

**DANVERS HISTORY** by Susan Pelletier Ortins

*My* father, Donald Francis Pelletier, moved to 23 Wadsworth Street when he was six months old and lived there for the next 80 years. My grandparents bought the house in approximately 1914, and there was a small apartment on the first-floor to the side of the house. My parents lived there when they were first married. They raised a large family in that house, starting with two small children from my mother, Muriel's first marriage, and another seven children my parents had together. We always thought it was such a huge house, but it really wasn't at all. I was the last of their children. The oldest child was 20 years older than me. My brother Jeffrey is only a little over a year older than me, and then there is a 10-year gap to my next sister. In between, my parents lost a child.

Danvers is divided into "sections," and those neighborhoods were very important when I was young. There was a certain neighborhood pride that we all had back then. Wadsworth Street was in the Tapleyville section of Danvers. We had Tapley School and Tapley Park, Your Market, a gas station. It was a great place to grow up. Almost every neighborhood had their own elementary school – we were all able to walk to school. Some students even got to walk home for lunch! The junior high school – for us, Grades 6-9 – was the beautiful Holten-Richmond Junior High (current Middle School and formerly Danvers High School) right off Danvers Square. We lived a little over a mile from there, and we walked there every school day. Danvers High School had since moved down to the Woodvale section of Danvers, a huge, new neighborhood of slab ranch-style houses. Our house was just on "the line" for the bus to get there, and I was lucky not to have to walk there.

During my youth, Danvers was a bedroom community that experienced huge growth. This was a pretty great place to be in the 1950's and 60's. Schools had to be built, churches expanded and business boomed. The Northshore Shopping Center (now the Northshore Mall) in Peabody, only a couple of miles from us, was the first shopping center in the area. By 1971, Danvers had its very own Liberty Tree Mall. This, naturally, took a toll on the downtown businesses, although Danvers Square has survived and is currently the home to several new restaurants.

In our backyard was "The Meadow" – a large wetland area bordered by a large stream, Hobart Street and Wadsworth Street. Our large yard sloped right down to The Meadow. In the summertime, it was tall grass and wild flowers, but in the wintertime it was flooded and, "hopefully," froze for skating. There were so many wonderful hours spent skating there. The ice cover was cared for by the Town of Danvers Public Works Department – plowed and brushed when it snowed, and sprayed with water to create a shiny new coat of ice, when needed. People from all around the North Shore came there to skate in the winter. On the week-ends it seemed there were hundreds of people there! In February there was an annual "Winter Carnival", complete with a king and queen and court and races for all age groups. It was the highlight of our winter.

The Square was the place to go! We had department stores, grocery stores, drug stores, shoe stores, bakeries – it was bustling. And there were lunch counters in Woolworth's and Almy's and all the drug stores. We would walk to the Square on Saturdays and go to the Penny Pincher or Caruso's Paper Store or sit at the lunch counter in Woolworth's and buy a Coke and a side of french fries. We walked everywhere we went. Most families only had one automobile, and if you wanted to go somewhere, you usually walked there. Back then, it felt like there was no great social or financial discrepancy between us. During my teen years, I worked at Byrd's Bakery in the Square every Saturday and a couple of

afternoons a week. I would walk there from Danvers High School after school – a good couple of miles – hoping someone would come along with a car and offer me a ride! It didn't happen very often. And, as teenagers, almost everyone had an after-school job.

This year (2016) marks my 45<sup>th</sup> reunion from Danvers High School – a milestone I can't even fathom. The late 60's/early 70's was a great time to be a teenager. Although classmates went away to college or simply moved away, many have kept strong ties to their hometown of Danvers. Sometimes I feel like George Bailey from "It's a Wonderful Life," as I have lived my entire life here. We are perfectly located just 20 miles north of Boston and intersected by Route 1, Route 114 and Route 128/95. A town steeped in history, Danvers is a very short ride to the ocean and only a couple of hours away from the mountains. It was a great place to grow up, it continues to be a great place in which to live, and I am proud to be a "Townie."