

Reminiscences of the Early Days around Cantitoe

BY CHARLES RAINSFORD

When my family decided to buy a place in the country they toured Long Island and New Jersey and finally were urged to look around Katonah by their friends Capt. and Mrs. Casey who lived here. Capt. Casey met them at the station with his pair of horses and drove them to their home by way of Maple Avenue. The line of splendid old maples - said to have been planted by John Jay - then stretched far beyond its present length, a large part of the old road being now under the waters of the Cross River Reservoir. It was a brilliant October day and as they drove over the carpet of gold with the sun shining on the golden arch over head they felt they need look no further - this was the place for them. I am sure they never regretted this decision. In 1901 they bought the old house belonging to a Miss Timberman (now the Hitchfield place) which they did over. Capt. Casey died soon after and his widow later married Frank Potter and they built a house which is now on the Rosen place.

In those days most of the land along the present route 22 was taken up by large places. There was the Fargoe place - now the Harvey school, the old John Jay place then occupied by Col. and Mrs. William Jay. Henry Barbey owned the old farm house on Cantitoe Corners with its tall old pine tree which stood for so many years as a land mark until it finally died and had to be cut down. The Dickinson family owned the opposite corner, the Caseys lived in the house now owned by the Theodore Wallers. He had a large chicken farm and their property took in all the present Caramoor. Then came the old Lyons farm and the present Bellamy place then owned by Dr. and Mrs. Lefferts. He was a distinguished N.Y. nose and throat doctor and his hobby was oriental art. He had a very fine collection of old Chinese masks which stared down from the walls and which I found quite terrifying when I went there occasionally with my parents. The largest of all the places was the Clarence Whitmans which lay between 22 and Harris St. on the east and west and between Beaver Dam and Matthew's Mill roads on the north and south. They had a large, hospitable house and four sons. I still remember the wonderful Christmas party they had each year for all the neighbors with a huge tree, presents for all and Mr. Whitman playing Christmas carols on their organ. This property with the exception of a piece which was retained by the Whitmans eldest son, Morton, on which he built the present house was bought by the Robert Chambers and the house was later completely destroyed by fire. Our place was surrounded on three sides by the Whitman place and much of my childhood was spent exploring it for it presented endless possibilities, the woods with their rocky slopes and caves and the great rock under which Chief Katonah was said to have been buried, the brook, the barn with its enormous hay loft, the herd of cows and the great red, razor back hogs which Mr. Whitman raised. Mr. Will was gardener and it was always a treat when he took me inside the green house with its tropical climate, its beautiful flowers and its huge old vine of delicious muscatel grapes.

I look back on my childhood as an extremely happy one though group activities, organized play, even the companionship of other children - other than my older brother and sister - all of which are considered so important today were almost entirely lacking. There was a freedom and independence about it, which is prohibited by modern conditions. We walked or rode our bicycles with no thought of traffic and seemed to have more time to read, invent our own pastimes or do things with our families who on account of the limits set by the horse could not get as involved in outside activities as in the present day. Occasionally I would go and spend the day with other children or they would come to our house or several families drove over to