

Letters

To the Editor of *Spritsail*:

I read with great interest the article on the history of Quissett Ridge in your Winter 2000 issue, since I spent summers in the middle Whittemore house from the late '30s to the early '40s. The research showed hard work and included details I was unaware of, but I thought you might be interested in the human dimension of living in one of those houses when they were homes and not businesses.

In the '30s my grandfather, Edgar McCallum, along with buying the Briggs and Glidden land, also bought two Whittemore houses - the Bleakie "barn" and Hilltop. Hilltop remained un-lived in during my time on the ridge but my mother, my grandmother, and I spent many wonderful summers in what we, somewhat prosaically and without irony, called the Big House.

The tide of memory that rose after reading the article managed to beach a few items:

- The living room of the house was almost as long as a football field and the only bathroom on that floor was at the far end - a long hike for a two-year-old. The foundation floor was level with the grounds and fitted out with rooms. The "third" floor had the bedrooms. But it was the second-floor porch, which ran the length of the front of the house, where we really lived. From that vantage point we could look down the terraced lawn, with formal gardens on either side (a greenhouse on one side, a mulberry tree, now gone, on the other side) to the fish pool and gazebo (the gazebo can still be seen from Woods Hole Rd.) and then beyond to Vineyard Sound. My grandfather hired an artist to capture this scene and I still have several of W.C. Woolner's works, with their fanciful Victorian maidens, hanging in our present house.

At dusk on warm and humid summer nights we could watch the deer approach the salt licks that my mother had set out at the bottom of the garden and when it got dark watch the heat lightning play across the Sound.

- There were two other buildings on the property - a small stone library (still there) to the right of the drive as you approach the main building. The shelves of the library were crammed with books. Although my grandfather had bought the house, he never lived there, he and my grandmother being in the process of a divorce. Besides he was busy building his own place in what is now Quissett Gardens. So I assume the books in the library once belonged to Mr. Whittemore. Behind the main house was a huge garage

featuring a car turntable. The turntable was so precisely balanced that by the time I reached five I could turn it with foot pressure. It was designed so that cars would drive in and park on the turntable. The driver - or more likely his chauffeur - would then spin the turntable so the car was facing out, ready to drive away.

- We had one car and no chauffeur but we did have help with the grounds. Edgar McCallum was a southerner who had come north to make his fortune - and he did - in the envelope business. He brought with him some black family retainers one of whom, Cap Hough, is buried next to him. But that's another story. Cap mowed the vast lawn (most of the time with me on his lap on the tractor) and generally took care of us. He was almost my only male companion during the week. Family legend has it that Cap and an American Indian named Wiley dug the driveway to my grandfather's new house (what is now McCallum Dr.). That would seem an almost impossible task so I assume there must have been some kind of cartway already there that they expanded.

- "From 1929, when Mrs. Whittemore built her house in Racing Beach, to the 1950s, there does not seem to be a record of what happened to the original Glenockie." (Sprintsail p.30) I can perhaps fill in a little of that gap. Sometime in the early '40s Glenockie, which had been empty for years was either bought or rented by a family named Marsh from Texas. Mrs. Marsh was young, blond and quite attractive. Mr. Marsh was an older man (well, he was bald which in my child's view made him old). I was given to understand that he owned several newspapers in Texas, and he was away most of the time. The Marshes had two children - Diane and Michael - who were approximately my age and became my companions. Mrs. Marsh may have been German. The couple who took care of her and the children were certainly German and the children spoke German fluently. In her loneliness Mrs. Marsh took up the piano, having a perfect place to play one in the northern gazebo-like bay of the house. But that's another story. [Note: The photograph of Glenockie that appears on page 32 is identified as coming from the Marshall family album. Could I have confused Marsh with Marshall (I don't think so since the J.G. Marshall family owned an estate on Quissett Harbor) and if not what was the Marshall family connection to Glenockie? As you are probably aware, there are several postcards, produced sometime between 1900 and 1915, featuring Glenockie and identifying it as the residence of Charles Whittemore]

- "The Whittemore family and the three houses dominated the ridge in Quissett until after World War II." (Sprintsail p. 23) This statement would seem to be at least partially in error. Their spirit was perhaps there but physically and fiscally they weren't. As described above my family owned and lived in the middle house from the '30s through the beginning of World War II. Hilltop was also not owned by the Whittemores during that period.

The war years were traumatic for my grandmother whose only son, Russell McCallum, served his basic training at near-by Camp Edwards and thus was temptingly close. I was allowed to visit him one day for the daily lowering-of-the flag ceremony. The men were at attention in dress khakis; the sky was clear; the sun was bright, if setting; and there was a slight breeze. The bugle sounded (Recall?). In my child's heart I knew then we would never lose the war. Russell went on to Europe and was wounded in the Normandy campaign. Whenever we went to the movies we always watched the pre-feature newsreel attentively because my grandmother was sure Russell would appear.

My wartime Racing Beach memories, as those of Mrs. Howard, also include walking the beach after the convoys had left and finding crates of walnuts or grapefruit, old tires, and pieces of the never-ending oil slick congealing into tar. After a day at the beach during that time we usually wasted at least half a stick of butter getting the tar off our feet.

And I have my spy story too. My grandfather Ward on my father's side was an Englishman and like other of his countrymen he was fond of walking. It was more like hiking really when I was forced to tag along on what he thought were educational tours of the brambles behind the house. He had also never become a U.S. citizen, even though he had moved to this country around the turn of the century and had a successful cabinet-making business in Providence. We had both walked from the Big House down to Racing Beach and back many times during his visits, marveling at how there could be hundreds of ships in the bay one morning and by the next morning they would all be gone.

One day, though, his nature walk was a little too early for me and off he went by himself, his birding binoculars in hand. He didn't return as scheduled but we weren't worried since he often took the road less traveled by, got lost, and had to fight through the brambles to get back to the main path. Noon arrived and then early afternoon and still no grandfather. Then an official looking car pulled up the long driveway. Out climbed grandfather Ward. The frowning driver accompanied him to the kitchen door where we had all gathered.

"Is this man Harry G. Ward," said the man.

"Yes," we said almost in chorus.

"Well, you better tell him we're at war and non-citizens are not welcome in sensitive areas."

It turned out he had been discovered on the beach looking at the ships through his binoculars and had been stopped by one of the local citizen "wardens" who had somehow discovered he was not a citizen. Other security forces were called but after all he

was a gaunt old man with a British accent and it was worth checking out his story before sending him off to the firing squad. Change the binoculars for a camera and perhaps my grandfather was the “spy” nabbed by Mrs. Howard and company.

When the war was at its peak my grandfather McCallum loaned the house to the officers of Camp Edwards as a sort of club house. We moved across the street and roomed with Charlie Stowers and then with Capt. Obadiah Pierce on Shore St. But that’s another story.

Well I’ve run on too long. I hope these notes help fill one niche in the history of this remarkable part of town.

E. Graham Ward

To the Editor of *Spritsail*:

I would like to point out several errors in the printed version of my article “The History of Quissett Ridge and Development of Racing Beach” in the Winter 2000 *Spritsail*. These errors happened after the manuscript left my hands to be edited and designed. On page 21, in the third line of the right column, it says “In 1898, the Bleakies built “Glenockie”... In this case the last two numbers of this date were reversed; the correct date is 1889. Unfortunately, this is a serious error, giving the impression that the house was built a decade later, which led to another error below in the beginning of the next paragraph: “Also, in 1898...” ‘Also’ was not in my manuscript because there was no previous mention of this date.

In addition, the captions for the photos of Racing Beach gates on page 24 and the top photo of page 26 were reversed. The photo on page 24 is of the gate at the Widgeon Road entrance and the photo on page 26 is of the gate at the end of Racing Beach Avenue and Sippewissett Road.

Sincerely yours,
Susan Fletcher Witzell

To the Editor of *Spritsail*:

I was both disappointed and perplexed after having read the article on The Greeks Add Flavor to Falmouth in last summer’s edition of the *Spritsail*. The article was well written by Barbara Kanellopoulos and as a native Greek brought up in Falmouth I can not argue the prominent role that the Tsiknas and Karalekas families played in the commu-

nity for years. Aglaia Tsiknas and her brother Mikey were very dear friends of my Mother's. However, there were many Greek families not mentioned in this article who lived in Falmouth for many years and also contributed in many ways to Falmouth's community. The Boretos family had numerous businesses in Falmouth since the 1940s, including the Cottage Club at the Casino. Mark Boretos worked for Jackie Kennedy redecorating the White House during the Kennedy Administration in the early '60s. The Angelos Family lived and ran businesses on Main Street in Falmouth for many years starting in the forties. Mrs. Angelos spent a lot of her time helping Greek widows who had difficulties with the English language. The Tourles Family ran a fine restaurant and motel in Falmouth Heights for over 20 years!

I understand the article couldn't have mentioned each and every Greek family that has lived in Falmouth, but I think more thought should have been given to those families that lived in Falmouth for many years. Though their businesses may not have been as prominent as the Tsiknas's, they none the less played significant roles in Falmouth's community through their Greek work-ethic, generosity, and hospitality.

Sincerely,
C. Diane Boretos