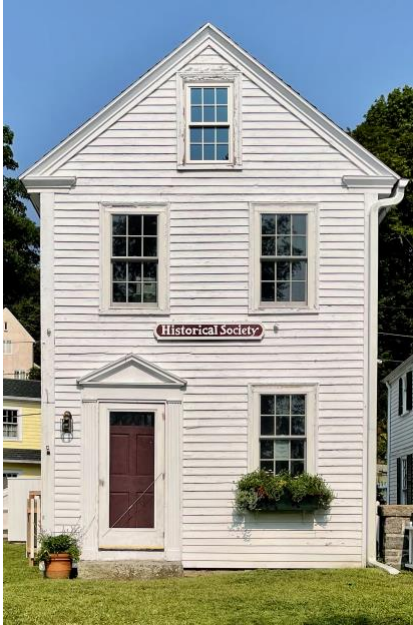


A Letter To The Firehouse

Home of the Annisquam Historical Society



November 2021

Richard (Dick) Morrow: Memoir of an Annisquam Childhood

Transcribed by Rita Littlewood Teele

Last summer, a letter, addressed to the AHS at 7 Walnut Street, was delivered to Deedy Sargent because the Firehouse was closed. I received it on behalf of AHS.

The writer was Dick Morrow, third son of Jim Morrow, the whistling postman, whose portrait by Margaret Fitzhugh Browne hangs in the Village Hall.

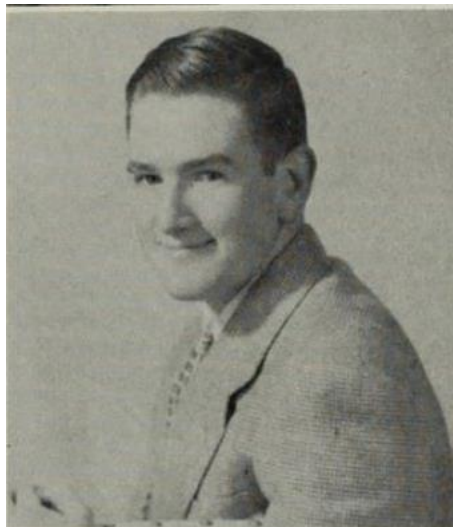
Dick grew up in Annisquam and went to school in Gloucester. After serving in the military, he settled in Pennsylvania. It seems that after spending his childhood here, Annisquam has always meant “home.” After a conversation by telephone, Dick sent us this lovely gift: memories of growing up in Annisquam. AHS has a photograph of Dick at the Leonard Club picnic of 1929: he is sitting in his mother’s lap; his father, Jim, is beside them.



(The story of Jim Morrow's portrait, *The Village Postman*, which was painted in 1929 by Margaret Fitzhugh Browne, is a June 2020 posting on the AHS website.)

Dick, the youngest son of Elizabeth and Jim, was a month shy of being 10 years old when his father died in October 1937. His family then consisted of his mother, two older brothers and three stepsisters from Jim's first marriage.

As mentioned in his memoir, below, Dick attended Leonard School, Riggs School and Central Grammar. In 1946, he graduated from Gloucester High School. Thanks to Sawyer Free Public Library and Archive.com, the Gloucester High School year books are online and include photographs of each graduate.



RICHARD MORROW "Doc"
701 Washington Street
General. Characteristic Interest: Sports. Activities: R. O. T. C. Sergeant 4; Hockey 3, 4; Third Place Haskell Individual Drill; Band 1, 2, 3, 4; Orchestra 1, 2. Ambition: To join the U. S. M. C.

Dick did join the U.S. Marines as noted in the legend above. His email address includes the initials DIPI (Drill Instructor Paris Island).

The original typescript, Dick Morrow's memoir of being a child in Annisquam, during years that included the Great Depression, was in small font; this copy is in larger font. The spelling of some words was the only other change.

Richard Morrow Sr.s' Memoirs
Annisquam 1927-1954

I was born on November 23, 1927, at home at 701 Washington Street, Gloucester, Mass. My parents were James Thomas and Elizabeth Frances Morrow. I had two brothers Jim and Larry.

My father was known as the Whistling Postman. He would whistle tunes about the letters he delivered such as—if the letter was from the South he would whistle "Dixie", if the letter was edged in black, which meant death; he would whistle "The Letter Edged in Black" and when he brought bills, he would whistle Chopin's Funeral Dirge.

He played in the Village plays and Minstrel shows. He had his portrait painted by Margaret Fitzhugh Browne—a well known artist. It hangs in the Village Hall in Gloucester.,

His first wife Catherine died and had three daughters—Harriet, Edith, and Edna. They all were also in the plays.

My father remarried Elizabeth and had three sons. He died in 1937.

In the summer we would go to Essex and buy chicks. A lot of people raised chickens. In my preschool days I didn't see many kids. I played with the boy next door Frank Parsons. We played marbles and with trucks and boats. He had Polio and wore a brace, but it never held him back. We ran, swam, skied, and sledded.

When I entered Leonard School it had two floors and at one time had grades 1-8, but due to lack of students they only went 1-4 when we went there. Katherine Hodgkins was our teacher for all the grades. There were about 20 kids in the school. We Pledged the Allegiance to the Flag and said the Our Father prayer and the teacher would get each grade separately to get us started. Then she would spend time with each grade.

The schoolyard was all dirt and stones and surrounded by wooden fence. It was split in half. The left side was for the girls and the bigger half was for the boys. We played football and baseball. We climbed over the fences to catch the ball for a touchdown. We broke the window a couple of times in the Post Office. We had the usual teacher's pet and bully. We had a bully who was older than the rest of us due to him being expelled so much. He loved to fight, and his great delight was to wrap his legs around our heads and rub back and forth. He shaved his legs, so the stubble felt like sandpaper.

We had ink wells and pens that you dipped in the ink and practiced the Palmer Method at handwriting. We had to repeat the letters over and over and if you did a good job you got a pin at the end of the year. You had to make sure the ink didn't smear or drip, so a blotter was to dry up the ink.

The school was heated by a big pot-bellied stove. When Mr. Stanwood would put fresh coal in the fire the coal gas was terrible till it burned away.

The school had a big bell that was rung by pulling a rope that went through the second floor. It was rung twice a day. To begin school and after lunch. We'd walk home after lunch and it was about a half a mile.[701 Washington Street.]

We had to cross a wooden bridge over the harbor and in the winter. It was the coldest part of the walk. Especially with the short pants and long stockings.

On Memorial Day the kids picked Lilacs, Tulips, etc. and we marched up Walnut and Leonard Streets to Mt. Adnah Cemetery and decorated the graves. I

played the drum like my brothers before me. Then we would stand at the statue and hear prominent people speak.

At lunch in the Fall, we would go up Adams Hill Rd. Where the summer people lived and pick apples. We would fill our sweaters with them and polish them to a great shine.

When I got a little older, we would fill burlap bags with different kinds of apples and bring to West Gloucester to a Cider Mill. If you brought your own jug, you would get a gallon for a nickel or a dime. We would go to ponds after the summer people left and get goldfish. There was a nice pond on Adams Hill Rd. At other ponds we would catch polliwogs turtles.

The Sheep Pond on Dennison Street which was owned by Mr. Ellery had large snapping turtles. We caught them by using a broomstick with a nail driven through it at the end and sharpened on both ends. We pushed it at the turtle's face, and he would snap at it and impale himself on the nail. Some of the people made snapper soup and if we couldn't find anybody we threw them in the saltwater.

We also hunted lizards and salamanders. Our prize catch was a salamander we called a tiger striped. It was about 6 inches long and fairly fat with yellow spots on a black body. We kept them for a while then released them where we found them.

In winter we skied and sledded. One of the favorite hills was from Squam Rock down past the Village Hall and down the hill and as far over the bridge you could get. Kids would take turns watching the cross streets for cars.

There were two ponds that froze over for skating. The Turtle Pond froze first. It was on Mr Rogers' property and was very shallow. Sometimes we skated before Thanksgiving, The Sheep Pond was the best and was pretty deep. When I was very young, they cut ice there. There was a large icehouse next to the

pond. The icehouse was burned down so they stopped cutting. We had many hockey games there. We played lots of games—marbles, football, baseball, capture the flag, cowboys and Indians and ice buckling and humping.

Ice buckling was a great adventure. The harbor cove would freeze over, and the tides would go in and out causing “ice cakes”. When the tide came back in the cakes would float and we would jump from one to another and back to shore.

Humping was when the ice was frozen but not thick. The idea was to run from one shore to the other shore. We ran from one shore opposite the market to the market without falling in. The first one would cause the ice to roll. (Hump) All the other people would cause the roll more. Most of the time we made it.

We were always looking for trees to climb. All the boys carried a jack knife in his pocket, and we would carve our initials in the trees and make whistles out of Willow trees. You’d cut a six or seven in small branch and tap the wood till it loosened enough to skid off. About an inch in you cut a little opening then cut a piece of the wood about an inch long and split about 1/4th inch of it put the small piece in the hollow of the bark and the rest of the wood you’d slide in the other end and moved the wood in and out while blowing in the other end.

We played a lot in the woods and sometimes camped overnight.

The village Hall held different Affairs in the winter. They had plays and Minstrel shows. They had “pie socials” where women would bake pies and paid 10 cents every game and form a circle. The floor had marks on the floor, and you marched around to piano music. When the music stopped—if you were on the mark, you stayed, and all others left. Like musical chairs they would remove some of the marks and continue till there was only one and he would choose any pie. Then they would have another game. Every year in August they had the Annisquam Fair. It was a great day of games, food, and articles for sale. The Village Library was open every Monday afternoon and after school we

rushed over and got hot cocoa and read magazines. The adults had tea poured out of a beautiful silver tea server.

On Christmas Eve the Villagers would gather in front of Joe Wilson's near where Walnut and Leonard Streets met. There was a huge evergreen tree about 6-70 ft. tall 1.7 width with hundreds of 25-watt-colored bulbs. Three trumpeters led by Ralph Parsons would lead the people through the village singing carols for all the shut ins during the war. I had a chance to be one of the trumpet players. Of course, there was no lights during the war. When we were finished, we went to the library for cocoa and tea. During the Hurricane in 1938, the top of the tree was lost so it's only about 40 ft now. Every Christmas when I was small, I got new boots that had a small jack knife in a pocket on the side. Can you imagine that now?

A family on Dennison Street were German and had a nice farm at the end of the street. Every Christmas they had a live tree with revolving stand that played carols and they had lit candles on it. There was no electric now that far till about 1937.

In spring we would fly kites made from newspaper and before school we would go up the hill and fly them. We'd tie them to a piece of farm equipment and go to school. When we went home for lunch we would see if they were flying. We had aerial battles where we would put broken glass in the tails and try to cut the other guy's string.

When someone was sick, they called the pharmacy in Gloucester, and he would give the medicine to the driver, and he would stop and give to the person on the side of the road. One thing you don't see in drug stores—an eye stone. If you had something in your eye and couldn't get it out, you put the "stone" in the eye and it would roll around and drop the item on your cheek. I was told it was flaxseed. It really worked.

We had no furnace just a wood (coal) stove in the kitchen. You didn't waste much time getting dressed in the winter. We got electric in 1937 (two outlets). We used Kerosene lamps. No toaster, refrigerator, washer dryer, etc.

We kept chickens and I sold eggs for 35 cents a dozen. I also had rabbits, ducks, geese and guinea hens.

We made model airplanes out of balsa wood and had a rubber band to turn the propellers, No plastic.

In around 1940, we had a Tuna tournament and a lot of us got boats to run. I was about 13 and I got a new boat with twin engines. It was a four-day tournament. We caught no fish but had a good time.

When I finished 4th grade, I went to Riggs School in Riverdale about 2 miles away.

A group of us would walk to school and visit the farms on the way. We walked home at lunch usually catching a ride—just a sandwich and we met up again. We would try to kick a stone all the way to school. One time we walked all the way on ice. We would pitch gum cards against the wall—the one that was the closest to the wall won all the cards. We did a lot of walking in these days.

Finding work was hard during the depression and a lot of people were out of work. Winter was good time to make a little momey when it snowed. It was dog eat dog to get the big driveways. I had a coal shovel and carried a small can of kerosene to oil the shovel to keep the snow from sticking. We usually got 35-50 cents for short driveways but got more for longer ones.

When I was in high school, I signed up with the B&M railroad and shoveled out switches. They paid 25 cents an hour. They put you on a train to Boston and dropped you off and when you were finished you waited for the next train,

and they dropped you off at another location. You did this till you got to Boston. They put you on a train to Gloucester.

The buses had stopped running so you walked home about 4 miles.

Frank Parsons had a small sailboat and when we were about 8, we would sail all day. We would take turns going to lunch so we wouldn't have to take the sail down.

On the 4th of July, we got up early to go to Riverdale and watch the "Horribles Parade". The band would dress in fancy clothes. Then we would fire our firecrackers till we ran out. In the evening we would go to Stage Fort Park and watch them burn the huge pile of fish barrels that were stacked like a pyramid. They soaked the barrels in salt water and when they burned, they had all different colors.

During the summer before the war there were 2 circuses that would be at Stage Fort Park. Gil Gossom and I went real early to help them put up the tent. We got free tickets.

When I was in grade school, they had a contest to see who would collect the most caterpillar nests. We got one cent for every 5 nests we brought in. There was also a money value on crows and seals. You got so much money for each of crow's feet, and I think 5 dollars for seals also.

Summer also meant a chance to go tuna fishing with Bunt Davis. He was the best harpooner around. He would take a couple of the Squam kids every now and then. You didn't just go for the ride. You had to work also.

We went blueberry picking in Dogtown Common. You always got your fill.

I delivered Saturday Evening Post (5¢), Ladies Home Journal (10¢), Liberty (5¢) and Colliers (10¢) magazines. Most of the kids played or worked outside most

of the times. We went to bed early and got up early. We always found something to do.

We never celebrated Hallowe'en like they do today. It was mischief night and we pulled pranks on people. On the radio—no TV—we listened to Tom Mix, The Shadow, Jack Armstrong, and G Men. They were 15-minute programs.

My next-door neighbor Frank Parsons was given a building that had been a chicken coop and we cleaned it for a workshop. It had a pot bellied stove. We would make a fire and whittle and plan adventures. We melted lead and poured the liquid into molds that made toy soldiers. We also made fishing jigs and sinkers.

When I was a boy, you had to climb Squam Rock to be a Squamer. We climbed the cliff on Walnut Stree to get to the "Rock".

During the winter Chard and Wilkinson moved the Market up to Leonard Street across from the Village Hall. I guess it was easier for the regular Squamers to get to.

I went to the 7th grade in Riggs and then went to the Old High School. It was called Central Grammar. Then started Gloucester High. It was just built. It had a ROTC until there once a real good and which I joined.

In December, we were playing football and I got a bloody nose which wouldn't stop bleeding. It was in a field near our house, so I went home to get it fixed. While I was there, I heard that Pearl Harbor was bombed. I went back and told the guys and the game stopped and just laid down and talked. Some of the guys were 17 or 18 years old.

The war was always on my mind. I couldn't wait to join up. Both of my brothers went and about all the young men in Squam went. I was too young to be Fire Warden but was a messenger. We had drills and had helmets to arm bands.

The whole place was blacked out. Streetlights were painted black with just little opening and car headlights were painted half black.

A unit from the Texas National Guard patrolled the shore and you had to have a card to go onto the beach.

When I turned 16, I carried the mail at Christmas and in summer at Squam. I carried where most of the summer people had their homes while the regular carriers had River Road and the other side of the bridge. Then I basically left Squam and put a tour in the Marines. I came back home but was called back in for Korea and then settled in PA.

Postscript:

The AHS is very grateful to Dick, and his family for sharing his wonderful memoir. We saved its posting until this November's *Note from the Firehouse* because the first sentence in his memoir, above, gave us his birthdate.

He and his family will celebrate Dick's 94th birthday on November 23rd.

**Wishing Dick Morrow a very Happy Birthday
from all of us in 'Squam!**