

Constance “Connie” (Turner) Tefft 1921-2010

On Jan. 16, 1921 Ernest “Steb” & Gladys (Schumacher) Turner of South Lancaster, MA welcomed the birth of their third child and only daughter at Clinton Hospital: Constance “Connie” Turner. Connie’s elder two brothers, Steve and Bob Turner, had been born in 1917 and 1918, respectively. Her younger brothers, Frederick (known as “Mike”), Wesley and Walter Turner, each came after her in order of their following respective birth years: 1923, 1926, and 1931.

Thus Connie grew up in the lively Turner home with her loving parents, sandwiched between five rambunctious and respectable brothers. Like her brothers, Connie attended Lancaster’s public schools, beginning her education at the old brick Narrow Lane district schoolhouse for grades one through four. She then continued her studies at the Center School on the Town Green up into high school when she eventually transferred to the Worcester Trade School where she obtained her secondary education with an emphasis on hairdressing.

Connie had deep roots in the greater Lancaster community.

Her father, Steb Turner, had operated the very last blacksmith shop in Lancaster. He hailed from a long line of blacksmithing tradition stretching back five consecutive generations and over one hundred fifty years from when his ancestor Prince Turner opened his blacksmith shop in 1785 at nearby Harvard, MA. Prince Turner’s son, Stephen H. Turner had been responsible for bringing the Turner name to South Lancaster when he bought a blacksmith shop there in 1832, brought his father’s tools with him and moved his family there. In those days the small village was still known as “New Boston.” This same Stephen H. Turner was Connie’s great-great-grandfather. His blacksmith shop remained the family establishment until it burned in 1909. Connie’s grandfather, Fred Turner, who owned and operated the shop at the time of the fire, simply purchased another building a few yards down the street (rather than rebuilding upon the ashes of his lost shop building) and the Turner’s continue their blacksmith operation there. This was the blacksmith shop Connie’s father worked from when she was born and brought up. It stood near the triangle of Sterling Rd. and Mill St. in South Lancaster. The Turner family resided in their large old house across the street from the blacksmith shop, Connie’s childhood home. In later years, Connie fondly recollected her childhood memories of sometimes escorting her father when he made “house calls” to shod horses upon various farms which were then still prominently found throughout the region. By the early Depression years Steb was making such “house calls” in his handsome wooden-sided beach wagon (predecessor of the station wagon), hauling therein his small 22-pound portable anvil and carrying his hand-forged hammers and tools in his large wooden toolbox. Connie wrote the following in 2004: “I remember my Dad making his own horseshoes on a forge and nailing them on the horses’ hooves. He wore a heavy leather apron so the sparks wouldn’t burn him when he shaped and pounded on them. The sparks would fly wildly with every blow of his busy hammer.”

Connie’s maternal family came from the other end of town where her grandfather Charles A. Schumacher, Sr., affectionately called “the Squire of Ballard Hill” by his neighbors, maintained a handsome farm at the birthplace of Connie’s mother Gladys until his death in 1928. His widow, Maud, continued there until selling the farm and farmhouse in 1941. Connie had recalled

periodically visiting her step-grandmother with her mother at the Schumacher Homestead, enjoying “Maud’s” hospitality and kindness. She likewise had recalled visiting her maternal Grandfather Schumacher’s sister Aunt Emily Walker in Clinton on a number of special visits with her mother.

Many extended relations on both the Turner and Schumacher family resided throughout the area.

Connie’s father’s family had been long-time members of Lancaster’s First Church of Christ, Unitarian. But it was her mother’s influence that prevailed in her religious upbringing and Connie and her brothers attended the Sunday School at Lancaster’s Evangelical Congregational Church. Connie’s mother, who had trained to be a teacher at the Fitchburg Normal School, sometimes helped with Sunday School services and also occasionally played the piano for music ministry.

When she was around twelve years old, Connie’s mother inherited \$1,000 from her Aunt Emily Walker who died in 1934. With this money Connie’s parents purchased a camp site and cottage on Spec Pond in the north end of Lancaster, next door to her maternal Aunt Elsie (Schumacher) Neithardt, Harris’s camp and cottage. Connie, her brothers, their cousins, and numerous other extended family and friends enjoyed many long happy hours playing, swimming, boating, and relaxing there during the warmer months of her youth. The following was noted in an October 1935 Boston Herald article featuring her father: “The summer is given wholeheartedly to the family’s camp on Spec Pond.... The Turners move out of the South Lancaster home as soon as school closes and return just in time for it to reopen. A visitor to the [blacksmith] shop will, in all likelihood, be invited to camp for steamed clams following a swim, for the family is one that is never without guests.”

Winter’s were not without their recreational fun either in the Turner household. According to the same 1935 newspaper article: “The wall of the [blacksmith] shop office holds six pairs of shoe-skates, five or six pairs of skis, a whole row of sleds, toboggans, and ski poles – the oldest son [Connie’s brother Stephen] is a skiing champion in Lancaster’s own yearly ski meet [on George Hill]. These objects illustrate how the Turner children spend their time in the winter.” Connie was thrilled to watch her brother Stephen compete at the annual ski jump contest on George Hill.

Connie married her sweetheart Francis “Joe” Tefft at the Lancaster Evangelical Congregational Church on Aug 19, 1939 with Pastor Frederick K. Brown officiating. Joe had been born on Jun. 3, 1917 at Boston, MA, the son of Byron & Etta (Liard) Tefft. Connie and Joe settled into their first home in an apartment at 298 Main St. in Clinton and ever thereafter Connie remained a resident of Clinton. Joe found employment with a local doll and toy manufacturer Ralph A. Freundlich, Inc. and Connie enjoyed being a loving homemaker. The young couple welcomed the birth of their first child, Jackie, on Mar. 1, 1940 at Clinton Hospital.

By 1943 Connie, Joe and Jackie moved to their home at 19 Oak St., in Clinton, where Connie remained until ____ when she and Joe purchased a brand new home at 3 Candace St.

Connie’s second and last child, Gregg Tefft, was born to she and Joe on Jun 10, 1947 at Clinton Hospital.