

Streams

No. 47 Winter/Spring 2014 A Newsletter of Crystal Spring Center for Earth Literacy

A Roof, Russets, and Rising Seas

Autumn's bared branches opened a broad sweeping view of our landscape. Anyone approaching from George Street onto Everett Skinner is sure to note, particularly if s/he had observed a mix-match of patch work repair in the past, that Crystal Spring has a new roof. Three layers of shingles had to be removed before the original hand cut wooden ones painted a dark green and nailed down with hand crafted wooded nails, was exposed. The zig and zag of the rotted under boards identified the original homestead before a kitchen was added on one side and a parlor on the other. A century of cultural changes told in the debris in the plastic tarps lying around the house.

One morning I stopped into the Red Tomato offices to check that the hammering in replacing sections of siding had not disturbed or damaged anything. Early morning sunlight shone on a woven basket sitting in the center of a small conference table. The basket was filled with cards, cards of an ilk that stirred a fond memory, holy cards. Like hand cut shingles, holy cards were once a common artifact in so many of our homes. The cards had lovely painted pictures of a saint and on the back was a story that folded in what the person had offered to the world to merit canonization.

The cards piled in the basket also had stories. Each narrative recounted the history of an heirloom apple. Reading each story was like reading a prayer on the back of a holy card. The heart stirred and longed for relationship.

There were stories about russets. The Golden Russet is considered to have the best flavor of all American russet apples. It's still popular today and its aromatic flesh produces high quality juice which is used for cider production. The Red Russet originated in Roxbury, Massachusetts in the early sixteen hundreds and it's thought to be the first named American apple variety. The russets are famous not only for cider but also for desserts. They ripen late in the fall and keep in storage until spring. These slightly rough, yellow-brown, skinned apples are part of New England's commercial history since the 19th century.

Boston has just engaged in a mayoral race which caught national attention. In his effort to support the newly elected mayor, the outgoing mayor stated one reason that might slow economic growth in the city. He noted that the current reports of rising sea levels could impede financial development from the imposed building restrictions on new properties on

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the waterfront. The mayor's primary emphasis was definitely on the financial gains, or loss thereof, with not a nod to the notion that sea levels are rising.

We have arrived once again to the season of the long night. Across cultures, Festivals of Light are reenacted, candelabras lit, stars placed atop evergreens, ritual fires set ablaze on the hillside. Engulfed in darkness the human heart ever stirs with a spirit of hope and a gladness of love. Yet, it's within the darkness of our time, rising sea levels and global warming, that our familial stories must encounter an ancient preface. In the prelude to all our collective tales is the story of the birth of the seas.

Where the human eye once claimed, "We have seen a star in the East," now with the simple turn of a telescope we see millions of stars. And beyond that, though still elusive to our uncomprehending minds, we see billions of galaxies. The story of the ash shingle and the russet apple began a long time ago, more than five billion years ago. In our Milky Way galaxy a giant star exploded. The reverberations, the wave of debris, soaring through the darkness of space encountered a hovering possibility in a gaseous cloud that had floated unperturbed for a very long time. The density of the debris ushered in our Sun with its solar system. Many the roiling eons, darkened phases, ice eras before the rhythms of atmosphere and oceans made relationship with a living land. Today all higher forms of life are dependent on that relationship, the balanced cycles of oxygen and carbon dioxide. No wonder the human heart ever stirs and swells in the presence of intimacy.

Thomas Berry is claimed to be one of the

greatest thinkers of the 20th century. He was drawn to the stories that emerged from people's cultures, as those cultures took root in Earth's bioregions. He wrote that our time requires a new spirituality. He said that we can no longer identify the guiding person of our society primarily as the saint or sage, the prophet or priest, the guru or monk, the philosopher or even the modern scientist. He owned that each of these types and their teachings are immensely important in their own field of functioning. Yet, he said, none can be considered sufficient guides to the human process in its rapport with the natural systems of the planet in these times with our new understanding of the universe, of Earth, how they came to be, and the sequences of transformations through which they pass.

In the lore of this place, one of the tales that is often recalled is the decades of the 1920 and 1930's when a retired sea captain lived here. No doubt the income from his sailing days allowed him to add on the kitchen and the visitors' parlor. An old newspaper reports his 1600 peach and apple trees were things of beauty in all seasons.

Just shy of a century another flourishing is underway. Red Tomato offices are now well established in our two classroom addition. Red Tomato is a dual purpose non-profit organization. They market sustainable grown fruits and vegetables in the Northeast, and they consult on regional food development across the country. Their mission goes far beyond buying from farmers and selling to the major suppliers in this region. They work with farmers, scientists, and other non-profits to build a food system based on ecological practices,

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fair treatment of farmers and workers, and strong regional networks that connect the farmer with the “consumer”.

When autumn weather ends vegetable production, the crisp fall New England weather is perfect for apple growing. This region has a long history of flourishing orchards, all the way back to the 17th century! The intermixing of species introduced over decades has had a disastrous effect on fruit trees. An effort is underway to restore orchards in the northeast. With the support of innovative scientists, eco apples are grown on family farms by farmers choosing natural methods and minimum spraying so that their very commercial agricultural enterprise will also steward the land and water and wildlife. Look for Eco-Apple bags at your market. They're filled with familiar standard and heirloom varieties that have been grown, savored, and passed down for generations. You'll learn their story in the tasting!

It's Red Tomato's constancy and discipline of strengthening relationship and forging new partnerships that guides northeast farmers to a sustainable regional food system. It's the gradation of the landscape that flows down from the oldest mountain range that offers the perfect aeration for orchards.

In a report to the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems the author wrote that Red Tomato's move to Plainville, MA should increase their effectiveness. The new headquarters is located with Crystal Spring, a center for leaning our place in the universe story and for coming home to our bioregion. No wonder when I picked up the card from the basket with the story of the heirloom and read the fine print at the bottom of the card – 76 Everett Skinner Road – my eyes well up. We are part of something so much bigger than ourselves.

Spring's light and warmth will coax budding; blossoms will appear. Incredible beauty will surrender to intimate relations ~ to wind and water, to sun and insect. In the fullness of the seasons, Apples will be plucked and consumed. In offering oneself in relationship, everything becomes what it is meant to be. It is the demand of the universe. There's a sense of terror in this, but it is the given in our sacred story. The ecological person will be the one who guides the human family into a new intimacy with the natural systems and the beings who inhabit this Earth. The fullness of those relationships even now dares to enter our imagination. *Deep the Love that calls us on.*

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Dear Friends of Crystal Spring,

At this time of year, as we open to the message of aspiration and love, promise and generosity, I invite you to consider a contribution to Crystal Spring. Over the past years, Crystal Spring and the Dominican Sisters have been dedicated to seeking the path to learn our place in the Universe Story that all our programs and projects might foster a healing human-earth relationship. As we participate in this transition period, we recall our history that we might enter fully the transformation that with guide us to a vibrant and engaged future. With your help and accompaniment, we continue to move forward.

With Holiday Best Wishes,
Sue Chamberlain,
Chair, Board of Directors, Crystal Spring

Winter - Spring 2014 Calendar

Winter's Bite

Tuesdays, January 14 through March 11

9:30 – 11:00am

Ages 5 – 12 are welcome

Cost \$50

Snow cones with maple syrup are not all we mammals eat in winter. Some of us chomp on branches, some of us eat each other...and come to think of it...we all use our jaws and teeth as tools. Gotta be a story about how this came to be!!!!

Join us to discover differences among tooth marks, tracks and even mammal scat to clue us in about the favorite foods of local mammals like deer, squirrels and coyotes. We'll explore animal skulls too. How about this? Let's make up a game of "Mammals and Mouths" using things around the house to show how mammals became fit to eat in "communion", creating the web of life. There's a story in every bite!!

For more information, email Barb at barbarahop@comcast.net

Green Reel Film Series

All Films Shown

6:30pm, Sunday evenings

At Congregation Agudas Achim

901 N. Main Street, Attleboro

Rt 95 – Exit 5

Rt 152 and Toner Blvd

January 5	A Fierce Green Fire
January 12	Cape Spin
January 26	Money & Life
February 9	Eating Alabama
February 16	Mother Caring for 7 Billion

Free and opened to the public. Discussion follows film. For more info: 508-298-9450

Sponsors: Congregation Agudas Achim, Crystal Spring, Footworks, Murray UU Church, Progressive Asset Management, Mercy Ecology Center, Woodforms, Wrentham Food Coop