

Ghosts Who Haunt my Woods

Written for members of the Monadnock Conservancy

By Ernest Hebert

When my parents bought the house on 19 Oak Street in Keene when I was four years old we had two big trees in the yard. Even though the street was called Oak there were no oaks on Oak Street, but our trees were magnificent enough--indeed, they typified Keene. Does anybody here remember what Keene was called in the 1950s?

Yes, it was "The Elm City." The trees in our tiny yard were elms--towering, beautiful elms.

I remember when a crew of men took down our two elm trees. I watched the stumps rot and the earth settle over the next fifty plus years. I watched all the elms come down until you could no longer call Keene the Elm City.

In the summer of 1949 when I was eight years old, I remember my parents taking a driving tour of the forest fire that enveloped most of the town of Marlow in April of that year.

I remember my neighbor Donald Chase on the corner of Roxbury and Oak Street burning leaf litter and dried grass in the early spring. I remember the smell and how after a rain everything was suddenly green, and Mr. Chase whistling for his dog. I thought if I could whistle like Mr. Chase I could get through life unscathed.

The houses on oak street might be crowded in, but only a few hundred yards away were the woods of Beech Hill and Robinhood

