

TRAVEL TALK- THE FELLS

BY CHASE BINDER



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Bud and I love exploring exotic places. The thrill of visiting an elephant sanctuary in Burma; the drama of a leopard snoozing on a sturdy overhead limb in South Africa; the other-worldliness of riding a camel at the base of Egypt's Pyramids!

But while the world beyond New Hampshire's borders is full of adventure and the anticipation of the unknown, every so often we stumble upon a destination right here in our home state that delights us and even inspires us to dip our toes into new areas of interest. This happened a couple of weeks ago when we were invited to visit The Fells in nearby Newbury to hear our friend and much-acclaimed poet, Daniel Thomas Moran of Webster, read some of his works.

I won't say that such an evening was outside of our comfort zone... well, at least not very far outside. We've enjoyed hearing Mozart perform in a small church in Prague and spent hours in Jane Austen's homestead in the English countryside. The same, sort of. But we'd only heard the name "The Fells" a few times, and certainly had no idea of what—or even exactly where—it was. Even so, the late afternoon sunlight was warm and dreamy. We'd read and enjoyed Dan's latest collection of poems "A Shed for Wood." Off we went!

Our first surprise was sheer loveliness of The Fells estate and grounds. It's not evident from the understated Gatehouse on Newbury's Route 103A, but the setting

of the Main House is classic and pure New Hampshire turn-of-the-century lakeside bliss. The gardens are, well, perfectly situated among the rock walls, tall trees and gentle meadows. The house itself seems just right—not too big, not too small. Here and there a sculpture invites contemplation. The lawns bring to mind ladies in white dresses playing croquet while frock-coated gentlemen smile and sip brandy.

Even better, the Fells is one of those rare (nowadays, anyway) historical estates that seems well-cared for and restored in an authentic and respectful manner. We were greeted by an enthusiastic volunteer, who immediately began explaining the estate's provenance. The Fells, meaning rocky upland pastures in Scottish, came to be when American statesman John Milton Hay began buying Newbury farms in 1888. Hay accumulated almost 1000 acres and built a summer house overlooking Lake Sunapee, moving in in 1891.

Hay, it turns out, was an interesting fellow. Getting his start working on Abraham Lincoln's presidential campaign, he served as private secretary and assistant to President Lincoln in the White House. He was at Lincoln's death bed and later co-wrote with John George Nicolay a defining biography of Lincoln. Later, he served as Ambassador to the United Kingdom and then as Secretary of State under President McKinley—and remained Secretary of State under President Teddy Roosevelt. Notably, he negotiated the treaties that cleared the way for the Panama Canal.

And all the while he wrote poetry, biography and other literature. Imagine a man like that in today's political world! Hay died at the Fells in 1905, and in 1906 his son Clarence took over and began expanding the gardens and renovating the property—a process he continued well into the 1930's. Today the estate is owned, maintained and managed by The Fells nonprofit and local volunteers.

The Main House is full of art, history and the ambiance of the age. The Fells is not content to be a static museum, though. Throughout the late spring, summer and early



Photo courtesy of the Fells

fall there are educational programs focusing on history, horticulture and ecology as well as art and literature—for example, the evening of Daniel Thomas Moran's poetry that Bud and I attended. The setting was the expansive Veranda—perfect for wine and nibbles, greeting some old friends, meeting some new ones, and, above all, getting a glimpse of a world that lay just beyond our fields of vision.

But wait, there's more! In addition to the house, gardens and grounds, The Fells also has extensive walking paths. One goes to a Fairy Village where children of all ages are invited to build woodland creations, another passes by a state-ly maple planted by Theodore Roosevelt in 1902. Yet another hugs the

shore of Lake Sunapee.

Programs and events continue through November—why not take the kids or grandkids to Hay Day Family Day on Sunday August 21, or gather some gal pals for Ladies Night on Wednesday November 9th? For more info and details, including the noted Christmas at The Fells, or even how to reserve the estate for your own wedding or other special event, visit TheFells.org. If I've piqued your interest in Daniel Thomas Moran poetry, "A Shed for Wood" and several of this other books can be found at amazon.com. Even better is to shop local and go to Gibson's Book Store at 45 South Main Street in Concord. gibsons-bookstore.com

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