

Growing Up in Tuckerton During the Early 1930s

*Editor's Note: The following essay, excerpted from **Society Scroll**, the Ocean County Historical Society newsletter, details a child's life in Tuckerton in the early 1930's. Carolyn Campbell, the author, lived in the town for eight years, from 1929 to 1937, before moving with her family to Toms River. A Beachwood resident today, she is a past president of the county historical society and a co-author of **Chickaree and the Wall**, a recently published history of one-room schools in Ocean County.*

By CAROLYN CAMPBELL

My world was the block bounded by Clay, Marine, Main and Green streets. To me, Clay Street was a most delightful place to live. It sloped slightly on its way to Green Street, which parallels the creek (pronounced crick). On our side of the street, the driveways had enough of a slope to let you get a start and turn your Flexible Flyer into the snow-packed street in winter. We always tried to catch up with a sled going by as we shot out the driveway.

A fence divided the back of our property from Dr. Fox's abandoned home and property, which extended to a frontage on Main Street. Dr. Fox's home was a little spooky – a great place to explore. If we were feeling especially brave, we would creep down the stairs into the pitch black basement. However, the thing that attracted the most attention was the writing etched on the windows on the stair landing. Everyone knew you could only write on glass with a diamond! In the backyard there was a hole about 14 to 16 inches wide in the ground. No one knew how deep it was. You could lower yourself into it carefully and stand on a pipe which crossed through it.

Dad managed the Tuckerton Lumber Co. hardware store on Main Street. When Mother helped out there, Gram came to stay with us for a while. Inventory time was especially busy. Dad's allergy to dust, which caused his tongue and heels to swell, always acted up at that time.

Most of Mother and Dad's friends had telephones. You didn't need to know any numbers – you just told Gladys Horner whom you wished to call. She'd ring the number or tell you they'd gone to the store or post office or maybe to Blatt's in Atlantic City for the day. When my brother, Cliff, would take a walk without Mother's knowledge, Gladys would call and say, "Hattie, Cliff just went around the corner headed for Main Street." Mother would then call Dad to say Cliff was on his way. Dad would send him home with a note for Mother. The telephone exchange was in the bay window of a lovely old home at the corner of Clay and Green streets.

The school I attended was only a few doors away at the corner of Clay and Marine streets. Lots of children walked up Clay Street on the way to school. For a while even the principal, Mr. Rosenberger, walked right past our house. He and his wife, Helen, were friendly with

Mother and Dad so we got to know him quite well. In school everyone called him "pussyfoot" because he walked so quietly despite being such a big man. Once on New Year's Eve, when my cousin Claire was visiting, Mr. Rosenberger took us to the school and let us ring the bell. What an exciting time!

There was just one class for each grade, so those of us who started Grade 1 together went right through with hardly any changes in the class roll. I can still call the roll – Mabel Brown, Robert Carmona, Alda Cox, Chester Downs, Hubert Driscoll, Geraldine Eshelman, etc. Jimmy Rutter, who would later become Ocean County sheriff, came later in the alphabet.

The year I was in third grade I broke my arm. As a result, and in order to keep me from breaking the other one, I was allowed in the classroom as soon as I got to school. That was a great privilege and made it possible for me to read every Bobbey Twin book the school owned.

There were two other notable events that took place in Grade 3. One, Fernando Pons, whose father was a dentist, joined our class. That was a name quite different to me from Cranmer, Driscoll, Pharo, Morey and Cox. Second, Bobby Carmona wore green slacks to school. I'd never seen a boy with green slacks. Bobby later became the funeral director and started the Carmona-Bolen Funeral Home. His father was our doctor in Tuckerton.

A few friends and I spent hours and hours in Grade 6 working on our penmanship papers to send in to see if we qualified for a Palmer Method Penmanship certificate. We did, and I still have mine. Push and pulls were fun to do. The aggravating thing was that the pen you dipped into the inkwell might make a blot on a perfect paper just before you finished. Teachers must have looked forward with dread to the filling and spilling of the inkwells each week. A separate classroom not in use across the hall was the "penmanship workroom." It was there that one of our classmates told us all about the birth of her mother's baby.

Seventh and eighth grades were located in the high school building next door. Boys entered at one end and the girls at the other. Here Miss Virginia Todd and Mrs. Carrie Kelley taught us so much. Mrs. Kelley assigned great quantities of work. Each night there were 40 spelling words to mark diacritically, define, and use in a sentence. Arithmetic homework consisted of problems with two or more steps.

For some reason I had the chance to go someplace with Miss Todd in her car. That was a real thrill in itself, but the fact that it was a new car and could go 50 miles an hour was most impressive.

In Grades 7 and 8 we were joined by pupils from West Creek and Giffordtown (Galetown) schools. This expanded my world and called for bicycle rides and visits to Doris Holloway and Althea Cranmer in West Creek. Lawrence Jones and Frank Zagiba, two academic rivals, also

lived in West Creek. The funny house with the chair on top (still to be seen on Route 9) was not far from Frank's home.

To go from the center of Tuckerton to west Tuckerton and Giffordtown, one crossed the dam where water spilled from Lake Pohatcong into the creek. Thus the phrase "over the dam." For a few months before moving to Toms River in 1937 we lived in half a double house "over the dam."

Majorie Mathis and her older sister Mary, who often stayed with Cliff and me when Mother and Dad went out, lived on Green Street. It was during this Grade 7 and 8 period that I remember Marjorie walking past our house with her list of words to study. She was on the high school spelling team. County spelling bees were held with Tuckerton, Barnegat and Toms River high schools taking part.

Playmates were always plentiful on Clay Street. In our gang were Ruby Morey, Gerbie Engelder, Claire Lane, Elaine Honer, Laura Gaskill, Sonny Price, Mabel and Winnie Brown, Sonny and Shirley Smith, Stuart Horner, Elmer and Marietta Luker, and numerous younger siblings. Dad put up two swings and a trapeze behind our house, so our backyard became the center for many activities including football games. For my many outdoor activities, skirts were not very satisfactory. Knickers were popular and I finally persuaded my mother to buy me a pair.

I ran all the errands for my mother since Cliff was too little. I'd go to the store, take Dad's lunch to him, and collect the Blanket Club money each week from Mother's 10 or 12 "customers." (I don't know for which organization the Blanket Club was a project.) This was my first experience with keeping records, and I felt very important. Another errand was the delivery of lunch to Steve Sackas at the ship-to-shore wireless station just north of town.

As soon as March came, the roller skates were put into use. They were the kind that clamped on your shoe, and a key was needed to tighten the clamp. The key was worn on a string around your neck. Straps around the ankle held them on tightly. There were sidewalks all around my block but some were raised by tree roots and some had a rough surface. We'd head for Main Street – the section in front of Tuckerton's old Community Theater and Gerber's store which had the smoothest concrete in all of town. Besides the smooth concrete, that area had many advantages. One could make the turn at the corner of Water Street and go downhill alongside Gerber's store to the loading platform where the sidewalk ended. The loading platform was a good place to stop yourself. If the wind was blowing across the lake, the ride was very fast.

Saturdays were special days. My friends and I, and sometimes Cousin Claire, went to the movies, where I considered the short serial with its exciting episodes fiction and the full-length movie real. For a while a new jigsaw puzzle in the American history series was for sale for 25

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cents each Saturday. The puzzles pictured were of famous paintings of the Battle of Bunker Hill, Mount Vernon, etc. That was my big purchase of the week.

Anytime of the year a visit to the little library on Marine Street was a treat. I never saw so many books! It was a tiny one-room building which has been moved since then and is now part of the Tuckerton Library. Miss Price, my friend Sonny's aunt, was the librarian. That and the bookmobile which came once a month to our school were my book sources. Margaret Dolittle, the county librarian, drove the bookmobile. I was always excited about its coming and about seeing Miss Dolittle, who boarded with Aunt Mary and Uncle Marv in Toms River.

One could swim in either the lake or creek in Tuckerton. There was a sandy beach on the west side of the lake to which I was allowed to go by myself after I learned to swim. Dad took me to the creek a few times, but it was deep in the middle and not as safe as the lake. There were always little sunfish in the shallows at the lake's edge near Route 9.

Mother frequently took Cliff and me to the beach at Ship Bottom. There was also a nice beach at the east end of the lake in Manahawkin where we swam sometimes.

One summer I collected butterflies. I caught them, chloroformed them, and mounted them on display boards. By the next summer my concern for the butterflies took over and I never caught another one. The summer of collecting did serve to make me very aware of the beautiful patterns and designs in nature. There were so many fields and empty lots filled with wild flowers, insects, and butterflies in those days. I miss them.