

Town Forests: The Massachusetts Plan

ROBERT L. MCCULLOUGH



THE GROTON memorial town forest, 400 acres and more bounded by the Nashua and Squannacook rivers near Groton center, is approaching its seventy-fifth year. Established in 1922, the forest has fulfilled the promise of those who first championed the town forest movement a decade earlier: cultivation of a sustained yield of timber consistent with recreational, educational, aesthetic, and other beneficial uses. In truth, Groton's reserve is a model town forest firmly grounded in community welfare. Dedicated as a memorial to residents who served in World War I, the forest was created with land donated by a local benefactor and with pasture and woodlot from the town's poor farm. Members of Groton's 4-H Club transplanted seedlings, WPA labor conducted timber-stand improvement during the Depression years, and the local garden club long ago began nurturing a wildflower sanctuary. Active forestry management continues today with harvesting typically undertaken at five-year intervals. Most recently, 20 acres of white pine were cut during the spring of 1996. Proceeds are reinvested in timber-stand improvement, and the town forest committee, not funded under the municipal budget, keeps a well-balanced ledger. The forest also invites recreational use, and town members explore secluded paths on foot and with bicycles.¹

From their origins, town forests such as Groton's have played an important role in the larger quest to reverse deforestation and reclaim idle farmland, goals that became rallying points for municipal forestry during the early decades of the twentieth century. Massachusetts' wooded townscapes, now abundant, are testimony to that endeavor. As with so many aspects of natural resource conservation, Massachusetts became a vanguard in the movement for town forests. As early as 1905, the Massachusetts Forestry Association (MFA) shaped the beginnings

of a campaign that soon gathered momentum in several New England states and eventually became national in scope. Harris A. Reynolds, the association's tireless secretary from 1911 to 1953, guided that campaign steadfastly. The MFA's mission, as Reynolds so astutely put it, was to make forestry part of people's everyday lives, and town forests have always been a quiet place to do just that. Where once policy-makers could argue the need for more and better forests, they now can ponder strategies that accommodate uses as diverse as timber cropping and ecological demonstration. The debate has changed, but it remains enveloped by sylvan canopy.

Town forests did not suddenly sprout on barren soil — far from it. They are a vital link in an evolving woodland ethic cultivated by Massachusetts towns for nearly four centuries. This continuum of forest and community began with the vast common weald that once encircled the nucleated villages of Massachusetts Bay and other colonies. Woodsmanship, the practice of culling forest resources without killing trees, was part of Anglo-Saxon culture transplanted from rural England during the Great Migration. Where individual routine blossomed into collective voice, guiding the course of new communities, the beginnings of forest conservation can be observed. Today, that process continues to mature.

Although these common lands were soon given up to private ownership, public lands — typically ecclesiastical allotments known as glebe, parsonage or church lots, together with school lots, all set aside by town proprietors to subsidize the costs of community institutions — endured much longer. Some exist today in the guise of town forests. The largest part of Massachusetts' history of communal woodlands is one of timber-products utilization guided by a stewardship applied consistently to community benefit. For much of the twentieth century, the town forest movement nurtured and refined that stewardship, all the while encouraging recreational and educational forest uses. Only during the last 50 years have the latter pursuits grown dominant in local woodlands, threatening to erase part of a working landscape essential to a complete understanding of the region's forest and urban history.

A MASTER PLAN TO RECLAIM IDLE LAND

The movement for town forests in Massachusetts emerged amid changing attitudes about America's woodlands, a reordering that took shape during the second half of the nineteenth century. Concern about wasteful cutting practices and depleted timberlands, the introduction of professional forestry and forestry science, focus on the role of forests as part of larger ecosystems, the influence of woodland cover on water supplies, and the culling of forest reserves from the public domain in western states, all propelled this transformation. Reform-era progressivism that helped to synthesize the conservation movement also fostered progress in urban and regional planning. These events made it easier for citizens to sift unrefined policy into workable, community-sized initiatives. The ancient bond between town and forest in many parts of Massachusetts offered fertile ground for these seeds of opinion.

Amid shifting outlooks, selection of one event to mark change is seldom easy. However, the appointment of Bernhard Fernow in 1886 to head the U. S. Department of Agriculture's newly created forestry division stands out as a milestone for local forestry. Fernow, a Prussian-born professional forester, was especially knowledgeable about Europe's carefully managed communal forests. He encouraged a similar program in America and can be given a large share of the credit for inaugurating the town forest movement. In an 1890 editorial letter for Charles Sprague Sargent's journal, *Garden and Forest*, Fernow wrote: "In Germany I know of communities where not only all taxes are paid by the revenue from the communal forests, but every citizen receives a dividend in addition." Suggestions that American towns could produce comparable lucre were enticing, and Fernow's comments were borrowed countless times by those who publicized town forests during the years to come. Fernow frequently pointed to Zurich's ancient city forest, the Sihlwald, as a model of efficient forest utilization. There, management by city foresters had begun as early as the fifteenth century, and technical working plans were in place by 1697. Modern forestry practice originated with a series of nineteenth-century management plans, the results of which were carefully scrutinized by American foresters who made frequent pilgrimages to the Sihlwald.²

Germany's communal forests were rooted in a village structure quite similar to Massachusetts' first settlements. The nucleated village

of Anglo-Saxon culture and its counterpart, the Mark Society of Germanic civilizations, both developed as communal agrarian societies with dwellings clustered to form a village nucleus. Outlying arable, pasture, woodland, and waste land were held in common, and communities were defined by the margins of this varied landscape. In England, feudal tenure buttressed by a unified central monarchy steadily suppressed communal ownership of land, eventually limiting common rights to those acquired by grant or by prescription through timeless use. A great many were extinguished by a legal process known as enclosure. In Germanic states, however, these common lands ripened into well-defined community-owned resources. It is ironic that Massachusetts' Anglican towns, where vast common lands had been renounced by the beginning of the seventeenth century, turned to Germany two centuries later for the model that would help them reclaim public lands in the form of town forests. The value of these ancient common rights did not escape Fernow, who remarked, "Through all the changes of centuries, these so-called servitudes (certain rights in the substance of the forests) have lasted until our own times, much changed, to be sure, in character, and extending by new grants especially to churches, charitable institutions, cities, villages, and colonists."³

Fernow was practical in his endorsements for community forestry in America, often cautioning that towns should not expect immediate returns but should plan instead for the distant future. Nevertheless, he wisely understood the educational value of such a program during an era of policy reform:

If every community will concern itself in the rational use of the land within its borders, if every town and every county will give profitable occupation to its waste lands by utilizing them for forest-growth, the movement would not only increase the financial prosperity of each community, the efforts of those who work for a rational forest-policy in the country at large would be subserved by every communal forest established. In fact, no better method of forest reform could be suggested than by beginning forestry in each town."⁴

Unfortunately, Fernow's successors at the U.S. Forest Service were not as farsighted about the prospects of municipal forestry in America,

and the federal government did not participate in the town forest movement until Franklin Roosevelt's administration. Instead, the task was left to private forestry associations such as the Massachusetts Forestry Association and to state forestry programs. Many state laws enabling towns to acquire municipal forests subsequently required management assistance from state foresters whose programs were aided by federal funds. An informal and effective system of collaboration between states and towns quickly developed.⁵

Massachusetts policy-makers had already responded to concern about the state's depleted forests and polluted waters. A law enacted in 1882 allowed towns to purchase land for "the preservation, reproduction and culture of forest trees for the sake of the wood and timber thereon, or for the preservation of the water supply." Acquisition was sanctioned by either direct purchase or eminent domain, but title vested in the state as a trustee for towns. Ironically, although recreational uses were clearly a secondary goal, the bill received support from those who sought a metropolitan park system, and it became known as the Massachusetts Public Park Law. A number of important forest parks, or reservations, as they are sometimes called, were founded during the ensuing years. These include Lynn Woods, Prospect Hill Park in Waltham, Forest Park in Springfield, and Indian Ridge in Andover. Portions of Middlesex Fells, too, initially were acquired by a group of trustees who subsequently conveyed the Fells to the Metropolitan Park Commission in 1894. Forest parks qualify as a discrete category of community-owned woodlands devoted to recreational use, and they are distinct from town forests, although the latter often double as recreational lands. Often placed in scenic locales, forest parks are usually kept a cautious distance from timber cropping, sometimes in accordance with the express wishes of those who donated land or money. The distinction between forest parks and town forests remains an important one in Massachusetts and in several other New England states as well.⁶

Thus, when the Massachusetts Forestry Association organized in 1898, it did so in the midst of a prevailing mood of reform. Its charter identified the need to promote afforestation of unproductive lands, to encourage the planting and care of shade trees, and to educate the public about forestry management. Education was achieved in part via a steady flow of published materials, and town forests were promoted as

early as 1905. Only after the appointment of Harris Reynolds, however, did a program for town forests fully develop. In 1912, the MFA reprinted a short bulletin by George H. Maxwell, a California lawyer who vigorously advocated government control of rivers and waters as a means of converting arid or waste lands to productive use. Titled "Forests for Towns and Villages," Maxwell's article had been published already by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (SPNHF). He recommended municipal forestry for the entire country, remarking that German communal forests supplied an annual quota of fuelwood to the local citizenry and sold sufficient timber to meet all public expenses. Although Maxwell remained an obscure figure in the field of forestry, his article was publicized at a pivotal moment by both the MFA and the SPNHF, the region's two most influential private forestry organizations. Reynolds later credited Maxwell's contribution with being the genesis of the town forest movement in Massachusetts.⁷

The year 1913 proved to be one of consequence for both Harris Reynolds and town forests. Reynolds married a woman of German descent, Alice Hecker, and the couple spent their honeymoon in Europe observing Zurich's Sihlwald and communal forests in Heidelberg, Frankfurt, and Munich, accompanied during part of their excursion by William Wharton, a member of the MFA's executive committee and later its president. Reynolds also honed his ample literary skills, producing three of what would become a respectable corpus of articles and monographs about town forests. The first, "A Citizens' Movement to Reduce the Tax Rate," was published as a bulletin by the MFA to convince communities that turning waste lands into forests would improve local tax rates. In the second, which appeared in the journal *American City*, Reynolds discussed the MFA's ambitious plan to establish an extensive network of branch associations in towns throughout the state to be assisted by trained foresters. As he described it, the appointment of foresters in every city and town and the acquisition of municipal forests were the MFA's principal objectives. In the third article, written for *Landscape Architecture*, he suggested that landscape architects could fill the multifaceted position of city forester as capably as commercial foresters. Also in 1913, Massachusetts amended its town forest enabling law so as to permit towns to own and manage forests independently.⁸

With passage of this amendment, town forests in Massachusetts

were given a statutory purpose: cultivation of trees for the production of wood and timber for common benefit. A year later, Fitchburg adopted an ordinance designating four unused parcels of city-owned land as a municipal forest, and the town forest movement was under way. Town forests became popular in New Hampshire and Vermont, and in other states, too, particularly New York and Pennsylvania, where enabling laws had been enacted a few years earlier. Several midwestern states developed active programs as well. Massachusetts towns, however, seized the idea with an enthusiasm that paid tribute to the state's history of community and forest, long intertwined, and their initiative eventually outlasted programs in many other states.⁹

PINE PLANTATIONS

The movement's first decade in Massachusetts was dominated by efforts to encourage towns to organize town forest committees, acquire suitable lands, and transplant seedlings, primarily coniferous types such as white, red, and scotch pine or spruce. At the MFA's annual meeting in 1914, William Colton, a member of Fitchburg's branch association, carefully outlined the procedure for starting a town forest, identifying types of available land, unredeemed tax lots for example, and describing appropriate forestry work. This included conducting inventories, drafting compartment maps, undertaking improvements such as fire lanes or roads, and creating working plans to govern planting, thinning, and harvesting. Contests exhorting committees to establish town forests were launched by the MFA in 1914 and 1915. Hoping to establish working forests of efficient size, the MFA required towns to obtain at least 100 acres, officially designate the area as a town forest, and plant a minimum of 50 acres with white pine seedlings. Judging focused on carefully identified criteria including size of land area, quality of planting, potential for commercial productivity, recreation, aesthetics, fire prevention, water and soil protection, and various improvements such as roads. Unfortunately, fewer than 10 entries were submitted each year, the minimum required by contest rules, and no winners were declared.¹⁰

Nevertheless, activity in two important forests did occur. In Fitchburg, the city forester, Page Bunker, prepared a working plan and supervised planting on lands that included a former woodlot for the



Figure 8.1. Dedication ceremonies held on May 6, 1916, for the Walpole Town Forest, Massachusetts' first comprehensively planned town forest. Left to right: George Plimpton, donor of the land; Calvin Coolidge, then lieutenant governor of Massachusetts and later, as president, convenor of the 1924 National Conference on Outdoor Recreation; and Charles S. Bird, Jr., a member of the Walpole town planning committee and, later, chairman of Governor Alvin Fuller's (1928) statewide Committee on Needs and Uses of Open Spaces. Walpole Historical Society.

town's poor farm and several parcels devoted to watershed protection. Walpole developed a far more elaborate scheme as part of a comprehensive town plan produced by the landscape architect and planner John Nolen. Nolen had completed his work by 1914, but Charles S. Bird, Jr., head of the city's planning committee, inquired about the MFA's contests after a local benefactor, George Plimpton, agreed to donate land near the Neponset River for a high school park and town forest. Nolen set to work again, proposing winding roads, open meadows, and scenic vistas for a town forest that proved to be as much park as forest. However, he did retain a consulting forester, George Carlisle, to recommend tree species and supervise planting. A dedication ceremony was conducted on Arbor Day in 1916, and Lieutenant Governor Calvin Coolidge planted a symbolic first tree before relinquishing the task of planting remaining seedlings to the town's schoolchildren. The forest was developed according to Nolen's plan, and the pattern of trails that

he devised still remains. Today, however, entry points are not well defined, and interpretive evidence of Walpole's important contribution to the town forest movement is absent.¹¹

The onset of World War I caused the movement to stall, and momentum did not return until after 1920. All the while, however, progress had been occurring independently on local watershed lands. Industrialization during the last quarter of the nineteenth century had fostered rapid growth of urban centers, and a great number of Massachusetts cities and towns had been forced to develop new and larger sources of water. Many of these systems depended on surface drainage, and lands surrounding newly constructed reservoirs were purchased to protect water quality. The ability of forests to retard runoff, equalize the flow of streams, and thus prevent pollution and sediment from reaching water bodies steadily gained credence. Massachusetts' 1882 enabling act for local forests gave legislative sanction to these theories, and many an old cow pasture became a young pine plantation.

The New England Water Works Association was chartered in Boston that same year, giving shape to a professional body of municipal engineers and portending a merger between forestry and water-supply management. Beginning with the 1887 paper evaluating forest influences by the MIT engineering professor George F. Swain, the association's journal chronicled the patient growth of forestry on watershed lands. By 1911, presentations such as that by Boston forester Edward Bryant outlined very detailed silvicultural practices for watershed forestry, a realm that eventually would become quite specialized. Thereafter, forestry became a topic of frequent discussion at association meetings. Forestry work had actually begun in a number of communities by this time, well before the MFA's contests were publicized. For example, Fall River's reservoir commission began measuring water levels in Watuppa Pond before 1900 and solicited help from state foresters to increase the efficiency of water collection. A working plan and type map, prepared by Harold Cook (who later became state forester), were in place for the city's 5,000-acre watershed by 1909 — one of only a few formal plans in New England at the time. Other cities — Brookline, North Adams, Pittsfield, and Westfield, for instance — all began planting prior to or shortly after World War I.¹²

The MFA doggedly sought an alliance with water utilities, and the match often worked. Addressing a gathering of New England Water

Works Association members in March, 1911, Massachusetts State Forester Frank Rane placed special emphasis on the economic advantages of timbered watersheds. Observing that municipal forestry offered lucrative opportunities, Rane argued that utilities had everything to gain by converting idle lands to profitable use. He also pledged assistance from the state's forestry program, and his text was reprinted in bulletin form by the MFA. By far the most extensive planting on municipal lands prior to World War I occurred on watersheds, and many became model town forests.¹³

Successful watershed plantations also served as useful demonstration forests for the MFA after 1920. That year marked the start of the town forest movement's most prolific decade, a success impelled by several factors. In 1920, the state legislature passed a bill authorizing the state forester to provide free seedlings for town forests, and a year later the MFA offered to plant 5,000 trees on any newly established forest of 100 acres or more. These incentives prompted similar offers from a number of local organizations, including the Berkshire Forestry Association, the Springfield Chamber of Commerce, and the Hampden County Improvement League. The New England Box Company also offered to plant seedlings in any town forest in Franklin County. An array of published materials continued to emphasize the benefits of local forests in the broadest possible manner, from commercial to recreational, and all were aimed at public education. Harris Reynolds maintained a steady pace of writing, producing a 1925 monograph titled "Town Forests: Their Recreational and Economic Value and How to Establish and Maintain Them," published by the American Tree Association with a foreword by Charles Lathrop Pack. These enticements yielded prodigious return, and by 1930, 90 forests had been established on more than 25,500 acres with over 3 million trees planted.¹⁴

Forests in Petersham and Russell were among the state's most capably managed. Town officials in Petersham began harvesting timber on a portion of the poor farm in 1921, and established a fund to pay for reforestation of open land that same year. Silvicultural work commenced in 1926 with the help of students from Harvard Forest, and a type map was prepared. The following year, a town forest committee took shape under the aegis of Richard T. Fisher and Albert C. Cline, respectively director and assistant director of Harvard Forest, and a third member, Daniel Broderick. Pine and spruce plantations were

established that year on six acres of abandoned fields near the old town farm buildings. Two other parcels, the Shaw Tract and the Monroe Tract, were added later, and Petersham's forest soon became a prototype for other communities. Russell, a small village in Hampden County, began purchasing lands in 1923 to protect water supplies and to reduce the cost of town services to a few struggling hill farms. Acreage steadily increased, spreading into neighboring Blandford, and forestry management progressed according to a working plan prepared by state forester C. A. Galarneau. A full-time forester, Elmer R. Foster, was eventually hired, and Russell's forest affirmed the union between municipal forestry and water-supply management that the MFA so actively pursued.¹⁵

WEEDING, THINNING, AND RELEASING

By 1930 the town forest movement had begun to grapple with an assortment of stubborn problems. Many communities had neglected young plantations, and coniferous seedlings were quickly overtapped by sprout hardwoods. In response, the MFA placed greater emphasis on stewardship, and the need for silviculture — weeding, thinning, and releasing — replaced earlier emphasis on land acquisition and planting. These events coincided with inauguration of the annual Conference for Town Forest Committees in 1928, sponsored by the MFA and held continuously until after 1960. At the conference's first meeting, held in Boston, Albert Cline stressed the need for weeding in order to improve composition and quality of tree stands. Subsequent conferences included field demonstrations in towns such as Westfield, Russell, Fitchburg, Groton, Ayer, and Petersham. Each conference elected an executive committee to plan the following year's conference, and this committee gradually acquired more autonomy as the MFA began channelling its energies in other directions. Both committee and conferences added much-needed structure to the movement, and the committee's reports were published regularly in the MFA's informative newsletter, *Forest and Park News*.¹⁶

Commercial productivity also received closer scrutiny after 1930, and a skepticism about the ability of communities to produce marketable timber began to afflict the movement. Inconsistent municipal administration, lax bookkeeping, competing local interests, and a fickle timber economy all presented barriers to successful management.

Competent oversight notwithstanding, Petersham's forest illustrated the formidable quandaries facing those who advocated sustained yield cultivation on small tracts of community woodland. After initial improvements in 1926, Petersham's forest was left with only mature or very young stands. Establishing a desirably short period between yields was not possible until an even distribution of age classes existed. Allowing mature trees to age beyond their greatest vigor lessened their value for the commercial market because of increased potential for disease. Cost-saving features, a portable sawmill, for example, were key to any ledger balancing but were not practical until yield periods became relatively short. Nominal returns during the interim did little to encourage local financial support for indispensable silviculture. Not surprisingly, many communities facing similar difficulties soon lost interest in their town forests.¹⁷

Partly in response to these factors, and partly as a result of alliances between a cadre of conservationists and planners, recreation began to assume a larger role in the town forest movement. As early as 1924, at the National Conference on Outdoor Recreation, Reynolds had hinted that recreation might prove to be the greatest benefit from town forests. Although the cultivation of marketable timber characterized this particular class of community woodlands (and today remains an important element if one is to understand the movement's origins), the MFA had to work hard to sustain the momentum of local forestry. The country's worsening economic condition aggravated circumstances, and in 1933 the MFA changed its name to the Massachusetts Forest and Park Association (MFPA) as a way of adjusting to these trends. In correspondence to Benton MacKaye, Reynolds sought advice about this change, and his remarks set a tone for the period: "Am short on office assistance, cash, spirit and ideas — Am think(ing) of moral bankruptcy — Where can I get a quart of pre-war?" For his part, MacKaye had been working with the Committee on Needs and Uses of Open Spaces, established by Governor Alvan T. Fuller in 1928. MacKaye's plans, regional in scope, employed forests as means of controlling metropolitan sprawl and attempted to connect these wildlands with recreational trail systems. The value of open spaces as a means of balancing irrepressible urban growth rapidly gained acceptance and ultimately influenced local planning as well.¹⁸ Between 1930 and the onset of World War II, the number of town forests in Massachusetts did

not increase significantly. At the annual Conference for Town Forest Committees in 1938, the year the U.S. Forest Service launched a community forest program, Reynolds reported 105 town forests. Possibly incredulous at the Forest Service's long period of absence from the field, Reynolds was nevertheless gratified that federal participation had finally arrived.¹⁹

Although Reynolds and the MFA had awakened national interest in town forests, impetus for the government's program came from Franklin Roosevelt, who asked Nelson C. Brown, friend and faculty member from the New York State College of Forestry at Syracuse, to assist. Brown traveled to Europe to study German and Swiss communal forests and, upon his return, authored a substantial collection of articles promoting community forestry. Although Brown served Roosevelt's goal of public education very well, much of his writing failed to adequately consider the movement's progress in Massachusetts and other New England states and, more important, to isolate some of the troublesome problems that had surfaced. One such article, "Community Forests — A New Idea in the American Forestry Program," appeared in *Southern Lumberman* in 1939. Undoubtedly Reynolds and others who had struggled to build the movement during the preceding decades felt the irony in Brown's choice of words. The title of a 1938 bulletin by the MFPA, "The First Quarter Century of the Town Forest in Massachusetts," was surely not coincidental.²⁰

Nevertheless, the Forest Service's program did spark a period of renewed interest prior to World War II. Productivity remained at the center of debate, however, and comparisons between national and community forests were inevitable. Reynolds argued that the period of acquisition for national and state forests had passed its heyday and that the future of new public forests rested with communities. He also contended that local forests were ignored unfairly by professional foresters and lacked crucial financial support. At the core of Reynolds's arguments lay the conviction that town forests could produce higher yields per acre than national forests in western states. Soil quality on abandoned farms in Massachusetts was higher, the growing season longer, and water more plentiful. Transportation costs to large market centers were lower, making shipment of low-grade lumber worthwhile. By-products such as wood fuel could also be marketed more easily. All these factors offered opportunity for more intensive management and a higher rate of return. Acces-

sibility during all seasons also increased recreational benefits and provided added opportunities for employment.²¹ Despite the apparent merits of these arguments, skepticism about commercial productivity continued to daunt the movement, and the Forest Service's program did little to change that perception. Fairly stated, however, fear of government interference in local matters also contributed to the movement's weakness in the field of timber production.

Capitalizing on the increased public awareness of community forests generated by the Forest Service, the MFPA and the Conference for Town Forest Committees jointly sponsored a regional conference on town forests in the fall of 1940. Delegates representing 14 states journeyed to Springfield, Massachusetts, to attend the two-day symposium, which included field trips to Westfield, Russell, Petersham, and Northampton. Although a variety of topics were addressed, including the need for technical assistance from professional foresters, the relationships between local, state, and federal governments received especially close scrutiny. The conference closed with a bluntly worded resolution: "It is the sentiment of this meeting that a community forest should grow out of local interest and meet local needs. We are opposed to any form of federal or state control of such areas. We believe, however, that close cooperation should be maintained with state agencies in drafting and carrying out plans of management." This policy statement was significant, at least for Massachusetts' town forests, because it set clearly defined boundaries in the struggle to address the problem of consistent management. All agreed that assistance (financial as well as technical) from government foresters was essential, but few were willing to tolerate any form of bureaucratic oversight. Questions about the capacity of towns to produce marketable timber were thus drawn more sharply into focus.²²

Not surprisingly, those who administered state forestry assistance programs wanted assurances that their efforts and funding were not wasted. Toward that end, the Massachusetts legislature passed a bill in 1941 requiring towns to obtain approval of plantation lands before trees could be distributed for planting. A year earlier, Reynolds had conducted a survey of the state's town forests and had found widespread neglect of young plantations. At about the same time, he had grown increasingly concerned about management practices on small, privately owned woodlots. Recognizing the need to span a gap between owners

of modest-sized tracts of timber, towns among them, and government forestry programs aimed at large-scale operations, he conceived the idea of establishing a nonprofit organization to provide technical assistance to the former. The New England Forestry Foundation was created in 1944 by the MFPA to provide complete forestry services at cost, from survey to harvest, and offered private owners an alternative to government foresters. Reynolds was appointed secretary of that organization as well. The foundation sought to demonstrate that owners of small tracts could produce a profit if their lands were managed properly. A network of consulting foresters soon developed in several New England states, and their services were offered to an assortment of woodland owners, including towns. Working plans for town forests in Greenfield, Groton, Needham, North Adams, Pembroke, Pittsfield, Russell, and Walpole were the result. The MFPA also developed a concise policy: sustain public support, improve local administration, and generate management plans.²³

Greater public cognizance of community forestry during this period, in part the result of the Forest Service's campaign and in part the result of well-publicized state programs, led to other developments that ultimately affected town forests in Massachusetts. In 1941, the Society of American Foresters instituted a special committee on community forests and named Reynolds its chairman. Other members included Nelson Brown and U.S. Forester Joseph Fitzwater, who later was replaced by George Duthie. The committee quickly confronted the seesaw contest between recreational and commercial uses by cautioning against unrealistic economic goals. Rather, greatest emphasis was given to conservation education, best achieved through recreational use. Logging activities became a means to reduce the costs of multiple-use management, the forest policy the committee sought to advance through public education. The matter of local control was also confronted, and the committee initially stressed the authority of local town forest committees. Later reports issued during Reynolds's chairmanship, however, looked with envy at profitable communal forests in Germany and argued for greater control by state programs and the appointment of full-time community foresters. Committee members also encouraged the U.S. Forest Service to create a separate division for community forestry and to allocate sufficient funding.²⁴

The onset of World War II caused an interlude in the promotion of

town forest programs, but opportunity lingered. With supplies of coal and oil scarce, cordwood became an increasingly important resource, and Reynolds was appointed director of Massachusetts' wood-fuel production. Fortuitously, the thinning sorely needed in many town forests generated a timely crop of cordwood. Reynolds quickly turned the situation to advantage, inviting regional wood-fuel production managers to attend the annual Conference of Town Forest Committees in 1942. Many committees subsequently marked selected trees and allowed volunteers to do the culling, often charging only a half cord for welfare. Toward the close of the war, emphasis on employment opportunities also surfaced, and the MFPA publicized self-paying work projects, borrowing a page from Roosevelt's New Deal. The MFPA also hired a forester, David Miner, to inspect town forests across the state. His report, published in 1949, revealed that many forests lacked management plans and required silviculture. By this time, 35 years after the establishment of Fitchburg's town forest, 127 towns had cultivated forests on almost 40,000 acres and had planted more than 8,500,000 trees.²⁵

Although post war enthusiasm helped to rekindle interest in town forests, the surge was a fleeting one. Between 1942 and 1944, a legislative initiative that would have provided federal subsidies for community forests had failed, and this defeat struck an ominous note. Although Roosevelt had sponsored the bill, he later abandoned his proposal when advised that community forest projects would not pay for their costs. This advice, tantamount to admission that town forests were unprofitable, was undoubtedly rooted in the U.S. Forest Service at a time when their community forest program was only a few years old. That program, never much more than a clearinghouse for information and census taking, all but ended with the retirement of George Duthie in 1949. Unquestionably, the inability of towns to produce consistently marketable timber influenced policy-makers in the Forest Service at a critical juncture. This in turn contributed to a weakening of their community forest program.

On the other national front, the SAF committee sputtered, barely managing to sustain momentum. Brown acknowledged that the movement had not met the expectations generated by profitable European communal forests, and Reynolds complained about the absence of forceful sponsorship by a national agency. His committee report for

1951, the year he requested appointment of a new chairperson, carried a tone of irritation. Three years later, the committee was dissolved for lack of a “concrete and specific assignment.”²⁶

The collapse of national initiatives in turn caused a weakening of state programs. Town forests in Massachusetts suffered an even greater misfortune in 1953 when Harris Reynolds perished following a heart attack. It is a testimony to Reynolds’s Herculean effort during the preceding 40 years that the town forest program in Massachusetts managed to sustain momentum during the decade following his untimely death. Town forest committees continued to gather at annual conferences, and *Forest and Park News* faithfully reported these events. By the early 1960s, 147 Massachusetts towns had dedicated forests totaling more than 43,000 acres, a marvelous legacy to the memory of Reynolds. In 1957, however, passage of enabling legislation for local conservation commissions foretold a new movement that would hasten the decline of town forests. Conservation commissions, intent on preserving a variety of ecologically important lands, soon gained overwhelming popularity, obscuring any local interest in timber management that still lingered. Remarkably, more Massachusetts towns formed conservation commissions in the five-year period between 1957 and 1962 than had formed town forest committees during the preceding 50 years. These trends may have reflected a decreasing public interest in the state’s forests as well. Many town forests survive today, and a few of these still produce timber; a significant number continue to protect water supplies. Many others, however, are more properly classified as ecological preserves and are overseen by conservation commissions, often without complete understanding of the origins and objectives of the town forest movement. Noticeably absent, too, are the commitments to forestry management that are part of that movement’s heritage.²⁷

THE FUTURE OF EVERYDAY FORESTS

The true history of Massachusetts’ town forests can be found, not on these pages, but in the woodland places that contribute so serenely to our communities. There, in the landscape where it belongs, history is transformed into something more tactile than the written word, and greater insight is the reward. Any who seek out these timbered enclaves, and seek one must for many are well hidden, will quickly understand

why conservation is so deeply rooted in our culture. Remarkably, too, the individual visions expressed in these local patches of forest are singularly creative, often quite different from one place to the next. Collectively, these very personal affirmations of a woodland ethic offer a fresh outlook on the broader history of forests and conservation in America. Their resiliency, too, is a tribute to the ability of forests to accommodate human use. Indeed, their value as everyday places is beyond measure.

Today, an array of examples entice exploration. Pembroke's J. J. Shepherd Town Forest honors a former state representative and district fire warden. Its 100 acres, planted with red pine in the 1950s, are managed according to a working plan prepared in the mid-1980s, and the town forest committee continues to meet several times each year. Stands of pine shelter picnic areas as well as nature walks, and a portion of the land has been kept open for Little League baseball fields. In Westford's town forest, plots were assigned to demonstrate the value of thinning and pruning white pine to promote rapid growth and to improve the commercial quality of timber. Those tracts are now mature, and the town forest committee continues to function. However, little harvesting has been conducted; ironically, an adjoining watershed forest currently demonstrates more intensive management.

In contrast to Westford, Natick's town forest committee once set aside plots as natural resource preserves during the 1950s and prepared an informative manual. However, the town forest committee is now defunct and the woodland is underutilized. In Duxbury the Frederick Knapp Town Forest is no longer under active forestry management, and the town forest committee, too, has ceased to exist. The forest's 32 acres of white pine are, however, part of a large central green belt owned in part by the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society, the Massachusetts Audubon Society, and the Duxbury Conservation Commission. This extensive weald also protects local water supplies. No better opportunity exists to merge and interpret demonstrations of timber cultivation, ecosystem protection, and history.

So often, the answers to questions that perplex and divide our society can be found in the history that fills our landscapes, if only we take the trouble to look. This is certainly true for the current debate about forest use. By most standards, the town forest movement was unsuccessful in the production of commercially saleable timber. Yet if

one peers a little more carefully into these forests, important features begin to take shape. The continuum of working forest and community in Massachusetts is an ancient one, but one guided throughout by strong ties to stewardship. That tradition of stewardship deserves to be carried forward, if only to demonstrate the enormous cultural endowment represented by these timberlands. Town forests, a link between the utilitarian woodscapes of earlier periods and today's conservation areas, the latter managed with equal utility as natural ecosystems, are perfect places to sustain that continuum. With these backyard reminders, we achieve better understanding of past cultures, we sharpen perceptions of our own culture, and we make better decisions about our environments. In doing so, we help not only our own generation but those to come.

Town forest and community are bound in other important ways as well. Local woodlands have played a valuable role in the evolution of community form, and they are as much a part of urban and village history as they are of forest history. The shifting balance between public and private land has been a fundamental force in the evolving structure of Massachusetts towns and villages, and that tension continues. The instantaneous popularity of conservation commissions during the early 1960s can be explained in large part by concern for the overwhelming, unfathomable pace of change in our society. Acquisition of conservation lands offered communities an opportunity to confront that change in emphatic terms. Yet urbanization continues to swallow open environments whole, nullifying even the most carefully conceived efforts at large-scale planning. As a consequence, we are being forced to concentrate our energies in manageable, pocket-sized realms; to claim and reclaim habitable communities from within, all the while reliant on a human sense of place and scale. Public lands will remain indispensable to this campaign. If, in the future, we pause to consider the time when New England communities first embarked on a sustained effort to reclaim their public lands, we will begin with the town forest movement.

Finally, our success in constructing habitable communities will depend upon alliances among those allegiant to both natural and cultural resources. Unfortunately, such alliances have proved all too elusive in the past. It is the intricate layering of history in our landscapes that creates a sense of place. In town forests, cultural and natural

history intertwine to the extent that distinctions between the two become unimportant. There, communities can continue demonstrating forest policy that successfully accommodates recreation, timber production, and ecosystem management. There, too, we can add to the understanding of those who seek interpretation of our built environment, a society whose very foundations were erected with wood. Surely, too, these town forests are sheltered places where such alliances can be steadily nurtured.

What is to become of town forests in Massachusetts, or, for that matter, in New England? Simply suggesting that towns have much to gain by sustaining a centuries-old tradition of forest ownership and utilization will not make it so. At the very least, there must be a concerted effort among policy-makers to reinforce forestry management at the local level. Achieving consistent silviculture, an essential component if cultivation of timber is to be anything more than symbolic, should be the product of a partnership between federal, state, and local governments. Such a partnership would supply the required funding, technical assistance, and public interest, all the while ensuring that the goal of multiple utilization within a diverse and carefully sustained ecosystem is rigorously pursued from one generation to the next. The federal government's Forest Legacy Program, part of the Forest Stewardship Act of 1990, encourages the U.S. Forest Service to build precisely that type of partnership. Town forest enabling legislation, still valid in all New England states, remains a viable tool as well.

More is needed, however, to link town forest programs with community efforts to preserve both cultural and natural resources. A non-profit organization chartered to reclaim town forests could provide the foundation for such an alliance. In addition to encouraging local interest in forestry, such an organization could collect and hold the valuable but widely scattered records of New England's town forests. These records are in great danger of being lost or destroyed as offices are moved from one place to another. Developing systematic communication between towns and state or federal foresters, often a difficult undertaking, might also be possible. Time and time again, Massachusetts has been a place of innovation in matters of conservation, and rejuvenation of its town forests would be a shining and much-deserved tribute to Harris Reynolds.

 NOTES

1. See Groton, Mass., *Annual Reports* (1922): 11–13, (1935): 73–74; H. S. Ripley, “Forest Management Plan for the Groton Memorial Town Forest” (July 1952), records of the New England Forestry Foundation. Harlan Fitch is a longtime member of the town forest committee.
2. Bernhard E. Fernow, “Communal Forests,” *Garden and Forest* 3 (July 16, 1890): 349. For a very thoroughly written biography of Fernow, see Andrew D. Rodgers, *Bernhard Eduard Fernow: A Story of North American Forestry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1951).

For the most comprehensive study of Zurich’s Sihlwald, see Ulrich Meister, *Die Stadtwaldungen von Zürich*, 2d ed. (Zurich: Druckerei der Neuen Zürcher Zeitung, 1903). A number of visiting Americans published articles in various journals. For a good example, see Gifford Pinchot, “The Sihlwald,” Parts 1, 2, and 3, *Garden and Forest* (July 30, August 6, August 13, 1890): 374, 386, 397–98. For a more recent work, see James P. Barrett, “Recreational and Timber Opportunities on Swiss and German Town Forests,” *Forest Notes* 140 (Spring 1980): 2–5.

German city forests were also influential, and those in Villengen, Baden-Baden, Freiburg, Darmstadt, and Frankfurt were often visited by Americans.

3. Bernhard E. Fernow, “Report upon the Forestry Investigations of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1877–98,” House Documents, 55th Cong., 3rd sess., 1898–99, vol. 71, serial 3813 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1899).

For a general discussion of open-field systems and the origins of community in England and Germany, see C. S. Orwin and C. S. Orwin, *The Open Fields* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954). See also Howard L. Gray, *English Field Systems* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1915); W. E. Tate, *The English Village Community and the Enclosure Movements* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1967); and Franz Heske, *German Forestry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938).

4. Bernhard E. Fernow, “Communal Forests,” *Garden and Forest* 3 (July 16, 1890): 349.
5. Gifford Pinchot, “Forest-Policy Abroad,” *Garden and Forest* (January 1, 1891): 8–9, (January 14, 1891): 21–22, (January 21, 1891): 34–35.
6. Massachusetts Laws of 1882, Chap. 255, Sec. 1–8, adopted May 25, 1882. See also “The New Forestry Law of Massachusetts,” *The American Journal of Forestry* 1 (April 1883): 304–7.

For a discussion of Middlesex Fells, see Medford Historical Society, *Round about Middlesex Fells* (Medford, Mass.: Medford Historical Society, 1935); and Metropolitan Park Commission, *Annual Report* (January 1905): 42–44.

See also Sylvester Baxter, "The Lynn Public Forest," *Garden and Forest* 2 (October 30, 1889): 526–27; M. C. Robbins, "Forest Park, Springfield, Massachusetts," *Garden and Forest* 4 (December 2, 1891): 566–67; and Susan Blake, "A Communal Forest for Andover," *The Forester* 3 (November 1, 1897): 132.

7. M. Richard Applegate, *Massachusetts Forest and Park Association: A History, 1898–1973* (Boston, Mass.: MFPA, 1974). See also George H. Maxwell, "Forests for Towns and Villages," *Bulletin of the Society for Protection of New Hampshire Forests*, n.d.; reprint, Massachusetts Forestry Association, n.d. (c. 1912); and Harris Reynolds, "The First Quarter Century of the Town Forest in Massachusetts," *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Forest and Park Association*, no. 163 (December 1939).
8. Harris Reynolds, "Notes on European Town Forests (1913)," records of the Environmental League of Massachusetts; "A Citizens Movement to Reduce the Tax Rate," *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Forestry Association*, no. 104 (May 1913); "Establishment of Foresters in Towns and Cities through State Forestry Associations," *The American City* 9 (November 1913): 412–14; and "An Opportunity for the Young Landscape Architect," *Landscape Architecture* 4 (October 1913–July 1914): 47–51. See also Massachusetts Acts and Resolves, 1913, Chapter 564, "An Act Relative to Public Domain," pp. 483–85.
9. For Fitchburg, see Page Bunker, "A Town Forest in America," *Forest Quarterly* 13 (March 1915): 4–7; and Guy Hubbard, "The Municipal Forest in Fitchburg, Mass.," *The American City* 24 (February 1921): 121–24.
10. William Colton, "Organization and Management of Town Forests," *MFA Bulletin* no. 115 (1914). See also Harris Reynolds, "Town Forest Contest," *MFA Bulletin* no. 112 (June 1, 1914).
11. John Murphy, "The Town of Walpole Establishes a Communal Forest of 200 Acres," *American City* 15 (August 1916): 144–53. See also letter of George Carlisle to Charles S. Bird, 4/25/1916, records of the Walpole Historical Society.
12. George Swain, "The Influence of Forests upon the Rainfall and upon the Flow of Streams," *Journal of the New England Water Works Association* 1 (March 1887): 11–26. See also Edward Bryant, "Practical Forestry for Water Works," *Journal of the New England Water Works Association* 25 (June 1911): 243–46; reprinted by the MFA as an undated, unnumbered bulletin.
See also Massachusetts Forest Service, F. W. Rane, State Forester, Harold Cook, assistant in charge, *Forest Working Plan for Land Belonging to the City of Fall River on the North Watuppa Watershed* (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1909).

13. Frank Rane, "The Reforestation of Watersheds for Domestic Supplies," *Journal of the New England Water Works Association* 25 (June 1911): 234–42. Reprinted in *Eighth Annual Report by the State Forester of Massachusetts*, 1911, 58–59; also reprinted by the MFA as an undated, unnumbered bulletin.
14. *Massachusetts Acts and Resolves*, 1920, Chapter 604, titled: "An Act to Provide for the Purchase and Development of State Forests," pp. 668–69; see specifically Section 5. See also MFA, "Why Massachusetts Needs Town Forests," *MFA Bulletin* no. 132 (1921); and MFA, "Summarized Report of the Third Annual Conference of Town Forest Committees," *MFA Bulletin* no. 150 (1930).
15. For information about Petersham's town forest, see annual town forest committee reports, 1930–38, records of Harvard Forest, Petersham. For information about Russell's town forest, see "Second Conference of Town Forest Committees," *MFA Bulletin* no. 147 (November 8, 9, 1929): 4; and Harris Reynolds, "The Russell Town Forest," *MFA Bulletin* no. 170 (1946);
16. Harris Reynolds, *Report on the First Conference of Massachusetts Town Forest Committees, January 10, 1929* (Boston: MFA, 1929). See also "Second Conference of Town Forest Committees," *MFA Bulletin* no. 147 (November 8, 9, 1929): 4; and "Summarized Report of the Third Annual Conference of Town Forest Committees," *MFA Bulletin* no. 150 (1930).
17. Letter to Spencer H. Palmer, N.H. State College of Forestry, 2/24/33, probably from Albert C. Cline. See also "The Management of a Small Forest for Sustained Yield: The Petersham Town Forest," undated but probably 1926. Both documents are in the records of Harvard Forest, Petersham, Mass.
18. Harris Reynolds, "Town Forests," *Playground* 18 (July 1924): 224–36. See also letter of Benton Mackaye to Harris Reynolds, 9/26/32, and reply of 10/4/32, both in the Mackaye Collection, Dartmouth College Archives. For information about the Governor's Committee on Needs and Uses of Open Spaces, see Benton Mackaye, "Progress Report," typewritten manuscript, 4/4/28, and "Suggested Classification of Open Spaces," undated typewritten manuscript, both in the Mackaye Collection, Dartmouth College Archives.
19. "Town Forests Endorsed by U.S. Forest Service," *Forest and Park News* 3 (January 1939): 1, 4.
20. Harris Reynolds, "The Town Forest in Massachusetts," *A Planning Forum* 3 (October–November 1939): 34–36; and Harris Reynolds, "The First Quarter Century of the Town Forest in Massachusetts," *Bulletin of the Massa-*

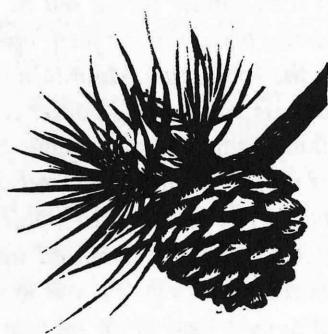
- chusetts Forest and Park Association no. 163 (December, 1939). See also: Nelson Brown, "Community Forests — A New Idea in the American Forestry Program," *Southern Lumberman* 161 (December 14, 1940): 154–58.
21. Harris Reynolds, "Town Forests — A Neglected Opportunity," *Journal of Forestry* 37 (May 1939): 364–67. See also "Report of Committee on Community Forests," *Journal of Forestry* 49 (February 1951): 132–34.
22. "Town Forests in the Northeast," *Forest and Park News* 4 (November 1940): 3.
23. *Acts and Resolves of Massachusetts*, 1941, Chapter 455, titled "An Act to Provide Demonstrations in Forestry Practices and to Encourage the Rehabilitation of Forest Lands," p. 529. See also Richard Applegate, *Massachusetts Forest and Park Association: A History: 1898–1973* (Boston: MFPA, 1974); and Harris Reynolds, "Bringing Forests to the People," *MFPA Bulletin* no. 165 (November 1941).
- The New England Forestry Foundation was brought into being with the hope of improving the quality of management practices on private woodlands. The services of its foresters were offered to a variety of woodlot owners, from wealthy property holders to farmers seeking to improve marginal returns. However, Reynolds may have been most interested in reaching a class of landowners who were engaged in speculation and who typically employed clear-cutting. By studying markets for forest products in well-defined regions, he hoped to demonstrate that owners could realize greater profit after employing a professional forester. Although town forests were not the primary focus of foundation efforts, Reynolds nevertheless touted the availability of foundation foresters in a number of the MFA's publications aimed at promoting municipal forestry. For example, see Harris Reynolds, *The Russell Town Forest MFPA Bulletin* no. 170 (Jan. 1946), and "Work of the New England Forestry Foundation on Watersheds," *Journal of the New England Water Works Association* 62 (June 1948): 133–40.
24. "Report of the Committee on Community Forests," *Journal of Forestry* 40 (February 1942): 112–17. See also reports in *Journal of Forestry* 41 (May 1943): 332–34; *Journal of Forestry* 42 (May 1944): 348–51; and *Journal of Forestry* 44 (November 1946): 1005–7.
25. "Town Forests Aiding in Wood Fuel Campaign," *Forest and Park News* 6 (December 1942): 1, 4; "War Demonstrates Value of Town Forests," *Forest and Park News* 7 (November 1943): 1, 4; and Harris Reynolds, "A Survey of the Town Forests in Massachusetts," *MFPA Bulletin* no. 171 (November, 1949).

26. "Summary of Recommendations Presented by the Forest Service on February 16, 1940, to the Joint Congressional Committee on Forestry with Respect to a Forest Program for the United States," records of the National Forest Products Association, Forest History Society, Durham, N.C. The document is attributed to Ferdinand Silcox.

Various correspondence between Roosevelt and members of his administration discusses the fate of this legislative initiative. See specifically letter from Claude Wickard to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 5/12/41, and letter from Earl Clapp to John Bankhead, 10/10/41, both in the U.S. Forest Service Collection, National Archives, Records of the Office of the Chief. See also Memorandum from Wayne Coy to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 5/16/42, in Edgar B. Nixon, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Conservation, 1911–1945* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1957).

For information regarding the SAF committee , see: "Report of the Committee on Community Forests," *Journal of Forestry* 49 (February 1951): 132–34.

27. *Acts and Resolves of Massachusetts, 1957*, Chapter 223, titled "An Act Authorizing Cities and Towns to Establish Conservation Commissions to Promote the Development of Natural Resources, and to Appropriate Money Therefor," pp. 141–42. See also MFPA and Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, "A Guide for Town Forest Committees and Conservation Commissions," *MFPA Bulletin* no. 179 (1962). For a discussion of the history of conservation commissions in Massachusetts, see Andrew Scheffey, *Conservation Commissions in Massachusetts* (Washington, D.C.: Conservation Foundation, 1969).



*T*he sounds of the Hall Tavern household coming to life, and the first milking underway in the barns of the nearby Hall Tavern Farm, caused 12-year-old Bob Healy to stir in bed and open his eyes. Although it was barely sunrise, he sighed contentedly thinking of the long summer ahead far removed from his home in the Chicago suburb of Evanston, Illinois. Bob and his siblings were free to roam the 500 acres of Deerfield River bottomland and forest assembled by his father, starting in 1905, to fulfill his mother's desire to spend family summers near her home town of Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts.

The Hall Tavern, once a coach stop on western Massachusetts' historic Mohawk Trail and a hostelry for eighteenth-century travelers and the nineteenth-century work crews building the Hoosac railroad tunnel, had become the Healy family's summer home, a welcome respite from Mr. Healy's regular duties as the Illinois state's attorney. Yet the summer would not be unmitigated pleasure, Bob knew, because his job in the farm operation was to take the cows daily up to the Pocumtuck Mountain woodland pastures. The pail of grain he carried, and the border collie who kept him company, were usually inducements enough for the livestock to follow him, but Bob would still have to travel up the main woods road, manage the heavy rail pasture gates, and then return to the mountain in the early afternoon to round up the cows for the evening milking, a daily roundtrip of about four miles in the heat of the summer that caused him to do quite a bit of grumbling.

In recent years, Bob had begun to notice how the livestock would browse selectively on the hardwood sprouts, leaving more and more of the little pines to take over the pastures. In fact, the boy had overheard his father discussing with neighbors how the forest and farm supported each other naturally—the forest providing a dependable source of fuel, building materials, and forage and the farm, through selective grazing, hastening the growth of what would become the third great pine forest since colonial days. In the eighteenth century, these forests yielded the stately "broad arrow" mast white pines so favored by British surveyors-general. In 1949, under the guidance of Bob and his son, Jonathan (Jay) Healy, the Massachusetts commissioner of food and agriculture, the Hall Tavern would be moved to serve as the visitor center for Historic Deerfield, and the Hall Tavern Farm, still in Healy ownership, would become the oldest continuously managed private forest in the entire Massachusetts Tree Farm system.