

CHAPTER X

"We all let our hair grow and bought smocks"

HISTORIANS have written that the "Roaring Twenties" was a time of both quaint innocence, as well as of fretful anxiety caused by great social change. Examples of both were seen in Avon in the years following World War 1.

The twenties, for example, was the decade in which "progress" came to the village. In 1920 the town finally agreed to spend \$250 to install indoor toilets in the Engine House (also known as the Town House), and in the same year voters decided to spend \$175 for an electric adding machine for use by the several town departments. At the same time it was agreed to raise the pay of firemen from 25¢ to 60¢ per hour, but only while they were actually fighting fires. The pay of town laborers was also raised to 50 cents per hour. (Note 1)

In 1924 John E. Dynan, principal of the high school, recommended the immediate installation of a telephone because, he wrote, "there is an imperative need of getting in touch with the outside world for business purposes as well as for emergencies." The town agreed and the phone was installed. (Note 2)

Throughout the period the automobile was becoming both a blessing and a nuisance, and in October 1928 the first electric "traffic beacons" were installed on a trial basis. The selectmen reported in 1929 that these lights, one in Goeres Square and the other on East Main Street near its intersection with East Spring Street, were "very effective," and should be made permanent. The police chief also noted that in 1929 no less than sixteen stolen automobiles had been recovered in Avon, but he added that only two had been stolen from there. (Note 3)

In November 1920, with Avon women going to the polls for the

firsttime in a national election, the town gave Republican Warren G. Harding a seventy-eight vote margin over his Democratic opponent, James M. Cox. The town report for that year does not give the number of women who were registered to vote, but it was substantial. In the state election held in November 1919, there were 329 ballots cast in Avon. The following year 639 villagers went to the polls, for an increase of 310 voters. (Note 4)

The 1920's also brought Prohibition, but this appears to have presented few problems for Avon. Long before the Volstead Act became law the town had voted, almost every year, to remain "dry," that is, to prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages. So Prohibition brought no drastic change to the village. The number of arrests throughout the period differed little from former times, and the investigation of suspected offenders was left in the hands of federal authorities.

This is not to say, of course, that liquor was unavailable in the town during those years. Many residents continued to make hard cider or elderberry' wine, and some old-timers remember that there was an "established" bootlegger who supplied "moonshine" to a few customers. Such things were hardly the source of much conversation, however, and

they attracted little attention in the long run

Of much greater interest to the townspeople in the 1920's was the brand of baseball played by the New England League teams over at Highland Park. These games were very well attended and competition among the teams was spirited. Verne Cannon, a lifelong Avon resident, remembers that as a boy he stood with his friends outside the park hoping that a foul ball would come his way. The lucky youngster who retrieved the ball and brought it to the ticket office would receive free admission to the park for the rest of the game. (Note 5)

Highland Park contributed its share to the "Roaring Twenties" in other ways too. Erma Ballum remembers the place because her father, Wallace Beals, ran the park throughout this period. Her grandmother worked in the restaurant and her mother sold tickets to the merry-go-round. The roller coaster was one of the most famous in the area, and

the ballroom was always crowded on weekends. Sunday was for family picnics, she recalls, and the electric cars would bring hundreds to the park during warm weather. Many of the older residents still remember the big dance marathons held at Highland Park around 1934 and 1935, and there was also a grand "Walkathon Marathon" in 1934. (Note 6)

If the park was the scene of much of Avon's outdoor recreation during the twenties. Enterprise Hall in Goeres Square saw a great deal of indoor activity. Typical of late nineteenth century construction, the building housed two stores on the first floor, a large public meeting hall on the second, and rooms for club or lodge meetings on the third floor. By the late twenties Enterprise Hall was one of Avon's busiest meeting places. The site of dances, minstrel shows, musicals, high school graduations, etc., the hall also featured weekly motion picture shows. Verne Cannon remembers that the wallpaper near the piano carried the stains of countless eggs that had been tossed at the piano player over the years. In fact, the boys used to joke that the reason it cost more to sit up in the balcony was because those seats carried "throwing privileges." (Note 7)

Enterprise Hall remained in the Square, on the site of the present-day Avon Co-operative Bank, for about fifty years. In the 1940's a fire extensively damaged the building and it was subsequently demolished. For all the frivolity of the "Roaring Twenties," there was a dark side to the decade as well. Momentous social and economic forces were changing the world, and Avon witnessed these right along with the rest of America. There was more to the period than baseball games and roller coaster rides. Oftentimes popular media leaves the impression that the twenties was a period of unbridled economic prosperity which ended suddenly and shockingly with the stock market crash of 1929. While this may have been true for some segments of the economy, it certainly did not apply to all Americans. Some businesses were suffering long before the collapse of the market.

The year 1922, for example, saw the end of the Doherty Brothers' Shoe Company. Its demise after eight years saw the end of a dream for the brothers, whose family had a long history in the town. Roger Tracy, born in 1897, worked for the Dohertys throughout the entire life of their business. He was just 16 years-old when he started, and almost seventy-five years

later he remembers that; "In the beginning the Doherty boys came from other jobs at night to work in their own business. We started in rooms upstairs over L.G. Littlefield's in the Square. Later, they built a factory over on West Main Street, not a very far walk from where I lived up on Page Street."

Young Tracy's job was loading nails into the heeling machine, which in those times had to be done by hand. "I'd go in there about seven in the Morning," he remembers, "and work till six. It was sometimes a long day."

Mr. Tracy remained in shoe manufacturing for forty-seven years, finally retiring in 1961, as a quality control specialist at Stetson Shoe Company in South Weymouth. What he remembers most about working for the Dohertys was the great sense of camaraderie amongst the owners and their employees. "I knew all the Dohertys," says Mr. Tracy, "all seven of them. They were all so friendly. Why, Mike ran the office, and some days he'd call me upstairs and we'd chew the fat for half the afternoon before I'd go back to my own work and he'd go back to his. Later he used to take me golfing. And I remember Tom Doherty - what a beautiful baritone voice he had. Yes, I knew them all; they were a fine bunch of fellows." (Note 8)

For some Americans of the 1920's hard work and dreams were not enough. When the Dohertys closed their factory in 1922 they too had to find work elsewhere. In 1926 the building was sold and in the following year it was remodeled by the Brockton Co-operative Egg Association, better known as simply the "Egg Auction," where poultry farmers wholesale marketed eggs to local stores. The factory still stands on West Main Street near Harrison Boulevard, having since changed hands two more times.(Note 9)

It was also during this decade that Avon began an indirect connection to one of the most celebrated legal cases in American history. In August 1927, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were executed for their part in a South Braintree robbery during which the Slater & Morrill Shoe Company paymaster and his guard were killed. The case, and especially the trial, has engendered debate continuing to this day.

The murdered paymaster was Frederick A. Parmenter, who at the time of his death was a former Avon resident and selectman, Parmenter and his wife Hattie were well known around town. Records show them living in Avon as early as 1909. In 1916 Mr. Parmenter was first elected to the Board of Selectmen and he won re-election in the next two years. In 1918 he

was also elected President of the Avon Baptist Church and in 1919 was chosen to a three-year term on its Board of Deacons.

Late in 1919 the Parmenters moved across the town line into Brockton, while he retained his position at the church and also kept his job at Slater and Morrill. He and Alessandro Berardelli were gunned down on the afternoon of April 5, 1920 while transporting a payroll.

Berardelli died instantly, Mr. Parmenter lingered for fourteen hours.' (Note 10)

Ironically, as Parmenter lay dying, the members of the Avon Rifle Club were sponsoring a dance at Enterprise Hall and were awaiting the arrival of Godfrey Knight, another member. Suddenly news came of the holdup and shooting. There was great concern because Mr. Knight and Frederick Parmenter worked together at Slater and Morrill. Was Mr. Knight the other victim? It wasn't until later that word was received of his safety. (Note 11)

On May 5, 1920 Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested, the former as he alighted from a streetcar near the present Stoughton Public Library. When they were tried at the Dedham Superior Courthouse a year later, one of the twelve jurors who decided their fate was John E. Ganley of Avon. Like Frederick Parmenter, Mr. Ganley too was a well known figure around town,

In 1910 he moved not only his family, but also his house from Brockton to East Main Street. He was an active member of St. Michael's Parish and a successful grocer. In 1927 he won election to the Board of Assessors and didn't retire from public life until 1950. He died three years later at age 80, certain to the end that the jury's guilty verdict had been a just one. (Note 12)

The 1930's brought Avon into its fifth decade of incorporation. On July 7, 1930 the first motor bus from Brockton to Mattapan Square stopped at Goeres Square, and this meant that the days of the open trolley cars were numbered. At first the bus service was offered on the half-hour, but later the busses ran on the quarter-hour as well. By 1947 an express bus of the

Eastern Massachusetts Street Railway Company connected Bridgewater, Brockton and Avon with Park Square in Boston. A one-way ticket from Goeres Square cost 50 cents.

The 1930's, of course, were taken up with the Great Depression and the townspeople did the best they could to cope with the crisis. Initially, in 1930, there were 130 persons receiving public welfare, but this number would increase quickly. In 1932 the Board of Selectmen noted that because the earning capacity of many citizens was diminished the town was having trouble collecting taxes and paying its bills. This, reported the Board, has caused "a great deal of anxiety to the Treasurer and to us."

The number of public welfare cases had increased in 1932 to the point where the town had been unable to keep within its \$7,500 budget. A special town meeting added \$2,000 to the fund. Before "New Deal" federal programs arrived, men receiving public welfare had to go on public work projects under the supervision of Superintendent of Streets Nicholas M.

Pupello. Welfare recipients also had to meet with the selectmen each week to report on their projects. (Note 13)

The number of public welfare cases in Avon continued to rise until 1935. From 130 cases in 1930, the figure jumped to 221 in 1934. The year before, the selectmen, who acted as the Welfare Board, reported

that their caseload had "increased to such an extent that the Board has had to work almost every day and night." By 1935 the selectmen were reporting that seventy-two families, representing 280 persons, were receiving public assistance. Thankfully, by 1936 that number had dropped to 144. (Note 14)

In March 1933 Franklin D. Roosevelt became the nation's thirty-third President and upon his inauguration promised a "New Deal" for the American people. In addition to restoring a sense of hope and optimism to the country, he instituted a myriad of special programs in an attempt to ease the Depression. Never in history had the federal government played such a dominant

role in the nation's economy. In Avon, at least four New Deal programs were begun. In 1933 the town received a \$900 grant from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration which was used to provide money, food, and fuel to needy persons. In addition, this agency distributed pork, eggs and butter to the poor.

At first the FERA focused only on providing the necessities of life to those in need. Within a few months, however, the Civil Works Administration, under the aegis of the FERA, was busy with public works projects. In 1933 the CWA gave the town \$6,575 to employ seventy-three men on projects which included school repairs, playground restoration, drainage improvements, etc. In 1934 a total of \$10,162 was spent on these and similar jobs, including the painting of the Gifford School and landscaping the Littlefield schoolyard. In 1934 the program employed 134 Avon men and forty-two women.

In December 1935 all of the town's public works projects were consolidated and put under the direction of the Works Progress Administration. West Main Street was rebuilt under the WPA, and sidewalks were placed on Pond, Pratt, West Spring and East High Streets. Additionally, Pond Street was widened and curbing was placed on Bartlett Street in 1937.

In 1938 there were 100 individuals working for the WPA in the town, but that number dropped to sixty-nine in 1939, perhaps because of a

new requirement which made the town promise to finance 25% of any new project. It was also noted at the time that the Avon Sole Company was doing its part to help out by running extra hours, thereby providing more jobs for the townspeople. (Note 15)

Avon also contributed men to the Civilian Conservation Corps, another New Deal program designed to put people to work. From 1933 until its end in 1942, the CCC gave jobs to about two and a half million young men. They worked on reforestation projects, dam construction and other conservation programs. In 1933 the town reported that it was glad that its five young

men in the CCC were contributing two-thirds of their wages to their families in order to help keep them off the welfare rolls. Likewise, in 1939 the town reported that the seven local residents then working for the CCC were required to make an allotment of \$22.00 per-month to their parents. (Note 16)

For all of Avon's reliance on New Deal programs, it is interesting to note that not once in four attempts did Franklin D. Roosevelt carry the town. In 1932 incumbent President Herbert Hoover defeated FDR by just eight votes. Four years later Alf Landon, while losing the election in a landslide, received 118 votes more than the incumbent Roosevelt. In 1940 Wendell Wilkie carried Avon by a 153 vote margin, and finally in 1944 FDR lost for the fourth time, to Thomas E. Dewey, by 199 votes. (Note 17)

Today, more than fifty years later, many of the young people who lived in Avon during the Great Depression remember it as a time of shared hardship, and that seems to have taken some of the sting out of tough times. We never knew we were poor, it has been said, because everybody else was in the same boat. Madolyn Graham remembers that people learned to adjust

to the shortage of money for new clothes and other luxuries. "We all just let our hair grow and bought smocks," she says. "That was good enough." (Note 18)

Verne Cannon, who graduated from Avon High School in 1934, recalls going down to the Brockton Public Market, at the corner of

Main and West Elm Streets in that city, looking for a day's work. The pay was 25 cents an hour, and he remembers young men standing outside hoping that a temporary position would open up. "George Maxim would come out of the store," says Mr. Cannon, "and he'd say, 'Sorry fellas, I've got nothing for you today.' Sometimes, though, he'd put his hand on my shoulder and quietly say, 'Verne, go up and help Mr. Washburn on the second floor.' Why, I'd sometimes bring home as much as \$12.50 a week." (Note 19)

Life went on in Avon despite the Depression. In December 1933 Prohibition was repealed and a special town meeting voted to allow the sale of light wines and malt beverages. The following March voters consented to the sale of whiskey within town limits.

The end of Prohibition brought no significant increase in crime. Police Chief Orlando Graham reported that most of the arrests in town were for motor vehicle violations, and the majority of these were for running a red light or a stop sign. "Oilie" Graham, as he was called, was a familiar figure as he patrolled the streets of Avon, believing, as he often said, that just the presence of a police officer would usually deter trouble. In 1934 the town bought its first two-way radio to help Chief Graham in his work. It wasn't until 1958, however, that Avon acquired its first official patrol car. (Note 20) This was during the administration of Chief Charles "Buddy" Maloney.

It is difficult to assess exactly how the Great Depression affected the Avon Public School System. In 1931 enrollment stood at 527, but within five years that number had dropped to 429, and by 1938 the enrollment had decreased still further, to 408 children. In 1939 the number increased to 446, but that was only because the public schools had enrolled students from the Avon Home School of the Lutheran Orphanage.

In 1932 Superintendent of School Adolph O. Christiansen reassured the town that he was operating under a Spartan budget. "Fundamentals have always been stressed," he wrote, "but Experimental work is minimized, not because of its possible value but because of its added expense. We have, therefore, no superstructure or 'permissive

education' to defend at this time when economy must be observed." In a statement that must have wounded his sense of professional pride, Mr. Christiansen reported that "The low per capita cost for support of [Avon's] public schools from all sources is evinced by the fact that in the grand total of 355 cities and towns in Massachusetts, AVON ranks LAST on the list. (Note 21)

On May 1, 1936 the Gifford School caught fire. Although the building was safely evacuated there was considerable damage, and this delayed the opening of the 1936-1937 school year until the twenty-sixth of October. At that time it was decided not only to renovate the building, but also to build an addition, including an auditorium for the high school.

In July 1938 Avon celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. The three-day celebration began on July 2 with an antique show in the town hall and a field day at Legion Field in Brockton. That evening a banquet was held, featuring Frank Palmer Speare as the-main speaker. Forty-five years earlier Mr. Speare had been the young principal of the Gifford School; now he returned to Avon as the president of Northeastern University.

On July 3, a Sunday, there were religious services in the morning followed by an afternoon band concert and a bonfire at midnight. The celebration concluded on the Fourth of July with a huge parade and an evening fireworks display.

The week after the official festivities Avon was visited by Prince Bertil and Princess Louise of Sweden, who toured the Lutheran Orphanage. They were later honored at a reception attended by 4,000 persons. After being welcomed to Avon by Frank M. Noyes, chairman of the Board of Selectmen, the Prince addressed the crowd in both Swedish and English before departing for Brookline.

Avon had a birthday present of a sort in 1938. In March of that year the town voted to accept the generous offer of Henry Lawton Blanchard, a former Avon resident. A man whose heart was always open, Mr, Blanchard had offered to donate the former (and future) Blanchard's

Tavern to the town for use as a town hall. Until this time most official business had to be

transacted in the offices upstairs in the Engine House. (Note 22)

The year 1939 also saw the demolition of an Avon landmark, the L.G. Littlefield shoe factory in Goeres Square. Built in 1888 to replace the original factory which had been destroyed in the great fire, this structure had fallen into disrepair and become a target for vandals by the time it was razed. In addition to the Littlefields, who went out of business about 1910, other shoemakers, including the Dohertys, had used the factory at one time or another.

Avon's Golden Jubilee year was ushered out by the hurricane of September 21, 1938. The storm, which killed 600 people throughout New England, caused only property damage throughout the town. It struck so suddenly that many residents didn't even realize how quickly the weather conditions were deteriorating.

"I was a senior in high school in 1938," remembers Mrs. Virginia Buckley, "and I worked after school at the Avon Public Library, I went to work that afternoon as usual, and people kept coming in, saying 'Why don't you girls go home? It's terrible outside, why don't you go on home?' And finally we decided that if it was that bad we'd better go. When we got out-

side we realized what an awful storm it was. It was pouring rain, and there were trees and limbs coming down everywhere." (Note 23)

On Page Street, not far away, Roger Tracy was sitting in his kitchen window watching the wind play with the maple trees on his property. He particularly remembers the tree which stood at the corner of the yard: "I was sitting there and watched the hurricane pull that maple tree out of the ground like a dentist pulls a tooth," he says. "Didn't even disturb the roots,

just pulled it out roots and all." (Note 24)

Erma Ballum recalls picking her daughter up at the Swedish Lutheran School and then driving to Randolph. By the time they were ready to return, about 4 P.M., she found many streets blocked by fallen branches. Unable to pass through Randolph or Holbrook, she finally

headed through Brockton and returned to Avon that way. As she pulled into her West Main Street driveway and started to get out of her car, she saw the big roller coaster at nearby Highland Park begin to topple. "I'll never forget that if I live to be 100," she says. "That roller coaster looked just like a giant pile of lumber going down."

Mrs. Ballum's husband Lawrence, another former employee at Doherty Brothers', was working at the Reservoir Dairy on South Street. She remembers that the men hadn't yet harvested the big cornfields, and now they wouldn't have to. "The wind laid that corn down flat," she says. Note (25)

As deadly as the storm was, the winds of war were blowing with even greater ferocity across much of the world during that summer and fall of 1938. Just weeks before the big hurricane hit New England, Czechoslovakia had been betrayed at Munich, and the Japanese were continuing their conquest of China. "Peace in our time," to use the phrase of British Prime

Minister Neville Chamberlain, was becoming ever more distant as fascist armies found new targets for aggression.

Back in 1775 church bells and horseback riders had brought news of the American Revolution to the villagers, and in 1861 the telegraph announced the fall of Fort Sumter. On December 7, 1941 it was the radio that brought word of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and even now - close to fifty years later - many of Avon's older residents can remember just

what they were doing when they first heard the news.

Pearl Kearney, a former town clerk, recalls that she was about to sit down to Sunday dinner with visiting relatives when she heard the bulletin flash over the radio. There was a great deal of discussion about what this terrible news would mean to America, but, happily, Mrs. Kearney recalls that it was not the only topic of conversation that afternoon. Of more immediate importance to the family was the impending arrival of her baby, and indeed Perry Kearney, Jr. came into this perilous world on December 11, just four days after the bombs had fallen on Pearl Harbor. (Note 26)

News of the tragedy reached others in different locations, but most now associate the bombing with the abrupt end of a pleasant Sunday afternoon. "We were in the car," recalls Madolyn Graham. "We had just driven into the yard and it came over the radio." Her husband Everett would enter the Army and go overseas as a member of the 546th Field Artillery, a unit

which saw combat at, among other places, the Ardennes Fore Verne Cannon remembers that he spent that afternoon at a friend's home in Randolph, They passed the time listening for details of the attack on the radio. Although he was startled by the news, he says that he was not really shocked by it, because many Americans had long since considered war inevitable. Mr. Cannon was drafted four months later and spent the

war as a member of the 8th Service Command, U.S. Army Air Corps. (Note 27)

Much of what we know of Avon during the war years has been left to us by William P. Lorch, a tireless student of the town and its history. On November 17, 1941, less than a month before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Avon Board of Selectmen appointed a committee of three to compile a list of all the Avon men and women who were serving their country during the "emergency" which would soon explode into the Second World War.

Mr. Lorch submitted his final report six years later, and it represents his painstaking effort to follow the progress of every Avon citizen who served during the war. By the time he delivered his findings to the selectmen in July 1947, Mr. Lorch had walked through every section of town, calling upon hundreds of returned servicemen or their families. Throughout the conflict he submitted periodic "honor rolls" to local newspapers, and he became a repository of bits and pieces of information about local GI's and their whereabouts. This was a monumental task for which he went unpaid. It was his contribution to the war effort, he said. He was 72 years-old when he finished the project.

His figures tell us that Avon sent 288 individuals - including twelve women - to fight for the Allied cause. Of these, 258 entered the Army, eighty-four joined the Navy, and twenty-five were Marines. Others joined the Coast Guard or the Merchant Marine. They served in both the European and Pacific theatres of war, and at least seventeen were wounded.

World War II, like all wars, was fought by the young, and this too is shown in Mr. Lorch's report. At least 181 of Avon's servicemen were between the ages of 17 and 23 years of age, while another fifty-nine were between 24 and 30 years-old. At the other end of the scale, only eighteen of Avon's GI's were older than 39 years of age. In submitting his work to the

town, Mr. Lorch admitted that sometimes the work had been tiring, but he said that in all he considered it to have been "a priceless experience." (Note 28)

The war, of course, drastically changed the lives of those on Avon's homefront. Civilian defense and military preparedness became high priorities among villagers. In 1941 the Public Safety and Defense Committee, directed by Eddy R. Hendricks, urged local people to take courses in air raid precaution techniques so they would know what to do in case of an

attack by enemy airplanes. These classes were regularly scheduled throughout the town during the early months of the war.

Until 1942 Avon's chief air raid warden was H. CarroU Gilgan, principal of the high school. The town was divided into eleven sectors, each under the supervision of a district warden. There were also provisions made for enforcing the blackout at local factories and schools, and these too had wardens assigned to them

The signal for an air raid or blackout was a series of short blasts sounded on the town's fire siren or from the steam whistles of local factories. Also, the bell on the town clock would be rung. The alarm would continue for two minutes, and in that time all non-essential lights had to be put out. Those buildings in which lights were a necessity - police and fire stations, for example - were required to place thick

"blackout curtains" over their windows.

Likewise, both foot and automobile travel was discouraged during blackouts. Villagers were warned to do their errands during daylight hours so that they could be off the streets after dark. "Go about your business quietly," citizens were told, "and when it is over, go home. Don't stand around; avoid gatherings. The blackout is not a lark. It is a grim

business." (Note 29)

Roger Tracy was a lieutenant of the Avon Auxiliary Police, and it was his responsibility to see that the blackout was enforced and that no unnecessary movement compromised security. "I drove around in my car," remembers Mr. Tracy. "I had the east side of town and Bill Sullivan had the west. All I had in my windshield was a small blue flashlight bulb that fit in above the dashboard. That's all; no headlights or anything like that. Dark? You bet it was dark. I'd drive along slowly, and if I saw any lights on, I had to go in and tell them to turn them off. If I saw anybody walking I had to tell them to get along home. But I knew 'most everyone in town anyway." (Note 30)

Mr. Gilgan, before leaving for duty with the Army Air Corps in January 1943, reported that Avon High School was doing its part to help with the war effort. The physical education program was being improved, he said, and a course in the elements of aeronautics had been added to the curriculum.

Throughout the war Avon school children contributed heavily toward the purchase of War Bonds. In June 1944, for example, it was announced that the seventh grade students at the Gifford School had raised \$3044.55 in thirty-five weeks for Uncle Sam. Under the direction of Mrs. Gilgan (the high school principal's wife and a sister of Andrew Goeres) the student contributions had purchased a jeep, two parachutes, two motor scooters, two life floats, two mules, one potato peeler and one Navy hospital operating table. (Note 31)

It was also during this period that most villagers were introduced to rationing for the first time in their lives. The Avon Ration Board No.

56, Office of Price Administration had its office over the fire station. Its members were Mike Doherty, Everett Olson, Grace Packard and Roger Tracy. It was their responsibility to see that ration stamps and coupons were distributed fairly and that the administration of the government's rationing program went smoothly in town.

Pearl Keamey remembers that period well. She and her husband, Perry, had moved to Avon in 1939. They bought the old Howes Estate at the Stoughton end of Page Street, paying \$500 for fifty-two acres on both sides of the road. Perry Kearney was a hunter and fisherman, and in those days Page Street was little more than a dusty cowpath. "It was backwoods country," says Mrs. Kearney, where red fox, pheasant and all manner of wild game were plentiful.

The couple worked hard to get a garden started, and their labors were successful by the war years. They grew several types of vegetables, and they also raised chickens, pigs and turkeys. The bountifulness of their land brought food not only to their own table, but to others as well.

"Ben Hunt's grocery down in town would help people out," recalls Mrs. Kearney. "My husband gave Ben all of our meat coupons because we didn't need them, and he would give them to people with families. I used to can

fruits, so the lady down at the town hall would pass along a few sugar coupons when she had them to spare. We all helped each other out when we could in those days." (Note 32)

There were additional ways in which the civilians aided the war effort. Scrap metal drives were often held, for instance, which was where many of the iron fences which once surrounded some of Avon's prettiest backyards ended their days. Likewise, the Old Colony Railroad tracks (abandoned in 1938) which ran along the foot of Page Street toward the Stoughton line

were taken up for recycling by the military. Anything and everything that could be turned upon the Axis powers was appropriated.

Others, meanwhile, helped in different ways. Erma Ballum, for example, worked in the office at the Doyle Shoe Company in

Brockton. This firm made government military shoes by the carload; its one millionth pair was produced in 1944. At the same time, Mrs. Ballum labored at a more personal task. She estimates that through the war years she sent letters or an occasional package to fifteen or twenty local boys serving overseas. She typed the letters during her lunch hour, figuring that her efforts might brighten the day of some lonesome soldier or sailor. Today her scrapbooks, filled with return letters, postcards, badges and photos, attest to the fact that she was right. (Note 33)

World War II ended on the deck of the battleship Missouri on September 2, 1945, when the Japanese formally surrendered. During the remainder of that year and throughout the next the young men and women who fought the war came home to Avon. All but four. Robert B. Malley, John Maguire, John J. MacDonald and George D. Nichols joined the long list of villagers who had given their lives for their country.

Their friends who were spared were honored at a giant Welcome Home celebration held on Saturday, September 21, 1946. The festivities began, in front of more than 5,000 spectators, with a big four-division parade, highlighted by bands, floats, fire apparatus and celebrities, including Governor Maurice J. Tobin.

The first division of the parade was paced by a motorcycle escort led by Police Chief Oilie Graham, himself a hero of World War 1. In this division marched the 240 local veterans who were attending the celebration. The route of the parade took them from Highland Park down West Main Street to Goeres Square, up West High Street to Page Street, and over to Legion Memorial Park.

The veterans marched twenty across, and for many, both in the ranks and in the crowd, it was a deeply stirring experience. "The veterans represented all branches of the services," reported a newspaper correspondent, "and made a very impressive showing. However, as they marched down the parade route, and through Goeres Square, they received little in the line of applause from an emotionally filled crowd." Upon arrival at Legion Field the parade was dismissed and the official

welcome of veterans was presided over by Eddy R. Hendricks, who acted as master of ceremonies. Speeches were made by the governor and others, and when they were finished the soldiers and their families went home to prepare for the last round of celebration.

That evening 650 persons attended a dance and banquet at the old armory on Warren Avenue, Brockton. In addition to dancing to the music of a well known orchestra, veterans and their guests were treated to films, speakers and laughter. Each veteran was presented with a new \$10 bill and an attractive leather folder suitable for holding discharge papers, etc. Many still have them.

Underneath this air of celebration was a deep sense of gratitude, as the villagers tried to show their appreciation for what these men and women had undertaken. "All that you have done is indelibly graven in History," reads the dedication in the Official Program. "It is something which neither the world nor we will ever forget - something which transcends the power

of words to express." (Note 34)

The veterans who came back from World War II were young, ambitious and optimistic. Fettered first by the Great Depression and then by the war, they were eager to meet the future. For many that would mean marriage and a family, for others the start of a long-awaited business or college education. Whatever their plans, most of these people were eager to get on with their lives.

They drove back from the Brockton Armory that night to a small town that would be changing soon. The massive growth of technology and transportation which had been spawned by the war would affect even little Avon. The postwar era would bring the kind of change not experienced by the village since the days when the shoe industry took hold. Indeed the decade immediately following World War II represents a turning point in Avon's history.

NOTES

1. Avon Town Reports, 1920, pp. 67, 68.
2. Avon Town Reports, 1924. p. 120.
3. Avon Town Reports, 1929. pp. II; 55. Incidentally, the first fatal traffic accident on record for Avon occurred on March 23, 1919 when Nelson Ourish succumbed to injuries. Avon Town Reports, 1919. p. 62.
4. Avon Town Reports, 1919, p. 48: Avon Town Reports, 1920, p. 79.
5. Interview with Verne Cannon, December 1, 1988: hereinafter cited as Cannon interview.
6. Interview with Erma Ballum, December 1, 1988: hereinafter cited as Ballum interview.
7. Cannon interview.
8. Interview with Roger Tracy, December 3, 1988; hereinafter cited as Tracy interview
9. Interview with Madolyn Doherty Graham, November 30, 1988; hereinafter cited as Madolyn Graham interview, Mrs. Graham was the daughter of Tom Doherty.
10. The Avon connection to this case is well covered by Barbara Beck-Ramsay in "Two had roles in the Sacco and Vanzetti case," Brockton Enterprise, August 23, 1988, pp. 47-A-8; hereinafter cited as Beck-Ramsay.
11. Undated newspaper clipping entitled "Avon's Memory Lane," in Lorch Scrapbooks, Avon Historical Society.
12. Beck-Ramsay, p. A8.

13. Avon Town Reports, 1932. p. II.
14. Avon Town Reports, 1934, p. 7; 1935. pp. 8-9; 1936, p. 8. These figures do not include soldiers' relief or old age assistance.
15. The figures for FERA, CWA and WPA programs are taken from Avon Town Reports, 1933, pp. 11-14; 1934, pp. 81-87; 1935, p. 62; 1938, p. 9; 1939, p. 9.
16. CCC figures are taken from Avon Town Reports, 1933, p. 14; 1939, p. 10.
17. Avon Town Reports, 1932, p. 99; 1936. p. Ill; 1940, p. 120; 1944. p. 53.
18. Madolyn Graham interview.
19. Verne Cannon interview.
20. Avon Town Reports, 1934, p. 67.
21. Enrollment figures are found in Avon Town Reports, 1936, p. 140; 1939, p. 136. Budgetary constraints are from Town Reports, 1931, p. 143; 1932, p. 108.
22. Avon Town Reports, 1938, pp. 154-66; Blanchard donation information is found on p. Ill,
23. Interview with Mrs. Virginia Buckley, December 1, 1988.
24. Tracy interview.
26. Ballum interview.
26. Interview with Mrs. Pearl Kearney, December 1, 1988; hereinafter

cited as Keamey interview.

27. Madolyn Graham interview; Verne Cannon interview.

28. "William P. Lorch Submits His Report on War Record of Town," Avon Messenger, July 18, 1947. There are conflicting reports on how many Avon citizens served in the military. Mr. Lorch reported 288, earlier reports said 287. I am accepting the Lorch figure.

29. Avon Town Reports, 1941, pp. 53-62.

30. Tracy interview.

31. Avon Town Reports, 1942, p. 114. o

32. Kearney interview.

33. Ballum interview.

34. The material covering the welcome home celebration is found in a newspaper clippingi probably from the Avon Messenger, dated September 27, 1946, found in the Lorch Scrapbooks, Avon Historical Society. That is also the repository of the Official Program, entitled "Welcome Home to Avon Service Men and Service Women in World War II."