

C-HIST  
DOW

Dowdeswell, Helen.

Recollections of the 1920's / taped at Valley Stream Historical Society Meeting in 1975 and concluded in 1987 ; introduction by H. Bertram Keller. - Valley Stream Historical Society, 1987.  
1 cassette.

NOTE: Miss Helen Dowdeswell talked about her recollections of the 1920's, covering topics such as her family background, her family home, neighbors, Wheeler Avenue School, teachers, recreational pastimes, etc.

1. Dowdeswell, Helen. 2. Valley Stream (N.Y.) - History. I. Valley Stream Historical Society.  
II. Keller, H. Bertram, 1915- .

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:

1. Transcript of Program - Prepared by Helen Dowdeswell.
2. Photograph of Helen Dowdeswell, taken in March 1981. \*

\*Original photograph is filed in the Valley Stream Historical Photograph Collection.

Tape Side 2 - Helen Dowdeswell's recollections of the 1920's as told at a Historical Society meeting in 1975 . (Tape was interrupted and was concluded in 1987)

Bert Keller's Introduction

Helen's narrative:

All of the Dowdeswell family were born in Brooklyn and moved to North Valley Stream in November of 1919. Our house was a white frame structure at the corner of North Corona and Franklin Avenues. It had four rooms downstairs and five upstairs. A full attic was reached by a ladder through a trapdoor. There was no basement but a round rootcellar was reached through a trapdoor in the porch. This porch extended on three sides of the house which was L-shaped.

When we moved in, there were no facilities at all although the house had been lived in for many years and at one time had contained a general store in what we called "the parlor".

Water was obtained at a pump on the open backporch. After the first winter when the pump had to be primed each morning our first home improvement was to have the pump moved indoors and to have a sink installed. We still had to heat the water on the stove and baths were a Saturday night ritual taken in a tin tub in front of the kitchen range.

No electricity meant oil lamps at first, then Coleman gasoline lamps with mantles which seemed so bright until we later had electricity installed. Being without a telephone proved an inconvenience only in an emergency when we had to walk a quarter of a mile to the nearest phone to call the doctor who lived in Hempstead.

Also lacking was indoor plumbing and the toilet or privy was a good distance from the house. To provide for nighttime emergencies there was chamberpot under each bed.

The only rooms with heat were the dining room with a potbelly stove and the kitchen with the big, black range. Both were fed with coal. Usually the bedrooms had no heat except in extreme weather when a kerosene stove would be carried upstairs. My parents who were city folk were not used to such a lack of comfort but we children took it as a matter of course since none of the neighbors had any more than we.

Thése neighbors, none of whom lived nearer than a block away, were all farmers. They had horses and cows and pigs and poultry. I remember so well how when one cow went dry and we had to get milk from another one, the taste of the milk which was neither pasteurized nor homogenized would be so different that it would be quite unpleasant until you got used to it.

Although we had a car, Dad used it for business and Mother was generally at home. Instead of our going to a supermarket, the tradesmen came to us. Our butcher came once a week (from Franklin Square) and delivered what Mother had ordered the week before. El Golder drove his grocery wagon to the door. The baker stopped if he saw a white rag tied on a post of the porch. In the summer when we'd be playing croquet one of the Rausteins who had come to deliver kerosene would stay and play a game with us. People seemed to have more time then.

School #13 on Wheeler Ave. was one and one-half miles from home. To get there we walked along Corona Ave., a dirt road winding past woods and farms and empty fields.

There was no lunchroom, just eight classrooms, four on a floor around a large central hall. Everyone brought his lunch and <sup>on</sup> bad days we'd go down to the basement to eat it. Actually there were two basements, one for girls and one for boys with a furnace room between.

Ebbie Hall, the janitor, would bake the "mickies" we'd brought from home and carved our initials in. No potatoes ever tasted better.

In the girls' basement after we'd eaten, the little ones would sit on a hot pipe that ran along the wall about a foot off the floor. The older girls would read and act out a story while passing the book from one to the other.

Just as there were two basements, there were two privies, one on either side of a fence in the back of the school. Leaving the room was an excursion. Later the boys' and girls' rooms with flush toilets were installed in the basement rooms and to this day the school-children will ask to go to the "basement" even when the facilities are on the second floor.

The teacher often tried to arouse enthusiasm in learning about nature by conducting contests. One was the identification of birds seen on the way to school for which we won lovely Audobon pictures. The appetent caterpillar hunt was a great contest. We would bring in the egg patches which looked like a band of black tar on a twig. After being credited with the number we'd brought we'd turn them over to Ebbie Hall to be burned in the furnace. All went well till the day he didn't get around to burning them and next morning the basement was alive with caterpillars. That contest was cancelled in a hurry.

Our teachers were Normal School graduates and a couple of them, Dezla Miller and Norma Metcalfe only 18 or 19 years old, were great favorites. They would sometimes come out and join in our games. These were the usual ones each with its season, marbles, jumping rope, hopscotch, one of a cat, tag, hide 'n seek.

At school boys and girls played separately but at home the neighborhood boys and girls often all played together. There weren't

enough of us to be choosy.

Summer was long and carefree. We had woods to wander in, brooks to wade in, fields to pick wildflowers in, haymows to jump in and attics to explore. There was no T.V., and not even radio at first. We invented our own entertainment and when our imaginations ran dry, Mother was always full of ideas. I particularly remember her suggestion that we put on shows in our garage and charge the neighborhood children two pins admission. These shows were a great success before a very uncritical audience.

In the daytime we saw little of our parents except at mealtime. But evenings we did things together, listened to the Victrola recordings of Caruso or favorite hymns, played games like Parchesi, Flinch and Jackstraws. Later when Dad's first crystal set with earphones was replaced by a radio with loudspeaker we enjoyed "The Happiness Boys" and "Amos and Andy".

Our house was gradually modernized. Electricity, indoor plumbing and a telephone helped us to join the 20th Century/ We had probably been poor but so was everyone else and if we were deprived we never knew it. North Valley Stream in the 1920's was a great place for a child.



HELEN DOWDESWELL, TAKEN IN 1981.