

Memories of summers at Cold Spring Farm

By June W. Kennedy
Eagle staff

Marian F. Winnek (1883-1977), great granddaughter of library benefactor J.V. Fletcher, shortly before her death spoke of her rich memories of summers spent on his famous farm:

"During his productive years in Belmont, my great grandfather, J.V. Fletcher, still had a love in his heart of Westford. In 1872, at the age of 60, he purchased his family homestead and birthplace, the Cold Spring Farm, where his family spent the entire summer from Fourth of July to Labor Day, and where he returned each weekend from Belmont.

"In the 1880s and 90s, three generations of his offspring, myself included, would board the wagon and drive down the sandy Cold Spring Road, continuing on about five miles of back road to the Littleton Station to meet him and our week's supply of four year old Western beef he carried by hand from Fanuell Hall Marketplace.

"It was there that great grandfather had made his fortune in the wholesale beef trade. The mist, the croaking meadow frogs, and the "part-singing" as

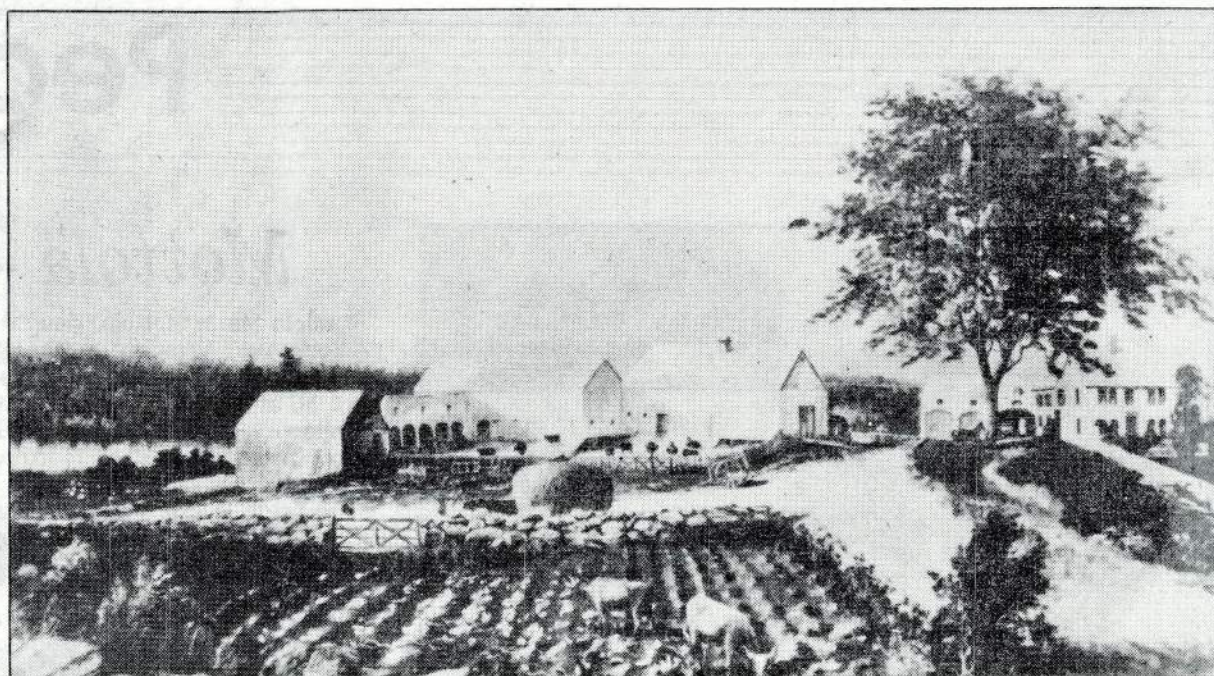
we drove home remain fixed in my memory.

"I remember great grandfather's large saltbox farmhouse could hold as many as 21 people. There was a cook, a second-maid, and someone to drive the horses, plus the farmer whose well was beyond the woodshed. Picture, if you will, on this 200-acre farm, some laying hens, grazing sheep, pedigreed cows, pigs, cornfields, berries and vegetables — even a rough 9-acre golf course.

"A lovely pine grove extended down Cold Spring Road. Here in the middle of the five or six acres of pine and close to the bubbling cold spring, was held the annual family picnic. Although the affair was ¼ mile distance from the farmhouse, it was complete with trestle tables, chairs — no benches — white linen tablecloths and fine china. Oh, it was a merry occasion, with a first rate Victorian meal.

"In fact, the fare at J.V.'s home was always sumptuous, frequently offering six courses. Sometimes we'd shell a whole bushel of peas for one meal. The Bannister children down the road sold blueberries, three quarts for 25 cents. The cooks would make large juicy pies

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AN ANONYMOUS PAINTING of the 200-acre, self-sustaining Cold Spring Farm shows sizeable outbuildings and a grand main farmhouse that burned in a fire rumored to have been started to cover the theft of fine bathroom fixtures. The farm was the summer home of library namesake J.V. Fletcher.

(Courtesy 'Westford Recollections')

Summers at Cold Spring Farm

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with a top crust. I remember that the person who took the last piece got the plate and the juice. There were lots of raspberries to eat, and vegetables in season.

"I never could appreciate even the appearance of the pigs under the barn, but I do remember that great grandfather's roasts from Boston were tasty treasures. You might like to know what a typical Sunday morning breakfast consisted of. I'll tell you: A half orange eaten with a spoon, scrambled eggs, baked beans and toasted brown bread, deep-fried fish cakes, applesauce — 365 days a year — and coffee with cream skimmed from a 12-inch pan in blobs too heavy to pour. Why it's starvation today compared to those meals!

"J.V. taught all the children at an early age to harness and drive the spanking Morgan horses. In the 1890s, he owned a 9-passenger "mountain wagon" in which we made one annual trip to Long Sought For Pond for a picnic and swim, and one to the Groton Inn, where the very idea of mince pie in mid-summer was the lure. Here one could get a nice solid country meal.

"Great grandfather read his Bible every morning. Then, as he was an early riser, he assisted

others in awakening by moving all the big rocking chairs around on the piazza, making considerable noise snapping the window shades to the top, and swatting flies with a newspaper.

"But J.V. loved a good time too. I remember a gay party we had for some friends up town. In preparation, about 200 Japanese lanterns with candles were strung along the piazza and along the picket fence which surrounded the garden. It took a week to put them up. The whole house was alive to the sound of banjo, mandolin and guitar; the dancing was held on the large porch.

"The water that we drank in the house was from the cold spring, and it was very cold! Another spring above the farm served the animals. With all those people in the house, there was but one bathroom for their use. The attraction here was the copper tub plated with tin. But with two doors to the room, one was not encouraged to stay long. I might add that J.V. had his own private, fancy toilet downstairs.

"At the old home I remember the Franklin grates, the fireplaces and window seats. There were panelled shutters and large four-poster beds. The year that J.V. presented the library to the town — it was dedicated in June of 1896 — he invited many friends to the affair. Being

a meticulous man, he had the entire house stripped and completely redecorated, adding much charm with painted flours, Chinese straw matting, wallpaper and antique furniture. The outside was painted yellow-ochre.

But on Sept. 8, 1896, within a week after his return to Belmont for the winter, great grandfather received a telegraph message stating that his Westford home had burned to the ground. Rumors were that the incentive for the fire was to cover the theft of the plumbing (the tin-plated copper tub and marble basin).

"It must have been a tremendous shock to the then 84-year-old man, but by the following summer, J.V. had a new house built on the same foundation — the present large home at the sharp bend in the road where Depot Street and Cold Spring Roads greet each other. The great barn did not burn. It was torn down in the 1960s and was still as square and sturdy as the day it was built 200 years ago.

"In closing, I might say that J.V. was a sentimental man. He had wooden handled button hooks made from the tremendous elm, killed by the fire, and which stood only five feet from the old home."

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