

## Bayside Life in the 1930s by Robert D. Witherill

Bayside life in the 1930s was quite different from today. No cottage had a telephone, no cottage had refrigeration, most had only one car and some had none at all.

Our cottage was built in 1927 – later than most in Bayside. We had a single bare bulb in the kitchen, and ones with glass shades in the other rooms. We had a flush toilet, but no lavatory in the bathroom. We had a single cold water tap at the porcelain kitchen sink. All hot water was heated by kettle on the kerosene or small wood stove.

Baths were taken in the kitchen in a big galvanized tub with about three kettles of water heated on the stove. Mother said that since we kids were in the water every day, a formal bath was not needed except on special occasions. A bath was a special occasion in itself!

There was a laundry from Rockland called Chaters Laundry that came every week to pick up and deliver the laundry. Mother sent sheets and towels, and company tablecloths to the laundry. “Body clothes” were done on Monday mornings at the cottage. Mother built up a fire in the little wood stove with a hot water reservoir on one side. It didn’t make any difference what the outside temperature was, Monday was wash day. Father had put a shelf on a step stool and the galvanized tub was put on the stool in the center of the kitchen floor. A washboard was used in the tub with Fels Naptha soap. In the early years the clothes were wrung out by hand, but later on Father bought a hand crank wringer that clamped onto the tub. Needless to say, after the last set of underwear was clipped to the clothesline, Mother was exhausted. My sister helped when she was big enough and I can remember cranking the hand wringer.

Although we might be at “camp” that was no excuse for not having the same kind of meals that we had at home. That meant major meals three times a day. Lunch was just a shade less major than dinner, which was often served at noon and always was on the weekend. There was usually a roast, potatoes, several vegetables, often a molded salad and dessert. While dessert at lunch or supper might be fruit and cake, at dinner there was often pie or layer cake.

These meals were prepared with only a three burner kerosene stove. I believe the brand name was Perfection. There was an oven (stored on a shelf in the bathroom) that fit over two of the burners when an oven was needed. It was about 30” wide and could hold two pies easily. A portable thermometer was placed on a shelf in the oven, and the temperature was regulated by adjusting the burners of the stove.

The kerosene stove had a one-gallon glass tank at one end that fed all three burners by gravity. A round wick absorbed the kerosene and provided the flame. A small door with a transparent window made of “isinglass” had to be opened for the burner to be lit. The flame was adjusted by turning a round knob, which elevated or retraced the wick. Every time a burner was used a match had to be lit. It is a credit to all Bayside cooks that there were not more major fires. We had a five-gallon can under the cottage with a reserve supply of kerosene, which we bought at Perkins (later Hastings) store here in Bayside. See photos in Campground News 1882 and 1894.

Of course with no mechanical refrigeration, ice cream could not be kept for any period of time. Tuttle’s store sold ice cream in cones and was very popular. (See Grovers, Excursionists and Rusticators plus Campground News 1892 for photos of Tuttle’s store.) However home-made ice cream in the hand crank freezer was wonderful. Mother would make up the mix – strawberry was the favorite flavor – while Father would get out the old wooden bucket, chop up some ice and get out the rock salt. The mix went in a can with rotating paddles and was placed in the center of the bucket. The ice and rock salt went around the can. Various family members

took turns cranking. Then came the exciting part when the can was opened. It had to be done very carefully so as not to get any ice or salt into the ice cream. We kids were allowed to lick the paddles – a real treat! Mother used real cream and eggs in the mix and it was rich and delicious!

For my mother, life was a lot like at home – cooking, washing, and cleaning house. We received the Waterville Sentinel in the mail and she enjoyed reading that. When we did not have company, mother would usually take a nap. But we did have a lot of company.

There were two kinds of company. Day company, usually on Sunday, people from our hometown of Waterville, who would bring a lunch and come for the day. We had no phone so we never knew who might show up. Other company would be close friends of my parents who would be invited for the weekend. Entertaining them would be a lobster dinner served by mother and much visiting while sitting on the front porch.

In the 1930s telephones were scarce at Bayside. Obviously this made mail very important. The post card business was thriving with the Eastern Illustrating Company in Belfast producing new cards every year. Bayside had a post office from its early days and I can remember the post office in at least three different locations. The mail was delivered twice a day – about 10 am and 4 pm – making the post office-store a social center. Many people built their day around the mail schedule. It was often late and this gave everyone a chance to visit and catch up on all the latest gossip.

Without telephones there was much more social calling within the campground. People felt free to drop in on neighbors in mid-morning, mid-afternoon or early evening. Card playing was one of the major forms of entertainment and a stroll through the campground would reveal games of cards at many cottages. Needless to say, any significant event was known throughout the community in short order!

Most families had an automobile, but almost no family had two cars. If the men had the car for work, the women and children had no other transportation. This was not as much of a problem as it might seem. Bayside had two grocery stores, and neighbors were helpful doing errands. Bicycles were used by the youngsters, but not the adults.

Capt. Goodwin had a small party boat---the “Ellie.” This boat was about 30 feet long and 7 feet wide. It had a high oval cabin with windows all around and seats like a bus. The “Ellie” was available for charter and made trips to Castine, Brooksville and Dark Harbor. There were very few boats at Bayside in the 1930s and almost no outboard motors.

Belfast had train service and therefore Railway Express for shipping. A package or trunk could be taken to the Railway Express office and arrive as fast as the next train. With cars having very little storage capacity, people would have their summer belongings shipped by Railway Express, which would deliver to your door.

Transportation was not a great problem because people arriving at Bayside were here for the summer and wanted to swim, visit, read, play golf, and just loaf. The only things they needed were here or brought to them. In addition to the grocery store, there were two milk delivery services, and the Cushman Bakery truck came every day, while the fish and vegetable trucks came once a week. A Mrs. Clark would drive in a horse and buggy and sell blueberries and cottage cheese, and Jack McCaskell and Louis Drinkwater filled the ice boxes.

Play was after chores at our house. One of the first chores was cutting the grass. Our lawn was so rough that a hand pushed lawn mower was of little value. Father used a hand scythe and sickle. Kids were not allowed to use the scythe, but we used the sickle for trimming. We also did the raking, some painting, gathering driftwood .

Play was wading and swimming every day. As we grew older, we made a sail for the rowboat out of a curtain, and rowed half- a mile up wind, hoisted the mast and sailed back using an oar as a rudder. We made pirate swords and daggers out of lath, and Mother helped us make pirate clothes from the ragbag. We built a tree house and a playhouse for my sister from old lumber.

Berry picking was half play and half work. The first quart was fun, but we kept at it because there was money to be made. I can't remember what we received but 10 cents a quart comes to mind. The strawberries were wild and usually went into cake frosting. Raspberries and blackberries were right around the house, but blueberries grew on Beech Hill.

Beech Hill has a house on it now, but in the 1930s no one minded if people climbed and picked berries. The view was similar to Bald Rock, but not so high to climb. The blueberries grew on both sides of the path all the way to the top. When you got done counting the islands in the bay you could walk across the top and count seven ponds on the backside. Once or twice we toasted marshmallows and sometimes we came down by moonlight. The next morning there would be blueberry muffins for breakfast.

It was always a treat to go to the Bayside playground. It consisted of a slide, swings and the teeters. While we played, we could hear the clang of horseshoes being played between Clinton and Pleasant Streets. The swing in Blaisdell Park was between two trees. The chains were very long and therefore the swing was a slow one but could go very high.

Sometimes we would get out the double set of oars and row to the wharf for the mail. This was always a big deal and worthy of a 5-cent ice cream cone (strawberry please) at Tuttle's Store. Tuttle's had three or four windows along the Sea Street side and a wooden walkway on which one stood to order. They sold candy, post cards, film and ice cream. Yes, rowing to the wharf for the mail was a big deal.

One of the most frequents forms of recreation was a picnic—more work for Mother, but she enjoyed it too. The obligatory trip with company to Mount Cadillac was built around a picnic, but we also picnicked at Camden Hills State Park, on Bald Rock or Beech Hill, at Fort Knox and of course on our own beach.

One time Father decided to have our own lobster bake. He built a fire under an old cast iron stove top with seaweed and the clams and lobsters on top. A tent fly was put over the whole to keep the steam from escaping. We boys were told to watch the bake and add water to the tent fly while Mother and Father went off to Belfast for shopping. Of course we did not stand and watch but played on the beach nearby. Father returned to find several holes burned in the tent fly! Somehow that clam bake did not taste as good as we thought it would.

As I grew older, I would ride my bike to the wharf where I met some boys my own age. In those days the wharf was supported by crib-work filled with rocks. Crawling around the crib-work under the wharf was a favorite pastime. We were also discovering that there was an opposite sex, so lying on the wharf "getting a tan" became a big interest since the Bayside girls were doing the same thing.

I started caddying at the golf club at 13, but my heart was not in it. I was much more interested in sailing, but was told it was time I earned some money. Not many golfers hired a caddy, so there were usually more caddys than jobs. Being the newest, I was usually one of the last to be sent out. Caddys got 35 cents for nine holes and 70 cents for eighteen. We hoped that a tip would round up the amount to 50 cents for nine and \$1 for eighteen, but Mr. Pingree who owned the big mansion on Bluff Road led a revolt of golfers as he said that 10 cents was all the tip that should be given!

Golf was not as popular in the 1930s as today, so there were many hours of waiting for a call. Mumbley-Peg and Poker were the way the caddys whiled away the hours. Mumbley-Peg was played with a jackknife – trying to have the blade stick in a board when flipped from the chin, eye, nose or ear of the participant. It really was nonsensical but many hours were spent in this contest. I didn't play Poker but I enjoyed watching it.

Boys were expected to get summer jobs, but the same did not apply to girls. They helped in the home and some did babysitting. The only jobs for girls were car-hopping in the late 1930s at a take-out restaurant called Lufkins at the junction of Route 1 and the Bayside Road. The girls all wore uniforms and would take orders at your car—a novelty at the time. They would bring the order on a tray that hooked to the outside of your car window.

Growing up summers in Bayside in the 1930s seemed like a wonderful place to be and of course it was. But at the time I didn't realize that things would change and that the lifestyle that we lived then wouldn't be the same in 50 years. Of course this is true today. What seems normal for today will be the 'good old days' 50 years from now. I hope someone will record them.

1996