

ENTREPRENEUR—LATE 1920S

*A true recollection by Elsie Charles Basque**

After school every day, we all picked mayflowers. Their sweet aroma filled the air—white, pink, clustered blossoms.

We bundled them carefully into bunches, tied them with a string, sat them in a basin of water, so they would be perfect when we met the train the next morning. We'd climb on board as soon as the train came to a halt and proceed through the train cars trying to sell as many bunches as we could...ten cents a bunch. A fortune!

Much to our chagrin, Maurice always seemed to make the largest sales. He could run alongside the train and jump on, before it came to a halt. He could always stay on longer than the rest of us too, for he had learned how to jump off a moving train. Papa had forbidden me to try the same shenanigans, and for once I obeyed, and grumbled. He must have grown tired of listening to my frustrations and suggested "Why don't you go to Norwood? You can get on the train there and have all your mayflowers sold before you get to Hectanooga?"

Sounded like a good idea. Why not ask my other disgruntled friends to come along? From that time on, Mary and Delorie would come along with me—down the railroad track to Norwood about three miles away. We'd put out a flag, the train's signal to stop. We'd each get on a separate car—and sure enough our mayflowers sold like hot cakes!

Starting at the Yankee Camp one morning, I almost didn't make it. Norwood was six miles away, and I had to do a lot of running to get there on time. Mary and Delorie were already there. The flag was out. The DAR was just a whistling around the bend. I earned whatever I made that morning... a dollar? Probably.

In the fall, Papa set rabbit snares and mink and weasel traps. He said that if I tended the snares and traps within a mile radius from our house, I could have the profit. I'd have to hurry home from school to do this before it got dark. My dog, "Yowie," always came with me. I had an automatic .22 rifle that I always took along for protection.

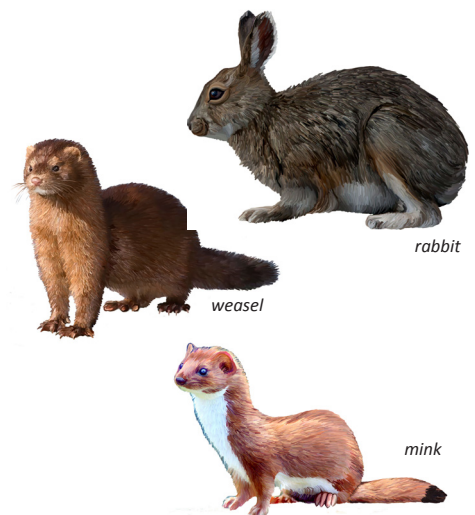
I'd hang the rabbits by their hind legs, on the front porch for everyone to see and buy. Any weasel or mink I caught, I'd have to skin and put on stretchers to dry. These would be included with Papa's catch when he sold them to the fur buyer.

Rabbits were twenty-five cents each. Prices for the mink and weasel varied according to the quality of the fur. Over the course of the winter I may have made as much as fifty dollars. A real fortune back then.

Happy childhood memories.



Elsie, age 13, with her father, Joe Charles, and their dog, Yowie. 1929.



**This is a true story as recorded by Elsie Charles Basque. Students can be encouraged to map story locations. Story and photograph courtesy of Elsie Charles Basque.*