

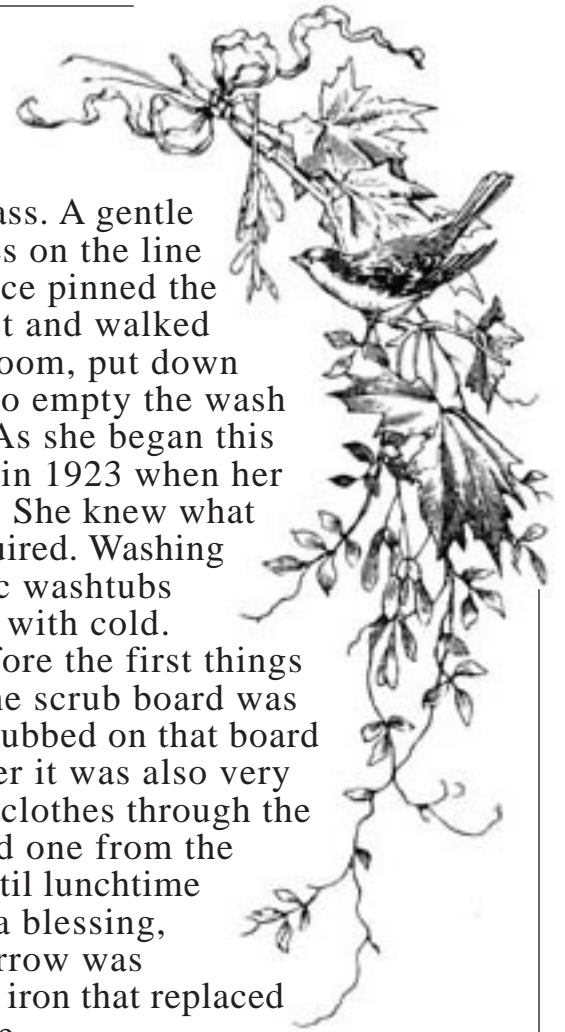
Florence Nixon

North Street Tales

The morning sun had burned the dew from the grass. A gentle breeze from the southwest was moving the clothes on the line back and forth. It was an ideal drying day. Florence pinned the last towel on the line, picked up her clothesbasket and walked slowly towards the house. She entered the back room, put down the basket and entered the kitchen. She still had to empty the wash water from the washing machine and rinse tubs. As she began this chore her mind wandered back in time to the day in 1923 when her father purchased a new electric 1920 Thor washer. She knew what it was like to do the wash before the Thor was acquired. Washing then was an all day, backbreaking chore. The zinc washtubs had to be filled, one with hot water and the other with cold. Soap was shaved from the bar of Fels-Naptha before the first things to be washed were put into the hot water. Then the scrub board was placed into the hot water. Each piece had to be scrubbed on that board until it was clean. Not only was this a backbreaker it was also very hard on one's hands. She remembered putting the clothes through the hand-cranked wringer, once from the washtub and one from the rinse water. Washday lasted from early morning until lunchtime if one was lucky. Yet, even though the Thor was a blessing, she always felt tired because she knew that tomorrow was ironing day. Again she was grateful for the electric iron that replaced the old sadirons that had to be heated on the stove.

Once the water was emptied Florence took the wooden basket that tumbled the clothes in the washer out to the back stoop to dry. She turned to go in but then paused to look at the beautiful patches of color that adorned the back yard. They were the flowerbeds that she and sister Emily had planted. She knew they needed weeding and edging but that would have to wait, there was no time today because the lawn needed mowing. She would have to do that right after lunch. Her reverie continued as she shifted her gaze to the barn. It was used mostly for storage now, but years ago when she was a child there was a cow and a horse stabled there. The hayloft was a fascinating place to play. Tears came to her eyes when she remembered how much she and brother George liked to jump in the hay. Now George, a doughboy in Pershing's army during the Great War, was resting in an American cemetery in France. Florence made sure that the silk flag that was given to Mother was displayed on every occasion that called for flags to be flown.

Florence saw a blue bird going into the birdhouse that George had made. There was a robin searching for breakfast out by the old chicken coop. She loved the birds, but had never heard one sing. Her deafness could have been alleviated by a hearing aide though getting one during these hard times was impossibility. There was no extra money, Florence was trying to help out by the seasonal work she did at the Jam Kitchen. This factory on Main Street was owned by a woman who hired the women who made up the great majority



of the workers. The money Florence earned was not much. She was paid thirty-five cents an hour, but every little bit helped. She also had work at the laundry just down North Street. It was a five-minute walk for her, not the twenty minutes that she had to walk to the jam factory on Main Street. She dreaded going to the laundry on hot summer days because the humidity and heat inside the laundry was almost more than one could stand. Thankfully, Mr. Diefenbacher provided cold water with a handful of dry oatmeal thrown in. The oatmeal prevented stomach upsets from drinking cold water too quickly. Florence had two days scheduled at the laundry next week.



Her reverie was interrupted when she saw Mrs. Barkley hanging out her washing. The Barkleys were good neighbors. Mr. Barkley always had a big garden and often appeared at the back door with a basket of vegetables or fruit. His sweet corn and peaches were among Florence's favorites. She waved at Mrs. Barkley then turned and went inside. There was work to be done.

First, however, she went into the dining/sitting room to see if Mother was OK. She saw her parent sitting in her favorite chair by the window. She was tatting, making lace for a pair of pillows she was going to give Emily for her birthday. Just then the phone rang and Mother answered it. Florence knew it was Mother's sister, Aunt Mert, who was calling. She called every day at the same time. Florence never had used the phone because she was forbidden to touch it. Her Mother just knew that Florence wouldn't be able to hear. Florence looked out the front window and saw the postman coming up the walk. She didn't go out because she wasn't allowed to get the mail because there was a danger that she might lose an important letter. Florence really resented that because everything else that was done was her responsibility from mowing the grass, weeding the flower beds, doing the laundry, cooking the meals, cleaning the house, and caring for Mother was her responsibility. Florence thought to herself, "Some day I will answer the telephone and bring in the mail!" Right now, however, she had to make lunch for Mother and herself. After lunch was taken care of, Florence would have liked to take a nap. After all she was 46 years old and didn't have the stamina she once had. She couldn't nap today because Mother had said that the porch floor needed sweeping, the plants there needed watering. Mother liked to spend her afternoons and evenings on the porch now that the days had lengthened with the arrival of summer. Florence retrieved her broom and watering can from the back room and went out to sweep and water. She glanced up from here sweeping to see Lizzie Williams come out of her front door across the street. Lizzie and her brother Dan rented the east half of the double house owned by Mrs. Buttrey. They were good neighbors. Lizzie liked to sit by the front steps and watch folks as they passed by. Today Lizzie was watching for Barney, the man who sold fresh vegetables from his horse drawn wagon. His arrival was signaled by an old school bell that he rang as the wagon moved slowly from house to house.

Florence went back to her sweeping when Reta Spencer came up the sidewalk. Reta and Florence had much in common. Reta was also caring for an elderly parent, her father. She also worked at the laundry which paid top wages for

that time - 40 cents an hour! Reta visited with Florence for a while, then said goodbye because she had to get back home to make sure that Daddy was all right.

Florence finished sweeping, watered the plants and then went inside to get her clothesbasket. The clothes were dry and had to be taken in and dampened for ironing tomorrow. She also had to put the chicken that they were having for supper in the oven. That chicken would be good for at least two meals. The leftovers from today could make a nice chicken salad for tomorrow.

Florence and her Mother ate supper every day promptly at six. After supper during the summer months they would go out on the porch. Mother would read the evening paper. After she had finished she handed the paper to Florence, though usually by that time the daylight had faded so Florence would fold the paper and put it aside for any free minutes she could find tomorrow.

Bedtime was at ten o'clock. Mother had to be helped upstairs to her room. Then Florence would be able to go to her room to seek the rest that she had so craved. "Tomorrow" she thought, "I'll do the ironing, then get the front yard mowed. Day after tomorrow I'll be at work at the laundry. I hope it won't be a hot..." and then she fell into a blessed sleep.

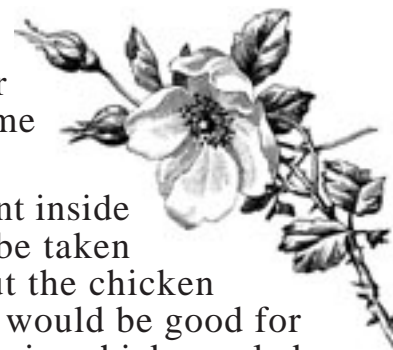
I well remember the events in Florence's life during World War II and beyond. She was devastated by the death of her father in 1944. Florence adored him even though he lived on his son's farm in Linwood. He simply did not like town life and was willing to give up a close association with his wife and other children. I never heard Florence speak a harsh word about her father.

In 1950 I left home for the army. I remember that when I was home on leave sometime in 1951, we received an invitation to "lunch" from Florence. I put quotes around lunch because what we had was a feast. Dad, Mother and I went next door and were seated at the big table in the kitchen. Florence began setting the food on the table. There were a variety of salads, baked beans, a hot casserole, freshly baked rolls, pickles, tomato conserve (the best I ever tasted), Jell-O, and then dessert. I remember a chocolate layer cake and two pies, apple and a berry. I managed to at least taste everything, much to Florence's delight.

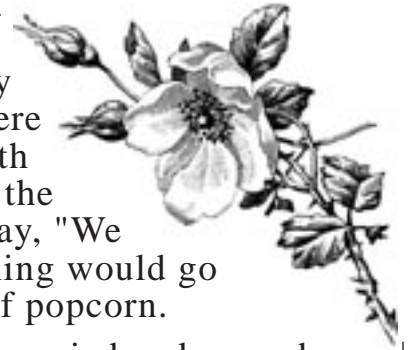
War brought tragedy to the Barkley neighbors. Two of their sons were killed in action;

Duane in the Pacific, Billy in Germany. When Florence heard the news she was one of the first knocking at our door with food and a sympathy card.

In 1952 Florence's Mother passed away. She was 87. Florence had cared for her for many long years. Right after the funeral, Aunt Mert came to see Florence. She said that she was going to move in with Florence so that she could take care of her. Florence said, "NO!" and that was that. Soon after her Mother's passing Florence began to use the telephone. She was the one who brought in the mail and newspaper and read the letters and the paper. She was becoming her own person and enjoying every minute of it. However, the thing that I remember most about this lovely person occurred when I came home



from the service after spending a year in Valley Forge Army Hospital. My Mother had passed away and my Dad and I were alone. Florence and sister Emily, who had come to live with her, would invite me over to their house. It was usually in the evening when our phone would ring and Florence would say, "We just made a big bowl of popcorn, come on over." The evening would go quickly as we talked and indulged in more than one dish of popcorn.



Those years passed quickly as I look back in retrospect. I married and moved away. I would see Florence when we came to visit Dad, however, it was usually a quick hello over the back fence. I wish now I had taken more time to visit with her. She and Emily had been so kind to me as had their eldest sister, Neva. Neva and her husband, Carl, had come to visit me in the hospital. They were kind, caring people.

My last visit with Florence happened in the early spring of 1975. My family and I were visiting my sister Gert who lived across the street. I happened to glance to the other side and saw Florence standing on her front porch. I took my four children over to see her. When she saw us the tears began to flow. For the first time ever I gave her a big hug and a kiss. Then I became aware of a scent of violets. This was her perfume. Now whenever I see the violets bloom I am reminded of Florence Margurita Nixon. I never saw her again. She passed away in January of 1976 and was buried next to her father in Temple Hill Cemetery. She was one of the wonderful people who made North Street such a grand place to live. She lives on in my memory, never to be forgotten



Edward Barkley