

AT EAGLE POND FARM

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AN OCCASIONAL LETTER

February 2023

Winter

Winter was not a time of indolence or hibernation at Eagle Pond Farm in the days before its main crops were poetry and prose.

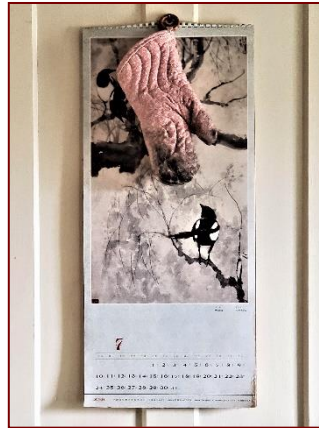


Winter was when wood for the stoves, cut in summer, had to be hauled from the steep slopes of Ragged as soon as there was snow enough to sled it.



The Glenwood in the sitting room: a guardian against winter. The first year after Jane and Don arrived to live at the farm, two stoves--this one and the cookstove in the kitchen--were all that held back historic cold.

Typically, stovewood cut the previous summer was left to dry all the preceding year, then worked up the next fall and stacked in the woodshed attached to the far end of the house. The wood yarded in winter anticipated the following season. Don's grandfather, Wesley, hired extra help for the cutting on Ragged and oversaw work on the woodlots. He sold firewood, too, delivering it as far as Andover, for \$3.00 a cord in 1915.



Stove, retrieved from the back chamber, that warmed Jane's writing room after a chimney was rebuilt.

On the door is a calendar that Jane brought home from China, when she and Don, sponsored by the U.S. Information Agency, read and lectured there and in Japan in 1986.

In older years, winter was also when ice on the pond--after it had, for sure, frozen solid twelve inches deep--was scored and sawn in long strips, then cubes, and brought to the ice house behind the cow barn to be packed all around with sawdust that would preserve it for cooling milk in the warm months, frosting summer lemonade, and in the years before electric refrigerators, keeping a cabinet icebox--installed in the backshed--chilled. The icebox, a convenience common in American households by 1900, required a new block of ice every day, and the melted ice in a drip tray had to be emptied, a chore that Don's mother, growing up on the farm, especially disliked.



Eagle Pond, almost frozen.

During winters, Don's grandmother Kate, who had a millinery business, spent evenings making hats in anticipation of spring. She worked at a table in the center of the sitting room, shaping and decorating the hats with ribbons and feathers and fabric flowers bought in Boston. Then, with the turning of the year, the parlor was for a while converted to a shop. All the furniture was removed,

and sawhorses were set against three sides of the room. Long boards laid on them were then covered with white paper and wire stands were arranged to display the hats.



The parlor at the front of the house, right beside Route 4, was an easy stop for Kate's customers.



Several times a year Kate also loaded the farm wagon with carefully-wrapped and crated hats and made a circuit of home showings.



A millinery rose on the parlor mantel.

For Don's grandfather, there were certainly barn jobs, too, reserved for the winter, besides the daily milking and chores. And there in the barn near the house, the cows and the horse named Riley waited in their stalls for spring pasture.



Hay still remaining in horse stall. Across the road was another barn (no longer standing) for sheep and, next to it, the chicken yard.

Freeman Morrison, who was related to Kate and a wizard of farm work and invention, came down from his cabin higher on Ragged and spent the cold months at the farmhouse, sleeping in his bedroom upstairs.



Freeman's room, with a view of Kearsarge to the south. Regarded as family, Freeman was older than Don's grandmother and turns up often in Don's farm prose--especially *String*, *Life Work*, and "Christmas Snow." In *String*, Don called him Washington Woodward but it was Freeman and his eccentricities and qualities that Don was replaying. *The Man Who Lived Alone*, one of Don's picture books, is also the story of Freeman and true to fact--except that Don gave him a beloved mule instead of his actual pet ox because the book followed *Ox-Cart Man* and Don felt he couldn't have an ox in both books.

Every winter, Anson, a hired man, used the room next to Freeman's--which Don later made his upstairs study until relocating to the front bedroom downstairs where he had slept as a boy, the summers he came to the farm.



In the kitchen, Kate, and her mother Lucy before her, were glad of fall and summer canning that brightened winter meals.



Wesley, road agent for East Wilmot, was responsible for keeping open a section of Route 4 as well as the road that skirts the pond and the Wilmot portion of New Canada Road (which rises from Route 4) by rolling winter's snow with a horse-drawn roller--in those years before snowplows, when snow was managed by compacting it for sleds and pungs and sleighs. At a time when most things that a farm needed were grown or made on the farm or traded, the cash earned from roadwork supplemented income from milk (shipped by train to Boston) and helped cover taxes.



Snowroller and team, 1924. Photograph by Ralph G. Chaffee, courtesy of Andover Historical Society.

Some farmwork didn't change with the seasons: many chores were daily or weekly, whatever the month--not only barn chores but also the mending, the laundry, the ironing, the meals, the housekeeping.



Old irons that Jane and Don used throughout the house as doorstops, as had Kate and Wesley in later years, recall a time when weekly ironing took an entire day--which was traditionally Tuesday, following laundry all day on Monday. With the advent of electric irons, flat irons that had to be repeatedly reheated on a stove, and used carefully to avoid scorching, could be retired and become doorstops.

Winter was also when longer light began to return. Despite the storms, the cold, the chores, and the extra layers of clothes, every year January again became February, and February promised spring, even if it was still months off.

February brought other promises, too.



Valentine boxes in back chamber.

We've also made promises--to the farm and to all the story and poetry it holds. We thank you for joining us in this and for your gifts in support of what we're building toward.

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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, as well as 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.

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