



Al Hunt and Helen Johnson, taken April 16, 1966 at the wedding of Hunt's son, Charles, at the Sunnybrook Club in Philadelphia. (Courtesy Charlie Hunt)

Exmoor Farm and 725 Boston Post Road Recollections

[Editor's note: The following history of Exmoor Farm was written by Albert B. Hunt in 1993. Many thanks to Hunt's son, Charles, for making it available.]

Charles Herbert Farnsworth was to have considerable influence on my future. In 1932 or 1933 I dined with him and Cousin Lottie, who was living with him in Brookline several times. I don't believe his wife was living. I enjoyed listening to his experiences, such as his daily check of the incoming butter. My interest must have made an impression and I believe we developed a mutual feeling of simpatico. I know I tucked away in the further reaches of my mind the possibility of a job when schooling ended. Mr. Farnsworth had one child, a daughter, Marion B. Farnsworth.

Mr. Farnsworth was president of the First National Stores, then the largest chain of grocery stores in New England. He started as a farmer's son in Lancaster, taking weekly produce to the Boston market on weekends. He ultimately put together several grocery chains, forming the First National Stores.

Marion Farnsworth, known as Embee, was C. H. Farnsworth's only child. When I met her she was unmarried, living with Helen Johnson, known as Yonnie. . . . They opened their home to a group of girls of somewhat similar age and for various reasons. The girls lived at Exmoor Farm and at times Ashby Pasture through college and to marriage or job. When I was introduced to the establishment, beyond Embee and Yonnie there were Nancy Jane de Canizares (niece of Yonnie); Thelma Stevens (niece of Embee); Elizabeth "Lee" Francis (daughter of a widowed father known to Embee); Jean Melville, whose mother worked for the English Speaking Union; and Corita "Tiqui" Arche, a Cuban-born beauty, probably known through Yonnie's father in Varadero, Cuba. To keep it all together was Johnny Lingley, who gardened and drove; Irene Fortune in the kitchen; Loretta and Olive serving and cleaning; Marjorie Packard and Jenny Kroll, both secretaries; MacLeod and wife Isabelle—he tended the horses and she assisted in the house; and then another older couple (name forgotten) who tended cows and chickens. Some moved to Ashby Pasture in the summer to join Gene Wright and wife who cared for the horses, cows, and farm in general. Walter Kurth, an Ashby Fin, was on hand when there was any building, which usually was in process.

I first joined my new family-to-be when Johnny Lingley, driving Miss Farnsworth's open Packard, picked me up at the Harvard Club and delivered me to Exmoor Farm in Weston on Thanksgiving Day in 1933. The driveway circled past a large barn to a brick walkway running across the front of the house. A centered entrance opened on to the usual colonial New England hall, with rising stairway to the rooms above. Doors opened to the right and left into a parlor and library and straight ahead to a dining room with windows across the far end. I describe this layout in some detail, as it would soon become my second home.

There was some confusion as I was greeted by Miss Farnsworth and introduced to Miss Johnson and a number of young girls. There were also a number of boys crowded in the entry area all of the same name, I later learned was Kellogg. Also an odd lot of dogs were underfoot: black, white, pedigreed, and mongrel. Miss Farnsworth became Embee, Miss Johnson became Yonnie, and the four boys became the Kellogg brothers: Moulton, Stanley, John, and Alex. The girls I have mentioned before: Thelma Stevens, Nancy Jane de Canizares, Elizabeth Francis, Jean Melville and Corita "Tiqui" Arche. I guess we had a typical Thanksgiving dinner: Yonnie at one end standing and carving the turkey and Embee at the other — I was tucked in somewhere among the young ladies, all in their late teens. That's the way I remember the setting, which I was to share for the next several years.



Helen Johnson (left) with Sally Ann Farnsworth on the day of her christening in November 1941. (Courtesy Charlie Hunt)

The next invitation to Exmoor was Christmas, one I shall long remember. Grouped with all my new friends, I heard sleigh bells and looking out the window I saw Santa with a huge pack approaching across the snow from the nearby barn. He entered the house and with jolly ho ho ho's withdrew the gifts from his pack and passed them to each good child. I felt as such, seeing my first real Santa in red suit and white whiskers. In my excitement, I received skis and other related gear and even claimed more than what was intended for me, to the amusement and laughter of the group. In the years to follow, I replaced MacLeod in the Santa suit and

produced the ho ho ho's.

I can't recall whether it was the summer of '34 or '35 that I was first invited to spend the summer months at Exmoor, but I did become a permanent boarder in September of 1934. I was furnished a room, bath, and sleeping porch in the farmer's cottage occupied by Isabelle MacLeod. Her husband had tragically been gored by a bull within a box stall of the big barn. I paid Embee \$30 a month for room and \$25 as a boarder. So I started my Exmoor Farm life, the only man with at one time thirteen ladies ranging from late teens to late eighties. I became known as "the white haired boy" and I really have never known just what it meant. Before I became permanent, it was decided to move the two-storied main house, located next to the big barn and close to the Post Road, to a new location far back from the road. The house! chimneys and all! was jacked up, placed on huge beams and rolled over the apple orchard to its new site. Eleanor Raymond, architect and friend of the Aunts, designed the additions, which more than tripled the area. The old quarters remained unchanged and the move was so perfectly performed that the floral antique landscape wallpaper of the dining room was not damaged. Edith Cochran, partner of Miss Raymond's, designed the surrounding gardens; and Walter Kurth supervised the construction. Walter and I

became good buddies, often visiting the dogs in Revere [Editor's note: Wonderland Greyhound Park race track]. He was later to build my house at 725 Boston Post Rd. There was now room for everyone, those that were there, those to come, and all the dogs.

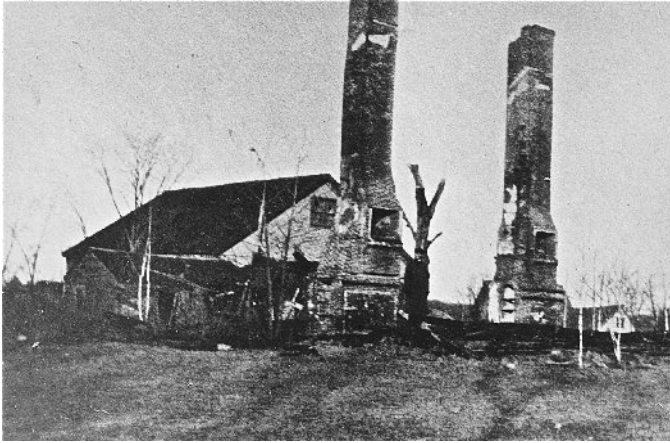
As I became one of the household, the girls were busy struggling and enjoying college: Jean with Gropius in architecture, Tiqui at Regis, and the rest at Radcliffe.

Yonnie, raised a Quaker in Wayne, PA., was the prominent church attendee of the group, every Sunday off to the Episcopal church. Tiqui accepted an occasional invitation; she was a beautiful dancer and I think we did a bit of that. At one point she teamed up with a pro and gave dancing exhibits. She attracted others, and finally there was Christopher Sykes, who won the beauty.

The Aunts were all into providing and arranging to broaden the interests of their adoptees. There was tennis in Ashby, later a swimming pool and horses to ride. Both Aunts rode, Yonnie was most accomplished and had a thoroughbred named Lark. She alone rode Lark until Margie Crofton Atkins appeared on the scene.



Sally Ann Farnsworth's christening, November 1941, taken by Peg Hunt. From left: Mary Hamblet, Helen Johnson, Miss Jones, James Pennington (boy), Marion Farnsworth (in white), Lee Francis (behind Miss Farnsworth), Miss Charlotte Perkins (behind Chris Sykes), Chris Sykes (man with baby Sally Ann), "Pickie" (Marjorie Thompson Packard, behind Sally Ann), Jenny Kroll (upper right), Corita "Tiqui" Arche (lower right in white) (Courtesy Charlie Hunt)



The Flagg Tavern burned to the ground in 1902, but the two charred brick chimneys weren't demolished until decades later. In the interim, the chimneys served as a landmark for early motorists traveling by automobile to New York. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)

They had a many hand heavy Irish hunter named Cinders they allowed me to ride along the trails in the woods behind Exmoor; I believe they called it hacking.

On one such Sunday aboard Cinders, the single line [of horses] at a walk approached a downed log across the trail. As usual I followed in the rear and watched my companions step their steeds over the log; however my mighty hunter decided to make more of the obstacle. I'm told he made a mighty leap from a standing start. The next I knew, Tiqui was leaning over me and peering as I lay in Embee's linen sheets. I learned that Dr. Paul, who always seemed to be attending Embee or someone of the group, had checked me out. My lack of riding ability and Cinder's sudden leap apparently threw me to the trail. I was told I remounted and continued with the group but acted strange enough to call for Dr. Paul and bed.

In 1937, Embee purchased some additional land adjoining her on the Boston Post Road to the east. Immediately next to the pasture that contained her horses and Jersey cows was an area acquired that contained an Exxon (then Standard Oil) station, numerous sheds or shacks, and a cellar hole with two rising brick chimneys which had once been the Flagg Tavern. It burned down in 1902 and dated back to the eighteenth century — another place where Washington had slept. It had been owned by a Mr. Emerson, a recluse and son of a prominent Boston family, who lived in the squalor of numerous shacks, moving from one to the next as the stench urged a change.

I describe this property in some detail because it was proposed by the Aunts that it was time I moved out of my cellar bed and bath and lived in the sunlight. Embee offered to build a house suitable for a bachelor and rent it to me at a nominal interest on her investment. A site was chosen behind the gas station under lease to



725 Boston Post Rd. The photograph shows the cellar hole of the former Flag Tavern, with the newly constructed Hunt house in the rear. Workman are in process of replacing the old tavern foundation with a swimming pool. Albert Hunt is the second person from the right, with his back turned. (Courtesy Charlie Hunt)

a Mr. Coburn, with some years to run. Jean Melville, as mentioned, one of the Exmoor gals and an architectural student with Gropius, was given her first design job. Needless to say, I had agreed to everything and influenced Jean's design. I suggested a California ranch style with combination of brick and wide clapboard, and a relatively large vaulted living room with huge fireplace. The final design included what I had suggested plus a one-car garage attached to the vaulted living room, small dining area, bath, kitchen, and bedroom. Walter Kurth took over, first bulldozing the numerous shacks, filling old cellar holes excluding that of the Flag Tavern, and then starting on my future home. This was in early 1938.

I participated in the house site location, at the northerly edge of the decline away from the Post Road and some sixty feet back from the sharp drop-off to the swamp below feeding into Foote's Pond. The northerly view cleared the small intervening pines to the Jesuit College on the distant horizon some mile or more away.

In the summer of 1938, Peg Parson began to show interest in the progress of the new home being built at 725 Boston Post Road, and when our engagement became a fact, changes were made in the design. . . .

Eleanor Raymond came aboard to assist Jean Melville. The single-car garage was converted into an entry, a two-car garage with connecting breezeway was added to the west, and three rooms with bath were added to the east. Two of the rooms were for sleeping, while the third, with a fireplace that always smoked, was for dressing. The drive, which came straight in from the Post Road directed at the former one-car garage, was curved westerly in back of the gas station to an area sufficient to turn into the westerly facing doors of the new garage. The first planting was between this new driveway and the gas station; one spruce and two arborvitae still remain some fifty-five years later. The gas station was tended by Mr. Coburn until his lease expired in 1944. The station house, pumps, and tank were removed and our entering drive was revised. The westerly entrance to the station was retained and became our new entrance on the Post Road, and the original drive was removed and planted to grass. So the present turn-around came into being and access to the existing garage at that time went through the area where the garage is now located, being moved there in 1954.

Miss Farnsworth who owned the land paid all costs of design, construction of the original house and addition, and original landscaping. We paid rent at \$100 a month until December 1944, when she sold us the house and 2.4 acres of land for \$15,000. Some years later she sold me an additional 2.78 acres for \$7,542 . . .

With war devastating Europe, the Aunts decided to add to their family by giving refuge to British young fleeing the air raids over London. Effy Inskipp with her son, John, Norman McKinnon, Doreen Doggett and June Sylvaine arrived by way of Canada. A farm cottage was made over for Effy and John, Norman was handed over to us, and the two girls moved into the main Exmoor house. So our first child was thirteen-year-old Norman, quite a proud teenaged Britisher. We were somewhat relieved when the Aunts placed him in a boarding school. . . They all returned to England before the war ended but after the air bombing of London had ceased. . .

By Albert B. Hunt, 1993

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