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Lifestyle (/Lifestyle/)

Priceless views

[Sarah M. Earle](#)

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It's easy to get lost in your own little world when you're in your car. But you won't get away with that on Route 107 in Gilmanton. As you crest what's known as Frisky Hill, you'll be alerted to look out your window by a prominent (but tasteful looking) white sign proclaiming "Gilmanton's Greatest Views." A little beyond that, you'll spot another, asking "What's this view worth to you?" and a third insisting, "Saving this view is up to you."

Not that you're likely to miss any of these roadside panoramas, no matter how absorbed you may be in your favorite new song or that Bluetooth conversation. The first one you'll come across is an absolute stunner of a view, a lush expanse of grassy field with an inset of dark blue water, bordered in back by the Belknap Mountain range.

Two others offer views that sweep all the way into Vermont across acres of seemingly untouched nature.

"I've always loved driving on 107 to see this view," said Carolyn Baldwin, secretary for the Gilmanton Land Trust, which is working to save four large tracts of land from development. "When For Sale signs popped up here two years ago, everybody panicked."

The land trust turned that panic into action and, with the help of the Five Rivers Conservation Trust and some federal grants, negotiated a deal with the owner of all four properties, a retired auctioneer who agreed to sell them for about two-thirds of their value. Conservation easements will be put on all four tracts, permitting agricultural use, responsible forestry and hunting, but forbidding residential development. Grants, pledges and donations have already paid for nearly 90 percent of the \$1.2 million project. To help raise the remaining \$127,000 the Gilmanton Land Trust is holding a fundraiser Saturday from 2:30 to 7 p.m. at the property across the street from the Frisky Hill parcel, a one-of-a-kind place that truly seems ripped from the pages of history.

"When you stand in the house, it really is like stepping back in time," said Barbara Morris, who serves on the land trust and lives a few houses down.

The property, which includes a saltbox-style home, a three-level barn, a corn crib, a water tower and even a historic Gilmanton schoolhouse, all set on 13 scenic acres, is owned by Gilmanton native Doug Towle, who has built a reputation in the area for restoring historic homes.

The house itself, known as the Farley Garrison house, is believed to be one of the oldest in the country, dating back to 1665. It was originally built in Billerica, Mass., and remained there until 2000, when it was dismantled and kept in storage.

Towle, who has restored several other homes in town, including Morris's, and lives in a tiny house next door to the property, has turned the house into an authentic showcase of early American architecture and design. The other buildings were brought to the property and restored piece by piece.

"He's a perfectionist," Morris said. "If he runs out of nails (from the proper period) he'll have them made."

The fundraiser will include a cocktail-and-hors d'oeuvres reception, a slide show, a chance to gaze at the views being preserved by the land trust and tours of the property, which, incidentally, is for sale.

Inside the home, guests will see such historic details as a 6-foot high brick fireplace with a brick oven, hand-troweled plaster walls in the master bedroom, the home's original balustrade stairs and a beautiful collection of period furnishings.

Guests can also wander through the schoolhouse, where they'll find a shelf of tin lunchboxes, a basket of vintage sports equipment, original desks and writing slates, an old organ and woodstove and shelves of antique books.


Prior to the main event, there will be a flax spinning demonstration at one of the Meetinghouse Pond properties, where the remnants of a flax retting operation were recently discovered.

It's the only known flax retting pond in the state, distinguished by a collection of medium-size stones on one side of a tiny pond, where flax stalks were weighted down and submerged in stagnant water.


"It makes the property quite unique and special," Morris said.

The cost for Saturday evening's fundraiser is \$20 for the slideshow and reception (which includes two drink tickets) or \$50 for the slideshow, reception and house tour.

For more information visit gilmantonlandtrust.org.

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By STEFANIE DAZIO and DAISY NGUYEN - Today

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