

THE ART OF REMEMBERING

“It was the day of the accident.” “It happened when we had the big flood.” “That was when Great Aunt Marion won first prize in the farm show for the largest tomato.” Everyone of us has heard stories that started like this. Maybe we have even told some.

History is a series of stories about things long, long ago and some not so long ago. We know about those things from what people wrote down, the things they left behind, and the stories they told and passed down to the next generation.

Our experiences and the experiences of others enrich our lives. Use your memory and jog the memories of others to learn about your local and personal past.

At age ninety, Bernice Beatty Wing still had in her mind a clear picture of an event in the life of one of her relatives. She never knew this ancestor, but the stories told to her by her grandfather and others remained sharp. Her memories, like those of so many others, give us a glimpse of life in an earlier time.



“Even after ninety years I can still sympathize with the yearnings of an ancestor of mine named Amy living in North Ferrisburg. I can’t even remember her last name, but she was a real person.

“Amy lived up the road from my grandfather’s place, the only child of a young Quaker couple. All of Amy’s clothes were brown or tan, plainly made, with something white added at collar and cuffs. Her bonnet was poke-shaped and also of dark material. Her shoes were of heavy leather, stockings home-knit black.

“Her duties on a busy farm kept her fairly busy. Two fat cats to feed, a hen or two to tame, wandering down the garden path in summer to taste the first peas and string beans raw, or to sample the largest

berries used up some of the days. After each breakfast her father read an entire chapter of the Bible, holding a **pampered** cat on his lap, while Amy hugged a lovely little farm dog. The religious session ended with the family kneeling in front of their chairs in prayer.

“Amy’s family belonged to a Quaker settlement established about 1792. Grandfather donated a piece of his pasture for a Meeting House. Settlers from distant settlements met regularly for communion with their neighbors, friends and God.

“The Quakers did not approve of personal **adornment**, bright colors or anything fancy. But Amy loved color and this disturbed her. If God did not like color, or ornament, why did he use so much of it all over the earth? A bushel basket of squash with its golden, ruffled sides, melons, soft green, and brilliant orange pumpkins, and purple grapes – all part of creation. Surely it was right to adorn oneself with a bit of color.

“Amy did not recognize this longing as a rebellion against her religion, but she felt that something was wrong somewhere. She managed to hide away bits of bright ribbon found here and there or a brilliant feather from some unlucky bird. She often rode old Dolly to the watering trough where she could look across the fields in spring and see the glorious splash of colored wildflowers against the sky. She longed to put what she saw on paper, and she became more and more puzzled at the forbidden use of colors by her people. She would even like to pin a hollyhock or a huge sunflower in her hair, anything to have color a part of her outfit.

“One brilliant spring Sunday the Friends gathered **solemnly** for their Sunday worship. The horse would cramp the carriage beside the horse block while the women stepped over the wheel into the rubber tired

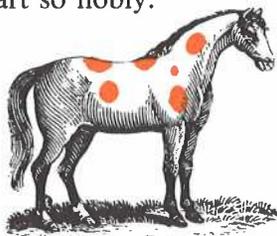


vehicle which had been washed and shined, the **lap robe** stiff with starch to keep off the road dust.

“Today Amy’s rebellion took shape. Begging to be left behind, she urged Dolly from her stall. She had found a can of some green stuff and a brush. She carefully spaced the spots of green here and there on Dolly’s white sides. From her treasure box she took pieces of red ribbon which she attached to the saddle, placing one over the harness eyeshade, using the biggest and brightest ribbon for her own hair. Thus decorated, she **cantered** to the Meeting House, not far from the farm, arriving just as the group was entering the doors, men on one side, women on the other. But the gathering of those entering the meeting place **halted** in amazement at the first glimpse of Amy and her steed.

“I am sorry to leave you in ignorance of what happened to Amy as that part of the story was never told to me. Evidently my ancestors were more concerned with the condition of Dolly, as I was told that she became somewhat **indisposed** because those green spots were of **Paris green** paint, not too good for horses.

“Three cheers for Amy and her rebellion, and for Dolly who did her part so nobly.”



VOCABULARY

pamper - to treat too well; to spoil

adornment - decoration

solemn - serious

lap robe - blanket used to protect one’s clothing from road dust when riding in an open carriage

canter - slower than a gallop and faster than a trot

halt - to stop

indisposed - mildly ill

Paris green - a poisonous emerald-green powder used as a pigment, insecticide, and wood preservative