

Clara Everett Reed (1879-1973) was born in Brookfield, the daughter of Sumner Reed and Clara Eliza Hamilton. The subject's grandfather was Horace Warren Hamilton, son of Alanson Hamilton who was instrumental in the formation of West Brookfield in 1848 and served as Judge, State Senator, and first Selectman.

This paper was likely written in the 1960's but I have to verify that. Regardless of when, it is a wonderful look at the end of the 19th Century and the early days of the 20th.

Your program Committee gave me Brookfield History as a subject; but if you wish to know about the early settlement or Brookfield's most prosperous days in Colonial times and the early 1800's, books in the library can inform you far better than I, so I am going to tell you from memory what Brookfield looked like when I was a child and give you occasional stories of the places and people no longer here – pages of unwritten history until now.

We shall start at the Ruggles Farm for that was my birthplace and where my memory began.

As my father soon sold the place, I have but two memories of it. One was of parting the lace curtains in a low front window and seeing Jumbo pass. Those of you who can recall the dates of Jumbo's brief sojourn to this country will know about when my memory begins.

My grandfather Reed built that house in the late 1850's for a Mrs. Benjamin, whose husband had been a missionary in Constantinople with Cyrus Hamlin and my grandfather Everett. In this house she and her son Sam, later our minister to Persia, ran a Girl's Boarding and Day School, discussing their problems before the pupils in Greek. Dr. Sherman's mother and Miss Roper's mother were some of the pupils, also one very small boy, my father, who was sent there for a time and much resented it.

There was an old plantation bell on the barn at Ruggles Farm and an open piazza on the east side of the house and a small house for help stood in the yard a short distance from where Mr. Ruggles antique shop now stands. Otherwise, the place looks as it did in my childhood.

To the west of that home were two large buildings where years before a Rev. Mr. Nicholls had a famous Boy's School. When I saw them they were in a most dilapidated state and housed some of Brookfield's poorest poor. West of them was an old unpainted gambel-roofed house with a picturesque well and well sweep.

On the crest of the hill to the left on the old road to West Brookfield was a fine house built by a Mr. Draper, a silk merchant and relative of the Lewises. It was built on the site of the Rev. Micah Stone's home and commanded an extensive view of the river and hills and the cluster of church spires and houses in the center of the town.

As a child that was my grandfather Hamilton's home. I often looked at the initials "H. T. D" ground in the glass of the side door, but I never saw the Horace T. Draper who had put them there.

Almost to the town line was the Leach family's old home. A clump of lilacs marks the spot where it stood.

On the Stone Hill opposite my grandfather's was the home of a Mr. and Mrs. Williams, Southern people, who dialect fascinated me. You know it as the Kelly home. Natural fires destroyed that and the Leach Homestead. A fire a neighbor's boy set burned my grandfather's home one windy day in 1899.

The houses on the northside of Main St. as we retrace our mental steps were unchanged until Mr. Merriam erected his roadside stand. The other buildings to the top of the hill then called Howe Hill were the house opposite Ruggles Farm, an old cottage house, the large old fashioned white house, called the Capt. Hastings house a big Howe barn which went with the Howe House now occupied by Dr. McCarthy.

Save for the Reardon Cottage in the lane, there was no house on the south side of the street from the present Ruggles Farm to what you know as Louise Galloway's Tea House, which had been my grandfather Reed's home but was rented to several families in my childhood.

Lest you think I have too many grandfathers I'll explain that the Everett grandparents died in Turkey during the Crimean War and the Wheeler Reeds of this town adopted my father and his baby sister.

The Boston Public Library has a picture of Chapin's house as perfect example of Colonial architecture. Although called the Chapin house, it was built by a Col. Crosby.

Between the late Mrs. Travis' home and the now vacant corner was a wooden tenement house called the church block. That was where the Rev. Micah Stone and the part of his flock loyal to his faith and the him held services after the Massachusetts courts gave the church edifice and all the property including the Paul Revere Communion set to the parish most of whom had decided to be Unitarians.

On the corner until recent years stood the Methodist Church. It was a fine symmetrical building with a tall spire.

My grandmother Hamilton took over the Primary class of 60 members when my mother as a bride crossed the mall to become a member of our church.

When visiting my grandparents, I used to go to the Methodist Church. Grandfather always had peppermints in his pocket which he doled out to me during service. Being a very shy child, I used to hold them in my hand where they grew moist and very sticky. Then during the long prayer, I dared put them in my mouth.

Rev. Waite, the minister, was rather emotional. Once when trying to drive home a fact, he gave the Bible a resounding slap and I, horrified, said: "Oh! He spanked the Bible."

The Fales family occupied the large house east of Brookfield Inn, the Kimballs and Mrs. Croft and her mother the next and the third large dwelling formerly occupied by Brewsters and the kidnapped Charlie Ross and his family had become the year-round house of the Joseph Lewises, relatives of the former occupants. Mr. Lewis had a store in Philadelphia which was a one time rival of Wannamaker's but an honest failure had cost him his city home and much of his property so he, his wife and daughter Katherine retired to Brookfield. Although Episcopalians, they attended our church regularly and helped in many ways. Miss Lewis was a choir director and she and her mother taught in the church school. (I was fortunate to have had them both). Summers a married son and countless little grandchildren and nursemaids filled the mansion to overflowing and two of the front side pews in our church.

Originally the Lewis house with its beautiful front door was as architecturally perfect as the Chapin house but some time earlier when little Brewsters and Rosses had become too numerous the Mansard roof had been put on to afford more sleeping quarters.

Directly below the Lewis home were two houses. The first had been the home of Brookfield's Dr. Fiske. From the stories told of him he was certainly a rugged individual but had a heart of gold. Here are two of my favorite stories, although they don't show the doctor's eccentricities as some do.

My mother's first experience with him was when she took her examinations for high school. She was only eleven and scared; for Dr. Fiske, a member of the school committee, was to give her the required quiz. When asked to name two rivers in Africa mother said, "The Nile..., The Nile and the". When Dr. Fiske asked: "Did you ever see a nigger?" "Oh! Yes Sir", Mother replied – "the Nile and the Niger".

Dr. Fiske had two horses, one named Doctor, the other Charley. He drove about in a gig and one night when returning from a case in Podunk he fell asleep and was jolted out of the gig near the north shore of Quaboag Lake. Later Dr. Fiske's household was awakened by a strange sound. Charley was striking the stone step with his hoof. Seeing the empty gig someone hopped in, giving Charley the reins, and he trotted quickly along the lakeshore road to the spot where his master had fallen out.

Although unconscious from the fall, Dr. Fiske soon recovered. He never tired of talking about his horse. A stone marks Charley's resting place in the field opposite Katy Eaton's house. Between the Ormsby home and the Conoyer's farm house was a large plain house painted red, and looking strangely out of place. (Tories once lived there). Further up the street the Spooner barn was still standing.

From the buildings on Elm Hill there were no houses until Dr. Sherman's family home now occupied by the Yaskolaskis.

On the west corner of Green St. and Main stood a large tenement house. Next it the Rev. Mr. Stebbins, our pastor, lived.

Mr. Joseph Guerin and son Victor did a flourishing business at their blacksmith shop east of the Durkin's for it was in the horse and buggy days. Hitching posts were in front of all the homes and stores, horse-sheds in the rear of the churches and watering troughs on Central St. and near the station.

Between George Finney's home and the Annex was a house the Derricks lived in. The Annex was a private dwelling owned by the Howes, relatives of the Johnsons. I used to love to go with my parents to see Mrs. Howe – or perhaps more truthfully to see her white mice. She was an old, old lady who took little notice of me but the cage of white mice was most entertaining.

On the corner beyond the Annex and facing Main St. was a long narrow store owned by J. H. Rogers. It was a general store.

Just back of it and facing on Common St. was a large warehouse owned by the Crosbys.

On the corner beside our church, the Crosbys were then living in a plain white brick house which they later replaced with the one the Gavitts now own.

Piazzas have since been added to the Estey and Fletcher homes. Mis Roger's house was then the size and style of Elsie Hooker's home. The house north of Dr. Pease's has been remodeled and the little

stone church was built in 1912. The former edifice, much larger, was built of wood. It had two spires, one high, the other low, and a gallery at the rear of the auditorium.

The Rices and Gadaires then lived Over-The-River.

On the Common just below the library, was a bandstand where the town band gave weekly concerts.

On Central St., facing the town hall, was a long, low stone house – a regular slum, housing several poor families, beyond it on the corner of Central and Sherman Sts was a little house where a demented old woman lived. My sole pleasure when in the dentist's chair across the way was watching for her to come out with a stick of wood to throw up on the roof to scare the witches away.

Back of our church was a large brick building. Years before it had been used for a library and later for the high school. In my childhood there was a hall upstairs and an ice cream parlor on the ground floor.

Next came the old town hall – a wooden three story building with a high tower and mansard roof. The main hall was equipped with large dressing rooms and a stage large enough to accommodate travelling shows such as dog and pony shows.

Below were two stores and a Savings Bank and in the east part of the basement was a butcher's shop. In the early nineties little cottage houses began to appear in vacant spots through the town. They were built by Hiram Gerald, our banker. He lived in the house now owned by Dr. Pease and was so prosperous he was called by some, Brookfield's leading citizen.

One morning he was missing. Clever bookkeeping had covered his thefts for years. Found later in Baltimore, he was given the job of keeping books in jail. That was the end of the bank and much of the people's savings. The spot occupied by the bank became a men's clothing store. Next to it was Thompson's Dry Goods store where Louise Crosby was clerk and next that, Crosby's Grocery Store where young Henry worked. My mother thought she had a part in that budding romance when Louise asked her to carry a note to Henry.

In the basement below our Tip Top Lunch Room was a restaurant, and stationed further down the street was a night lunch cart whose horses were stabled at Colburn and Mulcahy's livery stable on Pleasant St.

The building east of the town hall had a dentist's office, a lawyer's office, a barber's shop, the Post Office, a hardware store, a drugstore, a newsroom and a millinery parlor. The Livermores lived across the street on the corner of Sherman St. Below them was a building where they had their undertaking rooms and Mr. Goodell, Mrs. Sweet's uncle, had a shoe store.

On that side of the street the Vizards had a saloon and in the building where Howe has his market Mrs. Estey's father, the plumber, had a store where he sold stoves and sundries.

The chief industry in the town was Burt's Boot and Shoe Factory – one of the largest in the state and employing 1,800 hands. Much of the factory was later taken down.

The house and barn at the Edson Farm, where the Brookfield Airport is, was built from some of its lumber, and the odd-shaped little house between the main house and barn is made of two houses moved from "The Patch" a collection of tenement houses in the rear of the Burt Factory.

To go through the Patch was the quickest way to get to school, but I never dared go alone. In fact, I was afraid of many of the children who attended school. They were barefooted, ragged, and dirty, with matted unkept hair, and the boys so big and rough and ill-mannered. (Really, they were pathetic in their poverty).

There was one rather wild looking little girl with bloodshot eyes whom I shall never forget.

My grandmother Hamilton had made me a petticoat out of one of grandfather's flannel shirts. It was a sort of nondescript color suggestive of mustard and to make it more dressy (grandmother was really a dressy woman) she had sewed on rows of bright red braid. I hated it and nearly passed out with mortification in school one day when it came off as we were marching. At recess this poor little waif tried to comfort me, saying, "If I owned such a beautiful petticoat I wouldn't mind losing it off."

On Mill St. a little east of Kimball St. and facing the river was a large ramshackle tenement house and by the river was a mill whose tall chimney stood until recent years. The Grayhound bicycle was manufactured in a part of that building when I had reached my early teens. Usually it stood vacant. Twenty years or more ago Henry Ford removed some of its ancient machinery to Dearborn.

Two childhood attractions for me as I rode down Mill St. were a house where Tom and Maggie lived. In those days of larger houses I used to wonder how both Tom and Maggie could occupy it at the same time, it was so very, very tiny. The other attraction was the derelict little steamer Dolly Hazard which was moored to a wharf. It was named for an old colored woman who used to live Over-the-River.

Years before, bricks had been made on the northwest shore of Lake Quacumquasit. There was a draw bridge between the two lakes and the Dolly Hazard transported the bricks.

When my father was a boy this steamer used to be chartered to take people to the Point-of-Pines, a famous picnic ground, now the site of Camp Frank A. Day.

This brings us near the station. When I was a child many express trains as well as frequent locals stopped at Brookfield and the station was a busy place.

The Inn and livery stable sent teams to meet all the trains and the old Sturbridge stage met several daily. The roads were all dirt roads, and in the spring had mud very like that on Foster Hill described thus by an early Colonial traveler – "It seemeth not like ordinary mud. It seemeth more like porridge", so the Sturbridge stage driver encountered the same difficulties which the earlier stage drivers had had.

Brookfield's population was well over 3,000 in those days.

Rows of fine old elms lined Main St. Maples lined others, and yards were filled with beautiful shade or ornamental trees.

You see the Brookfield most of you know has changed greatly from the Brookfield I have been describing to you. Most of the fine old trees have gone, taking much of the beauty but the winding Quaboag river and the hills beyond still remain.

(Clara Everett Reed)