

# Dairying memories deliver nostalgia

By June W. Kennedy

The pastoral setting of grazing dairy cattle in green pastures will be only a memory in Westford with the closing of Stoney Brook Acres dairy farm this fall. Several old-timers now deceased, in interviews several years ago, recalled their experiences as milkmen in what was a large town with a small population.

"In 1905 I graduated from high school out the side door. I wasn't kicked out, but I went out the side door. That fall I went up to Amherst, to Mass. Aggie to take a winter course on dairying. I was 14 then. The next year they jacked the age up to 16," said Otis Day.

"A couple of years later a Frenchman by the name of LeDuc was quitting his milk route in Graniteville. We took over for some years.

"When we started there were no milk bottles. Milk was put in 8½-quart cans with 2-quart measures. We'd put the milk into a pitcher or pail or whatever was on the doorstep — or what we could find in the kitchen. We'd keep a goin' till we found some container to put it in. As the years went along glass milk bottles were made by the Thatcher Manufacturing Co. of Elmira, N.Y.

"It was up in the morning, out to our barn to milk the cows, cool the milk, bottle and peddle it before breakfast every morning. There was no electrical refrigeration to keep

Dairy No. 1

BOARD OF HEALTH, WESTFORD, MASS.

**MILK PRODUCER'S PERMIT**  
(ACTS OF 1914, CHAP. 741)

Mr. Charles H. Hildreth of said Westford is hereby permitted to produce milk at his dairy farm located on Main ~~Road~~ Street in said Westford, to be sold in said Westford subject to the regulations governing the production, care and sale of milk which now are or may hereafter be adopted by the Board of Health.

Date Feb. 28 1918

Orson P. Silsbee  
Shuman H. Fletcher  
Board of Health

A 1918 MILK producer's permit issued by the Board of Health licenses Charles Hildreth to run a dairy farm on Main Street, designated "Dairy No. 1".

(Courtesy of "Westford Recollection")

it, so we didn't deliver twice a week, but every morning.

"The price of milk was 5 cents a quart. Yes sir, lots of times I'd climb a flight of

stairs to deliver a pint of milk for 2½ cents. Later it got up to 7 cents a quart. 'Old Chip' I used on the milk route was Morgan, but

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not much ambition — hit 'em with a switch, just the tail would go faster.

"Yep, I've been milking cows in the morning when I was so sleepy that I went to sleep on the milking stool."

The late Tom Curley claimed raw milk compared to homogenized was as different as water is to ginger ale. From the time he was 13 (1907) until he became 18, he boarded at the Nashoba Farm down on Concord Road. This old farm is easily recognized because the road bisects the barn of many cupolas and the house.

"The sum of \$100 was offered to me in return for five years of living on the place and caring for 60 cows. At 4 a.m. I began my daily milk route with 'hoss' and wagon to Graniteville and Forge Village," Curley recalled.

"Milk was 5 cents a quart. People stopped taking extra milk when it went up to six cents; they couldn't afford it.

"We got blocks of ice from Gage's to keep the milk cool. In warm weather I put a tablespoon of soda into the milk so it wouldn't turn sour.

"The Old Pine Ridge Station was my first stop. If I dozed off, my 'hoss' would go right by. If I was awake he'd stop automatically.

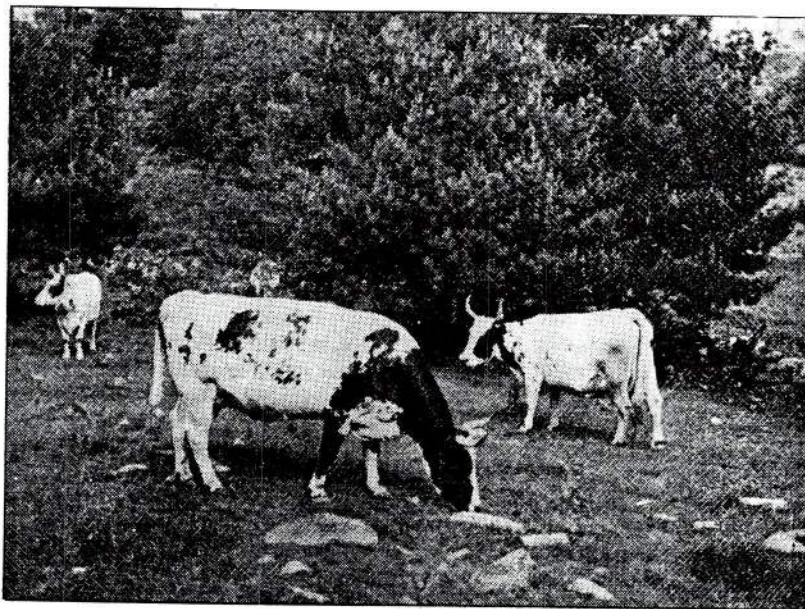
"There was no electricity; water was pumped by hand. The carriage shed housed the wash-tubs and round boiler used to heat the water for washing the milk bottles. My hands would break open from the soap and water."

Seventy years later, Otis Day would repeat to Tom Curley, "Everytime I see you, Tom, I see those knuckles."

When his early morning chores were finished, Tom then walked two miles to Westford Academy. One morning as he passed two men seated on the piazza of the Wright & Fletcher Store, he heard one exclaim to the other, "That boy has done a day's work already."

After school, it was right back home to those cows!

During the teens, Elizabeth and Bill Carver delivered milk in their pony wagon to customers in the center of Westford.



AN EARLY 20th century photograph captures dairy cows grazing in a Westford pasture, a scene only a memory now.

(Courtesy of "Westford Recollections")

They carried their raw milk in a 5-gallon can. They also carried with them the lists stating "1 pint for Mrs. Fletcher, 1 quart for Mrs. Hildreth," etc.

Some folk put out a Mason jar, a gray agate pail or even a tin pail with stopper in which to receive the milk. The children found it tricky to pour from the 5-gallon jug into a pint-sized jar. On the other hand, when a customer set out a 2-quart can, it was difficult for them to judge a pint.

In fact, a complaint went around that the Carver children weren't giving enough. From then on their Mother told them that no matter what the people put out, "fill it up."

"Parker's Best", featuring a picture of Ben Parker and his twin sister, was peddled in the area of Chelmsford, West Chelmsford and Nabnasset. In the late '20s and most of the '30s, from the time he was 10 years old until he entered the service in World War II, Ben with his pet "hoss" Dick, made deliveries each morning before school.

"Historically, the price of a quart of milk, a pack of cigarettes and a loaf of bread were 10 cents. Prices were stabilized for a long period of time," recalled Ben.

"As soon as the Board of Health put a sign on the door announcing a contagious dis-

ease we'd stop the returnable glass bottle. We used a waxed cardboard container, a forerunner of today's milk carton. In common usage were 8-quart cans with wooden bungs on the top. Twenty-quart jugs went to the large families or dealers.

"We picked up milk in 40-quart jugs until the mid-'40s. We'd put them in the spring ponds to keep them cool. Actually we used very little ice. Many farmers sent their milk by train to Lowell and Boston.

"In 1947, with the advent of homogenized milk, many milk men were forced out. The amount of equipment required just couldn't be sustained by the small dealers. New sanitary regulations demanded stainless tubing, and containers to be handled in bulk holding tanks were fed into tank trucks as opposed to use of the 40-quart jugs."

Gone are the once numerous small farms where the two or three cows supplied family and neighbors with milk and cream. Gone are the moderate-sized herds. No longer the sound of tinkling cowbells as cattle wend their way home from pasture, gentle grazing sounds, chewing of the cud, and the peaceful pastoral scenes of yesterday.

June Kennedy is a Westford resident and the author of "Westford Recollections", a series of historical vignettes and photos.