

# Westford Recollections

## Home thoughts

Ruth Johnson (Born 1900)

In 1910, when I was 10, my Father bought the old Heywood Place up on the Chamberlain Road. With it came 60 acres. It cost him about \$2,000. The farmhouse had been remodeled in the 1870's. As was the style of the day, the central chimney and all the fireplaces were removed. The little panes of window glass were replaced by a bay window and larger glass. The original kitchen was pushed back as a summer kitchen. We, of course, had the old wood stove in the house, but Mother moved into the summer kitchen when it got awfully hot. We did have a coal stove in the living room and wood stoves in some of the other rooms which we used in season. We had no facilities then in the house - our little outhouse was at the end of the walk beyond the woodshed. It was cold out there!

I remember my Grandmother drying apples and stringing them for winter use - apple pies and dumplings. She also boiled her sap collected from the buckets of pine hung on the maple trees. That syrup was good! When Grandma came to live with us, she told Father she would cure the hams from his pigs. He made a simple contraption. It was like a big barrel with a cover on

it. What she had to do was stay outside and tend the wood so that it would keep on smoking. Oh, she'd smoke those hams just right! After they were cured, we'd hang them in the attic - the ham and bacon. There are still hooks in my back pantry for hanging things on.

Father, like many men had to be, was a jack of all trades. He kept cows. I remember he built a watering trough for them and also an ice house to keep his own ice. Father added to the orchards here and went into the apple business. Perley Wright would come right to our place and load the wagons with fruit. Then, with his team, he'd head for the Boston markets. My sister, Edna, and I, used to put the Colley-Woods Co. cards in the apple boxes.

Oh, we didn't lack for something to do even if it wasn't play. Father had asthma so bad that quite often we girls had to milk the cows before heading for school. Mother made the butter some - not a lot. We had a small table churn that turned. I remember we always set the bread at night. And I mustn't forget the oil lamps. It was my job every Saturday to clean them - a tedious affair!

We were two miles from the center of town - had our own little neighborhood down here. I

remember Wednesday Night Prayer Meetin' at the Walker Family's house. All the folks attended. In our own big kitchen here we had a lot of good times - Halloween parties, games, cards and square dancing. Ellis Cram and Henry Hildreth played fiddle. When my children were growing up we had an iron stove in the kitchen. It was a great clothes dryer! In winter, when mittens and outfits were soaked from all the coasting and the skating on MacMaster's Pond, we'd hang them on the stove and string a clothesline in front of it to catch the blazing heat. Then when the garments were dried, my children - and the neighbor's, could go out again. No two sets of clothing then! During World War II we all folded bandages and cloth. We did a lot of knitting for the Red Cross, with plenty of time for socializing too - I sure wish I could sample one of Aunt Cindy Prescott's molasses-ginger cookies right now! Yes, we really kept like a neighborhood down here.

Dorothy Garlick (Born 1898)

Josephine Lamb (Born 1903)

At present, I, Josephine Lamb, am living at the old Burbeck Homestead down on Route 110 on the Littleton Road. My sister, Dorothy and I, have happy memories here at the farm. We have an original deed to the first lands that Samuel Burbeck bought from Walter Baker of the Baker Chocolate Co. in Dorchester. In our possession is an old tax bill dated 1857. The poll tax at that

time was \$1.50, Real Estate tax \$5.60, and the Personal Estate tax \$1.40, but because they paid their \$8.50 on time, they got it for \$7.08. Try that today!

Every winter we were given a load of wood and my father and I (Dorothy), would go out in the evenings and return in the old pung. It would be so beautiful. Not a bit of traffic on the road and the northern lights, I've never seen such a marvelous sight...and then arriving at the old silent house, the kitchen with one light turned low, a little hot drink and off to bed. I can remember climbing up the three steps (ladder, kind of), and getting into the feather bed. You'd practically sink out of sight. Later on there were some horsehair mattresses on the bed; originally, I guess they were made of cornhusks. The bedrooms had a pungent odor too. In those days clothes were stored with spices - all the furs, anything in wool. Recently, as we took out some of the old things to look them over, a regular shower of whole cloves descended upon us.

Behind the stove in the kitchen was a small oven in the wall next to a bake oven. It was curtained off so that the cat could sleep in comfort there and not be disturbed. The pantry beyond there had more smells of food cooking - especially oatmeal cookies. At the back of the

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Ruth Johnson tells us that the farmhouse where she lives up on Chamberlain Road was remodeled in the 1870s. "The little panes of window glass were replaced by a bay window." It was here that Ellis Cram and Henry Hildreth played fiddle for Saturday night home-parties. (A Johnson photo from the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series.)

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pantry was a hole in the floor probably 6' deep and it might have been 3' square with a dumb waiter on it that was pulleyed into the upper chambers. This was used as their refrigerator. It held a good deal, very cold.

The parlor with its horsehair sofa was reserved for the minister and for the home funerals...but, out from the house we'll go to the back a little, where the so-called necessary was. The three seats - one for Dad, one for Mom, and one for the children - were, in winter, all carefully covered with a soft gray flannel for sheer comfort.

Looking out the back window the windmill was generally groaning and turning, pumping water that led into a large wooden cistern in the barn which fed the 25 or more cattle. As the winds would change, the windmill blades would indicate the direction of the wind. This was overlooking the gardens.

Like every farm, it was self-sustaining. It had a 50 acre woodlot, a ten to twenty acre hay field and the cranberry bog, just across the pond where it was easily watered by a brook held back by a little dam. As children we were never allowed to play in the hay, or even to wander through a good hay field because they said it bruised the hay, and it wasn't good for the cows. If we watched them milking we had to tiptoe in front or in back of the cattle so that they would not be disturbed. The only thing that made any move in the barn were the cats as they waited for

a good squirt of milk, fresh from the cow.

In the old days the aunts, Mary and Grace, did all the work (the three brothers, William J, Fred and Eli, had moved to the city). I remember the aunts pitching hay so high, and herding cows on a bright old yellow-orange bicycle. One of the letters we kept told of one of the aunts picking 12 quarts of chestnuts. She made 72 cents - to her, quite a lot. Another treasured letter is one sent to this household during the Civil War, albeit the author soldier was not in sympathy with the "Cause."

There were "interesting folk" in the family too. Uncle Henry Harrison Burbeck operated a grist mill along with Mr. Heywood - down at the Depot (Westford) by the Brook (Stony). Uncle Henry was somewhat of a character. He had a glass eye which he never hesitated to haul out and polish regardless of company and conversation. Grandmother Burbeck received a citation for knitting so many articles for the soldiers during World War I. Uncle Eli Burbeck was the sole Westford survivor of Troop F Cavalry. This group never saw service, but it was simply an organization of the young bloods of the area. They gave a demonstration of drilling and horsemanship for the different towns. At one time when Troop F was reactivated at Fort Deyens, the Commander came down, visited with Eli, and presented him with a helmet that had been used by the original Troop F.

(This is Article No. 5 in the continuing Westford Recollections - 250th Anniversary series.)



Sisters, Josephine Lamb and Dorothy Garlick, recall many happy days at their family home, the old Burbeck place down on Littleton Road. The land was originally owned by Walter Baker of the Baker Chocolate Co. in Dorchester, Mass. Photo was taken in 1939. (A Lamb photo from the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series.)

THE EAGLE — THURSDAY, JANUARY 4, 1979 —



"During World War II we all folded bandages and cloth. We did a lot of socializing, too. Yes, we really kept like a neighborhood," reflects Ruth Johnson on days gone-by at Chamberlain Corner. The neighborhood photo includes from left to right in front row: Mrs. Clifford (Ruth) Johnson, Mrs. Henry (Ida) Fletcher, Mrs. Willard (Edna) Moore, Mrs. Houghton (Susie) Osgood, Mrs. Kidder and Mrs. Frank Bannister. Lucinda Prescott heads the back row on the left. Also included, with two unknowns, are Mrs. William (Addie) Parfitt, Mrs. Edward (Cornelia) Boynton, Mrs. Mark Jenkins and Mrs. Joseph Sargent, owner of the house. (A Johnson photo from the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series.)



Featured from left to right are Mary and Grace Burbeck. It was remembered that they really worked on the farm pitching hay, and herding cows on a bright old yellow-orange bicycle. (A Lamb photo from the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series.)