

# The Other Hopkinton

▼ Photo by Nicholas Coates.

**My wife Sarah is an archaeologist.** I am a newspaper reporter. We both rake through dirt to find truth.

As a reporter, I write about history as it happens. As an archaeologist, Sarah rewrites the history my profession gets wrong. She specializes in deciphering the meaning of migratory patterns of New England farmers from their farmsteads. I specialize in deciphering the meaning of zoning variances that are eroding the character of New England's historic lands and structures.

We live in Hopkinton, New Hampshire. Yes, there's a Hopkinton, *New Hampshire*, too, as I constantly explain to people south of "Live Free or Die" country. But they are related: In 1735, Colonial Governor Jonathan Belcher granted the land to transplants from the town in Massachusetts. I can hear the old codger down our dirt road cackling now: "Some things never change!"

I commute 149 miles roundtrip to and from Boston everyday. When I clear through the seemingly endless traffic and find my oasis (our exit), I happily drive unencumbered through town, especially on late winter afternoons.

On one such afternoon, I puttered along the straight and narrow road to absorb a row of homes I normally take for granted — sturdy blizzard-beaten Greek Revivals and Georgian Colonials that snake outward with each successive generation. They abut the refurbished Stanley Tavern, an 18th-century cream-colored pour house from which I fully expect Samuel Adams to stumble out. Four furlongs down the road sits the requisite white Congregational church, built in 1789, with its Revere bell. It gongs at 9:57 every Sunday morning for the 10 o'clock service.

Downtown reminds Sarah of pastoral Currier & Ives lithographs from the 19th century. In short, Hopkinton is her



archaeological world alive. I love Hopkinton because I am reminded of my hometown before the subdivisions and their finely-manicured lawns took over. Hopkinton is my childhood world alive.

Just past the church is the turn for our road. We live in a brick-red, one-room schoolhouse with its original pine floors and black cast-iron wood stove. If you go into our "junk" closet and peek through a semi-hidden doorway, you will find an old slate chalkboard still hanging on a wall. We look out our drafty kitchen window and see a stone-walled cellar hole about 25 yards long where, Sarah estimates, a stoic barn once stood. Snow covers wood piles from a recently felled tree and they look like inverted candy corns with puffy, white tops.

Our neighbor's mailbox says, "The Old Parsonage." Sarah thought it was a ruse from the beginning. It's a vestry, she said. One lazy autumn afternoon, we scoured the Henniker Book Farm — a used-book shop in a dusty post-and-beam barn — and found a musty copy of the Hopkinton town history with a map from 1892. She won that round of "I told you so."

I did similar research to learn about our sister town in Massachusetts.

That Hopkinton sounds similar to our

town, still clinging tightly to a rural image. Like our Hopkinton, it has two properties on the National Register of Historic Places. Like our Hopkinton, it caught the interest of interstate highway planners and is an easy commute to city centers. But our city center is Concord, and our interstate is Route 89.

That Hopkinton is best known as the start of the Boston Marathon, arguably the world's most grueling road race. I took up running a few years ago after my team-sports playing days ended. I slog through a five-mile run around the streets of my town and have to force myself up one daunting hill near the end of my route. The hill peaks at the site of a historic garrison house. On April 27, 1747, natives raided the house and took seven people as prisoners.

Every time I run that route, I stop to catch my breath there. I look around and see historic farmsteads of pastel yellow and blue and am in awe of the horses running in a wide-open field.

I wonder what the papers will write when suburbia reaches our Hopkinton. I think I will ask Sarah what she thinks. ■

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