

A... Plan of the Dickson property, Arlington, Massachusetts

The way I understand from what I was told is that my Grandmother, Mary Jane (Wilson) Dickson was born in this house in the year that the Civil War started in 1861.

Later, when she married Joseph Dickson, her parents William Wilson and Ann (Irwin) Wilson gave her the farm consisting of close to 27 acres of land to her as a wedding present.

All of my grandmother's 7 children were born in this farmhouse.

This was a working vegetable farm as was other close by farms managed by the Irwin family who were my grandmother's cousins. You can see the adjoining Irwin property in the bottom left of the property plan,

Other farms were the Bennett's, Cox and Knowles.

Each week my father and his brothers would load up the horse driven wagons with their produce and make the trek to the Market place in Boston to sell their vegetables.

My father was a Boston Policeman and in May 1939 because the farm was now vacant he moved his family of six children to the farm.

When we first moved to the farm there was no electricity or water. We had to use water from a well. In the kitchen there was a wood burning stove that was used to cook meals and there was a kerosene stove used to heat a huge pot of water. There was some plumbing in the house and a bathtub up stairs. We had to haul water by the bucket full to fill up the tub. Tadpoles and all!

The first goal we had was to dig a trench at least five feet deep from the farmhouse to Mountain Avenue so we could connect to the town water supply. This distance was a formidable task. My father hired a young neighbor to help with the digging. We worked all summer long in order to get the job done before winter. As unsuspecting children little did we realize that the muscles we gained from our "Big Dig" would later be tested as we had to dig the snow out the dirt farm road that connected to Overlook Road. And as you know, the snow storms in the 1940's were twice as deep and three times as often as they are now. No global warming came to our rescue and neither did the plows!

The second major task was to get electricity to the farmhouse. We had to purchase the required telephone poles. The connection was made to a street that ended at the property line that is located on the other side of what is now the School. The house had to be wired for electricity.

In the dirt floor cellar was a wood burning furnace. And of course you can guess where

the wood came from. No chain saws in our day. Naturally the firewood trees were a football field's length away. In May of 1939 the last thing that entered our minds was that a harsh winter could possibly come our way. Talk about a rude awakening.

In 1942 an Army encampment leased for \$1.00 a few acres of an open field. This Army camp had a Barracks, a searchlight, and an anti-aircraft gun, mounted machine guns and was manned by a company of about 20-25 soldiers. Because the elevation provided a spectacular view of the city of Boston it was one of several of these anti-aircraft companies surrounding the perimeter of the city. During blackouts that were common in the war years you could see the searchlights scanning the skies. To a 12-year-old boy this was exciting and at the same time a bit scary as my imagination would make me hear the drone of hundreds of German bombers about to pulverize the city.

The only Germans that we ever did see were the Prisoners of War that were working the Irwin Farm that was located near Turkey Hill. I did however marry a beautiful Fraulein in 1963.

My Grandmother died in October 1944. The farm was left equally to all seven of her children. My father wanted his share to include the farmhouse and his garden. However his youngest sister's husband had other ideas of getting rich and wanted to develop the entire parcel into house lots. A family feud ensued and in 1950 a public auction was held and because my father could not outbid his brother-in-law the farm and everything on it was sold to his brother-in-law for \$21,000. Less than a thousand dollars an acre. We were forced to leave the farm in January 1951. Each of my Grandmother's heirs received their share amounting to three thousand dollars.

Today the farmhouse still stands. It has undergone renovations, added a garage and has now crowded numerous dwellings not even a half a stone's throw away. The huge oak tree next to the house still stands. This tree was a small sapling in 1861 when my Grandmother was born in its shadows. It has survived the Civil War, WWI and WWII as well as the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, the Cold war and now Iraq. We all loved that tree and it stands as a symbol to us of a childhood that will never be forgotten.

If trees could talk it would have far more to tell that I can do here. I know that if it could, it would have in 1951, as we all said goodbye, have appropriately changed itself into a Weeping Willow.

Joseph R Dickson