TRADITION dies hard when it's part of your life and nine more people need you on Congress Street at five o'clock or sooner.
Imagine Your Town

Without a Steeple

Education For Ministry

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**Cover:** Shabbat service at the Etz Chaim Synagogue on Congress Street in Portland. **Photograph:** R. Todd Hoffman.

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LABOR DAY,
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Give the gift of Salt Magazine.
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NINETEEN PINE STREET

ABOUT THIS ISSUE—A modern-day madonna and child scene almost made the cover of Salt this time. It was first place in the running. That is until Todd Hoffman, the photographic editor, entered another photograph in the competition. It was one of his own. He acknowledged his bias and went on to comment about the good points of the other three choices. A good cover should attract eyes from across the room. All of them did. The four o’clock in the morning barn scene (right) had the stark contrast of white light on black air. The hands holding the prayer book (p.28) showed the graphic detail of herringbone and wrinkles. And the mother and baby photograph (p.45) had a strong human element to it—you can almost hear the sounds of the coddling.

What makes the winning menorah photograph the strongest is that it has all of those qualities—dramatic play of light and dark, variety of texture and the offer of intimate inclusion at a compelling moment.

The photograph as a cover shot also courts some danger. If you don’t know what a yarmulka and a menorah are, maybe we’ll lose you. And if you do, but don’t feel that yarmulkas and menorahs represent the real people of Maine, we’ll also lose you.

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Unlike the covers of some other magazines, our cover isn’t here to seduce you by feeding you what you expect—the celebrity of the week, or some postcard sunset. It’s chosen to give you the most arresting images, the freshest eye with the least cliched vision of the world, the wrench of reality propelling the myth, beauty in truth. Even if this cover bombs on the newsstand, we think it works. There’s a glory to it.

Contributors

Cay Chalker had just graduated from the University of Montevallo in Birmingham when she joined the Salt program in the fall of 1990. She wanted to photograph a different region of America—and found her subject in the Russell family dairy farm. From her we learned that “you all” is plural, not singular.

Jennifer Fiano spent the summer of 1990 at Salt after her junior year at the University of Connecticut. With a goal of developing her photographic style, she illustrated two articles, one about rockhounds, the other about society and its garbage. Her photographs were exhibited at the university upon her return.

Jennifer Freed came up from Boston for the 1990 summer term. A Yale philosophy graduate, she now teaches English in Czechoslovakia. Her article “Making Minyan” explores her own uncultivated Jewish heritage. At her last Shabbat breakfast with the men who let her into their midst, goodbyes were hard.

Anna Hoberman spent the fall of 1990 at Salt, though perhaps more of it was spent inside the Russell family’s cow barn than at the Center itself. An English major at Connecticut College, she devoted day after day to the Russell’s dairy farm. As a participant observer, she learned what keeps family farms going.

Anne Hunter came to Salt via Salt’s design consultant, George Hughes. A freelance illustrator, Anne first came to Portland last June. She holds a degree in illustration from the Philadelphia College of Art and is originally from Florida. Much of her prior work has been in the area of technical illustration.

Jeffrey Schlegel participated in Salt’s 1990 summer term. A graduate of the University of Delaware and itinerant teacher of learning skills to college students in every state east of the Mississippi, he now plans to attend graduate school. His quest for adventure led him to the mineral riches of Oxford County.
Imagine our surprise when she told us that some young woman walked up to her and said, “Excuse me, but I’ve been looking at your earrings all evening.”

One evening last winter, one of our customers attended the Portland Symphony and received a round of applause from a total stranger for her earrings. “They’re hoops—but they look different from every angle. Where did you get them?” she was asked. We’re pleased to say that they’re our very own signature design. We call them curvy teardrops, and craft them right here, by hand, in our Freeport store. All of our signature pieces have a three-dimensional quality that takes them beyond simple hoops or bangles. It’s our way of enhancing the innate beauty and energy of the gold itself. Because we don’t see our signature jewelry as being just merchandise. Instead, it’s a way for each of our customers to say “thank you,” or “I love you,” or “I deserve a special present for myself.”

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Five photographers who live and work in Maine agreed to talk about their work in an open forum recently at the Salt Center for Documentary Field Studies. Photographers studying at the Center were their audience, along with people doing written documentary work. Writers were invited because writers and photographers work together with images and words at Salt.

To a remarkable degree what these five artists had to say could apply both to visual and verbal forms of expression. The big pregnant question (what I am trying to do) and all of its trailing offspring—purpose, subject, point of view, voice, distance, truth, intrusion, timing, immersion.

The five photographers were Tom Donaldson, Arthur Fink, Tony King, Jack McConnell and Marta Morse. Here are excerpts of what they said, arranged by dominant themes.

The Artist as Person

Arthur Fink: I can't just be Arthur Fink the photographer. There's Arthur Fink, the whole person. Arthur Fink, the lover, Arthur Fink, the spiritual person, Arthur Fink, who lives his whole life. I walk through the world, and I see, and because I'm a photographer I spend a lot of effort seeing and I notice things. Thank goodness I don't try to photograph most of what I see and that excites me, 'cause I'd have no time for anything else in life.

And the medium at which I'm proficient is photography. So when I try in some way to record and represent what I've seen, it's photography that I use. And it's perfectly silly and mundane—I'm not proficient in oil paints or water colors or charcoal. So, nothing against that medium, it's not the medium that I choose.

But, if I have an assignment to photograph in a halfway house for a school, I think I'm the better off to spend at least a few hours, half a day, or a day or more, just being there, without the camera, to find out what feelings are coming into me. I mean, I'll see truth right away, I'll see, you know, poignant images, I'll see beautiful things, there'll be moments of life that I know won't be repeated. It's a discipline to not photograph.

Tony King: I'm worried about just the word "photographer." People ask me what I do, and I say, "I'm a photographer." That's perfectly satisfying, but yet I'm working as a photographer. I'm filtering things through my own experiences and my own mind and I'm interpreting them, and I want to interpret them and when I make a photograph I want to say to somebody, "This is what I felt or what I saw when I did it, and it won't be the truth, and it won't be exactly the reality." I don't know how to come to terms with that.

And just one other thing about taking assignments. I think there's a self commissioning thing that goes on inside us. I think you'll all get chances to make money, you'll all get chances to go to dramatic places, but I think before you take work what you should think of is do I have something to offer? Is this something I care about terribly, can I make a difference here? And if you can't say, really enthusiastically, damnit this is my calling and I should be doing this, I think you should probably wait for something else. That's tricky because you're faced with making a living, but I think what produces the best work is when you're working on something that you care very, very much about, and you have a connection with.

Truth and Reality

Jack McConnell: I have a problem with credibility, 'cause I want things to be credible, but yet I'm working as a photographer. I'm filtering things through my own experiences and my own mind and I'm interpreting them, and I want to interpret them and when I make a photograph I want to say to somebody, "This is what I felt or what I saw when I did it, and it won't be the truth, and it won't be exactly the reality." I don't know how to come to terms with that.

So what I do is, I just simply do what I do within my own self and let that be my truth, and it's not gonna be your truth, or yours. But that's
SALT SENSE

Stand out in the field. It could be a pasture or a city walk.

Sniff out a story like Tony the rockhound sniffs out a quartz crystal.

Watch people. In synagogues, diners, malls and apple orchards.

Listen to a Cambodian refugee tell his first joke in English.

Rap with clamdiggers and Mohammad from Afghanistan.

Hold onto your pen or hold onto your camera.

Use your sense

Look into Salt

MAKES SENSE

The Salt Semester Program offers publication and documentary field studies experience for advanced undergraduates and college graduates from the fields of English, folklore, history, anthropology, American Studies, sociology, journalism, photography, fine art. The Salt Semester Program is an affiliated program of the University of Maine at Farmington with accredited courses in field methodology, a topic in research and advanced skills courses in nonfiction writing and editing and in documentary photography. Three semester programs are offered each year, in the fall, spring and summer. For further information contact the Salt Center for Documentary Field Studies, P.O. Box 4077, 19 Pine Street, Portland, Maine 04101. Telephone: (207) 761-0660.
what one person saw, and I think the world needs to understand that's how photography works, and most art. It's our own interpretations and then you interpret it again and you interpret it again and it's different. What is the truth in all of these things—

Arthur Fink: And that is a truth.

Jack McConnell: The hard part comes when the truth has to be universal truth... Maybe I'm too influenced by everything around me. I'm a huge radio antenna and I get so much input that every day I feel differently about something. I don't even know what the truth is myself half the time.

Arthur Fink: Let me give you a case study. There was a big fire across the street in Longfellow Laundromat. And I went over there with my camera, and the flames were shooting out of the roof—it was, you know, the glamor fire. And it was a tragedy and people lost their homes. I arrived early on the scene.

Do you know what I was photographing? I was photographing the yellow bands on the bottom of firemen's coats. And I'd been in a few other fires and out of the images I took there, I was interested in that interplay of yellow and black.

And so I took eight, ten rolls of slides, maybe half a roll was something other than yellow bands on firemen's coats. I'm not showing anything about the scale of the fire, the equipment used to fight it, the poignancy or the people—in the middle of this thing the firemen carried out a bird cage, the bird was alive—you should have seen the looks on people's faces—all this is past—

Jack McConnell: What was your job?

Arthur Fink: I was just there as myself. And now I exhibit half a dozen or a dozen of these photographs. They're unmanipulated, you know. There's no dodging, burning, certainly no composites. Is that the truth?

You know, there's an interesting intellectual discussion about what's truth and getting into all the philosophical underpinnings. I would think it's more productive to shelve that discussion and look at a photograph and ask two questions: what can we learn from it, and then also ask what's the level of integrity of this image and of this photographer? Not truth on a case by case basis. I mean, if we're looking at a commercial photographer who is camouflaging and turning things into something that appears to be utterly other than our experience of it, I don't think that Vogue cover girl photographs or Playboy centerfolds are truth. They're an attempt to create a plastic image that meets somebody's idea and they're artfully, carefully done to do that. But we could still look at that and ask the question, "What can we learn from these images?" If you find that there is a level of manipulation mixed with a lack of integrity on the part of the photographer willing to sign her or his name to it and say, "This was my experience," then you've got a problem.

Tom Donaldson: One big difference between a writer and a photographer is that there are a lot of things around that are truths that can't be photographed, because they're thoughts, they're words, they're actions that don't take place in space and time in a way that can make a photograph. And so we're already dealing in different worlds. And it's sometimes very difficult to get together and make that work together. But it can, it does.

Closing the Distance

Marta Morse: The first thing you have to do when you're in contact with people who don't speak your language, you exchange curiosities. And it takes time to get confidence, to have them relax in front of you. You get them comfortable with you and the fact you have a camera. The camera's last.

Tom Donaldson: Communicate. Smiling, being non-threatening. Being kind, friendly. Eye contact.

Marta Morse: I think we all have problems with our fellow human beings. Took me years to photograph a person. I spent three weeks in China and I don't think I photographed one person.

Tom Donaldson: That was tough to do in China!

Marta Morse: After a while it was embarrassing. People said, "Well wasn't there anyone in China with you?"

Jack McConnell: I know a lot of young people who want to be architectural photographers or studio photographers. Why? Exactly the same reason.

Arthur Fink: In order to photograph people we have to join their community in some real way. I had an assignment to photograph in a fish packing plant. I found out they start at five in the morning. Four-thirty the next morning I was there. All of a sudden, "Who is this fellow who really wants to be here at five?" Then the doors began to swing open. I could walk around and point a camera in their face and they would go on with their same gossip and their same work.

Tom Donaldson: The really important thing is the transition that took place when Arthur did that. 'Cause the first day they say, "Who is this weird guy walking around with his camera?" Three days later they don't even know he's there. And that's wonderful. When that happens, you're home.
DIGGING FOR GEMS:
the lure of oxford county’s hills

By JEFFREY SCHLEGEL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENNIFER FIANO
I DON'T LIKE the term rockhound,” grunts Tony Gross, hammering away at some stubborn quartz rock.

“How about rockhead?”

“He's a rockhead all right,” jokes his brother Dennis.

Today I'm accompanying Tony and Dennis Gross on a quartz mining expedition. The Gross brothers belong to a small, but avid group of rock collectors who scour the hills and dig the mineral rich veins of western Maine, primarily in Oxford County.

Maine has a rich inheritance of gems and minerals formed over millions of years as molten magma cooled and solidified in granite rock. Of the 3,500 to 4,000 known varieties of minerals, Maine's granite surface contains at least 3,000.

Rock enthusiasts know the state primarily for two types—tourmaline and pegmatite minerals. Tourmaline, which is itself a pegmatite, is probably the most famous of Maine's stock of minerals, because of the huge find of this gem on Plumbago Mountain in Oxford County in 1972. That discovery netted over three-and-a-half million carats of tourmaline at an estimated value of $25 million, making it the largest tourmaline gem find ever in North America.

Such finds don't come easily. Dennis Gross expects far less on our dig today, maybe a few gems to add to his collection. He has warned me to be prepared for twelve hours of hard work, maybe more.

What induces people to do this, to dig in the freshly thawed ground of early spring when the mud is knee deep and the suction force of this brown slop rivals that of quicksand? What inspires them to pound on unmoving and unforgiving rock ledges in the heat and humidity of summer, to move 3,000 pound boulders, to do battle with nagging mosquitos, when they could just as easily watch a Red Sox game or play golf?

The day of the dig begins early. The nascent light of dawn is unfolding into a beautifully clear summer day as I enter onto the highway. Early morning mist shrouds the valleys, lakes, and streams in a smoky haze. There is no traffic at this hour, so the trip up Route 26 takes less time than expected. As I arrive to meet my guides at the Lake Store in front of Pennessewassee Lake, better known as Norway Lake, two canoeists paddling into the thick miasma disappear like ghosts.

At 41, Dennis Gross is 11 years older than his brother. Bearded, of medium height and stocky build, his strong, solid arms look as if they've been used to hard work. His left arm is adorned with a tattoo of a nude woman, sketched from the waist up, the result of a teenage escapade.

It was evident from our first meeting that he is a practical man not given to extraneous matters, including small talk. Arms folded over his chest as if they were glued there, he appeared unsure about the notion that someone was interested in doing an article on him and his avocation. I could tell it would take a while for him to feel comfortable with the whole idea.

Although about the same height, Tony Gross' frame and beard are thinner than those of his brother. His arms have the wiry strength that is the result of the physical exertion of his hobby. Bespectacled, with flecks of gray mixed in with his sandy colored hair, Tony has a definite, but not overpowering resemblance to Dennis. And yes, during our initial conversation, he spoke with his arms folded over his chest.

Our destination is a quartz vein on a hill somewhere in Oxford County. Rock collecting can become very competitive, so my hosts have asked that the exact location of this vein remain unknown.

Tony and Dennis have dibs on this particular piece of the hill. The company that owns this lower portion of the hill has agreed to lease the quartz vein rights to the brothers and has granted them permission to "post the property," which allows them to put up NO TRESPASSING signs. "Main reason we're posted right now is just we want to get some material out; we don't want the holes filled back in on us," says Dennis. "And besides," adds Tony, "we don't want somebody come suck out the gravy up either, 'cause we've done all this work."

Loaded down with our gear, we make the 300 foot climb to the quartz vein. The brothers unload their tools—crow bars, shovels, spikes, chisels, hammers, hoes, picks, spades, sledge hammers. And don't forget the bug dope. After 15 minutes of moving rocks and small boulders, as well as some minor digging, the vein is ready to be worked seriously.

Tony and Dennis have already put in around nine hours at this spot during recent visits, all in preparation for opening up this section of the quartz vein. All told, they've put in an estimated 400 to 500 hours on this particular one during the last few years. Right now, they're about 45 feet into this large quartz vein that runs down the mountain. Looking up from where we stand, the hill is strewn with discarded boulders that mark the path of the digging up to now.

At this hour, the sunlight is largely filtered out by the foliage of oak, birch, maple, spruce, and hemlock trees. The tree cover is too dense to make out the surrounding country-
side. Outside of the digging and hammering, the only sounds we hear are of birds singing, leaves rustling in the slight breeze, and the distant engine of a rare passing vehicle on the road below.

As the hole becomes deeper, the brothers pick through the clay to get to the crystals. Tony is like a bloodhound when it comes to ferreting out quartz crystals. "He sniffs 'em out. He smells quartz," says Dennis. "Yeah," adds Tony, "that's why they call us rockhounds."

The younger Gross is in his element at this particular site. Quartz is his favorite mineral, and this is his favorite rock collecting site. "It's my own personal mine these days. Dennis and I, our own personal place to go. Nobody else can come here unless we bring 'em."

One of the reasons he prefers this ledge is that he almost never comes away empty handed. Another reason is his fascination with studying the formation of this specific vein. It is this fascination that's behind the little brown notebook he always brings here.

In it he makes notes on the locations of each pocket they discover, the dates they were dug, and how far down into the rubble they have to dig.

The journal is valuable in charting the digging of this vein. Tony explains that pegmatite is a coarser form of granite comprised of quartz, feldspar, and mica. Pegmatite minerals, including tourmaline, are found in this material; and it's the size of these minerals (they can be measured in inches or even feet) that makes this rock so coarse.

He says the retreat of the glaciers eroded much of the earth's original rock cover, exposing the minerals closer to the present day surface. With notes to guide him, aided by his ability to understand the contours of the land, Tony can "read" the mineral composition of the mountain.

As they progress down the hill, the pegmatite material is giving way to basic granite, making it useless to proceed down any farther from our

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Cross Section of Quartz Crystal Mine

The trenches are excavated down to the quartz vein and run along the length of the vein exposing the pockets of crystal.

Rock ledge

Quartz vein

Crystal pocket

Broken off crystals suspended in clay "floaters"

Roots, rocks and loose dirt

Clay and glacial rock

Pockets are often filled with clay

Illustration by Anne Hunter
present position.

Tony hopes to use the information in his notebook to figure out how this ledge was formed, and ultimately would like to publish a handbook on the geological history of this rock site.


Dennis is more involved in the business side of the hobby. He’d like to sell minerals. “Yeah, I’d love to do it fulltime, as long as I could still get some time in to collect. Actually, I’d like to become a show dealer. Just travel around the country doing nothing but shows.”

Unlike Tony, Dennis will part with his minerals. But the money doesn’t concern him much—if it did I’d be charging outlandish prices.” He’s also involved in the jewelry end of the hobby, cutting gems and repairing rings that have missing stones. He’s always willing to run a free check on an old mine or piece of property to see if anything is worth looking into, or to look into the value of an individual’s personal collection.

Dennis’ fixation with the hobby began about twenty years ago when he and his wife saw a sign in Colorado Springs advertising a free rock museum. “Wewalkinandsay, ‘What in the hell is a rock museum?’ That’s basically what got me started, from day one.”

Tony’s interest in rocks and minerals began earlier in life. “I really like geology. I like the formation of the land. It’s always interested me since I was a little kid. When I was 15, I helped teach science in the science class. My teacher didn’t know anything about it [rocks], so I would stay after school and label all the minerals for him.” They had an agreement. “He gave me a fair grade; I did very little homework. But I knew what I was doing.”

“The only thing I had an interest in was women,” Dennis jokes about his school years. ”He’s been learning geology as he digs. He also took two college level courses in geology while he was in the army. Watching him work, I can see he knows his beryl from his apatite.

As the morning moves along, so does progress on the vein. The hole we’re working on is about four feet deep. The first two-and-a-half feet is root choked topsoil. The next half-foot is clay. At the bottom lies solid quartz rock. The rock is hard, rating a 7.5 on the Moh’s Hardness scale of 1-10, with 10 being the hardest.

It’s within these rock lined walls that the crystal pockets, or cavities, reside. The finds come in rock blocks with points. The points are the crystals, and these are the part that have value. These specimens resemble an archaeological find of a jawbone with protruding teeth. The trick is getting these samples out of the pocket without damaging the points.

When the rock becomes too thick for chiseling and hammering, then it’s time for breaking out either the heavy drill or the black powder. The former weighs 57 pounds, and when combined with the usual backpack load of 40 pounds, makes it a reluctant addition unless it’s absolutely necessary.

While the thought of blowing up sections of mountain might sound like fun, this too has a drawback that limits its use. Blasting can cause heavy damage to the crystal points.

Digging through the reddish, iron-rich soil to move around the stubborn pocket cover, Dennis and Tony have to deal with the ever present flow of water. That’s how Tony locates a pocket. A trickle of water coming from the dirt indicates a pocket. This water combines with the dirt to form a natural cover for the quartz. “We find our best ones
in the mud. The mud really protects 'em."

The presence of this water and mud requires constant bailing. To do this job, especially for the water, Tony brought along one of his grandfather's old-fashioned tobacco cans. "Velvet Smokeless Tobacco" reads the red can, "America's Smoothest Smoke." He has a whole collection of these cans at home; they remind him of his grandfather and when he used to help the old man roll his cigarettes. Tony hoped to find a good-sized pocket by noon. They've taken out a handful of specimens. They are white samples, not the highly-prized, crystal-clear type. The cloudy white within the points is a result of impurities, mainly iron. When joined with other minerals in exact chemical combinations, iron can create different-colored quartz pieces. Purple amethyst is an example of this mixture.

To Dennis, sticking his arms into the small pockets to retrieve gems is like sticking his arms into the "bowels of the earth—it's slimy and smelly." Smelly it is, as bacteria in the water deep within the pocket sends a malodorous scent into the otherwise clean, woods-scented air. After a good three hours of digging, Dennis is ready for a beer. A 12-pack accompanied us up the hill. Tony would rather wait until he gets into a sizable pocket. He decides to razz his partner. "You got a drinking problem?"

"It's all Tony's fault. I hardly ever drank after I got married until Tony got around me again and twisted my arm," Dennis says. "I tell him he's a wimp," counters Tony. Dennis' wilder days are behind him now, but he still looks like he can hold more than a few ales. The girth around his mid-section looks to be a carryover from those headier times. "Guts like that run in the family," says Tony.

We break for lunch. Actually, Tony doesn't have much of a break. Unable to sit still long enough to enjoy his meal, he constantly interrupts his own lunch to jump back into the hole to explore a new idea. After two attempts to finish his food, a quarter of a bologna sandwich and a third of a bag of potato chips still remain.

After lunch is over, the real work gets underway. A couple of handfuls of crystals of varying size and clarity have been found, and they lie cleaned and dried on a piece of newspaper. From the small hole that occupied most of the morning's activity, the pursuit for that big pocket will have us proceed another six feet up the hill during the rest of the day, at a depth of about five feet.

I'm put to work for most of the afternoon moving rocks and shoveling the thick, gloppy mud. The work gets the heart pumping at a steady pace. I can see why Tony says "It's really good for you physically, keeps you in really good shape."

"I think I had twelve pieces of bacon this morning," says Tony. "I wasn't very concerned about the cholesterol 'cause I knew I'd be burning it right off immediately."

The work continues on a day that's proving to be surprisingly pleasant. Not hot, not muggy. The mosquitoes aren't even that bad. They've found what looks to be a big pocket, but the rocks in the front are too hard, so they decide to advance farther up the hill to dig from behind. Which means prying more rock, moving more boulders, shoveling more mud.

In moving farther back into the pocket, some good-sized boulders are accidently knocked into the water, covering up our intended route.
Rather than spewing out obscenities over this setback the brothers operate in a calm, resolute manner to overcome this temporary roadblock. Incidents like this come with the territory. Or as Tony puts it, “Bring your balls, you’ll use ’em.”

Falling rocks are one of the big hazards of rock collecting in Maine. A major concern is “some other idiot throwing rocks.” What they mean is “some other collector coming up and knocking down something on us from above. Rule one—you never walk above somebody when they’re digging in a ditch.”

The ditch continues to expand. It’s now about 15 feet long, averaging three to five feet in depth. Hammer, chisel, haul, shovel. Rock, mud, slop. The work presses onward in pursuit of that elusive pocket.

BINGO! THE TIME for reward has come at last. Reaching behind the pocket wall in the cold, chocolate water, Dennis feels a cluster of points. In the muddy water it’s best to pull out the crystals with bare hands to minimize crystal damage. But the points are sharp, and in reaching into the water Dennis twice cuts himself. That’s all forgotten as they pull out a large eight-by-ten foot chunk of muck-covered quartz rock. A quick bath reveals eight large pieces of quartz crystal, most of them twice as large as the average find of one inch width. They look like light bulbs imbedded in the rock chunk.

“Boy, you get the ol’ rusher goin’ when you find something like this! Jesus, you know there’s a pocket somewhere, just a matter of locating it.”

This will prove to be the biggest find of the day, and for Tony, probably the biggest haul he’s ever taken out of the estimated 15 to 20 pockets they’ve opened up during the past couple of years here.

Quartz crystals run anywhere from fifty cents to fifty dollars. With that in

ECOLOGY HOUSE
Gifts of Environmental Consciousness

49 Exchange St.
Portland, ME 04101

Maine Mall
So. Portland, ME 04106
"It's like a dog burying a bone in the yard and forgetting where it is. Dig the whole yard up to find his bone. We'll dig the whole woods up to find a crystal."

mind, they think they might have about $40 worth of crystals here, even with a few minor breaks in the points.

Sensing that more crystals lie just beyond the latest find, they push forward. In doing so, they run into a huge boulder that Dennis estimates to weigh 3,000 pounds. They never thought they’d get that far today, but they have, so now it’s time to deal with this heavy monster.

Using crowbars, Tony and I create our leverage points. Dennis grabs a large branch, digs in, and away we go. The boulder doesn’t budge. Only after much straining, groaning, and swearing do we move this big bomb—a whopping three feet. Tony wonders aloud, “Was this worth it?” Counters Dennis, “If it’s easy, then someone else already has done it.”

Leaning on the branch, he continues. “You’d have to pay somebody a whole lot of money to do what we do.” Adds his brother, “It’s like a dog burying a bone in the yard and forgetting where it is. Dig the whole yard up to find his bone. We’ll dig the whole woods up to find a crystal.”

This was our last hurrah for the day. It’s four in the afternoon, and Dennis admits to being a little “burnt.” In the next two hours, it’s a fruitless exercise of battling more rocks in the soil and mud. The mud now becomes extra thick. When Dennis’ watch beeps the six o’clock chime, it signals the end of the day. “Can’t work that mud in that side, you have to work from the other side,” Tony says. “We’re already planning for the next time we come out.”

Sipping beers, the brothers reflect on the day that’s just passed. Was it a successful outing? “Well, I got the biggest group I ever got out of here, that’s a success,” smiles Tony. They estimate their total haul for the day at between 40 to 50 pounds of quartz crystals, which they’ll split up later. They think Dennis got about 70 percent of the material. And they’ll probably throw 70 percent of that out. Tony figures if he gets three to five crystals in his collection then he’s done all right.

What about those inevitable times when they dig all day and find nothing. Is that a wasted day?

“It’s not a wasted day,” says Tony. “We enjoy it, either way,” agrees his brother. “I mean, we’re disappointed if we don’t find anything, but we really enjoy just gettin’ out and doing it.”

The 29TH WESTERN Maine Gem, Mineral, and Jewelry Festival is as good a place as any to meet the world of rock collecting. Dennis Gross agreed to be my guide for this annual summer affair taking place at the Oxford County Fairgrounds in Oxford.

As I make my way into the exhibition, I spot Dennis hard to the left of the entrance, talking with fellow rockhounds. Tony is there also, looking over the displays with his wife and son.

A record crowd of well over 1,000 people have gathered for this event, from the serious dealer to the novice collector. The show is sponsored by the Oxford County Gem and Mineral Association. The club, whose membership has steadily risen during the past few years to its present number of 84, meets most of the year at the Dr. Moses Mason House in Bethel. During the summer, it convenes monthly at potluck suppers in the homes of its members.

Most of its members appear to be middle-aged or older. But as one member put it, the number of young people joining the club “is on the upswing again. It’s a boom cycle.”

Tables displaying rocks and gems, cut jewelry and trinkets, lapidary magazines (relating to precious stones) and other rock related literature, line the walls of the building. These belong to the eight dealers who paid the fees to sell their wares.

In the middle of the floor are glass case displays with samplings from the private stocks of some of the local collectors. Dennis has his display there, containing his collection pieces of quartz, calcite, geodes, arganite, and fossils. The goods on display include tourmaline and amethyst, as well as other native minerals such as beryl, aquamarine and quartz.

Some of the sites they came from include the Tamminen Mine in Greenwood, Mt. Mica in Paris, and the Bennett Quarry in Buckfield.

The Maine landscape is dotted with many of these workable mines. Some are open-pit quarries. Although not as numerous, others are underground.

On display from outside the state are Montana agates, milky slices of polished stone with intricate designs of black, brown, and rust that form nature scenes of trees, birds, and a misty lake dotted with protruding rock islands—“natural” nature landscapes on one-inch, round stones.

There are crystals and onyx carvings from Mexico; green Alaskan gem carvings of elks, rams, coyotes, and fish; fossil ferns from Illinois; and even coral, purple, maroon, and white.

Another local collector and gem club member at the festival is Duane Leavitt. He is the proprietor of Poor'spectors' Rock Shop in Buckfield, as well as a high school chemistry teacher.

His store tries to carry one specimen of everything that a particular mine or quarry has to offer. People collect these minerals “for study, for personal enjoyment, the aesthetics of the specimen, the location, even some of its history. Sometimes you’ll find people specializing in certain mines, and they are almost as fanatic as any group of collectors when it comes to being complete.”

As with Tony, Duane knows a lot about geology. “This is a very unique geologic environment in the state of Maine, and it has been duplicated in a few other places in the world—notably Brazil, Madagascar, Afghanistan, and parts of Africa. And most of those places are not really conducive to the tourist industry.”
According to Duane, the Gem and Mineral Club sponsors this event not so much as a commercial effort as an educational one. It offers a good representation of what the local mines and hills have to offer. In this way the club can educate the public, and “especially the children because they’re the ones who are going to inherit Oxford County.”

To Duane, the motivation behind rock collecting is pure and basic. “The lure of what am I going to find when I dig into this ledge, when I break into this pocket, when I shovel this next shovel of dirt, is probably as old as mankind. So it’s a treasure hunt for everybody.”

Educational intent aside, the mineral show is also designed to make money. Dealers want to sell, and the folks who pay the nominal entry fee want to walk out with some kind of purchase, however big or small.

One fellow comes simply to carry on some old-fashioned bartering. Dave Bierbrauer is here to swap.

“Everything I got—I haven’t bought one percent of my minerals. And I probably got 5,000 of them down there. I originally started out as a hunter myself, and then in order to enlarge my collection you did some trading. That’s what I’m doing here. Most of this stuff has been traded or self-collected.”

As this thin, sprightly, octogenarian explains it, serious buying and selling takes all the fun out of rock collecting. Coming from the Midwest as he does—Wausau, Wisconsin to be precise—Dave brings along rocks and minerals from that region in exchange for rocks and minerals from Maine, New England, and the Northeast.

Opening the trunk of his car, Dave brings out egg cartons and boxes filled with rocks, gems, and minerals, mostly from the Midwest. He also displays his pride and joy—a collection of 2,000-year-old copper Indian arrowheads and fishing hooks. These aren’t for sale, just for looking. In fact, these are willed to his good friend from home, Doc Johnson. Says so right on the bottom of the display.

Dave got his start in mineral collecting while vacationing in Maine back in 1965 on a visit to his wife’s hometown of Brunswick. Rough seas cancelled a planned boating excursion, so he went with a young couple on a rock hunting expedition instead. “They took me in there and I got garnet, and some feldspar crystal—WHOOO! I went home and that started it. I really got bit and I think it kind of helped my ulcers a little bit because if I was tied up and tight, I could go down in the rock room and just forget it.”

If Dave Bierbrauer represents one end of the rock collecting spectrum, the pure hobbyist, then Jim Mann is at the other end. He is a businessman. He attracts customers to his displays with a big blue overhead sign that boldly reads MT. MANN. He looks like a blackjack dealer with his thick bushy mustache and a visor.

Working out of Bethel, Jim earns his livelihood as a gem cutter. To make it fulltime in this business, he feels the need to look beyond the confines of Oxford County. “It’s hard to make a living in minerals and gems without networking to dealers in the United States.” He also sees the need to keep a world-wide perspective. “If you went to an international show, you’d be boggled.”

Even though he makes a business of it, Jim still retains a passion for these minerals. “I go out and get just as thrilled about a quartz crystal now as I did when I first found one. I think anybody who’s a real true mineral lover, it doesn’t take a lot to stimulate that quest to find something that’s pretty. ‘Cause it’s inherent; it’s like observing a butterfly. No matter how many times you see a pretty butterfly, it’s still beautiful. Yeah.”

There’s a story that’s passed around during the day about the infamous “Rose of Maine” incident in the autumn of ’89.

As the Grosses tell it, two brothers—Ron and Dennis Holden—took from the Bennett Quarry one of the largest morganite crystals ever discovered. “The Holden boys did a lot of work. I’ll tell ya’ right now, they probably moved 20 ton of rock.”

Weighing in at around 80 pounds and 115,000 carats, this pastel pink gem was nicknamed the “Rose of Maine.”

“Yeah, that was a wicked gem, but—they had financial problems and stuff too.”

The mining operation put the Holdens in debt, and a dispute soon arose over forming a company to sell the gem and market the mining site as a tourist spot. Should the crystal be preserved whole and toured as a museum piece, or cut into smaller pieces and sold in piecemeal fashion?

The debate became so intense that Dennis Holden decided he’d had enough. He took his chisel to this prized gem and split it three ways—one for him, one for his brother, and one for the landowner, Mr. Bennett.
Whole, the crystal was valued anywhere from several hundred thousand dollars to over one million dollars. Hacked to pieces, its value was far less.

The event caused shock waves throughout Maine's mineral collecting community. No one wanted to see this rare find split apart, but many people could sympathize with the need for fast money. Tony Gross shakes his head, “You know, it kind of pissed me off at the time, but it’s hard to say. Would I have done anything different? I wouldn’t had it cut, but—”

"It’s possible somebody somewhere has more pieces, but in terms of some really exquisite gems that have been cut here in the state of Maine or from Maine material, I have yet to see anybody that has a collection that is a fraction of what we have."

Ralph Pride works hard at maintaining his store’s selection of “fine” native Maine jewelry. Located on Congress Street in downtown Portland, Cross Jewelers has more than 700 pieces of Maine Tourmaline jewelry on display.

Of the 14 display cases in the store’s showroom, three are devoted to jewelry cut from Maine gems. There are pieces made from purple amethyst and aquamarine, but most are tourmaline.

Tourmaline of pink, green, and watermelon (a pink core with a green “rind”). Bi-colored tourmaline of green on one end and pink on the other. Ralph Pride shows me a gem whose geometric lines of green tourmaline play with the light to produce a “bottomless” effect—it appears to go on forever. He shows me a watermelon tourmaline ring that, when combined with the diamonds and mounting, sells for $16,500.

According to Ralph Pride, Mainers who are aware of their state’s treasure trove of minerals buy these gems not only for their beauty, but
Tony and Dennis Gross aren’t too concerned with enhancing their interdimensional communication.

Above: Dennis Gross (left) and Tony Gross (right).

also out of a sense of pride. Out-of-staters might buy Maine jewelry as a reminder of their experiences, or perhaps love affair, with the state.

"You could bring a lobster trap home and it may sit in the living room for a couple of years until you decide you’ve outgrown that. You can bring many things home that say "from the state of Maine" to a state outside our state. It just doesn’t have that transcendency of time that a gem that’s been worn for periods of years [has]."

One particular group of out-of-staters consistently purchase huge pieces of jewelry. "It’s surprising how many people from Texas buy big pieces of tourmaline. Compare any place else in the United States and people from Texas buy the really big ones."

Quartz isn’t found in Cross Jewelers, at least not clear quartz. As a clear gem, it lacks the brilliance and sparkle of other clear gems such as diamonds and pearls. As Ralph Pride puts it, without these qualities, it doesn’t lend itself to the adornment purposes of jewelry.

Where quartz is found in abundance is at the Ecology House on Exchange Street in the Old Port section of Portland. A store devoted to the principles of animal, human, and ecological rights, it attracts followers of the New Age philosophy.

The Ecology House has a full array of stones for sale. According to the store’s proprietor, Jerry Devlin, a lot of young people are starting rock collections. Drawn to these stones for more than just their color, they’re interested in where they come from and why they’re important. "Plus, with the New Age group of customers that we have, they come in and they’re looking for a specific kind of stone for their own health and well-being."

Hanging above the rock section in the Ecology House, the “Crystal Awareness Guide” describes the physical and spiritual enhancing properties of quartz. The list reads like the cure-all promises made by snake oil salesmen at old-time traveling medicine shows. "Enhances crystalline properties of blood, body, and mind—amplifies thought forms—dispels negativity in one’s energy field and environment—excellent for meditation—enhances interdimensional communication and communication with Higher Self and Spirit Guides . . . ."
THE GROSS brothers aren’t too concerned with enhancing their interdimensional communication. To put it politely, they think all this hoopla about quartz is bunk. But they’ll gladly fuel the market if it’s there.

At least Dennis will, since he’s more of the businessman. His house contains the basis for what he hopes will one day be his full-time occupation. His home is on a quiet little dirt road just off Route 219 in Oxford County. The mailing address says it’s in Sumner, but the 200 acres of woods, fields, and mountain vistas that surround the homestead give not the faintest hint of any nearby town. For an outdoorsman like Dennis, this is an ideal spot. Once during lunch, a moose meandered into the field across from his kitchen. “I could see him drooling, he was so close.”

The basement walls in his home are lined with shelves of boxes containing 4,000 to 5,000 rock specimens. These are his “rough” goods, meaning they’re either not his best finds or he just hasn’t gotten around to cleaning them yet.

His wife Linda says she can live with all these rocks on one condition—that he keep them in the basement and his “room” and nowhere else. His “room” is devoted solely to displaying the best of his collection, his own personal museum of sorts. The walls are lined with shelves containing 2,800 different pieces, a montage of items he’s gathered from Maine and about 25 other states.

Included here are different colored tourmaline, amethyst, a wide range of quartz, turquoise, emerald, ruby, gold nuggets, and dinosaur bones. Hanging on the walls above the display shelves are glass enclosed picture frames of Indian artifacts from Illinois—arrowheads, tools, and human teeth. Some of these artifacts date back to around 7,000 B.C.

He also shows me his gem cutter and some of the pieces of jewelry he has made with its help.

Up the road about 80 yards on the right is Tony’s house, the only other residence on the street. Tony recently moved into his house, so most of his personal collection remains in boxes. What he has displayed are his finest, clearest quartz crystals.

His wife Norma encourages her husband’s hobby. She’ll sometimes head out with Tony and make a family outing of it. Their 10-year-old son Josh is his father’s frequent rock hunting companion and a rockhound in the making. “It’s interesting when you find something. You hold it up—it’s pretty neat, that’s for sure,” says Josh.

Even though they live on the same road, Tony and Dennis have traveled different paths to get there. Dennis has been more of a wanderer. Seven years in the service and stints living in different regions of the country have given Dennis a wider perspective. Sometimes he thinks he’d like to move back to Idaho one day, given the right opportunity. He claims Maine is getting too crowded. Gazing around at the open spaces surrounding his home, I find that hard to believe.

Tony is more of a homebody. Except for when he went out to live with Dennis in Illinois for about a year after high school, and a temporary stay in Ohio, he’s lived in Maine all his life.

In fact, his goal has been to settle down in the Oxford County area. Tony has moved several times during the past few years, hopscotching up through southern Maine so he could be closer to his quartz vein and the other prime spots in Oxford County.

For a rock collector like Tony, this is the place to be. “It’s prime here. The best. You have a bigger variety here. You have sedimentary here, you have igneous, you got everything here. The hike is nice. You can’t beat this.”
MAKING MINYAN

BY JENNIFER FREED
PHOTOGRAPHY BY R. TODD HOFFMAN
BUDDY COMES AT four-thirty every afternoon to open up the place. First the key in the shiny padlock that fastens the rusting iron fence, then briskly across the lawn, up the four brick steps to fit another key into the high double doors. Eli has come too—Buddy always drives Eli here, and someone else drives him home—but Buddy neither slows his pace to match the older man’s, nor waits the extra minute to hold the door.

He says he is in charge of opening up the synagogue because “I live near, up the hill.” He looks down for a moment at the keys in his hand, then adds, “Other people have keys, but I don’t know when they’re coming. Wouldn’t want our customers to get discouraged.”

He pulls the door open to a long dim hallway. At its end a low table holds a basket of round, satin caps: yarmulkas. Buddy puts one on. Eli keeps on his baseball cap. He shuffles past to a closet, takes out a broom, returns outside to sweep scattered leaves and pine needles from the front steps.

Across from the table, on the right, is the door Buddy wants. He enters, switching on the fluorescent ceiling lights, then walks up the aisle between six pairs of benches to the ark, a wooden cabinet set against the front wall. He slides open its small door, revealing the embroidered velvet curtain that hides the Torah, the Five Books of Moses. Then he switches on the electric menorah. Six lightbulbs glow orange, illuminating the Star of David at their center. Then back into the hall, to turn on the two outside lamps “so people know we’re here.”

“Here” is the Etz Chaim Synagogue in Portland, a three story brick building standing back from Congress Street in the shade of tall pine trees. Passersby would not notice this place. They would notice the parking lot to its left, Tommy’s Hardware Store to its right, and perhaps, between them, a few yards of high shrubbery reaching above and through an iron fence. They would have no reason to turn and look through the gate; the traffic is heavy, the bus stop nearby, Levinsky’s clothing store across the street. People in this part of the neighborhood are on their way somewhere else: into a store or out of one, to a church or an Italian restaurant or up Munjoy Hill, toward the old immigrant neighborhoods and the Eastern Promenade, with its tennis courts and ocean view.

The synagogue’s name means “Tree of Life.” On its back and sides, sheets of metal siding imitate bricks. Their red paint has weathered off in specks and chunks, revealing the blue-grey of metal below. The windows are arched, colored along their rims with sections of stained glass. In back, one of the third floor windows is broken, boarded over from inside.

INSIDE, ten men congregate every afternoon, sitting in the long, narrow room on the first floor. The “regulars” in the group are Buddy and Dean and Ben and David, Danny and Morris, Herbie and Eli, and Maurice, the one they call their leader. None is under 65. Buddy is wry, Dean is quiet, David is ninety. Maurice likes teaching. Ben likes people. Eli sweeps the steps. Herbie collects music. Morris came from a synagogue that was torn down. Danny’s father helped found this one.

“We have practically a minyan if everybody shows up,” Herbie says, referring to the quorum needed to hold the prayer service. Ten men make a minyan. Ten men, at least, must be present for group prayer. Group prayer is a mitzvah, a commandment.

“You’ve heard of Sodom and Gomorrah?” Maurice explains. “God told Abraham that He’s going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. And so Abraham started to argue with him. He says, ‘God, what if You find fifty righteous people there?’

“And so God said to him, ‘Well, if I find fifty, I won’t destroy it.’

“But Abraham started to have second thoughts. He says, ‘My God, what if there aren’t fifty? What if You have forty?’

“God says, ‘All right, for forty I’ll let it go, too.’

“And he finally got God down to ten. And God said, ‘Yeah, if you find ten righteous people, I won’t destroy.’ And Abraham didn’t have the chutzpah to go below that, because I guess he said to himself, ‘Look, if there aren’t ten people there, what the hell...'}
[is the] point of the whole thing? And this is one of the rationals for the—would you believe—for having the official quorum of ten people."

But there are only nine men in this group today. What do they do for the tenth? What do they do when not all of them can come?

"Well we call next door, across the street, or B & B," Herbie says. "That makes ten." He means Jeffrey, from the hardware store next door, Phil Levinsky and his sons from the clothing store across the street, and Gary Berenson of B & B Cleaners, a block away. And then there's Sam, who comes most Saturdays, and Richard, who also comes Sundays, and Sid, who comes when he can. And Stevie, who calls every evening from his investment office to see if they need him.

Stevie is Morris' nephew. Richard is David's nephew. Buddy and Dean are cousins. David and Maurice are second cousins. Morris invited Herbie over.

Few of them came daily when they were younger. Some didn't come at all. A different, older group of men were the "regulars." Several in the present group came once in a while, when they were needed to help make minyan. As the older men died, they filled in. Now they call on others to fill in.

"If a stranger walks in, fine," Herbie says. "If not, we call a few people. Slosberg comes once in a while. What's his name used to come quite a lot. The guy that just died. Hy—What the hell was his last name?"

Before Hy, in April, another man died—someone, Stevie says, who used to bring his brother when he came. "So that's two gone right there."

When enough have gone, they won't be able to make minyan regularly. They can still pray, of course, but not as a group. "I mean you can walk down the street and pray if you want to," David's nephew Richard says. "Or under a cherry tree or an oak tree. You don't even have to be in a synagogue. But, in Jewish tradition, there are certain prayers which are said at certain times, only when there's a group together, a group of ten males, adults."

So each day they come, and each day they are not certain that they will have enough men for the service. "It's a problem," David says, "a problem that's going to have to be dealt with, and recognized, before too very long." He smiles gently at the allusion to his own age. He is the oldest of them all. "One by one the congregation dwindles away, and there's no future. We're holding our breath."

They sit, waiting for a minyan, in the same places every day, chatting, checking the hospital list, sharing news. And then, at five o'clock, they pray. "And these words which I command you this day shall be in your heart," they read in the prayer book. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall speak of them when you are sitting at home and when you go on a journey, when you lie down and when you rise up." (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

Dean usually walks in soon after Buddy opens up. Straight back, silver hair, face tanned and taut. He doesn't replace his fe-dora with a yarmulka. His head is covered; that is sufficient.

Morris also arrives around four-thirty. Eli grins at them child-like, a broad smile of hello, from his bench along the side wall. He mumbles something, lisping slightly, and falls into a steady stream of rambling.

Buddy turns toward his cousin. "Where's the papers, Dean?"

Dean pulls the folded newspaper from under his arm, drops it on Buddy's bench. "Delivered."

"Paid on delivery."

Thirty-five cents pass from Buddy's hand to Dean's. "Did you see the doctor today?"

Dean's voice is low, hoarse. "I did. He looks good."

"Oh does he? And how's his health?"

Dean has cancer of the vocal chords. After three operations, he has been getting radiation treatment. "When I play ball, I do a lot of yelling," he says. "I used to get laryngitis every summer, and at the end of every summer it would go away." A pause. "Last summer it didn't go away."

"So you going to the game anyway?" Morris asks. "Oh yeah."

"What time are they playing?"

"Six fifteen."

"So we gotta have a minyan on time tonight."

The service is supposed to start at five o'clock. They have fifteen minutes.
Above: “Babe,” David and others wait for the tenth man.

Danny and Herbie come in and take yarmulkas from the basket by the door. Danny glances from face to face, breathing deeply through puckered lips, counting with his eyes. A heart attack some time ago has left him short of breath. He doesn’t talk for long before he stops to breathe again.

Herbie counts out loud. “One, two, three... five. Oh, you gotta make some calls, Buddy.”

No one has official positions here, but people have their roles. Buddy’s is to telephone. He has inherited the part of caretaker, and it is his job to clean the building, to lock and unlock it each day, to make sure they have a minyan.

He heads toward the desk at the back of the room—an old wooden office desk, its surface cluttered by stacks of deteriorating prayer books, a pile of dated telephone directories, folded paper bags. A black rotary phone sits in its corner, next to a small vase holding a brown and wilted flower.

“Maybe Maurice’ll come.” Herbie says. “He hasn’t been here for two days.”

“He’s been on business,” Buddy answers. “He’s
Everyone does that.”

Jeffrey walks in, puts a purple yarmulka on his thick brown hair, and sits next to Eli, listening but saying little.

“Oh, I saw a fellow at Shop ’n Save today. He called me by name. I didn’t recognize him.”

“You mean you couldn’t tell by voice?”

“Didn’t you ask?”

“No, I didn’t. I was tryin’ to figure it out.”

“I usually keep ’em talkin’ till I can figure it out.”

The telephone rings. Buddy answers. “Can you make it tonight? Okay, you can make it some other night.”

A few minutes before five o’clock, a muffled bang comes from the hall, the sound of the outer door falling closed.

Buddy hears it. “Well, here comes another candidate for sainthood.”

Ben enters, glances around the room. “How many we got today?” He counts by the clusters of men, leaning to see who’s sitting in the benches. “Two, five—”

“We got twelve,” Herbie says with a straight face.

“Twelve?” Ben seems surprised. “Two, five, seven. Why you tell me twelve, we got seven?”

He touches his Red Sox hat, decides to keep it on. Herbie doesn’t bother to explain. He accepts his joke as lost.

David pushes open the door and walks to his bench in front of Eli. He has a back that wants to make him stoop, and a long, white-haired head that he holds up straight. “How are you today?” he says as he passes Danny. His voice is even, modulated, his diction clear. He speaks like a gentleman.

The various conversations grow quiet. Buddy glances at the clock above the door.

“Five o’clock and all is not well.”

“Doesn’t look good.”

Morris walks slowly to the cabinet and pulls out a stack of prayer books to pass out. They have not made minyan. One short.

Silence. The sound of breathing and pages turning.

Morris stands. Others stand when they, too, have reached the appropriate place. Voices now and then, quietly speaking the Hebrew words.

Suddenly Richard pushes through the doors, a big man with a big voice. He still wears his dark suit, straight from his law office on Exchange Street.

“I’m only here because I had to pick up my shoes,” he says with a laugh. “Otherwise you wouldn’t see me.” Others chuckle with him, but his uncle does not.

“I don’t like to hear that explanation,” David says, his tone slightly stern, like a parent’s to an impolite child.

But Richard has made minyan. They can have a service.
“WHO’S GONNA read today?” “Gary did yesterday.” “Eli, you do afternoon service.” “Herbie, want to do evening?” Everyone’s head is covered. Six yarmulkas, three baseball caps, one fedora.

Today is a week day. Not the Sabbath. Not the new year by the Hebrew lunar calendar (Rosh Hashanah), or the day of atonement (Yom Kippur), or the first day of a new month (Rosh Hodesh). Not a particular holy day of any sort. So today they do not open the ark to read from the Torah. They open their prayer books, say the words they said yesterday and the day before, without any of the special words for the holy days.

Eli shuffles to the front of the room and stands at the lectern, his back to the congregation, facing the ark. He reads aloud quickly, in Hebrew, racing through the words. The others read along in silence, each at his own speed, sometimes muttering the words softly. Then silence from Eli as he joins the rest in reading to himself. A moment later everyone stands, and then everyone speaks out loud together.

Then they sit. Stand. Sit. Silence. Speech. They do not all speak or stand in unison. They do not all always stand.

They read the Shemoneh Esreh. “The Shemoneh Esreh is recited in silent devotion while standing, facing east,” the prayer book explains in a small English caption. “The Reader repeats the Shemoneh Esreh aloud when a minyan holds service.”

East because that is the direction of Jerusalem. Spoken aloud by Eli because he is the reader. In Hebrew:

“When I proclaim the name of the Lord, give glory to our God.” (Deuteronomy 32:3).

“O Lord, open thou my lips, that my mouth may declare thy praise.” (Psalm 51:17).

Richard’s voice is the loudest as he mutters the prayer to himself, his words coming out in a singsong chant. He rocks slightly, forward and back, forward and back, as he reads.

They say the Kedushah. “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of his glory.”

A voice whispers, a paper rustles, a prayer book is put down and a Hebrew-English dictionary picked up.

And the Tahanun. “O Lord, punish me not in thy anger; chastise me not in thy wrath. Have pity on me, O Lord.” (Psalm 6).

Ben forgets his place. He flips the pages in his prayer book, backwards, forwards, back again. Herbie leans over and turns to the right page, points with his finger. “Right there, see? Okay?”

“Oh, yeah, yeah.” Ben remembers and follows along again.

Stevie pushes open the door with a force that shows he has come in a hurry. He is surprised to see the service has already begun; he wasn’t needed for the minyan. Holding The New York Times under one arm, he puts on a yarmulka and goes to stand next to his Uncle Morris. They whisper for a moment. A few minutes later he wanders toward the back of the room, looks at the calendar hanging on the wall, walks out the door. No one seems to notice his departure, but after the service Danny turns to Jeff.

“You weren’t very alert.”

“What’d I do?”

“When Stevie came in, you should have gone like this.” He mimes, holding his head up and his prayer book out, indicating that Jeff should have given his own book to Stevie and taken the opportunity to leave. Jeff laughs. “Oh, my soul needs cleansing anyway.”

They do not linger for conversation when the service is over. Buddy hurries them on. He wants to be on his way. “On the way out,” he says, and they oblige, walking in ones and twos, Buddy jingling the keys and turning off the lights behind them. Their cars are next door, in the small parking lot where a wooden sign proclaims in red letters, “Parking for Levinsky’s Shoppers Only. All Others Towed Immediately at Owner’s Expense.”

THE ETZ CHAIM SYNAGOGUE is the only one still functioning in the eastern end of the Portland peninsula, an area where once there were three. Once, at the beginning of this century, people called this area “Little Jerusalem” and “The Jerusalem of the North.” There were Jewish bakeries, kosher butcheries, and rabbis who walked from house to house on the Sab-
bath to teach the children. The children’s first language was Yiddish, the language of their parents and grandparents, a mixture of medieval German dialects with Hebrew and bits and pieces of other languages as well, the languages of the places from which they had come—Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, Russia.

They began settling in Portland in the 1860s. Sixty families lived there by the 1880s, six hundred families by the 1920s. In the 1940s a small group formed a less traditional congregation. By World War II, the Jewish community had begun to disperse, drifting out toward the suburbs and beyond, toward affluence and assimilation.

When the people left the area, one of the synagogues followed them, moving to a new building in the Woodford’s Corner neighborhood. One was eventually torn down, replaced by a parking lot. Etz Chaim stayed.

When they were building the synagogue in the early 1920s, they modeled it after the synagogues of Eastern Europe. Women bathed each month in the mikvah, the ritual bath, across the hall from where the men meet now. Families climbed the double staircase at the end of the hall, up to the meeting room on the second floor, up another flight for the women, to the third floor balcony. Men and women sat separately, so that prayer would be without distractions.

The meeting room takes up the whole second floor, a grand, wide, wood-paneled place with curved rows of polished benches. The benches were filled every Sabbath. The youngest children played while their mothers tried to keep them quiet. Older children, the boys, sat with their fathers. Sixty years ago, Maurice came with his father. “I used to sit down here and look at the girls up there, even though it was against the rules, against the law.” Some of the others, too, came as children. Danny and Dean and Ben and Buddy. Some of their fathers were among the founders.

On the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, every member of the synagogue came. Three hundred or 350 families, Maurice says, and “all the young kids would go, for the service, but also to see each other.” All through the service they would visit, back and forth, in a constant flow between this synagogue and Shaarey Tphiloh, the synagogue a few blocks away on Newbury Street.

In the ’50s and ’60s Gary Berenson of B & B Cleaners came as a child. “It was fun with the third floor. You could play up there. All the kids were running around.” Still at that time, for High Holidays at least, he remembers people filling the room, full enough that the youngest children couldn’t find a place to sit upstairs with their mothers.

Now the air smells of dust and emptiness. A ceiling cuts the stairway off in mid-flight, sealing up the third floor balcony “in the interest of conserving energy,” Maurice says. People use the room only for the High Holidays. Twice a year. Twenty people come. Maybe thirty.

“For everything else, even Passover and the other festivals, they stay in the small room on the first floor. They have no reason not to.

“Why bother, when there’s plenty room down here?” Dean asks. “It’d be a waste. Light, heat—everything.”

“People don’t turn out anymore,” Maurice says. “At best we have 12, 13 people. It’s endemic.” He pauses. “Like the Masons.

“That’s the only thing that’s unfortunate about this place,” he says later. “That there are so few of us to enjoy it.”

“W E DISTINGUISH between Shabbat and the rest of the week,” Maurice Rubinoff says. “We call Shabbat holy, and even though we don’t call the rest of the week profane, it doesn’t have the same amount of sanctity.”

On the Sabbath they read the Torah. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. The record of the Israelites, the words Moses brought down from Mount Sinai, the laws of moral and physical conduct—613 commandments given by God to the people of Israel.

“[Torah] means the scrolls, [and] it means the entire compendium of Jewish knowledge,” David’s nephew Richard says. “In Jewish tradition throughout the ages, since the time of the destruction of the temple, the way of preserving the Jewish religion, and Jewish life, was to study the religious writings.”

The scribes who write the Torah scrolls must use indelible ink on special parchment, transcribing from a model text, copying the Hebrew exactly as it was
originally written. The people who read it to the congregation take care not to mispronounce, not to skip a single word, to read with respect.

On the Sabbath the men meet in the morning. Sam comes—he is "a Saturday regular"—and Arthur and Sid come as well. Their presence makes up for the men who for some reason couldn’t come today.

Today's service is longer, more formal. No sneakers, no sport shirts, no baseball hats. Today they wear yarmulkas, suit jackets, ties. They shake hands, smiling, saying, "Good Shabbos. Good Shabbos." And they take the prayer shawls from where they hang folded over the back of each bench, drape them over their shoulders, smooth the long fringes.

"I am enwrapping myself in the fringed garment," the prayer book says, "in order to fulfill the command of my Creator, as it is written in the Torah: 'They shall make fringes for themselves on the corners of their garments throughout the generations.'"

Eli opens the morning service, leading the group in the traditional blessings, the prayer for the dead, the psalms. No sounds but rustling paper, Eli speaking the last line of each psalm aloud, the whisperings of Hebrew as the men read along to themselves.

Then speech, standing, sitting, a song: Feet tap out the beat. Voices do not quite blend. One person breaks for a breath. Another finishes a line early.

"That doesn't sound like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, you know that?" Sid whispers as they finish.

"I thought it sounded like the Shaarey Tphiloh Choir. What's his name, the leader...?"

Dean turns in his bench six feet away, whispers the name over his shoulder.

Eli continues, "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the children of Israel and tell them to make for themselves fringes . . . . " (Numbers, 15:37, 38).

Each man takes the corner fringes of his prayer shawl, brings them to his mouth, kisses them.

"You shall have it as a fringe, so that when you look upon it you will remember to do all the commands of the Lord."

Again they kiss their shawls. One more time Eli reads the word "fringes," and one more time the men kiss them, and kiss again with the last line of the prayer, "I am the Lord your God."

When the time has come to remove the Torah scrolls from the ark, all the men stand. Eli carries the scrolls up the aisle and back, pausing for each of them to kiss his shawl, touch it to the Torah.

Maurice Rubinoff reads the Torah every Sabbath because he is the one who knows how. It is written, as it was three thousand years ago, in a Hebrew with no vowels and no punctuation. Maurice has studied enough to know what the groups of consonants mean, where each sentence begins, where it ends.

"I have an expression that I maybe use too much," he says. "It's a French expression: Un royaume des aveugles, les borgnes sont les rois. In the kingdom of the blind, a man with one eye is a big shot. So I happen to be the man with one eye."

He was not always a good student. "When I was going to Hebrew school, I was voted the one least likely to succeed. I resisted education, would you believe, even at the college level." But his grandfather was a rabbi. And later, after he married, he taught for fifteen years in the community Hebrew school.

"... And so they point me out as their surrogate rabbi," Maurice says. "Except that I don't push it. My philosophy has always been, if we have people, if we have resources here other than me who can do it, I prefer that they do it. In areas where they can't, like the Torah reading, that I do. But I like to spread it around. It's the only way."

Together he and Ben work with the heavy scroll, rolling up one end and unrolling the other until they get to the day's reading. Each week they take another chapter, going in order, finishing the whole five books at the end of the Hebrew year. But "nothing is cast in concrete among us," Maurice says. "There's a group of Jews who takes three years to go through it."

Today Ben and David stand at the front with Maurice, one on each side, acting as the monitors to correct him should he make any mistakes. He chants out the reading in a sing-song rhythm, breaking into English every so often to translate because, "When you read the Torah, you're not reading for your health. You're reading to educate the people."

Everyone in the group knows Hebrew, but Maurice wants to be sure no one gets lost. So he paraphrases.

"He reminds them they were down in the desert. Reminds them, 'You're coming to a land which has everything—plenty of land, plenty of water, plenty of oil—except fuel oil.'"

A few chuckles. The service continues. Reading, paraphrasing, reading, paraphrasing. Ben's hearing aid whistles. In one of the back benches, two of the men hold a whispered conversation.

Then it is time to call people up to the front of the room to say the blessings over the Torah. Maurice calls them according to the list Dean made before the service began—"the batting order"—names recorded week after week on the same paper so everyone will have a turn.

Between turns, waiting for another person to walk up to the Torah, those at the lectern speak among themselves.

"I was in the hospital the other day."

"You all right?"

"Yeah, what I have to do is cater to it."

"Cater?"

"Stop eating, stop drinking—"

"Have to lose any weight?"
"Not much. Forty pounds or so."

An hour into the service, the door opens and a twelfth man walks in: Mr. Lerner, who comes to the service when visiting his summer home in Maine. He whispers his greetings as he passes the benches. "Good Shabbos. Good Shabbos—How's Julia? Good Shabbos." Then it is his turn to go to the front of the room, say the blessing, stand for a few minutes beside Maurice, looking on as he continues to read, translate, read.

"You shouldn’t say to yourself, 'I'm such a tzaddik [righteous man] that God did this for me, it's my due.' "It's because of God's promise to our forefathers, so it's not because of you.

"We're a stiff-necked people, a bunch of bums. Listen, really, we're all people."

Several lines later Maurice interrupts himself, moves to speak over his shoulder without turning his back to the ark. "Very interesting passage here. It was at that time that God separated the tribe of Levi from all the other tribes. Said you won't have an inheritance—"

"Portion," Sam corrects him from a front bench.

"Portion, that's a better word, in the new land. Right."

And so the service goes on. One man comes up to the Torah, one returns to his seat. Stopping, shaking hands on the way, Herbie walks back up the aisle. "Good Shabbos. Good Shabbos," he says softly as he takes people's hands. Eli's head has drooped to rest on his chest. "Eli's sleepin'," Herbie says to no one in particular. "Don't wake 'im."

"You better be mighty careful you don't go against the will of God," Maurice continues.

"You teach your children when they're at home, when they're at school, when they're up in Bethel—"

David stops him as he reads the Hebrew, says something quietly. Maurice rereads the Hebrew, correcting himself. "See, you do pretty good, David."

After the Torah reading, David stays at the front of the room to sing the Haf'torah, the passage from the Prophets. He stands still for the song, hands resting on the lectern, shoulder blades showing through the back of his jacket. He was trained as a cantor, and his voice is still rich and resonant. Every Friday evening, for the welcoming of the Sabbath, he is the one who sings the special service. He only needs a few lozenges to moisten his throat, and then his voice carries through.

When David has finished, when thanks for the Torah and the Prophets and this Sabbath day have been given, when the Torah has been replaced in the ark and the day’s commentary on the reading has been given, the service ends. It is time to eat.

They share their Sabbath morning meal at the table at the back of the room. Styrofoam plates and cups. A bottle of wine, seldom touched. Two bottles of Polar ginger ale, usually emptied. Potato chips, crackers, chopped white fish, pickled herring. A coffee cake with the Shop 'n Save bakery label on the box. Talk of politics, plans, the past week.

"Pass the horse radish."

The man across the table hands over the open jar and its cover. "I'm a structuralist.

"So he said to me, 'I hear you drive on the Sabbath.' "I said, 'Well, you do what you have to do,' Turned out he wasn't judging. He wanted a ride."

Buddy has already left for the day. Maurice locks up the place and they walk out to their cars, to the rest of the weekend. No meeting Sunday. "Give the boys a rest," Maurice says. They'll be back again Monday.

O

N THE WALL IN the room where they meet for services, next to the desk, hangs an engraved plaque dedicated to Harry S. Judelshon: "In recognition of his generous voluntary service for over twenty-five years in leading our prayer services and reading the Torah on Sabbath and Holidays. May 31, 1982."

Harry Judelshon wasn't a rabbi," Buddy says, "but he knew as much as any rabbi."

"There's nothing sanctified about the word rabbi," Maurice explains. "The word rabbi simply means 'rabbi, my teacher.' And that's the real function of a rabbi, not to participate in Bar Mitzvahs or weddings."

The plaque was presented to Mr. Judelshon sometime near his death, but Buddy isn't sure exactly when that was. He turns toward the benches where Morris and Dean sit. "When'd he die?"

"Before we gave that to him, wasn't it?"

"No, he was in the Home. They found it in his office after."

Danny pushes open the door to the room and walks.
in, puckering his lips and breathing through them. “Hey, when’d Judelshon die, do you remember?”

“Thirteen Tammuz.”

“Good; he knows the month,” Buddy says. “The year?”

Danny goes to the table at the back of the room, moves a book, turns pages in a notepad. “5,745.”

“What year is it now?” Morris asks.

Buddy pulls a small pocket calendar out of his jacket, looks at the year on the cover. “5,750.”

Maurice walks across the room, past the back table and the cluttered desk, to take one of the old books from the shelves built into the back wall. The oldest of them came here from Europe, carried by the first immigrants over 100 years ago. They fill the shelves, wide leather-bound volumes resting against each other at a slant. Volumes written in Hebrew, their pages thin and yellowed, worn from years of fingers tracing their lines. Volumes of the Torah, commentaries on the Torah, commentaries on the commentaries, scholars arguing with scholars across time.

“Look, some things you can’t get an agreement on,” Maurice often says. “That’s the nature of the world. One of the beautiful things about the Jewish faith is that’s room for debate. It’s not like communism.”

In the past, these books held the people’s education, their culture, their law, their religion. “In the Old Country you couldn’t go to a non-Jewish public school anyways,” Maurice says. “They didn’t take the Jews into the universities.”

But in America things changed for them, and over the years, their habits changed. The prayer books show the process. First the text all in Hebrew, then in Hebrew with directions in English, and now, for every Hebrew page, a page of English.

The men who come now are, as David says, “run of the mill Jewish people. Liberal type Jewish people. Which doesn’t mean that they have to go over to the shul [school] three times a day like a religious Jew would insist, and study the Gemara, the Laws.”

“These boys want a service, and support a service,” Maurice says, “but they don’t want it to be a millstone around their neck.”

He laughs. “We don’t [have a rabbi], and the boys are happier without one, because you know, having a rabbi sometimes can become a little bit impressive. There’s nobody [here] making long speeches, nobody’s dragging out the service.”

“So you see,” David says, “you’re dealing with a peculiar situation: People who while they want to perpetuate themselves realize that they’re not going to. It’s kind of sad, you know? After so many years....”

He pauses a moment, then continues. “This is life, this is progress. I suppose this is a development of generations, and all the things that go with them. Like saying a person died from natural causes. What are natural causes? The inherent decay that takes place as life goes on.”

Now it is only a question of how long they will last, whether someone new will come along to help per-
petuate the group meetings.

“If we had a few swingers it’d be all right,” Morris says.

“Thirty years ago,” Buddy snaps, “they didn’t think they’d last another day.”

For now they keep coming, day after day, helping each other to make minyan.


Because “when you grow up that way it’s not difficult.”

Because “my father was one of the founders here.”

Because they needed me.”

Because, as Maurice says, “I couldn’t divorce myself of it. It’s a part of me, you know.” He pauses, then adds, “It’s like the appendix. It’s a vestigial remain, but it’s a part of the whole, and I feel that without it, I’d be lost.”
The Etz Chaim Synagogue in Portland stands back from Congress Street in the shade of tall pine trees. Passersby would not notice this place. They are on their way somewhere else—into a store or out of one, to a church or an Italian restaurant or up Munjoy Hill toward the old immigrant neighborhoods and the Eastern Promenade, with its tennis courts and sweeping view of Casco Bay boats and islands.
Today's service is longer, more formal. Today they wear yarmulkas, ties, suit jackets. They shake hands, smiling, saying, "Good Shabbos. Good Shabbos."
Today they read the Torah, the ancient scrolls, written as they were three thousand years ago. Maurice reads the Torah because he is the one who knows how.
When you read the Torah, you’re not reading for your health. You’re reading to educate the people.” Even though they all know Hebrew, Maurice paraphrases, so they won’t get lost.
They keep coming, day after day, year after year. They say, "It's a part of me, you know." They say, "Habit probably." They say, "My father was one of the founders here." They say, "Because they needed me."
MAINE SYNAGOGUES

ADAS YOSHURON SYNAGOGUE
PO Box 1250
ROCKLAND
04841
594-5444

BETH ABRAHAM SYNAGOGUE
MAIN ST.
AUBURN
04210
783-1302

BETH ABRAHAM SYNAGOGUE
145 YORK ST.
BANGOR
04401
947-0876

BETH ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE
144 YORK ST.
BANGOR
04401
945-3433

BETH ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE
862 WASHINGTON ST.
BATH
04530
443-5181

BETH ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE
49 E. GRAND AVE.
OLD ORCHARD BEACH 04064
934-2973

BETH ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE
MAIN ST.
WATERVILLE
04901
872-7551

CONGREGATION BET HA'AM
111 WESCOTT ST.
SO. PORTLAND
04106
879-0028

CONGREGATION BETH EL
UNION ST.
BANGOR
04401
942-1308

CONGREGATION ETZ CHAIM
BACON ST.
BIDDEFORD
04005
284-5771

ETZ CHAIM SYNAGOGUE
267 CONGRESS ST.
PORTLAND
04101
773-2339

SHAAREY TPHILOH SYNAGOGUE
76 NOYES ST.
PORTLAND
04103
773-0693

TEMPLE BETH EL
WOOLAWN ST.
AUGUSTA
04330
622-7450

TEMPLE BETH-EL
400 DEERING AVE.
PORTLAND
04103
774-2649

TEMPLE ISRAEL
OLD TOWN
04468
827-4792

TEMPLE SHALOM
74 BRADMAN ST.
AUBURN
04210
786-4201
A HEAVY FROST COVERS the ground around the big dairy barn. It is only 37 degrees outside, but forty milking cows have warmed the inside of the barn. The family working in the barn moves through the cool damp air with the comfort that comes from being in a place twice a day, every day.
The barn is noisy and chaotic, with a pipeline sucking milk from the cows into a tank, two young boys riding bikes, a baby calling to her parents, and seven young heifers mooing loudly to be fed. The cows push levers to get their own water, their chains tinkling against the water bowls. The voice of Pastor Mike Macintosh, for WWMR Christian Radio, admonishes, "You can be a witness to Jesus Christ, but not a silent witness."

Mark Russell is the father of this busy family. While he milks his 43 cows, they munch quietly on fresh hay, chained in stalls facing the outer walls of the barn. As he works, his younger son, six-year-old Nathaniel, rides over to him and sings a song from school. "This is the song that never ends, it just goes on and on my friends." It is a simple, measured beat, something that a beginning drum student might practice. Soon Mark is humming this tune, and he keeps on humming as Nathaniel pedals away.

Vicki Russell is feeding the young calves milk, her blonde bangs bursting off her forehead in a coiled bunch. As she mixes another bucket of milk replacer for the next heifer in line, the sweet smell of vanilla pudding fills the air. For a moment it overpowers the urine and manure odor that hangs heavily in the barn. Knowing that she will dump a little on the floor, six cats and four kittens come running. Behind the newest kitten are Vicki's children. First, 18-month-old Angelina, calling out "Kee-ee!" She toddles right up to the spilled milk with the cats, putting her face down to rub her cheeks against their soft fur. As she tries to pick one up, her guardian brother, ten-year-old Tristan, tells her gently, "No, Ang, let them stay there."

Every Saturday such a scene takes place at Potter's Brook Jersey farm on the Plains Road in Litchfield, just 30 miles outside of Augusta. Although many families in Maine have decided that farming is just too demanding, the Russells are still fighting to keep their farm afloat. In 1978, there were 1,133 commercial dairy farms in Maine. Now there are only 659, and that number continues to drop.

Mark and Vicki bought this 200 acre farm ten years ago, the year they had their first child. At that time, dairy farming was a more lucrative business, and Mark believed that he would be able to make money at it. Even though they now know otherwise, they have still remained on the farm. The continued drop in milk prices, along with the constant rise in fuel and equipment costs, is driving many other farmers out of the business. For Mark and Vicki, the rewards are worth the sacrifices. Living on the farm lets them raise their children the way they believe children should be raised.

So every morning at five o'clock, Mark gets himself out of bed to tend his herd. He spends 90 percent of his day doing chores in the barn or paperwork for it. These 14 hour days, seven days a week, are providing Mark with as little to live on as $10,000 in a bad year, and only as much as $18,000 in a good year. But that's not the most important part of life for Mark and Vicki Russell. She feels that "the best part of living on the farm is being here with Mark, and being here for my children." He says that "I enjoy it very much. It's challenging, and it's rewarding. And probably the only profession I know that I've used just about everything I learned in college." It is also fulfilling to Mark. "When I get done with a day's work, I feel like I've done something."

Any dairy farm, not just mine, is not likely to be successful in terms of business. There is very little return on the investment, commercially, I'll tell you that right now. There is no way to make money on the equity. The only way to get the equity out is when you sell. So you have to change the question to 'What is a successful way of life?'

Mark is not alone in his feeling that it is impossible to make a good living on a dairy farm right now. The number of commercial dairy farms in Maine has dropped by over 40 percent between 1978 and 1991, according to U.S. Census figures and the State Department of Agriculture. When the Russells bought their 200 acre farm in 1980, for a total of $195,000, they brought 20 milking cows with them. The previous owners had retired five years earlier and had just been taking the hay off the land. Mark was leaving a partnership on a dairy farm with his uncle and grandfather. As his share he took part of the herd.
Since he purchased the farm, the profits in dairy farming have decreased. In 1980, the average price paid to Maine farmers for milk was $14.80 per hundred pounds of milk. That was enough for Mark not only to live on, but to make money on. Now, with about 85 cows on his farm, 43 of which he milks at a time, he is not able to make money. That is because the price of fuel, grain, equipment, and even sawdust keeps rising, while the cost of milk is actually dropping. In 1989, the average price paid for milk by the plants was $14.53 per hundred weight (average blend price), a 27 cent drop from 1980. While this rose to $15.80 in 1990, it has dropped to an average of $13.45 for the first eight months of 1991. Prices fluctuate monthly from as low as $12 to as high as $16 in any given year.

Minimum prices to be paid to Maine farmers are set by the Maine Milk Commission each month. Those prices are based on the Federal Order Price for the region set in Boston, plus a 15 cent per hundred weight premium for Maine dairy farmers as production costs higher than those in southern New England. The price set in Boston takes it cue from what food processing plants in Minnesota and Wisconsin are paying for the class two milk they buy. This is known as the MW price. To this is added the cost of transportation to Boston, which is about $3 per hundred weight and any premiums southern dairy distributors are willing to pay to keep the milk in the region for a steady supply, currently about $1 a hundred weight.

Due to a surplus, prices have been dropping steadily since a high of almost $16 in November of 1990. This plummeted to $13.72 in December, a 12 percent drop, with a steady monthly decrease to $12.58 average blend price in July. Dairy farming is getting more difficult at a time when farmers are feeling the economic depression that is affecting all of Maine in 1991.

In addition to the difficulty of producing milk cheaply enough to avoid losing money on every hundred pounds, Mark is trying to pay off an especially large debt on his farm. His total investment in the farm, at $436,730, is not unusual for a medium sized dairy farm. The average of 14 other medium sized dairy farms in Maine is $424,995. What is unusual is the way that investment is distributed. His land investment is greater than that of other farmers. Mark’s land makes up 48 percent of the total, or $210,000, compared to the average of 26 percent, or $113,391. His buildings comprise 22 percent of the total, or $95,000, compared to the average 27 percent, or $113,339.

Another obstacle for Mark is his low investment in equipment and supplies. His is 15 percent of his total investment, worth $68,030. His fellow farmers, however, have on average 30 percent invested in equipment and supplies, worth $129,438.

This means that Mark needs to push his equipment and himself much harder than most farmers. His tractor is open, and can be wet and cold. These are the things that must be endured in order to stay in farming.

Interestingly enough, the cows themselves make up only 15 percent of Mark’s total investment. The biggest capital investments for a dairy farmer are land, buildings, and equipment and supplies.

The Russells have only owned this farm for ten years, and that means that they have not made much headway in paying off their debt. Many farms are passed down in a family, but theirs was not. The initial payment that Mark and Vicki had to make is in itself a burden. The land and buildings that they purchased were financed entirely through a loan from Farmer’s Home Administration (FHA) for $160,000.

At that time they also took out a separate loan for $35,000 from FHA for the equipment that they purchased with the farm, including two tractors, a hay elevator and baler, two rakes, a tedder, and a manure spreader. Some of that money went towards a manure pit that had to be built for the main barn. In 1984, the Russells borrowed approximately $5,000 to buy a new compressor for their bulk tank. In 1987, they again borrowed from FHA, this time $35,000. With this money they bought a new tractor, put in a manure pit for the downstairs portion of the barn, where the heifers are kept, and remodeled the inside of the barn, tearing out stanchions, and replacing them with comfort stalls. They also put in a bark bed leaching field outside the milkroom.

The low price that Mark receives for his milk forces him to borrow to make necessary improvements on the farm. Right now, Mark still owes about $208,000 on his farm. That includes the land, buildings, and machinery. Twice a month a portion of his money...
from his milk gets subtracted from his check and sent directly to FHA. Even so, a debt that large takes a very long time to pay off. The average farmer is only paying off a $90,356 loan. That puts Mark at a disadvantage. His debt is more than twice that of his fellow farmers.

That is why Mark milks 43 cows a day by himself. If he milked fewer cows, he would not have the money to pay off his loans. If he milked more, he would have no time at all to spend with his family.

Mark still believes that the benefits of farming outweigh the hardships, and he is willing to keep struggling to stay in it. He knows that the future looks grim, but he feels up to the challenge. He is used to the reality of working 14 hour days, and earning so little that he is not required to pay income tax.

In 1989, Mark's best year, his total farm receipts were $118,112.92. Of this, $96,407.31 came directly from the sale of milk. Another $6,000 came from the sale of cows. And $14,453 came from the insurance company to repair the milkroom, which was damaged when a car crashed into it.

The farm's debts and operating costs immediately took $88,326.82 of that money, leaving the net income at $29,486. After repairing the milkroom, Mark was left with about $18,000. In a worse year, like those in the near future, he will be making closer to $10,000, which he has lived on in the past and is willing to live on again.

"It'll mean lowering your standard of living. It may mean restructuring the debt sometime in the future, but I think if you have the will to stay in, you can stay in. You won't make much money, but the question is, how much is worth it? You know, is it worth working 14 hours a day for ten thousand dollars a year, or not? So far it is."

The alarm breaks the silence of the dawn. It is five o'clock, and Mark's duties on his farm once again are calling to him. He pulls himself out of bed, and dresses silently in the room next to his and Vicki's. He wears torn brown work pants, a stained white t-shirt, a brown work shirt, and a heavy dark blue sweatshirt. From his Agri-Mark cap to the two pairs of socks on his feet, he looks and smells like a dairy farmer.

He moves through the dark house to the kitchen, where he turns on the first light of the day. Mark eats a huge bowl of cereal. As Vicki says, "That's the only thing that fills him in the morning." Then he leaves the house, through the attached shed where his boots are kept, and finds himself in the frosty morning air. As he passes the big barn, he opens the doors to untie his dogs. The older dog, Alex, trots off to relieve himself, while the new, younger dog circles frantically at Mark's feet.

Mark begins his chores by cutting open several bales of his own fresh hay and shaking it out in front of the 40 empty stalls. Then he pours out three pounds of grain, next to the hay in front of each stall. If he puts the grain on top of the hay, the cows will toss the sweet green bales all over as they hunt for every last pellet of grain with their long rough tongues.

Now he is ready to call in his cows. They have been waiting for him at the electric fence since four-thirty. Mark unhooks the electric wire, and leaves it down for them to pass back through once they have been milked. He waits for the cows to make their way slowly down the muddy lane behind the house, arms crossed over his chest, his chin resting in the palm of one hand.

As the cows waddle into their stalls, udders bulging with milk, Mark stands in the middle, to make sure that they are going where they belong. Because the younger ones "can't read their name cards," according to Mark, some of them try to go into the wrong stall at first. He grabs onto the collar of one such cow and asks her, "What are you doing all the way down here?" As he pulls her back out of the stall, she stumbles in the gutter behind her feet. He reminds her, "That's not where you live." Now she finds her way home, and Mark can walk the outer aisles of the barn, hooking each cow's collar to a chain that holds her there until it is time to go back outside.

Mark goes into the milkroom to wash out the pipeline. The loud motor drowns out the quiet munching of the cows. Once it is fully sanitized, Mark is ready to begin milking. He carries out four milking machines with their masses of hoses and tubes, each serving the purpose of a four-handed man. The machines are able to milk a cow in four minutes. Although Mark has never milked a cow fully by hand, he guesses that it would take about thirty minutes for him to do

"IT'S CHALLENGING. WHEN I GET DONE WITH A DAY'S WORK, I FEEL LIKE I'VE DONE SOMETHING."
so. “Can you imagine if I had to do it that way? Can you imagine!”

He starts with the same cow every time he milks. Mark begins to wash her teats with a hot diluted iodine solution. He rubs the teats clean, twisting the rag on them, checking them with his fingers and his eyes, making sure they are as clean as possible. This washing also stimulates the udder, and lets the cow know for sure that it is time. “I wash one ahead, to give the cow thirty seconds to let her milk down at the same time that I’m putting the machine on.” This daily contact with the udders has made them easily recognizable parts of the cows to Mark.

“I would be able to tell blindfolded which cow it was just by feeling the udder. Maybe not the young ones, but some of the older ones have very distinctive udders.” Once Mark has attached all four machines to cows, his task is to watch them and move them when the cow is finished. He turns a valve that shuts off the vacuum from the pipeline to that machine, removes the milker, and dips the teats in iodine to prevent infection.

Mark wears a special milking harness around his waist. It is a web belt that has a board for him to sit on, and a thin metal rail that ends in a coil. This way, when he drops down to the level of the udder, he has three places for the weight to go, instead of just two.

He drops onto this coil 240 times a day. Once to wash the udder, once to attach the milker, once to remove it, each time he milks a cow.

By the time Mark is halfway down the barn, the sun has started to peek its warm face over the horizon. “I see every sunrise and sunset except in the dead of summer.”

When he finishes the milking, he feeds more grain to keep the milk production of his cows as high above the state and national average as it is now. As the cows eat, they raise their tails to deposit wet, pungent piles of manure on the cement behind them. When they finish eating, they take advantage of their clean stalls with fresh sawdust and lie down lazily on their sides. Mark feels that “they’ve done their work for the day, the first part of the day, anyhow.”

Mark is willing to do this tiring work every day, for very little financial return, because he feels it provides him with things that are more important to him than money. “I think this is what I’ve been called to do. I feel I’m where God wants me. He put me here. This is my role in life. I mean, he’s given me a parcel of land, and I’m the steward of it.

“My first responsibility is to be steward of that particular parcel of land. And my long term goal would be that I do it successfully. And leave it in as good shape or better shape than when I received it. To me, stewardship means not only taking care of the land, but also making it productive. And when I leave, if the land can still produce a good hay crop, similar to what it did when I got here, or better than it did, then that would be successful stewardship.”

Mark is a third generation dairy farmer, following his grandfather and his father into farming. His father was a dairy farmer when Mark was young, but found that he could not make enough money to support his nine children. He went into insurance. When Mark returned from college in Ohio, he started working part time on his grandfather’s farm in Winslow while he looked for a teaching position. He enjoyed it, and decided that he would like to be a partner with his uncle and grandfather on that farm.

After Mark and Vicki got married, they wanted a house of their own. While looking at houses, they happened upon the farm and loved it. They decided it was time to start a life for themselves and bought it. Now, with his father and grandfather dead, Mark is the only one in his family still in dairy farming.

“It’s hard work, and so I don’t have as much time to do some of the things I’d like to do. Or some of the things I feel I should do. But it’s not a business where you’re gonna get rich in, it’s not a business where you’re gonna have a lot of rewards and material possessions, or glamor, or anything like that. So it’s a pretty humbling experience to be a farmer.”

**VICKI IS OUT OF BED BY 5:30 in the morning. She’s brought the baby a bottle, and is curled into a ball pushed all the way back into the deep cushioned corner of the overstuffed brown couch. She hopes to have a half hour to be alone to read her Bible, her only personal time in the day. To her left is a large picture window. Through the glass, 20 cows under the age of two wander around in the first paddock. Beyond them, 200 acres of Russell land stretch away from the house, lush and green even in November, with the sun reflecting off the brook that the farm was named for.

Inside, the woodstove and central heating are working together to keep things warm in the den and kitchen. Behind the kitchen door stands a coatrack. The work clothes that hang on the rack are never allowed farther in the house. They give off such a pungent odor that it is like walking into the barn when you walk past the rack.

In the center of the kitchen is a dishwasher, half full of yesterday’s dishes, disconnected from the sink, waiting for Vicki to fill it tonight. On either side of it are the huge refrigerator/freezer, and the stove. The refrigerator is nearly empty, with some cow’s milk, some store bought, pasteurized milk for the baby, and iced tea. The freezer outside is where Vicki stores her meats and the vegetables that she has frozen from her continued on page 57
Tristan was born the year the farm was bought. He is the oldest and has more barn chores than Nathaniel.
"After Tristan was born, I was back out in the barn. You had to do it. You have to be able to work together. We are partners."
"If you have the will, you can stay in. You won't make much money. Is it worth working 14 hours a day for $10,000 a year? So far it is."
"I expect them to help make the farm go. Just to get from one day to the next. Help that's needed with chores. The primary purpose is to teach them responsibility. A sense of helping out."
"I'd like to see our farm stay in the family—keeping, fighting for this farm. Some day there may be very few farmers left. I want to be one of the farmers left."
garden. The giant white stove has a kettle of water on it, which Vicki will begin to heat when Mark comes in to make his coffee. Over the stove hang two plaques. One, in blue swirling script, reads “God gives the heart a voice to sound its joy, and calls it music.” The other spells out JESUS.

Vicki gets up from the couch to pull on jeans with big tears on both knees and an old forest green sweatshirt, the color of her eyes, but lacking their spark. Tristan and Nathaniel pad softly downstairs.

They know better than to wake the baby. Vicki tells them to finish getting dressed and to get some breakfast. She’s off to do morning chores, pulling on a heavy quilted flannel shirt. The smell of manure surrounds her.

A few minutes before seven, the boys come out to the barn to say goodbye before the schoolbus comes. By then, Vicki is done with her chores. Now her work inside begins. The intercom on the refrigerator, hidden by the many boxes of generic cereal, lets Vicki know that Angelina is awake. When the baby gives her hungry wet cry, Vicki is up there. “Well good morning, sweetheart! And how are you? Oh you stink!”

She carries the baby downstairs, and together they go to “get a Pamper.” Once Angelina is clean, Vicki burrows her face into her daughter’s neck, “I’m gonna get some honey! Yes I am! Ohh, and I’ll get some mayple syrup on the other side!” Once the child is in a fit of giggles, Vicki relents. Then she hands Ang the diaper to “throw that away for Mumma.” She follows as Angelina runs into the kitchen, naked from the waist down, straight to the garbage can. Vicki narrates like a sportscaster, “and she stops, and she pops, and she drops it in! Yeah!” Angelina turns and claps for herself.

Now it’s time for a bath. Vicki puts Angelina on the counter and starts to run the warm water into the empty half of her sink. She lets the baby feel the water, asking, “Is that okay?” When it is, she plugs up the bottom, squeezes in a little baby shampoo, and puts Ang in. The baby is mostly interested in the dishes in the other half of the sink, and in looking out the window at the herd of cows. “Mmuh,” she points out to Vicki. “You see the cows?” her mother responds.

During breakfast the first of the day’s many phone calls comes. It is a friend of Vicki’s, asking once again for advice. The friend is concerned that her son is giving in to peer pressure. Vicki tells her that the best way for her to open a dialogue with her ten-year-old son is to “look in the Bible, and find a few places where it says that is wrong and show it to him. Don’t do it in a real condemning way, just show it to him, and say, ‘Maybe you should read this, and then we’ll talk about it.’ Cause God’s word in print is much stronger than [the other boy’s] word telling him right then to do it.”

Vicki’s advice usually leads the person to the Bible and to prayer, because that is where she finds the answers to her own questions. She is also called on by her friends because she is willing to take up a cause that she believes in. She’ll speak at the meetings, read the necessary books, and stand up to people in positions of power.

Vicki has no farming in her family and never expected to live on a farm. Her father was in the Army, and she was used to moving frequently. When Vicki and Mark met, she was studying to be a legal secretary at Kennebec Valley Vocational Technical Institute in Waterville. He was a partner on his grandfather’s farm. She never got a chance to make use of her degree, because she got married right after graduating.

Mark and Vicki planned on her doing more work in the barn with Mark now, but those plans were changed by the birth of their daughter. From the time she wakes up in the morning, until she is deposited in her crib at night, with a brief break at noon for a nap, Angelina is Vicki’s shadow.

“It’s so different when you have a child who is under the age of five years old. ’Cause you’re constantly with them, and having to keep them busy. And having to teach them while you’re doing that. You know the first five years, you’ve got to have enough into those children, that when they go into the public school system, they’re gonna know what’s right and wrong. And that’s what my five years, of each of my kids, is gonna be.”

It is so important to Vicki to spend that time with her children that she is willing to sacrifice the benefits that would come from a job outside the home. “If I went to work, hey, I’d have so much, but it’s not worth it. The materialistic values are not worth it in this world right now. We’ve got to start going back to our children, and being home for them, so that they don’t go find something else to go to. And that’s where we stand.”

The demanding work in the barn continues for Vicki. When she went to the hospital to have her first child, she took only a short leave. “When he was born and a few days afterward, then I was back out in the barn, and that was doing what I do right now. It’s amazing, you know, you had to, you had to do it. And it got harder with each one, because you’re holding a kid, and you’re carrying one in yourself.”

Vicki is willing to work hard to do her share as farmer and wife. “We are partners. Not only in our business, but in our life, and in our marriage. It’s a partnership.” Vicki knows that this partnership is a necessary ingredient in their marriage, and she also knows that it is important in the running of the farm.

“To run a successful farm, you have to be able to work together, to think together, to give in to each other, and to respect each other. And that way when
you come up against something that’s financial, you can work through it. Which in our kind of lifestyle. You never know from day to day what’s going to happen in the milk business. We could have five cows get sick and lose umpteen pounds of milk. So our next milk check, next month, will be wiped out. And we have to prepare for that.

“But Mark and I, we’ve struggled through all the hard times in the milk industry, and we’re once again right now coming up on some more hard times. But I feel very, very comfortable going into them, knowing that I have the frugality to say, ‘No, I don’t need this, can do without this,’ or, ‘No, this can wait another year or two.’

“And that’s where you have to stop putting your materialistic self first and think of the future. We don’t need all the brand new equipment. We don’t need all the frills. And we don’t need to go out constantly, and we don’t need a new car. And that’s how we run a successful farm.”

TRISTAN PULLS HIS LEFT arm across his sweaty forehead, leaving a smudge of dirt. He sighs as he leans into his work, using all the weight of his slight frame to try to move the wet, manure filled hay from the floor into the gutter. He is in the dim, musty downstairs of the barn, where the young heifers are kept. Above him, in the main barn, his father is milking.

He vents his frustration at the heifers, pushing them when they are in his way. “Move it!” The legs of his narrow Levis are dirty, with wood bits hanging onto the bottoms. As he works, the end of the scraper he is using brushes against the cobwebs that hang from the low ceiling.

“All right, Nathaniel, you’re helping,” Tristan threatens his six-year-old brother. Each boy grabs a small plastic shovel and starts putting down fresh bedding. “Hurry up, Nathaniel!” After ten trips to the sawdust pile for each boy, the chore is done until tomorrow morning.

The Russell children are taught about responsibility at an early age. Mark explains, “I have the opportunity to teach them responsibility. More so on the farm than if I wasn’t farming. There are certain things that I expect of them that I probably wouldn’t expect out of them if they weren’t farming. Helping out to make the

farm go. Just the day to day, everyday living. Just to get from one day to the next. Help that’s needed to be done with chores, and stuff like that. It’s a big help to me, but the primary purpose is to teach them, I think, responsibility. A sense of helping out. A sense of fulfilling.”

For Tristan, responsibility “means getting things done on time, and making sure that the animals get enough food, or they get milked properly. And getting my studies in on time.” School has never posed much of a problem for Tristan. He has always been one of the top students in his classes. If he has homework to do, he does it as soon as he walks in the door from school, before changing to do barn chores.

Vicki knows that the farm gives her a chance to teach her children responsibility. “They are all responsible for some part of this farm. Whether they want to admit it or not, that’s the way it goes. And in doing this, enforcing it at such a young age, they will definitely grow, when they are older, to be responsible adults.”

EVERY SUNDAY MORNING the Russell family goes to the Congregational Protestant church in Litchfield. Before the service, the boys attend Sunday school. Mark often plays a role in the service, now that he has become a deacon in the church. But religion means more to the Russells than a few hours on Sundays.

For Mark, his religious beliefs provide him with his personal goals as a farmer. He wants to be a successful steward of the land and animals on his farm. If he does this, then, in his eyes, he will have a successful farm. Vicki believes that her acceptance of her religion is what has made her into the kind of person that she is. She feels that if she lives her life the way the Bible dictates, then she will be a good person. A good wife, mother, and friend.

For Tristan, religion defines his place in the family as the oldest child. He is the only one of the children who is old enough to stay in the chapel during the service. His brother and sister go downstairs with the other small children and infants.

Angelina is too young to understand religion, but even at one and a half, she knows the position for prayer. She won’t let people eat until they fold their hands, and her mother says, “Thank you, Jesus, for this
food. Amen.” Then the baby claps happily, until the next person comes to eat, and the prayer must be repeated.

For Nathaniel, believing in God is a comfort. It gives him a way to think about death. This fall, he and Tristan were given kittens by some family friends. Nathaniel became attached to his quickly, holding it, and following it around the barn. He also helped make a special place for the kittens, where they would be safe from Alex, the dog who kills cats. One day, when Vicki went out to the barn, she found that Nathaniel’s kitten had been killed by Alex. She told Nathaniel right away.

“Nathaniel, come here, please! I have to talk to you. When I went out to the barn today, Daddy found your cat, dead. Your little kitten.” As he begins to cry, Vicki is ready to comfort him. “Okay, listen to me, it’s okay, it’s okay. Alex got to it. It’s my fault, because I left it running around this morning, and I’m sorry. If you would like, we can go over to Freddy and Flora’s and get you another one.”

With a catch in his breath, Nathaniel asks her, “Right now?” “Right now.” “Okay.” “Is that all right? Okay. Do you think we could say just a little prayer about your kitten?” “Mm hm.” “Do you want to say it?” “Yeah.” “Okay, you say it.” Nathaniel clasps his hands together, bows his head, and sniffs a few times while he composes his thoughts. “Lord, be with my kitten. . . . His spirit is still alive. . . . Amen.” “Amen.”

WITH THE milk industry struggling to stay alive, it is surprising that Mark plans to stay in farming for another twenty years or so. He would like it if one of his children would take over the farm, but he doesn’t think it’s likely. “I think Tristan’s too smart to come back to farming. There are a lot of things he could do if he wanted to.” So Mark doesn’t want to push.

That future is far away for Mark, and he doesn’t think about it much. “I don’t think the next eight or ten years are going to be that different from the last eight or ten. I think it’s going to continue to be a struggle economically. I think as the kids grow older, the farm itself is going to take less importance, and trying to include activities with the children will probably become more important. As the kids move up into more activities they’ll be involved in, I’ll probably be involved in them too, hopefully.

“And that may mean that I have to hire some help, whether I can afford it or not. And hopefully I’ll be able to afford it, but even if it isn’t, we’ll work around it, cuz it’s important for me to be with them. To share in their activities, too. As Angelina gets older, Vicki may work part time. I think she has a desire to, and that would add a considerable amount of income. That would allow me to cut back on cows, and give me a few more hours of free time. That’s a possibility.”

Vicki doesn’t favor the idea of working away from the farm. “I don’t want to, financially I may have to, just to help support the farm. But if I can substitute [teach], and make, you know, $150 a week, I would be happy subbing, instead of going into an office.”

About passing the farm on to their children, Vicki says, “Someday he will, hopefully, hand them [the reins of control] over to one of the kids. And I’m gonna take him away from this place. Because I know that if he was still around here, he would still be in that barn.” Farming is in Mark’s history, and it is in his blood. Even though fifteen years ago Vicki had no idea that she would become involved in farming, her dedication is as steadfast as Mark’s.

“I’d like to see our farm stay in the family. I’d like to see one of my children take it over. I would like to see a partnership of some sort, with one of my children. And being able to support two families on this type of farm. We may have to enlarge, which would mean eventually having to go into our equity, on the farm, and borrow on it. And make revisions in the farm. Staying together as a family, keeping this farm, fighting for this farm. Because the time may come when there’s going to be very few farmers left.

“I want to be one of them. I want to be one of the farmers left.”

Left: Mark milking cows.
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No. 35:—Folk Culture (Popular Culture): Two monuments (Paul Bunyan, Woodman's Memorial); folk group Schooner fare; Inner Maine (photography); Bingo Fever; Junkyards of Mancured Maine.

No. 36:—Jamaican Apple Pickers; Flea Market; Peaks Island.

No. 37:—(Maine's New and Old Ethnic Groups, Part 1): Cambodians; First Generation (Austria, Italy, Afghanistan, Ireland); Finnish.

No. 38:—(Maine's New and Old Ethnic Groups, Part II): Irish of Portland; Swedes of Aroostook; French of Lewiston; a Russian church in Richmond.

No. 39:—Salt sponsored Folk and Popular Culture conference (From Folk to Pop and Back Again); Maine diners; Selling the Folk: Marketing Maine Culture.

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