



### 1942 Farm Animals

1942

The next summer, Dad bought a horse. She was an old plug and didn't behave very well. But we children were allowed to drive her up and down our road and around to the other end by Route 44. Dad made a very strong wagon, not at all like the surrey the Conklin's used with their retired racehorse. Bobbie did the driving and one time, the horse just sat down in the middle of Route 44 and wouldn't move. As there was little traffic in those days, we had quite a wait before a driver came by to help. We were taught to always stay together and to never leave the horse. So, the driver went home to get Dad and by golly, he made that darn horse get up and take us home, probably another mile or so. That was the end of that horse and Dad bought another.

The next horse, Jennie ( I named her Jennifer but no one in our house was willing to go that far) was a real workhorse and in the summer pulled all the gear and wagons for haying. But she revolted one year and fell into the brook behind the Conklin's property, same brook as behind our house. We had to get two tractors and several ropes and men and it took forever to get her out. She had to be rubbed until she warmed up and we had to call the vet. Meanwhile, the sleek and shining retired racehorse carried on without a fuss during the entire war.

Well, we also had a cow. Now I didn't know they were dumb. They did something miraculous like give milk and butter and whipping cream. No 2% for us. We were strong and healthy farmer's kids. But, one day someone(?) left the bag of food too close to the cow and she ate almost to bursting. Again, Dad had to call the vet. The boys were allowed to watch the proceedings in the barn. So, outside of a lot of strange noises, we girls knew nothing. My mother's father was a dairyman in this country, but she knew nothing and never had any curiosity about anything bovine.

As the war marched on, we had cows butchered once a year, but after one stab at that with the uncles, dad sent the next cow off to somewhere for the main job. Then home it came, and the men butchered while Mother and the aunts made all kinds of god awful stuff and then the steaks and roasts. Living as we did, I am not sure why we children never liked the innards of anything. Our parents ate everything with relish, as did the aunts and uncles. They all ate kidneys and tripe and other unmentionables. None of us children ever developed a taste for anything but the real thing and then we liked our steaks cooked!

The garden grew bigger as we grew bigger and we worked really hard at that. It was great though. We ate very well during the war and we gave a lot away. Mother canned with the aunts and often on her own. We had an electric refrigerator but certainly no freezer! All was shared.

Well, we had a cow, some pigs, a horse and the guinea hens and Dad decided that we needed a goat. Bobbie's job was milking and we girls churned everything on the back steps; and not with a Cuisenaire, either. We used brute force with a wooden paddle and it seemed to take hours. The move to Hartford in 1946 brought oleo, that awful white stuff that had a packet of orange to make it look like butter. Taste like it? Never!

**Town of Coventry**  
1712 Main Street  
Coventry, CT 06238  
(860) 742-6324  
[www.coventryct.org](http://www.coventryct.org)





## Birthplace of Nathan Hale

In any case, my father was either prescient or lucky. The people on the western end of our road at the corner to Route 44 had a baby allergic to cow's milk. We gave them milk from our goat in exchange for a huge patch of ground. Their baby thrived and we grew potatoes. I don't remember what Dad did with all those potatoes but I can tell you that I will never forget sitting on the ground and cutting each potato so that each section had an eye (you know that white horn that grows if you keep your potatoes too long).

There are advantages to being small kids. We didn't have far to bend. I think of that every Sunday as our priest bends to serve communion over and over to hundreds of people kneeling at the altar.

And then, Dad decided we needed wood for our furnace. I don't know if we started with coal and there was a shortage or what. But along the way, he and the uncles and Bobbie had dug out the cellar beneath the entire house.

There was a trap door to the cellar in our parent's bedroom almost invisible except for the handle that could be lifted in order to raise the door and expose the wooden stairs. And on the outside, there was a door used for tending the furnace. But why just the area near the furnace was dug out when the house was built, I don't know. And now that we had storage, we needed wood. Dad bought woodlots way out in Willington. He always had gasoline because he worked for the war effort.

And then he bought wood lots opposite our potato patch up near the corner of our road to Route 44. Mother made us all the best wool mittens and scarves, but it was cold work. We worked on the Willington lot in the summer and the one up the road in the winter. Bobbie and Dad sawed and sawed with a crosscut saw, a very long blade with a standing handle at either end. Hazel, Ted and I stacked the wood. We made the most perfect standing cords you have ever seen. And half the time we cried with cold and fatigue. But Dad needed to keep us warm and that we were.

Dad had friends everywhere and when I graduated from 8th grade he and mother somehow found a ration ticket so that I could have a two-wheeler to ride 3 miles to the high school bus. I could ride it all summer, but in bad weather, I walked just like everyone else.

We all had ration coupons for things like sugar and flour and, I think, shoes. I say that because there was a real shortage of shoes in our house and we were not encouraged to wear them while at home. Still when I turned 13 in 1943 after graduation, I wore shoes from then on. Real canvas, I suppose they were. No synthetics as yet.

Dad also had a friend in Ashford, The Russian. Who is he was and how Dad knew him, I don't know. But we used to visit The Russian and he always served bacon and sour cream or some other concoction just like it. Dad loved it, but we children wouldn't touch it. He always had some candy though, so we were quite content to sit and behave ourselves' while the two men talked.

More another time.

Respectfully submitted, Jean Thibault Castagno

**Town of Coventry**  
1712 Main Street  
Coventry, CT 06238  
(860) 742-6324  
[www.coventryct.org](http://www.coventryct.org)

