

# AT EAGLE POND FARM

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**AN OCCASIONAL LETTER**

November 2022

## Don and Jane, Locals

Neighbors going to the Wilmot post office in November and December will find that Jane and Don have paused there, with yellow pads and pencils ready, in case a poem approaches.



The Greek Revival-Italianate building where the post office is located was, for many years, also a store. This gives it two front windows that are now allocated each month to a pair of the town's nonprofits to tell their story and increase awareness of what they're about. At Eagle Pond, Inc. has been warmly welcomed to the rotation.

In this season when straw figures with pumpkin heads--descendants of scarecrows employed in fields--are common around New Hampshire, our variants celebrate that tradition to acknowledge how deeply Jane and Don were part of the Wilmot community and others close by. It is high honor, here, to be regarded as locals. And Jane and Don were.



Books by Don and Jane decorate a tree framing last year's display at the Wilmot post office.



In one of her early New Hampshire poems, Jane wrote, at the start of “Potluck at the Wilmot Flat Baptist Church” (across from the post office),

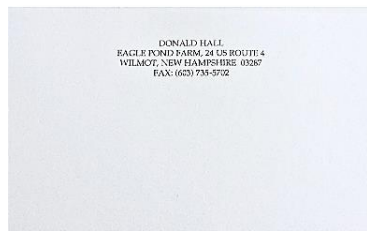
*We drive to the Flat on a clear November night. Stars and planets appear in the eastern sky, not yet in the west.*

*Voices rise from the social hall downstairs, the clink of silverware and plates, the smell of coffee.*

They're arriving for a reading, which the poem describes, but it is as much a valentine to this place where she and Don had found home and townspeople embraced them as their own poets.

Just as Don observed in *String* that every town around claims the best view of Kearsarge (the blue presence that everyone here looks to), the same is true of claims on Don and Jane themselves. Lying where the towns of Andover, Wilmot, and Danbury so nearly meet, Eagle Pond Farm set them where they naturally belonged to all three, and their participation in the life of those communities added proof of the belonging.

Even their address, and which post office served them, left claims of ownership open. Taxes on the farm were due to Wilmot; Jane and Don voted in Wilmot and attended Town Meeting in Wilmot. But their mail was delivered from Danbury, giving the farm a Danbury address. Then, in 2002, mail for Eagle Pond was assigned to Wilmot, and in Don's later years the R.F.D. carrier brought it right to him when the mailbox on the road became too far to walk.



From Don's desk, a succession of addresses.

The closest post office, only two miles down the road, was, however, the one at Potter Place, which is a section of Andover. Jane and Don used it often for sending manuscripts and letters until it closed in 1988. Their telephone, too, was an Andover number. And in all three towns, a host of cousins confirmed old lineage for Don and gave Jane new family.

In a geography of the heart that, here, is less about town bounds than about looking at and living with the same hills and mountains, sharing a feeling for place and its memory, postal address is only part of the story.



In the former J. C. Emons Store at Potter Place, the front corner designated as post office has been preserved intact by the Andover Historical Society, which also maintains store exhibits, the village depot and freight shed, a freight car and caboose, and the home of the stationmaster. Here, too, are the graves of Richard Potter (1783-1835)--a magician, ventriloquist, and showman who was America's first Black celebrity entertainer, known across the country--and his wife Sally, who sometimes performed with him. The graves are on the site of their then-impressive homestead, no longer standing but known at the time as "Potter's Place." For more information about Potter, Potter Place, and when the museum buildings are open to the public, see [www.andoverhistory.org](http://www.andoverhistory.org).

## Pontine Theatre to perform "Christmas Snow"

On the evening of December 13, the South Danbury Church and At Eagle Pond, Inc. will present Pontine Theatre of Portsmouth (N.H.) in their adaptation of Don's short story, "Christmas Snow," an imagined Christmas at Eagle Pond Farm in 1938, the year that Don was ten.



PONTINE THEATRE PRESENTS  
**C**HRISTMAS SNOW  
A STORY BY DONALD HALL

All the time that he was growing up in Connecticut, Don came to New Hampshire to spend summers at the farm with his grandparents, but he was never actually here at Christmas. This story allowed him to conjure what he had so long wanted.

The language surrounds a listener: “I stepped outside into the swirl of flakes, white against the gray of early morning. . . . When it snowed in Connecticut, the snowplows heaped most of it in the gutters and the cars chewed the rest with chains and blackened it with oil. Here the snow turned the farm into a planet of its own, an undiscovered moon.”

The story appeared first in *The New Yorker* in December 1964. Don later constructed a second Christmas trip north, in 1940, published in hardcover in 2012 as *Christmas at Eagle Pond*.

After Don and Jane, early in their marriage, arrived in 1975 to live at the farm, they came to know snow at Christmas intimately--as well as the annual Christmas pageant and tree at the South Danbury church, which they frequently wrote about with affection in poems and prose. Don’s picture book, *Lucy’s Christmas*, illustrated by Michael McCurdy, grew, too, from his mother’s recollections of a still-older Christmas at Eagle Pond Farm when she was growing up there and the tree at the church--where Pontine will be performing--was answer to a whole year’s anticipation.

At the time of Lucy’s childhood, few local families had a Christmas tree at home. There was only the one at the church, dressed with gifts for everyone.



Interior of the South Danbury church. Photograph by Artelia Ellis.

Staged for a small audience, Pontine’s dramatized reading of “Christmas Snow” features hand-drawn props and storytelling but has no conventional actors. It is performed in one act, in one hour, with music by fiddler Ellen Carlson.

Pontine Theater ([www.pontine.org](http://www.pontine.org)) was founded in 1977 by Marguerite Matthews, after study with the French actor Etienne Decroux at his L’Ecole du Mime Corporeal in Paris. In 1982, Greg

Gathers, with a BFA from the Cleveland Institute of Art, began designing and constructing Pontine's sets, puppets, masks, and costumes, and in 1984 he joined Marguerite as co-director of the company. In addition to other productions through the year, every Yuletide they celebrate the season with a holiday work drawn from New England literature and stories--which, this year, is *Christmas Snow*.

The December 13<sup>th</sup> performance, for adults and older children, is at 7:00 p.m. at the So. Danbury Church. **There is no charge to attend, but reservations are recommended because seating is limited. Email [at.eagle.pond@gmail.com](mailto:at.eagle.pond@gmail.com) to register.**



Early photograph of the South Danbury church, completed in 1867. From the collection of Alison Buckwell, courtesy of Jim Buckwell.



Watercolor by Calvin Opitz. Courtesy of the artist and his family.

The church was built a year before Don's great-grandfather, Benjamin C. Keneston, sold his farm high on Ragged Mountain and bought the farm close to the railroad at Eagle Pond. Don's grandmother, Kate, the daughter of Lucy Buck and Ben Keneston, played the pump organ at the church from the time she was sixteen until she was ninety-two, four years before she died in 1975. Don's mother, Lucy (named for her grandmother), said Sundays were for church when she was growing up, and all of her social life "was also church-oriented," but more casually, with frequent box suppers, hymn sings, picnics, and "putting on little plays" or "rehearsing cantatas." The church had many young people, she said, as well as cousins, so she relished those social occasions.

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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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