

Recollections and Reflections on the Trapelo Road Area from 1916 Arlene Taylor Richards, 1974 (included in Waltham Rediscovered*)

Source: Waltham Public Library, Waltham Room – unpublished works – Box 2 – accessed May 7, 2009 – in the public domain

After having been born in East Bridgewater on my grandfather's farm in 1909 my folks migrated to Waltham to the south side when I was 2, from Somerville. My father hated the city and yearned for the country (having been born in Pepperell, Mass.)

My earliest recollection was of us carrying tent and equipment on the street car to Lake Street then on to Hardy Pond and camping by the pond at the base of Stearns Hill (where the Windsor Village apartments are now) every week-end-weather permitting.

It wasn't long before he met a man who had built a home at 1192 Trapelo Road (not numbered in those days) who persuaded him to acquire the land next to him – 14 lots in all (20 ft. lots) on the corner of Grove Rd. and Trapelo Rd. at the entrance to "Wellington Grove" which partly circled the Pond and was mainly edged with summer cottages. Wellington Grove was named after the Wellington Estate (farm) situated across from our land which consisted of 90 acres (more or less) and the big main house was reached from a winding driveway entering from Trapelo Rd. at the base of the hill. Large milk barns were at the back of the house to the right and large horse and cow barns on the left. The piggery was well over in back and was on the Lexington line.

We rented a cottage (while our house was being built) way around on Hardy Pond Rd. right on the edge of the water. Immediately my father bought a canoe boat and before my feet could touch the bottom of the boat I was on the pond rowing and gathering beautiful pond lilies which grew in profusion. We were there two years before our house was built on the corner of Grove Rd. and Trapelo Rod. (#1200) in 1918. There were few houses at the time. Beside the Wellington House was the Stearns Farm just up from Lexington St. (west). The Graverson house across the street from the Wellington House and then crossing Lexington St. east was the Reed Farm and the Hamblett Farm next to it. The Lawrence Farm was just over the line in Lexington and as children we used to pick beans for 25 cents a bushel at Reeds', Lawrence and the McAdoo Farm (who acquired the Wellington estate from people named Glass who only owned it for a short time.

Trapelo Road was a dirt road in 1918 running from Belmont to Lincoln center across the Cambridge water basin.

The McAdoo farm was mainly milk, with pig raising and slaughtering. The senior McAdoo – Robert – was a character I remember as being very gruff and Saturday was "Brighton" day, and he would drive the wagon to the abattoir in Brighton to leave his load, took off to the local tavern, was very tipsy on the way home but the horses knew the way by themselves but one day got startled on the driveway, shied, tipped over and the old man came to his end. The mother and boys carried on for years. Harold, in charge of milk, Robert Jr. left to live in Lexington. Tom and Elliott worked in the milk room. Very curious was the fact that Bob, Tom and Elliott contracted Parkinson's disease (Harold, very bad arthritis) and were in various nursing homes and died. Harold sold the farm to Carmine Nardone and his brothers and bought another in Bolton with his son-in-law. Incidentally my father who was a carpenter died of a heart attack on their farm roof in Boston while remodeling in 1949.

After the Nardones (of The Three Sons on River St.) had acquired the farm, Carmine commissioned Mr. Davenport a famous artist from Weston to paint three scenes

of the old Wellington-Mc Adoo place. One scene is painted a short way up from my home and takes in the long winding driveway, now extinct, up to the farm house. The second is half way up the hill on Trapelo Road (toward Route 128) and overlooks the rolling farm land and takes in all the apple trees and blossoms. The third looks down from the top of the hill and takes in the farmhouse and other buildings. The huge pictures are on the walls of the back dining room of the Three Sons Restaurant on River Street, Waltham. Carmine will very graciously show them if you visit there. Memory really takes you back when you view them. A beautiful job.

When we first moved into our house on Trapelo Road the road was just a dirt track from Lexington Street to the town of Lincoln with barely enough room for passing (not that there was enough to pass, just the farm trucks) no lights – electricity, no water none of the essentials of today.

The big event was Saturday when my father went to Faneuil Hall Market in Boston by taking a lantern and leaving it behind the stone wall on the corner at Lexington Street and taking a street car to Waltham and going to Boston. On being dark on the way home, he would light the lantern and trudge home with a big pack on his back. It was very mucky under foot when it rained.

Before the “big ice storm” I think in 1922 the most beautiful trees mostly maple lined the road and formed an archway overhead. When it rained and froze solid the limbs came crashing down and it was unsafe to walk and most of the beautiful trees were damaged and had to be removed.

In the winter Hardy Pond was our recreation spot. Every one would get out and clear the snow for skating and make a slide down the Stearns Hill area and it was great fun coming down the side of the mountain and on over the pond. Everyone skated. You could also see my father fishing through the ice on any spare time he had and the skaters had to bob the red flagged sticks warning that ice holes were dangerous. He had a couple of cronies who loved it and fished with him but the skaters and ice speed boats didn't care for them but I guess there was room for everyone.

The big event of the winter was when the Stearns family from the Stearns farm would cut the ice for their ice house. That was a fascinating time for us kids. That big saw moving through 8 and 10 inches of ice to be cut into blocks and by conveyor put in the team while the horses waited patiently. One winter very cold – the Pond froze to the bottom and the fish froze – at the spring thaw they rose to the top and what a stench but the farmers came for miles around, scooped them up and used them on their farms for fertilizer.

Our big event for the summer was to ride in the “open cars” which ran from Waltham to Lexington (4 cents to start but the price rose rapidly to 7 cents and stayed stationary at that price for years.) Our parents would take us to Norumbega Park and they had open cars going from Central St. through Auburndale so we really got a ride.

In the winter for 6 weeks the street cars couldn't run with ice in the tracks so we had to get to school the best way we could (Pond End School on Winter St.) We crossed the ice and through the woods (Lakeview) which consisted of about 3 farms (before the building boom). Sometimes we “hooked” on pungs running on Lexington St. (these were low wagons on runners mostly carrying milk) What fun. Of course we didn't have the traffic problem on Lexington St. in those days.

I must mention Halloween. A big event which grown ups did most of the trick and treating – more are “tricks” than treats. It seemed to be the time for grown ups to get back at their neighbors for petty grievances which built up during the year.

“Out houses” would be found in the most out of the way places. Fences would be thrown in the Pond. Fights would be started – real fist fights – and one time two McAdoo wagons were pushed down to and across Trapelo Road blocking it for some time.

I must remark on the Stearns family as many happy hours were spend at the milk barn where “Nat” Stearns was king – the Stearns farm one of the oldest in the surrounding area is situated just up from Lexington Street (west) and comprised all the acreage the “Star” complex consists of now and running up Trapelo to Sheffield Rd. The big horse barn was situated on the hill up from the farm house on the right hand side coming up from Lexington St. Underneath the barn was where the ices was stored and it lasted all through the summer and people came for miles around to get the supplies for the old ice chests and picnics and events. Right across from this was the cow barn and all the land down to the Pond where a piggery was located. My father knew just where the catnip grew in the rear of it and he used to dry it so our cats had their own home grown catnip. The Stearns I knew consisted of Bill the eldest, Nat and Lizzie. None of these ever married. The oldest girl Rosabel I think her name was was long married before I came on the scene to a Foster and lived in Belmont. Her grandson Homans Stearns Foster sold the last bit of land – Stearns Hill to the people who butchered it by building Windsor Village – the eyesore of the City.

Bill was a very crabby man who was a brilliant wagon maker but he took so much time imbibing, he had no time for wagons. Lizzie was a gentle sweet woman bent over almost to the ground with curvature of the spine but was also kind to a little girl coming home from school, loading her down with lilacs and giving her cookies. As I grew older she would tell of the ballroom in the upper story of the big rambling house and the dances her parents would hold there. She and Will didn’t see eye to eye and the last years of their lives they didn’t speak but Lizzie would prepare his meals and leave them in the summer kitchen. I remember incidents when Bill would get a bottle and take himself down the road through the pasture and drink with his crony, Old Bob Ward who lived on Shady Pond Rd. They would come across the pasture which was located across from Kingston Road (west) rip-roaring drunk and we were always afraid the bull would charge them which was kept there. I almost got it once going through but I guess God takes care of people like those two. Old Bob’s grandson is on the police force today.

Nat was a smiling good natured thin to emaciation-hardworking Yankee who kept things moving. Always ready to take time out to show us kids how to milk and when we weren’t looking would get a squirt of warm milk in our face.

Farms were our only source of entertainment and the next one was the Reed Farm on the east corner of Trapelo Rd. corner of Lexington on the same side as McAdoos and Stearns. Old Mr. and Mrs. Reed had a huge produce farm and took in state boys to live and work on the farm. Their recreation was to visit a little store situated on the corner of Grove Rd. and faced on Trapelo Rd. The Daniels family run it for quite a few years and the only social life around was to gather at the store for tonic and candy. They were great boys – never got into trouble and I got to know them very well, living next door to the store.

Two of the Reeds sons – Frank and Joe – ran the only gas station for miles around on the north corner of Trapelo Rd. and Lexington St. for years and years (another social gathering place). Frank was a devoted Catholic and Joe – a staunch Protestant. Whatever happened to produce this situation was never made known. Eliza, a dear sweet little lady was a devout Catholic also and gave much of her time and money to make what the Church of our Lady is today. Eliza and Joe never married but Frank married but no children and they all lived together in the old farm house. They had the only two horses around it was quite a sight to see them ramboling over the fields every day. Frank died and Joe had a serious cancer operation on his throat which left him speechless and lived on with Liza. When he died the family had him buried a Catholic. I will never forget the feeling I and a neighbor who knew all the circumstances had when we went to the “wake” and saw Joe lying there with the black rosary beads in his hands. We really expected him to rise up and say some dry caustic remarks.

The Hamblett Farm was next to Reeds going east and as children used to visit there to get milk and see the hens, chickens, and goats.

Much further east on Trapelo Rd. was the Louis Dean farm and Wendell Dean his son, rode often to school (Pond End School on Winter Street where I attended) on his horse and that was quite a novelty. They gave up the farm and moved to Weston and opened “Dean Dairy” in Waltham where ice cream was sold and also one in Weston which they had for years with Wendell operating it. He was crippled with polio during this time but carried on. He was married to one of the Caughey girls and I couldn’t write this without recalling Reuben Caughey our faithful mailman who delivered our mail for many years in a horse and “buggy” – sleigh in winter – through snow and blinding blizzard. He died at 98 several years ago. Also our faithful meat man, John McNally, who never failed us. He was a small, smiling bantam Irishman who came around in a truck with fresh meat and fish which was a boon in this our out of the way place in those days. He had his home on Dale Street.

Going back to the Reed farm and bringing it up to date. Now Liza died in 1973 and the farm is boarded up. The children in the neighborhood have broken in, ravaged and destroyed the contents and carried off most of the valuable old relics of the past. The estate is still in turmoil – what to do with it.

Three gas stations are on three of the corners at the intersection of Trapelo Road and the Reed land is located on the southeast corner.

The most recent gas station on the southwest corner was just built this past summer and was formerly a three store block. In 1951 – I went in partnership with Augustine ____li of Lakeview and we opened the Glen Meadow Grocery store in the middle store on July 1951. Besides our grand opening there was further excitement of General Douglas MacArthur with his grand entourage coming up Lexington Street and then on up Trapelo Road to the Murphy Army Hospital (then). I have pictures. I stayed in business with Augie and had charge of the store for two out of the four years, I was there, but he stayed on for 23 years and was forced out by the selling of the land to Getty Oil. Many, many people miss him and his submarine sandwiches.

I forgot to mention our summer fun. Several families during the summer would take their children and walk three miles on a hot Sunday up Trapelo to Spring St. and go north across Rte. 2 (it wasn’t like it is now) to Colonel Kelsey’s Ranch in Lexington. He had a huge farm where the Raytheon Buildings are now – with prize bulls and cows.

There he supplied ice cold mild for the visitors. What was so different for those days was the stalls were all tile and the cows gave more milk by the constant music of a player piano! As I grew older and got married they converted one of the horse barns into a lodge and many were the good times the Trapelo Rd. Association enjoyed special parties like Halloween and Christmas with a roaring fire in the huge fire place and an orchestra for dancing. We would all pitch in to supply the collation - - no caterers in those days.

Another Sunday fun was families would walk up to the Cambridge water basin and go blue-berrying for the afternoon. Very plainly comes to my mind a neighbor's dog, little terrier by the name of Bobbie Mansfield – he used to eat the blueberries right off the bushes faster than we could pick them.

Well, time changes all things – for the better? I don't know.

Arlene Taylor Richards
1200 Trapelo Road, Waltham, Mass.
1974

[included in Petersen, Kristen A. Waltham Rediscovered: An Ethnic History of Waltham, Massachusetts. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher, 1988. (pages 56-57, "Trapelo Road before WWI")]*