

The Cycle of Life Plays Out With the Town Forest as the Backdrop

The Walpole Town Forest will be celebrating the 100th Anniversary of its creation on May 1, 2016. This article is the fifth in a series describing subjects pertaining to the Town Forest, from the first recorded deed in 1659 to modern times.

The Town Forest was dedicated in 1916 and for most of us, the date is simply one year in the continuum of history. For one Walpole family, the connection to the Dedication is much more tangible and personal.

To my knowledge, the family of Attorney Jim Brady of Walpole is the only one that can trace a direct connection to the Dedication.

Jim's aunts Catherine Brady (b. 1902) and Esther Brady (b. 1903) were both in attendance as schoolchildren and recalled to Jim over the years of their meeting that day with a very warm and cordial Lt. Gov. Calvin Coolidge. Catherine was 14, Esther 13 at the time and of course both planted trees.

As I mentioned in a previous article, Charles S. Bird, Jr., in whose vision the Town Forest was created, believed strongly that if children planted trees at the Dedication, they would have a direct personal connection to the property. This would lead them to be frequent visitors and vigilant stewards.

Listening to Mr. Brady describe his aunt's enthusiasm at the 75th Anniversary in 1991, Mr. Bird was spot-on. Catherine and Esther, who by this time had become Sister Paschaline of the Sister of St. Joseph, were "so happy to plant another tree that day", with the assistance of Jim's young children, their niece and nephews.

The aunts could not recall where they planted their trees in 1916. The Town Forest at that time began just behind Plimpton School, and the original location of the Coolidge Rock, to commemorate the Dedication, was probably near the location of the current snack shack.

Speaking to Mr. Brady recently about his aunts was a chance to go on a trip through modern Walpole history. They were 2 of 12 children. Catherine, an 8th grader at the time of the Dedication in 1916, ended her education after the 8th grade to go to work in the box shop at Bird & Son in East Walpole, in order to help support the family. (In fact, my own father left school after the 8th grade to help support his family. My dad was one of 13 children). For many young people in the early decades of the 20th century, completing high school was a luxury reserved for but a few. Education after high school was quite rare. Esther went to high school for a few years but did not graduate. She completed her education with the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Though the aunts were not present at the 50th Anniversary in 1966, Jim remembers singing as a sixth grader at that event. He also recalled planting his tree along the ridge to the left of the current John Lee pressbox.

In the accompanying photo taken at the 75th Anniversary, Jim's daughter Megan is about 18 months old. Granddaughter Kyla, currently about 18 months, will be visiting from out of state during the weekend of the 100th Anniversary on May 1.

Jim can see his granddaughter in the Town Forest, a toddler as his daughter had been a generation before. Looking down the road many years, he can see a young adult Kyla at the 125th, and a mature Kyla at the 150th and perhaps the 175th.

The cycle of life playing out, with the Town Forest as a backdrop.

The Town Forest Committee is still looking for your memories (stories, photos) of the Town Forest. We have created a website for your photos taken in the Town Forest and stories of your Town Forest memories. Please go to walpolematownforest@gmail.com. If you need help scanning your photos, contact Gary Riggott through the Town Forest website.