Staff Photo by Gordon Corbett

INDOOR GARDENING—Now retired, Maytie Sparling, 73, has more time for her plants.

72 years in same house, she's true to Allendale

By DIANA CRAWFORD
Staff Writer

Born and raised in Allendale, where corporate whizkids now play musical houses, Maytie Rowland Sparling is a rare individual indeed.

She has lived in the same house for 72 years.

It's a simple white frame house. It has six rooms in three stories—the top floor is an attic. The house is nestled among fir trees at 29 Ivers Road. Inside is furniture her ancestors used. Her dining room is lined with plants. The floors are covered with rugs of many patterns and colors.

"It's home," Mrs. Sparling says. "I would only hope to live my life out here."

The idea of staying in one place is almost an anathema to most Americans today. One out of five move every year. And elderly New Jersey residents migrate in large numbers in South Florida with its bright sun and low taxes.

Mrs. Sparling says she has traveled to half of the 50 states and has just never found any reason compelling enough to leave. At the age of two, when her mother died, Maytie Rowland moved in with her aunt and uncle. Her brothers went off to seek their fortunes, but she remained to teach in Garfield. Charles Sparling, a young printer, married her shortly after her aunt, by then a widow, had died.

The walls of the parlor, now called a living room, have been repaneled, the furniture reupholstered, and the rugs replaced.

There is running water, gas heat, electricity—and the coal and gas stove are gone.

It is nevertheless the same house where a pretty blue-eyed girl with blonde ringlets invited her school chums for jam and bread.

Now zoned residential, there was a time when the house had 600 chickens in the back yard. Allendale had about that many residents then. It has more than 10 times that today.

Bells, bells, bells

Maytie Rowland's young life, she recalls, was regulated by bells.

"The school bell would ring a half an hour early if there was to be no school that day," Mrs. Sparling recalls.

There were, of course, no telephones, televisions, radios, or even blinking lights until much later.

"There were school bells, and for fires they banged an old train wheel with a sledge hammer. They tapped it in a different way for the various parts of town so the firemen would know where to go," Mrs. Sparling says.

Then there was the familiar bell of the peanut vendor. "Children loved it," she says. We also loved the organ grinder. He came less frequently."

Mrs. Sparling also remembers the train whistle.

"At 12:33 p.m. every day, all the children used to run to the train station to see the Harvey Springstead pull in. That was the name of the train that ran from Suffern to New York every day," she says. "It was solid brass."

Allendale children also liked to go to the blacksmith's shop on Franklin Turnpike, then a dusty road. "There was a cider mill in the same building," she says. "We were forbidden to beg, but we didn't have to. The owner always gave us some."

"There were lots of windmills in those days," says Mrs. Sparling. The richer families, she recalls, used them to pump water to the attic to be used later. Her aunt and uncle, who were less well to-do, had several hand pumps.

Her uncle supplemented his income by lighting the gas street lights. One year, Mrs. Sparling recalls, when the municipal budget didn't balance and her uncle wasn't paid, he collected all the lanterns and hid them in the cellar.

"He used to love to tell that story," she says. "Of course, he got paid."

Paying grocery bills, Mrs. Sparling says, was in those days an event. "People would only pay their bills a couple of times a year. When you did, the owner would take you around the store and treat you to a bag of everything."

Milk was only seven cents during Maytie Sparling's girlhood. When she sold eggs they were ten cents a dozen. Mail arrived promptly enough that no one thought to complain, and the mailman stopped for pie at almost every house. "He was fat," Mrs. Sparling says.

Mrs. Sparling says she has had several thousand children in her classes during 41 years as an elementary school teacher, but she never had any of her own.

She wrote a gardening column for the defunct New York Herald Tribune for many years, belonged to the local gardening club, and was president of the Allendale senior citizen group, the XYZ Club, a post her retired husband now holds.

For the last five years, Mrs. Sparling has been the Allendale welfare director. She is resigning in January.

She says she wants to stay at home a while.

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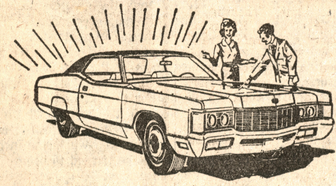

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