



Farm buildings and solar array from Cemetery Hill, 9 Dec.

**JOHN R. SWEET**  
**8562 Jackson River Road**  
**Mustoe, VA 24468-2150**  
**Phone: 540-468-2222**  
**E-mail: [jrs@johnrsweet.com](mailto:jrs@johnrsweet.com)**  
**18 December 2017**

Dear Friends and Family,

My biggest project this year was working on family history. I started last year and it has continued all of this year, with a break of several months during the warm season when I spend a lot of time outdoors. Much of January was spent scanning photos from Aunt Mary's trip to

China in 1932. She was accompanying my father, who was going to China to take a position at the Peking Union Medical College. They took the scenic route, going to England, France, Egypt, India, Malaysia and Singapore before finally arriving in China. The photo below shows my father astride a camel at Giza in Egypt. Upon arrival, Dad and his sister had to set up housekeeping. The second photo below shows Dad in a ricksha in Peking as newly-acquired furniture is loaded. The small table he is holding is now in my dining room and the two larger ones being loaded are at the ends of the sofa in my living room



Then in February, while rummaging for something else, I came upon a box stuffed with old letters. Most had been written by Dad between 1909 and 1950 to his brothers and sisters and his mother. He wrote to his mother practically every week while he was in medical school. These are a treasure trove of family history. I have now scanned about 3/4 of them and I've stored the originals in archival sleeves.

I also came upon several cassette tapes of oral history I had made with my mother about 25 years ago. I converted them to digital files and also transcribed all of the content, adding photos of what was being told in many cases. I have continued to enter data in [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) and create or edit memorials in Find-A-Grave. These projects can continue for the rest of my life without ever reaching completion!



But on to other things. I've been trying to figure out what to do with this very special property that I call home, to best preserve it for the future. It has taken most of the year to work out, but I have finally completed a deal to donate the farm to the Valley Conservation Council, a local land-preservation group, and to set up an

endowment fund for its maintenance. I hope to complete the transfer next year but I will retain life estate, which means that I will be able to live out my life here. I am also in negotiations with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation to establish a Natural Area Preserve on part of the farm. This would provide additional protection for the unusual plant and animal communities here, if some remaining issues can be resolved favorably.

I have had company several times this year. My cousin, Ann Wagner, was here for a couple of days in August and another cousin, Tom Beaty, was here earlier this month (photo at right). Daughter Stephanie came for ten days in July. That was a great visit, long enough to get some things done. She cooked a lot and I've been eating off that effort on and off ever since. Later that month, Claire and Paul Gesalman, friends from Penn State days, came for almost two days. Paul is very much interested in Find-A-Grave, so we visited several local cemeteries. One of these was untended and badly overgrown. Chris and I cleaned it up later in the summer. We also hosted DCR and VCC people several times while making plans for the property.



All of the usual farm stuff happened as well. We made maple syrup but it was a short season again. We erected an 8-foot fence around the garden to stop predation by deer, which worked a treat. Hay making in June and August, firewood cutting on and off all year, and seemingly endless mowing, trimming and spraying throughout the growing season. We were splitting wood in August when the solar eclipse came and we enjoyed the sudden drop in temperature. It was about 85% total here.

My Model A Ford had been in a local mechanic's garage for at least two years, with not nearly as much getting fixed as expected. We brought it home in June and proceeded to fix many of its ailments ourselves. I drove it a number of times just to go places and entered it in parades in Monterey and Franklin, WV, 35 miles away. It runs better now but still overheats and there are some other issues needing expert attention. I made arrangements for a member of the Model A club to work on it this winter, then suddenly that need got bigger. On the way home from town one afternoon in September, the right-rear wheel came off. That was exciting, but not in a good way!! I got off the road and stopped without further damage. We got it loaded on the trailer and it now resides in the equipment shed, awaiting word from Reggie Hiner as to when bring it to his shop.

All of the animals are doing OK except Rudy still has bouts with fleas. I'm doing OK too, just getting older and slower at an accelerating rate. I went caving for the first time in several years, just a little cave, newly discovered, but it wore me out and beat me up worse than I expected. I fear I shan't be able to do caving trips for much longer.

There is always more to tell but I want to hold this to two pages so I will stop now. I look forward to your cards and letters and I hope more of you can come for a visit in 2018.

Love to all,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the text "Love to all,".