

Dedication Speech
September 27, 2007, Pelham, New Hampshire

“CUTTER WOODS”

Martine Merriam Banister
Conservation Area

Hello, my name is Ellen Banister Nadeau, the last family member to inherit the 37 acres- Cutter Woods, Martine Merriam Banister Conservation Area. This land has been passed down by will from one generation to the next in the Cutter Family.

The name Cutter Woods was chosen for its simplicity and because it encompasses all the Cutters who have farmed, worked, played, learned and socialized on the land. These 37 acres were part of the original 86 acres, 30 poles not including travelling roads within that John Cutter purchased from his older brother Richard on May 25, 1792. Richard had purchased the land in 1790 from the widow Martha Brown of Boston, MA. John's son Benjamin, a nurseryman and horticulturist, was the next owner followed by his son Frederic, my grandmother Virginia Cutter Merriam's father. My grandmother Virginia and my mother Martine were next in line.

I had mixed emotions in making the conservation sale to the Town of Pelham. The land would no longer be owned by a family member after 215 years. But, how does what I did fit with the beliefs of my grandmother Virginia and my mother Martine? Cutter descendants I knew who had been stewards of this land.

My mother and grandmother both held onto this land to keep it from development. My grandmother, a plain N.H. farmer's wife, was an early proponent of stewardship, the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care, and conservation, the careful preservation and protection of the land. She showed this in many ways.

First, you could tell by the way she kept the grounds around the farmhouse. She had extensive gardens, both vegetable and flower, which contained healthy and weed free plants.

If a person came to the door to ask if he could put up a sign on a tree he got the standard lecture about no nails in the trees (her grandfather's or any others). The sign was not put up, but the person won her everlasting good will plus her vote and any of those she influenced.

My grandmother often took me on walks in the woods. She pointed out the cardinal flower and skunk cabbage by Aunt Mary's Brook (the one below here which passes under Sherburne Road), bird's foot violets, arethusa and pitcher plants by the irrigation ditch in the Wyman field, ladyslippers near a pine tree, princess pine, mayflowers (her favorite flower which didn't grow naturally on the farm so she planted some). The phoebe rock where the phoebes nested. She would not allow the picking of any rare flowers unless there were many and then only one.

She said it was OK to walk on the land but we were not to disturb it or leave any sign we were there, especially garbage. She was an early proponent of "leave no trace." She spent many hours picking up trash along Sherburne Road.

Another activity she spent time at was to keep the alders out of the Wyman field. She also spent much time trying to keep the beaver dams monitored and open. In her later life she could no longer keep up with the alders and the beavers.

In the 10 years between the death of my grandfather, Clifton Merriam, and my grandmother in 1973, my grandmother would say her chief exercise was answering each knock on the door, "Any land for sale?" with a resounding "NO"!

As I read through my mother's writings and newspaper clippings the reoccurring theme was the need for open space and the need to learn from nature.

In the Derry News, May 16, 1985, my mother wrote, "Life as I define it includes space for movement, fresh air, sunshine and clean water. It also embraces animals, birds, reptiles, fish and insects, trees, flowers, fruit and vegetables. We had better widen our walking paths and enlarge our parks."

The following was taken from her eulogy by Michael E. Jones, her son-in-law who lives in the farmhouse, on June 11, 1999.

“She was worried that her grandchildren - Andy, Matt, Elka, Susan and Katarina - and their entire generation - would grow up not knowing, not caring and not respecting the special kinship people need with plants and animals, with the water and the marsh. Writing nature stories and walking with her grandchildren in the back 40 acres was her way of teaching about wild flowers and wild berries, and about agriculture and conservation. She knew the object of your care becomes a part of you. Martine was Rachel Carson before the Silent Spring was ever published.

“Martine lived the life she wrote and spoke. Born in her cousin Charles Jack’s house and raised on the family rock strewn farm with her brother Fred in Pelham, she inherited her mother’s love of outdoor life. Martine learned to work the land, recognize birds by their songs, and cultivate a life long appreciation for open space and clean water. More importantly she taught all of us, especially her children Ellen, Joanne, Carolyn, John and Charlie, and her nephew Ricky how to recognize and appreciate the beauty of nature ... she knew life is never constant.”

Did I make the right decision to sell my 37 acres to the Town of Pelham for a conservation / forest area?

If I was to have a say in the disposition of the land I needed to do it while I was healthy and able to make the decision. To put the land in the stewardship of Pelham made sense once my Uncle Fred’s Gage Lot (110 acres) was sold to Pelham in a conservation sale. The land needed stewards who live nearby.

My mother and her brother Fred were not only sister and brother, but playmates, along with cousin Charles Jack, who has 25 acres adjoining this property in conservation. This brings them all together in a way on the land where they played, learned and worked. The land they loved.

Much of the 37 acres was a mature forest which hadn’t had firewood taken off it in about 50 years. It had many dangerous and leaning trees. It needed rejuvenation. It will be interesting to see what grows back. In 1792 it was covered in oak and then pine came in during Benjamin Cutter’s time. My mother called green fields “New Hampshire’s Emeralds. I’m sure she would be glad to see the open fields once again, as would my grandmother.

My mother appreciated the small farm lifestyle, being in tune with nature. She would be glad people will have a place to walk, cross country ski, snowshoe, skate, and observe nature in all seasons. Activities she enjoyed. Both she and her mother would be glad Pelham had the foresight to recognize the need for open land before it was too late. I believe I made the right decision.

An article my grandmother saved from a newspaper called the 1590 Broadcaster, dated March 8, 1972, has the following quote from Dr. Lorus and Margery Milne's book The Arena of Life: The Dynamics of Ecology, "The world does not belong to man to do with as he chooses. Mankind belongs to the world, and can have a future only as a cooperating part of ecology."

Thank you.