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Malls may not be the village square, but people meet in the neon light of the concrete beast to forge the same old links of belonging.
Salt Magazine is produced jointly by college students and professionals. It is a result of Salt’s educational programs. Salt also maintains an archives of tape recorded interviews and photographic negatives.

Above: The Rancourt dairy farm in Vassalboro. Photograph by Pam Berry.
CONTENTS

5 View from Pier Road

8 Vassals of the Farm
Hired hands and owners of the Rancourt dairy farm in Vassalboro are bound to the farm in relentless work days. For some it beats the mill. For others it is peonage, long hours, poor pay and little to call your own.

22 Community and the Concrete Beast
A childhood friend challenges sociologist and Maine native George Lewis. Why do people go to malls?

24 The Mall: By Salt Mass Observation
Malls are the last word in consumerism, great airless, sunless temples for the exchange of money and goods. As far from Maine values of independence and "make do" as you can get. Yet Salt interviewers found a distinct mall culture of young and old who hang out there to get a sense of belonging: from mall "rats and bunnies" to "mall milers".

29 Mall People
A photographic center section by Jim Daniels.

46 The Farming Edge
The dairy farmers of Turner are known for their competitiveness. That's a primary reason that Turner is so successful in the business when other towns aren't. Salt looks closely at this.

61 Eating in Maine
Where can you eat in Maine without feeling overwhelmed by outsiders or worrying about the size of your wallet? Here's where.

Cover Photograph: Jim Daniels
The Beauty of the Macintosh

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BONNIE BRAGDON, the author of “Vassals of The Farm”, came to Salt’s 1987 Fall Semester following her freshmen year at Wellesley College in Massachusetts. She grew up in Vassalboro, the town where her article is set. Her father still owns and runs a farm there.

PAM BERRY is Salt’s first photographic fellow. The annual fellowship was established to allow beginning photojournalists/documentary photographers a chance to work heavily within a given subject area for three months with as few constraints as possible. Her photographs of the Rancourt farm were part of a larger study of rural poverty. The bulk of her work on poverty will appear in Issue No. 34 of Salt in December. Originally from Texas, she holds a master’s degree in visual communication (photojournalism) from Ohio University. She now works as a photographer for the Telegraph, a daily newspaper in Nashua, New Hampshire.

EIGHT STUDENTS contributed to the Mall story. PETER LANCIA comes from Portland and is a senior at Bowdoin College majoring in anthropology and religion. AMY RAWE comes from New Jersey and is finishing her last year as an English major at Wake Forest College in North Carolina. JULIE MAURER, who did the illustrations for the piece as well as write one section, is from Hanover, New Hampshire, and had just completed her degree in art from Middlebury College in Vermont. She will be teaching art at Carrabassett Valley Academy in Maine beginning this fall. BRETT JENKS is also from New Jersey and is entering his last year as an English major at the University of Massachusetts. EDITE PEDROSA comes from the North Shore of Massachusetts and is an English major at Smith College. AMY SCHNERR, from Philadelphia, goes to the College of Notre Dame of Maryland in Baltimore. HARRY BROWN comes from Kennebunk, right next door to Salt. He is finishing up his last year at Friends World College in New York City. He arrived at Salt after several months in India and leaves for several months in Africa. His older brother was a Salt student when it was a high school level program at Kennebunk High School.

LOU BROWN comes from North Carolina and is completing her last year as an anthropology major at Wake Forest College.

GEORGE LEWIS, a professor of sociology from the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, wrote the introduction and worked with students in both the gathering and shaping of the article. He was born in Houlton, grew up in Bar Harbor where his father still lives, graduated from Bowdoin, then headed out to Oregon for graduate work. As he says, Oregon was a lot different from Bowdoin. That’s probably where he picked up his continuing interest in popular culture, the research topic for the summer semester.

The subtitle of the article, “By Salt Mass Observation”, comes from the name of a group, Mass Observation, that existed in Great Britain in the 1930s. Operating from a loose social science perspective and publishing such works as The Pub and the People and Britain by Mass Observation, the group was committed to trying to understand what was going on among the working classes of Britain and to circulate what they had learned as widely as possible.

JOHN DALE, author of the Turner farming article came to Salt for the fall 1987 program from Wheaton College in Illinois. He had completed a degree in sociology with an interest in agriculture. He has worked on family farms as well as the Heifer Project International in Iowa. Originally from Tennessee, he is now working with the Community Associations Institute in Washington, D.C.

JIM DANIELS who shot the center photographic section of the mall, the cover photograph, as well as the photographs for the Turner farming article, is a free lance photographer now living in Yarmouth, Maine. Originally from New York City, he is making his second attempt at living in Maine. He worked for several years as a photographer for the Providence Journal newspaper in Providence, Rhode Island.
In that year, colonists built their first ocean-going vessel. Christened the Virginia of Sagadahock, it sailed from a little shipyard just twelve miles down river from the present site of the Bath Iron Works.

Since its founding in 1884, Bath Iron Works has added many "firsts" to Maine's catalogue of maritime achievements. And through the years, we've made the hallmark "Bath-built" a synonym for shipbuilding excellence.

In the years to come, we will build ships in Bath and repair others in Portland. And each ship will carry a part of Maine's proud maritime heritage to the oceans of the world.

Thanks, Maine, for a great shipbuilding tradition.

A history of Bath Iron Works is on exhibit at the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath.
HERE’S TO George Willard, easily the most un lawyer-like lawyer the state of Maine has ever hatched. A rare bird George, who feathered his law offices on Sanford’s Main Street with poetry, philosophy and photographs, banishing the law books at the peak of his career.

“Oh I have one shelf of law books, the good ones that I really use.” That was when George was 48 and began making his law offices into a self styled “museum,” where he presided as curator, philosopher king and raconteur.

“I enjoy talking with people and I overdo it. I know I am sort of a story teller, ham actor type. In spite of knowing it, I can’t seem to resist it.”

When George Willard died a few weeks back, he was just short of eighty years old. It’s hard to think of the right words to propose a toast to George, because when George was around, he always did the talking and others did the listening—and laughing. You think of George Willard and you don’t think of words about him. You think of his words.

“I never wanted to be a lawyer. My father was deathly afraid I was going to turn out to be a poet and a bum. As I tell people, I only half succeeded, because I can’t write poetry for a damn!”

George had one lawyerly trait: he was contentious. Nothing he liked better than taking on the unwary, the foolish or the arrogant. Not before a judge and jury, but a live audience.

“My wife always said to me, ‘Why are you always teasing, why are you always arguing with people about different things?’

“I said, ‘I really can’t say, except that this is the instinct of the teacher, and the preacher, and the poet, and the journalist. You want people to challenge life around them, give it a second thought, take things that you see all the time and re-evaluate them.’

George was born in Kennebunkport in 1909. The family moved to Sanford when he was two years old. “The family house was the big Queen Anne style house just south of Lee’s Market. “I came half a generation ahead of the hippie movement. Actually I’m a split generation hippie.”

About then George usually leaned back in his oak swivel chair and put his feet on his desk. Then he launched into his “streaking story.” He told it with particular relish if he sensed the slightest aversion to hippies in his listener.

“I always liked the outdoors. I’m thinking I’m part Eskimo, part Collie dog, part Indian, and whatever else I don’t know. I always liked to jump and run. I was about five feet ten and weighed about 110 pounds and I was really skinny. I slept outside from May to November.

“So I woke up one night about two o’clock in the morning and there was about a half moon out. Temperature was about 68 or 70, just a gentle breeze from the west, and you could hear the crickets, you could hear the tree toads. There were a lot of trees around there and you could hear the wind just rustling in the leaves and the grass.

“And so I thought, ‘This is a good night to go for a run.’ So I’d never done it before, but I thought, ‘Well, I’ve gone swim-
The Rancourts, like most farmers, have an informal relationship with their hired help. The terms of employment are simple, dictated by the demands of dairy farming: You are hired to do the work that needs to be done, whether it is milking or feeding, driving tractors or fixing machinery, cutting wood or selling hay. You start at five in the morning with a break after milking and a break at two. You get done when the work is finished, whether that's six PM or nine PM and you do this six days a week. In return, we will let you live in one of our houses on our land rent free, we will pay the utilities and give you a starting weekly salary of $150.

It is an arrangement that should benefit both the Rancourts and their workers. Fred and Thelma need help running their farm, but cannot afford to pay several men outright for working eighty hours a week. The hired men are free to spend their salaries on things besides rent, heat and electricity.

In fact, the arrangement fails both the farmer and the farm hand.
In 1943 Thelma and Fred Rancourt bought land along the Kennebec River north of Augusta and south of Waterville in Vassalboro and began dairying. Thelma estimates that there were about eighteen “family” farms in operation in the area at that time.

Today, the Rancourts milk 140 head of cattle, producing 5,600 pounds of milk per day, making it by far the largest dairy farm of the remaining five in Vassalboro. It is surprising to find a farm of such size in a town like Vassalboro whose farming population is fast losing ground to a growing bedroom community. The economic stagnancy of Vassalboro continues to force most of its residents to seek work in Augusta or Waterville, while its delapidated quaintness draws others from away to enjoy peaceful “country” living.

The decrease in dairy farms in Vassalboro is a reflection of a statewide trend. At seven dollars a hundred weight, it is getting harder to cover costs and pay mortgages, a problem compounded by a booming job market; nowadays, hired help can afford to be choosy. Both farming and the Rancourts are hard on hired help. In the last few years, as Fred will tell you, it has become increasingly hard to find dependable, steady help who know what they’re doing.

Generally, they come to the job inexperienced and unfamiliar with farm work and farm life. They are not efficient workers for the first two to four weeks and cost more money in mistakes than they produce in labor. They often discover within a month or two that farming does not suit them and they quit without notice, staying in Fred’s houses cost-free while searching for a new place. It used to be, Fred says, you could put an ad in the paper and get an experienced man who’d stay for a year or two.

Ask a farmer about hired help and you’ll get an earful.

“DON’T GET ME STARTED on hired help, boy. I get all wound up.” The hired help today, Thelma continues, “they’ve got an awful lot of demands. They don’t want to hold up their end. They try to compare farming with mill work. They want all the benefits and farmers can’t afford it.”

They complain they’re doing the job of two. “How many times have I done the work of two down there? But everytime I say that they say, ‘Yeah, but you’re the owner.’ Well that isn’t the idea. It isn’t because I’m the owner. It’s because those animals depend on us to feed them and clean ’em and if nobody else is gonna do it, I’ll go out and do it.

“But they aren’t proud of their work anymore the way we used to be.

“It’s supposed to be teamwork and everybody holds back and lets the other guy do it. You know you give one guy the order to go do something and he’ll turn to the other guy and say you do it. Or if you’ve got nothing to do while somebody else is still working go in and help him so he can get done, too.

“It isn’t just us,” Thelma declares.

Plagued by emphyzema, Fred huffs, puffs, and wheezes. “It’s very seldom you can pay these people five dollars and up because they don’t do the job. If they done the job, you’d be glad to give ’em five dollars an hour.

“We just hired a man that’s supposed to be fully experienced. We turned him loose on the other guy’s day off and holy God everything was upside down. The tank dropped a hundred and some odd pounds.”

Thelma responds in agreement. “I’ve had people come in here and say they were herdsman and they dry a cow off. The next time I went down to milk in his place here comes this cow with a signal on her she’s going dry.

“What the hell is she going dry for? I went and looked her up. She’d only been milking three months but because she came in one milking and
gave only five pounds he called her a cow ready to be dry. He didn't take the time to go look at the records to see how long she'd been milking. She musta been off feed or she mighta been in heat. It takes a lot to be herdsman."

Fred sighs, "We just hope and pray they're gonna do somethin' about this welfare business to get people back to work. Since they've increased welfare, you just can't get 'em." Fred goes on to prove his case using Mike as an example. After only a month Mike quit. "That fella in the house, he's got food stamps apparently. As long as I'm supplying him with living quarters, he's gonna live like a king all winter.

"Hell, I can't afford it. I'm not running a welfare outfit here. We're just struggling to exist ourselves. I gotta go to court on Wednesday to get 'em outa the house. I can't hire anyone 'cause I don't got no place to put 'em. I'm paying the utilities. He's heating the outdoors and burning up electricity, outside light stays on day and night. He broke the window in the door.

"You iron out some problems and new ones come back and hit you. We're struggling to hang on to what we got and it's getting real discouraging."

Thelma adds, "The last few years we get fed up with it but what are you gonna do? You build up your farm on fifteen dollar milk and now you have eleven dollar milk to pay it off with. Nobody with enough money can buy you out and if they've got that kind of money they'd be foolish going into dairying right now, because there ain't that much money in milk.

"But you've got to keep going and try and get the mortgage paid up."

**Bobby Rancourt, Son**

BOBBY RANCOURT, Fred and Thelma's middle-aged son, sits on a flatbed trailer, a huge piece of machinery rising above him. The wind plays with his dirty blond hair and whips his nose red, tightening his deceptively boyish face with numbing cold. He unconsciously bangs a pipe and swings his leg at the knee. He lives with his wife Charlene in a house across the
street from his parents and still works on their farm.

Thelma says, “He only stays because we can’t run [the farm] without him. Oh we’ve had our spats and he’s threatened to leave and he wouldn’t come to work two or three days, but then he’d come back again because he figured we needed him, just loyalty to the family.

“It’s not because he enjoys the work. He’d like to see us sell out so he could go do something else.”

But having worked on the farm all his life, it would be hard to go onto something else at this point.

“My father, he’s kinda hard, ’cause he worked all his life. I can remember when I was real young he dug a ditch from the house to the barn with a pick and a shovel. He’s used to working himself. But now he’s got emphyzema and makes it a little hard for me ’cause everything has to be done.

“If he wants something done he has to get me or one of the men to do it. So he sits around and waits for somebody to do it and it makes him nervous. He can drive a piece of equipment, things like that. But as far as physical labor he can’t really do that well.

“It’s getting so now it’s hard to find good help, but you know you gotta put ads in the paper and they’ll call in they can do this and that. Sometimes you try to weed ‘em out, pick the best ones, but sometimes you don’t always do it. Like some of them say they got, you know, a lot of experience. They drive tractor, they can do this but put ‘em on something, they’re altogether different. You can tell. It don’t take long.

“It’s not bad right now. It’s ’bout what we need. Sometimes you can use an extra guy here and there, but on the whole it’s not too bad. Like summer work, you can always stand to have an extra one in the summer sometimes. Once in a while we’ll hire some outside help. Just to fill in a bit.

“Afround here you really don’t get the real bad jobs. You know everything has to get done. I mean I do a little bit of everything. The milking crew, they mostly stick to milking, if that’s what they’re good at. You do different things everyday. It’s always something different. But as far as milking, you gotta do that seven days a week.”

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BIRTHING

THE GREAT, HULKING COW strains with the effort of bearing her calf. She stands hunched, her massive back arched, her shoulders and hind quarters squatting under her. Eyes bulging, neck and nose thrust out, she bellows hoarsely.

“She’s tight. Her cervix isn’t dilated,” Thelma Rancourt says, her arm working deep inside the cow. A handful of hired men watch, leaning on the pen or waiting for orders from Thelma.

The cow heaves, her muscles contracting and pushing against the calf, held fast in her tight cervix. “Push, moma, push,” Thelma encourages. Two tiny hooves appear. Mike heads for the barn door to find a chain.

“Not that way, the other way. It’s quicker,” Fred, Thelma’s husband, grunts to Mike in his raspy wheeze. A pulley of sorts is rigged up, the chain wrapped around those miniature feet.

Andy stands on the chain and Thelma laughs. “What’s your 99 pounds gonna do?” Kirk stands on the chain with Andy, their weight pulling at the calf, drawing the cow’s hind end down.

“She’s gonna drop.” And with a breathy groan she sinks to her knees. Dropping her hind end, she rocks her weight to the floor.

“Pull her hind leg out but watch you don’t get kicked.” Kirk pulls her tightly strung leg straight. Uncomfortable, she rolls onto her front knees and rises.

Kirk’s and Andy’s weight pulls at the calf again, drawing it out steadily. All at once the calf plops to the cold floor, a steamy, sloppy heap of placenta and fur.

“Pick it up.quick. Is it breathing?” Held by the hind legs, the calf hangs oblivious to the world. The cow turns to her calf and sniffs bewilderedly. Soon the soft, rhythmic monotone of her lapping tongue can be heard.
THE FLOURESCENT LIGHTS shine starkly on Andy’s dwarfish face. He and Ralph make their way through the milk parlor to the free stall and begin herding the cows for morning milking.

Cows lie in beds of sawdust, lining the walls or stand at the feed bunk poking through last night’s feed. A conveyor rasps and shakes as a cow activates the automatic grainer. The heavy, acrid vinegar smell of silage stings the senses.

Ralph moves to the right driving the cows around the feed bunk towards Andy, who sorts them; dry cows and Max the bull to the right of the barn and milk cows to the left.

Andy directs the cows in the right direction, pushing and prodding, slapping and poking, yelling and cajoling. “Come on you mummies, wake up. Hey go this way so I can see your serial numbers.” Cow patties fall with a wet splat. The muck sucks at Andy’s boots.

“They were into that brew last night,” Andy jokes, referring to the corn liquor dripping from the silo, an unexpected fruit of the summer’s labors. “They don’t know which way to go this morning.”

“It’s drippin’ pretty fast,” Ralph observes. “Good, insteada havin’ coffee we’ll have that. Come on girls, let’s go. Rise ‘n shine. The milk truck comes today.”

The cows sorted out, Andy and Ralph meet and make one last check, herding the cows closer to the parlor entrance.

“We gotta get 72 in this morning,” Andy worries. “We’re gonna operate on ‘er.” Andy lets a gate drop from overhead with a clatter.

They make their way to the right side of the barn toward another set of doors to the milk parlor.

Andy says, “Last night I thought I could hear somebody hollerin’. So I went up ‘n it was Fred. I said, ‘Yeah, Fred what’s the matter?’ ‘Did the babies get fed?’ I said yep. ‘The heifers in the barn all..."
been taken care of? 'Yep. 'OK' and he shut the window back down."

Ralph pauses at the silo and bends to examine the corn liquor. "I'd like ta hang a jug under there. Comin' outa there just as clear."

Andy tastes it. "Well, it's pretty good this mornin'. Coupla more days it'll be about right. Man, take a drill, drill just about in here ya see. Put one them tree taps in it, hang your jug on it. Every farmer I know's got a side line business goin'. We might' swell have a side line business going, too."

Ralph takes Andy's joke with a quiet smile.

They slosh through the foot bath, pry open the doors and go into the milk parlor, a rectangular room with doors at each corner and a pit in the middle. Above and along each side of the pit runs a set of eight stanchels and eight grain bins. Four jugs stand suspended on poles in the middle with two sets of spidery-looking suction cups for milking. Hoses and knobs and pipes and valves are everywhere.

Andy turns on the radio and sings along. "Sure love, baby it's sure love. Milk and honey, Captain Crunch and you in the morning." Andy starts the machines. Their rhythmic pumping piston sound almost drowns out the blare of the radio.

Andy and Ralph are busy in the pit of the parlor hooking up hoses and turning knobs. Andy pulls a rope with a quick jerk, and the doors of the milk parlor swing open. The cows sniff, swaggering in clumsily, slowly, anticipating their grain.

"Push up, push up." Andy pushes and slaps and prods. He yanks on the rope again and the doors slap shut. Ralph sprays the muddy hooves and Andy shuts the gate behind the eighth cow. Busy with their grain the cows barely acknowledge Andy as he dips each teat in iodine. Legs, tails and udders face Andy and Ralph while an occasional nose peeks out. Ralph follows Andy, wiping off the iodine and squirting each teat to test for mastidias.

Andy hooks up the milkers to the cows's udders and the suction pulls the milk into the jugs. It splatters in rhythmic spurts, like the pumping of blood. The spraying, dipping, wiping and squirting begins again as Andy lets in another string of eight cows. Having finished their grain, the cows hooked to the milkers grow restless. Ralph and
Andy yank the hoses and dip the teats in blue disinfectant. Ralph jerks a rope at the opposite end and doors in front of the cows open. He slides the gate before the cows back and lets them swagger lazily out, completing the circuit.

Ralph teases Andy about leaving him to milk the herd by himself.

Andy says, 'I'm gettin' used to it. Had one guy here, he came in did probably two strings and he says, 'Well I have ta go ta the bathroom.' I said, 'All right, go.' I waited, waited, what the hell? I went in. He wasn't in the bathroom. He just disappeared.'

They continue working, yelling to each other occasionally over the ruckus of the machines. The main herd done, Andy ushers in the scraggly, sickly cows from the heiffer barn, those that have just recently calved out or those injured. Then Ralph and Andy begin washing up. Andy rinses the jugs while Ralph rakes muck into the grates in the floor. Andy takes hoses, cups, pails, everything and dumps them into a cavernous sink in the tank room. He gives everything the once over with a scrub brush and hooks the hoses up for the rinsing, sending hot sudsy water through the entire system. Ralph finishes the milk parlor, hosing it down from top to bottom.

Washing done, it's break time.

THE FARM HANDS

Andy Stewart, 40s
From Mill to Farm

Andy Stewart drives his rumbly Mustang down the road a bit to his apartment, one of two in a house owned by the Rancourts. Saturday morning cartoons drone on the television, while the children go about their business. The youngest, an eight year old girl, proudly totes a gray, sickly kitten. Coffee cups and spoons clink as Andy's wife, Linda, makes his breakfast.

The lines of Andy's face belie his boyish frame and bright eyes. A short, brisk man, he bristles with barely contained nervous energy. And as everyone around Rancourts would tell you, he's a character, always quick with a smart remark and hard to keep up with. He self-consciously avoids direct eye contact, preferring attention to be centered on his jokes rather than himself.

Andy came to the Rancourts inexperienced, having worked in woolen mills, sawmills, and a gas station around his hometown of Clinton and for a while as an "odd jobber" in New Hampshire. Andy is not only quick to joke, but also quick to learn and after six months of devotion to Thelma has won over a little bit of her frugally dealt trust.

'I try to keep Saturdays away from work for family day, but when the unexpected comes up you can't help it. Corn ain't in yet 'n we're short of help.

'I'd never farmed before and I just thought I'd try it for a change. I figured after seventeen years of being indoors I wanted to try outdoors again for a change. I like it a lot better. Air's better for ya and everything.

'I was working in the mill part time. I coulda got a job there full time if I'da wanted it, but I didn't want it.

'A lot of these industries and mills, it's non-union. If the boss, if he just don't like your walk, he can fire you and get away with it. 'Cause he can think up any excuse he wants to.

'Down in New Hampshire I got fired once for bad attitude. I just didn't get along with the boss. I figured I knew more than he did and he didn't like it.

'There again, union, they're always puttin' ya on strike. Lota places that's unions, if you're set to one job and you decide well my job's done, I'll go help my friend out in his department, they can fire you for trespassing the other department.

'I'm the type of guy if I got somethin' to say, I'm gonna say it. I don't care who likes it, who don't. Point blank. Just the way I've been."
Ralph Linkletter, 57

Standing before a mound of bales, Ralph Linkletter says in his thick Maine accent, "If you watch a farmer, you won't wanna be a farmer." He picks up two bales of hay and lugs them off. Ralph is a slender man of 57 years, bland in color and temperament. His words are sparse and plain, but weighted with meaning.

He left his father's farm in Harmony when he was married, looking to find a higher paying job. Since his divorce 12 years ago, he has moved around the state and to Florida, following jobs according to his "moods" and looking for something new to spend his money on.

"Ayup, I almost made up my mind take this old Cadillac here and take off." He drives a short piece to his trailer. It is old and shabby, another one of Fred's living quarters for his hired hands. "Then I got ta thinkin'. And I read the paper and I said, well Fred need 'nother man this winter. I'll call him up. Called him up and he told me to come down. I come down. He wanted me to go ta work right then. Just 'cording to my moods I guess.

"You never know what I'm gonna do. Wherever I can make more money. You come back in the spring and I'll say, 'I'm outa here.' 'At's the idea. You work so long you get tired that ta devil with it. Do somethin' else.

"I've been moved around for the last 12 years so much since my wife left me. Got over being homesick. Keep going. Don't know any better I guess. Always wanted to buy something else. That's it.

"I didn't think much about [leaving the farm]. Guess I figured I was gonna be right there till I died. Then I got married. That's when I left. When I was twenty-four.

"Didn't wanta be held down. Farm you gotta be there everyday. You gotta be up four-thirty. Get done when you get done. 'Course it ain't hard work a lot of it. Working out I can get a couple of days off. Here I can only get one.

"Fred, I can't plan nothin' from him. She's the boss. They'll get mad at him 'cause they'll just get ready ta go home ta dinner or somethin', he'll holler, 'Did you get this done? Did you get that done? Oh help us just a few minutes.' Just when you're ready ta go. No, I think every man down there knows what ta do.

"Oh well, you got ta have a boss. Thelma's nice. If you frig up, you're gonna git it. She'll tell ya about it. I've been lucky. I never had no problems with 'er. I get along with people pretty good. Pretty quiet. I seen guys have trouble with 'er. Well they didn't do their work that's all. You can't blame 'er really."

He looks over the fields to the farm and sees that Andy hasn't returned from break. "He don't hurry. We know what we got ta do."

Brian Lajoie, 23

Brian Lajoie's whisker-darkened face seldom smiles. His white teeth strike a startling contrast with the darkness of his face, making it appear grubby and even darker. He sits, in blue coveralls, on a pile of bales in the heiffer barn. The cows move in their stanchels, metal clinking and clanking against metal. A pile of cats and kittens, white and black, yellow and orange, lie near Brian's leg for warmth.

At age twenty-three, Brian could be called a veteran of Rancourts' s farm, having worked there for about seven years. His dad got a job with the Rancourts when Brian was fifteen and Brian started working there after school and on weekends during his senior year of high school. He stayed with the Rancourts after graduating and worked full time for one year.

Now he helps out only part time, receiving an hourly wage for working on the weekends or in the evenings or whenever he is needed and he isn't working at his full time job, putting up telephone poles; he is able to be a part of the rhythm of farming without being exclusively bound to it.

Something Thelma said rings very true in Brian's case. "Anybody who is farm experienced is either fed up with farming and wants something else—like less hours—or they've got their own farm."

"I was gettin' wore out. Long hours, tired of it.
But I been on a farm all my life so I got attached to it. I been away a coupla years and I missed it.

"I was always on the farm. Go ta school on the bus and come home on the bus. Spent most of my time right around the farm.

"I took building maintenance in high school. I liked that, that was all right. When it comes ta readin' and writin', I'm not that good. I can read and write if I have ta, but I don't care to.

"I almost went for electrician. I wanted to go but I really didn't have the money and I didn't want to take it out and stuff. And then I was going the next year 'n I didn't end up going. So I'm stuck on the farm." He laughs. "Oh well."

"I'll be here for a while. As long as they treat me good. When I was here full time, we'd go a round. Fred'd get mad about somethin', some little thing. I've gone home a couple times. I just came back the next day and we'd get all over it. Since I come back just part time they been good. I can't complain.

"Lot of things I wouldn't do the way they do. But they're the boss. Lota people don't see it that way. Hate to be in his shoes I guess. He's got a lot on his mind.

"You can't go wrong settin' telephone poles. I get paid more there so I'm better off. It's not that I don't like farmin'. It's just that I can make more money and get more benefits and stuff. It's a pretty good job, working all around the state, wherever we have to go.

"I'd go crazy if I had to set around all day. I go on vacation and two days after I'm goin' crazy 'cause I ain't got nothin' to do. I go on vacation it's awful."

He says his next vacation he's going to visit his sister. "We're all close. We all help one another out and go over, we always visit each other. We're pretty close.

"I wanna stay pretty much in the same area. Mostly Winslow. I'm workin' on [buying a house]. Somethin' out in the country with a little bita land. Somethin' not too expensive. I seen a lot of 'em. Some of 'em, they're nice but they're expensive too. More than what I can afford. I guess 'at's one of the advantages 'bout being married. You have a second income.

"But I can't take it with me so I might as well spend it and enjoy it. I work hard enough for it."
Kirk Bowman, 40s
Frances Bowman, Wife

IT IS HARD TO JUDGE Kirk Bowman’s age. He is an easy going man with a strong but fair sense of right and wrong. After seven months at the Rancourt farm, he now belongs to the “past employees of Rancourts’s farm” category, a group growing in number. He sits in his home in China, having just returned from an unsuccessful attempt to get a job at a farm in Winslow.

Low wages, long hours and a herniated disk convinced Kirk to leave his job at a hen house and seek work elsewhere. He found out about the Rancourts through a newspaper ad and in the spring started work full time, with the understanding that this job would lead some place, not far but some place.

Because he owned his own house, Kirk didn’t live in one of the Rancourt apartments. He received full payment of four dollars an hour for his work. But over the summer he found he wasn’t going far and saw no future improvement, not even a raise.

When Kirk gave Fred his ultimatum—give me a raise or I’ll quit—Fred didn’t see that Kirk was worth the raise. Fred says, “No, we didn’t give Kirk an increase. You can’t do that all the time. Then his wife wanted him to get six dollars an hour. And there was no way. Better off sell the cows, never coulda got enough money outa the cows to offset it.”

The way Kirk sees it, he was due a raise. “They uh...how do I want ta say that? They lead you on I’d call it. You know they tell you what they want from you before they hire you, but when you get there it’s a whole different story. They say do you know how to drive a tractor but when you get there, there’s no tractor driving. It’s all mostly labor. I know how to drive tractors, trucks, everything.

“Nother thing is they promise you a raise after a coupla months and you never see nothin’. That’s half the reason I got done. Fred told me when I started, he says hang in there Kirk, he says, we’ll make it worth your while. I been there almost seven months and the only thing I saw for a raise was uniforms were paid for. That doesn’t amount to diddly-dad.

“If you tell ‘em you need a raise, they threaten they’re gonna sell their cattle on ya and try and con ya inta stayin’. He told me ‘at so long at the end of it I said, ‘Well I guess you’re gonna have ta sell ‘em. I got a family, too, I gotta take care of.’

“They’re trying to hire new help but they won’t give their old help a raise. I’d go back to that farm in a minute if they’d just change their attitude about the workers and give ‘em a chance. It’s a really nice farm. I like the setup and everything, but I don’t like the way they set the work up.

“The Rancourts, They’re hard people to please. Thelma, she’ll show ya somethin’ one day and if you do somethin’ wrong she’ll jump right on ya ‘stead tryin’ ta lay it out and explain to ya like most factories would. If they thought anything of their workers, wanted ta help, they’d take their time and show ‘em. Things’d go a lot smoother.

“I call it more or less stress on the job. She just keeps ya under stress at all times. Lota mornings I’ll go in there and I’ll say I’m gonna do a real good job and I’ll sweep the cribs, do a real good job. She comes in at ten a clock in the morning, checkin’ the barn and she’ll say, ‘Well, you didn’t sweep these out, you didn’t do that.’ Brings ya right down, you know. Keeps ya down.

“It makes you feel like you don’t wanna do nothing. They’re the only ones that know anything. The people that work for ‘em don’t know anything. One day had a broken engine and she said what makes you think you know how to fix that motor? I worked on small engines just about all my life. I took it up to the garage and fixed it and had it running and she couldn’t believe it.

“She said why she treats people so hard, that’s the way she was taught. But she’s gone through an awful lot of people, ’cause she don’t give ‘em a chance. If she’d give someone half a chance to learn, they’d probably turn out to be good workers.

“I know farmers in Maine are having it rough, but there’s no need of making it all the rougher for the workers. The hours and the work is hard
enough itself, but it'd be different if they'd use ya
equal. That's all anybody could really ask. I ain't
seen no benefits or anything. I didn't see no future
there for myself. Who's gonna set pushin' a shovel
all their life?"

USED TO THE HARD KNOCKS of rural life,
Frances Bowman is fiercely protective of Kirk, her
second husband. She is vehemently independent,
a result of raising four boys alone after she left her
first husband. She sits ramrod straight in her
wheelchair, as imposing and stately as any queen.
Her long brown hair and country girl looks are
reminiscent of country and western singer Loretta
Lynn. A tough lady, she is a match for Thelma
any day.

"He was doing two jobs at once. I couldn't have
him work there and take care of me. It was hard for
him because they wanted more outa him than he
could give.

"He still wants to go back. I'm not gonna let
him, 'cause they would really make him do what
was the dirty work. I'm not gonna have him feel
the guilt. Like when I called and told 'em that
Thursday. Well she told her husband and he went
crying in the barn. He was gonna have ta sell some
cows. I say well tell 'em go for it. You got to, you
got to. I says don't take his guilt 'cause I had it
done to me and I know how it's done.

"He was always easy going and he don't like to
leave somebody stranded. But I said if you're
gonna make it in this world you're gonna have ta
fight.

"Ever since we been married I've been helpin'
him get more courage about himself. And it's
helped a lot. He knows he's good.

"His father always taught him that all he could
do was pick eggs. He was 16 when he started and
that's all he did. He said, 'I don't know nothin'. I
says, 'Don't tell me you don't. I know better 'n
that. 'Cos you do. Animals is animals.'

"I really wanna look after him. You know,
make sure nobody keeps shittin' on him. Because
anytime he worked anywhere before he married
me, he thought he was supposed to do this and he
was supposed to do that and I said no, you don't
have to do nothin'. You do what Kirky wants."
Mike Roy, 23
Angela Roy, Wife

MIKE ROY IS A BITTER, angry man at twenty-three. He is one of those damned by the Rancourts as lazy, undependable and on welfare. Fred complains, "You got an individual like this guy down the house. You tell him to go do something. He comes back in five minutes and he's all done. And you go look and you see he hasn't done a damn thing. This is why Thelma blew her stack and told him if he didn't stop lying he might's well get outa here. So he quit."

Thelma, "Which told me he couldn't stop lying and didn't intend to straighten out."

After a month at the farm, he quit without notice. He came to the job with a wife and two babies. The longer he stayed with the Rancourts, working at a job he didn't like for eighty hours a week, the less he could support his family.

"They have a real bad attitude towards people. You can't do it as good as they do it. No matter what. She was always bringing us down. Like you're no good for this, you're no good for that, you're in my way all the time, you're not smart enough for this job and all kinds of crap.

"If they'd just leave the workers alone and let them do their job, things would go a lot better. I'd go out there do the beds for the cows and I wouldn't put enough sawdust, so I'd put more sawdust, and then I was putting too much sawdust, so you can't win.

"No I just went to another job and started working. If I woulda gave her a notice, I woulda worked the whole week and she wouldn't have even paid me for it. It would have been useless really.

"She just drives and drives. I didn't expect eighty hours a week. I was coming home from work and going to bed and getting up and going to work. That was the way it was. No time for my family or anything."
“She took a hundred and sixty-three dollars a week for this apartment and paid me a hundred and thirty-nine (after taxes). It wasn’t right for the hours I was putting in. I was putting in eighty-three hours a week.

“I’d get paid on Friday and it’d be gone on Friday. If my kids got sick with what I bring home, I couldn’t even pay the doctor bills. I couldn’t even clothe them really. I can buy ’em a few clothes, but nothing to amount to anything. It costs money for food. Between doctor bills and food for the kids it would be gone. Plus gas for the week. He’s got money for everything else but not the workers.

“What really made me decide to quit was I had a friend come down from Lewiston. He wanted me to change his clutch for him in his car. She asked me about it, ‘cause I wanted to use an extension cord for light. When I went out back to feed the bigger cows, she was telling him that he should stay, just leave ‘cause, ‘He don’t have time for you. He has to be here at five o’clock in the morning to go to work.’”

AN UNGAINLY PUPPY CRASHES through the small apartment leaving in its wake a mess and two crying kids. Angela Roy quiets them distractedly and draws on a cigarette, her face and eyes tired. At twenty-one, she is a mother of two and expecting another child in the spring. Quickly, she spills out her sentences in great chunks punctuated by nervous laughs leaving little space for breathing. She is somewhat wistful, perhaps a bit regretful of some of the choices she’s made.

“I woulda preferred he work up here while living in Waterville. I’d finally got a somewhat good paying job compared to everything else and I quit my job so we could move up here, because I don’t have my license. I coulda still been working. We gave up Waterville housing to move up here and now we have to go right back on the waiting list. We thought this was really going to be a long term thing. The lady didn’t tell him the hours he’d be working.

“We’ve been subpoenaed. At first they [Rancourts] told us that we had three days to move out, ‘cause he quit. I don’t know if anybody can do it in three days. How does she expect somebody to find a place while they’re working all these hours? To find another job? We just don’t have the money to move out in three days.

“Even in two weeks we haven’t come close to saving enough money to move. In Waterville they don’t rent by the week. We’re having a really hard time moving, but they’re not being very under-standing. Pine Tree Legal said where it was part his job they have to give us a reasonable amount of time for him to get a job and find an apartment.

“She [Thelma] was really nice to me when I first met her. Mike took me up to meet her. Mike had told me, ‘This lady she’s old but she’s really a nice lady.’ My first impression of her was this woman looks mean. She’s a hardened woman, you can see that. I’m from the city and I’m not used to this.

“He had a hard time calling and talking to her. When he had to take Jason for his shots or take him into the hospital—he has respiratory problems—he made him feel guilty. You know like ‘What’s the matter with you, going into town to take your kid to the hospital when we got work to do over here?’ It’s not like he signed his life away to the devil.

“I can’t handle this country stuff. I’m used to the city where I can call up somebody and have ’em over. I’m way out here and I’ve got a couple friends in Waterville. They can’t come all the way up here. That’s a lot of gas money. It was lonely up here for me, because I couldn’t find a friend in him because he was too busy up there.

“‘He’d come home grouchy all the time and I couldn’t even stand being near him. He was working too hard. He was putting in thirteen and a half hours a day. He’d be so tired, he’d just want to go right to bed. The only time I’d see him was on his day off and we were so busy taking care of other things that we wouldn’t have time for ourselves.

“We were arguing all the time and he had a lot of pressure on him. Sometimes he’d get really ugly and he’d tell me to take the kids away.

“I was working part time at Kentucky Fried Chicken and full time at Zayre’s. I was working both jobs at one time because we really needed the money and I wanted to save for Christmas. We wanted a Christmas this year, but it doesn’t look like we’re gonna.

“They don’t understand when you have kids you need money like you wouldn’t believe. He needs clothes, he’s outgrowing his shoes already and there’s so many things we need. I’m pregnant again. I gotta watch out what kinda job I get because we almost lost him. He was born in March, but he wanted to come out in January.

“I really wanted that job at Zayre’s really, really badly and I ended up quitting it after I was there only a month.

“I feel older [than 21]. I don’t know. I’ve got two kids and I’m pregnant and there’s stuff Michael and I have been through in our life. You learn a lot of lessons.”
IN STOCKTON, CALIFORNIA, the phone rang. I heard an old friend calling from a continent away. "Hello, Jim," I said. "It's been what, 15 years since I heard from you?"

"'Bout that." Jim's voice flowed through the static, the Maine accent of my high school chum rushing images of the state back to mind—a meadow circled by high pines at dawn, the sea gently slapping at a weathered dock, gulls circling a farmer as he turns the spring earth on his small family field.

"I'm callin' from the Maine Mall," Jim said. I could hear the buzz of conversations and the echo of heels on tiled floors behind his voice. My pristine images faded.

"The what?"

"The Mall. The Maine Mall," Jim said. "Saw your father here, down from Bar Harbor. He was with your sister—come over from Augusta to do some shoppin'. Got me to thinkin' about you, so I just picked up the phone."

The Maine Mall. Somehow, to my mind, California goes with malls. Maine does not. And yet, here it is, the Maine Mall, sprawling its concrete and tile and neon across suburban South Portland, attracting Mainers and out-of-staters since 1971. Spreading, growing in size and reputation since that time.

In The White Album, Joan Didion calls malls the "profound equalizers . . . toy garden cities in which no one lives, but everyone consumes . . . the perfect fusion of the profit motive and the egalitarian ideal."

This theme is echoed by Sue Hadley, marketing director for the Maine Mall, who sees "a pleasant shopping experience" as the ideal towards which the mall must strive. That it has been successful in its mission is reflected in the fact that, in 1987, South Portland generated about $505 million taxable dollars in retail sales, most of which came
from the Maine Mall and the commercial establishments surrounding it.

And yet, not everyone who goes to the Mall does so to buy. Contrary to Joan Didion, we found in a month-long study of the Maine Mall that a lot of living is done there—living that does not involve economic consumption at all. For some groups of people who have no place else to go in our contemporary American culture, the Mall is a convenient, safe and temperate environment.

In the end, people decide how they will use a place or space. And in Maine at least, we found in our study of the Maine Mall that people have decided to use it as a gathering place—a place of community and of life.

Teenagers, locked out of so much else in our culture because of their "in between" age, find the neon lights, fast foods and electronics shops of the Mall an appealing environment in which to find friends and help each other make sense of the world.

Young mothers, needing to get out of the house and yet still be with their infants, find a temperate environment and a "stroller friendly" tile floor.

The elderly find it a place to exercise, to meet and chat with friends, to spin yarns and tall tales.

And so, the economic monolith of the mall is not solely that sterile, impersonal collossus of consumption that many of its designers (and its critics) assume it to be.

Ironically, deep within the concrete beast that is charged with displacing the sense of community of the local village square—or even the urban neighborhood—deep within the beast, social and cultural chains of belonging seem to have been forged.

The rough embrace of community remains for some, even in an environment as smoothly calculated as the Maine Mall, a human need, felt and met under lights of cold neon and the polished sheen of endless tiled floors.

This is a study of life at the Maine Mall on a summer weekday in 1988. The purpose was to discover, as much as possible, what was going on, what brought people to the mall, how they felt about being there, and to what degree people socialized or didn't socialize.

Twelve people conducted the study. Among them were a professor of sociology (George Lewis), a journalist (Pamela Wood), an historian (Hugh French), a photographer (Jim Daniels), and eight advanced level college students. Several were from Maine, the others "from away."

No attempt was made to amass statistical records. Since this was a study of attitudes and habits and possible rituals, most of the results are based on intensive interviewing, with some mall frequenters agreeing to a series of interviews over a four-week period.

The study represents about 200 hours of interviewing and observation at the Maine Mall. Only a portion can be printed in this issue of Salt. It and the remainder have become a permanent part of the Salt archives.
PLACE

Any mall, USA, built in South Portland, Maine.

PEOPLE

Mall Milers
People who walk for exercise, usually retired.
Regulars
Older people who hang out at the mall.
Mall Rats and Bunnies
Young people who hang out at the mall.
Tourists
People who don’t live in Maine.
Mothers
Women with children who use the mall as a getaway.
Vendors
The 3,000 sales people.
Gatekeepers
Custodians and security guards who control the mall environment.

Reported and Written by Harry Brown, Lou Brown, Brett Jenks, Peter Lancia, George Lewis, Julie Maurer, Edite Pedrosa, Amy Rowe, and Amy Schnerr. Illustrations by Julie Maurer.

ANY MALL, USA
By Brett Jenks

The sign out front might read “Just Any Mall.” Shoppers ignore it on their average consumer commute. In cars and buses they glide through the evergreen banks of the Maine Turnpike onto a vast consumer plateau. They aim toward the high white walls of the shopping center, beyond the gas station, the pizza shop, and the billion-selling hamburger chain.

Under the summer sun, parking lot air dances like gasoline fumes, moist backs and thighs melt to carseat vinyl. Ignitions grind, radios fade in and out from passing windows.

The interior, too, might be any mall. Posted floor plans outline the paths between the mall’s major “anchors,” five chain department stores. The cool smell of recycled air and the hum of air-conditioning quiets people as they push through the doors. They talk softly while their eyes race from signs and faces to plants and benches and back to their own shoes and pocketbooks. Passing foreheads shimmer, reflecting ceiling lights. Cash registers purr. High heels echo on the shiny tiled floor.

Here are the smells of popcorn and floor polish and hairspray; the metallic air of ice cream makers; Italian dressing; the pet shop. And ever present, as in every mall, the scent of fresh new clothes.

“I’ve been in malls all over the country, coast to coast, in fifty states,” Billy Beck says, standing in South Portland’s Maine Mall.

In cutoff jeans and concert t-shirt, Billy is on break from his transient job erecting scaffolding for rock ‘n roll tours.

“The philosophy of malls is real generic, ya know what I mean? There aren’t too many differences between ‘em. I don’t care how remote it gets, you don’t have to go far to find something like this.

“Ya seen one mall, ya seen ‘em all.”

Billy could spot only one small difference in the Maine Mall from others. “It’s the first Spenser’s I’ve ever seen that has light colored walls. I’m serious! Ya go into every one and it’s always dark colored walls. This one has white walls. It’s different.”

Other details make this mall in Maine different. Carolyn Chute’s latest hardcover book with relentless stories about poor Mainers on display in the chain bookstores. Tall stands of spruce and fir and pine encircling the concrete prairie. Red crustaceans, the regional insignia, stamped on
license plates, adorning handbags, or molded into plastic replicas perched on gas grills in Sears.

Distinctions can be found, but not even a harvest of plastic lobsters can paint local color into the vast mercantile backdrop. Billy Beck is right. The Maine Mall looks like just another prefabricated monument to all that's generic in the world.

And the people who go to the mall. Are they as preplanned as closing time? Mothers feeding small mouths in strollers in the sunken gardens sheltered with shiny-leaf ferns. Women approaching columns of hangers to feel and price merchandise. Children sent with fathers to the food courts to eat ice cream under a canopy of indoor foliage. Subteens racing towards the video arcade, sweaty quarters in hand. Preschoolers fixed on pet shop windows, smiling at puppies and kittens and canaries they can't take home.

In every mall, maybe there is an elderly couple sitting under a well-shellacked wood gazebo, as if taking a break from the fluorescent sun. Maybe there are small packs of teenagers in full concert t-shirt black, bent over laughing under the Hallmark sign. Maybe their laughter echoes across the polished tile floor, like at every other mall.

1.

MALL MILERS
By Amy Snchenn

PAT VACCIANO coasts through the blinking yellow traffic signal, past electronic signs that compete with the brightening sky. The garbage men haven't come yet when he pulls into the Maine Mall parking lot.

Two more cars arrive in the empty lot. The drivers check their watches to see how soon the mall will open. Finally at six the security guard unlocks the glass doors.

"Age first," Pat insists as he holds a door for his two companions.

Inside the mall, silent mannequins observe the three men begin their daily laps. They belong to a walking group called the "Mall Milers." Pat, now eighty years old, decides to take a shortcut.

"You cheated," accuses the security guard, Paul Bernier.

"No, you're cheatin'," Pat accuses. "You're supposed to unlock all these doors and you're talkin' to them," he claims with a grin. "I gotta bum hip, and when you get to my age, you won't be walkin'!" He smiles and disappears down the corridor.

Paul laughs. "There's old mall rats, too. Old people that hang out here."

Across the corridor, two women walkers call in disbelief, "You were here before us, Al!"

"That's right," sings a man with square shoulders and thick white hair. "You're gettin' lazy." He strides, elbows extended, to an outdoor exit to walk his brisk miles around the mall's outside.

"I prefer the fresh air," he explains, grinning through a white mustache.

Robert Brown strides by doing his daily five miles. He is one of the original Mall Milers, which now has 333 walkers signed up. The program encourages senior citizens to use the mall as a track of sorts, where they can walk laps and record their own progress. It is sponsored jointly by the Maine Mall, the YMCA and Dr. Robert Lynch.

As Pat and the other Mall Milers continue around their track, the mall shows its first signs of awakening. A juice machine begins to hum at the bakery. The bakery worker escorts a rumbling tray cart over the tile floors. McDonald's employees set up for breakfast to Billy Joel music.

Pat Vacciano sits down at a table and sniffs the baking bread. Coming to the mall "gets me out of the house," he says. "I wish they opened at five."

Eddie walks by and takes his usual spot at a table. He rips open his McDonald's bag and inspects his usual breakfast. "Two milks," he huffs. I don't ever order two milks!"

Around the Maine Milers, chain gates slide up, at first only halfway, until the shopkeepers fiddle with keys, turn on lights and prepare their stores and themselves for a day at the mall.

2.

REGULARS
By Lou Brown and Amy Rawe

CHARLIE STALKS the gazebo, near the clock, greeting friends as they gather at their daily meeting place. He is my target. "Talk to him, talk to him. He likes to talk," his friends say. "Go ahead."

At the moment Charlies talks standing. This position makes him the center of attention. It also gives him double benefit of the mobility he needs when he gets excited about his subject and a wider view of the mall, so he
can spot friends in the distance. He is so engrossed in his present tale that I am afraid to interrupt.

In one breath I sputter. “Excuse-me-why-do-you-come-to-the-mall?”

Charlie and a seated friend look at each other, then both turn to speak at once.

“To get outta the heat.”

“Meet a lot of people here.”

They wait expectantly to answer more questions. “Do you meet new people or run into old friends?”

Charlies responds eagerly. “Oh yeah. Meet people. And then some folks I’ve known for forty years.”

His friends are right. Charlie does indeed like to talk. Sometimes he gives advice. “People will steal anything. Lock your doors. Don’t leave anything in your car,” he warns in a heavy Maine accent that turns car into cah. Turning to his friends, he looks for support. “I got robbed last week, didn’t I?” And he

punches his neighbor on the shoulder, prodding him to nod before he continues.

“Had two things in my car. An old coat I was goin’ to give to the Salvation Army and a racin’ form. I still don’t know who won,” he mockingly laments.” The pause is just right. “Yeah. Lock your doors.”

His eyes scan the dizzying streams of people as they whirl around the mall. The scent of fresh tobacco floating from Perkins Tobacco Shop mingles with the
stench
of a spent cigar refusing to die in the ashtray behind us. A car door slams as yet another shopper inspects the interior of the nearby Suzuki Samurai.

“You don't wanna be rich,” Charlie states definitively. “Then you need bodyguards. Look at...” and he pauses, groping for the name and studying the skylight as if expecting to find it there, “Sylvester Stallone. All that money, but if he came in here, they'd mob him. So what good’s it do 'im?”

He peers into my eyes. His penetrating expression will accept only an assenting “yes sir” in response.

Suddenly he flags down Irene and Bob in the crowd. He delves deep into his wallet and retrieves two Arby’s coupons. “Here’s tonight’s dinner. Came out in Monday’s paper.”

Irene, poised and distinguished looking, nods and smiles in appreciation. “Good. We were goin’ there tonight.” She and her husband don’t stop, but continue
on their path until they have taken their seats behind Charlie.

Amy Rawe

BOB AND IRENE'S the name. "Bob's words are hushed, as he leans toward me just a little, all the while looking straight ahead. His forearms rest on his legs and his hands are clasped between his knees. Next to him his wife is in the midst of detailing her well-founded dislike of telephone sales people.

"They always call me at lunch." One of the worst sells cemetery plots. "I finally told him that my husband and I both have our plots all picked out. We're just sitting here waiting to go. He didn't call back after that!"

Irene and Bob have just finished their daily exercise. "We have a group of walkers. Took us a while to get acquainted. We sit here and talk about our illnesses, medications, diets. We have a lot of fun." Briskly she picks out one of the faces scurrying past. "There goes another walker."

As we sit, the whole mall seems to be in motion. The shoe rack in the window at Hanover shoes keeps up its ceaseless rotation. A child shrieks by, needing his nap thud. A middle aged woman in a shiny, knee-baring dress teeters past on impractical shoes.

I turn to my neighbors. They are dressed neatly and conservatively. Bob's light blue pants, white shirt, and red-white-and-blue sailor cap would be just as appropriate on the golf course as the mall. In her white leather dress shoes, stockings and white blouse buttoned to the neck, Irene looks more suited for downtown.

"Do you shop here?" I ask.

Bob laughs. "We got everything we need."

But Irene, smoothing her pink polyester skirt, has more to say. "We don't buy too much. I hate the clothes. That wrinkled stuff." She twists her nose in disgust. "They don't cater to the elderly. One of the clerks the other day said to me, 'You're not buying anything.'"

"I told her, 'When you get somethin' in I can wear, I'll buy it.' I don't mind ironing. And those short tops!" She chops at her midriff and shakes her white head. "Who can wear 'em? I can't."

She continues to editorialize about mall merchandise, her voice competing with the static of cash registers in the distance and the crackle of shopping bags carried by satisfied customers.

Irene peers into my eyes suspiciously when I leave. "I won't be getting any calls for subscriptions to your magazine, will I?"

Lou Brown

"I DON'T WANT TO TELL YOU my name, because if you put that in the paper, everybody will say, 'That gosh darn fool Bart.' They'll say, 'He's out there talking to all these young women.'" Smiling mischievously, Bart Peverada, now 78 and retired from his job at the Boys' Club, points an accusatory finger at my tape recorder. "I know you've got that on, you know."

Cocky Bart may be, but predictable, too, when it comes to his 260 days at the mall last year.

"I come here at quarter of eleven and I leave at twenty minutes past one," he says matter-of-factly, as he sneaks a glance at his watch. "I'm out here to do my walking."

"Every day?"

"Every day. Except—"

His two companions finish for him, "Five days a week. He's missed one day this year."

"And I have my lunch here at noontime."

He and his buddies could be on a streetside bench. A slender tree offers its branches to shade them, vendors' carts line the avenue, and even cars are parked nearby on exhibit.

This is Bart's eleven o'clock stop, outside of Porteous. I won't find him here at eleven-thirty.

"I move every half hour. I go from here down to where the clock is. Then where the clock is, I go down in front of Woolworth's, then I come back again and go up there and take my bus by the front of J.C. Penney."

Like a train winding its way though busy towns before chugging to a halt, Bart sees the same thing mile after mile. Hallmark, Regis Hair Stylists, Fanny Farmer, Sears, Spencer Gifts, Fanny Farmer, Regis Hair Stylists.

Like today. He introduces Harry Lerman and Tom McDermott. Pronouncing his own last name in conjunction with theirs, he proudly announces, "That's an Italian name."

He sweeps his arm towards Harry on the end, "That's a Jewish name over there." Finally, he flips his hand palm up to Tom. "And this is an Irish name. See there. League of Nations."

In between chuckles at his own joke, he peers at his watch again.

Harry seizes the conversation. "It's hard being a senior citizen. Very hard. It's a monotonous life. You know, when you're reconstructive for a good many years and then you have to relax and do

depot 10
COMING SOON
THE NEW LAHEY-WELLEHAN SHOES
nothing—and you’re alone—that’s worse.”

Silence. Somewhere behind us, a thirsty shopper sucks the last drops of soda through a sputtering straw.

“Well. It looks like you’ve got some pretty good friends here.”

Tom eagerly accepts the opportunity to brighten the conversation. “Girls down in the food court. They all look for us. We don’t come in, they ask everybody where we are. They think we’re sick or something.”

Harry and Bart tip their heads in agreement. “They look out for us. We kid a lot with them and everybody where we are.”

Harry takes it from there. “Well, you’re seeing a face, you know. If you stayed at home, and you’re alone, you see nothing. No matter where you’d live, you’d see a car go by, but people—you don’t see.”

Silence again. From somewhere behind the tree whispers the flip-scuffle-thunk of a pair of loose flipflop sandals. Harry leans forward a little in his seat, like a coach diagramming a play to his team. “So you come out here to see the living more or less.” He looks to his friends for reinforcement. “Am I right? I think so.” He settles back.

Tom jumps in to admonish Harry for his melancholy air. “You make everything sound sad, Harry. My lord, it’s not that bad. I come out here to get out of the house. That’s all.”

Lou Brown

HE IS SITTING alone on a wooden bench by the gazebo, wearing a small-checked black and white suit and a stiff tie. His legs and arms are crossed as if he is holding himself in. I come close and he cocks his head like a puppy.

As we talk, he comes untwisted and leans forward to look at me more intently. His eyes are melting-soft, like a watercolor. Their foundation has begun to sag, but just a little.

“How old do you think I am? Guess.”

“Oh . . . sixties?”

He wrinkles his nose and his eyes flash. “EIGHTY! 1908 . . . I was born here in Portland. My name is Pat.” Pat Vacchiano.

I ask him what he is doing at the mall at nine in the morning. He looks at me like I asked him what two plus two equals.

“I walked at quarter of six this morning. They open at six—I was here at quarter of.” Pat walks a couple of miles with the Mall Milers program every weekday. Then he relaxes on his bench under the transplanted tree and waits for his buddies to show.

“Little later, I meet six or seven fellas I know and we talk, shoot the breeze. I just come out here to kill a little time, that’s all. What am I going to do at home?”

He leans back to prop his elbow on the bench. His eyes follow a woman in red high heels taking choppy steps past Claire’s Boutique. He stretches his fingers, clenches them into a fist, then stretches them again, slowly.

“I was in business 65 years. Was in the meat business. Gave it to my son, my son gave it to his son. I don’t know whether you ever heard of it, Pat’s Meat Mart? [on Stevens Avenue in Portland].

Two elderly ladies in cotton skirts and sneakers walk past and wave to Pat. “Morning,” he answers. “You caught me, talking to the girls.” He laughs a solid, infectious laugh. The ladies giggle like school girls. “We knew we would. We keep an eye on you.” Pat’s smile lingers as he tells me that they were customers of his at the meat market.

“I have a lot of them, oh I have a LOT of customers, really I do ... people know us, ya know. He looks down and then away, as if he didn’t want to talk anymore.

“Well, thanks, Pat. It was nice to meet you.”

“Well, you’re welcome. I was going to show you my darlin’s picture.” He pulls out his wallet and unfolds a fragile, yellow newspaper clipping.

“She was the nicest, everybody loved her. They only make one like her . . . I miss this one, I tell ya. I do, I really do. Oh we were inseparable. I had her for 34 years. She died when she was 51, so—God wanted her. There’s nothing I can do, ya know.

“That’s the story of my life.

“Now where do you want me to send the bill?”

Amy Rawe

“HOT OUT, ISN’T IT?” A SOFT voice mumbles next to me. I turn my head and am surprised to see an elderly man smile sheepishly at me. It is Wednesday afternoon. My third Wednesday at the mall.

I hadn’t noticed when he sat down there. He mumbles again and looks at me with wide eyes.

“Excuse me?” I lean closer to decipher his soft words. He tells me that he has to take a break from his walking. Even the mall is hot. He smiles, which causes his cheeks to scrunch into velvety wrinkles—wrinkles as soft as his words.

He is wearing black and brown argyle socks. And Nike tennis shoes. “Oh yes,” he almost whispers. “I’ve walked six and a quarter.” He pulls out a small black odometer as I ask him his name.
“Fred Tapley ... from Westbrook.”
He pulls at his fingers for a while and begins to tell me of his walks outdoors with his two dogs. He savors those for fall and winter when the heat and mosquitoes don’t harass him and them. “Winters aren’t so harsh now. I can remember when it was 25 degrees below at noontime.”
As he tells me of frequent moose and deer sightings on his walks, the clerk in the nearby shoe store begins to vacuum. I lose Fred’s soft voice beneath the vrrrrmm of the machine and the thickening clamor of the mall crowd.
He continues to tell stories and I strain to hear snatches. “... deer ... don’t know if I could shoot one ... used to ... so pretty, innocent. Why kill ... pretty animals?”
The vacuum cleaner finally clicks off and its scream fades. I hear Fred say, “So, think you’ll be back next Wednesday?”

Amy Rawe

3.
TOURISTS

“TWO THINGS we see here,” says Aurore Briand, using the few English words she can, reverting to French and gestures when she can’t.
“Yes. We come here,” her arm describes the mall and she rattles the merchandise in her shopping bag. “And we go to the old, old church.”
Her companion, Cécile Levis, nods her smiling agreement. Both women wear large name tags that say they are from Timmons, Ontario. Two tour buses have brought them here to the Maine Mall.
The buses have unloaded 94 visiting tourists, all from Timmons, Ontario, for an afternoon of shopping. Seven of them sit at tables now, chattering in animated French, comparing shopping buys and drinking sodas. They are in their 50s and 60s and 70s. Their hair is coiffed more tightly than is fashionable now in the country they are visiting and their clothes are practical polyester in summer colors of pinks and blues and yellows. Their faces are relaxed and they are full of good humored banter.
“I have a good time here,” Aurore Briand says in English. “A good time.”
Her friend grins her agreement.
Someone calls “chauffeur” from the table and they gather their shopping bags and stroll to the door, clustering, talking, laughing, like a bevy of young girls off to a picnic.
“This mall is bigger than anything we have at home,” says Debbie, mother of five children who are sprawled on benches beside her. The family from Coventry in northern Vermont is vacationing in Maine for a week.
“We go to a different part of Maine each summer, see the sights in that area. The mall is definitely one of the sights of our trip. We’re at Old Orchard Beach and this is definitely one of the sights,” Debbie smiles.
Watching them from a nearby table, sits a Cambodian family, talking so quietly their native accents are lost in the sounds of passing footsteps. They have brought a recently arrived relative for his initiation visit to an American mall.
They take him to the mall first, before anything else. Before the seashore, before the mountains, before the woods, before finding him a job.

4.
MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

By Julie Maurer

BECKY BIBBER SITS among the steady influx of shoppers, browsers and loiterers. The confusion of the crowd does not seem to distract her from her work. She sits on a bench, mid-mall, bottle feeding her newly born daughter.
“She’s a good baby. I don’t have any problems with her,” Becky confides. “She hasn’t screamed at all. She’s been sleeping for the past four hours.” The two have been here all day since 10 A.M. and plan to stay until closing time.
“So it was very easy being a mother shopping today,” Becky concludes. “I guess it’s starting a new craze. You know, repeating an old one, where mother and daughter shop together a lot.”
Becky is from South Harpswell, about fifty miles from the Mall, and makes the trip routinely once every two months. This is her first trip to the mall as a mother, the beginning of what she claims...
is a traditional ritual, that of mother and daughter meeting together to shop.

And the Maine Mall is just the spot for such activity to her way of thinking. Becky notes the availability of strollers at the rental spot in the mall (though she brings her own), as well as the types of stores at the mall geared toward this combination of mothers with children.

"I think women are more out to shop than men. Most of the mall stores are encouraging women to shop. Trinkets and dresses, new styles. I think it's more of a woman's world than a man's. For every shop they've got in here, we've got five."

What she says is true. Glancing peripherally about the mall, we see men sitting on benches or fathers pushing strollers, while their wives duck in and out of shops, purchasing in their moments of freedom.

One young mother in mid mall is not experiencing one of those free moments today. Sue stands strained, as her son Alex twists to break free. The active child in her arms is at that in-between stage, restless in a stroller, but too young to scout the mall alone. "He's nine months now. The mall used to be a great place to bring him. He gets to the point now where he wants to get out of the stroller," she says as Alex jumps around in the seat beside her.

Sue is reluctant to talk about her own attraction to the mall. "It's a nice place to walk and to bring a carriage where you don't have to worry about the weather," she says. "Whatever the weather is, you can get out and exercise...but it really is a place to go. I really hate to be saying this, admitting it."

She grins and goes on, reflecting on the early stages of Alex's infancy and their time at the mall as it was then. "When he was younger, it was great, because he could just sit there and be amazed by the lights, sights and everything. So it was a good activity. It's pretty overwhelming for new eyes to see."

One mother from Cape Elizabeth is here with specific interests in mind, both for her and her daughters. Pat and her two young children, Kelly and Stephanie, are here for the pizza and brownies.

"We have sort of dual reasons for coming to the mall," Pat explains. "First, we need socks made of 100 percent cotton, which we couldn't find at Mars. So that's why we're here. Also we like pizza and brownies," she adds. "So it has a dual role. Food and 100 percent cotton socks."

An older mother and daughter have come all the way from Bangor on their bi-annual pilgrimage to the Maine Mall. They come in the summer, when they can also go to Old Orchard Beach, and then again around Christmas time.

Mrs. Rudnicki, has her teenage daughter Windy on one side and her neighbor, Sheila Mahone, on the other. Motioning towards Windy, she teases about their mall trips, "I just follow her and stop where she stops."

"She does not!" Windy scoffs. "She goes to Filene's and stuff and she looks around and goes, 'Oh my God! Look at these prices!' She does," Windy insists. "We're poor, I can't help it," her mother defends.

"She goes in there to look at the Liz Claibornes," Windy continues. "I mean, she goes, 'Oh my God! Look at these prices!'"

"Yeah," her mother admits, "I just look at Filene's and say, 'Oh my God, that's it.'"

Mrs. Rudnicki's three other children can't be traced. They are off shopping in another wing of the mall, but she doesn't seem concerned. The mall is a safe place to bring the kids.

The Rudnicki family even brought a picnic to the mall today. The only ants they'll have to worry about are the plastic ones in the novelty shop where the younger Rudnicki children are browsing at this very moment.

5.

VENDORS

By Peter Lancia

Jim takes a quick break when his business slows at the Thom McAn shoe store. He strolls into the hallway and stops. Looks upward to a skylight.

His eyes squint, his brow wrinkles, and, after a few seconds, his head drops. He scans the quiet mall, and then turns toward his store.

"No, it's not!" he hollers to a co-worker. She had wondered if it was raining yet, as the forecast had predicted.

Several yards away, Sue, the manager of Bombay Company, does the same. She darts to the hall and shifts to Old Orchard Beach.

Mr. Rudnicki's three other children can't be traced. They are off shopping in another wing of the mall, but she doesn't seem concerned. The mall is a safe place to bring the kids.
MALL HUMOR

Compiled by Edite Pedrosa

Interviewer: WHAT BRINGS YOU TO THE MALL TO DAY?

Answers: We thought it was going to rain and not a good day for pictures.

Women. There are all kinds of 'em out here.

People watch.

God only knows.

Chocolate croissants. We get them from this little French place here and we come every year and get one.

Nothing else to do.

We're on our way to square dancing.

Dual reasons. Food and 100 percent cotton socks.

Well, I'm visiting South Portland. I'm from Portland.

Talk and fight and settle some of the world's affairs.

It's like a trip. Once I enter the bus it's like a big adventure. Excitement.

I like the Pizza.

The brownies.
summertime and the Christmas season. The employees are almost as diverse as their patrons: teenagers and senior citizens, homemakers and career people, seasonal college students and year round retail specialists.

Talk to them and most will say they like working at the mall. Why? They enjoy people. "It's people, just walking by and even if they don't stop, they say hello. It's just a nice atmosphere." From her location at the end of the central corridor, the owner of the Shifting Sands pushcart has a good spot to see mall traffic. She's been at the mall for five years, two at the pushcart and three at one of the mall restaurants.

Two years with a pushcart is a long time in the mall. Her wares are novelty items made in California, colored sand and water in a glass box that shift to make new formations—quite a sales challenge—but for her, even a "dead" day at the mall has business that is "really good."

"Come in and look around! See all the nice things we have!" beckons Ellie, the smiling manager of Hickory Farms. She stands at a counter in the front of her store and tosses a mixture of sauerkraut and sausage in a sizzling dutch oven.

In the mall's newest section, Patty Shrum has worked at Porteous department store since it opened five years ago. She began when her children were in college on a part time basis. "I thought, 'My lord! I'm a people person! I love it! I feel wonderful!'"

"And then I realized, 'My lord! I'm a people person! I love it! I feel wonderful!'"

Patty is one of only three remaining original employees who started work when Porteous opened its store in the mall in 1983. The employee turnover is large. "For me, it's just a little part-time job, which is wonderful. But for people who have to support themselves—I think it's a pass-through place for the young kids."

Her greatest regret about her sales career is that she can't speak French to the French Canadian tourists, who in the summertime "come here by the bucketload."

Being a natural "people person" is a necessary buffer for the many imperfections of mall employment. Grumpy customers and shrieking children are among them. Jim of Thom McAn shoe store jokes that kids are a lot of fun "unless they spit on you, cry and yell."

Other drawbacks are harder to laugh off. Low wages, too few hours, too many hours and headaches caused by the mall environment itself all take their toll on mall workers.

Talking to employees about this, we get a sense of a dense, fabricated mall environment that serves as a backdrop for colorful players. Players performing their various rituals of browsing and buying before a spent audience of shopkeepers who appreciate them when they can.

One of the most frequent complaints is about hours. A store manager says she has been saddled with double duty shifts from nine A.M. to ten P.M. many days when employees call in sick.

Too few hours may be just as bad, or worse. Most mall employees prefer to hire part time help, who work under twenty hours weekly, rather than full time people, who are required by law to receive certain benefits. Two part time employees are much cheaper than one full time person.

Most mall jobs pay poor wages. As one department store employee put it, "I would say the turnover is big because of pay scales. Full time people who need to support themselves and families cannot afford to stay."

One former assistant manager remembers the people, both coworkers and customers, who kept him at his mall job for a couple of years.

"The hours are rotten and the pay is lousy. Would you believe I got $4.50 an hour, and that's for management! I guess it's the people that kept me there."

**6. MALL RATS**

By Harry Brown

"Y UP, THIS IS our new hangout," Derick claims. "This is where all the younger kids come and waste money and play video games."

Jamming his hands halfway into the pockets of his frayed cut-off jean shorts, his eyes probe the newest section of the mall as he admits, "It's a place to go before I have to go to work. I only work right across the street. I have nowhere else to hang out. Most of our friends hang out here."

Looking down at the arcade in the adjacent wing of the mall, he gestures towards it with a quick nod of his head. "Go over there to play video games. Spend all my money. I don't like spending all
Standing near Derick in the small knot of teen-agers, Erick takes a long, slow drag off his cigarette and exhales out the corner of his mouth. "I just started coming on almost a daily basis last year because it was just something to do."

You might call Erick a regular. He calls himself a "mall rat." Like many young people his age, he has come to rely on the mall as a place to "hang out," to be together with friends and feel a sense of belonging.

"You can come here anytime," Erick continues. "It's pretty good, but if we didn't have anything, you'd probably get in more trouble than we would if we came here, so it kinda works out you know. It's something to do and it kinda keeps you outa trouble."

As he says this he scans the familiar row of neon bedecked food stalls. People rush by, but he appears calm and undisturbed, like his four friends standing nearby. They chatter noisily among themselves, making jokes, and playfully pushing each other around, only half aware of the bustle and motion of other people.

Motioning toward his friends, Erick goes on to say, "I met all these people here. I've met lots of other people. One place where you can always find someone. If you know somebody else, they'll probably see 'em here, and you'll know them, then they'll know someone who is walking around and you know that person. So when you come here you kinda build on people."

Erick and his friends, the "mall rats" and "mall bunnies" usually arrive at the mall in the late afternoon around three-thirty or four o'clock and spend their evenings wandering around the different shops and playing video games in the arcade until nine-thirty or ten o'clock when the stores close and the mall shuts down. "I'm usually here for like four hours. Four and a half," Erick explains.

For some it's practically a second home. One mall bunny named Tammy reveals, "I used to come here every Saturday from eleven o'clock to nine-thirty, and just walk around." For two devoted mall bunnies like her and her friend Gina, the mall functions as a place to meet people and "check out the guys."

Erick continues to give his perspective on the mall. "It's a lot better with the new section because the old section, you walk around it a few times and it just gets boring. This [the new section] you have to walk around it a lot to get [bored], to want new things."

When roaming from shop to shop, playing video games or cruising the strip becomes tiresome, the pack usually migrates toward the food court. Here they sit, talk, bum, smoke cigarettes and form a meeting place for the rest of the rats and bunnies who wander in.

As the group gathers around the table, some standing, others sitting and talking, one of the girls breaks from her conversation to warn Erick, "Bob's coming."

"Bob's coming. Yeah. Okay." Erick acknowledges watching the approaching security guard out of the corner of his eye.

One of the girls sitting with him looks over at Erick and explains. "He's kicked out of the mall and he's not supposed to be here for three months."

"Up until July 23rd," Erick interjects.

"Just about all of us have gotten kicked out of the mall at one time or the other," a lanky youth named Tony says in a matter of fact way. He continues, "Well I was sitting down without anything to eat once, and like I didn't know the policy and he said 'Move' and I go 'Why?' I ran my mouth a little too much. What I basically did was stand up for myself, but he didn't like that, so he just booted me for a couple of months."

"Actually, I'm not supposed to be even in here. He said he's kicked me out forever, but I mean like I changed my hair style so he doesn't recognize me anymore."

Erick nods, "I changed mine and I changed my jacket. I used to wear a big leather jacket. I used to wear that all the time. That gave me away. But I've started wearing this jacket now with all my KISS pins on. And as long as I don't act up or do anything, they don't really care. See I like it here so much I hafta come back.

Outsiders create the real problems, according to the rats. "One incident we had was when somebody threw a chair at Jimmy Walker, a friend of ours."

"Jimmy went wild. There was one guy with a bat in here, swing-
ing the bat around. They've had some fights in here."

Tony looks up from the table and glances in the direction where the chair fight had been waged. "There used to be some guys from South Portland. All long haired guys. They looked like rock stars." They caused trouble and the security guards called the police.

"It was wild. They were haulin' 'em out the doorway in cuffs, by the hair and by cuffs. It was like wild. Everybody was lookin' and crowdin' around. The cops are sayin', 'Get outa here, we got enough trouble.'" "It'd be pretty boring around here without the mall," Tony decides. "It's mostly the main hangout. This is just about the most interesting place around here." It is here that the latest news is told and the drugs are traded.

"Other than Old Orchard Beach which is just like, 'deal it out on the streets,' I mean ya can get just about anything out here, pot, acid, hash, right here on Saturdays when it's crowded."

"If you know the right people you can pick up anything."

"And we pretty much know everybody here."

For some the mall is an escape from home. Heather, a tall and comparatively quiet mall bunny, explains that she comes here "to get away from home, get away from problems 'cause I can't stay at home. Because of my nephew and my sister. They bother me. So I come to the mall."

For Tiffany, a petite girl who sits beside Heather smoking a cigarette, the mall has become a second home of sorts. At the age of thirteen she lives with Tony and another mall friend. "My mom kicked me out when I was eleven," she says with an edge of anger in her voice. "She's a bitch. I call her every day and she's just—." Tiffany stops short as she shakes her head and rolls her eyes upward.

"I started going to foster homes and everything and I just quit. Now, I'm in state custody and I just—. She stops again and laughs nervously and blushes as she wears an embarrassed smile. "Sorry about that," she says, apologizing to her friends, seeming to imply that she has become too emotional. Abruptly she continues. "I don't do anything that they want me to do." She lets out a quick triumphant laugh.

"I swear to God if they came up to me and dragged me where I didn't want to go, I'd beat the crap right out of them. I would kill 'em. I got 'em twisted around my little finger. They don't mess with me." She growls as she clenches her teeth and curls her small fist that rests on the table.

"It's cool. You meet a lot of wicked cool people. I've met all these people," she says smiling at the other teenagers around her. "Never knew them before unless I worked."

"You also meet a lot of people that work everywhere else. I work here [Orange Julius] and know people here and Micky-D's and that's pretty cool." Being both a mall bunny and a mall employee, Liz's sense of community at the mall is especially strong.

She explains. "It kinda goes masculine and feminine, you know." Then she laughs and admits. "Yup, that's us. We are mall people and we are definitely the people to talk to because we ARE the regulars. We're here almost every day." From behind her, Tony declares quietly, "We're the mall. We're the mall."
polyester slacks she wears are covered by a green canvas apron. A monstrous walkie talkie is attached to her right hip. A symbol of her connection to a higher power.

There is a yellow brown pallor to her skin. Brown circles ring her dark eyes. "I smoke too much." she says. Fine brown curls cling to her neck and to the sides of her damp face. The pace here is hurried. She works up a sweat. By the end of the day she is clearly tired.

But she tells me, "I never really hate this job. Like it better than my old job." Her old job was hemming children's shirts for Stride-Rite in the Portland shop before it closed down. There she says she had to sit behind a sewing machine doing the same monotonous thing all day. Crabby supervisors stood looking over her shoulders to hurry her on.

Now she still hustles through the day. A whirlwind in constant motion. But it's different. She likes being on the move. Being with people. Talking here and there. And, she says, "I make good pay—well I think it's good pay, $6.15 an hour plus benefits." She shrugs.

Linda is 37 years old. A native of Portland, she has lived with her husband and three children in South Portland for almost 16 years.

She talks about the people who come to the mall. She likes meeting the tourists. "Except for the French Canadians. Can't understand what they're saying to me. When they talk to me in here, I always point down there and say, 'Down there on the left.' I always figure they're looking for the bathroom," she laughs.

Linda likes the regulars, too. The older people who come to the mall every day to socialize, pass the time. Her father-in-law is one of them. "He comes twice a day, every day. Ya, he sets over in the old mall, then he comes down and sets by Porteous for a while, then over by McDonalds."

She also has come to know the Mall Rats and Mall Bunnies. "They're really not bad kids once you get to know them. I fool around with them a lot. Sometimes I have to get some thrown out because they make a big mess. But generally they don't cause any trouble."

Linda says the Malls Rats and Bunnies are not as bad as another group who frequent the mall Friday nights in the wintertime. "I don't know what you call them. They hang out here only in the winter. In the summer they go to Old Orchard Beach. They're really scuzzy looking. And violent. "They get thrown out all the time. They punch holes in the walls and rip the bathrooms apart."

It's at times like that when the big walkie talkie dangling by her right arm is put to use. She calls for help. Other times the mall managers use it to get messages to her. The walkie talkie attests to Linda's role as a mall gatekeeper. She and the other custodians and security guards who keep order and cleanliness in the place, ejecting people who threaten the mall environment.

Tonight Linda is here to help close the mall. As closing time approaches, her pace increases. Every table and chair in the long hall must be cleaned and removed for the night. Food stalls close at 9:30, but diners often linger at the tables.

She whirs around a group of fat stragglers intent on McDonalds hamburgers and piles of French fries. Stacking chairs. Pushing everything against the walls. Soon the fat diners are a lone island in the middle of the vast, empty hall. They seem unperturbed by the green aproned cyclone. around them. They eat leisurely, slowly licking their fingers when the food is gone.

Scraping their chairs back, they rise to leave. Linda steps in. Demolishes their island as they straggle toward the door. Their big bodies cast eerie shadow on the polished floor.

Almost ten. The work is finished. Linda comes over to me, puffing a little, clearly tired, "sweaty and yucky," her polo shirt clinging to her skin.

"No wonder you don't like the night shift," I say as she pulls a chair off the stack to sit down. "It was bad tonight because we were shorthanded," she explains. "One girl called in sick. Said she had blisters on her feet."

"It would be pretty hard to do this with blisters on your feet," I say, making a face.

She slouches down in her chair. Laughs a little. "Ya."

A half hour later, we say goodbye and part. On my way out to the parking lot, I turn and look through the glass doors into the cavernous hall. Tables and neatly stacked chairs line the walls. All that is left in the center is a triangular advertising stand shaded by a lone tree in its wooden box of mulch and plastic rocks.

And Linda. Leaning. Stacking her chair back up.

Straightening, she pulls off her apron, crumples it into a green ball and heads for the locker room.

44
THE FARMING EDGE
The concentration of farmland into larger and larger holdings and fewer and fewer hands—with the consequent increase of overhead debt, and dependence on machines—is thus a matter of complex significance, and its agricultural significance cannot be disentangled from its cultural significance. It forces a profound revolution in the farmer's mind: once his investment in land and machines is large enough, he must forsake the values of husbandry and assume those of finance and technology.

—Wendell Berry
The Unsettling of America, 1977

Written by John Dale
Photography by Jim Daniels

The WORLD looks different through the windshield of Adrian Wadsworth's pickup. I watch the dairy farms of Turner, Maine pass before my eyes at 30 mph. The speed limit is 40.

Autumnal winds whip the unharvested hay. Noon sun catches the motion, and the fields whirl like a subway turnstile at rush hour.

"Grind!" whines Wadsworth's clutch, as he downshifts and his dry-manured boot brakes.

His calloused grip releases the stickshift and, flannel reaching across my face, he points out toward my windowscape:

"There!"

He cuts the engine.

"There's a perfect example of one of the real threats to agriculture that we have."

ADRIAN WADSWORTH has a pied perspective of Turner, a farming community about 10 miles north of the twin cities of Lewiston and Auburn. He and his wife began farming in Turner 13 years ago, so they hardly qualify as town natives. But previously, he lived on a dairy in Farmington, Connecticut, which had been in the family for 300 years.

Therefore, he is not ignorant of the forces of tradition that characterize Turner. And indeed, 13 years has provided time enough for "getting to know the neighbors." Adrian Wadsworth understands Turner as both an "outsider" and an "insider."

"See that house?" Mr. Wadsworth is still pointing.

I look out the window and see what appears to
be a fairly typical farmhouse. It is a three-storied structure, built more up than out. A screened porch runs along its perimeter. I see no threat to agriculture.

"A doctor lives in that house: Dr. Barris. A real nice guy. My cornfield is right here in the lines, right along those trees. When it comes time to put herbicides and pesticides on, I have a very concerned neighbor. Who butts right against my cornfield.

"And I don't know if herbicides and pesticides are right, but I know when you've got a neighbor who's got two little children, and you're spraying ten feet from his driveway, you've got problems."

He starts the truck and we're on our way again.

Mr. Wadsworth milks 240 cows. This is a large dairy farm for Maine. Not the largest for there are some dairy farms with 500 cows in Maine. Where Wadsworth may produce four million pounds of milk in a year, they may produce upwards of 10 to 12 million. To support his dairy, Wadsworth farms just shy of 200 acres of cornland and about 400 acres of hayland—most of which is rented from other farmers or retired farmers. One of the problems of being the new kid on the block is that he doesn't own the land he farms. There is not enough cheap land available. Unlike the majority of his successful competitors in Turner, he must rent the land he farms. In order to rent this much land, he must travel ten miles in three different directions. This means that the 3700 tons of forage that his herd consumes each year must be hauled that distance to his central barn. But despite the fact that Wadsworth's land base is so scattered, he defends his operation.

"I think I run a very efficient operation. We've managed to stay in business when others haven't."

Today I am traveling the route with him. A week earlier, Glenn Wildes, the area dairy specialist of Maine's Agricultural Extension Agency that covers the Turner area, had told me that he believes "the dairy farmers of Turner are characterized by an unusually high spirit of competitiveness." I want to see how dairy farmers in Turner not only manage to compete, but stay on top. Why are they so successful when dairy farmers in other parts of Maine are going out of business?

Turner has one of the largest volumes of farm production in Maine. Turner's DeCoster Egg Farm alone—"The World's Largest Brown Egg Producer"—had an output in 1983 of $50 million. But, even excluding DeCoster, the average farm sales per farm in Turner that same year amounted to $157,000.

David Vail reports, in a 1983 study comparing four of Maine's farm towns, that the dairy farm with the state's highest average milk yield and the nation's highest average butter-fat yield is in Turner. The owner, Albert Bradford, claims that he has earned this distinction fifteen of the last sixteen years. Mr. Bradford also serves as a Selectman in Turner's Town Government. And a consortium based on Turner's Wauregan Farms auctioned a Holstein cow in 1983 for over $500,000 at Madison Square Garden.

"A lot of things have caused farms to go out," continues Adrian Wadsworth. "Economic pressures, the need to increase size, people that inherit the farm, with all this in their face, having to borrow money to continue farming; and then deciding not to.

"We have the same financial pressures as any other business," he says. "Whether you run a hardware store or a construction company, you have labor, overhead insurance, cost of machinery, equipment, fuel, all those costs."

In the state's dairy industry, the minimum price milk can be sold for is set by the Maine Milk Commission.

As Mr. Wadsworth explains the economics that has grown up around this government intervention, "It's very difficult to cover the costs because the Government sets the floor and we happen to have an adequate supply of milk, and so the floor becomes the price."

The Wadsworth's are gaining equity, but their income is 60-70% of what it was seven years ago.

"The thing that is killing us," says Wadsworth, "is our debt. If I could write off 80% of my debt, I'd be embarrassed by the amount of money I'd be making." The reason Wadsworth is able to stay in business is a reflection of his efficiency. Or as he says, that is the "only thing keeping me in business." Up until 15-20 years ago, farming was an equity business. Help and equipment were relatively cheap. And there were a lot of small farmers. Now farming is more cash flow oriented demanding larger farm operations. With the inflated land prices in the 1970s, farmers took advantage of their deepened equity.

"But in Turner," explains Mr. Wadsworth, "any farm that's in business now with the exception of a few that are in my situation, you couldn't put them out of business. It would be nigh near impossible if they wanted to stay farming.

"We have farms with a lot of history behind them, and they've been in the families for generations, and they don't owe any money—very difficult to put a farm like that out of business if they want to stay."

"As long as you have father-and-son teams that
want to continue, they'll continue. The father wants the son to continue, so he virtually gives the farm to the son. There's no overhead incurred.

"I went out and paid fair market value for my farm. I paid for my cows and my equipment at market price. You're talking about, on a farm my size, close to 3/4 million dollars investment."

"I don't have that money. If I had that money, I wouldn't be working. I had to borrow it. When you borrow money, you've got principal interest payments."

"So when I go to compete against Caldwell [a long time Turner dairy farm], which is what every farmer's doing—in a market where the price is low, you're competing against your neighbor— whoever makes milk the cheapest, will be there the longest. That's just a fact of life. Same for my business as any other business."

ADRIAN WADSWORTH is right about family farms in Turner that have a strong history behind them. I had talked to the Caldwells the day before.

I pulled into the driveway that had a white billboard with a Holstein painted on it: Caldwell Farms.

"You can't miss it," the lady at Turner's General store had told me.

If she had meant that I can't miss Caldwell Farms, then she had a point. They own over over 600 acres, 350 of which they farm.

"Ralph Caldwell?" I asked

"Nope, Lawrence. You want my brother," replied an old man with a heavy Mainer accent. He was wearing his hat so far back on his head that I couldn't read the logo. I got the soiled underside of the hat's bill instead. I couldn't read his joking either. Ralph Caldwell is Lawrence's son.

"I'm Ralph Caldwell," said the man I was looking for, as he extended a firm shake to greet me.

He had been working on the tail-lights of his trailer in the barn.

The Caldwells have been farming successfully in Turner for forty years. Glenn Wildes told me that if farming turned sour in Turner, these guys would be the last still standing.

As farming goes, the Caldwells are "making it." To the "Adrian Wadsworths" of Turner, they are "Old Wealth," long-established.

I explained my interest in Turner's successful agriculture, and Ralph Caldwell invited me to join him in the barn to hear his thoughts on the subject.

"There was seven of 'em in the family and her father was a farmer in the town of Turner."
Mr. Caldwell explained that his mother was a Varney. Her father had farmed in the town of Turner, as did her five brothers. She had one sister. He continued to weave the social web:

"The Briggs family, they're our cousins. Adrian Wadsworth farms on one of the Varney farms that he's in the process of buying—smart young man. And there's been a handful of other pretty good farmers in the area, and it tends to keep you honest and working at it."

He gave me an example. "If you had a Sunday afternoon that you didn't have to do something, but you see a neighbor pass by with a mowing machine heading out to do some mowing, it pointed up to you that maybe you had things you could be doing if you wanted to. And it has been a good-naturedly, very competitive area. I think the farmers in the town of Turner have a very good relationship amongst themselves."

When I asked him how advantageous it is to own land as opposed to renting it as Adrian Wadsworth has, his wire-cutters stopped. His hand released the wire. I had his undivided attention. And from the glare of his eyes, I sensed that I was the one who had better be listening attentively.

"Owning this land is a psychological thing that farmers feel they must do to have independence. It is not necessarily the most expedient way to make money though. Your investment better be in milking parlors and efficient buildings and good cattle than in expensive land. Because you can't pay the interest on land that is in the southern third of the state of Maine on what it can return off'n it—to say nothing of ever paying any of the principal."

His bent elbows were pulled behind his back by the tension in his shoulders. His arms hung motionless.

"It just can't be done," he said. A silent pause punctuated his claim. Then the glare broke, the shoulders dropped, and the movement returned.

He cut the old wire from the removed tail-light.

"Now, we still buy land," said Mr. Caldwell as he reached for new wire, "and we've accumulated a lot. But we've got a lot of land that we've accumulated for $50-100 an acre, and so, today we can go and buy some $1000 an acre land to blend into that and not shipwreck the operation."

"But," continued Mr. Caldwell, "a man can't go buy a whole bunch of $1000 an acre land and stay in business 'cause it'll bankrupt him."

The yearly interest on $1000 land is roughly $100. The crop grosses about $200, maybe $300 if you have a decent year. Then there is another $150 for fertilizer, machinery, and harvesting time.
Mr. Caldwell explained:

“So, say you lose $50 an acre right off the top before you ever even get started. It can’t be done. But you can buy it because the fella that owns this land will rent or sell the feed off’n it, because he owns it reasonable and he wants to be independent and work for himself and so he won’t charge as much for the product as he could get by selling it to somebody else and putting the money in the bank.”

“Even in the good years,” explained Mr. Caldwell, “we work for less money than we could get if we sold our operation and put the money in the poor, everyday passbook savings accounts.”

I remember Ralph Caldwell’s answer to why he was in farming. Mr. Caldwell squatted over his tail-light again, and looked at me over his shoulder. “We like what we’re doing and so we keep doing it.”

He then walked me outside the barn door, and pointed toward the White Mountains with his palm extended and facing downward. “Look out over the house. The White Mountain Range sets right over that next blue ridge o’ mountains right there... in New Hampshire. That’s about eighty miles from here. The leaves are kinda pretty. The heifers down there on the side hill pasture looks kinda nice. Air’s clear. There isn’t somebody tryin’ to mug us, or rob us, or give us a bad time about somethin’. We like where we’re livin’ and what we’re doin’. It isn’t because we’re gettin’ maximum return on our hours.” He squatted, hands still above his head holding the connecting wires, to check the progress he was making on his tail-light.

With his back to me, he continued.

“But there is an encroaching urbanization, and it is very tantalizing to go out and give it a try. There’s a lot more money to be made there, I believe, than there is in this operation. And I think there is a great deal of money to be made in developing land of all sorts. I don’t think that the state, nor the town, nor the federal government have a right to legislate land-zoning.”

Then he stood and walked over to the cab of his truck. I noticed that the tail-light was working. He wiped his hands and approached me with a sigh. His shoulders became tense once again.

“I don’t think that somebody who owned half an acre in the village has the right to tell us that we must keep that land open,” said Mr. Caldwell, “so that when we ride up-and-down the street, they can look off and see the mountains. I want them to have the opportunity to look off and see the mountains, but the way to keep us in business so they can continue to look off and see the moun-
tains is not to harrass us so that we can’t make a living at our business.”

W

E PASS an oncoming garbage truck. “That’s Charlie Varney. He used to be in dairy farming,” Adrian Wadsworth tells me, motioning to the truck. Varney still runs beef cattle, Wadsworth adds.

I half-heartedly turn my head, more as gesture to Mr. Wadsworth than out of interest in this Varney guy. The truck is already passed.

Mr. Wadsworth continues, “Now he owns Andy Valley Refuse Service. He also owns quite a bit of land in Turner.”

I immediately begin searching my rear-view mirror, this time with genuine interest, as I try to picture the kind of garbage collector that could own large amounts of land where land is so expensive and development pressure is impending.

I make a mental note to myself to talk to Varney.

Turning back, I notice for the first time some grey strands in Wadsworth’s otherwise black beard and moustache. I remember how young Mr. Wadsworth’s children are. Junior high at most, they were playing in the front yard of his house when we departed the driveway. Mr. Wadsworth, I judge, is roughly 40 years old.

I ask him if he thinks his kids might one day be interested in taking over his farm.

“Well, I think that unless things get substantially better, I’ve got two challenges. One, I’ve got to be able to afford to put my kids through school—and I’m not pleading poverty, but farming, you know, has been paying tough. I’d like to see ‘em go to college. And unless things improve substantially, I don’t think they’ll want to come back to the farm.

“They see the hours. They see me getting up at two-thirty in the morning, and I have a lot of nights where I’m not done until after seven. And, you know, I keep promising I’ll do this and I’ll do that with them, and it never happen. It doesn’t take long for them to figure out that there’s better things in life than farming.”

I ask him the question I asked Mr. Caldwell. “Why did I go into it? Heh, I guess I wonder.”

After college and the Army, Mr. Wadsworth says he tried a few different things and decided that he really didn’t take orders too well. “And,” he adds, “I had liked a lot of farming when I grew up, and I guess I thought maybe I could do it one step better.”

When the Wadsworths began looking for a place to farm13 years ago, they were looking for a nice quiet village—a lot like his hometown in Connecticut used to be.

For two years the couple worked for Turner dairyman Paul Varney, then bought cows and contracted for their feed before actually buying their farm in 1980.

“We had land enough,” says Mr. Wadsworth, “to farm the way we were on the number of acres we had. He [Paul Varney] actually put the crops in 4 or 5 years, so I got to know quite a few people during that time. So, it really wasn’t all that difficult to get into it.

“The financing was the difficult part,” he explains. “I worked with PCA [Pressure Credit Association]. I never did any business with Farmers Home. I don’t know if that was smart or not. Pressure Credit is a lot more stringent with their requirements, so I figured if Pressure Credit would accept it, I had some amount of chance of success.

“If I had gone with Farmers Home, I was kind of concerned I might get myself in a real hole. I think as it worked out, it was smart.”

The Wadsworths used their money to buy the farm.

“We had two real super years,” claims Wadsworth. “We added on to the buildings and put it all back into buying farm equipment.”

He says he sometimes had a tendency to go overboard.

“New equipment. You get thinking things are going to be good forever. But everything is cyclical, and it came back around and things have been damn tight. I’m glad we didn’t over-extend. We wouldn’t be in business today if we had.”

Aside from bragging ownership of one of the largest manure-spreaders in the world, Mr. Wadsworth has “a good production unit and a nice big barn.”

His is the first cold free stall barn in the northeastern United States. It was built with the Hood Foundation’s help in 1962.

“Everybody told Paul his cows were going to freeze to death. Said you couldn’t put cows in a cold free stall barn in Maine winter—they’d freeze. It’s thirty below outside, then it’s 30 degrees below zero inside. Well they didn’t freeze. They did all right.”

Mr. Wadsworth claims that it is the perfect barn for animal health because it is constructed to provide good ventilation, which means animals are not left as susceptible to pneumonia as with most other barns.

“Here’s the Additon Farm. You won’t put them out of business. You just can’t drive somebody like this—.” Mr. Wadsworth does not finish his sentence before sounding his horn and waving to
the slow-moving farm truck in front of us. “That’s Abe Additon. Family farm of five or six generations—they aren’t going anywhere.”

I laugh thinking how appropriate it is that Mr. Additon’s slow-moving truck doesn’t seem to be going anywhere either.

Mr. Wadsworth, less amused, mumbles more to himself than to Mr. Additon.

“You gonna let us by, Abe?”

I suppose that he might otherwise shout, if he believed his voice could compete with the noise from Mr. Additon’s unmuffled engine.

Wadsworth shifts into third. Abe nods, and we pass.

Mr. Wadsworth sees his future in farming as very dependent on the choices that the people of Turner make concerning land use. His future depends on whether or not the landowners choose to keep land available to farm, instead of selling out to developers and bedroom residents.

As we take the curve, Wadsworth reaches for his head to adjust the visor of a hat that is not there. Then, realizing this, he grabs the car visor instead, flipping it downward to block the sun, which is now sitting on the windshield. I am still blinded.

“Turner,” he explains, “people look at dairying as both a way of life and as a business. At some point, you’ve got to have some of the things in life that other people have.”

The road curves again, and the sun frees my squint to reveal an almost visual cliche; but it is no cliche.

“I don’t know if there is a prettier spot in most of Maine,” he says.

A mountain range—just as a child might draw. Purple triangles break an apple-tree horizon.

ROUTE 4 runs through the center of Turner, is main street, and is very soon running through farmland again. The truck rises and drops as street names indicate: Lower Street, and now Upper Street.

Upper Street is where Bill Briggs of Brigene Farms lives. His son, Steve, has his home nearby on Lower Street. Together they own two farms and have an interest in a third. Steve is Adrian’s age. Brigene Farms’ major business is in selling fine bred dairy cows. Their reputation in this area is international. The Wauregan Farm that had one of its Holstein cows auctioned for $500,000 is the third farm the Briggs have an interest in. They also milk around 150 cows and rent some of the land that Mr. Wadsworth is now showing me. In all, they probably own more land than any other in Turner. They are a major force in Turner agriculture.

We look back at the mountain range horizon.

“The potential is for that land to be sold at any time,” says Mr. Wadsworth. A developer comes along and looks both ways: he looks down at the Androscoggin and out at the White Mountains. You’ll see Mt. Washington on a good day right back there from the barn! It’s not hard to see what the potential is up here.”

Mr. Wadsworth says that the owner of the land in the foreground of our view sold his cows in the herd buy-out.

The herd buy-out plan was a provision in the 1985 U.S. farm bill. Congress has tampered with the structure of the dairy industry and with the federal system of price supports in order to reduce large national surpluses of dairy products held by the federal government.

According to the Maine State Planning Office, these surpluses grew as the United States diminished its foreign aid.

And as a result of this Congressional tampering, Maine has lost almost 25 percent of its dairy farms so far. The national average expected is 15 percent.

Successful dairymen in Turner, such as Ralph Caldwell, have seen this development as an opportunity to “buy-out” the weak competition, and improve the dairy industry’s efficiency, since assessments on farmers who stay in business are used to cover the cost of the buy-out plan.

Mr. Caldwell said that, because of the technological changes that have been made in recent decades, this country can feed its entire population using only two or three percent of the people.

“We don’t need everybody in the business. The government tries to prop up people who shouldn’t be in business. We raise extra feed and sell feed. They come along with disaster programs and help programs, and give people subsidies to buy our feed—which is nice.

“But they’re subsidizing those people with as much as a 40 percent subsidy to buy feed with. And we don’t make any portion of a 40 percent profit on it, so that makes their feed cost them less than ours costs us. And we aren’t getting a subsidy.

“And so it makes a little bit stiff competition. They keep people in the business that shouldn’t be here. And my thoughts are not that I want them to have hard luck for a second, but still it’s awfully difficult for us to make our business float on its own while somebody else is being propped up by the government.”

But Mr. Wadsworth does not bring up the buy-
out to point out how the federal government's decisions affect the farm economy in Turner. He sees some more local decisions that will have to be addressed.

"I think Turner is yet to see a real crunch," says Mr. Wadsworth as he steers the truck back into the right lane. "

"Drive through Turner and you don't see much building going on. And why have we been able to hold out when every other town is in full development? And one thing, as I see it, is just that we have a lot of families that did farm at one time, and they want to see the land stay open. They don't want to see it built up."

He explains to me that many of these families did not choose to invest the money needed to modernize, because they were getting older and did not have anyone to take over the land after them.

"The children didn't like the life. They didn't see enough money in it, so they've gone on to other careers, and here sits the older couple.

He says, "They own 100 acres or 2-300 acres. They rent it out to other farmers, and as long as they live, that farmland will remain open and available.

"However, when the day comes that somebody has to pay inheritance taxes on that land, or the parents become infirm. Most of these families don't have the resources to bail themselves out."

Mr. Wadsworth says that he read an article in the Sunday Journal on the business climate, saying Lewiston-Auburn is the next area to boom. "Well," says Mr. Wadsworth, "it's bad enough already with development. That continued pressure is going to change the complexion of the town.

"Now I'm not saying that's wrong or right or anything else. It's just going to make farming more difficult. That pressure, along with the age of all the people that own this land and who are committed to keeping it open, ... is going to be a chink in the armor and maybe a major crack in the dike."

Maine's good farmland is found in small parcels, according to a 1986 assessment done by the Maine State Planning Office. Apparently, glacial activity is responsible for the "highly varied pattern of soil types" characteristic of land in Maine. As a result, "it is not as intensively farmed on a large scale and more land in total is needed for farms."

In Wadsworth's words, "It's very difficult to have economy of scale when the land is spread out in large chunks as much as this land is."

That same state assessment reports that "one third of the land currently being farmed is not
owned by the farmer.”

Parcellization of land into small acreages held by many owners has also occurred. The State Planning Office’s report suggests that such “parcellization has a two-fold effect: it limits the farmer’s capacity to acquire large parcels for crop production, and it drives up the value of land so that farmers are priced out of the marketplace.”

I had remembered Mr. Wadsworth’s mentioning that Charles Varney had quite a bit of land. And when Mr. Wadsworth said how his future in farming depended largely on the choices that landowners made regarding the development of farmland, I decided that I would talk to some land owners to see what kind of choices they were making.

With bent neck, I hold the telephone receiver between my ear and shoulder. My hands furiously dictate Charles Varney’s words:

“I am still a farm boy myself. I’m holding land. I could put up a hell of a subdivision, but I won’t.”

I had to climb the Varney’s family tree to do it, but I found my mysterious “garbage collector.”

It was not until I talked to his nephew Gregg, however, that I discovered Charles Varney to be a prominent citizen of Turner.

Gregg Varney is a full-time dairy farmer and, for the last five years, has been a member of Turner’s Planning Board. He has a B.S. in Animal and Veterinarian Science, with a minor in Agribusiness and Resource Economics from the University of Southern Maine. Gregg said that farmers in Turner, for the most part, are very intelligent and make a point of staying informed—whether it concerns the cost-efficiency of their own operation or the local politics of the community at large.

“The problem is that we drive around in our tractors all day. It allows us a lot of time to think...but little time to practice the art of communicating those ideas.”

Gregg said that “people of the land,” in a sense, have their own language.

“We talk among ourselves and understand each other fine, but when we go to town meetin’, and try to communicate our thoughts to businessmen, we are expected to speak their language.”

Now there is a lot of talk in the community about “zoning.” Gregg Varney explained that he is “torn” on the issue of zoning. “The people in town who want to zone the whole town are saying, ‘Well, it’s gonna help the farmer because he’s always gonna be able to have land to farm.’ That may be true, but how’s it gonna help the farmer,” Gregg asks, “if he has something he needs to sell? If it’s zoned as farmland, you can only sell it to someone who’s gonna use it for farmland.”

“My folks,” said Gregg, “own what they own because they worked damn hard for it, and because they didn’t waste their money—they saved it. Now, our land is an asset.

“Just like my neighbor down here might have money in the bank, or in the stock market. That’s what he’s done with his money. Now, I’m not telling him what he should do with his assets. Why should they come in here and tell farmers what they can do with theirs?”

Every spring, Turner has its typical New England country town meeting. Farmers can always voice their opinions at town meeting when they are voting on certain articles that are in the town report.

“It’s a very democratic little community,” says Gregg Varney, “nothing happens without the approval of the majority of the voters in town meeting.

“But the problem is farmers used to be the majority—but now, we’re the minority. It’s changed real quick. There’s a political clout that’s being lost. I see some changes that’ll be taking place in this town. That’s one reason I like participating on the planning board and the site review board: to help guide the development of this town along.”

To monitor development initiated from outside Turner, the community does have what they call a “Site Review Board,” which allows the elected representatives of the community to publicly review and offer input to the various development proposals being made in Turner.

The Site Review Board was adopted last spring at Town Meeting.

When I first discovered from Gregg that his “Uncle Charlie” Varney was on this Board, I suspected nepotism.

Although Gregg told me that his cousin Brad Varney is in some way related to every orchardist and dairymen in Turner, he denied any familial political strongholds exist on the Boards.

“The [Planning] Board’s getting so it’s being controlled maybe by business men and bankers and consultants and people like that. Well, the fact is the last two board members we lost were farmers. One was an orchardist and the other was a dairy farmer. They were replaced by a banker and a consultant.”

I asked Gregg if he thought this slipping control poses a grim future for dairying in Turner.

“I wouldn’t call it grim,” Gregg replied,”but,
there’s gonna be a lot of demands placed upon our land. It all depends on what we decide to do with it I guess."

"The more neighbors you have, and the smaller your farm gets and the closer the community gets around you, the more they start picking on you. They don’t like the way it smells, or the way it looks, or the noise that it makes. And it only takes one or two neighbors or people in the community to pass ordinances. They have in Livermore [a town bordering Turner].

"In order to spread hen manure, during a certain period of the year, and I’m not sure what the dates are, you have to go to the town office and get permission. And that’s why the farmers in this town do try to be considerate when they’re spreadin’ manure and stuff like that, because we don’t want any such ordinance in town. And if we irritate too many people we’ll end up with something, because when it comes to a straight vote, we would lose every time."

But Gregg believes that agricultural support in Turner is strong.

"Turner is the fifth fastest growing community in the state of Maine." It may even be higher on the list I later learn. "We’ve seen at least 200 house-lots made available in Turner just in the subdivisions that we’ve approved in the last year.

"But we’re lucky, ’cause I can only think of one field really that a subdivision was situated in. All the other subdivisions have been on pieces of woodland that have been cut-over or something. So that tells you right there how strong agriculture really is, because if it was any weaker, more fields would have been turned into subdivisions.”

And now, talking to Charles Varney on the phone, I am hearing the same thing.

"The people of Turner," he says, "have no more desire to see the town change than I do. The development pressures are from outsiders trying to make a fast buck."

Charles Varney’s voice loses no pitch as it shrills forth from the phone’s receiver. "You’ve got Goto-Coburn Developers hooking up with Chuckie Starboard—who owns a woodlot operation—outsiders comin’ in here surveyin’ the land and startin’ subdivisions. But it’s not the local people causin’ this."

But ever since Adrian Wadsworth first told me about Steve Leavitt’s plans for the apple-tree horizon that I had been so impressed with, I have been skeptical of scapegoating the outsider.

Mr. Wadsworth was concerned about development pressure, but “people are gonna do business as business,” was all he had to say when I
asked if any of the farmers could get together to discuss these kinds of decisions.

Where some of Steve Leavitt's orchards now flourish, he wants to put in a golf course. I cite this example of "insider" development to Charles Varney.

He replies, "Steve feels that perhaps the beauty and area of his orchards that he would be utilizing as a golf course could bring good dividends to him—better than apple trees. I think it's a good move—if he can work out sprayin' the apples and not interfering with people golfin.'"

REGARDLESS of whether or not they like the smell of hen manure, newcomers to Turner upset the local economy. Developers argue that they can promise the town a greater financial return for the use of its lots by developing them as commercial and residential areas, than can farmers by cultivating those same lots for agricultural use.

Turner's economy is very dependent on agriculture. DeCoster Farms alone pays 11 or 12 percent of the town's taxes every year. So, if the agricultural economy is upset, the local economy will be upset as well.

"Bedroom residents" do pay property taxes, but it does not offset the community's cost for educating the children of these families.

In other words the town receives more tax money when they use it for residential and commercial lots than when they use it for agricultural lots.

"When Turner starts losing fields to house lots," says Planning Board member and full-time dairyman Gregg Varney, "it's a losing battle. Because every time you sell a house lot, there's three kids that will eventually be born and raised in that house; three kids for the school to educate. And if it costs somewhere around $3000 a year to educate a kid, there's $9000 of taxpayer's money—that has to come from somewhere—but the average house in Turner only pays $600 in taxes."

In other words, bedroom residents do pay property taxes, but that does not offset the community's cost for educating the children of these families.

"So who makes up the difference?" asks Gregg Varney. "That's why there's quite a burden being put upon the larger land-owners—or the farmers. The property tax, it's the only place they're making up the difference to support these families with the kids. That's really gonna be a problem in the future."

In Turner, for every deed, there is one house lot. Where Ralph Caldwell lives on Route 117, most of the agricultural business happens within a two-mile stretch. And in that stretch are 10 or 11 parcels of land. And on every one of those parcels of land the municipality taxes the farmer for one $5000 house -lot. That is the same tax that a non-farmer would be charged. The rest of the owner's open land is taxed at $600. Mr. Caldwell says that he has no qualms with taxing the open land at $600, but he doesn't like paying taxes for the house-lots where he has no houses.

"We're raising corn," says Mr. Caldwell. "There actually is only 6 houses on that 11 pieces of land. But they're charging us with 11 house lots. And so that means that you pay a tax on five $5000 house lots that you don't actually own. Now, I'm not saying that you couldn't make them into house lots. They're raising corn."

Mr. Caldwell calculates that it is $9.50 in taxes for a $600 acre, but for a $5000 acre, it's five times $16 or $80.

"That makes one of those acres on that parcel of land cost us $80 for taxes—real estate taxes—when it shouldn't need to cost us but $9 to be fair and above board."

SINCE I talked to dairy farmers in Turner last fall, some of their concerns have been addressed at the state level. In the last session of the legislature, the Farm and Open Space Tax Law of 1973 (allowing farmers a lower property tax rate if they pledged to remain in farming for 10 years) was revised to drop the pledge by half, to five years. Under the '73 Law only six percent of Maine's farm land had been enrolled as penalties for breaking the pledge had been so severe. Only time will tell whether this change will have much impact. Another law that passed established a 150 foot buffer zone between new residential construction and a working commercial farm.

When I talked to Adrian Wadsworth recently, he didn't talk much about development pressures.

What was worrying him more was the fact that feed costs had gone up 50 percent in a three month period since last fall due to the drought. And the minimum milk price had gone down. The state's Milk Commission has since raised the minimum price by $1 per hundredweight in the price that dairies must pay farmers. With these kinds of other pressures, concern over encroaching development will have to take a backseat with Turner dairy farmers for a while.
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Guide to Maine Eating

The Really Important Places

KENNEBUNKPORT

Allison's. In center of town. Dock Square. Bastardized descendant of the old wonderful Chat and Chew. Polished gold rails instead. Don't expect miracles with the food. Tourist types enter heavily through the summer, but locals still dominant the bar. Emmy rules the roost. Hours: Serves breakfast 6 A.M.-11 A.M.; lunch 12 noon-4 P.M.; dinner 6 P.M.-10 P.M. every day of the week except weekend when open at 7 A.M. Bar is open until 1 A.M.

LUBEC

Tip's Lunch. On the land side of Water Street next to the Lubec Narrows. Straight food. Put your feet on a chair and you'll be told to remove them. Just as you should be. Counter stools and table dining. Hours: 5:30 A.M.-6:30 P.M. every day except Sunday when it's closed.

MACINTOSH

Helen's Restaurant. Unfortunately, now the New Helen's just north of the center of town on Route 1. Nothing like the great old Helen's. But the thick pies with thick topping of whipped cream are still the greatest. Counter area has closest feel to the old Helen's.

MILBRIDGE

The Red Barn. Route 1 in the center of town. Straight food and a large salad bar. Has a wishing well out front where coins are tossed in. Eat blueberry pancakes in wild blueberry benners' country.

PORTLAND


DiPhilippo's Ye Olde Pancake Shoppe. Forget what the name conjures up. 617 Congress Street. Breakfast and lunch. Hours: Monday to Friday, 5 A.M.-1:45 P.M.; Saturday, 6 A.M.-1:30 P.M.; Sunday: 6 A.M.-12:45 P.M. "Lunches 10 A.M. till closing But Never on Sunday" says the menu. Counter stools and lots of tables.

Jimmy DePhilippo's is in charge at the cash register hard by the entrance/exit. "George, you want a table?" "Oh." "You want table young lady?" She takes it. Two minutes go by. "George, there should be something breaking shortly for you."

Port Hole. 20 Custom House Wharf. Near the end of the old Casco Bay Ferries pier off Commercial Street. First name place for people who work on the waterfront. Sit down at the 25-foot counter and before you know it someone will be calling you "deah"—either Russ the owner or Linda the waitress or Louise the cook. Speedy comes in at noon. "Sit down, deah. Louise has made you your favorite dinner. It's nam today."

Just sit yourself right down, Speedy." Village Cafe. 112 Newbury Street. Inexpensive Italian food. You get what you pay for. Serves as a reminder of Portland's Italian community before it was dispersed by housing renewal projects, and a link for the remaining community. Mici's Italian grocery on the corner on India Street. Hours: 11 A.M.-11:30 P.M. Monday to Thursday; 11 A.M.-12:30 P.M. Friday and Saturday; closed Sunday.

PORTSMOUTH/NEW HAMPSHIRE

Rosa's. We realize this is just over the state line, but it's one of the two places outside of Maine that's worth eating at. 80 State Street in
the downtown. Straight Italian food. Not the same since recent expansion and renovations. Catch the Memorial Bridge All Stars musical group—a mixture of ages and instruments from piano, trombone, drums, to clarinet. Heavy on old tunes. Plays every Wednesday evening.

SACO

The Plaza. Main Street. Don't be fooled by the fancy new front. The Plaza is a great old girl in a new hat. The steam that clouds the windows on a winter day comes from the same 50-year-old coffee and water urns that began belching out strong black coffee in 1936. Wooden booths and teak wall paneling are also that vintage. Mashed potatoes, meatloaf and realable from a can in the two dollar range.

Rapid Ray's. Center of Main Street. Gussied up from former elongated van of duo Rapid Ray and Dynamite Don. Part of the gentrification look for Saco which no one thought possible two-three years ago. Biggest bargain: steamed hot dogs. This is pure hot dog heaven with servers you'd think if you met them on the street sold hot dogs for a living. Have hamburgers as well.

SANFORD

Redman's Corner Diner. Corner of Washington Street and Pioneer Avenue in the center of town. Eighteen stools line a long straight counter. There's a gumball machine behind. A couple of two chair tables plus one for four round out the seating options. Hours: Monday to Friday, 5 A.M.-2 P.M.; Saturday, 6 A.M.-1 P.M.; Sunday, 7 A.M.-12 noon. Breakfast served 5 A.M.-11 A.M. Monday to Friday and all day Saturday and Sunday. Homemade toast rivals Wonder Bread for airiness. Homemade pie: 90 cents. Daily special that day was steak and eggs for $3.50. Highest price on menu is under "Dinners" at $4.50. An 18 Wheeler goes for $3.50.

SEBAGO LAKE

Sam's Corner Café. Intersection of Route 35 and 114. Breakfast from 4 A.M. to 2 P.M. daily. Coffee 25 cents. This is where real men eat. Late one recent Sunday morning the three sided counter is all locals. A man in late 30s, early 40s, balding, unshaven, wearing loose clothes comes in through the front door. "How are ya," someone says to him. "Not bad." He sits down next to three women in their twenties, then leans over the counter and looking at them says, "Morning, girls." One asks him, "You just get up?" "No, I've already thrown some hay." Jim the waiter in turn asks him, "What do you want?" "Scrambled." "Anything else?" "Nope." An older man behind the counter area in the kitchen queries, "You gut your rifle oiled yet, Jim?" "Nope. I don't think I'm even gonna go this year unless my boy comes up." "You got one last year didn't you?" "No, two years ago I did. Didn't even see one last year." "Your boy's comin up isn't he?" "Yes. He says he's going to."

TURNER

Jimbo's Restaurant and Truckstop. Route 4, a mile or two south of the center part of Turner and on the same route. Open 24 hours daily. A long open room inside with a bunch of tables along with a front counter on one end with a couple of stools. A sign above the counter proclaims, "Senior Citizens Discount 10%". A board near the same spot says "Weekly deluxe steak dinner drawing. This week's winner—Todd". A full salad bar lines the opposite end of the room. $3.85 gets one an order of liver and onions.

On one Friday night, three Androscoggin County sheriff department members in brown uniforms occupied two sides of a booth. They were deep in conversation, particularly in talking their waitress. "Give us a can of Alpha (dogfood)," said one to her when she first approached their booth. They're regulars no doubt. "Put it in the microwave and put some gravy on it," the one continued. Same time later, their talk has turned to drink. Says one, "Black label, that's raunchy stuff."

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No.5:-The Forks; Bear Trapping (Russell Kennedy); Old Bottles (Ted Towne); Willis Gowen's Drugstore; Making Flintlock Guns; Arthur Fretwell's Wooden World; Gooch's Beach.
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No.11:-Dragging (Lester Orcutt); Fiddleheading; Making Bait Bags (Ada Foss); Making a Duck Blind; Willie and Elizabeth Ames; Whistle Making.
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No.13:-River Driving (12 chapter series); Cider Making; Old Time Christians (interviews with scores of Salt's people about Christmas 50 and 60 years ago).
No.14:-Grandfather's Golden Earring; Marie Gallaros: 50 Years in the Mills; Felling a Tree; Paddle Making; Cod Liver Oil; Ken Berdeen's Lilacs; Swan's Island (Part 1); Maine Diner.
No.15:-Fishing Cutting; Laying the Keel; Swan's Island, Part 2 (Ruth Moulden, Walter Stinson, Basil Joyce and Edwin Goot); Country Sawmill.
No.16:-Indian Island, Madasa Sapiel, Clan Mother of the Penobscots; Medicine Man (Senabeh Francis), Part 1; Ships in Bottles; Fishermen's Superstitions; Fire of '47; Metal Spinning.
No.17:-Friendship Sloops (Ralph Stanley); Rigging the Endurance; Sam Polk; When You're Married to a Fisherman; Stencilling; Medicine Man (Senabeh Francis), Part 2.
No.18:-Cecil Kelley's Tales; Digging Clams with Jake; Greek Easter; Fly Casting; Wreck of the Schooner Charles; Sam Miller, the Minstrel Man; Alewives; Bertha Guerin; Lofting a Boat; Helen Perley.
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