

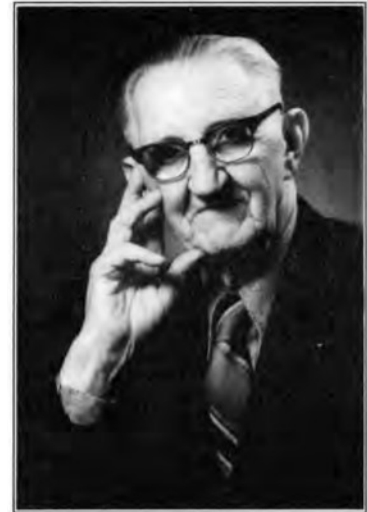
Excerpt from “Old Manchester II...The Storytellers,” compiled, written and edited by Milton K. Adams; photographic reproductions by Anthony J. Thibeau. Published by the Manchester Historical Society, November 1995. Copies of book for sale at the History Center, 175 Pine Street, Manchester CT. Available online in the reprints section of our website www.manchesterhistory.org.

OLD MANCHESTER II...
The Storytellers
 Compiled, Written and Edited by Milton K. Adams

Excerpt from Harry H. Cowles’s memoirs, starting on page 234 of the Storytellers book. Harry was born about 1897.

HILLSTOWN STORIES

Storyteller: Harry H. Cowles, age 85, a long-time resident of Hillstown Rd., from his book “My Random Memories,” published for his family in 1982



II. SOME HILLSTOWN PEOPLE

Isobel and Lacy

When I was a small child, one of our neighboring families was a Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hall, and Henry’s brother, Justin. They were a Negro family and their home was almost directly across the street from our place. When I was a little tot, I used to say that I had two mammas—Mamma Hall and Mamma Cowles.



Isobel and Lacy Cobb

I was quite young when Justin died, and I can’t remember how old he was at the time other than the fact that he was no longer a young man.

Henry and Maria Hall were a nice old couple as I remember them. I must have been something of a tribulation to them at times because I was liable to go over there any time of the day, sometimes before I was dressed in the morning. And I wanted to talk to Mr. Hall around his farm, asking all kinds of questions about his crops and why he grew them, and why he didn’t grow something else instead. He

always answered patiently, but as I remember now, at times rather vaguely. I’ll bet he wished many times that I would just go home.

He didn’t live a great number of years after his brother died. perhaps five or six, but probably only two or three. It seems to me that he died about nineteen seven or eight, and I think it was about that time that their niece Isobel Mason was married to Lacy Cobb. I remember that after Henry died, Isobel and Lacy moved in to take care of Maria. That was par for the course for them. Lacy and Isobel were always taking care of somebody.

If anyone in the neighborhood had trouble—was unable to take care of themselves, or if someone had died—that is where you would find Lacy doing things outside and Isobel putting the house in order, or doing the washing or ironing. No one needed to tell her what was needed to be done. She often helped my sister Flossie with canning or doing other things around the house.

Isobel and Lacy had one child, a son Richard, who was about the same age as Flossie’s oldest son, Billy. The two boys became playmates and have remained friends all their lives.

Because Billy always called me “Uncle Harry,” Dick Cobb also called me Uncle Harry. It used to amuse Isobel to hear him calling me “Uncle” Through the years it has become the accepted thing for us both, and eight, and I think it was about that time that their niece Isobel Mason was married to Lacy Cobb. I remember that after Henry died, Isobel and Lacy moved in to take care of Maria. That was par for the course for them. Lacy and Isobel were always taking care of somebody.

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Because Billy always called me "Uncle Harry," Dick Cobb also called me Uncle Harry. It used to amuse Isobel to hear him calling me "Uncle" Through the years it has become the accepted thing for us both, and he still addresses me as "Uncle Harry." Certainly Dick has always been a nephew of whom I could be justly proud. He was an outstanding athlete during his school and college years and is now directing athletics in the Manchester school system.

Old Joe Manuel

Joe Manuel was one of the human derelicts that Lacy and Isobel took in when he became too old to take care of himself. He was an ex-slave, freed in his young manhood by Abraham Lincoln. The army of the south had used him to help bury their dead. He seldom talked about what he had been required to do during the war years, but I remember his once telling about one battle ground where he could have walked a long way, stepping from body to body.

I have no idea how he happened to come here after being freed. I don't believe that he ever learned any trade. He just supported himself as best he could, working for farmers in the vicinity and I never knew him to overindulge in alcohol—if he drank at all.

In the summer months when the soil was fairly warm and dry, if he felt too tired to keep working, he would lie down right where he happened to be, between the rows of crops—his hoe or fork beside him—and go to sleep. When he woke up, he would dust himself off and go back to work.

I remember Isobel telling about one time, while living with the Cobb family, Old Joe told Isobel that he was going to Burnside for some reason. Burnside was about three miles away, and the most direct route was over a dirt road that required crossing a brook on a plank. The previous night had been wet and there were puddles everywhere, so Isobel told Joe to be sure he wore rubbers and keep his feet dry or else he could easily come down with a cold.

Joe walked to Burnside and, on the way back while crossing the brook, had the misfortune to slip and fall in, getting wet all over—except his feet. Somehow his legs from the knees down didn't get into the water. When he got home and Isobel saw him, she said "Whatever happened to you? You're all wet."

"No," Isobel," he replied. "You told me to keep my feet dry and I did. You didn't say anything about the rest of me."

I think old Joe must have been close to or over ninety when he could no longer take care of himself, and Lacy and Isobel took him in and furnished room and board for him, covering the cost themselves. Lacy tried more than once to get the town of Manchester to contribute to his support, without any success. At last, one day Lacy went again to talk to George Waddell, town manager at that time. But this time Lacy asked for nothing from the town. Instead, he told Mr. Waddell, "I just want to tell you that I wouldn't hurt the old man for the world, but early Monday morning, I'm going to bring Mr. Manuel up here to the town hall with a blanket around his shoulders and lunch in a bag and he is going to be your responsibility for a while instead of mine. That's where you're going to find him when you come to your office."

That, at last, got some action and I believe that Lacy was allowed something toward Joe's board. Later, he was put into the town farm where he died at something over one hundred years old.



The Cobb farmhouse on Hillstown Road, site of the present-day Botticello farm stand.



Entering Lacy's barn with a load of tobacco to hang.

