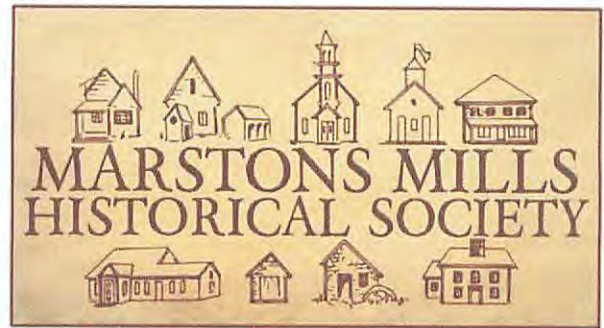


Marstons Mills Historical Society
Interview with
Claire Melix & Robert Parker
(by Jim Gould & David Martin)
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P.O. Box 1375 Marstons Mills, MA 02648
marstonsmillshistorical.org

Note: The interviewees' memories about the Gifford Farm are already on file with the Society, covering the haying process in that interview.

Question: Who were the memorable characters in Marstons Mills?

Robert(R)—There was a man who walked around town all dressed up with a derby hat, and a straight black cane with a gold-covered top.

Claire (C)—That was Robinson Weeks; we called him “the professor”. He once stopped at our farm when Aunt Olive (Gifford) was washing her underwear, and he looked in the sink and said, “Oh, what have we here?” She nearly exploded.

(R)—We loved going down to the farm and listening to the men talk. Grandpa Gifford, Robinson Weeks, Dave Leland, Frank Trainor, and our Uncles George and Merrill would have some rousing discussions. Mr. Trainor loved to start discussions and loved to argue. He had owned the Peabody house, and after he sold it and moved to Kingston, MA, he would come down for summer visits, staying at the farm.

(R and C)—People had more discussions in those days. There was no TV and no computers; we had radios. Grandpa Gifford's brother Charles was our Congressman, and he provided Congressional reports that were used in those discussions. Most people were Republicans. Grandpa's brother, the Congressman, at one time owned the Cotuit Inn and sometimes would play his violin there as evening entertainment. Uncle Charlie also was a Latin teacher and high school principal. He was also in the real estate business and bought lots of property under “straw names”.

(R)—Sam King used to come over from Sandwich. He was a state fire marshal. His brother was killed in a fire at Camp Edwards. There is a memorial there for him. Sam had a pair of oxen(very unusual) on his farm in East Sandwich.

(C)—Grandma's brothers—Charlie, Willie, Heman, and Raymond—visited her on Sunday mornings. Brother Willie loved to trade things. He had lots of odds and ends in his car, and he'd trade something for what he had. He worked for the town and also kept a cow and chickens. He also had a large garden. Uncle Willie drove a big tractor with big fenders on the sides. His daughter Molly, my cousin and friend, and I loved to ride on the fenders. It would probably be illegal today.

Question: How did your parents meet?

(C and R)—Dad's mother died when he was seven. He was raised by his father and grandmother in Duxbury. As a young man, he came to the Cape to work at Clear Lake Duck Farm. He boarded at first next to the duck farm at Henry Cahoon's; that came to a short end when he found hair in his food! He then boarded at the Gifford Farm where our mother Jean Gifford was the “head cook”—from that meeting, they started dating.

(C and R)—We were children during World War II when Camp Edwards was very busy with soldiers. Many of the women in town invited young soldiers home for Sunday dinner. Mother invited one—Richard Gearhart. He enjoyed coming and came quite often. We all liked him; he came from the South. Aunt Marion Gifford and Priscilla Higgins worked at Camp Edwards at this time. We had German POWs there. Aunt Marion found them to be friendly—they worked and also made jewelry. Aunt Marion purchased a bracelet made by one of them for our sister, Sandra.

(R)—Barnstable Selectmen that I remember were Chester Crocker, Tom Murphy, Victor Adams, and George Cross.

Question: What are your memories of school days?

(R and C)—One of our school bus drivers was Sylvester Boff. He drove the bus named Juanita. Another one was George McGoff. In our area the bus stop was at the Gifford farm. Our grammar school is now the John Lawrence Funeral Parlor on Route 28. We had grades 1 and 2 in one room, 3 and 4 in one room, and 5 and 6 in one room. We had a large lunch room with a nice stage at one end for programs that were put on. Also we had a large kitchen. For a few years, the government had a free lunch program at our school. We had to take hot lunch or go home for lunch. Mr. Kearney was our cook. He made lots of soups.

(C and R)—All students took turns setting the tables, clearing and doing dishes. Also at our school was a room that later became the library. When I was in the first few grades, this room was used for children with learning disabilities. I can't remember the name of their teacher. This program was for grade 1 through 16 years old. Charlie Howes was our principal, and he would run boxing matches at recess—giving the older boys something special that they could do. Some went on to the Golden Gloves and some became trainers (See Ben Perry interview). Mr. Howes later taught at our high school and was a baseball coach.

(C)—When I started school, I was left-handed. This was not allowed. My teacher, Miss Fourtier, would rap my left hand to try to get me to use my right hand. When I sassed her, she would put a piece of adhesive tape across my mouth which I would rip off when I left school. I started to hate school. My mother's brother, Merrill, got after my mother—he informed her that she had taken a sweet girl and turned her into a horror. My mother listened to him and went to the school and told them to stop bothering me and let me use my left hand.

(C)—Also at grammar school we had a gym teacher that came once a week—Kay Nehobian. She taught us, among other things, to jitterbug. Kay put on a show at the Panama Club every year for the benefit of the Catholic Church. She taught Tom Roderick and his sister Barbara to jitterbug. They were in her shows. Some of our gym classes would be spent with the jitterbug.

(R)—One of my favorite teachers was in grades 5 and 6, the "Weatherman", Mr. Small. He had been in the coast Guard and taught us a lot of interesting things about the weather—cirrus, stratus, cumulus clouds, etc.

(C)—In high school Mr. Connors was our assistant principal and a science teacher. He kept track of all absences and found some of us girls from Marstons Mills absent the same day. Mom and Dad had gone

to Duxbury to visit with Grandma Glover. We skipped school, went to my house, rolled up the rugs, and had a great time dancing. Mr. Connors gave us a “warning”.

(R)—He got mad at me for yawning in chemistry class.

(C)—When we were in high school, several of us girls would spend Tuesday evenings at our village library. We would do our homework there, around a big table. We had one set of encyclopedias, locked in a cabinet, which we could use. Our Librarian was Miss Lovell.

(R)—I read every one of Zane Grey’s westerns in the library. I noticed that my Aunt Marion had checked them out, too. She was a great reader.

Question: What about home life?

(see previous pages)

(C)—We were children at the end of the Depression. We didn’t feel poor, since there was always plenty to eat—gardens in the summer, canning in the winter, our own apple and pear trees, and fresh and cured meat from the farm. Dad had a large poultry farm, and Mother would make lovely dresses for us out of grain bags that were cotton at that time—very pretty colors and some patterns. Dad sold eggs and chickens.

(R)—Uncle Merrill made us all wooden stilts that we would walk all over the place on. He fixed our bikes, built a car, and he and Uncle George made their first tractor out of a Model A Ford.

Question: Tell us about hunting, Bob.

(R)—I first went hunting with my cousins and Uncle Merrill, hunting for coons at night so that it didn’t interfere with school. My father allowed me to start hunting deer when I was 14. For deer hunting, I got off one day from school in early high school, and later it was 2 days. Dad was very strict. The biggest deer that I shot on Cape Cod went 182 pounds (8-point buck) and 192 pounds (10-point buck). Both were shot out behind what is now the Stop and Shop on Route 28.

As a boy I shot rabbits west of the ponds. After school, I’d take Grandpa’s shotgun, grab a couple of rabbit hounds, and shoot rabbit around the duck farm. I shot a big pheasant, and my father had it stuffed—but it eventually fell apart. Our great grandfather in Duxbury stuffed both eggs and birds; he had a great collection.

When visiting Grandpa Glover in Duxbury, Claire and I would walk across the marsh to a gunning shack, picking delicious berries along the way. I didn’t hunt there. At home I hunted black ducks. They’re easier to jump-shot, and then shoot from a blind because they are level when they fly up.

(C)—Grandpa Glover would take me out in his boat in South Duxbury Harbor and trawl line for mackerel, which were quite plentiful.

(R)—Bob Hayden kept a boat on Patty’s Pond. Dad and I would go out fishing—sometimes the boat would spring a leak from the rusted nails. Dad would then take a blue-tip match and stuff it in—a perfect

fit. We also fished in Shubael's Pond. We would get brook trout. I fished in salt water off the stone jetties at the Lloyd's in Cotuit, for blue fish and striped bass. I also net fished for herring. Very plentiful at that time. I think we have fewer herring now because the town stopped closely monitoring the herring run. Taisto Ranta, the former conservation officer, rebuilt it with help from Bud Lapham and Uncle Merrill. It has been rebuilt again by interested Marstons Mills men.

Question: What do you remember about the Grange?

(C)—Bob and I were both members. I remember the fun that I had at the Grange whist parties and dances. After the whist party, which was always well attended, tables would be taken down, and the band would play for dancing. The band was Miriam Small on piano, Ernie Baker on drums, and Natalie DePedro on fiddle. The dance cost 35 cents, and candy was 5 cents at that time. We belonged to Cotuit Grange. Other busy granges were in Sandwich, Bourne, and Falmouth. Each grange had their whist/dance night on a different night so that a lot of the same people went to more than one. They were wonderful gatherings, with all ages in attendance.

(R)—A special memory to me was “linning” for bees with Grandpa Gifford. Gramp had a very large vegetable garden and kept bee hives. He and I would set up a stand in a wildflower field and put a box partially open on the stand. We would find a bee in the wildflowers, cup it, and place it in this box which had honey in it. After enjoying some honey, the bee would head for his hive. We would follow the bee to the hive and swarm), remove it, place it in a large grain bag, and bring it home to a bee house. Bees in a swarm like this seldom sting. Neighbors who knew Gramp kept bees would call him to remove swarms from their property.

Question: What was the story about the liquor still?

(R)—The still was up on Oak Street at “Sebatia Farm”. This happened after Claire and I were married. The owner ran a logging truck up and down the Cape. He hid the moonshine under the wood until somebody caught on. He was eventually found out, and they cut the still apart. While they were cutting it, the barn caught fire and burned to the ground.

(C)—When we were young, Marstons Mills had a smaller population. We knew all our neighbors, and everyone watched out for everyone's kids. It was a magical time to grow up in.

