

Going Home: 1937

by David Ackley

In the mid to late nineteen-thirties, according to my grandmother's Lela's reporting of family news in the personals column of the Nashua [NH] Telegraph, she, my grandfather and two or three of their six grown children, made a number of annual visits back to Cutler, on the Maine coast, from whence she, Fred and their first-born, Eugene, had emigrated around the turn of the last century. Lela had made the return alone or with a sister who lived near Nashua at intervals during the previous decade: for family funerals, including her mother's, but on occasion for weeklong sojourns with her Downeast relatives.

Fred's visits were rarer, and when either spouse went back, they went separately. But in the thirties, the family travelled by car together. As if my grandparents, Fred in particular, wanted their children to know something, perhaps belatedly, about where and what they'd all emerged from, and how their forebears had survived in this hardscrabble place hung perilously on the northeastern edge of the continent. A common fallacy of parents; to think their children would have benefited from having gone through what their parents couldn't avoid.

I've never seen Cutler, only in the old photograph of the family farm where I think my grandfather grew up: that's his black Buick parked in front.

[Cut of "The farm in Cutler" A paint-faded white farmhouse, and the Buick]

I feel drawn towards all of that, perhaps from some mix of my own experiences on the rocky shores, islands and beaches of Maine, and a tinge of the universal nostalgia felt by even those who have never seen the coast of Maine in person. I'd have liked to have been in the car going north with my father, his father and mother and an attentive aunt, like Ruth, with all the adults, telling me about this or

that sight along the way from the Portsmouth Bridge across Great Bay up Rte. 1 to Machias and Cutler, hard by the top end of the country at the border with New Brunswick.

Perhaps if my father had lived we would have made the trip and the link would have become real for me. You can miss what you never had and never could have, as if your life were constructed with certain gaps sealed in place, hard to fill or even grasp, but for the unapeasable longing.

