

Dublin Historical Society

Dublin, New Hampshire 03444 • Founded 1920

Newsletter No. 43 – May, 1998

Dorothy Worcester Remembers

[The following article has been adapted for the Newsletter by Nancy Handy from taped interviews with Mrs. Worcester conducted in 1988 and 1989 by Linda Van Wyk and Carol Peterson. All quotations are taken verbatim from the tapes.]

In every life there are defining moments. Probably, for Dorothy Worcester, an eloquent and energetic woman who distinguished herself as Dublin's librarian for sixty-seven years, such moments can be found in the summers she spent at a special school – a school run in Peterborough, where Dorothy grew up – at the home of Mrs. Shaw for the benefit of her own two children. Among Dorothy's teachers at Mrs. Shaw's experimental school were the Irish poet Padraic Colum, the American social critic and writer Lewis Mumford, and Ernest Bloch, the Swiss composer.

Those teachers recognized Dorothy as a young person with a gift for writing and for the theater. They encouraged her to venture to New York City after high school to enroll in the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. (Later, hoping to give her children, Ann and Michael, a similarly broad perspective on life, Dorothy sent Ann to Northfield and Michael to Kimball Union.)

It was in New York, while a student at the Academy, that Dorothy married Dubliner Millard ("Spook") Worcester in February, 1928, returning to Dublin that spring. "One stipulation I made when we got married was that Spook



Dorothy Worcester, c. 1937.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF DOROTHY WORCESTER.

would have to teach me to drive. Very few women here drove at that time, but I would never live in a little town like Dublin if I didn't have my freedom."

As a young married couple in Dublin, Dorothy and Spook Worcester had an active social life. "Everybody danced then. Ballroom dancing. I met Spook at a dance the summer after I graduated from high school. We did the foxtrot. We waltzed. I did the Charleston. Spook didn't. And he never would square dance, though I liked it. Then there were military whist parties at the church. Some Saturday nights we went to the movies. We had a little theater group for several years. And I remember that Spook and I had maybe twelve couples we used to see. We'd take turns going to each

other's houses, different weeks, bringing a casserole or dessert. And we did that for several years. We played bridge. But bridge got so serious that Spook said, 'No one will play bridge in my house again.'"

Looking back on the seventy years since coming here as a bride of twenty-one, Dorothy says she has never lived in any house in Dublin except for the one on Church Street. You could walk to the library, where she took the job of librarian in 1930.

You could also walk to Worcester's Garage, which Spook opened in 1934, a year before Yankee and the Dublin School came into being. As Dorothy tells it, it all stemmed from the fact that Spook didn't get a raise. "Spook worked for a neighbor who ran a garage in what

was formerly a blacksmith's shop. I think Spook was earning thirty dollars a week, and he asked for a raise of five dollars. His boss had just bought a new Buick but said he just couldn't afford the raise. Spook then threatened that he would start out on his own, which he did. I'll never forget. The first year he made so much more money that he wondered why he hadn't gone into business before."

Spook Worcester was a gifted mechanic. "People thought that if he put his hand on the hood of a car it would be healed." How Millard Worcester came to be called "Spook" remains something of a mystery. Dorothy claims she doesn't know. "I never asked him."

Dorothy remembers walking to the garage on the night of the big fire there. "It was in 1948, two years after we bought the garage property on the oval, having been renters elsewhere for years. Spook was working that night. Our son Michael loved to go out to the garage before he went to bed – he was in first grade and bedtime was eight o'clock – to watch his father and whoever was working at the garage. Spook usually had two men there, and we always had a summer kid who pumped gas. Danny Catlin. Dick Meryman. Every year there was a long list of summer kids who wanted to work at the garage. Anyway, I recall walking to the garage to get Michael. It was across a field. There was a beautiful sunset. And back home about half-past eight, I heard a fire alarm. To this day, when I hear the alarm, I go to the window and look in every direction.

"On that evening, when I looked out, it was just like a holocaust. All flames. People said that when I got back there, I just stood and wrung my hands. The

place was burning down. There was a Grange meeting that night. A lot of people were in town. And it was a windy night. They could picture the church going up in flames, plus Scribner's store – that was the store on the other side of 101, to the left as you headed for Peterborough – and all the Gleason and Lehmann property on our side. In other words, the whole center of the village. This was long before mutual aid." The fire was finally put out with help from Keene and Peterborough.

The garage fire is a haunting memory. But Dorothy also continues to have sharply focused reminiscences of some of the people she met through her work, not only at the library but also chauffeuring for the garage. The chauffeuring started during WW II, she says. "Gas was rationed. And many people had their own tanks. There was a kind of greed. People didn't want to use the gas that was allotted to them, their coupons. So we drove them, and I got involved. I used to drive the maids. To keep the maids, the summer people would have to give them an afternoon off, Thursdays, though they wanted the maids to go shopping then, too, for groceries in Keene.

"One day, I remember, someone called up and wanted to know if we would take her guests to the bus, which stopped in front of the Town Hall at six o'clock on Sunday evening. Spook said, 'Gee, I hate the idea of having to get dressed' – we were going to the beach, this was when Ann and Michael were young – 'would you go? I told her we'd do it.' So I went to get the couple. And Mrs. M. said, 'What are you late for? My guests are going to miss the bus.' Oh, it was embarrassing to me. I felt like punching her in the nose. I bit my tongue and drove them to the bus. They apologized all the way down. They said, 'She got bored with us, and she got tired. You weren't late.' In fact, we sat there fifteen minutes waiting for the bus.

"Afterwards I went to the beach, and I said to Spook, 'Don't you ever, ever – I'll leave you – ask me to drive for that woman again. I expect to be treated with respect. I won't have it any other way.'" In Dorothy's memory live a number of Mrs. M's.

However, Dorothy says, she did meet some remarkable, truly nice people through the driving, mostly because of the Clarks. "Grenville Clark was a distinguished lawyer. Did you know that he wrote the Selective Service Act? Mr. Clark fished with Spook. Spook hunted and gardened, but he really was a fisherman. A fly fisherman. He didn't think much of people who put a worm on a hook. Often on the mornings they went fishing, Mrs. Clark would cook Spook's break-



The Morning after the Fire at Worcester's Garage, 1948.
D.H.S. COLLECTION; GIFT OF ANITA CROWELL.

fast. She was a wonderful woman. No hoity-toity with her, you know.

"I used to say that the Clarks were my ideal persons. If ever I were to have envied anyone, it would have been the Grenville Clarks. They lived on a lovely place, in an old house, and they farmed. Spook used to say, 'That's what you call gentleman farming. You don't have to be home at five o'clock to milk the cows. You have someone to milk them.'

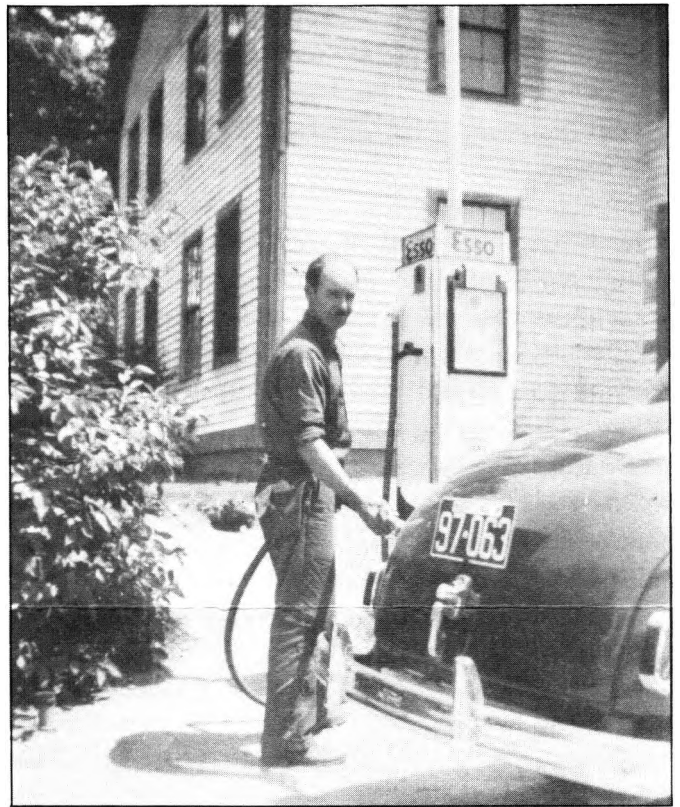
"We met Robert Frost, the poet, through the Clarks. He was a personal friend and visited them here in Dublin. And of course they didn't want to drive him to the train at Greenfield or whatever. Mr. Frost lived in Amherst, Massachusetts, and was poet-in-residence at the college there. Spook drove him to Amherst once and he said, 'Take me to the back door so I can go in through the kitchen. I don't like going through the reception area. There are always people there who want me to autograph something for them.' "

Dorothy also speaks feelingly and affectionately about the Alexander Jameses and the Joseph Lindon Smiths. "Mrs. James was very involved in the library. You know, we got a lot of our books from the summer colony's informal book club. And I remember Mrs. James saying to me, 'Someday you'll get some money to run the library.' She was right. Volunteerism just doesn't do it.

"Alexander James did a sketch, he called it, of Spook for our wedding present, which I treasure. I used to sit now and then for him as a model. It was interesting to see how an artist worked – the miles he would walk, back and forth, in his studio to his easel. I would go in every morning, or maybe two or three times a week. And we would have coffee in the house, and then go back to his studio."

Recalling the Smiths, Dorothy says, "Joseph Lindon Smith never drove, and neither did Mrs. Smith. But you should have paid her for letting you drive her. Once Spook drove her into Boston, and she wanted to eat at the Ritz-Carlton. She said, 'You're coming in with me.' And Spook said, 'Oh, no, no, no.' She insisted. He said, 'I'll wait out here.' But she insisted again. And she tipped to get a place to park. Handed over a ten-dollar bill. So they went in, and she met several of her friends. And she did not say, 'This is the man from the local garage who drove me to Boston.' She was that kind of person.

"I was at the Smiths' one day. We'd gone to Keene shopping with her cook, Martha, and we had come back. Mrs. Smith said, 'Oh, I'm so tired. Let's have a sandwich. What have you got in the kitchen?' So Martha made sandwiches. And we were sitting in the living



Millard "Spook" Worcester, before the 1948 fire.

PHOTOGRAPH BY EDITH FELIX. D.H.S. COLLECTION;
GIFT OF EDITH FELIX AND GEORGE WILLIAMS.

room, eating sandwiches when one of the summer people, a quite snobbish woman, came in. Mrs. Smith said, 'Will you have a sandwich? Martha will go and get you one.' The woman was flabbergasted that the cook and I were sitting in the living room with Mrs. Smith, having our lunch. But Mrs. Smith was that sort. Absolutely no snobbery there at all. She was 'old rich,' you might say."

Dorothy was active in the Women's Club and is particularly proud of her role in helping the Club to acquire and develop Dublin's first community beach. The Club was also a center of social life. "People loved getting into other people's houses, particularly a house belonging to summer people. We met on Thursday afternoons twice a month. Hats and gloves. Tea. They finally decided to restrict the food because it got so it wouldn't be just tea sandwiches, several different kinds. There would also be cake, maybe a chocolate jelly roll with whipped cream in it. And then the next woman would have yet another kind of cake. I think they voted that you could have sandwiches or cookies and cake. Not both. Because women do try to outdo one another."

Dorothy recalls having the Club at her house. "We borrowed some of the church's folding chairs. But my house isn't that big. People were sitting all the way up the stairway. I think there were probably fifty people.

It was one of the largest, best-attended meetings, possibly because of the program's subject. This was a time when very few people had refrigerators. We were totally dependent on the ice man or the food would ruin. It was a pain. Well, the Public Service Company was just starting to sell refrigerators – you know that one with the funny motor on top? Well, they moved a refrigerator through my front door. One of their people was going to talk about the new refrigerator — oh, the wonderful things you could do with the new refrigerator! And they asked me if they could put it right there in my living room.

"When the meeting was over, we had the tea. And of course the women were opening the refrigerator and looking inside. This Mrs. – I'll call her Jones – came over to me. And she said what a nice meeting it was and all. And then she said, 'Aren't you a lucky woman to have one of the first refrigerators in town? But why do you keep it in your living room?' I was horrified – horrified that she thought, you know, that I would keep it in my living room!"

World War II changed the Dublin community profoundly, Dorothy says. "I remember Mrs. V. telling me once – up until the war, they had had plenty of servants

– that they never knew how comfortable they would feel without a maid waiting on them. Because with a maid coming in and out of the room, they had to be so careful about table conversation. They even got so they used the washing machine. They discovered a life they hadn't known about, and which they enjoyed. They said they'd never go back to the old life. That was what summer people found out.

"And what the working person found out was that there was another way of earning your livelihood besides working for the summer people. The person who once might have been cooking was saying, 'I earned good money, maybe a hundred dollars a week at the end, but it was ten o'clock at night before I got out of that household. Why not a job doing typing and shorthand in Peterborough? I'm through at five in the afternoon, and I don't have to work Saturday or Sunday.' So I think it was two things working in opposite directions and both groups finding that they liked what they were doing. A lot of people went down to work in some of the factories in Massachussetts or Connecticut and never came back. They liked the life that they found."

Society News

On May 4, eight members of the Historical Activities Committee of the National Society of Colonial Dames of Massachusetts visited the archives at the invitation of **Lillian Carter**, a member of that Society as well as of ours. The Archivists did a brief presentation on the care and cataloguing of family papers and other historical records.

Thanks to **Lorna Trowbridge** and **Yankee Publishing, Inc.**, we now have a complete file of *Yankee* magazines from 1935 to the present.

Muriel Ivanov-Rinov has given the museum a paint box and palette used by her late husband, the artist Gouri Ivanov-Rinov, and some miscellaneous biographical documents and photographs to the archives.

Other welcome gifts have come from **William Bauhan**, **Nancy Campbell**, **Margot Close**, **Sharron Monaghan** and **Charles Winchester**. To all of them our most grateful thanks.

Summer Exhibitions

Quilts in New Hampshire: Piecing the Story Together is the title of an exhibition of quilts at the Museum of New Hampshire History in Concord. Among the quilts on display is one sewn by the Dublin Ladies' Social Circle in 1863. The quilt, which belongs to Jan Dodge of Berkeley, California, was the subject of our newsletter in November, 1993. Our Society has loaned the 1863 minute book of the Ladies' Social Circle, and bills for quilting materials purchased from Gleason's store. Quilt and documents will be on exhibition until September 6.

Society Trustee **Paul Tuller**, who is also President of The Friends of the Dublin Art Colony, has organized an exhibition of paintings by **Alexander James**, which will be at the Thorne-Sagendorph Gallery at Keene State College from June 20 to August 5.

C R E D I T S

This issue of the Dublin Historical Society Newsletter was edited by John W. Harris.

Design & layout by Heidi Thomas of Little House Graphics.