

THE PATH

Martha Warren Hertel

December 1979

THE PATH

Walk to the Cornell Campus? From the White Farmhouse at the Top of the Hill? Today, 1979, it poses an early morning choice, to walk or to drive the car?

In 1907, no decision was required. To walk was the only way my father George F. Warren, a new faculty member, got to the campus. He was always looking for an easier and more efficient way to do a job. It was quite natural for him to develop a shortcut. A triangle has three sides, not always equidistant. The roads, now Warren Road and Forest Home Drive, took him on the two longest legs of a triangle. A path would require walking only the shortest one.

In 1911, Professor William Albert "Bugs" Riley lived in the Whetzel house (206 Forest Home Drive) and owned the property in back of it as far up the hill as Warren Road. (He was the Entomology professor, not to be confused with Professor Howard Wait "Gas Engine" Riley, the Agricultural Engineering professor for whom Riley-Robb Hall is named. Both Rileys were on the faculty at this time. I assume the nicknames gave each a proper identity.) My father purchased a ten foot strip of land from the top of the hill (now Warren Road) to the first bridge across Fall Creek on Forest Home Drive, a distance of 450 feet and a drop in elevation of about 90 feet. This deed took account of a chicken-house through which the property line would go. As noted in the deed, Professor Warren could move it. However, he never did.

In 1914, the J.C. Whetzel's, the Plant Pathology Professor Herbert Whetzel's parents, bought the Riley property. They were "Grandfather" and "Grandmother" Whetzel to the entire neighborhood. As to the chicken house. Grandfather Whetzel had chickens there for several years. Eventually, about 1925, the building was no longer used and was demolished. The path had already been well established around it and it continues thus today. In 1960, the foot of The Path was slightly changed. Amy Whetzel wished to plant a few shrubs in the northwest corner. The shrubs were planted and permission to use the first few feet of her driveway was given for persons using The Path.

The land adjoining The Path on the northern side belongs to Cornell University. It is an unspoiled area today's environmentalists would enjoy. This area

is part of the Hasbrouck property willed to Cornell University. An inscription on the stone bench across Pleasant Grove Road from 200 Forest Home Drive (the Hasbrouck house) reads:

In Memory of Charles A. Hasbrouck of the Class of 1884
A Forest Home Boy Who Gave Cornell University His Home And
Seventy Acres Including This Ground To Be Put To Such Use As
Would Best Serve The Welfare of The Women Students

In seventy years this land adjacent to The Path appears almost untouched. Almost, for one spring it sprouted two or three unfinished huts or tree houses, the kind 8 to 12 year olds start and seldom complete.

There is little in life and living that takes no care. In its earliest years a constant winter disposal of coal ashes kept the foot-bed smooth, covered ice, snow and mud. Two students usually lived in the White Farmhouse and ate meals at Drakes's Boarding House at the foot of The Path. (Cynthia and David Bouldin are the present owners of this property at 218 Forest Home Drive.) Each winter morning as one of them walked to breakfast, he carried yesterday's furnace ashes. These he dumped on The Path where most needed and returned after breakfast with the empty pails. When the coal furnace was converted to oil, the house was warmed on a chilly morning by a turn of the thermostat. But there were no ashes to renew The Path. (Amy Whetzel remembers her father putting ashes on the lower section.)

Gradually the footpath became rough and winter snow made it slippery. One spring our 14 year old son, Tom, needed a Boy Scout community service project. He and a friend, Dick Heydt, of similar need, installed railings at strategic points. These were appreciated for many years; many a spill avoided.

A few spills were not avoided. For as many people to travel such a steep path for 70 years, a few upsets should be expected. Some persons were in a hurry to get to school or to make it to an "eight o'clock" (AM) college class. Many a child has left home in a rush only to return a few minutes later for the care of a scraped elbow or knee. Only one episode required a doctor's care. Nat Roe, as a Cornell freshman, lived and worked for his room in 1938-39 in the White Farmhouse. Winter arrived and he carried ashes to The Path. A slip of some kind and his leg was broken. Strangely, he had been skiing the day before

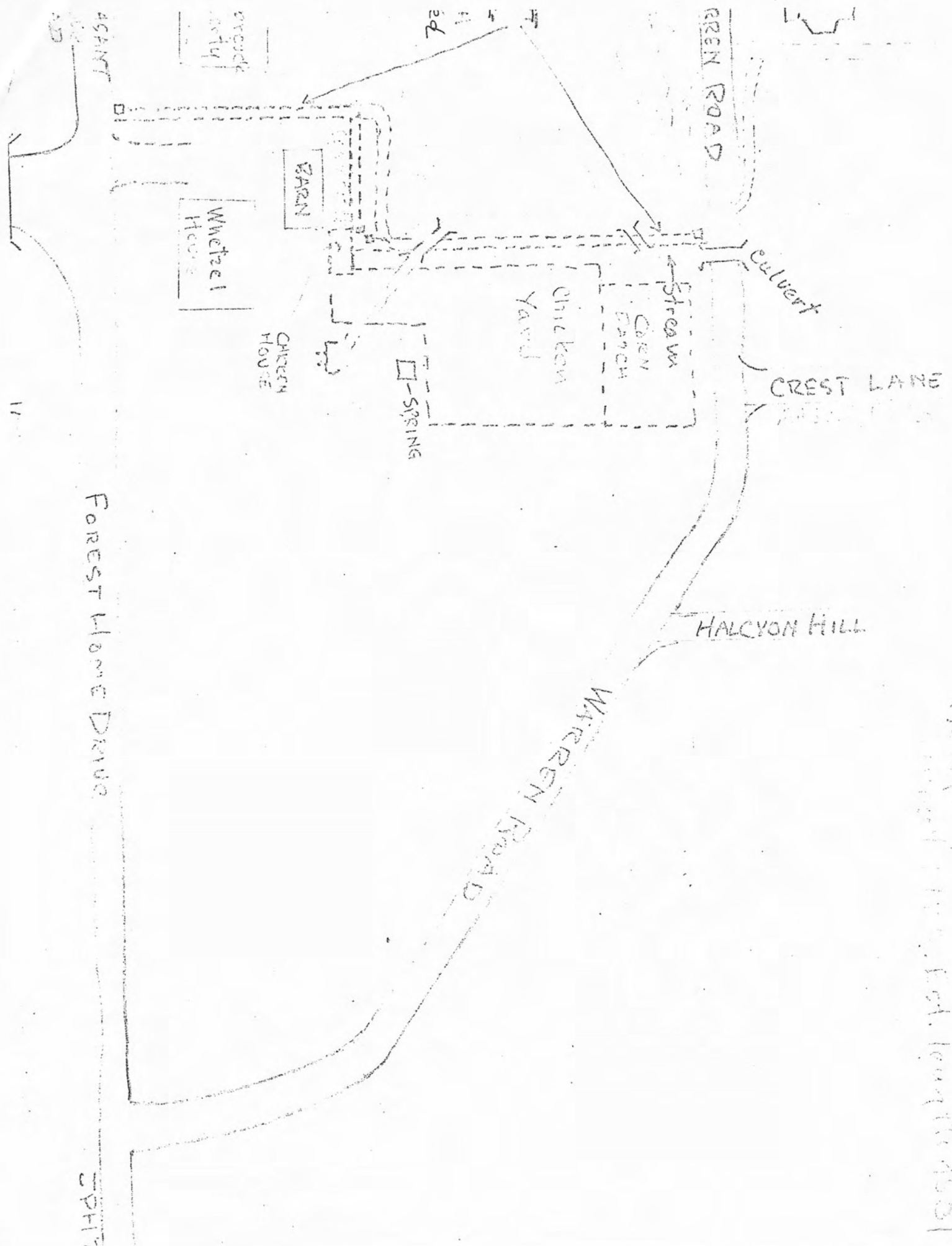
with no accident. Another episode I especially appreciated for it shows the "esprit de corps" of the people using The Path and in the neighborhood. At this time the school bus for high school students did not come up Warren Road. It stopped at the foot of The Path. My niece, Julie Swan, was hurrying for it one winter morning. The bus was already loading when she reached the top of the last descent. She hurried, fell and her armful of books scattered. She recovered, picked up her books; the bus waited. As she boarded the bus, everyone clapped. A disaster had turned into a success.

Every year the spring rains bring a drainage problem. The two culverts usually need cleaning. Six to ten year olds find it fun to make dams which may divert the water and cause washouts across The Path. My husband, John Hertel, found a fun solution. A Saturday afternoon was set when he and our student boy would be repairing The Path. Our children and others in the neighborhood were invited to help. After a busy hour or two the job was completed. It stayed in repair for four or five years. Then another group of children had grown up to become dam-builders. Another Saturday work-a-thon and it was repaired for four more years. Children learn too. This fall, 1979, extensive repairs were needed at the top of The Path. Kris Mersched volunteered, and placed several steps at this steep part.

Many feet have trod this path. School children and college students have run to school and trudged home. They are now grown and moved to distant places. New Families with other children have moved to the top of the hill. Every four years brings a new group of college students. The Path continues to serve. Professors and their wives come and go, though their stay may be longer. World War II and severely curtailed auto traffic saw an added group of foot travelers from farther distances.

A walk on a path is more pleasant than along a road. Today, the necessity to be constantly alert to traffic gives the path a relaxed feeling the road can never have. This path or short-cut has a beauty in any season.

Walkways and bikeways are a current issue. I recall only one person trying to cycle this steep path- a newsboy. This path has had an active seventy years. Will it see another seventy?



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THE PATH

Addendum March 1985

We, Martha and John Hertel, considered the future of the Path as we were selling the White Farm house and the three acres of Warren Road frontage. The Path seemed to go with the Farm house. However, continued and continuous care would be necessary. Care by the daily users seemed best. These persons would vary each year. At that time, 1978-80, considerable interest was growing in Tompkins County to establish open spaces such as parks, walkways and bikeways. After due deliberation, we received word the Town of Ithaca would accept it as a gift.

The Town's lawyer studied the deed. One of his staff discovered it was only partially ours. At the time of my Father's death in 1938, property was owned jointly by my parents and it went to my Mother; or so everyone assumed. However, this one parcel, a ten foot wide strip, now called the Path, had been purchased by itself, as an afterthought, and the deed had been only in my Father's name. So, at his death, as New York State Estate Law required, my Mother would receive one-third and her children two-thirds. My Mother had given us her share in a quit claim deed in 1949 when we bought the Farm house. So, we owned four-ninths of the Path and my sisters and brothers one-ninth each. Unraveling this could prove to be a lawyer's hey-dey. How many people were now involved in giving this piece of land to our local town-ship? This must have been in the Town Engineer, Larry Fabbroni's mind when he called me one evening. Did I have brothers or sisters? Yes. How many? Five. Are they all living? Yes. All this in a growing anxiety- and finally. Did I think they would be willing to give it to the Town. My answer, yes. He still seemed unconvinced.

After some delay, legal papers came from the Town's lawyer. A legal form for each of the six of us to sign before a Notary Public. And it must be done in our home residence community. At the time these came, my brother,
Fred, from Indiana

Fred, from Indiana was visiting us in Ithaca. How simple it would have been to see an Ithaca Notary and sign his paper here, but no, it must be done in his Indiana county. So, these legal forms started a journey via the U.S. mail to Indiana, Louisiana, and New Hampshire. Luckily three of us live in Ithaca. Properly notarized with all of the signatures, returned to Ithaca, it was sent to the Town. The Path was duly accepted as a gift. One wonders, is it simpler to sell?

The Path is now referred to by the Town authorities and new residents as The Walkway. The Town has spent many man and woman hours on its repair, realignment, and upgrading. It now follows the deeded lands exactly, no chicken house problems. Amy Whetzel had her shrubs at the Forest Home Drive entrance removed, gravel was placed on the entire walkway, steps were constructed of railroad ties and hand-rails installed at the steepest parts. The top or Warren Road entrance now has a set of steel grated steps, efficient so snow and ice do not accumulate. The natural look has been preempted by efficiency and safety. One can assume the Path will continue to serve both practically and esthetically for many more years. It is a Walkway.

A copy of the original deed is included. In 1911 deeds were hand-written. The Town Clerk at that time had a unique and attractive handwriting. I'm glad it wasn't typed. We would have missed this added joy.

NO. 177 DEEDS

William A. Riley et al

TO

George F. Warren

This Indenture, Made the 28th day of October in the year

of our Lord one thousand ~~eight~~ hundred and ~~eleven~~ BETWEEN

William A. Riley and Mae F. Riley, his wife and Harry Edwin Smith, all of the City of Ithaca, County of Tompkins and State of New York

of the first part, and

George F. Warren of the Town of Ithaca in said County

of the second part, Witnesseth, That the said part us of the first part, in consideration of the sum of One Dollar ~~in~~ other valuable consideration (\$1.00) to them duly paid, have sold and BY THESE PRESENTS do grant and con

to the said party of the second part, his heirs and assigns, ALL THAT TRACT OR PARCEL OF LAND situate in

Town of Ithaca County of Tompkins and State of New York, consisting of a strip of land ten (10) feet in width running from the state highway through Forest Home, along the north-west boundary of the lands conveyed to the said William A. Riley and Harry Edwin Smith by deed of Jacob E. Bogardus and wife dated Mar 1911 and recorded in Tompkins County Clerk's Office in Book 175 of deeds at page 521, to the highway running from Forest Home to Hanshaw Corners; the said north-western boundary being the south-eastern boundary of Hasbrouck lands now owned by Cornell University described as follows: commencing in the center of the street road passing through a stone monument on the northeast line thereof and running north 54° 35' East 317 feet to an iron pipe; thence south 32° 57' east 88 feet to a stone monument; thence north 59° 01' east 317 feet to the center of the road running to Hanshaw Corners and passing through an iron pipe on the south-west boundary of said road; the said boundary line being the northerly and westerly line of the lands hereby conveyed and the southerly and easterly line thereof being ten feet distant therefrom. Reserving to the parties of the first part, their heirs and assigns in the ownership of the remainder of the lands so conveyed by the said deed of Jacob E. Bogardus and wife, a right of way over the said strip of land for all purposes for which it may be used in connection with their remaining land. The party of the second part may, at his own expense and will, he so desires, remove the chicken house of the parties of the first part now standing on the land hereby conveyed and place the same upon the lands retained by the parties of the first part upon as good a foundation as the building now has. Until the chicken house is so removed, the said chicken house may remain on the lands so conveyed and be maintained and used by the parties of the first part.

Deed for The Path