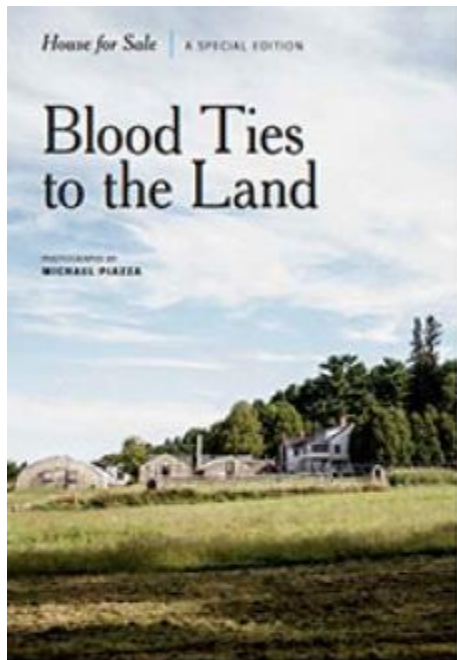


House for Sale

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In this provocative "House for Sale," the Tuttle family, heirs to America's oldest existing farm, discover that some historic legacies come with a cost.

BY JENNIFER LATSON

Lucy Tuttle sits on a patch of grass facing the empty storefront where she has sold her family's produce for the last 25 years. She leans back, pressing her palms into soft grass still wet with dew. It is an unusually warm spring morning in Dover, New Hampshire. The air smells fresh, a combination of flowers and dirt. This is the smell of her childhood, the smell of the sowing season. Because she was a girl, she was never expected to help spread manure or plant seeds in her youth. Her brother did that. Instead, she and her little sister, Becky, mowed the farm's 245 acres, pulling rails along the irrigation canals, spring on the teenage boys their father hired as farmhands. Now there are no farmhands. The fields behind her lie fallow. The store before her is dark and empty.

The sign by the road still bears the store's name in bold letters: Tuttle's Red Barn. But the message that once advertised the day's selection of crops is blank. Dead letters have sprouted in the gravel around it. Lucy can see the red paint starting to peel in patches from the storefront. Empty produce baskets are lined up by the front door, as if waiting to be allowed in. A white plaque by the door still reads: Welcome to Tuttle's America's Oldest Family Farm • Est. 1632.

This is the first spring of Lucy's lifetime that the fields haven't been planted with corn and cucumbers, strawberries and squash, pumpkins and peppers. In fact, it's the first time in nearly 400 years that this land hasn't been planted by a Tuttle: her brother, Will; her father, Hugh; or any of the nine generations of farmers who came before him. Lucy's grandfather, John Tuttle, made his way to what today is the smallest town of Dover—one of New Hampshire's oldest permanent settlements—in 1635 with a 20-acre land grant, secured three years before from King Charles I of England, and broke ground in the middle of a point of land between two tidal rivers, the Bellamy and the Cochran.

Now the farm is up for sale. At first, Lucy resisted the decision to sell, which was her brother's. "Over my dead body," she told him. As recently as five years ago, Lucy believed that the farm would live on in Tuttle hands. She still expected some member of the 12th generation—her son, one of Will's four children, or one of Becky's three—to come back and take the reins. Failing that, she secretly believed, well into her sixties, that she and her siblings could simply go on farming forever.

Stood on a patch of grass that is still—for now—Tuttle soil, Lucy looks around at a landscape so familiar that she almost can't bring it into focus anymore. It's like looking at herself in the mirror. She doesn't notice the details, just an overall impression of a part of herself, staring back. She thinks about what it would mean to no longer claim this land as her own.

She tucks her left leg beneath her, ankle-like. Her knee still accommodates these uneven fields, it's just a little crinkler than it once was. At 47, she's the oldest of the 12th generation of Tuttle. She feels like the youngest. Will has been as stubborn as an old man for decades. When Lucy wanted to breathe new life into the struggling farm, Will resisted. Why not let people pick their own strawberries or pumpkins? Let them interact with the land? Will didn't want strangers tramping around the fields. Why not play up the farm's deep history—offer hayrides and tell tales about the early days on the Tuttle



TOP LEFT: One of the fields behind the Tuttle farmhouse in Dover, New Hampshire, courtesy, Lucy Tuttle. TOP RIGHT: Lucy Tuttle, the 12th generation on the farm, sits on a patch of wet soil. THE STORE'S SIGN: A sign on a neighboring property, acquired by the Tuttle, the location of which has the above image. THE BARN'S LOG TUBS: Made with materials from a century of raising the farm's produce.

Farm? No, Will said, in hayrides. The conversation ended there.

A red-tailed hawk soars overhead. Lucy reaches up a hand to shade her eyes and watches a circle. She doesn't argue with her brother about the farm anymore. After all, Will owns the land and two-thirds of the business. The decision to sell, she recognized, was his to make—just as the decisions about strawberries and hayrides were his to make. Where she once stalled, she now acquiesces.

Two years ago, she finally told "Well, okay, we can sell the farm if it can only be to the most fit person, with the greatest ideas world." So they met with planners and developers. They entertained a pond by a nonprofit group that would have used the land for agricultural education, training would be furnished but the arrangement faltered after a season. In the meantime, Lucy thought deeply about this most treasured Tuttle business.

When Jennifer Latson, a third-year master of fine arts student in creative writing student at UNH, heard that Tuttle's Farm, America's oldest family farm in Dover, was for sale, she thought, 'They can't sell America's oldest family farm!' She had a nostalgic sense that it should be preserved at all costs, but after learning more about the family's complex relationship with the land, she realized that the situation was much more nuanced, and that sometimes the cost of preservation really can be too high. Latson's story about Tuttle Farm, which is told from the point of view of Lucy Tuttle, is featured in

the November/December issue of *Yankee* magazine “Blood Ties to the Land” (p. 104). [READ ONLINE >>](#)

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Written by Jennifer Latson



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