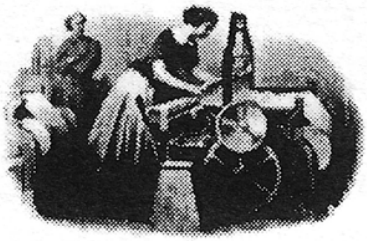
Common Threads



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The Newsletter of Harrisville, New Hampshire

TWO JOURNEYS BY WATER

A short way across the border to the north . . . in Nelson . . . is a farm on a height of land that straddles the divide between two of New Hampshire's five main watersheds. It was named Merriconn Farm, for the Merrimack and Connecticut rivers into which our Harrisville water flows. The original house and barn no longer stand, but the watersheds remain; water connects us one to another, and we are all downstream.

A storm gathers overhead. Raindrops fall and are blown by the wind in two different directions: one to the east and one to the west. . .

Imagine you can ride the rain. You blow east on one water droplet over Tolman Pond, and slanting sideways you are released into Spoonwood Pond. You swirl past a great blue heron—a still life of patience—across the pond, over the dam, and down into Lake Nubanusit. In spite of the rain there are kayakers out. Together you trace around the curve of the lake until you reach the gatehouse at Nubanusit Road. There you leave the paddlers and pass under the road, tumbling into Nubanusit Brook. You are drawn down into the Great Meadows where a silent family watches wildlife from a canoe. You wash from the Great Meadows into the wetlands that empty into Harrisville Pond. The rain abates, but the flow of water does not. You sail across the pond. Swimmers are at lessons at the beach, and people sit and gaze out across the water from their docks.

There are two places the water exits from the millpond, both leading to the same brook below. You take the one that passes the moored sailboat by the library. You cross under a bridge into the canal. And from here you surge down through the history of Harrisville village: along Goose Brook (Nubanusit) and the hundred-foot drop within a quarter of a mile, around which our self-sufficient mill town grew as it harnessed the energy of this water. Everywhere there was a precipitous drop, there was development. So many of our lakes and ponds in New Hampshire were created as reservoirs, which served as batteries to feed energy into the brooks and rivers that fueled the growth of local industry. Our clay and rocky ground held the water in place, unlike in Vermont, where the porous soil led to agriculture.

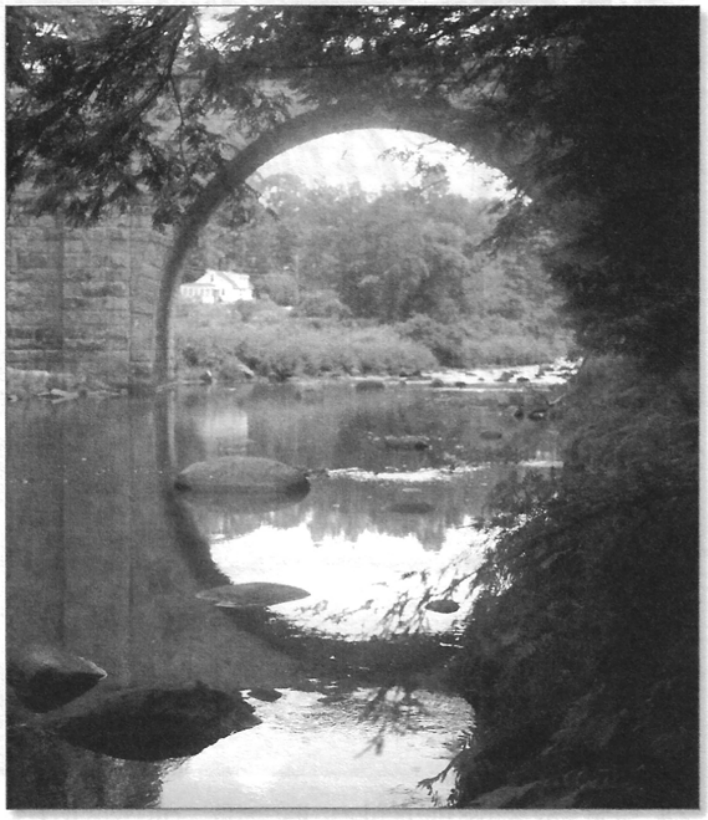


ALL PHOTOS: REBECCA UPJOHN SNYDER

The Nubanusit dam.

From the village you flow into Lake Skatutakee and around the fishing boats and past people in houses along the shores. You wash into North Pond and spill over the dam on Nubanusit Brook, which, for a while, runs parallel to Hancock Road. A hiker on the footbridge along the railway trail to Jacquith Road pauses and listens to the murmur of water over rocks as you tumble by. Forward you flow, east into Dinsmore Pond and then out of Harrisville. South and a little east, you flood into MacDowell Reservoir, then fall through the dam and back into the brook on your way to West Peterborough. Behind Nature's Green Grocer, where people are shopping, you descend into the center of town. A waiter serving diners at the Waterhouse Café sees you flash by, and a short distance away, your journey on the Nubanusit ends as the brook merges with the Contoocook River. From Spoonwood Pond you have traveled 15 miles and dropped 700 feet in a





Above: The Minnewawa. Right: The Branch Stone Arch.

steady descent.

Carried north in the Contoocook, you leave Peterborough. You twist and turn, passing dozens of people, then hundreds. In Penacook (North Concord) the 71-mile-long Contoocook River ends and you surge down into the Merrimack River.

You shimmer with ever-changing colors that reflect sky, trees, birds, buildings, bridges, and dams as you travel south and east, out of New Hampshire into Massachusetts. You connect thousands more lives as you flow onward until in Newburyport, you are released from the Merrimack (and its 117-mile passage) into the Gulf of Maine.

But wait, you say. There were other raindrops, and they blew west. You follow them too. Tossed by the wind north of Childs Bog, you land in Silver Lake. Rolled south by the whitecaps to the dam at the outlet, you drop toward Seaver Reservoir and from there you flow under Seaver Road and into Chesham Pond. You pass by two boys fishing at the dam, then course down under Chesham Road into Minnewawa Brook. You wend through Chesham, silver, blue, brown, drawing the grasses into long strands of green. Where Meadow Road meets Old Harrisville Road, you run under the bridge and into the trees down to Marlborough.

Between Jewett and Depot streets near the Marlborough Town Office, you cross under Route 101 and sweep along under the trees behind Marlborough Country Convenience. Flowing west you cross again under 101 just past the gazebo and run parallel to the north side of the road. Behind the Rocky Brook Motel, you race toward Keene. Where the Minnewawa meets Otter Brook, they form the Branch. You surge into it, over rocks, always onward. Again you pass under the highway. For a time you slow into a wider, shallower course, rippling beneath the Stone Arch bridge. You cross under South Main Street, and a little south of Agway, the Branch ends as it empties into the Ashuelot River. South and west you run now, gathering moments from the life of dozens and then hundreds of people, until just south of Hinsdale you stream into the Connecticut River.

You cross out of New Hampshire through Massachusetts and then into Connecticut. You flow onward south and east, a part now of the river's 410-mile passage as it touches millions of lives—people, flora, and fauna. You are swept along in this juggernaut of water, unstoppable, as it courses between Old Saybrook and Old Lyme until at last you sail through the mouth of the Connecticut River into Long Island Sound.

You ride the current out to the open sea. The sun shines and you rise again through evaporation into the sky. Droplets collect, and far above the ocean a cloud forms, and then another and another. A breeze nudges you inland. A wind grows, and over a farm on a height of land, a storm gathers. . . .

Rebecca Upjohn Snyder

"Thousands have lived without love, not one without water."
W. H. Auden.

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