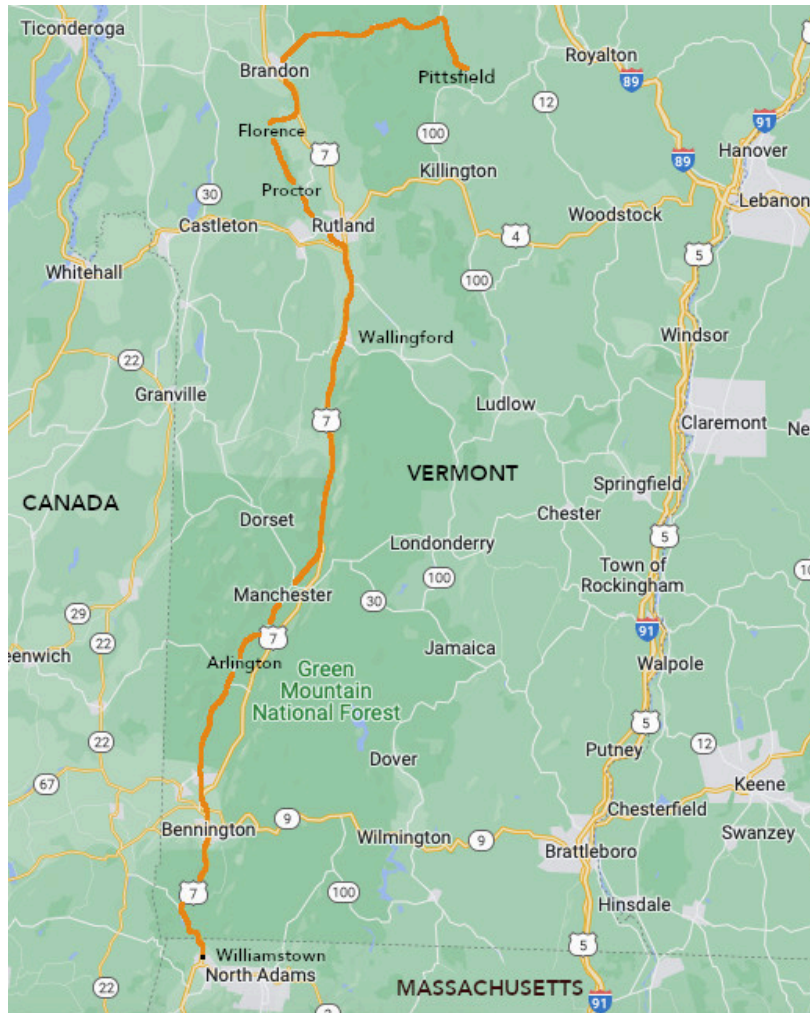


4 – VERMONT AND MASSACHUSETTS



Thursday, 15 October

This morning I was woken by Colm getting up at about seven o'clock. It was dark and dreary again outside. When ready, we went downstairs for breakfast. Before eating, I asked for a few sheets of paper and copied some information from a book that I had been reading the previous evening. For breakfast we had orange juice, fried eggs, bacon, French toast and some fruit. While we ate, our hosts' children ran around and played. The man in charge was as lively and good-humoured as he had been on the previous evening.

I paid him for our accommodation after we had finished eating and then, on leaving, said goodbye to his pleasant wife. Despite the drabness of the place, we had quite enjoyed our stay.

Colm now took the wheel and we drove northwards for a mile or two, then cut across the mountains towards the west, arriving shortly afterwards in the small elegant village of Brandon.

Having peeped inside the very plush Barton Inn, founded in 1786, we went into a shop nearby which, like the inn, overlooked the village green. As leather wallets and purses were on offer at half price, I bought a wallet for a friend. We ambled around the village in search of a call card, but had no luck, and so returned to the car without one. We then drove southwards along Route 7 towards Pittsford, then turned off the road and headed for Florence. Following the rather confusing directions that I had noted from the book, we managed to find the first of four covered bridges. This particular one, the Hammond, was no longer used for traffic; it crossed a narrow river close to a modern bridge. I examined the interesting old structure, then followed Colm after he had walked across it. Although the timber looked very thick and sturdy, the whole bridge had been carried downriver for a mile or so during a recent flood.

We drove along pleasant country roads and crossed another covered bridge. After this we headed towards Proctor, a town famous for its large marble workshop and its many fine marble buildings. It was quite an unusual place. We then looped around to Wilson Castle, a rather grim and uninteresting red brick structure, which we simply observed from the outside.

We returned along the road by which we had come and drove into the large town of Rutland, where we parked the car and walked around. Colm finally succeeded in buying a call card, found a public telephone, and rang his brother at home. We then wandered back to the car, stopping briefly to take a look in a book store.

Setting off again, with me at the wheel this time, we drove southwards. We passed through Wallingford and finally stopped in a lay-by near the entrance of the Emerald Lake State Park, where we had a simple lunch. Afterwards we both treated ourselves to a welcome snooze, and then I studied some maps in order to plan the following week and a half.

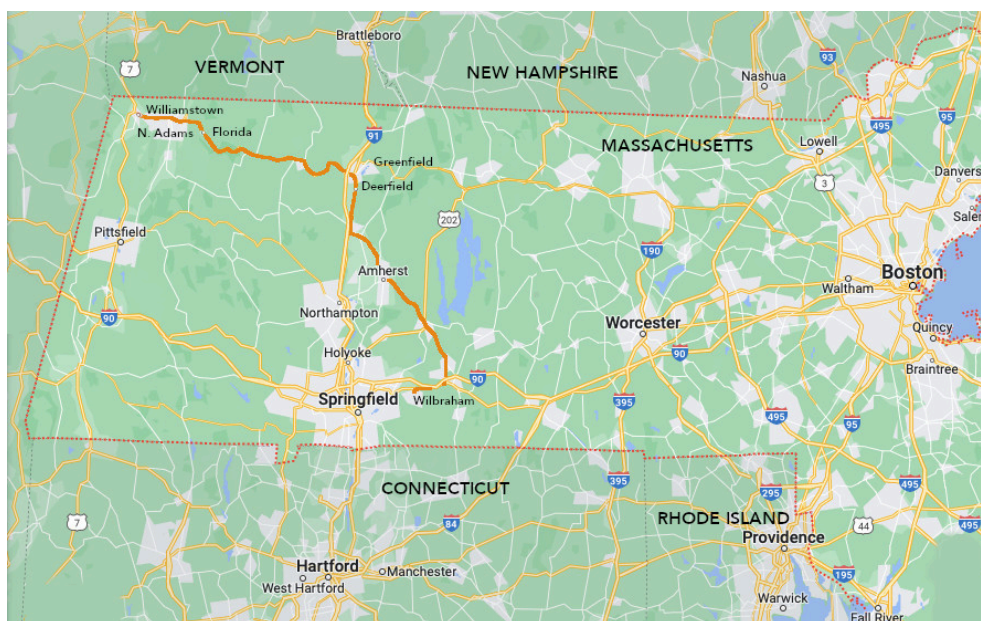
We then continued, passing through Wellingford, drove down to East Dorset and branched off on to the 7A for Manchester village, which turned out to be a very elegant and expensive-looking place – as Colm said, it was ‘very chic’. We stopped at Arlington, the following village, and had a quick look at the small and not particularly impressive Norman Rockwell Museum, which was housed in a converted church. We then walked down the main road a little and bumped into the couple with whom I had conversed on the previous evening. They looked very surprised to see us and the husband shook hands with both of us. We now learned that they were on their honeymoon and that they had booked a stay in a guest house here, where their room would cost them over \$100.

After chatting with them, we left and drove down through Bennington and back into Massachusetts. We looked out for accommodation as we approached Williamstown and found a place mentioned in our AAA book. We were shown into a nice clean room, which would cost us \$65 including a simple breakfast. However, during the time we were making up our minds, a lady came along and took the room. We declined a smoker’s room and so the lady in charge made a phone call for us. She directed us up the road, where we found the Green Valley Motel, a simpler place, where a pleasant enough room and an even simpler breakfast would cost us \$55. The lady who dealt with us (and who was very down-to-earth) told us that she would have nothing to do with the AAA; if she were to be listed in their book, she would have to pay them \$3,000 every year.

When we had settled into our room, we drove off to a local restaurant and had a good meal for about \$27. I had clam chowder, salad, barbecued chicken with rice, then vanilla ice cream. As the restaurant was packed, we were lucky to get a small

table for two. Afterwards we drove into what we supposed was the town centre, and found ourselves walking around some elegant university buildings; we had not seen architecture of this calibre since we had been in Boston. Even in the dark the campus looked most impressive. Colm asked one of the locals where the main street was and was told that it was nearby, just around a corner. It turned out to be a small compact street containing some fine shops. As it was now about eight o'clock, all of them were closed. We peered into some of the windows and finally returned to our car.

Back in the motel I tried to telephone my cousin in Canada, but without success. Before going to bed, Colm and I debated whether we should drive to Niagara Falls and into Canada or not but, as we came to no firm conclusion, we decided to sleep on it.



Friday, 16 October

This morning we rose at seven o'clock; it seemed that a fine day had dawned at last. We washed and packed our things and, when Colm returned the key of our room he collected two muffins that were to be our breakfast. We drove to the nearby 'Chef's Hat' restaurant, where we breakfasted on porridge and pancakes. Before leaving, I photographed the place next door, which was full of pumpkins



Pumpkins, Williamstown

and Halloween paraphernalia – all very colourful. We then drove into the town centre, where I took shots of the beautiful university buildings; they looked terrific in the bright sunshine. Colm looked into some shops and we met up once again in the main street.



University buildings in Williamstown, Massachusetts, and a view from the Mohawk Trail

Eventually we left the town and set off for the famous Mohawk Trail, the first scenic road made along a route originally used by the native people. First of all we passed through North Adams and Florida before entering some fine open countryside. The success and fame of the trail were proved by the fine vistas of mountains, valleys, the Deerfield River and the stunning autumnal colours. Once out of Florida, we climbed upwards and stopped to admire the view of the multi-coloured mountains. Farther on we stopped at another fine vantage point to admire the scenery.

When we approached Greenfield and passed under the I-91, we dropped down to Deerfield. As I had read up about Historical Deerfield while surfing the Internet at home, we now followed the signs and ended up in this beautiful village of fine old houses built along a tree-lined street. I had not realized that what we were about to see was a village, for I had just envisaged one large house with grounds. We parked the car at a spot where there seemed to be the most activity and went into a gift shop. I bought a couple of postcards and admired a decorative plate. In the post office next door I bought a set of stamps for a friend.



The Sheldon-Hawks House, Deerfield, Massachusetts

We then crossed the road to the visitor centre and bought two tickets at \$12 each, which would allow to see as many of the houses as we wanted. After the lady who had sold us the tickets had told us what was really worth seeing, we set off for the Sheldon-Hawks House, which contained old panelling. Although the house was bereft of furniture, we were able to appreciate its simple yet pleasing décor to the full. Most of what we saw was original, including the glass in the windows. Upstairs, the rooms were simpler and darker.

Afterwards we went into Ashley House, which was next door, and waited for the official tour that would start on the hour. However, just before one o'clock we were told that a large party was about to arrive by coach and that we would be better off visiting the elegant Wright House across the road. We went over to it and a lady drove up in a car; it turned out that she was the guide. We were joined by a couple, brought inside and shown around the various rooms. Although they were full of good quality furniture, none of the items belonged to the house. As the decor here was not original, the house was more like a museum. However, it was wonderful to feast our eyes on such fine architecture and antiquities after the endless stretches of

scenery that we had encountered during the past few days. It was this aspect of New England that interested me most of all.



The fanlight of Wright House, Deerfield, Massachusetts

It took us about three quarters of an hour to see all the exhibits, which included a square piano, some clocks, and lots of export Chinese porcelain. Afterwards we relaxed for a few minutes, then walked to the next house down the road: the Hinsdale and Anna Williams House. A very pleasant and friendly lady guide brought four of us inside, avoiding a clash with a large group of tourists. This house was also quite interesting, for the décor was either original or had been carefully reconstructed from fragments. Here we were able to get a fairly good impression of how the family had lived and as to what use each room had been put. Most of the information had been garnered from an inventory that had been kept in the family bible box. The wallpaper, panelling and windows were interesting; the wallpaper in the main (and most important) parlour was magnificent as it featured rustic scenes painted in blue over a white background. This room, and some of the others, had miraculously escaped a flood. It was also interesting to see the rooms that had been added at the back of the house, and that the then unfashionable windows at the front of the house had been moved to the back, thereby saving them from destruction.

By the time we left this house, it was almost three o'clock. We returned to the car, where we lunched on the breakfast muffins, apples and water, then walked to the Memorial Hall Museum. As this was only mildly interesting, we did not spend much time in it. Downstairs was a room containing some antique square pianos, a small chamber organ, and a spinet – an instrument that we had not expected to see here in America. The maker of one of the square pianos was Clementi; although he had been born in Rome in 1752, he had spent most of his time in England, where he had been (among other things) a virtuoso pianist, a conductor, a music publisher, and a piano manufacturer.

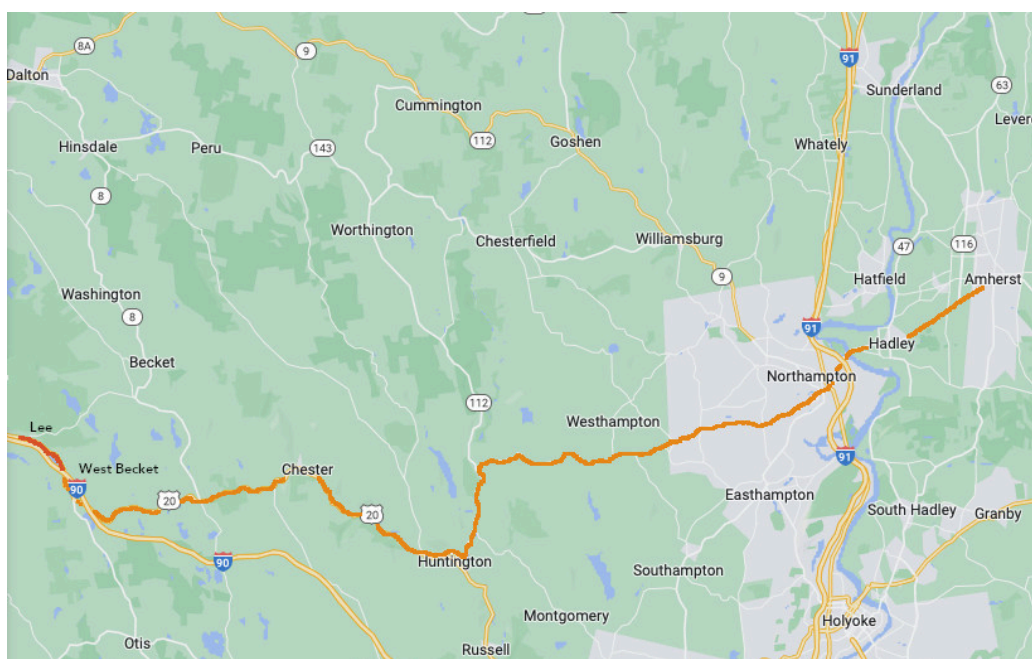
We then left the museum and walked back to the far end of the village in order to visit Ashley House – we arrived just in time for the 4 o'clock tour. Our guide was a very lively and enthusiastic lady. We learned that the house, an early example of its type, had been moved elsewhere and then had been restored to its original site. It was filled with furniture of the period and some later furniture that might have belonged to the owner if he had been rich enough to buy it. Although the whole

scenario was rather hypothetical, the guide made an excellent job of explaining everything and making it sound fascinating. Here the interior was quite dark and plain, with the exception of the main parlour, which was much more ornate and graceful.

After we had seen the whole house, we left with a young American lady who had been with us and, like us, was touring around the area. We chatted to her as we walked down the road until we parted company and returned to the gift shop near the visitor centre, where I decided to buy the decorative plate for a neighbour.

It was nearly 5.30 p.m. when we left and drove southwards to Amherst in search of accommodation. As we had left it too late and discovered that Amherst was a much bigger place than we had imagined, it was not surprising that we got lost and had to ask for directions. We then discovered that the motel that we had hoped to stay in was fully booked. The fellow at the reception desk was not very helpful.

We were therefore obliged to drive off into the darkness, not knowing where we were going. We eventually stopped at a gas station, where Colm filled up the tank and I got advice about a motel and a nearby restaurant. On and on we drove, seemingly lost once again, until we reached Wilbraham and the ugly approach to Springfield. Here we found a tiny motel run by a cheerful Korean lady. We were shown to a rather dingy and damp room that was very close to the main road and were told that it would cost us \$40. As we were delighted to have a roof over our heads, we took it. As soon as we had paid the lady and had put our baggage into the room, we walked across the road to an Italian restaurant, where we both ate a huge meal as we were very hungry by now. We then returned to our humble room where, after a while, I went to bed as I felt quite exhausted.



Saturday, 17 October

I woke this morning, having dreamt a lot of rubbish, and rose just as Colm emerged from the bathroom. We set off after I had taken a shower, and drove to a restaurant for some breakfast. As I felt rather queasy after the previous evening's heavy meal, I just drank tea and ate a warm corn muffin.

We then stepped out into the cold morning air and drove back to Amherst along a nicer route than we had used the previous evening. This approach to the town

centre was much more direct and easy. We parked near a green, where a big crowd of people were rummaging through boxes of old records and CDs in an outdoor market. We also saw fruit and vegetables on sale. We put money into a parking meter, asked a lady for directions, had a closer look at the market, looked into some shop windows, then walked the short distance to the famous Emily Dickinson House. We were surprised to discover that it did not open until one o'clock in the afternoon. We had come here specially to see the house as a musical friend of mine, who was a lover of Emily Dickinson's poetry and had had no chance of visiting the house when in New England some years previously, had asked me to visit it on his behalf and to 'pick some leaves off the trees in the garden' for him.



The back garden of the Emily Dickinson House in Amherst, Massachusetts

We were now able to wander into the garden at the back of the not particularly handsome house; while I photographed the building, Colm carefully picked a few autumnal leaves from the trees. As my stomach was now beginning to give me trouble, I walked back to a restaurant that we had passed, and went inside to use the rest room. When I emerged, feeling rather weak, I found Colm sitting at a table. He kindly went off to get me a glass of tepid water and a cup of tea for himself.

When I felt better, we returned to the green and had a proper look at the shops. We went into a small art gallery and then into a stationery shop. Next we went into a bookshop, where we looked at books about Emily Dickinson and her poetry. Afterwards we made our way up and down a nearby street, then walked along the other side of the green, where we looked inside another bookshop. We eventually returned to the first one, where Colm bought a biography of Emily Dickinson for his sister's partner.

We then put the book in the car, walked around again and finally made our way back to the Dickinson House, where we paid \$4 each for a ticket, bought postcards and, at one o'clock, started our tour of the house with some other visitors. There was not much to be seen in the house as very little of the original furniture now remained in it, but as the guide spoke very enthusiastically about Emily, her family and her poetry, the visit turned out to be very interesting. Unfortunately the first part of our tour was marred by the whimpering of a restless baby; thankfully the mother departed with the child shortly afterwards.

Colm and I left at two o'clock, delighted that we had at last visited this interesting place as well as making a pilgrimage for my musical friend and Colm's

sister's partner. I now drove the car out of the town along Route 9. As the traffic had ground to a halt because of an obstruction ahead, we drove into a gas station to top up the tank and have some lunch. Because of my delicate condition, I just ate a chocolate bar, drank some water and took a tablet for my stomach.

We then set off again and finally got out of the traffic jam. We drove through the elegant towns of Hadley and Northampton, then set off along Route 9 instead of taking Route 66. Although this road took us a little out of our way, we corrected this mistake by taking Route 112 southwards. This turned out to be a charming road, for it twisted and climbed through the countryside, passing many beautiful trees bright with autumnal leaves. Beyond them, on either side, were small fields similar to what we had at home.



The lake near our motel close to Lee, Massachusetts

We then took Route 20 from Huntington towards Lee; just after West Becket we found a delightful motel by a lake, where we got a very good and clean room for just \$42.28. The lady in charge was very pleasant; she showed us a postcard and a present that a friend of hers had sent her from Ireland.

When ready, we drove into the pleasant village of Lee, where we parked the car and walked up and down the elegant main street. Here, for the first time, we saw an ice cream parlor and a drugstore combined; inside they also had a candy section and a gift shop. We then went to an Italian restaurant, 51 Park Street (which was crowded), and sat down to a good meal. I was able to eat most of a ten-inch pizza and finished with carrot cake, all of which made me feel much better afterwards.

We then returned to our motel, where we paid the lady for the following night. Afterwards I telephoned another distant cousin of my father's, Larry Gannon, who lived in New York state, and made an arrangement to meet him on the following Monday morning. I then washed my teeth, wrote my diary, and went to bed before 10.30 p.m.