

History of “The Merriam Farm”

Mammoth Road, near Sherburne Road, Pelham, NH

The Cutter Farm at 93 Mammoth Road was built in the early 1800s and provided the Lowell market with trees, shrubs, fruit, vegetables, seeds, and milk. Clifton (known as Cliff) and Virginia (Cutter) Merriam took over the farm from Virginia’s brother Benjamin Cutter whose house across the street in front of the Hillman Carriage Shop and sawmill burned along with the mill in 1916. Cliff ran a dairy operation and needed more hay to feed the cows. In June 1922 he purchased farmland with a barn down and across the road owned by George Lovett. This farmland extended nearly 0.7 miles from Mammoth Road to the farthest point on Beaver Brook. George retained his house at 68 Mammoth Road and about four acres of land, and a row of pine trees was planted from Mammoth road to Gumpas Brook as a boundary between his house lot and his former barn lot to the left.

Cliff harvested the hay from the fields, which are still cleared today, and grew corn to help pay college expenses for their children Fred and Martine. The barn was built in the early 1800s and set up for cows, but Cliff never used it for that purpose. He stored wagons and other farm machinery on the first floor and basement, accessed from the backside, and stored hay on the second third floors. Cliff had at least four horse-drawn wagons that were built at the nearby Hillman Carriage Shop and later converted for pulling with a tractor drawbar. The four-wheeled Hillman hay wagon was always stored in this barn.

The woods surrounding these fields provided some of the firewood needed to heat the farmhouse. The Great Hurricane Disaster of 1938 devastated the old growth trees on the north side of the property, and downed pine trees were milled into lumber and stored in an icehouse behind the dairy farm barn. The upended root clumps of those downed trees could still be seen in the 1950s.

In February 1941 Cliff purchased about four acres of land from the Marsh family who owned the Hillman Carriage Shop property at the time. This was always referred to as the Marsh Pasture. In October that same year, Frank and Helen Nietupski purchased the remainder of the Hillman property from the Marsh heirs. Today Nietupski heirs own all the land on the north boundary of the Merriam Farm from Mammoth Road to Beaver Brook.

In 1942 Cliff and next-door neighbor Harry Jack (Virginia’s brother-in-law) purchased two Ford tractors to be used on the dairy farm. The bridge over Gumpas Brook now needed to be strengthened to handle more weight. Harry Jack was very mechanically inclined and upgraded the bridge with steel beams, still in use today, with lumber likely milled after the hurricane. Harvesting hay was a family affair. My first job in the early 1950s was tramping down loose hay atop the hay wagon, and after age 10, was allowed to drive the tractors. Probably not safe to drive a slow tractor down Mammoth Road today. By the late 1950s the labor-intensive collection and storage of loose hay did not make economic sense, so Cliff hired farming friends with hay baling equipment to do that job.

There was a very large black walnut tree near the northwest corner of the barn lot. Its lumber value was appraised at several thousand dollars in the 1960s, and it was close to Mammoth Road, so the state was convinced to protect the tree with a metal guard rail. That tree is no longer there, but the guard rail

remains, and there are several younger black walnut trees you can see from the north side of the parking lot. Cliff planted a few rows of Christmas trees in the field behind the barn near Gumpas Brook, now a forest, and planted rows of red pine trees on a rocky bluff where the south property line bends. The red pine grove was recently cut down due to disease. Across the bridge and to the left there was a sand bank where turtles laid their eggs at one time, and beyond that was an abandoned apple orchard. At the southeast corner of the back field there was a year-round turtle pond, but the surrounding brush is so high now there's not much to see.

Cliff died in December 1962, caring for the land he loved, clearing brush in the back field near where the Moonshadow Drive entrance is today. He was still a well-respected dairy farmer at age 79, providing milk to Kydd's Dairy in Lowell. After this, the Nietupski family generously looked after the fields keeping them mowed, rotating crops, and irrigating with Beaver Brook water. The property was very scenic with acres and acres of corn in even rows on gently rolling terrain with a network of well-worn tractor roads for access. The Nietupskis used a separate gated entrance from their property next door, so the Mammoth Road entrance was no longer needed and fell into disrepair. Four-wheelers and snowmobilers made their way in from several directions off-season and developed an interesting system of trails.

By the 1990s it appeared there was no market for old barn beams and the roof was leaking. An offer from a Pelham resident to dismantle the barn and recycle the components into a new house was accepted, beams and boards were removed, and the remainder left in the basement. Safety of the site became a concern by 2006, so the remaining wood and metal was removed, the foundation and a nearby well filled in, and the site graded flat. This is the location of the Merriam Farm parking lot.

Starting in 2006 Moonshadow Drive was built along the southern property line from Gumpas Brook to Beaver Brook. This ended the idyllic isolation experienced when visited by family but made it very convenient to access with the turning loop just feet from the stone boundary wall. The Merriam owners of this land wished to see it remain open and maintained for the enjoyment of future generations, and in December 2017 it became the property of the Town of Pelham. Special thanks go to Paul Gagnon for working with us to make this happen.

Fred Merriam
Grandson of Clifton Merriam
July 15, 2022

Merriam Farm Timeline

1916 – Clifton (known as Cliff) and Virginia (Cutter) Merriam take over the Cutter family farm at 93 Mammoth Road after her brother Ben's house across the street burns down along with the Hillman Carriage Shop and Sawmill in back.

1922 – Cliff needs more hay for his dairy operation and purchases George Lovett's farmland and barn across and down the street. George keeps his house and about four acres at 68 Mammoth Road.

1938 – A major hurricane devastates old growth trees on the property.

1941 – Cliff purchases about 4 more acres from the Marsh family who owned the former Hillman Carriage Shop property. Later the same year the Nietupski family purchased the remainder of the Hillman property from the Marsh family.

1942 – Cliff and Virginia's brother-in-law Harry Jack next door purchase two Ford tractors for use on the dairy farm and rebuild the Gumpas Brook bridge with steel beams to accommodate heavier loads.

1962 – Cliff passed away at age 79 and the Nietupski family next door starts farming the land for two more generations of Merriams.

2006 – Moonshadow Drive construction begins along the southern property line from Gumpas Brook to Beaver Brook. Also this year the remains of the barn are removed and the site graded flat.

2017 – The property, in the care of the Merriam family for 95 years, is purchased by the Town of Pelham and to be named the “Merriam Farm” in honor of Clifton and Virginia Merriam.

2022 – This new public space is dedicated exactly 100 years after becoming an integral part of the Merriam family farming heritage.