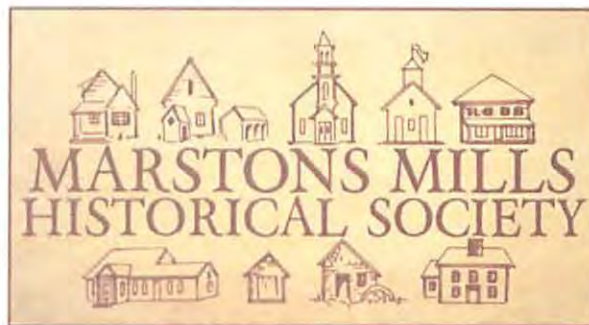


Marstons Mills Historical Society
Interview with
Janice Lapham Nickerson
(by Jim Gould & David Martin)
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I was born on 1 Feb. 1926 in Marstons Mills, delivered at home by Dr. Kinney of Osterville, who delivered Helen Barry on the same day. I was born in our house at the southeast corner of Race Lane and West Barnstable Road.

I went to school for the first four grades in the two-room schoolhouse where the gas station is now in the Village. There were two rooms—first and second grade in one room, and third and fourth grades across the hall. Miss Fortier and Miss Murray were the teachers. To see if I was ready for first grade (there was no kindergarten), I had to untie a ribbon around the man's finger (I don't know who he was now) to see if I could tie and untie it!! At recess I wanted to play with my brother Dana who was three years older than I. The boys and girls were separated at recess. Fifth grade was in the two-story schoolhouse in Cotuit (where the post office is now). The teacher was Miss or Mrs. Crawford. Sixth grade was at Osterville until the new school was built in Marstons Mills (now the John Lawrence Funeral Home); the school opened when I was in the sixth grade. I was so excited to be going there! Seventh through twelfth grades were at the High School in Hyannis. It was a long bus ride!

Halloween was fun when we lived in the Plains. We would go around to the few neighbors in a way that you'd not do today. They would give us treats and admire our costumes. There was Andrew Lawrence and his wife Ida and daughter Emily. "Aunt" Phoebe lived there, too. She was Ida's sister and was stone deaf. A very sweet lady. I loved to play dominoes with her. Mr. Lawrence had a dairy farm. He let us kids play up in the haymow. Sometimes we would be up there when he milked the cows. He would sing hymns in a high voice, then give her a slap and say, "There, you old bitch!" Emily owned and ran "The Oasis" tearoom in West Barnstable (in the house next to the corner of Route 6A. My sister Hazel was a waitress there before she was married. Emily never married, but had several love affairs. She worked in Hyannis for an auto dealer as bookkeeper for many years after she sold "The Oasis."

On the southeast corner across from us were Tim Stevens and his wife Sybil. She was always happy, but he was not! The poet Hattie Blossom Fritze lived down the road on the opposite side. She married a German named Fritz. His gruff manner and accent terrified us! Her foster daughter Delight (we called her Decie) married Alvin Wright. Farther down the road was Charlie Reid from Scotland. Charlie was the tree man! Somewhere in the back field lived Allie Crocker and his sister Cora. The house was long and narrow. He made toy furniture for my doll one Christmas. My sisters and their friends used to play in the old Plains schoolhouse on the east side of West Barnstable Road, a way up from Race Lane. They would stay there all day. They said I was too small, so I was left home! We spent many happy hours at Shubael Pond, swimming with all the neighborhood kids.

When I was nine, we moved to Newton, where we rented the Jones house across from Muddy Pond (Crocker Pond). My best friend was Constance Rosa, the daughter of John Rose, the plumber. She married a soldier and moved to California during World War II. Other friends were Kathleen Lovell,

Sally Savery, and Judith Marr. We used to roller-skate down River Road to the Cash Market, which was called Jones Store then.

Ernest Crocker drove a school bus, which was called "The Crackerbox". It was really small and round-shaped. Later Walter Scudder owned the nice big bus, driven by Tony Souza. We all loved Tony. George Burlingame was the bus driver from the Mills to Hyannis. I had a happy childhood and teen years.

In 1943 we moved to Main Street, across from Liberty Hall to the Library, next door to the Methodist Church. The church was a lively community center. Most of us young folks sang in the choir. Lena (Jones) and I sang duets. She sang alto and I was soprano. We would have practice at our house and the Joneses (we had piano's!) and play games afterwards—"Spin the Bottle" was a favorite! My mother would make popcorn balls for refreshments. Bea Lapham and Ada Jones were pillars of that church. Many times when funds were low, they would raise money putting on Bean Suppers, Rummage and Bake Sales, and Variety Shows at Liberty Hall, too. During the War, I signed up as a Junior Service Volunteer. We went to Camp Edwards to entertain the soldiers. It was all chaperoned. The bus would pick us up at Route 28. Many of us girls went. Connie and I never missed as we loved to jitterbug. There were some great bands—Glenn Miller, Harry James, Tommy Dorsey, and Vaughn Monroe played there as part of the war effort. I also attended events at the USO in Hyannis. I met lots of nice guys who were leaving for overseas duty. I exchanged letters with about 20 during those terrible war times. Good thing that postage stamps were cheap in those days!

I was married on 1 Feb 1946 by Marstons Mills preacher Jackson Butler in the Methodist Church to Edmund J. Nickerson of South Chatham. I had met him at a dance in Chatham (while living there one summer with friends); I was 15 and he was 17 when we met. We saw each other in group affairs and later he worked with my cousin, Jimmy Lapham, for Railway Express. I always managed to know when they would be driving by!!! Our romance continued through letters to the South Pacific. He served three years there in the U. S. Marines. He was in the terrible battle of Tarawa. He was wounded in action. I have his Purple Heart. Son of Theodore and Lillian Nickerson, he was born 30 Aug 1923. He died in 2016. We had been married for 70 years! After our marriage, we lived in South Chatham for 15 years. We moved to my mother's home in 1961 to help her after my Dad died. Edmund had been transferred to the Yarmouth office of the Cape and Vineyard Electric Company (he worked for that company for 33 years). He was President of the Nickerson Family Association, Chairman of the Friends of the Library, a village town representative for the Town of Barnstable, and active in the Marstons Mills Athletic and Civic Club.

I worked at Sears in Hyannis part-time.

The Laphams came from Dartmouth, I think. My nephew John Lapham has the family tree. My grandfather owned the farm property, which later became the veterinarian Dr. Daniel Leach's home and office. My grandfather was Arthur Wellington Lapham and he was first married to Annie Elizabeth Dewar from Dundee, Scotland. They had three sons—my father Frank, James Stanley, and Arthur, Jr.; they had one daughter Elizabeth. My grandmother died of Influenza. Grandpa married Hattie (Harriet) Brockway, and they had a daughter Elsie. Her husband was William A. Jones, Sr. from Barnstable, who was a State Representative for years. My grandfather had moved from the farm to a newer house, which was next door to ours. He owned many acres of land down there at the Plains.

My father was a plumber by trade; when he was eighteen, he moved to Dorchester to live with relatives in order to learn that trade. He became a journeyman plumber at a very young age. He met my mother Beatrice Moody from Eastham when he was working in Harwich, and she was a housekeeper for his boss's family. He was 38 and she was 23. They moved to the Plains soon after their marriage. During

the Depression, I remember eating lots of chicken that Daddy had raised, vegetables from our garden, and lots of seafood. Cape Codders always went to the shore for food! My father worked for Norman Williams Plumbing from Osterville for several years, and during the War, he, along with many others, worked at the Plumbing Shop at Camp Edwards. I have a picture of them.

My mother was called by everyone as “Nana Bea”. An orphan, she was taken to the Home for Little Wanderers when she was five years old. She was placed in a foster home in Orleans, which was abusive. Her sister was put in a home for the feeble-minded off Cape, even though she was perfectly sound. My parents got her out years later, and she came to stay with us until she was married. Bea was seen by a social worker (thank God) who realized that she was unhappy. She took her from that foster home, and they went to a cemetery where that little girl revealed what was troubling her. The social worker immediately removed her from that place, and took her to Eastham to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Harding; he was the postmaster. They were an older couple with a grown and married son who lived near Boston. My mother stayed with them until they died—nursing them until their deaths, first the wife with tuberculosis and then the husband of influenza. The son inherited the house, since they never legally adopted her. He gave her 30 days to leave.

Bea wrote news columns for the Standard Times and the Barnstable Patriot. Each week she would open her column in the Patriot with a short poem. The Editor told her she should have her poems published in a book. So she did! The first one was called “Buzz Along with Bea”, and then “Buzz Along with Bea Again”. They were a big success. She was quite the lady! She learned to typewrite, played the piano “by ear”, and in her 70’s she bought an organ and took lessons. She played the organ at church a few times when Rev. Ken Steigler was our preacher.

She was Librarian at the Mills Library during the 1950’s. I have a poem that she wrote in 1959 when they were “asking” for funds to add onto the Library. It was a very small place then. I had two sisters, Hazel and Frances, three brothers (George, who was called Buddy), Dana, and Paul. Paul married my husband’s sister Diana, so our children are double cousins! Paul and Diana met at our wedding rehearsal!

Edmund and I had three lovely daughters—Lynne, Lois, and Lana (nicknamed the Three L’s). Lynne is a retired high school English teacher and lives in West Bridgewater with her husband George. Lois lives in the Mills on River Road (I live in an apartment added onto her house in 2016). She retired from Puritan Store in Hyannis after twenty years. Lana retired from Eversource Electric and lives on Foss Mountain Farm in the White Mountains of New Hampshire with her partner Richard Dole. They have an alpaca farm and she is a Ragdoll Cat Breeder. I have five grandchildren, fourteen great-grandchildren, and seven great great grandchildren, plus many nieces and nephews.

I am blessed to have such a large and loving family. I have come back to Marstons Mills “full circle”!

