Prefatory Comments

These recollections of Avon Old Farms School are based on my experience as a teacher at the school from 1935 to 1941 and from information published in books, newspapers and magazines and other sources which I happened to have saved. In June of 1944, Avon Old Farms School was closed and became a training school for the rehabilitation of blinded veterans. The school re-opened in the Fall of 1948 under the headmastership of Donald Pierpoint. These recollections, then, refer to Avon Old Farms School in its first phase.

I have set myself the task of recording in detail facts and miscellany of the first six years of a long teaching career, a slice of time. Why an account of these years at Avon Old Farms School in such detail? About my age, 80 years, Grandma Moses began painting pictures of her life many years before because it suited her fancy to paint pictures of what once was so that the images might not be completely lost. It suits my fancy to "paint a picture" of Avon Old Farms School, 1935-1941. My "picture" is not in the style of misty atmospheric exemplified in Monet's Impression: Sunrise nor is it in the style of sweeping broad strokes as used by Franz Kline in his Painting Number 7. My "painting" resembles the style of Seurat in A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the Grande Jatte. The over-
all effect of my "painting" is derived from a series of
details similar to the discrete dots of the Pointillism
technique.

Aristotle believed that happiness is the greatest
human "good". An anecdote told me by Fred Davis, an
Avon faculty member, illustrates the point. Fred, who
had studied advanced statistics at Harvard with Pro-
fessor Truman Kelley, said that Professor Kelley in-
sisted that it was necessary for the proper use of
statistical formulae to be able to derive them. In
class one day Professor Kelley filled three or four
panels of blackboard, eventually arriving at one neat
little formula. When he had finished his scribbling, he
turned to the class and asked, "Are there any ques-
tions?" Since he had lost most of the class after the
first panel, there were no questions. Professor Kelley
persisted and finally one student said he had a ques-
tion. "Professor Kelley, what is the point of all
that?" "Point?", replied Professor Kelley. "It makes
one happy." I never got pleasure from any of the three
statistics courses I took, but recalling personalities
and happenings during a few years a long time ago I
find pleasurable. The fact that I can recollect so much
may indicate that the experience at Avon Old Farms
School was meaningful to me. Perhaps it may mean that
when we are young we are impressionable.

I was the most junior member of the Faculty when I
was hired in October of 1935 after school had begun,
primarily to live in the section of a dormitory that
housed the youngest students, grades 7 through 9. The
genral policy at Avon was that no Faculty live in the
dormitories and generally the system worked well. How-
ever, experience revealed that student "monitors" did
not have the time to give the youngest students the
supervision they needed. Since I was available, in
addition to this dormitory duty I assisted the School
Educational Psychologist, Dr. Frederick Zehrer,(1) in

1. Fred Zehrer and I both grew up in New
Britain, Conn., a nearby city, and both of us
graduated from New Britain High School. Fred
was older than I and I knew him as one of the
local football players and was surprised to
(continued...)
working with a handful of students who had reading problems. I received a salary of $25.00 a month plus room and board. Those were depression years.

I have had little contact with Avon Old Farms since I left in the Fall of 1941 to take a position at University School, Shaker Heights, Ohio, and subsequent years as a University professor. In the last fifty years, I visited the school once for about half an hour and talked with Bill Kegley, a school employee, who in my time was responsible for buildings and grounds, security, transportation and many other essential operations. He had been reduced to a minor role of maintenance work. I discovered Bill's memory of students and faculty was remarkable. I have almost no knowledge of Avon Old Farms School Post-Mrs. Riddle's death and Post-World War II. I have kept in touch with one Avon Old Farms student, Dan Gates of Chittenango, New York, Class of 1943, and I have been talking with Dan on the telephone at least once a year for more than half a century. I also exchange greetings with Mrs. Doris Fowler, widow of Coach Jack Fowler. Jack Fowler went to Choate School when Avon closed in 1944.

Background

Mrs. Theodate Pope Riddle [1868-1946], the daughter of Alfred Atmore Pope, was born in Salem, Ohio. At the age of twelve, she changed her name from the drab "Effie" to the imperious "Theodate", which was the name of her maternal grandmother in Maine.(2) She was educated at Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Conn. and became so enchanted with the charm of its beautifully maintained Colonial homes that by the age of sixteen she was drawing up plans for her dream house in Connecticut.

1(...continued)
discover he had subsequently earned a doctorate from Harvard.

"She bought and restored two seventeenth century cottages on forty-two acres of land near the center of Farmington ... She determined to become a professional architect but being denied admission to all-male Princeton, she enlisted private tutors ... In 1898 she arranged to have the country's most fashionable architect, Stanford White, build on her property a retirement home for her parents, using Mount Vernon as a model. She named the estate Hill-Stead." (3)

Hill-Stead is now a museum featuring etchings and paintings by Degas, Manet, Monet and Whistler. Mrs. Riddle kept sheep to mow the grass at Hill-Stead and a herd of cows. All younger Avon Old Farms students, in groups of about 4 or 5, periodically spent three or four consecutive days living the life of farm boys by doing chores at Hill-Stead under the supervision of a resident farmer. Early to bed and early to rise etc. It was part of the ritual for the group assigned to Hill-Stead to meet one afternoon at tea time with Mrs. Riddle in her drawing room surrounded by artistic masterpieces and to have cocoa with whipped cream and "goodies". She wanted her "farm boys" to have the social graces and she decreed that once a year in the School Refectory the boys should be served artichokes.

She persuaded her father to finance the construction of Westover School for Girls in Middlebury, Conn., built from 1909-1912. After her father's death in 1913, she inherited his fortune. In 1915, "Mrs. Riddle went down on the Lusitania, but came up again and collected $25,000 damages from Germany". (4) In 1916, she married John Wallace Riddle, United States Ambassador to Russia and Argentina. They had no children.

By 1920 she had acquired about 3,000 acres of farm and woodlands bordering the Farmington River in the neighboring town of Avon. This tract which came with an Esker -- a 50 foot mound left by a glacier -- and the remains of the New Haven to Northampton Canal, had a farmhouse and another larger dairy farm managed by a


4. _Time Magazine_, March 27, 1944.
Mr. Iversen. I am told that Mrs. Riddle bought some 30 farms to put together over 3,000 acres for the school. Since most of these farms were in the town of Avon, she named her school Avon Old Farms.(5)

Planning for Avon Old Farms School

Mrs. Riddle began planning HER SCHOOL early in the 1920's. A core belief of Mrs. Riddle's was that urbanized American youth had lost touch with hand labor and the virtues such experience inculcated.

"Avon Old Farms was to be more than a school; it was to be a place where the coddled sons of wealthy American industrialists could re-capture the Puritan work ethic, a farm village that reflected Old England and New England in equal measure".

Stern's comment that Avon students were "the coddled sons of wealthy American industrialists" is a misrepresentation. Avon Old Farms students were "privileged" but not necessarily "coddled"; few were the sons of "industrialists". Most of the parents were wealthy and the students' fathers included lawyers, doctors, bankers, merchants, politicians, statesmen, professors, artists, writers, etc. What they had in common was an appreciation of the kind of unconventionality that Avon Old Farms School represented.

Mrs. Riddle was arrogant about her architectural knowledge but sought counsel on educational matters from a group of prominent educators, including Francis Mitchell Froelicher, who subsequently became the first Provost of Avon Old Farms but later left to be head of Colorado's Fountain Valley School.

In the 1920's many of the leading educators in the United States subscribed to the concepts of the Progressive Education movement which had its origins in the educational philosophy of John Dewey. Progressive education emphasized individual growth and development in a supporting environment. It gave increased emphasis

5. This information was supplied to me by Mr. George Trautman, the current Headmaster.
to non-academic pursuits like student government, social service, "hand" skills, artistic creativity etc. Competitive team athletics received less emphasis. Mrs. Riddle enthusiastically embraced this philosophy since it re-enforced her conviction that much was lost when growing up on a farm had ceased to be the experience of most young people, particularly the children of affluent, urbanized parents.

The consultants recommended that no effort be made to emulate such established preparatory schools as St. Paul's, St. Mark's, Andover, Exeter and Groton. The principles and practices of progressive education would permeate all aspects of school life and maximum advantage would be taken of the school's location on three thousand acres of farm and forest, of river, stream and pond. Avon Old Farms School would be different.

Organization

Mrs. Riddle set up the Pope-Brook Foundation to manage the finances of the school with a further obligation to see that the Charter that embodied her views of significant and not so significant matters was strictly observed.

The school was administered by a Provost, a Dean of the Faculty, and an Aide to the Provost, who was in charge of discipline, Community Service, Village Government etc. In my time, there were two Provosts, the Rev. Percy Gamble Kammerer, Ph.D., and the Reverend W. Brooke Stabler; Richard Harvey Sears was Dean and Lt. Commander Harold O'D. Hunter, U.S.N. (retired), Aide to the Provost. Mrs. Riddle had trouble with both Dr. Kammerer and the Rev. Stabler (or vice versa) and both eventually resigned.


7. Avon Old Farms was ahead of the times. On the front page of The New York Times for July 29, 1992, was a report that Maryland is expected to be the first state to require all high school students to do seventy-five hours of Community Service in order to graduate.
The school was organized as a New England town and the students, the faculty, the faculty wives and children, the employees were all voting citizens. The Charter required that there be one open Town Meeting a year attended by the entire community and other meetings when there was business to transact. The executive officer of the Village of Avon Old Farms was the Warden who chaired the Council. Judicial decisions in the Village Court, including sentences to Hard Labor for violating ordinances and other "crimes", were rendered by a panel of judges, all elected by the boys. The following report in The Avon News-Letter for May 29th, 1936 gives the flavor of town meetings:

The Town Meeting

"In a short and snappy, 40-minute meeting last Friday morning, all business to be brought up in the spring town meeting was disposed with. Barry read the minutes of the last meeting; then reports of various Village Officers were read. Among these, there were several interesting statements. President Judge Rood suggested that more of the Council members should take the bar course (at present Warden Cobb is the only one who has passed the bar exam.) Commissioner Ross of the Library put in a plea for boys to give books to the Library. Village Attorney Riley suggested that the Council enact a ruling to the effect that if any boy broke something and did not report it in 24 hours, if it was discovered, he should be made to pay double for it.

The first thing brought up in the general discussion was the caterpillar situation, brought up in the last town meeting. R. Hartshorne wanted to know what the Council had done since then about it. Cobb reported that they had appointed a commission to study the job of getting rid of caterpillars on the estate, and that this commission had reported that this was just too big a job. Many in the school are loath to give up the idea,
and the discussion ended when Howland (8) said that this year we got started too late but that if next year we started earlier something could be done.

Riley suggested that a commission be formed which would handle second hand text books, so that at the end of the year boys could get something for their old books, and so that at the beginning of the year boys could get their books cheaper. After considerable discussion on this, it was passed by an almost unanimous vote.

Sample discussion at this point:

Said the Dean: The Faculty feels that the morale of the student is greatly improved if he can start the year with a clean book.

Said Riley: In a way, but we want the money more than the morale.

Ditto by Merriman.

Said Pearmin: To pay $3 for a book one intends to throw away in eight months isn't good for the morale either.

North came up with a resolution that the Village Officers not waste time in meeting reading their reports. Dr. Kammerer looked in the statutes and found that they said the reports were to be read, so that closed the matter.

The inevitable subject of taxes came up this year when Schiffer complained that when a boy did Hard Labor for his taxes he had to work four hours for a measly 25 cents. He was answered by various members of the Village Government, who said the Pope-Brook Foundation pays the Village government for this Hard Labor, thus making up for the taxes, and that the Foundation feels that an hour's Hard

---

8. In 1949 to 1953 when I lived in Princeton, New Jersey, Jonathan Howland was a local physician.
labor by a student is only worth 6 cents. And that was that."

**Architecture**

Clearly Mrs. Riddle had great interest in, and strong opinions about, architecture. She decided to build her dream school in the English Cotswold style using red sandstone from on-site quarries; hand-hewn beams fashioned from timbers cut on the premises were fastened with wooden pegs. The roofs were slate carefully warped and hand-blown glass was used in the leaded casement windows. All faculty houses and suites had wood-burning fireplaces. Stern says she began by importing six English workmen bearing seventeenth century tools but they soon returned home. Five hundred American workers were hired and instructed to "work by rule of thumb and to judge all verticals by eye". The men could take only so much of Riddle's dream and were said to use twentieth century techniques on the sly. One craftsman in wood, Mr. Laneri, continued after the school was operating as Head of the Carpentry Shop and taught interested students some of his skill. The record does not show what architectural assistance she received, since it suited her fancy to take all the credit herself.

She is reported to have spent $5,000,000 in building Avon Old Farms. One, probably apocryphal, story is that Mrs. Riddle on an inspection trip was displeased with one building half completed. She ordered it to be torn down and to be rebuilt according to the orders that she had given but were not followed.

Following is an excerpt from Stern's five-page discussion of Avon Old Farms School:

"Located five miles from Farmington, and approached through a dense forest. Avon Old Farms confronts the arriving visitor with the high cylinder of a brick water tower, a hulking mass that looks like a medieval castle keep. At its base the forge and carpentry shop are clustered like barnacles, superbly crafted, ancient looking buildings. The carpentry shop, a half-timbered structure with the spaces filled with brick work artfully bonded horizontally, vertically, and in
herringbone, was so reverently formed that later when circumstances necessitated cut backs, it was easily transformed into a chapel. Beyond the water tower group, a square stone Gothic tower rises to mark the principal entrance to the quadrangle which is neatly quartered by flag-stone paths; but as for the buildings themselves, Mrs. Riddle brooked few right angles. Irregularly disposed trees graced the lawn, which was bounded by picturesquely detailed common rooms, master's cottages, and dormitories. Dormers plunk out perverse rhythms through the red slate roofs above, the eaves drop almost to the ground, and the red sand-stone walls are beautifully carved to articulate the entries and frame the small windows that puncture the two-foot-thick walls. Passing through the quadrangle, the visitor arrives at the Village Green. The headmaster's and the dean's houses, opposite one another, open onto the Green. Each has an elevated court, enclosed by a low stone wall. The communal center designed for the school was the big Gothic hall of the Refectory. Outside, buttressed stone walls rise one storey to a slate roof and a band of clerestory windows. Inside, Riddle wed the late-Gothic forms to a Baroque sensibility, with enormous arched braces sprung over the room and ending in grotesquely over-scaled spirals. Despite the plane-honed oak and the relatively spare detailing, the Refectory has a luxurious fluidity of form.

For all her concern with traditional craftsmanship, Riddle was not interested in archaeological reconstruction but rather in the role historical styles could play in articulating the dialogue across time that she thought would best develop the character of the school's students. So it was next to the Refectory Riddle undercut the school's medieval styling with an anomaly-- a bank where one might expect a chapel or library. (9) Riddle deemed a bank fundamental to an educational program intent on teaching wealthy young citizens how to come to terms, practically as well as phil-

9. The school's modest library was located in an upstairs room of the bank.
osophically, with their industrial age inheritance. Riddle's bank was the school's one break with medievalism: a modern function required an appropriate form and Riddle chose a Classic Doric portico modeled after America's first temple of finance, the First Bank of the United States, in Philadelphia.

By 1930, Riddle had spent nine years and the lion's share of her fortune constructing Avon Old Farms, which had opened in 1927. Incomplete as it is, it stands as a radically inventive expression of American optimism."

The large, semi-circular stone arch of the imposing entrance facade was filled with a massive wooden barrier in which a small postern gate admitted visitors, one at a time. Just inside the entrance on the left was the small, tastefully wall-papered office with fireplace of Mr. Bill Kegley, Major domo, distinguished by his erect posture, impeccable manners, policeman's uniform and cap, white hair, blue eyes, ruddy Irish complexion. Mr. Kegley was instructed by Mrs. Riddle never to appear on duty without his coat and hat, no matter how high the temperature in the summer months.

There were two "common rooms" on the first floor of each of the four buildings around the Quadrangle. Off each common room was a small classroom where instruction occurred. The common rooms were used for Study Halls at night and for supervised study during the day during those periods when a student was not scheduled for class. The married faculty had three-storied houses built into the corners of the four quadrangle buildings. The unmarried Faculty had suites typically (12) each with a fireplace and combination

10. I think here Stern is letting his fantasy distort reality.


12. There was some variations. Some suites were on two levels and the arrangements were different.
bedroom-sitting room plus bath. The beds were built into alcoves with curtains woven in Spain. All furniture was part of Mrs. Riddle's design. All accommodations had school dial telephone service which we were given to understand was a first in America.

Stern writes and observes with an architect's eye. His description is detailed and accurate. I never remember ever hearing any discussion by students or faculty of the architecture of Avon Old Farms. After the surprise that I suspect all of us had when we first saw this bit of 16th. Century England in the Connecticut landscape, it became the place where we lived, studied, played and worked every day. At my then 6'3", I learned to duck my head automatically to avoid being scalped when passing under stone lintels designed for the altitudes of those who lived in medieval times.

RELIGION

During Dr. Kammerer's tenure, religious observance was limited to a Vesper Service held in the School Refectory at 5:15 on Sunday afternoon. Dr. Kammerer was a polished speaker and his comments were ethical and non-denominational. I overheard a student commending Dr. Kammerer for his Vesper "sermons" by stating that he liked the variety of these comments. Dr. Kammerer replied that he appreciated the comment but he was afraid that the student hadn't been listening carefully. He said he had only one "sermon", a theme with variations. Sometimes he began at the middle and concluded at the beginning; sometimes he began at the end and concluded at the middle. Dr. Kammerer was a sophisticated personality. I think his Ph.D. degree was in Psychology.

Dr. Kammerer, who had been Dean of the Episcopal Cathedral in Pittsburgh, brought with him the Rev. Warner Foote Gookin, A.B., B.D. Mr. Gookin, an elderly, soft-spoken, scholarly bachelor, taught German and a course in the History of Religion which was taken by younger students. He compiled and had printed by the Avon Old Farms Press some selections "in the translation of the Bible made by command of King James of England". He gave the collection the title As Thy Soul Liveth: Testimonies from the Literature of an Ancient People Who Found God.
Mr. Stabler, a graduate of the Union Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia, wanted to give religion a much more prominent place in the life of the school. He held services on Sunday morning in a chapel he created in one of the common rooms. Attendance was voluntary but encouraged.

Day by Day

Much of the texture of our living derives from the detail of our routines.

Lieutenant-Commander Harold O'D. Hunter, M.S., a graduate of the Naval Academy and a naval officer retired from active duty because of a health problem, was charged with the responsibility of seeing that everything ran "shipshape". Commander Hunter, who had a military style mustache and dressed like a British country squire had an accent that the uninformed might think had traces of the Bronx. The more knowledgeable would recognize the source as Savannah, Georgia. He came from a prominent family in that southern city and his brother, "Monk" Hunter, was an ace in World War II. Hunter Field, the airbase in Savannah, is named in his honor.

In his walks about the school, Commander Hunter was accompanied by two enormous, long legged Irish wolf hounds. He got the idea of making sled dogs of these wolf hounds and he began their training by hitching them to his daughter's little red wagon. The sight of Commander Hunter, squatting in this little wagon and shouting, "Mush" to two bewildered wolf hounds was a sight to behold. Either before or after this training, he purchased an Eskimo dog sled for use when there was snow. My recollection was that the experiment was not successful. Fayette Plumb combined Commander Hunter's initials with the name of the British flagship in World War II, the "Hood", and came up with the soubriquet for him--"The Hood".

Breakfast at Avon Old Farms was at 7:15 A.M. and all students and Faculty were expected to be present except for Sunday morning when attendance was voluntary. It was not easy for all students to make it to the Refectory at 7:15 A.M.. Commander Hunter stood at the door and noted who was absent and who was late. He
made it a rule that if there were an excessive number of tardy students, then all students living on the same corridor as the "delinquents" would be required to attend Sunday breakfast. To some students this was questionable justice since the innocent were penalized for the transgressions of others. It did put peer pressure on students to be on time which was what Commander Hunter wanted. I once talked with Commander Hunter about justice. He responded, "In the Navy we are not concerned with justice; we are concerned with decisive action."

There was another consequence of the voluntary Sunday breakfast. An enterprising student, Jack Downing, established in the chemistry lab, "Downing's Diner". He provided breakfasts on order at the lab and even offered room service to those too lazy to get out of bed. He also wrote parents and offered to bake birthday cakes for their sons on order. The following item appeared in The Avon Newsletter for May 29, 1936:

"Much taken by a dish named 'creme brulee' which he, Howland, and Mrs. Kammerer had when they were invited to Mrs. Riddle's, Jack Downing went out and saw the cook and learned how to make it so he is now going to try to make it on his stove in the lab."

Jack went on to study Hotel Management at Cornell which presumably led him to a career in the hotel business. His experience in finding a vocation through extra-curricular activities at Avon Old Farms is not unique. Davis Pratt, the first curator of photography at Harvard, began his vocation as a photographer at Avon Old Farms.

Classes were held from 8:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M., six days a week, Monday through Saturday. Students did not have classes every period. When a student had no class, he attended a common room where an instructor was available for individual help, if desired. Otherwise the student worked on assignments and prepared for classes. Students who had demonstrated better than average personal responsibility had the privilege of studying anywhere on campus they chose. At mid-morning the entire school took a break. Students assembled in the quadrangle and were led in calisthenics by Coach
Jack Fowler. Following this ten minute exercise period, the students rushed to the Refectory where there were pitchers of milk, hot cocoa and crackers. This was also a time when mail could be picked up at the School Post Office, presided over by Mrs. Eleanor B. Braman, A.B., Postmistress.

Luncheon was served at 1:00 P.M. The time between 2:30 and 4:30 was devoted to Community Service or Sports on alternate days. The younger boys had Community Service on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and Sports on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The older boys reversed the schedule and had only two days of Community Service.

Community Service was a distinctive feature of Avon Old Farms. Boys worked chiefly in the forest, stables, farm, garage, chicken run, print shop, carpenter shop and the biological and chemical laboratories. All Community Service activities were supervised and directed by "professionals". After students had spent a minimum time in each of these activities, they could select the one that interested them the most and concentrate on it. Many students acquired experience and interest in areas to which they would otherwise never have been exposed. Some of the "professionals" like Verne Priest, who had been a guide in hunting camps in Maine; Mr. Laneri, a craftsman in woodworking; Mr. Stein, the master printer in charge of an 18th. century hand-printing press, were personalities in themselves.

Mrs. Riddle outlawed inter-scholastic athletic competition and believed all sports should be outside activities, with a few exceptions, which meant no basketball, gymnastics or indoor swimming. The intramural competition was between two clubs, the Diogenes and the Eagles. Boys on enrolling at Avon were assigned

13. Pomeroy Barry of the Class of 1937 acquired the reputation of being the best student mechanic of cars, trucks, tractors and farm equipment.
at random to one or the other of these groups. (14) The range of sports activities was extensive and included: football, baseball, track, tennis, soccer, skating, ice hockey, rowing, skiing, golf, boxing, fencing, jiu jitsu, fishing, fly casting, wood chopping, shooting, horse back riding (15) and polo (16) -- "all under experienced guidance".

At 5:15 P.M. every day each faculty member held an academic extra help period, which a student could attend voluntarily or by "invitation".

Dinner was at 6:15 P.M. followed by about an hour's free time before faculty-supervised Study Hall in the various Common Rooms. The Faculty at this hour had coffee and chit-chat at the house of a married faculty member scheduled in rotation. The younger boys studied for an hour and the older boys for an hour and

14. Each of the four buildings that composed the quadrangle had a totem sculptured figure: Diogenes, an Eagle, a Pelican and an Elephant.

15. Diminutive, bright, perky, 60-pound "Skippy" Self, Third Former, was the star of the annual Avon Old Farms Horse Show. His mother, Margaret Cabell Self, reared in the red clay, hunting country of Virginia was a prominent horse woman and author of thirteen books on horses and four works of fiction.

16. The 1937 Polo Team was captained by Charlie Perkins of Middleburg, Va., who had an artificial lower leg which did not deter him from playing tennis as well as Polo. The story was that once in the heat of a game, his artificial leg fell off.

Paul Schoellkopf of the multi-million dollar family that owned the Niagara Power Co. also was on that team.
a half. Lights out at 10:00 P.M. for older boys, an half hour earlier for younger boys.(17)

On Saturdays, classes were held until 1:00 P.M. and the afternoon was "free" time. Some boys signed up to spend the afternoon in near-by Hartford and were driven to and fro by Mr. Kegley in the school limousine. Typically Avon Old Farms students had their own special interests and Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday until 5:15 P.M. Vesper Service were the times these interests could be pursued.

Saturday night was "Movie Night" in the Refectory with students operating the projectors. The News-Letter announced that "A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court" with Will Rogers and a "March of Time" was scheduled for May 30th. followed by "Under Two Flags" the following Saturday night.

A unique feature of Avon Old Farms were Verne Priest's "cook-outs" each Wednesday and Saturday night. Boys could sign up to attend and each cook-out could handle about 30 boys and Faculty. Most of the year the cook-outs were held at "The Island" about a two-mile walk from school on a "wagon" trail through the woods. Verne had built an overhead shelter and a long wooden table with benches. Boys under Verne's supervision built a fire in a pit and cooked in smoke-blackened buckets Verne's specialties: "Slumgullion" and "Pothellion" [mostly hamburger meat and elbow macaroni], plus coffee, tea and bread. In the depths of winter Verne operated from a log cabin about a quarter mile from school.

There were few unprogrammed moments for students and Faculty in an Avon Old Farms' day.

---

17. The Common Room in No. Four Building was used after lunch and dinner exclusively as a "smoking" and club room by Fifth and Sixth Formers who had received their parents' permission to smoke. I hope this tolerance for smoking did not bring some of these students to premature deaths.
Holidays.

There were two school holidays-- Thanksgiving and Founder's Day. On both occasions parents were invited to spend the day at the school.

On Thanksgiving morning the final football game between the Eagles and the Diogenes was played followed by a sumptuous Thanksgiving Day dinner prepared by Tony Candels. It was a custom to have a parade of turkeys. One boy from each table was assigned to carry in from the kitchen a huge turkey and in a long line the bearers paraded up and down the aisles. The boys sat at table by age groups which meant that some of the elected were relatively diminutive and they undertook their assignment with considerable trepidation. On one occasion, I believe Bronson Eden as a First or Second Former was turkey bearer for Mr. Thayer's table. When he finally reached his destination and he thought he had survived his ordeal, he said to Mr. Thayer, "Here it is, Sir. I made it." At that moment the turkey rolled off the platter onto Mr. Thayer's extended arms and he found himself with a "bird-in-hand".

The following account of the Founder's Day of May, 1936, appeared in the Avon News-Letter:

FOUNDER'S DAY

"There has been considerable argument about the number of people that were here Founder's Day, so unfortunately we cannot say there were more here than ever before, and since the privilege of saying this has been taken away from us, we can say the other thing: this Founder's Day was about the best we ever had. Anyway there were a lot of people here and during the morning most of them went down to the Flats to witness a thrilling super-combined-junior-senior-inter-club Track Meet on the best Founder's Day (climatically) for four years.(18)

18. I believe this report was written by Pete Seeger. As an Avon student, Pete's major interest was not music but journalism and broad jumping. He was a better journalist than a broad jumper but he had enthusiasm for both.
At 1:00 P.M. they came up to school and ate the usual superlative luncheon in the Refectory. (19) Towards the end of the meal Dr. Kammerer said several words to the parents and expressed his pleasure that this year the Founder was able to be with us. Mrs. Riddle made a few remarks in reply.

(20)

After lunch there was a meeting of the Board of Regents (21) in the Library and then after a longish interval there was a polo game with Andover. That evening most of the boys went out with their parents."

19. I never heard a single criticism of the food at Avon Old Farms.

20. Mrs. Riddle rarely appeared on campus. Whatever tensions and disagreements she had with Dr. Kammerer and the Reverend Stabler were never discussed with, or by, the Faculty. Time Magazine reported she and her Provost were incommunicado and only talked through their lawyers.

21. The Board of Regents included:

- The Hon. Charles Francis Adams of Boston
- Joseph Alsop of Avon
- Richard Bissell of Hartford
- Richard Burlingame of West Redding,
- Mrs. Theophilus Cheshire of Charleston
- George Draper, M.D., of New York City
- Brooks Emeny of Cleveland
- Clement Gile of Pittsburgh
- Wilmarth Lewis of Farmington
- Harold Pardee, M.D. of New York City
- Oliver H. Perry Pepper, M.D. of Ithan, Pa.
- Mrs. William Phillips of Boston
- Clifford L. Porter of New York City
- Paul Schoellkopf of Niagara Falls
- J. Laurance Sprunt of Wilmington, N.C.
- Bernard Trafford of Boston
Dress Code

To Mrs. Riddle the Dress Code was serious business. Only authorized clothing was permitted which had to be purchased from Brooks Brothers in New York City. Daytime wear included gray flannel trousers, white shirts with ties, a herringbone, gray tweed jacket. As an alternative to the herringbone tweed jacket in the daytime, students could wear the official Avon Old Farms jacket: rose-colored, black trim, brass buttons and pocket patch with the school insignia, a Winged Beaver. In the evening, the costume consisted of black socks and black shoes or black patent-leather "pumps", Oxford-gray, black striped trousers like those worn at formal weddings; black double breasted suit coats; white shirts with starched, detachable collars and hand-tied bow ties (NO READY-TIED TIES; GENTLEMEN MUST LEARN TO TIE A TIE PROPERLY). On Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday until Vespers, blue jeans were acceptable and many boys wore cowboy shirts, boots and hats. L.L. Bean boots were the fashionable cold weather footwear and some sported hunting knives carried in leather sheaths attached to belts. This informal costume was also worn while doing Community Service activities.

Faculty wives were expected to wear formal gowns to dinner which was served by candle light at long oaken tables with benches. Service was silver with some pewter bowls and pitchers.

Academics

In accordance with its educational philosophy emphasizing the worth of the individual, Avon Old Farms had a policy of admitting students with a wide range of scholastic abilities and needs. Most important, the school had the flexibility to fit the course of study to the student. Some transfer students who had not been happy at well-known, "traditional" preparatory schools found Avon a different and congenial environment.

As an extreme example, one student of limited scholastic ability had his own tutor for academic studies and participated in all other school activities. Several Faculty (including me) working with a Harvard-trained educational psychologist offered special help to students with reading disabilities of greater and lesser degree.
Dan Gates had a very high I.Q. and a very severe reading disability. Even though his condition was diagnosed in the elementary grades and although he received special instruction in reading for six or more years, he never achieved a level of reading ability that permitted him to attend college. Avon was able to devise an instructional program that gave Dan a good education. He once commented that the most important outcome of his education at Avon was that he learned that, though he had a reading disability, he was not dumb. During the Cold War years he went to Russia to tell the Russians how to improve their dairy production. Dan Gates was one of the few Avon students who was really a farmer.\(^{22}\)

Two students were epileptic. Their classmates learned how to be of assistance when they had seizures. These individuals, good students, were active in all school programs, and were accepted without any questions by their peers. Perhaps the students at Avon were so diverse that epilepsy was just another difference among many differences.

"Grades" were not emphasized at Avon even though the school had its share of high academic achievers. There was no "Dean's List"; no academic distinctions were acknowledged at graduation.

Circa 1938, Dean Sears with the assistance of Dr. Frederick Davis and Mr. Gookin devised a "Statement of Progress" which rated students in terms of EFFORT and ACHIEVEMENT. The Statement of Progress replaced the system that had been previously used. Dr. Davis has described the Statement in his book *Educational*

---

22. If Avon Old Farms had at least one real farmer, it also had one real prince, Prince Nicholas Cantacuzene of Russia, Class of 1934. The fact that Mrs. Riddle's husband had been the United States Ambassador to Czarist Russia is likely to have had something to do with the Prince's enrollment in Avon Old Farms. A dwarf, Henry Owen Tudor, member of a prominent Boston family, graduated from Avon Old Farms in 1930. He went on to graduate from Harvard magnum cum laude, received a law degree from the Harvard Law School and became a successful Boston lawyer.
"To supplement marks based on relative achievement levels, ratings of the amount of effort exerted by pupils are often effective for motivational purposes. Pupils who have somewhat limited capacities for learning often work very hard only to find their marks in achievement are mediocre or even poor while their more intellectually gifted classmates may loaf along, expend very little effort and obtain high marks. Some means of recognizing effort should be provided and separate ratings in this trait are probably best. At Avon the Effort of each student is rated in five characteristics:

1. Classroom participation.
2. Completion of assignments.
3. Readiness to learn.
4. Self-reliance.
5. Teachableness.

A total Effort Rating Score is obtained by summing the weights representing a pupil's ratings in the five characteristics. [The ratings are indicated on a line with categories describing observed behavior.]

The Achievement Rating has several parts, rating the pupil in terms of:

1. In terms of College Preparation.
2. In terms of his Class Group.
3. Work Habits.

23. Davis, Frederick B. Educational Measurements and their Interpretations. Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1964. Pp. 294-295. At the time of publication, Dr. Davis was a Professor at the University of Pennsylvania.
At the bottom of each pupil's Statement of Progress is a section where the instructor writes Specific Recommendations.

Each student had a member of the Faculty as his Advisor. The pupil's Statement of Progress was given to the Advisor who discussed it with the pupil in conference.

All Avon students annually took the Cooperative Achievement Tests and a cumulative profile of the results over the years was made for every student. This profile was discussed with each student.

The purpose of this elaborate evaluation system was to increase a pupil's knowledge of himself and de-emphasize competition with other students.

Courses of Study

One subject area where the Progressive Education philosophy was most prominent were the Biological Science courses taught by Mr. Holland Sperry and Mr. Reginald MacHaffie, both of whom had taught at the Lincoln School of Columbia University. Students in these courses, primarily First to Fourth Formers, learned biological principles and methodology through "projects". The News-Letter of May 29th, 1936 describes two "projects":

"RATS. It is now within the realm of possibility that the Biology Department has found a new rat mutation. In Dr. Keeler's letter to Mr. Sperry he stated that if the latter would procure some red-eyed yellows and mate them with our mutants, the results would definitely establish whether they are allomorphs of the red-eyed yellows or are a new mutation." (24)

24. The passage goes on at considerable length.
"HAWKS. The little hawks which Browning (25) is taking care of are getting along pretty well and are quite healthy, although there are now only two of them instead of three. It has not yet been determined what kind they are, as all young hawks look the same, but it is generally supposed that they are of the red-shouldered variety."

One student dug up "Old Sol", a deceased Hill-Stead bull, assembled the skeleton and exhibited him at the World's Fair in Flushing Meadows.

"Progressive Education. Last Tuesday when many Sixth Formers assembled in the lab for a review test in Physics, they were astonished to view the following upon the blackboard put there by mischievous students: 'Take a uniform brass bar and put your feet on it; assume you knew the bar-keeper and that your credit is good; order two beers. Now how much weight is on the bar? Also at what angle is the floor tipping?' "(26)

Sometimes a project could get out of hand. Some students approached Mr. MacHaffie and asked him how powder could be mixed to make a pipe bomb. He obliged. Unbeknownst to him, they constructed a pipe bomb and set it off in an empty metal shed on the storage lot of the Hercules Powder Plant in Avon with dramatic results. F.B.I. agents from the Hartford office descended on the school looking for German agents.

Another area where the Progressive Education philosophy was prominent was the Art Department under the direction of Paul Cushing Child whose after-Avon fate was to be known as Julia Child's husband, Paul. Paul's art class was run as a studio. Paul's specialty was photography but students worked in all the media. Again an excerpt from the Avon News-Letter:

25. Kirk Browning after World War II became a pioneer in TV, directing more than 700 telecasts of operas, symphony concerts, musicals, dramas, recitals, ballets. He was the first and best of his kind.

26. From the Avon News-Letter. The item gives evidence that Avon students knew about Progressive Education in practice and theory.
"PHOTOGRAPHY: On the Monday after Founder's Day, the Hartford Courant appeared with two photographs which had been in our exhibit. The two photographs were by Mssrs. Trimingham and Owre, but they were not their prize pictures. The pictures that were chosen were ones that could easily show on rough paper; the tender lines of some of the best photographs would just have been wasted."

"ART. All that seems to have occurred in the Art Room is that Franky Hart has developed some talent in oil painting and is now pursuing it. It is a little late in the year to get interested in this sort of thing, but, as we have always said sagely, 'Better late than never'."

Alexander Sturm, a Sixth Former, wrote, illustrated and had published a "children's" book

---

27. DeForest Trimingham and his older brother, Kenneth Trimingham, attended Avon Old Farms. They were members of the Trimingham family that owns and operates the well-known Trimingham Brothers Store in Bermuda.

I recall asking DeForest what his favorite book was. He replied he didn't have any because he had never read a book voluntarily. When I expressed surprise and wondered how that could be, he replied, "It's simple. I live in Bermuda. We have a tennis court. My father races six meter yachts. I go fishing. Nobody in Bermuda reads books."

Al Owre was an excellent student who won a big scholarship from Yale.

28. Franky Hart was a First Former, a neophyte polo player and one of my "charges". One Sunday just before Vespers, I asked Frank what he had been doing on Sunday, a "free" time for Avon students. He replied, "I went fox hunting in Virginia. My father picked me up in his airplane on Saturday and flew me back today." I never checked his story for truthfulness. At Avon such a happening was possible.
entitled The Problem Fox. (29) Augustus Fox's problem was that he was too intelligent to get along in a world peopled by mediocrities. Alex inherited from his father, Justin Sturm, once a Yale football star and later a stage designer, a powerful athletic body but he had no interest in athletics; he was an "artist". He refused to attend art classes with Paul Child because it might inhibit his creativity. He received permission to work in his room alone. Alex wore his hair long at a time when few followed this fashion. His hair and contempt for ordinary mortals disturbed some of his peers who "ganged up" on him, held him down and sheared his golden locks. At the next Town Meeting Alex rose to accuse his persecutors, many of whom held offices in the Village Government, of Nazi-like tactics. It caused a lively debate.

Most of the traditional subjects were taught in the traditional way. The teacher of French, Jean Emile Amedee Fraisier (30), had a competitive system which encouraged students to do extensive individual reading in French. (31) In the Refectory there was a "French Table" where only French was spoken.


30. For some reason he was known as "Fritz". Fritz had been in the Air Corps in World War I and when World War II was under way, he had the urge to join up again. He communicated this interest to one of his students, Charlie Towers, whose father was Admiral John C. Towers of the U.S. Navy and one of the commanders of the NC-4 which made an epochal flight across the Atlantic in the 1920's. Admiral Towers called and arranged to meet Fritz at Brainard Air Field in Hartford. The Admiral offered Fritz an administrative job in a school to train tail gunners. Fritz declined. He said he wanted to be a combat pilot but recognized he was too old for that but he said he would make a wonderful spy if he were dropped by parachute over France. He wanted action, not a desk job.

31. Jimmy Hewes was at the top of the list with some phenomenal number of pages.
Performing Arts. In the first few years of the school, a music teacher, Mr. Ernest Kitson, (32) presented excellent productions of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, using all local talent including students, Faculty, Faculty wives and children. Mr. Cooke, teacher of English, directed a quality performance of Hamlet using the same personnel.

The Glee Club was a popular activity. In 1937, thirty-five students participated. The Avon News-Letter had the following account of a concert in 1936:

GLEE CLUB CONCERT

"The Founder Day's Eve Glee Club Concert lasted about an hour and the Gunnery School Glee Club alternated with ours in the singing. They started the evening by singing two chants and one carol. They set such a high standard of excellence that several members of the Avon Glee Club felt faint. They managed to get up and sing, however, extremely well. Then after a few wonderful Gilbert and Sullivan choruses by the Gunnery boys, our nonette sang two merry madrigals very well. The entire Avon Glee Club then finished up the program by singing "The March of the Peers" from Iolanthe, as they had never sung it before."

Mr. Loder, Music teacher in 1937, who had studied piano in France with Mme. Nadia Boulanger, invited this world-renowned artist and teacher to play for the boys during one of her visits to America. After a brilliant performance of several classical selections, she took questions from the boys. One asked her why she didn't play some jazz music for them. She gave a gracious answer although I do not remember her precise words.

32. Mr. Kitson left Avon Old Farms when the first Provost, Mr. Froelicher, and most of the Faculty went to Colorado to found the Fountain Valley School. Mr. Kitson returned to Avon about 1940. Another music teacher was Mr. Joseph Hawthorne, a young man, who later became conductor of the Dallas Symphony [I think].
Faculty

The teaching Faculty in 1940 were:

Francis Hyde Bangs, M.A.          English
Thomas C.T. Buckley, M.A.         Social Science
Paul Cushing Child                Fine Arts
Douglas Courtney, B.S.            English
John S. Custer, Ph.D.             History
Frederick B. Davis, Ed.M.         Ed. Psychologist
Clarence Derrick, A.M.             English
John R. Fowler, B.S.              Sports leader
Jean E.A. Fraisier, A.B.          French
Frank G. Gerard, M.A.             Mathematics
Warren F. Gookin, B.D.            German/Religion
Bernard Hammons                   Riding Instructor
Gorham B. Harper, B.S.            Chem. and Physics
Wendell H. Langdon, M.A.          Mathematics
Reginald McHaffie, M.A.           Biology/Chemistry
Levings H. Somers, A.B.           Mathematics
Holland R. Sperry, B.S.           General Science
Max Stein                         Printing
Gordon Sunbury, M.A.              English/History
Robert Thayer, M.A.               English

Note: This list taken from the **Avon Old Farms Alumni Directory: 1930-1940** does not include any music teacher. My recollection is that James Loder taught Music and German at this time. Only Avon Old Farms would include among the Faculty positions for a "Sports Leader", a "Riding Instructor" and a "Printer".

Staff

In 1977, my son, Tom Derrick, a graduate student at Harvard, attended a guest lecture by Pete Seeger. Pete surprised his audience by not talking about folk music or politics. (33) He talked about journalism and mentioned that his interest in journalism had begun at Avon Old Farms School where he founded his one person **Avon News-Letter**. Pete had been a Harvard undergraduate but dropped out because the University did not offer courses that fostered his interest in journalism.

After the lecture, Tom talked briefly to Pete Seeger about Avon Old Farms and reported that Pete spoke fondly of his memories of Bill Kegley and Verne Priest, members of the Staff, an interesting commentary on who influences students. I have already written about Bill Kegley and now introduce Verne Priest of French Canadian ancestry who had been a Maine guide and was in charge of the woods at Avon Old Farms. Here are some excerpts from Verne's Stories of His Father written by Dan North and printed in The Winged Beaver for 1937, the Avon student annual:

Let us turn to our friend Verne, and endeavor to appreciate this extraordinary person's storytelling ability, remembering all the while the doubtful veracity of a woodsman's tale, especially that of one from the State of Maine.

When Verne was trapping bear with his father one winter, says he, "We was using cow-mouse for bait. Well, along come the warden, the head warden at that, too. He asks Fadder, "What's yuh using for bait, Horace?"

"Cow-mouse," Fadder says, and he was, too. Ol' Masters looks at him and says, "Yuh can't kid me. What's yuh usin' for bait?"

"No," Fadder says. I"m usin' cow-mouse; wanna see?"

"Nope," he says. "You can't kid me, you ol' fool". An' off he went.

By this time the little cabin where Verne presides over the camp suppers on Wednesday and Saturday nights is filled with laughter induced by Verne's tale and his beaming, sweating countenance.

SNAP SHOTS

To me, the real Avon Old Farms was the boys. Not all were likable, but most were; a few were brilliant but most were not. They were an interesting group, diverse in personalities, backgrounds, interests and
talents. I have mentioned some of these boys in my text and footnotes but here are a few others.

Michael Leslie Ogilvie Faber was one of the group of very young English schoolboys sent for safety to schools in the United States during the Blitz of London. Here is part of Michael's observations as recorded in the Avonian for Feb. 20, 1942:

"Little piles of snow surround me as I shovel a path towards the white boards of the hockey rink. Small, snow-capped hills are all about me, and to my left is Herby Phelps [a school employee] working his hardest to get the ice cleared. In front of me is a group of boys who are taking advantage of the section of ice that has been cleared and are playing hockey. I feel BEASTLY cold and miserable as the snow falls in my face. My ears are freezing and my toes so cold I can't move them. COMMUNITY SERVICE, Bah! The person who invented it must have been mad!"

A second diminutive (then) Briton was Deforest Trimmingham of Bermuda. Typically when a person is in a new situation, one in which he has never been before, the person behaves cautiously, timorously, and tentatively. Not Deforest. About 13 years old he had never been on ice skates but he approached ice skating with enthusiastic abandon and on his second day launched into pursuing a hockey puck, flailing away with his stick, whirling and falling, scrambling and falling, a performance worthy of Charley Chaplin. It was a sight to behold.

Fayette Rumsey Plumb of Berwyn, Pa., whose family manufactured Plumb hammers and hatchets, had a way with words, being particularly adept at conjuring up colorful appellations for Faculty. Between some students and some Faculty there was an easy, informal relationship. One morning when Mr. Davis was talking with a visitor, Fayette burst in and exclaimed, "Davis, Old Sock, Old Puss, Old Wash-in-the Eye, I'm going to take a rain check!" [Translation-- "I won't be in class today".] I shall refrain from giving other examples of Fayette's inventiveness in deference to the dignity of departed Faculty.

On one occasion an old Edison dictaphone became available to us, although we never used it. It had a
tube with a funnel-like mouth piece attached to a part with a rotating, wax cylinder. Late one afternoon in Building # 4 when no one was around, I overheard Fay- ette in another room all by himself using the dicta- phone and pretending to be Graham MacNamee broadcasting a description of the Beauty Parade on the Board Walk at Atlantic city. His extemporaneous commentary was hilar- ious.

I find among my "stuff", Fayette Plumb's account of what he called "The Derrick-Plumb Disaster":

"It was in December of 1935 when we were hit by a snow storm big enough to be called a blizzard. After the wind had stopped blowing and the snow had stopped falling, we emerged from within our building. Mr. Derrick, after chewing up some grub in the grub hall, decided it would be a fine idea to go tobogganing. This idea was considered a good one by two other guys that had been sitting by him during the meal. One of these was a big "butter-and-egg man from the West.(34)

Herr Derrick said it would be easy because he knew a guy over in Building #2 that had a seven seater that he could get. Well, the bird from Berwyn showed up with bells on but the Big Westerner had a date at Oscar's. (35) Thus, Mr. Derrick and the kid from the Key Stone State decided to go down without the guy from "Dee-troit".(36) A gentleman

---

34. Richard E. Williams of Grosse Point, Michigan. The Williams' family owned the Mennen Company. Dick's older brother became Governor of Michigan and was known as "Soapy" Williams because of the family business.

The "Berwynian" was obviously Fayette.

35. Oscar ran a store where students could buy candy, sundries etc.

36. Perhaps Fayette picked up his lingo from Jimmy Cagney movies.
from Litchfield (37) gave us a powerful shove and Derrick and Plumb were under way.

Having very little experience with the sport, we were quite unable to keep in the trough. Once or twice we nearly climbed the embankment. After going what seemed miles, the slide straightened out so I sat back to enjoy the scenery, when from the front came a shout that there was a sharp curve ahead. This time the "New Britainer" (38) wasn't wrong. We tried to bank the toboggan but she wouldn't bank. The moment was at hand. Yes, she was headed right for a fine grove of hard oak and pine. Then Herr Derrick yelled to bail out which I did and didn't lose any time doing it. In about three seconds the beautiful toboggan was a mass of splinters.

This was the great Derrick-Plumb Disaster in 1935." (39)

Victor Koechl was a Second Former (Eighth Grader) who belonged to the "precocious set". Avon Old Farms students did not have much time to listen to the radio but most had receivers and some had, in addition, crystal sets with earphones that could be used surreptitiously "after lights" to listen to WTIC Hartford which had its signal tower on Avon Mountain a few miles away. I engaged Victor in idle conversation one time when he was listening to his radio. I asked, "Victor, what radio programs do you like?" "Well, sir," he responded, "I have a predilection for Super-Man".

Jonathan Barry, Class of 1943, a 12-year old First Former, son of Philip Barry, playwright, who wrote The Philadelphia Story, attended Avon for one year. He was a bright, attractive youngster and I was assigned to be his advisor. I once asked Jonathan which of his father's plays was his favorite. He said he liked Here Come

37. Dave Doster and his brother Alexis were from Litchfield in northwestern Connecticut, an old town with magnificent colonial houses.

38. I grew up in New Britain, about ten miles from Avon.

39. A mixture of fact and fiction.
the Clowns. This surprised me because that particular play differed from all the others which were sophisticated comedies of "high society". It was Barry's one "serious" drama and did not have the success of the plays for which he is known. Jonathan said he liked the part about the "Man from County Kerry"; sitting on my couch with his short legs dangling three inches from the floor, he told me the "story" which I later looked up in the play.

"There was a Man from County Kerry. One day HE packed his bag, took down his walking stick and said, 'Tomorrow I'm goin' to Connemara'.

THEY said, 'You mean your goin' to Connemara, God Willin'.

He said, 'I mean I'm goin to Connemara'.

The Good Lord overheard what the Man from County Kerry said and was displeased. He took the Man from County Kerry and changed him into a frog and put him into a frog pond where he stayed for a long time. One day the Good Lord decided that the Man from County Kerry had learned his lesson and took him out of the frog pond, changed him back to himself and returned him to County Kerry.

One day the Man from County Kerry packed his bag, took down his walking stick and said, 'Tomorrow I'm goin' to Connemara'.

THEY said, 'You mean you're goin' to Connemara, God Willin'.

HE said, 'I mean that I'm goin' to Connemara, OR BACK TO THE FROG POND'!

Davis Weld Pratt--Photography Expert. [1923-1991]

I remember Davis Weld Pratt of Chestnut Hill, Mass. as he was when he was Second Former [8th. Grade] at the Avon Old Farms School in 1937. I left the Avon Old Farms School in 1941 before Davis graduated. As a classroom teacher for many years in two secondary schools and two universities, I have taught hundreds of students, perhaps thousands. I have not forgotten Davis Pratt.
Davis was an individualist, a pixie, the type of person the Avon Old Farms educational philosophy [c. 1937] was designed to enroll and foster.

Mrs. Riddle, The Founder, decreed that interscholastic athletic competition would not be permitted at Avon Old Farms. The Lower Forms had two afternoons of "sports" and the Upper Forms had three afternoons. Avon Old Farms School in the 1930's and 1940's did not attract many boys with developed interest in competitive athletics. Even among the Avon students there were those with more interest and talent in athletics and those with less. I was assigned to "supervise" ["coach" would not be an accurate description] the Lower Form boys and we went through the motions and perhaps profited by the fresh air and sunshine.

In the Spring we took ourselves to the Flats along the bank of the Farmington River and "played" at baseball. Davis Pratt found himself the right fielder and everyone knows what kind of player gets that assignment in juvenile baseball. On one occasion a batter by accident hit a ball to the outfield in right, something that had never happened before. By necessity, our attention was directed to the right fielder who at first glance was nowhere to be seen. On a second look we saw Davis prone in the meadow grass facing away from the diamond, peering through field glasses at whatever birds or other fauna might be visible. Davis Pratt had his own set of priorities.

"Pete" Seeger, Class of 1936, produced entirely by himself The Avon Weekly News-Letter which still existed when Davis was a student. I remember only one of the stories Davis wrote. It was an analysis and commentary on the contents of Dean Sears' garbage can. Davis had an original mind.

At a Fall Break, Davis requested that I give him a ride home in my Ford. To support his plea, he wrote the following verses which he presciently signed:

"Davis Weld Pratt, Curator"  "Fri. Nov. 3: 11:20 A.M.

"I must write you a lovely poem
About the ques. of getting home.
I have pled and will pled no more,
I have finished and will shut the door
Of all arguments thick and thin.
If you can hear about the din.  
The roar of three yelling hard  
Of trying to get a ride in your car.  
Gas and oil and all you need  
Will be given to you by we three.  
I now sign off and pray the Lord  
That we will get a ride in your Ford.

For further details see your local newspaper."

Years later I stopped by the Photographic Room of the Fogg Art Museum. I talked briefly with Davis and I got the impression that he did not look back at his school days at Avon Old Farms with pleasure and did not want to talk about it. Davis was a shy person and it may be that I misread his attitude. I note, however, that his obituary makes no reference to his attendance at Avon.

These are my recollections of an interesting personality that I knew briefly once upon a time. Below is Davis Pratt's Obituary in the New York Times, dated October 16, 1991, a Davis Pratt I never knew:

DAVIS PRATT IS DEAD; PHOTOGRAPHY EXPERT AT HARVARD WAS 68.

Davis Pratt, the associate curator of photographs at the Fogg Art Museum of Harvard University and a senior lecturer on fine arts at the university, died on Monday in Cambridge, Mass. He was 68.

He died of cancer, said his son, Samuel.

Mr. Pratt had held his position at the Fogg since 1971, and was instrumental in the development of the museum's photographic collection. He taught the history of photography at the university for many years, and was the author of "The Photographic Eye of Ben Shahn" (1975).

Born in Newton, Mass., in 1923, Mr. Pratt served in the Coast Guard during World War II before graduating from Harvard in 1946. After the war he photographed the plight of refugees in Europe, among other subjects, for various government and international agencies, and worked as a freelance photojournalist.
In 1962 Mr. Pratt worked as a special assistant under Edward Steichen in the photography department of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City where he carried out picture research for "The Bitter Years", the first major survey of work by the photographers of the Depression-era Farm Security Administration. From 1966 to 1971 Mr. Pratt served as curator of still photography at the Carpenter Center of the Visual Arts at Harvard.

In addition to his son, of New Canaan, Conn., Mr. Pratt is survived by two brothers, two sisters, two half-brothers and his stepmother.

I was told by a Harvard professor of art that Davis Pratt first came to the Fogg Museum as an unpaid volunteer. He made himself indispensable and created a collection of photographs where none had existed.

Moral: If no niche exists, create one for yourself through persistence, dedication and hard work.

John Gillispie Magee, son of missionaries to China, came to Avon Old Farms in 1939, having already graduated from the Rugby School in England. He wrote a collection of poems which he printed on the hand press in the Print Shop. After leaving Avon and giving up the scholarship he had won to Yale, he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and was killed on December 11, 1941. On the back of an envelope shortly before he died, he wrote a sonnet which he entitled "High Flight":

"Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth, And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings; Sunward I've climbed and joined the tumbling mirth Of sun-split clouds-- and done a hundred things You have not dreamed of-- wheeled and soared and swung High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there, I've chased the shouting wind along and flung My eager craft through floorless halls of air. Up, up the long delicious burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace,
Where never lark or even eagle flew;
And while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
And put out my hand, and touched the face of God."

Happy Landings, Herzberg, Paine and Works.
Pp. 87-88.

The Avonian for February 20, 1942, in its story on John Magee printed the following excerpt from The Winged Beaver of 1940:

"He came from Rugby with refreshing thoughts and effervescent Anglican vitality. He has exerted his poetic personality to the nth degree and won for himself a host of friends. John has many ambitions, and if we may quote him, one of them is to follow 'in the footsteps of Beauty, whether they lead to Gauguin, Rupert Brooks or Mrs. Keep!'"

In the same edition of the Avonian is this letter:

"Dear Sir:

It is interesting for one who saw the life that John Magee led while at Avon to see and hear boys who were schooling with him speak of him now with angelic tone. In his time he was denoted by the other boys as a 'queer.' Those same boys who at the time were strongest in condemning him now speak of him as a sort of saint that they had known well and admired for his admirable traits. Such is life, however. One is never fully appreciated in his own surroundings, or by his intimate fellows until he has left their company for other places, or has died. Thus it is with our own new-found hero.

Observant Subscriber"
Daniel F. Gates.

Of the many students I have taught over many years, I have kept contact with less than a half dozen. Of these handful, Dan Gates, whom I taught at Avon Old Farms about 1937-1941, is pre-eminent. I have visited him at his home, Gates' Homestead Farm in Chittenango, N.Y., 16 miles from Syracuse, about four times and he has called me on the telephone once a year for fifty years. About 20 years ago, Dan and his entire family visited us in Gainesville.

Dan is very intelligent and articulate but has had to live with "dyslexia", which in his case was diagnosed in the elementary grades but continued to impede his learning via the printed word. ["Dyslexia" is the term that is used but I don't believe we know just what it is, what causes it, or what to do about it.] We had a group of students with reading problems who came to Avon partly because we had a special reading program directed by a succession of educational psychologists trained by Dr. Dearborn of Harvard. As a beginning teacher, I was assigned to assist in this program working successively with Dr. Frederick Zehrer, Dr. Frederick B. Davis, Dr. Douglas Courtney and others. That is how I came to teach Dan Gates, one on one, about 20 periods a week for several years. We got to know each other quite well. Dan later told me that the most important thing we gave him was self-confidence; he had a learning disability but he was not "dumb". From me, he says, he learned the word "abattoir" and at the time he thought there is a word he would never use. Forty-five years later he used it when he was attending a meeting at Brown University. He telephoned me a few days later to announce this great event. From Dan, I learned all I know about farming. On his return from a vacation break, he brought packets of seed and set me the task of identifying them. He was delighted that the only one I could identify was corn!

In 1991 I did not hear from Dan; later I learned why. He called and described in graphic detail "a lost year", to use his phrase. About Valentine's Day of 1991, he climbed a ladder in his barn to get something stored on a level above. The ladder slipped and Dan fell into a narrow concrete passageway, "breaking his neck" [shorthand for what happened] and suffering injuries to his head and shoulders. He lay immobilized, paralyzed except for limited movement in one leg. Dan
had sold his large dairy herd several years before and now rents his barn to a dairy farmer who he knew would not return for 12 hours. There was no use to call out because there was no one to hear his cries for help. About two and a half hours later, by chance, the one employee Dan now has came to the barn, discovered Dan and called the ambulance.

Months of rehabilitation followed. For a time he could not move his limbs and could only ring a bell by holding it in his teeth. Dan said he told his doctor that his goal was to achieve the ability to "pick his nose and zip his zipper when it was expeditious to do so". A year later he can do both of these feats and, in addition, can drive his tractor and car. He still suffers deleterious effects and it takes a long time to dress and to eat breakfast after which exertions he finds it necessary to rest. Dan carries out the direction of his acreage and says that each day there are decisions to be made. Once a month he goes back to the rehab clinic to encourage his former "colleagues in pain". He acquired at the clinic a new friend, a fellow patient, a retired doctor who emigrated from the Ukraine years ago. Dan talked with him about Alexander Kerensky, premier of Russia in 1917, whom Dan had met at a conference at Colgate. His doctor friend knew all about Kerensky and lots more.

All of this description of a traumatic experience was conveyed to us with a vigor and good spirit that is incredible. I always knew Dan Gates was an extraordinary individual. This latest chapter attests to it.

Summing Up

There are a number of paradoxes associated with Avon Old Farms.

First, the name. Avon Old Farms School had nothing to do with agriculture; the students were not farmers and did not live in farm houses. Mrs. Riddle was indifferent to the likelihood that the general public, would draw conclusions contrary to the facts. Mrs. Riddle pronounced the "Avon" in Avon Old Farms with a short "A", while for her and for everyone else, the town "Avon", Conn. was pronounced with a long "A". I assume she thought her pronunciation of "Avon" in the school name was the correct British one, which it may be. The highest office-holder in the government of the
Village of Old Farms was the Warden. Another example of British usage where a Warden is the title of the principal official in a town. More confusion, more paradox.

Avon Old Farms was Mrs. Riddle's school. It was her idea, her land, her architectural plan, her money. Yet she never appeared at the school except on Founder's Day and sometimes not even then. The relationship between Mrs. Riddle and Dr. Kammerer, the Provost, was strained and the press reported that they only talked through their lawyers. For most of the Faculty, Mrs. Riddle ruled regally at Hill-Stead in Farmington but they rarely had any contact with her and, when there was some contact, it is likely to be on some such incidental detail as to whether the Avon boys should be required to wear "knickers" while doing Community Service.

Avon Old Farms was built in the 1920's but it looked as if had been built in the English Cotswolds in the 1600's. It was a 20th. building held together with wooden pegs with the first dial telephone system in the U.S. A modern power plant was hidden in a building with the exterior of a Elizabethan barn. To three-foot stone walls were fastened hand-hammered metal lamps that gave [little] light to the student desks in the Common Rooms. These lamps were fabricated by craftsmen to resemble lanterns lit by candles and the light bulbs were shaped like candles. The water tower was concealed in a medieval keep. A modern kitchen was in an oak-beamed Refectory resembling Westminster Hall originally built by William II., 1097.

New-style, progressive educational philosophy in old-style architectural buildings.

Some of Avon students were scions of families with great wealth. Robert Stern wrote that Avon was a place where the "coddled sons of wealthy American industrialists could recapture the Puritan work ethic". One Avon student was a Russian Prince. BUT the best known Avon Old Farms School graduate was a sometime member of the Young Communist League, who was blacklisted for many years by the entertainment industry because of his activities in behalf of radical movements. Pete Seeger, folk singer who really wanted to be a journalist,
dropped out of Harvard after two years because they wouldn't let him study journalism. Pete was no hillybilly. His father, Charles Seeger, was a Harvard graduate and eminent musicologist. The Seegers didn't come out of the Dust Bowl. They were an old New England family that went back to the Mayflower. They had been religious dissenters and they had been abolitionists before they became folk singers. Pete Seeger has described himself, and has been described by his friends, as a Puritan: he doesn't smoke, he doesn't drink, he disapproves of gambling. He has been married to his Japanese wife, Toshi Ohta since 1943." [John Leonard in The New York Times, July 16, 1981].

Money was important and unimportant at Avon Old Farms School. Without the $5,000,000 Mrs. Riddle is reported to have spent in building the school and the additional dollars she supplied to meet the annual deficits, Avon Old Farms could not have existed. With some unannounced exceptions, students at Avon had to have parents wealthy enough to pay the high tuition costs and other expenses. However, within the school there was an economic democracy. The boys all wore the same clothes. There was no way to spend money at the school. It was about a mile and half from the buildings to the nearest entrance to the estate. The town of Avon, then a small community, had nothing to attract student purchases.

The Faculty came primarily from middle-class backgrounds and many were supporters of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. There was almost no discussion of partisan politics. There were no Faculty ranks, and no rancor; I don't ever recall any discussion of salaries. The Faculty had excellent food, comfortable lodging and amenities supplied without cost. Like the boys, the Faculty had few needs for spending money. If, occasionally, a Faculty member may have wondered what he was doing teaching the "Children of Privilege", it was a passing thought. The focus was on the job to be done and how to do it better. The students were thought of as individuals, not as members of an elite social and economic class.

I think both students and Faculty gained from a few years' experience in the special environment of Avon Old Farms School. After that, it was time to move on.
**Enrollment**

In the academic year 1936-1937, the enrollment at Avon Old Farms School was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Form (Grade 7)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Form (Grade 8)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Form (Grade 9)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Form (Grade 10)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Form (Grade 11)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth Form (Grade 12)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>121</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>