

The old tree

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I've just spent three days at the farm in Maine, doing the spring chores, getting the furnace serviced (and examining the snake that the furnace man found: "This is not a Maine snake," he said. "Last time I saw a snake like this was when I was in Egypt, in the Navy." It made me feel ominously ilke Cleopatra)

Lilacs are in bud. And here is the apple tree that I see when I look through the kitchen window: newly pruned, very green in the rain, and quite gnarled and old. We have other, younger apple trees, and they bear more fruit than this ancient guy. But this one has so much history going for it, plus its wonderful shape, and the fact that countless birds use it for shelter; I have a snapshot of a pileated woodpecker on its trunk last summer.

Our farmhouse was built in 1768, before there was a United States. Early records show that our place was called Brigham Hill, and amazingly, Google Earth calls it the same thing when its little car icon drives up that road diagonally across my computer screen.

Down at the crossroads, in the little cemetery, there are many Brighams: old men and their successive wives who mostly died young, along with countless children, their mossy gravestones etched with lambs and angels and assurances that they are safe in heaven. The old books describe an apple orchard and though it is hard to imagine that this old tree could have existed then - almost 240 years ago - certainly the granite boulders that form our foundation date that far back, and the hand-hewn beams pegged together in the barn; they were all part of someone's existence long ago.

One can only imagine the generations of lives within these walls, the succession of stories.

I drive two miles to the grocery store for the New York Times and am home by the time the coffee is ready. This morning I watched a visiting grandchild gobble pancakes that I had cooked on the Viking stove.

They wrestled everything they ate out of the earth and the livestock, cooked it over the fire in the central fireplace, and were buried before their grandchildren were born.

I wonder who will look out at that apple tree fifty years from now, or a hundred.



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