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Rusticus:

Notes on Class and Culture in Rural New Hampshire

Donald Hall

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Old New Hampshire Highway Number Four was incorporated by an act of the New Hampshire legislature in the autumn of 1800. It wound out of Portsmouth, a seaport that once rivaled Boston, drove west through Concord, north past Penacook, through Boscawen, Salisbury, Andover, and Wilmot on its way to Lebanon and the Connecticut River. These names string history like beads. The Penacook tribe assembled each year on the banks of the Merrimack at the site of the present town that bears their name. I grew up thinking Boscawen an unusual Indian name; it is Cornish, surname of an admiral victorious over the French in the eighteenth century. Andover's land was granted to veterans of the Louisburg Expedition against the French, but the first house did not go up until 1761, a year after the English conquest of Canada put an end to Indian raids. We need no reminding in 1985 that Lebanon turns up in the Old Testament.

Not that these New Hampshire towns lack a history of violence. At Penacook is the island in the Merrimack River where Hannah Dustin killed ten Indians in 1697. Forty years old, she was kidnapped from the village of Haverhill, Massachusetts Bay Colony, where she had given birth a week earlier. Her husband with their seven older children was working in the fields, Dustin nursing her infant under the care of a neighbor named Mary Jeff, when Abenakis attacked, burned her house, and brained her baby against a tree. They took the two women into the forest where they divided their prisoners into traveling parties; these women were grouped with a boy captured at Worcester. As they began their journey north toward Canada, their guards were two braves, three squaws, and seven Abenaki children. While the Indians slept on the Merrimack Island, the three prisoners stole their tomahawks and quickly murdered all but one squaw and one boy. The colonists prudently hacked up the corpses of their captors, and when they returned to Haverhill received a bounty of fifty pounds for the scalps.

Cotton Mather tells the story, which he heard from Ms. Dustin herself, who survived into her eightieth year. I met her again in Frances Parkman, who spells the name Dustan, but I first heard the adventure from my grandmother in an old house on Route Four in Wilmot; she told it with some difference in detail as a family story about a heroic ancestor. About the time my grandmother died, at ninety-seven in 1975—the year we moved into her house—the New Hampshire State Liquor Commission contrived a Hannah Dustin commemorative bottle filled with bourbon: you twist her head off (as the Abenakis should have done) and pour yourself Kentucky's whiskey.

New Hampshire's state economy, without sales tax or income tax, is based on wickedness and ill health: the first state lottery was New Hampshire's in 1963; flatlanders buy truckloads of cheap cigarettes; a state monopoly keeps liquor cheap. Huge stores beside the interstates sell cases to visitors from Massachusetts, while highway signs primly warn about the dangers of drinking and driving. Novelty items, like the effigy of the amazonian Indian killer, help New Hampshire's citizens avoid paying taxes. I begin my generalizations about the culture or ethos of northern New England by relating these two pieces of New Hampshire lore, with nothing in common except a woman's name and fiscal prudence. Perhaps if we add the woman of 1697 to her 1975 figurine and divide by two, the product is present-day New Hampshire.

My grandmother was born in this house in 1878, thirteen years after her father moved here. The extended white farmhouse sits on a busy two-lane country highway, although the original house was presumably set back from the Grafton Turnpike—incorporated in 1804, not finished until 1811—which headed north after Highway Number Four turned toward the sunset at West Andover. The saltbox went up in 1802, I assume on a wagon track where men led oxen. It would not go so far back as Hannah Dustin, for reasons her adventure makes clear. Most settlement this far inland took place after the Revolution. Troops mustered out and migrated north from Massachusetts—doubtless some were descendants of the Haverhill Dustins—or west from the New Hampshire seacoast, for independence and a piece of land. This house stands between Danbury and Andover in the town of Wilmot, incorporated in 1817 out of scraps and patches, including Kearsarge Gore. It remains quiet despite the busy traffic; we see one other house from our house. We love this country solitude, interrupted by church, shopping, and occasional callers who stop by the dooryard; we love Mount Kearsarge, noble to the south of us, and Eagle Pond, placid to the west, Ragged Mountain rising behind our woodshed. . . . But we love best the culture we live in—despite its bourbon figurines.

When I was asked to write about the New England mind, or spirit, at first I thought: fine; that's what I always write about. A reservation followed quickly: What do I know about the mind of Greenwich, Connecticut? or Fall River, Massachusetts? or, Nashua, New Hampshire, for that matter? Nashua is New Hampshire annexed by California—crowded, changing day by day, Silicon Valley North. How can I generalize about New England if I cannot even generalize about New Hampshire? The novelist George V. Higgins, who reviews magazines in the *Globe* on Saturdays, once quoted Ada Louise Huxtable on "New England": "It's a very Calvinistic life," she said. "It has beautiful symmetry and restrictions, and great intellectual elegance." One of the *Globe*'s resident Hibernians, Higgins was puzzled: Perhaps Huxtable had overlooked Brockton and Lawrence? When Huxtable continued by saying, "But you could say it's a little constipated," Higgins's puzzlement disappeared. "It's Cambridge," he deduced with relief.

Surely he was correct. The New Hampshire in which I live is as alien to Cambridge as it is to Brockton, and it is about *this* province that I allow myself to speak; I can write, maybe, about the mind or spirit of Wilmot, New Hampshire. If what I observe in Wilmot, Danbury, and Andover applies elsewhere, it will apply mostly to other parts of northern New England—not to Nashua, not to the tax-free Boston suburb that is Salem, New Hampshire. And it may apply to the area spreading west from Vermont into the poorer rural regions of northern New York and Pennsylvania, into the country towns of eastern Ohio, settled with New Englanders about the time these New Hampshire towns were settled, with handsome village squares and Federal buildings.

Not to mention the rural South.

During the year, I take brief trips away from this house as I read my poems at colleges. Every year I go to the Coast once or twice, I visit Texas once a year, not only Austin and Dallas but Lubbock and Waco; I visit the exotic landscapes of Idaho, Colorado, Montana, and Utah; I return continually to the various institutions of Ohio—and nowhere in the United States am I reminded so much of rural New Hampshire as when I read at small colleges in Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina.

46 Four times I have visited Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina, where I stay with Allen and Yvonne King in the tiny town of Cross Hill. Twice I have been to Wofford College in Spartanburg, nearby. In a circle surrounding Atlanta—which could almost be Toledo or Houston—small colleges inhabit middle-sized Georgia towns: Columbus, Augusta, Milledgeville, Rome. Now when I stay at the Milledgeville Holiday Inn, I might as well sleep in Rhode Island or Montana. But when I walk or drive outside Augusta or Rome, when I sit on the verandah in Cross Hill, although the architecture differs and the accent is incorrect, I feel emanations of *home* rising from red dirt. It is more than the sculpture, alive in the center of southern towns as it lives in Wilmot Flat, of the Civil War soldier and the soldier of the War Between the States—slim fellow eternally bronze, with musket and identical standard handsome features, with the minor discrepancy of uniform, of victory and defeat.

He stands more often in the South than he does in New Hampshire. He poses in Wilmot Flat, not in Andover or Danbury. Rich Andover raised a war monument only in 1923, shortly after what it called The World War, but the list of one hundred forty-three Civil War soldiers takes pride of place on the monument's front. Poor Danbury—which my blacksmith great-grandfather John Wells left for the New Hampshire Volunteers, Company F, 15th Regiment—fixes a small bronze plaque on the town hall. Among the fifty-one names from Samuel S. Adams to Addison L. Woodman, I recognize families that survive in Danbury one hundred twenty years later: Braley, Brown, Butler, Danforth, Farnham, Ford, Minard, Morrill, Morrison, Sanborn. I recognize the name of a cousin killed by a cannonball at Vicksburg: John Wells brought back to his family the contents of dead pockets, and one object has come down to this house; in my grandmother's jewelry case, on top of another great-grandfather's chest of drawers in our bedroom, I keep a ring carved out of bone by a boy killed a hundred-and-twenty-some years ago.

Only in small towns of the rural South and in towns of northern New England does this war survive—blockade, starvation, burning, attrition, sepsis, trench warfare, and charges into cannon fire. If you search the suburbs from Connecticut through New York and New Jersey, past Pennsylvania, skirting Gettysburg into Ohio, Michigan, Indiana; if you search through the Plains states to the West Coast from Orange County to Bellevue, Washington, you will rarely find this war. In the present United States, this war recedes into *olden times*, like Homer, the Roaring Twenties, the Crusades, Gilgamesh, and Will Rogers. It is preserved like a bottled fetus in the library and in the notebooks of genealogical eccentrics. Outside Atlanta and Birmingham, and north of Boston, the blue and the gray still march—bugle call and amputated limb—in the fierce cannonade of old memory. The past continues into the present because the plaque's family names remain on the land. Only in the rural South and rural New England do you find any appreciable remnant of Americans who live where their great-grandfathers lived, or who know the maiden names of their great-grandmothers.

Rural New Hampshire separates itself not only from Cambridge and Brockton. Let me call rural people a separate class, class *Rusticus*. In order to talk of its uniqueness, I must speculate about the cultures against which it distinguishes itself. When we talk about American classes by making revision of European class structures, I suspect we miss the point. Americans divide themselves not so much into economic classes as into ethnic, regional, and cultural groups—except that most of us belong to a single class within which there is economic hierarchy. The middle class, or *Massclass*, is singular, because it shares goals and values—the names of desired objects alter according to hierarchy, and your mobile home is my year in France—and because it does not care where it lives except in connection with these desires.

When I assert this great monogroup, I do not deny that poverty and suffering assault its unluckier members. Depression or recession, unemployment, bankruptcy and foreclosure, failure and social welfare, are cyclical components of capitalism. I speak of a commonness not of success and prosperity but of standards of success and prosperity. Neither do I deny the existence of an underclass perpetually assaulted by poverty, rendered almost unemployable by habitual loss, generation after generation nurtured and enfeebled by welfare. I only deny, by definition, that these sufferers may be called working class.

At the other extreme, maybe there are a few families, with money around for several generations, who make an upper class. Maybe . . . I remain skeptical of inherited class in the United States, skeptical that its narcissism is secure. These people hold to superiority over rich massclass managers only by the skin of their capped teeth, the way the lower-middle class in England paddles furiously to distinguish itself from workers. *Black* is a class, most of the time, a culture and a set of values distinct from massclass, from which some blacks emigrate into massclass. I suppose that *Hispanic* is another. *Emigrant* is mostly a one-generation class, culturally divided according to place or origin, second and third generation joining massclass America. I suggest that *Rusticus* is another class or culture; I live among this class as a massclass emigrant.

My mother and my grandmother were born in this house but my mother moved to Hamden, Connecticut—a suburb of New Haven—when she married, and I grew up among blocks of similar houses, a neighborhood in a town where everyone shared four convictions: (1) I will do better than my father and mother. (2) My children will do better than I do. (3) “Better” includes “education,” and education provides the things of this world. (4) *The things of this world are good*. Within the town, the neighborhoods were distinct, especially according to hierarchies of money—the market value of houses, their size and proximity to each other, the number of stalls in their garages. In Hamden we lived on the western side of Whitney Avenue in a prosperous section called Spring Glen, a little more prosperous than Whitneyville, richer than Centerville and State Street. Because we were on the western side of Whitney, my father always said we lived on the “two-bit side”; east of Whitney was the “fifty-cent side.”

When I left Hamden High School, to go to Exeter, Harvard, and later Oxford, I learned a number of confusing things about class. For one thing, I learned that I cherished *ressentiment*. Exeter is massclass, but within the hierarchy it is more elevated than Hamden High School. At Exeter for the first time I met people whose fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers had gone to college—same colleges, same clubs. I was not like them; my grandfathers were not high school graduates; they had worked with their hands. I discovered poorboy resentment when I heard myself hiss at a fourth-generation Princetonian: “Rich Boy!” Any incipient hierarchy-hatred was muted by

Harvard, for the legacies who hung around Porcellian or Fox were figures of fun; powerful students mostly came from high schools in Denver and from the Bronx High School of Science. After Harvard, Oxford taught me something else, which was the tentative and apologetic nature of American classes in contrast to venerable English habits preserved in conservative Oxford. My arrival at Christ Church College was a series of social traumas. Two distinguished gentlemen, as I thought, lifted my heavy suitcases from the taxi and ignored my protests as I tried to relieve them of their burdens. Politely but with magisterial firmness they allowed me to understand that I was not permitted to carry my own suitcases: my suitcases would be delivered to my rooms, sir. When I gained my rooms, I was assaulted again: a handsome youngish man knocked on my door and introduced himself: "I am your servant, sir." I wanted him to take it back; don't say such a thing of yourself! And for two years he never sat in my presence.

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Later I understood that for all the tipping of caps, English working-class deference concealed notions of superiority, and that working-class culture took pride in its separateness. Not so in the American massclass that I grew up in and moved back to. Ann Arbor, Michigan—I taught for many years at the university there—cloned Hamden, Connecticut, and Lexington, Massachusetts. Ann Arbor was massclass, and in southern Michigan everyone lived in a geologic stratum of this class—unless you were black and sometimes if you were black. The academy is an institution of massclass, not to say a boot camp, and professors at the University of America rise through the layers of their careers like caterpillars from larva to winged glory. The assistant professor, in my time, drove a Beetle; Volvos were Volkswagens with tenure. In American society no segment—not even big business, not even government, not even the Masons—is so hierarchical, so positively medieval, so graduated and organized by level, so pope/cardinal/archbishop/bishop/priest, as the University of America. The graduate student pad becomes the small house of the assistant professor, which turns into the larger house on a larger lot for the associate—and with success the near-estate of the full professor, the chairman, the associate dean for student affairs. In Ann Arbor neighborhoods, the professional class surrounds itself with other professionals, with lawyers and doctors and the more pretentious executives from the automobile industry, willing to commute to Dearborn or Detroit for the sake of musical evenings, football Saturdays, tennis with tenured professors, polysyllabic cookouts, and doctoral cocktail parties.

Ann Arbor is a prosperous town, and neighboring towns house its servants. This pairing or balancing of towns and neighborhoods is a constant feature of society. But the man who pumps gas for you, if he lives in an Ann Arbor neighborhood of home-made houses, does not belong to a different class. At least, when we call him "working class"—because he wears white socks and T-shirts, because he bowls on Thursdays, because he hangs his belly over his belt, because his annual income is less than ours—we do not name a culture, as we do for an English agricultural laborer or a Yugoslavian coal miner or a French chambermaid. His culture is different on the surface but his aspirations follow the same template. He is massclass, but he didn't have the breaks or the education; by God, his kids will! He works to take time off; his time off is a cottage by the lake with his outboard, rather than a sabbatical at the British Museum with an ACLS grant, but only the names are changed.

If I indulge myself in ironies about the massclass, it is not with the notion that I thereby detach myself. I am a card-carrying member, Amexco, and one does not alter the habits and values of a lifetime by changing one's place of residence. I retain the

markings: lust for comfort, distaste for physical labor, fear and loathing of false teeth, desire for my children's education and comfort. Because my parentage was mixed, because I spent my childhood summers in this house, I kept at least a vision of something different.

The class or culture of Rusticus is alien to massclass. Let us start with a stereotype of New Hampshire's citizenry as cherished by citizens of Boston: Rusticus women are fat; Rusticus men wear crew cuts; there isn't a full set of God-given teeth from Vermont's border on Lake Champlain eastward to Maine's Atlantic coast. Mr. and Mrs. R. inhabit a thirty-year-old trailer without calling it a mobile home, surrounded by two junked sedans and a pickup that's all froze up next to the old freezer past the washing machine; they are somewhere between thirty-two years old and fifty-seven but it's hard to tell; each weighs two hundred twelve pounds, but he spreads his weight over his whole five feet eight-and-a-half inches, while she tends to be more concentrated at five foot one; the working truck wears a gun rack and an NRA bumper sticker; there's a sign for night crawlers and another for a yard sale; when the mill's going they gum Twinkies and TV dinners but when they're laid off, they settle for squirrel meat and potato chips; they have never applied for food stamps because they don't know they are poor and because people on welfare are liars and cheats. They vote Republican.

Now some massclass visitors honor Rusticus with the epithet "redneck," acknowledgment of a perceived analogy to the rural South—acknowledgment more clearly of the antipathy that one class feels for another. "Redneck" is racist slang, like "hillbilly"; it demonstrates urban and suburban superiority to Rusticus, while it conceals terror of the alien. But of course, Massachusetts liberals, when they speak of the rednecks of New Hampshire, do not believe that they demonstrate terror of overweight people without teeth. They feel that they denounce right-wing politics, narrow and bigoted opinions associated with Alabama sheriffs named Virgil who shoot SNCC workers.

It must be admitted that the flatlanders may assemble some evidence, including a New Hampshire governor (born in Georgia) who praised the living conditions of Soweto, and a newspaper that is not only the worst occasion of journalism in the United States, but, for a daily paper, the grossest conservative rag. But things are never *quite* so simple: even to characterize New Hampshire's politics as right wing is unhistorical, as if we called Hannah Dustin a fascist for her attitude toward Native Americans.

Reading early American history, one becomes aware that the Revolution started not with the shot heard round the world but with landings at Virginia and Plymouth, and with the extraordinary, habitual independence of these colonies from their sovereign across the sea. Our ancestors were ungovernable from abroad; they were also largely ungovernable at home. Within each colony, every unit separated itself as much as possible from every other unit—town from state, village from town, family or neighbor group from village, and legislature from governor. On occasion we had to cooperate: to fence the common, to build a jail. *Some* law was necessary; but in spirit the colonists, Puritan or not, remained largely antinomian. We were, after all, self-selected separators, alike only in that we all decided to leave the past behind and start over.

New Hampshire's history for three hundred years has been dominated by the necessity to separate itself from its huge neighbor Massachusetts. If New Hampshire had not grown pointed bristles, Massachusetts would have eaten it alive in the seventeenth century, not to mention the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth. The generally separatist tendencies of Americans became exacerbated for New Hampshire by the power of Boston. When colonies became states, when the Union needed preserving, still Franklin

Pierce's Democrats voted in the House against using federal funds for construction of highways and canals in states and territories. Ideas of states' rights, and states' consequent responsibilities, pertained not only to slavery and the South. New Hampshire's 1985 conservative Republican is a Frank Pierce Democrat of 1853.

My great-grandfather John Wells was a Copperhead like the New England fellow who named his son Robert Lee Frost and moved west to California, along with others who bet on the wrong side. John Wells fought for the Union out of local feeling, hated Lincoln all his life, and bequeathed to all his descendants genetic adherence to the Democratic Party, which leaves my family, out of loyalty and DNA, eccentric in New Hampshire. When the Democrats nominated Al Smith, we decided that the pope would not take over the West Wing; Roosevelt's New Deal seemed only sensible to the clan descending from John Wells.

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Not so for my neighbors in general, skeptical not only of national government but of bigwigs in the state capital and, if truth be known, of the selectmen they elect on town-meeting day. If this politics is right wing, what do we call the National Association of Manufacturers, General Motors, ABC television, conglomerates and cartels, *U.S. News and World Report*, or Ronald Reagan? Of course, the New Hampshire Republican is conservative as an anti-collectivist . . . but Reagan Republicans are the collectivists of capitalism, and agribusiness is corporate collective farming, and U.S. Steel is stockholder nationalization.

In New Hampshire the ideal remains to work for yourself. Units of one are preferred: one-family mill, one-family farm, one-woman peddler and one-man logger. Veteran hippies move in, turning Libertarian in a climate that is almost anarchic. All labels falsify when they name cases. I think of an old friend in Danbury, in his late eighties now, salty as the Atlantic, who fought for his country in the Great War. At some point in his sixties he found in his mailbox a pension check—and he was infuriated. He sent it back with an insulting note. What do I want this for? He was a Republican for sixty years; Nixon changed that. Now he knows (and he feels foolish that he didn't always know): they are all scoundrels. Perhaps they are. And when we do not organize, we are helpless against them; one person, or a series of ones, battles without weapons against a corporation—as we discover when cotton mills or landfills become profitable.

In the conservatism of Rusticus there is considerably more Thomas Jefferson than Alexander Hamilton, yet New Hampshire's voters pile up majorities for Reagan's banks, deficits, and big business. Political labels deny manyness and complexity. If Lincoln's Republicans were radical on slave territory, they were conservative to maintain the Union; if the secessionists were conservative on slavery, they were radical as secessionists: radical and traditional. Magnolias, honor, Tara, and pure women erected a political lie of nobility to cover evil, the usual lie that helps us to think well of ourselves, to call ourselves good when we know ourselves vicious. Nineteenth-century chattel slavery—slavery in 1860!—was morally as defensible as the Final Solution; nowhere, of course, were noble ideals so commonplace as among the SS; the courage of evil is an imperial commonplace. The British Empire's lofty burden, as it slaughtered native populations for their own sakes, mimics Rome, Spain's American policy, and America's Spanish-American policy; we need not mention a more recent conflict.

In the ethics of Rusticus, the noble lie that masks evil is Proud Independence. We cannot compare its vice to slavery, pogroms, or napalmed villages, but it is worth acknowledging that freedom from taxation imposes suffering on the poor, on the insane, and on the otherwise handicapped; that New Hampshire, refusing to fund Medi-

caid, ruins families with ill children; that *laissez faire*, with its abhorrence of zoning, allows corporations to own dumps that murder ponds and probably people; that Proud Independence is an illusion of the many that serves the greedy few.

Not that notions of independence are without cultural benefit. For one thing, the culture of Rusticus encourages eccentricity, and eccentricity valued promotes toleration of diversity. Three-quarters of the stories I hear—"Did you hear about the time old Meacham made skunk stew?"—celebrate divergent behavior; a few famous eccentrics, dead fifty years, get talked about every day in Danbury. Social results of this enthusiasm are varied and useful. In the countryside only, never in city and suburb, old and young live next to each other, rich and poor, foolish and shrewd, educated and semi-literate. As the sexes have traditionally separated their functions less, as traditionally there has been less hierarchy among trades and occupations, so sparseness of population mixes neighbors at random, and the trailer or the shack squats two hundred yards down the road from the extended, huge late-eighteenth-century farmhouse spruced up with fresh paint on clapboard and shutters. At church and store, garage and rummage sale, the neighbors in their variety tolerate each other and talk. In the neighborhoods of massclass, the suburban ghettos quilt-patterned with hierarchy, old and young are as separated as rich and poor. Alienation breeds fear that wears the costume of contempt.

The social ethic of this varied Rusticus culture is niggardly in public and charitable in private; generosity is permitted as long as it appears voluntary, whimsical, responsive, and unplanned. When the house burns down to the cellar hole, next morning among rags of smoke the pickups stop by with clothing, food, and furniture. Ideas of work live at the center of this ethic, and the finest Rusticus compliment is "She's not afraid of a day's work," pronounced *wuk*. Variety of competence is as valuable as diligence. Half the men can build a house from cellar to shingles. Such versatility is historical. In the old days, everybody was a farmer, including preacher and lawyer and doctor, and every farmer could turn a lathe or operate a forge. Further back, the farmer made shoes winter evenings while his wife made clothing. She began with the sheep's wool or flax fibers, dried or carded, spun, woven, cut and sewed; she ended with dress, trousers, and work shirt. Grandfather and grandmother Rusticus were part-time everything—wagon maker, soap and candle maker—and their descendants remain jacks-and-jills-of-all-trades, unlike the specialist citizens of suburbs and cities.

On the old general farm—eight Holsteins, fifty sheep, two hundred chickens, five pigs; ice chopped from the pond in the winter, to cool the milk of summer; cordwood cropped for heat and cooking, for canning and sugaring, probably for sale; vegetables raised for the summer table and for canning; field corn grown for the cattle's ensilage—man and woman worked equally. The women who worked just as hard as the men neither voted nor as a rule owned property. Nonetheless, it is not merely ironic to speak of egalitarianism in the workload of the sexes, because work makes pride and equality of labor confers value. Of all the aggressions on the female inflicted by male industrial culture, surely the most destructive was enforced decorative leisure, useless ornamentation, despairing conspicuous inutility. In the growth of capitalism, the sexes in the middle and upper classes specialized: men worked and women demonstrated by their leisure the man's prosperity. This arrangement drifted down from aristocrats—where the man was equally gifted with uselessness—to the urban middle class in the late eighteenth century and became epidemic in the nineteenth century along with consequent female neurasthenia. Middle-class women were not allowed to do anything useful; and if their males died or failed or went crazy or alcoholic, there was no system of support—

proving again the importance of males. As late as the 1930s, when my mother left the farm and accommodated herself to the massclass life of Connecticut, wives did not take jobs. She had been a teacher and only virgins taught school. Although my father's weekly wage was small, maybe sixty dollars, it was Depression times: as part of her acclimatization, she hired a girl, five dollars a week, to clean house, cook, and serve dessert for bridge on Wednesdays in a black dress with a tiny white apron over it.

Her mother, at the same age, made soap. Every night the whole family gathered in a circle around a high table with an oil lamp on it, as the women sewed socks, basted hems, knitted mittens, crocheted, and tatted. While the mother ruled her house-empire, the father remained all day outside in his domain of barns and sheds. Think of my mother growing up in this world and after the brief transition of college moving to Connecticut, where the maid picked up the teacups after bridge on Wednesday afternoons. Now it is true that in New Hampshire her mother sometimes hired help. When crews worked at harvest, she hired a woman who lived nearby to make pies all morning for ten cents an hour. Because the helper valued her self-esteem, she would go home in the early afternoon, eighty cents richer, change into fancy clothes, and return as a neighbor for whom my grandmother would construct a cup of tea.

This story reminds me of an anecdote Henry James tells. When he wrote *The American Scene*, returning from decades of English life to his brother William's summer place in Chocorua, he wrote lyrically of landscape—and skeptically of New Hampshire's egalitarianism. New Hampshire lacked “the squire and the parson”; James missed measure and order, and lamented “the so complete abolition of *forms*.” He appears shocked, for our amusement, as he tells about a rustic, to whom he ascribes cynicism, “who makes it a condition of *any* intercourse that he be received at the front door. . . .” This rustic, thoroughly disingenuous, asks the summer person who opens the door, “Are you the woman of the house?” in order to deliver a message from someone he calls the “washerlady.”

This is a story about manners, and therefore about *form*. The characteristic teasing humor of Rusticus is accomplished by careful misuse of language. One common form of this humor derives from literalness: “Why is Dean pulling that big chain along?” Answer: “Ever see anybody trying to push one?” Another is self-mockery of proverbial cautiousness: “Say, is Car Morey your brother-in-law?” Answer: “Well, he was this morning.”

Manners. When I lived in Ann Arbor, I suffered from ironic deference. People deferred to me because I wrote books, an activity with prestige in the academy where worth is measured by column inches of bibliography; they were ironic because they could not abide their own deference. Living on Route Four, I suffer from no such burden. It seems not to occur to anyone that I might think myself better than they are because I write books. Why should it be better to write books than to build houses or grow blueberries? Better is not an issue: I am doing what I want to do and what I can do; so are other people, if they are sensible and fortunate.

Not that class Rusticus is without its own systems of superiority. If it were not known that I worked hard, I would feel disapproval. The general ethic praises work, and hard-working pillars of the community find laziness contemptible. Naturally there are lazy people about, working now and then in harvest or cutting summer brush on a ski slope or shoveling snow off the tracks in February—feckless, agreeable, sitting around in the summer twilight with a six-pack. I mean, of course, to distinguish the

self-appointed bum from the unlucky, from the insulted and injured, from the congenital unemployable *poor*: of course, it is commonplace for Rusticus as Republican to deny the distinction.

Women of the rural culture remain indistinguishable as workers from the men. Bum-women lie about with their six-packs; pillar-women work fourteen hours, and now, like their men, labor at factory jobs before they come home to continue working. The forty-hour week is unknown: Rusticus works either eighty hours a week or zero. If I brag to a neighbor woman that I have just frozen sixty pints of tomatoes, I hear a counterboast that puts me in my place: four hundred eighty pints, of everything. A forty-hour week may pay for mortgage or for taxes; then you are free to improvise, to do what you want to do, to raise pigs and cut cordwood, fish through the ice, sharpen saws, tear down a barn, hunt deer, build a house. In the nineteenth century, farm boys took jobs at the same shop in Andover because they had to work only twelve hours a day, six to six, only six days a week, and they paid you real money for it; it was a week on Hampton Beach compared to the farm. When the boss turned soft, around the turn of the century, and closed the mill at noon on Saturday, old-timers were contemptuous: "That's not a week's wuk!"

Once this ethic of work was common in the United States, when most people lived outside cities. Even Hamden, Connecticut, was a town of farmers providing milk and produce for the port of New Haven. In the eighteenth century, Eli Whitney used water power (the outlet of today's Lake Whitney, alongside Whitney Avenue) for his gun factory and built houses for his workers; Whitney's Village became Whitneyville, the section of Hamden where my father grew up. His grandfather Charlie Hall labored building the New Haven reservoir in 1860 or 1861, off Armory Street in Hamden near the old Whitney factory, and at noon one day he walked off his job and trudged three miles into New Haven, where he enlisted to fight for the Union.

Charlie was a day laborer, and became a farmhand in Spring Glen further out Whitney Avenue in Hamden. When he was old, one of his duties was to deliver his boss's milk to the neighbors. He fought with his boss, quit, and took his customers away—buying raw milk from another farmer. His son Henry, who was my father's father, quit school after fifth grade and picked strawberries for ten cents an hour. When his father died, Henry hired help, expanded the milk route, and in the 1920s combined with Charlie Brock to make the Brock Hall Dairy, which delivered fresh milk every day from horse-drawn carts all over New Haven and the thriving suburbs that surrounded it. When he died at ninety-one, Henry lived in a modest suburban house built over the strawberry field where he had earned ten cents an hour. The dairy he made from almost nothing had grown like a weed and paid four hundred employees. My father worked for him, and like Henry, he once knew every worker's wife's uncle's name and ailments, and bosses were workers too. Growth stopped all that. After the war, I remember walking across the parking lot: my father was in his forties, and he wore a straw hat and a brown suit and a necktie; he nodded his head with a quick smile at a nameless boy washing trucks; the boy was my age and I looked at the pavement, the boss's son. By the time my grandfather died, long after my father, the dairy was failing.

Hamden did not fail. Hamden High School shot up in a farmer's field half a mile from our house about 1940. After the war came the Hamden stores around macadam parking lots blacking over old farmland. In the 1970s condominiums arose behind the stores, high on the hills overhead; traffic lights blossomed everywhere, amidst bustle and confusion and change. By the mid-1980s the shopping centers turn dingy, and our

history becomes thirty seconds of film collage, not slow like Eisenstein or a Marx Brothers movie, but accelerated like a TV commercial. In Whitneyville where I watched the huge brick Brock Hall building rise when I was in kindergarten, wreckers and bulldozers have leveled it and another condominium takes its place. Next door, where I attended the opening of the Whitney Theater before the war, dozers wait to knock down the theater and the little row of shops beside it on Whitney Avenue to make way for more condos. After condosaurus has ruled its moment, some new disaster will wipe it out. Another creature will walk in its place while its cinder-block bones sink on top of Eli Whitney's gun-workers' cottages and the bones of shaggy dairy horses.

Henry James in *The American Scene* spoke of New York as a "vision of waste" because of the destruction of good houses "marked for removal, for extinction, in their prime." Once, New York was vanguard and template. John Jay Chapman (1862-1933) was a New Yorker who admired the exuberance of his town but who had been modified by Massachusetts after a tour at Harvard. "New York is not a civilization," he once said. "It is a railway station. . . . The present in New York is so powerful that the past is lost. There is no past. Not a bookshelf, nor a cornice, not a sign, nor a face, nor a type of mind endures for a generation, and a New York boy who goes away to boarding school returns to a new world at each vacation." On the other hand, "in Massachusetts you may still stop the first man you meet in the street and find in his first remark the influence of Wyclif. . . . It is one-sided, sad, and inexpressive in many ways. But it has coherence. . . ."

If we consult George Higgins about "the influence of Wyclif," he may question our experience of Brockton.

Nor would one find much coherence, now, even on Marlborough Street. New York is a model for city and suburb from sea to shining sea. When Thomas Hardy wrote a preface to *Far from the Madding Crowd*, twenty-seven years after its first publication, he wailed a familiar complaint of alteration and loss. After lamenting the disappearance of rural customs, he went on:

"The change at the root of this has been the recent supplanting of the class of stationary cottagers, who carried on the local traditions and humours, by a population of more or less migratory labourers, which has led to a break of continuity in local history, more fatal than any other thing to the preservation of legend, folk-lore, close inter-social relations, and eccentric individualities. *For these the indispensable conditions of existence are attachment to the soil of one particular spot by generation after generation.*"

My italics. The unhistorical may smile at the date of 1895; the present's creature thinks that because people complained a hundred years ago as they complain today, the complaint must be constant and not the matter complained of. But a hundred years is a wink in history. Hardy's complaint was valid in 1895; it is valid now.

What surprises me, I suppose, is the holding-out: for despite Hardy's pessimism, and my own when I was young, there is resistance to the murder of the past. Rusticus is a series of eccentric individualities indeed, complete with legends and folklore, and this culture will persist at least into the twenty-first century. When Japanese soldiers hid out in caves thirty years after the war was lost, the war was not lost for them. Italian hill towns, settled by Greek colonists long before Christ, spoke ancient Greek halfway through the twentieth century.

In New Hampshire over the decades of Hamden's destruction, the look of the land has altered. But only a bit. When I alighted at the West Andover depot in 1939, my

grandfather drove Riley and the buggy past a series of dying one-man farms. The farms and the men and the horses and the depot are dead, and stone walls that once marked pastures for sheep and cattle now keep pine trees from wandering into Route Four. But the houses mostly endure. In the culture of Rusticus, tearing things down is as wicked as fecklessness. Nothing separates massclass culture from Rusticus more than the country dedication to preservation and continuity. When the University of Michigan, inheriting a beautiful Federal house on State Street in Ann Arbor, sold it and it was torn down for a fast-food franchise—I did not make this up!—there was only a resigned shaking of heads.

Returning here, I told myself that I came back to house, hill, and pond, the inhuman environment, and that, after all, my work was such that I could do it anywhere. Of course, I discovered or rediscovered that the people were better than the hills. I had not suspected so, I think because I had made a decision in my twenties not to live here. In the spirit of Aesop's fox, I disparaged the New Hampshire present; it was the rejected alternative. When I came back in 1975, to live where I wished to live, I found myself among other people who live where they do because they wish to and for no other reason. Ann Arbor (Berkeley, Madison, Hamden, Atlanta, and Shaker Heights) is largely composed of people who live where they live because that's where the job is. They will leave when a better job comes along elsewhere, the "migratory laborers" of the prosperous massclass. A saying, repeated at parties in Ann Arbor, is common to every campus of the University of America: "One third of the people in this room were not in town last year; one third will not be here next year." The sentiment is unknown in Danbury and in Andover.

Rusticus lives where he does because he wants to. Anybody with a skill and an appetite for work can make more money elsewhere. People who build houses can get twice as much an hour if they migrate two hours south. Many leave to follow the money—and return, shaking their heads, surprised that they will put up with less income for the sake of place, determined to do just that, not martyrs, just un-Americans of happy, voluntary low income. People who remain here are self-selected partisans of place; many were born here, after parents, great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents. Many moved here because they liked the look and feel of it. Some came here because of a job and then refused to be transferred elsewhere. They are un-American because they prefer land, place, family, friends, and culture to the possibilities of money and advancement. Now, of course, many Americans prefer something or other over money, but most of us feel guilty when we do anything except for money; a man is not manly or decisive if he admits a motive outside money. But no one remains in rural New Hampshire for the money. Everybody living here hangs out a sign: I do not care so much for money as you do. Therefore, the massclass, shaped like summer people, exploits the native . . . and the native, secure in a secret superiority, laughs back. This is the "cynicism" of Henry James's rustic.

Indifference to money is not proof of virtue; ax murderers are notoriously indifferent to the wages of their profession. It depends on what you love instead of money, or on the mix of motives. Many people remain here not only out of love but out of dependence or perhaps inertia. Maybe it makes one happy to be place-bound or family-bound, but it limits one's possibilities of becoming a ballet dancer or an astronaut. In my family that has stayed here forever, I hear this limitation in many stories: Aunt X started normal school over to Plymouth, an hour away, but took sick and came home and never did go back: homesick. Uncle Z, with a job in a sawmill, worked only part-

time because the mill was doing poorly. He found a job doing the same work, four hours west in Vermont, at twice the money. But soon he was back at the old job, and would make do, looking for odd jobs to buy shoes for his children. He missed his brothers and his old mother.

But the love of place shows itself true in a hundred ways. We returned to an 1802 house, including an unrevised 1802 chimney, which had gone with insufficient upkeep during my grandmother's eighties and nineties. As we shingled, painted, replaced a chimney, and repaired, people constantly thanked us when we met them in stores or at Old Home Day: "Good to see the old place coming back." Strangers parked their cars, as we worked in the garden, to praise us for keeping the old house alive.

The land, not the scenery, is dearer than I credited. Once at our church our summer minister—pushing eighty, he lives in the farmhouse he was born in—asked us to come next week prepared to speak about something we liked to look at. Next week he could hardly get his sermon in, as his normally taciturn parishioners gabbled their love: the Jack Wells brook where it dropped over the little rapids; the noble stretch of double stone wall by Frazer's place; the patch of wild day lilies at the base of New Canada Road; the way Kearsarge changes color in dawn light month by month all year, green and blue and white and lavender; the gaunt and bony ruin of the old mill's foundation.

The main link that joins us together, and separates country people from the mass-class, that ties rural North to rural South, is connection to the past. We love the house, not just for its lines or its endurance, but because people were born and died here; we love the mountain, not only because it is beautiful, but because we know the dead who gazed at it every day of their lives and left behind testimony of their love. House and mountain connect us to the past. These connections are strongest for true Rusticus; they are also strength for emigrants from massclass who join themselves to the rural culture. They prevail not only among the inhabitants of white farmhouses but among shack-people who approach the flatlander's stereotype. Not all shack-people, of course, not all green-shutter-people, either. . . . But connections in this culture *prevail*.

In the last decade or two, all the little towns have started historical societies (I belong to the Danbury, Wilmot, Andover, and Northfield historical societies), which meet sometimes for invited speakers with special knowledge (railroads, Shakers, watermills), more often with a neighbor who brings photographs to show and stories to tell. Historical societies sponsor museums: in the Wilmot Town Hall, in the Flat, we keep a room with old photographs, Civil War memorabilia, old farm tools, clothing, flags, and typed-up reminiscences. In Andover the elegant Potter Place Depot, a glory of Victorian gingerbread, donated as a museum to the Andover Historical Society by people who bought it for an antique shop, itself forms exhibit number one.

Historical societies could be fads, like the gentrification of old parts of cities, but I think they represent deep mind-habits; they are story telling turned into institutions. The section of Andover called Potter Place took its name from Richard Potter, celebrated magician and ventriloquist of the early nineteenth century, who spent his show-business fortune to build a mansion in Andover that burned when my mother was a girl. He died before the railroad came, but when they built the depot near his house, they named it after him. More than a hundred years after his death, my grandfather told me trickster stories about Richard Potter, "fellow used to live around here"—how he avenged himself on an enemy-farmer by hiding in the bushes and casting his voice so that the brute heard a baby crying from his load of hay, emptied his hayrack, loaded it again, heard the baby cry again. . . . My grandfather neglected to mention one piece of information

about Richard Potter: either he did not know, or it seemed unimportant, that he was black.

In most of the United States, you do not hear stories about a “fellow used to live around here” a hundred and fifty years ago. In most of the United States, you know that the lawn you water was desert or apple orchard or strawberry field until 1957—and that is all you know. Americans dislike the past. Or they simply adore it and lump it together in a glossy product of generalized nostalgia, *olden times*, a decorative and disconnected alternative to the present. The ornamental past enforces the dominance of the temporary.

W. H. Auden remarked that the mediocre European is possessed by the Past and the mediocre American by the Present. For mediocre I would substitute something less invidious, like “normal.” At the same time, one must observe that many of the cleverest and most inventive Americans—Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson—were possessed by a Present. Ralph Waldo Emerson, with centuries of accumulated knowledge and culture burdening or imprisoning him, spent a lifetime protesting independence of history, authority, religion, and order; his intelligence served the disconnections of stupidity. But if many bright Americans are possessed by the Present, *all dumb Americans are*. An unexamined assumption of massclass culture is that such possession is a duty, and twin results are the torn-down Federal house and the bright Toyota.

In northern New England, in Wendell Berry’s Kentucky, and in other rural places, the culture suggests and supports connection to a continuous past that lives in the air, in relics, and mostly in the stories that old people tell. Everywhere are historical societies and antiquarians, but without the living linkage of stone wall, Civil War soldier, and story, library antiquarianism is documentary and disconnected. It is better than nothing, because it gives evidence of our famine, of need for the nutrition of historical connection against the thin, bare, accelerated moment. Perhaps the recovery of old parts of cities—in Chicago, Washington, Boston—is not merely faddish but more testimony of hunger.

Americans can almost be defined as the people who lack history, who immigrated here to escape a nightmare from which they could not wake. Current protests about the unhistoricism of the American young only repeat and multiply complaints that started before the Revolution, that the successful and blessed Revolution only accelerated. But the narrow present turns into the worse nightmare, and as always we divorce for the same reasons as we marry. In *The American Scene*, still in New Hampshire, Henry James spoke of the land “not bearing the burden of too much history.” But he continued:

“The history was there in its degree, and one came upon it, on sunny afternoons, in the form of the classic abandoned farm of the rude forefather who had lost patience with his fate. These scenes of old, hard New England effort, defeated by the soil and the climate and reclaimed by nature and time—the crumbled, lonely chimney-stack, the overgrown threshold, the dried-up well, the cart-track vague and lost—these seem the only notes to interfere. . . .”

The word is “defeated.” The country north of Boston ended up as defeated, after the Reconstruction, as the South was. Southern cotton mills started the decline and fall of the northern mills, and the opened western country took New Hampshire’s farms away. Defeat is melancholy but it creates historians; it provokes connections, while victors remain trapped in shallow and prosperous modernity.

Now the New Hampshire dirt, and the dirt of South Carolina, does not extend deep into past time. We dig to find no Roman roads, only artifacts of the nomads who first migrated into this wilderness and hunted bear on these hills or trapped raccoon by these ponds a few thousand years before the Europeans arrived to blast them away. When we dig in the soil of England, we dig into Stonehenge and Othona; yet England is young, compared to the soil of Italy, Greece, Egypt . . . and China; while shaggy Homers improvised hero stories in analphabetic Greece, the Chinese assembled their first dictionary.

But how much history does the soul require? Hardy's "indispensable conditions" are "attachment to the soil of one particular spot by generation after generation." How many generations is that? Three is too few; four or five may be sufficient. Let me announce Hall's law: when 50 percent of the local population remains aware of the maiden names of its great-grandmothers, or can visit the graves of ancestors born two hundred years ago, or can tell stories handed down from a century and a half ago, the spirit's necessity for connection may be satisfied.

The family story of Hannah Dustin differs so much from Cotton Mather's version that I suspect it derives from another seventeenth- or eighteenth-century ancestor, switched in the telling to the famous name. Of course the truth of it, unascertainable, never matters; the felt connection matters. Another story I remember concerns a male ancestor who fought the French and Indians. Retreating with an outnumbered patrol, my storied forefather volunteered to return alone through the woods to their abandoned camp in order to retrieve the cooking pot they had inadvertently left behind. He found it, but on his solitary return he heard the sounds of a war party in the woods. He hid in the hollow trunk of a fallen tree, and moccasined feet pattered over his shelter; he waited, he emerged, he returned safely home. Was the log big enough to hide the pot in? Did he set it upside down on the ground, hoping it might be passed over for a stump? No one could tell me. When I walk in the woods I look for a rusted pot.

Inhabitants of Danbury, New Hampshire, lack the hunger that citizens of Hamden, Connecticut, feel. We live in an air of connections—with stories of Indian fighters, of famous hermits on Ragged Mountain, of how they built the road through the bog, or how two hundred oxen pulled the mast-tree all the way to Portsmouth, or when the boys marched off to fight Johnny Reb. Connections to the past imply a future. Without past there is no future.

If the present's partisan charges that Rusticus "lives in the past"—a sin against America—I claim that only our connection with the past validates the present; the exclusive present is psychic desert. Americans pay homage in the church of work to the religion of money and the present, but in their private houses they are despairing atheists. Epidemic despair derives from the violated need for connections. This denial started when we left Devonshire and Calabria, the Norwegian farm and the shtetl in Galicia. We left for good reason: some connections braid ropes that tie us down; hierarchical structures prevent motion, invention, or discovery, in the name of the fixed relation of part to part, like the planets and the sun that circled the earth. Therefore we sailed two months in an eggshell across the tall Atlantic into a wilderness sparsely populated by a people that, understandably enough, came to regard us as a source of protein.

But the same forces that shot us loose loosened the acceleration of energy, which by Henry Adams' law doubles every ten years. Adams looked back on a life that began with the railroad, doubled into the dynamo's coal-energy, and quadrupled toward petroleum with the motorcar and the airplane. Eighty years after the expression of his law,

acceleration continues its regular progression. Now the human system—that lived in one town for five hundred years—generations of stone masons living on the same cobbled lane to build the cathedral, quiet centuries without technological change—interrupted for slaughter, for Crusade and conquest and Inquisition—has arrived at a panic-present of continual speed, Paris for lunch and New York for dinner, divorce tomorrow in Santo Domingo, and the human system requires pills, dope, alcohol, violence—possibly not greater in quantity, for the quantity has been constant, but violence wonderfully greater in quality; as Henry Adams put it in 1904: “bombs educate vigorously” — falters, starves, and dies in the desert of volatility. Against acceleration, Rusticus and its emigrants raise entropy’s flag with this strange device, not Excelsior but Lentior. *Slow down.*

E. M. Forster’s “Only connect” implies lateral, social, and geographical connection. It is good advice, and it works best when lateral extent is bisected by vertical connection to the dead, to the old persistent earth of graves and foundations, upward into connection implicit with the divine and the unborn, contracted with the earlier-born, earlier-flourished, earlier-dead. In America outside the historian’s library and the antiquarian’s museum, the lived past thrives where people live with their dead, separated from the brutality of change, the filmic witness of buildings rising and falling in Hamden, Connecticut, the universe new every thirty seconds.

We are Lentior’s vanguard, stewards of human connection. History records straight lines. As the nuclear plants shut down, let the word go out: *the world of tomorrow is delayed until further notice.* While present-livers expand themselves in acceleration, speed canceling their bodies, let us spend quick lifetimes telling old stories while we stand on dirt thick with the dead.