

XI. INDUSTRY, COMMERCE AND TRANSPORTATION

THE PERE MARQUETTE

The Pere Marquette Railroad Station was a pivotal point in the life of our town. It was there that Mother bought her train tickets to Grand Rapids in order to visit her parents and make her infrequent shopping trips.

Until the advent of the automobile, a horse driven vehicle was the usual means of traveling short distances. For a longer trip we had to count on the Pere Marquette.

In earliest times the station must have contained a pot-bellied wood or coal stove, which would have been highly welcome while waiting for a train in cold, blustering weather.

I well remember those early days when Mother and we two children sat on the prickly double red plush seats. At one time a colored man sat in front of us. This was such a rare sight that little Dorothy was prompted to inquire, most vocally, whether he was black all over.

I also well recall the odor of coal smoke which prevailed throughout the coach. Added to that was the more refined fragrance of oranges, which, along with chewing gum, and the like, were distributed up and down the aisle.

TOWN COMMERCE

As Dad told the story, the towns of Sparta and Cedar Rapids were once rivals for the placing of the tracks of the Pere Marquette. The future of each town was at stake. Sparta's businessmen and the neighboring farmers must have come through handsomely, for our town was selected. In due course of time, tracks were laid and a builder came along to start a factory.

During my life in Sparta, tenants of this factory came and went. Of course it was the responsibility of the businessmen to find another occupant. I well recall, on one occasion, how excited Dad was when he was able to report the arrival of a Carnation Milk plant in Sparta.

Besides Dad's department store, there were several other businesses located on Centennial Street. Among them was a bakery, where Dad bought his annual supply of Fourth of July fireworks, two rival stores selling groceries and meat, a Rexall drug store, Will Rogers' hardware store, and a millinery store operated by Mother's rival, Miss Dora Clute. The local undertaker had his place of business next to Dad's store. In addition, on the same street were *The Sparta Sentinel-Leader*, two banks, the post office, and the movie house.

I have a vague impression that there were one or two other places of business, perhaps of questionable repute, farther along toward the tracks and the depot.

Walking north on Union Street, we school children passed by a flourishing blacksmith shop, the Carnegie Public Library, and the dairy which apparently made use of Spring Creek.

Mother was often at the home of Miss Lulu Symes, who took in sewing. Miss Symes was able to relieve Mother of some of her domestic duties, and Dorothy and I should have been more charitable to the lady, who was badly deformed. Her continuous chatter and inane laughter about the affairs of her clients was too much for us! She certainly had it all over Grandma Smith!

In my childhood there were no paved roads. Anyone intrepid enough to buy any automobile had to negotiate existing dirt roads. Even before paved roads began to come in, I remember nothing but dirt roads all through the countryside. It was on a sandy road near our town that Dad taught me to drive an automobile.

We were very pleased when construction on Route 37 from Sparta to Grand Rapids

began. Little did we expect the many months of road building, or the endless, frustrating detours involved. Our joy on its completion, however, was to be brief! For the asphalt covering proved unsatisfactory and had to be replaced by concrete.

ADVENT OF THE AUTOMOBILE

Dad was not the first automobile owner in our town. In the course of time, naturally, he was talked into buying a Chandler. Events occurred quickly after this purchase. A garage had to be built and a car mechanic located. The garage, which was attached to the house, proved to be essential in that the mechanic whom Dad finally located was still learning his trade.

In spite of forthcoming disaster, our parents decided on a trip of several hundred miles to visit Uncle Eldred and Aunt Nina. Neither the roads nor the tires on the care were what they should have been. It is a near miracle that Dad, with his lack of manual skills, was able to complete the trip.

Dad always loved to drive around the countryside, and he had a real talent for making the farming area interesting to us. He seemed to take a personal interest in the lives of the farmers and their crops. He was also fairly good at identifying plants and bird life.

He later took us on more extended trips. This was the day of the leather-bound Blue Book automobile guides. Our parents diligently tried to follow a given route by means of mileage between such landmarks as schools, churches, stores, and cemeteries. Road maps were in the future.

While our parents were laboring over the frustrating guidebooks, Dorothy and I whiled away the time by counting windmills, various kinds of animals, or better yet chanting in unison the different parts of a series of Burma Shave signs. Somehow our parents endured our hilarity, but Dad clamped down when our racket became intolerable.

After having taken automobile trips to various places of interest throughout Michigan, Dad was ready for more ambitious plans. Conveniently, he had a great-aunt and two distant cousins living in the state of New York.

Aunt Libby, who lived in central New York in the Finger Lake area, and who was a sister of Grandma Smith, was a very sweet unassuming lady. Her home and the homes of her friends were of another age. There was no modern plumbing, and the contents of these houses would have satisfied any antique dealer. I distinctly remember that Aunt



Travel conditions in 1921
Erastus is fixing a puncture
and changing a tire.



House near Interlaken, New York, where Grandma Ida Salome Smith was born. Dorothy, Erastus, and Marion are seated in the front yard in this 1921 photograph.

Libby possessed a spinning wheel. The upstairs room contained china bowls and pictures, and commodes under the beds. At the present time, I am the proud owner of a cracked blue and white pitcher and a torn linen homespun tablecloth which eventually came my way. Dorothy probably inherited similar items.

Our visits to Aunt Libby were especially pleasant because of the long leisurely

drives around the Finger Lakes. By chance, we once happened to stop beside the road at a scenic spot near Auburn. This point of interest turned out to be a rocky little cliff intercepted by a picturesque ravine, which had the potential for a good climb. Mother fortunately talked the family into ascending the marked trail. This adventure proved to be one of the highlights of my entire life. I had my first exhilarating emotional experience when I identified with the natural world.

In the course of events, Aunt Libby returned our visits by spending relatively long periods of time with both Grandma Smith and our



Grandma Smith and Aunt Libby



Marion and Dorothy as young adults at the Falls

family.

There were also one or two trips to the city of Niagara Falls. It was there that Dad had a cousin named Percy Weston. This relative was a branch manager of the Bissell Carpet Sweeper Company. The Westons had a daughter named Vera who was the approximate age of Dorothy and me. The whole family was gracious to us. Mr. Weston seemed to enjoy escorting us to the places of interest at

the Falls. I have an enlarged photograph of us two sisters standing arm-in-arm on one of the small islands above the Falls. Later Vera spent several weeks with our family.

Dad had another cousin who lived in the iron country of the Upper Peninsula. He seemed happy to introduce us to the interior of an iron mine.

When Dorothy and I were of high school age, our parents really extended themselves by embarking on an automobile trip which included points of interest all along the eastern seaboard from Portland, Maine, to Washington, D.C.

I am happy to report that Mother did manage to “land” on Plymouth Rock and that she did view with awe the



Marion, Dorothy, and possibly Vera at the Falls in 1921



Dorothy and Marion in Washington D.C., 1921

great respect. In the course of our travels, we were forced to climb, step by step, to the top levels of the Woolworth Building, the Statue of Liberty, and the Washington Monument.

For our parents, this over-extended automobile trip must have taken on

crack in the Liberty Bell. Emotionally Mother was very much affected by her first view of the Atlantic at Portland. The “presence” of the Lincoln Memorial was almost too much for her. For some reason she viewed all tall buildings with



1927: Lillian (R) and her daughters in Atlantic City

some of the aspects of a “grand tour.” So far as I was concerned, the trip, which included hundreds of miles of driving and the visiting of many historical places, was exhausting. On the way home it came time to take in the historical significance of Fort Ticonderoga. I was then fully aware that I had had a sufficiency of tourist attractions.

Lillian, Dorothy, and Erastus
at Atlantic City



XII. WORLD WAR I

I was probably ten or eleven years old when the full realization came that our country was engaged in a serious war.

Each evening after supper Dad and Mother became thoroughly involved in a large map which was placed on the wall behind the dining room table. I was fascinated not only by the different colored pins which represented the trench lines but by the foreign words. My parents seemed to have no qualms in the way they attacked the names of the French localities on the map. Probably their pronunciation was no worse than what we were later taught in high school.

Everywhere there was a patriotic fervor. Everyone knew that we were waging a war to end all wars and that each person was expected to help President Wilson save the world for democracy. I too did my small part by picking up scraps of aluminum foil off the sidewalks. As I recall, a thrift stamp campaign was conducted through all the grades of the school. There was also the observance of meatless, wheatless, and, perhaps, heatless days.

Mother proved her patriotism by accepting into our home a young wife and son of a soldier stationed in the Arctic. It seems that Mother's rival, Dora Clute, had evicted this pair for non-payment of rent. Mother, of course, met the challenge. (It might just have been, too, that she used this opportunity to attain a little spiteful revenge.)

The war finally ended; the treaty was signed; and November 11 was declared an official holiday. Naturally enormous victory celebrations were in order all over the country. The burning of the effigy of the Kaiser was the high point. Ironically, however, these street celebrations, in which countless numbers of people were involved, caused a nation-wide health disaster. A highly contagious and pernicious virus had already been imported from Europe by means of the returning soldiers. The ensuing epidemic, later designated as the Spanish Influenza, grew out of all proportions, and the whole country was devastated by the number of casualties.

I have, of course, no knowledge of how many people in our community were affected, or how many fatalities there were. I do know, however, that our family of four remained totally helpless in the two upstairs bedrooms until a nurse provided by our friend, Dr. Bolender, arrived on the scene.

Hopefully, those who were fortunate enough to escape the ravages of the Spanish Influenza continued to rejoice in the miraculous ending of World War I.

APPENDIX

NOTE ON GRANDMA (IDA SALOME WOODWORTH) SMITH

Marion learned very late in her life that her family's lineage contained more notable names than she had recognized (p. 46). Ida Salome was the great x 6 grandchild of Rev. John Lathrop, the Congregationalist minister who was banished from England for his religious beliefs and founded the town of Barnstable, Massachusetts, in 1639. Rev. John's descendants include Presidents Bush I and II, Grant, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, along with Longfellow, the two Oliver Wendell Holmeses, John Foster Dulles, and Benedict Arnold. Ida Salome's great-great-grandmother, Hannah Abell (the wife of Deacon Simeon Lathrop), was probably a descendant of King Edward I of England. Marion's maternal ancestry is also distinguished, as Grandpa (Henry) Clark was a great grandson of Robert Morris, the financier of the American Revolution and a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

NOTE ON CAMP LAKE

The editor understands that Camp Lake was drained, as Marion reports, sometime in the middle of the last century. However, it has since been restored. Marion revisited it after her book had been written and saw that it is still surrounded by a "welter of cottages" that continues to make access to its shoreline quite limited [Ed.].



Recent photograph of Camp Lake