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Number 15

Rockland - A Special Place



Stevens Store 1942

A hundred years ago in April, 1901, a 19 year old young man named Roland Stevens - "Rollie" to his friends - set out to make his fortune as a retail grocer in Rockland, the northernmost section of Madison. He took \$50.00 he had saved and, with his father's blessing, bought an assortment of groceries, which he began to peddle among his neighbors. By hard work and a good business sense his initial investment grew. He rented a vacant store for \$2.00 a month and later expanded into his own store which still stands on the east side of Route 79 in Rockland just two miles south of the Durham/Madison Town Line.

Today busy commuters pass Mr. Stevens' Store with no thought for Rockland, its rich heritage and its place in Madison history. Fortunately for us, Mr. Stevens yielded to the nagging of his friends and wrote down his recollections of 80 years in Rockland. Entitled "Pot Skimmin's" it chronicles a way of life unfamiliar to most of us in the 21st Century.

He answers the question, "What is Rockland?" It is home to a group of people with no intentions of "dark deeds" who choose to live in Rockland, who love its streams and woods and rocks. He notes that a person cannot know Rockland

unless he or she lives there for a long time. It is a place where neighbors help neighbors when they need help. Rockland is "a lot of the past, a lot of living, and planning and dreaming and hopes."

He writes of his early years in a family with two brothers and a father whose simple way of life defined the character of Rocklanders. His father, whose wife had died at a young age, was a farmer with a cow, a garden, a chicken coop full of hens and several hogs. He made charcoal, and bought eggs from his neighbors which he sold in New Haven. In season he bought the bushels huckleberries picked in the woods and sold them in the city. He owned his own home, his farm and woodland. Mr. Stevens recalled that he and his brothers ate well, shared in the hard work, had plenty of fun, and avoided being labeled as bad boys

It is a little over 11 miles from East Wharf Beach on Long Island Sound to the center of Rockland. The church, the one-room school, the post office and Stevens Store still remain though no longer fulfilling their original purposes. The woods and rocks remain also. Among the hills and valleys lies the Black Rock that lends it's to name to Rockland on occasion. Old maps still designate the area as Black Rock.

As you pass through Rockland slow down and savour the memory of times past. Remember Roland Stevens and his store, which still stands just north of the Church. Take a moment to celebrate a special place - Rockland.

Directions to Steven's Store in North Madison: From Madison Center take Route 79 north to the North Madison Traffic Circle where Route 80 intersects with Route 79. Continue north on Route 79 until you enter Rockland. You will pass a former church on the right with a red door. A short distance beyond the former church you will see Steven's Store on the right looking much as it does in the picture above except for the gasoline pump. The house next to the store has been moved back from the road.

Please Note: This building is privately owned and not open to the public.