

Famous Last Words of Stanley Arthur Phelps

Part II

1993

We have had a real nice winter. More like the old fashioned winter with snow up to two feet here and more on the hills with no ice, which was better for logging. Douglas and I did a little logging at his place on the Pratt Road in Alstead as well as getting out wood to heat his home there which he has just about finished. We used my old JD 420 crawler and only had one break down so had pretty good luck.

Uncle Charles Messer died last month at 99 years, the last and the oldest of his family. Mother was 95 and I think Uncle Will was in his nineties when he died but not sure.

Richard and Audrey are in the poorest health of the Phelps family at this time as Audrey has been in the hospital for two weeks with pneumonia and complications. Dick is home but can not be left alone as he has Parkinson's disease and has to take medications. Charles had trouble with a blood clot in his leg in Florida so is not able to do much this spring so he will not be able to sugar for two years in a row now. Too bad as he has all the latest equipment and all set to make good syrup.

We had what was called on TV the blizzard of 93 a couple weeks ago but if I had not watched TV now and then I would not have known it was a blizzard here in New Hampshire. We had 15 inches of snow here with quite high winds but not too cold. In the old days before automobiles it would have been called a heavy snow storm and school would have kept if it was a weekday. Children either walked to school or went on horse drawn vehicles so a little snow did not bother much and most homes in the countryside did not have telephones. Most of the trouble in this storm was caused by water and tornadoes in the South.

The farmers used to take a walking plow and hang it over the rear bunk of a logging sled, chain it to the runner and plow their driveway and quite often keep on going to the next farm and have the roads all plowed. When snow got deep sometimes they would put boards above the plow to help throw the snow back. If the drifts were too deep for the horses they would go out in the fields and drive around it 'till we could all get together and shovel it out. Quite often we did not even get paid for it but we were glad enough to get the road open so we didn't care.

Dennis and Denise moved to Georgia last fall so we have not seen them since. They write and seem to be getting along all right. Lois and Hack come over about once a month to visit Hack's mother and us. She has been having the shingles so not too well. June and Dave are getting a divorce so they are right in style for modern life style. Curtis is living in Washington D.C. where he and Elwood have bought a condominium and Curtis is working on it. Gary is on a farm in Northfield and drops

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in once a week. Douglas is working on his home on the Pratt Road in Alstead as there has not been much building in NH this winter.

We had a chimney fire and the smoke came out a flue in the living room and caused quite a lot of smoke damage. The insurance people brought in some cleaners and then Doug has been painting and helping us get things back in shape. Lucky we had him close by. We always seem to have one of the kids around when we need them. This is a great help when we get older and have trouble with lifting and climbing. Elsie says she never had her house cleaning done so early in the spring before but does not think this is the best way to do it.

Today is the third of April and tonight we have to put the clocks ahead one hour to make people think the days are longer. Everything is white this morning as it has been snowing a little the last two days. We still have about a foot of snow in the woods except on south slopes. Reminds me of the old winters when the farmers would say we had six weeks sledding in March. I remember sugaring with the old wooden buckets. When we got home from school we would have to dump them out so when the snow melted we wouldn't get a little water in now and then but it all boiled out and made the syrup a little darker but we usually ate the dark syrup ourselves and sold the better grade. We also made sugar of it and that tasted just as sweet to us.

The worst thing to me about the old wooden buckets besides being heavy, was having to wash them and stack them to dry at the end of the season. Three or four hundred wooden buckets can take up a lot of room as they have to be placed two on the bottom and one on top to drain, making rows as high as one can reach. The bigger boys would have to pile the top rows.

Also a lot of them were painted red on the outside and sometimes white on the inside. Sometimes the white paint would flake off on the inside so the sap would always have to be strained before boiling. These buckets would usually leak a little till they swelled up but we would tap the metal hoops to tighten them up if they got too loose. When we young folks were boiling we would take the last pan of syrup into the house where mother would finish boiling it to the proper degree for the best syrup on the kitchen range. Of course this was all done with wood heat as that was all we had so there was a lot of labor involved. But it gave us boys something to do as we didn't have electricity or any of the modern ways to waste time. I suppose nowadays it might be against the law or we would have to report to the government or some other stupid thing. The more educated people get the more stupid they get. Somehow they think it's all right for a boy to play by the hour at throwing a ball or something and maybe getting hurt but if he uses the same amount of time and energy at doing something useful it is a bad thing and the government people get all excited

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and pass a law to stop him working. And then they all wonder what we can do to stop the boys raising hell on the streets.

Just like the drug problem. They want the taxpayers to spend millions of dollars to stop drugs coming into the country when all the people have to do is stop using drugs and there would not be any coming in. We are spending millions on AIDS cures and in the next breath want to let the queers into the Army and spread it around. People are so afraid of hurting someone's right to do something but if it hurts someone else's rights they don't pay any attention. Rodney King violated the rights of a good many people before he was caught but then he started screaming about his rights. In the old days when this country believed in punishing the guilty he would have been whipped and put in the stocks for people to throw mud, rotten eggs or horse manure in his face.

It is getting in this country more and more where everything is run by the cities. That is where most of the voters are but it shows how stupid many of them are when we learn that most of the troubles in the U.S. today are in the cities. The rest of the country is asked to raise money to help out the city.

It is not in the nature of man to learn from other people's mistakes, in other words from history. Especially in this country we are free to do things and find out for ourselves. Which is quite often a hard teacher and quite often we find out that we could have done better and saved alot of trouble to ourselves and others if we had listened to the voice of experience as everything we do has been tried before and usually the best way has been found and handed down thru the ages. Like marriage for example, over the centuries it was learned that marriage was the best way for a woman to raise her children and have a mate to help her. Also being married and having just one sexual partner practically eliminates sexual diseases like AIDS, syphilis and gonorrhea. But altho marriage with one partner was proved to be the best method for women to raise their children it is the women more and more in late years who have decided to do away with this system of just one partner and since easy divorce and easy sex have swept the nation starting in the 60's most of the problems with young folks have been getting worse every year. As I said before these are facts proven by doctors but still humans have to find out for themselves. So as the old folks used to say "we are locking the door after the horse in stolen" instead of not letting things get started like Gays in the military and teenage pregnancy. The mothers of the country have got to raise their children right and not expect someone else to do it for them. Playing and having fun is the number one priority in the U.S. today and anything that interferes with it is pushed out of the way.

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1994

A good year for the Phelps family but not so good for the country I am afraid as Bill Clinton, a Democrat, has been elected President and with the Democrat majority in Congress I am afraid the government bureaucracy will escalate and taxes will get heavier, in other words the people will lose more of their freedoms. Clinton wants the government to run the health care of the nation. When it has failed in every country that has tried it. The same old story, we can't learn from other peoples mistakes but have to try everything ourselves.

Uncle Charles Messer died at age 99, the oldest of the Messer children. His sister, Florence, my mother was 95 when she died.

Brother Charles is staying late in Florida and not making syrup this year so I tapped half a dozen trees around the house here and have made two quarts of syrup just to make sure I remember how and to give me something to do. It takes a lot of time and effort to make maple syrup.

We had the coldest winter for some time and the most snow which helped as the frost did not go very deep in the ground. The coldest morning was 30 degrees below zero but there was over a month of subzero weather. We got most of the snow in December and January which is unusual as February and March are usually the snow months but it was a good thing as insulation against the cold. The most snow was about three feet in the woods before it had a rain and settled some. I like this kind of winter because we don't have ice and the snow shoes and skis work well.

I sold about 30 Christmas trees and gave away five or six but the competition has gotten so bad I could only get \$10 each for them. But every little bit helps when we get old and can't work. I also cut a big maple in back of the garage so will get about five cords of wood from it. I also cut about 3,100 foot of logs up back and got almost \$600 for them before paying the trucker so I kept pretty busy all winter.

We had a nice winter with more snow than usual which I liked and colder weather than we have had late years, getting down to 30 degrees below zero one morning. The snow gave me something to do to keep in shape and the trees and landscape were beautiful.

Brother Richard died in March and we had a good mild day for the funeral and he was buried in Bernardston cemetery near Mother's grave.

I made almost three gallons of maple syrup from my five trees so we will not have to buy any this year. It has been a real good sugar year.

We didn't do any traveling this summer as my eyes are not good enough for much night driving and the cataracts are not quite ready to come off.

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Worked cleaning up woods and picking up dead wood that I can burn in furnace. Sold over 100 Christmas trees at \$10 each. Helped a little with the taxes. Have plenty left for next year. Went deer hunting some but did not work at it very hard ^^ as neither of us eat much meat now. Only saw three and they were does so didn't have to shoot them. Got up at four one morning and went up to Warren NH to hunt with Tom Johnson but we did not see any that day. He got a 9 point buck the next week in the same place so we were in a good location. He owns over a hundred acres of woodland that borders the National Forest. We had a nice Christmas with all the family here but June and Dennis but not all the same day as the house is not large enough. Tomorrow is New Years and we have no snow on the ground at present.

1995

We have had the mildest January on record and I dug parsnips the 15th with no frost in the ground. We had one snow storm in February of 12 inches but I only used my snow blower three times all winter.

I tapped a few trees around the house the 18th of February and took the buckets up the 18th of March and made 16 quarts of syrup and a couple pounds of maple sugar. I am the only one in the family making syrup now. I have not used any sugar since making the syrup as I use it in coffee and cereal. Elsie does not use it much so still buys sugar for cooking. Elsie's last cousin on her father's side, Edna May Coyne died in March at 86 years and was buried in West Northfield cemetery.

George and Rita came out from Nevada in June to go to his class reunion in Northfield. We had a good visit with them. George was born in Bernardston in 1927 but the folks moved to Northfield soon after he started school. He moved to Nevada when he got out of the Navy as father was living in Elko, Nevada at that time. He got married and all three of his children were born in Nevada.

Elsie has three cousins left on her mother's side of the family who live in Brattleboro, VT. The oldest, Harold Barry, has retired and he and his wife, Peggy, live in a development in West Brattleboro. We just heard she has cancer. They had a boy and a girl. His sister, Viola, married Bud Pratt and they have two boys. The younger one has just developed cancer. The youngest girl, Bertha, has had heart trouble the last few years but is doing better now.

Viola had a heart attack the middle of November and had to have her arteries opened up around the heart. She is home now and doing well. I guess heart trouble runs in the family as all three have it now.

I have been cutting trees for my neighbor, Herman Sargent, around his buildings as some of the pines were tall and he was afraid they might blow over on his shop. Some were within 6 or 8 feet of the shop and he was a little worried but I got them all down okay. He said he trusted God and me. A lot of people leave the small pines

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around their buildings because they are so pretty when they are small but then they get big and the needles get all over the roof and if they should blow over they would do a lot of damage so then they want to cut them which is sometimes a problem. The biggest problem I had was taking care of the limbs as these old pine grown in the open have lots of branches.

We are in the middle of deer season now but I have been too busy to go out much but the first three days I saw two and one was shot about 200 yards ahead of me but I did not shoot as they were moving fast and in thick woods. I hunt alone now and move pretty slow but I enjoy being in the woods as much as ever. I heard a little noise last Sunday as I was walking slowly on a trail in the town forest and I looked up and saw a large oak tree falling but it went across the trail instead of toward me. Another minute and I would have been right under it but could probably have had time to jump back out of the way. It was a good live oak almost two feet thru at the base but we have had a lot of rain lately and it was on a side hill where the roots just pulled out and let it fall making no noise until it hit another tree knocking that one over too.

Thanksgiving is next week and we will be going to Nottingham to have dinner with Lois and Hack if the weather is good. Gary is back with us for awhile as his fanning venture in Mass failed up.

December - We had a good year with Christmas trees this year and the best part is meeting all the people. If I sell 100 trees I meet twice as many people as lots of children come to help.

February 14, 1996

I am 85 years old today and just getting back on my feet after a bad fall in the woods the second day of January. I was getting off my tractor when it started rolling ahead and caught my left foot. I stepped in a hole with my right foot and my left was carried sideways and behind me before I could get it off. It tore the ligaments below my knee and has been pretty slow healing. The first two weeks I laid flat on my back as I could not move the leg sideways. I crawled down out of the woods and into bed and stayed right there. Gary was here but came home with a bad cold so he was not much help. Then Doug caught it and he stayed home and then Elsie caught it. I was just getting around with a walker but could not do much. I called Lois and she came over two days and I caught it so we were pretty sick bunch. We had a nurse in a couple days and Doug got going and took his mother to the doctor so she began feeling a little better as they gave her antibiotics to cure the congestion. When I first got laid up I thought it would be a good time to take a vacation. I could look out the window and see the snow blowing and some mornings were subzero but when we all got sick that took all the fun out of it.

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I was supposed to renew my license the 15th of January but had to put it off 'til February so went down yesterday and got it renewed 'til year 2000.

Last week we got word that sister Ruth, who lives in California, fell and broke her hip. As trouble usually goes in threes we received word this week that brother Raymond, who lives in Nevada, broke his collarbone or breast bone altho I have not heard any particulars of that one yet. They tell me at my age I should not be working in the woods but these other people are walking on floors and sidewalks and are breaking bones while I fell in the woods and didn't break any bones so I tell them the woods is safer.

They all tell me I should not tap my trees this year but I may just to have something to do. I can't carry much sap at a time but I have the wood all cut and I can sit by the fire and keep it burning just as well as I can sit in the house and do nothing.

I have 200 Xmas trees coming in April to set out but by that time I should be in pretty good shape. I sold a lot of my big Xmas trees so trimming will be a little easier this year.

April 1 - tapped seven trees and made six gallons of syrup and a couple pounds of maple sugar. All my trees were within 50 yards of my fire so I had no trouble collecting altho I could not carry much more than a half pail at a time. My knee is a little better but gains strength very slowly. Going up and down stairs and ladders is the hardest. Most old people have to use a cane anyway so I am not alone.

It has been a sad year for old folks in their eighties. One day last month we had two funerals in one day. My next door neighbor, Herman Sargent, died at age 82 and a lady whose family lived next door to us on the Johnson farm and in later years has lived a few houses below us on the Keene Road was buried the same day. I will miss Herman a lot as he and I would visit back and forth in our gardens and orchards as well as fishing and hunting together. I remember one Saturday afternoon the first of deer season I had my deer and was sitting watching a football game after dinner. It was a college game I remember as I do not watch pro games anymore and Herman dropped in to see if I had time to help him get a deer that he had wounded slightly in the foot, he thought. There was about an inch of snow and he had trailed it down to the river but decided to get help. I told him sure so I drove his car to where he could follow the deer and drove down the road below the farm buildings. I knew that section quite well as I had worked on the next farm several years. I picked a good spot and when the deer came thru I shot it and Herman got me home in time to watch the rest of the ball game.

Another time on the last day I had my deer but he didn't so I told him we would go up the road toward Walpole as we had just time for a couple drives before dark, in the second patch of woods as we were walking parallel I heard him shoot and when I got there he had a nice 4 point buck.

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We fished together a few times but he was an expert and felt he could do better alone as he usually caught more fish but I quite often caught the larger fish and I guess he thought he could have caught them if I had not been along. We had a lot of fun together and I will miss him a lot.

Guy Bemis died last month also at the age of 95. I first met him in the late twenties when I was a clerk in the IGA store in Bernardston and the boss, Myron Barber, and I would go up to Keene to Holbrooks to meetings of members of the Independent Grocers Alliance which was just getting started at that time and Guy was also getting started in Walpole in a store of his own. Later when I moved to Walpole we traded in his store and I met him when I had to get my NH driver's license. When I was in the log trucking business I did quite a lot of work for him and when we both retired I often did small jobs for him as I was 10 years younger. I remember when he asked me to draw logs for him in Athens, VT where he had a large timber lot. I said I guessed I could work it in as Dennis and I each had a truck at the time. He said "Good, he kind of wanted me to draw for him." He said, "You know the old saying - it's better to hire a rascal you know than one you don't."

1997

The year 1996 was pretty good all around but each year now we find more things we can't do or have trouble doing.

Elsie gave up her driving license as her eyesight is getting worse. She also has more trouble with her feet and legs. She has been fighting a sore on her ankle where she fell and bumped it two months ago. She has been to Doctor but about all they do is give her pills. With all the modern medicine and know how I should think they could cure it. Of course it bothers her mostly at night so she has trouble sleeping and that makes her so weak she has to rest in the daytime.

We have had a mild winter with bare ground thru January but have had a foot or more of snow thru February. Last year I tapped my trees the last week in February but may wait this year 'til March.

Dorothy's husband, Elmer, died last summer, otherwise there were no deaths in the family. Charles and Ray are on oxygen full time. John and Gladys have stayed close to home this winter but are still living alone and taking care of themselves. John is 89. He will be 90 in October. Sister Ruth had a bad year. She fell and broke her hip and arm last spring and is still having trouble and will have another operation.

August 1- only made 4 gallons of syrup this year as it got to be more work than fun. We had a dry spring and June was hot and dry with only about 1 inch of rain. It hurt my peas and my potatoes came up very uneven and grew very slow. I will have more small ones this year but Elsie says she likes them better than the large ones.

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I have been behind on my work all spring and summer and have just begun to put wood in the cellar. My deep well pump went bad so had to get that out which proved to be quite a job as we had dumped dirt on it while digging the cellar under the El. That was in June and we still have not got it going. David's brother, Bill, and his son, Jeff, have been putting it in. The water is not good for drinking so I told them no big hurry but now our other wells are getting low and we can use the water for some things. The new pump had to have new control switches so I guess that is holding it up now. With all the modern equipment it still seems to take longer to get things done than it used to. Maybe it is because I used to do things myself and it seemed shorter. It cost over \$1,700.

We had both reunions last month and we lost Dorothy's husband, Elmer Russell at the Phelps reunion and Arthur Messer at the Messer. The big thing in the Phelps family this year was John's 90th birthday October 12, The first Phelps that I know of to reach that age, We had a big party for him at the Congo church in Bernardston. There were over 100 guests. Sister Ruth flew out from California and George and Rita came from Nevada. All the living brothers and sisters were there but Raymond. Charles celebrated his 80th birthday at the same time as he will be in Florida on his birthday, November 25th. George will be 70 next week so the Phelps family had three boys 70, 80, and 90 all in about a month. I never heard of that happening before.

2000

Well, the year 2000 just rolled around and all the dire predictions never came to pass. This modern world worries about things that never entered our minds 100 years ago.

When people were asked what they thought was the most important invention in the last 100 years they came up with computers and airplanes and other things that we could get along without. I mean I could, as I don't use either one. I would list inventions like safety razors and washing machines and even toilet paper. These things are so common now that most people don't realize what it was like to shave with a straight razor, to mix the lather in a shaving mug, to strop the razor on a leather strap and to put little pieces of paper on the cuts to stop the bleeding. Look at the time saved today.

1998

At the age of 87 and Elsie at 86 we are beginning to have a lot of little things bother us. Of course Elsie has glaucoma which gets a little worse each year even with eye drops twice a day. Her grandmother was blind at her age but they did not have the kind of medication they have today.

Elsie fell and banged her leg pretty bad (1997), which finally developed into an ulcer and that took months to cure. She sleeps down stairs now to be closer to the

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bathroom but has developed a pain in her lower back which bothers her sleeping. She also had a lot of lower abdominal pain so finally went to the doctor. They spent all day checking for blockage of the intestines and X-ray of the abdomen. They couldn't find any blockage but decided she had diverticulitis. She also has shortage of breath so has to rest a lot. If she goes out riding too long she gets cramps in her legs and can't sleep. She says the golden years aren't that much fun.

Sister Ruth has been out from California and stayed here two days. We had a fine visit and took her to Northfield to Bob's and Albert's old home and up thru Vernon, over Huckle Hill by the old Phelps farm. Things have not changed as much as we have.

She is flying home today and Betty and Arthur are taking her to the airport so we went down yesterday to say goodbye. She says she will try to come again next year.

2000

The year 1999 was quite uneventful except for Elsie having trouble with her ^ heart and going on a regular diet of pills each day. As she is getting so she can hardly see the pills she has help putting them in sections where she can just dump them out morning and night all sorted. She got thru this winter better than last but I have to sleep down stairs as I cannot hear her if she falls out of bed or needs me in the night.

I put in a gas furnace to connect to the hot water system to use in case I can't tend the wood furnace but we are still waiting to get it connected up. I have been cutting my old spruce this winter as they were not healthy and were spreading disease to my young trees. I am burning a lot of red pine this winter as I thinned the red pine stand last winter. It makes a hot fire but does not last so have to run up and down cellar a lot. However, it would be left to rot if I did not burn it so I help clean up the woodlot.

A great mistake made by the modern generation is to close the forests to all timber harvest. Of course they let people play in the woods with off road vehicles and snowmobiles that do more damage over the long run than cutting trees that are past their prime and cleaning the woods to prevent forest fires which nature has to use if people don't keep the forest cleared. Also forests left to themselves have insects and disease to help nature prevent overcrowding so we have forests dying just the same but no one gets the benefit of it. The best way to destroy anything is to make it free for people to use.

The last week of January, 2001, I was shoveling a little snow in my driveway by the mailbox when I slipped and fell on my left side. I cracked my pelvis and could not walk but a fellow stopped and helped me up. My right leg worked some but my left side was helpless. We started for the house and Douglas came along so they got me into the house. I was laid up most of the winter with that. I could not get in and

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out of bed for two weeks so slept in a recliner. I got around with a crutch for my right leg and a cane for my left one. I walked backward as I could not drag my left leg forward as it was too painful. Dragging it backward did not seem to put any strain on it where it hurt. By the last of February it was well enough so I tapped my trees and I could gather the sap by using a cane for my left leg and carrying a half pail of sap at a time. I made 17 quarts of syrup. The last of April when my small trees came to set out I started having almost like convulsions and throwing up altho nothing came up. After about an hour I was so weak I could not stand so called the ambulance and went to the hospital in Keene. They gave me X-rays and two or three other tests but could not find anything wrong with my stomach but they did find the crack in my pelvis which had healed nicely. They said they could not have done anything for it anyway so I saved some money there. They sent me home and the next day I set out about half my trees. The day after that I don't remember anything, even getting up in the morning. Elsie got Doug down and he took me to the hospital again. I don't remember anything even where I was for the next week but they gave me all kinds of tests and pills to keep me quiet. They cut a hole in my throat and put a tube in so I would not choke to death. After two weeks they finally isolated the germ or whatever it was and sent me home. Visiting nurses came for ten days to change the dressing on my throat and I began to get back so I knew what was going on.

Elsie came down to see me but at first I did not even know her so as she had trouble walking she did not come too often. When I got home her legs got so bad she fell a couple times outdoors so I had to tell her not to go out without a cane or a walker. The 3 prong cane was pretty good but one afternoon she was in the further flower garden and when she turned around she sat down and couldn't get up. She called but I was up in the garden and didn't hear her. She had something bright colored on so I finally saw her and came down. We had quite a time getting her up and she did not go out by herself much after that. In the winter she got a bad infection in her left leg. It spread to her foot and that got so bad she went to the hospital but it got worse and finally the circulation got so bad they took off her leg but it was too late and the poison got in her whole system and she died April 2. She died quite peaceful in her sleep. Now I am all alone except for her cat, Goldie. We were married 69 years. I miss her a lot.

January 1, 2003

I am still living alone on my little farm but my children check up on me quite regular.

I had a check up yesterday and the nurse just called and said I was going to live to be 100 but I told her I hoped not. It is not too much fun when all your friends and older relatives have died. I don't see how these old folks make out who do not have children or other family left to take care of them.

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We are having a lot of cold and snow this winter and had quite a lot of rain in the fall so my wells are full.

I had a good year selling Christmas trees, selling over 100 and giving away a dozen or so to churches and relatives.

I did not get to go deer hunting only 3 or 4 days as I had to be here all day to sell the trees. Elsie used to be able to do that as all we do is stand in the doorway and take the money and hand them a saw. I ordered 200 more trees this year but they will not be big enough to sell 'til I'm 100. I have been selling them for about 30 years now so do not have to advertise.

I made about 3 gallon of syrup this year and still have a little left. The only one in the family still making maple syrup.

I had a good garden this year so have plenty of vegetables still. I made two squash pies this afternoon and have potatoes and onions enough to last 'til summer. I canned 21 pints of shell beans which are my favorite and some string beans. I get by on less than \$20 a week and don't have to buy any drugs yet. So I live pretty cheap.

I also burn wood for heat so do not have to buy any fuel. It also gives me good exercise going up and down stairs to tend the furnace and out to get wood for the kitchen fire.

I think I will give the farm to one of the boys to keep it in the Phelps name for awhile. Of course Dennis is the only one married so it will not be very long if I give it to one of the others and Dennis is in love with the southern climate now. It may be long enough so folks will call it the old Phelps Farm.