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By

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In the early years of this century, the area about Union Market was quite isolated from the rest of Watertown. It was shut off on one side by the stockyards, bounded by the railroad, Walnut, Franklin, Washburn and Irving streets, and on another by the great Adams estate, which stretched across town from Belmont street on the north to Spruce and Laurel streets on the south. Factories closed the other side. It was a mile from Watertown Square in the pre-automobile era, and the residents were not carriage trade.

A community developed here, with stores, a post office, a hotel, a hall for social events, a railroad station with frequent trains to Boston and Waltham, and a small slaughter house for those who wanted their meat fresh. There was a street car line to Central Square in Cambridge. The Arsenal had a steamer and hose cart which was available for serious fires outside the yard. It was not entirely self-contained; I went to Watertown to church, and to barber Pat O'Halloran, a one legged Civil War veteran with blood curdling stories who was also the town's Truant Officer. This was about the limit of my association with the Center. It was a community of factories and the homes of those who walked to their work, and home at noon to dinner.

The stockyards had passed the peak of their activity by the early 1900's as the development of refrigeration resulted in the concentration of the meat industry in Chicago. There was still a cattle auction every Tuesday morning however, and this was a day of great activity for Union Market. The cattle trains came in between four and five in the morning and lined up on the two side tracks to await their turn at the unloading dock. Their arrival was announced by the noise of cattle, and the spread of barnyard odor throughout the district. Their cargoes included pigs and sheep as well as cattle. As the cars were unloaded the animals were driven to holding pens, and the auction began.

Following the auctions, the cattle drive down Arsenal St. to the slaughterhouses in Brighton began, herded by cowboys on horseback. Most of the cattle were docile, dejected and resigned to their fate, but now and then a Texas longhorn would leave the herd and take off. Then there would be an impromptu rodeo until the animal was lassoed and brought back to the herd, or perhaps shot.

By 1915, the cattle auctions were over and the yards were used as a holding area where horses and mules were held to await shipping to take them to Europe. Except for a few primitive tanks that were moved on horse and mule power.

In the 1920's factory development took over the yards, though there were still some open fields in 1940. One night in December Of 1941 I heard a commotion in that direction and next day found an anti-aircraft battery installed on Walnut St. within a thousand feet of my front door. The tents for the crew were soon replaced by a Quonset hut, and the unit remained there for sometime until a more useful place was found for them. Another battery was located in the field which then existed across the street from St. Patrick's Cemetery. They were supposed to protect the Arsenal in the event of an air raid.

The yards had a brief notoriety late in the 1920's, when Federal authorities investigated a flat-car loaded with two-by-fours which was on the siding and found that a thin layer of lumber concealed cases of Canadian whiskey. Of course no one claimed it.

The last remnant of the stockyards except for the unloading dock by the railroad tracks is the lower section of the building on Walnut St.

occupied the Ivory Tower Press. This brick structure supported the stockyard haybarn which made a spectacular fire about 1920. It was about the last appearance of the old horse-drawn steamer. The old steamer was a thrilling sight as it came up the hill on Mt. Auburn St., drawn by four galloping horses, smoke and sparks streaming from its stack. As it passed, the man on the rear platform could be seen furiously shoveling coal on the fire. Steam must be up by the time the fire was reached.

The Union Market House stood on the present site of the telephone exchange on Walnut St. In my time it had the shabby appearance of a Dodge City TV set, and the characters occupying the chairs on the front porch could have stepped into a Marshal Dillon episode on cue.

The Union Market community was centered at School and Walnut streets. The railroad station was east of School St., at the site of the carwash. It was a nineteenth century artifact, with a chattering telegraph sounder and a waiting room with a pot-bellied stove which was convenient warming place on the way home from skating on the river. There were stores on School St., and in the two-story building still standing on Dexter Avenue. The lower floor was occupied by Hilton's market, and the upper by a hall which was used for social events. In later years this hall became a night club. Across the tracks on the southwest corner of Arsenal and School (which went through to North Beacon) was Mrs. Cheney's news stand and candy store which contained the post-office. Just beyond on School was Bleiler's slaughter house, a small establishment not comparable to those in Brighton. Waterfall and Hilton were the early store owners, and later the Dederian brothers Mirack, Shadrach, and Abdinigo. There were no restaurants, people ate at home.

The Arsenal, the Walker and Pratt foundry, and the Hood rubber factory dominated the district. It was a neighborhood of working people who walked to their work. My father worked at the Arsenal, as did the man across the street and the man in the next house up the street. My mother's sister, who lived

with us was the commanding officer's secretary. Other neighbors were the locomotive engineer who ran the shifting engine in the yards, a job carpenter, and a Watertown policeman. Working people who owned their single family houses. I think that there were no two family houses in Watertown until after 1900.

The neighbor on the other side was an exception, the manager of a road house in the former mansion of the Adams estate which supplied the automobile set of Boston with illegal entertainment with the connivance of corrupt selectmen. We would know when a raid was due by the commotion next door as liquor and gambling equipment was hastily stored in the cellar. The election of an honest selectman, Sarsefield Cunniff put a stop to this, and the place was soon closed and burned. the neighbor moved on to Hull.

The factory whistles ruled our lives, seven, eight in the morning, twelve noon, one and five in the afternoon. Many whistles could be heard, but the local ones dominated. Each had its distinctice sound, the Mood, the foundry, the Arsenal, and the deep-throated bellow of the Brighton bull at the abatoir across the river. For years the Watertown fire alarms were sounded on the foundry whistle. The fire department had a few full time men to drive horses and get up steam, but man power was supplied mostly by call firemen who responded (on foot) from their place of work at the sound of the foundry whistle.

Since my father worked at the Arsenal, that whistle regulated our lives. We set our clocks by it. The twelve o'clock whistle meant that my father would be home in exactly fifteen minutes for dinner, which must be on the table, since he would leave exactly thirty minutes later. The five o'clock whistle meant that we children had fifteen minutes to get cleaned up so as to be presentable on my father's arrival. Supper was at six. ----- Early on the morning of November 11 1918, we were awakened by a blast of all the whistles from Cambridge to Waltham. They were tied down and allowed to blow until the steam pressure

failed. There was no radio to spread the news. Another method of spreading important news was lights in the Custom House Tower, then the highest building in Boston. I remember a chilly November evening on the hill watching for the signal which would announce the election of Woodrow Wilson. After an election night announcement of the wrong winner, it was several days before slow returns from western states determined the winner.

The Hosmer School served this area. The building torn down to make place for the new Hosmer was, in the early 1900's the newest school in town, but it had no gymnasium, auditorium or artificial lighting. Reading had to be suspended on dark days. Since the building contained only eight classrooms for a grade one to nine school, a shanty in the yard provided another room. School committees were frugal in those days.

The building was surrounded by open fields where meadow larks built their nests, the long abandoned and overgrown golf course of the Adams estate. Walter Putman was the principal. The best remembered teacher for me was Nellie Burns. An explosive person, she engraved herself on my memory by picking me up by the ears and shaking me, for some offence which I am sure was trifling. She followed this performance by screaming "Dont you dare tell your mother" . A few years before she had taught in a school where my mother was principal. She was of course in no danger of my telling my mother. I had had enough trouble. The most important person at the Hosmer was Joe Richardson, the janitor (custodians had not been invented). He was the ruler, arbitrator and disciplinarian in the corridors, playroom, and schoolyard. He ruled the nether region, and an appeal from his allowance of three sheets of toilet paper was met by a chilling account of the frost encrusted corn cob of his youth. I still think of Joe Richardson, with a twinge of guilt at my extravagance.

The Arsenal was a military post with a small garrison until 1917. Sentries with shouldered rifles walked their posts in a military manner at the gates. A sunrise gun was fired at six A.M. and a sunset gun at six P.M. whether the sun conformed to these hours or not. All the bugle calls of the day were sounded live, and the lingering notes of Taps was a regular feature of summer evenings on Spruce St. hill. Full national salutes, forty six guns until 1912, fortyeight thereafter were fired at noon on Memorial day, and the Fourth of July. A fireworks display finished the day on the fourth.

In 1900 the land from Spruce St. to Dexter Ave. south of Mt Auburn St. was open fields. Traces of of the old golf course remained in bunkers and sand traps, and the estate drive which became Boylston St. could be traced. The Hosmer school was built in the middle of the area in 1900. A brook appeared near School St and ran to beyond Dexter Ave where it vanished into the Hood property to reappear at Sawin's pond.

Eugene Foss, a former governor of Massachusetts, bought this land about 1910 and developed it with streets and houselots. He gave a large tract to the town on condition that the proposed new High School be built there. The town accepted, and the school was built there, using plans for a high school in Fairhaven donated by Charles Brigham. This area was known for some time as Fossland.

Fullerville sprang up on the lower end of Spruce, Cypress and Walnut streets, and a line of three deckers was started on Walnut St., but a hastily passed new building law stopped this development at five, and saved Watertown from that plague.

School St. ran to the river until 1942, and gave access to an important source of recreation. Though the river was very dirty, there was a town beach behind the Parkins Institute used for swimming by those who were not particular. In winter when the weather was right, cold without snow, it was a great resort for skating for the whole town. On Sunday and holiday afternoons there would be hundreds on the ice, of all ages, with M.D.C. police on skates to maintain order and mark danger spots. Sometimes it would be possible to skate as far as the Harvard Business School, where another large crowd would be enjoying the ice.

While middle class women did not work outside the home, it was not a world of idle women. My mother kept house for my father and five boys, serving two family dining room meals everyday. She baked bread several times a week, and there was a marble slab in the pantry for rolling pie crust. She turned the grapes and currants into jelly, and preserved the pears. She made many of her clothes, and some for the smaller children, however I never saw her with a coal or snow shovel, or a lawn mower.

The plan of the house the family moved into when I was one month old had a room designated as "Sewing Room" and here the sewing machine was placed and the dressmaking and mending was done. An itinerant dressmaker, one Nell Barry came several times a year to assist in fittings and scatter hundreds of pins on the floor for the children of the family to pick up next day. Since she visited houses all over town this way, she was a priceless source of gossip, and her visits were eagerly anticipated for a fresh supply. She never disappointed. Peyton Place had nothing on Watertown in the early 1900's. Another aspect of the dressmaking was the "buttonhole lady". She worked at the shirt factory on Spring St. and lived in Mt. Auburn. Her specialty was sewing buttonholes, a

chore which my mother evidently did not care for. It was my assignment to buttonhole her as she passed along Mt. Auburn St. on her way home and give her a package of goods requiring buttonhole sewing, and to meet her a few days later to retrieve the finished work and pay for it. She no doubt had a name, but to me she was the buttonhole lady.

Mothers also had to respond to emergencies. One evening when I was about thirteen, my oldest brother, a student at M.I.T. with a weakness for playing with explosives, had an experiment go wrong in his room, blowing a finger off his left hand and setting fire to the room. My father was in Boston teaching night school to earn tuition money(two of my older brothers were students at M.I.T.). My mother took charge, throwing a rug on the fire, and applying a tourniquet to slow the blood flow. We had no telephone, so one brother was sent to ring an alarm at a nearby box, and another to a neighbor to telephone my uncle who was a doctor living in Cambridge. It was during the January thaw, and Spruce St. was not paved. The horse drawn fire engines went hub deep in the mud on the hill. The firemen arrived somewhat later carrying hand extinguishers. Fortunately the fire was almost out. My uncle arrived quickly and took charge of the wounded, taking him to his home where he stayed until the danger of infection was past. By the time my father arrived home everything was normal except for a smell of smoke and a certain amount of blood and extinguisher chemical splashed around. It was by the way his birthday. A teacher in school, asking me about the affair inquired "Did not your mother faint?" reply "My mother is not the fainting kind.

With the coming of the war (1917) the neighborhood changed. Both the Arsenal and the Hood Rubber factory grew far beyond the capacity of Watertown to supply workers, and the walk-to-work character changed. A loop was built

at Coolidge Square so that street cars could be turned there so great was the number of out of town workers. Cars ran from Harvard Square just to Hood's loop at shift change times. A siding was built on Arsenal St. for the same purpose- street cars still ran on Arsenal St.

Factories came to the stockyards- Lewis Shepherd and American Soda Fountains, and they gave way to others. Automobiles came and people no longer walked to work. The factories closed, and the Arsenal became a laboratory. There is little trace of the stockyards. The Union Market House is gone. There is a carwash where the Union Market station was, though the name is preserved in a restaurant. The whistles are silent, but the strains of "Taps" still borne on the summer breeze bring back memories of a day long past.