

# *The Notebook*

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HOPKINTON HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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## *Stories from the Past*

*compiled by Lauri Arruda*

Since 2001, I have been interviewing many of the citizens of Hopkinton and have spent many pleasant hours listening to their life experiences. I would like to share some of those stories with the reader.

The first man I approached told me I was welcome to come over but he didn't know anything...six hours later...Adelbert "Dell" Crandall was born in 1908 in a large, 18<sup>th</sup> century house on Tomaquag Road. He told me it was a dirt road and the neighbors were few and far between. He said there were many large farms in those days. But added everyone knew each other.

"When I was small, I attended Tomaquag School at the corner of Collins Road and Tomaquag Road. The road was dirt, and if the weather was nice, we would remove our shoes because we only had one pair and needed to save them. There were two doors to walk into the school, one for boys and one for girls. The school was one room with a big woodstove. There was an outhouse, part of it was a wood shed. The school had long benches to sit on. There was no such thing as homework, us kids had to go home and do farm work. When I was twelve, I was the janitor at the school, I was paid 15 cents a day to get the fire going early and sweep and I guess just made sure things were clean and in place." I asked him how they got water to drink. He told me they would pull a bucket up out of the well and dipped a dipper into it. He added, "Nobody covered their wells in those days and we had one dipper, everybody drank out of it."

"When I graduated from the one room school house, I rode to Ashaway School on a two horse wagon, like a school bus, a long wagon with a long seat on each side. The wagon was closed in with heavy cloth. In those day's there were not many motorized wagons or cars around this place. It wasn't important to go to college, I left in the tenth grade."

Dell explained, "We moved to the next farm when I was maybe 7. My father rented from a man named Mr. Wilbur. There was a great big apple orchard on the property and the trees were higher than the house, big trees. The apples were so big and there was twenty five different kinds. Mr. Wilbur didn't live on the farm and he never worked the farm, he got boys from reform school or orphans, old enough to work and they would live with him. He would bring them over to work the farm. Come fall, Mr. Wilbur would take the apples to the county fair and he won ribbon after ribbon for those apples. This was 1917 and there were no bugs, didn't have to spray the trees and you would pick them, big and beautiful, they would be shiny, just like the grocery store. Mr. Wilbur let us have some bushels for ourselves. We had an old Model T, and put those apples in the back. We would ride down one side of

Bowling Lane and up the other side selling those apples. Well, we would make \$12.00 by the time we were done and by golly, that would buy our family a lot of groceries. My father did many different jobs to support the family, he was a hard worker. But it was also up to us kids to do chores and support the family too. One thing us boys would do was hunt and trap. We would sell the fur, mostly to Sears, and depending what kind of animal we caught, it would be cooked up by mother for supper. The money we got for the furs we would give to our mother, money was tight back then. Most people were self-sufficient. Like we would have a large vegetable garden and along with the meat we brought home from hunting, we ate good. Life was so simple then.”

“Something you didn’t see when I was a boy, was trash on the side of the road. And there were no dumps. We recycled everything. Glass bottles were used again or thrown down the outhouse. Vegetable peelings and such were used for compost. Old furniture or wooden things were burned.”

“We went to ‘husking bees’ which were held in the evening. The husking bee was like a party and it was a social event for the young folks. The group would meet at a different farm each time. The corn was dry and you would pull off the leaves. If you found a red ear, you found the nearest girl or boy and got a hug and kiss. I went to as many as I could, but never found a red ear.”

“In 1931, me and Eleanor Champlin were married. We just went off one night and got married. Real simple. We rented a small place in Ashaway, I didn’t know much about Ashaway until I got married and moved into ‘town.’ I worked as a carpenter, plumber, electrician and worked on heating, too, all my life. Back in those days you didn’t need a license to do those things.”

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Gerry Baton, Rockville, interviewed June 2018 – He grew up on Spring Street (Route 138) about a ½ mile north of Camp Yawgoog Road. “I visited Claude Hopkins a lot as a kid. (Claude Hopkins lived a little north of Gerry) He was quite a character, I was maybe 12. I liked going up there. He could use the help. He had a horse and team (of horses) and he would cut hay with the team, load it up on an old truck, drop the hay fork down from the barn and it would go up into the hay mow. Once I went home for lunch and when I came back, he was hanging upside down from the body of the truck. He had been trying to get down from the truck and caught his pant leg. He was probably hanging there for a half hour. He was old then, probably mid to late 70’s. He farmed up until he died. He wore bib overalls all the time.”

“When we were haying down in the fields, way down by the brook, there was an old canning jar perched on the limb of a tree and that’s how we would get a drink. He owned about a hundred acres.”

“I used to go pick blueberries for his wife. Claude would pay me with Barber Liberty Head Quarters or a half dollar. The most he ever gave me was two half dollars because I worked from daybreak until dark because it was going to rain and work needed to be done.”

“I liked living in Rockville, it was nice and quiet then. We pretty well knew everyone. Wincheck Pond was right there, so all summer long, we went swimming. We used to fish a lot, old Mr. Yeles (who lived on the pond) would rent row boats out. Every once in a while we’d get some money up and rent one for a dollar.”

“We used to go up to Jim Edwards’ and play in the barn. One day it was getting dark and we came down the barn stairs to head home. My cousin didn’t see the scuttle hole was open and he fell right down into the cow manure.”

“Some people still didn’t have running water when I was a kid (50’s and 60’s) Everyone had an out house in the back. All kinds of flowers were planted around the outhouse, lilacs, roses, honeysuckle, anything that smelled fragrant.”

“My father was the Police Chief, Bob Baton. The first official police station was his chicken coop in Canonchet. Then out of his house. Police would go out on parole periodically during the week, but definitely on Friday and Saturday. They had to pool their own money for a car. The town would pay for gas and repairs.”

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Harold Arnold, Ashaway, interviewed December 2002 – “I was born in 1917 and grew up on West Street in Ashaway. I was two years old when my father, Daniel Arnold, a jeweler, died from influenza. That was when my mother said the good life ended. She had to go to work in the mills to make a living. She made \$8.00 a week. There was nine children in my family. My older siblings went to work also. As each of us reached an age where we could bring money into the house, we got right to it. In them days, there was always something to do. And you had to go out and look for things to help bring money into the house. I used to walk a man’s cow up to a pasture on top of ‘Diamond Hill.’ Every day in the summer, walk the cow up to the pasture and get the cow in the late afternoon. I did it barefoot to save my shoes. I got 5 cents a day. In those day’s you didn’t forget your responsibilities, if you had a job, you remembered to do it. I was nine years old that summer. When I was 11, I sold seed packs for 10 cents each. Sometimes people would buy a whole dollar’s worth. Oh boy, I was so happy! When I was about thirteen, I learned to trap. I would do that all winter and sell the fur to Sears & Roebuck and they would send a check. I loved the trapping business, I made such good money with that. One time I had a job mowing a lawn on Knight Street once a week. The grass was very tough and in those day’s there was no power lawn mowers, it was a push mower and it took me quite a while to get it mowed. I got 25 cents to mow it.”

“The Ashaway Bridge (by what is now the Line & Twine) was wooden and when you went over it, the bridge made a lot of noise. There was a grist mill at the bridge and John Slocum (the blacksmith) would give me 5 cents to carry corn in a wheelbarrow to be ground over to Jim Johnston (the miller).

“It sounds like all us kids did was work, but we had fun too. Us boys played catch back and forth on the way to school. We played marbles at recess, those marbles was like money to us. My brother bought an old bicycle for me, not too many kids had one. My older brothers were kind to me like that.”

“Mostly people drove Model T’s. Lots of motorcycles. When I was older, I had a Model A and my friends and I would get together and race down the road in them towards Westerly. Gosh, we’d get up to about 40 mph, it’s a wonder we didn’t get killed. Old Frank Brown, he was the only cop in town, if he’d have caught us, he would have put us in jail. In those day’s there was no street signs or stop signs.”

“Mostly each village in Hopkinton was independent of each other. Everything that was needed was in your own village. A very big deal was the fair in September. (the fair was on the grounds where Dunkin’ Donuts is located. The little homes on Route 3, going north, were not built until 1952, it was one big field) Everybody went to the fair. The fair of my day was not like today’s fair. There was no mechanical rides. There were games and of course, no one won a thing. Fair’s in my day were mostly agricultural and items people made, like quilts and such. The ladies made up glass jars with preserved food in them

and they made pies. There were animals that farmers would show off and maybe get a prize. We had fun visiting.”

“People visited back and forth in those days, not like today. Saturday nights were a lot of fun at the Triangle Restaurant. It had a big restaurant, sold gas and had a hall to dance in. There was square dancing on Saturday nights. The music was Perry Crandall, his wife played the piano and he played the fiddle. That’s where I met my wife.” (Dorothy Cooke)



The Triangle Restaurant. Route 3 is to the left and Route 184 is to the right. This photo was taken prior to I-95 being built and was located where the turn is today for the Exit One on ramp from Rte. 3 to travel to Connecticut. *Photograph courtesy of Mac Gray.*

“When I started working at the Pawcatuck Woolen mill in Potter Hill, there was a short cut to get from West Street to the mill and every tree along the way had initials carved into them. A lot of people in Ashaway worked in Potter Hill and they cut cross lots. Those were the days when people could cut through people’s properties and they didn’t care. Nobody bothered anybody. It was a different world back then. One that I miss.”

Gordon Oates – Ashaway – interviewed December 2017 – “I went to Ashaway School and things were more lax back then. My father was a truck driver and would come into the classroom and say, ‘I have to get Gordon, we have to go to Pennsylvania.’ I was about five years old or so. My father wasn’t a fan of Mrs. Barker who was my second grade teacher. She wanted everyone to bring their hankie to school. (The hankie was a square piece of cloth that one would blow their nose in. It would get washed in the laundry. Kleenex was on the market. It was too expensive to use.) Everyone carried a hankie with them. If you forgot your hankie on any given day, you would go to the front of the room and have the back of your hand smacked with a ruler. Hard. That was to remind you to bring in your hankie the next day. Corporal punishment went on in those days.”

“I spent time at the Ashaway Recreation Center (ARC) The building was owned by the Crandall family (Line & Twine) who made it into a gymnasium. There were all kinds of activities for the kids, basketball, baton lessons, movies, teen dances, Halloween parties, there was a trampoline, so many activities. John Marley and Mrs. Fish pretty much ran the place. They were nice people and the Crandall family has always been good to Ashaway.”



*Photos courtesy of Gordon Oates*



“Did you know there was boat racing on the Pawcatuck River? From the Potter Hill Dam to the Meeting House Bridge. You can’t go under the (Meeting House) bridge except with a canoe or a kayak because the rocks from previous bridges were dumped underneath. Racing was big on the river. The Martin family was really big into boat racing, Roland, Pat and Eddie Martin. Roger DeSarro was big into it too. He was pretty much fearless from what I hear.”

Elizabeth (Champlin) Cugini, Westerly, interviewed October 23, 2019 – She was born in 1930 and grew up in Ashaway, daughter of George and Helen Champlin.

“My father owned Champlin’s Filling Station. In those days gas stations were called ‘filling stations.’ My father started the Fire Department in Ashaway because we always had to wait a good amount of time for Westerly to respond to a fire. The fire station was built across the street from his filling station. John Arnold sold the land for the fire house.”

Elizabeth tells of the time she had eight teeth mistakenly extracted at school. “In those days a dentist would come to school, examine our teeth and perform the necessary work. I was seven and in class with another Champlin girl. But Jacqueline Champlin did not attend school the day of the ‘dental work.’ Her father’s name was George Champlin also. When the name Champlin was called, I went right up to the desk. I was asked if my father’s name was George. I said yes, and off I went to the dentist’s office. When my father came home, he hit the roof. He made phone calls and everyone told him it was a horrible mistake. Since the teeth were all baby teeth my father eventually calmed down and let the whole thing drop.”

“During the 1938 hurricane we were at school and my Uncle drove to pick us up. On the way back, the big Elms that lined the street were getting blown over and landing in the road. My Uncle had to drive on people’s lawns to get us home. The buses could not get through to pick up kids at school, those kids had to stay in the school through the storm and during the next day until the trees could be cut up going to the school. My father’s garage was the central place to gather after the storm. There were no chainsaws, the trees had to be cut up by hand saws and groups of men all went about clearing the roads. In those days if you wanted something done, you had to do it yourself. The men worked in shifts and came back to my father’s garage for hot coffee and soup. My father fed them for free. In those day’s everybody took care of each other. “

“Almost everyone in Ashaway worked at the Line and Twine. The people that worked in the long part of the building made sure the lines were coming out perfect. Some of the lines would get knots in them and the workers would have to work to undo the knots. That’s all someone would do take those knots out by hand, the women were the only ones that had the patience to do that. The women workers would wear blue uniforms with a white collar and the men would wear a blue shirt.



## President's Corner

Happy New Year to everyone!

The past year proved to be very successful for the association. Thanks to the generosity of our members, a much needed roof was installed on the Meeting House the first weekend of October. We thank our members for funding this very important project to begin the restoration of the 1790 building.

We had an Open House on December 14<sup>th</sup> which was very successful. The Christmas Party for our members on December 15<sup>th</sup> was fun and a big thank you to Barbara and Bill Capalbo for opening up their lovely home to host the party.



On a sad note, we mourn the passing on December 18<sup>th</sup> of long time member, Hope (Greene) Andrews. For her entire 93 years, she lived in Hope Valley, becoming a local historian for that area.

Joining the HHA in 1757, she wore many hats from writing our first newsletter called, "Hopkinton Notes," to fund raising and served as President for several years.

She is the author of "the History of the Langworthy Library," and "Hopkinton City, the Williamsburg of Hopkinton, Rhode Island." She will be missed.

Lauri Arruda, President

[hopkintonrihistory@gmail.com](mailto:hopkintonrihistory@gmail.com)

401-377-4597

Hopkinton Historical Association  
PO Box 37 - 2 Town House Road  
Hopkinton, RI 02833