

BEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY *stories*

June 29, 2016 - Bedford Stories - Vol. 34

A Peek Into The Past - *Summer in Bedford*

Today's summers are nothing like the lazy days of the past. Take a stroll back in time with Wilhelmine Kirby Waller as she recounts her childhood in Bedford so many years ago . . .



"We never failed to be on hand every evening to drive to Bedford Station in the Packard twin-six to meet father's train. "

I have always been grateful that my childhood was spent before the days of organized play.... my childhood in Bedford seems quite perfect as I look back on it.

Our occupations and interests were largely seasonal. In early January we picked out a clump of skunk cabbage to watch, measuring its growth meticulously every week through the medium of a notched stick and always tramped into the swamp after each heavy snow to see how it had fared. And we collected

frogs' eggs from Mrs. Sutton's pond, which we considered a vast body of water, as we kept a rowboat on it. This was at Succabone Corners, and the pond has since been obliterated by interstate 684.

As far as we were concerned, spring ended on Decoration Day with the firemen's parade in Mt. Kisco. This was a red-letter day, for all the men on our place belonged to the Bedford Village Fire Department and marched in the parade, resplendent in the same navy blue uniforms which we had seen brushed and hanging on the line the day before. Ned O'Brien, a brother of Will O'Brien of O'Brien and Kinkel fame, drove the fire truck, and we would always contrive to ride on it either to or from the fire house.



Chickens at Maple Grove Farm

Summer seemed the shortest season of the year. I had a garden which I tended carefully, for the vegetables which came up were sold to mother for exorbitant prices. The eggs which my chicks laid were pedaled in the same high-handed fashion and collecting them each night never lost its interest, for I sold them by the egg and not by the dozen! The soundness of the economy of these ventures was never discussed, and mother supplied the chicken feed as well as the garden seeds. We had no swimming pool, and on hot days we cooled off by sitting in the house where the cakes of ice cut each winter from our pond were stored. In doing so, we were always in the wrong, for the icehouse

door was never supposed to be opened, except by our farmer, Harry Mathews.

Our favorite picnic spots were the Darlington woods, right across from here, and the top of Guard Hill. We knew every inch of them, from the Indian campfire site to the cave where the leather man was said to have lived. In those days the trees weren't so dense, and when the weather was clear you could see the Brooklyn Bridge from the summit of Guard Hill.

We never failed to be on hand every evening to drive to Bedford Station in the Packard twin-six to meet father's train. This also gave us the opportunity to browse in Mr. Adams' general store, which was where the parking lot is now and was also where we bought straw hats for both ourselves and our two farm horses, Elcaya and Pigeon, who wore them in order to keep the flies from bothering their ears.

Haying was our favorite farm activity and all hay was put in the mow loose, as there was no baler. We were convinced that it never could have been gathered without our jumping up and down on the loaded wagon to make room for more hay.



Cutting ice for the icehouse

In addition to the chickens and farm horses, our animal family consisted of Mussey, a cat of unknown sex; Abraham, a pet skunk who lived in the coal frame; Agememnon, the red rooster; Jimmie, a raccoon; and Sunnybrook Kitty, a red and white cocker spaniel. Mussey was often in disgrace because her favorite sleeping place was the middle of the red salvia bed by our front porch. Abraham's grave still stands, carefully, if somewhat crudely, marked "Here Lies Abraham." Agememnon was a terror; he belonged to Florence Mathews, our farmer's daughter and, while they loved each other dearly, the rest of us were obliged to give him a wide berth, for he chased us unmercifully. Jimmie, like all raccoons, carefully washed his food before eating it and never ceased to be amazed at the way a hard cookie became soggy after its bath. Sunnybrook Kitty was a dear little cocker who loved everyone, but the day Dr. Coopernail took my tonsils out on the kitchen table, she apparently thought I was being murdered and tried to bite him. The tonsillectomy was done at home, as it was mother's theory that her house was probably much cleaner than the hospital, and that in it one would not be subjected to as many germs.

We didn't keep cows because Rock Gate Farm's



Cows on Guard Hill Road

wonderful herd of jerseys was right across the road from us, and Mr. Nash supplied us with milk, and with cream thick enough to eat with a spoon. I was in my late teens before I discovered that these cows belonged to Mr. Darlington and not to his farmer, my great friend Mr. Nash.

Mr. Willis Clark's Shetland ponies were within walking distance on Clark road, and we visited them almost daily, always remembering to speak politely to Judge Clark if we passed him, because grandfather considered him such a fine man.

Three times a week I went to Bedford Village for a riding lesson with Uncle Willie Hoyt. In those days, little girls did not wear blue jeans, and jodhpurs or breeches were too expensive for growing children. Instead, I wore a middy blouse with a sailor collar and tie and blue serge bloomers. My knees were bare and I can still remember how the stirrup leathers pinched when I cantered up the hill by Mr. Kinkel's quarry on Old Daisy.

On rainy days we played in a big room on the top floor of the house in which my grandparents lived. Here we kept all our precious collections under the impressive title of "The International Foundation for the Collection and Preservation of Relics and Curios." Our motto, that nothing was too good or too bad for our foundation, filled this room with a wide variety of treasures and each article was painstakingly labeled. We had a Board of Trustees as unique as our collection, and we often picked people's names at random out of the newspaper and wrote asking them to serve on it. Oddly enough, many accepted! We felt that a foundation should undertake worthy projects, and each trustee had to promise to write once a week to the King of Spain, demanding that bull fights be stopped at once.

Of course, the most momentous day of summer was the Fourth of July. It had double importance because it was also the birthday of Mrs. Mathews, our farmer's wife, and we were allowed to pick all the sweet peas in the garden for her. We saved our allowance for weeks to buy fireworks at Carpenter's store in Mt. Kisco.

In addition, father ordered long strings of fire crackers, which came in the most wonderful red boxes decorated with gilt and fascinating pictures, directly from Japan. He held these in his bare hands, running on about the law while they went off - much to mother's horror and our delight. He had a gray suit which we always referred to as his "Fourth of



Fireworks Stand

July Clothes" because the trousers had holes in them, burnt by the fire crackers. The Fourth of July was the one day when it seemed as though night would never come, for, of course, the big fireworks were not set off until after dark. We had a wonderful display of them, which mother always felt was a frightful waste of money, but which we and father adored.

The second gala day of the summer was the horse and cattle show held annually at the Moses Taylor place, Annandale Farm. Our world centered about our own place and our villages were Bedford Station, or Bedford Hills as we know it now, and Bedford Village, so this trip to the other side of Mt. Kisco was really invading foreign territory.

As children we were remarkably good weather prophets and knew that the buzz-saw song of the cicada meant hot days, and that when the cows lay down for long periods rain was coming. Likewise, we recognized the tree toad's eerie cry, predicting rain, and the katydid's voice warning that frost was but six

weeks away....



Haywagon in Field

Perhaps as children we took the miracle of the four seasons for granted, but they gave us a reassuring faith in tomorrow and made us aware of the infinite wisdom of nature.

Excerpted from an interview with Wilhelmine Kirby Waller. A longtime resident of Bedford, Mrs. Waller owned and operated Tarrackin Farm until her death in 2004 at the age of 90. Her accomplishments are too numerous to edit to one line. You can read more about

Mrs. Waller by clicking [here](#).

Bedford Stories is one of the many ways *we bring history to life!*

[Please support us as we begin our second century of stewardship and ensure that history remains a part of the future! Thank you for your support.](#)

 Like us on Facebook