

Downtown Munsonville

(continued from page 1)

When we moved next door to the mill site where the chimney still stood it bore a few scars, some from lightning strikes, but still a stately 100 feet tall. Having long since ceased to function for its original purposes and apparently useless except as a landmark, it had become important to a certain group of local residents.

Our old colonial has a lovely porch on its south side which offered shade from summer sun and a place to sit and enjoy the ever-present, gentle breeze off the lake or the green field next door to the west. Evening was a delight on the porch except for the annual visit from black flies or mosquitoes.

Less than a hundred yards to the northeast of our porch stood that brick sentinel rising silently heavenward from its massive concrete base, stately, but useless during the daytime. However, as the sun slid below the huge pines across the field behind the (then) Balch's farm house and the long twilight time began slowly to turn to the dark of night; we became aware of increasing activity in the darkening sky around that tall brick sentinel. Shortly the air would be filled with darting figures and graceful, long, slender wings swarming around the opening at the chimney top. A large flock of chimney swifts had claimed that massive boarding house for their own.

The flock would swarm around the top – darting, diving and swooping until one by one they would come to a hover over the square open top and gracefully flutter down into the tower to nest for the night. How they stop at their selected nesting place in the black shaft is a wonder.

With most of the flock already swallowed by the open chimney, there was always one or two hold-outs, most likely teenagers, darting and diving during their last cavorting of the day, procrastinating before going to roost for the night.

Many evenings were enjoyed sitting on our porch enjoying the evening air, smelling the sweet mock orange blooming nearby and sharing the end of day celebration with the flock of chimney swifts, which enjoyed the final use and hospitality of that huge boarding house.

At the end of (now) West Shore Drive began the "Shinbone Shack Road" (now

the Aten Road). There were no buildings between the Lake Road and the Lodge at the far end of the road. The Lodge was standing but in sad disrepair from vandals working it over. The copper rain gutters and downspouts and the armatures from the generators in the power house had long since been stolen and sold for scrap.

The whole area was beautiful for deer hunting and for hiking at all seasons. The road was closed in winter and not always well maintained the rest of the year.

Often, in winter, the long straight hill from the power line to the Lake Road was excellent for sledding. Our two children and I have fond memories of those events.

Not long after we got settled I was recruited for the fire brigade where I served for about forty years. Firefighting apparatus consisted of a 1940's vintage Dodge truck with a small water tank, a self powered pump, a booster hose on a reel, a few lengths of 1½" and 2½" hose and two lengths of 4" hard suction. The pump was temperamental, at best, and sometimes wouldn't start at all.

Protective clothing consisted of Civil Service hard hats, some hand-me-down fire coats and boots and woolen mittens

for winter protection. Over the years equipment and training have improved greatly and today the Nelson Fire Department is very well equipped and staffed.

There have been several major fires during our time in Nelson. Early on before the firemen had modern equipment, there was a tragic house fire that took the lives of two young children. This was one of the most difficult and helpless feeling experiences of my life. I believe, sadly, that event provided some of the impetus for the town to begin to approve town meeting requests for new fire fighting equipment. With that and support from the Mutual Aid System a number of buildings have been saved that probably would have succumbed completely in earlier days.

Barbara and I had returned to our native New Hampshire in September of 1959 via two years in California on active duty with the United States Air Force and five years in Connecticut where I worked for Sikorsky Aircraft doing flight test work on helicopters and Barbara worked at Yale University Library in the Reserve Book Room.

We fell in love with the 1830's vintage colonial we found overlooking Granite Lake. Charlie Tarbox showed us the house and after a rather short deliberation, we made a small down-payment. I had just accepted a job with MPB in Keene so felt comfortable assuming responsibility for a mortgage.

When we moved to Munsonville we had no children. It must have been the New Hampshire air and Munsonville water because daughter, Kim, appeared in February of 1962. Then in April of 1964 her brother, Christopher, joined the family.

In 1960, I got caught up in one of MPB's lay-offs and was fearful we might have to leave our lovely new home on Granite Lake and Munsonville – within about two weeks I was interviewed and offered a job with Markem Corporation. That was a successful venture, a fine company to work for, interesting work and great people to work with. The connection lasted 33 years and I retired in December of 1993.

This is the first part of Don Bennett's reminiscences of his family's life in Munsonville. You may read the continuation in the next issue of the Grapevine in June.

PROSPECT PLACE

Prospect Place is a warm,
safe 16 private bedroom Assisted
Living Home.



As a not for profit, we offer
lowered rates to aid
qualified seniors.

Caring staff available 24 hours
per day, superb home cooked meals,
various activities, and transportation
to local appointments.

361 Court Street
Keene, NH 03431
603-352-6051

kmoreland@prospectplacekeene.com
www.prospectplacekeene.com