



John Edward Phelps
1936

**Memories of My
EARLY YEARS
1907 to 1941**

Memories of My
EARLY YEARS
1907-1941
By John Edward Phelps

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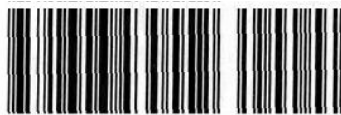
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FOREWORD

It was around the turn of the century, from the twentieth to the twenty-first, when the correspondence between my brother John and me increased tremendously. It was the time when, among other things, he was finalizing his book on the Phelps Family Genealogy, a task which he completed, including the publishing phase, when he was ninety-two. Many of his letters contained bits and pages from that book. Other letters contained information related to stories about his early life.

Later, after his death, I learned about some small notebooks that he had kept, in which there were handwritten notes not only about his early years in New England but also about his military experiences in World War-II. I first took on the job of editing and compiling the latter story, his time in the army, and then worked on the chapters from his early years.

This book contains, in relatively chronological order, some of John's stories about the Phelps Family and his own part in its progression through the difficult depression years leading up to the time when our country went to war.

George A. Phelps, Editor and Compiler

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CHAPTER ONE
REMEMISCENCES WITH FATHER

My father, Austin Clayton Phelps, was born on the 28th of June, 1887, in a house painted red in Chesham, New Hampshire. It is still painted red but the big barn is gone. His father, Alfred Clayton Phelps, bought the place in 1879 because he was planning to marry our Grandma Anginette "Nettie" Seaver, and he did so on December 1, 1880. The house was the first one west of his Father's place on the south side of what is now Brown Road. Father's sister Zoella was born there before he was, on October 20, 1881.

One of our distant Cousins, Richard Upton of the Farwell clan, lives there now with his wife the Rev. Mary, retired. She used to preach in the Chesham Baptist and Harrisville churches. The Chesham Village Church is down the hill from Father's birthplace. When Father was about eight years old his folks moved to the City of Keene, New Hampshire, which once boasted of having the "widest Main Street in the world."

Father and Mother both graduated from the Keene High School and from Tiffin's Business College. They were married in 1907 in Keene, at the home of Elwin and Helen Messer, my mother's parents, at 45 Grant Street.

I was born at my Great Grandma Seaver's home on South Lincoln Street in Keene on October 12, 1907. My brother Richard was born at Grandma and Grandpa Messer's place on February 2, 1909. Father was then working in a Keene shop but I don't know where it was. After Richard was born we lived briefly in a house not far from our Grandparents Messer, then Father got a job, perhaps as a stenographer, the kind of work he had prepared for at Tiffin's in South Keene.

I think it was that summer that his Cousin, Bert Seaver, let my folks use a summer cottage in the woods on his place not far from Silver Lake in Chesham; that is, according to an old photograph. But it must have been that fall when Papa and Mama rented an apartment from a Mr. Southwick, near the Marlborough railway station, and Father took the train to work and return daily.

Brother Stanley was born there in Marlborough on February 14, 1911. Father must then have gotten the job as secretary-stenographer to Mr. Percy Russell, who owned a lumber business and sawmill located on the left as you crossed the bridge entering Chesham from Marlborough. A little white office building on the right was where he worked. Mrs. Russell was some sort of relation to the Seavers, I think. Both of the Russells thought a lot of Father as a reliable worker, and would have recommended him to anybody. But it was there that he realized that he did not want to spend his life cooped up in an office. He had always wanted to be a farmer. He talked with Mr. Russell, who understood what

he meant, and advised him to make use of his Business School training by writing letters to gentlemen farmers advertising for managers, giving his credentials.

Mr. Dawes, a gentleman farmer of Roxbury near Chesham who primarily raised turkeys, hired Father for a year's trial. Mother was carrying Dorothy at the time and Mr. Dawes ordered her to have a girl, to help with the heavy work and feeding of the hired men.

Miss Maude Green of Westmoreland became Mother's "girl Friday," and Mother's brother Charley Messer was "sweet" on our Aunt Maude to be. Not many years later the two were married.

Sister Dorothy was born at Roxbury on December 30, 1912. It was one of New Hampshire's coldest and snowiest winters.

When spring came, and the end of Father's tryout year, Mr. Dawes and Father parted company. Father had decided that he must have a farm of his own. We were all packed off to Father's folks' place at 80 North Lincoln Street in Keene while Father took a train, ostensibly on his way to the Carolinas. Somebody had sold him on the idea that good, low priced farms were available in the Piedmont Belt.

Father stopped off at Springfield, Massachusetts, to talk this over with his brother-in-law, our Uncle Frank Messer, who convinced him that there were good, small, low priced farms for sale in the Springfield area. So he set out next day and found one. And that's how close our younger siblings came to being Southerners.

Meanwhile, the Phelps home at Keene proved to be too small for three lively little boys and a baby girl, so Mother removed to her parents' big farm in Bernardston Mass., where they had moved from Keene soon after Brother Richard was born.

While waiting there for news from Father, Mother received a post card one day giving a date for her to pack us aboard a train and head for Three Rivers, Massachusetts, where Father would be waiting with a wagon. But when we got there, after an exhausting train ride with Aunt Minnie Messer as helper, there was no Father or wagon in sight!

Actually, Father had sent another card with a change in date, because the train with all of our furniture and goods had not arrived when it should have. Our resourceful mother finally found a team and a taciturn driver who knew where the farm was that Father had named, and with the last money she had, a two dollar bill, Mother got us aboard a topless wagon and under a hot sun on a dusty road we finally arrived at our destination.

Father and a teamster were there unloading a dray of the late furniture that had caused the need of the second card. Father was glad to see us all but it was late in the day. A quick supper and to bed on mattresses on the floor in the house was the last order of the day.

Every other place we ever lived in was a palace compared to this house and the run-down 25 acres with it. We had arrived in mid-May, and would leave it a productive piece of property in Mid-May of 1920.

Father worked hard and long hours and we began to be of use around the place as we grew older. He had to "work out" at first; that is, he had to work for more affluent farmers to earn the cash we needed. A Deacon Barrett hired him and tried to get him to attend his Baptist Church in Three Rivers, I think, but we finally attended the handsome, tall spired, white Congregational church in Ludlow Center, about four

miles away riding in our "carryall with the fringe on the top."

Father built up the farm and had a small dairy and a very large henhouse full of white leghorn hens. He peddled butter and eggs from door to door in Ludlow Town with his wagon, with one of us boys holding the horse. Many of the Portuguese folks wanted our white eggs, and the Scots, Irish and French the good butter. We sold broilers in season.

We raised corn and beans. Mother made great corn bread from the meal ground at Alden's mill, which we ate with our own baked beans. Of course there were other crops: hay, millet, buckwheat, oats and rye. And Father raised bees as well. And we boys caught fish in our free time, and every fall there was a pair of pigs to be slaughtered. And there was wood to be cut for the kitchen as well as for the parlor fires when the frosts and snow came. But with that there came sleigh bells, sliding and skating on a shallow pond.

Father got the school bus driving job when Richard and I started going to school along with other kids who needed transportation to the District No. 9, one room, five grades, white school house at Red Bridge on the west side of the Chicopee River in Ludlow. At first he used a horse and wagon and sleigh in the winter, but in 1918 Father bought a 1907 Ford runabout with a shiny brass radiator and oil lamps on either side of the cowl, but no windshield. This was solved when a 1914 Ford that had been in an accident gave Father the chance to acquire real mudguards and acetylene headlamps.

He had already converted the machine to a bus, by building a set of plank seats length-wise at the rear of the seat. The Ford was a 1907 model with the steering wheel on the right side and a handbrake lever and neutral stick on the outside of the body of the car. Of course it was hand-cranked to start, as all cars were at the time.

Another thing, the car was put in the garage and jacked up off the ground when cold weather came. Then it was back to the double-runner farm sled fitted out with a floor, sideboards, lengthwise plank seats and straw on the floor, and plenty of blankets. But how wonderful was the sound of the bronze Swiss bells as the big horses trotted along the glistening tracks in the hard packed snowy roads, with every now and then a ball of snow thrown up from the sharp-calked horseshoes, and the "sissling" sound of iron shod runners on the shiny, hard-packed road track.

Even frost-nipped ears and shiny red noses were worth the price, when memories are now recalled of snuggly warm bodies and woolly blankets when annual church hayrides were stylish!

Those are the good old days that everyone remembers. Not the frozen kitchen pipes and the pitcher pump, the howling winds that sifted snow upon your blankets in the attic, the cold floor when you leaped from bed and donned your cold overalls and jacket, and plunged out the kitchen door with mittened hands to wield the shovel twixt house and barn to feed the cattle, or when sitting on ice-covered logs in a great buffalo-hide coat, ears collared and frost rime building from one's own breathing. And so it was when Father brought his shaggy beasts to day's end out of the dark pine woods.

Father worked part-time for well-off farmers, as I said, especially for a Mr. Crandall at Red Bridge who raised broilers for wholesale

shipment. Father learned the business from him. Father was a skilled man with an axe and chopped many a cord of wood for pay. He was one of the best scythe-men around and worked on the mowing gang for Mr. Hurlburt, the superintendent of the Springfield Reservoir. Those men had to keep the grass and brush cut in wet areas where mowing machines could not operate.

Came the sinking of the Lusitania and America's entry into WW-I. Father decided that he could leave his family better off with army pay and insurance if he were killed, than by working on his farm. When he went to Springfield to enlist he took me with him. I remember the grizzled old Sergeant looking Father in the eye and saying, "The United States needs more farmers with as many kids as you have than it does one more soldier. Damn it sir, I wish I had your assets! You're free to go, sir."

Brother Frank was born on May 26, 1916, Brother Charles on Thanksgiving Day, November 28, 1917, Sister Ruth on May 31, 1919.

After the War Father decided that, even though he got paid to run the school bus, he would like to live where his kids could walk to school. He broke this news one suppertime in early spring, 1920, saying that he had looked at a farm in Brookfield, a few miles east of Ludlow. The fields rolled gently down to the waters of a lake, he said. A benign old house stood guard over field and water, and a big barn hovered behind the house. Just what he had always wanted, if he could raise the down payment; I never knew what that was but he was sure we kids would love the place for swimming, boating and fishing. It never happened. Instead, a few days later we learned that we were to pack up and be on our way to Grandpa Messer's place in Bernardston by the middle of May! We made it. Father had bought the big dairy and fruit farm. It was just under two miles from the center of town and we would walk to school. Our house was the last one at the top of the Fox Hill Road, although the road had once continued over and down the back side of West Hill. In the springtime it developed that the road was an almost impassably muddy right-of-way between cut banks.

Brother Raymond was born on the Fox Hill Farm on the morning of December 14, 1920, seven months after our arrival on the hill. It was right after the December rains and a thaw and the dirt road was a hellish mess. But it was a nice morning. Doctor Barnard of Greenfield had driven up in his brand new, shiny, red Buick convertible. But just in sight of the house all four wheels had dropped into the water-filled ruts and flailed mud uselessly! His car rested on its bottom like a boat. Angrily, with his face nearly as red as his car, he walked the last few hundred feet to the house, where he regained a professional mien just in time to be present when Brother Ray made his appearance, with the customary yell, we were told, as we were then well on our way down the hill to school.

Afterwards, all was smiles and happy predictions for another man in the family, the good doctor joked briskly with Grandma Messer, who was on hand to help for a few days. He drank a cup of hot coffee, complimented Grandma on her fresh hot doughnuts, kidding about his weight at the same time, and departed in his red Buick, which Father had hauled to the house with our team, Jerry and Ben. Father advised the good Doctor to keep his wheels on the high ground, and he was off.

Ray was the only one of us born on Fox Hill, because in about two years time Father realized that there were too many acres and not enough hands to do the farm work; he had bought Mr. Egbert Cairns' milk route that served the town's good wives fresh milk at the door every morning.

Austin C. Phelps was six feet tall and generally wore a sunny countenance. But he could be very stern. When he was a newcomer in Bernardston, a neighbor owed him for several loads of stove wood. When Father expected to collect it the man acted as though he had no intention of paying. Father gave him a week to think it over.

Apparently the man let it be known to his neighbors that he had no intention of paying the newcomer. Apparently those neighbors considered him to be a dead beat, and when the man truculently bragged, "That'll be the day before I'll pay," they expected a fight and planned to see it.

Father knew what was going on so he appeared early on a Sunday morning at the man's house. The man appeared at the door unshaven and half-dressed. Father put his foot in the half open door and calmly advised the man that he should pay. Of course the fellow refused. I believe I know what Father looked like. When he was angry his blue eyes became twin icy sparks and his words could be like whips. The man soon agreed to pay his bill albeit a little at a time, because he really was hard-up having been temporarily laid off at a Greenfield mill.

Father once remarked that anyone unexpectedly faced by a determined man before breakfast, and half dressed, is apt to want to quickly settle a problem; especially when there is no grandstand to cheer him on.

He sold the farm to Mr. Willis Herrick and we all moved to the Huckle Hill Farm in mid-May, in time for spring planting. Father had bought the 80-acres more or less from Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Cutting. There were many advantages, aside from the fact that there was sunshine in the early morning. Like Fox Hill this place was just less than two miles from school so we walked, unless someone gave us a lift. Father soon sold the milk route to Mr. Dell Cranston of South Street and devoted more time to the farm.

We boys were growing up. We soon had our own jobs around the farm; the cow and horse stables, working the horses with the mowing machine haying, and helping Father in the woodlot. Jerry and Ben were still our draft horses, and even the cattle had come with us so that Father had to enlarge the barn and erect two silos to keep up with his growing herd of milch cows. Like his neighbors, he sold milk to Mallory's of Springfield in 40-quart cans, that for several years we hauled to the railroad station for shipment.

Huckle hill was up the east side of the Falls River that ran more or less centrally from north to south through the township, whereas the Fox Hill Farm had been on the west side of the river.

When we lived on Fox Hill we used to pass the lower end of a rounded hill that began at the top of the first, short steep hump in the Fox Hill Road. Rightward, near top of that hill, was a big mostly dead American Chestnut Tree, with one live branch that bore the last native chestnuts in the fall of 1920, as I remember.

On Huckle Hill, a few dozen yards beyond our north line fence, was the spot where the first church in Bernardston had been erected. And some distance up the road, on the old John Fields place when we first moved to Huckle Hill, was the location of Deacon Sheldon's Fort during the early Indian Wars. On our own land near the north fence was a depression with shards of ancient handmade brick and broken pottery. (A history notation.)

Father still had to find outside work to supplement his farm income for our growing family. He got a job at the East Deerfield Railroad Yards, a vast complex of sidetracks where freight trains were made up for the western run through Greenfield to Albany, or for trains going east to Boston. This entailed engine houses and machine shops for locomotive repairs, and turntables to direct locomotives to stalls in the engine house, or to reverse their heading. These short turntable-tracks were so finely balanced that a man could almost turn them in their circular pits by hand. Indeed the first ones were turned in that way. Father operated one of the turntables for a while, until he developed a terrible carbuncle on the back of his neck that put him in the Farren Memorial Hospital in Montague City for a spell. We boys ran the farm.

Back on the farm he showed us boys how to bury large, elongated granite boulders by undermining them and using a crowbar and a fulcrum in the right place. He showed us how to lift a sizeable stone onto one's thigh by stooping near the ground and not bending forward from the hips, and to move great boulders along the ground with rollers, even up a ramp with nothing but a crowbar, and to lay stone walls like the old timers did.

About then Father began working with the town road gang, and shortly thereafter he worked as a foreman for the Kelleher Brothers who were building roads. They liked him because the Italian and other ethnic laborers would work well for him because he treated them "like people," they said.

That reminds me that when we boys were at the Red Bridge School in Ludlow, some of us Yankee heritage kids were kind of snotty to our Polish fellows. Father got wind of this, and held his school bus while he gathered the few of us together and told us that he didn't ever want to hear of us looking down on anyone because of his ancestors. "Every one of us is a foreigner to the American Indian," he said. I think every one of my brothers and sisters feel that way.

After Richard was married, he did a lot of carpentering before he finally got into the machinist trade, which was his real calling. He once took a contract to demolish the old horse sheds that stood along the edge of Depot Street and belonged to the Unitarian Church. Then his contract time was running out. For some reason I was at home, so Father and I went down and helped him finish the job.

Another historical episode occurred when the Quabbin Reservoir area towns had to be cleared out before the gates could be closed to hold the water. He and Stanley took a building apart, numbering the pieces as they did so, and put them back together again as a lovely little cottage on South Street just north of the old Dwight Slate building.

Grandpa Phelps, a Baptist Deacon for many years, always began the day with a family prayer. We knelt by our chairs while he prayed for

guidance for the day for all of us, including our president and country. Then he gave thanks for all of our benefits.

But Father, although brought up as a Baptist, had never been baptized. He and Mother were supposed to be baptized on a certain Sunday at the Bernardston church. At the last minute he would not do it but Mother was baptized.

"Why didn't you do it?" Mother asked later.

"I was afraid the minister would lose a hold of me and I would drown," was always his answer. He would never say grace at the table. He claimed that he was not good enough to do so.

However, on Sundays we never were allowed to do anything but the needed feeding and care of the farm animals. And when I was small, no card games or rough outdoor games were allowed. We had one neighbor, a WW-I hero, who used to get up early on Sunday mornings and mow his hayfield, or maybe do his plowing. He had a carrying voice and would swear at his team. I have often wondered, of late years, if he did that on purpose to aggravate my father, though I never heard him allude to it. Actually the man was kindly and would be the first to assist anyone in trouble.

Father was pleased when Richard decided to go to college. He went to Antioch College in Ohio to study electrical engineering; which, as Aunt Mertie said, was a practical calling. That pleased Father immensely also. I always felt that Father would have liked for me to study to be a teacher. He worried because very few artists made much money.

In July of 1923, at the Huckle Hill Farm, a lovely sister Helen Louise was stillborn. But on Richard's and my graduation from High School at Powers Institute, June 23, 1926, Elizabeth Louise was born. And the following year Brother George Alfred joined the family on October 29, 1927. He had the honor of being named after our Cousin George Woodward, and his middle name was our Grandpa Phelps's first name. Robert Seaver Phelps, our youngest sibling, was born on St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 1933. By some quirk of fate I was living temporarily unemployed but working for my room and board on the paternal farm.

In August, I was loading the hay wagon while some of my younger siblings were "treading the load" in a field above Mr. William Field Sr.'s place. Sister Dorothy brought her car to a stop outside the field bar-way, then came through the passage toward me, all smiles, and handed me a letter that she knew I'd want to see. It was from my erstwhile art school roommate, Roger Augustus Wolcott of Amherst, Mass. Eagerly opening the missive I discovered that, although he was living with his folks having lost his job at New York City, he had just been awarded a commission to do murals under one of the Federal Works of Art Programs that President Roosevelt had just put in motion for the relief of artists. This was during the Great Depression of the 1920s and '30s. The murals were to be painted in the Springfield Natural History Museum.

"Come right away, John," he wrote, "as I have asked for you as my assistant."

Richard had come along with Dorothy, having come home for the summer, so he took over my pitchfork and finished my day's job. I

hopped into Dot's car, we returned to the house where I quickly packed some clothes, and she took me to catch a train to Northampton where Roger picked me up. I stayed the night at his folks' place, where I met Beth and baby Elaine, his wife and child, and in the morning we were off to Springfield. There I met Josiah Marvel, the Director of the brand new, Springfield Fine Arts Museum. He was the person who assigned the artists to work in the new Federal Program.

After filling out the proper papers and displaying examples of my art, I was duly enrolled as Roger's Assistant artist. There followed weeks of research and planning, and travel to the Peabody Museum and New York City to study murals done or being painted by contemporary artists as well as traditional mural painters. Even Father became interested and took me on a trip to Dartmouth College at Hanover, N.H., to study the Orozco Murals there. At last we were ready to begin painting.

There were two 60-foot walls and one 45-foot wall, each 10-feet tall and beginning 10-feet from the floor around three sides of the great room, the fourth wall was of windows giving light to an inner room. The subject of the paintings in the Hall of Ethnology was suggested by the large cases against the walls and standing on the floor, which were full of ethnic examples of clothing, weapons and art work from all over the world. One wall would display five panels of civilizations of the Western Hemisphere; another wall, civilizations of the Eastern Hemisphere existing about the time of the great navigational land discoveries by Columbus, Magellan and others; the third wall displayed two huge discs of the two hemispheres, with colored lines across the oceans showing the courses that the ships of discovery took.

[In 1992 I published a book entitled, "Forgotten Mural Painters of Springfield, 1933 - 1938," containing color illustrations of these and other murals done by the Springfield artists who participated in the Federal Program.]

After I left the Huckle Hill Farm, in 1933, and before Roger and I completed the murals in early 1937, the United States Depression worsened to the point that in 1935 Father lost his farm. He moved the family and livestock to the ancient Holton Farm in West Northfield, which he rented. It was located on Route 10, on the hill above Bennett's Meadow Bridge.

While living at the Holton Place, and when I was still in Springfield, my younger siblings Betty and Bobby contracted scarlet fever. The house was quarantined with the infected ones, Mother, Ruth and George inside. But Father, Frank, Charles and Raymond, in order to be allowed to farm and sell milk, set up housekeeping across the road from the big house in a small building that had recently been a gas station.

Father began working as a paperhanger for the Mount Hermon School for Boys, which bordered the south fields and woods of the Holton Farm. Brother Frank, with Father's blessing, was studying at the School.

Charles, now about seventeen and almost through his junior year of high school, was allowed to find a job rather than have to adapt to the Northfield system of public schools.

Soon Father sold his dairy herd and gave his faithful horses Jerry and Ben to an old friend, Mr. Woodward, of Goose Lane in Bernardston. Father told me, later when he visited me at my Springfield Studio in 1936, that his friend had put the two elderly animals out to pasture for the rest of their natural lives.

In the spring of 1936, days of incessant rain caused the Connecticut River to reach its highest stage of flood since 1927. Great floes of ice formed dams in the narrows and against bridges forcing the levels ever higher. The roaring sound was loud and constant at the farm, two-thirds of a mile away.

As soon as it was possible to cross after the flood, Father and his remaining family moved to Meadow Street in Northfield, on the east side of the river. The younger siblings were properly enrolled in the Northfield schools, although Raymond would leave high school and take off with the family dog, Wayne, to live and work in New Hampshire with Uncle Henry Plimpton and others.

Frank did very well at Mt. Hermon School, having earned his way by working in the School Store under Mr. and Mrs. Carmean. There he learned how to keep store, and when he was nineteen Father underwrote his buying what has always been called "Streeter's Store," no matter who owned it, in Bernardston. He was single and did so well that by age 21 he owned the store.

Earlier Brother Stanley had owned Streeter's store. He had previously worked for Myron and Luman Barber in their store, but when the Barbers were forced to reduce their help because of the "New Deal" regulations Stanley went into business for himself. He said that he learned a valuable lesson then. With too many uncollected, outstanding bills he couldn't make ends meet.

He then hired out to manage Father's old Huckle Hill farm for Harold Streeter, who had acquired it, until a Mr. Koch of Greenfield offered him a still better wage. Stanley managed Mr. Koch's Sheldegren Farm throughout the years of WW-II, and hired Brother Charles as a farm hand. As it happened Charles was then deferred from military service because farm workers were essential at the home front during the war.

Frank loved to play the violin and studied briefly with an elderly gentleman in Greenfield. Grandpa Phelps then gave him the violin that his Father, Jason Phelps, had given him when he was a youth. Frank played for church affairs and for fun with his musical friends.

One Saturday evening, after closing his store for the weekend, he and a young friend, Hulbert Denison, drove to Boston to visit friends. Late Sunday night they had driven back as far as Gardner, Mass, when Frank apparently fell asleep at the wheel and ran off the road at a curve. The vehicle, a Ford panel truck, half-rolled over and he was pinned against the earth and killed. Hulbert had been asleep in the back of the truck. After the funeral, Brother Charles and Father worked to reduce the inventory and close Frank's store.

On the same Saturday that Frank was killed, Father had stopped at my Studio at 1694 Main Street in Springfield for a visit. I took him to see the murals that Roger and I had been working on, introduced him to Mrs. Grace Pettis Johnson, the Museum Director, and other friends who happened to be there. In the evening I took him to dinner at a

first class restaurant across the street from my place. I ordered a steak for him and he was pleased. It was done exactly as he liked. Rare! Afterwards we repaired to my Studio and visited way into the night.

Father was never at a loss for words, but on this particular visit he was more relaxed and retrospective than I had ever known him to be. He asked if I remembered when he had run into a bicyclist, who had appeared suddenly on a sidewalk from behind a house as Father started forward. There he was falling in front of the radiator. His dignity was hurt more than his body but the front wheel of the bike was crumpled. Litigation followed; no insurance in those days. It was several years before the case closed with the payment of a sum of money. I remembered, although it was from his telling us all about it at the time.

He went on to tell about an earlier time when one of us boys went with him to mind the horse when he peddled butter and eggs to the Ludlow housewives. I was with him a number of times. One lady in particular he spoke of was a Mrs. Bordeau. She was one of his best customers. She bought eggs, butter, and fruit in season. One time I took a basket of eggs to her kitchen when Fathers arms were full with a basket of apples, he reminded me. She treated me to a glass of milk and a fresh cookie or two. She was a red haired lady and quite excitable at times. Her only son had been in Mexico when the Army made its useless pursuit of the brigand Poncho Villa before WW-I. On his last visit home he had given his Mom some Springfield Rifle cartridges. And Mrs. Bordeau gave one of them to Father. (Later, unbeknownst to him, I borrowed it to hold a clandestine "show and tell" to some of my cronies during the noon recess at the Red Bridge School in Ludlow.

I remember driving Black Dick on one of those Ludlow, back door to back door peddling days along the tradesmen's alley where Father sold his white leghorn eggs to the Portuguese women. He reminded me of the jolly lady who always threw the wooden gate wide open with a voluble greeting. She would invite him in to her kitchen. But first she'd hold one of those pristine white eggs to the light, knock the small-end tip of the shell on the gate post, rear her raven-locked head back and with the punctured tip to her lips let the golden contents rush down her throat.

She talked a lot about her country, Father told me, and always hoped to return there someday. When Father praised her culinary skill after tasting some of her homemade spaghetti, she insisted on showing him just how it was made so he could cook some for his family. Father had to try it, but he admitted to having forgotten a stage in the making someplace. She used to cut it in thin strings and hang it in the sun, as I seem to remember seeing it once.

Father went on to stories about Fox Hill and how he had bought some big Holsteins of Mr. Arthur Chapin of Gill, who was closing out his dairy farm and retiring. As he spoke I remembered Mr. Chapin and his son Myron bringing a pair of the huge cows up the Fox Hill Road, tied behind a buggy that sagged terribly on Mr. Chapin's side for he was a big man. Father bought the Holsteins, I remembered.

"But the story I wanted to remind you of," Father went on, "was the

one Mr. Chapin told when he came to dinner soon after we moved to the Huckle Hill Farm."

It seems that when Arthur Chapin and his brother Roy were kids, their folks lived on the farm in the same house we were living in when he told the story, and I suddenly realized that Mr. Chapin had really come for his last payment for the Holstein cows.

In the Huckle Hill farmhouse, one entered the stairs to the attic of the whole house through a narrow doorway in the wall opposite the back door entry. It was almost as steep as a ladder, and just as we would do the Chapin brothers had climbed them every night to their attic beds. One dark early morning his brother Roy, groggy with sleep, stumbled in the darkness at the top of those stairs and fell bumping down the thirteen steps and whacked his head terribly hard against the door frame at the bottom. For a long time he was not expected to live but eventually he did. I remember him as perhaps not the brightest man in the world, but a willing worker whom housewives favored with puttering jobs that their husbands never seemed to find time to do.

To digress a moment: When I drove through Bernardston for the first time after returning from WW-II, I saw Roy Chapin on the sidewalk in front of the Goodale United Church. I parked my car and crossed the road to speak to him. He was overwhelmed to see me but then began to cry. "Nobody wants ole Roy anymore" he wheezed. I consoled him as best I could and went on my way. The old man was a lost soul in a gathering generation intent on speed. I never saw him again.

After Father retold the story, he paused a moment and then began to reminisce about when he was a lad in Chesham, N.H. How he had "worked" for a kindly old man who lived across the road from his parents place. He would cut stove-length wood for the man's kitchen stove. The man's name was Mr. Eaves. He made the lad a boy's sized bucksaw and a boy's sized sawhorse. He would admonish the lad every morning to be careful, and to stop cutting just before the saw cut through the last bit of wood. And he demonstrated what he meant. The small boy promised solemnly to be careful.

After a while the sawhorse crossbar began to look quite sick with lots of nicks in it. The lad felt uneasy about that but he had tried to be careful. Then one morning, wonder of wonders, there was a brand new crossbar and the small boy felt relieved. Before he began to work his friend Mr. Eaves bade him the usual "Good morning" and bade him once more to be careful and stop the saw before it went through the stick. The small boy once more solemnly promised to be careful.

After a few sticks had been sawn the same old thing happened, the saw blade dropped through to the crossbar. But this time there was a shower of sparks. Somebody had driven a lot of big-headed nails the length of the bar and a careless boy, my father, became a wiser one.

Mr. Eaves always invited the small boy into the kitchen after his morning stint was finished. There, Mrs. Eaves would fuss over him and make sure he had a comfortable chair. Then he would be given his "pay," a glass of milk and a fresh cookie or two and a shiny penny, while the elderly couple filled him in on the neighborhood news that he later dutifully reported to his mother.

Father told me that he had never realized that Mr. Eaves was a black man until he went to school in Keene, after his folks moved

there when he was about eight years old.

"Mr. Eaves wrote to me after my folks moved to Keene," Father said quietly with the hint of a tear in his eyes; and sure enough, after Father died I found one that he had saved for so many years.

Mr. Eaves was a runaway slave during the Civil War, Father told me. While taken in at an "underground railway station," somewhere in the Chesham area he and a young woman had begun a romance. After the War was over and the slaves were free, Mr. Eaves returned and the two had married. But they agreed never to have children. The small boy had been a great solace to the devoted couple.

It was really late when Father finally went to sleep on the built-in couch I had made, and I rolled up in a blanket and slept soundly on the floor.

It was about three or four o'clock in the morning when there was a loud knocking on the studio door. I groped my way to it in the darkness and opened the door to find a Western Union Telegraph boy standing there with a telegram in his hand. "Is there a Mr. Austin Phelps here?" he enquired.

"Yes," I replied, and he handed me the telegram addressed to my father. I turned on the lights and handed it to Father where he sat on the edge of the bed. As he read it in silence he suddenly seemed to grow older.

"Frank is dead," he said very calmly, handing me the telegram to read for myself.

To me as a young man it just didn't seem possible, though of course we both knew it to be true.

Mother had sent it to my Studio believing that Father, whom she knew had planned to be in Springfield, must have stopped for the night at my place when he hadn't returned to Northfield.

We had to wait until six o'clock in the twilight morning for a gasoline station to open. Then Father filled the tank at a station near the entrance to Springfield's Memorial Bridge, and wasted no time driving to Northfield where we stopped at Mr. Kidder's Funeral Home.

The police were still there so Father talked with them and learned that, to the best of their understanding, Frank must have fallen asleep at the wheel of his car and run off the road at a curve near Gardner, Mass. The car had rolled over onto its side and Frank was pinned under the door when it was flung open and his shoulder was broken.

Mr. Kidder took me aside and told me that he believed, after examining Frank, that he was strangled to death due to the weight of the car. Had someone been there to lift the car enough for him to be pulled out from under the car, he might have been saved.

Hulbert Denison, who had been sleeping in the back of the car, was only somewhat bruised and shaken up with a black eye.

The funeral was held at Frank's beloved Goodale United Church in Bernardston. It was something for the family to remember. The church was full of people and the flowers were many in tribute to the young man whom people trusted and loved.

Frank had become a pretty good violinist. I believe it was Father or Dorothy who asked Mr. Harold Alexander Leslie, a virtuoso of Greenfield, to play several of Frank's favorite violin pieces,

especially a certain Dvorak, at the funeral service. He too was deeply impressed by the exhibition of affection of this young man.

It was a soul satisfying service in memory of our Frankie, and it touched Father to the depths of his being. He was never the same afterwards. He had lost his farm and now his son Frank.

Father had always been interested in spiritualism, now he pursued his study more ardently than ever. He often went to Springfield to attend the Spiritualist Church there. He invited Mother to go with him at first but she refused. Years later she confided to me that it might have been a mistake, for he went by himself and associated with some fine and some not so nice people. He eventually left home and Mother completely. He would divorce her and marry the widow Marston of Northfield and live in the West.

But on that evening of December 31, 1936, he was still optimistic that "all things work together for good." He had actually consulted a wise man somewhere in the Worcester area the day before visiting me in Springfield. He felt that many individuals were truly more interested in trying to better humanity than were our traditional churches. He believed that they were too involved in politics and money.

Sometimes he invited me to accompany him when he visited those who claimed to be able to receive information from the ethereal ones. Many were sincere people who really believed that they could help folks who were mentally confused or, more to the point, who needed assurance that life was not meaningless.

He introduced me to a Universalist Minister, a Rev. Owen Washburn, who preached in a small church in Guilford, Vermont. Rev. Washburn had published several books on the subject of spiritualism.

Father had read the Bible from cover to cover, had discussed specific areas with ministers at Sunday School classes, and also with knowledgeable people of various church affiliations. I also know that he had listened humbly when certain churchmen had preached dogma. I had known him to listen intently to men of entirely different faiths. He had read the Apocryphal Books in a large, tooled leather-and-gold Holy Bible that had been given to him, as well as the Josephus book about the Jewish insurrection when the Temple at Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. He had read of the mysterious Fort Masada, where a remnant of its garrison employed suicide rather than be captured, tortured and made slaves by the conquering Roman soldiers. He was also interested in what I had read, stories gleaned from the Greek and Roman classics and translations of the Ramayana and the writings of Confucius.

I was interested indeed when brothers George and Raymond, living in Nevada and the West, informed me that in a sense he had gone full circle; that is, he was highly esteemed by Baptist church members and the young people listened to him. Brother Ray wrote that one Sunday morning when listening to his radio, on a day when the regular minister was unable to be present, he heard a sermon delivered by Father.

I remembered what Grandpa Phelps used to say: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Which, of course, was a quote from Proverbs 22:6. In fact, Father often used to quote that Proverb himself.

Father would talk with anybody, whether a tramp he picked up on the road or a College professor. I remember, and I'm sure Brother Richard would have remembered, the day that Father brought Mr. Davis, a customer on his milk route, up to our Fox Hill house. He and Father had been discussing the merits of the rumor that a treasure was buried in the cellar of our house. Mr. Davis had had some success in finding such things by, shall I say, an occult sense. So Father and Mr. Davis went into the old cellar, which was stone-walled and earthen-floored as old cellars were at the time. It was dank and dark and the lantern light only accented the eeriness and whetted expectations of ghostly figures casting odd shadows. We boys did not stay there very long.

Mother was exasperated when we came up to the kitchen and told what was going on. When the men mounted the rickety cellar stairs and admitted to finding no clues whatever, only a floor of ledge-like hardness, Mother made a few sarcastic remarks. The men went out the back door into the bright sunlight somewhat sheepishly, and no mention was ever made of the affair.

Mr. Davis had a small shoe repair shop in his home and often listened to other people's problems. He had lost a leg while working at the East Deerfield Railway Yards. He was walking beside a slow moving freight train, I believe, when suddenly a fast moving passenger train zoomed through on a parallel set of tracks. Even though he dropped to the ground and held onto the ends of the railroad ties, the suction was too great and he lost part of a leg under the trucks of the passing cars.

"Peg-leg Davis," the kids called him, though not to his face. But Father said that many people felt that his being so near death had lent him a spiritual quality that enabled him to help troubled people.

In Northfield, Father began playing cards in the evenings with some friends of the Lazelles at their home. Among them was a widow Marston. Father invited Mother to accompany him but she felt that she should stay at home and make sure that our younger siblings did their school homework. So Father went by himself.

In her later years, Mother admitted that she should have gotten someone to be with the young ones and gone along with him, because after that Father began to be absent for a day or two at a time. (He was visiting Spiritualists in other towns.)

Father finally left the house, bag and baggage. He rented a room for himself and took a job in the Leather Tannery in Winchester, New Hampshire. Gladys and I, with then baby Jason, had a short visit with him there when I was on a furlough from the army, not too long before I went overseas in 1944. When I returned from the Army in mid-October 1945, he was living in Nevada with his new wife, the Widow Marston of Northfield.

Fortunately, Mother had been working part-time in the Northfield Library, and in a short time she was recommended for the position of Head Librarian. Our younger siblings did well in High School. Betty was Valedictorian of her class and George did well enough to graduate.

Under Sister Dorothy's aegis, George studied the violin under Mr. Leslie. He not only played solos with the Young People's Symphony Orchestra of Greenfield, but also earned a little money playing at dances in the area with Shattuck's Dance Orchestra.

Betty and George both worked at the Northfield Hotel and Chateau to earn money to pay their way, as many other Northfield youths did. I believe Ruth had worked there briefly before them. Robert's mechanical genius enabled him to transform an old, reel-type lawnmower to a power tool so that he could mow more lawns more easily; for the fact is that, other than two checks of \$15.00 for Betty, there was no money coming from Father for their upbringing.

In a letter I received from Father sometime in 1956, he said that he had removed himself from the scene because he felt that Mother would be better at bringing up the younger children than he was at that time.

George and Raymond wrote to me from the west, occasionally mentioning that Father and Ruth (Marston) seemed to be doing well, that Father was applying his trade of house papering and painting. Indeed Father had sent me a snapshot of him surrounded by the tools of his trade, where he appeared to be mixing a can of paint.

In one of Father's 1956 letters, when he and wife Ruth were living in Pomona, California, he wrote that he wished that when his time came he would die in a lonesome, forgotten desert place.

On December 31, 1956, Father had gone bicycling. While returning to his home in Pomona, for whatever reason we will never know, he turned suddenly in front of a motorist who could not avoid hitting him. He was taken to a hospital in Pomona where Sister Dorothy, who was a nurse, was able to be with him when he died. He had suffered a mortal injury to his head and never came out of a coma. We are all eternally glad that Dorothy was able to be with him. She and husband Elmer Russell were living in the area at the time.

Father died on New Year's Day, twenty years to the day after his son Frank was killed in the auto accident at Gardner, Mass.

None of us children in the East were able to be present at Father's simple funeral, but we were represented by Dorothy, Raymond and George who were then living in Nevada. Despite the fact that Father had written to me that he wished he might die forgotten in some desert spot, his name, as it should be in memoriam, is carved on our Family Monument in Bernardston, Massachusetts, on his Father's monument in Keene, New Hampshire, and on his own marker in a Pomona, California Cemetery.

Brother Frank lies in what was in 1937 a new section of Bernardston's Center Cemetery, situated between the Unitarian Church and the Baptist Church. By now that area is nearly filled with Frank's contemporaries, including those of our family and some of our older friends.

At this time there are the graves of Mother, Richard and his small son, David, and my son, Vernon. All lie in the same plot with Frank and, as I wrote, Father's name has been added to the family monument "IN MEMORY."

Several times, in earlier years, Father had mentioned that his youthful wish had been to be a farmer and have a lot of children. Mulling this over, recently, I realized that if he had never married, or if he'd married and had no boys, the Phelps name by the descendants of his Grandfather Jason Phelps by his third wife, Mary Webster Knowlton, would have ceased.

In closing, it would be well to note that our father left a small "tribe" of both males and females by the name of Phelps: twelve children altogether, 11 of whom lived to the age of 21 years and older, and ten of whom had children to the sum of 33 grandchildren, several great-grands and a few great-great-grandchildren at this date in time.

I have written about our Mother and of her STEADFAST love for Father and her Family in another essay.

CHAPTER TWO AUNTS AND UNCLES

There were ten children in the family of Elwin and Helen Messer. Our mother was the fifth to be born, the first girl.

Mother told me that everybody loved Uncle Arthur Messer. I'm sure that as a year-old kid I had to have seen him, because my folks used to once in a while have Sunday dinner at the Messer family home at 45 Grant Street in Keene, New Hampshire. Then, during the last month that my mother was carrying brother Richard, Grandma insisted that Mother and I should live with them until Richard was born.

Uncle Arthur died about a month before that event occurred. But it was my brother Stanley who was given Uncle Arthur's name for his middle name. Uncle Charley named his oldest son, Arthur, and so did Uncle Frank who lived in Springfield, Mass.

I do not remember seeing Uncle Will at 45 Grant Street, as he had married and had his own home by then. But when we lived on the Fox Hill Farm in Bernardston, in 1921, he used to come up from South Street and play his drum when my Grandpa Phelps visited and had brought his drum from Keene. And it was Uncle Will who took me to Greenfield in his Model "T" Ford touring car to get my driver's license after I graduated from Powers Institute [high school].

I think my Uncle Frank had left home by the time Richard was born. He was the one who advised my Father to buy a small farm in the Springfield area, instead of going all the way south to the Carolinas as he had intended. I recall that when we lived up on Huckle Hill, in Bernardston, Uncle Frank drove up from Springfield one Sunday to show off his new wife, our Aunt Blanche. (In the future when I returned from overseas and WW-II, I had a very short and sad visit with Uncle Frank. He had cancer of the throat and could only speak a few words, but I was very glad that I spent the time with him.)

Uncle John and my father were buddies when they were young. They went bicycling, played tennis, bought a canoe together and fished the lakes and streams of Cheshire County in New Hampshire. One early morning, before sunrise at Silver Lake, in Chesham, a slight noise woke Brother Richard and me from our sleep and we heard muffled voices and the scrape of a boat against the wharf at Aunt Mertie's cottage. In our nighties we ran to the dock, and there was Uncle John and Father with a bushel of fresh caught fish. How they gleamed in the lantern light! They had been fishing in the morning darkness.

After Uncle John returned from France and WW-I, he stayed at our Ludlow, Massachusetts, farm on the night before he smashed his beautiful Excelsior Motorcycle. It happened at the treacherous North

Wilbraham underpass when he tried to avoid an automobile driving on the wrong side of the road.

In October of 1919, Father drove us in our 1907 Ford to Bernardston, Mass., to attend Uncle John's wedding to Aunt Rose. They were married at Hermon Streeter's house on the Bald Mountain Road. Uncle Raymond was the chauffeur for their get-away, while Grandpa Messer stood by the kitchen door for the couple's quick exit. Just at the right moment, as Grandpa was about to open the door, somebody outside burst in and somehow Grandpa's arm crashed through the door window and cut his wrist. In the hullabaloo the couple got away, with tin cans musically following on a string behind. Uncle John and Aunt Rose spent the last night of their honey-moon at our place in Ludlow, I remember.

Next on the list is our mother, Florence, who did a wonderful job of bringing us all up to the age of twenty-one. She was a good mother, teacher and firm friend to her children. She loved us all, as well as her many nieces and nephews, to her last days.

Aunt Ada came out to Chesham during Christmas vacation in 1911, to help our mother with us children. Richard got a small, round-runnerd sled, painted blue, from Uncle Charles that Christmas; and I received its mate, painted red, from Uncle John. Next day we just had to try out our sleds. The snow was hard as ice but we insisted. As soon as we stepped onto that crust our feet went out from under us and the sleds skittered off downhill. The more we struggled to stand, the more we slid, too!

Remembering the summertime warnings we were scared that we would slide to the pond and drown! Nobody had told us that we couldn't drown on an icy pond. Aunt Ada made a valiant attempt to rescue us but she fell and slid along with us. Finally Mother appeared, walking boldly toward us all, having buckled ice-creepers onto her boots. She rescued all of us and we soon had a jolly party with cookies and hot cocoa in the warm kitchen. Our sleds were forgotten for that day.

Aunt Ada became a country schoolteacher before her marriage to Henry Plimpton. In the early 1920s, she and Uncle Henry lived awhile in a house on Library Street, opposite Powers Institute, in Bernardston, Mass. Auntie had a small library of good books and she used to allow me to read from them during the school noon-hour recess.

Mother once told me that Uncle Charles used to be a meat cutter in a Keene store. The sight of blood never bothered him, she said, but if he cut himself he would faint.

When we lived on the Dawes farm in Roxbury, N.H., Mother was carrying Dorothy. Aunt Maude - Miss Greene at the time - was helping Mother with the housework and Uncle Charley frequently came up from Keene to court her.

Uncle Charley and Uncle John built a unique shooting target in a field away from the house. Solidly made with 2 x 4s, they hung a cowbell at the back in such a way that when you hit the bull's eye everyone knew it. They never bothered to check the target for any other shots. We boys were not allowed to go across the road to that field.

Mr. Dawes had a large maple sugar orchard. In the spring of 1913

Father tapped all of the trees. Because there had been a lot of snow that winter the buckets were hung high. I was allowed to go along one day.

While the men collected sap I hung around the big wooden tank on its sled, as the horses waited patiently. But then I, being a six-year old, thought maybe I could help. I dragged a big pail to a nearby tree and stretched up to reach the bucket; of course it twisted on its wire hook and the cold wet sap poured all over me!

Uncle Charley saw this as he approached with his big pails full of sap, slung from the yoke across his shoulders, and came charging to my rescue. He yelled to Father, then grabbed me up and took off for the sugar house where he opened the doors to the red-hot fire under the huge evaporator. He tore off my wet cloths, wrapped me in an old blanket, and sat me down in an old chair in front of the fire. He hung my clothes on a string there, too. Father soon arrived, and we each had a tin cup of hot maple sap to drink. When my clothes were dry, Uncle Charley carried me to the house and Aunt Maude-to-be took me in hand. She gave me a cup of hot cocoa and, over my protests, by Mother's orders she put me to bed.

Uncle Raymond was the youngest of my Messer Uncles. He once told me that he was about 14 or 15 years old when his folks moved from Keene to Bernardston, and that the last load of goods was loaded on a dump cart. His Father drove the team from the single seat up front, and he was perched uncomfortably among the farm tools and such on the load. He said he was mighty glad when they reached the end of the day and the Fox Hill Farm.

Before he went off to the Army in WW-I, Uncle Ray was one of the Y.M.C.A. baseball players that Rev. Eugene Frary organized in Bernardston. After the war, and when our folks were living in Bernardston, Uncle Raymond was catcher and captain of the town baseball team. He was a great ball player and I think us boys thought him to be the greatest ball player on earth, and I'm sure his nieces did, too.

Uncle Ray married Eunice Wyatt, and started out store keeping with his brother-in-law, Lynn Wyatt, in Bernardston. For many years he was proprietor of his own meat store in Shelburne Falls, Mass. Because he was nearer to my own age he was more of a role model than the others, though I respected them all.

Aunt Minnie was one of the most fun loving people you would ever know. She was a beautiful woman. She, Uncle Raymond and Aunt Ethel were Powers Institute graduates.

When my folks were to move to the Ludlow, Massachusetts, farm, Mother and we kids stayed with her folks on the Fox Hill Farm. And then Father wrote telling Mother what train to take to Three Rivers where he would meet us. Mother knew she would need someone to help with us three boys so she could devote more care to Dorothy, who was only five months old at the time, so Aunt Minnie came along as a helper. That worked well until after we ate our paper-bag lunches that Grandma Messer had put up for us, she then became very carsick. However, once we were on firm ground once more she was her usual perky self.

After supper, which Mother cooked in our new home, it was late evening so we boys were bedded down on mattresses on the floor, and

Auntie joined us on her own mattress. For the next week or so she was great fun for us while we settled into our new home.

Aunt Minnie loved to be in plays at school. She and her sister Ethel would dress up in Uncle John's and Uncle Ray's army uniforms and ham it up. We have photographs showing the two sisters having fun that way with some young men. Except for Cousin Mae, Aunt Minnie's children were all boys, a credit to her.

Aunt Ethel was about eleven when she visited our folks in the summer of 1911, when we were living in the yellow house across the road from the Baptist church in Chesham, N.H. One night, Brother Richard and I were rudely awakened by a shrill scream. It seemed that Auntie and our folks had been sitting on the front stoop, counting fireflies under a full moon, when a woods-pussy ambled round the corner of the house very close to Aunt Ethel. In the moonlight, the creature looked a lot bigger than it really was. Auntie screamed and ran into the house, our folks close on her heels. The startled creature perfumed the yard a bit but no one was actually targeted. Father brought us boys, including Stanley, downstairs to the kitchen where he and Auntie became hilarious trying to see who could say, "the skunk sat on a stump, the stump said the skunk stunk, the skunk said the stump stunk," the fastest without making a mistake. Try it sometime. We all had cold milk and cookies, and were off to bed once more where I dreamed about skunks.

When our folks lived on Fox Hill in Bernardston, Aunts Ethel and Minnie used to come up with their beaux of a Sunday afternoon from downtown, from our grandparents' place on South Street, Bernardston. Everybody would gather round Mother's Kroeger piano and sing the latest songs, church hymns and old timers like "The Walloping Window Blind," and other Gilbert and Sullivan songs.

All of the Messer Aunts and Uncles used to say that our Aunt Ethel, the youngest in the family, was the only one who would stand up to her Father when she thought she was right. In fact she was a really spunky young lady. I remember an incident that took place at 45 Grant Street one Sunday, at dinner at our grandparents' home, as follows:

Aunt Ethel asked to be excused from the table. "You haven't finished your dinner," her father observed mildly.

"I won't eat that, I don't like it," she replied.

"Young lady, you finish your dinner or go to your room," my Grandpa Messer said sternly.

Aunt Ethel pushed her chair away from the table and, weeping softly, went to her room.

I never forgot that incident and was always careful to do what I was told at my grandparents' place. However, there was no one more gentle and caring than Grandpa Messer, especially when anyone was ill. God bless us all.

CHAPTER THREE SOME KEENE, NEW HAMPSHIRE STORIES

My Grandpa A. Clayton Phelps had been a strong Baptist ever since his spiritual conversion sometime during his eighteenth year. He was personally convinced that Unitarianism was destroying the American society with its liberal views about life.

Along with most New Englanders of old stock, he felt that having children out of wedlock was a sin. Yet his personal sensitivities were affected by friendships, like everyone else's.

Mr. and Mrs. Doak were members of the First Baptist Church of Keene, the same as our grandparents were. And they were good friends. Their home was a short distance from 80 North Lincoln Street, the Phelps's place, at the street crossing of North Lincoln and Beaver Streets to be exact, on the southeast corner.

It was an unpretentious, one-and-a-half story, white painted dwelling with bottle-green blinds at the windows. The gable end of the house faced North Lincoln Street, with one or two small maple trees on the tree belt in front. At the rear, a small ell projected toward Beaver street with an entrance door facing North Lincoln and a window at the back and one facing Beaver Street on the north end. This ell was devoted to what we would perhaps call a "Mom and Pop" store today; a neighborhood small groceries and what-not place to rely on when bread or milk or sundries, such as a spool of thread, was needed immediately and the main stores were better than a mile away; except that on Sundays, as good Baptists, the store was closed on the day of rest.

On opening the door a small, Swiss bronze bell tinkled musically, announcing patronage, and presently Miss Violet, the Doak's gaunt-faced daughter of indeterminate age responded, coming from a door in a darkened passageway to the right that opened from the kitchen of the main house itself. She was prim and proper and tended to business, her black hair drawn close from her forehead to a coil atop her skull. Interestingly enough, a gold tooth gleamed when an occasional smile relieved her features, although I remember that she seemed always to be more kindly when speaking to children as compared to her dry efficiency when waiting on adult customers. Her clothes were of somber hue and my mental picture is that she wore a close-fitting, small, upright collared dress. It seemed to rustle as she performed her duties, as though there were several petticoats.

As one entered the little store from the bright sunshine the little room seemed dark, its one small northern window with its bottom sash dimmed by plain white muslin curtains, and a similar eastern window beyond the narrow space behind the barrier wooden counter twixt customer and proprietress, Miss Violet. Narrow shelves were mounted from floor to low ceiling, wide apart below waist level and narrowed for assorted needs of boxed and canned goods above in the corner between the two windows and beyond to the south wall which was plain except for articles hanging from pegs, a short, folded step ladder, a

broom and household articles. Small glass cases held candies, frosted cakes and store breads, and one with spools of thread and soaps, articles against some housewife's emergency needs. But mostly my memory is full of a potpourri of smells to a small boy of spice and store bread, kerosene from an oil lamp in an iron wall bracket, and the indefinable sense of a woman's presence haunting the place.

Miss Violet had a fair-skinned son about my age, with curly golden hair and a bony build that seemed to presage a large solid person in adulthood. He had large, strong-fingered hands that a few years hence, during one of my Keene visits to my grandparents, proved capable of managing the banks of stops and keys of the great pipe organ at the First Baptist Church in Keene.

Grandma Phelps urged me to be friends with Reginald and indeed I needed no urging, as we seemed quite compatible in our mental likes and dislikes. I knew no one in Keene other than my Messer Cousins, Walter, Lawrence and Donald, and so we got on very well. He was shunned by many of the local lads because he had no father that anyone knew about, which was my first introduction to the peculiar, unwritten, unspoken rules of Protestant everyday behavior, the silent, semi-polite ignoring of your fellows who claimed no father. Reginald seemed not much concerned about that. He did once admit that somehow you just accepted it, like accepting the weather.

Reginald had another friend, Harold Scott, who lived with his father but who - to me an odd sense of proprieties - was not known to have had a mother. At least that is the peculiar interpretation that my youthful cogitation put upon the manner in which folks never said anything publicly about a child of extramarital production at the time. Nobody said that the youngsters were bastards, in so many words, but you realized that if the kids in the neighborhood were being invited to a party, this kid would somehow just not be invited. As a kid at 12 years myself I had a hard time understanding that sort of thing, because as far as I could see this lad was every bit as good a playmate as some of the fellows I knew whose weekday use of scriptural language was certainly offensive, and their misappropriation of other folks' property was certainly thievery.

I remember that this particular trip to visit my Grandparents occurred shortly after Father moved the family from Ludlow to the Fox Hill Farm at Bernardston, Mass., in 1920. Miss Harriet Farr, our new teacher, had realized that my eyesight was not what it should be so I was tested and the doctor prescribed glasses. Father was always inclined to believe that much of modern medicine in its many forms was a waste of money. He believed that there were natural ways to overcome many of our physical problems, especially in the young. He felt that there must be methods of what today would be termed physical therapy; exercises that, if religiously observed over a period of time, would enable folks to overcome a physical short-coming. However, in this instance when Grandpa Phelps heard that Father did not plan to have me fitted to glasses, he wrote that he would foot the bill himself.

Grandma invited me to visit at their North Lincoln Street home in Keene, and Grandpa would have his oculist, Dr. Wright, fit to me a set of glasses.

And so, early one morning, Father took me down town and paid Mr.

Foley my fare to take the train to East Northfield, where I was to change trains for one going to Keene, New Hampshire. That was my very first solo train trip. As agreed upon, Grandpa met me at the Keene railroad station and we walked on up Main Street, which at the time was advertised as the widest Main Street in the world. We branched off to the right past the little park in front of the handsome First Congregational Church to Washington Street, which soon passed a stonewall with an iron door at the old Episcopal Cemetery.

This iron door was right at the inner edge of the sidewalk, and even though it was clear daylight I felt tingly because of an old tale that Father had told about this particular tomb, about bodies temporarily laid to rest there awaiting springtime, when the frosts had left the ground, for burial. It was an authenticated story about people hearing scratching noises and a ghostly gibberish from inside that tomb one wintry night and who fled, telling all whom they met that there was a voice from inside the tomb. Sure enough, when the authorities finally opened the tomb, there, against the iron door, was the pale corpse of a man who somehow had managed to get from his coffin to the door.

Not far beyond this cemetery, Beaver Street turned off to the right between two fine, brick, white-trimmed mansions. By the time we had walked the remaining mile to my grandparents' home, we had passed between rows of small neat houses and across a bridge over Beaver Brook; and just beyond on the right was the head of Dover Street. There lived our Cousins Walter, Lawrence and Donald Messer and their half-sister, Ruth Towne, and Aunt Martha (Messer) Towne and her husband, who was one of the city firemen in those days.

Opposite Dover Street, the white picket fence of the City Cemetery began and ran for a block in length, broken up by two large arcaded gates. Opposite its far end Grant Street began, where Grandpa and Grandma Messer, Mother's folks, had lived, and where she and Father were married. The first house on the left on entering Grant Street was a big gray house where the Sawyers lived, they who had been real friends of Mother's brothers. The remaining short distance to North Lincoln Street, where the Doak's home and store was located, and a turn to the left on that street soon brought us to 80 North Lincoln Street where Grandpa and Grandma Phelps lived. I was to stay a week there altogether.

Mid-morning next day, Grandma and I walked southward along North Lincoln Street, crossing to the east side as we approached the North Lincoln and South Lincoln Street junction at Roxbury Street crossing A fine hemlock hedge about four feet high edged the last hundred feet of sidewalk, ending at the front door of the good Doctor Wright's domicile.

Grandma rang the bell and we were soon guided by the doctor's wife into the parlor; a reception room in modern parlance. The Doctor soon made his appearance and it was quite evident that everybody knew just why I was there, better than I did myself. In no time at all, my natural trepidation having soon been allayed, for I had no idea whatever what the then simple machine was for, much to my relief the deed was done; and we were on our way, or at least out the door, when it turned out that we were so close to Great Grandma Seaver's home

that we headed in that direction on the same side of South Lincoln Street as the Doctor's home, a block away.

I do not remember much about our visit, other than that I felt very welcome as always whenever one visited Great Grandma, who was not at all a large woman but one of the most vital people I have ever met. She had raised a family of mostly boys to be fine young men, with very little money and a lot of hard work after her husband died. Of her two daughters Grandma was the oldest, and our Aunt Mertie, her sister, had married a Mr. Pond of Keene. They lived in a fine brick mansion on West Street beside the present Keene City Library.

I was born in a little room on the second floor of Great Grandma Seaver's house; but what I remember most from this particular visit was a big patch of blackberry bushes on the north side of the house.

In a couple of days my glasses were ready, and on Saturday evening Grandpa asked me if I would like to take a walk downtown. I knew that Grandpa did a lot of walking. He walked to work every day in those days and home again. He and Grandma walked to church every Sunday and to midweek services and church suppers. Grandma used to walk downtown on shopping errands. It was a way of life. Nobody thought much about it. It was nearly two miles downtown.

I always loved to walk with Grandpa so I said, "Yes," when he asked if I'd like to take a walk downtown that day. We walked briskly most of the way and sauntered when we arrived at the park at the head of Main Street.

"How about going to the library?" Grandpa asked, and so we walked along West Street a short distance to the library, which I have already mentioned was on West Street. Grandpa made himself known to the librarian, who appeared to actually know him quite well. Grandpa was really a great reader. In fact, I think his collection of National Geographic Magazines went back to or almost to the first ones. Grandpa asked for permission to take me to an upper hallway as, he told the librarian, he wanted to show me a large oil painting of the famous Mount Monadnock that his brother "Preston" had painted. Grandpa always called his brother "Preston," although his official name was William Preston Phelps. Actually the artist preferred to be called Will or William, I've been told by his descendants.

Permission granted, Grandpa and I walked up a flight of stairs to an upper hallway, which was none-too-bright in the afternoon. Even with the single incandescent bulb hanging from the ceiling it was not really as light as it ought to be to see the painting. But I was so eager it didn't really matter. I studied it for quite awhile. It was the first large painting I had ever seen of my great uncle's work. I was very impressed and wondered, because I had already decided that I wanted to be an artist, whether I could ever paint that well.

That painting, by my Great Uncle, hangs above the main desk at the entrance to the Keene City Library today. It is a very fine example of the artist's work.

The rest of our visit was anti-climatic. I rode home from Keene with my new glasses on, and later marveled at how easily I could read the books that I had been having difficulty with.

To this day I feel indebted to my Grandparents for providing those glasses for me.

CHAPTER FOUR A BOAT TO BOSTON

My interest in sailboats began when Brother Richard and I were little tykes and our folks lived in Chesham, N.H. We had seen a sailboat, no doubt, when we visited our Great Aunt Mertie and her husband Mr. Herbert Pond at their cottage on Silver Lake.

Our first boats were rectangular pieces of wood scrap from some of Father's house repair projects. A nail driven through a square piece of stiff paper and into the wooden "hull" was all that we needed to create a sailboat with the glamour of a Newport yacht, as far as we were concerned. We made one for Brother Stanley, too. I'll bet a cookie that Father made the first one for us. I remember distinctly some bloody sails, spattered from hammer blows by us to thumb or finger.

After the April rains, wind was no problem for a fast sail down the muddy waters of the roadside ditch in front of our house at Chesham Village, where we lived across the dirt road from the Baptist church.

After our folks moved us all to a small farm in Ludlow, Massachusetts, we didn't do much sailing, until a new graveled state road was put in, in front of our house on what is now Route 21. A big cement culvert then brought water into our pasture in abundance for a faster stream. We dammed it to make pools in places big enough so that the wind moved our boats instead of the fast moving stream. That was a lot more fun.

Then Father built an earthen dam with a plank gate, which made a small pond where he could cut his own ice in the wintertime for his small dairy business. Now we had plenty of water to sail our boats on, even though he opened the gate and lowered the pond in the summertime. By that time our boats had begun to look more like real boats because we had learned how to shape them with our jackknives. We drilled holes for the masts with an old gimlet that someone gave us, but discovered we could do a faster and better job with a red-hot wire that we heated in a stone fire pit in the back yard. Then we whittled the butt ends of the masts with our jackknives to fit the holes. Since the water was lower in the pond in summer, we could wade out to the rescue if a boat ran aground. We had a wonderful time that summer.

After WW-I came to a close; Uncles John and Raymond Messer were discharged from their service in the army, and began to show up at our place in their cars with their dates on Sunday afternoons.

At first it was Uncle John with Florence Parker of Bernardston, but then he began to squire Rosabelle Dunklee, whom he finally married. She was also from Bernardston.

Uncle Raymond would double date with Myron Barber or Lynn Wyatt. Lynn's date was Georgia Boyle. Myron had been in the navy. His lady-friend was Miss Julia Pratt of Bernardston, while Uncle Raymond's steady was Eunice Wyatt, Lynn Wyatt's sister. These men eventually married those ladies.

Double dating, using one car, saved gasoline money. Myron Barber and Julia Pratt came by oftener than the others. I'm pretty sure that

Harold Denison and Sidney Gaines were sometimes part of those happy young people's foursomes, and maybe others whom I now do not remember. The young folks would gather round Mother's Kroeger piano in our parlor and sing such songs as "A Bicycle Built for Two," and "Tipperary," one of the late WW-I war songs, as well as Gospel songs and hymns; for all of these young folk were members of the Bernardston churches. They really could sing and there was always plenty of lemonade and Mother's cookies, as well as the food the young folks brought with them.

Father often joined in for he loved to sing, and Mother would play the piano, or one of the young women, for in those days lots of girls could play the piano quite well for both religious and secular songs. I remember that one of their favorites was the hilarious Gilbert and Sullivan song, "The Walloping Window Blind." They could sing all of the verses and we kids picked up on that one, and could sing all the verses with or without a piano accompaniment.

One Sunday afternoon - don't forget, we attended church in the morning some four miles away more or less, as did our uncles and aunts in Bernardston some forty miles to the north. Anyhow, late one Sunday afternoon Myron Barber and Julia Pratt came past where I was fixing something on one of my boats. Myron made some passing comment and went on to speak to Father, but Miss Pratt was interested in what I was doing. Finally she asked me whether I had ever seen a real sailboat. I told her that Richard and I had studied pictures of boats in magazines, and we tried to make ours as much like them as we could, using our jackknives and an old rasp. She thought I had done very well, but suggested that if I had added a keel to balance a taller mast it would have sailed better. She thanked me for letting her view my boat, which I had handed to her for a closer look. She then went on to join the others, who were visiting with Mother and Father in the house, and I thought no more about it.

A couple of weeks later Miss Pratt and Mr. Barber came again, and when they were about to leave Miss Pratt said, "I have something for you, John," and she reached into the back of their car and presented me with a lovely, sleek, store-bought sloop, white with green below the water-line. It also had a lead-weighted keel to balance the tall mast and gaff-rigged sail. The jib was attached to the bow stem rather than to a bowsprit, as I was accustomed to seeing in magazines. It was a little more than twelve inches long from stem to stern, and the deck was a tan color lightly scored to imitate planks. The tiller was a heavy wire down through the hull and was well attached to a fair-sized metal rudder. On deck the tiller could be moved to larboard or starboard position under a sort of wide staple, notched to hold the tiller in any position that you needed to sail where you intended. You could set the tiller, put the boat in the water and let the wind do the rest.

I was surprised indeed, and am sure that I must have been quite awkward in thanking the dear lady for this unexpected gift.

I sailed that boat for several years, at least into my eighth grade. I was in Mariner's Heaven, as far as I was concerned, to own my very own boat and sail it on the pasture pond.

A couple of years later, when I was in the 6th-Grade at the Ludlow

Grammar School, having graduated out of the one room, five grades, Red Bridge Elementary School, Father sold his little 25-Acre farm and we moved to the farm on Fox Hill in Bernardston, where Uncle John and Uncle Raymond had lived before they married their dates, the ones who came to Ludlow with them right after WW-I had come to an end.

Julia Pratt married Myron Barber and they raised a family in Bernardston, and were firm friends of Father and Mother and all of our family during and long after we left Bernardston.

When I was in the 7th- and 8th-grades in Bernardston, I enjoyed many happy hours sailing my Julia sloop, along with other school kids and their boats, on a little spring-fed pond on the Powers Institute grounds. The puddle-sized pond was called "Silver Lake," by students and old grads as well. It was located on the southeast corner of the Powers Institute lot, in a depression between the long sweeping knoll of the school yard and the abrupt knoll beyond the water where the Cushman Library stood. The library was a small brick building fittingly located and, in a sense, clinging to the very Institution of learning which libraries are supposed to serve, where young minds are being taught to reach out for answers to the questions their teachers are propounding.

This library was given to the town by the Honorable Henry W. Cushman, and gratefully accepted by the town. It was dedicated in 1863, while this nation was fighting to save itself from the curse of slavery. Henry W. Cushman was a native son with vision, and who had become one of our state Governors.

As I have already written, in season we students at Powers Institute sailed our boats, handmade or boughten, during the noon recess on Silver Lake. There were always one or two kids who occasionally threw a stone or two at boats on the water, and after I built a small, two-masted schooner, having learned a lot from studying my Julia boat, that began to out-sail anyone else's, and since I was a newcomer in town, several of the native sons ganged up one noon and pelted my little blue schooner with a barrage of sizeable rocks and totally wrecked it.

I was furious. But that evening, having heard about it, Father told me to forget it. He advised me that many times in real life folks who had not or could not build good things, often in frustration tried to destroy what others had made.

"That is a weak link in democracy," he said. "A lot of thoughtless people can be led by conniving minds to destroy other peoples' work, and even vote away their own freedoms, as the people of Athens had done."

"As for Athenian democracy," he went on, "no one mentions that their slaves, the helots, were not allowed to share the Athenian democracy, so far as I know."

It was about then that I finished reading Charles Dana's "Two Years Before the Mast," the story of an ordinary seaman's life aboard a sailing ship. He had signed aboard a vessel that sailed 'round the Horn, at the southern tip of South America, to collect cargos of cow hides from the Spanish-Mexican ranchers along the Californian coast. He wanted to know first-hand what "sailing before the mast" was all about. He learned in a two year cruise that a sailor's life was no

lark, even without a tyrant for a sea captain. His object was to learn just what it was like for a book he wanted to write.

One of his Captains was William Dane Phelps. Years later I was to learn, in genealogy study, that this Captain was a descendant of Henry(2) Phelps of Salem, Massachusetts, 1634, brother of our ancestor Edward(2) Phelps of Newbury-Andover, Mass.

This Captain once loaned some of his big ships' guns to help the Spanish-Mexicans of San Francisco stand off the troops from the despotic Government of Mexico. He was also the first American sea captain to sail a full rigged ship up the deep-water channel of the Columbia River.

In school we had learned about our early U.S. Navy, especially about the famous fight between the U.S. Frigate Constitution and the British Guerriere, where the Constitution won its nickname of "Old Ironsides" because the British cannon balls bounced off of the tough, live oak planks of the Constitution's hull.

After I gave up sailing my boats on Silver Lake, I decided to build a model of the Frigate Constitution. I had found a fine block of white pine in the Fox Hill Farm carpentry shop, and began to shape it by lantern light evenings after supper. Nobody took much notice when I told someone what I planned to do. Everybody at our home worked on some project or other after the day's chores were done.

I began to shape the hull with wood chisels and rasps to match a steel engraving I'd found in a book. I recall that everything was related to each other to a scale. I finally finished the hull from stem-to-stern, painted it black with a white band, and black gun-ports with cannon at each one, just like in the drawing, with a figurehead at the bow. I stepped the fore, main and mizzenmast as shown with a spanker abaft the mizzenmast above the poop deck. I attached all the lines and cables, the man-o-war shrouds and dead-eyes, the martingale and the battle style jib nettings. I did quite well for a twelve year old novice who had never seen a real ship model. But it was not made to sail. It was for display on a shelf or a mantelpiece.

Father was quite interested when I finally finished the job. He had quietly monitored the work in his various trips to the shop. Apparently he had been waiting to see whether I would stick to the fairly demanding piece of work I had set for myself, or give it up as youngsters often do when it becomes a job and not an easy flag-waving hobby.

Out of a clear sky one evening he invited me to travel to Boston with him, when school closed for the summer vacation, to visit the Charlestown Navy Yard and see the real frigate "Constitution." I was surprised and happy and said "Yes" with alacrity.

But first, to finish my ship model story: Some years later, and I had been out of Art School for some time, Mother asked me one day what I intended to do with my ship model.

"Let the kids have it to play with," I told her. And now I haven't the ghost of an idea whatever happened to it. The fun was all in the doing of the thing, of course, and now none of the errors can be seen.

So, one early morning after school closed for summer recess, Father and I got up at 4:30am and we were soon on our way in the big, red, 1919 Buick touring car that Myron Barber had sold to Father, gliding

smoothly along to Greenfield on Route-10 to take the morning train to Boston. We climbed aboard a Boston-and-Maine railway coach at the Greenfield station, and soon got away to a slow start through the East Deerfield Yards on our matutinal run to Boston.

Though not my first train ride by any means, it was a trip to the great city of Boston, our Massachusetts State Capital, and I was wide awake as the train sped along the track eastward through an awakening countryside.

We passed through villages, saw farms and country roads with now and again an early trotting horse and buggy driven by an early riser, or a man standing legs widespread as he drove a fine pair of animals ahead of a heavy wagon, and a few Model-T Fords waiting at crossings alerted by the train's whistle of our approach. As the morning advanced, kids waved wherever they were, fish-poles aslant over shoulders, a cocky mutt alongside. We passed close to villagers' back yards. Some folk stood on their back porches or in their barnyards to wave as we passed, for we were the morning train and folks set their clocks by the steel harbinger of a new day, back then.

When we passed through small cities I was amazed at the backyard squalor. Broken wooden fences, unpainted, patched rear views of apartment houses track-side, never seen by folks passing street-side, the way we soldiers were to see places in WW-II later on. We passed through places like Somerville, manufacturing towns, and tarpaper shacks of otherwise homeless unknowns along the edges of swamps and refuse gullies just beyond the railway fence.

But, as always, I was in love with the acrid smell of burning coal, the cinders that swept through the door when, with a whiff of smoke, the conductor entered the forward door of our coach and announced a town's name, with stentorian accent, then continued his practiced tread through the swaying coach, his hand now and then playing wisely on the polished bronze loop of an aisle seat.

A cinder in the eye was a common occurrence, not loved, but endured, while the iron wheels went clickety-click as they rolled and squealed on the curves, and clackety-clack when we crossed a bridge over traffic below, or a babbling brooklet not shown on a map.

The jostling sway of the coaches mesmerized me nevertheless as we hurried along, and in spite of myself I would nod and sway with eyes open or closed for a spell, then jerk to attention. It never failed, from the rhythmic mélange of sound and smells and the moving pictures the window presented, fast changing, while riding behind the tall-wheeled drivers of coal burning locomotives.

The musical sound of the tolling bells, at stations and yards like East Deerfield, and the wail of the long-drawn whistle at intervals sent shivers spine tingling, a warning to those inattentive out there, unaware of our speedy presence. The train: a disembodied time-keeper by which folks set their kitchen clocks, and "on time" by the man with the Hamilton Watch.

Our train slowed to a smooth glide as we approached the North Station at Boston, my first of many such entries to the town of the cod and the bean as the years would roll by.

Newcomers with anxious faces stood up and began to gather their bags and belongings from the racks overhead, but Father sat still and

perforce did I. Habitues of the Boston train clung to their seats with relaxed mean while the train glided to a soft stop to the sound of escaping air from the brakes.

We were there!

My emotions were mixed. Eagerness to see the famed city was tempered by a strange reluctance, by the vision pictured by the very real view of acres of jumbled buildings that I had seen through the car windows during the last few miles of our journey while we approached the North Station. Only heaven's Jerusalem is ideal, I thought.

At the Station itself I was in for a bewildering mad rush of people hurrying, seemingly, in a directionless double-time to somewhere. Uplifted faces scanned the painted numbers over the doors to the long, covered platforms we had just trod. Others with equally furrowed brow concentrated on blackboards with scrawled numbers in chalk under "On Time" or "Departure" boards by the ticket wickets. Soon it became apparent to me that the mad rushing and avoidance rushing about was the result of those hurrying to catch, and others rushing from the trains to exits to the street where taxis, carriages and waiting limos stood at the curb outside the station under the rumbling overhead streetcar system.

Even the pavement quivered and shook underfoot from the plethora of traffic. It seemed an inextricably mad mess to a country boy and I stayed close to Father, I can tell you.

Cars, honking taxis, drivers swearing, trucks and big drays drawn by huge horses with glittering brass-studded harness. Horses whose iron shod hooves struck sparks as they rhythmically pounded their way along the street, suggesting a hitherto irresistible power and assurance from the ages of horseflesh dominance that had helped mankind conquer the earth.

But even at that very moment, that smell of gasoline mixed with that of street-strewn horse-manure and un-numbered other odors should have been a warning of a borning power hitherto un-dreamed of, except by modern prophets, that would soon dominate the world I knew and of my future; while this one would be remembered by the titles, "Teamsters Union" and "Clydesdales," the great eight-horse hitches of the brewers of later decades, and the elite riding ponies.

Of course Father knew his way about Boston. He had been there before and, believe you me, I clung to his hand as we threaded the traffic, crossing to a small hole-in-the-wall eating place to wet our whistles, to have a bite to eat and plan our day.

Thereafter, by treading sidewalks or riding Boston's excellent street railway system, we found our way about as tourists.

Taking a subway our first stop was at Park Street, on the southeast corner of the famous Boston Common. There, at the bottom of Park Street across from the subway we had just left, was the famous, white-steepled, shining Park Street Church where a "Hell-fire" preacher still scared kids to death with long Sunday morning sermons calculated to save one's soul, if heeded. We marched up Park Street alongside the Common to Beacon Street, where the Old Corner Book Store silently invited book lovers in to bury their noses in old tomes, whether they purchased or not.

All the way up the hill our gaze had been focused on Bulfinch's famous, golden-domed, Massachusetts State House. A proud sight indeed, with its dome glowing in the mid-morning sunshine.

We stood and stared at the pillared arcade across the front of the massive building. Presently we crossed Beacon Street, to climb the stairs and look off from the pillared gallery high above the street. From there we could look across the tops of the tall elms on the Common below us and off to the right those of the Public Gardens. And beyond, the tall buildings lining the far side of Tremont Street edging the Common seemed insignificant. Back at Beacon Street we stood in front of St. Gauden's Memorial to Shaw's Regiment of Black Soldiers of the Civil War. It is a fine bronze bas-relief of men striding rapidly toward the battle, Shaw riding an eager mount alongside those intrepid black men who covered themselves with glory on the terrible battle-field. It is a monument that all American school children should see and be told of its story.

Father reminded me that his Uncle Francis Jason Phelps had been killed in that same Civil War between the States, at the Battle of the Wilderness in Virginia, on July 6, 1864.

From there we walked the short distance to the Public Gardens to admire the professionally cared for flower beds, that Mother would have loved to see, I realized. We also saw the foot-powered Swan Boats at the Garden Lake, which Father thought I would like to try, but they were not available till later in the day so we found our way back to Tremont Street, looked through the gate at the ancient grave stones in the cemetery beside the Park Street Church, went on past Tremont Temple to Scollay Square, and before long we saw the Old State House, the marker in the street where the Boston Massacre had taken place on March 5, 1770, which sort of confused me at the time because somehow, in my childhood calendar of dates, I had gotten things arranged around 1775.

Father told me that that was one of the reasons we went to school, to learn to set up a correct calendar of our country's historical happenings so that we wouldn't be embarrassed when strangers asked us about our country. The metal plaque in the street, walked over, run over, pounded by iron shod-hooves leather boots and rubber tires, seemed an odd place to set a reminder of important deaths; and yet there it was, a reminder that some folks had suddenly decided that they had to stand up for what they believed in, right where they happened to be if it killed them. At least that's the way I sorted it out amongst the bustle of what may have been the same kind of a busy day with people and vehicles all around as on that memorialized, March day.

Before we got through, we had been to King's Chapel and the old graveyard beside it, where among other famous people our first Colonial Governor Winthrop was buried.

On we went, because Father wanted to see Paul Revere's statue and birthplace, and the Old North Church where the two lanterns hung that warned him and Mr. Dawes that it was time to make what became their famous ride to awaken people in the night with those famous words, "the British are coming," on the 19th of April 1775. We then visited the Old South Meeting House where the Boston Tea Party got off to its

merry work, dressed as Indians and dumping British tea in the harbor because of what was considered to be an excessive tax. Some of our taxes today are worse than that one. We saw lots of things that day, but time was running along and we had not gotten to the real object of our trip, which was for me to see the old U.S. Frigate Constitution, berthed at the Charlestown Navy Yard.

We had no trouble getting to the Navy Yard, but due to repairs of some sort we were unable to make the tour of the grand old warship, much to my great disappointment. It had been Father's intention that I be able to see and even feel parts of the old ship, and see at first-hand what was not there in the drawings I'd used, the shape and feel of things in three dimensions, especially below decks. Nor have I ever since been able to see the gun decks below the holystoned main deck of the old relic of our first Naval Victories. I had to content myself with gazing in humble pride and awe at the old hero, whose majestic proportions were saved for all to cherish by Oliver Wendell Holmes' poem appealing to the American people and children to preserve this hallowed monument.

To see the Constitution's majestic entity, however, was sufficient reward to crown the work that I had put into my boyish carving of this famous American relic.

A young Naval Officer suggested that we see the old rope walk. As I recall it was like a very long roofed corridor, or shed, where an unfinished rope of several twisted strands lay on the plank flooring. My memory is a bit fuzzy after these many years about details, but I remember the smell of sisal hemp fiber that permeated the place. There was no rope being made, but Father called my attention to a glass case on a wall with a description of how it was made. It stated that men walked back and forth in this long space twisting the fibers into strands. The fibers, from sisal or hemp about the diameter of a horse-hair, were then twisted into rope, say, one inch in diameter.

A cable was made, the information read, by twisting ropes together to diameters of four, six or even larger diameters. A plain laid rope was three strands twisted together. A shroud laid rope was of four strands, but one is a core around which the other three were twisted. Three plain laid ropes twisted together made a cable.

There was a lot more, nor did I memorize this as you well know. Father had read all this to me. I just looked this up and realized that I had been really ignorant of what I had read in Dana's book when he mentioned men working aboard ship repairing ropes and cables. I had learned from that book, though, that all rope of any kind aboard ship had to be waterproofed with hot tar, which of course is how come old-time sailors got to be called "tars." Had I known how much more accurate I ought to have been, in rigging a square rigged ship, I wondered if I would have tried it. As it was I had done the best I could, working from an engraving.

Walking toward the gate we saw some sailors splicing rope, an ever present need for old time sailing vessels, but it was apparent that they were engaged in the craft for the benefit of tourists.

When Father enquired, a grizzled old bo'sn's mate told us that once a year the old frigate was towed far enough from its berth to be turned around and berthed in the opposite direction. Theoretically,

both sides of the vessel would then weather to the same degree over a period of time. I wished that we could have been there when such an event took place. How much more convincing as a warship it would have seemed, away from a wharf.

When we did arrive at the gate to take our leave, I just had to turn and take a long last look at "OLD IRONSIDES." Father stepped aside and waited, realizing my need.

I stood quietly against a post of some sort gazing into the maze of lines, stays and yardarms, the man-o-war shrouds, the dead-eyes, and the martingale and battleship jib nettings forward. I raked the hull from stem to stern with a lingering glance and then, aloft, to view the top hamper silhouetted against a cloudless blue sky. And I thought, what a deadly spider's web the old ship must have been, to sting the enemy with iron balls fired from its cannon snouts. Suddenly, tears of pride welled up in my eyes, and I turned abruptly to rejoin Father at the gate where he had been conversing with some navy personnel.

From the Navy Yard, we marched over to the New England Memorial to the dead and living who had fought at Bunker Hill until their ammunition ran out, and then sustained a regular British Army's cold steel charge on June 17th 1775. It was our budding young country's first real Battle for independence from the British Empire.

Arriving at the obelisk we took the stairs, some 295 stone steps, to the little room at the top. From that height we gazed from its little windows over acres and acres of houses, apartment buildings, commercial establishments, parks, and the Boston Harbor. We could easily see the Custom House tower, church steeples and domes, and of course our golden-domed State House on Beacon Hill, all spread out like a three dimensional map. It was a glorious sight!

At school we had studied about the Battle of Bunker Hill, which really was fought on Breed's Hill, but the Americans had suddenly realized that their siege of the British in Boston wouldn't amount to much if the British General Gage should seize the high ground of Bunker Hill and Dorchester Heights, and so they belatedly decided to fortify Bunker Hill and thus beat them to the draw, so to speak. I think it was General Israel Putnam who undertook that job, under a cover of darkness on the night of June 16th. Men worked feverishly digging trenches on Breed's Hill, which was nearer to Boston, and then undertook to do the same on Bunker Hill.

When morning came, as Yankees know, our farmers and tradesmen stopped several British charges before they were overrun for lack of ammunition. But historians now agree that, had the British General Gage been "on the ball," to use a modern expression, he could have cut off the Americans at the narrow neck of land connecting Bunker Hill and the mainland. By using disciplined troops and his heavy ship's guns, he could have blasted us out of existence!

It didn't happen.

Having already read, when we lived in Ludlow, the thick volume of the "Life of George Washington," by Parson Weems, whatever savants have to say about it I had already begun to realize that many of the incidents and battles between the British and Americans during the American Revolution seemed to be the result of pure goodluck or

happenstance, or the Hand of God, just as our ancestors believed at the time. We certainly were far from being military experts at the time of the Revolution.

For an Empire that was proving more than equal to the task of defeating some of the best military minds of Europe at the time, the British military leaders in the American fray seem to have made an inordinate number of foolish decisions; mostly, fortunately, by under-rating American determination.

The only real British success seems to have been their repulse of Montgomery and Arnold's attempt to seize Quebec, thereby enabling England to hold onto Canada for the British Empire.

Not until the 1960s did I learn, during my genealogy searches for descendants of our Edward Phelps of Newbury-Andover, Massachusetts, that one of ours, a Robert Phelps of Lancaster, was one of those wounded and taken prisoner at Bunker Hill. He died of his wounds three days later, a prisoner of the British at Boston.

After Father and I toured the Charlestown Navy Yard and the Bunker Hill Monument, we returned to Boston and walked along that artery of commerce, Atlantic Avenue, with its large drays loaded with stuff from the great ships tied up at the wharves from all over the world.

A deafening roar came from traffic on the cobblestones, and we walked carefully amid the uproar as we studied the great steel-hulled behemoths disgorging freight swung from their holds by giant booms operated from the decks. Ship after ship was tethered along wharves extending into Boston Harbor.

Great hawsers were looped over huge balks of timber pilings that protruded above the timbered wharf decks. I noticed the steel discs, bigger than dinner plates, attached midway from ship to shore on those hawsers. I asked Father what their use was. Even as he was answering my question a big brown rat scuttled along a hawser toward the tall prow of a steel freighter. The rat halted, perplexed by this shiny vertical wall. It finally attempted to leap over the barrier, lost its footing, plunged into the filthy harbor water below and swam furiously toward the slimy pilings.

"That's what the discs are for, John." Father chuckled, then continued his story. "They prevent rats from boarding or leaving the ships. The reason, other than that they are a pest to cargos of grain and crew, is that long ago wise folks realized that rats carried diseases from port to port, from country to country, including the terrible plagues that killed thousands and thousands of people during the Middle Ages and later in Europe."

"It was learned that it was probably the lice that transported the diseases. Lice from infested shipboard rats transferred to other rats when the shipboard rats came ashore or went aboard an anchored ship. Lice bit people and the diseases spread from country to country, till this simple disk cut down the numbers of rats to shore and visa versa."

Those wharf rats were ugly looking creatures indeed. We had seen some lurking around some old boxes and barrels in the alleys, and they seemed to have no fear of people. We saw them dodge across an alley despite horses and wagons and seafaring men going about their

business, even during mid-day. Father stopped to talk with an old bewhiskered fellow leaning against the side of a sad looking tenement building. He was smoking a short blackened pipe, and wore a broken-visored seaman's cap on a shock of gray hair.

"Yeah," the red-faced derelict snorted. "Them's real devils, them rats, some of 'em big-uns'll kill a cat in a fight!"

When we walked on, Father told me that he had heard tell that those brown rats had been known to kill babies in their cribs in the night, in some of the dingy tenement houses along the waterfront. They were especially bad in the winter when food was scarce.

By that time I had already decided that I would never want to live there, there among the malodorous smells that assailed our nostrils from the garbage ashore and the filthy water lapping at the barnacled caverns formed by a myriad of pilings under the wharves and buildings, from of all sorts of odoriferous privies emptying into the tidewater.

I also knew, from Dana's "Two Years Before The Mast", that this was the waterfront haven of grog shops and whore houses world wide, where sailors perforce relaxed from the close quarters aboard ship. No different in Boston than in far away Cathay.

We continued our tour through gloomy alleys where ship's chandlers, bleary windowed warehouses and sail lofts, not much in use any more, hobnobbed with the memories of the glorious clipper ship days. And then we found the real gem of our waterfront excursion. Objects displayed on a green, baize-covered table top behind a clean, large-paned window of a faded red clapboarded one-and-a-half story gabled house squeezed between tall drab wooden warehouses. There were the handsomest brass navigation instruments I'd ever seen. Telescopes, compasses, sextants and carefully rolled sea charts, all casually arranged on the green cloth along with some South Sea trinkets.

Because the little house stood on the shady side of the alley, nothing could really be seen in the gloom in the back of the small room, other than the indistinct form of a massive desk and a captain's chair. There was a glint from a brass pendulum swinging in the gloom over the desk, and the red glow of a fire through cracks of a tall iron stove at the rear of the room reminded us why an acrid coal fire smoke lay in the air, despite the fact that we had been feeling Old Sol's spring heat as we had trudged along. The fire suggested an inhabitant, yet we saw no movement inside, nor any movement of any interest in the world outside the door.

But I have wished for a shiny, brass binnacle compass ever since that day.

We had gone but a little way when Father abruptly broke into my thoughts. "John, did you notice the little ship in the green bottle?"

"Yes." I replied. "Almost the first thing." Although it was stuck unobtrusively to one side next to the wall. "How do they do that?" I asked, wrinkling my brow in thought.

Father then admitted that he didn't quite remember, although he had been told once by a sailor.

In my memory it seems to me that we then went to South Boston and walked along a causeway at low tide, the heavy smell of seaweed accompanying us, gulls majestically interlacing flight patterns above as we hurried along, for we were heading for the remains of an old

fort where we intended to eat our lunch that Mother had packed for just the time when we could look out to sea. I have not been able to remember the name of that place, nor has anyone of late been able to tell me. And while I haven't found it on a map the name "Castle Island" has stuck in my thoughts. Unfortunately, at the time I was not much impressed and was getting rather tired.

Returning to solid land, we took some form of the Boston Transit System and returned to South Station and thence to Tremont Street, I think, to Boylston Street, and got off at Copley Square because Father wanted me to see the great Boston Public Library.

It was a massive structure compared to our little brick library building in Bernardston, Massachusetts.

We went up the broad entrance steps between the two pieces of sculpture by Bela Lyon Pratt, and on into the foyer and great entrance hall. It was flanked by the murals of the French painter, Puvis de Chavanne, which didn't mean a thing to me right then. My admiration for that fine artist's work came years later when I began to study art at the Massachusetts School of Art; which was actually located not far from the Library. Nor did the Edwin Austin Abbey murals, at the left end of the main hall, impress me as much as they would later, when I would read the story of his life and was quite taken with his beautiful pen and ink drawings. I had begun to read stories of King Arthur and the Round Table, the Holy Grail, Queen Guinevere and Sir Lancelot of the Lake, but the room where the Abbey murals were was not very well lighted and, truthfully, I was very tired after our morning's perambulations.

But Father had brought me to this library to see the great murals high in a barrel-vaulted room, knowing that I thought Sargent was the greatest American painter of that time. So off we went to climb the grand double stairway up to the second floor. Opposite the top of the stairs, in an otherwise sheer wall hung with old tapestries, an opening appeared in a twilight hall and a set of stairs began climbing to the right immediately inside. They climbed to a half-darkness with dim lights in wall recesses, and seemed to converge a long way up. Halfway up, a recess in the left wall opened onto a small projecting balcony with a heavy stone balustrade. Below was the library reading room on the first floor below us, with its many golden oak, slightly slanted reading tables, nearly all with intent people comfortably seated in the matching oaken chairs, thoughtfully reading books or the daily papers. Again, as an art student in later years, I would become intimately acquainted with that room, where noise was anathema.

But at the time I was glad indeed to lean upon the baluster briefly to catch my breath, and I'm sure that Father was glad of the break himself.

Then we resumed our climb. The stairs seemed interminable to my tired feet, though the steps were fewer by far than those at the morning climb of the Bunker Hill obelisk.

As we approached the last steps there seemed a strange hush, except for our footfalls, as though we were invading some austere, sacred place. Indeed, mounting the last step and gazing upward there it was, centered in a great lunette at our end of a barrel vaulted room.

The Christian Dogma. A carved, gold-leafed Crucifixion surrounded

by painted relics and the furniture of Religion steeped in antiquity and the blood of martyrs. It exuded the sense of zealous centuries of power and tradition solidified in symbols. Weighty as tomes of saintly argument and logic theologically sealed and long upheld by sceptered Emperors and Popes.

We gazed in silence at this symbolic presentation of Church Might under the grey light from the ceiling skylights. Finally, we turned about and almost tiptoed to the center of the hall and gazed aloft. There, in a lunette opposite the first but in a much less somber mood and color, were the scholar's studies and translations from the Greek and Roman descriptions from the Pentateuch and other sources. Behold the glorious Astarte, who, by many other names as well, was worshipped from prehistoric times as Mother. It was known for its pagan rites beneath the moon in groves of trees, and for its dances, considered lewd in Babylon, to entice fertility. Long celebrated in the dells and caves and woody hilltops in a thousand guises under the names "Diana of Ephesus," "Venus," and "Baal," and feared by the Hebrew tribes. The several symbols of the moon and stars were woven through the fabric of the mural, fitting the space and time of the most ancient goddess of humankind; a mural done with the grace and understatement of an American Victorian artist.

Finally, we faced the spacious wall above the stairway well. A stone parapet sealed off the stairwell, where we could lean at leisure and view once more the opposing dogmas in the apt lunettes, and then contemplate the wall known as the "Frieze of the Prophets" above the stairs. It was John Singer Sargent's masterpiece, the Principal Hebrew Prophets.

Men! Painted in the simplicity of their desert robes, some of distinguished mien and all of noble countenance. All of men made brave by an inner sense of their eternal worth as teachers to mankind's need to be free of dross and slavery, free from blind obedience to pomp and circumstance, kings, priests and bigots.

I was drawn to the simplicity of painting by those bold, earnest men. In later years I would return to this hall whenever I visited Boston. But right then I was tired and my feet hurt. I was used to being barefoot most of the time, and here I was on hard sidewalks and stone floors, a boy of 13 years after a wonderful day of looking at some past glories of our country, a cache of memories to remember indeed.

When we left the Boston Public Library we faced Trinity Church across Copley Square. And that, it turned out, was the place that Father wanted to visit before we should leave the city.

We crossed the Square and stopped for a while in front of the statue of the once Episcopal Bishop of Boston. Father had often referred to him as a good man. Indeed our Grandpa Phelps was fond of his writings and used to speak his name in a reverent tone of voice. Grandfather himself was a Baptist Deacon, but he never let that bother him when it came to speaking about really fine men or women, whoever they might be religion wise.

Grandpa really believed that it was what men did that mattered most in this world, not just going to church on Sundays, though he believed that that was good for people to do also. He said his idea was sort of

a free translation of the meaning in the General Epistle of James, in the New Testament. I think that was pretty much what our Founding Fathers of the Constitution of the United States had in mind, too.

After studying the Phillips Brooks statue, we entered his beautiful Trinity Church and I am glad that we did, because I was introduced to stained glass windows that were pictures quite unlike any colored glass windows I had seen before. For the first time I saw stories from the Bible in glass. I was fascinated. Many of those at Trinity Church were done by our American artist, John LaFarge. Again, several years later, I would visit them with our art history instructor, Ella Munsterberg, she of revered memory who made dead history come to life.

At some time during the day we had visited the Natural History Museum just off of Boylston Street, the "Old" Natural History Museum. It was like a big window box full to overflowing with specimens of flora and fauna, and of unusual and fine examples of geological wonders and rare gems from far and near; one memory being that showing the interior of a very large amethystine geode.

Of the stuffed creatures, I remember a gloriously brilliant specimen of a golden Chinese cock pheasant. There were rare birds that I had never before seen.

I marvel today at all the places we "took in" as tourists trying to miss nothing of importance, yet primarily interested in seeing the places where Boston was in the forefront of many of the "happenings" that occurred when it was the hot-bed of dissent and lively action against the rule of Royal Supremacy and rapacious Nobility.

What I still remember very well about the day's end was that I was exhausted but happy. Accompanying Father, a long legged six footer, was not a leisurely stroll. For a thirteen year old I was not a large kid, and even as an adult I was never able to attain a fraction of an inch over 5-feet three and a half inches. So I had to stretch my legs to keep up, though I well knew that Father was in his opinion being fairly leisurely in his gait. On the other hand, neither of us thought as much about it then as I am right now whilst writing about it. A kid accompanying a parent just naturally expected to keep up. It was an idea as ancient as the hills, that's all, though as the afternoon wore on I realized that somehow it seemed to me that we stopped more often to talk about the things we had seen. Father was an observant man.

That day was one of the very few times when I was growing up that my Father and I really spent what is now-a-days called "quality time together." As our family grew, Father was obliged to take part-time jobs to make ends meet, and it would be after I was out of art school a few years before we regained a sense of camaraderie.

By the time that we returned to the North Station, had a bite to eat in the "hole in the wall" eating place and got on the train, the sun was pretty well down in the west. I was ready for a good nap and I slept until we pulled into the railway station in Greenfield. We soon were on our way home in the old red Buick.

To return to the model I had made of the U.S. Frigate Constitution. I have realized of late years that I had indeed built me a boat that took me to Boston!

John E. Phelps

CHAPTER FIVE BEN AND JERRY

When we moved to the Fox Hill Farm in Bernardston in the spring of 1920, we did not bring our horses and stock. Father bought the farm from his father-in-law, our Grandpa Messer, and his cattle and stock came with the place; but not his fine draft horses. Grandpa prized them and would not sell them to anybody.

Father would have to buy some workhorses of his own. All of the regular wagons, work sleds, a buckboard and a family sleigh came with the place but not Grandpa's special, low-slung logging wagon and a heavy logging sled, nor his heavy dump cart that he called a tip-cart that he used when he worked on the town roads.

The farm wagon was an old timer, with wooden-hub wheels, that we would use for haying, logging and general use. The same was true of the old double-runner work sled. There was an ancient dump-cart that proved to be more substantial than its appearance led us to believe, and of course the graceful old sleigh with its single seat would be appreciated come winter snows.

I believe there was an old driving horse there, but of course to run a farm, as I've written, a pair of workhorses was an absolute necessity. Grandpa suggested that Father go to see a Mr. Tetreault in Greenfield, a horse trader who ran a livery and horse stable off of Federal Street in the rear of the old Mansion House Hotel.

About that time Father got word, probably from his Mother, that his Cousin Bert Seaver of Chesham, New Hampshire, was ready to retire from farming and would be willing to sell "Austin" his team of horses if he would come up and get them.

Cousin Bert Seaver was a distant cousin by way of the Farwell family connection, and Father had worked for this cousin sometimes during school vacations. It was Bert Seaver who had let Father and Mother use his summer cottage in the woods not far from Silver Lake, the summer after Richard was born. Someone once told me that Father bicycled from there to a job he had someplace nearby every day.

Later, when we lived in Chesham, I remember visiting the Seaver's place because there was a big maple tree stump that had been hollowed into a basin that was full of glowing orange nasturtiums every summer. There was a big ell-shaped barn across the road from the white house, and that is where the horse and cow stable was. The carriage shed was an extension of the ell beyond the kitchen, as was often customary in the old farmhouses.

I have no idea what the "actual deal" was, but Cousin Bert sold Father his pair of horses and their handsome, black, gold-pin-striped surrey with its fold-down leather top and hard-rubber-tired wheels, together with its light driving harness as well as a heavy work harness for the pair of bay horses each with a white stripe down its nose.

The surrey's upholstery was a dark green cloth and there were leather snap-curtains with small glass windows, and larger ones for the rear curtain, and a leather piece that protected the driver. That one had a special aperture with flaps over the reins from the horses' harness to the driver. And there was a candle lamp equipped with

French glass attached to the outside on each side of the front seat. And of course there were ample iron steps that hung down conveniently for the lady passengers in the back seat. The distinctive feature of the carriage was that its carriage body was built so that it rose higher under the front seat, so that the smaller front wheels could turn underneath instead of cramping against the side of the wagon as with regular horse drawn vehicles, giving the driver a chance to take a sharper curve. And of course the surrey was equipped with a pole, for a pair of horses, rather than the shafts used for a single horse hitch on our ordinary buggies.

I don't know what time of day Father began his drive back to Bernardston, but I do remember that he told us that he had gotten beyond the town of Winchester, New Hampshire, when he realized that a big storm was about to descend upon him so he stopped the rig, and before he had quite finished snapping shut all of the side curtains the storm broke. Thunder and brilliant green flashes of lightning and water came down in sheets. Although he had lighted his side lamps, they were of no value in the darkness. He had to trust to the horses to stay on the road, which was being rutted terribly by the heavy fall of water.

In those days the Winchester road turned a bit westward near the Northfield end, near a farmhouse with barns on the right, and came down a very steep pitch to the brook on the Northfield side of Winchester Mountain. Father said they came down that steep incline safely, thanks to the surefootedness of the horses, about midnight, and arrived at our Fox Hill Farm in Bernardston at breakfast time. He was so tired that he unhitched the horses in the yard, un-harnessed them in the stable, and walked into the house where all of us were just hanging around. He was dead tired. He told us to feed the cows and do our morning chores, while he had a cup of coffee and went to sleep, wet clothes and all, on the parlor sofa.

Meanwhile we boys were all over the surrey, checking it out. To our delight it even had brakes that slammed against the rear tires when we pulled a cogged, iron-handled lever on the driver's side of the front seat.

After a couple of hours sleep Father was ready for some hot food, and we gathered round knowing that he would have a story for us as soon as he had eaten his "breakfast", although by then lunch time was approaching.

The oldest of the pair of bays, with white stripes down their noses, was so "done in" that Father, after a couple of days, took him to Greenfield tied to the buggy's tailgate. He made some sort of a deal with Mr. Tetreault and returned with a fine younger horse, one that had been beaten about the head by someone so that he was rather nervous.

Mr. Tetreault offered Father a good deal on that horse because, he said, it had never been "harness broke." Father liked horses and believed that he would be able to do that. Anyhow, Mr. Tetreault told him that if he wasn't able to harness the horse he would take the creature back and offer him another one.

The horse was a handsome black animal with a white star in his forehead and looked just like our old favorite, "Black Dick," the one

that Father had left with the new owners of our Ludlow place.

Next morning, a Saturday, Father tied the black horse to a big, sweet-cherry tree on the north side of the house. He told us to stay inside, so we all rushed to the north window in the dining room to watch Father harness the new horse.

He stroked the animal's nose and talked to him awhile, and then picked up the light harness that he had laid on the ground ahead of time. He walked toward the horse talking quietly, but as soon as he began to swing the harness up to set it on his back, the big black horse snorted and whinnied, stood on his hind legs and struck at Father with his front feet. He danced around a bit, pulling on his halter as Father dropped the harness and talked mildly to the horse again, stroked his nose, and patted him on the shoulder and the horse seemed to be all right. But as soon as he picked up the harness and approached the animal it went into a rage again. Father dropped the harness and came back into the house. He told Mother that time was running out, spring plowing was overdue, and it wasn't worth getting killed to try and break this horse to a harness. And so the black beauty was returned.

Early the following week, when we returned from school one afternoon, there, tied to the hay wagon, stood a chunky bay with a flowing mane and a sweeping black tail. Father called him Jerry and he was with us for many years, working alongside of old Ben, Bert Seaver's horse, plowing and logging and trotting along of a Sunday morning when we drove to church in the surrey. He dragged a stone-boat when Father cleared land for hay-fields on Fox Hill, and with Ben he hauled logs and hay and lumber from Dunnell's grain mill to the Huckle Hill Farm for Father, Richard, Stanley and myself, before we all left home and Father moved to the Holton Farm in West Northfield near the Mt. Hermon School for boys. Frank and Charles used the team there, until Frank left when he bought the store in the Streeter Block in Bernardston.

Father had begun working as a paperhanger at Mt. Hermon, and eventually decided to give up farming altogether. He did so, and moved with the younger members of our family to Meadow Street in Northfield.

When that took place he sold off his cattle and made an arrangement for the horses with an old friend, Clinton Woodard, who lived on Goose Lane off South Street in Bernardston. Mr. Woodard had an empty stable, as many folks did in Bernardston when automobiles took over the work that they had owned horses to do.

In the mid 1950s, Father wrote to me from the West and told me that old Ben had died there at Mr. Woodard's place. He also wrote that, as I remember it, old Ben had a habit when he got to his feet of throwing his head up high. The ceiling in the stall was low, and one day the old horse struck his head so hard that he died.

As for old Jerry, he led the life of Riley, in a sense, because Mr. Woodard had no work for the old fellow. But he'd promised Father that the horses were welcome to use his stable and pasture as long as they lived.

Father later wrote that Jerry spent his life there in the pasture, and that is where he left this earth for horse heaven; if indeed there is such a place.

CHAPTER SIX THE FOX HILL HOUSE EXTENSION

At the time I am writing about, in mid-1920 and 1921, there was no electricity on Fox Hill. Ours was the last house on the dirt road, just short of two miles from the Town Hall in Bernardston, Massachusetts.

The summer kitchen of the Fox Hill House was only one section of a long extension westward from the main house. One entered from the main house through a door in the northwest corner of the kitchen, a door which in the normal sense was actually the back door to the main house. It was treacherous for strangers, because one had to step down to a small platform since the whole extension was literally lower than the house. A lot of old New England houses enjoyed that peculiarity due to the lay of the land.

To the left was the South wall of the summer kitchen. It had a door in the center and a window on each side. Even so it was never really well lighted and one had to watch one's step leaving the main house kitchen, though there was a post and wooden rail on the right edge of the platform for support.

There was always a clear aisle alongside the left wall, for one thing it was the direct route to the three-holer at the far end of the house extension. A door in the West wall straight ahead opened inward to disclose a set of wooden steps down to the earthen floor of the woodshed. A couple of feet to the right of this door in the summer kitchen were a brick chimney and brickwork extending a few feet into the room with an iron door at its front end. We were told that there used to be a big copper boiler that was set on this brickwork. Folks boiled their white clothes for laundering, or used the boiler to heat quantities of water for whatever reason. It was said that there used to be an iron plate at the front end to cook on. At any rate the brickwork was in really bad shape.

A stovepipe reached to a small iron stove on which our Grandma Messer used to heat her copper boiler on wash days, and Mother did the same thing when we lived there. The West wall continued to the corner with the North wall with no further openings, but there were shelves and hooks, and an old bureau stood against the wall. The North wall had racks and hooks that held garden tools, old raincoats and such. There was a window about half way to a door with a half sash, I think, and a couple of feet from the door a wall projected into the room about eight feet and turned abruptly East with a heavy wooden door in its approximately six foot width. This was the buttery. All the walls were double thickness with sawdust in the space between the planks. Even the door was insulated.

There was a tiny window in the outside or north wall with a wide

board shelf about waist high below it. In fact, both sidewalls were covered with wide shelves about twelve inches apart. This was where in an earlier time milk was set out on the shelves in round tin pans about three inches deep and left for several hours for the cream to rise to the top. Then the cream was skimmed off the top with a thin metal skimmer, an ovoid shape something like a shallow oyster shell seven inches wide maybe, the bottom punched full of small holes so that the skim milk would leak through the holes leaving the thick cream, of course. Part of this skimmer was a small rectangular section for a handle.

Grandpa Messer, from whom Father bought the farm, sold cream and butter, and this old fashioned method of separating the cream from the rest of the milk, which was very time consuming, had been made obsolete by an invention twice blest everyday by dairy farmers. The cream separator! Grandpa had a De Laval separator, one of the best in the world.

During WW-II, when the 26th Division in General Patton's army was driving down through Bavaria to Regensburg on the Danube River, my 81mm mortar platoon spent a night in a big barn and cow stable. The German dairyman looked an awful lot like our Grandpa Messer, and in the morning before sunup he and a helper milked their Holsteins and he was soon pouring pails of milk into the huge bowl shaped open topped reservoir at the top, and was turning the big crank that whirled the discs in the separator cylinder. The cream came out of one spout into a big can, and skim milk poured out of a second spout into another big can. The machine was a dark blue painted cast iron stand with a shiny metal tank and working parts, just like the one Father had had on our Ludlow farm and Grandpa Messer at Bernardston, a U.S. of A. DE LAVAL.

Mother never used the summer kitchen to cook in unless she canned fruit and vegetables there, which I don't remember. What she did do there was the family washing, and she did use the iron stove to heat the copper boiler with its tight fitting cover, just as Grandma had done. White clothes, linens and such were boiled. Mother had a clothes stick, as she called it, that Grandpa Phelps carved for her from a stick of wood. It had two prongs, maybe six inches long and as thick as a man's thumb, on the end of a three foot shaft. It was as white as a bone after years of use in hot soapy water. After the clothes had boiled a certain length of time, off came the cover and a cloud of steam burst forth. The clothes stick was then thrust into the maelstrom of steaming clothes. Squint eyed against the cloud of steam the operator began turning the stick and twisting and lifting till a ball of white clothes was formed on the end of the stick, cleverly separated from the rest of the mass, drained a bit and quickly jerked to the nearby wash tub full of hot, soapy water. This was repeated till all of the whites were whisked from the copper boiler to the nearby tub. Then the real slavery began.

The first big galvanized iron tub was one of a pair that sat on a sturdy plank bench with stout legs at each corner. The thick rim of a tub was about waist high on the bench. The scrub board consisted of a thin wooden structure approximately sixteen by twenty four inches of mostly a corrugated metal plate. It had two four-inch legs at the bottom, and a compartment at the top to hold a bar of strong, homemade

soap.

A piece of clothing was grabbed in both hands and laid across the metal plaque & soaped profusely, especially the collar of a work shirt, then the whole article was taken in both hands and rubbed vigorously, and I think the word viciously might come to mind, rubbed and dunked and rubbed again on the corrugated metal ridges resulting in loosening the dirt from the cloth into the water.

When satisfied with the results, the scrubber would gingerly insert the article between a pair of rubber rollers. These rollers were set horizontally in the center of a vertical wooden frame, with thumb screws on the top cross-bar to tighten or loosen the pressure of a spring, like an automobile spring, to accommodate the thickness or texture of the clothes. An iron handled crank was turned round and round clockwise to pull the material through, and it dropped off of a narrow board chute into the water in the second tub where, when all had been turned through from number one tub, the clothes wringer was attached to number two tub and the process was repeated; except that no soap or scrub board was involved, just a knowledgeable dunking and swishing to rinse out the soap and remaining dirt from the previous operation. When put through the ringer again, the clothes fell pressed fairly dry into a wicker clothesbasket on the floor at the far end of the laundry bench.

Then followed the march with a heavy basket of clothes to the outdoor clothesline, where the items were attached with clothespins to snap like signal flags in the breeze, flaunting the message that cleanliness is next to Godliness.

Women would sweat doing that job! It was Blue Monday every week with a vengeance the year round, twelve months a year.

You had better believe, that when we boys were old enough to crank that handle one of us got the job, as well as that of dumping the water after the washing was done.

When we first arrived on the Fox Hill farm, there was quite a lot of stuff lying around in the so-called summer kitchen. For example, in the inside corner by the chimney there was a big box full of stuff, and one day when I was looking through the contents I discovered a cured, folded deer hide. It was by then in very poor condition so we had to dispose of it. Later I learned that it was a hide that Uncle John Messer had cured when he was working for his father up there.

But the find that delighted us boys for a long time was an Excelsior Motor Bike frame. Although it was motor-less we fell in love with it. It had two very flat tires but a big comfortable leather seat and fine wide handle bars. I think we got the chain to work, but there was no brake. We discovered that two of us could uncomfortably ride the thing, one sitting on the rear mudguard clasping the other round the waist. The boy at the handle bar had a double duty, for without a brake something had to be done to stop. We wore out our sneaker soles braking with our shoe under the front wheel fork above the wheel and bearing down with the sole against the old flat tire for a brake. Of course we had removed the front mud guard.

To operate the bike we coasted down a hill, for we were too small to foot-power it otherwise. And Fox Hill was a Hill. There were some halfway level spots on the way down but then a good downward pitch.

The last few feet went onto the main road, what is now Route 5, so we never did go that far. We would coast to Fred Hales place and hide the thing in the brush. And then there was the return. That was a real deflator of ego. Together we had to push the thing all the way back up three-quarters of a mile to our house.

To return to the summer kitchen:

As I wrote earlier, a door at the left rear of the summer kitchen opened inward and a set of three wooden steps let down to the dirt floor of a large woodshed. It was open to the elements on the South side and had a shallow curved apron high up, like the old carriage houses used to have, but I don't recollect seeing any evidence of hinges for such a use. At any rate, that's where we stacked a lot of stove-length wood against the back wall. It was half floored overhead; that is, there were loose planks over the joists to the middle of the shed. The first half of the woodshed was exposed to the rafters above.

A great wooden shaft, its ends metal-sheathed to roll upon a set of small iron wheels like ball bearings, held a big wooden wheel with a channeled rim making it a pulley maybe six feet in diameter. Its wooden hub was firmly attached to the shaft. A rope wound around the big wheel hung to a cleat beside the carpentry shop door. This contraption was used to unload heavy stuff from a wagon. It was also used to haul a freshly dressed critter, a deer, hog or beef, out of reach of stray dogs.

The carpenter shop was a rectangular box entered, as I may have suggested, by three steps from the woodshed and through a door opposite the one by which we stepped down from the summer kitchen into the woodshed. There was a set of double doors with half-sash windows in the center of the left, south wall. You could look across the road to the hay barn from those doors. The west wall just beyond was the end wall of the whole house structure. A few feet from its corner with the south wall there was a window, and just beyond that was a brick chimney. A stovepipe reached down to an old iron stove, a quite ornate one for an old shop. Next there was a small door to a three-holer, properly equipped with seat covers, that was attached to the outside of this west wall. There were old chromos tacked to the walls, store catalogs on the bench, and a pail of lime on the floor.

Beyond this door was a window, a few feet from the corner where the north wall began. This window gave illumination to a large plank carpenter's bench that reached almost the width of the room along the north wall, except for three feet of space between the bench and the west wall. The bench was equipped with a metal stop to hold a board steady while a carpenter was planing it. There was also what I called a "stomp press" or vice. It had a tread next to the floor for the operator to stand on to hold a piece of work tight while planing or boring a hole.

The ancient bench sported many nicks and gouges from inexperienced workers during its recent history.

The north wall behind the carpentry bench had brackets to hold wooden screw clamps of different sizes and a wide variety of tools, their shapes painted on the wall in black paint so that anyone would know where to return a tool to its proper place.

Under the workbench there were rows of drawers of various depths,

shallow ones at the top and deeper ones toward the floor to accommodate different pieces of equipment. There were compartments where cabinet maker's fine tools had once lain. Others were for graded sizes of wood chisels, wood bits and saws of various shapes and sizes including several ancient wooden carpenters' planes.

In one drawer there was an old carved wood-bit brace with brass fittings, which Father kindly permitted me to appropriate. I used it for many years although I now have no idea what finally became of it.

With that wood-bit and some old, worn-out wood chisels and my jack knife, I carved out an 18-inch model of the U.S. Constitution from a seasoned block of soft white pine. I stepped the masts and installed lines and yards as shown in an old book and I fitted it with cannon at the gun ports and a figure head at the bow. I did this according to the scale drawing that I had found in the book I mentioned.

Father was quite interested in my effort, but I have no idea what eventually became of it. The fun was in the making of it.

When I came home sometime after I had been to Boston and the Massachusetts School of Art, Mother asked me what I wanted to do with the model, for it was not made to sail in water but to be shown on a mantel same place. I told Mother to let the kids play with it if they liked, and that was the last I heard about it.

Back to the Fox Hill Farm carpentry shop: Just inside the entry doorway on the right there was a steep stairway that led to a small landing beside the 8x8-inch cross tie beam from the north to the south frame of the building. I neglected to mention earlier that the entire building was of the old time [post and beam] frame structure. There was a handrail along the free side of the stairway. At the top, a tall man would have to stoop unless he walked directly under the ridgepole when he crossed the loose planks over the woodshed. In earlier times, green lumber used to be stacked on the loose timbers to season, but there was nothing there but the loose planks when we lived there. Once across that there was a good flooring over the summer kitchen, but throughout this whole stretch from main building to the peak at the West end of the carpenter shop, the five sided timber ridgepole was visible as well as the oak-pinned hemlock rafters, some with bark still on them.

There were lots of old boxes up there, discarded and broken furniture, and even old things such as a worn out farm sled.

At the dark end of this attic there was a small solid wooden door, maybe 18x20-inches, that slid into the wall between the main house and this extension. We all knew about its being located in the wall at the head of the back stairs of the main house, for Grandma had pointed it out to us when we visited a year before we had come to live there. Grandma claimed that it had been made a long time ago so that, in case of an Indian attack or someone breaking in and holding people hostage, someone could escape unnoticed through that door and get away to alert the neighbors. It was one of the very old houses in Bernardston.

Well, after we moved there I discovered a small hole on the attic side that someone could stick a nail in and move the door into the wall from this attic. I used to have fun appearing in the house sometimes when everybody thought I was still out of doors. It was the sort of thing a kid loves to pull off successfully. One wonders who

built that and if anyone ever had to use it for a serious reason?

If a person stood at the northeast corner outside of the house, the north wall was continuous from the main house all along to the far end of the whole structure to a small brook.

From the South side of the house looking up the slight rise to the whole house, it could be seen that there was a small downhill grade from the main house to the woodshed, which was the reason for the short stairway from the shop and the summer kitchen to the earthen floor of the woodshed. There was also a great stone step on the ground in front of the entry door of the summer kitchen from the barns across the road.

One autumn day when returning from school I found the entry door open and, being barefooted, I walked into the half dark and was about to reach for the latch to the main kitchen door when, with a savage growl, Buster, our shaggy haired English sheep dog, not having heard me as he slept on the mat on the entry step lunged at me. One tusk caught me over the right eye, where there is still a faint mark, while his lower jaw tooth caught me along my lower jaw. Fortunately he recognized me before he clamped his jaws together, and was abjectly glad to see me. I couldn't blame him really, for he was doing his job. I could have been an unwanted stranger.

Interestingly enough, the privy at the west end of the structure was as close as ten feet from the brook that ran south past our house to Fox Brook in the ravine below the barns.

I nearly forgot, that when searching for odds and ends way back under the rafters at the dark end of the attic rafters one day I discovered what had been a fine repeating rifle. Its barrel was terribly bent and I was really curious about how that could have come about. Of course in my young mind, having just read tales of heroic Indian fighters, I had a vision of someone using the rifle like a club when his last bullet was gone, defending himself valiantly as he fought the intruder to the death!

Years later, when I asked about the bent rifle, Uncle John Messer told me the following story.

Grandpa Messer and his sons had set out a big orchard of apple, pear, quince and peach trees. Deer were constantly a problem, so whenever they went out with a wagon they would carry a rifle. One time, John took his brand new rifle with him on the flatbed wagon when he drove through the orchard on his way to a woodlot to get a load of wood. The road was rocky and on a side-hilly stretch, before he thought about it, the rifle slid off the wagon bed and lodged between the spokes of one of the big wheels. Before he could stop the horses the damage was done. It was a sad lesson learned the hard way; that is, never leave a gun loose anywhere.

Thus ends this chapter about the Fox Hill Farm in Bernardston.

John

CHAPTER SEVEN

FABYAN HOUSE

Massachusetts School of Art

My thanks to Madame Burguet. It was she for whom I waited table when I was a student at the Massachusetts School of Art. I worked from 7pm to 8:30pm Monday through Friday during the autumn, winter and spring terms, until mid-June of 1932. Thus I was able to survive my study years in Boston. Madam Burguet's French Pension [a European style boarding house] was located at 45 St. Botolph Street. At that time my school was located on the corner of Exeter and Newbury Streets, not far from her pension. But when I graduated in 1931, our school was located in a brand new building on the corner of Longwood and Brookline Avenues. The next year I took several courses, but mostly studied the old masters at the Museum of Fine Arts and researched at the Boston Public Library.

However, had not Mr. Ernest L. Major, my Illustration Class instructor, come to my rescue early in my sophomore year [1928], I truly would not have been able to stay at the school. He arranged for an interview with Madame Burguet, which resulted in my being taken on as a waiter in the American Room at Madame's Pension. I also accepted her offer of a basement room with a single bed for sleeping.

Madame was a French lady, born in Corsica. She had come to America after her second marriage. Her oldest son Laurent, by her first husband, was a flutist in the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra. Her daughter's husband, Monsieur Louis Speyer, was also a flutist, I believe with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. They also had a daughter named Fifi and a small son, Pierre.

Her son Jacques, who spoke the language very well, served in the French Room; where most of the patrons spoke French, including those at a table reserved for some hair dressers from Paris, one of whom had been a French soldier in WW-I.

As spring came round in my sophomore year I expressed my concern to Madame Burguet that I would be unable to attend school the following year if I did not find work in the coming summer to pay for my tuition that autumn.

One evening, after the diners had departed, Madame informed me that a Miss Blackwell, Secretary to a Mrs. Oscar Barron, a White Mountains hotel owner, had dined in Jacques's room the previous evening and had asked Madame whether she thought that the new art student waiter would be interested in bell-hopping at the Fabyan House the coming summer. If so he should call at the hotel on the first street corner to the west on Saturday, at 10AM, and ask for Mrs. Barron's room.

I told Madame that I had never been a bellhop and knew nothing of the trade, but she encouraged me to at least see the lady. With mixed feelings I showed up at the hotel Saturday morning and found the room number Miss Blackwell had given Madame.

Miss Blackwell, a pleasing brunette, answered the door when I buzzed and after a short conversation knocked softly on Mrs. Barron's door. We were invited to enter.

I was introduced to a past middle-aged woman of strong though pleasing features, with quite evidently reddish tinged gray hair, and with that air of authority that emanates from strong people but without the overbearing attitude of those who wish to have others fear them.

I was made to feel at home. Tea was served and general conversation ensued. Mrs. Barron enquired about my art studies and mentioned that the White Mountains offered unusual opportunities for the landscape painter, along the Ammonoosuc River as well as the surrounding fir clad hills. She enthusiastically extolled the grandeur of the Presidential Range as seen from the wide veranda of the Fabyan House itself, and short tours were available to many of the natural wonders round about. She was much interested that both my father and mother, though farmers, had studied at a business institute. I soon learned that she had a wry sense of humor as she related different happenings at the hotel.

She plainly asked if I would like to try being a bellboy at the hotel for the summer. I told her that I would like to give it a try. With that she suggested that Miss Blackwell and I return to the outer office to attend to details. We shook hands and I followed Miss Blackwell to the front office.

There I learned that the hotel wished me to be the elevator operator, which entailed the same pay and was received when the hotel closed for the season, the day after Labor Day when the guests left practically en masse, she said. Bellboys were required to pay for their own uniforms, the cost of which would be deducted from the September settlement after Labor Day. The big thing of course was the tips. Mrs. Barron had stressed that generally the best tips came to those who were courteous at all times, often when the season closed but in a large amount.

In closing, after signing an agreement, Miss Blackwell emphasized that the hotel would expect me to appear two weeks before the hotel officially opened on July the 4th. So with a pleasant exchange of goodbyes, I took my leave and reappeared at Madame Burguet's. She was delighted that I now could return, not only to the school but to her Pension as well in the autumn.

As soon as school closed for the summer in 1929 I packed my things, said my goodbyes to my sort of second family, and suitcase in hand took the subway to the North Station for a train to Greenfield, Mass. My Father picked me up in the family car and I was soon enjoying HOME; at least for the next day, after which I took the train from East Northfield northward to Wells River, Vermont, where I had a very long wait for a train that took me to Littleton, New Hampshire, and Fabyan House Station.

We would arrive very early in the morning. As always I slept well, sitting with my head against the green, velvet seat back of the old railway coach. A gray ground fog enveloped everything, and made eerie shapes of the hills beside the tracks when I awoke to the sound of the train whistle and the chime of the locomotive's bell as we slowed at

our destination. The fir-clad mountains seemed to loom over the train as it came to its steam-hissing gentle stop. The conductor had long since called out in his big, baritone reaching voice, "FABYAN-AN-N-N, ALL-L-L-CHANGE."

I was surprised at the length of the train, which I then remembered had taken some time to be made up at Wells River. There were a few sleeping cars, though nothing compared to those we were to see once the real summer season began.

Grabbing my suitcase I stepped off in the cold onto the plank walkway, gained my earth balance once more and slowly walked with a few others toward the covered walkway, for it was a long train. Way ahead beside the station house I saw a group of men scanning the few newcomers, of whom some headed toward station wagons whose logos advertised hotels from round about in the mountains; such as Mount Washington House, Mount Pleasant Hotel, Twin Mountain and others. Then I came to. "Now where's the famous hotel?"

Introduction to Fabyan House

I looked hard through the fog to the right, but I was passing what later proved to be the rear end of the hotel ANNEX. Next a rustic pavilion loomed. Quickly bringing my gaze back to the walkway, I went toward a group of men surrounded by gardens, and beyond it what nobody can deny was a perfectly grand view of the massive FABYAN HOUSE. It stood tall against the distant hills beyond the Ammonoosuc River. Dressed like conductors with visored caps, the men proved to be head bellmen or baggage masters from nearby hotels. And sure enough, on closer approach I saw the compact figure and florid face, the freshly shaven bald man of medium height whom Mrs. Barron had described. He was clad in a close fitting, dark blue jumper with sleeves tight to his wrists, slightly baggy dark trousers and a pair of excellent, light work shoes. The telltale lump in his left cheek betrayed a cud of tobacco.

When I first spotted him, his arms were crossed on his chest and there was no doubt that he was entertaining the men with stories. He was a Red Sox Fan; he had known the Yawkeys! As we approached each other I saw that he wore wire rimmed glasses and a suggestion of a smile.

"I'm John Phelps," I vouched.

"Yes, I know," he acknowledged with a quick smile. "I'm Tim Dwyer. Welcome to FABYAN HOUSE."

He extended a hand for a warm handclasp. "Let's head for the Annex," he said as he took a shortcut through the tall grass toward that building. "About time for breakfast," he observed, "I'll introduce you to some of the boys who'll show you your room and the dining hall. Then I have to report to the manager but I'll see you at nine tomorrow morning with the others."

Some of the boys were on the long porch at the front of the Annex. I was introduced to several who would be my bellboy comrades. Tim then left, as he had said he would, for the main hotel where we were to gather for work at nine o'clock next morning. So, I still had not set foot in the hotel itself!

As I remember it, the Annex was the two story building diagonally

across the road west of the hotel. It had an "A" roof, its gable end to the road, and a wide parking area in front. There were maybe two wide steps to a veranda that ran the full width of the front of the building. Central double doors, with big windows on either side, opened to a foyer in front of a post office inside. Another door, next to the post office boxes, gave access to an alleyway to the dining room and kitchen. Another door opened to a stairway, which took us to a second floor alley or hallway off of which several doors led into bedrooms. The boys I just met had claimed the first bedroom left, and one of these boys, John Kelly, sort of claimed me as his partner. He was a student from the Vesper George Art School, as were two other lads who turned out to be avowed "gays" (to use the current rubric). They were the first of that sort whom I ever met, as I never knew of any at our school to be known as such. Later in the army there were some, and during a long life since I have known several.

Of the young men to whom I had been introduced, the two gay friends chose the bed next to a west window, whereas John and I chose the bed nearest the door; and one other lad, whose name I don't recall, took the single cot under another window.

Other bellboys roomed beyond us, and the kitchen help were beyond them as well as outdoor workers, I believe, as it was a male sleeping quarters building. The cooks, who had to be up at 4am, slept next to the back stairway.

There was a Jack somebody who was supposed to be our bell captain, but after the first few days he seemed not to be with us. I think we were to be called at 6am, or when on duty by the boys going off duty at midnight. Somebody had to be on duty all night, once the hotel was open. Oh yes, we were expected to make our own beds and keep our clothes off the floor. We were welcome to spend time on the veranda, as long as we did not impede the folks coming up for their mail. If it was a rainy day we were allowed a very limited time in the foyer, as long as we left a passage free for the neighbors who stepped in for their mail.

We did crowd the Post Office foyer that first morning, though, as we were hungry and seemed scarcely able to wait for the door to the dining room to open. When it did, the repeaters, those who had worked at Fabyan before, made a dash and jam which the assistant cook and a waitress attempted to control. It turned out that the reason for this unseemly behavior was that, from previous experience, they knew that the dining room was always dark in the mornings because there was only one light at each end of the room; probably a 60-watt bulb hanging by its own cord from the ceiling. So everybody tried to get a seat under or nearly under a hanging light or in front of one of the two windows, also at either end of the west wall of the dining room, as I remember it. The table was made of planks with a plank seat built on along each side, as we all remember from homemade picnic tables of the 1980s.

I have never been one to worry about food, unless it's really inedible. My memory guess would be that breakfast consisted of dry cereal or hot oatmeal, scrambled eggs with bacon or sausages, or toast and eggs, with perhaps once a week plenty of pancakes and syrup. Coffee and milk were the beverages. I believe a neighbor woman and the assistant cook served as waiters.

Dinner would be beef or pork in some form with vegetables. Thick slices of bread, butter and perhaps pie or pudding was the dessert, and of course coffee or milk. I think the main supper dish would have been a stew or soup of some kind, most of the time.

Naturally it was not like home fare, especially for some of those college students needing money for tuition, or those with expenses who came from the so called better families. Someone probably kept notes as to exactly what the food consisted of. And of course the notes of the chief steward, who supervised expenses, would be very helpful. Letters home might be revealing.

The cooks, when I was there, were a father and son from Newfoundland who came to New England every year, traveling by boat from their home area and of course by train to the mountains. I believe their name was Fenton.

Our bellboy uniforms were gray with a black stripe around a high collar, such as West Pointers wore at one time. I believe they had a black stripe at the wrist and one down the trouser leg. Black shoes were to be worn, polished. Mrs. Barron's husband had had the title of Colonel, so perhaps this uniform was his idea.

John Kelly was a devout Roman Catholic who realized that I was of the Protestant persuasion, but he respected my desire to make a silent prayer at bedtime. When one of the gays loudly guffawed, John, who knew the guy from school, immediately silenced him; which I appreciated.

I'm sure that today the matter of two of us males sleeping together would seem offensive, but we were closer then to our early colonial era when male hotel guests, perfect strangers to one another, often slept even more than two to a bed when necessity required it. My brother Richard and I shared a bed until we went our separate ways to college. And during WW-II, men shared foxholes with a buddy for sleep and defense. It is hard to believe that our world has changed to the degree that now exists.

At nine o'clock next morning we appeared at the hotel lobby in our work clothes, where Tim Dwyer awaited us. He introduced me to Mr. Brophy, familiarly known as Tom, and confirmed that I had appeared as per my signed agreement. He then told me that I was free to join the boys at work, which consisted of hand scraping the ballroom dance floor with pieces of broken glass; pieces that were collected each spring by the yard men, and Jack the Painter who had replaced the broken windows.

"Winter storms always leave broken window glass somewhere in the great complex of the hotel." Tim said, then markedly announced, "Nevertheless, there is seldom as much of it as first appears so use all sides of the pieces," he advised.

At first appearance I daresay my guess was that this dance floor was no more than a quarter of the whole parlor, and although the lads had been at it a whole day before I arrived not a great deal had been accomplished, it appeared to me. It would be a slow job. Tim admitted that the job was going to be very time consuming. However, as Tim kept us at the work his fund of stories about the "baseball Yawkeys," the Boston Red Sox and their Yankee opponents, seemed inexhaustible. He could name the players and tell about crucial innings as though he

were right at the moment of those fateful plays that had faded into history. Sometimes he just stood and listened to our chit chat, or let us get a cold coke from the lobby machine, and then we'd resume our work and he his tall tales.

Although Tim's language was often couched in colorful phrases, it never got to be offensively dirty. Didn't need to be, his descriptions of the games' actions were so full of color. Sometimes he praised us a bit, when the monotony got us down on a real hot day. Tim was one of the most charismatic men I ever knew.

Two of our fellows were football players at their college, so of course they had tales to tell. Even Tim, we learned, had stories about football games as well, and even golf. And so the time sped by until the day arrived when the long handled, iron weighted, floor polishers arrived and we took our turns until Tim acknowledged that the work was finished.

Then we waited, until the final okay was given by the general manager, Mr. Tom Brophy. We had finished with time to spare!

These many years since, now that 2001 has caught us, I was thinking recently about those young men and myself. I doubt if anyone can easily believe today that any young man who expected to be somebody someday would want to be caught lying in those odd postures on a floor, scraping: Kneeling awhile, then rolling onto a thigh and then the other, then trying the sitting pose to scrape between the upraised knees, but no, your heels rest now, old friend, on what you've just finished! So it's back to the belly for a while. Indeed ungainly and awkward you appear, no matter what.

You've pinched a shard of window glass for hours between your thumb and the side of your index finger, left or right handed, till every flat facet of this glass has done its work of scraping a thin layer of last year's wax from the dance floor; side by side with others lined up across its width, from the parlor's back wall beneath the tall windows viewing the grand escarpment of the Presidential range, eastward. Though fingers ache from grasping, pinching those odd shaped shards of window glass, make sure to get the last of sharpness from each facet. After all, we didn't want to run out of that commodity.

Somehow Tim Dwyer had imbued us with a sense of loyalty to this, the House of Fabyan, and that's what kept us at it. We were inexplicably bound to a tradition.

Tim had given us an inkling of the balls once held there, when lovely women and handsome men filled the ball room at great parties where romance blossomed in a tête-à-tête, it was easy to visualize, as he told it, the handsome couples on this same dance floor as great bands played famous waltzes. Or dowagers, seated as in chaperonage of their nubile grand- daughters, eyed the young gentlemen so eagerly willing to prove their worth. Or white collared, portly gentlemen, cigars in their mouths, behind all this grand stuff obliviously carrying on those schemes that made the "gay nineties" tick. Money made names and fortunes.

I could see the handsome velvet drapes that still adorned the tall windows, and the wall lights, and the crystal chandeliers that still glittered as they had in the early 1900s, when Colonel Barron and his wife were then among the younger set. Rich, satin covered, fine carved

chairs in golden yellows, greens and crimson, and the still cushioned, S-shaped love seats placed discreetly near a column and the chaise lounges where the dowagers would gather. Those shapely chairs, set loosely in a studied random pattern, created in their simple elegance a picture revisited of scenes remembered by the annual guests, often those who were the children when those balls had been celebrated.

Crawford Notch to Mt. Washington

Since we had completed the dance floor, all waxed and polished with time to spare, Mrs. Barron and her Secretary surprised us with a party of sorts. It was a "safari," along the long ridge from Crawford Notch to the summit of Mt. Washington itself.

Mr. Frazier, the head steward, had had the cooks supply us with first class sandwiches and thermoses of coffee. I think Tim Dwyer went with us. The hotel jitney took us to the Crawford House, from which it returned to the Fabyan whilst we climbed the steep trail across from the hotel, as I recall. We got our second wind when we reached the top of the ridge, where we took a short rest. From there on it became a game of "hanging in there" till we sort of got the hang of it.

It got really warm, although it was not yet July the 4th when the sun was toward its zenith. First the jackets came off and we tied them round our waists, using the sleeves as ties, and finally most of us stripped to our undershirts as well. Tim suggested that we might rather keep them on, else we would probably get a bad sunburn. So I did, but many of the fellows stripped them anyway, and they did get well burned by the time we ended our day.

When we came to Tuckerman's Ravine, where nature had scooped a slide that zooms down to the mountain bottom, the wind came blasting up as if it were in the bore of a tunnel. The fellows wondered how strong that draft was. Would someone be able to lean into it without tumbling down in a very nasty slide? The guys began daring one another but no one took the dare. Finally someone asked me if I dared to lean into the draft. I had been studying it, and finally said okay. I leaned out into it just long enough at a slight angle to satisfy myself, when suddenly many hands grabbed me back to a silent audience. Their imaginations had done enough! Nor do I have any idea why I did such a foolish thing, other than because I was sure that I could.

We continued on to the top of Mt. Washington where we sat around eating our sandwiches. There was some groaning, as we contemplated the fact that we still had to hike back down. It was decided that the down trail beside the Peppersass locomotive's cog-railway tracks was good enough, for we knew that the hotel jitney would be waiting for us at the base house. We were a tired bunch of young men, believe me, but also elated.

Although I have climbed the trail beside the tracks several times alone over the years, I think perhaps that first one was the grandest climb of all, and it helped to get us used to being together as a team.

Fabyan House Description

It's about time that I gave my description of the hotel as I remember it. In the first place, as though from the air I think of it

as a great "T", its top against the road. Its most impressive feature was the enormous, three story main structure, with its central mass of four stories jutting forward several feet into the veranda, across the front, enough that a window enabled one to view the entire east end of the veranda as well as one of the most impressive views of the Presidential Range and Mt. Washington itself that was to be had. The stem of the T, containing the dining room, extended to the shorter base of the T which was where the kitchen was located, all with guest rooms above. Atop the four-story front roof was a small, boxlike structure that housed the upper machinery for the hydraulic elevator, and a flagpole rose from its roof.

A pair of doors opened into the dining room from the front lobby and main hall, and in turn a pair of doors led from it to the kitchen. There were personnel rooms on either side of the kitchen.

Guest rooms occupied the two stories above both the dining room and kitchen, as well as both wings on the street side. Several feet to the rear of the kitchen, the heating and power plants and the tall smoke stack were located, and to the right of them was the steam laundry building.

A striking feature of the front of the hotel, as viewed from the street, was the wide veranda, which was two steps above the street at the hotel entrance but the street sloped away at the western end, which entailed the need of a short stairway at that end. From the entrance the street also sloped away to the east end of the veranda and was some six feet at least above the green lawn below.

The whole front section of the hotel had been built on a long mound that sloped quickly downward several feet, which enabled the management to earlier construct a bowling alley underneath the dining hall. This was un-useable when I was at the Fabyan, due to flooding at some time from the Ammonoosuc River; which, as it swung round from beyond the power plant eventually passed under an iron bridge perhaps 100-feet beyond the east end of the hotel veranda. A dormitory for the waitresses, kitchen help, maids, laundry, and female help in general, was located under the kitchen.

Entering the hotel lobby through the double doors, a wide red carpet stretched to the double doors of the dining hall. Sturdy columns stood in pairs on each side of the running carpet, from the entrance through the dining room doors and continuing the length of the room to the kitchen doors. The columns also ran the length of the ballroom to the dance floor. These supported the structural beams for the guest room hallways above.

The columns width apart must have been conditioned by the long entrance carpet's width, say six or eight feet and were a corner for a carpet that ran left along an eastern corridor past card rooms, ladies parlor and a small library to the grand ball room and dance floor. A west corridor passed rest rooms on both sides, a barber shop, card and conference rooms to an exit toward the post office. Columns in the grand dining hall supported the walls in the corridors above, as they did in the ballroom.

The central front section of the foyer allowed a side window west and east, the last for a fine view of the Presidential Range. The west window gave the manager a good view from his office to the Post Office

and Annex across the street, as well as of the octagonal shaped garage a quarter mile to the west. The head bellman's desk was also on that side of the foyer, and a small reading room opposite. The tall front windows of this central section allowed a good view of the gift shop, flower gardens, the railway station and the fir clad hills to the north. That's as it was when I was the elevator operator at the Fabyan House.

Summer Season, 1929, Miss Blackwell's Picnic

Miss Blackwell and Daisy Lane were asked to arrange a picnic for us bellboys and new waitresses for the last Sunday before the hotel opened on the 4th of July. We'd hike a bit, then picnic at a shallow cave on the Ammonoosuc River west of Fabyan House a few miles, where there were trails alongside the river. "Bring a blanket," we were advised.

The hotel jitney, which rarely got used after automobiles came into use, was pressed into service for transport. I don't remember who drove the thing, but I know that Miss Blackwell was present as chaperone for the girls and Tim came along with us boys.

Mr. Frazier's cooks put up some really great sandwiches, and at about ten o'clock on Sunday morning the hotel jitney pulled in next to the hotel. The several of us fellows and girls, with Miss Blackwell and Miss Daisy Lane, a niece of Mrs. Barron, gave the signal and off we went for a last frolic before the hotel opened to the public. A few miles west down the road, the jitney let us off and we walked a few yards to the River, which we must have crossed on a bridge of some kind because we found ourselves hiking a well-worn trail along the farther bank of the Ammonoosuc, where the small hills beyond us were covered with the fragrance of mountain balsam fir, its aromatic redolence equal to Chanel No.5, according to New Hampshire natives.

Each of us guys paired off with one of the waitresses, except the two young men from Vesper George Art School I earlier wrote of. I think it was a Miss Anne Brown and I who sort of chummed together that day. We all chatted about our schools, admired the unusual shapes of granite rocks carved by eons of rushing mountain water, sampled the partridge berries beside the trail, and carefully stepped among the gnarled fir roots that looked like traps for the unwary as they were half hidden by mosses among boulders. We noted the deep, dark pools into which the waters poured, resurging, bubbling, streaming away to be lost in other pools, rushing on to pour between boulders downstream.

Meanwhile the sky had been closing in, unnoticed, swallowed up by a great black cloud from the west. It was first observed by Miss Blackwell, when lightning flashed in the sullen western mass.

"Hurry!" she commanded, "There's a great rock shelter up ahead, watch your footsteps but hurry, hurry!"

Loud peels of thunder and baleful forks of lightning licked out soon and the first great drops of water splashed on flesh and rock. We barely made it, hurrying under the overhanging granite monolith on a sandy beach that stretched upward into the cave. Girls clung suddenly to their escorts, fear glinting from wide eyes while lightning played in the tree tops and on the water, and struck down a tall dead spruce

right before our eyes! It burned like a giant candlewick! The thunder rolled a continuous cannonade while sheets of rain knifed through the racket. It was wondrous scary even though I had seen such rain before when bright green lightning like giant chains writhed on the earth.

"Now take the blankets we have lugged up here and hide yourselves if lightning frightens you," Miss Blackwell bade as calmly as a ship's captain in a hurricane, while young misses shivering with fright clung burr-like to their escorts.

Then, as it had come it was no more. Brilliant sunshine from the west dazzled us in mockery of the storm's fright. A sky so blue and clean it hurt the eye to gaze at, it spread over all the landscape and I remembered a Dutch painting where this self-same scheme had shone so well that this could have been its model.

Miss Blackwell crisply spoke and dryly commented, "Since now sweet nature is serene let's raid the poke's we've brought, they're stuffed with goodies that Frazier packed!"

Then the maids, released from unintended coziness, breathed sighs of relief and chattered gaily with their muddled escorts as if it was a game they'd played to test them. But time ran on and all too soon the sound of the jitney rent our afternoon idyll with horn blasts. Then silently we rode the several miles to cold reality.

When we got down to cases, and those of us brand new at the game were wondering just how the performance would play out, it developed that I was considered the one to operate the ornate, wood and ironwork elevator. Its side toward the street boasted of arabesque ironwork, and an iron-grill gate allowed entrance and exit to and from the elevator itself. Its locomotion was accomplished by means of water pressure in pipes whose valve was controlled by a rope that the operator pulled to open or close the valve as required at any one of the floors.

There were only two floors above the street floor, but at times it was a tricky business holding the machine at its proper threshold. In the several years I worked there, I believe only twice did it briefly refuse to budge between floors.

I became personally interested in elderly ladies' welfare, and was well able to converse with all the guests on a number of subjects. The tips were not very heavy per day, but at season's end I would find that I'd received tips of appreciation beyond those expected, even though many times I had gone beyond mere service as an operator.

The annex, situated diagonally across the main road from the hotel, was where all of the ordinary help, bellhops, waitresses and chambermaids ate. The front of the first floor was the Fabyan Post Office, the rear full length was the dining room, separated from the kitchen at the rear by a thin partition. The cook was a Newfoundlander assisted by his son and another, as I said before. A matron kept the girls separated from the bellboys and men workers.

Touch Football Incident

I remember once after lunch on a sunny day when I was napping on one of the veranda steps and Tom Brophy crossed over the road and reprimanded me as a poor exhibition for the hotel guests, which of course was true enough.

Another time, during the noon rest break, Tim had us on a stretch of lawn behind the paint shop where we were about to play touch football. I had never played this game before and so I made a tackle of the opposing team's ball carrier, which I assumed was what one was supposed to do with an opposing ball carrier. It was the tall college youth. Anyway I was roundly called to task for the play, for my ignorance of course, by everyone present.

Some days later at noon when I was standing with others on the front porch after lunch that youth came up behind me, which I thought nothing of, but he suddenly wrapped his arms under mine and up behind my head and gave me a full nelson. There was a "snap" and apparently some damage was done to the atlas under my skull. I guess he suddenly realized what he might have done for he let me go, but I almost blacked out right there.

I walked slowly to the other end of the veranda and sat down with my legs over the edge. I was nearly sick to my stomach and things were in a whirl and I had a bitter taste in my mouth. It seemed as though everyone was suddenly aware that something bad had occurred, and I'm sure that those nearby had heard the crack. I sat there for some time though, and recovered enough that I went back to work on the ballroom floor with the others. My neck hurt and made a soft "crack" sound when I turned my head to the right for years, even overseas when I was in combat.

Mrs. MacDonald, our Scot laundress, worked in the large laundry at the rear of the hotel to the right of the steam plant. It was a busy place every day of the week except Sunday. When I was the "new boy" at the hotel, some of the bellhops who had worked there before told me to go ask the laundress a question. I was explicitly told to address her about something apparently related to her nationality. I went and addressed her as instructed and, as they knew she would, she seemed suddenly converted into a demon and came at me as though about to strangle me with her red hands and bulging biceps that any sledgehammer man would have respected.

I thought I was in for it and a strange hush interrupted the usual nonstop chatter. Of course I stepped back, sharply banging my shoulder against the door stanchion, and then she sensed my innocent alarm.

"Oh Johnny, I forgive ye, those busybodies have done it again." And in a softer voice she admonished, "It's Mrs. MacDonald, Johnny, and never forget it, dear."

I was quite some relieved and the guys were disappointed, because it seems that some yokels had had her heavy hand laid on them in the past. And of course at the time I was completely unaware of the situation because my family studies were far in the future when I'd learn that, according to old tales, one of our Phelps had married a girl of one of the MacDonald Scots long, long ago. However, I always admired the Scots and their fight to be free of the English in Wallace's War against Edward I, which I had read about at the age of fourteen.

Anyhow, from that time on I knew her as a normally jolly and likeable soul.

Recreation and Rest

Beyond the laundry house some few yards and hidden from the hotel proper was what appeared to have been a one-room schoolhouse at some time. Called the "Bucket of Blood," it was the recreation hall for off-duty help, usually bellboys and waitresses. Mostly we used it for singing the contemporary songs and dancing to phonograph records. However, as my time off rarely coincided with that of my comrades, I found it more rewarding to walk the trails in the nearby hills.

It was there that Henry Bridge shone as he turned out to put on a good showing against fellows wrestling from other hotels. It turned out to be an exciting event with shouts of encouragement from supporters of Henry or the stranger. I had wrestled a great deal during my grammar and high school years, but these young men were of an older age and gave quite a professional exhibition.

One afternoon after a wrestling match, when there were only a few waitresses and bellboys in the "Bucket of Blood," we fellows were talking about gymnastic tricks when I suddenly had one of my odd hunches.

One window was half open and I happened to know that there was nothing but tall clean grass outside. Of a sudden I took a few quick steps toward that window and dove headfirst through it, landing on my hands and springing upright as everyone could see who had crowded the window expecting to see an injured me. Back on the farm my brothers and I had done a lot of such tricks, though none just like that one. I did, however, refuse to do it a second time.

It was something about the labor laws, I guess, but once a week each of us was given a free couple of hours in the afternoon. I used mine to hike the many trails on the hills nearby or beyond the railroad tracks. I've forgotten most of hills' names now, but one was named after Mt. Oscar, Mrs. Barron's husband.

On the first hill a short distance beyond the railroad station, someone had placed a stout plank high up from one spruce tree to another. On it I learned that I could lie on my stomach full length with my arms hanging down and sleep in the warm sun, such as animals sometimes do.

One time I discovered a rare orchid alongside a trail in the orchard-like hardwood forest. Another time I came silently upon a white tail buck with a fine set of antlers, which sensed me but I kept a certain distance away among the trees. Though I'm sure he finally saw me, this lordly creature with his handsome rack ambled his way along, the lord of a noble forest. I finally had to retrace my way to the hotel or I'd have been late for work. But was an unforgettable experience.

An unforgettable experience of an entirely different sort came about one afternoon when our big, Swedish-American security guard asked me if I would reeve a new line through the wheel at the top of the flagpole, which stood on top of the tower, if he held a ladder against it for me.

"Sure," I told him. So he held the ladder and I climbed up and did the job. Several folks below glanced up but I guess to them it was no big deal. I had done the job before, on the flagpole atop our school tower when I was a senior in the Bernardston High School. The guard, I

wish I could remember his name, said that he would not forget my help in case I ever had any trouble in the future.

The Red Headed Irishman

Tom Troy was a red headed Irishman who was the overseer of the service maids and housekeepers. He and I became friends. He seemed especially interested in the fact that I knew quite a lot about the history of the Irish people, and offered to teach me Gaelic. I thanked him, but told him that I felt I'd need more time than I had while at the Fabyan House in the summer months.

One night he came to me carrying a stout cudgel, and told me that Mrs. Barron wanted the two of us to check out the women's quarters for someone bothering the housemaids, especially one little maid. She was probably of middle age and was a dear sweet thing but had a deformation of her nose. It was flat and odd looking and some of the yokels called her "monkey face." On this particular evening someone had banged on her screened window and threatened to break in and rape her. She was a hysterical bundle of nerves by the time Tom and I arrived, but the chief maids were doing a good job of quieting her. Of course we found no culprit, although we checked every alleyway and talked with the other women in that part of the complex.

We finally withdrew, with the admonition that the women call us at the least disturbance and to leave their hall lights on that night. For a few evenings the Swede checked the area oftener than usual, and passed the word that he had no compunction about using his gun if necessary, but I believe the offender was never found.

In their off hours, some bellhops caddied for our Jewish guests; which reminds me that I have not mentioned the fact that the Fabyan House catered to Jews as well as Gentiles, so there was a sizeable Jewish clientele when I came to work there.

Some of the men guests were blue-collar burly types who could not understand why they were obliged to dress for dinner, despite the fact that their golfing clothes were generally reeking with perspiration. Of course to change would make them even later when they had already come in late. But the house was adamant, which was a satisfaction to those who were scholars or, in some cases, folk of very wealthy families who dressed for dinner in their own homes; as did everyone who was Jewish and wealthy of New York City, Philadelphia and several mid-western cities.

In the evenings there was dancing in the ballroom for those who wished, and several specially designed card rooms opened off the hallway to the ball room.

A foursome of men and their wives, friends of long standing, played pinochle quite often in one of the east corridor card rooms. They always arrived together on the same train. It was a wonderful example of camaraderie. One night the two erupted from the card room practically in the act of punching each other had not their wives clung to their arms. They were yelling at each other and one claimed that the other had cheated him. A matter of a few cents that they played for! Everyone was shocked to say the least. Mrs. Barron finally calmed them down and they separately returned to their rooms.

The couples politely ignored one another for the remainder of their stay. But I've forgotten whether either, neither or both couples returned the following year.

Mt. Washington Cog Railway

On fine summer days some guests would engage the bellboys to set up card tables on the east end of the veranda, where they were then served cool drinks and confections brought out by waiters from the kitchen. The view of the mountain was a majestic sight, as I've mentioned, but was especially so on the day the Peppersass Engine's boiler blew up.

The Cog Railway Locomotive, that hauled people in cars to the top of Mt. Washington, may have been the originator of mountain climbing steam engines. Its boiler was so mounted that it was horizontal when on a grade and canted when on level terrain. The whole train was constructed so that in case of accident, brakes on both locomotive and cars would lock, preventing what would otherwise be catastrophic.

Of course the ancient locomotive's steam boiler blowing up was bad enough in itself.

Mr. Oscar Barron

In its heyday, when Oscar Barron first built his Fabyan House in the valley, both it and the Crawford House were very well known. And several trains a day brought wealthy people to the White Mountains.

Mr. Barron had been in the Cuban War and became a noted sportsman in the upper New Hampshire region. Trails for riders as well as pedestrians were kept open and were utilized by the summer people. Evidence of his hunting prowess was obvious.

The hotel's oaken front desk was of such a height that a person had only to slightly bend to sign the register, and it extended around a corner to a wall with an entry gate for office personnel. High on the wall behind it hung the mounted head of a great moose. White tail deer heads with fine racks were to be found hanging on the walls in the lobby. Over the dining hall doors was another large elk head, above which in an arc was centered a set of cavalry sabers.

On the west side of the wide entrance foyer was a large fireplace, and over its mantel was mounted a magnificent elk's head, flanked by several enlarged photos depicting Oscar's hunts. A cozy fire in the evening was often welcomed by the guests, as they sat comfortably in leather upholstered chairs while browsing through magazines borrowed from the racks and small tables at hand.

Hike and Bike, The Willey House

At the close of my first summer at the Fabyan House, in 1929, I decided to hike to one of the lower towns, at least as far as to Conway, and then decide whether to take a train on south. Everyone tried to dissuade me, feeling that I had no realization of the many miles involved. Nor did I indeed.

Mr. Frazier, the chief steward, ordered one of his cooks to pack for me a couple of sandwiches, with ample fillings of cold beef slices, and some fat cookies that I would discover when lunch time came. As usual, I expected to find water as I went along. Mrs. Barron

directed Miss Blackwell to take me by auto as far as the Crawford House, where she bid me a good journey. I waved goodbye and went on my way jauntily enough, soon to pass by the old Willey House.

I am trying to recall the tale of the Willey House that I read in a little book in the Fabyan House library, a story that any one of the old staff knew by heart; although I have no idea who might know the today.

But then, on seeing where the old house stood, somewhat above the main road with a great boulder looming behind it, I readily understood what had occurred. I think it was one of those years when rain was phenomenally plentiful and oldsters implored the Willey family to leave their home and stay with neighbors in the valley. They decided to stay, fearing vandalism if the place had no occupants.

What happened was that an avalanche of mud, trees and stones came crashing down the mountain and the Willeys, on hearing it, vacated the house and ran. They had been right in the first place. Had they remained in the house they would have survived, for the great rock outcropping above never moved as the mass split and flowed past it and around the house. While trying to get away the Willeys perished in the river of trees, mud rocks and debris.

I couldn't help but feel a shiver down my spine as I passed the old place.

Soon I was reminded of an old Indian Legend about those "white hills" we call the White Mountains. It was somewhat along the order of El Dorado, a place of vast treasure that naturally drew the early explorers. I took my time and gloried in the gold and crimson early autumn colors that must have been the basis for the Indian myth, for the grandeur and loveliness of nature was the very soul of our red brothers, feelings which few white people seem to have learned.

By late afternoon I was tired and hungry, having dined earlier on the food prepared by the hotel cook.

I was astonished, on looking westward, to see what looked like benches of stone on distant hills that gleamed with water flowing over the edges. Then I remembered Miss Blackwell telling me to watch for the "Baths of Diana." Had I been prepared with bedroll and proper gear I would have spent another day hiking to that phenomenal scene, that I understand is one of the unsung attractions that some folk have on their lists of "must see" in the mountains today.

I passed through a small village, then took the way marked North Conway which I also passed through to another small village. My nearly exhausted body still carried me on, though complaining to the last, and I was glad to finally walk a sidewalk again. I learned of an eating place that was still open, stopped and had a hamburger and a cup of coffee, the latter seeming as fine as ambrosia.

It was 10 o'clock in the evening. A train would stop around 7am or so, I was told, but as I ate I saw some bicyclists with packs riding through town. I then and there decided to buy a second-hand bike if I could find one. The man at the grill said a fellow on the floor above sold them, so I went up the dimly lit stairs and found the man working on some bikes at a bench in front of a big window overlooking the street. I looked over several bikes and picked out one that looked good to me, and for \$10 I bought it.

I had gone but a short distance down the street when something broke. So I took it right back and in a half-hour he had repaired the part as he had guaranteed he would if something went wrong.

At 12:30am I was finally tooling along down the road, getting used to the dark although there was a moon and I had brought a flashlight from the hotel. I only used the flashlight when a car approached, which was seldom enough at that hour in those days, but it was tough on my eyes now attuned to the dark.

I had no baggage, only a raincoat, because I had sent my things home by parcel post the day before. I had been able to catnap during the short time when the man worked on the bike, but I found that the night air, somewhat chilly, was vastly energizing. And in those days even macadam roads were none too smooth, so the rough riding was a big help.

I now planned to go as far as Meredith, New Hampshire, and take a train or decide otherwise when I got there. I think it was somewhere along the road to Farnsworth that my front tire went soft and I pulled off the road. There was brush on both sides and a thin pine lot on my side beyond a barbed wire fence. I pushed the bike into the brush, but without a blanket what to do.

A large maple tree attracted me as some 10-feet up from the ground it branched into a comfortable looking "U" shape. I remembered an afternoon snooze in such a tree when I was a kid, so I climbed the tree and found it reasonably comfortable. I may have dozed about two hours when I awoke with a start and discerned what appeared to be a big wildcat staring up at me from the ground. In the half-light, I growled loudly and the creature bounded off through the pasture.

Dawn was breaking, it now being about 6 o'clock by my pocket watch, so I climbed down, recovered my bicycle and walked it along the road with by then a really flat tire. About a 30-minute walk later I came to a country garage on the left side of the road. I had to wait an hour before anyone showed up, but the man was sympathetic enough that he patched my tire and wouldn't take any money. Said he had a boy who biked a lot and maybe someone would give him a hand when in trouble sometime.

On inquiry I learned that there was a country, eating place down the road a piece, so he bade me good luck and I took off. My road branched right and the main road went straight ahead with a scattering of buildings at roads edge, one being the place where I got hot dogs, sandwiches, donuts and coffee.

From there I turned right and crossed through a covered bridge; which was still there in 1999, the last time I passed that way but in the comfort of a 1986 Chevy Cavalier.

It began to rain by the time I reached Meredith, and I then really decided to ship my bike by train and ride in the comfort of a coach to Keene, New Hampshire. Unfortunately, no train would leave until evening some time, which was quite a monotonous wait. The train finally came and I was able to sleep on doubly comfortable plush cushions, after shipping my bike on through to my hometown in Bernardston. I visited with my grandparents in Keene, as I had planned, then took another train to Bernardston, where I left the well-used bike to one of my younger siblings when I returned by train

to Boston for my next year of Art School studies.
So ended that adventure.

More Characters

The two principle floor maids were middle-aged, but were not at all bad looking. I think Tim was quite fond of the handsomest one. The other, a little more heavy set with bobbed hair, was called Mildred, I think. Evenings they sat in the upstairs front hall where they would be available if anyone had a problem. At the same time they were where they would be available if Mrs. Barron needed anything, even though Miss Blackwell was always at hand it seemed.

A Mr. Wheeler, I think was his name, had been the hotel bookkeeper for many years, but he had one accomplishment unshared, nor desired, by anyone else. He was a tailor of the old school. Every autumn the long red carpets were taken up and stored over winter. But in the spring, when we fellows were there doing our thing in the ballroom, I discovered him sitting in the dismantled foyer patching worn places in the carpets. He was snipping and mending them by hand while sitting cross-legged, old tailor fashion, on the floor. His stitching was so neat that one was never aware of it once the carpets were tacked into place. He had been with the Barrons for years, a typical retainer one might say. The patient man deserved a medal.

Another such was wiry, short, bowlegged Jimmy, an Irishman of uncertain age. He was wrinkled and bent but as spry as you please as he went about little fixit chores. But his most beloved task was to gather the sprigs of the redolent fir tree, cure and use them to make sweet smelling pillows. He, too, was a patient man, and a master of his craft, working his alchemy whilst sitting cross-legged on a vacant bit of floor in the octagonal garage some distance from the hotel.

The little bags found their way to the souvenir gift shop, located beside the straight walkway leading from the hotel to the airy, railway waiting station. The shop was in a rustic hut that had a sophisticated title, but I am unable to remember what it was. It was operated by Mrs. Dodge and a friend, whose name I don't recall either, though I can visualize her very well.

We had little to do with the hut, unless a guest asked us to carry packages they had purchased. I believe it was during my first season when there was a college girl working with Mrs. Dodge, but not thereafter.

Of course then, as now, souvenir shops depended a great deal on people just passing through, the carriage trade who wished to show their friends objects from where they had been. Jimmy's sweet fir pillows sold well there, because their aroma was what most people considered characteristic of the region's fir trees.

The waiting station was a long, roofed, open air space beside the railway tracks. The large letters F-A-B-Y-A-N stood on its roof. This was where eager bellboys awaited their customers as they stepped off the train from New York or Boston, or elsewhere as the case might be.

A small baggage shed nearby remained locked except at train time, when the baggage men with their station wagons gathered from the Mt. Washington House and other hotels to pick up their clients' baggage. Among them was our own Tim, neat and trim in his close fitting tunic,

his bald head a gleam in the train's early morning headlight, waiting for our Fabyan guests to arrive with their trunks.

Tim was well liked by these men, many of whom were grizzled and white haired, dressed in blue, brass buttoned jackets and wearing visored caps. At least the Mt. Washington men were so attired.

The Mt. Washington was the largest and most high-class resort in the region, and still is these many years since though the Fabyan and Mt. Pleasant Houses are no more, as I discovered on a trip in 1973.

Season's End, Top of the Mountain

After the hotel closed the day after Labor Day, 1930, I rode my bicycle in a heavy fog to the cog railway station where I began to hike up the mountain, following the tracks. Suddenly I was above the fog, as it lay like an endless lake everywhere below me. As I continued to climb it began to get cold, and was finally freezing cold with a strong wind blowing.

All of a sudden those crosses I had noted on previous trips cried out their message. Long icicles stood out horizontally from the crosses, and in my light sweater and cap I realized that I would be fortunate if I made it to the sanctuary inside the tip-top house alive.

I had never realized how important a hot cup of coffee could be, until I fumbled out loose change for a cup of the hot stuff and slowly felt its warmth begin to restore my frigid body to its proper temperature.

I stayed inside the hut with some other folks who felt as I did, but they were awaiting the train. Some of them had stayed overnight, in fact, having slept in bedrolls. Anyhow, it was apparent that they had been aware of the climate and wore arctic-style clothes.

I studied the maps on a bulletin board, and discovered that I could quickly slip over the edge of the rocky eminence onto a gully leading away from the arctic wind into a growth of stubby mountain spruce trees; whose grotesque shapes were the result of the strong wintry blasts for which Mt. Washington had become famous.

And thus I returned by a safe route to the cog-railway station at the foot of the mountain. It was by then nearly dark, and I had long since consumed the fine sandwich that Mr. Frazier's cook had kindly sent me off with in the early morning.

Not far from the station, I was freewheeling a little faster than I ought when I ran onto a recently repaired road that seemed as though it had been done with marbles of all sizes. I lost control of my bike and saw that I was about to be tossed head first at the butt end of a log guardrail at roadside above a gully. I held onto the handlebars, but I was un-ceremonially pitched from my bike seat.

I sat up to discover that I had thankfully missed the log end, but had slid on my right knee and chipped a fragment from the left edge of its kneecap; though because of the tough, whipcord riding breeches I wore only a rasping of the skin resulted in a meager stain of blood.

I ached all over but soon began walking along slowly beside my minimally damaged bicycle. I did manage finally to ride, erratically, the rest of the way to the Fabyan House, where I was received in

wonder that I had sustained no real injuries. I was fed hot food while I related the whole day's episode to Mrs. Barron and Miss Blackwell.

Homeward Bound

The next day, on their insistence, I took it easy and put my bike back in as good shape as possible. I bade everyone goodnight and said that I'd be off very early in the morning on my homeward journey.

And so I did indeed. I said goodbye to the Swede night guard, picked up a sandwich that Mr. Frazier had put up for me, and took off before the sun was up. My route was down through the familiar Crawford Notch and past the old Willey House. The blacktop road was narrower then than it is nowadays and it was hard riding up and down the hills but I kept on as dark approached, using my flashlight as necessary, to finally arrive at North Conway for the night.

Mind you, those were the days before the advent of three-speed bicycles, let alone multi-speed bikes, and my ride was to get me home not a lark or a tour for pleasure.

After sunup the next day I found myself in rain at one point, a real pouring rain from the heavens with thunder and lightning for good measure. My feet squished in my shoes and the water ran out of my gauntlets because my gloves were full of water. Despite my raincoat I was soaking wet, but I had my uncle John's old WW-I broad-brimmed felt hat on, which kept the water away from my eyes fairly well.

About one o'clock I was cold and wet and bone tired and the rain finally stopped. I pulled off the main road around behind a great log that sealed off a curved segment of road that a new one had bypassed. I let my bike lie on its side and began to build a tent with my raincoat over some sticks I was able to thrust into the old road.

I searched for some fairly dry wood, and dug some dry heart-slivers from a stump and built a tiny pyramid with them. I removed all my clothes and arranged them on sticks so that a small hot fire would dry them, and myself, under my tent. I found a book of matches but realized that they weren't good enough to create a lasting hot blaze. What to do?

I suddenly thought of a nearly full package of small black stogies that a guest had stuck in my pocket the last minute before he got aboard his car at the hotel. With only three paper matches left, I lit a stogie and was finally able to get the fine-split slivers of pine to ignite. The rest was easy.

My clothes began to steam and I fell asleep, naked as I was. After a seemingly short time a noise awoke me with a start. I expected perhaps it was the law and that I was about to be arrested for being in the buff.

I hurriedly dressed in my now dried clothes; the outer garments were still pretty damp but they felt great. I packed my socks, put on my wet shoes and took off on my bike for Lake Winnepesaukee and beyond, for I now decided to ship my bike and go home by train by way of Keene.

My memory is that to take the train I had to wait, along with other passengers, at a Godforsaken, wilderness junction station that was nothing more than a platform. And I believe a railroad man had to flag the engineer to stop.

There was no cover and it was dark and chilly and I was not dressed for that experience. But by walking back and forth and stamping my feet I was as comfortable as a soldier might be while walking an army post on such a night. (Except that a few years later, at Camp Edwards, we would have woolen greatcoats to wear.)

P.S. My kneecap was a problem that stayed with me for years. Every time I knelt for a rifle shot in the army it let me know that it was not well. It must have been as late as 1973 before I could kneel and not feel a sharp pain.

Northbound from Keene

One of the laughable incidents occurred on my third year trip to Fabyan, in 1931, when I rode my bike up through the towns on the east side of the Connecticut River.

About mid-morning I bade grandma goodbye and began my trip northward by the roads that occasionally bordered the Connecticut River. The weather was very good and the roads, though by stages of hillock and valley it was always climbing in a sense. At nightfall of a beautiful day I finally decided to camp for the night. At some point I remember riding into the town of Lyme, N.H., past some long sheds with horse stalls and a church on the left. I was tired so I rode into the cemetery close by to rest, sitting on a boulder under a great oak tree. My lunch was several squares of a Hershey bar and a drink of fresh water from the cemetery water supply. And then it was back to the road again.

I must have started too late from Grandpa's place in Keene, because night overtook me when I was not yet at Wells River, where I was to turn to the Ammonoosuc Valley and Littleton.

It had been a warm day, and a little after sunset a pasture quite near the road seemed all right and I decided to camp for the night. No cattle were in sight. I hid my bike in the brush, tossed my pack ahead and crawled through the barbed wire fence, as I'd done many times on the farm. I walked some 100-feet to a likely spot on the close-cropped sod, spread my raincoat, rolled into my blanket and soon fell asleep.

About one o'clock, under an illuminated night sky, I woke up suddenly to find myself ringed by young cattle, snuffing and nervous. I flew out of my blanket, grabbed my pack and hat, and snapped the blanket at the cattle while shouting a loud "Hah!" And they fled. I walked quickly toward the fence, trusting not to step in a cow pie in the dark. The cattle gradually regained their natural curiosity and began to overtake me, but I stuck to just a fast walk so as not to start a stampede that would overrun me. I reached the fence and wasted no time getting through it as the first bold animals practically nuzzled my butt.

The mass of silent critters crowded the fence, as I wheeled my bike to the old road and took off northward on my lonesome ride. A dog barked now and then, as I peddled past infrequent farmhouses where a steady light now and again shone from an early riser's kitchen.

While passing one farm a big dog rushed me as I peddled, but having learned from experience I drew my exposed leg away from his jaws at the last second. However, in this case I was about to dismount when the farmer appeared in his lamp-lit doorway and ordered the dog away

in a loud stentorian voice, for he could see just me in that odd pre-dawn light riding through the fog.

I recall that on this or another trip, using the river road on a long loop westerly and north from Keene, I went through the town of Walpole because I wanted to see a particular, large brick house on the right side of the road, a farm that my Grandpa Messer rented when he left Ludlow, Vermont, the town where my mother was born.

There I found a good restaurant, where I had a hamburger and a cup of coffee before crossing the Connecticut River to ride up the west side of it, because someone had told me that the roads would be better over there for a bicyclist. This also led me to discover a diner in Vermont that was one of the good old fashioned ones. (It is still in business as of 2001.)

My trip up the west side of the river was without unusual occurrence. At Wells River, where I crossed the bridge over the Connecticut once more, I began the last leg of my trip up along the Ammonoosuc River Valley, through Littleton to Twin Mountain and at last the level notch past the garage to the Fabyan House Annex, where I arrived after dark. I walked over to the hotel where Tom Brophy, still at work in his office, greeted me warmly with a "Welcome back, John."

He called Mrs. Barron, who phoned Mr. Frazier, and I was soon eating a good meal in a room just off the kitchen, after which, late as it was, Mrs. Barron wanted me to come to her room to tell her all about my trip.

In the morning I reported to Tim Dwyer, who had to hear my story all over again, and since the guys were all there they heard it too.

One must remember that bicycling long distances in those days was not the same as today, especially in the White Mountains. We didn't have the gently-graded roads of today, and my bicycle was of the single-speed, coaster brake type with ordinary, hard (tubeless) pneumatic tires. The sprockets ratio I'd say was medium. When I came to a real hill I had to walk and push the bike. I never tried, as lots of young boys did, to pedal standing up for a ways; I just accepted the fact that I was going to have to walk and did so.

Every year, after all the painting and sprucing up for the opening was done, Jack had no hurry-up jobs and relied on Mrs. Barron having occasional pieces of furniture to varnish, or perhaps the decision was made to repaint a room left in poor condition by a transient roomer. Anyhow, by early August Mrs. Barron phoned Jack to report to her room for some work she wished done. She could get no reply from his phone so finally called me and agitatedly asked me to go and see whether Jack was in a condition to do any work.

Everyone had been requested to not procure or give Jack any liquor, and since all of the old hands respected her wish we wondered how or what he may have gotten a-hold of. Then someone remembered that he had once gotten a copy made of the wine cellar key and made off with some of the best wines that were being kept against the day when prohibition would cease.

I went down to the paint shop, and there behind the closed door was Jack; an empty bottle in his hand and sprawled lifelessly among empty

paint cans and buckets, and wood alcohol jugs from which he had actually been drinking.

Mrs. Barron called an ambulance, maybe from Littleton, and he was whisked away to a hospital. I heard no more about Jack but I doubt that he survived. His eyes had been ringed with a yellowish-white color for two years. Even during prohibition he had had a source of the poison, as it was often sold to alcoholics in those days by unscrupulous bootleggers.

In 1932, at the close of my fifth year at Mass. School of Art and Madam Burguet's Pension in Boston, I bicycled to the hotel by way of Concord, N.H., through Chocorua to Conway, North Conway and Crawford Notch. Interestingly enough, I rode over the steep Notch by just barely pedaling over each rise then driving as fast as I could on the more or less level stretches and repeating the slow pedaling over each hump. No one could have been more surprised than I was that it worked out.

Woodbury's Apple Farm

At the end of that season I went south by way of the Old Man of the Mountain, through Concord, and at Hillsboro took Rt. 202 down through Greenfield, New Hampshire, and across the state line to Winchendon, Massachusetts. From there I went on to Baldwinsville, Templeton, Barre and Brookfield to Fiskdale. There was a morning thundershower on Rt. 20 between Sturbridge and Southridge, but I kept on to North Woodstock, Connecticut, arriving about 4pm Sunday at Mr. Woodbury's apple orchard farm.

I turned in there and napped in my raincoat and blanket on a wagon standing there. Mr. Woodbury was quite surprised to find me when he came out at about 6am. But he invited me to breakfast.

Mrs. Woodbury was a motherly lady about my mother's size, neither stout nor thin. Both were quite interested in my brief tale of my trip down from the White Mountains, as was their son, Melzar, who appeared around 7:30 when the local apple pickers showed up for the day's work.

There was a knack to picking apples, placing your pointed ladder into a branch just right. If one tried too small a crotch in a small branch it broke and your ladder slipped side wise and crashed to the ground.

I had the misfortune to have that happen once on a very tall tree. I rode the ladder down and leaped from it when nearly at the ground, which startled everyone as they expected me to have stayed on the ladder and maybe sustained a broken arm or leg. I had simply done what came naturally, although I admit that in those days I was more agile than I was a few years later.

Mr. Woodbury kept me on a little longer than most of his hired help as he seemed to like my company. And for some reason he and his son didn't get along very well.

My good friend Robert from our high school days had married the Woodbury's youngest daughter Helen, and he had been helpful in my getting the job in the first place. Robert told me that it was not Melzar per se that was the problem but his wife Rose, who had been a nurse. The Woodburys had considered her the wrong woman for their son.

I believe it was during my last season at the Fabyan House when Timmy lost himself. He had been an alcoholic for many years, I gathered, temporarily reprieved by the Volstead Act. He had lived and worked in hotels as far back as he could remember, he once told me, and had had a good wife, a waitress, who finally divorced him because of his drinking and using her money.

He was all right at first that summer, until some of the arriving guests began slipping him bottles. He finally began drinking too often and too much and I guess someone spoke to Mrs. Barron about it.

Tim was a good Irishman and one who understood the proper behavior necessary to keep everyone's good will. And he had served long and well. So I'm sure that

Mrs. Barron resisted for some time before finally telling him that he was through forever at the Fabyan. He made his last nostalgic visit of the familiar corridors, said goodbye to old friends and departed. It was a sad thing for us bellboys who had known and worked with him for so long.

I was the head bellman for a short time that year, and because tourism was not very good Mrs. Barron graciously released me early.

And thus ended my very interesting, educational and rewarding experience at the famous:

FABYAN HOUSE.

[Editor's Note: John's studies at the Massachusetts School of Art and his summertime job at The Fabyan House in the White Mountains were things of the past in 1933, when he went into the Public Works of Art and later the WPA Federal Arts Project in Springfield, Massachusetts.

But that's another story entirely, one that he wrote and entitled, *Forgotten Mural Painters of Springfield, 1933-1938*, published in 1992.

[George A. Phelps]

CHAPTER EIGHT MOUNT HERMON TO WW-II

In the spring of 1937 the Federal Works of Art project, that Roger Wolcott and I had been working on at the Natural History Museum in Springfield, Massachusetts, was terminated. We both were obliged to find other artwork to do. Roger found work at the Amherst Agricultural College, and also taught some art Classes at the Springfield Museum of Fine Arts.

Had I taken the Commercial Art Course at the Massachusetts School of Art at Boston, rather than the Fine Arts Course, perhaps I would have been better equipped to use art as a profession. In the fine arts I was basically a portrait and illustration painter, but I was a poor salesman.

Both of us had proved to be competent mural painters, but very few opportunities actually exist for that branch of painting on a regular basis. Miss Marion Huse, who had been appointed Regional Director for the Federal Programs at that time, and a fine artist herself, suggested that I try for a mural project to be done in the Elliott Street entrance hall of the Springfield Technical High School. I prepared a scale model of the entrance hall and a color rendition of my proposed mural, and Miss Huse took it to Boston and presented it to the State Supervisor for the Federal Projects. It was turned down because federal projects were being dropped in the area. I still have drawings for the hall and the color study for the mural.

About then I received a letter from my father stating that, if I was interested, the Mount Hermon School for Boys at Gill, had an opening for a painter in their maintenance crew; that is, if I would report right away. I did so and was soon climbing ladders and "drawing sash" along with some other men. I found that I liked the work and over a period of time I became more knowledgeable about paint and the mixing of large batches of lead and color. Artist's white lead paint was a standard thing in those days, as it had been for centuries, and I had learned how to mix colors as an artist. But mixing color on a large scale was something very different.

In the final analysis, lead and linseed oil make the best kind of paint against the elements for buildings. Wood breathes through lead paint, while zinc is too finely ground. I suppose we should burn all of the old art masters' paintings that were done using leaded paint. Of course the museums try to keep viewers a safe distance from their paintings.

I have little patience with those who make such an issue of lead paint. In our family, from childhood we learned not to eat lead paint or other things not good for us. As painters our hands were daubed with paint at times, but a painter certainly knows enough to wash his hands before he eats his lunch.

At art school we first washed our brushes and hands in turpentine,

then rinsed them well with soap and water in a sink in the studio. We cleaned up ourselves in the same way. True, many painters were inveterate cigarette smokers and their "painty" fingers handled the butts of their cigarettes. And on weekends many of them went on drinking binges, which I imagine was no healthier then than now. Further, among other things, I guess that as many people die every year from raw lead from guns as from lead paint. Perhaps some people are just less intelligent today about dangerous things that should be handled with care.

Mr. Charles Bruce of Gill was in charge of the paint shop. He was a small man, somewhat hunch-backed and had a limp when he walked. Our paint gang was a motley crew. Many were professional house painters down on their luck for one reason or another. I learned a lot by observing how they handled problems.

One of the young men was the son of Mr. Mayberry, head of the Farm Department of the school. His son Paul, a big fellow, and I became quite good friends during the three-plus summers I worked on the paint gang. I remember that the two of us used to see who could draw sash the fastest using a four-inch brush, which we had discovered did just as good a job as a sash tool and was heavy enough that its weight helped us draw a straight line close to the glass. We never got paint on the glass, something that annoys me when I see people do so and then have to scrape it off afterwards.

Because I was the last man on the team, and also the smallest, I was often given the job of painting high places after the big guys set up the tall ladders that lay flat against the wall of a building when extended full length. Heights never bothered me as long as I had a handhold. All of us used to stretch as far to the right as possible at the top of the ladder, holding onto the ladder with our left hand, sometimes even standing on our left foot right close to the outside rail with our right foot swinging in the breeze. Of course the can of paint always hung from a ladder-round on an S-shaped heavy wire. We would then do the same thing on the left side of the ladder. We'd paint under the ladder and close to the top of each side rail, then "hunch" it over carefully and swipe the small spot where the ladder tips had stood against the wall.

I was elected hands-down one morning when the slightly conical roofs of the tall silos of the farm barns needed painting. They did ask me whether I was afraid to do it. Still I wanted to know what safety precautions I would have. Oh they would handle the halter, or whatever they called the rope-works. They put me in a bo'sun's chair, if I remember rightly, and worked it somehow from the housing on the roof where ensilage was blown into the silo during harvest time. All that I really remember is that I did not linger on the job.

Mr. Bruce and I hit it off pretty well, as we both had had some higher education. And I seem to think he mentioned that at one time he had considered being a minister. Anyhow, after a couple of summers he would take me with him to one of the professor's cottages on the campus that was being "done over," a new wallpaper and paint job. As a matter of fact, my father was doing the wallpapering work at the School at that time. When it came time for a new color for the floors

that the lady of the house required to look well with the new décor, Mr. Bruce would confer with her ladyship and get an idea of the color required to her way of thinking. Then he'd return to the shop and begin mixing a color: a dab of this, a little of that and just a smidgen of something else from a small can. Then he would send me to her house and I would try a swatch on the floor while the lady studied the color, glanced at the wall paper, held up a swatch of the new drapes. Not feeling that the color was quite right she would say "It should look redder," perhaps, "or colder," and I would walk back to the shop and tell Mr. Bruce what the lady thought about the color.

After seven tries more or less and no satisfactory decision had been made, Mr. Bruce would quietly hand me his first color mixture, made up to his sense of the right color. I would try that one and the lady would be so happy. "Oh, Mr. Phelps, I am so pleased, tell Mr. Bruce that that is exactly the color I had in mind." And then we painted the floor.

One summer during the school vacation, several of the professors' wives had furniture brought into the paint shop to be refinished and varnished. In preparation, several men cleared out whatever had been stored in a large shed attached to the paint shop. Then the overhead and walls were brushed down for cobwebs and the floor carefully swept with a soft broom. After all this, the overhead timbers, walls and floor were spray-hosed with water and the men left, locking the door behind them.

As I remember it, the next day when there was no water dripping from overhead, all the furniture that had meanwhile been sanded, stained if necessary and carefully wiped clean, was brought into this shed and set up with plenty of room around each piece for someone to work. Then the men left the room again and locked the door.

After all the crew had left for the day, Mr. Bruce took a can of furniture varnish, entered the room, shut the door behind him and worked until twilight when he locked the doors and went home. If he had not quite finished the work he was back bright and early in the summer morning, and would complete the job before the men arrived at eight o'clock. He then locked the shed door again, and no one was to enter the building until he knew very well the varnish was hard and dry without a blemish or spic from a speck of dust.

Mr. Robert Ware was one of the standbys on the paint gang. An older man, he was a very reliable person and a permanent member of the paint crew along with Mr. Bruce. He was quite tall with a sallow complexion and a shock of iron gray hair under his white painter's cap. He had a long bony hand and shapely fingers, dark eyes, and wore an almost smile on his face as if the world about him was amusing. I can see him now in my mind's eye, slightly stoop-shouldered, wearing a white shirt and black bow tie and white, painter's overalls with minute dapples of dark paint spots here and there, grayed from use and many washings. A pair of well-worn black shoes poked from under the overall bottoms, also dappled with specks of many colors.

Mr. Ware and I became good friends, and the two of us were often put on special jobs together in some professor's home.

Mr. and Mrs. Ware were good friends of my father and mother as well, having become acquainted when our family attended the Baptist

Church in Bernardston, when we lived on Huckle Hill.

The Wares' oldest daughter, Bernice, was a practical nurse. She was a special friend of Mother's and Mother introduced us to each other. We became good friends as well, and attended many local affairs together.

I remember that we once both entered a certain spelling bee, held at the Northfield Town Hall. Bernice held on for a while but the words became more exotic and with many syllables, so that one who had had Latin would have an advantage. I believe I was one of the last three, with Mrs. Birdsall, the wife of one of the Mount Hermon professors, and one other at the end. Suddenly, with a very simple word, to my chagrin I miss-spelled! Mrs. Birdsall won the prize. But it was a lot of fun for me. I had not been in a spelling bee since my grammar school days.

I had called at the Ware's home to visit with Mr. Ware before I met Bernice, but after that I naturally called oftener. Strangely, it was there that I first met Gladys. She had stopped by to see the Wares on some errand, the Wares and her Aunt Bertha being neighbors as well as members of the Bernardston Baptist Church.

One weekend the Wares decided to drive to Wilmington, Vermont, to visit their son Herbert and his wife. Bernice and I were invited to go along. The two of us decided to go in my big ark of a Buick sedan, one that I had just traded a worn-out Plymouth for. Although I had filled the gas tank before we left Gill, about half way there it ran out of gas. The Wares were behind us so Mr. Ware left his family to visit with Bernice in my car while we went to the nearest gas station for a gallon of gas to get us to the town.

We had a first rate visit with Herbert, his wife and family, and had no more problems with the car on the way back to Gill. However, the next day I took the car to Streeter's garage in Bernardston, where it was discovered that the glass cup for the gas filter was cracked so that under pressure, when the car was running, some gas leaked out.

Although I could have had it repaired, I decided that it was a much bigger car than I needed and traded it in at Streeter's for a small Nash coupe that was much better for what I needed. However, in 1940 no more of that model were being built and no parts were available. And so, for want of a part for the steering gear, even though it was running beautifully I gave it up and bought a 60-horsepower Ford from the Spencer Garage people in Northfield.

The painting job at Mount Hermon was only good during the student body vacation months, so when school time approached Mr. Bruce advised me that the caretaker for Dwight's Home, the School Infirmary, had decided to leave for a better job. He thought I might wish to apply for the job, if I didn't mind taking care of a coal furnace and doing janitorial work.

So I went to see Mr. Carroll Reichert, the hiring boss for working personnel, and he arranged for an interview with Martha Trein, the R.N. who was the nurse in charge at Dwight's Home. She had an R.N. assistant, and a registered dietician as cook. All of us were domiciled at the Home.

Miss Trein was happy to have me at Dwight's Home, so I was well set for the job when the student body was at the school from September to

June. I would work on the paint gang during summer vacations and at Dwight's Home when school was in session thereafter, until I was drafted into the army on March 10, 1941.

Dwight's Home, as its name implies, had been a dwelling house on campus converted to an infirmary for the student body. My duties were to maintain the heating plant in operating condition, and to keep the wards, corridors, parlor and office reception room clean.

During the years when I was there, several minor epidemics of colds took place. But in the early spring of 1940 an epidemic of flu occurred, and in a matter of days all of the regular wards were full of students and an attic room, over a south ell of the building, was also full of patients. Mrs. Glennis Doran, a registered nurse and a very pleasant person indeed, was called in during the onset. She told me about a sister who was caring for their grandfather, Mr. Horace Martindale, who lived on a small farm adjoining the Mount Hermon property to the west.

I knew about the Martindales, because Miss Bertha was a member of the Bernardston Baptist Church, as I have remarked earlier, and who was a neighbor of the Wares.

At any rate, an art exhibition was to take place on the Mount Hermon campus and Nurse Doran suggested that she arrange a date for me to meet her sister Gladys there at the exhibition, and I did so. When I saw Gladys I realized that I had met her before, at the Ware's home.

It would have been in the spring of 1939, after the fall hurricane of 1938 with its exhibition of nature's ruthless power of wind and water when people learned once again how insignificant human beings really are during catastrophic natural phenomena.

The long driveway approach to Mount Hermon, in those days, was bordered by a stand of tall white pine trees as it wound its way to the main campus. After the hurricane struck, the giant trees were strewn like jackstraws across the road. The campus was littered with uprooted trees everywhere. There had been heavy rains for three weeks before the winds came, and the ground was sodden.

I was at Dwight's Home when the winds began to blow. Miss Trein and I ran from room to room closing windows. We both remembered an open window on the west end of the third floor.

"John," she shouted, for the roar of the wind in the trees outside was terrible. "Run upstairs and close that small window in the west end."

I dashed away even before she had finished. It was a casement window that swung in on hinges. I grabbed the window and pushed with all my might, and after a really hard tussle I closed and locked it. It was a frightening situation beyond anything I had ever imagined.

When I got back downstairs, I found that while I was on the third floor a great maple tree at the southeast corner had uprooted and smashed through the roof of the veranda, making kindling wood of the wooden benches and spindle railings.

There were uprooted trees everywhere on the visible landscape. Two giant, blue spruce across the driveway from the front door were uprooted and, thankfully, had fallen parallel to the building. Leaves, twigs and branches had flown through the air and found lodgment, plastered against the house walls, the lawn and the driveway. But

miraculously there was no damage to the parked cars at the west entrance of the building.

It was several days before anything like normalcy returned. The trees were cut up and carted away. The great blue spruce trees were pulled up in place, the earth tamped around their roots, and steel cables set to hold these prized ornaments until they should regain their footing once more. No real damage had occurred to Dwight's Home itself, for which we were all most thankful.

And so time ran on. I rented a studio in the long ell at the back of the Northfield Post Office. It was part of the "block" diagonally across the street from the Unitarian Church at Warwick Avenue and Route 10. My artwork, books and other property, which I had temporarily stored at our folks' place on Meadow Street, was now there. At last I had a real studio for doing some art work; that is, whenever possible in my time off from the job at Mt Hermon.

I became interested in the Christian Endeavor Society once more, which I had been active in at Bernardston before I went to Boston in 1927 to study art. Being at Mount Hermon, and remembering that the Trinitarian Church in Northfield had been built by D.L. Moody, I began to attend church once more with my father and mother. It was good to be associated with the young people there.

Reverend Stanley Carne, from Maine, was then pastor of the church. Father liked his preaching from the Bible, and the Reverend and I felt drawn to one another through our work with the young people. His youngest daughter and son were members of the society, as were his two older children, a daughter and a son. Another daughter was in college and a son worked elsewhere for Western Auto.

Before long I was elected president of the Society. We had wonderful Sunday evening meetings with song and participation, which of course was the essence of the Christian Endeavor. My sister Ruth and Albert Cembalisty, whom she would eventually marry, were members of the group as were several of the Bolton young folks.

I soon realized that Reverend Carne urging me toward studying for the ministry. This had happened twice before, when I was younger and a member of the Bernardston Church and before I decided to study art. Many artists in the course of history have been interested in the ministry. Artists during the Renaissance were students of the Bible. Great artists drew inspiration from its study, especially Rembrandt, who did many works of art inspired by Biblical passages.

It is true that I loved the Bible, and still do, and I studied it thoughtfully. But it always brought pictures to my mind, actually, rather than a desire to be evangelistic about it as it seemed always to be among small groups in Northfield. A daughter of a retired missionary living in Northfield at the time was one of our Christian Endeavor members, and she would devote her life to foreign missionary work as an adult. I believed in the Christian Endeavor very much, and I still do.

I tried to get young folks to attend our Sunday meetings no matter who they were. I wrote a short play about the founding of Christian Endeavor by the Reverend Clark and his wife of Maine. The young people put on the play for a small group at the church and it was well

received. We were guests of the Bernardston Society at the Goodale United Church. We accompanied Rev. Carne to a large meeting in a church in North Keene, New Hampshire, at which I lead the singing. Grandpa and Grandma Phelps attended.

Small groups of us led meetings in a country schoolhouse on Northfield Mountain, and in a one room schoolhouse in lower Northfield, where a road went up the hill past the Bennett place from Route-63. We met at different homes, sometimes in threes or a half dozen, for hot cocoa and cookies and songfests of sacred music. Several of the girls were good soloists and pianists. Mr. Carnes' daughter suggested that we sing at a faster tempo (than her father wished at his Sunday meetings at the church) and I agreed that music should be gladsome rather than funereal, for I believe that the Bible admonishes us to make a "joyful noise unto the Lord."

On the Hundredth Anniversary of Dwight L. Moody's birth, we gathered in the street in front of the house where he was born. Mr. Carne said a prayer, gave a brief talk and then we marched, singing to my beat on Grandfather Phelps' tenor drum, along Highland Avenue to the Trinitarian Church. People pulled their shades as we passed by and none joined us on our march to Moody's church. This in the town where people unctuously pronounced his name and feigned reverence for the man who founded the Northfield School for Girls and the Mount Hermon Boys School across the River; the same river over which he rode the ferry many times, we are told, with the great singer Sankey who made the valley ring with his sacred music.

A few days later, Father advised me that one of the important men of the church wished to talk with me at his home, so the two of us drove over to his house. The man complimented me on my work with the young people, but added that he was obliged to advise me that a church committee was not pleased with my bringing certain characters into the Christian Endeavor, people who they felt were not the sort with whom they wished their daughters and sons to associate.

I then met with Mr. Carne, who seemed also to have become less welcome since his participation and association with a Mr. Roberts and others who belonged to an "end of the world is about to happen group," and with others of a prayerful "born-again" Christian group.

I said, "I shall resign from my work with the Christian Endeavor, Mr. Carne, because I have other work equally important to attend to." Or words to that effect.

And so I did.

My personal feeling about religion, and Christianity in particular, has always been that an individual must make up his own mind about God. Communication with Him at any church or place that inspires someone to be a good neighbor, to be careful of his speech, that he offend no one by a phrase or a gesture, that he honor his parents and also the nation wherein he expects shelter and protection from destroyers of life and liberty. I also believe that a person's liberty of behavior ends where another person's body and property begins, including the right to not be obliged to hear or see obnoxious words or behavior. I also believe that justice is not served by laws alone, nor by police, and certainly not by frenzied mobs urged on by media conjecture, but by a judge and jury of our peers and an Iron Faith in

precepts for behavior learned long ago and very well described in the Bible.

It was very soon after that, on Wednesday March 5, 1941, that I received my notice from the "People of the United States" that I was to soldier for them in the newly established draft under Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States of America, to report for induction on March 10th, 1941.

Gladys M. True, who was a graduate of Colby College (in 1932) and was a teacher for two years, had come to Gill, Massachusetts, to help her Aunt Bertha Martindale care for an aging and nearly helpless grandfather who had once been an employee of Mount Hermon School for Boys. For several hours each day she worked part time in the main office at the school switchboard. Although she owned a 1930 Model-A, canvas-topped Ford coupe with a rumble seat, she often walked the short distance from her grandfather's home to the office. And, as I have said, I first met her at the Ware's home.

We had become engaged in December of 1940, although no one on the campus apparently realized this since we were never seen there together.

Back when I was a student at the Massachusetts School of Art in Boston, I'd had to work my way through school, as did many others at the time. Mr. Major, one of my teachers, suggested that I apply to Madame Burguet for a job as waiter at her pension at 45 Saint Botolph Street in the Back Bay of Boston. I did so, which required that I be there to serve at the evening dinner from Monday through Friday. I was glad to have the job.

Madame's son Jacque served people in one room, where many people spoke French as some of the French men hairdressers had been poilous in the French army during WW-I. I served the people in the front room as you entered from the street. The patrons were teachers, musicians, business folk and artists, including Mr. Major himself.

I was then rooming with two fellow art students on Newbury Street, not far from the school at Exeter and Newbury Streets. One evening our class was having a dance and Roger Wolcott said, "Come on, John, come to the dance with us tonight. All work and no play is not good for you, you know."

"Sorry, Rog, I can't afford to lose this job. Sorry."

"Oh, come on, John," Blair Whitney urged, and the two of them kept after me to go to the dance with them, while they spruced up for the evenings fun.

Finally Blair said, "John, I declare, if you don't get into the swing and socialize a little you'll end up marrying somebody from Skowhegan, Maine. And it did happen, but this way.

On the Wednesday evening of the day that I received my draft notice, March 5, 1941, I took Miss Bertha Martindale and her niece Gladys True of Skowhegan, Maine, to see "Gone with the Wind" at a theater in Greenfield. On returning, I let Miss Martindale off at her door while Gladys and I talked a few minutes in the car. After a while I said, "I received my draft notice today to report for induction Monday coming."

Gladys sat quietly a few seconds and then, "John, I think we should get married."

I was agreeable. She then went into the house and I drove off to Dwight's Home for the night.

Thursday and Friday were busy days indeed. I gave my notice to Miss Trein and to Mr. Reichert at the main office, then got in touch with Gladys. She said that when she told her Aunt Bertha that we were going to get married, her aunt said, "Aren't you being foolish?"

But then she realized what really had been said and cried, "Well, let's get a move on. We've got lots to be done."

We obtained our marriage license from Mr. Slate in Northfield, rushed to Greenfield to get a waiver from Judge Thompson, who enjoyed a nice chat with us inasmuch as he was somehow a distant relative of Gladys' family. We drove to Bernardston where Rev. Lovett agreed to marry us at eight o'clock Friday evening at the Baptist Church parsonage. Then Gladys, her aunt and her sister Glennis Doran made whirlwind visits and went shopping. A cake was baked and a few immediate family members were invited to the wedding. Gladys's folks were unable to attend on such short notice.

On Friday I was obliged to honor a parting dinner invitation from Miss Trein and the Dwight's Home Staff, and one or two friends. In parting they wished me well on my way to my soldiering service, and happily I was able to slip into the office the last minute and leave a note with the announcement: "When you read this, Gladys True and I will be husband and wife." I knew no one would see the note until morning, or at least not till I had driven away.

And so it was that at eight o'clock in the evening of Friday, March the 7th 1941, Gladys and I became husband and wife. We were surrounded by my brother Richard as best man, Gladys's sister Glennis True-Doran as matron of honor, my parents and grandparents Phelps, Audrey Burrows-Phelps, Richard's wife, Gladys's Aunt Bertha Martindale, Glennis's husband Harold Doran and his mother, Mrs. Alice Doran. And my brother Stanley, who happened to be in town and who heard about it and came as he was in his work clothes. Of course, the minister's wife, Mrs. Lovett, attended.

Ours was to be the last marriage that Rev. Lovett performed, for he died a few months later, having had heart trouble, I believe, for some time.

Following the ceremony we all repaired to Glennis and Harold's home in Turners Falls where we cut the wedding cake, fed each other the first pieces, received congratulations for finally "tying the knot," and then drove ourselves to the Northampton Hotel where we spent our wedding night in the "bridal suite."

We awoke next morning to a crystalline world of eight inches of snow! After a brief breakfast we drove to Springfield, as we wished to tell old friends the good news of our marriage and that I had to report to the Army on Monday morning. We saw Roger and Beth Wolcott and John Magee with his wife Elinor on Cherry Street. They toasted us with glasses of wine.

After a brief but warm visit there we headed for Easthampton, Mass. Leaving Springfield we were hampered by the slick streets and ruts in

the melting snow. The car tires were somewhat bald and every time we stopped for a street crossing, or anything whatsoever, we had trouble getting under way again. In fact, several times different men good naturedly got out of their cars to give us a push. They had smiles on their faces and good wishes as we got underway. Some tooted their horns.

When we arrived at Robert and Zoe Putnam's home in Easthampton, we discovered telltale pieces and bits of ribbon that had tipped off the folks that we were "newlyweds." Their smiles and good wishes were our Godsend.

We spent Saturday evening visiting, and retired to discover that Zoe had managed to "fix the marriage bed," having strewn rice and toilet articles betwixt the sheets which wed us to the past by a custom old. Certainly a mild shivaree.

Late Sunday afternoon we arrived at Glennis and Harold's home at Turners Falls once more, for a good visit and my last sleep as a civilian for quite some time.

Early Monday morning we were up for a good breakfast with the Dorans, who accompanied us to the bus stop where a number of young men from Turners Falls, Northfield, Greenfield, Millers Falls and hamlets round about had gathered along with relatives and friends. Farewells were accompanied by tears and smiles from wives and parents.

We boarded the bus and took off while several young men shouted "suckers," having no prophetic warning that the following draft would toss them among us after Pearl Harbor's December destruction.

Thus we, and others all over the United States, supplied a new army of citizen soldiers for the war that we would call "World War Number Two."

I was inducted into the Army of the United States on March 10, 1941, and was stationed at Camp Edwards on Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

There I received my basic training as an infantry soldier in D-Company of the 104th Infantry, the 26th Division, which was known as the YD, or Yankee-Division.

Editor's Note: The account of John's tour of duty in the U.S. Army is chronicled in his book:

Memories of My
MILITARY EXPERIENCES
1941-1945
By John Edward Phelps