



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

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Thanksgiving Dinner with the Swift Family

Thanksgiving day was the oasis in the usual dull month of November. The Sunday before Thanksgiving day the minister always read a proclamation of the governor, reminding us of what we had to be thankful for and always ending, "God save the commonwealth of Massachusetts." When I heard the proclamation, I commenced to feel tired. My mother, one of the most generous and thoughtful of women, always enjoyed remembering her particular friends on that day, especially those not as prosperous as herself. I was the



This archive photo from early 20th century Falmouth shows a bountiful harvest of pumpkins and squashes. Do you recognize the man and girl in the photo? If so, please let us know who they are.

humble instrument foreordained by God to carry out her wishes. "Go to the back door Oliver. When it is opened take off your hat, be sure and take off your hat, make a nice bow and say, 'Mother sends her compliments to you and begs you will accept this little remembrance and hopes you will pass a pleasant Thanksgiving.'" When she took me to the back pantry and said, "I have them all marked. This chicken pie is for Aunt Martha. These vegetables (be sure and don't forget the onions) are for Uncle Tom. This mince pie and cranberry is for some other one. He is very fond of pies but does not have anyone to make them for him," and so on through the whole list.

Thanksgiving dinners mother used to prepare for the family and invited guests were a source of pleasure to all. How she ever had the strength and energy to do it was a wonder to me at that time and has been to this date. I think perhaps its preparation she thought was a religious duty. She seldom attended the usual services at the church on that day, but always was insistent that the rest of the family should. First came soup, often of oysters obtained from the nearby rivers.

Soon after appeared the turkeys. They were a revelation. None could be more

toothsome and why? Two had been selected by my father at just the right size and weight and were inspected by mother, then stuffed with a dressing seasoned with sage, summer savory, sweet marjoram and thyme, not too much of any one, but enough to make the whole very agreeable to the taste.

Children, do you know what a tin kitchen is? A tin kitchen was about as large around as a small size barrel and not quite so long. A portion of the side lengthways was left open to give ample room for the heat from the hard wood coals in the open fire place to penetrate. The bird was then put on a spit with a sharp point which was run through the turkey from end to end. Then the operation of roasting commenced. The spit was turned enough to expose a portion of the victim to the heat. When it commenced to cook it was dredged and the juices dipped from the bottom of the kitchen were poured over the surface. It was turned again and treated in the same way and so continued the turning, dredging and dipping until mother appeared with a big fork, to decide if the color was just exactly the proper shade of brown and try with the fork if it was properly cooked. You may think turning that spit before the open fire until one's face was nearly in the condition of the turkey, the dredging and dipping until one's arm was tired and fingers burned was an easy task. The only time I was reconciled to the task was when I could stay away and not be obliged to listen to Parson Hooker's two and a half hour sermon. The other turkey—mother decided boiling was good enough for him, and as some might like boiled turkey he was given a turkish bath, properly stuffed with a liberal supply of oysters in the dressing and with his arms folded over his breast. A tureen of white gravy containing more oysters was placed by his side on the table.

Mother's specialty was pies, on that festive day. There were apple, pumpkin, cran-

berry, with the top all covered over with little strings of crust like paths crossing in and around a sheep pasture, and mince pie, not one but two or three of each were on the table. They all looked so nice that to the question "which kind do you prefer?" the answer invariably was a small piece of each, if you please. No one knew better than I did how those pies were baked. I was the boy who had to cut the kindling and bring in the wood to heat that brick oven like the fiery furnace the three men [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the Book of Daniel] were thrown into, seven times hotter than it was ordinarily heated and like the men they were not burnt, scorched, or even browned. They were also like the men — good.



Oliver's mother, Eliza (Jenkins) Swift (1807-1880), in her later years.

Oliver Franklin Swift