



A History of

The Pat Roche Hospice Home

Background and Recollections
of Polly Thayer Starr



Welcome from the CEO

Dear Friends,

As a non-profit entity, our team at the Pat Roche Hospice Home is committed to providing our patients a death that is comfortable and peaceful, immersed in emotional and spiritual support, surrounded by loved ones in a home that is centered on the dignity of every patient.

The vocation of hospice care is also a partnership with families. Every patient story is different but united by unconditional love. Whether that family is two people or two hundred people, the experience of loss is indeed an overwhelming shared journey. At the end of our lives we seek very little but the comforting touch of a loved one, the laughter of a shared story, and the realization that a life filled with love is a life well lived.

That is why I am so pleased that we are honoring Polly Thayer Starr, former owner of this beautiful estate in this historical retrospective. The Thayer family summered on Turkey Hill starting in the mid-1920s. The family history, layered with joy, heartache and love, covers every corner of this home.

I hope you enjoy learning about this remarkable woman and her family.

Sincerely,



Renee McInnes, MBA, RN
Chief Executive Officer
NVNA and Hospice



Renee McInnes, MBA, RN

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Credits

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Visit the pollythayerstarr.org website to learn more.

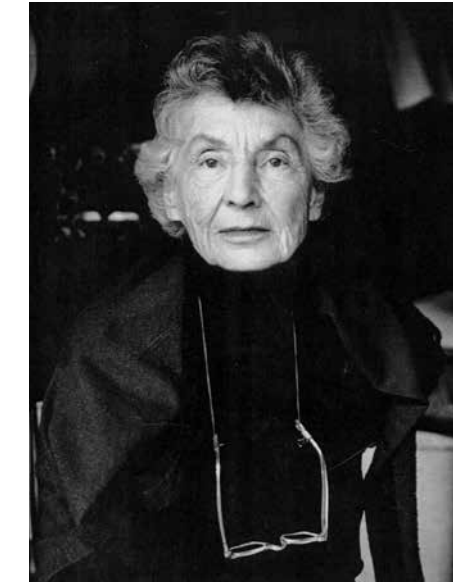
I. Introduction to Polly Thayer



The Algerian Tunic
an acclaimed self-portrait, c. 1927
Private Collection



Self Portrait with Fur, c. 1943
From the collection of the
Boston Athenaeum



Polly Thayer Starr photograph by
Steven Trefonides, c. 1985

Polly Thayer Starr (1904-2006) donated this property, her childhood home (now the Pat Roche Hospice Home) to the New England Yearly Meeting of Friends in 1959 for use as a rest home.

Named Ethel Randolph Thayer after her mother, she was known as “Polly” since childhood. She was the daughter of Harvard Law School Dean Ezra Ripley Thayer and Ethel Randolph Thayer, granddaughter of legal scholar James Bradley Thayer, and a descendent of Plymouth Colony Governor William Bradford and Colonists John and Pricilla Alden.

Polly was an exceptional artist. She painted flowers, cityscapes, houses, beaches and landscapes, cats and cows, insects and zebras. With the aid of a jeweler's loupe she produced many close-up nature pieces. She was also a highly acclaimed portraitist, with works displayed at the Museum of Fine Arts, Harvard's Fogg Museum and many other major art institutions.

II. Poetry of Hand and Spirit: Polly Thayer (Starr) the Artist

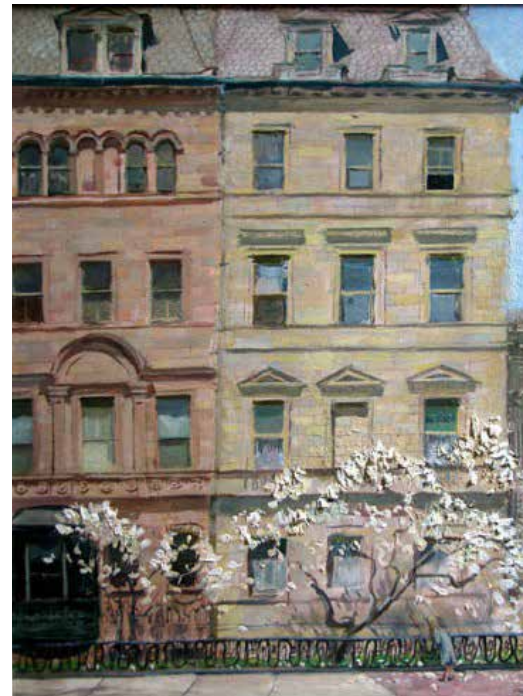
by Dorothy Koval (Preface to the catalog of an exhibit at the Vose Galleries in 2001)

Polly Thayer's quest has been to see into the heart of things. For the better part of a century she has tirelessly sought to understand the nature and effects of seeing, as well as to coax her own highly-trained hand into locating and conveying what she calls the invisible within the visible, the enduring spirit within each expression of what we see as reality.

*"I want to see with my whole being, and to communicate what I experience. William Blake called it seeing **through** the eye rather than with the eye: instead of superimposing my own expectations on a subject, I seek what the form will reveal of essence, what the visible will tell me of the invisible. It is an effort that requires intense, prayerful attention, but if the seeing is honest and the hand is well trained, a revelation will emerge. The reward is bliss." ~ Polly Thayer (Starr), 2001*

Born Ethel Randolph Thayer in 1904, "Polly" as she has been called all her life, was raised in Boston's Back Bay when it was still so rural that her parents could go on daily horseback rides in the Fenway. Each spring the family moved by carriage to their farm in Hingham, where Polly, her brother Jim and sister Eleanor, took boundless delight in the goings-on of the farm creatures and the offerings of nature.

Her beloved father, Ezra Ripley Thayer, who was Dean of Harvard Law School, died when she was eleven, and her widowed mother, the former Ethel Randolph Clark, who came from a line of ministers, occupied herself increasingly with religious and charitable affairs. Noticing her daughter's fascination with a group of students drawing from casts at the Museum of Fine Arts, Mrs. Thayer arranged for her to take drawing lessons with Beatrice Van Ness, herself then a recent graduate from the Museum School. Polly threw herself into the activity with such enthusiasm that her teacher could hardly see the child for the charcoal.



Spring on Commonwealth Avenue

Thayer graduated from the Westover Boarding School in Middlebury, Connecticut and briefly considered a career in acting. She joined Harvard's *Cercle Français* and the Footlights Club in Jamaica Plain, acting in semi-professional productions of George Bernard Shaw's *Androcles and The Lion* and Molière's *Tartuffe*. But painting was clearly her passion and she decided to enter the School of Painting at the Museum of Fine Arts.

Before beginning classes, Thayer went with her mother and brother on a voyage to China, Korea and Japan. On September 1, 1923, as they were about to leave Yokohama, their ship "shivered like a human thing in pain," and suddenly the pier broke apart and was swallowed by the ocean. The greatest recorded earthquake in Japanese history had just struck, leveling Tokyo and Yokohama. In the ensuing days the *S.S. Empress of Australia* was converted to a hospital ship and the nineteen-year-old Thayer found herself tending the dead and the dying. The experience remained with her as a measure of reality both in life and in art (quote taken from a journal she kept on the trip).

Directly after returning to Boston, Thayer entered the Museum School and took Anatomy and Life Drawing with Philip Hale.

"You did a nude in a week, and you worked all day on it, each day... You established the form in the first two days, then you carved the detail for the next four. It was a regular system on every one... You were given a ruler and a piece of paper the size, as you held it up, of what you saw on the model stand. And you cut off that little strip of paper, thumbtacked it to your ruler, and then divided it into seven and a half heads. Then you reproduced that on your paper, so you were establishing your exact points... Your drawing would be as faithful as it could possibly be made, using the plumb line and diminishing glass and this ruler with the paper on it. That took quite a while." ~ Polly Thayer Starr, 1995

The next fall she enrolled in Leslie Thompson's class on portraiture, but soon became dismayed by what she believed was too simplistic an approach: "Paint what you see, like a child," he insisted. She later remarked,

"It did not commend itself to me, when I got to thinking about it, that I should turn off processes that seemed to me important, such as the intellectual or the thoughtful... My difficulty from the start was to put



The Westover Boarding School

together what the teachers were telling me to do, to copy exactly what I saw, and still to fulfill the desire I knew was in me to say something about it... Painting, for me, was a way of understanding what I saw.
 ~ Polly Thayer (Starr), 2001

Upon learning that Hale was willing to give her private lessons, Thayer left the Museum School after a year and a half. Under Hale, Thayer mastered the conventions of professional academic painting that were considered hallmarks of the Boston Style, but she wanted to know more about color and composition. With an artist friend she rented a fish-house over the water in Provincetown for a summer to study with Charles Hawthorne. Hawthorne taught his students to capture large blocks of light and dark and had them paint in full sunlight with a putty knife. Thayer enjoyed the sense of *mattière* she gained from the thick paint, and recognized that Hawthorne had keyed up her palette.



Wandering the Salt Flats
 Provincetown, c. 1960
 Private Collection

Over the next few years, Thayer traveled extensively. She spent a winter with her mother in Paris, studying at the Académie Colarossi, and toured Italy with landscape architect Rose Nichols. In 1929, she sailed to Morocco. The trip was cut short by acute appendicitis, but not before she received word that the National Academy of Design in New York had bestowed the prestigious First Hallgarten Prize on her painting *Circles* (now in the collection of the New Britain Museum of American Art in New Britain, Connecticut). The next spring she followed the advice of Royal Cortissoz, art historian and critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, who had recommended that she study Velasquez, but the

voice that spoke to her most directly was that of Goya. She felt he painted what mattered, and copied his work many times trying to decipher its significance.

From Spain, Thayer moved on to Paris and sublet the studio of American painter Waldo Pierce, near the Chambre des Députés. She studied briefly in the atelier of cubist painter Andre l'Hôte and then settled down to work on models of her own choice, with her newly acquired Siamese kitten, Hunya, for company. She wrote back to the States in 1930,



Polly's cat
 Polly Thayer Starr Charitable Trust Collection

"I have met people in Paris who for the first time in my life make me realize... the riches a tradition and an older civilization can dower on society. Art, as I never dreamed it could be, is a daily and vital interest—it is more important than business, than politics, than eating even! You cannot think what the effect of it is when always among a group of my fellows at home, I have had to keep my greatest interests hooded, or if I mentioned painting it was only to bore, as 'talking shop' or 'being precious'."

From 1930 to 1933 Thayer spent the winters in New York City, where she began to struggle against the limitations of her Boston School training. *"Wheels (John Brooks Wheelwright the eccentric Bostonian poet and social activist) took me around all Friday to exhibitions,"* she wrote to her mother. *"I don't know what to think... the new is harder to swallow than a large oyster."* Eugene Speicher came to her studio just as she was beginning work on a large double nude in the Boston School manner. "Get out on the streets!" he exhorted. "Get into the subway! Get into the park! Get some life into it!" She went to wrestling matches and even asked a doctor friend to get her into an operating theater. *"To see the living organs pushing up uncovered out of a woman's body... I forgot everything in the wonder of it."*



Interval, self-portrait, 1930
 Museum of Fine Arts

Thayer won a gold medal from the Boston Tercentenary Exhibition mounted at the Horticultural Hall in 1930 for her self-portrait *Interval*. In that same year her first solo exhibition opened at Doll and Richards Gallery in Boston. One reviewer declared that it "surely settles her status as one of the foremost painters in the country, especially notable in portrait painting but evidently gifted with that kind of genius which is not circumscribed." The exhibition brought in commissions for eighteen portraits, many of which were shown the following year at Wildenstein's Gallery in New York.

Stimulated by her success, Thayer took a course with Harry Wickey at the Art Students' League in New York, and reached, in her own words in 1995,

"...a turning point... Wickey took my first drawing and slashed



John Brooks Wheelwright
 Brown University Collection

into it. He marked it all over to show me plastic values—that there was something that went on between the outlines other than just dark and light. Suddenly to realize another dimension was very exciting. The heavens opened.”

Forms and spaces had become “not merely abstract relationships, but powerful psychological currents which helped animate and unify the entire composition.” Thayer realized that she had much both to learn and to unlearn. With renewed interest she studied the penetrating portraits of Thomas Eakins, which seemed to her next to Goya’s in eloquence, and tried to integrate Wickey’s formal lessons, as well as Eakins’, into her own work.

Still seeking a more thorough knowledge of composition, Thayer spent the summer of 1932 studying with Jean Despujols in Fontainebleau. She was struck by his contention that an artist could not give equal weight to value, line and color. She explained in an interview in 1995,

“There’s a French saying ~ *tout dire, c’est ennuyer. If you are saying everything, you are a bore. Things that you see aren’t sharp against each other, they’re blurred. You only sharpen the ones that you want to look at... If you want to make a statement, then you need to focus on some one point in it. I began to understand the importance of that.*”



May Sarton
Harvard Art Museum

In her class at the academy in Fontainebleau, Thayer met Neyan Stevens, a young woman who had been born in Egypt, studied magic with the Moroccans, and adventured around the world. Stevens elucidated for Thayer the paintings of Van Gogh which, “to a Boston-trained artist... looked wildly distorted.” Before returning home, Thayer spent a week at the 15th century Abbaye de Pontigny, which had been converted to a retreat by a group of scholars. The week made a profound impression on her. Association with serious intellectual activity, she assured her mother, “helps work just like hearing good music.”

Thayer returned to New York in 1933. Her portrait subjects over the next decade included numerous writers, poets, actors and artists, among them Judith Anderson, Jacques Barzun, Maurice Evans, Lewis Galantieri, Robert Hale, May Sarton, John Brooks Wheelwright and Agnes Yarnall.

For some years Thayer had been close to Donald Starr, a Boston lawyer and man of many talents who had been at Harvard with her brother. In spite of their mutual attraction, she was hesitant to enter into marriage, unwilling to put less than her whole heart into either marriage or career, and uncertain as to



Polly’s portrait of her husband,
Donald C. Starr
Boston Athenaeum

how well the two could co-exist. She communicated her fears to him in a 1932 letter from Paris,

“I have been working like a dog... and for the first time feel a power in me that, if I have the strength, I can make grow... How much it amounts to I don’t know and I fear, and sometimes it almost makes me face abandoning it, that the handwriting on the wall reads that only what you are is what counts.”

In 1932 Starr resigned his post as Assistant Attorney General of Massachusetts to sail around the world with friends in a schooner, *Pilgrim*, he had built for the purpose. A year and a half later Thayer went to meet him in Genoa, Italy. She had deliberated long enough; the couple married and spent their honeymoon in Paris. Donald rejoined his ship and crew to finish his circumnavigation, while Thayer, whose tendency to seasickness made her an unenthusiastic sailor, steamed home directly.

The couple built a summer home on land which had been given them by Thayer’s mother from the farm in Hingham. Donald, hoping to introduce his wife to the joys of cruising, took her on a sailing trip in 1936. After two weeks Thayer asked to be put ashore: “I wanted to kiss the ground. I’d never felt about

the land as I did then... I wanted to celebrate it, praise it.”

She settled herself at a small inn and painted landscapes for ten days straight. The same summer, Neyan Stevens and May Sarton visited the Starrs, and Sarton posed for both painters. Thayer’s portrait, now owned by the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard, conveys the sharp intelligence of her sitter using a more modern idiom than she had used previously. She simplified the shapes of Sarton’s clothes, and heightened the poet’s gaze by keeping her face very pale with only a hint of shadows.

Back in Boston Thayer joined the Painter’s Workshop, a group of artists who met to analyze techniques and materials. It was during the course of their professional discussions that she identified a technique she had been seeking for years: “*Reubensian underpainting, in grisaille, and then glazing the color over it! That was how to get the luminosity of the shadows without losing the color.*” No longer would she blend adjacent pigments to form shadows that reminded her of mud. Instead, her darkness would reflect the light at the heart of the painting, through layers of modulated transparent glazes.

The demands on Thayer's time and energy increased. Her daughters Victoria and Dinah were born in 1940 and 1945. In 1942 she became a member of the Society of Friends, which, having no hierarchy, relied upon its members to devote many hours to their Meeting's activities. Moreover, she had a gregarious husband who loved travel, sports and club life. Nevertheless, in a solo show at Vose Galleries in 1950 she showed thirty works including portraits, landscapes and several finely-detailed renditions of flowers and small animals. Over the next decade she had exhibitions in Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

Around this period Thayer was given a jeweler's loupe. *"It was a watershed,"* she recalled in a talk in 1997. *"As a child I had been shown how to pat bees. It was always a thrill for me, and, to judge by the purr-like vibrations the stroking generated, for the bees as well. But I had no idea of the bronze wings' beaded hinges imbedded in the delicious fur jacket, or the jewelry of their articulation, until I studied them under the loupe's magnification."*



Sketch of Bees
Polly Thayer Starr
Charitable Trust Collection

She focused increasingly on elements of nature, fascinated by the construction of insects and plants. Although she was still accepting portrait commissions, her pursuit of meaning centered on flowers, which had become for her a direct bridge to the invisible.

In the early 1960s, the Starrs bought a summer house on Martha's Vineyard, conveniently situated for Donald's sailing. Donald too had begun painting, and they both enjoyed the "Painters' Weekends" at Naushon Island where her cousin, Edward Forbes, had a summer home. Alternately they joined Charles Hopkinson at Sharksmouth, his home on the North Shore. Thayer continued to paint at *Sharksmouth* even after Hopkinson's death in 1962, often pairing the massive worn rocks with an almost calligraphic rendering of the delicacy of water that had shaped them.

Thayer learned in the early 1970s that she had glaucoma and macular degeneration. She would have to learn to see in ways she had not yet imagined. She reflected in an undated typescript, *Why I Paint*, on the imperative of art in her life,

"I find there are secrets, certain numinous things, that seem to speak to me in a special sense, signaling in a language that compels decoding. To be faithful to this task demands absolute attention..."

In winter she drew white cyclamen blossoms, whose pristine recurved petals were sometimes splashed with red at the heart. In summer she delved into irises and zinnias that bloomed in her garden. The graphite and charcoal of her early training gave way to rich pastels. Some flowers were fully formed and lavish, with pale brown throats and bees and vibrant backgrounds, and some were almost abstract in the simplicity of their lines and planes.



Cyclamen Blossoms from the Polly
Thayer Starr Charitable Trust Collection

At times Thayer's subjects underwent a kind of transfiguration as she expressed, *"A process takes over like automatic writing, impossible to describe, an entering into the person or creature or thing that you are depicting. You feel you have succeeded if you have captured its essence, revealed its source in the ground of being. The object is transformed in the process – the Queen Anne's lace becomes a burning bush, the cyclamen is seen leaping joyously toward the sun, the fish's eye is the eye of God."*

At the age of eighty-seven, when it was clear that her eyesight would not permit her to commit her observations to paper for much longer, Thayer undertook two of the most precise and poetic projects that she had ever attempted. The first was a sequence of delicate drawings depicting the life cycle of the thistle. In the more than two dozen pieces that comprise it, all drawn directly from nature, no shadow falls between vision and reality; they are equally literal and metaphysical—unsentimental examinations of birth, growth and death, light and darkness, evanescence and recurrence. The second was a final portrait of herself. The physical skills she had challenged and honed for seven decades were at the command now not only of an eye, but of a soul which looked *through* the eye—and acknowledged both its own strength and its fragility.

Thayer loved to quote the words of the Japanese artist Hokusai, written at the age of 75, *"I have drawn things since I was six. All that I made before the age of sixty-five is not worth counting. At seventy-three I began to understand the true construction of animals, plants, trees, birds, and insects. At ninety I will enter into the secret of things. At a hundred and ten everything—every dot and dash—will live."*

In her later years, although Thayer's physical vision had diminished, her anticipation of insight was as keen as ever. *"You never achieve what you want,"* she admitted to a friend in 1996, *"but you're always getting nearer to the essence... And that's a search that is all important."* ■

A note on sources: For specific references, please refer to the original essay "Poetry of Heart and Hand" by Dorothy Koval at pollythayerstarr.org.



Self-portrait 1989
Polly Thayer Starr
Charitable Trust Collection

III. Recollections of Weir River Farm by Polly Thayer Starr

It is hard to imagine now, but a few yellowed photographs show my childhood home, when first erected, without a tree or bush or blade of grass in sight. The oaks, maples, lindens and beeches that shade the lawn had all been chosen in the early years by Mother, who dearly loved trees.

The sole casualty of the early plantings has seemed to be the wineglass elm at the front door, mortally wounded we believed by the fire that razed the house twenty years later. But it recovered from the disaster to live for almost another half-century, succumbing finally to Dutch elm disease. Year by year we watched the decimation of the elms that formed an archway along the avenue from East Street. They figure poignantly in my memories of those days, and even, I think, in the paintings I later did of tree-sheltered houses. Frances Cornford in *August at Home* expressed something of my feeling for them:



Wineglass Elm
Polly Thayer Starr
Charitable Trust Collection

*How rich the elms, and large, and summer-sad,
My childhood trees,
I thought of them as people, when I had
No words for them like these.
I drink their presence, and I go my ways,
They bring no altered mood;
These heavy trees are part of all my days,
Like sleep they are, and food.*

During my childhood the only threat of fire was from the magnificent thunderstorms that took our hilltop with full fury in the summer. The best vantage point for nature's pyrotechnic displays was the balcony of Mother's room over the



The original Thayer summer home, which burned down in 1929. This is where Polly grew up.

northwest porch. From there we would also watch the manmade fireworks for the Fourth of July at Nantasket.

Over Mother's dressing table hung a painting reproduction of Guido Reni's *L'Aurora*, setting the note in calmer weather for the airy feeling of her room, which had windows on three sides. The view from her room commanded the garden with its turquoise colored tile lined pools of goldfish. To the north was the great sweep to the sea and the harbor islands; and in the west, the sun setting beneath the arch of two wineglass elms flooded the room with light.

The room ticked and tinkled with the hours. Mother had eleven time-pieces in her room, all synchronized as exactly as human agency permitted in the days when clocks were still wound by hand. They were of every size, shape, and nationality, from an elegant little French clock no more than ten inches high with



The re-built Thayer summer home in a photo taken around 1933. It is now the Pat Roche Hospice Home.

chimes for every quarter hour to an uncouth octagonal wooden wall clock that thudded the house laboriously. Mother cherished time and was always prompt to the minute.

The guest rooms were on the north side and to a child's eye the prettiest of all the rooms—the "Yellow Room," with hand-painted white furniture garlanded with little yellow roses and love knots, ruffled organdy curtains at the windows and a brilliant green rug; and the "Pink Room," alive with roses—big pink cabbage roses climbing the wallpaper, red roses on the bedspreads, and a deep rose rug. The hand painted bureaus were decked with all the appointments that were considered essential for transient occupancy: the hairpin box, the button hook, the fancy pin cushion (for the Yellow Room, the pin cushion was a satin carrot); on the bed table the bonbonnière (filled with crackers) for the guest who might be hungry; and in the bathroom the fresh cake of soap in an unbroken paper wrapper.



Polly Thayer's mother, Ethel Randolph Thayer, in her garden, shortly before her death in 1958

Across the hall was the sewing room, which vibrated to the sound first of the old-fashioned treadle sewing machine and later of a modernized version. Nothing short of miraculous were the repairs of the nightgowns and towels, and it would seem impossible for any but a spider or a lace maker to have so disguised the wear and tear suffered by damask napkins and tablecloths.

My room and my sister's were opposite each other further down the hall. My brother's room (a fascinating place with no carpets and all sorts of gymnastic contraptions) was on the top floor, and the maid's rooms were over the kitchen and laundry.

The farm yielded all the vegetables, poultry and dairy products we needed, and even the big uneven cakes of brown soap that would be laid out in the sun on the attic floor to harden were made in the house.

Each week the "S.S. Pierce Man" (pronounced *purse* by Bostonians) arrived in horse and buggy and derby hat to submit a list for mother to check off items we could not produce ourselves, such as fresh and dried fruits, and brandied cherries whose equal I have never tasted since. We always watched eagerly for his appearance.



S.S. Pierce & Co. Label

Before the days of frozen foods, kitchen shelves were lined with preserves. The beans that came out of mason jars through the winter tasted better than the fresh; the jellies and jams which numbered among them included the now nearly extinct quince, gooseberries and currants.

Our menu was predictable winter and summer in its main outlines. I remember being amazed at a play where the fact that the husband knew just what meal his wife would serve on any night in the week was considered a domestic outrage. I liked knowing that Sunday always meant face of beef rump with those incomparable cherries, and homemade caramel ice cream. The noise of the ice being pounded was the prelude, and we could lick the freezer if we got to the kitchen porch in time as we were not allowed in the kitchen. Monday was Sunday's roast beef warmed over; Tuesday, fresh roast chicken; Wednesday, leftover chicken; Thursday, a leg of lamb; Friday, fish of course, with our Catholic help (the favorite form was what



Polly's portrait of her mother,
Ethel Randolph Thayer
Polly Thayer Starr Charitable Trust Collection

my brother for some reason called "smelly fish", a dish of finely shredded schrod buried in buttered breadcrumbs); and, best of all, a brisket of corned beef with white sauce on Saturday. Last but not least were Sunday morning's sacrosanct, ceremonial fish balls, which a guest enhanced further by showing us how good they were with farm cream. Though we children were only allowed two and breaking rules was generally unthinkable to me, I would usually find some excuse to dart into the pantry and grab a third to stuff whole into my mouth or, if that were not possible, pocket-which was rather a messy procedure, as they were runny inside with a crisp fried covering.



Scotch bannocks

Sunday night was the occasion for variety. Supper might be Scotch bannocks, of which Mother was proud as it had been difficult to get a recipe for the real thing, or milk toast, which had no relation to the mushy substance that generally goes under the name but consisted of a pile of hot crisp toast placed before Mother which she salted liberally and over which she then poured a half-and-half mixture of warm rich farm cream and milk. When a migraine robbed Father of all appetite, he could always eat that with relish. Another welcome alternative was baked beans with brittle on top, and steamed brown bread which would reappear in crumbs on Monday, served for some reason as a vegetable, reheated in cream. This brown bread "brewis" was delicious. Other probabilities were samp or lobscouse, for which I have never been able to find any recipes. Samp was, I believe, a form of corn, that looked rather

like popped corn without husks and boiled in butter, and the mere thought of lobscouse makes my mouth water. It was the simplest of dishes, and I have a dim idea it was of seagoing origin and, considering its name, perhaps Scandinavian. It consisted of thin layers of buttered baked pilot biscuit, fragile and soggy at the same time. And there were such delicious desserts: buttered toast drowned in molasses and caramelized by baking, brown-skinned rice puddings, and bread puddings with surprise layers of our own wild grape jelly, topped with meringue. I wonder if time has glamorized these sensations of taste that remain in my memory as so uniquely delicious.



A bowl of samp

Mother never smoked, but her European background showed in the small glass of wine she often enjoyed with meals. She refused under any circumstances to break the law by serving alcoholic beverages in all the years of Prohibition, and I never saw her overeat, though she appreciated simple and well-cooked food.

The kitchen icebox was supplied by ice from the Weir River, where each year the farmhands harvested about six hundred blocks from a bend which had been dammed up for extra depth. The ice would be packed in layers of sawdust in the ice house just a stone's throw from our back door off Turkey Hill Lane, and most years the supply lasted all summer. Every other day, in the summer, our sturdy farm horses hauled a big block of ice from the ice house to our kitchen icebox.

Our dogs were never thoroughbreds, as Mother was convinced that the advantages of owning mongrels were threefold: that no one would want to steal a mongrel; that their diet did not have to be fussed over, as they could be fed table scraps; and that they were liable to be brighter than the purebred. In other words, the mutt was “all purpose.” There was one exception to this rule, however: a cocker spaniel named Scrap, who had lost one leg in a collision with a trolley. He managed on three legs as if he had the full complement, and Mother was so devoted to him that she wrote the poem etched on the back side of his gravestone in the small pet cemetery which borders the path in the woods:

*Dear little Scrap thy three small legs
Have borne thee far beyond our ken
While others of thy race and size
Boast four for the last journey when
They fare them forth from haunts of men
Tis true thy body lieth here
But whither is thy spirit fled
We learn that Love fulfills the law
Thy life was Love – then all is said
My little dog thou art not dead*



Mother also wrote a poem for the grave of our canary Harzi, whom she loved as dearly as any other animal. When it came to birds, though, I was more inclined to share my Aunt Sarah's view of them as giant insects.

In both farm and family life, horses figured largely for us. In the cow barn at the foot of the hill there were two roomy box stalls containing a patient pair of big workhorses. One of the memorable luxurious sensations of farm life

was sinking my face in the furry softness of their velvety chests.

The horses we rode or drove daily were kept in the stable near the house. The names are still over their stalls: the big-boned Mowgli I and II that father rode, Mother's Teresa, the children's horse Judy in the box stall, and the really elegant pair Pampon and Pierrot, who might have been cloned, so perfectly matched they were. They were carriage horses. Because horses were what we knew, we tirelessly “played horse,” prancing down the path through the sumac grove with tails made of carefully chosen sumac fronds, which to our childish eyes suggested the neatly cut horse tails. Imitating tails, whinnies, the measure of hoof beats was no problem; but I was frustrated always by being unable even to approximate the rhythmic rumble of Mowgli's stomach at a trot. Every Sunday, after the breakfast fish balls, we would troop over with our weekend guests to feed the horses lumps of sugar.

As my brother and sister were older than I, and much more daring, I was left to my own devices much of the time while they rough-housed on the rafters of the hayloft in the cow barn. The summer I was ten, Jim and Eleanor were both away. The Teddy Bear on whose “kind velvet bonnet, with my tears falling on it” I had brought my joys and woes as a child could no longer answer my needs, but I found a new companion in our pig. Piglets, of course, are irresistible. Not long before, Eleanor and I had sat for a portrait by William Sargeant Kendall, whose painting of a sprite kneeling on a rock to look at her reflection in a pool in the New York Metropolitan Museum had greatly pleased Mother. The portrait is now at the Art Complex Museum in Duxbury. He kept us so amused, I can still remember his appreciation of pigs.

An example that remains in my memory to this day is:

*Dear little pig with the curly tail,
All pinky white and pearly pale,
How very much nicer you are – by far
Than the lumps of iniquity big pigs are!*

Perhaps he was the author; I have never come across it since. It may have well helped to spark my interest in the “lump of iniquity” that was living in our barn.



*Polly and Eleanor Thayer
by William Sargeant Kendall
Courtesy of The Art Complex Museum
Duxbury, MA (Ed Nute Photo)*

That summer I suffered a searing disillusionment. Every day I would go down to the pigsty to see my new friend. I would bring him apples, scratch his back, and read Dickens aloud to him. We were almost to the end of *Dombey and Son*—the chase was on for Carker and Mrs. Dombey—but as I climbed over the bars of the sty and started to settle on my stool, my pig charged me, teeth bared, with loud squeals. There was no possibility of misinterpreting his hostility. Though I knew nothing of the consequences of a pig's bite I could imagine it as formidable, having watched my pig crunch corn cobs. I vaulted to safety just in time. I shall never know what shattered the idyll and transformed my pig's contented grunts and snufflings into the bared teeth and menace of that bleak morning.

Most days as soon as we had swallowed breakfast my sister Eleanor, my brother Jim, and I would race down the hill to the farm, always barefoot, so that by summer's end it was great fun to see whose feet had the toughest soles, and I can remember how interesting it was to find that I could take needle and thread and sew patterns in the soles of mine without any sensation in my foot as I decorated it.

If it was rainy we played in the vast penumbra of the hayloft with the tidy little barn swallows twittering and skimming about us in the rafters. There was no end to the variety of engrossing activities that farm life provided for a child. The ritual of the ducks emerging from the duck-house to waddle in single file down the hill and launch into the river in the morning, returning in formation as punctually at dusk, was one I hated to miss.



Distances
Private Collection



"If I could choose where I'd die it would be in a cowbarn. I think there is more virtue from a cow than any other animal I know." ~ Polly Thayer (Starr) to Helen Howe, 1952
Polly Thayer Starr Charitable Trust Collection

We would often try to ride the cows. I don't know why we were not reprimanded—I suppose it was clear that the cows were able to take care of themselves and could frighten us off with a toss of their horns.

The cool dairy, with the butter churning and separators humming, was an enormous satisfaction, as was learning to milk the cows, even though they never yielded me more than a trickle. The river had infinite potential. Where it had been dammed for ice it was deep enough to swim in summer, but simply wading in the amber water was wondrous, as it flowed over small areas of rough ochre sand, more like a fine gravel,

which never stuck to you or got between your toes. There were all kinds of green underwater ferns and garlands that waved in the slow current, and here and there on the edges were the unique French forget-me-nots.

There was an octagonal summer house by a pool in the woods, draped with white wisteria in the spring, where we played house and tickled with timothy grass the emerald backs of the frogs that sunned themselves at the pool's edge (if someone scared them and they plopped into the water, they were quickly back for more tickling). On hot days we picked wild strawberries by the stable, and held competitions for how many quarts of huckleberries we could gather.

My retreat was outdoors on top of an arbor at the end of a garden. It was bliss to lie in a murmurous bed of white clematis tremulous with bees, buzzing ecstatically as they do when hard at work in the full sunlight, with the protective grace of a blue sky above them.



House in the Woods
Polly Thayer Starr Charitable Trust Collection



St. John's Episcopal Church in Hingham
from a postcard printed in 1949

Every summer Mother played hostess to a carefully planned sequence of old friends and people she felt might benefit from a weekend in the country. Between guests, her days were simple. She carried on a voluminous correspondence, oversaw the care of the trees and the gardens, and put much time and love into the rebuilding of St. John's Church, in Hingham in Father's name. It is well worth a trip for the very handsome stained glass windows in the chancel as well as the creatures carved in the pew ends which were copied from an English church where they had struck my Mother's fancy.

In the attic were piles of sky blue notebooks with labels bearing, in every imaginable type of handwriting,



Ezra Ripley Thayer, c. 1909

the names of those who had used them. They were the examination books that Father had had to grade each summer after he left the active practice of the law to teach. Marking them was an incalculable strain on him, and Mother had built, in the woods across the lane a stone's throw from the house, a one-room study with porch and hammock where he could work undisturbed.

His little house stands now near mine, and serves me as a studio. I remember him as he sat at the breakfast table, an engaging figure

with eyes of the most intense depth of blue I have ever seen; then later, a haggard figure—it was probably his last summer—coming in the door from chopping wood, which for him was a way of relieving tension. Of all my impressions, recorded and unrecorded, the most potent is one which precedes all other recollections of any kind, so I must have been very small. I am running along an alley of trees with a tiny, pink-tipped French daisy, a páquerette, in my outstretched hand, to give an all-embracing LOVE—that awaits, and into whose arms I will fling myself. I cannot see him, but I know it is Father. ■

Note: This article was originally written by Polly Thayer Starr for the New England Friend's Home. Mrs. Starr donated the Weir River Farm property to the Quakers in 1959 upon the death of her mother.



Polly seated next to her mother, Ethel Randolph Thayer, flanked by her sister, Eleanor, and brother, James, c. 1907.

IV. Historical Timeline of the Pat Roche Hospice Home

Compiled by Rob Clory

- 1898** Ezra Ripley Thayer (b.1866) married Ethel Randolph Clark (b. 1870). They lived at 77 Bay State Road, Boston. Ezra was a lawyer after graduating from Harvard Law School. Ethel and Ezra maintained a stable near their home and would ride to the Fenway. In summer they rented a place in Cohasset and enjoyed horse back riding up to Turkey Hill in Hingham. They purchased Weir River Farm on East Street and added additional acreage up to Turkey Hill.
- 1904** Ethel Randolph “Polly” Thayer was born.
- 1910** Ezra became Dean of Harvard Law School.
- 1910** Ethel and Ezra began building a large shingled house atop Turkey Hill. Polly had fond memories of this summer house, playing with her brother and sister, milking cows, and damming the river in order to create a place to swim on hot summer days.
- 1915** Polly’s father, Ezra, died. Polly was 11 years old.
- 1920** Ethel, a religious woman, rebuilt St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church on Main Street, Hingham in memory of her husband, Ezra. (Polly’s portrait of her mother hangs in this church.) Polly attended the Winsor School, took art classes at the Museum of Fine Arts, in Provincetown, New York City, Madrid and Paris.
- 1929** Polly was awarded the prestigious Julius Hallgarten Prize from the National Academy of Design for her large nude *Circles* which led to numerous portrait commissions.
- 1929** The wood shingled home atop Turkey Hill burned to the ground.
- 1933** The Thayer family home was rebuilt on Turkey Hill with a Georgian style and brick architecture. The new home featured blue tiles imported from Japan, Italian marble for the fireplaces, and carved woodwork from England for the library mantel.
- 1933** Polly married Boston lawyer, Donald Starr, in Genoa, Italy, despite her fear that it would interfere with her art career. Donald proved to be very supportive of her career.



Circles
New Britain Museum
of American Art

1935 Camel statues, each weighing over a ton, were placed on the bottom of the drive to the farmhouse. Stone peacocks and pheasants purchased from the San Francisco Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915 were placed on the house grounds. There were four turquoise, tile-lined fish ponds built in the formal gardens. They also built a tennis court, a croquet court and a barn for the horses.

1936 Polly and Donald built a summer home on land given to them by Polly's mother, Ethel, from the farm. Unfortunately it too burned down in the late 1950s.

1938 A stone bridge was built over the Weir River to replace the original wooden-plank bridge at the East Street entrance to the farm.

1940 Victoria Starr was born to Polly and Donald.

1942 Polly formally joined the Society of Friends.

1945 Dinah Starr was born to Polly and Donald.

1957 The New England Yearly Meeting of Friends was notified that their Huntington Home in Amesbury was not up to state building code requirements and would need extensive renovations to comply. This property had been the home of Sarah Alice Huntington who donated it to the New England Yearly Meeting of Friends in 1904 as a rest home for the elderly.

1959 Ethel Randolph Thayer died. Quaker Polly Thayer Starr donated her parents' summer home on Turkey Hill as a replacement for the Huntington Home in Amesbury to be called the *New England Friends Home*.

1961 Friends renovated the home. Per code, fire escapes, sprinkler system and alarms were installed. Some rooms on the second floor were subdivided, creating ten bedrooms. Three new bedrooms were created on the first floor from what had been servant quarters. The kitchen was enlarged. The fish ponds were filled in for safety reasons, and made into rose gardens. The driveway was paved and a parking lot was installed. The first Friends Home director planted flowering crab apple trees in front of the home.

1962 The first residents moved in to their new home on Turkey Hill. Residency was not restricted to Quakers.



One of the Camel Statues

1991 At age 87, with failing eyesight, Polly did her last two art projects. The first was a series of over two dozen drawings of the thistle flower. The second was a final self-portrait.

1998 The Friends decided to build an addition so that each resident could have a private bath. The Home became a licensed assisted-living facility with 18 units, with a total of 16,781 square feet.

1999 Polly donated the 75 acre Weir River Farm to the Trustees of Reservations to preserve it for public use.

2006 Polly Thayer Starr died at the age of 101 in Lexington. She was buried at the family plot in Hingham.

2011 The Friends decided to close the New England Friends Home on Turkey Hill. With only 14 residents left, none of them Quakers, it was not financially feasible to continue.

2012 NVNA and Hospice partnered with Campus for Caring to purchase the Friends Home in order to open a hospice residence for the South Shore area. Extensive renovations and improvements were completed as a result of a community fundraising campaign.

2013 Victoria Starr, Polly's daughter, died in March. In 2001, she had returned to Turkey Hill, converting a carriage house next to the family homestead into her home. She is survived by her sister, Dinah Starr.

2013 On October 17, 2013 the Pat Roche Hospice Home on Turkey Hill opened to serve the community as the only non-profit residential hospice care facility on the South Shore. ■



Cows in Field
Polly Thayer Starr Charitable Trust Collection



A recent photo of cows in the same field

V. Philanthropy and the Pat Roche Hospice Home

The Pat Roche Hospice Home would not be possible without charitable support.

When the NVNA and Hospice Board of Directors established the Pat Roche Hospice Home, they persisted because of the compelling need for this service. There had been no Hospice Home serving the region, leaving limited alternatives for families who could not remain at home for their hospice care.

As a local, independent, non-profit organization, NVNA and Hospice will not turn away families in need of the Hospice Home due to financial circumstances. However, the cost to provide hospice services well exceeds the reimbursement NVNA and Hospice receives from Medicare or other sources, creating a financial gap for hospice care.

The philanthropic launch of this vital facility is due in large part to the vision of the Campus of Caring with the generous support of the Tedeschi and Roche families. Our honor roll of donors expands each year, and for that we are forever grateful.

Philanthropy is the margin of difference to sustain our mission at the Pat Roche Hospice Home. Amidst the complexities of the health care economy, philanthropy enables NVNA's hospice team to provide compassionate dignified care every day. Philanthropy will assure the future of the Pat Roche Hospice Home for decades to come. ■

NVNA and HOSPICE **CHARITABLE FUND**

Our Charitable Fund was established to sustain and expand the patient care programs of NVNA and Hospice.

For more information on how you can help,
please call: 781.610.1409.

nvna.org



The Pat Roche Hospice Home
86 Turkey Hill Lane, Hingham



120 Longwater Drive
Norwell, MA 02061

This booklet is complimentary for patients of the Pat Roche Hospice Home and their families.