

## History of our Dead End Neighborhood for People, Animals and Trees

The New Hampshire Grants were given out by Governor Wentworth in 1763. He chartered a half dozen townships including Williston. What we call Williams Hill today was in Williston then and in 1794 became a part of Richmond. The original owners never even saw their land or lived here but speculated in virgin timberlands and sold the best trees to make masts for the King's ships because we were an English colony then.

Williams Hill Road is a quiet dead end road where neighbors and other residents walk and enjoy the peace of the forest and wildlife. Neighbors often stop their cars in the road when driving by to chat with walkers or other cars because the traffic is minimal. Dogs are often walked unleashed. Four properties collect maple sugar in the spring here. There are 2 steep hills on the road and the school bus has always picked up and dropped off children halfway up the road before the second hill because the road there is narrow and there is no place to turn around. Generations of children living at the end of the road have had to walk 2/3 of a mile each way to get the bus regardless of weather. The house I've lived in for 39 years is called the Old Higley Farm at #787. It's half way up the road and is 191 years old. It is the second oldest surviving house on Williams Hill and the grand maple tree by the road is at least 120. It's a happy tree with a high concentration of sugar in the sap. At least 27 families have lived in this house before I moved here in 1982. We may own the land but actually, we're the caretakers for the next 27 families, just like we are all caretakers for the environment.

The reason why the surveyor has not found evidence of Williams Hill Rd being a town-owned road may be because it's not owned by the town, but is an old farm connector for two houses clustered at the end of the road. Let me tell you some history of the road. Vermont Roads were built by residents who were required to either work to make the road or provide money for making the road. This was documented in Survey Bills which are still archived in the vault at our Richmond Town Hall. But there are none for Williams Hill Road. The very first house built on

WHR was in 1820 on the crest of the hill. It was the Williams farmhouse at #1140 where John and Kris Linn live today. They are only the fourth family to own the house. Our house, the second one, was built about 1830. The road between our two houses is a third of a mile and all the land on the road was farmed from 1820 until the 1970s. Town records show that in the 1830's, Higley put up a gate across the road at our house to keep the livestock from going down the road. Jumping forward to the 1869 map, there were only 2 other houses on the road besides the Higleys and the Williams. They were the ones at the very end, owned by the Readys and the Clarkes. These families would have found it much closer to connect to Fay's Corner, the industrial center of Richmond at that time than go up and down Williams Hill Rd. Road maintenance was not what it is today and the hill is very steep with heavy snow pack and runoff. (It took some years after Vermont's railroad was completed in 1849 for the new town center to grow in the late 1800s and early 1900s to what we call the village of Richmond today). There was a Hinesburg road close by for which the surveyer was able to locate a Survey bill in the Hinesburg town office. A short "farm connector" would make sense.

The Richmond Historical society has a diary of a teenage girl living in my Higley house from the early 1900s saying she sits by the window hoping against hope that someone will come up the road because life is pretty dull there at the time.

By the 1940s, WHR road was much the same. At that time, Emily Gyllensward bought the Williams family homestead. She said, at her expense, she had to put in a "corduroy road" \*to be able to even get a vehicle up the road from the Old Higley house to her house. The other houses on the upper half of the road above the Higleys didn't get built until many years later when she sold parcels of land. Even in 1971 when the Rogers bought their land across the street from the Higley home, there was still a gate at the original location which Emily had to open and close when going up or down the road from her house. She couldn't always travel the road – she showed me pictures of the deep mud and road washed out in the Spring which she said was an annual occurrence. She remembered the last time anyone used the farm connector at the end

was in 1942 to bring a load of apples over from the Brown farm. The road never even had a name until Emily was asked by the town if they should call it Gyllenswards Road. She said she preferred Williams Hill Rd to name it after the original family.

I spoke with Jens Hawkins from the Vermont Fish and Wildlife department who said that ANY new amount of human infringement on undeveloped land WILL impact wildlife. The amount of the impact will depend on how MUCH use and we would n't know the impact until after the change took place, there being no way to assess it. Although there would be a difference in impact between the use of motorized and non-motorized vehicles, there is also noise associated with bikers and walkers. Bikers often travel in groups and yell to each other to be heard over the noise of the tires, wind, and distance between them. If the area was opened up as a trail, it would be impossible to enforce a ban on motorized vehicles and it would open the area up to more noise and vandalism. Jens says that where there are stretches of undeveloped land on either side of a road, wildlife will cross there. We have seen moose, bear, coy-dogs, beavers, big cats, spotted salamanders and great blue heron to name a few animals who have made their homes at the end of Williams Hill Road.

Let's not be overly aggressive about creating new trails. A disregard for wildlife and the environment for the sake of human recreation and economy has led to huge climate problems across the world. We need to reverse this trend not continue it. As a child, I am sure you read Dr. Seuss's The Lorax book where he spoke for the trees. And you probably now read it to your children. Remember children learn what they live, they watch us and do like we do, not like we tell them to do. Opening those woods is a hypocrisy we can't afford. Cutting these trees down would be for our own pleasure, not for necessities like shelter or heat. How many trees and wildlife will we cut down in exchange for that pleasure and a chance to gain 30 pieces of silver? Is that exchange acceptable? It's just a few trees you might say. But that is what they all said. And our children and our children's children will say the same. Why? Because they learned it from us.

\*Corduroy roads are a series of logs laid parallel across a roadbed to allow passage of wagons, horses, or foot traffic through usually muddy or wet areas to prevent them from getting bogged down.