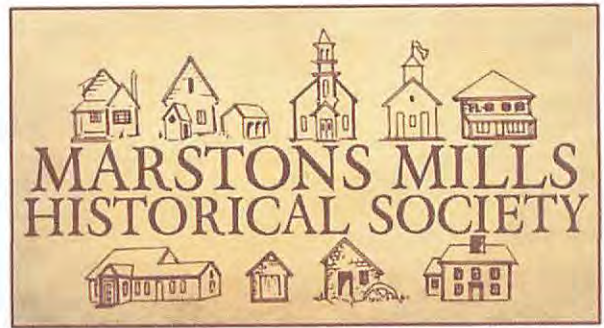


Marstons Mills Historical Society
Interview with Priscilla Higgins

(Interviewers not Recorded)
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P.O. Box 1375 Marstons Mills, MA 02648
marstonsmillshistorical.org

I was born in Marstons Mills in 1902, the fourth child of my parents. My father was practicing medicine here in 1894, the year before he was married. He had offices in Osterville and Cotuit, but that was before I was born. My parents met in church in Dorchester, and were married in that church in 1895. My father had been born in Missouri and my mother in Columbus, Ohio. Mother's parents had come to Cotuit in summers and knew the area. My father and Mother's father heard about the practice in Marstons Mills, so my father came here. A Dr. Pierce had been in practice here, but he went to Nantucket. Ted's father remembered Dr. Pierce. That Dr. Pierce went to the train accident in West Barnstable. That occurred about 1888.

Christmas 1913 we left the Mills for the West Indies. Dad had been there before and he liked it. He had to get away because of his health and the move saved his health. We left with 30 pieces of luggage and made the trip by train and boat. We came back the following March. My health would not stand the tropical climate. Before I left I had red cheeks and they returned when we came back.

We then went to live in Vermont where we had cousins. We stayed there two years.

Dr. Presant replaced Dad in the Mills. He was a German doctor. His wife couldn't stand the place. There was no social life for her.

Dad hadn't sold the big house. He'd asked George Mecarta to try and sell it, but he hadn't. George was a farmer and not a realtor. Arthur Finley was the realtor, but Dad had asked George.

Us children were glad to come back. We liked it in Vermont, but it was bitter cold up there in the winter. Weeks went by when you never saw the ground.

My father was very active in village affairs. He was on the library board. Charles Fuller, the miller, built the library. I don't know whether he was paid for it, but I wouldn't be surprised if he did it for nothing. Dad would purposely go to Boston to buy books for the library.

Mother painted all the scenery for the Hall. The curtains had vines and flowers painted on them. Mother was a graduate of an art school in Boston. On the curtain that was there before the main curtain went up, there was a painting of a ship. We children were very jealous because that painting was done by Ike Green and riot by our mother.

While we were away young Louis Kleinschmidt sold the scenery.

Ted says the Kleinschmidts moved to New York during the first World War because people were saying they were making poison bandages.

I graduated from Elizabeth Lowell High School in Cotuit. The school is gone but not forgotten. Ted said his grandfather drove the school barge to Cotuit. Sometimes his father would drive the barge and leave the horses in some barn while he went to school. In summer they drove that barge from the Seapuit Golf Links to the Cotocheset Inn (now the Wianno Club).

Alton Jones, Loring Jr's great uncle, drove the first real school bus. He lived in Newtown where John Warner now lives.

After high school I went to teachers college in Hyannis. That building is now the Town Hall. The dormitory was at right angles to that building. We children all went to different colleges, I went to Boston. Don, my younger brother, finished at Elizabeth Lowell and then went to Hyannis for a postgraduate course. My brother, Roger, who came back from the Navy in World War I, went to school with Don in Hyannis. Then they went to Clark College in Worcester. Roger got his final degree from Harvard and Don graduated from Harvard Medical School. Don came back to the Cape and practiced medicine in Cotuit. He still lived there when he died, although he and his wife spent the winters in their home in Florida. Rog only came to the Cape in the summers.

My sister, Kathryn, still lives in Cotuit.

I worked as an occupational therapist in different cities. In 1927 I worked at the Naval Hospital in Brooklyn. I also worked in Indiana, Delaware and Maine. Then I went back to New York to work for the Literary Digest. In 1934 I returned to the Cape to look after my parents. Dad was beginning to show his poor health although he continued to practice, but with a lighter load.

Yes, Dad went to people's homes, day or night. My brother continued that practice. Dad had three high-stepping horses which he used as well as the car. Marjorie often went with him. Ted taught Marj to drive. I never did learn to drive. Mother and Dad went to Boston one time for a week to get away from the patients and I guess maybe to get away from us children. Marion Oldham tried to teach me to drive while they were away. We just had one car and Dad had to have it, so that was the end of my driving. Dad had a Model T but his last car was a Model A.

Dr. Kinney was in Osterville and Dr. Haskins in Cotuit. It was Dr. Haskins who brought Jean Gifford Parker into the world. My Dad had what is called a general practice. He also pulled teeth. Ted remembers he pulled a tooth for him when he was young. Dr. Higgins told him to take the tooth home and put sugar on it and watch it eat. Ted Thanked him. Dr. Higgins had a sense of humor.

Dad had patients in West Barnstable and a big practice in Mashpee. Ted says Dad was good with burns. He remembers a child being brought in from Mashpee who had a coffee pot turned over on it. Ted had an arm badly burned when a powder he was using backfired when he was cleaning a chimney. That was when Ted had his own oil truck. His arm was burned to the bone and Dr. Higgins treated it.

Dad did obstetrics. Bea Adams, who helped Mother around the house and did the cooking, used to go out on calls with Dad. Bea Adams also went to the West Indies with us. Beatrice Perry, who just died, was named Beatrice after Bea Adams, who assisted at her birth. Marion Coleman went to Boston to learn midwifery and Dad would call on her to assist.

I went to the village school. I only went five years as I skipped a grade. But the school did have six grades.

We went to the village church. My parents belonged to the church in West Barnstable, but they didn't have the time to go over there very often. All us children went to Sunday School here. The girls all taught in Sunday School. The church had no minister. A minister would come over from Osterville or Cotuit after performing the service there. Sometimes he didn't come until one o'clock.

Ted remembers Billy Sunday coming for big sings at the village hall. I don't remember that but we may have been away at the time. He also remembers medicine shows--kickapoo juice and snake oil. A fellow would go up and down the aisles rubbing soap into his arms. It would disappear. Then he'd put water on it and it would reappear. People bought that soap like nobody's business. They didn't realize any soap will do that. Poor old souls spending money to cure asthma or eczema. The stuff would kill or cure a mule. Maybe that's why Dad didn't say anything about those shows.

My mother's name was Grace Goodwin Babbitt Higgins. I had no middle name, but I made one up for my diplomas.

We lived in the big house until my parents died. In summer we used the whole house. In winter we moved into this end. While we were away our coal furnace rusted and Dad never replaced it. That furnace went to Japan as scrap, and we eventually got it back. The library we turned into a winter kitchen. The coal stove was turned into one that used kerosene. Of course we had a stove in this room.

Dad had his own ice house and a greenhouse. Down by Rt. 149 he had a garden. For several years he had strawberries in there. He did much of the gardening himself. It was more than a hobby. It was a lot of work, but he enjoyed it. Gideon Lovell worked in the garden as did a colored fellow, Joe Friday, and a Portuguese named Mederios.

We didn't use the greenhouse in the winter. There was no heat in it. Grandpa Higgins took charge of the greenhouse. He lived with us from the time his wife died in 1903. He died in 1911. I remember when he died because he was buried on my birthday. I was nine years old. For quite a while I didn't like it because I didn't have a birthday party. Don't get me wrong. I loved my grandpa, I just missed having a party.

Grandpa Higgins had the watch repair shop. The shop was moved In 1913 or while we were in Vermont. It's now on the corner of Newtown Road and Lovells Lane, behind that stockade fence. Mrs. Gross lived in it. She and Mrs. Kleinschmidt were sisters. I couldn't bear that Mr. Kleinschmidt, nor could Mrs. Gross. She knew him well. He was an unkind person.

Mrs. Gross lived at one time behind the Cash Market. I knew that as her son, Gerald, was my age. One time a swarm of bees came to the top of her front door and she called on my father to get them away. Dad kept bees, so he had all the equipment for gathering up the swarm. This must have been before 1911 as Grandpa Higgins was watching. Some of the bees flew up his pants leg. He went high-tailing it up the hill, banging himself against the trees, trying to get rid of the bees. I don't remember how badly he was stung, I just remember him banging against the trees.

Mrs. Gross lived in Osterville for awhile. Gerald just died three or four years ago. He was an old beau of mine. I didn't want to marry him, but I did like to go dancing with him. The village hall had the best dances. Every village had a place to dance. I don't remember going to Cotuit. There would be a piano, a violin and a drum. Edith Hallett played a lot for the dances. Every Friday night there would be a whist party and afterwards a dance. We girls didn't care a hang about cards, but we did love to dance. Ted says Lydia Fuller also played for dances. He knows because he used to date her--two red heads.

There wasn't much social life in the village for my parents. They used to go off to Boston. They'd go for a good show or to shop. They could stay with friends or relatives in Dorchester. They were more likely to go to Boston than other villages because they knew the city. They didn't go frequently, but they did go several times a year.

My parents always had people coming down from Boston to visit. And when someone came to the hall to sing or to have some kind of a show my parents would put them up. Dad kept on with his calls even when there were guests. They did love to have company.

Ted said, "You had a lovely mother, Pil." Well, he had a lovely mother, too. She had twins and she fed them condensed milk. I'd go over on purpose, go into the kitchen and ask if she had any empty condensed milk tins. There would always be a teaspoon or so of milk in them for me. My mother didn't know I did that. Our mothers didn't know a lot of things we did.

Ted would go over to the Higgins's and work there like heck. His mother said he didn't work at home like that. Ted would come over and ring the bell. One of us children would answer it and he would ask where he could sit. He'd be coming for breakfast. He'd also ask when we were taking baths so he could have one. He and Don were great pals. Don was born the first of June and Ted was born the 26th of August a year later. They were just about a year apart.

People stayed at home when they were ill as there was no hospital in the area. There was an old hospital in the west end of Hyannis, but it wasn't much. Ted's sister, Violet, was in there for awhile. Mrs. Pierce couldn't get in every day and Violet became covered with bed sores, so she was brought home. In 1920 Dr. Gleason donated his home for a hospital. I was one of the first patients. I went in to have my tonsils out. My dad had a surgeon come down from Boston. The room I was in was bigger than this one and I had it all to myself. I think there were only six rooms.

Ted says you can live a healthy life if you have good meat, good tobacco and good whiskey. Also good air will do the trick. Now they tell you coffee will kill you and tomorrow they'll tell you coffee will keep you alive. You can't eat the fish because the water is polluted.

At the beginning of World War I Dad had the south field all in vegetables. He always had flowers around the edge of his vegetable gardens. He loved flowers. One garden was entirely flowers. Mother never worked in the garden. She was busy enough with the house and the children, taking calls, and caring for company. We children all liked gardens and we each had a garden of our own.

Dad had his own smokehouse. When the road was repaired he got the old conduit for his smoking. One time we had a cow. We always had pigs and chickens.

Grandpa Higgins raised tobacco in the henhouse. He had it hanging in the sleigh house to dry. The sleigh house is still there. Maybe we should go down and look at the rafters.

While we were away, Eph Jones kept his horses in our barn. Ted says he caught a white rat in the barn, an albino rat. He put it in a cage and hung it up in the store.

Ted says the cookies came in cardboard cartons with glass tops. The cartons were stacked three high on a rack. The customer could get as many loose cookies as he wanted. The rats always got the bottom layer. Every night the bottom layer had to be cleaned out. Loring Jones, Sr. had purchased a fresh box of penny bolsters. They disappeared and he asked me what happened to them. I hadn't eaten them. When that old wooden store was torn down we found the box of penny bolsters uneaten. The rat had lugged them away and left them.

Ted says when the grist mill was torn down the rats all came over to their house. We had mice, but we also had cats. I had a mother cat, Mona, and, I kept a family tree on her litters for two or three years. Cats are as different from one another as people are. I have two cats now. They'll follow me to the foot of the hill and wait there while I go to the store, then return home with me.

Mrs. Pearlstein used to come round with a little red wagon selling yard goods. I guess mother bought a lot from her. When we were little Mother made a lot of our clothes. She also went to Boston. She was more likely to go to Boston to shop than were other villagers. She knew the city. She usually took the train. In later years, in the 30's, Dad would drive to Boston, but he didn't like that drive. He didn't have a heater in his car either.

We children always took the train. When I worked in Boston I'd come home weekends and holidays. I think I spent more weekends at home than at work. When I worked in New York City I'd come by bus to Boston and then to the Cape by train. Sometimes I'd come by boat to Fall River and then take a train to the Cape.

Dad had the first car on the Cape. It came by train to West Barnstable. It wasn't in one piece; it came in parts and a man came with it to show Dad how to put it together. That man stayed and stayed and stayed. He was sure a freeloader.

We had good food and I always loved to eat. We had our own meat, fish, chickens, and vegetables. We had pear and apple trees. There were gooseberries and raspberries. Grapes grew all around the pond. Just a few years ago I bought some gooseberry bushes for Marion

Oldham. I think she has gotten some berries from them.

There was pickerel and red perch in the pond. I liked to eat the fish, but I never liked to fish.

Gypsies used to come to camp by the pond. They'd pitch camp in a low spot, and wash their clothes. Sam Adams was the undertaker and the sheriff at that time and he'd come and shoo them off. Gypsies had no permission to camp in the Town of Barnstable. They did have nice baskets for sale.

I don't know what my father charged his patients in the early years. We could look it up as I have all his account books. In the early years he was often paid in produce--a fowl or a quarter of a pig. Before he died he was charging \$2 for a house call and \$1 for an office visit.