

Coming Back to the Land 240 Years of Human Activity at Mead Base

by Tom Okie
Summer 2001

The old headquarters building at Mead Base, on first appraisal, is nothing remarkable. Like any number of New England farmhouses, it has been scarred by weather and time: the paint is peeling in places, the chimney unstable, and the rear siding rotting. To most observers — passers-by on their way up Mount Israel on the Wentworth Trail, campers in the Adirondack cabins to the west of the house, or confused tourists searching for Sandwich Notch — the house signifies nothing, unless they notice the Daniel Webster Council–Boy Scouts of America sign that still hangs over the front drive: “Building Better Youth.”

The house’s unimpressive appearance, however, conceals a rich, varied past. Hidden underneath this static facade is history — the organic unrolling of the past right into the present. Like so much of what surrounds us, this homestead has a story to tell, a story that intersects and illustrates broader historical narratives — of New Hampshire, New England, the nation, the world — in important ways.

The old homestead cleared by Jacob and Eliphalet Smith sits nestled in the lower slopes of Mount Israel. The *intervale*, a lovely swath of grasses and clover that is still hayed twice every summer, stretches south from the house toward a quartz-studded ridge known as Diamond Ledge. On the western side of the *intervale* runs what is now Diamond Ledge Road, formerly (and more accurately) known as Smith *Intervale* Road. It joins Sandwich Notch Road at the end of the *intervale*. To the west is remarkably flat terrain, undoubtedly once the Smiths’ best farmland, dotted now with Boy Scout-era cabins under an open grove of white pines. Fieldstones that once provided the foundation for Lewis Q. Smith’s barn or the boundaries for his fields, along with several small gullies that run with water in wet weather, break up the landscape. Further west, the Bearcamp River descends from Beede’s Falls across the *intervale* and southeast into town. To the east, a stone wall, now hidden by the forest, extends from Wilbur Cook’s big oak in the middle of the *intervale* to nearly halfway up Mount Israel. To the north, the Wentworth Trail ascends Israel, passing stone walls and barbed wire that once marked off a number of pastures far up the mountain.

Old houses are not unusual in New England, but many have only seen a couple of different uses in their lifetimes. Too, many have been restored to period so that they represent only one slice of history. What makes Mead Base especially interesting is that it has been affected by so much of American land use history and still bears the marks of that history. Not only is it a rare representative of the unique agrarian society of early nineteenth-century New England, a hill farm that survived the virtual disappearance of its neighborhood, but it also illustrates a great deal of subsequent history. By the 1930s, the house was a tourist attraction and was later purchased as a summer dwelling. Engineer and conservationist Jack Mead bought it as part of his effort to save the surrounding forest from timber harvesting, and his widow later donated it to the White Mountain National Forest.

The Boy Scouts used the place for forty-six years to reintroduce the young men of America to the wilderness and the virtues it instills. And today, the house touches on the conservation-recreation conflict that currently plagues public-lands management. The ways we live in the world — especially the ways we use the land — have changed dramatically in the last two centuries, and these changes are vivid in the history of Mead Base.

It is a place that brings people back. Eliphalet Smith's son Josiah returned often to the homestead established by his father, even as a very old man, when he was seen "shuffling along slowly with the aid of his two canes."¹ Eliphalet's grandson Burleigh, from his missionary post in India, made frequent, affectionate references to "the old mountain home" in his letters to the family, and later came returned on furlough to help his aging father farm during the Civil War. Burleigh's brother, Lewis Q. Smith, was restless as a young man, but eventually settled down to farming here for nearly half a century. His son, Demerit, also returned after farming elsewhere to give the land its last thirteen years of husbandry. The mountainside that once harbored livestock summer after summer now supports a forest and the Wentworth Trail that brings back summer campers and hikers year after year. Former Scout campers with fond recollections of their days of high adventure at the Wilderness Base visit to show their families around. Summer residents appreciative of the house's historical facade have kept the place under watchful eyes.

Since this purports to be a history of land and buildings, it may seem out of place to spend so much time on the people. But natural history is, or should be, human history, and in a place as inhabited as this one has been, the two are inseparable. The people who have traversed these few acres have all somehow etched their culture into the land, and the land, for its part, has returned the favor. As one state historian notes, early New Hampshire pioneers "did not impose their will on the land so much as the land imposed its character on them."²

Knowing how this relationship has developed is important because of what it teaches us about ourselves. At the least, perhaps, it should remind us that we humans are uniquely *in* the world. We are, as environmental historian Donald Worster puts it, "truly part of the planet," but part of it in a way shared by no other creature.³ Here at the foot of Mount Israel, people have been both farmers trying to eke out a living and modern Americans trying to get back in touch with their pioneer forebears — the hard labor, the feel of an untouched forest, the quiet solitude.

The story stretches infinitely back, and perhaps with intensive environmental–archeological projects we could learn a great deal about the distant past, but we begin with the available documentation, in the 1760s, just before the little town of Sandwich was chartered.

1760-1935: THE SMITHS

Jacob and Dorothy Smith

Nearly 250 years ago "Colonel" Jacob Smith (1739-1816) of Exeter, New Hampshire, began making regular trips to the Sandwich area with some of his prominent Exeter companions — perhaps his comrades-in-arms — to hunt and trap.⁴ The party camped under a couple of mountains

¹Sandwich Historical Society (SHS), *16th Annual Excursion of the SHS* (1935), 11.

²Elizabeth Forbes Morison and Elting E. Morison, *New Hampshire: A Bicentennial History*. States and the Nation Series, ed. James Morton Smith, (New York: Norton; Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1976), 50.

³Donald Worster, "Transformations of the Earth: Toward an Agroecological Perspective in History," *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 4 (March, 1990): 1087-1106.

⁴We know little of Jacob Smith's prior history, but there is a rumor that he came originally from England. Other sources say he was born in Exeter.

at the southerly edge of the Sandwich Range near “the little river” they named Bearcamp on account of a mischievous bear that, in their absence, broke into their camp and consumed their provisions.⁵

In a few short years the land they explored was chartered to a group of Exeterites as the town of Sandwich, and Jacob emigrated with his wife, Dorothy⁶ Ladd (1741-1824), and their son Eliphalet to settle in the Bearcamp Valley.⁷ Their earliest neighbors were Israel Gilman, who gave his name to one of the mountains, and Simeon Smith, both members of the famous hunting party.

Jacob was apparently a regular at the local tax sales,⁸ and so bought an enormous amount of land in the area – about a thousand acres, according to one report.⁹ And like almost everyone settling in northern New Hampshire in the eighteenth century, the land he found was almost certainly thick with trees. According to tradition, he was the first to significantly change the land on which Mead Base stands — he cleared the forest for farmland, an arduous task that has been chronicled elsewhere.¹⁰ He built a little red house out in the middle of the *intervale* which served as the center of a 200-acre farm.

Gallant Captain

As Jacob was coming of age in Exeter, local Native American tribes such as the Canadian Saint Francis Indians were attacking often enough to justify garrisons and small fortresses in even the smallest towns, and there were frequent excursions to do battle with the belligerents.¹¹ Three Jacob Smiths (father, son, grandson) were listed among the Exeter recruits for various offensive and defensive maneuvers to counteract the raids, which the colonists suspected were incited by the French or the British, whoever happened to be the greater enemy at the moment.¹² Even if our Jacob did not join these expeditions, it is probable that his interest in the military had its roots here. We may also speculate that his patriotism was in part a result of his Exeter upbringing. From its earliest days as a refuge for religious dissenters, the town seemed to foster independent thinking. By the late 1700s, Exeter was a center of revolutionary ferment.¹³

Thus it is not surprising that along with most Sandwich residents (except for a few loyalists and some “of Quaker proclivities”), Jacob Smith signed the Association Test of April 1776, a document recommended by the Continental Congress and circulated by state assemblies to shore up patriotic sentiment. According to Georgia Drew Merrill’s 1889 *History of Carroll County*, it was effectively “a declaration of independence by the New Hampshire people.”¹⁴ Signers promised:

⁵ 16th *Excursion*, 8.

⁶In some of the deeds at the Strafford County Registry, she is listed as Dolly Smith.

⁷Charles H. Bell, *History of Exeter, N.H.* (n.p., 1888; Reprint by Facsimile Heritage Books, 1979.), 76; SHS, 16th *Annual Excursion*, 11.

⁸According to custom, when an original grantee failed to occupy his parcel of land and accrued back taxes, the town would reclaim the land and sell it to the highest bidder at the “tax sale.”

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰See for example William Cronon, *Changes in the Land* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983) ch. 6 (108-126).

¹¹Morison and Morison, ch. 4, *passim*.

¹²Bell, 233.

¹³*Ibid.*, 10-12, 66.

¹⁴Georgia Drew Merrill, *History of Carroll County* (Boston: W.A. Fergusson, 1889; Somersworth, NH: New Hampshire Publishing Co., 1971) 74.

to the utmost of our power, at the risque of our lives and fortunes, with ARMS, oppose the hostile proceedings of the British fleets and armies against the United American Colonies.¹⁵

Jacob backed up his words with his gun. He served with the Continental Army in 1777 under General Gates and Captain Nathan Ambrose in the crucial battle at Saratoga, in which a British force of some 7000 was captured by colonial militias. He was discharged after General Burgoyne surrendered in November 1777.¹⁶

Apparently his military career continued extensively after his stint with Captain Ambrose. In April 1781, according to Sandwich Historical Society records, Jacob Smith, this time as a Captain, led a company of sixty-five men which was to be ready at to march to West Point at General Washington's command.¹⁷ Then from August to November of that year, for twelve pounds a month, Jacob participated in an expedition to punish an unruly Indian tribe as the "Gallant Captain of the Rangers."¹⁸ By 1787, he was in the state militia's nineteenth regiment as a first major; by 1795, at the respectable age of fifty-six, he was a Lieutenant Colonel.¹⁹ Presumably the title by which he was known, "Colonel," derived from his service in the state militia.

Citizen Farmer

Jacob Smith was also an important figure in the Sandwich community. In the 1770s and 80s he was several times a selectman and once a constable. And his geographical position was important, too. According to one report, the road from his homestead was laid out to Moultonborough in 1772.²⁰ Later, in the early 1800s, his land would become a kind of threshold for the Sandwich Notch Road — in its day a much-traveled trade route — and the locally powerful community that grew up around it.

As he grew older, Jacob distributed some of his land to his sons. In 1795 he sold to Samuel Smith a piece of land across the Notch Road near Dinsmore Pond, which under the husbandry of Samuel's son Colonel Lewis Smith (not to be confused with his cousin Lewis Q. Smith) became one of the most prosperous farms in Sandwich Notch.²¹ And in March of 1815 he left about fifty acres at the base of Mount Israel to Eliphalet "in consideration of the love regard and affection" he held for him.²² But Colonel Smith was unable to hold onto his own farm. In 1811 he was forced to mortgage it to a Dover, New Hampshire gentleman and finally sold it in 1812 to Paul Wentworth.²³

¹⁵5th *Excursion* (1976), 5. A reproduction of the document courtesy of State Archives, Concord, NH.

¹⁶16th *Excursion*, 11.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.* These may have been the same famous Rangers organized by Robert Rogers in 1754 for the protection of the New Hampshire frontier.

¹⁹5th *Excursion*, 11. See also, in SHS library, *The Proprietors Records 1763-1827*.

²⁰21st *Excursion* (1940), 30.

²¹D. Bruce Montgomery, "Sandwich Notch Revisited," 69th *Excursion* (1988), 24.

²²Jacob Smith to Eliphalet Smith, 5 March 1815, Strafford County Registry of Deeds, Book 91, page 83.

²³Jacob Smith to Ezra Green, 18 April 1811, Book 67, page 229. Jacob Smith to Paul Wentworth, 24 February 1812, Strafford County Registry of Deeds, Book 68, page 405; See also John Wentworth, *The Wentworth Genealogy*, vol. 3 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1878) 462, in SHS library; SHS, 16th *Excursion*, 8, 10. Incidentally, the place was Wentworth's first home in Sandwich and the birthplace of "Long John" Wentworth, later an early mayor of Chicago.

According to reports, Jacob lived with Eliphalet in a house they built in 1812 until his death in 1816.²⁴ After a lifetime of adventures, Jacob Smith had come at last to the homestead at the foot of Mount Israel to die. It was here, with his descendants, that his legacy would live on.

Eliphalet and Mercy Smith

We know little about where Eliphalet Smith (1762-1848) was before taking over his father's land. He is listed as a cordwainer (shoemaker) in 1789, when he purchased ninety-nine acres high in Sandwich Notch at a tax sale.²⁵ It is unknown if he ever cultivated this tract (he may have later sold it for a profit, since he paid just three shillings, five pence for it), but at some point he did change his occupation to husbandry, ultimately made his home at the base of Mount Israel, and probably built the original house. It is likely, moreover, that he did all this before his father granted him the land — tradition holds that he and his father built the original house in 1812, and the 1815 deed from Jacob includes “the buildings thereon.”

In any event, we may consider Eliphalet to be the real father of the homestead now known as Mead Base. He was the first in written memory to call the place home, even though Jacob may have actually cleared the land. Eliphalet laid the foundation for the next three generations of Smiths, for adventure-seeking Scouts, and for innumerable outdoor enthusiasts.

The plot he carved out of the forest included a narrow strip of arable land extending to the west of the house, and probably some pastureland and perhaps garden plots up on the mountain. It was bordered on the east by his father's old farm, then in the possession of the Wentworths and later belonging to the Beedes.²⁶ Eliphalet seems to have been a precise fellow. According to some documentation he recorded the time of his marriage and the births of his children down to the minute.²⁷ And he took it upon himself to produce a document, titled simply “Experienced, Medicine, and Cuers for many certain Diseases,” relating his remedies for ailments such as film on the eye (“Dry human Dung in the sun that is yalow and of a Good consistence and having Reduced it to a Very fine Powder Blow it throw a quill two or three times a day into the Eye..”), swelling, and “the courses” — a woman's menstrual cycle.

Like his father, Eliphalet fought in the Revolutionary War, enlisting three times from 1779-81, including once with Jacob as captain.²⁸ An unknown source relates that “he escaped British capture because in receiving the kicks and buffets of his enemies he assumed the position and repose of the dead, and so counterfeited death as to escape the negligence of his enemies.”²⁹

In March 1784, he married Mercy Burley, who bore him seven children. Josiah, who later changed his name to George Washington Smith, made frequent visits to his birthplace until the end of his life. John (1793-1869) succeeded Eliphalet on the farm.³⁰ According to reports, Eliphalet's

²⁴16th *Excursion*, 10.

²⁵Ezekiel French tax collector to Eliphalet Smith, 3 June 1789, Strafford County Registry of Deeds, Book 22, page 470.

²⁶16th *Excursion*, 8-9. The Wentworths and in particular the Beedes were very prominent families in the early days of Sandwich.

²⁷“Accounts. Eliphalet Smith,” card given by Lucy Weed, Smith Manila Folder, SHS Archives.

²⁸Eliphalet Smith, Pension Application, 18 October 1832, Revolutionary Pension Files, National Archives, Washington D.C.

²⁹16th *Excursion*, 10.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 11.

home burned sometime in the 1830s as he, “saving only his musket and his beloved fiddle,” sat on a stump and calmly watched.³¹ He is said to have rebuilt the ell before he died in 1848, supposedly leaving the construction of the main house to his grandson, Lewis Q. Smith.³²

John and Eliza Smith

It was not long after his father and grandfather built the house under the mountain that John Smith (1793-1869) took their legacy of soldiering on himself and carried his grandfather’s gun into battle against the British in the War of 1812.³³ Shortly after he returned (and less than three weeks after Eliphalet acquired it from Jacob) he bought the homestead from his father for \$500.³⁴ Presumably, although he sold it to his brother Samuel Smith in 1820, John cultivated the property until Lewis bought it in 1867.³⁵

Disappearing Neighbors

By 1820 John had married Elizabeth (Eliza) Webster, who as the daughter of Dr. Jacob Webster was reputed to be medically astute. According to reports, she made use of the remedies of Dr. Harris, a locally famous doctor from Sandwich Notch.³⁶

It was probably no coincidence that the Smiths had this connection with the Notch. More than their parents or their children, John and Eliza would have seen the rise and fall of this famous neighborhood. About the time he was leaving for the War, the Notch was just gaining momentum. It reached its peak by 1830 as a thriving and very nearly self-sufficient community of forty families along an important Canada-to-seacoast trade route. By the time John died in 1869, the Notch was comparatively empty, down to about a half-dozen families, its residents driven elsewhere by the Civil War’s demand for men, the railroad’s ability to transport goods, and the soil’s stubborn stinginess.³⁷

Remarkably, the Smith homestead survived the decline of Sandwich Notch and hill farming across New Hampshire. The Notch was probably a typical early nineteenth-century hill farm community (as defined in a study by Richard C. Waldbauer of Brown University) in that its social and economic life was oriented around the “cluster” of farms along the Notch Road. Notch families, for example, were famous for their solidarity, so much so that they dominated local elections for years by voting as a bloc. Individual farms for the most part were not large or prosperous enough to be “self-sufficient” entities; rather, it was the cluster that was self-sufficient. Residents depended on each other, perhaps even to the extent of making decisions collectively. Thus, as the Notch population dwindled, the ones left behind were generally not equipped to deal with the vagaries of hill farming alone. The Smith homestead, however, seemed to have the internal

³¹16th *Excursion*, 10; 1st *Excursion*, 1; Jameson S. French, “Historic Site Inventory, Sandwich Notch,” Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (SPNHF), Summer 1975, Forest Supervisor’s Office. This inventory is also filed in Sandwich Notch file, SHS Archives, and in the SPNHF Conservation Center in Concord.

³²Wentworth, 462. *Ell*: A single lean-to wing of a house, often containing a kitchen.

³³Merrill, 86; John E. Donahue, USFS Regional Attorney, letter to Hiram G. Smith, 1 September 1950, Forest Supervisor’s Office, Donation File #917.

³⁴Eliphalet Smith to John Smith, 31 Mar 1815, Strafford County Registry of Deeds, Book 84, page 368.

³⁵John Smith to Samuel Smith, 29 January 1820, Strafford County Registry of Deeds, book 106, page 499.

³⁶16th *Excursion*, 10.

³⁷69th *Excursion*, 6-11.

resources — and perhaps the necessary proximity to Sandwich Center — to sustain itself. And like other hill farmers of the 1800s, the Smiths evidently “looked inward for adaptations,” increasingly relying on immediate family members instead of their Notch neighbors.³⁸

Making a Home and a Living

On these spare sixty acres, John and Eliza raised six or possibly seven children, making a home of which their eldest son Benjamin Burleigh wrote fondly and frequently in his letters from India. “It must be hard,” he wrote in 1856, for the children “to leave the old house under the mountain. I know right well how to sympathize with them on this point.”³⁹

Whether or not it was hard for the children to leave, they did return. There were periodic social visits, calls on sick people (Eliza, for example, suffered from fevers and headaches, as Burleigh exclaimed: “How many times the poor woman has had the fever, and how much suffering she has been called to endure!”⁴⁰), and help for the farming operation. Home on furlough in 1862, Burleigh traveled around New England giving lectures on behalf of the “Christian Society,” but he and his young son Eddie helped on the farm as they could.⁴¹ John’s son Jacob was frequently on the farm helping his father hay, plow, and plant, as was Frank Wiggin, John’s son-in-law and one of Lewis’ best friends. Lewis’s wife Mary Elizabeth evidently moved in with her sons while her husband was away and, as it happened, never left. Lewis, for his part, apparently left home for a number of years — as a shoemaker perhaps out West in the 1850s, and as a private in New Hampshire’s 14th Regiment of Volunteers from 1862 to 1865 — but ultimately succeeded his father in 1867. In these small but significant ways, the land shaped the family’s social interaction.

John tilled the soil at the old homestead well into his seventies, wringing from the land peas, wheat, beans, potatoes, maple syrup, oats, corn, hay, and garden vegetables. Although the Historical Society’s *Sandwich, New Hampshire, 1763-1990* and at least one local farmer agree that most of the farms in the area were oriented toward livestock since the soil was too thin and rocky for many crops, family letters suggest that the Smith farm produced mostly food crops.⁴² Mary Elizabeth Smith writes much to her husband Lewis of plowing and sowing, but little of livestock. They seem to have had a few sheep, a pig, an old mare who in 1863 bore a fine colt – according to Lewis’s wife Elizabeth “the best there is around” –, and a cow. They actually had to rent cattle. Mary assured Lewis in 1863: “We shall get some cattle to do our work,” and they also needed the manure to keep their land fertile.⁴³

In order to survive on a farm, John and Eliza’s mid-western counterparts probably raised a few marketable crops and used the profit to purchase what was not grown. For the Smiths, however, it appears that the aim was not commerce but self-sufficiency. Owning livestock meant wintering

³⁸Richard C. Waldbauer, “The Transformation of a Rural Ideal: Farm Strategies and Failed Practice,” paper presented at annual meeting of the Society for American Archeology, New Orleans, LA, 1986.

³⁹Benjamin Burleigh Smith, letter to his mother Elizabeth Smith, Balasore, 3 Sept 1856, Smith family letters, SHS Archives.

⁴⁰Benjamin Burleigh Smith, letter to sister Lucy Smith Wiggin, Balasore, 4 Jan 1858.

⁴¹Benjamin Burleigh Smith, letter to Lewis Q. Smith, Sandwich Nov 6, 1862, .

⁴²SHS, *Sandwich, New Hampshire, 1763-1990*, ed. Patricia Heard and Shirley Elder Lyons, (Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher for SHS, 1995) 33; Wilbur Cook and Joan Cook, interview by the author, tape recording, Center Sandwich, NH, 13 July 2001.

⁴³Mary E. Smith, letters to Lewis Q. Smith: May 14, 1863; July 13, 1863; undated May. In SHS Archives.

them over, which meant cutting a lot of hay, something for which the Smiths did not have enough land or manpower. With only sixty acres, and some of that uncultivable due to slope and rocks, priority was given to crops that would sustain the family through the winter. And in any case, there was no easy way to get most of their products to market. The railroad never came very close to Sandwich, and roads were poor.

In 1865, John's brother Samuel Smith of Winchester, Massachusetts sold the sixty-acre homestead plot for \$500 to J. Frank Wiggin of Meridith, the husband of Lewis's sister Lucy Jane Smith.⁴⁴ Frank did not live in the house; he had a bustling shop in Meredith. But the land stayed in the family, in part because of a friend and relation who was reaping the benefits of a bigger town.

Lewis Q. and Mary E. Smith

In about 1853, Sandwich schoolteacher Lucy Jane Smith wrote to her brother Lewis Q. Smith,

If you come home to spend the winter I shall be at home with you, or if you go away I shall go with you . . . Mother wants you to come home to spend Thanksgiving all of you [Lewis, his brother Jacob, and "Mary," possibly Lewis's future wife] and I want you to come very much if you can.⁴⁵

Lewis did come home, but not before employing himself as a shoemaker, considering a trip to western gold mines, getting married to Mary Elizabeth "Lizzie" or "Libby" Paine, and volunteering to fight in the Civil War.⁴⁶ This last adventure he later regretted (he confessed to his wife his feeling that "this is a judgement sent upon me . . . I was too mean to stay there at home with you"), and perhaps it drained the restlessness out of his bones at last. He stayed on the family homestead until he died in December 1913.⁴⁷

Uncle Sam's Soldier

The War was doubtless a life-changing event for Lewis. He traveled through New York, Maryland, Washington D.C., Georgia, and Louisiana, endured sickness and battles, and saw enough to grow very bitter toward his leaders. He complained to his sister Lucy,

If it was not for the big pay that the [officers] have this war wood very soon come to close but they have big pay an keep drunk haft thar time and haft of the other haft . . . they [fare] well while the por soldier is kick around by the cursed [officers].⁴⁸

In the field, the Sandwich Historical Society has noted, company K "became the men's surrogate family" as it comprised more Sandwich residents than any other unit.⁴⁹ Indeed, Lewis' wrote to his

⁴⁴Samuel Smith to Joseph F. Wiggin, 9 October 1865, Carroll County Registry of Deeds, Book 47, page 150.

⁴⁵Lucy Jane Smith, letter to Lewis Q. Smith, Sandwich 28 Sept 1853 (?)

⁴⁶Ibid.; J.P. Chase, letter to Lewis Q. Smith, Farmington, undated July 9.

⁴⁷Lewis Q. Smith, letter to his wife Mary E. Smith, 29 Apr 1863 (?)

⁴⁸Lewis Q. Smith, letter to his sister Lucy Smith Wiggin, Poolville, MD, 25 Jan undated.

⁴⁹SHS, *Sandwich*, 36.

wife in May 1862, "Asa [Magoon] an Molton Webster took care of me they spared no pains."⁵⁰ But Lewis was also very lonely and homesick. At times he was deeply pessimistic. From Poolville, Maryland, he wrote, "every thing looks dark and darker every day."⁵¹ He felt the acute powerlessness of being unable to do anything but send money. "When I hear of any of my friends air at home under pains of sickness," he confessed to Elizabeth, "it makes my heart aches [aches] within. My feelings I can hardly control but we will try to make the best of it."⁵² Sometimes his reflections on home were more light-spirited. He imagined playfully what he would do if he could spend Thanksgiving with Elizabeth:

I think you was coming out large to kill your poor old hin for me if I come home . . . I would don better by you if you had come out here to see me. I would give you a good fat turkey if I had to hook it which I have never done since I have been in the army.⁵³

"I should like to spend the winter with you," he declared to Elizabeth in November 1863, "but as I cannot you must try and make the best of it and I will try and do the same and we will both come out bright and shiny at last."⁵⁴ He later wrote to Lucy and her husband Frank Wiggin, "I should like to be there with you, but I am in the fetters fast and strong. But there is a day coming that the iron [iron] chain will be broken. Then we will return to our homes."⁵⁵

As it turns out, he was one of the fortunate who did return home. When he was finally discharged in July 1865, by this time a Corporal (though he had earlier confessed to Mary that in reality "a Corporal is no better than a private"), Lewis had given up "likker," talked of abstaining also from tobacco,⁵⁶ and begged forgiveness of his wife.

I think that you ought to take some comfort now for you never did before while I was there with you and I know it now but the past I cannot recall. You must forgive me for the past if you can . . . I should think you would rather I should stay for when I am here there is no one to trouble you . . .⁵⁷

For her part, Elizabeth Smith replied, "I did [not] think you was a bad boy . . . I think you love your wife and children too well for that."⁵⁸ In one letter she was adamant about his return.

I am going to say one thing . . . don't you insist again it . . . I want not your money, I don't sell my husband. I need you hear more than your kneaded any where else. Your boys want a good

⁵⁰Lewis Q. Smith, letter to Mary E. Smith, May 1862.

⁵¹Lewis Q. Smith, letter to Mary E. Smith, Poolville, 8 Feb undated.

⁵²Lewis Q. Smith, letter to his wife Mary E. Smith, Carrollton, LA, 10 May 1864.

⁵³Lewis Q. Smith, letter to his wife Mary E. Smith, Washington D.C., 24 Nov 1863.

⁵⁴Lewis Q. Smith, letter to his wife Mary E. Smith, Washington D.C., 22 Nov 1863.

⁵⁵Lewis Q. Smith, letter to Lucy and Frank Wiggin, Maryland, 14 Dec 1862.

⁵⁶Lewis Q. Smith, letters to his wife Mary E. Smith, Harpers Ferry, WV, 29 April 1863 (?), and Washington D.C., 6 December 1863.

⁵⁷Lewis Q. Smith, letter to his wife Mary E. Smith, 29 April undated.

⁵⁸Mary E. Smith, letter to her husband Lewis Q. Smith, Sandwich, 15 August undated.

Marster and your are the one for them.⁵⁹

As Elizabeth's plea suggests, the war was also hard for those who remained on the farm. Because so many men were called away, labor was difficult to find and very expensive. Wages increased by some fifty percent during the war. Prices, meanwhile, rose by about one hundred percent, and this combination in addition to higher taxes caused some families to lose their farms altogether. The Smiths used family help when they could, but apparently depending mostly on John, who was by this time in his seventies. And when John got sick, as he apparently did in the winter of 1863-4, it was real cause for worry. "I was afraid he would never get over it," Lucy confided to Lewis, "I thought what could they do with out him when you was away."⁶⁰

The town also did what they could to help out. At an October 1861 town meeting, William Weed was named the aid disburser for families of soldiers. Elizabeth often mentions "going to Weed" to receive her sum.⁶¹

In Lewis' absence, Burleigh's return in 1862 must have been a godsend. They clearly relied upon him. Lewis repeatedly wrote his wife to see Burleigh if she needed help, and Burleigh declared to Lewis that "you may be assured that we shall do all that we can to assist her." Of course, Elizabeth was far from helpless. She was "very prudent," and tried "to get on with just as little expenses as she possibly" could. She gathered plums and blueberries, made soap, sent candies and supplies to Lewis, mothered six children, and at least once assisted the men with the haying, though she was modest about it. "I guess I shall help him [John] some," she wrote. "Don't you think it will be great help."⁶² She even bought property and saw to a great deal of farm business — buying hay, renting cattle, selling calves, and so on. Lewis was proud of her: "I think," he wrote in October 1863, "you are right smart on farming."⁶³

A Place to Live

When Lewis finally returned to Sandwich, he set right to business. In January of 1867 he bought the sixty-acre homestead lot from his brother-in-law Frank Wiggin, who was apparently holding it on behalf of the family.⁶⁴ That September, he sold the fifty-acre plot near Kiah Pond his wife had acquired while he was in the service.⁶⁵

It was Lewis's tenure that defined the homestead. We can only guess at the character of the property before him, and Demerit and Eva Smith after him did what they could to keep the old farm going, but the years Lewis lived here still pervade the place. In fact, it is still referenced today as the "Lewis Q. Smith farm."

Lewis is supposed to have built the house that stands today in the 1850s before he left for the War. He married in 1856, and joined the army in 1861, so if tradition is accurate, he built the house

⁵⁹Mary E. Smith, letter to her husband Lewis Q. Smith, 27 May undated.

⁶⁰Lucy Smith Wiggin, letter to her brother, Lewis Q. Smith, 1 Feb 1864.

⁶¹SHS, *Sandwich*, 90, 91, 99.

⁶²Mary E. Smith, letter to Lewis Q. Smith, Sandwich, 15 August undated.

⁶³Benjamin Burleigh Smith, letter to Lewis Q. Smith, Sandwich, 6 Nov 1862; Lewis Q. Smith, letters to Mary E. Smith, Poolville, MD, 8 Feb undated and Washington D.C., 2 October 1863.

⁶⁴Joseph F. Wiggin to Lewis Q. Smith, 7 Jan 1867, Carroll County Registry of Deeds, Book 51, page 28.

⁶⁵Lewis Q. Smith to Henry R. and Wentworth S. Cowan, 16 September 1867, Carroll County Registry of Deeds, Book 51, page 296.

in the intervening time. However, the way that Burleigh speaks of the place in his letters (“the old home under the mountain”) suggests a pretty substantial dwelling — and it must have been for John and Eliza to raise six or possibly seven children in it. On the other hand, it is possible that if Lewis did construct the house, he built it after he returned from the war. There is evidence that he did not live on his father’s homestead before the war. He was a shoemaker employed in a larger town sometime in the 1850s, and Burleigh asked where he and Elizabeth would be settling, which suggests it was not assumed that he would inherit his father’s occupation or the family homestead.

To cloud the picture even further, the main two-story house was probably built at a different time from the ell, or lodge, part of the building. Some reports indicate that Eliphalet rebuilt the present ell after the fire, and that Lewis finished the place later. Others have said that the ell was built as a later addition to the main house. Of course, even if the ell is in fact older, its age is hardly recognizable now. The Scouts rebuilt the far eastern end of the building (the commissary) in 1965, added a laundry room in 1993, and apparently replaced the floor and the entire roof structure, so little is left of the original building.

In any case, we can learn a few things about the builders by looking at the house. It has a number of features typical of Greek Revival architecture, a style prevalent in the first half of the nineteenth century. The doorway is surrounded on each side by pilasters, rough imitations of Doric columns, side lights (window panes), and above by a decorative entablature. The roof joins the exterior walls with boxed eaves that feature cornice returns.⁶⁶ And the lodge porch supports are common vernacular renditions of Greek pillars.

We may only guess as to why the house was built in this style. “Architectural models evocative of Greek democracy,” one author has written, “were thought to be especially appropriate in the new republic, as it rejected traditional ties to England . . . following the War of 1812.”⁶⁷ Perhaps (if the house was built post-Civil War) Lewis was inspired by architecture – Southern mansions in particular – he may have observed during his stint with the Union army. More likely the style was simply whatever seemed locally popular. A number of Sandwich houses have similar features.

The house, like so many early New England homes, was apparently constructed in the sturdy post-and-beam style, which is one of the reasons it has lasted as well as it has. Instead of a frame of numerous two-by-fours as in most modern houses, the Smith home appears to be supported primarily by a few heavy posts — in the attic, one can still see the original hewn timbers. At the time the house was built, post-and-beam construction was still relatively common in New England, although it was rapidly being superceded by frame-style supports.

The Smith place also seems to have been a connected farmhouse, a famous particularity of New England architecture in which the house was built or arranged from preexisting buildings in several phases: the main house, the ell (usually consisting of a kitchen and living area), and the barn.⁶⁸ For the Smiths, the barn was a separate building, but the other parts were connected. The connected style, according to architect Thomas Hubka, was a “symbol of progressive agricultural

⁶⁶*pilaster* – a flat, ornamental strip set against a wall and decorated like a column with a base, shaft, and capital; *entablature* – the horizontal elements of a classical architectural order, usually supported by the columns or pilasters; *cornice returns* – horizontal segments of a cornice (the uppermost section of an entablature) that extend partly across the gable end of a structure at the eaves level (Bryant F. Tolles, Jr., *New Hampshire Architecture* [Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1979], 374, 378-9).

⁶⁷Virginia McAlester and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 177.

⁶⁸Thomas C. Hubka, *Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn: The Connected Farm Buildings of New England* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1984), 6.

improvement.”⁶⁹ Farmers were trying to adapt to a changing economy, and as Richard Waldbauer has written, the arrangement represented “the culminating efforts by small family farms to maintain their particular rural life.” In view of the precipitous decline of agriculture in New England around the turn of the century, Waldbauer concludes that the connected farmhouse testifies to “outmoded farming strategies and failed practice.”⁷⁰ We may speculate that the Smith house represented in part their attempt to deal with the decline of their immediate community.

A Growing Farm

Lewis expanded his father’s holdings by purchasing fifty more acres west of the homestead in 1883, and the farm seems to have prospered under his husbandry.⁷¹ In the inventory of Mary’s estate after she died in 1915, she owned six head of cattle, two sheep, and a pair of oxen — a marked difference from previous years.⁷² On the other hand, part of this change may be due to the adjustments that Lewis had to make to survive the decline of Sandwich Notch community.

If the farm was indeed more prosperous, as seems to be the case, credit was in part due to the advantages of a big city. Four of Lewis’ sons — John B., Leslie A., Lewis E., and Frank B. — all moved to Boston. John became a lawyer and administered his mother’s estate after her death in 1915. Leslie and Frank worked for the New England House, evidently a trading company that Leslie may have owned, and acted as agents for their father. They sold his maple syrup and bought supplies for him and Elizabeth — rings, for example, or corned beef — probably cheaper than they could have found them locally.⁷³

In this way, perhaps, Boston helped to preserve the countryside. Still, it appears that contact with emigrated sons and daughters was mostly limited to letters — a situation probably characteristic of many Sandwich families, as dwindling employment opportunities led children westward or cityward. Lewis was wistful about having his children so far away. “Frank,” he wrote in 1886, “I want you and Annie to come up and see us this summer and make us a good long visit. You won’t have a father and mother always to come and see.”⁷⁴

The children, indeed, were by this time pursuing their own lives, and when Lewis and Elizabeth died in 1913 and 1915, there was no one to take over for them. After Elizabeth’s death, the children collectively deeded the land to Leslie A. Smith, but the old homestead remained peculiarly empty.⁷⁵ The house was apparently unoccupied for seven years, except perhaps for occasional summer visits from relatives. Lena Smith Ford, a descendent of Eliphalet Smith’s brother Samuel, photographed one such visit: a camping expedition she and her family made to the old Lewis Q. Smith place in August 1921.⁷⁶

In 1922, however, Demerit and Eva Smith sold the former Nicholas Smith (also a descendent

⁶⁹Ibid., 3.

⁷⁰Waldbauer, 4-5.

⁷¹Samuel H. Dorr to Lewis Q. Smith, 9 June 1883, Carroll County Registry of Deeds, Book 80 page 371.

⁷²Final Account, Mary E. Smith Estate, 6 May 1919, Carroll County Probate Records #8000. In Carroll County Probate Office, Ossipee.

⁷³Frank B. Smith, letters to his father Lewis Q. Smith, Boston, 11 Mar 1883 and 20 Sept 1881; Lewis Q. Smith, letter to his son to Frank B. Smith, Sandwich, 15 June 1886.

⁷⁴Lewis Q. Smith, letter to his son Frank B. Smith, Sandwich, 15 June 1886.

⁷⁵Mary E. Smith heirs to Leslie A. Smith, 23 April 1917, Carroll County Registry of Deeds, Book 163, page 591.

⁷⁶Lena Smith Ford photo album, in possession of Martha Fenn.

of an original settler) place where they had apparently been farming since 1903, and moved back to the old homestead.⁷⁷ They would give the house another dozen years of life before it again fell silent.

Demerit and Eva Smith

Demerit E. “Met” Smith, as near as we can tell, inherited little of his father’s restlessness. Born to Lewis and Elizabeth in 1869, we have no evidence that he ever left his hometown. He was certainly nearby as late as 1895, as he is listed in some of his father’s labor records for work on the farm.⁷⁸ Less than a year later, he married Eva G. Burrows.

Growing up Farmers

In 1903, Demerit and Eva bought from his parents the “old Nicholas Smith homestead,” a nearby hundred-acre plot on Smithville Road that they evidently cultivated for nearly twenty years. Receipts from F.M. Smith’s General Store in 1914 and 1919 show that they sold eggs to the store. Meanwhile, they bought saltpeter, a curing agent; lead arsenate, a common pesticide for codling moths on apples; and two pounds of barbed wire staples — all of which seem to indicate the occupation of husbandry.⁷⁹

Indeed, Demerit and Eva nourished a lively interest in agriculture from their youth. They both joined the Mt. Israel Grange No. 158 in 1891, the year of its founding, and we may speculate that, like many young couples, they met there. They remained devoted members of the organization for at least forty years, and according to a 1931 newspaper article, did not even allow their wedding (or their 35th anniversary) to keep them from the regular Grange meeting.⁸⁰

Founded in 1867 by Oliver Hudson Kelley as the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, the Grange was dedicated to organizing small farmers and preserving the rural American lifestyle. There were barn dances, burlesque balls, debates and discussions, and community-service projects, all efforts aimed at “making the labors of this life cheerful.”⁸¹ It was a noble attempt to save a fine American tradition, but the tradition was dying, and the Grange was only able to ease the pain of its passing. Still, it was apparently at the very center of the Smiths’ lives, and as such provides a useful lens through which to understand them.

Back on the Old Homestead

Demerit and Eva heartily embraced this dying way of life. Late in 1922, they sold their farm to Norman F. Hodge and moved back to the old homestead, a characteristic undertaking for a couple so committed to the Grange.⁸² In the records we have of them, they come across as collectors and

⁷⁷Lewis Q. Smith to Demerit E. and Eva G. Smith, 1 Jan 1903, Carroll County Registry of Deeds, Book 120, page 65; Demerit E. Smith to Norman F. Hodge, 11 Nov 1922, Carroll County Registry of Deeds, Book 164, page 306. See also SHS, 21st Excursion, 10.

⁷⁸Lewis Q. Smith’s receipts and rates of labor, Smith family letters, SHS Archives.

⁷⁹Demerit E. Smith, receipt from F.M. Smith, Dealer in General Merchandise, 25 January 1919. In Smith manila folders, SHS archives.

⁸⁰The Manchester [NH] Union, 11 July 1931. From Bud Burrows.

⁸¹Sylbert Ainger Forbes, Master, “A History of Mt. Israel Grane No. 158,” SHS, 66th Excursion, p. 9-20. See also *Sandwich, NH*, 149-50.

⁸²Demerit and Eva Smith to Norman F. Hodge, 11 November 1922, Carroll County Registry of Deeds, Book 164, page

curators, exhibiting for public curiosity artifacts from the past: a bear trap (perhaps belonging to Jacob Smith) that supposedly snared one hundred bears in its day, a drum and uniform from Lewis's stint in the Civil War, his proud military ancestry (he always said he regretted that his age prevented him from serving in World War I), and of course the house and farm itself, which, he seemed proud to note, had been passed down to him through five generations.⁸³

The homestead became a kind of curiosity. By 1931, as noted by Sandwich resident Mrs. Charles B. Hoyt, the house was "an outstanding point of interest to summer people for miles around."⁸⁴ "Last summer," a Manchester Union article noted in that same year, "nearly a thousand persons were allowed to inspect the sturdy, well-preserved New Hampshire homestead."⁸⁵ Met and Eva, for their part, seemed to encourage this, and kept guestbooks full of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of names.⁸⁶ That fall, their cousin Lena Smith Ford rejoiced with them over the increased attention. "I am glad you have so many names on your book. You will enjoy looking at it this winter and recalling all the pleasant visits [you] have had with so many people."⁸⁷

In this fascinating way, the Smiths' lives intersected with the burgeoning New Hampshire tourism industry. Increasingly, the state was valued, not for its business, but for its lack thereof. It was a refuge for overworked residents of the more urban rest of New England. The Smith farm, for most people, was not valuable for its fine hay, fresh vegetables, or superior livestock — not for its usefulness, in other words — but for its nostalgic appeal. Visitors came because the place was quaint.

Met and Eva were no less a novelty. They were simple country people in an age when simple country people were increasingly rare, replaced by the whirlwind of progress with sophisticated country people or ignorant urbanites. They were, however, at times quite innovative. George Alcock, a neighbor as a child, remembers a wooden trough system they had engineered to make it easier to transport the sap from the maples on the hillside to the sugarhouse. They kept the farm alive, probably doing most things as their parents had done them. Little else had changed on the farm. But the world outside was remaking itself in a way that rendered the Smith homestead a fossil to the public — most people, by this time, probably bought their farm products in grocery stores. And so the visitors came.

Tourism, however, was not enough to sustain the operation. Demerit and Eva were almost certainly not farming on the scale that their parents had, and a sinking economy and his failing health probably brought it to its eventual end. Toward the end of his life, Demerit was reportedly deranged. There is a story he used to dress up in his father's uniform and bang his drum for the benefit of visitors. Worse, it is said he used to drive his wife through the Notch with a gun to her head.⁸⁸ In October 1935, in the middle of the Depression and apparently suffering from chronic

306.

⁸³Herbert Otis Warner, "Bearcamp Water-shed and Adjacent Regions: A study," Probably early 1930s, SHS Photograph Archives. *Manchester Union*, Saturday 11 July 1931; Mrs. Charles B. Hoyt, *Sandwich Reporter*, 9 July 1931, Sandwich Scrapbook, SHS Library; Conversation with Martha Fenn.

⁸⁴Mrs. Charles B. Hoyt, *Sandwich Reporter*, July 9, 1931.

⁸⁵*Manchester Union*, Saturday, 11 July 1931.

⁸⁶Bud Burrows, interview by the author, tape recording, Center Sandwich, NH, 28 June 2001.

⁸⁷Lena Ford, letter to Demerit and Eva Smith, in West Hartford, CT, 28 September 1931, courtesy of Bud Burrows.

⁸⁸69th *Excursion*, 21.

illness, Demerit shot and killed himself in his own house.⁸⁹ His estate, inventoried in 1938, consisted only of one-ninth share in the family homestead, and was valued at a paltry \$200.⁹⁰ At a 1936 auction, neighbor George Alcock remembers, “they sold everything”; still, his relatives had to foot the bill for his funeral expenses.⁹¹ Eva relinquished her claim on the estate in exchange for whatever value it had and moved to Norman F. Hodge’s place, where she and Demerit had previously made their home.⁹² The homestead was again empty. The gunshot that killed Demerit also signaled the demise of agriculture on these hundred acres.

The death of husbandry here, however, was by no means the end of the land’s use. After Leslie Smith’s tragic death in 1936 (he was killed by an express train), the heirs deeded the place to Beatrice M. Smith, a granddaughter of Lewis.⁹³ There is no evidence that she ever occupied the house, however, and she sold it in 1940 to W. Wallace Benjamin of Long Island, New York.⁹⁴

1940-53: THE FALLOW YEARS

The Lewis Q. Smith place had finally followed the course of so many other New Hampshire farms and become a summer residence. We know little about Wallace Benjamin, but it is said that he may have spent one summer in the house. Otherwise, as far as we can discern, the old homestead returned to its natural state. As the Sandwich Historical Society has put it, “Cropland became hayfields. Hayfields turned to pasture. And pasture was left to go back to woods.”⁹⁵ Indeed, except for a pasture or two still in use, most of Mount Israel was wooded by the 1940s, and the land was valuable primarily for its timber. The forests of New Hampshire are famously vigorous, rendering once-cleared land unrecognizable to the unpracticed eye in less than half a century. It was this forest that brought Jack Mead to Mount Israel and the Smith homestead.

Jack and Cary Mead

George Jackson (Jack) Mead (1892-1949) was from his youth a great lover of the Sandwich Range. In the summer of 1905 he attended a camp in the area that undertook as one of its projects to cut a new trail from Sandwich Notch to the summit of Sandwich Dome (the Algonquin Trail). His wife, Cary Hoge Mead, speculates that this experience “must have awakened in Jack a desire to make trails, because always, throughout his life, he not only loved to climb mountains but loved to

⁸⁹Burrows interview; George Alcock, interview by the author, tape recording, Center Sandwich, NH, 26 July 2001.

⁹⁰Inventory, Demerit E. Smith Estate, June-August 1938, Carroll County Probate Records #11316.

⁹¹Alcock interview; Administrator’s Account, 8 Nov 1939, Demerit Smith Estate, Carroll County Probate Records #11316.

⁹²Hiram G. Smith, Statement of Lewis Q. Smith Heirs, 20 September 1950, Forest Supervisor’s Office, donation file #907.

⁹³“Eva S. Smith–78–Jan 17, 1950,” Handwritten Notes in Forest Supervisor’s Office, Donation File #907; Leslie A. Smith Estate, Carroll County Probate Records #10,915, 1 February 1938; Leslie A. Smith heirs to Beatrice M. Smith, 22 November 1937, Carroll County Registry of Deeds, Book 211, page 135.

⁹⁴Beatrice M. Smith to W. Wallace Benjamin, 14 August 1940, Carroll County Registry of Deeds, Book 220 pg 38.

⁹⁵SHS, *Sandwich*, 83.

clear old trails and make new ones.”⁹⁶ Indeed, he did a great deal of work on the Wentworth Trail, keeping it accessible even after the 1938 hurricane left the mountain looking like “a pile of jack straws.”⁹⁷ Although an accomplished engineer living in Hartford, Connecticut in later years, he returned as often as he could to the clean air and tranquility of Squam Lake and the Sandwich Range, and eventually bought an old house in Center Harbor that was later known as Mead Farm.

Upon learning that the Draper Timber Corporation planned some heavy lumbering in Sandwich Notch, from Mount Israel north, he immediately set out to keep it from happening. He contacted the White Mountain National Forest about purchasing the land for the Forest, but interestingly, they were reluctant to get involved. In 1942, after Mead had presented the idea to the Forest Service (USFS), Forest Supervisor⁹⁸ C.L. Graham noted,

While I did not try to discourage Mr. Mead in this very excellent thought, I did point out that the Forest Service was adverse to accepting any donations of this sort with any particular strings tied to them and inasmuch as his chief interest was in preventing cutting of the remaining timber in that area, a donation on that basis would hardly be compatible with National Forest policies.⁹⁹

Mead took matters into his own hands, and in 1943-44 bought some 2400 acres himself, stopping the logging operation in its tracks.¹⁰⁰

In many ways, Jack Mead exemplified the changing world that caught the Smith homestead up in its whirling winds. His roots were deep in the hills of New Hampshire. His ancestors were of “pioneer New England stock,” and he spent a great deal of time here as a young man, even logging in Sandwich Notch one winter.¹⁰¹

Mead had an engineer’s brain, however, and the place for engineers was in the more settled areas to the east. He studied at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and worked with engineering firms in New York and New Jersey before co-founding Pratt and Whitney Aircraft in Hartford, Connecticut.¹⁰² He was one of the creators of the famous Wasp R2800 airplane engine, which powered thousands of planes in World War II, and was for many years an important visionary of the aeronautical community.

His remarkable work ethic, though, led him to flee the city for the countryside. Long hours of studying damaged his eyes and sent him logging in the Notch to restore them; long hours of engineering work sent him into the mountains for physical and mental rehabilitation. Thus he labored on the one hand to accelerate progress and encourage the burgeoning aeronautical industry, while simultaneously working to preserve natural areas for the sanity of people like him. His pioneer

⁹⁶Cary Hoge Mead, *Wings Over the World: The Life of George Jackson Mead* (Wauwatosa, WI: Swannet Press, 1971), 10. In Nichols Memorial Library, Center Harbor, NH.

⁹⁷Bob Miner, editorial notes on the present work, 12 August 2001.

⁹⁸For the sake of clarity, the Forest Service hierarchy goes something like this (from top to bottom): Chief Forester and national office, Washington D.C.; to Regional Office, in this case Philadelphia; to the Forest Supervisor over the White Mountain National Forest, in Laconia, NH; to the District Ranger’s Office, in this case the Saco District, Conway, NH.

⁹⁹C.L. Graham, letter to “the Record,” regarding “Beebe River Donation,” 3 July 1942, Forest Supervisor’s Office, donation file #907.

¹⁰⁰See Mrs. George J. Mead Donation File, #907, in Laconia Supervisor’s Office.

¹⁰¹Cary Hoge Mead, 2.

¹⁰²Charles H. Mead (son of Jack Mead), personal correspondence, 23 July 2001.

forebears doubtless valued the forests and fields for what they could produce; Jack Mead and countless others of the modern world valued it for its aesthetic power. It is to this ethic that we owe the preservation of the Smith homestead and the eventual establishment of Mead Base. In 1944, he bought the farm from Benjamin to keep the Wentworth Trailhead open to the public.

Cary Mead and the Donation

Following Jack Mead's death in 1949, his wife Cary contacted the Forest Service about donating his land to the National Forest. This time, they were eager to accept — Forest Supervisor C.L. Graham responded to Mrs. Mead's offer within hours.¹⁰³ Cary, on her end, chose to donate without reservation. She explained in a 1953 letter to Chief Forester Richard McArdle,

My husband loved this small section of the United States very dearly, and bought that land in the first place to save it from ruthless and wasteful lumbering which threatened it at that time, and his idea was to have it become a part of the national forest so that it would always be safe in the keeping of your service.¹⁰⁴

Indeed, according to a Forest Service memo, she had “complete faith in the ability of the Forest Service to manage the property in the best interests of the public.”¹⁰⁵

Although officially Cary donated the land without reservation, the Forest Service was considerate enough to seek out her desires for the its use. In an October 1950 meeting between Mrs. Mead, Ranger Andy Brands, and Forest Supervisor George Mullin, they discussed a number of options, including renting the place to a private citizen, or leasing it to a “responsible club or organization.”¹⁰⁶ Ideally, the place would be maintained; however Brands reported, she “would not feel badly if it were removed.”¹⁰⁷ The Forest was pleased with the meeting, as Brands noted to Mullin, “I might add that your original plans certainly did coincide with her ideas. Probably because both of you were thinking of the general good of the public.”¹⁰⁸ Apparently out of deference to Jack Mead's original intentions, it was recommended that “timber cutting on the tract should be delayed for several years.”¹⁰⁹

At this time, the Service was still primarily a timber management company and had few precedents for dealing with historically significant buildings like the Smith house. They were unable or unwilling to care for the old homestead themselves, so the choice was simple: find someone to use and maintain the place, or raze it. For many months, the latter seemed the most feasible option.

Boy Scouts to the Rescue

¹⁰³Memorandum from C.L. Graham to Regional Forester, Jan 13, 1950. Supervisor's Office, Donation File #907.

¹⁰⁴Cary H. Mead, letter to Richard E. McArdle, USFS Chief, 5 Sept. 1953. Supervisor's Office, Donation File #907.

¹⁰⁵Andy Brands, note to the Record regarding “L-ACQUISITION–Donation, Mead, Mrs. George J., Tract #907,” 17 October 1950. From Forest Supervisor's Office, donation file #907.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Andy Brands, memorandum to Forest Supervisor George Mullin, 21 October 1950, Forest Supervisor's Office, donation file #907.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

The idea for a scouting-style camp was apparently born in November 1951, and in July of the following year a committee of officials from the Daniel Webster Council (DWC) of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) visited the old homestead to “investigate the possibilities.”¹¹⁰ The committee was “favorably impressed,” and wanted to pursue the “possibility of hiking trips — using the house and adjacent area as a headquarters.”¹¹¹

Forest Service officials were thrilled. Acting Forest Supervisor K.P. Butterfield would write in early 1953, “We have done quite a job of selling this house to the scouts, thereby finding a use for it that will please Mrs. Meade [sic].”¹¹² Cary Mead was indeed happy with the proposal. “Nothing could please me better,” she wrote in April 1953, than this use of a house “which has charm as well as historic significance.”¹¹³

The situation was looking up on all sides, except for one important consideration. “Our hands seem to be tied,” the Forest complained to the Regional Office in 1952, “because we don’t know whether we own the land or not.”¹¹⁴ The interest shown by the BSA apparently caught the USFS somewhat by surprise, and the Regional Attorney in Philadelphia had never officially established title. To be fair, it was a very complicated process, particularly because Jack Mead had bought the land in three separate pieces. In order to be absolutely sure of their ownership, the Forest Service had to verify that the preceding owners — as far back as the 1850s — had actually held title to the land. This frequently involved going back to private citizens to reconfirm the original deed transfers, and in one especially convoluted case, the government had to persuade a neighboring owner to agree to a new boundary line.¹¹⁵

Needless to say, the Forest Service quickly grew impatient with the process. The Regional Office wrote to the attorney in December 1952, “We wish you would give us something to say about when the case may be consummated, as we are embarrassed by the fact that this case has been in our hands for almost three years.”¹¹⁶ The Supervisor’s Office was equally impatient with the Region. Supervisor K.P. Butterfield pleaded with the Regional Office to “dig into this a little more and see if there isn’t some way it can be pushed along. . . . It is very embarrassing to have to keep putting these folks off.”¹¹⁷

Then in 1953 U.S. Senator Styles Bridges began inquiring on behalf of the Scouts. In March he wrote to the Chief Forester, “It is hoped that the Forest Service can issue this permit to the Daniel Webster Council of the Boy Scouts this Spring, so that the property may be readied for use by the

¹¹⁰George Mullin, note to the Record, 8 July 1952, Forest Supervisor’s Office, donation file #907.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²K.P. Butterfield, Acting Forest Supervisor, memorandum to Regional Forester, 19 Jan. 1953, Forest Supervisor’s Office, donation file #907.

¹¹³Cary H. Mead letter to C.L. Graham, 9 April 1953. Forest Supervisor’s Office, donation file #907.

¹¹⁴WMNF, memorandum to Regional Office, 23 Dec. 1952, as quoted in Mattoon, Asst. Regional Forester, memorandum to Regional Attorney, 30 Dec. 1952. Forest Supervisor’s Office, donation file #907.

¹¹⁵John E. Donahue, USFS Regional Attorney, letter to Miss Faith Bowen, 20 March 1953. Forest Supervisor’s Office, donation file #907.

¹¹⁶Mattoon, Asst. Regional Forester, memorandum to Regional Attorney, 30 Dec. 1952, Forest Supervisor’s Office, donation file #907.

¹¹⁷K.P. Butterfield, Acting Supervisor, memorandum to Regional Forester, 19 Jan. 1953, Forest Supervisor’s Office, donation file #907.

Scouts this Summer. Will you please let me know if this can be done?"¹¹⁸ The Chief Forester responded that they were working on establishing title to the land, but Sen. Styles was not to be dissuaded. "I wonder if you would be willing to advise me," he wrote in May to USFS official Howard Hopkins, "as to why the question has not been cleared during the period of several years."¹¹⁹

Sen Bridges' inquiries galvanized the Forest Service, and it took the Forest Service barely more than a month to clear up the issue. In June 1953 they informed Sen. Bridges and Cary Mead that national ownership was official. "Please be assured," Chief Forester Richard McArdle wrote to Mrs. Mead, "that as custodians we of the Forest Service will do our best to see to it that these lands are devoted to the same broad public service which marked the spirit of the gift."¹²⁰ In keeping with this promise, they leased the place to the Daniel Webster Council in 1953.

1953-98: THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

In the late nineteenth century, Frederick Jackson Turner published an influential series of essays on American pioneer spirit. The American frontier, he maintained, had disappeared by the 1890s, taking with it the virtues that had given America its success.¹²¹ The American pioneer, with his rugged individualism and predilection for self-government, embodied all that made his country great, indeed, the best in the world. In the words of historian Roderick Nash, Turner argued that "democracy was a forest product."¹²² But could this crucial pioneer spirit be maintained, he asked, without the frontier conditions that had forged it?

Whether or not Turner's thesis actually changed American minds, he certainly articulated what others were thinking. The idea that the pioneer was the quintessential American yielded a variety of possible solutions. And this is where the Boy Scouts of America came in.

Founded in 1910, the BSA quickly swallowed up similar organizations and became one of the most important purveyors of "the wilderness cult," as Nash has dubbed it.¹²³ In the 1914 *Official Handbook for Boys*, Chief Scout Ernest T. Seton addressed himself to the "normal" American boy, a child of civilization who nonetheless desired to "live again the life of his hunter grandfather who knew all the tricks of winning comfort from the relentless wilderness — the foster-mother so rude to those who fear her, so kind to the stout of heart."¹²⁴ By 1965, this message was even more pronounced.

¹¹⁸Sen. Styles Bridges, letter to Mr. Richard McArdle, USFS Chief, 5 March 1953, Forest Supervisor's Office, donation file #907.

¹¹⁹Bridges, letter to Howard Hopkins, 15 May 1953, Forest Supervisor's Office, donation file #907.

¹²⁰Richard E. McArdle, letter to Cary H. Mead, 25 June 1953, Forest Supervisor's Office, donation file #907.

¹²¹See Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of Sections in American History* (New York, 1932); and Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920).

¹²²Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 146.

¹²³Nash, ch. 9, 141-160.

¹²⁴Ernest Thompson Seton, "A Message from the Chief Scout," *The Official Handbook for Boys* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co. for the Boy Scouts of America, 1914), x-xi.

Have you ever dreamed of hiking the wilderness trails that were worn down under moccasins hundreds of years ago? Do you hear in your imagination the almost soundless dipping of Indian canoe paddles or the ring of the ax of an early pioneer hewing a home out of the American wilderness? . . . Have you thought of the men and women who built our country by their determination and devotion?

You are the descendent of those people. You are the guardian of what they built.¹²⁵

Whereas most boys' "hunter grandfathers" (was Jacob Smith one of these?) had sought to build up civilization by taming the wilderness, the grandsons would seek to save civilization by returning to the wilderness.

Although apparently established to help address the effects of too much civilization, the Boy Scouts sought to provide what boys (and eventually girls too) lacked in *any* community, city or countryside. As longtime Scout Bob Miner has said, Boy Scouts were to learn how to get along with each other, how to be leaders, and how to take care of themselves.¹²⁶ The woods was simply the best environment in which to do this.

Beginnings

It was in this context that the DWC (the BSA presence in New Hampshire) acquired a special-use permit from the National Forest for the old Smith homestead: the house, a barn, a sap house, two chicken houses, and 11.1 acres of land. Here, far away from civilization, boys would learn to be the kind of men that could preserve that civilization. This plot of land is what became known as Mead Base, in deference, no doubt, to Mrs. Mead's generosity.

Mead Base, according to longtime Base Committee member Bob Miner, was largely the brainchild of District Scout Executive Cooper Gilkes, a former swordfisherman from Martha's Vineyard. Gilkes, Miner remembers, was "as independent as a hog on ice" and an expert recruiter and encourager of volunteers, a skill necessary to getting the Base running with little funding. He was also an able scrounger, procuring, for instance, free buckets of nails from hardware stores and free wood from lumber yards. In many ways, this "ball of fire," as Miner has called him, set the tone for Mead Base throughout its existence. According to those associated with the Base, it never seemed to receive the attention or financial support that other Council camps did.¹²⁷ But like Gilkes, Base supporters learned to scrounge, and, all things considered, made a remarkable success at it.

Mead Base started out small. The 1953 permit allowed for the construction and maintenance of ten or more tent platforms along with latrines, fireplaces, and water lines. USFS fees were a mere \$25 a year in addition to maintenance costs.¹²⁸ The Forest Service, it appears, was simply relieved to find someone to take responsibility for the place.

As it was, fifteen years of little responsibility had left the old homestead rather disheveled. The Scouts found dead grass and brush around the buildings, broken window panes, and a sap house and two chicken coops that were in such bad repair that the Forest Service recommended their

¹²⁵*Boy Scout Handbook*, 7th ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Boy Scouts of America, 1965), 9.

¹²⁶Bob Miner, interview by the author, tape recording, Center Sandwich, NH, 12 August 2001.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*

¹²⁸[Special use permit \(Designated U-USES-White Mtn.\) from WMNF to DWC-BSA, 6 Oct. 1953](#), Ranger's Office, special use permit file.

immediate destruction.¹²⁹

The task must have seemed overwhelming at times. District Scout Executive and Base Director Don Porter responded to the Forest Service inspections with some polite exasperation. “There have and are so many things to do at the base,” he wrote in October 1955, “that it is easy to overlook many items. Since all of the labor is voluntary it is difficult to try and accomplish everything however we will endeavor to do what we can.”¹³⁰

Indeed, it seems the Scouts’ early efforts at improvement were often makeshift and patchy. They pruned white pines by hacking off the lower branches with an axe (whereas the Forest Service recommended using a saw). They dumped plaster and lathe from the original house interior into a nearby open cellar hole. And in a November 1956 letter to District Scout Executive and Base Director Cooper Gilkes, District Ranger J.R. Griffiths noted that “stove pipes have been placed through windows . . . and one has a Mobiloil oil [sic] can for an elbow.”¹³¹ It was a pattern that would continue in the future, as an administration with limited funds and mostly volunteer labor struggled to meet the demands of running a youth camp and maintaining an important piece of history.

The camp was conceived as “Mead Explorer Base,” a staging area where Explorer posts could check in and out for mountain hikes. There was apparently only one camping area, the so-called “Porcupine Site,” which may have accommodated as many as thirty-two boys at a time. They stationed at the Base one professional Scouter, perhaps with a helper or two, to oversee troops as they came and went.¹³²

1960: A New Plan

By the late 1950s, however, the Scouts were thinking bigger, and applied to expand the acreage in order to allow for new campsites and more diverse training. The Forest Service, in response, recommended that the permit could be revised to include areas for camping demonstrations, recreation, skeet and rifle shooting, archery, and axe and rope training.¹³³ Other training, the Service wisely suggested, could be located outside the 22.6 acres under permit in order to keep costs and maintenance needs down. Moreover, Forest Supervisor G.S. Wheeler explained, “there would be no advantage to the government in devoting much land to such single purpose use.”¹³⁴

Indeed, it seems that multiple-use was still the Forest Service watchword for public-lands management, and this showed up periodically at Mead Base. In 1949, when Mead’s 2400-acre donation was appraised (for some \$26,000, incidentally), Supervisor Graham noted that it was “a desirable tract for timber production, watershed protection, game management, and recreation.” There was apparently timber harvesting quite near the Base in later years, and in 1964 District

¹²⁹J.R. Griffiths, Dist. Ranger, memorandum to G.S. Wheeler, Forest Supervisor, Oct. 7, 1955, Saco District Ranger’s Office.

¹³⁰Don Porter, memo to Dist. Ranger Griffin, 10 October 1955, Saco District Ranger’s Office.

¹³¹Griffiths, letter to Cooper Gilkes, Scout Executive, 13 November 1956, Saco District Ranger’s Office.

¹³²H.K. Adams, District Ranger, memorandum to C.L. Graham, Forest Supervisor, July 14, 1954, Saco District Ranger’s Office.

¹³³G.S. Wheeler, Forest Supervisor, memorandum to Verlund Ohlson, District Ranger, Sept. 15, 1958, Saco District Ranger’s Office.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*

Ranger Verlund Ohlson reprimanded the Scouts for posting “No Hunting” signs, as they might interfere with other uses of the land.¹³⁵

The Plan

The Council apparently agreed with the Forest’s suggestions, and may have tempered their ambitions a little. Still, the plan they submitted in 1960 called for tremendous changes. They planned three new campsites — “Black Bear,” “Wildcat,” and “Lynx” (all species common to the area) — with Adirondack or open-front cabins, which would accommodate as many as ninety additional campers. The 1960 plan also called for 11.5 additional acres on the side of Mount Israel, where they proposed to establish “nature-study,” “survival,” and “mountaineer training” areas. They planned a large garage and storage building to the southeast of the house and a first-aid station to the west.¹³⁶ The proposed Mead Base was a far cry from the previous little cluster of canvas tents.

In fact, however, not much of the plan was ever implemented. The Black Bear campsite had been completed by 1965 and is still in use today, and the first aid station was built, but nothing ever came of the Wildcat or Lynx campsites. The various training areas were used more or less as designed, but there is no visible evidence of them now. Still, in some respects their intentions are as important as what they actually accomplished. Mead Base was at this time very much in the vein of the traditional Boy Scout ethos. They learned to wield axes and carve camps out of the forest. They learned to use rifles in preparation for earning their hunting licenses. They learned fishing, campfire cooking, first aid techniques, and sylvaculture. They conducted a winter-survival course, apparently acquiring a reputation with their search-and-rescue skills — Bob Miner remembers that the State Fish and Game Protector declared, “I’d rather have this gang of kids on my team than half the men in the county.”¹³⁷ The boys were here to learn the skills of their pioneer grandfathers, to imbibe the virtues that come from grappling with the wilderness, but increasingly, they also came to better deal with contemporary problems.

The more traditional emphasis seemed to linger through the next decade as the program at Mead continued to expand. The Scouts found hearty support in District Ranger Verlund Ohlson (or “Swede,” as he was called), and his unusually long tenure (1957-79) was seemingly a high point of cooperation between the Scouts and the Forest.¹³⁸ In addition to his service on the newly established Mead Base Committee, Ohlson and some of his rangers helped lead “Operation Black Bear,” a week-long course in which Scouts were instructed in fire and recreation, botany, timber management, and other forestry subjects in preparation for merit badges in nature, wildlife, or forestry. “This course,” Ohlson urged, “should be as strongly supported in the future as it has been in the past.”¹³⁹ The program did not focus on fun and recreation; in a sense, the Boy Scouts were still learning how to cultivate the land.

¹³⁵Verlund Ohlson, District Ranger, letter to BSA representative John F. McDonough 28 Apr. 1964; C.L. Graham, memo to Regional Forester, 13 Jan. 1950, Forest Supervisor’s Office, donation file #907; Saco District Ranger’s Office.

¹³⁶“Areas, Special Use – Mead Base” map, R.F. Miner, 1 February 1960, Saco District Ranger’s Office.

¹³⁷Miner interview.

¹³⁸Charles M. Chase, DWC Program Director, letter to Verlund Ohlson, Dist. Ranger, 10 July 1972, Saco District Ranger’s Office.

¹³⁹Verlund Ohlson, Dist. Ranger, memo to G.S. Wheeler, Forest Supervisor, 8 August 1962, Saco District Ranger’s Office.

Gearing Up for the Future

Toward the middle of the decade, as enrollment swelled to 250 campers per season, the Scouts were again thinking of ways to expand and underwrite the increased use. In 1965 a group of interested men established a committee to “watch over the camp and make recommendations for its maintenance and its program.”¹⁴⁰ They raised \$1,400 among themselves before concluding that they would need at least \$10,000 “to do the things that needed to be done if we are to realize the full potential of this camp.”¹⁴¹ In keeping with this realization, they created in December 1965 a Council committee after the pattern of other DWC camps, indicating the Base’s increasing importance. It offered something the Council did not have.

Revisions

The Committee’s first order of business was to write and approve a five-year plan, and here it is clear that a different sort of Mead Base was emerging.¹⁴² First of all, there was evidently by this time a Mead Base program, a schedule composed of various training periods and expeditions. In 1965 the plan was for two weeks of basic Scout skills; courses in wilderness survival, forestry, and wildlife management; a trek from Mead to Mount Chocorua (about 30 miles); and a “Pack Burro Expedition” on the 1920s logging railroad that runs along the Beebe River just north of the Base. In addition, the Committee was self-consciously aiming for chartered troops instead of provisional camping (individual Scouts without their troops). The reasons for this change are unclear — the plan only said that “the experience over the last ten years has shown the advisability” of the change — but perhaps it was part of the effort to accommodate more campers without expanding the Base staff.¹⁴³ In addition, as part of the traditional emphasis on developing group and leadership skills in boys, the National Council was specifically encouraging units to go camping with their own leaders.

The Committee certainly looked to expand the physical plant. In the works for 1965-69 was completion of many of the projects proposed in 1960: two new campsites, a garage and storage shed, and so on.¹⁴⁴ They would be using the land a great deal more than they had in the past.

But perhaps more notable is the *way* they would be using the land. Attitudes were changing. The goal in 1965 was to provide “the opportunity for rugged, *high-adventure* camping, hiking, backpacking, and exploration of . . . wilderness areas” (emphasis mine). Axes were still used, although they were beginning to be replaced by safer and more portable saws. Riflery was still a popular activity.¹⁴⁵ They still offered instruction in “buckskin skills,” and a week-long “Davy Crockett expedition.” (The latter apparently took its title from a popular television series, and Scouts probably used the name to capture the interest of young viewers.) But as it turns out, the subtle change in emphasis from pioneering to “high-adventure” was important in foreshadowing what would become of the Boy Scout enterprise at Mead Base.

The BSA, of course, was also changing as an organization. They had been running camps at

¹⁴⁰R.L. Parrish, DWC Camping and Activities Chairman, letter to Verland Ohlson, 9 Dec. 1965; Parrish, letter to Norm McWilliams, Chairman, MWB Committee, 19 July 1965, Saco District Ranger’s Office.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

¹⁴²Mead Wilderness Base, Long Range Plan, 1965-1969, DWC-BSA, Saco District Ranger’s Office.

¹⁴³Ibid.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

least since acquiring the 127,000-acre Philmont Scout Ranch in 1938-41. In 1952 some 9,000 Explorer Scouts had camped at the Ranch, and by 1966 the number was up to 17,000. Meanwhile, long-term Scout camping was growing in popularity all over the country, and nearly sixty-five percent of the nation's troops (more than 792,000 boys) conducted trips in 1969. In 1971 the Scouts opened the four-million-acre Maine National High Adventure Area, and by 1978 there were at least six national high adventure bases.

At the same time, the Scouts' programs for disadvantaged youth were growing. In 1965 they launched the Inner-City–Rural Program, and in 1967 almost 26,000 needy and non-Scouts attended camp. By 1971, that number had grown to 48,000. Thus, the emphasis at Mead Base was on making the programs open to all young people, especially “at-risk” youth from urban southern New Hampshire.

Meeting the Locals

Agriculture, once the lifeblood of the property, made several somewhat amusing forays back the stage under Boy Scout tenure. In the 1960s the Forest Service occasionally noted that there were sometimes cows from the neighboring farm grazing around the building.¹⁴⁶ It seems little was done about it. But by 1972 the situation was more serious. In July 1972 the Scouts complained that loose pigs had “rooted most of the ball field and other places.” There was, furthermore, “much evidence of cows not being fenced in.”¹⁴⁷ (One wonders what sort of “evidence” the cows must have left behind). Of course, campers did not help matters by once or twice disabling an electric fence meant to keep the animals in check.¹⁴⁸ It took a couple of years, but the situation was eventually resolved, and the relationship between the Scouts and the farm were generally quite friendly.

For the most part, the Scouts at Mead Base kept to themselves, and although there were always Sandwich men on the Committee, the town never had enough young people for a proper Scout post. There were a few times, however, when the Scouts crossed paths with the Sandwich community. The Base is a five-minute walk from Beede's Falls, where the Bearcamp River curtains over a granite ledge and forms a shallow pool. The Falls is also a town park, and so it is natural that the Scouts would meet residents there. In the late sixties, former Assistant District Commissioner Bob Miner remembers, two boys rescued a Sandwich man who had broken his back sliding down Beede's Falls.¹⁴⁹ Sometimes, however, the meetings were of a different nature. According to lifetime Sandwich resident and former selectman Bud Burrows, some troops took the Falls to be their bathtub. When “people came in with kids” and surprised groups of naked boys, Burrows recalls, “they didn't appreciate it. . . . So we had problems with that.”¹⁵⁰

In Full Swing

By the mid-1970s the base was booming. Enrollment was steadily climbing, and the summer of 1976 saw 408 campers. The budget, meanwhile, was nearly \$20,000, and the Base was operating

¹⁴⁶Verland Ohlson, Dist. Ranger, letter to Herman Foster, Nov 19, 1962, Saco District Ranger's Office.

¹⁴⁷Charles M. Chase, Program Director, DWC, letter to Verland Ohlson, 10 July 1972, Saco District Ranger's Office.

¹⁴⁸Wilbur Cook, private conversation with the author, Center Sandwich, NH, 15 August 2001.

¹⁴⁹Miner interview.

¹⁵⁰Burrows interview.

consistently debt-free. Attitudes continued to shift away from the earlier emphasis on the pioneer virtues (after all, the frontier had closed some eighty years before, with few catastrophic consequences) and toward recreation. In 1975 the Base offered for the first time a very popular rock-climbing program, certainly a recreational activity, and something in which the boys' hunter grandfathers would have been unlikely to participate. Rock-climbing taught a different sort of lesson: according to a later Director's Report, it offered "young people a chance to develop greater self-confidence by confronting fears and exploring personal limits," as well as an "opportunity to build trust and teamwork."¹⁵¹ In 1976, Director Donn Clark enunciated the objectives of Mead Base, maintaining that aside from teaching technical outdoor skills and the Scout outdoor code (e.g. the more traditional emphasis), the Mead program should instill an appreciation for "the intimate relationship between mankind and the rest of nature" and offer a "once in a lifetime [*sic*]" experience.¹⁵²

Pushing for Changes

Lowell (Massachusetts) University professor Donn Clark was evidently a key figure in the transformation of Mead Base from a Scout camp to a high-adventure staging area.¹⁵³ Under his leadership from 1973-80, the camp seemed to take a new direction. It reached its highest enrollment ever (514) in 1978. That same year he hired its first coed staff, saying, "I hope the rest of the world is ready for female trip leaders."¹⁵⁴

Clark's vision for Mead Base was startlingly ambitious. In his Director's manifesto, a 1976 memo to the DWC and the Mead Base Committee, he declared his aim to establish a "tripping program which can be considered the best in the East." He called for an official Mead Base support organization, an endowment, a fleet of Mead Base canoes, and a number of new buildings. He was adamant about the changes, especially those to the physical plant, which, he said, "must be maintained and improved upon. There is no choice in the matter."¹⁵⁵ Interestingly, he was also very concerned about the house itself.

The Council and the Mead Base Committee should be proud of the building and take a serious interest in the maintenance, upkeep, and restoration of the 'old Smith homestead' . . . The house is too valuable and historically significant for us to tolerate disinterest and neglect."¹⁵⁶

Unfortunately, there is little evidence that the Scouts ever seriously undertook to restore the place. Funds, it seems, were perpetually short, as shown by the extensive "scrounge" lists, and it was all they could do to keep the building from falling apart. Obviously, the day-to-day necessities of running a camp took priority over restoration of an historic building.

Had Clark's objectives been carried out, however, it would not only have changed the nature of the Mead program, but the nature of the property as well. Aside from the visual impact of the new

¹⁵¹Director's Report, MWB, 1998 Camping Season, DWC headquarters, camping committee file.

¹⁵²Donn Clark, MWB Director, memorandum to DWC, MWB Committee, DWC Camping Committee Sept. 1976, Saco District Ranger's Office.

¹⁵³Tom Doherty, interview by the author, tape recording, Center Sandwich, NH, 3 August 2001.

¹⁵⁴Mead Base Newsletter, Nov 1977, Saco District Ranger's Office.

¹⁵⁵Clark, memorandum Sept. 1976, 3, Saco District Ranger's Office.

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

buildings, the increase in capacity and funding would undoubtedly have brought more youth into the camp, which would have significantly increased the impact on the surrounding land. Furthermore, the resources invested in the camp would likely have made the Boy Scouts reluctant to give up their permit in later years.

But as it turns out, Clark's more ambitious goals were never met. The Committee attempted to establish a support organization in 1976, though it is not clear how effective it was. Maintenance work did seem to pick up under his administration. They repaired doors, porches, and roofs; painted the house inside and out; and built a new hearth for the fireplace.¹⁵⁷ They constructed a public latrine in 1983 and a shower facility in 1984, and bought a fleet of canoes. Without the facilities and the funding that Clark requested, however, the Base remained at about the same level of operation, never again enrolling more than 500 young people.

Recurring Friction

Clark's energetic leadership was not without its conflicts. He seemed to feel beleaguered at times, as when describing the lack of a public toilet:

The public toilet situation is somewhat critical. With as many as 100 guests milling around on a Saturday or Sunday [*sic*], the problem of where to send the women, young children, and shy men tries the patience of all. Often the toilet in the house is used to the point where the septic system completely overflows. In addition it is not the responsibility of the Director's wife to clean up after the general public. I doubt that other directors share their private dwellings to the same extent.¹⁵⁸

Clark also complained that there were no formal guidelines for DWC Camp Directors.¹⁵⁹

Program Director Charlie Chase (speaking for the Council), on the other hand, felt that Donn was uncommunicative and too wrapped up in Mead Base affairs. He failed to "present [an] image of a dedicated, career-volunteer Scouter," and he was apparently not cordial enough to guests, as some committee members felt unwelcome at the Base.¹⁶⁰ The two groups had it out at a December 1976 meeting, and, with the Committee promising to be more helpful and Clark to be more communicative and hospitable, relations were apparently improved.

This kind of conflict is representative of the awkward half-stage in which Mead Base seems to have been caught. The Base were firstly a Boy Scout operation, Council-run and supported. But it was simultaneously an independent entity. The Director was not necessarily a career Scouter, and as in Donn's case, seemed to have a great deal of freedom and responsibility for the way the Base was run. If the Base was a little too independent-minded for the Council's taste, those directly involved felt undersupported by the Council. Over the next twenty-five years, Mead increasingly relied on the participation of non-Scouts in its programs. Furthermore, the Base was still in transition from the fifties' and sixties' emphasis on pioneer skills to the focus on high adventure that increasingly characterized the Base (and the country) in its last two decades. Mead would never quite lose its

¹⁵⁷Verland Ohlson, memo to Forest Supervisor, 2 Oct 1974, Saco District Ranger's Office.

¹⁵⁸Clark memo, Sept. 1976.

¹⁵⁹Sam Smith, memorandum to Mead Base Committee members regarding meeting of 2 Dec. 1976, Saco District Ranger's Office.

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*

awkwardness; indeed, there was constant tension between the Council and the Mead Base Committee. But the half-stage of the 1970s would give way to a different, apparently more established program in the eighties.

The Final Decades

The new decade opened with a permit renewal for the DWC. Fees were raised to \$320 a year, plus \$10 per 100 days of outfitting/guiding activities. Under the Granger-Thye Act of 1973, however, the FS allowed the Council to perform major maintenance tasks in lieu of the fees.¹⁶¹ The Scouts took full advantage of this option. In spite of the fee increase, they quickly ran up a sizeable credit (more than \$2000 by 1984) on account of their extensive maintenance work.¹⁶² Due to limited funds and volunteer labor, of course, the Scouts' improvements were limited mostly to bare operational necessities, and were occasionally poorly executed.¹⁶³ But it must be remembered that the USFS was fortunate to have anyone at all leasing the property, and the Scouts were generally excellent permittees. They seem to have been very committed to staying within USFS guidelines and maintaining the structural and historic integrity of the property.

The Program

The direction of Mead Base in the eighties continued to shift toward newer, more exciting "high-adventure" programming such as saltwater kayaking and rock climbing and away from the more traditional pioneer activities like backpacking and canoeing. Already by 1977 the backpacking program was losing its appeal for young people, in spite of Director Donn Clark's efforts to promote the program to Mead Base supporters. The White Mountains, he wrote, are "the best backpacking country in the East." He continued, "Backpacking is raw nature . . . One cannot measure the results of such a program on the youth of today."¹⁶⁴ As we have seen, the decline in backpacking was accompanied by a very popular rock climbing program.

By 1988 the Base had instituted some important changes. The minimum curriculum was expanded to include low impact camping skills in addition to the patrol method.¹⁶⁵ There was a Wilderness Instructor Training for Youth (WITY), a three-week course designed to impart "advanced wilderness skills and leadership" – a kind of honors program for the great outdoors. It was in WITY, with its emphasis on teaching young people wilderness skills, that the program seemed to hearken back to its earlier days of pioneer training. Too, here the Base developed its future leaders. "Exceptional youth" were to be offered a paid position on the following year's staff.¹⁶⁶ Finally, mountain biking was offered for the first time in the early 80s, and along with rock

¹⁶¹USFS, Special Use Permit to DWC-BSA, 1980-81; "2715.21d –Granger-Thye Permit Fees," *Forest Service Manual*, June 73, AMEND 45, Saco District Ranger's Office.

¹⁶²Margaret A. Greenwood, acting District Ranger, memorandum to Forest Supervisor, 28 Dec. 1983, Saco District Ranger's Office.

¹⁶³The interior fuse box, for example, is located in a very visible corner of the dining room. The front porch deck seems rather hastily done. And the lodge chimney is decaying rapidly, apparently at least partially as a result of poor construction (the wrong kind of cement).

¹⁶⁴Mead Base Newsletter, Nov 1977, Saco District Ranger's Office.

¹⁶⁵Patrol Method, as I understand it, allows a group of about eight Scouts (a patrol) to function on its own, without an adult leader, and encourages leadership development within the troop.

¹⁶⁶Mead Base Fact Sheet: Wilderness Instructor Training for Youth, DWC-BSA, Saco District Ranger's Office.

climbing quickly became one of the most popular programs. Costs for all programs were \$160 per youth per week — evidently a much lower price than any other similar program (such as Outward Bound or National Outdoor Leadership School).¹⁶⁷ Leaders were constantly trying to keep the Base as affordable as possible.

Summer was not the only time the Base was busy. The Fall and Spring Trek programs extended the season by offering weekend trips with nearly all of their summer activities. Winter Trek (specializing in winter survival, skiing, and ice climbing) was a Mead operation for one season but was shortly moved to Hidden Valley Scout Reservation. The Base was apparently too far out of way, and the road was not cleared in winter.¹⁶⁸ Again the Base's location helped to dictate its use, and probably helped to keep it out of the center of Council attention.

In 1992 the Base introduced sea kayaking, which included training on Squam Lake and an extended trip of the coast of Maine. The program, like rock climbing and mountain biking, was a "big success," though somewhat more expensive due to the cost of kayak rentals. By 1994, sea kayaking and mountain biking were the most popular activities.¹⁶⁹

This shift was the cause of some consternation by 1998, when Dave Sucke's Director's Report analyzed how the various activities were meeting the goals of Mead Base. Backpacking was "more conducive to programming and group development," but had nevertheless "taken a back seat to the more exciting programs." Lake canoeing was considered downright "boring" by participants and so in the future would be pared down to a half-week and combined with another activity. As for river canoeing, it would be called "moving water" canoeing instead of "white water" canoeing to "tame expectations, and they planned to change the location to the Saco River, which would provide a "greater feeling of isolation and self-reliance."

Rock climbing received high marks for offering "young people a chance to develop greater self-confidence by confronting fears and exploring personal limits" and an "opportunity to build trust and teamwork" — all of which are important for group development and leadership training. Fortunately, climbing was also very popular with the campers. Mountain biking combined "the enjoyment of scenic mountain vistas with the rush of off-road bicycling," but Sucke is careful to point out that it was a high-maintenance program and also very dangerous. Although one of the most popular programs, it was also one of the least efficient for developing group skills. Sea kayaking, finally, was simultaneously the "most progressive," the most dangerous, and one of the most popular activities.¹⁷⁰

The values guiding the operation of Mead Base were changing. By 1998, the program was much more oriented toward "fun" and adventure — giving the campers a good time — than it had been before. The idea, it seems, was to get young men and women doing things that they enjoyed while constructing those activities so as to teach leadership and group development. In one sense, of course, this approach is no different than the earlier years at Mead Base — Robert S.S. Baden-Powell, the founder of Scouting, had originally taken boys camping because it removed them from familiar surroundings and made them easier to teach. But the new language of high adventure was significant. The most popular programs at Mead Base were simply the most "exciting." Years before, it seems, it had taken less to teach boys these important lessons of

¹⁶⁷Doherty interview.

¹⁶⁸Fall Trek Programs for 1996 brochure, DWC-BSA, Saco District Ranger's Office; Miner interview.

¹⁶⁹DWC-BSA Camping Committee Meeting Minutes, 25 Oct. 1994, DWC headquarters, camping committee file.

¹⁷⁰Director's Report, MWB, 1998 Camping Season, DWC headquarters, camping committee file.

leadership and interdependence. In 1914, the Handbook declared, “All that is needed is the out-of-doors, a group of boys, and a competent leader.”¹⁷¹ Was there a time when we were less enamored of entertainment and more devoted to duty?

Mead Base associates (and a good number of Americans), it seems, still thought of the great out-of-doors as a necessary element for the survival of civilization. But whereas interaction with the wilderness was previously supposed to teach boys to be rugged and resourceful, by the 1980s and 90s it was hoped that the forest could offer a kind of therapy to troubled people. Perhaps young people of recent decades were simply not rugged enough. Or more likely, perhaps an increasingly urbanized society had left large numbers of young people so dysfunctional and unfamiliar with the outdoors that they could not be expected to learn extensive wilderness skills. Get someone who has grown up in the city into the woods, and maybe they will live better in the city.

In any case, this concept of the therapeutic outdoors found an especially sympathetic ear in Tom Doherty, longtime staff member and Base Director from 1986-88. Doherty brought high-risk youth from southern New Hampshire to Mead Base on off-season weekends. And after his stint with the Base, Doherty went on to be the Daniel Webster Council’s Director of Learning for Life, the BSA’s program for at-risk young people, and is in similar work today with the YMCA in Maine. He still escorts groups of young people to Mead Base for fun and therapy.

Developing the Property

The changes in the physical plant during the eighties and nineties continued to be primarily a matter of maintenance. This approach was reinforced at a 1989 long range plan meeting in which the Committee elected to continue operating as a staging area only. Mead Base would not be a residential camp like other Council operations (Camp Carpenter and Hidden Valley Scout Reservation). They were thinking tentatively of expanding to accommodate as many as 1000 campers a summer, but Mead Base would remain basically true to its name: it would be a Base as it had been from the beginning, a place for campers to receive instructions and equipment before diving into their wilderness experiences. Had the Scouts had chosen to make this a residential camp, it would doubtless have changed the landscape dramatically — more buildings, more on-site education, more people, and therefore, more impact on the immediate environment.

As it was, though, it was all the Scouts could do to keep the property in usable shape. After a troubling inspection of the cellar in October 1979, Forest Service Engineer Joseph Reinhardt concluded a follow-up inspection with ominous words. “I found the floor joists, flooring, and sills to be in very poor condition,” he reported. “It has now progressed to the point that all joists and sills must be replaced if the building is to remain in use.”¹⁷² The sill-beam project was constantly near the top of the Mead Base Committee agenda for the next several years, and it apparently took at least six years to complete the work – another testimony to the Committee’s limited resources. To be fair, of course, it must be noted that the whole house had to be jacked up in order to do the necessary work, and the Scouts evidently kept the Base programs running at the same time.

Other major projects seemed to be actual improvements, helping the Base to adapt to changing needs. In 1983, perhaps as a delayed response to Donn Clark’s pleas for more toilet facilities, they installed a “visitor’s latrine.” In 1985 they “upgraded and remodeled” the commissary.¹⁷³ Much to

¹⁷¹BSA *Handbook*, 1st ed., 3.

¹⁷²Joseph H. Reinhardt, Forest Engineer, memo to District Ranger 25 Aug, 1980, Saco District Ranger’s Office.

¹⁷³MWB Historical Major Project List (minutes from recent [1990s] meeting?), Saco District Ranger’s Office.

the campers' delight, we imagine, they constructed a hot-shower house in 1992.¹⁷⁴ And in 1993 they replaced a line of consumer-size refrigerators with a walk-in model.¹⁷⁵

Getting the Word Out

The eighties and nineties also saw the development of a more comprehensive marketing strategy. By 1989 they had thought to offer “canned” or pre-planned trips in order to make it easier for Scoutmasters to bring their troops.¹⁷⁶ Shortly thereafter the Council produced a professional promotional video, *Four Seasons of High Adventure*, that was meant to “motivate campers and allay some of the anxiety in the leaders about an out of state high adventure trip.”¹⁷⁷ By 1991 the Mead Base endowment idea had resurfaced, with the Committee hoping to raise an initial \$250,000 in order “to help maintain the program and improve the facilities . . . [and] to control the cost of attending the Base and other High Adventure Programs.”¹⁷⁸ In 1992, they began discussing an “older boy exchange program” with Hidden Valley Scout Reservation (later known as the “Mead Shuttle”), evidently to expose Hidden Valley regulars to what the Base had to offer. The program did not seem to work out as planned, however, and by the next year the Committee was already questioning its usefulness.¹⁷⁹

The Changing Landscape

The use of the land at Mead Base had changed in some obvious ways during the Scouts' tenure. Land that once burst with corn and wheat was converted into a campgrounds. Jacob Smith transformed the land by removing the forest; the Forest Service and the Scouts cultivated the forest, pruning trees and cutting down underbrush. Jacob and his descendants, could they have seen the future of their property, might have shaken their heads in disbelief.

Land use also changed in surprising ways. Former Director Tom Doherty met his future wife at the Base in the eighties, and they later held their wedding reception here – probably a first for the property.

But there was also a surprising level of continuity in land use between the two eras. John Smith, like most farmers, probably spent a considerable amount of time fighting back the brush at the edges of his fields and pastures. The Scouts kept campsites and the front yard of the house mown. Lewis Q. Smith loved going fishing with his friend Frank Wiggin; Scouts who came to Mead Base also fished in the area, probably visiting the same ponds. Moreover, the location itself dictated a certain continuity. Mead Base was remote enough to be a secondary consideration for the Council; the Smith farm had been out of the loop in a similar manner. Both Smiths and Mead Base Scouts had to be very resourceful to keep their respective operations running.

The End

¹⁷⁴DWC-BSA Camping Committee Report, MWB for 1992, DWC headquarters, camping committee file.

¹⁷⁵Historical Major Project List.

¹⁷⁶Mead Base Committee Meeting Minutes, 22 Mar. 1989, Saco District Ranger's Office.

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁸Mead Wilderness Base Promotion, draft of form letter from MWBC to potential donors, 17 Oct. 1991, Saco District Ranger's Office.

¹⁷⁹DWC-BSA Camping Committee Meeting Minutes: 22 December 1992, 23 February 1993, and 26 April 1993; Mead Shuttle brochure, DWC headquarters, camping committee file.

In 1995, the Daniel Webster Council's lease from the Forest Service expired, and for the next three years they held a temporary permit for use of the property. In 1998, however, the lease renewal suggested by the Forest Service set the annual fee at \$2,550 and presented a long list of expensive maintenance projects, including a new septic system, for a total of \$29,000 worth of improvements required by 2013.¹⁸⁰ The Scouts initially tried to adapt to the increases, raising fees for the 1999 season in order to cover costs.¹⁸¹ In December 1998, the Base was found to be "unconditional" — meaning, "does not qualify as a nationally accredited high-adventure program for the 1998 season" — for three consecutive inspections.¹⁸² By this time, the Council's High-Adventure Task Force had already decided to relocate the 2000 high-adventure program to Parker Mountain, a site available through the Boston Minuteman Council.¹⁸³ Then at a March 1999 meeting, the task force elected not to return to Mead Base even for that summer, as it "was not the wisest business decision in the eyes of all parties." The maintenance needs at Mead Base were simply too great; moreover, Parker Mountain had the advantages of a dining hall, administrative support, better access to services, and waterfront property. On May 1, 1999, the Scouts rounded up their supporters and packed canoes, tent platforms, tents, desks, files, and commissary supplies onto two large UHAUL trucks and spirited them away to Hidden Valley and Parker Mountain.¹⁸⁴ They left in a hurry, leaving emergency signs and high-adventure posters on the walls, cinder blocks in the campgrounds, an old bed frame in an upstairs room.

The Scouts' near half-century at Mead Base has left a powerful legacy. The people have shaped the land — the house additions, the Adirondack cabins, the flag pole, the filled cellar hole, the shifted stone walls. But the land has also shaped the lives of probably thousands of young people. In testimony to this fact, several former campers have come to see the place again even this summer. They saunter up to the porch and introduce themselves, explaining that they were just on their way to Boston or Portland, Maine, and thought they'd stop by to revisit their old tromping grounds. One young Latin American man, arriving with his family in a tightly packed Isuzu Rodeo, told us how he had been a counselor here several years ago and wanted to show his family his former habitat. His summer at Mead Base had obviously made quite an impression on him. For others, it made an even deeper impression.¹⁸⁵ Tom Doherty recalls that a number of people, himself included, met their spouses at the Base.

We have only rarely heard negative recollections of Mead Base, although others undoubtedly exist. And even now that the Scouts have vacated the Base, the landscape continues to impress young people — casual hikers, or students from YMCA groups, Girl Scout troops, and Camp Hale, who spend overnights here in order to explore the region.¹⁸⁶ "Mead Base is simply a shell," Director

¹⁸⁰Special Use Permit from WMNF to DWC-BSA, 21 Dec. 1998, DWC-BSA, Forest Supervisor's Office, donation file #907.

¹⁸¹DWC-BSA Camping Committee Meeting Minutes, Oct 27, 1998, DWC headquarters, camping committee file.

¹⁸²MWB Task Force Meeting Minutes, 16 Dec. 1998; 1998 National Standard Rating Scoresheet for Council High-Adventure Bases, DWC headquarters, High-Adventure Task Force File.

¹⁸³DWC-BSA Camping Committee Meeting Minutes, 15 Dec. 1998, DWC headquarters, camping committee file.

¹⁸⁴"Mead Wilderness Work Day," announcement flier, DWC headquarters, camping committee file.

¹⁸⁵Doherty interview.

¹⁸⁶Camp Hale is a 100-year-old summer camp on Squam Lake that gives campers and counselors primarily from Boston's South End neighborhood a few weeks in the country.

Dave Sucke had written in 1998. "It is the people that make it a successful program."¹⁸⁷

1999-2001: CONSERVATION CENTER

The shell, however, remained. The old Smith homestead, now known as Mead Base, was again solely in Forest Service hands. In May 1999 USFS archeologist Karl Roenke presented to District Ranger Rick Young a list of suggestions for future management of the property. The house, he claimed, did not meet health and safety codes and was to be closed immediately while they developed a maintenance plan. Meanwhile, since all parties interested in using the place had backed off "due to the extensive deferred maintenance needs," the house would be refurbished. "Modern additions," Roenke declared, "can easily be removed and the structure returned to its original configuration and grandeur." Although the Black Bear campground would continue to be rented out to visiting groups, the ultimate intention was to "remove all 18 structures built on site by the Boy Scouts leaving only the Smith House."¹⁸⁸

However, the Forest Service has taken little action toward these ends; the property is still very much as it was when the Scouts left it. For the last two years (2000-01) it has been used by local conservation organizations like the Student Conservation Association (SCA), the Wonalancet Out Door Club (WODC) and Squam Lakes Association (SLA) as "Mead Base Conservation Center." Trail crews working on nearby mountains come back here on their days off, sleeping in the old Base staff cabins and cooking and fraternizing in the Smith house during the days. This arrangement with the Forest Service, however, is only temporary. They pay Fred Lavigne, a conscientious logger who lives just up the road, to supervise activities at the Base, and he looks after the campground and the house as trail crews and campers come and go.

Recently there has been interest from a couple of organizations in acquiring a special use permit for the place. Little is known about "Team Wilderness" of Perpetual Life Ministries, but it is supposed they are a kind of inspirational outfitter, and would be running group trips in the White Mountains.

The Squam Lakes Association is apparently more serious about acquiring the permit. "I hope to establish the property as the Mead Conservation Center," explained SLA employee Eric Morse, "to be used for trail maintenance in the Squam and Sandwich Ranges."¹⁸⁹ The SLA is reported to be in the process of forming a committee with WODC members and neighbors and pursuing fund-raising possibilities with WODC, Lakes Region Conservation Trust, and the Sandwich Historical Society.

Thus the property touches on the conservation-recreation conflict that presently baffles land managers all over the country. Recent years have seen the explosion of an urban population into the countryside for recreation: hiking, backpacking, mountain biking, skiing, snowmobiling, and even off-road driving. As a result, public unpeopled areas like the White Mountain National Forest

¹⁸⁷Director's Report, MWB, 1998 Camping Season, DWC headquarters, camping committee.

¹⁸⁸Karl Roenke (Heritage Resource Program Leader), "Field Review to Develop Mead Base Management Approach," May 20, 1999 letter to Rick Young, Asst. District Ranger, 20 May 1999, Forest Supervisor's Office, Roenke's personal files.

¹⁸⁹Eric Morse, SLA information sheet, summer 2001.

struggle — both administratively and, some would argue, ecologically — under the weight of such increased use. Local activist groups like the Friends of Sandwich Range are consequently working to minimize the level of human impact on the land. For them, a “Conservation Center” at Mead Base is immensely preferable to an outfitting operation, because it translates into less impact on the mountains. Ideally, a conservation center would actually build up wild areas, since it would house crews responsible for improving the trails. In any event, the Base’s location once again shapes its character; this time its position on National Forest land ensures that it will be affected by how the USFS, activists, and vacationers work to resolve this conflict.

There is no tidy conclusion to this story, or for that matter to any history. The future of the property is uncertain — the Forest Service does not seem to have the resources to properly maintain it, nor is there any guarantee that the SLA will either. If neglected, the old homestead could decay beyond repair; if used improperly it could be similarly ruined. Let us be grateful for the sense of our own history that the Base can offer us and agree that it should be *used* — sensitively and responsibly — in the future.

* * *

I fell asleep last night with only the stars, the crickets, and an occasional mouse scuffling overhead to disturb the quiet darkness. I awoke this morning to bird calls and the chattering of chipmunks and red squirrels. Although the house is currently inhabited by five students, much of it remains basically unused. The forest has grown up around it, and if not for the Forest Service crew that visits a couple times a month to mow the grass, the house would soon be entirely concealed. A visitor commented once, “Yeah, you sure are way out in the country.”

Mead Base looks and feels like a thing apart, a world unto itself. But appearances are in this case deceiving. If anything, it should demonstrate how the world is much more interwoven and complicated than we are wont to think, a world of “blurred and dirty boundaries,” as historian Richard White has put it.¹⁹⁰ It is easy to identify the city and the country, for example, as two distinct realms, but as the history of Mead Base shows, the two are inextricably connected. Lewis Q. Smith’s city-dwelling children were important to his sustaining an agrarian way of life. Jack Mead had the resources to purchase the property because he went to the city to practice engineering; at the same time, he seemed to need the countryside in order to survive in the city. The Boy Scouts were founded to some extent in response to the city, and a number of young people came (or were brought) to Mead Base for the therapy the wilderness offered to frazzled urban souls.

Of course this interwoven world has changed, too, and this should also be evident in the history of the Base. Today, like most days this summer, there will probably be hikers arriving in four-wheel-drive station wagons and sport-utility vehicles to go climb Mount Israel. There may even be a bus of young summer-campers to fill the air with their shouts and laughter. There is nothing unusual about this kind of recreation; people have certainly been doing it as long as I’ve been alive. It is just what we do.

And yet humans have not always done it this way. Americans have not always valued vast tracts of undisturbed woodland. We have not always sent our children away to summer camps; indeed, some have argued that we are unique among world cultures in this respect. And we have not always thought it important to preserve old houses. With no understanding of history — not just the past,

¹⁹⁰Richard White, *The Organic Machine, A Critical Issue*, ed. Eric Foner (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), xi.

but the evolving processes of history —, we are likely to be ignorant of this fact. Without the sunset of the past behind us, our silhouettes are indistinct. History does not make it all crystal clear, of course. But it helps.

We are fillers and subduers of the earth; we have been as long as we can remember. With every step, we shape the land and are shaped by it. As we accumulate understanding about how this relationship has developed, we must ask how we will interact in the future with the planet we inhabit — a question that can be as broad as how we should deal with global pollution, but is also as narrow as how we should use Mead Base. Our answers may tell us a great deal about who we are in the world.

Acknowledgments

I was raised in the South, and I've only seen New Hampshire for three months now. I've studied history for just three years, and my understanding of architecture, agriculture, real estate, and so on is mostly limited to what I could pick up from books and conversations since starting this project. In short, I claim responsibility for mistakes in the narrative

That said, I would have floundered with this project without a lot of help from a lot of people, and I will try to remember them here. In no particular order, I am grateful to...

Bob Miner for his patient supervision, assistance with research, and sharp editor's eye. Fred Lavigne and Evelyn MacKinnon for thinking up the project and seeing to daily necessities like toilet paper and rhubarb. The Quimby Fund for helping to finance the project and the Student Conservation Association for making it available to me. The Sandwich Historical Society for sponsoring the project, and the volunteers, staff, and trustees for helping me along the way.

Lorraine Elliot for being glad to see me and for finding important documents in obscure corners of the archives. Karl Roenke, George Zink, Doug McVicar, Jere Daniell, Jane Beckman, Chris Conrod for answering questions and pointing me to resources, and Bob Cottrell and Derek Brereton for their time and intellectual encouragement. George Alcock, Tom Doherty, Bob Miner, Joan and Wilbur Cook, and Bud Burrows for subjecting themselves to my interviews. Bud Burrows and Marty Fenn for answering questions and allowing me to use photographs in their possession. Chuck Mead for graciously providing information about his father.

Carroll and Strafford County Deed Registries and Probate Offices for assistance with research. Searcher "MS" at the National Archives for prompt service. John Perkins and M.F. Hambrook at the Wentworth Library for allowing me to keep their books all summer. John Rainville and DWC headquarters in Manchester for access to their files and photos of the Scout camp in operation. The Forest Service offices in Laconia and Conway for pointing out pertinent files.

Ben Harper, Kelly Clarkson, Jina Hawk, Becca Norman, Jade Alger, Nathan Maphet, Andrew Hansinger, Steven Cook, Chet Hutchinson, Matt Novenson, Jane Baldschun, Rob Heiskell, Ben Borger, Ben McInnis, Joe Staven, and Josh Hinman, for general encouragement.

David, Lynn, Anna, Andrew, and Abby Hare for being a family away from family. Scott Goddard and Cornerstone Fellowship for general edification.

Lang Martin for loving editorial work. My father, Dick Okie, for editorial help and for the use of his laptop and truck. Dorothy Beach and Ned and Sharon Okie for room and board and general encouragement. Abe and Ellen Okie for traveling companionship and Mom and Charlotte for love and cookies.

WODC for free meals. Bill and Silke Hoffman for their interest and hospitality. Ashley and the Community School for letting me work in the garden and take home fresh vegetables.

Jesus for daily strength and sustenance.