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**Interpreting the Place Space of an Extinct Cultural Landscape:
the Swift River Valley of Central Massachusetts**

By

Delphis F. Levia, Jr. and Mark J. Bashour

The study of cultural and historical geography encompasses a wide array of subject matter, including the historical reconstruction of the geography of a place, the investigation of the changing geography of a place in the past, and individual and collective understandings and interpretations of past experiential space. As such, cultural and historical geography are intimately connected with the field of environmental perception. Although geographers have studied environmental perception for over half a century, especially the perception of flood and drought hazards, relatively few geographers have examined experiential space and the corresponding sense of place historically.¹

Humanistic geographers, such as Yi-Fu Tuan and David Lowenthal, and writers such as Wallace Stegner, have studied the concept of the intimate experience with place.² Tuan argued that the meaning of a place

¹ Perception of flood and drought hazards have been studied extensively by geographers. The foremost works in hazard perception were conducted at the University of Chicago.

² Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); David Lowenthal, "Geography, Experience, and Imagination: Towards a Geographical Epistemology," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 51 (1961), 241-260. This seminal article examines the factors that determine our perception of sense of place. Wallace Stegner, *Wolf Willow: A History, a Story, and a Memory of the Last*

is the result of an individual's history with the place and that sense of place is evoked initially from visual experience but more intimately with the senses of touch, taste, and smell.³ Touch, taste, and smell require a higher level of identification and experience with place than the visual and are usually only realized through prolonged interaction.⁴ More recently, Edmunds Bunkše has related sense of place to the notion of geographic sensibility, which invokes the use of our senses, emotions, and intellect in perceiving and interacting with our surroundings.⁵ He defined geographic sensibility as "knowing how to be in a place and how to find one's way about in geographic space."⁶ Sense of place is also dependent on culture, life experience, and the extent to which one is connected with the land.⁷ It should be clear that the sense of place of a particular locality experienced by a person is highly individualistic. Further, the sense of place perceived by a person also should be distinguished from the sense of place embodied by the landscape.

In a seminal piece on landscape and the human psyche, Simon Schama has argued that landscapes can be designed to convey particular political or social orientations of a community that elicit a certain sense of place.⁸ As a product of our intellect and culture, the sense of place engendered by a landscape will typically differ among individuals. Landscapes of a particular place may also be utilized as a time-line that reflects the history of the people inhabiting that place because, as argued by Tuan and Dean, it is the history that one has with a place that forges

Plains Frontier (New York: Penguin, 1990). Stegner analyzes how experience with a place and one's senses manifest themselves in sense of place.

³ Yi-Fu Tuan, "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," *Progress in Geography* 6 (1974), 211-252; Stegner, 220-238.

⁴ Barbara Dean, *Hunting a Christmas Tree, Finding Home* ed. P. Sauer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 262-277.

⁵ Edmund Bunkše, *Geography and the Art of Life* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷ Lowenthal, 251-254; Bunkše, 14.

⁸ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1995), 15.

its character.⁹ As such, it should be obvious that the historical dimension is a critical factor in the understanding and interpretation of sense of place.

The cultural and historical geography and sense of place embodied by the landscape and experienced by those who lived in the Swift River Valley of central Massachusetts (Figure 1) will be examined during the period of 1820-1940. This historical period coincides with the transformation of the valley from four rural New England towns to a massive reservoir. The cultural and historical geography of the Swift River Valley in the pre-Quabbin Reservoir period has not been explored thoroughly. Since many Swift River Valley inhabitants are now in their eighties, it is vital to record their perceptions, understandings, and interpretations of these small towns to preserve the character and historical integrity of the Valley. Thus, the aim of this manuscript is to examine the historical and cultural geography of the Swift River Valley during the years of 1820-1940, before the construction of the Quabbin Reservoir. What was the sense of place in the towns of Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott and their associated villages? This is an important question since, as argued by Kent Ryden, history, landscape, and sense of place tends to change significantly across boundaries and borders.¹⁰

By 1895, Boston's insatiable appetite for water had outstripped its supply. Lake Cochituate Reservoir, located just west of Boston, proved inadequate to meet the growing water demands of Boston.¹¹ The Metropolitan Water District Committee then decided to purchase land further west in the towns of Clinton, Sterling, Boylston, and West Boylston. This project culminated in the construction and completion of the Wachusett Reservoir in 1908.¹² Owing to the escalating water

⁹ Tuan, "Space and Place," 214, 235; Dean, 262-277; Schama, 5.

¹⁰ Kent Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 1.

¹¹ J. R. Greene, *An Atlas of the Quabbin Valley: Past and Present* (Athol, MA: Transcript Press, 1975), 4.

¹² Greene, 4.

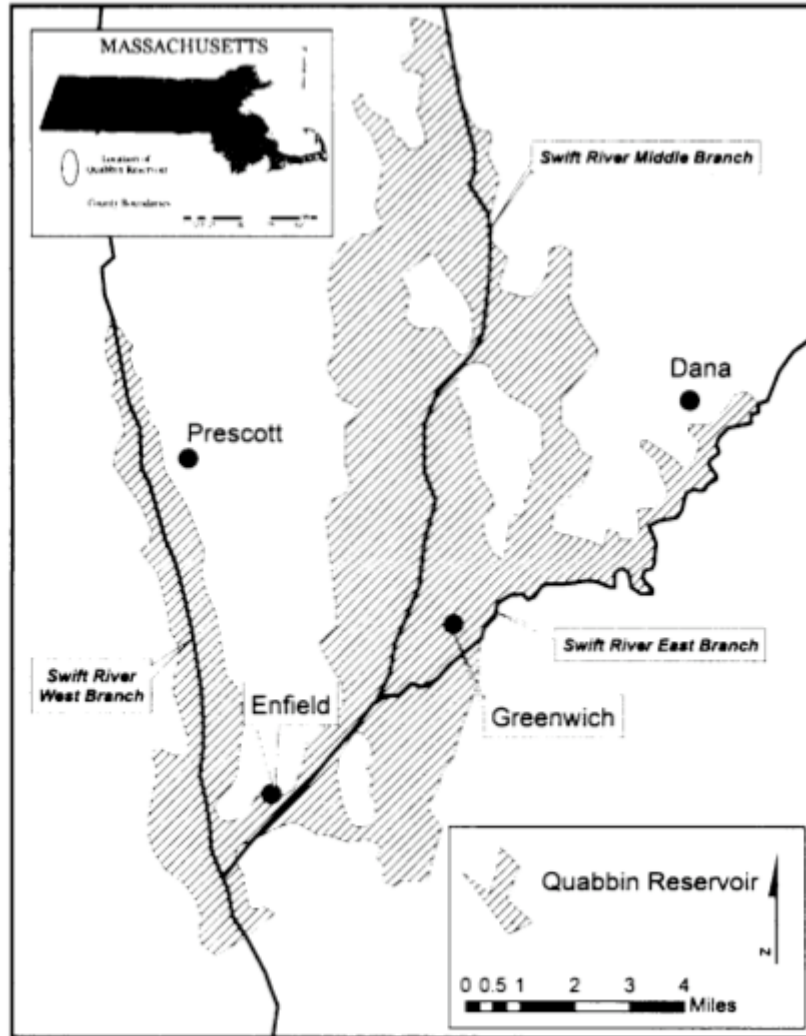


Figure 1.

demands of Boston, the Wachusett Reservoir only proved adequate for a decade.

Facing a water shortage, the State Board of Health and the Metropolitan Water and Sewer Board began a study which concluded that water should be piped into the Wachusett Reservoir from the Ware River via an aqueduct.¹³ Another study conducted in 1924 determined that a reservoir should be built in the Swift River Valley, approximately 30 miles west of the Wachusett Reservoir and 70 miles west of Boston.¹⁴

The Ware River Act of 1926, combined with the Swift River Act of 1927, legislated the communities of the Swift River Valley out of existence in order to meet Boston's water demands through the construction of the Quabbin Reservoir.¹⁵ The land acquisition process began in 1927 and culminated on April 28, 1938, when Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott ceased to exist and were completely annexed by the Commonwealth.¹⁶ After deforesting the Valley, removing cemeteries and buildings, flooding began on August 14, 1939, and was completed in 1946. With the completion of the project, the experiential space of the former Swift River Valley became history. Figure 2 of this article depicts the present day reservoir system that supplies Boston and the metropolitan area with potable water.

To better understand the historical experiential space of the Swift River Valley before submergence the following were conducted: (1) a review of the existing local literature on pre-Quabbin life, culture, and geography of the valley; and (2) interviews with selected individuals. Because there are very few people alive that are old enough to have experienced and who remember life in the Swift River Valley, its sense

¹³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Donald W. Howe, *Quabbin: The Lost Valley* (Ware, MA: Davis Press, 1951), 36. This book is a compendium on life in the Swift River Valley. The sense of place of the four towns of the Swift River Valley is evident in this text from discussions on town industries, culture, traditions, and a wide selection of photographs depicting the buildings and people of Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott.

¹⁶ J. Russell, *A Place Called Quabbin* (Monson, MA: Blatchley's Printers, 1987), 23.

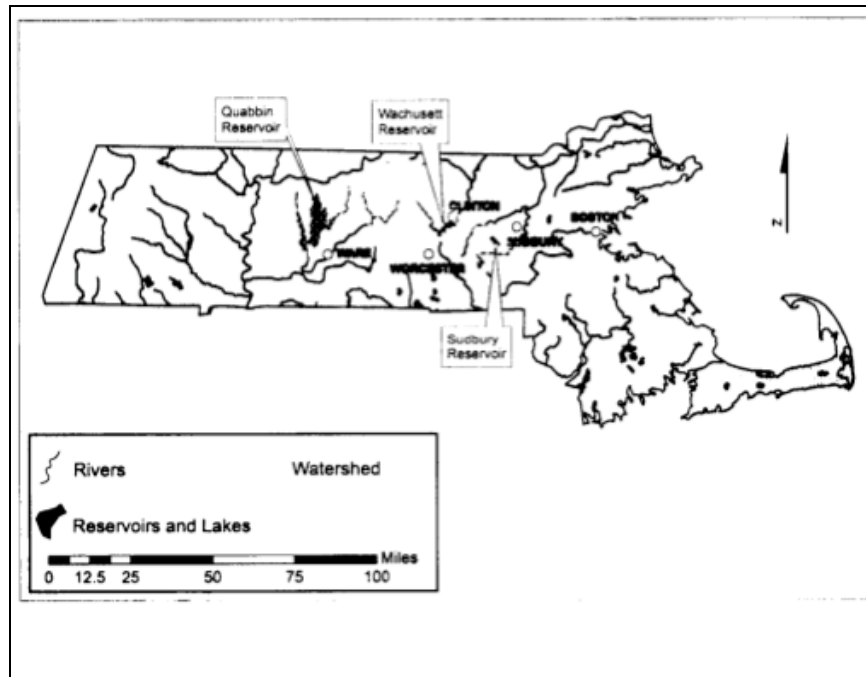


Figure 2.

of place (embodied by the landscape and experienced by its inhabitants) has been partly obtained through the available literature. Results from the interviews are integrated within the results of the past sense of place of the four towns to clarify, supplement, and strengthen the literature review.

The requisite conditions for interview or focus group participation were: residence in one of the former towns of the Swift River Valley; and memory of their experience living in one or more of the four towns. Semi-standardized interviews were conducted in person and in a group setting utilizing a questionnaire to achieve a more thorough and personal understanding of the sense of place of Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott before they were flooded.¹⁷ The objectives of the questionnaire were to have respondents characterize the sense of place they experienced in the town where they resided; describe any traditions within the town; describe an ordinary day within the town; and give insight into civic interactions. The semi-standardized interview involved the employment of a set of prepared questions asked in a systematic order for each interviewee, followed by an unscheduled probing beyond the answers given to the predetermined questions.¹⁸ Follow-up questions (probes) allowed the interviewer to approach and better understand the world from the interviewee's perspective.¹⁹ The semi-standardized interview was chosen because it gave the interviewer the freedom to explore the historical geography of the Swift River Valley on a deeper, more personal level via the application of unscheduled probes, giving insights into the subject's perception of the sense of place of their former town. Patton has found that the use of probing in semi-standardized interviews is particularly useful for increasing the richness of data obtained, thus increasing the probability of capturing the true sense of place experienced by the residents or embodied by the landscape and historical character of the Swift River Valley.²⁰ Two semi-standardized

¹⁷ Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001), 70-72.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ M. Q. Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Press, 1980), 238-240.

interviews were conducted individually on March 12, 1994. A focus group session consisting of six former inhabitants of the Swift River Valley provided the setting for the semi-standardized interview on February 19, 2002. The two individuals selected for semi-standardized interviews were chosen in an early phase of the study, preceding the focus group session, as a result of their accessibility to the authors. The volunteer participants of the focus group were members of Friends of Quabbin, a group composed of people who inhabited the Swift River Valley in the pre-Quabbin era. Berg argued that focus groups are an excellent way to collect data from elderly adults since the group atmosphere allows freedom of expression about attitudes and opinions.²¹

Responses to interview questions from the semi-standardized and focus group sessions were transcribed into text and categorized by town. The assembled data were then analyzed using content analysis.²² Themes were the content unit of analysis utilized to examine interviewee responses in this study. An inductive approach was employed whereby themes were developed based on responses to prepared and probed questions on the basis of the tone and terminology of a response. For instance, terms such as “sharing” and “get-togethers” in a response would signify a theme of community. Themes were categorized by town. The themes gleaned from analysis of the responses were utilized to formulate the sense of place experienced by the inhabitants of each town, the first of which to be discussed will be Dana.

Incorporated on February 18, 1801 and named after Judge Francis Dana, Dana was formed from sections of Greenwich, Hardwick, and Petersham.²³ The villages of North Dana, Doubleday Village, Dana Center, and Storrsville collectively formed Dana.²⁴ Dana tended to be

²¹ Berg, 111.

²² *Ibid.*, 238-264.

²³ Evalina Gustafson, *Ghost Towns 'Neath Quabbin Reservoir* (Boston: Amity Ambrose Press, 1940), 89. Published shortly after the flooding of the Swift River Valley was completed, Evalina Gustafson's rare text on the Swift River Valley is unique because of its descriptive nature of the four towns and the extent to which she considers the heart-breaking experience of those who had to move from their beloved homes; Howe, 379.

²⁴ Greene, 6.

agricultural while North Dana was the site of the town's industry. Two minerals extracted from Dana's mines were potash and soapstone.²⁵ The logging industry was also important to the town's economy.²⁶ Rye was an important agricultural crop cultivated by Dana farmers.²⁷ The town hosted several factories that manufactured hats, table legs, boxes, and pocketbooks in North Dana.²⁸ Four Protestant congregations and a Roman Catholic church flourished within the town.²⁹ After forty years of growth, the town began its decline in the mid-1800s with the rise of the railroad.³⁰ Stiff competition in the agricultural sector from the Midwest and a lack of access to the railroads, which bypassed the Valley, and very limited access to electricity were reasons that people began to emigrate from Dana around 1860 (Figure 3). With the exodus of a critical mass of the town's population, Dana was unable to sustain commercial activity.

Dana possessed a particular sense of place. An interviewee and Evelina Gustafson felt that Pottapaug Pond was a natural feature that captured Dana's sense of place.³¹ Sunset over Pottapaug Pond was an attractive sight indicative of the town's physical pulchritude. Gustafson argued that the clear waters of the pond were reflective of the purity of the Valley.³² Pottapaug Pond, nestled in the hills of southern Dana, functioned, not only as a recreational center, but also as a wildlife

²⁵ J. R. Greene, *The Creation of Quabbin Reservoir: The Death of the Swift River Valley* (Athol, MA: Transcript Press, 1981), 4.

²⁶ The sense of place of Dana acquired from a semi-standardized interview with a former resident conducted in March, 1994. The insights of experiential space in Dana obtained by probing during the interview were not available from other sources. Cited hereafter as "Dana resident interview."

²⁷ Gustafson, 90.

²⁸ Howe, 382-383.

²⁹ Greene, *Creation*, 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

³¹ Dana resident interview. Gustafson, 91.

³² Gustafson, 91.

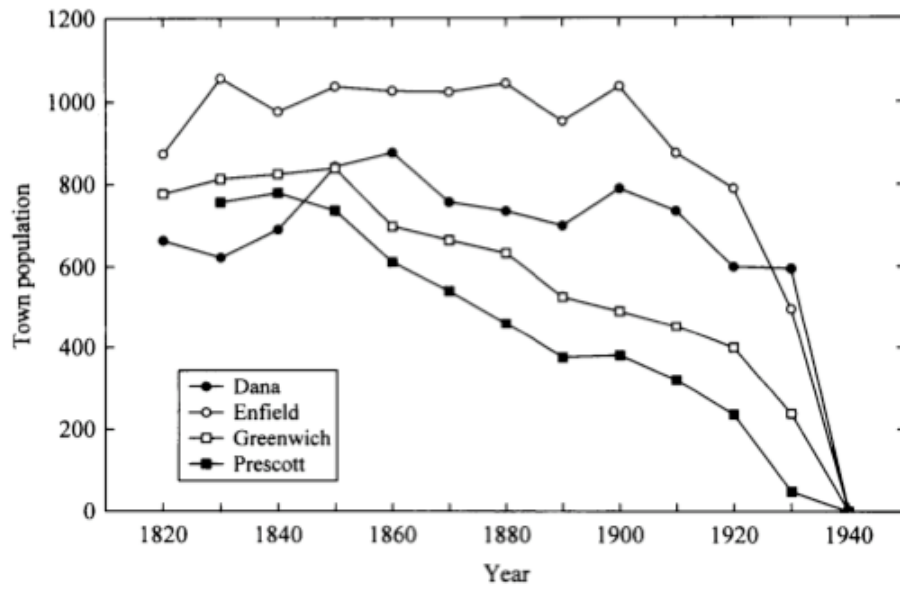


Figure 3.

preserve. The sense of place embodied by Pottapaug Pond was one of relaxation and leisure. Gustafson also contended that strolling on “Hell Huddle,” the road that circled Pottapaug Pond, one could observe and sense the spirit of Dana. Similar to the rest of the Valley, small, antiquated houses peppered “Hell Huddle.”³³ Locally designed ranch style homes generally had centrally located chimneys and were painted white. The modest style of the homes on “Hell Huddle” and in Dana may have been a reflection of the practicality and humility of its citizens.

An interview with one of its former citizens reflects the humility of everyday life in Dana and the ingenuity of its citizens. Since the lamp oil canisters that were used to transport oil from Hager’s General Store to one’s home did not have lids, it was customary, in accordance with conventional wisdom, to cover the oil canisters with pig potatoes to prevent leakage. Pig potatoes were approximately the size of sand dollars and were found to function nicely as canister lids. The interview also revealed that the geographic scope of one’s everyday life was local and that, in absolute terms, celebrations were not extravagant (especially by present day standards). “As a child, I can remember going to Harvey’s Inn for ice cream on special occasions. I also bought my Valentines there. When my parents paid their grocery bill in full every month, I got a free lollipop from the store named Hager’s General Store.”³⁴

Two themes that emerged from two former citizens of Dana during the focus group session were the local scale of life in Dana and the strong sense of community.³⁵ The local scale of life was also echoed by the citizen of Dana in the previous paragraph. The two past residents of Dana fondly recalled picking blueberries, fishing in nearby ponds, and sledding on most Thanksgiving Days, since snow was usually on the

³³ Ibid., 91-92.

³⁴ Dana resident interview.

³⁵ Results from the content analysis obtained from the focus group conducted in February 2002. Three of the focus group interviewees were former residents of Greenwich and two former residents of Dana. The other interviewee lived for a considerable time in both Greenwich and Prescott. Once again, the historical interpretation of sense of place conveyed by these people during the focus group interviewing process were not available elsewhere. Cited hereafter as “Focus group session.”

ground in mid-November. "Everyone knew everyone else and was always there to lend a hand when needed."³⁶ The stock market crash of 1929 had a deleterious effect on the economic livelihood of many Dana residents. One interviewee recalled that the strong sense of community helped the citizens of Dana weather the Depression.³⁷ In particular, the interviewee said "Those who had large vegetable gardens would share vegetables with older residents -- it was quite a while before the government created the Progressive Works Administration (PWA) which distributed food and provided work."³⁸ The strong sense of communal pride and cohesiveness was also demonstrated during the one hundredth anniversary of Dana in 1901 when the whole town was draped in red, white, and blue bunting.³⁹

North Dana, a cohesive village of Dana, was the location of the town's factories because of its plentiful water power.⁴⁰ The spirit embodied by the landscape of North Dana was characterized by its strong orientation towards business and civic interactions. The village conveyed a "hustle and bustle" atmosphere. Its sense was also captured by the dominance of the church in the center of the village.⁴¹ Viewing photographs of the church, with its plain architecture, one gets a sense of the simplicity of life in North Dana. These were simple people with a hard work ethic, as stated by an interviewee, "we were happy with simple things."⁴² Their lifestyles and the corresponding senses of the place were reflected in their churches and the modest appearance of the mills and factories where they labored and homes where they dwelled.

³⁶ Focus group session.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Gustafson, 81.

⁴¹ J Russell, *Vestiges of the Lost Valley: Buildings and Bells from the Quabbin* (Monson, MA: Blatchley's Printers, 1986), 25.

⁴² Dana resident interview.

In contrast, factory owners lived in Dana, which created a division based on economic status.⁴³

During the historical period in which Dana and its associated villages were growing (1830-1860), the sense of the place felt by the inhabitants was one of simplicity, purity, great pulchritude, and humility.⁴⁴ These attributes could be seen through the architecture, surroundings, and the people of Dana themselves.⁴⁵ However, once the commercial demise of Dana was initiated, the sense of place embodied by the landscape and felt by the local people changed. Gustafson relayed the story of the “spooky” house in North Dana.⁴⁶ She noted that the house was abandoned and stood dilapidated and empty for years. The structure was indicative of the hard times of the village, as mirrored by its great population decline before the advent of the Quabbin (Figure 3). The sense of place epitomized by such a structure in the landscape was loneliness, hopelessness, darkness, and destitution and it parallels the sense of place felt by town residents as construction of the reservoir continued.

Enfield, the most populated town in the Swift River Valley (Figure 3), was likely named after Robert Field, a prominent tailor and leading citizen.⁴⁷ Incorporated on February 15, 1816 from sections of Greenwich and Belchertown, Enfield had two villages: Enfield Center and Upper Village, known as Smith’s Village.⁴⁸ According to Francis Underwood, Puritan outlooks on life dominated Enfield.⁴⁹ Both agriculture and industry were vital to Enfield’s economy.⁵⁰ Since the railroads which

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Gustafson, 82-85.

⁴⁷ Greene, *Atlas*, 9.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁹ F. Underwood, *Quabbin: The story of a Small New England Town with Outlooks on Puritan Life* 1893 (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 187-193.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 194-195.

circumvented the Valley were located closest to Enfield, it was able to maintain its industry longer than the rest of the Swift River Valley.

Quabbin Hill was reputedly one of the most scenic places in Enfield and a place where one could view the entire valley and capture the spirit typified by its landscape. Gustafson mused that, from Quabbin Hill, one can see, “the beautiful Swift River as it meanders through wood and field. The color contrasts of the white churches, the many blue lakes and ponds sparkling like mirrors in the sunlight, the green pastures, the winding white roads, the leafy green of the trees with here and there a red barn dotting the landscape.”⁵¹ On the basis of this quotation and its context, it can be concluded that the complex patchwork of field and forest was an integral part of Enfield’s experiential space because it created a rich mosaic of farm and forest that was a testament to Enfield’s agrarian economy.

Enfield farms evoked a particular sense of place. The first part dealt with farm life in the community. Although Hanks Farm and Blue Meadow Farm were both successful operations, Underwood painted an ugly picture of farm life in Enfield.⁵² He argued that making a living was difficult and that life on most Enfield farms was “pinched and sordid.”⁵³ Many farmers could do little more than read, write, and solve simple arithmetic operations.⁵⁴ It would be fair to categorize life on an average Enfield farm as trying. The sense of place felt by many on Enfield farms was desperation and failure. The agrarian landscape was arguably a reflection of the ruggedness of Enfield’s populous since they toiled in the fields despite the odds against financial gain and security. Additional income was obtained from ice harvesting on many Enfield farms. In fact, thousands of tons of ice were harvested as a communal effort each season in Enfield, more than any other town in the Swift River Valley, and sorted and shared among neighbors and friends.⁵⁵ Although there

⁵¹ Gustafson, 25-26.

⁵² Focus group session; Underwood, 18-26.

⁵³ Underwood, 24.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁵ Focus group session.

was a great demand for ice to be used in ice boxes, the precise value of ice harvested from Enfield is unknown.⁵⁶

Enfield's industrialization created a landscape that embodied a similar sense of place to many of its failed farms. The lack of immediate railroad access in the Swift River Valley drained Enfield's industry. This meant that business opportunities were siphoned to locations along the railroad that were initially attracted to and located in Enfield.⁵⁷ Without access to the railroad and a bleak outlook for agriculture, the mills and factories that ground and processed the local grains flirted with a destiny of failure. Underwood argued that this was the precise combination that sealed Enfield's fate.⁵⁸ The spirit of place embodied by the failing industries was disheartening. The landscape of the town engendered a sense of emptiness and failure that was triggered by the railroad and competition from abroad. The depressed sense of place transmitted by a landscape with failed farms and factories stood in stark contrast to the peacefulness experienced by traversing the Enfield countryside.

Unlike other towns of the Swift River Valley, Greene contended that Enfield had a couple of prostitutes.⁵⁹ Since the activities of Jennie Burton and Nellie Bradley were at odds with the Puritanical ideals of Enfield, they were arrested.⁶⁰ Both were fined ten dollars because of their activities engaged in at the "house of ill fame."⁶¹ The presence of prostitutes in this small, rural New England town was surprising and illustrated the heterogeneity of Enfield's community and the spatial variation of sense of place within a town as a function of human occupation. The literature does not convey the sense of place felt by these two prostitutes or other typically marginalized populations.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Underwood, 194-206.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ J. R. Greene, *Strange Tales from Old Quabbin* (Athol, MA: Highland Press, 1993), 93-94.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Three themes particular to Enfield emerge concerning the sense of place felt by its inhabitants or embodied by the landscape. First, as the most populated town in the Valley, inhabitants perceived that Enfield was more heterogeneous and cosmopolitan than the other towns. The presence of prostitutes is a notable example. Second was the destitute sense of place felt by those living amid the failed industrial landscape since the number of factories shut down was larger than that of any of the other towns. Lastly, a focus group participant stated that “Enfield was unusual in that it was both a farm town and industrial town in about equal proportion,” adding that the other towns were much more rural than industrial. The sense of place embodied by contrasting locations such as Quabbin Hill and the industrial landscape of other parts of town was particular to Enfield.

The next town to be discussed is Greenwich. Originally formed as Narragansett Township #4, Greenwich was not incorporated until April 20, 1754.⁶² The town of Greenwich was later subdivided to form the towns of Dana and Enfield.⁶³ Greenwich was separated into Greenwich Plains and Greenwich Village.⁶⁴ Like Dana and Enfield, Greenwich had its milieu of farming and industry.⁶⁵ Greenwich, according to Howe, had a greater diversity of religions than the rest of the Swift River Valley.⁶⁶ The town even had a sect of Independent Liberals that were more open to science and new ways of viewing the world that were less common among more traditional religions.⁶⁷

Both Greenwich Plains and Greenwich Village embodied a differing sense of place. Greenwich Plains was primarily an agricultural area where traditional grain crops were cultivated.⁶⁸ Interviewees in the focus

⁶² Greene, *Atlas*, 12.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Gustafson, 34-45.

⁶⁵ Howe, 252.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 271-275.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁶⁸ Gustafson, 34-40.

group contended that the plains of Greenwich were a place of great political debate and fiery campaigning between Democrats and Republicans.⁶⁹ They felt that the Plains emitted a sense of democracy, freedom, and agricultural and civic stability.⁷⁰ The bountiful fields of Greenwich Plains and the active political realm of the landscape conveyed a vivacious spirit.⁷¹

Local citizens harvested cranberries in bogs located on the outskirts of Greenwich Village.⁷² Gustafson's accounts of picking cranberries in Greenwich Village gave insight into the experiential sense of place embodied by the Village. The cranberry bog transmitted a sense of uniqueness since they were seldom cultivated in interior Massachusetts. The experience of picking cranberries, and Gustafson's interactions with other cranberry pickers, revealed the close-knit nature of the Village. Greenwich Village also proved to have a sense of cohesiveness, as evidenced by conversations and commercial interaction at the general store and the social camaraderie of the cranberry pickers.⁷³ The annual celebration of "Old Home Days," where "every year everyone in town would get together for music, dance, and eat outside or in a tent, rain or shine" relays the strong sense of community felt by local people in the town.⁷⁴ Greenwich Village also had a small industrial center. Gustafson noted that the Village was the site of grist mills, button and broom factories, and well as factories that manufactured hats and sleighs.⁷⁵ In its time, Greenwich Village was an industrial center albeit on a minute scale compared to other locales within the Valley. Similar to the

⁶⁹ Focus group session.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Gustafson, 42-45. A focus group session participant also revealed that the cranberries were harvested on a large scale and represented an important cash crop.

⁷³ Focus group session.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Gustafson, 41.

industrial village of North Dana (but on a smaller scale), a visitor to Greenwich Village would feel a sense of “hustle and bustle” and youth due to the beehive of activity generated by the factory workers manufacturing their goods.⁷⁶

Besides the themes of community and vivaciousness that are evident from the interviewee responses and the local literature concerning sense of place experienced, another theme is that of a transitory existence in Greenwich. Interestingly enough, this theme was not developed from interview responses from other towns.⁷⁷ One focus group participant argued that a real problem was “lack of friends because people were coming and going all the time. As a teenager, you want a girlfriend but they were always selling farms and moving away.”⁷⁸ In terms of sense of place perceived by its inhabitants, Greenwich was similar to Dana with respect to the strong ties to community but different with respect to the liveliness of the political fervor and sense of impermanence.

Prescott, the final town, formed from portions of east Pelham and southern New Salem, was the last incorporated town of the Swift River Valley, which was on January 28, 1822.⁷⁹ It contained the villages of North Prescott, Atkinson Hollow, and the center of town, located on Prescott Hill.⁸⁰ The town was named for Colonel William Prescott, who commanded the American forces in Charlestown during the Revolutionary War.⁸¹ There were a multiplicity of religions with Baptists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Methodists practicing their faith.⁸² Prescott was the most rural and least populated of the four towns (Figure 3). Because the town was on a ridge and its topography

⁷⁶ Focus group session.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Greene, *Atlas*, 15.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Howe, 521.

⁸² Ibid., 534-537.

was hilly, farming was the primary activity of the town's economy.⁸³ The focus group session revealed that dairy farms and orchards were the most common way for residents to eke out a living, although some relied on hunting. Orchards and dairy farms were located on both hills and in valleys.

The soil of Prescott was particularly adapted to the cultivation of fruits and vegetables. Gustafson maintained that Prescott was dotted with plum orchards and vineyards.⁸⁴ The fruit orchards, according to Gustafson were "tempting, the grapes hung in clusters on the vines bordering the roadside emitting their tantalizing odor. There is a large plum orchard there and when they are ripe, the trees present a colorful picture to the passerby."⁸⁵ The senses, both olfactory and visual, testified to the pleasant experience of being on a Prescott orchard.⁸⁶ Although most of the farmhouses in Prescott may be described as mundane, the Griswold farmhouse was a notable exception. The Griswold farm was a peaceful place in Prescott.⁸⁷ Nestled in the hills, the Griswold farm afforded a "pleasing" view of the Valley.⁸⁸ The architecture of the house was early American, with old fireplaces, hand hewn beams, and brick ovens.⁸⁹ With its ornate decor and setting among the fruit orchards, the sense of the place embodied by the house and surrounding landscape was one of extravagance and ease.⁹⁰ According to the Prescott interviewee,

⁸³ Ibid., 550.

⁸⁴ Gustafson, 46.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁸⁶ Focus group session. The sense of place of Prescott was also acquired from a separate semi-standardized interview with a former resident conducted in March 1994. The insights of experiential space in Prescott obtained by probing during the interview were not available from other sources. Cited hereafter as "Prescott resident interview."

⁸⁷ Gustafson, 47-48.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

the sense of place felt by traveling by the Griswold farm was arrogance. The Griswold farm (and the few other up-scale homes in Prescott and the rest of the Swift River Valley) were atypical and represented a paradox to the sense of community and mundane felt by those living in the rest of the Valley.

Prescott was the only town in the Swift River Valley to have summer homes owned by wealthy residents from throughout the Commonwealth, though there were relatively few of these homes in absolute numbers.⁹¹ Prescott Hill was the location of some summer homes.⁹² Despite the fact that some of the population were part-time residents, Prescott had a strong sense of community.⁹³ The strong sense of community was fostered by the relatively small number of people in the town. In fact, one former resident said, "There were only eight kids in my entire school, Prescott School #4. Five of us were Waughs."⁹⁴ Another former resident joyfully recalled, "The frequent square dances at the Grange Hall that continued until we moved to Greenwich and the Grange Hall was closed."⁹⁵ The annual Christmas Pageant at the local elementary school was another Prescott tradition. The interviewee appeared to enjoy her participation in the Christmas celebration.⁹⁶ As with some of the other towns in the Swift River Valley, a theme that emerged from the interviewing process was that of a close-knit community.

Prescott was also a town with Yankee ingenuity. Greene argued that Rufus Powers, a citizen of Prescott, invented an early version of the present-day smoke detector in 1866.⁹⁷ After having his mill destroyed by

⁹¹ Prescott resident interview.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.; Focus group interview session.

⁹⁴ Prescott resident interview.

⁹⁵ Focus group interview session.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Greene, *Strange Tales*, 46-47.

fire, Powers patented his smoke detector with the U.S. Patent Office.⁹⁸ His invention met with some success but was not widely adopted until the 1970s, almost 110 years later.⁹⁹ Powers was also one of the first people to manufacture iron horseshoes.¹⁰⁰ Prescott had a spirit of intellect which was personified by Rufus Powers.

Although Prescott was a pleasing place to visit, it was also moribund. A sense of morbidity pervaded the town that was felt by its residents, even before the Quabbin project was imminent.¹⁰¹ A former resident described Prescott as a “dead and dying” place.¹⁰² He argued that there were no educational or economic opportunities for young people in the town and “the quicker you got out the better.”¹⁰³ The lack of economic opportunities was particularly acute in Prescott because the charcoal kiln was the only industry, thereby creating a poor tax base.¹⁰⁴ Year-round residents “made a living from the orchards, dairy farms, or from hunting pheasants and deer (one day while working at the orchard I saw 22 deer at once) that were shipped to New York City restaurants.”¹⁰⁵ Given the lack of significant opportunities for young people to prosper, perhaps, as claimed by the interviewee, “The Quabbin was the best thing to happen to the Valley.”¹⁰⁶

⁹⁸ Ibid., 46-47.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ R. Rice, *Quabbin: Past and Present* (Video copyrighted by author, 1993).

¹⁰¹ Prescott resident interview.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. It is important to note that the pro-Quabbin view expressed by this interviewee is not representative. In fact, none of the other people interviewed agreed with him. The other interviews and literature review revealed quite the contrary. The evidence suggests that most of the former residents of the Swift River Valley lament the loss of their towns.

A theme particular to Prescott that emerged from the interview and focus group session was a moribund sense felt by the townspeople, even before the Quabbin Reservoir project was planned. Similar to Greenwich and Dana, the residents felt a strong sense of community, even the small influx of summer residents. Everyday life was not as limited in geographic scope, however, as it was in Dana and Greenwich since Prescott farmers would deliver milk twice a week to Amherst, approximately twenty miles west.¹⁰⁷ The landscape of Prescott also embodied a particular sense of ruralness since it had a much smaller population than any of the other three towns and was the location of just one industrial plant (Figure 3).

In conclusion, the Swift River Valley had a particular sense of place preceding the construction of the Quabbin Reservoir. The sense of place experienced by residents and embodied in the landscape of each of the four towns was similar in some respects but differed in others. Since all of these towns were typical of central New England towns at this time, the most considerable differences in the perceived sense of place among town residents and the sense of place embodied by the landscape stems from the nuances of their experience. Prime examples are “Old Home Days” celebrated by citizens of Greenwich, the beauty embodied by Pottapaug Pond of Dana, and the sense of place engendered as one passed by the Griswold farm in Prescott. One could argue it is details such as these that give people’s lives special meaning and each location a particular sense of place. By uncovering the Swift River Valley’s past, one gains a greater appreciation for the Quabbin Reservoir and the sacrifices that were made by the citizens of Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott. It is hoped that the historical reconstruction and interpretation of place presented in this manuscript may aid in the preservation of the historical integrity of the Swift River Valley.

The authors would like to thank all the former citizens of the Swift River Valley that have shared their individual and collective understandings and insights of the experiential space of their former towns. It is hoped that through their contributions to this work that the historical geography of the Swift River Valley may be preserved indefinitely.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.