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The Edmund L. Sanderson Lecture Series presents

# Reconstructing History & Genealogy: Mom's WWII Letters

By Corinne Hosfeld Smith



Corinne H. Smith is a writer who is originally from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. She served for several years on the board of The Blair County Genealogical Society in Altoona, Pennsylvania. Her first book was a self-published family history titled "From Saxony to the Lehigh Valley: The Descendants of Ludwig Hossfeld" (1992). Since then, she has written several books about American author Henry David Thoreau. She is a former librarian and lives in Gardner, Massachusetts.

Tuesday, June 8, 2021  
7:00 pm via Zoom

**"Reconstructing History & Genealogy:**

**Mom's WWII Letters"** is the story of my discovery of more than eighty letters from 16 different servicemen that my mother corresponded with during World War II. I have taken on the task of tracking down their descendants and returning the letters. So far, I've given letters back to twelve families who had no idea that handwritten pages from their soldier still existed. It's been a fun and educational project, and I still have more work to do.

In May 2017, Corinne Smith found her mother's stash of more than 80 letters. Some are in V-Mail form, which means that the one-page letters were first microfilmed overseas. Then the film was sent to America so that the letters could be printed here and mailed to the proper addressees. The rest were written on various types of stationery. All of the men talk about their experiences as lightly as possible so as not to get censored.

This presentation links history and genealogy to present-day research and diligence. It revisits a time that we may not want to forget. And it may prompt others to wonder for themselves what treasures lurk in their own old family boxes, and how they can share the information with others.

Corinne H. Smith is author of "Henry David Thoreau for Kids" and "Westward I Go Free: Tracing Thoreau's Last Journey"

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*The Weathervane newsletter is constantly seeking stories and reminiscences of our Members' experiences. The following was submitted in manuscript form to the Society by Marjorie Childs Hunt in 1975. Photos were added by the editor where it seemed appropriate.*

## Reminiscences

By Marjorie Childs Hunt — 1975

My home, where I was born, was located in North Waltham, on Lexington Street. It was a large, fourteen room house, built in 1900 by my father for his bride. We had a large lot of land at the rear, where there were shade trees, fruit trees, vegetable garden, currant bushes, and, beyond, a large rock, with a grapevine covering most of it. Hen houses were also part of the landscape. After the death of my Grandfather

Childs in 1902, a few months before I was born, my father and uncle inherited his milk business, which had been carried on in quarters at the rear of their home at 508 Lexington Street. The stable adjoined the milk plant. Later this was removed to the rear, and kept for storage, and a larger barn and milk plant was built, with an ice house and artesian well. Pigeons occupied the loft of the old barn, and a single stall adjacent to our backyard, was kept for an ailing horse, when needed.

My Grandmother and Aunt continued to live in the old home, and just beyond was the large house built by my Uncle William for his family. There was a single trolley line that went by our house from Waltham Center to Lexington.

Beyond that, on the other side of the street, we owned the vacant land leading down to Chester Brook. On this side of the road, we had more vegetable gardens, with asparagus beds also. I used to enjoy walking down by the brook and picking, in season, blood-root, dog-tooth violets, cowslips, and blossoms from the wild flowering trees. Beyond the brook was a hill leading to Storer's woods, where the paths were inviting, with birds, flowers, and trees at every turn. The wild flowers were many and beautiful – violets, honeysuckles, saxifrage, lady-slippers, buttercups, ladies' tobacco, sedge, shepherds' purse, Jill-run-over-the-ground, anemones, bellwort, and many others.

The electric cars helped to create a fantasy for me. My active imagination produced a family by the name of Whitaker, who used to come, via trolleys, to make a call. These beings constituted a

whole household that became very real to me. I also seemed to enjoy teasing my Aunt's large yellow cat, and stealing kerosene from my Grandmother's cellar, as a toothsome delicacy at lunch-time. Playing paper dolls with my chum next door and learning to ride a bicycle occupied some of my time. We also took walks to the Jericho area (to the northwest) and in the winter used our Flexible Flyers or toboggans either down this slope, or the hill near Storer's.

When I was six years old, I went to the Pond End School on Winter Street, where there were only two rooms and two teachers, who taught four grades each. There were double desks in these rooms, where my father before me had learned his lessons. These desks often bore the carved initials of my predecessors. In the smaller room, I first began to struggle with the fundamentals of education with Miss Georgina Pratt. We laboriously went through our pronouncing charts, wandered in the depths of arithmetic, and stumbled over our reading books. There were only a few pupils in each grade, so the teachers could give us more individual attention and help. While one class recited, we were supposed to be preparing our next lesson. However, the teaching schedule seemed to be constantly changed, improvising from day to day. When I moved into the 5th grade, in the larger room, with Miss Ellen Jones as my teacher, I spent only one year there, as we were obliged to move into new quarters in the fall. There was, I believe, no teacher equal to Miss Jones, who was superior in every way, and to whom I owe more than to anyone else for my early, well-rounded education. I well remember, in the winter months, how we used to heat up our lunches by putting them over the large register, and how we used to hook pung rides to school, whenever possible, as the streets were very seldom plowed, if at all.

While attending classes at Pond End School, Miss Jones frequently asked us to write imaginary letters to people we knew, concerning everyday events. The following excerpts were taken from some of these: Sunday School attendance was called for unless it rained or snowed; one of our milk teams had an accident and the driver was thrown out, but not hurt too much; piano lessons were on Thursday; Luke Madden went on a drunken spree and tore up papers, and the dictionary at the school, and put the blackboards and clocks out in the snow, also making off with the pendulum and hands of Miss Pratt's clock; Sanderson's cows were often in the field, sometimes the pigs were



eating the tomatoes, and the pheasants were frightened from their nests by the intruders.

Our favorite place to shop was Miss Hare's Smart Style Shop in Central Square. I often visited my Grandmother Westwood on Orange Street Waltham, where she would show me her jewelry, and where I learned to play flinch. My constant playmate was my next-door neighbor, Alice Armstrong, who, although older than I, enjoyed simple games such as hopscotch, dominoes, croquet, and pin-the-tail on the donkey. In February 1913, Mother took Garland, Elliot, and me into Jordan's to see the toys – I noted in my diary that "Elliot was fully taken away with them!"

I recorded in my sketchy diary the following: "On March 2, 1913, went to Sunday school, and in the afternoon visited my Grandma Westwood. We took the trolley over to Orange Street, but Uncle William brought us home in the auto. Because of a severe blizzard, we could not see Moody Street from Grandma's house. March



4th, 1913 was Inauguration Day of President Wilson. That evening Papa tuned his banjo and played "Louisiana Hoedown." During this time, I was taking piano lessons with Carl Safford, a somewhat strict teacher. On March 18th, Mother and I went to the High School concert. Ira Ames played on a violin he made himself, and Katherine Sewall sung a solo. On November 23rd, 1913, I went to our Church concert; Friday I went to the Church Social; Saturday, to the dentist, and later in the morning, to dancing school."

After 8 grades at Pond End, I went to the North Grammar for the ninth – the year preceding the elimination of that grade. It was difficult, as everything was new – methods, teachers, and building, and home study was required. High School was still more difficult with much more work piled on our shoulders. Somehow we weathered it, and graduated in 1920.

It seems to me, as I look back at my diary, that I was constantly on the go during 1915-1920. We attended parades and pageants, and every play of any account, whether in Boston or Waltham, such as Weston's Parade and Pageant, 250th anniversary, "Hansel & Gre-

tel," "The Bluebird," "Little Women," "Mrs. Walter's Ball," "Merchant of Venice," Piano recitals, "The Man Who Stayed at Home," Firemen's Ball, Nuttings, Dec. 7, 1916, "The Year of the Tiger," "The Masquerader," "La Mascotte," New Central Square Theater (Fatty Arbuckle in "Coney Island"), Harvard Class Day Exercise, "Pollyanna," "The Blue Bird," Barnum & Bailey Circus, "At the End of the Rainbow," with Irene Johnson and Louis Hanscom, principals, at Scenic Theater, Waltham (300 in cast), and Sothern and Marlowe in "Hamlet."

All kinds of services were rendered to the householder in those days by men and women who came to our door – the ice man, the grocer, the umbrella man, the knife grinder, the fish man, the produce man, the coal man, the hairdresser, and the dressmaker.

Our means of transportation, in my early days, was by horse and carriage, usually a democrat, or a sleigh in winter. When automobiles were first introduced, my father purchased a Chalmers, and my uncle had a Stanley Steamer. In the early 1920s, or before, I was given by my father a Model-T Ford (4 door) in which to commute to Simmons College in Boston. In the winter this was like crossing the Alaskan Tundra, as the freezing cold air came up through the holes in the floor where the brakes and gearshift were. Also the streets were not cleared of ice and snow, as now, so that I had to often take a devious route in order to follow the car tracks. A trolley line went by our house and well do I remember the open cars in summer. Once in 1920, after a very heavy snowfall, the streetcar and a plow were stuck in front of our house for weeks. The first few days the motorman slept in the car and had his meals at our house. When there was no sign of being able to move the car for sometime, he abandoned his post. Winters were very difficult for man and beast, in the delivery of milk on unplowed streets. The open pungs were used, but it was not easy to keep the driver or the milk from freezing, and the horses sometimes could hardly make it because of icy conditions or deep snow. In the early days, deliveries were made in Boston, but this was abandoned when the trade picked up locally.

*Marjorie Childs Hunt — 1975*



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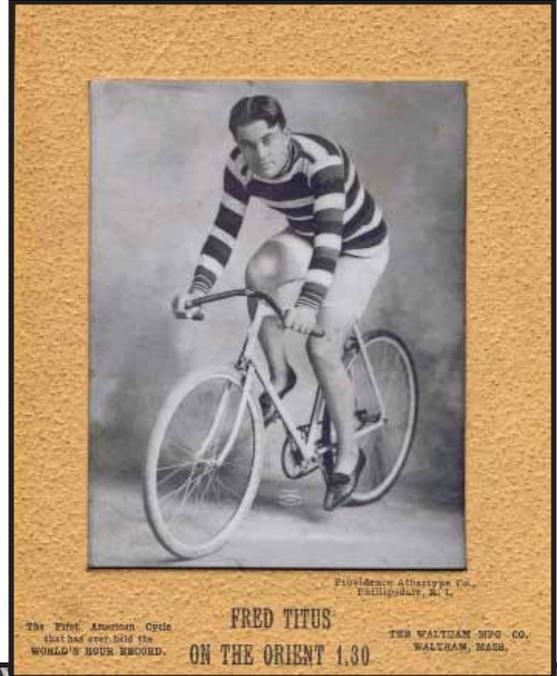
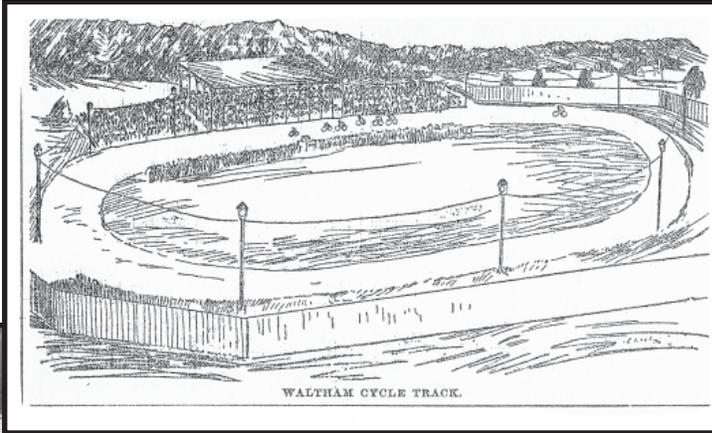
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Jeremy Hagger found an interesting article on the Massachusetts Historical Society website. He suggested we might put a piece in our newsletter for folks interested in cycling history in Waltham.

<http://www.masshist.org/object-of-the-month>



Waltham Manufacturing Company Bicycle Club



Ralph Butler (1892-1983), born and lived most of his life in Waltham - worked at the Waltham Watch Co. He was a member of the Roadsters and lived on Ash St. Picture of him with an early motorcycle (~ 1912) courtesy of his son, Robert Butler.