

## Then & Now - Growing Up in Princeton Memories

### *Donald Whittemore:*

I grew up in Princeton, moving there in 1947 when I was about 3 to the small house on the west side of Worcester Road just to the south of the Caldwell house, which is about 1/4 mile to the south of the town center. I graduated from Wachusett Regional High School in 1962.

I used to sled down the hill in the field just to the south of the house. I remember walking to the old school on Boylston Avenue about a quarter mile to the west of the town center. Then, after several years, my parents had a new home built on the north side of Boylston Avenue a couple tenths of a mile west of the old school (sometime in the early to mid-1950s). They purchased over 13 acres of woods for the property on which the house was built. It is the bi-level house with especially large glass windows, particularly facing the south towards the road. I attended all eight grades in the old school house and then took a bus to Wachusett Regional High School. In 1965, while I was an undergrad at the University of New Hampshire, my family moved to Seattle. However, my parents only sold a couple acres with the home. Many years later, they sold the rest of the land, on which were then built a few homes.



The house in the center of town that has been remodeled used to be the country store, post office, soda fountain/cafe, kerosene sales, and home all wrapped up in one. The family who lived there had the last name of Chase, and their daughter, Eleanor, was a classmate of mine. I remember picking up the mail on occasion from the post office and buying food at the store (including

having Mr. Chase grind up meat for hamburger and having him slice a wedge of cheese from a large circular cheese block).

Before the Catholic Church became a church, it was a home and I remember visiting a

child who lived there.

The mountain did not have a ski area with lifts when I grew up but did have two amateur ski trails. I would either have to hike up the trails to ski or hitch a ride with some who drove up the mountain road when it was open. Russ Vickery was the superintendent of the mountain. He and his family were good friends of my family. In the summer, I would ride my three speed bicycle from my home (the "glass house") up the up road to the top of the mountain and whiz down the down road. When I was young, the mountain had an old hotel on top, which was not being used as a hotel but did have a soda/ice cream/cafe operating for a while during some summers.



The Wachusett Meadows Wildlife Sanctuary is also familiar. It started up operation while I lived in Princeton and I remember visiting it when it was new. George Fred Mason was one of the individuals involved with (managing?) the sanctuary. He was the author of several nature books for children (Animal Tracks, Animal Clothing, Animal etc.) For several years he operated a summer nature camp (in a building next to his home in Princeton) that I attended a couple of years, and then I assisted him

one summer at the camp. A couple years ago, I visited the natural history museum in New York City and saw his name on a plaque next to a couple of the panoramas of large Alaskan mammals. He had gathered materials in Alaska for the foreground/background in the exhibits and was probably involved in setting up the materials in the exhibits. I remember him talking about his trips to Alaska for this.

One time, a couple decades ago, when I returned to visit Princeton with my wife and mother-in-law, we stayed at Harrington Farm.

I hope you enjoyed the 250th anniversary of the town. For the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, my father and others formed the Hirsute Adornment Committee, with a proclamation that all men had to grow a beard for the celebration or buy a shaving permit for a dollar. The committee had a float in the celebration parade with several men dressed as back woods types with their full beards. He just passed away this summer. I saw in some of his items one of the shaving permits.



***Elizabeth Densmore, who when writing this lived in Worcester, but she spent nearly all of her summers growing up at Russell Corner.***

"I began spending summers in Princeton when I was just one year old. My mother, who was born in 1881, spent all her summers here. My mother's grandfather was Charles Russell, after whom Russell Corner is named. He ran the area as a farm, with gardens and cows. When his daughters had families, they came up here with their children, and it just became tradition.

"My mother moved into the Yellow House year-round in 1937 and lived here until 1970. "Summers in Princeton were lots of fun, with my brothers and sisters and cousins all playing in the fields here. We had puppies to play with, and sometimes we had a pony. Quite frequently we would take trips to East Princeton, where we would go swimming in the waterfall and the brook there. We used to swim in a little pond that the cows drank out of behind our house in the pasture. We would dangle our feet in it and would float around in it in wash tubs on hot summer days.



"When we were teenagers, fear of polio was very prevalent. This was prior to the vaccine, and it was believed that there was danger of polio from crowds. As a result, many people tried to keep their children away from crowds. I think that may have been one reason we stayed in Princeton. But we still did participate in the events that went on in the center of town.



"Often we would climb up to the top of Wachusett Mountain. We climbed, sometimes ran, up a trail that began across from the Bowling Alley Tea Room on Mountain Road. The Halfway house, an old-fashioned log house, was on that trail, and up at the top was a shop where we could get ice cream.

"If there was any sort of tension between summer people and natives, we didn't know about it. We used to play with the Mason boys, who lived next door, and the Clarks, who also lived close by. We may have been summer people, but our roots were really in Princeton in a way because our earlier family members lived here year round."

## Oral History About Bobsledding In Princeton

My dad told me and my siblings a story about ridding a bob sled from the center of Princeton to the four corners in West Sterling around the year 1928. The bob sled was towed from the four corners to Princeton with a Model T. The sled was made from a thick wide plank, possibly chestnut. The driver controlled the front runners with heavy ropes which he pulled on. An acetylene lamp was used to light the way. The driver was a "young buck", very broad in the shoulders, and he wore a fur lined great coat and he wore gauntlet style gloves. Because my dad was a wee fellow, he enjoyed multiple runs when they ran it. He could squeeze in between anyone he told us.



*Miricks on Mountain Rd by the Library on their Bobsled.*

***Edmund Wronski***



*This is DH Gregory, who's family owned and ran Gregory Store (yellow building) in the Center of Princeton for over 100 years*

The below bobsled was donated to the Needham Recreational House at Krashes' Field. It hangs in the loft which was supposed to be used by people, but unfortunately can't be used because there are no two ways of egress. Jay Goodnow claimed he rode a number of times a similar sled, and "it was a hell of a ride."

*Nathaniel Gove*



My father told stories that, after church on Sunday, a group of them used to slide on Flexible Flyer double runners down Mountain Rd. and then turn and head down Gregory Hill toward Sterling. They would then walk back up to the church and ride again down Mountain Rd but continue down Worcester Rd. toward his house in the late 1920's. Of course, there was less road traffic at that time.

He and a couple buddies, even once, walked up Mountain Rd. and slid down Mile Hill Rd, and the byproduct was that he wore out the toes on his boots trying to slow down around the curves at the bottom.

*William "Bud" Brooks*

**We would love to hear your stories about growing up in Princeton. Please send your remembrances to [princetonmahistory@gmail.com](mailto:princetonmahistory@gmail.com).**