## Activity

### Making a Mokuk

**Objective:** To make a maple sugar container similar to those used hundreds of years ago by Native Americans. The Abenaki might have used such a skill.

**Materials:** Copy of a mokuk pattern (see Appendix), one for each participant, heavy construction paper, stapler, pencils, scissors, string/twine, hole punch, and crayons, markers, or paint.

**Activity:** 1) Brainstorm a list of the materials Native Americans might have used to make maple sugar containers since they did not have glass, plastic or metal. Birch bark was used for a number of things, including baskets or mokuks.

2) Find a piece of bark at least 8 1/2" x 11". You might prefer using construction paper given that it is more pliant and easier to work with. Use the mokuk pattern as a guide. Fold the bark or paper in half along the pattern fold line. Cut out the pattern along the solid lines and add the dotted lines on the opposite side.

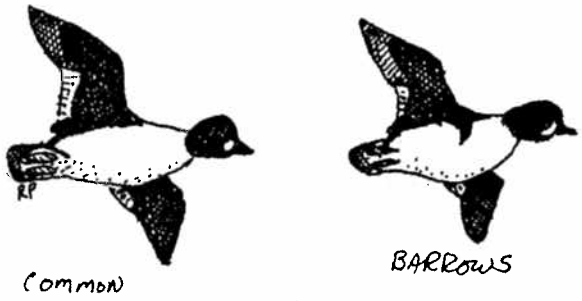
3) Open the pattern and place it on a piece of poster board or heavy-weight construction paper. Trace around the pattern. Mark in the dotted lines and cut it out.

4) Decorate the outside of your mokuk. It is easier to decorate while it is flat. You can paint them to look like birch bark, and/or decorate them with original designs or Native American designs.

5) Fold the mokuk along the dotted lines. On both sides, fold in the **b.** flap and then bring the **a.** flaps together overlapping them on top of the **b.** flap. Staple or tape these flaps together from the inside to create the sides of the mokuk. Add extra staples as reinforcement if necessary. The top opening of the mokuk will be narrower than the base.

6) Punch holes in the sides of your mokuk using circular markings as guides. Then attach a piece of string or twine as a handle.

*Adapted from* Project Seasons
*by Deborah Parrella; illus. Cat B. Smith*






# Growing up in the Waterworks

Field Notes

## An Interview with Earl Bessette

*Jill Hindle*

Earl Bessette, a retired trapper and dairy farmer, grew up in New Haven at the corner of Lime Kiln Road and Plank Road. His property, known as Elgin Spring Farm, consists of the original barn and milking parlor, adjacent to an old white farmhouse where he still lives with his wife. His two sons have taken over the operation and continue to supply milk to Cumberland Dairy Farms. After reading Earl's written account of his memories of the Norton Brook Watershed, I arranged to talk with him personally about the history of the Waterworks property which, during his youth, was known as "Wheeler Hollow." I was interested in hearing about how the ecological composition of the land had changed since the thirties. I was also interested in how the ownership of the property had affected its overall usage and purpose, and in turn, how the local community had been altered as a consequence.

I arrived at Elgin Spring Farm early on the morning of March 24th, and was surprised to find no one home. It must have been no later than eight o'clock, but eight o'clock I realized, is hardly early to a farmer. I had resolved to leave a note saying that I would check back around lunch time when a man came out of the barn and asked if he could be of any help. At the time, I didn't realize the man was Earl's eldest son. I told him who I was and that I had come to speak with Earl about the Waterworks property. "Do you know when Mr. Bessette might be returning?" I asked.

The man chuckled to himself and said, "Oh, he's just off somewhere ... Why don't you try back later, around noon." In the interim, I followed Plank Road over to the Waterworks and hiked up to the western ridge to better familiarize myself with the lay of the land. At noon I left

*EASTERN CHIPMUNK
(Tamias striatus)
-reddish brown rump
-large internal cheek pouches

-found in hardwood forests & well-drained areas providing shelter
-breeding, late March - early April; poss. second breeding

We saw a chipmunk in a hollow tree. We stayed until he came out a few times, but he still wasn't sure of us. His tiny movements amused us.

the ridge, drove into Bristol for a coffee at the bakery, and made it back to the farm by one.

This time, Earl was waiting for me at the kitchen table, and before I had a chance to knock he was motioning me inside "I was just up over the hill watching a flock of wild turkeys," he said. "We must have missed each other by minutes."

I assured him that it was no problem and that I had made good use of my spare time. Our discussion of the Waterworks property began immediately. There were no formalities involved other than a brief handshake, and his casual gesture towards a chair in the living room. I sat down and asked him to tell me about his boyhood—what it was like growing up trapping and hunting freely on land that is now set aside for conservation.

"Well, I was born on this land, and raised. And I've never left," he replied. "In 1938, my father had enough equity to buy our land—before that we rented the farm on shares—and I worked for him until I was old enough to take over the business. We did a lot of trapping back then. It's how we made a living. Now you've got to have all kinds of permits and licenses to kill anything. You know why we haven't got any brook trout left? Because all the otters are eating them."

I looked at his hands. They were broad, thick and worn. His face was also worn, colored by the sun, and framed with a white beard that accentuated his dark complexion. "Tell me about your memories of the Waterworks land when the Fish & Game Club was still in operation," I said. "What did it look like? Do you remember if there were more or less animals and birds living there?"

"The area was known as Wheeler Hollow back then, named after the owners." Earl folded his broad hands across his chest and sighed. "I was brought up in a whole different generation. You can't visualize it because you've never seen it, but there were so many sheep and cattle."

As he said this, I recalled a passage of his written history that describes the physical make-up of the property during the first half of the century.

*The lowlands in the Hollow were either meadow or pasture. The land behind the little reservoir was open pasture on the north end of the cobble. When I was ten or so the pasture had a few large apple trees in it. Ted Norton from Bristol owned it at that time. He was a cattle dealer as well as a land buyer. He would buy cheap cattle in the spring and put them in the pasture until fall and then sell them, returning a neat profit ... The land on the north end of the big dam was a hay meadow where the water and the red and white pine plantation is now. My principal at Beeman Academy, who was Ridley Norton, son of Ted Norton, told me of dump raking hay and pitching it there as a young boy for his father. This was in the 1910's.*

We continued to discuss the changes in the land. I noted how the resurgence of Vermont's forests within the last fifty years had altered the landscape a great deal, both physically and economically. For reference, I mentioned another section of his written history that told about the cutting that was done on the property when it was known as Wheeler Hollow.

*The mountain land on the east side of the pine plantation was all clearcut for wood that was sold to the Lime Kiln to burn in the kilns. They cut four-foot wood and drew it to the kiln with horses past our house. For years, you could see the clearcut from the farm. After the dams were built, they planted it to red pine, of which just a few lived. Poplar and grape vines took over the pines. It never amounted to anything.*



Interested in how his perspective might differ from other members of the present community, I asked Earl what he thought about the productivity of the forests and their rapid reclamation of the land.

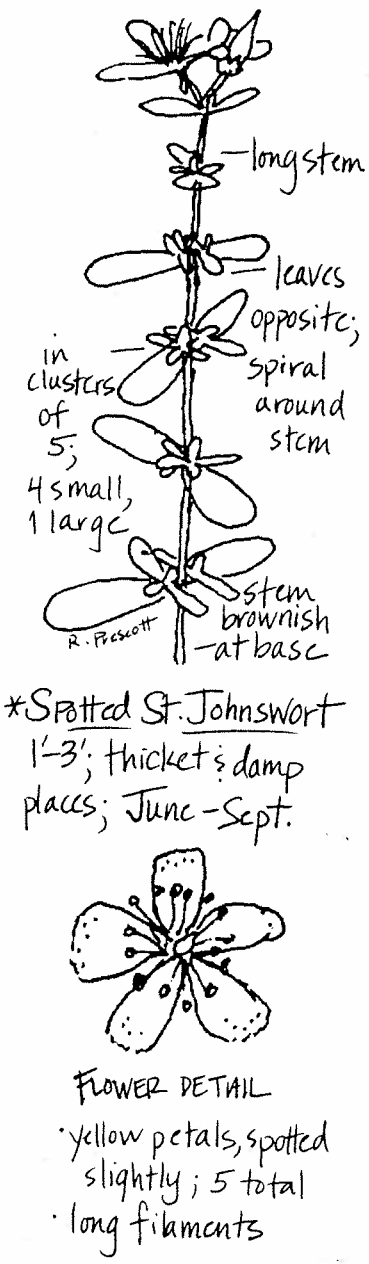
His reply was immediate, spoken like a true farmer. "Unreal. It's all growing up. And you're going to see it worse in the next few decades because of all the ten-acre house lots—they're buying so much land that they have no control over it, so it disrupts the crops."

Agriculture is an ancient occupation, but not so ancient that I would consider wild growth disruptive. Earl's perspective, however, has been cultivated right along with the cycles of the growing season. Breaking, taming and managing his land (which was once his father's, and is now his sons') has been more than a way of life for Earl; it serves as the substructure for his world view. So, naturally I was not at all surprised when he expressed to me his opinions with regard to the resurgence of wildlife on the Waterworks property and throughout the watershed.

"Wildlife was here when my father started out here," he said. "Then, because everyone was hunting and trapping in those days, animal populations went way down. I was a trapper and what I could earn from trapping, I put in the bank for doctor and hospital bills because we had a large family and no insurance." He pointed up at the pictures of his seven children on the wall. "In 1939, I saw my first deer cross behind the barn. We never *saw* deer, never saw beaver, never saw otter, never saw coy dogs, never saw possum, never saw fisher—none of this kind of wildlife showed up before the dams were built because it was open with not much cover. After the Watershed was closed to cattle and the cutting of wood, then cover came, but this wasn't until the late 50's."



Field Notes



JONATHAN BLAKE

A segment of Earl's written history tells the story of a hurricane that hit the New Haven/Vergennes area during the winter of 1950. It felled most of the trees in Wheeler Hollow, making an excellent deer cover.

*This is when the deer really came on. A man couldn't walk through it because the trees were so deep ... all tipped to the northwest.*

Earl's enthusiasm for hunting gave me the sense that, like farming, it was yet another important aspect of his mental and spiritual makeup. He had taken a walk that morning over the hill behind his barn to watch the flock of wild turkeys, not to admire their beauty, but to examine their flight patterns. The better you understand the animal (or in this case, bird) the better you'll hunt it, or so I've heard.

While I looked around the room at his gun rack encased in glass, the photographs of his children on the wall, his arrowhead collection in the coffee table, and his John Deere tractor replicas in the cabinet to the right of his chair, Earl continued with his stories. "We and our deer hunting pals hunted on the high hill on the west side of the Hollow in those days... Then the deer spread out into the valleys and surrounding farms, so we started hunting the low lands. Turkeys moved here in the late 70's. And one day I saw two large black snakes on the west side of the ledge. They were huge—five to six feet long! And they were wrapped around grape vines, sunning themselves. The wildlife just kept growing."

Curious about the role of the once-active Fish & Game Club within the local community, I asked Earl to talk about his memories of the place as it used to be. He told me that the Club opened in the early fifties. The proposed club site, situated near the entrance of the property, was plowed and harrowed by none other than Earl and his father. Embedded in the soil around the springs



near the site, Earl found a number of chipped stones that appear to have been fashioned by Native Americans for use as tools. Earl outlines the actual development of the club in greater detail in his written work.

*The clubhouse was built first, then fireplaces in the woods, then the barbecue pit and the shooting benches. This was real active in the 50's and 60's... We'd have fishing derbies for the kids and turkey shoots for the grown ups... I would take my family over on Sundays. We had picnics and played ball. People didn't have much money at that time so this was something the families could do. Many weekends we would work on the grounds and buildings, and the women would do the cooking. What good times we had!*

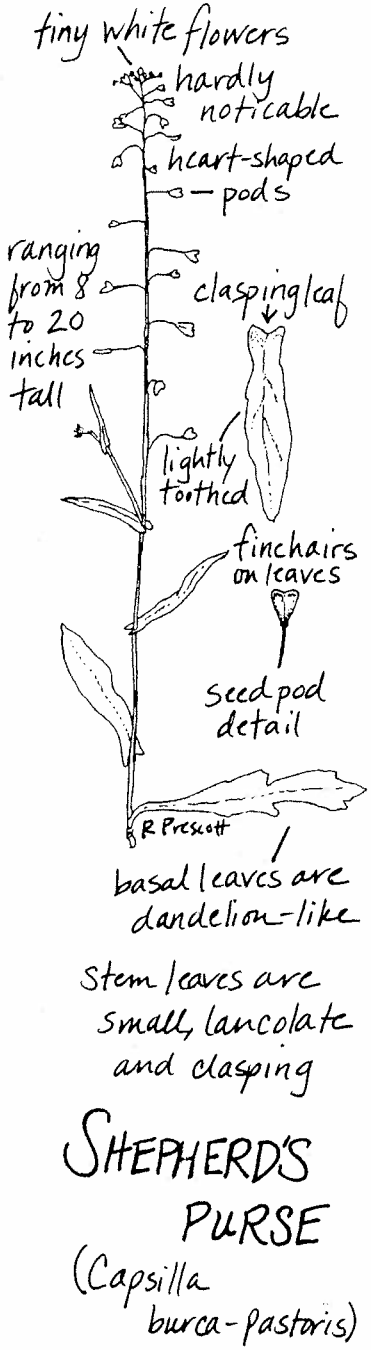
Since then, the Fish & Game Club has been discontinued. Its demise began in the early sixties when the Club decided to stock the reservoir with trout, attracting large numbers to the spot. The shooting range was a popular attraction to the land as well, and after two visiting fishermen were accidentally shot and wounded, the Club was closed for liability reasons. After speaking with Earl, I got the impression that a significant part of the spirit and togetherness of the local community went with it.

"There was a livelihood that surrounded that area, and now it's gone," he told me. "It is. We really enjoyed it back then, when we were allowed to hunt and trap. Something about the land died with the end of those days—the way we experienced the land was different. But now it'll be enjoyed in another way."

When I asked him if he supported what the Watershed Center has been trying to do with the Waterworks, he thought for a long time. Finally, he shifted in his chair to face me and said, "They bought a lot of land cheap. Now they don't want anyone to come in and use it... They wish we wouldn't disturb the wildlife." He smiled as if to acknowledge his own hesitation over the matter. Then, he sighed and tried again. "People have been disturbing 'the wildlife' for centuries. This land used to have virgin pine and hemlock



Field Notes



all over it. They were the largest trees in this part of Vermont, and they were beautiful. Beautiful! There might be a few left, but damn few. What you see over there now is second and third growth stands; that forest has been through the mill and back again."

He struck a chord. I hadn't thought of it in this context before. I only know the Waterworks in the present tense; I am familiar only with the things I have noticed during my walks there. I associate the land with what I have learned in my classes on conservation and with the mission statement of the Watershed Center, which was compiled just a few years ago.

Earl continued. "It would have been nice if the Watershed had come in fifteen or twenty years ago, when the land wasn't all logged off. I loved walking up through there..." A memory took him back twenty years, then realizing he had not directly answered my original question, he righted himself again. "No, I probably don't fully support everything they're trying to do over there now. But it's out of my hands. It's just good to keep in mind that the land *will* keep changing, whether it is us that change it or nature itself."

Earl still visits the property regularly to walk the old logging roads and enjoy the quiet woods. When I asked if he wanted to join me for a hike around the property later in the week, he shook his head. "If I took you there, I wouldn't know what to tell you, do you know what I mean? You know it as it is today. I know it as it was then. I see what has happened *to* it; I see what we've lost. I'll let you see it in your own way."

## Untitled

In a woodsy spot on the Waterworks property,
We explore the natural neighborhood.
Trees form groups like families.
My daughter and I lean against four firm hemlocks
Sprouting from one base.
The youngest, smallest member grows from the center,
Stretching and maturing toward the sky.
My young one crunches on an apple,
Enjoying yet another tree offering.
The tree diversity around us, like races of people,
Is shown in the scattering of leaves settling on the ground.
Collages of color in the higher layer
Is reflected in a muted way below.
The cycles of life continue, a young child plays with the sticks strewn around.
The young trees delicate and fragile, entering childhood.

*-Susan Ogilvie*



## Activity

Field Notes

### Life on the Farm
### Making Cottage Cheese

**Objective:** To learn about where cheese comes from and how to make it.

**Materials:** 2 cups of milk, 3 Tbs. of vinegar or lemon juice, a pinch of salt, some whipping cream, a sauce pan, 2 bowls, a wooden spoon, a colander or sieve, some cheesecloth, an apron.

**Activity:** 1) Put the milk in a sauce pan and add vinegar or lemon juice. Heat the milk for 8-10 minutes on low, stirring occasionally until it begins to curdle.

2) Remove the pan from the heat and continue stirring until all the milk has curdled. It has now separated into solid curds and liquid whey. Set this aside. (You might try tasting a bit now to see what Miss Muffet was eating).

3) Now line your colander or sieve with a double thickness of cheesecloth. Set the colander over a large bowl and pour in the curds and whey.

4) Carefully gather the corners of the cheesecloth together and twist it to form a bag around the curds. Then continue twisting to squeeze out as much of the whey as possible. You can add the whey to the compost or dilute it with water and use it to water your plants.

5) Next put the curds in another bowl, add salt to taste, some cream to moisten and stir well. Then enjoy it alone or with your favorite fruit for a nutritious snack.

**Adaptations:** Cottage cheese is also great with honey for the sweet tooth. Whole, 2%, 1% or skim milk may be used.

*Adapted from* Project Season *by Deborah Parrella.*