**Memoirs of Colebrook River**
**Helen Seymour**
**(1950s)**

Happy recollections of life on the farm at Colebrook River with my parents, Edward Allen Seymour and Belle Catlin Seymour, and my sisters Esther, Ella and Doris, and brother, Charles.

A yellow and faded newspaper clipping, written by my Grandfather, Henry Hawley Catlin, sixty-two years ago for the Winsted paper, is of great importance to "us Seymours", for it is the account of our parents wedding.

They were married June 11, 1893 on a sizzling hot Sunday morning in the Methodist Church in Colebrook River. Mother and Father were a fine looking couple on that far away Sunday. They were about the same height (5 feet 6 inches) and up to the minute in the style of that day.

Mother was attired in a gown of drab color (a yellow-brown), lace trimmed, with a train, wearing lace mitts and carrying a bouquet of talisman roses. Father was wearing a real wedding coat with black trousers to match and a white silk vest and black tie. When he left for the church, he wore a topper (something like a derby) and white kid gloves.

After the ceremony and a change to their new travelling outfits at the home of the bride, they left for Winsted and their wedding trip to Boston on the steam cars.

Father used to add this when Mother told us about their wedding. "Yes sir, we went in style to Winsted that day in a hired hack with a driver". Then a reminiscent smile as he related the Rev. Adams' astonishment when he found a ten dollar gold piece in his hand when he shook hands with Father after the ceremony.

Mother and father lived in Winsted for two years and then purchased the farm in Colebrook River from Edward Ransom. All the following events took place while we were growing up on the farm at the south end of the village of Colebrook River.

When Father was a young boy, he said to his brothers, "I hope, if I have children, they will all be girls". Well, he missed by only one. We numbered four girls and one boy. Father seemed satisfied, but admitted late in life that he wouldn't have minded a half dozen boys like Charles, as he hadn't thundered around as most boys did.

Esther was their first born. An extremely pretty child, with dark brown hair, which curled easily. Small and quiet and very timid; loved by all who knew her during her short 11 years of life.

I, Helen, the question mark as to looks, came second. Relatives spoke of my nice smile, or dimples, or good color, but never called me pretty. Usually ended with "But she is smart and dependable". Nature somehow didn't put my "good features" together right. I had a big nose, freckles, straight hair and large bones. It didn't bother me much, as life was too interesting to mope about looks.

Ella came next, a pink and white blonde. "A perfect Seymour", said Grandmother. She was a pretty child; small, chubby and cute. Quiet, but very decided in ideas and one who spoke

her mind if pushed too far; a very independent little miss. I think she had to be, as Charles almost pushed her out of the cradle when he came along.

Charles was the next baby. He was a good looking lad with very light brown hair, olive complexion, like mother's, and nice eyes. He was quick and quiet, and had an even disposition, but it was hard to change him if he once made up his mind.

Doris was the baby of the family; a very pretty child too, blonde hair and beautiful blue eyes. She was born about a year after Esther died and baby Doris helped us to feel the loss of our sister less, she loved fun and music and tried to dance almost as soon as she could walk. Doris had a quick temper, but like a sudden summer shower, quickly over and sun out again.

## Bill, our first horse

When Father and Mother first moved to the farm, they bought a horse and named him William, but called him Bill, of course. He was so strong he could work all day and make a trip to Winsted eight miles away in the evening in forty-five minutes, when Father used the gig (a two-wheeled cart). Bill had a strong mind, too and few could manage him except Father. Bill was a pretty chestnut color; a sturdy built horse, but very quick in movement. Mother said he had shifty eyes and wasn't to be trusted. His disposition was rather mean, but he became somewhat friendlier in old age. He had one habit, which was unique; Bill would swing his tail in a complete circle as he traveled along. We never knew why. Father said some horses would do it so as to catch the reins and then run. Bill never tried that; just the continual swinging of his tail. Some neighbors called him "old switchtail", much to our dislike.

A few times Mother took us for a ride in the surrey (yes, it had a fringe on top), but had to give it up because Bill knew Mother was afraid of him. We went as far as the store one day, did the shopping, and were going to cross the iron bridge at the center of town and visit our cousins, the Baxters. Bill refused to go where Mother reined him; backed neatly around and started for home. At the Spencer Bridge, a mile south, Mother decided to try crossing, and Bill calmly took us over and up the west side of the river to the Baxter home. They were in the yard and came to meet us. We told them what Bill had done at the store – and then he did it again – almost backing us over a steep bank. Bill took us home at a fast clip. So for a time Mother gave up trying to drive him.

What a time Father had with him the next day. Bill tried the same trick with him. Father jumped out and used the whip on his front legs and this ended his backing trick when hitched to the light wagons. This he learned quickly, but it took two bad tumbles down a steep bank with a loaded farm wagon before he learned to go ahead to the top of the hill to the upper barn. Father thought he would be killed by the fall as he rolled over and over to the bottom of the hill, but Bill came through o.k., with only a limp to show for his trouble. The wagon was wrecked, of course. Father wasn't hurt, as he jumped off when he saw Bill wouldn't stop.

After this, Bill settled down to farm work. Mr. Prevo was the only one outside the family who could make him work. Mother, Charles and I did drive him some after he became less lively and stubborn.

After twenty years of service, Father pulled off Bill's shoes and turned him out to pasture. He was old and seemed to enjoy the rest. To see how docile and gentle he was, you'd never believe he had been so "ornery" in his young days.

## Felix and Colonel

This is a story of a man called Felix, a neighbor's cow and our foxhound, Colonel. Felix was a trapper and handyman who lived on Woodruff Hill and dogs just didn't like him.

One day a neighbor's cow jumped the fence and came home with our cows. This neighbor sent Felix to bring the animal home. All went well until Colonel appeared, and then things began to happen. Colonel chased after Felix with such loud barks that the cow turned and ran back up the drive dragging Felix by the rope tied around her neck. She headed for the garden – just planted the week before – Father appeared from the barn shouting, "get out of my garden! Take that cow home!" This only made the cow more frightened and on to the soft dirt of the garden she went. Felix set his feet together and tried to stop, but that cow dragged him up and down to the thunderous shouts of Father, and to Felix's broken French "By gar, she I think stop?", and Colonel's howling.

By this time Father reached the garden, swinging a whip and Mother came from the back door with a broom. This was too much for "bossy", who stopped so suddenly she fell to her knees, but Felix kept on going – right over her head, which pulled the rope tight about the cow's neck. The cow was quiet at last. Colonel stood there very proud of himself as much as to say, "I did a good job, didn't I?" Then he hurried to the house looking for his breakfast.

Felix rose slowly to his feet, found his hat, helped the cow to stand and started for the road, saying "De nex time I tie rope to horn." The cow meekly followed, coughing and mooing. We were watching from the windows and saw Mother and Father were shaking with laughter by now. We joined in the fun, and then looked at the garden to see what damage had been done. To Father's relief and surprise, he found that the cow had unbelievably gone between the rows for many of her trips up and down, so the damage was slight and repairs not too hard to make. Oh yes, Colonel, who caused the trouble, was fed his breakfast, and then put on his chain for several days to keep him out of mischief.

## Our dogs

We always had a dog on the farm – for a pet – to help Father with the cows, or for Father to use when hunting. We grew up with them for pets, as Father enjoyed going fox hunting and tracking rabbits. Hounds have such beautiful eyes and soft, floppy ears, but such appetites, and such howling! We loved then just the same. Old Colonel was our favorite, he always kept things lively and never had to try. He, and a three-colored mother cat were such friends. They shared the warm place under the kitchen range in winter, or did until one day, old Colonel stuck his head under, making ready to take his place beside the cat. Giving a howl, he hastily backed out, blood dripping from his nose, and ran for the door, the cat on his neck with her tail twice its natural size. Mother opened the door and out they went. Colonel soon shook the cat off and crept to the barn to sleep on the hay. It seemed the cat had had four baby kittens that day and

this changed her from the dog's friend to attacking him, for she thought he was after her babies. Poor Colonel kept away from her until the babies were old enough to be weaned; then they were friends again, until she had more kittens.

I must tell you about the rabbit dag who came to us, and we gave him a home. Father always called him "that hound dog", but we called him "Spot", because of the large brown, black and white spots on his back. He was a small dog with short legs and long, floppy brown ears and a large appetite. All hounds have a tremendous capacity for food, but Spot took top honors by eating 17 chicken heads – bills and all. Father had been preparing young roosters for market, and was working fast. He did not notice that Spot had somehow escaped from the barn. Father brought several of the picked chickens to the cooler to hang them up. On his return, he found all the heads gone and the small dog swollen to a very large size. He could walk, but looked so unhappy. Father had Mother call the "vet", who said he thought nature would take care of things. "That hound dog" weathered it o.k., but I can still see Father and Mother looking so astonished even that night, when they told us about Spot's large meal. "Just think", said Mother, "seventeen of them!"

Then came the day Father said, "well, that ends it; I'm going to stop keeping hound dogs." The reason he said this was the loss of a whole pound of butter. Yes, the hound swallowed it whole! Father had just brought it from the cooler and placed it on the kitchen table. Major, the hound, had just returned from chasing a deer, (he would never chase a fox), and Mother was feeding him Johnny cake and milk. He had eaten and eaten and Mother was escorting him to the door, when he saw Father place the butter on the table. With a leap he seized the butter and down it went – paper cover and all!

Later we had "Dooley", a part shepherd, part collie dog. He had many accomplishments. What a cow dog he was! Just a natural, for he never had been trained. He cleared the land of woodchucks, too. Father never had to worry about his garden while Dooley lived. He was a fighter, and licked every male dog in Colebrook River who came to the farm or went past. We were never afraid to stay alone at the farm when our parents were away while Dooley was on guard.

Then Mutt came to live with us. You would have loved him, as we all did. He looked after us all, but had a special liking for Mother and Charles. Our first sight of him so astonished us that we could hardly believe our eyes. We had just returned from church service and were going into the house by way of the kitchen door, when Mother stopped and asked, "Is that a goat peeking around the corner of the house?" We all laughed as we could see nothing then, but we went to the south corner and sure enough, there stood the strangest dog, looking at us with such pleading eyes and shaking with fear. It is hard to describe this dog of many breeds; he had chin whiskers like an Airedale, a police dog's tail, small feet like a collie, and a head like a boxer. Long hair on his jaws, short hair; black, white and tan, covered the rest of his body, which was so thin you could count the ribs. Dirty, smelly and limping because of sore feet.

Father found his voice first, "What a looking mutt:", and Mutt he was called. Mother said, "Bring him in, and I'll feed him." Mutt was so grateful for the food and milk. We put him

in the big chair Father used on the back porch. Charles washed his sore feet with carbolic water, then we left him to rest.

Father thought from the rope about his neck, which had a chewed end, that someone had tied him to a tree and left him to die. We lived in the last house on the road to Riverton in Colebrook River; not another house for four miles, so people often abandoned unwanted cats and dogs on this road.

The next day Charles and mother cleaned and brushed his coat, and never again was this necessary, as Mutt took baths in the river and rolled on the grass and sand to dry and keep his unlovely coat shiny clean.

Mutt took over the Seymour family; he was a wonderful watch dog. He, too, kept the farm free from woodchucks, and such a cow dog! Every night and morning when the cows were out in the pasture, at the right time, without a word from Father, Mutt went to the pasture, rounded up the cows and drove them to the barn. He never barked at the cows and controlled them with a growl if they tried to dally. Mutt always had them all, they couldn't hide from him.

He knew when it was time for Doris and Charles to come from school, and took up his watch for them from the driveway. He would watch for Father and Mother to return home, too. How we all grieved when he ate some spoiled meat used for trap bait by a neighbor. He was so ill, and no treatment seemed to help. Finally he could no longer walk and Charles carried him to the barn to his bed in the hay. He slept himself into dog heaven. One grand pet and friend was Mutt, king of mongrel dogs.

Then we had Rex; not much good, but to be loved and to help Father round up the cows. He was Father's last dog, and he tried to train him to drive the cows. Rex brought them home, but barked at their heads instead of their heels. The cows really chased him to the barn. Rex walked many a mile with me when I was first home from the hospital. He and I grew to be fast friends. He was much loved by us all even with his many short comings.

After Rex was put to sleep and Mother and I were alone on the farm, Mitzie became our dog. Like Rex, she was a pet to be loved. She was everyone's friend, but would bark and so did make strangers wary. Mitzie couldn't be broken of the habit of chasing cars, or trained as a cow dog as most collie-shepherd dogs can. Ten years later when Mother and I moved to Winsted, we had her put to sleep as we didn't want her to be uncared for, or hurt.

Our last summer at the farm, Pete guarded us. He came from the Hartford Humane Society Dog Pound. He was another mongrel; very lovable and very grateful for a home, food and care. I'm so glad we had so many dog friends to grow up with us, as there is so much gained from dog companionship.

Grandfather and his heifer, Ruth

Grandfather Seymour lived on the farm next to us. He had been a carpenter until he was about 60 – too old to climb ladders, he felt. He retired to a small farm. He didn't enjoy farming very much, and became quite out of sorts if his animals strayed from the pasture.

"Ruth" was a lively heifer who had been made to wear a poke to keep her from jumping fences. She broke this one day and had a fine time frisking about in our cow pasture.

Grandfather came for her late one afternoon. Father offered to take the lively heifer home for him later, after he finished his milking, as Grandfather had a rupture and shouldn't be pulled about by a cow. Grandfather said "no" and tied the rope around her neck and impatiently started out for home. Ruth sensed she could be boss, and began pulling and twitching Grandfather about the driveway. She fairly danced around in circles, stopping now and again to switch her tail and usually hit Grandfather in the face. He was so angry that Father tried to help, but Grandfather shouted "no, I'll take her home if it takes all night", so Father went back to milking. Just as we were becoming frightened that Grandfather would be hurt, Art Wilbur, a young man, 6 feet tall and a neighbor, came into the yard with his gun. He was returning from squirrel hunting in our woods. He had a wonderful laugh and we loved to hear him. He laughed now. The heifer started running, first towards the barn, then down the driveway; Father came from the barn. Poor Grandfather could hardly keep his feet, his hat came off and his hair stood straight up. Art handed Father his gun, rushed up and took the rope from Grandfather and said "Now run, if you want to", and run she did up the road towards home with Art shouting with laughter. She was so frightened she didn't dare stop. Grandmother saw them coming and said to her daughter, Ruth, "Here comes your father, running like a sixteen year old. I think he has taken leave of his senses. His rupture will burst. Oh Dear!" Aunt Ruth took a look and said, "It is Art Wilbur and the heifer; Dad is all right."

When Art came for his gun, he kept us laughing while he told us about Grandfather. He said he was so angry he wouldn't speak to anyone. Grandmother was awakened in the night to find the bed shaking. She shook Grandfather and said, "Sid, Sid, wake up. We are having an earthquake". Then she realized it was Grandfather, laughing so hard that he shook the bed. His experience was funny to him, too – then.

## Telephones

Today nearly everyone has a telephone, but I was ten years old before we had a phone at the farm. Oh, yes, the village center had service, but we were a half-mile off the main road and until Father, Uncle Charlie Gray, and Grandfather signed for phones, cut, and placed the poles by the roadside, the company wouldn't give us service. It was 1907 in July, before everything was finished and we made our first calls. We made all local calls on our line in Colebrook River for several years. Our new line was the 261 one, the old was 237.

Just before our phone was installed, Father needed grain, so he gave Mother the list and she sent Charles and Ella, six and eight years old, to my Aunt Ruth and Uncle Victor Quail's home to ask her to phone the Leonard Grain Company in Winsted to send up the order. On the way, Ella stopped at Welch's to ask Mable Welch, the granddaughter, to go with them, and on they went. Just before reaching the farm, they met Uncle Victor taking his cows to the pasture accompanied by his bulldog. The dog followed the children back to the house. They knocked and knocked, but Aunt Ruth didn't come, so Ella decided to go next door to the Baxters. On the way out the driveway, Charles ran to look at some baby chicks in a "run". Just as he leaned over, the bulldog grabbed Charles in the far part of the thigh. How they screamed! The dog let

go and ran off. Charles was bleeding so, the girls hurried him out of the yard and up to the Baxters.

Amy Baxter bound up his leg while Earle harnessed up and brought them home. Dr. Ward was sent for from New Boston, six miles away. When the doctor arrived, he said he'd put in only one stitch, as it was on his leg, and a scar wouldn't matter. Father used to feint at the sight of blood, so he would have been no good to help. Uncle Ted happened to come to see us that afternoon, so he and mother held Charles while Dr. Ward put in the stitch.

Of course, he was a very frightened six year old boy. Mother sent me with Doris, a three month old baby, Ella, and Mable Welch some distance from the house, but we could hear his cries at that distance and were glad when father called us to say it was over.

We kept our distance from Uncle Victor's dog after that. Aunt Ruth had a sick headache that morning and was in bed. When she finally located the children, they were hurrying out of the yard and she thought they were playing; little dreaming what their dog had done. Charles healed up fine, but what a care for Mother. His scar is very plain today to remind him of what it cost him to look at those baby chicks so long ago.

A shortcut by footbridge

When Uncle Charlie and Aunt Grace Gray moved to Colebrook River, they lived on the farm opposite us, but across the Farmington River. So near, but to see them, we had to travel around by the Spencer Bridge – a mile and a half trip, so we cousins were delighted when the grown-ups decided to erect a footbridge for use in the summer months.

The men made wooden horses of two by four pieces of wood, placed long stringers on top from one "horse" to another with cross pieces of boards to form a walk. They securely fastened the walk with wire run through iron rings on the walk and in trees, so if high water washed out the wooden horses, the rest would be saved. It looked like a long, narrow picnic table when finished.

How much we all enjoyed the bridge each year. We three Seymour girls narrowly missed disaster on one of these bridges. It happened this way: we had had several days of rain and the water was a rushing torrent in the river, nearly up to the floorboards of the bridge. Esther, Ella, Charles and I took a walk while Mother was busy papering the living room one afternoon. We thought it would be fun to remove our stockings and sandals and swing our feet and legs in the water. Leaving Charles, who was about two years old, on the high bank, Esther and I let Ella, age four, go out a little way on the bridge, but she and I went half way. We had a grand time interrupted after a bit by Mother calling from the bank to come right up. We had been taught to obey, so we went directly up the bank and home. Mother scolded us and applied a lilac whip to our legs; to Esther's for being the oldest and letting us go into danger, to mine for thinking up the stunt, Ella being only four, escaped punishment. Father walked in to find us in tears, and after learning of our foolishness, went to the river. The high water had washed the bridge away just minutes after we had left it. It was a lesson we never forgot. Then came the order: Never cross the bridge unless Mother or Father had given permission.

# Fourth of July Celebrations

For several years Fourth of July started for us about four a.m., when we would be awakened by sounds of gun shots. Father and Uncle Charlie vied with each other in being first to fire the first shot. One year Uncle Charlie was first by firing his gun at a minute past twelve o'clock. It was easy for him to be up late at night, but hard to wake in the early morning hours.

Father didn't believe in "burning up hard-earned money", so we had few fireworks as compared with youths of today. Of course we each had some four packs of small firecrackers about a finger long, 2 boxes of caps for our pistols, a box of sparklers, a few sky rockets, a roman candle or two, perhaps a long-burning red light, and a pinwheel. Really a lot to us and we were happy. Before we had cap pistols, we had brass heads with movable jaws for the caps. The head was attached to a string and we would drop the head on a stone to set off the caps. We liked the pistols better.

For several years, while Grandfather and Grandmother Seymour lived, the whole family, aunts, uncles, cousins and a few friends would hold a family picnic. One of the best, I remember, was held at Uncle Charlie's farm across the river from us. What fun we had getting ready. Grandfather, Father and Uncle Charlie built a long table under the row of maple trees in their yard and put up two swings in nearby apple trees for the children. The morning of the Fourth the families began coming about nine o'clock with just the nicest looking food. Salads, baked beans, homemade rolls, pickles, jellies, cakes, pies, cookies and freezers of ice cream. And wonder of wonders – four watermelons! The melons were placed in tubs of water with large cakes of ice to cool. I can picture the food now and feel again that dinnertime would never come.

The men dug a pit and placed large stones in the bottom and built a fire on top. When the stones were red hot, wet hay was laid on top, then clams and potatoes. All were covered and left to steam. We girls helped the women set the tables and bring out chairs and benches. Big cans of lemonade were made and the food placed on the long table. By this time the clam bake was ready and opened by the men. What a feast we had! Mother finally called a halt to my eating more watermelon; she was afraid I'd be ill. I wasn't, though. Watermelon was a great treat in those days.

Everyone had a grand time visiting with family members they hadn't seen for a year, and making plans for next Fourth of July. The celebration ended with our combined display of evening fireworks; a celebration enjoyed by all but our dog. We always had to tie the dog in the barn and close the doors so he wouldn't be so frightened by the sound of fire crackers.

The year Doris was born [1907] we spent the Fourth of July at home, as Mother felt the long drive to Winsted in the heat would be too much for a three month old baby. We had been shooting off our firecrackers and caps that morning when mother called me to help her. Charles left too, and went to the ice house to watch father pound the cake of ice fine enough to pack the ice cream freezers. Ella stayed by the well near the driveway counting her firecrackers. From the workroom window Mother and I saw Uncle Victor drive into the yard and up to the hitching post. He had trained his horse, "Punch", to stand without being hitched. He walked on to the ice

house to talk to father. I forgot about them all, as I was helping Mother mix the bananas and milk with the cooked sauce for banana ice cream. All at once we heard a banging and a poping and saw a can cover rise into the air near the well. Then Punch went flying past the window, through the yard, across the barnyard, and up a steep hill, coming to a stop by a barb wire fence. We were frightened, and Ella was in tears; our horse wasn't afraid of fire crackers, and she didn't know Punch was. Uncle Victor rushed up the hill and finally quieted Punch. He had to back him, still harnessed to the wagon, down the hill and turn him around in the barnyard. Poor Punch was trembling, and when Uncle Victor tried to drive him toward the yard, he reared up and fussed around. Finally he started, almost running, for the driveway. As they passed the well where the fire crackers had been shot off, Punch pranced about a bit and snorted, then stopped. We heard Uncle Victor say as he pulled grimly on the reins, "You smell powder, don't you?" All at once Punch lunged forward and up the road he raced, Uncle Victor's straw hat sailing off as they went. Quite a bit of excitement, and we were glad no damage had been done. And the banana ice cream – yummy, was it good!

## Thanksgiving at the Fred Seymours

When Uncle Fred and Aunt Annie were living in Robertsville, they invited the entire Seymour family to dinner on Thanksgiving Day. Of course each family contributed some of the food. The day came very cold and clear and no snow, but the ground was frozen, making the dirt roads very bumpy to ride over. We had had rain a few days before, so the road had frozen in ridges. As each family arrived, the horses were unhitched and taken into the warm barn out of the frosty cold. While the women and children hurried into the house to be greeted by relatives, the women gathered in the kitchen, catching up on all the family news, the men in the living room smoking and enjoying themselves and the children playing games in the dining room.

Soon the smell of good things cooking came from the kitchen. The smaller children were dressed in their warm coats and went for a short walk with two of the older girls. Others set the tables; one in the dining room, one in the kitchen for the children. Then the tables were loaded with the mouth-watering food. How hungry we all were; and didn't that chicken pie taste good! After we finished our mince and pumpkin pie, each grownup told why he was thankful, and the older children recited their school poems for Thanksgiving Day.

My cousin had an organ and after dishes were washed, we all joined in singing our favorite songs. All except my two cousins Allen and Fred Jr.; they had gone to the Deming home not far away.

Four o'clock soon came, the time to leave for home where farm chores waited. I noticed Father said something to Mother in a low voice as he went out to harness up. Mother hustled us into our warm clothing and we were ready as soon as Grandmother Seymour was. Good-bys were said and we went out into the cold. We noticed that Grandfather looked angry and heard Grandmother say, as they climbed into their one-seated wagon, "You'd think those boys would have more respect for their grandparents". Allen, Fred Jr., with Grove, Earl and Ralph Deming

couldn't keep from laughing. As Grandfather drove out of the gate, he shouted, "You boys get up to the farm tomorrow and fix my wagon. You'd do it now if it wasn't so cold."

We were puzzled, but the wagon did look funny. We got settled in our surrey and Father explained. Those young rascals changed the back wheels of the wagon to the front. That makes the front higher, and the passengers feel they are sliding backwards. I arrived just in time to stop them from changing the wheels on our surrey. That was why he spoke to Mother to hurry, as he had a feeling the boys were up to some mischief.

Our ride home was one to remember; it was almost dark at four o'clock that November day and the full moon was just rising. It flooded the valley with light as we drove down Woodruff Hill and made the water in the river beautiful as it reflected the moonlight. The next day the boys arrived at Grandfather's farm and changed the wheels, but it was sometime before Grandfather forgot his ride on Thanksgiving Day.

## More about Grandfather Seymour

Grandfather loved to dance, play jokes and tell funny experiences about others, but was not too keen at having a joke played on him. By the way, he had red hair too, like Father, and an explosive disposition to match. On April Fool's Day, we put sawdust in a regular coffee bag and placed it in the road north of his home. Mr. Hitchcock, the tea and coffee agent, had just driven over this road. We hid in the bushes nearby to wait until Grandfather drove by for his mail. Sure enough, to our delight, he stopped, got out and picked up the bag. He was just ready to drive on when we rushed out shouting "April Fool, April Fool!" Grandfather grunted, threw the bag down and drove on his way. That evening he told Father we should be punished for making him get out of his wagon; he thought we should have more respect for his age. Father didn't say anything, but we weren't punished for the harmless joke.

Grandfather loved to tell this story about Mr. George Ives and the teapot. One day a woman came into Mr. Ives' General Store wanting to purchase a teapot. The teapots were hanging on hooks on the top row of shelves. Mr. Ives would slide one off the hook with a long stick and catch it as it fell. This day he missed and the teapot struck him on the bridge of his nose. Mr. Ives was a sedate old gentleman with a white beard. He was a deacon in the church, and usually very calm and unruffled. But was he angry when that teapot landed! He kicked the teapot all around the floor until it was shapeless, all the while saying, "By codfish!, By codfish!"

Grandfather and his friend, Roswell Brooks, were so amused they went outside so Mr. Ives wouldn't see them laughing. The woman shopper was so upset and astonished that she left without her purchase of a teapot.

A few years later Grandfather had an experience with a teapot at home. Grandmother always placed the teapot on a trivet near her place at the table. Grandfather had been teasing her all through dinner and she had had enough. So she said, "Sid, if you are through eating, I wish you would go to the store for the groceries." Grandfather, still laughing, walked around to her chair and bent over to say something. As he straightened up, his suspender caught the handle of the teapot, swung it around, the spout catching in the top of his trousers. Before he could

disentangle it, the hot tea ran down inside his trousers. He danced about calling for help, then grasped the handle of the teapot, opened the door and threw it out, breaking the nickel spout. Now Grandmother was upset. "Just like a child to throw it outdoors", she said. Grandfather changed his trousers and prepared to leave for the store with Grandmother's order ringing in his ears; "Don't come back until you buy me a new teapot!" Then she had a good laugh with her daughter, Ruth. Yes, Grandfather came home with a new teapot.

Aunt Ruth told me this story about Grandfather, and we enjoyed hearing it. The stove hook, which was used to lift the covers [this was also called a "lifter"] to the kitchen range became unsafe to use, as it would let the hot cover turn and lip off. The person using it might drop a hot cover on his foot and get a burn. Grandmother had asked Grandfather to buy a new one several times, but he would forget. So she hunted up the old-fashioned iron one, which had to be handled with a pot holder so as not to burn your hand. Of course, Grandfather forgot one day and grasped the hot lifter, which he quickly dropped. Then picked it up with the holder and going to the door, threw it out into the deep snow bank. "Well, that was a slick trick", said Grandmother; "you will have to shovel that snow until you find it. It was the only one we have". After Grandfather had cooled off, he found the lifter and on his next trip to Winsted came home with two lifters – the new kind.

Father often took a walk after supper to visit his father and mother for a short while. One evening, when he went in, Grandfather continued reading and only grunted when Father spoke. Ruth and Grandmother looked as if they wanted to laugh, but didn't. They visited with Father a short time and finally Grandfather threw aside his paper and said to Father, "You should have your ears examined." This was a strange remark, but Father kept on smoking, waiting to hear more. Finally the story came out; Grandfather had a contraption fixed on the outside of his chicken house door to keep it securely fastened. When he entered, he put it to one side, then set it again when he came out. That morning he took feed and water to the hens, and then found the door securely locked when he wanted to go out.

This was a problem, as the windows were too small for him to climb out, so he called and called and pounded and pounded, but Ruth and Grandmother didn't hear. Then he saw father driving up the road, so he roared, "Ed!" at the top of his lungs. Father heard him shouting, but thought he was calling the cows from the river after watering them, and on he drove. Poor Grandfather was out there two hours before Ruth realized shouting had been going on for a long time, and went out to investigate. Grandfather was angry at them, but more so at father. He wouldn't talk, and it struck Ruth and grandmother funny, but it was no joke to Grandfather. He never bragged again about his "sure stay shut" hen house door.

Grandfather loved to dance the old-fashioned dances and reels, but didn't care for other dances. Grandmother would have "none of such foolishness", but she would attend all dances with Grandfather and enjoy watching the others "cut capers" as she expressed it.

Grandfather often was the paid prompter too, as he was one of the best callers in their town.

When Grandfather was very young, he volunteered for service in the Union Army. He and Grandmother were married when she was 17 and he just 21. They lived to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary.

Corn cutting time.

What a busy time for Mother and Father when September rolled around, for that was corn cutting time. Father was the first farmer in Colebrook River to build a silo for storing fresh cut cornstalks for winter feed for his stock. His first silo was a small square one built inside, and in one corner of the barn, extending to the rafters. The cows liked the silage so much he decided to build a large circular one outside, but attached to the barn. He interested several neighbors to do the same and so it became a community affair.

All the farmers helped each other and hired about ten extra men to help with the hand cutting and loading the corn on wagons in the fields. At first a Mr. Fargo from New Boston came with his machine to fill the silos, then for years Bill Betts did this work. He had a more modern engine with a blower, which blew the finely cut corn to the top of the silo through a six inch pipe. Mr. Hurd was the man in the silo. As the fodder drifted down and the pile grew under the blower, he would shovel it away and then tramp round and round packing the silage down. We children often had fun running around and helping pack it down.

Mr. Northway, Mr. Bourquin, Mr. Verchot, Mr. Hurd and Father furnished teams with hay rigs on the wagons to use in bringing the long corn stalks to the cutter. The day before the machine came, the extra men arrived with hand corn knives and cut some of the corn, laying the long stalks so they could be easily picked up and placed on the wagons. Seven o'clock next morning the engine was started and the man on the first wagon loaded with corn handed Mr. Betts an armful of corn, which he fed to the chopper and up the blower went the first fodder for the cows next winter.

The men were paid a certain wage plus dinners (and what dinners!) Mother was fortunate, as Aunt Rocelia hired Mrs. Hurd to help her each year in preparing the food. When I was eleven, I, too, helped out. Dinner and two lunches were some work to prepare. Mother often had a large chicken pie, three vegetables, jelly, pickles, pie and coffee the first day and baked ham, vegetables, pineapple salad, hot rolls and cottage pudding with coffee the next.

The day the machine went to work, at seven o'clock, Mrs. Hurd started making delicious sugar cookies, while Mother fried a double recipe of her famous fried cakes. Then Mrs. Hurd and I began making sandwiches. Mother made hot coffee in the morning and a cold drink for the afternoon lunch. About ten o'clock, carrying baskets of sandwiches and cookies, and Father carrying the can of hot coffee and cups, we went to the fields to give the men lunch and a few minutes of rest. They had to work fast and steadily to keep the corn cutting machine busy.

Promptly at noon the men came in to wash for dinner. How busy we were serving them and how glad to rest and eat when they finished. At three o'clock it was lunch time again. Mother was always glad to see the last wagon leave after dinner the second day. If we had rain, what a time! The men were wet if they tried to work and the cut corn spoiled if left on the ground, so they usually finished what was cut, then waited for a pleasant day.

Corn cutting time was fun and exciting. Mr. Bourquin Sr., who spoke broken French, always took time to catch a few bull frogs and dress the legs for frying. He'd bring them to Mother and say, "For de leddle lady." meaning Doris, who was about four years old. They were good – just like chicken.

When the silo became nearly filled, a shorter man than Mr. Hurd was needed, so Felix often took his place. One day after Felix had been tramping about an hour, Father climbed the ladder to check on things, and found a heap of silage under the blower, and Felix either asleep or unconscious. He called for help; the engine stopped and Felix wakened or aroused. He was so white and ill-looking that the men helped him down the ladder and rolled him in a blanket in the shade. It was a rule "No hard liquor" when cutting corn, as it was dangerous work around the machine, belts and those wicked sharp corn knives. No liquor could be found. It was a mystery what made Felix ill. He couldn't or wouldn't say; he just kept repeating "me dizzy, oh so dizzy". About two months later, when Father was forking out silage, his fork caught in a stout cord fastened to a support in the side of the silo. Pushing the silage away, the cord came in sight, and tied to it was a small empty jug. Its contents had caused Felix to be "ill". He had smuggled in some "home brew", and no wonder he was "oh so dizzy"!

Earning money on the farm,

The Larkin Co. catalogue played as big a part in our young lives as did the Sears Roebuck catalogue in the lives of other youngsters. We'd look at the pictures of the premiums and long for so many things, but we set our hearts on a lawn swing and croquet set and talked of nothing else. Money wasn't plentiful in farm families and we were delighted when Father said to the four of us, "If you will pick up those small stones on the lower half of the upper field, I'll pay you money to use for a lawn swing, and if you clear the entire field, I'll add a croquet set". We were to use Charles' little wagon and empty it on the stone boat for the horse to draw away later.

We went to work as soon as the field was dry, and by vacation time we had the entire field cleared. We worked after school, Saturdays and spring vacations; we were sick of the sight of stones. The thought of the prizes, though, kept us at the task with never a complaint. Mother sent in the order, and we could hardly wait to receive the prizes. The day finally arrived when Father took the farm wagon and went to the Winsted freight office and brought home the swing and croquet set. The entire family enjoyed both immensely, and so did our friends. During our growing up time, the croquet set was replaced twice and the lawn swing three times. The new ones we also earned by "getting up a Larkin order". All our neighbors bought from the fine list of supplies; soap, coffee, tea, cocoa, perfume, etc., and we earned the swing or croquet set for doing the work.

Charles takes up trapping.

The Farmington River, which flowed past our farm, abounded in muskrats and their skins brought in quite a little income if you were willing to work. Charles bought a few traps and learned how to set them and fasten them securely so that if a trapped muskrat, accidently caught

by one foot, wouldn't carry the trap off and himself slowly die. It meant early visits to the traps on nippy, frosty mornings before school, but Charles faithfully did this.

Father taught him to skin the muskrats and stretch the skins inside out on special shaped boards to dry. When ready to be sold, Charles sent for Al Simons, who came and judged their value, and Charles proudly added the money to his bank account. For several winters he carried on his business quite profitably. One winter he caught an otter. He tried to trap the beavers, who had a den in our pond, but they were too smart to get caught. We liked to visit the pond and catch a glimpse of those beavers. We often did see them, but they would catch our scent and we'd hear the slap of a flat tail on the water. They were gone like a flash; gone to their den until we left.

One winter when Charles was older, in his early teens, he wanted to set box traps for rabbits. A Mr. George Burgess would buy all he could catch, but he wanted them alive. Mother was against the project, but finally Charles persuaded Father to help him convince Mother that it would be all right. He built one box trap, set it, and to his delight found it sprung the first morning. Fearing the rabbit would get away if he opened it there, he took the trap home and into the kitchen, all excited. Mother was against opening the trap in the kitchen, but Father assured her they would get the rabbit into a burlap bag. They opened the trap a little way and out shot, not a rabbit, but a flying squirrel. Mother was frightened and ran into the pantry and shut the door, leaving her men folk to cope the best they could. That squirrel flew and jumped about the kitchen – up on the window shades and down – one time making contact with Father's head, then a quick trip across the hot stove. The dog barked, the cat ran under the table, and Father and Charles rushed to shut the doors to the other rooms. Finally they opened the outside door and Mr. Flying Squirrel found freedom again. Mother came from the pantry and had her say, "No more of this nonsense; if Mr. Burgess has to have live rabbits, someone else will catch them!"

Another of Charles' projects worked out fine and netted him a nice profit. This was catching eels. Ella and I would go with him at dusk each evening and watch Charles set his poles securely, letting the hook and line float out a short distance from shore. Then we returned home. Early in the morning was the time the eels would "bite", so Charles was ready to catch them. He would make the rounds early, put his catch in a burlap bag, and take them to the same Mr. Burgess. He took all Charles could catch.

Charles wanted a bicycle so very much; for enjoyment and to help him deliver his papers, "The Saturday Globe", a Chicago weekly paper. Mother suggested raising potatoes. Father agreed, and together they raised two fields of potatoes; one large field for Father and a smaller field for Charles. He learned to cut the seed just right, helped plant and cultivate the potatoes. When the hard work of harvesting was over, they had a bumper crop. Charles not only had a fine bicycle, but a complete new outfit; suit, overcoat and shoes.

He was a proud boy, and for several years he raised potatoes and made out fine. He had a great deal of pleasure with his bicycle and let me ride it, too. That was quite a trick; a boy's bike and country dirt roads, but I managed. In order to mount it, I would go to the chopping block,

stand on it and get on from there, sometimes falling to the ground, but eventually I learned to balance and the others had no more fun watching me hit the dust.

## Family Discipline

When we were quite small, Mother and father decided that not one of their brood was going to be a nuisance to grownups, so we were taught to obey a few simple rules.

When in a room with grownups sit still and listen.

If you must fidget, excuse yourself and go outside.

Answer older people, otherwise keep still. Outdoors is the place to shout and be noisy.

Don't argue, obey.

Discuss complaints later, things will be righted.

Father was a rather small man about 5 foot 6 inches, and weighing about 150 lbs.; very quick in movement and easily moved to anger or laughter.

Mother was 5 foot 6 inches also, very slender in her youth, weighing 102 lbs. when married, and never more than 125 lbs. in later life. She was calm, even-tempered, slow to anger, but very determined when once aroused.

Father realized his own shortcomings and decided Mother should discipline us. "You decide and I'll back you up". And back her up he did. Never once in all those years did he reverse a decision she made. We never could out-wit Mother by asking Father for permission to do something, for he'd always ask, "What did your Mother say?"

They both worked hard and deserved a little peace and quiet in the evening and discipline never hurt us. They played games with us before bedtime. I recall such games as "Jack Straws", "Dominoes", "Pitt", "Proverbs", "Old Maid", etc., enjoyed by all gathered round the dining room table. First, however, Charles filled the wood box and we girls did the supper dishes.

Mother always kept a short branch from the lilac bush on the shelf back of the stove as a reminder to us. This she'd use to tingle our legs if we were naughty. Usually we were punished by losing some privilege, which hurt more than a whipping.

If we showed signs of revolting against Mother's rules, the stern voice of Father, "Do as your Mother says", was all that needed to start us doing our work. I suppose I wanted to see if Father meant what he said, as I'd never seen him punish one of us, because when I was about 5 years old, I was playing with paper dolls under the dining room table. Mother told me to put them away and come wash my hands for dinner. I lingered even after Father said, "Do as your Mother said". All at once I decided I'd better wash my hands as Father appeared on his hands and knees, and I felt the sting of that lilac bush whip on my legs. As Father crawled under the table on one side, I went out the other side in a hurry. Just couldn't get to the sink fast enough.

The only time I remember Father punished one of us on his own was when Charles, then a boy of 6, was the cause of a friend falling from a horse. Bill Griffin had his cousin, Sylvester Northway, behind him on a very gentle horse, and came for a ride as far as our farm. When they started out the driveway, Charles clapped his hands and shouted, "Get up!" to the horse. The old horse started to trot and Sylvester slipped off. Father picked him up and thought he was all right. Then he took Charles over his knee and gave him a few smart slaps with a shingle. Mother also

scolded him and told him he might have caused a very serious accident. As it was, Sylvester did fracture a small bone in his arm.

One thing that made Father and Mother very nervous was the thought of one of us falling from a wagon or surrey seat and being run over, so we were never allowed to stand up in any wagon, even when very small. We knew we wouldn't go if we did. If they gave a neighbor's child a ride to school, it was understood that he sit down, or he'd have to get out and walk. In this way we all enjoyed the ride. We sang and told stories along the way, and many were the recitations we practiced when out riding.

When Esther was a small child, she had the habit of crawling under Mother's bed and crying and kicking the bed springs every time she couldn't have her way. One day Father was working in the cellar right under her, when she began crying and kicking. He took a broom handle and pounded on the floor, not saying a word. Mother said it was funny to see Esther come out from under the bed; she did not try it again and never knew for years what made the noise.

Father expected his farm animals to "toe the mark" too, and he tried to train them by sheer power of his lungs. He often shouted at the top of his voice when getting the cows into their stanchions at night in the summer time. We had many a giggle over the performance, but never let him hear us. We'd hear something like this: "Get into your places; how many times do you expect me to tell you? Back out of that place, you belong over there. Your calf is all right, get back here! I'll tan your hide. Get your head into that stanchion; you're the dumbest cow I ever owned; I'll sell you to the first dealer who comes along." (Now and then a few unprintable expletives were also heard.) Then all would be quiet and we'd know the brush and curry comb were busy. Then the cows were sprayed to protect them from the flies, their bags wiped off, the milking started, and peace and quiet would reign, although broken now and then when some brave cow flipped her tail and hit Father in the face. Then the explosion, "Keep that tail quiet. I'll fix you!", and he would tie the end of her tail to her leg and all would be serene again.

Grandfather Catlin, a calm, steady man, used to say to Mother, "I'd think that all that noise would make the cows so nervous they wouldn't give their milk." Mother's reply was, "They expect it now and like it, I think, and it gives Ed a chance to cool off when he is tense and tired at day's end." And so it seemed, his cows thrived and were rated high in milk and cream production.

Cats and hens weren't given the loud voice training; cats could do no wrong in Father's mind, and he usually had about six in the barn to pet and feed and find homes for their numerous offspring. He kept the feed mill supplied with good mousers for years. Father was as quiet around the hen house as he could be, and we never knew why. Mother's explanation: he had used up all his energy on the cows.

## Winter Evenings

How cozy we were on those cold winter evenings; Father liked to be warm and could build the best fires of anyone I knew. He had a fine large woodpile each year and we enjoyed basking in the warmth it provided. Some evenings Mother would make chocolate fudge or penuche for us,

or best of all, old-fashioned molasses candy just full of butternut halves. Yummy! We always had several barrels of apples, and an apple, cold and juicy from the cellar made a wonderful bedtime snack. The games we played I've mentioned, but let me tell you a few of the stories of their own experiences that we loved to have Father and Mother tell.

Sterling, Illinois

When Father was 18 months old, his mother took him and went to Sterling, Illinois to join Grandfather, who had been out there three months building a house for them and finding work. The then called "west" was just in the height of 'growing pains", and carpenters were in demand with work for them the year round. This was a fine opportunity for Grandfather, and he was anxious to settle. Grandmother was about 18, a small woman, and very timid. She had a dreadful journey out alone with Father not yet 2 years old. She crossed New York State by the Erie Canal and then went by boat on the Great Lakes. She was so glad to see Grandfather after her long journey, but her peace of mind was soon shattered by seeing several Indians near their home. They frightened her even when assured that they were friendly.

One day a neighbor saw her running towards her with the new baby in her arms and dragging Father along by his hand. She could just gasp "Indians" when she reached the safety of her friend's kitchen. Grandmother finally said that eight Indians had just opened her door, entered, and sat down on the floor by the fireplace. The friend persuaded her to return with her to her home, for the Indians were making a friendly call and would stay until they were fed. The neighbor helped cook a big meal and serve the "guests", who eagerly ate everything, then without a word got up and left. Grandmother never felt safe with Indians about, and, after two years of misery, persuaded Grandfather to return to Connecticut.

Father's most exciting experience came on a Halloween when he was about 16. He, with five other boys were looking for mischief when they saw a young man hitch his horse and go inside a nearby home to call on his best girl. Quickly and quietly they unhitched the horse from the carriage and rolled it to a barn not far away. They removed the wheels and shafts, and then with ropes, they hauled the shafts and body to a position astride the ridge boards and replaced the shafts. Father was left holding them in position while the others returned to bring up the wheels.

Just then dogs began to bark, and men appeared to see what Halloween pranksters were doing. The boys and wheels disappeared from Father's sight in the nearby woods, leaving Father to face the music alone. Not wanting to let the wagon fall and be demolished, Father held on, getting more and more angry. He had, for once, to keep quiet and hope the men wouldn't see him. In a few minutes the bells began to ring in the church across the way. The men returned to the house thinking that was the cause for the dogs to bark. Father sighed with relief as the boys returned, fastened the wheels on the carriage and left for home. Thinking back, Father thought that they had had enough Halloween fun, hadn't been caught, and wouldn't press their luck.

Mother's older sister, Josephine, was very nervous even as a child. One day she, then a girl of 10, and Mother, only 4, were sent to the garden on top of the hill to cut a cabbage for dinner. They ran most of the way and when Aunt Josie bent over to cut the cabbage, she was puffing. All at once she dropped the long knife and ran for home, calling for her mother.

Mother picked up the cabbage with one hand and the knife in the other and started for home. Her mother told her later that Aunt Josie yelled, "I'm dead! I'm dead! My heart is heating!" She was scolded for frightening her mother and told she was a pretty lively corpse. Grandma Catlin always laughed at the memory of Mother coming down that hill with the long knife and big cabbage.

One afternoon when Mother was about 5, she went across the road to their old-fashioned plum tree and filled her pinafore with delicious plums. As she was climbing the fence on her return, she looked up the road and there, not far from her, was a man walking toward her leading a big bear on a chain. Mother was frightened; she dropped her plums, ran for the house shouting to her sister, "Lock the doors, a bear is coming!" Then up the stairs she ran and crawled under her mother's bed and hardly dared breathe. She stayed there a long time – once hearing Josephine calling her to come down, but Mother didn't move from her hiding place.

At last, when it began to get dark, Mother went cautiously down stairs to hear what she had missed. Her sister had given the man a few pennies and the bear had done tricks for her and danced with a broom. After her mother explained that the man earned his living with his performing bear, Mother wished she hadn't been in such a hurry to hide.

Grandma Catlin was a practical nurse, and when away from home after Aunt Josie married, Mother had charge of things. Wishing to be real helpful one such time, Mother did the family washing and ironing. John Ransom boarded with the family and, of course, she did his laundry too. Sunday evening, after dressing to call on his 'lady fair", John came down stairs pulling at his trousers and wriggling about. Finally he said to Mother very seriously, "Pears to me this shirt has considerable starch in it." And it had, for Mother had starched the shirt all over, not just the cuffs and shirt front as they did in those days. The tails rattled with John's every move and he thought Mother had done it on purpose as a joke. Mother hadn't, only thought she had done a good job. The whole family teased Mother for a long time about that starched shirt.

Mother's most frightening experience was her ride down Beech Hill with her school teacher, Miss Delia Wolcott. Miss Wolcott lived in North Colebrook when she taught at Colebrook River and went home weekends. One evening she invited Mother, a little girl of 8, to go with her and spend the time with her half sister, Ida Simons. Mother's half sister, Ida, had been adopted by the Simons family shortly after her mother died.

Mother had a pleasant weekend and she and Miss Wolcott started for Colebrook River early Monday morning. The horse was quite frisky, but Miss Wolcott seemed to handle him well until they reached the steepest part of the hill. Mother was on the ravine side and could see over the one-rail fence to the rocks far below in the brook. She didn't look again, as it was frightening. Then the horse stopped and refused to go on. Miss Wolcott had Mother climb over the back of the seat and sit on the floor of the carriage. Mother realized then that the horse was getting ready to kick. All at once he lunged ahead, running, then stopping to kick all the way down the hill. Mother was never so frightened in her life. When the horse reached more level ground, he stopped again. This time Mother jumped out and scrambled to the top of the bank. Nothing would induce her to get back into the carriage. The horse reared and kicked about, but

did not run. Then Miss Wolcott got out and whipped the horse very hard about the front legs. The kicking act was over and the horse seemed quiet enough, but Mother walked the mile or more to the schoolhouse and never again did she ride with Miss Wolcott.

## Bees, Bees, Bees

We had two hives of honey bees under the crab apple trees not far from the clothes line, which Father had strung from pear tree to pear tree for Mother. One morning Mother was hanging up the laundry to dry, when half a dozen bees began buzzing about her head. She drove them off, all but one, by swinging a wet towel at them. This one persisted, and she called for Father. He ran down and with his straw sun hat beat off the bee, but not before it had stung Mother on an eyelid. She was in great pain and her eyes, nose and one cheek puffed up. Father finally found the bit of stinger left by the bee and pulled it out. Mother applied baking soda and water. It was 2 days before she looked natural again. When Charles first saw her face, so puffed up, he burst into tears, crying that he wanted his own Momma back.

A few weeks later we were playing "horse" and Mother and Father were watching us in the front yard. We had made spool-knit reins with colored twine and we were taking turns at being the driver and the horse. It was my turn to be the driver, and I thought I needed a whip, so giving my reins to Mother to hold my "horse", Ella, I ran across the road to break a whip from the bushes that grew there. I was wearing open sandals on my feet, but no stockings. Just as I broke the whip, I felt a lot of "hot needles" on my legs. Giving a yell, I ran straight for Mother with a swarm of yellow jackets all around me. Mother saw me coming and she, Ella and Charles ran for the back of the house. Father came to help me using his hat, this time a felt one, he drove the yellow jackets off. He always said my screams helped more than the hat, and didn't see how the yellow jackets ever found a place to sting, as I didn't stand still long enough for them to alight.

I was a wreck. My legs, arms, hands, face, even the top of my head had been stung, and each place was swelling. My nose, large enough as nature's gift, was a sight. My eyes were narrow slits. Father said I looked like the loser in a prize fight. They all had a good laugh every time they looked at me, but every one of them helped put on moistened baking soda to ease the pain.

"The sting to end all stings" came later when pears were getting ripe; not to one of us, but to Grandmother Seymour,. She went out to the pear tree one afternoon in time to see a fine pear drop to the ground. She thought she picked that one up, but she took another one, which had been there several hours. It looked so inviting she took a bite and groaned with pain. She had bitten on to a blue wasp, which had been hidden in a hole in the pear. Her lip swelled up – her nose too. She was a sight! How sore it was, and as the pain kept up, they took her to Dr. Ward for treatment. It took about three days before Grandmother was back to normal.

We looked for the first signs of spring. With father, we'd hear, "Well, spring is near; I saw a flock of wild geese this morning", or he would send us to see the wild ducks resting in a cove in the water of the Farmington River. With Mother, "There's a bluebird, children, the first

I've seen. Robins will soon arrive. I hope it won't be cold tonight." We all enjoyed feeding the birds when it was stormy, and they couldn't find much to eat.

With us girls it was walks looking for the first spring flowers; skunk cabbage, dutchmen's britches, adders tongue and violets. With Charles, he'd fuss about his woolen underwear, "It's hot, they itch, can't I take them off?"

May first was a time to celebrate. May baskets were hung for the faintest excuse, just to have a party. We'd decorate a basket with pretty crape paper and fill it with candies, gum, cookies and little gifts if the person was a shut-in. Then we'd cover all with the pretty spring flowers. When the young folks gathered that night, we'd go quietly to the home of the person to be honored, leave the basket on the doorstep, knock, and run and hide. The hostess must then go out and find everyone and invite them in for games and refreshments.

One never to be forgotten May basket was made and filled by the Northways; Della, Clara and George; Ethel Hurd, Fred Long and we Seymours. We planned to leave it on the door step of Mr. & Mrs. Henry Spencer, who lived close by the Northways. We placed the basket, knocked and quietly started to the Northway home through the meadows between the two places. Just then a shotgun went off with both barrels. The shot fell on the Northway porch roof, frightening the parents as well as us. We huddled back of a large boulder in the field until we heard the men shout it was safe to come to the house. It seems Mr. Spencer thought he would have some fun with us and didn't mean to frighten us. It was a careless thing to do and the mothers told him so. That ended our parties for that year.

## The Berry Season

After the joy of the spring months with the return of the birds and wild flours, came the hunt for wild strawberries. Wild strawberries are the most delicious treat. The taste can't be matched by the best flavored cultivated ones. The only drawback is the small size of the wild berry. It took so many for a shortcake. But this was no problem to four children with plenty of time. Mother made the best biscuit shortcake, and we loved to provide the wild strawberries. To do this we roamed the pastures, following the rail fences, for the early berries found in each enclosure made by the rails were the largest then. Later, when Father mowed the meadows, he'd keep watch for berries as he cut the grass, and call us to pick them up. These were the largest, sweetest and best; and too, they were on stems, and easier to hull. How good they tasted!

Soon after wild strawberries, raspberries were ripe and picking them for jam, pies, shortcake and tea berries kept us out of mischief.

When we were little, Father picked all the blackberries, as struggling with the briers was too rugged for youngsters. He'd watch out for the blossoms and keep the patches secret. Then when ripe, he loved to surprise us with a ten-quart pail of the finest blackberries. What luscious pies, steamed puddings and desserts these berries made! Father's specialty was blackberries, bread and milk.

When we were older, Ella, Charles and I had a frightening experience when we went blackberrying on Spencer Hill. We'd often been there with Grandmother Seymour, but never alone before. Mr. Spencer told us the berries were plentiful and to help ourselves, and so we did

one morning. On the way home with two large pails of fine berries, we rounded a large boulder and saw a herd of cows grazing on the hillside just below us, where we had to cross to reach our woodlot. The cows didn't disturb us, as we were country children, but leading them was the Spencer's ugly bull. He was making the turf fly with his hoofs and digging up clods of earth with his sharp horns, only stopping to bellow loud and long. At first Ella and Charles wanted to run for our fence, but I felt it wasn't safe to attract his attention, so we drew back behind the boulder, climbed to the top, taking time to pass up the pails of precious berries. For a long time we crouched on the rock, peeping over from time to time to see if the bull had started away. Every time we moved, it seemed the boulder shook with his roars.

At long last the cows passed out of sight around the bend and the angry bull slowly followed, pausing to look back now and again to stamp his feet and make the hills echo his roars. There never were more thankful children than we to see him go. We stretched our cramped muscles and clambered down and set a record for speed, I'm sure, in crossing to the safety of our woodlot.

## Blueberries Are Ripe

One of the nicest memories is blueberry days. For several years Father and Mr. Hurd hired the Hull farm as this gave them the extra pasturage and hay needed to supplement their smaller farms. These pastures abounded in Blueberry bushes and in one was a fine cranberry bog. The berries were ripe about the time the men started haying, so we were impatient to hear Father say, "The berries are ripe and Mrs. Hurd wants you to go tomorrow." This was good news, for it meant two or three trips with the men up the mountain road to the Hull farm near Tolland and West Hartland. Mother, Charles and I loved to pick the berries, but Father refused, as it took so many berries to fill a pail. Ella preferred to do the housework and look after Doris, who was too small to help.

We rose before the sun was up, had an early breakfast, packed a basket lunch, and were off before seven. It was wonderful so early in the morning; everything dew-drenched, sparkled in the sunshine; the birds sang and we'd count the different kinds that flew across the not much traveled road, listening to their music. There were the sweet odors of the ferns and fragrance of pine and hemlock trees. We'd stop sometimes to uproot a fern or flower for Mother's garden. Often woodchucks, rabbits and squirrels appeared only to scurry away at the sight of us. What excitement was caused one morning when Mr. and Mrs. Skunk and three baby ones were seen in the road ahead. They ran along the wheel track for a short time, then made off into the woods, probably more scared than we, but were we glad to see them disappear!

On reaching the Hull farm, the men began their work and we started for the berry lots to get the most of our picking done in the cool of the day. There were so many bushes we could be "choosy" and pick only the biggest of berries. Time went quickly and soon pails were filled and our stomachs called for lunch, so we'd return to find the men and eat our picnic lunch.

No food ever tasted better than those lunches. The bracing air of the hills helped give us an appetite. One lunch time we had a story to tell the men. How excited we all were, and all talked at once. The story was this: Mother and Mrs. Hurd approached a large bush just full of

the finest berries and started to fill their pails. Then Mother saw this large snake raise its head. She got away fast, and so did the rest of us. One said it was a black snake, one said a brown striped one. Then Father asked me, and I replied, "I don't know, it was a long slithering snake and I ran for the fence". Mr. Hurd told Charles, "You were the man, why didn't you do something?" Charles, about 6, said, "I had a stone to hit him with, but he shook his tongue at me and I ran!" The men said the snake was probably harmless and was just eating the nicest berries he could find for lunch, but the experience made us approach every bush very carefully that afternoon. Charles felt the men needed him to rake hay, so didn't go with us.

By four the men had the wagons loaded with sweet smelling hay and we were ready to go home. It was a "scary" business getting on the hay load, as we needed help to step on the shafts, then on the back of the horse and be helped to the top by the driver. We always rode with Mr. Hurd down the long hill, as our horse "Bill" often stood straight up, then ran down the next hill. We didn't want to experience that thrill again. He was o.k. on the level, so we'd finish the last mile atop Father's load.

Mother often canned forty quarts of blueberries for winter use. Fresh blueberry pies, muffins and steamed puddings – just the thoughts of them make my mouth water.

## Nutting

The first "nippy" mornings of late September and early October would send us scurrying downstairs to finish dressing by the warm fire. How good breakfast smelled and how hungry we were. On such mornings, one of us was sure to think of nutting, and say, "Let's go to the woods tonight after school and see if we are going to have nuts this year". Father had been before, but he always let us go see for ourselves. There is nothing nicer than the smell of the woods at this time of year. We'd visit all the hickory nut trees, the many chestnut trees, and the few butternut trees on the farm and scan each one for sight of nuts. In plentiful years we could hardly wait for the killing frosts to open the burrs and hard outer shells. When these came, armed with baskets and pails (Father usually went along with a long pole for knocking the nuts off the branches), we'd go to the woods for the coveted nuts.

We had to gather a few to satisfy our appetites at first, of course. Chestnuts are hardly known these days, but then we had a feast on them. We never gathered too many, as we liked them to eat when ripe rather then when dry. It was fun to sit on the ground near a rock (many were found in the New England pastures) and crack open the shells of the hickory nuts with a small stone for a hammer, and taste once again the nuts we liked so much. How the squirrels chattered when we came! Probably wishing we'd leave their winter supply of food alone. We often heard or startled a partridge as we rustled through the leaves.

` With a good supply of nuts we'd go home and spread then to dry. We always gathered as many hickory nuts and butternuts as we could, as we never bought nuts those days, for nut cake, candy or Christmas cookies.

How the squirrels would work days to get their supply of winter food. It was fun to see a squirrel with a mouth full of nuts scurrying along the limbs of the trees, off to its winter home in

a nearby tree trunk. Mother told us not to fret that they would go hungry when nuts were plentiful, as they worked from dawn till dark stowing away nuts.

One nutting trip I remember well. Father took Esther and me to the pasture, where the chestnuts were ready for gathering. We'd just filled our pails when it began pouring rain. Father hurried sister and me into a hollow trunk of an old chestnut tree, placed us and two pails of chestnuts inside, took the other pail and ran for home. We waited and waited for him to return for us after the shower was over, and began calling him when we grew tired of waiting. Mother went outside for water and heard us calling and noticed then that Father was doing a bit of fall plowing north of the house. She called to him asking if he knew where we were. He had completely forgotten us in the hollow tree, but hurried up to bring us home.

Christmas, 1904

Before the aroma of Thanksgiving's chicken pie and steamed fruit pudding had faded away, we began real plans for Christmas. So much to be done! First we counted our hoarded pennies and talked with Mother about ways of "stretching them out". Our Christmas lists were made out for Mother to purchase for us and conferences held on gifts for our parents. Mother would choose one of us to go with her on the great shopping trip of the year. The lucky one had a wonderful time; no school for that day, and the treat of seeing the stores in their Christmas dress, the toys and the pretty window displays, but best of all the chance to buy their own gifts. A long cold ride in a sleigh to Winsted – but we loved it.

Then came the gifts to be wrapped and hidden from prying eyes. The old farmhouse held many secrets; we each chose a place and then it was "Don't go near that drawer", "Don't open that closet door", or Mother saying, "Don't go into the parlor", and wonder of wonders, we didn't. There would be no surprises on Christmas morning and we loved the suspense, I think. We had Mother put away any gift coming by mail, too. It was all in the Christmas spirit, and we spent a lot of time guessing what was in the boxes and hoping Santa would bring the coveted skates or doll carriage. We spent happy hours popping pop corn and making long strings of it for the tree; we made strings of cranberries also for the tree. Then we made paper chains of silver and gold paper we'd saved for decorations, too.

On Christmas Eve, before leaving for bed, we'd place the chains of pop corn and cranberries and paper chains on the table with a plate of sandwiches and cookies, and a pan of hot cocoa on the stove for Santa. Mother brought out our store ornaments to place with them and then we hustled up the cold stairway to beds made warm with hot soapstones.

One Christmas Eve something wakened me and I thought I had heard sleigh bells. I listened, thinking it must be Santa, (although by then I was half convinced Santa was a spirit). After a long time of quiet, I wakened Esther and Ella and we tiptoed downstairs to the large, warm kitchen. The doors were closed to the bedroom and parlor. A lamp burned on the table beside a box of chocolate-covered molasses chips, but no tree and our stockings were limp, except for a piece of kindling wood in each. Never were there more mystified children. Helping ourselves to the candy, we quietly crept up to bed again.

We waited until we were called next morning, as we were in no hurry to go down to no Christmas. In the kitchen we were greeted by Aunt Julia and Uncle Thomas. When did they arrive? I thought of the sleigh bells in the night and believed I knew.

Not a word did we say about our trip downstairs the night before, and Charles was the only one to ask where Santa put his engine. Father laughed and told us, "I saw Santa yesterday afternoon driving north like the reindeer were running away; he called to me, 'I'm afraid I can't make your house this year.'"

We were very quiet, not knowing if Father was teasing or not. But after breakfast, they took us into the parlor and there in all its splendor stood the prettiest hemlock tree, its branches covered with our decorations, candies and a doll for Ella tied to its firm trunk. The other gifts were around the tree on the floor. We were speechless. We seldom used the parlor in winter and Mother wanted us to eat breakfast first, so planned a double surprise. We never told them about our midnight trip until several years later. They never heard us, as they were so busy with our surprise. Chocolate-covered molasses chips are still a big favorite candy with me.

When our tree began to shed its needles, the trimmings came off, were packed away, and the tree placed outdoors with food for the birds tied to its branches. Then we began to dream of next Christmas.

Not only did we look forward to Christmas at home, but at church, too. Here the real meaning of Christmas was learned. We spent many happy hours after school learning Christmas songs and parts in plays. It was a special honor to have a separate piece to say. The whole village contributed to the Christmas Gift Fund for all the children who would come. For years Mr. Humphrey supplied the tree, always a beautiful spruce from his land in Massachusetts, and played the part of Santa Whiskers. I remember candle-lit trees in the church too, until the insurance company told us we couldn't do it anymore. The grownups enjoyed it as much as we children and applauded every effort we made to entertain them. They joined in the singing of the loved Christmas carols, forgot their cares and a feeling of goodwill seemed to fill the church.

The end

Postscript

Helen Louise Seymour, born 3-20-1897 at Colebrook River; graduated Gilbert 1916; Danbury Training School, 1918; taught at Colebrook schools (Center and River), 1918 – 1924; Durham 1924 – 1927; Hartford 1927 – 1932. She retired because of health. Died ____?

Having just completed this memoir by Helen Louise Seymour, I regret not having entered it into the computer sooner than I did, as it certainly supplies a wide window into the life in The River in the first few years of the twentieth century. The author was the same age as my parents, so those of us who were born in the late twenties and early thirties can easily relate to all of the happenings. I found it quite interesting to find that her experiences and mine were so similar, regardless of the fact that we were of different genders. I believe this is partly due to the fact that neither of us grew up with electricity; neither knew paved roads and understood the horse, both as a means of transportation and as a supplier of power on a farm. Most of the farms were small by today's definition, but it allowed us to be independent of many of the demands of society.

We all faced the same challenges, enjoyed the same comforts and had a strong feeling of belonging to the same community.

It is interesting (and comforting) for any "old-timer" to recognize the number of family names that still persist locally; names such as Seymour, Spencer, Deming and Ransom. Others still have descendents, but with other names, having come down through the female side of the family; names such as Ward, Northway, Baxter, Stillman, Ives, Verchot, Bourquin, Chapin and Rebillard.

The reference to her grandfather being a carpenter in Sterling, Illinois and encountering Indians sent me searching for this frontier town; it is about fifty miles northeast of Davenport, Iowa and twenty-five miles east of the Mississippi River.

The bad experience of going down the steep part of Beech Hill with a truculent horse will almost always revive memories in those of us who lived on that section of road before the days of realigned Connecticut Route 8 and paved roads. It is about 150 feet almost straight down near the top, and the one-board fence separating the traveler from oblivion that Helen Seymour mentions was to remain in place until the 1950s, after having been there about a century. When my father was a game warden during the Second World War, he checked a fisherman somewhere along the Farmington who asked, after inquiring of my father where he lived, if that board fence was still in place down Beech Hill. When he replied, "Yes, it is, I just went past it this morning", the fellow, who was a gray-haired oldster, said that he had helped build that fence when he was a teen-ager, which would have placed the date around the late 1870s or early '80s.

Cliff Moore, from Harvey Mountain in Tolland, the grandfather of George Gray, had a section of Beech Hill Road slide down into the deepest part of the gorge while he was taking a load of hay from Chapin Road. It missed taking his rear wheels by less than ten feet,

Accounts such as this one by Helen Seymour will help keep alive the memory of that section of our town which now lies sleeping beneath the waters of Colebrook River Lake.

Bob Grigg, 2011