SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 11
OF MARSHFIELD, VERMONT

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Preface

I call these memoirs “Chasing Thistle Down”, because it seems to drift with the wind, and like Artemus Ward says about his lectures on the Mormons “it contains so many things that doesn’t have anything to do with the subject”. I think you are going to like it because if you will be honest - you will admit that it is quite like your own life, only perhaps a little more so in places.

The people mentioned in this article wee real and I have called them by their own names. All the older people are gone. The boys and girls that went to the red school house in District No. 11 at the time I am writing about are the old people now, most of them that are left are quite active but at times they all have spells of thinking back, a sign of growing old. Thus have I in my own way told of them and the days of Pranks and Progress in District No. 11, known now as the “King District”.

Bert Herman Townsend

There it stood about thirty feet back from the river road, about one hundred rods from Perkins sawmill facing Jerusalem, Lord’s Hill and Onion River (Winooski River, the real name in Indian language meant wild onions, so it was called Onion River locally for a long time) on the east, and Kings Hill on the west, the traditional “red schoolhouse”, District No. 11 in Marshfield, Vermont. (The Marshfield that was bought from the Stockbridge tribe of Indians, for a keg of rum and some tobacco. History says the price was one hundred and forty pounds in lawful money but the old people say the Indians preferred rum and tobacco, so Mr. marsh, whom the town was named after, was glad to make the substitute).

I thought of this schoolhouse and things connected with it, when I saw an article in some magazine asking for information on “red flannel” used for petticoats, etc., now out of use. The etc., I presume, referred to drawers as I never saw any red petticoats unless the wearer had red drawers to match.

I think I well go into detail about red flannels now and let the red schoolhouse stand until a little later. The ensemble was worn by most of the girls that attended the school in District No. 11; the petticoat was rather full and was held on by a rubber cord that ran around the waist, and came down half way from the knees to the top of the shoes. The shoes, by the way, were heavy calfskin that laced up and had brass eyelets and thick leather soles. Girls didn't have rubbers those days, or boys either for that matter. Some of the boys wore leather boots with copper toes. In our family these copper toed boots were bought with the "turkey money" late in the fall. Father would measure the length of our feet with a stick cutting the stick off the length of the longest foot and marking on the same stick the length of the smaller ones required.

Christmas didn't amount to much in our family at that time on account of the money bag being always empty. We didn't mind for you don't miss things you never had, but those boots were something to look forward to and the boy that didn't make his boots last through the winter until bare foot time in the spring was simply out of luck.

Now about red flannel drawers; they too were home made and were buttoned to a waist that was also a similar material. These drawers or bloomers or whatever you choose to call them, had a rubber cord around the bottom of each leg that held the bloomer legs down, and the home knit stockings up, a very good arrangement.

How do I know so much about the underwear of these girls of 1875-1885? Well, I went to school with these same girls at this same red schoolhouse and we all used to slide down King's Hill on jumpers. Probably you don't know what a jumper is any more than you know about flannel underwear. Well, you take a barrel stave and nail a post on it about two-thirds back from the end, and nail a seat on the post that is cut about ten inches high and there you are - so when you slide down King's Hill with all the girls and boys on individual jumpers you will know a lot about what a girl wears if you are at all observing. The hill was steep and rough and few there were who reached the foot on those jumpers without a bad spill.

The red schoolhouse that I started off with was about thirty by thirty-six feet with a "lean-to" shed for wood. The schoolhouse was really red once, and had two windows on three sides high up, so you could not look out to see the teams go by without stretching your neck and that was not allowed. The school yard had no grading, even the rocks were just where God had put them, and in the pasture back of the schoolhouse there were a plenty - even now there is a large rock at the top of King's Hill already to roll down. Only woodchucks have for years had a hole under this rock, and the dirt they have pawed out makes a sort of bank that still keeps the old rock where it belongs.

Oh yes, this schoolhouse has one of "Chic Sales four holers" only it didn't sit under the apple tree, but was located at the back of the schoolhouse. The four "holer" was partitioned off in the middle so there were really two "holers"; not a very large affair, and quite often some of the big boys would tip it over and roll it to a new location.

Well, that's that: now about District No. 11. It was composed of the King's, Perkins', Spencer's, Martins, Fitzgeralds, Dows, Maxfields, Rushlows, Townsends, (lots of them) Hills, and some others I don't remember, altogether there were about twelve to eighteen families. Their children made up the school. The girls all wore calfskin shoes and the boys leather boots in the sinter, and all went bare foot in the summer. All brought their dinner or lunch; all drank from the same water pail and used the same tin cup. Germs and vitamins were not born at that time, though we did have to look out for polliwogs and wigglers in drinking water. Things that we couldn't see didn't bother any of us. The water was brought from "King's well", and the privilege of passing water was a reward given to the scholar who behaved the best.

I forgot to tell how the door on "Chic Sales House" squeaked when it was opened or closed, and a question that was always asked by the school teacher when a boy or girl asked to go out was, "Is it necessary?". So the children got the habit of saying "Please may I go out? - It is very necessary." I am told that now the children communicate to the teacher their desire to leave the room by holding up one or two fingers; one finger indicates not urgent, two fingers P.D.Q.

Some of the things I remember: - I have heard the "silver tongued orator", Wm. Jennings Bryan and President McKinley; have read the speeches of President Wilson, but they never made the lasting impression as did our District Clerk Marshal Perkins, when he read the warning at the school meetings to the fifteen or twenty voters and about as many school kids.

These meetings were an annual affair held in the evening. Marshall, as he was called, came up the road; took down the warning that had been legally posted on the schoolhouse and proceeded with great dignity to the

teacher's desk holding the "Dilitz" tubular lantern - even with his eye - he would proceed to call the meeting to order. Taking his steel bowed glasses from the tin case, adjusting them about half way on his nose, snapping the case shut, which, by they way, made a noise as loud as a small pistol, and with great dignity announce, "The meeting will please come to order", and then read the warning.

Article 1. To elect a moderator.

Article 2. To elect a Tax Collector, Clerk and School Committee.

Article 3. To determine how many weeks of school.

Article 4. To raise a tax to pay the teacher and to pay for wood.

Article 5. To determine whether the teacher shall "board around" or have a steady place to board. The former according to the number of scholars in each family; the latter place to be decided by the lowest bid.

Article 6. To do any other business thought proper.

D.M. Perkins, District Clerk

Setting down the lantern and looking over the top of his glasses, his eyes shining in the darkness, he wold announce, "Gentlemen, nominate someone for Moderator". No President or Governor ever felt more dignified than Marshall when he presided at a school meeting.

Herman Townsend was usually elected for school committee, and at the proper time would set out with the old buckskin mare and buckboard to interview the prospects. For days and days he would scour the country for a teacher. Sometimes the pay was as much as four dollars per week and board. Probably why "Herm", as he was called, was school committee so long was because he usually got a surprisingly good teacher.

The qualifications were not much; anyone who could do the Vermont rule in arithmetic, and name the states could get a teacher's certificate, but the committee looked more to general principles, - more like they were adopting someone into their family, because the teachers those days were the whole push, and the boys and girls who went to school long enough to go through the Greenleaf's Arithmetic, the Geography, Munroe Reader and Grammar, got quite an education.

There were no grades; the student could go in any class, that is, first class in arithmetic, second class, third class, etc. Also the same arrangement in spelling and geography. If you could not keep up, you simply dropped back in a class where you could, - about like a horse race. No one was held back and the pride of the scholar and the help of the teacher usually kept the boy or girl in the class where he or she belonged.

I don't suppose the scholars of District No. 11 were superior to any other school at that time. None of them have been elected President - neither have any of them, as far as I know, ever been in jail. All that lived to grow up have been able to support their families without any town or government help - paid for what they had or went without - and the families who could not take care of themselves and their children were not well thought of. If you want to start a fight just call someone a town pauper.

Vermonters are supposed to have a peculiar speech or dialect. The average grown-up that I remember used the same kind of understandable language that is used today. Boys and men alike did more swearing - got mad oftener and in more fights than they do now, (but that is not what I started to write about).

Here are some of the things I remember and are really true.

Ernest Spicer - one of our school characters - came in late one morning (nothing unusual for a walk of two miles or more) put his dinner pail on the long side seat, (no moveable furniture except teacher's chair) started across the floor to his seat in the back of the room; when halfway across he stubbed his toe on a knot in the floor, stopped short, picked up his foot and seeing the blood ooze out under his toe nail, he let a yell you could hear for miles. Teacher said, "What is the matter, Ernest?" "Stubbed my toe on the G-- D-- knot", he replied. You see Ernest couldn't learn much in books, yet he had a way of bawling and swearing that I never forgot. With tears standing on his fat cheeks his first blast would be like steam escaping from a locomotive whistle, and then followed by a

bellowing sound that I can't describe. Perhaps a river steamboat whistle comes as near to it as anything that I have ever heard, only there would be an echo that would come back from the hills.

Those knots are very real to me. They looked like rivets in an iron bridge - round and smooth they were, and black and shiny, nicely polished from much wear. There were more of them in the isles and around the box stove, and they were separated by the cracks between the boards.

The desks were made of wide birch boards; just one wide board for the top of the desk, the seats and backs were wide boards also, thirty inches or more in width - made quite like the modern desks now in use. You may find a few of these in use for summer seats in the homes of some of the people that live in this district. The scholars had carved deep in the desks, railroads, pictures, and hearts with arrows that had a meaning, and some letters - all cut deep. Remember?

A toad lived under this schoolhouse. He used to come out between the underpinning stones and wink his eyes. He had warts on his back, not unlike the knots in the floor. We thought he was what caused the warts to grow on our fingers. Maybe 'twas so, I don't know - but we also thought if we rubbed a piece of salt pork on a wart and buried the pork where no one knew, the warts would go away. We also were sure that if we had a side ache after running too hard, it could be cured by spitting on a small smooth stone and putting it back, spit side down, where we found it, the pain would go away.

One time a man came to visit the school - more especially the teacher 'cause when school was out he always gave the teacher a ride. The boys took one front wheel off his wagon and changed it with one of the back wheels. When they started off the wagon wiggled quite badly - like one of those boats they have at fairs. Next day teacher was very mad at the scholars.

We had good teachers, all of them, Laura Gale, Clara Pike, Alice Martin, Susie Hollister, Anna Spencer, and Clara Davis, who put me under her desk because I couldn't remember the letter H.

The first thing the teacher taught a beginner was the ABCs. After we got so we could say the alphabet the teacher would say, "now find G" or "point out L". Most of the beginners could learn the letters and read some by the end of the first term. We all learned to read by saying the letters that composed the word out loud at first, then after a little we would whisper the letters. Perhaps this method helped to make good spellers but certainly slow readers for a long time. Also I am wondering if it was one reason for so many stuttering grown-ups. We had a lot of them in District No. 11.

It was quite amusing to listen to Larry Fitzgerald. His was a bad case, and the kids would always congregate whenever Larry got stuck with his yoke of "stags" that he used for all his farm work and trucking business. How the spit would fly and his eyes would snap trying to say some appropriate words to those balky stags. It didn't take much to amuse the kids in the 75's as it does now.

The first day Been Dodge came to school, teacher asked him what town he lived in. He said, "I don't live in any town, I live up the brook road with Ma and Aunt Sarah". Eben made a better ox teamster than a scholar.

They were all kind teachers (some are still living) and tried hard to teach us something.

Laura Gale, who taught several terms of school in District No. 11, was one of the very best teachers we had. I wish I could describe her to you so you could see her as I remember. She could look at a boy or girl in such a way with her big brown, watery eyes, and give a smile that you could remember long after you had got through going to school. Perhaps you can remember someone like that, I hope so. Not especially handsome, but a face that keeps coming back; just like the look that the woodchuck gave us when we helped Zack, the dog, get him out of the stone wall. He seemed to say, "Why don't you boys play the game fair?", and he did it all with his eyes, remember?

What I want to say is that Laura (that was my mother's name, perhaps that is why I remember the teacher so kindly) was a nice singer, and taught the school a lot about singing. The words to the song that I am remembering now ran something like this:

"Alone I walked the ocean strand

A pearly shell was in my hand,

I stooped and wrote upon the sand

My name, the year, the date.

As onward from the spot I passed

One lingering look behind I cast

A wave came rolling high and fast

And washed my lines away."

And several other verses I don't remember.

She taught the boys and girls to carry the different parts; soprano, alto and bass. We didn't realize just how much those words meant then, it was just another song. There were several other songs she taught the scholars. She read "Black Beauty" out loud. Funny how we can remember little things and forget things we should remember. She has been gone a long time now, but there is one boy somewhere that should be proud of a mother like Laura.

I hope none of the modern crackpot jazz radio singers will ever make hamburg out of those songs that Laura taught us, like they have out of Stephen Foster's songs. Foster probably doesn't mind being elected to the "Hall of Fame" after he has been dead over seventy-five years; but he would do some tall kicking if he could hear what these hillbillies do to his compositions.

Well, that's that, and I guess there's just a little more good than bad in the world, even in radio programs.

You know not longer than three hundred years ago, if a baby happened to be born on Sunday, the mother and father were lucky if they didn't get voted out of the church, and into the "stocks", especially if they were Puritans, and lived in Salem, Mass.

There was usually some water beside the road near the schoolhouse, and sticks and cedar posts floated on the water. Boys and girls sailed these sticks and posts and called them boats. Frogs lived in these waters so it was called a frog pond, and they made nice music at night. WE used to eat our dinner beside the pond, when it was pleasant, and throw crumbs into the water for the frogs. They were all green like the water, and boys could learn how to dive by watching them.

We had a nice swimming pool, long and deep in some places; alder bushes for bath houses and folks didn't steal your clothing like they do over to Barre, unless you pay ten cents to have them locked up.

We had a "sucker hole" where we fished, and a "clay hole" where we found funny shaped stones. Many other places in the river, there were clams, mud turtles and fish and sometimes we found Indian arrowheads. Onion River was the recreation ground for the boys and girls of 1875, just as it was for the Indians, years and years ago. We could fish and hunt anywhere, at any time, whenever we wanted to. We had to look out for poison ivy and keep out of farmer's fields, and not tread down their grain and grass, - if you did they didn't call the police, but would kick you in the pants, if they caught you - and that was not very often.

One day one of the boys put a frog in Ernest Spicer's dinner pail. When teacher rang the bell, we all grabbed our dinner pails and ran into the schoolhouse. When Ernest came in (a little late as usual) he felt something move in his dinner pail so he took off the cover and out jumped the frog. Then he yelled, "Some of the G-- D--n boys put a frog in my pail". We all laughed and the teacher said, "Who did that?" One boy said, "Probably got into the pail all by his own self". Ernest said, "Damn likely story". Then we all laughed some more, so did teacher. We didn't get punished when we laughed together.

When the Superintendent visited school one day he talked on "Physiology and Hygiene". That was a book the Women's Christian Temperance Union furnished and all schools had to study it. Well, the Superintendent gave a nice interesting talk on the effect of alcohol on the stomach. (He pronounced it stomic.) Curt Martin said, "Stomic - Christ". He was a little boy then and he was just thinking out loud, but everyone laughed, except the superintendent and the teacher. She said, "I'm very much ashamed of you, Curtis". We had never heard it pronounced that way before.

One time Curt was telling of the bad effect of tobacco. He said, “There is enough nicotine in one cigar if placed on a dog’s tongue to kill a man”. He was always getting things twisted, did it on purpose to make the boys laugh. He didn’t get punished for he was always “so sorry and didn’t mean to”.

I don’t remember what that superintendent’s name was, but I do remember he had on a light suit and there were creases the whole length of his pants. We wondered what they were for and what made them. We knew what patches were for but hose creases we couldn’t understand, so we asked teacher about them. She told us that well dressed gentlemen always had their pants creased, and we observe they are still doing it even if it is old fashion.

CHAPTER II

“AND THIS DAY A BRASS BAND WAS BORN UNTO DISTRICT NO. 11”

In 1880 we went to a circus in Montpelier, my brothers and I, with my father. I don’t know how he happened to take us as he had neither time or money to spare, anyhow we went and so did most of the boys in the neighborhood. That was our first circus, in fact it was the first time we had seen a town except “Slab Holler” (that was what Plainfield Village was called at that time). The circus was not unlike any other, then or now, but it was the first one we had seen, and what a show.

What I remember now was the circus band, probably 15 or 20 marching at the head of the parade, each musician in a uniform of blue and yellow trimmings, a drum major tossing and twirling a baton. He wore a tall bearskin hat. How they could make those horns crack and rip off the snappy marches. Right then and there was born the Townsend band. The band that later on was Marshfield’s Juvenile Band; and still later Jackson’ Band, in honor of Frank Jackson, who taught us how to play. Yes, sir, when we boys got home from that circus we began to look for things to make a band. We found some coils of lead pipe up over the wood shed, some was inch pipe and some was half inch pipe. We shaped a mouthpiece at one end of the pipe, put the coil over one shoulder and under the other arm, then we would march around the house, one playing on the beat and one “after beat”. We discovered that by cutting the pipe we could bring the tone in harmony. We also found that by making holes and using our fingers we could get a variety of tones. But the lead pipe band was short lived when Father discovered his lead pipe was being cut up.

Likewise, when we went into the trapping business to get money to buy powder and shot for the three dollar shot gun, we caught a skunk, but before we got him killed he “peed on us”. Father said, “You boys tend to your * and let the trapping go.” Then we leaned that by using a box trap we could catch a skunk, and take the box and skunk to Marshal’s mill dam and hold it under the water for a while and the skink wouldn’t stink. One time we opened the box trap after it had been submerged and there was King’s black and white cat, drowned. That day at school we leaned on the yard fence and heard Mr. King calling, “Mixie, Mixie, Mixie”, - but Mixie didn’t ever come back. My brother pulled his cap down over his eyes and said to me, “We ain’t ever going to trap no more,” and then he blowed his nose hard.

He was funny like that. When we were playing “touch the goal” Bertha * in King’s hog box; the narrow kind that has a board that fits in the end, and has a wooden pin so hogs can’t get it open, neither can folks when they are inside. Fred saw Bertha go and hide in the box so he slops around and props the tailboard in place and put the pin in, and ran and touched a goal on Bertha; then the bell rang. She couldn’t get out so she began yelling and after a while some of King’s folks heard her and let her out. You see, the box had been left back of King’s barn on a drag, that was what they used when transporting hogs. When Bertha came in school after being released, she was still bawling and yelled right out loud, “That darned old Fred Townsend locked me in King’s hog box”. Then we all laughed and teacher said, “Quiet, please. Fred may stay in from recess.”

Kids were the same in 1880 as they are in 1940, some good in all of them and some bad in most of them.

Now that band that I spoke of a while back was the most worthwhile accomplishment that took place in 1875-1885, that I am writing about. We were handicapped by the lack of money to buy instruments. The boys folks could not and would not fool away their money that way, so we got a few * and fifes as premiums for magazine subscriptions. Some were in the key of C, some B flat, some in A’ no two alike. We used to meet for practice at the

home of some of the boys that went to make up the band, but the mothers and fathers soon got tired of the discords, and out we went. I wonder what they would think of the Jazz and Swing Bands of today.

Then for a while we had meetings in Howard Martin's cupola on his * barn. We had a few meetings in Uncle George's covered bridge. After a while we got some instruments that were somewhat better. I borrowed an old army drum from Fred Slayton. Cur Martin got money enough from the pig business that his father had turned over to him, to buy a second hand Alto horn. * Hill had an E flat clarinet given him by an uncle. Frank Townsend got a B flat clarinet and Fred Townsend got a B flat cornet, given him by Jim Hooke...*. Fred Dow went around the neighborhood and got donations enough to buy a bass drum. Henry Laird, the steam mill owner, gave three dollars. He and his three dollars were the topic with us kids for a long time. So Fred was the bass drummer. Perhaps that practice on the drum was the reason why he was so efficient giving the boys a beating.

Sometimes I played the two drums and symbols with a home-made contraption that had a bird cage spring and a foot pedal, not so hot to look at but it worked.

We gave a show at the schoolhouse, a farce comedy, "Dun Duckety's Picnic". Fred Dow sang "three Men Went a Hunting" and played his own accompaniment on the banjo. Fred could play a mouth organ quite well and sing. He didn't ask any admission, but passed the hat and believe me there was a house full of people and lots of them gave a dollar. Good kind people them folks were that lived in District No. 11.

Most of the men wore whiskers; some drank Medford rum; more of them chewed B. & L. tobacco; and some of the grandmothers smoked T.D. pipes and took snuff.

After a while brother Fred got money enough to buy a C.G. Conn B flat cornet, all silver and a gold plated bell. When he played one eye followed the music, but the left eye looked up and off to the left; that would make people laugh - they thought he did it on purpose, but he couldn't help it. It was caused by blowing that cornet so long and so hard when he was little. Even now when he is weighing meat for a customer one eye looks and the scale and the other is looking up and off.

Brother George, the youngest, was the baby mascot. He played the B flat tuba. The mouthpiece was larger than his mouth so when he played he sucked in wind around the mouthpiece and it made a funny noise, and his cheeks would bulge out like a chipmunk full of corn. Folks thought he did that on purpose, but he couldn't help it. The folks like to watch him play, he was so small and the horn so big - he really could play it quite well.

Soon after the show we managed to get better instruments, and Frank Jackson, an old singing school master and a good band man, became interested in our band. He gave us instructions that were badly needed. For a few years we were in much demand to furnish music for serenades, Democrat and Republican rallies, roller skating rinks and promenades. We had some snappy blue uniforms, and they too were trimmed with yellow, like the circus band, but we never got a job with a circus. There were about eight of us, ages from twelve to eighteen. I really think those old hard-working fathers were proud of us.

A funny thing happened when we went to Marshfield to help celebrate the Fourth of July. We got quite a few extra boys to help out on that day. Frank Hoyt was the drum major and drilled us on marches. He had some signals that meant stop, go play, also when we were to make right or left turns. He could handle the baton like a professional. Frank decided it would be fitting to get out of the band wagon at the edge of the village. We formed in line four abreast and started up through the main street. It was up hill for a little ways so we just marched to the beat of the drums. When we got to the top of the hill Frank gave the signal to play. I don't remember the name of the march we were playing, but it went all right until we reached the common where the natives had gathered. We got a big hand there, so Frank decided to make a grand turn about. He tossed the baton high in the air and caught it as it come down, clicked his heels together, and gave the signal to turn right about face. WE were still playing the march and somehow Frank Jack, who was playing the big helicon, dropped his music and in trying to pick it up bumped into someone else, and in no time at all we were in a bad scramble. The drum major, sensing something was wrong, turned around and saw the mess we were in, yelled, "What in Hell do you think you are trying to do?". We didn't do any more marching that day - we played in the band stand.

Later in the day some of us were in Mark Mears' general store eating peanuts, there were lots of people in there eating crackers and cheese. Some gypsies came in and bought something. Some of them didn't have any shoes or stockings on, and Mark, who was waiting on them, said to one of the women; "Durable stockings you are

wearing, never will need mending". The woman replied, "You're darned right Mister, pants are of the same material". Everyone in the store got some free peanuts from Mark.

About the last time the band played together was to give the boys a serenade when they got married. When Frank, the clarinet player, got married we decided to do the real job. Dressed in our blue uniforms with brass buttons and yellow trimmings we crossed over the covered bridge where we previously had so many meetings. Some one thought of the brilliant idea that we should have lights on our caps so we could see the music. So we got some cat tails, soaked them in kerosene, stuck them in our caps, lighted them and started toward the house playing "There'll be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight." All went well until we got to the house, then the oil began to run down on our caps and to prevent being burned alive, we began throwing the cat tails in all directions, Uncle George Townsend (Frank's father) came rushing out of the house and yelled, "What are your trying to do, set the buildings afire?" (Uncle George was scared to death about fires. He always, before going to bed, would travel around the house, and look along the skyline of the railroad to see if those spark throwing, wood burning engines hadn't set fire to his "backwoods", - they had done just that a number of times.) Well, after the excitement had died down we were invited in and met the bride and groom and had some apples and cider.

Soon after, Fred Dow got married and we gave him a serenade. He was a long time in coming to the door, but after we played "We Won't Go Home 'Till Morning", Fred came out on the piazza and invited us in - told us, "She'll be down in a minute". Fred had a habit of chewing his finger nails when he was thinking hard or had something serious on his mind. We stayed as long as we could think of anything to say. This proved to be the last serenade, but the band boys all gave each member a "Seth Thomas" clock for a wedding present when they got married; and they are for the most part ticking away the time in 1942 as a reminder of the days long past, when we had so many good times and so little to worry about.

After a few years the band boys drifted apart. Some went away to work; others to school. For a long time some played in the Marshfield band and quite a few helped to organize the Plainfield Military Band. These like all other small town bans have gone. You may occasionally see a band instrument resting on the top of a piano in some homes, but for the most part they are silent.

In the year 1892 the old read school house was torn down and a new one built on the same spot only a little farther back from the road. This same Herm Townsend built this new school house, but none of the boys I am writing about ever went to the new school.

In recent years the families in this same district, through their own efforts, have put in a basement containing a dining room, a good heating plant, electric lights and a nice hard wood floor. All paid for by the splendid team work of the people of this same neighborhood. Such cooperation and hard work makes this one of the best one room school houses in the valley of the Winooski River.

Perhaps I am thinking of those kind old people with a mind that is partial, there are probably lots of neighborhoods just like the Kings district. They are all gone now, the Kings, Perkins, Spencers, Townsends, Martins, Fitzgeralds, Dows, Maxfields and Rushlows, all gone and somehow I am not sorry.

Probably some of the larger farms will take in more real money in 1942 than did all the farms in District No. 11 together in 1880, yet they seemed to be happy and enjoy life with their large families and small incomes. They had their floods and hurricanes, droughts and frosts that ruined their fruit and vegetables, yet somehow they managed to overcome all these disasters which are no different now than they were in those days. They probably did not understand farming as well as they do now, but I do believe they did know how to overcome obstacles, and it made them strong in mind and body to work out their own difficulties without expecting or getting help from anyone except their neighbors.

Yes, and they had their babies just they same as they do now, yet trained nurses had not come into the picture. A good doctor and some kind neighbor for a few days and the mother would continue to do her usual work.

I don't think many of the boys that went to school in District No. 11 at the time I am talking about did the things they had planned to do. As for myself my first great ambition was to run a peddle cart like A. W. King's - a big red and yellow cart with broom and mop handles sticking up all around the top. A big chestnut horse he called "Jerry" and a big umbrella to keep off the rain. The cart was loaded with tinware, glassware, but mostly with bags of rags that he traded tinware for. Oh boy! that was the life for me. Instead I learned to be a barber. Then for a time I was in the grocery business, clerked in a general store, and post office, and finally used up thirty years delivering

mail to the people that made up the most prosperous part of Marshfield and a portion of Plainfield, called R. D. 1. The two hundred odd people, included the District No. 11. They were and are very dear to me. No better folks lived anywhere than these patrons I served.

There was Leo Hill, he too wanted to be a barber, but he learned to take photographs and made a success as a photographer.

Curtis "the Innocent" wanted to be a cowboy, he really did go "west", but soon returned with a Chicago saddle and settled on a nice farm.

Fred Dow, "the Untouchable" followed his father's business always along the sawmill line. He was rather tough, having been brought up among saw mill workers, - was quite young when his mother died. He could swear by rule, fight like a tiger, got more lickings in school, got blamed for things he didn't do, but finally married a Scotch girl from Canada, raised up some nice children and for the greater part of his life was a Sunday School Superintendent in a Methodist church in one of the larger cities in Massachusetts.

There was a time during the height of our band career that we all wanted to go to Philadelphia and work for J. W. Pepper making band instruments but we didn't ever go. These long range planned programs don't always work out just as they are expected to. This applies to boys and girls as well as to countries.

Well, after all those days that we didn't know how to appreciate any more than the boys and girls do now; we did each of us get the best wife and raised up the best young ones of any group of people I know anything about. That doesn't make it so, but if we are satisfied other people ought to be.

There was Martin Foster, he was not a very good scholar. When teacher asked him to name the countries that made up the Eastern Hemisphere, he said, "Europe, Eriop, Oriup, Arioup and part of Australia." Yet he made a good railroad engineer, and ran an engine on a southern railroad for a long time.

To mention some of the girls: there was Bertha Perkins with her big round brown eyes, - she was a good singer - could put most any boy on his back at "ruff and tumble." Della St. Cyr, tall with blue eyes, probably one of the best scholars in school, could out run most of them. Luella Dow was not so fair to look at, but could spell the whole school down and was a wizard at figures. Mabel Emery and Flora Hill were something like the "Two Little Girls in Blue", - I really believe that at sometime every boy in school was in love with them. Don't think it had much effect on the girls, but the boys were hard hit. We all suffered at one time or another with an acute case of love. I don't know what the first attack is called now, but we called it "calf" love. It was like eating too many green apples, or eating choke cherries and drinking milk afterwards. Each of the boys as they had their attack of calf love, wished he could lie down under an apple tree and be found there cold in death by the girl he loved - perhaps she would cry a little - just as she did the last day of school. Girls and boys who never went to school in a one room red schoolhouse don't know the heartaches of the "last day." Sometimes the teacher would let a boy and girl sit together for a little - they could use the big geography for a screen - they could get their heads close together and laugh and perhaps cry a little. You don't remember how salty the tears tasted that last day, do you?

I will just mention one case of this calf love business, there are others I could tell about but I ain't agoing to . My brother Fred seemed to fare better with the girls than the other boys. He really did manage to walk part way home from school with Mabel, tho' he didn't live on that road. He sometimes went home with her from paring bees and parties. Fred and Mabel seemed to think a lot of each other. They grew more bold and Fred actually went to see Mabel in her own home. That was his first and I suspect his last call. Their juvenile love suddenly went cold when Harris, the stern foster parent of Mabel, suddenly appeared.

Here is his ultimatum as Mabel and Fred and incidentally, Flora Hill who was a very near neighbor, heard the remarks, and the one-sided declaration was soon heard all over District No. 11. Harris was a character. He wore shin whiskers that had a peculiar way of turning upwards toward his face, sometimes like a fish hook, and of reddish brown color. Harris had only one eye that made him different from anyone else in the neighborhood. That one eye would open and shut like a corn planter in action when he was excited. Harris said, "Yee see, you know, by God, this sorter thing has got to stop, it has". Fred may be all right but there is a damn disagreeable element in that Townsend tribe and Mabel ain't going to get mixed up with them, she ain't".

Harris had a peculiar way of repeating the last few words of his statements to make them carry more power. Harris married rather late in life. He and his bride made a dooryard call at our house and while his wife was

visiting with mother, Harris told father in a low voice not intended for us kids, “You see, you know, Herman, she kinder took my eye, she did.”

That way of expressing his feelings made a by-word for us kids for a long time. I always supposed that the reason Harris had for not liking the “Townsend tribe” was because father was a Democrat and Harris was a Republican, but my brother Fred believed the real reason why Harris objected to Mabel seeing him was when Harris was building his new house and father was working for him, father was slacking lime for the plasterer; they always used a big wooden box and a long handled hoe to mix the correct portion of lime, sand and hair - a very particular job to get it just right. When lime and water are mixed it is hot; in fact it boils just like thick molasses. Harris was standing by the mixing box and father was working the hoe when a big gob of hot lime and sand landed right in the top of Harris’ boot. Harris yelled, “What in hell and damnation you trying to do”. And pulled his boot off as quickly as possible.

It didn’t help the situation any for all the help laughed.

For some reason Harris was not very popular in District No. 11.

CHAPTER III

GERTIE AND AUNT MARTHA

Gertie Spencer was one of the girls that studied hard. She was rather the Puritan type. She would be described today as streamline - no variation in her build. She did not slide on jumpers and was inclined to by shy, or perhaps I should say bashful. Gertie did not have any brothers or sister, this was unusual for District No. 11. This fact may account for her, what we thought was, shyness. Gertie was at her best when it come to speaking pieces. Sometimes on a Friday afternoon we didn’t have to do any studying, instead we all had to learn to speak a piece and “spell down”. This was done by the teachers naming someone for leaders and they wold go out and stand on opposite sides of the room. Then the leaders would choose the pupils, each one taking his place on the side that called him. Each side would call the best spellers first and so on until all were lined up on two sides. Teacher would put the words to be spelled to the leaders, alternating. If you misspelled a word after two attempts you went to your seat. The two who stood up the longest were “it" for the next spelldown, that’s that. Now about the speaking pieces.

The scholars could select any piece they chose, but they had to learn one or stay after school and learn one, or some other method of punishment would be prescribed. The boys’ choice would be “The Charge of the Light Brigade” or the “R.R. Engineer”, and sometimes several boys would learn the same piece just to be smart. We always had to go out front, bow to the teacher and scholars, and say the piece we had learned. Some of the scholars were very good and would put lots of work in committing a long piece to memory. Now this Gertie that I mentioned had a rather high pitched voice, and would always select a piece like the “Death and Burial of Little Nell” or about the traveler who shot his dog because he kept barking. His master thought he had gone mad only to discover the real cause when he retraced his steps to get his saddle bags that he had forgotten. There he found his poor, little, dear Fido shot by his own master. This piece was sure to cause some nose-blowing and weeping.

Gertie had an Aunt Martha that I remember quite well. She used to come and visit Uncle George and Aunt Olive Townsend and talk about the Seventh Day Advents. The society had quite a number of followers of which Aunt Martha was one of the leaders. She had a red splotch on her neck and one side of her face. We kids asked Aunt Olive what made it and she would say, “oh, it is only a birthmark”, but Uncle George would say, “Birthmark, hell”, and proceed to explain to us kids that before Martha was born, her mother used to fuss and fuss about some fresh liver to eat (in those days they called it pluck). When he butchered his bogs he took the pluck and threw it at his wife and when Martha was born there was a perfect picture of the liver on her face and neck. Folks could trace every unusual mark or deformity in their children to something that had happened before they were born. Possibly these old superstitious people were as near right as the modern explanations are.

Uncle George used to call Martha the old “Revelator” probably because she revealed so much about the Seventh Day Advents and quoted the Bible to folks who worked or played on Saturday. That was their Sabbath Day. There is a story “Handed down” that the Advents had a meeting at the foot of Lord’s Hill on a pleasant day and it was revealed to them that they should go to the top of the hill and if they were good and pure they would be

taken up by the Savior. So some of the believers made the journey, put on their long flowing robes, climbed a big boulder and floated off into space. They landed in the elderberry bushes. Aunt Martha was one of the believers who took the flight, relating afterwards that their faith was not quite strong enough. There may be no truth in this incident but the hill with the bald spot on the top was ever after known as Lord's Hill and the small one on the south of it was named Devil's Hill. These names, as well as Jerusalem, are all local. They are referred to in the geography as part of the Green Mountains, but they are part of District No. 11 and if cellar holes and grave stones could talk there would be many interesting stories.

CHAPTER IV

FRED'S TEAMING DAYS

My brother Fred always wanted to do the teaming. When we went anywhere he always had to do the driving. He would take the neighbors' steers to break and they were always glad to have him to it. Bome Martin would have Fred take a pair of wild two-year olds that had never been handled and after a few days of wild run-a-ways and all kinds of mishaps he would get them so he could hitch them to a bobsled and team them all over the neighborhood. He felt pretty big with his long lashed whip "geeing" and "hawing" while he rode on the sled that he had rigged with a box so he could draw slabs from the mill. One of the scraps that I remember was when he decided to clean out the back house. For convenience these houses were equipped with a long box that had an iron ring in one end so when the house needed cleaning, all that was required was a team of some kind to hitch to the ring on the end of the box and out it would come. Well, Fred decided to use the steers. After securing the chain to the ring on the end of the box that had a wide flat bottom like a drag, he started for the field to deposit the load, riding on the back of the drag. The steers responded to his "wohish", "gees" and "haws". All went according to schedule until he came down through the yard in front of the house, just to show how handy the steers were.

It was a little down grade and there was some ice and snow. The drag and its load slid on the steers' hind legs. They jumped and Fred yelled whoa. Then the drag hit them again. That time they didn't stop but kept gaining speed and made the sharp curve around the barn. The ring pulled out of the box freeing the steers from the load. They went over the hill as fast as they could run, and Fred, the drag and contents went head over heels into the orchard. WE didn't have any bathtub but mother saw to it that Fred used the sap tub and plenty of soft soap. The tub which we all used was really a large wooden sap bucket. No one in District No. 11 had a bathroom at that time I am writing about, but they all had a buckboard and plenty of sap buckets, soft soap and a backhouse that had to be cleaned out occasionally. Everyone now has a sewer that empties into the Winooski River. That doesn't improve it any for a swimming place for the boys.

When I started this yarn about Fred and his teaming business, what I really wanted to say was that I didn't get much practice driving the old buckskin mare, though I was a year and a half older than Fred. Well, I got courage up enough to ask Bertha Bowles to go to a party. I had the high posted sleigh and the same buckskin mare we were all brought up with. It was dark before we got to the party and just as I drove into the yard I got the lines crossed, ran over a log pile and dumped Bertha into the snow. When we got things righted again and started going, Bertha asked me what happened I said, "Guess I must have got the lines crossed". All the kids and Bertha too, kidded me for years for running over Perkins' log pile and dumping my best girl into the snow. After that Fred said I could drive part of the time, at least until I learned to keep the lines straight.

A while back I had quite a little to say about "Chic Sales" houses. Perhaps I should explain about these necessary out buildings. There is, or rather was, no difference between a backhouse, outhouse or privy. In our family they were called backhouses, later some of the more refined people called them privies. Anyhow that hasn't anything to do with this story, only I'm including it to make the article longer and less interesting, just as those "best sellers" use page after page telling about a beautiful sunset or the color of maple leaves after a frost.

At the time I am writing about, my Aunt Emiline, who was one of the best persons in the Townsend family - a real Methodist and everyone loved her for just what she was. This widowed aunt had a son that was subject to fits, in fact he had them so much that his mind was affected and he would go teetering about the house and was not always in a presentable condition when company called.

Well, one time when he was about eight years old, his mother had taken him to the backhouse. While there, the mother, looking out of the small window that such houses usually had, saw the minister drive into the yard. There being no one else to greet him, she hastily left the boy to complete his toilet; turned the button on the door, and rushed through the kitchen and opened the door for the minister. As was the custom, Aunt Emiline, after a short visit, asked the minister to say a prayer. They were just kneeling down to their chair when the high pitched voice of her little boy rang out, "Maw, ain't you gonter let your little boy out of the backhouse"? No one, ever knew whether Aunt Em or the good parson finished their prayer or not, buy she being a Townsend would of course, see the funny side and told us about it.

Yes, she and her little fitty boy have been gone a long time now, but she left a lot of friends that loved her, and everyone called her Aunt Em.

I did not intend to say so much about the Townsends only as a group, but since telling about Aunt Em and her fitty boy, it comes to my mind about Uncle Nathaniel Townsend. He was the youngest of all my Dad's sisters and brothers. He too, chewed B & L tobacco and wore whiskers, that were red only folks called sandy, and like all bewhiskered fathers you couldn't tell by their looks whether they were pleased or angry. Their whiskers destroyed their expressions just as too much make-up spoils the natural beauty of women folds. God did a pretty fair job on most folks, though he did slip up on some of them.

These Townsends seemed to be able to do most anything, though most of them were farmers. Yet my Dad made ox yokes, buckboards, sawmills, barns and houses and bridges, in fact he could make almost anything buy money. Uncle Nat seemed to be the undertaker in his neighborhood. They didn't call them undertakers then, they just laid out folks that died.

When Harvey Batchelder passed away, his wife Eliza, who was so suddenly made a widow, sent for Nat. He as usual went and did the things he had so often done for others in the neighborhood. After Nat got his job completed he asked Eliza if she would like to come in and see Harvey. This she did and after gazing down at her now silent husband, she looked at Uncle Nat, with tears in her eyes and smiled sweetly and said, "He looks real cute".

Not long after she married again. Uncle Nat, meeting her one day asked for her new husband. She said, "Well, he ain't much compared with Harvey, but he is a good deal better than no man at all".

The buckboard and the buckskin mare were all the conveyance we had for a long time. The buckboard was just like everybody else's, - they were all alike. But the buckskin mare that we all drove was different. Dad got her before she was broken when we kids were small, so we kinder grew up together. Father did a good job breaking her. She was safe and kind, and terribly lazy. * neck, long ears, homely beyond description. She would stand anywhere, was afraid of nothing but the whip and steam cars. When she was plugging along the road and you said whoa, or anything that sounded like whoa, she would stop so quick you were liable to go over the dashboard. That wold make us kids mad, so sometimes when we went to the "Hollar" to do the shopping, the old mare stopped, we would give her a crack with the whip then she would jump enough to snap your head off.

When father had to go to the village for something, he could never get past Howard Martin's house without stopping to talk. Howard was brought up on the "Vermont Watchman", a Republican weekly and Dad's paper was Hiram Atkins "Argus and Patriot", a decidedly democratic weekly. Well, one time Dad was seated in the buckboard and Howard had one foot on the hub of the wheel. They were having it out on Hayes and Tilden, the candidates for President. Suddenly the old mare heard something like the whip being taken out of the socket. She jumped. Howard tumbled down, and before Dad could gather up the lines he was well on the way to Plainfield. He didn't seem to be mad at the buckskin, but when he got home he told us kids if we couldn't drive the horse without using the whip he would try it out on us. We didn't talk back, in fact we learned never to do that, but Howard told us all about it. He said it was real funny to see Dad and the old buckskin take off down the road so suddenly.

Father couldn't always say just what he thought at the time, he had to spit first. It's quite an accomplishment to spit tobacco juice gracefully and is fast becoming one of the lost arts.

Howard didn't use tobacco, yet he was a good neighbor. He seemed to understand boys, even when his boy Curt and I put a dead woodchuck in a hole and fixed it up so it looked like a live one. Howard was working in the field and when he saw the woodchuck he came around on the back side of the hole, thinking the chuck would not see him, crept carefully up, and rammed the tines of his pitchfork clear through the already dead and helpless

woodchuck. Then we laughed. Howard wasn't mad when we played tricks on him. He seemed to remember that he was a boy once, and he stayed that way as long as he lived.

I remember one time a few years later when Curt and some of us boys were playing in Howard Martin's new barn, someone found a bottle of rum that Howard had hidden in a grain bin. Most farmers used to have some spirits for haying, also when they washed sheep. Some of the people who thought it wrong to drink rum used to put Snakeroot and Thoroughwort brew in it and called it "bitters" that would help rheumatism, also a preventative for colds. Anyhow we took Howard's rum and mixed it with corn meal and gave it all to the turkeys and hens. They put on a good show for us kids, trying to fly and light on the barnyard fence. Their judgement of distance was bad.

Sometime later Howard missed his rum and we saw him hunting for something in the hog house. Curt said, "Whatchy looking for, Dad"? His father replied that he had some medicine in the grain box and it was gone. "Perhaps that damn Frenchman that was working in the sugar place stole it". Curt said, "Probably."

I think it helps a lot if boys can grow up, old and bald headed, and still keep the boys liking them, and girls too for that matter. It kinder keeps you from thinking you are growing old. Folks don't like to grow old, even if they do say they don't mind. One of the hardest jobs in the world is to grow old and be nice about it.

CHAPTER V

THE BUCK BOARD CRAZE

It is quite possible you don't know anymore about buck boards than about red flannel underwear and jumpers that I mentioned a while back, so I'll just ramble on for a while. The buckboard craze struck District No. 11 around the 1875-1885's just as Henry Ford's Tin Lizzies did twenty-five years later, only buck boards didn't cost as much and were more reliable. Every family had a wagon, that preceded the buck board era. These high wheeled wagons were well made by local wheel wrights. They had a high seat that was upholstered with leather. The back of the body was also covered with leather and slanted up to form the back of the seat. A leather dash in front with a leather "boot" that was attached to the dash and folded up then not in use.

They were patterned after the "Deacon's One Hoss Shay". These wagons were not very popular because they were so high up, and there were no extra room for anything, you couldn't even carry a basket of eggs. Some of them were called phaetons. They had even less room in them, you couldn't carry a halter or hitch rope without tying it on the back. Every family owned one and they all cussed them. Dad took the body and springs off our phaeton and substituted four spruce boards about eight feet long that connected the front and rear wheels. These boards or slats were bolted to a rocker plate on the forward axle and to the stock on the back wheels. He built up a box-like seat that was hung on hinges so the box under the seat would hold as much as two bushels. Two grown people could ride on the seat and the kids on back.

People used these buck boards to go to church, to mill to bring home a barrel of flour. They were so practical that in a very short time Dad converted hundreds of these old wagons into a modern buck board. Some were painted fancy colors but most of them were just Brandon Brown, that was a mineral paint made in Brandon, Vermont. It didn't cost much so most everything was painted Brandon brown. My Dad put the whole population of District No. 11 on buck boards, and believe it or not some of these same buck boards are still in use; but privy cleaning and steer breaking is a lost art. The former in recent years has been taken care of almost entirely by water power and on that account flies have been on the decrease, for which we are truly thankful.

We hear quite often that the Town Meeting is a true form of democracy. That is true as far as it goes, but the school districts also were democratic, only more so.

Those old whiskered fathers not only made laws to suit the occasion but executed them without fear or favor. Like when an undesirable family moved into District No. 11 folks began to complain about losing lambs, chickens, eggs, etc., and evidence pointed to that newly arrived family; those old law abiding citizens called on this particular family, advised them to hitch up their team and with the help of the good neighbors, loaded what goods they had into the wagon and told the family, "All aboard", the foreman of this friendly call of neighbors said to the man holding the reins, "Your ticket reads New Hampshire, and remember, no stop over privileges allowed. A committee will see that these instructions are obeyed".

These neighbors that so kindly lent a helping had to get these undesirables to some other locality were all disguised as Indians, probably got the idea from the Boston Tea Party; but this all happened long before I can remember. The story was just "handed down."

You know the Boston Tea Party was composed of a bunch of fun-loving patriots disguised as Indians, and sponsored by the West India Tea Co., so they could sell their tea to the New England customers at a price that was higher than the taxed English tea, tax included. The patriotic idea was not thought of for years afterwards.

American Indians have had to stand a lot from the white man; even Columbus had to kidnap a few of them to prove to his Spanish Queen that he really had discovered something. History in the making and history in the school books are sometimes quite alike, but not often.

John Martin, one of the early settlers, was losing some of his dry wood out of the shed by the side of the road. Dry wood was sometimes very scarce, but always plenty of green wood. Uncle Josh recognized some of his dry wood in the kitchen wood box of one of his neighbors who lived across the river. He didn't say anything, but went home and returned with an armful of green wood and dumped it into the wood box. He said to the wife, "We are short of dry wood and our folks have to mix it; wish you would do the same."

I should be able to write a chapter on Politics, as I remember very well the excitement around election time. A boy who had a father that was a democrat believed his boy should be a democrat also, and so with the republican family. With some of those politicians it was a crime for a republican to marry into a democrat family and vice versa.

In the 75's and 85's in District No. 11 there were hardly any democrats. My father and Uncle George were about the only ones. I remember one election my Dad had to go to Montpelier with Howard Martin and carry a torch in the Republican Parade, because he felt sure the democrats would win. Howard thought different and Howard was right, so Dad had to go and march with Howard and carry the republican banner. That certainly was a heavy penalty for being in the minority. When Cleveland was elected in 1884 the same arrangements were carried out, only father was the winner. I remember when we came to school the morning that the news came that Cleveland had been elected. Fred Dow came in the schoolhouse just before teacher rang the bell and announced the Cleveland victory in this way, "Cleveland's elected and the country has gone to hell, by God". Teacher said, "Why Freddie, you should not say that.". Fred replied, "She has, by God, for my father says so." That was the first democratic president I remember.

Folks ought to know about King's Hill and Lord's Hill and Jerusalem. One day not long ago, I went up to King's Hill and set on this rock that woodchucks lived under. There was Lord's Hill way over to the north of Jerusalem; a bald spot on the top like was on Horace Hill's head, and some shaggy hemlock trees near the top with their long limbs sticking out. We kids thought they were God throwing water down the hill maybe to drown the world because he was mad that the world was so wicked, and he made it thunder hard so boys and dogs were afraid. There is Jerusalem where the first settlers came. There are no houses there now, only grave stones and cellar holes and stone walls. Some apple trees, a cold water spring at the foot of Lord's Hill where folks used to get nice cold water. Only foxes and a few folks know where it is now, and the railroad that has a sharp grade as it goes around Lord's Hill. In the 75's the engines burned wood, and instead of being numbered they were lettered in big gilt letters "W.A. Stowell" or "D.R. Sawtell", these and some other people were the ones that ran the railroad. We always remember the way the sparks would fly out of the big flaring smokestacks at night when they were pulling freight cars loaded with cattle, hogs and lumber. Once a week they had a butter car to take the butter to Boston.

In the 75's and 85's the "gravel pit" that was a part of District No. 11 was a busy place. Much of the gravel that was used for ballast on the Montpelier and Wells River railroad came from there. A woodshed a hundred feet long was where the engines wooded up. Farmers could draw all the four foot wood they could cut. The railroad would pay them for all they could deliver. It was a year around job for someone with a saw rig to cut this four foot wood into sixteen inches. The engines would burn it about as fast as the fireman could throw it into the fire box.

It was in 18733 that the first train went over this road that added so much to District No. 11. Long side tracts at the gravel pit where twenty or thirty flat bottom cars would draw gravel all summer to make the fills in the railroad which at that time had a lot of temporary trestles. The cars were loaded by hand. The shovelers were as thick as they could stand and work, the whole length of the train. There were not signs "Men Working", but there was a boss walking the length of the train that saw to it that the shovels were kept busy until the cars were loaded. Then he would yell, "Clear off the rails and get aboard." That meant for them to take their shovels and clear the

gravel off the rails so the cars would not be thrown off the track when the engine started the train. Then they would all get aboard and ride to the place where the work was being done. The workmen lived in the box cars, on the job and were called “contract labor”.

Several saw mills shipped hundreds of cars of lumber from the gravel pit, surplus rails and ties were stored there. Farmers would have carloads of sawdust come to the gravel pit from some of the steam lumber mills located on this railroad.

There was never any station house there, but trains would stop to take or leave passengers. All the business was handled at the Plainfield Station. This gravel pit that is so plainly seen from King’s Hill was a busy place at the time of this story.

I don’t want to get the Montpelier and Wells River railroad mixed up with District No. 11, even if it does go through on the side hill in sight of the red schoolhouse. That should be another story.

The Montpelier and Wells River Railroad grew up with the boys and girls that were born and went to school at District No. 11 in the 1870’s and 80’s. All of the boys that didn’t want to play in a circus band planned to get a job on this railroad. Some of them really did.

There were the Mansfield boys, Martin Foster, and some of the Fitzgerald boys. Bart Fitzgerald was conductor for many years. He had charge of the excursion trains that carried the picnickers to the White Mountains. Everyone that could find 1.25 went on these picnic outings. The railroad officials didn’t have to consult the state commission of railroads regarding rates, etc. This was before everything was “regulated”.

Fred Laird who was one of the best lawyers in the state, and by the way he was one of the older scholars that went to school in District No. 11, told us at a picnic we held in Jerusalem that there were so many State and Federal laws that a person with the best of intentions would break some of them on an average of once a week.

The neighbors who conducted this picnic got Fred to come back to his old neighborhood just to talk to the folks. He told about him and my oldest brother Herbert butchering a pig for Mrs. Preston Bancroft. They allowed they hadn’t had much experience, but the Mrs. thought with their help the three could do the job all right. They caught the pig that was destined to furnish meat for Mrs. Bancroft (everyone called her Aunt Nancy) through the winter. He was not over fat for the reason that he ran wold around the buildings with occasionally a few scraps and dishwater to add to what he could find. In telling the story, Fred said they got the pig down after a while and Brother Herbert held him on his back and Fred did the sticking. He pushed the knife well down in the pig’s neck. Nancy deciding it had been properly done told them to let the pig up as it would bleed better on its feet. As soon as the pig was freed he lit out around the barn down into the orchard, not much worse off for the operation. Evidently the pig thought that the trio were no friends of his and refused to die or be caught for a second operation. He was slowly bleeding from the wound but seemed to gain in speed and his piercing squeals took the fight out of the boys. But Aunt Nancy said they must catch the pig anyway. After a while they got the pig cornered. One of them hit him on the head with a club knocking him down. The second operation was successful for they cut his head off completely. Perhaps this butchering experience helped my brother to become a doctor. Anyway eventually he studied medicine and became a really good country doctor.

Years later my father told Ben Moores (one of our old neighbors who had crazy spells) that Herbert was a doctor. Ben said, “I want to know if (the damned) is really a Dr. Why, I wouldn’t have him doctor my old cat.”

Quite a number of years after this hog killing bee, in fact it was after Fred had established himself in a lucrative law practice in Montpelier, he became the owner of Laird’s Mill Pond where his father had for years operated the sawmill that did so much to help the growth and prosperity of District No. 11. Fred had this pond stocked with trout and posted it “No Fishing or Trespassing”. To see that this warning was obeyed he arranged with one Chester Wood to occupy the camp that Fred had built. Chet, as he was called, was a big man not much over twenty years and could lick his weight in wild cats. During the fishing season a couple of Fred’s lawyer friends, I believe their names were Dillingham and Howland, asked Fred if they couldn’t go up to this pond and try their luck at fishing. Fred saw his chance to get even with them for some jokes they had played on him so he told them to go ahead and fish as long as you want to. Soon after, one morning Chet saw a couple of well dressed men out on the pond smoking and enjoying themselves. He watched them pull in a couple of trout. He made up his mind that they were strangers and decided to go into action at once. He went down to the shore and called out "What you fellers

think you are doing, fishing on this private pond?" They replied, "We are Mr. Laird's friends and he told us we could fish here as long as we cared to".

"I don't give a damn who you are or where you come from, you better heave anchor and come in PDQ".

They said they came 15 miles to fish and they were going to fish as long as they cared to. Chet replied, "Better be coming in if you don't want to get wet". Chet tossed a ten pound sledge hammer into a boat and started for the somewhat frightened fishermen. He pulled up along side, heaved the sledge straight down through the bottom of the fishermen's boat and without saying anything started back for the shore. The boat with the gaping hole soon began to sink and soon the occupants were in the water hanging to the gun wale. The shore looked too far for them to swim. They decided they had fished as long as they cared to and asked Chet to take them ashore. Chet swung his boat around and they started to climb in the boat.

Chet said no. "If you fellers have decided you have fished long enough you can catch hold of the back end of this boat and I'll tow you ashore." They started to climb in again, but Chet took his oar and told them, "I said I'd tow you in, better stay outside."

The well soaked fishermen were soon on shore and saying something about having the law on the big country sledge heaver. Starting for Montpelier they came into Fred's office somewhat dryer than when they left the pond, but still looking rather damp. When Fred saw the condition of his brother lawyers he burst out laughing and said, "Thought you fellows went a fishing". Then it occurred to them that Fred knew all the time how their fishing trip would turn out. They all laughed together as only lawyers can and decided that Fred had a very reliable caretaker of his fish pond.

To get back to the railroad again. Soon after the road was completed (and most of the towns that the road passed through had issued bonds, some of them as much as $40,000 and some of the towns, Marshfield anyway, just a few years back paid the last of their installments. Other towns somehow met their obligations that they voted on themselves, though the greater part of the bonds were paid by the next generation). Anyhow, soon after the road was completed it failed up. All the rolling stock and everything connected with it was attached by the contractors for debts. I believe the contractor's name was a Mr. Munson. One of their few locomotives happened to be at Plainfield Depot at the time it was attached. The officer who served the papers deputized Sam Cree as keeper of this valuable piece of road equipment. The engine was housed in the shed built for the purpose of protecting the engine and the engineer and firemen who were hired to look after the iron monster. Sam, who was hard of hearing and very conscientious lived in the cab. One morning the engineer said he would have to build a fire in the engine and get up a little steam so the boiler wouldn't rust. This was all right with Sam. The fireman crammed the fire box with balsam wood until the steam gauge showed quite a pressure and the shed was filled with smoke to a point where breathing was difficult.

The engineer asked Sam to get down from the cab and go to the end of the shed so that he, the engineer, would just let the engine roll out so the smoke stack would just clear the entrance to the shed so they all would not suffocate.

Sam thought it was a good idea and placed himself at the point beside the track where he could see when the stack cleared. He gave the engineer the signal to slowly go ahead. The engineer pulled the throttle wide open. With a roar she leapt out of the shed. The engineer tossed Sam his coat and waved a goodbye. The astonished Sam with all the authority of a duly appointed keeper yelled, "you come right straight back here", but they didn't come back. Sam remarked to some of the loafers, "You don't suppose they're running away do you?" The story is that their first stop was at Boston and the engineer got $100 for the job. However, the Montpelier and Wells River Railroad grew and prospered as long as the original owners lived and is still doing its bit as a branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad.

Back when this railroad was still belching wood smoke and throwing hot cinders from the high big hooded smoke stack my sister Jennie and a girl friend and neighbor by the name of Ada Dow used to go picking raspberries beside this M and WRR track. They took me along with them for some reason, that proved to be quite an important time in my ten years of life. The railroad was not more than one mile from our house and in plain sight as it skirted the side hill across from the Onion River. We crossed the river at Eugene Cree's farm, then we just followed the old road to "Larry's Crossing", so-called as Larry Fitzgerald the stuttering Irishman's farm was located just across the railroad track.

We stopped at Mr. Cree's for a drink of water. Alice Cree, who lived in Plainfield, was there visiting her cousins. She was a year or so younger than I, so she went along with us. She was the prettiest girl I had ever seen. We were not long getting acquainted. She had long curly hair and wore a number 3 shoe just the size I wore. Ordinarily I would have been barefoot only we had to wear shoes when we went raspberrying on account of snakes and scratchy bushes. After we got to the railroad tracks where the berries were we all worked north toward the gravel pit that I have mentioned several times before. My sister and Ada had their pails filled with berries before we got to the pit. Probably Alice and I did not do quite as well. Anyway, when we go to the gravel pit my sister said to me, "Ada and I are going down by Dow's Sawmill. As it will be the nearest way home, you and Alice can go back down the railroad track to Larry's Crossing the way we came up. And remember the 4 o'clock freight will be coming soon. Take good care of Alice and look out for the train". With this warning we started down the track. I felt quite puffed up with my nice little girl friend. At ten years of age I had the care and protection of the only girl in the world. I showed her how I could walk on the rails and not fall off. She couldn't do it. So I took hold of her hand and helped her. That was fun. Then we would see how many ties we could jump. We sat on a rock and made raspberry pies by taking raspberry leaves and squashing the berries between them. We used up all the berries we had picked. Before we got to the crossing we heard the train whistle at Colburn Crossing. Alice was frightened. I, being more used to the train, told her, "Don't be scared. I won't let a thing hurt you". She put her faith and her hands in mine as we scrambled up high on some rocks. I held her tight as the engine whistled at Larry's Crossing and came roaring past us throwing out smoke and cinders. We got down and hustled home but that was not all. Alice said if we would come down to Mr. Cree's house the next day we would all play school. So brother Fred and I asked Mother to let us go down and play just a little while. We were supposed to get the cows from the pasture by six o'clock so father could milk them when he got home from work. We had on old cow with three teats and one horn gone, and a red Devon heifer. We could milk the old cow but the Devon would kick anyone except father when they tried to milk her. I tried several times and got kicked out every time. She would roll her wall eyes at me, snuff her nose, and kick the milk pail and me clear across the stable. Did you ever try to milk a kicking cow that had you scared stiff? Father said it was all foolishness. I didn't think so.

Well, to get back to playing school. My Alice was the teacher. We forgot about the cows until it began to grow dark. Then we hustled home but father was already in the yard with his milk pail. "Where are the cows?" he demanded as soon as we arrived. We started to explain that we were playing school and, and--" Shut your mouth and get those cows. Then I'll tend to your case".

The cows were soon in the barn and Fred and I told mother what had happened. She said we had better go to bed. I don't know even now whether that was a mild punishment or to escape a more serious one. Anyhow, we were upstairs in bed and had our heads covered up when father came in with the milk. We could hear him travelling around and finally we heard him coming up the creaky backstairs, tramping around in the back chamber that led to our room. I think I didn't grow any for the next two years. Father had never licked any of us children. We felt certain he was just about to begin. Finally after he had traveled all around that squeaky backroom we heard him going down the stairs and we were soon in the happy land of dreams.

Next morning we asked mother what father came upstairs for and she said he was after catnip.

Well, the school party must have been well worth the bad scare or I would not have remembered it sixty years.

This Sam Cree that I mentioned, always wore a beaver tall hat and a blue black coat with brass buttons. He lived alone in a house just a few rods from his brother, Orvin Cree. Sam had fits so Orvin looked after him as best he could. One cold winter morning Orvin didn't see any smoke coming from the chimney of Sam's house so he went down to investigate expecting to find him sick or having had a fit. Sam was just dressing so his brother thought he wold build the kitchen fire. There was no kindling or shavings to start the fire with so Orvin went to the shed and chopped some. By the time he got the fire going Sam was dressed. Orvin said to Sam, "Why don't you cut the kindling the night before and have it ready to build in the morning?" Sam replied, "I thank God I am not so damn lazy that I can't get up in the morning and cut my kindlings". At one other time Sam was down to the village to a band concert. He was in Snow's Drug Store when he fell on the floor in a fit causing some excitement. Some one suggested a little whiskey. Snow, the proprietor, rushed to the back room and brought out a tumbler full of the spirits. They raised Sam to a sitting position putting the glass to his lips. Sam opened his eyes and inquired, "What is it, whiskey? Pretty good, guess I'll drink it all". He downed the whole glass full, got up and walked out leaving the store full of folks wondering if Sam had played them a trick.

There was Ben Moores. Probably his given name was Benjamin, though I never heard anyone call him by any other name but Ben, or "The Profit." He spoke of himself as the Profit, or Jesus Christ. He was an unusually bright man in many respects. He lived alone in an old house a little way out of Plainfield Village. He was quite religious and seemed to enjoy it. Some said he was crazy. He attended prayer meetings quite often and could make a prayer that was much better than the average layman. On one occasion he started off his usual way thanking God for the many blessings he had received. He finished the prayer by thanking God that he was not like Joe Lane or that lying Hiram Moore. He continued to name several deacons of the church and finished by asking God to help these unholy ones to depart from their sinful ways and lead lives as our Savior would wish them to do.

One evening Jo Bailey and some woodchoppers were returning home from their work. As they passed Ben's house they saw him bowed in prayer. Thinking to have some fun they began yelling like cats. Ben raised his head and listened a moment to the fighting tomcats. When the boys saw him take down his double barrel shotgun from over the door they jumped over the stone wall and lay down. Ben came out on the porch and let both barrels go in the general direction of the supposed cat fight, remarking, "I'll see if I can't pray without being interrupted by those damn cats". After this close call from the Profit and his double load of buckshot the boys decided not to stage any more cat fights when the Profit was praying.

On several occasions he made the statement that he would be raised from the dead on the seventh day and ascend into heaven. The fact that Ben was very poor in worldly goods meant that when he died he was buried by Hiram Moore, the overseer of the poor, in a little grave yard close by his home. This yard had not been used for many years and contained only a few graves with a number of tumble down black slate markers. Few people even knew there was such a grave yard in existence. Either for financial or some other reason unknown, the overseer buried Ben in this unkempt yard. When this become known some of the townspeople put up such a holler saying that Ben was a respectable citizen and should have been buried in the new center burying grounds with others of his relatives. They kicked up such a rumpus the overseer quietly had the body disinterred and placed in the center cemetery, with a proper marker for his grave. When someone discovered the empty grave of Ben's first resting place they immediately recalled his prophecy that he would rise on the seventh day and for some time many believed this had really happened.

Soon after the time when Sam let the engine escape from Plainfield a wealthy brewer from Medford, Mass., by the name of Daniel R. Sortwell, bought the controlling interest from the received. He set to work improving the road bed and replacing the temporary trestles with gravel from the pit in District No. 11. For this purpose he installed a wonder of wonders, the steam shovel. It was the center of attraction for the boys and girls of District No. 11. In fact, people came from all the surrounding small towns to see this human monster load the cars with gravel. From that time the steam shovel replaced the hundreds of hand shovelers. Thus, for better or worse, the machine age was born in this locality.

The Sortwells, three generations of them, first, D. R. Sortwell, then Alvin Sortwell and last a grandson, D. R. Sortwell, continued to operate and improve this railroad from the time of the receivership until it was absorbed by the Boston and Maine interests in the great railroad consolidation under President Mellon of the New Haven system. Soon after 1880 during the ownership of the Sortwells, the road bed and the equipment were in good shape.

About that time in addition to the two passenger trains a day each way and mixed trains and one-way freight, there was added during the summer travel a White Mountain Express that ran from Fabyans in the White Mountains to Saratoga, New York. These were the gala days of summer business at these two famous resorts. This train passed the Plainfield station at exactly 3:57 P. M. It ran express the whole length of the road. About the only person in this town with sufficient prestige to stop this train was John Ryan, a snappy Irishman, who bought and shipped livestock to Boston. John like Bome Martin got bitten by a political bug and represented the town of Plainfield in state legislatures and strange to say he, too, was added to the long list of people who couldn't stand prosperity.

We saw the first bicycles appear, also the first automobiles, telephones, radios and electric lights. We saw hoopskirts, bustles, red flannels discarded, likewise cutaway and swallowtail coats. Boys now day wear their shirt tails outside of their pants and no one yells, "Tuck in your shirt tail, Bub" like they would have in the "gay nineties".

Like the fall of Rome, these changes have been brought about gradually. You can't jump over a span of sixty-five years and find your place in this changing world. Old Rip Van Winkle tried it you remember and after a twenty year nap Rip was a bit confused.

The boys and girls that went to school in District No. 11 have all fitted in somehow in the place where destiny placed them. I just feel sorry for the boys and girls who grew up and didn't have a "school district", "corn husking", "paring bees", "kitchen junkets", "home knit woolen stockings", and "copper toed boots".

All these things come back to us now as we sit in our steam heated houses with built in bath tubs and electric stoves and listen to radio broadcasts tell of our boys, yes, and girls, fighting in all parts of the world in the Second World War. This is the third war that the boys and girls that were born in the 70''s can remember. While each war grows more terrible.

These thoughts to my mind are not very happy ones; rather let us do as Joe Benjamin, Howard Martin, the Hollisters and Horace Hill did when things went wrong. "Go to Jerusalem and salt the sheep and cattle". These people were the "older folks" when we were going to school in District No. 11.

As I try to finish this Red School House story, I am reminded that I started in in December of 1940, just to pass the time away. Now as I write the last few pages in December of 1943, the whole world is being rocked by bombs from the air and under the sea. What a job historians are going to have writing text books for the schools. Each country, as always, will play the star role in the world wide tragedy.

Whenever you happen to go St. Johnsbury way on U.S. Route No. 2, just park for a few minutes in the first school yard you come to after leaving Plainfield. This is our old District No. 11, now know as King's School. There you will see "King's Hill" with the big rock at the top and over to the east the Onion River, Lord's Hill and Jerusalem. You won't see King's peddle cart moving along the sandy road, or "Chic Sales" house with its squeaky door; or Jim McMayon with his six horse team load of lumber. Neither will you hear Dow's Sawmill, nor the steam whistle of Laird's Mill at 6 P.M. telling the bunch of "Canucks" (Canada Frenchmen) that they are through work until six the next morning.

All this is changed, even the Montpelier & Wells River combination mail, freight and passenger train consists mostly of train crew and coal smoke - but skunks, cats and woodchucks and boys and girls remain just about the same.