

Diary of a Farmer's Wife: Summer, 1920

By Dorothy Helbing Morris

Summers are far from "lazy days" as they are filled with boarders, a variety of interesting visitors, entertainment, summer chores and a lot of cooking!

- June 9, 1920: "Papa brought home seed potatoes from Killcawley" (HM grocer.) "Paid \$10.20 for a bag". This was acceptable because potatoes were the mainstay of the diet year round. "The egg yield is low."
- June 10: "Papa brought home 1st new potatoes, a small bag which cost \$1.00 Also the first fish from Killcawley."
- June 11: "Boys had school picnic at Mineral Springs Falls." (Very close to the farm) "Carroll and son fixed the telephone."
- Returned the next day "to put new wire on telephone."
- June 12: "Half holiday. E, Mr. Anthes, & Carl came on the Tuxedo." People worked a half day on Saturday; took the Tuxedo train which was express from NYC to Tuxedo. Pattern was to exit at the Woodbury Falls station and walk several miles to the farm.
- Sunday, June 13: "Anthony, Loretta and Frances stayed for supper/ had some good music at night." (Loretta and Frances Heinlein were professional classical singers).
- June 16: "Otto went to CV School to take Regents in geography. Papa brought home the first strawberries and peaches. Had strawberry shortcake for dessert."
- June 22: "Some boarders arriving by car. Some still come by train, picked up in the wagon."
- Sunday, June 25: "22 for dinner" "Loretta Heinlein played for us."
- June 28: "Haying begins." E spends his 1 week vacation working on the farm." (Son, E lives in a NYC boarding house, works for Western Electric and attends Cooper Union College at night, because it is tuition free)
- "Boys played new records that Charles brought up from Sonnabend". (No electricity. Victrola had to be wound by hand).
- July 1: "moved back in the villa again." (4th of July weekend is approaching.)
- Egg yield is so poor that the farmer's wife gets a supply from the Cornell's, the neighbors down the hill.
- July 2: July 3: "Families arrive for the holiday" (Some days have no entry. Very busy schedule)
- July 4: "had 23 people at the table in dining room. 10 in kitchen." (One of the tables had 9 leaves in it. The sturdy oak table continues to serve as the kitchen table for this writer.)
- **Willie John arrived.** (More about this guest in a future article). "7 more neighbors came in the evening after dinner. "(Several photos in albums show the patio decorated with patriotic streamers, lanterns, paper hats, and an ample supply of adult beverages on the tables!!)
- Papa is buying bread and groceries in CV. He has taken 30 eggs to the baker.
- Monday: 19 guests left via train and car.

- There are no 1920 entries for several weeks in July. Bertha records that Mr. Kent has come to do the haying. Time is of the essence; rainy weather the enemy! Everyone must pitch in to prepare the hay for winter storage. Sons E, C and O spend all free time haying. Boarders give of their time. The hay must provide food for the animals in winter. Papa is still purchasing hay from Thibaults in town to supplement his supply.
- The farmer's wife, having made few entries, records some 1921 events on the pages, notably "This is to remember when the blackberries and red apples are ripe. The ladies (boarders) peeled apples and picked blackberries also huckleberries. Have 18 boarders."
- Sunday, July 10, 1921: "had 52 for dinner"
- End of July 1920: Bertha records that all the hay has been "turned" and is now "in". For the next week, she records "rainy, muggy days with thunderstorms." (They were just in time!)
- Sunday, July 25: "35 for dinner with kitchen folks."
- August 4, 1920: "Mrs. Heinlein was up with Loretta had a nice evening of music and dancing." The name "Heinlein" appears frequently in the summer. The Heinlins owned the property adjacent to Papa and Bertha. Heinleins lived in Brooklyn where he was a businessman. They had a large family of very talented members. They enjoyed coming to their Woodbury summer home.
- Sunday, August 8, 1920: "A busy day. A very hot day. Table set for breakfast for 22 at dinner extra setting for 8.....for supper besides the 30 who had dinner Chas and family.....our own family----47. Mr. Kent (the Hay man) and family were here in the afternoon." 5 more visited; then left on the train.
 - Tuesday, August 10 1920: "Edgar's birthday and I have to think of him all day". This is her first born, the most like her, sensitive and caring who treated her as one might treat a priceless art object . Her pride in his accomplishments was heartwarming. She sent no card or gift but it wasn't necessary or expected. Their bond was the greatest gift.
 - There are no entries for several weeks in August. There is no mention of "Labor Day". Was this a holiday in 1920?
 - The weekend of September 24-26: Temperatures reached 100 and the 26th was the hottest day of the whole summer. Only 12 guests for dinner.

The summer season is now over. Bertha speaks of doing laundry and ironing. Oats are harvested. Entries are brief and mundane, dealing with everyday life. A few boarders stay on a long-term basis. Bertha's children are settling in preparing for fall. Papa still goes to town almost every day by horse and wagon.

There are virtually no more entries in the 1920 diary. The last few unused pages record a schedule of reservations for 1922, 1923, and 1924. Business is brisk as usual. The boarders are primarily repeat guests.

According to deed records, Papa bought the Heinlein property in 1924. The family left the 274-acre farm on the mountain and began to settle in to a 34-acre

property closer to town and the main road. Their “new” house was about 70 years old, had indoor plumbing, and was smaller than the homestead on the mountain. There was a barn, granary, chicken house, shed and a “carriage house.” This building became the “boarders” domain. Each of the 12 rooms, of various sizes, had a metal frame bed with horsehair mattress, a washstand with basin and water pitcher, a small freestanding wardrobe and a curtained window. There were no bathrooms in the building. Two outhouses (men and women) were near the building. Boarders brought their pitchers to an outdoor spicket. Water was drawn for washing/shaving etc. The Carriage House had no heat or electricity, only kerosene lamps.

In the main house, there was a long room which served as the dining room and could seat over 30 people. The overflow used the kitchen (complete with the old oak table). At times, particularly holidays, there would be several seatings scheduled. The parlor had a piano, well used by a number of boarders who enjoyed entertaining. In season, it is not recorded if any boarders slept in the main house. However, there were some boarders who, for a variety of reasons, stayed year round. They lived in the main house with the family in the winter. There was a furnace and a wood cooking stove in the main house. An attached, walk in stone pantry served as a refrigerator and storage area for the enormous cooking vessels so necessary to prepare food. Surprisingly, it was quite cool even on the warmest of summer days.

One might understandably ask, why did these people continue to come to the boarding house? Besides being welcoming and friendly, it was located in an area where there was an outstanding water supply of excellent quality. In the mid 1860’s, Lewis Beach wrote a book about several areas in the Hudson Valley which were desirable vacation destinations. His treatise on Mineral Springs Falls and brook describes the quality of the water as being restorative and healthy to drink and to bathe in its pools. People were known to come by train and wagon to the falls to bathe in the cold water and to drink from the natural well near by. At the “old farm”, the boarders could take a 5 minute walk through the woods and come to the water falls where they could bathe and also drink the water. In the new boarding house, the brook, which took the overflow from, the waterfalls, was but a few short steps away. Some boarders established friendships, hiking partners, card players, or just solitude. Several boarders found their “soul mates” and eventually married. For some, notably the corporate attorney for Uniroyal Tires, married to a very wealthy heiress, this was a place where he didn’t have to dress formally for dinner, could play ping pong and horseshoes, and smoke an expensive cigar after dinner while he watched the sun set or listened to a babbling brook (without his wife). The artist who painted the backdrops for the Metropolitan Opera House could spend a quiet afternoon painting a landscape or an accurate depiction of the farm. Above all, this was a destination close to the city and their work... and for most, it was very affordable.

All too quickly the summer will draw to a close. As the leaves sport their brilliant colors of red, orange and yellow, the farmer’s wife prepares for the long winter ahead. Once again, her diary only reflects her orderly transition from a busy tourist

season to fall and her preparation for a very long winter. Hopefully you will enjoy excerpts from her small black covered journal.

As stated earlier, this writer will soon share with you, the story of **Willie John**, a man of mystery who walked down the driveway 4th of July, unannounced in his black suit with white shirt, starched rounded collar, little black hat, no matter how hot the day. "I wonder if Willie John will arrive today" was the conversation at the breakfast table. And when he did, we all knew it MUST be 4th of July!