Where the Mountain Stands Alone
Stories of Place in the Monadnock Region

Edited by Howard Mansfield with new work by
Jane Brox, Tom Wessels, Ernest Hebert, Janisse Ray, Richard Ober,
Edie Clark, Jim Collins, Richard Meryman, and Sy Montgomery.

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in cooperation with the Monadnock Institute of Nature,
Place and Culture at Franklin Pierce College.

Painting by Alexander James
Dear Reader,

Six years in the making, *Where the Mountain Stands Alone* chronicles and celebrates the people and places of the Monadnock region of New Hampshire. Focused on the towns in sight of Mount Monadnock, this anthology features essays, recollections, historical documents and photographs that tell the story of life as it was lived in the past and as it is lived today. The volume takes its outline from the shape of human settlement in Northern New England: First Encounters, Making Land, Emptying Out, Returning, and Here and Now in the Global Market.

The terrain of the Monadnock region, and of the White Mountains and their adjacent uplands, is unique in North America. It is among the continent’s most unpredictably variable topographies. New Hampshire is a relatively new addition to North America. The Green Mountains and the Appalachian west of the Connecticut River were already more than 160 million years old and neatly folded in place when New Hampshire arrived. The forces of Continental Drift pushed three or four large landmasses together and sent them crashing toward the Green Mountains’ shores.

**PART 1: First Encounters**

**Mali Keating**

Mali Keating holding her grandmother’s wedding photograph from 1872. Keating’s family represents the region’s unbroken Abenaki presence.

**11,000 Years on the Ashuelot**

Dr. Robert Goodby and student archaeologists dig test pits at the Fishdam Site in Swanzey.

**Making Claims**

By the 19th century, Abenaki families were still to be found all across Ndakinna. For much of this time, Native American Indian people in New Hampshire were literally “hiding in plain sight,” within full view, but of little interest to their white neighbors. Even the keenest observers exhibited a curious blindness to Native people who crossed their field of vision. Henry David Thoreau [in his journals about Mt. Monadnock] devoted three pages to plants, more than five hundred words to describing the particular shade of gray on the mountain, and but one sentence to Indians, who were apparently less interesting than rock.

**The Disorderly Origins of the Granite State**

— Peter Sauer

Sokoki Homeland from Monadnock: K’Namitobena Sokwaki

— Marge Bruchac

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According to author and editor Howard Mansfield

“Where the Mountain Stands Alone captures the elusive feel of one place as it exists in the intersection of political and family history, landscape, destiny, expectations, weather and time. We bring together stories that have dirt under their nails, essays that mix history, memoir, geology and geography, and recollections that capture the life of a place, and the habits and hopes of a community.” We are proud to be offering this new book, a testament to our distinctive region and an important contribution to our history.

Sincerely,
John R. Harris, Monadnock Institute executive director
PART II: Making Land

The primary early market for apples was cider, the producers of which bought apples from small local farmers. In his Peterborough history George Morison notes that John Quincy Adams built a cider mill at his farm on the Old Dublin Road: “For years the old pomace was dumped along the road into neat piles on the south side and could be seen year after year, as an advertisement of what was done there each fall. Cider was big business in Peterborough in those days. In 1870 there were six cider mills which altogether produced 3,290 barrels of cider. J.Q. Adams was the leader with 940, John Cragin made 750, John H. Vose 600, John H. Vose 600, Charles Barber 425, L. McClenning 350, and E.A. Robbe 225. But the temperance movement that swept across the United States in the 19th Century was to greatly affect cider production. By 1886 fewer than 1,000 barrels of cider were produced in the region.

PARALLELS OF PLACE
— Tom Wessels

Many people know of the early 1820s fire that exposed Monadnock’s summit, but don’t realize the important role that a hurricane, the Great September Gale of 1815, played in that fire. Without the preceding gale, it’s possible that the fire would have spared portions of the summit forest. But the fallen red spruce logs, drying for years, were waiting fuel when the fires reached the summit. They burned with an intense ferocity that killed all existing plant life. Erosion by wind and rain did the rest to create a hiker’s magnet that today attracts over 100,000 individuals annually.

Plant Your Apples on the Hills
— Jane Rose

The thriving hill town of 1810 had vanished. The farms were gone, the soil exhausted, the fields clogged with brush and trees. The flourishing glass and lumber industries had come and gone. And most of the people were gone as well, what was there to keep them in Stoddard? This was more than a temporary downturn. The population of this isolated community had declined an average of ten people every single year for 110 years in a row. The majority of those who remained amidst the rapidly encroaching forces of nature were families whose ancestors had lived here for generations. Most could not bear to leave despite the fraying social and economic fabric of their community. By 1930 it was doubtful if Stoddard’s last 113 people could keep their town from disappearing altogether.

PART III: Emptying Out

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The Last 113 People
— Alan F. Rumrill

Land of Stone
— Kevin Gardner

Somewhere along the now rail-less bed of the Chesire Railroad, in East Westmoreland, a buried treasure hides in plain sight. It’s a little to the west of the famous London Cut, a mile-long shaft precisely excavated through solid rock to a depth of as much as 30 feet by crews laying out the road in the late 1840s. The builders of the railroad believed they were making something permanent, a fact to which their work, in thousands of places, still testifies.

The Cheshire Mills, c. 1890. Nearly 150 workers produced woolens, flannels, suedes and fleeces at Mill Number One.

Phelps in his Studio
— Edie Clark describes how debt, drink and despair plagued “the painter of Monadnock,” William Preston Phelps in his later years.

Harrisville Textile Mills
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“Operation” at The Cheshire Mills, c. 1890. Nearly 150 workers produced woolens, flannels, suedes and fleeces at Mill Number One.

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Coming to live in New England is like reversing myself thirty years, to a time when towns across America weren’t all trying to look the same and to a time when people mattered. Here I feel sometimes like the girl I was who could walk the mile to Baxley’s, an old supermarket in my hometown of Baxley, Georgia. It had unfinished pine floors and shelves that even I, at ten or twelve, could see over. Baxley’s had a meat counter with a real butcher behind it and usually only one checkout. But even then, although none of us knew it yet, that store had entered into decline, the last of an era, and the age of the corporate personless chain was upon us.

PART IV: Returning

The cottage itself, described by Gladys as “somewhat on the order of a camp,” was merely sheathing over a wood frame. In the winter, the only heat was four fireplaces. The only water came from a hand pump in the kitchen, much later supplanted by a pipe from a crenellated tower. There was an outhouse. Lacking electricity, the lighting was oil lamps and candles. Paranoid about the possibility of tuberculosis, certain that fresh air was the antidote, Thayer sometimes kept windows open in the winter. Each night the whole family, dressed in buffalo skins, trekked out to individual, three-sided lean-tos (a canvas hung across the fourth side), each with a bunk below a bookshelf. Though scrubbed and monastic, Thayer habitually wore knickers, high Norwegian boots, and a paint-spattered Norfolk jacket formerly owned by the great philosopher William James, a present from James’ son. In winter he donned long underwear. As the weather warmed, he cut off sections, reducing it to shorts by summer.

Chorus Jig

ends, and a few dancers sashay over and throw open the hall’s tall windows.

 Getting Out of the Hole in Nelson

— Jim Collins

On a warm summer night in Nelson the contra dancers arrive, “spilling” — as Dudley Laufman would write in a poem — “into the hall like a tipped over basket of many colored balls of yarn.” In the small, white clapboard building, Dudley plays accordion and calls the figures. A line of skilled musicians crowd around him on the low stage. They’re playing the night long, spirited, the kind of night that made piano player Bob McQuillen “ring” with the music. Everybody’s getting along. The dancers heat up, skim as couples lean across the floor, arms around each other. Couples bunch up in a far corner, a quirk of the old hall’s sloping floor. The window drip with moisture, the air smells of sweat and hair and dust. Chorus Jig ends, and a few dancers sashay over and throw open the hall’s tall windows.

Mr. Roy’s Market

— Janesse Roy

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PART V: Here and Now in the Global Market

Taxi

— Ernest Holbert

Mr. Roy has perfected the art of the little-box store. For Roy, a 42-year employee of the company, “just the right size for the neighborhood.”

Downtown Keene was small, and you saw the same people day after day on Main Street (the widest paved main street in the world, or so the story went). You got to know their faces, walks, wardrobes, and demeanors. Most were strangers to me and would remain so, but they were part of the downtown and I was always happy to see them. One was a forty-something woman, tall, stately, plain face, good body, and she dressed very well, dark brown hair always in place. What I liked about her was the way she held her head — high, aloof, the message: always alone, but proud; she never made eye contact, never smiled. I’d think: she’s got nobody — me neither. I dubbed her the Sexy Spinster.

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Where the Mountain Stands Alone provides us with a collection of stories about the Monadnock Region that illuminates our rich history. The volume reveals the essence of this place, and traces the habits and hearts of our communities. Please join us in securing our future by preserving our past.

Your contribution to the Monadnock Institute's anthology project will make it possible to publish this volume using full-color throughout at a price that is affordable to every interested resident. If you choose to, your name will be included in the final printed version of Where the Mountain Stands Alone. To make your contribution, select from the options below:

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Please make check payable to the Monadnock Institute at FPC and send your contribution to: Office of College Relations, Franklin Pierce College, 20 College Road, Rindge, NH 03461.

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