

Songs from Eagle Pond Concert Honors Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon

At Proctor's theater, October 29 at 7 PM

Press release

Poems by Jane Kenyon and Donald Hall – set as songs by California composer Graham Sobelman and performed by him, Maggie Hollinbeck, and Omari Tau – will be presented in concert on Saturday, October 29, at Proctor Academy Theater in Andover at 7 PM. There is no charge for admis-

poetry.

Then, in 1975, three years after he and Jane Kenyon married in Ann Arbor (where Don was teaching at the University of Michigan and Jane had been a student), they decided to try a year at the farm, together. Almost immediately, they knew they wouldn't be returning to Michigan.

The farm had long held the story of Don's family. But Jane found her own there, too. Though she had begun writing poetry in college, she said it was coming to Eagle Pond that made her a poet. It gave her a subject, she said, and a renewed way of looking, as it also gave her a place to enter a new life and learn home.

Discarding nothing from previous generations, Don and Jane filled the Eagle Pond farmhouse still further with books and art, and writing became the habit of their days. In time, both were named New Hampshire poet laureates, and Don also served as a US poet laureate.

In 1995, Jane died at Eagle Pond Farm when leukemia took her at age 47. Don continued to live and write there,

until he also died at the farm in 2018, months short of age 90.

Nonprofit Buys Eagle Pond Farm

When Eagle Pond Farm, right at the edge of Andover, in Wilmot, was about to be sold in 2019 and the contents of the historic farmhouse were also about to be dispersed at two auctions and an estate sale, it seemed that all that the farm represented was ending. But the story took a different turn.

Feeling they had to do something, without quite knowing what that "something" would be, a hastily-formed group of neighbors, friends, and colleagues in historic preservation came together to save the farm.

Two members of this group, Lynne Monroe and Frank Whittemore of Kensington, New Hampshire, used their retirement savings to buy the property, not to live there but to hold it until a long-term plan could be pondered. At the same time, others in the group bought at the auctions and estate sale the most representative furnishings and other items they could, though without a clear sense of what was ahead.

The auctions and estate sale were, however, barely over when all involved realized they would have to create an organization to become steward of the farm and preserve what it was about. The resulting nonprofit, At Eagle Pond, Inc, is now a 501(c)(3) established to maintain the farm as a local and national historic landmark, as well as to honor the work of Don and Jane, invite reflection on why it matters, and provide eventual residencies where poets and others can take up their own work for a period of time.

In 2021, the nonprofit purchased the farm from the interim buyers, "without whom there would be no farm to preserve," says president Mary Lyn Ray, a South Danbury writer and friend-and-

neighbor of Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon. Repairs to the house, along with restoration of views of Eagle Pond, wait for fundraising and grant applications.

But research and documentation for nomination of the farm to the National



Eagle Pond Farm, where Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon shared a writing life.

Photo: Daphne Bruemmer

sion. Reservations are not required.

Growing up in Connecticut, Donald Hall came to spend his summers at the Eagle Pond farm that had been in his family since the Civil War, where his grandparents were still living a farm life. There he wrote some of his first



Graham Sobelman and Maggie Hollinbeck at Eagle Pond, October 2021.

Photo: Graham Sobelman

Register of Historic Places are well under way; and as furnishings and other history are returned, the house recovers more and more from the drama of the auctions and estate sale.

Now past the necessary focus on incorporation and purchase of the farm, the organization can begin to give more place to programs and other public events, inaugurated by "Songs from Eagle Pond," a premiere of work in progress by the nonprofit's first residents, Graham Sobelman and Maggie Hollinbeck.

How Songs Grew

Graham, a composer, pianist, and music director in Sacramento, who had set some 50 of Jane's poems as songs, and Maggie, a singer, musician, actress, and poet based in New York City, who had performed and recorded those songs with Graham, had been wanting to experience the place that shaped Jane's and Don's days. Hearing about the nonprofit's plans for the farm, they were soon in touch, and what had seemed off in the future no longer was. They understood that the house was

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