

Reminiscence

The Hersey Farm

This reminiscence is excerpted from *In Their Time* by Helen Duchesne, a book about the Hersey Family Farm. Copies are available for loan at the Andover Libraries.

Driving west on Route 11 between Franklin and East Andover Village, New Hampshire, a picturesque old farmhouse with its large attached barn and several outbuildings rests on a gradual incline to the left of the highway. A little more than a mile from the Franklin town line, the buildings are surrounded by a stretch of fields on each side of the road. Purchased by my grandparents in 1904, it is the Nannie R. and Guy E. Hersey Farm.

My mother, Dorothy Hersey LaPlante, was born in this farmhouse on June 4, 1907, the first of six children. She was born at home, as were most babies in her day, in her parents' tiny bedroom. Her parents were farmers as were her nearby aunts and uncles and most of the other neighbors.

In the fall of 1995, my sisters, brother, and I had the privilege of revisiting the land and buildings where my mother grew up. The farmhouse has not been lived in for thirty-five years and was owned by my uncle, Samuel Hersey, who lived in Hartford, Connecticut. He was the oldest son and in keeping with early English tradition, he inherited the family property. It is maintained and watched over by another uncle, James Hersey, and his son, Jerry, who live nearby where they operate their own farm. They were the hosts of our tour. Recently, Samuel died and left the farm to his son, Roger.

The white farmhouse with its red doors and the attached barn with its weathered brownish-gray shingles have not changed much in the past century. This may be the reason it is frequently photographed and painted by local and regional photographers and artists looking for a piece

of yesterday.

Both inside and out, the farmhouse today looks very much as it did when I was a child and probably is little changed from my mother's childhood. In the kitchen, the big black and silver Home Comfort stove that heated the house and cooked the family's food still dominates the kitchen. A two-gallon metal water tank attached to the wood-burning part of the stove heated water for dish washing and small chores. Two warming ovens attached to the top of the stove kept food warm and helped to dry wet mittens and gloves.

The wooden water barrel in the corner of the kitchen that fascinated me when I was a child is no longer there. I liked to watch my grandmother lift water out of the barrel with a dipper and carry it to the water tank on the wood stove to heat.

The pantry where my grandmother prepared her food for baking, especially pies and cakes, adjoins the kitchen. Imagine my surprise to see the butter churn still sitting in the corner of the pantry as if waiting for someone to pour in the cream, turn the handle, and create rich butter.

The living room is a small room off the kitchen and in the middle of the house. I don't think there was enough room for all the family to sit at once, but my mother said the children usually went to bed just before dark anyway. Without electricity, it was easier and safer not to be moving around with lanterns. I'm sure my grandparents went to bed early too after a day's work on the farm. With only kerosene lamps and nothing much to read, there was probably little incentive to stay up.

My grandparents' tiny bedroom was next to the living room, and here all the babies were born. My mother remembered it also as the thunderstorm room. Grammie was so frightened of thunder showers that she took the children into her bedroom where



The red doors of the Hersey barns make them a well-known landmark on Route 11 in East Andover. Photo: Beth McGuinn

they huddled together on the bed until the storm was over. Not surprisingly, she passed this fear on to my mother. Fortunately, I was never too frightened by thunder showers.

The living room leads to the hallway, the main front door, the upstairs, and the parlor. The front door was rarely used except for special occasions, such as when Baby Lewis (my mother's baby brother) died at three months, and the wake was held in the parlor. My sister Irene asked my mother at an earlier time if Grammie had cried when Lewis died. Mama said she didn't see her cry, but that didn't mean she hadn't cried. My mother added, "People didn't talk much then about such things. They tried to forget and just go on."

Steep narrow stairs lead to two small bedrooms, one for the boys and one for the girls. My Uncle Raymond remembers how the wind blew through all the cracks. With five heavy quilts on him, he couldn't turn over and didn't want to get up. My Aunt Elsie says she slept with everything covered except her nose. In the morning her hair was covered with frost!

At the top of the stairs, an old washstand still balances a beautiful pink and white pitcher and bowl. It is as if they are waiting there for someone to climb the stairs bringing water to take a bath.

The parlor was fancy. It still has a velvet chair and my grandmother's desk where she wrote many letters. Still hanging near the desk on the wall is my grandparents' large marriage license dated September 27, 1903. Grammie's organ still commands its place in the parlor.

At the Peabody Home where my mother spent the last three and one-

half years of her life, a man who frequently played the guitar and sang for the residents in their rooms always sang and played *In the Garden* for my mother. The song was one of her favorite hymns. My mother cried each time she heard it as she explained that her mother played it on the organ when Mama was a little girl.

When we returned to the kitchen, I tried to visualize my mother as a little girl living in this house with its calendars on the wall and its cold bare floors. While it was exciting for us to see, I could understand how she felt that growing up on the farm was "hard – very hard."

HERSEY FAMILY FARM CONSERVATION, PHASE 2

Fundraising is progressing well for the conservation of the "stretch of fields" surrounding the buildings described by Helen Duchesne in *In Their Time*. Thanks to the generosity of donors in Andover and beyond, an additional \$10,000 has been raised to purchase a conservation easement on approximately 55 acres of the Hersey Farm. For our campaign to be successful, an additional \$30,000 must be raised before the end of the year.

Your financial assistance is needed to help ensure these fields remain undeveloped in the future. Please send your tax-deductible donation to the Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust, PO Box 2040, New London 03257.

For more information about this second phase of the Hersey Family Farm Conservation project, please contact Beth McGuinn at 526-6555.

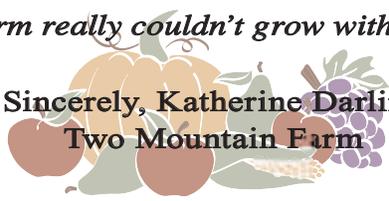


Thank You!

To all the customers and friends who supported Two Mountain Farm this season.

Special appreciation goes to the GROSS FAMILY, who enable me to have a roadside stand in such a fantastic location.

The farm really couldn't grow without you...



Sincerely, Katherine Darling
Two Mountain Farm

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