

Composers' Cabins

Joan (Caughey) Gorga

Did you know Antrim has at least two small cabins set up as quiet retreats where music composers could ply their trade without intrusions from the outside world? I stumbled upon one of the cabins last winter while enjoying a quiet stroll on snowshoes deep in the woods. When it appeared in front of me, a manmade geometric shape rising out of a gentle knoll, I thought, "I'm not in Kansas anymore." But then a little voice in my head said, "You've seen this before, maybe fifty years ago. It's the old composer's cabin." Every once in a while, while my siblings, cousins and I were exploring the woods around Gregg Lake, we stumbled upon this tiny cabin, but we tried to stay away since we knew a composer worked there when he wanted a quiet place to think.

What had become of the composer who chose this quiet corner of Gregg Lake to unleash his creativity? Was there even a chance I could find out? The starting point was the time-honored New Hampshire tradition of not acknowledging change—I still called it the Vogel place, even though, as far as I knew, no Vogel had owned it for at least twenty-five years. That, combined with the new-fangled Google search, led me to musician Leslie Vogel of Greenfield.

Leslie says her parents, Norman and Lucille Vogel, bought the remote property at the southern end of Gregg Lake around 1957 for \$1200, planning to spend peaceful family summers there. They erected the main cabin on the lake from a kit that cost \$500, and then started on the little A-frame cabin back in the woods, where Norman would spend quiet hours composing songs and pieces with lovely melodies for dance-like movements. Leslie and her young brother Tim helped carry the lumber back to the little knoll chosen for the cabin. Norman built the cabin with the help of a local carpenter, who apparently said little and demonstrated a solid work ethic, but periodically hit himself on the thumb with his hammer, whereupon he would let loose

a muffled expletive and hurl the hammer into the woods. Of course, both he and Norman then had to spend time searching for the hammer. I had an ominous feeling that this story was going to go where I didn't want, and emailed back to Leslie that possibly no one in Antrim would want to claim the hammer-throwing relative. Unfortunately, she didn't take the hint and broached the carpenter's identity with her mother, now living in Peterborough, who was certain it was a Caughey, and it can only have been my father's cousin Jack. "Tee hee—it's your family!," Leslie wrote. "But my father was quite eccentric himself, so they were in good company together building the A-frame." We'll leave the many Jack Caughey stories for some other time.

To help with his composing, Norman borrowed a heavy harmonium (also known as a pump organ) from some friends and carted it the length of the lake in a rented boat, since



there was no road in. Leslie remembers that "by stages that harmonium was dragged, carried and coaxed all the way back to the cabin in the woods." There, they had to build a porcupine-proof cage around it because they would chew anything they could get to. While the rest of the family enjoyed

the lake, Norman worked in his woods retreat.

Norman Vogel had attended the student program in New York City affiliated with the Juilliard School, and graduated from Michigan State University. He remained interested in the connection between music and movement after his Ant-


 — continued on page 14



**PREFERRED
COMPUTER
SOLUTIONS**

Matthew Burke
Owner
matthew@PCS-NH.com
603.924.7846

70 Hancock Rd
(Route 202) Suite J
Peterborough NH 03458
www.PCS-NH.com



**Great Brook
Veterinary Clinic**

Dr. Tom Dowling, Veterinarian
Route 202 North • Antrim, NH 03440
603 / 588-3460

rim years, and later taught eurythmy, a kind of dance movement developed in conjunction with the anthroposophical movement and used extensively in Waldorf Schools. He is now eighty-seven years old and lives in Switzerland near the Anthroposophical Society's international center.

Leslie Vogel has continued the family musical tradition, even though she didn't get to use the little cabin as a studio. She is one of the founders of "Folksoul Music" and has performed at many local venues, including the Antrim in the Evening concert series. She also fondly remembers playing the piano for Antrim composer Dick Winslow's musical play "Many Moons" at the Peterborough Players Theater in 1998.

As you might have guessed, Dick Winslow, venerable musician, prize-winning poet and former *Limrik* editor, is the owner of the other composer's cabin in Antrim. Dick's old cabin can be seen through the woods on the west side of Smith Road, but it wasn't always there, nor was it always in the woods. Dick says his retreat was originally an ice house located behind the Alabama Farm barn. Ice was cut from local ponds in the winter and stashed in sawdust there to provide cold storage through the summer. Around 1955, Dick precisely laid out a place where he wanted a studio at the far side of a pasture across the road from the farmhouse. Friends and family helped him rig rollers under the ice house and tow it out from behind the barn, across the street, through a gap in the stone wall and into the pasture. But there were so many rocks impeding the progress that they finally gave up and left it where it was in the pasture, far short of his carefully prepared spot. They managed to get a piano out to it, too, and Dick used it as his studio for at least twenty years.

Dick graduated from Wesleyan University in Connecticut with a degree in English. It was during a stint in the Navy in World War II, while working with a mine disposal unit in Panama, that he decided he wanted to become a musician. When the war ended, he enrolled in graduate school at Juilliard, where he studied music composition. He was enticed back to Wesleyan as a music professor, where he was instrumental in expanding a small traditional music department with programs in experimental music and ethnomusicology, now better known as world music.

Dick spent summers in Antrim composing in his studio. Why did he need a retreat across the road a good distance

away from the farmhouse? Dick answered quietly, "Well, I had five children...everyone knew not to get near me there." He especially loved choral music. He wrote operas and oratorios that were performed at numerous northeastern universities, as well as directing the Wesleyan Glee Club and Concert Choir. He was renowned at Wesleyan for engaging the community in his compositions, and the same held true when he directed plays at the Peterborough Players Theater and at Town Hall in Antrim.

Dick was one of the major figures in the Antrim Players productions for many years. He conducted his first production, *The Pirates of Penzance*, in 1939, when he was a senior at Wesleyan, with a cast and crew of nearly fifty and an audience of four hundred. He produced several more Gilbert and Sullivan operettas after World War II. In the 1960s, the Players put on two of his original musicals, *Her Father—The King* and *Alice*.

Dick retired to live in Antrim full time in 1983. Ten years later, he became editor of *The Limrik*. At about the same time, he won the grand prize (\$250 worth of free books) in a contest sponsored by the Harvard Square Booksellers Association, fittingly, with the following limerick:

Said Melville to Beckett, "You know
you have written a contrary show!
Whilst I must be quick to espy Moby Dick,
you just sit there and wait for Godot."

In 1998, Dick adapted James Thurber's children's story "Many Moons" for the musical stage and wrote the music for the production, which was performed at the Peterborough Players Theater. Maria Belva, Director of the Peterborough Children's Choir (now the Grand Monadnock Youth Choirs), remembers how he reached out to her to invite the children to participate and what a wonderful experience it was for them to work under Dick. This was the same production that Leslie Vogel fondly recalled.

Trees have slowly filled in the pasture around Dick Winslow's cabin, and he says he hasn't used it for years. Those he's influenced have spread far and wide, his words and music continue to delight, and at the age of ninety-seven, he is still contributing to *The Limrik*.

Two small cabins in the woods, two composers, and two musical legacies still playing in Antrim and beyond. ☐

