

'Dick's Dispatch'

Columns 101 through 125

Richard E. "Dick" Venus, a native son and Ridgefield's first town historian, wrote 366 "Dick's Dispatch" columns for The Ridgefield Press between March 13, 1982, and Nov. 16, 1989. They focus mostly on the people of the first half of the 20th Century and the events and places that were part of their lives.

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#101: AN OLD SOUTH SALEM ROAD FARM WITH AN EXPOSITION BARN

Sometimes, when a routine is interrupted, one may find it difficult to get back in the groove again. Such was the case during my rather enforced absence [due to illness] while this column has been missing from this page of The Press.

Something was needed to get me started again. Suddenly there it was, in the form of a photograph by Joe Hartmann that recently appeared on this page. The picture was of the fine old farmhouse that still stands on Old South Salem Road. It is now the home of the James Madison Blackwells and has gone through considerable change since that photo was taken.

Rita Potter correctly identified it as the house in which her family resided in the early 30's. It sure brought back a lot of memories.

The farm was once owned by Richard Keeler and this old Ridgefield family farmed the surrounding land for many years. They should have received some kind of a medal for being able to eke out a living from a farm that had little topsoil and an awful lot of stones. It must have taken a lot of ingenuity as well as some very hard work.

It was primarily a dairy farm and the small wing that showed in the photo on the west side of the farm house was a little milk room in which cream was separated from the milk, and butter and cheese were made.

The cow barn itself was set a good distance back from the highway and has since been converted into a very nice family dwelling. Another barn that was used mostly for storing hay sets out close to Old South Salem Road. This building has also been converted to family use.

The hay barn may have some historical value since it came all the way from Chicago. As the story goes, Richard Keeler attended the World's Columbian Exposition that was held in Chicago in 1893. While there he was strongly attracted to this building that was put on display.

The design of this building was somewhat of a departure from the traditional farm building that had a straight gable roof. This one had a roof that was rather concave in its construction. Many of the buildings at the Exposition were to be dismantled when it closed and some were put up for sale. The public was invited to place bids on these buildings and Mr. Keeler was moved to bid on this large barn. When the bids were opened at the close of the exhibition, he turned out to be the successful bidder.

Many of these buildings proved to be a great bargains and they were carefully taken apart in sections that were numbered to facilitate reconstruction. The sections were placed on flat railroad cars for delivery. In a few weeks Mr. Keeler's new barn arrived at the Ridgefield freight yards and was then reassembled where it stands today on Old South Salem Road.

World War I had ended and Reginald Lewis' (brother of Wadsworth of the Lewis Fund) had reconstructed the mansion on South Salem Road [#100] which is now the home of the Harry Neumanns. Reggie needed more land to round out his estate so he purchased the neighboring Keeler farm. The Keeler family then moved to the corner of West Lane and Olmstead Lane to the house that is now the home of the Richard Callahans.

Reggie Lewis now had land that extended northwest to Peaceable Street and northeast to Golf Lane, some 70 acres in total. In fact, whereas his front driveway entered from South Salem Road, the back driveway exited on Golf Lane by use of a raised road bed that was to have had tracks laid on it for a proposed railway that would have connected Ridgefield with the large cities to the south of us.

Reggie invested a lot of money in renovating his mansion and when that was completed he turned attention to the farm. The large cow barn was completely changed from the commercial type to one more suitable for what was known as a gentleman farmer. I once heard Francis Collins, who owned Whipstick Farm, describe a gentleman farmer as one who made his money in the city and then came to Ridgefield to spend it.

Achille Bacchiochi was engaged to renovate the cow barn and a silo was erected, and two additions or extensions were made. The extensions were built either side of the barn in the direction of the highway and this made the barn take the shape of a horseshoe.

The extension on the east side had box stalls for four horses and a pony and the one on the west served as a maternity ward for the cows and had box stalls for the calves. Each extension was capped with a concave, concrete ceiling. They were very smooth and very attractive but later on, as you will see, they caused a serious problem. At the time, however, they were ideal for the purpose which they were intended.

To be sure, those ceilings were very well constructed and probably do not have one crack even today, although one was disengaged from the main barn and moved years later to Mead Ridge where it made a very substantial home for Joseph Tulipani and his family.

Richard Hopper Sr. was engaged as superintendent on the estate and moved with his family to the farmhouse. The farm was put in operation and its produce was used mainly for the Lewis family and those who worked on the estate.

A dam was constructed near the highway east of the farm house and it created a nice little pond. We always called it Hopper's Pond and had lots of fun skating there. Someone stocked the pond with goldfish and there were so many fish that the water sometimes took on a reddish hue. For some reason, the dam was opened some years ago and now the pond has shrunken to a small pool.

Mr. Hopper's son, Richard Jr., used to care for the saddle horses and when it was necessary to have them shod he brought them to Harry Thomas's blacksmith shop. Dick would ride one horse and lead another early in the morning and leave them at the shop while he went to school. I always knew when he had brought the horses, for when he showed up at school he would be wearing his riding pants and boots. In such instances I made a quick exit when school was over, and then a mad dash for the blacksmith shop. Dick used to let me ride one of the horses back to the farm and I was in seventh heaven.

However, the return trip was slightly altered. We went down Peaceable Street rather than pass the mansion on South Salem Road. The Lewises might not have liked to see someone else enjoying one of their prize saddle horses.

More on this farm next week.

#102: MORE TALES FROM AN OLD ESTATE

Reginald Lewis was like his father, Frederic E., in several ways. He was very thorough in anything that he set out to accomplish. When he took on the task of transforming the Keeler farm from commercial to that of a country gentleman's farm, he went all the way. Nothing was spared in making the farm into a real showplace.

The approach to the big barn that the Bacchiochis were remodeling was very impressive. A perfect stone wall lined either side of the long driveway. The walls are still in excellent condition today, but trees and large shrubs overhang them and cut off the view of the great barn that has since been made over into a lovely dwelling.

Reggie also easily adopted his father's fondness for the juice of the grape and constructed a very large wine cellar that would have been the envy of the crowned heads of Europe.

A rather sizable fire at the Lewis mansion occurred and was brought under control by our always very efficient volunteer fire department. When the great efforts of the firemen were successful, they were introduced to the fine art of popping a cork. Reggie was always the perfect host, even when his guests were unexpected. All of the firemen were in complete agreement on that deduction.

By the end of the 20's, Reggie had tired of the good living afforded by his beautiful estate and moved with his family to New Preston, just north of New Milford. There he started once more, from scratch, to build a second gentleman's estate.

The Hopper family at this time moved from the little farm house to the Bell estate, just across the state line in Lewisboro.

Richard Sr., was very adept at estate work and was also a very good bowler. He bowled on a team that was sponsored by the Horticultural Society in a league that used the alleys at the Congregational Church House.

We recall that he and George Tator were much alike in size and had similar bowling styles. Both kind of tiptoed up to the foul line and dropped the ball in a marvelous hook that always seemed to wind up in the pocket. If a second ball was required, they both had the habit of placing their right hands on the window ledge while waiting for the ball to return.

In 1930 the entire estate was sold to Robert P. Scripps. Patrick Potter became superintendent for this famous newspaper family. Pat and Nellie and their daughters, Rita and Patricia (McManus), moved into the nice little farm house on Old South Salem Road.

Pat was a great man, with years of experience in the operation of a private estate. Like all the Potter boys, he was a rugged individual and what he did not know about estate work was just not worth knowing.

Daniel Bennett, an excellent horticulturist, looked after the gardens. Chauncey Wilson, an accomplished stone mason, was kept busy building fences and helping on the farm. Howard Beers was the teamster and Porter Stannard was the cow man for a nice little herd of purebred Guernseys.

Porter had been one of the very early state policemen, along with John E. Kelly, Leo Carroll, Henry Palau, Louis Baker, and Harry Tucker. For some reason, he quit the police work and worked with the cows.

Porter also did carpenter work for Peter McManus and built a nice home for his family on New Street. He was an excellent shot and the Potter girls remember how, during his lunch break, he would practice by shooting snakes that had come out to sun themselves on the rocks near the pond on the farm.

Patsy also remembers riding the Scripps pony bareback and how the pony would throw her off when he tired of the sport.

Ernie Stash was the Scripps family chauffeur. We wrote about Ernie and what a great character he was in Dispatch No. 9. Milo Holub was an excellent mechanic and doubled as a second chauffeur. Milo and Jenny and their son Edward still live on Golf Lane.

There was a huge garage with two apartments at the rear of the mansion and the Holub family lived there at the time. The Stashes and their two daughters lived in the yellow house that still stands on the corner of Saw Mill Hill and North Salem Roads.

The Scripps garage has since been converted into a large family dwelling, almost as large as the mansion.

Because of the Lindbergh kidnapping, wealthy and famous families lived in constant fear in 1934. The Scripps family was naturally concerned about their children. When they received some kind of warning, either by note or by telephone, they did not hesitate. They just packed up and left for their ranch in California, never to return.

The Stash family accompanied the Scripps and we never saw them again. However, one of the girls contacted us last year after we wrote the column about her father.

Milo Holub stayed behind and looked after the estate for many years. One of the automobiles that the Scripps did not take was a large seven passenger 1931 Buick. My brother Jack purchased the car and enjoyed it for many years. It was a great car.

Eventually the mansion and adjoining property was sold to August Zinsser, a prominent New York banker. After a few years, August passed away and his wife, Mary, kept the place going for several years. A family named Ward owned it for a while, and then it was purchased by an osteopath, Dr. Sossei.

In the meantime, the farm remained idle for a number of years. Joe Pinchbeck used the Chicago barn to keep a team of horses and William Patten had a pony farm there for a while. Finally in 1942, the farm was purchased by the Walter H. Deiches and things began to liven up considerably.

Walter had been an official in one of New York's largest clothing stores, and apparently had made a lot of money. Now, as Francis Collins would say, he would spend it in Ridgefield.

He had the idea of turning the farm back to commercial use. He must have had a lot of courage for, to be charitable, his knowledge of farming was absolutely nil.

Walter was to learn a lot in the following year, not the least of which was how much it cost to operate a farm. He and his wife, the former Nancy Westheim, lived on the corner of Nod and Branchville Roads.

I got to know him because someone referred him to me for information on how to get the farm started again. It turned out to be a most interesting relationship.

#103: THE LONG NIGHTS AT BULLARD AND CALLS FOR FARMING HELP

Our first phone call from Walter Deiches came at 2 p.m. one afternoon in March 1943. It woke me from a sound sleep. Sleeping during the day was necessary for I worked from 8 in the evening until 8 in the morning.

At the time I was employed by the Bullard Company in Bridgeport. An aptitude test had shown that I possessed some ability in tool-making and this type of work was considered vital to the war effort. Because of this happy discovery, the production line was bypassed and I found myself learning the trade in the tool room. One of the master tool-makers was assigned to teach me the fine art of toolmaking.

My instructor turned out to be a very fine gentleman named Steven Norris. No one called him Steve; he was always Mr. Norris and was held in awe by the other toolmakers. Some of them referred to him when not in his presence as "Curly" because he was completely bald. At any rate, he received my undivided attention. The result was that after a few weeks, I had my own milling machine to operate. My pride must have been noticeable when the blueprints for my first job were handed to me.

In the toolroom there was not the hustle and bustle of production that was so evident in the other areas of the great Bullard enterprise. However, the work was very exacting and the tolerance for error was practically nil.

Many people from Ridgefield were employed at Bullards during this period. Some worked the day shift and some worked at night and all worked 12 hours straight. I rode to work with Gene Casagrande, Orrin Beers, Herb Shaw, and Charles Cain and we took turns driving. We arrived home each morning about nine o'clock, had a meal and slept until five, when it was time to get ready to go back to work.

Therefore, a 2 p.m. phone call was not actually relished. During the first phone call, Walter asked an awful lot of questions and he got so much information that I felt it would take him at least a week to digest it. However, the next day, at two, he called again and then the calls became daily. It was nice to be of some help but we finally had to explain to him that the calls were interrupting my sleep pattern with a very adverse effect. Despite Walter's apologies, the calls continued and soon he was inviting me to visit at his home on my day off.

Walter seemed to be a pleasant man and I guessed him to be in his early forties. My guess was wrong and he turned out to be younger. If you have gotten the impression that he was persistent, we would agree with that analysis.

One Sunday he appeared at our home with a friend and asked that I accompany them for a look at his farm. As usual it was difficult to say no and against my better judgment I got into the car with him and Larry.

The barns were pretty much as I remembered them except that instead of the nice saddle horses, the east wing now housed eight, very picturesque, horned Dorset sheep. The sheep, with their large curved horns, were just elegant but looked as though they would have been more at home on some craggy mountain top.

When asked what he intended to do with the sheep, Walter said that he was not sure but felt he needed something to start the farm off with.

The west wing that had previously been home for the purebred Guernsey cows was now occupied by a herd of hogs, twelve sows in number. There were many different breeds: Chester Whites, Jersey Reds, Poland Chinas, Berkshires, and one Dutch-Belted. A Dutch-Belted hog is black with a white stripe around its middle.

Walter had named this one Brady after his friend Sim Brady. He did not explain why. It was probably Sim who had steered Walter around in my direction. We asked Walter what he planned to do with all these sows and he explained that there was a great need for pork so he decided to raise some pigs. We noted the absence of a boar and pointed out that one was needed if there were to be little pigs. Walter wrote that down in a little book that he carried.

It was truly amazing to see how little the man knew about farm life. No doubt he was intelligent and had made a considerable amount of money in his business. However, he never did learn to tell a bull from a cow and the only animal on the farm that he ever recognized was Brady, whose colors were so distinctive. This hog became his pet and would come running when he called her.

Walter pointed to the large Chicago barn and announced that he intended to have it converted into the largest chicken house ever seen. He had his own idea about egg production. At his home on Branchville Road he kept a small flock of 20 New Hampshire Red hens. One day he collected 20 eggs and theorized that with 2,000 hens he would then collect 2,000 eggs. We tried, without any noticeable success, to explain that it really did not work out that way.

It was plain to see that Walter was badly in need of someone with experience to take charge of his new venture. Soon he was trying to entice me to move into the nice little farmhouse. Despite my love for animals and farm life, I declined the invitation with thanks. All of his considerable persuasive powers were brought to bear but to no avail. Extending some friendly help was one thing while making a career of it was something else.

The Bullard Company had spent no small amount of time and money in training me for the work I was doing. My progress had been rather good, due no doubt to the urgent need for machine operators. The firm had been very good to me and bonuses were coming my way with regularity.

This and the fact that I was happy and proud of my present employment was carefully pointed out to Walter. It was also noted that the kind of employment the farm offered could never warrant the pay I was now receiving. He was informed further that Bullard would never release me as the work I performed was vital to the war effort and I had just earned the Navy E for a job just completed.

Walter was not the least impressed by all of this and stated that he was confident that he could match or even better my present wages. That should have told me something. He went on to note that his farm would also be a very definite part of the war effort. He was so persistent that I reluctantly agreed to ask for my release from Bullards, secure in the knowledge that it would be denied. My feeling of self-importance proved to be slightly unjustified.

As agreed, that night my foreman was asked to put in for my release. He looked at me in astonishment and then started to laugh as he thought it was a joke. I laughed also but then explained that I had to prove to a certain person that I could not get a release.

(To be continued)

#104: WALTER HAS BIG PLANS FOR A SMALL FARM

When my wartime foreman at Bullard's assured me that there was no way that my release from that firm could be secured, his opinion was received with considerable relief. However, he agreed to forward my request through the proper channels.

As expected the denial was received in writing the following evening. It carried with it a feeling of security as well as indicating that I was much needed. The feeling was short lived.

Two nights later I received a message directing me to report to the office of the superintendent. The super was most cordial in his greeting and then he handed me a letter that I still have, 41 years later. It started out in a very complimentary manner, noting my accomplishments and guaranteeing reemployment at any time in the future. It ended, however, with the announcement that I was being released to supervise an agricultural project in Ridgefield.

The super could offer no explanation for the abrupt change in the firm's decision and I felt quite deflated to say the least. It was more than five years later that the story unfolded. My brother Gus was introduced to a man who at the mention of the name Venus asked Gus if he had a relative named Richard. When Gus informed the gentleman that I was his brother, the man said that he remembered the name because of an incident that occurred during his employment with the Department of Agriculture in Washington.

According to this man, a fellow appeared in his office one day and in no uncertain terms demanded that I be released from employment with a firm in Bridgeport. Of course the fellow was Walter Deiches who then proceeded to paint a picture of some gigantic agricultural enterprise that I was scheduled to operate. He backed up his demand with a letter from some high government official who had endorsed Walter's request. That was how I was Shanghaied and I guess by now you would have to agree that Walter was a very persistent man. When he made up his mind there was no stopping him.

So back to the little farm on Old South Salem Road where the first job was to acquire the livestock and get the farm going. We say "little farm" for as farms go, it did not have many tillable acres. This was solved by renting or leasing additional acres of unused fields around the town.

Though we still did not have any milk cows, Walter wanted to find a place to market milk. The names of several large dairies were furnished and he settled on Round Hill Farms in Greenwich, which was operated at the time by William Tuttle. Mr. Tuttle came to make an inspection of the farm and seemed astonished at not seeing any cows. Walter assured him that the cows were on their way and he could expect a certain number of gallons of milk each day. Mr. Tuttle looked to me for confirmation of all this and I assured him that Walter would do just as he said he would.

Now we were in the market for milk cows and various dealers were canvassed. If there was one profession that had more than its sharp operators, it had to be the horse and cattle dealer. After talking to a few, I suggested we go to see Morris Budinski. Morris had a reputation for fairness and had a farm between Newtown and Brookfield.

At the time we visited Morris, he was making ready for a cow buying trip to Canada. Walter and he engaged in a very lively conversation and during their negotiations Morris quickly came to the conclusion that he was dealing with no ordinary person.

When Walter asked how many cows came in a railroad carload, Morris informed him that it was governed by the size of the cow, but generally he would get between 40 and 50 in a carload. Walter told him that he would need a full carload. It was no place for me to interfere but

on the way home I told him that if he went through with his idea of buying a full carload of cows, he would have to put an addition on the barn as even with using both wings of the barn, it would hold no more than 20 cows. Walter assured me that he would find a way of getting them all in. When I questioned why he needed so many cows, he seemed very evasive.

George Bloomer Sr. was building a house for the sows at the time. It turned out to be a nice pig barn with 12 fair-size stalls, one for each sow and a very large stall, twice the size of the others. We guessed correctly that the large stall was for the boar. George had had the advantage of seeing the new boar and planned accordingly. Walter had purchased an enormous Chester white boar from Howland Adams. He must have weighed more than 600 pounds and the stall was none too big for him.

It may be of interest that the pig barn was originally constructed close to the woods at the rear of the cow barn. When Bill Shipley bought the farmhouse some years later, the pig house was moved out near the highway on the west side of the farmhouse and remade into a garage. The Blackwells have informed me that the garage burned several years ago and they had it reconstructed, exactly as it was and it now serves as living quarters.

At any rate the farm now had a total of 13 hogs and while I have always considered 13 to be a lucky number, on this occasion I had some misgivings. When I asked Walter where he would keep all the little pigs when they arrived, he said we could cross that bridge when we came to it.

Since each sow could have somewhere between 12 and 16 little ones, we felt it only fair to apprise Lee Vance that after a gestation period of 112 days, he could have an awful lot of pigs to care for. Lee was a little "shook up" at the prospect but reasoned that if the little pigs were sold off quickly enough, he might be able to handle the situation. Little did he know of the plans Walter had in store for him and the pig project.

(To Be Continued)

#105: DISASTER LOOMS AT WALDEE FARMS AS COWS & CHICKENS ARRIVE

Waldee Farms was the scene of feverish activity, as preparations were made to make the farm a going concern.

George Bloomer had no sooner finished building the new pig barn than Walter Deiches had him start on the renovation of the large Chicago barn. Up to this time the barn had been used primarily for storage of hay and machinery. Walter planned on making it over, into a huge chicken house. It probably would be, at least during this period, the largest chicken house in this area.

There are the old axioms that say, Don't count your chickens until they are hatched and don't put all your eggs in one basket. Walter would furnish another that said: Don't put all your chickens in one house.

It was the spring of 1943 and the production of food was of vital importance. In the upper portion of the Chicago barn, another floor was being added. The new floor was almost completed when Walter's first order of baby chicks arrived.

This shipment consisted of 1,000 fuzzy little New Hampshire reds. The barn was so big that the chicks must have looked real tiny to Walter. I assured him they would grow rapidly and would soon use up what now looked like a lot of extra space.

However, Walter soon began talking about a second order of baby chicks. He was cautioned about the dangers of overcrowding as the chicks grew. Lee Vance and I measured up the barn and concluded that it would safely accommodate 1,800 full-grown chickens.

This information was passed on to Walter in the hope that he would order accordingly. He accepted our advice with a wave of his hand and I was not the least surprised when a week later an additional 1,000 little red chicks arrived. When the following week a third shipment of an equal number was delivered, there was a genuine cause for alarm.

Lee was very upset about the number of little charges that he must care for, and with good reason. A few days later, Lee came over to the dairy barn to see me and he was obviously distraught as he asked that I speak to Walter at once as he had reason to believe that he was planning to order again.

We went together to try to talk Walter out of getting any more chicks. He listened to what we had to say, but it was obvious that he had no intention of canceling the order, which he had already placed.

We drew a very graphic picture of what could be expected as the 4,000 little chicks approached their full size. Walter insisted that his goal was to get 4,000 eggs per day and we kept warning him that the death rate from overcrowding would be disastrous.

I felt sorry for Lee but there was nothing we could do about the situation.

Walter's attention was now directed to the dairy part of his enterprise. There was a nice silo attached to the cow barn and he wanted to know its purpose. It was explained to him that it was intended to store enilage that was chopped up corn and corn stalks.

We noted the importance of having fodder of this kind for the cows during the cold winter months. We measured the silo and informed him that it would take about five acres of field corn to fill it.

There was need for all the acreage of the farm for pasture use but just over the New York State line, on the former Dr. Shelton estate, ten acres were available for this purpose. Walter hired Bill Patten and his Alis Chalmers tractor to plow and plant the entire field. The field has since been partly developed and the rest has become a wooded area, directly across from Elmwood Road on West Lane.

All of this plowing and planting activity must have fascinated Walter and the next thing we knew he had Patten plow a tract of about five acres that stood just east of his home on Branchville Road. This acreage has since been made over into a very nice development, with a road called CasaTorch Lane. The name is a contraction of the names of the late John Casavecchia and Gino Torcellini who developed the property.

Bill Patten had a potato planting attachment for his tractor and when Walter saw that, he decided to plant the biggest field of potatoes that I ever saw in Ridgefield. A normal harvest of potatoes from a field of this size would have been sufficient to supply the whole town at that time.

A normal harvest of corn from the ten acres he had planted would have filled two silos the size of the one at Waldee Farms. However, it did not turn out that way. My main concern was the corn as it was of such importance to the cows.

When we saw the corn field for the first time, the weeds were as tall as the corn. Apparently it was thought that all that was necessary was that the corn be planted. It had to be learned that cultivation was a very important part of the growing process.

We located a nice little gray horse and a cultivator and went to work on the corn field in an effort to save as much of the corn as possible. It was a monumental task. The horse worked very well but the weeds made it very difficult to see between the rows of corn and they had such a hold that many resisted the tugging shoes of the cultivator.

Several local boys were put to work, pulling by hand the weeds that could be destroyed no other way. This can be a very tedious process and boys lose interest in it very quickly, especially in a field of this size. It looked very hopeless.

It was some weeks later before I had a chance to see the potato field on Branchville Road and by then it was in even worse condition than the corn field. It was obvious that the yield would be practically nil.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch a call was received from Morris Budinski announcing the arrival of a carload of milk cows. When Walter and I went to see them, they were all turned out to pasture. They were not very impressive and out of the 48 cows, only a few looked very promising. What was of even more concern was the fact that they all looked a little on the wild side. Most of them were Holsteins, with a sprinkling of Jerseys. Guernseys and milking shorthorns.

Walter and Morris engaged in a prolonged conversation as to how the transaction would be completed for the purchase of the cows. Somehow on the way to see the cows, I was able to convince Walter that he should not take the entire carload.

It was fun to hear an experienced cattle dealer extolling the virtues of a bunch of cows of which he himself actually had no personal knowledge. It was equally amusing to hear a real tenderfoot in the buying of cattle, circumventing each offer of the cattleman by substituting one of his own.

Walter sure did not know much about cows, but he did know his way around the marketplace.

#106: THE HALF-WILD COWS AND OVERCROWDED CHICKS

While Walter Deiches and Morris Budinski continued their negotiations, 48 cows were milling around in the pasture, awaiting their fate. Offers and rejections flew thick and fast. First Walter suggested that I select 40 of the cows and he would buy them, though he had been made aware that this was at least 10 more than the barn could properly house. Morris agreed to Walter's suggestion but then balked when I asked that the cows be put in the barn where an examination and then a sensible selection could be made. We learned later why Morris was reluctant to have the cows put in the barn.

When it was explained to Walter that it would be impossible for me to evaluate the worth of an animal which was walking around in the field, he did not seem overly impressed. I began to get the feeling that Walter was more interested in numbers than in the quality of the cows.

After a great number of ideas on how the problem could be solved, Walter said that he would buy all 48 cows and then sell back eight of them to Morris. Selecting the eight cows that were the least desirable rather than choosing the best 40 seemed a lot easier and I finally agreed to try this method.

The whole operation seemed a bit unreal and I found it hard to believe that I could be in the middle of such a situation. However, the process of elimination was started and one could not help but feel sorry for the eight poor critters that were separated from the herd. We will not attempt to liken it to a Miss America contest, but the system was pretty much the same.

On the way home, after the purchase of the cows was completed, it was explained to Walter that it would be necessary to breed the cows at intervals that would produce three or four calves each month. In that way a steady flow of milk would be provided and that would keep the buyer, Mr. Tuttle and his Round Hill Farms, happy. Walter thought that cows just continued to

give milk, day after day, and was surprised that they had a dry period during the two-month rest period prior to calving.

We went on to explain to Walter that cows' main purpose was not to produce milk for human consumption, but rather for their calves, just as the bees work hard to fill their hives with honey and intend it for their own use. Through the years, because of careful breeding, production has been substantially increased and we humans benefit from the excess. He seemed to have a genuine interest in these facts of farm life, with which he was so unfamiliar.

It was suggested that artificial insemination, which was relatively new at the time, be used to breed the cows. Several purebred bulls were being kept on a farm in Woodbridge for this purpose. They were of top quality and offered a real opportunity for the improvement of their breeds. Walter wanted none of that. He had his heart set on having his own bull as it would add another animal to his herd. So I began looking around for a bull.

Morris Budinski lost no time but started right away delivering the cows. They were deposited in a pasture adjoining the cow barn and that's when the fun began. In altering the barn to house the cows, the storage area in the center of the barn and the horse stables were put to use. The sheep had been sold to make room for the cows but it still would be an awful tight squeeze.

Now it was time to put the cows in the barn. It would prove to be the very first time they had been put in a stanchion. Apparently in Canada, where they had come from, they were kept loose in a shed. It was now quite clear why Morris had refused to put them in his barn.

The old days on the western range, at roundup time, could have been no more exciting than the project of getting these half-wild cows secured in the barn. It took most of the afternoon and the combined efforts of Lee Vance and myself, as well as the farm boys Dick Freivogel, Mario Scala, George Bloomer Jr., Dick Scala, and another boy named Bill, whose last name escapes me. As might be expected, these young fellows exhibited much more enthusiasm as cowboys than they did as weed pullers in the cornfield.

When the cows were finally secured, we fed them before bringing them into the 20th century by introducing them to the milking machine. It would be some time before one could feel safe while applying the machine to one of these cows. Their ability to kick and the accuracy of their aim is second only that of the mule.

One of the cows caught Lee Vance on the forearm with a real smart kick one day. It did not break his arm but it was very painful. Lee said that he had no idea what he was getting involved in when he came to Waldee Farms. Poor Lee, for him the worst was yet to come.

The chicken population in the Chicago barn had now reached 4,000, and while they were still not half grown it was easy to see trouble ahead. Day by day you could see the available space in this barn diminishing rapidly. The barn was like a pail under a running faucet and it would soon be overflowing.

As the crowding began, the story becomes a sad one. Each morning I could see that Lee would carry out young chickens that had smothered during the night. It was not long before he was using a bushel basket for this purpose. Lee tried letting some of the chickens out during daylight hours to avoid the summer's heat, but to no avail. Soon there was more than one basket and Lee was a very sad man, though he did the very best he could.

By the time the chickens started to lay eggs, production was far less, as you can well imagine, than Walter's goal of 4,000 per day. Then one day an old friend, LeRoy Chapman, visited the farm. He was the director of the Fairfield County Farm Bureau.

Chappy was recognized as outstanding in his knowledge of farm life. It did not take him long to size up what was going on at Waldee.

In an aside to me, after looking at the chicken situation, he said, loud enough for all to hear, "You did have enough points, but you are losing them fast." The reason for overstocking was beginning to become clear.

Following Chappy's visit, Walter and I had a rather hurried conference. Since he was listed with the Farm Bureau as a farm worker, it was strongly suggested that he get himself a pair of rubber boots and show up early the next morning. He thought that I was kidding, but was assured that he was expected to perform his duties as a bona fide farm hand.

Walter did not like his new career but to his credit he was right on the job the next day with a brand new pair of knee-length Ball Band boots. It was a bit comical to see him perform the chores that are done with relative ease by those who are accustomed to farm work.

#107 A COOL-RUNNING FLINT AND A BOILING DURANT

One of the nice things about this business is that a lapse, or an omission on the part of the writer, will generally elicit a response from someone. We find this enjoyable since it indicates that the column is being read.

Last week we mentioned some of the boys who worked at Waldee Farms during the summer of 1943. One of the boys was listed as Bill, with no family name. It turns out that Bill's last name was Rogers.

Bill was a nephew of the late Mary Linda Bradley and a descendant of one of our most prestigious families. Miss Bradley, who lived in the family mansion on West Mountain, was very prominent in local affairs and during World War I became the first local chairman of the National League of Women's Service.

Mary Linda's father was the Honorable William Harrison Bradley, who held several posts at the U. S. Department of State. At one time he was our consul at Nice and then was consul general at Manchester, England, and at Montreal.

William Harrison Bradley was the son of Judge William Henry Bradley who served as clerk of the United States Circuit Court at Chicago for many years. William Henry was a grandson of the famous Colonel Philip Burr Bradley. The Colonel, as everyone knows, was one of Ridgefield's genuine Revolutionary war heroes.

Colonel Bradley's homesite is now our Ballard Park. He was the second postmaster of Ridgefield and served in that capacity from 1794 to 1801. His mother's maiden name was Esther Burr and she was an aunt of Aaron Burr, who served as vice-president of the United States during Thomas Jefferson's first term. This fact accounts for the Colonel's middle name.

We do not know where Bill Rogers is now, but remember him as a very handsome teenager. Like most youths, Bill was chock full of energy, but exhibited excellent decorum and we are sure he has been a credit to his famous ancestors.

A few weeks ago, in Dispatch 100, we told of how more than 50 years ago, a new car agency was being operated from the store that is now Brunetti's Market. It was from this store that George G. Scott Jr., sold several makes of autos including the Flint. Recently George's younger brother phoned to say that he enjoyed the article.

"Hi," as we always called him, and his wife Marion, now live in Florida and he keeps track of his home town through the pages of The Press. The Flint was a favorite car of his and he recalled how well constructed they were. We had noted in our column that the Flint was so well built that it did not wear out quickly and this fact helped to put them out of business.

Hi agreed with our observation and told of a Flint that was used in a demonstration on Main Street back in the mid 20's. Overheating has always been a problem with automobiles,

especially when left at idling speeds for any length of time. It was probably Hi's brother George that parked a Flint one afternoon on the sidewalk in front of the store. 5

The car was started at 6 o'clock in the evening and left with the motor running at idle. It ran all night and in the morning it was still running well. The amazing part of this is that it was not necessary to add any water to the radiator. Of course, gasoline was added more than once. The car was allowed to run until 6 o'clock in the evening and still no water was added. Hi wondered if any of our modern autos could endure such a test without boiling.

While the Flint was like a camel, not all of the cars sold at the store would run as cool. About the same time Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Haggert lived upstairs in Carrie McCann's house on Gilbert Street. Tom bought a new Durant touring car from the same store. He was a railroad man and knew my brother Charlie, also a railroad man, who lived in Pawling, N .Y.

The Haggerts' first trip would be to Pawling and they invited my mother and me to accompany them. The trip to Pawling was pleasant and rather uneventful. However, the trip home to Ridgefield was a different matter.

There was a hill on old Route 22 midway between Pawling and Brewster. It was called Jack Yale's hill, probably after a farmer in the area. When we were about half way up the hill, the radiator started to boil over and we had to back all the way down to a brook that crossed under the highway.

We had no pail with which to carry water for the radiator, but my mother had a felt hat which she donated for the purpose. It took several trips to the brook, but we finally satisfied the thirst of the little car. With the radiator full, we tried the hill again and reached the top before it started to boil again and we had to stop again at the very next brook for a refill.

When in Ridgefield, the Hiram Scotts lived on Casa-Torch Lane which we have previously described as a part of Walter Deiches experimental potato field. In so doing we told of how the word Casa-Torch was a contraction of the names of the developers, John Casavecchia and Gino Trocellini but failed to mention Donald Torcellini who was also a member of the team that created this fine little development.

Speaking of Walter's potato project reminds us that I must get on with the story about Waldee Farms. As far as the potatoes are concerned there is not much to tell. When it was time to harvest the potatoes, Walter hired Bill Patten with his tractor and plow. He must have had great expectations as he had four or five of the farm boys with bushel baskets to follow the plow and pick up the potatoes.

As previously noted, there had been little or no cultivation and the weeds ran rampant through the field. Picking up the potatoes must have been the easiest job the boys had while at the farm and they thoroughly enjoyed it.

On my way to lunch I drove down Branchville Road to see how the harvest was progressing. It was quite a sight. Normally you would plow just the row in which the potatoes were planted in order to expose the crop. However, the weeds had overgrown the potato vines to such an extent that it was just impossible to see where the rows should have been. Therefore it was necessary to plow the whole five acre field.

With the field almost half plowed they still had not filled one basket. It was most discouraging to see this operation and the potatoes that they did find were no bigger than marbles.

Walter sure was learning about farming the hard way. I often thought that it might have been easier to transport the hogs from the farm and turn them loose in the field where they could rout out the potatoes with their strong snouts.

#108: BRINGING IN THE MILK — AND HAY

At long last, Waldee Farms had its first product to put on the market.

To be sure, milk production was not great to start with, but as the Canadian cows became accustomed to their new surroundings, and the milking machines, they began to respond and the flow of milk increased. They even seemed to get used to those who worked around them, and as they are naturally a docile animal, they soon became contented.

As the number of cans of milk picked up each day by the Round Hill Farms truck reached the level that Walter Deiches had agreed to furnish, he became a happy man.

A farm in New Fairfield advertised a bull for sale in one of the area newspapers. The price must have been right and Walter bought the bull without ever going to see him. A couple of weeks elapsed before the bull was delivered and by that time Walter apparently forgot the deal he had made by telephone.

There was a fine bull pen in back of the cow barn near the wooded area that had been constructed when Reggie Lewis owned the farm. However, the bull looked as though he needed a square meal so I tied him out where the grass was plentiful.

The bull was a rather nondescript character and it was obvious that he was of questionable ancestry. My disappointment in this animal was not so great as it was becoming increasingly apparent that this whole operation was not being geared for a long haul.

The first time Walter saw the bull tied out by the barn, he asked if I had bought a new cow. The difference in gender was explained to him and he then wanted to know the bull's name. We told him that we thought "Hornet" would be suitable. Walter thought it was an odd name, but we thought it fitting as he sure got stung when he bought him.

Walter had read someplace that contented cows give more milk and that music was one way of keeping them contented. We were not surprised when a few days later he showed up with a nice radio for the cow barn. Like some of the young people today, he thought louder was better. We had to convince him that he was scaring the cows rather than soothing them. It was also pointed out to him that the cows adjusted easier to the rhythms of Wayne King, the "Waltz King," than to the vibrant syncopation of Spike Jones and his "City Slickers."

Most of the cows were bred before they arrived at Waldee and a few were ready to calve. The first calf to arrive caused a mild sensation and Walter was happy with the additional point it provided to the farm. There would be a lot more points, and the sows would do their part in boosting the total.

All of the cows were not cluckers and some were even better than average. One in particular seemed to have the makings of a big producer. She was a very large holstein and was obviously well bred. Because of her size we named her "Bertha," after the huge World War I canon of that name.

Bertha was dry when she came to the farm and was about a month from calving. When her day arrived we found that there was ample reason for her size as she delivered twin calves.

They were a pretty pair of heifers, almost identical, and caused considerable excitement around the farm. Walter was inclined to send a birth notice to Ripley, for his Believe It Or Not cartoon, until it was explained to him that while twin calves were very unusual, we had seen others.

This great cow must have known that she would have two mouths to feed and prepared herself accordingly. For several months after the arrival of the twins, Bertha averaged 40 quarts of milk each day and certainly did her part towards the milk quota. As a matter of fact, if nine of the other cows produced as she did, we could do without the other 30.

Soon it was haying time and Bill Patten was kept busy with his tractor, mowing fields, where they could be found. The fields on the Shelton estate on West Lane were harvested as well as those in the Mill River area, the Rainsford estate (now Le Chateau) and the old Kraft estate, owned at this time by Mr. Kaplan.

Kaplan's estate was directly across South Salem Road from Le Chateau and was one of the largest estates in Westchester County. The mansion on this place burned to the ground just a few years ago, in a spectacular fire that was visible in most areas of Ridgefield. Actually the mansion had been vacant for years and had had numerous fires. The last one did a complete job.

I do not believe that the Kaplan family ever lived in the mansion. There were several houses on the estate and they chose to live in a cottage, on the corner of the road that leads to Pound Ridge.

Mr. Kaplan was president and owner of the North American Molasses Company. It must have been a very large operation and it was rumored that during World War II, the government had commandeered 50 railroad cars from the firm to assist with the war effort.

Mr. Kaplan was a rather rugged, gray-haired, little individual and Walter, after talking to him briefly about cutting his hay fields, decided to withdraw and let me do the negotiating.

He was a very interesting man and had some rather unusual habits. Although he was well along in years, he insisted on walking from his home all the way to Katonah to get the train for New York. While walking, he carried his head to one side, as if to act as a ballast against the large, ever-present briefcase that always swung from the opposite side. On several occasions we offered him a ride, but he always declined.

There was a good-sized porch on the cottage and Mr. Kaplan always slept there, winter and summer. It was said that on many winter mornings, Mrs. Kaplan had to sweep the snow off of him as she awakened him.

He had another little peculiarity. He did not believe in having his shirt laundered; he just wore them the limit, threw them away, and bought another.

Much of the haying for Waldee Farms was done by hand, in the old-fashioned way. There was no side-delivery rake or hay baler. We did locate an old Yankee dump rake. Once in a while, you will see one of these rakes today, used as an ornament on the lawn of an old farmhouse. It has wooden shafts that go on either side of the horse and the rest is completely made of metal. The iron wheels stand about five feet tall and between them there are 50 large tines that drag the hay along until it is dumped into windrows.

After Bill Patten cut the hay, the gray horse was hitched to the rake and after the windrows were made, the boys came along and rolled them into haycocks. Then each haycock was pitched by fork onto the hay truck.

There was an old Dodge truck that had been left behind by the Scripps family and we made a hay rigging for it that worked quite well.

Incidentally we named the horse "Traveler" as he had a marked resemblance to General Robert E. Lee's famous steed. As we will see, this little horse will show us that he also had plenty of speed.

#109: LOTS OF PIGS AND A RUNAWAY HORSE

At Waldee Farms we were like Smith Barney: We did things the old-fashioned way.

This was especially true when it came to making hay and it was no easy task. The cocks of hay had to be pitched by hand onto the hay truck and they were large enough to tax the

strength of a man. They soon diminished in size as the boys who made them found that they also had to pitch them up to me. Walter Deiches was pressed into service as the truck driver.

The very first day while getting the hay at the Kaplan place, the boys got a considerable distance ahead as the truck failed to keep up with them. We rapped on the cab of the truck with our fork as a signal to Walter to move the truck ahead. When the truck still did not move, we climbed down from the load to find out what the problem was.

There was Walter, oblivious to what was going on around him, studying the financial section of the New York Herald Tribune. An immediate summit meeting was held with the result that all newspapers were banned from the truck for the duration of the haying season.

The boys also learned a lesson that day at Kaplan's. They had been told and shown the proper way of harnessing the horse. It was impressed on them that in hitching the horse to the wagon, the hold-back straps must be quickly snapped into place as the traces were attached. They were likened to the brakes on a motor vehicle and without them the wagon could not be stopped.

On this occasion, we were finished loading the truck and ready to return to the farm. The boys hitched the horse to the wagon but failed to fasten the hold-backs. The horse took a few steps with George in the wagon and as they were headed down hill, the wagon rolled into Traveler's rear. The horse started into a trot down the hill and as he reached the highway, the wagon hit him a good crack. The trot quickly became a gallop and it was most fortunate that there was no other traffic as the horse and wagon, with a very frightened boy at the helm, streaked across South Salem Road and into Old South Salem Road.

There are not many things that are more exciting than a horse in full flight and this had now become a full-fledged runaway, as Traveler raced for the barn under a full head of steam. As he sped past Pinchbeck's greenhouse, the traces became unhooked, freeing the horse, and the wagon with George still aboard finally rolled to a stop.

Traveler, without the cursed wagon to impede his progress, continued his flight but had the good sense to turn into the long driveway leading to the barn. As described earlier, the barn had an extension on either side that made it into the shape of a giant horseshoe. Between these wings and in the center of the barnyard, stood an apple tree.

As the horse flew by the tree, one of the traces caught in a lower limb and Traveler was thrown to the ground and that is where I found him a few minutes later. The poor horse was terribly frightened and covered with lather. It was some time before we could quiet him and then he promised not to run away again. The boys also promised not to forget the hold-back straps again.

We harvested an awful lot of hay that summer as there were a number of mouths to feed. It was one of the few projects that turned out right and we had enough to carry us through the winter.

Grain, however, was another matter. It took only a few bags of grain each week when the chicks were small, but as they grew and with the addition of the cows and then the little pigs, the feed order was multiplied many times over.

They used to say that pigs were either mud or gold and in 1943 they were gold. In fact while they usually sold for \$5 a pair, when seven or eight weeks of age, this year they were bringing \$25 apiece. As word got around that we had a lot of little pigs, people came to buy them.

We thought Walter would be happy at the prospect of turning a neat profit. However, he refused to sell them. He operated on the theory that if they were worth that much to others, they

must be worth that much to him. We tried to explain to him that the price was very unusual and it was a great chance to cash in, but he said that he wanted to keep them all. We pointed out that it was going to take an awful lot of feed to keep all those pigs till maturity. Walter was steadfast in his refusal to sell and at one time we had 157 pigs on that farm.

On the northern side of the barn, there was a wooded area and beyond that a large swamp that extended all the way to Peaceable Street and encircled what is now Mead Ridge to South Salem Road. Lee Vance used to let the pigs roam through the several acres that made up their playground.

Except for their unmistakable squeals, one would have thought that a herd of elephants was loose in the swamp as the pigs went crashing through the brush and fallen trees.

No other domestic animals grow as rapidly as pigs — providing they get enough to eat and Lee made sure that they had plenty of grain. The small loads of feed increased to large truckloads and then rapidly swelled to railroad carloads. A carload of grain cost \$2,500 at the time and amounted to 40 tons. The pigs went through their share as if there was no tomorrow.

They were the happiest little porkers that I ever saw. I'll say one thing for Walter: He never complained about the enormous cost of feeding all those animals.

There was something about life on the farm that fascinated Walter and he seemed to have a genuine interest in learning as much as possible about it. He once asked me to show him how the various farm products were processed for use by those who actually lived off their farms.

There was a time when we had some surplus milk so I took Walter over to the little dairy that was attached to the farmhouses. There was a cream separator that had been left behind by the Scripps family and we showed him how cream is separated from the milk by centrifugal force. He was surprised to learn that it took ten quarts of milk to make a quart of cream.

The dairy also had a butter churn and he wanted to see how it worked, and even turned it himself. It took a lot of turning and considerable patience but the cream finally turned to butter. He was again surprised to learn that it took a quart of cream to make a pound of butter.

Walter quickly figured that making butter was a losing proposition, but after a glass of that fresh buttermilk and a taste of that fine fresh butter, he agreed that it might be worthwhile after all.

We showed him how to make cottage cheese out of the skim milk and he was delighted with his brief excursion into the mysteries of dairy farming.

#110: THE VERY FINEST ICE CREAM EVER

If Walter Deiches needed anything to sell him on the advantages of home-grown farm products, it was a batch of homemade ice cream. We used an excellent recipe that Mrs. Irving Conklin had used with great success on so many occasions.

Mrs. Conklin would carefully mix the numerous ingredients and pour them into the freezer can and then allow me to turn the crank until the can would turn no more. This carried with it the privilege of licking the dasher as well as a nice dish of ice cream that this fine lady always made sure to provide.

For some reason, the ice cream left on the dasher always seemed to taste a little better than what came later in the dish. Could be that the first taste is always the best. One thing was for sure and that was that this was the very finest ice cream ever made since Dolly Madison surprised her White House guests with this famous delicacy.

There can be no other delightful repast that conveys such a pleasant taste, along with the urge for a second helping. A host will really enjoy the plaudits of the guests when serving ice cream made with Mrs. Conklin's renowned recipe. It is a sure way to put everyone in a good mood.

I guess that with the price of the ingredients on today's market, this ice cream could cost about \$10 a gallon. The cost with the accompanying calories would be enough to put it off limits to today's weight-conscious public.

Why is it that so many things that we so thoroughly enjoy have to be listed as taboo. As I write this I am actually convincing myself that I must make some more of that heavenly ice cream.

To start with a quart of heavy cream would be needed; most of the other ingredients would be right in the refrigerator. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, quite like it.

Perhaps we do not work hard enough to burn up the calories found in the foods that were consumed as a regular part of the diet years ago.

We felt bad when doctors started recommending skim milk rather than whole milk. Remember that beautiful bottle of milk topped with that golden cream? We have always contended that the butter fat in milk burned up much more rapidly than the fats found in meats. We know of several people who survived well into their nineties on nothing more than bread and whole milk. We knew others who actually drank heavy cream and never gained a pound.

One young fellow in particular worked at Conklin's Dairy back in the 30's and consumed at least two half-pints of heavy cream every day. Of course Donald worked very hard, as we all did, but all that cream had no visible effect on him and he remained quite slender.

We were just going through the Williams-Sonoma catalog for cooks and noticed a Minigel ice cream machine that would yield a quart of ice cream in just 15 to 20 minutes. It had been reduced in price from \$750 to \$595 and that alone would be enough to discourage any aspiring ice cream maker.

This infernal machine posed double jeopardy in that the price is out of reach of most households and if a family could afford it they would miss all the exercise from turning the handle in the old-fashioned method.

With this modern method, you just throw the mix into the machine and presto, the ice cream is produced for you. Sometimes good things do not come that easy.

Walter looked around for some other produce from the farm to sample. A bull calf was being fattened up for sale to a butcher and Walter suddenly developed a penchant for veal. The order was given that the calf must not be sold but rather it would be butchered for consumption on the farm.

We made sure that Walter was on hand to witness the butchering. It had the effect of changing somewhat his expressed desire for veal. Finally he decided to settle for the wiener schnitzel and the rest was divided among those on the farm who had a taste for veal.

Now it was time to harvest the corn and fill the silo with fodder for the cows during the cold winter months. This was always an enjoyable project despite the hard work that it entailed. There was always something fresh and wholesome about the newly cut corn and there was an air of excitement from the noise of the ensilage blower and the increased activity around the farm.

Ten acres of corn were ready to be cut on the former Shelton estate owned at the time by Konrad Bercovici. We had measured the capacity of the silo and knew that five acres of good corn would fill it. Walter always thought big and this time it was well that he did as he had Bill

Patten plant twice the needed acreage. The corn had fought a valiant battle with the weeds and as a result it was somewhat retarded. In fact it took the entire crop from the 10 acres to fill the silo.

The corn was all cut by hand with the curved corn knives that were shaped like a hook. The stalks were laid in piles and then loaded by hand onto the truck to be carried back to the farm.

The ensilage blower had been set up with its long pipe extended to the top of the 32-foot silo. The corn stalks were placed on a chute that had a conveyor that carried them into the mouth of the blower where whirling knives cut them into one-inch pieces. Along with the knives there were huge fan blades that turned at terrific speed as they blew little pieces of corn up through the pipe and into the silo.

All of this was powered by an ancient Fordson tractor with a belt that extended from its pulley to a pulley on the blower. The tractor was made entirely of iron and steel, even the wheels with their large metal cleats. It was really not adapted for farm work and was a far cry from the sleek, rubber-tired machines of today. Aside from using it to power the ensilage blower, the old tractor got very little use. We did use it to dig out a watering place for the cows with a rolling scoop that we borrowed from John Morganti. It got the job done but not nearly as well as the bulldozers of today would do it.

Just about every farm had a silo, especially if it had a dozen or more head of cattle. Ensilage made great food for the cattle and in some instances served a second purpose. Around the base of many silos one could see where small holes had been bored. The holes were kept plugged until the corn had fermented and the juice had settled to the bottom of the silo. A spigot then replaced the plug and the juice was drawn off and distilled into the very potent corn liquor.

Walter thought this was a very nifty idea but after a taste of "Brown's Mule" and experiencing its devastating effect, decided he would stick with scotch.

#111: ONE OF THE WILDEST DAYS AT WALDEE

[Warning: Persons who are sensitive to the treatment of animals will probably find parts of this column troubling.]

On Sunday afternoon, Jan. 8, 1944, Lee Vance had some visitors at Waldee Farm. Each year at about this time, several couples from the Bronx made an excursion into the hinterlands in search of hogs. They would go from town to town inquiring as they went along of anyone who had hogs for sale.

In this instance, their timing was perfect as only a few days before their visit to Ridgefield, Walter Deiches had agreed to sell a few of the large sows. He still insisted on keeping the younger pigs.

The Bronxites and Lee did some negotiating with the result that they purchased three of the sows. One of the conditions of the sale was that the hogs be butchered at the farm and Lee hired the late Joe Young to do the job. Joe had real good equipment and did a lot of butchering of both hogs and cattle.

It was the middle of January when the date set for the butchering arrived and the thermometer was stuck right on zero. To make matters worse, a stiff wind was blowing. Today they would probably say there was a chill factor of 20 below.

At any rate, Joe decided that this was no day for him to be butchering. As Lee did not have the phone number of his customers, there was no way he could inform them of the change in plans.

It was noon and I was home having my lunch when Lee called to say that the people were at the farm to get their hogs and would I please do the butchering? This was something I had not bargained for and I refused to do the job. When I got back to the farm, there were no less than 10 people from the Bronx. They had come in two cars and an old R.H. Macy truck, an old high-wheeler.

There were many unusual days at Waldee and this would be one of the wildest. These people had built a fire in the field on the west side of the barn and had a large kettle over it in which the water was boiling. We soon learned that the boiling water was for the purpose of cooking several pounds of spaghetti which they had thoughtfully brought along.

They also brought four gallons of wine and it looked as if they were prepared for a real party. This was an annual ritual that they went through and the wind and frigid weather did not bother them in the least.

When Lee informed them that the butchering had been postponed, there was almost a riot. These people were devastated as the men had taken the day off for their annual party and soon were asking for their money back.

Lee pleaded with me to do the butchering and when the pork people heard this, they surrounded me and it began to look as though I would be pressed into service, like it or not. They all promised to help and I soon regretted their kind offer.

Then started one of the wildest scenes I have ever witnessed.

Three of the largest sows were selected and their average weight must have been close to 500 pounds. What we were unprepared for was the insistence of these people on having the hogs turned loose in the field so they could run them down. It was similar to the practice of turning the bulls loose in the streets of Spain and it could have been just as dangerous. These sows were not the least good-natured and as they raced over the frozen turf, they must have figured that this was their last chance to run.

The biggest of the sows was cornered and with her large powerful jaws open wide, she rushed at her pursuers and they scattered like tenpins. Both men and women joined in the chase. Finally, two of the men were successful in grabbing the hind legs of the hog and the strong animal dragged them in a mad dash for freedom. The hog did not just scream, she roared, as she seemed to know that her day had come.

The men wore the knees from their pants and the elbows from their jackets as the others followed along shouting encouragement. Finally two other men grasped the hog's front legs and she landed with a thud on the hard ground. The noise from that hog could have been heard a mile away.

The exhausted animal was thrown on her back with four of the men each holding a leg. The fifth man held the hog's snout, and one of the women, caught up in the excitement, sat astride the hog's belly.

With all these people just about covering their quarry, my job was going to be difficult. After some careful searching through this mass of humanity and with the aid of a large, double-edged sticking knife, I was finally able to apply the coup de grace. It was done as quickly and as painlessly as possible.

The Bronxites wanted to complete the dressing of the first hog before starting on another, but as the afternoon was rapidly wearing on, I insisted on completing the butchering before the dressing started and then all could be done together. After a few glasses of wine, the second hog chase became a duplicate of the first, except that fortified by the wine, the pursuers exhibited a lot more courage. The animal was quickly subdued and dispatched with alacrity.

The last hog was the smallest of the three and had considerably more speed. The wine seemed to have slowed down the runners and it took a little longer to throw the hog. One of the men stepped forward and announced that he would do the sticking. He was the one who had the barber shop and after watching me do the first two felt confident that he could do the job.

The barber approached his victim, double-edged knife at the ready, as if he were about to give a shave. His incision was several times larger than necessary yet he still missed the jugular vein by a good two inches. His helpers released the hog with blood streaming from her wound and she roared to her feet, very much alive. She was recaptured but by now the Bronxites were a very bedraggled group.

Now the woman, who had sat on the hog, grabbed the knife from the barber and announced that she would finish the job. The fact that she wore a camel hair coat did not seem to faze her. Unfortunately, she entered at the same spot and though her arm disappeared almost to the elbow, she also missed the vein and it was necessary to take the knife away and mercifully finish the job.

Now it was time to dress the hogs and here the others could be of some help. We had enough “candlesticks” for everyone to use and I put them right to work. To those unfamiliar with this, they are tools used to remove the hair or bristles from the hogs. They have a round metal base and a straight wooden handle and do resemble a candlestick in appearance.

After scalding water is poured over the dead hog, the candlesticks are used, generally in a circular motion, to clear the skin of the unwanted bristles.

Around these parts there is a saying that “they use everything but the squeal.” These people were fortunately interested in only the popular cuts of pork. We were grateful as it was now quite dark and the cows still had to be milked. After hoisting each carcass with a block and tackle from the yardarm that extended from the top of the barn, they were cleaned and ready to split.

We had one more incident during the splitting, which could have been serious for me but I was lucky. The proper way to split a hog that is hanging is to do it from the inside where the entire spinal column is in full view. In this way an exact split can be made.

We were working now in semi-darkness as the auxiliary lighting was not very effective. I was about half way down through one carcass when from the other side of the hog came the long blade of a very large butcher knife. It went right by my right eye and actually grazed my cheek.

Someone had decided to help by cutting through from the outside. All activity ceased until it was thoroughly understood that only one could do the splitting.

Lee Vance and I both heaved a sigh of relief as the truck, loaded with the six halves of hogs, disappeared down the long driveway and headed for the Bronx.

#112: PAINTING A PIG'S RUMP AND THE BIDDING FOR #13

[Some parts of this column, though not as graphic as #111, may be troubling to those sensitive to the treatment of animals.]

You may be tired of reading about Waldee Farms, so I will promise that this one will wind it up. There was one more incident concerning the hogs that shows yet another method of preparing them for table use. It was not as gory as the one involving the five couples from The Bronx [Dispatch #111] but almost as brutal.

On this occasion, two very rough-looking men appeared one day, just a week following the first butchering episode. Lee Vance sold them two of the remaining large hogs.

These men were also from somewhere in New York. They made arrangements to return the following week to pick up their hogs. They did not request that they be butchered at the farm, so Lee supposed that they would just crate the hogs and haul them away. This was not the case, but it was comforting for me to know that my services were not required in this transaction.

On the appointed day, the men returned with a station wagon and no crates so it was apparent that the hogs would not be alive when they left Waldee Farms.

It was a terribly cold winter day and the wind blew right from the North Pole. I watched the proceedings from the shelter and comfort of the cow barn, as Lee led the men to the pig house. They carried a heavy rope and when a few minutes later, a large hog burst through the door of the pig house, the rope was secured to one of its hind legs. The man was big and strong but he had an awful time holding the lunging hog.

The other man reached into the station wagon and produced a rifle that appeared to be a 22 calibre. Because of the bobbing and weaving of the hog's head, the man had to change his aim several times, being careful not to get his partner in the line of fire. Eventually he was successful in planting a bullet between the eyes of his victim. The hog dropped and the man shot twice more to be sure. The same procedure was used to dispose of the other hog.

Now came a complete departure from anything I have ever witnessed.

There was no attempt to bleed the hog or dress it. The men asked Lee for some hay and he went to the barn to get it. Then before my unbelieving eyes, they piled the hay around the dead hogs and you just knew that when they lit the hay, it was not for the purpose of keeping the carcasses warm. Yes, it was just a vain effort to burn the bristle from the skin of the hogs.

There seemed no end to their innovations and when this plan fizzled, one of the men bought a blow torch from the station wagon, in yet another approach to ridding the hogs of their bristles.

I'm not sure how well the bristles burned, but the pork must have been half cooked by the time the charred remains were loaded in the station wagon. We came to the conclusion that during those war years, there must have been a lot of weird people roaming the highways in search of pork.

There are several ways of sticking a hog and none of them are pleasant. The best job was done by a Frenchman, who lived in Katonah back in the 20's. His name was Jacques, but everyone called him "Frenchy," and he traveled from farm to farm at butchering time.

He was a marvel with the knife and limited his activities to just sticking the hog. The rest of the work was done by others. With the hog flat on its back, he would sit on his belly and with unerring aim, dispatch the animal with one thrust of the blade.

Nothing unusual about that except that Frenchy always wore a top hat and full dress suit and never got spattered. He was as neat at the end of the day as when he started.

Many of the people in Ridgefield back in the butchering days used to stick the hog in a pan and they would then make blood pudding from it.

Meanwhile, Walter Deiches had a birthday and shortly thereafter he began to receive job offers. One call was received on the dairy phone one afternoon from one of New York's largest stores. The figure I heard was \$40,000 and Walter turned it down, calling it peanuts. This was 1944 and you better believe that kind of money was not considered peanuts at that time.

At any rate, it became clear that Walter was making ready to reenter the business world and the days of Waldee Farms were numbered. Early in April we were informed that he had engaged the finest auctioneer in these parts to conduct the sale of livestock.

The choice of Mr. Granger was a wise one as he had a big following and it assured a good attendance from all over the area.

The sale was held on April 29 and it came just one year after the birth of Waldee Farms. We were surprised that it had lasted a year, it had really cost a lot.

Granger came to the farm on the day prior to the sale and made sure everything was in order. For a man of his stature, this would not be considered a large auction. His plan would be to sell the chickens first and try to sell them all to one buyer. If this was not successful he would offer them in lots of 100 and then in lots of 50.

The pigs would be sold next and then the cows. For purposes of identification, numbers were assigned to each cow and pig. The numbers were painted on the side of each pig and on the rump of each cow.

This was easy to do on the cows but the pigs were another matter. They took a lot more time and a great deal of paint, but the boys enjoyed the exercise and the excitement.

Walter wanted a large number one, painted on the bull's rump and also requested that I select one cow for him to keep at his Branchville Road residence.

There was one little Jersey that produced very rich milk, though not a great deal and seemed like an ideal family cow. Her name was Friday, and Walter immediately asked that I bid her in for him, in the event that he was not there when she entered the sales ring. We took one look at the number, 13, that Mr. Granger has assigned her and flatly refused, telling Walter he better be there.

The weather was fine and there was a good crowd at the auction. The chickens were quickly sold, as out of the original 4,000, there were now only 800. What a loss!

The pigs were next and the boys had great fun singling them out, by number, for the bidders. It is interesting to note that pork, which had been gold the previous fall, was now mud. Pigs that could have been sold as babies for \$25 each, were now bringing the same price, after consuming several thousand dollars worth of grain. Another big loss.

Walter was not present when the auction started and several cows had been sold before we noted his Ford station wagon turning from Old South Salem Road into the long driveway that led to the barn.

He had timed it well as number 13 would soon be coming up. When she entered the ring, we were surprised at the spirited bidding. We felt that she would bring \$200 tops.

The bidding started at \$100 and went quickly to 300. 400, and finally 500 as two bidders at opposite ends of the crowded barn yard competed for the little brown cow.

It was the highest price, and Walter — and his wife Nancy — were bidding against each other.

#113: A HISTORIC HOUSE AND APPLE

In the past 276 years, Ridgefield has developed an admirable history. Much of the history concerns the many fine people who were a part of it and much of it is retained in the grand old homes that still line some of the older streets.

One such structure is now the home of the William H. Casey family at 536 Main Street. A great part of the history of this elegant example of early architecture revolved around the Gilbert family. Members of this fine old Ridgefield family had lived in what we have always called "The Gilbert House" for almost a century and a half.

Bill and Valerie Casey have done considerable research on this grand old home and the families that have lived in it. They have a document from Mrs. Harriet Walker of Simcoe,

Ontario, Canada. Mrs. Walker is a direct descendant of the original Gilberts who came to Ridgefield in the early 1700's. Mrs. Walker, who fittingly lives on Gilbert Road in Simcoe, furnished some valuable information on the Gilbert family.

We are also greatly indebted to Walter Boyce for information about the Gilbert family and the Gilbert House. Walter's interest stems from the fact that he is also a direct descendent of the Gilbert family. His grandmother, Emily Davis, and her sister, Jennie Gilbert, were the last of the venerable Gilbert family to occupy the house. He recalls many of the happy hours he spent with the lovely old ladies when his parents were away,

The actual year that the house was built may be questionable, as well as the original appearance, for some additions were put on the house and some remodeling was done through the years.

It seems fairly well established that it was built by Benjamin Stehbins, who lived where Casagmo is now, right after the close of the Revolutionary War. The house has a simple Federal form that was modernized many years ago with the Greek Revival style and has been recognized by the Connecticut Historical Society as an architecturally significant home and so documented in the archives of the State of Connecticut.

Benjamin Stebbins had a daughter, Sarah, and she married Dr. Amos Baker, who was a surgeon's mate in Colonel Philip Burr Bradley's Regiment in the war. Doctor Baker and Sarah lived in the Gilbert House following the war and the property passed from the Stebbins family to the Bakers.

As everyone knows, Dr. Amos Baker was an authentic hero of the Revolution and was one of the local men who participated in the Battle of Ridgefield. This famous battle can be successfully argued as being the one actual land battle fought in the state during the entire war.

There were other doctors in Ridgefield before Dr. Baker, but there seems little doubt that he was the very first surgeon. He was known as a very religious man and used pew No. 19 in the early Congregational Church. The church was located near the spot now occupied by the War Memorial, at the junction of Main Street and Branchville Road. The church was set in the middle of Main Street and the road ran on either side.

Later on, the Doctor was active in the establishment of the Methodist Church in Ridgefield. In fact, some of the early organizational meetings were held in the kitchen of what is now the Casey home. The church became the third Methodist Church to form in all of the New England states.

There was an old grist mill at Mamasco in Scotland District where local families took their grain to be milled into flour. On one occasion when Dr. Baker waited for his flour, he noticed a nearby apple tree that was loaded with very attractive fruit. He sampled one of the bright red apples and was agreeably surprised to find that it tasted every bit as good as it looked.

Dr. Baker remembered that tree and returned early the following spring and cut several scions from the tree. He had several apple trees on his Main Street property that ran all the way back to Grove Street and he proceeded to graft them with the scions from his favorite tree.

The grafts were successful and the all-purpose Baker apple was born. The Baker apple was destined to become popular all over the country. It was good to eat just as it came from the tree, or as a baked apple, or in a pie, or as applesauce and it also made excellent cider.

Years ago people used to buy their apples by name as they had varied uses. Each variety of apple had its own particular purpose and they were different both in appearance and in taste. The red and the yellow delicious and the McIntosh are probably the most popular today, as applesauce and apple pies are more often bought in the grocery store than baked in a housewife's

kitchen. We had ten acres of apple trees at Hillscroft Farm on St. John's Road and as well as the three varieties mentioned above, we had the old fashioned sheepnose, greenings, northern spy, Wolf's River, Baldwin, Cortland, Baker, fall pippin, and russet.

Greenings were the favorite pie apple and a combination of the fall pippin and russet made the best cider. The sheepnose resembled the red delicious in shape and in color, but there the similarity ended. I would be surprised if there are any sheepnose trees left in Ridgefield. They were very dry and rather tasteless, but there were those who liked them above all others.

At any rate Amos and Sarah Baker had a daughter, Laura, and she married Abner Gilbert Jr., about 1805. Abner built what is probably best known as the Pierrepont house, across the street from Casagmo, about 1812. The Bakers left their home to Abner and Laura and since both houses then belonged to the Gilberts. The Pierrepont house was called the Gilbert Homestead and the Casey home was known as the Gilbert House.

Abner had a brother-in-law, Richard Randall, with whom he ran a store on the east side of Main Street, just south of the Pierrepont House, under the firm name Richard Randall Company.

It should be noted that Abner was a very enterprising man and took a very active part in town affairs. He was selected as a delegate to the Constitutional convention of 1818.

Abner and Laura Gilbert had a son they named Abner and they left him the Gilbert House. When the younger Abner married Frances Lewis, they went to live in the Gilbert House.

When they passed on they left the Gilbert House to their children, William A. and Lizzie.

In 1893, William bought out his sister's share and became the sole owner of the Gilbert House. William was very prominent in Republican politics but never held an elected office.

(Continued Next Week)

#114: FROM TEA TO TOURISTS: LIFE AT GILBERT HOUSE

It was William A. Gilbert (1853-1921) who thoughtfully preserved the documents that contained information about Ridgefield's part in the War of 1812. Our town's participation in the Revolution was recorded in much better fashion than activities during the second war with England.

William, who was born in the Gilbert House on [538] Main Street, saved records that reveal that Ridgefield had its own Peace Party, which actively opposed participation in the War of 1812. Interest in this conflict mounted to a point where a celebration, or rally, was planned in 1813. The organizational meeting was at the Amos Smith Tavern, located where the Ridgefield Library now stands.

Sunday, July 4, 1813, was selected as the day for the demonstration. Members of the Peace Party refused to attend, using as their excuse that the day was inappropriate, and asked that the affair be held on Monday, the 5th. However, their members were few, and apparently ineffective, for the committee voted to proceed without them.

There was a military demonstration and Abner Gilbert read the Declaration of Independence and William Hawley read Washington's Farewell Address. James Perry read the Toasts of the Day, but unfortunately they were not included with the material that William Gilbert saved. They certainly would have made interesting reading today.

William was a scholarly person and after attending Ridgefield's public schools, continued his studies at the High Ridge Institute for Boys. This school was conducted by

William O. Seymour in his home, the Peter Parley house, now the residence of the Preston Bassetts.

William Gilbert became one of Ridgefield's leading horticulturists. After his schooling was completed, William was a clerk in the store of Seymour and Barhite. He was a smart young man and saved enough money so that in 1896 he was able to become a partner with Richard W. Osborn in the lumber business. The business would be the forerunner of our present Ridgefield Supply Company.

William's wedding to Jennie Pehrson was not of the May-December variety. Perhaps it was more like a November-December romance since William was 66 and Jennie was certainly not a school girl when the knot was tied on Jan. 26, 1919 [Editor's note: She was 48]. Neither Jennie nor he had ever been married before.

Unfortunately the marriage was of short duration as William was to pass on less than three years later. Following his death, Jennie and her widowed sister, Emily Davis, joined forces and turned the Gilbert House into the very charming Colonial Tea House.

Colonel Louis D. Conley was in the process of organizing the great Outpost Nurseries in the 20's and it was to be the town's largest commercial operation up to that time. This enterprise was to cause the need for lodging space for some of the personnel connected with it. The two little old ladies, with a sharp eye for business, changed the sign in front of the Gilbert House from the Colonial Tea House to The Colonial Tourists.

Walter Boyce remembers many of the boarders that patronized Colonial Tourists and wrote to some of them to secure some of their remembrances of the old house. There were some whose stay at Colonial Tourists was for only a short period of time, but Joseph M. "Woody" Woodcock, Charlotte Sandman, Jerry Rathjen and Bob Mitchell had rooms there for several years and were considered members of the family.

Charlotte was executive secretary at Outpost Nursery and the other three were salesmen at the nursery.

There was an old upright piano in the main hall that no doubt had been used by Emily's daughter, Lottie Davis, who was to become Mrs. Willis Boyce and mother of Walter. Like her husband, Lottie was an excellent musician and specialized in piano, which she taught to many young Ridgefielders, including Jim Bacchiochi.

Charlotte Sandman was also a fine pianist and provided great entertainment for the people at Colonial Tourists with selections of the day such as The Old Spinning Wheel, Easter Parade and Wagon Wheels. There were also the evenings when they enjoyed sing-alongs with Charlotte at the keyboard. These festive occasions were interrupted during the muggy summer months when dampness caused by the many large trees that surrounded the house would get into the piano keys, causing them to stick.

Others who stayed at Colonial Tourists from time to time were George Tuoti, Bob Buhl, Bob Templeton, Phil Piser, Steve Zvoncovic, and a lady known only as Miss Chestnut. She must have been some kind of character, as Walter remembers she came from some western ranch and always wore leather pants and boots and a large cowboy hat.

When the Ridgefield Playhouse opened some 45 years ago, where the Village Bank is now, Steve Zvoncovic was the first projector operator. Bob Templeton came from Oregon and was noted as a teller of tall tales. George Tuoti was an Outpost salesman and when the nursery closed down, George started his own nursery business. Mrs. Tuoti still lives in Ridgefield. Phil Piser came from Massachusetts to help clear the town of the debris left by the great hurricane of

1938. Phil looked at the town and liked what he saw, including May Moore, whom he married and they are now good neighbors of mine.

There is a feeling that Harvey Tanton stayed for a brief time at Colonial Tourists. If so, then the old house spawned two of our first selectmen as both he and Woody were not only salesmen for Outpost but also served in our town's top office.

All of these nice people must have been intrigued with their friendly hostesses. Both Jennie and Emily were great soap opera fans. Of course the soap operas at the time came through the speaker of a radio rather than from the picture tube of a TV. One thing was for sure, while there was much frivolity at Colonial Tourists, it was necessary to remain completely silent as the two ladies inched forward in their chairs, hands cupped to their ears, to catch every thrilling word from such favorites as Our Gal Sunday, Portia Faces Life, The Guiding Light, Just Plain Bill, or Ma Perkins.

These programs were of only 15-minute duration, most of which was taken up by commercials that kept Jennie and Emily fidgeting for the resumption of the romantic stories. This form of entertainment would be considered very quaint today, especially when compared with the hard rock music that blares forth from portable and auto.

#115: COUNTING CARS, PLAYING PINOCHLE, & FIREWATER FOR FIRE CHIEF

We have been writing about the various ways in which the people at Colonial Tourists were able to entertain themselves. There was the piano and the little Atwater Kent radio.

Walter Boyce remembers that, as a little boy, he sat on the front porch with his grandmother Emily Davis and counted cars. Walter would count the cars going north on Main Street and Emily would count those going south. There were not so many cars in those days, but enough for their quaint little game.

Then there were the more adult games such as Chinese checkers, regular checkers and Old Maid, but the favorite game was pinochle. Sometimes they would have several pinochle games going at one time.

Players in these games were not only Emily, Jennie and the roomers, but neighbors as well. Essie, Charlie and Amos Reed lived across the street on the corner of Gilbert and Main and were regular visitors at Colonial Tourists, as were the people from the Olcott estate next door. The personnel at Olcott's changed quite rapidly and some of the card-players were Bert Anderson, Ed Holt, Owen and Evelyn Wright and their children, Peter and Yvette, and Mrs. Hall who took care of Miss Olcott's prize poodles.

Jennie and Emily were such avid pinochle players that they hated to have the games end. Jennie was not averse to tricking the players into continuing the games long past bed-time. She would slyly turn back the clocks and the unsuspecting contestants would think they were going home at 10:30, whereas it was actually the wee hours of the morning when the playing stopped.

The four regular roomers — Charlotte, Woody, Jerry and Bob — all had fireplaces in their rooms and Jennie or Emily were always sure, in cold weather, to have a fire going in each room when the roomers came in from their day's work. We call them roomers rather than boarders for boarders get meals along with their rooms. Roomers never developed the boarding house reach.

The two ladies were very proficient in the kitchen but were getting along in years and the task of feeding all these people would have been too much for them. During these years, Rudy and Mrs. Hurzeler were operating the Ridgefield Bakery, where Roma Pizzeria is now.

Marie and Bertha Hurzeler remember how their mother used to cook meals for the help at the bakery.

When Woody heard about these scrumptious dinners he persuaded Mrs. Hurzeler to cook for Charlotte, Jerry, Bob, and himself. This opened a new door and as word spread around town, the bakery quickly became a restaurant as well.

Mention of the fireplaces reminded Woody of an incident that could have ended the glorious history of the grand old Gilbert House. Charlotte received a large box of china that was well-packed in excelsior. When the unpacking was completed she decided to burn the excelsior. The fireplaces had not been used for several months and when she filled hers with the volatile material, plus the box, the result was a flash fire that ignited the soot in the flue of the chimney. The walls of the house got real hot as a jet of fire arose six feet above the chimney top.

A call was put in to the ever-faithful Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department and within minutes they responded, accompanied by Chief Ellsworth Brown. The fire was quickly extinguished and the firemen returned to the firehouse but without the chief. Someone had produced a bottle of firewater and Brownie remained till it was finished and he departed only when a promise for a repeat performance for the following year was extracted.

In a previous column we mentioned a letter the Casey family received from Harriet Walker. Mrs. Walker lives in New Brunswick, Canada, and is a direct descendant of Isaac Gilbert, who was born in the Gilbert Homestead (Pierrepont House) in 1742. Her letter contains a fine history of the Gilbert family and though it is too lengthy to reproduce here, there are anecdotes that will prove to be interesting to some.

Isaac was Mrs. Walker's great great grandfather and when he was grown, became the only Loyalist in the Gilbert family. Of course, Isaac was on the losing side and when the Revolutionary War was over, he had to move along with thousands of other Loyalists. He had married Mary Rowland in 1771 and they had three children. Mary came from Redding, as did the late Joseph S. Rowland, who was once our next door neighbor and whose wife, Alice, became a state senator from this district.

At any rate, Isaac and his family migrated to New Brunswick but left their youngest, a three-year-old girl, in the care of a local family. After having seven more children, they moved to a newly opened "Long Point Settlement" along Lake Erie and proceeded to build their frontier-type log cabins.

Mrs. Walker's great grandfather (Isaac II) used to walk all the way to Ridgefield each autumn to visit his relatives. He walked 60 miles each day, 10 miles before breakfast and then a considerable distance after supper. It is plain to see that these were very hardy people.

Meanwhile, back to Colonial Tourists where Walter Boyce remembers Dino Giardini mowing the lawn and Howard and Fred Williams doing maintenance work and Charley Russell delivering ice up the old stone steps at the southeast corner of the house. I can remember delivering milk up those same old stone steps and kindly Emily would always ask me in to have milk and cookies. She no doubt forgot that I had a whole truckload of milk standing outside.

Before milk delivery started, the two ladies had their own cow and I think her name was Molly. Jennie used to milk Molly and take care of her. Molly supplied things other than just milk, which when applied to their big asparagus bed, produced the finest spears ever seen of that delectable food.

When Colonial Tourists closed, it was purchased by John Jay Pierrepont who lived across the street and wanted to keep the historic property from being developed. He did a

considerable amount of renovation on the old house, all in good taste, and deserves great credit for its preservation.

Dr. and Mrs. Theodore Safford made this fine house their first home when they came to Ridgefield in 1951 and for the past 31 years Bill and Valerie Casey have kept it going with what is best described as tender loving care.

#116: THE MOVING OF ORENECA INN & THE MAN WHO PEEPED ON NUNS

A couple of weeks ago, there were some photos in The Press of the Gaeta Shopping complex that was recently sold. They brought to mind some things you might find of interest. One picture was of the old Odd Fellows Hall that now houses Marshall's, Rodier's, Cortina's, Century 21 Associates, Gigi's, and Rubin Associates.

At one time it was the site of one of several inns that were located along Main Street. The original inn at this location was a large three-story structure, not four as The Press reported recently, that was operated as The Oreneca Inn by Harvey K. Smith after the Civil War. The Dyckman family purchased it by the mid 1870s and it became known as The Dyckman House.

The name was changed again in the late 1880's when it was purchased by James Thompson and was then called The Thompson House. Another label was attached in the early 90's when J.O. Poole bought it and it became The Ridgefield Inn. In the mid 90's the place was sold again to Mrs. Sidney (Lydia) Ruggles and she changed it back to its original name, Oreneca Inn.

Mrs. Ruggles was probably the most successful of the hotel managers and kept the place going until the turn of the century. She accommodated both permanent and part-time guests. It was at a time when the wealthy families in the city were discovering beautiful Ridgefield and Oreneca Inn offered a convenient place for them to stay while they selected a suitable place to build their "summer cottages."

As the 20th century dawned, Lydia Ruggles apparently tired of the quite arduous duties attendant to the operation of an inn and leased Oreneca to the Ridgefield Land Improvement Co. A few years later the large building was sold to Samuel S. Denton.

S.S., as he was called, was about as sharp as any businessman Ridgefield ever had and could see dollars in most anything. When he died some 40 years ago, he must have been just about the largest property-owner in town. His exploits would fill a good-sized book.

At any rate S.S. had plans for the old inn. No project was too big for him to tackle and he always had the dependable Caro H. Northrop for assistance. Caro had the reputation of being the best building-mover for miles around. He would guarantee to move any building without cracking the plaster. There were those who said that you could set the dining room table and when the building reached its destination, the knives forks and dishes would all be in their original positions.

Caro and his son Reed, along with S.S. and his right hand man, Elbert Ferguson, proceeded to jack up the old inn and then slid long heavy timbers under it. Then the timbers, plus the building, were jacked up again, this time high enough to slide more timbers under those on which the building rested. Round wooden rollers were then placed between the timbers.

Several sets of large block-and-tackle were used and guyed to nearby trees or other stationary objects. The leverage provided by all the pulleys made it comparatively easy for Caro's trusted team of horses to draw the big structure which was now ready to move.

The path of travel was to the west where S.S. had thoughtfully beforehand purchased land on which to set the house. He must have gotten permission from the Biglows (Mrs. Ballard's parents) to cross their fields on the way to High Ridge.

Negotiating the hill on Abbott Street would prove to be difficult as it necessitated raising the east side of the building to keep it level at all times.

It was slow work as the building moved only a few feet with each pull of the team and after each pull the block and tackle had to be reset and the timbers had to be constantly replaced as the house moved over them.

Caro Northrop was a patient man and the large three-story building finally came to rest on the corner of High Ridge and Abbott Street where it still rests today.

It served as the Denton family home for many years and evidence to that effect is still visible in the stepping stone on the south side of the house. The steps are a relic of bygone days when they were used to make entry into the great horse-drawn carriages easier. On the front side of the steps in raised letters is the name S.S. Denton.

During the mid 50's, Saint Mary's School was built and the nuns who taught at the school took over the Denton house as their convent. Later on an addition was put on the school for the nuns and the convent then became an apartment house which it is today.

The nuns' stay at the Denton house was not without incidents, some of which they probably would like to forget. At the time, there were no less than three Peeping Toms operating within a short distance of the convent.

One whom we will call Peeping Tom No. 1. was a prominent man in town. In fact he held a public office at the time but could not resist the temptation to look in on other people. The nuns were in a state of shock one evening when they discovered him peering in the window at them.

The police were called but the peeper heard them as they left the Town Hall where they were quartered at the time. He made a quick exit from the area and though there had been a light snow he had covered his tracks well.

The urge to peep must have been very strong in this man and he returned many times and kept the telephone lines between the convent and Town Hall busy. On each occasion the result was the same as Peeper No. 1 was an exceptionally fast runner and always made it back to his home, just a couple of blocks away. It is doubtful that any policeman could have caught him in a straight race.

Finally came an occasion to which I was a witness. The approach was made without the benefit of flashing lights and sirens. This time Peeper No. 1 must have been over-confident and waited too long to make his departure. When the first car pulled in to Abbott Street, he could be clearly seen standing at the window of the convent.

As the lights of the car were turned to high beams, Peeper No. 1 took off at a fast pace and was hotly pursued. As luck would have it Mrs. Foley had taken in her wash but left up the clothes line. As he raced through the yard the clothes line caught the peeper under his chin and flipped him to the ground. He quickly scrambled to his feet, continued his flight and escaped, but not before he was clearly recognized.

No arrest was made but it was noted that his position in public office was quickly filled by another person.

Nothing more now on Toms No. 2 and No. 3.

#117: IN THE DAYS OF CIRCUSES AND DANCING AT ODD FELLOWS

It was 1903 when the Oreneca Inn was moved from Main Street to High Ridge, and it left an open lot that would remain vacant for some 25 years. It made a swell place for kids to play ball and many events of a temporary nature through the years.

Traveling shows used to visit Ridgefield on a regular basis during the early years of this century. There were circuses of the smaller variety, such as the Hunt Brothers and Sells Floto, and they pitched their tents on one of the many lots that were available at the time. One of these lots was east of the library where later on the Ridgefield Playhouse was built, which is now the Village Bank. On several occasions they used what we called Con Nevin's lot at the top of Prospect Street Extension.

The best and most level location for these shows was the lot left vacant when Oreneca moved from Main Street. It later became known as Odd Fellows Lot, when that organization purchased it in the 20's.

When compared with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey circus, the shows that played in Ridgefield would be considered tiny. However, to those who never saw "The Greatest Show On Earth," the little shows provided great excitement. These shows might boast only one elephant, perhaps one or two large cats, a few horses and ponies, a dog act, and the usual group of clowns. All in all, they provided great entertainment for the local kids.

Sometimes a boy might be lucky enough to get a job carrying water for the horses and the elephant in exchange for a free ticket to the show. If there happened to be a camel with the show, the waterboy really earned his ticket.

One show that came each summer could have been properly called a one-man show as it consisted of just one man and a little black pony. The man's name was Hammond and the great little pony was called Black Bear. They performed most times in a tent on Odd Fellows lot, although we remember one appearance they made on the stage at the town hall.

I guess I liked the pony show best of all. We were too young to understand that the pony did everything on a signal from his master. It seemed the pony was of super intellect as he performed his seemingly endless number of tricks, adding, subtracting, and dividing numbers that were supplied by those in the audience.

Without our knowing it Mr. Hammond would order Black Bear to start pawing out his answer as well as when to stop. We were greatly disappointed later on when we learned that this great exhibition of mathematical prowess on the part of the cute little pony was actually only a demonstration of Hammond's sign work.

Another great attraction that came to Odd Fellow's lot was the Chautauqua. This organization put on a show that was part musical, part lecture, and the speakers placed considerable emphasis on religious teaching. There is still a Chautauqua Institute in a town of that name near Jamestown, N.Y.

At one time the lot was the site of Ridgefield's only public tennis courts. They were operated by the late Harvey Keeler who played a great game of tennis and spurred considerable interest in the sport. After the construction of Odd Fellows Hall (Gaeta Bldg.) in the late 20's, the tennis courts continued at the rear of the building.

The lot proved to be an ideal place for a carnival and both the Odd Fellows and the Volunteer Fire Department would each hold one every year. Along with the various games of chance there would be a temporary dance floor that was erected in the middle of all the activity. Ballroom dancing was very popular at the time and dance contests were held with trophies offered as prizes to the best couple. At first, winners were selected according to the amount of

applause they generated. To prevent its becoming a popularity contest, the system was changed and judges were appointed to make the selections.

Some of the musicians who played for dancing were Willis and Lottie Boyce, Allen Sterry, Charles Wade Walker, Joe Venus, Page Kange, Victor Davis, Aldo Casagrande, Stephen DisPence, Harold Davis, Artie Seymour, and the great Mary Fox.

By dint of a lot of hard work, the Odd Fellows were able to raise enough money to construct the present building and when it was completed, the dancing was moved inside.

Ballroom dancing remained popular and orchestras such as Jack Miller's, Frank Volk's and Charlie Sterling often played for dancing. It was noted that no matter which orchestra played, Andy Bloomer was always in the sax section. Some of the more memorable dances were sponsored by the late Francis D. Martin. Marty and Doris were great dancers and he always felt that there were too many people who just did not do enough dancing.

One of Marty's fine affairs was a Washington's Birthday dance in February of 1933. It was a program dance, and by invitation only. The program was a cute little booklet about 3 by 5 inches, with several pages on which were listed about 16 dance sets. The name of the song that would start each set was also listed in order that you would know what to expect: a slow set, a fast set, a waltz, or a fox trot.

Marty was of the belief that people should mix it up and dance with as many different people as possible. Therefore, you were allowed to dance the first and last set with the partner that accompanied you to the dance, but in between it had to be someone else. The trick was that you must approach your prospective partner for each set and have that person sign the program, with a tiny pencil that was attached by a braided cord, in the space provided.

I still have my program and it starts and ends with the name Miss May Moore. Charlie Sterling's orchestra played and as expected, Andy Bloomer played his sax.

In later years, the Odd Fellows found another source of revenue when interest in square dancing was revived. They were held each Saturday night in their hall and were jam-packed with people from all of the surrounding towns as well as local people who enjoyed these vigorous dances.

Some of the musicians who played for the early square dances were Allen Sterry, Frank Lancaster. Mrs. Harry E. (Elsie) Hull, and Andy O'Connor. Al Broadhurst and Elisha Keeler were the callers and they had a great following. In later years, the Tulipani boys [Sagebrush Serenaders] — Aldo, Albert, Alfred and Johnny, along with Bud Morrisroe and his violin — became a popular fixture at these Saturday night affairs.

#118: WHEN HOPI WITH RATTLESNAKES DANCED AT 'ODD FELLOWS LOT'

We have been writing about the many events that took place on the Odd Fellows lot back in the 20's. One very interesting exhibition was put on periodically by a group of genuine Indians. They were of the Hopi tribe that originated in the south west and these particular Pueblo Indians came from northern Arizona.

The Hopis were very proud of their culture and were skillful potters as well as being expert in weaving baskets and blankets. On their visits to Ridgefield, they brought along their wares and sold them as they went along. They put on a good show and did not charge admission. They did accept contributions, which along with the sale of their goods gave them a comfortable livelihood.

The Indians traveled from town to town in horse drawn wagons and always created great excitement, especially among the young people, as they paraded along the street. The tribe was

noted for being industrious and many of the Indians were considered excellent farmers, but those who made the trips were probably selected because of their dancing ability or perhaps because of their skill at handling snakes.

The Hopis worshipped various forces of nature and were influenced by the supernatural. The purpose of their shows was to attract customers for their wares and time was allowed between the three events to make their sales. With their brilliant costumes and painted faces, the Hopis put on a show that consisted of very colorful exhibitions of their War Dance, the Rain Dance and the very exciting Snake Dance.

The Snake Dance was held until last and took place after the Indians were convinced that they had sold as many of their wares as possible. Since a permit would be required today for their huge campfire, they might not be able to perform.

People were still talking about Lindbergh's dramatic flight over the Atlantic in late May of 1927 when the Hopis landed in town with ten or a dozen wagons, drawn by multicolored horses. They set up camp on the Odd Fellows lot and planned to stay for two days and nights. A large crowd was attracted, especially for second and final night performances.

It should be noted that the Indians used live rattlesnakes in staging the Snake Dance. The snakes still had their fangs and had not been deprived of their poison glands. There were skeptics who felt that the poison glands had been removed. This, however, was refuted by an examination that was made by expert reptile handlers. There were also people who felt that the snakes had been doped in some manner, but this was also disproved.

Rattlesnakes are not noted for being good natured and one could not help but wonder what action would be taken if a mishap occurred. No doubt the Hopis had some home spun remedy to combat the poison and they all carried knives which you could imagine they would use in case of an accident.

We understand that there were very few instances where a performer was bitten and are happy to report that none occurred during their stay in town.

One thing we noticed was that all the snake dancers were young braves. Also none of the women were allowed to handle the snakes. Of course, this was long before the equal rights movement. The Hopis still perform their dances on the reservation and perhaps by now the squaws have joined the braves in handling the reptiles.

The older members of the group either played the tom toms or sat cross legged in a circle around the dancers.

On the second night, just before the Snake Dance started, we saw in the crowd our favorite character, Jimmy Rogers. Jimmy was always ready to perform some zany trick to get a laugh so we were ready for something unusual. We have described what Jimmy looked like in other columns, so will not repeat but just say that just seeing him would elicit a hearty laugh.

It was a warm, late-spring evening but Jimmy was wearing his long khaki duster. No one was surprised at this as Jimmy could always be counted on to do something a little different.

As it turned out he had a very definite purpose in wearing his long coat. We decided it best to keep Jimmy in sight without getting too close to him.

As the dance started he began to move forward and soon was in the very front row, almost touching elbows with the dancers. It was about this time that we noted two of Ridgefield's "wild boys" and they also were working their way to the front row of spectators. We were aware that we had a setting here where an incident could easily occur.

The beat of the drums intensified as the dance neared its end and the dancers responded to the mounting excitement by actually holding the deadly rattlesnakes in their mouths. It was an

amazing display of raw courage and many of the onlookers shuddered at the prospect of seeing someone bitten by one of the snakes.

As one of the braves went gyrating by with a huge snake draped over his shoulders, he seemed to stumble, then stagger and finally he fell to the ground as the snake slithered off in the direction of the Indian ponies that were tethered nearby.

The braves were about as sure-footed as could be and for one of them to fall would be most unusual. Since this all took place very close to where the “wild boys” were standing, there was good reason to suppose that they had something to do with it.

At any rate, the brave quickly regained his footing and took off in hot pursuit of the escaping snake amidst the shouts of the terrified spectators.

It was at this point that Jimmy Rogers chose to emit a blood curdling war whoop as he pulled from his long coat (as you may have already guessed) a large replica of a rattlesnake.

Jimmy quickly wrapped the dummy around his neck and went into his own version of the snake dance, all the while yelling at the top of his lungs.

The fact that the brave had captured the live snake and returned to the scene had no pacifying effect on the crowd as the lot emptied in record time.

The Hopis left at dawn and I do not think they ever returned.

#119: THE LAST BLACKSMITH & GREATEST WALKER

*Under the spreading chestnut tree,
the Village Smithy stands.
The smith, a mighty man is he,
with large and sinewy hands,
and the muscles of his brawny arms,
are strong as iron bands.*

It was 143 years ago that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote his famous poem. That was 43 years before Harry Marvin Thomas was born, so we can not say that the great poet had Harry in mind when he composed it. Yet, the description of the village smithy fit Harry to a T, especially the references to his honesty and sterling character.

I was less than ten years of age when I first met Harry Thomas and a friendship began that was to last all those many years. Harry enjoyed a great reputation for miles around and we felt very privileged to be included in his circle of friends. When he passed on, just a few years ago, in his 89th year, he was the last of Ridgefield's many blacksmiths. Just a few years later his wife Minolia, followed him to her reward at the age of 96.

Harry Thomas was a descendent of Benjamin Stebbins, one of Ridgefield's very earliest settlers. Members of the famous Stebbins family lived where Casagmo is now for almost 200 years. Harry's father, George M. Thomas, was a conductor on the railroad branch that ran from here to Branchville. George was only 27 when he was crushed to death while assisting the brakeman in the coupling of two railroad cars.

As reported in an earlier column, the business of hooking the railroad cars together was probably the most dangerous part of railroading. This tragic accident left Mrs. Thomas with the task of raising three children, a daughter, Edna, and two sons, Harry and Howard.

Howard will probably be best remembered as the proprietor of the West Lane grocery, where Gene Casagrande has his CasaMore store today. Sports enthusiasts will recall how Howard made those great left-handed shots in basketball games at the old town hall. For some

reason, Howard would always shout “Hey” as he unerringly made those shots from either side of the court.

Harry and Minolia had three daughters, Gertrude, Esther and Marie. Gertrude is now Mrs. Lawrence Hoyt and still lives on Silver Spring Road. The Hoyts' daughter, Doris, is Mrs. George Ventres and the Ventres'son Dale is proprietor of the Ridgefield Power Equipment Shop. So Dale can easily trace his lineage back to 1714, when Benjamin Stebbins came to town.

The Thomas family has had an active participation in town affairs for many years. Harry's great grandfather, Albert N. Thomas, was town clerk for Ridgefield back in Civil War days. Albert was also an original member of the Library Club, which formed a nucleus for our present Ridgefield Library.

Albert's son Elijah L. Thomas (grandfather of Harry) succeeded his father as town clerk and also served as a judge of probate for the town. All this would seem to indicate that the Thomas family were pretty solid citizens.

At the time Harry's father suffered his fatal accident, there was no such thing as Social Security to assist Mrs. Thomas in raising her three children. When Harry was 16 he went to Purdy's Station, near Brewster, N.Y., to learn the blacksmith and farrier trades.

Perhaps we should explain for those not familiar, that a farrier is a shoer of horses, whereas, a blacksmith performs all kinds of iron work and may also engage in horseshoeing.

During his years at Purdy's, Harry worked 12 hours each day and six days each week. The shop opened at six in the morning and normally closed at six in the evening. However, if six o'clock came around and there were still horses to be shod, the farriers continued to work until they were done.

Harry was a religious man and always looked forward to Sunday. After church services he would walk the 15 miles to Ridgefield to visit his mother. He would time his return walk to Purdy's so that he would arrive in time for work on Monday morning.

Harry Thomas was the greatest walker we ever saw and even in his late 70's, he would think nothing of a Sunday walk to Danbury or Brewster. Though he was of average height, his long strides were as great as those of the long-legged giants that play basketball today. He was often offered a ride but would always, graciously, turn it down and then many times he would keep pace with the horse, whose driver had offered the ride.

Ridgefield had several real good walkers. Frank Parks Jr. took very quick steps when he was a young man and Earl Hibbart had a very smooth and graceful stride, but they could not keep pace with Harry Thomas.

He was by nature, a very friendly man, but always walked alone, for no one could keep up with those great strides. He got over the ground, at a walk, just as fast as some of the joggers that I see on the highway.

Harry was born in the old Bailey Inn that was located on Main Street on the west side almost directly across from where the Christian Science Church is now. Before he and his family moved to their new home, next to the firehouse, he walked daily from his home in Flat Rock near the Wilton town line.

He rarely wore a jacket, except in real cold weather and very seldom was seen with a hat, although when he got to his shop he would don the little black cap with the shiny visor that was the trademark of the smithy.

After Harry had finished his apprenticeship at Purdy's, he returned to Ridgefield and worked at the Big Shop for a short time. The Big Shop was, as everyone knows, at the rear of the Allan Block, where it had been moved from the corner of West Lane and Main Street, to make

room for the Congregational Church. Today the old building is home to a multitude of enterprises, but at the time it served as a blacksmith shop and a carriage shop.

Soon Harry was able to open his own little blacksmith shop. It was located on the Rufus Seymour lot on Olmstead Lane about opposite from where the Piser family now lives. It was while he had this shop that he almost lost his life.

When you brought in a horse to be shod, Harry would never refuse to tackle the job, no matter how bad or unruly the horse might be. He was shoeing a real wild horse one day when he received a kick in the head that Dr. Bryon said would have been fatal if it were one half inch closer to a vital spot. Fortunately Harry was in excellent physical condition and recovered.

#120: HARRY AND THE HOOVES

When we left off in our story, Harry [Thomas] was in the process of recuperating from a kick in the head that had been delivered by a wild horse. During this period he must have wondered whether or not he was engaged in the right business. His excellent physical condition was a big factor in his recovery and the doctor suggested that he find less arduous work until his health was fully restored.

The Ox Ridge Hunt Club in Darien was looking for a farrier at the time so Harry closed his shop on Olmstead Lane and took the job. After wrestling with the great draft horses, shoeing the sleek little polo ponies was just a snap for Harry.

We have seen farriers who felt that it was only necessary to cut down the horse's hoofs and nail on the shoes. Harry was a perfectionist and settled for nothing less than a first-class job.

After removing the worn shoes, he would carefully cut and shape the hoof, just so. He would take his heavy rasp and smooth the bottom and the outer walls of the hoof. The new shoe was then placed on the hoof to size it up. The shoe was then placed in the forge and shaped until it fit the hoof perfectly.

The shoe would be red hot when Harry removed it from the forge and when he placed it on the anvil he knew exactly where to apply his hammer in order to bend it to the correct shape.

Sometimes calks were applied to the toes and heels of the shoe, to prevent the horse from slipping. The shoe was then subjected to more heat from the forge and while it was still hot, several trips would be made back and forth between the hoof and the forge to make sure that the shoe fit perfectly.

The hot shoe would burn the hoof in each instance as Harry blew away the smoke so as to observe the fit. This all looked very barbaric but really was not and caused no pain or discomfort to the horse.

To carry the shoe back and forth during this fitting procedure, Harry used a punch that had a rectangular point and was inserted into one of the nail holes in the shoe. When he was entirely satisfied with the fit of the shoe Harry would again use this punch to clear all the nail holes in the shoe.

The punch would be set in a nail hole and then tapped with the hammer until the hole was large enough to accommodate the rectangular shaft of the horseshoe nail. Between the clearing of each hole, the punch was inserted in a hole in the large wooden block on which the anvil was set. Into this hole a piece of suet had been packed. I suppose this was to facilitate the removal of the punch from the shoe after each nail hole had been cleared.

Whatever the reason, this maneuver added to the many delightful aromas one could encounter in a blacksmith shop as the punch was hot enough to melt the suet and a gentle little cloud of smoke would arise from the anvil as each nail hole was cleared.

There were eight nail holes, four on each side of the shoe. Actually Harry only used seven nails. The back hole on the inside of each hoof was not filled as there was the danger of drawing blood because of the location on the wall of the hoof. Harry was so expert at nailing the shoe that the eighth nail was not really needed.

There was a saying that went something like this, "For want of a nail, a shoe was lost and for want of a shoe, a hoof was lost and for want of a hoof a horse was lost," etc. This did not apply to Harry's workmanship and we do not recall any of his horses ever "throwing a shoe."

As each nail came through the hoof as it was being nailed, Harry would twist off the end of the nail, leaving about three eighths of an inch of the nail to be bent over and "clinched."

Before clinching the end of the nail he would carefully prepare a place for the clincher by using his rasp to make a little receptacle on the side of the hoof to receive it. He was so careful and painstaking in doing this that when the job was completed, the hoof was as smooth as it could possibly be.

If a horse's hoof could be considered beautiful, then it would have to be said that when Harry was through, the hoof could be considered a thing of beauty. I think even the horses were proud of the way they looked and they probably stepped a little higher.

There were times when a horse may have had a hoof problem and Harry was expected to correct whatever it might be. Sometimes the frog of the hoof became tender or it might have an infection. The hoof might also have become dry or brittle.

Harry would cut a piece of leather to fit the shoe and before nailing the shoe he would stuff pine tar and oakum into the bottom of the hoof. The piece of leather would then be placed over this concoction to hold it in place and the shoe was then nailed over it to keep the leather in place.

This must have felt good as we can remember a horse that was very sore, looking at Harry when he had completed his errand of mercy with a look of gratitude. Harry must have sensed it as well and it is doubtful if any man before or since ever thoroughly enjoyed his own work as much as he did.

Harry was very proficient at correcting many problems that afflicted horses. The speedy driving horses seemed to be particularly susceptible to overreaching (striking their front hooves with their rear hooves as they trotted) or interfering (striking one front hoof with the other or one rear hoof with the other). Harry would correct this by making a shoe with more weight in one area than another to make the horse throw his hoof away from whatever he was striking. Many times this resulted in some very funny shaped horseshoes.

Dr. Edwin B. Van Saun had a bay driving horse that was exceptionally fast. He used to enter it in the Sunday afternoon races on Main Street, along with William R. Keeler, Henry C. Swords, George G. Haven, Edward Payson Dutton, and others. Doctor Van Saun's horse had a real problem with interfering and Harry was charged with correcting his stride to eliminate this serious problem.

Harry was a very patient man and this assignment would test his patience to the limit. He must have made at least 15 different shoes before finally correcting the interference. The shoe that eventually would prove to be successful hung in the blacksmith shop for many years after the horse was gone as proof of Harry's uncanny ability. It sure did not look like a horseshoe and caused many a comment but it enabled Van Saun to beat Haven and the great dentist was always loud in his praise of Harry M. Thomas.

#121: WHENCHURCH-TURNED-THRIFT-SHOP WAS THE SITE OF AN ANVIL

By the start of World War I, a number of wealthy families had moved to Ridgefield and many of them still retained their horses, despite the increasing popularity of the automobile. In many instances the man who had previously been their coachman now became their chauffeur.

A great many of these families kept their horses for sentimental reasons.

John Dollar operated the blacksmith shop in the building that was formerly the Catholic church and now serves as the Ridgefield Thrift Shop. John needed a first-rate farrier to take care of the pampered horses of the Swords, the Doubledays, the Chisolms, the Lewises, the Scripps, etc. He was successful in luring Harry Thomas back from the Ox Ridge Hunt Club and a lot of horses were the happier for it.

When the war was over, Harry bought the business from John Dollar and then operated as Ridgefield's blacksmith for about half a century. The old shop had a cathedral-type ceiling and was very difficult to heat during the cold New England winters. Harry had a large pot-bellied stove as well as the fire in his forge, but in cold weather the shop could be really frigid.

There was room for about ten horses on the east side of the shop and the anvil, the forge, and material such as iron and steel, were stored on the west side of the shop. Harry also had a little office on the west side of the shop and it was located strategically near the front door. He was a smart businessman and would have the bill ready as his customers were leaving for they had to pass the office door.

The floor of the shop was heavily gouged by the iron shoes of the horses. Most of the wear occurred during the winter months. During the summer months the horses were shoes that were either flat or had toe and heel calks that were dull.

The winter shoes had very sharp calks that were either screwed into the shoes or were driven in by a hammer. They were, of course, to prevent the horse from slipping on icy pavement, but they sure cut into the floor. I would bet that those old worn planks are still there, beneath the modern floor of the Thrift Shop.

As well as the cathedral ceiling, the shop also retained the long narrow church type windows that are arched at the top. These windows have been well preserved through the years and may still be seen on both the east and west side of the Thrift Shop.

The first means of preservation for the windows was furnished by Harry himself. He was well aware that horses are, by nature, very inquisitive animals and love to explore things with their long soft noses. So Harry took several long half-inch-round metal rods and cut them into lengths that would stretch across the windows. The ends of the rods were then placed in his forge until they were red hot. Each rod was then removed from the forge and the ends were flattened with a heavy hammer on his anvil.

While the ends were still hot, he used a punch to make a hole for a screw in each one of the ends. It should be noted that the electric drill had not yet been marketed when Harry made the holes in the rods, which were then fastened horizontally across each window, about two inches apart. The rods had the desired effect; the windows were saved and the rods remained for many years, even after the old building had become a plumbing shop.

I must have been about seven when I was irresistibly drawn to Harry Thomas's blacksmith shop. The attraction was two-fold, as the desire to be with the horses was equally as strong as the urge to add yet another customer to a fast growing newspaper route. An unexpected bonus was the happy acquisition of Harry's firm and lasting friendship.

Kids, in their efforts to be helpful, many times just get in the way. I am sure that this was the case when I tried to be of assistance to Harry Thomas. He was very good natured and overlooked my attempts to do things that were beyond my capabilities.

However, though the learning process was rather slow, I did manage to do a few little things. If a horse was small enough and gentle enough, he might look the other way while I labored at taking off the horse's front shoes. Whenever I was successful my pride knew no bounds and I might observe Harry smiling to himself.

Of course, this would inflate my youthful confidence to a point where I would feel indispensable to the operation of the blacksmith shop. However, life has its own way of reducing that feeling of self importance. It can teach a lesson that will help a young fellow stay within his limitations.

One day Arthur Northrop (Caro's brother) appeared at the shop, with his fine little bay driving mare. For me, that mare was just about the last word in horseflesh. She was bigger than a large pony, yet smaller than most driving horses. In retrospect I suppose she had many of the attributes of the great Justin Morgan. She was exceptionally well-mannered and gentle.

Harry Thomas's attention was commanded by several large draft horses that were in the shop at the time. So, it was no problem for me without attracting any attention, to pick up a small nailing hammer, a sharp chisel with which to straighten the nail ends (clinches) and a pair of pincers, for pulling off the shoes. Since I was aware that the mare was very well behaved, I approached her without trepidation and picked up a front hoof.

After eliminating the clinches, in order that the nails would slide through the hoof, I grasped the shoe with the pincers, which had one sharp jaw and one dull jaw. There was considerable pulling and twisting and finally the shoe began to separate itself from the hoof.

During all this operation, the little mare just stood there, the perfect model of a patient animal. I should have quit when I was ahead, but boylike decided to push my luck by cutting down the mare's hoof. A curved knife, used for trimming the hoof, was found and the trimming began as the walls of the hoof took on a sharp edge.

It was at this point that Matt Holmes chose to enter the shop. Matt was described in an earlier column and it was noted that he was a big man with a very loud bass voice.

On this occasion he wore a very large floppy straw hat and as he came through the door shouted a hearty hello that must have rattled the windows. The little mare jumped straight into the air and I went flat. When she landed that sharply trimmed hoof was resting on my left index finger.

Somehow I freed myself and quietly retreated out the side door where it was discovered that the bone was protruding from the end of my finger. I still have that large scar and it is a constant reminder that horse shoeing should be left to an experienced farrier.

#122: WHEN SIXTH GRADE WAS AT THE FIREHOUSE

For me, the year 1925 has to be one of the best remembered and certainly one of the most enjoyable. The previous year had been one that I would like to forget, and for the most part, I have succeeded in doing just that.

Fourth grade was as far as one could go in 1924 at Titicus School (now the Legion Hall). Therefore, in the fall of that year, we were uprooted from that friendly little schoolhouse and transferred to the Benjamin Franklin Grammar School (now Boehringer-Ingelheim [Richard E. Venus Office Building]) on East Ridge. Later on, this move caused us to appreciate the trauma

experienced by little kids who had to switch from one school to another, especially when the change is from the intimacies of a tiny school to one of large proportions.

The "Big School" was not as large then as it is today, as several additions have been made through the years. However, it was big enough to be rather intimidating to a little kid. That school was, for many years, the biggest structure in Ridgefield.

One of the things that made that transition a little hard to take was the fact that the school system was suffering a severe classroom shortage at the time. This caused some mixed classes and youngsters 10 years of age were often placed in rooms with older students.

In the 1925-26 school year, the situation got so bad that several high school classes were conducted in the town hall. The effects were also felt by the lower grades and two sixth grades were installed on the second floor of the fire house, and the kids really enjoyed this.

Miss Margaret Callahan and Miss May Boland were the teachers at the firehouse. Neither of these ladies was great in stature but more than made up for that as both had an exceptionally strong will. Their voices were very commanding and they were proud of their ability to keep order in their classrooms. They were very good teachers and were dedicated to their profession.

The very first day of school at the firehouse, the teachers laid down the law. We were reminded in no uncertain terms of where we were and ordered to stay in our seats, in the event that the fire whistle was sounded.

Ridgefield was a much smaller town at that time and as a consequence there were not so many fires. It was probably more than a month before the siren went off and by that time we had become so accustomed to our surroundings that the air of expectancy so prevalent during the first couple of weeks had almost disappeared.

However, when that very eventful day finally arrived and the siren began to whirl, the unusual noise had an electrifying effect on the teachers and their pupils. This was our first electric siren and the telephone operator could set it off from her switchboard, upstairs over where the Roma Pizzeria is now [Planet Pizza]. It took a little while for the rotor inside the siren to rev up. By the time it had reached its piercing shriek, the two teachers with arms outstretched were firmly planted in the doorways leading to the stairs.

Also at this time every pupil was on his or her feet and it became obvious that there was about to be a confrontation. Two of the boys, Bob Mulvaney, who would later become a fireman and later still, superintendent of road maintenance, and Eddie Conley, later to become a professional boxer, carefully lifted the two little teachers and set them to one side as some 50 pupils went dashing down the stairway.

We had no paid firemen at the time, but volunteers always seemed to be close at hand. Firemen were soon arriving from every direction. The excitement was intense as they clambered into the trucks. Fortunately the pupils had the good sense to stay out of the way and give the firemen room to operate.

There were four fire trucks at the time and three of them had self starters. The hook and ladder truck was an old, chain-drive Republic with solid rubber tires and it had to be cranked by hand. The Reo was a pumper and the Locomobile was a general purpose truck carrying both a pump and a few lengths of hose. The fourth truck was something else. It was a 1924 Packard and, like the Locomobile, had been converted from a limousine for use as a fire fighter and carried many lengths of hose. This great machine had 12 cylinders, a V engine with six on a side. It was without question the most beautiful-sounding engine that I have ever heard.

Like the other trucks, the Packard had no cab and the shifting levers were outside on the running board. One can only imagine how much a vehicle like this would be worth today. Although this was not an easy truck to drive, all the firemen wanted to try it. It attracted drivers the way a pretty girl attracts the boys. This caused so many contests that Chief Ellsworth F. Brown had to assign a driver for each truck with backup drivers to take over when they were not available. Arthur Dingee was assigned to the Reo and Ed Scott to the Packard. Gus Venus drove the Republic and Fritz Frinder handled the Locomobile.

Each of the trucks was equipped with a small siren that had to be turned by hand. The Packard also had a beautiful bell as a part of its warning system and the sound of that bell could be heard for miles.

Things slowly settled down after the trucks had left and we fully expected that we would now have to face the wrath of the teachers. However, they apparently were as caught up in the excitement as their pupils and we escaped without the use of the birch rod. The scene just described was to be repeated several times during the school year.

There was a small gray building in back of the fire house. It was not quite as large as a one-car garage and served as a storage place as well as a convenient place to keep a barrel of cider. Next to the little building was a very sturdy, arbor-like affair with two uprights and a cross piece on top from which hung a large heavy metal hoop or ring. A sledge hammer hung from one of the uprights. In years past it was used to call the firemen and when the hoop was struck by the hammer, proved to be an effective warning device. Many times these hoops would have a cut in them and in some instances a piece was actually cut out of them. Perhaps this caused more vibration in the ring.

With all the changes that have been made around the firehouse, this ring was taken down. We have seen it or one exactly like it on a private estate in town.

Yes, this certainly was a very eventful school year and it was thoroughly enjoyed by the students. None of them could have been as happy as I when we were moved right across the street from B.E. Sperry's Livery Stable, slightly in back of which stood Harry Thomas's blacksmith Shop.

#123: CROWDS WOULD GATHER TO WATCH HARRY SHOE THE WILD HORSE

Yes, the 1926-27 school year that we spent in sixth grade at the fire house was truly the most exciting ever. My two favorite haunts were Harry Thomas's blacksmith shop and B.E. Sperry's livery stable and then they were right across the street from our temporary classrooms. After the dark days of the previous year at the Big School, the world had brightened considerably.

One morning before school started, Miss May Boland discovered that her toothbrush was missing. She called home to see if she might have left it there and was assured that she had. Miss Boland knew that I had a bicycle so I was appointed to go and fetch the brush. Her family lived at that time on Olmstead Lane, right next door to where my family now lives.

As I peddled into the Bolands' Driveway, a very familiar aroma wafted through the air. It was from the burning soft coal in Albert Baynham's forge. Al conducted a little repair business at the rear of the property. He would not shoe a horse but did all the other things that a blacksmith was supposed to do. The smell of the smoke should have prepared me for things to come.

The toothbrush was picked up and the ride back to the fire house started. As I left West Lane and entered Main Street at the fountain, I could see but not hear a team of horses, hitched to

a buckboard, entering Main Street from Branchville Road (Rte. 102). I peddled faster and realized that the reason I could not hear the horses was because they were bare-footed.

As I neared the wagon I noted some familiar signs about the driver. It just had to be Burr Sanford with his western-type hat. He never wore the ten-gallon style or the sombrero. His was a little smaller but the wide brim and its style and fawn color were unmistakably western and he always wore it at a jaunty angle, just so.

I peddled faster and caught up with the wagon as it was entering the business area. By now Burr Sanford's handsome face and ruddy complexion were plain to see and I felt excitement mounting as he turned into Catoonah Street. There was no question where Burr was going nor was there any question that there would be some intense activity at the blacksmith shop the rest of the day.

Burr Sanford was one of the famous Sanford family that at one time just about made up the whole town of Redding. He had left Redding early that morning after two men had helped him hitch the horses. It took three men to do the job as this was another pair of western horses that Burr periodically had shipped to his farm in Redding. He had been bringing in these wild horses for some years and this pair of greys had come from Wyoming without benefit of ever having been harnessed or driven, and, of course, without shoes.

Burr avoided the word "break" when referring to his association with these wild horses. He preferred to say that when he was through with them, they would be well trained, not broken. One thing was sure and that was that when they first arrived in Redding these horses could kick the stars right out of the sky.

They were right off the range where their knowledge of the human side of animal 'life had been limited to an occasional passing cowboy. Then came round-up time and the relationship between man and horse deteriorated rapidly. The closest that Burt's greys had been to a human was when a lasso settled over their heads and they were snubbed down long enough for a halter to be placed back of their ears and around their noses.

These horses were not real large animals and compared to the huge draft horses they were considered small. However, they were much larger than the ordinary range mustang. The increase in size was due in no small measure to the ranchers who had thoughtfully turned out large stallions to run with the wild herds.

It was not necessary for one to make an appointment when one brought a horse in to be shod at Harry Thomas's blacksmith shop. You just came in and took your turn. However, when Burr Sanford planned to come in, he always called a couple of days ahead so that the entire day would be reserved for the battle that never failed to take place.

When the day for Burt's horses to be shod arrived, word would quickly spread and a good crowd always assembled to see the show and nobody was ever disappointed. This is not to say that it was an official holiday or that the stores closed for the day. The stores just operated with fewer people as clerks took turns watching the show.

Andrew Bloomer Sr., Jack Whitlock and sometimes Bedie himself came over from Bedients. Of course, Dr. Van Saun left his office over the store to attend. Tom Ryan and Edgar Master Sr., represented the J. E. Ryan Company. Oscar Schultze and Howard Freer always came and even Louis Joffe would put away his needle and thread to join the crowd. William R. Keeler, Fleet and Bert Sperry were regulars and stayed most of the day. I do not believe any ladies ever attended.

Harry Thomas always had assistance with Burr Sanford's wild horses in the person of Gus Sturges. I think he was a brother-in-law of Harry Thomas and all of the Sturgeses were very

good horsemen. Burr Sanford also helped and I do think that could be the reason that Harry would waste a whole day with these horses. If you did your part as a horse owner, Harry would go all the way. He was that kind of man.

I doubt that he ever charged extra for all the time used on those wild horses. However, knowing Burr to be a real good man, I would like to think that he paid Harry extra for his time and the chances he took.

It was a long ride from Redding to Ridgefield and no doubt it would have been easier for Burr to have gone to Bethel where they had a blacksmith shop or to Danbury where they had stocks. The stocks were generally used to shoe oxen but sometimes were employed in getting shoes on a dangerous horse. No doubt Burr avoided the stocks as they tended to break a horse's spirit. We learned later that the blacksmith at Bethel flatly refused to go near wild horses and with good reason. It took a lot of know-how and an equal amount of nerve to approach an animal that had every intention of kicking your head off if you would just get in the line of fire.

At any rate, I followed the buckboard and the grays into Catoonah Street, and as if drawn by a magnet I made the left turn into the blacksmith shop as all thoughts of returning to the classroom in the firehouse quickly evaporated. On this day the teacher would have to wait until lunch time to brush her teeth.

(Continued next week)

#124: HOW TO SHOE A WILD HORSE

After the long drive from Redding, one would expect that Burr Sanford's horses would be very tired, but if they were, they did not show it. While Burr held their heads, Harry Thomas and Gus Sturges carefully unhitched them from the backboard. They were then taken into the shop and unharnessed.

Most horses were shod while still wearing their harness. If they were troublesome, perhaps the britching might be removed and some were divested of their saddle and girths as well. With Burr's horses everything came off including the traces, the hames and the bridle. All that was left was the collar, which played a very definite part in the proceedings and the halter, which with these wild horses was always worn under the bridle.

As soon as the bridle was removed, it was immediately replaced by what was called a pulley bridle. Harry had acquired the pulley bridle while taking a course in horsemanship from the Professor Jesse Beery School. The crow piece that went in back of the horse's ears was about one inch wide and made of a webbing material. The bit was made of one inch rope, with large rings on either side through which a smaller rope passed, that went through a pulley and became a cheek piece on its way to meet the crow piece.

The pulley bridle was not a very pretty piece of equipment, but it was very effective in the training of a horse and proved to be valuable in securing the horse's attention. At first glance, a person might think the pulley bridle was a rather cruel gadget. However, compared to other means of acquiring and holding the horse's attention, this method was actually very humane. I'm sure you have all heard about the man who used a two by four for the same purpose.

It has been said that a horse that cannot be controlled by a pulley bridle is just uncontrollable. I am told that this bridle is still very popular today among real good horse trainers.

At any rate, the show is now ready to start and the first horse is led out of the shop and into what is now the parking area for the Thrift Shop. There would be need for a lot more room than the blacksmith shop afforded.

By ten in the morning there had assembled at least 30 people, who had come to watch the proceedings. They formed a ring around the parking area and most of them tried to be where they could beat a hasty retreat, should the occasion demand it.

At the very start, the horse was allowed to walk to the end of the bridle rope. He was then brought sharply around with a hard pull and the command, “come here.”

It was amazing to see how quickly the horse learned to obey this command. In a few minutes, he was so docile that it was hard to believe that he was really a wild one. That all changed with the next step in the proceedings.

A large rope that must have been two inches in diameter was then draped over the horse’s neck near the withers and thence through the collar which had thoughtfully been left in place. As soon as the rope touched the horse’s neck, he must have remembered his first encounter with a rope at roundup time. The animal reverted to the wild in a matter of seconds.

There are those who feel that a horse is more dangerous with his front hoofs than with the rear hoofs. Our own experience is simply that they are more accurate with the front hoofs but take in a lot more territory with the rear hoofs. This horse lashed out vigorously with both front hoofs, but fortunately the three men were not surprised.

The horse went raging around the yard until the pulley bridle was employed to bring him to order as the crowd scattered to make room for all this activity. The rope was then tied around the horse’s neck with a bowline to prevent it from slipping and choking him. While the knot was being tied, the horse just stood there and trembled from one end to the other. He was a bundle of pent-up energy, ready to fly off into orbit.

A large leather strap with a metal ring was then put around the horse’s right front hoof, near the fetlock. I guess that I may have made this sound too easy. Actually it took a considerable while to get the strap in place and several passes were made around the yard, giving ground without ever being directed to do so.

The pulley bridle played an important part in this maneuvering, but mostly it was but another exhibition of the incredible patience of Harry Thomas. Imagine if you will, trying to do a favor for someone while they are trying to kick the head off your shoulders.

If you think that a horse cannot move around on three legs, you are greatly mistaken. As soon as Harry attempted to cut the hoof and shape it, the horse would go on his hind legs with the free front leg flailing the air in what would have been lethal blows had they ever connected.

Again the bridle was put to use and Harry had a chance to fit the shoe. It would not be the polished job that Harry was noted for. Just to get the shoe on the hoof was a major accomplishment. Strange as it might seem, tacking the shoe on did not appear to bother the horse as much as having his hoof held off the ground.

As the final nail was driven home, one could get the impression that the horse had finally decided to cooperate. Nothing could be further from the truth. When the strap was transferred to the other front hoof, there was a repeat performance, every bit as intense as the first.

Finally, the front hoofs were completed and now the strap had to be put around the fetlock of the rear hoof.

No man in his right mind would attempt to walk up to one of these wild horses and attempt to place the strap around the rear fetlock. As a matter of fact, if you walked within 12 feet of the rear of one of these horses, you were courting a quick trip to the hospital — or worse.

So another rope was used with a large loop as a lasso and laid on the ground, until the horse was coaxed into putting his rear hoof into the snare. The loop was drawn tight and the kicking was fast and furious as the horse and the three men went around and around the yard.

At long last, with the performers near exhaustion and with the help of the pulley bridle, the horse agreed to have the strap applied. The rope was then passed through the ring in the strap and back through the collar until the mighty rear leg was secured.

It was still necessary to use extreme caution in taking on the shoes. By now it is after one o'clock in the afternoon and a break was made for lunch before the second horse was tackled.

Eventually the dangerous job was completed as the sun started its descent behind Sperry's Livery Stable and Burr, with his fine western hat at just the right jaunty angle, began his long ride home to Redding.

The crowd had stayed to the very end and now dispersed as Harry and Gus looked forward to a well-deserved rest and the sound of the new shoes on the hard pavement receded in the distance.

#125: THE TRICK HARRY PLAYED ON TWO MISCHIEVOUS BOYS

It has been pretty well established that Harry Thomas was a man of great patience. We have witnessed his enduring things that would have driven lesser men to distraction. On those few occasions when his forbearance was stretched beyond the breaking point, his actions were always swift and sure and someone learned a lesson.

We remember a Mr. Hotchkiss who used to enjoy sitting around Harry's blacksmith shop swapping stories with anyone who would reciprocate. He had two sons who would sometimes accompany him and they were probably seven and eight years of age. They were nice boys but like others of their age, they needed something constructive to do or they would get into mischief.

On the west side of the shop near the forge and anvil, there were four chairs generally used by teamsters as they waited for their horses to be shed. The chairs had curved backs and were very similar to captain's chairs and were exceptionally well made. They would be worth a fortune today.

Most every day, Mr. Hotchkiss could be found, tilted back in one of the chairs, while reading his newspaper. One particular August day business was slow and there were no horses in the shop when Mr. Hotchkiss and his boys arrived. Since all four chairs were unoccupied, he proceeded to make use of two of them by propping his feet in one while seated, tilting back in another. The boys scurried around the shop, getting into various things that would amuse them for the moment.

It must have been rather boring for the boys as they waited for their father to read the paper from one end to the other. They must have run out of games to play and time must have lain heavy on their hands as they searched for something that would interest them and hold their attention.

Mr. Hotchkiss paid no attention whatsoever to what they were doing. He must have been a pioneer in letting kids do their own thing. Dr. Spock's book was written many years later.

As previously noted, the building where the old blacksmith shop was, is now the Thrift Shop and before the Thomas shop was established, it had been St. Mary's Church. While serving as the shop, the building still had the cathedral type ceiling, the peak of which extended some 30 feet above the floor.

A single electric wire came all the way down from the very top of the ceiling. At the bottom end of the wire there was attached a single electric light bulb. The wire was positioned in such a manner as to allow the bulb to hang directly over Harry's anvil at about head high.

The boys decided that it might be fun to use the light bulb as a pendulum and started swinging it back and forth. The problem was that when they pulled the bulb back as far as it would go before releasing it, the bulb on its return trip would bounce off Harry's head. The boys thought this was great fun but Harry found it to be very annoying.

After being hit several times as the long wire carried the bulb back and forth, Harry suggested in a nice way that the boys find something else to play with. When the boys continued, annoyance became harassment and Harry made his suggestion in a much stronger tone of voice. It made no impression on the boys and the father seemed oblivious to what was going on.

I found myself wondering how long Harry's extraordinary patience would hold up. Finally, after suffering a direct hit on the back of his head, Harry left the anvil and went to a large wooden box where he kept his large metal rasps when their teeth became worn down. He elected two of the bigger rasps and poked them into the hot coals of his forge, next to a couple of crowbars that he was sharpening.

It became obvious to me that Harry was about to play a trick that I had seen him perform on a previous occasion. The trick was one which was guaranteed to clear the shop in seconds. Therefore, with a knowing look at the blacksmith, I quietly left the building and waited just outside the door for what I knew would happen.

The trick was to allow the rasps to get so hot that they were just about to disintegrate. When they were just right, Harry dipped his hand into the ever-present barrel of water next to his anvil and then sprinkled some of the water on the face of the anvil. Then, with long tongs he removed the melting rasps from the forge and quickly placed them above the anvil and with the same quick motion he struck the rasps with a terrific blow from a large hammer.

The effect was devastating. There was an explosion such as would come from a good-sized cannon and the shop filled from one end to the other with red hot fragments of the molten metal. Why it did not start several fires, I never clearly understood.

At any rate, there was a second great crash as Mr. Hotchkiss went over backwards in his chair and two very terrified boys went flying out the front door of the shop as fast as their legs could carry them.

The father lay on his back until he regained his bearings and struggled to his feet, swearing a blue streak about how he knew those damn kids would cause a short circuit if they kept on playing with the light bulb. He tended to forget that he had made no attempt to stop the boys from annoying Harry with their antics.

Harry went on about his work as though nothing had happened and it is doubtful that his tormentors or their father ever learned what had actually happened. They did not stay around long enough to find out and once they were gone, Harry and I had a good laugh. It is a good bet that the boys received considerably more supervision following this incident.

There are many good stories about things that happened in Harry Thomas's blacksmith shop and with one exception the ones that I relate are ones that I actually witnessed. However, there is one that is felt to be very good that happened several years before I got to know Harry. He told me this one.

I would preface the story, which I will not have room to conclude in this column, by stating that in all the years that I knew Harry Thomas, I never heard him swear. As a matter of

fact, the strongest word he ever used was damn. He used that word only once that I know of and he certainly had good reason.

Not only did Harry not swear, he did not drink and he did not smoke. This, despite the fact that some of the language used in the blacksmith shop by the teamsters was a great deal more than just salty. Somehow, he never picked up the habit and he could be considered the original Mr. Clean.

The story has to do with a horse owned by the Rev. Richard E. Shortell, and will reflect the great-personalities of both Harry and the good Father.

(Harry Thomas stories continued in #s 126 and 127.)