

During Depression era, living down on farm not all hard work

By June W. Kennedy

Several years ago, an interview with the late Grace Fletcher reflected on her thoughts of home on the Fletcher Farm, which today is known as Stoney Brook Acres on Plain Road, the last remaining dairy farm in Westford:

"I think there is no place like a farm to bring up a family. My children were never bored, had something to do all the time — even if it wasn't always what they wanted to do.

"It wasn't all hard work. We took time to enjoy life too. Every weekend in the hot weather the children wanted a picnic out in the pasture. We'd have hot dogs and sandwiches. They'd go for a swim or do a little fishing in Burgess Pond.

"Picking wild strawberries on Fletcher Hill was a favorite pastime. What beautiful jam it made!

"I think Walter Jr. had a reputation as a naturalist by the time he was 4 years old. He and the gang would pick a bushel of mushrooms from the oak trees and gather little pinky ones from the meadow. In the spring wild spinach or pigweed was plentiful. It's nicer than the spinach that you buy. We'd eat skunk cabbage, too, when it was young and tender. And daylilies, did you know that if you cook the bottom of daylilies they taste good like turnips?

"Our children invented games to play. They'd go out back and dig tunnels and reinforce them with sand (I suppose it's a wonder those tunnels didn't cave in). And, too, they skated on Stony Brook and took their sleds up Fletcher Hill for a long fast slide down Depot Street.

"If I had a few moments in the afternoon I sat and read a book — mostly fiction or history. Every so often I would have the Grange come down and we'd have whist parties — sometimes 12 tables. Then we'd have dancing in the kitchen. I think it was Henry Fletcher used to play the fiddle for us.

"During the Depression [Great Depression of the 1930s] we were on rationing. We were allowed only so much. Living on a farm we were more fortunate than other people because we had our own meat supply and our own vegetables which I



FOOD RATIONING AND other effects of the Great Depression were not so severe for those who made their living off the land. In this 1932 photo, little Charlotte Fletcher (Stone) accompanies her father, Walter Fletcher Sr., and George Hardy Jr. to hoe in the potato patch of their Plain Road farm. Today that farm, known as Stoney Brook Acres, is the last dairy farm in Westford. It is scheduled to fall victim to development this fall.

("Westford Recollections" photo)

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canned. In fact, I canned meat too. Altogether they'd be 1500-2000 jars.

"We didn't have the lovely things they have today. I'd take an old dress and patch it or make the children things out of it. Bon Marche of Lowell and

A.G. Pollard's always saved remnants of cloth for Mother Fletcher. Nothing was wasted.

"Things didn't come prettily packaged; most of them came out of bins and boxes at the country store — a warm and welcome place to greet a neighbor. It was always so pleasant to chat with Ben and Freda Prescott, proprietors up at the store.

"But there were so many things you couldn't get; people today can have anything they want if they have the money. In those days, if you had the money you still couldn't buy because it wasn't there. But folks came through beautifully and the country came back.

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