

Westford Recollections

#52

By JUNE W. KENNEDY

The limited, numbered edition of *WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS 1729-1979*, featuring highlights from this column, has sold out. A second hard-cover edition will be available in December in time for Christmas gift-giving. Customers are advised to call or visit the "Book-tique (692-2347) at 6 Carlisle Place, or the author, to reserve copies.

Russians Part IV

Second Generation

Steve and Mary Beskalo:

Steve and Mary Beskalo are the only Westford second generation couple of pure Russian descent. Mary remembers there were no written recipes from the old people. You had to learn by trial and error -- this and that. Loaves of raisin bread, unsalted bread and Paska at Easter were common fare. There was always tea on the back of the black iron stove. It would be there for a week -- very strong. You'd pour it in a cup and just add the boiling water. Both orange and dried plum were popular for tea. Mary also recalls both her mother and father making braided rag rugs on Sunday afternoons -- from need, as well as for pleasure. Menfolk helped wash and scrub the clothes too, especially if their wives worked in the mill.

Steve enjoyed the professional ball games offered by Abbot Worsted with the beloved Jack Abbot in attendance. The folk, he recalls, were proud of their big gardens and shared a friendly competition in the raising of crops. Consequently, their pride and hard work forbade any relative from entering the Town Farm or Tewksbury State Hospital. To them this was shameful. They cared for their folk at home.

Food

Second Generation

Florian Woitowicz:

"Russians are great mushroom eaters. Even today the older ones gather them. My mother used to have me pick them. I still do. I dry them to put into soups. Some fry them. There are only a couple of bad ones. The flying angel is the most poisonous of all the mushrooms. It is a yellow mushroom and looks like it had oatmeal on top. Then there is the fly amoneta. Russians would boil it and set it in a bowl on the table to catch and kill flies. Several years ago I found a puffball right off Howard Road. It was 13" in diameter and 43" in circumference.

I've also gathered nuts and grapes for years.

There are a lot of wild grapes throughout the town. Everybody used to go nutting. In back of Palmer's Quarry the forest was so dense you could get a twenty or thirty pound bag of chestnuts in the burr. When frost came and the burr popped -- three nuts to a burr -- we'd pop them like popcorn on top of the stove. The blight has changed all that, but there are a few trees left. There are still a lot of hickory and hazelnuts and some pignuts and butternuts. The black walnuts are mostly cultivated, growing on someone's lawn.

I remember my mother had us gather cranberries in a bog. They are still plentiful in town. She had a big pcelain crock that would hold maybe thirty gallons. In the fall we'd cut the cabbage up. She'd mix the cranberries with the cabbage, seal it with grape leaves and put a big block of wood on top of the stone crock. Then we'd have sauerkraut all winter."

SECOND GENERATION

ALEXANDER BELIDA:

"Russian food was plain, but wholesome. Store macaroni? No! Mother rolled it out like a pie crust, laid it on a bed on paper to harden. Then she'd roll it up and chop it like macaroni, boil it and add milk like a porridge. It was good tasting. I remember a hearty dish called Kapusta which consisted of cabbage soup with lamb; another was called pigeons which was hamburger wrapped up in cabbage with tomato sauce. Overalls were treats served at the wedding blasts. They were made from a flour mixture, twisted, fried in deep

fat and dipped in powdered sugar. Vorenikee were cottage cheese turnovers with a little egg and sweetening.

Other specialties were pickled cucumbers packed with salt brine and dill, bean-potato soup, Kapusta, a soup with cabbage, lamb and bay leaf, homemade kielbasa...we'd get sheep gut casings from a butcher in Lowell and soak it a while for it was preserved in salt...then we'd cube pork and beef, add liver, onion, mustard seed, garlic, salt and pepper, and with the neck of a bottle we'd stuff the casings. Beet soup and Black Russian Bread were two more favorites. In closing, the custom of drinking Russian Green Tea prepared in a Samovar might be of interest: Use glass-leave spoon in, draw glass of tea, spill some in saucer, put a lump of sugar in your teeth, sip from saucer. Sometimes lemon was served."

This is article No. 52 in the continuing *WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS* - 250th Anniversary Series.



Several years ago, Florian Woitowicz picked this giant puffball on the Shea Farm near Beaver Brook in Westford. It measured 13" in diameter and 43½" in circumference. His children, David, Anne and Kevin proudly posed for their Dad. . . who claims that the Russians and Poles are great mushroom eaters. (A Woitowicz photo from the *WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS* Series).



Steve Beskalo, a second generation Russian in Westford, heartily enjoyed the professional ball games offered by Abbot Worsted Company for its employees. Posing with a soccer trophy for the 1924-1925 season are three halfbacks. Left to right: William Drolet, Reginald Blowey and William Marcouillier. (A Blowey photo from the *WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS* Series).