.

HOW RICH I WAS IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION

The Great Depression of the 1930s is ancient history to all except senior citizens today. But to those of us who experienced it and who grew up during that fateful period, we will not forget the impact that it had on our lives. Nor do we need to look far to see the lasting influence it has had on our society and economy.

To many older folks, mention of the Great Depression brings immediately to mind economic and personal catastrophe and ruin. Family fortunes lost in a day. Secure jobs gone, followed by long periods of unemployment. Participation in government "make work" programs was the only way to bring home bread. To a fortunate few of us, talk of the Great Depression is a reminder of how well off we were when so many were suffering.

I was nine when the stock market collapsed in 1929. As the ninth of ten children on a rocky hill farm in New Hampshire, one might think the Great Depression would have done us in. In fact, we were so much better off than most of the other families whose children I knew that for a long time I really thought we were rich.

Our comparative well being requires explanation. Of course, our income from sale of farm products must have decreased, but it definitely was not cut off. Prior to 1930 we sold our dairy products to individual families—door to door— and to two or more small grocery stores where in turn staples were purchased. Dairy products sold included raw milk, cream, cottage cheese, butter and eggs. The dairy was taken over in 1930 by brother-in-law John Weeks, so from then on, our milk was all sold to him. Maple syrup and sugar was the next most important income

source. Income also came from the sale of a few meat animals each year, and from sale of fuel wood and occasionally lumber. Income from vegetable products was minor but I'm sure important. Sweet corn, potatoes and strawberries were sold, never in great quantities. All of that seems now to add up to only a very small income to keep a large family, and I'm sure it was.

Both Mother and Father were always very careful with money. Looking back, I think Mother was the more frugal of the two, spending almost nothing on herself, and making the food produced at home go a very long way towards feeding us all. One of the reasons I thought we were well off was that we ate so well. Lunches we carried to school were as good as any kid had, and better than most. In fact, some had no lunches, and mine were frequently stolen. Mother fixed that by planting Exlax in my sandwiches and having me leave them where they would be stolen. After that they left the Smith kid's lunch bag alone.

Even though we sold our farm products at terribly low prices, everything purchased was at the same low level. A gallon of maple syrup sold for three dollars bought flour for an awful lot of bread, and a fat calf sold for five dollars brought home a lot of peanut butter, fish, and the store bought meat used to piece out that grown at home.

Mother's frugality is well illustrated by the mackerel story. A fish truck came by our house once each week. I suppose he got his fish each day right off the morning "milk train" from Boston, because it was good fresh fish. I can remember when he came with horse and wagon, but by the time of the great depression he drove a truck, and I always believe Mother enjoyed bargaining with him. His fish were iced in

barrels, and in warm weather by the time he reached our house where was more water in the barrels than ice, and sometimes not too much fish left either. One day Mother asked for a mackerel, and old Ed reached his arm in the barrel of ice water, fumbled around a while, and pulled out a mackerel and said "Winnie that one is just the right size." Mother said no, she needed a larger one. Again Ed reached in, fished around, and pulled out a fish. By this time Mother was well aware it was the same fish and the last one in the barrel, but Ed said "Well Winnie, this one is much bigger, you'd better take it." Mother without hesitation said she would take them both. Ed knew he was hooked, they both had a good laugh. Mother made do with the small mackerel and Ed took something off the price.

Mother fed us so well that I never even thought about people going hungry, but Mother did. She worried about the neighbors' children, and for a long time would invite children from a big family further up the road to stop in on the way home from school for something to eat. She could and would feed a lot of extra people with little or no advance notice. I remember a big winter storm when the town snow plow crew of six or eight were trapped at nightfall down the road a half mile and Mother and my sisters put out a huge bean supper for the whole crew.

I'm sure a major reason why I felt so secure in the Depression was because of my position in the family. I was always pampered and protected by eight older brothers and sisters, and even had a younger brother to pick on. When the Depression came, several of the older ones were out on their own, and their memories of those times are probably more harsh than mine. I never have understood where the money came from for

all of them to get a higher education. I know they all worked very hard. Having never known anything different, I guess we all accepted hard work as almost a privilege rather than an unfair burden.

Mother had some rental income from an apartment house she owned in Laconia. That house came to her from Grandfather Page. I think that modest income was used mostly to help some of my sisters with school and college expenses. I suppose another reason I thought we were well off is that major money matters were never discussed in front of the children.

When the farm was purchased in 1900 the lumber was immediately cut off, and the sale must have at least partially paid for the farm. I'm sure there was very little debt at the time I came along and I think none at the start of the Depression. A small worry was planted in my mind when, at the age of 5, I overhead a night time conversation between Mother and Father about a mortgage of $850. I obviously didn't know what a mortgage was nor what that amount of money meant to them. I did understand that they were quite worried so I worried too, but never again heard anything more about it. Certainly the absence of debt was one reason why we were fed and clothed well in the Depression.

Farm expenses were very modest. We did not grow much of our feed grain and buying grain for eighteen to twenty milk cows was the largest single farm expense. But our cows were never great producers. Father was a light feeder, and animals not in milk got no grain anyway. We had no tractor, and gas for the family station wagon at 12 cents a gallon was no big deal. Horse harness, ox yokes, and iron tired farm wagons cost very little to maintain.

Father hired farm help after brothers Royal and Forrest were gone from home. But it was always at very low cost. For harvesting corn silage in the fall, I well remember he paid men a dollar a day for some years. Much of the firewood we sold during the early 30s was cut by old Mr. Hall, working alone in the woods. He was paid one dollar a full cord for cutting, splitting, and stacking the wood in four foot lengths.

I don't remember having a regular allowance or being paid regularly, but somehow I always had a little spending money. Being able to buy a nickel candy bar at the store across the street from school at lunch time set me apart from many of my classmates in the early 30s. I know I had better shoes and clothes than many of my school friends. Laconia was a factory town, and at times I was teased for being a farmer, but as the Depression progressed, most of the kids I went to school with came to realize our family was better off than theirs. In 5th and 6th grade at the old Gilford Avenue School, I was on the baseball team. In fact, we wouldn't have had a baseball team if I had not been on it, because most of the time I was the only kid with a baseball and one of the few with both a glove and a bat. I remember once Leo Morin hit the ball so far it went into the brook behind the school and was carried away. We thought the season was over. Fortunately, Leo's father worked at the mill downstream, and rescued our ball the next day when it floated under the mill and caught in the screen. I know I did feel rich as the only kid with a ball in good enough shape to use in a game. Besides, it got me elected captain. But it also carried responsibilities. I had to call the other grade schools in town and schedule games, and at age

twelve I hated to use the phone. Then too, Father always growled and sulked when I played ball after school and got home late for milking.

By the time I reached high school in 1934, my world was big enough to bring realization that my family was definitely not rich. It wasn't until I got to college that I came to see that our old Gilford Farm was not the greatest farm in the world. But as long as I live I shall continue to believe that I had the best of all worlds as a child in the Great Depression.

WHEN WATER USED TO RUN UPHILL

Of course water doesn't run uphill. But I used to think that at our Gilford farm it did, because a major source of water for our farm was a spring located way up in the pasture. It seemed to me the pipeline had to climb a long way up out of the pasture before it started downhill to the buildings.

When the farms of New England were first cut out of the woods, a reliable source of water influenced the location of buildings and farmsteads. A good supply of pure water is as important today as it was then, but until the last half century, the means to bring water to the farm buildings where people and livestock could use it was pretty much limited to forces of gravity or hand pumping and hauling. When farmsteads could be located so that water would run to them and pumping or hauling could be avoided, a tremendous saving in time and energy resulted. As a result, the buildings on many old farms are found at streamside, and many many more are located downhill from good natural springs.

Where a good water supply could be located fairly close to the surface, dug wells from ten to forty or fifty feet in depth were the main source of water for the farm. Many of these wells were at higher elevation than the farm buildings, and water could be piped from the shallow wells as well as from natural springs directly to the buildings. Even so, until electricity and electrically powered pumps came to New England farms toward the end of the first quarter of the 20th century, a great many farms had to pump water by hand from wells at or near the house for both family use and livestock use, or drive livestock to the nearest stream.

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At our farm in Gilford, we had no drilled or artisan well, and depended entirely on a unique gravity feed system. I suppose every farm had a "unique" water system. Certainly each was adapted to the available supply. "Running water" was the term applied to those gravity systems where water reached the point where it was used in house and barn without pumping or carrying. And those farms with a running water system were greatly envied by those without it.

We had running water long before we had electricity to pump it. It worked very well, bringing sufficient water for a very large family and fifty to sixty head of livestock.

Water ran into the house with enough pressure or head to be piped to the 2nd floor, where Father had installed a copper-lined storage tank of perhaps 100 gallon capacity. This tank fed the kitchen sink and the one downstairs bathroom. We thus had inside plumbing at a much earlier date than we had electricity. There was a pump at one end of the iron kitchen sink where water could be pumped from a shallow well for some years after running water came from faucets over the sink.

Water was also piped directly into the milk room, where it flowed into a cement tank where milk could be cooled in cans. Water also ran directly into the barn basement, into a large concrete tank. That big old tank was the scene of a lot of activity. From early November to late April all cattle except very young calves were tied in place in the barn. Until individual drinking cups were installed in the mid-thirties, all the cattle had to be let loose in groups to go to the big water tank for water each day.

The milking cows were stanchioned on the 1st floor, as with most New England dairy cows in those days. They were let loose in 3s and 4s to walk down a cleated ramp (we called it a "shute") to drink at the tank. As it was their only daily exercise, they were often reluctant to make the trip in a hurry, and it took some shouting and prodding to avoid using half a day to water the cattle. The herd bull was always kept tied in a basement stable. Too often we had an ugly and mean bull,and getting him to the watering trough and back each day was an experience.

The old watering trough often contained a fish or two that one of us boys had caught and wanted to save a while. A trout would usually live only a few days in the trough, but a horned pout would survive indefinitely. When Father had to replace a bow for an ox yoke or steer yoke, he would soak the green wood in one end of the trough, putting a little more bend in the bow each day.

Our water came from two sources. The first was a pair of dug wells located perhaps 150 yards uphill from the buildings. These were piped together so that the supply from both was brought to the buildings in one pipe. The second source was a spring located way up in the pasture behind our upper field. I recall Father giving the distance as 1400 feet, but it seems to me it was further. Water was piped all the way from that spring to the buildings. Although Father assured me it was downhill all the way, it seemed to me the pipeline had to climb a long way uphill out of the pasture before it started downhill.

The supply from the dug wells was insufficient for our needs, and dropped to a trickle after a long dry spell. The spring way up in the

pasture never went dry, but the flow did drop off and cause some concern in very dry weather.

Because of severe winters, the pipe had to be buried pretty deep to avoid freezing. On one occasion the line to the dug wells was dug up and replaced. Father hired two men of French Canadian background to do the digging. They were short of stature and digging in the trench their heads were barely visible. And could they ever dig! As the time was the early thirties, I'm sure Father paid them about $1 a day, but they seldom came out of that trench except for dinner at noon. Digging in hardpan soil with pick and shovel is about as hard physical work as can be found. Of course, all ditching is done by machine today. In 1984, I had a bulkhead dug for our Ithaca home. After waiting two months for a backhoe that never came, I hired two carpenters to dig it by hand. It took them three days and they ended with blistered hands and lame backs. Those little French Canadians Father had in the 30s could have easily done the job in half a day. You could not hire men to dig that 1400 feet to our pasture spring today for any amount of money.

The pipe to the dug wells was replaced because it was lead and had to be replaced with copper pipe. Most of the years our family of ten was growing up we were drinking water coming a long distance through lead pipe. Why we didn't all die of lead poisoning I don't know. Sister Esther recalls that the family doctor finally decided Sister Jessie did have lead poisoning, and that was the reason to replace the lead pipe to the dug wells. Perhaps we all suffered from lead consumption and didn't know it. I do recall the basketball coach at Laconia High frequently

accusing me of having lead in my feet when he was trying to get me to move faster.

On one memorable occasion our water system failed. In late winter, water suddenly stopped running into the barn basement tank. The line to the house kept running. We had fifty head of cattle to water and it was cold with a lot of snow on the ground. The stream at the far end of the farm beyond where the Gilford Church now stands was the nearest available source not frozen over. As we could not drive the cattle that far, we had to haul water to them. And haul we did, with two yoke of oxen using tanks from our maple sugaring operations. After just a few days, Father got the water running again, but those few days seemed like an eternity, and gave me a lifetime appreciation of the importance of a dependable supply of good pure water.

HIRED HELP ON THE OLD FARM IN GILFORD

There were four boys and six girls in our family and some of my sisters did a lot of barn and field work. Thus, there was very little outside help hired until the older children had grown and left home. But by the time I was six or seven my older brothers were gone and Father was frequently hiring some help. For very brief periods, Mother even had some help in the house, in spite of her incredible capacity for work.

Those hired for more than a day lived with us and were pretty much treated as family. They were all of good moral character and were for the most part a good influence on us younger children. Mother would not have housed and fed any bad actors. Even so, some of the people hired were memorable characters, and are easy to recall and describe after more than half a century.

Some were hired for a day or so for special projects. Father didn't like to butcher, and usually hired one of the Beans - Arthur, Clarence, or Harry - to come for a day and butcher hogs. Arthur was a sad faced man who loved Mother's cherry pie, and we used to marvel at how fast he could eat three pieces. He kept a very sharp pocket knife used to shave an apple or a pear into thin slices to eat. It was a long time before I realized that he had few teeth, a fact which strangely affected his speech as well as his eating habits.

I was not permitted to witness the hog killing when I was small, and when I got home from school on butchering day, the snow in front of the barn was red with hog blood and the carcasses hung over the barn floor.

We had two small silos to fill with corn each fall, and lacking all of today's harvesting equipment, Father hired help by the day to get in the corn. Big Bill Fountain was one to remember. On a bet, he proved he could cut two rows of corn clear across the field while the rest of the crew cut their one row. After proving his point, though, I well remember he slowed down to the same pace as the rest, perhaps because he was paid the same - a dollar a day and his dinner.

One of my favorites was Arthur Hill. The Hill family farmed in Belmont and Arthur "came to help" for various periods over several years. His sister Dorothy was my first grade teacher in our one room school. Arthur was a great whistler and could whistle "The Irish Washerwoman" and "On Pretty Red Wing" in great style no matter how strenuous the task he was performing. Although he never could teach me to whistle well, he did teach me a lot of good work habits. We never thought of him as a hired man, just as someone who came to help.

Some who came were reclamation projects. Harold Graeme came from a broken family to live with us when he was twelve and I was eight. From that time on he had no other home until he finished college and had a family of his own. Harold was very bright, very energetic, and small. And he was accident-prone. Because he was always getting into scrapes, Father had little patience with him, and gave him the worst chores and me the best, but Harold never complained. One summer he ran his hand into a pulley while unloading hay and was laid up for weeks. Another summer he cut his thumb almost off on a hand scythe. He mowed into a nest of hornets, started to run away, and fell over the scythe. He and I were alone a long

way from the house and I was sure he would bleed to death before I could get help. But he was indestructible.

Another summer Harold decided to earn spending money trapping skunks and skinning them. He was so successful in catching skunks that he smelled like one most of the time. My sisters made him sleep in the sugar house, and for a time wouldn't even let him eat at the table. He managed to buy an old Essex car when he was sixteen. We called it his Ess ache, except we substituted an "A" for the "E". It was a truly square car, and within two weeks he managed to turn it over in the road, where we came upon it sitting on its square top, wheels still spinning in the air. We expected to find Harold dead or dying, but again he survived with no lasting injuries. Harold went on to college and a career in education. We like to think we made a success of him by providing him with a good home, but I'm not sure he didn't do more for us than we did for him.

Other boys worked for us and lived with us all the time I was growing up. One winter there were four of us boys with mumps at the same time. Mother put us all in the big bedroom and waited on us patiently for days, listening to our moaning and complaining. That big bedroom is still called the South Chamber, and was the scene of many escapades. The mumps session ended abruptly when we got into a tremendous pillow fight, spreading feathers all over the room. Mother sent us all to the barn for chores that afternoon and back to school the next morning.

We did have one or two real losers among those hired to help. Charlie from Meredith Center was one. He moved so slowly, we sometimes wondered if he was still breathing. I could milk three cows while he milked one, and it took him almost to noontime to harness a team of horses. Mother wanted

the men at the dinner table promptly at noon, and Charlie tried his best to oblige. One day while discing he heard the noon whistle blow at the mill downtown, and unhitched the team, at the far end of the field, leaving the disc a half mile from the barn. That finished Charlie, and Father sent him home at the end of the week.

Another memorable mistake was a man we called "Pouty." His favorite food was horned pout (catfish). And his only subject of conversation was fishing for horned pout. When possible, he would fish most of the night and doze most of the day. He didn't last long at our house either.

Mr. Hall was a most remarkable man who worked for Father cutting wood for more than two years. He was probably well over sixty when he came to work for us. He had previously owned a small farm but in some way had lost it early in the '30s. Father paid him one dollar per full cord (four feet by four feet by eight feet). He worked alone in the woods with an axe, a one man cross cut saw, a splitting hammer, and wedges. Each morning he walked to our woods from downtown where he lived, carrying his lunch bucket, and walked home each night - between 3 and 4 miles round trip. He could put up about a cord each day. Father was very demanding in measuring up the wood piles, and sometimes complained about "too much limb wood, not enough cleft (split) wood." Only rarely would Father have us boys give Mr. Hall a little "free help" in splitting or on the end of the crosscut saw. On the other hand, Mr. Hall was always ready to help me if I got my ox team and sled in a tight spot when yarding out the wood.

Nowadays, when I'm having fun working up a little wood with a chain saw, or splitting it with a power splitter, I appreciate how terribly hard old

Mr. Hall worked to earn his dollar-a-cord using only hand tools. And, oh, how badly he must have needed those few dollars each week in order to eat.

Mother put up with all the extras Father had around to help, but seldom had a "hired girl." Even after my sisters all left home, there were not many years when Mother had house help. About the time I started school Mrs. Johnson, who was very Swedish, came on washing days for a short time. When I was in high school, Dorothy, who came from a very large family up the road, lived with us at various times, and went to school too.

All in all, I don't think my father was overly difficult to work for. I suspect he had a reputation of not paying very well, and I think he liked to bargain on rate. He liked to tell about bargaining with Sam, who was from a large French Canadian family. Father made an offer of $5 a week and board. Sam said no, he had to have the $5, board, "and ironing." Father, knowing Sam's wardrobe consisted of two pairs of bib overalls and two flannel shirts, was nonplussed. But they haggled over the ironing a while, and when Father agreed it would be included, Sam came to work very satisfied with the terms. Mother afterwards concluded that Sam, whose primary language was French, somehow confused washing with ironing. At any rate, wouldn't any farmer today like to settle the question of fringe benefits that easily when contracting for hired help?

GROWING UP WITH A YOKE OF OXEN

For many years, I have jokingly claimed to be the only ox-teaming college professor in captivity. Growing up on a New Hampshire farm in the 20s and 30s, I did drive oxen to yard wood, skid logs, and haul maple sap in the winter. In summer, we used oxen to supplement available horse power in hauling hay wagons and occasionally for plowing with a single bottom walking plow.

There may be others in my profession who had similar experiences, but to date my claim as the only professor still around who has driven oxen has not been challenged.

There were not many farms left still using oxen for draft as late as the 1930s, even on the hill farms of New England. Father used them because he liked oxen, was not a very good horseman, and did not adapt well to things mechanical. Also, the amount of work we did in the woods was conducive to using oxen. There was not a tractor on the farm until the 40s. Even when driving a car, Father seemed to want to pull on the reins to stop instead of stepping on the brake. Right up to his eightieth year, long after he was actively farming, he had a yoke of cattle in the barn, using them occasionally for light work around the buildings. My favorite picture of him is one taken about 1955 with the last yoke of oxen he owned. They were a beautifully matched pair of white faced four year olds, and in the picture are hitched to the two wheeled ox cart we used at home for so many years.

I had my own yoke of oxen that I literally grew up with. When I was five I learned to milk on a gentle old white faced cow that was an "easy" milker, didn't give much milk and was used mostly to nurse calves

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born to other cows. In the spring of 1927, before I turned eight, "old white face" gave birth to twin bull calves. When I came home from school that day and ran into the house for the usual milk and cake mother always had ready, she told me to get to the barn quickly because Father had a surprise for me. When I got there, Father showed me the twin calves and said: "Well, you've been begging for a pair of steers of your own--there they are."

The calves were not identical twins. Their color markings differed, from birth on there was a noticeable size difference, and they differed markedly in temperament as well. All those differences made them much less than an ideal pair, but because they were my own, the differences didn't seem to matter. My older sisters were much amused at my devotion to the task of training the calves and sister Edna named them Hokum and Hooey. At age seven, I didn't attach any significance to the names, but in retrospect, I guess those names were appropriate, and at least quite different from names commonly given working oxen in those days, such as Buck, Star, and Broad. At any rate, the names stuck for the fourteen years they were around. Hokum was the near or left ox in the yoke and had spots on his white face. Hooey was the off or right ox and had a clear white face. Hokum was bigger. We commonly yoked the bigger ox on the off side, but I started Hokum on the near or driver's side because he was from the start more difficult to control and command. Father once described the team as a "willing" pair. He said the off ox was willing to do the work and the near ox was willing to have him do so.

I first yoked the steers before they were a month old, and by fall of that first year had them hauling around a little drag or stone boat

of planks about four feet long and two and a half wide. Father and Mother thought up things for me to pull around with the calves to make me believe I was getting work done. I remember hauling potatoes up from the field a bushel at a time. One of my daily chores was to fill the wood box for Mother's kitchen cooking stove. It opened into the kitchen on one side and into her back washroom on the other. The calves and I were so small I would drive them through the door into the washroom dragging a load of wood. Of course, it would have been easier and quicker to carry the wood in, but Mother praised me and the calves, and once or twice let the calves right into the kitchen, yoke and all.

The first winter the calves were too small to go to the woods with the working teams, but Father did toggle up a little "calf sled," not much bigger than the old, man-pulled hand sleds you now see in antique shops. He again thought up a few chores I could do hauling with the calves and sled.

When yoked as small calves, a halter was used on the near calf, so the pair was more led than driven in training. But the halter was soon discarded and I don't recall even putting a halter or rope on either Hokum or Hooey after they were four months old. We never used a whip to drive our oxen, instead depending entirely on a "goad stick." This was a straight four or five foot ash or hickory round stick with a sharp half inch nail protruding from the end. Well trained cattle respond to "Gee," right turn, or "Haw," left turn pretty well. But a light tap on the nose of the near ox and a light prod on the rump of the off ox with a goad stick brought quicker and surer results for left turn than a command of "Haw To," the opposite of which was "Gee Off."

Of course, my calves matured much faster than I did and were full grown working oxen at age 4. They were castrated the first winter to become steer calves instead of bull calves, and the yokes, sleds, carts, and loads were upsized as they grew. For a few years, Father or the hired man worked them more frequently than I did, but they were well trained and never outgrew my boy-sized ability to manage them. By the time I was in Junior High School, I was going to the woods alone to "yard" fire wood out to the highway for sale, during winter vacations, and was the main ox-teamster for hauling sap in sugaring season.

I earned my first two dollar bill with my yoke of steers. The dirt road by our farm got treacherous during spring thaw, and unwary motorists sometimes became mud bound. When not in school, I was allowed to pull cars out of mud holes with my steers. Often I only got a "thank you" in return. But on one occasion a man with a new car was so impressed with a small boy and his big steers that he forked over a two dollar bill. If you consider that at the time Father was paying a dollar a day for farm help, you'll understand my excitement over the two dollars earned.

My oxen were well trained and where woods roads or snow trails through the fields were well established, I usually rode on the sled rather than driving, walking by the head of the near ox. They would also follow a ploughed furrow readily, allowing the man holding the handles of a walking plough to direct them from that position. Skidding or drawing logs out of the deep woods to a skidway for loading onto sleds was a regular winter job. Hokum and Hooey would follow a snow trail up into the woods where one man would hook their trailing chain on to a log, then send them down the trail alone to the skidway, where

another man would unhook the log chain and send them back. Admittedly, however, they often stopped to rest and chew cud halfway back, requiring one man or the other to go and prod them along to destination.

By nature oxen are placid, patient, and considerably slower moving than horses. It was nearly impossible to coax my team into a trot, unless they were being pushed by a heavy load of wood on a down hill icy road. In that case, they ran on the path of least resistance, for the yoke would push forward against their horns in an uncomfortable position. Their inability to hold back heavy loads required rigging sleds that would minimize the need to hold back. Further, the ability of yoked oxen to back up a loaded wagon is also limited.

On two occasions when long periods of icy woods roads made it difficult for oxen to stand, much less pull, we had shoes put on my team. That process is more difficult than shoeing horses. It requires putting the ox in a sling so that his weight can be lifted, as an ox will not stand on three legs while the blacksmith shoes one foot. Uncle Charlie Smith, living a half mile away, had an ox sling in working order. The split hooves of an ox means the use of eight shoes per ox.

I never heard of an ugly or vicious ox. They normally are disinclined to fight, hook or horn other cattle, and I recall only one occasion on which either Hokum or Hooey kicked with effect. One winter while in high school the sledding was good on the public dirt road by our farm, and I was regularly hauling on the road with an ox sled. A high school acquaintance had a sled dog team of huskies that he raced. He took pleasure in running by my plodding cattle, and his wheel dog liked to nip at my near ox's heels as they passed. Riding behind the

cattle on the sled, I was not between the dogs and the cattle as the dogs raced past and couldn't keep them apart. About the fourth straight day this happened, Hokum lashed out with his left leg, shod with a sharp shoe. His foot caught the wheel dog in full stride, knocking him out of his harness into the snow bank on the other side of the road. The dog teamster picked up the injured dog, loaded him on the dog sled for the others to carry, and went off up the road very unhappy. Needless to say, the ox teamster went home with a big grin, and I saw no more of the dog team on our road that winter.

The cost to maintain a team of working oxen was really very little. Our oxen were fed only hay too poor in quality for the milking herd. Occasionally in sugaring season when working most every day, they were given a little ground corn. In summer when not working they were pastured nearby where they could be brought back to work in an hour's time. I would sometimes ride Hooey's back when bringing them home from pasture, but in truth, riding an ox is very uncomfortable and although the ox didn't object it is not a method of transportation to be recommended. In winter the oxen were stanchioned in the barn basement in a space not usable for milking cows, so again the cost was minimal. The modest equipment used, sleds, wagons, and carts, was not interchangeable with our horse drawn equipment,but was of very low cost and used for a lifetime. A lot of it was homemade.

After I left home for college, the oxen stayed on, and I enjoyed working them in the woods and for sugaring season during vacations. Dollars important for college costs, I earned skidding logs and from minor hauling jobs for farming relatives and neighbors. I never did

consider my oxen as pets, but rather as farm equipment. As a consequence, I felt only a little remorse when they were sold for meat before my junior year at college. The $250 sale price provided all the cash I needed for that college year. And my claim of being the only ox teaming college professor in captivity has given me a lot of bragging rights ever since.

HOW BIG IS AN ACRE?

An acre is by definition an area 43,560 square feet. That's about the size of a football field. But experience and observation tells me that what you are doing on, with, or to an acre determines how big it is.

At our old farm in Gilford, we had something less than 60 acres of fields or tillable land. Compared to neighboring farms and considering field work, all done with horses and oxen, it was then and there a big farm. At least I thought so. I graduated from Cornell in 1942 and went to work as a County Agent in the Genesee Valley of Western New York. The first day on the job my boss, Nelson Smith, took me on a tour of the county. We stopped on the River Flats west of Geneseo where Haxton Canning Company was plowing under winter rye. There were four tractors with three bottom plows working in one field. Nelson asked me to estimate the acreage in the field. Trying to show my college gained wisdom I squinted carefully in all directions and allowed as how there might be close to 80 acres. I was dumbfounded when he told me there were 285 acres. Up to that time I had never seen one field larger than 60 acres, and I surely had never seen anyone plowing in one field with more than one two-bottom plow.

There were just a great many field jobs at home that made an acre seem as big as all outdoors. And all of them are easy to remember.

A lot of our plowing was done with a walking plow turning one 14" furrow. Whether you pull that plow with a yoke of oxen, with two yoke of oxen, or a team of horses, covering an acre in 14" strips at the speed of oxen or horses takes time. And because our fields were all rocky, causing the plow to be thrown out or stopped every few rods, it took even

longer. I know it took all the time between morning and evening milking to cover one acre plowing alone with a yoke of oxen.

Cultivating corn with a one-horse walking cultivator was another ever lasting job. I was the little kid riding the horse for too many acres. On a hot July day the kid's pants stuck to the horse's bare back and the kid's bare legs itched from rubbing on the horse's sweaty sides. It seemed like the noon whistle on the factory downtown would never blow and allow the kid, horse, and hired man following to go in to dinner.

We always raised an acre or more of potatoes. Potato bugs were picked off the plants by hand by my older sisters. By the time I was old enough for field work we had a hand cranked one row duster, and I had the job of dusting the potato field in early mornings when the plants were still wet with dew so the dust would stick and kill the bugs. The poison we used then was strong enough to kill a horse, let alone a potato bug. The mask I wore did not keep the dust out of my mouth, eyes, and ears. I think some of it is still in my lungs. Walking the potato rows cranking the duster made an acre seem awfully big.

In the early 30's, Father felt affluent enough to clear the bigger boulders from a three-acre field west of the barn. Clearing a field of big rocks then meant dynamiting off the granite boulders to plow depth. In order to set dynamite charges, holes had to be drilled in the top or side of each rock. Father hired an elderly stone worker to drill these holes by hand, using what was called a star drill, held by hand, turned a half or quarter turn after each blow with a heavy hammer. Most of the time the old man worked alone, drill in one hand, hammer in the other. On occasion, Father sent me out to hold the drill to relieve the old

craftsman. I soon realized his hammer always found its mark, so there was no danger in holding the drill, but it was a very dull job indeed, and there were a lot of rocks to drill on each acre. The dynamiting was all done in one day while I was in school. When I came home that afternoon, the whole three acres seemed to be covered with shattered pieces of granite boulder.

At about fourteen I inherited the job of mowing hay with the team of horses. It was one of the more pleasant jobs in haying time, but it too was tedious. The five foot swath cut by the McCormick-Deering machine covered ground a lot faster than plowing, but laying down two or three acres with that rig took a lot of time.

In the early thirties, we enlarged the upper field by about one acre, pushing the fence back into the pasture. That area had been cleared of timber thirty years earlier, so stumps and roots were well rotted out. Even so, it took many man and boy days of work to plow that little lot the first time, dig and pick all the rocks, and level off the hummocks. It gave me some appreciation for the stupendous amount of manual labor that went into originally clearing the rocky hillsides of New England farms and the building of the many miles of stone walls.

An acre of farm land does seem large when it is so hard to come by. The New England perspective on acreage is illustrated by the old story about the Texas rancher who was visiting his cousin's farm in Vermont. The conversation went like this: Texan, "How big is your farm?" Vermonter, "My line runs down the road a piece to that fork, then along that stone wall to the ledge at the top of the hill, along the ridge to the clump of pines, and back here to the barn, about 100 acres. How big

is your ranch?" Texan, "Why, last week I started to drive around my ranch in my truck, and it took me all day!" Vermonter, "Ayuh, I had a truck like that last year, and traded it in for a horse." The Vermonter obviously wasn't impressed with the vast acreages of the west. All of our Smith ancestors must have been similarly unimpressed. They continued to farm the small and rocky hillsides of Hampton, Gilmanton, Sanbornton, Meredith, and Gilford in New Hampshire from the mid 1600s to the mid 1900s. All those generations watched their neighbors and relatives go west and west again to farm in quarter sections and square miles instead of in acres. Our ancestors were all "New Hampshire born and New Hampshire bred, and when they died, they were New Hampshire dead." Perhaps some of them yearned to go west and never had the opportunity. But I would bet that most of them stayed put by choice, readily accepting the rugged life of farming in the rocky thin soils of New Hampshire where an acre is still a pretty sizeable piece of ground.

SMITH FAMILY DIFFERENCES ON POLITICS, RELIGION, AND PROHIBITION

It required a lot of teamwork between Mother and Father to raise ten children and see them all educated. I think my parents generally agreed on how to manage children, on the difference between what was needed and what was wanted, and on how to make limited time and income go furthest in meeting the children's needs and having a little left for their wants. On some major issues of the day, however, they had very different ideas. Their differences on politics, religion and temperance made life more interesting to us as children and of course shaped our own convictions.

Both parents had very good minds and I think could have been successful in a variety of careers. Probably to outsiders Father appeared to be dominant and the decision maker. In fact, Mother had a sharper mind, great determination, and infinite patience. I really don't believe Father was ever able to impose his will on her on any major question.

I first became aware of their differing political inclinations during the Presidential campaign of 1928. Father, a lifelong Democrat, was a strong supporter of New York's Governor Al Smith. Mother firmly spoke up for Herbert Hoover, and I think always voted straight Republican. During the Smith-Hoover election brother Forrest was very loud in support of Al Smith, and posted Smith campaign posters on all the farm buildings. But he didn't post them very near the house, which was considered Hoover territory. Father as one of the few Democrats in Gilford, frequently ran for public office, but never was elected. I

don't discuss politics with brothers and sisters now, but would bet that with one exception they vote Republican regularly, perhaps evidence of Mother's strong influence.

Church attendance was a sore point and one area where friction between Mother and Father was open over most of the period I was growing up. I've been told that when the older children were young Father did attend church with some regularity, and I recall tales of good times at church gatherings when the family attended church in Gilford Village and travel was by horse and wagon. By the time I was of school age, Mother was taking us to the Methodist Church in Laconia, and Father very seldom went along.

There was agreement that Sunday was not a working day. That only meant that the usual work in fields or woods was postponed. Of course, Mother still had to prepare meals for a crowd, but two big meals instead of the usual three. Then, too, cows had to be milked and fed.

At sugaring time maple sugaring went on whenever sap ran from the trees, Sundays included. And in haying season, hay had to be hauled in if it was ready and weather was threatening.

In spite of farm chores, Father could have attended church regularly if he had wanted. Instead, he "went to church" on Robinson Pond in Chemung on many Sundays. He loved to fish for perch and pickerel. Even in winter, several Sundays each year were spent ice fishing. Father owned shore property on the pond and Forrest built a camp there. When I was faced with the choice of church with Mother or fishing with Father, even Mother's strong disapproval and disappointment failed to aim me towards church. She compensated somewhat by sitting us down on Sunday

evenings and reading a few minutes aloud from the family bible. Her Sunday evening bible readings continued about as long as she lived. Mary remembers them going on after we were married in 1942.

Although Mother installed a true religious conviction in all of us, and I think made all of us good protestants, I can't report that she made a regular church goer of me, and several of my brothers and sisters are no more regular in their attendance than am I.

Mother was strongly set against alcoholic beverages of any kind, and she must have thought civilization took a huge step backwards with the repeal of prohibition. I never saw any of my older brothers and sisters drink anything alcoholic until I reached college age. Although I know now some of them did take an occasional drink before that time, some of them still don't.

Father was very fond of hard cider, and I know occasionally shared a drink of hard liquor with a friend, and would have welcomed more opportunities to do so. He always had at least one barrel of hard cider in the cellar, but Mother ruled that it should not be brought upstairs.

Father made good use of the hard cider in our cellar and liked to tell good hard cider stories. The outside door to our cellar was always unlocked, a fact Father made known to townspeople he knew appreciated hard cider. The town highway crew headed for Sam Smith's whenever a snowstorm came up. Our road always seemed to get plowed first after a storm. I learned to like hard cider at a fairly early age, but was so intimidated by Mother's conviction that alcohol in any form was evil that I seldom visited the cellar, even after I was in college.

Apple cider allowed to cure in the right way and flavored with a little maple syrup was then and still is considered by many to be a fine alcoholic drink, and a lot of farm house cellars carried a good supply. Father told a supposedly true story about a distant relative living up in Chemung who always had an inventory of twelve to fifteen barrels. While he was away from home his horse barn caught fire. The neighbors came to fight the fire and found little water available, so rolled out the cider, stove in the barrel heads, and put out the fire with the cider. Upon returning home, the farmer complained that he would rather have lost the barn than the cider.

Father's best cider story was about the old man so hooked on cider that he drank himself dead drunk every two weeks. His friends thought they might scare him into giving up the cider. While he was stone drunk they placed him in a coffin and carried the coffin into his dark cellar. They waited for him to come around, thinking that if he feared he had killed himself with drink he would be cured. When the old fellow came to, he pushed up the coffin lid, exclaimed to himself "Godfrey mighty, I'm dead!" Then after a moment's pause, he asked in a high pitched pleading voice "Children of this world, have you got any good hard cider?"

There certainly was no celebration at home when prohibition ended, and the no drinking rules didn't change in our family. For some of our French-Canadian neighbors, the end of prohibition meant one source of income was cut off. Neighbor Joe LaBranch had a small dairy farm and every few weeks made a trip to Canada to "visit relatives." My brother Forrest would do the evening milking for Joe, and would take me to the

LaBranch farm with him when I was still quite small. Joe left for Canada in the morning and would return in the dead of night but in time for milking the next morning. Joe never talked much to anybody, but it was clear to all that the purpose of the regular trips to Canada was "rum running," the term commonly applied to bringing in whiskey from Canada. As a youngster, I associated Joe LaBranch with the Al Capone gang. I know now he was just a poor farmer who had found a way to pick up some extra dollars. Mother thought it was so bad that Forrest shouldn't even milk the man's cows. Neither Father nor Forrest had any such reservations. As far as I know, however, Forrest was paid in cash for milking, and Father got no pay in "Canadian goods."

Although a number of her children have not closely followed her beliefs on religion, politics, and prohibition, I don't believe Mother would really be very disappointed if she could come back and check us all out on those and other issues on which she had such definite beliefs. In general, her teachings took well, and have only been modified by her children to fit changing times and changing social conditions.

FARM NEIGHBORS AT HIGH MAPLE FARM

I have good memories of our neighbors in Gilford during the 20's and 30's. But we really spent no time together as families and there were few children of my age to play with. The neighborhood of my memory included about ten families, most of whom farmed to some extent.

From our farm it was just over a mile down our dirt road - Morrill Street - to the Laconia City line, and about three miles up the road to Gilford Village. Between our farm and the City line, Reddy Bennett, Oscar White, and Louie Collins were faming. Mr. Bunker lived between White's and Collin's, but did not farm. Close neighbors up the road were George Dow, the Harrimans, and the Dockhams. George Dow farmed, the others did not. West beyond our sheep pasture was the Vincent farm. Down the road, if you turned left at Bennett's, the road goes to Gilford Avenue. On that quarter mile stretch lived "Aunt Carrie" Stone and down at the end, John Hammond. Neither farmed.

That area and those families made up the neighborhood of my early memories. We did have some contact with the Stark Street families. Stark Street hit our road a half mile up. Turning left or West on Stark Street takes you to Lakeport in about one mile. The Johnson's lived on Stark Street. Mrs. Johnson had a strong Swedish accent and a son, Georgie, who Father said was a "no-good." Mrs. Johnson helped Mother for short periods with housework. Stark Street children went to school with me at our one room school until it closed in 1928. Father and Mother "helped out" some Stark Street families in the Great Depression. But in general, we had little to do with Stark Street.

The size and nature of the small farms around us was quite typical of what New England farming was in that era. We had the biggest farm in the neighborhood. But that was mostly due to the fact that the surrounding farms were really small, one man farms. Bennett's farm was closest, and you could see nearly all his farm from our front porch. His two hayfields totaled perhaps fifteen acres, and the pasture twenty more. He grew only hay for cattle and a garden. He kept four or five cows and a horse. Reddy and the horse did all the farm work, with field help from Mrs. Bennett during haying. Reddy sold his milk to Louie Collins until Collins gave up his retail milk business, then to Week's Dairy until well into the 40's.

Reddy had no bull, and the only visits I can recall him making to our farm were the occasions Reddy would lead a cow up the road to breed to Father's bull. Other neighbors with no bull made similar visits.

Oscar White owned the farm brother Forrest bought in the mid-thirties. In my time, Oscar did not sell milk. He kept a few head of cattle and usually hogs - sometime quite a few. Oscar was a heavy drinker. On occasion he had scrapes with his auto, once driving it halfway through the back of his garage, where the front end was left hanging out over space for several days. he

bought and sold some livestock, did the haying on the place and let the buildings run down.

Next down the road from Oscar White was Mr. Bunker, who was not a farmer, but who owned several acres and worked in town. Father sometimes cut the hay on his very small field.

The Collins place was the last down the road before the City line. Collins kept about 12 cows and ran a retail milk business, delivering door to door in Laconia with a horse or horses for many years. He bought milk from neighbors, including Father, before father started his own retail delivery. The Collins' were not very friendly with the Smiths, but I do recall Louis Collins visiting father in our barn on one or two occasions, talking business. Louis was not very good with horses, and I remember his team running away with his milk delivery wagon causing excitement in the neighborhood.

George Dow lived first up the road from our farm. He had four cows, cut hay on a few acres, and worked in Laconia. Just beyond the Dows was the Harriman place. I think my older brothers and sisters knew and enjoyed the Harriman children. I also believe the Harrimans kept a few animals and did a little farming. But by the time I was in school, their children were grown and they had stopped what little farming had been done. In the late thirties, that place was sold to Joe Curran.

Curran kept pigs and collected garbage to feed them. He also was a heavy drinker and the garbage collecting was often noisy at all hours. Joe Curran kept a cow but no bull. Joe had little money and less inclination to pay for having the cow bred. Father often kept a young bull in our John Swain pasture. The pasture gate was just up the road from Curran's. One summer in the late 30's Father got a midnight telephone call from Dot Dockham, who lived across the road from the pasture gate. She reported that Joe Curran was taking his cow into our pasture with loud swearing and much commotion. Father hastily drove to the scene, found Joe in his nightdress, very drunk, in the pasture. Joe's cow and Father's bull were "in business" in the moon light. Much more yelling and cussing ensued while Joe and cow were being evicted from the pasture. Father pretended to be furious about Joe getting free breeding service, but he sure did like to tell the story.

The very large Dockham family lived in a battered old house, long since gone, just beyond the Stark Street turnoff. Although their father provided no visible means of support (father said he just hunted and fished) the Dockham children did remarkably well. They ranged in age from older than sister Esther to Dorothy, about my age. There was no farming at the Dockhams. Two of the older Dockham girls married brothers named Forbes who became very successful farmers in Cortland County, New York. I later came to know the Forbes well, and had one of the grandsons as a student at Cornell.

On the short road between Morrill Street and Gilford Ave. lived Aunt Carrie Stone and her "hired man" Civil War veteran Mr.

Goodwin. Aunt Carrie was a relative by marriage. Mr. Goodwin seemed to be her companion. We Smith children visited there often because Aunt Carrie liked children and had interesting toys. I believe she kept a cow and chickens. That "farm" was about five acres in size. At the end of that cross road was the John Hammond place. He was a great friend of Father's and sold insurance. Perhaps at an earlier date there were farm animals at Hammonds, but none in my memory. We cut hay on the small field of four or five acres, and sometimes raised corn or potatoes there. I remember plowing there all day alone with my yoke of oxen on one occasion. On Mary's first visit to New Hampshire, she helped me dig and pick potatoes at Hammond's.

The only other farm within what I thought of as our neighborhood was the Vincents, on the road where Nathan now farms and Sam Smith also lives. My route to the Vincent's was west through our sheep pasture about half a mile. Vincent's kept about ten cows.

Children of my age in the area were few and far between. Stewart Vincent was a year older, and for a few years we spent much good time together. By High School, my interests ran to sports and girls, while his did not. Norma Vincent was brother Gardner's age, but I don't recall them sharing play time at any age. The youngest of the Collins girls was a little too old for my interest. John Hammond's daughter Ruth was a friend of Sister Edna. The Bennett's, White's, and Dows were either childless or had children much older than I.

There was a minimum of socializing between our parents and the neighbors I have listed. I do not remember a single instance of any of them coming to our house, or of mother going to theirs just to visit. Father did spend visiting time with John Hammond, who was a fellow Democrat and those were hard to find in Gilford. Father's business transactions with the neighbors listed were minimal, though he did sell milk to Louie Collins when I was very young.

I don't know why there was so little socializing. Sister Ellen says because neither Mother or Father had time. I think that was only part of it. There were so many relatives - Smith and Page - that much of the socializing time was with close relatives, and with relatives not so close.

I'm confident we Smiths were not considered "bad" neighbors. But the fact remains that we did not spend time visiting back and forth. Nowadays we often remark about how little we know of our urban neighbors, and how un-neighborly suburban dwellers commonly are. Well, my childhood experiences seem to indicate that even in the good old days in the good old countryside, neighborliness might not have been as deep and as general as many believe.

July 1993

THE VERY SMALL BEGINNING OF A VERY LARGE BUSINESS

In the July 1985 issue of a New Hampshire business publication, there was a story about Weeks Dairy Foods. The company is described as one of the leading milk and ice cream distributors in northern New England. 1985 sales for the company were estimated at forty million dollars.

That very large business was started by my brother-in-law, John Weeks, in 1931. At that time he took over the little milk business my father had run for some time, selling milk and cream and sometimes cottage cheese, butter, and eggs which we produced on the home farm. Father ran the business from our house, and when John first took over he installed some equipment, a walk-in cooler, and for about five years continued to build the business right from our farm. The business grew rapidly and he had to move to Gilford Avenue in Laconia in 1935.

I was eleven when Father sold the business to John, and I have a lot of happy memories about that little dairy business we had that has now grow in into a multi-million dollar operation. Sister Esther, Mrs. John Weeks, has memories that go back further than mine, and her association with Weeks Dairy Foods and its predecessor, our Smith family dairy operations, covers more than three quarters of a century.

As the oldest of ten children, Esther and Royal were very early given responsibilities in the "dairy business." For years Father sold milk produced directly to neighbor Louis Collins, who had a farm and a retail milk business. Father, with the children's help, bottled the raw milk in quart bottles and carted the bottles down the road to the Collins farm by horse and wagon. Esther recalls the first time she was allowed

100.

to drive the horse with the milk. The horse was eager to start and took off before Father got the milk all loaded. Before Esther could stop the horse and return for the milk, he had completed half the trip. At an even earlier period, father shipped milk to Boston by train in eight-quart cans. Esther and Royal remember that each farmer's cans were identified with a tag on the handle, and the empties came back each day to be picked up at the train as the full cans were loaded. They also remember how bad the wooden plugs in the cans smelled when they came back from the J.H. Cashing Company in Boston.

Esther and Royal attended school at the old Batchelder Street School. During several of those years, Father was selling cream in pints and half-pints to stores in Laconia--Harry Sanborn's and Rand and Dearborn's. Cream deliveries were combined with trips to school. Royal would help milk in the morning, Esther would get cream, horse and wagon ready to go to Laconia. They would deliver the cream before school, put the horse up in a borrowed barn near school, go to school all day, and pick up the cream bottles and cash at the stores before coming home, where more farm chores awaited them. This general system went on when Esther and Royal reached high school, with the horse then stabled in a barn on Bowman Street during the school day.

Sometime in the early 1920s, Father started a retail milk route of his own, and my earliest memories of the milk business date back to that time.

Before I was old enough to go to school, Father sometimes took me with him delivering milk and cream to homes and stores in downtown Laconia. As I recall, he stopped at only a dozen or so homes and one or

two stores. I guess he might have had forty or fifty quarts of milk, a dozen pints of cream, and a few dozen eggs for a typical day's delivery. In the early twenties, winter delivery was often with a horse and sled. I remember riding on that sled in a box behind Father's seat and in front of the milk cases.

A shirt-tail relative, Aunt Carrie Stone, lived about a half mile down toward town from our farm, and if it was very cold, Father would drop me off while he went on to make his calls with the horse. Aunt Carrie had toy farm animals I liked to play with, and I believe she enjoyed my visits as much as I did. She also had an elderly hired man, Mr. Goodwin, who entertained me. He was a Civil War Veteran.

A little further down the road lived John Hammond, who was not only a good customer but also Father's political ally. They were both registered Democrats and about the only ones in the town of Gilford. Between the two of them, they must have been candidates for every elective office in town at one time or another. Of course, neither was ever elected. The deliveries were often delayed while we went into the Hammond house to visit.

Sometimes after a heavy snow fall, old Jim could not haul the milk sled until a road had been broken through the drifts. On occasion, Father would hitch three yoke of oxen to a sled, and break the road open with that rig so the milk could be delivered. By the mid-twenties, the town of Gilford had acquired tractors with snow plows and very rarely failed to open the road within a day after a snow storm.

By the time I was in school Father had either a station wagon or a truck to make the milk deliveries. A country store at Glendale on Lake

Winnipesaukee was a good summer customer and we made daily deliveries there. Brother Forrest was home for some of those summers, and he often took me with him to Glendale for the morning delivery. Gilford Brook runs through Gilford Village and on down to the lake. Just past the village there was a good swimming hole, and on a warm morning, not being in any hurry to get home to help with haying, we would stop for a swim.

We milked from 15 to 20 cows most of the time. If we had more milk than Father's regular customers could take, it was separated in a hand operated cream separator. Most everyone refused to drink skim milk in those days, and it was fed to the hogs and calves. If the cream could not be sold, we made butter. For some time Mother also made cottage cheese. So Father sometimes had butter and cottage cheese to sell as well as milk and cream.

Mother made the cottage cheese and pressed the butter in the iron sink in the pantry off the kitchen. In summer, we kids churned the butter in a barrel churn sitting on the back porch. We had a "milk room" where the garage now stands at the farm house. That milk room was the first location of Weeks Dairy Foods. Long before that, it was where we brought the milk from the barn and separated the cream from the milk. There was in that room a water tank where the spring water ran in constantly, and where the milk stood in cans to cool.

Getting the milking done and to the milk house was all manual. We had no electricity on the farm until 1928, and of course milked by hand. We never milked over twenty-five cows and generally about eighteen, and there were usually three or more of us milking. The short days of winter meant we milked and did other barn chores by the light of kerosene

lanterns for many weeks each year. That made the jobs seem longer. Lanterns were hung behind the cows during milking, but for many barn chores, a lantern had to be carried along. I carried the lantern many hours following Father while he was working in the barn. The barn was on the west side of the road, the house on the east side, and even though the trip was short, carrying milk from the warm barn to the house at twenty below zero produced a chill my bones still remember.

The milk was bottled in glass bottles or separated with the hand cranked separator before the cream was bottled and the bottles capped with old cardboard caps. Of course, there was no pasteurization, no homogenization, and the cooling was by spring water only. That was the milk business that John Weeks took over from Father in 1931. Now, fifty-five years later, it is Weeks Dairy Foods with forty million dollars in yearly sales.

Thumbing a Ride

I recently read an article about hitchhiking written by a man about my age. It was a good description of the practice, but probably of little interest or understanding to most readers. Unless you have participated in the practice, and did so in the years it was common and relatively safe, you have little appreciation of why we did what we did, and what it meant to many of us as a method of getting to where we had to go.

Today, standing beside the road with your hand out is, in effect, begging for trouble. In a sense, this has always been begging, but in the Great Depression and the World War II years, it really wasn't very dangerous. The driving public accepted the fact that many people had no money for train or bus, and certainly no cars to get there. In consequence, very few hitchhikers were abused. At least very few in relation to the total number of men who did it. And in those times almost no women tried to travel in that manner.

Prior to enrolling at Cornell, I don't believe I ever thumbed a ride, certainly not for any distance, because up to that point I had never traveled west of the Connecticut River, and not many times to Boston. My Acacia(?) fraternity brothers introduced me to the practice, which they described as an art.

I believe my first thumbing experience was getting home at the end of Spring semester, 1940. Bert Spofford was an Acacia fraternity brother from Georgetown, Massachusetts. Bert was a character, very tall, very thin. He pitched baseball at Cornell, and ended up driving a bakery truck as a profession after World War II. He and I decided to thumb home- Ithaca to Boston. Bert's idea was to pick a well-traveled road corner, preferably a busy intersection, and make yourself **very** visible. He would lean his 6'4" frame far out into the road with his thumb extended to almost the middle of the road. I let him take the initiative for the first few hours, but it soon became obvious to me that he was **too** obvious, and this annoyed some who might have picked us up. It seemed to work better when I was out front and his ugly mug was in back of me. We had a very long day and reached Worcester after dark and were stalled there for perhaps an hour before picking up a ride to Boston. From there I caught the milk train at North Station, arriving in Laconia early morning. I believe Bert took a bus to Georgetown. Our remaining cash just go us home. We had enough to buy soup for lunch in Albany. Most of our rides were short- from a few miles to 40 or 50.

I had three very long and memorable thumbing trips. At the end of sophomore year I wasn't in any hurry to get back to haying and milking, had no money to speak of, and didn't want to ask Ellen or anyone else at home with a car to come and get me. Besides, I had a crush on Milly Keith, who had taken a summer job at Sodus on Lake Ontario, and wanted to get in a visit before fall term. Carl Osberg- my best friend- was more than willing to hitchhike home with me. Carl's home was in Manchester. We thumbed north to Sodus Bay, found Milly already had a new boyfriend, and from there thumbed all the way through the Adirondacks and Vermont, splitting up at Concord- Carl south to Manchester, me north to Laconia. It was two days from Sodus Point, where we spent the first night. We stayed in Tupper Lake the second night, sharing a double bed in a **very** cheap motel, taking about all of our cash.

Traveling with Carl was always a pleasure. He was a good looking guy and very

good at catching rides. And always having fun. The first day out of Ithaca was very warm, and at Geneva he decided to go swimming in the outlet of Seneca Lake. To do so, he took off about all of his clothes, climbed the old railroad bridge, and dove the 25 feet into water that might have been only two or three feet deep. I'm sure we left Ithaca with less than $20 between us, but got home in fine shape.

Although we all knew thumbing alone picked better rides and quicker rides, it was much more fun, with no worries, thumbing in pairs.

My long hitchhikes alone were mostly in trips back and forth to Buffalo after Mary and I got together in February of 1941 and before we were married in June of 1942. One such trip was memorable because it was long and difficult. Another was memorable because it was quick and easy. The slow one started in Concord, where I believe Ellen dropped me, and, of course, ended in Buffalo. In thumbing one always had a preferred route mapped out, but if a ride was offered on a different route in the same general direction as the objective, you usually took it. On that trip to Buffalo after haying in Summer of '41, the routes traveled were pretty strange. Keene, Williamstown, Massachusetts, Troy, Schenectady, Route 5 along the Mohawk to Syracuse, Auburn, then on old Route 20. Many rides of 5 or 10 miles. Overnight at a cheap motel on Route 20. I was pretty discouraged by the time Buffalo appeared on the second day. Mary drove me back to New Hampshire in the car she and Auntie "jointly" owned, then back to Buffalo a couple of weeks later. That visit of hers was the time of the big family picture which she should have been in but wasn't.

My return trip back to New Hampshire, the last of that season, was a piece of cake. Mary took me out to an intersection of Route 20 by the University of Buffalo, kissed me goodbye, and waited in her car to see if I'd get a ride. When the light changed, the first car through heading east stopped, picked me up, and took me all the way to Boston. I had to drive much of the way.

Mother's Trips to the Dentist

Recently, as I sat in the dentist's chair having my teeth cleaned, I reflected on how fortunate I am to have good teeth at 80 years of age. That led my thinking back to my first trip to the dentist.

I believe I was five years old. I must have been complaining about a toothache, because Mother decided I should go to the dentist. There must have been a number of dentists in Laconia, but my first remembered dentist visit was not in Laconia.

Mother, for reasons I never knew, believed Dr. Forrest in Tilton was the man to see. I don't really remember how she and I got to Laconia's train station, but I suppose Father, or brothers Forrest or Royal drove us down. I'd like to think we went by horse and wagon, but I don't really think we did.

The train trip of 10 miles or so from Laconia to Tilton was my first train ride. The station in Tilton was only about a five minute walk from Dr. Forrest's office. The visit must have been to remove a tooth, because I distinctly recall having "gas", passing out, and thinking I was dead. The train trip back included a lunch of the sandwiches Mother had brought along.

Ellen says Mother always took the children to Dr. Forrest, and that he had "always" been Mother's dentist. At the time of my first remembered visit, all 10 children were still at home. It must have been somewhat of an escape for Mother to have a few hours away from home with a brief train trip to Tilton. Even so, shepherding a young terrified son to Tilton and back was not exactly a one day vacation.

This is just another reminder of what a remarkable mother we had. From Esther's birth in 1903 to Gardner's birth in 1922, she never had a day when the responsibility of motherhood did not increase, and it didn't decrease very much if any after that birth of the last child for all the rest of her life.

Dirt Roads

There was a recent article in the US Airways magazine entitled Dirt Roads. The author lived on a Vermont dirt road and romanticized about the fact. It was obvious that his choice to live off the beaten path in this time period had little relationship to my own experience of growing up on a dirt road in the 20's and 30's. But perhaps his story prompted me to record how it used to be.

Our road past the Gilford farm was not paved until some time after World War II. I remember when Gardner was farming in the late 40's we could still slide with the traverse or double bobsled when conditions were right all the way from the schoolhouse down past Reddy Bemmell's- and that was not possible on a blacktop road.

With the house on the east side and barn on the west side of the road, things would have been difficult with much traffic, but there was very little through traffic until after World War II. In fact, much play and work was conducted on the road itself. It was the most common place to play ball. In haying time, the rope pulling the hay fork to the barn's top floor was pulled across the road by a horse, the ox team, or later sometimes by the car. In summer, the road was a busy part of the farm.

Our road really didn't connect any two points of importance. Starting at the Laconia city line, one could travel it to Gilford Village or to Lakeport, but it was not the most direct route to either. About a half a dozen small farms and residences up the road most commonly went past our place to town. Farms and residents down the road had little reason to go past our place often.

Father had some responsibility for road maintenance for I believe one mile. In the spring "mud time", he dragged the road to make it barely passable and reduce roughness or "washboarding" as he called it. In late summer we mowed the roadbanks with handscythes. I believe his road work reduced his tax bill. Just up the road above the schoolhouse was a wet spot or spring hole which each spring caught the unwary who tried to pass in car or truck. I'm not sure Father tried very hard to fix that mud hole. Drivers who got stuck there usually had to have our help with ox or horse teams to get out. My first $2 bill came from pulling out a car there with my ox team.

The road was kept open in winter to deliver milk from our farm and Dow's up the road and Bennett's down the road. Sometimes Father had to "~~beat~~ break roads" with horse or ox teams, though Father delivered milk with horse and sled in winter up until 1930. I can barely remember the use of a snow roller to make winter roads passable. I well remember the first town tractor snowplow. That town crew liked to plow our road because our cellar outside door was always unlocked, and the crew knew how good Father's hard cider was and that they were welcome to it.

One memorable snowstorm in the late '20's was so severe the tractor had to be accompanied by a dozen men hand shoveling. The crew reached our farm as darkness approached. Mother and my sisters brought in the whole crew for a barn supper.

By the time I was driving the farm station wagon and sister Ellen's car, I was gaining personal experience with dirt roads. As about all the town roads were dirt, and that is where I drove, I took my turns getting stuck in snow banks and mud holes, usually on dates at embarrassing moments.

I suppose there are still zillions of miles of dirt roads in this country, but certainly a smaller percentage of our total population now lives on them. If one chooses to do so, and can romanticize about it, more power to him. For my part, digging out of the mud in the spring, putting on tire chains at freezing temperatures, and choking on road dust in a hot and dry August are good things to be in my past.

Milking Shorthorns

Somewhere and sometime on the internet there appeared a notice that Jack Weeks had a question about Sam Smith's milking Shorthorn cows. For no good reason, that brought back vivid memories of Father's less than great success with dairy cows and milk production.

Father's attachment to milking Shorthorns was strong, and I think for several reasons, which I will try to elicit.

I'll start with a short description of the breed. Milking Shorthorns are a so-called dual purpose breed. That is, they are supposed to be good milk producers and also be good for beef. In practice, like other dual purpose creatures, they long ago proved to be far from the best **either** for milk production **or** for beef. They were often called **Durhams**, rather than Shorthorns. As milkers, they characteristically produced even less milk in quantity than did the high milk fat breeds of Jersey and Guernsey, and milk of butterfat content not much higher than high producing Holsteins.

If I am correct in this assessment, then why did Father want milking Shorthorns? I believe it was for all of the following-

First, they are nice looking animals, varying in color from all white to all red, but most commonly color combinations of "roan" or red with nice white markings. And they do well on any kind of pasture or barn feed conditions.

Second, they are of very good disposition, easy to care for, very healthy, and very seldom ever wild or mean.

Third, Father considered matched shorthorn oxen as **the** most desirable as working often. It was easy for him to find bull calves elsewhere to match up with his Shorthorn bull calves at home. In this belief, he was not alone. Even today, if one goes where oxen are still to be found, i.e., Fryeburg Fair, there are many more Shorthorn or "Durham" ox, steer and calf teams than of any other single breed. My twin team of Hokum and Hooey were from a Shorthorn cow Father had bred to a Hereford bull belonging to Uncle Charlie Smith. Somewhere in Smith family picture albums one can find a picture of Sam and I think Nathan Smith with two pair of Shorthorn calves yoked to a sled in the snow in front of the old house.

Fourth, Father was really not very good with dairy cattle and thus would ignore the limitations of Shorthorns as milk producers. As an example, when most of the herd was condemned because of brucellosis (?) in the early Thirty's, Father used the replacement dollars from the government to buy some Shorthorn cows from the Tufts farm in Holderness, when he could have bought higher producing animals.

I have strong memories of some of the Shorthorns on the farm as I was growing up. Of course, the first are memories of Hokum and Hooey, they really looked more like their Hereford sire than their Shorthorn mother.

Of all the milk cows we ever had, my favorite was a big red cow with a white star on her head that we simply called "Milker". She produced well, was easy to milk, was the dominant cow in herding others to and from pasture, always ready to be patted and petted. And was the **one** animal lost to T.B. testing. I remember well that Dr. Rob Smith

tested her twice at Father's request hoping she would test negative the second time.

Although Father never kept Shorthorn steers for work other than my pair, he raised, matched, and sold quite a few pair. Some of these we had yoked a few times but never really trained (we said "handied") before sale. I remember one winter after a big snow storm, he yoked the oxen ahead of three pairs of steers and broke trail through the drifts, pulling an oxsled with a plow tied to one side of the sled.

The years cattle were pastured in the summer "down back of the mountain", we had some memorable steer team stories. One year and really nice pair of yearling Shorthorns, pastured where the Gilford Recreation area now is, disappeared in mid summer. Father liked to think a bear killed them. It was much more likely they were stolen.

Then there was the infamous incident when a big pair of three year old Shorthorn steers were pastured in what we called the Steam Mill pasture. Father sold them in late summer in the pasture, and assured the buyer they were "half handy", i.e. partly trained. In fact, they were never yoked until we caught them in the pasture to bring home to deliver to the buyer. Harold Greene and I had the task of driving them home yoked and thus deliver them "half handy". Truth to tell, they delivered **us** home, knocking down many mail boxes along the five mile road home.

To "improve the breed", Father, I believe at Royal's insistence, bought young bulls at UNH, which in those years, maintained a small herd of Shorthorns. There was at that time a livestock barn at the University on the left side of the road into the campus just before one reached the railroad tracks. Cy Terrell, who I believe was a professor, was in charge of livestock (sheep, hogs, beef cattle). There is now a livestock barn at the Fryeburg Maine fairgrounds in Terrell's name. He was a friend of both Royal and Father, but the bulls he sent to Father never seemed to improve the Shorthorn breed.

October 2002

Grandfathers

Here is a mini review of Smith grandfathers in this country:

First- Robert Smith, born about 1611, in England. He was obviously part of the sudden dramatic increase in immigrants coming after 1620 to join the Puritan settlements in New England. Settled in Hampton in 1657 (probably moving from Massachusetts), he was a tailor by trade. Must have been a prominent member of the community, as he was a signer of the ~~Constitution (?????)~~ Combination, 1639.

Second- Jonathan Smith, born 1645, was a brickmaker by trade and "settled" in Exeter. As a second son, there was probably little reason for him to stay at home.

Third- Joseph Smith, born in Epping about 1682, died in Stratham. I have no record of his trade, as the history of Hampton does not, of course, follow him to Epping or Stratham. Perhaps the history of one of those towns (if available) might tell more.

Fourth- Elisha Smith Sr., who was born in Stratham and died in Sanbornton. He was born in 1723, died 1811. His generation saw the end of the French and Indian Wars, which allowed many to move inland in New England, as he did, and many more to move westward before, during and immediately following the Revolution.

Fifth- Captain (?) Elisha Smith, born in Epping in 1769, died in Sanbornton in 1833. I assume he was a captain of militia, as he was too young at Revolution time, but would have been active at the time of the War of 1812. He is buried in the Sanbornton Bay Cemetery, along with his son Samuel.

Sixth- William Smith, born in Sanbornton in 1842, married in '69, and bought the Meredith Hill farm with his older brother in 1869 (or 1866). William was 24 at that time. The price of the farm was $1500.00. That land had apparently been cleared farm woods when purchased by Gideon Piper (?) in 1783.

Would it not be wonderful to be able to visit with these men to determine how and why they lived as they did, why they did and did not. The question which has puzzled me the most over time is why, when they moved inland and stayed in New Hampshire after the Indians were no longer a major threat, why they did not go West with the great mass migration to much better land. Perhaps the earlier generations were basically tradesmen rather than farmers? The second Elisha would have been best positioned to move West, as he was the right age from 1790-1800. And when William bought the Meredith Hill farm in 1869, certainly the logical move was to go West, instead of farming on that little hill farm.