TATTOO ERNIE, like many Mainers, marches to a different drummer. So do stone cutter Henry Bray and farmer Eric Brandt-Meyer.
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Cover: Ernie Villeneuve in his tattoo parlor on Congress Street in Portland. Photograph: Robyn Redman.
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Salt Magazine

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Address: Salt Magazine, P.O. Box 4077, 19 Pine Street, Portland, Maine 04101 Telephone: (207) 761-0660

Staff:
Pamela Holley Wood, director
R. Todd Hoffman, photographic director
Hugh T. French, research associate
Jade Elliott, assistant director
Faye Eaton, bookkeeper
George Hughes, design consultant

Contributors:
Zena Calhoun, Beth Greenfield, Anne Hunter, Michelle Lambert-Williamson, Julia Mickenberg, Maryanne Mott, Amy Potokar, Robyn Redman, Andrew Reiner, Julia Rodriguez

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A.A. Bird Professor of History, University of Maine

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LABOR DAY,
NEW YEAR’S DAY,
VALENTINE’S DAY,
MEMORIAL DAY,
FOURTH OF JULY,
CHRISTMAS,
VETERAN’S DAY,
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ABOUT THIS ISSUE—The forces of change and tradition are always a part of any region and Maine is no exception. Sometimes these forces are at odds with each other, sometimes not. Witness the rapid growth over the last decade of a new aquaculture industry along the eastern coast of the state. This industry represents immense change to the coastal fisheries, but at the same time sustains a traditional working link to the sea, albeit in a new form. A major subject of this issue explores the issue of the importance of natives to a place, using as an example the small, picturesque and historic town of Castine. The same forces of change and tradition are at work here. The historic landscape of the Castine peninsula has been preserved to a remarkable extent. Summer folk continue to come to Castine as they have for more than a century. The Maine Maritime Academy continues an institutional and economic presence begun by the Eastern Normal School in 1867. And yet we listen to 80 plus year old Castine native, Phil Perkins, bemoan the loss of Castine natives living in the town.

The explosion of property values during the past two decades (never mind the recent decline) has prevented many natives from living where they were born. We know and hear of a whole generation of young Maine natives forced to live one, two or more towns inland from the coastal communities they grew up in. We see historic buildings remain in Castine and elsewhere. We see historic landscapes remain as well. But what of “historic” people, those people whose families have lived in a place as long as any remaining building? If value is placed on the creations (buildings, farmscapes), should there be corresponding value placed on the creators or on the descendants of the creators themselves? Is it enough to see these remnants of buildings and landscapes left behind by people who have moved away, lived in and enjoyed by those who can afford to stay?

CONTRIBUTORS

ZENA CALHOUN came to Salt in the fall of 1990 from small Coker College in South Carolina. One of only a handful of Afro-Americans at this college, she sought out and photographed an Afro-American church community in Maine along with photographing Maine barbershops that appear in this issue.

BETH GREENFIELD was attracted to the natives of the “tiny, little, beautiful ” town of Castine in part because she grew up in suburban New Jersey where she says, “No one’s from.” An English major at the University of Hartford, she was at Salt in the fall of 1991.

MICHELLE LAMBERT-WILLIAMSON brought her photojournalism interests to Salt from Western Kentucky University during the summer of 1991. Then for eight weeks, she took aim with her camera at the Good Earth Farm family and operation in Freeport.

JULIA MICKENBERG was a researcher’s researcher when she came to Salt from Brown University in the summer of 1990. She found out more about barbershops than we ever knew. Some of what she found appears in this issue.

MARYANNE MOTT knew the coast of Maine and its granite for many years before she came to Salt in the fall of 1991. She is now working on a show of her photographs documenting a sense of place—rodeos, towns, landscapes—in Park County, Montana.

AMY POTOKAR hails from Wisconsin and came to Salt in the fall of 1991 by way of graduation from Stephens College in Missouri. She found her story on the working of granite in Maine today as hard as the rock itself.

ROBYN REDMAN brought her large energies and laugh from the graduate program in photography at Ohio University to Salt in the fall of 1990. She found Maine and us infectious. She has now returned as the staff photographer for the Bar Harbor Times.

ANDREW REINER went looking for a “standard, stereotypical Maine farmer” when he came to Salt in the summer of 1991. A graduate student in writing at Towson State University, he turned off on the wrong road and ended up on the Good Earth Farm.

JULIA RODRIGUEZ was described as the quintessential looking Salt student, nose ring and all, when she came to us in the fall of 1991. A photography major at Hartford Art School, her nose for a story took her along the coast to Castine.
Dear Salt,

Jennifer Freed's “Making Minyan” [issue #41] is charming, well written and well informed. My concern is that the average reader might come away with the erroneous impression that Jewish life in Maine as a whole is dying out. Those "other" synagogues, built outside of the original areas of Jewish settlement are doing fine. . . . True, the nature of the service, the language of prayer and gender barriers have changed. So too has the membership of most synagogues. It is not at all uncommon for more than twenty percent or so of the people active in a Jewish congregation to be converts from other faiths. Judaism in Portland, or Maine or North America for that matter isn’t disappearing. It’s simply changing.

Rabbi Douglas Weber
Temple Shalom, Synagogue-Center
Auburn, Maine

Dear Salt,

As a federal prisoner I get moved around the country every year or two and it’s difficult and costly to get my mail rerouted each time. The prison system will not forward any mail. I was born and raised on Mount Desert Island and have a deep love for the state of Maine. It was for that reason that a very good friend of mine first purchased a gift subscription to Salt for me. . . . I like the stories about the old ways of doing things, the how to make soap or dry fish, snowshoes, anything to do with being self-sufficient. I enjoy the stories about the old people, most of my friends are very old people. I’ve lost some friends and most of my accent over the past ten years that I’ve had to be away from home so I grab any little piece of Maine I can.

A Salt reader
Milan, Michigan

Dear Salt,

I am an old waterman retired from the sea now, and I like that you have good pictures and words of fisherfolk, since we are not the beloved people in this nation of computer witlessness. Keep your bow to the wind and your sea anchor handy.

Stan Fullerton (Stan’s daughter lives on Peaks Island)
Fortuna, California

Fast Forward & Rewind

WHO WE’VE TALKED TO
AND WHO YOU’LL MEET
IN FUTURE ISSUES

▼ “Nope! Nope! You’re desperately wrong! None of them here!” That’s one of the responses Laura Burden from Connecticut College got when she first went looking for women ministers in the state. Then she found that Maine has more women ministers than the national average. But why? Is Maine more progressive? You’ll find out in Salt’s upcoming issue about women.

▼ When Herman Butler went to Boothbay Harbor 13 years ago, he was the novelty in town. People could pinpoint every meal he ate. When he moved to Portland, they thought he was a pimp. Now this 60-year-old black man from Caledonia, Mississippi lives in Brunswick. He has found respect and security in this almost 97% white college town. Kerry Dakin a white, college, history student tells Herman’s story.

▼ Dan Bigman, a student from Emerson College, got hit by “that Greenville feeling” when he went to explore the jumping-off point for the Great North Woods. In Greenville he met 19-year-old E.J., who says, “It’s almost like the friggin’ town is a friggin’ spirit in itself. It’s almost like the town is a person. A really cool person that everybody knows, that everybody likes to be around.”

▼ Paul, Dick, and Bob have a way of life that didn’t invent itself out of the 90s language of recycling. Elka Uchman, from Bowdoin, finds out about Paul’s “Strugglebuggy,” Dick’s hubcaps and Bob’s treasure hunts.
SALT SENSE: EDITORIAL

“IT TAKES A SPECIAL person to live in an area where you don’t need all the material things in life. I call them the things domesticated mortals need.”

Kathy Hegarty laughed in her hearty way. She was talking to a Salt team in her home in Jackman, Maine, on October 9, 1986. She was then in her mid forties and in her element. Dressed in the jungle camouflage uniform she wore as a Maine guide, she was deftly skinning out a wild grouse she had killed that morning. So quick and sure was she that it took only ten minutes of a two hour tape recorded interview Salt had with her on that day, an interview catalogued as number 86.38 and filed along with hundreds of other oral history interviews and photographs in the Salt archive.

The three young women who were interviewing and photographing Kathy at work were fascinated with her. Two were Mainers, Carol Kuhn and Maria Hazen, and the third was from the South, Camille Sturdivant, who has since made Maine her home.

Kathy represented everything they had not expected to find in the Maine woods. She was a woman expertly doing what they thought only men did and she took to it as naturally as a duck to water.

Much of this had to do with how she felt about the outdoors. “I am the only one in my family that does anything like that in the outdoors.” The rest of her family were back in Nashua, New Hampshire. “They all think I’m crazy. They all have beautiful homes. Their life is furnishing a home. Mine isn’t.

“Mine is in the outdoors. I can’t stand staying inside. And I love to grouse hunt. And scout around and everything. I just love it here.”

Here was Jackman, along the Kennebec River where Maine ends and Canada begins. “It’s a very secluded, unique area. A lot of wilderness. You’re a fifty mile circumference to the nearest village.”

It was the exploring of this wilderness that excited her. She paused to regret that so few people now “have the instinctive desire to go off on their own to explore the area. You know, maybe it’s part of our American heritage that we’ve lost.”

For Kathy, scouting was more important than the game she might bring back. “A million acres right in


the back woods here that’s not posted. We scout all over. That’s the thrill. If we do get something, that’s just extra, yeah, like a fringe benefit. But if we don’t get anything it doesn’t matter. But that doesn’t happen too often.”

Kathy was one of the first women guides in Maine, if not the first, having passed the exam in 1975. When Salt interviewed her in 1986 she had been guiding over a decade and had hunted since she was 15 years old. Her husband, Jack, taught her to hunt and was her longtime partner in the woods, as well as her business partner in the camps they ran in Maine, and later, the motel they owned in Florida.

SIX YEARS later Kathy Hegarty was dead, killed in her own home by the bullets of three law enforcement officers. Protests over her violent death have taken place all over Maine and Salt adds its voice to those protests. That she should be tracked to her home and gunned down like a mad dog in the middle of the night is shocking and unjustifiable.

Kathy Hegarty was a plucky woman with a zest for life. She knew the woods well and she valued its spaces. It is not surprising that she told noisy campers intruding on her space to move on—and that failing, fired a couple of shots in the air to scare them off. She was not the first woodsman to do that, nor is she likely to be the last.

The relentless manhunt and killing that followed raise many questions. Would the five officers who tracked her down have pursued a man in the same way? Might they not have laughed and said, “Well, old Joe is at it again. Guess he showed those campers” and then given Old Joe a verbal dressing down the next day? Was this woman hunter gallling to them, a small compact smiling woman who could outsmart them and outshoot them in the woods?

Kathy Hegarty told Salt you should always be on guard in the woods. For her the danger that lurked there was not the danger of the wilds but the danger of the agents of civilization.

Pamela Holley Wood
"O, ARE YOU going to do anything radical with your hair today?" I ask a slightly elderly man at the Senior Citizen Barbershop in Portland. He is waiting patiently in his sky blue cap for a haircut.

"I'd like to have more of it, but I'm afraid that's beyond question. I'm going to settle for a trim around the ears. This is my monthly visit."

"Do you always come on Thursdays?"

"No, sometimes I come on Mondays. Whenever Norman is here. I just drop in. It's called potluck. Are you taking a survey?"

I have interrupted the daily routine at this Congress Street barbershop. The shop is right by a tattoo parlor, and directly across from Joe's Smoke Shop. Just past Longfellow Square, where Henry Wadsworth Longfellow sits immortalized in green copper. He looks down from his pedestal on benches full of elderly people and drunks who watch the passers-by and feed the pigeons.

The barbershop is an old man's world, not mine. On nice days I see them leaning on the brick windowsill, underneath the faded canopy and the painted wooden letters: "BARBERSHOP." The white paint is peeling off the top of the 'S.' Beside the "Discount to Senior Citizens" sign hangs the barber pole, stripes curling silently upward.

Inside, the men sit around waiting for haircuts, discussing the local news, reading the newspaper, watching the barber as he cuts. The murmur of their voices coming through the doorway draws me into the shop.

Barbers have been around almost as long as hair. And from Samson's strength to long-haired hippies, from dreadlocks and Afros to Hari Krishnas and holy bald priests, from flat-topped soldiers to side-burned swingers of the seventies, hair has always told as much about us as how we dress, where we live and what we do for work. Who we let cut it tells something about us, too.

"The young ones are gettin' their hair styled," says Sam Cavallero, a semi-retired barber on Portland's Munjoy Hill. "The old ones still have their original haircuts, by a barber. The tops." He adds wistfully, "There are not many old-timers like me left." Only 11 Portland barbers are listed in the 1990-91 Maine Business and Professional Directory. The 1980 edition of the Maine Register lists 41, and for 1950 I found 86.

But they still line up for haircuts at the Senior Citizen Barbershop.

Three men are sitting in metal, vinyl-cushioned chairs against the wall. Norman Millette, the barber, is nowhere in sight, but a man wearing a "Sarasota" baseball cap says Norman will be back soon. He is drinking coffee and smoking a Rold Gold. "Come in and wait," he says.

Clutter fills every corner and covers every wall of the 155 square-foot triangular room. Two barber chairs, six waiting chairs, a file cabinet, sink and gumball machine. A guitar case hanging from the ceiling. A bumper sticker on the mirror that says, "BALD PEOPLE ARE REAL HAIR RAZORS." A daily calendar showing yesterday's date. By the open window in the back, on a stack of fat yellow telephone books, a television that no one is watching.

"We have it on all day," says Ed, the man with the Sarasota hat. "They used to have opera on there all the time. Now they all want Geraldo. Everybody likes to watch him."

No one seems to mind waiting. No one seems to mind that the barber is missing. In fact, no one even seems to need a haircut.

"You guys going to be hanging out here all day?"

"No, not I," answers the polite man next to Ed. "I'm just leaving because of you," he adds quickly, "I'm just leaving." He makes no motion at all to leave.

Ed definitely isn't going anywhere. "I just come in here and kill time," he says matter-of-factly. He is always around, keeping Norman company, making sure Norman's shop runs smoothly. "When he wants to run errands, he goes. When he wants to go to the bank and get money and go cat or..." Ed's hoarse voice trails off. His breath smells of stale cigarettes and coffee.

"I drink enough of it," he says. "Keeps me awake so I can watch you girls go up and down Congress Street."

Ed has known Norman for about thirty years and is the authority on the man and his shop.

"We started off here as a sports barbershop," says Ed. We used to all be sports fans, no matter what it was, all the guys come in here and talk about football, baseball, basketball, hockey, whatever." Now all the sports fans have grown old, and Norman offers a discount to senior citizens to keep business up.

"Norman don't get no trouble," Ed tells me. Once Norman threw a guy right out of the shop. The man kept moving around in the chair, telling Norman what he wanted. Norman said, "I'll give you what you want, just stop moving around.

"At my age I don't care about style. I'm just interested in getting a little hair off around my ears."

Right: Norman Millette

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A few minutes later, the guy came or I'll throw you out.” The guy moved, and Norman threw him out.

“We're all nice people here,” Ed tells me. “We'll all take care of you.”

“This is one of the best barbershops in town.”

“One of the busiest.”

“He's always busy in here.”

“He's kindly to old people.”

“Does he get many young people?” I ask, looking around the room at the white hair and wrinkles.

“I don't know, most of the young people around here going to—you know, they go for the style, and at my age I don’t care about style. I'm just interested in getting a little hair off around my ears.”

“Here's Norman now,” says a voice, and all eyes turn to the man coming through the door.

“When I leave, something always happens,” says Norman with a grin. His salt and pepper hair is very short, and he has gold, wire-rimmed glasses and a moustache that curls when I got out of high school, a friend of mine was going for it, I says ‘Well, I'll try it.’ I musta liked it.” He chuckles. “I enjoy talking to people and what not, so it turned out all right.”

“You've probably cut some people's hair their whole lives.”

“Yeah, that's right.” He thinks for a moment. “Oh yeah. Like there's this one guy who comes in, John Murphy. I cut his hair when his mother brought him in for his first haircut. His father still comes in here. I knew his grandfather; his grandfather died not too long ago. And John, I gave him his first haircut when I was on Pine Street. He was about five or six. Now he brings his own kids for haircuts. That makes ya feel old.”

At the end of the day, the Senior Citizen Barbershop is quiet and nearly empty. Ed sits in the corner smoking a cigarette, and one young customer waits for a cut. Norman finishes with the old man in the chair who has had a little off the ears and has discussed today's golf game with Norm. Lost a ball in the sandpit, but otherwise it went well. The young man, probably in his late twenties, gets up from his seat and takes the older man's place.

“After this I'll be all through except for Mr. Sims,” says Norman.

Norman uses the electric clippers all around the head to begin and then brings out the shears. He cuts confidently, as though it is second nature, as though he could do it blindfolded. The young man looks at himself in the mirror, smiling a little self consciously. He watches the piles of light brown hair accumulate on the shoulders of his cape. Sometimes he closes his eyes with implicit faith and trust in Norman’s capabilities.

Mr. Sims comes in and Norman goes over and shuts the blinds to let people know he's closed. Mr. Sims and Norman banter about kayaking and fishing while Mr. Sims waits his turn. Norman squirts a cool puff of shaving cream onto his hand from a gold-tone automatic dispenser and puts it on the back of his customer's neck and around his ears. Then Norman pulls out a shiny straight razor, rubs it several times on the heavy leather-backed strap that hangs from the chair, and shaves with smooth, effortless strokes.

No worries, it seems, about nicking an ear, or twitching just a bit at a crucial moment. The captive man never says a word, just listens to the older men talking and stares, mesmerized by his own reflection. Norman finishes up and pushes off the cape, and there is a quick feeling of relief, release even, a regaining of identity as the man sees himself again in the green t-shirt, shorts and dockshiders he came in wearing. Now he is back to himself, only cleaner, more refined.

Norman has left his trademark, a speck of shaving cream beside one ear, but the man doesn’t notice that, nor does he seem to be bothered that his new haircut reveals a previously hidden receding hairline. Glancing last time in the mirror
Barbers once did all the unglamorous tasks that doctors shied away from, like bloodletting and pulling teeth.

Above: Bill’s Barbershop in South Paris

and touching his head, he pays Norman, picks up the motorcycle helmet he has left on his chair and leaves. The whole ritual took only about seven minutes.

“YEAH, I’M probably something like the last of the old barbers, you know?” Bill Bedard, is a small-town barber who went to barber school with Norman. He is in his mid-sixties and works only part-time now, Thursday through Saturday, in the last of the South Paris barbershops.

South Paris is one of those small towns in Oxford County with European names, like Poland and Norway. The sort of towns that people drive through without stopping. Small black painted letters say “Bill’s Barbershop,” on the door of a tiny, green, rustic-looking A-frame, next door to Ranger’s Market and right across the street from the South Paris train station. The only way anyone who didn’t know the place could ever find it is by the barber pole hung outside the window.

Bill’s shop is quieter than Norman’s, even with the pop music that plays from a tinny radio. No Eds are outside leaning on the window. The five dining room chairs for customers are empty.

“Would you like your eyebrows trimmed a little bit?” Bill asks “Doc” Merrill, who sits in the big barber chair where he has sat once a month for close to 25 years. Bill has fluffy white hair, brushed to one side, and he wears a light blue smock very similar to Norman’s.

The inside of Bill’s shop has wood paneling and a lodge sort of feeling. The most striking thing as you walk in is the wall entirely covered with pictures of wildlife—geese, ducks, deer, bears, moose.

“Yeah, I’m interested in wildlife,” says Bill. “I don’t hunt but I do fish, and I like to see the animals running around alive when there isn’t shootin’. Unless I was really hungry and had to have their meat, that would be different.”

Bill’s walls are as cluttered as Norman’s. A faded flyer near the door shows a smiling bald man and says: “Bald is Beautiful: God Made only so Many Perfect Heads. He covered the rest with hair.”

Doc and Bill talk about the “old-fashioned” contradances where Bill plays banjo and guitar in the “Bedard trio” with his wife and brother. Doc complains that Bill’s prices are too high and remembers when he only charged a dollar? They joke about
To become a barber, you can’t just buy a barber pole and a chair and set up shop

Above: Hanson’s Barber School in Lewiston

perhaps barbering can’t claim to belong to the world’s oldest profession, but there is more history behind barbering than you might imagine. References to it appear in the Bible. Haircutting was accompanied by sacred rituals and ceremonies in many societies. In Fiji, for example, the chief of the Namosi used to eat a man by way of precaution before having his haircut. The Golden Bough tells us that in New Zealand, the most sacred day of the year was that appointed for haircutting. Under Alexander the Great, the clean shaven Greek army had an advantage because they could grasp their bearded enemies by the hair on their chins.

Barbering was introduced to Rome in 296 B.C., where it became practice for free men to shave whereas slaves had to keep their beards. Rome was known for its fine baths and barbershops, which were also centers for daily news and gossip.

In the early Christian era, barbers began to expand their repertoire of services. Barbers did all the unglamorous tasks that doctors shied away from, like blood-letting and pulling teeth, and for over a thousand years they were known as barber-surgeons. The red and white stripes of the barber pole actually come from the tradition of hanging blood-stained bandages to dry outside the shop. Later on, they also administered herbs and other medications. An official barber-surgeon alliance formed in France in the year 1096.

The barber-surgeon alliance was dissolved in 1745 as scientific advances made it less acceptable to visit a barber than a dentist or a doctor for a toothache or cold. Following this milestone came a general decline in the barbering profession. “There was a slow degradation of the art,” claims the 1966 Standardized Textbook of Barbering, “and by the end of the nineteenth century barbershops had become untidy, unsanitary and undignified.” Barber
bershops came to be characterized as centers of base conversation and reading rooms for risque magazines, and barbers were no longer held in high esteem in the community for their skills and knowledge.

All that changed in 1889 in America, when efforts got underway to upgrade the profession. The first barber schools were established, and over the years minimum education requirements and uniform standards were implemented. The barbering profession was threatened in the late 1960s when many of the barber’s former customers started wearing their hair long and stopped going to the barber.

“I think the time when the Beatles came around, you know, with their long hairdo, that changed the concept of the whole barber business,” speculates Sam Cavallero, the Munjoy Hill barber. “When they saw all those old-timer haircuts, they probably figured well, the barber couldn’t do it, you know?”

In Norman’s shop, the red and white stripes on the pole have at times had more than historic connotation.

“When I was on Pine Street, there was an old barber,” he tells me. “He’s passed away now. Jack Barber, he’s the one I started off with. In fact, his son owns Barber Food. Old Jack’s an Armenian. And there was a guy, Bob Mercer, had a little mole in the back of his neck.

“And Jack says, ‘I’ll take that out for ya.’ Bob says, ‘Go ahead.’

“I said, ‘Jack, don’t do it. Don’t do it.’

“So I go to dinner. When I come back, he had just started cuttin’ into him. Well, I didn’t want to get him shook up, you know, why get him nerved up. And he took that thing out just as neat as could be. Cut around it with a razor and pulled it right out. Let it bleed a little bit, then he packed it with a septic powder, put a bandage on it, and he says, ‘You’ll be all right.’

“He shoulda been a surgeon, ’cause he was just as calm about it as can be. The guy in the chair wasn’t drunk or anything. Bob was just as sober—Bob was just as calm. He had big hands, Jack, he had a big grip, and I don’t know if he pinched it a certain way you wouldn’t feel it.

“I never was so surprised. He’d be well over a hundred now, Jack. ‘We used to do that in the old country,’ he says. God, I said, ‘Better not do it in this country.’ Can you imagine the barber inspector walked in? Or, another thing that worried me, what if he can’t stop the bleeding? You’d drag him to the Mercy Hospital and say, ‘Well, we tried to operate and wasn’t too successful!’ We’d all be sent back to Armenia, and I’m not Armenian!”

Reggie has taught haircuts ranging from the crew cuts of the fifties up through the styles of today. The haircut Reggie remembers with the most amusement is what he calls the “Elvis Presley,” a popular style in the seventies.

“Elvis Presley was the cut back in those days, when they brushed the sides back into a ‘D.A.’” Reggie explains. (D.A. stands for ‘Duck’s Ass,’ but it took some cajoling for Reggie to say anything more than the abbreviation). In years following, Reggie recalls, “they would do the flat top on top. That’s what we used to call the old Elvis Presley cut.”

Training for the barber is no quick and easy process. You can’t just buy a barber pole and a chair and set up shop. That became clear when leafing through the 1966 Standardized Textbook of Barbering, (the only edition in the Portland Public Library). As one might expect, the book has sections explaining the fundamentals of haircutting, shaving, honing and strapping and shampooing. But it also has chapters covering anatomy, digestion, circulation, musculature, head bones, the nervous system, skin, light therapy and diseases. Plus, a detailed section on “Business Principles,” including shop management, selling, public relations and ethics.

Since 1937, Maine has required all barbers to get a license, either by going to barber school for nine months or by completing an ap-
Today is Saturday at the Senior Citizen Barbershop in Portland, which means the regulars who come during the week have to share their turf with a younger, weekend crowd.

Two men are waiting, neither of whom have any hope of getting a senior citizen discount. One of them has spiked blond hair and looks like he is in his early twenties. He has come dressed in full pink and black lycra cycling regalia to get a flat top. Bike seat stowed safely under his chair, the cyclist looks around in the room and smiles self-consciously. Next to him is a tattooed man with shoulder-length hair hangs limply under a navy fishing cap, and his long moustache spills over the letters L-O-V-E spelled out on the tattoo of an anchor on one arm, unkept whisker fuzz on his face. He look, you know?” The cyclist listens know? It’s a matter of getting a he says. “I mean it’ll grow again, you know.”

An older couple comes in. They sit in the two empty chairs by the door. The husband wears a navy blue baseball cap that says “Bay Side Dump Ranger.”

“Hey, hey!” says Norman to the familiar face. “Sorry to hear about your brother. Passed away, huh?”

“Yeah. Jeez yeah.” He and his wife settle in to watch the show.

“Look at this guy!” says the friend, “he loves it!” He makes a hooting laugh. “And I love it too.”

Mohawk Man is in Sanitation.

“My grandfather is.”

An older couple comes in. They sit in the two empty chairs by the door. The husband wears a navy blue baseball cap that says “Bay Side Dump Ranger.”

“Yeah!” he says. “Yup, go for it! Good old boot camp.”

“Oh, you Cherokee!” yells the long-haired friend from across the room.

“It’s all right, I am one,” he says, never taking his eyes off his glistening reflection in the mirror. “My grandfather is.”

Norman explains a few things to him about the procedure, but the man just looks in the mirror with determination and says, “Do what you gotta do, Barber.” The electric razor starts whirring. Hair starts dropping. “Yeah!” he says. “Yup, go for it! Good old boot camp.”

“Now I’m bad,” says Mohawk Man as the whirring of Norman’s clippers finally ceases. Norman pulls off the cape to reveal Mohawk Man’s bare torso, and he gets up and turns to smile at the crowd with gleaming eyes.

“No way would I ever get that. Oh, no way would you touch my head. Uh uh,” says the long-haired friend.

“I’m a man,” replies Mohawk man, touting his new do like a proud rooster. “You gotta be a man to do this.”

The friend turns to Norman. “You’re a fucking butcher. Oh, you butchered his hair.”

“Well that’s what he wanted,” answers Norman calmly. Prancing across the room with his shirt draped over one of his bare, tattooed arms, Mohawk Man eyes the husband in the “Dump Ranger” hat, who, with his wife, has been quietly enjoying the spectacle. Both work for Portland Public Works—Mohawk Man is in Sanitation.

“Check it out, eh, what do you think?” The older man doesn’t know what to say, so he just smiles. Mohawk Man leaves after waving goodbye to the crowd.

His boss’ll be surprised Monday morning when he sees him!” says Norman.

“Gonna be Mr. T tonight, boy! Watch out!” yells Tattoo Man for Joe, that’s fine too.”

Barber’s getting into it,” says Tattoo Man, who is gradually turning into Mohawk Man. “Singin’! Yeah!” Norman just keeps shaving, ignoring the comments. No one else says anything. “Yeah, a real Cherokee now, boy.”

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“His boss’ll be surprised Monday morning when he sees him!” says Norman.

“They’ll probably throw him on the dump and keep the trash,” says the husband in the “Dump Ranger” hat.

“Oh boy,” Norman says into the cyclist’s half-finished flat-top.

Editor’s note: Hanson’s Barber School in Lewiston is no longer in operation due to the poor health of Reggie Gousse.
TATTOO PARLOR

A Photographic Essay by Robyn Redman

Tattoo artist Ernie Villeneuve finishes an arm tattoo on Toby Giles in his Portland shop.
LEFT: Toby Giles engages in horseplay, while “Tattoo Ernie”, center, gives a tattoo to Fred Maloy, with Fredrick Stanley, right. Above top: Kelly Klein ponders while her son, Jonathan Robert Klein sleeps. Above below: Tattoo Ernie at work.
Moments of commitment for Dawn Dyers.
Granite ledge rises up, surrounding the water-filled quarry. In the distance, a red canoe floats. Sunlight dances on the rocks and catches embedded quartz crystal chips. A tree lying in the water, weighed down by tons of stone reaches out, its moss covered limbs coiling around its captor. The trees in the area are virtually motionless. The sound of the drill seems muted in this overgrown, tranquil place.

Gibran jumps off the rock, still bouncing, side effects of drilling. His tye dye and old plaid shirt smell of patchouli oil. Dust covers his shoes. He turns off the air compressor and the noise of the drill subsides. He lights a cigarette and takes a break.

"It’s a lot of hard work."

At 21, Gibran Buell is young in the trade, but intensely focused. He’s one in a long line of artisans. A line that started off in Maine in the early 1800s and thrived for over 100 years, fell apart in just 17. In 1889 there were 62 million paving blocks made in Maine, and in 1931, production dropped to 22 million.

Today granite is a luxury. Elegant benches, backyard walkways, and garden sculptures enhance the yards of the wealthy. Granite steps cost $250, twice as much as cement ones, and an average granite fireplace costs between $3,000 and $5,000, twice as much as a brick one.

Only one commercial quarry still exists in Maine on Crotch Island. Only a handful of men still cling to working with granite, each plying the tradition in a different way.

Quarrymen like the four on Crotch Island, where work is slow and boredom comes easily. Stone cutters like Henry Bray and Norman Casas, both teaching the craft to others. And young men like Gibran Buell who are starting in a trade that is only a remnant of what it once was. All of them hoping for a modern granite revival, or at least that it won’t die out altogether.

"I think it’ll keep going."

"They’re using stone a lot more."

"Yeh, it’ll come back again."

ONE DAY, AT THE Common Ground Fair in Windsor, where tradespeople show their goods, Gibran Buell watched Norman Casas split granite. It was then he decided to carry on the tradition.

"I never really set myself on a plan. It just sort of came along."
For two summers, Norman and Gibran worked together. Norman traded his knowledge for granite and the young man’s help.

At 16, Gibran learned the techniques. How to swing a hammer. How to hit his chisel and not his hand. How to “pull” a piece of granite out of a quarry. And most importantly, how to find the grain in stone and cut along that grain without wasting any material.

“You have to study the stone and work it very slowly because if you rush it at all, more than likely it will shatter into a billion pieces. That would be the end of that. It’s sort of humbling, you learn to do it a different way. You always take a risk when you cut a piece. You have to allow mistakes. It’s a lot of hard work. It’s an art.” When the day is over, he’s “tired. In pain. Slaved. Good.”

“I think there’s definitely a market out there, it just has to be hooked into. I want to find the medium between large curbing companies that flood the market with cheap granite, and the exclusive, high priced, ornamental pieces.” A place between mass production and sculptures.

One day he hopes to have employees handling the more practical side of the business. He already owns his own quarry and 23 acres just down the road from his parents. He has plans to build a house there in the near future.

“I always want to have a tie to Sullivan. I’ve been here all my life.”

For now, he lives on his parent’s land, in a small cabin, alone, with no running water. His expenses are low, he doesn’t have much overhead. “My dad gives me a great deal on the granite.” Not for a price, but for a split in the profits.

Right now, work has been on and off. But he’s just starting out. The small scale orders like steps and posts and the mooring stones for boats like he’s doing today, pay for his new tools and that’s about it. But he knows what he needs to do.

“Working with granite is pretty much the thing that I like to do the most. Just kick back and do it I guess. It’s a good profession. Honest money. I want to do this for the rest of my life.”

The one thing that bothers him about granite cutting is that he may be “raping and pillaging” one of the earth’s natural resources.

“I suppose it’s all in the scale that you do it on and I’m not really doing anything too detrimental. I am taking something away, but it’s just being transported to a different form. It’s also nice to know that granite isn’t going anywhere. It’s fairly beautiful when the quarries fill up with water. You can use them for aqua farming.”

Gibran’s father uses their inactive quarries to breed polywogs, minnows and salamanders.

Two of the quarries on the Buell land are lost among the trees and grass and hills, almost hidden. But the third quarry has a new ledge, a clean cut, a freshly worked look.

“There’s nothing I’d rather do than be in the quarry on a nice day and be chunking out a nice piece. I really love the sound of a piece coming off, fresh granite is very enjoyable to me. It’s unique.”

Acres away, a waterfall cascades from the top of a granite overhang into a pool. You can’t see where it starts. A pile of rocks, defying gravity, rests in the middle of a hill. If you listen hard, you can almost hear the echoes of many hammers that used to bang on this granite, but mostly you notice the hum of Gibran Buell’s drill while he works at the quarry, alone.

**Crotch Island**

Crotch Island, a quarter of a mile off of Stonington, is the only active commercial quarry left in Maine. And one of the only quarries in the United States with purple granite.

The “T” shaped drill, stretching toward the sky is the only activity on the island. Right now, 150 blocks, 14-feet-deep, 14-feet-long, six-feet-wide, are waiting. Some are waiting to be drilled, some are waiting to be moved, and some, it seems, are just waiting to be waiting. Two 16-foot-drill bits work their way into one of the blocks as David drags on a cigarette. He waits for the drill to come up before turning it off, grabs each steel bit from its socket and places it on a pile to be sharpened. Shoving new bits into the drill, latching them in place, turning it back on, and taking a few steps backwards, he lights another cigarette and stares at the drill watching it lower into the granite. He moves only to keep himself warm. Twenty minutes, about three cigarettes later, David repeats the process. Every hour and a half the men rotate between sharpening, drilling, staring, smoking and resting. Eight hours a day. Five days a week. Seven months at a time.

Benny Oliver, the foreman, says that this year has been slower than usual.

“Last year we had everything here. We had tools, everything, two compressors, two drilling machines, we had double the crew. We worked hours straight all the time. Last year we quarried 100,000 cubic feet. This season, we’re just drilling.”
"You have to study the stone and work it very slowly because if you rush it at all, more than likely it will shatter into a billion pieces."

Above: Stone cutting demonstration at the Common Ground Fair

Last year the men of Crotch not only drilled granite blocks, but they also pulled them out of the ledges, transported them from the quarry to the barge with a crane and sent most of them to their destinations.

Crotch Island’s purple granite is one of thousands of different granites in the world all made up of the same basic elements in varying proportions, creating hundreds of colors. From purple, which looks gray but has colored flecks, to red, or salmon, Maine has its share forming and coloring the landscape. Feldspar, the most abundant mineral, colors granite, ranging from milky white to midnight blue. Quartz, with its shimmer and mystical qualities, looks like glass. And, Biotite, or black mica, is black and flaky, giving granite the pepper part to its salt and pepper look. Most of the differences in the stone have to do with the overall age, the grain size and grain evenness, and the quantities of each mineral and its color. The closer together the minerals, the harder the granite.

The granite from Crotch Island is said to be one of the best in the world, the strongest, with clean, straight cuts. In the early 19th century it was transported to its destination by schooners and barges. It’s the granite that was used to build the Brooklyn Bridge and the Rockefeller Center Plaza.

Now, granite blocks from last year’s work line the dock with nowhere to go. Just waiting for their time. From the dock you can see an old power plant and a boarded up office building, reminders of a much more active past. No water runs on this 25-acre granite island today, no toilet bowls flush.

And the offices for this operation aren’t even in Maine. They are in Rhode Island at New England Stone, a company owned by Tony Ramos who also owns 12 other quarries throughout the United States. He bought and reopened Crotch Island in 1979, 15 years after poor money management preceded by the onslaught of concrete and cement forced a shutdown. Before that, Crotch had been continually active for almost one hundred years.

The ride to where all the action takes place today is a half a mile on a windy, bumpy road in Benny’s old blue pickup truck. The drive is deceiving. Foliage conceals the granite. Overgrown trees smack the side
Last year we had everything here. We had tools, everything, two compressors, two drilling machines, we had double the crew....

Last year we quarried 100,000 cubic feet. This season, we're just drilling."

Above: Richard Stinson (left) and David Thompson (right)

Left: Crotch Island activity
The men of Crotch also play mean practical jokes on each other. Like the time Dickey put the cardboard bottom of his Twinkie package in someone's sandwich.

Richard misses last year when there were more men to laugh with. But he thinks the industry will pick up. "I think it'll keep going, yeh, it'll come back again."

If it doesn't, he'll move to a different operation, leaving Stonington and his roots. He's already had to travel to other quarries owned by New England Stone in the winter when Crotch shuts down. When he's not working, he and David catch a ride to Phare Island. But every summer, they return home to Crotch Island.

The steady money is what keeps him at Crotch Island. Nine years ago, Richard was selling fish. But then he heard he could make eight dollars an hour quarrying on Crotch. He gets good medical benefits too, even in the winter when he collects unemployment. Richard is 30, single and content. He always has a cup of coffee in his hand. He likes to smoke. He likes to laugh. He likes to tell stories about the tourists that flock to Stonington in the summer.

"They start asking questions and asking directions. There's been 10,000 people lost on [the] island and it's almost impossible. Stonington is one big loop, after a while you'll come out somewhere. [But] the tourists [drive] around and around again. We just wave at 'em." David, with a knowing nod, laughs with Richard.

Next to the trailer a wood burning stove pumps out heat and smoke from inside a crooked shed. Warm, moist and stagnant, this place seems to breed flies. Hundreds of tools lie on shelves, unused, rusty. Back in the old days, this was probably a very active blacksmithing shed where all these tools were sharpened in haste and hurried back out to the men cutting stone.

ENRY BRAY conducts a battle between stone and fire. His pudgy, wrinkled hands loosely clutch a torch used to flame finish the surface of a slab of granite, soon to be a large step. It looks rough, but it's smooth to the touch. As the stone heats up, little pieces of granite pop, or "huff-off," causing a spastic and unpredictable firecracker noise over and over again.

Henry works at Cormier Construction in Stonington. In a horse-shoe-shaped area formed by evergreens, he gracefully swings the torch back and forth. Normally he walks cautiously, making sure each step he takes is a secure one, but now he glides around the rock, intently focused on the work at hand. Henry is oblivious to his movements, his surroundings, and the cold. His arm swings. He throws the fire around the rock like a dragon in armor.

Henry Bray is called a master in his trade by his boss, Frances Cormier, and "an icon" by his peers. He is one of the only men left who worked in the industry when it was booming. He has seen it in its glory and now he is seeing it in its decline.

He bends over to pick up a hammer and chisel. Slow to stand back up, this is the only sign of an aging, 63-year-old man. His otherwise sturdy body dances alongside the granite creating a rhythm as he evens up the surface. His blue jean apron, wrapped around his hard, but obvious belly, protects his pants from burning hot chips, his legs from being singed. Henry breaks his pat-
You take just a rough piece of stone that hadn’t been nothing done to it, it’s quite a little job to take it and make something out of it.”

Above: Henry Bray

tern to watch larger chips fall to the ground. Victory. His face, marked with little red veins, remains stoic, intent, unchanged.

Henry has practiced this trade since he was 17. He started working at Crotch Island.

“Just started doing it when I was a young fellow, you know, and I’ve been doing it ever since.”

Henry worked on Crotch Island for 21 years before it shut down. With more than a hundred stone cutters, quarrymen and blacksmiths, it was one of the biggest quarrying and cutting operations in Maine.

It was where he worked on two “honorable ventures,” the Kennedy Memorial, and the Maine State Seal.

“We didn’t cut the heads on the seal. We cut up past the neck, and they had a sculptor come in at the face, but we cut everything else.”

On the island, the cutters worked in sheds right by the docks. A small locomotive brought granite from the quarry into the middle of the sheds where the stone was finished. Work was steady, year round, but the job had its danger.

“I was standing a shot away from a fellow when he got electrocuted one time. He was running a rotary saw and they had bolts in a box for fuses, and they were only supposed to take one lever at a time, which he forgot. He grabbed on both of them and they turned him black. Like the black on my bumper. Burn him right up. And there was another fellow went to grab him and it threw him right backwards.”

After the quarry on Crotch Island shut down, Henry held many different jobs, from a foreman in a packing company to a clam digger. Twenty some years passed and then he “got an urge” to get back into granite. His wife was not happy, afraid he would get the deadly silicosis, stone cutter’s consumption. Similar to black lung that miners get, granite dust coats and kills. So Henry got a respirator and went back to the stone.

“The things you like to do, you’re gonna do. That’s the challenge of it. I’m gonna tell you, you take just a rough piece of stone that hadn’t been nothing done to it, it’s quite a little job to take it and make something out of it. “I can cut pretty good stuff.”
The company also made the 16-foot drill bits used today on Crotch Island. When the drill bits used today on Crotch Island, the granite industry shrunk, Bicknell is the only company in Maine and one of only four in the United States that still makes tools for the granite industry.

It is a family business. Dave Bicknell's grandfather spent a lifetime building the company, his father spent a lifetime buying it, and his brother spent their lives expanding it, as will Dave's son Bruce and daughter Jane.

Dave's grandfather grew up during the granite boom and passed his knowledge down. Dave knows about the stone's qualities, the colors, and the strength, and about the old quarries. He knows about the men who worked it, the cutters, the quarrymen and the blacksmiths, and they know his name. A Bicknell tool can be found in almost every tool box of almost every stone cutter and quarryman across the United States, and in continents as far away as Australia.

Dave knows what happened to the granite industry in Maine. First the island quarries slowly went out of business. Huge tractor trailers that could carry granite to its destination much faster than the schooners or barges appeared. Then concrete and cement became readily available. And the United States "just turned to those materials and stopped promoting granite."

Dave knows how granite used to be cut and is fond of the "old fashioned way"—men holding hammers, banging on the stone. And he also knows that the technological advances that have replaced human hands in cutting sheds are necessary, good.

First there was the short saw, or wet saw where a machine rapidly dragged a mile-long steel wire across a piece of granite, spraying water and grit under the wire, wearing away at the stone until it split. Now huge plants in Rhode Island have 11-foot-diameter, diamond blade saws, which cut huge pieces of granite into very small slabs with clean, smooth, straight surfaces. Computers keep these factories running 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In the near future, lasers may slice right through the granite with ease.

"We have to sell our hand tools all over the entire U.S. today to equalize what we used to do in the old days, locally . . . . As far as Maine getting back into the granite business, I can't necessarily see it.

Norman looks more like an elf than a Zen karate master. He is short and tiny and the flecks of color in his hazel eyes are always grabbing the light. He has nine children.

As an independent contractor, Norman feels the pressure of so many counting on him. He takes whatever jobs he can get, whenever he can and wherever he can. He splits stone, shapes stone and trims stone. He is a carpenter, a brick mason, and a stone mason. He can even "shovel manure" if he has to. During the seven non-winter months, he pulls in anywhere from $13,000 to $40,000 working with granite. Right now he is in Nantucket doing stone work. Some years he struggles more than others, but he's surviving, doing his own thing, carving his own path. A decision he refers to as "pure stupidity."

Someone once advised him, "Norman, you don't want to be a mason, you want to be a finished carpenter. Then the only thing you have to lug is maybe a one by six piece of pine." Norman did not heed the warning.

"I can't relate to anything but somehow working with my hands, especially working with stone. Being a tradesman sort of grounds you on reality. We're doing this for a reason, there's a specific function for this stone when I am done with it. I generally feel better after I cut stone.

"People have used it for thousands of years and I think it's just ingrained in our nature to have an appreciation for it. It's got the wonders of nature in it, that's all. We walk on it. It's us and we are it."

BICKNELL Manufacturing Company of Rockland, Maine, made the old hammerheads that Gibran Buell found in his quarries. Left behind from years ago. The company also made the 16-foot drill bits used today on Crotch Island.

The company started in 1893, making all the hand tools for stone cutters and quarrymen. When the granite industry shrunk, Bicknell grew. Accepting the new era of cement and concrete, it started manufacturing construction tools as well.

"Today construction tools would be 70 to 75 percent of our business and stone cutting tools are probably 20 to 25 percent. Our dedication to stone cutting tools are probably 100 percent."

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"People have used it for thousands of years and I think it's just ingrained in our nature to have an appreciation for it. It's got the wonders of nature in it, that's all. We walk on it. It's us and we are it."

NORMAN CASAS can eat an entire bowl of oatmeal without getting any on his beard or mustache. He cuts stone in the same methodical way he circles and conquers his cereal bowl.

"I'll start from one end and I'll tap the wedges all the way down. Then I'll come back and do it again. Then, I'll wait a few minutes and I'll do it again. Towards the end, when I sort of really have a sense of how it's going to split, I will go free form or a capella.

"There's something incredible about working with stone because you are messing with one of the real constituent elements on this planet.

"Then, there's that whole Zen karate type thing. If you hit the stone with just your hammer and your chisel, it doesn't do anything, or it does something wrong, but if you focus on it, you can drive those shock waves all the way through."

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NUMBER FORTY-TWO • 29
Aftermath: Hurricane Island

Photographs by Maryanne Mott
The Quarry Years, 1873-1914
Good Earth Farm

Written by Andrew Reiner
Photography by Michelle Lambert-Williamson
GOOD EARTH FARM. The name sounds like it came from a late-night session of incense, listening to the Grateful Dead and philosophizing about Thoreau’s "Maine Woods." A Volkswagen bus, resting on the grass near the farmhouse, so old it appears to be graying, makes the farm look like an artifact. A fossil left over from the invasion of the back-to-landers, who came to Maine during the 60s and early 70s to grow their own food.

Yet Good Earth’s 105 acres are not sprouting organic vegetables and raising chemical-free livestock. Good Earth is a thriving business. The land is blooming with four acres of flowers that will be dried and sold to craft shops, four acres of pumpkins for jack-o-lanterns and pies, eight acres of adolescent Christmas trees that will be ready for sale in seven years, and 89 acres of pasture and forest.

On the first day of harvest at the farm in Freeport, Eric Brandt-Meyer and seven workers pick larkspur, long-armed flowers with tiny buds blossoming into cones. Larkspur is one of ten varieties of flowers Eric grows on his farm.

"Could you do me a favor?" Eric asks one of the pickers. "I've got a customer coming here in a few minutes and I might forget to take this out," he says of a purple flower dangling from his bushy red beard. "If you have any compassion, please remind me." When Eric laughs, he looks like Santa Claus-in-training. His holly-red cheeks bulge, and his blue eyes glow.

He did not begin harvesting until nine o’clock, after the morning dew evaporated from the flowers. Dried flowers should not be picked wet. Standing in a row of larkspur which reach his stomach, Eric knows.

At 33, the Virginia native could be dubbed the Dried Flower King of Downeast. Selling 25,000 bunches in 1991, he is the largest grower of dried flowers in the state and one of the largest in New England. He is also one of the largest wholesalers in Maine, grossing more than $75,000 in sales last year. His inventory of dried flowers ranges from Globe Thistle, German Statice and bayberry to the more poetic sounding: Sweet Annie, Sea Lavender, Love In A Mist and Love Lies Bleeding. Dried roses, dried eucalyptus, and dried wheat are a few of the flowers and grasses that Eric buys from other growers. His biggest sellers are Nigella, Ambrosia, artemisia, yarrow, joe-pye weed and pennywort.

Only four years ago, not a single flower could be found in these same fields. The cash crops were corn, tomatoes, potatoes, green beans, lettuce, spinach, zucchini, cucumbers, carrots, summer squash, winter squash, and pumpkins. Vegetables, organically grown. No larkspur, no Love Lies Bleeding.

When Eric and his wife, Ann, moved to Maine in the winter of 1984, they came with the hope of starting a farm, leading a “slower pace of life” and being able to “spend more time together as a family.” Family was so important that both sets of parents later migrated to Maine, and so did two sisters and a brother. “I guess we didn’t like the suburban lifestyle of going off to work and the kids going off to school and not having any interaction. Eric, especially, really wanted to be around his family as they were growing up,” says Ann.

The couple decided to grow vegetables, without herbicides, pesticides or fertilizers, at their new home. Hence the farm’s name. “We were definitely pursuing it as an organic farm at that point. Good Earth seemed to fit in with that concept,” Eric recalls. But after three years of organic vegetables, their vision wilted and reality took root. They had to make a “drastic change” or lose the farm.

IT IS AN OVERCAST morning in late July at the Good Earth Farm. Dressed in L.L. Bean blue jeans, a yellow Common Ground Fair t-shirt, duck boots and blue suspenders, Eric stops picking to stare at the pewter sky. Fearing rain, he ushers his pickers to the next field. He wants to finish harvesting this first crop by lunch. Rain the day before postponed the job and he’s concerned that another lost day could mean flowers that are past their prime in size and color. Larkspur blooms quickly. Budding plants will be in bloom no more than three days from today. Once they blossom, it’s a matter of days before the petals wilt.

Today, Eric and the other pickers are harvesting the flowers' center stems. In three days, they’ll take the side shoots. Eric cuts only the ripe “spikes,” as he calls them. With a rubber band from his canvas apron, he bands the cut flowers into a bunch—ten if they are long-stemmed, twelve if they are short.

Popping and bursting in hues of violet, azure, pink and white, rows of flowers near Eric explode like fireworks against the drawn, overcast sky. This radiant display spreads throughout the surrounding fields.

Except in one. With flora only on the ends of the rows, this field looks like Woody Allen’s balding pate. Three quarters of the crop in this field was wiped out earlier this summer by cyclamen mites. This is the first time in the five years Eric has been growing larkspur that he has seen the parasites. Typically, he says, they thrive in a hot, dry climate, the type of weather plaguing Maine this summer of 1991.

To deal with the pests, Eric uses the pesticide, Kelthane, which he says “doesn’t wipe out the mites altogether at once like more potent pesticides can, but doesn’t linger to harm the environment either.” Unlike more toxic pesticides, “This one doesn’t require the farmer to wear a scuba suit.”

Eric does not consider himself a chemical farmer because he continues to use many of the practices of
Four years ago, not a single flower could be found on Good Earth's organic vegetable fields. Now Eric could be dubbed the Dried Flower King of Downeast.

Above: Eric rebunching larkspur and at computer
"I don't know of any thriving organic farms that are supporting families and paying health insurance and paying bills that I would regard as critical."

Above: Eric and Ann
Right: Rita (front) and Megan
organic farming: rotating crops, using cover crops and interplanting. But when he has a problem that threatens a crop, if there is no alternative, he'll spray it to save it. "I'm not particularly interested in going out of business to maintain the ideal."

Already this year Eric has used synthetic chemicals on two crops and has spread synthetic fertilizers on the rest of his plants. "But when I spray, I only use organic pesticides," says Eric, a member of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOGFA).

While he relies on both natural and synthetic means in farming, Eric feels his dried flowers and pumpkins are "almost organic." He realizes that many purists argue if he does not follow guidelines set by MOGFA and uses non-organic chemicals, he does not farm organically. "I understand that position," says Eric, whose farm was certified by MOGFA from 1985 through 1987, "but I don't know that that necessarily pertains.

"I don't know of any thriving organic farms that are supporting families and paying health insurance and paying bills that I would regard as critical. As well as purchase property."

Non-organic farming is one of the many changes Eric has made to keep the farm. Marketing is another.

Although he has sold pumpkins and has offered hayrides since starting the farm in 1985, Eric began advertising four years ago. He buys ads in local newspapers, with an appeal to Maine residents. He also pays for radio spots which advertise his Fall Festival.

Promoting the farm seems to be worth the investment. About one thousand people came to the farm in the fall of 1985 when Eric first ran the hayrides. By 1990, after four seasons of advertising, about 10,000 people came to the Good Earth to pick their own pumpkins and ride in four hay-filled wagons pulled by tractors. Six to seven thousand people—many of them school children—booked hayrides, weekdays, mid-September through Halloween. A small number of these customers include people from a local nursing home and patients at Pinelands, a mental health care facility. To accommodate customers with special needs, Eric rigged one of the wagons with a low bottom to make getting on and off easier.

Eric has extended his marketing to his dried flower business as well, advertising annually in four trade journals: Business of Herbs, Potpourri, Partyline, Crafts Report and Florist Review. These publications best target his market of florists, craftmakers and gift shops. Before he began advertising in journals in 1987, Eric grossed $15,000 through his dried flower business. That number has quadrupled in the past few years. Eric also plans to showcase his flowers at the Maine Florist Association Trade Show and the Boston Gift Show.

His mushrooming business sense seems to be paying off. Customers call in and mail in orders from all over New England, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, extending as far west as California. The dried flower business now grosses two thirds of his income.

Over the years, Eric has made other key changes that have made Good Earth a more cost-effective business.

Now with his new computer system and the touch of a few keys, he can retrieve an order for 50 bunches of larkspur, figure out if he has enough in stock, and bill the customer. The new system enables him to deal with a higher volume of orders and to turn them around quicker.

Apprentices have also contributed to the financial well-being of the farm by increasing productivity—at a low cost. Since the farm's first year, four to five apprentices—mostly from colleges—live, work and gain educational experience at Good Earth for six to eight weeks each year.

This year, Karen Looney, a third-year student from Antioch College in Ohio, is at the farm from July through September. The New Jersey native earns college credits while helping with chores ranging from installing insulation to taking orders over the telephone, maintaining the inventory and assisting Eric with his mail-order business. She found out about her apprenticeship the same way many before her have—through MOGFA.

ANNN A N N  BRANDT-MEYER sits near the family garden on a sunny Saturday afternoon. From this vantage point she watches Megan, nine, and Rita, three, scouring for wild raspberries. Ann does not work most weekends, unlike many of her co-workers at Richardson & Trobe. That's the benefit of being a librarian at the Portland law firm. Although she passed the bar in Maine, Ann prefers researching to practicing law. "I went to law school because I love doing research," Ann says. Although she "loves" her job, Ann, 34, has been working out of necessity since they moved here eight years ago.

"The farm wasn't making enough money so I needed to work, to support us at a minimal level."

Megan has spent the afternoon foraging through the nearby garden compiling pages of notes and drawings for a handmade book. On one page, is a drawing of a caterpillar Megan saw on a leaf, while another has a Black-Eyed Susan stapled to it. On the cover page, in crayon, she has titled her book "Nachor Diry."

In a peach-colored cotton jumper and plain white t-shirt, Ann looks like a Maine farm mom. Yet her curt, groomed red hair and board room glasses belie that image, revealing a person who can comfortably cross into both worlds. More than Eric, Ann is the pragmatist. Although she initially conceived of life on the farm as simply "going out in the field and picking some food for dinner," she now sees things differently.
She views the stress of farming as equal to that in an office. "You have a lot of people working for you, it's the same as other types of jobs. You have to be a good manager—you have to deal with a lot of personalities, you have a lot of people depending on you, you have things that have to be done at a certain time. You have emergencies come up and you're responsible."

It was more than a single emergency that nearly cost Eric his farm. The first three years at the Good Earth he grew vegetables and ran hayrides. During that time, he and Ann lost "an awful lot of money with the vegetables." By the end of the third season, both Eric and Ann had sunk much of their savings into the farm to keep it alive. "By the third year, we needed to make a decision," Eric says. "Close the farm altogether or make a radical change."

He and Ann opted for the "big shift," as Eric calls it. He dropped the vegetables from his roadside stand and kept the pumpkins and hayrides as his focus.

During the third season, the "big shift" included adding dried flowers to the list of crops. Eric made this decision after a season of growing an acre of statice, Paper Daisy and Love In A Mist, which he dried in his barn and sold to the owner of a Freeport craft shop. Sales for these flowers to customers wanting "the country look" were strong so Eric designed a price list, and made the annuals part of his retail as well as his wholesale business. "That second year was so bad it was a relief to think I could continue farming at all and that we might actually salvage something from this and continue being in business," Eric says.

"It was definitely a trial by fire, and it sort of burned away a lot of romantic nonsense I had in my head about a lot of things I was doing."

As Ann recalls, "Growing vegetables organically is very labor-intensive, and we couldn't get the price we wanted. People wanted to know why our stuff wasn't the same price as Shop 'n Save who buys their produce from places like Chile, California, or Florida where the labor is cheaper. If stuff grown in the U.S. is not organic, it's cheaper to grow because $200 of chemicals can save you, I don't know the exact numbers, say $3,000 worth of man hours." It was a tough decision to phase into chemicals and fertilizers—"strictly economic." If Eric wanted to keep the farm, he had to do it.

Ann views Eric's decision to drop vegetables and strict organic farming with typical, bottom-line pragmatism. "I don't think Eric's abandoned his original beliefs. I just think he's realized we have to find a way to also make a living. We can't just go out there and commune with nature. As nice as that is, we have people to support, not just our kids. We have people working for us.

"He's really changed over the years from being interested in farming as almost a back-to-the-land thing . . . Now he's much more of a businessman."

"The first year we would get money from the stand, and I would shove it in a paper bag, and we'd stick it in my drawer in the desk," Eric says, laughing. "At the end of the week I might count it, I might not. Yeah, it was like a really bad joke."

I T WAS ANN WHO introduced Eric to Maine. Growing up, she spent her summers at Chewonki, Duck Neck Island and later, at her parents' home in Southport, where she and Eric went for their honeymoon.

Eric had a "gut sensation" about Maine. He liked the slower pace of life. "It's less hurried here. Less rushed. More laid back." He was also drawn to the "rocky coasts, the ocean, the countryside and the cooler summers. It was just too hot to work outside in the South. It snows here like it's supposed to in the winter."

He was also attracted to the people, both native and immigrant. He thought the "dour" Yankee farmers were "cool," but he was most drawn to the people who moved here. "I really liked the back-to-the-land element." With these newcomers he felt a bond. They were also college-educated, and shared his interests in quality of "health and lifestyle." He liked surrounding himself with people who came to Maine "by choice," seeking something beyond money or jobs—the reasons most people move somewhere, he says. "Seemed like it was sort of an exceptional value here. We've developed relationships with folks—oldtimers and newcomers—that I don't see happening in other parts of the country."

There are striking similarities between Eric and Ann and the back-to-landers who came to Maine in the 60s and 70s fleeing from urban living. "It's much less of an urban area here," says Eric. "Less crowded." Like the dour Yankees he admires, Eric's background would seem to be rooted in farming. Nothing could be further from the truth. He comes from nouveau dirt, growing up in Reston, Virginia, a middle-class suburb of Washington, D.C. The family house bordered a

"I had this Jeffersonian, yeoman concept of the guy on his little property out there doing it."

Facing page: Eric and Rita Brandt-Meyer

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farm. This small stretch of fields became Eric’s entre to his passion. “I had this Jeffersonian, yeoman concept of the guy on his little property out there doing it,” he muses. “It always seemed like a real beautiful and romantic thing to me.”

At the College of William and Mary in Virginia, where Eric met Ann, he was a history major subscribing to American Vegetable Grower. He spent much of his time trying to figure out how he was going to become a farmer. “I thought about going to an Ag school, just getting an Ag degree.”

Eric and Ann came to Maine in January 1984. Ann’s parents offered to co-sign a loan for a farm if the young family settled in Maine. Eric and Ann began to look for a farm that met certain criteria. It had to be affordable. It had to be close to Portland where Ann could get a job. And it had to have good soils and a location accessible to cars—Eric wanted to sell produce at a roadside stand.

Eventually they found a farm for sale on Pleasant Hill Road in Freeport that had been a dairy farm. The soils appealed to Eric and the farm was located on a main road about four miles from downtown. In October they moved in and established the Good Earth Farm.

It is July Fourth at the Good Earth Farm. A party. The music coming from the shaggy-haired foursome in front of the garage conjures up musty images from the rock and roll closet of the 60s. Jimi Hendrix. The Doors. There are people everywhere. Kids douse each other with water, while adults barbecue hamburgers and hotdogs, and sip Corona beer. Two farmhands, Neil Kalson and George Morris, 20-year-olds from California, explain to one of Eric’s neighbors that the Volkswagen bus on the nearby grass is actually their home while they work on the farm.

Nearly all of the adults look about the same age—in their 30s. Many of the men have beards which are so bushy it would virtually take minutes for any of them to feel a flame beneath them. After a few botched attempts at Purple Haze, Eric consoles the band. Two of its members have worked for him for five years, since they were 12.

Since moving to Freeport, Eric and Ann have had Fourth of July parties every year. For many of their neighbors and friends, the parties are more than just an excuse to wear red, white and blue and try some of Eric’s home brew. Honey Brandt, Ann’s mother, recalls one of the first annual parties at the farm when a neighbor stood before the gathering and explained that he had been offered a job elsewhere. “But he wouldn’t leave the area because Ann and Eric created such a sense of community for him. And he never wanted to leave. I’ll never forget that because I was so touched.” She adds, “That was Ann and Eric’s idea when they came here. They wanted a community.”

And they have become quite popular in it. When the town council wrote its plans for the future of Freeport, one of its goals was to preserve working farms and open spaces. Good Earth is one of three such farms.

But, Eric is concerned that rising property taxes could make it difficult to continue farming in Freeport. Between 1980 and 1990, Freeport’s population rose nearly 18 percent. This increase was the result of waves of young professionals who moved in and rehabbed old houses, which in turn jacked-up real estate values and in some cases, property taxes. Between 1985 and 1990, Eric’s property evaluation soared from $77,600 to $154,600. He feels better about his property tax, however, since the state began to offer reduced tax rates for farmers. The state tax package bases property taxes on current use rather than possible use if a farmer guarantees his land will not be developed. “Which is going to make a huge difference,” Eric says.

He may feel better about his property taxes, but Eric sees a growing conflict between farmers and newcomers to the town. “I think there’s more of a rural-suburban conflict than there used to be,” he observes. “People move in to rural areas of Maine and then find out that the farm next door smells real bad a lot of the time when they’re hauling manure and then raise a stink about it—but you would think the people who move here would tend to have more of an awareness of the realities of rural life.”

Eric and Ann have confronted these realities. To survive as farmers, they have had to sacrifice the romantic dream about organic crops. Part of the dream remains—the part about spending time with family, knowing their neighbors, and living in their chosen landscape.

At the End of a day’s harvest, Rita rushes toward her father, as he leaves the barn. She wants to see the farm animals. Eric lifts the rope that slips over the gate letting Rita into the chicken coop. Like a wind-up toy, she races around in spurts. Stopping. Going. Fluttering the chickens as they try to escape her in their mattress-sized pen.

Within minutes, Rita tires of this pandemonium, and father and daughter visit Pumpkin, the orange and white piglet, and the turkeys. It is important to Eric that the girls be able to walk out of the house and pet the pig or feed the turkeys. Since they eat the livestock, Eric says, “the girls are exposed to issues of life and death. I think it’s been real good for Meg and Rita to figure out pretty early on how real life works.”

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EA SPURLING IS 91. She is sitting at the electric piano in Gilley’s Family Restaurant in Castine as she does every Friday night from seven o’clock to a quarter past playing songs as if it’s nothing. Her tongue lolling around in her mouth, her white tuft of hair, her small, fragile feet tucked into red Chinese slippers, she looks like a little girl singing nursery rhymes. Her veiny hands, covered with loose skin and age spots are bouncing over the keys, seeming almost disconnected to the turned-up corners of her mouth, which add to her childishness. An aging, long-time friend helps her back to the table when she finishes her short performance.

Gilley’s Family Restaurant is the type of place that has fishtanks in the walls with colored gravel and big pieces of coral, but no water and no fish. Blue cafe curtains line the inside, which feels warm and self-contained and has smells of fish dinners and coffee and homemade pies.

Something lies in this place—something I don’t find anywhere else in town. Gilley’s has down-home chowder and fish fillets and crab rolls. It’s for old people and townies who come regularly to this untrendy, warm spot. I can feel a wistfulness every day at 11 o’clock, when Phil Perkins and Louise Brown and Bea Spurling meet for lunch, sticking together as natives whose families date back as far as 1760 in Castine. They call themselves the “wharf rats,” because in the summer they eat right out on Castine’s dock, but once October hits, it’s back to Gilley’s.

Bea sits there with her blue Gilley’s baseball cap pushed down over that white tuft, and those matching blue young eyes peering out from under the brim, intently taking in any action or conversation that she can. And Phil talks about old times, about his garden, about the new people in town, about this and that, all in between gulps of chowder and coffee that sometimes secretly slip down his chin. And Louise just sits and smokes and eats and smokes and laughs and smokes.

They meet every weekday, this group, feeling like strangers in their own town. There are new people cropping up everywhere; people who haven’t been there long enough to say “I remember when . . .” about anything in Castine.

And then at night, Gilley’s is what it is tonight, a memory show, with Bea and her old friends at center stage, singing, chatting, remembering, being. There is bonding going on here, as the regular pianist continues his slow plunking out of popular turn-of-the-century songs like “Yankee Doodle Dandy,” and “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.” There are other people in Gilley’s besides Bea and her friends, but they are younger; they are part of a new Castine generation. They do not sing. Louise, with her white hair and wrinkles around her mouth and constant cigarette between her fingers motions to me and other young people to sing. The song is “I’m Looking Over a Four-Leaf Clover.” We don’t know any of the words except for the chorus. The old women continue on without us, disappointed. We are too young for turn-of-the-century.

But Bea is not too young. Bea with the thick distorting glasses and sunken-in lips from her lack of teeth, and loose, hanging neck skin is not too young at all. She was there when young Castine boys were shipped off to World War I. She was there when the Maine Maritime Academy was the Eastern State Normal School. She was there as a child, taught at home by her mother from 1905 until 1911, when she began fourth grade at the Castine Adam’s School.

I sat down with Bea and a fish sandwich one afternoon with a list of questions, anxious to hear stories of the past from this woman who has been around for nearly a century. She didn’t know. She couldn’t say. She is 91, and is losing her memory. She is just one of the “dying breed” of long-time Castine natives, the element of the town that many say can be counted on two hands.

Castine is losing its memory. It is happening slowly and goes almost unnoticed by most of the townspeople. Amid beautiful homes and historic sites and forts there is a distancing taking place—a distancing between the town’s rich history and its people. In The Past is a Foreign Country, David Lowenthal speaks of this distancing, a sort of “historic amnesia,” and a longing for the past which exists in the form of nostalgia and relics and preservation. “Awareness of . . . relics enhances knowledge gained through memory and history. But no physical object or trace is an autonomous guide to bygone times; they light up the past only.
The perfection here is eerie, feeling very much like a facade for the set of an old B-movie about New England settlers.

Facing page: Gail at Gail's Variety

course, is hanging at the bottom of Main Street, on the edge of gleaming Penobscot Bay, framed at every angle by huge, ancient, looming elm trees, taxed for disease protection, giants with faces, limbs and hair carved into their chestnut-brown bumpy barks.

The perfection here is eerie, feeling very much like a facade for the set of an old B-movie about New England settlers. Even the lighting and sound are surreal, with the sunlight then moonlight strangely reflected by prolific whiteness, and sounds of people and boats and cars being bounced and echoed by the clean spacing of homes and yards and corner stores and elm trees.

All strangely perfect—until you are enveloped by Castine's gargantuan, overshadowing monster: the State of Maine. This 13,319-ton, 533-foot training vessel of the Maine Maritime Academy, has loomed over the town since 1942, when the Academy took over the campus of the Eastern State Normal School for teachers begun in 1867. This large ship, a prominent symbol of the Academy, has been called every-

stools, and salt and pepper shakers that are bumpy like beehives, and vegetarian pizzas or nachos. Next to this is Gilley's, and the hardware shop with the fading powder-yellow front and "Posted" signs in the window, and the "Four Flags" gift shop geared towards tourists, with brass ship steering wheels and little bearded ceramic men in yellow slickers holding their heads out to see what awaits their ship. Across from this are real estate agencies, a recent convenience store with aluminum-siding and two gas pumps called Tarratine Market, and a couple of antique and clothing and art stores—overpriced with the tourist in mind. The only bar in this district is The Reef, where townies and ubiquitous Maritime Academy students gather for cold brews, a game of pool, and a juke box.

Gail's Variety, which is the heart of this area, sits on a corner, guarded by a burnt-sienna post, with six stools and a counter, milk shake machine, coffee, sandwich list, double sink, soda fountain, magazines, Bangor Dailies, postcards, a faded sunglasses display, gift soaps, and candy bars, as well as at least two town characters at any given time.

And all of this, of course, is hanging at the bottom of Main Street, on the edge of gleaming Penobscot Bay, framed at every angle by huge, ancient, looming elm trees, taxed for disease protection, giants with faces, limbs and hair carved into their chestnut-brown bumpy barks.

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when we already know they belong to it." Distancing in Castine has gone so far that no one knows how many natives the town has. And without these people, the live connection between present and past will cease.

Castine has fewer than twenty streets, all laid out in a neat grid, called things like Battle Avenue, Water Street, Pleasant Street, and then Main Street, which brings all who venture off Route 1 on a dramatic descent into town, smack down the middle of the peninsula. Off Main Street on Court Street is the classic town square, complete with white Unitarian church, white little schoolhouse called Adam's School housing 64 children from K-8th, a library, and a neat green square, all across from Emerson Hall, the town hall.

The town of 1,500 is so picturesque it could be a model-idealized version of a New England town, lined with very well-maintained 18th- and 19th-century Georgian, Federalist, and Greek Revival homes, looking so white it's blinding. The entire peninsula is a federal historic district—one of the first in Maine—and has appeared on the National Register of historic districts in Maine since 1969. It is a town that has been praised for its beauty for more than a century. A 1920 House Beautiful article titled "Castine—A Village by the Sea" called it "Castine the Beautiful," and "a bay as picturesque as the far-framed Bay of Naples."

Almost the whole town is white and perfectly restored, speaking of neatness and control and clean bright white. Any passing car is an intrusion, spewing fumes and sounds of engines. Every detail is perfect, right down to the symmetrical wood piles in manicured front yards, small hills of crimson and golden raked leaves, and even prominent date markings and names on the homes and buildings: 1792, 1800, Samuel Adams House, Fort Charles.

The houses lead to the center of town—the "commercial district"—which is not what its name may bring to mind. Cracking street pavement surrounds the Village Pizza Place, the restaurant that feeds mostly tourists and students from the Maine Maritime Academy. Inside there are four booths with tables that have cracks filled with hardened glaze, five brown vinyl
thing from a “view-blocker” to “the artery of Castine” by the townspeople.

During the mid-19th century, Castine was left outside the mainstream of commercial expansion. Her peninsular position was a disadvantage when transportation changed from sailing vessels to railroads. The schools of Castine, first the Eastern State Normal, then the Maritime Academy, have been a stabilizing factor. Unlike so many of the small towns in Maine that have died when their economic base was gone, Castine remains very much alive. Without this hulking vessel hogging the dock space and blocking the view, there might very well not be this chance for such careful preservation of history in this very historic town.

He is hunched over his rake, wearing a soft, ratty old blue sweater that’s pilling, with shallow cables and a tear in the collar, and khaki’s that might’ve been dress pants one day, but are now losing their hem and have splotches of tar and paint and dirt here and there. His feet are shoved into a pair of very old blue Converse low-tops, and a white collar pokes up through his sweater, framing the loose skin of his face that breaks into a smile as he turns to greet me.

Phil is old. No one knows exactly how old, but it’s a thought that makes people in town raise their eyebrows, shape their mouths into little “o’s,” and shake their heads. General consensus says he’s at least in his 80s. It fits that he’s a history buff, considering the fact that he represents almost a century of history himself. Words like “Yankee” and “Civil War” pepper his language, sticking him in another time, another way. He speaks with American history as his guide—talks and talks and talks—always somehow able to relate any historic tangent back to Castine.

“You had the ships built here . . . and they needed the ships in the South to take their cotton to England . . . England has the ideal climate for weaving, because of the humidity, which you can control today . . . But what I’m getting at is that after the Civil War this became just a peaceful quiet town.”

Phil is convinced that the natives of Castine are a lost breed, virtually impossible to replace, and that if you look at the history of the town, it’s possible to see where many old family names have disappeared completely; names like Scott, Mann, Bene. Perkins could soon join the list, and Phil knows it.

“You know, there’s a poem written during the First World War . . . it’s written by an English fellow, I forget . . . Now it says, ‘To you from failing hands we throw the torch.’ That’s overblown a little bit, but what I’m saying is, there’s a transition of power from the natives to the other people . . .”

It’s amazing to me, how he stands here now in his garden, near an old aluminum-frame lawn chair, how he just stands and talks and talks without stopping or breathing even, about times I’ve only known through books. He gets excited making these references—his wrinkled hands dance around his face, and his eyes are bright and blue and most alive and drift upwards towards the back of his head now and then, searching for the right memory or feeling or fact.

PHIL PERKINS lives on Perkins Street, named for the six Perkins boys who settled Castine in 1760. His home is hidden away from the center of town, where a tall metal flagpost fails to control his front yard, a mass of unruly grass and weeds and wildflowers. His big green boat of a car with its wide, seventies frame is docked in the driveway, guarding a long, narrow toolshed filled with clippers and rakes and shovels and wrenches.

Phil’s father built the house after the turn of the century. This dirty white house—but white—has three entrances, each door with some sort of problem—only one hinge, a large dent, sticking doorjamb, or loud squeaks. Inside is a haven for clutter—jumbled pots and pans separated from their lids hanging on a wooden pegboard, more tools and rakes, dishes, a massive old grainy TV with muddled color, miscellaneous chairs sitting in the center of rooms, and then the books—piles of history—old journals, letters, essays, articles, books and more books, turn-of-the-century-this, turn-of-the-century-that—facts, facts, facts, history everywhere—by the TV, covering the desk, on the floor—it’s practically spilling out the windows.

Beyond this is the backyard, home to Phil’s vegetable and marigold gardens, in the middle of more uncut grass and scraps of wire fence and wood and metal and cement left over from various projects. Phil is turning over the rich black soil of his tomatoes and cabbage, grown “mostly for the deer,” he says and laughs and throws up his arms. “I’ll talk to them . . . they get pretty tame.”

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Phil is old. No one knows exactly how old, but it's a thought that makes people in town raise their eyebrows, shape their mouths into little "o's," and shake their heads. General consensus says he's at least in his 80s. It fits that he's a history buff, considering the fact that he represents almost a century of history himself. Words like "Yankee" and "Civil War" pepper his language, sticking him in another time, another way. He speaks with American history as his guide—talks and talks and talks—always somehow able to relate any historic tangent back to Castine.

"You had the ships built here . . . and they needed the ships in the South to take their cotton to England . . . England has the ideal climate for weaving, because of the humidity, which you can control today . . . But what I'm getting at is that after the Civil War this became just a peaceful quiet town."

Phil is convinced that the natives of Castine are a lost breed, virtually impossible to replace, and that if you look at the history of the town, it's possible to see where many old family names have disappeared completely; names like Scott, Mann, Bene. Perkins could soon join the list, and Phil knows it.

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Phil taught political history to high school students after studying at the Eastern State Normal School and University of Maine in the 30s, and he can still sound as if he belongs in front of the blackboard, pulling down maps and writing down dates and jumping around the classroom yelling “Yankee!” or “battle!” Phil remembers a lot of the history that he is so passionate about.

“You know it’s true, because you lived through it. You know, you don’t have to read it in a book.”

Not all of it, anyway. Books tell you that Castine in 1630 was a small fortified trading post, tossed back and forth for almost the next two centuries between the French and the Dutch and the English and the American colonists. A Frenchman, Charles La Tour, created this original trading post, first called Pentagoet and then Majabagaduce and then Castine, which permanently became an American colony in 1815, and served as the county seat until 1838 when the courts were moved to Ellsworth. During the period following the 1812 War, Castine was one of the wealthiest towns of its size in New England, undergoing much construction of town buildings and homes, and also serving as a large fishing and boatbuilding and shipping port. These were major industries in the town until after the Civil War. In 1867, the Eastern State Normal School took over as an economic base.

The arrival of the Perkins family took place over a century earlier, after a migration from Massachusetts and then Ogunquit, Maine—Perkins Cove, actually. There were about six Perkins families, all first settlers of Castine.

“John and his brother Stover, and his brother Daniel. Then you have cousins—cousin Joseph, cousin Nathaniel, cousin Daniel, oh I don’t know—it sounds like a horse farm now.”

That’s another thing about Phil, always twisting personal anecdotes into little teasing jabs—his past, his age, the changes in town—always making light, always seeming young, always writing off the importance at the last minute, amusing himself with a straight face and a pause, then falling into a long belly-laugh, slapping his knee and looking up at the sky.

His mother of five was Swedish and his father was a Yankee fisherman and they were very poor. He remembers a lot about the fishing his father did way back in the 1910s and 20s when Castine had lots of fishermen and many factories—for canning sardines, for canning peas and corn, and for processing lime. He remembers going fishing with his dad in the spring—how they would go out in their small 14-foot dory and get seven or eight hundred pounds of fish without any trouble. There is no fishing in town at all now. First the schools of herring stopped coming, so they went lobstering. When lobstering wasn’t enough, they went clamming.

“I would go clamming for fifty cents a bushel, and now they’re about $70, $80 a bushel. That’s supply and demand. Yeah, in other words, the clams have long gone.”

Besides the fishing industries, the way to make money when Phil was very young was off of the summer people. Year-round people would do just about anything to get by—work on summer estates, caddy at the golf course, carry mail. The wealthy summer families who arrived every June on big ships from city ports were what the year-round townpeople waited for, as they scraped by through harsh, isolated winters. Phil’s mother took in washing, and Phil and his father sold fish to the hotels.

“But summer people as a way of life is not a viable way. I’ve lived through that. Three months of activity at $100 a month to bring up a family, and a retaining fee of, say, $25, $35 in the wintertime, is not a very, uh . . . you live.”

Phil is speaking intently, as though he has thought of these lines every day of his life. A Dixon No. 2 yellow pencil dangles out of his hat from behind his ear, and every now and then he pushes on its full pink eraser, nudging it back up into the space that it has begun to slip out of. I wonder what use this pencil has in a garden of cabbage.

Phil goes on about the summer people, about the feelings they stirred in the year-round natives.

“Some people would be resentful . . . because it was a disturbance of a normal way of life. Now the normal way of life is entirely the way you want to view it yourself, you see.

“You know Abraham Lincoln said, of course, ‘You can be just as happy as you want to be . . . ’”

The feelings of resentment are now muted. So is the clear-cut season of summer people. Many of these people are now in town permanently, or at least hanging around longer, usually through October. The
once-obvious “class distinctions” have been tempered; summer people almost look like natives now, walking their dogs or going for coffee, wearing casual work-in-the-garden clothes.

Phil is basically alone here, regretting the fact that he never married, related now only to his one sister in town, another in Massachusetts, and a brother in Connecticut, where Phil himself lived and taught for 25 years.

The creases in his expression are most in place when he is thinking deeply about his past, and about his place now in Castine: there are short ones leading away from each eye towards each ear, long connected ones around his mouth and chin, and two deep lines sweeping across his forehead, which is almost always shaded by a crisp yellow baseball cap that sits on his sprinkling of white hair.

Phil is the chairman of the Castine Cemetery Association—yet another signal of his close link with the past. He believes that the history of the town is found in its cemetery, because if the history of the town is in its people, then this is where those first vital people lie—the ones who contributed to the making of Castine—the ones who gave their life and blood. Although Phil realizes that many people fear cemeteries, he feels that the knowledge of these names and people and their legends could cultivate the roots that many young people could use, although the young may not even value it very much.

“If you don’t have a sense of history, then it’s very difficult to juxtapose these two positions, if you can use that word, into a living presence. But if they’re not aware of that fact that there’s any legacy at all, it becomes awfully tragic, you see what I’m getting at?”

And what Phil seems to be getting at, as he tugs at his yellow cap and leans on his rake and squints from the sun, is a loss of identity. A loss of understanding.

“If I were to go back to your age, I would say, ‘Oh boy, I don’t understand what he’s talking about at all. As you get older, though, it means more and more. Much more . . . ’cause you lose a vital part of your being. See, the dead support the living in the sense that, it’s a spiritual thing, you see.”

He sticks together with his group of native friends, feeling safety in union with these people he was born and brought up with. Their lunch club, in the summertime, probably serves as an added attraction for tourists, as they sit out on the dock on the edge of their town, looking so old and wizened. But it’s too cold for that now, so the show moves inside to Gilley’s, where these white-haired friends sit and eat their chowder and really do look wizened.

Peter Davis is very new to Castine. In fact, he’s barely even here yet, considering the fact that people who have been here for ten years are still called newcomers. He is a writer and moved here two years ago from New York City to live near Main Street in this white 200-year-old well-maintained house with nine fireplaces, everyone of which he uses.

“I don’t know the history of Castine. I’m very interested in it, and I’d love to wallow in it, but I don’t have all my dates right.” He looks a bit defensive now, leaning forward slightly in his big soft chair set in front of his computer, his short brown hair shaping his forehead like the top of a heart, and fiery eyes and fraternity-boy grin making him youthful, despite the sagging neck and jowl skin.

“I think I focus on the 1850s . . . at that time if you had a tape recorder, you would’ve found people saying, ‘This place, I don’t recognize it anymore, it was throbbing in the 1820s . . . we’re just gonna be some place where people come for nice weather.’

“I think that would’ve been the grumble in the 1800s, and if you had talked to the Phil Perkins of that time, you’d have heard a tale that his grandson would never be able to tell. I don’t think that’s true today,” he says, going on about continuity that started in the post–Civil War time calm. This is Peter Davis’ history—the one he has heard about. It is different from Phil Perkins’ history.

Although Castine has changed somewhat since the 1800s, he feels the continuities here are more controlling than the changes. That people come to Castine “to
become some part of this community. . . [which] means the love of the water outside, the love of the neighborliness, the trees themselves."

"I think that the tale Phil Perkins tells you is the tale his grandfather would have told, and is the tale that his grandson will be able to tell. In other words, I don't think it's changed all that much."

Peter Davis says they fell in love with Castine, he and his wife and two children, and that it is a town belonging to those who love it the most. If the natives love it more than he, "more power to them."

"But I'm glad I'm not a native, because you know what? This is one thing that I can say that the natives can't: I chose Castine. I love it here. I fell in love with this house, and as I told you, every splinter in it. And so I'm delighted every day to be in Castine. That's enough."

Above: Downtown Castine.
The word "native," of course, has many different meanings in Castine—many different degrees. Marc Hodesh, owner of the Castine Inn with wife Margaret since 1984, has taken careful note of these variations.

"There's natives and then there's natives. There are old time natives with five generations, that are still summer people, basically. Their wealth comes from away, and that's a lot different than the indigenous blue-collar natives.

"Now you have to look very closely, because the children of the summer families sometimes blend in, and yet hold political and economic views of the summer people, even though they've been carpenters for two generations. So, it's tough."

Philip Booth is one of the summer people who is year-round. Author of eight published poetry collections, he now lives in what was his grandmother's house, a white house built in 1848, which sits on Main Street, at the beginning of that very dramatic and beautiful descent towards the water and the center of town. He and his wife Margaret have grandchildren who are the fifth generation in this house. His mother grew up here, although she, like Phil, was not born here, and attended the Normal School school, as it's called, as a little girl in 1899, the turn of the century.

"I personally think that there is some real reason, maybe they're good reasons, for protecting the historical integrity of the town, without it becoming a Williamsburg. Which there was some thought, only casual, but people did come here thinking it might become a Williamsburg-sort-of-peninsula. I would feel very unhappy about that. I wouldn't want it to be a museum town at all."

Ken Eaton is reluctant to use the word native to describe himself, since he was born in Connecticut during wartime, even though he has been here since he was six months old and is of third-generation Eatons in town.

He owns the boatyard in Castine, Eaton's Boatyard, where he stands in his flourescent orange hunting suspenders and tall rubber boots, covering boats for the winter, and rubbing his scruffy beard every so often. He doesn't care to ever go "up off the neck" of this peninsula again; Ken got over that urge about 25 years ago, when he was a very young man and took off to the big city of Boston where he found his bride.

Most of the changes Ken has seen have been economic. When Ken's grandfather bought the boatyard, his taxes were a mere six dollars a year, and now they're $4,000. When Ken says "4,000," his already high-pitched voice gets even higher, almost squeaking at the word "thousand," and he stands by his boat, rope in hand, shrugging his shoulders, saying that it makes no sense—that this boatyard is virtually the same piece of property that it was then. Property taxes have been rising faster than the pay rate, causing taxes to fall heavier on home owners than businesses or institutions. In 1960, the property valuation in Castine was at $647,424, increasing to $4,608,000 in 1970 and $35,950,000 in 1980 and again to $97,800,000 in 1990.

His emotions bolstered and his face reddening, he refers to himself as a native finally, and admits that there
are "damn few" of them left. But changes and zoning laws and summer people—those are touchy subjects. Ken needs these people for his living.

"Of course if it wasn't for those people that just come here, this town would wither up and die . . . . Those are the people that support this town. The summer people . . . they come in, they spend their money in town, they don't demand as many services, they still pay the same tax rate, they don't have any kids in school . . . . They don't use the sewer system, only a few months in the summer."

The fifty-page zoning ordinance for Castine does bother Ken. He liked things the way they were. "I don't like to have to ask my neighbor if I wanna do something . . . . I mean, just the ordinary day-to-day operations, you know. I don't think if I wanna repair my bulkhead that I have to go get somebody to tell me how to do it . . . ."

Phil Harmon agrees. Technically deprived of his Castine birthright because his mother wanted to be at her mother's in East Holden to give birth, Phil left Castine as a young man and has returned. He is now the director of waterfront services at the Maine Maritime Academy.

He squirms at the mention of zoning laws, his big fleshy face shaking back and forth, baseball cap sitting slightly up off his head. Zoning, he says, is "economic discrimination practiced in its finest form . . . economically discriminatory to the native Mainer."

He feels that a town is worse off when its older natives die, because there will be a new population that may have trouble understanding the town or the natives or the situation. They go about things differently. They do things like post their land during hunting season, which annoys Phil. They don't have any family tradition of coming here and staying.

But he says the differences between natives and non-natives is not as important now as it was then. "The whole population of the country is more transient than it was in 1950. I think that in 1950 [it] probably would have been . . . more valid and difficult . . . for somebody coming into a town, trying to get a grasp on what the natives are really upset about.

"The fact of the matter is, Castine doesn't really have a native population anymore. It really doesn't . . . . I think that the statement that newcomers don't understand the town is not as valid as it was 40 years ago."

Micki Colquhoun wouldn't argue with Phil Harmon about that. She is a newcomer. She moved here four years ago with her husband Jeff and their two children, and like most people who move to Castine, it wasn't for history's sake but for the appearance of the town. They were just "blown away" by the drive down Main Street with the houses and the elms and the dock and the water, and they fell in love with what is now their home on Court Street and they bought it, simple as that. They started out as summer people in 1986 and moved in permanently two years later to open a business—financial advisory work for small businesses, mostly away from Castine.

Micki is concerned about keeping the development in the town to a minimum, but admits that it could go too far. She would call a halt if Castine decided to have a "town-subsidized lobsterman, or something."

"I'm glad I'm not a native, because you know what? This is the one thing that I can say that the natives can't: I chose Castine. I love it here."

Facing page: Peter Davis in his home with nine working fireplaces.

"This IS NOT A TOY TOWN, this is a real town." Nancy Carr is talking about new people, about how it takes them a while to understand Castine. Nancy has been in Castine for twenty years, and it has taken her that long to figure it out. She sits here in what was once the lightkeeper's house at the Dyce's Head Lighthouse, built in 1828. It is quite a few blocks from the center of town and is filled with an orderly sort of clutter—old brown bottles in the window to collect the sunlight, a variety of furniture collected from rummage sales, plants, old photo books, a back room filled with her paintings, and a black cat purring in the sunlight on a soft armchair.

Nancy Carr came from away, from a little farm in Falmouth Foreside near Portland. She chose to live in Castine when her husband's job moved to Bangor, where she didn't want to live. Now divorced for nine years, Nancy supports herself to stay in the town that she fell in love with, working with food services at the
local Adams School, cooking Eggs Benedict on Sundays for the local pizza place.

"I chose to come here because of what the place is. That’s why I’m staying here. I don’t make any money here, I’m poor as a churchmouse, I mean I could really make a lot of money someplace else if that was what I wanted out of life, but it isn’t.

“I want quality of life, that’s why I’m here. And I’m glad. I’m glad that I decided to do that. Everybody else has left me.” This is when one of her brash laughs comes in. “My husband’s gone, my kids are gone . . . but I said, ‘okay, this is what I want.’ Takes a lot of courage to do that, I think.

Nancy is not fat or skinny, but soft, like a warm mother whose perfume lingers on your pajamas after tucking you in at night. Her face is one of slight roundness, with skin that is creamy and just beginning to show lines and loose sags, holding almond-shaped eyes that look directly into mine when I speak, and topped with silky, short white hair. She speaks in a matter-of-fact tone, meaning every word, and laughing honestly and loudly, her face turning pink and her head thrown back and her eyes to the side and gleaming.

She speaks of the new people that can afford to come here and feels that many of them in the past five or ten years can’t really understand what not to do here. She sees many changes that annoy her.

“Like lots of signs. Who needs all these signs in town? And, like, the plastic mailboxes that you put the paper in. We used to have a paper boy! Now that junk is everywhere!” Nancy’s face is red now, and she is visibly enraged, piercing my eyes with hers, her voice rising to a more high-pitched, sing-songy complaint, somewhere between a lecture and a plead.

“That stuff, little by little by little! They really think that the only reason they don’t have it is cause they haven’t thought it up. But it’s because they just simply do not want that kind of thing here . . . I’d rather have potholes any day than have this.”

Nancy’s children love Castine, but can’t afford to live here just yet, because of rising property taxes. They have had to go away to make money before even thinking of buying a house in Castine, which is “what you have to do these days,” and which is also a reason that families may leave, ending the native presence in town.

She notices the decline of longtime natives, and feels that it will absolutely affect the town’s character. Recently she went to a rummage sale and saw only five people that she knew. This memory makes her shake her head, as if she is still in a state of disbelief. Nancy does not believe that the loss of natives will be a noticeable change to many people.

“To some of them it may be, but generally I really think some of the retirees that come into town forget why they came here, and you find them associating totally with each other, and almost living the same kind of life that they lived when they were living in Massachusetts or New Jersey, or something like that.” She tells me through a snickerish laugh about the people across the way, how they have just arrived in Castine and are so enthusiastic about the town, so excited. They are the new ideas, the new town.

“I don’t think a lot of them notice the natives. I don’t think they get involved. Very rarely are certain creative people, who are really interested in what goes on in the head of the people who grew up here, and how they really feel about the place. But most of them just don’t get it, you know? They think the place is pretty, but they don’t really get it, you know?” She sighs and looks out at the water, which is cradling the red sun as it melts down and away.

GAIL IS ON VACATION today, leaving her daughter Janis, who lives in Ellsworth, in charge of the regulars at Gail’s Variety. The old faces are resting a foot away from the Bangor Dailies which are framing each steaming coffee cup. Janis is looking a little droopy this morning at six o’clock, her pale, drawn expression hidden under feathered bangs of ash blonde hair.

“So what’s with the water?”

“Bacteria.”

“Can’t drink it.”

Janis rushes to calm the wrinkled expressions. “I used spring water for the coffee. They say it’s only the other side of Main Street that has to worry, though.”

Old Earl looks up then—Earl with the creased checks and tuft of graying red hair sticking out from under the baseball cap with the half-closed eye and bum leg and the ducks he makes but can’t advertise because he’ll lose his V.A. benefits—Earl looks up and
says, “But what’s the cause?”

Suspicious silence. Louise says it first. “Apparently caused by something at the,” then whispers, “Academy.”

“Hmm.”

“Uh oh.”

“Yep.” Louise nods.

Yes, in this store, which sees no more than five midshipmen a week, the Academy is blamed for more than the water. It is a love-hate, or “town and gown” relationship that Castine has with the Maine Maritime Academy, which provides employment for one-third of the townpeople. They can also use the Academy’s swimming pool, racquetball, tennis, and basketball courts. It is an economic prop for the town—a clean industry—an industry without the smell of Bucksport’s paper mill or of old Castine’s sardine factory. Many people feel that the Academy is one of Castine’s greatest blessings.

Phil Perkins agrees. But his voice lowers and his forehead crinkles when it comes to the physical development of the Academy. It keeps getting bigger and bigger, enveloping more of Castine’s scarce acreage as the school’s popularity continues to grow. This year, the student population has reached 630 men and women, which nearly equals the number of year-round residents. The land and buildings owned by the Academy equals more than $15 million of tax-exempted real estate, which stirs much resentment among townpeople towards the students, or midshipmen. Also looming above Castine is the fear that the Academy may one day exercise its right of eminent domain, displacing everything and everyone—from Phil Perkins to Gail’s Variety.

Phil is worried that this school is overburdening the town with traffic and brick buildings and short-haired boys in uniform. He’s seen it in Mystic Seaport, Connecticut, with its bridge going up and down like a yo-yo. He wishes there had been some forethought about the Academy’s development, and has already seen the downtown area hit badly from an architectural standpoint, with the school’s modern brick waterfront building creeping into the white perfection. What worries him is the danger that such a good thing could get out of control.

“You know, Tennyson has a poem that says, ‘The old order changeth, yielding place to new, and God fulfills himself in many ways, lest one good custom should corrupt the world.’ Maine Maritime . . . it’s a marvelous institution for the town. The question is, can you fit it in? ‘Cause you’re apt to destroy more than you create.”

The Academy creates a new Castine and adds to the distancing of its history. Castine is now widely known as home of Maine Maritime Academy instead of home of history. Its port is no longer used for fishing. It is used to train Maritime students to navigate elsewhere in the world. Just as the homes in Castine are mere relics of history, the State of Maine is a mere training vessel, serving as practice for the real thing.

The militant-looking midshipmen and the ruddy-faced sailors stay pretty much separate from the town by choice, Gail thinks. They have everything they need in their own stores on their campus up the hill and are mostly seen going up and down Pleasant Street, from campus to the waterfront building and back again.

One student who does stray from this usual path, however, is Frank Livingston Warcham III, or “Stone.” He is different from other Academy students because he feels that Castine is his home and says hello to townies when they pass him.

Maybe it’s because he grew up in rural Maine and is more accepting of places, because he lived in a house with no running water as a boy with his divorced mom and her Zen Buddhist friends until he moved in with his swinging-70s father and started drinking at age 13. Maybe it’s because of this harsh, truly rural Maine upbringing, as he calls it. Whatever the reason, Castine is home.

There have definitely been problems between the town and the Academy—problems with loud parties, loud cars— basically with loud male students trying to create excitement in this small town.

“So you know, as much as squealing the tires and bottles getting broken and signs getting ripped down,
"I think it's very secondary to the positive things the Academy has to offer. "I think the Academy and the town would do wise to quit messing with each other . . . and kind of get on the ball. They both have a lot to offer each other." As far as changes in the town, Frank sees the dying breed of natives and believes that Castine must find a way to keep its young people. "Cause without the people who have grown up and lived here, Castine will get lost in some ideal, other than what it really is, I think. And as far as what I think will happen to it, you know, maybe 20, 30, years down the line, who knows? Sets itself up for some real hardcore development, and in becoming another real plastic place without any heart and soul. "You know, very easily that could happen when all the real people leave, and there's just people who retire, and none of the kids want to come back. It won't have its own identity. It'll be just a potpourri of personalities and won't really have a single unifying theme, I guess." He pauses and looks into my eyes. "Which I think sucks."

MAIN STREET IS LINED with cars today. Old-boat cars like Phil's, in shades of green and brown, scruffy pick-up trucks, and new Mazdas and Toyotas with New York license plates. Gail is dressed-up but somber, and so are Phil and Louise and Philip Booth and scores of other Castiners, all on their way into the Trinitarian Parish Church for a funeral. It is the funeral of Betty Foote, a longtime summer person, who seems to have been known and loved by people in every faction of the town. Even Paul—Paul with his sagging soiled jeans and long scruffy beard and wheelbarrow full of redemption cans—even he is wearing a suit and tie today. "The maven of Castine has gone," he says of Betty, looking at the ground.

And here they all are, getting together to show respect, even though they may all go to different places for coffee in the morning, all for a woman who was old, who could probably remember Eastern State Normal School and the lime factory and the obvious class distinctions. I never talked to Betty Foote. I never knew she existed. And now she is gone—another missing link in the memory of Castine.

PHIL PERKINS IS smirking as he walks down Main Street. He is smirking at the long, hulking tour bus, winding through streets as wide as its engine. It drones loudly, leaving puffs of black exhaust to hang in front of white 18th-century doorsteps. It stops at Nancy's lighthouse, at the town square, and at the Four Flags giftshop, even though they are all in walking distance from each other, and it is filled with old women in clouds of perfume, sharing other stories of travel—"England was divine, Rome was a picture"—and now the white, white New Englandy Castine. They read "Welcome to Castine" pamphlets, written by Elizabeth Duff, the town clerk from Greenwich, Connecticut who runs this town from Emerson Hall. She shakes her scowl and says there never were many natives in Castine, that things are just the same as they ever were.

The casual visitor to Castine is usually most impressed by the number of 18th- and 19th-century Georgian and Federalist houses still in existence and in perfect repair. Most of these beautiful old homes have been carefully restored by people "from away." When one checks the pages of town records however, the names of those first sturdy farmers and early settlers appear generation after generation. These people managed to stick it out through both British occupations, in prosperous times, and in lean years, as well. One might say the people of Castine today are a homogeneous mixture of natives and "newcomers" who take interest and pride in sustaining the beauty of this unique coastal community.

Phil said once that when he was a young boy no one would have thought of trying to sustain the beauty of this coastal community. That no one would have thought of a zoning law. No one was foolish enough or lucky enough or had money enough. He said people raised pigs and cows right in the center of town, because if you didn't raise a hog, then you wouldn't have meat for the wintertime.

"And you can imagine what would happen today. It would be shot at sunrise!"

But today Phil is marvelling at the tour guide's inaccuracy. He says the tour guide's dates were wrong, and Phil corrected him, eventually taking over the small microphone at the front of the bus. He tells me all this with a laugh, with his head shaking back and forth, his shoulders riding up towards his ears and his lips stretching out into a desperate sort of expression. He wonders whether the people would even have cared if the dates were wrong, because what does a tourist need with correct dates and living connections and less-distanced history when they have beautiful relics to see?

They don't need it at all, he says.
SALT SENSE

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Look into Salt

MAKES SENSE

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