

'Dick's Dispatch'

Columns 176 through 200

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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#176: THE FATE OF THE PIGLET RUNT AND DOWNEY

There were many interesting farm animals at Hillscroft Farm, not the least of which was the hogs. We had two great Chester white sows that were kept for breeding purposes. Every spring, each sow would have anywhere from 10 to 16 little white pigs.

I guess everyone is familiar with the stories that have unfairly pictured pigs as being slovenly in their habits. It has been my experience that, given the opportunity, they will keep themselves as clean or cleaner than many other animals.

It is easy to generate a lot of affection for puppies, kittens, and baby chicks, as well as little calves and young colts, but we think that baby pigs are as cute as any of them. They are also highly intelligent and are great fun to watch as they run hither and thither.

One typically wet and cold day in March, a litter of 15 litter pigs was born to one of the sows. A few days before, because of the severe cold, we had moved the sow into a box stall in the horse barn, where it was much warmer.

Despite our precautions, little number 15 (the runt) was very weak and his chances of surviving did not look very good, as he could not stand up to nurse. We called a hurried meeting of our family and a vote was taken. When they saw the pitiful condition of the little pig and the ballots were counted, "Whitey" had won himself a place right next to the kitchen stove, without a dissenting vote.

A wooden box, stuffed with straw for bedding, was prepared for little Whitey. A nursing bottle, complete with rubber nipple and full of that good warm Guernsey milk, was soon being force fed to the little fellow.

Several attempts were necessary before Whitey's hunger caused him to act like a little pig. However, with everyone's tender loving care he was soon enjoying the substitute for what his brothers and sisters were getting from their mother.

After only two days in the infirmary, little Whitey had improved to where the wooden box would no longer confine him. When he climbed over the side of his box and started running around the kitchen floor, it was the signal to return him to his family.

Our kids would have liked to keep him right where he was and they roared with laughter as Whitey skidded around as he raced across the smooth tile of the kitchen floor.

The big question was whether or not the sow would accepted Whitey back into the fold. Sows are rather unpredictable and can be very cantankerous at times. With Whitey being absent for two days and 14 others to care for, there was the possibility that the little fellow might be regarded as a stranger in his own family.

It was with considerable trepidation that we opened the door to the box stall and put little Whitey inside. It was mealtime and the sow was laying full length and facing the other direction, as Whitey joined his brothers and sisters.

It is not easy to understand how the sow knew that an addition had been made to all those at the supper table. Perhaps she was good at arithmetic. At any rate, she was immediately aware that there was now another mouth to feed.

The other little pigs squealed as the sow scrambled to her feet to face the intruder. She presented an awesome picture with her huge 350-pound bulk and her large mouth half open and ready to do battle.

It was with a great feeling of relief that we heard the sow emit a couple of contented grunts as she resumed a position, satisfactory to 15 little white pigs. So, it was “welcome home” for Whitey and it is worthy of note that the little fellow soon caught up to the others in the litter in size, but we could always tell him from his brothers.

It was just a few weeks later that we encountered an unforgettable experience that concerned one of the cows. It was the first week in May and late one afternoon a cold rain started to fall. Dick Bennett put the cows in the barn and then informed me that one cow was missing. It turned out to be one that we called Downey and she was a very valuable cow.

We went looking for her and found her in a pasture, almost over to Wilton Road West. Downey stood there in the rain with her back humped up and it was obvious that she was not feeling well.

We encouraged her to get back to the barn and she responded, but with apparent difficulty. It was uphill most of the way to the barn and as we neared it, Downey seemed to be in agony.

We took Downey’s temperature as soon as we got her inside and it was 106. This was not as bad as it seems as the normal temperature of a cow is 102.5. However, we were very concerned about this fine cow, who up to this time had never shown any sign of having a problem.

Our first inclination was that Downey had somehow contracted pneumonia. With that in mind we prepared and applied a mustard plaster along her ribs. We covered the plaster with paper and covered the paper with a blanket. Then we called Dr. Walter Holcomb.

Dr. Holcomb was a young veterinarian and had taken over the practice of Dr. Knapp on New Street in Danbury. He and Mrs. Holcomb were on their way out to dinner but when we explained our problem to him he said he would be right down.

He was as good as his word and it seemed only a matter of minutes before he and Mrs. Holcomb in their Packard were flying into the barnyard. He was all dressed up but that did not deter him as he hurried to the cow barn.

Dr. Holcomb was very athletic, with a powerful physique and very muscular arms. The first thing that he did was to take off the mustard plaster and inform me that it very definitely was not pneumonia. He was the picture of self confidence, but I was not so sure. Then he announced that he felt it was hardware and I really had no idea of what he was talking about.

The next thing he did, still fully dressed, was to get down on hands and knees and crawl along with his right ear pressed against the lower left side of the cow's rib cage. Suddenly he stopped and asked me to pass his stethoscope to him. With the aid of this listening device he again traversed Downey's rib cage and stopped just before reaching her left front leg.

Now things really began to happen. The good doctor quickly made a small incision with his scalpel, after first giving Downey a local anesthetic. He then used a little saw to open a tiny window on the side of the cow.

I was then invited to look in the window, while Dr. Holcomb used his forceps to withdraw a two-inch length of old barbed wire that had traveled almost to the heart of the cow. So the wire was the hardware referred to and it apparently had been in her system a long time.

Downey could not tell us where her pain was and we will always feel that this was the greatest exhibition of the art of diagnosing an ailment that we have ever witnessed. My respect for Dr. Holcomb can best be described as immeasurable.

#177: LOVE FOR A SAD AND ANGRY LITTLE PONY

It would be my guess that most every kid would just love to have a pony. When I was a kid, it certainly was true in my case, but it never happened.

The Carl Stolle family in Farmingville had a real nice pony and we walked over there many times to visit him. In the early 20's the Walter Scott family moved to North Street, just north of St. Mary's Cemetery. Along with a couple of cows and some chickens, they brought with them two fine little ponies.

As it was just a short walk to the Scotts' new home, this was considered a very important event in my young life. All this probably kindled my determination to see that our children would someday have a pony if at all possible.

In the mid-40's Bill Patton had a number of ponies at the farm on Old South Salem Road that we once operated as Waldee Farms. When we learned that Patton was selling out, we hurried to the farm and purchased one of the ponies.

The little pony had apparently lived a rather hard existence and as a result she was not very good-natured. In fact she would not hesitate to bite or kick anyone or anything that crossed her path. Because of her very snappy disposition the pony was promptly named Ginger.

One thing about ponies and horses is that on the first day in their new home they are generally on their best behavior. Even when the horse or pony is quite ill-natured, the new environment seems to have a pacifying effect. However, after that first day everything is downhill as they quickly revert to their former bad disposition.

Under Ginger's bedraggled red and white coat, there was a good little animal, and it was up to us to bring it out by earning her confidence.

On Ginger's first day at Hillscroft Farm, there was no indication that years of frustration, spitefulness and mistrust had been stored up between those pointed little ears. It soon came out, however, and it would be some time before we felt it safe to let the children handle her. When that day finally arrived, we were very proud as Lizzie rode Ginger out of the barn for the first time.

We credit ourself with changing the pony's very disagreeable nature to one that became quite placid and amiable. At the same time we have always felt that we were aided to a great extent by Dr. Van Etten's beautiful horse, Kathleen Mavourneen, for even ponies can learn by example.

Mavourneen had the very finest disposition and her excellent manners were apparently contagious. She and Ginger became great friends and they were just about inseparable. It was great fun to see them cavorting around the paddock or racing the entire length of the fields on the western side of St. Johns Road. Several very nice homes now occupy that fine long pasture.

The Scott boys had a little stud pony and after a couple of years Ginger was bred to him. The night the little colt was foaled, there was a terrible electrical storm but since it was such an important event to our family, we all went out to the barn to see the new arrival. Ginger had become so friendly that she allowed our children to enter the box stall and put their arms around the cute little fellow when he was only a few minutes old.

Because of the electrical storm and the fact that there was a jagged white line the length of his face, the colt was aptly named "Lightning." Now Mavourneen had two little pals and when they all raced across the fields, the colt had no trouble in keeping up, as he was as fast as his name would indicate.

Dr. Van Etten used to ride Mavourneen at least once a week and we are sorry to say that we probably caused him to stop taking the rides that he enjoyed so much. However, the mare was in her mid-twenties and he rode her as if she were young and strong. She was not a big strong horse but she was full of nervous energy and loved to go at full speed and never needed any urging. She just had a great big heart and too much ambition for her size.

The doctor weighed at least 250 pounds but we did not mention that; we just noted that the mare was getting older and suggested that it would be much safer for all concerned if a slower pace were selected. However, he rode his horse at top speed, just as he drove his car, so our words fell on deaf ears.

One day without the doctor's knowledge, we took moving pictures of him and Mavourneen as they sped across the fields. The grass was high and somehow we got them at an angle that made it appear as though her belly was touching the ground. It emphasized not only his great weight but the smallness of the mare.

When the opportunity presented itself, we set up our movie projector and then invited the doctor in to see a film about the farm. He thoroughly enjoyed the pictures of the livestock but was totally unprepared for that portion of the film that was devoted to his riding habits. It seemed

to have the desired effect as it was plain that there was real danger that the mare could fall. This could have disastrous results and the possibility was graphically illustrated when we pointed out that she had stumbled slightly.

For the next few months Dr. Van Etten rode at a much slower pace and we felt that our point had been well-taken.

A much more drastic step came about one day when the doctor was present and the blacksmith came to shoe Mavourneen. During the many meetings with the blacksmith, the mare had developed a habit of standing in a rather peculiar stance while being shod. When the blacksmith worked on her left rear hoof, she would lean the right side of her butt against the side of the box stall. The procedure was reversed when the right rear hoof was being shod.

We must admit that a person seeing Mavourneen leaning in this manner for the first time might get the impression that the mare was too tired to stand. This was the first time that Dr. Van Etten had been around at shoeing time and the effect of seeing the horse leaning against the stall for support was devastating. He was so upset that he never rode Mavourneen again.

We felt very bad about his decision not to ride again because the mare was safe enough to ride at a moderate speed and the doctor always enjoyed it so much. I had the feeling that he thought I had staged the whole shoeing episode for his benefit. We encouraged him to resume his riding but once he made up his mind, there was no changing it.

Mavourneen knew the sound of the doctor's car and never failed to whinny when he drove into the farm and he never failed to visit with her and give her some sugar. She was a great mare and had won blue ribbons at several of the area horse shows. We still have one of her trophies and several of her ribbons as well as a real nice picture of her.

#178: HOW NASTY P.T. WAS REPLACED WITH RAYMOND MASSEY'S HORSE

We have been telling about the horses and ponies at Hillscroft Farm and there are a couple more stories that may prove to be of interest. They were draft horses and though not the heavy type, they were heavier than the coach horses.

There was a gasoline-powered cultivator available on the farm for use in the garden or in the cornfield but somehow it was not as satisfactory as a horse. Dr. Van Etten was a very progressive man so it would be up to me to convince him that the old-fashioned way of cultivating was superior to the modern.

Joe Donnelly and his family lived on Wilton Road West at the time and had a little farm that adjoined Hillscroft. Among other farm animals, Joe had a nice bay horse, so we borrowed him for the experiment. After cultivating only a few rows, we proved our point and got the approval to buy a horse.

Charley Sheridan had a horse in New Canaan that we felt would fill the bill and soon he was occupying the stall next to Mavourneen. The new horse was spotted brown and white and Dr. Van Etten suggested that we call him P.T. after the great P.T. Barnum, as he reminded him of a circus horse.

As it turned out, P.T. could very well have put in a shift in the circus, for he sure knew a lot of tricks. The horse was quite intelligent and there were things that he seemed to enjoy doing and there were other things that caused him to show great annoyance when he was asked to do them.

Clifford Seymour had a horse that was almost a twin of P.T. in appearance. So we got a double harness from Irving Conklin and used the two spotted horses as a team. They worked well together but when used alone P.T. sometimes lived up to his name and performed some tricks that were more adaptable to a circus performance.

When used as part of a team P.T. was a master at getting the other horse to do the greater portion of the pulling. It was a different story when he was used alone and had to do the whole job. He would pull a cultivator but when hooked to a barrow that required a stronger pull, P.T. would balk and no amount of urging or pleading would cause him to move forward.

P.T. would offer no objections to pulling any kind of sleigh, either a cutter or a wood shod sled, but he did not like drawing a wagon at all.

A wood shod sled is one that, as the name suggests, has runners made of wood. It is a low-slung vehicle, the bed of which would not be much over a foot high. It would be a little over four feet in width and probably 10 feet long, and of very solid construction as it was meant to carry real heavy loads.

To make the runners for such a sled, a young tree, preferably a hard maple about six inches in diameter, would be cut and then split along its length as perfectly as possible. The runners were then cut to proper length and three holes were bored through them and wooden pegs were fitted through the holes and driven into the runner holders on the bottom of the sled. Of course, the curved side of the runners was put on the bottom so that it would make contact with the surface over which the sled would be drawn.

This all sounds like a rather primitive conveyance, but you may be assured that it was a very efficient method of moving heavy loads during the winter. The only problem was getting it started after it had set for a while. The runners had a habit of sticking to the ice or snow, so it was necessary to carry a little crowbar along. Once the sled was shifted the slightest bit by the crowbar, the horse could easily draw an enormous load. It actually seemed that P.T. enjoyed pulling the loaded sled.

P.T. kept coming up with new tricks which we were as tolerant of as could be possible. He had an intense dislike for other horses and one day when Joe Donnelly's horse was visiting, P.T. showed the worst manners ever by kicking the other horse on the rump. It left a very jagged wound and just about sealed P.T.'s future at Hillscroft Farm.

We called Dr. Holcomb and as luck would have it, he came just about the same time as Dr. Van Etten arrived to spend the weekend. I told Dr. Van Etten what had happened and suggested that he come over to witness a fine veterinary at work. A few minutes later he came into the horse barn, just as Dr. Holcomb was about to start stitching the large gash on the horse's rump.

Dr. Van Etten stood quietly in the background as the sutures were uniting the edges of the wound and it was obvious that the great surgeon was impressed. Dr. Holcomb, of course, did a first class job and a broad smile flashed across his face, when Dr. Van Etten said that it was as neat a bit of stitching as he had seen in a long time.

It was not long after this incident that P.T. with his cantankerous ways departed from Hillscroft and we wished him well and hoped that he would catch on with some traveling circus where he belonged.

Those who dealt in cattle and horses had a way of knowing when anyone was in need of a horse or a cow and we had several cattle dealers that used to stop at Hillscroft quite often. Early one morning Charley Slapin stopped by and asked me to look at something that he had in the back of his truck.

It turned out to be a beautiful black horse. Charley told of how he had picked up the horse the night before over on Route 7. The fine animal had belonged to Raymond Massey, the celebrated actor. Massey was moving from the area and had no further use for the horse.

When we asked what he was going to do with the horse, Charley said that he guessed the horse would wind up in a glue factory. It was apparent that he was well aware of my feelings about horses and after only a few minutes of bargaining, I had purchased another horse.

We called him Thunder and we were quite pleased with the transaction that brought him to Hillscroft.

Though Thunder was a horse of great spirit, he was a very gentle animal with a disposition the exact opposite of our former horse. He performed every duty that he was called on to accomplish and never rebelled. We soon found that as well as being a willing worker, he was also an excellent road horse and could trot like the wind. Thunder was truly a gem.

When the winter snows came we decided to see how good he was on a sleigh. The Scott boys had a fine black horse and they also had a beautiful two-seated sleigh. The two horses proved to be perfectly matched and they were just as great as could be when hitched to the big sleigh.

We had (still have) a set of sleigh bells for each horse and driving them on a moonlight ride was about as great a thrill as can be imagined. One famous evening ride included Norman and Elsie Craig, Jim and Gloria Bacchiochi and Marie and me. It was just zero when we left the barn but we never noticed the cold on that moonlight night.

When Hillscroft was sold we had to part with Thunder but found a good home for him at the Holy Ghost Fathers where our Board of Education is now located [Prospect Ridge Congregate Housing in 2022].

#179: THE AMBITIOUS DOCTOR GETS A BLACK EYE

In an earlier article we characterized Dr. Royal C. Van Etten as being the best-natured person, with the worst temper that we have ever seen. He could be smiling one moment and a raging bull the next.

By the same token, he could be a raging bull and in the flick of an eyelid, change to a very charming and friendly person. It has always been my feeling that the reason he was able to live all those years was because he had discovered the secret of letting off steam. One thing was sure, he used to loosen that pressure valve at least once or twice every day.

From the earliest part of our long association, the doctor used to warn me about his terrible temper. He always told me to try and overlook things that he might say while in a temper tantrum. He did spend a considerable amount of time telling people that he was sorry for what he had said.

His admonition was accepted and I countered by informing him that no matter how annoyed I might become I never said anything that I did not mean, so he could expect no apologies from me. This seemed a rather strange way to start out.

However, we quickly came to a real good understanding and there were only one or two serious confrontations and they appeared early in a relationship that was to last 37 years. During all of that time, we were very good friends and he was a lot of fun to be with.

The doctor was a very determined man and once his mind was made up, there was no changing it. We were completely unaware that he had long harbored a secret ambition to climb to

the top of the Hillscroft Farm silo. When the silo was empty in late spring, there was an open space from its top to its bottom. This space was on the barn side of the silo and through it the corn silage was forked to be fed to the cows.

As the silo was in the process of being filled in the autumn, small doors that were some fit two feet square were placed in the open space. They were locked in place by a round metal rod that also served as a step for climbing up the silo, as each little door was secured, one atop the other.

One year after the silo had been filled, Dr. Van Etten seemed to be paying more than his usual number of visits to the cow barn and after only a few minutes, he would disappear. A little later on, in the same mysterious manner, he would reappear. This happened a number of times and our curiosity was aroused.

On one occasion we happened to meet him just as he emerged from the passageway that led to the silo. He seemed to be greatly animated and though he had a broad smile, he was breathing rather heavily, as from some kind of exertion, and it was obvious that something unusual had taken place.

When he saw my concern, the doctor explained that each time he came into the barn he practiced climbing the silo. He had progressed a little each time and on this particular day he had finally succeeded in climbing all the way to the top of the 40-foot structure.

Perhaps this does not seem to be such an outstanding accomplishment for a man who was capable of performing real delicate surgery. However, to the doctor it probably seemed as if he had scaled Mount Everest and he was elated.

When one considers the size of the man and the fact that he was in his 60s at the time, it is easier to understand why he was so proud of his achievement. As for me, I shuddered every time I think of all that weight on the little round metal steps of the silo's ladder. It was probably just as well that he had kept his desire to perform such a feat a secret.

It was with considerable relief that we received the doctor's assurance that he would rest on his laurels and not try climbing that ladder again. The whole matter just points out the tremendous determination of this man to be an achiever. It was a trait that he never lost.

There were occasions where Dr. Van Etten's penchant for performing daring feats could have had serious consequences. When the silo was being filled we used to place a 40-foot wooden ladder against its outside. The ladder was there in order that we might make any necessary repairs or adjustments to the long blower pipe through which the ensilage was blown into the silo.

One day a problem developed and I had to climb to the very top of the ladder. The problem was resolved and I was about to make my descent when I felt the ladder start to sway — I looked down and there was the doctor coming up the ladder. He wanted to see for himself just what the problem was.

The top of the ladder was tied to the top of the silo, so I reasoned that if the ladder broke in two (which I was sure it would do), I could hang on to the upper half until I was rescued.

Those on the ground said that the ladder swayed so much that its middle came right against the silo. They pleaded with the doctor to come down off the ladder and he finally did but not before I had the scare of my life.

He later explained his indiscretion by saying that he had only promised not to climb the inside ladder. With that we immediately elicited his pledge to stay away from all ladders, inside and out.

On another occasion we were gathering the hay on Mrs. John H. Lynch's estate (now the Cnngregation of Notre Dame). The doctor took one afternoon off to help with the haying. This was great fun for him and we were happy that he found so much enjoyment in what most people considered very hard work.

However, we took a dim view of his expressed desire to ride back to Hillscroft on the top of the load of hay. We pointed out all the dangers inherent to riding on a public highway atop a load of hay.

He was just as insistent and declared that he was determined to fulfill what he said was his boyhood ambition. We argued our points but to no avail and the big man clambered up on top of the load of hay.

The ride back to Hillscroft was made without incident and Dr. Van Etten was exhilarated over achieving another of his goals and we hoped that. He did not have any more that were dangerous.

We also hoped that he was satisfied and would not insist on any more rides. This was not to be, however, and as we were getting the last load of hay, he again climbed back to the perch on the top of the hay. Unfortunately this was a much larger load and on the way home to Hillscroft a low hanging limb caught the doctor in the right eye.

He did not fall from the load but we felt terrible when upon reaching Hillscroft we discovered his badly discolored eye. Actually he was lucky that he was not knocked down to the highway.

The eye became black and blue and we asked him a few days later how he explained it to his patients and to the other doctors. He said that he did not even try to explain what happened for he felt that no one would have believed him anyhow.

#180: THE DOC AND HIS TEMPER TANTRUMS

We had seen several examples of Dr. Van Etten's temper tantrums and there always seemed to be a question of whether or not they were genuine. We had a feeling that they may just have been put on for effect. This was especially true when he would go from a great show of anger to a smiling pleasantness.

There was a large oxheart cherry tree along the western side of St. Johns Road. It was so large that it extended over the entire width of the roadway and each summer it was loaded with those large, dark and delicious cherries.

The tree stood about 40 feet from the gate to the field where we used to pasture the horses. One afternoon as we were taking Mavourneen across the road to her pasture, we heard the doctor yelling at someone in a very loud voice.

It turned out that as he was walking along the road, an auto with out-of-state markers came along. There were several people in the car and as the car stopped they got out and began picking and eating the cherries that they could reach from the roadway.

This infuriated the doctor and he ordered the people to get back in their car and get out of there. He was in such a state of agitation that we became concerned about him. Apparently he had made such an impression that the people scurried back into their car and drove off, though it was our feeling that they had a perfect right to pick any cherries that hung over the roadway.

We turned the horse loose in the pasture and then approached the scene of the recent altercation, just as the car started off. When Dr. Van Etten saw me, he apparently thought I was one of the cherry pickers and continued his tirade, only now it was directed at me.

The incident had so affected him that his vision was distorted to such an extent that he failed to recognize me. It was not until I was only a few feet from him that the doctor realized whom he was shouting at and, of course, he was very embarrassed. However, in a few minutes he was smiling again, even though still denouncing those who had been eating fruit from his tree.

As for me, it must be said that this episode in our relationship served to dispel any doubts about the sincerity of his display of temper. It was for real.

When the doctor had regained his composure, I attempted to explain that the people actually had a perfect right to pick the cherries as long as they did not enter his property to do so. My remonstrances fell on deaf ears and he let me know in no uncertain terms that he knew how to deal with these obnoxious people as I did not.

Faith Venus is a niece of ours and lived in Pawling, N.Y. Faith enrolled as a student nurse at the Lenox Hill School of Nursing as she understood it to be just about the finest school of its kind.

One weekend that Dr. Van Etten spent at Hillscroft, we were discussing the operation of the estate when suddenly he said that he had noticed a student nurse at the hospital who had the name Venus on her name tag. He wondered if it was possible that she could be a relative of mine.

We informed him that Faith was a daughter of my brother Charley. We did not tell him that she had been at the hospital for several months, but kept out of his way as she, like the other students, was scared to death of him.

Dr. Van Etten had met Charley several times at Hillscroft, and was quite fond of him. As soon as he got back to the hospital he looked for Faith and when he found her, walked down the hospital hallway with his arm around her.

This was a side of the doctor that the nurses had not seen and they stared in amazement at this sudden display of affection. He has really stepped out of character in this instance, and Faith blushed profusely in surprise.

It was some time later that Faith told me about the incident and how it had made such an impression on everyone because the doctor was held in such awe by all concerned. To prove her point, Faith produced a little brochure that was put out by the nurses at Lenox Hill. On the cover of this particular issue was a cartoon which pictured a very scared nurse, fleeing from the operating room while the air around her was filled with all sorts of surgical instruments.

Obviously they had been thrown at the nurse because of some indiscretion. It could have been any one of a number of nurses, but there was no question as to who the huge doctor was who stood scowling in the doorway.

We still have the feeling that Dr. Van Etten had the capacity to use a certain amount of restraint when the occasion demanded. Knowing of his skill as a surgeon, we often wondered how he could have possibly operated if his ability was ever impaired by a sudden burst of temper.

This question was answered to a certain extent by a very prominent doctor who, during his days in training, had been assigned to assist Dr. Van Etten in an operation. He told me the story of how on the night before this particular operation, he had not had enough sleep.

On this occasion the young doctor told of how it was his duty to hold one of the clamps that kept the . incision open during the operation. Because of his lack of sleep, he may have moved ever so slightly as the operation was proceeding. He said that Dr. Van Etten did not stop his work or even look up but without showing any emotion said from the corner of his mouth: "One more move like that, Theodore, and you will be minus one finger."

For all his great size, the doctor was extremely quick. This was especially true of his mind and his hands. When you talked with him, you would find your own mind racing, just to keep up with him. He was always way ahead.

His hands were unusually small for such a big man, but they were very strong and very sure as well as being so very quick. Sometimes they were a little too quick. During the war, coal was in short supply and it was being used to heat the doctor's home at 121 East 62nd Street. During this period he called the firm from which he purchased coal and ordered five tons.

When the truck arrived he was waiting for it and he found that it was carrying only one ton. He questioned the driver as to why he brought only one ton and then quickly two mistakes were made.

The first mistake was made by the driver of the coal truck for in a very insolent manner he informed the doctor that he was lucky to get even one ton. The second mistake was made by the doctor when he reached up into the cab of the truck, pulled the driver out. and smacked him in the nose.

This caused an awful lot of trouble as the truck driver had the doctor arrested. The doctor was well aware of the trouble he was in and got a very eminent attorney, James Madison Blackwell, who was a relative of Mrs. Van Etten.

The lawyer soon recognized that his biggest problem was with the doctor himself who still felt that he was right in what he had done and would have welcomed a return engagement. The courtroom proceedings must have amounted to a classic and they strained the attorney's physical as well as mental capacity in just keeping the antagonists apart.

#181: A BUS CRASH AND PATIENT SUNBURN

It would be fair to say that Hillscroft Farm was the essence of tranquility and served as a restful haven for a big-city surgeon from the pressures of his profession. This fact was well

known to Dr. Royal C. Van Etten and he thoroughly appreciated the serene atmosphere of this beautiful estate.

It was the perfect place for the doctor to unwind and twice a week he would drive up from New York City to do just that. There were many times when the visit would be a short one. It was not unusual for him to drive in and then get a call that would send him flying back to the hospital.

When he came to Hillscroft, he was never more than an hour from his patients. He was the most dedicated man that I have ever met.

The mansion at Hillscroft was closed down each year on Nov. 1 and the only thing left working within it was the telephone. Until the house was again opened on April 15, the doctor would use the chauffeur's apartment over the horse barn. He had long since dispensed with the use of a chauffeur, as he could never find one that could drive fast enough for him.

The apartment over the horse barn had steam heat that was furnished by a coal fired furnace and it was really quite cozy. Before he would go out for his walk, the doctor would use the apartment to change his clothes and don his felt boots and when his walk was completed he could use the place to shower.

Probably there are not very many who remember felt boots. They were quite heavy and cumbersome, but they were very warm and were great for anyone who had to be out in the snow and cold. The doctor knew well the importance of avoiding cold feet and he still had a pair of Ball-Band felt boots when he passed on many years later.

The doctor loved that walk around the farm and he would always make it regardless of the weather. To breathe in the fresh unpolluted air was a real treat for him. The weather never kept him away and I can attest to that.

On one occasion, during Christmas week in 1947, we had a real heavy snow that actually was of blizzard proportions. Somehow the doctor drove all the way from New York, under terrible driving conditions. When he got to St. Johns Road he found that it had not been plowed. So he called me from Wilton Road West and I used the large farm tractor to tow him through the snow drifts on the remaining half mile of his trip.

This time he stayed only a few minutes and then I towed him back to Wilton Road West. The important thing was that he was determined to make that trip and to him it was just another achievement.

On another occasion, he and Mrs. Van Etten arrived late one January afternoon. It was one of those cold rainy days and the temperature was dropping rapidly. As they started back for New York it was apparent that the roads were just a sheet of ice.

At the time, New York state was not noted for sanding its highways and about an hour after they left, our telephone rang. As you have already guessed, it was Dr. Van Etten. He had been involved in an accident over in Bedford and would I come over and see what could be done. We had company and we were just sitting down to our evening meal and I did not relish the idea of driving over the state line on those terrible roads.

Of course I started out, but with an incredible display of good common sense, I first called Louis DeVantery and asked that he bring his wrecker and meet me in Bedford. Louis operated the garage where Pamby Motors is now located, on the corner of Danbury Road and Grove Street.

Louis was a very dependable soul and we both arrived about the same time at the scene of the accident. It was then revealed that the doctor had tangled with a Greyhound bus almost head on. His left front fender was bent back over the left front wheel in such a manner as to prevent the wheel from turning.

Fortunately no one was injured and Louis, by using the hoist on his tow truck, was able to straighten out the fender. Louis was very practical and things were so much more simple to correct in those days.

As always, Dr. Van Etten's major concern was for a patient that he must visit in the hospital. When he was assured that the car was capable of continuing on its journey, he sped off in a flood of unheeded warnings about the dangerous conditions of the highways. The doctor really did live for his patients and they were always uppermost in his mind.

There was another snowy Sunday when he started out for Ridgefield and while he was en route, we received a phone call and a request that he call the hospital when he arrived. We delivered the message when he drove in a few minutes later and he ran to our cottage to make the call.

The conversation went like this. "I want to speak to the nurse in charge."

"You are speaking to the nurse in charge."

"Oh no, no one would go away and leave a d—— fool like you in charge. Now get me someone else."

I have always felt that there was something about a telephone that seemed to irritate the doctor. It sure brought out the worst in him and the girls who worked as Ridgefield telephone operators lived in fear of his thundering voice and sharp tongue. That was in the days when the telephone office was on the second floor over where the Roma Pizzeria is now.

There were occasions when the doctor was entirely justified in blowing his top. We can recall a bitter cold Sunday afternoon when he arrived and told me he had only time for a quick walk as he had to visit a patient at the hospital. He rushed up to the apartment and changed his clothes and we saw him trudging through the snow at the far end of the farm. He always walked rapidly and soon was back at the apartment.

He rushed up the stairs and disrobed before jumping into the shower. Suddenly Marie called out that someone wanted the doctor on the phone right away. It appeared to be an emergency and the doctor did not even bother to dry himself but simply wrapped a huge towel around himself and came bounding down the stairway.

It was necessary for him to cross more than 100 feet of open space between the horse barn and the cottage. This would have been no problem if he had been properly dressed. However, the temperature at the time was just minus five degrees and he was nearly naked as he raced across the lawn.

The phone call turned out to be from a patient who had gone on vacation to Miami, against his wishes. Now she was on the phone to complain that she had contracted a slight case of sunburn.

Her sunburn was nothing compared to the burn that the doctor did. His remarks cannot be printed here but suffice to say that it was one of the rare occasions that I ever heard him dress down a patient.

#182: ONE LAST TEMPER TANTRUM

One more example of Dr. Van Etten's remarkable temper is offered for your consideration and then we will rest our case.

On this occasion the doctor sailed in the driveway as we were closing up the mansion for the winter. He jumped out of his car and ran pell-mell through the house to the telephone in the sunroom and attempted to make a call.

This was in the days before the dialing system was put into use, which meant that you must furnish the operator with a number and she (or he) would then make the necessary connection to complete your call.

It soon became apparent that he was having difficulty in making connection and he was so intent on what he was doing that he did not see me just outside the room. Several times he went through the rudiments of making the call without success. With each attempt, the doctor's attention would rise and it soon became obvious that there would be an explosion.

The telephone at this time was one that stood quite erect and an integral part of the system was a black box, about eight inches wide, ten inches in length and about four inches deep. The phone was connected to the box and the box was secured to the wall of the room near the phone.

Suddenly, with his patience exhausted, the doctor ripped the telephone and the black box right off the wall. Then to complete this display of physical force, he hurled both the phone and box against the wall and stormed out of the room.

I walked around to the door of the house just as the enraged doctor, with a scowl on his face, emerged. When he saw me, his countenance went through a complete transformation and with a big smile, he said. "Richard, I guess that I will have to use your telephone."

"I think not," I answered. "I may need to use it myself."

With that I offered to take him into town where he could use a pay phone and he readily agreed. Along the way to town, he told of how it was imperative that he make this phone call and the stupid operator kept connecting him with a funeral parlor.

We stopped at the Benjamin Franklin 5 & 10 cent store, where the Allan Brothers store is now, at 440 Main Street. The doctor had written down the telephone number and he handed it to me with the request that I place the call for him.

I gave the number to the operator, just as he had recorded it and as you have probably already guessed, found myself talking to a funeral director. Yes. that "stupid" operator had goofed again. Then, by use of the telephone directory, we finally got the correct number.

The doctor had another side which surfaced on a few occasions. They were instances in which he seemed to have less confidence in himself than others who knew him well did.

One time he came alone to Hillscroft and he seemed to be deeply troubled about something. He walked around, completely absorbed in his thoughts and did not speak to anyone.

I was bursting with inquisitiveness but knew that it was best to hide it. Finally he came over and asked if I remembered him speaking of Miss Richardson, who was head of the Nursing School at Lenox Hill Hospital. When I answered in the affirmative, he told me of how a cancer had developed and she needed an operation in a matter of days. The problem was that she had asked that Dr. Van Etten perform the operation.

He then reminded me of how he had always said that, if people who were close to him needed surgery, he would get the very best surgeon for them rather than do the operation himself. My only comment was that I was completely surprised that a thing like that would upset him. He whirled around and snapped "and what is that supposed to mean?"

I hurriedly explained that he must know that a person of Miss Richardson's stature provided her with the luxury of being able to select the best surgeon in the country and that he should be proud and consider it a great honor that this great lady wanted him to do the job.

The good doctor looked at me and the perplexed expression vanished from his face and he said, "Richard, I never thought of it that way."

With that the doctor jumped into his old car and roared off on his way back to the city. The operation must have been quite successful, for Miss Richardson lived many more years.

Of course there was no charge for the operation, but the well-known lady gave the doctor a beautiful Atmos clock. The clock passed on to his grandchildren, but they are unaware of the nice story of how their grandfather acquired the clock.

We referred to his car as being "old." because he would never buy a new car. For many years, the new cars carried on their dashboards a brass plate that warned of the perils of exceeding 35 miles per hour for the first 500 miles.

There was just no way that the doctor could restrict himself to such a pace for that period of time, so he bought cars that were, in his words, "well broken in." He kept his cars in excellent running condition, changing to new tires every 7,000 miles and a new battery every six months.

Many are the stories about the speed at which the doctor sailed over the highways. My favorite was about the time that a policeman stopped him in New Canaan.

He was on his way for a brief visit to Hillscroft and as usual he was racing along the Merritt Parkway. The exit at New Canaan was a perfect spot for police to apprehend those who had become accustomed to the high speeds of the parkway. Then that long straight stretch into New Canaan looked so inviting.

There was a drastic reduction in the speed limit as one exited from the parkway and no doubt the doctor failed to slow down. So the officer had him dead to rights and the MD on his license plate was not going to help him this time. Nor would the numerous excuses that he must have collected through the years. The preliminary questions were asked and license and registration were examined and the policeman was preparing to write out a ticket.

The officer's car was parked some distance from the doctor's car and suddenly, the radio in the police car started to crackle. The officer, who incidentally wore badge number 11, apparently could not hear the message, but the doctor heard something about a brush fire on Smith Ridge.

The cop asked the doctor what he heard and, without any hesitation, Dr. Van Etten said, "There is an armed robbery in progress at New Canaan National Bank."

Needless to say the officer never completed the ticket and as he sped off to what he felt was a much more serious crime, the agile-minded old doctor had a good laugh for himself.

#183: WHEN CHARLIE WAS SANTA

His name was Charles, and most everyone called him Uncle Charlie — that is, except at this time of the year when he became a very famous character, in a bright red suit, and a long white beard. Of course, we are referring to the one and only, Uncle Charlie Ashbee.

More than 60 years ago, Charlie and his wife, the former Ida Smith, lived at 3050 Grand Concourse, in The Bronx. They used to come to Ridgefield quite often to visit the James Smith family on North Salem Road and later at the Smiths' farm on Barry Avenue. Big Jim Smith was Ida's brother.

Like everyone else who came to visit in Ridgefield, the Ashbee grew to love our favorite town. Charlie made up his mind and Ida agreed, that when he retired, they would buy a lot and build a home in Ridgefield.

Charlie had been an executive for some 30 years with a large insurance company. The Ashbees were so anxious to get to Ridgefield that Charlie took an early retirement in 1928 at age 55. In those days early retirements were not common, but then Charlie was not common either.

The Ashbees bought a good-sized lot from Arthur Carnall on Wilton Road West. The lot was where the old Ridgefield Fair and Cattle Show took place more than 100 years ago. Then they built what must have been their dream house and it shows that they must have put a lot of thought to it. It is a very attractive house and few, if any, in our town, are like it.

After living in The Bronx, the place on Wilton Road West must have seemed like a spacious ranch to the Ashbees, when they moved into their new home in early 1929. Both Charlie and Ida were friendly, outgoing people and they fit right into the social life of their adopted town.

Charlie wasted no time in getting involved in local affairs. About the time he arrived in town, the Promoters Club was being reorganized as the Ridgefield Lions Club. Charlie jumped right in and became one of the original members of the new club. Thirty years later, the Lions Club had a big party at the Inn at Ridgefield. They called it Uncle Charlie's Night and it was a well deserved tribute to this fine gentleman, for his years of service to the club, the community as a whole and especially the kids whose lives were made brighter by his annual visits.

It was at a Lions Club Christmas party that Charlie's role as the man in the red suit began. Someone was needed to act as the man with the long white beard and as usual Charlie volunteered. Little did he, or anyone else, realize that this would develop into a tradition, in a town noted for traditions. He certainly must have been the longest running show in Ridgefield's history.

Charlie got to be such an important part of the Christmas season that letters addressed to the man at the North Pole were rerouted to him. He would never fail to visit the home of the little kid that wrote the letter. In many cases he was able to locate a toy that a youngster had asked for.

When he did he would take it along with him and leave it with the parents, to be put under the tree. Bill Sturges was a great help in this connection as all year long he collected and repaired toys.

To say that the kids loved Charlie would be a gross understatement. Not only the kids, but grownups as well thought that he was just the greatest. Many people who are grandparents today, were visited by Charlie when they themselves were little ones. These people all have fond memories of him.

It was quite a distance from the Ashbee home on Wilton Road West to the business area and when we saw Charlie walking to town each day, we suspected that it was a part of his health program. Such was not the case. What we did not know was that Charlie had never learned to drive a car.

Charlie's brother-in-law, Big Jim Smith, was a rural mail carrier and when Jim wanted to take some time off, he asked Charlie if he would substitute for him on the mail route. Charlie, agreeable as always, said that he was willing to learn to operate Jim's old Dodge. The Smiths lived on Barry Avenue where Paul Korker lives now and they had a farm on which there was an orchard. Jim acted as Charlie's tutor and helped him familiarize himself with the brakes, the steering apparatus, etc., and then took him out into the orchard where he charted a course among the apple trees. Charlie soon mastered the operation of the vehicle and announced that he was ready to deliver the mail.

Jim Smith's mail route was in the northern section of town and included the Ridgebury area. The houses were a considerable distance apart as this was some time before developments started to spring up. The people along the mail route liked Big Jim, but they considered it a rare treat whenever Charlie filled in for him. Charlie's personality would be best described as effervescent and the people looked forward to his visits.

Jim Smith had a sideline in which he dealt in furs and collected the hides of foxes, skunks, muskrats, raccoons, and rabbits. All of these animals were in abundance along Jim's mail route. Therefore, he established a trap line and set steel traps under each of the many bridges along the way. Jim would check the traps each day anything that he caught was put in the trunk of his car. Charlie was expected to check the traps when he did the mail route. He did stop and examine each one but after doing the route several times, it was noted that he did not bring back any game.

The reason was quite simple. Charlie could not stand the thought of trapping any animal. If he found anything in a trap, he would release it. If there was nothing in the trap, Charlie would spring it so that nothing would be caught in it. He was a kind man.

Charlie never ran for any major elected office in town government. If he had he would have been a shoo-in, because of his popularity. He did serve several terms as registrar of voters. Charlie served for many years as a valued vestryman at St. Stephen's Church.

In his younger days, Charlie, who was a great lover of sports, was a very good left-handed pitcher. He used to umpire the baseball games and he was exceptionally good at settling disputes. His word was always taken as the players had a lot of respect for him.

He also used to keep score at the Congregational Church Bowling Alleys for the big pin bowling league. We well remember one occasion when a violent dispute erupted between two very angry, very big and very tough bowlers.

As they were about to tear each other apart, Charlie jumped from behind the bench on which he was keeping score. He threw his cap on the floor and jumped between the huge gladiators and announced that if there was going to be any fighting, he would do it. No doubt he

saved someone from serious injury, as the sight of this great little man serving as a buffer between the big fellows, caused everyone to laugh. All agreed that his quick action had quelled a potentially dangerous situation.

Charlie developed several nice hobbies during his long life span. He had a real fine stamp collection but his greatest collection was of autographs and especially those of Presidents of the United States. He had them all, with the exception of George Washington. He also had the autographs of Civil War Generals, missing only J.E.B. Stuart and Stonewall Jackson.

The Ashbees sold their home on Wilton Road West in 1946 to Elmer Q. Oliphant. In case you never heard of Ollie, he was the greatest athlete ever to graduate from West Point. He was on everyone's All-Time All American Football Team.

Charles Francis Ashbee received many tributes and he deserved every one. He was the first to receive the Citizen of the Year Award from the Ridgefield Rotary Club.

One year after his passing in 1962, the road Ashbee Lane, off Route 7 was named in his memory.

Uncle Charlie continued his role of the man in the red suit, at this time of year, until his 88th birthday. At that time he was a patient at Altnacraig on High Ridge and felt bad that he could not go out to visit his kids. So the procedures were reversed and his kids all came to see him. It was a great tribute to a great man.

#184: THE NIGHT THAT MUSICIANS LIVE FOR

The boys in the dance band will tell you that they play for peanuts all year and then New Year's comes along and that makes it all worthwhile. This is the night that musicians live for and for the people who go out to dance on that night, the sky is the limit.

A musician who does not have a job on New Year's Eve is a very unhappy one. To him, New Year's Eve is like the World Series is to a baseball player or like the Super Bowl is to a football player.

We can remember a lot of New Year's Eves and some of them could possibly be of some interest. There was the one in 1934, when we played at the I.A.M.A.S. Hall on Prospect Street. The building is much bigger today as a couple of additions have been made to it since that time.

There was a tremendous crowd that night and there was very little room to dance. Popular songs at the time were Star Dust, Time on My Hands and Moonglow. Aldo Casagrande (Gene's Dad) led the band that night. He was an excellent cornetist and played several other instruments as well.

Aldo was right at home, no matter what kind of music the affair called for. When we played at Miller's Hall, the call was for Polish music and at Vasa Hall, it would be Swedish. Of course the favorite music in the hall on Prospect Street was Italian and in this field no one could hold a candle to Aldo Casagrande and he knew all that music by heart.

At some time during that particular New Year's celebration, the crowd suddenly pushed back and made a circle on the dance floor. Then, out of the crowd stepped Benvenuto Carboni and his wife, Assunta. As if on signal, Aldo started to play Farlanda, a traditional Italian folk song and the couple went into their dance.

The theme of this folk dance was to depict the courting procedures of a bull and a cow. It was a very lively dance and the gestures of the dancers were very expressive as they whirled around each other.

Assunta could outdance several partners and when the dance finally ended, the applause was deafening. It was all great fun, for both the dancers and the audience.

Another New Year's, we played with Jim Bacchiochi, Andy Bloomer and Paul Waldarke at a place on High Ridge Road, between Pound Ridge and Stamford. It was a nightclub named Laurel Lodge and it was rumored that the owner was a gangster. His name was Moll and perhaps that gave it the connotation.

At any rate this was a very modern nightclub and it was decorated in a very ornate manner. One of its unusual features was that much of it was built below ground level. I well remember the eerie feeling that came over us when we descended into the lower area of the club. That feeling was not alleviated by the huge tanks of exotic fish that lined the walls. I found myself wondering if one of those tanks might harbor some piranha.

While we were playing a snow storm was raging outside and when we started for home at four in the morning, it looked like trouble ahead. Paul and I chose to try it up Tator's Hill and after a lot of pushing, we finally made it. Jim and Andy decided to pass up that route and tried going over West Mountain. They got stuck and did not get home until noon.

One New Year's we played at the Gothic House in Westport. This place was right where Manero's Steak House is today. It was a fine old mansion and no doubt had a great history. It must have had a charmed life as it ran all through the Prohibition era.

On this New Year's, Prohibition had only recently been repealed and the owner must have still stocked some of what they used to call bathtub gin. After we had played a few numbers, the owner came over and asked if we would play a popular song, Annie Doesn't Live Here Any More. It just so happened that his wife's name was Annie and she worked at the Gothic Club. Annie was an exceptionally large woman and when we finished playing the request, she lumbered over to us carrying a tray with glasses that looked as if they contained water. With a flourish Annie announced that the glasses contained gin and the drinks were on the house.

We were not quite sure whether the gin was being tendered in appreciation for playing the song, or whether she disapproved of it. Our feelings leaned toward the latter for as Annie set the tray on the piano, one of the glasses tipped over and splashed onto the piano. In a matter of minutes the veneer on that piano started to curl up! It was a sure deterrent for any young fellow who had contemplated the sampling of gin that night.

Several years later, we were furnishing the music at the Mayflower Grille in Danbury. Actually, the Mayflower was our home base and we played there Friday, Saturday and Sunday for nine years.

Each year I made eggnog for the boys in the band to enjoy at midnight on New Year's Eve until it became sort of a ritual. This eggnog was made from a recipe that I got from Louis Courtney, Sr. He called it Virginia Eggnog and it was different from any we ever had.

The recipe called for a dozen eggs, a can of condensed milk, a quart of heavy cream, a quart of “hard” cider, a pint of rye whiskey, and a pint of Jamaican rum. It was seasoned with some brown sugar and nutmeg. When this was all properly put together it made a very pleasing, albeit a very potent, drink. The boys all seemed to look forward to having a taste of this eggnog.

On this New Year's Eve complications arose early in the evening when our first little daughter began sending signals that she was getting ready to make a grand entrance into the world. Dr. Joseph Bell was called and it was his decision that Marie spend the night in Norwalk Hospital even though he was confident that the baby would not arrive until the next day. It was a wise move because of the holiday traffic and the fact that a storm was brewing.

While Marie made ready for the trip to Norwalk. I began to make the eggnog. I became so engrossed in what I was doing that I failed to see Marie as she returned and sat watching the proceedings. I was in the middle of breaking the eggs when a noise caused me to look up and I could see by the look on her face that there was nothing appetizing in the picture that was presented.

The fathers were not allowed in the delivery room in those days; in fact, the less the doctors and nurses saw of them, the better. So after getting things settled at the hospital there was a race to Danbury and the Mayflower. The boys had their eggnog and we played until 3 am. I was home by 3:30 and just a few minutes later the phone rang and you just know that it was Dr. Bell, telling me that things were about to happen.

So there was another wild ride to Norwalk at 4:20. Elizabeth Ann became the very first baby born at Norwalk Hospital that year.

There can be no question that this was our most exciting and most eventful and the happiest of New Years.

#185: SONNY BLOWS IT AS A FARMER

It was some weeks ago that we interrupted our story about the upper part of High Ridge Avenue to tell about one person who would own the place that was built by E. P. Dutton. Our story about Dr. Royal C. Van Etten and his Hillscroft Farm was just about concluded when we again interrupted to do a couple of columns that were in keeping with the holiday season.

So now we are back to the year 1951 and Hillscroft is up for sale. The price was \$120,000 and included 89 acres that stretched along both sides of St. Johns Road, a large horse barn, with an apartment over it, a hay barn, a fine dairy building, a three-car garage, a very modern chicken house, numerous sheds, a fine superintendent's cottage, an excellent mansion, and several formal gardens.

As might be expected, a great number of people came to see Hillscroft. Most of them came out of curiosity, but all seemed to admire the beautiful place and its commanding view of Long Island Sound and the Island itself.

Finally a man came from Cleveland. His name was Samuel Tell and he was an importer of bananas and coffee. Sam walked in the front door of the mansion and walked out the back door. In less than five minutes he made up his mind to buy Hillscroft.

We found this to be little short of amazing as he still had not seen the many wonderful things the place had to offer in addition to the mansion. Mrs. Tell seemed to concur in the decision.

The Tells had a daughter who had only recently married and we soon got the impression that Sam's hasty decision to buy Hillscroft was motivated to a great extent by the fact that it would provide an opportunity for the son-in-law to unleash his super-abundant store of energy.

This young man had done some farming in Ohio and the overall plan called for him to operate Hillscroft as a working farm.

It was arranged for me to stay for a month and show the son-in-law, whom we will call "Sonny," the ropes. He seemed like a pleasant young man but fancied himself as an expert in the field of agriculture. I gave up my teaching chores when it became apparent that he placed no value whatever on the advice that was offered.

The very first day on the job, Sonny got off on the wrong foot. He took the large Allis Chalmers farm tractor and proceeded to plow up the very finest asparagus bed that I have ever seen. The bed was just three years old and it had received a lot of tender, loving care that would guarantee top production for many years to come. It seemed like a very senseless act and Sony was made aware of our feelings on the matter.

It was fall plowing time, so the very next day Sonny decided to plow the large field on the north end of the farm. Perhaps there were no stones in the Ohio fields that he was accustomed to. At any rate, he had not gone far before he had wrecked the plows and had to quit while additional plow shares were purchased. There would be many more broken shares before that field was plowed.

The final straw was Sonny's decision to sell the registered Guernsey bull that we were so proud of. This bull had sired some beautiful heifers and we had great hopes for the future. We had good reason to believe that in just a short time, the bull would be worth several thousand dollars. However, he was sold to a cattle dealer, to be used for beef.

So the bull brought a grand total of \$50. The cattle dealer was astounded but managed to hide a big smile as he drove away with his prize.

The dealer told me later of how he was well aware of the value of the animal, and had no intentions of taking him to the slaughter house. Instead, the bull was sold to a farmer on Mill Plain Road in Danbury for some 15 times what the dealer had paid for him. So the farmer was elated over his acquisition and it is a good deal that makes everyone happy. It was years later that we learned that the bull had proven himself and was actually more valuable than we had supposed.

In retrospect, I guess that such things that transpired made it a little easier to leave Hillscroft. We sure did not want to be around for the actual demise of that beautiful estate. It was my feeling that the farm would not last a year under the new owners.

It was 11 months later that the place was again sold, this time to the William Phillips family. Bill, his wife, and three children appeared to be just what Hillscroft needed. He had been

an executive with a large frozen foods company and perhaps was attracted by the very rich soil at Hillscroft, as well as the sheer beauty of the place.

The dairying part of the farm did not seem to interest Bill Phillips, so he wisely engaged William Royal to operate that part of the enterprise. They did well for a while but values were rapidly changing and I guess the land had become so much more valuable for development purposes that the farm had to go.

It certainly became a very fine development and many of the builders are reminders of past glories. We were happy to see that some of the orchard was preserved and it brings back fond memories of the fine cider we used to make. We used Fall Pippins to give it smoothness and Russets to give it sparkle.

Two barrels were made, one of which was purchased each year from the bakery. It would be one that brought jelly to the bakers for the jelly doughnuts. The jelly would be extracted from the barrel by use of a giant syringe, which then was used to inject the jelly into the doughnuts.

It was impossible to remove all the jelly so there would be a good coating left inside the barrel. This jelly blended nicely with the cider as it aged, and the result was a very pleasant drink that was very much like champagne.

Back to 1951. With the arrival of the Tells from Cleveland, the Venus family and the Van Etten had to move. Dr. Van Etten had become interested in several local places, as he did not want to leave Ridgefield, which is easy to understand. His favorite place was the former Dutton estate next to Altnacraig at 63 High Ridge.

These large mansions were not selling at the time and this substantial structure with its garage and three and one half lovely acres was offered to Dr. Van, Etten for \$21,000 [\$227,000 in 2022 dollars]. Actually he could have bought it for less, but he did not quibble; he placed a binder on it even before he had a chance to tour the mansion.

These prices may seem ridiculous when weighed against what people must pay today, but they just go to show what 35 years can do.

Dr. Van Etten asked me to accompany him on his visit to the Dutton mansion and produced a key that was to give us entrance. However, a screen door that was hooked on the inside prevented our access to the door in which the key would be used.

#186: HOW THE DOCTOR HANDLED A YOUNG REPORTER

On a very nice September afternoon in 1951, Dr. Royal C. Van Etten placed a binder on the Dutton mansion at 63 High Ridge. He did this without ever setting foot inside the old house and received a key for the front door so that he could further examine the place that had caught his fancy.

Apparently the last person to leave the house had hooked the screen door from the inside and then departed by way of another door. The key that we had would not fit any of the other doors and the doctor, who was always in a hurry, was becoming quite agitated.

Suddenly I remembered a very thin screwdriver that was in a tool box in our car. It was almost as slender as an ice pick and bent only a couple of the tiny wire squares as it was being

inserted through the screen. The screwdriver slid easily under the hook which when lifted, gave us access to the door. In later years, the doctor had great fun giving his version of how we gained entrance to the mansion for the first time.

The doctor was delighted with the simple beauty of the great mansion and immediately decided to complete the purchase. It would be his home for the next 30 years, and no one else ever owned it for that length of time.

It seemed like an awfully large house for just the two of them. He explained this away by stating that it was his intention to use every bit of the house. He did this by taking off his tie in one room, his shirt in another, etc. My own feeling was that he enjoyed the big house because it made him a little more difficult to find.

As soon as ownership passed into his hands, Dr. Van Etten had the toilet that sat in the middle of his bedroom, as described in Dispatch #164, removed. The very next thing he did was to visit Lovell's store in Newtown, where he purchased a Farmall Cub tractor. With the tractor he got a set of three reel lawnmowers, a snow plow, a land plow and a disk harrow. The whole outfit cost \$900 and had to be one of the best deals ever.

That little tractor was to last until the doctor passed away 30 years later and was as good as new after all those years. It must have traveled a good many miles on that big three acre lawn and the doctor drove it himself, until he was 88 years of age and he always went at top speed.

He really was a remarkable man. Up to that time his movements were still quick and he still possessed that great energy that was the envy of those much younger than he. It was said that when he breezed down the corridors of the hospital, the tails of his white jacket stood out so straight behind him that you could have played a game of checkers on them.

Dr. Van Etten's youthful enthusiasm was fueled by an abiding interest in just about everything that went on around him. He never stopped learning and even after he retired he continued to read his medical books and kept abreast of new developments in the field of research. While he never had time for TV while conducting his practice, in later years he made good use of it.

The doctor's interest in the exploration of outer space was so intense that even in his 90's he would arise early in the morning hours to watch the launching of a spaceship.

Not all of his interests were so lofty and some were even quite earthy. When I had the retail milk business that operated under the name Dic-Rie Dairy, he delighted in riding in the milk truck and exploring parts of Ridgefield and the surrounding towns that he had not seen. This was especially true of the Silvermine area where some of his patients resided, although he would caution me not to tell them that he was in the truck.

Most doctors will refuse to talk about their relationship with a patient and Dr. Van Etten was no exception. However, on occasion he would offer some information, especially if it had to do with a former patient.

In the 40's the star hitter and famous first baseman of the Detroit Tigers baseball team married an equally famous New York girl, who happened to be a patient of Dr. Van Etten's. The

good doctor had never had much time to spend watching sporting events. However, in no time he became a Tiger fan and could reel off league standings and batting averages with ease.

The young couple had their first child and it turned out to be a girl. This was rather disappointing as it was expected that the little one would follow in the father's footsteps and become a baseball star.

The couple moved to Detroit and when the next baby was expected they went to a Detroit doctor. We expressed the feeling that the reason the couple switched to a Detroit doctor was to avoid commuting to New York.

Dr. Van Etten did not look at it that way and always felt that it was because he did not produce a boy on the first try. Needless to say he became a New York Yankee fan and remained one.

Jack Sanders found out first hand how reluctant the doctor was to talk about his medical practice or his patients. Jack came to the mansion to interview the fine old gentleman on his 90th birthday.

The three of us sat on the front porch that Aug. 2, 1976, amidst congratulatory messages from the President, the senators, the governor and many others. Jack employed his ample expertise as he manfully tried to elicit from the doctor an interesting story about some of his famous patients. Each time a name was mentioned, such as Tina Louise, the agile-minded old doctor would direct the conversation in another direction.

When Jack asked about America's Sweetheart, Mary Pickford, the doctor went off on a tangent. Turning to Jack he asked "Did I ever tell you about the house that used to stand between this house and Altnacraig?" Without waiting for an answer he launched into a story that I had told him years before. However, he gave it the most unbelievable twist.

The correct story appeared in Dispatch #160 and concerned the lovely house now owned by the Jack Sherrys at 72 High Ridge. It told of the monumental task performed by Caro Northrup, his men and his horses.

The doctor not only had a rare sense of humor, he had the knack of telling a story in such a manner as to turn a routine subject into a matter of earthshaking importance. Knowing the doctor, I guessed what was coming. Jack, however, in anticipation of a sensational story, was listening and writing furiously.

The old doctor said that Mrs. Hepburn, who lived and owned Altnacraig at the time, did not like the house standing so close to her house so she waited until the family had gone out shopping one day and got two of her men with ropes and pulled it across the street.

I will never forget the look of incredulousness on Jack's face as he stopped writing and then put his pencil away.

It would take several books to tell the great story of Dr. Royal C. Van Etten, but he left nothing but the gigantic files on his patients to assist one in writing it.

#187: THE YOUNG DOCTOR'S FABULOUS JOURNEY

In a previous column, concerning the famous people who have lived on High Ridge Avenue, we noted that Dr. Royal C. Van Etten had graduated *cum laude*, first in his class, from Columbia Medical, in 1910. Four years previously he had graduated with the same honors from Amherst. So now he was a young doctor, going out to face the world and he was well prepared.

At the time, it was not unusual for the very wealthy families to engage a physician for just about their exclusive use. It so happened that shortly after Dr. Van Etten graduated, Arthur Curtiss James was planning a trip around the world on his fabulous yacht, the Aloha.

Dr. Van Etten's credentials were very impressive and the fact that he was a 1906 graduate of Amherst did not hurt a bit. Mr. James was a loyal son of Amherst, class of 1889.

The doctor was anxious to broaden his knowledge of the world at large but did not feel that he could spare the time for the whole trip. When he was approached by Mr. James, the doctor explained his feelings on the matter and James quickly offered to solve the problem by employing a second doctor to complete the last stages of the trip.

Just in case you never heard of Arthur Curtiss James, and chances are very good that you have not, he was one of the ten richest men in the country. Born in New York City in 1867, into a wealthy family that had always maintained a low profile, young Arthur was not one to rest on the laurels of his father and grandfather, both of whom had been very successful businessmen.

The grandfather, Daniel James, was a founder of Phelps, Dodge & Company in 1834. His son, Arthur's father, joined Daniel and expanded the company's interest in the mining of copper and railroading.

Arthur, upon graduating, jumped right into the family enterprises and three years later became one of the partners in Phelps, Dodge. Fifteen years later, in 1907, on the death of his father, Arthur became the largest stockholder in the company.

He then started to devote much of his time to railroading and acquired interests in such rail lines as El Paso & South Western, Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific, Northern Pacific, The Great Northern, Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, Southern Pacific, Western Pacific, and Rio Grand Western.

Linking together these various rail lines had become a passion with Arthur James and by the early 30's he had major interest in more than 40,000 miles of railroad.

Men of much less influence than Arthur Curtiss James would become household names but his activities were always rather subdued as far as publicity was concerned. This was especially true of his many philanthropic ventures. It appeared that he intended it to be that way.

Mr. James and his wife, the former Harriet Eddy Parsons, had no children, so without any fanfare their great wealth was distributed among several, very fortunate beneficiaries. He gave away more than \$20 million during his lifetime. When he died in 1941, James left \$25 million to create the James Foundation, for the purpose of aiding several institutions that he had helped during his lifetime. In 1965 that foundation had disbursed more than \$144 million.

We had a friend, Philip P. Masterson, who lived just over the line on West Lane. Phil was an appraiser, and in fact the biggest of the professional appraisers. He appraised the J.P. Morgan,

the Marshall Field and Vanderbilt estates, but it was with glowing terms that he described the Arthur Curtiss James estates, in New York City, Newport, Miami and Tarrytown. You quickly got the impression that he thought they were just the greatest.

Along with all this wealth, James was described by Dr. Van Etten as being gregarious and just good fun to be with.

The young doctor was the adventurous type and when presented with an opportunity to explore southern Europe and northern Africa, while receiving generous compensation for his services, he must have considered it an offer that he could not refuse. The trip would serve as the nearest thing to a vacation that the busy doctor would ever find time for in the years to come.

It was not until his 90th birthday that we ever heard anything about the fabulous trip on the Aloha. At that time the doctor revealed the story about the memorable voyage and produced four huge and beautifully bound volumes of photographs that graphically illustrated points of interest along the way.

It must have cost a small fortune to compile these books as there were at least 300 photos in each book and each volume had an index, explaining the subject matter. Mr. James had thoughtfully retained the services of a top photographer for the trip. Of special interest were pictures of Egypt, the pyramids, the sphinx at Giza, and of the trip up the Nile.

When the Aloha reached what was then Persia, Dr. Van Etten's tour of duty came to an end and he took a steamer for the return to the U.S.A. He thoroughly enjoyed the voyage on the Aloha and I am sure that he must have had some misgivings at not having agreed to continue the trip around the world.

The four great picture albums must have a real historic value and they are now owned by the doctor's grandchildren. We hope that they will some day grace the shelves of some deserving library.

On his return to the states, Dr. Van Etten started a medical practice that was to span the next 60 years. Somehow he found time to serve as chief of staff at Lenox Hill Hospital and become a part of the teaching staff at The College of Physicians and Surgeons.

At one time he was associated with a Dr. Voorhees, who had achieved prominence in the field of gynecology.

Dr. Voorhees received considerable notice when he invented the Voorhees Bag, which was a process that induced labor in pregnant women. Dr. Van Etten never had much to say on the subject, but it was obvious that he did not entirely approve of this method. This is not to say that he was not progressive. It was just that he had a built-in suspicion of anything that might be considered unnatural.

Dr. H. Harlan Stone, a surgeon and chief of surgery at the University of Maryland Hospital, has been featured in a recent newspaper article as recommending the use of zippers when it is anticipated that surgery will follow surgery in the same area. Dr. Stone has substituted ordinary skirt zippers for stitches in 28 pancreas operations. By using the 7 inch, 60 cent zipper, just like the type used on women's polyester skirts, he was able to avoid repeated operations to change internal bandages and lowered the death rate dramatically.

We can recall Dr. Van Etten saying, more than 40 years ago, that a women who had required a cesarean section and planned to have more children, should have a zipper installed to facilitate delivery.

#188: THE DEDICATED DOC AND HIS ODDITIES

There were several things in the makeup of Dr. Royal C. Van Etten that would attract me, not the least of which was his great love for Ridgefield. He lived in our town for more than half a century. During all those years he was a model citizen and asked no favors, other than what he considered the privilege of living here.

The doctor favored local tradesmen and paid them well. He paid his taxes without complaint and was never a burden, in any way, to his adopted town. In fact, I do not believe that the town was ever charged with the responsibility of educating the children of the various owners of either Hillscroft or the great mansion at 63 High Ridge Avenue.

Despite our characterizing him as a good-natured person, with the worst temper we have ever seen, the doctor was basically a quiet person and might even have been considered a little on the shy side. He sure avoided parties as though they were a plague and this caused him to be almost unknown in party-loving Ridgefield.

On those rare occasions when he accepted an invitation to a party, the doctor's personality went through a dramatic change, as quickly as a chameleon changes his color. When he finally got into the spirit of the thing, his delightful mannerisms drew people like a magnet and invariably he became the life of the party.

One of his fears about attending parties was that, just as the party got to be enjoyable, he would receive a phone call. He did not like being singled out on such occasions, as there were always those who felt that being paged at these affairs was a form of advertising one's business or profession.

We recall a party that the doctor and Mrs. Van Etten attended on a Saturday afternoon at the home of the late Anne S. Richardson. His reason for accepting the invitation was that he felt everything was well under control and there were no patients in the hospital that required his constant attention.

The nice lawn party was in full swing when the phone rang and as you have already surmised, it was for Dr. Van Etten. The person taking the call was full of the spirit of the occasion and made a commotion in getting the doctor to the phone. As might be expected, it was a long time before he attended another such affair.

Dr. Van Etten had a strong sense of self-discipline and some of his living habits were almost Spartan-like. Yet he enjoyed junk food almost as much as a gourmet meal.

While he encouraged his patients to have the best in health care, he himself suffered with a hernia during the last half of his life and would not have it taken care of. It proved to be a tremendous burden in his later years.

He believed in plenty of exercise and devoted much of his spare time to it. He did a lot of walking and used to ask that sticks that fell on the big lawn be left for him to pick up, as he felt

the bending was good for him. He could really walk and it would take a Harry Thomas (Dispatch #120) to keep ahead of him.

We would not say that the doctor was superstitious, but most things that happened had a deeper meaning, a warning or perhaps a prophecy, and he was very observant to what they seemed to indicate.

When we were at Hillscroft, there was a neighbor who lived in the Caro Northrop house. The neighbor left his home one day and drove north on Silver Spring Road. Something caused him to look back and when he did he saw that his large barn was on fire.

From that time on, when Dr. Van Etten left Hillscroft for New York, no matter how much of a hurry he might be in, he'd always drive south to Silver Hill Road, turned around and drove by the farm once more to make sure that everything was all right.

The same procedure prevailed after he had moved to High Ridge. When leaving for New York, he would drive down the hill to King Lane, then turn and come back by the mansion for one last look before continuing on his journey.

These little oddities were treated quite seriously and we never joked about them. He was so cautious that before leaving the house, he would go to the fuse box in the basement and take out all the fuses, except the one that controlled the light on the back porch.

This procedure was followed even when he and Mrs. Van Etten was just going out for a ride. When he had surgery scheduled and something happened that could be interpreted as a warning, the operation was canceled. That he was eminently successful, there can be no question, so we will not argue with success.

With Dr. Van Etten, his patients always came first. There would be a tendency to feel that the wealthy patients would receive more attention than those of lesser means. Not true as far as he was concerned as we firmly believe that no one could have received better care than this fine doctor furnished to his charity patients.

When it came to charging his patients, the matter was handled by a nurse who also served as his secretary. We enjoyed listening to her stories of how the patients would attempt to influence the fees charged by appearing to live in a lifestyle that was entirely different than what it actually was.

This very sharp lady had her desk situated near a window where she could see down the street for a couple of blocks. When she observed a wealthy lady get out of her Cadillac and change from a mink coat to a plain cloth coat before entering the office, an asterisk was placed in the records just before her name.

“Dedicated” is a word that is greatly overworked; however, it is the one word which best describes Dr. Royal C. Van Etten. He lived for his patients and they greatly appreciated him.

When he passed away five years ago, we received letters from all over the country from former patients. In fact, just a week ago, a letter arrived with a New Orleans postmark from a former patient who requested a copy of his obituary.

In Dispatch No. 170 we described the staircase at Hillscroft and how very beautiful it was. A story that had to do with that staircase was once told to us by Dr. Francis B. Woodford. He said that one morning about 5 o'clock, back in the early 30's, he was called to Hillscroft.

Dr. Van Etten had been awakened that morning by the ringing of the telephone in the next room. As usual he jumped out of bed and ran to the phone. In so doing he slipped on a throw rug and went sailing over the stair rail. He was just regaining consciousness when Dr. Woodford arrived. He brushed aside any suggestions about being hospitalized and a few minutes later was on his way to a patient at Lenox Hill Hospital.

#189: ONE LAST COLUMN ABOUT A GOOD FRIEND

Marie has expressed the feeling that I should start writing about something, or someone, other than my old friend, Dr. Royal C. Van Etten. I have an idea that her suggestion was prompted, to some extent, by the fact that she has heard all these stories about the good doctor so many times before.

On the other hand, people constantly tell me that they enjoy reading about the fine old gentleman. So, we will offer one more column concerning the doctor and then move on down High Ridge Avenue.

As previously pointed out, the soil at 63 High Ridge was extremely rich and just about everything grew well there. The doctor liked vegetables and Mrs. Van Etten liked flowers, so we had lots of both. At one time we had no less than 12 large flower beds and a vegetable garden that measured 35 feet in width and 50 feet in length. All this for two people.

We used to grow a lot of sweet corn and when hybrid corn came into prominence, we were one of the first to grow it. Across from us on Olmstead Lane, in a house that is now the residence of Ed Dowling [#93], lived Lillian Gilkes and Louise Davidson. These ladies were good friends of former Vice-President Henry A. Wallace, who lived at the time just over the state line in South Salem.

Henry had been secretary of agriculture in FDR's first cabinet before becoming the Vice-President and retained a keen interest in the crossbreeding of corn and did considerable experimenting with it.

Golden bantam had long been the favorite sweet corn. It had small ears but a delightful taste. When this corn was successfully crossed with the larger varieties, it resulted in the retention of the fine quality of golden bantam while producing ears that were much larger. The new corn was called Golden Cross Bantam.

Henry Wallace gave some of the seed of this new variety of corn to Lillian Gilkes, who promptly passed it along to me. We had a lot of fun with this new corn and made a lot of people happy with its great taste.

Then two things happened: first, the crows agreed that the new corn was vastly superior to anything they had ever tasted, and then the raccoons concurred in the opinion expressed by the crows.

It seemed incredible that the big black birds and the masked nocturnal villains could always tell when the corn had reached perfection. They would then clean out the entire corn patch in one night.

We tried many tricks in an effort to thwart the thieves, but to no avail. Shiny pieces of tin, hung in the corn patch, flashed in the sunlight and kept the crows away. However, they were useless at night, or on cloudy days.

A radio planted in the middle of the patch scared the marauders away for a day or two and then they got used to the music. The doctor said that he felt they enjoyed the music of Glen Miller, with their meals.

When he looked out the window one morning and saw a large crow standing on top of the radio, we capitulated and a decision was made to give up trying to grow sweet corn.

Little pleasures that many people took for granted could be considered a great treat by the old doctor. For example, a trip to the Danbury Fair was to him an event that he looked forward to. We always went on a Sunday morning at 10 o'clock as he felt that there would be fewer people there at that time. It would be a whirlwind trip and by noontime we would be on the way home.

During that short space of time, he would have surveyed every exhibit at the Fair and I would have to trot on occasion to keep up with him. He did not miss anything, and when we got home he would describe in detail to Mrs. Van Etten every display and note whether any had been added since the previous year.

The doctor loved the Big Top and never failed to buy some Vermont cheddar cheese, some salt water taffy, and some gourds. As we would leave the Big Top there was a cider mill just outside and we always had a glass of sweet cider.

The pleasure that he derived from this little ritual is really indescribable. It would be fair to say that no one visiting the mall that will replace the Great Danbury Fair will ever have as much real fun as the doctor did.

Sometimes our little girl, Mary Madeline (Moo Moo), would accompany us and on one occasion we sat for a few minutes to watch the oxen pull those great loads on a stone boat. The men handling the oxen can be quite rough at times and one in particular used both the lash and the butt of his whip without mercy on one poor ox that did not move quick enough to suit him.

Suddenly, Mary Madeline, who was about six at the time, began to laugh gleefully. When the doctor asked her what was so funny, she pointed to one of the cloven hoofs of the huge ox. The large beast had planted the hoof firmly on the foot of the unhappy drover who, with a pained expression on his face, was attempting to get the ox to release him.

We all enjoyed the plight of the drover and it was one of the few times that I ever heard the doctor enjoy a real belly laugh. He could not stand anyone who was unkind to an animal.

The following little anecdote will best describe the kind of man that the doctor was. The first time I ran for public office, he saw it to change his voting residence from New York City to Ridgefield. That same year, as usual, we made plans to attend the fair on Sunday morning. He always drove back to the city on Sunday afternoon. This time, however, he told me that he planned to stay over on Sunday night and return to the city after voting for me on Monday.

On Sunday morning, as I approached the old mansion, I saw that a note had been pinned to the door. It read: "Sorry, Richard, I got called back at 3 a.m., but I will be back to vote for you tomorrow." I could almost feel his disappointment at not getting to see the fair.

In those days the voting was done in the town hall. It was a cold and rainy Monday but as Marie and I crossed Catoonah Street, we saw the doctor's old black Cadillac as he pulled into a parking space near the town hall. The fine old gentleman had kept his word, and he jumped out of his car and ran into the voting place. We crossed the street to meet him as he emerged from the back door of the town hall, still on a run.

He had a big smile as he approached and with a pat on my back said, "Good luck Richard, told you I would be back to vote for you, got to get back." With that, he jumped back in his car and drove right back to the City.

It was several months later that I learned that the phone call that spoiled his weekend had brought him back to hospital to care for a charity patient.

He certainly was some kind of man and when Dr. Royal C. Van Etten passed on at age 94 on July 24, 1980, Ridgefield lost an exemplary citizen and I lost a very good friend.

#190: THE HERRICKS OF HIGH RIDGE

Many places get to be known by the name of the family that originally lived in that particular location. Then there are times when the place is named after the family that lived there the longest. For many years the old estate at 63 High Ridge Road was known as the Dutton place as it was built by the publisher, Edward Payson Dutton.

However, Dr. Royal C. Van Etten lived in the great mansion longer than anyone else, so I guess to me it will always be the Van Etten place. After the doctor died in 1980, the place was put up for sale.

At the time, Gary Harris, who had formerly lived in Ridgefield, was residing in California. He knew first hand what a great place Ridgefield was and like everyone who ever lived in our town, Gary harbored a strong urge to return. So the Harris family sold their home in California and soon they were busy remodeling the old mansion on High Ridge.

The basic structure remained pretty much the same as there was really no way to improve on that. The greatest change in the exterior was the enclosing of the back porch and then combining it with the kitchen and the butler's pantry into one huge kitchen.

Notable changes in the interior of the house, other than painting, were the addition of several rooms in the large attic and the removal of the great steam heating system that was previously described. It was, for some reason with which I am unfamiliar, replaced by electric heating.

Just a few years ago the grand old place was sold again and now Alice McKnight and Jean Kirksey are enjoying that particular kind of grandeur, found only on High Ridge.

The very next place, traveling north on the Ridge, was constructed by Helen Minturn Post on land that she acquired from John A. King. Shortly after World War I, Mr. A. Bolton Hall purchased this very nice place from the estate of Mrs. Post.

Mr. Hall renovated the house to such an extent that when he was through it bore little resemblance to the original structure. In the early 20's the Halls' daughter, Lois, married Gerardus P. Herrick and for the next 60 years this fine estate was known as the Herrick place.

Just as their neighbors did, the Herricks used their High Ridge mansion as a "summer cottage." They closed up the house each fall and with their children, Susan and Scott, they would spend the winter in their New York apartment. The family owned considerable property in New York City.

Mr. Herrick had several interests, but seemed to enjoy experimental work best of all. He had a great ambition to produce an airplane that could land and take off in a very small area. He experimented with the autogyro before Sikorsky came along with his helicopter.

Herrick understood the principle of a rotating propeller that would lift an object into the air. He was finally successful and invented a plane that would take off vertically, by use of a propeller on its top.

This gyroplane had wings that folded back like the wings of a bird. When the plane reached the desired height, the wings snapped forward into place and the plane then flew off horizontally. It was stored in a hanger that still stands at the rear of the High Ridge property.

Mrs. Wilfred Weaver's father, Albert Benninger, was superintendent for the Herricks. I am sure that Al played some part in the construction of the gyroplane as he was an expert mechanic and could fix just about anything.

The Herrick family had an ocean-going yacht in addition to several automobiles. As well as taking care of the buildings and the property, Al Benninger was kept busy keeping all the machines in good running condition.

One of the family autos was a gigantic Packard touring car. Somehow, the idea surfaced that this great car should have a Cadillac engine. Al was equal to the challenge and in no time he had removed the Packard engine, installed the Cadillac engine and had the classic 'hybrid' car back on the road. The actual reason for changing the engines was never clear to me.

Mrs. Herrick passed on just a few years ago and many items that the family had accumulated through the years were put on sale. Charley Dougherty bought a spinning wheel that must have come over on the Mayflower. It must have been the buy of the year.

While the sale was in progress, I noted the biggest propeller that I have ever seen, lying on the floor of the garage. No doubt this enormous thing could lift a house right off the ground, if you had a machine with the energy to turn it.

There was no price tag on it so I came to the conclusion that it was part of Mr. Herrick's gyroplane. Perhaps it was a spare propeller, as the plane itself had already been transported to a museum in Pennsylvania, where it is still on display at this time. [A Herrick propeller, perhaps this one, was given to the Ridgefield Historical Society and is today hanging on the wall over the entrance to the vault in the Town Clerk's Office in the Town Hall.]

Mrs. Herrick was very community-minded and took an active part in anything which she thought would benefit Ridgefield. She was a member and an officer in the Ridgefield Garden Club and took her duties in this organization quite seriously.

In 1936 she was selected to represent the Ridgefield Garden Club at the international convention of Garden Clubs. The event was in Paris that year and with a big send-off from her fellow club members, she set sail on the Normandy Saturday, June 20, of that year.

Like most of us, Mrs. Herrick had a few of her own little idiosyncrasies. One was her penchant for feeling that it was her solemn duty to keep the streets clear of debris.

On her daily walks she would carry a large bag and her attention would be attracted in particular to beer cans and bottles that thoughtless people had deposited along High Ridge and King Lane. She must have picked up tons of this offending type of litter in the many years that she engaged in this admirable activity.

Ridgefield was not the only place that benefited from Mrs. Herrick's dedication for keeping the streets attractive. We recall a story and a picture of this fine lady that appeared in one of the large New York daily newspapers about ten years ago. It showed Mrs. Herrick in her favorite pastime, picking up the litter from the street in front of her New York apartment.

Mrs. Herrick also had another habit that was a trifle different. That was the place she chose to keep her money, whether for convenience or security reasons. The matter was well known to local storekeepers, especially to the boys in Bissell's, such as "Squash," Freddy, or Johnny.

However, one day a new young clerk was starting his first day On the job and one of his first customers was Mrs. Herrick.

She made several purchases and the young clerk totaled them for her and handed her the tab. Without hesitation she deftly lifted her skirt and pulled a wad of bills from her stocking, as a young clerk with a deep crimson complexion slowly slid to the floor in back of the counter.

#191: HOW SPIKE TOOK A FLYING LEAP

There is a stand of stately pine trees at the rear of the former Herrick place on High Ridge Avenue. Mrs. G.P. Herrick once told me an interesting story as to how those trees came to be on her back lawn.

According to Mrs. Herrick, she learned through the Fairfield County Farm Bureau that the government would furnish pine trees to anyone who was willing to plant them. This was all a part of the reforestation program.

An application on which to order the trees was secured by Mrs. Herrick from the County Agent. She filled out the application, intending to order 12 pine trees. Actually she was ordering 12 bundles of tnees and they came 12 to the bundle. Therefore instead of ordering a dozen trees, her order was for a whole gross of trees.

It was several months later that the shipment of trees arrived at the local freight station, which was in the building new occupied by The Woodworks at 32 Bailey Avenue. There came a phone call from the station agent, George House, asking Mrs. Herrick to make arrangements to pick up the trees. At George's announcement that there were 144 trees rather than the 12 which Mrs. Herrick expected, she apparently voiced considerable surprise.

We described George House in Dispatch No. 47 as a very jovial, though rather mischievous individual. He was always very alert and could recognize an opportunity to play a prank with great ease.

Therefore, when Mrs. Herrick inquired as to the size of the trees, George assured her that they were a very good size and would make fine Christmas trees in no time at all. Then to add to the deviltry for which he was noted, George offered to lend a hand to the men who would be loading the trees on the truck.

This all began to sound to Mrs. Herrick like a great deal more than she had bargained for. Her thoughts turned to her many friends and she began to figure on which ones would be willing to take some of the trees off her hands. It looked like a very big project and she enlisted the help of Charley Elliott and his big truck.

That afternoon Charley came by the Herrick place with what appeared to be an empty truck. Mrs. Herrick went out to meet Charley, thinking that he was making a dry run to see where to unload the large shipment of trees.

Charley dismounted from his vehicle, then turned around and reached into the cab of the truck and withdrew a medium sized package. The package contained 12 little bundles, each containing 12 little pine trees. The trees were only a few inches in height and all 144 of them could have been easily carried by a young boy.

Mrs. Herrick was a good sport about the whole thing, as evidenced by her willingness to tell the story about herself and have a good laugh about it.

Today, some of those trees must be at least 40 feet in height and they surround a cute little swimming pool at the rear of the residence. Except for one small, four legged individual, the pool did not receive much use in the past few years.

I once had a little black dog and his name was "Spike." He was a real character and the name seemed to suit him well.

Spike used to accompany me each day when I went next door to the Van Ettens'. As time went on, Spike showed an increasing interest in the daily visits. It got to a point where he could hardly wait to be let out of the car when we arrived at the Van Ettens'.

As soon as he was released, Spike would make a beeline for the Herrick mansion next door. Knowing of Mrs. Herrick's fondness for animals, I assumed that Spike was being attracted by goodies that she was giving him. As it turned out, the goodies were a factor but there was still another.

One time, when Mrs. Herrick was visiting the Van Ettens, she asked me if I knew who owned the black dog that came to visit her each day. When I admitted ownership and informed her that his name was Spike, Mrs. Herrick laughed heartily. Then she told me of a regular routine that the dog went through each time he went over to see her.

First, Spike would climb the steps to the porch just off the kitchen. Then he would scratch at the kitchen door until she appeared with a cookie for him.

When he had finished his snack he would race across the lawn to the pool. Mrs. Herrick said that when Spike was within 10 feet of the pool he would make a tremendous leap that would make him airborne to the very center of the pool.

She said that Spike would luxuriate as he swam about the pool for four or five minutes. He would then climb out of the pool and after a few vigorous shakes that sent sprays of water in every direction, he would return to the kitchen door for another cookie. It was Mrs. Herrick's opinion that Spike considered this to be proper payment for the performance, which she apparently enjoyed.

I had to see Spike's routine for myself, so I watched one day from a discreet vantage point. He performed all the antics, just as Mrs. Herrick described them, but his leap into the pool was performed with such abandon that you would think the dog had caused a tidal wave. He was a real actor and I really believe he thought that the pool had been constructed for him.

The Herricks took over the operation of the estate from Lois Herrick's father, A. Bolton Hall, in the mid-20's. Mr. Hall made substantial changes to the outward appearance of the mansion when he acquired the place a few years earlier, from the estate of Helen Minturn Post. The Herricks also made some changes until the house bore little resemblance to the original house.

The changes were not limited to the house itself. There were changes made to the contour of the lawns and in the location of the driveways. It was while this work was being done in 1925 that a cannon ball was unearthed. The cannon ball had been fired during the Battle of Ridgefield on Main Street, April 27, 1777.

Though buried in the ground for 148 years, the cannon ball was in good condition. In those days a cannon ball was solid and since it contained no explosive, it was used as a conversation piece.

Whether the projectile came from the throat of a British cannon or one that belonged to the Continental Army has not been determined. We would prefer to believe that this glaring example of poor marksmanship was displayed by the British. The patriots would have known at that time that there was nothing on High Ridge to direct a cannon at. It would be more than 100 years before the millionaires would provide something for an invader to shoot at.

#192: A GREAT MANSION AND A FUN MONKEY

Sometimes we write a column and when it is completed we feel that it is really not so very good. Then when it comes out it turns out to be one of the better ones. By the same token, we write one that has all the necessary ingredients to make the column one to be proud of and it turns out to be a dud.

A couple of weeks ago, we wrote Dispatch No. 190 and it seemed to touch all the bases, so we felt pretty good about it. However, in paragraph six there was a misspelled word. It was much more than just a misspelled word: It was the name of a nice lady.

We identified the present owners of the Dutton-Van Etten mansion at 63 High Ridge Avenue, as Alice McKnight and Jean Kirtley. Actually it should have read Alice McKnight and Jean Kirksey.

Having had my own name misspelled on occasion, we are aware of how it feels. Therefore, Jean, I will accept ten strokes with a lash of your choosing.

We have been writing about the Herrick estate at 77 High Ridge Avenue. The most interesting personage connected with this place is Lois Herrick (Mrs. Gerardus P. Herrick). Her determination to keep the area around her place and the roads leading to it, neat and clean, are legendary. She never left her home without a large bag in which all kinds of debris was deposited.

Mrs. Herrick was a prolific writer and The Press carried many Letters to the Editors, the contents of which ranged from political opinions to the large number of cans and bottles that she collected while on her daily walks.

Physical fitness must have been one of Lois Herrick's many attributes. To be sure, she was always trim and never overweight.

A distant cousin, L.P., who was very fond of her, told me how they went out to dinner one time and Lois took along a little plastic box. After eating sparingly, she placed the leftovers in the box. Perhaps it was a forerunner of today's doggy bag, although I am not sure she had a dog at the time.

Mrs. Herrick, like so many of her neighbors, lived to a ripe old age. The life spans of the Duttons and the Van Ettens, as well as Lois Herrick all exceeded four score and ten.

A contributing factor could have been the rarefied atmosphere of lofty High Ridge, but we kind of feel that of equal importance was the tender loving nursing care that was administered by some very dedicated ladies.

There was that period after World War II when there was genuine fear that the great mansions on High Ridge might fall into a state of disrepair. People were just not interested at the time in these large structures, even though they were available at bargain-basement prices.

Ridgefield is very fortunate that they finally were sold to families that were' sincerely interested in maintaining these architectural and historical gems. They came along at the right time to preserve and restore them for future generations and they have now retained their place as the most desirable real estate.

When Bill and Tina Bradt acquired the Herrick estate, we knew that it was in good hands. They have exhibited very good taste in the restoration of this fine old mansion. Like the Albert Swansons farther down the street, the Bradts apparently knew what they were doing.

The next estate on the Ridge, before crossing Peaceable Street, is 87 High Ridge Avenue. It was built by the Holts, Charles Henry and Ellen Ives, just before World War I.

Charles was another noted publisher and his presence on the Ridge added yet another reason for applying the name "Publishers Row" to the southerly section of the famous street.

This very attractive red brick building, with its beautifully landscaped lawns, exotic shrubbery and graceful terraces is of excellent construction. My father worked on the place when it was being built and never tired of telling how nothing was spared in putting this great building together.

To the best of my knowledge, the Holts never affixed a name to their beautiful estate [Note: They called it Grovellen.]. However, after Mr. Holt passed on in the mid 20's, the place was acquired by Miss Amy Low Huntington, who promptly named the place "Aloha." The name was simply transferred from the place that she had previously leased from Dr. George G. Shelton, just across the street from his own mansion, just over the state line on West Lane.

We would think that the name was given because of the similarity to her own rather than because to any connection with our 50th state.

John Lane was Miss Huntington's chauffeur and he and his family lived in a garage apartment at what is now 19 Peaceable Street. For some reason the Lanes moved, after a few years, to a house in Bryon Park, but John continued as chauffeur.

After John retired Elmer Anderson became a kind of combination chauffeur and groundskeeper. This may have been an economy move fostered by the Great Depression, which was in full swing at the time.

At any rate when the Lanes moved from the garage apartment, Charles Larrabee, who had been superintendent for A. Barton Hepburn, moved in with his family. Mr. Hepburn had passed on and Mrs. Hepburn had sold Hepburn's farm on Whipstick Road.

The Larrabees became newspaper customers of mine and I got to know them quite well. Charles was a very nice man and he wore a straw hat most of the time. The hat had an enormous brim and when I asked why he merely said that he was allergic to the sun.

We always liked the name Larrabee as we found it to be not only euphonious but rather unusual as well. In fact this is the only family that we ever knew by that name and even today, there is none listed in our telephone directory.

The only other time we ever heard the name, it was applied to a jitney bus. Dave Rich bought a Larrabee in 1925 and used the jitney to provide transportation back and forth to Danbury.

The little jitney only held about 15 people but that was plenty big enough at that time. Mr. Scribner bought one a few years later but it was larger and he used it as a school bus. Scribner's bus and Mortimer Keeler's hard-rubber-tired Barker were the only school buses we had during that period.

The Larrabees had a very beautiful daughter named Hazel and I am sure that those who attended local schools in the late 20's and early 30's will fondly remember her.

The Larrabees also had a monkey, which was a great attraction to me. It was never quite clear why the family had settled on a monkey for a pet, but that little animal provided us with a lot of fun.

#193: THE FAMILIES OF ALOHA AND ITS GARAGE

We have been telling about the very beautiful estate that sits on the southwest corner of High Ridge Avenue and Peaceable Street. Built by Charles Holt during the teens of this century, this very attractive place is now the home of Francis and Helaine Zarro and their family.

We feel that it is nice to know that young people will get to enjoy life in a High Ridge mansion. Many years have passed since Sue and Scott Herrick, Hope, Hastings, and Sterling Foote used the Ridge as their playground. Even then they were only here during the summer months, in their great "summer cottages."

We have always felt that it was too bad that many of the older mansions were never really used as a place to bring up children. Of course, there are those who would point to the unmarked woodwork in structures such as the Dutton-Van Etten mansion and say that the beautiful woodwork would never have remained unscathed if children had been reared there.

We really do not think that these fine families refrained from having children in order to preserve all that extraordinary woodwork. More than likely they were not financially able to build those great houses until late in life, at which time their children were fully grown.

One thing is sure about the grand "Aloha," the Holts' children were all grown when this great estate was built on High Ridge. The next owner, Miss Amy Low Huntington, certainly had no children and we never saw any around the next owners, Herbert and Cora Parm, or the ones who brought it from the Parns, George R. and Ellen Jane Halpern.

So we say three cheers for the Zarros, who with their children, Mariam and Mathew, have changed this all around and the building has gone from a mansion to a house and then to a home, which is really what the great place was intended to be.

There have been happy occasions associated with Aloha and there have also been a couple of tragedies. One was the death of Miss Huntington's superintendent back in the very early 30's. The other was the death of a later owner a half century later.

Both deaths were due to gunshot wounds and were said to have been self-inflicted. James Sweeney had been superintendent for several years and was known as a good-natured, happy-go-lucky kind of man. However, Jim had gone through a personality change that many of his friends felt had been brought on by the Great Depression. It was at a time in our history when these things happened with considerable frequency.

Miss Huntington had been a semi-invalid for many years. When she passed on in 1950, she had no immediate survivors, but several nieces and nephews. She was very wealthy and left a large estate. At the time it was listed as more than \$200,000. It seemed they had a habit of doing this and then they listed bequests of well over a million.

One notable gift was an electric organ, which Miss Huntington left to the Methodist Church, in memory of her cousin Ethelbest Ide Low. There was also an outright gift of \$20,000 to the church as well as a trust fund of \$400,000 for the church.

Her housekeeper, Margaret Hutchinson, received \$15,000 and John Voss, her superintendent, was left \$10,000. There were many other smaller bequests.

Herbert Parm, the next owner, will be remembered as the one who made some drastic changes to the appearance of Aloha. Whether the changes added or detracted from the beauty of Aloha is debatable. One thing is sure, with today's regulations, it is extremely doubtful that the changes would have ever taken place.

The house at 19 Peaceable Street, currently the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Scott, was once a part of Aloha. It served as a garage and it had a nice apartment. The garage doors faced Peaceable Street and there was a wide concrete ramp that carried the vehicles from the street to the garage.

After the Parmes took over Aloha, Coleman Murray and his family lived in this comfortable apartment. Coleman is fondly remembered by all who knew him. He was a gentle giant of a man and served the Parmes as chauffeur, gardener, handyman or whatever.

He was also a clergyman and had a parish of Blacks in White Plains.

When we call Coleman a giant of a man, we feel that it describes both his character and his physical appearance, as he was more than six and one half feet tall.

Despite a problem that he had with his knees, Coleman was able to get in and out of his little foreign car without difficulty. He would open the car door and then back up to it, where he appeared to fold himself several times, then with a few deft maneuvers, he made it appear as though the car was devouring him as he landed in the driver's seat.

Oh yes, Coleman had another car: A large black Cadillac, the use of which was restricted to when the whole family traveled together, such as on Sunday morning, when the family traveled to church services in White Plains.

The Murray family was large and its makeup was liberally sprinkled with foster children. Those kids were very lucky to have parents like Coleman and Mrs. Murray, who ran a tight ship, but were generous with their loving care. That family earned the respect of all who knew them.

For some reason, Herbert Parm decided that he wanted the garage to be closer to the mansion. Perhaps it was to cut down on the size of the estate. At any rate he sold off the garage and the lot on which it sat and then built the existing garage, which sits just to the east of the mansion.

The new building is of red brick like the main house and we are sure that the apartment within is very comfortable. However, we thought it was better the way it was and apparently the Murrays felt likewise, for they refused to move to their new quarters. Though Coleman continued his association with the Parns, he and his family moved to the corner of Route 7 and Great Pond Road, where the golf driving range is now.

So the building that had served for so many years as a garage as well as an apartment, became strictly a residence. Of course, it then became necessary to add a garage, in order to complete the little compound. I think it was Mary Luke who turned the operation at 19 Peaceable into the very attractive place that it is today.

#194: TALES OF SPORT AND LARRABEE'S MONKEY

In order to complete our story about the building at 19 Peaceable St., we must tell about Charley Larrabee's monkey. In order to tell about the monkey, we must tell about another dog that I had, so we will have to start back even before the little ape landed in Ridgefield.

My cousin Eddie Sullivan was a very kind man and when I was five years of age, he gave me a Marine Band Hohner harmonica for Christmas. It was one of the very nicest presents that I ever received and much to everyone's surprise, including my own. I quickly learned to play the little instrument.

The harmonica was of such a size as to make it fit easily into my pocket and so, along with my little dog Sport, it became my constant companion. Yes, his name was Sport and he was pure white, as opposed to Spike, who was black and came along many years later.

Sport was mostly bull terrier and though he probably did not weigh more than 20 pounds, he was all solid muscle. He was exceptionally good natured, but when he was annoyed at another dog, he was a most ferocious fighter.

Frances Mahoney, who lived on Bryon Avenue and worked in Brundage and Benedict's store (where Fitzgerald & Hastings is now), gave Sport to me one day while I was delivering my newspapers. I never could figure out why anyone would part with such a wonderful dog. The only thing that may have caused this may have been Sport's capacity for fighting. It could have caused trouble.

At any rate, Sport and I hit it off immediately and though I have had many fine dogs, none could ever replace him in my affections. He loved to go with me on my paper route and in

no time at all, he had learned to very carefully take the newspaper in his teeth and deposit it on the doorstep of a customer.

Watching Sport as he trotted along the street, you got the impression that he knew everyone in town, and just about everyone knew him. He used to walk into town each morning with my father and wait for the car that came to take him to work.

The men used to assemble in front of Pop Crouchley's plumbing store, where Liberta's Liquor Store is now. After Pop had gone off to work, Sport would retrace his steps to what is now 612 Main Street and then he would walk to school with me.

He was always very good about returning home after school had started. That is except for one day, when I was in seventh grade in Ridgefield's first junior high school — in the addition on the south end of the building that now houses Boehringer Ingelheim.

For some reason, perhaps because of curiosity in the new classrooms, at any rate, on this particular day Sport decided to stay around the door until someone came along and opened it. He then scooted into the building and after locating me in Miss Yates' classroom, he began to frantically scratch at the door. Miss Yates opened the door and much to the delight of my classmates, Sport made a grand entrance like a miniature cyclone into the classroom.

It was the one and only time that Sport ever committed such an indiscretion and a very understanding teacher allowed me to remove him from the school building. Not only that but Gertrude Witlock (Mrs. Fred Smith), a classmate was allowed to record the event for posterity, with her little camera. More than 55 years later, Gertrude was kind enough to give me that picture.

At various places along my paper route, it was customary for some of my customers to request that I play them a tune on the harmonica. This always brought out the very best in Sport. At the first note, he would sit down, throw back his head and emit the most mournful howl you ever heard.

I was never sure whether the people were interested in my ability to play the mouth organ or whether they enjoyed hearing Sport "sing" along with me. One thing was sure, the little dog was well aware of his acting ability and never failed to put on a good show for his admiring audience. He was such a ham that when he realized he could make people laugh, he really got in the spirit of the thing.

A few weeks ago, The Press carried a picture of a 1926 minstrel show. The night that the show opened Sport caused a mild sensation when he wandered in backstage at the old town hall, just as I began to play a harmonica solo. From in back of all those curtains came the unmistakable sound of Sport's wailing and except for quick action by Carl Gustafson, he would have completed his act on center stage.

Sport was absolutely fearless, as far as other dogs were concerned. However, when it came to monkeys, it was a different matter. He would carry the paper to the doorstep of each customer. but when we got to 19 Peaceable Street, Sport would sit by the side of the road until I made the delivery. He just wanted no part of Mr. Larrabee's monkey.

One day Mr. Larrabee, with the monkey in his arms, was standing in the garage with the door open. I climbed the concrete ramp to the door of the garage, handed the paper to Mr. Larrabee, patted the monkey on his head, and started back to where Sport patiently waited.

As I rejoined the little dog, I started to play the harmonica and as usual Sport commenced his outlandish singing. We were just not prepared for what happened next.

The monkey bolted out the garage door and clambered up a trellis that was attached to the east side of the building. With a quick leap, he went from the trellis to a nearby tree, all the time screeching very aloud monkey language.

No amount of urging would convince the little animal to descend from his lofty perch. He was not even tempted by a bunch of bananas offered by his master.

I am not sure that the little ape had a proper name, other than monkey or just plain monk. One thing for sure, on that day Mr. Larrabee coined a few names that will not be reprinted here.

Our theory that the music from the harmonica had caused the flight of the monkey, was disproved a few days later, when Mr. Larrabee and the monkey appeared at Harry Thomas' blacksmith shop.

For some reason or other, Sport was not with me on this occasion and Mr. Larrabee was in the process of telling the story of the effect that we had on the monkey. There were five or six teamsters listening intently to the story when Harry Thomas expressed his opinion that it was Sport's singing that spooked the monkey. All seemed to agree that I give it another try.

At the first notes from the harmonica, the little ape sauntered over and started to climb up my pant leg. When he reached my shoulder, he removed my little round hat and after climbing down he went to each of the men and held out the hat in an obvious attempt to take up a collection.

The men roared with laughter at the capers of the street-wise little urchin. Unfortunately, the Larrabees moved away before the monkey and I were able to forge a business alliance.

#195: SOME NAMES OF OLD MANSIONS

It would seem appropriate that as we conclude our trip along Publishers' Row, or Millionaires' Row, as some called it, we reveal the names that the owners had affixed to their great estates. This little area could be (take your pick) either the upper or the lower part of High Ridge Avenue.

The choice is offered by the fact that the southerly section of a street is generally portrayed as the lower. Just as the lower section of Main Street is considered by most people to be south Main.

Somehow, that theory does not work so well when considering High Ridge as the southern end of this famous street is considerably higher in elevation than the northern end. Those who would label the southern ends of these streets as the lower sections would be aided and abetted by the fact that the lower house numbers were assigned to the homes on the southern end of the streets.

We have always found intriguing the way people use the words upper and lower or up or down in describing their travel from one place to another. In my family when someone went to

Danbury, it was always up to Danbury. Yet, we know many people who always said that they went down to Danbury. It seemed natural to me that since Ridgefield is actually located south of Danbury that, to get to that city, we had to go up. I suppose that those who used the adverb “down to Danbury” did so because of the fact that Ridgefield’s elevation above sea level is much greater than that of Danbury.

One thing is sure, if you are going by water from here to New Orleans, it’s like the grand old song says, “Down the Mississippi, Down to New Orleans.” I’m not sure how we got off on this track, but I guess it just proves that the flu bug can cause a person to think kind of flaky.

I guess what I started out to say was that we had just about completed our trip from the southern end of High Ridge Avenue to where it intersects with King Lane and Peaceable Street.

One of the interesting traits of the very wealthy families was their habit of selecting a name that they felt best befitted their own particular estate. The name could be descriptive as to the geographical location of the mansion, its color or physical characteristics or even the direction it faced.

It could have a gentle touch of humor, such as Frederic E. Lewis’ “Upagansit” or it could have little or no meaning to the general public, such as “Felsenberg,” which may have had personal meaning for William Harrison Bradley when he named his great estate on West Mountain. [Editor’s note: Felsenberg is German for “rock hill,” a most appropriate name for many locales in Ridgefield.]

Another name which may have had an important meaning that was known only to George H. Newton was “Naranauto” which he applied to his historic mansion at 563 Main Street. Mrs. Newton drove a specially designed Franklin automobile but we cannot see any connection.

Across the street from George Newton’s, George M. Olcott built the very beautiful estate that became one of Ridgefield’s real showplaces. When the work was finished and he named it “Casagmo,” there was no question but that it stood for: home of George M. Olcott.

The manner in which this great mansion and its surrounding historical acres fell victim to human greed in the name of progress is another story. Enough to say, in passing, that the person who would eventually demolish the mansion and “develop” what needed no developing, stopped by the post office to assure me that I would be very proud of what he would do to Casagmo. He was informed in no uncertain terms that it was our considered opinion that there was nothing he could do to improve that great place.

Back to Millionaires Row where most of the families in that section of High Ridge managed to come through with suitable names for their beautiful homes. It should be understood that when these names were applied in the early part of the century, they were registered with the post office and became a very definite part of the address. Of course, the town was much smaller then but it did seem nice that a letter addressed to John Doe and just Casagmo, Ridgefield, Conn., would reach its destination without being impeded in any way.

One of the few homes on High Ridge that did not have a moniker, as far as we know, was home of the Hyde sisters, Elizabeth and Mabel, and it would have been so easy to find a suitable name for that place with all the stonework and the old English courtyard. It was one of the very

last of the mansions to be built and perhaps that had something to do with their reticence to name the very attractive estate that is now the home of the Mortimer V. Schwartz family.

There is no question about a fitting name for the next house for it is known for many miles around as the Peter Parley House. The Preston Bassetts now give this famous place their tender, loving care. Of course, it was in this grand old house that Samuel Goodrich grew up and we have been so fortunate to have his weekly columns in The Press. They are a delight to read.

Next we come to the rather modern home of the James Ettingers and we are not sure that they have a name for their place. However, the original and very ornate structure that stood on this site was owned by MacDougall Hawkes at one time and he called it "Caudatowa." This, of course, was the name that the Indians had given Ridgefield because of its lofty elevation. Therefore, it would be entirely suitable for this very imposing location.

The name "Overlook" was given the next place by its builder, William A. Jenner, and we are sure that the present owners, the Albert Swansons, agree on it.

It may come as a surprise to some that the name of the next elegant mansion was "Breezy Nook." Yes, that was the name selected by the very conservative Alonzo Barton Hepburn for what we all know now to be "Altnacraig." It carried the name Breezy Nook for several years, but apparently proved to be unsuitable for the home of the president of the Chase National Bank.

Right next door was Edward Payson Dutton, a man of simple tastes as well as one of a direct approach. He called his place "On-the-Ridge." Years later Mrs. Van Etten called the place "Four Chimneys," but after one set of printed stationery, allowed it to revert to the Dutton or Van Etten place.

Mrs. Gerard Herrick called her place "Gray Shingles" but it was a name that never seemed to catch on and most everyone referred to it as the "Herrick Place."

Of course, Miss Huntington named the beautiful red brick house on the corner "Aloha." The only other house at the time we are covering is also the only one at that time on the eastern side of High Ridge. It was called "Bent Garth" by Mrs. Gerald Gray, perhaps because the large garden on the place was built on an angle.

#196: THE PEOPLE OF PEACEABLE ACRES

Just west of 19 Peaceable Street in the teens and early 20's, there was a great open field. There must have been four or five acres in that well-kept field and it pastured some of the very finest horses to be found anywhere. These proud animals belonged to E.P. Dutton and he settled for nothing but the very best.

Mr. Dutton had coach horses and riding horses, but his favorites were four mahogany bay Morgans. They were the true American breed that got its start in nearby Vermont. These horses were fine to ride, but it was as driving horses that they became really famous. They were just a natural when drawing a buckboard or a buggy and that was Mr. Dutton's favorite sport.

At the western side of the field there was, still is, a lane bordered by stone walls, as described in Dispatch #167. It was the very dignified entrance to Dutton's barns and now serves as the driveway to the homes at 39 and 45 Peaceable Street.

Mr. Dutton was a true lover of horses and it was not unusual to see him perched on the stone wall along the lane as he enjoyed watching the spirited animals cavorting around the pasture.

To the west just beyond the lane was a much smaller field that also served as a pasture. In just a few years this smaller field would become the site of a home for Henry Steele Roberts and his beautiful bride, Mary Seldon Roberts. Later still, it would be the home of Edson K. Green and his bride, the former Carolyn Roberts. I believe it is now 45 Peaceable Street.

At the turn of the century, the noted international banker, Alonzo Barton Hepburn, was preparing to retire from his post as president of the Chase National Bank. Mr. Hepburn had completed his very imposing mansion, Altnacraig, on High Ridge and was looking forward to enjoying the peace and quiet that the great place had to offer.

In planning for his retirement, Hepburn had brought into the management circles of the bank a young man named Albert H. Wiggin. There was some grumbling among some members of the board that Wiggin was too young to have a seat on the board.

Mr. Hepburn was aware of the resentment concerning the newcomer, but he did not let that interfere with his plan to groom the young man that he had selected to succeed him.

A. Barton Hepburn proved to be a man of great persuasion. When the day came and he stepped down as president of the Chase, his favorite, Albert H. Wiggin was installed as president of that great banking institution. Wiggin must have thought it prudent to stay near his predecessor, for in April of 1903, he purchased the property of William Loomis at what is now 51 Peaceable Street.

The Loomis property was not nearly large enough to satisfy the very ambitious plans that Mr. Wiggin had for his budding country estate. Soon he enlisted the help of his benefactor, Barton Hepburn. Edward P. Dutton was a good friend and neighbor and Hepburn persuaded him to part with several more choice acres that would round out the Wiggin show place.

There were an awful lot of buildings involved in the operation of the Wiggin estate. Living quarters for the help, garages for the autos and barns for the horses seemed to spring up as if by magic. These buildings and the elegant courtyard and driveways all contributed to a very picturesque setting.

The mansion, which is now the home of Ray and Doris Bessette [the house sold in July 2022 to Peaceable Acres LLC for \$920,000], does not have the spectacular view offered by some of the homes on High Ridge, but it is an ideal place to watch a sunset and at the time it was built, it bordered the very pretty old Ridgefield Country Club. Just the fact that the golf course was next door made it a very desirable location.

So the development of the Wiggin estate was in high gear and it was the scene of a great deal of bustling activity...

The Wiggin family retained ownership of their great estate until June of 1921. At that time along came the noted surgeon Dr. Dudley D. Roberts, his wife Carrie S., and their children, Dudley D. Jr., Henry Steele and Carolyn Roberts. This was a very handsome family and it fit nicely into a neighborhood that included the equally handsome Doubleday and Chisolm families.

A very descriptive name “Peaceable Acres” had been chosen by the Wiggin family for their beautiful new home. The name must have had a pleasing sound for Dr. Roberts and his family and they quickly adopted it when they moved into their new home.

The ladies of Ridgefield, like the town itself, have always been noted for their beauty. This fact becomes increasingly clear when a person returns to town after having traveled extensively. Mary Seldon did nothing to sully this reputation when she married Henry Steele Roberts. When you saw this young couple, you just knew that you were seeing something special.

Steele, as his friends called him, decided that he and Mary should have their own mansion and in the mid 30’s, they started tramping through the surrounding wooded areas, looking for a suitable site. They did not have to travel very far from the old family compound.

The young couple just traveled down Peaceable Street, past the old Ridgefield Country Club, where C. Chandler Ross had just transformed that acreage into his residence. They crossed Golf Lane and there they found what they had been looking for.

So Steele and Mary purchased some 40 acres from Frank Pavey. The land stretched back to the Scripps property on Old South Salem Road and to Peaceable Hill Road.

The story should have a very happy ending, but it did not work out that way [as we will see in the next Dispatch].

#197: A DREAM REDUCED TO ASHES

It just seemed as though Steele and Mary Roberts and their family had about everything possible going for them. They were handsome as well as young. They were off financially and the beautiful new home that they had just built was in every sense a real dream house.

Just beyond where Marshall Road is now and high above lower Peaceable Street, the new mansion had a commanding view of the entire area. There were no corners cut in putting this great house together. It had everything, including a woodworking shop, where Steele could work at his favorite hobby.

There was plenty of privacy and the 40 odd acres stretched from Peaceable Street to the Robert P. Scripps estate and from Golf Lane to the corner of Peaceable Hill Road.

Alas, the family had hardly gotten used to their new home when a great misfortune occurred.

It was 1938 and scars of the Great Depression were still quite visible. War clouds were gathering in Europe with increasing intensity, and people needed something to lift their spirits. It seemed that every night, radio commentators got some kind of kick out of telling tales of woe.

It could have been a move to counteract the gloom that hung over the land. Perhaps it was just an effort to provide a temporary respite from the dreary part of a bitter, but fading winter. Whatever the reason, on the morning of Tuesday, March 1, 1938, the young Steele Roberts family, along with the household help, took off for a visit to New York City.

It was just afternoon when Henry Gay, who was the caretaker for Steele's father at Peaceable Acres, drove over to look after the dogs at Steele Roberts' new home. Henry could

smell smoke before he reached the house. When he opened the door, he was met with a sheet of flame that sent him flying to the nearest telephone.

As usual, our volunteer fire department, under Chief Horace Walker; was on the scene in a matter of minutes. However, the terrible fire had made such headway that the firemen never had a chance.

March, on its very first day, had come in like a lion and a stiff wind fanned the blaze into a gigantic inferno. The gallant firemen made one dramatic foray into the burning building and succeeded in removing a few pieces of kitchen furniture, but that was it. Everything else was totally consumed, including many personal belongings that could never be replaced and the woodworking shop, with all its valuable machinery.

Crowds of people from far and near gathered to watch the spectacular blaze that had spread even into the wooded areas nearby.

Among those who had responded to the wail of the fire siren was former Fire Chief Joseph Bacchiochi. Joe was an amateur photographer and made it a point to always carry his camera with him.

Just at the moment when the entire burning building collapsed, with a tremendous crash, Joe snapped a most dramatic picture. The picture was so action-packed and so vivid in detail that it was featured in the very next issue of Life Magazine.

So, the very beautiful 21-room mansion, just four months old, was reduced to a pile of ashes.

There was much speculation as to the cause of the disastrous fire, but investigations carried on by the fire department, the state and the insurance company failed to provide a definite clue as to what had started the conflagration.

A phone call to New York City brought the very sad Roberts family back to Ridgefield. Steele and Mary Roberts were the picture of dejection as they viewed the scene of the disaster.

Their great loss had its depressing effect and they just could not bring themselves to consider rebuilding the mansion. The place was allowed to lay as it was and for many years the only reminder of the once splendid estate, was its very forlorn looking foundation.

The Steele Roberts family once again called Peaceable Acres their home. The mansion was large enough to house them and many others as well. In just a couple of years, Dr. Dudley D. Roberts passed on and the family began to disappear from this area.

With the entrance of this country into World War II, the lifestyle of many people went through some dramatic changes. This was especially true of those who lived on the large estates.

Luxurious living habits had to be curtailed and with the manpower shortage, many of the activities that had been considered routine just came to a standstill. Soon the stables that housed those beautiful horses became empty as did the dog kennels.

In the early 40's, the beautiful Peaceable Acres was sold to Paul and Sadye Meisner. The Meisners were experienced in the operation of hotels and felt that the large mansion offered great possibility for this type of enterprise. They were quite successful and provided employment for a number of Ridgefield people in what they had transformed into an exclusive hotel.

The Meisners kept their hotel going for some 16 years and it was during this time, as related in Dispatch 166, that a fire in the basement of the mansion caused an explosion that blew several firemen right out of the basement. Fortunately none of the men were seriously injured.

Once again, Peaceable Acres was placed on the market and in 1960, it was sold to J. Louis and Assunta Read. The Reads had lived for some time on Country Club Road and so were familiar with this area. They also had experience in the operation of a hostelry and Louis had been a purchasing agent.

For some reason the hotel business did not pan out so well for the Reads and soon the great house was being leased or rented to various families. Then bits of the estate were sold off with the many buildings that were a part of Peaceable Acres.

One family that lived in the mansion for a short time during this period was the Raymond Sawyers. Ray will be best remembered by his Ridgefield friends for the part he played with the Columbia expedition, in locating the "Thresher," the submarine that sank off the coast of New England. Ray and Margaret hosted some great parties at 51 Peaceable Street.

In the late 60's the Sawyer family moved to Denver and the Reads sold Peaceable Acres to the present owners, Ray and Doris Bessette.

#198: WARD ACRES ARISES FROM GOLF CLUB

It was not our intention to bypass Ward Acres Farm. It just so happened that to tell the story about the Roberts family, it was necessary to keep them together by hopping over what is, at this time, Ridgefield's greatest showplace.

There is little today to remind anyone that Ward Acres was once Ridgefield's only golf course. It served its purpose well for some 40 years and provided a place for the wealthy of our town. to get their much needed exercise. In the days when the Ridgefield Country Club flourished, only the well-to-do played the game of golf.

The golf course was ideally located for those on Peaceable Street, West Lane, Golf Lane and "Millionaires Row." The estates where these people lived just about surrounded the golf course.

Old timers will remember Bill Rimple as the pro at Ridgefield Country Club. Of course there were no electric golf carts in those days and a caddy was an absolute necessity as these were not the kind of people who carried their own clubs.

Just a few of those who carried the golf bags of Ridgefield's famous summer people were Tom Kilcoyne, Al Girolmetti, Gene Casagrande, Dwino Pierandri, and the Romeo boys. I think Mike Romeo was the caddy master later on at the new [Silver Spring] golf course.

The old Ridgefield Country Club extended west and south from Dr. Roberts' Peaceable Acres and crossed Golf Lane almost to where Mead Ridge is now. Despite its size, the course had only nine holes and when the sons and daughters of the original builders of the course came along, they wanted something bigger. So in the late 20's they started looking for a place with acreage enough to support an 18-hole course.

They found what they were looking for on the west side of Silver Spring Road, and by 1930 they were ready to start construction of the present Silver Spring Country Club and the old Ridgefield Country Club was abandoned.

In the mid 30s, the noted artist C. Chandler Ross visited Ridgefield and like everyone else, he fell in love with the town and wanted to make his home here. Mr. Ross thought that owning a golf course was a rather novel idea and moved quickly to purchase the Peaceable Street property.

Francis Martin, always on top of things, was aware that the old clubhouse would not fit into Mr. Ross's plans so he purchased the building and had it dismantled. Marty then had the former clubhouse reconstructed as a home for his goats on Grove Street near Danbury Road.

The little goats were very appreciative of the sumptuous home that Marty had provided them with. They returned the favor by cleaning up the entire surrounding acreage, thereby increasing its value to a great degree. The goats ate everything but the stones and then, as an added bonus, they gave milk, which you could buy if you were lucky enough to get on Marty's list of customers.

The goat barn became a home for the Ridgefield Silversmiths and served in that capacity for several years. Then it became the laboratory and office for The New England Medical Research, under the direction of Dr. John Heller. Of course, everyone knows that the old building was completely gutted in a disastrous fire last year. The debris has been cleared from the property and new owners are in the process of erecting a colossal office building on the site [90 Grove Street].

Chandler Ross wasted no time in preparing the construction of his beautiful new mansion and he hired the very best tradesmen to put it together. There were a great many men employed in the project and I used to stop each day with milk for them. In delivering the milk, it was necessary to walk through the building, room for room, as it was taking shape.

One of the things that intrigued me was a group of Scandinavian carpenters that laid the floors in the mansion. They probably were very good at any kind of carpenter work, but their specialty was laying those narrow oaken boards that made such a superb floor.

These men were so mechanical in doing their job that there was no lost motion whatsoever. They laid a pile of loose boards in front of them and then drew the boards to them, with the claw of their hammers. The tongue and grooves were fitted neatly together and with only a couple of blows with their hammers. The special nails were driven home.

They did this with such precision, such accuracy and such speed that you could get the impression that the floor was actually flowing into place.

There was also a garage and a superintendent's cottage that were built at the same time. Henry Jankowski was Rose's superintendent and he and his family moved into their quarters before the Ross family arrived.

The golf course had been perfectly landscaped for its purpose but considerable alteration was needed to make it suitable for use as a private estate. Some of the tees were left pretty much as they were but the greens had a special kind of grass that did not blend with lawn grass and the bunkers and sand traps had to be filled.

Another task for Henry Jankowski was placing the many fine shrubs that grace the landscape on such an estate. Henry was a man who took his responsibilities very seriously and when he began to find the leaves on some of his rhododendrons turning yellow, he became very concerned. The matter was thoroughly investigated and it was determined that the blight was not caused by the fertilizer that was used. The expert services of Fairfield County Farm Bureau agent LeRoy Chapman were employed. Chappie, as he was called, quickly diagnosed the problem as having been caused by roving animals, probably large dogs.

Henry told me of the trouble he was having and how he had narrowed the cause down to a huge great dane and an equally large St. Bernard that belonged to next door neighbor Dr. Dudley D. Roberts. Every morning Henry would see, at just a few minutes after 8 o'clock, the two dogs as they slowly trotted across what had been the third fairway and make their first stop at the very expensive shrubbery.

#199: THE DOGS WHO WENT SHOPPING AND LEG-LIFTING

Dr. Roberts' two great dogs probably should be listed with the many characters that Ridgefield had such a propensity for bringing forward. The dogs had no way of knowing that most people recognized them immediately, but because they were so large, once seen they were not easily forgotten.

That, coupled with the fact that they were never confined except at night, which allowed them to roam at will, caused them to be readily recognized as they trotted along side by side on Main Street.

Fortunately, both the Great Dane and the St. Bernard had excellent dispositions and any trouble they caused was not intentional. Actually the dogs were so polite that as they ambled along the sidewalk and someone approached, they would turn out to allow the pedestrian to pass. It was good that they did as their size was such that they took up the whole sidewalk.

The big dogs were well disciplined and it was apparent that someone had spent a considerable amount of time in training them.

Walter Stewart had taken over the store that had been operated by Samuel D. Keeler for many years. This old store, next to [today's] Ridgefield Hardware, was later operated by Sam Perry and later still by the Gristede chain and now houses the Ridgefield Auto Parts Store [Deborah Ann's sweets in 2022] on the south end. The store on the north end is now vacant.

At the time we are referring to, it was all one store with groceries on one side and a butcher market on the other. If you could afford it, this was the store to trade in as it carried the very finest products.

The customers were mostly wealthy, like the Roberts family. Sam Keeler may have been a little vain, for when he owned the building he had his initials, SDK, emblazoned in brass, in the sidewalk in front of his store. The letters must have been close to three feet in height and two feet in width. As a kid we were greatly impressed by the large shiny letters that have now been covered with several layers of asphalt.

At any rate, believe it or not, Dr. Roberts' large dogs were trusted with carrying parcels home to Peaceable Street from the store. They would perform this little chore without tearing the

paper or damaging the parcel in any way. We often wondered if any of the parcels they carried contained meat.

This question was answered one day when the dogs appeared at the store and no one came out to offer the parcel to bring home. After waiting a few minutes, the two dogs took matters into their own hands, or perhaps jaws would be more appropriate.

One of Walter Stewart's delivery vehicles was in the process of being loaded. The rear doors of the truck were open and several parcels were in full view. The dogs each selected a parcel. One contained several chops and the other a large steak.

On the side of one, the name E.L. Ballard was printed and on the other, the name S.L. Pierrepont. The dogs had not yet learned to read and there was much embarrassment when the dogs dutifully delivered the parcels to the cook at Dr. Roberts' mansion.

When it was established that the two dogs were responsible for the yellow leaves that were dropping from Chandler Ross's rhododendrons, the situation quickly became serious. Henry Jankowski, the superintendent for Mr. Ross, told me he had tried every method to repulse the neighboring dogs. He was stymied to some degree by Mr. Ross's reluctance to the use of a weapon and even felt that as a new neighbor, he should not complain to the owner of the dogs.

We informed Henry of a new product that had just come on the market called an electric fence. He wanted to know all about it and how it worked as he had to contend with both his own boss and his neighbor.

It was explained to Henry that the rather simple gadget consisted of a strand of wire, attached by insulators to posts set at desired intervals and at a desired height. A six-volt hotshot battery supplied the current that passed through a transformer that turned the current on and off, creating a kind of pulsation rather than a steady flow of electricity. This kind of fence would supply protection while its single strand of wire would not be unsightly, or even attract attention.

The current would flow for a second and then be off for a second. If a person were to touch the wire while the current was flowing through it and the person was wearing rubber-soled footwear, the shock would be very light. However, if that person happened to be barefoot, the jolt could curl his hair.

The purpose of the electric fence was to control the movements of horses, cattle and hogs. It worked well except that horses with their iron-shod hooves got such a jolt that it caused them to jump into the fence rather than away from it.

Hogs on the other hand would touch the wire only once and after the initial experience always stayed a couple of feet from it.

Henry thought about the fence for a few days but when the leaves continued to turn yellow and fall, he decided it was time for action. He explained the proposition to Mr. Ross, who was not quite sure that he wanted to get involved in something that could cause trouble in the neighborhood. He finally gave in when Henry explained that the trouble was already there and this was an opportunity to get rid of the trouble.

The superintendent's cottage had a garage attached and as I made a delivery one morning about eight o'clock, Henry came out and asked me to come into the garage. He explained that he had purchased an electric fence and had it all set up.

The window of the garage offered a fine view of the eastern side of the property and the Roberts estate. Henry asked me to wait as the dogs made their trip across the open field at the same time each morning and they would be on their way at any moment.

Sure enough, it seemed only a minute or two and from the far side of the old fairway, the two huge dogs began their early morning trek toward the shrubbery, some 100 yards distant. The Great Dane led the way as the two enormous dogs lumbered along toward their daily destination. They seemed to be very slow, but that was probably because of our anticipation of what would happen when they reached the electric fence.

The tableau unfolded as though it had been rehearsed as Henry and I watched from the shelter of the garage. Each dog selected his favorite shrub and as if on signal each raised his right rear leg. Apparently both dogs scored a direct hit with the wire and they left the premises at a much greater speed than they arrived even, though much of the distance was covered on three legs. Henry was a very happy man and told me later that the dogs never returned again.

#200: THE MASTER OF WARD ACRES

You may recall that in Dispatch 196, I told about a fine book that I once had. It was written by Albert H. Wiggin's daughter and that dutiful girl had used the book as a stirring defense of her father. A number of years ago, the book was loaned out to someone and we have not seen it since. The book, entitled *New England Son*, was published by Dodd Mead & Company of New York and the author was Marjorie Wiggin Prescott. It told some very interesting stories about her childhood in Ridgefield during the very first years of this century.

At any rate, Marie and I recently returned from a trip to find that a book had been left at our home in our absence. The book is not the one we loaned out, but an exact duplicate.

Unfortunately the person who left the book did not leave his name, so we had no way of thanking him. However, a week later we received a phone call that revealed the very thoughtful person to be George Davis.

We have known George for many years and are deeply grateful for his kindness. George found the very interesting book at a local tag sale and we assure him it will be returned after we have renewed our acquaintance with some of its anecdotes. One cannot read this warm portrayal of a father by his admiring daughter without gaining a large amount of respect for one of the most famous bankers that this nation ever produced

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We have been telling of the difficulties encountered in protecting the shrubbery at the C. Chandler Ross estate on Peaceable Street. Rhododendrons and other valuable shrubs were suffering from the daily visits of Dr. Dudley Roberts' Great Dane and St. Bernard. Mr. Ross was quite pleased with the resurgence of his shrubs, but I do not think he was ever made aware of just how the two huge dogs were persuaded to stay away.

It was Chandler Ross who had purchased the old Ridgefield Golf Course in the mid 30's and after building the mansion, named the place "Shallow Brook Farm."

Chandler and his wife, Mayte, for some reason unknown to me, left their fine estate after about 10 years and it then became the home of Lyle B. Torrey and his family.

It is interesting to note that the Torreys retained the name Shallow Brook for their estate. The shallow brook was one that flowed across the property and made a fine hazard when the place had been used as a golf course. However, it would prove to be not so shallow and a real problem in later years.

Actually the brook could be dry during certain periods but a raging torrent during others. This was especially true after a heavy rain and a flow of water which originated on High Ridge in the vicinity of Altnacraig came rushing down High Ridge and then down Peaceable Street to a culvert that directed the water onto the former golf course.

Lyle Torrey was a big friendly man, with a voice to match his size. He shied away from direct involvement in the political arena and would not run for public office. However, he did accept appointment to Ridgefield's Board of Finance, on which he served with distinction for several years. Lyle had a reputation as a tough but fair financier and when budget time rolled around, the heads of various town departments had better be prepared to defend their budget requests. Lyle always used a pencil that was sharp.

The Torrey family moved on in the latter part of the 50's and by a stroke of exceptional good fortune, the present owner of what we have come to know as Ward Acres Farm was attracted to our town. We say good fortune for in our humble opinion, the Frederic E. Lewis family had been Ridgefield's most generous benefactors. Since the demise of the great Lewis family no one had appeared on the scene who was willing and able to assist various town organizations that had struggled through and were just emerging from the throes of the Depression, and the adverse effects of World War II.

That all was to change with the arrival of Jack B. Ward and his mother at Ward Acres Farm. Mrs. Ward has long since passed on but Jack has been with us for almost 30 years and many institutions in this area are so much better for it.

Interestingly enough, Jack has been considered an "old timer" almost since he first moved here and well he might. When the Wards first came to Ridgefield, the great Peaceable Showplace consisted of the mansion, a garage and a superintendent's cottage.

It would take a number of additional buildings to house the many things that would accompany Jack Ward to his new home. That would be solved by the arrival on the scene of Primo Baldaserini, accompanied by his hammer and saw.

Primo, a fine carpenter, was engaged to provide the stylish stables that would house Jack Ward's beautiful horses. Along with the stables, a museum was added to the compound that would shelter what was probably the finest collection of horse-drawn equipment ever assembled under one roof. It would include great carriages, a tallyho for a four-in-hand, surreys, buckboards, show carts with their shiny chrome spoked wheels, training carts, as well as several sleighs with hand carvings that made them collectors items.

Julius Tulipani headed a group that took care of the outside operations and Pompeo Roberti assisted him. Julius's nephew Joseph Tulipani is still on the job at Ward Acres. The fact that all of the above-mentioned gentlemen are all local people should not be overlooked. It should also be noted that they were all well-versed in caring for such a private estate as they had each experienced many years in the care of various local estates of Ridgefield's wealthy people.

The graceful trees and beautiful shrubs at Ward Acree grace a landscape that is manicured to perfection. The stately maples that line the very impressive driveway stand as sentinels as one approaches the mansion. Everything is laid out in such a manner that is befitting the home of a country gentleman.

The mansion itself has received a substantial addition, during the years since it has become the home of the master of Ward Acres. The whole lovely place is in such a peaceful setting that it would surely satisfy the most meticulous of critics. This grand estate has everything a person could ask for and certainly would be very difficult to duplicate.

There have been times when Jack toyed with the idea of relocating but we are confident he realizes that he could never be happy anywhere else. After all those years, Ridgefield and Ward Acres have a special meaning for him.