

Westford Recollections

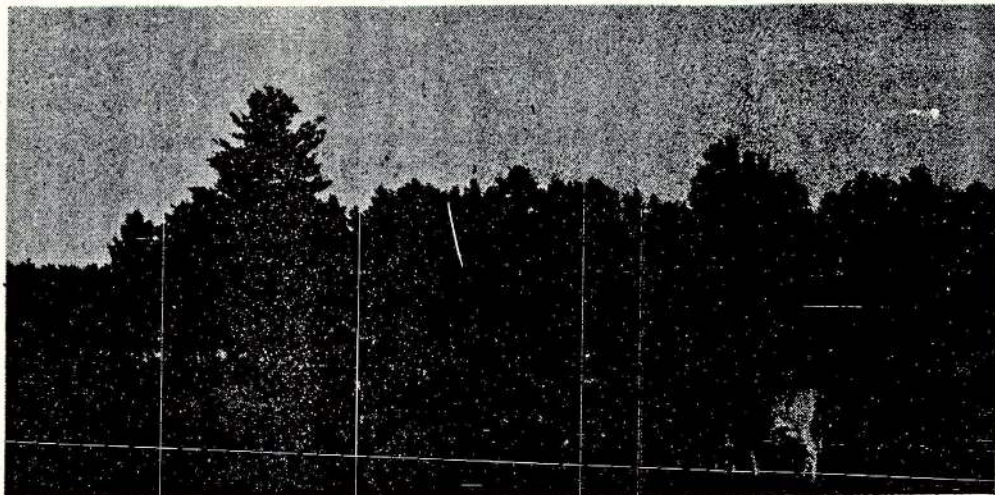
by June W. Kennedy

This is Article No. 31 in the continuing
WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series.

Peddlers of milk

Otis Day tells us that in 1905 he graduated from high school out the side door. "I wasn't kicked out," he claims, "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 fourteen then. The next year they jacked the age up to sixteen. 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 8 1/2 qt. cans with 2 qt. 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 Almira, 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. There was no electrical refrigeration to keep milk, so we didn't deliver



Westford's last sizeable dairy farm belongs to George Fletcher. Located on Plain Road, his stock of 200 offers a glimpse into Westford's rural past. It tends to make one nostalgic! (A Fletcher photo from the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series)

Dairy No. /

BOARD OF HEALTH, WESTFORD, MASS.

MILK PRODUCER'S PERMIT

(ACTS OF 1914, CHAP. 740)

Mr. Charles W. Hildreth of said Westford is hereby permitted to produce milk at his dairy farm located on Main 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 R. Spalding
Sherman H. Fletcher

Board of Health

Milk Producer's Permit from Westford Board of Health, dated 1918. (From the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS SERIES)



The Fletcher Farm on Plain Road. (A Fletcher photo from the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series)

twice a week, but every morning. The price of milk was 5 cents a qt. Yes, sir, lots of times I'd climb a flight of stairs to deliver a pint of milk for 2 1/2 cents. Later it got up to 7 cents a qt. 'Old Chip' I used on the milk route was Morgan, but 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."

Tom Curley claims raw milk compared to homogenized is as different as water is to gingerale. From the time he was thirteen (1907), until he became eighteen, he boarded at the Nashoba Farm down on the Concord Rd. This old farm is easily recognized; the road dissects the barn and house. "The sum of \$100.00 was offered to me in return for five years of living on the place and caring for sixty cows. At 4:00 a.m. I began my daily milk route with 'hoss' and wagon to Graniteville and Forge Village. Milk was 5 cents a quart; people stopped taking extra milk when it went up to 6 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 (Teddy Green's place today) 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 washtubs and round boiler used to heat the water for washing the milk bottles. My hands would break open from the soap and water. Over seventy years later, Otis Day would repeat to Tom, '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. They carried their raw milk in a five gallon can. They also carried with

them the lists stating one pint for Mrs. Fletcher, one 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 five gallon jug into a pint-size jar. On the other hand, when a customer set out a 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 twenties and most of the thirties, from the time he was ten-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," recalls Ben.

"As soon as the Board of Health put a sign on the door announcing a contagious disease we'd stop the returnable glass bottle. We used a waxed cardboard container - a forerunner of today's milk carton. In common usage were eight quart cans with wooden bungs on the top. Twenty quart jugs went to the large families or dealers. We picked up milk in forty quart jugs until the mid-forties. 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 forty 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 size herds. No longer does one hear the sound of tinkling cowbells, gentle grazing noises, chewing of the cud, and the peaceful pastoral scenes of yesterday. Westford's last sizeable remaining dairy farm belongs to Walter Fletcher, Jr. Located on Plain Rd., his stock of 200 offers a glimpse into Westford's rural past. It tends to make one nostalgic!!