

## PEOPLE SHAPED BY SOIL



### Vermont Farm Women

Peter Miller  
2002; 135 pp. \$34.95  
Silver Print Press

*Their skin is tan and leathery, their clear eyes edged with wrinkles earned during years of working outside in sunshine, rain, and snow. They are the powerful women who farm the land in one of the most beautiful areas of America—the state of Vermont.*

*For many, the classic image of a farmer is a man in overalls on a tractor. Not so here. In Peter Miller's book, large black-and-white*

*photographs illuminate the hardy spirits of forty women who make a living by working the land, while the narrative reveals their unique stories. It is both a celebration of their victories (winning legal battles, surviving despite poor soil, lack of funds, threats of development), and a mourning of their losses (accidental deaths, manic depression, unexpected illness).*

*The types of farms run the gamut—dairy, vegetable, herb, maple sugar, Christmas tree, horse, and sheep. There is even an emu farmer! The women come from all walks of life; some took over the family farm, while others came from cities out of curiosity and never went back.*

*After I put the book down, my desk and computer suddenly felt small and insignificant. I could smell the vast fields of Vermont and see the curtain of green mountains framing the silhouettes of these women farmers. What a treat to read a book that honors them.*

—EP

**“**I am more of a farm wife than a farmer's wife because I am married as much to the farm as I am to Mike. If something ever happened to Mike, I would want to continue farming. I guess cow shit just flows in my veins. I love to be outdoors. I like physical work. I like animals. I like to incorporate the physical and mental work as much as I can. Being self-employed is very important to me.  
—BARBARA EASTMAN, EASTMAN FARM



Above: Anne Burke, dairy farmer, Harvest Hill Farm (pictured below).

Right: Amy Pomeroy, dairy farmer and cheese maker, Pomeroy Farm.



**Stone by Stone**  
**The Magnificent History**  
**in New England's Stone Walls**

Robert M. Thorson  
 2002; 287 pp. \$26  
 Walker & Company

*The author delves deeply into the natural history of stone walls' stone—how it emerged through the slow deforestation of the New England hills and was eventually transformed into practical walls. He debunks every myth we have about these walls, including the idea that they are intrinsic to the history of New England pioneering.*

*In fact, the walls were built over many generations, beginning with initial clearing piles made by farmers tilling and deforesting their lands. Laborers hired in the early 1800s turned "tossed walls" into "double walls" that could be used as practical ways to pen in livestock and mark property boundaries. They are now, like English hedgerows, an essential habitat for numerous critters, as well as the foundation for continued geological study.*

—SGS

“ Stone walls are now an important part of the ecological fabric of New England. They are not an alien rocky intrusion into otherwise pristine woodland; natural stone ledges have always been present....Besides, the concept of pristine woodland is in error.

“ Colonial farmers knew practically nothing about why and how rocks formed deep within the Earth or how frost heave and other natural processes brought them to the surface. In fact, most farmers blamed the devil for the fieldstones of New England, which appeared as if by black magic in seventeenth and eighteenth century fields....

Henry David Thoreau said in what is arguably his most famous quote, "In wildness is the preservation of the world." Thoreau did not use the word "wilderness," a geographic place untouched by human hand, but "wildness," which connotes a condition in which nature has the winning hand. It is here in this semantic gulf between the two words "wildness" and "wilderness," that stone walls become especially evocative.

**Yankee Moderns**  
**Folk Regional Identity in the Sawmill**  
**Valley of Western Massachusetts,**  
**1890– 1920**

Michael Hoberman  
 2002; 162 pp. \$32  
 University of Tennessee Press

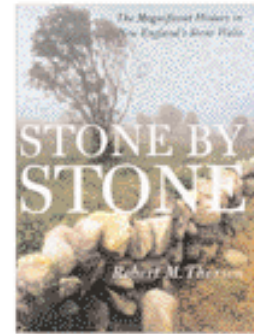
*Michael Hoberman has spent years researching what constitutes the essence of the New Englander. This book results from years of conversations with "old timers" in the Sawmill River Valley of Western Massachusetts. His fascination and respect for the older residents in his study is readily apparent in his affectionate descriptions.*

*Hoberman explores what it means, in this transitory human landscape, to be "from" a place. How is a regional identity formed? What is the collective process involved? In the case of the Sawmill Valley residents, he illustrates how they assimilate into a common identity and deliberately relinquish their own ethnic heritages during the process of joint enterprise and common experience.*

*Yankee Moderns is as much a story of how the New England soil shaped the people who moved onto it as Stone by Stone is the story of the people shaping the land. Both reflect deeply on the stones of that soil, and—especially in Yankee Moderns—what it means to choose to live among them.*

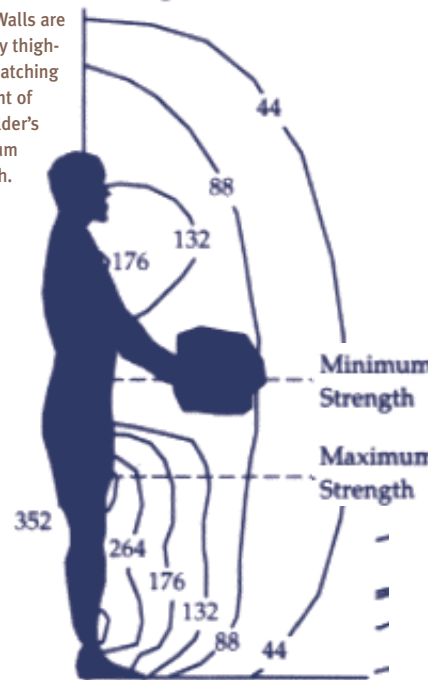
—SGS

“ Indeed, for all the tormenting they received at the hands of local children, town eccentrics like Fred Cole, Clestin Torrey, and Dave Nichols often were viewed by their neighbors as integral members of their respective villages. In the days before large-scale institutionalization of the mentally handicapped became common in rural areas like Sawmill Valley, local pride had a good deal to do with the locals' self-proclaimed ability to take care of their own. In the Sawmill Valley, the existence of eccentric characters helped local residents to cultivate a sense of themselves as autonomous. The fact that the valley supported its town eccentrics enabled locals to keep outside incursions to a minimum.



**Lifting Strength of**  
**Strong Male (Pounds)**

Right: Walls are typically thigh-high, matching the point of the builder's maximum strength.



STONE BY STONE

