The Walpole Society Goes to Dinner

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—Edna Greenwood’s diary, February 5, 1936

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Since 1910, this exclusive and secretive society had been convening two weekends a year, spring and fall, for visits to distinguished antiques collectors and scholars like themselves. In the past they had inspected private museums of scrimshaw, early maps, and American Indian artifacts. They had been to Annapolis and Andover, Princeton and Providence, Nantucket and New York, Concord and Lexington. Now came this tour of a restored and furnished turn-of-the-eighteenth-century property, courtesy of Mrs. Edna Greenwood and her husband, Dr. Arthur Moses Greenwood, who also promised a period dinner. 

Of the two Greenwoods, Edna was the true collector, with the doctor filling the role of her faithful shopping companion; today she is considered one of the first important collectors of early American antiques, right along with the Walpoleans. But until now she has not been recognized for another accomplishment, one related to food history. 

Edna Greenwood’s impulse to collect produced America’s first significant collection of culinaria. 

Edna Greenwood began to collect as Edna Heilburn, a member of Smith College’s class of 1911. Among college girls in her day it was tradition—in fact, a fad—to engage in that relatively new pastime, “antiquing.” Many who took up the hobby were after old china, and those who pursued it most vigorously were said to have fallen victim to “china mania.” In China Collecting in America (1892), the earliest scholarly book devoted to this country’s version of the phenomenon, Alice Morse Earle, herself a ceramics collector, acknowledged that the collecting habit wasn’t a “wholly ennobling” pursuit, especially when one undertook it as many coeds did. Edna and friends, besides going to auctions and shops, traveled in horse-drawn buggies to pay unannounced visits to farm families living along the byways of the Holyoke Range, their eyes set on items that weren’t for sale, which they tried to persuade the owners to part with. Some of these objects were already considered heirlooms; others, such as a saucer used for the cat’s milk, seemed suddenly dear if these college girls coveted them. In either case, procuring them required flattery, wheedling, guile, and, occasionally, deception. But even if objects of desire were acquired ethically, acquisitiveness—compulsive and apparently addictive—was still a relatively new middle-class trait, feared in many quarters. Indulged, it might lead to other cravings, perhaps carnalities. The girls invariably met peddlers on the road, and everyone knew how shaky their morals could be. 

More opportunely, some girls learned a different kind of lesson from peddlers—lessons about the business world. There is evidence, barely studied so far, that many women entered the antiques business as early as men did. Since furnishing the home was part of the traditional female sphere of influence, the girls’ trade was considered an acceptable way to participate in the family’s economic life. Edna’s collecting penchant, however, was never mercantile. Neither did she ever seem to have prized the painted china teacup that sat up on the sideboard. Instead, everyday household objects from the eighteenth century and earlier became the area of her expertise and unprecedented passion. 

Edna bought literally thousands of things, among them this culinary-related catalogue, part of a typewritten inventory more than a hundred pages long, in itself only a part of the whole:

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Waffle iron. Round. Waffle iron. Oblong. Wimpole. (Kettle tilting device.) Notched trammel. Small, plain. Notched trammel. Small, crudely forged. Large ratchet trammel. Ipswich, Massachusetts, 17th century. Wrought iron toaster. Ramshorn decoration. Concord, Massachusetts. Wrought iron toaster—large with wooden handle. Used in Sudbury Tavern. Wrought iron bird roaster with 8 hooks, twisted handle. Wrought iron broiler. With drip pan projecting at side. Revolving roasting jack. Adjustable. Ring at top. Liverpool oven with brass clock jack. [A notation in Edna’s handwriting says: “This was transitional from fire cooking to stove. An English device—I have found only 2 in America.” The other bracketed phrases are also from her longhand.] Wrought iron fireplace crane. Ten cast iron skillets. [“All sizes.”] Wrought iron cake turner. Twisted shaft, notched edge. [“Made in Conn. 18th century.”] Jack knife. [“Everyone had his own—even her own. For use at table as for all else.”] Pewter covered pudding dish with 2 wooden handles. [“The Pudding Dish & pudding-time was of real importance in every house-hold. ‘Come before pudding’ meant ‘Come early’—and pudding was of many kinds, not a sweet exclusively.”] Pewter porringer. Heart handle, small, medium, and large. Fourteen pewter spoons with round bowls and straight handles. Pilgrim type. [“Very early.”] Tin fish-horn. Two turned wooden funnels. Hand-carved burl porringer. Probably Indian. Wooden pudding stick.

Coconut dipper, one with ivory trim, one with pewter trim. Tin cookie cutter in the shape of a hand. Whalebone scrimshaw jagging wheel. Gov. Oliver Ellsworth’s soapstone mashed potato dish. Connecticut. 18th century. Pair of blown champagne belly tumblers. Engraved grape design. Obtained in Alexandria, Va., 1917. Hand-hewn wooden bowl from Plymouth, about three feet in diameter, of the type often made by Native Americans, used for bringing entire meals to the table and for carrying corn and other grains from the storehouse to the kitchen.

Edna’s interest in the commonplace ran counter to the preferences of prominent male collectors, like those in the Walpole Society, whose members were among the first to develop such specialties as Boston silver and high-style American case furniture. The men’s more usual, elite antiquarianism had its roots in the burgeoning historic preservation movements that were, in turn, associated with the conservative, anti-immigration drives that began at the turn of the twentieth century. One reason why the call went out to save the old Paul Revere House in Boston’s North End...
was that numerous Italians had settled there, much to the dismay of the old families who traced their roots back to the Revolutionary War. In Our Colonial Homes (1854), Samuel Adams Drake singled out the Italians’ foodways, writing that the neighborhood’s air was “actually thick with the vile odors of garlic and onions—of macaroni and lazaroni,” and adding that “The dirty tenements swarm with greasy, voluble Italians, and bear such signs as Banca Italiane, Grocery Italiane, Hotel Italiane, constantly repeating from door to door. Once can scarce hear the sound of his own English mother-tongue from one end of the square to the other; and finally (can we believe the evidence of our own eyes?), here is good Father Taylor’s old brick Bethel turned into a Catholic chapel.”

In reaction to immigrants of all kinds, natives felt compelled to define, or redefine, what it meant to be an American. Many historical, genealogical, and patriotic societies formed in those years, joining the long-standing Massachusetts Historical Society (1791), Boston Athenaenum (1807), and New England Historical Genealogical Society (1845). True, members genuinely cherished history, but they also sought camaraderie with like-minded fellows of their class, hoping to shore up its influence and power. Never mind that early collectors often bought antiques from men with names like Goldberg, Grossman, Jacobs, Rubin, Flayderman, Bernstein, and Breitenstein. Harold Sack, son of the legendary Israel Sack—born in a Lithuanian shtetl in 1883—wrote in American Treasure Hunt (1986) of “a community of antiques dealers” on Boston’s Charles Street, “most of them new American citizens like my father.”

In Random Notes on Colonial Furniture (1931) Henry Wood Erving, a Hartford-based banker and Walpolean, explained why he got captivated by the early American period: “For a couple of centuries if one owned a farm of even moderate dimensions, he derived from there all the necessities of life and many of the luxuries… This was the one period of personal independence in our history.” It is easy to see early Americana collections as icons of that ideal. But Edna’s collection and reasons for assembling it went beyond reverence for abstract ideals. She wasn’t scholarly; she didn’t study objects. She didn’t even display them; she used them—to the point of excluding objects from her own time.

In 1926 Edna, shunning electricity and central heat, set out to create her own period-correct habitation at Time Stone Farm, where she and her family lived year-round. There she prepared and served elaborate eighteenth-century meals for lucky guests. In 1949 she donated the best of what she had acquired, some two thousand pieces, to the Smithsonian Institution, providing the basis for its first Division of Cultural History. She wrote: “…I acquired the various collections I am here enumerating during many years’ time, because of our interest in the artifacts and customs of life in America before the age of the machine… We now give these collections back to the people of the United States, from whose ancestry they came, not only for their preservation, but with the hope that through their continuous visual presentation, and through study, the evidence of their authenticity may correct misconceptions and misrepresentations as time goes on…”

C. Malcolm Watkins, curator of that first Division of Cultural History and the one who sought Edna’s collection in the first place, saw her less as an antiquarian than an anthropologist, “interested in what these things mean in terms of the cultures and places and periods in which they were used.” That approach, hardly novel now, was then on the cutting edge. In a condolence letter sent to Edna’s younger son upon her death, Smithsonian deputy director Silvio A. Bedini wrote:

As you are doubtless aware, the Greenwood Gift was a precedent-making advent for the Smithsonian. Although our collections had previously included great numbers of objects related to early American history, these were either associated with particular aspects of technology or had to do with nationally famous individuals. There were also scatterings of implements and household furnishings, but nowhere was there a coherent collection of objects that could depict the patterns of daily life among anonymous individuals or show in their aggregation the spirit of American people as revealed in their craftsmanship and unself-conscious creativity. The remarkable gift that came to us in the names of your mother and Dr. Greenwood supplied this lack…”

What the official statement doesn’t reveal is the extent to which Edna, like so many collectors, risked her family’s personal happiness in her obsessive pursuits. That part of the story can be found in the diary she kept for sixty years, beginning in 1912, shortly after her first marriage to an attorney, Amos R. Little. Restricted to what could fit an appointment calendar’s spaces, Edna’s entries were not voluminous. Nor do we have access to the whole run—only to ninety-seven pages privately published in 1990 by Bedini’s addressee, the late Edward Filene “Spif” Little. But Spif, a businessman turned history professor and amateur philosopher, was a remarkably objective editor, who, on the evidence, selected passages, appended annotations and pertinent correspondence, and supplied explanatory footnotes with the sole aim of presenting the truth. He did not wash his subject’s face or show her only in her Sunday best. He was, indeed, his mother’s offspring, an historian at heart.
Collectors as a group are frequently analyzed by parties both qualified and not. Werner Muensterberger, a practicing psychoanalyst, theorized in his book Collecting: An Unruly Passion (1994) that the tendency to collect "derives from a not immediately discernible sense memory of deprivation or loss or vulnerability and a subsequent longing for substitution, closely allied with moodiness and depressive leanings." Their premise was amply illustrated and convincingly defended. Edna herself conforms to the pattern. Born in Lynn, Massachusetts, during the blizzard of 1888 to Emma Louise Filene and Melvin A. Heilbrun, she lost her father at age two when he died in what Spif characterized as "an accident of some kind." Thereafter, she, along with her mother, became wards of her maternal uncle, Edward Filene, the brilliant department-store developer, who, among other things, invented the automatic markdown system made famous by Boston's original Filene's Basement. Add to early parental loss Edna's Jewish roots, which she could well have experienced as a "vulnerability" in Protestant New England (indeed, as a Smithie, she had scuttled them—the college's Office of the Registrar lists her as "Unitarian"), and there you have conditions for fostering a collector, at least according to Muensterberger's hypothesis.

But a broader, cultural interpretation of Edna's collecting behavior is possible. If, during her lifetime, the American public was not yet ready to absorb into existing professions a female's enormous energies and talents, then she would, and did, channel them into unique versions of activities that were considered appropriate—shopping, furnishing a household, cooking, and entertaining. By buying and using antiques, many of them kitchen-related, she found a way of asserting her independence, transcending gender (and religion, too), and establishing a place for herself in the world.

Edna's Collecting Collides with Her Marriage

As the Walpoleans motored down the drive that led to the assemblage of buildings at Time Stone Farm, they observed (as one of them would later write) "near an ancient barn weathered to silvery grayness" several old-fashioned vehicles parked beside it, among them "a hearse so early in type that few of us could recall having seen one like it." Their collective hindsight was lengthy. Among the eldest was Luke Vincent Lockwood of Greenwich, Connecticut, born 1872. One of the Walpole Society's three founders, and the only one still living, Lockwood was an attorney who in 1901 published the first volume of Colonial Furniture in America, a groundbreaking piece of scholarship that became a standard. Another elder club member on hand was Stephen Hyatt Pelham Pell of New York City, Lockwood's junior by two years. The banker, broker, and collector of colonial coinage was a descendant of the Pell who had purchased the ruins of Fort Ticonderoga in 1820. Opened to visitors in 1909, the fort was restored by Stephen and his wife, Sarah Gibbs Thompson Pell. Mrs. Pell would probably have been as eager to tour Time Stone Farm as her husband, but wives were not invited on the outings of this all-male club, whose membership was limited to thirty and whose qualifications for election were defined as "distinction in the collecting of early American objects of the decorative and other arts, attainment through study or experience in the knowledge of these arts, and the social qualifications essential to the well being of a group of like-minded persons."

The gender restriction obviously did not apply to hosts. On past excursions the men had visited Mrs. J. Inelsey Blair of Tuxedo Park, New York, considered today the first important female collector of Americana, and Mrs. Miles White of Baltimore, who helped to found the Baltimore Museum of Art and presented it with her collection of early Maryland silver in 1933. In the future, they would inspect the influential folk-art collection of Nina Fletcher Little, whose husband, Bertram K. Little, Edna's first husband's cousin, would become a Walpolean in 1949. Nina herself would enjoy renown in the antiques world for her meticulous scholarship and her unerring, original eye (in 1994, the Little collection was auctioned by Sotheby's over three days that are now legendary in auction annals).

But Edna's own marriage to Little, whom she met on an old-fashioned grand tour of Europe after college, may have been ill-fated from the start. "One came from old Boston; the other, from a very different tradition," Spif wrote. "One was steady, conservative; the other, highly adventurous and imaginative." Nonetheless, between 1912 and 1920, Edna bore four children (the last one being Spif) and set up a household in what is now the suburbs west of Boston. Their first house was in Lincoln; from there, they moved to a farm in South Lincoln. Then, at some point between 1916 and 1920, they bought a property on Lincoln Hill. There was apparently a cook during those years, since Edna spent most of July 1918 "cook hunting" after the previous one left suddenly. Like many housewives of the period, she was also growing and putting up vegetables. At one point, she wrote, "A & I did 30 jars of corn!" She and Amos were also "amateur farmers"—Spif's words—"who sold apples from their orchard. Edna's diary additionally mentions a "hen house"—Amos was shingling it. Between her motherly and wifely duties,
Edna continued her college pastime of buying antiques.

“Tuesday, 1/8/16: ‘Auction, Waldon Hall. I got several things. Took Mr. Samuel. Got stool, kettles, plates, etc.’”

“Saturday, 5/20/16: ‘Went to the great Auction at Sudbury [Massachusetts] at Bright place—an awful fake. Took Abercrombies & Susan. Uncle Ed there.’” She seemed reasonably happy, except that Amos never appeared to join in these antiquing activities. Instead, another man did.

Edna’s first mention of Arthur Greenwood in the diary excerpts comes as early as 1914, when her marriage was barely two years old. “Wednesday, 1/14/14: ‘Dr. Greenwood here in p.m. We have a great talk chorus by both babies. Little Nell has an operation performed & Dr. Greenwood is going to get married.’ It’s an odd non sequitur—her babies to the doctor’s wedding—but a note she appends to the diary in that same month gives context: “January 1914—Arth...began to take care of me in 1913 when [obstetrician] Jim Torbert called him for me when I was in trouble. He came with his big black mustache. I kissed him first with it & then got it off.” Uncannily, then, Edna has recorded for future what she intuited to be a key moment in her personal history: her first romantic encounters with the man who would become her soulmate, the minor detail of his marriage notwithstanding. Arthur’s first marriage was, in fact, brief, and most of it he spent as a lieutenant colonel in World War I. In 1922 there was “a marked increase in the incidence” of Arthur’s visits to Edna, according to Spif’s summary. There was also markedly more antiquing going on.

In more ways than one, it was getting crowded, and Edna started looking for another house, accompanied by “Arth.” On December 12, 1925, she and Amos bought what was known as the Goodale Farm for $17,500, where seven generations of Goodales had lived. The original house had been one room, built circa 1702; in intervening years it had grown into a rambling, eleven-room farmhouse, with several barns, sheep sheds, cider mill, forge, and numerous other outbuildings on 385 acres. It was because of the sundial—“time stone,” as one of the Little children called it—that the property got its new name.
With so much space to fill, the collecting took on a new intensity. More from the inventory:


But as Spif wrote, “Her antiquing was on a collision course with her marriage, as was her life style in other respects.” He meant Edna’s juggling of Amos and Arthur, who, on the evidence, was not only making weeklong buying trips with Edna but also living at the farm. Arthur also took quarters on Boston’s Beacon Hill, just blocks from where Edna and family rented an in-town place.

The ménage à trois did not suit Amos, and on July 30, 1928, the day Edna recorded the $4.50 purchase of a “clock reel”—presumably a roasting jack—she also noted briskly that he had left her. On August 1, 1928, the marriage did seem finished. (“Over the phone he told me we were thru.”) But it sputtered on while they exchanged letters, in which Edna attempted to justify the presence of Arthur in her life by relating it to collecting, preservation, and her antique world view:

August 23, 1928: …Amos, think back into the old pioneering days a little—when they first settled these old places like ours out here—there were women then who just made everyone they could part & parcel of their household—& the more that came in on it the more the old places grew & the fuller were the lives of the people on it because it did grow—I agree that in town you ought to have your house to your self if you so want it, no one shall come there whom you do not want but all this is aside from just the you and me end of it & and all the time to make that the way it should be…I have never been mean. I have always tried to make life as big as possible.

In an undated letter Amos replied:

…the last thing I want to do is to cramp you and keep you from people and things—but I have wanted and wanted and wanted and you have denied me so much—our home, our common home, our children, have we not either of us the right to say that a third party shall not be made a part of it?…I admire your capacity in what you are trying to do. If you have thought I didn’t it was because my pocket book was only so long and it has been emptied and all my years with you have been ones where I was behind my bills. I have not kicked—but it has dulled my enthusiasm. I would like to have a hobby of my own and I should think you could grant me the opportunity.

A mental note to herself, penciled on a small, undated page, seems to be Edna’s summary argument before the verdict: “He hated everything I liked or did—people bks…So I did the Farm & some one had to help me. & that one has been Dr.—et al. But chiefly Dr…” Like Amos, Dr. Greenwood had blue-blood New England credentials. The son of Moses Phelps Greenwood and Georgia Whitney Greenwood, he was a graduate of Cushing Academy and Brown, with a medical degree from Harvard. But his spirit apparently matched Edna’s in ways that Amos’s never could. Spif gives 1934 as the year his parents “went through with the divorce.”

“Desire Under the Elms” at Time Stone Farm

Judging from Walpole Society correspondence, the suggestion to visit Time Stone Farm came from Clarence Saunders Brigham (known to Edna and others as “Brig”), director of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester. But many club members were already acquainted either with Edna or with her reputation. In the early 1920s she had developed a friendship with another Walpolean, George Francis Dow. For twenty years Dow had been associated with the Essex Institute (now part of Peabody Essex Museum) in Salem, Massachusetts; for the next eighteen years, until his death in 1936, he was at the Boston-based Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (now Historic New England). Working through those institutions, Dow created many of our country’s first period rooms, including period kitchens. He also restored many historic houses. The circa 1684 John Ward House of Salem, opened to the public in 1911 as the first outdoor museum of architecture in the country, was his project. Edna gives most credit to “Dr.” for helping her with Time Stone Farm, but Dow was one of the most important “et al.” Under his guidance, the renovation of its buildings took place.

It was Dow who thought enough of Edna to compare her to nineteenth-century Britain’s preeminent china maniac, Lady Charlotte Schreiber, formerly Lady Charlotte Guest, known as the world’s first private collector of English china. For thirty-eight years, from 1853 until 1891, Schreiber kept a diary, noting virtually every purchase she made, recording where and from whom she made it, and how much she paid. In 1911 extracts of this unexpectedly fascinating opus were published as Journals: Confidences of a Collector of Ceramics. Dow encouraged Edna to keep a
Schreiber-like diary, and she did, for a while, in 1928. ("July 23. Well, I fell into the Charles St. spider web today…"; "July 28. Sat. Arth & I take in the annual Hubbardston auction at Waite’s & find some good buys…") But Edna’s diary had neither the Britisher’s panache nor her distanced perspective. Besides, keeping a systematic record did not suit Edna’s style. She would much rather share her collecting stories with a live audience at her dinners and parties.

In an interview recorded in 1992 the Smithsonian’s Watkins said of Edna:

She owned a fabulous old farmhouse in Marlborough, Massachusetts, where she loved to entertain museum people and people of that sort… [She] had this fabulous collection … something along the same lines as [Old Sturbridge Village originator] Albert Wells had collected, only, I think, with a good deal more sophistication in her judgments about what she’d collected… I hit it off very well with her. She liked young men around her anyway, especially if they liked antiques. So I got to know her quite well… This was way back in the 1930’s… [There] was a general atmosphere about the place that made it romantically fascinating. People loved to go there. She and Dr. Greenwood loved to hold parties, and she loved to have people who had common interests with her.²¹

More to the point, Spif wrote: “Many remember the parties at the Farm. The parties were fun, but they were much more than that. They were her way of ‘publishing.’”

The Walpoleans usually chose an October weekend for their fall get-together, but, as club secretary Chauncey Cushing Nash of Boston wrote to Lockwood on July 11, 1946, Brigham was “anxious to have the meeting on September 27th to 28th rather than later. Daylight Savings Time goes off on September 30th, and the extra hour of daylight would be most necessary in inspecting Time Stone Farm… on Saturday afternoon and evening, as there is no lighting but candles there.”²² In any case, word that this event should not be missed must have been communicated. It would be the Walpoleans’ “largest attended meeting on record,” with only three missing out on it.²³

On hand to greet the entourage was, in addition to the Greenwoods, Mrs. Edwin “Ned” Hipkiss. Her husband, curator of the department of decorative arts at Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts, had been elected a Walpolean in 1943. “Ned initiated the pioneering development of displaying art objects in logically related groupings and, whenever possible, in original rooms of their period,” Bert Little would write when Ned died in 1955.²⁴ As for Mrs. Hipkiss, it was she whom Edna entrusted to make the “sallet” that this August party would eat. That detail, among many others, is known because, in a requested accounting of what was fed the Walpoleans that day, Edna wrote: “The Sallet, arranged by Mrs. Hipkiss, was, according to John Evelyn, of colley-flowers, sellery-hearts, cresses, radishes, whole melon balls, grapes and lettuce.”

Mrs. Hipkiss didn’t dress the sallet, though; that fell to Lawrence Counselman Wroth. Wroth, librarian of Brown University’s John Carter Brown Library, a research professor of American history, and a Walpolean since 1935, completed his task “in true seventeenth-century fashion,” using “sweet Oyle from Italy and condiments brought back by sailing ships from around the world,” according to Edna’s chronicle.

Edna also had help from two other couples who were friends of hers and Arthur’s, Mr. and Mrs. Clements Ferguson and Mr. and Mrs. Hadley Spear.²⁵ The rest was all Edna, including the punch served outside, under ancient elm trees, before the pre-dinner inspection of the property. It was called, naturally, “Desire Under The Elms” and made of “Rhum Negrita and French Brandy, the juice and bits of the rind of fresh limes and lemons, loaf sugar, Orange Curacao, Falernum, and a jar of Guava jelly stirred in!” J. Frederick Kelly of New Haven would later write of it being served from “ice-tinkling bowls.”²⁶ Kelly, an architect and architectural historian elected as a Walpolean in the same year as Wroth, would also describe in an article for the Walpole Society’s annual Note Book the main farmhouse’s construction features inside and out.

Dow’s work had revealed the original heavily timbered ceilings, stenciled walls, and mammoth stone fireplaces in the earliest part of the house. One fireplace was in the “old kitchen,” circa 1705, fully equipped by Edna. Another old fireplace (there were later ones elsewhere) was in the so-called great room. “Certain Walpoleans, not satisfied with externals, were impelled by characteristic curiosity to peer up the throat of the immense stone fireplace at the eastern end of the room,” Kelly would write. “To their gratification, they saw there two wooden ‘lug-poles’ built thwartwise into the masonry for the purpose of suspending trammels, an arrangement which antedates the use of cranes.” In another part of the house was a “one-room extension,” added around 1846, a hundred years before this group gathered. It served “as the present kitchen.”²⁷

The rooms were filled with chests and cupboards, tables and chairs, benches and stools, beds and bed hangings, looking glasses, textiles, woodware, ironware, pottery, pewter, primitive portraits, candles, lamps, lanterns, and on and on. Making their way through the rooms were these other Walpoleans of note: William Sumner Appleton Jr., founder of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities; Russell Hawes Kettell of Lexington,
Massachusetts, whose furniture collection would expand significantly the holdings of the Concord Museum; John Marshall Phillips, American silver expert and curator of the Garvan Collection at Yale; and William Mitchell Van Winkle, a New York City attorney and pioneer collector of early American glass.

Leaving the main farmhouse, the men toured the outbuildings, which were likewise filled with the results of Edna’s obsessive drive to collect. In addition to all the household furnishings, tools, and so forth, there were vehicles—not only the early-nineteenth-century hearse that the men had noticed on arrival, but also a hulled-corn wagon and numerous other wagons and sleighs. One structure, dating from 1678, had been moved by Edna in 1929 to Time Stone Farm from Everett, Massachusetts, just outside of Boston. Called Book House, it served as Edna’s library, filled with the results of her lifelong bibliomaniacal interest in mostly children’s books, but also many antique cookbooks, gardening books, and herbs. Wroth and two other bookmen in the group—William Alexander Jackson, founding librarian of the Arthur E. Houghton Library of Rare Books and Manuscripts at Harvard, and George Parker Winship, librarian and curator at Brown and later at Harvard—must have tarried there.

When twilight came, the tour ended and scores of candles were lit, including fourteen that flickered in branches of a chandelier hanging over the long table in the great room. The diners who didn’t have places there overflowed into the dining room, once the private kitchen of a cantankerous old relative of the Goodales, “Uncle Nathan,” or so Edna’s story went. Little gateleg and tavern tables were set up in there. Then the courses were served from pewter chargers. Plates and spoons were pewter, too; knives were steel; forks, two-tined. Drinks were poured into tankards and flacons.

An appetizer of Indian Pudding, fragrant with molasses, was served with “thick cream,” followed by fish, an eighteen-pound cod. “At any gathering, and always for a Saturday evening meal, Cod-Fish was served,” Edna’s account states. “It was a necessary dish. It was stuffed with Cod’s cheeks, which had been previously cooked just a minute in cream, herbs, and sherry (Dry Sack) and baked in the brick oven. A sauce like Hollandaise, but with more lemon added, and herbs—basil, tarragon, fennel, and dill, was served with it.”

Fowl came next. First, the diners ate squab, one “to each good man and true.” These were stuffed with “sauerkraut and shredded cocoanut, seasoned with smoked hickory salt, herbs, rubbed over with lemon butter, covered with bacon, and basted generously with a Rain Water Madeira.” Second, a roast turkey was carved, its stuffing “chestnuts and hulled corn, laced well with Orange Curacao! (We had a sea-faring ancestry!) and rubbed with lemon butter inside and out.” Before going into the brick oven, the turkey had been “brushed with herbs, sweet marjoram predominating, crushed garlic, and smoked hickory salt, [and] covered well with bacon.”

For vegetables there were “Sprouts (John Evelyn’s Acetaria, 1699), Sukugutahash (Roger Williams) and a whole Squash (baked by Mrs. Ferguson) with milk, butter, and maple sugar.”

Accompanying these dishes was “corn or maize bread,” along with another, anadama-like bread that Edna called “rye and Injun.” These breads were accompanied by “Farm cheese,” applesauce (“made by the Host”), gooseberry preserves, honey in the comb, and sweet butter.

For dessert Edna had made “Mince Pyes, according to Mrs. Hannah Glasse’s Art of Cookery, London, 1774.” The feast had one final, memorable component: “The Colophon, or End Piece, was Flip,” which Edna claimed was based on an old Sudbury, Massachusetts, recipe, “with Time Stone touches added.” Anyone wanting to re-create this drink was instructed to beat a dozen egg yolks (“the whites tend to curdle”) with four pounds of “old-fashioned brown sugar.” (“Maple sugar is equally good.”) Pound in a mortar some cinnamon stick, whole cloves, a little cassia, a bit of ginger, and some freshly grated nutmeg. Add the spices to the egg and sugar mixture, then beat in “as much heavy cream as you can without making the mixture thin.” To that, add “about a pint of the best rum you can get...—a dark Rum.” One could add more rum if he or she wished, “but never less.”

Finally, dramatically, the flip was heated:

Have some Flip-irons red hot in the fire. Have four quarts of the best Ale simmering hot—but never let it boil. Pour this into a big, heavy jug and your basic mixture into another one. Add more Rum if you wish and pour the contents of the two jugs from one to the other to blend very thoroughly—then thrust in [a] red-hot Flip iron. (Do not let the hot iron touch the jug sides.) Let sizzle and foam up—then pour and Drink Heartily!

In addition to writing about the event, Fred Kelly was its “Official Photographer.”28 One of his photographs shows Edna in the yard while the punch was being served, surrounded by Wapoleans looking dapper in their business suits, some with bowties, white moustaches, and goatees, one or two with walking canes. When shown that photo, Edna’s granddaughter Debby Hertz offered this description
of her grandmother, wanting to evoke qualities “that would not show up, like her wit, in any of her written communications or in any photograph, which would never do justice to her charisma.” She wrote:

I think of her hair as warm brown, her eyes amber (though this may not have been the case), the color of the large amber beads that she constantly wore. There was also an exotic scent to her, rich, spicy, with just a touch of powder, and her speaking voice was a unique combination of Boston accent and rich musical lift that formed at the back of her throat, then rolled forward, seductive. It was the scent and sound that enveloped you and impressed you. You can see in the photograph how she tilts her head just slightly, coquettishly, when talking to the gentleman. With women, I think, she was much more direct.20

Hertz also sent a cotton swatch on which she had sprayed perfume, explaining: “For many years I searched for that scent, which seemed to draw up images of my Grandmother’s warmth, amber, and wit. Only a few years ago I found out that my Aunt had a bottle, given her after my Grandmother died. It’s Coty’s l’Origan. They don’t make it anymore but there are companies that make a copy of it.”21

Along with Fred Kelly’s essay and photos in the Note Book, two other photos taken by Dr. Greenwood with a flash camera were published. They show Walpoleans under the blazing candles of the great room’s chandelier. Their heads are what appear to be party hats. Kettell of Lexington, who wrote his own commentary for the Note Book, explained the headgear. At some point,

Mrs. Greenwood brought in a remarkable collection of early hats, and distributed one to each member with the request that he don it. Instantly a magical transformation took place and each Walpolean seemed to display a new and entirely different personality that reflected the character of the headgear… It was a lively scene. Our tall and musty stovepipes and gray and brown derbies tilted and turned in accompaniment of our conversation, or to our saying yes or no to the replenishment of our dishes.22

The captions give the hatted ones’ names: Nash and Kettell, Hipkiss and du Pont, Pell, Miller, Winship, Jackson, and Appleton. Also present were August Peabody Loring Jr., a Boston attorney and great nephew of philanthropist George A. Peabody; Morgan Bulkeley Brainard of Hartford, whose family had founded the Aetna Life Insurance Company; William Hutchinson Putnam, also of Hartford, an ancestor of Israel Putnam; and J.H. Pleasants, a Baltimore physician and amateur historian who wrote several books, the most important of which was published in 1939, about his own personal discovery, An Early Baltimore Negro Portrait Painter, Joshua Johnson.

Rhetorically, Kettell asked, Was Time Stone Farm a museum? “Yes, in a way, but a very lively one, in which you could sit or lean on or pick up anything. What would happen to the guards in the American Wing if anyone laughed as we did at Time Stone Farm that evening? Would they faint, or would they whip out their six shooters?”23

Only very reluctantly, the group dispersed, and the caravan departed for the ride back to the hotel in Worcester. A month later, Kelly wrote to secretary Nash: “What a good time we all had at Time Stone Farm!…in all my Walpolean experience I cannot recall anything like it.”24 A few months later, Kelly suggested that a copy of that year’s Note Book be sent to Edna and Arthur. Nash replied that it would “have to be voted.”25 In the previous thirty-six years, only one other non-Walpolean had been so honored.

Edna’s Collection Is Dispersed

Edna did, in fact, receive her Note Book, and she thanked the clubmen in a letter they published in the Note Book of the following year: “Dear Mr. Nash and all the Gentlemen of the Walpole Society, It is a generous gesture, and a kindly one, and fully appreciated in all its implications. Believe me when I say that it will always be one of The Farm’s most treasured possessions, and I will see to it that your confidence in presenting it to us is justified and never abused.”26 In that same missive she invited the group back in 1952 to help her celebrate the farm’s two hundred and fiftieth birthday. It was not to be. Dr. Greenwood died in 1947 at the age of seventy-one, and things would never be the same at Time Stone Farm. In 1949 Edna made the Greenwood Gift to the Smithsonian and began to spend time in Washington, helping with the transfer and cataloguing of objects. Late that same year, a selection of items was exhibited as “Arts & Furnishings of Rural America: 1650–1830” in the foyer of the Smithsonian’s Natural History Museum—a prelude to the exhibitions of the Hall of Everyday Life in the American Past, to be installed in the Museum of History and Technology.27 In a 1951 article for The Chronicle of the Early American Industries Association, Watkins acknowledged Edna’s gift as the Smithsonian’s entrance into the field of colonial studies. “The whole colonial pattern” can be seen in “the smaller and humbler types of objects,” he wrote, singling out the kitchen equipment.28 In 1954 Edna gave another major gift, her Book House and its contents. It was dismantled and reassembled inside one of the museum buildings.
And yet, even as Edna deaccessioned, she continued to collect: andirons, firedogs, Dutch ovens, pot-lifters, pot-hooks, dredgers, ladles, stirring sticks... No true collector ever stops. A visitor to Time Stone Farm in the mid-1960s recently recalled that it looked as full then as it ever had. But Edna had money troubles. When Uncle Ed Filene died in 1937, he left five thousand dollars to Edna and fifteen million or so dollars to his progressive Twentieth Century Fund (now known as the Century Foundation), which he had founded in 1919. (“Everyone seems to need consoling re Ed’s will because I am not an heiress!” Edna wrote in her diary.) There were other disappointments, too, chiefly her thwarted attempt to get the Smithsonian to accept her gift of Time Stone Farm itself. She imagined the main farmhouse dismantled and reassembled. A memo written by Watkins on September 2, 1958, states:

Mrs. Greenwood’s desire for the past several years has been to move the entire house to Washington and re-erect it here, using it primarily as a ‘staff house’ where Smithsonian professional people can foregather in an atmosphere of relaxation and detachment—in short, carrying on the tradition of intellectual fellowship that had characterized the farm’s social role under the Greenwoods. This has been virtually a religion with Mrs. Greenwood.

Watkins’s memo goes on to suggest bringing the great room alone to Washington. But Edna’s heart’s desire was not fulfilled in any form. Perhaps inevitably, then, Edna began to demand that some objects be returned.
The unpleasant record of correspondence is stored in Smithsonian files. “I didn’t see much of her after that,” Watkins told his interviewer in the 1990s.18 Edna Greenwood died on December 10, 1972, at the age of eighty-four. Time Stone Farm was left to Spif and his brother, Amos R. Little Jr. It would not be theirs for long. For the previous fifteen years, Spif wrote, “[Edna] had successfully sweet-talked her banker into ever larger loans, to live on. To do the things she wanted to do, and of course, to collect more books and antiques. After her death the books and the antiques had to be sold… to pay estate taxes and debts. There was nothing left but the land, and that was sold ‘back to the family,’ specifically to Lucy Goodale Thurston’s descendants in Hawaii.”19

Nearly sixty years after the Greenwood Gift was made, the Smithsonian is changed. The Hall of Everyday Life in the American Past has long since been dismantled; so has Book House. In 1980, what had become the National Museum of History and Technology was reconfigured and renamed again, the National Museum of American History. In 2007, closed and undergoing renovation, it accommodated researchers with difficulty. All objects, including Edna’s bequest, were in storage. William Yeingst, chair of the Division of Home & Community Life, said that when the museum reopens, some of her items would be sprinkled among various exhibitions. The others will be on the storage shelves, ready for today’s culinary historians to consider.

Meanwhile, Time Stone Farm moments like this one are preserved in Edna’s diary: “Saturday, 7/19/41: ‘Grand day with Alice and Carl here—Loaf talk eat & Drink… Sit up til 4 A.M. again!!!… Such stories!!!’” These guests were Alice Winchester of New York City, editor of Antiques magazine from 1938 to 1972, and Carl Drepperd, author of many popular books about antiques. In 1951 Winchester wrote a cover story for Antiques about Time Stone Farm in which, ironically, she praised it precisely because it had none of a museum’s “impersonal atmosphere.” Instead, Edna and Arthur were able “to preserve the essential character of an old house, and at the same time to impart to it the warmth and vitality of their own living.”20

And what of the Walpoleans after their moment at Time Stone Farm? They continued, just as their current membership does, to visit collections and houses. In the fall of 1952 they met in Rhode Island, where the George H. Warrens received them, after which dinner was served at Newport’s Clambake Club. That was followed by “John Phillips’ captivating account of his tracking down a Jacob Hurd gold thimble in England last summer, and Bill Jackson’s fascinating story of procuring the one missing Pennsylvania document needed to complete his set.”21 By then Appleton was gone; so was Kelly. But the others must have reminisced about Edna, the hats, and all the rest.

Edna certainly did. Debby Hertz has her grandmother’s copy of the Note Book, in which Edna handwrote a few notes of her own, probably twenty years after the dinner took place, Hertz guessed. “Most of them refer to architectural elements mentioned in the text. However, she did correct the number of members, half a dozen, who knew their way out there—a minor detail, probably not of any use to anyone, but important to her. And on another page, she wrote at the top, ‘And “Brig” in defiance of all, made Martinis!’ So typical of the high jinks that our generation suspects went on at Time Stone Farm.”22

Notes

1. The group was named after writer, political figure, and collector Horace Walpole (1717–1773), fourth Earl of Orford, since his “turn of mind and methods of collecting were similar to those of our collectors—their prototype, as it were.” Lawrence C. Wroth, The Walpole Society: Five Decades (The Walpole Society, 1960), 5. The Walpole Society of England (see www.walpolesociety.org.uk) should not to be confused with the American one. Founded in 1914 to promote the study of the history of British art, it is open to the public (“anyone can join”) and has a current membership of approximately six hundred.

2. Edna’s father spelled it Heilbrun, Edna herself also went by Hilburme and Hilburn, according to Smith College records.

3. Alice Morse Earle, China Collecting in America (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1892), 23.


5. The first exhibition of early American silver to be held in this country, displayed in 1906 by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, was assembled by two Walpoleans, Francis Hill Bigelow and R.T.H. Halsey.


9. This and all subsequent diary quotations are from “Edna Who Only in Name was Little,” compiled, edited, and privately printed by Edward Filene Little, 1990. The author wishes to thank all members of the extended Little family with their help in this article’s preparation, especially Edward Filene Little (1920–2006), Debby Hertz, and Peter and Eliza Little Love.


Ironically, there was a time when collecting was considered to be a remedy for illness, not the manifestation of one.

Walpole Society Note Book, 1946, privately printed by The Walpole Society.

Walpole Society Note Book, 1935, 9. According to an overview of the Walpole Society collection of manuscripts at Winterthur Library, in recent years wives of members and widows of former members have been invited to society functions.

In dedicating her book Little by Little: Six Decades of Collecting American Decorative Arts (New York: Dutton, 1984), Nina gave credit where it was due: "In affectionate memory of Edna Little Greenwood whose knowledge and enthusiasm inspired our lifelong interest in collecting New England country arts." In the same book’s introduction Nina credits Edna with taking her to her first antiques shops and auctions shortly after she and Bert were married. It is not an exaggeration to say that this mentorship changed the course of antiques history.

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Chauncey Cushing Nash in a letter to Henry Watson Kent, 10 October 1946.


I was unable to find biographical information about the Fergusons and the Spears.


Ibid., 43.

His prints are archived, along with other Walpole Society papers, in the Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera at Winterthur Museum & Country Estate. Downs, himself a Walpolean, can be seen in the photographs. Curator of the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, he joined the staff of Winterthur in 1949, invited by yet another Walpolean, Winterthur’s creator, Henry Francis du Pont, who is pictured, too. Apparently, both men thought Edna’s soiree was not to be missed. The Walpole Society visited Winterthur for the first time in 1932, almost twenty years before it opened to the public.

Debby Hertz in an e-mail to the author, 25 January 2007.


The Walpole Society Note Book, 1946, 52.

Ibid.

J. Frederick Kelly in a letter to Chauncey Cushing Nash, 26 October 1946.

Chauncey Cushing Nash in a letter to J. Frederick Kelly, 17 January 1947.


The Museum of History and Technology opened in 1964. In 1969 it was renamed the National Museum of History and Technology.


Today the property is still owned by Goodale descendants. A caretaker lives on the place, and the name has reverted to Goodale Farm. Phone conversation with Kay Johnson of the Hudson Historical Society, 2 January 2007. Johnson also said that Time Stone Farm is now officially considered to be in Hudson, Massachusetts, not Marlborough, and that the property is administered by the Asa Thurston Trust.

Alice Winchester, “Living with Antiques: Time Stone Farm, in Marlboro [sic], Massachusetts,” Antiques, June 1951, 460.


Debby Hertz in an e-mail to the author, 15 January 2007.