

## THE MABEL BACON STORY

By John Knight

During the 1930s and 40s the Knight family home was the old Barrett Farm which stood alongside the Turnpike Road on the shores of Megunticook Lake and in the shadows of Megunticook Mountain. Today the Maidens' Cliff parking lot is on that site.

In the beginning the Depression had not seemed so bad, but it hit Camden and its neighboring villages hard during the full-fledged 30s. The mills ran sporadically, many people were out of work and money was scarce.

In 1934 our mother, Annie Gillis Knight, passed away after an illness of several years. Between Christmas and New Year's, Isabelle Gillis Leighton also passed away. She was Mama's aunt, and she lived with us after she retired from many years of working for rich people as a cook and housekeeper.

Times were really tough that year and there were few gifts to give out. We did have some tinsel and wrapping paper, and Ruth and Marian wrapped up pieces of cardboard and blocks of wood and put them under the tree. They pretended that they were gifts from some unnamed "aunt". We all got in the spirit, then, wrapping up boxes and pieces of wood in the leftover Christmas paper. It looked rather impressive, and we got many a laugh out of the "gifts" that we "swapped".

The second year we repeated this performance—it was a success! Only this year the anonymous "aunt" had received a name. She had become "Aunt Mabel."

The third year that we started preparing the "Aunt Mabel" gifts, it was deemed time to bless "Mabel" with a last name. Roosevelt had started the program of delivering surplus food. As we were

debating “Aunt Mabel’s” name, Tootie looked out at our kitchen table. On the table there was a collection of powdered milk, cornmeal, and nut butter, and a big slab of bacon. “Bacon,” Tootie giggled, “Mabel Bacon. That’s who she is, Aunt Mabel Bacon.”

As the years passed and times got better, our gifts became real gifts. There were novelties and treats and some jokes. It has been great fun, and a tradition worth perpetuation. It is a gentle reminder of what Christmas was like those hard times, and a bitter-sweet memory of how we made do and survived. Most of all, it’s a heart-warming recollection of how we loved each other. We still do!