

# EAST MONTPELIER SIGNPOST

Volume 2, No. 5

May/June 1992

## GREENHOUSES & GREEN THUMBS: CATE FARM

The road to Cate Farm traverses a covered bridge over the Winooski River, then wends its rutted way over the river once again before it crests the hill. At once you are greeted by fertile-looking, if for-the-moment-dormant fields, rows of long greenhouses, a tattered windmill, an assortment of weathered outbuildings and a one-and-a-half story brick cape. Somehow, even with no one in sight, there is a sense of activity, of life being cultivated all around.

Six hundred tomato seedlings, 10,000 celeriac and another 10,000 lettuce and assorted herb seedlings huddle in the greenhouses, awaiting spring and their transplanting. Root crops from winter storage are being cleaned and readied for sale. Machinery is being tinkered with and, throughout the long winter, financial planning is taking place.

It is here that 35-year-old Richard Wiswall has chosen to operate his Cate Farm Organic Produce business for the past 11 years. His produce, which last year consisted of 20 tons of carrots, 20 tons of potatoes, 800 bushels of spinach, 500 cases of lettuce, 3000 pounds of tomatoes, 1000 pounds of burdock root, 12 tons of celeriac, other greens, assorted herbs and root crops, is sold at local co-ops, health food stores, restaurants, farmers' markets, and through Deep



Richard Wiswall of the Cate Farm

Root Organic Truck Farmers, a growers' co-op which sells to Boston and New York accounts.

As a certified organic farm, which Cate Farm has been since the certification process began in Vermont in 1984, reports Wiswall, "you have to

demonstrate to an independent third-party that you have a farm plan that makes use of crop rotations and cover crops, that you haven't used any chemical fertilizers or pesticides within the last three years, and that you follow other sound organic practices."

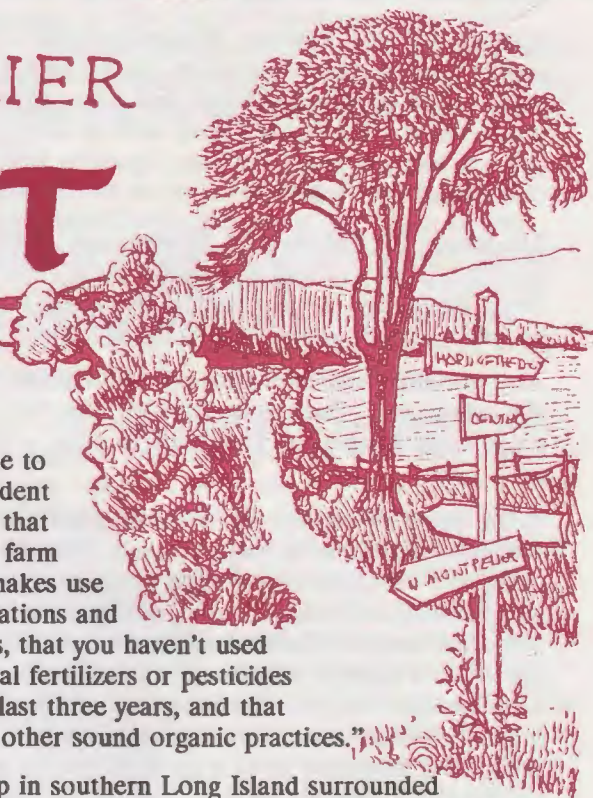
Growing up in southern Long Island surrounded by farms, Wiswall and his brothers often schemed about living a homesteader's life. Spurred on by this scheme and by various readings such as, "The Unsettling of America" by Wendell Berry, Wiswall came to Vermont in 1975 to study Environmental Science and Agriculture at Middlebury College. As part of his college experience, Wiswall spent a year living with a rice and wheat farm family in Nepal, studying its subsistent, agrarian economy.

Back in Vermont, after graduating with a degree in Environmental Science, he and a group of college friends decided to form a self-sufficient community and began looking around the Champlain Valley area. Then, in the summer of 1981, through a connection at Goddard College in Plainfield, they heard that Cate Farm was up for sale.

In October, Wiswall and four others formed a partnership, purchased the 184-acre homestead from Goddard College, and became the Cate Farm Association. Wiswall and Chris Pratt, another member of the association, along with four other friends, moved into the farmhouse and began renovating it that winter. "It's still in process, 11 years later," Wiswall laughs.

Cate Farm was settled in 1797 by Enoch Cate. The farmhouse was built in 1835 and the barn in 1865. The farm remained in the family until 1901, at which time it passed through the hands of a number of farmers until it was purchased in 1964 by Goddard College. During this illustrious period, it was used as a base for Bread and Puppet Theater and the Institute for Social Ecology.

In their first year at Cate Farm, Wiswall and his friends put in an acre market garden which they used as a testing ground to see what would sell best. Everyone had outside



jobs. Wiswall worked at Hunger Mt. Co-op and did snow-plowing. Since that time, the farm has pretty much doubled in size every year, cresting last year at 18 acres.

Starting this year, however, Wiswall intends to reverse the trend of enlarging his operation, cutting back to seven or eight less labor-intensive acres, and targeting only those plants which he knows sell well, such as tomatoes, carrots, spinach, and a couple of popular specialty items such as celeriac and burdock root.

The reason for this reversal, Wiswall says, is the incredible amount of financial and managerial stress involved with a larger operation. "I was spending more and more time in my office. I want to get back in the fields and the barn."

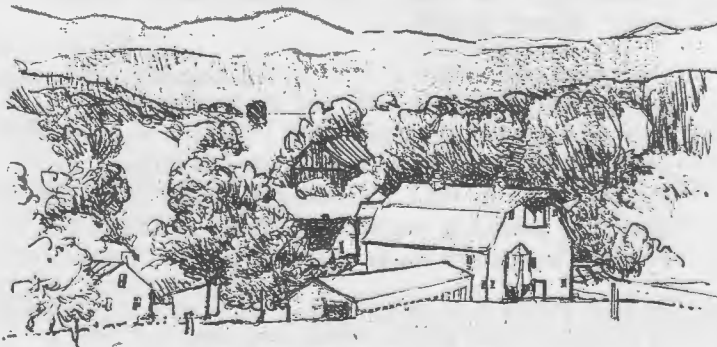
Also, recently separated from his wife, Linda Buckley, Wiswall wants to have more time with his two children -- six-year-old Kuenzi and four-year-old Flint -- when they are with him.

"Most people who start out in farming have a very romantic idea about it," says Wiswall. "But the reality is that you do a lot of undervalued work that you don't get compensated for. And you are constantly dealing with unknowns such as weather and markets, plus having to know about each crop cycle and its diseases, and having to keep up with the latest technologies. In order to be an organic grower," continues Wiswall, aside from farming skills, "you also need to be a good mechanic, welder, inventor, and have the skills of a small business person and personnel manager." Wiswall relates that a popular saying among his farm help is "farm hard, die young," to which Wiswall adds, "...and broke."

Not surprisingly, Wiswall put together a resume for the first time this winter and is now considering teaching, probably in the field of organic agriculture. "A lot of people are interested in it now, and I'd gladly help them not make the same mistakes I did."

Still, the harsh reality of farming today has not tempered the engaging enthusiasm of the man himself who remains deeply committed to it. "I still believe in it and even feel good about it," says Wiswall, "but, you know, I see my peers making three to four times as much as I do and going camping on the weekends. It does give you something to think about."

Lilli Lenz



## FROM THE TOP OF THE SIGNPOST

*What is a community? We started this newspaper with an article in Vol. I, No. 1 which said that "community is a word heard frequently in East Montpelier." The sense of community, we hoped, might grow by having the Signpost cover town news and go to into every household in town. Only you can tell us whether it's working.*

*Meanwhile we are left to ponder the basic question: what is a community? We are sure that it is more than a collection of houses, more even than neighbors who meet at Town Meeting each year. Community in its truest sense is a vital, stable and sustainable place with long-range goals for ourselves and for generations to come. It is a place where people can express differing beliefs freely and search for common ground -- a place where consensus is earnestly sought.*

*Several years ago an impressive number of townspeople spent an evening looking into the town's future. Everyone spoke, all ideas were recorded, and an exciting vision of East Montpelier emerged. Too bad that exercise was never repeated. That yeasty meeting had the seeds for helping us become a more vital, stable, sustainable community. It got everyone talking without a "them and us" mentality; it heard everyone's views; it set up a pathway to further discussion. And there it ended.*

*There is talk in town meeting of setting up a place for more of this constructive discussion. It's important that we talk on a regular basis, not just briefly when there is a controversial, volatile issue on the ballot. Can we learn to talk together even though our viewpoints differ widely? Can we explore hidden issues in an environment where everyone feels safe to speak out? We need to find the common ground and if possible discover areas of consensus, so we may take actions to make this community more truly vital, stable and sustainable. Let's talk.*

Jean Cate

## OUR THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTORS TO THE SIGNPOST

Donald and Elizabeth Atkins  
Henry and Lena Brazier  
Gary and Connie Bryant  
Ann Carr  
Richard and Anita Clark  
Earl Ellingwood  
Ross and Luella Gardner  
Philip and Maureen Gates  
James and Lois Hanna, Jr.  
Irma Hodgeman  
Martha Holden  
Fred and Joyce Jacek  
Robert H. Morse  
Robert and Harriet Papineau  
Harold and Carolyn Pastore  
Elizabeth Pulsifer  
Dona Welch  
James and Mabel Wright



## MOOSE LIPS



◆ Vegetable and flower sale at EMES gym on 5/16/92 from 9:00 A.M. to noon. Proceeds from this sale will go to buy books for EMES RIF (Reading Is Fundamental) program. Great variety of vegetable plants, herbs and flowers to plant in your garden. All plants are from Legare's Farm Market and are \$1.75 each.

◆ SURPRISE Retirement Tea in honor of Claire Rivers, R.N., school nurse at EMES for the past 15 years. For more information call Ann Carr at home (223-5641). Please do not call the school as the staff is trying to keep this a surprise. All are welcome to come and wish Claire a happy retirement.

◆ Austin Cleaves is happily retired from the mad round of meetings of the Selectmen (12 years) and the Solid Waste District (8 years). However, don't ask him about peace & tranquility.

◆ The wonder of a red fox sleeping in Cherie Langer's backyard paled when Stuart Hall saw a black panther along Vincent Flats Road.

◆ And then there was the moose sighted on County Road near the Cutler Cemetery.

◆ A group of U-32 students recently returned from a trip to Russia with Project Harmony. Students and chaperones from East Montpelier included Sara O'Hare, Abbie Wilson, Eric Allen, Eric Pauly, Megan Reed, Scott Page, Ella Abrams, David MacLeay, Jessie Klein, Aleph Johnston-Bloom, Kris Clark, John Wolff, Kathy Nelson, Mollie Saudek, Tom MacLeay and Dick Saudek. This group will be sharing their experiences with the school and community in the near future.

◆ The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City has just mounted a special exhibit of musical instruments by artist and musical instrument builder Ken Riportella of North Montpelier. Ken and his wife Ruth Crose have two children who are musically gifted and play violin.

♥ Holly Edwards thanks everyone for the care they've given her while she was recuperating.

♥ George Sibley is back home after recovering from a broken collarbone.

◆ A pig who could climb over a 10 foot fence used to entertain Anne Sherman and her disbelieving neighbors. Ask her for the full version!

### MILESTONES

(Received by the Town Clerk by Apr. 1)

#### BIRTHS

♥ Scott Timothy Bigelow born December 18, 1991 to Kimberlee Ann and Timothy Allen Bigelow.

♥ Eric Michael Lefebvre born January 17, 1992 to Dawn Wheeler Lefebvre and Patrick Michael Seitz; granddaughter of Joyce and Duane Wheeler.

#### MARRIAGES

♥ Norman Nadeau and El Pope on February 14, 1992.

#### PASSINGS

Ryan Henry Schnaars died January 8, 1992; born September 25, 1992 to Henry A. Schnaars and Mary Chappas.

Raymond Madiford Peardon Donaghy died November 26, 1991; husband of Frances Mary Donaghy.

Elizabeth M. Sarcka died February 2, 1992, mother of Anne Sarcka of Montpelier.

#### LAND TRANSFERS

(Received between December 17-February 13)

10 acres and dwelling on County Road from Raymond H. Loso to William J. Kelly & Maria Calamia.

3.22 acres and dwelling on Towne Hill Road from David B. Towers to Gary & Cynthia Muir.

8 acres and dwelling on Bliss Road from Steven & Louise Eldred to Thomas Kaiden & Susan Andrews.

5.1 acres and dwelling on Center Road from Mildred Ann Cacicio to Dario & Darcy Cacicio.

1 acre and dwelling on North Street from George D. & Leatrice M. Brown to George D., Leatrice M., Robert D., and William M. Brown.

43.1 acres on Route 14 from Gordon T. Wells to Allen & Debora J. Freund.

Right-of-Way quitclaim deed from Thomas K. & Carol C. Pierce, Gregory Shepler & Mary Ellen Stringos, Harold A. Mayforth III & Charlotte E. Magurn, and James M. & Dianne W. Vitt to Town of East Montpelier, for new road off Barnes Road.

#### AWAKEN ME

Seems Spring again  
Snow sinking  
Air perspiring  
Green renewing  
The light, the scent, the warmth  
All is right



But Spring is too damn stubborn  
Yesterday was fall  
Tomorrow's Winter  
I crave something green  
Branching inside me  
Awaken me  
Now!



Ken Riportella, Spring 1992

#### MAILING UPDATE

We've shared our woes with you in the past over how to get the Signpost to you more promptly. You'll remember that first we blamed the Christmas-New Year holidays. Then March-April was even worse with 12 days from first to last delivery through the various post offices. With this issue, we're trying a new strategy. We mail roughly 900 copies. About half go to East Montpelier, a third to Montpelier, and the rest divided among North Montpelier, Barre, Plainfield and Adamant. This issue will be bundled separately for delivery to the East Montpelier and Montpelier post offices (bulk mail), with the remaining copies going first class. More expensive, but let us know how it works.

Deadline for July-August issue is June 1. Please get copy to Janice Waterman, RR 1, Box 4330, Montpelier, VT 05602, 223-5826.



**THE SELECT BOARD**

*Weston Cate, Allan Couch, Edie Miller*

**February 12, 1992**

- ▶ Town Attorney gave update on Solid Waste issues and court proceedings. Discussed what the impact might be if the Town were to withdraw from the District.
- ▶ Heard report from Chair of Conservation Fund Advisory Committee re Merritt application. The Board expressed concern that the fund not become an enterprise fund rather than a land conservation fund. Merritt application seems inconsistent with the purpose of the fund and the proposal did not include any provision for permanent protection of the land for agriculture or other open land uses. Voted not to support the Committee's recommendation.
- ▶ Approved catering permit for a wedding at the North Montpelier Dance Hall.
- ▶ Signed liquor license application renewal for Riverbend Store.
- ▶ Approved sending out notices to inform people that Farm Tax Stabilization Contracts expire on April 1 and need to be renewed.
- ▶ Received a letter from a group of EMES teachers regarding the listing of salaries in the Town Report. The teachers would like years of experience and education, and state and national statistics on teacher compensation listed as well. Report had already gone to printers.

**February 26, 1992**

- ▶ Met with Tim Carver to discuss the C.V. Landfill Act 250 application and how to best coordinate the positions of the Town and Regional Planning Commission.
- ▶ Met with Tom Brazier regarding dispatching changes by the City of Montpelier Ambulance for the East Montpelier Fast Squad. Dispatching has moved to Police Department from the Fire Department resulting in longer response time. Bill Bryant will work with Tom to try to rectify this.
- ▶ Also discussed big increase in

ambulance budget for this year. Voted to have Tom Brazier and Bill Bryant request review of ambulance budget on an annual basis.

- ▶ Voted to accept plans for a possible future town road on proposed Brazier subdivision on Bliss Road.
- ▶ Town Service Officer appointment - will ask Hamilton Throckmorton to continue in this role.
- ▶ Appointed Road Foreman Butch Davis and Sylvia Tosi to Co-chair Green Up Day on May 2nd.

**March 18, 1992**

- ▶ Selectwoman Edie Miller was sworn in and Allan Couch was elected chair.
- ▶ Met with Tom Brazier, Richard Angney, and David Hudson to discuss location of the driveway for a 2-lot subdivision on Bliss Road. Mr. Angney does not want drive to be directly across from his. Board said town involvement in the matter is limited to safety issues and that traffic engineering standards are that it is safer for the two drives to be across from each other rather than offset. A Board member will do a site visit.
- ▶ David Burley appointed to the Recreation Board. Need to fill vacancies on Zoning Board of Adjustment and Conservation Fund Advisory Committee. Will advertise for these as per policy. Have received letters of interest from four people already.
- ▶ Liquor license renewal application for Dudley's was signed.
- ▶ Farm Tax Stabilization contract for Bradley Witham approved for 8 acres at the intersection of County and Templeton Roads. Parcel is leased to John Hall.



**PLANNING COMMISSION**

*Chair: Johanna DeMartino*

**January 16, 1992**

- ▶ Public hearing on Merritt subdivision on Factory Street. Total acreage of the subdivision is 37 acres in five lots. Voted to accept the preliminary plat as presented.
- ▶ Ed Leonard of Solid Waste Division spent over an hour explaining the various State permits that would be required before the CV Landfill could be permitted.

**March 5, 1992**

- ▶ Elected Johanna DeMartino Chair.
- ▶ Voted to approve preliminary plat for Richard Copping on Kelton Road.
- ▶ Public hearing on proposed 3 lot subdivision on Bliss Road submitted by Tom Brazier. Some inquiries by adjacent landowner about road cut and possible hazard it could create. A member of the Select Board will meet with the parties to discuss the road cut. Voted to approve preliminary plat.
- ▶ Voted to approve final plat on Merritt subdivision with conditions that any septic system get necessary state and local permits before construction and that utility lines be underground.
- ▶ Heard update on ongoing proceedings on CV Landfill.
- ▶ Discussed Bill Klein's request to keep a farm stand near the intersection of Routes 2 and 14 year round. He will need to apply for a permit for a permanent structure.



**CONSERVATION FUND  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**February 13, 1992**

- ▶ Reviewed new operating procedures (formerly bylaws) of the committee and will send to the Select Board for approval.
- ▶ New members Georgiana Miranda and Steve Sinclair were welcomed.

## BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT

Chair: Earle Ellingwood

March 9, 1992

► Public hearing on application of Earth Construction, Inc. to expand the operation for gravel extraction at the former Cooley Asphalt Gravel Pit off Coburn Road. Heard testimony from representatives of Earth Construction and from concerned citizens. Voted to recess hearing until a site visit could be made.

March 16, 1992

► Site visit for Earth Construction application. Determined that no further testimony could be taken this meeting since original meeting had not been posted at Town Clerk's Office. Moved to recess application until 3/30/92.

► Earle Ellingwood will be attending the Town Officers Educational Conference.

► Discussion re: rights of way to landlocked parcels. Will ask town attorney to come and explain.

March 23, 1992

► Public hearing on Dean Hedges' application to replace a small existing barn, requiring a dimensional variance. Some confusion over exact size and location of building. Voted to recess until a site visit could be made and more exact dimensions received.

► Public hearing on Brazier application for gravel extraction of 6000 yards over a 29 year period. Many concerned citizens present. Question raised over legality of re-hearing this application. Concern raised about water quality of Crystal Springs. Discussion to be continued on April 13.



### EAST MONTPELIER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BOARD

Jan Aldrich, Sue Stephen, Rich Davidian,  
Tony Klein, Burr Morse

February 6, 1992

► Discussed concerns of a resident about amount of money spent on special education in the district.

► Heard a report on the enrichment activities that take place at school and

commended Cathy White for her leadership.

► Superintendent George Olive presented his goals for the year. He hopes to unify efforts of the six schools in the district. Boards will be adopting common goals for 1992-93 in the area of curriculum and staff development.

March 5, 1992

► Board elected officers for the year, with Tony Klein re-elected Chair.

► 1991-92 negotiations resulted in salaries raised by 3% on base and Health Plan B. 1992-93 negotiations will be salaries raised by 4% on base with Health Plan E. The Board did not like the wording in the teachers' contract. Voted to further discuss the language.

► EMES will participate in writing and math portfolios for the State.

► A 5 year pre-school kindergarten count was compiled by Jean Cate.



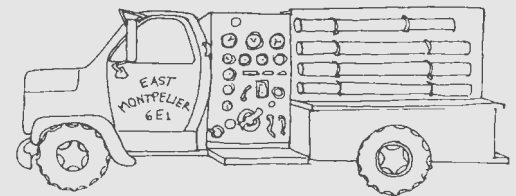
### FOUR CORNERS SCHOOLHOUSE ASSOCIATION

President: Don Donnelly

Two snowshoe hikes, planned and led by Clifton Wright, were enjoyed by several townspeople on February 22. Refreshments were served at the schoolhouse after both treks.

Clean, white snow fell steadily Saturday night for the first annual SUGAR-ON-SNOW party on March 29th. Paul Cate, planner and producer of this event, thanks his able assistants Sandal Cate, Clifton Wright, Peter Hill, Ginny Burley, Anna Molloy, and Marion Codling. An added attraction to the sugar-on-snow, donuts, and pickles, was a demonstration of Native American sap-boiling with fire-hot stones placed in sap contained in a carved-out stretch of log, as well as a tree-tap. Over 50 people enjoyed this community affair.

A Handcraft Show will be held on Saturday, May 16th at the Schoolhouse from 10:00 to 4:30 p.m. Come and see the creative talents of your neighbors. For further information phone Don Donnelly at 223-8697 or Marion Codling at 223-2058.



### FIRE DEPARTMENT

Winter is slowly giving ground to mud season and with this change, the Fire Department begins its busiest season, GRASS FIRE SEASON. One of the easiest ways to get rid of the dead grass, etc., is to burn it. Few people realize that state law prohibits the open burning of grass and brush without a permit and does not allow any burning of trash or construction debris.

If you wish to burn grass or brush, a permit must be obtained from the Town Forest Fire Warden, Robert VanZandt, owner of the Riverbend Store, at 454-7101 or the Assistant Forest Fire Warden, Chris Reed, at 223-7707. In issuing or denying a permit, the weather conditions (primarily wind), and the dryness of the ground will be considered. Failure to obtain a permit could result in an unexpected visit from the warden or the Fire Department, a possible fine, and a bill for the cost of extinguishment and for any damages. ALL IT TAKES IS A PHONE CALL!

Once you've obtained a permit, please follow these simple safety tips:

► Have extra people on hand, with water and tools to extinguish the fire if necessary.

► Burn a small area of grass or a small pile of brush at a time. Do not let it burn beyond your capability of extinguishment.

► Be aware of changing weather conditions, particularly the wind. Spring breezes are fickle, shifting directions and with sudden gusts.

► If the fire gets out of control, call the Fire Department at the emergency number, 476-4111, immediately!

► Obtaining a fire permit does not absolve anyone from burning grass or brush in a safe and responsible manner.

Any questions? Call the Fire Wardens.

William H. George, Jr.

## TOWN OFFICERS - 1992

Moderator: Martin K. Miller  
Selectwoman: Edith Miller  
Lister: Steven Sinclair  
Auditor: MaryEllen Hill  
Trustee of Public Funds: Sylvia Tosi  
Town Law Agent: Conrad Ormsbee  
Town Grand Juror: Laura Williams  
First Constable: Dennis Carver  
Second Constable: Arthur Montague  
Cemetery Commissioner:  
George F. Sibley, Sr.  
Planning Commission: Claudia Bristow  
John S. Hall  
Johanna DeMartino  
David Hudson  
Margaret E. Richey  
Edward S. Blackwell  
Elementary School Directors:  
Susan O. Stephen  
Anthony Klein  
U-32 Director: Ted Guilmette

### WINCHESTER COLLISION REPAIR

*Personalized Auto Body Repair  
and Refinishing Service*

*Michael A. Winchester, Proprietor  
479-2654  
Rt. 14, Across from Northlight Studio*

## CHURCH CHIMES

### Old Brick Church Old Meeting House

William Sloan Coffin, well-known activist for civil rights, peace, environmental and social justice issues, and former Chaplain of Yale University, will be preaching at the Old Meeting House on June 7. This will be a joint service for both congregations and held at 10:00 a.m.

June 14 will be Children's Sunday in both churches.

People who would like to become members of either congregation are invited to meet on May 3. Call Hamilton Throckmorton at 229-9593 for place and time.

The Brick Church will serve Mexican style with a Dinner on May 9 at 6:00. For a flavorful meal, call 223-5705 for reservations, \$6 adults, \$2.50 children.

Despite the terrible weather on April 11, the Red Flannel Hash Supper raised about \$550 to help pay the rent for the Onion River Foodshelf's new quarters in Marshfield.

Services are held at 9:30 a.m. at the Old Meeting House and at 11:00 a.m. at the Old Brick Church. Sunday School is held at the same times.

*(Charles Johnson - continued from page 7)*

conducted as three large dogs jumped about the room and as Nona Estrin, his friend and companion, gave details Charles was too humble to give.

The dogs are worth a line or two. After several admonitions to lie down one dog laid its head on Charles' shoulder, covering him completely. As Nona scolded him to not let the dog be too obnoxious, Charles countered gently that he liked it, and scratched the mutt's back. The same gentle caring was evident as we walked out along "the Canine Express" behind Nona's house. When we stopped for me to take pictures (of all five of them!), the result was a pile of arms, legs, tails, and giggles. The serious, intense side of Charles Johnson is balanced by a sense of humor and playfulness.

As we walk along, Charles and Nona stop to examine tracks, debate whether the red osier is redder now or in the deep winter, and guess what animals live in the stately remains of an old elm. They both see much more than the fresh growth coming through the snow. They see cycles and patterns along the path they travel frequently.

Charles mentions his teenage sons. I ask if they share his enthusiasm for the outdoors and he seems to say "not very much." Nona suggests that fathers and teenage sons can't always acknowledge those shared values -- yet. But she notes how a frequent free afternoon is spent out by a beaver pond and that one son seems increasingly concerned about environmental issues. Charles flashes a look of pride and satisfaction.

This summer, Charles and Nona will both be leading hikes for Vermont Walkers. Some of their spare moments will be spent walking through fields and forests of East Montpelier. Walk along for a bit and look for that new book next year. Both will be memorable experiences.

*Fran Weinbaum*



*The Elementary School Band played, the community gathered, and Weston Cate gave dedicating remarks on November 11, 1991 when the new Veterans Honor Roll was unveiled at the Municipal Building.*

## SEEING THE FOREST AND THE TREES: CHARLES JOHNSON

When Charles Johnson went back to Naushon Island, Massachusetts, he found the same bushes thriving that were there when his family summered on the island. He commented on how important it was to him to remember not only things as they were but to have places and things still there to help him recapture the magic of childhood.

We had talked in chronological order about where he was born and raised, what colleges he attended and which degrees he earned. Naushon Island, though, was where our conversation really began. Charles let his gaze wander out of the window. He was remembering -- "re-feeling" as he put it -- places, people and events from 23 summers. This island, virtually the same today with no electricity, no telephone, no automobiles, is where Charles believes his love for the outdoors was nurtured.

The island offered him an "endless series of experiences with nature that were not extraordinary." His parents, knowingly or otherwise, let him and his brother roam.

Together they explored tidal pools. While his brother was riding the swirls of foaming water, Charles was playing with hermit crabs in the backwater and feeling the minnows bump his legs. He recalls digging for clams with the birds. "We would imagine that we were the birds and our shovels were our long bills digging out the clams."

Charles fondly and almost reverently remembers John Olsen, the Danish lobsterman, who would row across the bay for dinner. After dinner, John Olsen would tell stories of sailing and fishing. One story was about the bumblebee that landed in a puddle on John's boat. The bee was too tired to fly so John picked it up gently, getting stung in the process. Rather than slapping the bee off, John carefully removed the bee with stinger still attached so that the bee would survive.

John's stories would create a feeling of timelessness where Charles felt everyone was ageless and equally engaged in the experience. He personified a life-style and a relationship with nature that Charles deeply respects. Olsen did not "make a living"; he lived every moment and every day in direct relationship to the world around him.

These boyhood experiences were the beginning of an environmental ethic that underlies all that Charles Johnson has done. On the island, he studied "nature in the context of living". He went on to study the science of nature at Wabash College, University of Illinois and Indiana University. Charles came to Vermont as a Park Ranger at

Island Pond in 1973 and moved to Moscow, Vermont, as a Park Naturalist in 1974. In 1978 he became the State Naturalist, a position he still holds with responsibilities in conservation of rare and endangered species, management of state natural areas, and involvement with major land acquisitions.

Charles also acts as consultant to the Commissioner of Forest, Parks and Recreation. He is the author of two books, *Bogs of the Northwest* and *The Nature of Vermont*, the latter by which he is particularly well known among naturalists. Charles has enjoyed his journey along the naturalists' career path, bringing together his work in the field with environmental policy development.

Increasingly interested in how people interact with nature, he is exploring that relationship in his third book where he reflects on the summers on Naushon Island. Charles hopes that by describing the simplicity and directness of life on

that island, readers will sense the wonders around them everyday. By making those small intimate connections, he wants to stir people to rebel against the thought that things have to change for the worse, that our childhood memories must be replaced by paved roads and shopping centers. But how we as a society balance the benefits and losses of technological progress is a question Charles does not answer directly.

Charles has lived in the Horn of the Moon since 1978. As he talks about East Montpelier as a community, one begins to hear pieces of where we each need to start. He remarks how communities formed around functional needs. People simply needed to live close together. Today, automobiles

allow people to travel distances to work, to recreate, to go to school. Small towns become bedroom communities and weekend retreats. Charles suggests that communities may come together now through a spiritual need. Commonly held values that speak to a way of life all but lost in much of our country is still a possibility in East Montpelier and other small Vermont towns.

While not a native Vermonter, his values and visions about simplicity, community and the land are the essence of a Vermont tradition we all want to preserve. It is easy to get philosophical speaking with Charles. He seeks meaning in every day events.

It seems important to end this profile with a glimpse of the playful Charles Johnson. Much of the interview was

*(continued on page 6)*



*Nona Estrin, Charles Johnson, and friends*

## COMMITTEE MEETING CALENDAR

Selectmen	2nd & 4th Wednesday	7:00	Town Office
Planning Commission	1st, 3rd, 4th Thursday	7:30	"
Zoning Board of Adjustment	2nd & 4th Monday	7:30	"
Conservation Fund Advisory Comm.	2nd Tuesday	7:00	"
Volunteer Fire Department	Every Tuesday	7:00	Fire Station, Templeton Rd.
U-32 School Board	2nd & 4th Tuesday	7:30	U-32
Elementary School Board	1st Thursday	7:30	Elementary School
Town Clerk's Office Hours	Monday-Thursday: 9-5, Friday: 9-12		Town Office
Zoning Administrator	Tuesday & Thursday	1:00-2:30,	Town Office

Meeting times are subject to change

## EVENTS CALENDAR

Saturday, May 2, 10:00 a.m.	Pick Up Liberty Elm Trees	Elementary School
Saturday, May 2,	Green Up Day	Along the Roadsides
Saturday, May 9, 6:00 p.m.	Mexican Dinner	Old Brick Church
	Call 223-5705 for reservations	
Saturday, May 16, 9:00 - 12:00	Plant & Flower sale	Elementary School
Saturday, May 16, 10:00 - 4:30	Handcraft Show	Four Corners School
Sunday, June 7, 10:00	William Sloan Coffin, Guest Preacher	Old Meeting House
Tuesday, June 9, 2:00 - 4:00	Retirement Tea for Claire Rivers	Elementary School
Thursday, June 25, 5:30 - 7:00	Strawberry Festival	Old Brick Church



## SIGNPOST STAFF

<i>Jean Cate, Publisher, 223-2951</i>	<i>Cherie Langer, Managing Editor, 229-4858</i>	<i>Janet MacLeod, Artist, 229-4349</i>
<i>Fred Tubbs, Copy Editor, 454-8462</i>	<i>David Coburn, Copy Editor, 223-6886</i>	<i>Sylvia Tosi, Town Records, 223-3240</i>
<i>Anne Sherman, Business Manager, 223-2693</i>		<i>Janice Waterman, News Editor, 223-5826</i>

Printed on Recycled Paper with Soybased Ink

**East Montpelier Signpost**  
**RFD 1, Box 80**  
**East Montpelier, Vermont 05651**

**Address Correction Requested**  
**Return Postage Guaranteed**

Volume 2, No. 5

**INSIDE:**

**CHARLES JOHNSON**  
**CATE FARM**  
**GRASS FIRES**  
**ELECTION RESULTS**  
**WEATHERVANE**

**SUBSCRIBERS: CHECK YOUR LABEL!**

**Bulk Rate**  
**U.S. Postage**  
**PAID**  
**L. Brown and Sons, Inc.**

