

Helen Hallett's reminiscences on her father and his family,
probably written to Kathy in the mid-1960s. Transcribed by JH
March 2006 (*"my father, since you never knew him"*) p¹²

Some Maine relatives on the Handy side (Your grandfather's
family)

Uncle Lou Deasy and his family.

You would have liked uncle Lou - or at least been amused by him. I saw him only a few times, first when I was about five years old. He was in Boston then on business and invited us to have dinner with him at the Hotel Bellevue, an old hotel which was on the corner opposite the State House in Boston. I remember him (from that visit) only that he wore a monocle in one eye. It was fastened to a long black ribbon which was fastened to a gold button on his vest, and I was chiefly interested in waiting for it to fall off, but it didn't. The other high point of the meeting was my introduction to raw oysters on a bed of cracked ice on a shell. Everyone ordered them, and so did I when my turn came to order. I still remember my shock as they slid down, icy and slippery before I had time to find out what they tasted like. Uncle Lou was chief justice of the Maine Supreme Court and he and his wife Emily (Known as Aunt Em to neighbors and relatives alike), and their daughters Blanche and Louise lived in Bar Harbor, in a large, rambling old house. By the time I saw them again, Blanche was married & Louise was teaching French in a H.School, and spent only summers in Bar Harbor.

The visit I remember best was in the summer I was sixteen. We took the boat from Rowes Wharf to Boston. It arrived in Rockland, Me (at 2 a.m.) where we changed for Bar Harbor.

We arrived at uncle Lou's to find the house pretty full. Uncle Lou loved company. He was considerable of a ham and could tell endless funny stories about happenings in court, etc. He had a long, sort of horsy face, and very keen blue eyes. If you've ever seen an old movie about Disraeli with George Arliss, he looked very much like Arliss.

Everyone loved Aunt Em, who managed somehow to furnish food, beds, etc. for everyone while remaining unflappable. No doubt she has heard uncle Lou's stories many times and she would often look at him like a parent regarding an irrepressible child

as his stories got more and more outrageous, but he certainly could keep everyone at the dinner table well amused.

Aunt Em's way of solving meals was to take us all out for picnic lunches at noon time, to some nice woodsy place, and for supper there was a large seemingly endless salad, which she could add to, as required. There was a big vegetable garden she could draw on for reinforcements, and with the salad would be hot biscuits, and for dessert cake or pie. In berry season there would be fresh raspberries or blueberries. She made her own salad dressing and the high point of one meal, when I visited, came when a screw came off the egg beater while Louise was beating the salad dressing. We couldn't find it and all though supper we watched the gusts closely to see who found it. But it never turned up and if anyone swallowed it, either he didn't know it or he was being terribly polite.

Uncle Lou loved to drive fast. He had a big open touring car. There were no paved roads near, and his favorite speed, about 40 or 50 miles an hour produced clouds of dust which inundated his passengers. Aunt Em would say, plaintively, "Lou, aren't you going a little fast?" "Just 25 miles an hour Em, look for yourself." he would say, pointing to the speedometer, which indeed said 25 miles an hour. He had fixed it (as he did in every car he owned) to register no more.

He was a great baseball fan, and while we were there we went to the local games. One afternoon I sat next to some boys wearing clean but much patched khaki pants (that was long before patches were fashionable). Later Uncle Lou told me I had been sitting beside the Rockefellers, who came in from the island where they spent their summers.

The house in Bar Harbor burned down later. I was glad I had my pleasant memories of it, and after I was married I had the pleasure of knowing Louise better. By then she had married and she and her husband were living temporarily in Cambridge while her husband attended Harvard Law School. Louise & her husband Frank Gray had a daughter Theodosia, born while they were in Cambridge just about the time your father was born. We enjoyed getting together and comparing notes. We kept in touch for some

time, but later on, we lost touch. Now of course, Frank and Louise are dead; and I have no idea where Theodosia is.

My father's mother, Grandma Tracy.

Grandma Tracy married Henry Tracy, a widower & a contractor and builder in Southwest Harbor, a few years after her husband, Capt. Marcus Handy died.

Captain Marcus Handy died of yellow fever in the Bahamas when he was about 30. He was a ship captain & went on voyages delivering various goods, and Grandma Tracy, who had three children, my father (Daniel), Fred and Hetty used to go with him, when the children were small. When they reached school age she stayed in S'West Harbor. He often had to be gone for months at a times she had a lot of responsibility back at home.

If you have ever been to Sturbridge Village there is a little red farmhouse there with gabled windows, and a farm yard behind it, which is almost exactly like grandma Tracy's house and farm yard. The house & yard backed up to a small cove which led to the harbor & out to sea. It sloped (the yard) steeply down to the shore, and when I visited there as a child there was a big red scow which had got stuck there in a storm. When the tide was out, or very low, it was a wonderful place to play after one had climbed aboard by means of a ladder borrowed from the barn.

We spent two weeks every summer (my father's vacation) with Grandma Tracy until she died, when I was about ten years old.

As I think about those summers now I wonder how Grandma Tracy ever coped with all the work. I remember her as a plump, spherical little woman with a round coil of brown hair on top of her head; she was tiny, and always in motion.

In those days there were no motels and seldom a hotel, in small towns, and people waiting to vacation in places like S'West Harbor stayed in private houses where they took in summer boarders. Almost everyone in town who had a house big enough did have boarders, as there were not many sources of income and people were glad of the money though glad when summer was over and they could be rid of their boarders, too!

Grandma usually had 4. Quite a house full, with Grandpa Tracy and her own 3 children, Grandpa Tracy's son Merle (by his first marriage), three of us, and a number of farm hands who had to be fed.

We all helped before we started out on our own amusements. We usually ate breakfast at grandma's, and supper, and took our lunch with us on our daytime excursions.

Amusements were simple - harnessing grandma's little filly up and going for a ride in her brown carriage, which had two seats, and a fringed top. Blueberrying. climbing mountains (not very big but nearby), picnicking and walking. Sometimes the fishermen would take us out with them, first enveloping us in borrowed oilskins, as we usually got drenched with spray. Or we took a boat and explored a bit ourselves. I distinguished myself by having to go to the bathroom at the most inopportune moments and remember being let off at various piers which I had to climb to by means of a rope ladder while everyone waited, I'm sure with some impatience.

Grandma got up about 4 am on wash days. She had a Summer Kitchen away from the stove (in which she burned wood), and her wash tubs were in the Summer Kitchen. Wash day began with boiling the clothes in a huge copper boiler (of course, after the wood fire in the stove was built and burning well). Some clothes had been put to soak (with soap she made from saved fat). the night before in the big tubs. It was a long process, and when it was done, the clothes rinsed and wrung out with the hand wringer, everything was hung out in the yard and eventually brought in, smelling of fresh air and sunshine.

By the time we got up, grandma was busy preparing breakfast which was at eight o'clock sharp, and everyone was expected to be on time. We had our chores to do first. Making our beds, and emptying our water pitchers and wash basins (big pink flowered china ones) and the inevitable matching chamber pots into the covered pail which was part of every bedroom washing set, and carrying them out through the barn to the outhouse, a sturdy and immaculate 3 seater, the walls of which were covered with

sections of old magazines, which often caused us to stay longer than was strictly necessary.

There was a velvet ribbon on which were three chimes, hanging by the stairs and when breakfast was almost ready grandma struck the chimes twice. That was to warn us that we'd better get down stairs, as breakfast was served at 8, and cleared away, when people at the table were finished. Late comers just had to wait until lunch time.

Breakfast usually consisted of oranges, cut in half with a spoon, hot cereal, hot blueberry or corn muffins - or maybe biscuits, scrambled eggs, home cured bacon, and assorted jams and jellies. Also tea, coffee or milk. After breakfast the table was cleared and reset for lunch, and covered with an enormous piece of white cheesecloth to protect it from flies. Only sheets of fly paper (or a swatter then, to cope with flies) fly paper was horrid stuff, (but effective, except for the unpleasant sound of the flies caught on it as they succumbed). It smelled awful, and where to put it was a big problem, so that only the flies would get stuck. Now and then a cat would roll up in a sheet of it and a terrible job it was to free him.

I remember platters of lobsters at suppertime, and wonderful= fish chowders. The Maine air and our outdoor exercise gave us good appetites.

I had certain outdoor jobs; my favorite was collecting the eggs from the hen house. Grandma had a few cows, pigs, lots of hens, some cats to keep the mice down and two dogs that helped bring the cows home from the pasture. The hired men looked after them.

She liked to take care of her flower garden and the house was full of flowers in the summer.

There were traveling stock companies that went to some of the small towns, putting on plays and staying about 2 or 3 weeks. Something like summer theater now, except that they were not very good, and the plays were apt to be wild melodramas. They usually put them on in any local bldg. that was big enough and had a stage, and the cast boarded with people in town. It was about the only exciting thing that happened in the Summer, so

almost everyone went. I remember going to one when I was about 5, and spending most of the evening with my coat over my head because there was so much shooting, but I've no idea what the play was about.

My recollections of Grandma, unfortunately are rather dim. As a child I was aware of her chiefly as someone who was always very busy, but never too busy to be hospitable and make us feel welcome. She rarely had time to share our fun, as usually her boarders were there for lunch, and she had to get a separate lunch for the hired men when they were free. Also grandfather Tracy came home each day for lunch. Between times she baked pies and stored them away in the "cold cupboard" and filled endless crocks with cookies and doughnuts. Also, in her "free" time, she did dressmaking and altering for people, a service which was much in demand. She was a very skilled dressmaker and had supported herself largely that way after grandfather Handy died.

Grandpa Tracy's son Merle

Grandpa Tracy's only son, Merle (not a relative strictly, but a loved member of the family) was born with such poor eyesight he was considered nearly blind. He studied at the Perkins Institute for the Blind. He was a brilliant man - a great big man - who didn't seem to belong at all in a little N.Eng. seaport town. He wound up being a columnist for a chain of papers, lived in N.Y. in his early days, then became editor of the Houston Chronicle and moved to Houston. Texas was just his style. He wrote a book called, I think, "Our World" and it is still in many libraries. He and my father were very congenial - more so than my father and his own brothers and sisters were, as my father was always bookish, cared nothing for sports, and when they were children and the boys were out wrestling or playing ball, my father was usually up in a tree reading a book. So said my grandmother.

Uncle Fred, Aunt Hetty, Joseph, Geneva

Uncle Fred married, had two daughters and for a long time ran a successful automobile sales room on Portland, Me. He was a great joiner and belonged to various Portland clubs. (Again different from my father who liked friends in small groups and

cared not at all for organizations). I lost track of uncle Fred's family. His daughters were grown and married while I was in grammar school, and it has been years since I have heard from them or known where they were. Aunt Hetty and her husband we saw more frequently. Their son Joseph, my only first cousin (except for Shirley, in Calif) and I were very close - like brother and sister. Right after he finished college he married and went to one of the southern states to practice osteopathy which he hated. His mother, making the mistake parents sometimes make, had pressured him into becoming an osteopath. It was a new technique - still under some criticism. A few years of practice convinced Joseph that it was a mistake for him and he sold his practice and moved to New York. Soon he got a job as a wholesale sales representative for one of the biggest drug and pharmaceutical companies, and was sent to the Bahamas to meet with buyers. His wife Geneva, and extremely nice girl from the mid west, stayed in N.Y. where she had a job. The Bahamas proved to be Joseph's undoing, as his job required him to spend hours in the country club entertaining buyers, and entertaining meant a great deal of drinking. He had never done any drinking before going there, and he gradually realized that he was an alcoholic. Finally he returned to N.Y., but by then was having a good many problems. However, he was able to carry on for quite a while. He was a very handsome man, tall, with black hair and grey eyes. he and Geneva belonged to a theatrical society, and his looks and bearing usually got him roles as an ambassador, king or some such impressive character. He, himself, was a very modest, unassuming person, always doubtful of his own abilities. He died in his early thirties, as a result of his alcoholism. The had no children.

Aunt Hetty, his mother (and my father's sister) was a rather formidable lady, tall and with a quite regal manner, which was really quite unconscious on her part. She was friendly and hospitable and often entertained us through the years when they lived in Portland, Maine. She was fond of clothes, dressed very smartly, and never looked mussed or untidy, even when washing clothes or scrubbing a floor. She kept house impeccably and was an excellent cook, but even on the hottest day he hair curls flawlessly, her cotton house dress was starchily clean, and

always worn with an immaculate, high collared guimpe (sic) with little whale bones at the neck to keep it straight. (see sketch on original draft)

When Joseph was in the Bahamas, his apt. backed up to the house where the Duke of Windsor lived. The Duke having been sent there after his abdication and I remember Joseph (who had never spoken to him)said the Duke came out about 9 o'clock every night and called his pug dogs in with the same words each time - "come on, you little bastards."

Aunt Marianna, Aunt Henrietta

My father had two "aunts." (I was never sure what their exact relationship was, as they were not sisters of either of his parents) But they'd always been called "aunt" and they were related in some way. They lived in Steuben, Maine and they couldn't have been more different. They lived in big houses across the street from each other, had tea together most days, but wisely never tried to live together. Aunt Marianna lived in one of those square, white houses so common in N.Eng. villages. Her husband had been a sea captain, and had been dead for many years. She lived alone, cooking her meals on the big kitchen stove in which she burned wood. The house had no electricity or central heating and in the winter she closed up most of it and heated just two or three rooms with Franklin stoves. Oil lamps furnished the light.

Aunt Marianna, who was about seventy five when I first saw her was thin and wrinkled, and stood straight as an arrow. Her white hair, which was quite thin, was pulled back severely and fastened in a neat roll on top of her head. She wore glasses with no frames, just thin gold side pieces, which were attached to a button fastened to her dress. They snapped neatly in place when she took them off which intrigued me at the time. She looked severe but was in fact very quiet, self-effacing and gentle. She was very religious, and didn't believe in dancing, playing cards or doing anything frivolous on Sunday. Although she was not very well, she declined to ride to church on Sunday but always walked, and indeed would ride nowhere on Sunday until after o'clock, and then only in the cemetery. She later weakened a bit, and agreed (with some misgivings) to be collected from friends

in Springfield, Me. on a Sunday for a visit with us, as my father could collect her only on Sunday.

She never imposed her beliefs on other people and when we visited her once when I was about 17, she arranged to have me go to dances, and supplied cards for us to play games.

Her parlor was typical of the period - seldom used, it had a flowered carpet, cold slippery black horsehair covered furniture, lots of little bric a brac - dried flowers, ornaments made of hair, shell, etc, under glass, a large family bible on a stand, and the thing I enjoyed most, a small organ which one pumped by foot.

Aunt Marianna had , a large wart on her nose which various relatives had suggested could be easily removed, a suggestion she had always rejected, feeling perhaps that for her even to take notice of it would be to confess inexcusable vanity. When she ws eighty she agreed to come and visit us and we went to Maine to pick her up. We had then a small Overland car notable for its high bouncing springs and as we drove into New Hampshire on the way home with Aunt Marianna my father drove over a culvert, and Aunt Marianna who was(at her insistence) in the back seat, bounced up and hit the metal bars on the roof of the car. Typically, she insisted she was all right and not hurt, but my father insisted on stopping at the office of a friend of his who was a doctor in Farmington, N.H. Dr. Greeley was a fine doctor = rather bluff in personality. He examined Aunt Mariana and found her nose was broken. "Oh" he said, reassuringly, "we'll have that fixed in no time. And what are you carrying that wart around for? Might as well have that off too." And he snipped it off. She was soon taped up and we were on our way again. Her nose healed beautifully and she admitted later that she was pleased to be rid of the wart, and wished she'd done it before.

Aunt Henrietta, a widow of many years too, had carried on her husband's large farm successfully since his death. I saw her only once (the summer I visited Aunt Marianna when I was 17). She was short, chunky, and her hair - a mixture of black and gray - was knotted loosely at the back of her head, and was usually somewhat untidy. Whenshe was working she generally

wore full skirted dark, printed cotton dresses, and whereas Aunt Marianna when not actively busy with her housework, could usually be found crocheting, knitting, or reading her bible, Aunt Henrietta was more often on her knees in a flower bed, or driving her model T Ford which she had bought and learned to drive when she was 70. She drove according to ideas of her own, erratically, sometimes fast, and with the certainty, apparently, that the entire road was hers, so she was as apt to be on the right as on the left, and a ride with her was a fearful thing. The only thing that gave her pause was a herd of cows, and she would sit, with considerable impatience, and let them get by. She was capable, opinionated and high-spirited.

She took care of her large house and farm, fed the hired men she needed to help her with the stock and outdoor work, and was handy with a pitch fork at hayig time. When she was in her early sixties she created quite a scandal in town by taking in an ex-minister who had a nervous breakdown, and had been told he must get away from the city and live a quiet life in the country if he was to keep well. He wasn't able to do anything that taxed his brain but was able to work in the garden, do simple carpentry, etc. He had an agreeable tenor voice and joined the church choir. He and Aunt Marianna became constant companions. He was a pleasant, good looking man about 35 or forty and the townspeople were all agog - never daring to ask Aunt Marianna what his status was, but of course, assuming the worst. My feeling always was that as she'd had no children she sort of adopted him as a son, and they fulfilled each other's needs happily as long as she lived. But it seemed to me that was the important part (their happy companionship) and it made no real difference what their relationship was. He was grateful for a peaceful home and devoted to her when she got older and unable to get around much, and was always a great help to her. He inherited her farm and looked after it well until he died.

My father's grandparents

My father's grandparents I never knew except for his grandmother Handy whom I saw once when I was about seven or eight years old. I can barely remember her. She lived by herself in a pretty little house in Cherryfield, Me., and we rode over in

Grandma Tracy's carriage to call on her one afternoon. I remember only that she was quite plump and had lovely white hair like milkweed floss. She gave us tea and homemade hot biscuits with raspberry jam and showed us her flower garden full of a variety of beautiful flowers and evidently a source of great pride for her. I wish I knew more about her but I don't.

Probably it seems strange in this generation when everyone is so mobile, to think that people in another state as near as Maine could seem and be quite literally so inaccessible. My father was in a profession which paid a low salary even for those days; because of an impaired heart he could never get insurance though his work was supported by insurance companies. My mother had a great deal of sickness, and there was just no extra money for travel. A trip to N.Y., Texas or California would have been impossible for us as a family. And even Maine was a luxury. We had no car until I was twenty one years old, and our infrequent trips to Maine were made by train and boat and required numerous changes. Before air conditioning and diesel engines a train trip could be very hot and uncomfortable - eyes full of cinders and perspiration soaked plush seats were an inevitable part of traveling by train.

My father

As to my father himself - since you never knew him, to me he was always a perfect companion. He was a remarkably able man, in respect to his ultimate profession, attested to by the monograph recently published by "special libraries" as a tribute to his accomplishments in that field.

After going to Bucksport Seminary in Maine, where he met my mother, he attended Ohio Wesleyan and Boston University. His first job was as a reporter for the old Boston Post one of Boston's great papers similar to the Boston Globe in scope. A reporter's job didn't pay very much for a married man, as he was by then, and he left that to be secretary-treasurer of the newly opened U. of Puerto Rico (after a brief period in between as librarian of the fire insurance library). Changes at the library compelled him to leave there and go to the U. of Puerto Rico. I was born there (in P.Rico) and wish I had lived there long enough to remember it. We lived in a house with slats (like wide

venetian blinds) that could be open or shut. It was necessary to sleep under netting because of the bugs and insects and all the furniture had to sit in little basins of kerosene for the same reason. Once, I was told, when the "army ants" were on one of their periodic marches in search of water the house had to be vacated to allow them to go through it, as once headed in any direction they didn't deviate and we were in their path. Cooking was done on charcoal stoves which were hot but burned out so quickly that a cake might have to be moved to three ovens before it was cooked. Black servants were a part of the life and necessary for one in my father's position there. For a New Englander used to doing things herself housekeeping must have been very frustrating, as for a white woman to do certain chores would have been a disgrace and the servants, too, would have felt disgraced to be in such a place, so my mother had to wait many times for the "correct" black person to come and do something she could have done easily and quickly herself. The servant hierarchy was adamant and one who scrubbed clothes didn't fetch water and so on.

My father contracted malaria and generally found the climate with its heat and humidity very difficult, although he enjoyed Puerto Rico and liked the Puerto Ricans. Soon he had a chance to return to the insurance library in Boston as full-fledged librarian and secretary and he stayed there the rest of his life. - building what had been a small library into a distinguished one, with a world-wide reputation.

My father was a modest man, after letting other people take credit for work he had done, to our exasperation. He loved to garden, make his grapes into wine, and he read widely all his life. He had a great sense of humor and a gift for drawing. I think he'd have made a good political cartoonist if he'd worked seriously at it. He used to amuse me when we lunched together sometimes, in Boston by drawing pictures of the waiters or people in the restaurant. Sometimes he drew very funny little scenes.

He was intensely interested in politics and world affairs and loved more than anything just talking, with some of his friends, over dinner or a glass of wine. He had an interesting and

catholic group of friends and kept them all his life. They ranged from Ellery Leonard (an eccentric but gifted man who was once Poet Laureate) to Will Lord who had been Commissioner of Education in Puerto Rico and returned later to be Dean of the B.U. Business School, Truman Temple - the Quincy librarian, and Oscar Stevens, the editor of the Quincy Patriot Ledger, and others equally interesting. Talk was lively at our table and often over my head - but as I got older I grew to appreciate my exposure to it and the freedom I always had, at home, from "personalities," gossip about the neighbors, etc.

My father always talked to me as an equal and shared many of his thoughts and feelings with me. He taught me to love Boston and appreciate the things cities have to offer. From him I learned to appreciate the variety of architectures, the interesting ethnic mixture and his artist's eye noted all the little unexpected views, the wonderful faces one might see in the Italian and Chinese neighborhoods, etc, and I learned to find my way around all the little irregular streets with the fascinating names.

My father's tastes were very simple and I don't think he had any personal extravagances, except for occasional books he couldn't resist. He liked to walk and I used to join him often as my mother couldn't walk far. He brought the same curiosity and alert observation to our walks at home and I discovered many things I'm sure I'd never have noticed on my own.

When he died, I think one of the nicest tributes paid him was by the laundry man who used to launder his shirts. When I went there to collect some things, he left his counter and came to open the door for me. "Other people used to come get laundry, say hurry up Charlie," he said. "Your father, he tip his hat, say "good morning, Mr. Chan." He very fine gentleman." To which I would have to agree.