

Westford Recollections : Thanksgiving Past

By JUNE W. KENNEDY

"Over the river and through the wood--
Oh, how the wind does blow!
It stings the toes
And bites the nose
As over the ground we go.

Over the river and through the wood,
Trot fast, my dapple-gray!
Spring over the ground!
Like a hunting hound!
For this is Thanksgiving Day.

-Child

Millions of Americans are grateful to Norman Rockwell for leaving them a nostalgic portrayal of small town life. Reassuringly and pleasantly he illustrated a culture of rural ways which our fast-moving nation is leaving behind. Last week I visited the Corner House in Stockbridge which contains Rockwell's original works. As I reflected upon his paintings of "Freedom from Want" and "Freedom of Worship," my thoughts turned to Westford and some old timers here who in their own way painted a picture of our town which might be titled "Thanksgiving Past." I share with you my findings.

Emma M. Day and her husband, J. Warren Day, lived at the old farmhouse located at the junction of Graniteville and Cold Spring Roads. She was but a 26-year-old housewife when she penned in her diary: "Tues 24 Nov. 1868: I have

made my pudding for Thanksgiving & may I have a thankful heart.

Wed 25 Nov. 1868: Got a turkey
Thurs 26 Nov 1868: Rainy - W. (Warren) & Mother went to church. S & I tended Turkey while they were gone it was nice."

Another entry written a year later shows the folksy hospitality extended the traveling "pedler." No matter that the calendar marked Thanksgiving!

"Wed Nov 17 1869: The pedler staid here tonight.

Thurs Nov 18 1869: Thanksgiving Day Mother took 3 handkerchiefs 40 cents each We had three chickens and all the fixings for dinner."

Marian Winnek (1883-1977), great granddaughter of J. Varnum Fletcher, donor of the Westford Library, told many tales of her childhood visits to his old homestead, Cold Spring Farm, located at the sharp bend in the road where Cold Spring and Depot Street greet each other. Born here in 1812, J. V. Fletcher was sentimental about the homestead. Accordingly, when he was 60, he purchased his birthplace where his family spent the entire summer from 4th of July to Labor Day. Mr. Fletcher, himself, returned each weekend from Belmont to his self-sustaining 200-acre farm. Many a six-course meal was served at Cold Spring Farm.

Although the holiday meal was probably enjoyed at the Belmont home, Miss Winnek

recalled that a typical Fletcher Thanksgiving menu of the 1880's and 1890's would consist of:

"Soup, consomme, fish baked in a scallop shell, turkey, 3 or 4 vegetables (hubbard squash and creamed onions), pan-roasted potatoes, biscuits, pies (mince, squash with brandy and rose water, latticed cranberry pie), nuts and raisins, fruit (apples and pears he raised himself).

All served on the lovely Royal Worcester dinner set which had been taken from the china cupboard and washed for the occasion."

By 1905, when May E. Day, granddaughter of Emma M. Day, was a girl of fourteen, she wrote in her diary:

"Thanksgiving - Papa didn't go to bed. He and Uncle Arthur worked at the telephone." The Day Family had one of the first Westford phones. May's brother, Otis, still recalls the chilly day the lines were laid from the mills up to Westford (probably the Depot). The Day phone, a private one, was hooked to this line.

Frank Jarvis grew up in Parker Village in the early years of this century. He recalls, "Thanksgiving found our table loaded with home-cooked foods. We looked up to those who had turkey as wealthy! We had chicken. Cracker pudding was a favorite dessert - especially with me!

Finally, Ruth Johnson remembers Thanksgiving Day in the teens as a big family continued on page 5



"Over the river and through the woods, to grandfather's house we go...Charles Willis Hildreth pulls into the drive of his son on Boston Road sometime in the late teens. (Photo courtesy of June Kennedy)

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time. "We had 7 to 8 kinds pie at our house on the Chamberlain Road. It seems fitting to share a couple of old-time recipes that were favorites here in Westford.

Cracker Pudding

About 12 common crackers

1 cup sugar

1 tsp. salt

1 cup raisins

1 egg

1 tsp. cinnamon

3 pints milk

Bake in oven till firm. Stir once or twice.

Emma M. Day - 1871

Miss Parloa's Squash Pie

5 pints squash

2 qts. boiling milk

1 1/2 nutmegs

4 tsp. salt

5 cups sugar

9 eggs

4 tbs. Madeira

2 tbs. rose water

Pastry for 8 pies

A favorite of the J. V. Fletcher Family. From Miss Parloa's Cookbook - 1880 edition.

"Over the river and through the wood,

Now grandmother's cap I spy!

Hurrah for the fun!

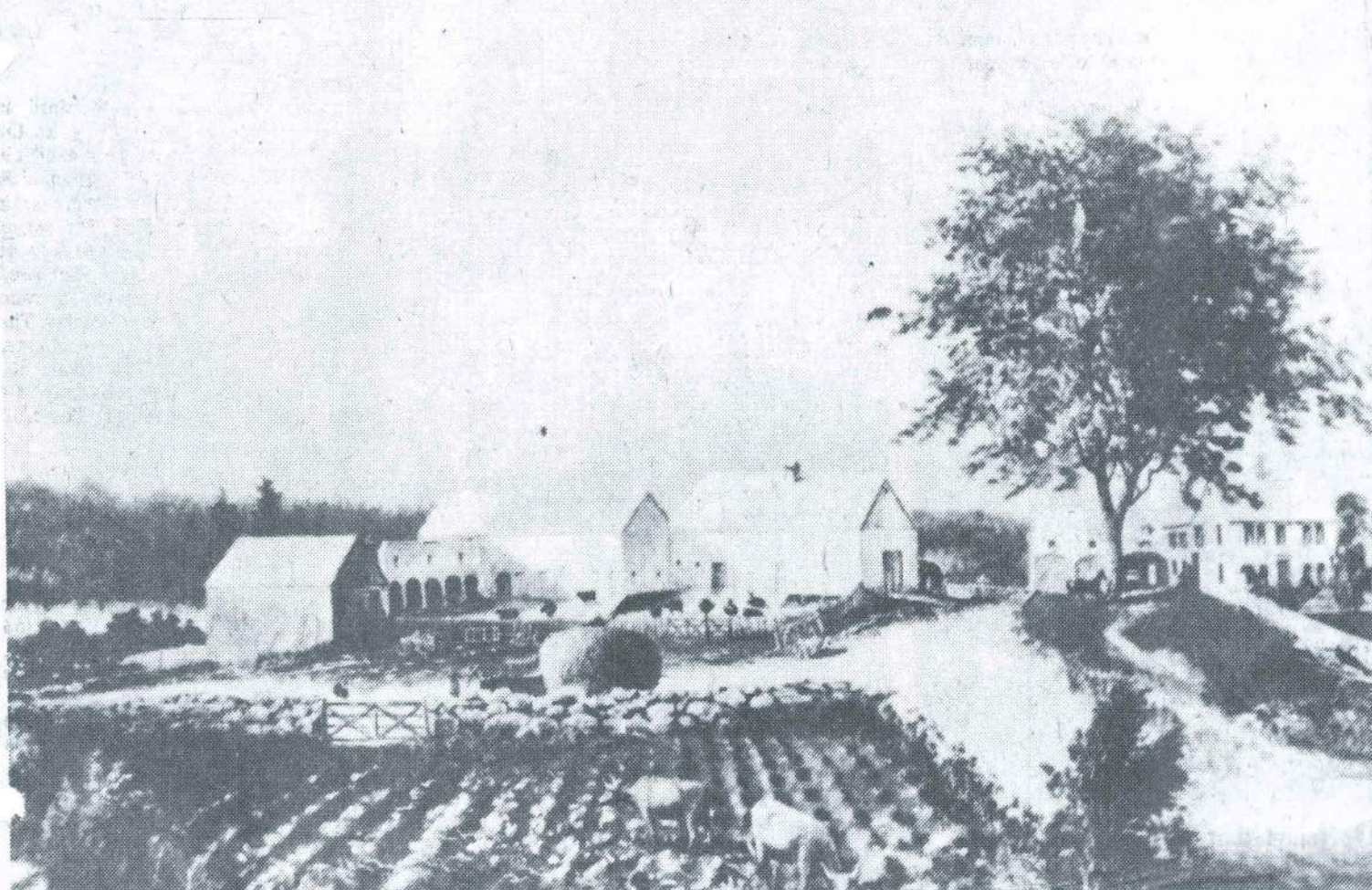
Is the pudding done?

Hurrah for the pumpkin pie!

May yours be a season to gather for worship!

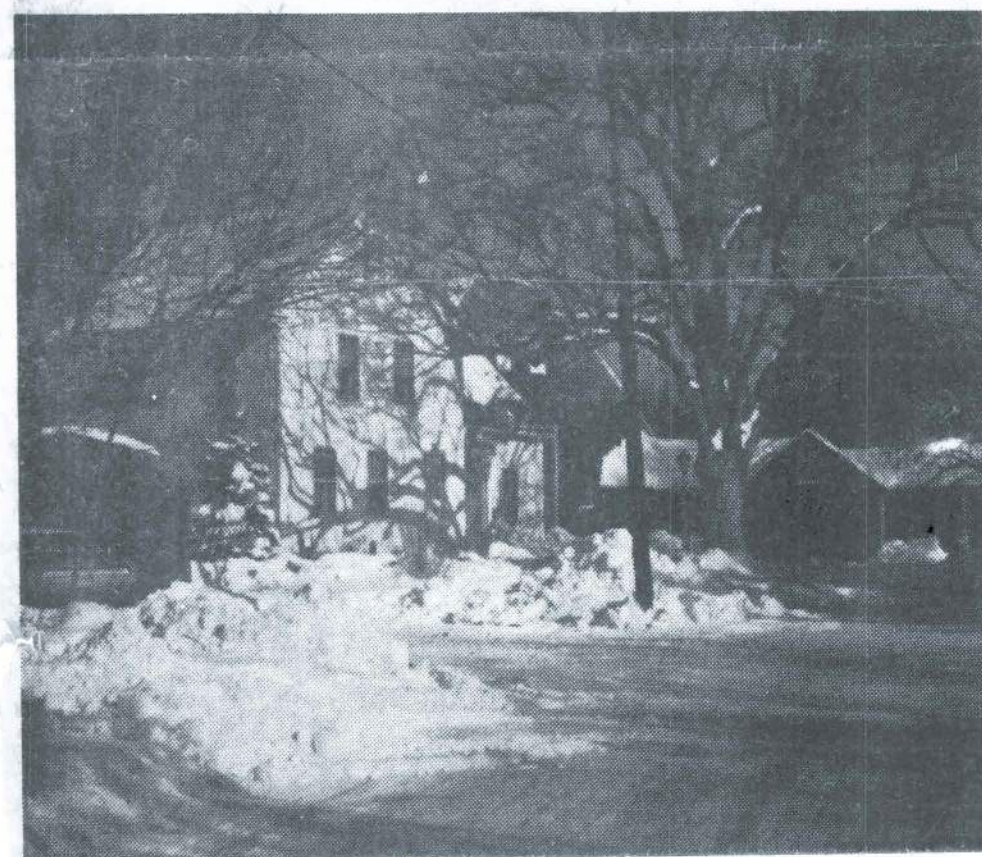
May yours be a season to gather at table!

HAPPY THANKSGIVING TO ALL!!



Featured is a photo of a painting depicting J. V. Fletcher's - 200 acre self-sustaining Cold Spring Farm. Could be that the

squash for Miss Parloa's pie was raised on the property. The artist is unknown. (Photo courtesy of June Kennedy)



J.V. Fletcher, donor of the Westford Library, provided a sumptuous Thanksgiving feast for his family and relatives. The meal was topped off with apples and pears he raised himself. (Photo compliments of June Kennedy)