

winchester  
historical  
society

# Black Horse Bulletin

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## *ORAL HISTORIES COME ALIVE*

**By Randy Bairnsfather**

On the evening of Oct. 29, the recollections of four long-time Winchester residents, unheard for decades, were brought to life. Their oral history interviews, along with many others recorded in the early 1980s, had been safely stored in the Town Archives in acid-free boxes. Then nearly 20 years later transcriptions were done and stored alongside the audiotapes. The stories contained in the interviews remained dormant until the Society's fall program, *In Their Own Words*.

As Marilyn Preston took the part of interviewer, Dick and Dot Santos spoke for the residents, and it was as if those people were standing before us telling about their work, town, and families. Dick, speaking for former Chief of Police Edward Bowler, told amusing stories about his early days on the police force when police officers did all the clerical and janitorial work. When Bowler joined the force in 1938, he was paid \$36 a week. Officers had to buy their uniforms so they would go into a store in Boston to purchase used uniforms of the Boston police—trousers for \$2, blouse coat for \$6, an overcoat for \$10—the fit was never perfect. There was much laughter from Bowler's stories about the incomparable Chief Rogers.

Next Dick became the voice for Nick Rosa, a native of Italy, who worked for the Department of Public Works for 35 years. He told how everything was done by hand in the old days. "We used to have one hundred men with shovels down the square picking up snow, loading trucks. We had three double teams of horses and eight or nine single rigs.... We invented one of those sleighs—pungs. Up on High Street, after the men had broken up the drifts so the horses could get a footing, we put a plank across the runners of the sleigh, and four horses would open up the road. There weren't too many houses up there at the time. It was wild country. Some drifts were ten feet high."

Dot Santos took the part of Valerie Timmons O'Connor who trained as a nurse at Winchester Hospital from 1918 to 1921. Five months after her arrival and with very little training under her belt, the flu epidemic hit, and she found herself in charge of the hospital's first floor. "That meant I had to take care of the maternity ward, the operating room, the telephone, and I had a floor with 14 patients to take care of from seven at night until seven in the morning." As a student nurse she was paid \$9 a month. "I worked seven days a week—that included a half day in the middle of the week and a half day on Sunday."

***Oral Histories (continued from page 1)***

Dot then spoke for Marjorie Cutting Mason, born in 1886, whose grandfather Alexis Cutting was in the lumber business and whose father, Frank Cutting, dealt in hemlock bark. "I used to go with him to Beggs and Cobb on Swanton Street when he went there on business. We had a horse and carriage, and I would meet him at the station and take him over. I didn't enjoy it at all—it was awfully smelly. It was the combination of all the hemlock bark and tanning. That was before they used chemicals. That put my father out of that business."

She recalled the trolley cars. "When I wanted to go to dancing school, I didn't want to be driven down by horse and carriage. I wanted to walk to Symmes Corner and take the horse car. I remember them well. Particularly in the winter, it was fascinating to get into the horse cars because there was a little stove in the corner, and they put coal into the stove. There was no protection for the driver. One time I was shocked when I saw his beard was frozen and it was just like icicles. I came home almost in tears, I felt so sorry for him."

*In Their Own Words* was so well received that another oral history program is being planned for the spring of 2003.

**ROBERT METCALF**

**by Ellen Knight**

Condensed from an article in the *Daily Times Chronicle*, Aug. 30, 2002

About a century ago, Winchester welcomed its first full-time superintendent of schools, Robert C. Metcalf. Due to a gift of Metcalf materials to the Society from his great-grandson, also named Robert C. Metcalf, we can now know more him.

Metcalf came to Winchester after a long career in education. His own earliest schooling took place in a one-room red schoolhouse, about half a mile from his father's farm in Wrentham. "Our

knowledge of literature was confined to the brief selections in the school readers... Our work in geography, grammar, and history was of the most primitive character." After his father moved to a factory village, "my father sent his children to school whenever there was a suitable school to attend, but the school terms were very short, and the teachers, well, they were the best that could be found for two and one-half or three dollars per week beside their board."

After a three-term course in the Bridgewater Normal School, Metcalf taught in Needham, Weston, Northboro, Cohasset, and Roxbury, all before turning 21 in 1854. His highest annual salary was \$1,000. Marrying in 1856, he found a somewhat more lucrative job in East Boston. Thus began a long, respected career as teacher and master in the Boston schools. From 1882 to 1902 he also served on the Board of Supervisors.

During part of that time, from 1877 to about 1888, the Metcalf family lived in Winchester. Wife Martha served on the School Committee from 1881 to 1884, during the dozen years that women were allowed on that committee during the 19th century. Robert Metcalf served on one of the Town Hall building committees and as a library trustee. During this time (1883), Winchester hired the first of three part-time superintendents. In 1902 Metcalf was asked to take the job full time and accepted because he said he wanted, at age 69, a less demanding position. "At the same time, it permits me to return to Winchester and enables me also to keep in touch with educational affairs to which my whole life has been devoted." He kept the job until 1907 and lived in town until his death in 1911.

Metcalf's annual reports reveal some of his educational philosophy, as in this excerpt from 1906:

"The ideal school has about 40 pupils. In Winchester we average about 42 in the grades. These pupils are not all brilliant scholars. Some are slow and dull, and a very few may come near being stupid. But every one is trying to do his

best, and he is trying because he has a teacher whom he loves. He knows that she is doing her best for him. When he makes mistakes, or even carelessly blunders, he sees how patient she is, and because of her patience, he pulls himself together and tries again. to visit such a school is a delight and an inspiration.

“The room itself reflects the good cheer of teacher and pupils. The very pictures on the walls, and the plants in the windows, are voicing benedictions on the school. The room is not deathly quiet, but what one hears is the hum of a busy group of studious but happy boys and girls. The study periods are short, but they are devoted strictly to hard work. And yet the boys and girls do not think of it as work. The periods for recreation are frequent but brief, and these are given exclusively to play, which our ideal teacher enjoys in full measure with the children.

“Money cannot pay for ideal teachers. Their pay comes in a coin called gratitude, which springs up and continues to grow in the heart of the pupil; and throughout the long years of after life it becomes the inspiration to the highest types of manhood and womanhood.

“Winchester needs ideal schools and wants ideal teachers. When our wants and needs are fully met, Winchester will be an ideal town.”

### ***THIS OLD HOUSE PARTY***

*Question:* What happens when you have 150 people inside a 1922 Colonial home that is undergoing major renovations, complete with sawdust, large power tools, a heating system up and running only the day before, TV personalities, wine and food?

*Answer:* A very good time!

Thanks to the graciousness of homeowners Kim Whittemore and Bruce Leasure and the enthusiastic response from the This Old House program, Historical Society members had a chance to take a peak at the progress on the Cabot Street project. In addition to Bruce and Kim, on-hand and ready to answer questions

were: project architect David Stirling (also Society board member), series host Steve Thomas, contractor Tom Silva, plumbing and HVAC expert Rich Trethewey, and landscaper Roger Cook.

In addition there were people who have worked behind and off camera , including cameraman Steve D’Onofrio (who grew up in Winchester, once worked for the Recreation Department, and got his start in TV with the local cable station), associate producers Deborah Hood and Chris Dick, and publicist Leah Orfanos. Historical consultant Ellen Knight was also among the crowd.

To help us visualize the finished project, display boards posted in the foyer showed both the architectural plans for the house and the beautiful interior decorating schemes that will be used once the renovations are finished.

To learn more about this project, visit: <http://www.thisoldhouse.com>. And if you look at the Web Cam archives for November 8, you can watch the party unfold.

### ***OLD TOWN DIRECTORIES PRESERVED***

**by Randy Bairnsfather**

Perhaps you are curious who was the original owner of your house or who has lived there over the years. Or maybe you are researching an ancestor or someone who lived in town in the 19th century. The Winchester Archives, located in the lower level of the Town Hall, has the most complete run of town directories to be found anywhere. The first was issued in 1874, and this edition is arranged by the surname of the head of household with his occupation and the street of the dwelling. If a woman is head of household, she is usually listed as widow, but some were dressmakers or nurses. House numbers were not assigned, so it is not easy to match the exact house today. The next volume for Winchester appears in 1881, but it isn’t until 1893 that house numbers appear, aiding in matching the house

with a current address, unless the street has been renumbered.

One can see how the town changes from a farming and industrial town to a bedroom suburb by looking at the occupations. In 1874 typical occupations were farmer, blacksmith, currier (working at tanneries), bell hanger, coal teamster, sawyer, pianoforte maker, carriage manufacturer, lumber dealer, and machinist. In the business directory at the end of the volume are listed, among other industries, six leather manufacturers, a felt manufacturer, a harness maker, three boot and shoe makers, a saw mill and a watch hand manufacturer. The town officers included fence viewers, three men on the fish committee, measurers of leather, and measurers of wood and bark.

It is not surprising these volumes are one of the most frequently used in the Archives collection, considering that genealogy is one of the most popular hobbies in the country and that the town's residents are interested in the history of their houses. But the high usage was taking its toll on the volumes—many of them have brittle pages and loose bindings.

This summer, with grants from En Ka Society, Winchester Rotary Club, and the Winchester Historical Society, preservation copies were made of the oldest directories. Those from 1874 through 1915 were sent to the Acme Bookbinding Company in Charlestown. There the pages were scanned, reproduced on acid-free archival paper and bound. A CD-ROM of the pages was also produced. The original volumes are now in storage and the preservation copies are available for use by the public. A copy of the CD-ROM is available at the Winchester Public Library. Ask for it at the reference desk.

Supplementing the town directories and also reproduced were the List of Polls from 1896 to 1910 and seven volumes of the Blue Book of Winchester from 1895 to 1924. Still more volumes of the town directories need to be preserved, especially those of the 1930s through the 1960s. It is hoped that this can be accomplished in the near future.

### ***A CHILDREN'S HISTORY OF WINCHESTER***

What started out as a simple request has turned into a large-scale project for the Historical Society. When a first-grade teacher at the Muraco School asked Gail Sjo to speak to her class as part of their study of Winchester history last spring, Gail was curious to know what kinds of materials the teacher was intending to use. The teacher showed her a mimeographed copy of a hand-written booklet called *A Children's Early History of Winchester* put together by Mildred Alison. Well, Gail had never seen this booklet before nor had the members of the Historical Society board, archives volunteers or the public library director. And discovery of this booklet started a discussion of what resources students and teachers could use to learn about our town's history.

What happened next moved us quickly from the discussion stage to action. Ed Delaney, board member and father of an Ambrose School third grader, took home a copy of the booklet, and it was shown to his daughter's teacher. The teacher told Ed that all the elementary schools were planning to teach a short unit on Winchester History to the 365 third-grade students starting in December or January, which had not been done town-wide in recent years. The teacher asked Ed if she could have a copy of the booklet and a few historical maps for her classroom.

Getting the teacher maps was easy, but somehow just recopying the booklet didn't seem like the right thing to do. So first the booklet was typed up into a Word document. Next, pictures and maps started to be inserted, the text was corrected and edited and some new text was added. Currently, the document is in the final stages of formatting and will be off to the printer soon to make a copy for each third grader and extras to sell through the Society and at Book Ends.

Yet, with all of the research that has been done on this project, a mystery still remains. Who was

Mildred Alison? When did she put together the original booklet? Who did she distribute it to and does the original copy still exist? If you know the answer to any of these questions, please let us know!

The Historical Society thanks Kathy and Ed Delaney and Ellen Knight for all their quick yet careful work on this project and Jim and Diane Donovan for helping scan the pictures.

### **GENEALOGY NOTE**

Information from the 1880 U.S. census and from the 1881 British and Canadian censuses is now available through [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org). When you search for a name at this site now, it will automatically be checked against information transcribed from the censuses, as well as the IGI, Ancestral File, and index to the Pedigree Resource File, or you can opt to search the censuses only. The site and searches are free.

### ***Lt. Col. William Winchester***

Lt. Col. William P. Winchester was the subject of a lecture by local historian Ellen Knight at the semiannual meeting of the Association of the First Corps of Cadets in Boston on Nov. 10.

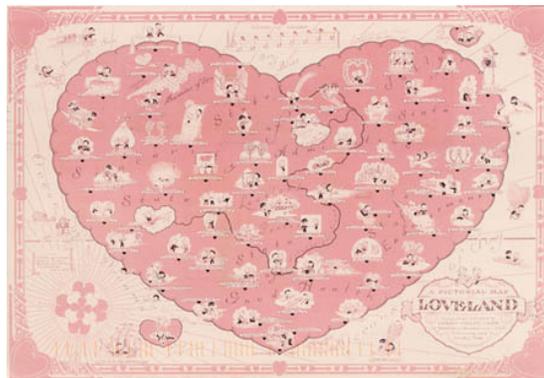
When Winchester was its commander, the corps was the governor's bodyguard. In the 20th century it became part of the National Guard. Reorganized many more times, since 1996 it has been the 211th Military Police Battalion (First Corps of Cadets). There are now about 600 active cadets. After 9/11, members of the corps were assigned to guard Logan Airport, reservoirs, and power plants for six months. Most recently over 400 were mobilized for service in Operation Enduring Freedom and have been deployed to Afghanistan.

### ***GREETINGS FROM WINCHESTER & An Invitation from Harvard***

The Harvard Map Collection will present an exhibit, *Greetings from Winchester: The Pictorial Maps of Ernest Dudley Chase*, from February 11 to April 30, 2003.

A long-time resident of Winchester, Chase (1878- 1966) worked for many decades as a graphic artist and executive in the greeting card industry, most notably for Rust Craft. A man of abundant energy, Chase traveled extensively and recorded his experiences in thousands of drawings. Many of those sketches served as raw material for his maps, greeting cards, and calendars.

His pictorial maps run the gamut from his allegorical rendition of "Loveland" to his whimsical "United States as Viewed by California," from his battle maps of World War II to "Peace Map of the World United." His maps are dense with narrative text and illustrations, often addressing ambitious themes: a history of aviation, a survey of world wonders, even a guide to stamps illustrating the history of exploration and navigation.



The exhibit will focus primarily on Chase's cartographic publications, but it will also include graphite and ink drawings, his annual Winchester calendars, photographs, travel journals, and greeting cards. Many items will be on public display for the first time, including materials from the Winchester Historical Society, the Winchester Town Archives, and the private collection of Fred Holland, Chase's stepson.

The Harvard Map Collection, open to the public, is in Pusey Library, adjacent to Widener Library in Harvard Yard, in Cambridge. The hours of the library are Monday- Friday, 9:00-4:45.

All members of the Winchester Historical Society are invited to the opening on Tuesday, Feb. 11, 5:30-8:00 p.m.

### ***HOLIDAY PARTY*** **from Randy Bairnsfather**

The elegant, warm, and seasonally decorated Winchester Country Club was the scene of the Society's annual holiday party on December 4. After savoring the refreshments, we gathered in the President's Room to hear talks about the country club and the architects associated with it. Ed Delaney, member of the country club and the Society's board of directors, spoke about the history of the club which was founded in 1897 as the Winchester Golf Club. The first course, a six-hole course, was in the area of Winter Pond. In 1902 the club purchased the old Stephen Swan farm. Future purchases extended the property to 170 acres, including 121 acres in Winchester and 49 acres in Arlington.

Richard Joslin, a retired architect who grew up in Winchester and now lives in Cambridge, gave an interesting slide presentation illustrating the work of his grandfather, F. Patterson Smith. He was the junior partner in the firm of Warren and Smith which was hired in 1916 to rebuild and expand the barn on the Swan property. The firm went on to restore the farmhouse and construct a dining room, connecting the barn to the farmhouse.

Maureen Meister, author of *Architecture and the Arts and Crafts Movement in Boston: Harvard's Herbert Langford Warren*, due out next fall, gave a fascinating

slide talk on Warren, founder of Harvard's architecture program and a president of the Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston. She described how Warren's ideas about architecture related to Arts and Crafts themes and how those

ideas are apparent in the firm's projects, including the country club.

Concluding the program was David Stirling, principal of Stirling/Brown Architects who used architectural drawings to show how his firm, in 2000, redesigned the clubhouse, renovating some spaces and adding new ones. A major concern was the twelve to fourteen different levels in the building that had to be made handicap accessible. This was artfully accomplished, and the buildings have retained their historic character.

Society President Gail Sjo expressed the Society's appreciation to the presenters for the interesting program. She presented copies of *Winchester Country Club 1902-2002* by Gary Larrabee to Randy Bairnsfather and Ellen Knight who gave research assistance at the Archives to the author. Also helpful to the author in his research was the late Martha Speers, a director of the Historical Society and Town Archives volunteer.

Copies of the book are available at the Archives and the Library.