

Abstract

As archaeologists and cultural resource managers, how do we communicate the work we do and how might the stories of that work contribute to the value of public lands? We define archaeological significance in terms of process and how we identify those processes across the linear structure of a chronology, defining historical landmarks as temporal as opposed to spatial. Public lands present a unique opportunity to use archaeology to tell stories that are rooted in space since the landscape is conserved. With this conserved land, we can tell stories that are written across a landscape as though the landscape itself is a text that people can read. In so doing, we can tell stories about the past that create more intimate connections between people and our beloved public lands.

“Isn’t it strange how this castle changes as soon as one imagines that Hamlet lived here?” Niels Bohr speaking to Werner Heisenberg on a tour of Elsinore Castle in 1924 (Basso 1996:4).

Introduction

By populating the landscape with names and stories, and communicating these names and stories to the public, archaeologists have an important role to play in the stewardship of our nation’s public lands. When we meet someone and exchange names, we begin a relationship, and when we tell stories, we create a bond between the listener and that which is named in the story. In filling a landscape with names, a storyteller writes the stories into the land and the landscape becomes a text to be read and physically experienced, transforming what might otherwise be anonymous and mundane into something personal and unique. Through layering stories and names onto the landscape, archaeologists can be a part of building relationships between the general public and their public parks and forests.

This paper looks at links between storytelling, archaeology, landscape, and the conservation and management of public lands. Through reciting names and telling stories that are rooted in the landscape, teachers, interpreters, historians, archaeologists, and others can forge closer connections between the public and public lands, creating more personal relationships with parks, forests, and other conserved properties. However, in explaining the past, archaeologists often write linear narratives. These narratives rely on chronologies to give temporal structure to the processes that created the past and have led to the present. But what if they organized the stories they told, spatially, tying stories to specific locations within a landscape that can be physically experienced by the listener? What if archaeologists understood significance not only in terms of how data contribute to theorizing and defining the processes that shaped the

past, but also saw significance in the possibility of drawing poignant stories from the archaeological and historical record?

Public lands belong to everyone and are conserved in perpetuity. Today, public lands are typically understood as locations to protect from the “improvements” of modern construction and to be conserved as wilderness. But by filling parks, forests, and wildlife refuges with names and stories from the past, they become more than a potentially abstract ideal of untouched nature. What might have been understood as anonymous becomes personal. A landscape layered with stories and names ceases to be a place “untrammeled by man” (The Wilderness Act (1964) 16 U.S.C. 1131), but rather becomes a land rich with the history of thousands of years of different ideas and visions for how to manage that land.

Abraham’s Map

My wife Lauren and I moved to Jericho, Vermont in January 2012 with our two sons, Abraham and Liam. Abe’s new elementary school was located about half a mile down Route 15, the road outside the house we’d just bought. That first Monday, Abe decided that he didn’t want to take the bus but that he would walk to school. I said I’d walk with him but before we left, he took a pencil and a piece of paper from a yellow legal pad, explaining to me that he needed to make a map. There’s no sidewalk on Route 15 and it’s a busy and unwelcoming road, so we walked through the snow at the edge of the front yards that lined it. With all the morning rush hour traffic, it was not possible for us to speak so we walked silently, and I pulled Abe farther in and away from the road and the tires spewing up salty meltwater. Abe paused several times as we walked. He’d then look around and write on the paper he’d brought with him. After a few stops, I looked over his shoulder and saw that he’d drawn a single line starting at the bottom of the page, making marks with annotations for our mailbox and a large white pine at the corner of our lot. We had passed a small hill leading up to a big brick house with three saplings, planted in a row, each with a brace to keep it secure. Abe had drawn them in, a dot and a note for each tree. I asked Abe why he needed a map if the school was only a few thousand feet down the road on our left; we couldn’t miss it if we kept walking in this one direction. But he didn’t answer and kept making notes on his map. A couple hundred yards from our house, the ground sloped down into a steep culvert filled with ice and snow and I suddenly slipped in the slick ice under my feet, sliding down into the ditch. I let out a few choice words and I apologized, but Abe stopped, mapped in the culvert, and told me that it was now named “Daddy Falls and Curses Culvert” (Figure 1). We walked to his school each day that week and every day he made new entries on his map. By the end of the week the piece of yellow legal paper was in tatters, tearing at the fold lines and where his pencil had made holes when it was wet with snow. That Friday night I looked at his map and it was covered in names and anecdotes about our little

stretch of Route 15. Abe said he was done with it and that he'd take the bus to school the next Monday.

I once read that the U.S. Interstate System is a marvel of engineering; you can drive from one end of the country to the other and see none of it. In much the same way, I saw Route 15 as what we might call "fly over country." Moving there, I considered it as nothing more than the road by which I'd get from our new house to work or to run errands, and I had no expectation that it would ever be more to me than that. But I think that Abe understood that if Jericho, Vermont, was going to become his new home, he needed to build a relationship with it. To do that, he needed to walk slowly along our road. It was only by walking slowly that he would find the names and stories that would make this new place his home.



Figure 1. Daddy Falls and Curses Culvert. (Photograph taken by author).

It is the stories that we map or write onto the places in which we live our lives that bring a landscape to life and as Robert Archibald (1997:5) writes, "without stories, places are desolate." Working with the image of the landscape as a text, Tom Wessels (1997, 2010) uses the word "reading" in the titles of his books about the evolution of the forests of New England. He writes that through learning how to read the landscape, we develop a deep intimacy with it. And I am reminded of the Smiths' (Marr and Morrissey 1986) song from my youth: "nature is a language, can't you read?" Reflecting on my walks with Abe that week in 2012, I recalled a John Muir quote about the importance of what Muir calls "sauntering." He cites the etymology of the word, explaining that it comes from the Middle Ages to describe pilgrims going "*a la sainte terre*": to the Holy Land (Palmer 1911). Muir never expressed much if any interest in the thousands of years of reverence people had shown the Sierra Nevadas before he got there, but he instructs that we should "saunter" through these landscapes with reverence in order to absorb their sacredness. For Muir, sauntering is a slow process that takes

patience. Abe's patience became my patience and through his eyes and the process of his naming, I learned to see this stretch of what would otherwise have been a road identified for me by no more than "Route 15."

A Sacred Landscape

I remember hearing George W. Bush, freshly settled in at the White House, talk about his need to get back to "the Heartland," back at his ranch in Crawford, Texas. But he didn't say his heartland, he said *the* Heartland. Seven years later, Sarah Palin told the 2008 Republican Convention that "we believe that the best of America is in these small towns...these wonderful little pockets of what I call the real America, being here with all of you hard working very patriotic, um, very, um, pro-America areas of this great nation" (Brooks 2008). And, citing someone she never named, she said, "we grow good people in our small towns, with honesty, sincerity, and dignity" (Rossmeier 2008). Americans love to talk about the "Heartland" although I don't think anybody can map where that heartland is, but I do know what it isn't, and it isn't Washington, D.C., where I grew up. I suppose if the heartland is at the heart, then it must be somewhere in the middle of the country, the center from which all the life-giving blood of the nation flows. But that would put Crawford, Texas, and Wasilla, Alaska, no nearer the geographic heartland of the United States than the corner of Porter Street and Connecticut Avenue in Northwest Washington, D.C. Yet if you ask me where my heartland lies, I'll point you to that corner, at least until they took away the 7-Eleven where the insomniacs, the bums, and the schizophrenics would huddle together at night, drinking endless cups of coffee clutched in their shaking fingers, their teeth biting and chewing on the plastic tip ends of Swisher Sweets and Black and Mild cigars. Bush and Palin can't see it or won't see it, but that corner is my heartland because I can tell a story for every inch of that landscape.

Walking around my old neighborhood in D.C. with Abe and Liam, I realized that the story of my childhood is spatial and not chronological. It's a story written onto the landscape itself. There's the spot where I badly skinned my knee racing down the sidewalk in my Big Wheel with my friends, the self-titled Porter Street Big Wheel Gang. And here's the cul-de-sac off Rowland Place that we called "The Circle," where we'd gather and ride our bikes around and around, mine with the banana seat and the multicolored tassels off the handlebars that seemed to glitter in the wind as I rode. And over there is where I scaled the back wall of the Uptown Theater with Dave and a kid named Sam Hawkins, climbing through an air shaft and then dropping ourselves down onto the balcony to watch a movie. I've forgotten what movie it was; it couldn't match the thrill of breaking in to see it.

Arnold Toynbee famously said that history is "one damn thing after another" (Quote Investigator 2015). But the history of my childhood is not written linearly as though reading from one page and then to the next, progressing through the chronology of my growing up. Rather, my story is spatial. The text of my book is written across the

landscape of my old neighborhood, switching back and forth across time. My heartland isn't an idea or an ideal, it's not a theoretical construct or an ideological aspiration like Palin's small towns or Bush's "Heartland." It's a landscape of lived stories, and it exists in physical space, mapped out and written across the streets where I grew up, making the streets and buildings of my little corner of D.C. home and therefore sacred to me, and now to my children through the stories I tell them.

Walk a landscape shaped by a people whose traditions are communicated orally—recite the names of the places as you walk—and you recite the names of the stories of the people who live there. The anthropologist Keith Basso (1996) spent his career working with the Apache of Cibecue, Arizona, and he writes about these connections in his well-known book *Wisdom Sits in Places*. In Western society, historians and archaeologists list events as one damn thing after another, constructing a linear past that moves chronologically to the present. They tie events together with processes, using theories to posit and explain the processes through which the events unfold to reveal our destiny that is the present (Basso 1996, Carlson 2018). Through the chronologies and processes that archaeologists and historians create, the past becomes a validation, connecting the chronological landmarks that mark the linear path forward. Zooming out, Western history is a progression from barbarism to civilization, from multiple gods to one, and in the United States, a Manifest Destiny to rule from shore to shore (Carlson 2018; DeLoria 1994). In the western world today, many people see the past as ancient and the present as modern when we are, in fact, the ancient in a future modern. The religion of my culture is full of people and events from thousands of miles away along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. But Moses and Jesus never stood on the corner of Porter Street and Connecticut Avenue.

Archaeology has often defined the connections between people, cultures, and their landscape through system models, creating a materialist relationship defined through demographic patterns, subsistence strategies, the exploitation of the environment, and other research orientations. But as Basso (1996) points out, models can become abstractions, devoid of individual people and places and, as a result, did not interest and captivate the Apache people that Basso worked with and befriended in Cibecue. Basso writes that, for the people of Cibecue, history as told in the West was silent and did "not have much fun" (Basso 1996:155). For them, the past is very near, local, and episodic and as his friend Charlie Henry said, histories of his people written by anthropologists and historians are "pretty mainly quiet. It stays far away from all our many places" (Basso 1996:34). In Basso's analysis, anthropologists, historians, and archaeologists understand the people of Cibecue as data and their stories are useful and interesting dependent on how they illustrate wider theories and ideas. The individual places and people of the White Mountain Apache are a means to an end.

As a young boy, when I looked at objects made centuries and millennia ago, I imagined the individuals that had held them in the past. In school as a young man,

working in the world of academia, I was taught about the relationships between data, theory, and methodology and how archaeologists worked those relationships to explain the processes that have defined cultures as they changed through time. As a contract archaeologist working in cultural resource management (CRM), I learned the practicalities of fieldwork, collecting archaeological data, and I learned how to assess the eligibility of historic properties for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). And today, I manage historic resources on public lands for the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation (FPR). Many years ago, working as an archaeologist with a newly minted master's degree, I was directing an excavation along a highway in Pennsylvania. A local resident out for a stroll came by and asked us what we were doing. I responded with an explanation full of the multisyllabic words I had just learned over the previous years of my schooling, words that defined the grand processes and flows of the human experience through time. At least in my youth I was convinced they did. But what I remember is watching the questioner's eyes glaze over and then they mumbled a "thanks" and walked away. To paraphrase Basso's (1996) friend, my stories did not "have much fun" and were "pretty mainly quiet." On some level, I was able to see through my theoretical enthusiasms to realize that I'd lost my audience. Maybe we were working in a field that my questioner had walked past for years. Maybe they had a specific story about their town or the road we were working along, and I had let go of an opportunity to open a conversation from which I might have learned from them and built a connection. The next time someone came by, I tried to remove all the academic jargon. But in removing the jargon, I felt almost naked, left with little to say, like an emperor with no clothes.

Whereas the summaries I told to the visitors that came by our excavations were organized around the abstract and impersonal patterns that I used to create motion through an otherwise static chronology of dates and typologies, stories rooted in space invite the listener into the physical world of the story. Painted across the landscape, the past becomes less abstract. Archaeology can be a vehicle for building these connections and since public lands are conserved, the physical locations of these stories will remain. Archaeologists therefore have an opportunity to be storytellers, right there in the thick of—to borrow from Charlie Henry—"all our many places" (Basso 1996:34).

The Vaughans and the Bruces

In CRM archaeology, archaeologists mitigate the destruction of an archaeological site through excavating a significant portion of it, before the construction of the new exit ramp or housing development radically alters or completely removes the old landscape. As a department of transportation archaeologist once told me, "It gets tiring when you're losing sites all the time." Where once there was a site, now there is an expanded highway and a report describing what was once there. But public lands are conserved and so there is an opportunity to retain sites and the surrounding landscape, and visitors

can experience an archaeological site where it lies within the landscape. People can be physically present at the site, imagining those in the past who lived there. However, the opportunity to build connections requires that archaeologists are good storytellers.

Fred, a forester at FPR, once asked me about the research value of historic farmsteads. People today might see the forests of Vermont as a primeval wilderness, but with few exceptions, the forests are recent, having grown up over the course of the 20th century to cover the pastoral landscape that developed in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Although Vermont is now the fourth most densely forested state in the country (Wisevoter 2023), walk through those forests and forests elsewhere in New England and you will encounter thousands of cellar holes, stone walls, and other overgrown historic features. Fred's question was, what does the public gain from avoiding and conserving all the old farmsteads when there are so many in Vermont? What is the public benefit?

Fred's question is not new to archaeology. The "farmstead problem" (Baugher and Klein 2001) has been the subject of debate for decades, leading John Wilson (1990) to write an article on the question partially titled, "We've Got Thousands of These!" Symposia have been held resulting in edited volumes discussing lists of research contexts and goals to guide the evaluation of farmstead sites within the context of CRM archaeology and the NRHP. These articles provide important and useful guidelines to assist in determining the questions that archaeologists might pursue when investigating farmstead sites, and what data might address these questions. They explain how data and questions can be used to determine if a 19th-century farmstead site is worth excavating and investing the time, money, and effort involved in CRM mitigation.

In responding to Fred's question, I explained that following the National Register of Historic Places (36 CFR §60), historic properties can be determined eligible for the NRHP based on a set of four criteria. These four criteria are labeled A through D and define associations with famous people or events, important and seminal structures, or Criterion D ("D" for data), which can be applied to sites that "have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history" (National Register of Historic Places 36 CFR §60.4(d)). I said that eligible archaeological sites are invariably identified following Criterion D, meaning, the site contains significant data that can be used to increase what is known about the past. Therefore, to mitigate the loss of data from the construction of something like a new exit ramp or a housing development, archaeologists will excavate a statistically significant portion of the site. In theory, once the data have crossed that statistical threshold, the recovered data will become repetitive. The goal of mitigation is to recover a sample that will statistically represent the whole. This approach is premised on the understanding that the significance of a site lies in the data that the site can produce and once the site has produced that information, it is no longer significant and the impacts from the proposed construction are therefore resolved. Following Criterion D, it's the information that makes a site

significant, not the landscape on which it sits except in how that landscape interacts with the data. I once joked with a colleague when we were filling in a completed excavation unit that we had successfully “information cleansed” another cubic meter of the planet.

As Fred pointed out, since Vermont contains countless examples of 19th-century farmsteads, both on public lands and elsewhere, the data that they might contain will, theoretically speaking, become repetitive. Therefore, why do we have to save all of them if a sample will be sufficient? I argued that his question was correct only if one approached archaeology as an inductive pursuit like finding all the pieces to a puzzle. But I preferred to see archaeology as a deductive process. The past is not a puzzle waiting to be put together once the pieces are all located. Rather archaeology should be a creative process of asking and answering questions. It's the creativity of the archaeologist to ask new and interesting questions that sets limits to the discipline, not the availability of puzzle pieces. However, as I thought about Fred's question, I realized that the management of historic resources on public lands presents us with a different sort of opportunity since the land is conserved, owned, and open to the public. In managing these historic resources, we have an opportunity to see an archaeological site not simply as a repository of potentially significant data, but as something situated within a landscape. Since the landscape of the site will remain in perpetuity, archaeologists on public lands can move beyond the collection of data (“cleansing” cubic meters of information) to cultivating stories and names from archaeological sites. They can personalize what might otherwise be considered impersonal, inviting people to be physically present to the location of these stories. In this way, archaeologists can build closer and more intimate relationships between the public and our shared public lands.

A few years ago, I wrote the historic resources section at FPR for the long-range management plan for the Worcester Mountain Range Management Unit, a unit that includes the C.C. Putnam State Forest. I've hiked (hiked and not sauntered) the trails that run up and down the Worcester Mountain Range many times, especially one on the east side of the mountain in Middlesex that leads up to the top of Mount Hunger (Figures 2 and 3). On a clear day, the mountain provides spectacular views of the valleys below. In preparing the chapter, I identified two farmsteads that once flanked the present-day Middlesex Trail on a map from 1873 (Beers 1873). I'd walked past the two farmsteads for years on my way to climb up to the top of the mountain, tucked away deep in the thick woods. So, in preparing the management plan, I researched the two families that had once lived on the farms, the Vaughans on the west side of the trail and the Bruces on the east (Figures 4 and 5). In brief, James Vaughan, his wife Abigail, and their children, and the Bruces—Jesse, Nancy and their three daughters—built their farms along the eastern slopes of Mt. Hunger in the middle of the 19th century. What initially caught my attention is that, according to the 1860 census, the Vaughan family included three surviving teenage children: Volney, Edwin, and Varona. However, by 1870, the three children were gone and James and Abigail, now in their 60s, were living

with Edwin's wife, Esther Vaughan, age 25, and their one-year-old son named Frank. By 1880, James and Abigail, now in their 70s, were still at the farm but they were alone, and the farm's value had dropped. The typical pattern at farms in Vermont in the 19th century was that as the father and mother grew too old to work the farm, the youngest son and his family remained, typically in an addition built onto the original house. The youngest son would then take over the farm and the elderly couple would move into the addition (Barron 1984).



Figure 2. Worcester Mountain Range.
(Photograph taken by author).



Figure 3. View of Mount Hunger.
(Photograph taken by author).

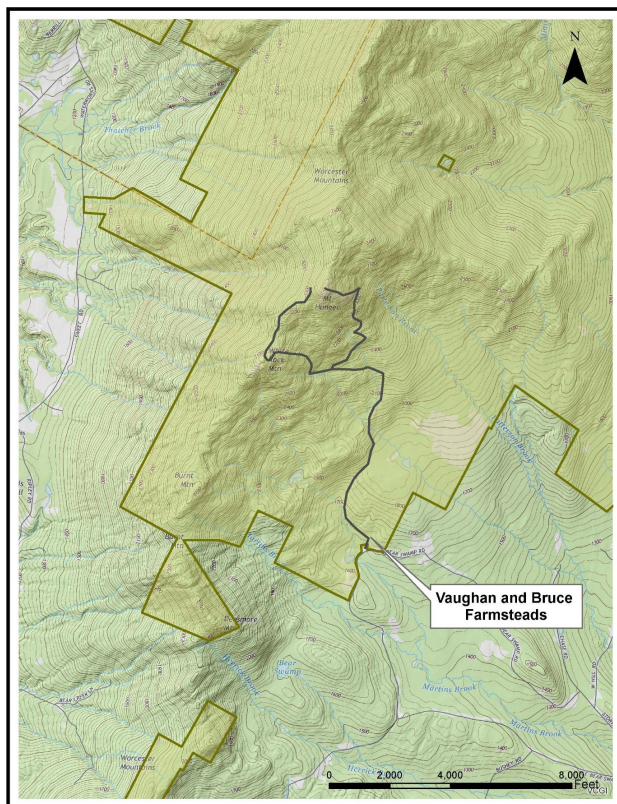


Figure 4. Location of the Vaughan and Bruce Farmsteads in C.C. Putnam State Forest.
Map by author.



Figure 5. Close up of the Vaughan and Bruce Farmsteads (Beers 1873).

But what happened in the Vaughan household? Why were James and Abigail living alone with their daughter-in-law and baby grandson in 1870? For farmers in the 19th century, success was not measured so much in the accumulation of wealth as in the ability to pass on the farm to their children (Barron 1984). In researching the family, I found that their daughter Varona married in 1865 and moved away and Varney had bought a farm elsewhere in Middlesex. Within a year of the 1870 census, their youngest son Edwin had reunited with his wife Esther and their son Frank, but they had moved to Worcester, Massachusetts where Esther gave birth to their second son, George, and where Edwin held a job as a machinist. So, Edwin broke with tradition and moved away to take a job in a city, and in the 1880s both his parents died alone at the farmstead where he'd grown up. All three of the Bruces' daughters married and left home as well. By 1900 Jesse Bruce was a widower, living as a boarder with another family where he died four years later of dementia (Family Search 2023). Throughout the 20th century, timber companies harvested the trees that grew up over the old farmsteads, and FPR purchased the land in 2020.

I don't think that the value of these two archaeological sites is dependent on whether they might "yield information important in prehistory or history" (National Register of Historic Places 36 CFR §60). Although they might contribute important data, the value for me is that now when I walk past the ruins of the two homesteads, I think of the two families that I can list by name, and, in particular, I think of the two aging couples, growing old in the farms they had committed their lives to, small hill farms at the edge of the steep east slopes of Mt. Hunger. Having learned the names and stories, even if the stories are only a shell of the long lives these people led, I have developed a deeper and more intimate connection to the landscape that encompasses the Middlesex Trail. The Worcester Mountain Range has long been vital to generations of people in Vermont, and I have returned to these trails for years because it's a beautiful spot. But I now walk this trail more slowly, or as Muir might put it, I "saunter" past each site with a greater sense of reverence than I did when they were only anonymous squares of stones and scattered 19th-century artifacts.

Telling Stories

But how does the work of an archaeologist, exploring and learning their own landscape, contribute to making the past of that landscape more meaningful for others? The relevancy of archaeology is measured, at least in part, by the ability to communicate with the public about the connections that archaeologists build for themselves through their work. In learning about the Vaughans and the Bruces, I formed a deeper connection with the Middlesex Trail and as stated above, I pass the location of the two farmsteads more slowly now, with a greater reverence as I make my way up to the top of Mt. Hunger. But how can I more effectively tell these stories to the wider public? As described above, Basso's (1996) friend in Cibecue said that the stories of Western

anthropologists were silent to him. And I had left the local resident in Pennsylvania, who stopped by to ask questions about our work, with glazed eyes. I was not talking about the specific site so much as larger processes of cultural change. Processes occur within a chronology, but people live in places within a landscape. Teachers, interpreters, archaeologists, and historians can create more engaging stories about the past by organizing their stories spatially as well as chronologically. If archaeologists can tell stories with images that are rooted in specific places, then those images will have a greater impact, perhaps becoming like a memory for the listener.

Culverts are commonplace and nameless. We drive or walk over them every day but, unless we are engineers or with a department of transportation, it's unlikely we will ever take notice of them. However, every time I walk or drive past "Daddy Falls and Curses Culvert," I see it. If I told someone the story of its name, it might be the first culvert that the listener will have ever actually noticed and they would remember it when they walked past it in the future. They would see that culvert and remember the story of its naming, complete with the image of me slipping on the snow and ice and letting out some colorful language. This article is over 6,000 words long, with only about 500 words given to describing the walk I took with Abe along Route 15 in Jericho, but it may be the image that will remain with the reader.

It is unlikely that a discussion of the processes that led to the decline of 19th-century Vermont hill farms in places like the Worcester Mountain Range will stick with most listeners: not the ending of tariffs on wool and the expansion of sheep herding out West; not the migration of young Vermonters to city centers in New England to take on factory jobs; or the switch to dairy farming and the consolidation of larger farms down in the valleys with the ability to ship perishable goods like milk and butter to distant urban markets. But walking past the Vaughans' old cellar hole off the Middlesex Trail on my way up Mt. Hunger, I imagine the elderly couple, James and Abigail, maybe seated together on the front porch of their farmhouse where they worked for decades and raised a family. The sun has set behind the mountain to the west and in the gathering darkness, they feel the cold, knowing that all their children have left and none of them want to take over the farm. Now they are old and less and less able to care for the place and so things are falling into disrepair. The forest is slowly closing in around them. With that image in mind, my attachment to the place grows and I want to know more, resulting in questions that can lead to discussions of process. Why did nobody want to continue farming at hill farms like the Vaughans'? What happened to the land as the older farmers died and their farms were sold? How has the land continued to evolve and what has become of farms and farmers working in Vermont today?

Conclusion

That first spring at our new home in Jericho, Vermont, we converted an old shed on our property into a chicken coop and purchased a dozen little chicks. Each chick looked

much the same as the other to me, but the boys soon named them all and could tell them each apart. There was Erika the Red, Copper, Rocky, Blacky, Ishtar, Foghorn and all the others. I warned the boys that the chickens were livestock, and you do not name livestock. With names, you become attached to each animal as an individual and you don't want to risk becoming attached to livestock. But Abe and Liam were diligent, feeding them, taking turns cleaning the coop and all the other responsibilities. As the spring turned to summer, it became apparent that Blacky was actually a rooster and so his name was changed to Charlemagne. It wasn't long before Charlemagne was waking me up each morning with the rising sun, weekday and weekend. So, I slit his throat. I plucked him, butchered him, and cooked him up in a big pot of *coq au vin*. But that night, as we sat around the table, the boys looked at the pot and they refused to eat it, because it was Charlemagne. I said they'd eaten pork, beef, chicken, and lamb, why was this pot of *coq au vin* different? Because the animal in the pot had a name and stories associated with that name. I reminded Abe and Liam that this is why you don't name livestock and I ate a lot of leftover chicken that week.

It's perhaps easy to see the sacred as Muir did when walking through the breathtaking landscapes of the Sierra Nevadas. But the power of names and stories is in bringing out the unique in the seemingly mundane, like a cellar hole in the woods, a culvert along a state route in Vermont, or a street corner in Washington, D.C., ... or the death of a rooster. The neighborhood where I grew up is just another intersection, but because I have populated it with names and stories, it is sacred for me and hopefully for my children through my recounting the stories of my home. Abe understood that to make his new street his home, a sacred landscape, he had to populate it with stories and names. In so doing, the road where he lived would cease to be an otherwise anonymous street named with no more than a number: Route 15. Abe found names and stories to build that connection in much the same way as the stories of the Vaughans and the Bruces now tie me to my home here in Vermont, far from where I grew up in Washington, D.C. And these stories can tie other people to these locations as well.

The understanding of public lands in the United States is largely shaped by ideas of wilderness as a primeval landscape. As stated in the Wilderness Act of 1964 (16 U.S.C. 1131), wilderness is land that is "untrammeled by man where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Or in the language of property taxes, land that has not been "improved." But people have remained in those landscapes for millennia, long before the Wilderness Act declared them a wilderness. Through the names and stories that archaeologists place on the landscape, the public can imagine past geographies and how people lived, managed, and cared for the land, and how they "trammed" it. These stories can help us see the land not as an anonymous wilderness, sacred for its wildness as Muir saw the Sierra Nevada mountains, but also as a land made sacred by the centuries and millennia of names and stories that populate it.

Since public lands are conserved, their history and archaeology present archaeologists with an opportunity to build connections with actual physical landmarks across the space of these conserved landscapes. Historians and archaeologists use temporal landmarks to create chronologies: the fall of the Roman Empire, the Battle of Hastings, Columbus landing in the New World, and others. Archaeologists often divide time into divisions of three (early, middle, and late) and then use processes of cultural change to connect and move forward through these temporal divisions. But although important to interpreting history, these landmarks remain abstract and without place. Putting names on the landscape and tying those names and stories to specific places creates spatial landmarks that are physical, and that people can see and touch. As with Charlemagne, once something has a name and stories associated with that name, you become attached to it. It, whatever it is, is no longer anonymous and you have begun a relationship with it. Freeman Tilden (1977:38) famously wrote, “through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection.” Stories about the past that archaeologists tell can help people create deeper relationships with our shared public lands, increasing the love that people hold for them and the desire to see them conserved and cared for.

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