

AT EAGLE POND FARM

.....

AN OCCASIONAL LETTER

April 2023

Visitors at Eagle Pond

When Carolyn Chute, author of *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*, came with her husband to visit Don and Jane in the 1980s, she brought her camera.

The then-pair of blue chairs were *in situ* and Jane and Don, too. Family portraits intermixed with Paris Review posters decorated the walls, books filled shelves, the days were ripe with poetry.



Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon at home, c. 1985.
Photograph © Carolyn Chute.

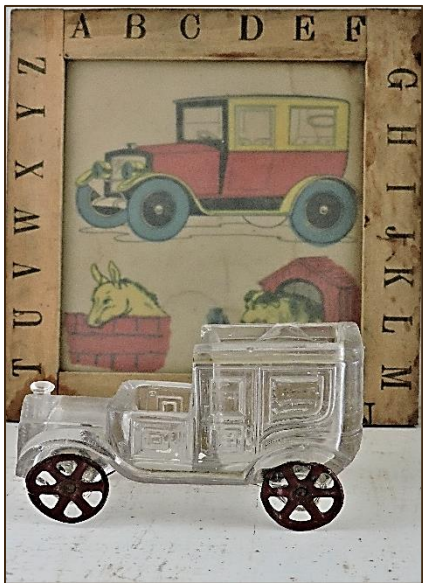
If you also have photographs from visits to the farm, we would like to know about them. We will not make public use of them without your permission, but we would like to have copies in our files for reference. Pictures of Don and Jane help fill in their story, and what shows up in the background of a room or outside view can provide useful detail for telling the history of the house and farm. And if you have stories but no pictures, we'd be grateful to collect those, too.

Though the farm gave Jane and Don a certain solitude, it also provided a destination for friends, colleagues, pilgrims, and family. But even before them, there were constant callers during the years of Don's grandparents--and probably, in old country custom, before them. The conversation visitors brought, the stories (and, sometimes, pictures) they left: these kept the farm a happening place.

Conjuring visitors of decades before, in *String Too Short To Be Saved* (Godine, 1979. 2021) Don returns to Sunday afternoons when he and his grandparents “sat reading in the sitting room and wondered who would come.” Don says of the expected callers that “[o]ften there were so many that we emptied the dining room and kitchen of their wooden chairs, and the sitting room was as crowded as a theater.”

But it wasn’t only Sundays, Don notes: “The late light of the evenings of early summer invited people to ride in their automobiles, and they gave themselves reasons by paying visits. We all sat together in the slant sun of the sitting room, or we fanned away insects on the porch, while Mount Kearsarge gathered the pink sunset in the distance.”

Some callers were local, some from nearby towns, and some from farther away who had moved to other places but came back annually in the summers. Many were family in one way or another, but many, too, were old friends or old neighbors--not seen for a long time or just the week before.



An alphabet toy found in the back chamber and a toy glass car (originally filled with candies when it was new, c. 1915-1920). In those years, it was cars like these (and, surely, wagons, too) that filled the drive when visitors came.

When old people--as Don regarded them--made calls, the women, he said, usually “chatted together--not listening to the men’s stories--about weather and canning and the diseases of their friends and the new babies of their descendants. They never talked about the past as the men did.” For the men, though, these visits were a time for storytelling and remembering old exploits, and those stories kept a young Don listening closely.

At that time, Don was, of course, himself a visitor--brought first to the farm at four months old to be introduced to his grandparents. A few years on, he was staying every summer until he was seventeen and preparing to go to Harvard. Then there was one more farm summer before his last Harvard year.



Don in the hayfield across from the house, c. 1932. Eagle Pond can be seen in the background.

Here, Don has--*veni, vidi*--met the farm, with the joy he claimed all his life totally evident. But this photograph holding so much story came close to never being seen again.

After the estate sale in 2019, there were boxes and boxes of tattered things to be sorted. Among them, one appeared to contain only mouse nests: shredded newspapers from 1880, gnarly remains of wool socks, a lot of filth, a scrap of "The Youth's Companion" (1827-1929). It looked as if the box could be tossed without reaching in, but we of the nascent nonprofit knew that everything had to be examined, right down to the bottom . . . where there was a tiny browned rectangle of paper, two inches by one and a half. We took it out, turned it over, and there was this declarative picture of Don.

The process of sorting is the same in all the house and eventually the barn. Some discoveries are small, some larger; but they each add something to the story of lives lived and time gathered at Eagle Pond Farm.

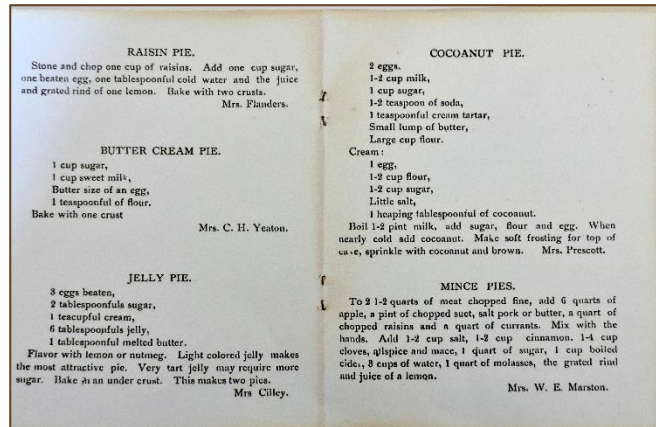
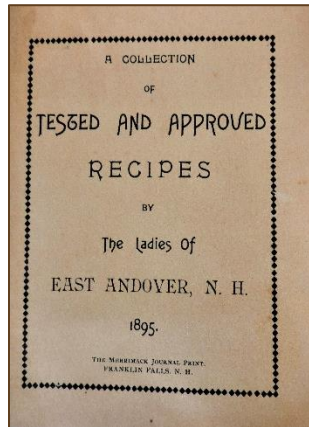
Even a rolling pin can--

On Saturdays, Don's mother Lucy recalled, from her years growing up at the farm, her mother (Don's grandmother Kate) "had Mary Peaslee (a little white-haired lady who lived across the pond)" come help make the week's pies. "She arrived about seven o'clock and stayed until around 11:30, when she had to go home to cook her husband's dinner. Mary worked for 10 cents an hour. When she went up to 12½ cents, Mother didn't know as she could afford her. She did still have her come, however."



Kate's rolling pin, used too by Jane when she made her celebrated peach pie for the annual So. Danbury church supper.

Friday nights, Lucy said, Kate “prepared the fillings for the pies: peeled apples, cooked pumpkin, etc.” Then, the next morning, “Mary would [in those years] make at least a dozen pies and such a variety: apple, mince, custard, pumpkin, rhubarb and raisin, cranberry-raisin, or fruit and berry pies, depending on the season . . . We always had pie on the table for both dinner and supper” (and, often, at least seven people at each meal).



East Andover cookbook, 1895, used by Don’s grandmother. Gift of Sarah McIntyre.

After the pies were out of the oven, Mary “would go home, get dinner, then get dressed up in her high-necked white shirtwaist, long black skirt and hat and come back over in the afternoon for a visit. I can hear Mother now,” Lucy said, “as she’d look out the window and groan, ‘Here comes Mary!’ That meant that Mother had to sit down and visit--and serve refreshments.” But thus was the dignity of hired-help preserved, along with the production of pies.



A teaset remaining at the farm.

In the pantry

If, at the estate sale, you bought white dinner plates that match these below and you might

consider returning them, we would be very glad to continue their use at the farm. One was found in a cupboard, with some bowls and smaller plates, but nine dinner plates may have been sold.



The angle of the rim gives these plates a classic 1970s look. That angle, the absence of decoration, and their overall simplicity identified them as modern, arty, and urbane when Jane and Don chose them; but they also referenced traditional tableware, such as nineteenth-century ironstone every farmhouse had known. Over the years, the style of these dishes was its own metaphor for how Jane and Don lived at the farm, combining contemporary and old, *au courant* and old-fashioned.



The lack of markings on the underside of the single plate and other pieces complicates a search for replacements.

.....

Except as noted, all photographs © At Eagle Pond, Inc.
If you would like to unsubscribe, please contact at.eagle.pond@gmail.com.

At Eagle Pond, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit established to preserve the farm where poets Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon shared a writing life and to honor their work, open the house to the public, invite reflection on poetry and place, and provide residencies where poets and others can take up their own work.

**Your support, daily put to use for these purposes, is what ensures we can keep on.
Donations can be made online at www.ateaglepond.org or sent to the post office box below.**