

Northfield Mount
Hermon
Student
Publications

Lamplighter

ISSUE 1
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Dear Readers,

These days, “the news” means many different things.

While sifting through articles, Instagram posts, and broadcast news, it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish fake news from real, quality news. Journalism bridges the gaps between us and the moving parts of the world. It fuels democracy: informing our votes, our voices, and our behavior. The current state of media is a detriment to the authenticity that newspapers provide; information centers are shifting from reputable journalists and news centers to online chat hubs and reels. We’re only one-fourth of the way into our 2023/2024 school year, and we’re all observing from Gill as our world faces critical humanitarian crises. Our responsibility to foster well-informed journalism has become a necessity to our discussions, our learning, and our actions.

As “small scale” journalists at The Lamplighter, our job is to help you empathetically take on these conversations of global importance in your classroom, dorm, the dining hall, and beyond this campus. In addition, we want to ignite conversation about the cultural shifts happening at NMH, which are emerging from new faculty, increased dean presence around campus, and changes within the student body. We anticipate more changes to externalize as the year continues.

Our mission for this year– as The Lamplighter enters its third year after its merge between The Bridge and the magazine Hermonite– is to be an organized, formal, and established voice on your behalf. We will take turns with you; as matters arise, we will write. When you talk, we will listen.

Yours,

The 2023-2024 Lamplighter Editorial Board

Faculty Summer Spotlights

*By Margaux
Moos '24*

Photos by Chiara Pinci '24.

**Q: What was something fun and cool
you did this summer that you want
NMH to know about?**



Ben James:

This summer Ben James traveled to Louisville Kentucky to visit his childhood neighborhood, Portland, one of the poorest neighborhoods in the state. He spent a week interviewing and taking photos of the residents – listening to their stories, learning about what it's like to live there, and how the neighborhood has changed over the years. He spoke to many kind and friendly people who were eager to share their experiences, specifically enjoying interacting with the grandmothers who are the core of the community!



Eliza Mott:

This summer Eliza Mott participated in Regatta Day, a Canadian holiday filled with rowing and other festivities. Taking place in Quebec, Eliza and her brother placed third in a unique canoeing race – where they stood on the gunnels (the edges) of the canoe and paddled. They managed to keep their balance, and cross through the finish line!

Senior Poll *By Margaux Moos '24*

**Q: What was your Mountain Day
experience like?**



Photo by Auggie Swartwood '24

Auggie Swartwood:

“After climbing it at my previous school, it was a great experience to climb it again, but this time with fellow teammates and PGs. It was a great way to get to know more people!”



Photo by Chiara Pinci '24

Tidiane Thiam:

“It was a great experience to have a fun day away from academics with my friends! I also think the tradition is an amazing way to bring the school together!”



Photo by Chiara Pinci '24

Anna Brenner:

“I had a really great time hiking Mt. Monadnock with my friends, and thought it was a special way to bond with the senior class. It was cool to reflect on all of the seniors before me who had also undergone this tradition.”

Poppy Merrill:

“I was shocked and perplexed by the challenge bestowed upon the class of 2024 during mountain day this year. It was more difficult than I expected, but it was worth it when I made it to the top with my friends!”



Sharing Spirit and Culture Through Art: Mwanga William

By Xiaotong Shen '24

Photos by Delphi Lyra '24.

Under the scorching heat of the red sun, six local fishermen gather in central Uganda to prepare for their annual rowing race across the Wamala Lake. As they listlessly row to the starting line, they aren't six men racing each other for glory, but just friends working their boat, subject to the heat of the sun. William Mwanga, an artist and a fellow rower, captures this scene of his home country with his paintbrush and canvas. His vibrant colors dance on the canvas, emulating the spirit of the moment.

This year, William Mwanga was invited to exhibit his work in the Rhodes Arts Center gallery. Jamie Rourke, arts teacher, took on the role of the new gallery coordinator and organized Mwanga's exhibit. With the

help of other arts faculty, Rourke installed the exhibition which opened on September 11th. "[So far, I've found that] people respond to the color, the intensity, and the vibrancy of [Mwanga's] paintings. They feel a sense of life and vitality," said Rourke.

Mwanga, before creating representational art, was first a freelance commercial artist. He would paint advertisements on big buildings for companies, paint family portraits, and sculpt figures and statues for commissions. "[The benefit of doing commissioned art] was that I traveled across the country a lot... [and] met new people," says Mwanga.

Along with showcasing his painting at NMH's gallery, Mwanga also shares dozens of pictures of him sculpting

life-sized figures of people and lions on his Facebook page. His resume is extremely distinctive. From his life-sized clay sculptures to his colorful, smaller paintings of daily life in Uganda, he holds an extensive list of disciplines under his belt. A jack of all trades, some might say. However, as of now, he has primed his focus on creating representational paintings of his life in Uganda.

Mwanga lists sports as a big influence in his life and artmaking. Now living in Vermont, he coaches rowing at the Putney School and dabbles in soccer as a pastime. In Uganda, Mwanga is the assistant rowing coach of the Ugandan national rowing team and was previously the coach of the Ugandan national para-rowing team. As a child, Mwanga was both a rower and a soccer player. Because of his sporty upbringing, he was often given the opportunity to travel internationally. In this sense, being an athlete was a gateway that allowed Mwanga to experience the vast diversity of cultures and practices throughout the world at a very young age. "It helps open up your mind," says Mwanga.

Part of Mwanga's passion for art is

to share his culture with folks who aren't familiar with it. One painting in particular, "Herdsman," displays the nomadic culture of West Uganda. Mwanga explained that West Ugandan nomads are characterized by their lack of belief in ownership. No one owns the land, the animals, or the people. They don't believe in permanent settlement. Instead, they travel in groups with cows or other animals and build temporary houses or shelters with nearby resources. Mwanga recollects a time when a group of Northeast Ugandan nomads took his family's cows. "They believe all the cows in the world belong to them... where my grandfather grew up, not far away from them... They [once] came and raided all our cows and took them," says Mwanga.

Animals and nature are another motif in Mwanga's work. Throughout the gallery, there are paintings of giraffes dancing, giraffes in giraffe print, parrots, elephants, and more. Mwanga explains that animals and nature hold a close grasp on his heart. He grew up surrounded by nature and connections with animals. In particular, he used to play with chimpanzees



from the zoo. "They were so friendly. They knew us... [we] used to kiss them," recalls Mwanga. One painting, named Chimpanzee Portrait, features a chimpanzee as its subject.

Drawing inspiration from memory and life, the paintings of William Mwanga are beautiful in their "grounded nature", says Rourke. Mwanga's creative process is spontaneous and intuitive. While he creates semi-abstract, realistic art, he rarely relies on photographic references. All of his inspiration comes from experience,

some level of contact, or connection with the subject. Whether it's his encounters with the west Ugandan nomads, his connection to animals and nature, or his experience rowing and canoeing in Uganda, he experiences the subject first, before transplanting the culture into his work.

For his painting Hawkers, Mwanga was inspired by a boy that came up to him selling bananas. He started drawing him and later came up with a few more figures to fill the space. Mwanga has a fascinatingly strong hold on translating images from memory or imagination onto the canvas. His medium of inspiration and lack of photographic reference instill a sense of truth in the painting. Without being bound by what is captured on the camera, he creates based on what is captured by the eye and the mind. "There seems to be no pretense for the painting; it seems like the artist is struck by the imagery that he sees, and recording – recreating that from a place of love," says Steve Allison, an art teacher.

Mwanga's exhibition held a reception on the evening of September 15th and was accompanied by a beautiful sunset. Along with the red glow of the sun, the World Percussions Team performed an exciting, upbeat drum performance for Mwanga's reception, a fitting energy for the exhibition.



Football's Final Fall: The life and death of NMH's long lost team

By Soren Anderson-Flynn '25



Photo by Robert Van Fleet

In 1951, a crowd of 2000 people—larger than the entire population of Gill—came to watch NMH play a sports game. This is a fact that is likely mind-boggling to any current NMH students or faculty members; 200 people at any game is astounding, much less 2000 spectators. This game was contested between the football team of the Mount Hermon School for Boys (also known as the Maroons) and their rivals, Deerfield Academy. Despite their incredible popularity in the past, the NMH football team is scarcely talked about, or even known, on campus today. This is a shame, since the story of the team is a fascinating one: a rollercoaster ride of ups, downs, and a demise which can teach us all a little more about what it means to be a member of this community.

In 1933, after decades of only intramural competition, the Mount Hermon School for Boys set to assemble a school-wide football team in preparation for their first interscholastic competition

since the turn of the 20th century. Their game, played against Williston, was not a thunderous showing of Mount Hermon athletic prowess, with the Maroons falling short in a messy 12-0 shutout. Still, it was a start.

Over the next decade, the Maroons slowly began to find their footing. Some years they'd play 1 game, others 3, and still others had none at all. However, by the late 1940s, Mount Hermon slipped into a regular schedule of seven interscholastic games per year and progressed greatly compared to their earlier showings. In the 1950s, the Maroons reached their pinnacle: posting 8 winning seasons during the decade and beginning a tradition of playing fiercely competitive contests against the Deerfield Doors.

In 1965, football played the central role in possibly the most famous moment in our school's history. During the Maroons' annual heavyweight bout with Deerfield, Silliman Laboratory, a science building which one stood where

Gilder now resides, burst into flames. As firetrucks rushed onto the scene and doused the building with water, the gridiron action continued. The Maroons were riding the momentum of a 17-game winning streak, the best in the program's history, and were looking to cap off a second straight undefeated season with a victory over Deerfield. This led to a photo which would later grace the cover of *Sports Illustrated* and the back page of *Life Magazine*: football being contested in front of an inferno. It was truly a different era.

In a cruel twist of luck, Mount Hermon lost not only their science building, but their record-setting win streak and undefeated season, as the Maroons fell to Deerfield by a score of 20-14.

In 1971, Mount Hermon merged with the Northfield Seminary for Young Ladies, forming the institution we know today. A short time later, all NMH teams gained the moniker Hogggers. Over the next three decades of NMH football, the Hogggers won New England Championships, trudged through winless seasons, and confronted everything in between. The team remained a seemingly immovable fixture of NMH life; Peter Weiss '72, the school archivist still remembers the score of an NMH victory over Deerfield from when he was a student here. "We beat them 7-6 when I was a sophomore."

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the team experienced a lull. This rough patch was not helped by NMH's consolidation onto the Mount Hermon campus in the mid 2000s, which, since it halved the school's population, halved the number of eligible football players. On April 3rd, 2014, after a winless season and multiple years of waning interest, the Northfield Mount Hermon Board of Trustees announced their decision to end the NMH football program. Over the team's 80 year history, more than a thousand athletes suited up for the Maroons and Hogggers, and many thousands more had watched them play. Despite their later woes, the history of the Hogggers demonstrates that they were a very respectable team. According to scores from decades of archived versions of *Gemini*, NMH's yearbook, the Hogggers posted a final record of 212 wins, 218 losses, 15 ties, and multiple New En-

gland championships.

Weiss believes the program was ended for two simple reasons: money and lack of participation. Because of the price of equipment and the dozens of roster spots needed to maintain a football team, it's an incredibly expensive sport for a high school to support. Since such a large number of students are required for a football team, participation is crucial. As Weiss explained, "It's not just that uniforms and helmets are expensive...it's that you can't support a football program without the students for it because the kids get beaten up." Football presented a cyclical problem for NMH, because the worse that the team did, the fewer students signed up to play or were recruited. When fewer people decided to play football, particularly in positions crucial to player safety like offensive linemen, more students got hurt, and the school did worse.

This problem was accentuated by concerns around concussions in football. In the early 2010s, science was coming to light about the irreparable damage that concussions (which are more common in football than any other American high school sport) can wreak on young people's brains. Repeated concussions can lead to CTE, a degenerative brain disorder which according to a Boston University study on the disease, can lead to "memory loss, confusion, impaired

"The story of the team is a fascinating one: a rollercoaster ride of ups, downs, and a demise which can teach us all a little more about what it means to be a member of this community."

judgment, impulse control problems, aggression, depression, suicidality, [and] parkinsonism."

This led a number of parents to pull their kids out of football or simply prevent them from ever playing the sport. The problem this created for NMH is that there was a massive class divide in terms of the parents who decided to remove their kids. Mr. Weiss described this dynamic clearly, "The people who play football do not tend to be full-pay kids. Because full-pay kids' parents tend to be, not always, but tend to be, wealthy and well-educated, and wealthy well-educated people do not let their kids play football [because of the risks]."

This trend wasn't unique to NMH, as a Bloomberg Politics poll from 2014

showed that "62 percent of college-educated respondents said they don't want their children playing football." However, it did create a particular problem for NMH's budget because it meant that football recruits and any football-playing students were more likely to need scholarships to attend the school. Since the football team was already playing poorly, good recruits were less likely to attend and those that did required substantial support from the school. All the while, NMH spent large sums of money on football-specific costs while students continued to get injured and damage their long-term brain development. Essentially, because of factors largely outside of the school's control, a football team became unsustainable for NMH.

However, the termination of the football team may have ultimately contributed to NMH in a positive way. Mr. Weiss stated, and most anyone familiar with NMH would probably agree, that the school is the "un-prep school." There is no formal dress code. Teachers are called by their first names. The school was started to educate the poor and marginalized, not the rich, and the school's song is an anthem against the ravages of capitalism. Despite the class disparity in terms of who plays it, football is still an incredibly popular sport to watch among wealthy people; some Super Bowl tickets sell for tens of thousands of dollars each. Because of this discrepancy between those who watch football and those who actually play it, football sometimes becomes a gladiatorial match between poor kids that more affluent people get to gleefully watch. One can see how this does not exactly fall into the justice-oriented image of the "un-prep school."

Sometimes, we have to sacrifice things, even incredibly entertaining, fun, and nostalgic things, in pursuit of our values. We're Northfield Mount Hermon, and if the meaning behind that name, the meaning behind being the "un-prep school," carries any weight, we must make sacrifices to continue to deserve that label. Hogger football may be gone, but the Hoggars and the institution they represent are stronger for it. And if we continue to live up to our core values, we will be stronger than ever.



Photo by Jessi Shin '24

Counseling Corner

By The Counseling Team

The Counseling Corner is a place where students can anonymously ask for advice from our expert counseling team.



Dear Stressed Out Students,

There are three major types of stress: acute, chronic, and episodic. There is also a positive type of stress called eustress. The difference between the first three types of stress and eustress is the perceived outcome by the person experiencing it. Typically, day-to-day stress is experienced as a negative experience. For instance, you might be working on several projects, doing regular homework, attending practice, team lifts, theater rehearsal and then one of your teachers springs on you a test you didn't anticipate. Yikes! What is your first response? For most of us, we think something like: holy cow, there's no way I can do this. I'm going to fail and I won't get into a

good college and then I'm going to be homeless and nobody will love me... Or some version of that. Our brains have a negativity bias which means our mind is always scanning for the negative, whether it is a future or current failure, or a break up or a lion hiding in the bushes. Positive stress encourages action and performance.

There are four important things to remember about stress. First, it is inevitable; there is no escaping nerves, worry and uncertainty. Stress is simply a part of the human system's response to the demands of living. Second, it is contagious. Other people's stress can activate our own stress response. Third, it is temporary. It comes and goes, shifting between acute phases (you've been working

on a paper for days and your computer crashes) and more chronic ongoing stresses (you have to work really hard to understand math always and it never gets easier and you're trying to raise your GPA) and some level of relief. Fourth, and this is the most important thing, you can do something about it.

Very often there is a fantasy that either no one else is as stressed out as us or the fantasy is that we shouldn't be stressed at all, if we were doing it right it would be easy. But that is simply not true. Almost everything we do that is important challenges us. Moving away from home, learning new things, applying to college, trying new sports, meeting new people who challenge your beliefs, get-

ting things done are all stressful. It is also fun and can be motivating. Let me repeat: almost everything we do that is important, challenges us and is stressful.

What can you do about it? Most stresses around school can be managed in simple ways: get your homework done, ask for help when you need it, and take care of your body. And also, put down your phone. Though scrolling through TikTok is distracting, it actually doesn't alleviate your stress, it just puts it off, and when you put off something stressful it grows, gets bigger, feels more dangerous and less manageable. Much better to take action, gather information, clean off your desk, fold your clothes. Action almost always decreases stress. Part of the stress is about trying to control the future and thinking there is a "right" way and a "wrong" way. But, and this is key, the

future doesn't exist. We create the future by being in the present, taking care of today's business and setting aside the worry about the outcome. Many students get caught in the perfectionist concern of what if. What if I don't write a good paper, or college essay, or what if I fail this quiz... Getting stuck on what ifs, is simply the stress taking over.

Here are a few things to try out:

If you are really stressed out, start small. Clear a space, a literal space, like your bed or desk and start something you've been putting off.

Ask for help.

Write things down: keep lists, prioritize.

Look at the calendar: recognize that a break is coming, the semester will end. Stress can obscure our perspective, convincing us that it won't ever end.

Again: do something. Typically

when we take a small action it helps with the bigger picture. Finishing the first paragraph of a paper means there is less paper to write.

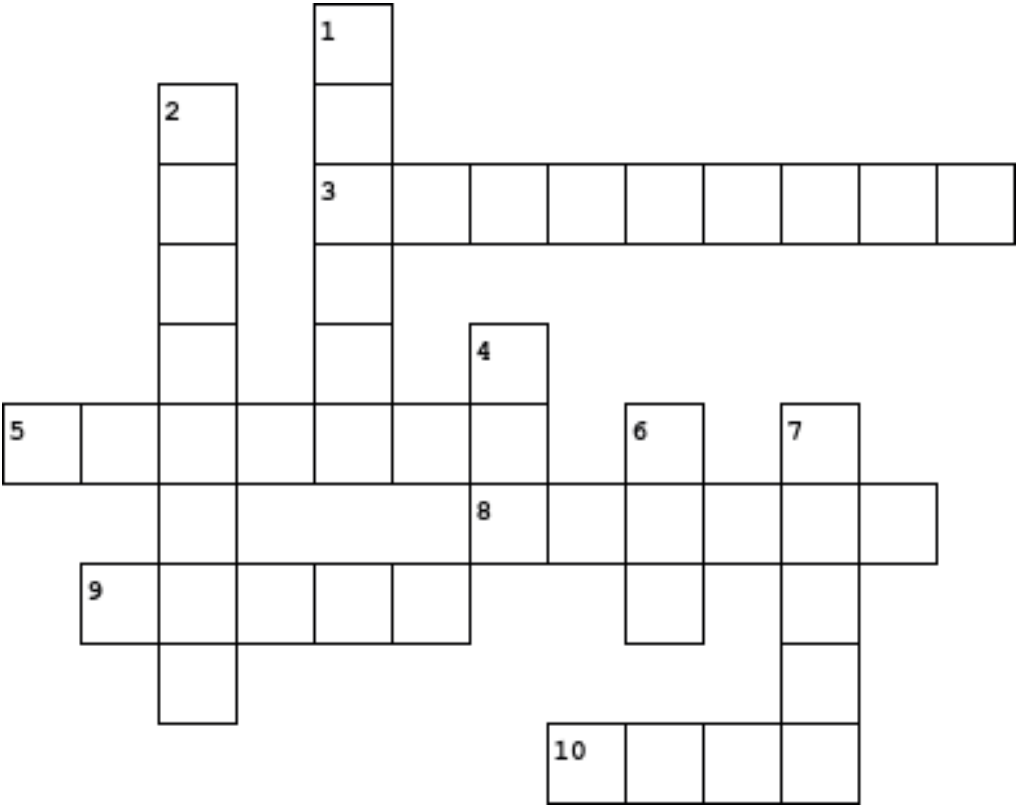
Stop talking with your stressed out friends about how stressed you are. This isn't a contest. Do talk about how stressed you are with people who can materially help you: teachers, parents, college counselors, advisors, coaches, the health center folks....

Set aside a little time to do nothing: no phone scrolling, no nothing... maybe listen to music, read for pleasure... Doesn't have to be all day. It is hard on our systems when we aren't attending to pleasure.

Develop some sort of practice of checking in on yourself: keep a journal, talk to a counselor, meditate, pray, talk to Lee Ellen, do some yoga.

And do this before it is out of control! It is hard to destress in the middle of finals week. Start now!

NMH Crossword!



Across:

- 3. The first poem to memorize and recite for HUM I
- 5. Sundays specials
- 8. Built by the first work job students
- 9. The most popular type of bagel at the bagel bar
- 10. Home to COVID patients

Down:

- 1. A popular pant choice for classes
- 2. New England fast food chain founded by the namesake of Blake Student Center, _____'s
- 4. Most populated girls dorm abbr.
- 6. Tom Bloom's dog
- 7. Grant, Kristen, Kim, e.g.

Poisoned Ground: The Aftermath of NMH's Legacy Of Pesticides

By Alexandra Tse '24



Photos by NMH Archives

Gray dots on a site map highlight the former apple orchard at Northfield Mount Hermon, all areas where soil is still contaminated with lead and arsenic from pesticides sprayed over 100 years ago. This map is part of an Orchard Management Plan submitted in 2005 by ECS, an environmental consulting company.

NMH abandoned the Mount Hermon apple orchard that same year. Since then, it has been overwhelmed by invasive bittersweet vines, poison ivy, and trash. The orchard was cleared last summer because “it had gotten to a point where it was not saveable,” said Jeff Seymour, the director of facilities and grounds. But it wasn’t always like this. The orchard was once productive, said Mary Hefner, a biology teacher at NMH. “We used to have a team tradition in my cross country team, and every Friday, we would run to the apple orchard and pick an apple.”

According to a reference in the 1903-1904 Principal’s Report, The Mount Hermon orchard was laid out in the fall of 1904 and completed in the spring of

1905. Students in the work job program, faculty, and workers scaled wooden ladders to pick apples, pressed cider, and pruned and mowed the orchard. They picked roughly 100,000 apples annually and pressed approximately 2,000 gallons of cider for drinking in the dining hall. However, the pesticides sprayed on the orchard that contained lead and arsenic

persisted much longer than the apples.

Over the decades, while the site looked harmless, students and faculty alike were unaware of the mayhem under the surface. “The soil was certainly heavily contaminated because they were spraying apples with all kinds of terrible chemicals,” said Peter Weis, the school archivist. Mount Hermon School sprayed Lead arsenate (LA) pesticides on the site for decades because of their low toxicity to plants and effectiveness in controlling insects – particularly the codling moth.

LA pesticides were not only a prominent problem for NMH; at one point, it was the most popular pesticide in the nation. According to the Washington State Department of Ecology, The USDA recommended it broadly, and millions of acres were sprayed nationwide to protect crops. As farmers increased the frequency of application, concerns over its use increased.

The potential danger posed to human health by lead and arsenic contamination in historic orchards is complex and fraught with scientific uncertainties and competing interests. Arsenic is a known human carcinogen. Exposure to lead, especially prenatally and in childhood, can lead to neurological damage. These pesticides were generally phased out by the



1960s; however, according to the Orchard Management Plan, there is no information regarding exactly when Mount Hermon stopped using them.

Even though it has been at least 77 years since LA was last used at NMH, it was designed to be persistent; it is that same persistence that is now causing environmental contamination issues many years after its use has ended. As elements, lead and arsenic do not break down, they are buried deeper and deeper into the soil over time. They stay in the soil and stay toxic for decades.

Peter Sniffen, the Sustainability Program Coordinator and an Environmental Science teacher, learned about the contaminated soil in the orchard from a board of trustees member last spring and looked for ways his Advanced Environmental Science class could get involved. Cynthia Zhang '23, one of the students in his class, created an Orchard reclamation research proposal, which included an ecological monitoring plan on how NMH should handle the contaminated soil as well as necessary research, observations, and testing that could help the school make sound environmental decisions for the future of the orchard's land.

According to soil sample testing in the Orchard Management Plan, the average arsenic detected in the orchard soils exceeded the naturally occurring or "background" ranges for Massachusetts. This raises the vital question of how many students, faculty, and workers throughout the orchard's operation were exposed to the hazardous lead arsenate during and even after its use in the orchard. There is no doubt that excessive exposure to either substance can adversely impact health, but in this case, any risks are almost exclusively long-term. "I wonder if these toxins caused any health problems for people later on," Zhang '23 said. "I don't understand why they would keep an orchard at such close proximity to students who literally have class around the area and move around the place every day."

The orchard was abandoned in 2005 when NMH ran into problems around health and safety regulations. The school had to start informing anyone within 100 yards of the orchard 24 hours before spraying pesticides. "The problem is that the orchard was within 100 yards of students under the age of 18 because of Overtoun being right there. So all of the parents [would] have to be notified and respond that they understood and okayed it within 24 hours of spraying," Weis explained. "If one person or one family objected then you would have a problem. You would have to have every single person sign off. And that was just not going to happen."

Richard Odman, who managed the orchard from 1977-2005, claimed that the pesticides used under his direction contained neither lead nor arsenic. But even so, "it was a bigger problem PR wise," Hefner said.

Over the years, the school neglected the orchard, and it became a place where students could hide out and break school rules, a dumping ground littered with beer bottles and cigarettes. "It was more of just an eyesore than anything else," Seymour explained. For 18 years, the orchard remained untouched and forgotten. Until recently, many people at NMH were unaware of its existence. "I was very surprised when I found out there was an apple orchard because no one really talked about it," said Zhang.





"I walked past it a bunch of times, but I didn't know it was like an apple orchard because there were just a bunch of dead trees."

The board of trustees decided to clear the apple orchard last spring, and Seymour and his team subsequently took it down last summer. "This was just kind of the natural way to start and get it clear and kind of make the campus look a little bit better," Seymour said.

Today, all that remains are bare patches of ground and overgrown vines between James Gym and Overtown dorm, where the orchard once was. But just because the trees are gone does not mean the contaminated soil or invasive bittersweet vines that once plagued the orchard will be as well.

Bittersweet is very tenacious in its root system. NMH cannot eliminate it without pulling its roots out of the soil, which would also draw out the arsenic and lead-contaminated soil. "It's helped because [cutting the trees] harmed the bittersweet vines by cutting them back," Sniffen said. "They're not going to fruit as big and they're not going to have as big of photosynthetic area. So it's better than nothing, but the issue is not solved at all." Sniffen also explained how arsenic and lead could spread to and contaminate other areas more quickly now that the trees are not there. "The trees provided a natural containment system of water flow. But now there's going to be more moving off. So there's an increased risk."

The campus master plan shows potential for different athletic facilities like a field house, expansion of the tennis courts, or the back of the hockey rink in the area where the orchard used to be. If something is built at the site in the future, it raises questions about pesticides that may still be present in the soil and the potential risks they pose to people. Although the NMH apple orchard is long gone, the lead and arsenic are still buried deep in the soil today. In most cases, the risks involved may be modest and long-term, but low risk is not the same as no risk.

The NMH website describes sustainability as "part of the fabric of our community. It's embedded into everything we do." The school took 18 years to finally take the first steps in dealing with the legacy of soil contamination at the orchards. But there is still more to do. "It feels to me like we should try to remediate that land," Sniffen said. "We harmed it. It's not a healthy ecosystem. We should be trying to put it back together."



Video by NMH Archives

What's The NMH Farm Without Its Animals? A More Sustainable One.

By Jessica Zhang '25

If you've noticed that the barns have been quiet recently, you're not the only one.

Last year, I visited the farm almost every week. I'd stand against the metal fence and peer at the draft horses, Belle and Shorty, who'd always stare back through their tufts of blonde fur. If the barn was open, I'd say hello to the goats. This year, however, all of that has changed. Over the summer, the goats were sold. The farm then lost its two beloved horses— one to a stroke, and one to retirement. When I opened my email on a warm day in July, I found that Jake Morrow, the former farm director, wrote in a heartbreaking eulogy that “[Belle and Shorty] gave countless students the opportunity to learn the deep joy of being around horses.”

When I visited the farm at the beginning of the semester again, I was deeply disappointed by the absence of familiar friends. Most of all, I hated to be the bearer of bad news: all the livestock are gone, and they aren't coming back— at least not for the foreseeable future. The



Belle and Shorty, Photo by Jake Morrow

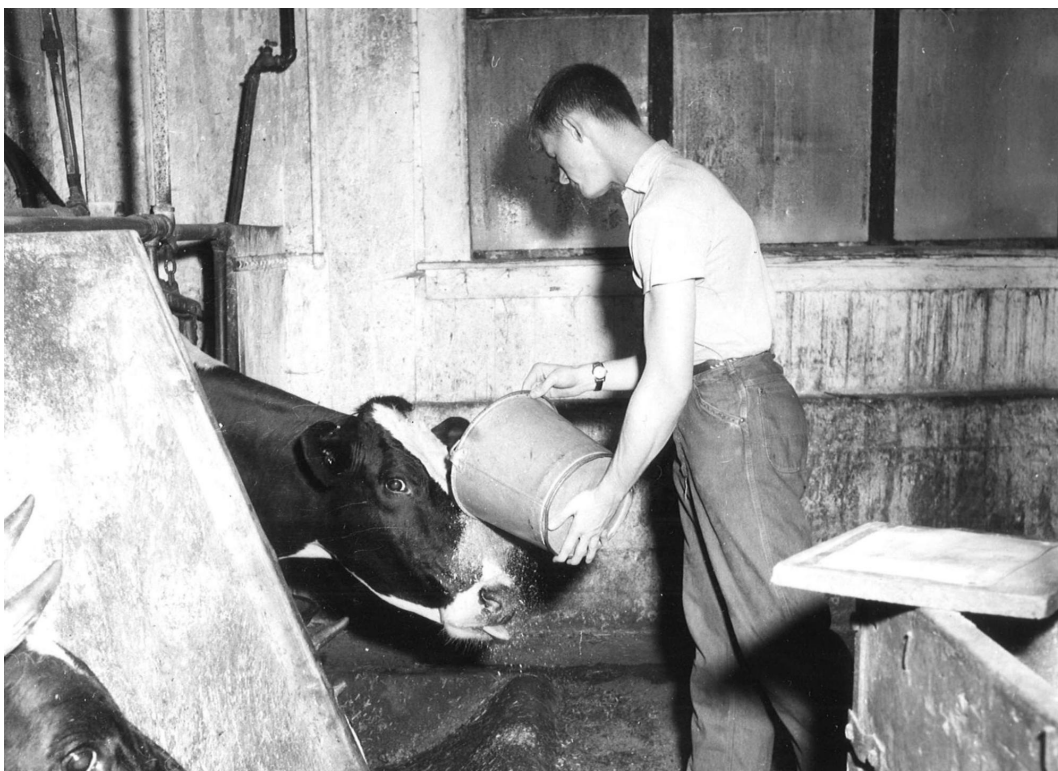
NMH farm is undergoing its most drastic overhaul in a decade, and this time, it will not be accompanied by farm animals. It was a decision by the administration that left many with more questions than answers. After all, why would NMH give up something so integral to the farm? Had it not been a staple of its program, its culture, and its traditions

for well over a century?

Talia Baron 26', who tended to the animals for her farm work job last year, echoed this sentiment. “The whole program was a big part of our community,” she said. They were special, because “Some people are scared of bigger animals, but our animals were so sweet and well-tempered.” During her many hours at the farm, she would clean stalls, feed the horses, and care for the goats. It gave her a deep connection and appreciation for them. “I would like to get our animals back,” she admits.

At first, I was a staunch advocate of this. Like Talia, I too missed the draft horses and the sound of their hooves as they meandered around their pasture. I missed their quiet strength; the ease they'd bring to me when I was homesick. I missed pointing them out to my parents whenever they stopped by campus, as if their presence was not just a point of school pride but also a personal one. After all, how many schools could boast that they owned a pair of beautiful draft horses?

The cost of owning those animals, however, was incredibly steep. Staff had to attend to the animals at all times, in-



Feeding the dairy cows, circa 1950

cluding over summers and winters and the weekends when workjob students were away. With few people qualified to man the equipment and care for the livestock, Jake Morrow had been the one shouldering nearly all the labor.

“It was a very demanding job,” said Jake, who recently pivoted away from farmwork to teach English. “It was seven days a week, every morning, every evening. Someone always has to be there. For six years, that someone was me.”

During his six-year tenure, Jake saw a lot of change. The farm went through a rotating cast of livestock that included dairy cows, cattle, draft horses, goats, laying hens, and even oxen— though few animals overlapped. For Jake, his work was endless. Since handling draft horses required a specialized skill set, only he could do it. When COVID-19 hit, and work job students left campus, he was the one cleaning their stalls, keeping them fed, and caring for the farm. Even with all these animals, however, the farm’s primary purpose was still to grow vegetables; the animals were more of a bonus. But they have always been a cornerstone of NMH history.



Milking the cows, circa 1940

“Every private school in the 19th century needed a farm to sustain life on campus,” said Peter Weis, the school’s archivist. As he regaled old stories of the farm in his dim-lit office, I got the opportunity to look at some photographs taken over the years. Back in the early 1900’s, roughly half of the students worked at the farm. It was critical work; in an isolated school like NMH, far from distri-

bution centers in the cities, it was impossible to get food from external sources. Without refrigeration, milk could hardly last the trip to campus.

At one point, NMH ran a dairy farm with around 200 heads of cattle. And they were pretty darn good at it, too. In the 1920’s, the herd was named a championship herd for the quality of their dairy products, and they became the



Mount Hermon boys working at the hay ensilage cutter, 1928. Photos by NMH Archives



Lumbering, 1900s

third best herd in New England. In 1927, the herd was unfortunately infected with tuberculosis, which ended that chapter of NMH dairy herd dominance.

A decade later, NMH was caught in a wave of new technological and societal advancements. Between 1927 and 1960, the U.S. became increasingly urbanized. The mass production of dairy made it cheaper to buy milk than to produce it, which led to the herd being sold in 1961. The farm was shut down shortly after. Peter remembers that scene of abandonment very vividly: "It's just like people got up and left."

Luckily, that wasn't the end. The farm eventually did return in the 1970's, buoyed by the progressive back-to-the-land movement.

But to understand the farm's present circumstances, it's important to learn why it was created in the first place. It was out of necessity that NMH owned hundreds of dairy cows, that they sent the Mount Hermon boys to the woods every winter to log timber. This was the reality of a time before the comforts of technology sheltered us from the hard labor of lugging around hay to keep the cows fed, or cutting down trees to keep the dorms warm.

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The modern world has made it obsolete for NMH to have a working farm, so its function now is purely educational. Students get to experience farmwork for

the first time. They tap maple, harvest zucchini, and till the soil. The presence of livestock like draft horses or goats or dairy cows on campus was a wonderful thing, and it brought joy to many students. But it was neither easy nor sustainable to manage, and in the end it was too taxing on the school's resources.

The decision that the administration has made is a good one. But that leads to the question: where do we go from here?

Back the farm, actually.

I contacted the new farm director, Nancy Hanson, to find out what changes the farm was undergoing. And when I returned to the red barn again, I was a bit surprised to find that the place where the goats once stayed had been replaced by a shiny new tractor. The sight of stirrups and saddles still hung on the wall made me terribly nostalgic. Yet it wasn't all sad.

As Nancy led me around the sunny grounds, I saw the farm take on a new light. Peeking out through the gray cover of the greenhouse, a couple cucumber plants were growing. We passed by rows of tilled soil where plants of all kinds stuck their green stalks out to greet the sun. I saw watermelon radish, squash, and zucchini.

"These will all go to the dining hall," Nancy told me. "We're hoping to plant some grapes and blueberries soon."

A generous donation from alum Theresa M. Jacobs '10 has allowed NMH to expand its farm program and invest in more equipment— the shiny new tractor included— all of which will be going towards more vegetable plots, more experiences, more opportunity. Nancy told me that they're committed to growing a greater variety of fruits and vegetables, (which means more delicious, fresh food in the dining hall!) and are even looking to plant an apple and peach orchard.

By diverting resources from livestock to agriculture, the farm has set itself up for a sustainable, generational project; in a couple of months, there will be apple groves and peach trees set to bear fruit long after my time at NMH. I will miss Shorty, Belle, and the adorable cluster of goats. But the most important lesson that I've learned from the farm is that when you give something up, you gain something, too.



Lamplighter

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