Buy a Farm, Live in Maine

Maine Development Commission

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BUY A FARM
LIVE IN MAINE

PUBLISHED BY THE
MAINE DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
IN COOPERATION WITH THE
STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AUGUSTA, MAINE
WHAT I THINK of MAINE

By Booth Tarkington

Booth Tarkington, the noted author, says: "To my mind Maine is the most beautiful state we have in this country, but even more appealing is its homeliness. It is easier for a stranger to feel at home in Maine than in almost any other place I ever knew. That is perhaps the reason why so many visitors cease to be visitors and get to think of Maine as home."

A Summer Home on Sheepscot Lake in the town of Palermo, Maine

The owner spent less than $500 in alterations and repairs. He built two new dormers, painted outside and inside, put on blinds and general repairs.

The old wagon shed was torn down and a flower garden made.

As the owner says, "The expenditure of a very small amount of money can make a whale of a difference in appearance."
The Old Farmhouse

By MAUDE CLARK GAY

We first saw the old farmhouse, gray, rambling, and a bit lonely even in the brilliant May sunshine. A row of maples, brave in new green, bordered the winding lane. In the hillside orchard behind it, the apple trees were a mass of riotous pink and white bloom.

Intrigued as we always are by deserted houses, we left the car at the foot of the hill and followed the path to the worn stone doorstep. Turning to look back we again saw glory of blooming trees, sturdy Norway pines and lilac bushes beaten by the winds and snows of many years. A garden that someone had loved with grass-grown clumps of daffodils and hardy tulips pushing their way to the light, bordered a mossy foot-path. Beyond lay spreading meadows and hills with the sunshine on the heights.

What a wonderful place for a summer home! The thought beat insistently as we strolled down to the pasture bars, where bells once tinkled as the cows came to drink at the little brook rioting joyously between ancient willows. Then back again to the stone steps as the twilight came on and a star winked out of the orchid haze in the western sky.

We did not forget the gray house with the lilacs guarding the door with its sacred cross. We often spoke of it and planned to ride that way again. But somehow time flew by on golden wings that summer and it was late August before we found the tree-bordered road again. Stopping the car at the foot of the lane, we thought we had made a mistake. Something had happened to the old farmhouse. The grass was trimmed close; bright flowers were in bloom in the great beds guiltless of weeds; a swing was fastened between the sentinel maples half way up the hill; an automobile stood in front of the great barn that flaunted a new green roof; shining windows were bordered with the same shade of dull green. The house was no longer deserted. Hearing the voices of children ringing from the meadows we knew that it was a home.

On a pretext of being thirsty we ventured up to the doorway. Through the screened portal we caught a glimpse of bright cretonne, shining newly painted chairs, a table with colorful cloth. Then a smiling honey-tanned woman greeted us. “Come in,” she said.

We accepted the invitation and, as we sipped the cool water, took courage from her gracious manner to tell of the first visit to the old house and of the lure that drew us back again.

“I can well understand,” she answered, bright eyes aglow, lips curled with smiles. “We were just as much fascinated as you were and we needed the house.”

It was the old, old story. A nest egg tucked away in a bank with which to build a summer home. Closed bank, loss of money and courage. With vacation time came the urge to go somewhere, to take the children from the hot city, to heed the call of Maine answered by them for so many years. Setting forth with no destination, stopping at camps, days on the open road, then, at last, one hot July morning, the vision of the old farmhouse framed by drooping trees set high on the wind-swept hill. By denying themselves a bit and by lowered cost of living, they had been able to pay the modest price. They had found courage, happiness and peace.

“I had a letter from a friend, who is travelling in Italy,” went on the lilting voice. “She was seeing many marvelous things, but Nature-lover,
as am I, she seemed most impressed by the purple hills, the blue waterways, long stretch of white plains with ruined castles and churches. She described Venice glowing in its rare setting, Genoa, nestling in the peace of green valleys. Suddenly as I read, the thought came to me—hills, valleys, lakes, mountains—why, we have them all in our own Maine."

As she talked we looked down from that hilltop once more. This is what we saw—a river winding like a silver ribbon to the distant sea. Golden glory of sunset sky with lights twinkling out from white houses and the gleam of a pointing spire, vista of purple mountains with white clouds on their heights. The thought of Holman Day’s poem lingered tenderly on the lips:

"Home son or far son,
Is other land so dear?
There's fame and gold
To coax and hold,
But it's home—it's home up here."

Retaining the old charm while adding the new

A Summer Home on Windham Hill, Maine
"The Thunder of New Wings"

By THOMAS DREIER

Many of us who used to live in city suburbs and who now live on farms wonder what malicious influence it was that kept us so long from country life.

Take the University of Maine graduate, trained as an engineer, who got his first job in the central west. His life was pleasant enough. He married, had two sons, and lived comfortably in a city apartment.

But something was missing. He was only a cog in the industrial machine and had little to say about the life he lived. He was in a great community but he never was made to feel that he was part of it. He and his wife talked things over and decided to escape before it was too late.

They returned to Maine long before the claws of depression began to tear the industrial fabric, bought a farm, began to raise chickens, and within three years he was a leader in his new community. He was president of his county Farm Bureau, vice-president of the local Chamber of Commerce, vice-president of the Rotary Club, and active in poultry organizations. His wife became president of the Garden Club, created a garden of her own that brought many interesting visitors, and the children had and still have the time of their lives.

In some way this man, starting almost from scratch, has $40,000 invested in his own plant. He is in control of his own time. He has an opportunity to exercise his creativeness in many fields. He has grown. His life is well-rounded.

Another man, this one in his fifties, had been an expert in Ohio rubber factories. He had always enjoyed a good income. But something was not wholly satisfactory. He, too, longed for the country. Today he owns his uncle's old farm and is playing the part of a practical farmer. His securities sank out of sight and today the farm is almost his sole means of support. He boasts that last month his chickens netted him $25. During the summer he gets a thrill out of being able to sell his vegetables above the market price because they are just a bit better than the usual market product.

These two men are not living lives of ease. They are not gentlemen farmers. They are practical, hard-working, money-earning men. Their wives do housework, help in the gardens, and have little time for bridge and tea parties. But all of them have found something that satisfies an inner longing. They are close to the soil. They witness at close hand the miracles of the seasons.

All over the country young college men whose wings carried them off to the cities where they hoped to find wealth and power, are flying back as fast as they can. You can hear the "thunder of new wings". Some of them, it is true, are only warming up. They have the longing. Their desire is mounting up. Tomorrow, perhaps, they will wing their way back to the country. Not as cogs in some great industrial enterprise, but as individuals expressing themselves in their own way, they will work out their salvation as their forefathers did.

And the country welcomes those who come with their eyes open and who realize that the man who fails in the city will probably also fail in the country. The country offers nothing but opportunity. It cannot supply a man with industry, intelligence, business sense, and the ability to find a market for his products.

It is no service to people who are unfit to urge them to buy farms. The wrong kind of people can be as helpless in the country, on the most fertile of farms, as they are in the city. Their opportunities for employment are probably fewer.

Young people with the pioneer spirit may come with little capital and fight their way through to success. Their youth and energy and their spirit of adventure will carry them forward. They will accept the hardships in the right spirit, as part of the game. They have time for experimenting. Their imaginations will enable them to triumph.

But old folks without either training or capital would do better to stay where they are. The farm offers them too much hardship to make the adventure worth their while. If they lack training but are fortunate enough to have a dependable yearly income of $1,000 or so, then, if they have a love for the country, they are safe in buying a place.

All of us can remember dozens of instances of farmers who were successful and decided to retire. They turned over their farms to their children or sold them and moved to town. There some of them decided that they could not be idle but did not want to work hard. They started stores. They were sure that any person could run a store successfully. When they lost all their savings they learned that to run a store successfully calls for special ability.

The same is true of farms. Nothing is gained by urging city-trained people, who know little or nothing about farming, and who have no dependable income, to buy farms and try to make a living from them. Some people in that class may win through to a life of ease, but the chances are against them. Trained farmers have their trials and tribulations.

But all that does not mean that city people should not buy farms. They should buy them, though, with their eyes open. Thousands of city people are buying farms and are having the time of their lives playing with them. But note that they are playing with them. They are not dependent upon them for a livelihood. They do cultivate their own gardens, keep hens and
pigs, have a dog or two, milk their own cows, and sniff the pure air that rolls in from the sea across sky blue waters of inland lakes or down from the mountains. They can stretch out their arms and point to a few hundred acres over which they rule.

They are the people who are in the best position to enjoy what the country offers. They do not necessarily have to be people with big incomes. They may have, as we said, $1,000 a year. But they ought to have that much at least. That insures them food and warmth. They can make that amount go much farther than they can possibly make it go in the city. Less money is needed in the country. Old clothes serve a long time. The garden, orchard, hen yard and the wild berries that grow everywhere make their contribution to the family treasury. Subsistence farming of this kind is a pleasant adventure.

For those who have a bigger income, farm life offers unusual delights. It becomes a life of infinite variety. Those of us who treat our country homes as we did our homes in the suburbs, not as income producers, but as places in which to enjoy a full, rich, well-rounded, healthy life, could not be persuaded to go back. We are the ones who hear most clearly the thunder of the wings of those like us who are preparing to join us.

What the suburbs were to the cities two or three generations ago, the farm country is now. Good roads, powerful motor cars, airplanes, bus lines, coastal steamers, railroads—these make it possible for the country dweller to dash to the city at will. Even during the winter the roads are kept open.

And the country towns themselves are not what they used to be. More and more graduates of colleges live in them. The intellectual life is rich. Usually the newcomer from the city is surprised when he discovers that he need not be dependent at all upon his old city friends for companionship. He finds new friends—and rejoices in his new human wealth.

The radio brings to him the music and talks that it gives to the apartment dwellers. The chances are he has a wider choice of stations. The rural mail man brings the daily papers, magazines and books. There is probably a good public library not far away. Public service also attracts those who have something to give. The newcomer to the country, if he uses sense and does not pretend to know everything, will find that the neighbors will welcome his advice and help.

Maine welcomes purchasers of farms who will not only be self-supporting, but who will contribute to the enrichment of the state as a whole. Such people will find the new joys of the country to be worth far more than they cost. The pure air, the country odors, the sight of apple blossoms in the spring, the glory of autumn foliage, the sting of winter winds, music in the pine trees, gurgling brooks, the song of birds, the quietness of the night, the friendliness of the neighbors, the leisure one comes to know intimately, the satisfactions of cooperating with Nature to grow crops—these are only a few of the delights of the country.
Another Showing of
WHAT CAN BE DONE

A Vice President of the Hudson Motor Company
has his summer home in Maine
On the Top of a Hill

This is the story of the Farnsworths who bought an old farmhouse on the top of Sawyer Hill overlooking Goose Pond. They planned to use the property only a few weeks in the spring and fall for fishing and hunting or week-end trips.

Mrs. Farnsworth remained at the farmhouse steadily all through the first summer, however, and found it hard to tear herself away in October. From May to October she now makes her home there, and when Mr. Farnsworth can retire they are planning to live here permanently.

“Our plans,” writes Mrs. Farnsworth, “were at first so simple, but they grew with our enthusiasm until we put in a bath, an artesian well, and finally persuaded the power company to run up lights for us and neighboring farms. We now have every comfort.

“The reclaiming of this dear little house, built in 1779, and the restoring of it and the grounds, have been my greatest joy and interest through these years.”

After a time Mrs. Farnsworth wanted to share her good fortune with people she knew, so, as she writes, “I yielded to the pleas of friends and friends’ friends and took paying guests. It was an interesting experience to see these people not only benefit physically from the wonderful air and climate and return to the city robust and rested, but also to watch each one fall under the spell of outdoor charm.”

You see, when you buy a farm, you simply enter upon a new adventure.
Why Not Rebuild Your Home Yourself?

By SYDNEY GREENBIE
Reprint by permission from the magazine "Leisure"

The homing instinct is a building instinct, a making talent. To be a true home, a place must be the expression of the one who lives in it. No amount of luxury, of conveniences, of modern improvements can win the love of the home owner so much as the home he has built himself.

One can fall in love with an old house which was made in this way. I own such a home. It was built for the most part a century and a half ago. It stands upon an eminence overlooking Penobscot Bay, Maine, with a certain lofty dignity. It did not take me more than fifteen minutes to fall in love with this house and the farm and the Bay, and it became my own.

But possession was only the first stage in making this home my own. It merely gave me the right to do with it what my living in it required. Fortunately for me, I could only spend three or four months a year on the place at first, the rest of the time going into traveling and writing, so I could not at once begin the reconstruction. This deprived me of the pleasure of making mistakes. Had I been impatient, I should have turned the old house over to an architect who would have lifted its face and stuffed its wrinkles with parafin, and made it look like an old demi-monde. But I let things drag. However, the roof leaked, and when I found myself with some time on my hands late that summer, though I have never been on a roof before, I took to the task of putting on new shingles myself. I hired a neighbor and we put on a new roof for the cost of the shingles and his daily wages. When the last nails had to be driven in, my eight-year-old boy and six-year-old girl climbed to the ridge pole and sealed the house against rain with their little hands. Such ceremonies help to make the home theirs for ever and ever.

We started getting estimates for rebuilding. I thought it would be so nice to open the stairs into the living room, to put on new floors, to put in a furnace, to build myself a study out of the woodshed, and the dozens of others things one wants to do with an old house. But, luckily, time did not permit and the estimates seemed so exorbitant that we decided to do it bit by bit. And nothing saved our house for us more than this hesitation, for as we began living in it, awkward as it too often was, we began to discover the house, its possibilities, its moods, its relations to the meadows and the forest and the sea. We took out the trees that grew up carelessly and opened the view; we tore down a barn that shut out the Bay from sight; we removed the century of rubbish that had accumulated;
we tore out partitions that had been put in to accommodate a son’s wife and a new family. Putting the hand-hewn ancient timbers of the barn into the ceilings where the partitions in the living room had been, and setting the small-paned windows that had originally been in the house but had been put into the chicken houses, back into an extension that now formed a sun-parlor looking out across the Bay, we paused. It cost us only $100 to make this transformation. Then we waited.

The fireplaces, too, had long been removed. What is a home without a fireplace? Well, it can be many things. It can be stuffy; it can be snug and warm all over. Fireplaces are things which make it possible to know winter and summer at the same time; summer in front and winter behind. If I had hurried to put in a fireplace, we should have enjoyed this discomfort the rest of our lives. When I finally got around to it, after a trip around the world, I discovered that fireplaces need no longer be places where one sees the heat going up the chimney and freezes. There are these new units made of steel around which one builds one’s fireplace which puts your furnace into your living room and gives you circulating, fresh, heated air in every corner of the room. It costs little more than an ordinary fireplace and with some carvings I brought back with me from Angkor-Wat in Indo-China, from India and Japan, I added these personal touches that make home one’s own.

There followed years of dreaming, planning, waiting, years in which we had every conceivable modification made and rejected, till the thing just to our liking was accomplished. I learned to hang paper just because the paper-hanger balked at putting enamelled paper with fishes, sea-horses and sea-urchins on it, on the bathroom ceiling. I wanted the room to look like a pool, with yourself immersed in blue water and creatures swimming all about. But the paper-hanger had never heard of putting paper on the ceiling. After he went home at 4:30, I put on the paper, and discovered that I could do it as well as anyone. That lesson saved me hundreds of dollars. A contractor had given me an estimate of $300 for redecorating the living room; I did it for $15 and my own labor, in my spare time. The kitchen was located in what was the back of the house but facing the Bay. A contractor said it would cost $250 to rebuild the kitchen. We didn’t do it at the time. Another summer, when I had time on my hands, I began planning to do it over myself. Then it occurred to us that that was where the dining room should go, with a view of the Bay on the west, and a view of the lane on the east. With sheet-rock wall board for plaster, and paper of our own choosing, I turned that kitchen into a dining room at a cost so small it’s a shame to tell how much, and it looks and is so much better than the former dining room (now the kitchen). It makes us mad to think of how much we spent having a decorator on that job. The terrace! How I wish I had room to tell the whole story of the terrace! But at any rate, with the hewn granite from the old barn, and a laborer to help, I satisfied a life-long craving for doing something in stone, for making something myself which I know must last generations. A mason wanted $150 for this little job. From that I went to building a dry-wall for the garden and discovered that stone is not the hard, forbidding thing we think it is.

But the great achievement, the room that people have come to ask us to let them see, and say “Oh” and “Ah” at, is the old woodshed. There it stood, dirty, rickety, purposeless. Visions of what it might be hoarded over us for two or three summers. Estimates of what it would cost to turn it into a vaulted room varied from $300 to $800, and suggestions ranged from the use of insulating board to knotted pine. It all seemed intangible and didn’t quite strike fire. But to get the feel of the room, we cleaned it out and tore down the flimsy partitions. Using the weathered ceiling boards for floor boards, and lifting the hand-hewn beams up into the rafters and buttressing them with other hand-hewn beams for king-post and queen-posts, slowly we came to realize that a thousand dollars could not buy the weather-stained texture of the boards as they were. And now, at a cost of a few dollars, with days of the happiest, busiest, most hurriedest and absorbingest labor, I have a study with large windows looking out across the Bay and others facing the lane, with a double Dutch door hung on old hand-wrought barn hinges, and a couple of ox-yokes hanging from the cross-beams, with some lobster buoys as monk’s cloth portiere brackets, with tapestry hangings I bought in India and chinday carvings from Rangoon, a ladder from the old barn for steps, and walls lined with book cases I myself made, I have a room that is mine, where I can work and dream and think of the future as well as of the past, and which others love with me.

Space does not permit of more explicit details. The purpose of this article is not so much to tell you how to rebuild your own homes, as to show you that you can do it yourself. We are all scared from doing by the experts. They merely want the jobs. But if it is the joy of doing, not merely having, you want, plunge right in! Only do it cautiously. Don’t let the fact that the government is ready to lend the money lead you to errors. The more eager you are to get at it, the longer you should wait. Money spent for materials, with your own taste and workmanship, will give you more satisfaction and make for economic recovery more than will turning vast sums of money into commissions, compounded, to contractors and builders.

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The Department of Agriculture, State House, Augusta, Maine, has a list of over 200 farms for sale in all parts of the State which will be sent on receipt of request.
While the services of an architect are desirable, and often pay more than they cost, many people like to draw their own plans or hire a local contractor or builder to plan with them for alterations as the work progresses.

There are reliable contractors and builders available in or near almost any town in Maine.

The names and addresses of the Architects who furnished the photographs and sketches for the transformations shown in this publication will be sent to interested parties on application.