

George McLean & the George Family:

A Bond with the Land

by David Holdt

*My Path to the George family and
Senator McLean:*

From 1974 to 1979 I lived in an old house in the McLean Game Refuge. I did a lot of writing there. Henry George was my teacher. The McLean Fund asked me to write a brief biography of this unique piece of land and of the people responsible for it. It is impossible to separate these people from the land, which has grown in size and in importance under their care for what is natural through the circles of seasons since the beginning of the Twentieth Century.

David Holdt, January 25, 2002

Introduction

“Everything’s laid out for you. Your path is straight ahead of you. Sometimes it’s invisible, but it’s there. You may not know where it’s going, but still you’ve got to follow that path. It’s the path to the Creator. That’s the only path worth following.”

Leon Shenandoah, Iroquois (Stone Canoe 288)

The first thing I did when I moved to greater Hartford in 1970, was to take to the woods. I have been a walker since I learned to think, and since I needed to think, I needed to walk. I found the blue Connecticut Walk Book in the first bookstore I entered. I hiked the blue trails and the MDC reservoirs. I “discovered” the McLean Game Refuge early on, as part of the outdoor education activity I helped teach at a nearby school. On weekends and vacations I walked every trail in the Refuge. Soon I began to range cross-country. I didn’t know I needed a house.



Following the cascades of Bissell Brook

One day, following the cascades of one of the branches of Bissell Brook that eventually forms the waterfall just off Firetown Road, I saw what looked like a path. It led me into an open field. At one end of the field a dark green house, like an illustration from an old history book, stared back at me. I slipped back into the woods and studied the clearing. There was a collapsed garage and shed at the other side of the field. Redwings flared up. A green heron took off—there was water nearby. The house was still.

I circled around, found and followed a driveway up to the house. There were no signs of traffic. I walked onto the porch and knocked on the door. Inside the dining room table was set, with a folded newspaper on it. I knocked again. By now I did not believe it was occupied. I walked down the driveway, and found that one reason there was no sign

of traffic was that there was no bridge across the brook. I had found the house I didn't know I needed. I lived in it for nearly five years. My "next-door" neighbor was Henry George. I also found a link to the fascinating family that had lived there for twenty years. In time I came to understand that my discovery of the people was more significant than my discovery of the house.



*Henry George at the Picnic Grove Pavilion
Hartford Courant, Kay Cahill Photos, 4/27/81*

Section I.
The Senator and the Indian

*"He was a real man, he had a respect for things.
You can always tell a man by the way he hunts and fishes."*

Amos E. George (Grant 98)

George Payne McLean was born on a farm in Simsbury, Connecticut, in October of 1857, the son of Dudley McLean and Mary Payne. He grew up with farm chores and the rhythms of nature around him. Even as he grew out of the local school and had to commute by train to the Hartford Public High School, he had, first and last, to milk the cows. He graduated in 1876, worked as a reporter for a few years, and began to read the law in the offices of Henry C. Robinson. By 1881 he was admitted to the bar, and he soon entered politics, as a Republican, serving in the State House of Representatives in 1883-1884.

In December, 1882, Amos Everett George was born in Ledyard, Connecticut. A Pequot Indian, he was born into a period of poverty and dispersal of his people and by the time he was twelve, he had left the reservation to make his way in the world. He gained employment as a teamster, married Cora Robbins, and had a son, Amos A. George, who was born in Mystic. Amos E. and his young family made their way north and west, eventually finding themselves in the Farmington Valley, west of Hartford.



Amos E. George

George McLean, meanwhile, had served on a commission to revise Connecticut's statutes, been elected to the State Senate, been appointed District Attorney for Connecticut for the period 1892-1896, and resumed the practice of law in Hartford. He

commuted to Hartford from his farm in Simsbury. In 1900 he was elected Governor of the state, and served until 1902. In his Inaugural Address, McLean inserted a phrase that revealed more about him than he perhaps knew himself: “I believe it is very bad economy to permit the extermination of the trout and game birds from our brooks and woodlands . . .” (Grant 37)

Exhausted and frustrated by his stormy term as Governor, he returned home in 1902, to refresh and restore himself, putting aside the public life and walking the woods and fields he loved so well. He then began to buy up some inexpensive, available lands to the west. (Grant 42)



Senator McLean in one of his favorite places on Bissell Brook in the Refuge

In 1905 McLean came into an inheritance of over three million dollars from his Aunt Sarah, and he soon used some of it to purchase land in the “western highlands” of Granby—mostly poor farming land—and in nearby sections of Simsbury. (Grant 45) Over the next years he added the area around Spring Pond, the head waters of Bissell Brook and land along it and Salmon Brook, which he dammed to form Trout Pond. In the last decade of his life he added both sides of Salmon Brook, the trap rock ridge and other acreage around the Barn Door Hills, and the site of the current picnic area. (Yale 3,4) In the midst of this period of enlarging his holdings, he also found time to fall in love, and in April of 1910, he and Juliette Goodrich were married.

He soon encountered a young Pequot Indian who knew something about nature. As Hugh Payne Greeley wrote to his brother in 1969: “Then Uncle George found Amos, and he was full of the lore of wood and stream and was, because of this, indispensable in Uncle George’s project for raising ruffed grouse in captivity. What white man would have known that baby partridges had to have ants’ eggs for a diet?” (Greeley) In 1912 Amos E. George took the job of watchman and caretaker of McLean’s growing estate. It was the last job he would ever have.

The Senator, a man whose sense of what we now call ecology had led him to significant personal and political decisions, had just made one of the most important decisions of his life. At exactly the right time, given the demands of his career, he had chosen exactly the right man to entrust with his real treasure, his land. Amos E. George knew how Nature worked and what Nature needed. His charge was to protect and restore the natural order of things to land that had been cleared and plowed. He understood the principles required to permit wilderness to blossom anew. And his sons learned those principles from him, and would extend that trust, that wilderness, into the modern era, paying faithful attention to the rhythms of Nature.



Senator George P. McLean

McLean’s political prospects were blossoming at this same time. In 1911 he was elected to the United States Senate, where he served three distinguished terms, which included the First World War. Between sessions of Congress, he would return to his beloved land, inviting friends and colleagues, including three U.S. Presidents to join him on the ponds and trails of what would become his Game Refuge.

Though famed for his expertise and strong opinions about finance, McLean was also the Senate champion of various conservation issues, including the Migratory Bird Act of 1918 that extended Federal protection to both game birds and non-game birds. In part this was in reaction to the devastating slaughters that had, among others, caused the

extinction of the passenger pigeon, but his appreciation of the need for safe migration in the natural cycle of bird life was an enlightened perspective for the day. He chaired the Committee on Forest Reservations and Game Protection in two Congresses, perhaps foreshadowing what he would do with his own land in the future. (Congressional Bio. McLean) He retired from the Senate at the end of his term in 1929.

Amos E. George, in the meantime, was settling in to learn the land in the Senator's holdings, and to construct or maintain the cabins, shelters, dams and trails there, where McLean loved to fish and hunt. Amos had moved into an 1830's farmhouse on Firetown Road—the mortgage to build the original house had come from the State of Connecticut, which was rich in cash, having just sold its “Western Reserve,” known now as Ohio. Henry George, Amos E.'s second son, related that he, himself, had been born on the kitchen table of that house in 1918, though, he laughed, “he could not recall the details.” (Holdt)

Section II.

The Land

“We original inhabitants may become great lawyers and athletes, but most end up bargaining for some time in the open. . . The original inhabitants put a premium on conservation because the woods were their life.”

Amos A. George (Riley, *Times*)

The land of the McLean Game Refuge was shaped by the glaciers of the ice ages. Rounded highlands of ancient crystalline rock and jutting trap rock ridges, sandy flats and kettle ponds, where mountains of ice melted, define the geological footprint of the Refuge. Draining two tributaries of the Farmington River, Bissell Brook and Salmon Brook, the land offers a variety of terrain. (Egler 8) As the authors of a Yale School of Forestry study put it, “The wildlife and watershed value of the Game Refuge may have been obvious to Senator McLean, although it was probably pure chance that he assembled such a remarkably diverse landscape. . .” (Yale 20)



The woods road to Spring Pond

Indian populations moved into the lands of the Refuge at the end of the glacial period—perhaps as many as 12,000 years ago, and cleared woodlands for agricultural purposes, as well as hunting and fishing the land. The earliest European settlers arrived at the beginnings of the Seventeenth Century, and the culture of farming and pasturing they established continued through the Nineteenth Century, dwindling in the early Twentieth Century, which enabled the Senator to acquire failing farmland adjacent to his holdings. Cellar holes and stone walls that lie scattered throughout the woods of the Refuge today testify that the region looked very different, even when the Senator was a young boy. Indeed, even a hundred years ago most of the forests of the state had been cut for timber or charcoal or firewood, while at the beginning of the Twenty-First Century perhaps half the state is wooded.

As the development of suburban housing spread out from urban centers, commuting to Hartford from the Farmington Valley is certainly easier and faster than it was in the days of George McLean's train rides to school and work. Yet in the years since McLean established the Refuge, the Trustees have managed to increase the acreage, from 3,200 acres to 4,234 acres. (Yale 7) Despite the encroachment of "civilization," the Yale study of the Refuge in 1981 noted 19 fish species, 17 amphibian species, 17 reptiles, 194 species of birds and 42 mammals within the Refuge. Sixteen of these species are rare or endangered. (Yale 41) And while the refuge was established for "game," the multiplicity of vegetation patterns, trees, plants and bushes, is equally diverse, and often rare species appear, along with those introduced by farmers such as apple trees and grape vines, found near old settlements, and cellar holes. The two significant ponds, Spring Pond and Trout Pond, attract migrating waterfowl and occasional blue heron. The former was probably originally formed by a beaver dam, succeeded by an earthen dam under the Senator's

instruction, while the latter seems to have been dammed intentionally. Both, along with Ulrich Pond off Firetown Road—which has had its dam washed away—were stocked with trout and perhaps other game fish, and Presidents Taft, Coolidge and Hoover were regular guests of the Senator in his home, and, particularly, in his woods.



Senator and Mrs. McLean host President and Mrs. Coolidge at Trout Pond

In an article on the Senator in the *Hartford Times*, the reporter found himself following McLean on a walk in the woods. “A short distance further on, the Senator stopped and pointed. There through the woods and beyond a mass of laurel and moss-covered rocks was a beautiful waterfall tumbling down into a large, clear pool . . . For a long minute Senator McLean stood and gazed at the beauty of it.” (Grant 81) The last public appearance of Senator McLean was at the dedication of Eno Memorial Hall in May of 1932. His friend, colleague and ally in conservation efforts, Simsbury native Gifford Pinchot, Governor of Pennsylvania, appeared with him. (Vibert 141)



*Mr. Hokan Steffenson, Mrs. Amos Eno Pinchot, **George P. McLean**, Mrs. Hokan Steffenson, Mr. William P. Eno, Governor Gifford Pinchot (PA), Mrs. Pinchot and Amos R. Eno Pinchot at the dedication of Eno Memorial Hall, May 1932*

Section III. The Will and The Way

“Whenever, in the course of the daily hunt the red hunter comes upon a scene that is strikingly beautiful or sublime—a black thundercloud with the rainbow’s glowing arch above the mountain, a white waterfall in the heart of a green gorge; a vast prairie tinged with the blood-red of sunset—he pauses for an instant in the attitude of worship. He sees no need for setting apart one day in seven as a holy day, since to him all days are God’s.”

Ohiyesa, Santee Dakota (McLuhan 36)

George P. McLean died in June of 1932. His will is a testimonial to his wide and deep engagement with his region and its people. He made significant bequests to churches and hospitals, schools and civic organizations, to the McLean Fund which was entrusted with management of the McLean Home, and the McLean Game Refuge. He wrote of the Refuge that he wanted it to be “a place where some of the things God made may be seen by those who love them as I loved them and who may find in them the peace of mind and body I have found.” (GPM Will)

McLean also left monies to his employees, including Amos E. George, for whom he added, “I direct said Trustees to retain Amos E. George as watchman for the McLean Game Refuge. . . and to pay him a reasonable salary for his services as such watchman so long as he shall be able to discharge the duties of such position . . .” (GPM Will)

He went further, providing an income for Amos once he could no longer carry out the duties in the Refuge, upon his death, an income for his wife, Cora—should Amos predecease her—for her life, and coverage for any medical expenses Amos or his wife might incur in their lifetimes.

At George McLean’s funeral, honorary pallbearers included Senators, Governors, Congressmen, and the ailing President Coolidge—represented by his wife. Those who actually carried his casket included Amos George, and his other close and longtime employees. In a tribute, Frederick C. Walcott, who succeeded McLean in the Senate having previously chaired the Connecticut Board of Fisheries and Game, described him thus: “Lover of Nature, at whose shrine he worshipped, he did much to teach people the physical and spiritual values of forest, field and stream, the healing values of the great outdoors.” (Grant 87, Congressional Bio. Walcott)



One of the spectacular waterfalls in the Refuge; the George family lived among some of the most beautiful and unspoiled lands in Connecticut

Section IV.

The George Family

The George family was already living in the Firetown Road house, which they continued to do until the 1970's. Amos continued to supervise the Refuge until he retired in 1947, having devoted thirty-five years to the land and the dream of Senator McLean for the land. In a way, Amos E. George shaped that dream, and carried it in the spirit of McLean's will, from the Depression through the Second World War. He lived on the land in retirement for another twenty years, walking its woods daily. His wife Cora died in 1956. Amos died in 1967, at the age of 84. In 1973, 1,800 acres of the McLean Game Refuge was named a National Natural Landmark.



The Amos E. George house where Henry George was born and where David Holdt lived in the 1970's

Amos and Cora's two sons, Amos A. and Henry T. George, continued the special relationship with the land that their father had been entrusted to care for by George McLean. Amos A. George lived in Simsbury from the age of six, except for a 14 year stint in the U.S. Army. He served for 29 years as a member of the police force in Granby, and for 28 years as a forester for the McLean Refuge.(FVH Obit) He was also chairman of the Connecticut Indian Affairs Council and was active, including serving as chairman, on the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council. (Fox People) He retired from the Refuge in 1975, and died at the McLean Home in 1978.

Henry T. George was in his early twenties when World War II broke out. He enlisted in the U.S. Army, and served mainly in the Pacific, earning three medals: the Philippines Liberation Ribbon, the Good Conduct medal and the American Service medal. (Pequot Museum) He had a photographic memory, and nearly thirty years after he had spent a few days on leave in Sydney, Australia, he drew and labeled a street map of the city on a napkin at my kitchen table in the house he had been raised in. (Holdt)

Upon the retirement of his father, Henry applied, and in 1947 was hired to be the caretaker of the McLean Game Refuge. Asked by a reporter, several decades later, what his title was, " he tilted his head and replied: 'I have a title they gave me once. I forget

what it is now.” (Cahill) In 1974, when I moved into old Amos’ house and was getting to know Henry, I asked him the same question. “Are you the Caretaker, or the Ranger, or the Forester?” “Yup,” he replied, “one of those.”



*Henry George by the falls that feed the beaver pond
Hartford Courant, Kay Cahill Photos 4/27/81*

Section V.

Henry George

*“There’s only one price I ask you to pay. And, I’m sorry, it’s a very high price.
I ask you to pay the price of attention!
If you’re willing to pay that price, you just may learn something.”*

Eddie Benton-Banai, Ojibway (Canoe 294)

“You never go on a spirit-journey without a sign that it’s time to begin.”

Two Trees, Cherokee (Canoe 293)

Henry George was proud of his Indian blood, and it was early on that I came to understand that his relationship to the land was special, and that if he and I were going to have any relationship, I would have to pay attention. Having found my way from the woods to the Trustees of the McLean Fund, and having gained their assent to renting the Amos George House, I now had to deal with Henry.



The first bridge in the Refuge and one of the many woods roads that are part of the miles of hiking trails in the Refuge

First and foremost, in both of our minds, there was the matter of the bridge that was not there. Having found the house in early spring, and having contracted to rent it in May, Henry now had a couple of months in which to build a bridge strong enough to allow me to drive my car up to the house. He said he would do that. Because I loved the woods, and because I walked there often and worked not far away, I checked on the progress of the bridge. As time passed I began to notice a pattern: nothing was happening. This is not an example of paying attention. Indeed, I was comparing the turning pages on my calendar with the date by which I had to be out of my previous place, and I was getting itchy. I may have written Henry a note. He did not reply. If I encountered him in the woods—he seemed to be everywhere in those woods—I would ask, and he'd say "it's coming along." I was still not paying attention.

One warm summer night I was driving, well after ten o'clock, past the driveway to the house. There were headlights down by the stream. I had visions of vandals ransacking the house. I pulled down the long driveway, and as I approached I recognized Henry's jeep. He was working on something. I got out of my car.

"What are you doing?"

"Building a bridge."

“Why, at this hour?”

“It’s a full moon, I figure I can get it done in one night.”

“Well, if it’s such a quick job why’d you wait so long to get it done?”

There was a long cigarette break in here somewhere. Then he looked at me for the first time in the conversation.

“Well, I had to find three red oak trees on the Refuge that had been hit by lightning. Then I had to get ’em out of the woods and down here. That’s them over there. They’ll be the base of the bridge.”

“Cool, I was worried you wouldn’t finish it in time.”

Henry turned toward me for the second time.

“I said I would,” he said. (Holdt)

That was the night I learned to pay attention to Henry George. I also came to understand something about his perspective on things. He knew what had to be done, where he could find the necessary resources and when the chore had to be completed. He gave himself time to think out the project and to do it right. In all of this, and in his oversight of the rest of the Refuge, he was thoughtful and attentive, but on his own schedule. As a Native person his schedule was often in sync with the rhythms of the seasons and land, as in waiting for the trees for the bridge, not with his neighbors who did not or could not sense these.

In the four or five years that I lived in the Refuge I saw Henry often. He and his wife Louise lived about a mile down the road in the house that has always been called “The Pink Palace,” though it has always been white to my knowledge. For a shy man, Henry liked to talk. In those days all the trails of the Refuge were blue-blazed, and I served a term as Trails Chairman of the Refuge for the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, publishers of the Connecticut Walk Book. The Association was founded, by the way, in 1895, by George McLean’s brother John and John’s friend Gifford Pinchot. One of my duties for the Association was to walk the trails of the Refuge and make sure that the blazes were clear and there were no blow downs on the trails. In the years that I did this I never did anything but walk the trails. Henry had always been there before me. When we’d meet I’d mention some lovely vista or natural configuration that I’d noticed. He could not only recognize the spot from my feeble descriptive enthusiasm, he could tell me what was going on in all four points of the compass from that spot. He also began to believe that I cared about the woods and respected them, and he began to tell me things.



Spring Pond in the summer

Once splitting firewood, I stopped at the sound of Henry's jeep coming up the drive. "Mice climb trees," he said, after watching me work awhile. "Betcha didn't know that." I didn't.

"You put the garden in the right place," he volunteered once. "We had one there." I felt honored.

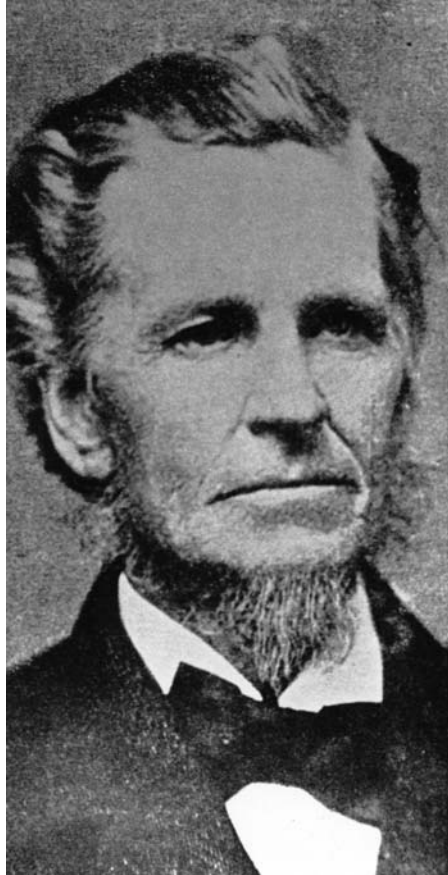
As I mentioned a lovely glen I had found, wandering off the trails, he said, "There are Indian graves in these woods. I won't tell you where. You'd tell somebody, and then somebody would be in here bothering them." I protested that I wouldn't tell anyone. He just smiled and shook his head. And here I am telling about them, as much as I know.

One Sunday morning I flagged down Henry's jeep near the waterfall on Firetown Road. Across the road, in a clearing off the trail, I had found dozens of beer cans, broken glass, and a badly made fire. I was furious. Henry was sad.

"1973," he said. I asked him what that meant. He said that kids had always snuck into the woods to drink beer or do other things they wouldn't do in their living rooms. "But they always cleaned up. They left no trash. They wanted to be able to come back. 1973 was the year they started to not care," he said. "1973 is when I started to worry about the way things were going."

I was repainting the numbers on my mailbox one weekend day when Henry pulled into the driveway. As I painted he asked me about what I taught. I said "History: American and also African." "They used to hide runaway slaves in these woods," Henry said. "In caves and sheltered places." I asked where. He said, "You'll probably guess some of them if you keep poking around." (Holdt) I filed that one away as probably a legend. I still wasn't paying attention all the time. Later, teaching about the Underground

Railroad, I found references to the fact that while Farmington was a well-documented station, the escapees had to keep going north from there, and that Westfield, Massachusetts was the next big station, but that many had to hide out on the way. (Underground 4)



Dudley Bester McLean, Senator George McLean's father

In his Tercentennial history of Simsbury, *Three Centuries Of Simsbury*, Bill Vibert reports, "There are several accounts which point to the fact that Simsbury had an Underground Railroad station, but its owner has not been identified. Mrs. John E. Daniells . . . remembers Mr. Cooper, who worked as a farm hand for her grandfather, Dudley McLean. Mr. Cooper, according to Mrs. Daniells' recollection, was a runaway slave, who arrived in Simsbury via the underground railroad. It is Mrs. Daniells' belief that the McLeans were involved in the underground railroad." (Vibert 137) Dudley McLean was George McLean's father. Amos George was Henry George's father. It got my attention. Probably a legend. Maybe.

The house I rented, which everyone seemed to refer to as Amos' house, has a steep roof which hangs over porches fore and aft. The front porch was screened, and therefore more often used. Inside a huge stone fireplace covered half of one wall in what is now the living room, but was probably the kitchen when it was built. I could stand up in the fireplace, and I am 6'4" tall. What I assume is an addition now houses the kitchen, bathroom, and a bedroom. Upstairs there are two rooms, one large and one small, with slanted ceilings. In those days the house was dark green, but it is currently gray. I can't imagine heating it in the days before electricity—the electric heaters were installed in

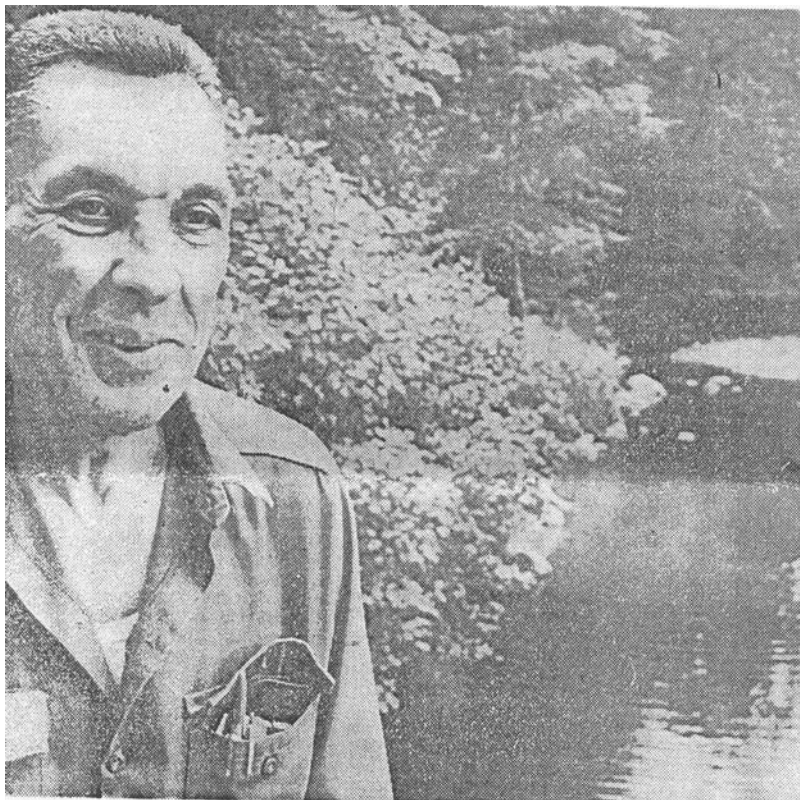
1959. The screened porch faces south, across a field that was marshy for a good part of the year—except where the garden grew. Nearly thirty years later I can still remember the sweet sound of the thrushes from the summer woods. Once I heard a coyote, others have reported sighting a black bear, and one of my successors swears he saw a mountain lion in the yard one morning very early.



The cabin on Trout Pond

“The ties that bind Native Americans to their homelands and sacred places are far more complex than mere territorial claims . . . veneration of the land is inextricably entwined with a tribe’s way of life . . . The Indians believe that their physical and mystical connections to their lands are vital, not only to the maintenance of their religious practices, but also to their very cultural integrity.”
(Spirit 13)

As I spent sporadic time with Henry, I began to connect the, ultimately, thirty-five years that Henry had spent, responsible for the Refuge, with the twenty-eight his brother Amos had spent there, and the thirty-five their father, Amos E. had worked there before them. It totaled ninety-five years of George family employment caring for that land, its animals and its vegetation. But beyond the years working there are the years living there—for Henry, the total was nearly 74 years, for Amos E., it was 55 years, and for Amos A., who did not always live on the Refuge, it was surely over forty. In short, about 170 George-years were spent by those men who officially cared for the land Senator McLean protected in his will. They grew up with that land. They knew its secrets and its pleasures. They shepherded its wildlife and they shared it, understandably sometimes reluctantly, with the Public the Senator had invited in. They knew what a Refuge it truly was, for they understood that land, while the impatient Twentieth Century prohibited most of us from developing that kind of relationship with any place.



Amos A. George
The Hartford Times, photo by Einar Chindmark

When Steven Paine took over as manager of the Refuge in 1981, it was the end of an era, but it was also the continuation of relationships. Henry and his wife lived on in the Refuge until his death in 1992. As Paine put it, describing Henry, he “has more intimate knowledge of the Refuge than anyone else.” (Chung) When Europeans came to this land, they had other ways. They distanced themselves from Nature. Their children—down to the seventh generation—prefer to live inside, in conditioned air, in rooms heated to the point that they consider the circle of seasons to be an imposition, rather than a natural turn in the year. Yet in each generation there are those who understand. Thoreau

and John Muir and others wrote, and still speak, to these people. On any day, in the woods that Senator McLean rescued from being what everywhere else is, there are those who walk or run or sit; there are those who pay attention.

“In our way, with every decision we make, we always keep in mind the Seventh Generation to come. It’s our job to see that the people coming ahead, the generations still unborn, have a world no worse than ours—and hopefully better. When we walk upon Mother Earth, we always plant our feet carefully because we know the faces of our future generations are looking up at us from beneath the ground. We never forget them.”

Oren Lyons, Iroquois (Canoe 299)

George McLean moved among the most powerful people in his generation, and what did he do with them when he had their ears? He brought them to the woods that had enabled him to feel grounded. And while the woods were his physician, his religion, as it were, Amos George was his teacher, his interpreter, who shared the wisdom of the earth, and whose sons took care--as caretakers do-- of the legacy that he and Senator McLean left to the future.

“Think about it. You yourself are a Seventh Generation!”

Leon Shenandoah, Iroquois (Canoe 299)



Senator George P. McLean in the Refuge

Postscript

The McLean Fund has prepared this piece to remind others of the heritage and legacy of Senator George P. McLean and Amos E, Henry and Amos A. George. We must listen to the rhythms of the seasons and the lands so we may learn to walk in them and care for them in the special way that Native people know and the Georges did for more than 178 years. The Senator wrote in his will in reference to creating the Refuge and retaining Amos George to be its caretaker -“a place where some of the things God has made may be seen by those who love them as I have loved them and who may find in them the piece of mind and body I have found.”

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An Appendix
Recall of the Wild:

I had always pretended, for reasons of sanity, that I lived on the edge of wilderness. I did live, for a time, in the 4,234 acre McLean Game Refuge, miles, at least a dozen, from the state capital, on the outermost edges of suburbia. Wild animals were seen in my back yard. I, myself, heard them in the attic. Over the years, therefore, I often had to cope with the mildly wild. I was unprepared for the real, wildly wild thing.

There were raccoons that devastated the corn patch. To deal with them I turned loose a quick, rather alert dog, which was quite effective. Then there was the invasion of woodchucks. They ravaged the zucchini. To meet that test I simply turned the zucchini loose; so much zucchini grew that the woodchucks, overwhelmed at the task they faced, went away. The most unpleasant creature frequenting these woods turned out to be the red-eyed adolescent, a nocturnal beast which, in the heat of mating opportunities or other social pressures, left copious droppings of aluminum cans and empty matchbooks. A Smokey-Bear hat and a John Wayne voice produced enough of a shudder in the teen-age grape-vine that the herd seemed to shift its watering hole, although I occasionally spotted fresh spoor.

In my imagination, a great white hunter figure, fresh from King Solomon's Mines, began to inhabit my house. My friends, blinded by the mists of familiarity, did not find the transformation remarkable, although they did comment on the predominant role khaki played in my wardrobe. Pride, in the form of self-lionization, goeth before the fall. Or, in my case, the flight. I recall with damp palms and rising neck-hair the details of my encounter with the real wild.

It was a beautiful late afternoon. Jogging the trails of the game refuge was an activity I often affected at such times, in Sisyphean pursuit of the survival of the fittest. The sun was setting, splashing red and gold light on the woods. As I topped a small rise and dropped into the shadow of a valley, a concussion of air struck, followed by a high-pierced shriek. I ducked and broke stride. Ahead of me a huge, dark-winged bird lifted to a perch in a dead white pine. The bird paused long enough for me to identify him as a hawk, and then he slid back toward me in a low trajectory dive which brought him and his unnerving screech within a foot of my head. Before I could recover, he had disappeared in a cluster of pines.



Note the talons of the Northern Goshawk

I began to run with new motivation, searching the edges of the trail for something Stewart Granger or John Wayne would doubtless have found closer at hand: a rock, a stick, anything remotely resembling a weapon. The first stick I grabbed was a branch as thick as a baseball bat. It disintegrated in shreds of rotten luck. Then I found a crooked pine bough with enough needles remaining to assure me of some integrity, and I ran on, bearing it before me like a torch. Rather than seeing Olympic parallels, I was reliving Greek myths, rehearsing how to heave this unburning brand into the eye of the creature at the last possible moment.

Two or three seconds later—it seemed much longer—the hawk dived once more. He was angry, but respectful of my armed status, and swooped just out of my strike zone. His wingspread was over three feet, and his fierce visage inspired my imagination and my perspiration. Then he was gone. I did not believe he was gone, however, and I carried my branch all the way home, feeling increasingly foolish. Perhaps that was his intent.

Safe from the Refuge, within the walls of my house, I secured myself with a blanket of field guides. Thumbing through the hawks, I found him, more by the shudder I felt when he stared at me from the page, than by any approved bird-identification technique. He was a goshawk.

My first problem, now that I knew my attacker, was what to call him. Goshawk is a difficult word to pronounce on first reading. Should I say “gosh-hawk!” or “go-shock?” Either was appropriate in my state, but I learned it should be pronounced “gaws-hawk.” The more I read the less I worried about such esoteric problems. Forbush, in his *Natural History of American Birds* says of the breed: “Its attack is swift, furious and deadly. In the death grapple it clings ferociously to its victim, careless of its own safety, until the unfortunate creature succumbs to its steely grip. Its stroke is terrible. It is delivered with such force as sometimes to tear out most of one side of its victim . . .”

The goshawk can dive at a speed of 60 miles per hour. My jogging speed has never exceeded six miles per hour. I was facing a problem which most Americans have

only read about in adventure magazines: a real wild aggressive creature was living and hunting near my house.

I turned to vested authority; I reported the goshawk to Henry George, caretaker of the game refuge. He allowed as how he had heard of its existence; someone else had been attacked and actually struck by the bird.

“Of course,” he pointed out, “in the wild it is the hiker and jogger who are the strangers and intruders.” He suggested that I jog elsewhere.

The impact of this encounter of the old kind, contact with a truly wild creature, was profound. Of course I had seen many deer, and I had started up a fox or two while walking on the edges of a day in the woods. Once an ancient, dying porcupine crossed before me on the driveway, too intent on making dignified progress toward eternity to see me as any obstacle to its course. But the goshawk meant something quite different to me.

First of all, he was dangerous. To me. Second, he was defending a territory, and was therefore marching to the drum of an instinct which, when placed against my activity--the incidental exercise of muscles atrophied by a soft life and distant from elemental survival--gave him the clear superiority. At the same time, the confrontation with that primal energy evoked echoes within me. I became alert to the sounds of the woods as I never had been.

The next day I returned to the area, armed with binoculars and a sturdy stick, not only to attempt observation of a rare and beautiful bird, but also to drink at the springs of my own natural history. Like a hunting animal I slipped into the pine grove. I was aware of the wind sounds and the position of the sun. I stepped only on wet leaves, avoided twigs and other forest debris that might make noise. I felt I was being a credit to all the adventure movies I had absorbed.

All the while I was being watched.

Despite my precautions, I was unprepared for the rush of his first dive, though my reflexively raised stick kept him on a foreshortened arc. I watched him pose with white leg-feathers ruffling in the breeze, and my binoculars fairly tingled with electricity. The scream of his mate, who attacked from the shadows as if shot from the sun argued effectively for discretion. I retreated, and returned no more.



Photo by J. A. Spindel *a young Northern Goshawk*

In a game refuge, a museum of wilderness if you will, one does not disturb a true freedom for a vicarious one. And somehow just the knowledge of that freedom stretched, for me, the boundaries of what was possible.

There was no dramatic end to my story. There was no expedition to hunt the birds down. There were no human fatalities, no photographers from tabloid newspapers in quest of gore. The goshawks eventually left the refuge. I do not know exactly when, for I avoided that trail for several months. Presumably after nesting, raising fledglings to flight, and depleting the populations of field mice and rabbits in these parts, the birds flew back to the northern forests, which are their more usual haunts. On a late summer day, with my hiking staff for comfort, I went again on reconnaissance—and found nothing. The pines harbored no hawks—though they retained the potential for that. It was rather eerie.

I resumed jogging that path. No goshawks. Yet the woods had a quality I had not seen in them before. And I perceived in myself a connection between previous posturings and primeval survival. I had always pretended, for reasons of sanity, that I lived on the edge of wilderness. I did.

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Ellsworth Grant notes, in his biography of the Senator: “A pair of the rare and endangered goshawk has nested in the Refuge in recent years.” (Grant 4)