

THE CHRONICLE

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THE CHRONICLE

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WAR ON OUR ROAD

By Jan Spies

Hidden away in an estate box of Herb Day, former Board member, President, and curator of the barn Museum, we found the following article which came from *Vogue's First Reader*, 1934. Although we have not been able to discover the history of Jan Spies, we thought it was such a wonderful article that we wanted to share it with you. We later found that Mr. Day had written the article in a previous *Chronicle*, but felt it was well worth repeating.



Levi Squires' home, late 1800s

"Our road was founded by the family Godfrey in pre-Revolutionary days. A stone's throw beyond the green-shuttered, white Colonial house that was the Godfrey master house, there are a stone wall, two lilac bushes, and a doorstone, all that remains of the original Godfrey house. In the original house, the famous Gold Dragoons once met under the aegis of Colonel Gold during the years 1775-1779. Today the Gold Dragoons are again forming as a home defense unit to patrol the roads leading to the new dam and to assure enemy parachutists of an unhappy landing. If those first Gold Dragoons still meet in the

early shades of evening, they must wonder at this new war. . . war the hard way, war from the skies.

"Every American war has been on our road . . . Godfrey Road. The Revolutionary, with a Connecticut Yankee pitchforking a Hessian officer down our road. The War of 1812 that a Godfrey captained. The Civil War with a bugle boy from the road writing letters home. The war that had a slogan, 'Remember the Maine,' and yellow fever that laid a soldier from our road to rest far from home. World War One saw a Major from our road decorated in France. The road is at war again.

"It is a different road now from the road that heard the creak of cart wheels turning, the lowing of cows being brought back from pasture, the not infrequent click of deer's feet, or bark of foxes. It is two and a half miles long, dissected by a highway, but still scarcely more than a rutted country lane, still warily plodding to a hilltop, gaily dipping into an orchard, turning a cold shoulder to a brook that approaches it too closely.

"It is a road of old houses, trees old enough to have great-grandchildren, gardens that bloom from May to October. It is a road of neighborliness, of serenity, of peace. But it is a road girded for war again, ready to preserve its rights against the invader, an all-out road in this war for democracy. A road that a man in Australia thinks of when he thinks of home; a road that is home

WAR ON OUR ROAD - CONTINUED



David Godfrey house

to a war correspondent, an artist who does war posters, a cartoonist who shows his opinion of the war to hundreds of thousands of readers, a manufacturer who turned his factory to war production. English refugees, French refugees, a man who organizes entertainment for the Army camps, women who are knitting, defense workers, a man who has two sons at some far-flung fronts. It's war for every man and woman of our road.

"It is a different war for each of them. To begin with, there is the farmer on our road, the old-timer. His grandparents lived on the road, his father and mother lived there, and he has lived there all his life. If a human being can be called a root in the sense that he belongs where he is, then Levi is a root of New England . . . a root of our Connecticut road. It must have a special meaning for him, the meaning that a river has for a man who spends all of his life sitting on the bank observing life flowing past him, not intrinsically related to it. Levi is not intrinsically related to the people on the road because they are city people transplanted to the country. Not for them the deep knowledge of the season's changes, the earth's yielding, the patient planting. His blue eyes, set in furrows, see clearly what is hidden from them, but because these new people have come to his

road, they are his charges.

"He is a true native of New England, kindly, simple, good, and wise, and all those other things they say about New England too. Shrewd, hard-bitten, fearless, the best friend a man could have, the worst enemy. But the newcomers are his friends. He chops wood for them, digs out their wells, and ploughs their fields. He brings them Yule logs at Christmas time, medicine when they are ill, tears when they die. He is the personification of the road, and now that the road is at war he chops



Reconverted barn belonging to Wood Cowans

more wood (for we face an oil shortage on the road), he farms longer hours; if he could be, he is kinder. If catastrophe came to our road, we would all instinctively turn to him.

"The Godfrey master house was built in 1790. It is guarded by two huge maples that wear the conventional wreath of robins' nests in their hair, but that is as far as they allow the conventions to disturb them. Their limbs are set in foreboding gestures toward the north from whence the hurricanes come, they refuse to donate sap for any purpose whatever, and

they encourage violets and daffodils to blossom close to their tired, old roots.

"The house, rechristened Fox Pass, is gracious, set in flower-beds and lilac bushes. A small orchard is part of its war effort. The farthest flower garden has become a kitchen-garden with strawberry plants, and vegetables. The vegetable-garden has been doubled in size, and the chicken house is in process of becoming a one-room residence . . . a self-sustaining unit for the duration. The little house will be heated with wood (cut on the place), and the root cellar and pantry shelf (filled with canned goods from the summer garden) will supply all the necessary food except meat.

"In the small house across the road, the air-raid warden, once a famous actress, gives almost full-time to her job. It is full-time there on the road, for the sound of the siren is apt to be lost unless one attends it carefully. And there is endless checking of water facilities, sand-buckets, general articles needful in case of fire, for the road has no Fire Department, but a small volunteer until that would have to go where the danger was greatest.



Upper Parish Schoolhouse

WAR ON OUR ROAD - CONTINUED

"Next on the road is a huge modern farm with refrigerator plants, a magnificent root cellar, hot-houses, horses and cows. Due to the labor shortage, the whole family spends the week-ends and vacations planting, pruning, weeding. The war has a special meaning for them, with a young son hurrying toward the Air Force and spending his last civilian days for the duration taking rocks out of the hillside garden, setting plants in place, tending the cold-frames.

"Beyond the big farm and across the road from it, there is a French Provençal cottage that has made itself very much at home on the New England road. It has graciousness and charm and the first daffodils that bloom in the spring. No one knows why they bloom there first, but they may have some reason of their own. Perhaps they learned a wayward efficiency from the master of the house. He is meeting the war problem by putting into effect his Work Simplification plan, which will increase war productivity by fifty per cent. This plan is already in use with DuPont, Vultee Aircraft, Republic Steel, and others. But it is hard to believe that sheer efficiency makes daffodils bloom a week ahead of time. Perhaps the stone wall they grow



Lum Gould farm, later owned by Nicolai Sokoloff

beside is warm.

"Two English women have made a practical, self-sustaining farm of their home. They have chickens, a vegetable garden, berry patches, and, last year, they raided their beehives for eighty pounds of honey. This year, they think the bees are aware of the sugar rationing and will double their output. Honey for defense, a motto on our road. One of the sisters was a V.A.D. in the last war and is hostess to homesick English sailors. 'Funny, this seems like home,' one of them told her.



'No funny,' she retorted, 'this road goes winding back a long ways. The Godfreys came from England, by boy.'

"The road dips down a steep hill and crosses the highway where the mailboxes wait for mail from places the mailman can't pronounce. The censor has stamped the letters. They are so precious that the hand that reaches for them trembles with eagerness, with joy. Johnny is a long way from Godfrey Road, but he hasn't forgotten a single thing, not the neighbors, or his pet horse, or the pies that ma bakes on Saturdays. What's the



Original Godfrey house and farm, later owned by the LaChat family

war about? About getting it over with and getting home to the road. 'I have a picture of you folks in front of the house tacked up in my tent. It sure looks great.' Tents in a row under a stabbing sun, mail-boxes in a row on a peaceful country road, but the distance between them is only as long as it takes to say, 'There's a letter from Johnny.' Yes, in the house back of the mail boxes, there are two sons in the service... a soldier and a sailor. When it's over, they'll both claim they won the war... well, what's an Army without a Navy, and vice versa?

"In the old house across the brook, there are two small children. Their father hasn't seen the baby. He writes from Australia, where he is a war correspondent. He writes publicly about the war and privately about the baby and about his three year old son and about what joy it will be finally to be coming home. His wife is organizing a special fire brigade, volunteers from the 5:31. She is also responsible for a plan to double up on trips to the station, trips to town, general conversation of tires and gasoline.

"In what was once the little white schoolhouse, a war correspondent from Berlin has written his book, Strategy of Terror. He is now attached to Colonel Donovan's staff, engaged in sending war news,

WAR ON OUR ROAD - CONTINUED

authentic war news, to Europe by short wave. His wife, who came from Europe with him, whose family are in Switzerland now, says, 'I'm ashamed to have to much to eat. My mother has so little.' She will be a citizen soon, and then she can do ever more war work than she is doing now. She works in her vegetable garden a great deal. She has even learned not to shrink when the planes pass overhead.

"The house at the top of the road, the last house on the road, is set in gardens and orchards. Two small boys and a dog run through the grass, and in the big studio their father draws his strip cartoons of family life as they live it. 'Thad' and 'Boopy' are excelling models of what boys all over America are thinking and doing in these days of the new war. They are a little more serious than they were last year. They know more words, more

names on their maps. They would rather be a home than any place else, because suddenly that house with protective wings outspread has become precious to them. They explain what they feel when they say, 'We listen to the English kids broadcasting to their mothers and fathers back in England.'

"In spite of the way that the lives of the road go beyond it to wars on other continents, to war as it is fought in our own nation's capital, to war as it stems from our own great cities, the life of the road itself makes the war a practical issue. Conservation is a byword; more than that, it is a by-product. What was once discarded is saved, every hand turns to making the most of what there is. One trip to town, in one car, suffices where before cars hummed casually over the road. The road turns out full force for town meetings to put down any hint

of useless expansion, to suggest more general ways to conserve. During canning season, the women will share, not recipes alone, but the fruits from their orchards and berry patches, the vegetables from their gardens, the chickens that can be canned against winter needs.

"Our road is a country road, remote from city activities, but it is not an escapist's road; it is a peaceful road, but it is a road at war, too. It does not say this is the first war for democracy or the last war for freedom - it says I saw war on the ground, muskets and bluecoats; I saw war at sea, war between brothers, war to end wars, and no I'm seeing all-out war. Back of every soldier is his family, back of every soldier is the road he left waiting for him to come marching home. That's always been the end of war, it will always be the end of war, the long march home to your own road." ◇

ANYONE WANT TO PLAY?

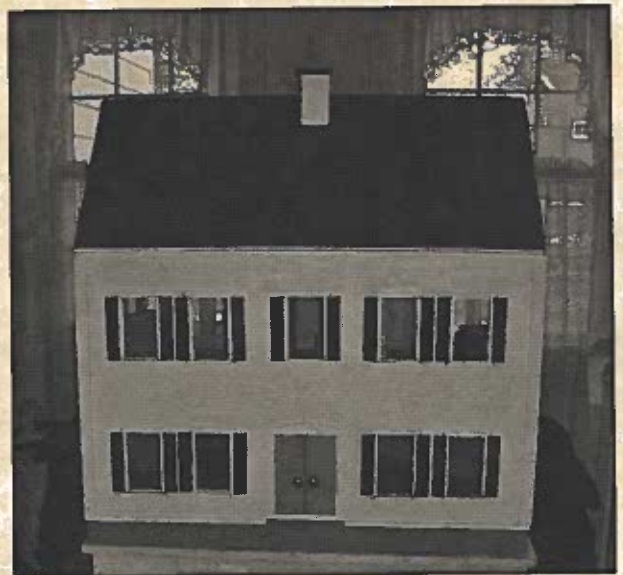
We were so excited this past year to be called by Patricia Bill Peabody who was a former resident of Weston. She called and asked if we would be interested in a doll house that her carpenter had made for her daughter. When Pat moved to town they wanted to do some renovation on their house and she called a local carpenter to do the work. The gentleman was so enamored by her daughter that he made her a doll house which was a replica of the house in which they lived. The house is the historic Joseph Godfrey home, built in 1820, located at the corner of Godfrey Road and Newtown Turnpike.

Of course, we were very anxious to have such an incredible gift. It

is quite large and has a table under it, also made by the carpenter, so that you can stand and play in the house. There is carpet, stairs, windows, and some furniture that went with it. We have already had a donation of doll house furniture that we will add to the rooms. Pat also had at one time put lighting in the house.

If anyone would like to come and see the doll house or just play around and fix it up, we would love to invite you to come to the Coley House. We are grateful to Pat and

her family for giving us this wonderful piece of childhood memories. We would love to show it off. ◇



MARGARET GIFFORD REMEMBERS GODFREY ROAD

Along with the Jan Spies article on Godfrey Road, we also found a reminiscence from Margaret Gifford from a 1988 Chronicle. This also talks about her memories of Godfrey Road "back in the day."

She began by saying that a wet snow falling in Vermont where she was living brought back memories of Godfrey Road in Weston. "Our farm was the fourth one from Route 57, or Newtown Turnpike. The west branch of the Saugatuck River flowed thru the eighteen acre hay field across from our love New England colonial.

"Godfrey Road was a quiet area with only five families, each raising some cows, pigs, chickens and a couple of horses. Hay and grain and potatoes were the main crops.

"Rachel Andrews, a Civil War widow, lived alone up the hill from us. She tended her animals and farm, as did Mary Lib Turney, on the other side of us. She also was a Civil War widow. I remember her telling that she sobered her husband by locking him up in the hay press in the barn. The Cy Weeks lived there some years later and the Wood Cowans make a lovely home of Rachel's place.

"The Lum Gould farm was sold to the Nicolai Sokoloff's. They started an outdoor theater and had summer eve concerts. Mr. Gould, 'Lum', was a great fox hunter and did a good job of preparing skins and sold them thru Sears Roebuck. The other farm was owned by Harold and Maud Burritt. They were the only ones that sold milk to a large milk company in Norwalk. In later years, the farm was sold to Mr. & Mrs. LaChat. They continued the milk business for some years.

"The pasture fields in this area grew great crops of wild berries, such as blueberries, huckleberries and bellberries. Blackberries were always large and juicy. The women felt obligated to pick these fruits and usually put up a great many cans for pies and cobbler desserts. Next we had elderberries and large wild grapes. I can taste that delicious grape catsup that Eva Barnes taught me to can.



"There were many private barrels of wine before Prohibition days. Perhaps some after, too. The apple crop was important to all and sweet cider became hard cider in time.

"The upper Parish school is now a home, but I believe we got a good education and recall the effort those dear teachers put into their duties. Some of the eighteen



students walked five miles each way and carried their lunch. Some would eat their bag of food before they ever got to school. We had to fetch a pail of water from our well and enjoyed going to a stream in the woods. Our school graduation was held in the Norfield Town Hall. It burned to the ground later. Some of us were lucky enough to go to Norwalk High School. I walked to and from Cannondale Railroad Station. Carrying my books was the hardest part of the daily trip.

"Later years we sold our farm to a prominent couple; actor and actress John Cecil Holm and his wife, Faith Drake. John wrote 'Three Men on a Horse.' It was a popular

show here and in Europe. Sarah Churchill lived there while she play on Broadway, Later, the James Rands - of typewriter fame - enjoyed the old house for some time.

"My old clock has just struck the hour of twelve. It causes me to think of the great outdoor clock on Harriet Hubbard Ayers home next to Cobb's Mill. With the strike of twelve, the twelve Apostles appeared and moved around the outside of the time piece. I enjoyed waiting for the clock to strike."

With that, Mrs. Gifford signed off with kindest regards to all in Weston and thanking us for letting her share her memories. We loved hearing about these memories and think it is wonderful how much their apparently hard life brought them such joy. ◇

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*The Historical Society Celebrates the Holidays, Victorian Christmas party 2013
Special thanks to the Weston Garden Club for their festive decorations*