



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

From the Archives of Museums on the Green

Papa's Christmas Goose

Eleanor Conant Yeager (1904-1981)

Eleanor grew up in Conant House, which now houses the archives and some exhibits for Museums on the Green. This essay was published in the book *Cape Cod Yesteryears: The Life and Short Stories of Eleanor Conant Yeager* by Robert Conant Ellis.

The time: the 1920s; the place, a house just off the Village Green; the cast, mother, father and two girls.

“That is the peskiest goose I ever raised,” Pa sputtered as he came in from the shed; “got another complaint about him today.”

Mama looked up from her bread making and replied, “You’re right, Pa, Mrs. Carr called on the phone to say she was afraid to cut through our yard, the goose hissed so at her.”

“Well, gol darn it,” Pa said, his face getting redder and redder; “they have no business cutting through the yard anyway—did’ja tell them that?”

“Now, Pa, you know I would never tell neighbors that.” Glancing at him over her glasses, she continued, “Tell you the truth, we don’t have to tell ‘em, with old goose hissing and pecking at their heels, they’ll get the point—now out of my way while I set this bread to rising on the back of the stove.”

Pa always assisted at the hatching of the goslings. As he said, foolish old goose lumbering around on the nest always managed to kill at least one of her little green goslings. So he was present when “the cussed” one was hatched. He shot out of that egg like a viper ready to strike in all directions at once, to hear Pa tell it. He seemed to remain mean all his short life. Still, Pa had a kind of fondness and respect for him. One time Pa slipped and fell in the yard. Old goose stood by him with wings outstretched, in a sort of protective way. Then, when Pa got up, he commenced his hissing and snapping. Pa never got over that.



Top: Conant House, 2015, just before renovations. **Above:** Margaret and William Conant with their children, c 1906. Photos in Museums’ archives.



Trade card, c1885, at Digital Commonwealth.

because of that honk. He never honked when he was out of his pen, except when dogs and trespassers went down the driveway.

Thanksgiving went by and the largest of Pa's roasting chickens was served with all the fixings for that dinner. Christmas was coming, and old goose was fat. Mama had her fruitcakes made and cookies put away in stone crocks. She began to think about Christmas dinner and how she would ever get Pa to kill the "honking bomber."

"He'll never do it himself," she said softly to herself one day. "I'll have to take the critter down to Mr. Vieira in Teaticket and have him dress him for us," with a worried frown on her face, "but I'll have to talk to Pa about it first."

Four days before Christmas she heard Pa come in from the yard, and thought she would wait until he got a cup of coffee into him before she sprang the killing of old goose on him.

"Pa," Ma said, clearing her throat, "it is only four days to Christmas; what are you going to do about our goose? You know you count on getting that goose bone that tells what kind of winter we're going to have—and I always like to have some goose grease on hand for sore throats and colds, you know."

Pa didn't answer for a minute, then he said, "Yes, yes, I know, I know."



Margaret Conant was a graduate of Fannie Farmer's cooking school in Boston.

Left: Boston Cooking School magazine, 1908, Wikimedia.

Right: Ad for Fannie Farmer's school, 1903, Wikimedia.

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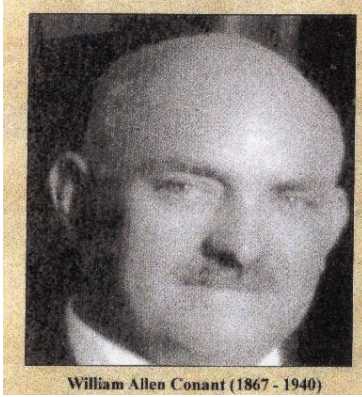
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She couldn't get another word out of him. Well, she thought to herself, I'll take matters into my own hands, say nothing to him, just have Mr. Vieira come get the critter while Pa is at the office. Mama's mind was made up. She wasn't going to have to hear that old goose honking at dawn every morning, wanting to get out of his pen, and all the neighbors complaining about him. No, siree, old goose was as good as gone right now.



The deed was done, and on Christmas day the house was filled with the fragrance of cooked goose. Mama and the girls were a little worried about Pa's reaction to eating his goose, but they hoped for the best.

They heard him fussing around in the shed about the time they planned to eat. Mama called out, "Dinner's ready, Pa."

"Just a minute—I'm sharpening the knife," he said.

In front of Papa's place reposing on a huge platter lay old critter, the hissing bomber, the neighborhood nuisance, done to a turn. After a little Christmas prayer, Pa took the big fork and put it into the side of his goose.

The juice spurted out, then he commenced to carve. Slice after slice fell away from his knife—lovely, dark, succulent meat. Mama, with spoon in hand, was waiting to put vegetables on the plates when she heard a clatter.

Pa had dropped his utensils on the side of the platter. His head was down and she could just barely make out, "I can't eat him."

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