

Myrtle Dator Reminisces

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Mrs. Dator smiles easily as she reminisces about her early years in Allendale. Only her wheelchair and her hearing aid bely her 94 years. She says firmly and proudly, "I'll be 95 on Dec. 22 of this year."

What was the town like when Mrs. Dator was born in 1888? She notes, with precision, that she was not born in Allendale, but in Franklin Lake's. "Of course, we called it Campgaw then." Myrtle Quackenbush moved to Allendale when she was 3 months old, to what is now 184 Myrtle Ave., and lived on the street until, as a married woman, she and her family moved to Wyckoff. Why did they move? "The traffic was getting bad" — this was in 1926! — "and it was difficult to back the car out of the driveway into the traffic on Myrtle Avenue."

Her earliest memories, however, do not include motor cars. Rather, she recalls easily horses and wagons, farms, strawberry fields, sugar maple trees, a variety of crops at The Celery Farm and three students in her 8th grade graduating class. She knew the Van Houtens and the Mallinsons and the Archers and the Burtis family who had the sawmill near San Jacinto. Was it a quiet life, growing up around 1900? Mrs. Dator smiles gently in reproof, "We thought we led a busy life."

Branches of her father's

family, the Quackenbushes, had long settled in Allendale. Early maps of Allendale show them along Franklin Turnpike and on what was to become Myrtle Avenue.



Myrtle Quackenbush Dator

Her father and his brother were painters and decorators, originally from Mahwah. She grew up on Myrtle Avenue with her two brothers, her mother, always a cat in residence,

once a dog and a few chickens — "just enough for ourselves." Myrtle Quackenbush went to "the old school" on Franklin Turnpike, "the same one that my father went to,"

and then to the "new school" (that was being built near Thurston's garage). "There were only three students in my 8th grade graduating class, two boys and me. The boys

missed some schooling every year because they had to work on their fathers' farms." She pauses and recalls sadly that one of the boys, Sam Pritchard, was killed in the war.

Mrs. Dator's schooling was interrupted by the birth of her second brother, 12 years younger than she. "My mother was very sick after his birth, and I had to stay home and keep house and look after them." Both prospered under her care and her mother regained her health.

What does she remember of those days? "Well, we don't have thunderstorms the way we used to. We'd all move into one of the basement rooms until the noise and the storms stopped." And speaking of storms, "When I was 9 or 10 years old, there was a cyclone and my father took us down to Cherry Hill in Hackensack. We saw all the houses that had been destroyed. I've never forgotten it. I was so frightened."

"During the hot summer weather, we'd get out the special furniture, and arrange it in one basement room. We'd spend a lot of time there because it was cooler than the rest of the house. And, of course, we had the ice box there, too. The men would come to deliver the great blocks of ice."

However, the coal stove and the kitchen wood

range were sufficiently warming in the winter. Everyday, whatever the weather, there were eggs from the chickens, and fresh milk in the big pail that they left on the doorstep for the farmer to fill. And the grocery store owners would send their carts around for the housewives to place their orders with the drivers. The groceries were delivered the next day.

"I don't remember any policemen stationed in town then. We called them 'constables' when we did see them. And to alert people about fires, the men would use hammers to sound on the 'big wheels' to inform the town where the fire was."

And Allendale, itself? "It was a farming area. Even my grandfather raised strawberries. And the nearest market was Paterson, where the berries were brought by horse and wagon." The same means of transport took them visiting to her grandmother's in Franklin Lakes. "We went to Crestwood Lake for picnics. I wasn't much of a swimmer."

And wasn't Allendale a summer resort? "Oh, yes," recalls Mrs. Dator, laughing. "I knew the Zabriskie girls who lived on East Allendale Avenue near the Saddle River border. We'd walk along that street, which was known

as 'Boarding House Row' — you know all those big houses there? — and look at the rich people sitting on the lawn."

Mostly, her family stayed in town. No traveling the way so many do now. There was the train, of course, and the line up to Ramsey, but she doesn't remember any casual day tripping. Except for one event, a dance, where she met her future husband. "I went with another boy," Mrs. Dator says, grinning at the memory. Married at 21, in a home wedding, in a dress of "white net over satin." And then the move across the street to a house that the family lived in until the move to Wyckoff.

Her family is scattered now. Her daughter lives in Lake George, N.Y., the youngest brother in Waldwick — "he comes to see me every Saturday" — five grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren, but none of them living in New Jersey.

Mrs. Dator was the guest of honor at the May 1 fashion show at the Allendale Nursing Home, one of the grand ladies of the town, the home's oldest Allendale resident, who remembers the days when Allendale was the "strawberry capital of the world," and a small town where for fun "we did all the ordinary things that children do."