

Deer Hunting in West Granville 1924-1934

I am thankful that I never shot a deer in West Granville. Herd control would not excuse the guilt feelings coming from killing one of these beautiful animals. As a matter of fact, there were not many deer in this area during the 1920s. Never-the-less, deer hunting brought me to the home of Charles and Mrs. Sheets, and these two people are the reason for my wishing to have the readers of Stonewalls know them through a boy's eyes, and then reflecting on their lives as an older man.

The first week of December was "Deer Week"; open season on both bucks and does. I never knew how the Sheets' farm became "the place to be" during that exciting seven days. I came there with my father, Lew Gridley, a well known sportsman and state champion trapshooter. Other friends from the Springfield area were always with us. I remember the ride, first to Westfield, then Southwick and finally the long upgrade ride to the Granvilles. The Sheets farm was on a dead end road leading off from the Tolland Road which lead toward the Hubbard river.

Usually there were from six to twelve men staying for all or part of the week. I'm certain now that the evenings of sociability and the home cooked food, not the promise of a deer, kept the men coming year after year. A few names that I remember: George Rice, City Treasurer of Springfield, Charles Vining from Longmeadow who was reputed to be an heir to the Absorbine fortune, Eddie Olds from Southampton, whose talent for converting apple cider into something stronger was well known during this period of National Prohibition, and Bob Doolittle, who operated the Puritan restaurant on Winchester Square in Springfield. He owned one of the first automobiles in the city, a Knox, manufactured not far from his place of business. Sue Hobbs, my uncle whose story of association with the

famous madam from Holyoke can never be told. There was also another restaurant owner, whose name I can't recall, but whom I do not want to overlook. His restaurant was located near the corner of State and Main Streets in Springfield and called The Handy Lunch. No one will ever know of the gifts of meals he gave to former customers who became jobless during the depression. His son became an attorney and hopefully will learn of this tribute to his dad. Then there were Mel and Mull, two characters from Holyoke, whose stories of hunting with their bird dog Nellie gave us many an interesting evening. For years I believed their tale of hand feeding ducks at Forest Park in Springfield. As the ducks came close, Mel or Mull would feed with one hand and grab the ducks neck with the other. Their graphic description of the "catch" seemed so simple that I wondered why we ever bought chicken when ducks were so easily available. Many years after I had the opportunity to test a wild duck's reaction and found it far quicker than the human hand.

Bed time was seldom later than nine o'clock. The bed rooms were cold but never mind; we had three resources found in most country homes of that era. They were a feather bed, a quilted comforter and a "Thunder Jug" under the bed.

Breakfast was on the table by six o'clock and it was food good for a long day in the woods: meat, potato, eggs, homemade bread, and homemade doughnuts. Then, as we were ready to leave, a generous lunch would be ready.

As for the hunting part of my recollections, I'm sure that I expected to see a deer over every stone wall and behind every juniper bush. Sadly, I never did, but I do remember enjoying the hike along the road past the Sheets' farm and leading toward Otis. Today

it must be a favorite ride for cross country vehicles.

Also, time has brought into true perspective the enormous amount of preparation and hard work that went into feeding and housing a dozen or more men. In those days there were no short cuts like store bought food or disposable dishes. How well I remember the meals, but I have no recollection of the after meal clean up duties. I know that Mr. Sheets helped in the house but he had barn chores to take care of, so the burden of after meal work was mostly the responsibility of Mrs. Sheets. At that time I would estimate that she was more than sixty years old. I have always marveled at her capacity for hard work.

A final event marks the end of my association with Mr. and Mrs. Sheets and will indicate the compassionate side of their character. One summer, perhaps 1933 or 1934, I was without work and I asked Mrs. Sheets if I could come and stay and pick blueberries for my board and room. They agreed and for

several weeks I was their guest, but doubt if I every picked enough berries to make my visit worthwhile as an employee. A granddaughter of the Sheets' often came to help with the picking. I remember her as a pretty teenager and a far better berry picker than I. Also, there was another girl named Leona who I recognize as the sister in the article on page 22 of the fall issue of Stone Walls. There was a visiting student minister mentioned in the same article. Some years ago I met a brother of the Sheets girl mentioned above. He had a camp in New Hampshire where I resided at the time.

All of us are now seniors and some are no longer with us. If at times during our lives we found ourselves working harder without complaining, then perhaps in our subconscious minds there was the example of this kindly couple.

Kenneth C. Gridley
Little River, So. Carolina

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Fall '92 issue
Dad

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