

Caring for a Town

The Physicians of Westford, Mass.

1740 - 1960

Marilyn Day

**In cooperation with the
Westford Historical Society
Westford, Mass.**

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CYRIL ARTHUR BLANEY
(1879 - 1956)
Served Westford as early as 1905

CYRIL ARTHUR BLANEY, born at Dorchester, Mass. 11 Dec. 1879, died at Groton, Mass. 18 Jan. 1956, son of Cyril Chandler and Ellen/Ella Frances (Stanyan/Stanion) Blaney.¹ Cyril married at Westford, 19 April 1911, FLORENCE EDITH POND, resident of South Framingham, born at Natick, Mass. 8 May 1886,² died at Westford 27 March 1955, daughter of William H. and Susan (White) Pond. Cyril died at his daughter Genevieve Palmer's home in Groton.

By 1905, Dr. Blaney was practicing in Westford. May Day in her diary for August 16, 1905 wrote:

"I got up about 4 o'clock this morning to fix some stuff for Grandma. I went up after Papa. When we got home Papa went right up stairs and soon told me to go for Mrs. Symmes. While I was waiting for her, Papa went by. He went to telephone for the doctor. Dr. Sherman came up. Doctor Blaney came..."

The *Westford Wardsman*³ reported: August 11, 1906 – "The College Social held at the Congregational church vestry Friday evening of last week was very much of a success....Rev. C. C. P. Hiller of Springfield sang two Denver university college songs.... Miss Harriet C. Sargent, Wellesley, was the accompanist.... Boston university was represented by Rev. Hiller, Rev. C. P. Marshall and Dr. C. A. Blaney."

Dr. Blaney was appointed the physician for the Westford Town Farm in March 1908. He submitted his expenses for attending patients there during 1909-1910. The amount was \$13.75.

He was called three times in 1915 to treat accident victims at the Abbot Worsted Mill.

Florence Edith Pond graduated from Framingham Teachers College, and in 1910-11, she was teaching in Westford at the Parkerville School. In 1911, Dr. Blaney was the school physician. The *Westford Wardsman* reported on 11 March 1911, "The engagement is announced this week of Miss Florence Edith Pond and Cyril Arthur Blaney, M.D." Dr. Blaney's wife was active in town. For the Memorial Day preparations in 1911, she was on the committee to serve dinner to the veterans. In 1913 when Mrs. Arvilla Gould died, the *Westford Wardsman* reported that Mrs. Blaney was one of the soloists at her funeral. She was referred to as Edith in Patrons of Husbandry Grange records in town. In 1930 she was the pianist and in 1931, she held the office of Pomona. She sang in the choir at the Union Congregational church in the days before choir robes. "Mrs. Blaney was a small woman, but she wore very large, floppy hats. She was outdone only by Mrs. Perry Shupe who wore a very large hat adorned by a dead bird the size of a pigeon. At the time,

¹ Dr. Blaney's mother died at Boston in 1891, age 37; her death was listed in the *Boston Daily Globe* on 10 Jan.

² NEHGS, Mass VRs 1840 – 1910, Natick, vol. 386, p. 203.

³ Robert W. Oliphant has transcribed the *Westford Wardsman* for the years 1905 – 1921.

I thought this must be the ultimate in hat styles.” (William B. Prescott [1918-2008], former Westford resident)

Doctor Blaney enjoyed a good time and even had an interest in horse racing. He undoubtedly had a horse known for speed with which he would have made house calls in town prior to the advent of the still unreliable automobile. Again, from the *Westford Wardsman*:

Jan. 27, 1912: “Speed Trials. Great interest is being shown in the coming speed trials for horses to be held on Forge pond on this Saturday afternoon. J. Austin Healy, with his fast trotter, ‘Dolly C,’ and Harry Harrington with his speedy colt, will be in the lineup, and it is expected that Dr. C. A. Blaney, of Westford, and Angus McDonald, of Littleton, who always drives a speedy horse will be on hand. Mr. Wesley, of Acton, will also be present with a fast one, while others will be present from Lowell, Groton, Pepperell and all the surrounding towns. Everything is free and all are welcome. It is thought that the Yapp stables of Littleton will send over some fast ones for first honors. All roads lead to Forge pond this Saturday afternoon for the speed trials.”

Feb. 3, 1912: “Three interesting heats were run off that were closely contested by J. Austin Healy with Dolly C, Henry Harrington with his colt Little Derby and Dr. C. A. Blaney with his fast gelding Knox Gelatine Boy. Dolly C nosed out a victory in the first two heats, Little Derby second, with Knox Gelatine Boy a close third. Henry Harrington took first in the third heat, Dr. C. A. Blaney second and J. Austin Healy third, an accident happening to the harness of Dolly C in this heat, putting her out of the running.

Henry Harrington and Dr. Blaney then had another tryout, but Gelatine Boy fell on the ice in this heat receiving some bad scratches, so that the racing was called off for the day.”

Feb. 10, 1912: The racing continued – “...the third prize went to Knox Gelatine Boy, owned and driven by Dr. C. A. Blaney, of Westford.” A special race was then run off between Dr. Blaney’s Knox Gelatine Boy and J. A. Healy’s Nakomis. This race was won by Nakomis.”

On Dec. 20, 1913 the *Wardsman* reported on a Boy Scout meeting: “Dr. C. A. Blaney gave the boys a talk on first aid to the injured, which was very practical and instructive, and at the close of his talk questions were asked and answered.” Dr. Blaney was one of several town men on the local board council advisors of this organization in 1914.

On Sept. 4, 1915 the *Wardsman* announced the birth of his son Cyril. “Dr. and Mrs. Cyril A. Blaney, welcomed a baby son into their home on Wednesday of this week”

Gladys Ferguson, in an interview in 1988 by Jessica (Kusmin) Sloan, spoke of Dr. Blaney. Jessica asked Gladys, “Did many people in Westford have cars?” Gladys replied, “No, not too many. The Abbots and the Camerons. Oh, I remember when Claire was born, Dr. Blaney took me to the hospital in his brand-new Ford.”^{4,5}

⁴ The Ferguson family lived at 80 Main Street. Claire Ferguson was born at Westford, 28 Sept. 1928, daughter of Howard H. and Gladys M. (O’Neal) Ferguson.

⁵ *Westford: Portraits & Perspectives*, published by the Westford Oral History Project, 1989. p. 52.



From the glass-plate negatives of Emily Fletcher,
taken about 1900



Westford Form B collection, taken about 1975

**Home of "Doc" Blaney at 7 - 9 Boston Road.
Purchased by him in 1918**

On 31 December 1918, Cyril and Edith bought the property at 7-9 Boston Road from Ida A. Fletcher, then of Lynn, Mass. The *Wardsman* of 4 Jan. 1919 reported, "Dr. C. A. Blaney and family have moved into his recently purchased home on Boston road." The 1930 census showed the doctor, age 50, with a general practice, and F. Edith, and their three children. The 1930 census added a new question, "Do you own a radio?" Dr. Blaney's family did not own a radio in 1930. In 1957 when his estate was settled, the property at 7-9 Boston Road was sold to Victor and Joan Archambault. Subsequent owners were Leo Coupal, then later Mildred Alling.

Children of Cyril and Florence (Pond) BLANEY, born at Westford:

1. GENEVIEVE LOUISE BLANEY, b. 18 Feb. 1912, d. 1 Dec. 1999. Genevieve m. at Westford 1 Nov. 1933, CHARLES O. PALMER, b. at Ayer, Mass. in 1907, d. at Littleton 9 July 1969, son of Ernest R. and Marion (Steere) Palmer. His name was given as Ormand C. Palmer on his birth record. Genevieve graduated from Westford Academy in 1929. She and Charles are interred in Fairview Cemetery, Westford.
2. INEZ CLAIRE BLANEY, b. 14 Oct. 1913, d. 6 June 1986. Inez m. (1) at Nashua, N.H. 8 Nov. 1944, ROBERT E. SHEA, and (2) JAMES A. DORSEY (d. 1987). Inez graduated from Westford Academy in 1931. She is interred in Fairview Cemetery, Westford.
3. CYRIL CHANDLER BLANEY, b. 1 Sept. 1915, d. at Nashua, N.H. 14 Sept. 1991. Cyril m. at Westford 23 Feb. 1947, ANNE DENISEVICH, b. at Westford 21 Oct. 1921, who d. at Merrimack, N.H. 2 Sept. 2009, daughter of Joseph and Vanara (Bilida) Denisevich. Cyril graduated from Westford Academy in 1932. He followed in his father's footsteps and was also a doctor, receiving his under-graduate degree from Clark University in 1936 and his M.D. degree from Boston University School of Medicine in 1940. He practiced at St. Vincent's Medical Center, Bridgeport, Ct., for 38 years, retiring in 1985. He entered the service as a Captain, serving with the Army Medical Corps in the European-African-Middle Eastern theater, and saw action during the Battle of the Bulge while attached to the 750th Tank Battalion. His name is on the WWII Honor Roll in Westford. Cyril and Anne are interred in Fairview Cemetery, Westford. The gravestone lists his father and mother, his sister Genevieve and her husband, Charles O. Palmer; and his sister, Inez C. Dorsey.

Children of Cyril and Anne:

1. CYRIL "CHIP" CHANDLER BLANEY, b. 1948.
2. BARBARA ANNE BLANEY, married name RAFFERTY, of Worcester.

On March 12, 2006, Anne and her son, Cyril Chandler Blaney, "Chip" visited the Westford Museum. At that time she donated a letter written by William C. Roudenbush from his home in Keene, N.H., to Dr. Cyril C. Blaney upon the death of his father. It was written on white-lined paper and dated January 20, 1956.

Dear Cyril,

I have just seen in the *Boston Herald* the notice of your father's death.

Few doctors serve a community as long as he did, and fewer still in various public capacities outside their practice. His age was that of mine, and I think of him as one of my contemporaries in Westford whose numbers are rapidly diminishing.

I do not know your Bridgeport address, so am mailing this letter to Westford with the thought that you may be there helping Genevieve and Inez in the settlement of your father's affairs. Your father was very proud of you, I know, and justly so. There is every prospect that you will be a credit to the profession. Most professional men, I think, take pleasure in sons who follow in their steps.

Most Sincerely,

William C. Roudenbush

Doctor Blaney has practically become a legend in Westford. Like Dr. Osgood, he was known to pull pills out of his pocket, blow off the lint, and hand them over to the housewife. He was a very short man. People remember seeing his big touring car coming down the road with only the top of his hat, or his newspaper, showing over the steering wheel.

Mickey Crocker remembers him well. She says, "As for Dr. Cyril Blaney—his claim to fame is he delivered me at home on Palermo Street! He used to play cards down at Wyman's Tavern in Forge Village, and I can remember my mother sending me down there one day to tell him my mother's problems. He would reach into his pocket, dirty hands and all, and take out a handful of pills and pick from them and say...take one of these every so many hours and drink plenty of water. I think everyone in the Village did the same routine. He was truly an old fashioned country doctor.

I remember seeing him drive by and he would be looking through the steering wheel as he was such a short man. I don't know of anyone who didn't love him and depend on him.

I am sure some of the stories of when Dr. Blaney was a Selectman—were most interesting...heard he could be a bit feisty!"

Shirley (Kelly) Contreras who grew up in Forge Village and now lives in California adds: Doc Blaney probably delivered me, but that was something that my mother never talked about. She was pretty guarded about such things, you know, and Danny used to say that I was born on the pig nut tree that once stood between the Daranchucs and us. No respect!!! Aunt Veronica used to say that Doc Blaney would come to her house, and not leave until she passed him some pastries to take home with him. And his driving? It was often said that he knew every telephone pole in the town as he'd hit every one of them at one time or another.

I remember one time that he came to the house to visit me while I was sick in bed. When he pulled my pajama bottoms down, I slapped his hand and told him to leave me alone. With that he glanced at my mother and the two of them burst out laughing. That's about all that I can remember about the doctor. When a car was coming down the street and I couldn't see anyone driving, I knew that it had to be Doc Blaney....as he was a very, very short man.⁶

⁶ Even on Dr. Blaney's WWI draft registration form under height, the "Short" box was checked off.

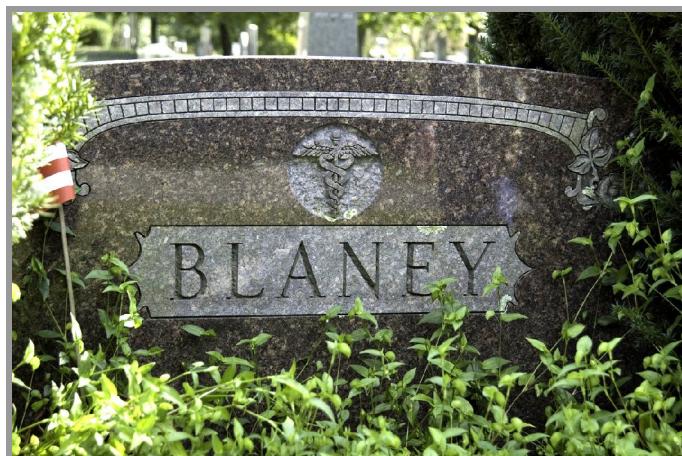
Barbara (Blanchard) Greenslade added: "He was great at curing pneumonia back when there were no antibiotics." Millie (Blanchard) O'Connell (1924-2011) remembers him curing her in 1930, when she was six, and bringing her a coloring book.

George Fletcher (1933-2017) and Arnold Wilder (1909-2009) both confirmed the fact that there was no one like Dr. Blaney if you had pneumonia.

Former Westford resident, John Waugh (1928-2010) wrote, "Back when I was living at The Elms on Route 110,⁷ I was living with another foster kid named Jefferson Eaton. That foster family had a little black Scottish Terrier and Eaton used to blow on his face, which irritated the dog in the extreme. Eaton thought it was fun, but it actually was quite cruel. Anyway, one day I bent down to pat the Scottie; and he jumped up and bit me on the nose. That may account for some of my facial disfigurement. The dog went into quarantine and I had to stop at Blaney's office every morning en route to school for the next 14 days to get some kind of anti-rabies shot in the base of my spine. Old Doc was not exactly Florence Nightingale when it came to injecting needles so my memories of those days are still quite vivid."

As early as 1909, Dr. Blaney was the Medical Inspector for the Westford Schools. He remained the school physician through 1933, to be followed by Dr. Cowles. Dr. Blaney's reports list cases of head lice, cholera, measles, and in 1911 he reported a case of Fuedrick's disease⁸. It is interesting to note that he served the schools for so many years, but it wasn't until about 1925 that he was on the Board of Health. Dr. Blaney served 15 years as selectman and "at the time of his death in 1956, he was serving his thirty-first year on the Westford Board of Health."⁹

Cyril and Florence Blaney are interred in Fairview Cemetery, just inside the main gate.



Blaney gravestone in Fairview Cemetery
with the medical caduceus symbol.¹⁰

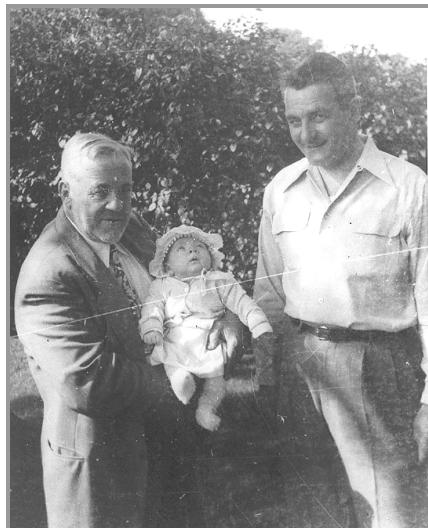
⁷ The Elms was near 239 Littleton Road.

⁸ According to Joseph J. Lapiana of Westford, this is probably Friedreich's Disease (named for N. Friedreich, German Physician 1825-1882) Hereditary Ataxia, Friedreich's sign: collapse of the internal jugular veins in cases of adherent pericardium.

⁹ *Westford Recollections*, June W. Kennedy, p. 17

¹⁰ Photograph by Rob Rudin, taken September 2006.

The Westford Board of Health concluded its 1955, annual report, with the following: "We were deeply shocked to hear of the death of Dr. Cyril A. Blaney on January 18, 1956. This was a great loss to the board of health, and to the town as a whole, as Dr. Blaney had been a member of this board for the past 31 years and took a keen interest in all town affairs."¹¹ What a triumvirate that must have been when Drs. Cowles, Blaney and Cole all served together on the Westford Board of Health from 1944 to 1956, until Doctor Blaney's death, to be followed by Dr. Cowles' death in 1959. Certainly this marked the end of an era in town.



Three Blaney Generations



Capt. Cyril C. Blaney

In the three-generation photograph Doctor Cyril Arthur Blaney is holding his grandson, Cyril "Chip" Chandler Blaney, who was born on Patriots' Day, April 19th. Dr. Blaney's son, Dr. Cyril Chandler Blaney, is on the right. The photograph was taken while on a day trip to Lexington and Concord in 1948.



Anne (Denisevich) Blaney and son "Chip." March 12, 2006 at the Westford Museum Cottage.

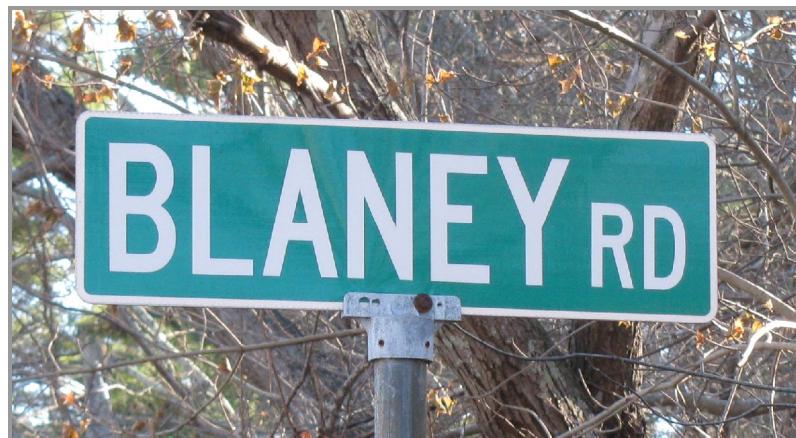
¹¹ *Annual Report of the Town of Westford for the year ending, 1955*, p. 92.

After so many years of service Doc Blaney's medical bag now rests at the Tewksbury Public Health Museum.



Photograph courtesy of the Public Health Museum

The name Blaney is not to be forgotten in Westford. Before 1970 there were two West Streets in town, one which still runs beside St. Catherine's Church, and the other one, a little piece of road off Carlisle Road (Rt. 225) which connects to West Street in Carlisle. In 1970 Selectmen, Sam Richards, yet another Westford baby delivered by Doc Blaney, suggested that that short piece of road be renamed Blaney Road,¹² and by 1972 it was accomplished.



¹² *Annual Report of the Town of Westford for the year ending 1970*, p. 120.