The Story of Little Farm

Almost six years ago, my wife and I bought the Little Farm house, located just off North Street and adjacent to the high school. We weren't exactly planning on buying a house, but we fell in love the moment we stepped through the door. The Little Farm house is a big, rambling Colonial with lots of charm—beautiful stone work, coffered ceilings, a wood-paneled library, and six working fireplaces—that once actually was a working farm. It was the manor house for a ten-acre property (though the size of the estate would fluctuate over time) that, over the years, also featured a gardener's cottage, a barn, a carriage house, a stable and paddock, a chicken coop, a grass tennis court, numerous flower and vegetable gardens, and an orchard with peach and apple trees. Today, portions of the stone wall that lined the property as well as a sole apple tree remain, but everything else is gone—except, of course, for the house itself and the at least 200-year-old beech tree that still stands in what was once the front yard.

There were two mysteries about the house, the first of which was its age. We heard conflicting accounts: a 1990s real estate brochure lists it as "circa 1710," on another the date "1924" is written in pencil but is crossed out in pen, while the previous owner says the architectural details date from the late 19th century. A house does appear at this location on an 1867 map of White Plains, but then again that house might not be the one that exists today. The mystery was solved when we located the deed. The current Little Farm house was probably built in 1910 for "no less than $12,000," with half of this sum put up by the Wallen family and the remainder by the Antony family, who owned property and for ten years would lease it to the Wallens.

The second mystery remains unsolved. Previous owners had found an old photograph hidden behind one of the panels in the library and bequeathed it to us. The photo appears to date from the late 19th to early 20th century, and is a portrait of a middle-aged women with a sad, haunted expression on her face. She is garbed in what appears to be foreign dress; is she a newly-arrived immigrant to this country, perhaps? The photograph was placed facing the inside of the library, as if the woman depicted in it were watching over the room though out the decades.

As we attempted to discover the identity of the mystery woman and the age of the house, we learned about the lives of some of the exceptional people who owned Little Farm over the years. The Barnes family is the earliest owner on record. They were Quakers and farmers, and their ownership of the property, which then consisted of over 20 acres, dates to at least the early 19th century. *The Friends Intelligencer*, a Quaker magazine, reports that on February 18, 1887, Elias Barnes, aged 72, died from pneumonia "of about two weeks duration [. . .] on the farm where he was born": "Surrounded by his family, the last word his lips uttered was love." His visiting niece, Louisa Atwater, would die one month later from the same disease in the same house. His wife, Letecia Haviland, was left "in feeble condition" and would also die a few years later, but the Barnes family would thrive and their descendants become prominent Westchester families.

In 1891, Elias Barnes's son, Samuel, carved out a ten-acre parcel of his father's property and sold it to a well-known stage actor, Daniel H. Harkins, and his second wife, Alicia. Harkins would enjoy a fifty-year career that was interrupted by the Civil War. In the 12 years before the war, he had belonged to acting companies in Philadelphia and in New York, and several times had shared the stage with John Wilkes Booth in traveling shows. But his sympathies definitely lay not with

the Confederacy. When the war broke out in 1861, Harkins raised a company and enlisted in the Union army. He was made captain of Company D of the 1st Regiment New York Volunteer Cavalry, and after seeing action in the Virginia Campaign, was promoted to major in 1862. In February of 1864, he gave a rousing speech before veterans of the First New York Calvary in honor of General McClellan. After the war, he resumed his acting career and eventually owned his own company that would travel the world performing works by Shakespeare. Harkins was also interested in fruit-farming, and at the age of 55, he bought the property from Samuel Barnes to try his hand at the business. He may be the one who planted the orchard that once stood to the east of the house, down what is now Little Lane, when he lived here from 1891 to 1895. D.H. Harkins is buried in San Francisco, where he died in 1902, a few weeks after his final, tragic performance on the stage, when the audience booed him when he appeared confused and could not remember his lines.

The society pages of the *NY Herald* and the *NY Press* would herald the arrival to White Plains of the next owners of the property, in December, 1895: "Among the pretty young debutantes who will entertain for the winter are the two daughters of the late H.K. Enos, Miss Bessie Enos and Miss Natalie Enos, who have purchased a very pretty country establishment near White Plains. Both of these young ladies have wonderful complexions, are accomplished whips, and are well educated." The Enos sisters moved in the world of the Gilded Age elite. Their grandfather had been instrumental in ensuring the nomination of Abraham Lincoln to the Republican ticket. Their father had been the broker for Jay Gould, William H. Vanderbilt, and other well-known financiers and speculators. In 1895, bereft of both parents for three years, Elizabeth ("Bessie"), age 28, and Natalie, age 20, left New York City and, for $7500, bought the property in White Plains that they would name "Littlefarm."

The turn of the century was an exciting time to live in White Plains. The population of the town was burgeoning and its industry was blooming. Wealthy New Yorkers were flocking to the suburbs and building spectacular mansions on lavish estates. The Enos sisters' social circle was comprised of the cream of White Plains society: Howard Willets of the "Willets Point" Willets, the Thebauds, and the Reynals, all of whom owned huge, palatial estates nearby.

In 1895, golf was the new craze among the young and wealthy, and in that year, Bessie and Natalie Enos were among the first women to join the Knollwood Country Club in nearby Elmsford. Their exploits on the golf course would be covered in the *NY Times* and *NY Herald* over the next nine years. Bessie Enos, in particular, appeared to have a flamboyant streak: "Miss Bessie Enos is an expert wielder of the niblick and the putter and the mashie, as well as of every other known golf club. She always looks charmingly picturesque when in golfing attire, much scarlet, golf's own color, being in evidence in waistcoat or jacket, with a coquettish toque crowning her locks." But with a limited income, the party was over for the Enos sisters by 1904, and they sold "Littlefarm" to their neighbors across North Street, Emile and Florence Antony, for $8500.

The two would move to the Mayfair neighborhood of London, England, and establish Enos, Ltd., which became a successful court dressmaking business. Over the ensuing decades, news of the Enos sisters would occasionally filter back to U.S. and circulate in American newspapers: "Miss Natalie Enos and Miss Bessie Enos of White Plains, probably lead the most strenuous lives of any American girls in London. [. . .] Every night after they put up the shutters after a brisk day's

business, off they go to the opera with a party of friends or to one of the many big American parties so constantly given. [. . .] They are extremely clever and amusing conversationalists are are absolutely determined to make their business a success, after which they will once again retire into the less strenuous social life to which they had been accustomed before their family fortunes disappeared." Although their business would indeed prosper—the Queen herself frequented their store, and they supplied the wedding dress for at least one royal wedding—the two would never return to their life of ease nor would they return to the United States except as visitors. "Woman should not work if they do not have to," Bessie would write in the *London Times* for a series of articles about women in the workplace, as the system of education for women did little to prepare them for the business world. Elizabeth died in 1929 in London, and Natalie would tarry on without her as a dressmaker until 1939, when their shop would close for good. She died in 1949 in Beacon, NY, while on a stateside visit.

Uncharacteristically for their times, Bessie and Natalie Enos would remain independent and unmarried throughout their lives, "spinsters," as they were called back then. Their friendships with Mrs. Whitelaw Reid, wife of the publisher of the Republican *NY Herald*, and with Florence Jaffray Harriman, a prominent suffragette, whom they list as references on U.S. passport applications, hint at allegiances to progressive causes, though this implication may never be corroborated. In a final act of unorthodoxy for the time, both sisters had their bodies cremated.

In the meantime, the original Little Farm house probably remained unoccupied. Though they owned the property from 1904 through 1921, the Antony's most likely never lived here and instead resided across North Street at Valley View Farm, where Emile Antony bred and trained champion horses. He was a riding instructor at the New York City Riding Club and for some time also served as its president. His skill at handling horses was renowned among New York society and he was a star attraction for many years at Madison Square Garden horse shows. According to *The NY Times*, at one charity horse show in 1914, "Emile Antony and his handsome chestnut stallion Masterpiece had the place of honor at the evening show, as he has frequently done in days past, and as his father before did in the early days of horse shows. To the music of the waltz, the march, the one-step, and the tango, Mr. Antony put his mount through the paces of the haute ecole, the mincing steps and graceful carriage of the handsome horse earning the applause even of those who look on the horse as a medium of riding, driving, and hunting." Swiss by birth, Antony was naturalized in 1892 and married Florence Ogden Henry in 1894 at St. Ignatius Loyola Church in New York City. Florence Henry had lost both of her parents at an early age, but was fortunate enough to be taken in and possibly adopted by her aunt and her husband, Thomas Rainey, who was the engineer of the Queensboro Bridge. Valley View Farm is long since gone, having been subdivided and sold off in the 1930s soon after Mrs. Antony passed away in 1928. Emile Antony himself died in 1940 in his home at 575 North Street, which still stands today. Antony Road, across the street from Little Lane, is named after the Antony family and runs through their former farm land.

It was the Antonys who helped finance the building of the current Little Farm house when they struck a deal with the Wallen family in 1910. The two families would split the cost of building a new dwelling house and in addition, the Wallens agreed to rent the house and property for five years. They stayed for ten.

George Sykes Wallen was a West Point graduate and coffee importer who ran his business out of New York City, where he had lived since he was ten years old. He was the son of General Henry D. Wallen, who had been Inspector General of the Department of New Mexico during the Civil War and best man at the wedding of Ulysses S. Grant. George S. Wallen loved music and was the founder and president of the Metropolitan Opera Club. His wife, Natalie Ray Greene Wallen, grew up in Rhode Island and was a direct descendant of General Nathaniel Greene. They were an adventurous couple who led a full life: amateur pilots, dog breeders, fox hunters, parents of young children who may have been born in the house, and accomplished horseriders. Like the Antonys, the Wallens bred and exhibited champion horses. They were wildly successful. At one show, they won the top prize of $12,000—the cost of building the Little Farm house.

In 1921, the Wallens would move to Greenwich, CT, and the Antonys would sell the property to Charles and Lucile Heming. Married in 1918, the Hemings lived in New York City, and Little Farm would serve as their country home for the next three decades. It was they who built the library as well as an addition on the second floor. Charles Heming was a successful investment banker and the son of German Jewish immigrants. During World War I, he had changed the family surname from “Heimerdinger” to “Heming” for fear of anti-German bias. Lucile Wolf Heming was the daughter of Austrian Jewish immigrants, a graduate of Barnard College, a humanitarian, and a philanthropist. In 1929, she became a single mother to four young children—one of whom, Delia, was born in the house—when her husband, all of 32 years old, died suddenly from heart disease. Lucile carried on, raising her children with help from her siblings and parents, continuing her work with charities, and ultimately serving as the president of the New York League of Women Voters throughout World War II. She would see her three daughters married in the gardens here at Little Farm, with the ceremonies presided over by a parson from the Ethical Culture Society. In 1951, she sold Little Farm, remarried, and moved to California with her new husband, with whom she would continue her philanthropic work until her death in 1978.

Over the ensuing decades, Little Farm would pass to various owners as the neighborhood began to change. The old estates were being subdivided and sold in small, affordable lots, despite the protestations of neighbor James Cash Penney that property values would plummet. In a desperate attempt to preserve what he believed to be the integrity of the neighborhood, J.C. Penney bought up as many of the adjoining properties as he could. His ire only increased when a new high school was planned for the North Street neighborhood, and he ultimately gave up the fight and moved to Florida. In the late 1950s, White Plains High School would be built where his house once stood, and the city would also buy four acres of Little Farm to use for the school’s campus. In the 1960s, Little Farm itself was subdivided into the Little Lane neighborhood that exists today, with the final lot sold in the 1990s. The old barn that still stood on the high school’s property was taken down almost twenty years ago, the carriage house in 2012.

Little Farm has been the home of some remarkable people: farmers, soldiers, socialites, equestrians, adventurers, philanthropists, fathers, mothers. It’s been the home to strong, independent, and adventurous women (and it certainly remains the home of one of those today). It’s been a witness to births, marriages, and deaths. And it’s a link to and reminder of the history of White Plains, a past that can never be fully recovered but of which vestiges can still be seen today.