

**John G. Newton, Jr.** (Farnsworth House)

***Interviewed by Shaniqua Osgood***, and with special thanks to Meriwether Rhodes, Farnsworth House Resident Services Coordinator. (2002)

My name is John G. Newton, Jr. I was born in 1926 in Jamaica Plain, MA. at the Forest Hills Hospital (which was behind the West Roxbury Court House near Forest Hills Station). I lived in Hyde Park my whole life until I moved to Farnsworth House. When I was young, there weren't many cars on the roads. It was quite quiet. I also think that people were more friendly back then.

I lived with my parents and my brother, Robert. We were a small family. We had a big garden in the back yard. It was the depression, so we grew some of our food. I lived across the street from a huge house — 20 rooms — that burned down. We had three cats ... and a dog named Blondie. We had a car ... the first car we had was a Model T Ford ... it was a shift.

I went to public school in my neighborhood, then I graduated from Hyde Park High School in 1944. When I was a teenager I used to like to go hiking, go horse back riding, run the steeple chase. Besides horseback riding, we played outdoor games like baseball and football. It was about that time that I began to teach myself to play the piano. This was before I discovered my love for the organ.

My favorite season is the autumn. In the summer I liked to swim and go camping, in the winter we went skiing, snow shoeing ... and I wasn't suppose to, but in the autumn I went hunting. In the springtime, I looked forward to school ending! The only thing I didn't like about winter was shoveling, and in the fall we had to rake leaves. In the springtime, we had to dig up the garden — that was a big job!

Shortly after I graduated from high school, I was drafted into the Army. I was sent to Oklahoma for training to be an observer in Flash and Sound Artillery. That involved watching for the flash of enemy gun fire, counting the seconds between it and it's report, noting the direction of enemy fire, then setting up our fire control guns to reply. After that I trained in Fire Direction, and was on my way to Manila Bay (the Philippines) when we got word that the war was over. That didn't mean, however, that the Army was going to let us go right then! Eventually, we shipped out to Korea, landing in Stone Quay. By that time, I had transferred to the Army Air Corps where I learned to fly a Piper Cub. One of the things I loved about flying was the sense of spaciousness. I took aerial photographs and drew maps.

I love music, especially classical music. My one claim to fame is that I once played the organ at Symphony Hall during a BSO rehearsal. I was working part time for a man who had a contract to service the Symphony Hall organ. We were there, and the soloist was late. The conductor, Koussevitsky asked, "is there anyone here who knows how to play this damned thing?" He was livid at the delay. I said "well, I'll give it a whirl," and I did.

In thinking back over my adventures, I believe my time spent in the Army was very exciting. I saw so many things and went so many places that I might not have, otherwise. For example, I was invited for a weekend at a palace in Korea. It had at least 100 rooms. The princess who lived there was the last of the Manchu family. I enjoyed that experience. When I returned from overseas, I brought back with me many souvenirs, among them, 6 bolts of raw silk, (which I gave away), a couple of kimonos, and a mandarin coat. I still have the kimonos and the coat ... they're packed away carefully to preserve them.

If anyone were to ask me, I'd give only one bit of advice. Don't be afraid to ask a question, because you'll otherwise never know the answer and, in many cases, the answer may surprise you!