

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER?

You don't have to have been born in Madison, or even lived here more than five or ten years to have personal recollections of what the town was like when you first arrived. Madison changes, redefines itself in ongoing fashion. And you are in the midst of changing it. You bring your name to a house known for its original owner a hundred years ago. Or you have built a new one in a former pasture or part of a forest. Perhaps you had been spending part of the year since back when, and now you live here full time. Or you went off somewhere to work, having graduated from the old school, and now you are back. You have seen- and heard- the increase in traffic along the East Madison road and Route 113. The Coleman gravel ruin has expanded at the Route 16 entrance. The ice storm of 1998 altered roadside landscapes since you came. Some of our dirt roads have been paved. And of course, the building housing Town offices came down the road one Sunday from its original location! The old school house was knocked down, to be replaced by a brick faced larger building. Silver Lake has a completely renovated store. Becky Knowles has a bed and breakfast facility in the same house where her great-grandfather had a similar business. Carol Lyman Batchelder lives in a house set on land where Herbert and Marion Weston kept store.

Your editor's memories

go back to 1953 when he came to Silver Lake with a college classmate, Bruce Acker. His parents had retired down by the bridge, their property bordering the stream. I remember being confused each time Bruce drove us around the Conway-Tamworth area. But two years later I bought a house in South Eaton. For years I drove by the Churchill House at Madison corner, never giving a thought to its age. It had been thoroughly changed by Victorian alteration. Ruth Henry had bought it to save it from further spoiling. When we bought it, we recovered its earlier name of Atkinson Inn, and found an early document with the phrase, "the land on which I have lived," dated 1804. Now, we have lived in the house perhaps longer than any previous owners, with the possible exception of Sarah Churchill, who kept it as an Inn into the 1920s.

Perhaps you took your car to Cliff Ward, Jr. to be repaired. At first, you went to the Old Clayton and Ward Garage, where Cliff got into the pit you drove over for him to change the oil. Later, when he built down and across the road, you marveled at the big area inside, complete with lifts and an array of equipment. The sawdust pile was bigger than it is now, behind the garage. Since that time much of it has been hauled down to the power plant on Route 41 for burning.

David Levitman, who has two houses on Colby Hill, came up for visits back in the 1950s, as he still does. One year he had a big black Buick convertible

with red leather seats. His mother, who spent the whole season on the hill, garaged an old 1949 or 50 Lincoln sedan. I had a new Ford, but it could never match the luxury vehicles David owned.

Pat Shackford kept the postoffice at Madison Corner in those days. And next door Ernest Meader handled town clerk business. The library was housed in our old red schoolhouse. The Madison dump really was a dump.

Silver Lake shorelines have changed. New structures outnumber the original. And it is noisier. Bruce and I rowed about the shore there forty-five years ago. I have not seen a pair of oars in action for a long time. Nowadays you may see a pontoon boat, like the one Cliff Wells bought last year. Wells Cargo, he calls it.

The Old Home Weeks come and go. Like the Bible story, each year we gather up the abundant crumbs, mingling what Once Was and partly Still Remains. Your personal history includes that memorable family gathering, that time when you had a flat tire in a rainstorm, when your daughter got married in a lawn ceremony. When.....

HARRIET ATWOOD

Harriet Atwood of Chocorua died this spring at Sunbridge Nursing Home where she had resided for several weeks. Harriet was 88. I met Harriet about twenty years ago when we were both active at the Gibson Senior Center. I was working on a newsletter

project there, and I asked if she would assist in typing some of it. We became acquainted, and through the years Harriet was a frequent visitor at our historical society meetings. Indeed, Harriet seemed to be everywhere! I would often find her in attendance at various meetings around the county, and when I sat with her on a busride to Boston to a museum exhibit, we talked all the way. She always had firm opinions on most subjects. She had a sense of humor, and although she was pretty much an Episcopalian, I remember one time when she referred to herself as an "Eskimo Episcopalian." She didn't elaborate. When I visited her at the nursing home in early April I did not realize I would never see her again.

FOR 97 YEARS - CONTINUED

In the last issue of this newsletter we printed part of an unsigned essay on the Madison Church Donation. We still have not found the writer's name, but we conclude the essay as follows.

A program of entertainment for about an hour precedes the sale of the products, and this too is a donation. No admission is charged. This year the program was highlighted by a male quartet of ability, one of whose members was born in Madison. The entertainment is always varied- always good. There may be singers, accordionists, trumpeters, pianists, readers, or just plain story tellers, - always some jokesters. Visiting clergymen from adjoining towns have a few words to say, sometimes we believe with a

little envy. After a month of preparation the big moment arrives. Eight P.M. and the town hall is jam packed full with local citizenry, neighbors, and friends from nearby, and folks who have moved away, now returned for an evening of fun, entertainment, renewing old friendships and the purchase of cakes. The program of entertainment passes swiftly followed by a brief intermission for the refreshments; oyster stew is consumed in quantity, cut-up samplings of cakes in paper plates are sold and ice cream fills its proper place.

The highlight of the evening approaches. The auctioneer takes his place on the platform, picks up one of the fifteen or more extra good, most fancily decorated of the selected cakes. "How much am I offered for this fine angel cake baked by Mrs. ----?" and the bidding is on. The ladies nervously fidget hoping that their cake may be the one to bring the top price of the evening, for that honor is well a vote of confidence that theirs is best. Now it is man against man, and this night the wallets take a deflation. Each husband would like to see that his wife produced the high selling cake. Other men would like to take that certain cake home and bidders from neighboring communities want to take home one or more of these extra good cakes. The humor and urging of the Yankee who ably fills the role of auctioneer does so with the skill of a professional and jokingly needles many a man to bid "just \$1 more" but then again surprisingly knocking a cake down "sold" when he realizes that person has bid all he should

and ought to have the cake. There is as much rivalry among the men to buy certain cakes as there had been among the women in their production. Cakes have sold for as much as up to \$50 but many go for far less. There is a limit to a man's financial ability to preserve his wife's prestige. This is one way, and an easy way to give money to the church for in the old Yankee spirit you do get something for your money. You get a lot for your money in cake, in the labor and love that made it and in the furthering knowledge that your money will support a worthy cause. It is a net gain for all involved. Madison Church in 1962 was made the richer by nearly \$800 from this one evening affair. Perhaps the most famous guest each year for many years has been "Aunt Edie" Chick, as she is affectionately known to everyone. A member of Madison Baptist Church, she is 95 years young, small, hale and hearty, trim and spry, she this year composed the following poem in honor of Madison Church's 97th Annual Donation:

Donation Poem

On the 9th of November
The year nineteen sixty two
We meet here in the Town Hall
And everything all right to do.

We are so glad to meet our friends
In the old fashioned way you see
Everyone happy, laughing and gay,
And also hungry as can be.

The 97th anniversary of our Donation
Not a year has been missed since the first

Our parents then were the active ones,
Now we in their place do the work.

Neighbors and friends, we are glad you are here
It is nice to see you all tonight
We hope you will have a very nice time,
And also a good appetite.

For 97 years it has been this way
We laugh, talk, and eat all we can.
When we are through, everyone is happy
We hope you will come next year if you can.

OLD HOME WEEK

Vice-President Mary Lucy has contributed mightily to the creation of the Old Home Week booklet this year. Using material from our museum library she has assembled both historical information and a number of old photographs. As genealogical enthusiasts have known all along, Mary also works with Madison vital statistics. The results, including marriages and other Town data from the 19th century forward are available in our collection.

OFFICERS

President - Ray Stineford
Vice President - Mary Lucy
Secretary - Cathie Gregg
Treasurer - Dolores Messner
Dues: \$5 individual

~~\$10~~ Family

Members receive 10% discount on all purchases of mugs, maps and publications.

Mail: Box 505 Madison 03849

MEETINGHOUSE CORNER

A Play for Voices and Scenes
From the Past

September 19, Thursday, 7:30,
South Eaton Meetinghouse,
Horseleg Hill, East Madison.

Written by Ray Stineford
Accompanying slide photographs
by Bruce Acker

In 1978 the program was given at a meeting of the Madison Historical society at the museum hall. Based on the construction of the South Eaton Baptist Meetinghouse at the top of Horseleg Hill in 1844, voices speak from that time, including Stephen Allard's, the principal builder. With pictures and narrative the audience is taken into a dreaming past when South Eaton Neighbors took courage and erected a house of worship. Based on research, combined with imagination, the performance brings the voices of children who did not live to grow up; of men and women who studied the deeds, laid out the foundation, lived and died in a countryside that is little changed today. The program will replace the regular September meeting of the Society. The public is welcome.

CONSERVATION AND HISTORY

Madison's Conservation Commission and the Heritage Commission, a sub-section of MCC, provide us with a crucial connection to our past, as well as to the future. In 1850 most of Madison had been turned into pasture land. Now, the pastures are only a small part of the town's acreage, the rest being

forests of pine, some fir, and hemlock and hardwoods. Cellar holes scattered along Class 6 roads indicate that nineteenth century inhabitants lived in cleared spaces, often with fine views to the mountains and lakes. The Conservation Commission is putting up trail signs along some of these old travel ways, one of which was a path to the Cascades to the southeast of the museum property. In the first years of the 20th century this was a popular destination for summercaters to bring a picnic and enjoy the rapid flow over the rocky channel. The water probably runs more slowly now than formerly, for various reasons, but it is still a pleasant spot. The ancient pines still rim the embankment, thanks to good timbering practice when the adjoining land was logged some years ago.

The meeting room at the town hall now has large topo maps placed along the walls. If you want to have a sense of what Madison was, is, and we hope will remain, study these authoritative color coded depictions of the heights and depths, water courses and soil types. Although we are still growing, Madison is working to balance present day pressures for new home building with good land management.

COMING PROGRAMS

June 20 - Golden Age of Wildlife
Eric Orff, Fish and GameDept.

July 18 - Early Hotels and Tourism in the White Mountains

Aug 15 - President Grover Cleveland, as acted by his grandson, George Cleveland.

MARY BLAISDELL KENNETT

Frannie Kennett has given the Madison Historical Society this letter. We reprint excerpts.

The letter was copied from a faded original written by Ruth Kennett on September 19, 1963 to Rosemary Kennett and is a story of Rosemary's grandmother, Mary Blaisdell Kennett.

Dear Rosemary,

Because you can claim Madison as your ancestral town, it may be that some old-time pictures that are in sharp contrast to "Life" as you live it, will interest you.

In a country district in the 1870's and 80's there was little of recreation as you know it today. The girls and boys depended on themselves, their family, and their schoolmates for all their social activities. There were Singing Schools in the winter months, some social get-togethers connected with the Church, and of course there was always visiting back and forth between families and friends.

In all such occasions Mary Blaisdell was at ease. She was blest with good looks and fine manners. And too, she was the proud possessor of the first piano brought to the town of Madison. And with an inherited musical ability, she soon learned to play it with quite some skill. Such talent made her a much wanted girl in a country town. She and Lora Ferren were said to be the Best Looking of all the good looking girls in Madison. (All of the above information I had from my Mother and all the other Madison Mothers.)

In her girlhood Mary was rated as a regular Tom-Boy. She could run faster and climb higher than any boy. A favorite play area was her Father's mill that was equipped to saw logs or grind cereals into flour. In this mill she would run up on the rafters as agile as a trick circus performer.

The pine grove alongside Blaisdell's Pond was a daily delight. It had an abundance of the small animals, birds and flowers that are native to this part of our New England. . One year her Father had a "rush order" for some dimension lumber. To fill this he started cutting the pines in this grove. Mary's heart was crushed. She loved those trees, the birds they sheltered, and all the interesting plants and flowers at their feet. She begged her Father to go elsewhere for his lumber, but all of no avail. Men with axes started cutting these pines. A dozen or so were cut and every last one of them had a hollow heart, and so were worthless for lumber. Young Mary was truly happy to know that her dearly loved trees were to be saved.

The Blaisdell home was not like the average New England farm house with an ell and barn attached. It was designed by someone who dared to be an individual and build something different. Your Father remembers it before modern progress made it fit the profitable Recreational Business of the mid-twentieth century. When built it stood an elegantly designed cube-like building with a simulated watch-tower on top. That tower undoubtedly was an adaptation of the "Widow's Walk" seen in the seacoast homes. The house had an air of stability and at the same time was a bit like an elegant lady dressed for a dignified social call. In summer there was a profusion of flowering shrubs and oldfashioned garden blossoms all around it.

(To be continued)