

Without L. Morgan Porter, there might not be a Shenipsit Trail in the Manchester area. If he hadn't volunteered through the Connecticut Forest & Park Association to lay out the official trail in the 1940s, the area that he blazed might not be open to hikers today.

Starting in 1946, Porter began creating trails and obtaining permission for hikers to cross private and water-company land. He chose the direction of the trail, sometimes linking up with old tote roads, sometimes choosing rock ledges or clearing brush for a new footpath. He kept in mind scenic views for hikers, as well as avoidance of swampy places. He was the first to paint light-blue blazes along the trail, and he drafted the trail's first maps.

By 1947, he had established the trail, which hikers continue to enjoy 61 years later.

What a thrill Porter must have felt when he saw this history-making note in one of the trail logs: "Look for the Shenipsit Trail on new edition of U.S.G.S. Topographic Map of Ellington Quad." The date was August 7, 1953, and the signer was R.T. Barron, U.S. Geological Survey, Arlington, Virginia.

The trails that Porter laid out have changed, of course, over the years, and in some places housing developments have replaced the forest that he encountered, but we are fortunate that he devoted himself to this work and that the trail acquired official status when it did. Otherwise, would this trail have disappeared when land was sold off to private owners?



L.M. Porter in 1955, using a measuring wheel on a trail in the Adirondacks. He went out measuring rain or shine, wearing a poncho in bad weather.

Photo courtesy of Susan Barlow

A PIONEER IN MANCHESTER

*Lewis Morgan Porter (1903-1967)
and the Shenipsit Trail*

BY SUSAN BARLOW

When Porter was exploring, he referred to "a wilderness" from the Glastonbury fire tower to the springs near Case Brothers mills on Spring Street, Manchester, and on to Somers' Soapstone Mountain.

In letters to Edgar Laing Heermance, founder of Connecticut's Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails, Porter tells of progress with landowners:

► In June 1946: "On 6-22-46 I obtained verbal permission from Mr. F.H. Parker to cross the lands of the South Manchester Water Committee...[assuring] virtually all of the trail from Birch Mountain to the fire tower....They don't know who some of the owners are, they have been trying to buy it up, and since it is all wilderness I guess we can go ahead anyway. I did get a couple of names from the Water Committee's maps and will see what I can find out about them." Porter had also obtained permission to cross Case Brothers property "from the heirs, Mrs. Robert Dennison and her sons,

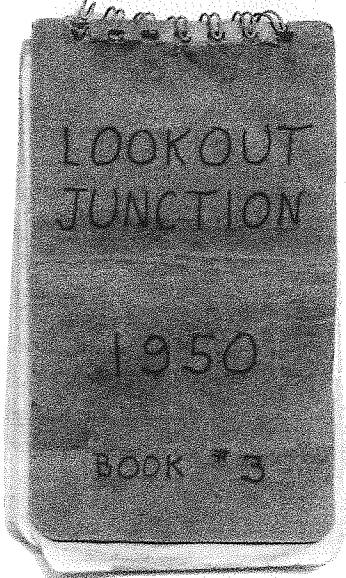
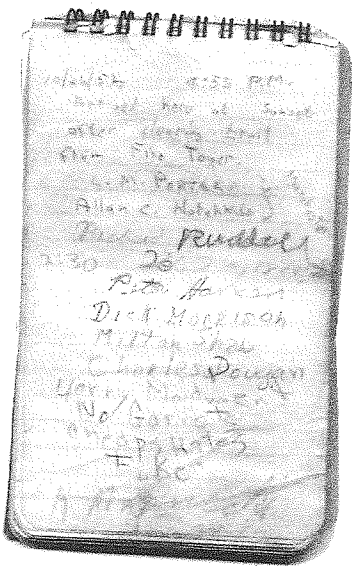
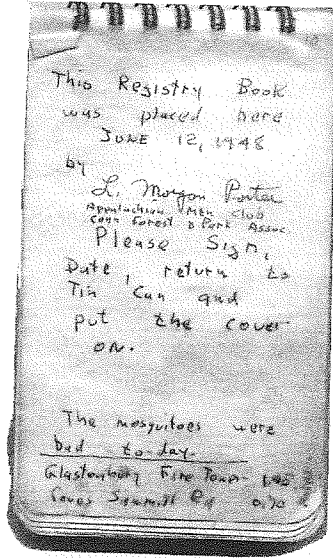
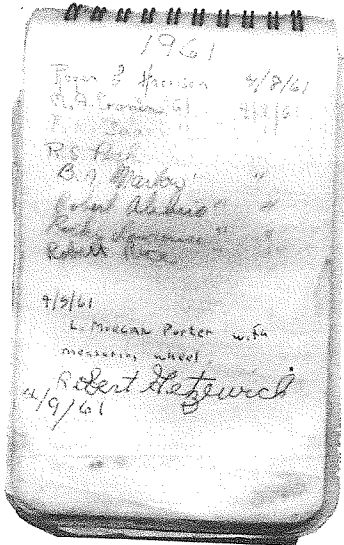
Wells and Robert ... and have walked over the trails with Mr. Wells Dennison. They are very much interested in this work."

► In May 1947: "I went over the proposed trail from Highland Park to the Glastonbury Fire Tower with F.E. Thrall of the Water Committee and received his OK provided we properly post it with signs...specifically referring to a watershed and saying 'Commit no nuisance,' etc." Porter enclosed a design for a sign, already approved by the Water Company, and requested that the signs be printed by CFPA. "I expect to start clearing the trail this week end. Thanks for the can of trail paint which arrived recently."

In a June 1946 draft map of "Walks Around Manchester," we see Porter's workman-like drawing of trails, brooks, roads, and town lines. His handwriting is the same that graces the old wall books, when Porter became the chairman of the Shenipsit.

Drawing must have come naturally to Porter, a 1924 Yale University graduate, an engineer at United Aircraft, and a teacher of mechanical engineering at the new Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute graduate center, beginning in 1955. He combined these duties with family life – he and his wife had two sons – and with heading up volunteer work crews to maintain the Shenipsit. His son J. Winthrop Porter said that Sunday afternoon was his father's favorite time to work on the trails. Winthrop recalls the can of that special blue paint in the cellar, and bottles of India ink on the dining room table when his father worked on Shenipsit maps.

L.M. Porter was no stranger to trails and the outdoors – he measured the trails in the high peaks area of the Adirondacks, rewrote



Three-by-five-inch hikers' logs, maintained by L.M. Porter. These contain mileage information about the trails, location of garnets, as well as penciled comments by hikers, including an entry from 1962 by Susan Barlow, the author of this article, during a hike from the old fire tower (now gone) to Camp Merrie-Wood. Other signers were tree expert Ed Richardson, his wife, Marion, and brother, Bob, Dr. Amos Friend of Manchester, and Ms. Barlow's brother, Michael.

Susan Barlow, with thanks to Ed Richardson

the *Guidebook to the Adirondack Mountains*, served as president of the Adirondack Mountain Club, and was known throughout New England for his interest in the outdoors and conservation. Although he didn't move to Manchester until 1939, he threw himself into community activities, including serving as chief timer for Manchester's famous Thanksgiving Day 5-mile road race.

John Hibbard, who became executive director of CFPA in 1963, remembers him as a longtime member of the Trails Committee and a very organized trail manager. Mr. Hibbard said that Mr. Porter worked "to a large extent on his own. After his death, the Shenipsit was split into three subsections. Dick Whitehouse still has a portion and Clyde Brooks, formerly of Glastonbury, had the southern end for many years."

Harrol (Bill) Baker, who chaired the Trails Committee in the 1960s, notes that Porter "lived in the era before computers and possessed a three-foot slide rule for calculating engineering problems. He was an inspiration for trail maintainers."

L.M. Porter died 41 years ago, but his pioneering work lives on, a model to those of us who enjoy the Blue Trails.

The summit of Case Mountain, a view L.M. Porter enjoyed many times.

Susan Barlow is a local historian and CFPA family hike leader. She thanks Dick Whitehouse for unearthing copies of the Porter-Heermance letters.





Photo courtesy of Susan Barlow

Case Mountain summit, where Lewis Morgan Porter, who blazed the Shenipsit Trail, spent much of his time. See page 14.

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