

An Enigma

The definition of enigma is something unexplained, or a mystery. The situation I am about to relate happened in Colebrook back in the 1930s, and the person who confided the information I know for a fact to be honest and truthful, if I had the slightest doubt, I would let this go untold. But this is a really good tale, one that deserves to be told. I think that we humans tend to avoid that which we can't explain or make sense of, and I can tell you that it is the reason I have left the subject alone until now.

On an autumn day in 1937 or 38, two adults and a child set out for a walk along a long-abandoned road that ran through the woods. There was no destination, and no time restraints except to return home before dark. The two adults were aunt and niece; the child was the offspring of the younger woman. They were aware that the old road existed, although neither had ever walked it. It was not surfaced at all, neither dirt nor gravel; rather it was leaf, grass and fern covered, with an occasional short section of corduroy, no doubt constructed by the last lumbering outfit that had cut these woods.

The road began relatively level, and after a quarter of a mile or so began a gradual decent for about one half mile, after which it once again leveled off. Shortly thereafter a small brook appeared, entrenched two or three feet into what had been a cleared field many decades before. A hundred feet or so beyond the bridge stood a one and a half story farmhouse. The road met the stream and crossed it by means of a small, eight foot wide or so bridge made of heavy logs and planks. Although not in what could be called good condition by any means, nevertheless it appeared relatively sound, so the three walked across without any problems. The house was now directly in front of them, located within a relatively clear space in the forest.

There were two other outbuildings near this old house; a run-in shed seventy-five or so feet behind it, and a one-story barn slightly further away to the west. The house, of course, held their interest. It was definitely not in good condition; as a matter of fact, it was obviously not too far from a final collapse that would end up in the cellar. The house faced south, and along the entire front was a porch. In the space between the roof of the porch and the eaves of the house was enough room for two eyebrow windows. The front door was centered with a window on each side, although all windows had been removed long before. The women didn't like the looks of the porch floor, and avoided walking on it, although they permitted the child to do so, but with a warning not to enter the house.

On the west side were two windows, one for each of the rooms on that side of the house. The land surface adjacent to the foundation dropped off fairly rapidly, so that it was not convenient to stand next to the house and peer into the open window, although the child was held up, enabling him to lean on the window sill and look into what had probably been the kitchen. No furniture or other objects were to be seen.

Their attention next turned to the run-in shed, in front of which was a dilapidated buggy, the wheels of which were sinking into the soil. Nothing else was in or around this building, although an old pear tree stood between the house and shed.

The barn also was empty, and in a condition not much better than that of the house. There was a small amount of hay in the mow, nothing more.

The day had progressed to the point where their thoughts turned homeward, and the day ended with a retelling of events to the rest of the family over the dinner table.

The story now fast-forwards ten or twelve years and another after dinner conversation with an elderly gentleman who had grown up in this part of town. When the story about the abandoned farm was finished, he had a puzzled expression on his face, and remarked that it was a truly remarkable tale, but he couldn't see how they could have seen what they saw just ten or so years before, as it had been perfectly described the way it had looked seventy-five years before, when he had been a student at the Beech Hill school, and was familiar with the old place, as the boys used to play there on occasion. The last owners had packed up and left, allowing the place to go back to nature, something not so uncommon around here in the years following the Civil War.

As soon as it was practical, an expedition was mounted to see whether or not they could find the location and determine if any answers could be found that might shed some light on the subject. The once child, now a high school student, with a friend, walked through the woods along the now overgrown wood road until they came to the brook. The brook was there, but no bridge, only the remains of the abutments, but more amazing; there was neither house nor any outbuildings to be seen. They waded the brook with no difficulty and approached the cellar hole, which looked much the way any cellar hole would look long after the house had rotted away. One thing caught the eye of the boy who had been there as a youth, and that was the rotted remains of a white birch tree that had grown to maturity, died and decayed in the cellar hole at the base of the central chimney. The bowl had been at least sixteen or eighteen inches in diameter, a fact easy to determine because white birch bark does not decay rapidly, and can sometimes be seen long after the interior wood has turned to powder.

Upon hearing this report over the supper table, the parents decided to check this out more thoroughly, carrying with them a shovel in case it might come in handy. Nothing except some shards of glass and a few scraps of indistinguishable metal was found in the cellar hole, but in front of where the run-in shed had been an iron tire from a buggy was found a foot or so beneath the surface. There was no sign of the pear tree, and the woman bemoaned the fact that she had not broken off a branch to graft onto one of her trees, wondering out loud whether it would have taken, and if so, what it might have proven.

The elderly gentleman, when brought up to speed on developments, could add nothing except that perhaps they had seen an old photo of the house, although he wondered who would have taken one, and where it might now be. That still would not explain the buried tire from the buggy, which had been discovered right where their memory told them to dig. The old aunt, now living in Canada, was asked to describe anything she could recall about that long-ago sojourn, and an explanation would be forthcoming upon receipt of her letter. She wrote exactly what her niece had remembered, only that they had seen an abandoned farm in the woods.

It would be an easy thing to fabricate a story such as this, but as I said, I trust this person's integrity, and have known him all my life. He doesn't want his identity revealed, as he feels that it would no doubt be interpreted by many as either a blatant lie, or that he had been abducted by space men and reprogrammed, either way, nobody would ever again believe a word he said. As I said at the beginning, it's an enigma.