

History of Chickering Family in Westmoreland, New Hampshire

Six generations of Chickering have lived on this farm which is situated on the rich bottom land of the Connecticut River on the New Hampshire side of the river. Timothy Chickering is the family patriarch who moved to Westmoreland, New Hampshire from Dedham, Massachusetts in the early 1760s. He served as a private in the revolutionary army and during the war he kept and sold cattle for George Washington's army.

From the beginning, the Chickering have been best known for being cattle dealers; they have had a special knack for being judges of good cattle. Their land holdings have increased significantly with the passage of time; currently their land holdings consist of approximately 1,110 acres.

Robert Olmstead who is the narrator of *Stay Here With Me* grew up on the Westmoreland family farm. Born in 1954, he was immersed in small town farm life. In the 1950s and 1960s, the farm was an impressive agricultural operation; that continues to be the case today. Like many small New England towns, Westmoreland has lost most of its family farms but the community of 1,745 people still maintains the look of 19th century agricultural New England.

In the summer after his senior year at Keene High School, and the summer before he was headed to a post graduate year at Mt. Hermon Preparatory School, Olmstead's grandfather, Sam Chickering, counseled Robert to "stay here with me" but by the summer of 1972 he knew two things. From a practical point of view, he could not count on the farm in his future. In the memoir, he makes reference to his younger "boy" cousins. He writes, "I knew from an early age they'd be the ones to take over the farm someday because I was born to a daughter and not a son." His heart also reflected a yearning for new experiences. He writes, "That summer of 1972, when I was eighteen, I could feel in my bones, in my flesh, the inexorable turning of my life. In a few weeks I was leaving a place where people never thought about leaving. For two centuries my mother's family was born here and lived here and was buried here under the ground a stone's throw from where they sunk their plows. Not only was I leaving, but I was leaving for good. Did I know that then? No. But to even have such a thought was different."

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