

Book Bag - Hampshire Gazette

by Steve Pfarrer

TALES OF A WAYSIDE COMMUNITY By Frances Henry
East Branch Press

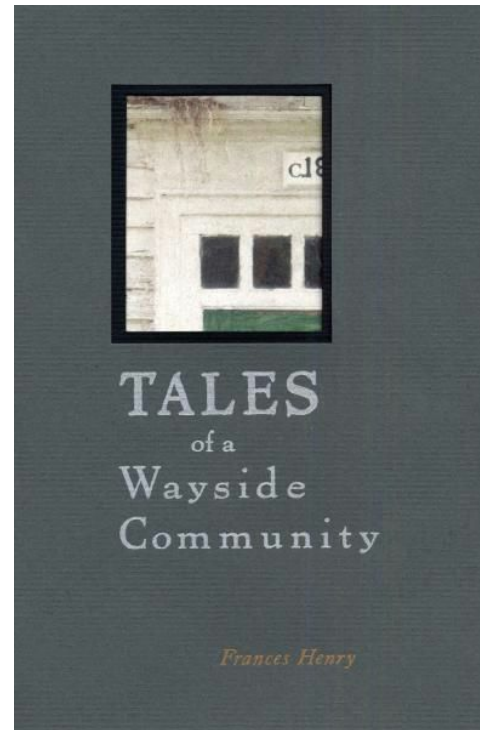
When Frances Henry moved to western Massachusetts in the early 1980s, two of the first people she met were Harry and Evelyn Guyette, longtime Plainfield dairy farmers who welcomed Henry to the new neighborhood with a fresh-made pie.

As Henry, of Cummington, recalls in her new book, “Tales of a Wayside Community,” by the time her new friends left, it had turned dark, the pie was devoured, and she felt “smitten.”

That’s one of many scenes Henry traces in her book, a collection of essays about her time in the Hilltowns and the people she’s met there. Harry Guyette, who farmed with horses up until the 1950s, was still working part of his farm on his own at 91, while also tending to his wife, who had become confined to a wheelchair at that point.

But Guyette takes the work, even at his advanced age, in stride. He tells Henry about some real pain, like the time a horse he was trying to shoe stepped on his foot: “The whole front of the horse standin’ on me. Now that’s a pinch.”

In another essay, Henry writes of a miraculous coincidence: English friends of hers live in the same house as did an English family that had befriended another of her neighbors, Dana, when



he was stationed in Britain during World War II. Dana had long since lost contact with that family, to his great regret.

But simply learning that the house survived WWII without being bombed greatly cheers the reclusive Dana, who came back from the carnage of war a different man. When he and his wife host a Christmas party a few months after discovering this information, an ebullient Dana greets his guests with holiday music, “leaning out of the upstairs window while he balances a speaker box in one arm and waves with the other.”

“Frances Henry knows by heart the farm world of Massachusetts, and writes of its people with warmth and tact and modest art,” writes former U.S. Poet Laureate Richard Wilbur of Cummington.

Frances Henry will read from and sign copies of “Tales of Wayside Community” Sunday at 4 p.m. in Plainfield Town Hall.