

*My Remembrances of Growing Up
in Knox, N.Y.*



*by Margaret Nicholson
Torok*



White Homestead c1900



White Homestead 2011

My maternal grandparents Alvy and Ethel Hotaling White, lived on the White homestead that had been part of the Van Rennselaer Wyck Manor. My gr. gr. gr. Grandfather George J. White Sr. came from Connecticut in 1790 and started the farm on what is now called Knox Warner Lake Road. The farm was around 90 acres of land and woods, later bisected by the road.

Alvy and Ethel had 6 children.

In 1933 Mildred, oldest child of Alvy and Ethel, married Patrick V. Nicholson, an emigre from Liverpool, England. I was born in 1935 and my parents and I lived with my grandparents until I was four years old.

Grandpa would order baby chicks and they would be delivered by the mailman. They came in a box cheeping loudly. My father and mother told me that when we still lived there and I was about two years of age, Grandpa was puzzled as he was finding dead baby chicks on the ground. The puzzle was solved! I was picking up the baby chicks by their necks and loving them to death!!!!



My Aunt Dorothy, Grandma Ethel, Aunt Hilda, and me.



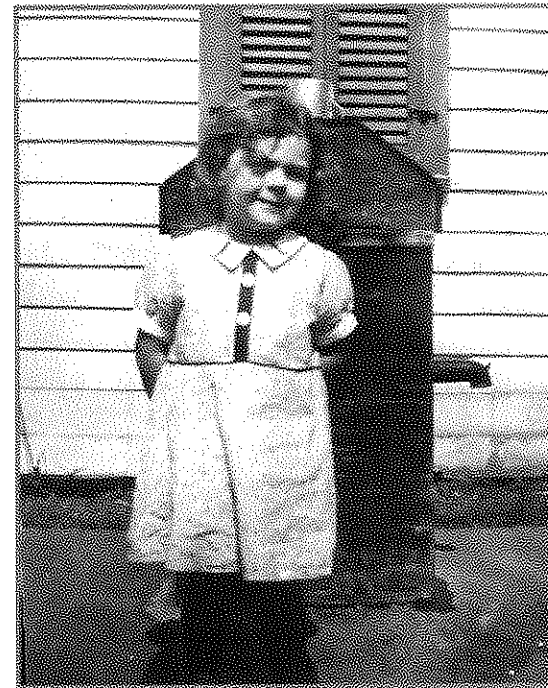
Pat Nicholson (my father) and Ethel White (my grandmother) holding me at the White Homestead.

Grandpa also raised sheep. I always liked when a black lamb would be born. Sometimes the mothers would not accept their babies and Grandma would bring them down to their house and put them in a box behind the kitchen stove to keep them warm and feed them with a bottle that had a big black nipple. I remember how upset I was when a couple of local men came to shear the sheep. I thought they were hurting them.

In 1939 my parents and I moved to Knox village. I missed all the attention I had received from my mother's younger siblings and my grandmother. Fortunately, every Sunday afternoon we, along with my mother's married siblings and their children would all go to Grandma's house. There was lots of activity for sure. Grandma usually had one of her delicious chocolate cakes or a yellow cake with a filling made with hickory nuts from their trees. She would gather the nuts from under the trees and take them back to the front porch where she would use an old flat iron to place the nuts on and hit them with a hammer. She would then use a nut pick to get out the pieces of nut meats. She made huge soft sugar and molasses cookies also. During the summer, she would pick wild strawberries and make strawberry ice cream in the ice cream maker. The rest of the time it was always vanilla. All the menfolk took turns turning the crank.



*Aunt Dorothy, Grandpa Alvy, Uncle Bernard,
Grandmother Ethel, Aunt Hattie, and Aunt Edith at White
Homestead.*



Margaret at the White Homestead.

My brother Edward was born in 1942 and my brother James was born in 1947,
completing our family.



Margaret with her brothers Edward and Jimmy in 1999.



Mill Pond, Knox, NY; July 1944

*Top Row: Patrick Nicholson & son Edward
Bottom Row: Donnie Warrin, John Boucher,*

*Dorothy Boucher, Anthony Boucher, Jackie
Boucher, Margaret Nicholson, Gilbert
Warrin*

In the town of Knox there were a number of houses that had been owned by the same families for generations and members of the present generations had their main home elsewhere. They were known as the summer people and were around town during the summer months at the old homesteads.

Ogden Brower was one of them. He owned property in back of the Knox Cemetery. On the property was the Mill Pond. The water entered from a little stream into the large pond and then went over the spillway of the concrete dam when leaving the pond as it meandered down thru Knox.

There was a huge dock where we could sit or lay in the sun. Mr. Brower had a row boat that we could row about on the pond. We all learned to swim in the Mill Pond, thanks to my dad. He loved to swim and wanted all the kids to learn. There were no Red Cross swimming lessons back then.

Mrs. & Mrs. Bryon Ogden would come to their home every summer. Mr. Ogden would go back to Washington, DC to work, while his wife remained in Knox. She always had a picnic for the kids and we roasted hot dogs, ears of sweet corn, and marshmallows to make s'mores. After the picnic we would all go into her house and play charades. The first time we did that, none of us had ever heard of charades!



*Byron Ogden House, corner of Rt. 156
and Knox Cave Road.*

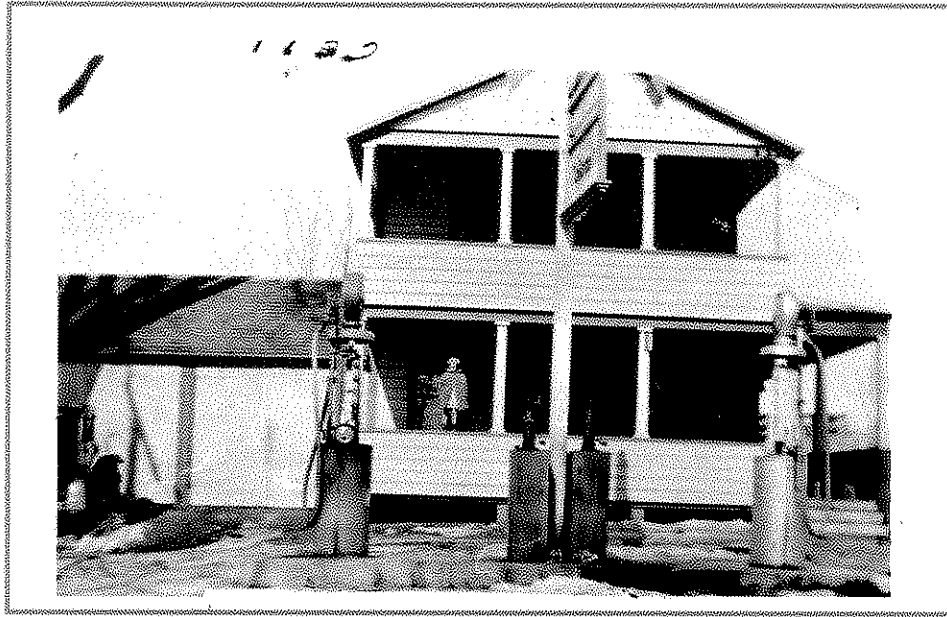
The old one room school house in the village was the place where many people went on Saturday nights in the summer. Some of the men from town would play their fiddles and one of them would be the caller and square dancing would go on for hours. People from other towns would come also. We kids usually were on-lookers.



Knox School House District No. 6



The Knox Fire Company, established in 1948, purchased the 1 room school building from District #6 for \$1 on 5/5/1950 and remodeled the interior. This building was demolished soon after the new firehouse was built in 1988.



*Stevens Mobil Gas Station 1932.
(The Helderberg Sun, Tuesday, March 4, 1975.)*

Many evenings in the summer, folks could be found at Web & Edna Stevens store, sitting on the porch benches chatting, eating ice cream cones, fudgesicles or creamsicles or drinking soda. Some of the men would play horse shoes across the street. We kids, after eating our refreshments, would run about playing tag, red rover, or hide and go seek. I remember one evening Edna was out in back of the store and was sprayed by a skunk. She started screaming and everyone went running to see what was wrong. It only took a few seconds before everyone smelled the leavings of the polecat!



Margaret age 7.

There were lots of children my age who lived in Knox. Our group consisted of the Ray Stevens, Norman Van Wormer, and Pat Nicholson families. Later on, Charlotte Shaffer and her parents moved into their newly built bungalow followed by Freddie Deckers family moving in next door to the Stevens.

During the summer our group would get together every evening to play Kick the Can, Sardines, "May I ?" or other games. We also had softball games, with the teams being made up from every age group - therefore the final scores were not important. We had lots of fun.

We knew everyone in the village and would wander from one end to the other, sometimes running about in the fields and other times we walked on the sidewalks.

Many of the ladies would come out on their porches and give us fresh baked cookies sometimes. They also would give us TLC and bandage our cuts and bruises if we had fallen and were hurt near their homes. I'm positive they would have chastised us also if we had done anything wrong.

We usually all had pennies before starting our wanderings and would stop at Web Stevens store to get our little brown paper bags filled with penny candy as some of the candies were two for a penny. We sometimes pooled our money and bought a couple of rolls of Necco Wafers to share.



*Margaret and sled near her home in
Knox.*

In the winter we all went sledding on the eastern end of the Knox Cemetery. No one was buried on that end back then. My mother gave me her old pair of wooden skis and one of the boys cut strips from an old inner tube and used the strips to hold the skis together. They were used in lieu of a toboggan. Three of us could go down the hill together and we took turns going over a big bump that left us in the air. This was iffy, as we might stay on and bounce when we landed, or we might all fall off and land in a snow drift and then we'd chase after the skis that had continued on and were a good distance away. Back then about the only traffic on the roads was the morning traffic of people who worked below the hill and again at night when they returned home. We older ones would pull our sleds and climb the first hill on the Knox Warners Lake Road and if we got a good start, we could coast thru the four corners and nursing the sleds along, continue on down the first big hill of the Knox Cave Road. Being as we all wore heavy snow suits and mittens that were wet from the snow and boots that the snow could slip inside of we usually only made two trips up and down the hills. Tired and wet we'd drag our sleds back to our homes.

In the mid 1940s Girl Scout Troop # 146 was formed. Virginia Quay was the leader and my mother Mildred Nicholson was the assistant leader. We met every Tuesday evening to work on badge requirements in the old church hall that existed at that time. That was fun in the summer but during the winter my mother and I would try and get there a bit early as she had to build a wood fire in the pot belly stove and we would all gather as close to the stove as possible for our meetings.



*Virginia Quay,
Girl Scout Leader*

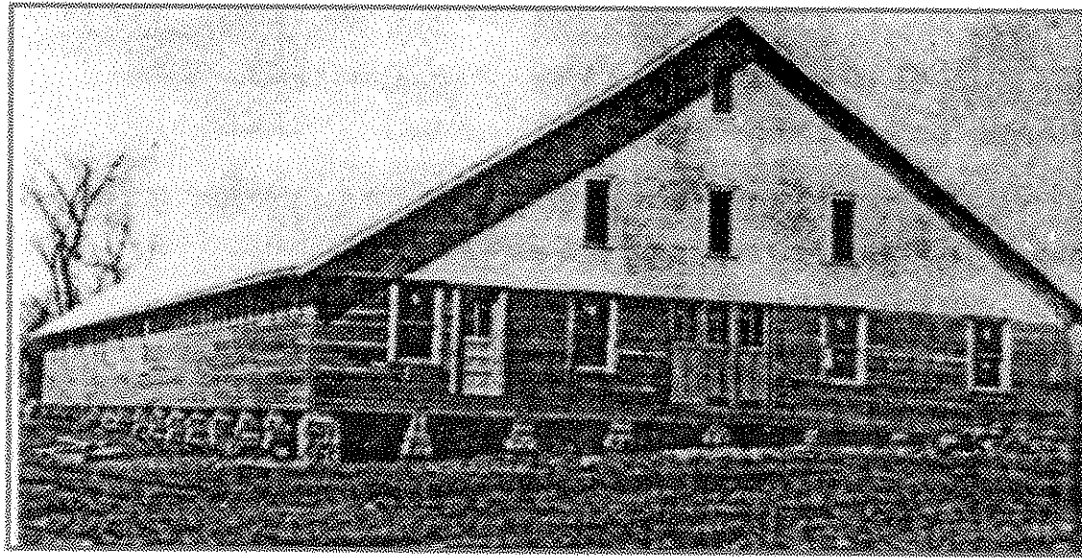
There were a number of other women that helped us with our badge work in their homes. Emma Stevens, Iona Shafer, Violet Anderson, and Orpha Quay were some of them. We collected newspapers and stacked them in a garage until we had enough to have a truckload and my dad took them to Albany in the county truck he drove. I can't remember how much we were paid for them but I would think it wasn't a very big money maker.



*My mother,
Mildred White
Nicholson,
assistant Girl Scout Leader*

During the nice weather a couple of the girl scouts would walk down to the War Memorial and unfold the American flag and raise it every morning. Then at dusk they would return to take the flag down and fold it correctly. We also joined the Berne Troop #1 at Warners Lake for two weeks of Day Camp in the summer. The troop was disbanded in 1949.

Later on as we older kids grew up, Sunday afternoons and evenings found us skating at the Knox Cave Roller Rink. Mr. and Mrs. Robinson were the proprietors. She would fill us in on all the latest news tidbits about our fellow skaters. There was usually a crowd of skaters on the floor and Mr. Robinson did not allow any rowdiness and would march out on the floor and grab the boys who were the culprits. Many people met their future husbands and wives there.

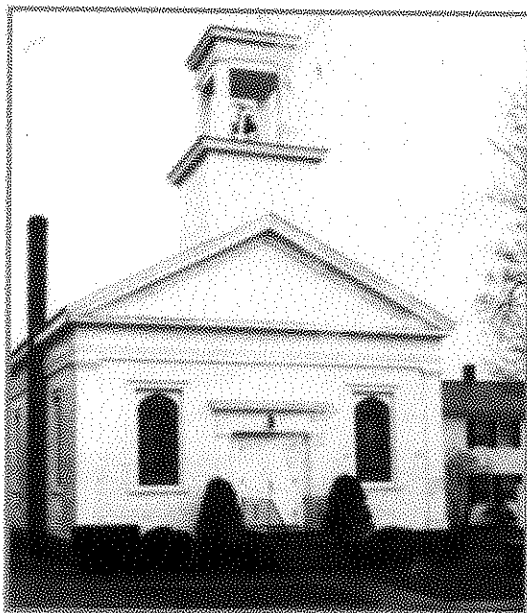


The Knox Roller Rink under construction in 1937.

The Church Ladies Aid of the Knox Reformed Church met to quilt every Wednesday morning and as my mother was one of the quilters, we girls would sometimes visit to see the beautiful quilts the ladies were working on. They all were expert quilters using ever so small stitches on the designs Aunt Vertie Gibbs had traced from templates on the quilts. The ladies would continue quilting and chatting after their lunch break and go home around four o'clock.



This photo of Nickie Barber's Father's Choice quilt was taken in 2002, but it shows the same technique used by the Knox Reformed Church quilters over the years.



*Knox Reformed Church (1972), Hall and
Parsonage*

The Knox Reformed Church was the hub of many activities of the community. The Ladies Aid Society held a chicken supper every year on Election Day. A few days before the supper many of the ladies along with their farmer husbands would congregate at Harry and Vertie Gibbs farm. The farmers all donated live chickens for the supper. The men would behead the chickens and then the chickens would be dunked in the hot water on the stove in a little building. Next the chickens were laid out on newspapers on long tables and the ladies began to pull out the feathers. It was a regular assembly line. (I helped as a teenager). On the day before the Election Day Supper the ladies would meet at the old church hall and work all day. Some of the chicken had been cooked by some of the women in their own kitchens and the rest was cut up and cooked at the church hall, the bones were stripped for the chicken salad, and the tables upstairs and downstairs were set up. All the dishes and silverware had to be taken upstairs also.

Election Day found the ladies at the Knox Reformed Church Hall early in the afternoon doing last minute preparations. All the food was prepared on the big range in the kitchen and the younger teens carried the dishes of food up the back stairway up to the waitresses working upstairs. The older teenage girls waited on tables along with some of the adults. Of course people were washing dishes in the kitchen all night long. I remember Ida Zeh mashed all the potatoes with a hand masher. After the last tables were served the workers all sat down to eat. The following day the ladies returned to put the tables away etc. The supper was always a great success.

Congregational potluck suppers were held and lots of yummy food was passed at the tables. During the summer there was a strawberry social attended by lots of folks.



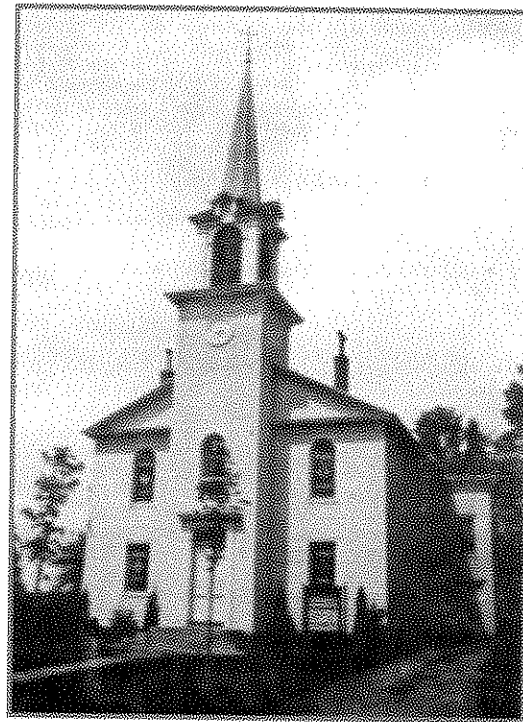
Mildred Nicholson counting money after one of the Knox Reformed Church suppers.

After graduating from Berne-Knox- Westerlo Central School, I married Stephen Torok. We were married in the Knox Church. Our family consisted of a daughter Susanne and a son Mark.



Steve and Margaret in back row with children Susanne and Mark in the front.

In 1959 we moved to our home in West Berne, albeit the house was located in the Town of Knox. We attended and were active in the Beaverdam Reformed Church in West Berne.



Beaver Dam Reformed Church, built in 1830, was located on Rt. 443 in West Berne. The congregation merged with the Berne Reformed Church in 1982.

My husband worked for Albany County surveying for a number of years prior to going to work in the same capacity for what would become ConRail. Due to his work projects, our family moved near Columbus, Ohio in December 1968 and a bit later to Niagara Falls, Ontario for a spell.

The children and I would spend the summers at our home in West Berne. In 1973 we permanently moved back to our home. We owned that home for 57 years.



Margaret's home in West Berne.



Margaret and Steve

Many of the land marks of my yesteryear are no longer standing. The old one room school house became part of the first Fire House in Knox, and was razed to build the new fire house. The Reformed Church hall was also taken down and a new one erected. My husband helped to take part of it down and we have some of the boards in our present home. Sadly the roller rink was burned by an arsonist. The eastern end of the cemetery has since been filled with tombstones. Through neglect, after Mr. Brower did not come to Knox anymore, the mill pond dam did not hold the water back and the water is not very deep anymore and the pond is full of weeds. With the passing of time the older folks have all passed away but as I stand in the new church hall in Knox I can visualize the many white haired ladies chatting as they were busy quilting in the old church hall and many of the villagers sitting on their porches. Around Memorial Day when I go to the Knox Cemetery to place flowers on all my relatives graves every year, I always glance at the graves of the many others who were always around during my youth and were so much a part of my life, as I drive slowly by them.

How blessed I feel to have had the privilege of growing up in a small town.



Our Family in 2015: Mark, Steve, Margaret, Susanne.