

water (it is riley if it is pumped.) I told him Pa drew some for me that night. 'Yes,' he said, 'pa would get down and suck it up if you asked him to.' Ren thinks it remarkable that we get along. I don't think he is a bit hard to get along with in the house

Hattie didn't lack assistance in carrying out her plans for renovating the Oak Knoll Road house. Besides Ren and Pa Porter, her mother and father began to stay overnight once the weather improved in the spring, and Pa Brown was once more involved in a task that he relished, that of tearing down the old kitchen, rebuilding it and arranging the rooms more to Hattie's liking. She sent a second plan with more specifics off to Laura, and Emaline, in writing about the renovations gives us a clue, inadvertently, to the age of that house. On Feb. 26, 1894, she wrote to Laura:

Pa Porter thinks it is all right to tear down the old kitchen and to clean up and get rid of the old (truck) that has been accumulating for nearly 50 years, he told me that dear mother always wanted to keep everything whether it was good for anything or not

On this basis, the origins of the house are in the mid-1840's, making it one of the oldest homesteads in Cuba Township. It was probably built by Pa (Elliott) Porter, who was one of the early settlers to take up government land grants. Arnett C. Lines, in his "History of Barrington," has noted that Silas Jayne and Elliott Porter were among the early settlers who walked to Chicago to file their claims for government land on which they had settled. Since Lines also notes that the last government land was sold around Barrington in 1848, and the Porter name appears on the earliest landowners maps, the evidence would place the original part of the house as close to 140 years old.

As an extensive study is made of the Octagon House letters, the patterns of income for families like the Browns, the Porters, and also the Nightingales become clearer. The Browns had owned land in both Cuba and Barrington Townships; in the latter, as has recently been established through landowners maps, it was approximately 40 acres on County Line Road, now opposite part of the Barrington Hills Country Club. The 1886 map shows that the Browns still owned this property. But since 1882, they had modestly farmed the land around the Octagon House, perhaps a maximum of 5 acres, until they began to sell it off in the 1890's.

The Porter Family owned about 90 acres on the north and south sides of what is now called Oak Knoll Road, and west of the intersection of Buckley Road. Wheat, corn, potatoes, some dairy cattle, some beef cattle, a few pigs, and chickens, were the basis around which the Porter family economy revolved. Their own staple needs were amply provided for, the excess would be sold. There was no mortgage on the property, farm equipment was maintained and repaired rather than replaced until the use of steam power became more widespread and technology begin to price these small homesteaders out of the market. Purchases tended to be of cloth goods at the local general stores, curds and whey at the local dairy to feed the cattle, wheat was taken to the local flour and feed mill to be ground, a lot of trading was done, which often took the form of barter. In this mid-1890 period eggs were being sold by both the Browns and the Porters for between 8 and 10 cents a dozen. Hattie notes that:



A southside view of the Porter farmhouse in the early 1900s. The Octagon House letters indicate that the house may have been built in the 1840's, making it one of the first homes in the area.

In the afternoon we went uptown with more wheat. We sold \$26.18 worth at 60 cents a bushel

Emaline records that:

Pa is planting potatoes in the henyard today, he has sold lots of potatoes this spring he gets a dollar a bag has sold over all we have to spare

Emaline also mentions that she has made a gooseberry pie which took a lot of sugar, but,

we get 22 lbs of nice granulated sugar for one dollar

In one way or another, Hattie manages to decorate her house to her liking, she mentions new wallpaper for the upstairs front room after the men have built a closet in it. Paid 9 cents for each roll, and will send samples of all her papers to Laura when she is finished with the papering. There isn't too much fuss about making and hanging curtains:

Monday (April 23, 1894) we were uptown most all day. I bought my new curtains, got enough for all the windows downstairs-12, including the sash door in the kitchen. There is one window in the storeroom down here that I didn't get a curtain for. They are dark green, very pretty I think, will send you a piece when I trim the one for the door. I had four good ones, light green in the front room, so put those upstairs in the front room. I spent all the time I had apart from the housework in putting up the four upstairs, four in the front room and two in our bedroom. I had to take nearly all the curtains off the rollers, and cut the rollers shorter. The twelve curtains, rollers, stick for the bottom, and rings to pull down by cost me \$4.60. Bought them of A.W. Meyer. Ma gave me the money to pay for them which Ren didn't exactly like but I made him think it was all right. I also bought calico to cover one of my rocking chairs over

Hattie also acquired two household appliances at this time, the first being a washing machine.

Ma and Pa made me a present of a washing machine like theirs and yours for



Ren Porter, husband of Hattie Brown Porter, shows off his farm "machinery" on his Oak Knoll Road farm in the early 1900s.

a birthday present. Ren likes the machine very much. He says it has but one fault—it is too cheap (3.50) Not a bad fault I am sure

The other appliance was mentioned by Emaline:

Hattie and Ren came up to town yesterday he went to mill and Hattie stopped here and I went downtown with her to get her a carpet sweeper. She told me to tell you that she took the dollar and a half that Joe gave her and put a quarter in it and bought her a real nice carpet sweeper. Have you ever got one yet.

In that same letter, Emaline tells about an occasional "happening" in Barrington life which was also written about in later years by another chronicler of the town—Marvin Snyder, and that was the passage of bands of gypsies to and from their summer camping rounds further out in the country:

There has been a band of gypsies camping near here (according to Marvin Snyder this would have been in the vicinity of the high school) and one old hag came here and pa went to the door and she wanted to tell his fortune she says I want to tell you something you are going to have good luck. I want to tell you something you will have good fortune pa told her that he could stand that all right, she kept talking and pa kept telling her he could stand that all right, finally she went off mad. they had lots of horses and large covered wagons I presume they found lots of people that had their fortunes told.

Possibly not, because according to Snyder the community went into a state of alarm at the sight of the gypsy bands. Tranquility, law and order were being menaced, and a climate of "lock up your daughters" swept over town!

(In the next article—the people of Barrington, Emaline's circle, and beyond. Hattie and Ren's first and only child, Laura and Joe's second.)