



NORTH RIVER PACKET

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Mrs. Mercy Turner of Jacobs Farm

If you've taken a tour of the Jacobs Farmhouse, you've heard myriad references to "Mrs. Turner," wife of the caretaker of the Farm (from 1897 until the 1930s). Who was this remarkable woman who left such an impression on the Farmhouse Museum?

by Judith Mercy Miller, granddaughter of Mercy Brown Turner

Mercy Brown Turner was my grandmother. Unfortunately, she died long before I was born. I wish I had known her because she must have been a remarkable woman. She was greatly loved and admired by her three children and, given their memorable

Mercy's husband, George Turner, lost his position working in the shoe manufacturing business after the Depression. Through a distant family connection with Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs, owner of Jacobs Farm in Norwell, George was given the position of custodian. He remained in that position until his death in 1936.

“ A woman's work around the farm at the turn of the century was an exhausting and mind-numbing routine... ”



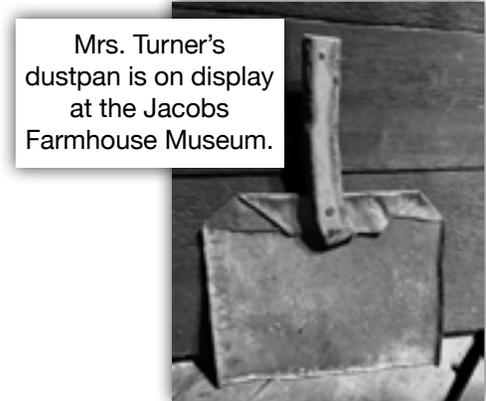
Mercy Brown Turner, the author's grandmother, lived at Jacobs Farm with her husband and three children. They were the caretakers of the property for Dr. Henry Barton Jacobs.

George's occupation is listed on my father's birth certificate as "carpenter," and that skill apparently gave him the opportunity to work in town from time-to-time as well as at the Jacobs Farm. Mercy and George were thrifty with everything, as is evidenced by the hand-made dust pan in the Turner living quarters at the Jacobs' home.

My father, Harold Melvin Turner, was the second of Mercy's children. She also had a daughter, Edith, who was

eight years older, and Katherine (Tat) who was eight years younger. Although Mercy spent her adult life on Jacobs Farm, she inspired her daughters and son to seek an education beyond high school and to be prepared to support themselves if necessary—and they did.

The joke between the sisters was that "Ma" favored her "little boy" by making sure he went to a four-year college, whereas they did not have that opportunity. However, given the times, ambition for her daughters to obtain teaching degrees and for a college education for her son was remarkable. And, even with Mercy Turner's thrifty ways, Harold still had to borrow money from Dr. Jacobs for tuition. As it turned out, Mercy did not live long enough to see him graduate from Tufts University in 1922.



Edith and Katherine both taught in local schools until they retired. Even more notable was that Harold rose to become the Chairman of the Board and President of Canadian General Electric company in Toronto which made him, at the time, one of the top industrialists in Canada.

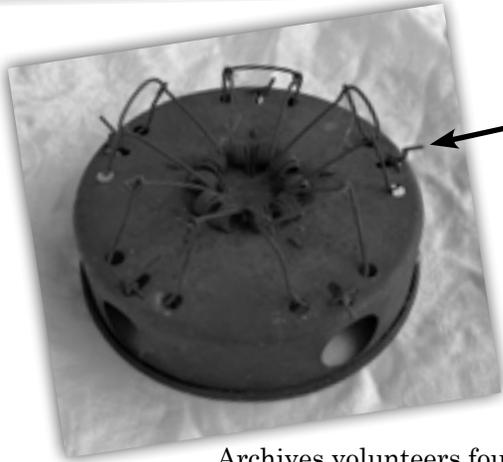
In a retrospective, my brother wrote: "Mercy Turner was in constant motion

(continued on page 7)

good humor and their successes in life, she instilled admirable values in each of them.

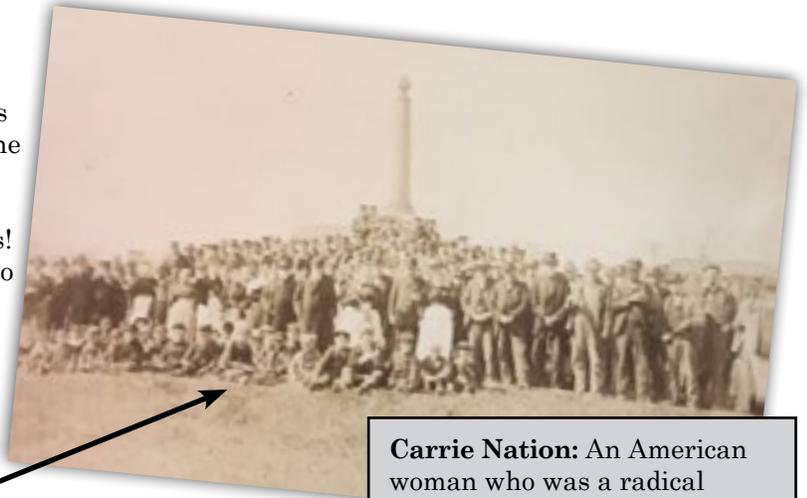
FROM THE ARCHIVES

Treasures known and treasures found in the Norwell Historical Society Archives, in the Society Research Library, and in the Jacobs Farmhouse Museum are featured here in each issue.



This antique “choker trap” for mice currently resides in the kitchen at the Jacobs Farmhouse Museum. Able to catch up to five mice per night, it was a very popular style of mousetrap in the early 1900s. The upper spring mechanisms would be pressed downward and held in place with the small trigger (shown at the tip of the arrow). The mouse would be attracted to food placed under the trap and put its head in one of the holes on the side, which would trigger the spring. Surprisingly, mice continued to “use” the trap, even when others were caught. Apparently, curiosity kills the mouse as well as the cat!

Archives volunteers found this photo of a gathering around the Civil War monument in Town Center... and many of those pictured are carrying hatchets! There were many guesses as to the purpose of the assembly (an anti-liquor protest with folks carrying Carrie Nation-style hatchets, perhaps?), but a second version of the photo was then discovered with a caption and date:



“Arbor Day 1896. A number of the citizens of Norwell assembled in the morning for the purpose of clearing brush, etc., out of Gaffield Park. They worked during the forenoon, then had lunch in Fogg Hall [the second floor of the South Scituate Savings Bank in Norwell Center] (this picture was taken at the monument after lunch) and then returned to work during the afternoon.”

Carrie Nation: An American woman who was a radical member of the temperance movement. She is remembered for attacking alcohol-serving establishments (most often taverns) with a hatchet.



Find more photos of historic Norwell on our website. Go to the home page and scroll down to the Historic Photo Gallery.

Just The Facts

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Museum & Research Library

The **Jacobs Farmhouse Museum** is open at scheduled events and by appointment only. Please contact the Society to schedule a tour.

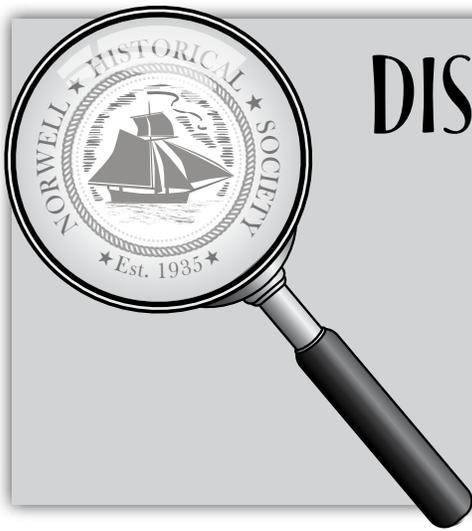
The Norwell Historical Society **Research Library & Archives Center** on the 3rd floor of the Sparrell School (322 Main Street) is open on Thursday mornings from 10:00 am until noon or by appointment.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Norwell Historical Society is to discover, preserve, and celebrate Norwell history through stewardship, education, and awareness—engaging our community, both present and future, to be vested in its history.

Mailing Address & Phone

The Norwell Historical Society
P.O. Box 693
Norwell, MA 02061
781-659-1888 (Research Library)



DISCOVER MORE AT OUR WEBSITE!

Look for the magnifying glasses in this issue
—that means there is
more to discover on-line at the Society's website:
WWW.NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG.

September 1987

Telephone conversation with Wesley Osborne, Sr., former Tree & Grounds Superintendent. At the time of this interview, Mr. Osborne Sr. is 88 years old, born and raised in Norwell. Lived here all his life.

At this stage in your life, what incident stands out in your mind?

Walking behind 15 to 20 cows I herded almost daily from Main Street to South Street.

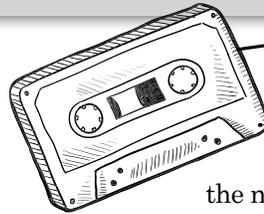
Other recollections?

I believe the first hard surface road in Norwell was from the Hingham line to Ridge Hill. As a student at the Ridge Hill School [Oak and Washington Streets], I recall playing on the road building equipment. Hard surface road ended about where Anderson's pool place is [about 256 Washington Street].

Berry's greenhouses formerly on Main Street [just below the UCC church, about 430 Main Street] grew cucumbers for the Boston market.

Do you remember Ridge Hill Grove [the semi-pro baseball field behind what is now Cole School]?

Wonderful memories. Satchel Paige, great baseball player, pitched at Ridge Hill Grove;



Oral History Transcriptions

In the last newsletter, we printed a portion of the newly-transcribed oral history interview with Wesley Osborne, Jr., who recently passed away.

The following transcription is a portion of another interview— with his father Wesley Osborn, Sr., who was born in 1899 and died in 1992. *Transcribing oral history interviews from old cassette tapes (which are deteriorating) is one of the projects where volunteers are needed. Interested in helping? Email Archivist Janet Watson at watsonje@comcast.net.*

however, the featured player at the time was a white catcher.

Where did you work before you were Tree & Grounds Superintendent?

During WWI, I worked at the National Fireworks Company in Hanover and earned about \$60/week. That amount was considered very good wages indeed. My father worked in a shoe factory in Rockland. I believe that if a railroad had come to Norwell, the shoe factories here would have prospered and Norwell might have become a greater shoe town than Rockland. There were box and trunk factories in Norwell that made wooden boxes for shoes.

Do you remember when you were first interested in trees and grounds work?

I recall the ornamental trees brought back from Japan by William Penn Brooks. They are

in the Osbornes' front yard at 296 Main Street.

I recall my father and I (as a young boy) cut hay at the Henry Norwell house. My father dealt with Mr. Norwell, but I don't remember any conversations about Henry.

I also remember my family carting farm produce to Boston in horse-drawn wagons and selling the produce ourselves to retail buyers.

Do you recall the Influenza epidemic after WWI?

I recall many new graves at a Weymouth cemetery.

Any other thoughts?

I recall an incident when a selectman wanted to reduce wages of those clearing snow (possibly other road work as well) to about 10¢ per hour—this caused a big uproar and wasn't successful.

Answer from page 4: This photograph was taken from what is today the Ridge Hill School on High Street. The large building was the trolley barn for the Hanover Street Railway which ran from Mann's Corner in North Hanover, down High Street, to Queen Anne's Corner. The railway opening in 1896 until 1920.

Letters to William Gould Vinal: A Glimpse at Life in Norwell in 1900

The last newsletter featured an article on the life of William Gould Vinal—one of Norwell's most illustrious citizens. Recently uncovered in the Society Archives was an article written by Vinal that features excerpts from his mother's letters while he was away at Bridgewater Normal School. These snippets offer a glimpse into life on Grove Street in 1900-1901, and showcase Mrs. Vinal's wisdom and ability to describe the world around her.

**Transcribed by Janet Watson,
Society Archivist, edited by
Wendy Bawabe & Marybeth Shea**

**Originally written by William
Gould Vinal, circa 1950**

... My mother's letters have been kept through the years. I have now taken excerpts from them to portray the manners and customs of that time. The inclusion of some names and places may make it more interesting to those who date back to yesteryears. They may give courage to boys and girls who are facing new but equally perplexing problems today.

Jan. 24, 1900. You fare pretty well for letters, but must not write too many for it's expensive. News is a very scarce article here as well.

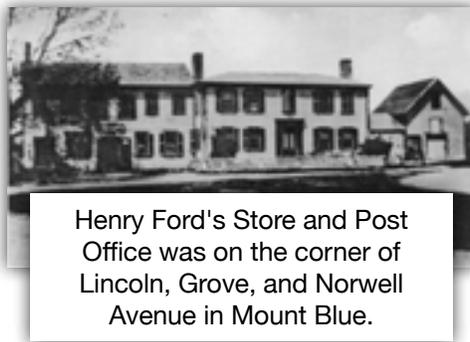
Feb. 4, 1900. Mr. Jim Sampson has broken his leg. He and Jess Reed were loading logs and one fell on him and did the mischief. I think this month and next will be stormy and cold if old signs and sayings amount to anything.

Feb. 18, 1900. Your "Rabbit" you had for supper is a French dish, very fashionable and is pronounced "Rarebit." You can't see Uncle David's house sometimes for the swirl of snow. Hackett's team with four horses went through this noon. I can hear some snow birds (juncos) chirping.

Feb. 1900. Carl Richardson said he went half way up Bowker Hill on Friday night and he had to let the horse rest twice going up the hill. Mrs. Ford and I went to the Relief Corps [WRC, see inset box at right] and drove home around Assinippi so I could see Aunt Zoa. Pa has sold the cow and calf so

when you get home again milk will be quite scarce.

March 3, 1900. It's been the coldest days of the year and Jim Leavitt moved into the Prouty house Tuesday. It was 4 degrees below zero at 7 a.m. Gracie Damon and her husband moved into the Henry Damon house. That man that lives at HF's house has been ordered out of town by the officers [Ed: could be Henry Ford's Store, which also had rooms to let]. They gave him



Henry Ford's Store and Post Office was on the corner of Lincoln, Grove, and Norwell Avenue in Mount Blue.

24 hours to leave or they would arrest him. The boy told in court that he told them to steal anything they could lay their hands on.

The WRC got up the dinner at Town Hall tomorrow. I have baked a pot of beans for them and shall send them a peck of potatoes toward the clam chowder. Last time I went to the WRC I was flag bearer and it was quite grand.

March 11, 1900. The Billie Geese ran off this Tuesday and were gone until Friday. Pa started out this morning and didn't get home until 1:30 p.m. He found them in the swamp and drove them home. For Heaven's sake, don't be sticking your nose into such places as standpipes, and also be sure when

you take a bath and not go outdoors again until next day. Always take it at night or not at all.

April 8, 1900. The children rode to school in all their glory in an old rattle trap of a barge. Elmer wished it were morning so he could go again. Pa did his first plowing of the season yesterday.

April 15, 1900. Your father was looking in the woods last week for another pair of stray geese and says the cowslips are out a little and will be large enough for greens next week. The frogs are holding an Easter concert of great magnitude.

““ The frogs are holding an Easter concert of great magnitude. ””

September 1900. Mount Blue is very quiet now that schools have opened. Pa came home tonight from the field and said the constable stopped and asked him where EV lived. He was going to serve a warrant on her for not being vaccinated. She was pretty mad, nearly jumped up and down. They have all got to appear in court Friday. BB was arrested too. Hope you won't come home until the hot time is over for fear they will arrest you. I think you had better be vaccinated. More than half the high school are in the warrant so the school will be pretty small.

WRC (Women's Relief Corps):

The women's auxiliary organization of the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic), which was a Civil War Union veterans' fraternal group. The purpose of the WRC was to promote patriotic education.

(continued on the next page)

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Mary Vinal, Bill Vinal's mother, taken in 1898 in her WRC uniform from a collection of photos of women of the WRC donated to the Norwell Historical Society by Marie Anderson.

Sept. 23, 1900. Can't you wear an extra shirt or two vests when you come as it's real cold nights? Dr. Little came up Saturday and vaccinated F, M, and D, but H the doctor did not consider able to be [vaccinated]. D and M went down to the doctor to get exempt from it. He said, "You ride a wheel?" They said, "Yes." He said "If you are able to ride a wheel you are able to be vaccinated."

Pa and Dandie [the dog] got an awful big woodchuck today, almost as big as Dandie. Aunt Carrie Morse has a cousin "Gracie Farrar" who is studying music in Europe and has sung for some great opera singer. You may become one or the other in the future. All things are possible, you know.

Sept. 29, 1900. I enjoyed your last Sunday's letter very much, all but the football part. I hope you will not play anymore but stop where you are. You better come home Friday nights. It won't tire you out as much as playing that game. Baseball has crippled your finger and your bone in one leg.

Pa is very hard up right now. Buying two cows took his money.

Oct. 7, 1900. Am glad you go to church and Sunday School. Hope you will continue the good work. Don't like to hear you speak of them as "cranks". Why not join the Christian Endeavor or Young Men's Christian Association? Grandpa has bought a Morris chair and Grandma a rocking chair. I understand the Norwell H.S. master is a little bit discouraged over his dull scholars.

Oct. 14, 1900. Dandie [the dog] has got 16 woodchucks. Shall be pleased to see your friend and will do what I can to make it pleasant for him. Hope he is a common sort of fellow and that he fully understands that we are, and that we live in an old house. Our welcome will be all right. It's your father's birthday on the 2^{5th}. If you get any game we can have a game pie.

Dec. 12, 1900. I know you will be sorry to hear that Mr. Gaffield is dead [Thomas Gaffield, namesake of Gaffield Park, died on 12/6].

Dec. 15, 1900. Some of the Green folks (Christmas greens) have gone into Boston tonight [to sell the greens that they harvested]. Think they will have a cold ride. How awful cold it has been this morning. Four degrees below zero at 7:30.

Jan 6, 1901. This is my first attempt at letter writing this new year and new 20th century. Did you hear the guns and cannons and bells? Seth and Aunt Eliza and Mabel came New Year's Day. They brought a suet pudding. Uncle Seth and your father went gunning over by Flat Swap in the afternoon. Pa got a squirrel and Seth got a rabbit.

Allie and Lizzie were down for an hour or two. Lizzie has the bronchitis quite bad this winter. You ought to see how Allie bundles up. The way you dress is all right for fall but not for winter. Allie had on woolen underdrawers and vests and a heavy winter suit, also an ulster [a long men's overcoat made of wool], all the collars turned up and a muffler besides, also wristlets. Lizzie says you are crazy not to put your vest on. You look as if you ain't got clothes.

The Installation of Officers of the WRC takes place Wednesday evening. Expect Mrs. Ford will take me with them. Sometime when I am richer than I am at present, I will make her a nice present for her kindness to me.

Jan 18, 1901. I was pleased to hear from you even if the letter was a short one. When you write, tell me if you have put on your new undervests. You wrote that your room-mate had commenced a diary. Hope he will make a greater success of it than you did. Elmer comes to see me. The other night I gave him a dish of cranberry



The Vinal family lived on Grove Street in this "old house." Mrs. Vinal hoped the friend Bill brought home from school was "a common sort" like they were.

pudding with sugar syrup and he went home quite grand. Harrie Duval had to have Allen take one of his horses and help him up Bowker Hill last Friday and he also took the hind shoes off his horse so he could stand at all.

Jan. 20, 1901. Mr. George W. Litchfield is home sick. Expect he went to the hospital yesterday. The doctor told him he either had cancer or appendicitis. Dr. Little made Grandpa a present of a briar pipe in a velvet case.

“ George W. Litchfield is home sick. ...doctor told him he either had cancer or appendicitis.”

Feb. 10, 1901. Those wristlets I sent are silk ones and very nice. You must wear them when you come home if no other time. Pa caught an owl Friday night. It had caught his pigeons at night. Pa has been keeping Dandie out in the haystacks to keep the cats off but it has been awful cold for him lately.

Feb. 17, 1901. Was pleased to have such a nice long letter and also to hear you were getting rich. You must not let your outside work interfere with your

(continued on page 6)

Vinal Letters, cont'd

(continued from page 5)

studies. The money is a great help to you and doesn't it make you feel good to be earning something to help yourself along? If you give satisfaction and have the library work for another year you can continue right along with your studies.

Feb. 1901. I am invited down to Mrs. Ford's some day this week to spend the day and she is going to take me to call on her friends the "Osbornes." I expect to have quite an outing. We hope you will not "Swipe" as you call it any more food. Don't do anything that is against the rule. I don't like to hear you say you are breaking the rules.

Pa dressed a pair of chickens to have today but as you did not come I have not cooked them.

March 3, 1901. Mr. Gifford bought Pa's little heifer and took it home tonight. Said he didn't want to take it over Rockland Hill until after dark; if he did, everyone would holler, "cow, cow." I don't think anyone will see him as it was quite dark when he started from here.

March 10, 1901. The farmers around town are going to commence work now. Seems early, and they may think so too before the week is out. Al Farrar

and George W. H. Litchfield were buried today. Each one leaves four little children.

April 7, 1901. We had two letters in the first mail (Mt. Blue P.O.) Grandma

“ *...Norwell Village looks quite citified. Ten telephone wires over the Hill.* ”

is going to have a letter box. You must write to her when there is something to write about. You can direct my letters to Box 9. [Mt. Blue Postmaster] Attie [Ford] says it depends on this quarter's showing to the government whether there will be a post office there or not.

April 11, 1901. Mabel says Norwell Village looks quite citified. Ten telephone wires over the Hill. The Bank has one, Turner House one, also one at the Undertakers. Vinings telephoned the Doctor, who was in the office when the message came, so he

went at once. Before they always paid someone \$1.50 to come for the doctor; now they can telephone for 10 cents.

May 8, 1901. I am very sorry to read the part that said you went rowing Sunday. You know that such things are very much against my principles and I brought you up to keep Sunday in a proper manner.

May 12, 1901. I saw a sight today I never expected to see. Teams went by loaded with Italians. Should think they just came over by the looks of their bundles and the way they were dressed. A Mr. Lawson, a very wealthy man has bought a place in Scituate and is having fixed up in great style. Has lots of workmen. Costs \$700 a day, someone said.



Lawson's Dreamwold estate in Scituate (stables shown above) would not have been possible but for the approximately 1,000 laborers who built it (many of whom were immigrants). Photo courtesy of the Scituate Historical Society.

June 10, 1901. Your invitation to the NHS reception came yesterday. The class entered 17 and graduated 6, five girls and one boy. We received through the mail last night Dr. Little's wedding card. Grandpa Farrar was 79 years old today. Made him a strawberry shortcake.

THROWBACK PHOTO OF THE MONTH



Alan Anderson sent in this photo of Norwell in the late 1800s or early 1900s. Where was this photo taken and what was the large barn in the background?

(answer at the bottom of page 3)



Discover more about William Gould Vinal's life in the Winter 2020 issue of the Society newsletter. At the Society website, click on **LEARN MORE**, then scroll to 2020 **NEWSLETTERS**. The **WINTER 2020** issue has a great article about Professor Vinal's amazing life.

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_____ Researching at the Archives _____ Other:

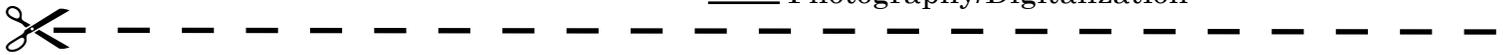
_____ Organizing at the Archives

_____ Farmhouse Tour Guide

_____ Farmhouse Maintenance

_____ Event Planning

_____ Photography/Digitalization



Mrs. Turner, cont'd.

(continued from page 1)

from all accounts. A woman's work around the farm at the turn of the century was an exhausting and mind-numbing routine of manual labor, cooking, cleaning, washing, baking, all performed on a rigid schedule of specific days But Mercy Turner had a lively intellect. She loved books and was Assistant Librarian in the village library."

My father often told of hitching the horse to the buggy on Sundays and

taking Mercy to church, which he felt she enjoyed as much for the community as for the services. She would then have him take her to the local library so that she could check out a book. No one knew how she ever got the time to read a book.

My mother and father met when they were in college. Mother was quite a fashionable young woman and tells the story of getting "all dolled up" in a *haute couture* dolman coat that was

of heavy orange satin and lined with fur. She topped it off with a cloche hat that had a pheasant feather down one side of her face. Mother laughed at her own story and said she wondered what kind of "lady" Mercy thought her son was bringing home! But, Mercy, dressed in her modest farm clothes and high boots, was a gracious hostess and accepted mother as one of her own.

Mercy Brown died in 1923 at the age of 62 from pneumonia. She is buried in Fairview Cemetery which is behind the First Trinitarian Congressional Church in Scituate.

I named my daughter Mercy because I remember well that, late-in-life, when my father talked of his mother, he would wipe tears from his eyes. I always thought she must have been a wonderful woman and mother.

Certainly, her children thought so.

Read more Turner Recollections from the author's brother on the website (see box below at right...)

"...When I reconstruct those years, I remember how much my mother enjoyed her time in Assinippi. She was accustomed to a life of urban amenities. Her family lived in large homes in Everett, Boston, and Watertown. My father's sisters loved my mother from the first time that my father brought her to meet his family. They were both still in college, mother at Wellesley and my father at Tufts. She, in turn, adored this placid family whose temperament was in sharp contrast to her people."

"...With the exception of the barns, Jacobs Farm was without electric power until the 1930s. Aunt Tat recalled that Uncle Irving... brought a[n electric] line from the big barn to the house so my grandmother [Mercy Turner] would have a single, bare electric lamp for light in the kitchen. Dr. Jacobs noted this bit of gentle piracy by the Turners on one of his inspections. The hired hands were told to take it down."



Discover more about the Turners' time at the Jacobs Farm! At the Society website, click on **LEARN MORE**, then scroll down to **READ INTERESTING ARTICLES**. The **TURNER RECOLLECTIONS** article has more stories of the Turner's time at the Farmhouse.



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This ad from 1940 was recently found in an old newspaper in the Society Archives.

Being told to “stay home” was popular in 1940 as well.

Past issues of newsletters, virtual tour of the Jacobs Farmhouse and other historic properties in Norwell, books for sale, articles on neighborhood histories... all accessible on the website: norwellhistoricalsociety.org.



CALLING ALL THOSE WHO ARE LEARNING FROM HOME!

The ABCs of Norwell will give you the means of teaching Norwell's history. A map of locations (perfect for in-town “road trips!”) will show you where to find the historic sites with your kids.

A Narrative of South Scituate & Norwell is a great way to read short tales about our town's history.

Each chapter is a new story—perfect for your Middle or High Schooler because it gives local history in bite-size portions!

BOOKS CAN BE PAID FOR ONLINE & DELIVERED TO YOUR DOORSTEP (WITHIN NORWELL) OR MAILED FOR A \$5 FEE.

 **MORE ITEMS
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