

# Growing up in Graniteville

## Homemade fun in days of WWI

By June W. Kennedy

The following are recollections by Vivian Sargent Smith, great-granddaughter of the founder of the Sargent Mill, about her childhood in Graniteville at the turn-of-the century.

**"I**n my childhood days in Graniteville during the 'teens', we made our own fun. We didn't have a lot of toys and things as the children do today, just a few dolls.

I often played in the woods back of the house. We often used acorns for cups and saucers, leaves for dishes, and we carved little baskets out of horse chestnuts.

"There were some great quarries up in back of us; we used to climb all over the ledges. We picked lots of wild strawberries, blueberries and wildflowers and knew a great many of the flowers and trees by name. I think we lived a little closer to nature than we have time for today.

"Always, just before May basket time and valentine making time, we'd go over to Mr. Wall's, the wallpaperer in our village, and beg him to give us his old paper books.

"Sometimes, for fun, we'd make ice cream sodas out of soap by whipping it up with straws and then coloring it with Dennison's colored paper. Fortunately we didn't drink it.

"During the First World War, I remember a lot of the school children got together and held a bazaar on my grandmother's front porch. I presume the mothers did most of the work. They made pies and cakes and all kinds of goodies.

"But we contributed a great deal. We were learning to knit and made knit washcloths for the soldiers. I expect they were pretty shabby looking things, but we were quite proud of them. They dressed us up in nurse's costumes and we stood behind the tables to help sell the things. It was quite an event for



A TURN-OF-the century photo depicts the gracious victorian house on North Main Street built by Charles Sargent, owner of Sargent's Mill and great-grandfather of Vivian Sargent Smith. During World War I, Vivian and her friends held a bazaar on the front porch to benefit soldiers.

(Photo courtesy of "Westford Recollections")

us.

"As far as chores, I really didn't have very many, which was too bad. I do remember bringing in wood from the shed for the stove. We burned a wood stove which was nice and cozy.

"In the early days when I was very tiny, we probably didn't have running water, because I vaguely recall some round pasteboard tubs that my mother told about bringing into the kitchen, filling with heated water for the Saturday night bath — which was taken in turn by each family member right in front of the toasty warm stove.

"We had a windmill in the backyard. When the wind blew, we had plenty of water. That was before we had town water. My mother told of filling buckets from a watering trough down at the foot of the hill and bringing it up to the house to wash clothes when the wind wasn't blowing.

"The only thing I remember about the trough was that it was a great hangout for me. I'd sit there by the hour waiting for a horse and buggy to come along and then watch the horse drink the water and talk to all the men as they went by. I don't think my family were too happy about that, but I did it.

"I remember there was a little store at the foot of our hill. Once a month came time to pay the bill and I would love to go, be-

cause when we did, the man would give us a whole bag full of candy. That was the reward for paying the bill.

"I also remember how greatly embarrassed I was one day when I was at my grandmother's house next door. The butcher came. Grandmother wore great long black taffeta skirts with about 16 petticoats. When it came time to pay the butcher, she pulled up her outer skirt, and in the first petticoat was a pocket. In the pocket was a pocketbook. I thought that was not very nice, but perhaps that was an English custom. She had come over from England as child.

"We did a lot of skating in those days. Practically every winter we skated on the Graniteville Mill Pond, except where we were cautioned about the current. Another place was the blacksmith pond over near the Graniteville foundry. Still another spot for skating was up near the Catholic Church at the other end of town. That was fun because you could go up a little brook and wind around. We loved that. We did a lot of sliding too. They were happy days."

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