

## [Marie Haggerty--Worcester #1]

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PUB. Living Lore in New England

(Massachusetts)

TITLE Marie Haggerty - Worcester #1

WRITER Emily B. Moore

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STATE Massachusetts

NAME OF WORKER Mrs. Emily B. Moore

ADDRESS 84 Elm Street, Worcester,

Massachusetts

DATE OF INTERVIEW January 31, 1939

SUBJECT Living Lore

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NAME OF INFORMANT Mrs. Marie Haggerty

ADDRESS 63 Austin Street, Worcester,

Massachusetts

Mrs. Haggerty is 72 years old, a sweet refined little lady, with a forced dignity, which she tries to maintain in the presence of her too modern family. She keeps house for a daughter, about 35, a son 32 and a younger son about 30. The daughter is a waitress, the older son a jack-of-all-trades, (when he works) and the younger son lives in the glory of a would-be pugilistic career. There is more slang used in that household than in the average middle-class family, and through it all, the little old lady has difficulty in retaining her sweet, gentle manners. When she has her company vocabulary flowing, it is not unusual to hear her say, "Indeed, Mrs. Sergeant was quite a lady; everything had to be just so; truly, it was a pleasure to serve her, but her husband, - what a guy — he was nuts!"

To see Mrs. Haggerty you always think of lavender and lace, for she only weighs 90 pounds, has dainty little feet and hands, wears soft lace collars, chic little hats, and there is always a small black velvet [bow?], at her throat, just under the chin. She speaks in a very soft tone and never raises her voice. She loves to sit and think of the days when she was working for wealthy people, and how the help in the hotels treated her as "quality" just like her mistress. She speaks with longing of the soft beds, and the beautiful candle-holders in her room, of the fine horses and carriages she used to ride in, and "right in the same seat with the children" she was taking care of. She is mortified that she is forced to live in her present home - just a "squalid tenement" and is always looking forward to the time when "something will happen" to the family and they will get their "just dues" and they can have a little cottage somewhere, like she had "when Pa lived." She has been accustomed to much better than she has at present, but for all her reduced circumstances, she is cheerful and kind, always neat and clean, and no matter what her shiftless children do she pets them and says "they're really good boys and girls - poor things."

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“Mother died when I was five, and as I was the youngest and all my sisters and brothers grown up, I had to live with my old maiden aunts, and some cousins. We lived on a farm in New Brunswick. Farm life was hard in those days and as my cousins grew older, they went to Boston to work. I'll never forget the work we had to do on the farm. We raised sheep, and during the summer we would shear the sheep, wash the wool, spread it in the sun, and when it was dry we would bring it in and I would have to hand it to my old maid aunts who would spin it on the wheel. Sometimes I thought my back would break, and many times I would fall asleep at work. All the wool was carded by hand, dyed by hand, and even woven on a hand loom.

“There were four women in our house, and I was the only child, and they all made it their business to keep me busy. I could knit socks before I was 8. I also had to gether the eggs, churn the butter, skim the cream, and about everything that they could think of, kept me busy from dawn until dark. My only pleasure was going with my uncle, once a month, to town, to take the butter, wool cloth or homespun, as they called it, to market. These things would be exchanged for flour, sugar, and other things that we couldn't raise on the farm. Another thing I liked to do was watch my uncle put his money away in a large chest, where he kept gold and silver in piles, and paper money between flat stones. I remember he used to wind up the roll of bills and tied with a string were as as big around as my tea kettle. He let me hold it many times, and always said it would be mine if I stayed with my aunts until they died.

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I always said I would stay with them, but as I grew older, the aunts got so crabby, nothing I did suited them, and one of my cousins told me I was getting as old-fashioned as the aunts, and if I would come to Boston, she would get me a job with the family she was working for. My uncle was cross, for he kept the post office in the town where we lived, and it had been in the family since the first mail came to New Brunswick and he wanted me to be post mistress when he got too old. Well, I did want to go to Boston, but I didn't

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want to be a maid, so another cousin said if I came she would get me in the dressmaking shop where she worked. To make a long story short, - I went to Boston. At first I was homesick and cried all night, but I soon got over that. I got the job in the dressmaking place, but for two years all the mistress allowed me to do was baste, and I got tired of that. I never could raise my head up, look at anyone, or talk without getting scolded. Finally another cousin got me a job with the family she worked for, taking care of two children. I loved that, for the children were lovely. I used to live at a hotel in Boston for the winter and then we went to Swampscott for the summer. It was lovely there, and I stayed with that family for years, and only left because I was afraid of the husband. He was wonderful when sober, but a terror when drunk, and he used to do tricks with lighted oil lamps, and I was scared. Once the house did catch fire, so after that I got another position.

“You know in New Brunswick, we used candles in part of the house and oil lamps. But when I came to Boston most everybody was using gas lights. I couldn't get used to them - I was always blowing them out instead of turning them off. And when the electric lights came, I was scared even worse. I'd rather put my hand on a hot stove than on the switch to turn on the lights. Poor Mrs. French - she was the wealthy woman I worked for - she had a lot of patience with me. I learnt to go all through the house without any night light, but one night I almost knocked her down. She gave me a good talking to - not scolding - said I had to get over such a feeling. I did - of course - but it took time.

“I was very much amused with many things the rich people did; for instance, where I was raised, all girls had to do house work, but when I lived with Mrs. French they sent both their daughters to college to ‘learn to keep house’. Now why couldn't they learn at home?

“They were nice girls though - real ladies. You know in those days no nice girls used rouge and powder, for it was a disgrace to paint your face like a [heathen?]. The first powder I ever used on my face was my own girl, Marie's. Girls were not so bold then, either, not even the rich ones. They waited until a young man asked them for the favor of going out with them. Now, Glory be to God the young girls are even bold enough to come to the

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boy's house. I know, for they come here for my John and Bill. I suppose I'm old-fashioned, but I still like modesty in women; there's a limit to everything. There are lots of good girls, 4 but the majority of them are bold hussys. Maybe it's because I don't see the other type, but I do think they're bold. They need to be tamed down some. “

“Well, I suppose things have changed so for the young people to-day. There's so many more places to go than there were. Don't you think that makes a difference, Mrs. Haggerty.”

The little old lady looked out through the window and sighed.

“Yes, 'tis true. There was no such places to go then as the young people go today. Most fun we had was when I went to dances with my cousin, and we did all sorts of pretty dances. A girl that could bow nice and act most graceful got all the dances. I never was big, nor awkward, so I always had a lot of dances. What I liked most was the nice sleigh rides we used to have. My cousin had the finest pair of bay mares in Boston, and when I'd have my day out he always came and took me ridin', and sometimes we'd go as much as twenty miles. There were taverns along the roads and we'd stop for a hot oyster stew or anything they happened to have; that is in the way of food. Don't misunderstand me. Ladies never drank liquor them days; well, mabbe some of them did, but I didn't, for it wasn't considered modest. I never heard, and never seen, either, a lady smoking. Goodness, me, everybody smokes now, and a body is not smart if she can't drink. Just onct in my time did I see a woman sittin' with a man drinking, and the way she looked and carried on - dearie me. I couldn't sleep that night 5 thinking about her. Oh, yes, there always was huskin' bees, but most out on the roads out of town, not right in Boston, but my cousin was a 'cop' and he always had invites to most everythin' that went on, so he'd take me to the huskin' bees. I always had a lot of fun, for he was so good-lookin' that all the girls wanted to dance with him, an' me bein' his cousin, none was jealous of me, so I always had a lot of fun.

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“In Boston, most of the time, we had what you call house parties; not the kind the society people of today have, but just like a birthday party. All the young people would be invited for miles around. There was always someone that could play the piano, and we'd all gather around the piano and sing; dearie me, no, I don't remember much the names, but like ‘After the Ball’, or ‘Put on Your Old Gray Bonnet’, and some sad songs. One of the men used to sing ‘Oh, Where is My Wandering Boy To-Night’, and when he sang that, there wasn't a dry eye in the room, he had so much sadness in his voice. Mebbe if people sang songs like that today in these taverns young people wouldn't drink so much. I used to have to recite a piece at most all the parties; it always brought a lot of clapping. Yes, I remember it. It was headed 'tom Jones'. I'll think over the verses and tell you them sometime. It was very pretty and very sad. Made everyone cry.”

“For pete's sakes. Ma, what are you chinning about crying for? Mrs. Moore'll think you're nuts.” It was Bill, Mrs Haggerty's oldest son home for his supper.

“Now Bill, be a nice boy. Please excuse him Mrs Moore— he's a real good boy even if I do say it myself. You'll excuse me now— poor Bill must be hungry. He's been looking for work, poor dear.”