



## OLD-TIME FARMERS WISE TO THE WAYS OF MOTHER NATURE

2009

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*This photo from the archives of Gilford's Thompson-Ames Historical Society shows a tranquil Grant farm in Gilford. Farms such as this filled the town's landscape in years past and during poor growing seasons like the one experienced this summer, farmers shared their crops with one another in order to survive.*

The sunless, cloudy, rain-filled days of this past summer wreaked havoc on the carefully planted crops of our local farmers. Irrigation systems, often used during a typical summer, lay dormant. Nursing tender crops in greenhouses and placing row covers on plants in the field helped, but could not compete fully with the wrath of what Mother Nature had planned for the summer of 2009.

Witnessing the battles our farmers face even with the aid of modern technology, we are left with the nagging question of what old-time farmers did during seasons that may have been filled with extreme weather. We are the fortunate ones; we now have local supermarkets that sell a wonderful variety of food shipped in from across the country.

Conversations with local farmers who remember farming before the gift of modern aids give tremendous insight into their talents and knowledge of nature, weather, and careful crop management.

Local resident, Jerry Lacroix, spent his boyhood on his uncle's farm in town. He never remembers a

time where there was a shortage of food; somehow each year family members were able to overcome the weather. Like all farmers, one of the biggest concerns on the farm was producing enough hay to feed farm animals through long, tough New England winters.

Haying was done on the Lacroix farm around rainstorms that were very carefully watched. The process of harvesting the hay crop occurred over a period of several days, each phase done during a certain time of the day to ensure the hay harvest stayed dry. Wet hay was unsuitable for use as animal feed and could not be put into storage.

During the days before hay balers, hay was stored in the loft of the Lacroix barn in mounds. If moisture was present, they would wisely spread a layer of salt on the hay to draw out and evaporate any dampness before another layer of hay was added.

Crops were planted around Memorial Day with some, such as peas, being harvested as early as July 4<sup>th</sup>. Those crops were then turned into tasty, home-cooked meals by Lacroix's aunt, and those meals are remembered as a true delight for a hungry, hard-working farm boy.

Ernie Bolduc grew up on Gilford's historic Bolduc farm and has many insights into the knowledge farmers possessed back in the days before the weatherman told them what the week's weather had in store.

"First of all, we watched the animals on the farm very closely," he said. "They were allowed to move about freely, and we could predict the weather very well by where they moved. The animals, after all, don't have a weatherman to tell them what the weather will be; they need to be able to do that for themselves.



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“When we planted in the spring, we always waited until after the last full moon in May. In addition to that, we planted when the soil was warm to the touch, which can sometimes be as late as the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> of June. If seeds are planted before the soil is warm and there’s a lot of rain, there is always a chance of them rotting, and then you just have to replant the entire crop. That way, too, the bugs that will attack certain plants have by that time gone through their cycle.

“We had raised bed gardens for our vegetables. Even heavy rain will drain out of a garden like that, whereas the water will not drain as well in the field. If we did need to water plants during a dry spell, watering would be done very early in the morning before the sun came up.”

All the hay needed for animals on the farm was grown and harvested right on the property. Knowing just the right time to harvest proved to be the greatest challenge for all farmers.

“The definition of rain today means it has to be a measurable amount,” he said. “Back when we harvested hay, rain meant any drops of rain that might get onto the hay drying in the field, and every drop was significant.”

If hard work, talent, and the best predictions of weather still didn’t all come together to make a good harvest of either food for the family or hay for the animals, the farmers still had a very powerful weapon: community spirit.

“In those days, there were a lot of farms in Gilford. We were all working to accomplish the same thing. We farmed in the neighborhood style, but really, we were all just one big family in town. If one farmer didn’t produce enough of one crop and another did, then the excess was given to the one who needed it the most. We bartered and swapped what we needed, and in the end, we all landed up in good shape.

“If we knew a family was poor, we would just automatically give them what we knew we wouldn’t use. It wasn’t about making money from our surpluses; it was about taking care of one another.” he added.

Gilford’s Thompson-Ames Historical Society welcomes stories of local history. To contact the Society, e-mail: [www.thomames@metrocast.net](mailto:www.thomames@metrocast.net). Be sure to check their website at: [www.gilfordhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.gilfordhistoricalsociety.org) for listings of upcoming programs and events.