

What kind of services did Dick Keeney, "The Mayor of Buckland" provide while in honorary office? One year there were 2 dump trucks rumbling through Buckland several times a day on Tolland Tpk. puffing very black smoke. That smoke was blowing right into Dick's garage. He called the trucking company and told someone there that he intended to report those trucks to the State D.O.T.. The person on the other end of the line asked who was calling. The Mayor of Buckland was all that Dick said, and apparently that was all that was necessary. He didn't see those trucks again. I believe trucking companies should take that as a warning. They may soon be hearing from the Buckland Health Dept., or other Buckland officials. Our thanks to Dick for services rendered, and for all that inspiration. * * * * * *this issue sponsored by and available at.*

The Tobacco Story, Contributions from our Neighbors to the North

"A good cigar was many things to men in generations past. It was a token of courtesy and acceptance that one man could offer another, a companion for a lonely peddler, a common bond among spectators of sporting events. It was a necessity for politicians in their smoke-filled rooms, the complement to a good dinner, and the salvation of a poor one. It was an antidote for righteous cleanliness, a badge of substance and success, a comfortable vice, a simple pleasure." So say Mary J. Springman and Betty Finnell Guinan in their book about East Granby. Many things have changed, but for many men a cigar is still a simple pleasure. Tobacco is under fire for medical reasons today, but remember only a year or two ago doctors changed their minds and told us it's actually good for us to have a glass of wine once in a while. In a few more years they'll be telling us that, for some folks a cigar now and then is another good thing.



The Mulnite family lives in the Windsorville section of East Windsor. Mulnite Farms is still growing Shade Tobacco. Emil Mulnite was 87 yrs. old last Nov. His son and nephew are in charge of most of the farming now. Emil says his job now is to keep his eye on the balance in the check book. This gives him some free time, and when I called he suggested that I come up and see the farm. He gave me a grand tour. They use some modern methods that might surprise some of you old tobacco hands. The day I was there they were wrapping their sheds with plastic and running steaming equipment inside to soften the tobacco that was hanging there. After a few hours of this the crew went to work taking the tobacco down and off the lathes, and packing it for shipping. This new process allows the farmer a little more control over that part of the operation. They finish 5 sheds a week. Not long ago the farmer had to wait for a change in the weather, usually in November before the tobacco could be taken down.

Arline (Miller) Bidwell is 89 yrs. old this year, and she grew up on her father's farm on Barber Hill Rd. in So. Windsor. The Mulnites were neighbors of theirs. She remembers that they always hoped to sell their tobacco by December so they could celebrate Christmas in style, but they were not always so lucky.

Mr. Mulnite's parents were immigrants from Germany. They went to work first in the metal working industries in central Ct., but his father's health deteriorated quickly. A wise doctor told him he should go back to the farming life that he'd grown up with. They bought 25 acres of land in East Windsor of which only one acre was cleared. They had no animals to help them with their work. Alexander and Amie Mulnite settled in there to await the arrival of their first child - Emil in 1907. Emil grew with the farm, and he had his share of responsibilities by the time the 1920's rolled around. He remembers the Ct. Valley Tobacco Growers Assoc. very well and the controversy that surrounded it. His father was a member. He believes that each farmer paid so much a year, according to the number of acres of tobacco he grew, to maintain his membership. The farmers signed 5 yr. contracts. When the tobacco was sold the farmer paid a commission to the Assoc.. The Wapping-Manchester Tobacco Warehouse was under exclusive contract to the Assoc.. Farmers probably paid a storage fee for use of the warehouse. The offices of the Assoc. were at 225 State St. in Hartford. There was a wide range of prices that a farmer might get for his crop depending on the type and quality of the tobacco he or she grew (there were many women managing farms, too). When promoting the idea of an Assoc. in 1922, those in charge proposed that if 75% of the farmers joined they could set and control prices. The prices they thought they could get were acceptable to most farmers, and more than 75% signed contracts in the spring and summer of 1922. Mr. Mulnite tells me that at the end of that season the buyers for the tobacco companies went to the Assoc. and made an offer that was below the prices that the Assoc. had set. For instance, the price set for the best Broadleaf tobacco was 25¢ a lb. and the buyers offered something like 20¢ a lb.. The Assoc. turned their offer down. It may be that this is when the buyers went around the Assoc. to buy most of their tobacco, because in the end the farmers got much less than 20¢ a lb. for their tobacco. In fact it seems the Assoc. was still trying to sell that Broadleaf crop 2 or 3 yrs. later. This of course was disastrous to many farmers, and it seems the Broadleaf farmers were the hardest hit. They were mostly small farmers and could not wait 2 or 3 yrs. to be paid. That decision by the Assoc. was apparently the beginning of a loss of confidence in the Assoc.. Mr. Mulnite says that for many years this was known among farmers as "The big mistake". He remembers those difficult years very well. His family got by saving wherever they could, and by sorting and grading their own tobacco and other farmer's tobacco. There are 100 leaves in a pound. A good sorter can sort 8 pound in an hour.

It seems apparent to me that good information was very hard to come by. Today with world-wide communications gathering information is easier and many people make it their business to gather this kind of information and analyze it. But as Mr. Mulnite could tell me it is still very difficult to predict what the demand for tobacco is fundamentally different from other or

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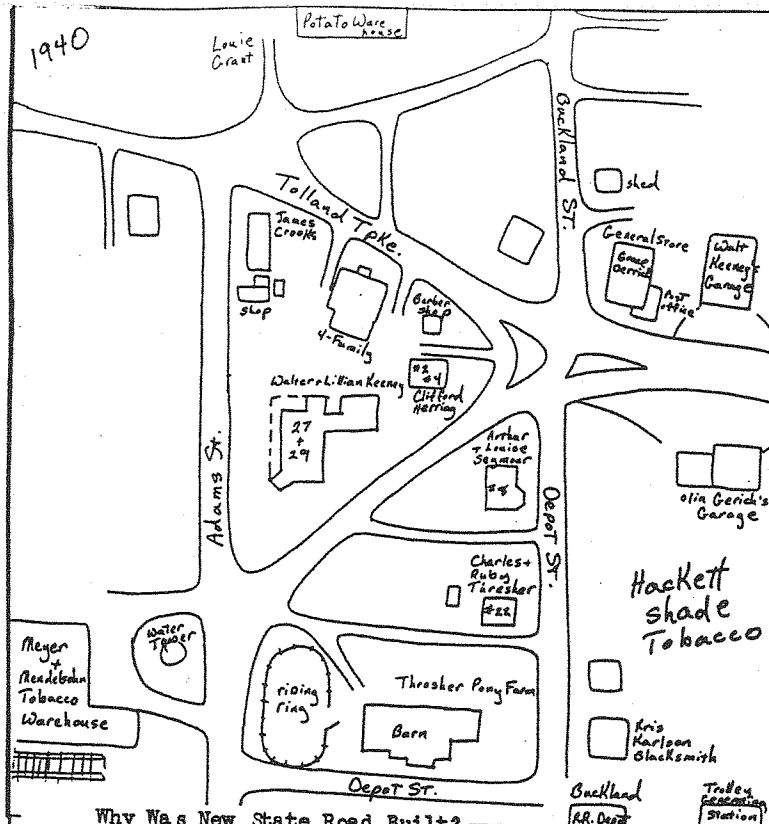
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Why Was New State Road Built?

It was while sitting under a tree at the end of Depot St., drinking lemonade that Dick Keeney tried to explain to me what Buckland had once looked like, and how it had changed. What was this old piece of road we were sitting next to I wanted to know. I was trying to draw a map. He explained it to me 4 or 5 times, and I still didn't understand it. By then he was hollering at me. I'm sure some of you can imagine what that would be like. I pushed the paper over in front of him and handed him the pen, and with effort he drew a map. Finally I understood. They put a road right through the middle of the block-corner to corner. About a week later I had to ask him-"Why did they think they had to do that?" "To ease the traffic," he said very seriously. Another 3 weeks or so went by before I got up my nerve and asked "Dick, how much traffic was there in Buckland in the 1930's?" I have asked several people that question and they all say about the same thing, "Traffic, in Buckland? In the 1930's? Not much." In fact a reliable source told me that New State Rd. was mainly used as a drag strip by a group of local young men (including our new town treasurer Ron Osella) for many years after it was built. I've also been told that cars often came around the bend at Gerich's Garage going west too fast and more than once ran right into the Keeney homestead, probably bringing Gerich's and Keeney's Garage some extra business.

Realizing that the 1930's were Depression years, I wondered why the State of Ct. would build a road that seemed to be essentially a short cut from start to finish with no other apparent urgent purpose, and move 3 buildings to do it. It then occurred to me that perhaps the State wasn't paying for it. Was this a WPA project? No. This road was built in 1931. The WPA was formed in 1934, but it's still possible that this project was done with Federal relief funds. However I have found 3 maps which may help to explain what happened. This project was called "The Hartford-Rockville Rd # 3 - S (State Highway) #106. The 1st map found at Mary Cheney Library suggests that the State decided to improve this route when they decided to take up the trolley tracks and make this a bus route. The route included N. Main and Oakland St. The 2nd map found at the Town Clerk's office shows that the State was not just buying land from H.S. Keeney it also wanted to sell him the old trolley property. The 3rd map found at the Engineering Dept. which I have copied above shows the actual layout of the roads. I think it shows that going up and around the corner of Tolland Tpk. and Adams St. meant dealing with 4 landowners and paving almost twice as much road. Even after moving 3 buildings the State may have been saving money by going through the Keeney property. It seems the State saved some money at the expense of one family's home.

In any case, according to old maps the layout of roads in Buckland had not changed much in almost 100 years. In 1931 the State made the decision to build a road across the tobacco fields around Hilliardville then under the R.R. tracks with Adams St. and through H.S. Keeney's property. Herbert Keeney had no particular reason to want a road through his back yard. His Grandson Herb Seymour describes what happened in his book *Growing up with Gramp Keeney*. "The surveying teams were around for weeks, and eventually the State came to Gramp with a proposal to take his property for a two lane concrete highway.... He wanted no part of it, but they threatened to take the property by eminent domain, and he eventually gave in and sold them the property required for the road."

"The State wanted to tear down the big barn and the old red barn, move the double house where Howard Erickson (and David Armstrong) lived, and the Barber Shop.... run the road through the orchard and the windmill. They won the right to do most of what they wanted. However Gramp wouldn't part with his big barn, and the settlement required the Highway Dept. to move the barn across the road to a new foundation they built on part of the sheep pasture. The old red barn was torn down and disappeared. Gramp had tears in his eyes when he saw the construction gangs cut down the trees that he had pruned with his jack knife when they were sapplings and he was young.... To me the whole project was exciting for I was too young to appreciate the extent of the changes." (p. 40-41)

We can only imagine what this did to the actual value of this property, which was now 2 triangular pieces of land. We can never measure the effect these changes had on individuals or on the village of Buckland, but on the next page you'll learn how and why the Thresher family who inherited that salvaged "big barn" transformed their corner of Buckland into the Thresher Pony Farm. This is a corner of Buckland that many people remember very well.

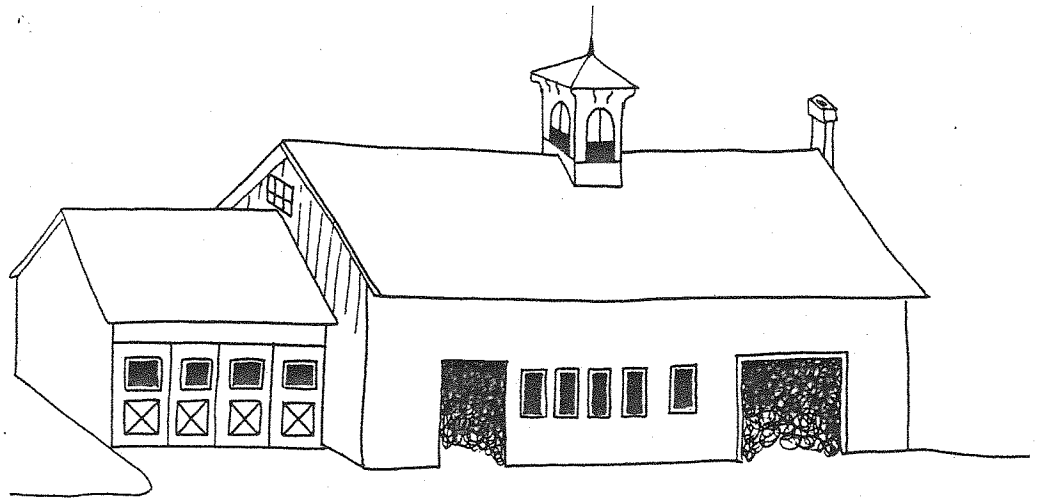
-left- Buckland center 1940. For 1925 map, see B.T.#2. Until 1931 H. S. Keeney owned all of the property between the trolley tracks and Depot st. See also p.5

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GROWING UP with GRAMP KEENEY
 RECOLLECTIONS ON A NEW ENGLAND FAMILY IN THE 1920S & 1930S
 by *Herbert Keeney Seymour*



The Thresher Pony Farm

According to Herb Seymour his cousin Merv Thresher "always had a variety of animals, and one of the best was Spot, who was an enormous English setter. Old Spot was of course devoted to Merv and willingly allowed himself to have a small bridle put on his head and be hitched up between homemade shafts of an express wagon and pull the two of us around the area. Sometimes he didn't steer too well if he got distracted by a cat or another dog, but all of us had a grand time." (photo see Herb's book) It seems this was an early beginning. Merv's parents were Charles and Ruby (Keeney) Thresher, his grandparents were H. S. & Elsie Keeney and George & Julia Thresher who lived on Pleasant Valley Rd. and grew tobacco. Charles Thresher was also a tobacco farmer and was mentioned several times in the B.T.#5. He apparently played an important role in getting the tobacco Warehouse built in Buckland. Merv was just five years old when the Warehouse was built in 1923, and he doesn't remember hearing much about it or about the controversy that surrounded it. Parents are generally very busy people, so it's not surprising that they don't often take the time to try to explain complicated things to small children. Later when we're old enough to understand such things more easily, the subject quite often just doesn't come up. Other things come along to take our attention and time. W.W.II for instance was a big attention getter. Men and woman sometimes get a chance to tell their stories after they've retired, but that was not to be for Charles Thresher. Charles Thresher grew about 4 acres of tobacco on the western corner of Tollans Tpk. and Adams St. He had about 25 acres off Smith St. in Wapping. They lived for many years in $\frac{1}{2}$ of the Keeney homestead at 27&29 Adams St.. Ruby Thresher kept Gramps books, wrote his letter and drove him everywhere." She also kept her husband's books. Merv and his brother Bob who was born the same year the Warehouse was built went to Buckland school with Dick Keeney, Herb Seymour, Charlie Glode, John Daley, Chic Carrol (Buckland's boxing champ) "Tuckie" Lucas, Larry and Maynard Briggs and many others. You might say those teachers faced quite a challenge. Early on Merv had a pony named Dandy which he rode everywhere. It wasn't long before people began to stop and ask if he would give their children a ride. According to Herb Seymour, "Charles Thresher was a good horseman and brought up Merv the same way... animals just liked Merv anyway and responded to him well even though he was always demanding and firm with them." Soon he had a sign up- 5¢ a ride. 6 for a quarter. Adams St. was paved now while other streets still were not, and so a drive out to Buckland was a popular Sunday event. Merv and his father were in Hartford buying another pony on Sept. 21, 1938 when the great hurricane struck with full force at about 2 P.M.. They soon decided they should try to get home. It took about 4 hours, and I guess they were lucky to get there at all. There were power lines and trees down across all of the roads. Apparently the dam in front of Hilliard's or Adams' pond had given way at 11:00 A.M. that same day. (more on that in the next issue) They arrived at home to discover that all of their tobacco sheds had blown down. There were many sheds blown in Buckland that day. The Hartman plantation lost 60 sheds. Emil Mulnite tells me that at his farm they carefully went around and put out the coal fires that were drying the tobacco inside the sheds before the storm's full force struck. When he left the last shed he had to roll out of the way as it collapsed because he couldn't stand up against the full force of the wind. Others tell the same kind of stories. of turning to close the shed door and watching the whole shed blow down. Emil said that it occurred to him later that if he hadn't been so careful to put out those fires he might have collected on some of his fire insurance. The Chaponis brothers would like to correct him on that notion. There were farmers in Buckland whose sheds burned that day and who tried to collect on that insurance. The insurance companies claimed that since the sheds had blown down before they caught fire, it was not a shed that burned - it was a pile of lumber and trash. And they didn't pay, except for the man who had an eye witness who swore in court that the shed was burning before it was blown down. Because it was Sept. all of the tobacco was in the sheds, the fruit of one years work. If you lost all of your sheds you didn't get paid that year, at all. There was no electricity for about a month, and no water

- continued on p.4

Mr. Marlow has kept my old Royal typewriter, which belonged to my grandmother in good running order, and now he has graciously agreed to sell The Buckland Times, and sponsor it too. Stop at the front counter.

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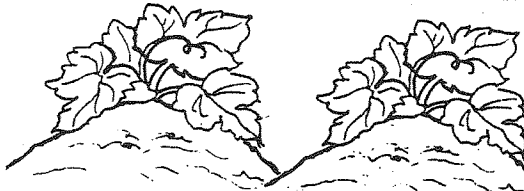
unless you had a fuel driven pump or a neighbor with such a pump. Some of the wood from the sheds could be saved. The Chaponis brothers still have two sheds that were moved in pieces from another farm and rebuilt. There was nothing you could do with the crushed tobacco but harrow it under. What made the difference was which way your sheds were facing. Many sheds were built in a North-South direction to catch the prevailing West to East winds which helped to dry the tobacco. But during the storm it was the sheds that had their long sides facing the winds that blew over. Mr. Mulnite says that the State moved quickly to offer help in the form of low interest loans, but for some farmers who had lost their crop and their sheds and probably uncounted pieces of equipment etc., that help just wasn't enough. By the Spring of 1939 Charles Thresher and Louie Grant had decided to plant all of their fields in potatoes. Louie later added a sparagus and the Threshers added cucumbers for pickling. Cucumbers were sold to the Silver Lane Pickle Co., founded by Hesper Gould but then operated by R.C. Simmons of Deerfield, Mass. Those pickles had to be a certain length to fit in the jars. Cucumbers grow very quickly as I'm sure many of you know. Not as fast as tobacco which starts as a very tiny seed and grows to a plant 5 or 6 ft. tall (broadleaf) 8 or 9 ft. tall (shade) in just a few weeks. Merv Thresher says he remembers listening to the tobacco grow at night, but the cucumbers kept him up many a night - measuring. When they are just the right size they had to be picked right away and delivered to the factory. He remembers being turned away at least once because the cucumbers were said to be too long. That load of cucumbers was then delivered to the pig farm-
or. At least the pigs were happy.

They placed an add in the paper to sell their potatoes, and then delivered anywhere in town for 50¢ a bushel, and he remembers delivering some to 3rd floor apartments. Louie Grant eventually sold potatoes and a sparagus from his warehouse. His brother Donald also built a potato warehouse on Buckland St. that is now being taken down for the expansion of Buckland St..

It was sometime in 1939 that Charles Thresher came to his son and said something like this, "Merv, you've got a good business here with your ponies. How about selling them to me?" They soon came to an agreement and Charles bought a model T truck (possibly a 1924 model), painted Thresher Pony Farm on the side and began taking them around to all the country fairs. The business expanded and a riding ring was set up next to the old Keeney barn. Eventually the Threshers cared for 30 ponies in that barn and families continued to make a drive out to Buckland a regular Sunday event, stopping for pony rides and a sparagus in the spring at Louie Grant's. The pony farm became a family business with Merv and Bob working with their father and many other loyal employees, Barry Cole of New England Sweeping, Walter Behrmann, Teddy Williams who went on to become a veterinarian among others.

As W.W.II approached Merv, Bob and many of Buckland's other young men joined the services. Bob joined the Coast Guard and Merv joined the Air Force. They both served 5 years. Merv worked as a cryptographer. One of his most memorable moments came when he lifted the hatch on the door of the trailer that carried the equipment to find a highly decorated General and his Aide standing outside. Merv had his orders. He told them they would have to have the password, and they would have to talk to the officer of the day to get it. That officer was very upset that Sgt. Thresher had given General Eisenhower a hard time, but Eisenhower commended him on following orders and said he was glad to know that trailer was secure. I asked Merv if he had known all along that it was Eisenhower. He said he had a pretty good idea. He'd never seen anyone with that many decorations on his uniform before, and hasn't since. The Thresher brothers came safely through W.W.II, but did not get home in time to see their father again. Charles died in the summer of 1945. By the time they arrived at home their mother, Ruby had learned to drive the truck, handle the ponies and the business was running as usual. Another one of her jobs, which I'm sure would make a long list, was to make lots of bologna sandwiches for the hired hands going out on the truck with the ponies. Merv admits that they usually managed to wait until about 9:30 before digging in to those sandwiches.

The Threshers had inherited that corner between two sections of Depot St. when Herbert Keeney died in 1939. The Walter Keeney family moved into the Keeney homestead, and the Threshers moved into the house at 22 Depot St.. Later they converted what was originally a tobacco sorting shed on the corner where Honda is today into a house and Merv and his wife Elizabeth (Burnham) Thresher raised their family there. Bob & his wife Loraine (Russell) Thresher and their family continued to live on Depot St. Their families were growing and in 1960 Merv decided to go to work for Pratt & Whitney full time. Bob Thresher continued to run the pony farm until 1980. Soon after that, that corner became Buckland Agway, leaving lots of kids and their parents with happy memories. * * * * *



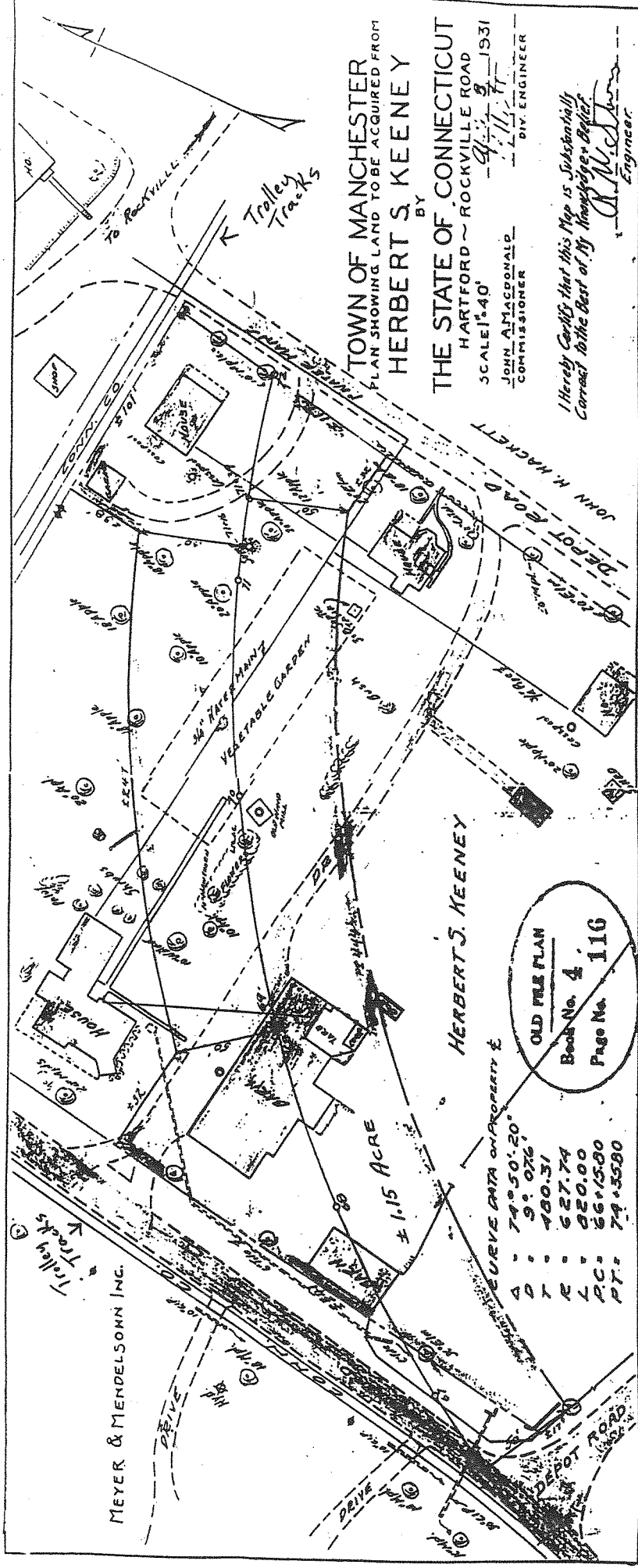
Do you have young sprouts coming up?
Do they wonder where they came from?
There's more than one answer to that question. 643-8313
Genealogy - Family History *style*

-Tobacco cont. from p. 1

Many people have told me that the buyers quite often tried to take advantage of that fact. Mr. Mulnite says that it was a generally accepted truth among farmers that the buyers stayed at the Bond Hotel in Hartford and met there to agree on the prices they would pay. That may have been illegal even in the 1920's. Farmers knew what they read in the papers, what they saw around them and what their neighbors were willing to tell them. Sometimes even brothers wouldn't be honest with each other about the price they'd gotten for their tobacco. If a buyer thought a farmer was vulnerable he might wait a little longer before going to see him. Fred Griffin of Granby tells me that everything about your crop was considered to be a trade secret. The seeds for the next season were looked up in the safe. The Assoc. may have been advising the farmers to cut back on their production, but it probably didn't look that simple to the farmers. As Mr. Mulnite said, if you grew every pound that you could, at least you had volume. If the price per lb. was low, at least you had every lb. you could grow. In short it was difficult to cut back on what you planted and just hope for higher prices in the fall. I was not taught economic theory in High School. I doubt if it was taught in the 1920's or earlier. Many farmers of the 1920's I'm sure felt lucky if they got the chance to finish High School. An appropriate education is more available today.

Mulnite Farms today sells it's crop to an English company. They own 400 acres and rent another 100 acres and they divide their acreage between tobacco and nursery stock. Diversifying is something that many farmers learned to do over the years. Mrs. Bidwell's father grew about 8 acres of tobacco, 8 acres of potatoes, kept 5 cows and sold cream to the creamery, and he kept 75 chickens and sold eggs to Willard's store in E. Hartford. Mr. Mulnite remembers Buckland in the 1930's & 40's very well. He sold his tobacco to Meyer & Mendelsohn for 25 or 30 years, and considered Mr. Mendelsohn and his buyer Isadore Seltzer to be very honorable men.

If you'd like to show your children or grandchildren what a working shade tobacco farm is like, or if you're curious yourself, Emil would be pleased to have you drive up to Graham Rd. in Windsorville during the season and have a look. If he has some free time I expect he would be even more pleased to show you around. From there it's an easy drive on Rt. 75 over to Windsor's Northwest Park and the John E. Luddy Conn. Valley Tobacco Museum. It was endowed by Mr. Luddy, a merchant who sold tent cloth and other supplies to farmers. The man who was primarily responsible for organizing the museum was Dr. Gordon E. Taylor who was in charge of the agricultural experimentation station in Windsor. He was also responsible for sol-



TOWN OF MANCHESTER
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 COMMISSIONER
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I hereby certify that this map is substantially correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
 J. W. Keeney
 Engineer

- Tobacco cont. from p. 4

Much of the equipment on display was donated by Emil Mulnite, Francis Litwinis and Stanley Waldron another of Buckland's neighbors to the north. Dr. Taylor died shortly after the museum was finished. Since then his wife Libby Taylor & Marion M. Nielsen who is curator at the museum, keep the organization running. The exhibits are arranged to explain the entire growing season, all the old methods and ingenious equipment that were used, and all the work and care and the many hands that were needed to produce a good crop. Great care was taken to produce a perfect leaf. I asked Mrs. Bidwell how old she was when she first began to help out with the tobacco. She said something like this, "Well... I had to be tall enough so that I wouldn't step on the leaves after they had been picked."

N.W. Park in Windsor is a very nice place to take a picnic lunch in nice weather. You'll just have to dream about that until the snow melts. The museum reopens April 1.

For more about Buckland and the Ct. Valley Tobacco Assoc. please wait for future issues of the Buckland Times when I hope to tell you about what I found at the UConn Archives where the papers of the Assoc. are stored. Some of the facts in this story came from those papers. Among other things there are 2 boxes of index cards containing info. about individual members of the Assoc.. If you would like to know if someone in your family was a member, or what those records have to say, call me 643-8313, or write to the address below. I think I could look that up for you and hopefully send you copies of those records for \$1 or \$2.

My thanks to Mr.'s Mulnite, Thresher, Chaponis, Waldron and to Mrs. Bidwell for her lesson in So. Windsor history. Thanks to the Manchester Town Clerk's office the Stat Library Staff, the UConn Archives, and all those who have called or written, or steered me in the right direction. Thanks most of all to my readers, my sponsors, and the Hartford Courant for it's words of support.

-above-map found at Town Clerk's office. There was a smaller map with it, showing the trolley property to be sold to H.S. Keeney. Notice the apple orchard and the wind mill

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