

Charlotte Smith, a gift to the town at 96

“Meet Your Neighbors” column by Marie MacDonald
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Meet Your Neighbor

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Early 1920s, Charlotte Fiske (Smith) seen on her bike. The old necktie factory, where Apple Barn nursery is today.

“When you can't laugh at trouble, then you are in trouble,” said 96-year-old Charlotte Smith, who was recently presented with the Boston Post Cane as New Boston's oldest citizen. Charlotte lives in her home on South Hill Road and her family includes four sons and their spouses, 12 grandchildren, 15 great grandchildren and three great-great grandchildren.

Charlotte's father, William Vaughn Fiske, transferred as a locomotive engineer from North Hampton, Massachusetts to New Boston in 1907. He moved here with his wife, Bertha Mary Ball, and their four children Arvilla, Dorothy, George and Theodore. Charlotte was born in the house behind the Fire Station, across from Leon and Ella Daniels, in 1909.

Once in New Boston, Mr. Fiske soon got the reputation of a “one man Chamber of Commerce” and spent many an afternoon on Dodge's porch as an advocate for the town he had grown to love.

Charlotte said that it is her love of New Boston, which she inherited from her father, is the reason she has moved five times in her life--but none of them out of New Boston!

When Charlotte was born, New Boston's school, which held all 12 grades, was on the site of our current Fire Station. Her family soon moved to the house on River Road where the Manna family now resides, and it was in that house where she grew up.

After high school in New Boston, Charlotte went on to Hesser Business College, earning her degree in 1927. In 1929, the American Guernsey Cattle Club in Peterborough employed her in their publicity division.

In 1931, Charlotte married Lawson Newton Smith, also a New Boston native. As a matter of fact, Dodge's Store separated their family homes! Lawson and Charlotte purchased the property where Masiello Real Estate is located on River Road in 1936 and opened a service station. The garage sold Mobil gas, known then as the Flying A, and was one of three gas stations in the center of town.

“Whence we delivered babies and gasoline simultaneously,” commented Charlotte. She and Lawson had four sons, P. Vaughn, Philip, Newton Fiske, and Renton Butterfield.

Charlotte recalls her husband taking photos of the flood that swept through the village in 1936. They sold prints which brought in enough of a profit to buy a cash register for the garage. The couple owned the garage business for 16 years. “Lawson had the reputation of being New Hampshire’s best mechanic,” noted Charlotte proudly.

She held many titles during the garage business days; she was wife, mother, bookkeeper, gas pumper, and parts runner. The garage didn't have precise hours during those days – “whenever a car pulled out in front and beeped their horn, we'd run out and take care of them. We were open 24/7,” said Charlotte.

With all of her obligations, Charlotte still managed to slip in some extra curricular activities. She recalls Homer Dodge buying his wife, Dorothy, a brand new 1954 Buick and she would give Dorothy driving lessons in the big car. Charlotte laughs as she recalled the days the two of them would set off through town in that Buick.

“Dorothy was always dressed so nicely with nothing out of place. It was like Queen Elizabeth riding around with Huckleberry Finn!” Charlotte laughed.

For several summers, Charlotte and a few of the neighborhood ladies took ballet lessons in the upper town hall from a summer resident, Mrs. Phelps, who was the first woman from New Hampshire to graduate from the Russian School of Ballet.

Charlotte has also taken her share of piano lessons. or as she remarked with that impish bit of laughter, “I went through four teachers and that's about all I can say about my piano playing.”

Charlotte began working outside of New Boston at the age of 50, working for 19 years at New Hampshire Ball Bearing in Peterborough.

During her spare time, she and friends took several trips on bus tours throughout the United States and she shared wonderful cross-country trips with her oldest son and his family.

Charlotte isn't terribly fond of the television programs that are on for viewing these days, except for the Travel Channel and Animal Planet that is. She spends her free time now relaxing in front of the television, viewing one of her collection of 400 old movies.

Movies and a passion for photos fill much of Charlotte’s time. She has a wall of photo albums dated and indexed from the '70s to today. She still takes her camera wherever she goes.

Although rooted in the past, Charlotte is certainly not stuck there – she communicates frequently with friends and family through e-mail on her Web TV! She connects with her New Boston friends every Thursday at the lunch sponsored by the Recreation Department, followed by a good ol’ competitive card game among friends.

“Whenever we schedule my doctor's appointments, I make it very clear that I am booked on Thursdays!” noted Charlotte.

I asked Charlotte what she thought about the changes she's seen. Basically she said she doesn't think much about it, but doesn't care for the continued growth in New Boston. Actually her exact words were that she "hated to see the progress."

As far as the many fashions that she has seen during her 96 years she commented, "You just go with the flow now don't you. It usually comes back around if you wait long enough!"

To meet Charlotte is to meet a woman who loves life; a woman with a sparkle in her eyes that reflect the many times that she has, and will continue to, "seize the day." Charlotte sums up her view on life just perfectly, "I'm the luckiest woman in the 21st century!"

And we, Charlotte's neighbors, are lucky too to have a woman such as Charlotte to remind us of the gift of life.

Charlotte Fisk Smith (1909-2007) was a lifelong resident of New Boston.

We thank Marie MacDonald and Brandy Mitroff for permission to reprint this article!