

AT EAGLE POND FARM

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AN OCCASIONAL LETTER

September 2022

FROM ROOM TO ROOM (with a nod to Jane's 1978 title)

As soon as “doing something” to preserve Eagle Pond Farm turned into creating a nonprofit organization, incorporating a 501(c)(3)--and setting up all that goes with it--became a first, protracted task. Another was the necessary 2021 purchase of the farm from the interim buyers, without whom there would be no farm to preserve.

From the start, however, many, many hours have also gone into restoring composure to the house and bringing back a sense of the lives that Don and Jane--and family before them--lived here and how this place informed them and their work. That will, of course, continue. But what has already been accomplished makes an important difference in conveying what days were like at Eagle Pond Farm.

1

Though many things, not only furnishings, left the house during the auctions and estate sale, some of substance remained. Others have been returned. And still others continue to be discovered.



Among the first of the familiar fixtures of the sitting room to come back were two rows of *Library of America* volumes. A close reader and admirer of Don's work noticed the books on eBay, with Don's notations on the flyleaves, and bought the set so they could be reinstated where they had been. Gift of Larry Smith and Michele Welch.

On top of the bookshelves is a toy ox-cart overlooked at the estate sale (and long-ago mended, like most of the playthings found here and there in the house and back chamber). Then this summer a pair of oxen turned up!



2

This chest of drawers, original to the house, was bought back at auction in 2019. It was made not long before the Civil War by a cabinetmaker who lived less than a mile down the road, in West Andover. According to family history, Don's great-grandmother, Lucy Buck soon-to-be-Keneston (1835-1898), commissioned it in anticipation of her marriage to Don's great-grandfather, Benjamin Cilley Keneston (1826-1914), who bought Eagle Pond Farm from an earlier owner in 1868.



Above the chest is a painting on a tin tray of the approximately same period, with the border on the tray making a frame for the painting. The view is remarkably suggestive of Eagle Pond and the birches where, years back, Don and Jane had their beach for pond afternoons. Gift of Dana Dakin.

3



Plant marker ("Potentilla, Miss Wilmott") found in the toolshed beyond the kitchen: a testament to Jane's gardens.



Flower pot, also in the toolshed.



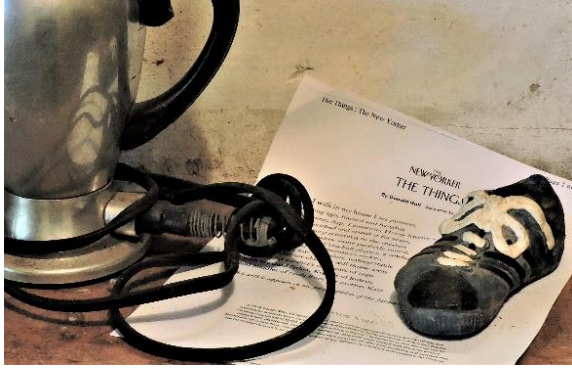
In Jane's study.



During the years of Don's grandparents, milk was stored beyond the toolshed in a room at the back corner of the house. There, a flank of Ragged Mountain presses against the house and keeps the room cool. A panel removed from the door to the pantry was replaced with screen to provide ventilation and protection from flies.

In winter, the six pies Don's grandmother made weekly were kept frozen here. Later, this became a repository for old or broken kitchenware that might one day still be useful, as well as seasonal dishware, equipment, and things retired with the passage of time.





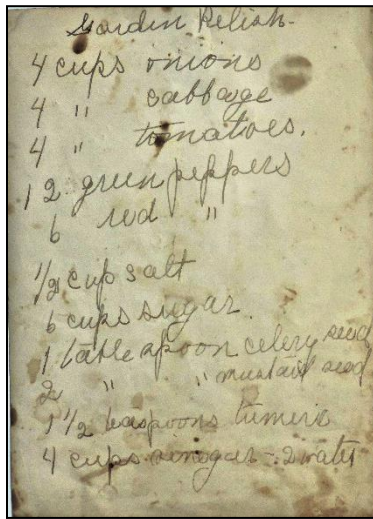
A squeaky dog toy that belonged to Gus, a percolator put to pasture, and Don's poem, "The Things," left by someone attending the estate sale.

5

Don's mother, Lucy, recalled that when she was growing up at the farm, "several kinds of relish were made from green tomatoes. I can never remember," she said, "a dinner when some kind of pickle or relish was not on the table."



In Jane's distinctive handwriting, a label for rhubarb chutney, May 1992.



This recipe for late-summer canning was found in a cookbook used by Kate Wells, who was Lucy's mother and Don's great-grandmother. Gift of Sarah McIntyre.

6

A long-missing dining chair was discovered in the back chamber when recent cleaning of the attic began.



Time has left the chairs in need of repair, but we no longer have to look on eBay or in resale stores for a match. All are in place again--and help recall the writers, poets, friends, and other guests who have contributed to meals and conversation at Eagle Pond.

For additional photographs of the house and history it holds, see www.ateaglepond.org.

“SONGS FROM EAGLE POND”

Our first residents--at the farm last fall--return for an October concert to introduce their work in progress: Proctor Academy Theater, Andover (N.H.), Saturday, October 29, at 7:00 p.m. There's no charge for admission. Reservations not required. For questions, contact at.eagle.pond@gmail.com.

Graham Sobelman, a composer, pianist, and musical director in Sacramento who had set some fifty of Jane's poems as songs, and Maggie Hollinbeck, singer, musician, actress, and poet based in New York City who had performed and recorded those songs with Graham, wanted to experience the place that shaped Jane's and Don's days. They understood that the house was far from being ready for residencies, so they would be camping more than “residing,” but they were game.



Graham Sobelman (<http://www.grahamsobelman.com>)
Maggie Hollinbeck (<http://www.maggiehollinbeck.com>)
Photograph courtesy of Graham Sobelman.

Though they could be here only a week, it totally confirmed what is intended for the new life of the farm. During that time, Graham began setting to music the poem-letters that Don wrote to Jane after her death. He and Maggie also edited some earlier songs; and both fully embraced this place and community. At nearby Proctor Academy, they presented a class on “The Art of Expression.” And at the end of the week, to express their own thanks, they gave an impromptu concert of Jane songs at the Wilmot Congregational Church, which was exceptionally generous with its piano and its space. Windows open to the night air because of Covid, the church was filled by an audience--responsibly distanced--who were profoundly moved by hearing the poems as songs and by the sensibilities that Graham and Maggie brought to their performance.

From the start of this undertaking at the farm, we've been hearing--from neighbors, from groups and individuals who visit the house, and from people who know about Eagle Pond only at a distance--the keen feeling a broad public has for the farm, for Don's and Jane's work, and for the nonprofit's endeavor. They tell us that it matters just to know the farm is there and cared for. But this first residency generated a new understanding of, and excitement for, what is ahead.

Equally confirming is what it meant to our residents and their work to be at the farm and staying in the house. Back in California, Graham wrote: “Having set Jane Kenyon's poems to music, I felt

very connected to her work. But after spending the week at Eagle Pond Farm--looking out the windows, breathing the air, meeting old friends and neighbors of Jane's and Don's, learning places familiar to them, seeing faces morph into smiles when I mentioned their names--I started to actually understand the impact of their poetry and the legacy they left behind. Then to share the songs in concert at the end of the week with so many people who knew them --really one of the highlights of my career as a composer. Maggie and I felt so welcomed by the community and by At Eagle Pond, Inc. giving us a chance to work there, to discover new meanings in poems and, honestly, just to sit in the space where the poems were born and crafted.



When the piano at the Wilmot town hall was retired in 2021, it found a new home in the front parlor at Eagle Pond Farm. Its age makes it a surrogate for a piano originally in the sitting room, which was displaced by the construction of bookshelves. Some visitors to the house have remembered, from when they were growing up, coming with parents or grandparents who were calling on Don's grandparents, Kate and Wesley Wells. Tiring of adult conversation, the children would amuse themselves at the piano. This successor to it, installed shortly before the arrival of Graham and Maggie, was put to immediate proud use. Piano moving, gift of Margaret Doody.

Since last fall, Graham has composed settings for more of Don's poems, and he and Maggie, who both have long history and credentials in musical theater, have continued shaping "Songs from Eagle Pond." The October 29 premiere of the work in progress will juxtapose selected poems by Jane with Don's "letters" and some prose excerpts. Graham, at the piano, and Maggie, performing the Jane songs, will be joined for the Don songs by Omari Tau (<https://www.omaritau.com>), singer, actor, and educator, also based in Sacramento but performing widely, including touring with Disney's *Lion King*. Time for conversation will follow.

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At Eagle Pond, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit established to preserve the place where poets Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon shared a writing life, as well as to honor and examine their work, invite reflection on why it matters, and provide residencies where poets and others can take up their own work at the farm.