

**Recalling Life In The Early 1900s (Sept 1989 with an update
February 2005)**
by Jan Shandera

Uncle Joe doesn't know why everyone is making such a fuss about March 4th this year. But then, how many of us can talk about the experience of one's 100th birthday?

I should explain that Uncle Joe is really my mother's uncle, Joel Packard, but I've always called him Uncle Joe, just like my mom. It's been 16 years since I interviewed him with his sister, Etta Packard, in an effort to preserve some of their past. Their past is the past of midcoast Maine, not to mention my own family history.

In preparation for the celebration, the Camden Herald has decided to reprint the former article, along with an update about Packard, who now lives with his daughter, Gini Erwin, in Massachusetts. Given that Packard is a man of few words, Erwin helped us out with some additional thoughts.

I asked Packard if he had any advice for others. He said he's had many ups and downs in his life, but doesn't have any idea what to tell other people. His daughter reports that her dad always lived his life the best he could with whatever came his way. He taught his family to make the best out of whatever came their way, too. Perhaps he's telling us more than he realizes, by not having advice for others.

I asked to what he attributed his long life. He says he really doesn't know, but perhaps it's all the cider he drank as a kid. The farms used to have many varieties of apples. They pressed the apples and put a barrel of cider in the yard. Erwin added that her father has stayed active and curious. He enjoys reading, woodworking and gardening. His favorite food is fish.

What about technology? Packard said he doesn't understand computers, but questions whether they're always used right. Cell phones are a long way from the crank telephones he grew up with. Back then one had to crank the handle on the box mounted on the wall to ring up the operator. The phone had batteries in it, which they burned in the woodstove when they were expended. He supposes this was to clean the chimney.

I asked him about his fondest memories of growing up in midcoast Maine. He recalled the winter sledding fun, when he could sled from his house at the top of the hill on Youngtown Road near Youngtown Inn, all the way to the schoolhouse door. That schoolhouse still stands, partway down that first hill

on Youngtown Road. He remembered boots made of grainsacks, Armistice Day, and dancing.

The night before July 4th they went to Oakland Park, where there were two orchestras, one at each end of the dance floor. The orchestras took turns playing one right after the other. Later the dancers watched the sun rise at the beach. He met his wife at a dance, picked her up after her date had taken her home and went down to Megunticook Lake to sit and talk together.

He enjoyed swimming. They would swim the length of Megunticook Lake with a rowboat at their side in case anyone got tired.

So – swimming, sledding, dancing, making cider; hardships and hard work; making the best of what comes your way; and staying actively engaged with life. Come March, family members from Maine to Ohio will gather to honor Packard on his special day.

Joe Packard was small for his age and sick during the first four or five years of his life. “Dr. Hart called it ‘chronical vomiting,’ “ he recalls, and laughs, remembering Dr. Young’s response when consulted for a second opinion: “Chronical vomiting! Hell, I don’t know what ails him!” It was a rough start on life, but one would never guess today that Packard, who is 84 and going strong, was a sickly child.

Packard was born in his home on Youngtown Road in Lincolnville in 1905. His sister, Etta (Packard) Ingraham, was born there two years later. This summer he has been visiting his sister in Camden and they shared their memories of growing up.

Joe and Etta’s father, William Packard, spent three years learning the blacksmith trade. During that time, he received all he could eat and two pairs of overalls in compensation. For most of their childhood memory he was employed as a tool sharpener and layout man, working at a granite quarry near George Hardy’s home on Route 52 in Lincolnville. “Father probably made \$1.50 to \$2 a day and he had eight kids,” Joe recalled. A layout man decided what and where to cut in the granite. All the headers and stools [window sills] for the Camden Library windows, Joe said, came from this quarry.

Joe and Etta’s mother peddled garden vegetables with a horse and grocery cart at Lake City (the cluster of homes at Barrett’s Cove on Megunticook Lake). “Grandfather Hardy walked over the mountains – no Turnpike Road along the lake at that time – of Camden Hills State Park to work in the shipyards of Camden,” Joe said, “and then walked home to his farm for evening chores. Everyone walked.”

Long-Ago Fun

Sliding was great fun for children in the winter. “We used to slide from the Rolersons’ – at the top of the hill near the Youngtown Inn end of Youngtown Road – all the way to the field shore – George Winslow’s home on Megunticook Lake,” said Joe. He improvised overshoes by cutting a gunnysack in half and tying the halves around his shoes like diapers.

“We made May baskets the whole month of May,” Etta said, enjoying the memory. “We delivered them to everyone, as far as we could walk.” The baskets were made of crepe or tissue paper and filled with fudge and popcorn, cookies and other sweets. “All things that could be made at home,” Joe added. The children hung the baskets on the doors, knocked, and then ran to hide. The recipient had to find them.

Summer was for swimming. Joe swam from the Chalmers’ home near Fernald’s Neck on Megunticook Lake all the way to the other end at Barrett’s Cove. The first time he did it, his chin blistered from the sun reflecting off the water. “After that I put grease on my chin first,” he said.

Come late summer they would pick apples, polish them until they shone, and sell them for a penny apiece to summer people driving up from Camden in their fringe-covered surreys and buckboards. “We had all kinds of nice apples,” Etta said. “Different than the kinds we have today.”

The School Team

One winter Joe and Etta lived on Sagamore Farm, a model dairy farm where the Camden Hills State Park entrance is today, to run the business. They attended fifth grade together in Camden schools, Joe being behind due to his earlier illness. They got to school on the school team, driven by Frank Collemer. In winter, the pair of horses pulled a sled with two sets of runners and seats. Otherwise, they traveled by wagon. There was no protection from the weather and it was quite cold some days.

Joe laughed, remembering the time he and some other boys jumped off the school team and began tearing into a stone wall to help some dogs catch a woodchuck. He caught something else from his mother later that day, and that was the last time he ever dared jump off the school team, he said.

World War I

When the United States declared war in 1917, joining the Allies in World War I, Etta and Joe, at ages 10 and 12, were too young to realize its significance. The war did not upset them and life went on just the same except for one thing: they were put on rations and thus deprived of foods they enjoyed.

It was brown sugar or corn syrup on their cereal – no white sugar – and they didn't like it.

At the beginning of their seventh-grade year, they lived in Camden near the arch and attended school at the old Camden High School building. Both said they will never forget Armistice Day that November. They were in class up on the third floor and their teacher dismissed them early. The students, delighted to get out of school, rather than pleased over the end of the war, went hooting noisily down the stairs. Two teachers, Miss Taylor and Miss Rideout, sent them back upstairs to come down “like gentlemen and ladies,” or else they would sit all the rest of the day. “And they would have done it to us, too,” Joe said with certainty.

A Trip West

In 1919, major changes occurred in Joe's and Etta's lives. Most of the family packed up and headed for Montana by train. It was a bitter-cold trip in January. Their mother got sick on the train and died of the flu. So did brother Vinal. Their sister, Lillie (Packard) Hardy, stayed in Maine to finish her senior year of high school.

Lillie said her father intended to open and run a gold min. He had found a good vein during the previous years he had been living in Montana; the location was a secret. He visited the hidden site on this trip with 2-year-old son Cloyd. It was still there, but he never opened the mine. Apparently, start-up funds were lacking, and the death of his wife broke his spirits. He returned to Maine in September, settling with family in Hope.

After living with relatives there for a year, Etta returned with her father to the Lincolnville farm on Youngtown Road and attended Camden high School. William Packard had a hard time caring for his children alone. At the close of her first high school year, Etta's teacher asked to speak to her after class. “Shaking in my shoes, always scared of what was next,” Etta said, she learned that she would spend the summer baby-sitting in Owls Head. She was 13 years old. “That was the first I knew of it,” she said sadly.’

Farm Work

Joe remained with the relatives on the Hope farm when his father moved back to Lincolnville. He worked there until he was 21, receiving food and clothing for his labor, and the choice of going to high school or receiving \$1,000 at age 21. Somehow the money never materialized. “I should have gone to school,” he reflected.

On the farm Joe drove his uncle's team to deliver milk in the winter. In the summer it was sold to a boys' camp, but in the winter it was separated, the skim fed to the hogs and the cream sold to Nash's in Camden, where residents drank it or used it to make butter.

He hauled kiln wood to the Rockport limekilns, and canned fruits and vegetables from True's Factory in Hope. The canned goods were loaded on electric freight cars at a terminal across from Duffy's gristmill along the river in Camden or put on a train in Rockland. "Hauling was a long day's work," Joe said. "I'd leave Hope with a pair of horses at half past 4 a.m. and get back at 9 at night."

Joe never had matching boots. Testing durability for a rubber company, he would return the unmatched sets so the company could inspect them for wear.

Dancing

Sliding and dancing were the big attractions for young adults. Joe joined the Patrons of Husbandry, or Grange, in 1919 and is a lifetime member. He remembers the "good old dances" at the Grange, with Billy Dean's orchestra, and the competition in waltzes at Oakland Park in Rockport. "I loved to dance, still do," said Joe. On the eve of the Fourth of July they would dance till sunrise. "Nobody went to bed before the Fourth," said Joe. There was a beautiful crystal ball with lights in the center of the hall and firecrackers to celebrate.

There was always a dance at the Camden Opera House, too. Joe said he would drive into town on a Saturday night and get a haircut, shave and shoeshine for 50 cents. And did he take a girl? "Sometimes two or three," he laughed, recalling the time he drove two girls to the dance besides his not-too-pleased date.

When Joe's father chose to give his Youngtown dairy farm to his younger son rather than let Joe buy it, Joe left Maine, marrying and raising a family in Massachusetts. Etta also married and lived out of state with her family for 30 years before returning to Maine.