

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



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Charles B. Cutter, Jr., Alice Cutter Tyler (Fraser), and Margaret Nash with "Billy" in 1911. "Billy" belonged to Alice's sister, Elinor.

GROWING UP IN WESTON: 1903-1920

Alice Tyler Fraser, a Charter Member, graduated from Weston High School in 1920. In March 1984 she spoke to the Weston Historical Society on the subject of her girlhood in Weston. The talk was so well received that we have printed it below. Ed.

* * *

My "growing up in Weston" differed considerably from that of my cousin, Phil Coburn, and that of my contemporary, Brent Dickson.

I grew up at my grandfather's farm, located at the corner of Park Road and South Avenue, and extending west to Ridgeway Road and south to land of Mr. Hubbard. My great-great-grandfather, Richard Cutter, had purchased the farm from Thaddeus Spring about 1799, but moved there from West Newton in 1803. In 1799 he had ordered from a nursery in New York ninety-five varieties of apple, pear, peach, plum, apricot, nectarine, and cherry trees to be planted on the farm in Weston. By 1820 he had 340 acres of land. His son Charles inherited the Cutter's Corner property of fifty-six acres, and Jonas the land that later became "Ferndale Farm". As the years went on, parts of the property were sold to Mr. B. L. Young. [B. Loring Young, Weston Selectman, became Speaker of the Massachusetts House], Mr. Charles W. Hubbard, and Mr. Francis Blake. My grandfather, Benjamin Franklin Cutter, had four children. My mother, Helen Cutter, went to Weston High School, then to Bridgewater Normal

School, and met my father when she was teaching in Medford. They were married in Weston in 1901. My sister, Elinor, was born in 1902. My father died suddenly on July 24, 1903, of typhoid fever and pneumonia, and I was born that same day. Some time later my mother brought me and my sister back to the Cutter home in Weston.

My grandfather died in 1903. Then his brother, my great-uncle Charles S. Cutter, sold his land and house on South Avenue to Mr. Page and moved back to live with us. My first real memory is of Elinor and me being held up to look at him in his coffin in the parlor, and we said, "Ar's asleep."

My Aunt Sue had been a teacher in one of the elementary schools and later in the intermediate school. She became ill in 1894, and the Town Report mentioned it and hope is expressed that she would return. She did for a short time in 1897, but the "shaking palsy" began and progressed slowly the rest of her life.

My Uncle Charlie, who had built a house on Park Road when he married Nellie Watson, took over the running of the farm and the cider business. Uncle Charlie also succeeded his father as one of the three Road Commissioners of Weston. He served until Mr. Percy Warren became Superintendent of Streets. Uncle Charlie was very interested in the new methods of building roads. The old dirt roads were not smooth, and in very dry spells the watering cart came and sprinkled the dust. Many of the steep hills were cut down and the ups and downs leveled out. You can see this by the heights of the stone walls, especially on South Avenue between the corner and the entrance to Nash Lane. The three Road Commissioners serviced the three areas of town, and the farm teams were used to grade and scrape and plow the roads. While Uncle Charlie served, much of the equipment was stored back of the mill.

The house had ten rooms and was heated by stoves that were set up in the fall and stored in the back shed in summer. The bathroom, which had been a bedroom, had a stove, and a fire was built in it on Saturday nights for baths. We used soapstones to warm the beds. A hot air furnace was put in about 1910 or '11, and the heat from the front hall register helped warm the two front bedrooms. The parlor was very Victorian and used only on special occasions. Elinor and I practiced on the square grand piano. Dusting the whatnot was my particular chore on Saturday mornings. The items were interesting, but I usually missed one shelf and had to go back. The Axminster carpet was taken up each spring and beaten on the clothesline. A straw matting was the summer carpet. The parlor was not used very often. Every Saturday morning Elinor and I had to clean our bedroom, and I liked taking the rugs out onto the porch roof and shaking them. It was a tin roof, and when it rained I liked to hear the sound.

The dining room had an old Dutch oven which was not in use, but I now wonder if the back part of the house had been built at an earlier period. There was a covered well in the front yard, and sometimes in earlier days the houses were built close to the road with the well in the kitchen — as in Ruth Murkland's house. But I spent as little time as possible in the house. I do remember looking out the west window of the kitchen and seeing Halley's Comet in 1910 and thinking I could never live to see it twice. I believe it is due back in 1986.

I loved the farm, and we were free to roam all over it. A brook, Seaverns Brook, crossed it, and Town Brook joined Seaverns Brook back of the wagon sheds. It is very high now. The brook was stoned up on both sides as far as a bridge that was built across it for a wagon road to the fields and orchard. East of the bridge the yard sloped to the brook, and the horses came down to drink. The cows had big tubs for water in the barnyard back of the barn. We waded in the brook in summer. We called it "Our Brook", and when it crossed under Park Road to the Bennetts' land, it was called "Bennett's Brook" and then "Lane's Brook". On the maps it is "Seaverns Brook" and still comes from Norumbega Reservoir. We lay on the bridge and watched water bugs and minnows.

Mr. Francis Blake had built the Keewaydin Water Works, so the water for the house came in from the street. We did not have electricity. [See October 1966 *Bulletin*, Ed.]

My mother never recovered from the shock of my father's sudden death in 1903, and she became more and more melancholy. She wandered over the fields looking for my father. Finally, when I was eight years old, in 1911, she went to the Westboro State Hospital and died there in 1922.

My sister Elinor was a very frail baby, but Aunt Sue finally found a formula which agreed with her, and she became a healthy, active child, but not as vigorously active as I was. When she had chickenpox and measles, I had to stay out of school for her two weeks, and then I would come down with it and have to stay out two more weeks. After she had scarletina her hair was cut off like a boy's.

Our playmates were the Nash children, Elizabeth and Margaret and Edward, who lived in the big yellow house on Nash Lane. In spite of a brace, Margaret would do everything I did. Our cousins, Marion and Charlie Cutter, lived down on Park Road. We climbed the trees, went across the fields to the orchard which was up the hill on Ridgeway Road, picked cowslips in a marshy pond in one of the fields and forget-me-nots and watercress in the brook. In one pond there were snapping turtles, and Aunt Sue's dog "Jack" almost got pulled in by one that grabbed his lower lip.

One winter day Elinor and I and a friend, Winifred Arnold, went to a small pond near the Blakes' land. The ice was "tiddlely" and finally cracked. I went in up to my waist, and Winifred slipped and fell down and got soaked. Elinor, who had stood on the shore, helped me pull Winifred to the shore. She said she couldn't walk, she was so cold, but we each took an arm and we made her run, she screamed she was freezing. We reached the house, and Aunt Sue put us in a hot bath and made hot ginger tea.



"I grew up at my grandfather's farm". The Benjamin F. Cutter farm, 134 South Avenue, looking south, at Cutter's Corner — the intersection of Newton Street, South Avenue, and Park Road. Park Road has been relocated about 100 yards to the east where it crosses over the Massachusetts Turnpike. This photo was taken in 1912.

Behind the house was a home orchard with Early Williams and Gravenstein and Russett apples, Bartlett and Comice pears. I used to get up early to eat apples as they fell. Off the ell of the house was an outhouse. A grapevine grew up over it, and in the fall Margaret Nash and I would climb up and gorge ourselves on grapes.

Aunt Sue always had a vegetable garden. In winter carrots, cabbages, squash, potatoes, and turnips, as well as two or three barrels of apples, were kept in the cellar. She made jams and jellies and canned pears and peaches and pickles, as I have done for years. She kept a flock of hens, and each year a "setting" hen hatched new chickens. The two-year-old hens were kept for "chicken every Sunday". On Friday night the hired man would kill the hen and pluck and dress it and hang it in the cellar. I learned to pluck them.

Sundays Elinor and I and my cousins, Marion and Charlie, walked to the Congregational Church in Auburndale to Sunday School. Our family had been members of First Parish for generations, but Newton Street was a long, hilly road with not many houses, and South Avenue was a more open, well traveled road with sidewalks all the way to Auburndale. [Weston's present] Dr. Davidson's father and uncle were in Sunday School, and their parents gave a party for all the children in grades 5 thru 8.

Sunday afternoons we could go to relatives. At Aunt Nellie's were her sisters and their husbands and children, the Glasgows and the Frasers. We children played tag, hide and seek, still pond, prisoner's base, statue, etc. Then Aunt Nellie gave us lemonade, cookies, and puffed rice candy. She was a wonderful cook, and in later years Margaret Nash said, "Mrs. Cutter's house always smelled of good cooking."

Margaret and Elinor and I formed an "Our Dumb Animals" club. The MSPCA was as active then as now.

"Going calling" was one of our summer duties. About once a summer Aunt Sue would take us in the buggy to call on our North Side relatives, Cousin Anna and Mr. Hastings, the Arthur Coburns, and Cousin Maud Coburn, Phil's mother. We also called on Miss Hattie Perry on Central Avenue [Boston Post Road]. We wore our best clothes and were on our best behavior. I remember how slippery the horse-hair furniture was. Refreshments usually made up for the long periods of sitting still. On the home trip the horse would have a drink of water at the watering trough in the center. Mrs. B. L. Young, whose summer home was in Weston, invited us to tea and to play in her children's playroom.

The Bennetts lived on the east corner of Park Road and South Avenue. Judge Bennett waved to us as his coachman drove him to the station every morning. There were six Bennett children, all older than we were. Barbara, the older daughter, was like a big sister to me. When Elinor and I were seven or eight, she came over and read the "Just So Stories" to us. She taught me rhymes and jingles and Pig Latin that she had learned, but best of all, she taught me to ride horseback. She went to the Park Riding School and to the Winsor School. She owned a lovely black saddle horse named Janice, and when I was eight years old let me ride Janice from the Bennetts' barn to Aunt Nellie's house, where Aunt Nellie took my picture.

I used to stand on the stone wall and watch Barbara and her friends, Betty and Nancy Hubbard, ride by on their beautiful horses. Some years later, when Barbara had one of the western horses that had been brought on by the Greens and "broken" at the Loker Farm on Winter Street where Rivers School is now, she let me ride "Janice" on one of their riding parties.

I also saw Mary Hubbard French riding in her pony cart, and we went to her birthday party in a log cabin on the estate.

The Bennetts were generous with their baseball equipment. They had a nice playing field next to Park Road, bordered by tall spruce trees. One summer the "South Side Sox" and the "Valley View Bums," two scrub teams of five or six boys each, had a series of games. I was allowed to back up the catcher and run after the stray balls.

The lower branches of the spruce trees had not been trimmed off, as they had on the Cutter place, so I could climb way up in them and see Cambridge and Boston and Blue Hill.

Tom Bennett, the youngest Bennett son, was interested in sports but not allowed much activity, due to a chest weakness, but he organized races for all the neighborhood children available. One was a race from Cutter's Corner up South Avenue to Ware Street, across to Newton Street and back to the corner. I measured it the other day, and it is .8 of a mile.

Margaret Nash had bought a goat from Elizabeth McAuliffe, but her father wouldn't let her keep it, and she sold it to Elinor. "Billy" had a cart and harness and gave us many rides. He played "Daddy in the Castle" with us.

There were ten Norway spruce trees planted around the edge of the front yard by my grandfather in 1865. One year when there was a bad infestation of Gypsy moth caterpillars, burlap bands and tanglefoot were put around each tree about five feet from the ground. Recently in one of the Town Reports of 1909, the Gypsy Moth Commission

gave prizes to students for the best essays on control of the pests. Prizes of \$5, \$4, \$3, \$2, and \$1 were offered to high school pupils.

The Nashes had a lovely house with a wide entrance hall that went the length of the main house. The Nashes entertained often, and Margaret would tell us about the parties and the dancing in the hall. One day after lunch I went over to play with Elizabeth. The maid let me in, and Elizabeth called down from upstairs for me to wait. I went over to the window seat at the end of the hall, where their airedale, "Squire," was curled up. Apparently I frightened him, and he turned on me, biting me in the face. The maids brought wet towels and kept me quiet. Mrs. Nash had gone visiting at the center. One of the maids called her, and she drove to Dr. Van Nuys' house on Central Avenue and brought him back to the house. I had lost a lot of blood. They put me on a window seat in the library, and the doctor put me to sleep. He had a hard time sewing up my lip, because I became very ill and he had to keep cleaning the wound. Poor "Squire" was killed and his head sent to Harvard Medical School to be tested for rabies. I was rather anemic for a while and had to take iron and cod liver oil and eat liver for a long time — ages, it seemed to me.



"I remember Harvard boys . . . trying to buy some of the champagne cider . . ." Closeup of the Benjamin Cutter barn and cider mill, about 1900. Cutter's farm extended westward to Ridgeway Road and south to the Hubbard property.

We always had a dog — first Aunt Sue's Scotch collie, "Jack", then "Rex". After Jack died, Aunt Sue took us in to Boston to the Animal Rescue League to get another dog. We chose "Rex", a big shepherd-collie. We walked him to Trinity Place Station. The conductor put him in the baggage car, then at Riverside took him out, and we walked him home to Cutter's Corner. He had a big doghouse, but one winter night Aunt Sue let us bring him into the house after supper. We started to romp with him, and he bumped into the table in the middle of the room. The kerosene lamp started to fall over. Aunt Sue grabbed it and told us to open the side door fast, and she threw the lamp into a snowbank. "Rex" was not allowed in the house after that.

There were always barn cats, but we were allowed one cat and kitten in the house. A good mouser was especially welcome. In the barn there were two pairs of work horses, "Philip" and "Dolly", who were white, and "Dandy" and "Dick", matched bays. There was a driving horse — first "Kitty", and then "Ginger". Elinor and I were taught how to groom and harness the driving horse.

A trip to Waltham took several hours, usually via West Newton so Aunt Sue could go to the West Newton Savings Bank, then over River or Cherry Street to Waltham.

where a special treat was ice cream at Mr. Farmer's Ice Cream Parlor next to Clifford Cobb's dry goods store, in what is now the Grover Cronin block. In West Newton there was Tarleton's, where we got new shoes every August before school opened. From Waltham we drove along Crescent Street, down Woerd Avenue, then along Forest Grove Road to Auburndale, coming out onto Commonwealth Avenue at the corner of Islington Road — where the playground is now. Who would drive each way was decided before we left home. The one not driving rode in the back seat of the two-seated Democrat wagon.

When we went to visit my grandfather and grandmother Tyler in Medford Hillside, it was an all-day trip. We would drive to the livery stable in Auburndale, take the train to South Station, the elevated to Sullivan Square, and the trolley to Medford Hillside. After dinner with my grandparents and my Uncle Webster, my father's youngest brother, we would make the long trip home. I was in awe of Grandpa Tyler; he sat at a big rolltop desk with a big spittoon beside it. My grandparents died when I was seven [1910], so we didn't know them very well. Later Uncle Webster had a farm in West Acton, and several times I went there for a weekend, walking to Stony Brook station after school to take the train and coming back to Weston on an early train Monday morning.



“There were ten Norway spruce trees planted around the edge of the front yard by my grandfather in 1865. . . . One afternoon Elinor discovered that the cow had fallen through the planks of the large cesspool . . .” Benjamin Cutter's house and farm buildings, from the south, about 1900. The field in the foreground in 1951 became part of the Massachusetts Turnpike.

A trip to the beach at Revere was similar, but we walked from South Station to the East Boston ferry, which cost 1¢; then we took the narrow gauge train to Revere. How well kept the M.D.C. bathhouses and beaches were in those days!

Nearer home we climbed Norumbega Tower; but our favorite places were Norumbega Park and the Riverside Recreation Grounds. For the park we had 25¢ to spend: admission 5¢, merry-go-round 5¢, ice cream cone 5¢, and 10¢ for the penny arcade or more rides on the merry-go-round, trying to get the brass ring. Margaret Nash could wheedle her Grandfather Rich or her mother out of larger amounts of change, and she was generous with extra rides or treats.

In the summer animals were brought from their winter quarters at the Franklin Park Zoo to Norumbega. Only the bears had a big cage and a den where they hibernated. Every Monday the lions were not fed, and often at Cutter's Corner we could hear them

roaring. There were bison, wolves, coyotes, monkeys, a golden eagle, and other animals. In an outdoor ring back of the Ladies' Pavilion—where mothers and small children could rest—there were gymnastic performances and one summer a pair of white diving horses. Before the theatre became the Totem Pole Ballroom, there were vaudeville shows and one summer a series of Big Brass Band concerts. Sousa's Band and Goldman's Band were there!

Riverside Recreation Grounds was the culmination of an idea of Mr. Charles W. Hubbard that city young people needed to get out in the country for exercise and pleasure. He bought the Seaverns farm; in the Historical Society we have a brochure of the plans. There were two boathouses with canoes to rent, a restaurant and dance hall above it, a big swimming pool and bath houses around it, several free tennis courts, and picnic areas. A footbridge was built over the river down back of Riverside Station, and trolley service was extended from Norumbega Park over to Riverside Road. Robertson's canoe factory and two more boathouses were on the Auburndale side of the Riverside bridge. For many years organizations held outings at the Recreation Grounds. Margaret Nash and I often rode our bicycles down and went swimming. We had learned to swim at Weston's pool, but it was small and there were no boys to watch!

One summer Mrs. Bancroft C. Davis—Annie Hubbard—invited my aunt to take Elinor and me to a house she owned at Edgartown. She provided a crafts teacher and a dancing teacher. I learned to make reed and raffia baskets and do the Highland Fling. I also learned to row and would row across from Edgartown Harbor to the bathing beach.

Our telephone at Cutter's Corner had been installed in 1906 when the Mabel Page murder case was in the courts. Reporters were constantly knocking on the door wanting to use a telephone. Finally my aunt had a "nickel in the slot" phone put in and allowed people to use it. At the time of the murder, the only telephone was at the Bennetts', and Mr. Page had gone there. As automobiles became more numerous, there were a number of accidents at the intersection of Newton Street and South Avenue. The telephone led to an accident to my aunt. A message came for Uncle Charlie, and Aunt Sue went to the barn to deliver it. "Dick", the gentle old work horse, whinnied and expected her to give him a handful of hay. She was in a hurry, and as she hastily pushed it over the edge of the



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Alice on Barbara Bennett's horse "Janice" in 1911. On the right is Alice in 1914. "When the South Side Sox played the Valley View Bums I was allowed to back up the catcher and run after stray balls".

manger, "Dick" reached up and bit off half of her middle finger. Elinor and I were at school, and the daughter of a friend came and got us at school and took us to her house until Aunt Sue's operation was over. Dr. Lowe, our family M.D. from West Newton, drove up and brought a nurse with him, and they performed the surgery in the sitting room.

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