

SPRING 2015

# Harris Hearsay

THE HARRIS CENTER FOR CONSERVATION EDUCATION

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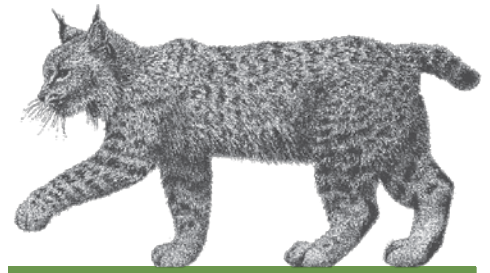


photo: Meade Cadot



## Our Mission

*A member-supported nonprofit organization, the Harris Center for Conservation Education is dedicated to promoting understanding and respect for our natural environment through education of all ages, direct*

*protection and exemplary stewardship of the region's natural resources, conservation research, and programs that encourage active participation in the great outdoors.*

If you would like to join or donate to the Harris Center, please visit our website at [harriscenter.org](http://harriscenter.org), call our office at (603) 525-3394, send an email to Diana at [jacobs@harriscenter.org](mailto:jacobs@harriscenter.org), or visit us at 83 King's Highway in Hancock, NH.

You can help ensure a grand future for the Monadnock Region by naming the Harris Center as a beneficiary in your will or estate plan. Anyone can make a bequest, and no amount is too small.

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# [harriscenter.org](http://harriscenter.org)

## SPRING STAFF PICKS

*We asked the Harris Center staff, "What's your favorite spring thing?"*

**Jaime Hutchinson:** My favorite place to be in the spring is anywhere that I can hear frogs singing!

**Laurel Swope:** I like photographing bud bursts on trees, shrubs, and fern fiddleheads.



**Vernal Pool Workshop**

photo: Meade Cadot

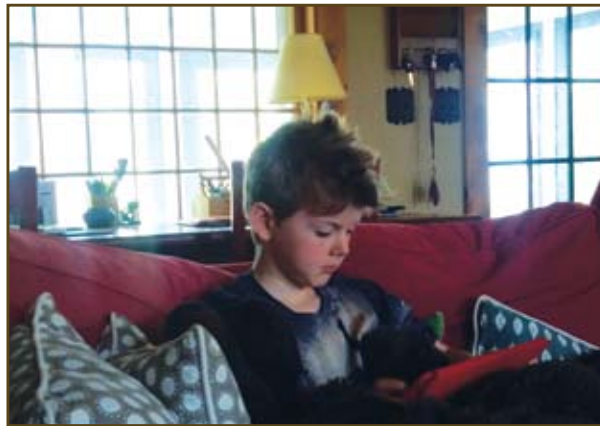
# Neighborhood Natives

by Susie Spikol Faber

I've begun to notice something. Perhaps you've noticed it, too. Where are the children in our communities? I rarely see them outside, riding bikes, climbing trees, running, and playing tag. I drive through our small neighborhoods and everyone seems neatly packed away. Where is the noise and the playful rush of children outdoors?

I'm thinking kids are inside, more often than not – connected to a device with a screen.

According to the latest studies on digital device use, children between the ages of 8 and 18 spend 7.5 hours on a device each day. This is all day. In some seasons that's all the time there's daylight. From the time they wake up to practically the time they go to bed.



In my work as a naturalist, I'm seeing the effects of this and I'm concerned. When I first started teaching for the Harris Center in 1994, before leading a hike up a local mountain I would ask students, "How many of you have hiked a mountain before?" Usually more than half the class would raise their hands. Now, when I ask this same question, only a small handful of students raise their hands. I could repeat this for almost everything I teach. How many of these kids have caught a frog, gone fishing, eaten a wild strawberry, gone snowshoeing, blown a dandelion seed? Across these twenty years, I've witnessed a slow and steady decline of children having these outdoor experiences.

I'm stunned by this. I believe hands-on experience is essential for children. Think of the first time you saw a shooting star or felt the freedom of climbing a tree or noticed the way the lilacs smell after a warm spring rain. These childhood experiences build connections in our hearts and minds.

Our children are newly described and defined as "digital natives," part of a generation who have never lived without being plugged in and connected. But I think we need our children to be *neighborhood* natives, people who know the best places to catch frogs, build forts, or climb trees, who know where to find

the sweetest smelling flowers, and exactly where the wild raspberries grow.

Without experiencing your small world, in your own neighborhood and community, how do you build a connection to a place or its people? This worries me. I believe in having a sense of place to nurture loyalty and a love of things we know. We carry this sense of belonging in our hearts, where it fosters compassion. We loved the monarch caterpillars we held as children; as adults we want to make sure they still have places to become butterflies.

I'd like to suggest something as a community. Let's become neighborhood natives. Let's put down our own devices, get up from the couch, open the door, and connect to our neighborhoods. Model for our children how to hike a mountain, shake your neighbor's hand, catch a frog, eat a wild raspberry, play outside until the light fades and you see a shooting star. As my mom would say, "Let's not go back inside until it's dark." Our children need this from us. I think our world needs this from us, too. ➔

## Repurposing Rail Lines

### Following the Manchester & Keene Line

by Jeremy Wilson

One of the fun challenges in the Monadnock Region is to interpret land use history from features found in the woods. Clues are often obscured by erosion, decay, or the maturing forest, but with a bit of detective work, we can find cellar holes, stone walls, and abandoned roads that reveal a period when European settlement and agriculture transformed the New England landscape.

A unique series of clues to the region's past winds through the forests of Roxbury, Marlborough, Harrisville, Hancock, Bennington, and Greenfield. The signs – narrow paths with gentle curves and modest grades, steep embankments camouflaged by thickly forested slopes, deep cuts through hills and bedrock, and most obvious, giant granite block abutments adjacent to stream and road crossings – all recall a very different time in the history of the Monadnock Region.

These clues are remnants of the Manchester & Keene Railroad, which opened in 1878, providing train service between Keene and Nashua. The line was taken over by the Boston & Maine Railroad in 1893. The effort and cost that



The new bridge over Nubanusit Brook in Harrisville, on the former Manchester & Keene Railroad line

went into constructing a railroad across challenging terrain using the tools and machines available in the 1870s must have been extraordinary. The line only remained in service for 58 years because the Great New England Flood of 1936 damaged trestles that were never replaced.

Fortunately for us, abandoned rail lines can make for tremendous trails. Trains require slight grades, broad curves, and smooth surfaces, qualities that make for accessible paths that can cut deep into the woods, away from our current roads. Harrisville Trails has been working to open sections of the Keene & Manchester Railroad line to hiking. Last fall they completed construction on a beautiful new footbridge over Nubanusit Brook, which opens 1.6 miles of former railroad bed between Hancock Road (in Harrisville) and Jaquith Road (in Hancock) to through-hiking. You can access it from Hancock Road, just southeast of the Skatutakee-North Pond dam and opposite an obvious marker – a large granite abutment near the road. The rail trail and much of the surrounding land is conserved by the Harris Center, and this bridge is the culmination of a decade-long, volunteer-led project to provide access to the trail for non-motorized recreation.

Opportunities exist for opening additional trail segments along the Manchester & Keene Railroad route, and the Harris Center is working to gain access to, and build bridges across, abandoned abutments to make this possible. Bridges are not cheap and we may be holding out a hat to help with expenses. Based on the popularity of the Hancock-to-Jaquith-Road segment, we think additional rail trails are a great investment in the region's recreational resources. Stay tuned! ➔

photo: Russ Cobb



Railroad lines in the Monadnock Region, from *The Railroad Map of New Hampshire, Accompanying Report of the Railroad Commissioners in 1894*



By the end of 2015, a fish-friendly road-stream crossing will replace this culvert under Hale Hill Road in Swanze, enabling brook trout and other fish to once again move freely throughout Falls Brook.

# Restoring Falls Brook

by Brett Amy Thelen

In 2006 and 2008, eighty of our citizen scientists surveyed nearly 1,000 culverts and bridges throughout the Ashuelot River watershed to see where fish and aquatic wildlife movement were most impacted by roads. In the years since, we've met with many partners – including Trout Unlimited, the Nature Conservancy, the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department (NHFG), and Antioch University New England – to prioritize sites for stream connectivity restoration based in large part on the data collected by our citizen scientists.

Now, restoration work has begun for one of our highest-priority sites: a new, fish-friendly crossing on Hale Hill Road in Swanze will soon reconnect more than 30 miles of stream habitat in Falls Brook and the Ashuelot River for wild brook trout and other fish and aquatic wildlife.

As with most ecological restoration efforts, partnership will be key to this project's success, and we're thrilled to be working with

Trout Unlimited, the Cheshire County Conservation District, NHFG, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the US Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Town of Swanze to restore fish passage to Falls Brook. Support for the project is provided in part by the New Hampshire State Conservation Committee Conservation Grant Program, through funds from the sale of the Conservation License Plate (Moose Plate), the Town of Swanze, the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services Aquatic Resources Mitigation Fund, and NHFG.

If you'd like to learn more about this exciting stream restoration project – and get an up-close look at some of the species that will benefit – join us on **Wednesday, June 10** for a preconstruction fish survey at the restoration site with John Magee, NHFG Fish Habitat Biologist. *This event is free, but space is limited and registration is required.* For more information or to register, please contact me at [thelen@harriscenter.org](mailto:thelen@harriscenter.org). ➔



# Cultural History Connects Kids to Their Communities

In addition to our nature-based programs, the Harris Center undertakes many cultural history investigations with students and their classroom teachers. Harris Center educators Janet Altobello, Jaime Hutchinson, and Dori Drachman recently presented on three of these projects at the Historical Society of Cheshire County in Keene. Here's a snapshot of what they shared:



photo: Janet Altobello

## KID CURATORS: The Contoocook and Nubanusit Rivers Project *by Janet Altobello*

Peterborough's Monadnock Center for History and Culture generously provides display space for a school class to curate an exhibit of their very own design. I recently worked with Patrick Keegan and his Great Brook School 6th graders to study how the Nubanusit and Contoocook Rivers influenced settlement in Peterborough. Students chose to investigate the early history of the Contoocook and Nubanusit Rivers in a variety of ways: through the town's mill history, records of the 1936 and 1938 floods, studying wildlife that depend on river habitat, and through the geography of the watershed itself.



Archival photo courtesy of the Monadnock Center for History and Culture

I helped the students with their research, taped their interviews with town elders, and took small groups out to explore historic mill sites. The Monadnock Center provided town histories, photographs, maps, local newspapers, and journals of mill workers. They also helped the students understand the workings of an interactive museum exhibit. The middle schoolers were motivated to prepare an engaging presentation for public display, including a three-dimensional map, diaries the students had written from the perspectives of the mill workers, artwork, and text to accompany archival photographs. Visitors to the exhibit were invited to record their memories of the Hurricane of 1938. One student remarked, "Because I've lived here my whole life, I really liked learning about Peterborough's past. I never knew these stories before we did this project." 🐾

## WHAT'S THE STORY OF THIS LAND? *by Dori Drachman*

I worked with Laura White and the 4th/5th grade class at James Faulkner Elementary School in Stoddard to investigate the cellar hole and the stone walls in the school's woods, as a doorway to understanding local history. In addition to their field explorations, students also explored historical maps and census records to gain a richer picture of what life was like in Stoddard over a century ago. Here are two students' reflections on the project:

"This map shows what was different in 1920...County Road was a main road and now it's not even a road at all. It's all grown over."

"When we found tractor parts [in the forest], we wanted to know if the owner was a farmer so we started to look for more clues. To begin with, we noticed all the big rocks had been moved. Can you guess what they did to the rocks they removed? They made stone walls!" 🐾



photo: Laura White

## STUDYING STONES AT THE VILLAGE CEMETERY *by Jaime Hutchinson*

For 4th graders in Marianne Sorrentino's class at the Jaffrey Grade School, the village cemetery is the perfect place to study the weathering of rocks. Inquiry-based lessons begin in the classroom with students conducting simple experiments that demonstrate the effects of both chemical and mechanical weathering. The students then walk the short distance to the cemetery to observe the effects of weathering on gravestones, record observations, and generate questions. Examples of student questions include: *Do marble and slate tombstones both show the same signs of weathering?* and *Which tombstone material weathers faster?* After deciding on a research question, the students return to the cemetery one more time – clipboards, data sheets, pencils, and cameras in hand – to collect data and conduct an investigation. Who knew that grave matters could also be such fun? 🐾

photo: Jaime Hutchinson



Karen and Susan Sielke

# VERNAL POOL SUPERSTARS

by Brett Amy Thelen with Cynthia Nichols

**K**aren and Susan Sielke are sisters, outdoor enthusiasts, and superstar vernal pool sleuths – although they don't like to be called that. They say, "We simply follow directions."

The Sielke sisters may be too humble to brag about their incredible involvement in our citizen science program, but we'd be delighted to brag on their behalf. Over the past two years, Karen and Susan have traveled from Walpole to Peterborough in search of amphibian breeding habitat on Harris Center-conserved land and land conserved by our Vernal Pool Project partners, the Peterborough Conservation Commission and the Monadnock Conservancy. They've investigated scores of potential vernal pools on two dozen different properties in four towns, documenting nine as active amphibian breeding sites. They've also volunteered

to take on some less exciting, but equally important, tasks: Susan helps with data entry, and Karen previews field sites with large numbers of potential vernal pools in the (very buggy) off-season, in order to make vernal pool sleuthing more fun and efficient during the short window of time in the spring when amphibians are active in the pools.

Each year, we honor our many passionate, dedicated, and talented vernal pool volunteers with special recognitions at a season-ending potluck. (In recent years, awards have been given for "Three-Year [In a Row] Volunteers," "Outstanding Spokesperson for Vernal Pools," and "Exceptional Fashion Sense" – and if you want to know who won *that* one, you'll have to join us next spring!) In her very first year as a vernal pool volunteer, Karen was recognized for "Earliest Data Submission" (for



photo: Cynthia Nichols

documenting a vernal pool *in between* sessions of our two-part volunteer training), and in their second year, the sisters were named our "Vernal Pool MVPs."

When asked what keeps them going, Karen said, "We love getting outside. If we can do that and help science at the same time, that's great! And I get to spend time with my sister. Being out in the woods is an adventure – this is real life – more people should do it." We couldn't agree more. Thank you, Karen and Susan. Here's to many more adventures in the woods! 🍄



## Henry, Hawk, and Ice Cream!

**H**ow does one get into the good graces of a wild raptor? At a special event for Harris Center members in April, local falconer Henry Walters introduced his red-tailed hawk, Seamus, and discussed some of the implications of the relationship between a wild bird of prey and a tame human being. Henry and Seamus's fascinating presentation was followed by an ice cream social, featuring local ice cream and a huge selection of toppings. This special event was free, by invitation to current Harris Center members.

**Want to make sure you don't miss our next members' event?** You can join or renew your Harris Center membership by calling Diana Jacobs at (603) 525-3394 or by going to [harriscenter.org/donate](http://harriscenter.org/donate).

photo: Rebecca Upjohn