



### Late in 1943 Church and Religion

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Once a year, the town would grade Old Turnpike Road with a truck and what looked like a plow to me. The rest of the year Dad would take whichever horse we had (all good sturdy stuff) and plow and grade and widen just a bit. That was not easy, but we had to have bypasses or pull-offs because the road was not wide enough for passing even though the cars were rather small.

As you may have gathered by now, our father was a rough, tough and softhearted man who was disciplined and expected us to be. There were no sissies in our house and little fighting among the 4. Frances was too young to squabble. We argued a lot and one time when our mother had to go to work because Dad had an operation, I actually threw the iron at Bobbie. He was a tease and I was 12 and not in the mood. I missed him, thank God, but I never threw anything again. That was a first and last.

And about then, Bobbie had to walk home because Mr. Rose, our bus driver, threw him off the school bus. I think Bobbie had tied some tires or whatever to the rear of the bus. Mr. Rose tolerated no nonsense. When I think of it, Bobbie had a long walk home and no one gave a thought to his safety.

That was the end of his public education. Our parents sent him off to Coventry Day School and there he stayed out of mischief. I have tried to get some history of that school, but have had no luck. If anyone knows the story of its coming and going, I would appreciate the news.

Meanwhile, the war went on and on. Our uncle was killed in France and years later when my husband and I went to the Normandy beaches, we looked up Uncle Frankie on the computer. I copied the story of his life and death in the service and sent it to his wife, Mary. Mary was Portuguese and a real novelty. She was Catholic at least but never really a part of the family and we rarely saw her.

I never understood any of this, but my mother's English father had married a French Catholic woman when she was 12 (her mother died in childbirth) because he did not want to explain the facts of life to a girl. It was Memere's fourth marriage, all her previous husbands had died of flu or some awful, irreparable ailment. By each of the three, she had children. We rarely saw the children of the first. My mother, all her life, kept in touch with everyone. She was a great letter writer.

So, on Mother's side all were French Catholic and Dad was raised French Catholic. We were Episcopalian because my mother's father was Anglican and Dad converted before marrying mother. Well that's a long way about, but as Aunt Mary was different, so we were in Coventry. Everyone was Congregational with easy sounding and spelling names.

I was soon called "Teasie" or "T-bone steak for breakfast" if someone was in a foul mood. As we had no Episcopal church, my mother sent us to all the Protestant churches she could find. There was a Baptist and a

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## Birthplace of Nathan Hale

Methodist in Mansfield Depot, but she wasn't happy about those. So, we started at the Second Congregational Church at the high school bus stop, junction of Routes 44 and 31.

We received communion once a month. Little squares of bread were passed to each and then we all had tiny glasses of grape juice served on wonderful little trays with a circle indented for each glass. We stood for much of the service and, as soon as I could get a ride home, I sang in the choir. The problem with the ride was that the choir rehearsed at night. I could easily walk to rehearsal but I was afraid to walk home. By high school, I was afraid of passing the cemetery on Route 44.

Reason? Because one year, we were walking home from a Halloween party at the church and some of the boys decided to walk us through the cemetery. They made weird noises and jumped at us with all kinds of weird gesticulations. Intellectually, I knew better, but it left emotional scars that last to this day. Never would I invite a ghost to visit me while walking in a cemetery at night.

Just below the cemetery was a pond that froze over every year. We would ice skate for hours. And, of course, we were cold. So, the boys built fires and we used to warm our hands, wet mittens and all, over the fire. We were all very young but we all knew the rules.

And, now and then, some kind soul living nearby would bring out hot chocolate for us. It was great!

Sometimes, I wonder how our mother ever had the time to knit all those hats and mittens and scarves. Later on in life, for Christmas, I knit slippers for all 13 nieces and nephews and they never wore them. Said they were uncomfortable. Gee! I was crushed. I never did it again.

Respectfully submitted, Jean Thibault Castagno

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