

## **Farm Life: Parker Farm**

Life on my father's dairy farm prior to WWII seems to me today to a long time ago yet it covered the first four decades of this century' My father started the farm about 1905 and continued until his death in 1951.

### **The plant.**

The property when he started consisted of the house, a barn and a carriage house. The house was maintained about as it was built except a "dust pan" dormer was added to increase headroom on the east side of the second floor. Another dormer on the west side over the upstairs center hall was replaced with a larger one to provide more light on the stairs. Of the modern conveniences water was provided at about the same time as the first of the cattle herd. This was almost mandatory because cows require enormous quantities of water and the pump was operated with a gasoline engine. Rural electrification was a long time in the future but the power company absorbed some of the cost for the long transmission line to house and the house, barn and shed were provided with lights and outlets. At about the same time a telephone line was added on the utility poles so the water service, electric service and telephones were provided over a fifteen-year span. Incidentally my father bought his first automobile in 1921.

At about the same time the barn was enlarged to accommodate the herd and a team of horses. A further addition was built around 1930 to provide additional space for four more cows and increased hay storage. I do not know what other plans my father may have had but the onset of the depression thwarted them. In a few years the war made additions impossible. By the time the war was over he was too old to contemplate changes and I think that he foresaw the inevitable demise of the small farm anyway. In the beginning lighting was provided by kerosene lanterns. This included spaces where work was performed before dawn and after sunset in the fall, winter and spring months. With all of the safety concerns of today we can consider this method of lighting with awe since buildings were not burned down with the crude lanterns available.

The carriage house was built after the house and shed to house carriages. When the original buildings were constructed, there was no real road connecting the property to the village. Most of the communication with the village was by boat while the harbor was free of ice and across the ice after it froze. At that time the main road to Southwest Harbor was over Beech Hill and down through the valley. As soon as the road down the east side of Echo Lake was built a right-of-way was obtained over the property between the Parker property and the road. This allowed use of horse and carriage hence the house to shelter this equipment. The original road was about 200 yards north of the existing Parker Farm Road. After Donald Gilpin bought the Mason Point property, he used the old road for a while but then requested the change so he could have a road that did not interfere with the farm operations. The

carriage house had an upstairs chamber when a carpenter's bench was the predominant feature. After the property became a dairy, walls were built at one corner to house the milk cooling tank, the cream separator and the primitive bottling works. The lower part not occupied by the milk room or the carriage was used for storage of the cook-stove firewood and various tools used about the farm. The use of the upper chamber was increased to include space for storage of off-season harnesses and harness washing area. I expect today's variety of milk inspector would have heart failure over this operation but I do not recall anyone becoming ill from drinking milk delivered from this facility. This building had been a depository of all kinds of farm paraphernalia and hand used equipment associated with fishing and marine affairs. Unfortunately, much of these artifacts were lost or thrown away after the wood pole supports gave away and the building demolished.

In addition to the three buildings mentioned above my father built a tool house to house equipment not being used, hen pen and an ice house. Also, little of the original 90 acres was not wooded. I do not know just how much my father cleared for hay and grazing fields but I saw the last area cleared which by the way was purchased from Allen Somes.

Although each set of dairy farm buildings was unique the buildings described would be those found at any small dairy farm before the change to mechanization.

## **Daily chores.**

Regardless of the day of the week or season of the year there were certain chores that had to be done. The following description covers those chores on the Parker farm including some that varied according to time of year.

Upon arising my father started the fire in the kitchen stove. On the evening before kindling had been split to make starting easier. The kindling was sprinkled with kerosene and a lit match dropped in to start the fire. Then larger wood was added and the day's work started.

Before milking both cows and horses were fed with hay. Then grain was measured out for each animal and deposited in individual rectangular wooden boxes. That for horses was put in the stalls after the hay was consumed. That for cows was put in their stalls just before being milked. While the hay was being fed the cow stalls were cleaned out and the accumulation of manure pitched onto the pile behind the barn. After each cow was milked it was weighed and dumped into covered 20-gallon cans. After milking was completed, the cans were lugged to the room in the carriage house described under the plant. The required number of milk bottles for the milk route were filled and stoppered by hand. If it were in July and August the balance was put in an ice cooled water tank to be picked up later by Bordeaux.

Otherwise, the balance was run through the cream separator, canned for transporting along with that from the previous evening by stage to the creamery in Ellsworth. While the milk processing was going on the horse stalls were cleaned out and the manure shoveled out back of the barn. At this time during

the cold weather while the cows were confined to their stalls, sawdust was spread under them to provide a clean bed. If the cows were let out during the day they were let out to pasture. Sawdust was also spread under the horses regardless of time of year. At this point we had breakfast.

Except during July and August, the bottled milk was delivered on the milk route and we were dropped off at school while on the way along with dropping off the cream cans at the Post Office. During July and August, the bottled milk was delivered in the evening. While the milk was being delivered the grain boxes were retrieved and the horses given water. Cows had individual muzzle operated watering cups but horses were watered from 12-quart pails. During the growing season some kind of feed such as green rye or millet was hand cut with a scythe for evening cattle feeding. The horses were cleaned with a currycomb and harnessed if they were going to be used that day.

As soon as the day's work was done the horses had their harnesses removed and were watered. The pastured cows were brought home sprayed for flies and fed the green feed. Otherwise, they were fed hay as in the morning. If it was during the winter the stalls were cleaned out and the manure removed followed by an application of sawdust. Likewise with the horses if they had not been used that day. Then hay was given to the horses and grain measured out to all the animals. Milking was done as in the morning. As I recall no milk was bottled in the afternoon even during July and August. My father preferred to deliver ice-cold milk in the evening. While milking was being done in the afternoon during warm weather a cake or two was removed from the ice house for the cooling tank, for our ice box or for sale to milk customers. Also, the firewood for the next day's use was lugged from the carriage house to the wood box in the kitchen. Then we had supper. Customarily the noon meal was called dinner and if we were home at that time, it was the largest meal of the day.

During July and August, the milk was delivered after eating. Regardless of the time of day the animals were tended to just before we went to bed. This included removing any manure accumulated, a little hay treat all around and a final pail of water for the horses.

As I recall this covers the mandatory chores required to keep the operation running as far as the males were concerned. My mother was not exactly sitting on her hands during this time. Breakfast was not a big production for her. On working days, we had bowls of cooked cereal, usually rolled oats, and cold cereal on Sunday. Why the differentiation I do not know since for at least half of the year Sunday was like any other day. But the other two meals were large to satisfy three healthy and growing children and several very active adults. Sometime in the past a few summer visitors had asked my grandmother if she would do their laundry which she did. Unfortunately, this got out of hand and I recall that my mother, my grandmother and my father's sister spent all summer doing laundry for the summer residents of Somesville. This was before the advent of drip-dry and wrinkle resistant cloth. Finally, after my

grandmother and her daughter died in the thirties and my mother had sense enough to give it up. On top of the laundry my mother had to keep house for five of us, not counting my grandmother, and a hired hand for a few years and had to keep the milk bottles, cans, pails and cream separator equipment extremely clean.

## **Seasonal chores.**

There were other chores that we did usually because weather conditions or became necessary to operations.

Usually during the winter there would be a day or two of rain when outside temperature would be relatively warm. Then the harnesses were taken to the shop chamber in the carriage house where they were taken apart, washed, dried and oiled. These kind of days in the spring were devoted to repair and painting of horse drawn equipment. In the summer we picked and canned berries. There used to be several places where one could pick blueberries and blackberries. There always seemed to be places on our property where wild raspberries thrived along with mosquitoes. If there was nothing better to do there was always weeds in the garden and needed repairs to the floor areas under the cows. In the fall there were mounds on top of mounds of cow manure that had to be moved which was piled in some out of the way location to rot for later use. Although my father was not a great admirer of chemical fertilizer some was used for specific applications but, in general, he preferred what today is called composted manure.

## **Normal winter work.**

As soon as the weather turned cold fuel was cut for the next year. Since there was ninety acres there was-always a supply of dying and undesirable trees. These were fitted up suitable for sledding out for furnace wood. Since the house was quite large and uninsulated this required several cords. If the cold was too intense a backup supply of coal was used because the poor-quality wood would not last all night. Wood for the kitchen stove was selected from live stands that could be thinned out and short-lived tree stands. Usually, some older pine trees were cut for lumber to make repairs. In those days repairs were done in-house if at all possible. This firewood and logs were brought out by horse drawn bobsled as soon as there was adequate snow. This meant that the disassembled sled parts had to be taken down from the second floor of the tool house and assembled for use. Likewise, when the use was done the sled was taken apart and hauled back up to the second floor of the tool house.

Usually in January the weather had been cold enough for pond ice to be about a foot thick. At that time ice was harvested for farm use and to a few small icehouses in the village. Before I was very old these other houses disappeared and I do not know who owned them. Probably the Somes House owned one of them. Harvesting ice from a pond and hauling it by horses is slow work and I expect under the most favorable of conditions it took about two weeks to complete. Icehouses were built without roofs and a leveled smooth spot used for the floor. They were simple rectangular structures built with the boarding

boards applied on the inside to present a smooth surface. Ice was installed with about six inches of clearance all around for sawdust insulation. The ice was installed layer upon layer for a depth of about six feet. Then the sawdust was applied all around the edge and about six inches deep on top. Individual cakes were about 20" x 30" and whatever depth nature provided-preferably about 12 inches. If this could be done before a warm spell or before a warm rain followed by a hard freeze all was well. But woe be to the person whose fate had dealt a hard blow because then the whole mass was one huge cake that had to be literally chopped apart.

After harvesting ice, the wood and logs were hauled out of the woods. The firewood was hauled to a point in the pasture to be out of sight and the logs to a point along the road where they could be picked up by the mill truck. When the lumber was brought back it was "stuck". By this I mean that two heavy poor logs were set on the ground spaced somewhat less apart than the length of the lumber. Then a layer of lumber was placed on them. Then mill-provided edgings were placed over the logs and another layer of lumber placed on the edgings or sticks. The procedure was repeated until all of the lumber was in place. This provided space for air to circulate all around the individual pieces for drying. In March the engine, saw frame, and base frame were transported to the site of the firewood piles where the rig was assembled and the wood sawed to appropriate lengths. The furnace wood was in one pile and the firewood in another. After the sawing was done the rig was transported back to the tool house and disassembled. The firewood was split and both piles allowed to dry all summer. This about finished the winter work.

## **Normal spring work.**

Spring work consisted of preparing ground for the garden and usually the plowing of one hay field. In those days the garden provided the source of vegetables for the whole winter.

Crops consisted of potatoes, carrots, beets, corn, pumpkins, squash, Swiss chard, cucumbers, tomatoes and probably a couple others. In those times you either raised the vegetables or used canned ones. Delivery systems as we know them today was non-existent. In fact, there is a book by one John Leavitt entitled "Wake of the Coaster" in which he was a participant in the early twentieth century. He describes the welcome the vessel received in Somesville in the spring after the inhabitants had been nearly isolated all winter.

Before the weather became too warm the barrels that contained the winter's supply of root vegetables had to be cleaned out and dried before the old vegetables started to rot.

In general, the garden plot was plowed, harrowed, and dragged smooth. The drag was made of heavy oak planks to provide a platform about three feet wide by eight feet long. One end was slightly turned up. The drag could be hauled from the turned-up end for such work as removing rocks from the site and it could be hauled from one side to smooth well-harrowed ground. Then furrows were made with a small plow. Then new cow manure was applied to the bottom of all furrows followed by covering it and tamping it down with a hoe. Large seed such as potato and corn were applied to the soil cover followed by covering the seed with the sides of the furrows. Small seed such as carrots, beets and rude bakers was planted by a special planter that fed the seed in graduated quantities down into a small double plow and was covered by a following wheel.

Fields were plowed to restore grass production. A disc harrow was used to break up the clumps of sod. After harrowing, rotted cow manure was applied using a manure spreader. Then a spring tooth harrow was used to smooth the surface made by the disc harrow followed by final smoothing by the drag. Then the grass seed was applied followed by using the spring tooth harrow to cover the seed.

When the planting was done the equipment used for harvesting hay was assembled to be ready on the fifth of July.

The mowing machine had been stripped of its pole and the sickle bar all of which was stored in the tool shed. The parts were dragged outside and assembled for use.

The raking machine had been stripped of its fills and wheels and stored on the second floor of the tool shed. Fills were the two light-pole-like members that were positioned on each side of the horse where they were connected to the harness. The parts were lowered to the first level where the machine was assembled.

Wheel assemblies for the hay wagon were removed from storage in the tool shed and located in the barn floor under the rack body. The barn floor was located back of the large rolling doors in the front of the barn. It was sufficiently wide and long to allow the loaded wagon to be completely housed. From this position hay was hoisted to either end of the barn. At the end of the last season the rack had been hoisted up and supported by heavy timbers across the barn floor. Now the procedure was reversed. The rack consisted of four 4" x 4" timbers running lengthwise. Crosspieces on each end extended about 18" beyond the outer timbers and held the four timbers in place. Spaces between the timbers were filled with wide boards to make a platform on which to start the hay load. A framework made of 2"x 4" above was supported by wooden rods set about two feet apart. Part of the frame was above the outboard members below. Another set of 2"x4"s was supported outboard to allow widening the load.

## **Summer work- harvesting hay.**

This took most of July and August.

The first operation was to cut the grass with the mowing machine. Mowing was done in the morning while dew would prevent work to promote drying. The sickle bar was limited to 6'. When the grass was thick and tall it required a team to handle the machine. The amount mowed on any given day was governed by the quantity we could load and discharge in the barn the second afternoon. The grass cut during the first two or three weeks contained a lot of water and required two days to dry: After that what was mowed one morning could be sufficiently dried to stow the afternoon of the next day. Care had to be exercised to prevent hay that was not sufficiently dried from being stowed in the barn. Damp hay is prone to spontaneous combustion and many barns have been burned because of it. I recall my father talking about having made that mistake. He knew there was trouble because there was a strange odor. Trying to remove the hay would be a mistake because exposure to air would promote instant ignition. About the only thing one can do is to apply generous quantities of rock salt to the area followed by prayer. Fortunately, that worked for him but the hay was spoiled.

While the mowing was being done there were chores to be carried out. One was to finish harvesting the green feed alluded to earlier. Another was to apply a spare moving member (knife) of the sickle bar to a specially designed hand operated grinder so a newly sharpened unit was ready for the next morning.

Usually, the mowing took about two hours. When done the harnesses were removed from the horses and they were led to their stalls in the barn. As soon as they had cooled off, they were given water followed by small portions of hay and grain. Before we ate dinner windrows of hay that were going to be stowed later were spread on the ground to promote last minute drying. After dinner one horse was harnessed for single operation and hitched to the raking machine to make piles of hay for loading that afternoon. This took only a few minutes and when done the rake was parked close by, the single horse harness removed and both horses harnessed for pulling the hay wagon. Loading the wagon was done to get all possible weight on it as opposed to just pitching hay aboard.

One man pitched the hay aboard and another stowed it. The portion below the rails was filled and the man on the wagon trampled it down to the level of the rails. At this point the real loading started. The man on the ground sent up loads of uniform size. Each load was somewhat twisted and set upside down on the rails on each side the whole length of the rails. Then loads were pitched into the middle and trodden down to lock that on the rails in place. Then loads were placed on top of those on the rails with another trodden row in the middle as before. These layers were added to make a load about as high as the man on the ground could reach with his pitchfork. When done the wagon was driven into the barn and the horses detached. One horse was led outside to lift the hay into the top of the barn and the other to his stall. If another load was going to be brought in his harness was left on, otherwise it was removed.

Hoisting hay was done by a system of rope and pulleys attached to a special fork. A wooden rail ran the length of the barn just under the peak of the roof over which a carriage was run. One end of the hoisting rope was attached to one end of this carriage. From there it led to a pulley on the fork, thence back to the other end of the carriage and to a pulley in the end of the barn. Whichever end of the barn this pulley was attached to determined which way the fork loads of hay went. From the pulley in the end of the barn the rope led over two more pulleys so the horse could draw directly while hoisting. The fork was a "U" shaped instrument about 15" wide and 30" long with parallel sides that terminated with sharpened points. Each side was hollow and contained connections to short levers near the lower ends. Levers near the top of the fork operated these levers. In operation the fork was driven vertically into the load as deeply as possible and the levers pulled up to set the short levers perpendicular to the fork sides. Each of the operating levers was attached to a common trip rope that led back to the person operating the fork. When all was set, the horse was connected to the rope described previously and led away. This lifted part of the load up and towards the end of the barn. The operator dropped the load by pulling on the trip rope and the horse was stopped. The horse was led back and reconnected. The fork operator hauled the fork back and set it for another load of hay. In the meantime, men in the ends of the barn stowed the hay until it reached the rafters at the center of the roof. Usually, it took about a dozen repeat operations with the fork to completely unload the wagon. Then the harness was removed from the hoisting horse and the routine evening chores started.

If the weather was dry and with daylight remaining after the evening meal it was not uncommon to harness one horse and rake what was mowed in the morning into windrows. Alternate spreading and raking tended to accelerate the rate at which the hay dried.

In addition to the equipment described earlier my father had a piece of equipment to accelerate drying called a tedder. It was the only one I ever saw or heard of. It was stowed ready for use in one end of the garage. It consisted of an angle iron frame about six feet square with the axle in its middle. Short forks were hung at the cranks in a shaft mounted on the rear end. There were six or eight forks evenly

spaced. Upper ends of the forks were connected to metal rods that led forward to bearings on the frame. The frame tilted by a lever to lift or lower the forks and a pawl arrangement at one wheel could be engaged to drive the crankshaft. In operation the forks worked the tines in a vertical circle with the lower part of the circles close to the ground that fluffed the hay up off the ground. There was a seat for the operator and customary rigging for attaching a horse. When the grass was tall and thick in July this rig could substantially reduce drying time and the amount of manual labor required to prepare the hay for stowage.

As I am writing this story, I am recalling things that I have not thought about for a long time and are not included in my instantaneous recall.

When the fields had all been harvested the tedder was returned to the garage, the rake was dismantled and hoisted back into the tool house attic, the mowing machine was dismantled and stowed on the first floor, and the hayrack was hoisted up over the barn floor. If no immediate use was found for the wagon wheels, they were returned to the first floor of the tool house,

There was another little chore that had slipped my mind. My father did not use straw or old hay for bedding as many farmers did. This was because fresh manure full of straw tended to block the beater that spread it evenly behind the manure spreader if the beater was free. Clearing a beater blocked with straw laced green cow manure is not a chore one gladly rushes into. Sawdust in the manure did not cause any problem.

Over the span of years that I lived on the farm Ernest Richardson had a lumber mill set up in the vicinity and was glad to give sawdust away. The vehicle used to transport the sawdust was called a jigger cart for whatever reason. The large wheels used on horse drawn equipment made the cart or wagon wheel axles very high. Hence, bodies mounted on the axles were even higher. To relieve this problem when handling heavy materials, the rear axles had cranks installed just inside of the wheels so the middle part of the axle was only about a foot off the ground. The body was made with a platform over the front axle with a series of short 4" x 4" timbers set one above the other to connect the body to the platform.

Although the idea was to make handling heavy materials easier the jigger cart was used for most transporting of solid materials. In fact, it was used so often that it occupied a separate area in the tool shed and was fully assembled except the pole was removed so doors could be closed. Burlap grain feed bags were shoveled full of sawdust with the tops tied shut. Mill sawdust was quite coarse because the saw had chisel like teeth that made a quarter inch wide kerf. These bags were stowed in one end of the tool shed and one bag was used for animal bedding every day. At this point the summer's work was done.

## **Fall work.**

By September the wood in the piles created the previous spring was dry. That for the furnace was stowed in the cellar. However, the area had to be cleaned of bark etc., from the previous year's wood supply. The house foundation contained several window and frame units. One of these was removed to allow passage of the wood. To accommodate the quantity involved it had to be stowed in tiers. As soon as the load was in the cellar it was stacked before the next load arrived. Wood for the cook stove was stowed in the carriage house. Although it was cleaner there was bark and dirt to be cleaned from the area



before starting to unload the wood. This wood was tiered also as it arrived. Both furnace wood-and cook stove wood was usually transported in the jigger cart.

Although one would think of using a sled in the winter, if the snow was not too deep the jigger cart was used to transport ice from the pond to the icehouse. The low-slung body was much easier to load with 150-pound cakes than lifting them much higher into any body mounted on the bobsled.

During and probably after the wood was moved vegetable harvesting was in progress. Some vegetables such as cucumbers and tomatoes were subject to damage by freezing and I recall the haste associated with gathering these vegetables during the afternoon before an anticipated frost. Since potatoes were in the ground surface freezing was not a problem. In fact, it was a boon because frost killed the large tops that had to be disposed of before digging, Potatoes were dug by hand with a five-tined hoe and the labor was backbreaking from leaning over. Carrots and beets were harvested by pulling them up by their tops and were harvested before a killing frost. Rude bakers were left until a good freeze since it improved their taste. Somewhere along the way cabbages were pulled roots and all. Pumpkin and squash were harvested also before a serious freeze. All of the root vegetables had to be dried before storing them in the barrels in the cellar. Cabbages were tied by their roots to nails partially driven into the first-floor joists. Pumpkins and squashes were stored in an unheated room in the house. One vegetable I have missed is com. Before extensive truck service fresh com was available in season that lasted about a month.

Along the way a lot of canning was done. Really the containers were glass jars. Fruit in jars included crab apples, peaches, blueberries, raspberries, and strawberries. Apples could be kept for most of the winter by selecting several types. Vegetables that were\_ canned included beet greens, green beans, wax beans, corn, Swiss chard and turnip greens. Several kinds of pickles were also canned including ripe cucumber, green cucumber, mixed and cucumbers preserved in brine.

Until my father became too old to handle a bull, he raised a likely calf to service the cows the following year. About the time my father wanted to stop using a bull artificial insemination use was being started. The bulls were fattened up and as soon as cold weather set in, they were butchered. Some of the meat was hung in out buildings and allowed to freeze. Briskets were corned. Tongues, livers and hearts were kept in the icebox for immediate use. The rest was canned. I have omitted the raising of a veal. When a large calf was born at least a month before Bordeaux would want milk it was raised on milk for a month. In the beginning it nursed its mother but soon it was taught to drink from a pail. Teaching it to drink from a pail consisted of putting one's hand in the milk with the fingers pointing up. The calf's head was forced down on the fingers which seemed to be satisfactory substitutes for the mother's teats. By withdrawing the fingers slowly, the animal learned to drink on its own. In one month, the calf was butchered and since the weather was warm most of the meat had to be canned. The age of one month was critical. Soon thereafter the meat starts to change to beef. Today this turning meat is known as baby beef and is sold as such. My father would not touch it. Since the age of the next critter butchered at home was 18 months old the age when the change is completed, I do not know the age when it is completed.

The next chore was to bank the foundation along the north wall. The foundation was and still is lengths of quarried stone. Joints were not close fitting and the insulating value of stone is not high so the cellar tended to be very cold particularly on that side. To keep some of the cold out a wall was made of boards

nailed to stakes driven in the ground a couple of feet off the foundation. The void was filled up to the sills with sawdust taken from the pile at the icehouse. It was removed and shoveled onto the ice in the house as soon as the weather started to tum and was no longer needed at the house foundation. The rest of the fall was spent spreading manure, making repairs to the buildings and fences and sometimes clearing land if new pasture area was needed.