

The Best of Times

continued

the whole township as our playground. We roamed over it as if it were our own backyard. There were few, if any, "No Trespassing" signs, and the only fence we did not climb over was the one with a bull on the other side.

There were acres and acres of open fields and meadows to run through. There were ponds and brooks to fish and swim in. Scattered about were discarded pieces of farm machinery and old wagons and buggies to play on. Miles of dirt road offered wild raspberries and blackberries (well fertilized by passing cows and horses) just for the picking. If you got tired of walking, you sat down by the side of the road and waited for a wagon to come along and give you a ride.

My sister and I would often walk the two miles or so to Chestnut Hill in Wilton to play with Elizabeth (Lynn) and Cohn Lofting – the children of Hugh Lofting, author of the "Dr. Doolittle" books.

I can't say I much cared for Mr. Lofting. Unlike his kind and gentle creation, Dr. Doolittle, Mr. Lofting struck me as severe and remote. I was always glad when we visited Lynn and Cohn and their father was in his studio or away on business. (Recently I found out that Hugh Lofting had fought in France with the Irish Guard in World War I. No doubt his horrible experiences in the trenches had a lot to do with what I perceived as his coldness.)

Our nearby Weston neighbor, old Mr. Chase, had also fought in a war – the Civil War. But there was a world of difference between him and Mr. Lofting. We kids would spend hours with Mr. Chase, listening to his recollections. He always made his war tales entertaining and not too harsh for a child to hear, especially if we were munching on Mrs. Chase's

fresh-baked cookies during the telling.

In the early 19th century, Weston had been a fairly prosperous community with big, lush farms and several successful small industries. But hard times had befallen the area and even before 1900, many farmers had given up and moved away and the small water-powered factories had shut down.

To us kids, this simply meant that there were lots of abandoned barns, old factories, outbuildings and deserted houses to explore. One of our favorite deserted houses was a tiny old place set all alone on a dirt road. We had been told that the house had last been occupied by three old sisters – all witches. Their ghosts were said to come back to the house from time to time. Sometimes, if we felt brave, we would go inside and hope that the witches' ghosts would show up. They never did, but well might have if a lady from New York City hadn't come along, fixed it up and moved in.

Years later, at a reception in her honor, I was tempted to tell Miss Eva LeGallienne that I had forgiven her for buying our witch house and spoiling our chance of ever seeing the ghosts. But at the last moment, I lost my nerve.

Miss LeGallienne, already a well-known actress on Broadway, and Hugh Lofting were among the many talented people in the arts who were then living in the Weston/Westport area, or soon would be. As a youngster, I remember quite a few of them – some well-known, others to become so. John Held Jr., Hendrik Willem Van Loon, Rose O'Neil, Van Wyck Brooks, James Daugherty and Lawrence Mazzanovich were all people we knew. They were not "celebrities" (in fact, the word was not even used in the sense we use it today), but simply friends of my family or perhaps neighbors. Some I liked, some I did not, but they were all threads in the fabric that made

that period so rich and varied."

The article goes on to tell that after the death of Frank Cobb, Hubbard, Jane and their mother moved from New York to Connecticut permanently. However, Mrs. Cobb did not want to spend her New England winters in her Weston home. Mr. Cobb lived in Westport for many years and shares some of his memories of his time there as well. In the spring of 1927 the Cobbs moved back to Weston and he continues his memories.

By the spring of 1927 we were back in Weston, and Jane and I were attending Norfield School – one of the five one-room, one teacher schools in the town.

Teachers in those days depended on a rap on the hand with a wooden rule to maintain discipline. Sometimes five or six of us would be called up together to receive punishment. But the ruler was of no use the day Lindbergh made it to Paris. We kids – excited and thrilled – decided it should be a holiday. Giving no thought to possible consequences, we tore out of the classroom to a grassy field across the road, ate our lunch and continued to chatter about "Lucky Lindy." Pretty soon, Mr. Knight, the school superintendent, drove up in his big black sedan. In plain English, he informed us that if we did not go back into the school that instant, he would personally give each and every one of us a licking. Figuring he would do just that, we shuffled back."

After Mrs. Cobb sold the property to two Englishwomen, Moira Wallace "Wally" and Sydney Dyke "Dykie." Dykie was a tall deep-voiced woman always immaculate in a shirt, tie, tailored jacket and shirt. They transformed the mill into a summer restaurant and guest house, and built three of four planned houses on the land until the depression ended their venture. This was when Jacques DeWolfe and Alice Delamar purchased the mill and spent thousands remodeling. One of the best