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Centennial

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Centennial salutations!

One hundred years - nearly the entire history of modern roads and of the automobiles that travel them. Jacob's Ladder Trail has seen many changes: cleared hillsides reverted to mature forests; whole industries developed to thriving enterprises, only to wither and die, or move to some other part of the country; farms and forests turned to subdivisions.

The road, too has changed drastically. A century ago, the entire road was barely wider than one of its modern travel lanes. Its course has been straightened and reshaped, and of course, widened, as greater capacity for reshaping the terrain through which it passes have made it possible to push back or cut through steep hillsides.

The challenges remain the same though. A century ago, engineers were just beginning to understand the vulnerability of macadam to heat, frost, traffic and a harsh, sometimes ledgy, sometimes marshy environment. The surface of the road that opened in 1910 began to crumble almost immediately, hastening improvements to paving compounds and methods. Experimentation and refinement continues today.

An anniversary invites reflection. This anniversary has me thinking about all the people who have contributed to the effort to preserve the treasures of the Jacob's Ladder Trail region. Ours is a special place – steeped in history and brimming with its own unique culture. There is barely an acre that hasn't seen human habitation or cultivation, yet it's one of the wildest areas in southern New England with thousands of acres of forests and open spaces.

This book is dedicated to the stewards of this special place, past, present and future. Change is unstoppable, but it's also malleable. May we be creative, resourceful and tenacious in our efforts to shape the future of our region, so that in another 100 years, that generation will still be celebrating its special qualities.

In memory of our friends: Natalie Bozarth, Newman Marsh, Howard Mason and Robert Oppenheimer.

Special thanks to our own "Bard of the Berkshires," Vincent Dowling, master of ceremonies for our celebration at the summit, September 25, 2010.

Thanks also to the Chester Granite Company for generously donating our centennial monument stone.

- Steve Hamlin

This book commemorating the centennial anniversary of Jacob's Ladder Trail is published by

*The Jacob's Ladder Scenic Byway Advisory Board
PO Box 508
Huntington, MA 01050
www.jacobsladderscenicbyway.org*

Our partners: Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Massachusetts Department of Transportation, the Massachusetts Cultural Council and the Cultural Councils of Becket, Chester, Huntington, Lee and Russell.

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Towns Along the Trail - Russell

By Ann Merritt

The Town of Russell is nestled at the foothills of the Berkshires in Hampden county, bordered by Westfield to the east, Granville to the south, Blandford to the west, Montgomery to the north, and Huntington to the northwest. Covering approximately 17.9 square miles, Russell's bucolic landscape of rolling hills is mostly forested, with some open fields used for agriculture. Though only 20 miles from Springfield, and 8 miles from Westfield, two of western Massachusetts' major commercial centers, Russell has maintained its quiet, rural character with a population of slightly over 1700.



Russell Town Hall

The Town of Russell was incorporated in 1792, in response to a petition by the residents of "New Addition", a piece of land belonging to Westfield, and valued because of its marble quarry and excellent building stone. The earliest settlers were located on Glasgow Mountain, now known as Russell Mountain, where farmers and loggers utilized the heavy growth of timber to supply building materials in fast growing neighborhoods.

The railroad came to Russell in the late 1830's, and the center of town moved to the river valley at the foot of the mountains. Streams flowing into the Westfield River, and the river itself, were harnessed to power sawmills and gristmills. The town continued to grow with the addition of brick and tile works, a tannery, charcoal kilns, stores, and taverns.

The abundant water of the Westfield River brought paper manufacturing to Russell. Beginning with Chapin and Gould in 1858, followed by Salmon Falls and Fairfield in 1872, and the Westfield River Paper Company in 1902, paper mills were built on the sites of former gristmills, charcoal kilns, and brick and tile companies. Russell became a bustling hub of paper manufacturing, known as "The Paper Town".



Mortimer Farm

Three distinct villages developed around the three paper mills in Russell. The paper companies constructed the villages of Woronoco, Crescent Mills, and The Grove in Russell, as housing for their workers.

The thriving paper mills helped to make Jacob's Ladder Trail the most important east-west truck route in Massachusetts until the opening of the Massachusetts Turnpike in 1957.

Until recently, the mills employed most citizens of Russell. Today, the only remaining paper manufacturer in Russell is Texon, on the site of the former Chapin and Gould Co. in Crescent Mills.

Although Russell was originally self-sufficient, state requirements led to collaboration in several areas. In 1965, Russell voted to join the Gateway Regional School District, which comprises seven hilltowns. Russell also partners with other towns in sharing and supporting the Hilltown Community Ambulance, as well as regional finance and selectboard sub-committees, the Jacob's Ladder Business Association and the Gateway Youth Athletic Association.

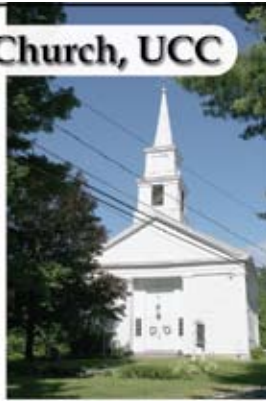
Russell, once a booming manufacturing community, is now left with three abandoned paper mills, and most residents work in neighboring towns and cities. With its proximity to Westfield and Springfield and rural character Russell remains an attractive place to live. Russell's central village has recently been designated a National Historic District.

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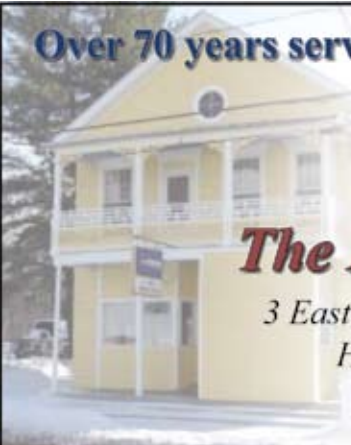
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Towns Along the Trail - Huntington

By Steve Hamlin



Huntington common & gazebo

Huntington began as part of Plantation No. 9 in June 1762. In 1765, Plantation No. 9 was named Murrayfield. In 1773, Murrayfield was divided and the eastern portion was incorporated as the town of Norwich. The town was named for Norwich Connecticut from which many of the early settlers came.

Present-day Huntington village was called “Falley’s Crossroads” after the owner of the tavern there. It lay at the intersection of three towns – Blandford, Chester, and Norwich – and two counties – Hampden and Hampshire. The jurisdictional quirks presented by the situation of the village were tolerated until the coming of the railroad around 1840 inflated both the importance and the political tension of the village.

The confusion of town and county boundaries that divided the village had some surprising consequences. A man could commit a crime and evade prosecution simply by crossing the street. Local folklore tells of a wedding that was held in the old Williams House that had to be moved to the kitchen in order for the ceremony to be legal.

The county license of the officiating justice of the peace was only good there – the town line ran through the building and the kitchen was in a different county.

To ease the difficulties, a complicated land-swap was engineered that exchanged parts of Blandford, Chester, Russell, Montgomery, and Norwich, resulting in the town boundaries we know today. It was incorporated in 1855 as the new town of Huntington, named in honor of Charles P. Huntington, the Northampton attorney who crafted the arrangement.

Huntington is closely associated with the Westfield River. All three branches of the river flow into the town as discrete entities, combining into the main stem in Huntington. Due to the ready supply of water, industry began early in Huntington’s history with sawmills, tanneries, and basket-makers.

With the arrival of the railroad and the ready access to more remote markets it made possible, Huntington’s waterpower was applied to paper and textile manufacturing. Two important mills developed – the Chester Paper Company on Mill St., and the Little and Stanton Woolen Mill on Russell Road (renamed Upper Russell Rd. with the relocation of the state highway in the 1930’s). Both of those businesses continued operation well into the 20th century, but both are gone now.

In the early days of the twentieth century, Huntington was at the end of two trolley lines. The Springfield Street Railway extended through Westfield and Russell to the Huntington town common. Its rails were laid along much of what became the Jacob’s Ladder Trail right of way – stone embankments from the trolley are visible in many locations along the Trail. Just a few yards away from the end of that trolley line was the end of the Huckleberry Line which ran over the hills to East Lee. Political differences prevented the two lines from merging. By the end of the second decade of the century, both trolley lines were defunct.

Today, Huntington is primarily a bedroom community. Retail business continues in both the downtown area and along the first couple of miles of Rt. 112. Farming has always been an important part of the community and it continues today, although considerably diminished.

For many years, Huntington has hosted the start of the Westfield River Wildwater Races – at 56 years, the longest continuously-run canoe race in the country.

While there is but a scant three miles of Jacob’s Ladder Trail in Huntington, the intersection with the southern terminus of Rt. 112 roughly at the mid-point makes it an important part of the road.

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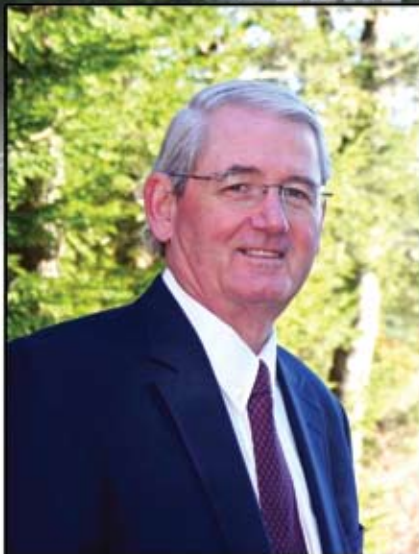


Chester Railway Station

As you travel the first mountain roadway, don't miss the first mountain *railway*, a short block down Main Street from Jacob's Ladder Trail Scenic Byway, in Chester, MA. At the Chester Railway Museum, follow Whistler's Father and see how he built the line on horseback, and the magnificent stone arch railroad bridges he engineered.

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Towns Along the Trail - Chester

By John Garvey

The Town of Chester was established as Murrayfield in 1762, and given its present name when it was incorporated in 1783. The original center of the town lies several miles north of the Jacob's Ladder Trail Scenic Byway. The rugged upland terrain is suitable for agriculture, and the early settlers spread their farms along what is now known as Skyline Trail. Other outlying sections of Chester that were primarily agricultural were North Chester, Littleville and Dayville.

Around 1812, a glass factory was built along the West Branch of the Westfield River and the small community that formed around the factory became known as Chester Factory Village. The Western Railroad reached Chester Factory Village in the 1840's, providing efficient transportation to Boston and Albany, and sparking a new era of growth in Chester, particularly in the Factory Village.



Chester Railroad Station

The building of the railroad brought skilled stone cutters to Chester to work on George Washington Whistler's keystone arch bridges. Some of them stayed on after the railroad was built, to cut the granite that was quarried in Becket. The stone was transported into the valley on the Chester and Becket railroad, cut in a shop near the railroad station, then loaded onto freight trains to be carried to its destination.

Chester lies on the fault line formed by the collision of two tectonic plates. The compression of the earth by the collision resulted in a rich diversity of minerals being concentrated along the line, and particularly in the area of Chester Factory Village. It's been said that every mineral on earth can be found there, at least in trace amounts.



The old Alladin Ice Cream Shop

In the mid-nineteenth century, emery was discovered in the hills around the village. This was the first discovery of emery in the United States, a significant find since all previous emery was imported from the politically volatile countries of Turkey and Greece. The Chester Emery Company was formed to mine the emery and large mills were built to process the mineral. The grindstone industry became an important employer in Chester and remained so into the 1980's.

Mica was also mined in Chester into the early-20th century. It was milled in town into diverse products such as windshields for early automobiles and windows for lanterns and stoves. These and other industries made Chester Factory Village into a bustling center of commerce. The Factory Village became the center of town affairs, as it still is today. The Jacob's Ladder Trail Scenic Byway runs right through it.

Outdoor recreational activities are popular in town - canoeing and kayaking on the West and Middle Branches of the Westfield River, hiking and cross-country skiing in the Blandford-Chester State Forest, and hiking the Keystone Arch Trail to view the famous railroad arches. The hike to Sanderson Brook Falls in the Chester-Blandford State Forest is a popular family weekend hike.

Annual events that take place in Chester include the MapleFest on Skyline Trail in March, a celebration of our railroad heritage called Chester on Track in late May, the Blueberry Days of Summer at the Kelso Homestead in early August, and the Littleville Fair, a traditional agricultural fair, also in early August.



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Towns Along the Trail - Becket

By Steve Hamlin



Becket Center Church

The town of Becket was incorporated in 1765, named for the estate of Admiral Lord Barrington, which was located in Shrivenham, in Berkshire, England. According to the *Bicentennial History of Becket*, by Cathaline Alford Archer and Mitchell Mulholland, “the economic and social hub of the town was in the area now referred to as Becket Center, where the picturesque Becket Center Church still stands overlooking the original town cemetery and the Minute Men’s parade and drilling ground. A second center of activity was built up at the intersection of the Farmington River and Becket Turnpikes in West Becket. Stores and a post office were set up at this point, which was for a time a thriving business area.”

The building of the Western Railroad in 1840 brought about a huge change. The railroad followed the West Branch of the Westfield River, a route that brought it through North Becket some five miles north of the center of the town. North Becket, which was a small, fairly insignificant community near the Washington town line before the coming of the railroad, soon overshadowed the original center.

Ready access to remote markets, along with abundant waterpower stimulated the growth of manufacturing in North Becket. The railroad station, and the passengers who used it, attracted innkeepers and merchants to North Becket. Within a few years, North Becket was a thriving commercial center.

Over time, the development of North Becket as the commercial center of Becket had the opposite impact on the other villages in town. While Becket Center remains the center of town government, its social importance, along with that of West Becket is greatly reduced.

North Becket was home to basketry and silk mills into the 20th century, when a disastrous flood wiped out much of the village and ended those industries. On November 14, 1927, several days of heavy rain brought flooding to most of the Northeast. In Becket, William Ballou, the owner of a reservoir upstream of town, sat watch over the crumbling dam in his car. As its failure became imminent, he drove through town alerting the residents. Due to his warning, all were saved except 60-year-old Mrs. Justine Carroll. Mills, houses and barns were washed away in the flood.

Lumber and quarrying were the main industries in Becket throughout much of its history. Like the other towns along Jacob’s Ladder Trail, farming was also important, particularly dairying.

The former Becket Quarry, which supplied granite to Chester via the Becket & Chester Railroad, is now preserved by the Becket Land Trust as recreational land. Stone cutting continues near Becket, with truckloads of granite carried through Bonnie Rigg Corners daily from the Chester Granite Co., just over the line on Algeria Road in Otis.

Today, Becket is known as an artists’ community. Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival and the Becket Arts Center are the most visible examples of the arts, but there are also many artists working in home studios.

With its many lakes and ponds, Becket is also known as a vacation community. The town’s population swells considerably each summer as people return to the summer camps and lake-front second homes that make up a large part of the town.



Becket Arts Center

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Towns Along the Trail - Lee

By DeeDee Fraser



First Congregational Church

Lee is the largest and western-most of the Jacob's Ladder Trail communities. It has historically been known as a mill town, but now enjoys a balanced economy of retail, services, tourism and agriculture. A recent comprehensive downtown revitalization program, the construction of a 60 store outlet complex at the Massachusetts Turnpike entrance, and two business parks on Route 102 combined with existing industry and farming to expand the economic base of Lee.

When the town was first settled in 1760 by transplants from Cape Cod, it was known as Dodgetown, a name that was short-lived. In 1777, Dodgetown was incorporated as the town of Lee. The town was given the name to honor General Charles Lee, George Washington's second in command during the first half of the American Revolution.

The ample water power of the Housatonic River supported some textile manufacturing in Lee during the 19th century, but it was paper that built the town. The first paper mill opened in 1806. By 1857 there were 25 paper mills in Lee. In the 1860s and 70s, Lee's Smith Paper Company was the largest paper producer in the world, having developed a process to produce paper solely from wood pulp, rather than the more expensive cotton that had previously been the norm.

In 1852 another industry was launched with the discovery of Lee marble, reputed to be the hardest and finest in the world. Within a few years, the quarrying of marble grew to be an important business. Almost half a million cubic feet of marble was quarried and shipped in 1867 alone. The Capitol building in Washington, D.C. is constructed of Lee marble. Lee marble was also used in the construction of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Grant's tomb, and the Empire State Building.

Lee has a long history as an agricultural town, stretching back to its earliest days as a colonial village. Today's farms produce dairy products, wool and field-grazed cattle.

Lee has many well-preserved historic structures. The first house ever built in town, dated 1760, still stands. A paper company and a lime kiln, along with many farmhouses and estates from Lee's early history still survive.

Lee's downtown is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Attractive, inviting, and eminently walkable, Lee's Main Street offers restaurants, gift shops and antique stores, hardware stores, barber shops and beauty salons. At the southern end of Main St., the steeple of the First Congregational Church – the tallest wood-frame steeple in New England – towers over the beautiful town square. It is a quintessential American downtown.



Main St. and the common



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What is Jacob's Ladder?

By Steve Hamlin

Jacob's Ladder was a section of the Becket Turnpike that was built at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Ironically, the original Jacob's Ladder was discontinued with the building of the new state highway that was named in honor of it.

It was an extremely steep road whether the traveler was approaching from the east or the west. It climbed in a nearly straight line over the summit of Becket Mountain (AKA Morey Hill) from a point very near the end of what is now Gentian Hollow Road, then descended to approximately opposite the end of the road into what is today called Sherwood Greens on the west side of the summit.

In her book, *Growing Up on Jacob's Ladder*, Shirley Phelps Brusco described the road:

“It was said that the dirt road looked like a ladder as there were rows of dirt going across the road to stop the rain from washing it out and on the sides of the road were clearings for horses and oxen to rest. Hence the name Jacobs Ladder.”

According to a Berkshire Gleaner article from September 21, 1910, it was Cortlandt Field Bishop who popularized the name Jacob's Ladder, having heard the name applied to the road by a local resident.

On the east side of the summit, the road climbed at a grade of 17 percent or more through soil that turned to sticky mud at the slightest provocation. On the west, the grade was 22 percent. By contrast, the worst roads around today – Becket Road in Lee, Round Hill Road in Chester, or Dickinson Hill in Russell, for example – are more on the order of 15 percent at their worst.

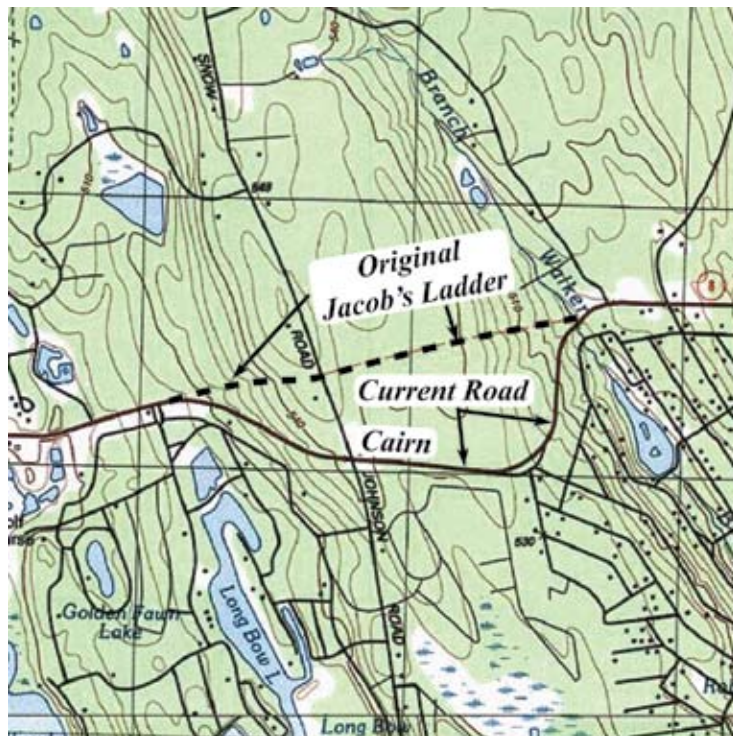
The ditches that paralleled the narrow road on either side added to the considerable challenge that the steepness of the west side presented. Many an early traveler became much more acquainted with those ditches than they ever intended to, courtesy of an unfortunately placed rock or an over-application of the brakes that caused a skid.

In July, 1906, the Boston Globe reported on a Col. and Mrs. Pfaff who, along with their traveling companions, were thrown from their car while descending the west side of Jacob's Ladder, “when their touring car struck a rock in the highway and turned the machine into an embankment.”

It was much more common to get stuck in the mud of the eastern approach, though.

In October, 1903, the New York Times reported that Cortlandt Field Bishop of New York and Lenox, “who has been the leader in the investigation of Jacob's Ladder, ... was caught in the quagmire last evening while returning from Amherst...” in “a soft portion of steep highway on Becket Mountain, where it was alleged that a trap was set for automobiles by clay placed on the highway...” Bishop was already at work trying to get a new road built to replace Jacob's Ladder, having raised \$600 towards the effort according to the article.

A Boston Globe article from November 1904 reported that the hill had become known as “Three-Dollar Hill” among motorists, the typical fee charged by the local farmers to have a car hauled out of the mud by a



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team of horses or yoke of oxen. The article goes on to state that “As many as four heavy cars have become mired in the clay deposit simultaneously.” Hauling wealthy, stranded motorists out of the mud must have been far more lucrative than farming.

Jacob’s Ladder was known far and wide as a hazard to motorists. In 1904, the national magazine *The Horseless Age* published a notice that the Automobile Club of America proposed “to post signs in Blandford and Becket, Mass., warning automobilists against taking the “Jacob’s Ladder” route (via Becket’s Hill) from Springfield to the Berkshires and to go instead by way of Becket Station and East Otis.”

At least as early as 1904, there were plans for a better road over the Berkshires to connect Springfield and the Connecticut River valley with Pittsfield and beyond, but the preferred route was far from certain. The 1904 Globe article listed the choices:

“There are four routes. One is via Northampton and Cummington, where an altitude of 2045 feet is reached. The way is circuitous and dangerous. Another is from Huntington on the Westfield river, over Peru hill, a distance of 55 miles, and a climb of 2080 feet above the sea. A third takes in the famous “Jacob’s ladder.” The fourth and approved route of the Automobile club of America is through Russell on the



Westfield river to Blandford, Otis and East Lee. This run is of 54 miles between Springfield and Pittsfield over an elevation of 1840 feet.”

“The most sought and probably the most difficult ascent for an automobile over a through county road in Massachusetts today is the climb from the Westfield river to the top of “Jacob’s ladder.” The height is 1810 feet from sea level.”

In December of 1904, *The Horseless Age* reported that “The Selectmen of Becket, Mass. have agreed to permit Cortland F. Bishop to expend the money he has raised by private subscription for repairs to Jacob’s Ladder, the road over Becket Mountain, which for some time has been practically impassable to automobiles.”

By 1908, the options had been narrowed down to just two. Either one would follow the current route along Walker Brook to Bonnie Rigg Corners. There, the choices became either northwest through Washington, Hinsdale and Dalton, or due west around Jacob’s Ladder via a cutoff to Lee.

The hoteliers of Pittsfield, and particularly Dalton, favored the more northerly route, but Lenox, Lee and Stockbridge argued for an improved route over Becket Mountain, mostly along the same Becket Turnpike that Jacob’s Ladder was a part of. In January, 1910, the Boston Globe reported that opponents to the Jacob’s Ladder cutoff predicted that it would cost \$200,000 to build a road around the “tourist’s terror.”

State engineers dismissed that prediction and the road we know was built at a cost of less than half of the opponents’ prediction. The “tourist’s terror” was tamed, with the precipitous grades reduced to less than 7 percent – a grade that cars of the period could conquer, reportedly without down-shifting.

The Morey Hill cutoff was completed and opened to motorists around the end of 1909. The rest of the new road into Lee was finished in 1910. Today, the original Jacob’s Ladder, the stretch of road that struck fear in the hearts of early motorists, has been reclaimed by the forest. Having vanquished the beast, its conquerors memorialized the road by naming its replacement in its honor.

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A Brief History of Jacob's Ladder Trail

By Steve Hamlin



On a September day in 1910, a crowd of people, reported to be 800, 2500 or 4000 by various sources, congregated on the summit of Morey Hill to celebrate a momentous advance in transportation – the completion of the first auto road over a mountain range. It was the dawn of the age of the automobile – the crossroads of the supremacy of horse-drawn and rail travel with the infancy of the trolley, motorcar, and airplane.

In an article describing the celebration in the *Valley Gleaner*, a newspaper in Lee, the writer asked himself how an “event held on a mountain top a dozen

miles from anywhere, only accessible by a single highway, in a rainy day, no shelter within several miles, with no attraction of a popular nature, should prove to be a real success”, then provided the following answer:

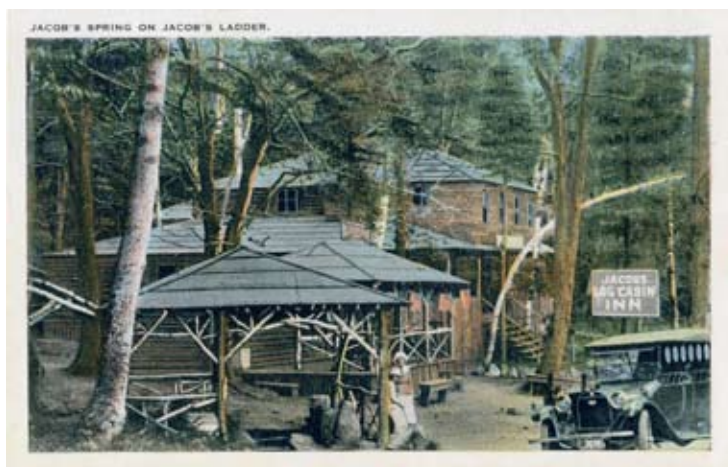
“It is to be found in the supreme significance of the event, in the major importance of the idea to be celebrated. The breaking down the natural barrier between the east and the west, the building of a highway connecting the Connecticut and Housatonic river valleys, Springfield with Berkshire, and in the larger sense the cities of Boston and Albany, the creation of an interstate route, the unifying of the state by surmounting physical obstacles, all this is meant by the completion of this project. It is not alone in the material sense either, for bands of communication create bonds of human fellowship and the people of the state will henceforth know each other better because Jacob’s Ladder has been conquered.”

Like with the railroad seventy years earlier, the Berkshire hills were the proving ground on which the efficacy of a new mode of travel was tested against gravity. Future mountain crossings would be grander and would carry travelers to loftier heights, but it was on these hills that the first victory was won – the victory against the skeptics.

In 1912, a trans-continental route was proposed by a group of small town businessmen in South Dakota. Their proposal became the Yellowstone Trail, which spanned the country from Plymouth, Massachusetts to Seattle, Washington. The Jacob’s Ladder Trail was adopted as part of that road system. So, within a couple of years of its opening, the Jacob’s Ladder Trail was part of another “first” - the first auto route across the Northern Tier of the US.

The 1920’s were probably the heyday of Jacob’s Ladder Trail tourism. Henry Ford had made the automobile accessible to the middle-class and they had embraced auto travel as an inexpensive form of recreation. Tourist inns and gift shops sprung up at the Morey Hill summit, Jacob’s Well, Bonnie Rigg Corners, and elsewhere along the Trail.

The 1930’s brought major changes to the road. Miles of it were moved and straightened, and bridges were replaced as projects of the Depression-era Works Progress Administration



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(WPA). Meanwhile, another “New Deal” program, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was creating many of the recreational assets we enjoy along the Trail today. As part of that program, both the Chester-Blandford and October Mountain State Forests were shaped. The existing forests on the state-owned lands were thinned, pruned and replanted, and fire- and pest-control measures were implemented. The tracts were also improved with roads, rustic shelters, and picnic areas.

By the post-World War II years, Jacob’s Ladder Trail was a busy highway. It was the main east-west truck route between Boston and the states to the west. The mill-towns along the Trail were at the height of their productivity as paper, abrasives, quarried stone, and woolen products were churned out up and down the Westfield River and in Lee.

The Interstate Highway program initiated by the Dwight Eisenhower administration brought construction of a new road across Massachusetts. At least as early as 1948, a route had been contemplated to alleviate some the congestion along the now nearly half-century-old network of state roads, particularly in Boston. The Federal program gave the state needed financial assistance. Construction began on the Massachusetts Turnpike in 1955. The new four-lane road opened from the New York state line to Boston on May 15, 1957.



Chapin & Gould (now Texon), Russell



Swiss Chalet, Becket

Swiss Chalet

image courtesy of ImageMuseum

The effect on traffic along Jacob’s Ladder Trail was immediate and drastic. Suddenly all through-traffic was siphoned off by the Turnpike, while the lack of an exit for the roughly 30-mile stretch from Lee to Westfield relegated the older road to local traffic. With the resulting isolation, the mills in the towns along the Trail began to falter.

The first to fail was the woolen mill in Huntington. The woolen mill had been a leading producer of blankets, but it suffered from the drop in demand from the military in the years after WWII. When the mill burned to the ground in the 1960’s the owners decided not to rebuild.

The paper mills began to fail or move away. Again, the Huntington mill was the first to go. Among the Russell mills, the Westfield Paper Company disappeared first. The venerable Strathmore Paper Company was bought out by International Paper and the operation was moved to Ohio in the 1990’s. Texon Paper Company continues to hold on in the Crescent Mills hamlet of Russell.

The Cortland Abrasives Company plant in Chester burned spectacularly in the 1980’s, bringing an end to that business. A small vestige of the once-thriving abrasives industry continues to operate out of a building on Middlefield Street. The Chester Granite Company – actually located in Otis – continues to do a good business providing granite curbstones, among other granite products. However, any connection to Chester, other than the name, is lost - the Becket & Chester Railroad that once delivered quarried stone to the stonecutting facilities and freight trains in Chester is long gone, as are the cutting sheds and freight sidings.

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These and many other remnants of Chester's industrial past lie decaying in the woods with maturing trees growing up around and through them.

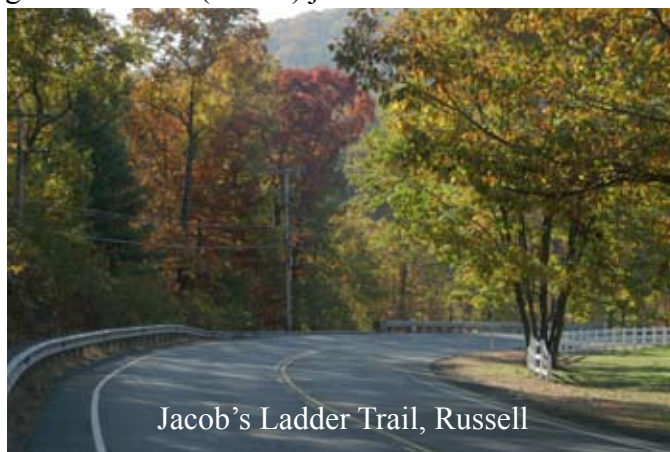


The towns along most of the length of the Trail are now predominantly bedroom communities for the cities of Westfield, Pittsfield, Northampton, and Springfield. Becket has also attracted a large population of second-home owners. While the decline of industry that resulted from the creation of the Turnpike has created some fiscal challenges, it has also created some benefits. The lack of development pressure has almost accidentally preserved much of the area. While the rest of the state has seen an explosion in population and development, the Jacob's Ladder Trail corridor has almost regressed - a reminder of Massachusetts in a simpler time.

In 1991, the federal government passed the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), which provided funding for many transportation-related projects. One of the programs spawned by ISTEA was the Scenic Byways Program – a national grass-roots collaborative effort established to help recognize, preserve and enhance selected roads throughout the United States. Locally, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) and the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) joined forces to re-establish the Jacob's Ladder Trail as a scenic byway.

The name Jacob's Ladder Trail had faded into insignificance during the road's years of decline. The road was still remembered by that name by many of the "old-timers" of the area, but younger residents were unaware or disinterested in the road's history, and often confused by its quaint moniker.

Under the leadership of PVPC and BRPC, and with the partnership of MassHighway (now MassDOT) – the modern-day Massachusetts Highway Commission – the Jacob's Ladder Scenic Byway Advisory Board (JLT) was formed in 1992. Since then, JLT has successfully applied for grants of hundreds of thousands of dollars to enhance, preserve, and interpret the qualities that make the Jacob's Ladder Trail and the towns along its length special.

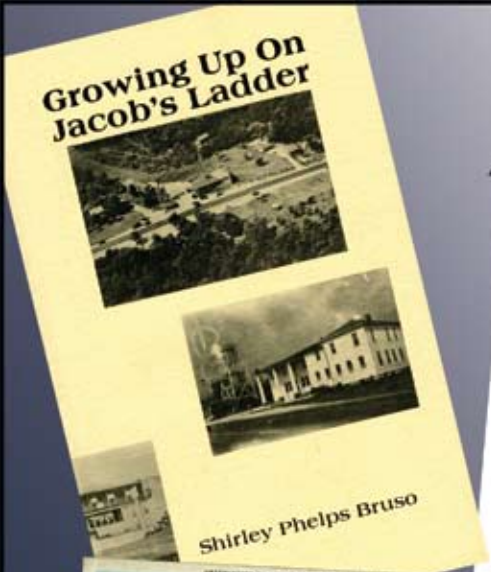


The members of the JLT advisory board include citizen representatives of the five towns and the business community, representatives of the two RPAs – PVPC and BRPC – and a liaison from MassHighway. Since the inception of the modern incarnation of Jacob's Ladder Trail, four more scenic byways have been recognized in Western Massachusetts: the Connecticut River Byway, the Mount Greylock Scenic Byway, the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway, and the Rt. 112 Scenic Byway.

The advisory boards of the various scenic byways, through our RPA representatives, have formed a loose collaboration in the belief that we can be more successful as allies than as competitors. The roadways we have adopted encompass the entire western third of the state and, with the exception of gaps between Lenox and Lanesborough, and Westfield and South Hadley form a continuous network of connected scenic byways.


In celebration of the centennial of Jacob's Ladder Trail, and in tribute to its dedication 100 years ago, we are placing a stone monument at the site of the cairn. Fittingly, the stone comes from the Chester Granite Company, who generously donated it.

Growing Up On Jacob's Ladder




Shirley Phelps Bruso

In memory of Shirley Phelps Bruso
 Author of ***Growing Up on Jacob's Ladder***



Shirley Anne Phelps,
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The Summit

Excerpted from *Growing Up on Jacob's Ladder*, by Shirley Phelps Bruso

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In 1925, soon after Pa, my grandfather, went to the Summit, Jacobs Ladder, he, Uncle Harry and carpenters built an observation tower out of pine logs. The tower stood about fifty feet high. Pa strung lights around the top and around the first landing. I heard a story that Sonny, when about three, had to be rescued from the first landing as he sat up there with his legs dangling down. People paid 10¢ to walk up the tower but sometimes Jack, our good-natured hound dog, would lay on the landing and people were afraid to come down. A big telescope, which swiveled for the convenience of viewers, rested on the top landing.

Sometimes walking up the tower, I'd be scared going up the last two flights of stairs.

Right next to the tower and on the corner of the highway and the dirt road, Pa built a gas station and sold Socony gas and oil. Everyone, including the women, turned the handles on the gas pumps to pump gas. Sonny used to help pour water in the radiators and he collected money from the tower.

The rock pile was in front of the gas station until my grandfather moved it across the street directly opposite the store. He cemented the rocks together and behind the rock pile he put up a flagpole. The flag always flew at the Top 0' Jacobs Ladder.

...Pa built the store called Summit House with a porch around three sides upstairs and two sides on the bottom. There were about ten bedrooms. Before 1930, he built an addition to the store which contained a good-sized kitchen and dining room. The stairs led upstairs from the dining room to a bathroom and three bedrooms.

...The cottages were built east of the store—one "Big Cottage" and two "Little Cottages" as they were called. About 1930, "B.B. Cottage" and the "Last Cottage" were built west of the dirt road. During the summer we girls lived in the "Last Cottage" along with Marion, Fred, and Margaret. Up the dirt road my father and Fred built "Little Cottage" in 1940. Marion and Fred lived there for awhile.



Behind the "Big Cottage" stood the icehouse in which the men put the tons of ice they cut in the winter at Greenwater Pond. Beyond the icehouse was the pig pen.



Opposite the icehouse was the shop. That's where the two generators were—the big generator and the little one. I remember my father always trying to start them. He spent much time on his back trying to repair them. His forge sat there and in the back of the building was the sawmill.

Across the street from the store and in the field was a gondola for picnickers to use and picnic tables along the dirt road. The gondola and the chicken house were taken down about 1939, but the other buildings were still standing at the Summit,

Top 0' Jacobs Ladder in 1946 when my parents sold the store.


To order a copy of *Growing Up on Jacob's Ladder Trail*, visit <http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~shirleyb/jacobsladder/>



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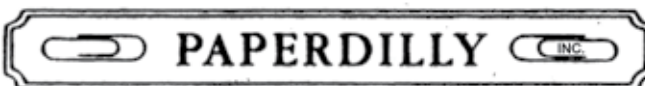



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The Good Roads Movement & *Jacob's Ladder Trail*

By Steve Hamlin

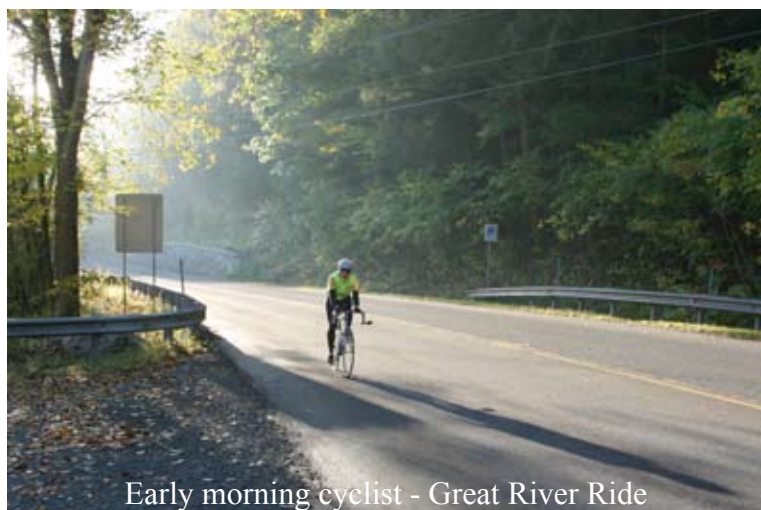
The development of the bicycle and its popularity as a mode of transportation in the 1870s brought to light the inadequacy of the road system in the U.S. Roads were fine in towns and villages where they received regular maintenance. In between, though, maintenance was left to those who lived along the roads. Consequently, especially in rural areas where residents were sparse, maintenance was irregular and roads were often barely passable.

In the 1880s, a group of bicyclists formed the League of American Wheelmen (LAW), in large part to advocate for an improved system of roads. This advocacy became the Good Roads Movement, which spread across the country. The cause was taken up in the name of improved and less expensive mail delivery and better access for farmers to urban markets, but it continued to be spearheaded by the LAW.

In 1892, in response to the demand for better roads, the Massachusetts legislature passed a bill creating the Massachusetts Highway Commission (MHC), the first such commission in the nation. Prior to this action, other than mandating or authorizing the building of early turnpikes, roads had been left entirely to the counties and local communities. The MHC represented the first direct state-level involvement in road construction or maintenance in the nation.



Cyclists circa 1900
photo by Amos L. Avery



Early morning cyclist - Great River Ride

By the turn of the century, automobiles were gaining popularity. Motorists and bicyclists became allies in the cause of improved roads. Within a few years, though, the number and influence of motorists eclipsed that of bicyclists, and the Good Roads Movement became theirs, the role of the LAW largely forgotten.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, bicycles were on the cutting edge of technology. Victorian-era techies – mostly the well-to-do – embraced them in the same way people of today have embraced the technology of our own era. There is no evidence that

Cortlandt Bishop was a bicycle enthusiast, but it seems likely that he was in the years before the automobile. In any event, he adopted the principals of the Good Roads Movement in his pursuit of an improved road over the mountains.

On the centennial anniversary of Jacob's Ladder Trail, it's good to remember that it was bicyclists, not motorists, who began the movement that made this road possible.



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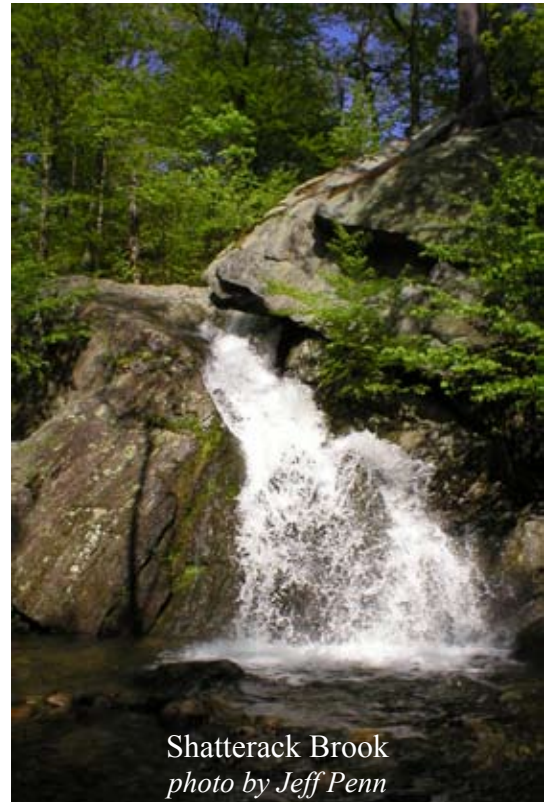


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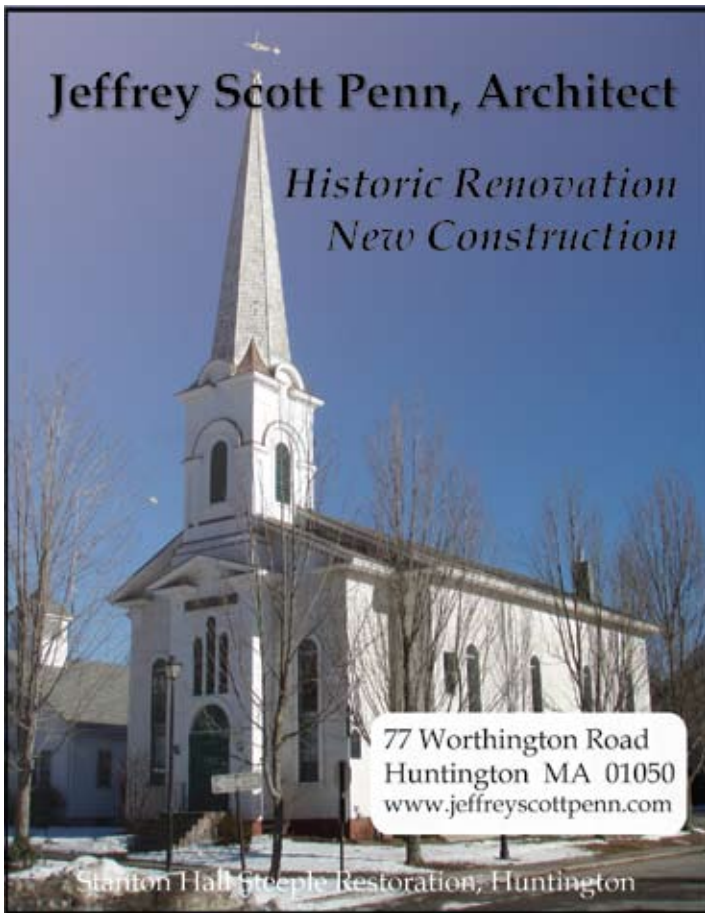
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View northwest from Observation Hill
photo by Jeff Penn



Unidentified paddlers - Westfield River Races
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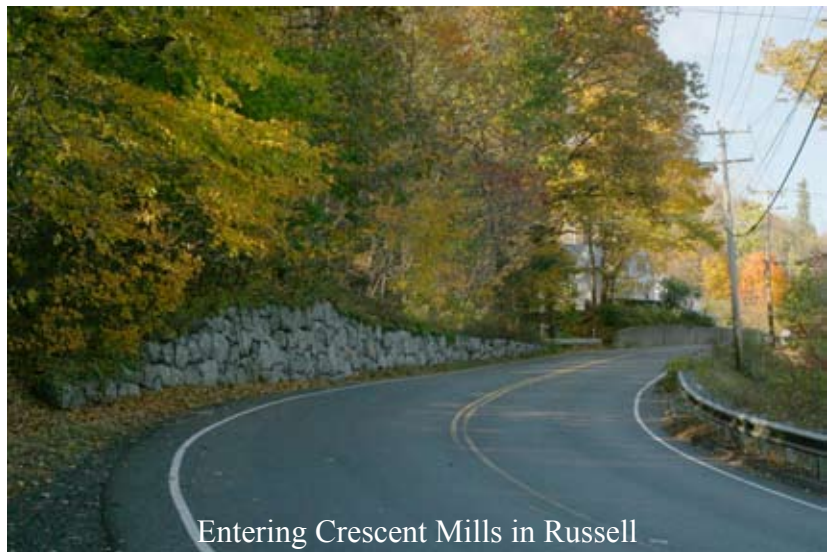


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Along the Westfield River
photo by Linda Hamlin



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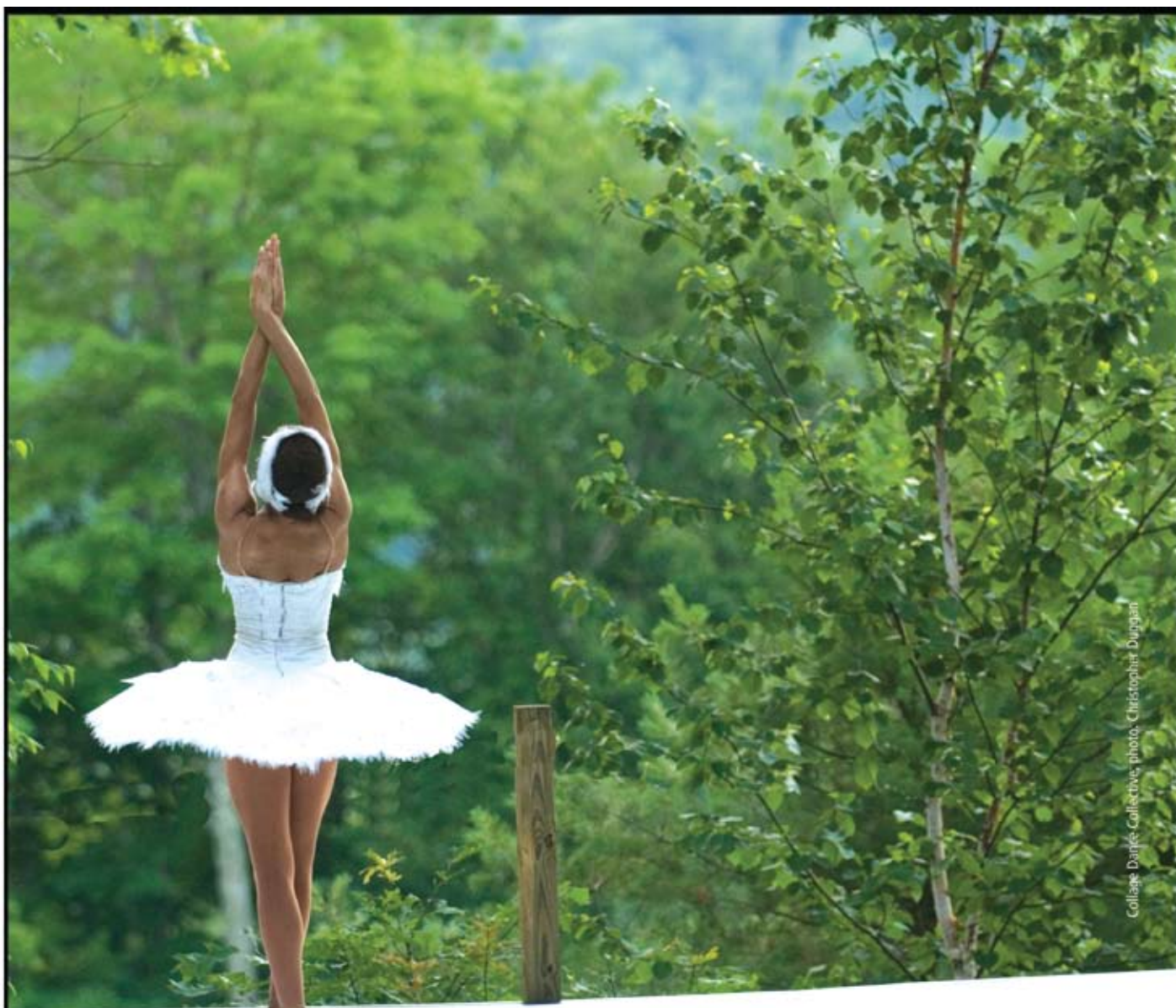
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