

# LIKE ORDINARY PEOPLE

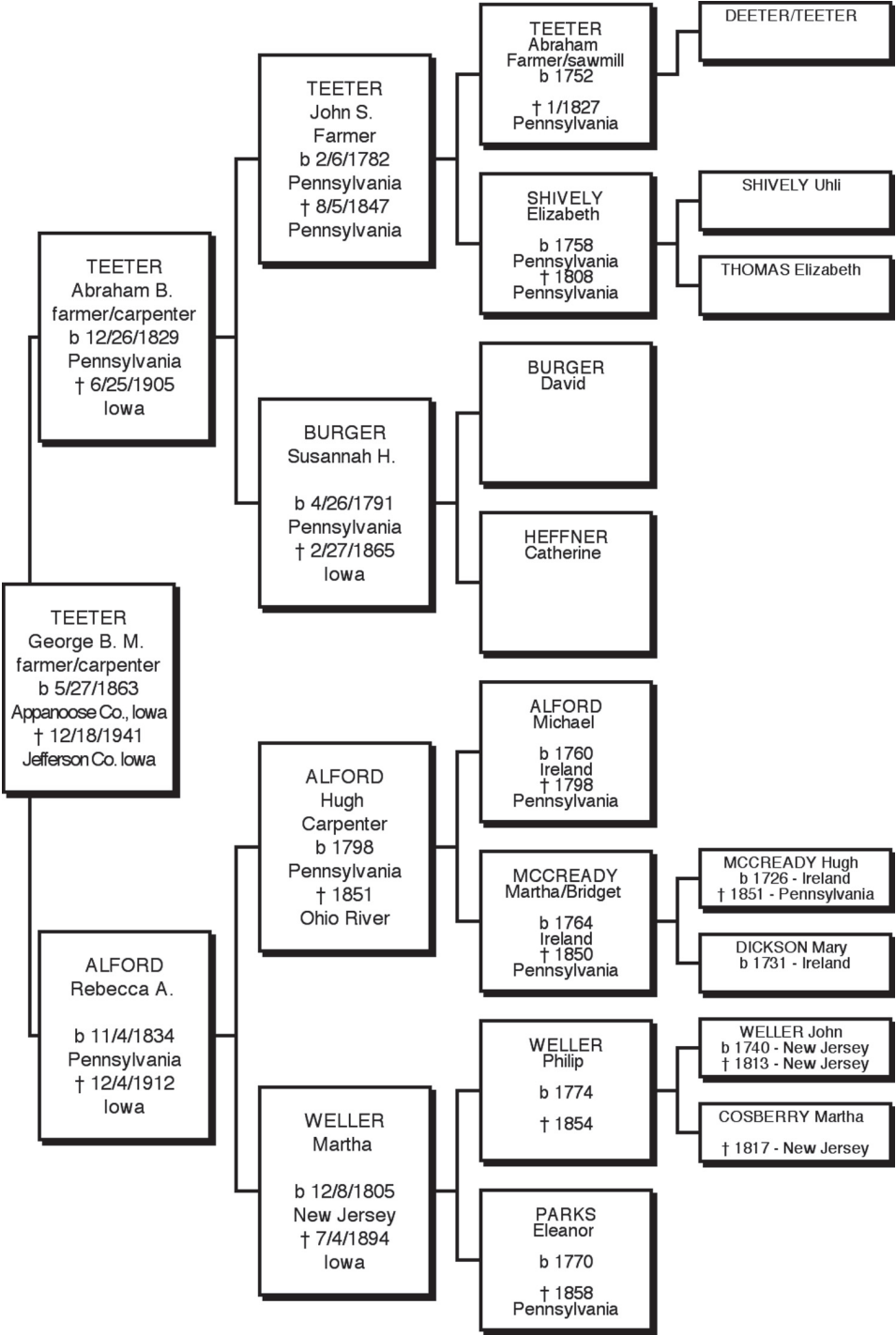


An Illustrated Iowa Social Biography of  
**JOSEPHINE MAE TEETER CURTIS**  
and Her Times 1903-2007



**Bruce Curtis**

Josephine Teeter Curtis — Paternal Ancestry





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Josephine Mae Teeter  
mid 1920s

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Her Times  
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**Bruce Curtis**

Little Stronach Press  
East Lansing, Michigan

## Cover illustrations

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Josephine Teeter, about 1925

Josephine Teeter Curtis, about 1985

Steele-Teeter Home, by A.E. Keller, Curtis family archives

### Back

Steam engine and thresher, Nichols and Shepard Co. brochure cover, 1913,  
courtesy of Michigan State University Library, Special Collections

George and Ollie Teeter family, about 1912

Band Concert in Central Park, by Dorothea Tomlinson, courtesy of Fairfield  
Public Library

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## DEDICATION

To the memory of Josephine Mae Teeter Curtis and to the essential women in my life: Joy Diane Hilleary Curtis, Hilary Ann Curtis Arthur, and Kathryn Andrea Venz Curtis; to the girls who will become women: Sabrina Anne Curtis, Julia Mae Curtis, and Emma Elizabeth Curtis; to Jason Hilleary Curtis and Michael Dennis Arthur; and to the boys who will become men: Matthew Dennis Curtis Arthur and Thomas Michael Curtis Arthur.





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## PREFACE

The dead in their silences keep me in memory,  
Have me in hold. To all I am bounden.

—Edwin Muir, from “The Debtor”

Brevity does not make life meaningless, but forgetting does.

—Least Heat Moon, *Riverhorse*

Longevity does not make life meaningful, but remembering does.

—The Author



Josephine Teeter Curtis and Bruce Curtis, 2002

## THE CAST:

Josephine Mae Teeter Curtis, whose biography this is.

Fannie Ulrica Steele Teeter, Josephine's mother, always called Ollie.

Sarah Elizabeth Miles Steele, Ollie's mother.

Joseph Elliott Steele, Ollie's father.

George Brinton McClellan Teeter, Josephine's father, known as George B.

Rebecca Ann Alford Teeter, George B.'s mother.

Abraham Burger Teeter, George B.'s father.

Earnest Albert Teeter, Josephine's older brother.

Bernard Steele Teeter, Josephine's younger brother.

Kitty Irene Teeter Gorman Knopp, Josephine's oldest sister.

Rebecca Elizabeth Teeter Wheeldon, Josephine's older sister.

Chester (Chet) Kerlin Curtis, Jo's husband.

Wayne Keith Curtis and Bruce Eugene Curtis, sons of Jo and Chet.

These few lead actors—plentifully supported by Josephine's aunts, uncles, cousins, in-laws, friends, neighbors, schoolmates, teachers, and students—are at the center of action in this story.

To avoid confusion concerning names, readers should note that Josephine was regularly addressed in her earlier years by her given name. This was probably because her mother did not hold with nicknames for her, although Fannie Ulrica herself was nicknamed "Ollie" almost from birth, and although sister Rebecca was sometimes called "Re." Josephine usually preferred to be addressed, at least by intimates, as "Jo." I will use both Josephine and Jo, as seems fitting. Furthermore, she was originally named Josephine May, possibly middle-named for her Aunt Cora May Steele (Carlson), but in high school Jo evolved the apparently more elegant "Mae." In various letters, Bernice May Gorman Cronk, Jo's eldest niece (who told me her name was originally spelled "Berniece," and that she too had changed her middle name to "Mae"), addressed her aunt as "Dear Opene." She had first managed this pronunciation when Josephine had boarded with Bernice's mother and father seventy-five years earlier. In the late 1920s a would-be flapper friend was probably alone in addressing Josephine as "Josie."



## THE SETTING:

Most action in the Josephine Teeter Curtis story occurs in the twentieth-century Midwest, in the southeastern Iowa agricultural counties of Jefferson and Wapello, more particularly in Des Moines and Pleasant Townships. Readers will nevertheless find themselves at times transported to nineteenth-century pioneering and politics; to the twenty-first century; to Estes Park, Israel, Rio, and other exotic places. In *Dark Star Safari*, Paul Theroux writes that “For an author, there is no greater achievement than this, the successful re-creation in prose of the texture and emotions of a real place, making the reading of the work like a travel experience, containing many of the pleasures of a visit.” That has been my purpose here, even as I have recognized the difficulties, the impossibility, of achieving it completely. I am dealing with a relatively obscure person in a relatively obscure community and place. But as the poet Adrienne Rich writes in “Focus,” “Obscurity has a tale to tell.” As the eighteenth-century poet Thomas Gray urged, appropriately for my purpose in “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” “Let not ambition mock their useful toil, / Their homely joy, and destiny obscure; / Nor Grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile, / The short and simple annals of the poor.”

## THE TIMES AND JOSEPHINE:

From the earliest years of the twentieth century to the early years of the twenty-first, both the domestic and the agricultural conditions of life in Iowa changed astoundingly, even as Josephine’s nation and its relationship to the world changed with equally astounding results. Change, then, is a theme of Jo’s long life, unsettling change.

But more significant is that within a lifetime of unsettling conditions, in her parents’ home, in her husband’s, and ultimately in her own, Josephine consciously and painstakingly developed certain unshakable core values that guided her thinking and her behavior. A central drama of her life derives from her quest to identify and to develop those values within the flux and confusions and resistance of everyday life. Born into a family that a friend described as “like ordinary people,” Josephine Teeter Curtis, by her own choices, proved to be indeed extraordinary.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In an enterprise as old and rambling as this, mistakes both of omission and commission, like termites in Texas, must inevitably have crept in. I can only hope they are not excessively damaging to the structure, or to those housed within. Once it is understood that those nasty little critters are my responsibility, I can acknowledge a great many people and institutions that have contributed to whatever interest and value this social-historical biography may have.

I began thinking of organizing such a work early in my career as a historian of American life and culture. I first interviewed my mother in the 1960s, to record her memories and experiences, and I interviewed others whose lives intertwined with hers. I continued doing so occasionally, as time and circumstance allowed. I also began irregularly and haphazardly collecting information about the time and place in which my mother lived. One consequence is that, after many years, my records and memory of information sources are sometimes dim, sometimes embarrassingly nonexistent. But I have tried to fill the gaps. As Isabella Bird says of some poor soul in *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, "He did his incompetent best." I will also say, as Huck Finn asserts of his creator, that I have tried to tell the truth, mainly. I have certainly tried to identify all those persons and institutions to whom I am in debt. To those I may have failed to identify, I hold myself doubly indebted.

For information, reminiscences, varied assistance, and encouragement I am grateful to: Mattie Arbogast, Judy Bar-Shimon, Gladys Beckwith, Peter Berg, Louise Wheeldon Bishop, Roger Bresnahan, Stuart Burns, Jeanette F. Carter, Gail Christie, Ada Tresenriter Curtis, Gordon Curtis, Kathryn Venz Curtis, Kathy England Davis, Orpha Wheeldon Dodge, Leona Hutton Domino, Judy Dovico, Lisa Fine, Maureen Flanagan, Teresa Font, Ruth Foreman, Bernice Frescoln, Fred Graham, Mary Ruth Wheeldon Hanna, Gordon Hawley, Louise Hawley, Julius Hilleary, Ruth Hale Hilleary, Dorothy Hoffman, Gale Honeyman, Rebecca Huggins, Paul Hughes, Helen Sheets Kesselring, Jamie Hilleary Kozlevcar, Mary Ann Lemon, Norman Leppo, Janet James Markley, Richard McNiell, Lowell Rothert, James Rubis, Harold Shipler, Joann Sloca, Dorothy Smith, Ferne Gorman Smothers, Ennis Sterner, Paul Swan, Sharon Taylor, Joan Teeter

Tedrow, Helen Steele Teeter, Lillian Thada, Claudia Hutton Van de Ven, Janet Weaver, Wayne Webb, George Wheeldon, and True Wheeldon.

Professional and near-professional genealogists who saved me from repeating work, blind alleys, and egregious errors, and to whom I am most grateful, include Verda Baird, Jim Boor, Mary Ellen Hall, Sherry Steele Hayden, and Jeanne Steele Virtue, from all of whom, especially Verda, I have borrowed almost shamelessly. My thanks to Dawn Martin, who copyread the manuscript with good humored interest and professionalism.

In addition to Josephine herself, those who submitted cheerfully, enthusiastically, and sometimes more than once to interviews over the years include Edna Steele Carr, Bernice Gorman Cronk, Chester Kerlin Curtis, Ethan Judson Curtis, Leonard Wayne Curtis, Wayne Keith Curtis, Wilma McCleary Curtis, Mildred Sandell Dallner, Mildred Stull Fickel, Edith Stull Giltner, Marie Loy Gorman, Naomi Curtis Hutton, Bertha Curtis McNiel, Margery Loy Ornduff, Floyd Peebler, Nellie Stull Peebler, Jean Keith Selz, Alma Nelson Teeter, Elmer James Teeter, Isobel Manning Teeter, Ollie Steele Teeter (most especially), and Rebecca Teeter Wheeldon.

To Hilary Curtis Arthur and Jason Hilleary Curtis, who read the early manuscript with the eyes of Jo's grandchildren, and who helped immensely in its production, I am most grateful. Hilary thoroughly critiqued the final manuscript. Jason interpolated the many illustrations and formatted the final product. Pauline Gordon Adams read and critiqued the entire first draft with the eye of both a professional and a friend. The work is significantly better for her help. Murl O. Black Jr. (always "Junior" to me) read an early manuscript as one who knew the neighborhood. Like Jo Teeter Curtis, a country girl come to town, Patti Nelson Glenn saved me most particularly from a mistake about out-of-season oysters, shared information about her mother's teaching experiences, and gifted me with *John Williamson of Hardscrabble*. Gary Cameron offered encouraging commentary deriving from intimate knowledge of the territory and its denizens. Milton Powell and Sue Knox Powell have long shared their expertise concerning midwestern Methodism—theology and folkways. For timely and invaluable advice at a crucial moment, I am beholden to Jim McClintock, Betty Wilson Vinten-Johansen, Peter Vinten-Johansen, Barry Wright, and Peg McCamley Wright. And to Betty for clarifying the chinch bug. Naomi Curtis Hutton commented helpfully on the manuscript and during numerous phone calls. As well, she provided invaluable memoirs and photographs. Over the years, Isobel Manning Teeter was a cornucopia of information that only a local resident, daughter-in-law of George and Ollie Teeter, and sister-in-law of Josephine, could have been.

Joy Hilleary Curtis has helped shape and interpret this biography of her favorite Mother Jo from its very inception years ago—from idea, to outline, to extensive genealogical research, to various manuscript stages, and, most recently and crucially, through hands-on production. Even effusive and loving gratitude is insufficient.

I am deeply gratified that I was able both as a boy and as an adult to know and to talk at length with my long-lived Grandma Ollie Steele Teeter. Surely the very embryo of this story sprang from the tales she told me, during my eleventh summer, of her pioneer parents coming to Iowa in a covered wagon; of wolves; of ornery neighbors and undertakers; of everyday work and amusements; of being courted by handsome George; and of that lovely frosty morning when my mother was born.

Like her Mother Ollie, Josephine was long-lived and clear-headed. Like her mother, she had an almost impeccable long-term memory. It was my good fortune as a son to know her from my childhood, into adulthood, and on into my own old age. As I have reminded myself repeatedly, the creation of this biography is as much hers as mine. For almost forty years she wrote many memoirs and notes; collected and called to my attention much material; participated in numerous interviews, alone, with Chet, with numerous relatives and friends. Particularly during the several years of episodic drafting, she and I engaged in countless question-and-answer telephone conversations. She read and commented on every early chapter draft. Whatever in this story is true of the specific everydayness of rural and small town Iowa life in the twentieth century, of bad times and good, of the resilience of the human spirit, and of the extraordinary born from the ordinary, it is her doing and her life.

Bruce Curtis  
January 1, 2008  
East Lansing, Michigan  
Irons, Michigan





## CHAPTER 1: EARLY ON ONE FROSTY MORN

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

—T. S. Eliot, from *Little Gidding*

We become our past, and it becomes a part of us,  
by our reliving of our beginnings.

—Wallace Stegner, Foreword to  
A.B. Guthrie Jr., *The Big Sky*

Josephine May Teeter was born at home, early one frosty morning, a Tuesday, October 27, 1903 “the prettiest day there ever was,” according to Mother Ollie’s lyrical testimony. As the nursery rhyme teaches, and as Josephine’s life would illustrate, “Tuesday’s child is full of grace.”



Josephine May Teeter, 1904

Assisting Ollie (and Josephine) that morning were “a neighbor lady” and a medical school graduate and experienced practitioner, Dr. Robert Bruce Stephenson of Libertyville, a few miles to the northeast. That summer carpenters had added to the “genial” doctor’s house, creating “a very comfortable home.” Now, a few months later, Josephine’s parents (and indirectly Josephine) contributed their mite to his comfort and social prestige. Several years later, during Josephine’s first school year, a

Libertyville columnist versified of this authentic general practitioner that “He can pull your tooth, set your limb, and if you want anything more, just call on him.” Reportedly, “his greatest fault . . . was in making his charge for his services too small.” Doc Stephenson would continue to practice faithfully in Libertyville and the countryside around until he died after falling while trimming a tree in 1934.<sup>1</sup>

Both that village and Josephine's farmhouse birthplace were in Liberty Township, Jefferson County, Iowa. Both were on the road earlier known as the Black Hawk Trail, down which young Black Hawk with his Sac and Fox band, under increasing pressure from white westward migration, had supposedly traveled in 1824. They had come from Rock Island on the Illinois side of the Mississippi to fight the loway tribe on Des Moines River bottom land near the future town sites of lowaville and Selma. There, the probably apocryphal story went, they virtually massacred the loways and drove the remnant westward. The Sac and Fox themselves, in fact, would almost all be "removed" to Kansas in 1844-45.<sup>2</sup>

In 1838, following his humiliation by the United States in 1832, in a war to which he unwillingly lent his name, Chief Black Hawk, with his wife, returned to Iowa. They settled in a bark-covered wickiup, and then a log cabin that white friends built for them, on the Des Moines River's south bank across from lowaville, an ephemeral white settlement and trading post. That site was a very few miles from Josephine Teeter's birthplace. The old chief died in 1838, on the fourth day of Josephine's birth month. Years later, in 1921, Black Hawk tires and tubes, sold at the Star Garage, Fairfield, Iowa, were advertised as "Chief of the Trail." After his death Black Hawk's Trail came to be called First Territorial Road, which ran from Memphis, Missouri, through lowaville, northeastward through Fairfield, the Jefferson County seat, and on to Iowa City, the first state capital.<sup>3</sup>

In Fairfield newspapers, I searched in vain for notice of baby Josephine. The *Jefferson County Republican's* Libertyville column for that week commented, as had Ollie, that "This is beautiful fall weather" with corn harvesting soon. It noted that "Rev. G. W. Barber [who had married Josephine's parents] is suffering with a carbuncle on the back of his neck"; that "the Brethren [including Josephine's paternal grandparents] held their love feast Saturday night at the Pleasant Hill Church"; that "Harley Yost had a part of two fingers taken off on his left hand while bailing hay last week"; and that "the ladies improvement society will serve warm lunch all day election day. Everybody invited."

Since Josephine's father was an open and cantankerous Democrat, I surely wasted my time searching the *Republican*. But then, on that spectacular October morning no one had reason to assume that this infant should receive particular notice, or that she would live many years. Local newspapers in those days paid much more attention to departures than to arrivals, to illnesses, deaths, and funerals, and with good reason.

Parents learned early to fear the worst, knew they could not assume easily that infants would live and thrive, and too often grieved too many

losses. Nineteenth-century Iowa pioneer Kitty Belknap wrote of a second child, "Such a nice little girl. Only six pounds at first and though it is a month old is not much bigger than at first. It has never been well so we have two children again for a while." A year later she wrote, "My dear little girl, Martha, was sick all summer and October 30 she died, one year and one month old. Now we have one little puny boy left." That same month she reported on sewing for that boy, "With what he has that will last him (if he lives)."<sup>4</sup>

### **Iowa Life Could Be a Grim Gauntlet**

Illness and death intermingled with Josephine May Teeter's earliest memories. On February 3, 1908, in a time of much neighborhood illness, Josephine, four years old, was down with pneumonia at her maternal grandparents' home, where her parents had hired a neighbor lady to care for her. On this day Grandmother Sarah Elizabeth Miles Steele, age sixty-three, died of tuberculosis. In that grieving household, little Josephine, sick and uncertain about the meaning of death, cried because a household full of relatives and friends was crying.<sup>5</sup>

Since a funeral would soon occupy the house, Josephine's father George came with a horse and buggy, wrapped his ill daughter in blankets, and returned four miles along snow-blown roads to their rented house back in the field on the W. C. Hunt farm. Josephine had been told before being taken to her grandparents that baby brother Bernard, not yet two, also down with pneumonia, was not expected to live. Knowing that, she had kissed him goodnight and probably goodbye forever.

But when Josephine returned, Bernard was still alive. Even so, both recovered slowly. March 1, the traditional date when farm renters moved, was more than three weeks after her father brought Josephine home. Since she and Bernard were not yet well, George arranged with Bill and Alice Hunt, who would be the farm's new residents, to delay moving. Even when Ollie and George did go, they put both children in one cradle, head to foot, and covered them entirely with blankets.

Josephine remembered nothing, of course, about her Aunt Addie James Steele's death in 1904, she being the wife of "Uncle Wils" Steele, Ollie's brother. In fewer than fourteen married years, Addie bore Joseph Wilson Steele nine children and died at age thirty-eight years, one month, and eighteen days, not long after bearing the ninth. Nor was Josephine aware of Grandfather Abraham B. Teeter's death in 1905. She remembered

little about her Uncle John Teeter's death when she was eight and believed she did not attend his funeral.

Jo did, however, clearly remember in 2002 her Grandmother Rebecca Ann Alford Teeter's December 1912 funeral. She could see her family in their buggy following Batavia Undertaker M. A. Davidson's horse-

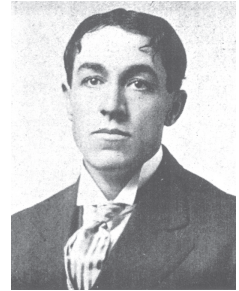


Brethren Church funeral, with  
horse-drawn hearse, 1915

drawn hearse with the plate glass side and rear windows that carried her grandmother's wooden coffin. The procession moved slowly down windswept rutted dirt roads from the home funeral at the Teeter farmstead southwest of County Line, nearly

passing George and Ollie's rented house on the Samuel Peebler farm, and on east to the Brethren or "Dunkard" cemetery. There, Rebecca Ann, aged seventy-eight years and one month, would lie beside her husband, Abraham Burger Teeter.<sup>6</sup>

In 1916 measles struck the Teeters—Earnest first; then Ollie, Rebecca, Josephine, and Bernard were in bed at one time. George and recovering Earnest were left to care for the rest, to cook, clean, and do farm chores. Ollie was so "terribly sick" that the doctor, probably Batavia's Baldrige, not expecting her to live, came more often than usual. Tragically, eldest daughter Irene, newly married, newly pregnant, visited while Earnest had early unidentified measles symptoms. Her son died at birth.



Dr. M.D. Baldrige  
of Batavia

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, preventive and reliably curative medicine had not yet become an assumed part of life in American and other "modern" societies. Thus many diseases were endemic, often epidemic, including measles, mumps, chickenpox, smallpox, scarlet fever, typhoid fever, infantile paralysis, cholera, diphtheria, influenza, croup, and whooping cough, the latter four being infectious pulmonary diseases. In 1895 a hardly newsworthy item reported, "George Teeter and wife are visiting with Joe Steel's, their children having the whooping cough." Grandmother Sarah Elizabeth, with tuberculosis, and Josephine, with pneumonia (sometimes called "lung fever"), had suffered the two

pulmonary diseases, reported the *Fairfield Ledger*, that killed the most early-twentieth-century Americans. Before Josephine was born, “croup,” or “membraneous croup,” had killed two of her cousins, children of Addie James and Joseph Wilson Steele.<sup>7</sup>

From one perspective, life could be a grim gauntlet for a child—or an adult—to run, even in Iowa, which claimed the lowest death rate of any state. Even so, the early-twentieth-century was on the eve of momentous discoveries, of medical miracles soon to seem commonplace. Immunizations for an array of childhood diseases would soon save thousands and would limit suffering for many thousands more.

In the year of Josephine’s birth, in 1903 France, Monsieur Curie, “assisted by his clever wife,” so newspapers said, had discovered a “mysterious substance” called radium that “possesses the extraordinary property of continuously emitting heat without combustion, without chemical change . . . and without any change in its molecular structure.” The papers short-changed Marie Skłodowska Curie just a tad. Not only was she the first woman to win the Nobel Prize, which she shared with her husband (Physics 1903), she became the first person to be awarded a second Nobel Prize (Chemistry 1911). She died in 1934 from effects of radioactivity. Not only would their daughter, Irene Joliot-Curie, share a Nobel Prize with *her* husband, she also would die of radiation poisoning. Twentieth-century Americans would come to live longer, healthier lives because of scientists like Madame Curie, her husband, and their daughter. Even old folks would suffer far less from chronic ills.

Josephine Teeter Curtis lived more than a hundred years specifically because of twentieth-century scientific and medical discoveries. She was born into an era of other stunning developments as well, into a land increasingly bold and brash. This was, according to certain of the novelist Sinclair Lewis’s characters, “1903, the climax of civilization.” America seemed optimistic and “Progressive,” where “muckrakers” were unearthing corruption private and public and were decrying monopolization in oil, steel, and railroads; were seeking to revive democracy. An optimistic age, yes, although for some individuals there must have been countercurrents. *Fairfield* newspapers reported regularly on suicides, especially local and statewide, of both men and women. Gruesomely enough, taking carbolic acid seemed the method of choice. One woman “suicided . . . it was reported by eating spiders. That, however, was not a fact, death being caused by Oxolic acid which she procured at the laundry.”<sup>8</sup>

## The Promise of America

Josephine arrived exactly a century after the Louisiana Purchase ensured there would be an Iowa and a Continental United States, an event the St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition celebrated in 1904. And imagine this: she was born into a country with just forty-five continental states, for Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona were yet to be admitted. She was born during the reign of Theodore Roosevelt, still celebrating his self-mythicized charge up San Juan Hill in the recent Spanish American War and reveling in the presidential “bully pulpit.” In the year of Josephine’s birth, Teddy visited nearby Ottumwa in transit from a Yellowstone National Park vacation to dedicate the Purchase Exposition. In 1904 he ascended his bully pulpit—a flag-draped open automobile—at the Wapello County Fair in Eldon, only a few miles from little Josephine’s crib.



President Theodore Roosevelt at the 1904 Wapello County Fair, Eldon.  
Courtesy of Ottumwa Public Library

Mark Twain, a shrewd judge of character, was said to have privately called TR “a showy charlatan.” The novelist Henry James, just as shrewd, and just as privately, saw the president as “a dangerous and ominous jingo.” Even an admiring later biographer referred to Roosevelt’s “characteristic immodesty.” And the satirist Finley Peter Dunne opined that TR’s report on the Splendid Little War against Spain should have been titled *Alone in Cubia*. Roosevelt’s domestic accomplishments were laudable—conserving vast public lands, advocating and practicing “clean” government, and at least attempting to pit the government’s strength against that of the great corporations. And yet, he also personified, almost caricatured, an age of world-encompassing American national pride. TR would die in 1919, Josephine Teeter’s first high school year, but that expansive and expansionist attitude would endure, like Josephine (although not prideful, she).<sup>9</sup>



In 1903 Martha Jane Canary, a Wild West character known as Calamity Jane, died peacefully. In Cheyenne Tom Horn, a cattlemen's hired gun who had killed a sheepman's boy, didn't die as peacefully, being hanged on November 20. Closer to home, one of Jefferson County's first pioneer residents, Thomas Bonnifield, died in August. In the month of Josephine's birth, Chief Moses Keokuk, an even earlier resident of the area, son of the Chief Keokuk who had been forced to treaty with the white man, died in Oklahoma, far from the lost graves of his Ioway ancestors. At the St. Louis Exposition in 1904 the War Department allowed defeated Apache "insurgent" Geronimo to support himself by selling autographed photos. Just a month before Josephine's birth in 1903, a white Jefferson County hunter on Skunk River shot and killed eight pelicans; earlier that year the Milliner's Association had submitted to the Audubon Society's demand that it stop using songbird feathers on women's hats. Memories of Indians and their removal, of pioneers and their arrival to clear and "civilize" the wilderness, lingered for years into the twentieth century. In local newspapers, reminiscences and obituaries of early white residents regularly fed those memories. The times were seeing a decline of the old, but notably a continuation of some that was old, despite much that was new.<sup>10</sup>

Both old and new were encompassed in what was often called "the promise of America." The phrase meant many things—certainly political and religious freedom. But just as certainly, America promised wealth. Whatever may be said of the Puritans and myriad other religious groups, America had always been about wealth, increasingly about wealth from trade and manufacturing, but always about the land, and what could be coaxed or wrenched from it. In this respect, millions of immigrants to this New World, even given difficulties of "assimilating," were instant Americans.

In 1903 numbers of immigrants were the "Greatest In History," almost a million. Many more were on the way. This flood, asserted the *Fairfield Ledger*, disproved political assertions that "the poor man has no chance in the United States." In that year to the base of the Statue of Liberty was added the resounding lines of Emma Lazarus: "Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. / Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, / I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" In fact, despite often abominable conditions for the lowest classes, the period from Josephine's birth through World War I was prosperous for many, even relatively so for midwestern farmers. It saw good or better prices for corn, wheat, and other crops, and generally rising land values. Josephine was born into a land



in flux, flooding with hopeful people on the move, a land of promise. That promise would bear her and countless others up in distressing times, even when it sometimes proved illusory.<sup>11</sup>

Apparently limitless land and natural resources had made many Americans, native born or naturalized, even among Puritans, ever restless, ever with an eye to a route over the eastern mountains, across the plains, from sea to shining sea. In 1903, as earlier, as later, “Homeseekers Excursions” on railroad cheap tickets were offered in Iowa, typically to Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado; but to the South and even the Southeast as well; even to Canada. Americans were still restless, still searching for better and cheaper land, for riches, for bonanzas. In 1903 explorers were still naming mountains in Montana, construction on Yellowstone Park’s Old Faithful Inn was just begun, and segregated “colored” Federal troops were guarding the nation’s second National Park, Sequoia, from devastating flocks of sheep, loggers, and local poachers.<sup>12</sup>

In this era, while explorers of several European nations were mounting Antarctic and Arctic polar expeditions, ever westering Americans who were brought up short for the moment by the Pacific had turned by the thousands north to the Klondike gold rush, beginning in 1896. Predictably, as we say by hindsight, and as the following bit of doggerel illustrated, most adventurers died poor, and some died soon. The poem, loosely mimicking Mrs. E. C. Norton’s “Bingen on the Rhine,” was “The Klondike Miner”:

A Klondike City mining man lay dying on the ice . . .  
But a comrade knelt beside him as the sun sank to repose  
To hear what he might have to say and watch him while he froze . . .  
'I thought to make a fortune here,' the dying man did say,  
And then he hove a sigh or two and froze up right away.

Of course, a few lone miners died neither poor nor soon, but struck a bonanza, although big operators and merchants were the really big winners. In 1903 ships from Alaska were reported arriving in Seattle with \$500,000 in treasure.<sup>13</sup>

In early-twentieth-century America a man (not necessarily American) might strike a bonanza in the gold fields—or marry it more comfortably. Queen Victoria having died in 1901, her son’s “Edwardian Era” was well begun when Josephine was born. On August 26, 1903, the *Fairfield Weekly Ledger* noted cynically that “A London man has refused to be knighted by King Edward. Evidently he doesn’t know of any rich American girl he wants to marry.” But only a few years earlier, in 1899, an “Iowa Girl,” Miss Beulah Hubbell, daughter of Des Moines’ F.M. Hubbell, “three times millionaire,”

had married “Count Axel Wachmeister, of Sweden, Vice Consul at Chicago,” who would sweep her away by fast steamship to live “at some European capital.” In 1908, “A great party of Huns arrived in New York City . . . They are not going to earn American money with pick and shovel, but they are going to carry away a pile of it . . . One of their number is to marry a Vanderbilt girl.” Thus did Count Laszlo Szechenyi, the Hun[garian], marry the girl—and bits of the family fortune.<sup>14</sup>

### **An Era of Speed, Machines, and Horses**

This was an era, much like that of a century and more later, that worshipped speed in movement and communication at lower and lower cost. Egged on by passengers in a hurry and thrilled by speed, steamboat captains had always raced each other on the nation’s waterways. Now, on September 23, 1903, the *Fairfield Weekly Ledger* noted that by steamship “The time for a trip around the world has been reduced to fifty-four days, eight hours, thirty-nine minutes—which is evidence that Jules Verne was not an impracticable dreamer after all.” Just a few days previously an important man, rushing to his dying daughter’s bedside, had been highballed by rail coast to coast in three days. Two weeks after Josephine was born, a German electric train reached 118 miles per hour. In 1902 the Pennsylvania Railroad had built a steam locomotive to run a hundred; in 1905 its crew claimed 127.1 mph. In 1903, F. E. Stanley raced his Steamer a mile in one minute two and 4/5 seconds. The next year, Henry Ford would set a world speed record of 91.37 mph. In 1903 occurred the first transcontinental automobile trip—a Packard and two drivers on awful roads for fifty-one days from San Francisco to New York. The next year a driver would take just thirty-three days. In 1903 the very first Harley-Davidson motorcycle roared off. About six weeks after Josephine arrived, Orville Wright lifted off this earth in flight for twelve seconds. Competition to get into the air was intense. A few weeks before her arrival the *Fairfield Ledger* had reported concerning the “airship” of Samuel Langley that had been launched from a boat and crashed into the Potomac River, “The Machine Did Fly.” It didn’t, in fact. Another source wrote more accurately, “the Great Aerodrome . . . simply slid into the water like a handful of mortar.” In Paris, the Argentinean, Alberto Santos-Dumont, did not fly until 1906.<sup>15</sup>

In 1923 in the year Jo Teeter graduated from high school and started teaching, just twenty years after the Wright brother’s first flight, an American plane (with tailwind) reached a record 274.2 mph. Another flew coast to coast nonstop. In the preceding year, a woman pilot had

flown coast to coast. In the year Jo entered high school, 1919, the first transatlantic flights occurred, one from Newfoundland to Lisbon, another nonstop from Newfoundland to Ireland. In that year as well, a British airline initiated London-Paris and London-Amsterdam service. With lots of stops, a plane flew around the world in 1924, another over the North Pole in 1926. Before dying in 1948, Orville Wright lived to see Chuck Yeager break the sound barrier (1947).<sup>16</sup>

Speed, and yet higher speed. Horses and trains, automobiles and aeroplanes, went faster and faster. No sooner had bicycles become popular early in this era than racing began. The National League of American Wheelmen, created in 1880, had 1,400 Iowa members in 1897. In 1899 Ottumwa in Wapello County hosted national races on a new one-tenth mile track. Male riders, particularly racers, rode “wheels,” and were called “wheelmen.” The machines and their riders were the talk of the town. In 1897 a Bostonian “advertised for a boarding place where there was something besides bicycle talk three times a day.” Women and girl riders were known as ladies—provided they acted the part. Otherwise, unfavorable publicity resulted. In 1898, “A young lady bestride a bicycle was a sight on South Main Street last Thursday evening. The young lady was not dressed to ride such a wheel . . . and her skirt caught in the chain. Then there was a fall, an unearthly yell and as the gentleman escort assisted in extricating her he was compelled to hold his hands before his face—he was a bashful man.” How he extricated her without hands was left to the reader’s imagination.<sup>17</sup>



Proper lady cyclist. *Jefferson County Republican*, July 8, 1897



“Wheelmen.” Courtesy of Ottumwa Public Library

The year 1903 seemed to be the age of the horse, the workhorse, the fast horse. In the week Josephine was born, Prince Albert, a pacer,

set a world record mile of 1:57. Just a month earlier, Lou Dillon, a trotter, paced by a mare namesaked “Carrie Nation,” had achieved a world record two minutes. In those years, four or five thousand horses annually were auctioned off in Fairfield. And yet, and yet—during that very October, “An automobile of the Olds type has been purchased by Dr. J. Fred Clarke . . . and he is using it daily in his work.” Oldsmobiles would be manufactured for a century. Also in 1903, the first Fords were created in Michigan, following the first Cadillacs of 1902. The famous Ford “Model T” appeared in 1908. Where affluent doctors went, others, thousands of others, would soon follow. In 1914 forty Iowa farmers traveled en masse to Michigan and drove home forty autos, no doubt Fords, not Cadillacs. The *Jefferson County Republican* asserted critically in 1915 that “Farmers Have More Invested In Autos Than Schoolhouses.” Well, of course, schoolhouses didn’t have wheels.<sup>18</sup>

Young Iowa men in 1903 got half price rail tickets to rush out and sweat for good money in the Great Plains wheat harvest. Symptomatic of rapid transportation changes, when Jo Teeter’s future husband went to the harvest in the 1920s, he followed dusty roads into the Dakotas with a gang of guys in a car. These farm boys joined other seasonal workers—“tramps and teachers, demi-hoboes and divinity students, factory workers empty of pocketbook and emigrants with the gutturals of foreign land on their tongues.”<sup>19</sup>

Dusty Iowa prairie and Dakota plains roads were bad enough; mud roads were far worse. In 1898 mud roads were so bottomless that *Fairfield Weekly Ledger-Journal* editors noted “a number of four horse wagons in town.” In Iowa, as elsewhere, Good Roads movements and conventions proliferated early in the century. Iowans wanted out of the mud for convenience and pleasure, but crucially to get produce to markets and railheads. Rural Iowans also wanted good roads for RFD—Rural Free Delivery of mail—making headway as Josephine was born. “The rural [mail] carrier,” asserted the *Fairfield Ledger*, “is the pioneer of the good roads movement.” In the muddy spring of 1903, with Ottumwa and Eldon on the Des Moines River inundated, and tributaries flooding, the Post Office nevertheless hoped “to extend mail routes in Jefferson County.” Iowa already had 1,375 rural mail carriers.<sup>20</sup>

A “good road” was not necessarily concrete or macadamized or even graveled, but more often was a well-graded and drained dirt road. Local newspapers regularly badgered farmers to build road drags, to get out there and drag the roads, fill in the ruts, make them passable, especially for the town’s cars. As late as 1922, the *Weekly Ledger-Journal* reprinted

an editorial from the nearby *Birmingham Enterprise*: “We took a trip over the Pershing Way . . . from Birmingham to Keosauqua, and it is certainly as fine a dirt road as there is in the state.” This was not, mind you, tongue-in-cheek.<sup>21</sup>

### **Inventiveness and the Three R’s**

In 1903 other kinds of communication were becoming faster and easier, were promising to encircle the globe. In Fairfield “and adjoining country,” the Jefferson County Telephone Company had 650 subscribers. In that year, Libertyville had organized a company with a hundred subscribers, and with “Mrs. Clara Pratt as hello girl.” “Neighbors can now talk to each other and sit at home in the shade.” And not wade mud roads. In that year another and older communications technology had finally bound the globe with wire and underwater cable. The first round-the-world telegraph message took only twelve minutes to reach the President of the United States. On April 1, 1903, the *Fairfield Ledger* announced that “Marconi’s wireless telegraph system, with a charge of \$3.00 a word, is being installed for practical operation by the United States government in Alaska . . . It has been found . . . that the higher the poles on which the instruments are placed the more perfect the transmission of messages.”<sup>22</sup>

Despite the date, this was no April Fool joke. This invention became “radio.” Marconi had two years earlier received “wireless signals” from England to the New World. Now his wireless enabled regular news transmission between New York and London. Radio joined the phonograph and the motion picture, both in use and being improved in 1903 with amazing speed. In 1903 Enrico Caruso made his American debut in New York City’s Metropolitan Opera. But now his voice could be recorded for the ages. Several years earlier, in 1898, Thomas A. Edison’s “Projectoscope” had introduced “moving pictures” to Fairfield. In 1903 appeared *The Great Train Robbery*, a major technical achievement, and the first “Western,” at twelve minutes long. In 1900 television was already a gleam in the inventor’s eye.<sup>23</sup>

Rapid developments in such technologies, in medicine, in industry, in many fields, resulted at least partly because many Americans were well schooled in at least the basic “three Rs” of “reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmetic.” In 1902 Iowa’s legislature had required all children between seven and fourteen to attend school, although attendance was already widespread. In 1903 Iowa, where Josephine would soon study, the reported literacy rate was 97 percent, purportedly the highest of any state.<sup>24</sup>

Iowa girls like young Josephine were educated in the elementary grades, and increasingly in high schools, equally with boys. Iowa women were in some ways moving, even if glacially, toward equality with men. Witness *Fairfield Ledger* "Editorial Notes," April 1, 1903. According to a state law that a Jefferson County (male) legislator had written, in school elections concerning bonds or taxes, "The right of any citizen to vote shall not be denied or abridged, on account of sex." The paper noted later that a new schoolhouse proposal had failed, 321 men voting, sixty-three women. A much higher percentage of women supported the proposal than men, and, noted the reporter acidly, "Six men spoiled their ballots, simple as was the method of voting." Despite local and state gains, women in America and elsewhere would have to fight, wait, and fight, for years before winning full civil rights. In 1903 British "suffragette" Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst founded the militant Women's Social and Political Union.<sup>25</sup>

### **Fairfield is Up-and-Coming**

Despite some opposition to spending money on schools, Fairfield, where Josephine would graduate from high school, in fact had a good educational system—a well-established set of elementary schools, a growing high school, and Parsons College, a small Presbyterian academy. Early in 1903 Parsons was trying to recover from a fire that had destroyed Ankeny Hall, the school's central building. Mt. Pleasant to the east, Ottumwa to the west, and even Cedar Rapids many miles to the north, tried to entice Parsons. But townsfolk contributed \$30,000, and an ambitious building program followed, including a science building (Foster Hall), an "Academy building," (Fairfield Hall), and a heating and power plant. Thereafter the college grew sufficiently to serve the town and surrounding area for much of the twentieth century. Parsons helped make Fairfield unique, local residents boasted, because both college and city had a Carnegie Library.<sup>26</sup>

In 1903 people crossed Fairfield's Central Park when shopping on the Square, and where they congregated to sit and talk—and sometimes desire—under the elms, to hear Fourth of July speakers, to enjoy summer evening band concerts. In the early 1960s Dutch elm disease disposed of the trees, but not necessarily the desire. The Square had originally been illuminated by six 1800 candlepower arc lights atop a tower 175 feet high. It had replaced seventy or so gaslights when the Gas Company, seeking more money, tried to strong-arm the City Council by shutting off the gas. When the tower was first lighted, September 15, 1882, Fairfield reportedly was only the second town west of the Mississippi to be electrified. "The event



was made the occasion of great celebration; excursion trains were run on both railroads and from five to six thousand people” attended; “music was furnished by the Silver Cornet Band of Fairfield. An address on the history of electric invention was delivered by Professor Albert McCalla, Ph.D., of Parsons College.”<sup>27</sup>

The light was good for people all over town, but hell on birds, for they “have been picked up by the barrel about this tower”—doves, tanagers, indigo blue birds, orioles, wild canaries, and unknown birds. In 1885, during a violent storm, the tower did in more than 200 migrating ducks. Boys of all ages had always broken the law to climb it, as in 1898 when two descended sheepishly, were met by the town Marshall, and were fined \$7.50 each by the Mayor. By 1903 this siren beacon to birds and boys was “not presently in use,” and some wondered how safe that looming tall tower was.<sup>28</sup>

As the streets bounding it were being bricked in 1903, Central Park was also central to another issue, the perennial parking problem, but with a time-bound twist. Fairfield, on high prairie, not a miasmic lowland river town, had the reputation of being healthful, at least relatively. But it had a problem common to other contemporary American towns. For sanitary and aesthetic reasons, civic-minded citizens—no doubt swatting filthy flies while holding their noses—were attempting to remove hitching racks from



Dorothea Tomlinson,  
“Band Concert in Central Park,” Fairfield, Iowa.  
Courtesy of Fairfield Public Library



Fairfield Square with electric light tower,  
early-twentieth-century.  
Courtesy of Fairfield Public Library

the square. Their scheme was to banish horses and associated droppings to the nether courthouse regions a couple of blocks away. Perhaps reformers assumed the courthouse gang would not notice extra ordure—and with a healthier smell at that. Rural folks were adamantly opposed to lugging “boughten goods” all that way from the square to their banished buggies and wagons. For years, some—like Mrs. J. E. Prince in 1913—threatened in letters to the editor to shop Chicago mail order houses, or in more hospitable towns—Batavia, Libertyville, or Ottumwa. Ultimately, the fastidious and health-conscious townsfolk won. But the automobile soon came, bringing congestion around Central Park, parking meters, and businesses fleeing west along Highway 34. Early in the century, however, Fairfield was still very much a small town, with a “Good Barn, one block from the square” for rent, and a “flock of geese being driven to Zeigler’s slaughter pens [that] numbered several hundred.”<sup>29</sup>

The livestock problem was hardly new. As early as 1871 citizens had sought an ordinance requiring animals to be confined, to avoid befouled streets and sidewalks. Attempts failed then and in 1882. One versifier pleaded, “O Marshall, spare that hog, / Touch not his lengthy snout; / You say the walks are sights, / And many folks object; / But ain’t a hog got rights / That people should respect?” An ordinance passed in 1887, but barely, and was rarely enforced.<sup>30</sup>

In 1903, in addition to being the seat of county, state, and federal government, because two railroads intersected there, Fairfield had become a farm market, commercial, and light-manufacturing center with 5,000 inhabitants. The Loudon Machinery Company, one of the town’s oldest industries, began a plant expansion. The Malleable Iron Foundry located there in 1903. In 1905 the town’s manufactures ranged from bobsleds to bricks, brooms, brushes, and butter; to cider and cigars; to flour, feed, farm wagons, and a long list of agricultural products. The leading newspaper, the Republican *Fairfield Ledger*, supported commercial and industrial development; as did, no doubt, the town’s mostly Republican population.<sup>31</sup>

### **Crime, Violence, Prejudice, and Religion**

As in much of the country, Fairfielders who “counted” viewed labor organization as dangerously radical. In 1903 Big Bill Haywood led the Western Federation of Miners out of the conservative American Federation of Labor, led them into a disastrous strike at Cripple Creek, Colorado. There state troops and private Pinkerton agents broke the strike with deadly force, but received little attention, and often approbation, in the press. Reporting



in 1905 on a strike in seven Lowell, Massachusetts, textile mills, the *Ledger* noted with apparent approval that the owners, rather than submit to labor demands, had shut down the mills, idling 17,000 workers. Years later, in 1917, forty or fifty Loudon men walked out after management fired three men for trying to organize the shop.<sup>32</sup>

A few years after Josephine was born, a *Ledger* editorial was rigorously pro-management. "There is a shortage of labor in Iowa canneries because of a state law which forbids the employment of children. This law will probably make loafers of a lot of boys and girls, for whom work in the summer months is better than a period of idleness . . . Statutes of this kind are the work of the labor unions." Idleness and mischief making, idleness and vice—these were mated categories in the work ethic of Fairfield's better sort.<sup>33</sup>

As for the other sort, in 1903 America and Iowa, Budweiser was already, in its own estimation, the "King of Bottled Beers," although some might hunt the hard stuff, legal or illegal. In that year the drug store of A. B. Cleasby, Libertyville, newly opened in 1898, was raided of "a barrel of bottled whiskey, a small keg partly filled, and several gallons in large bottles." *Fairfield Ledger* editors asserted that only 10 percent of inmates in Mount Pleasant's insane asylum "ward for inebriates" were rural, most from towns, "where temptation and opportunity go hand in hand."<sup>34</sup>

To such observers, idleness and vice seemed primarily an urban phenomenon. In Wapello County, just west of Jefferson, the County Attorney asserted in 1903 that "fully one-third of the crimes committed in Ottumwa [notoriously wide open] are traceable . . . to the use of cocaine." This was already the era of the "soft" drink, Coca-Cola. The "Coca" was, of course, cocaine, a little of which the early drink contained, as well as extract of cola nuts, a caffeine source. Have a Coke! In that year big city Des Moines' Iowa State Fair was criticized for "an unparalleled reign of indecency permitted without restraint." That is, beer was sold, gambling was permitted, and "indecent and immoral shows of all kinds" were allowed. Almost necessarily, however, at least a majority of observing miscreants must have been rural folk.<sup>35</sup>

In some ways, baby Josephine Teeter's 1903 America seemed reckless, violent, and unjust, a view Jefferson County newspapers emphasized, especially by pointing fingers elsewhere. They noted the *Chicago Tribune's* annual report of twenty-eight killed and 1,485 injured by July Fourth fireworks. (Casualties had included, in 1902, a dog that, unfortunately, had attempted to fetch a large firecracker.) Newspapers featured "Dreaded Mafia" of eastern cities, mob lynching of a "Black

Woman” (Louisiana), an “Innocent Negro” (Georgia), and “One Negro” (Illinois). In that year, a Georgia planter was convicted of “holding colored people in involuntary servitude.” Other Georgians were similarly accused, as were Alabamans, eighteen by one grand jury alone. Between 1885 and 1907 more people were lynched in this country than were legally executed. Nevertheless, Henry Watterson, “the Kentucky editor,” declared in 1903 that the Negro question should “be solved by the process of evolution, not by political agitation.” About a century later, in June 2005, the United States Senate apologized to descendants for failing to protect some five thousand lynching victims.<sup>36</sup>

Early in the twentieth century, local crime, violence, and racial prejudice were in fact evident in Fairfield and the countryside around. There were occasional fights, occasional robberies, more than occasional break-ins (or, given a paucity of locked doors and windows, walk-ins and climb-ins), the extremely rare murder, the not uncommon con man or con woman. Less than a month after Josephine was born, a woman “accosted” a Fairfield brick mason “on Second Street north of the Broadway hotel. They went into an alley to continue their conversation, and when they separated” the brick mason “found that he had also been separated from \$75.” In 1906 an abandoned newborn was found. One week later a woman said to have three illegitimate children was arrested, and her infant taken to Chicago by a home finding agency. Occasional prostitution, petty thievery, and robbery occurred. A few years earlier Josephine’s future uncle, “Wilson Steel butchered a hog . . . and at night it was taken, leaving nothing for Mr. Steel.” A few years later, in 1907, Byron Lewis “was ‘held up’ on the Libertyville Road near the city Saturday evening and relieved of his purse, containing \$5.75.” A few Saturday nights later a horse and buggy belonging to John Adams was stolen from the hitchrack “west of the Rock Island station near the carnival grounds”; the culprit was soon jailed.<sup>37</sup>

Some area crimes were a mite beyond petty. When Josephine was less than a year old, “Rock Island Express No. 11 was held up” not so far from Fairfield. In a Wild West scenario, just between Whisky Hollow and Fruitland “five masked men” stopped the train by swinging a red lantern, then climbed into the engineer’s cab. They “covered him and the fireman with their guns,” and, “after dynamiting the express car and looting the contents, unhooked and rode the engine about ten miles further west . . . and abandoned it, making their getaway through the lowlands . . . through a deep ravine into a thickly wooded and thinly settled section. . . . The robbers worked”—the reporter scarcely concealed his admiration—“with the coolness of men experienced at the business.”<sup>38</sup>

Despite local crimes, local newspapers tended to blame outsiders, especially the lower sorts who drifted through town on the rails—the Rock Island, the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy (and who were in fact sometimes culpable). During January 1900, 153 “tramps” were housed and fed about 500 meals in the city jail. The *Fairfield Weekly Journal* asserted that “The Blame For The Extra Number Of Drunks Lies Not At Our Door. The Rough Characters Are Largely Those Who Have Recently Come To Work On The Railroad.” For example, “a hard looking . . . dark complected” man.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, crime and violence seemed to intrude from the outside, from cities, from lower classes, from foreign, undemocratic, uncivilized regions and peoples. Just as colored folk suffered at the hands of unreconstructed Rebels in the distant American South, so, in far distant Russia, Jews were being subjected in 1903 to pogroms, to loss of property and often their lives at the hands of savage rulers. In Russia that year as well a false Anti-Semitic document was published, the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” later used to rationalize Nazi genocide. Anti-Semitism was, however, not merely a foreign matter. The *Jefferson County Republican* had noted in 1898 that “The Jews were turned loose in Fairfield Saturday and we had two auction sales at Jew stores.” In the Balkans, where in little more than a decade World War I would ignite, 1903 headlines noted “Moslems Charged With Massacring Christians.” Meanwhile, in the Ottoman Empire, soon to be whittled down to “Turkey,” a movement of “Young Turks” was seeking to modernize and even secularize their predominantly Moslem country. Following the assassination of President McKinley in 1901, the immigration act of 1903 refused admittance to anarchists, in 1906 to Japanese. In 1919, as Josephine entered high school, Japan failed in its attempt to have a clause declaring racial equality included in the Covenant of the League of Nations, the United States voting in the negative. The Immigration Act of 1924 was yet another affront to many Japanese, who would remember. In these early years of the century, and for many years after, newspapers and their readers could refer casually to slingshots as “nigger shooters.” Late in the previous century, the *Jefferson County Republican* had noted that “A chinaman driving in a race is one of the freak attractions on an Ohio track.”<sup>40</sup>

Such provincial and exclusive attitudes, although certainly not universal in the county, were surely influenced by a historically homogeneous population, which had always been overwhelmingly European, Caucasian, and Protestant. According to the 1875 Iowa Census, in Jefferson County’s population of about 17,000, more than 11,000 were church members, all

Christian, and almost all Protestant. Catholics totaled two hundred, and were probably clustered in Fairfield's St. Mary's church. (In neighboring Van Buren County, the writer Phil Stong reported as late as 1940 that "Only one town . . . has a Catholic church; a very small one.")<sup>41</sup>

Des Moines Township, where Josephine would spend most of her early life until she married, paralleled the county generally, but with no Catholics. Its 1875 population of 1,202 tallied 1,202 whites, no "colored." Even this early, almost everyone was native born, considerably more than half in Iowa. Only fifteen reported foreign birth. Only eighteen reported both parents as foreign-born. Nineteen mentioned a father, ten a mother. Among voters, three had been born in "British America," that is, the colonies. In 1875, one resident only appeared in the category, "Foreigners Not Naturalized." By contrast, other Iowa areas and numerous nearby states had a high percentage of immigrants—the Dakotas, Minnesota, Wisconsin. Grover notes that "In 1900 immigrants made up 47.6 percent of the population of eleven western states."<sup>42</sup>

Like many Americans, but more intensely, residents of Jefferson County and Des Moines Township in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries seemed isolated from heterogeneous peoples and influences. Nevertheless, in the wider world of American growth and expansion, especially internationally, Josephine, her parents, and her community would be deeply, fundamentally, affected in the century to follow. No events would be more important than those surrounding the Spanish American War of 1898.

### **America Grows Up, into Expansionism and Splendid Little Wars**

Despite violence and injustice at home, Americans, insulated by great oceans and weak neighbors, might have felt relatively secure on their huge continent, but they were unwilling to stay there. In viewing the outside world, Jefferson County citizens, at least their newspapers, Republican and Democratic, seemed to accept the attitudes of the great empires, as when a headline read, "French Rule A Benefit To Land Of Algeria." Despite America's republican and democratic beliefs, this was not a complete and sudden shift in viewpoint or behavior. As Robert Kagan argues in *Dangerous Nation*, from their colonial origins, Americans had pursued "four hundred years of steady expansion and an ever-deepening involvement in world affairs." White European migrants to America, having swept across a great continent within seventy-five years of declaring independence, having swept away or corralled its native inhabitants, in the late-nineteenth-century

and early-twentieth were ready for even larger game.<sup>43</sup>

Expansionist America fell into empire because of its long-term policy toward the Western Hemisphere, and of the vacuum created by a crumbling empire. The early-nineteenth-century Monroe Doctrine had declared Latin America a virtual protectorate of the United States. Then late in the century, the Spanish Empire's long slide into decrepitude and tyranny resulted in the Cuban rebellion, with which many Americans, including high government officials, sympathized.

In January 1898 President McKinley ordered the battleship *Maine* to Havana harbor to protect "American citizens and American interests." Whereupon, having been placed in harm's way, it mysteriously blew up with great loss of life. Captain Sigsbee, having survived, quickly cautioned that "public opinion should be suspended," reported Spanish rescue boats were helping, and noted that "many Spanish officers . . . express sympathy." Sigsbee appealed in vain, for many citizens, including government officials, blamed Spain. Democrats and Republicans vied to prove patriotism. Republican Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, among the most vocal and influential of jingoistic Americans, wrote, "When the war comes, *it should come finally on our initiative*, and after we have had time to prepare." Although Cuba was supposedly the issue, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Roosevelt, with unofficial approval in the administration, provided coal for warships near the Philippines.<sup>44</sup>

Declaring war, the U.S. easily swept Spain away in Cuba, the Philippines (in less than a day), and elsewhere. Charles Wadsworth's poem, "In Manila Bay," hailed "Dewey! Hero strong and grand! / Shout his name throughout the land! / For he sunk the ships of Spain in Manila Bay!" But, as the satirist Finley Peter Dunne wrote, Americans generally didn't know whether the Philippines were islands or canned goods. Despite ignorance and denials, America became an Empire in fact. Republicans and Democrats vied to prove that America was not an Empire. America was not imperialistic, declared John H. Reagan, Texas Democrat, but was simply extending freedom and constitutional principles to "the native," who "is not capable of self-government as we understand the term." That is, Americans should take up, as the English poet Rudyard Kipling urged in 1899, "the White Man's burden." Furthermore, these protectorates "are a necessity in the future progress of the republic" and will prevent "encroachments of real imperialism—monarchical government." To the Democratic *Fairfield Tribune* "the United States has demonstrated to the world that either on the sea or the land she is a first-class power," giving "every American cause for renewed glorification in the greatness of his country." Given victories,

patriotic fervor, and President McKinley's "unqualified approval," Secretary of War Alger called for a permanently enlarged army to police possessions and protect the country. Early in 1898 a *Jefferson County Republican* article extolled the size of battleship *Iowa's* guns. Soon coastal guns were reportedly being placed from Maine to Florida. Teddy Roosevelt recommended that the military study whether aeroplanes like that of his friend S. P. Langley might "be of use in the event of war." "Twenty-five thousand dollars [were] placed by the war department at the disposal of Prof. S.P.



Langley for . . . experiments respecting flying machines for reconnoitering and for purposes of destruction incidental to military operations." The Wright brothers as well hoped to profit. By 1908 they had contracts with the U.S. Army and a French syndicate.<sup>45</sup>

In 1898 Fairfield little boys wore sailor suits, their hats with the slogan, "Remember the Maine." In secret bravado, they surely giggled the slogan entire: "Remember the Maine—to hell with Spain." Women's "sailor girl" costumes were all the rage in summer 1898. In small town Birmingham, south of Fairfield, 3,000 celebrated with prayers, speeches, patriotic music, and fireworks in "One Grand Jollification." At Fairfield's Grand Opera House, Edison's Projectoscope projected a "Wargraph": "The moving pictures were grand and repeatedly brought forth rounds of applause" for "the grand battleships and Old Glory flying grandly at the mastheads." In that era, E. L. Doctorow writes in *Ragtime*, "patriotism was a reliable sentiment." Patriotic fervor apparently made one Fairfield choirmaster less reliable. For the Splendid Little War that supposedly was finally reuniting South and North, a full choir sang "John Brown's Body" and "Marching through Georgia." The Opera House also hosted a farewell dinner for Company M, National Guard. And when the boys moved out, "The air was charged with excitement. Schools were dismissed and places of business closed." Civil War veterans "escorted them from the armory to the park," where, after speeches, and "amid well-wishes and cheers, they departed by train." After drilling and languishing in Florida swamps, where numbers sickened and one died of typhoid fever, Company M returned to heroes' welcome, to bunting, flags, music, speeches, and Columbia Hall dinner.<sup>46</sup>



In Libertyville, Decoration Day 1899, in addition to speakers, including Civil War “old soldiers,” “school girls sang a patriotic song and gave a flag drill that captured the audience,” and “Miss Grace Hague recited Rupert Hughes’ ‘The Martyrs of the Maine’”:

And they have thrust our shattered dead away in foreign graves,  
Exiled forever from the port the homesick sailor craves!

Shall we desert them, slain,  
And proffer them to Spain  
As alien mendicants,—these martyrs of our Maine?  
No, bring them home!

Miss Hague got good mileage out of that poem, for a year earlier it had won her a Parsons College recitation prize. The *Maine* martyrs were in fact disinterred from Cuban—once Spanish—soil and moved to Arlington National Cemetery.<sup>47</sup>

In that glorious year of 1899 was lauded at Charles City, Iowa, in popular florid rhetoric, a young man who “Married And Went To War.” “Leaving his vivacious and charming wife, the young husband answered the call to arms, feeling that love is best shown in valor for one’s country and that manhood is best exemplified in bravery that demands denial of bliss.” In brief, Make War, Not Love. Princeton University conferred the obviously honorary degree of Doctor of Laws upon Admiral Dewey. And General Otis declared somewhat prematurely in 1899—several years prematurely—that the Philippine mission had been accomplished, the “insurrectionists” defeated.<sup>48</sup>

In a related East Asian policy statement of that year, Secretary of State Hay, seeking America’s fair share with European powers of the spoils, and without consulting China, announced an “Open Door” for the China trade. One writer took a common view that “China needs protection and guidance even to the point of wise compulsion.”<sup>49</sup>

Waves of patriotism sometimes swept people from the rock of reason and the rule of law. Fairfield Baptist preacher W. C. Shepherd sermonized that, “This is God’s country and it will eventually rule all nations.” Not all Iowans agreed, not one farmer near Webster City, who flew a Spanish flag from his barn. Editorialized the *Jefferson County Republican*, “That might be OK in some countries but not in these United States. So he was ordered to take it down and when he reached the ground he was stripped and treated to a coat of tar. Traitors should not be allowed to remain on United States soil.” Nor, apparently, should the Constitution’s First Amendment. Nevertheless, the editors had an ally in General Fred Funston, who said

war critics should be tried as traitors, and hanged.<sup>50</sup>

Not everyone everywhere took war and patriotism so seriously, not a “Missouri girl,” who preferred a man who preferred to make love, not war.

My feller says he'll go to war  
And kill them Spanish creetures,  
And feed his rich Missouri gore  
To Cubanesque muskeeters,  
But one consoling, soothing thought  
My grief somewhatly smothers,  
If he should fatally be shot,  
Thank heaven there are others.

But poet Minna Irving seriously concluded in “The Fallen Hero,” “The soldier who falls in a battle / May feel but a moment of pain, / But the women who wait in the homesteads / Must dwell with the ghosts of the slain.” Mark Twain was scathing in opposing the Splendid Little War and America’s brutal methods against Filipino freedom fighters. In a letter, the philosopher William James wrote that America had “puked up its ancient principles.” The writer and editor, William Dean Howells, declared that “Our war for humanity has unmasked itself as a war for coaling stations” for steamships. Yale Professor William Graham Sumner asserted that “My patriotism is of the kind which is outraged by the notion that the United States never was a great nation until in a petty three months’ campaign it knocked to pieces a poor, decrepit, bankrupt old state like Spain.” Such opposition failed utterly against nationalistic and commercial pressures in the era of John Philip Souza’s “The Stars and Stripes Forever.” Or against the rhetoric of Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, who had asserted that “Commerce follows the flag, and we should build up a navy strong enough to give protection to Americans in every quarter of the globe.” Or against newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst’s warmongering “yellow journalism.”<sup>51</sup>

In 1903, as Hearst surfed to Congress on waves of patriotism, Josephine Teeter was born into an Empire in denial, but one that was building battleships. Ottumwa’s first “Chautauqua” program in 1905 included a lecture calling for a strong navy. On January 1, 1903, “The people of an American territory 2,000 miles west of Oregon wired the President . . . their greetings, promising to build up in the Hawaiian islands a patriotic and progressive American commonwealth.” These people were apparently happy to have become Americans in 1898, even if they were possessed Americans. In 1897 Teddy Roosevelt had asked Alfred Thayer Mahan, the leading theorist of naval power and expansionism, about Hawaii. His reply,



“Do nothing unrighteous, but take the islands first and solve afterward.” Hawaii was a relatively trouble-free and pacific possession.<sup>52</sup>

Not so the Philippines. By fall 1898 American officials were already whistling in the Orient: “There is no uneasiness in official circles over our relations with the insurgents.” “Insurgents” indeed—an enduring word in America’s foreign policy lexicon. Emilio Aguinaldo, veteran rebel against Spain, was asserting that the Philippines should be “for the Filipinos.”<sup>53</sup>

The *Fairfield Weekly Journal* also noted that Philippine “popular opinion favors autonomy,” that “the people rather distrust the Americans who . . . have sent the Cruiser Raleigh for the purpose of showing the American flag and making friends with the natives.” Soon they became “our” natives when the paper noted that “Spain yields the point, and Uncle Sam gets the whole of the Philippines, also Cuba, Porto Rico and Guam . . . These islands will now be open for occupation by American enterprise and it will not be slow to take advantage of the opportunity.” As William Dean Howells and others had predicted, America would now have strategically placed coaling stations for a two-ocean navy and commercial steamships. To that end, in 1903 the U.S. leased Guantanamo Bay from newly freed Cuba.<sup>54</sup>

At Princeton, Professor Woodrow Wilson, future Democratic President, asserted that expansion was “the natural and wholesome impulse which comes with a consciousness of matured strength.” Republican Senator Chauncey Depew was boastfully explicit. “There is not a man here who does not feel 400 percent bigger in 1900 than he did in 1896, bigger intellectually, bigger hopefully, bigger patriotically, bigger in the breast from the fact that he is a citizen of a country that has become a world power for peace, for civilization and for the expansion of its industries and the products of its labor.” Among invading Americans in the Spanish American War, 5,462 died, 379 in battle, the rest from disease and accident. One Iowan died in battle, 163 by disease.<sup>55</sup>

This was not the first time, nor the last, that America’s foreign policy makers attempted to make friends forcibly in the name of freedom, democracy,



GETTING READY FOR ANOTHER SHOT.

Uncle Sam has bagged Cuba, the Philippines, and other territories, and is preparing to take Puerto Rico. *Jefferson County Republican*, July 22, 1898

and (implicitly or explicitly) commerce. Filipino “insurgents” challenged American hegemony for years, while American soldiers and officials were increasingly frustrated. As one soldier, J. B. McMillen, wrote in “To Colonel Baldwin,” “We came with good intentions / Doing everything that’s right / But when they caught us unawares / It was a deadly fight.” The story seems familiar and inevitable, given American military experience against Indians, Vietnamese, Iraqis, and other peoples. The Republican *Fairfield Ledger* editors admitted in 1902 that “The water cure scandal is a bad thing for the credit of the American people and the American soldier, but the administration has taken hold of it in a manner that will leave it only a memory in ninety days . . . These things are mere incidents; they are not large enough to be issues.” Thus, torture as means was merely incidental to the end of extending American civilization. An accused officer’s counsel agreed, arguing that “its use had saved more American and Filipino lives than any other expedients of the campaign.” Historian Joseph L. Schott explains that American soldiers sometimes used “a method of duress called the ‘water cure’”. The uncooperative official was spread-eagled on his back and the end of a hose was run into his mouth. . . . Water was poured into the victim until he swelled up and thought his very guts would burst.” The method was eerily similar to American “waterboarding” of prisoners a century later in Iraq. In another instance, General Smith, reports historian Brian McAllister Linn, had “ordered one of his officers to turn Samar into a ‘howling wilderness’ and to shoot any males over age ten.” His words: “I want no prisoners. I wish you to kill and burn. The more you kill and burn, the better it will please me.” Smith was a veteran of the army’s massacre of American Indians in 1890. Eventually, the *Ledger* without comment noted that “General Jacob H. Smith, who issued the kill and burn order . . . has been reprimanded by President Roosevelt and retired from the army,” instead of being court-martialed<sup>56</sup>

Publicity forced civilian and military leadership to scapegoat General Smith, but the hierarchy was complicit from top to bottom. Private soldiers wrote home boasting of atrocities committed or witnessed, but their Commander-in-Chief—and General Smith’s—President Theodore Roosevelt had ordered “the most stern measures to pacify Samar.” He later said, “I did not intend to repeat the folly of which our people were sometimes guilty in those days when they petted the hostile Indians.” Secretary of War Elihu Root and the Philippines’ civil Governor, later American President William Howard Taft, were aware of atrocities and torture. Officers superior to Smith were implicated but not punished. Commander in the field, General Leonard Wood, had said, “Work of this kind has its disagreeable side, which

is the unavoidable killing of women and children; but it must be done.” A few minor officers suffered minor discipline or had sentences commuted by the President. In 1898, noting that his country would pay Spain twenty million dollars compensation for the Philippines, Congressman Thomas B. Reed said scornfully, “We have bought ten million Malays at \$2.00 a head unpicked, and nobody knows what it will cost to pick them.” By war’s end in 1902 Americans could only guess at the cost to democratic principles, but they could total the bloody cost: 20,000 Filipinos died fighting to be free, another 200,000 because of the war. Of 120,000 Americans, 4,200 died.<sup>57</sup>

Robert Bridges wrote in those days “A Toast to Our Native Land,” which expressed well the conflicting impulses and policies and loyalties of the new American Empire and its peoples, and perhaps of the poet himself:

Huge and alert, irascible yet strong,  
We make our fitful way ‘mid right and wrong.  
One time we pour out millions to be free,  
Then rashly sweep an empire from the sea!  
One time we strike the shackles from the slaves,  
And then, quiescent, we are ruled by knaves.

This is the Land we love, our heritage,  
Strange mixture of the gross and fine, yet sage  
And full of promise,—destined to be great.  
Drink to Our Native Land! God Bless the State!

For many years before and after Josephine Teeter’s birth in 1903, Americans were greatly interested in a Central American isthmian canal, which would have commercial, military, and imperial implications. It would accelerate trade expansion and guarantee a two-ocean navy, which would anchor America even more firmly as a world power. The Spanish American War was the pivot point for the dream, in that it buttressed the United States as the undisputed Caribbean power.

In 1903 the newly minted country of Panama—territory torn from Colombia under protection of Roosevelt’s navy and



Uncle Sam lectures little Central America

with American funding and connivance just a week after Josephine's birth—was within three days recognized by the United States; within twelve days a canal treaty had been signed. Somewhat later Colombia (whose leaders TR had privately referred to as “jack rabbits”) received twenty-five million dollars compensation. Canal construction, begun in 1904, was completed in 1914. American policy was to allow international use but to retain canal control, as James Jeffrey Roche's “Panama” clearly versified:

This, the portal of the sea,  
Opes for him who holds the key;  
Here the empire of the earth  
Waits in patience for its birth.

Yea, the gateway shall be free  
Unto all, from sea to sea;

But—the hand that ope'd the gate shall forever hold the key!

In 1903 President Roosevelt asserted that “America's geographical position on the Pacific is such as to insure our peaceful dominion of its waters.” In 1904 appeared his “corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine, which justified sending troops to the Dominican Republic, as well as future preemptive action against other debtor Latin American nations.<sup>58</sup>

By 1903 the United States had acquired—and boastfully—a small but strategically important Caribbean and Pacific empire. America had thereby given hostages to fortune, had set the pattern for its twentieth-century foreign relations and wars. For in 1903 as well, Czarist Russia and the Empire of Japan moved toward a climactic confrontation resulting the next year in Russia's decisive defeat, and Japan's emergence as *the* East Asian power. By 1905, under the headline, “Why The Japs Won,” the *Fairfield Ledger* could praise the “wonderful physical strength and ability to withstand privations” of Japanese soldiers. “The achievements of the little yellow men,” wrote the *Ledger* “surprised the world.” As they would continue to do throughout the century. The “little yellow men” reference simply highlights the racist tinge to American foreign policy concerning the Orient and Latin America in this era. Two final facts: In 1976 a Naval inquiry headed by Admiral Hyman Rickover concluded that the *Maine* explosion had been caused internally, not by Spain. In 1907 Teddy Roosevelt, a major force in causing the war and capturing the Philippines, decided America should dump those islands as a liability that would antagonize Japan.<sup>59</sup>

## A Crowded Year in a Crowded Century

Josephine Teeter's birth year, 1903, was a crowded year in a crowded century. Born during the reign of the first Roosevelt, who would have imagined that she would witness innumerable events of a century and the administration of sixteen more presidents? Surely, no one imagined that this child would live into the twenty-first century, a time that at the outset of the twentieth must have seemed almost inconceivably distant. In 1903 a baby, if it survived at all, could expect to live little more than forty-seven years. A century later, that figure had increased by thirty years, to seventy-seven, a profound biological and social change. A century and more earlier, although three older children of Ollie and George Teeter survived, two did not—a boy, Paul Leroy, lived five months and twenty-one days in 1897, dying suddenly December 26; a girl, unnamed, born on Christmas 1901, was a "blue baby" whose blood would not clot. She died December 30. For Ollie and George Teeter ever after, sadness tainted the Holiday season.

Given such tragedies, Ollie and George must have feared that their next infant would not survive. But of course little Josephine did survive, did thrive, did early on come to believe and to feel that life could be more than tragic, could also be joyful, could, for children at least, be fun at least part of the time.



Josephine May Teeter, 1905.  
Photograph by Aunt Evangeline Teeter

## Baseball, Blue Laws, and Blackman

In rural Iowa a century and more ago, life's ultimate events—births, deaths, epidemic illnesses, weddings, funerals, doctor and undertaker visits—all happened at home much more than later in the century. As did neighborhood parties, family reunions, and children's play. Parents were generally busy in the kitchen, garden and orchard, barns and fields—or plumb tuckered out after being there. They had little time or energy for play. Thus, having no Little League Dads, no Soccer Moms, no Videositters, no Munici-Fed programs to Keep-um-outa-trouble, the three younger Teeters (Rebecca, Josephine, and Bernard) with neighborhood children, made most of their own fun and games. This they did at home and at a rural one-room school with ten or fifteen other students.

Although bikes and kids might later seem inseparable, bicycles were rare in Josephine's rural area and nonexistent in her family because they were expensive and often impractical on muddy or snowy roads. Even in Fairfield, still with mostly dirt streets, came the announcement on May Day 1903, "The bicycle has made its appearance on the streets again." Josephine never did learn to balance a bike. She remembered playing croquet (which some wags called "Presbyterian billiards") with Rebecca as a young adult, but not as a child. Sledding was possible when Dad George built a sled and repaired the boughten one big brother Earnest had broken while, no doubt, attempting heroic maneuvers. Everyone young in the neighborhood, and some oldsters, went sledding. In 1907 a Libertyville columnist reported "Good sledding this week and the people are making good use of it."<sup>60</sup>

Most play in those early-twentieth-century years required no expensive equipment. Marbles, which Josephine played at school, required only a patch of bare earth. A swing called for only a looped hemp hay rope, a tree limb, and a short board seat notched at each end to hold the rope in place. Jumping rope took even simpler equipment.

Baseball had become all the rage in Iowa soon after the Civil War. In two newly organized Fairfield teams' first game, hitting prevailed laughably over pitching or fielding, the score 50-23. Thereafter, the game's popularity exploded even as scores shrank. Since the first World Series was played in 1903, baseball was perhaps inevitably Josephine's favorite sport. The game was not at all as complex, expensive, or adult dominated as later. More than once she made a ball by using a hickory nut or black walnut as a core around which she wound yarn from an unraveled sock or two. Then she sewed the yarn securely in place and played with a coverless ball. A



stick served as a bat. Josephine never had a store-bought ball or bat, certainly not a glove. "Work up" was the rule since usually only a few kids were available. In work up, by choice, chance, or brute force, players took positions with a couple at bat, the rest consigned to infield and outfield. When and if she or he was put out, a batter was relegated to right field and catcher became batter, *ad infinitum* (at least 'til darkness or the end of recess intervened).<sup>61</sup>

One of Josephine's cousins, Elmer James Teeter, remembered that family gatherings always included a ball game, and that some girls always played. "Girls were expected to play just the same as boys. They had to fill in, you know. They didn't come out just to stand and watch." On the other hand, "Shinny," a circle game played with sticks and a tin can, with a goal-hole in the middle of the circle, was a rough game Josephine left to boys. Sometimes it was too rough for them. In 1909 at Libertyville, "Paul Ferrell got his eye badly hurt while playing shinny Tuesday."<sup>62</sup>

On Sundays she may have been permitted to read the popular poem, "Casey at the Bat," but Josephine did not play ball. Although her parents were not formally religious, they nevertheless observed religious customs that were often sanctioned by so-called "blue laws," which prohibited certain activities on the Lord's Day. On June 28, 1889, the *Fairfield Ledger* had editorialized that "Ball playing is harmless in itself, but when indulged in on Sundays, it is inconsistent with every moral law and the Iowa statutes." In 1904, twenty-two boys, denied Sunday use of Fairfield's ballpark, were arrested while playing in a pasture outside city limits, where they evidently had broken every moral law and one of Iowa's. In 1907 adult Iowa Malleable Iron Factory team members were fined a dollar each, not for ball playing, which the law apparently did not specify, but for disturbing the peace and charging admission for a Sunday game. This all-purpose decades-old blue law prohibited "carrying firearms, dancing, hunting, shooting, horse racing, or in any manner disturbing a worshipping assembly or private family, or in buying or selling property of any kind, or in any labor except that of necessity or charity." The team appealed the case and announced it was playing for charity the following Sunday.<sup>63</sup>

In that same year, an Iowa Catholic priest berated a female team, charging that "when women donned a ball players uniform and entered the diamond they dragged womanhood down to the lowest depths." Undeterred by being likened to prostitutes, in 1908 the Chicago White Socks American Bloomer Girls played Fairfield's Iowa Malleable team, admission twenty-five cents. Josephine might have disagreed with the priest, but custom sanctioned by law and religion limited her and her playmates to six secular

weekdays even as Sunday baseball gradually prevailed. Nevertheless, as late as 1923, as she graduated from high school, a Columbus Junction team suspended Sunday play in the face of persistent local opposition.<sup>64</sup>

Iowa blue laws extended beyond ballparks, of course, in Josephine's early years. Although sometimes ignored, Sunday religious observers often revived them. In 1909 merchants in numerous Jefferson County towns had been opening regularly on Sundays. Despite customary laxness, however, "The Code of Iowa provides for the arrest and punishment of those violating the Sabbath." Once a town was closed down, others came under similar pressure, leaving only restaurants and "eating houses" legally free to open Sundays "at meal times." In northwestern Fairfield's small commercial area of "New Chicago," a restaurateur created a test case by selling a cigar to a dinner customer, was arrested, was prepared to argue that a good smoke was essential to enjoy a legal meal. In 1918, local ministers sued a cinema proprietor for Sunday opening. Although a judge declared him not guilty, he compromised by opening only for Sunday matinees. Nevertheless, another judge fined him a maximum of \$100, which he appealed.<sup>65</sup>

Another ball game Josephine played, but less controversial, was "Ante Over," or "Ante-High Over," or "Anthony Over," or "Anti-I-Over," which was worn smooth in practice to "Andy Over," or "Handy Handy Over," or "Annie Annie Over," or even, in little Isobel Manning's experience, "Annie Over the Schoolhouse." The game involved one side throwing a ball over a farm building or schoolhouse (and yelling "pigtail" if thrown short), and the receivers chasing the throwers to tag them with the ball. The game required of course much screaming and shouting, much forbearance by parents at home or by a teacher trapped inside a schoolhouse with a ball banging and bouncing on the roof.<sup>66</sup>

Screaming and shouting were of course prescribed in all chase-and-capture games. The most popular were London Bridge (is falling down); Run, Sheep, Run; Drop the Handkerchief (in which "It" drops the cloth behind one of a circle of children and is chased back to the empty spot); Last Couple Out (a variant of the preceding, but with boy-girl, boy-girl racing in opposite directions); and Hide and Seek (where "All outs in free" became "Holly hollyhocks in free," or even "Ollie oxen free"). Blackman was a casually racist title for a chasing game (Blackman starts as "It" and tries to catch others, who are then also "It"), as players run between two bases in the yard/schoolyard. And, of course, there was always Tag.

In winter, the same principles of chase-and-capture applied to Fox and Geese, as a fox chased the geese around a spoked wheel tramped in the snow while a pursued goose could find safety only in the wheel's hub.



But in winter, snow forts and snow fights might take precedence, as might the gentler girlish creation of snow angels. Blind Man's Buff (or Bluff) might be played indoors at school (in which blindfolded "It" attempts to touch evasive others). In any season, "Whip Cracker" or "Crack the Whip" was the scariest game. As a popular Winslow Homer



Winslow Homer, "Snap the Whip," *Harper's Weekly*, September 20, 1873

engraving illustrates, the last kid on the running and twisting "whip" might well lose his (or her) grip on the human chain and careen into a tree, fence, or school outhouse. The game on ice was awesome. In 1922 Jefferson County an end skater disengaged and crashed into Lyle Anderson, causing a dislocated kneecap and assorted bruises. As slang of the time would have it, Crack the Whip was not all it was cracked up to be.<sup>67</sup>

Summer games were supplemented by wading in richly sedimented creeks, which many parents and even some children thought too muddy for swimming. Ninety years later Jo was still unable to understand why Mother Ollie, phobic about water, had allowed even wading in Lick Creek (say "Lick Crick"). Father George, inveterate angler for catfish and sunfish, took Jo along one time, when she was "quite thrilled" to land a six incher. George, inveterate hunter also, practiced alone. Jo never hunted, although Chet tried to teach his bride rifle technique on the back porch. Whereupon she promptly shot a hole in the floor and even more promptly declared, "That's it. No more of that."

## Horses and Horseplay

To young Josephine home was where the horses were, as many as eighteen or twenty horses. In those early-twentieth-century, pre-tractor days, like everyone else the Teeters depended on literal horsepower in fields and on roads. "Some people would drive six horses in the field on plows, discs, and the like," and four was common.

Josephine never had her own horse, but beginning with old clodhoppers she grew up loving to ride, and was in her modest estimation of many decades later a "fair" rider. She continued to ride as a young

woman, remembering that in the mid-1920s she and other young folks rode out one muddy night to a party, a charivari or “shivaree,” designed to honor and, more importantly, harass newlyweds, in this event, Carl and Larue Frieburg. To get to her rural schoolteaching job in those days she sometimes rode a lively mare that big brother Earnest had trained to take off the moment a rider had a foot in the stirrup and was swinging up, just like Tom Mix in early silent western movies.

As for her riding habit, many years later Jo “presumed” she wore a dress, but she rode astride. She would have agreed with young pioneer Mary Alice Shutes, who wrote in 1862 while headed toward Iowa, “I am to ride straddle like Cow Girls are supposed to out west in the Indian Country. Besides it is the only safe way as no one wants to fall off[f] their horse and be hurt.”<sup>68</sup>

Sometimes the very young shared a horse. “Coalie,” so called because entirely black from mane to tail to fetlock, was a gentle old thing that didn’t mind a crowd of lightweights aboard. Once when company came, four kids (including Josephine) managed to scramble up a board gate and onto Coalie’s back. The four then declared applications closed; but there were five kids, and Kid Five was mad. (Jo spoke Kid Five’s name ninety years later, but this writer, to protect the eternally guilty, will not reveal it.) Well, Kid Five, poor loser, picked up and threw a clod. Hit on the rump, startled Coalie lurched, unhorsing the four, making all five equal groundlings again, and, as it happened, all essentially unhurt.



Rebecca Teeter on Coalie, c. 1910

When Josephine was eight or nine, “I thought then I could draw. My favorite was”—can you guess the subject? —“drawing horses.” About that age she also learned in school Cecil Frances Alexander’s poem that begins,

All things bright and beautiful,  
All creatures great and small,  
All things wise and wonderful,  
The Lord God made them all.

Especially, it must be supposed, horses.

In my judgment, my mother had hardly a vindictive bone in her body. And yet, at times her sense of having suffered injustice endured

for decades. Once she and Bernard and Kid Five, whose name I still do not reveal but whom I will say was a girl, were walking home from school. And Kid Five had a secret to tell, but not to Jo. So, KF took Bernard aside, sat with him on a comfy little roadside mound, and whispered the secret Josephine was not to know. But those two got their comeuppance. For that mound turned out to be an immensely active anthill, which “sure stopped the secret and they ran like mad to the house to have someone older help them” remove the ants from their pants. Josephine no doubt trailed vindictively behind, vindicated by Anthill Justice.

Young readers may note that, after they finished chores, Josephine and other children played mostly outdoors, and that they played actively. Not incidentally, in those days, in all of Des Moines Township, could hardly be found—an obese child.

Sometimes, of course, fun and games occurred inside. Seldom did they begin inside and end outside, but one instance involved older sister Rebecca. Remember the jingle about monkeys bouncing on the bed? Again, as in the Coalie case, company came for a picnic. The kids were all in an upstairs bedroom. Older sister Rebecca was showing off, bouncing and turning somersaults on the bed, and the window next to the bed was open. After one especially spectacular lopsided bounce older sister Rebecca somersaulted right out through the upstairs bedroom window and ended that somersault, according to one version, by landing on her feet outside the house. Later, after climbing the stairs again, according to another version, Rebecca said her head hurt. Many years later, when older sister Rebecca was celebrating a birthday that approached one hundred, her little sister, also approaching one hundred, sent a message: “To live a long life be sure to always land on your feet.”

### **Indoor Life**

Usually indoor fun and games were more sedate and remained indoors. On winter evenings, the family, especially George, read farm magazines; Ollie, the *Ladies Home Journal*, newspapers, an occasional book; Jo, newspapers, the funnies, and Horatio Alger tales of hard working, honest, modest boys and young men—exclusively males—making good when a boss noticed them. Josephine did not remember nursery rhymes or fairy tales at home, although she thought she had learned some at school.

A less sedate indoor activity was “carom” or “caroms,” which Dad George was easily persuaded to play. This was a board game somewhat

like pool, in which players used a bent middle finger to flick a wooden “doughnut” shooter at other doughnuts. The aim was to knock them into corner pockets of a board almost three feet square. George apparently was a champion, and sometimes neighbors joined in around the dining table under kerosene or “white gasoline” mantle lamplight.

For reasons she undoubtedly considered sufficient, Mother Ollie did not play games. Everyone’s memories of Ollie Steele Teeter include images of her sitting in a rocking chair, feet on a little stool, sewing or crocheting, being busy and useful even when not on her feet in the kitchen, garden, or barn. Ollie had developed an aversion to games and gaming when she was young and literally at her father’s knee, for Joseph Elliott Steele regularly invited friends in on Sunday mornings for a friendly euchre game while Mother Sarah Elizabeth was off alone, or with her other children, driving a horse and buggy to the Baptist church. And when a friend was missing Joe regularly drafted—or dragooned—Ollie to sit in with the men, some of whom cheated, in a gambling game.

Stakes would have been penny-ante, but consider the picture—three bluff, hearty men in clean bib overalls and stocking feet sitting at the kitchen table on a Sabbath morning, smoking or chewing tobacco (Joe chewed), lard can spittoons handy. They are talking farming or politics or joking more or less discreetly about who knows what between hands—betting and bluffing and cheating and spitting—and there sits cute and slightly chubby and usually good-humored little Ollie, glaring at her cards.

Mother Ollie was not opposed to all games, but she was understandably opposed absolutely (well, almost) to card games in her house. When Jo had grown to adulthood, she and her future husband Chet and brother Bernard and Dad George did play rook at home. And when George was old Ollie did “let” him play solitaire, but the Teeter children’s winter evenings were utterly cardless.

To complete the playing card picture, for several years as young marrieds, and later, Jo and Chet belonged to a pitch card club. As a widow Jo took up bridge and played twice a week or more for many years (even sometimes on Sunday afternoons). She regularly reported with evident relish that she had been high scorer and had won twenty-five cents. In 2003, approaching 100, she was still playing, reporting in April that “we” had won at bridge. In later years she also took up her father’s game, solitaire. Here is rare evidence of Grandpa Joe and Father George prevailing over otherwise formidable Mother Ollie.

Like most little girls, Josephine had a special doll, one of two bought by their parents, then dressed and given to her and Rebecca by George’s

spinster sisters, Aunts Evangeline and Elizabeth Teeter. Excellent dressmakers, one a professional seamstress, their dolls were stylishly dressed, with “lots of tucks and lace,” and were appropriately named “Evie” and “Lizzie.” As Jo revealed in 2002, both dolls had china legs and feet, and both suffered a broken lower limb. Whereupon elder sister prevailed upon younger sister to sacrifice her doll’s unblemished lower limb in the interest of symmetry all around. Josephine learned to sew for her soft-legged doll, and then to be a gracious hostess when big brother Earnest gave her a real China doll’s tea set for Christmas when she was about four. Once, becoming absorbed in fantasy while playing dolls outside, Miss Josephine missed an entire meal.

Like other girls in training to become mothers and housewives, Josephine learned needlework and crocheting at her mother’s knee. When



Josephine’s China doll with original clothing

a schoolteacher began giving her girls crocheting lessons, she found eleven-year-old Josephine an apt pupil, for she already knew all the moves. Knew them backward and forward, so to speak, for she had watched right-handed Ollie, and then had of necessity translated for her left-handed self.

In later married years Jo would sew dresses and blouses for herself, and sometimes for others. She would piece and sew quilts; would crochet as well, including many afghans and slippers, for daughter-in-law Joy a snow-white tablecloth, and for herself a very large cream-colored one;



would embroider, including a blue tablecloth for Joy. As a widow, Jo took up painting on tablecloths, pillowcases, and the like, as well as ceramic painting for a time.

Josephine first learned to appreciate music by listening to her father, who played banjo, organ, and piano by ear and “by the hour,” played such popular songs as “Redwing.” She learned on the family pump organ, graduating in high school to a new family upright piano. A striking young neighbor, Grace Cutchall, with braided red hair that almost brushed the floor when she sat on a piano stool, taught fifteen year old Josephine for fifty cents a lesson, as she had earlier Irene and Rebecca. During those years, in the *Batavia News* ran the ad, “Miss Grace Cutchall, Instructor in Music, Pupils Solicited for Violin and Piano, or will teach ensemble.” Never marrying, Miss Cutchall, member of numerous ladies organizations, died in 1973 at age ninety-one. As for Jo, in later years she played only occasionally.



Grace Cutchall,  
Josephine's piano teacher

### **A Girl's Complete Education**

In 1906, under the heading, “A Complete Education,” the *Philadelphia Inquirer* held that “A girl's education is most incomplete unless she has learned: To sew, to cook, to mend, to be gentle, to value time, to dress neatly, to keep a secret, to avoid idleness, to be self-reliant, to darn stockings, to respect old age, to make good bread, to keep a house tidy, to make home happy, to be above gossiping, to control her temper, to take care of the sick, to sweep down cobwebs, to take care of the baby, to marry a man for his worth, to read the very best of books, to be a helpmeet to her husband, to take plenty of active exercise, to keep clear of trashy literature, to be light-hearted and fleet-footed, to be a womanly woman under all circumstances.”<sup>69</sup>

As a girl and young woman Josephine knew a poem by Elizabeth Lincoln Otis that was modeled on Rudyard Kipling's “If,”—This “An ‘If’ for Girls” that ended:

If sometime you should meet and love another  
And make a home with faith and peace enshrined,  
And you its soul—a loyal wife and mother—  
You'll work out pretty nearly to my mind  
The plan that's been developed through the ages,  
And win the best that life can have in store,  
You'll be, my girl, the model for the sages—  
A woman whom the world will bow before.

Young Josephine May Teeter, outdoorsy lover of baseball and horses, also learned traditional feminine skills, arts, and desires. “Sleepy Time Gal,” the song, summarized enduring expectations for girls and women: “You’ll learn to cook and to sew. / What’s more you’ll love it I know . . .”

Mother Ollie had had a sister named Lillian Maude Steele who had died when not quite six, many years before she could become Josephine’s aunt. As Josephine could see, Lillie “was such a pretty child, and I—you know there used to be a picture on the [parlor] wall of her [on a stool with one leg under her], and I used to sit and look at that and hope that I would be as pretty as she was.”



Josephine May Teeter,  
about eight years old

Josephine surely read the clipping of Lillie’s obituary in the *Fairfield Tribune* of July 29, 1882, which, in attempting to arouse the pathetic emotions following a child’s death, was typical of the era:

Lillie M. Steele . . . was born July 20th, 1876, and died July 12th, 1882 . . . Deceased died with croup-diphtheria, after an illness of six days of untold suffering . . . She was conscious of her death some time before she died, and told her parents she would leave them. She called them all to her and asked to kiss the baby, something unusually strange in one so young. The little darling suffered but little for some time previous to her death, and was conscious to the last. . . . The remains were interred . . . by the side of her little brother and sister. Sleep on sweet Lillie, and take your rest, / God called you home, He thought it best.

With such a beautiful and pathetic model, Josephine naturally liked to dress up for special occasions. Early twentieth-century holidays were somewhat like those later, involving family gatherings and food, but they also reflected time and place. On most Thanksgivings and Christmases Josephine's family visited the farm home of George's parents, Abraham Burger Teeter and Rebecca Ann Alford Teeter. Grandma Rebecca Ann was widowed in 1905, but holidays continued there.

### Family Holidays

Most of her seven living children and her grandchildren usually gathered—Uncle Wils and Aunt Etta Teeter's family from Eldon, and often Uncle Ad and Aunt Sadie Teeter's family from Martinsburg. In her inimitable prose, Ollie Steele Teeter reported of Sadie Rooker that Uncle Adam had "got her up around Hedrick." Probably also attending were unmarried John, Gus, Evie, and Lizzie, all of whom often lived with their mother. This was quite a crowd in those days when families were still almost always large. (Wilson and Mary Etta Teeter had twelve children, most of whom lived; George and Ollie had five; Adam and Sadie five.)

Getting to Grandma's, even though only a few miles away, was often difficult before automobiles and good rural roads were common, particularly in winter. First, everyone bundled up in heavy coats, hats, scarves, and mittens. Then they hustled out and got under blankets in a surrey (no fringe on top), or farm wagon if the snow wasn't too deep, or in a bobsled if it was (its four runners fitted under a wagon box), and the horses trotted off. In a scene reminiscent of a Currier and Ives print (but colder), once arrived at Grandma's, the womenfolk, little children, and girls piled out and rushed inside to thaw while the menfolk and older boys saw to unhitching, stabling, and feeding horses before joining their families.

As a schoolgirl, Josephine learned to recite Lydia Maria Child's "Thanksgiving Day," now quaint, then descriptive and entirely appropriate:

Over the river and through the wood,  
To Grandfather's house we go;  
The horse knows the way  
To carry the sleigh  
Through the white and drifted snow.

Over the river and through the wood;  
Now Grandmother's cap I spy!  
Hurrah for the fun!  
Is the pudding done?  
Hurrah for the pumpkin pie!



Eating a huge dinner was the central midday holiday task, with turkey the Thanksgiving centerpiece, goose at Christmas, complemented by all the “fixins,” an array of dishes and desserts that only summertime threshing dinners could challenge. Loafing in the living room before and after dinner, the men talked harvest yields, grain and livestock prices, and sometimes politics; the women, working in kitchen and dining room, traded family and neighborhood gossip. Meanwhile cousins got reacquainted with cousins, played, and waited. For, since the crowd was too large to fit even Grandma’s long dining room table, there was never any question about who would eat first and who would wait.

After the old folks had eaten, after the older girls had “redd up” (straightened up) and helped wash the dishes, after they had helped set the table again, only then was the young crowd of fifteen or twenty cousins invited to eat at second table. As Jo wrote with wry humor in a 1981 memoir, “I don’t remember when the time was changed where the children ate first but anyway I am still last.”

Not long after second table finished, and the women and older girls had redd the table again, and washed dishes again, it was time to head for home. For there were miles to go and livestock to feed and cows to milk before chill winter dark set in and the holiday ended.

Christmas dinners at Grandma Teeter’s lacked gift exchanges, presumably because the process would have been too complex and certainly too expensive. Even at home, Christmas largesse was limited, as was celebration. Exotic oranges, bananas, and nuts always filled Ollie’s tall clear glass compote dish on the dining table. But the Teeters had neither tree nor decorations until Josephine’s grade school classmate and neighbor, Edith Gurwell, prevailed upon her mother to invite Josephine, Rebecca, and Bernard to attend their family tree lighting just a half mile down the road. It was a lovely tree decorated with very real (and very dangerous) open burning candles.

The next year, Jo recalled eighty-five years later, “I had a tree, but without candles.” Instead, Josephine cut strips of colored paper and with flour-and-water paste glued them into loops to make long paper chains. With needle and thread, she made long popcorn strings. Then she wound both in spirals around the little cedar tree that big brother Earnest had cut at her behest. Having created her own tradition, she decorated a tree annually, sometimes with help from others. Once she began teaching, that is, had an income, she was even able to buy some decorations, such as tinfoil icicles and various dangles.

On Christmas Eve the children hung stockings over a chair back, there being no fireplace and no mantel, and found next morning gifts from Santa Claus. Santa's toys tended to be gendered, with doll things for girls—including the Evie and Lizzie dolls one Christmas—iron horses for boys, sturdy toys almost certainly, practical gifts inevitably, especially clothing. But there was that sled George made for all the children about 1911, and always the nuts and the lovely fruit. "This was the time," Josephine's sister Rebecca remembered many years later, when "you had fruit," those fresh store-bought bananas and oranges.

Other family and holiday events were perhaps less memorable, but not because food was less plentiful. Family reunions were sometimes at George and Ollie's. On Sunday, July 29, 1923, soon after Jo graduated from high school, thirty enjoyed a "sumptuous picnic" and "a good social time." Later, Teeters gathered annually at the Eldon fair ground, and then at Fairfield's Chautauqua Park (even into the twenty-first century). From girlhood days, Josephine remembered particularly a surprise birthday party for Grandma Teeter, one bitterly cold Fourth of November, to which Ollie and other mothers brought, of course, abundant food. At such events, cousin Elmer remembered nostalgically, "We were kind of like one family."<sup>70</sup>

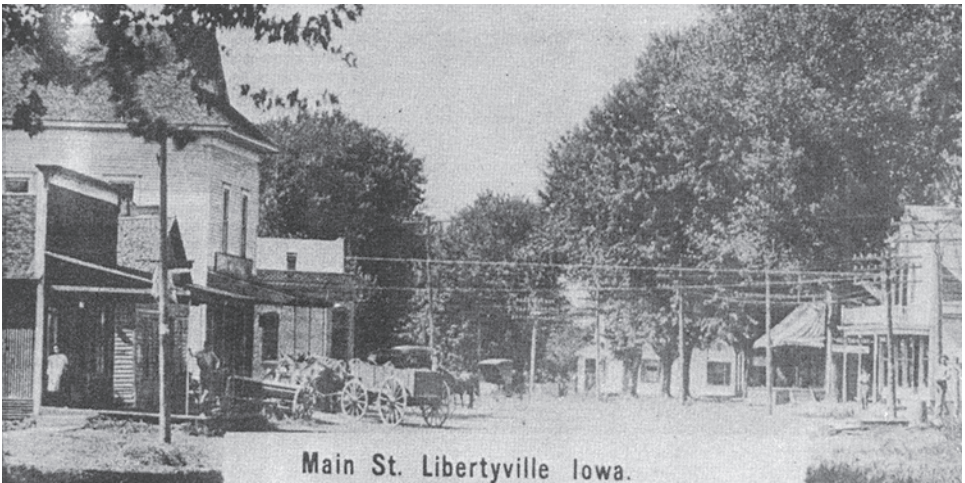


Teeter Reunion, 1998, with several grandchildren of Ollie and George Teeter, from left: Elmer Teeter, Bruce Curtis, Bernard Albert Teeter, Mary Ruth Wheeldon Hanna (kneeling), Joan Teeter Tedrow, Shirley Teeter Stanley, Louise Wheeldon Bishop, Wayne Curtis, George Wheeldon, Ferne Gorman Smothers, True Wheeldon, Bernice Gorman Cronk

## Libertyville

Every summer's high point was, of course, another Fourth. Jo's first remembered July Fourth was memorable because of personal tragedy (even if minor in entirely irrelevant later perspective). This was in 1909 or 1910 when she was five or six and Uncle Ad and Aunt Sadie with cousins Harry, Winnie, and Alta were visiting all the way from Martinsburg. On that day everyone piled into buggies for a few dusty miles to celebrate in Libertyville, an exciting little town on both the Rock Island and the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad spur running from Batavia to Ft. Madison, known locally as the "Peavine" because of its curling route. Originally called "The Colony," Libertyville had been a crossroads where the old Dragoon Trail that ran from the Mississippi to the Indian Agency twelve miles to the west, and then on to Fort Des Moines, had crossed the old Black Hawk Trail, later known as First Territorial Road.

In the early-twentieth-century, along streets lined with telegraph



Libertyville, 1910. Courtesy of *Fairfield Ledger*

and telephone lines (but no electrical wires 'til 1921), Libertyville had a hotel; Barney Gifford's saloon (later closed during Prohibition); and Barney Gifford's meat market, which included the United States Post Office operated by Barney Gifford's daughter. The town had several general stores, including Slimmer's grocery and dry goods; Cleasby's drugs; a hardware store and tin shop; two barbershops; two livestock buyers; a grain elevator; and a feed store. The town had a sound financial institution, the Libertyville Savings Bank (which notably would survive the farming depression of the 1920s and 1930s). It had a blacksmith shop operated by a Wagner cousin-

in-law of the Teeters; a harness and shoe shop; a couple of farm implement businesses; and a furniture and furniture repair shop. There were an undertaker with “a beautiful hearse”; two physicians, including Josephine’s deliverer, Dr. Stephenson; a two-story elementary and high school; and about four churches, Presbyterian, Methodist, Adventist, and one or two smaller congregations. A local news columnist claimed in 1911 that the Methodist and Presbyterian ministers “put in almost all their time pitching horse shoes, playing croquet and going to ball games,” but surely that is not to be believed?<sup>71</sup>

The Libertyville columnist to the *Fairfield Weekly Journal* had complained in 1898 that “Cows running loose in our village are a great annoyance to farmers driving to church. They disturb the wraps and eat the hay thrown into the conveyance for the comfort of the persons riding to church,” that is, to keep their feet from freezing. The columnist continued the theme in 1899: “Query—Why this rank growth of weeds in the streets of our beautiful village? Is it for ornamental purposes? . . . Possibly the design is to afford a luxuriant pasture for the cows and other stock enjoying the freedom of our streets.” A decade later livestock were under better control. And at least once in that year, “There were several automobiles in Libertyville Sunday.”<sup>72</sup>

On young Josephine’s particular Fourth of July, after the men and boys tied the horses to hitching posts, after parading along new concrete sidewalks that had replaced decrepit boardwalks dating from 1892, and after crossing the town’s still dusty, unpaved streets, everyone was ready for the festivities. For this occasion, “I was all dressed up in white. It was my first time to ever have an ice cream cone [a St. Louis World’s Fair innovation of 1904], which was pink. We were walking along eating and I stubbed my toe and lost most of the pretty pink ice cream.” There was no chance, as Josephine knew already, for a second cone after the first bit the dust, because “People then didn’t dish out money.” Thus memory culminates, not with fireworks on the Fourth, not with a bang, but a barely suppressed whimper.<sup>73</sup>

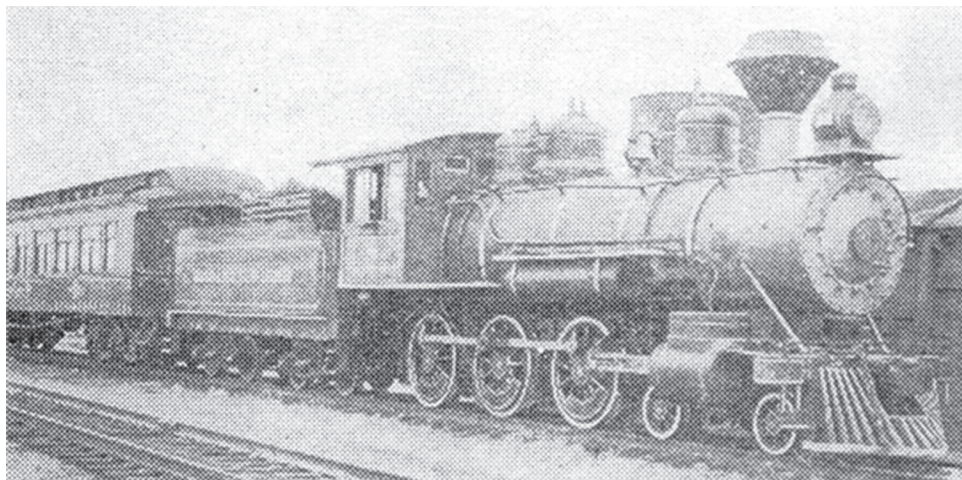
### **Memories of Rails Leading on and Places Left Behind**

Another holiday was memorable for Josephine precisely because it was not a perennial, but was unique, was literally once in a lifetime. It happened just because her name was Josephine, and was for that reason, if no other, the favorite of her Grandfather Joseph Elliott Steele. On one unforgettable morning even before she had started to school, in 1909 or



1910, Grandpa Joe, with Josephine sitting beside him in twin braids, a party dress, and no hat, trotted his horse and buggy the three miles or so from his farm to Libertyville. There they boarded a stubby little steam passenger train that puffed its way southwesterly down the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad through tiny County Line, a “flag station” after full service had been terminated in 1894. How powerful people must have felt, including later an older Josephine returning to high school, flagging that great steam engine to a stop!

Joe and Josephine’s journey was not many miles, but there they sat



Rock Island engine No.9 at Eldon. *Batavia Beacon*, July 7, 1960

on those plush green upholstered passenger seats, in the warm breeze, looking out the open windows, soaking up the sights, as they ran through level and then rolling farmland. In not many minutes, they arrived at the station (with a hissing and clanging stop) in the rail-and-river town of Eldon with its Rock Island roundhouse and repair shops where Uncle Wilson Teeter worked. Then it was on across the big Des Moines River Bridge, and up about three miles to the Davis-Wapello County line and the coal mining company town of Laddsdale, which since 1872 had supplied fuel for the Rock Island. There Grandpa Joe’s friends, the Copelands, met them.<sup>74</sup>

In late afternoon, after Joe had visited with the Copelands, who had fed them noontime dinner, they flagged the evening train for the reprise ride to Libertyville, seeing everything backward this time as daylight receded. Untying their patient horse from the hitching rail near the depot, they were safely home before dark. Their little ride had not matched the Rock Island’s deluxe Golden State Limited run from Chicago to Los Angeles, but

to Josephine it must have been just as exciting. Libertyville still exists—barely—but County Line Station and settlement, Laddsdale Station once the coal played out by 1918, the Rock Island Line (once a mighty fine line, even when repeatedly teetering on the edge of bankruptcy) —all are long gone. Excepting a few crumbling bridge abutments, the Line's traces are mostly covered by corn, leaving only shining memories of rails leading on and places left behind.

Many years later, on the day of my father's funeral in September 1972 at Batavia, our town on the old Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy, I took my children walking the rails down the line as I told them about the last steam trains of my own lost youth. Later I wrote a poem for them, and for myself, which may have expressed feelings similar to those of young Josephine:

### The Old Trains

We walked in the evening  
before the warm rains,  
Hilary and Jason and I.  
And we heard clear far off  
the sound of the trains  
at the crossing.  
And the click and the clack  
came echoing back and back,  
and I remembered  
the trains.  
The Old Trains.  
The Steam Trains.

There's a sound a steam engine  
train used to make.  
In the yards it was shhh and shhh,  
and on the road it was roaring like thunder.  
And I wonder if I can say  
what it was like on that day  
when your Uncle Wayne and I  
were in town.  
And we heard the train coming far off,  
coming down the Fairfield grade.  
And we made a dash for the depot  
as the swinging crossing bell  
began to ding and ding and ding.

And as we stood right between  
the station and the track,  
you could hear the rails begin to sing  
as that big Baldwin engine came  
bearing down on our no-stop town,  
bound away for Ottumwa, and Red Oak,  
and Council Bluffs.

To stand between  
a station's brick wall  
and a hundred car freight,  
to stand there and wait  
for the fall. For the  
walls to cave in.  
To stand in the din  
on a shaking brick station walk.  
To stand in a roar—  
Impossible to talk—

That's a Train.  
That's a Steam Train.

And for something that's passing  
it's something will last.  
And, you know, nothing's quieter  
than when the train's past.



"Peavine" train on Chicago, Burlington and Quincy spur through Libertyville.  
 Courtesy of *Fairfield Ledger*

### A Brush with Auto-Rage

For young Josephine, there were old trains and new cars. It may seem to stretch the definition to call a brief respite from farm life's daily routine, to call a little ride along dusty farm roads, a holiday. But if one remembers the event for ninety years or so what else should it be called? Uncle John Teeter had a brand new, dull-red automobile, one of those early ephemeral makes (1907-12), a "Brush." A stunning little two seater (leather), it had a left hand emergency brake, left side wooden steering wheel, one-cylinder, six-horsepower motor, and chain drive to the wooden-spoke rear wheels. This was a real humdinger, with brass radiator, carbide headlights, rubber bulb horn, one taillight, and no rear vision mirror. "That," when Josephine was six or seven, in 1910 or 1911, "was the first car I ever rode in."



Brush car, 1911

Uncle John was a left-handed carpenter, housepainter, and paperhanger, a perfectionist worker and, since he remained a bachelor, apparently with standards equally high in the courting department. Thus he should not have had a Brush car, in fact, any car of his day. For early automobiles were notoriously balky, cranky, prone to breakdowns and blowouts that their novice drivers—and novice mechanics—often could not cope with (and up with which some would not put).



John could not cope, perhaps because all Teeters “had tempers,” that is, were given to uncontrollable—at least uncontrolled—fits of rage; and John by numerous accounts certainly was a Teeter. Because he sometimes lived at George and Ollie’s, young Josephine had ample opportunity to observe that: “He had a terrific temper, and he would get so mad at that car.” Josephine’s cousin, Elmer James Teeter, once observed the concatenation of Uncle John, the Brush, and a punctured tire: “Boy you talk about an explosion! You could have heard him for a mile.” Young Chet Curtis once observed the Brush experience a flat while attempting to cross the CB&Q tracks west of Batavia and was impressed far into manhood by the heights and depths of Mr. Teeter’s rage, a real conniption fit. As Ollie Teeter reported of her brother-in-law, religion, and the Brush, he probably didn’t go to church much. “I don’t think you’d have much religion if you had” that car.

John Alford Teeter died of “pleura pneumonia” on November 24, 1911, his fifty-first birthday. He was buried with his father in Brethren cemetery, after a Sunday afternoon funeral in his mother’s house, where he had lived. The Reverend William Glotfelty preached for John, as for his father six years earlier. John had been “an efficient honest workman whose services were in much demand.” Only the preceding spring he had painted and re-papered the Brethren church.<sup>75</sup>

John died in Frank Acton’s house, where he had been working. Did riding to work in that topless, windshieldless Brush cause his chill November death? Brother George, inheriting the car but not attempting to drive it, promptly sold it for ninety dollars to Fritz Nehre, who found it an aggravation, although it is not recorded that it killed him. Or even that he had a brush with death.

In later years, another bachelor uncle, Gus or Gust, reputedly less explosive than most Teeters, took Jo for rides in his Model “T,” a flivver, a Tin Lizzie. Henry Ford had started mass-producing the “T” with its novel left-side steering in 1908, had kept on producing it—about fifteen million “T’s”—more and more efficiently and less and less expensively on an “assembly line,” into 1927, replacing it with the “A” in 1928. By 1917, when America entered the Great War, about half of all cars that were produced were Fords. The “T” was obviously more reliable than a Brush, and had a classy brass radiator cap to boot, but was painted Ford’s inevitable funereal black. Perhaps David Augustus Teeter was less rage-full than other kinfolk because he had a “T” rather than a Brush?<sup>76</sup>

Auto-Rage was not confined to Teeters. A 1911 story, “Tourist Gave Away His Auto,” demands quoting at length: “Hammond, Ind.—‘Take

the blamed machine and welcome,' snapped a New Your [sic] tourist as he crawled from under his automobile in front of the home of Cecil Hancock . . . The man was on his way to Chicago, Ill., . . when the knuckle in the steering gear broke and sent the car up side down into the ditch. In addition to paying the boy who hauled him to the nearest railroad station he gave the lad the car, valued at \$2,000 and in good condition save for some scratches and twisted irons . . . When the lad's father learned of his son's good fortune he sold the car to a dealer and will apply the money toward giving his son a college education."<sup>77</sup>

Here was manly action by a member of the stronger sex. John Neihardt reported otherwise in 1908 on a member of the weaker sex: "I once saw a tender-hearted lady on her knees in the dust before a balky auto. I remember her half-sobbed words. 'You mean thing, you! What is the matter with you, anyway! Oh, you mean, mean thing.'" People, either women or men, could talk to, sometimes perhaps even reason with a horse, but an automobile had not the humanity of a horse.<sup>78</sup>

No doubt, it was good that George and Ollie Teeter never learned to drive, although they owned two cars, plus the ephemeral Brush. The first was a Model "T" "touring car" with fabric "convertible" top and "side curtains" with "isinglass" windows, bought from Roy Van Ausdeln, commonly known



Teeter's second Model "T"

as "Dillon," sometimes "Deln," because Roy thought he would be drafted in the Great War, which he wasn't. For a driver the elders had Earnest, later Bernard. George never trusted either car—the second a Ford Model "T" sedan with steel body and glass roll-down windows—and probably neither driver.

Late in the twentieth century, nephew Elmer James Teeter and daughter Jo delighted each other with Elmer's tale of riding to Uncle Ad's funeral in mid-June 1918. In the back seat, young Elmer was tickled pink when George ordered Earnest to stop at the Farson railroad crossing, so George could get out and make sure no train was coming before allowing Earnest to proceed. Such mistrust of a son! But then Earnest had once opined that the car should go back to the dealer, because they'd had it quite awhile, and it hadn't used any oil yet. As for Ollie, she treated cars as foreign objects, and pronounced the place where theirs was kept as if it were two hyphenated foreign words—"gare-age."

As we know, in 1903, Josephine's birth year, Dr. J. Fred Clarke bought one of the first Jefferson County cars. In 1904, the doctor and his

wife had passed through Libertyville, having ventured just about six miles from Fairfield's square. Later that year, "Ten automobiles passed through" Libertyville "with a crowd of pleasure seekers from Ottumwa," about twenty miles away. By 1903 Iowa tax assessors had been instructed to include automobiles in the column, "Vehicles including bicycles."<sup>79</sup>

In 1904, in all of Iowa, 155 automobiles were registered. In 1910, the year of Josephine's first ride, Jefferson County had about a dozen, Fairfield eight, making Uncle John—and Josephine—pioneers. Jefferson County's first car had been Fairfield's carriage and wagon shop operator C.C. Carl's steamer in 1901. But rural folks always or soon had a higher percentage of cars than townfolk. By 1921 almost every Iowa farm had "an automobile of some kind," which implicitly included early trucks. In 1919, as Jo entered high school, a "Notice To Auto Owners!" signaling a great proliferation of both makes and numbers of cars, listed ninety-four models that had to be weighed to qualify for state licenses, required for the following year. An A to Z sampling includes the Abbott Detroit, American Ben Hur, Brush, Firestone, Great Western, Inter State, Maytag, Singer, Pullman, Stanley Steamer, Stutz, and Zimmerman.<sup>80</sup>

By 1928, most of those models and many others had disappeared,



Fairfield Square with autos, 1910. Courtesy of Fairfield Public Library

and, of 4,557 Jefferson County cars, over half were Fords. Fords were generally reliable, and increasingly inexpensive, even if hardly luxurious. A 1921 newspaper squib ran, "What is more harrowing to the soul of man than to have a Packard taste with a Ford income?" Ford, of course, succeeded precisely by catering to folks with Ford incomes. Greatly accelerating sales

over rivals and over its own “T” model, Ford had in late 1927 rolled out at New York’s Waldorf Hotel “The new Ford Tudor Sedan . . . long, low and roomy, with graceful lines.” This was (in my opinion) the high-slung, boxy, entirely ungraceful Model “A.”<sup>81</sup>

Still competitive in 1927, Studebaker, an early manufacturer of wagons turned carmaker that survived until after World War II, proudly announced a new model for \$1,195. This was “The Dictator,” which had what seems an incredibly long life span—until 1937—given that it was the age of Italy’s Il Duce and Germany’s Adolf Hitler. In the annals of Madison Avenue, “The Dictator” should be remembered as a baffling marketing triumph. But then admen attempted to be evenhanded by touting other models— “The Commander” and “The President.”<sup>82</sup>

By 1920, about when Jo would learn to drive, Jefferson County had 2,482 autos, Iowa a stunning 440,155, and some “automobilists” (men especially) were becoming somewhat more experienced drivers and, often, practical mechanics. In 1921, for example, autos were required to meet certain new Iowa headlight standards, but “A man can make his own as long as they comply with the requirements.” Four years later, a newspaper notice gently reminded flivver folks that “The little red light on the rear of your auto must function if you are to avoid arrest in Fairfield.” People learned to fix and rebuild cars of necessity and for fun. Long-time Fairfield resident and my father-in-law Julius Hilleary recalled that for the family “T,” “we finally had three engines, one in the car, another repaired and ready to install and the third in the process of repair.”<sup>83</sup>

Iowans and others were gradually acclimating to these new machines, but in our now car-wise and antiseptic age we forget that novices could find them mystifying, enraging, and sometimes positively dangerous. On July 20, 1916, the *Batavia News* reported that “while drawing gasoline from the supply tank at the rear of the Nehre & Son hardware store E. B. Brown and Stew Alfred [a Teeter relative] narrowly escaped serious burns when a five gallon can of gasoline caught fire, caused from a lighted match . . . Mr. Alfred standing close by was lighting a cigar and the discarded match . . .” Mr. Brown’s hands were burned, but Batavia did not go up in smoke, even though the store caught fire briefly. At Wilson’s garage in Eldon, Fred Humbry tried to do two things in close proximity—gas up his car and light a cigarette. A friend saved his life. At Cantril, some folks tried to refill their Ford gas tank by the light of a kerosene lantern, with unpleasant results for themselves and their car.<sup>84</sup>

Once a flivver was gassed up, it probably had to be cranked to be started. In an age before electric starters were common (and inexpensive),

a car had to be cranked by hand, and that car's motor often "kicked back" (even if not a horse), compression reversing the crank suddenly and dramatically, bruising or breaking anything in the way, commonly a hand, thumb, or arm. John Harlan broke his wrist in Eldon. W. G. Taylor of Eldon and Huston Butt of Batavia broke a wrist and an arm respectively on Fords. In Dubuque, Ben Kipp suffered five fractures in his arm when "The force of the backfire threw the old man several feet." Elderly L. H. Bufkin of Lynnvile died of complications from breaking his arm. An early victim with a broken arm, in 1912, Eldon dentist Olin Isbell suffered as well the indignity of being lectured publicly by the *Eldon Forum* editor: "Moral—Get a selfstarter for the car." An intermediate device, a little hook to catch a backfired crank, was advertised in the *Fairfield Tribune* in 1921, but apparently never caught on, perhaps because overtaken by self-starters. Most men, of course, and some women, managed most of the time to avoid or minimize dangers thus far advertised.<sup>85</sup>

But then came driving. News items and reminiscences of elders recount numerous fender benders, crashes over embankments, into bridge abutments, into other cars from front and rear and sides, the latter often when inexperienced drivers attempted to pass and turned out too late or in too early. At Eldon, one car passing another—ironically "just this side of the cemetery—cut in so close . . . that its rear wheels caught the Ford and turned it over." Inexperienced and speed-exhilarated drivers, in primitive machines without a single safety device except bad brakes, on bad dirt roads generally narrow, often slick and muddy, or dusty and rutted, ensured a steadily increasing stream of accidents on curves, corners, even the open road. The Iowa speed limit outside towns and cities was twenty-five mph in 1915, but those who think most people obeyed the law would also buy a used speedometer.<sup>86</sup>

These primitive vehicles could not take the beatings they suffered. At Eldon, Mrs. Charles Shaffer leaped from her car when its brakes failed and was lucky only to dislocate her shoulder. Many cars, especially early, like wagons and buggies they aspired to replace, had wooden spokes to hold—their builders hoped—the iron rim that held the narrow high-pressure pneumatic tire. They didn't always. A headline read, "Fort Madison Man Killed When Auto Loses Wheel." These were common disasters. Radius rods came loose or broke. Cars caught fire occasionally, because of gasoline line leaks or electrical short circuits. In his Fairfield garage, Walter Loudon's car backfired and caught fire. A Ford short-circuited one night near Fairfield, causing the lights to blink out, causing the driver to miss a bridge and plunge into an icy creek. Uniformly with high clearance and



top heavy, without steel bodies in the early days, cars “turned turtle” with scary and disastrous regularity.<sup>87</sup>

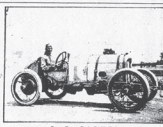

Early day drivers with good judgment and good depth perception at speed were in short supply. On railroad tracks in 1926, “26 Persons [were] Killed In Iowa At Grade Crossings,” plus 149 injured. By that year, only five accidents involved horse-drawn vehicles. “Twenty-seven were caused by automobiles being driven into the sides of trains.” In 1917 J. W.

Reed bought a Ford from W. L. Hendrickson, who undertook to teach Reed “the fine art of keeping within the fence posts that usually line both sides of the road,” but Mr. Reed “began to Barney Oldfield down the road . . . and hit a telegraph pole.” Barney Oldfield, an early dirt track racer who drove like greased lightning, would race at the Jefferson County Fair in 1921.<sup>88</sup>

## **AUTO RACES**

Leading Drivers and Cars of the Middle West Will Contest For Supremacy

A Program of Thrilling, Startling, Sensational, Mad, Hair Raising Races will be Given Each Day. A Speed Carnival of Real Merit.

<b>A Thrill A Minute</b>	 <b>C. R. PARKER</b> The Barren Oldfield of the Middle West in a Newberry	<b>SEE THE DAREDEVILS SHAKE DICE WITH DEATH</b>	 <b>GUS MONCKMEIER</b> of Ogle, Peoria, New Auburn, and Terra Haute teams	<b>High Powered Cars</b>
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If you enjoy good races be on hand early. Get a high seat and we'll guarantee that you get your money's worth. Make your arrangements now to attend. Bring the whole family. They will enjoy these races.

<b>Drivers Who Will Compete:</b> C. R. Parker, George Knevels, Eddie Lyons, Fred Jordan, "Big" Kane, Gus Monckmeier, Art Day, and several others in the same speedy class.	<b>ELDON</b> Big Four Fair Grounds Tuesday and Wednesday, SEPTEMBER	<b>14-15</b>	<b>Prices of Admission:</b> Adults 35c Children under 12 yrs 25c Seasonal, 50c Lifelong, 25c
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*Eldon Forum*, September 9, 1915

## **Autoists and Speed, Always Greater Speed**

By 1928, “the proud holder of the world’s speed record for automobiles,” Ray Keech “drove a 36 cylinder Triplex at an official speed of 207.55 miles per hour at Daytona Beach, Fla. This record brings the title back to the United States since it beats the record of Capt. Campbell by nearly a mile.” Leaving professional racers out of it, given inexperienced drivers and untrustworthy vehicles, according to Tim Cahill’s 1991 *Road Fever*, “Measured in terms of deaths per million miles driven, the 1920s was the deadliest decade in the history of American driving.”<sup>89</sup>

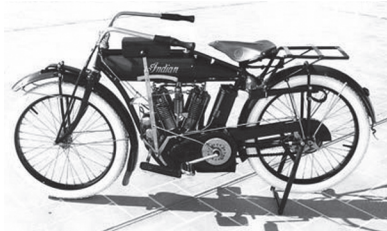
Cars usually suffered from insensate objects like telegraph poles or other cars, but not always. In 1913 a Bloomfield pony jumped onto a passing auto, kicked out its windshield and a front light, and considerably marred the finish. The John Burgess family, out for a soothing “evening’s airing,” was unscathed but horrified. The pony was taken to be jealous. In 1918 a car near Eldon ran into or over a bull, which apparently angered him; whereupon he arose, gathered his dignity, charged the car, and broke a woman’s arm in five places. As late as 1928 a University of Iowa

student and companion were hospitalized when a horse, blinded by their convertible's lights, "jumped into the open car. The animal died and the automobile was demolished." Not only horses and bulls disliked cars. In 1921, near Winfield, a male hog bit a tire, caused a blowout. What a bore! Not only four wheelers seemed enemy aliens to animals. In 1899 a Mount Pleasant wheelman arrived in Fairfield, whereupon a horse "became frightened and jumped into his bicycle, wrecking it badly," forcing him to return by train.<sup>90</sup>

Even if aggressive, livestock were by custom and law given the right of way in the early days of steam and gasoline locomotion. In Fairfield's *Ledger* of May 10, 1905, appeared this notice from E. R. Smith, Lawyer, concerning "Engines and Automobiles On Highway": "Whenever any steam engine is upon the public highway the whistle shall not be blown, and the person having the engine in charge shall stop it one-hundred yards distant from any person with horses or stock if they exhibit fear on account thereof, and the engine must stop until the horses have passed and a competent person shall be kept one-hundred yards in advance to assist in any emergency." Furthermore, "Any person operating an automobile shall immediately stop at request or on signal by putting up the hand from a person driving a horse and must remain stationary a reasonable . . . time."

Despite the awful syntax, such laws and regulations were understandably designed to prevent accidents, especially runaways. Over the years, horses and other livestock became somewhat accustomed to engines of various sorts, they tended as well to be less on the roads, and such laws fell into disuse. Early on, there were of course innumerable runaways and accidents.

Most early major accidents included cuts from shattered shards of plate glass windshields or side windows, safety glass a future innovation. Not to mention, young reader, seat belts, air bags, side impact bars, rear view mirrors, windshield washers, variable speed wipers, and anti-lock (as well as hydraulic) brakes. Thousands died who today would be unscathed. We will not even mention motorcycles, except to note that Chet Curtis had one before going with Jo Teeter, until it landed on him in a ditch and permanently decorated his leg with an exhaust pipe burn scar. That pinned Chet's ears back pretty good, so he got rid of the thing.



"Indian" motorcycle



George Teeter was right not to trust either cars or drivers. Neither did Batavia's Town Council, whose 1911 Ordinance No. 37, and 1916 Ordinance No. 44, set the speed limit at ten miles per hour, approximately that of a trotting horse. The comparison may be apt since this was an age of transition from one form of transport to another. For a time Batavia had an "Auto and Horse Livery" operated by John Henderson, succeeded by D. E. Plum, "Liveryman, Horse and Auto Service." Not only Batavia was conservative concerning speed. In 1927, Ottumwa lowered its business district limit from twenty to fifteen, thereby complying with state law.<sup>91</sup>

In 1923, after Jo had graduated from its high school, Fairfield installed a few traffic signals, given increased traffic on newly paved, east-west U.S. Route 34 and intersecting north-south, newly paved State Highway Route 1. The *Weekly Ledger-Journal* first reported that signals were "being heeded by most motorists," that "a few lawless drivers . . . seem to be a gratifying minority." A couple of weeks later it noted "Fairfield autoists are proving good sports about the new traffic signs and only a few inconsiderate or forgetful ones are passing them by." But several weeks later, an editorial warned that "Unless there is more general heed to the stop signals along the arterial highways and at the corners of the public square there will be some Christmas funerals in Fairfield." This was a milder response to aggressive drivers than that of *Fairfield Ledger* editors, clearly not in a Thanksgiving mood in November 1905: "The shotgun is not a bad remedy for the automobilist who wants to crowd everybody off the road. And other game is scarce in Iowa, anyway."<sup>92</sup>

"Last Sunday," reported the *Eldon Forum*, October 10, 1912, "was surely a delightful day for auto riding and everybody who owns one was out enjoying it." Despite dangers, and funerals or no, people wanted cars. Men, of course, wanted them for work, convenience, and pleasure, that surging feeling of *machismo*—a word not then common north of the border, but a feeling highly developed nevertheless.

In 1903, Sinclair Lewis's Sam Dodsworth had "sped on, with a feeling of power, of dominating the universe, at twelve dizzy miles an hour." Women too wanted autos—so claimed a 1925 General Federation of Women's Clubs' "nation wide" study "of 445,987 homes." They wanted cars more than modern plumbing, more than running water in their kitchen sinks and toilets. Why? "Because the housewife for generations has sought escape from the monotony rather than the drudgery of her lot . . . The automobile, the telephone and the talking machine or radio offer the modern homemaker escape from that monotony which drove many of her predecessors into insane asylums." The modern housewife "does not mind" drudgery

“if she knows that at the end of the task she can sit down and chat via the telephone,” or “if the evening brings the relaxation of an automobile ride.” Thus the automobile, although often causing trouble, offered inexpensive and socially acceptable psychotherapy for both women and men.<sup>93</sup>

A “To Whom It May Concern” *Batavia News* notice, October 2, 1919, illustrated that cars could cause trouble for those other than their owners: “Will the party driving a Dodge car Old Settlers Day, that was seen cutting the fence to avoid mudhole, please send \$5.00 damage to the owner and



Wapello County, Iowa, road scene. Courtesy of Ottumwa Public Library

avoid trouble.” Perhaps the advertiser owned both the mud hole and the fence, given that some rascals in those days made money by pulling cars out of manufactured morasses.<sup>94</sup>

Tim Cahill points out that, “in 1910, there was no auto road across America. There were a series of dusty tracks heading west, but they all ended somewhere in Nebraska. After that, the road was a wandering progression of ruts across the prairies. Adventurers attempting beyond Nebraska encountered fences and locked gates. By 1923, a coast-to-coast highway, Route 30, had been built.” One should, nevertheless, not take “highway” in too literal and modern a context. Such highways might well be populated by dirt, dust, mud, mudholes, washouts, landslides, fallen trees, and, understandably, abandoned cars. Long stretches might lack “filling stations” and “tourist courts,” not to mention your friendly highway patrol and emergency phones. When in 1924 Leland Horton drove from California

to Brighton, Iowa, it took “nine and one half days in his Ford.” Despite the disagreeable and the dangerous, automobilists rode the wave of the future. The Iowa Railroad Commission reported in 1926 that increasing use of “private automobiles . . . for travel has cut railroad revenues by eight percent.” Two million fewer had ridden than in 1924, which was partially attributable to “motor bus lines,” but primarily to “private automobiles.”<sup>95</sup>

According to a popular song just before and during World War I, “He’d have to get under—get out and get under . . .” Intrepid explorers needed to carry extra gas, plenty of spare oil, extra tires and inner tubes, tire patching kits, and spare parts. A basic kit included also a shovel for mud or snow, ax, tow chain, jack, tire pump, wrenches, preferably a socket set, baling wire to hold things together when something went “haywire,” spare light bulbs, raingear, spare food, and spare water for radiator and, secondarily, human consumption. One had better carry ingenuity as well because unpredictability was predictable. In the late 1920s, Chet Curtis made it to the top of eastern Colorado’s Pike’s Peak, in those days an ultimate test for a car, particularly its radiator. But then he had to get down. Even modern car brakes can get hot and worn down on the descent, but then brake shoes smoked and burned, even with a car in low gear. Chet got out his little ax, cut down a fair sized branchy tree from either National or Private property, and hooked it to his rear bumper with his log chain. And then, slick as a whistle, came booming down the mountain toward the Colorado and Kansas plains and Iowa prairies in a rolling cloud of gravel. Eat my dust!

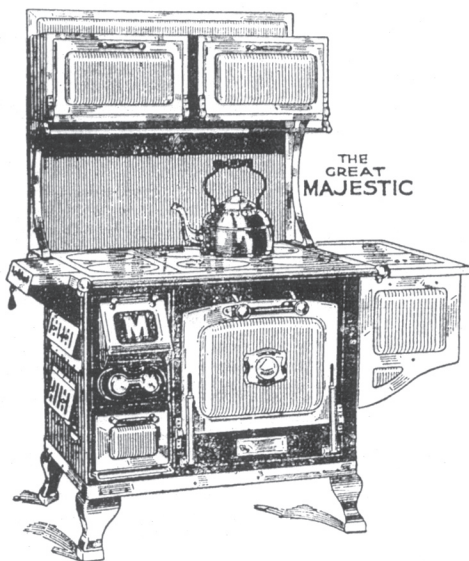
Despite multitudinous problems, irritations, and dangers, Iowa cars continued to multiply like rabbits. In 1940 the writer Phil Stong asserted that “Iowans own more automobiles per capita than any people in the world.” And at one time or another, they all caused trouble. Apparently, the only way to avoid trouble with early-twentieth-century cars was to “get a horse,” as rude passersby sometimes shouted at unfortunate autoists; or ride the train, or walk, or stay home and work.<sup>96</sup>

### **Iowa Farm Life was Unending Work**

The life of farm children like Josephine Teeter was hardly all fun, games, holidays, and rides in new contraptions. These were memorable because rare and because they relieved monotonous everyday work. An early-twentieth-century farm family, if it were not well-to-do, had to be as self-sufficient as possible. Consequently, even children had to work early and sometimes long; sometimes they had to work too early, too long, and

too hard. This was an era of factory child labor as well as on farms. In 1910, excluding farms, in the United States were almost two million “gainfully occupied children aged ten to fifteen.” By 1920 Congress generally attempted to regulate urban children’s employment, but not that of farm children. Ollie and George Teeter’s children, however, apparently did not work unreasonably hard or at tasks beyond their capability, at least not by that era’s rigorous standards. Nevertheless, from Jo’s later perspective, “It seemed to me I always worked.”<sup>97</sup>

Josephine early learned to do dishes and to help her eldest sister/ supervisor, Irene, eight years older, who actually liked housecleaning—to mop and sweep and dust furniture and clean rugs with a carpet beater and wash windows with a little kerosene in a bucket of warm water. Like the other children, Josephine carried in wood and coal and corncob kindling (especially effective when soaked overnight in kerosene, or, as it was commonly called, coal oil). Carrying in fuel was no minor task in houses without central heating, with stoves in several rooms (except bedrooms). Most intimidating was a large, voracious kitchen range for cooking, baking, warming heavy solid iron “sadirons,” drying clothes, warming feet, and heating water in a covered reservoir at one end of the stove. Almost always in the Teeter’s rented houses, water had



*Batavia News*, October 18, 1923

to be hand pumped from an outdoor well or cistern and carried inside, a bucket at a time. Ashes from all those stoves had to be carried out periodically. A messy task, it may have fallen mostly to adults.<sup>98</sup>

Livestock had to be cared for—chickens, geese, ducks, turkeys, and guinea fowl had to be fed; penned at night safely away from foxes, minks, hawks, owls, and other varmints; and their eggs gathered more than once a day. Prying eggs still warm from under an old biddy might or might not have been considered fun, but broody hens could peck a small girl’s hands, while roosters and ganders could attack her bare legs. Poultry houses and pens inevitably were messy and dusty, or messy and wet, but always smelly.

Ducks and geese were kept for food, but primarily for the bedtime comfort (or comforters) they provided. Periodically, at the right time of the moon, as Ollie and the almanac determined, she and the girls corralled them and, despite their flapping and squawking protests, plucked their downy breast feathers for use in luxurious bedding, pillows, and ticks. In this way, the Teeters avoided use of lumpy cornhusk- or straw-stuffed mattresses. Resulting luxurious warmth may explain why years later Jo could not recall having used a sadiron or hot brick wrapped in cloth to warm the sheets.

In summertime Rebecca and Josephine had to drive milk cows in from pasture morning and night, usually a pleasant break from adult supervision, if it were not raining or unbearably hot. To her later deep regret Josephine learned to milk cows while staying a week with Grandma Rebecca Ann Teeter, in bed with a broken hip, suffered when she tripped over a dog, or fell from a buggy—stories vary—an injury from which she never recovered. This was the summer of 1912, Josephine, eight going on nine, was eager to learn, and her maiden Aunt Lizzie was willing—perhaps eager—to teach. One is reminded of Tom Sawyer, salesmanship, and whitewashing the board fence. Josephine's major mistake, however, was to reveal at home what she had learned as an innocent abroad, with the result that she had to milk cows “for a time” as adventure descended precipitously into drudgery.

Grandma Teeter's dog had been a watchdog, not a pet. Neither did Josephine's family have pets, although like most of their neighbors they had dogs and cats. The dogs, not used for working livestock or for hunting, had limited purposes, principally barking away animal intruders and announcing human visitors. Most were nameless, except for inventively named “Collie.” Nameless cats hung around house and barn, earning their keep by mousing and ratting. Like the dogs, their keep was paid out in table scraps beyond the back door. For both cats and dogs, Darwin's “survival of the fittest” prevailed, given that it was inconceivable they should visit either the house or a veterinarian. Unlike livestock, there was no profit in dogs and cats, and certainly no money with which to pamper them. So, if they could not survive on their own, they kicked the bucket.

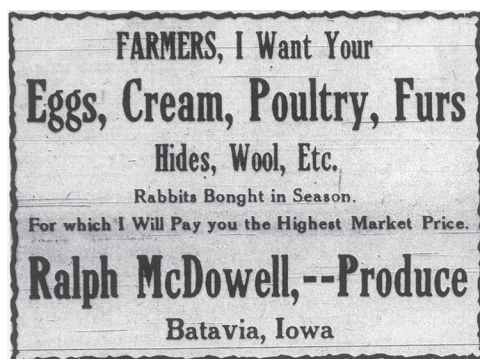
Childhood drudgery might be relieved if it were rewarded by something more tangible than parental gratitude or approval, as several instances testify. Jo best tells the first: “The only time I ever remember getting any money, I got a penny for washing dishes. Everybody else had something to do but me, and I cried because I was going to have to wash the dishes, and I got a penny.”

More lucrative than depending upon pity was to become an



entrepreneur. One summer, Josephine picked gooseberries, an often-painful enterprise, given that the bushes have vicious and intelligent thorns and that the best berries are ready in the stifling fly-and-mosquito-filled sticky heat of Iowa midsummer. But the tart pies that Mother Ollie made were delicious, and the money she paid Josephine was hers to save—and spend.

That same year in the fall George, Bernard, and Josephine picked up an enormous number of hickory nuts, enough to fill the low bed of a full sized farm wagon box, which involved much stooping and shelling. They sold the nuts at the Batavia Poultry House, a catchall farm produce business. With her share of these profits and her gooseberry



*Batavia News*, August 5, 1926



Shoe Button Hook, “Ed. Hunt. Fairfield. Iowa”

money, Josephine promptly went to town and, with motherly oversight and approval, bought a nifty but serviceable pair of black high button shoes.

Still in the entrepreneurial vein, early in the Great War, when Josephine was thirteen or fourteen, George gave her and Bernard, age ten or eleven, two runty pigs, the tiniest of the litter, the least likely to thrive, or even survive. But now Josephine and Bernard had a stake in society, at least in the pigpen. They lavished so much food and attention on those runty piglets that they had no choice but to survive, thrive, grow fat, and be sold, one at least, for \$30, divisible by two, as one would expect. But Mother Ollie, for reasons best known to peacemakers, convinced the two to share proceeds with Big Sister Rebecca. And so Josephine learned, although reluctantly, that the entrepreneurial drive to maximize economic profit sometimes has to give way to family and other social considerations.

### Threshing Season and Women’s Work

In summer harvest time hay and grain had to be protected and kept

as dry as possible until it was in the barn or granary. Then even young girls like Josephine and Rebecca could be useful in the fields. Jo's worst memory of work was of having to walk around the edges of an oats field to pick up bundles of cut oats that had been thrown into weeds along the fencerow. For "I always stuck my legs with the stubble, and the sun being so hot I always was sick afterwards." Jo's legs were scratched because proper girls, especially with mothers named Ollie, did not wear overalls or long pants, were consigned to dresses only. As Jo's friend, Mildred Stull Fickel, remembered many years later, "Girls was girls in those days." They wore dresses. Mildred cut the feet out of old stockings and wore them on her arms to avoid scratches and an unsightly suntan. Josephine did wear a hat, but could never remember wearing a bonnet. With scratches burning, sticky with salty sweat mingled with oat dust, sick from the heat, she found being indoors, even if hard at work there, much more desirable. And the hardest indoor work early-twentieth-century farmwomen could imagine was cooking for threshers, who harvested those oat bundles Josephine had rescued.

Before machinery (the "combine") was developed to harvest grain directly in the fields, the most efficient harvester was the "separator," a huge machine powered by an equally huge steam engine that also pulled the separator from farm to farm. Bundles of grain such as oats, wheat, or barley were stacked high on "bundle wagons," brought in from the fields, and pitched (with a pitchfork) one at a time, grain heads first, onto a conveyor chain at one end of the separator. The machine's flails and screens "thrashed" and separated grain from straw and chaff, the grain being funneled into sacks or open wagons. The straw was blown out through a



Threshing rig. Courtesy of Fairfield Public Library

large tube at the separator's far end onto the ground to be stacked loose immediately or baled later for livestock bedding.

Because the machinery was expensive and threshing required much labor, a cooperative system developed among farmers who hired the steam



engine and separator owner—or bought their own outfit—and organized a threshing “run” or “ring.” This meant that a dozen or so men descended on farm after farm, working hard cooperatively and competitively from morning dry-enough ‘til evening dewfall. They had to be fed at least twice. Hard work made them eat much; competitive group camaraderie made them eat more. Which meant that both threshers and their women were busy as bees all day long.

To young Josephine Teeter, “It was always a thrill to hear the whistle of the engine when they were coming into view.” The great steam engine somewhat resembled a small steam-powered railroad engine (it was sometimes called a “road locomotive”). But it had huge iron rear wheels as tall as or taller than a tall man that left slantwise cleat marks behind as it came rumbling and clanking up a narrow dirt road pulling the huge separator. Thrilling, yes, but many a farmwoman, up since before dawn preparing—really she had been preparing as much as possible for days—felt a thrill of terror at the sound and the sight. Only four more hours ‘til noon dinner had to be ready and served; and then only four more hours ‘til evening supper had to be ready and served.

A woman’s reputation as housekeeper and cook was on the line, for those men streaming in with horse teams hitched to bundle and grain wagons would eat at a dozen other neighborhood tables. Silently and perhaps otherwise, they would compare notes, rate the food on a scale of one to thirteen. Threshing promoted competition in both field and kitchen.

The resulting menu was awesome. The housewife who was “it” sought help from her girls, sometimes from reluctant little sons (who of course wanted to be out with the men, at least as water-boys), and from two, three, or four neighbor women. (In 1923, “Mrs. Helen Teeter and Miss Rebecca Teeter spent Tuesday with Mrs. Pearl Krumboltz, helping her cook for the threshing men.”) Teams of women and their helpers produced inevitable fried chicken plus roast beef or pork, homemade noodles, mashed potatoes and gravy, dressing, two or three vegetables, tomatoes and other produce such as radishes and green onions from the garden, bean salad, apple butter, preserves, pickles, homemade bread and butter and jam, a variety of homemade cakes and pies, iced tea if there was ice, and coffee. Specifics of this thresher’s cornucopia varied, but not volume.<sup>99</sup>

This “kitchen ritual of harvest” (Wendell Berry’s term), as with Christmas and Thanksgiving, and Sunday, and everyday meals, was prepared without benefit of electric or natural gas stoves, or electric mixers and other gadgets. Without refrigerators, often without ice or ice boxes, often with a cellar or well as the only cooling source. All this was prepared

on top of a kitchen range and in its oven, a stove fired by wood or coal, often in a stifling July kitchen and always without electric fans; prepared without even a microwave! Or Cuisinart! All those dishes, pots and pans and skillets, glasses, knives and forks and spoons, washed by hand. And, with no vacuum cleaner, the place tidied up at the end of a long long day.<sup>100</sup>

To keep the grain separator running at full speed the men often ate in shifts: "Usually there were two tables of men, and the dishes would have to be washed and the table re-set for the second group." Then the dishes would have to be washed yet again and the long table in the dining room or, often, outside under a tree would have to be set again for third table, reserved, of course, for women and children (including lifetime last-eater, Josephine). Then more water would have to be carried and heated; dishes would have to be washed and dried; and the table would have to be set one more time. Then cooking would have to begin again for supper, whose timing was unpredictable, because men trickled in whenever they had finished their particular work. Then redding up began again.

Sometimes threshing on a farm went on for more than one day. As Jo's old friend, Nellie Stull Peebler, said in 1981, it may have been a thrill to hear that steam engine tooting as it came, but it was a greater thrill to hear it tooting as it left. Those hearty eaters were good neighbors, but both Jo and Nellie would have delighted in Dana Faralla's image of threshing crews who "came like vultures."<sup>101</sup>

A young girl learned quickly in such conditions, watched her mother and other women; learned about planning, delegating, division of labor, cooperation; learned woman's work really never was done; learned practical skills by watching and by doing. When she was eleven or twelve years old Josephine baked all the cakes for the Teeter's threshing day. Eighty-five and more years later the praise of those hungry and discriminating threshers with their ruddy faces, white foreheads, and wet hair slicked back lingered in her memory.

As Jo also recalled, "The way of threshing went on the same way for many years, the tractor taking over for the steam engine. We were still threshing in the same way after my marriage in 1929. We thrashed six times in that first year and we had the men for dinner and supper. We thrashed oats, wheat, clover seed [more than once because of wet weather], and beans. When we went back to the farm in 1945 we were still thrashing although many were using the combine at that time." But by then, of course, by 1945, Josephine had ice, if not yet electricity.

## CHAPTER 2: ANCESTORS, THE MIDDLE SORT

The power is in the balance:

we are our injuries, as much as we are our successes.

—Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible*

The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together:

our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not;

and our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues.

—William Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*

You can pick your clothes,

You can pick a rose,

But kin and nose,

You can't pick those.

—Ivan Doig, *Heart Earth*



A. E. Keller, Steele-Teeter Farmhouse

In late fall of 1888 a reporter toured “The Southwest Corner” of Jefferson County, Iowa. His purpose was to publicize the area’s prosperous farms and thrifty, industrious, forward-looking farmers. Of particular interest was the last visit of the day before “dark caught us.”

“Joseph E. Steele’s was the next place at which our guide called a halt, and we were allowed a look at his new house. It is 34 feet each way and two stories high, built in the best style and finely furnished. The rooms are very large, three below and four above, besides broad center

halls. It stands in a splendid natural grove, and when entirely completed will be one of the finest country homes in the county. The farm contains 160 acres. Mr. Steele is a model farmer. He had just lumped off one bunch of fat steers for \$1,000! He has lived on this place 23 years. . . . It was at Mr. Steele's gate that we met. . . . A. B. Teeter, the carpenter who built Mr. Steele's house, (a job to be proud of), and who owns and lives on [a] farm [near] County Line."<sup>102</sup>

Joe Steele had a daughter. Abraham Burger Teeter had a son who carpentered with him. The rest is genealogy, is in part a history of the origins of Josephine May Teeter.

### Ollie and George

The eldest surviving daughter of Joseph Elliott Steele and Sarah Elizabeth Miles, Josephine Teeter's future mother was named Fannie Ulrica Steele. But a Swedish neighbor lady who lived "just across the creek," for reasons unknown (Was she Ulrica? Did she assist at Fannie's birth?) insisted on calling her Ollie, a nickname that endured ninety-six years from her birth on March 6, 1872. When Abe Teeter arrived with lean and lanky twenty-five-year-old George, to begin work on Joe Steele's house in the spring of 1888, Ollie had just turned sixteen. She was about five feet tall, round faced, sprightly, brighter than bright, saucy as saucy gets. Ollie surely appeared to George as



Ollie Steele (left) with a Wagner cousin

utterly fetching, although not entirely receptive to whatever overtures he may have made. But she certainly fetched him.

George Brinton McClellan Teeter had been born on May 27, 1863, late in Grant's siege of Vicksburg, just one month before Lee's disaster at Gettysburg. He had been named for the Union general McClellan, who dressed and paraded better than he fought. He had been named by a father who wanted to go to the war, but couldn't; named for a general who could

have gone to war sooner, but didn't. McClellan was, however, a Democrat, which suited George just fine. George's sharp features contrasting to Ollie's roundness; he stood about 5'8," but appeared somewhat taller because he was thin and rangy, and because he rather loomed over Ollie—whenever he could get close enough to loom. She did, however, secretly think him handsome. As she said later of the Teeter men, "They all were."

George courted Ollie. She consented to walk out with him from the one room "house" the Steeles were living in temporarily while building was going on. This structure later became Ollie's "gare-age" for their Model "T." Walking took them "various places" evenings after work, in moonlight, in moon dark, across fields, and down country roads. They walked to schoolhouse spelling bees, to rural literary society meetings in Des Moines Township No. 1 schoolhouse on Friday nights, or perhaps even to Libertyville, perhaps even to Krum on Thursday nights to hear local "talented speakers." (Krum was "an important wooding point" on the CB&Q line west of Fairfield, that is, where steam trains took on firewood, fuel, and water.) Did you walk fast? "You shouldn't ask secrets of old ladies." Was he a good kisser? "I don't want to tell about courtship. I won't sleep tonight. We'll just skip it."<sup>103</sup>

George wanted to marry long before Ollie did, "but I wouldn't take the ring." He went far away, to Sioux City, to carpenter and paint, stayed away a long time, about two years. Some other boys were after Ollie, and "There's always someone sticking around to report what you do." George must have realized he might lose the cutest little thing he'd ever laid eyes on. He came back. Late in winter 1891-92 George and Ollie walked out again, but now from the new house. Walking across fields was the most sensible mode of transportation, given that roads were often so muddy and sticky that even high and narrow buggy wheels got clogged. After almost four years, Ollie took the ring, and, following a brief engagement, they were licensed to wed.<sup>104</sup>

Since Ollie was a minor, Joe Steele, recovering from a month-long attack of the "grip" (often called "La Grippe," later influenza, the flu), an illness that had almost carried him off, wrote a note on pink paper to the Clerk of the District Court, Jefferson County, Fairfield, Iowa:

Libertyville

June 4, 1892

Mr. Sawyer this is to certify my willingness to the marriage of my daughter Fanny U. Steele to George B. Teeter barer of this note.

Jos. E. Steele

George returned with license No. 7059 and four days later, Wednesday evening, June 8, 1892, Ollie, recently turned twenty, and George, recently turned twenty-nine, were married.<sup>105</sup>

The bridegroom, “a fine young man, energetic and industrious,” and the bride, “a young woman of fine appearance and altogether a bride well worth the winning,” were wed in the parlor of Joe Steele’s new house. It was sited on a gentle hillside facing east, above the dirt road in that “splendid natural grove” of hickory and oak that overlooked little Lick Creek. The Reverend George W. Barber, circuit riding Methodist, Mt. Zion Church, rural Selma, Iowa, officiated. Present were the bride’s parents—“our esteemed citizen” Joseph Elliott Steele, and Sarah Elizabeth Miles Steele—and the groom’s—Rebecca Ann Alford Teeter and the carpenter who, with the groom, had built this solid house, Abraham Burger Teeter.

“The bride and groom,” continued the *Fairfield Tribune*, Joe Steele’s favorite Democratic party paper, “have the best wishes of a host of friends who hope that their pathway may be strewn with roses. The groom will engage in farming in Des Moines township this summer.” Despite friends’ best wishes, Ollie and George’s pathway of roses would be strewn with more than the occasional thorn.<sup>106</sup>



George Brinton McClellan Teeter

Fannie Ulrica (Ollie) Steele



### . . . the Middling Sort

The ancestors from whom the newlyweds—and their daughter, Josephine—sprang had certain similarities. Uniformly from northwestern European countries, from Great Britain and Germany, they had arrived in the British colonies or the new United States as part of the modern worldwide expansion of European peoples, especially to the New World. They represented the great eighteenth-century migration to America's eastern seaboard, and then across the Appalachians, sometimes before and certainly soon after the Revolutionary War.

In America Ollie and George's ancestors were almost uniformly Protestant. They may have left their ancestors' Old World behind—its extreme inequalities, its military conscription—but they brought its Protestant Christianity. They almost uniformly intermarried with other northwestern Europeans. Generation after generation had been rural, the men mostly farmers with the usual jack-of-all-trades skills, especially in carpentry, but also the occasional miller or storekeeper or preacher or teacher. They were a practical lot, valuable in a new land where, Bernard Bailyn notes, “the greatest need was for workers who could build things . . . who could repair things.” As Charles C. Hotle writes of the fictional Iowa *Slaughter County*, “There were trees to cut and cabins to build . . . fences to be erected . . . a crying need for corrals . . . and barns or sheds for tools and stock. There was work for crude masons, carpenters and farmers, but the men good with axes were most in demand.” The wives of such men had the impressively wide range of housewifely skills, sometimes farming skills as well; and, inevitably, many years of fruitful but dangerous childbearing experience.<sup>107</sup>

Ollie and George's ancestors seem to have been intelligent, but with eight grades of formal education at most, and often less; in a rare early case or two among the men, apparently none. Illiteracy was of course significantly more common among the women. These women and men had worked and played, married and reproduced, lived and died, unknown outside their families and communities.

They might have been called “the middling sort.” They had moved ever westward, principally from Pennsylvania and Virginia, often, like many other migrants, as extended families. Like most New World newcomers, whether rich or poor, they went seeking land. They had moved onto lands seized by force, purchase, or treaty, from Indians whose claims to the land relied upon residence or usage. As Christians, Ollie and George and Josephine's ancestors would have been familiar with God's command

in Genesis 1:28 to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over . . . every living thing that moveth on the earth.” They would have remembered his promise in Psalms 2:8: “Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.”<sup>108</sup>

## Polly and Joseph

Josephine’s mother’s paternal ancestry could be traced back to the Kentucky marriage in 1796 of Ollie’s great-grandparents, Hugh Steel (the Steels gradually added an “e” to become Steele) and Catharine Dunn, she the daughter of a pioneer and Revolutionary War veteran, Thomas Dunn, and of Frances Jane Spurgeon. Hugh and Catharine Dunn Steel had left Kentucky, had moved north across the Ohio River early in Indiana’s statehood, sometime after 1816 and before 1820, bringing with them a passel of children, including Ollie’s grandfather, Joseph, Kentucky-born in 1798. The Steeles had settled immediately and permanently into farming on southeastern Indiana’s fertile high prairies a few miles north of the Ohio River port of Madison, a commercial and manufacturing town.<sup>109</sup>

Thomas Dunn note, December 13, 1796, Bourbon County Courthouse, Paris, Kentucky: “Sir Let the Bearer Hugh Steel have Leave to marry Catharine Dunn my daughter and this shall be your Certificate as witness my hand and seal . . . December 13, 1796 . . . Thomas Dunn”

Joseph Steele, from youth to old age a farmer, land speculator, breeder of race and show horses, and Presbyterian-turned-Baptist, married Mary (Polly) Wilson in 1824. Polly was daughter to Nathaniel Wilson, like Thomas Dunn a Revolutionary War veteran and pioneering Kentucky farmer. Susannah Riddle, Polly’s mother, was born, like Nathaniel, in Pennsylvania, where they had married in Cumberland County. With Susannah and their numerous children, Nathaniel had moved from Kentucky to Indiana in

the same period and county as the Steeles, and like them had continued farming.<sup>110</sup>

Joseph and Polly Wilson Steele's youngest son was Ollie's father, Josephine's grandfather. Joseph Elliott Steele was born January 26, 1838, in Jefferson County, Indiana, just north of Madison. The youngest of six, Joe grew up around corn and cattle and racy show horses—and on lands that over time increased in cost and declined in divisibility. Tall Joe courted Sarah Elizabeth Miles, a neighborhood Baptist girl from Mudlick town, on the Michigan toll road north of Madison. Many decades later, in 1945, Ollie Steele Teeter was vastly amused to reveal, in the high-pitched tone signaling her amusement, that her mother had come from Mudlick, Indiana. The name apparently commemorated a tavern brawl that spilled out into rain and muck. Later denizens sought respectability by renaming the town Belleview. Joe and the girl from Mudlick-become-Belleview were wed by Baptist minister T. D. George in the fall of 1863, Wednesday, September 2. Her father, consenting to the marriage, was Enos Miles.<sup>111</sup>



Joseph Steele and Mary (Polly) Wilson Steele wearing sashes of the Grange, or Patrons of Husbandry. Young Joseph Elliott Steele

### **Mary and Evan, and Anna and Enos**

Josephine's mother's known maternal ancestry originated with Samuel Miles, a British immigrant to Virginia, probably a Revolutionary War veteran, married to Sarah James, daughter of Isaac, a Pennsylvania Baptist. In Virginia, nine children, including Evan, were born to Samuel

and Sarah James Miles. Evan Miles wed Mary Christie, she the daughter of Revolutionary War veteran James Christie and Sarah Lemmon; Sarah so beautiful as lifelong to be called "Pretty Sally." James and Pretty Sally Christie, Samuel and Sarah James Miles, all settled eventually in Shelby County, Kentucky.<sup>112</sup>

In 1800 Evan Miles and Mary Christie married and moved to Shelby County, but they ultimately settled, like the Steeles and Wilsons, in southeastern Indiana, as farmers and jacks-of-all-trades. Evan, farmer, land speculator, innkeeper, Baptist-turned-Universalist preacher, and Mary Christie had eleven children. These included Ollie's grandfather, Josephine's great-grandfather, Evan Enos Miles, known as Enos.<sup>113</sup>

Enos Miles, always a Baptist despite his father's example, was as well a farmer, land speculator, storekeeper, saloonkeeper, and Justice of the Peace (a useful combination if the chronology matched). He owned a section of the "Michigan toll road" that ran from Madison on the Ohio to the southern tip of Lake Michigan, and was a member of the Masons and the Grange societies. Enos married Anna (Ann) Hand in 1829. Her parents were Ephraim Hand, a Baptist of German extraction, born in New Jersey, who had moved westward with a wife named Comfort, a Pennsylvanian. Ann was born in Fayette County, Kentucky, near Lexington, in 1807. In 1815 the Hands moved to Indiana, where Ann met and married Enos Miles, with whom she had five children, including Sarah Elizabeth, future wife of Joseph Elliott Steele, Ollie's mother, Josephine's grandmother.<sup>114</sup>

### **Westward Pioneers in a Horsesdrawn Wagon, Joe and Sarah**

Go West, young man (and young woman). Apparently not drawn to the Civil War, at twenty-five Joseph Elliott Steele may have been drawn like many thousands of other young men, even during the war, to westering adventure, as may have been Sarah, his brand new bride at nineteen. As a younger son in an area where farms were increasingly dear, land hunger drove him on. Sarah, perhaps with help from her new mother-in-law, perhaps from her own mother, may have stitched a canvas wagon cover to stretch over bentwood bows. Joe would hitch his team to that covered wagon, and off they would go.

The newlyweds drove horses, not oxen, daughter Ollie emphasized, horses a sign of relative affluence. Oxen were apparently always in a minority, were useful on prairie sodbusting plows, but would decline rapidly in Joe and Sarah's new territory. In 1860 Jefferson County had about 1,500 oxen, in 1880, six. The *Fairfield Weekly Journal* reported in 1897

that, “The ox team on the south side [of the square] this morning aroused considerable curiosity, especially with the younger generation, who are not used to seeing such teams.”<sup>115</sup>

Joe and Sarah, having packed their wagon with indispensable worldly goods, and about two weeks into their marriage, turned their horses’ heads northwesterly for the long trek to southeastern Iowa. Their orderly wagon box was chock full of things that pioneering folk had learned to pack from long and sometimes hard experience. Starting at the front would probably have been a general provisions box with bacon, salt, et cetera, upon which Joe could sit while driving. Then came a clothes chest, perhaps cushioning a few precious breakables; a medicine kit; a tiny open space with chair for Sarah, when she wasn’t sitting next to Joe. Then sacks of flour, cornmeal, and other food—dried apples and peaches, beans, rice, sugar, coffee, and tea; a washtub holding daily dishes and cooking utensils. Bedding would have been laid over the food sacks.<sup>116</sup>

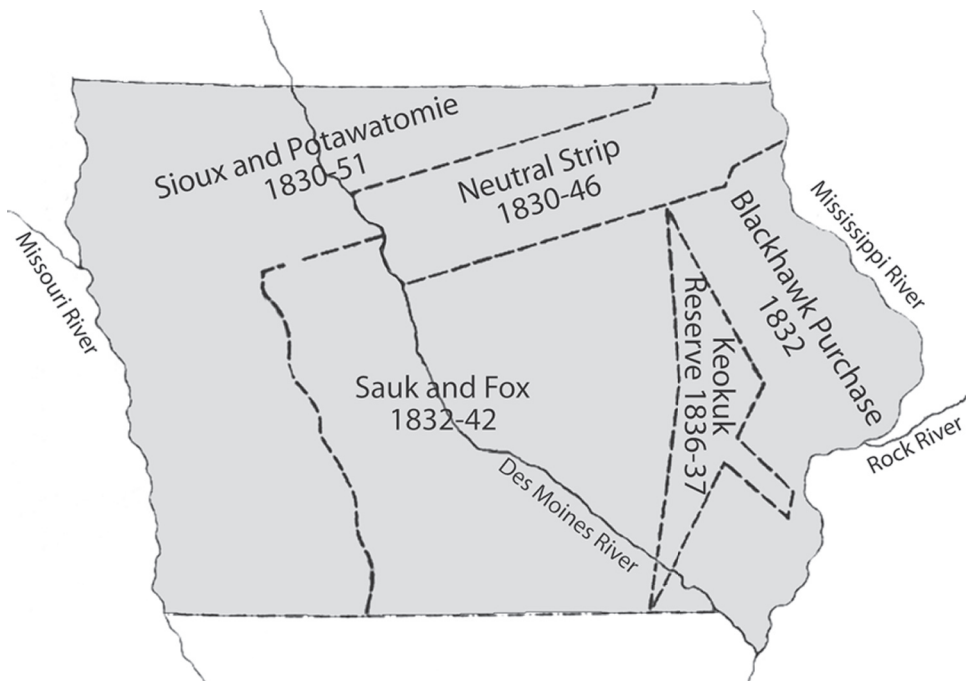
Descendants of pioneer Steele, Dunn, Spurgeon, Wilson, Riddle, Miles, James, Christie, Lemmon, Hand, and other families (and individuals lost to history, including a woman named Comfort), Joe Steele and Sarah Miles were well equipped ancestrally for pioneering, for pulling-up stakes and moving on. They surely profited also from the current example and information provided by three of Joe’s uncles, James, Thomas, and Marshall Steele, the first two having traveled from Indiana on horseback by way of Chicago to examine Iowa in 1851. All three brought their families there, at least for a time, in the early 1850s.

## **The Country Between the Two Great Rivers**

The destination of young pioneer Joseph Elliott Steele and his younger pioneering bride was 160 acres his father Joseph and older brother John had bought in Iowa, December 20, 1855. Whether his father and brother traveled there, or bought sight unseen, is not known. Joseph Elliott bought the farm from his father and brother in 1868 for \$1,200, just \$160 more than they had paid. The grantor of the 160 acres to Joseph and John, for \$1,040 “to us in hand paid,” was a George W. Cutting and wife Elizabeth, whose address for sale purposes was Middlesex County, Massachusetts, and who had actually bought 320 acres. His address suggests that Cutting was a speculator who never saw the land and was reimbursed through an agent. On the other hand, in 1841 a Des Moines Township election was scheduled “at the house of Messrs. Cutting and Gordon.” Elsewhere the house is referred to as a “storehouse,” past which a road is planned. Was



United States map locating Iowa



Iowa map showing “Indian Purchases”



this “storehouse” the “trading post” that Ollie Steele Teeter remembered as being on the Cutting/Steele farm? Like numerous others, had Cutting been an early squatter who had preempted land that he bought after that became legal? Whatever the truth, Fairfield land office records indicate that Cutting had bought the land in 1848 from the United States, administration of President James K. Polk, under Land Act of 1820 rules. He had paid the standard \$1.25 an acre, and had sold to the Steeles for \$6.50, a tidy seven years’ investment profit. The average cost of Iowa land purchased from various Indian tribes had been eight cents an acre, although the Sac and Fox had been paid about thirty cents an acre for land in this “Second Purchase.” The federal government could buy or trade tribal lands and move Indians ever farther west under provisions of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which abrogated earlier laws recognizing tribes as sovereign entities, and which now held that individual Indians were subject to laws of states where they lived.<sup>117</sup>

### **A Time and Place Only for Brave, Resolute Hearts**

Joe and Sarah Steele’s land lay just west of the original Black Hawk Purchase of 1832, which had been opened to white settlement in 1833, just thirty years before they arrived. Their land was part of the “New Purchase” or “Second Purchase” of 1837, which pushed Indian claims ever westward. The 1879 *History of Jefferson County* is quite clear that “Black Hawk was strenuously opposed” to being moved west across the Mississippi and beyond, but that “he was forced to comply.” And so, “when the Indians quietly removed” westward beyond the Purchase, “this fertile and beautiful region was opened to white settlers.” Although skating on the thin edge of admitting injustices, the *History* asserted in a burst of soothing rhetoric that “civilization’s advance guard came to occupy and develop the rich agricultural lands and exercise dominion in that part of the Black Hawk country included in Jefferson County.”<sup>118</sup>

The coming of militant white civilization to America and Iowa seemed to fulfill the purpose of both God and Nature. John B. Newhall, an early explorer and zealous promoter of Iowa settlement, wrote, in *A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846*, “It is not only the Garden of America, but of the world!” And he quoted Alexis de Tocqueville, “that learned French statesman”: “It is the most magnificent dwelling place prepared by God for the abode of man.” In 1870 Alexander R. Fulton, who had worked on the *Fairfield Ledger*, had been a Jefferson County surveyor for a dozen years, and was now Secretary of a new state promotional agency, wrote *Iowa: The Home for*

*Immigrants*. Like the Jefferson County *History*, he viewed European New World and Iowa settlement as resulting from the inevitable, natural march of civilization: "In some unknown age of the Past . . . Nature by some wise process, made a bountiful provision for the time when in the order of things, it should become necessary for civilized man to take possession of these broad rich prairies."<sup>119</sup>

The theme was entirely common. In 1866 author and poet Benjamin F. Taylor had viewed Iowa as "a splendid wilderness," as "just a part of God's uninhabited globe waiting for the coming men." Jefferson County pioneer John Williamson used a curious image in 1876 to describe the land before white men came: "It was a barren desert, inhabited by the deer, the buffalo, the prairie chicken and the wolf; and the wild Indian had dominion over all." Before the plow broke the prairie, that is, what would become a rich garden was merely "barren desert." The elder Henry Wallace, outlining civilization's progress out of savagery in an early-twentieth-century speech, "When God Made Iowa," referred to "this Mesopotamia of the New World, the country between the two great rivers, like the ancient paradise." And in his 1914 *History of Jefferson County, Iowa*, Charles J. Fulton believed "it was a time and place only for brave, resolute hearts and a hardy conquering race."<sup>120</sup>

Given great tracts of "vacant" land in Iowa and America, given such persistent and florid encouragement, no wonder nineteenth-century government land offices did a "land-office business." Characters in Ruth Suckow's Iowa novel, *New Hope*, "all felt excited by the fertility that lay around them, in the smooth high billows of dark-brown loessal soil: the deep fresh fertility, for centuries undisturbed—waiting for their own plows." And, "the smell of the earth was new. The light-blue sky had the freshness of morning. . . . New Hope wasn't built upon ruins . . . Their town was the first. It started history here." Iowa was surely God and Nature's New World.<sup>121</sup>

Adding a more important, more insightful personal dimension than all the florid publicists was a pioneer Jefferson County woman, Clarinda Ellmaker. Mrs. Ellmaker remembered "well the widow, two sons, and daughter of Black Hawk . . . She recalls with sympathetic sadness the wailings of the Indians as they were pushed farther west after the Agency treaty, and their all-night dirge dances. They lamented most for their dead that they were leaving behind." Some sympathetic whites, however, thought the Indians would be better leaving the Agency, which in fact had been partly built in 1838 by "a considerable number of slaves, both men and women" a Missouri contractor brought in. During the 1842 treaty negotiations, "a

motley throng: literally hundreds of gamblers, bootleggers, outlaws, free lance traders . . . were in search of . . . easy money.” The Congregational missionary, B.A. Spalding, thought, “If these people could be placed forever beyond the reach of whiskey smugglers and other vicious men, it would be a great blessing to them.” Although Kansas was not that haven, by mid-nineteenth century, Iowa from the Mississippi to the Missouri, apparently always sparsely populated, was almost entirely empty of Indians.<sup>122</sup>

In 1897 the *Fairfield Tribune* reported without irony that fifty Sac and Fox Indians, “a major attraction,” would attend, and then had attended, the Van Buren and Jefferson County Fairs. At Fairfield, “As soon as the Indians came into the grounds they were surrounded by a crowd of curious onlookers . . . It was truly very interesting as well as instructive to see them putting up their wigwams and preparing supper.” Their War Dance “hadn’t been seen since Black Hawk’s time.” After they had thrilled fairgoers with a peaceable war dance, presumably the fifty were returned expeditiously to their reservation. No hard feelings? In 1920 at Fairfield’s Old Settlers’ Celebration, Mesquakie Indians from the Tama, Iowa, reservation, performed both a War Dance and a Peace Dance.<sup>123</sup>

Within a few decades of the Indians’ defeat and the Old Settlers’ triumph in Iowa and elsewhere, appeared “a sensational melo drama in life motion pictures, entitled the *Cowboy’s Revenge*, depicting with startling realism the massacre of several cowboys and the abduction of a ranchman’s wife and child, by a band of Indians led by a white renegade.” Many such motion pictures, and many more potboiler books, would continue to “educate” Jefferson County residents, other Americans, and people worldwide, concerning Indian ways. Although Jo could not remember playing “Cowboys and Indians,” this would become an instructive game that innumerable children played everywhere.<sup>124</sup>

Even by 1863, however, Joe and Sarah Steele had nothing to fear from Indians. It was true that just the year before, Minnesota reservation Indians, cheated, starving, and hopeless, had massacred dozens of whites. But the U.S. Army had quickly hanged dozens, had moved the

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 5,000 Soldiers, 3,000 Indians. Battles of Wounded Knee, Summit Springs, Etc.  
**Approved by the U. S. Government**  
 Eldon Forum, January 14, 1915



remnant westward, where hundreds more had starved. And in 1864 the distant Colorado state militia would ignore a flag of truce and massacre 150 defenseless Indians, mostly children and women, at Sand Creek. Iowa's Indians had been removed years earlier, and in 1870 the government declared Iowa's frontier officially closed.

### **Two Miles an Hour, Perhaps Twenty Miles a Day**

For perhaps three weeks after leaving southeastern Indiana in the fall of 1863, Sarah and Joe were up at daybreak or before seven days a week, after camping out under the wagon or sleeping on the load in the wagon alongside roads either dusty or muddy. On clear fall nights, sleeping under the stars after lanterns were out and campfires had gone to banked coals might have been an awesome experience; but as country folk before electricity dimmed the night, they would have been accustomed to "the glory of the heavenly firmament."

Perhaps sometimes they slept in an inn or hospitable farmer's house or barn, as travelers often did. An earlier emigrant to "loway" in 1839 to Van Buren County near the confluence of Lick Creek and the Des Moines River, only a few miles southeast of Joe and Sarah's destination, was Kitturah Penton Belknap. Her diary details the routine her family and countless others followed for decades. "We camped out every night, took our flour and meat with us and were at home. Every night cooked our suppers and slept in our wagon. We had a dutch oven and skillet, teakettle and coffee pot, and when I made bread I made 'salt rising'." Kittie would mix bread dough after evening meal, leave it to rise, tend to it again about midnight, and in the morning before cooking breakfast would put the dough in the lidded cast-iron Dutch oven. After breakfast, "we had nice coals," upon which she set the oven, "and by the time I got things washed up and packed up and the horses were ready the bread would be done and we would go on our way rejoicing." As early as 1839 the Belknaps could buy provisions at farmhouses along the way, "a head of cabbage, potatoes, a dozen eggs or a pound of butter, some hay and a sack of oats" for the horses. Hay and oats, yes, for even by 1839, and certainly by 1863, westward routes across Indiana and Illinois were browsed clear of animal forage.<sup>125</sup>

In bad weather the Belknaps sometimes stayed with friendly folk where they "thawed some out a little and made coffee, and the kind lady put a skillet in the corner and made us a nice corn cake. We had bread, butter, good boiled ham and doughnuts." And then they bedded down on the kind lady's floor, and went to sleep rejoicing. Sometimes hosts, who

didn't know such travelers from "Adam's off-ox" (a phrase for a person or thing that cannot be identified), allowed them to pay something, sometimes not. Even if a little money was involved, it was a good deal for both parties. By the time Joe and Sarah Steele moved out, there were even some organized camps for travelers. In 1862 Mary Alice Shutes, age thirteen, wrote romantically of moving with her family "to the west," to "the Promised Land out in loway, the Indian Country." Her diary celebrates "a shelter with a fireplace. It is a good place to camp. . . . First one in Illinois and best one yet." The local "Store Keep" had thought a free sheltered campsite would bring good business. Sometimes camping at a busy spot, as at Mississippi River crossings, cost money.<sup>126</sup>

Like other emigrants, Joe and Sarah Steele dusted or mudded along at an average of perhaps two miles an hour, perhaps twenty miles a day, maybe more in the dry, maybe not at all in heavy rain. They camped or sheltered; Sarah cooked twice a day over open fires and washed clothes when she could. (As Mary Alice Shutes wrote without irony, "Mother Ann and me rested up by washing up things that needed it.") Joe checked his horses' hooves, shoes, and harness daily; tightened bolts and canvas that had rattled loose. Wagon wheel hubs that squeaked got the grease. They forded (crossed) some creeks still unbridged in 1863 and rumbled across wooden bridges over the sizeable Wabash and Illinois Rivers. They jolted across the raw construction of about a dozen new railway lines in Indiana and Illinois (lines "literally swarming with troops moving to important points southward"—There's a war on you know). They consulted their often-untrustworthy map, asked other travelers and locals for advice on road and bridge conditions, bought supplies from "store keeps" and farm wives. Two weeks or so from Mudlick, on the east bluffs, they viewed the mighty Mississippi. A daunting passage, they may have thought, lay ahead, but one that many thousands of pioneers had been making for years.<sup>127</sup>

One earlier pioneer, a young boy in 1837, recalled, "Our wagon was driven onto a flatboat . . . about thirty feet long and twelve feet wide. There were two sets of row locks on each side, one man to each oar. A man stood at the stern with a long steering oar . . . Getting on the boat was quite a job, for there were a great many families waiting . . . Each man who crossed helped to row . . . The rapid current carried us down stream, and . . . it was nearly always necessary for the men to jump ashore . . . and tow the boat back up stream to the landing." Once across, "axletrees were tarred, linchpins carefully adjusted; feather beds, blankets, pots and skillets, the axes and rifles loaded in. These were indispensable, . . . and [there were] really few other things to care for." After climbing the bluffs out of the valley,

“we found a mere trail. Every step of the way was on wild prairie soil.”<sup>128</sup>

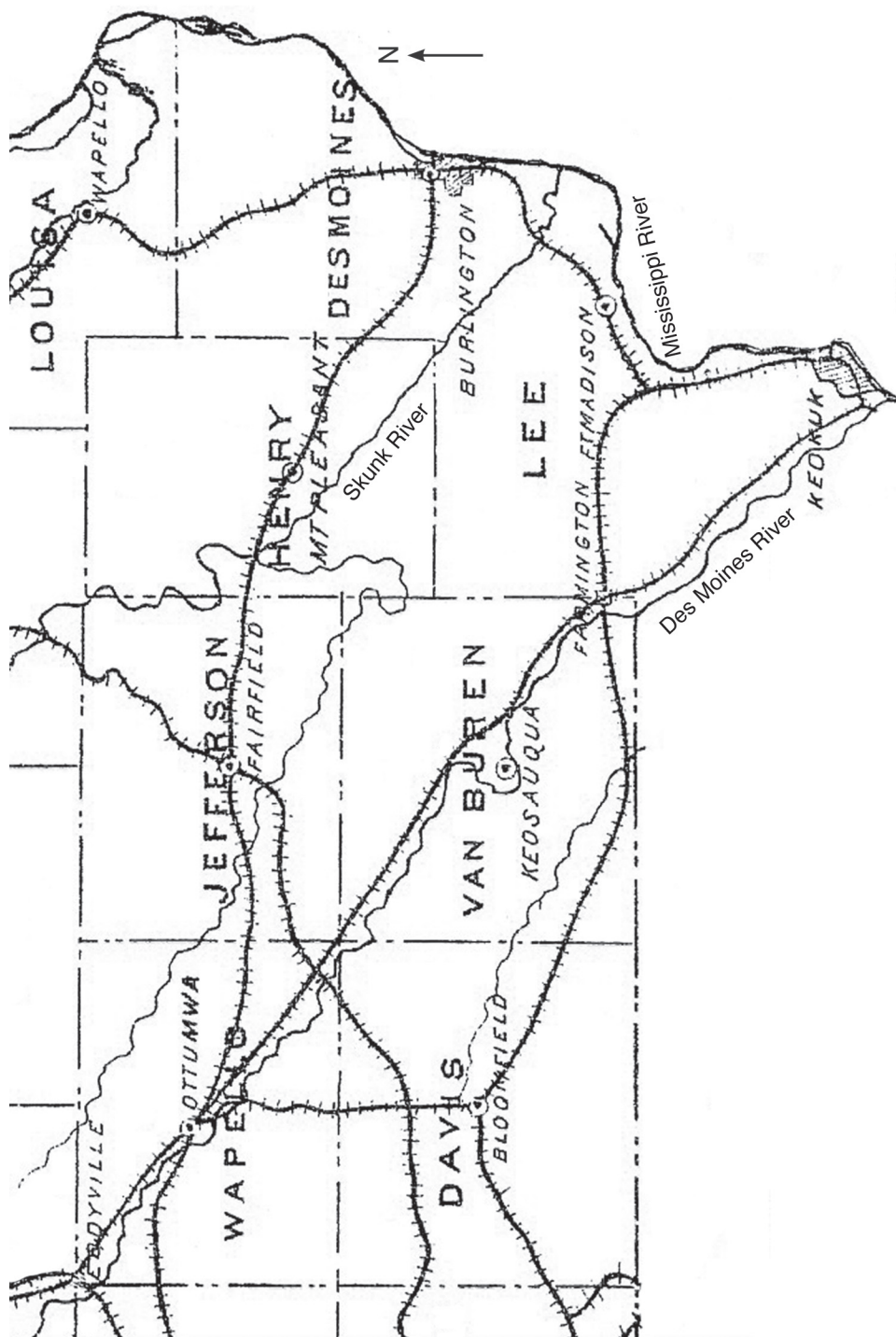
Twenty-five years later, railroads had bridged the river in a few places, but covered wagons and livestock still had to be ferried. Steam ferries had, however, almost replaced manpower at the oars, and the passage turned out to be hardly daunting at all. After paying ferry fees, after Sarah Elizabeth at least was scared by certain fellow travelers (granddaughter Josephine recited from family lore), with no worries about Indians, but with winter coming on, they hurried their well-worn wagon along the rutted way.<sup>129</sup>

Their trail passed through gently rolling land, sticking to the high ground as much as possible, with Des Moines River slopes to their left, the Skunk River’s miles to their right. This southeastern Iowa land was glacial Drift Plain, older enough than northern Iowa glaciation to be well drained, with few bogs, swamps, or potholes, with relatively flat, high tablelands cut by well-defined creek and river drainage systems. Joe and Sarah’s northwesterly route, probably up from Keokuk, or perhaps Fort Madison, passed through wide prairies and through small woodlands as well, particularly along the southeasterly flowing streams and ditches they had to jolt and muck across when bridges were absent or washed out. Until finally and at last, perhaps three days from the Mississippi if the weather was good, four or so otherwise, this latter day contingent of civilization’s advance guard arrived in Des Moines Township, Jefferson County, Iowa.<sup>130</sup>

The advance guard was not alone. Young and excited Mary Alice Shutes had been disappointed in 1862 for “covered wagons are too common to attract attention any more.” All the way from Indiana Joe and Sarah had had plenty of company. All the way up from the Mississippi they had seen the prairie dotted with farmsteads—and not all of them new and raw. As Iowa land had been coerced or treated from the Indians—often a simultaneous process—eager settlers from the mid-1830s on, most early emigrants from Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, had pushed to the limits of treaty boundaries, and often had squatted beyond. The later famous Oklahoma “Sooners” were hardly unique in the history of western expansion, for, in America, Eden always beckoned westward, just ahead of the pioneer.<sup>131</sup>

Drawn by fertile land that seemed to deserve utopian rhetoric, land that in years to come would be almost entirely farmed, settlers had begun filling the territory and then-state of Iowa with amazing but understandable rapidity following the Black Hawk Purchase. A few dozen in 1833 had ballooned to somewhat over 10,000 in 1836, to about 675,000 in 1860. In Illinois and Indiana during Iowa’s early years, John Newhall saw “the roads literally lined with the long blue wagons of the emigrant,” saw “cattle





Southeast Iowa map, late-nineteenth century

and hogs, men and dogs, and frequently women and children . . . often ten, twenty, and thirty wagons in company,” headed for “the ‘Black Hawk Purchase’.”<sup>132</sup>



Street scene, Brighton, Iowa. Courtesy of Fairfield Public Library

### **The Great Iowa Railroad Boom**

Wagon trains brought people, yes, but other trains accelerated Iowa's development. Federal land grants of four million acres heavily subsidized a great railroad boom in Iowa from the 1850s. Promoters then sold their free land to speculators and settlers for several dollars an acre. Such easy profits capitalized the development of roadbed and rolling stock—and lined the pockets of insiders. Desirable land at reasonable prices enticed a population that would produce crops for railroads to haul and be a market for finished goods that railroads would haul. Prospective farmers would of course pay to ride to their land, emigrants from the East, immigrants from Europe. The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad (CB&Q) had publicity offices in England and Scotland. In the 1850s various lines stretched from Chicago, were impeded by the Mississippi, but by 1860 had bridged that water in several places, the first at Davenport in 1856. By 1869 the Union Pacific and Central Pacific had united America's oceans. As had the telegraph, whose wires paralleled the railroads and, Alexander R. Fulton noted in a memorable phrase, flashed across the miles “the live lightning of our thought.”<sup>133</sup>

Serious railroad talk in Jefferson County had begun in 1848 and 1849. As early as August 1853 local citizens were taking stock in the proposed “Burlington and Missouri Railroad.” Of \$100,000 pledged, \$30,000

was collected eventually; by February 1854 engineers were surveying; on September 1, 1858, the first train arrived at Fairfield station.<sup>134</sup>

That auspicious day “was ushered in at sunrise by the firing of a cannon, which continued every half-hour until 10 o’clock,” and then every ten minutes to the crowd’s delight. “At 11 a.m. a train of 17 cars filled with military and fire companies and citizens from Burlington and Mt. Pleasant, also several bands from those cities pulled into the city.” “The military fired salutes. The fire companies ‘squirted’ water to the astonishment and delight of the quiet country people who had never witnessed such exhibitions before.” It was a dress-up occasion, with professional men, and even many farmers, in silk hats, and women dressed to match, with the whole countryside attending, with picnic tables circling the circular central park, with “two mammoth pyramidal cakes . . . prepared by the ladies.” There were inevitable speeches by important businessmen and bankers, with toasts all around to “Iron,” “Steam and Electricity,” “The Iron Horse,” “The Burlington and Missouri Railroad Company,” “Agriculture,” and a dozen others. The first toast, an attendee remembered, was to “Iron, the metal which transcends in value the finest gold: Its magic tissues make distant nations neighbors”—this reference not only to rails but to the new Atlantic Ocean-spanning telegraph cable. There was even a toast to “Woman—May her virtues be as large as her hoops and her imperfections as small as her bonnet.” “In the evening a grand ball came off at Wells’ new hall at which one hundred couples [no doubt by invitation only] were present.”<sup>135</sup>

On November 11 the *Ledger* reported “The cars have made two regular daily trips to and from Burlington since the first of September with two or three exceptions, and is doing a large amount of business. The officers are all very clever and obliging gentlemen, and every effort is made to render passengers comfortable and the greatest care taken of stock. The track is laid to Cedar, six miles west of us. It was the intention to complete it to Agency City this fall; but owing to the continued bad state of the weather, we incline to the opinion that the cars will not run any further than Fairfield this winter.”

The next year, however, track was extended through Batavia to Ottumwa, at one place on and paralleling the south property line of the farm Jo Curtis and her husband would one day own. At Batavia, halfway between Fairfield and Ottumwa, “My, the crowds that came to see the first train go through. They came in wagons, horseback, with oxen and many on foot. It was a day I shall never forget,” recalled Mrs. J. V. Clark many years later. Mrs. Von Holtschuherr remembered that in Ottumwa

on that fall day celebrants up from Burlington had come in two “sections.” “Each section had two of the old-fashioned, brass-covered, wood-burning engines. They were all trimmed up beautifully with flags, flowers and green branches and the brass trimmings glistened like gold . . . There was one private coach from Boston bringing stockholders and officers from that city [which illustrates the common fact of Eastern investment in Iowa railroads]. Some were accompanied by their wives and families . . . An immense crowd gathered at Colligan’s grove east of Ottumwa, where two oxen, two sheep and two hogs had been prepared for a barbecue. Seven bands entertained the people.” This for the common folk, some of whom had come from Burlington on flatcars that left passengers unprotected from live locomotive cinders and the hot sun. One contemporary account noted that the flatcar train resembled “the moving wood that Shakespeare tells about in *Macbeth*,” because “each passenger carried a tree branch with green leaves for protection against the sun.” Invited Fairfield guests rode an “immense train” of thirty flatcars “drawn by two engines, which, once everyone had enjoyed a day’s worth of being fed and feted, returned them to Fairfield by seven that evening.”<sup>136</sup>

For stockholders and other movers and shakers, “a banquet was served by P.G. Ballingall in the uncompleted . . . freight depot,” a banquet culminating in “a layer cake built up like a pyramid about two feet high and topped by a Goddess of Liberty.” The night, “until broad daylight, was given up to general merrymaking and dancing.” The railroad had advanced rapidly westward, but as Civil War smoldered and flamed, Iowa railroad building languished. The Burlington would not resume westward ‘til 1865.<sup>137</sup>

This little railroad, the Burlington and Missouri, so intensely needed, so lusciously celebrated, was replaced eventually by the great Chicago, Burlington and Quincy, which built a double-

Burlington & Missouri River Railroad.			
CHANGE OF TIME.			
On and after Tuesday, January 5th, 1864, and until further notice, Passenger Trains will leave and arrive as follows:			
GOING WEST.			
STATIONS.	MIXED.	EXPRESS.	
Burlington,	6:00 A.M.	11:00 A.M.	
Middletown,	6:49	11:36	
Danville,	7:13	11:47	
New London,	7:48	12:07 P.M.	
Mt. Pleasant,	8:26	12:35	
Chenauqua,	9:15	1:08	
Glendale,	9:45	1:29	
Fairfield,	10:33	1:57	
Whitfield,	10:59	2:12	
Batavia,	11:27	2:31	
Agency City,	12:02 P.M.	2:56	
Ottumwa,	12:25	3:15	
GOING EAST.			
STATIONS.	EXPRESS.	MIXED.	
Ottumwa,	1:00 P.M.	3:00 A.M.	
Agency City,	1:22	3:34	
Batavia,	1:46	4:05	
Whitfield,	2:12	4:37	
Fairfield,	2:34	5:10	
Glendale,	3:02	5:47	
Chenauqua,	3:31	6:25	
Mt. Pleasant,	4:04	7:10	
New London,	5:32	7:48	
Danville,	4:54	8:20	
Middletown,	5:06	8:36	
Burlington,	5:40	9:00	
H. THIELSEN, Superintendent.			

Fairfield Ledger, January 7, 1864



track roadbed that, west of Batavia, ran south of the original. Just east of Agency City—near the old Indian Agency—in the month Josephine Teeter was born in 1903 the new tracks were opened, passing the grave of Chief Wapello, as they would a century and more later.<sup>138</sup>

Typically, the hard, really hard, work of laying, and often maintaining, Burlington track fell primarily not to local labor but to imported (and segregated) Poles, Italians, Greeks, Mexicans, and Negroes. The *Fairfield Weekly Journal* noted in 1900 that “Negroes will be employed to a greater extent than Italians. . . . The contractor said that the Negroes are more faithful and intelligent workers than are the Italians and they are much more easily controlled.” The open practice of pitting ethnic and national groups against each other was evident as well on the road that became the Rock Island. Housed in sixteen boxcars at Fairfield in 1907 were a couple hundred Mexicans who were “engaged in spreading stone ballast on the tracks between Skunk River and Centerville.” *Fairfield Ledger* editors noted that the Rock Island “experiment” of hiring 6,000 Mexicans had been successful, for they were better than “European” workers, “quiet and orderly and sober, much better than other foreigners.”<sup>139</sup>

Although staunchly Republican and generally supportive of management, the *Ledger* in 1906 nevertheless editorialized that “The law limiting the day of labor of railway employees to sixteen hours is now in effect.” This would reduce workers’ wages, “but it may save mistakes of overworked men and bring greater safety to the traveling public.” Thus, the law was approved as protecting the public, and as a loss (in wages) rather than a gain (in safety) for workers.<sup>140</sup>

Fairfield flourished because of its railroad, but by September 29, 1870, the “Chicago and Southwest Railroad,” later the fabled Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific, which the Civil War had halted at Washington, Iowa, had also reached town—with appropriate celebration of “the great event of the cars of the C&SWRR crossing the B&MRR.” By late October the road had extended southwesterly through Libertyville and County Line to what was called “Ashland Station,” which would grow to be Eldon, the railroad being only a few miles from Joe Steele’s land. For the two roads, county citizens had raised more than a quarter of a million dollars, \$135,000 for the Chicago and Southwest. Railroads promised, of course, transportation of finished goods—necessities and luxuries—to the region. They hauled coal, lumber, groceries, tobacco, clothing, pianos, farm machinery, wagons and buggies, hardware, woven and barbed wire fencing (barb wire, Bob wire, “Devil’s Rope”), and much more. Railroads transported farm produce—livestock, chickens, grain, cream, even wild game. Railroads made the

difference between subsistence and commercial farming, allowed farmers for good or ill to enter the market economy. Thus early enthusiasm. Farmers, increasingly able to produce abundantly because of such new machines as grain drills, binders, steam engines, and threshing machines, also increasingly had to be able to transport floods of grain and livestock, or all else was useless.<sup>141</sup>

In novelist Herbert Quick's *Vandemark's Folly*, a character exclaims, "The railroads are coming . . . and they will bring you coal and wood and everything you want. They are racing for the crossings of the Mississippi. Soon they will reach the Missouri—and some day they will cross the continent to the Pacific . . . Towns! Cities! Counties! States! We are pioneers; but civilization is treading on our heels." Newspapers of the era, including Jefferson County's, were filled with railroad news—schedules and schemes and money raising and actual building.<sup>142</sup>

News also appeared of injured employees, especially of deadly injuries to brakemen. Before automatic couplers were developed and required in the 1890s, a brakeman had to stand between two cars and couple them by hand. Before air brakes were developed, also in the 1890s, a brakeman had to operate mechanical brakes from the top of each car. Not until 1907 did federal law require air brakes on every car. Grisly reports were common, as when young brakeman David Burkholder was, headlines blared, "Cut To Pieces" after falling between Rock Island cars north of Fairfield. News appeared regularly also about injuries and deaths of creatures. Train engines had "cowcatchers" up front, looming over the oncoming track for good reason, although "cowkillers" would have been more exact. Or "horsekillers," as when "Five horses of Samuel Black were killed by the cars at the crossing west of County Line store." News stories, inexcusably graphic from a later point of view, reported on hoboes, drunks, suicides, and upright citizens alike who were sliced in two, decapitated, or mangled horribly by the wheels. Perhaps as stunning as graphic descriptions, were cold statistics. The new Interstate Commerce Commission reported that throughout the country, in 1888, one of every 375 railroad employees had been killed, one of every thirty-five injured. In the year ending June 1897, 1,693 employees were killed, 27,667 injured; that is, one of every 486 employees was killed, one of every thirty injured. In 1904 railroad employees who had been killed totaled 3,367. In 1912 the Interstate Commerce Commission reported 3,633 had been killed, and an incredible 142,442 injured.<sup>143</sup>

Another common story, although less traumatic, appeared in the *Fairfield Tribune*: "What might have been a fatal accident occurred last



Thursday night near County Line station on the Rock Island Road. As an apple hauler was driving across the track . . . his horses became frightened and shied to one side . . . the wagon was caught by the engine and was badly demolished. The driver crawled out from the debris with no worse injuries than some severe bruises. Horses were badly bruised and harness was used up. As many as a bushel or two of apples were found on the engine when it reached Eldon.” For years, spirited horses and steam engine trains roaring and whistling down the tracks did not mingle well.<sup>144</sup>



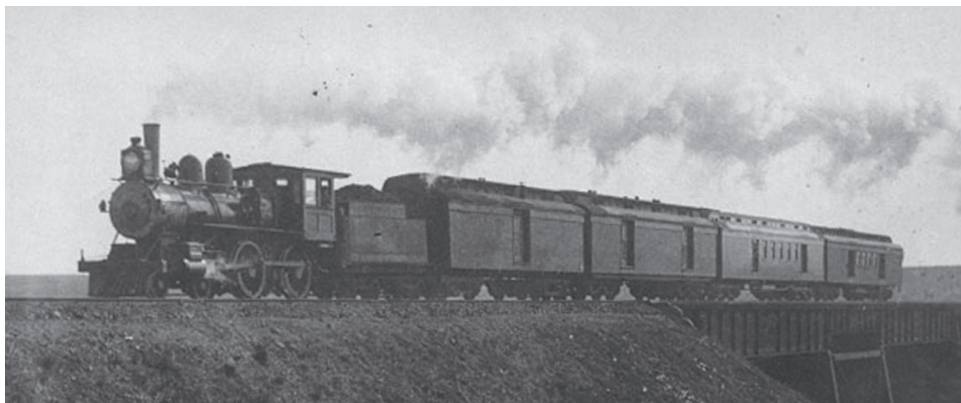
Eldon Rock Island Depot. Courtesy of Ottumwa Public Library

Despite the toll in human and animal life, Iowans, certainly those inland from Mississippi-Missouri River shipping, seemed to accept the railroad as a necessary cure for the region’s isolation and consequent economic ills. Railroads sped produce and passengers from place to place. In 1887 the Rock Island advertised that its passenger trains averaged thirty-three miles per hour, including stops, between Chicago and Kansas City. In 1890 the CB&Q boasted that riders could have “Strawberries and cream for dinner in Chicago, mush and milk for supper in Fairfield, made possible by the new quick time passenger runs.” The *Fairfield Tribune* reported in 1897 that a CB&Q train had made a record run of more than a thousand miles from Chicago to Denver at nearly sixty miles per hour, so as to rush a father to his dying son’s bedside. Railroads offered both speed and luxury, for the affluent. In 1898, the CB&Q offered four new trains with Pullman sleeping cars, compartment cars, and “a composite car having smoking room, bath and barber shop, reclining chair cars and a diner.”<sup>145</sup>

Affluent Americans could now have luxury at speed, but speed—not only on the rails—could be democratic (and dangerous) as well. In 1890 the *Fairfield Tribune* editorialized against “Reckless Cycling,” noting numerous accidents and even deaths “through people being ridden over by cyclists,” with “excessive speed as the prime cause.” In 1914 “Miss Wilma Duncan of Columbus Junct., was . . . run down by a bicycle on the sidewalks. Her collar bone was fractured in two places and several ribs broken.” And yet in 1894 eight hundred spectators turned out for a “Bicycle Tournament” at the

Jefferson County Fairgrounds, to enjoy vicariously the thrill of “excessive speed.” Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Thomas B. Reed said rather tongue-in-cheek that the American people’s greatest problem was “How to dodge a bicycle.”<sup>146</sup>

People in a hurry sometimes warned about the dangers of railroads, as of bicycles, but they seem overall to have been willing or resigned to bear unfortunate side effects of both. Americans had always wanted “spirited” horses that would “get out and go” —often with disastrous consequences. Latter-day Americans would view the automobile and the airplane and space travel in much the same way.



The Fast Mail. Courtesy of Fairfield Public Library

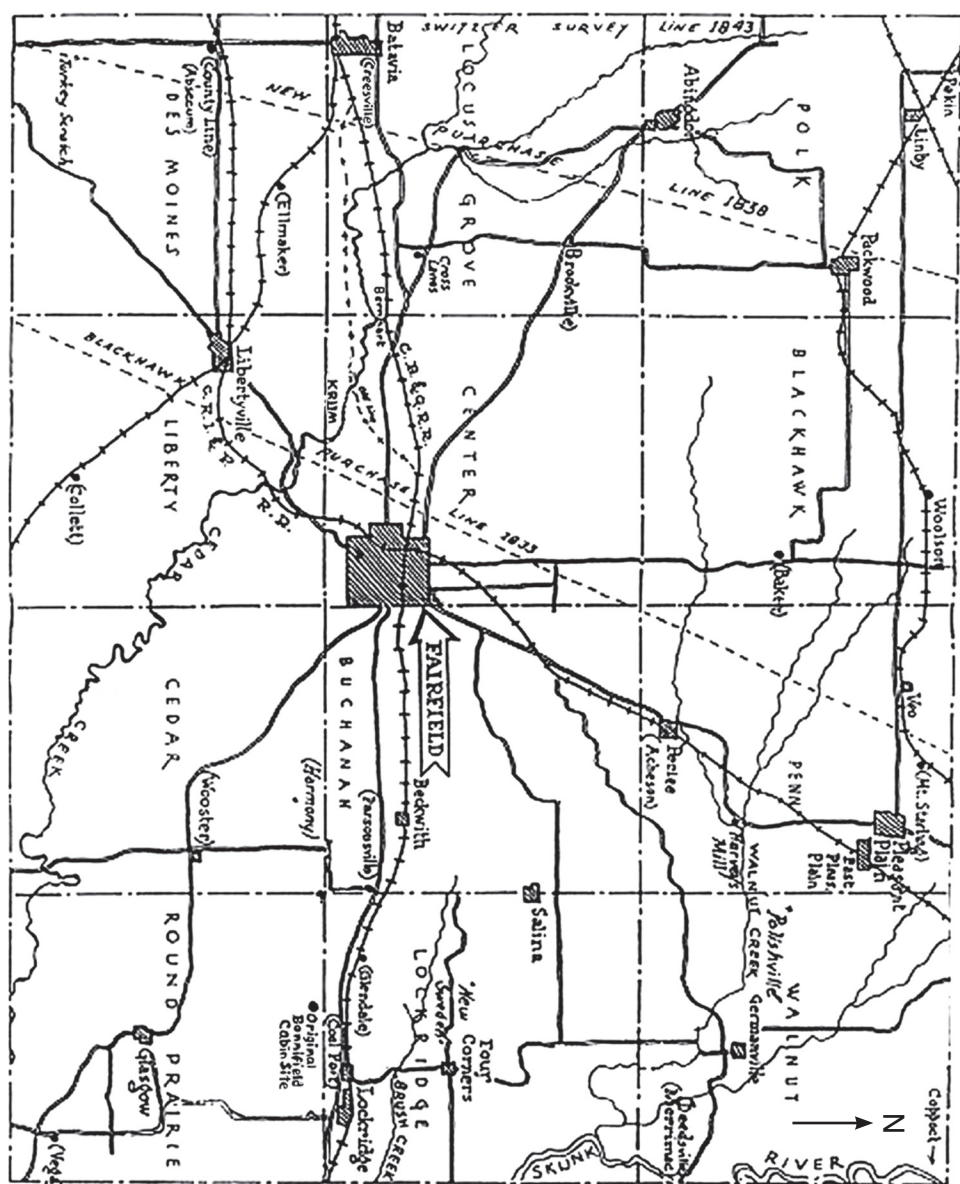
After initial enthusiasm over what railroads could do *for* them, midwestern farmers especially began to protest, and soon, against what railroads were doing *to* them, as agriculture found itself increasingly enmeshed in a developing national and international economic system to which transportation was central. Protest resulted from both the Credit Mobilier scandal of 1872 and from the panic of 1873, which resulted in part from runaway railroad speculation, combined with currency deflation and dropping agricultural produce prices. Farmers saw railroads as corrupt monopolies that could set haulage rates arbitrarily, especially for crops and livestock that could not easily or for long be withheld from markets. Farmers like Joe Steele were necessarily politicized. Back in Indiana, his parents, Joseph and Polly Steele, and his father-in-law, Enos Miles, were stalwart members of the Patrons of Husbandry, or “Grange,” a social and political organization with a major purpose, somewhat successful in some midwestern states, of lobbying for legislation to control railroad rates. As his Iowa neighbors would learn, Joe Steele took after his folks, perhaps not in the Grange, whose political clout soon declined, but certainly as an activist Democrat with certain Populist leanings.<sup>147</sup>

When latter day settlers Joe and Sarah Steele arrived by wagon in 1863—far less expensively than by rail—Jefferson County, after a quarter century of settlement, had a population of approximately 15,000, not many fewer than almost a century and a half later—approximately 17,000 in 2000. (In fact, by 1875 the county would have 17,127.) In 1863 the county had approximately as many cattle as people, but livestock numbers would grow as human population stabilized or declined.

Fairfield, the county seat, was a bustling commercial and railroading town of about 1,500 in these years of Civil War, but with no indication in *Fairfield Ledger* advertisements of shortages of any sort. Offerings abounded of farming and building equipment and supplies, of textile “dry goods,” and certainly of enough patent medicines to dose the entire county into superb health—or into “kingdom come.” On the town square surrounding circular Central Park were an occasional brick but primarily wooden frame structures. On the north side of the square counterclockwise from the northeast corner, notable buildings were the frame National hotel and other frame stores; across the alley to the west a bakery and a three story brick with first floor shop, tailor on second, lodgings on third; on the west side of the square were Dr. Clarke’s drug store in a two story brick, a row of frames, south of the alley the Jefferson house hotel and William Alston’s grocery; on the south side of the square, a corner brick building with Dr. Meyers “in the eye-tooth corner,” another frame grocery, second floor printing office, “the democratic paper,” and other frame and brick businesses across the alley. Beyond the square to the east was the Leggett hotel. Completing the square on the east were a dry goods store, second floor offices, another drug store, a hardware store, and a three-story brick business and office building. A few businesses, including a Daguerreotype photographer, blacksmith shop, saloons, and even a bowling alley, were on side streets. The two story brick courthouse and the jail were a block north of the square, and north of that a depot for Fairfield’s prize railroad. On hitching racks around the park were saddle horses, and horse and ox teams with wagons, buggies, and carriages.<sup>148</sup>



When Fairfield’s Square was a Circle, 1865.  
Courtesy of Fairfield Public Library

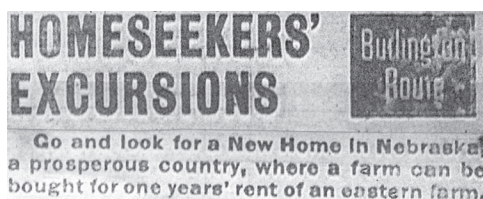


Jefferson County map, 1894

## Grass in Places Taller than Tall Joe

In 1863 Des Moines Township, the newlyweds' destination, had about 1,300 people, surprisingly more than in 1890 or in 1900 when the census would be under a thousand and declining, and with tenant farming increasing. In 1880 about 25 percent of Iowa farmers were renters, by 1920 over 40 percent. From 1880 to 1890 Jefferson County lost over 2,300 people. Why such a decline? In part because increasing mechanization required fewer farm hands. In part because people moved on, the landless hoping for cheaper land yet farther west, the landed perhaps selling at a profit and hoping to buy a bigger spread out on the edge. In part because that's what Americans did—kept moving West, the direction in which hope moved. The *Fairfield Tribune* argued that the West had been “overboomed” by railroads and realtors, both hoping to stir up land sales. In spring 1887 the paper had urged, “Young Man, Stay In Iowa.” But in that same period, it reported “a half dozen families in the vicinity of Libertyville leave Tuesday for Sherman County, Kansas,” and “quite a numerous exodus . . . is occurring now” for Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado. *Tribune* editors and other local boomers would have enjoyed immensely a reputed Nebraska sign: “This claim for sale. Four miles to the nearest neighbor. Seven miles to the nearest schoolhouse. Fourteen miles to the nearest town. Two hundred feet to the nearest water. God bless our home! For further information address Thomas Ward, Oskaloosa, Iowa.” By midsummer 1887 the paper was able triumphantly to note, “an emigrant ‘schooner’ passed through Burlington a few days ago, headed east bearing a large placard upon which was feelingly inscribed:

Farewell to Kansas and Nebraska,  
We bid you both adieu.  
We may emigrate to hell someday,  
But never back to you.<sup>149</sup>



*Fairfield Weekly Ledger*, Sept. 28, 1898

That was 1887. In fall 1863, however, when Joe and Sarah Elizabeth arrived, the population drain had not begun, and their own land awaited, from which there is no evidence they were ever inclined to roam. Not after they saw it. What they saw that early October day was rolling, well-drained land, undeveloped, unbroken by any plow. It was unmarked except possibly for a rutted trail from east to west, and corner stakes or



blazed trees marking their 160 acres, Section 22, Township 71, Range 11, elevation 700-750' above sea level at the Gulf of Mexico. An early surveyor had described land in their vicinity as rolling dry prairie with "good second rate" soil. And that must have seemed good enough to Joe and Sarah. Almost thirty years later, in 1892, Jefferson County's Hiram Heaton wrote, "It is doubtful if anywhere on the face of the globe, within the limited space of eighteen by twenty-four miles, as many natural advantages for man's comfort and welfare can be found as are massed in Jefferson county." In fall 1863 Joe and Sarah probably would have agreed.<sup>150</sup>

On their new land that triumphant day, they saw golden and russet and red fall colors coming on in the groves of hickories and oaks to the east and west of their land; in the willows and cottonwoods and sumac and buckbrush along the watercourses. And, on the prairie high ground where they would live and work, they saw golden brown colors in the big bluestem grass, which was sometimes called blue joint or turkey foot for its three branching seed heads; grass in places taller than tall Joe.

In the spring of the year the prairie would be, in the eyes of Herbert Quick's protagonist Jacobus Vandemark, in *Vandemark's Folly*, "like a great green sea" composed of many dozens of grasses and flowers. Early pioneer Mary Ann Ferrin Davidson wrote that "The beautiful rolling prairies covered with luxurious grass lay stretched . . . as far as eye could reach, with here and there a



"Turkey Foot" Bluestem  
Prairie Grass

belt of timber which marked some watercourse." And Joanna Harris Haines recalled "the magnificence of the wild flowers that made the prairies . . . one gorgeous mass of variant beauty," lavender blazing star, white tufted rattlesnake master, prairie roses, black-eyed susans galore. Even more specifically, C. V. Finley recalled a riot of flowers—buttercup, windflower, violets blue and yellow, iris, yellow star grass, cone flower, Sweet William, upland lily, sheep and wood sorrel, goldenrod, asters, lady's slipper.<sup>151</sup>

Prairie grass was no longer intimidating or indicative of poor soil, as it had been to earlier settlers breaking through the forested Appalachians onto the prairies, but was now inviting. As had his father and grandfathers in Indiana, and his uncles in Iowa, Joe Steele, sodbuster, would seek prairie gold under upturned big bluestem roots. Or, perhaps more likely since he

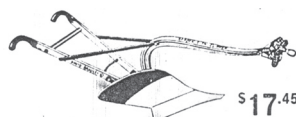


probably now regretted lacking oxen to pull a heavy breaking plow, he may have hired the first hard turning of bluestem roots to “break out” the prairie, paying a couple of dollars an acre to a neighbor who still had yokes of oxen (a yoke is a pair of oxen). Pioneer Kitty Belknap remembered hiring a “breaking team . . . five yoke of oxen with a man to hold the plough and a good-sized boy with a long whip to drive the oxen.” To Herbert Quick’s fictional Vandemark, surely more poetic and perhaps more insightful than most pioneers, “Breaking prairie was the most beautiful, the most epochal, and most hopeful, and as I look back at it, in one way the most pathetic thing man ever did, for in it, one of the loveliest things ever created began to come to its predestined end.”<sup>152</sup>

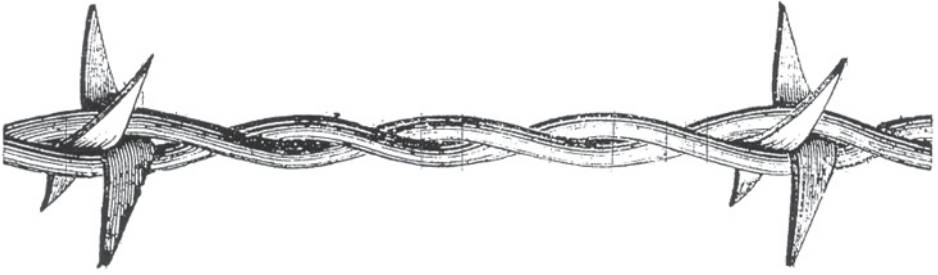
Whether Joe Steele felt at all like Vandemark, he would soon be raising in that rich upturned prairie soil corn, oats, and some potatoes, perhaps some wheat and rye, even a little sorghum for molasses, if he didn’t buy it from a neighbor. Soon, but long before hybrid seed and commercial fertilizers were developed, corn

would average a gratifying forty bushels an acre. Remnants of the original rank prairie grass, some kept for horse hay, some left in swales and fence rows, could be a fire hazard, as it often spectacularly was in northwest Iowa and other treeless prairie areas. Vilhelm Möberg imagines emigrants to whom “it seemed as if God’s heaven was burning that night, and a burning heaven is an awesome sight.” Less spectacularly, “Joe Steele set some stubble on fire one day, and there being a high wind, blew the fire into his fence, which was rail, and burned nearly eighty rods.” In nearby Van Buren County when a man’s rail fence had blown down, friends had asserted that the Good Lord was punishing him for being both a Unitarian and a Democrat. Joe Steele’s enemies may have said his fire burned for a godless Democrat—but that is another and later story.<sup>153</sup>

In the year his rail fence burned—which probably impelled him to build fairly newfangled (and fairly expensive) barbed wire fencing—we know what major crops Joe raised, their acreage, and estimated yield. Mr. Steele, among many others, answered a *Fairfield Tribune* questionnaire. On his 160 acres in 1889 he had twenty-two acres of oats at forty bushels per acre, a good crop; thirty acres of hay, yielding a ton and a half an acre, a fair crop; twenty-two acres of corn, which he predicted would yield thirty-five bushels an acre, a decent crop. Probably like almost all of his neighbors, he had other small garden plots, but about half his land was in pasture for cattle, horses, and other livestock. By 1889 almost no one



14-inch WALKING PLOW  
“Walking plow,” *Batavia News*, April 2, 1936



Barbed wire, *Fairfield Tribune*, March 20, 1879

in school district #6, Des Moines Township, was trying wheat; some were raising timothy grass for hay and seed to sell; several raised small plots of rye; almost everyone raised an acre or two or three of potatoes; two farmers had thriving apple orchards; and one reported picking forty gallons of blackberries from thirty domesticated hills.<sup>154</sup>

In these early years mixed farming dominated in Joe Steele's neighborhood, as Iowa's 1875 Census illustrated. Des Moines Township had almost a thousand horses and mules, more than 2,500 cattle, almost 5,000 sheep, almost 10,000 hogs. In addition to a much wider range of field crops than a century and more later, orchards in 1875 had almost 9,000 apple trees, almost 3,000 cherry trees, and many fewer peach, plum, and pear trees. In addition to the dominant potato, gardens yielded sweet potatoes, onions, beets, turnips, peas, and beans. Grapevines there were, but almost no wine production.

### **The Steele's Prairie Farm, Ollie's Birthplace**

In groves skirting Joe and Sarah Steele's upland prairie when they arrived in 1863, especially to the northeast and east across Lick Creek, in addition to shagbark hickory and varieties of oak, could be found elm, ash, black walnut, cherry, cottonwood, willow, and maple both hard and soft. In 1846 Surveyor Paul C. Jeffries had judged "the timber bordering on the prairie" "rather poor," often with brushy undergrowth, including wild cherry, wild plum, and thorny crab apple. But even poor trees could become firewood and perhaps building material. Better to have well-watered, well-drained prairie, along with mixed lowland timber, rather than all of one and none of the other.

What Sarah and Joe breathed on their upland prairie was air most readers nowadays cannot imagine and can hardly experience. Theirs was air borne on winds that had blown across the salty Pacific, across a newly American Continent that seemed to transplants from crowded

Europe virtually empty of humans. It was air with intermingled hints of pine, fir, sage, buffalo, prairie grass, and prairie flowers. Air with less dust than later plowing would release. A continent to the west virtually empty of cities, with air not yet tainted by crude oil and internal combustion engines. There were some bituminous “coal banks” in the county—a dozen in 1875 according to the Iowa census—but, despite glowing predictions, productive only in a minor way in the early years, the mines pretty much played out by the turn of the century or a bit later, with minor exceptions. Jefferson was a couple of counties east and a tier north of John L. Lewis’ United Mine Worker country, in central southern Iowa. Even Wapello County, just to the west, had more coal. So theirs was pure air that Joe and Sarah could take for granted because they knew no other. Except indoor air, and that was quite a different matter.<sup>155</sup>

On the high ground above Lick Creek—named so because of salty deer licks along its banks—with long views to north, east, and south, and with a gentle upward slope to a westward tree line, was situated, according to Joe and Sarah’s daughter Ollie, a former log-trading post. Jeffries’ 1846 survey seems to support her memory. I suspect that at one time the old “Angling Road,” which followed an easy upward grade from Keokuk on the Mississippi in southeastern Iowa, paralleled the Lick Creek watercourse near Joe Steele’s land, and that Joe and Sarah Steele had followed it. From there, the road led on to Joseph Street’s Indian Agency five miles east of Ottumwa and a mile or so north of the Des Moines River. The Indian Agency had been established in 1838 as the Sac and Fox had been moved west out of Chief Black Hawk’s “Purchase” and Chief Keokuk’s “Reserve.” Joining that trail somewhere near and probably north of the trading post had been a later stagecoach route originating in Burlington and passing through Fairfield, Libertyville, Agency, and Oskaloosa before reaching Des Moines.<sup>156</sup>

Joe would have known the cabin was there, which may explain why the newlyweds had ventured out so late in the season, and soon a



A view from the approximate site of Joe and Sarah Steele’s log cabin

bad season at that. Charles J. Fulton writes, “The holidays were a season of intermittent storms. Heavy snowstorms were followed on December 31<sup>st</sup> by a raging blizzard. The cold was intense. The wind was terrible . . . . Roads were blockaded with impassable drifts. Trains were unable to move.” Sarah and Joe lived in that log cabin several years, their first three children being born there. Their firstborn, Charles Miles, at just under two, and their third, Mary Ann, at just over one, died there.<sup>157</sup>

One must wonder whether that cabin—probably dark, dank, and drafty, often filled with smoke from fireplace-chimney downdrafts—contributed to their deaths. Sarah suffered for years from what was believed to be asthma. Rebecca Teeter Wheeldon told of Grandma Sarah inhaling smoke from a burning substance on a tray (which could have been one of various asthma remedies—nitrate powders, cubeb (a pepper), stramonium (Jimson weed), even tobacco). Newspapers were laced with ads for all sorts of concoctions guaranteed to cure respiratory ills—consumption, diphtheria, coughs, colds, flu, asthma, and “bronchial affections.” Despite whatever remedies, Sarah would die after years of ill health of what was diagnosed as tuberculosis. In sixteen years of childbearing, she lost three; three survived. On midwestern prairies, as John Madson argues, because of overwork, and poor diet, clothing, and housing, respiratory illnesses—influenza, pneumonia, diphtheria—were killers among pioneers. As was tuberculosis. Josephine’s Mother Ollie, a fourth child, was apparently not born in the cabin, the Steeles apparently having a second dwelling by that time. Eventually, when Ollie was sixteen, Joe would hire a fine house built, where his family could live in healthier surroundings.<sup>158</sup>



Fannie Ulrica (Ollie) Steele

Joe Steele was a farmer, cattle dealer, and horse trader. That went with the territory when horses were the chief power source, and so he had learned to judge horseflesh at his father’s knee. With numerous horses, and at least one team of mules, he developed his farmland, upgraded his livestock, bought “some nice stock hogs,” began to have a reputation among local farmers and merchants. According to the 1880 U.S. Census, in Mr. Steele’s household, in addition to his wife and three children, were Josephine Sheets, 17, House Keeper; and Charles Olive, 16, Farm Laborer. Joe was able to display results of his and his wife’s work at least once

and perhaps more to his father and father-in-law, who came by train from Indiana. In 1878 ailing widower Joseph Steele stayed a declining time with his three children, Joe and sisters Kate Steele Wagner and Ann Steele Lane. He died in Iowa. In 1881 Enos Miles stayed briefly before visiting siblings in Wisconsin. All seemed well with Joe Steele and his family.<sup>159</sup>

### Tragedy, and a Fairfield Sojourn

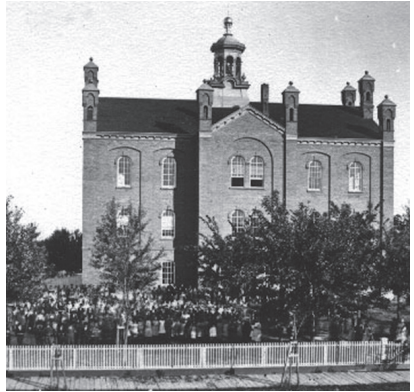
Then, on June 29, 1882, the *Fairfield Tribune* noted that the Peebler and Bennett families were “having diphtheria” and that “J.E. Steele has been having sickness in his family.” Two weeks later came news that Joe’s brother-in-law, sister, and nephew “of Fairfield, were suddenly called to the home . . . by the serious illness of Mr. Steele’s daughter, a mere child, afflicted with croup-diphtheria. Dr. Miller, of Libertyville, the attending physician, says he has no hopes of its recovery.” Lillie, not quite six, died on July 12 and was buried “in the Fell graveyard, about two miles southeast of Libertyville, by the side of her little brother and sister,” all with small identical soon-faded headstones.<sup>160</sup>

Joe Steele, according to granddaughter Josephine’s memory of what Ollie must have told her, could not bear to stay where his darling daughter Lillie had died. Within a few weeks of her passing appeared a newspaper report that “J.E. Steele thinks of leaving his farm and moving to Fairfield, his wife’s health being so poorly that a change from country to city life would do her good, she not being able to attend to the many trials as a farmer’s wife.” A week later Mrs. Steele, “ill for some time, . . . is now under medical treatment of Dr. Hayden, Libertyville.” Perhaps, like Joe, grief, not merely illness, overwhelmed Sarah. A month or so later, Joe had rented his farm to a Mr. Lemly. “We are sorry,” wrote the local correspondent, “to lose him, as he is one of our good farmers.” Early in 1883 the Steeles are reported to be moving, which they would have done by March 1.<sup>161</sup>

In those days before home delivery of mail required numbered houses, the Iowa 1885 Census has Joseph Steel, forty-seven, “Stock Dealer,” on what would later be called Washington Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets. He bought cattle for a man named Light, with a “New Chicago” meat market near the small stockyards on the CB&Q line, and only a few blocks north up Fourth from his house. Ollie, Jo said, would chat with Mrs. Light many years later on Fairfield streets.

During her family’s few town years, Ollie attended what must have seemed to her the elegant Franklin school, new in 1868. Her teacher for at least a year was Miss Lizzie Locke, many years later Advisor and Librarian

in Josephine's Fairfield High School. Perhaps Ollie's experience with both town and rural education influenced her to send two daughters to a big town high school. When, in 1912, deteriorating Franklin was demolished to make way for a new CB&Q passenger depot, the railroad donated land south of the depot to the city. Howard Park was named for one time Fairfield mayor and railroad Vice President E.A. Howard (although it seems numerous nostalgic denizens continued to refer to Franklin Park). On those grounds, in 1861, the first volunteers of Company "E," 2nd Iowa Infantry had drilled, who answered President Lincoln's early call to arms. From 1919 to 1922 Jo Teeter, perhaps faintly aware of its national and family history, would pass morning, noon, afternoon, and evenings through or along that park on her way to and from high school.<sup>162</sup>



Franklin School, 1876. Courtesy of Fairfield Public Library

### **Joe Steele and Civil War Times**

After three years in Fairfield, probably by March 1, 1886, Joe Steele took his family back to the country, resumed farm work, in a couple of years had Abe Teeter and his boys build a house, and further developed his political interests. He had come to Iowa from Indiana in 1863, smack dab in the middle of the Civil War, from a state riven by wartime political tensions. This was so generally in Indiana, but in the south along the Ohio River particularly, where many Kentuckians and other southerners had settled. Some of Joe Steele's neighbors opposed slavery and supported the Underground Railroad that ran through his county and township. Other southern migrants were openly proslavery, and Joe would have known them as well.<sup>163</sup>

In the war's early years, Indiana's state legislature had a Democratic majority with "Copperhead," that is, southern sympathies, or at least sympathies favoring peace rather than prolonged war, and certainly sympathies favoring their party's dominance in state politics. Lacking the legislature's cooperation, the Republican Governor, Oliver Morton, a strong Unionist, simply ignored and overrode it, collected funds for state government and the Unionist cause by any means possible, including unofficially from the federal government. Morton became, in effect, State



Dictator, with support from Washington, DC. With Morton's approval, General Sherman even trained a few thousand Unionist Kentuckians in southern Indiana.<sup>164</sup>

Whether Joe Steele left Indiana in part because of southern sympathies, desire for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, or rejection of Indiana politics, he came as a Democrat. Thus he would have been suspect, if not shunned, by Republican Unionists, who regarded Democrats, if not traitors, as southern sympathizers, as Copperheads, a term that in Iowa became common in 1863, just as Joe was arriving. They were so called because early in the war openly southern sympathizers (among whom some could be found in Iowa) had worn lapel pins with copper heads cut from pennies. Unionists likened them to copperhead snakes, reputed to strike sneakily from the rear. "A Copperhead," fulminated the Republican *Fairfield Ledger*, "is always a vile reptile," and it reported that a man who "drank to Jeff Davis . . . in a whiskey shop" had been driven or scared out of town by soldiers. As well, Unionists in 1864 destroyed the Fairfield offices of a reputedly Copperhead newspaper, the *Constitution and Union*. Editor David Sheward had been arrested in 1862 and held without charges for a time before being released. That brouhaha threatened armed conflict, which would have included the Jefferson Home Guards, based in Libertyville, a few miles from Joe Steele's future farm, and with members from Des Moines Township, as well as Liberty. In 1871 the *Fairfield Ledger* recalled that at Libertyville "a blatant copperhead cut down the Lincoln pole that was erected [a flagpole with Lincoln's name inscribed on the banner] . . . in 1860." Alice Conner Harness reports that near County Line during the war "southern sympathizers came through the community and set fire to some haystacks." Similar events occurred in southeastern Iowa wherever "peace Democrats" or Copperheads emerged—a brawl in Abingdon, scuffles in Ottumwa, Fairfield, and elsewhere when home guardsmen and upstanding (Republican) citizens attempted to remove copperhead pins from the clothing of (treasonous) Democrats. In Jefferson County, "Old Settlers" split over Civil War issues.<sup>165</sup>

Young Joe Steele came into an area whose newspapers and crossroads talk were much about Union victories and Rebel shortages of men, materiel, and money. And about Copperheads. The *Ledger* did refer to news from the West, to extending telegraph lines there, to Nevada gold. As well it called attention to a new "Billiard and Oyster Saloon" in the town, where "Those who like to play, or love the bivalves, will please call to be gratified." But in the main that paper overflowed with summaries of battles and troop movements, with letters from boys before or after the battle,

with reports of the local “Prairie Rangers” and “Fairfield Union Guard,” with appeals to patriotism.

During early fall 1863 Joe Steele had arrived on the heels of Grant’s overwhelming victory at Vicksburg, which split the Confederacy, and Lee’s Gettysburg disaster, crucial turning points. Even as Joe and Sarah ferried the Mississippi and settled in Des Moines Township, Union forces were gathering at Chattanooga,

from whence they would funnel into valleys that would lead Sherman’s men to Atlanta and the sea. In late 1863 and early ’64, only a few months after Joe had unhitched his team, the *Ledger* printed “Mr. Lincoln’s Speech” at Gettysburg, with indications of repeated applause. And it printed news of the impending military draft; publicized volunteers who would receive a \$302 bonus, whereas dilatory draftees would receive nothing. Des Moines Township volunteers included A[braham] B[urger] Teeter, Josephine’s paternal grandfather, but not her maternal grandfather, Joseph Elliott Steele. Nor was he drafted. In February 2003 Jo told me Mother Ollie had said that her father “hid in the haymow to keep from going to the army.” How Ollie knew, if it was a fact, is unknown, although Isobel Manning Teeter asserted immediately that “Aunt Ann Lane,” Joe’s sister with whom young Ollie stayed often when her mother was ill, “would have told her.” Whether Joe Steele hid anywhere cannot be proven. Nevertheless, the story seems authentic, especially given the proven veracity of innumerable memories carried down the years by Ollie and Josephine. Probably Joe Steele was, in the argot of the era, “a draft skedaddler.” Some Jefferson County draft evaders did in fact skedaddle out of the county, striking out for the West, just as Joe Steele probably struck out for his barn one scary day to avoid inconvenient officials.<sup>166</sup>

It is unknown whether Joe Steele observed America’s first official Thanksgiving in 1863, which Mr. Lincoln had declared to celebrate Union victories. Clearly, however, like many thousands of other young men, he would have said that he didn’t have any dog in this fight between North and South. Early in the war, Mark Twain “fought” for the Confederacy in one Missouri skirmish and then, like his character, Huck Finn, “lit out for the territory.” He had plenty of company among those heading west, away from battles and elections, toward bonanzas of gold and homesteads. Bruce Catton and James McPherson note that in the year the Civil War

**Recruits Wanted**  
FOR THE  
**NINETEENTH IOWA INFANTRY!**

---

This Regiment is now stationed at  
**BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS**

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THE SAME  
**BOUNTIES AND PREMIUMS**  
are offered in this as in all other Regiments.

began, Congress passed the Homestead Act, which promised 160 acres of public land free to anyone who lived on and improved it for five years, and which enticed many westward, away from war. Catton reports, "Every day from twenty-five to one hundred wagons were ferried across the Missouri at Council Bluffs, and on the Iowa side the road was usually packed for half a mile or more with wagons waiting . . . One man noted a solid string of twelve hundred wagons on the road leading west from Omaha, and a traveler in Kansas reported that he met five hundred wagons every day bound for Colorado and California." Twain was not alone, and neither was Joe Steele, who happened to stop in Iowa.<sup>167</sup>

### **Joe Steele and Politics**

With whatever taint he may have carried, at least for a time, Joe Steele continued to live in a heavily Republican state. This was in a post-Civil War era when Republicans flourished nationwide while waving the "bloody shirt" of Union victory and Confederate rebellion, and while continuing to paint Democrats as Copperheads. In Fairfield, the "Democratic Rally First Held Here September 1888" was "not a very grand affair," attracting "little more than the usual Saturday crowd." So asserted the Republican *Ledger*. Joe Steele was, despite all, a lifelong Democrat, as were his brother-in-law, Abel Lane, and future son-in-law, George Teeter. Joe was a free trader or "tariff for revenue only" man who opposed high tariffs as hurting farmers. He was a "silverite" who supported a "bimetallic" monetary policy that would expand the money supply by including silver as well as gold. This because he opposed the "single gold standard" as deflationary, as rewarding creditors and penalizing debtors (although he was not a debtor). He nevertheless refused to support the Greenback party's extreme inflationary desire to print a great deal of paper money. Joe Steele was an anti-monopolist who, although not a Populist Party member, had populist leanings against "Wall Street," the railroads particularly, and other business monopolies generally. While area Republicans tended to support Prohibition, like his party Joe Steele supported a licensing law for liquor establishments that would ensure "true Temperance," rather than total prohibition.<sup>168</sup>

In 1887 an October Democratic County Convention report lists J. E. Steele as one of seven Des Moines Township delegates, member of the Committee on Permanent Organization, and of the County Central Committee. Concerning a proposed resolution that the Democrats support an anti-Prohibition, anti-monopoly, independent Republican for state representative, rather than offering a Democratic candidate, Joe voted in

the negative with all seven Des Moines Township delegates (but in the minority overall). That township in the county's far southwestern corner, its inhabitants often feeling, it seems, isolated and ignored by Republicans controlling courthouse and county, tended to be strongly Democratic. The Des Moines Township correspondent to the Democratic *Fairfield Tribune* reported in 1893 that "The only Republican elected here last fall was the constable, and he feels so lonesome he declares he will not serve." In 1903 and 1906 Democrats swept all Des Moines Township offices.<sup>169</sup>

In early November 1887, however, despite personal feelings, as township chairman J. E. Steele called to order a meeting at schoolhouse No. 8, where independent Republican G. A. Unkrich, Fairfield grocer, endorsed by Jefferson County Democrats, spoke. Joe continued active in party politics as township delegate and committeeman at county conventions. More than a half dozen times (1889, 1890, 1891, 1893, 1896, 1899, 1906), he served as county delegate to state conventions. In 1889 he attended probably his first convention in Sioux City, at the time renowned for its "Corn Palace." (It was an era

of "palaces" devised from natural resources. Ottumwa had a "Coal Palace" in 1890-91; Creston a "Blue Grass Palace.") In 1890, J. E. Steele was a delegate to the Cedar Rapids state convention, and was a delegate in 1906. In 1891, 1892, 1898, and 1899 before United States senators were elected directly, J. E. Steele was a delegate at statewide Democratic Senatorial Conventions.<sup>170</sup>



Ottumwa Coal Palace, 1890-1891.  
Courtesy of Ottumwa Public Library

In 1896 when the Nebraskan William Jennings Bryan ran for President on a Democratic platform whose chief plank was "free silver," Joe Steele served as Des Moines Township delegate to the Jefferson County convention in the courthouse, and then as county delegate to Ottumwa's state party convention. Young Edna Ferber, later a noted novelist, would long remember Bryan's rousing "Cross of Gold" speech in that town's Opera House. As poet Vachel Lindsay exclaimed, "He scourged the elephant plutocrats / With barbed wire from the Platte." Hearing that the great financier J. P. Morgan had said, "America is good enough for me," Bryan responded, "Whenever he doesn't like it, he can give it back." At the state convention, "J. E. Steele, one of Des Moines township's staunch

Democrats,” like fellow delegates, supported “the complete fusion of all the element opposed to [William] McKinley and the single gold standard,” including Populists and free-silver Republicans. He served on a committee to confer with Populists concerning a cooperative campaign. With his fellows Delegate Steele supported the national platform planks of free and unlimited coinage of both gold and silver at a ratio of 16 to 1; a tariff for revenue only but against protectionist tariffs that supported trusts and



William Jennings Bryan  
campaign poster

monopolies; an income tax that would require “accumulated wealth” to share the “just burdens” of government; opposition to “importation of pauper labor”; opposition to government aid to debtor corporations, including railroads; politically obligatory support for Union veterans; and opposition to life tenure in government, which was aimed at the courts, including the Supreme Court. In that year Batavia, located in Locust Grove Township just north of Des Moines Township, was as usual strongly Democratic. There “a Bryan pole, 110 feet high was raised; the stars and stripes, followed by the 16 to 1 flag, was raised . . . The crowd set up a mighty cheer, and enthusiasm for a time ran wild.” Inevitable,

and interminable, speeches followed in the Nelson Opera House and even a couple of churches. Republican old Doc Baldrige and a Democratic farmer friend argued all one day outside the Post Office. Wearing yellow ribbons, gold standard supporters taunted followers of silverite “Mr. Anarchist Bryan,” which caused some fist fights. The new school Principal, a vociferous Democrat, was dismissed as incompetent.<sup>171</sup>

In probably his last hurrah, Joe Steele served in 1908, as in 1900 and 1906, as so often before, on a county convention Resolutions Committee that favored the perennial William Jennings Bryan. With his fellows he supported tariff reform, as always; railroad regulation by a strengthened Interstate Commerce Commission; anti-imperialism, which meant leaving Cuba and the Philippines “free,” but retaining coaling stations and naval bases; an income tax; direct election of U.S. senators; and restriction of Asiatic immigrants. Bryan won the nomination, but not the race against Republican William Howard Taft. A premonitory fact was that in 1907 a



horse named “W. J. Bryan” had dropped dead at the end of a race. Neither Bryan ever ran again.<sup>172</sup>

Neither, apparently, was Joe Steele active in politics beyond this date. By then, newly a widower, he was three score and ten, and had been in politics for more than twenty years. A small “golden” ornate “Delegate” badge survives from his service to his party, which lost most local, state, and national elections during that era. In 1919 the *Eldon Forum* reported that “Jack O’Leary was cut by flying glass from the windshield” when his Ford sheared off two telephone poles. The Ford was “a total wreck. In fact, the car looks like it had gone democratic.” Joe would not have been amused. Neither would he have warmed to jocular Republican attempts to link Democrats and Populists by references to “dem-o-pops” and the “popocratic” party.<sup>173</sup>



Joe Steele’s Democratic  
“Delegate” identification badge

Apparently, Joe Steele himself held only one elective office, as Des Moines Township tax assessor in the early 1890s. In what may have been an electioneering statement, or a post-election promise, “Joe Steele says that no fifteen thousand dollars in property will be listed at fifteen thousand under his administration as assessor.” Assessor Steele undoubtedly viewed himself as a champion of the little man, of the hard-working farmer.<sup>174</sup>

Like many midwestern farmers, like almost anyone who had to ship perishable goods by rail, to Joe Steele railroads came to represent “debtor corporations,” monopoly, corruption in American life and politics. In 1872, for example, the Credit Mobilier scandal revealed that congressmen and businessmen had bilked the public for many millions of dollars. Another premier example of congressional and capitalistic collusion occurred in the presidential campaign of 1884, Grover Cleveland the Democratic candidate, James G. Blaine the Republican. On July 10 the *Fairfield Tribune* excerpted the “Mulligan letters” between men involved in a railroad land grant (or grab) scheme and Blaine, then the powerful Speaker of the United States House of Representatives. These are naked proposals to use political power for financial gain. Blaine writes, “Your offer to admit me to a participation in the new railroad enterprise is in every respect as generous as I could expect or desire. I thank you very sincerely for it, and in this connection I wish to make a suggestion of a somewhat selfish character.” While boasting that he has already delivered the votes on certain railroad legislation, Blaine asks what reward he can “depend on.” In another letter



he tells a correspondent that “your conduct toward me in business matters has always been marked by unbounded liberality . . . You urge me to make as much as I fairly can out of the arrangement . . . It is natural that I should do my utmost to this end.”

### The Success of Tall Joe

In newspapers of the day, railroads often placed ads mapping the growth and complexity of their lines. Those who feared railroad power naturally saw them as primitive monsters with entwining tentacles, as did novelist Frank Norris’s *The Octopus* in 1901. That era’s legislation was



Rock Island Railroad map, *Fairfield Weekly Journal*, January 24, 1884

concerned to control the power of the Octopus—the Granger laws of the 1870s; the 1887 Interstate Commerce Act; the Elkins Act of Josephine Teeter’s birth year, 1903; the 1906 Hepburn Act; the 1910 Mann-Elkins Act. Such laws did not succeed entirely. In 1884, however, by losing the presidential election, including in Iowa, Blaine confirmed, at least to opponents, not only that

corruption tied politicians to railroad and corporate “Robber Barons” but that a determined opposition might prevail. As the poet Vachel Lindsay wrote in *Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan*, the “dour East” was “Crucifying half the West,/ Till the whole Atlantic coast/ Seemed a giant spider’s nest.” As Robert Wiebe argues in *The Search for Order*, those who faced an increasingly complex and heterogeneous society and economy had been reared in “island communities” that were based on traditional face-to-face moral and ethical values that everyone in the community learned at home, at church, and from the McGuffey readers at school. Thus to farmers like Joe Steele, a man had to stand against the octopus, the spider’s nest, corruption and monopoly, or he would not be a real man.<sup>175</sup>

In his prime Joe Steele appeared to be a real man, was an imposing figure, noticeably taller than average, somewhat bulky from rather more muscle than fat, with short sandy brown hair that lay flat forward and v’eed



Joseph Elliott Steele



Sarah Elizabeth Miles Steele

toward his forehead, and with a goatee of variable length. He was nice to children generally and to Josephine particularly. He was not necessarily nice to adults. Phrases like “terrific temper,” “high strung,” and “temperamental,” punctuate Jo’s reminiscences. Rebecca Teeter Wheeldon remembered Joe’s wife, Sarah, as “easy to get along with,” but her grandfather as “hard to get along with.”

Reared, according to his obituary, a Presbyterian, married to a churchgoing Baptist, in the Iowa Census religion column of 1895 he listed himself as having “None.” His obituary asserted, “he was a great reader



Big and tall Joe Steele, no churchgoer, back row, fifth from left, attends a Baptist Des Moines River baptizing.

of the Bible.” Perhaps so. As we know, he chewed tobacco, not quite a sacrilege; but with small time euchre gambling (with dragooned daughter Ollie) while his wife was up the road at Baptist services, he profaned the Sabbath. More than one person has witnessed to his habit of profanity.

Joe Steele was a successful farmer in a time and place when this fact mattered. This was publicly evident in the 1890s and in the early years of the new century, when Josephine was born and came to know her grandfather. In 1894 he is referred to as “a leading farmer in Des Moines Township” who has sold “the finest [rail] car load of cattle of the season.” Later that year he is “a leading cattle man” of the township who is “building quite an extensive cattle barn.” In 1895 he “sold a fine horse for \$125”; in ‘98 “the banner bunch of two year old steers . . . for \$54 per head”; in ‘99, “the banner horse . . . for \$140 to John Famuliner.” Even the *Republican Weekly Ledger-Journal*, (misspelling his last name) in noting that “Jos. Steel and wife, of Libertyville, are in town today,” referred to “Mr. Steel” as “a prominent stockman.” In July 1899 the *Fairfield Weekly Journal* noted that “Jos. Steel and family of Libertyville are in town today,” which happened to be circus day. During these prospering years, he had Abe Teeter and sons build “one of the finest country homes in the county”; later he improved its cellar with a concrete floor. He bought from Libertyville merchants “a fine two-horse buggy” and “a new cooking stove” (something for everyone in the family!). After his cattle barn and contents burned, ignited by flying sparks from a steam engine thresher in September 1905, he had a new barn before December. According to the Libertyville correspondent, “Joe Steel had a barn raising last week,” a good sized thirty by forty feet structure, the barn that Josephine knew early on, and I many years later. No one who knew Joe Steele would have been surprised to learn that “He is pushing the building with considerable energy.” He was the kind of man who could



Joseph Elliott Steele and Sarah Elizabeth Miles with dog at home. Note dinner bell in front of smokehouse/shop, and corner of one room cabin, later George and Ollie Teeter’s garage.



Typical nineteenth-century Iowa barn raising scene.  
Courtesy of Ottumwa Public Library

make things hum.<sup>176</sup>

This was the man, the father-in-law, successful farmer and politician, who came with the family package when George B. Teeter married Ollie Steele in 1892—a man rugged, experienced in dealing with people, often dominating or manipulating or overpowering them. One example: In 1881 “A difficulty between Mr. Joseph Steele . . . and a young man who worked for him last winter, culminated in a row. . . . The young man claimed there was a balance due . . . and had repeatedly asked him for it; urging the claim one day when Mr. S. was on his way to Fairfield occasioned the fight. In a trial before Justice Simes last week, it appeared that Mr. Steele had been the first to resort to blows, and a fine of three dollars was imposed.” Joe Steele was obviously a man with a fiery and unpredictable and probably calculating temper. Nevertheless, in George Brinton McClellan Teeter, Joe might find his match, would at least find a worthy opponent in their future wars of words.<sup>177</sup>

### **Westward with Rebecca Ann and Abraham B.**

Josephine’s father’s paternal ancestry begins definitely with George’s great-grandfather, Abraham Teeter or Deeter when in 1785 he took up Commonwealth of Pennsylvania land in Morrison’s Cove, Bedford County. He, a descendant of German Brethren pacifists, came northwesterly with his wife, Elizabeth Shively, perhaps daughter of Uhli Shively and Elizabeth Thomas, and with their eleven children, from the Pennsylvania-Maryland borderlands. Daughters of the American Revolution documents indicate that he was in the war, but not everyone agrees.<sup>178</sup>

In the Brethren community of Morrison’s Cove, with its rolling, fertile land virtually surrounded by dark forested ridges, he and his family made a home up against Dunning’s Mountain, cleared and farmed as much land as they could, and bought more land. His Brethren congregation apparently called Abraham to preach. Although always a faithful churchgoer, he did not answer the call. A widower in midlife, he remarried to Mary (Molly) Magdalena Wise, whom Abraham’s adult children accepted into the family. Molly brought land into the marriage, and Abraham bought more, amassing as many as 884 acres.<sup>179</sup>

He illustrates, however, the great American truth that it is possible to be land poor. For mere raw land, tree-and-brush covered, uncleared for farming or pasturage, was of limited value and sometimes a liability. Abraham Teeter worked hard, no doubt worked his family hard, in addition to farming had a sawmill for a time. But in their later years, he and Molly



were dependent on a son, John Shively. Abraham died in 1827—his estate worth exactly seven hundred fourteen dollars and thirty-three and one-fourth cents. In 1838 his heirs deeded a hundred-acre farm to John in recognition of his services to Abraham and Molly.

John Shively Teeter, born in 1782, dying in 1847, was no more successful financially than his father. In addition to his inherited farm, he had bought and sold other land, had moved to a good farm in Monroe Township, Bedford County. But following his death that 322 acre farm, with two story log house, “double log barn,” “log tenant house,” and other buildings, had to be sold for \$1,000 to pay small debts to two of his children. His widow, Susannah Heffner Burger Teeter, was left with \$200 from which to draw interest while she lived. In time, she moved to Iowa, to Jefferson County, Des Moines Township, where some of her children had gathered.<sup>180</sup>

One son who settled there eventually was Abraham Burger Teeter, Josephine’s grandfather, born December 26, 1829, in Morrison’s Cove. He was the youngest of twelve, five of them sons. From his father and older brothers, and with his father’s many tools, he learned carpentry and other practical skills, like any farmer’s son of his time and place.<sup>181</sup>

When young Abraham left Bedford County is uncertain. He appears in Wayne County, southeastern Illinois, in 1853. Probably he traveled overland from Bedford westerly to Pittsburgh on the already well-traveled route that the Pennsylvania Turnpike much later approximated. From Pittsburgh, he could have rafted or steamboated down the great Ohio River thoroughfare into the American interior. At the confluence of the Wabash, he could have gone upriver to the vicinity of Wayne County. Or he could have continued overland from Pittsburgh toward St. Louis, part of the way along the National Road (also known as the Cumberland Road, built in 1811 from Cumberland, Maryland, to Vandalia, Illinois)—one family story is that he came by covered wagon. By midcentury he could even have traveled part of the way by railroad. However and whenever he got to Wayne County, where other Pennsylvania Teeters may have emigrated, on February 10, 1853, Abraham Burger Teeter, twenty-three, married Rebecca Ann Alford, eighteen.<sup>182</sup>

Born November 4, 1834, with her carpenter father, mother, and eleven siblings Rebecca Ann had floated the Ohio River westward. Conceivably, even if romantic and improbable, Abraham B. and Rebecca Ann may have met on the river. Her family had come from South Slippery Rock Township, Lawrence County, Pennsylvania, just northwest of Pittsburgh and not many miles from the Ohio River’s great bend. Their journey had been broken, however, by Hugh Alford’s death in his early fifties, either on or in the Ohio

River, probably in 1851 or 1852. He was buried, according to family lore, in southern Illinois, presumably overlooking the Ohio. How or why his widow, Martha Weller Alford, and their children got from the river northward forty or fifty miles to Wayne County is unknown. We do not know where Hugh Alford was taking his family, but in a few years, his widow migrated from Illinois to Iowa, Jefferson County, Des Moines Township.<sup>183</sup>

How Abraham B. and Rebecca Ann met is unknown, but both were from Brethren families. Perhaps a connection had been made in Pennsylvania or developed in Illinois. Abraham B. had relatives, including two older brothers, in Iowa, Jefferson County, Des Moines Township, where he and Rebecca Ann settled eventually.<sup>184</sup>

The “eventually” should be stressed, because the whereabouts of Abraham B. and Rebecca Ann for the next couple of dozen years changes often and is often unclear. Whether the newlyweds went directly from Wayne County to Iowa is unknown. Assuming that birthplace of children indicates family whereabouts, their first, appropriately named Adam, was born August 29, 1854, in Pennsylvania, in Altoona, an early rail center just north of Abraham B.’s birthplace in Morrison’s Cove. Was he working in Altoona? Left-handed John Teeter (1860) was born in Iowa, in the same year that his parents mortgaged a town lot to Abraham B.’s older brother, David Burger Teeter, in the recently platted but evanescent village of Absecum, Des Moines Township, Jefferson County. George B. (1863) was born in Marion County, south central Iowa, in the spring, but in December, “A.B. Teeter” volunteered in Jefferson County for Union army service. David Augustus or “Gus” (1866) was born in Jefferson County, where in 1867 Abraham B. Teeter bought a lot in Batavia, and where the 1870 Iowa census locates the family in Des Moines Township. Abraham B.’s obituary reports that he joined the local Brethren church in 1871. But Evangeline (1872) was born in Appanoose County, Iowa; and Elizabeth (1875), the last child who lived, was born in Bedford County, Pennsylvania, Rebecca Ann presumably in the bosom of Teeter in-laws at least temporarily.<sup>185</sup>

Rebecca Ann’s obituary indicates that she and Abraham B. “lived in different parts of Iowa,” and that they finally “settled” on a farm near County Line, Des Moines Township, in 1879. Abraham B.’s obituary, however, indicates that he “made this county his home since 1876.” Wherever and whenever their perambulations, in 1879 the Teeter’s permanent home was situated just south of the old Keokuk-to-Indian Agency trail that Indians, trappers, traders, cavalry, pioneers, and Mormons had traveled. In 1838 part of their land had been included in Chief Keokuk’s cession to the United States.<sup>186</sup>



Abraham B. and Rebecca Ann's small sixty-seven-acre farm, for which they promised to pay \$933, was much mortgaged from the outset, was repeatedly remortgaged, or their promissory notes were repeatedly renewed at 8 or 10 percent interest. After twenty years, they owned a farm for which they had paid in interest alone two or three times the purchase price, a familiar story for Iowa farmers. A much more profitable investment was the Batavia town lot that they bought for a hundred dollars cash, probably on speculation, in 1867 from a Bostonian, probably himself a speculator. They sold lot seventy-seven in 1870 for \$620, a significant profit when a carpenter made only a couple of dollars a day.

Despite their being "settled," Abraham B. was seized periodically by wanderlust. Like his sons, Abraham B. Teeter had a lean and wiry, sharp-featured look. Like his son, George, he probably seemed taller than he was. He must have had in those years a certain restless look in his eye. A grandchild, Elizabeth (Tiny) Teeter Linge, recalled hearing that "One day Grandpa Teeter said, 'We are going to Pennsylvania.' Grandma Teeter was a little woman, but she told him they were not going to move again. If he wanted to go, he could. He left, but was back in two days."

Then there was the war. Reputedly, among all the states, Iowa had the highest per capita rate of Civil War volunteers. In 1861 "twenty times as many men as could be taken" volunteered. As we know, despite his pacifist heritage, despite having three young sons, including George just born that spring, in his mid-thirties Abe Teeter volunteered to serve in Company H, 30th Iowa Volunteer Infantry. Perhaps, like so many men of his time and place, he was tired of the same horizons and sought adventures afield; perhaps the significant enlistment bonus of \$302 influenced him; perhaps patriotism. For reasons unknown, however, the mustering officer rejected him, and he was left to face his farm and his family and his pacifist Brethren heritage.<sup>187</sup>

### **Faithful Brethren**

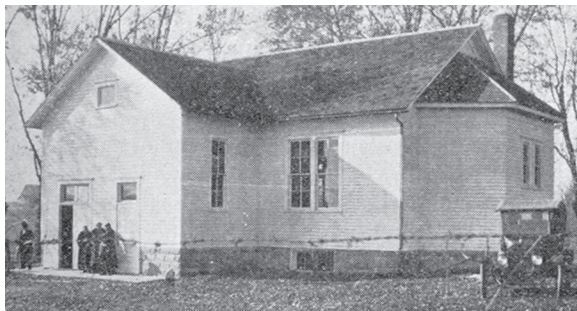
Abraham B. and Rebecca Ann were members of Church of the Brethren meetinghouse three and one-half miles northwest of Libertyville. The first Brethren in Iowa Territory had founded it in 1844 with a cemetery about three miles to the west. Theologically, from their early eighteenth-century German origins, Brethren stressed the New Testament and Christ's teachings, emphasized religious devotion and observances, practiced adult baptism (as "Dunkards"), were pacifists, dressed plainly to avoid "the

sinful fashions of the world,” and abhorred “worldism” generally. Preachers should at least ideally be unpaid, and Dunkards should whenever possible avoid government institutions. They should avoid the legal system, and no lawyer should be admitted to membership. They should (unlike Abraham B.) avoid the military, fighting certainly, but even organizations like the Grand Army of the Republic. They should not join the Farmers’ Alliance, or a labor union, or any “organization of the world.”

They should not attend fairs, celebrations, birthday and anniversary parties, ice cream suppers, and the like. These were, of course, ideal rules that over time, in the lives of Abraham B. and Rebecca Ann Teeter, came to be bent, broken, or sometimes ignored.

Several southeastern Iowa Brethren congregations met occasionally. In 1880, soon after the Teeters had settled, a “love feast” or annual communion

consisting of “washing feet, partaking of the Lord’s Supper, etc.,” attracted believers from nearby counties—Appanoose, Keokuk, Washington. So many came that “a number of sleepers [floor joists] broke, causing the floor to give way in the north end of the building,” this although a new meetinghouse had replaced the old one in 1876.<sup>188</sup>



Rural Libertyville Brethren Church

in 1876.<sup>188</sup>

In addition to morning sessions, prayer meetings were held every Sunday evening at 6:30, meetings not always incident-free. On October 29, 1897 appeared a probably empty threat in the *Fairfield Tribune*: “The thieves who stole those lap robes and whips [from buggies] at the Dunkard church last Sunday night had better return them or they will be arrested.” The Dunkards were not alone in sustaining losses. Some years later, County Line Methodist suffered two break-ins, losing numerous chairs, a broom, a dust pan, a coal bucket, and matches, causing a reporter to suggest that some thief wanted to set up housekeeping. Baptists as well suffered indignities from arrogant unbelievers. On Sunday, May 9, 1880,

a basket meeting [or potluck dinner] was held . . . at what is commonly called the ‘Turkey Scratch,’ but sometimes more euphoniously termed the ‘Pleasant Point’ school house. In the afternoon seven or eight young men were baptized by immersion

in a creek near by. A number of others, including several ladies, intended to be immersed, but a young gentleman (?) of the vicinity amused himself by riding his horse around a while in that part for the baptizing, rendering it unfit for use. Much indignation . . . and it is seriously proposed to resort to law for a punishment for the young barbarian.<sup>189</sup>

In a community less than entirely pious and honest, the Teeters were, according to their granddaughter Josephine, “faithful Brethren.” This meant, among other things, as Brethren delegates for the Southern District of Iowa assembled in the Libertyville meetinghouse reiterated in 1881, that a man should wear a beard, but no mustache or goatee. Abraham B. wore a beard but at least sometimes a mustache, using the excuse, according to delighted daughter-in-law, Ollie, that his lip sunburned. Perhaps the 1881 delegates had a particular new mustachioed member in mind? Nevertheless, Ollie recalled, he was a “good Christian man if there ever was one, I think,” precious high praise from a woman who sometimes doubted whether there were any good ones; and who sometimes asserted, “Not one righteous, no not one.”

Good and righteous Christian or not, Abraham B. was an exemplar of the Teeter temper, which meant he might fly off the handle at any provocation. His grandson Elmer James Teeter remembered him as “a pretty crusty old gentleman” who fortunately favored Elmer and would let only him, no other grandchildren, slide down his cellar door. He was, according to Elmer, “not what you would call a pleasant person, kind of sour, didn’t believe in any foolishness.”

### **Built Good, and Everything was Square**

No foolishness would certainly have described Abraham B. Teeter’s attitude toward work and workmanship. Although owning only a small farm, he probably worked the fields little, especially as he aged, leaving that mostly to his sons. Principally a carpenter, he was, said daughter-in-law Ollie, who should have known, having watched him work and having lived for many years in the house he had built, “very good . . . very exacting.” Rebecca Teeter Wheeldon asserted, no doubt from family and neighborhood lore, “If Grandpa Teeter built it, it was built good, and everything was square.” It may have been that his family’s frequent movements in southeastern Iowa were related to his carpentry. Having framed a house, he could of course plaster and paint it. A precisionist, he had apparently at some time apprenticed in clock and watch repair, a skill he practiced.

Abraham B. Teeter was a model American handyman, like his ancestors a jack-of-all-trades who passed on to his children his talents and training and ethic that all workmanship should be “square.” As grandson Elmer James Teeter, himself a carpenter and handyman in that tradition, said, “I think they were all handy with tools,” as we see they were.

Among Abraham B.’s children, Adam or “Ad” was a carpenter, painter, cabinetmaker, a “finisher” who, his niece Josephine believed, fashioned the ornate cornice braces for Joe Steele’s house. John was an expert carpenter, painter, and paperhanger, if no car mechanic. George, a carpenter and painter, was a better than fair-to-middlin’ all round handyman. Gus, also a carpenter and painter, was as well a paperhanger, and, like his father, a watch and clock repairman who for a time had a watch and jewelry shop in Burlington; on the back page of Jo’s textbook reader he once drew a bird that was “perfect.” Wilson, with skills John apparently lacked, was a Rock Island roundhouse mechanic in Eldon. Lizzie was an expert seamstress who “lived in” while sewing for families, and then moved along. On April 6, 1922, the *Batavia News* noted that “Miss Lizzie Teeter who has been spending a few days sewing at the Pumphrey home returned to her home in Eldon Sunday morning on 29” (“29” being the number of a southbound Rock Island train that flag-stopped at County Line). Sister



Abraham Burger Teeter and Rebecca Ann Alford Teeter with children from left: Adam (with son Harry), David Augustus, George B., Wilson, John, Evangeline, Elizabeth

Evie's hobby was photography, darkroom and all.

In 1905 after months of being "quite poorly," being confined to bed with pneumonia, being visited by friends and his children, including his eldest, Adam of Martinsburg, some distance away, Abraham Burger Teeter, father of eleven children, seven surviving, died on June 25. He was seventy-five years, five months, twenty-nine days old. He died before his granddaughter Josephine, barely twenty months old, could remember him. His funeral was at his home southwest of County Line, as was customary, on June 27, conducted by Daniel Holder and W. N. Glotfelty (who had become a Brethren elder in the year of Josephine's birth, and would continue until he died in 1951). His funeral sermon followed James 4:14, "Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Abraham B. Teeter was buried in the Des Moines Township Brethren cemetery northwest of Libertyville.<sup>190</sup>

### **Rebecca Ann**

The mother of Abraham B.'s clever children, Rebecca Ann Alford Teeter was herself the daughter of a carpenter—her children's talents were not inherited entirely from their father. She was a hard working housewife—creator and manager of an eternity of threshers' dinners, family dinners, meals holiday and Sunday and otherwise—her children's ethic of work was not absorbed entirely from their father. Late in life, Mrs. Teeter signed a legal document with an "X," which suggests that she carried an awful lot of recipes in her head.

Rebecca Ann was as small as her husband was tall. Grandson Elmer recalled "just a little bird of a woman," but one daughter-in-law Ollie characterized as possessing, despite Brethren pacifism, a "wicked temper." As Josephine remembered Ollie saying, "If something didn't go right she'd just go all to pieces," which suggests that Teeter temper, like Teeter talent, had twin roots. Although married-in, Rebecca Ann could just "raise Cain," just like all the Teeters, at least the men. Like many women of that era she suffered from respiratory ailments known as "asthma," which involved difficulty getting enough breath; wheezing that was certainly distressing to hear, undoubtedly painful to experience; and continual discomfort that may well have contributed to emotional outbursts.

Grandma Teeter had a gentler side, especially for favorite grandchildren. As younger sister Josephine was quite aware, Rebecca Elizabeth enjoyed double-namesake favorite status with Grandmas



Rebecca Ann Teeter and Sarah Elizabeth Steele since both had cared for her, perhaps saved her, as a fragile newborn. Both gave Rebecca Elizabeth a doll or dolls.

As Abraham B. Teeter's wife, married at eighteen, Rebecca Ann bore her firstborn at nineteen, her lastborn at forty-two or forty-three. In twenty-two childbearing years, eleven children were born to her; seven lived to adulthood. One lived less than two years, one three months; two infants, including her last, died nameless.

On May 2, 1912 the *Eldon Forum* carried two columns—County Line and Ashland—which reported that A. B. Teeter's widow had fallen in late April and broken her hip, Dr. S. H. Sawyers of Eldon, her attending physician. The Ashland correspondent noted that Mrs. Teeter "is now in a serious condition. Her life is despaired of, but we hope for a speedy recovery." Grandson Elmer recalled that his grandparents had "a good sized black dog" that had bitten tiny Rebecca Ann on the hand once when she had lost her balance. Jo thought Rebecca Ann tripped over a dog in spring 1912. A legal deposition may absolve the dog, since it indicates that she fell from a buggy. Or perhaps both dog and buggy were implicated?

Grandma Rebecca Ann did not die quickly; nor recover speedily. Rather, as was common for an elderly woman with such an injury in those days, she lingered, ending her days only after several months as a bedridden invalid. During those months Evie and Lizzie, who lived with their mother, cared for her, while neighbors and relatives, including some grandchildren—Adam's children, Josephine, no doubt others—came to visit.<sup>191</sup>

An obituary reports Rebecca Ann Alford Teeter's death on December 4, 1912, in stock phrases: She had "united with the Brethren church early in life and lived a consistent Christian life until her death." Grandma Rebecca Ann never followed "the vain and foolish fashions of the world," but dressed plainly all her life, wearing as Jo recalled in 2004, a little bonnet or hat on Sundays, a "plain covering" as Brethren required. She had, however, been known to attend birthday parties, at least when they were her own in her own house and were a surprise. She had, as we know, for many years prepared and presided at innumerable Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations. As he had for her husband and her son John, the Reverend William Glotfelty led funeral services at her home. Later he conducted Brethren cemetery graveside services, four miles away over December roads that her earthly remains had traveled in the horse drawn hearse that granddaughter Josephine remembered.



## **Family Lines Leading to Jo and Ollie and George**

Josephine's father's maternal ancestry is less well known than his paternal. It originated in Ireland where George's great-grandfather, Michael Alford, was born about 1760 and about 1789 married Martha (Bridget) McCready, she probably daughter of Hugh McCready, like his daughter and son-in-law an immigrant to far western Pennsylvania north of Pittsburgh. Michael and Bridget Alford had eight children born in Ireland, on Atlantic high seas, and in Pennsylvania before Bridget was widowed about 1799.<sup>192</sup>

Their son, Hugh, born about 1798 in Allegheny County, later Beaver County, was a carpenter. He married Martha Weller about 1823, had the standard large family—twelve—and died while attempting to move his family westward. Martha, now household head of a dozen, sold 120 acres and left Wayne County, Illinois, for Batavia, Jefferson County, Iowa, in 1856 or 1857. Martha had been born in New Jersey, December 8, 1805, the daughter of Philip Weller, he born about 1764, probably in New Jersey; and of Eleanor Parks, a Pennsylvanian, born 1770. Martha's paternal grandfather was John Weller, born about 1740 in New Jersey, and her grandmother was perhaps Martha Cosberry. Like many thousands of other mostly unknown nineteenth-century women, Martha Weller Alford had journeyed always westward, following a husband, leading her children, seeking a better life out beyond. She died July 4, 1894, age eighty-eight, and was buried in the rural Jefferson County Brethren cemetery.<sup>193</sup>

Like George's paternal line, his mother's featured a long rural, farming, pioneering, independent, hard working, practical handyman tradition. George had grown up witnessing, and perhaps modeling, his mother Rebecca Ann's "wicked temper," one that must have matched that of his crusty father, Abraham B.

## **Family Troubles and Young Josephine**

It appears that George was well prepared by inheritance and upbringing for confrontations with his father-in-law, old Joe Steele. And that both were equally ill prepared to resolve peacefully those intermittent but virtually unending quarrels that so unfavorably and deeply impressed their daughter and granddaughter, Josephine.

After years of illnesses, Sarah Elizabeth Miles Steele died Monday, February 3, 1908, and was buried in Fell cemetery on Friday following a funeral conducted in her home by Baptist minister E. W. Smith. Joe Steele

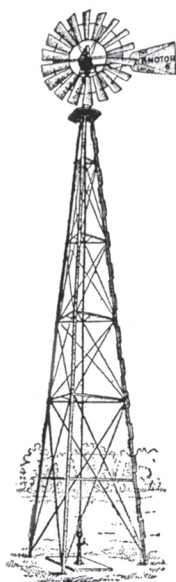
had just turned seventy. He turned immediately to Ollie, came to live with her and George, and never turned his hand to work again, not as a guest, nor on his own farm, whose annual rental he lived on for the next fifteen years.

George and Joe were both lifelong Democrats, and agnostics or atheists, but their mutuality ended—except that Teeter temper approximated Steele temper. The consequence for household tranquility was catastrophic. Josephine, close witness at ages six and eight and later, found the “pretty radical arguments” between the men, laced with epithets from one and probably both, “pretty hard on a child to hear.” Into her early consciousness filtered lifelong lessons about the costs of verbal abuse and intemperate character.

At times Grandpa Joe would storm out of the house, stride up the fields, or down the road, or would whip up the horse on the buggy he kept for his own, and would disappear for a time, only eventually to return. And the cycle would resume. In winter, he generally stayed with Illinois or Indiana relatives, but always returned in summer. Coming or going he gave little or no warning. He was the Man Who Came To Dinner—and Supper, and Breakfast.

Despite a history of rancorous conflicts, Joe nevertheless had asked George and Ollie, soon after Sarah died, to live with him in his house and to farm his land. They, although being perennial peripatetic renters, agreed reluctantly. The story is painfully sordid. Near the end of their second year, in January or February 1911, a person they had considered a friend brought “papers” from Grandpa Joe serving notice they would have to move by March 1. They refused to accept this informal notice as legal. A law officer thereafter arrived with a summons. “So,” wrote their daughter Jo late in life, “they had to take what they could get” by way of a late rental.

“What Dad found was a poor farm” with a poor barn and a four-room house for seven people. A tiny house to replace Joe Steele’s, which that newspaper reporter had called “one of the finest country homes in the county.” This was the house that Jo remembered as always having luxurious running water in the kitchen, water pumped by windmill into a holding tank on the rise above the house. In March the Teeters moved into the four-room house near Abingdon, a little town northwest of Fairfield more commonly called “Bogus” because of its legendary



*Batavia News,*  
Sept. 27, 1923

association with counterfeiters. "Then in the fall, the teacher couldn't find a place to stay so Mother boarded her," perhaps from kindness, probably as well for the little extra money boarding would bring. The teacher, Miss Alvessa Saddler of Birmingham, slept in the same room as the three girls, even had to share a bed with the eldest, Irene. Over ninety years later, Jo said wonderingly, "How we lived I don't know." But one good thing happened—Miss Saddler married a man from near Bogus, whom she apparently met that year.<sup>194</sup>

Bitterness and estrangement between Joe Steele and his daughter and son-in-law endured for years. He went off to Illinois immediately but hardly permanently. Eventually he made overtures; they were more or less reconciled; he returned in 1915 or 1916 to live with them for a time.

December 1917 found Grandpa Joe in Palestine, Illinois, where he must often have visited his only remaining brother, Nathaniel. Although Josephine could not recall ever meeting her great uncle, he was always known in the family as "Uncle Doc." Nathaniel, born in 1835, had followed a quite different path from younger brother Joe, having attended Hanover College and the Universities of Indiana and Michigan, having graduated from Louisville Medical College, having done postgraduate medical work at New York City's Columbia University. He began practicing in the little town of Palestine in 1859, continued successfully for almost fifty years, married twice, had children, was widowed twice, was active in civic affairs.



Dr. Nathaniel Steele

Now Nathaniel's body lay in the Presbyterian church, and brother Joe for the last time was staying in his house, which, Nathaniel's funeral orator declared, had been "home for a large number of persons, some of whom were relatives, and others not." One wonders how the brothers, apparently so different, had gotten on together over the years when Joe had come to board with Nathaniel. But then one learns from Judge Gaines that his friend, Dr. Steele, had been an active Democrat and "a great admirer of William J. Bryan, and a supporter of Wilson in the present great world's crisis" of the Great War. Surely mutual political beliefs bonded the brothers? But then one notes that Joe's son-in-law George was also a fervent Democrat.<sup>195</sup>

His choices narrowing, Joe Steele came back to Ollie and George for a time. The 1920 census, however, shows him at eighty-one enumerated

as a boarder with Charles A. Fisher, Batavia, Iowa, “Hotel Keeper,” and Lucinda Fisher, “Cook.” In August he spent “a few days” at Ollie’s. In 1922 he lived with Ollie and George mostly, but occasionally went off to visit friends, including the Earl Crawford family southeast of Libertyville.<sup>196</sup>

Joe Steele was no longer an imposing figure. Isobel Manning Teeter remembered as a child seeing Mr. Steele pass their house while walking between son Wils(on) Steele’s and daughter Ollie’s houses. Suggestive of his appearance, she recalled, “We had always been cautioned to be careful of tramps.” Although not yet senile, he neglected his appearance and continued to chew—and expectorate—tobacco haphazardly. Floyd Peebler, then a young neighbor, recalled with mixed chagrin and glee hauling a wagon load of coal one windy day for Joe Steele, who sat upwind on the spring seat next to Floyd and sprayed him repeatedly with tobacco juice.



*Fairfield Tribune*, April 3, 1879

Joe Steele was a model, it seems, of “The Man Who Spits.” As the *Philadelphia Times* of 1883 opined, “The man who spits is a liberal creature but unlovely in his liberality . . . he is bound to spit, even though he spit all over his fellow men . . . To the moral perception of the man who spits, if indeed he have any moral perception at all, the world is one vast spittoon.” Years later, in 1905, the Fairfield city council was considering an anti-spitting ordinance, based on the argument that spitting was “a filthy habit,” and that Ottumwa and Burlington already had such ordinances. But wait! In 1909 a headline noted that “Chew Of Tobacco Saves Man’s Life.” It seems that the man had unwittingly grasped a live electric wire, but “Physicians attribute Walters escape from a tragic death to the fact that . . . the shock caused him to swallow a big quid of tobacco. This tobacco in the stomach acted as a stimulant and kept up the heart action.” Which goes to show that precipitous action against supposed social evils may be unwise? Perhaps guided by such a belief, certainly to avoid strangling, men continued to expectorate outdoors and in, out of and in town, whether in the presence of a receptacle like a cuspidor or spittoon or not. Olive O. Coppock, of 305 South Main, Fairfield, reckoned in 1922 that the town needed “clean streets, less expectoration and more sanitation of the thoroughfares.”<sup>197</sup>

Increasingly over several years Ollie looked after her father, whenever he lived with her and George, tried to make his person and clothing presentable, especially when he went to town. Mercifully, the arguing dwindled, because, Jo believed, Ollie finally “put a stop to that.” It

may have been also that both George and Joe, having less energy, argued less.

Grandpa Steele became increasingly debilitated while at Ollie and George's. Dr. King "was a professional caller" frequently in 1922 and early 1923, Mr. Steele being "sick," "quite poorly," "in a very serious condition," and "seriously ill." He is "very low . . . Not much hope is entertained for his recovery." Lizzie Teeter came to help for several weeks. Wils and Cora visited their father. Cora stayed for a time, as did Joe's niece, Vic Wagner, who helped. Among others, neighbors Cora Ornduff and Fred Boysel paid their respects. Earnest's wife, "Mrs. Helen Teeter helped cook for hay balers at the Teeter home," and "Gust Teeter of Eldon" did "some papering at the George Teeter home." Entering this hectic scene, "Miss Josephine Teeter spent the week end with home folks." "The folks"—her father and mother driven by Earnest in the Ford—had told her about Grandpa Joe when picking her up at her Fairfield rooming house on Briggs Street across from the high school. Surprised, she "didn't know he was dying."<sup>198</sup>

As Grandpa Steele declined, Ollie and George were away from mid-December to mid-March attending to George's health needs at the baths in Hot Springs, Arkansas. On weekdays, Jo was in school. Rebecca, whom Joe Steele had once ungraciously characterized as his laziest grandchild, nursed her grandfather (with help from other family members) from late January until he died, Wednesday, April 25, 1923, aged eighty-five years, two months, and twenty-nine days.

Joseph Elliott Steele's Friday funeral was held where he had died, on the Gonterman farm that Ollie and George rented, a half mile east of County Line, he having rented his own farm to Roscoe Riggs. Grandpa Steele's obituary reported that among those attending was "Miss Josephine Teeter of Fairfield," high school senior. On the evening before the funeral she had gone alone into the living room where her grandfather was laid out in his coffin, hearing as she went Mother Ollie expressing concern to someone that Josephine would be there all alone. Then and later Josephine believed that she was and had been old enough.

The family's neighbor, Josephine's former teacher and long time friend, Edith Stull, had played their piano for the funeral. Other neighbors and friends, Minnie Pumphrey, Cora Ornduff, Wilbur Pumphrey, and Will Bartholow had sung hymns; the Reverend Fitzsimmons, Methodist of Batavia, had conducted the service (surely not by choice of the deceased who never went to any church so far as Jo could recall). Will Dillon, Howard Harshman, Fred Ornduff, Fred Boysel, Elmer Ashbaugh, and Charley Newland had been pallbearers. Family and friends had followed Batavia

undertaker Davidson's motorized hearse in their cars to Fell cemetery along now passable roads after a bad winter, there to lay Joseph Elliott Steele beside Sarah Elizabeth Miles Steele. Jo could not recall any gathering or meal following the funeral: "I think we just buried him and came home." On Sunday afternoon, Josephine returned to Fairfield from County Line flag station on No. 30, Rock Island line.<sup>199</sup>

As Doc King said, Joe Steele's body had outlived his mind. He had, however, named efficient Ollie executrix of his estate, which included a 160-acre farm valued at just under \$13,000; a bank balance just under \$1,200; and \$1.60 on the decedent's person, a respectable showing for those years. Rebecca was paid \$250 for "care and nursing during his last illness." George and Ollie received \$355 for "board, room and washing furnished to decedent for the period from Aug 15 1920 to April 25 1923, one hundred and forty weeks at \$6.00 per week," minus \$485 previously received. Other charges to the estate included \$42 to Dr. D. H. King for medical services; \$33 to Joseph Elliott's daughter, Cora, interest on a loan; \$10 to Abel Anderson, gravedigger; \$9 to Gus Teeter for "paper hanging"; \$7.50 to Mrs. Ada Curtis for timothy seed; and a significant, a memorable, \$550.20 to M. A. Davidson, undertaker.

With her brother Joseph Wilson Steele and sister Cora Steele Carlson, Ollie inherited and eventually, with some continuing family rancor, divided the farm that Joe and Sarah had taken up in 1863. In early 1929 Ollie and George moved into Joe Steele's fine house on the east eighty acres where they had wed. This, the house that George had helped build, he would soon remodel at Ollie's behest. There they would live in their retiring years.



## CHAPTER 3: AT HOME, AT PLAY, AT WORK

What we outwardly regard as important—  
the big events, the key moves, the prominent characters—  
may have nothing to do with the story that needs to be written.

—Sven Birkerts, *The Fourth Genre, Vol. I*

These are not the events of a great history;  
even local lore barely records such trivia,  
but lives are fashioned out of trivia.

—Richard Lloyd-Jones, *Fire and Ice:  
A Rhapsodic View of the 30s*



The Teeter Family. Front Row: Ollie, Bernard, George.  
Back Row: Irene, Earnest, Rebecca, Josephine

When Ollie and George Teeter left her parents' parlor on the eighth of June 1892 as a married couple, they entered a new realm for

which “walking out” had hardly prepared them. Lacking the sometimes questionable benefits of modern sexuality—TV and movies and sex manuals, sex education at home or school, trial marriage—Ollie knew her way around the kitchen and George the carpenter’s shop much better than the bedroom. Friends had hoped that George and Ollie’s “pathway may be strewn with roses,” but then, no thorns, no roses. Coming from homes where temper tantrums were almost routine, George and Ollie were poorly prepared to negotiate cooperatively in a marriage that for many years would be financially strapped, and stressful in other ways as well.

They were certainly prepared, however, for work. Both were solidly grounded in the practical three R’s, Ollie at Fairfield’s Franklin school and at Des Moines Township School No. 6, and George at County Line School No. 3, both for eight years. At twenty-nine, journeyman George had long ago completed a home apprenticeship in the practical arts, especially farming and carpentry.

Although almost a decade younger, at twenty Ollie had nevertheless had an intensive home-schooled course in domestic management, particularly because Mother Sarah was often debilitated by asthma and other ills, and because Ollie was the elder of two daughters. No stranger to the barnyard, once when her father was ill she had to carry many buckets to water the horses because they were too “frisky” to lead. Contrary to the old saying, she could get a horse to drink, but leading the horse to water was the problem.

### **County Line was Dying Quietly, and Very Slowly**

On June 8 the very newlyweds immediately set up housekeeping less than five miles from the parlor, in the second house from the southwest corner of County Line village intersection, and within a coal chunk’s throw from the Rock Island’s frequent rumble. Foreshadowing their future, this was a rental, a second-floor-above landlady Mrs. Sketoe (pronounced like the last two syllables of a word denoting a pesky insect). She was probably Hannah Gardner, second wife and recent widow of Joseph Sketoe, County Line railroad agent, storekeeper, and postmaster. A decade or so earlier, the “Line” had boasted of “good surrounding country with good society,” the usual village businesses, “a number of dwellings . . . and—great expectations.” Like many such crossroad towns, expectations went unrealized. For as Alice Conner Harness illustrates, in 1892 and later County Line was losing ground. It had a post office in the general store, blacksmith shop, lumberyard (closed 1900), grain elevator (closed 1904),

church, school, Rock Island freight depot and passenger station (the latter closed 1894 and converted to a flag stop because of limited business), and very few houses.<sup>200</sup>

Thanks to an altered surveying line, County Line settlement, near an area earlier called Milton, and another called Absecum (or Absecum or Absecam), was actually a half-mile east of the Jefferson-Wapello County line. Milton, gone by 1870, had been a trading post and sawmill. Absecum, platted in 1855, a stage coach stop “notorious for its fights, horseshoe pitching and saloons,” declined after the rail line later known as the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy passed a couple of miles to the north. The tiny village disappeared entirely after 1870 when the railroad that would become the Rock Island created County Line station nearby.<sup>201</sup>

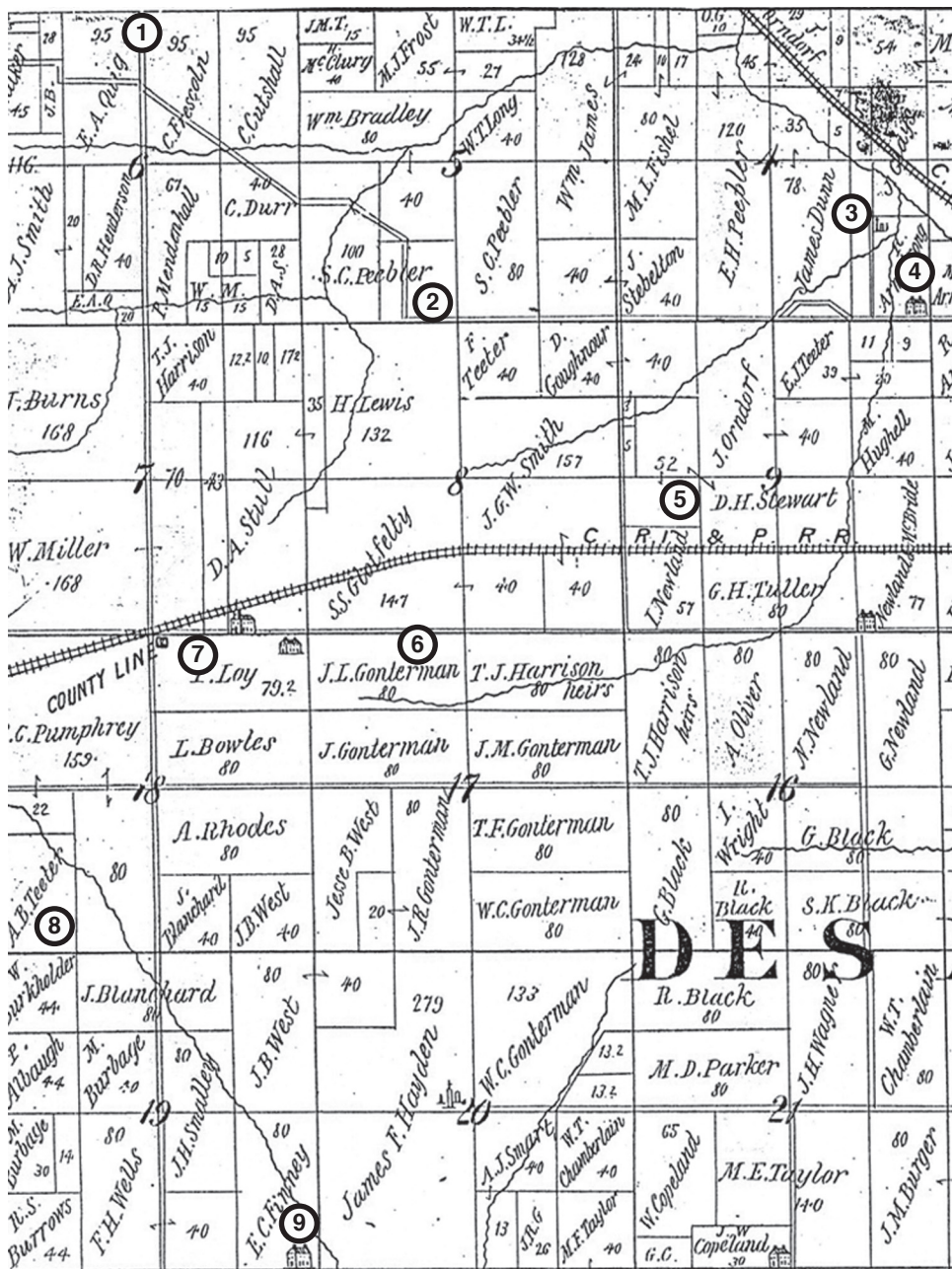
Just about fifty years after Ollie and George set up housekeeping there, probably 1941, County Line was dying quietly, and very slowly. That Sunday morning my dad stopped our dark brown 1938 Ford Tudor Deluxe at the general store’s gas pump and asked old Mr. Elmer D. Ashbaugh to pump a few gallons. And pump, actually pump, he did. That was my first and only experience of seeing gasoline rise and roil about a glass bulb, as it filled atop a metal cylinder perhaps seven or eight feet tall, while an attendant rocked a three foot long vertical lever back and forth. Mr. Ashbaugh died in 1942, the same year that the Rock Island depot, where Josephine Teeter had often flag stopped the Fairfield train on the way to high school, was torn down.



County Line Methodist Church

the play pipe. Here, perhaps, was a naughty source of young Josephine’s interest in religious activity?

County Line never became prominent enough to be called a one-horse town. Lacking patronage, Elmer Ashbaugh’s widow, Ada, closed the town’s last business in 1944. Why had she or her husband never modernized, never installed electrical gas pumps? Because, unlike Batavia



Jefferson County, Des Moines Township northwestern area, 1894 map

1. To Batavia
2. Peebler farm (Teeter rental c. 1912-18)
3. Brethren Cemetery
4. Ellmaker School #2
5. Hunt farm (Teeter rental 1907-)
6. Gonterman farm (Teeter rental 1920-29),  
Site of Absecum (1855)
7. County Line Station, Methodist Church,  
School #3, Mrs. Sketoe's house  
(Teeter rental 1892-)
8. Abraham B. Teeter farm
9. Turkey Scratch School #7





since 1916, County Line never had electricity. Batavia was barely two miles away. Clearly, the pace of modernization in rural Jefferson County, and in Iowa generally, depended not only upon time, but upon place as well. Like thousands of little settlements in Iowa and nationwide, County Line was a temporary town, at the mercy of an ever-changing economy and society.<sup>202</sup>

### **Ollie and George, and Country Medicine**

In 1892 only a mile and a half from the newlyweds by road, less through neighbors' fields, was the Teeter farm. George helped there while continuing to build houses with his father. Ollie busied herself with homemaking and pregnancy. On October 11, 1893, the *Fairfield Tribune* somewhat tardily announced, "BORN To George B. Teeter and wife in Des Moines Township, July 6, 1893, a son, their first child," namely Earnest Albert (the "a" in Earnest was intentional). Kitty Irene (first-named by Earnest, who said that as a newborn she sounded like one) appeared two years later, July 31, 1895.

In County Line, after Earnest and before Irene was born, George shot his wife, about which widowed Grandma Ollie told me with characteristically twinkling eyes in 1945. Mother Ollie was holding Baby Earnest and Father George was cleaning an unloaded (of course) handgun, which somehow went off with a stunning roar in a closed room. Ollie cried, "Oh, George, you've shot the baby." Whereupon George replied, more or less calmly, "No, I didn't, I shot you." As shockingly, he had, in the leg, a superficial wound. It is not recorded how landlady Mrs. Sketoe reacted, or whether the bullet penetrated their floor, her ceiling. Earnest was clearly at risk at County Line. When a toddler, he toddled off somewhere. After a frantic search he was found where the family's little black dog, teeth firmly imbedded in Earnest's clothing, had guided or dragged him out of a cornfield.

Other events were more common for that time and place, although often deadly as lost children or gunfire. After giving birth to Earnest, Ollie was blind four days. As an infant, Kitty Irene had whooping cough, a life threatening disease for one so young. Ollie and George's third, Paul Leroy, was born and died in 1897. A daughter was born September 5, 1899, but was not named until much later because her mother was ill for two weeks, was not expected to live, did not even know her baby's sex. Rebecca Elizabeth was eventually named for both grandmothers, who had cared for her during the crisis. As we know, the next daughter, born Christmas morning 1901, was never named. Josephine May, in 1903, and Bernard



Steele, November 6, 1906, enjoyed apparently “normal” births.

Ollie began childbearing at twenty-one and ended at thirty-four, thirteen years from 1893 to 1906, during which seven children were born, five survived. Following the American trend, she had fewer children in fewer childbearing years than had nineteenth-and eighteenth-century forebears, excepting her own mother, who bore six. Ollie’s children, except one, would have fewer than she.

As had her ancestors, Ollie gave birth at home, which now may seem to be dangerous, but which then was not irrational, given that hospitals were not generally well equipped, or safe, or located conveniently, if they existed at all. Old Doc King thought that homes were preferable to hospitals because, as Jo Curtis paraphrased him, “You were used to your own germs.” And Isobel Manning Teeter, Ollie’s daughter-in-law, pointed out that it was safer for a doctor with horse and buggy to attend a birth than for a pregnant woman to travel in often-bad weather over often difficult or impassable mud or snowed-in roads. In crises other than childbirth, a country doctor sometimes had no choice as well. Doc King once performed an emergency appendectomy, Isobel recalled, on the inevitable kitchen table.

David Hendricks King’s 1923 office hours are indicative of his services over many long years: “9-11a.m.; 3-5 afternoons; 7-9 evenings; Sundays from 10 to 11a.m. only.” Unmentioned in the schedule are house calls and almost normal emergency calls. King, a farm boy born in 1875, son of a widowed mother, had by 1898 made his way through Keokuk Medical College, as had numerous other area physicians. Graduating on borrowed money, he had returned to his home area at Abingdon, and then to nearby Batavia in 1907 where his house promptly burned down. That “five room cottage worth probably \$700” had been insured for four hundred. He was, as a relatively affluent leading citizen, able to rebuild promptly, although hard strapped patients sometimes paid off with unusual booty. In 1903 Frank Henry killed an eagle with a seven-foot wingspan that had been taking piglets. Presumably to pay a debt, he “presented the bird to Dr. King of Abingdon, who will have it mounted and placed in his office.” I seem to remember that fearsome bird hovering over me in his small Batavia office where he doctored for many years, and from whence he delivered my brother at home, among about 4,000 others by his count without a single death of infant or mother by 1931. Later he almost delivered me at home, and somewhat later cleaned and sewed up my boyhood traumas in the 1940s—a large gash in the calf of my leg, a nasty puncture in my palm.<sup>203</sup>

Doc King was our regular family doctor, but not always our doctor.

One afternoon Chet was not quite successful in attempting to repair our mowing machine. King being unavailable, Agency's Dr. Reed reattached the dangling tip of Chet's left index finger. With needle and thread. Without anesthetic. Ever afterward, an indentation circled his finger, and the tip tingled in the cold, but it stayed on. Jo testified that while being sewed, Chet had kicked a bloody pan of water clear across the room.

As for Ollie, childbearing was not her only trial. Like her mother, she suffered long-term from that common ailment, asthma, and had recurrent painfully sore throats as well. As a child of perhaps four, she had accidentally drunk lye water meant for bleaching clothes; a scarred throat may have contributed to her problems. To Jo, her mother's wheezing struggle for breath "would just scare you to death." Ollie had a tonsillectomy, about 1912 Jo thought, which seemed to help; but Isobel Manning Teeter noted Ollie's "pretty bad spells" in the 1930s. I, visiting in 1945, remember Grandma wheezing while trying to talk and walk uphill to the barn, of being "plumb tuckered out." One wonders again about lasting effects upon women of wood and soft coal burning stoves and kitchen ranges that often smoked when to conserve fuel the stovepipe "damper" was closed too far.<sup>204</sup>

Any family member might, of course, suffer life's miscellaneous ills at any time. The *Batavia News* noted in 1921 that Mrs. George Teeter was undergoing dental work in late January; that in September she had been called to Fairfield by "the serious illness" of grandchild Bernice Gorman (who lived to become a registered nurse); that in 1922, "Mr. Teeter is suffering from blood poisoning in his hand," and, two weeks later, "is confined to his bed this week" by the same malady. Next week he was out and about. Yet again in 1925, "George Teeter went to Ottumwa Tuesday and finished a course of treatments under Dr. Heckman for poisoning in his blood. He is well on his way to recovery." Jo noted that her father "could get blood poisoning quite easily," that later in life he was diabetic.<sup>205</sup>

Many ills not deemed serious enough for expensive medical attention yielded to home remedies, such as the mustard plaster, a hot poultice wrapped around an affected area—ankle, back, chest. Did it work? Jo: "Well, if you lived, I guess it did." For presumed medicinal

MRS. PINKHAM'S WARNING TO WOMEN.  
Neglect is the Forerunner of Misery and Suffering.



*Jefferson County Republican,*  
September 20, 1898

effect, liquor dosed even children on occasion, even Josephine. For sore throat and cough, horehound candy was the thing. If troubles persisted, one might turn to the heroic alternative of fat-permeated skunk oil.

For reasons unfathomable, fat was assigned curative powers. In 1903, "Scott's Emulsion" was advertised as replacing "Salt pork . . . a famous old fashioned remedy for consumption," that is, tuberculosis. Scott's, combined with "cod liver oil and hypophosphites . . . puts new life into the weak parts and has a special action on the diseased lungs." Scott's merely made one of the more egregious claims of the era. Many brands were guaranteed panaceas: Doan's Kidney Pills; Magnetic Healing of Rheumatism; Cuticura Ointment, and a "Magnet Pile Killer that Cures Piles." An 1897 ad, headlined "A Happy Woman," opined, "A happy woman must necessarily have a healthy liver, therefore to be happy keep the liver healthy. Prickly Ash Bitter will tone up the system, purify the bowels and put the liver right." Without revealing its chemistry, in 1899 "Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People" promised help to "Society Women" and other stressed females. The motto of Cascarets Candy Cathartic, a laxative, was, "The Entire Country Is On The Move." Castoria, surprisingly, advertised itself as "not narcotic," and another asserted, "No Opium In Chamberlain's Cough Remedy. Children Like It. Sold by Frank S. Shriner," Fairfield. This in an age when patent medicines and even popular drinks regularly dispensed alcohol and worse, including opiates and cocaine. In 1897 "Opium Cure," "painless and reliable," was "A Blessing To Womankind." In 1907 headlines announced "Ban Put On 'Coco Cola,'" [sic] "To Save Soldiers' Health." The War Department had prohibited "Coca Cola" in post exchanges because analysis revealed "quantities of cocaine and caffeine." In later years, the drink would make do with only caffeine, sometimes not even that. Meanwhile, "it is said," claimed one outrageously misleading ad, "that the soldiers who had taken Hood's Sarsaparilla stood the long marches in Cuba much better than the others." That patent medicine, like others of the era, sometimes resorted to rhyme:

There is one little maxim	It will banish dyspepsia,
That now I will name,	Rheumatics and gout,
Which may bring what is better	That Tired Feeling conquer,
Than riches or fame.	Drive Scrofula out,
All those who will heed it	And here is the maxim—
Good appetite find,	Its wisdom is sure—
Strong nerves, rosy cheeks,	Take Hood's Sarsaparilla
And vigor of mind.	And keep your blood pure.

Although more facts could apparently not be rhymed, Hood's Sarsaparilla also cured pimples, malaria, Salt Rheum, catarrh, and rheumatism. This

was a true panacea, a cure-all. Another jingly nostrum claimed that:

Whene'er you feel impending ill,  
And need a magic little pill,  
No other one will fill the bill  
Like DeWitt's Early Risers.

Those little pills, continued prosaic text, "cure constipation, sick headache, biliousness, etc. They never gripe or sicken, but impart early rising energy. Good for children or adults. Sold by Israel and Kramme."<sup>206</sup>

Notable also were numerous patent medicines for the reproductive system: "Motherhood is woman's natural destiny—actual barrenness is rare—comforting words to childless women . . . Among the many triumphs of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound . . . thousands of children owe their existence . . ." In another of "Mrs. Pinkham's Warning To Women," she asserted that "Nearly all the ill health of women is traceable to some derangement of the feminine organs." If perchance the "blame" lay not with a supposedly barren woman, an early day pill for erectile dysfunction in 1904, "Peffer's Nervigor," promised "Weak Men Made Vigorous. Cures when all others fail. Absolutely guaranteed to cure Nervousness, Lost Vitality, Impotency," etc. Other patent medicines promised to cure "etc." as well. "Sex-ine Pills" in 1900, for example, "have stood the test of years, and have cured thousands of cases of Nervous Diseases, such as Debility, Dizziness, Sleeplessness and Varicocele, Atrophy, &c [that et cetera again] . . . All drains and losses are checked permanently." Even as early as 1864 this advertisement appeared in the *Fairfield Ledger*: "Diseases of the nervous, seminal, urinary and sexual systems—new and reliable treatment— . . . sent by mail in sealed envelopes, free of charge" from "Dr. J. Skillin," Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. And in 1898 appeared "The Great French Remedy," "Regenero."<sup>207</sup>

Other nagging ills—for those untroubled by childlessness or impotence—that did not respond to home remedies or patent medicines were often worried through. That is, they were worked through. Since

**MANHOOD:**  
**How Lost! How Restored!**  
Just Published in a Sealed Envelope; Price 6 cts.  
**A LECTURE ON THE NATURE, TREATMENT and Radical Cure of Spermatorrhœa or Seminal Weakness, Sexual Debility, Nervousness, and Involuntary Emissions, inducing Impotency, Consumption, and Mental and Physical Debility**  
By **ROBT. J. CULVERWELL, M. D.**

WHEN IN DOUBT, TRY  
**STRONG AGAIN!**  
*Sex-ine Pills*

*Fairfield Ledger*, September 24, 1863

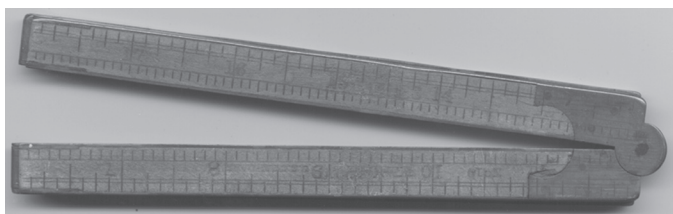
*Fairfield Ledger*, November 14, 1900

ills were inevitable, often incurable, unless you were down you worked. Merely feeling poorly was no excuse. George seems not to have suffered earlier such serious ills as did Ollie, although he later developed diabetes and Bright's disease, a kidney ailment. When Ollie was bedfast with illness or childbirth—often simultaneous—George cooked if necessary, and was “pretty good,” said Jo, although one of his spinster sisters, Evie or Lizzie, often came. When severe illness did not intrude, George and Ollie followed traditional rural work patterns.

### Rural Work Patterns

In addition to farming, as we have seen, George early carpentered with his father. In 1888 they built for Joe Steele. In 1889, “Abe Teeters and son” are building a house for M. L. Fishel. In 1890 they built “Squire” Copeland's. George Petzinger had A. B. Teeter put up a smokehouse in 1895. Apparently Petzinger was satisfied, for Isobel Manning Teeter recalled that Abraham and George had built his house, just down the road from Squire's, whose name was probably Millard. On Petzinger's, as on Joe Steele's, and probably all the rest, “The woodwork was all hand carved with chisels.” By late October 1897 Abraham and George had almost completed the house, and Petzingers moved in early in 1898. In 1896 “Abe” Teeter had E. H. Peebler's house almost finished. Jo thought her grandfather and father had built a Taylor house as well.<sup>208</sup>

These houses were all “balloon-frame” construction, a method new early in the nineteenth century, but soon the American standard into the twenty-first. Instead of traditional slow, heavy post-and-beam, mortise-and-tenon construction, carpenters now could quickly and inexpensively nail together a “balloon” frame of walls, ceilings, and rafters from 2 x 4 inch or heavier lumber. They could nail sheathing to the frame, thereby strengthening the entire structure, plaster the walls, and shingle the roof. Balloon-frame construction allowed a couple of carpenters like Abraham and George Teeter to build a respectable and satisfying house like Joe Steele's, and all those others, in a season.<sup>209</sup>



George B. Teeter's folding carpenter's rule

## Moving Day, the Same Day Every Year

Good workmen and true, George and Abe were in demand, but as his father aged—Abraham B. turned seventy-one with the new century and would die in 1905—George had to consider how best to support a growing family. Lacking capital, he turned to renting farms for many years. A neighbor said George’s farm was “the cleanest place around,” a shorthand definition of a good farmer. As the novelist Jane Smiley summarizes rural Iowa attitudes in *A Thousand Acres*, “What his farm looks like boils down to questions of character.” Seeing their “fixed up” property in a new light, landlords sometimes responded by selling out or moving in, requiring that the Teeters take to the road periodically on March 1, the traditional moving day. Then George would fix up another rental. Learning that he must move, the fictional Iowan, Fred Mutchler, in Ruth Suckow’s “Renters,” exclaims, “I’ve got this place into good shape, and you bet they’re smart enough to see it and take advantage of it too . . . Yah, been better for me if I hadn’t.” But neither Fred nor George Teeter could have done otherwise.<sup>210</sup>

## George Always Worked the Hard Way

The early-twentieth-century farms to which the Teeters moved repeatedly were much smaller and more general in production than in the later-twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For use and for sale, George and Ollie kept cows, sheep, pigs, and a wide range of poultry. Horses were always George Teeter’s only power source for tilling, planting, and



Cradle Scythe

harvesting corn, oats, hay, and other crops. But one year, Jo thought 1915, part of a field was too wet for horse-drawn machinery. Then George used a cradle scythe to cut and windrow (pile in a row to dry) his wettest oats by hand, a hard, sweaty, antique method for a man over fifty, who when young must have been tougher than whang leather, tougher than rawhide. Swinging a cradle scythe required both skill and stamina; in an earlier year “grain harvesters” were paid a dollar a day, but “cradlers” a dollar

and a quarter. In 1915 the “Ashland” correspondent noted that some had “resorted to the old fashioned arm strong reapers to save the grain,” and that a cradler supposedly had “a strong arm and a weak mind.” Although George’s cradle work was necessary that year to save much of the crop,



it illustrates Jo's observation that "He liked to do things the hard way it seemed like."<sup>211</sup>

In his early farming years George worked alone, and then with his sons as they matured. He gradually retired from fieldwork, except in planting and harvest times. Jo remembered America's Great War (WW I), remembered boys little older than she going off to train and sometimes to battle. In 1917 soldiers were in basic training just a few miles away at the Eldon fairgrounds. Brother Earnest was of draft age, but in 1918 Father George, ailing and fifty-five, engaged Fairfield lawyer Starr to petition the draft board to defer him. Even after Earnest and Helen Clark married in 1922 they rented a house from George's landlord and continued to farm his place until 1929. Bernard, like Earnest, quit school after eighth grade, learned from his father and brother, worked his parents' farm as well as other land, and cared for them after marrying Isobel Manning in 1933. Later, widowed Ollie would say of Bernard, always her favorite, "He was my stay." George increasingly attended to livestock chores, gardening (which he liked and which distressed asthmatic Ollie), splitting wood for insatiable stoves (until Ollie had a furnace installed in her own house in the 1930s), and "puttering around."

### **Ollie and George, and March 1 Moves**

Before finally settling in 1929, after thirty-seven years of marriage, on Ollie's share of the Steele farm, the Teeters moved at least ten times and at most perhaps a baker's dozen. In horse-drawn wagons, they packed and moved household goods; machinery, tack, and tools; chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, and guinea fowl. On horseback and with younger children walking, they drove sheep, hogs, cattle, and spare horses; greeted neighbors old and new along the road. Distances were typically only a few miles, but breaking down, packing, unpacking, and setting up was harrowing, particularly in often inclement March weather just right for ducks on those infamous Iowa mud roads, variously rich in black topsoil and an incredibly sticky clay, "gumbotil," "gumbo" for short. In "The Movers," Iowa poet James Hearst writes, "The east wind whips the skirts of snow / with a passing shower, / and over Iowa on the first of March / wheels churn hub deep in the mud / or grit their teeth across the icy roads." Newspapers reported in 1911, "Moving would be the order of the day if the roads were passable." In 1923 country roads were in such "bad condition" that "four horse teams are in evidence."<sup>212</sup>

Once arrived, and given typically inclement weather, the movers



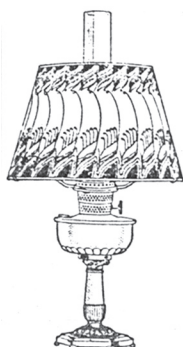
**Big Kitchen Pump**

**\$1.50**

*Batavia News,*  
July 18, 1935

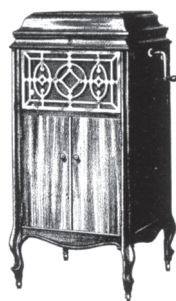
first set up and fired stoves, set up beds, fed and watered livestock, no doubt fell into bed early. The Teeters moved into renter's houses perhaps not as nice but differing little from those of most farm owners. Lacking central heating, they had wood and coal stoves. Lacking running water, a farm wife felt lucky if a "pitcher pump" was at the kitchen sink. More probably, water had to be drawn and carried by bucket from a pump in yard or barnyard. Toilets were in cold or stuffy outhouses. Tin tub baths on the kitchen floor were much less convenient and less frequent than in an age of showers, Jacuzzis, and hot tubs. Country folks were not entirely alone in lacking indoor toilets and baths. In 1903 Fairfield appeared this ad: "Baths 25c, Largest tub in town, shower attachment, at the office of Dr. Tailman."<sup>213</sup>

## Modernizing Communication



"Aladdin" gas  
mantle lamp,  
*Batavia News,*  
Nov. 14, 1935

The Teeters had no electricity anywhere until after George died in 1941. Thus lighting was by kerosene or gas mantle lamps; carpentry workshop and kitchen appliances were hand powered; and their record-playing Victrola was spring wound by hand crank. On that wonderful floor model record player, many years later I learned the Brown songs—Little Brown Jug and Little Brown Church (written of an Iowa church, 1857)—offering unsubtly different messages.<sup>214</sup>



Spring wound  
phonograph,  
1920

The Teeters had another device for transmitting culture, a stereopticon: a viewer with a vertical hand grip, upon which was a short, flat stick with two magnifying eyepieces at one end and a sliding card holder, the holder for a card having two identical pictures. Peering through those lenses and adjusting the focal length by sliding the holder along the stick, one could glimpse 3-D images of exotic lands and peoples. Local newspapers as early as 1895 and as late as 1915



Stereopticon

announced stereopticon lectures. Through that instrument I first saw in 3-D Egypt's wonders—camels, pyramids, palms. Somewhat later, as a high school sophomore, reading in my world history text about Egypt, I began, I have long believed, to become the historian I turned out to be. But it now seems that I may have begun to become even earlier.<sup>215</sup>

In Ollie and George's early married years, and into the early twentieth-century, before Rural Free Delivery (RFD), railroads brought mail to towns like Libertyville, County Line, and Batavia. The Teeters had to take horse and buggy, walk to town for mail, or share the task with neighbors. Congress first funded Rural Free Delivery in 1894, but the wheels of gods and government turned slowly, particularly since local petitions were required. By 1900 RFD routes operated out of Libertyville and Batavia, and by 1901 two from Fairfield. In 1902 a U.S. Post Office (USPO) representative was expected to establish or extend rural mail routes in Jefferson County. Early in the century County Line was on Batavia route #3. In 1906 the USPO warned "rural patrons" to clear snow drifts from mail boxes and warned county road supervisors to keep roads in good condition, or "permanent withdrawal of the delivery will likely result." That, however, would have upset a political beehive.<sup>216</sup>

Thus, early in the century ruralites caught up with Fairfielders, who had received mail at their doors, instead of trekking to the Post Office, only since July 1897. This after the town's mail receipts reached \$10,000, after houses had been numbered, streets marked, and sidewalks made safe for carriers. Reported the *Fairfield Tribune*, two major consequences of Rural Free Delivery were that daily newspaper subscriptions increased significantly; and saloon business declined just as significantly since farmers no longer "had to" go to town for mail. By early 1906 all of Jefferson County's rural residents, thirsty or not, had RFD. Newspaper subs increased partly because second class mail cost did not increase with RFD. First class postcards



Rural mail buggy, *Eldon Forum*, July 10, 1913

remained one cent. Male postal carriers always dominated, but in 1905 Nellie M. Hopkirk was "appointed carrier on Route No. 1, Lockridge."<sup>217</sup>

Rural folk may have lagged a bit concerning mail, but the Teeters and their neighbors were always almost as modern as townfolk in that almost everyone had telephones, George and Ollie by at least 1904. Isobel Manning Teeter believed that Joe Steele had a phone before Ollie married in 1892, which seems improbable, although in this period member-owned

rural cooperative telephone companies mushroomed in state and nation. Fairfield's first telephone appeared in 1878 between business and home of W. W. Junkin, and a Telephone Exchange in 1883, "with twenty-three subscribers" and unsatisfactory service. "It is expected that inside of three months, connections will be made with Chicago and all intervening towns, and in time with points west of here," was the utterly optimistic forecast. In that same year of 1883 Batavia had equally optimistic "plans to link to other towns by telephone." But its first phone appeared in 1885—a line between a merchant's business and home—and a "Batavia Telephone Company" was organized in 1905, to be succeeded in 1919 by the "Farmers Telephone Company," with original stockholders including Judson Curtis and Mrs. Ada Curtis. Jefferson County Telephone Company created a practical system in 1897, by the next year reportedly had poles set in the ground to Batavia, Pleasant Plain, Brighton, Germanville, and Libertyville, and expected to have wires up soon. In 1899, however, it was still extending lines toward Batavia. By 1900 Fairfield had reached County Line and Eldon, and soon thereafter was linked to Oskaloosa and probably Des Moines, the state capital. Locally, 1899 saw a telephone in the Jefferson County Treasurer's office, and in 1907 a courthouse public telephone booth, toll five cents. Farther afield and twenty years later, President Coolidge reportedly had no telephone on his White House desk—"He goes into a booth in a small room adjoining his office"—on an inexpensive party line? For many years, rural and small town telephone "exchanges" were worked by "hello girl" "operators" who took calls and connected parties on manual "switchboards." In 1906 a topical musical, *The Telephone Girl*, played at Fairfield's Grand Opera House.<sup>218</sup>

The telephone was fascinating. Ollie Teeter told Isobel Manning Teeter of being young and enthralled when Aunt Belle Manning would call and Grandpa Manning would play violin music over the telephone. Malcolm Trout remembered that down in Van Buren County, "On Sunday evening Uncle Charlie, who owned the only Edison talking machine in the neighborhood, would move the loud speaker to the transmitter and entertain everyone on the line." Those wonderful instruments were admittedly primitive battery-powered, hand-cranked machines, wall-mounted and short-corded, limiting range of motion and intra-familial privacy to virtually nil. "Party lines," on which everyone heard and could identify everyone's ring, were virtually public address systems conducive to "listening in." Jo knew a neighbor who disliked a private line because she could no longer listen in. Did Jo never listen in? "Well, sometimes I did, but I never made a practice of it." The telephone became a modern extension of traditional

rural and small town community relations.<sup>219</sup>

When everyone listened in the signal was so weakened as sometimes to be unintelligible. An impatient caller might snap at unnamed but known neighbors to hang up so he or she could hear. Early in the century, however, an Ottumwan discovered a benefit of being listened in on. This when he charged a caller with slandering him: "Mr. White asserts he will prove his claim by eight other neighbors who are connected on the same line . . . and all of whom chanced to have their ears to the receiver." A New Hampshire legislator in 1911 proposed a ten-dollar fine for listening in, but how to discover miscreants?<sup>220</sup>

Despite disadvantages (and the occasional quirky advantage), telephones were tremendously important in reducing rural isolation, loneliness, and dangers when illness, childbirth, farm accident, or fire occurred. Then one might be grateful when a neighbor listened in, or when the local operator cranked out a general alarm call. In 1905, "the alarm was given over the phone that W.N. Glotfelty's house was on fire and by the timely assistance of the neighbors the fire was extinguished before much damage was done." In 1924, "A rail road fire near Floyd Glotfelty's caused a little excitement," threatening haystacks, barn, and house, but "a call was given over the lines and in a few minutes a number of men . . . had it under control." In 1915, "The death of Mrs. Davis was announced over the lines." Even in 1941 a general alarm call informed Beulah Meier Pelton about Pearl Harbor.<sup>221</sup>

The general ring could also be used for mundane commercial purposes, as when the *Batavia News*, October 23, 1919, carried a local merchant's ad: "Will have a [railroad] car of Early Ohio Potatoes in a few days \$1.85 per bushel at the car. Watch for general ring." Some calls could be downright irritating. Earlier that year, June 12, the CB&Q Railroad had been impelled to pay for a "Public Notice: Account of our time being taken up with the duties of this office, we would request that people calling the station for the time of day, please discontinue the practice. We desire in every way possible to accommodate the public but the answering of the phone to give the time of day, throws but a double and unnecessary burden upon us. L. R. Ford, Agent, Burlington Station, Batavia, Iowa."<sup>222</sup>

An agent's life could be at least irksome if the phoning public engaged in semantic quibbling. "Railroad men are telling a story of a 'Q' agent at a small town along the line near here, [Batavia's Mr. Ford?] in which he was most conspicuously squelched by the woman who knows everything. 'When does the next train that stops at Burlington leave here?' 'You'll have to wait four hours.' 'I think not.' 'Well, maybe you know better

than I do ma'am.' 'Yes sir; and maybe you know better than I do whether I'm expecting to travel on that train myself, or whether I am inquiring for a relative that's visiting at my house, and wanted me to call here and ask about it and save her the trouble, because she is packing up her things and expects to take that train herself, and not me, and she'll have to do the waiting, and not me, and maybe you think it is your business to . . . instruct people about things they know as well as you do, if not better, but my idea is that you put yourself there because they couldn't use you in the switching department, and perhaps you'll learn some day to give people civil answers when they ask you civil questions, young man. My opinion is, you won't.'" If the young man were well informed, he would have known that only a year earlier, in 1897, a Bayer chemist in Germany had invented a painkiller called "aspirin," which the agent undoubtedly needed just then.<sup>223</sup>

In 1927 years after phones had become farm fixtures, a newspaper puff piece juxtaposed prejudices against the stereotypical "hired man" (and "hired girl") to tout the telephone's value. That is, the telephone "is a hired man who eats nothing, who will not forget his orders, who will not flirt or elope with the hired girl, who will not set fire to the farm with his careless pipe or cigarette, who will not strike for higher wages just when the need is greatest. A farm phone is almost as necessary as land or house or barn." Nevertheless, early day "patrons" complained about costs, threatened, since they could not change companies, to have phones taken out when charges around Eldon reached \$1.25 for three months. By 1919 they were up to \$1.50, with no ceiling in sight. Despite such malcontents, a 1923 local newspaper crowed, "Iowa Leads World In Use Of Phones." According to AT&T, Iowa the state had more phones than any country but Germany, Great Britain, and Canada.<sup>224</sup>

### **A Farm's Chief Business**

A phone call might relieve monotony, but after "hanging up" the "receiver" earphone, one had to return to a farm's chief business, which was to produce food. Like most farmers, George and the boys planted, cultivated, and harvested field crops. They raised principally corn, oats, and hay, some of which, once livestock had enough, could be sold to pay bills in a market economy; but much family work went to feeding themselves. In this, the Teeters, like their neighbors, like their ancestors, were virtually self-sufficient. As Jo wrote, "I guess we were a poor family but [we] always had plenty to eat." Ollie and George bought flour and sugar enough for winter in hundred-pound bags, bought baking powder, salt, a few other



spices, tea for Ollie, coffee for George, and in winter the occasional bucket of oysters for soup. The rest was mostly their own doing.

Meat was a high priority. Jo learned early that hamburger did not come from fast food drive-ins (of which, dear reader, there were none). Nor did pork or poultry. Chicken, duck, goose, turkey, these were captured fresh from the pen or the barnyard. Summarily beheaded on a wooden chopping block with an ax or hatchet, they were bled, dunked in scalding water, plucked, quickly singed over a little open fire to eliminate pin feathers, eviscerated, cut into pieces, washed, and cooked in a variety of ways. Those who ate poultry, pork, or beef knew how it got to the table, for butchering was a family and often neighborhood project in which children helped. The tradition continued for many years. In early 1923 the Harshmans and Earnest Teeter had a “butchering bee” at Fred Ornduff’s and then at George Teeter’s. In early 1927, “Last week was butchering week around County Line. George Teeter, Colonel Laughlin, Fred Boysel, Robert Gonterman, Earnest Teeter and Fred Ornduff participating.” I remember our family butchering in the early 1940s.<sup>225</sup>

In fall or early winter, after freezing weather had set in, a likely looking steer was knocked on the head with a heavy hammer or maul, or more likely shot in the head with a revolver or rifle. A “gambrel stick” pointed at both ends was thrust between hind leg bones and tendons and the carcass was hung by block and tackle from a tree limb or tripod. It was bled from a cut in the jugular artery at the throat, skinned, split down the backbone with an axe, and then divided with butcher knives into smaller cuts. A sacrificial hog experienced approximately the same process, except that, after its throat was cut with a butcher knife to bleed it, the carcass was dunked in scalding water and the hide then scraped to remove the bristles—a hog’s stiff and durable hairs. For many years, manufactured toothbrushes were made of hog bristles. Ugh! Now toothbrushes are chemically created. Ugh!

Before refrigerators and freezers were common, meat was processed and preserved in a variety of ways, principally salting, smoking, or canning. One complicated recipe for home-cured pork called for it to be soaked in salt brine with brown sugar added for a couple of weeks, then the brine replaced for a month, then the meat drained, rubbed with salt, and hung to smoke over a hickory or apple wood fire. Sausage—ground pork mixed with spices—could be fried down and stuffed into tied-off sections of pig’s intestines (thoroughly cleaned in salt water). Or, lard could be used to seal loose sausage stored in large crocks to be shelved with other foodstuffs in a cool cellar or “cave.” Lard? In a huge cast iron kettle hung

from a tripod over a fire, animal fat could be “rendered” into lard to be used for cooking (rather than latter day vegetable oils). Floating on the boiling grease were “cracklings,” the ultimate high in fat foods, pieces of which a child might beg in return for carrying firewood, and in which even adults sometimes indulged.<sup>226</sup>

Some beef and pork was eaten fresh on the day, or a day or so after butchering. If the weather was cold enough, a quarter of beef could be hung to freeze solid in a smokehouse or other outbuilding alongside smoked hams, pork shoulders, and side meat, where George could saw or hack off cuts on demand.

Killing and butchering and eating animals was a bloody but commonplace process for millions of people and for many centuries. Few people, probably, thought much about it, but in 1870 humorist Josh Billings caught a sense of the bloody commonplace in a bit of doggerel:

Now kill the pigs, butcher hens,  
Murder ducks and geese that quack,  
Chop down the wood, and sausage make,  
And evenings play-Hylojack.

Excepting card playing, this fits the Teeter family. In 1906 responding to widespread revulsion at “muckraking” revelations, especially in Upton Sinclair’s novel, *The Jungle*, about filthy, unhygienic commercial food processing practices, Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act. Both revulsion and legislation concerned urbanites primarily, not the Teeters and other self-sufficient folk, whose processing however bloody was as clean and hygienic as boiling fat and boiling water allowed.<sup>227</sup>

Those who are at this moment nevertheless considering vegetarianism could also have dined well at the Teeters for most of the year. The entire family tended a large garden. Whether they had fruit trees, grape arbors, strawberry beds, and the like depended on what farm they happened to rent, and what neighbors had, although apples were almost everywhere. Potatoes were a year-round mainstay. Rebecca, Josephine, and Bernard had to keep plants free of potato bugs by picking them off and dropping them in a can of kerosene. Ditto tomato worms. In late summer and early fall they picked up potatoes as George dug and turned over the hills by using a potato fork with four flattened tines.

Like their parents, especially George, the children picked, picked up, plucked, dug, hoed, and weeded. A common refrain from Mother Ollie half-an-hour before dinner or supper in late spring, all summer, and early fall was, “Josephine [or Rebecca, or Bernard], run out to the garden

and get . . . ” Options were numerous, including in addition to tomatoes and potatoes, lettuce, celery (which was wrapped in paper to bleach it), radishes (to be dipped in a “salt cellar”), cucumbers (fresh and pickled), beets (cooked and eaten with butter and salt), a limited number of sweet potatoes, peas (often in a dish combined with potatoes), wax beans (Ollie disliked green beans), onions (“Yes, always. We let them grow, get big, and then pulled them, and hung them to dry. We also had little green onions.”), melons (both muskmelons and watermelons), and pumpkins (“We had to cut and cook and run ‘em through the colander and can ‘em for pies.”). Pumpkins also served a brief decorative function at Halloween when Teeter kids carved faces in them. “We always used glass jars for canning,” Jo said in 2003, “except for tomatoes, where we always used tin cans with sealing wax around the edge of the tin lid. I don’t know why [we used cans for tomatoes].” Glass jars were fitted with zinc lids with rubber washers, were filled, boiled under water, and then sealed. Tomatoes were boiled in a kettle, poured into tins, and sealed.<sup>228</sup>

Summer and fall were garden and orchard cornucopia time. Children helping, George brought fruit and vegetables to the kitchen. For a time they could be eaten fresh. Ollie and the girls canned and preserved because for most of the year the family could not have fresh vegetables and fruits. Canned goods they stored in the cool cellar along with some fresh vegetables, such as potatoes. They dried beans and apples. Ollie always pared, cored, sliced, and dried apples under cheesecloth in the sun—not Josephine’s favorite food, but a common method of preserving fruit. In addition to drying apples, Ollie always made applesauce and apple butter. Cabbages, turnips, carrots, and parsnips they buried in loose dirt under insulating straw in the fall and dug them as needed through the winter and into spring, if any were left uneaten by then. As Jo said, “Everybody made sauerkraut,” which during the Great War in some households became “Victory Cabbage because it was German in origin. Like butchering, harvesting and preserving were sometimes social neighborhood affairs. In 1911 Brethren church members “met at Ed Smith’s for an old fashioned apple paring.” After drying, the fruit would be sent to people “in the drought stricken areas.”<sup>229</sup>

Out beyond garden, orchard, and barnyard were supplements from field, stream, and pond. Just as George and some of the children gathered hickory nuts, and as Jo picked wild gooseberries (the Gonterman farm had tame ones), so they collected other nuts and berries, especially blackberries, to be eaten immediately or stored for winter. In the “immediately” category were wild strawberries that Jo picked with Rebecca and Bernard along the

Rock Island right of way as they went to and from County Line Methodist church when they lived on “the Peebler place.”

George fished for recreation and, although unnecessarily, for food. Sometimes the family had catfish and sunfish for breakfast because, Jo said, “Maybe he didn’t come back in time to have fish for supper.” County Line’s columnist reported in 1920, “George Teeter was fishing Tuesday but was unlucky and returned home at a late hour with a string of suckers.” But not empty-handed!<sup>230</sup>

George had a four-ten (or .410) shotgun and a huge old twelve-gauge for which he loaded his own reusable brass cartridges. Supper sometimes featured squirrels or rabbits. For one Thanksgiving dinner he provided a quail apiece for the family and one for the boarding schoolteacher, eight quail in all. You had to watch out not to break a tooth on fugitive lead birdshot. Although George was a hunter, Jo could not remember that he trapped animals or sold skins.

Honey was always available to smear on morning biscuits. Wild honey could be had by finding a hollow “bee tree,” lighting a fire at the base hole to smoke out the bees, cutting the tree down and into sections, and then scooping out honey and honey combs while swatting infuriated survivors. A neighbor claimed seventy-five pounds of honey from a single tree. Another claimed a hundred. Or one could keep hives of domesticated bees. George once followed on the run after a wild swarm, managed somehow to hive them, and took them home where their handiwork would be within “easy” reach. Beekeeping was a widespread, long-term neighborhood practice. The 1875 Iowa Census for Des Moines Township reported ninety-two stands of bees.

Modern readers can hardly avoid noticing that early-twentieth-century Teeters and their neighbors ate virtually no factory prepared food other than flour and sugar and salt and pepper and tea and coffee. No packaged frozen food of course. Precious little out of season food was shipped in from distant states and lands other than at Christmas. The year before Josephine was born, there did appear an ad for a prepared gelatin mix derived from boiled animal bones and hooves, and called “Jell-O, The New Dessert,” which “pleases all the family. Four flavors: - Lemon, Orange, Raspberry and Strawberry. At your grocers. 10c. Try it today.” Promo ads continued for years, as in *Wallaces’ Farmer*, 1921, “Time for farm women to learn about jello like city women.” To the Jell-O mix one added water, perhaps appropriate fruit, and chilled it ‘til it “set.” An icebox or certainly a refrigerator was highly preferable, but Jell-O would set, if very slowly, in a cool cellar. Jell-O became a popular dessert for decades, not

only at home, but also at innumerable neighborhood and church sociables, enduring—quiveringly—into the third millennium.<sup>231</sup>

With few exceptions, the Teeters ate local, homegrown, essentially uncontaminated food, with virtually no additives or insecticides or airborne contaminants from fossil fuels and other sources, and with, excepting salt, hickory smoke, and sugar, almost no preservatives in their meat, vegetables, and fruit. They ate lots of lard and other animal fat, but much hard work and active outdoor living may have at least mitigated untoward effects. Newspapers, however, often reported sudden deaths from apparent heart attacks, and from seizures or paralytic attacks that seem like strokes.

Unless ill and flat on her back, Ollie cooked three meals a day. She baked bread every other day, plus biscuits, pancakes, dumplings for chicken or beef dishes, and cornmeal mush. As Jo wrote, "The cooking she had to do for all kept her pretty busy, like baking large batches of bread that had to be started in the evening, and it would take most of the [next] day to finish it up by the time it was mixed, raised, punched down to raise again, then into the pans to raise and be baked in a wood stove." Oh, for a half dozen bread machines! By adding milk, egg, and a dash of cinnamon to leftover slices, Ollie made bread pudding. And there were cookies. In the year 2000 granddaughter Louise Wheeldon Bishop still remembered (as do my brother Wayne and I) Grandma Ollie's sugar cookies—and her pickles. Ollie, because she didn't like it, never made cornbread, although George dearly loved it. After she married, tenderhearted Josephine would make cornbread for her father's rare visits.

## World War I Rationing

After the United States entered the Great War in 1917 and rationing was imposed on coal, gasoline, tires, sugar, and wheat flour, Ollie had to limit cooking and baking to available ingredients. United States Food Administration officials pressed the population to eat certain foods, and not

The man or woman who does not buy Liberty Bonds according to his ability to do so this time will have their name entered on a **YELLOW** card and it will be made the subject of a Federal investigation. We need no Federal spur to prod us to our patriotic duty in this county.



Jefferson County people are just as loyal as any in the state or the nation—but *we've got to prove our loyalty by our deeds, not words.* Let's get together in a determined effort and have old Jefferson go over the top with a hurrah! It can be done. Let's do it.

others. "Eating Potatoes Is Patriotic Act." People were urged to eat more corn products, because, unlike wheat, corn could not easily be shipped abroad, but it is not recorded that Ollie succumbed to cornbread. People were urged to make do, to do without, to be patriotic. A jingle of the time, titled "O.U. Hoover," referring to Herbert Hoover, then United States Food Administrator, complained that:

My Tuesdays are meatless,  
My Wednesdays are wheatless,  
I am getting more eatless each day.  
My home it is heatless.  
My bed it is sheetless,  
They're all sent to the YMCA.

The bar rooms are treatless,  
My coffee is sweetless,  
Each day I get poorer and wiser.  
My stockings are feetless,  
My trousers are seatless,  
My God, but I do hate the Kaiser!<sup>232</sup>

Wheat flour being rationed to provide for soldiers and Allies, Ollie reluctantly used rice flour. One day, perhaps a Wednesday, which as the jingle indicated was supposed to be wheatless, a rationing official appeared about dinnertime, ostensibly to check on some other rationing matter. Ollie was caught emotionally between irritation and amusement, certain that the official believed she was cheating on her wheat flour allotment. Had he known that Teeter ancestors had once been Deeter—and perhaps even Diederich—he might have doubted their patriotism even more. Even long-time citizens with German names had to watch their step in those days. Wartime sedition laws provided harsh penalties, including fines and imprisonment, for even criticizing war measures. In those days the demagogic preacher Billy Sunday prayed thus before the U.S. House of Representatives: "Thou knowest, O Lord, that no nation so infamous, vile, greedy, sensuous, bloodthirsty ever disgraced the pages of history. If you turn hell upside down, you'll find 'Made in Germany' stamped on the bottom."<sup>233</sup>

If not fear, then at least country hospitality requiring that the official stay to eat (as he of course knew), he went away satiated, perhaps by sauerkraut—"Victory Cabbage" rather—but certainly by plenty of rice flour bread, which Ollie with the twinkling eye undoubtedly pressed upon him repeatedly. A contemporary fad song was entitled, "I'd Like to See the Kaiser With a Lily in His Hand," that is, at his funeral. I suppose Ollie would have preferred that it be a rice cake.

On Monday, November 11, 1918, Armistice Day marked the end of the Great War. In an awful four years ten million soldiers had died. Although the U.S. entered the war late, in six months of combat 50,000 Yanks had died. By comparison, during the later Vietnam conflict not many



more Americans died in fourteen years. Terrible as the war had been, and despite the irritations of rationing, the Teeter family was not intimately affected. A neighbor suffered a poison gas attack in France, and, ever after, any exertion caused him to wheeze painfully. Estol Curtis, older brother of Josephine's future husband, Chet, and a volunteer army bugler, was disappointed on Armistice Day to be on a troop ship still in New York harbor. Homer Wheeldon, Rebecca's future husband, got to France in the horse Cavalry, but came home unscathed.<sup>234</sup>

Of Armistice Day, the *Batavia News* reported, "The people of this vicinity were awakened . . . by the blowing of whistles and ringing of bells, proclaiming the glad news of peace. Several of the people went to Fairfield and Ottumwa to celebrate and help hang the Kaiser." Similar sounds emanated from Eldon, also nearby, and there too Kaiser Bill (Wilhelm) was hanged and burned in effigy. It may have been that the sound of bells and whistles and bands did not reach the few miles cross-country to the Teeter farm, but they did not go anywhere to celebrate. Ollie undoubtedly thought it celebration enough to return to full-time wheat flour—and at peacetime prices.<sup>235</sup>

### The Weary Housewife

Aside from cooking in peace and war, more indoor work always awaited the weary housewife. In early wedlock, as earlier at home, Ollie washed clothes by rubbing them up and down and up and down on a ribbed glass washboard, its wooden frame set in a tub of warm soapy water. She rinsed them twice in cold water; wrung them out by hand; hung them outside on the line in all sorts of hand-chapping weather; gathered them when dry. She ironed some with six-pound sadirons, a pair heated alternately on the cookstove. And put them all away. She used lye soap (hardly as gentle on the hands as Ivory), homemade by straining



Washboard in washtub



Ollie Teeter's sadiron

water through wood ashes to produce lye, and then combining it with animal fat—lard, bacon grease, and the like. When Josephine and Rebecca were young, their mother had a hand powered, really kid powered, really daughter powered, washing machine with a handle on top that was pumped to activate an agitator in the tub. In later years, sometime after

1929, Ollie had a Maytag washing machine with agitator and wringer powered by a gasoline engine.

Unlike her grandmothers at her age, Ollie did not spin or weave. She bought cloth, but she certainly sewed. In spare, mostly evening, moments, Ollie sewed new and mended old clothing. Jo believed the family had almost never patronized the Montgomery Ward or Sears & Roebuck catalogs for clothing although they had “sent for a whole lot of crackers once.” Work clothes from men and boys came from local merchants. Clothing for the girls and usually for herself Ollie made at home. Until the work strained her hands too much, she made quilts. Thereafter, for many decades, crocheting became her chief “leisure” occupation.



Ollie Teeter's  
stork scissors

Finally, housecleaning was a regular task. For a few years, after Irene was old enough and before she married and left home in 1915, she took over much of that work. Irene was married at home to Russell Gorman with both large families attending on June 30, Batavia Methodist church's Reverend Fix officiating. Jo, then eleven, remembered that Russell's mother helped Ollie with the wedding feast. She did not say whether Irene helped clean before the wedding, but presumably she did not afterwards. Rebecca and Josephine continued to help with cleaning and other work while living at home, but soon they were away at school, either attending or teaching (although they helped during holidays and summers). Eventually they too married.



Wedding photograph of Russell  
Gorman and Irene Teeter

### **The Traditional Visiting Community**

You will have realized all along, observant reader, that, in addition to all above tasks discussed, Ollie was charged by custom and experience to care for her children and to nurse the ill. Nursing was a frequent and onerous task in those years before modern inoculations, modern medicines, and relatively easy visits to the doctor or hospital had become common. Caretaker nursing was an occupation at home and away, away especially

when grandchildren arrived, as they did regularly over a few decades. Then Ollie could be found visiting Earnest's, Irene's, Rebecca's, Josephine's, or Bernard's for a time "to help out." Mothers like Ollie, particularly rural mothers, of necessity nursed not only ill or birthing family members, but guests as well.<sup>236</sup>

If you think Ollie did all that canning, cooking, baking, washing, nursing, and miscellaneous work for a maximum of seven people only, think again. For the Teeters over many years had many "guests," who generally came singly but often stayed for extended periods, especially in winter, and who may or may not have offered to work or to contribute money for their board. In this the Teeters were not at all unique for that time and place. They, their neighbors, and their community were not isolated and lonely farm folks, neither female nor male. Most striking is the amount of "visiting" and "dropping by" and coming to stay awhile, sometimes quite awhile. It may well have been that they had more actual social relationships than did their descendants a century or so later.

One long weekend in December 1922 may serve as example. On Thursday afternoon Mrs. Fred Ornduff—Cora—visited with Ollie. On Saturday morning, the George Breckenridges and Wilson Teeter's widow dropped by. Already there were Irene Teeter Gorman and her children, staying for the weekend while Russell organized the family's move from Fairfield to Burlington, where he would work in the CB&Q yards. Already there also was Josephine, home for a long weekend resulting from a Thursday and Friday high school holiday. Sunday saw the arrival of the Earnest Teeter family, the Floyd Cummings family, and the Harry Mills family. Not all of these folks stayed for a meal. Several obviously did.<sup>237</sup>

Having numerous visitors was a venerable custom for Ollie and



Katherine Steele Wagner

George, and for contemporary Iowa families. Joe Steele's sister, Kate Steele Wagner, with her husband, came visiting in 1899. Joe's brother, "Dr. N. Steele and wife, of Palestine, Illinois," came visiting in 1900. Ann Steele Lane, widow of Abel Lane, was Ollie's favorite aunt with whom she had stayed much as a child, and from whom she had learned much about sewing, crocheting, and family lore. Ann Lane came visiting brother Joe Steele, in 1894. After being widowed, she had lived in Fairfield for years, but in her last illness she came again in 1904 to Joe and Sarah's, "where she . . . made her home for some time."

There her other living brother, Nathaniel, “Uncle Doc,” came to see her for the last time. Her funeral was at Joe and Sarah’s house, as had been her husband’s, both being buried in nearby Fell cemetery.<sup>238</sup>

“Almost always someone was staying with us,” Jo said. Some guests were more interesting and welcome than others. Irene came often and briefly, generally on Sundays, generally with Russell, and then with “little daughter Berniece,” and then with Ferne and then Leonard. Young Bernice



(the spelling varied) came on her own to Ann Steele Lane stay a week with the Teeters in 1926. In 1921 the *Batavia News* noted that a high school classmate of Jo’s, “Miss Mildred Gardner of Fairfield was a week end visitor at the George Teeter home.” Earnest’s future wife, “Miss Helen Clark was an over Sunday visitor.” In spring 1922 George’s niece, “Miss Alta Teeter who teaches at Mt. Pleasant spent the weekend at her Uncle George Teeter’s.” That summer, “Waldo Teeter of Martinsburg” spent “the week with his cousin, Bernard Teeter.”<sup>239</sup>

### The First Iowa State Fair

Ollie’s unmarried cousin, Victoria Wagner, like Josephine, loved riding horses. When Cousin Vic visited, she would reminisce about riding in the first Iowa State Fair at Fairfield in 1854 when just seven years old. Several thousands from around the young state had attended in early October, which had required much slow and strenuous travel, with horses and even oxen drawing covered wagons, early equivalents of the travel trailer.

The “great attraction” of that first fair had been gracefully provided by “female equestrians, . . . horseback-riding feats by 18 women, horses and riders being bedecked with colored ribbons.” The young ladies were “splendidly arrayed in long and sweeping riding habits, with feathers and



Young Victoria Wagner

ribbons to match.” They had performed on a tiny racetrack that required about five circuits for a mile. Fifty years later, one of the fair’s organizers, Dr. J. M. Shaffer, recalled one rider: “A thing which will never be forgotten by those who attended that fair was the ‘Iowa City girl’s ride’ . . . Judge Claggett had offered a gold watch as a prize for the best lady rider, and this was the top line event of the fair. Of course we had rules that the ladies must ride gentle horses . . . but there was one girl who didn’t respect those rules . . . She was down from near Iowa City and had ridden all the way to Fairfield . . . She induced Dr. Ware . . . to loan her one of his race horses. She took it bareback, didn’t wait for a saddle or anyone to help her, but vaulted onto the horse to a side seat and was off. It was the wildest race you ever saw. Around she went at the dead run, with everybody yelling and trying to stop her, but it wasn’t until she had made the round of that track upwards of a dozen times that she finally pulled up in front of the grandstand and dismounted. The prize was awarded to a Lee county lady, but Dr. Ware took up a hat collection for the Iowa City girl and raised over \$200. He took charge of her after that, and with the \$200 as a nucleus educated her. She was married, and is now living in Council Bluffs, I am told.”<sup>240</sup>

A contemporary account of 1854 and a recounting of 1929 supply essential details and certain corrections, noting that the prize was valued at a significant one-hundred dollars, and that “ten ladies, accompanied by their cavaliers, entered the lists to contend for it.” A cavalier, of course, was to ride chivalrously “within a convenient distance of the lady to render any service she may require.” The “Iowa City girl—really a girl—was thirteen-year-old Miss Eliza Jane Hodges, clearly the crowd’s favorite, and the reporter’s. “Wearing a broad blue ribbon,” she was “mounted upon a magnificent blood bay, all action and full of power and spirit.” But, “much to the disappointment of the people,” those judges had chosen that Lee County lady. However . . .

Because of “a universal desire,” the ladies (and the Iowa City girl) competed again the next day, although frustratingly with “much the same results.” This even though little Miss Eliza Jane’s was “the most dashing, terrific and perfectly dare devil performance ever witnessed on horseback. The scene was thrilling, fearful, magnificent. The boldest held their breath as mounted on her proud and untamable charger, she flew around the course with the rapidity of lightning and with the sweeping force of a whirlwind, and all this with a childlike smile upon her countenance and her whip in full play, thus imparting to all a more than half assurance that the daring little rider was equal in the emergency and abundantly able to take



care of herself. At the completion of the fourth round, and still at full and fearful speed, she wheeled gloriously from the track and was greeted with an earthquake of cheers as she brought her bounding animal to a graceful halt in front of the committee stand.”

Wow! Why don’t reporters write with conviction and fire like that nowadays! But wait! That reporter in 1854 also admitted to having been “spell bound and over whelmed” by the moment, but now had come to an ultimately sensible conclusion (perhaps in consultation with the paper’s editor?). “Sober second thought,” the reporter wrote soberly, “teaches us as it must all, that if we would encourage a tasteful, correct and ladylike school of equestrianism, such as we should be willing our misses and daughters should imitate, the decision of the committee was based upon correct grounds.”

The decision we already know, but who was the winner, other than being the Lee County lady? She was, “the lady of the pink ribbon,” Miss Belle Turner, an “easy, self possessed and graceful rider . . . whose gracefulness rendered insignificant what she may have lacked in boldness.” Perhaps not incidentally, Miss Turner on her gentle steed revealed “an elegant form, fine face and soft blue eyes.”

Scorning second thought and soft blue eyes, still in the moment, roaring both their disapproval and their approbation, the crowd of men and women and children passed the hat—several hats—and within five minutes had collected a magnificent one-hundred-sixty-five dollars for the Iowa City girl. (Or was it \$200? Anyway, keep your old gold watch!) Miss Eliza Jane supporters arranged as well for three free terms at the Fairfield Female Seminary, where a couple of unmarried ladies schooled about fifty misses, and for one free term at the embryonic Mount Pleasant Seminary, “all of which she gratefully accepted, as a sensible girl would.”<sup>241</sup>

In 1855 the second State Fair had women riders again, but “breakneck or otherwise daring riding” would lead to expulsion. “It is not the design to encourage ladies to train themselves for the circus or to perform daring feats . . . but it is the earnest desire of the board to encourage graceful easy riding . . . and with perfect regard to graceful and healthful exercise . . . Miss Eliza Jane Hodges rode again but won neither the approval of the judges nor the favor of the spectators.”<sup>242</sup>

And did the Iowa City girl tell grandchildren of such youthful unladylike behavior, which had alienated the powers that were? Or did she dwell on the democratic rewards she had enjoyed following such behavior? And did Cousin Vic, only six years younger, want to take the Iowa City girl as a model? Josephine, a twentieth-century girl, never rode sidesaddle, but



she supposed Cousin Vic had at such an early date, although not bareback surely. Cousin Vic had, of course, grown up to be a dressmaker.

In addition to female equestrians, that pioneer fair, located in the area that would become known as “New Chicago” after the railroad went through and the stockyards appeared, offered “a pretty respectable assortment of farming machinery,” which dealers brought in. “But the biggest display,” Dr. Shaffer recalled, “was that of farm products, as everybody who came brought the best they had,” including a four-hundred-pound cheese. Furthermore, Governor Grimes and other big cheeses attended. The fair had its crude aspects as well, notably bear baiting—a fight between a loose dog or dogs and a bear chained to a stake. At twenty-five cents, just a quarter of a dollar, per ticket, the fair collected about a thousand genuine dollars—and fifty counterfeit—actually making a profit of about fifty dollars.<sup>243</sup>

Miss Victoria Wagner, and her sister, Miss Kate Wagner, are listed in the Jefferson County, Iowa, *Directory* of 1886 as “Dress Makers” with a shop at “north side park,” that is on what became Broadway, north side of the Square, that is, of Central Park. They, with two other sisters, lived in the Third Ward with their parents, Jake and Catharine Steele Wagner, blacksmith and housewife, one block directly south of the Square on what would become Washington Street.<sup>244</sup>

When Cousin Vic visited, she also told Josephine about living in Washington, DC, where she had been “employed in the pension department” around the turn of the century, then an unusual line of work for a woman, even for an unmarried lady. More interesting to young Josephine was that she had also served as dressmaker for a President’s wife (about which tantalizing fact we know nothing more). Unfortunately, Cousin Vic once contracted pneumonia while visiting, and Ollie had to “nurse her back to health” that entire winter.



Victoria (Cousin Vic) Wagner

As a retiree Victoria Wagner lived in Fairfield, and finally, as Jo recalled in 2005, and as an obituary confirmed, in Burlington with Jo’s sister, Irene. There she died in 1936 at eighty-eight years, seven months, and twenty-nine days, her obituary noting only that she had been a dressmaker.

## So Many and Occasionally Troublesome Guests

Certain Teeter guests were less fascinating than Cousin Vic, were sometimes downright infuriating, and left host and hostess fit to be tied. Joe Steele led the list of course. Several of George's unmarried siblings stayed, especially after their mother died. There was John of the Brush car that George inherited, perhaps in part for boarding debts. David Augustus—"Gust Teeter . . . visited with his brother George and family a few days last week" in March 1921. And in 1922. And so on and so forth. Alma Nelson Teeter once told her husband, Elmer, that Uncle Gus was still welcome to a meal, but no longer to stay—and stay—with them. Uncle Gus, Isobel Manning Teeter recalled, "would come and stay and stay and stay and sit." She might have added, "and rock." Wayne Curtis and I both remembered Great Uncle Gus and Grandpa Teeter sitting and rocking, and each swatting flies on the *open air* front porch of the Steele-Teeter house.

Gus may have stayed more often and longer than any except Joe Steele, especially in winter when work was slow. A man, naturally, did no housework. A revealing joke of the time has a woman, tired from washing and wringing-out clothes, growl at her husband, "You lazy worm, if you was half a man you'd help me turn this here wringer." "'No, Jane,' said Sam, puffing his pipe comfortably. 'I may be a worm, but I ain't the kind that turns'." Like Sam, Gus was no housekeeper, but he did contribute his professional skills in 1923 by re-papering the walls in the Teeter's rented house near County Line. Although Gus was reputedly less temperamental than other Teeters, he may not have taken Ollie's preferences and directions easily. "I wouldn't want to say that he was contrary," Ollie recalled, "but it was so . . . I've been mad enough to pound him a couple of times." At least a body couldn't help but have a mind to with such an ornery cuss.<sup>245</sup>

George's sister, Evie, was good to come in crises, as was sister "Miss Lizzie Teeter of Eldon [who] spent a few days with her brother George and family" in May 1921, in March 1922, and so forth. Lizzie often stayed longer than a few days, either to help during an illness or to sew for Ollie. Evie or Lizzie could come and go the few miles by rail, five at most, between their home in Eldon and County Line Rock Island flag stop, No. 30 coming, No. 29 going. When Aunt Lizzie visited as a seamstress, Jo did not remember that she helped with housework. That may have been because she viewed herself as a professional; or because Ollie liked to have the kitchen to herself; or because of long-standing tensions between the two. As a child and older, Josephine noticed, and recalled much later, that Ollie would "do things" to irritate George when Aunt Lizzie came visiting.



Elizabeth (Lizzie) Teeter



Evangeline (Evie) Teeter

Why several of George's siblings did not marry is unclear. Men in those days did not often remain bachelors, as did John and Gus. Women more commonly became "old maids." Cloudy legend has it that either Evie or Lizzie may not have married because at some crucial moment a beau saw one of them kill a chicken. Neither is it clear why a beau of that time and place should have been so squeamish. Nor does legend clarify whether the chicken killing future spinster performed the act by grasping the chicken's head and flinging the body away, as masculine-minded women were reported sometimes to do; or, in a presumably more feminine and dainty manner, beheaded it properly with a hatchet. A more convincing theory is that the creature Evie or Lizzie dispatched was a cat, which has more possibilities than the chicken story.

Unlike some relatives, a visit from the traveling Watkins man or the Larkin lady was always welcome, for they brought to one's door and into the living room a wide and fascinating range of products. For the kitchen, the sickroom, and the household generally they offered spices, extracts, soaps, cosmetics, ointments, liniments, and patent medicines. The *Weekly Ledger-Journal* "County Line" column noted in 1922, "McCabe, the Baker medicine agent was making his usual rounds . . . this week"; and in 1927, "C.H. Cochran of Libertyville, the Watkins man, was canvassing this country." From the Batavia-based Larkin lady Ollie bought enough products, before Josephine was in high school, to win a bonus, a "Larkin"



Ollie's "Larkin" sewing table

drop leaf sewing table with drawers at one end. In the third millennium, it was serving as a computer desk for one of Ollie's granddaughters.<sup>246</sup>

### **Ollie Milked, George Separated**

Given so many and occasionally troublesome guests, can anyone doubt that Ollie needed sometimes to escape? With all those folks underfoot all the time, a body could hardly hear herself think. Can anyone guess where she escaped? To the barn. There she milked cows, as many as eight or nine cows, morning and evening, mostly by herself for many years, and then carried the milk to the house. We know that Josephine faded from the milking scene. She was, she said, always afraid of cows. Earnest did other chores and fieldwork, but not milking.

And it seems that George literally lost his grip fairly early in life, as Jo reported without irony, although she did wonder about his weak hands, and how he could hold a hammer. Not to mention fishing poles, firearms, the banjo, and even a heavy cradle scythe. George played organ and piano with both hands. However we choose to interpret his disability, although he lacked the milking grip, George compensated somewhat by cranking the centrifuge "separator" that spun lighter cream out a top spout and skim milk out a lower. The family used some, but most cream went to the creamery for cash, skim milk for hog slop. So much for low fat diets.

Ollie milked. George separated. With this division of labor, Ollie was content because she was for a time alone, away from husband, children, and guests. As Jo reported, "Mother always said it was while she was milking that she could get her thoughts together and relax." It was, one supposes, somewhat like crocheting, but more private, more like commuting—or communing—alone.

Given evidence that Ollie worked hard from dawn to dark and often beyond, it may be understandable that she was sometimes less than charitable toward those who were less than ambitious. Although she was a relative, Ollie allowed as how Cass Wagner had more ideas than ambition, always had big plans, but would get tired and leave off doing this or that. As Isobel Teeter recalled Ollie saying in her typically wry and ironic way, "Aunt Cass Wagner was always cuttin' down." Clearly, it was not Ollie's way to be cuttin' down. Nor was it her way to beat excessively about the bush.

While not universal, it was not unusual for women to at least help with milking. One apparent consequence, congruent with Ollie's general tendency, was that she felt entitled to keep for herself proceeds from

cream sales, just as she kept income from poultry and eggs, another fairly common although certainly not universal pattern among farm wives. With these dollars, Ollie “got the groceries. She drove a horse and could go by herself.” Having her own money, she didn’t have to ask George for anything.

A further significant fact is that Ollie kept in her own name her inherited share of Joe Steele’s farm, to which she and George moved in 1929. They moved to *her* farm. Ollie Teeter was an independent woman in an age when women were supposedly and often really were subservient. She was the family’s manager who for years regularly drove her horse and buggy to Libertyville or Batavia or County Line to transact business, shop for groceries and necessities, and in early days to pick up the mail.

George, more retiring, less social even than Ollie, preferred to putter about at home or go fishing or hunting. He was always a great walker, as he had proved to Ollie on all those courting nights. One winter, he told Chet Curtis, he tracked a wolf all the way from Batavia to Hedrick, which was many miles. And walked back the same day. About fifteen miles each way, cross country as a wolf lopes, in snow, carrying a rifle. Of such stuff are legends made. And then he told nephew Elmer James Teeter that once while hunting he saw two ducks flying toward each other, carefully gauged their trajectory, and downed both with a single shot. Methinks, as did Elmer, that George cried wolf once too often with that one. And yet, and yet . . . In 1890 Jefferson County paid George Teeter \$2.50 each for the scalps of six wolves under six months old, a total of \$15, equal perhaps to payment for two weeks of hard farm work. No doubt he had found a den and proved that he was no flash in the pan hunter.<sup>247</sup>

George’s walking sprang from the wanderlust that seized him sometimes, at least in his early years, as it had his father. When a young bachelor, as Jo dimly remembered hearing, George probably took a train “back east” to his ancestral Morrison’s Cove home in Bedford County, Pennsylvania. Until memories of delicious Ollie, and danger she would be lost to some other guy, drew him back, George carpentered and painted for a couple of years in Sioux City. Once Jo’s father George and Harry Teeter, son of Adam, bought half-price fares to the Dakotas, threshed wheat, returned with tall tales about nonviolent feats of strength in some saloon.

Otherwise, as a married man, George did not roam, unless tracking wolves and fishing Peebler’s pond ‘til after dark counts. He did not, Jo was certain, have a roaming eye for other women. He no longer frequented taverns, not that he ever had very much. He would have liked to travel more and farther, but Ollie preferred not to. In 1922 he did go with brother



Wilson Teeter to Hot Springs, Arkansas, for his health, arriving tired out, catching the flu. “Mr. Teeter returned from the Springs Monday morning. He’s feeling pretty well considering the damp weather.” But by late May he was “quite poorly” again. In winter 1923 both George and Ollie went to the Springs.<sup>248</sup>

Ollie’s was a shaping and restraining influence on George who, Josephine believed, usually deferred to her judgment, “probably didn’t do much without asking her.” George Teeter’s temper was not always restrained, however, as Bernice, Louise, Wayne, and other grandchildren who witnessed his outbursts could testify. Strange to say, although a boy of six or seven and eager to learn, I cannot remember any of Grandpa’s maledictions exactly, although I suspect I learned “What the Sam Hill . . .” and “That Dad Blamed . . .” in his presence. Perhaps the specificity of his phrases was too foreign to my tender ears. But their shape and tone and texture as he chased and consigned certain chickens and other animals to the devil (in whom he did not believe) were awe-inspiring and are indelible, as they must have been to his own children, certainly to Josephine.

Both George and Ollie, with limited formal schooling, were nevertheless further self-educated and conversant with modern political, economic, and other developments. Even after radio became functional in the 1920s, the two never had one; and although widowed Ollie bought one, she seldom played the thing. But George and Ollie always subscribed to and read the Fairfield and Ottumwa newspapers, George the *Davenport Democrat* and perhaps the Democratic *Fairfield Tribune* as well. Ollie read, said Isobel Teeter, “all the magazines she could get hold of,” including serialized novels. And, having had to do with various legal matters, she read anything about the law that she could find. Nevertheless, Ollie was emphatically not political, not as a voter.

By comparison, George, normally a solitary and retiring man, made an exception on Election Day. Sometimes he might stay in town all night—as on November 7-8, 1916, with Earnest and George Snyder. There from telegraph or telephone reports they could learn whether Woodrow Wilson (after whom a presumably Republican local wag had named a Registered Percheron stallion) or other Democrats had won.

But as Ollie told Bill and Dan Hutton late in her life, “I don’t meddle in politics. My dad did but I didn’t.” Iowa women having gained the franchise for local school financial affairs in 1894, perhaps earlier in some instances, she admitted to having voted in a school election because someone asked her to: “And I went down here and voted a couple of times and said I wouldn’t go again.” Her daughter-in-law, Isobel, was mystified: “She had



her mind made up but yet wouldn't go and vote. I couldn't understand that—she read so much and knew who she thought should be in office.”<sup>249</sup>

### **Ollie and George: Home, Family, and Church**

Ollie's religious attitudes and behavior suggest a pattern that parallels her politics. She was, she told me in 1962, a Baptist who had never been baptized, and then offered the flimsy excuse, “They ain't no Baptist church around here.” Besides, “If I gave anything I'd give it to the Methodists.” Jo recalled, “Mother always wanted to be baptized in the Jordan River,” in the Holy Land. To which I felt compelled to respond, “That's because she couldn't get there.” To which Jo responded with assenting laughter.

Ollie never joined a church, almost never attended any church. She told a minister that she didn't believe in dressing up in finery and going to church. Having your name in a church book would not save anyone. A religious iconoclast, her eyes crinkled and twinkled when she told about a preacher coming to dinner and skipping the blessing because, he said, they were all too hungry. And she told ironically, and with rising inflection, about her uncle, Nathaniel Steele, whose eldest daughter married “a Zionist preacher who went on so,” and whose eldest child died because the preacher would not have a doctor, not even “Uncle Doc” Steele, the child's grandfather.

Ollie probably knew and certainly would have enjoyed the story that Mildred Stull Fickel told about the very total immersion of Everett Giltner by Fairfield Evangelist A. K. Harper. Sometime after County Line church closed in the early 1930s it reopened for a series of Harper's revival meetings. Soon thereafter Harper, with a harvest of perhaps twenty souls, traveled down to Eldon and the Des Moines River, local version of Ollie's ideal Jordan, but significantly wider and deeper. “Yes, we'll gather at the river, / The beautiful, the beautiful river, / Gather with the saints at the river / That flows by the throne of God.”

There, on the Des Moines, near the throne of God, the Evangelist proceeded to baptize most of the flock without incident, including Mildred Stull, a petite soul. But then came Brother Giltner, not at all petit, an unmanageable, unswimming soul as it turned out, whom Evangelist Harper lost control of. Whereupon a couple of burly bystanding souls had to plunge in to assure that Everett's baptism did not merge seamlessly with his ultimate salvation.

As for Mildred Stull, clearly she had been prepared to seek and accept the ritual from an early age. For even as a child, after attending one

baptismal service, she had rushed home, unceremoniously gathered her pet cats, and without bothering to ascertain whether they were old enough and acted from doctrinal free will, had dunked them ceremoniously in the livestock-watering tank.

Ollie remembered, she told Bill and Dan Hutton, a preacher who had said it is better to say kind words to people when they are alive, and not send so many flowers when they aren't. "I've thought of that a million times . . . I want 'em to say kind words to me and not send so many flowers . . . I think a lot of this flower business is a waste. It just gives the undertakers more money."

Thus does Ollie segue to her most particular irritation: "I don't think the undertakers is just right, always is just right square. Maybe I'm mistaken but I've seen things. I've had to fool with 'em . . . I know one that didn't do the square thing. I had dealin's with 'em and I know that they didn't." It may be that Ollie had in mind the undertaker's bill for her father's funeral when she was serving as executrix, a bill in 1923 for \$550.20. As Ollie was wont to say, "None righteous, no not one."

At age thirty-two, George Teeter, like his father-in-law Joe Steele, identified himself in the 1895 Iowa census as having no religion, as having left his Brethren background behind; but he and churchless Ollie regularly observed Sunday at home. George would do necessary farm chores, and he would putter about, but he would not work in the fields, said Jo. Her father was an honest, upright, moral man who did not believe in dancing. Ollie did necessary housework, but she reserved the rest of the day for secular and, sometimes, religious reading; in Ollie's later years, her Bible was "pretty well worn." Jo also remembered Ollie praying with her children. Although she was "never much to go to church," she was "a great believer in prayer." There were, however, no prayers at the Teeter table.

In religion as in politics, Ollie Steele Teeter was an independent thinker, suspicious of institutions, wary if not cynical concerning human nature, particularly in institutionalized groups, and more particularly among their leaders. She represented the culmination of the Protestant Revolt against authority begun centuries earlier by dissidents against Catholicism, a revolt magnified in America by the developing tradition of democratic individualism. In this respect, she was her agnostic or atheist father's daughter rather than her churchgoing Baptist mother's. Ollie, a Puritan who despised the trappings of "finery" and flowers, sought whatever religious truth she could find as a self-educated person in the revelations of the King James Bible and in personal prayer unimpeded by priest or preacher.

About George Teeter and religion, there is less to say because

of less information. He seems not to have revealed his views, perhaps because he was not asked, except to respond in the 1895 census that he belonged to no religious body; and except, like Ollie, that he continued to observe Sunday and oppose dancing, inheritances from Brethren ancestors. But in the late-nineteenth-century as a young man, he broke with his family's strict religious belief and tradition as it weakened in Iowa, separated as it was from Pennsylvania familial and communal roots. One time only, in 1910 or 1911, he took Josephine, Rebecca, and Bernard, but without Ollie, to the Brethren church. Like his father-in-law, Joe Steele, who had left Presbyterianism behind in Indiana, and who embraced anti-institutional, anti-authoritarian, minority-Democratic politics, George Teeter was a contrarian who chose, like his wife, the minority position in religion and politics.

Whether as parents Ollie and George were in a minority and different from neighbors is less clear. They seem, however, as farm parents not to have worked their children excessively hard, and to have believed hardly at all in the old saying that to spare the rod was to spoil the child. Josephine thought Ollie "a very nice" mother, who "had a way of managing us in a kind way," who never whipped, never slapped her children. George, less involved in child rearing, especially of daughters, was nevertheless more inclined than Ollie to play with them—those dining table carom games on winter nights—or to play for them, the front porch banjo, the parlor organ.

Jo experienced only one spanking, when six and standing on a chair rung after Dad George had warned her it would break. It did. Jo thought he might have spanked other children—which suggests spanking was unusual. Neither George nor Ollie was physically demonstrative, did not hug or kiss children, at least rarely. George kissed Jo goodbye only once, when she was a young woman teacher going off by train to Colorado on her first long trip. Perhaps it was that his daughter was grown and going far away, perhaps that there were places he had never seen and would never see.

It seems that as parents both George and Ollie were generally reasonable and gentle, that George's rages were directed at inanimate objects and livestock and his father-in-law, and sometimes his wife, rather than at his children. As parents George and Ollie's most enduring effect was indirect, resulting from tensions and quarrels between them that, for Josephine at least, were memorably disturbing to overhear as a child and even as a young adult.

Whatever the range and variety of causes, money worries were central and enduring in Ollie and George's early and middle years. There

were of course the daily, perennial worries of farm renters who were making little more than subsistence while living in a rapidly developing commercial agricultural economy. That and the perennial worry of renters forced to consider what farm and landlord to gamble on next year, and to wonder which landlord would gamble on them. Having to move on short notice because of all those quarrels between George and Joe Steele was only the most dramatic example.

There were the less usual but often deeply disturbing details of settling estates. Both George and Ollie were estate executors when their fathers died. It fell to George to go to court when a neighbor challenged title to the little 66.99-acre farm. Executor again after his mother died, he arranged a public sale on the last day of 1912 of "one driving mare . . . lady broke, five milk cattle, fourteen Chester White hogs; farm implements, including a venerable "breaking plow" and a "walking cultivator," the family buggy, and "many other articles too numerous to mention."

George had to be in the court system again when his brother, Adam, challenged the proposed mathematical method for dividing their father's estate. And Ad won. To make a court ordered equitable division, George was required to arrange for the farm to be sold at auction on the Jefferson County courthouse steps. This despite objections and at least temporary estrangement from his sister, Lizzie, who wanted it sold to a friend for a lower price. Josephine was old enough to remember that "Dad walked the floor" over such disputes.

Another family dispute concerned distribution of Mother Rebecca Ann Alford Teeter's estate, settled only in the courts. Jefferson County District Court records, April Term 1914 report virtually identical claims by Rebecca Ann's daughters, Lizzie and Evie. Evie's claim:

The plaintiff claims against the estate of Rebecca Teeter, deceased, the sum of Five Hundred Dollars (\$500.00) for general services such as house work, washing, ironing, sewing, gardening, caring for stock and poultry, milking and caring for milk and making butter, and for nursing the said Rebecca Teeter during her last illness, said services and nursing covering a period from the death of Abraham Teeter on June 25, 1905 to the death of Rebecca Teeter on December 4, 1912.

"This claim is made in addition to the board and clothing which was received by claimant from the proceeds of her said labor, on the expectation that she would be paid for said services and the expectation on the part of the said Rebecca Teeter that claimant was to be compensated for said services.

The claims cases were continued November Term 1914 with testimony of a neighbor and relative. A. B. Mullinix had been present on two occasions when Rebecca Teeter had indicated, "the girls would be well paid for taking care of her, staying there and depriving themselves of any pleasure in life." The "girls," of course, never married.

Earlier that year, March 31, in an attempt to counter their sisters' claims, three Teeter brothers, George B., D. A. [Gus], and W. A. [Wilson], but not eldest brother Adam, had submitted a handwritten, apparently hastily prepared, letter to the court, a letter that in its logic, its spirit and tone, not to mention grammar and spelling, hardly presented the signers at their best:

We the undersigned object to the claims of Eva and Lizzie Teeter on the grounds that they not being married and had no other home, and that they did not have no contract to stay there, she [Rebecca] gave them the privilege of working for the neighbors, which they did at different times. Eva had a picture camera and went out from home and took pictures when ever she wished to during this time. As for washing and ironing for her their was not much of that to do, as she dressed very plain. She belonged to the Brethern Church. She did not have a wardrobe like Society women have. Our sisters had stock there cows & hogs and a horse and chickens. Lizzie and Mother had theres together & Eva kept her's seperate. The farm was rented for grain and the man boarded himself and hands.

The case was closed expeditiously with the Opinion of Judge D. M. Anderson, November 21, 1914, which said in part concerning the "maiden ladies," "It satisfactorily appears that they not only cared for the house but did a great deal of work about the place that more properly was in the sphere of a man's labor. The last seven or eight months of their mothers life she had not only the afflictions of age but in addition thereto she had a broken hip and required almost constant attention. From the testimony of Mr. Mullinix it appears that an expectation existed upon the part of the mother and the claimants that the services should be paid for—the mother going so far as to say that the girls would get the farm for what they were doing. . . . The claims filed are for \$500 each and . . . are very reasonable."

As executrix of Joe Steele's estate Ollie had to deal with similar tensions and details, principally how to reach an agreement with brother Wilson and sister Cora concerning the farm. An agreement, not entirely amicable, allowed Wils and Ollie to buy Cora's share, Wilson to take the better eighty acres, and Ollie the poorer eighty and the house. Bruised

family feelings survived for decades. Ollie and Cora were not close. Although their relationship was apparently civil, their meetings were less than occasional. Ollie's eldest grandchild, Bernice Gorman Cronk, recalled her saying rather sharply of Cora, "She has her illnesses, she has them on the shelf, and she takes one down when she needs it."

### **The Land, always the Land**

The Packwood farm was surely a source of enduring conflict and increased tensions between Josephine's parents. Briefly, in all their years, George and Ollie bought one farm in 1919; a big farm, 240 acres, for \$175 an acre, \$42,000, with two mortgages totaling \$35,000, which meant that they had scraped together a \$7,000 down payment. These were boom years for American and Iowa agriculture during and immediately following World War I. Newspapers overflowed with editorials and government messages that "America Can Feed The World," that farmers should "Prepare More Land—Grow More Food" to support the American and Allied war effort. "Cultivate, Cultivate!"<sup>250</sup>

Having decided to go the whole hog, George and Ollie nevertheless owned the farm for only a year. Then wisely or luckily—so it seemed at the time—they sold it in 1920, when farms were still selling like hot cakes before agricultural products and consequently agricultural land prices sagged into the farm depression of the 1920s. Sold it for \$48,000, \$200 an acre, deposited their down payment of \$7,000 and their \$6,000 profit in Batavia's Farmers State Bank, and returned to renting. In just a year, they had made an easy profit of \$25 an acre, and, as the slang of the day went, "That ain't hay!" When Ollie inherited a share of her father's farm in 1923 she had enough money to buy out both Wils and Cora, but various considerations delayed the settlement.

Then, on Thursday, March 12, 1925, a notice appeared in the *Batavia News* indicating their bank, organized only in 1914, had failed and was going into receivership. While coming home from teaching at Turkey Scratch school, Jo met brother Earnest on the road and learned about the disaster. Ironically, the defunct bank's President and one of its Directors was Thomas Judson Curtis, grandfather of young Chet Curtis, whom Jo would marry four years later. But no matter the culprit, Ollie and George's \$13,000 was gone (as was Jo's small deposit). As Ollie said many years later, "I had eighty acres. I would have had the whole 160 acres if the bank hadn't closed." The land, always in America, always the land.<sup>251</sup>

On September 22, 1927, the *Weekly Ledger-Journal* headlined a



story, “37 Closed Banks Pay Back Total Of Over A Million,” but the story revealed that the largest percent of deposits returned was fifteen, and Batavia’s Farmers State Bank was not listed. Jo could not remember that she, Ollie, and George had recovered any of their deposits, nor could Isobel Manning Teeter.

Recriminations surely followed Ollie and George’s loss of the money, loss of the land they might have had. Unable to attack or gain restitution from an institution, a failed institution that was not guaranteed by federal government insurance, a New Deal innovation of the 1930s, George and Ollie could only turn to each other. So they must have asked, Who had wanted to sell the farm? Thousands of dollars had been involved, even when mortgages were subtracted. Who had decided to deposit all that \$13,000 in that particular bank? Since Ollie generally handled business matters, and led in making major decisions, was she to blame? Possibilities for inflicting reciprocal pain were endless.

Their experience was of course a small piece of a larger pattern that developed in midwestern agriculture, of increasing bank failures and farm mortgage foreclosures, so that the agricultural depression of the 1920s prepared for the general Depression of the 1930s. Indicative of the precariousness of financial institutions and the agricultural economy, in late February 1928, leaving more depositors literally out in the cold, another Batavia bank failed and went into state receivership. From 1921 to 1929 Iowa led the nation in bank closings. But for Ollie and George, their pain was too personal and too immediate for the larger picture to matter very much.<sup>252</sup>

Among their memorable fights was one in 1933; witnessed at uncomfortably close range by Isobel and Bernard, newlyweds, living upstairs in Ollie and George’s house. The elders had begun quarreling about something at the dining room table; the newlyweds went to bed; but the quarrel continued. Isobel: “It got so loud Bernard said he had to go down and settle this. Grandpa Teeter evidently got his gun.” Jo: “That was always his thing. He was going to kill himself.” Isobel: “But it always calmed down after awhile.” Jo: “They had some pretty strenuous battles.”

Many decades later, in the 1970s, 80s, 90s, and into the new century, Jo returned repeatedly in her writings and conversations to family conflicts, to tensions she had felt, long-term estrangements she had witnessed, and quarrels she had heard from an upstairs bedroom. For they had all helped form her character and would profoundly affect her marriage many years later. Joe Steele; Abraham B. and Rebecca Ann Teeter by hearsay reputation; Uncle John and Uncle Gus; Aunt Lizzie; George and Ollie—all

had contributed by example to Josephine's education.

Beginning at the early age of six Josephine determined that she must learn self-control. As she remembered, "I had to work and work at controlling my temper. This is a thing I've had to work to keep myself from." In memoirs Jo is also recurrently distressed to note that she tends to remember bad times and bad behavior rather than the good. As a child, Josephine began to work and work at thinking and speaking charitably of others, and to be silent when she could not. As I can testify, she succeeded more than most in speaking charitably. And over many years, Jo Teeter Curtis must have become a short-tongued woman, from having bitten it so often.

## CHAPTER 4: INTO A WIDER WORLD

Yet, how much freedom to choose do we have?  
How much of what we do is decided by our culture and times?  
And how much by the essence of our own nature  
unaffected by culture and time?

—Richard Critchfield, *Those Days*

I want to bring together the two dimensions of our reality:  
that we experience ourselves as self-willed individuals and,  
at the same time, experience ourselves as caught up in systems and  
orders beyond our power to control or even, all too often, affect.

—Jane Adams, *The Transformation of Rural Life*

Young Josephine Teeter never used the famous *McGuffey's Eclectic Readers* series in school. At home, however, she inherited an autographed *Third Reader* from her sister Irene. From that dog-eared and battered book (its end pages crudely crayoned red and blue, perhaps Josephine's early artwork?) she learned young, as had Irene, as had no doubt her parents and their schoolmates, and probably *their* parents, lessons of morality and ethics and neighborliness. Josephine learned that one should "Lend a Hand," should, "lend a hand to one another / In the daily toil of life." The textbook, of course, simply reinforced traditional neighborhood attitudes and behavior.<sup>253</sup>

As Josephine learned early by example, it was often easy to think charitably and enduringly so of other people, particularly of neighbors who helped in time of need. Almost seventy-five years after pneumonia laid her low and nearly killed her baby brother, Josephine could recite the roll call of neighborly women who had helped: "The neighbors I remember most were Riley Parker's wife, Kate, who came so many nights to sit up and help take care of Bernard . . . Mrs. Ida Peebler also a good friend



Jo Teeter at Fairfield  
High School

who helped take care of Bernard . . . Mrs. Mabel James who also helped and brought good food.” Mabel and Ollie had been particular friends who “visited” often. As Jo reminisced in 2002, “They visited, and people got together more than they do now, because they didn’t have any way to go a distance . . . People helped each other more than they do now.”

If four-year-old Josephine might not have remembered every name of those who helped in that and other crises, Ollie surely repeated the litany enough times later to make them memorable. Of course Ollie herself “was always good to help others in time of sickness or death.” To do so was a matter of course. What else were neighbors for? As Iowa farmwoman Velma Skott Teeple remembered, “Neighbors depended on each other like a closely-knit family.”<sup>254</sup>

### **An Occupation only Less Dangerous than Coal Mining**

In this farming community, in an occupation only less dangerous than coal mining and perhaps deep sea fishing but employing almost every male; a man’s or boy’s team might run off with his hay rake or wagon or buggy, throwing him underneath; a thousand-pound steer or nearly two-thousand pound horse might kick him if he were careless. In 1890 A. T. McLane, age thirty-five, with a wife and four children, was “Killed by a Kick From a Horse,” as was a four-year-old boy some years later. A falling “harpoon” hayfork might strike a farmer. He might fall from a hayrack onto his back across a wagon tongue, as did Chet Curtis; fall from a barn haymow, as did Wayne Curtis—and nearly die from a ruptured spleen; might trip, get cut, get blood poisoning, as did George Teeter, repeatedly; might get wet, get cold, get pneumonia. His ax might slip. In 1880 because some oat bundles slipped, Josephine Teeter’s grandfather-to-be, “Mr. Abraham Teeter received a hard fall from near the top of a stack some two weeks ago. He was stunned so severely as to be unconscious for a couple of hours. Although not entirely recovered from his injuries, Mr. T. is now able to be around again.” As Jim Heynen writes in *The Boy’s House*, “The evidence was everywhere: missing thises and missing thats. Hobbler and limpers and a scar-face or two. Farms tore lots of people up, no doubt about it.” A physician wrote, “I found a lot of a country doctor’s practice had to do with trauma. . . . Somebody could run a pitchfork through his hand. Or slip under the cleated iron wheels” of a tractor. “Or maybe a tractor would start up unexpectedly when he was fixing a disc or harrow, and the farmer could fall beneath the knives or teeth and be sliced into the dirt. It happened. I was also to see men get caught in the tines of hayloaders, get

snagged and hoisted up by a haylift rope or get dropped, fall into a well or fall off the roof of a house or barn or from a windmill ladder.”<sup>255</sup>

In 1925 near Mt. Pleasant, Ted Hamilton was mangled when his horses, hitched to a mowing machine, perhaps stung by bees, bolted. A boy of twelve, Clarence Jacobson, fell in front of a “rake but in back of the horses. One of the horses kicked him in the head, and both started to run, dragging him a considerable distance. He survived, but with a fractured skull, a broken lower jaw, and facial cuts requiring stitches.” In 1927 another Iowa farmer, Danny Sullivan, was killed after being “thrown under a hay rake and dragged a quarter of a mile when his team ran away.” Twenty-five years later, not many years older than Clarence Jacobson, riding on the same sort of “dump rake,” I was luckier than he or Danny Sullivan. While



Dump rake

raking near a ditch, the left wheel of my rake hit a small hidden tree stump, breaking the rake tongue, allowing the rake to run up onto the horses’ heels, startling them into jumping, dumping me off behind them and in front of the rake’s teeth. By mere good fortune the broken tongue allowed the teeth to swing up and down as the terrified team jerked the rake forward repeatedly onto their heels. The teeth simply happened to swing up as the rake passed over me unscathed, as Prince and Bill took off with the rake clattering and banging far across the field.”<sup>256</sup>

In 1898 under the heading “Serious Runaway With A Binder,” the *Jefferson County Republican* reported an awesome event. Albert Ely of Utica, Iowa, was riding a binder (for bundling grain or hay into sheaves) that was cutting and tying timothy hay, while his daughter, Floy, was riding one of a team of horses pulling the binder. For reasons unknown, the horses “took fright.” To protect his daughter, Ely jumped in front of the team, which knocked him down “just in front of the sickle and as the machine struck him several of the guards entered his hip and thigh, one also catching his arm just below the elbow and penetrating between the radius and ulna. Fortunately the platform was set high and the guards losing their hold . . . the machine passed over him without breaking any bones. In meantime Floy fell from the horse in such a manner that her long hair caught on the harness and she was carried some distance between the horses. Then she dropped to the ground and as the great drive wheel came along it passed over her hat, the crank of the sickle driver caught her dress and tore it from her entirely, and the bundle carrier gave her a few turns as it passed over her.” Nevertheless, neither was “seriously” hurt. It was, reported the paper, “a narrow escape for Mr. Ely and daughter.” Indeed.<sup>257</sup>

## Runaway Horses, and Other Injuries

Options for farm and road injuries or worse were numerous and usually unforeseeable. To call farm animals, especially males in rut (mating fever), “domesticated” is an unfortunate misnomer. Bulls, sometimes as in my family referred to fastidiously as “gentleman cows,” could be viciously ungentelemanly. Near Libertyville in 1897 Civil War veteran Owen Null “was gored to death Thursday night by his bull.” K. K. Gorman of Mapleton suffered the same death, as did Miss Elizabeth Bell of Harlan. In 1900 a young Iowa farmer was bitten by a rabid boar, developed hydrophobia, and of course died. Whatever the venue, horses were often involved in injuring people, in part because they were so numerous, in part because so many had been bred to be “spirited,” quick on the trigger, competitive. Men wanted a span of faster, more spirited horses than their neighbors, especially on the road. They wanted “roadsters,” “drivers,” “steppers,” “high steppers.” In 1892 a man with a two-horse buggy tried to pass two other men with teams, all six horses spooked, became unmanageable, and ran off, with unfortunate results. An experienced man who thought he knew how to handle such horses was sometimes, in fact was likely to be, proved disastrously wrong. In 1904 a “Farmer Is Instantly Killed” in a runaway. “He was a lover of spirited horses and usually drove high lived animals.” The *Fairfield Weekly Journal* reported in 1899 a quick release mechanism for buggies if horses ran off, but unfortunately, the invention never caught on.<sup>258</sup>

One cold winter night young Floyd Peebler from down around County Line drove his mare and sleigh to Batavia, tied her to the hitch rack, and blanketed her. He grocery shopped, probably loafed for awhile with the boys around the red-hot stove, then came out, took the blanket off, and untied his cold horse. Now, a cold horse wants two things, it wants to get warm and it wants to get home to the barn. And a horse gets both by running. So that mare, bit between her teeth, took off lickety-split down the street from Swenson and Nelson’s Grocery, with twin sleigh bell strands jangling and Floyd trying to hold ‘er down, ‘til she got to the corner where John Hull’s drugstore used to be, and turned, and the outside sleigh runner caught and flipped the sleigh, which broke the belly band as the sleigh shafts went over her back, and threw Floyd out still hanging on to the reins,

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*Fairfield Weekly Journal*,  
November 4, 1903



blankets flying everywhere, Floyd being dragged on his belly and elbows like a sled but finally getting her stopped down by the poultry house. It was a doozy of a runaway, but the mare was ok, if not the harness and sleigh, which were considerably discombobulated, and Floyd was essentially unhurt, probably because of snow and heavy clothing.

If one reads local newspapers, however, notices of horse and rider or more commonly horse and buggy accidents that injure and kill people appear with surprising frequency. Early in the American automobile age, in 1908, those machines killed five hundred people; horses, five thousand. Spirited horses were “skittish,” liable to shy at anything unfamiliar or unexpected. In a spectacular Fairfield accident of 1887, “David Fry, an Aged and Honored Citizen, Meets a Sudden Death through the Frightening of a Team by a Bicycle.” Unaccustomed to “wheelmen,” the team, “a three and a four year old, both fine, spirited animals, . . . whirling instantly around” broke the wagon tongue, leaving a three-foot section attached to the wagon to drag in the dirt street, soon to run eighteen inches into the ground, flipping the wagon end over end, catapulting the old man “upward some ten or fifteen feet and entirely across the street.” That same year, in a similar accident, “Mr. Oliver Hoope’s horse . . . took fright at the [railroad] cars” [an entirely common occurrence], broke loose from the hitching rack, and, “As he ran the shafts of the road cart . . . dropped, caught, and threw the cart onto, or perhaps completely over the horse. The cart was badly demolished, and at last accounts the horse was making for home, three miles east of town.” Wagon and buggy tongues or “poles” between a runaway team could become fearsome battering rams or spears. Near Chautauqua Park in 1908 a runaway team pulling a heavy “station wagon” ran into a light buggy “from the rear, the heavy pole crushed it to the ground, and the animals reared and came down upon the occupants,” killing two, injuring another. And yet again, “In consequence of some reckless driving after dark young Courtney ran into Mr. Laughlin’s team, the end of the buggy tongue striking the horse’s breast, breaking one shoulder bone and penetrating the body, running entirely through the horse lengthwise and killing him instantly.” In 1891 Samuel Neiswanger’s team, “frightened by a flying kite, . . . ran east several blocks and jumping the walk, dashed against Geo. Phelps’ house” with such force that the broken tongue “pierced the weather boarding and plaster, breaking a large plate mirror and otherwise injuring a fine dressing case. Several other articles were broken. Mr. Phelps was lying on a lounge in the room at the time . . . Aside from the nervousness occasioned by the shock . . . no one was injured.”<sup>259</sup>

Horses took fright at bicycling girls, sledding boys, of course

automobiles and trains, but as well a covered wagon, broken harness, parasols, kites, flying paper, rushing water, dogs, a sheep, a cow, calves, squealing pigs, flies, squirrels, other horses, a blind man playing a hand organ, gunfire, and “without any apparent cause.” The same teams often ran away repeatedly. At Washington, Iowa, one horse frightened by sudden stentorian sounds of a departing train did not run, but leaped into the air and fell over dead.<sup>260</sup>

Automobiles, because unlike trains they ran noisily everywhere and because in the early years they multiplied like rabbits, were often the proximate cause of runaways. In attempting to remedy the situation, an Iowa judge decreed in 1905 that auto drivers must “exercise ordinary care and prudence and stop their machines the moment they see that a horse or team is becoming frightened and not wait for the driver of the horse to raise his hand.” This sounded fine in a courtroom, but was absurd when an “autoist” came upon hair-trigger horses that would be long gone before he could apply squealing mechanical brakes.<sup>261</sup>

Perhaps more surprising than that people were not always killed in runaways is that they, like Mr. Phelps and Floyd Peebler, were not always injured. In 1879 Fairfield, “Dr. Sutton was the victim of a runaway . . . The team . . . ran until finally caught near Mr. J. F. Wilson’s. The doctor was slightly bruised, the buggy somewhat demolished and one of the horses a trifle injured. Considering the chance for damage,” opined the tongue-in-cheek reporter, “it was a very decent runaway.” Scared by a Rock Island train in Libertyville, John Hutton’s team ran into a telephone pole in 1905. No one was injured, although the “buggy was quite demoralized.” Ennis Sterner reported in 1921 that sixteen-year-old “Chet Curtis had another run off Monday, upset his team and turned his buggy wrong side out and spilt himself,” without injury to self or horses. Note the “another.” This was a year or so before Chet started dating Jo Teeter. In 1922 the *Batavia News* noted that, on the way to Batavia High School, Floyd Peebler’s future wife, Nellie Stull, “had quite an accident Monday morning when her buggy became uncoupled letting the horse go on with the two front wheels. She and Fred Boysel, who was riding with her, were thrown out but fortunately neither were very much hurt.”<sup>262</sup>

Sometimes ill luck with horses melded with other disasters in twos or threes. In 1906, “George and Will Bartholow went to Ottumwa [from the Libertyville area], their team ran away and threw them out. Will had one leg broken and George had a rib broken. Will and Miss Acton were to be married Wednesday. The bride’s father’s house burned down Monday morning . . . But for all the ill luck they were married anyway.”<sup>263</sup>

Horses didn't have to run to be dangerous. Hugh Carmichael was "attacked and severely bitten by a stallion" in 1893. In 1898, "S.F. Fell had his hand bitten by a horse Saturday, and is suffering." Ira Peebler had "the finest black matched team in Des Moines Township," but "a horse bit" his little boy "on the face, lacerating his nose in a frightful manner." Near Birmingham, John Byers' large stallion "reached over a fence, seized a Shetland stallion weighing about four hundred pounds by the neck, shook the little fellow as a terrier would shake a rat and inflicted injuries from which the pony died." In 1908 a son of Gust Lind, neighbor to young Chet Curtis, "tied a halter strap to his thumb while leading a horse. The animal jumped suddenly and pulled the thumb off the lad's hand."<sup>264</sup>

Horses could kick viciously, of course. In the mid-1940s a horse kicked Wayne Curtis in the chest with both feet, leaving twin purple hoof marks for weeks. He could have died from internal injuries and shock. One Sunday morning in 1948 without saddle or bridle, I jumped onto the back of the yearling colt whose sire had kicked my brother, only to be flipped over her rear and kicked in the head on the way down. A glancing thump just above the hairline, a scalp wound that hardly hurt, it bled profusely. In an embarrassing and bloody fix, I washed my scalp and face repeatedly in cold water at the outside pump, guessing that cold would staunch the flow. Only then did I creep in casually and sit late in the kitchen where Mother was making pancakes. Turning to serve me, she screamed in a most unnatural way, seeing that blood had again begun to stream into my eyes and down my cheeks, somewhat like Oedipus, I suppose. I was allowed no pancakes until my wound was dressed, and I had stopped dripping into my plate.

Horses could hurt you by standing still. In 1898, "Howard Ralston's foot was painfully bruised when a horse stepped on it." Even now, a century and more later, I feel for Mr. Ralston, because in the mid-twentieth century a horse, whose name I have repressed but whose weight divided by four I still feel clearly, stood upon me. While I was unharnessing him after a long hard day for us both, he simply planted his right front foot on the toe of my left work shoe. I am sure he leaned; I think, but cannot swear, that he twisted his foot just a little. Maybe he smiled. I screamed and beat on him, but he always had been a horse slow to react. A month or so after he moved I lost my empurpled big toenail. Now I recall the name—"Prince"—which he was not.<sup>265</sup>

Animals aside, farmers worked and sometimes played with sharp and explosive instruments. They used "harpoon" hayforks, pitchforks, manure forks, spades, shovels, picks, saws, hatchets, and axes. Newspapers regularly reported slashed legs and severed toes from ax accidents,

and often that blood poisoning had set in. They regularly reported that farmers—and especially their sons, often very young sons—had shot and maimed, sometimes killed, themselves or their friends while hunting, or while fooling around the house with an, always, unloaded gun.

Carelessness with guns and ammunition was of long standing. In 1921 a family friend, Glenn Leathers, shot himself in the “hip” while reaching for a target pistol in his rear pocket. As late as February 9, 1956, the *Batavia Beacon* reported, “Mrs. Ray McCleary received a bad burn on her hand . . . while cooking . . . when a rifle shell exploded in the gravy she was stirring. It seems that someone had dropped the shell into a container of flour . . . They still have the empty cartridge, but the gravy was splattered all over the room.”<sup>266</sup>

When a farmer was injured seriously, neighbor men would come in with teams, wagons, plows, binders—whatever was needed—and would plow, plant, or harvest. And neighbor women would feed the crew. It was like threshing day, except informal and spontaneous. When men were threshing or haying they traded work and remembered who owed a day or two days, and when they could call it square. But illness or injury required a different accounting system deriving from both sympathy and recognition that disaster could down anyone, anytime.

### **“They was Just People, like Ordinary People”**

On June 30, 1927, the *Batavia News* reported, “Sixteen neighbor men, with 50 horses and two tractors gathered at Newton Dale’s east of County Line and plowed twenty five acres, disked thirty and planted about 10 acres of corn. Mr. Dale has been very unfortunate this spring, having sickness and accidents . . . At noon the ladies of the neighborhood . . . served a bounteous dinner on the lawn at the George Teeter home, close neighbors of Mr. Dale . . . Those present to help . . . were: Mr. and Mrs. Col. Laughlin and Jimmie; Van Creek; Mr. and Mrs. Charley Newland; John Stull and daughters, Edith, Nellie and Mildred; Mr. and Mrs. Harold Hite; Mrs. Kate Acton; Mr. and Mrs. Frank Hite; Mrs. Mary Acton; Wilbur Pumphrey; Mr. and Mrs. Earnest Teeter and Frances Elizabeth; Mr. and Mrs. Fred Boysel; Floyd Boysel; Jim Humphrey; Mr. and Mrs. Frank Stever and Alma; Mr. and Mrs. Robert Gonterman; Leonard Ornduff; Mr. Wm. Deln; Fred Zuehlke; Mr. and Mrs. George Teeter, Bernard and Josephine Teeter [she just back from Colorado and Kansas]. Kodak pictures were taken of the crowd and . . . of the men at work.”<sup>267</sup>

In 1922 Al Boysel, west of Batavia, “who lost his wife a few weeks

ago, was surprised . . . when his neighbors went in and husked his corn.” A few years earlier a Des Moines Township farmer, J. H. Laughlin, suffering from a daughter’s illness and death, helped by neighbors, had responded, “He did not know he had so many friends.” In 1909 Ward Yost of Des Moines Township had been injured in a runaway at harvest time. Neighbors turned out, “the women to cook and the men to thresh, for which some day he hopes to repay, if not in money, then they may be rewarded in some good way.”<sup>268</sup>

In whatever neighborhood over many years, despite many moves, George and Ollie Teeter were known as “good neighbors,” even if not at the community’s social center. As Jo and others emphasized, “My folks went very little, especially to social gatherings. Mother would go more than Dad.” Except for rare matters that reached courts and newspapers, probably few neighbors were aware of Teeter family troubles. Ollie and George’s relationship seemed serene and cooperative—which it generally was, despite spectacular outbursts. Ollie was, “jolly,” George, “always busy.” Jo’s best high school friend, Mildred Sandell Dallner, recalled that George Teeter, thin, rather distant, seemed “stern but nice,” while Ollie was “quite a chubby little lady, a real friendly type of lady.” As body types, they might have been Mr. and Mrs. Jack Spratt. The Teeters were, said Edith Stull Giltner, an early and younger neighbor, nice people who always came to help when needed. Ollie “didn’t go out and mix with people so much.” She kept her home “spic and span.”

Edith’s younger sister, Nellie Stull Peebler, noted, “I always called her Mrs. Teeter out of respect. Others called her Ollie. I always called him Mr. Teeter . . . Mr. Teeter was always busy. I’ll say this . . . they had the cleanest place around.” What were the Teeters like? Nellie: “I don’t know. They was just people, like ordinary people.”

### **County Line and Other Churches**

Ordinary people tended to be churchgoers in this entirely Protestant community. Here George and Ollie were extraordinary, although Rebecca, Josephine, and Bernard regularly went by themselves to little County Line Methodist, which, lacking a steeple, looked rather like an enlarged one room school. Since County Line shared a preacher with Batavia’s larger Methodist congregation, Sunday school normally met Sunday afternoon at two, church at three. When Josephine was young, the church was about a mile away if she, Rebecca, and Bernard walked through fields and along the Rock Island right of way, somewhat farther if by road. Their parents

would, however, take them to an evening event and sometimes would stay. One evening, when ten or twelve, Josephine recited Emma Lent's long poem of almost a dozen stanzas, "Unawares," which begins,

They said, "The Master is coming  
To honor the town to-day,  
And none can tell at what house or home  
The Master will choose to stay."  
And I thought while my heart beat wildly,  
What if He should come to mine, . . .

Perhaps young Josephine did think that, perhaps with some trepidation.

A dozen years later, in 1927, as a young adult and local schoolteacher, Josephine Teeter was elected Sunday school Secretary. That same year, innocent of later practical concerns with separation of religion and public education in a heterogeneous society, the annual County Line Methodist Church Christmas program of "songs, dialogues, recitations and pantomimes," was offered by the combined public schools of Nellie Stull and Josephine Teeter. Santa appeared "and distributed gifts from the beautiful Christmas tree. A treat from the Sunday school was given to all children . . . and . . . a crazy quilt made by the Ladies Aid was presented to the minister, Mr. A.L. Allison, also a large box of provisions from various members of the community . . . following an old custom of the church."<sup>269</sup>

Within and among local Protestant churches, relationships seem to have been warm and cordial. On occasion, as Isobel Manning Teeter recalled, three Des Moines Township churches, Methodist County Line and Mt. Zion, and the Brethren—Jo's Grandpa Abraham and Grandma Rebecca Ann Teeter's church—would "have what they called a Township Church Convention," a united service. But in 1899 a Libertyville correspondent reported, "Des Moines Township had quite a commotion Monday," because of two "Mormon elders making themselves quite free," whereupon they were "given two hours . . . to leave and it was well for them that they did." Community attitudes toward such outsiders may have mellowed over the years, even if only among certain individuals. At least in 1922, "Two Mormon missionaries in the area spent Thursday night at Howard Harshman's." Mainline

## COUNTY FAIR

at County Line

A County Fair will be given  
by the County Line Church

Saturday Night

September 9th

A concert will be given and  
lots of amusements for all.  
Babies under two years may  
be entered in the baby con-  
test.

EVERYBODY INVITED

Admission 10 cents

Batavia News,  
September 7, 1916



local churches, however, were widely viewed as bulwarks of morality. In "Church Notes" of May 23, 1912, the *Eldon Forum* noted, "Methodists of Eldon will be glad to learn that the great Methodist church took no backward step on dancing, theater going and card playing. The General Conference . . . refused to change the law of the church forbidding these sinful amusements."<sup>270</sup>

One County Line church attraction was as the community's social center, offering, in addition to religious services, the choir and Ladies Aid. Although no churchgoer, Ollie Teeter regularly attended Ladies Aid at members' homes for an afternoon of sewing, gossip, "fellowship," and "tempting refreshments of fruit salad, cake, and coffee." The writer Wendell Berry, a man but a close and sympathetic observer, wrote of such gatherings "in the climate of women," of "the talk and the domestic warmth of women at ease among themselves." In July 1928, "The County Line Ladies Aid met with Mrs. Charles Newland . . . The afternoon was spent in working on two quilts, one being an applique and the other a pieced quilt. At the close of the meeting lovely refreshments of ice cream, cake and coffee were served." Among "Mesdames" attending was Ollie Teeter, among "Misses," Josephine. On Wednesday, November 15, 1928, Ollie hosted an all-day meeting, and, "Although the day wasn't so bright, a goodly number of ladies braved the mud and helped on the quilt. At noon a sumptuous dinner was enjoyed cafeteria style." George, no doubt, banished himself to barn and woodshed.<sup>271</sup>

Nellie Stull Peebler remembered that at one Aid meeting Mrs. Teeter proved how very "precise" she was. Ada Ashbaugh brought feed sacks to be made into tea towels, but the towel edges weren't straight. Ada didn't care, but Mrs. Teeter, despite good-natured teasing, wouldn't have it. She "straightened them tea towels up so they'd hem up easier." Precise or not, Mrs. Teeter could take a joke, "was always a jolly lady . . . liked to laugh."

Ladies Aid, of course, served at church fund-raising dinners, ice cream suppers, and Christmas parties, at which Mt. Zion and other neighboring church visitors could be expected. Ladies Aid also sold food at farm auctions and saw that sick folks were fed. In 1922 County Line Ladies Aid raised enough money to buy a new piano from Steller's, in Ottumwa. In 1927, "The County Line Ladies Aid held a food sale at McDowell's office in Batavia Saturday p.m. A large crowd was in attendance and the neat sum of \$20 was realized from the sale of food and aprons, caps and tea-towels. Those from County Line" included Ollie and Josephine.<sup>272</sup>

Typically, such projects offered bargains. In 1916 Batavia Methodist women held a fundraising bazaar "of fancy and useful articles" and a supper

of “Hot Biscuit with Chicken, Oyster Dressing, Mashed Potatoes, Cucumber Pickles, Cabbage Slaw, Apple Sauce, Bread and Butter, Coffee, Cake and Fruit Salad. Just think of it—all you can eat for 25 cents.” Robert Inman’s novel of the South, *Home Fires Burning*, pictures this widespread American institution: “Huge piles of food [were] in the kitchen, the dining room table set for dinner. The women of the First Methodist Church had organized it, had brought whole hams and turkeys and roasts, casseroles, plates and bowls of vegetables, big urns of sweetened tea, enough to feed them for weeks.”<sup>273</sup>

The *Eldon Forum* of July 10, 1913, carried on its front page a “Ladies Aid” poem. Its first four stanzas dramatized many financial expenses that churchmen regularly prevailed upon churchwomen to help pay—a cracked bell to be replaced, taxes, carpeting, carpentering, the preacher’s salary. The fifth stanza was more spiritual in tone:

‘Ah!’ said the men, ‘the way to heaven  
Is long and hard and steep:  
With slopes of care on either side,  
The path ‘tis hard to keep.  
We cannot climb the heights alone;  
Our hearts are sore dismayed;  
We ne’er shall get to heaven at all  
Without the Ladies Aid!’



County Line Ladies Aid (Josephine Teeter in dark dress, sixth from left)

### **The County Line Night Club**

If church and Ladies Aid faced competition as the community social center, it was from the County Line Night Club, whose racy title might have

misled an urbanite. In fact it was designed to be anti-urban, anti-town at least. Significantly, the 1920 Census revealed that America's rural and small town population had become a minority, and those living on farms made up only about one-third of the total. Rural folks, especially elders, often resisted encroaching and divisive urban culture. As Mildred Stull Fickel recalled, in 1920 or '21 her parents, John and Lizzie Stull, with Bill and Alice Hunt, and Billy and Emma Van Ausdeln, had gathered at the newly-built Stull home and had formed the Club in an attempt to preserve rural neighborhood values and relationships. County Line folks were attempting to preserve a rural culture that a few years later, in 1925, Henry A. Wallace was to defend in *Wallaces' Farmer*. "Too often folks in the country seem to think they can maintain no social and intellectual life of their own . . . that the ideal is to dash off to the nearest small town as often as possible and to lose themselves in its activities. . . . No one who looks at it sensibly thinks that our urban civilization is anything to pattern after."<sup>274</sup>

The folks who organized the County Line club hoped to provide entertainment that would keep the younger generation from sampling the enticements of Batavia, a village of a few hundred souls, or of larger towns with more people but even less soul. Coe College authorities in far distant big city Cedar Rapids made news in 1921 by announcing that, to keep students on campus, they would permit dances. Even worse, students would not be prohibited from attending dances elsewhere. The danger, said Nellie Peebler, was that young folks would "run around the streets at night," or be on the roads alone together in cars. The danger was developing rapidly, but was of ancient vintage, for at Fairfield, in May 1900, "The first horseless carriage picnic which has been held here was enjoyed by a party of young people." As everyone knew, in cars there might be cuddling or petting or necking (more or less interchangeable terms for a dangerous enterprise), with who knew what consequences. This was the 1920s, even at County Line.<sup>275</sup>

A rhyme of the era, "Carpetting," opined,

A little petting in the car  
Oft keeps a girl from walking far  
And many girls prefer to pet  
Than get their dainty tootsies wet.

Well, yes, maybe. As they said at the time, It takes two to tango. But an oblique warning against such sentiments and behavior was offered in a 1923 advertising jingle ascribed to Harry Freeborn, Batavia Ford Garage employee:

The Stork and Ford are having a race.  
The Stork is throwing dust in Henry's face.  
Every twelve seconds the Stork goes the route,  
And in just seventeen a Ford is turned out.  
In a very short time if he does not skid,  
He will be making a Ford for every kid.  
Now we sell Fords and bet Henry wins,  
So you better buy two, for you might have twins.<sup>276</sup>

People came to the Club to talk, to exchange pleasantries and neighborhood gossip, to grouse about crops and livestock prices and weather and wind and mud and dust. They generally kept to safe and surface things because, as Lewis Atherton writes in *Main Street on the Middle Border*, "art, literature, and abstract ideas were beyond the daily experience" of the community. And as Mildred Walker's protagonist notes in *Winter Wheat*, "Folks jump from one safe and tried remark to another as though they were steppingstones, not wanting to get their feet wet in their own feelings and thoughts." County Line folks wanted to be sociable and to hurt no one's feelings.<sup>277</sup>

People came to the Club, said Floyd Peebler, "to get out in the yard and act like a buncha nuts," to go really hog-wild. Outdoor games in dim light could be treacherous. Mildred Stull Fickel saw older sister Nellie running wildly, being flipped backward (essentially unhurt) when she ran into a neck-high clothesline. Nellie recalled years later that even reclusive George Teeter attended several times, although he was surely more reserved than some, undoubtedly including pretty Nellie and her future husband, Floyd. In fact, not long after Jo's 1923 high school graduation, "The social club met Saturday evening at the home of Mr. and Mrs. George Teeter. As usual, a large crowd was present, and all had a good time. Ice cream and cake were served." Jo attended Club often when Bernard wanted to drive. Once, in 1927, because the Teeter house was close enough, she walked to Fred Boysel's alone.<sup>278</sup>

On June 5, 1924, the *Batavia News* reported that the County Line Club "met for the second attempt at Charley Newland's Saturday evening—the first time the rain interfered. A large crowd attended and various games and guessing contests were indulged in—also a debate on the question: Resolved that the power washer is more beneficial to the farmers wife than the tractor to the farmer—caused much merriment. The affirmative was discussed ably by Mrs. Jessie Whitmore, Maude Bartholow and Anna Harshman while Frank Acton, Fred Ornduff and Frank Stever tried to over balance their arguments with the negative side. However the

Judges, Edith Stull, Will Barthlow [Bartholow], and Lou Peebler decided in favor of the ladies. At a late hour refreshments of sandwiches, pie and coffee were served.”

Abundant “refreshments” were clearly required for any neighborhood affair. “At a late hour,” during one Night Club meeting, “pie and coffee were served and every one were very pious before they finished the pies (25) in number.” On February 26, 1929, Ollie and George were preparing to move, after nine years, from their rented farm just east of County Line, back to Ollie’s inherited farm. That night fifty neighbors and friends first gathered at County Line store before attempting to surprise the Teeters. After “a social good time was enjoyed visiting and playing games . . . refreshments of ice cream and cake were served each one having brought their share.” Providers’ names were virtually a neighborhood roll call—Newland, Hite, Humphrey, Clarke, Dailey, Long, Shelby, Ashbaugh, Boysel, Hughlan, Roland, Laughlin, Gonterman, Dale, Stever, Parker. Plus a young outsider, Chester Curtis.<sup>279</sup>

The list suggests that, even if not terribly social, Ollie and George had friends, and the latter name foreshadowed an imminent marriage. Josephine, living at home while teaching down the road at County Line School, remembered in 2002 that Chet had been later than expected. Dad George had prowled the windows watching for him, had seen “all those cars coming down the road,” and had warned everyone about the “surprise.” “They all got in the house,” Jo mused, all fifty. “I don’t know what we did with them . . . It was a large house.”

### **Charivari (Shivaree)**

**Noun [Fr] a mock serenade of discordant noises made on kettles, tin horns, etc.: often played as a practical joke on newly married couples**

On the way home from the Club, young and old often decided that a newlywed couple was due to be initiated by charivari, to be “shivareed,” a common rural custom imported from northern Europe. Josephine’s sister Irene and Russell Gorman had been so entertained by the Batavia crowd. Nellie Stull Peebler remembered one for Earnest and Helen Clark Teeter, seventy-five people for a “rousing charivari.” But most memorable, she and Floyd agreed, had been one for themselves. (It is tempting to imagine their romance beginning when Floyd saw Nellie home from Aunt Dinah’s quilting party.) Actually, Nellie remembered, there had been two shivarees. The first, by the County Line Night Club, occurred soon after they married,

“the whole bunch of ‘em” at eleven o’clock at night, but, “we was lookin’ for that.” Floyd and Nellie had expected “the Number Two [school district] bunch would come, but they didn’t,” because, as they learned much later, someone was sick, “so we’d give it up.”<sup>280</sup>

Two or three weeks later, after the unsuspecting not-so-newlyweds had blown out the lamp at ten o’clock, and nothing was stirring, not even . . . , “There was the blamedest boom you ever heard.” The belated Number Two bunch had seriously arrived, had set off a certain amount of dynamite across the road, and had stationed “all the shotguns in the country at every blamed window” (next morning, “Floyd picked up something like thirty-five shells”). And they were banging on pots and pans, hollering and yelling. Floyd’s blind mare ran terrified right through a wooden gate, smashing it to smithereens.

Thus honored, newlyweds were expected to give cigars to the gentlemen (a majority, at least in earlier days), candy to the ladies. By mid-twentieth-century, charivaris had virtually disappeared. At fifteen, Margery Loy (Ornduff) attended a 1929 shivaree for Jo and Chet, her only experience. In 1934, the *Batavia News* referred to a recent “old fashioned charivari.” Old fashioned or not, married in 1933, Bernard and Isobel Manning Teeter were shivareed with standard shotguns, pots, and pans, “And the candy bars and cigars took more than the price of two hogs.” You had a crowd? “We had a bunch.” Isobel remembered a later shivaree for Bob and Gladys McDonough. Junior Black and I experienced a mild affair as late as the late 1940s, in which, not noise, but a timid tiptoe peck on the beautiful bride’s cheek—that and candy bars for us (rather than cigars)—made the occasion memorable.<sup>281</sup>

The custom, long decried in some quarters, died hard. Back in 1890 the *Fairfield Tribune* had editorialized, “a charivari is not proper fun.” Out at Four Corners, Walter Trabert, groom, had taken umbrage, a shotgun, and revolvers, against a band of “Four Corner boys” (Walter a former member) who later asserted they had come “with no ill will, but for the fun of the thing.” The editors sided with Mr. Trabert in failing to see the fun of the thing. In the preceding year, 1889, the Iowa Supreme Court had taken the same point of view when it reversed an Albia charivari case on appeal. According to an editorializing *Fairfield Tribune* concerning that case, another newly minted groom, Royal Adams, had engaged in “a little promiscuous shooting,” which killed “one of the marauding parties.” The newspaper quoted in part the Court’s reversal of Adams’ manslaughter conviction: “The party assembled on the night when the tragic affair took place is called a charivari. Its object is about as barbarous as the pronunciation of its name. Whatever toleration



it once had has long since passed away. Even when in vogue it was often attended by violence and bloodshed. If it ever was allowable to direct a jury that such an assemblage, with all its tumult and confusion, was not a great provocation to those annoyed and insulted by it, that has passed away.”<sup>282</sup>

Naturally, a couple of months later, at Montezuma, Miss Flora Look was acquitted for killing a man while firing into a crowd shivareeing her just remarried grandfather. Again the *Fairfield Tribune*: “Seemingly public sentiment is with the young woman, and charivari parties are not nearly as popular or as frequent.” Even in 1907 a man who “shotgunned charivariers,” wounding three, one losing an eye, was convicted only of assault and battery, although two cases against him were pending. After Iowa’s Supreme Court issued its bald opinion, it is surprising, despite the Montezuma and 1907 affairs, both to find little charivari violence in the ensuing half-century, and that they hung on so long before they disappeared. They did become much less rambunctious and male dominated.<sup>283</sup>

### **Moving Pictures, Clubs, and Urbanites**

Shivarees, church socials, County Line Night Club parties, and certainly neighborly help in crises, created a neighborly spirit and common memories, which may have cushioned jarring changes that in retrospect seem inevitable. Actually, as Nellie Stull Peebler noted, almost from the beginning some youngsters had objected to Club meetings on Saturday nights. Presumably they wanted to be off then to Batavia, or even the silent cinema in Eldon or Libertyville or even Fairfield, even Ottumwa, where they could sample at a safe remove exotica and even mild (but titillating) erotica hardly dreamed of—at least commercially—at County Line. Almost certainly without erotica, as early as 1906 Libertyville had had a “large crowd” at “moving picture” shows. This would have been absolutely true of a “life motion show at the Knights of Pythias hall,” sponsored in 1908 “for the benefit of the Ladies Aid Society of the Methodist Church.”<sup>284</sup>

Some years later, on October 23, 1919, the *Batavia News* had promised “Zongar at the moving pictures in Batavia next Monday evening.” It had noted earlier that local businessmen were preparing to offer moving picture shows regularly in “Nelson Opera House,” that is, the large room above Nelson’s store where nary an opera was ever staged. Batavia, only a couple of miles from County Line, was apparently an up-and-coming town, having begun laying concrete sidewalks as early as 1904, having created a telephone company in 1905, and having installed electricity in 1916. (Not long thereafter, Chet Curtis recalled, one old resident, seeing

pitch oozing from an electric pole, had excitedly warned that electrical juice was leaking.) As early as 1917 Methodist Ladies Aid had raised money to pay for church lights. A 1916 newspaper editorial had urged that citizens vote to rescue the town from “darkness, a state not at all desirable any more for a modern growing town as is Batavia.”<sup>285</sup>

Not all Batavians felt secure in the face of actual or presumed urbane urban attitudes. Under the head of “Fairfield Boy’s Fined,” locals might have gloated to learn that “parties from out of town were not allowed to violate traffic rules here no more than at home.” Visitors “to what they are pleased to call ‘Hick Towns’ think they are privileged,” but “It is full time to learn these birds different.” Larger towns threatened small towns both culturally and economically, which helps explain why businessmen sponsored entertainments. As early as 1902 from Libertyville came “A Plea For Our Home Merchants,” asserting that mail order catalog giants like “Sears Roe Buck & Co., Montgomery Ward & Co., Marshall Field & Co.” did not sympathize with customers’ problems and tragedies, extend credit, or support local churches and charities.<sup>286</sup>

Perhaps drawn to urbanity, at an early County Line Night Club party certain young folks in the kitchen drew up County Line (Wednesday) Night Club by-laws. In January 1922 about forty “County Line Young People’s Club” members played games and music, but, “The greatest sport of the evening was unwinding of a carpet rag . . . by each young man in the center of which was a ladies name who was his pardner for supper.” Then on Saturday night, “The County Line Community Club of the older folks” enjoyed games, clever stunts, and ice-skating. In March, “The Young People’s Social Club of County Line were royally entertained at the Frank Hite home last Wednesday evening,” with games, stunts, and (need one say?) refreshments. Officers were elected.<sup>287</sup>

Thus for a time two age-divided Clubs competed. Late in May, impinging on their elders’ territory, “The young people of County Line enjoyed a ‘rook’ party at the home of Grace Mc Niel east of Batavia Saturday night.” “And then,” recalled Nellie Stull Peebler, “some of the old ones softened up and they got to going to the young ones, and the young ones got to going to the old ones, and they had two” clubs, but no longer generationally split. In fact, early on, “A joint meeting of the County Line Social Club and Young People’s Club was held at the Kate Parker home Wednesday evening, June 14,” at which a large crowd had a good time (plus ice cream and cake). Ultimately, however, the younger club hung on longer, while the older declined and was abandoned, a non-event that coincided approximately with the late-1930s closing of County Line church.<sup>288</sup>

Parishioners had organized County Line Church, originally “Pleasant Prairie,” in 1865, and had erected the present building in 1877 with lumber sawed from their farms. By the early 1930s it no longer flourished, and meetings were discontinued. But then the building was refurbished and reopened following A. K. Harper’s heartening 1934 conversion of those twenty souls. Nevertheless, membership continued to decline as members found it easier to drive to Methodist churches in Batavia, Eldon, or Libertyville, in cars over better roads. On March 6, 1941, the abandoned building, soon to be torn down, was sold for \$340, that sum added to the Batavia new church building fund, the old one having burned in 1939.<sup>289</sup>

### **Trouble with a Capital T . . .**

While its churches drew some to Batavia, its pool hall may have drawn as many or more faithful adherents of its own. Indeed, the clientele of these sacred and secular institutions sometimes overlapped discreetly. When young Chester Curtis, Batavia Methodist church member, came calling on Josephine Teeter in the early- and mid-1920s, Ollie and George, who knew about such goings on, wished that he didn’t play pool. But Chet continued of course. Probably it wasn’t so much the game itself as the surrounding atmosphere to which Jo’s parents objected (George played caroms, after all). Meredith Willson got it exactly right in *The Music Man* when his traveling salesman warns of dangers lurking in the pool hall in River City (modeled on Iowa’s Mason City). Another Iowa town, Mt. Pleasant, voted in 1921 no longer to license public pool halls, “where all the loafers loaf.” Private club pool and billiards were not, of course, affected. Significantly, “Many women voted.”<sup>290</sup>

Batavia’s pool hall was the workingman’s pub without the publican and officially without the beer, this being the Prohibition Era. The proprietor was reduced, at least legally, to dispensing soft drinks, racking up balls, and collecting nickels. There may have been side bets and the occasional see-gar or cigarette. There certainly was all that slang the Music Man had warned about; certainly warnings to a guy headed for a date: “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do”; certainly kidding and joshing about some girl and a masher’s car that hadn’t really broken down. (“The door that is hardest to keep the wolf from is the one to the sedan.”) There were hijinks and practical jokes and tomfoolery among this all-male and mostly young clientele who were feeling their oats, even if not sowing them. These included high-energy Estol “Nuts” Curtis, who liked to dress fit to kill, and his jokester younger brother, Chet. There were no flies on these guys. But

no drinking or smoking, not right there, and nowhere for some. In 1928 Batavia Town Council sold a pool hall license for \$40 and a cigarette sales license for \$50 to Ottumwa's Paul Hankins; interestingly, his employee for a time was Orval Willis, reputed (and then some) bootlegger.<sup>291</sup>

Years later, in 1952, when I challenged Chet Curtis, my dad, to test his seasoned skills against my green ones, he hesitated. Surely he did so not out of fear, but because our contest site would be Fairfield's pool hall, a saloon just off the square on North Main where spittoons still lined the wall behind the tables, and whose stale beer reek assaulted even passersby *across* the street. Nevertheless, he went, and he won (some of) the games. And had his customary grape pop.

### **Liquor as the Great Divide**

Batavia, and Iowa, had long struggled for the soul of the drinking man. In 1839 the Iowa Territorial Temperance Society was born at Burlington. In 1841 Fairfield witnessed a temperance meeting. In 1880 Batavia Methodist ladies, led by Mrs. Hiram Greenland, the Postmaster's wife, Maggie Greenland herself Assistant Postmaster, Mrs. M. B. Sparks, Mrs. Will Hall, and Mrs. Lew Shaw, perhaps twenty-five in all, rid the town of a drinking establishment. They did so only after the owner, apparently tolerated previously, hung a provocative sign: "This is a Saloon." After he spurned their offer to buy him out, and after prayerfully considering alternatives, they marched down the street, barged into his premises. They "broke bottles right and left and smashed in barrels of beer, rolled the kegs of whiskey into the street until soon a river of firewater was flowing through the town," down toward the CB&Q tracks. The saloonkeeper left town by the (former) saloon's back door, perhaps hastened by threats of tar and feathers from the militant ladies' husbands. To thirsty former customers, July 1880 must have seemed hotter than ever. Batavia's ladies preceded by about a decade a prohibitionist who gained national notoriety, the hatchet-wielding Carrie Nation. In later years would appear miniature axes with "Carrie Nation's" inscribed on the handle, but she was far from the first saloon smasher.<sup>292</sup>

Latter day prohibitionists may have been stiffened in their resolve by "Stand Up for Prohibition," copyrighted 1900 and sung to the tune of "Stand Up for Jesus":

Stand up for prohibition, ye patriots of the land;  
All ye who love your country, Against saloons should stand

Be bold against this traffic, your country's greatest foe;  
Let word and deed and ballot Proclaim 'Saloons must go'.<sup>293</sup>

Iowa law in 1870 had established local option for drink. Then in 1882 a prohibition law was both passed by the legislature and invalidated by the state Supreme Court, thus reinstating local option. Attempts continued to make towns, counties, and the state dry, but they met with strong resistance at the turn of the century. In 1900 petitions pro and con circulated in Batavia concerning a proposed saloon. Batavia's correspondent to the prohibitionist *Jefferson County Republican* complained, "We have more [liquor] in this town than we have need of. We have two drug stores here, and if it were



Ottumwa Brewery. Courtesy of Ottumwa Public Library

not for selling that soul destroyer, they could not make a decent living . . . There is a set of young men . . . who collect at places to smoke and chew and swear, so that it is not a decent place for a decent man to go, let alone a lady or children." Later that year the paper editorialized, "The Eldon Fair was largely attended and the exhibition of farm products and art was quite good, but it is said the amount of beer and bad whiskey consumed was awful." It seems this was old news, for in 1886 the Ottumwa *Democrat* had reported "all manner of illicit liquor dealers" at the fair. The *Republican's* Batavia columnist reported in 1901, "Everybody was in town Saturday. Merchants were kept busy. Even the saloons were busy from the number of drunks we saw on the streets." A few years later a "registered pharmacist of Batavia," W. K. Marsh, applied for a permit to sell "intoxicating liquors."<sup>294</sup>

Ottumwa, population 20,000 plus, was evidently as close to Sin City



Central Saloon, Ottumwa. Courtesy of Ottumwa Public Library

as the area could offer and had long been so. At the intersection of Main and Market in 1893 a mob lynched a man accused of rape. The novelist Edna Ferber, who as a young girl lived in Ottumwa from 1890-1897, asserted that in one year the town witnessed seven murders and no convictions. In post-Civil War years, Kinsey “Stormy” Jordan was a flamboyant firewater dispenser in his South Market Street “Road to Hell” saloon, who to attract customers reputedly sprinkled whisky on the sidewalk every morning. An 1886 newspaper item shows him as a Profane Publican. Upon being served notice in “a liquor case,” Stormy “belched forth in a storm of the most brutal invective” against Constable Tullis: “Serve one on Jesus Christ. . . . I hate God. I hate Jesus Christ, and I hate any s-n of a b---h that’s got any respect for them.” Stormy and his Road to Hell Saloon were hardly unique, as the *Ottumwa Courier* of April 3, 1877, asserted: “This city is cursed with two or three of the most disreputable saloons on earth,” including the “Mystery,” “where a shooting spree commenced today. . . . Wm. Manog, a saloon-keeper himself, last night lost heavily at cards, and this morning crazy drunk and mad at everybody,” intimately damaged Tom Shea’s clothing and the saloon door with a pistol ball. In a next door saloon, Manog slapped Henry Hendershott in the face. HH responded, “Don’t do that Bill, it hurts.” Manog: “I will just shoot you through the head, and finish the job . . . . Henry asked him not to shoot through the head, but to shoot him in the ear, not supposing the fellow to be in earnest—but Manog took hold of Hendershott’s ear pulling it out pretty lively with one hand and with the other fired the pistol, the ball going through the rim of Hendershott’s ear.” In 1908 Ottumwa had forty-three saloons where, as always, paid up drinkers could get a free bar lunch, and loafers could try. Ottumwa had gambling. And corrupt police and politicians. The town had a red light district where locals and traveling men could visit Aurora’s or Lil’s or Lulu’s or “303 West Main” (upstairs), most of these conveniently located near Main Street streetcars.



Main Street, Ottumwa. Courtesy of Ottumwa Public Library

Prohibitionist revivalists were sometimes temporarily successful in limiting the liquor trade, as when in 1908, “There isn’t an open saloon in Ottumwa, lately the wickedest city in Iowa,” because of recent Billy Sunday revival meetings, even though “The saloon has ruled Ottumwa for many years.” And yet, Billy Sunday would move on, and his aura would fade, at least some



of the forty-three saloons would revive, and Ottumwa would not really be cleaned up 'til state authorities moved in at midcentury.<sup>295</sup>

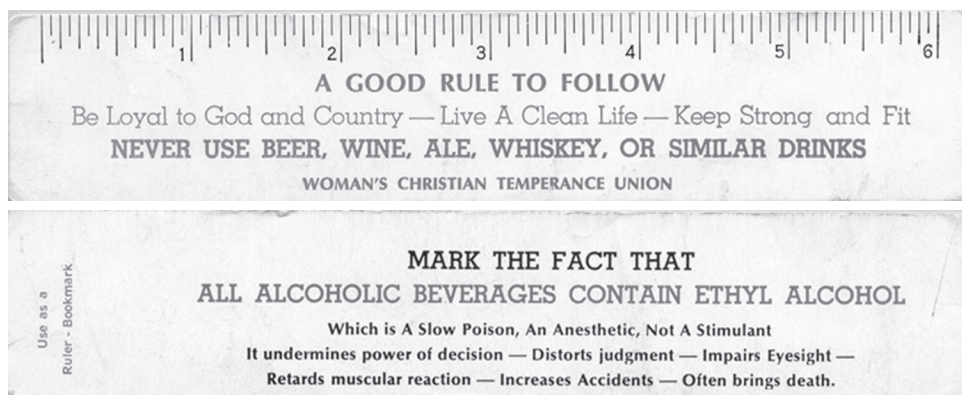
In this era, before and during national Prohibition, because good citizens were willing to fork over good money for bad liquor in back alleys and “blind tiger” establishments (a speakeasy or blind pig), moonshine bootleggers thrived not only in Ottumwa, and sometimes were caught. In 1894 David Albertson of Batavia was fined \$300, a painful sum, for bootlegging. S. V. Sampson, Agency druggist and prominent church member, was convicted in 1895 of concocting (and selling) alcoholic “cough medicine.” An 1899 raid on a drugstore at the southeast corner of Fairfield’s square netted “a large quantity” of whiskey, gin, blackberry brandy, beer, and “a small quantity of sour wine.” Confiscated and stored briefly in the courthouse, the stuff was expeditiously destroyed. Two decades later Dr. C. C. Ball, Packwood, pled guilty—and was sentenced to thirty days—both to being intoxicated and to brewing the intoxicant.<sup>296</sup>

Iowa bootlegging was evidently a long term, widespread, and sometimes equal opportunity enterprise that sometimes attracted the ingenious and often the stupid. Under the heading of equal opportunity, Mrs. Etta Johnson of Albia was convicted of bootlegging in 1898. The lady “comes from a bad family . . . Her husband has just served a six year term . . . for shooting United States Marshall Wray.” Mrs. Johnson was the second Iowa female recently convicted of bootlegging. Under the heading of ingenuity, during the Prohibition era a Cascade, Iowa, bootlegger hid a still behind a smallpox quarantine sign. Under the heading of an ingenious defense, one man, arrested for possessing forty gallons of vinegar, asserted in court that “he had the vinegar for his personal use, that he mixed vinegar with everything he ate and was inordinately fond of it. The jury took his word for it.” In Des Moines, a literal bootlegger tried to escape police, only to have the bottle break, so lacerating his ankle and foot that he gladly surrendered. Under the heading of inordinate fondness, a Davenport police raid on an Eagles lodge netted 33,500 pints of beer. And finally, as a sign of modernity in 1928, “Officers Seize Airship At Marshalltown With Hooch And Champagne Aboard.”<sup>297</sup>

Sometimes, an ardent prohibitionist would have said, the wages of sin, at least of drinking cheap rotgut, paid off in death. Reportedly, in northern Iowa three men died and a fourth was “in terrible agony” and likely to die after guzzling “eastern brewed beer” containing “the decomposed remains of a genuine rattlesnake.” A few years earlier in that town a drinker had become ill, so the story went, because “a dead toad occupied the keg with the beer.”<sup>298</sup>

In 1905 the Women's Christian Temperance Union ladies of Fairfield declared, "Our Purpose: United in Christ to save our children and our homes from the power of King Alcohol." A decade later, the Iowa prohibitionist campaign was finally successful, all Iowa saloons by legislative decision to be closed from January 1, 1916, and all "wet goods" to be shipped out of the state. Clearly the state was split down the middle, for a popular vote that year had rejected Prohibition. On New Year's Eve 1915, "In many surrounding towns the watch night services were climaxed by a jubilee over the closing of saloons in the state, church bells were rung, and a general praise service held. At this time six other states joined the prohibition procession."<sup>299</sup>

Temperance, evolved into Prohibition, was marching triumphal so it seemed. In February 1918 the Superintendent of the Iowa Anti Saloon



Two sides of Women's Christian Temperance ruler

League spoke optimistically to Methodists on "the temperance situation in Iowa." And in March Swenson and Nelson's grocery store *Batavia News* ad quoted a supposed sign in "a Chicago saloon window":

Poor little bar-room  
 Don't you cry;  
 You'll be a drug store  
 Bye and Bye.  
 What will you drink then?  
 'Coffee of course—Monarch—Because,  
 Well—everybody's saving these days.

That was, please note, March 7, 1918.<sup>300</sup>

On March 15, 1918, the *Fairfield Tribune* announced, "Booze Captured At Stockport," two autos groaning down on their springs with eight hundred whisky half-pints, and seventy quarts of beer. In June, near Batavia, State of Iowa agents seized "seventy-four quarts and eleven pints of whiskey, forty quarts of beer and a small quantity of wine from the cellar

at the Orval Willis farm southeast of town.” Mr. Willis, one time Batavia saloon manager, asserted that he was framed, but more explicitly, “I want to tell the people . . . that the frame up on the whiskey deal was a put up job on me in order to stick me for the fine . . . You’ll find out the thug’s name later who did this deal.” The essential question this case raises is whether Mr. Willis learned to talk like that from the (then silent) movies, or whether gangster movies learned from him.<sup>301</sup>

“Prohibition is still in its infancy. This is why people still want their bottle.” Just three miles south of County Line and high-schoolgirl Josephine Teeter’s home, down in the very southwestern corner of Des Moines Township and of Jefferson County, in the Turkey Scratch brushy woods and hills, where in a few years Josephine would teach, lived farmer Reid Finney. Mr. Finney was apparently a student of supply and demand economics, although Jo could not remember him. In early 1922 in a raid that did not find Mr. Finney home, federal and county officials discovered he was “prepared to make hootch on an immense scale.”<sup>302</sup>

In 1923 some people were singing the “Prohibition Blues,” but if you wanted to drink, either before or after national Prohibition, you could always get something to drink, you just couldn’t go to town and buy it openly, Jo Curtis and Nellie and Floyd Peebler agreed many years later. In addition to others mentioned previously, there was Merle Hood, the bootlegger, who for a time had a car dealership in Batavia and later a gas station in Ottumwa; he only recently deceased in 1981. Nellie: “We lived on a dirt road a mile west of County Line, and when you went down the hill and then down in the little hollow there was always mud holes, you know. And Merle Hood was there when they was havin’ Prohibition, and they’d come in those by-roads, see, . . . to try to avoid that man from Agency, Rodibaugh, who wouldn’t go on dirt-mud roads.” Floyd: “They hauled it from Illinois over here.” Nellie: “He [Hood] was the main one. He always had a big car.” Floyd: “Takin’ it to Ottumwa, probably.” Nellie: “Just stayin’ off the main road.” Jo: “I don’t think there were very many in that community, our neighborhood,” who drank. Floyd and Nellie agree. Certainly not compared to Ottumwa, with its well-earned reputation of being a wide-open town, certainly compared to Batavia. You could get booze and much else in Ottumwa along Smoky Row. Some years after national Prohibition ended and local option prevailed again in Iowa, W. H. Rodibaugh was elected Marshall of Agency, “and with the election of the same old council it will still be a dry town” (and so it continued into the twentieth-first century). Such a history helps explain why bootleggers routinely took the back roads around Agency and its Marshall.<sup>303</sup>

Prohibition in Iowa was not entirely prohibitive, it was in fact rather porous. In 1925 Jefferson County Sheriff Charles D. Butcher, and others, found “a perfectly good still—but empty . . . on Cedar Creek southeast of Bernhart . . . A fifty-gallon mash barrel was nearby” and “a cooler in which an excellent worm squirmed. The officers broke up the still.” The *Batavia News* of



Agency's Main Street. Courtesy of Ottumwa Public Library

October 27, 1932, reported under blazing headlines that on the preceding afternoon, “just outside of the west city limits of the town on Highway 34 . . . Iowa prohibition officers” had seized 1,500 gallons of grain alcohol and 228 pints of “Old Crow” and “Old Charter.” Plus, “a fairly new Model A Ford truck with tractor trailer.” The driver claimed to be from Illinois and bound for Council Bluffs, on Iowa’s western border. One wonders how many shipments of hooch (hootch) got through to Council Bluffs—and how many to Batavia.<sup>304</sup>

In 1996 Paul Kesselring asserted, “During prohibition the local area was supplied with illegal liquids. These suppliers were Jack Hutton, George Harden and Merle Hood. Later Merle Hood owned an Oil Station in Ottumwa and George Harden was elected Jefferson County Treasurer.” As for me, I only know what I read . . . And as the 1925 Prohibition-era song wailed, “Show me the way to go home. I’m tired and wanna go to bed. Had a little drink about an hour ago, and it went right to my head . . .”<sup>305</sup>

### **Schools Served as Social Glue**

If we ignore the pool hall and saloon, in addition to church and club, another institution serving as social glue was the school and the school district, for it led parents to gather periodically for scholarly, fundraising, and celebratory events. As with church and club, the school may have been less important for the Teeters than for some because they moved so often from one district to another, especially in Josephine’s early years. Nevertheless, Ollie and sometimes George attended Christmas programs, where Josephine, among others, might recite a poem. They might also attend annual end of year school picnics; and box suppers designed to bring in a little money for school materials. Box suppers, Nellie Stull Peebler remembered, were fun, but also, “a headache,” and if they made thirty or

forty dollars, “you were rich.” Twenty or thirty was probably closer to the average.

Box suppers actually served two purposes because eligible women, usually young, and girls of a certain age were expected to prepare an elaborate picnic for two, in an elaborately decorated box, to be auctioned off to the highest bidder, proceeds to the school fund. Hoping to eat with a delectable young Miss, young men and boys often bid recklessly. Sometimes a fella, tough and intimidating and attached enough, faced no competition. Sometimes a brother interfered, to wit: On the occasion of Josephine Teeter’s box-supper-coming-out-party at Ellmaker School, District #2, she hoped that Mahlon Johnston, whom she was sweet on, would buy her box. She and Mahlon were always partners in playground games. But her interfering big brother, Earnest, outlasted the bidding competition, seized the box, and presented it to little brother Bernard, with whom Josephine was therefore by the rules of the game forced to share in a very public picnic. “This,” Jo smiled many decades later, “didn’t make me too happy.”

### **The World Grew Up Right Before Their Eyes**

Several years before this shameful episode, Josephine had begun attending school in September 1910. That year, when Halley’s Comet reappeared in American skies, as did the seventeen-year locust, was eventful not only for young Josephine. As always, illnesses and death claimed much attention. Mumps closed a Libertyville area school for two weeks. At Batavia two children of John Boysel died within a week of scarlet fever. Infantile paralysis continued “to invade new sections of the state.” In Italy, a cholera epidemic struck Rome. In Russia, Count Leo Tolstoi died; in England, King Edward VII and Florence Nightingale died; in America, the philosopher William James, Yale Professor William Graham Sumner, Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy, Mark Twain, and artist Winslow Homer, who had painted “Snap the Whip”—all died; and in Des Moines Township, Uncle John Teeter. In 1911, 146 sweatshop workers, almost all of them young women, were trapped and died in New York City’s Triangle Shirtwaist fire. It was an age of polar exploration. In 1910 the Englishman, Captain Robert Falcon Scott, led his party toward the South Pole, using pack *ponies*, for heaven’s sakes. Just the year before, the American, Robert Peary, with Eskimo guides and dogs, had reached the North Pole. Scott would find that the Norwegian, Roald Amundsen, with dogs, without ponies, had already come and gone from the South Pole in

1911. Scott and his party, and poor ponies, perished while attempting to return from the Pole in 1912.<sup>306</sup>

In 1910 the expansionist Empire of Japan, several years after soundly trouncing Czarist Russia in the Far East, annexed the Korean peninsula. In 1911 followers of Sun Yat-sen at last overthrew the Manchu dynasty, created the Chinese Republic, banned female foot binding, and introduced the era of modern China as a rising world power in the twentieth century and beyond. In the twentieth century, and bloodily, Asia would come to belong to the Asians.

The *Fairfield Weekly Journal* reported in 1910 that in the preceding year American train accidents had killed 253 passengers and a stunning number of railroad employees, 3,469. Unreliable airplanes frequently fell out of the air. Harriet Quimby, the first licensed American woman pilot in 1911, crashed and died in 1912. Injuries and deaths by automobile were limited, but promised to grow exponentially. In 1910 someone who had been struck by Lillian Russell's car sued the Iowa-born entertainer. By 1910, 22,580 cars were registered in Iowa, and were predicted to double in that year alone. In Libertyville, "We understand Joe Wagner [a Teeter in-law] has ordered an auto. This will make four autos in this town." Early in 1911 Bob Burmans beat Barney Oldfield's world track record at Indianapolis. The first Indianapolis 500 was run that spring. Three weeks later, also in Indiana, at Marion, a fourteen-year-old girl was killed and seven friends were injured after a twelve-year-old driver lost control of his father's car when its steering gear broke. As in Indiana, the automobile (with new self-starters that year) was nevertheless in Iowa to stay, a fact symbolized dramatically when the Fairfield Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) appealed for volunteers to drive Civil War veterans to the cemetery on Decoration Day. But as always some curmudgeons refused to fall in line with progress: "Because he had a grudge against automobiles and motorcycles Phil A. Southworth, of Cedar Rapids," scattered tacks "in the street in front of his restaurant."<sup>307</sup>

That the technology of movement at speed on land, at sea, and in the air was already widely accepted had been illustrated on December 27, 1909, when the *Fairfield Weekly Journal* presented a cartoon of Santa Claus in an airplane. In that year the Frenchman Bleriot had flown across the English Channel from Calais to Dover in thirty-seven minutes, an event bound to alter military thinking in Britain and elsewhere. At a time when the automobile was hardly out of diapers, this new machine had also seized public attention. In Josephine Teeter's first year of school, "Aviator Arch Hoxsey smashed all altitude records at Los Angeles by ascending 11,474



feet”; Glenn Curtiss took off and landed a “seaplane” at San Diego; C. P. Rodgers completed the first cross-country flight in only seven weeks, and only eighty stops. That summer, Iowa State Fair “Wright Bros.’ Aeroplane Flights” were headlined: “Four races to the clouds every day without fail.” These same fellows had barely been able to lift off from Kitty Hawk dunes just after Josephine had been born less than eight years earlier. Despite a popular invitation appearing in 1907, “Come Josephine in My Flying Machine,” the song’s namesake never got off the ground ‘til much, much later. At a more mundane level, but perhaps as significant as the technology of flight, John Crawford drove off with the first farm tractor in the area. This was a forty-five horsepower “Avery,” “an object of considerable attention” on Fairfield streets and no doubt on roads to Stockport. As well it might have been, because tractors and related machinery would change the nature and productivity of agriculture fundamentally, ultimately worldwide. Another machine, as important as cars or tractors, at least for housewives, appeared in Fairfield when the Dexter Washing Machine Company was organized in 1911.<sup>308</sup>

The technology of movement at speed changed the nature of supply and demand as well. Early in 1911 H. C. Davis, Fairfield grocer, offered “fancy” Florida navel oranges at forty cents a dozen—leftovers from the Holidays? Such prices, and the very availability of fresh fruit in January, depended on rapid transportation (and commercial ice making). A year later Maddox and Maxwell Grocery advertised “Juicy California Navals” for twenty cents. “Everybody can eat oranges at these prices.” This was almost true, although a penny was still a penny, even though Lincoln’s head had usurped the Indian’s in 1909. In 1910 an “American Lady Corset,” machine mass produced, could be had for a dollar or two; “Excelsior Brand” white dresses for five to fifteen; “Josephine” dress boots for three-fifty. With the economy reasonably prosperous in America and Iowa, even farm folk could sometimes afford—or splurge on—such items. In those years pasture and timberland might go for a respectable \$50 an acre, the best farmland for \$150, and farming’s future looked rosy.<sup>309</sup>

In 1910 fast people in fast places—Paris, New York—were dancing the tango. In Jefferson County, Iowa, fast square dancing prevailed. Much entertainment was homemade, if sometimes a bit pretentious or self-congratulatory. A Halloween “hay rack ride” included, wrote an anonymous “Guest and Subscriber,” “a merry crowd of the most popular people of Batavia. . . . The evening was celebrated with whistles, horns, bells, and fireworks. One huge Jack-o-lantern . . . illuminated the wagon,” illuminating, prominently, the chaperones.<sup>310</sup>

Fairfield's annual "Chautauqua" arts and entertainment festival was initiated in 1904, just a year after Josephine Teeter was born. In the early-twentieth-century, Chautauqua had mushroomed from its 1874 New York State origins into a nationwide movement to popularize cultural and educational development. In 1906 Fairfield acquired Slagle Grove east of town, which became Chautauqua Park. The next year a huge wooden "tabernacle," built in town for the evangelist Billy Sunday, was moved to the park and became a secularized Chautauqua venue. For Chautauqua events, "midwestern audiences knew exactly what they wanted," writes Lewis Atherton, "to feel superior and cultured without being bored. . . . It was gay and folksy and uplifting and cultured." The annual event would continue until competition from movies, radio, and the Depression killed it in 1931.<sup>311</sup>

In those early years, the event depended partly on outside lecturers and entertainers, but not entirely. Chautauqua week's dominant tone was local, with leading Citizen-Chautauquans in 1910 camped in the park's two-hundred tent "White City," the term echoing Chicago's 1893 World's Fair. Occupying sites were leading churches, a local newspaper, Parsons College, Grand Army of the Republic, several reverends and doctors, other prominent Fairfield names—Hunt, Lamson, Fulton—plus others from town and country. The grounds had water and toilets, "a first class dining hall and refreshment stands," grocery and "supply station," fruit stand, bakery goods concession, et cetera.<sup>312</sup>

In 1910-1911 Fairfield as well, Barhydt Memorial Chapel, a handsome Gothic stone structure with square twin towers, which would become a center of worship and cultural events, was begun and completed on Parsons College campus. In 1910 Ottumwa, people could see a professional baseball team, a major league team. It was not reported which local team beat the Chicago Cubs. At the "Lyric" in Fairfield, "A Western Story" moving picture was titled with unselfconscious racism, *The Squaw's Revenge*. At only ten cents, like mass-produced clothing and furniture, mass-produced entertainment could be both inexpensive and cheap. Just a year later, in 1911, was born a future "B" movie Western star, midwesterner Ronald Reagan. In 1910 Libertyville, indicating that live entertainment was not yet secondary to film, on the same Saturday night occurred a local band park concert, and Opera House entertainment by "colored comedians." In 1910 Reno, Nevada, pugilist Jack Johnson knocked out white champion Jim Jeffries in the fifteenth round: "John Arthur Johnson, a Texas Negro, the son of an American slave, is the first and undisputed heavyweight champion of the world." In the South "anti-negro" demonstrations resulted.

As Johnson's entourage made its triumphal progress toward Chicago by rail, in Ogden, Utah, "young toughs at the depot tried to get him into a brawl." Such was the life of a professional "colored" entertainer. In Josephine Teeter's first school year, other professional entertainers—United States Senators—refused to grant West Point admission to American citizens of Chinese descent. Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1882 and 1902 were not repealed until 1943, when the U.S. desperately needed China to wage war against Japan. Returning home from his 1910 African hunt, Teddy Roosevelt stopped off to lecture respectful Oxonians on the dangers of "race suicide" if white birth rates continued to fall.<sup>313</sup>

In the 1910 category of Sin and Vice, Frank and Charles Potts, brothers living a mile southwest of Libertyville and about a mile from where Josephine would attend school, "had a hundred bottles of beer seized by Sheriff Neibert. Justice D.B. Wilson ordered all one hundred emptied into the dust after Prof. R.M. McKenzie of Parsons College tested the beer and found it to be intoxicating." Thank you, Professor. In that year, the Iowa Prohibition Party platform, to no one's surprise demanded a constitutional amendment "prohibiting the manufacture, sale, and importation of intoxicating liquors." Interestingly, the platform also demanded a graduated income tax and voting based "on intelligence rather than sex," surely a demand the party's dominant female numbers supported. If Cleanliness is next to Godliness, and if being unhygienic is a sin and a vice, then the persons residing corner of Hempstead and Second Street, three blocks from Fairfield's Central Park, deserve mention. There in 1910 were: six cows, four horses, one bull, one calf, about a hundred chickens, guineas, pigeons, two dogs, fifteen cats, and manure three to five feet deep in the pens. One wonders how neighbors or authorities took so long to ferret out the culprits. Perhaps because the great Central Park light tower, first in Iowa and costing a significant \$1,400, a marvel when erected in 1882 but now unsafe, no longer cast its blazing beams over the town, and would within a few weeks be torn down. Also under Category Sin and Vice, May Costigan, "a local character," was fined \$50 for "conducting a disorderly house." She appealed. Out west ten miles, a correspondent reported on Valentine's Day 1911 that for two weeks Batavia had been "annoyed by two undesirable females," who had been arrested for profane language, "and fined 5\$ or ordered to leave town."<sup>314</sup>

Meanwhile, in the real Wild West, Glacier National Park was created in 1910 and the United States Secretary of the Interior opened for white settlement 1,400,000 acres of "Indian lands" in eastern Montana. During the preceding year, lands on the Flathead, Spokane, and Coeur d'Alene

Reservations had been opened to whites.<sup>315</sup>

In 1910 American Indians continued to be displaced, but they were not alone. In the previous year, 384 hoboes who were riding the rods and in boxcars had been sheltered overnight in the Fairfield jail, as Iowa law required, and then told to move on. Most were young or middle aged, the *Fairfield Tribune* reported, most decently dressed and looking for work. No thefts had been reported.<sup>316</sup>

In 1910 another reluctantly unemployed itinerant, Teddy Roosevelt, back from that much-publicized African big game hunting safari, steamed into New York harbor, and was “whisked away” in a “White Steamer,” he reportedly having discarded “horses and carriages for the swifter and more reliable automobiles.” A less publicized hunter in 1910, George Stever, “shot a white pelican with eight and one half feet wingspread on Cedar Creek” south of Fairfield. The following year a \$400 reward was offered locally to anyone discovering nesting passenger pigeons. No one did, since extinct birds do not nest. Which recalls attention to TR, who returned from Africa wanting to serve the public in elected office (presumably after engaging in a rumored wild boar hunt with spears in Mexico), but who failed ever after to be chosen. Not so another Republican, June Chidester, a Jefferson County native, Fairfield High School graduate, and veteran elementary schoolteacher there, who had studied at the “State normal school and Chicago University.” Miss Chidester had been the only woman on the Jefferson County Republican ticket in 1906, but had failed to be elected. In 1910, however, voters chose her as County Superintendent of Schools, in which office she would immediately begin superintending Josephine Teeter as a first year elementary student and eventually as a rural teacher. Miss Chidester would superintend until 1936.<sup>317</sup>

### **Josephine’s Rural School Experience**

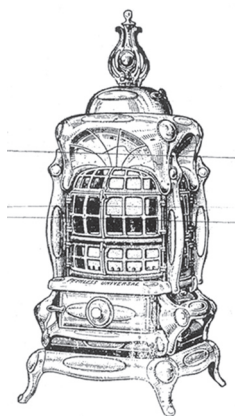
Josephine started to school when almost seven, the only girl in a class of boys; but she did have the advantage of age and of already knowing her ABC’s, which surely pleased her very first teacher, Elsie Stewart. Josephine started late because the Teeters were living on Joe Steele’s farm, almost a mile and a half from Des Moines Township School No. 6. A year earlier it would have been hard for a little girl to walk both ways in all kinds of weather, in fact during the “coldest winter in years.” Ironically, in mid-January the next year, 1911, a snowstorm was “one of the largest in several years.” Later in the month, ice covered everything and a newspaper called for people to feed starving quail. The informal

county chronicler, Hiram Heaton, reported that in January “rain . . . turned to sleet and the country was covered with perhaps the worst ice sheet ever known, for almost a week.” Early February saw “what old timers declare was one of the worst snow storms in twenty years.” Even some Fairfield residents were snowbound. Late-February thaw made muddy roads virtually impassable.<sup>318</sup>

Even at seven or eight getting to school through extremes of mud or snow was as much and sometimes more than Josephine could manage: “One morning I started out by myself to school. . . . It had snowed and I walked in the snow too close to a ditch, fell in, and couldn’t get out. It was a good thing [sister] Irene was following me, for she helped me out of the ditch.” Except for such sisterly help, like her siblings, Josephine was on her own. Some parents might sometimes deliver or pick up children, but her parents, “very rarely to never.” So, Josephine bundled up every wintry school day in woolen underwear, long woolen stockings, woolen dress and sweater, a heavy woolen coat, woolen mittens, woolen stocking cap, and rubber overshoes to protect her black high-button leather shoes. With the others, she trudged a mile and more to and from school five days a week.

The first school to which Josephine struggled, No. 6, was delightfully named Rabbit’s Delight, the same one room building in which Mother Ollie had begun about 1878, and where Jo would teach in the mid-1920s. Although it closed long ago, it was one of the rare rural Jefferson County school buildings to survive on site into the twenty-first century, and was typical of other schools Josephine attended.

Students entered at one end of a small rectangular building, often first into an entryway or “cloakroom” for coats, overshoes, and dinner pails. At the room’s far end was a slate blackboard covering the wall, above which was an antiquated, window-shade-style roll of maps, and above that probably a cloudy reproduction of Gilbert Stuart’s cloudy portrait of George Washington, below which was teacher’s desk, often on a slightly raised platform. Then came a recitation bench, then fixed desks for all eight grades on each side of a center aisle beginning with the smallest front row and ending with largest. At the room’s center was a large stove designed to burn wood or coal.



*Batavia News,*  
Nov 30, 1916

For much of the year, a teacher was expected to arrive an hour or so early to build a fire. Nevertheless, beginnings tended to be chilly, so a teacher might permit students to huddle near the stove. A former student

remembered they would “set our ink bottles around the stove to thaw out.” As Iowa poet Will Carleton remembered, “White snowflakes looked in at the windows, / the gale pressed its lips to the cracks; / And the children’s hot faces were streaming, / the while they were freezing their backs.” There they sat and wriggled, a dozen or so in sweaters, heavy coats, and even rubber four-buckle overshoes not long out of barnyard muck. Here was “the schoolroom smell” that “smote” a sensitive teacher in an Edna Ferber story, “a mingling of dead ashes, kerosene, unwashed bodies, dust, mice, chalk, stove-wood, lunch crumbs, mould, slate that has been washed with saliva.” Iowa writer Phil Stong merely refers to “the indefinable musk of small children.”<sup>319</sup>

The two longer-side walls of the building were generally wainscoted up to the base of the three large single pane windows on each side, with white painted plaster above. Those windows usually provided the only light. Few schools had kerosene or gas mantle lamps with concave reflectors. At the room’s rear was a stand with water bucket or ceramic jar, sometimes with a dipper all students shared, although in later elementary years each student might have a collapsible, telescoping metal cup. A shelf or cupboard held a few books. Especially in later years, there might be a wind-up tabletop Victrola and a few 78 rpm records, but not necessarily.

The school day followed a pattern, beginning with a morning ritual that in some schools required students to answer roll call by reciting a famous quotation. Reciting the pledge of allegiance and opening prayer tended in Josephine’s experience to be later developments. Recitations began with first graders (kindergarten being a newfangled implantation from Germany that rooted first in cities and towns) and proceeded to the eighth, with each succeeding set of students (sometimes a single student) coming forward to the recitation bench to be quizzed. In a nostalgic novel, Ivan Doig argues (as did my father-in-law, Julius Hilleary), “a central virtue



Two views of Elm Grove School, Center Township, relocated at Jefferson County Fairgrounds, Fairfield. Note unusually modern electric lights and running water



of the one-room school” was “the porosity between grades so that a lesson . . . to one level of students would find its way into others as well.” Thus younger students might listen with at least half an ear to older and perhaps learn thereby, meanwhile preparing lessons in the fundamentals of reading, arithmetic, penmanship (now a lost art), and spelling (ditto, or nearly so, given “spell check” software). In later elementary years, history, science, geography, government, and civics were added. In elementary, as later in high school, like other students Josephine was required to buy her own books. Concerning reading, Jo could not remember the text, but did of course recall inheriting at home older sister Irene’s venerable *McGuffey’s Reader*, which in some Jefferson County schools was in use as late as 1927.<sup>320</sup>

In Josephine’s rural school experience, the arts were notable for their virtual absence, except that a teacher might include singing with or without Victrola accompaniment sometime during the week. Teachers often read a book serially to the entire eight grades, such as Louisa Mae Alcott’s *Little Men*. In addition to famous sayings, students were required to learn by heart—and to recite—much more poetry than were their grandchildren or great-grandchildren. Eighty or ninety years later Jo could recall and sometimes recite at least bits of numerous poems—Longfellow’s “Village Blacksmith” and *Hiawatha*, Tennyson’s “Crossing the Bar,” Lydia Maria Child’s “Thanksgiving Day,” Cecil Frances Alexander’s “All Things Bright and Beautiful,” Oliver Wendell Holmes’s “Old Ironsides,” George Morris’s “Woodsman Spare that Tree,” John Greenleaf Whittier’s “Barefoot Boy,” Elizabeth Akers Allen’s “Rock Me to Sleep,” and inevitably Clement Moore’s “’Twas the Night Before Christmas.”

Prose literature that Josephine studied was more deeply rooted in England than was such poetry. An eighth-year reader belonging to “Miss Josephine Teeter, Batavia, Iowa,” copyright 1897, was strewn with excerpted works of nineteenth-century English writers, plus a smattering of inevitable Americans—Bryant, Whittier, Irving, Emerson, Longfellow. Victor Hugo was allowed to describe the Battle of Waterloo from a French perspective (counterbalanced by that of Lord Byron). Englishwomen Charlotte Bronte, Mary Lamb (of Charles and Mary . . .), and “Miss Manning” on Thomas More appeared, but no American women. One excerpt from Homer represented the Greeks, one from Plutarch, the Romans.

School, of course, was not merely the classroom; it was also the schoolyard. Near the front door was generally a water pump and flagpole, nearby a coal house, at the far corners boys’ and girls’ outhouses, perhaps playground equipment—swings, or teeter totters, or slides, but not



Josephine Teeter, at center left,  
with schoolmates and teacher,  
May 7, 1913, and detail



necessarily any of these, sometimes nothing. Into the schoolyard, except in the worst weather, students were expected (and wanted) to pour during the morning and afternoon fifteen-minute recess, and midday hour. From a tin lard or molasses bucket came dinner—sandwiches, generally an apple, sometimes a pickle (with occasional enlivening swaps)—eaten under a tree in good weather, at a desk otherwise.

During recesses from study and recitation most students played frantically with all appropriate noisiness—on playground equipment, if any existed, certainly with a ball, and at all those chase-and-capture-and-shrieking-and-hollering games. Sometimes a teacher joined in, perhaps more often stayed inside to repair her soul or mark papers. When Teacher rang the bell, students marched more or less sedately back to classes, even those older and much bigger boys (bigger than Teacher sometimes) who might go full time to school only in winter when parents could spare them. Josephine knew one older, bigger boy, Clifford Parker, who attended at least one winter. In an earlier day, 1887, the *Fairfield Tribune* reported, “The little son of Andrew Boyle had a finger broken . . . in the public schools by being struck with a rule as a means of punishment.” But Jo could remember no such extreme punishments during her school days.<sup>321</sup>

Classroom routine was relieved only rarely, most notably near Christmas when everyone practiced reciting a holiday poem or learned lines for a skit before potentially proud parents. Recitations sometimes had

reverberations, as when Josephine’s 1917 classmate, Mildred Eshlemann, performed her poem at Fairfield Chautauqua. At Christmas time, also, students exchanged names—girls of course with girls, boys with boys—and gave little homemade gifts.

On Valentine’s Day, Jo and her best girl friends exchanged handmade valentines, but gender segregation sometimes broke down, and secret admirers plotted how to distribute valentines with semi-secret messages, perhaps by dropping one on a desk, sometimes by engaging a go-between. Some secret admirers distributed widely. A valentine from her teacher Helen Clark’s younger brother, Johnny, no longer in school—an older man—flattered eighth-grade Josephine therefore. But then Josephine’s girlfriend, Clara Stouthammer, revealed a valentine from, guess who?



<p>ELLMAKER P U B L I C S C H O O L District No. 2 Des Moines Twp., Jefferson Co., Ia. Closing Date—Feb. 19, 1915</p>	
<p>NORA OLIVER, Teacher</p>	
<p>PUPILS</p>	
Anna Boley	Rebecca Teeter
Ruth Davisson	Alice Johnston
Frances Parker	Josephine Teeter
Catherine Manning	Mabel Smith
Gracie Manning	Mary Beny
Helen Hunt	Mabel Manning
Donald Whitmore	Leslie Peebler
Edith Gurwell	Burl Davisson
Claud Parker	William Boley
Guy Carr	Floyd Peebler
Charley Johnston	Wendell Carr
Orvel Davisson	Ivo Hunt
Henry Boley	Willie Carr
Donald James	Keith Parker
Mahlon Johnston	Walter Davisson
<p>School Officers</p>	
<p>H. B. Johnston, Pres. and Dir.</p>	
<p>Wm. Hunt, Sec.</p>	
<p>Charles Smith, Treas.</p>	

Ellmaker Public School, Des Moines Township, District No. 2

As she approached one hundred, Jo could recall her elementary teachers and that she had been a “fair” student whose parents’ frequent moves caused limited continuity and more than occasional gaps in her schooling. Furthermore, teachers had in her early years tended to be hired by the term, three terms a year, about eight months in all from fall to early April. In 1904 of ninety-two Jefferson County schools in only twenty-five did one teach all three terms; two different teachers taught in forty-six; three in twenty-one. Within a few years, however, hiring by the year became standard. In 1921 County Superintendent of Schools Miss June Chidester

noted that in the county's seventy-eight schools, "sixty-one directors have kept their teachers the entire year." Seven teachers had stayed longer than a year, which suggests a continuing if less drastic turnover rate as young women teachers were not retained, moved on of their own volition, or, almost inevitably, married. Josephine's teachers, all women, all young, most with limited experience, were further handicapped by having to teach all eight grades with few books and little equipment—and at salaries that very few early-twentieth-century men would accept.<sup>322</sup>

Even so, these young women performed remarkably well. In doing so, they proved that a system of universal public education, even if imperfect, in large part because imperfectly supported by the community and its taxes, was necessary to a literate, democratic society. Elsie Stewart, Alvessa Saddler, Frances (Fannie) Ellmaker, Cora Gonterman (McBride), Helen Beal (Warren), Beth Carr, Nora Oliver (at Ellmaker #2 with *thirty* students in 1914-15 including twelve-year-old Josephine, and Josephine's boyfriend, Mahlon Johnston), Edith Stull (Giltner) (with whom ten years later Jo would go traveling), Helen Clark (Teeter) (Jo's future sister-in-law, and only four years older than her eighth grade student)—all these young women helped young Josephine gain a basic education despite mutual difficulties. It is worth remembering that, in part because of such young women, and even though the rural curriculum was narrower than the urban, Iowa when Josephine Teeter was a student had one of the highest literacy rates among all the states, if not the highest, about 97 percent. This had continued for many years; in 1890 as Andrew Gulliford notes, "The states with the highest literacy rates—Nebraska, Iowa, and Kansas—also had the highest number of one-room schools." In 1920 when Jo Teeter was a sophomore, Iowa was second only to California in the percentage of school age children attending high school. One does not have to agree entirely with the psychologist Bruno Bettelheim: "The one room school was the best school we ever had," to believe nevertheless that it did its relatively narrow task commendably well. Nor does one have to agree at all with the Van Buren County writer, Phil Stong (a townie) that the rural school



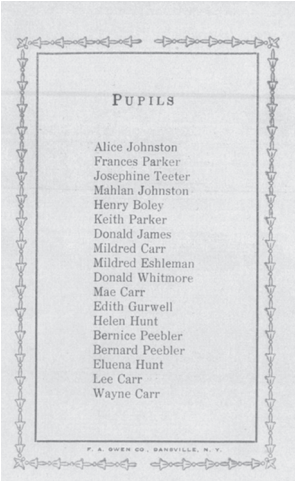
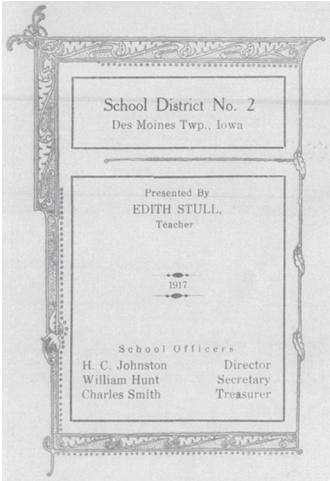
Frances (Fannie) Ellmaker, one of Josephine Teeter's elementary teachers

was “a thoroughly nasty and stupid institution, usually administered by an unsuccessful and embittered introvert.” In this instance, the truth truly lies somewhere in the middle.<sup>323</sup>

Rural school teaching in those days was not easy. Getting to and from the job was sometimes even more difficult. Edith Stull, Josephine’s sixth and seventh grade teacher (for both full years) at Ellmaker Public School, Des Moines Township No. 2, recalled driving a horse and buggy five miles to school—this during the Great War, 1917-18. And sometimes she picked up Josephine and Bernard on the road—a welcome respite from the daily trudging of almost a mile and a half each way. When the roads were so bad that sticky gumbo would roll up even on narrow buggy wheels, Edith rode her horse. Jo: “You had a big gray horse.”

One wintry day Miss Stull had her big gray mare on the buggy, and “We had snow . . . and had ice in places . . . and they was an icy strip across the road, and I forgot about this strip, and this horse kept a trottin’ along, and all at once she was a layin’ on the ground . . . and she couldn’t get up because she got the shaft run in back of her front leg, and I got out, and I didn’t see how I was gonna get it out because the tugs and everything had pulled so tight, so I took ahold of her foot, and when I took ahold of it she put it way up high, and when she did that then I run my hand in front of the shaft and pulled down on it, and it slipped down before that bone that’s in the upper part of their leg next to their body, and I got in and we just went a trottin’ on down the road.” On down the road to blanket the mare at the hitching rack, stir up the fire in a chilly schoolhouse, and settle down to a routine day.

Edith Stull Giltner recalled, as surely did Josephine’s other teachers, that she was a good girl, a good student who caused no trouble. “Children didn’t fuss around like they do today,” Edith noted late in the twentieth century. Josephine didn’t fuss around at school, but she did cause a stir as eighth grade began. In fall 1918 the Spanish Influenza pandemic killed more than



Ellmaker Public School, Des Moines Township



half a million Americans—and most of these in October. Countless others died worldwide—perhaps fifty million. How devastating was the disease? In all of World War I, more than 50,000 American soldiers died in combat, but 60,000 of the flu. In addition to deaths, “Fully a third of the flu victims who survived came to suffer from cardiac problems, tuberculosis, nephritis or other diseases.”<sup>324</sup>

As in many other American towns and cities, in nearby Batavia Mayor Judson Curtis announced closure of all schools, churches, and public meetings until further notice. Citizens were advised that Ottumwa was effectively closed down, that two area residents had recently died of Spanish Influenza, and, “There should be no spitting upon the walks, and every precaution should be taken.” On the same page in an adjoining column, appeared the obituary of Mayor Curtis’s eldest son, Thomas Arthur, dead of tuberculosis, father of Chester Curtis, future husband of Josephine Teeter. One wonders whether Arthur, much debilitated by TB, may not actually have been carried off by the flu.<sup>325</sup>

In that stricken period, Josephine had only a mild case from which she soon recovered. Although she thought other family members were never sick, a pregnant neighbor lady died. “The folks went to the funeral but they had to stay out in the yard.” Ollie reported that only thirteen people had attended. Unusually, “another pregnant lady, a former neighbor, had it but she didn’t die.” “Other people had it but didn’t die.” In 1918 and for some time thereafter as children skipped rope they demystified the worldwide tragedy by chanting, “I had a little bird. / Its name was Enza. / Opened the window, / and in flew Enza.”<sup>326</sup>

Because of the epidemic, Josephine’s school that year, “Liberty,” southwest of Batavia in Wapello County, was closed for a month between mid-October and mid-November. Once she had recovered from her mild case, and with school resumed, she soon caught up and began looking ahead to further education. Late that school year, having moved with her family back to Jefferson County on the farm near Packwood, she traveled to Superintendent Miss Chidester’s Courthouse office. There she passed the Iowa examinations and graduated in spring 1919 with other Jefferson County eighth grade students. In an era long before “grade inflation,” her “State of Iowa High School Admission Certificate,” signed by Miss Chidester and with the motto “Equal Training of the Head, Heart and Hands,” noted that she had “honorably completed the Course of Study covering the work of eight years” in rural schools. Her grades were mostly in the 80s and 90s—Geography 82, Arithmetic 84, Civil Government 87, Music 87, Reading 93, U. S. History 94, and Physiology and Hygiene 95. Years later



left handed Jo was slightly embarrassed, even though she had always tried to watch her p's and q's, that her Writing (or "Penmanship") grade had been 72.

For "Orthography" (or "Spelling") she received a dismal 70. And yet, among Jo's books is a ragged volume, *Peggy Alone*, a story by Mary Agnes Byrne about a poor, isolated, lonely little rich girl who overcomes social class differences to find young friends, friends whose families, "though poor, were highly respectable." As for Peggy, "She's no snob! She thinks people are what they are in themselves." One wonders what the young, rural, midwestern book's owner made of such a tale. Strangely enough, on the volume's flyleaf is inscribed Josephine Teeter's name, and "Prize in Spelling Dec. 25 — 1918." In later years Jo, who remembered much, could remember neither the book nor the prize.

In Josephine's graduating class were about fifty girls and thirty boys, indicating that academic attrition of rural Jefferson County males was already well under way, a tendency that accelerated in high school. Eighth grade commencement exercises occurred in Fairfield High School auditorium, first used in 1913 and "thoroughly modern," northeast corner of Briggs and Fourth.<sup>327</sup>

### Jo Teeter, High Schooler

On August 29, 1919, Josephine's father appeared before a notary to affirm that his daughter resided in Packwood District No. 3, Polk Township, Jefferson County. She was therefore eligible to have the district pay Fairfield High School five dollars monthly for her tuition, an Iowa provision of 1911 for districts with no four-year high school (Packwood's still three years). Josephine would be in an American minority, for in those days only about a third of those eligible attended high school.<sup>328</sup>

That fall of 1919, almost sixteen and old for her class, Jo Teeter would begin high school in the same building where she had graduated from eighth grade. She would be one of more than 350 students, 119 in her class, a breathtaking change from elementary school days, and she would live in a town of almost 6,000. Fairfield had switched in 1910 from electricity only at night to twenty-four-hour service, convenient for householders, and



Fairfield High School, Briggs and Fourth Street. Courtesy Fairfield Public Library

necessary for developing small industries. It had completed its first hospital and the high school, which cost more than \$50,000, in 1912 and in 1919 would continue the slow progress of paving some of its dusty and muddy streets beyond the central square. Fairfield, a county seat, rail crossroads, light manufacturing center, shopping mecca for farmers, was up-and-coming.<sup>329</sup>



Courthouse and auto-truck-tractor dealership, Court Street. Courtesy of Fairfield Public Library

On the first day of Fairfield High classes, Monday, September 1, 1919, at the northeast corner of East Kirkwood and North Court, two freshmen country girls chanced to meet on the way to school. Feeling “lonesome,” just in from one-room schools, now part of a large enterprise that was divided socially between town and country students, they “grabbed onto each other” and became best friends for all the rest of their high school days. Both had other friends, but the two “ran around” together regularly. Sixty-two years later in 1981 Jo Teeter Curtis and Mildred Sandell Dallner reminisced about the moment they met, about high school classes and good times. They reminisced about all the years in between, and about the fact that they and six other “girls” still met once a month as the “23 Club” to eat out or in rotation at their homes. By century’s end only Jo, Irene Meyers, and Hattie Webber Hutton survived from their class friends and ultimately only Jo.

On the first full day of classes, the local paper reported that “Bolsheviki Force Is Surrounded” on the Lithuanian front, that “Munich Is Ruled By Martial Law,” that “Wheat and Corn Growers Talk to President.” And that “President Wilson met with the Cabinet today for the last time before going on his thousand mile speech-making tour of the country in the interest of the peace treaty and the League of Nations,” a tour that would ruin his health. The preceding summer Fairfield Chautauqua had sponsored a League of Nations debate between Clarence Darrow, opposed, and former President William Howard Taft, in support. Great Fourth of July celebrations had welcomed soldier “boys” home from victories in France and Army of Occupation duties in Germany. More than 230,000 returned wounded, and more than 110,000 would never return. Even earlier in the year, the

Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment prohibiting manufacture, transport, or sale of alcoholic beverages had been ratified. Talk of women's suffrage was in the 1919 air, in the press, and in town meetings, as it had been for years. As early as 1916 Josephine might have noticed that the *Batavia News*, under the head, "Prominent Men Favor Suffrage," had presented the supportive views of numerous Iowa and other men, including former President Taft. Meanwhile, in far-off England the first woman would soon be elected to Parliament. Meanwhile, in farther-off India a man named Mahatma Gandhi was beginning in 1919 to lead a nonviolent movement against the British Empire.



From left: Mildred Sandell, Jo Teeter, Irene Meyers, at Fairfield High School

Despite such profoundly important national and world news, to freshman Jo Teeter much more immediately important, no doubt, was that she had found a friend.<sup>330</sup>

Josephine Teeter got to the county seat high school from rural elementary because of two facts. Perhaps most obvious was that her eldest sister, Irene, had sailed through small town Batavia's three-year high school program, promptly married, and moved with Russell Gorman to Fairfield. The Gormans had a spare room. The second fact: Ollie Teeter, who had herself attended Fairfield's Franklin elementary school for a few years, evidently believed that educational opportunities were better for her younger girls in Fairfield than in a smaller school, and Ollie's influence was paramount in the family. Josephine's brothers, Earnest and Bernard, did not attend high school. Like many early-twentieth-century farm boys, basic preparation in the three R's was considered adequate. More would have been superfluous if land and work were available. So, it appears that the Teeter boys did not yearn and their parents did not encourage them to continue.



Gorman's, 303 E. Kirkwood

Girls, however, were better suited for higher education, which might

prepare them for a vocation, or much more probably, for work until they married. Rebecca led the way by rooming at Irene's throughout four years. Only after her sister left home, incidentally, did Josephine at last have a room to herself, except when Rebecca returned weekends and summers. In late August 1919 Earnest drove Josephine in the family's Model "T" from the Packwood area farm to sister Irene's and to stirring times.

In 1919 Josephine's turn had come to move from limited rural elementary school opportunities to an excellent high school program. Fairfield High School had a remarkably good faculty, almost all of whom, women as well as men, had earned BA or BS degrees, and sometimes had done advanced work, in respectable midwestern colleges and universities. Jo attended classes in a fine new building hardly more than a half-dozen years old, in an excellent program served by excellent teachers—many of whom had or would have long careers in the school. One consequence was that, after being in her own estimation only a "fair" elementary student, Jo did "much better" in high school, so that some grades were 100 percent or not a lot lower. Mildred Sandell Dallner agreed that they had done well enough, had "got through in very good shape" and had learned a lot. Perhaps indicating the high level of her work, midway through junior year, "Miss Josephine Teeter returned home Friday morning. She did not have to take the exams, so gets a few days vacation from her school."<sup>331</sup>

The girls took basic courses in their first two years, two excessively basic, certainly for Josephine. Those were the "Domestic Science" courses in Sewing by Bessie Schwartz (who always thought Jo was one of five Mildreds in that class) and Lillian Rhinehart's Cooking. Inscribed on a front page of Helen Kinne and Anna M. Cooley's *Foods and Household Management; A Textbook of the Household Arts*, a new printing of 1919, costing a significant \$1.20, is the name of Josephine Teeter, Packwood, Iowa. The book is not well worn. Not surprisingly, given Domestic Science courses Josephine had taken under Ollie and older sister Irene, "I already knew most of what was taught."

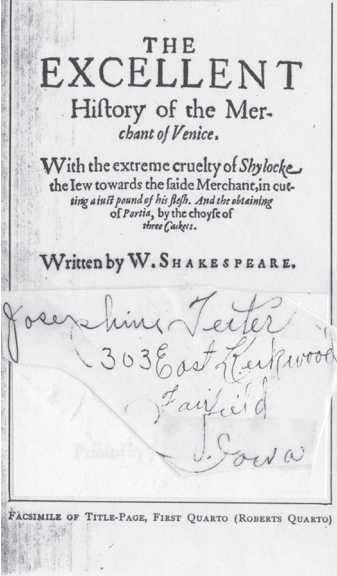
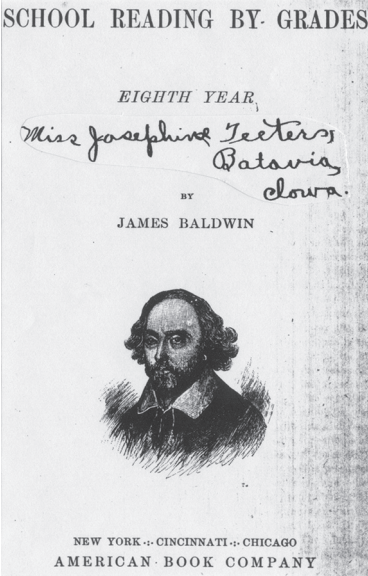
Several courses, however, such as algebra, entered entirely new territory, but Miss Fisher "explained the problems so well I got along fine with her," as was true also of Cora Porter's sophomore geometry. Other courses were Sara Morton's Modern History, and Cora Ball's Music. English classes ran all four years, with Eva Robertson for perhaps two years. Among Jo's books is a 1906 edition of



Jo's "Domestic Science" project



*The Merchant of Venice*, in which, “The only omissions are such passages as are out of place in a school edition.” As for Mae Rueggenmeier’s sophomore class, “I don’t remember much . . . other than I picked *The Old Curiosity Shop* . . . It was very hard reading. I read the first of it, the middle and the end. I was lucky when I reviewed it. I was asked questions about what I had read.” What could one possibly say to one’s mother after such an admission? As for elective courses, beginning in 1918 the high school offered four years of Bible studies, but Josephine chose to take none of these.



Jo Teeter elementary and high school textbooks and signatures

### Normal Training Prepared Young Women to Teach

In her last two years Josephine, like Rebecca before her, took “Normal Training” directed by Lois Farr and intended to prepare students, really women students exclusively, to become rural schoolteachers. If men wanted to teach, Mildred Sandell Dallner recalled, they went to college and rarely taught in rural elementary schools. To prepare for teaching in those days, a young Iowa woman could take either the two-year high school course or a ten-week summer college program. Many years later Jo remained convinced, despite the opposing but untutored earlier view of



Lois Farr, Director

a certain distant in-law, that the longer, deliberate, incremental approach was superior to the short crash course.

Josephine did well in high school generally and in Normal Training specifically, but she would not of her own free will have chosen that program. She would have taken the school's business course, by the 1920s increasingly popular. For young women this was the age of the business course. It would have prepared Jo for a stenographic, secretarial, "office girl" job, presumably in Fairfield, more interesting than familiar rural Des Moines Township. A typical 1920s advertisement read, "Wanted—Girl who can take dictation and run the typewriter. Apply in person . . ." The business course, Josephine believed, offered at least as much financial opportunity as teaching; the work would be more "interesting," possibly easier. And the town, she reckoned, would offer more "variety," which might have meant that Fairfield had running water, sometimes flush toilets, electric lights indoors and out, paved sidewalks at least in the center, a convenient and impressive Carnegie library—and movies.<sup>332</sup>

Pulitzer Prize winner Booth Tarkington's flawed heroine, midwestern urbanite *Alice Adams*, ultimately gives up social climbing and settles for Frincke's Business College. On the contrary, to country girl Jo Teeter a business course would have offered a way out even if not necessarily a way up. In time it would become clear that Jo Teeter had represented a long term and growing discontent with rural life among young folks, among young women, attracted to towns and cities. But it was not to be. This because Josephine reckoned without the opinions and convictions of her strong willed mother, and Ollie's will inevitably prevailed. Her mother, Josephine remembered, thought teaching "was the only thing a girl could do." Perhaps Ollie meant that as a rural schoolteacher, a "girl" could remain a "lady," but hardly as a secretary who mingled with men in the office and the town. Mildred Sandell Dallner succinctly expressed a common 1920s attitude: Taking teacher training seemed "the natural thing to do" because numerous neighbor girls had done so and always had found jobs for a while before marrying. Furthermore, Mildred thought that older folks were "suspicious" of girls working in offices.

Attitudes that Jo and Mildred recalled from the early 1920s are echoed in Winifred Van Etten's novel, *I Am the Fox*: "It was June and Selma was home after a year of secretarial training in New York City. Her father and mother had protested vigorously against her giving up teaching. To them teaching school was the only really respectable profession for a lady of good family." In a later memoir, Van Etten, who taught English at Iowa's Cornell College, wrote of herself and her sisters in the '20s: "It never



occurred to us or to anyone else that we could do anything except teach. What else could a nice girl do? She filled in the time between high school or college and marriage by teaching—for pin money, for funds, for filling a hope chest, or simply for something to do.”<sup>333</sup>

Josephine almost inevitably followed the course Ollie had set for Rebecca four years earlier. And that made all the difference. For it determined the community in which she would work and live, and it virtually determined the pool of men from which she would choose, or from which she would be chosen. If she were to marry a young farmer, only a limited number would have had an educational or work experience similar to hers. In the early-twentieth-century, much more than later, a young woman married her fortune, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer.

Jo and Mildred and about a dozen other girls in Normal Training followed a prescribed program almost separate from the regular curriculum. They were somewhat segregated, therefore, in their upper class of almost one hundred, certainly from men students. The Normal girls took Spelling (Jo’s “Akilles” Heel, despite her eighth grade award); Grammar, Latin (taught by Abigail Heaton); Mathematics, Industrial History or Economics (Madelon Peterson); Physics (Marshall Coots). (From *The Quill*, Fairfield High School yearbook, 1921: “What is a hypocrite?” “A person that comes into the Physics class with a smile on his face.”); American History (Cora Teeter—no relation); Agriculture (W. H. Washington’s course, considered important for those who would teach rural students); and Miss Farr’s Methods of Teaching. In 2002 Jo told of observing in a rural school, probably as a junior, while a senior girl practice taught one day only. Jo supposed she must also have done so as a senior, but the event was not memorable.

Charles Garrett had been high school Superintendent. A *Fairfield Tribune* puff piece in 1921 noted that Professor Garrett was well degreed, including Cornell University. He was author of several practical academic books; was an experienced administrator; mixed well with students, including the boys, with whom he could talk turkey; and was partial to the color red in his clothing accessories; but, “you’ll find he isn’t tainting the schools with that color of teaching. And we opine,” wrote the reporter for the *Democratic Tribune*, “that that’s something in these days of socialist teachers in educational institutions.” Assisting safe and sane Superintendent Garrett was Miss Martha Emry, Principal, with whom Miss Teeter was to visit at least once in her office, as we shall see.<sup>334</sup>

School Librarian, Advisor, and Study Hall Monitor had been Elizabeth (“Lizzie”) Locke, an elderly lady who had taught Jo’s mother many years earlier at Fairfield’s Franklin school, in the mid-1880s. In 1898 already a

seasoned teacher with a clear pedagogical philosophy, “Lizzie O. Locke said if mother, teacher and people in general, will give to the young that moral training which is discipline as systematically as in other subjects, it will result in the young acquiring character which will resist temptation . . . and determine citizenship in a community.” Jo’s class of ’23, as usual choosing to honor one teacher, chose Miss Locke, much to Jo’s gratification.<sup>335</sup>



Miss Locke

### Girls’ Athletics in School

In addition to academic subjects, Fairfield High students had Physical Education. For girls this meant, Mildred remembered, doing (implicitly boring) exercises intended to strengthen arms and legs. A 1921 newspaper article on “Girls’ Athletics in the Schools” did not add to the excitement: “The floor work consists of exercises with dumb-bells and Indian clubs, folk dances, and drills. Posture is emphasized throughout the training.” No kidding! You bet! School authorities announced that athletic letters for 1920-21 would be awarded to girls who earned three hundred points in intramural track, tennis, hiking, basketball, and “posture,” the latter worth a whopping 150 points.<sup>336</sup>

Boredom or no, letters or no, most girls took Phys. Ed., but not all girls. Not Josephine Teeter. Again, Mother Ollie decided and signed a permit excusing her daughter, apparently without explanation to Josephine, who could remember none. Although Ollie did not specify, I suspect she had accepted the widespread late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century belief that strenuous exercise might well injure girls of a certain age, girls preparing biologically to become women and mothers. In 1906 Harvard’s Physical Director had spoken against females engaging in rough sports: “Let woman rather confine herself to the lighter more graceful forms of gymnastics and athletics . . . Let her know enough about the rougher sports to be the sympathetic admirer of men and boys in their efforts to be strong, vigorous and heroic.”<sup>337</sup>

A 1921 *Fairfield Tribune* article on girls’ athletics noted that numerous girls did play basketball—about fifty practiced regularly. But it echoed that Harvard professor in assuming that “Girls of the Fairfield High School might well be expected to take an unusual interest in” athletics, “by reason of the notable records . . . by the boys.” The boys, of course, compiled

those notable records against teams at other schools, but Fairfield girls' basketball in Jo Teeter's day was strictly intramural, with no school team, no games with other schools, no *Quill* pictures to counterbalance the boys' football and basketball spreads. In these same years, small town girls were enjoying more opportunities than Josephine and her classmates, at least on the court. Eldon and Libertyville had varsity teams. At some point, Hedrick girls had a spirited cheering section with a yell used at least once before officially banned: "Rickety rackety russ, / We're not allowed to cuss. / But jam it to jell, / We play so well, / We really really must." In 1919 the *Batavia News* reported, "The Packwood girls were successful in defeating Batavia," but, "our girls . . . showed themselves to be good players," and, "Pleasant Plain will bring . . . a girls' team and a boys' team to Batavia" soon. Even as early as Jo's birth year, 1903, Batavia girls, led by Mrs. Jessie Campbell Whitmore, had organized an intramural team (this nine years before a boy's team appeared). In 1922 BHS played Douds Leando, and in a later contest, "Miss Helen Koons, of Batavia, got her nose broken . . . playing basketball" (as Mother Ollie surely noticed). Ollie would also have noticed newspaper and magazine articles like one titled, "Basket Ball Injures Women," in which a "Physician" declared, "The nature of women should keep them from this dangerous sport." Unfortunately, years earlier and ignorant of this fact, "while playing basketball at the [Fairfield] Armory. . . . Miss Ruth Johnson fell against a red hot stove and painfully burned both arms."<sup>338</sup>

In fact, Fairfield High girls had earlier played other towns, including the Bloomfield Maidens and Washington High in 1906. In 1908 the "girls basketball team lost [again] to Washington at Armory Hall." In 1904 and 1906 FHS "ladies" played Parsons College teams, including Elzevir sorority. As late as 1914-15 Fairfield had had a team.<sup>339</sup>

Like Josephine, other girls did not rebel against being intramural athletes. Mildred Sandell Dallner recalled that "We" had not really thought about being excluded from varsity sports as unfair. "That's kind of queer, isn't it? Nowadays they just raise the dickens. Girls are getting so tall and muscular anymore." Understandably, given severely restricted opportunities for girls, given that Ollie was opposed to Josephine playing basketball or any other games, Jo did not "go out for sports." At age ninety-nine, she believed that "I should have" played, "but I minded my mother." Jo found it irritatingly odd that Ollie had channeled her daughter into becoming a commuting rural schoolteacher, a role arguably more strenuous than Physical Education or basketball. Despite lack of opportunity, Jo believed,

no doubt correctly, that she could have been “athletic” as her baseball and equestrian skills suggest.

### Women’s Suffrage

In the fall of Jo’s sophomore year, Tuesday, November 2, 1920, for the first time in American history, under authority of the newly ratified Nineteenth Amendment, women could vote legally in a national election. This momentous occasion occurred only after many years of agitation, education, and lobbying by feminists, including the veteran national leader, Carrie Chapman Catt of Iowa (where a state suffrage amendment had failed in 1916). On October 25 the *Fairfield Ledger* had noted with implicit approval that “a good proportion of Fairfield women have registered.” Years earlier, September 29, 1897, the *Fairfield Tribune* had editorialized ambiguously concerning the first meeting of a woman’s suffrage group in the public library: “If the movement should ever grow



Carrie Chapman Catt



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*Jefferson County Republican*, March 1, 1917

to be a great one, those who come in after times can point with pride to what a small beginning it had in this city.” Despite belittlement, the movement had grown in Fairfield, as elsewhere, and surely dedicated local women (and even a few men) could point with pride.

Respectable suffragists were one thing. The nationally known and notorious Emma Goldman was another. Goldman, a Russian Jewish immigrant, anarchist, pacifist, advocate

of women's rights, sexual freedom, and birth control had gone too far for those in power. She had been deported in 1919 to the Soviet Union, which gave at least lip service to women's equality. Elsewhere in Europe, before 1920 women had won the vote in several countries including Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Portugal.

Even after American women had won the vote, they were sometimes patronized as potentially irresponsible females who needed gentle reminders of civic responsibilities. Early in 1921 the *Fairfield Weekly Ledger* noted that of approximately fifty chosen for jury lists, four were women, and two had served, "thus demonstrating that they are willing to accept the responsibilities as well as the privileges of full citizenship." Several years later in 1927 under the heading, "Congratulations Ladies," the *Weekly Ledger-Journal* "rises with a courtly bow" to approve election of two women to the school board and to express assurance that they will act responsibly by presenting the view of mothers. Women who had fought and suffered for a half-century or so to gain responsibilities that were the unquestioned birthright of any man might have been forgiven for sneering quietly.<sup>340</sup>

In 1920, however, Sophomore Jo Teeter appears to have been little concerned about women's deprived past or women's civic future. She seems to have been more impressed that Superintendent Garrett had given her a half-day's freedom by canceling classes than that he was encouraging her women teachers to exercise their first national franchise freedom. Jo was certainly no suffragist, popularly and hostilely defined as, "one who has ceased to be a lady and not yet become a gentleman." Not surprisingly, as a high school student Josephine Teeter's interests tended to focus on immediate, local matters, on schoolwork and schoolmates, on family.<sup>341</sup>

### **Jo's Home Weekends**

In June 1920 having survived and prevailed in her freshman year for "nine and one half months . . . the longest school year Fairfield has ever had," Josephine went home, where she spent each summer, each school holiday, and at least a part of most weekends. During summers and holidays she resumed household duties, but was able as well to visit and be visited by friends, as when, "Miss Verda Pumphrey spent Saturday night and Sunday with Rebecca and Josephine Teeter" in late August 1921. Earlier that year, in late March, "Miss Josephine Teeter of Fairfield High



School is spending her spring vacation at home,” but had “spent Sunday night with Verda Pumphrey.”<sup>342</sup>

During the school year, usually early Saturday morning after a brisk walk from East Kirkwood to the West Broadway depot, Jo caught the Rock Island local for the short ride of about a dozen miles to County Line, with an intermediate Libertyville stop. Bernard or Earnest met her at the station with the Model “T” touring car. When roads were too awful, with a horse and buggy. Rarely, Earnest, sometimes with Ollie, drove into town to shop and to pick her up.

Occasionally classmates came with Jo. Early in 1923 the Misses Sandell, Schillerstrom, and Teeter, “were week-end visitors at the George Teeter home.” Ollie and George were in Hot Springs, Arkansas, but Rebecca was there with ailing Grandpa Joe Steele, and undoubtedly other family members and neighbors came calling. Mildred Sandell came with Jo late in their senior year. They traded gossip with Ollie whom everyone found a jolly hostess and good cook. On Saturday evening they ironed their clothing that Ollie had washed. After County Line church on Sunday afternoon, and with clean clothes in their valises, they made the brief early evening return trip. If they had missed Rock Island No. 30, someone could have driven them a couple of miles to Batavia for the somewhat later CB&Q “Chicago Local” No. 4 at 7:41, arriving in Fairfield before eight.<sup>343</sup>

Sometimes Jo’s weekend visits were abbreviated. Twice in March 1921 the *Batavia News* reported that “Josephine Teeter . . . spent Sunday with home folks.” Sometimes she spent a weekend at Mildred Sandell’s farm home near Salina. In April 1922, her junior year, “Miss Josephine Teeter of Fairfield” spent spring vacation “with home folks,” but avoided catching the pink eye that had recently plagued Earnest and Bernard and had given Rebecca a week’s respite from teaching. One winter weekend of Jo’s senior year was unhappily memorable. Her parents were in Hot Springs for George’s health while Rebecca was caring for Grandpa Joe, in declining health and soon to die. One tiresome duty was to hand pump an air pressure tank in the cellar so the rented house on the Gonterman farm just east of County Line would have running water. As Jo described with crystal clarity seventy-seven years later, “When we went upstairs” water was leaking from a pipe in the front room wall. “I wanted to let the water out so the plastering wouldn’t fall. Rebecca said No. She had worked too hard . . . to just let the water run. Soon the plaster fell in the front room on the rug,” causing “more work than if we had let the water run [out]. If you ever clean up plaster with only a broom you would understand.” Undoubtedly Jo was happy to escape to Fairfield and serious schoolwork.<sup>344</sup>





Fairfield Carnegie Public Library.  
Courtesy Fairfield Public Library

All work and no play did not make Jo a dull girl, as Mildred Sandell Dallner witnessed. They had some schoolwork, but not every night. After school they headed east on Briggs to circumambulate the square or lounge in Central Park where everyone met everyone else. Rarely they might “study” or meet someone in the darkly elegant public library just a block off the square on South Court—a building for which Mr. Carnegie had contributed

\$30,000. Eventually they would amble up North Court toward Mildred’s room at 701, with Jo turning east to sister Irene’s at 303 East Kirkwood—this for their first three years.

### **Jo Teeter, Senior**

For Josephine’s senior year, since Irene and Russell would move to Burlington, Ollie found a room with cooking privileges at Baker’s house across from the school on the southeast corner of Fourth and Briggs. At first Jo shared an upstairs front room with “the Johnson girls,” and then a back room with Catherine Booker. Kitchen and bath were downstairs. The Bakers had an indoor flush toilet, unlike the Gormans, who, like several thousands of 1920s Fairfielders, had a privy out back. Not until 1928 did the city council order property owners to “connect with sewers where available and to abolish their out door toilets.” The key phrase, even in 1928, was “where available.”<sup>345</sup>

At the Bakers also lived Mother Ollie’s cousin, Vic Wagner, erstwhile horsewoman and seamstress to a president’s wife, still sewing in her later years. And, we suppose, able to serve as Ollie’s eyes, although she may have had divided loyalties. Jo could not remember specific rules at Irene’s, but the Baker’s 10 p.m. weekday curfew was not onerous, and she enjoyed somewhat more freedom than earlier under the brotherly-in-law watchfulness of Russell Gorman.

Jo’s move meant, also, that her train-scrambling days were done. As she and Mildred trekked North Court or North Main several times daily, they crossed and re-crossed the double Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad tracks just east or west of the depot. Trains sometimes blocked those streets for extended periods, as was true of one that regularly impeded Jo and Mildred’s return to school after midday dinner, a return that

obviously was their duty to perform promptly and meritoriously. Mildred reveals the inevitable solution: “We would crawl in between the wheels of the passenger train at noon and go on to school.” One day, however, after one of their meritorious and prompt returns, “the high school principal,” Miss Martha Emry, “told us not to.” Then Mildred concluded: “Sometimes we would walk up the steps on one side [of a car] and down on the other side.” Thus did they in principle obey the principal.

It does seem, since Mildred confessed, and Jo said nothing at all about it, either before or after, that surely Mildred misled my mother! I am particularly convinced because years later while attending college in Fairfield, I lived north of the tracks on North Main, but the pool hall was on the south side, and trains still stopped at the depot for interminable periods. Consequently, I found myself at least once misled by Bill Topping to crawl under a train. At least once, maybe twice, he led me scuttling up and across and down from a mail car, surprising clerks busily sorting mail on federal property for the USPO. Thus, improbable as it may seem, both my mother and I fell in with questionable companions in Fairfield, Iowa!

A Postscript: On October 14, 2000, my mother asserted repeatedly that she had absolutely no memory of any such events as Mildred Sandell Dallner recalled. She further asserted that she could not imagine what might have possessed her to do such a foolish thing. I can only conclude that her failed memory (otherwise up to that point almost impeccably excellent) and her use of “possessed” suggests that she had been *possessed* by something or someone to act in ways she would otherwise have steadfastly shunned. Such evidence points once again to her companion in such behavior. I am particularly convinced because in later years I have felt that my own experience in being *possessed* parallels that of my mother—although I do recall my behavior clearly. Grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and all later descendants of Josephine Mae Teeter Curtis, and indeed of myself, should view this cautionary tale as a warning to beware of companions with magnetic and compelling powers. Innocents abroad cannot be too careful, especially around trains.

It was a dark and stormy night in Jo’s first high school year when, on a dare from a male companion, a girl drove his car onto and around Fairfield’s Central Park, whereupon Night Policeman Copeland arrested all four riders. A threat of jail brought tearful pleas for mercy. In special night court, Judge Wilson dismissed two passengers, reprimanded the girl driver, and fined the car’s owner (and original darer) \$5 plus a galling \$9.60 court costs. Owner was overheard muttering, “And it wasn’t my own girl, either.” Oh, and by the way, the four were Parsons College students.<sup>346</sup>

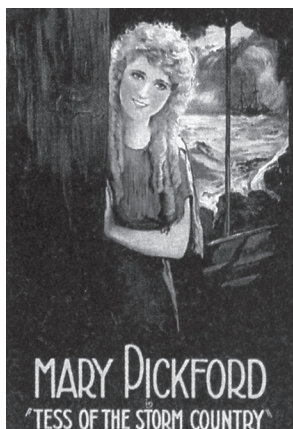
Other than train scrambling Jo's entertainment was not so wild as that of some college students, was high school eclectic. She and a few other girls formed a walking club and for a while did four or five miles once a week. There were community concerts and school plays. She was in junior and senior specialty acts, in the senior as a chorus "Reveler." Jo's limited school activities resulted partly from semi-segregated Normal Training; partly, as she remembered, from the gulf between town and country students, the latter a numerical minority, then a common pattern in Iowa high schools. Of 508 students enrolled in 1922, 155 were from out of town. Townies dominated extracurricular activities. Town girls tended to club together (although Jo pointed out that Helen Rakoe had crossed the line to associate with country girls. Helen's mother, Anna M. Rakoe, would in the mid-1920s serve as Jo's Superintendent of Schools when she taught in Van Buren County). Townies tended to date each other, as did country students. Concerning dating options, of about a hundred in Jo's class, two thirds were girls, and most boys were townies. Most farm boys were, of course, farming.<sup>347</sup>



Helen Rakoe, 1923

### Cinema and Other Social Things

Consequently, Jo found most entertainment outside of school, and much in the cinema with girlfriends. Moving pictures grew up with Jo. The first with a real plot, *The Life of an American Fireman*, appeared in Josephine's birth year. She had seen her first movie in Fairfield with Irene's niece, Alberta Gorman. It was the, of course, silent film *Daddy-Long-Legs*, based on Jean Webster's sprightly 1912 epistolary novel about a penniless orphan girl who is befriended by an educated and anonymous male benefactor. Whom she, naturally, marries eventually, a sort of Horatio Alger story for girls. The movie had starred, Jo believed, Mary Pickford. That would have been about 1915 when she was twelve. Now, as she began high school, many more movies were available, and filmmaking had become a huge industry, the fifth largest in the



Mary Pickford poster

country. Now, during school months from fall of 1919 to spring of 1923 she, with Mildred and sometimes others, squandered thirty-five cents on weekday or, more likely, Friday evenings probably once a week. Furthermore, “We bought quite a few candy bars and ice cream cones,” Mildred remembered, while watching “Mary Pickford and Norma Talmadge and those good old artists.”<sup>348</sup>

Interestingly, women stars seem to have been more memorable than male actors. During the last weekend before Mildred and Jo started to school in 1919 Mary Pickford, “America’s Sweetheart” (and theirs), had been playing in *Captain Kidd, Jr.* (followed on Monday by Bryant Washburn in *Venus of the East*). In keeping with such a suggestive title, very late in Jo and Mildred’s high school career there appeared at the Orpheum Theatre Cecil B. DeMille’s *Adam’s Rib*, the ad featuring an apparently nude Eve alongside the caption, “The Original Flapper.” Upright citizens would have preferred that they attend to DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments*, which also appeared that year.<sup>349</sup>

Back in 1919 had the two freshmen been in Ottumwa’s Princess Theatre not long before school began, had they been able “to shoot into the city in a jiffy”—as the slangy ad would have it—they could have taken in *The Woman Thou Gavest Me*. This was, “A thrilling adaptation of the novel by Hall Caine—vivid with action filled with sensational scenes in England, India, Africa, and the Polar regions.” Or they could have been gripped by *The Unpardonable Sin*, “From the sensational book by Major Ruppert Hughes—the picture of Emotion—of the Sin of All Sins.” As the ad promised, “The above are not common 5c and 10c attractions but are in a class with *Birth of a Nation*, etc. The first one will cost you 20c and the second one 45c, plus tax.” Vamps, seductresses, flappers. It may have been that in the movies Jo, Mildred, and other Fairfield High School Normal Trainees enjoyed vicarious experiences that their community’s all-seeing eyeball would never have permitted in fact and in town. There were, I think, no movies featuring flapper rural elementary schoolteachers.

Strangely enough, the inventor, Edison, who had much to do with developing “moving pictures,” predicted in 1927 that enthusiasm for “talking movies” was merely a fad, that Americans really preferred “silent drama.” He was, of course, stunningly wrong about talkies, and soon. In 1927 silent movies brought in about \$60 million. By 1929 as talkies began to dominate, the take had almost doubled. Jo and other FHS Normal Training graduates happily turned to talkies, but they certainly made do with silent films ‘til talkies came along.<sup>350</sup>

Despite the attraction of movies, both early silent and later noisy,



Russell posing in Colorado

and especially the attraction of female stars, men, at least high school boys, were sometimes memorable or at least interesting to have around. This was so even if they weren't Sheiks in the mold of Rudolph Valentino's 1921 movie. Mildred Sandell Dallner believed that Jo did not date much in high school—and Jo did not disagree. The reason may have been, in part, Russell Gorman. I remember Mr. Gorman, even as an older man, as a looming, strapping, even if apparently good-natured, presence. If an artist had caricatured him, he would have resembled the old comic strip boxer, *Joe Palooka*. When younger, he must have terrified several high school boys, two or three of whom reported to Jo that Russell had threatened to take care of

anyone who messed with his sister-in-law. Mildred reminisced that girls then were believed to be weaker, to need chivalric protectors. Her own future husband Rex, "the tallest fella in the neighborhood," from the same pattern as Russell, had exhibited the same protective/possessive attitude toward her.

Word of Jo's situation got around and boys tended to stay away, few being willing to come knocking at Mr. Gorman's door. One or two may have, but Jo tended to alleviate the Russell problem by meeting dates on the square or at the Carnegie library. (From *The Quill*, 1922: "I told her I was going to kiss her every step of the way home." "And what did she say?" "Oh, she said she was going up to put on a tighter skirt.")



Russell Gorman (left) delivering ice in Fairfield

Dates might involve no more than a soda at the corner drugstore, where the "soda jerk" was probably a townie boy classmate, or sitting on the square eating popcorn. There were high school football and especially basketball games. Jo never went to a high school dance, although, "I think probably after I was out of school I went to a dance at Libertyville a few



times, but teachers weren't supposed to dance." Jo could not remember having discussed such evenings with her father who opposed dancing. "I never learned to dance. I could dance with some people, but not with others. Chet never learned to dance. He was the only one of his family that didn't. I'm wondering now whether it was because I didn't dance. He never told me . . ."

In high school, the movies with popcorn and sitting around the square after on warm nights were almost inevitable. (*Quill*, 1921: "He used to take me to the theater every other night or so, but one evening when we were sitting in the parlor, I foolishly let him kiss me." "What has that to do with the theater?" "Well, now he wants to sit in the parlor all the time.") And then there was the jingle (*Quill*, 1920):

Mary has a little lamp.  
She has it trained no doubt.  
For every time her fellow comes  
That little lamp goes out.

Perhaps, in later years especially, a boy might borrow the family Model "T" and Jo might double date as she did on a few occasions with Mildred. Once Mildred, Jo, and her sister, Rebecca, tripled, six youngsters in, one fears, a cramped Model "T." (*Quill*, 1922: "Say, Lad, where were you last night?" "Oh, just riding around with some of the fellows." "Well, all right, but tell them not to leave their hairpins in the car.")

### Jo Teeter and Chet Curtis



Chester Curtis, Batavia HS, 1921

In 1981 Jo wrote in a memoir of an occasion on Friday evening, April 21, 1922: "I met Dad by introduction on the east side of the square in Fairfield. I had a date with Ralph Harris [and] he brought Chet along for a blind date for . . . Mildred Sandell . . . Ralph did not know where I lived so this was the simplest way to get together." [Editor's Note: And incidentally, perhaps, to avoid brother-in-law Russell. In 2003, discussing the Carnegie Public Library, Jo said abruptly, "I think that's where I was supposed to go to meet Chet and Ralph Harris. But . . . I met them before I got



there.”] “It was a chilly spring evening. We went to the show, *The Queen of Sheba*.” A *Weekly Ledger-Journal* review at the time noted, “The Big Surprise in *Queen of Sheba* playing at the Victory Theatre, is the chariot race” which included both men and women drivers. For a time after the movie ran, cute girls were “Shebas.” Perhaps the big question is, did Ralph and Chet buy the twenty-five cent seats, or splurge for the fifty-five? “After the show,” Jo continued, “to the Purity Ice Cream Parlor. I was then a junior in high school. Chet continued going with Mildred until school was out. After school was closed he called me for a date.”<sup>351</sup>



*Weekly Ledger-Journal*, Apr 20, 1922



Straw “Sailor” hat, *Weekly Ledger-Journal*, May 26, 1927

Jo had seen Chet Curtis once before, at June Gonterman’s party. “I think he was going with June at the time.” His disheveled hair and cut-up behavior had not impressed Jo, and she had asked someone if he was drunk. “They told me, ‘Goodness, no, that’s Chet Curtis. He doesn’t drink.’” And he never did. His dishevelment must have been unusual. His hair was usually carefully combed for social occasions and his wardrobe, although limited, had natty touches—gray felt spats over his oxfords in winter and in summer a straw sailor. Where clothing was concerned, Chet liked to put on the dog at least a little bit.

Despite her at least initial doubts, Jo and Chet saw each other often during her senior year while Chet, a 1921 Batavia High graduate, farmed at home. In fall and early winter of 1922 Ennis Sterner reported, “Chet Curtis spends most of his evening hours at Fairfield now,” and, “Chet Curtis was a Teetering again Saturday night.” As was true of Ollie Steele’s meeting with George Teeter, the rest is genealogy. But genealogy was not yet to engage, not for seven years, six years after Jo’s graduation.<sup>352</sup>

Commencement that spring—only the thirty-seventh since Fairfield High School had been formed—occurred on Thursday, May 31, 1923, at

8 p.m., in the Auditorium where four years earlier Jo had graduated from eighth grade. She had already, in mid-January, taken three days of Normal Training exams and was certified to teach. Several relatives and friends had come to see her in the Senior play—Earnest and Helen, Rebecca and Bernard (who had just graduated from rural eighth grade on that stage), Edith Stull (her grade school teacher and friend), and Letha Ornduff, Hugh Frazier, Ernest Latta, and Robert Gonterman. As for who may have attended her graduation, Jo could recall definitely only Irene, Russell,



*Josephine Teeter's cedar chest*

Bernice, and Ferne Gorman. Her parents could not attend, Ollie having recently suffered what was apparently a mild heart attack, and George having stayed to care for her. They had, however, already bought in Fairfield and presented to Josephine a highly polished cedar “hope chest” still with

a pungent scent seventy-five and more years later.

Although they were dating regularly, Chet would not attend her graduation. Eighty years later, Jo mused, “I don’t know to this day why he wouldn’t go to my graduation . . . You didn’t ask questions of people like him.” Not even when you were dating? “No.” Chet never took Jo to any high school events at Fairfield. Did she suggest he do so? “Probably not. He would have told me no.” One time only, Chet did take Jo, his brother Ethan, and “another boy” to the traditional Thanksgiving Fairfield High football game, but at Mt. Pleasant. In future Jo would attend many of Chet’s Batavia alumni banquets, even in 1928 before they married.<sup>353</sup>

With only Irene’s family attending upon Josephine, after the “Graduate March,” after a Mendelssohn piece and an “Old French Melody” by the Senior Chorus and the Senior Girls’ Chorus, and after the Invocation, came five senior student addresses. Clifford Messer weighed in with “Seward’s Folly,” and Robert Bartlett with “Our Foreign Policy”; the young women with “What is an Education?” (Agnes Spiers), “A True American” (Kristina Johnson, Valedictorian), and, notably, “The Modern Girl” (Frances Wilson, Salutatorian). Finally came the Presentation of Class, Presentation of Diplomas, and, as the tenor of the Senior addresses had suggested, a really serious world facing the Modern Graduate, and the Modern Girl, Josephine Mae Teeter.

How serious and absurd the world was and would be Jo and her classmates would someday learn from experience and from writers born that year, Norman Mailer and Joseph Heller. In November of 1923 an Austrian who had been a corporal in the Great War would lead an attempt

to seize control of Munich, fail, and be jailed for a time. His name—Adolf Hitler. In Hitler's Germany that year was born the Jewish Henry Kissinger, future refugee, historian, diplomat, and American Secretary of State. Miss Josephine Teeter of Fairfield High School was, however, perhaps blessedly unaware of all such future portents and specifics.

Ceremonies concluded, Jo went with Irene and the other Gormans to look in on ailing Mother Ollie. While a daring few of her classmates may have been doing the racy new "Negro Charleston," or fox-trotting to tunes like the new "Yes, We Have No Bananas," without celebration or fanfare Josephine began her summer home stay before turning to teaching in the fall of 1923.



Josephine Mae Teeter, Fairfield HS, 1923

## CHAPTER 5: TEACHER IN THE 1920s

He thought with some exasperation that the twenties have been badly misrepresented by moviemakers and social historians too young to know what they are talking about, and badly misunderstood by contemporary kids who have roared more by the age of thirteen than the slickers and flappers of the Roaring Twenties roared in their whole mythical lifetime.

—Wallace Stegner, *Recapitulation*

I and my peers did not have the money or time to go to the speakeasies or boot-leggers.

—Julius Hilleary, *The Twentieth Century and Me*

Miss Josephine Teeter was well prepared when she unlocked the door of Jefferson County's Des Moines Township District No. 7 schoolhouse early one morning in early September 1923. True, she was young, not quite twenty, and untried as a teacher. She had, nevertheless, completed with high marks a Fairfield High School course that included two years of instruction in teaching, or "Normal Training."



Jo Teeter, 1920s

It was also true that like perhaps every new teacher she quickly discovered her weaknesses, which meant "You learned with the class." "I learned more from my teaching experience," Jo wrote, than in all my time as a student because, "I had to know the right answers. I took

many arithmetic problems to bed with me and worked it out in my mind so I would be ready for the next day." On such nights her much thumbed copy of *Hamilton's Essentials of Arithmetic* lay on her bedside stand. "Teaching was interesting and a challenge," in that every day was different with new problems to solve.

Just as important as academic training and learning on the job was that Miss Teeter already understood thoroughly how a woman teacher

should appear and behave. She had, after all, come directly from four years in a high school where most of her instructors were female. Even more pertinently, she had lived intimately, several hours a day, five days a week, eight months a year, for eight years with nothing but young women who were elementary teachers. These had almost all been older neighborhood girls, carefully observed not only at school but at church and other social occasions, sometimes in their homes or in Josephine's. During one of those elementary years, she had even learned at home how a boarding teacher (Miss Alvessa Saddler) behaved not only at the table but when sharing a bedroom with the three Teeter girls, all three her students, indeed sharing a bed with the eldest, Irene. "Imagine," Jo wrote years later, "a teacher doing that now."

When Miss Teeter walked through the door of Turkey Scratch No. 7, she could have made her way around the one room school blindfolded. She could also have done so in the four other buildings in which she would teach, as she could have the five schools she had attended as a student—in two of which she eventually taught. With only minute differences, all followed the rectangular white clapboard model, generally with cloakroom entry, three large windows on each side wall, central coal stove, rows of single or double desks on each side of a center aisle, with desks increasing in size toward the entry at the rear.

But now for the first time Miss Teeter would be installed behind the teacher's desk, from which platform she would call students forward to recite, and would oversee them all. Behind her would be the three-sectioned slate blackboard, above which would be strung a model alphabet in print and cursive, and above that, overseeing both students and teacher, would be the Father of Our Country.

Miss Teeter certainly knew the schoolteacher's routine extracurricular work. This included reviving the fire from late fall to early spring, filling the three-gallon, ceramic water jar, carrying in a loaded coal bucket or two and banking the fire just before locking up, emptying the water jar so it would not freeze and break on the coldest nights. This was in a building whose walls, ceiling, and floor were utterly uninsulated, and whose windows were only single panes. She recalled, "I always had to do my own cleaning and building of fires, carrying coal, etc.," although one year she hired a student, Robert Scovel, as a Monday morning fire starter. She knew to raise the



Turkey Scratch, Des Moines Township, No. 7, Bernard Teeter (left) with Teeter Ford



flag and ring the 9 o'clock bell—or favor eager students with these tasks.

“Opening Exercises” followed, with Mondays’ the most elaborate, beginning on that one day with the Lord’s Prayer and perhaps a Bible reading. Every day Miss Teeter’s students sang a patriotic song and in later years recited the Pledge of Allegiance. She might lead in singing other songs, chosen later in her career from Charles A. Fullerton’s *A One Book Course in Elementary Music and Selected Songs for Schools*. Students answered roll call by reciting a memorized quotation from any reputable source. One Monday, when the Superintendent of Schools came visiting, Miss Teeter, perhaps out of deference to that busy official, omitted the Lord’s Prayer. Whereupon Miss Chidester not only insisted upon the prayer but wrote it on the blackboard. School prayer went unquestioned in an entirely Protestant community, as it would not in a later multi-cultural society. As farmer, writer, and perceptive observer Hiram Heaton wrote in 1892, Jefferson County’s people were “singularly homogeneous.” They were still essentially so in 1923, certainly in Des Moines Township.<sup>354</sup>

After Opening Exercises much of the day was absorbed in ten-minute recitations for all eight grades. These included an impressive array of subjects much like those Josephine had studied a few years earlier. In addition to the three Rs, there was geography, civics once a week for older students, and history—a little of Iowa’s, more of America’s, less of the world’s—the latter two from one text. In time-consuming daily penmanship practice, students were encouraged or coerced to follow rigidly prescribed pen strokes while anxiously scanning the “Palmer Method” models of letters and practice circles ranged above the blackboard. One wonders how left-handed Miss Teeter managed to teach the Palmer Method to almost exclusively right-handed scholars.

So we see Miss Teeter—as Conductor or Juggler—leading Opening Exercises at nine; attending to discipline; giving students who raise one or two fingers permission to run to the outhouse; answering a spectrum of academic questions for eight grades; seizing moments to grade papers and prepare classes; stoking the fire; timekeeping for opening, recesses, noon hour, and closing the day at four.

At noon Miss Teeter required pupils to eat at their desks for perhaps fifteen minutes while she ate her own cold meat sandwich plus cake or pie. Near day’s end, she was overseer of straightening up desks and the room and dispenser of the twin privileges of lowering the flag and pounding chalk dust out of the blue and white felt erasers somewhere outside the schoolroom. Strangely, these were enormously popular tasks, but no one ever offered to sweep, although some liked to wash the blackboard.





Winslow Homer, "Noon Recess,"  
*Harper's Weekly*, June 28, 1873.  
Homer's unhappy teacher is imprisoned  
with a delinquent scholar

During morning and afternoon fifteen-minute recess and at noon hour Miss Teeter had to decide whether to rest, work, or go out and play almost as an older sister, but one with a certain dignity and authority. (Did certain sly students ever secretly call her Miss Teeter-Totter? I don't know.) Often enough playing (and supervising play) won out for Miss Teeter, especially because her favorite game, "baseball or work up was always popular." But everyone

also played the whole range of games that she had learned not many years earlier and now taught her students.

On rainy and severely cold days inside the schoolroom, "We played fruit basket upset [a scramble-for-a-seat game], tick tack toe [played at the blackboard with "X's" and "O's" on a nine square grid], hide the thimble or chalk [or] whatever [and] there was a button game." Jo thought they might have played Blind Man's Buff and Pin the Tail on the Donkey. In those days, given limited equipment and facilities, "Children had to use their imagination and make their own amusement."

### **"Turkey Scratch"**

Her first school, Des Moines Township District No. 7, was called perhaps whimsically, probably descriptively, "Turkey Scratch." Some folks earlier had "more euphoniously termed" the place "Pleasant Point," but euphony never stuck. (Had the school's name been compared to District No. 1, "Buzzard Glory," "Turkey Scratch" might itself have seemed more euphonious.) Since the school was less than three miles from home by road, Miss Teeter already knew some students and their parents; she knew all by reputation established from family and neighborhood and professional gossip. For better or worse she soon got to know all students thoroughly. "I taught there for two years," Jo wrote almost sixty years later. "I had the feeling that was a long enough time in the same place. There were seventeen or eighteen pupils. I had perhaps five good students."<sup>355</sup>

One fifteen-year-old was a third grader, his brother a second grader at twelve, "partly from not attending school," but a third was "very retarded."

Their family was “very poor,” their two room house “almost a hovel.” Although two older girl students warned her that she would not be able to get away with doing so, Miss Teeter washed all three of their faces “many mornings as they were so dirty,” at the back of the room washed them as they meekly submitted. “It’s awfully hard to like a dirty kid . . . I tried not to be partial, and I don’t think I was.” Who knows, maybe their clean faces even felt better.

At the end of her first strenuous Turkey Scratch teaching term, just recently turned twenty, Jo, with Rebecca, also teaching locally, “entertained their pupils at their home Saturday afternoon,” an event at which “most of the children were present,” a “pleasant afternoon was spent,” and “refreshments were served.” And a sigh of relief was undoubtedly heaved.<sup>356</sup>

During her middle two teaching years, Miss Teeter enjoyed an almost impeccable collection of students, but in her last two, at Des Moines Township, County Line District No. 3, certain students resembled in their home lives certain of those in her Turkey Scratch years. Five came from “not a good family,” in that their father “served time for stealing [and] the mother didn’t know how to take care of anything. The Ladies Aid made a comforter for them. When someone went to call on them the comfort was on the floor with the dogs sleeping on it.” Two of the boys later stripped an old car down to running gear, motor, and steering wheel and “took it for a spin at a great rate of speed. Crossed a railroad track upset and were both killed outright.” Three sisters from one “family” had a mother who “kept house” for a man while their father, her husband, “was serving time at Ft. Madison” penitentiary.

Among students with learning problems and unfortunate home lives, were health issues sometimes involved? In 1920 Merle Wright, Jefferson County Nurse (supported by Red Cross funds), had reported that of three hundred students about a third were underweight, about a third needed dental work, about half had enlarged tonsils, twenty-five had defective eyesight, and nine had defective hearing. A few were “feeble-minded.” A 1921 report noted, “Not one has been protected from contagion by vaccination.” A University of Iowa Extension Service bulletin of that period indicated that 30 percent of Iowa students were underweight. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Deyoe had announced in 1915, “Country children are from five to twenty per cent more defective than city children,” concerning “spinal curvature, eye, ear, throat and lung troubles, malnutrition and mental defectiveness.”<sup>357</sup>

Jo could remember no students who seemed too thin, but she certainly could remember no student who was fat, nor any who wore

eyeglasses, although some may have needed them. Neither could she remember a single health visitor during her teaching career. She could remember none because there was none. For 1921 Superintendent Chidester had reported that the County Nurse had “inspected the children of every school in the county.” By the next year, however, a *Fairfield Tribune* editorial blamed loss of Red Cross funds on public indifference and the public’s opposition to the (low) cost of supplementing Red Cross funds.<sup>358</sup>

### **Miss Teeter had Few Discipline Problems**

Despite disturbing cases of students who could not succeed for whatever reason, in her six-year career Josephine had few discipline problems, fewer serious ones, even in her first trying year. Perhaps that was in part because she regularly began with one rule, the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” a rule with which most of her students would already have been familiar. But one morning, “When I was having class and writing [on the blackboard] I sensed something wrong. When I turned here was Bill coming toward me his sleeves rolled up and measuring his muscles because I had [promised but] forgotten to play his favorite song on the Victrola (‘Life’s Railway to Heaven’).” Obeying an obvious codicil of the Golden Rule, Miss Teeter promptly fulfilled her promise and Bulging Bill, a fourth grader but a big older one, was mollified.

Jo also remembered a more typical older big boy, who came during winter term, “wanted to learn and caused no trouble.” In six years, among dozens of students, Miss Teeter was forced to spank only one (little) boy for persistently refusing to answer questions about his lessons. Whereupon he did.

Edna A. Spencer, an earlier teacher in Cass County, Iowa, had similar memories: Students “came right in when the bell rang, for they had been taught to mind . . . I didn’t have bad boys. I may have rapped one over the head with a Geography book, but no major problems ever.” Since Teacher admitted to being “a farm girl . . . and a bit of a tomboy,” the rap was undoubtedly authoritative. Rosa Schreurs Jennings noted, “The boys had a sort of big brother tolerance toward my five feet three inches; they accepted things that must be endured for discipline’s sake, and they respected my ‘book larnin’.”<sup>359</sup>

Nor did parents cause serious problems although at least two were naughty: “I had two cute little Laughlin girls. They were always dressed nice . . . [but their] folks loved to dance [so] they would take the girls out

and the next day they were so tired and sleepy they couldn't do their work." This was, of course, long before baby sitters became the affluent fashion.

Even when students failed, parents seem to have accepted the sanction of school authorities. Josephine had an eighth grader who had never learned to spell well, who "couldn't spell," and whom Superintendent Chidester therefore refused to promote even though "all the other [county examination] grades were good . . . So that was the end of his education." In a later era of "social promotion," this would seem draconian; but even then it must have seemed severe. Nevertheless, his parents did not challenge the decision. In fact, "I never had any parents come to complain."



June Chidester,  
Jefferson County  
Superintendent of  
Schools, 1910-1936

In the early-twentieth-century, more than they would a century later, parents, administrators, and community generally supported teachers as symbols of authority and discipline. This sometimes led to extreme measures, as when in Huntington, West Virginia, 1915, "Electric spanking machines have been installed in two schools . . . capable of delivering five sharp blows of a paddle every second." Deportment had reportedly improved 100 percent, but I am unaware that the technology infiltrated Iowa. In 1907 Wapello County, however, the county attorney "understood" that the Eldon school board had authorized its school principal to use a rubber hose with attached handle. It was unclear whether the board had authorized his whip. In Batavia, 1913, G. F. Bradshaw, liveryman, charged the school's principal with assault, alleging that his son had been confined to bed several days after severe punishment. The case was dismissed when the prosecution witness failed to appear. In Reinbeck, Iowa, 1907, "When a parent objected to her treatment of his son, and tried to enter the school, Miss Lillian Smith beat him with a stove poker." Whereupon the school board raised her salary. Attagirl! At Columbus Junction, 1904, a father brought suit against a teacher for whipping his son, but withdrew it because, "The sentiment of the people and the board seemed to be for the teacher." Surely few teachers were as directly brutal, apparently without parental repercussions, as one Julie McDonald describes in "Growing Up in Western Iowa." "I doubt that anyone who saw it will ever forget the time Miss Carmichael clutched the blond hair of Tiny Lund (the late stock car racer) and banged his head on the desk until his nose bled, to get his attention, I think." Such events probably appeared in print because

they were unusual, as they certainly were in Miss Teeter's experience, and probably of most Iowa rural teachers of that era.<sup>360</sup>

Miss Teeter's dirty, difficult, and failing students were exceptional, even if memorably stressful. Some students were exceptionally bright and clever—or unaccountably dense. Seventh grader Verle Kerr, was “a smart boy who liked to make believe he was studying and have a book behind his class book.” Then there was the boy in 1929 who could never remember the Vice President's name! “This was just before I was married. I never could understand why he couldn't remember Curtis. He never could answer very many questions but when he went to take eighth grade exams he passed with good grades. Another mystery.” Conveniently, his name had slipped Jo's grasp.

She did remember red-haired, freckle-faced Beulah Stewart (Blough) and her brother, Kenneth, who won second in the County spelling bee. Another girl was “kind of a loner.” In December 2000 Jo and Elaine Farrell Bonnett met over bridge, and Jo was reminded how the Farrell sisters at Rabbit's Delight had been “two of the neatest girls who wore the same dresses all week and still looked clean.” In 2001 Elaine reminded Jo in a ninety-eighth birthday card that they shared birthdays. And then there had been certain other “girls who were the opposite of the Farrell girls.” Another Farrell, Robert, she remembered because she and Mother Ollie had visited him in the Jefferson County Hospital following an appendicitis operation.<sup>361</sup>

### **. . . and I was Always Theirs**

Some students at Rabbit's Delight, her third school, Jo remembered because they had invited her to walk home with them, have supper, and stay the night. A visit with one family's children was “not very good . . . a dirty place,” and sleep was difficult because of dusty bedding. Visiting Anna and Clarice Grimes had, however, been fun. Miss Teeter might have said of her students as another teacher, Marie Christian, said of hers, “They were always yours, and I was always theirs.”<sup>362</sup>



Rabbit's Delight School, Des Moines Township, No. 6, 1998

Jo could name former students who had continued to live, work, marry, have children and grandchildren, and often die of old age, within the complex, interwoven, relationships of their—and her—local community.

Charles Bogle had died tragically in a fall. Another had crashed his car on a local road. Mae Laughlin, one of her eighth graders, had married Jo's cousin-in-law, Donald Curtis. Among successful Fairfield entrepreneurs, Charles Winfrey had operated a laundry and Benny Winfrey an electrical shop. Robert Farrell had been an apartment manager. Glenn Teeter, "no relation . . . a beginner who was very stubborn," owned an Agency, Iowa, grain elevator. Helen Scovel (Hoffman), daughter of school director Deed Scovel, had played the Rabbit's Delight pump organ (a rural school rarity in Jo's experience), had continued as a church pianist, and had kept in touch. Jo could never forget Helen's brother because "I called him Glen and he just looked at me. I still can't remember his name. He should have been called Glen."

To all her students, Jo devoted time, effort, and creative energy beyond the call of professional duty or of the scanty material rewards of rural school teaching. She, naturally, fulfilled professional obligations, beginning before school started in fall of 1923 when, "The Misses Edith and Nellie Stull, Rebecca, Josephine and Bernard Teeter and Letha Ornduff were in attendance at the teachers meeting at Fairfield Saturday forenoon." Little brother Bernard drove. In 1924, "The misses Edith Stull, Josephine Teeter and Letha Ornduff attended the teacher's meeting at Fairfield Saturday." Furthermore, "Miss Josephine Teeter spent Saturday night and Sunday with the Stull girls," which time they presumably devoted to serious teaching issues.<sup>363</sup>

In fact Jo did take professional matters seriously. Notices appeared periodically, as in 1927 when, "The Misses Josephine Teeter and Verda Pumphrey were in attendance at the Teachers meeting at Fairfield last Saturday." In 1928 the Jefferson County "teachers' institute" was a two-day affair, with a baker's dozen of faculty speeches, and an address (a live radio broadcast) by Miss Agnes Samuelson, "state superintendent of public instruction."<sup>364</sup>

In 1926 at Rabbit's Delight, "With the advice of Ethel Morrison and Catherine Van Tassel [Batavia elementary teachers] I organized a parent teacher organization. We met each month [and] had a short program and social time. As I remember very little business" was conducted. At one meeting, chosen for a spelldown were, among others, Charlie and Grace Johnson, and Jo. Miss Teeter won. "I was lucky," said Jo with becoming modesty of the young woman whose eighth grade spelling test score had been a discomfiting 70. In situations like these, Miss Teeter's ability to combine sociability and professionalism may have helped lance any festering parental discontents.



## School Plays, Pies, and Program Scrapbooks

Similarly effective were traditional family-oriented Thanksgiving and Christmas programs. Two bed sheet “curtains” strung on a wire separated the teacher’s platform “stage” from the audience. Gasoline mantle lamps or kerosene lanterns that folks brought from home lighted the room. In that dim makeshift setting parents were able to see, as through a glass darkly, their little darlings parade, sing, recite, dance, and shine with varying degrees of luster in the community spotlight. Here enters Program Director Miss Teeter. Among Jo’s memorabilia is her own Playbook created from a Hamilton Brown Shoe Company *Household Book*, distributed by Libertyville’s Slimmer Brothers general store in 1910, a sort of hybrid farmers’ almanac liberally salted with slang-laden advertisements for women’s high top shoes: “American Lady Shoe No. 6643. The classiest shoe you ever saw. A beautiful black suede, with buttons to match; made on the chic ‘Spanish’ last, with Cuban heel and the new shield tip. Single sole and welt. It’s a beauty.” Or, the “American Gentleman Shoe No. 1249,” also high top. “This is about the swellest thing in shoes we have ever seen. An all patent leather . . . perforated diamond tip, made on the classy ‘Metropole’ last . . .” Another shoe had, “the snappy appearance that will delight most men.” Interspersed among such ads were medical home remedies, tables of weights and measures, time zones, lists of presidents, information on the Panama Canal (in process), “The Language of Flowers,” wonders of the ancient world, and “Naming the Baby.” Under “Expectancy of Life,” the sobering fact (at least for twenty-first century readers) appeared that in 1910, “a person one year old may expect to live 39 years longer.” Those who had reached ten, however, “may expect to live 51 years longer.”

By the mid-1920s life expectancy had risen somewhat, the Panama Canal had long been completed, and 1910 shoe fashions had of course become sadly outdated. Whereupon Jo began to use the old catalog/almanac as a framework upon which to straight pin and paste poems, stories, exercises, and programs for Valentine, Christmas, and Thanksgiving celebrations.

A complete 1928 County Line No. 3 Thanksgiving program survives. It begins with students singing “America the Beautiful”; proceeds through a “Welcome” by Phyllis Ireland; “Dan Speaks a Piece” by Bobbie McWhirter; recitations by Ruthie Laughlin, Gretchen, Margaret, Beatrice, Paul, Alma, Madeline, and Mary; and ends, notably, with a song, “Thanksgiving Turkey,” “composed by Mabel Humphrey and Mildred Clark.” The inevitable “pie social” followed. Ada Ashbaugh won the raffle prize of “a 2 pound pan

[can?] of coffee . . . Mrs. Col. Laughlin was chosen as the best cook and received a nice vegetable dish . . . Sandwiches, pie, candy and coffee were . . . sold, and about \$20 was realized.”<sup>365</sup>

In County Line School, newly painted inside and out, 1927’s twelve students had presented a similar program. Auctioneer Willie Trout sold thirteen pies, “A box of candy which netted \$8.85 was given to the most popular young lady of the community . . . Miss Josephine Teeter . . . Sandwiches, pie and coffee were served by the Ladies of the community,” and “sale of pies candy and sandwiches amounted to \$38.02.”<sup>366</sup>

Another program at Miss Teeter’s school, in springtime “threatening weather,” requiring an indoor picnic, included “ice cream cones a treat from the teacher.” A brief program unusually featured the combined voices of County Line No. 3 and Des Moines Township No. 8 (Miss Lila Black, teacher). It opened with the inevitable “America,” and included recitations and songs like “School Boy’s Spring Fever,” “It’s May Time,” and “Vacation is Here.” A common poem on such occasions ended with the appropriately gendered “I’m glad I’m not a (Boy)(Girl).” An unusually large number of men attended this program, perhaps because fields were wet. Father George, Mother Ollie, Brother Bernard, and Cousin Vic Wagner, a guest at the Teeters for a few days, attended the program, picnic, and picture taking session.<sup>367</sup>



Last Turkey Scratch school day, early 1920s. Note front row girl with doll. Teacher Josephine is to her right rear. Brother Bernard is to right behind Jo. Sister Rebecca is at far right. Jo’s nieces , Bernice and Ferne Gorman, are front row right. Mother Ollie is in center row, second from left.

Rural Iowa schoolteachers of that era almost uniformly recall that supplies were severely limited or nonexistent. Whether such economies were necessary or shortsighted may be debatable, but as Jo wrote in 1980, "All school boards were not as tight as [those in] Des Moines Township," which provided coal, chalk, and cleaning equipment, but "nothing extra." No school board where Miss Teeter taught provided toilet paper, an outdated Sears Roebuck or "Monkey [Montgomery] Ward" catalog evidently being considered adequate for scholars at school as at home. A correspondent thought it noteworthy that in addition to new paint and windows in 1927 the County Line school board had added, "two small dictionaries." In 1924 the school enjoyed a new Victrola bought from Fairfield's Fair store. Des Moines Township schools seem to have been less well supported than others in Jefferson County. Even so, in 1921 County Superintendent Chidester reported that of seventy-eight rural schools, five only had "talking machines," that is, spring-wound record players, while only one had a piano. The problem was hardly new and hardly confined to Des Moines Township or Jefferson County. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Albert M. Deyoe had in 1915 acerbically noted "that many a farmer has more money invested in automobiles than the entire school district has expended for school purposes for the year. . . . The one great hindrance to community betterment is the stubborn opposition of the farmer to pay for the support of schools and churches in proportion to his ability."<sup>368</sup>

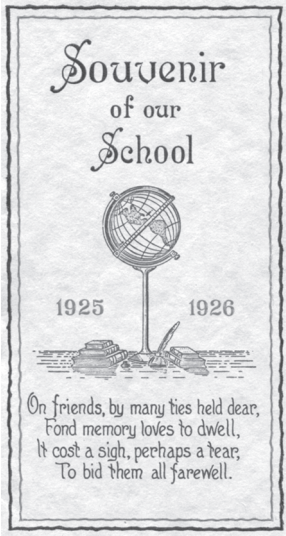
### **West Union School**

One of Jo's schools, West Union, Lick Creek Township, Van Buren County, had no well. The school board expected students to carry water from Kerr's farm, somewhat less than a quarter mile away. Students also shared a dipper for drinking, although that tradition was known to spread disease. In 1919 a year after the Spanish Flu epidemic, "Batavia School Notes" had reported, "The children have almost all gotten an individual drinking cup. This is a necessary step in sanitation." Even earlier, in 1909, numerous railroads were reported to have begun "installing dispensing machines for separate drinking cups."<sup>369</sup>

And even earlier, in 1905, advice concerning "The Public Drinking Cup" held that, "When it is necessary to relieve one's thirst abroad, if the cup be filled quite full and placed to the mouth in such a way that the rim will be about half an inch below the under lip, one can drink from the surface of the water. In this way no part of the vessel, to which some particles of poisonous matter may still be clinging, will touch the delicate skin of the

lip. It is hardly necessary to add that the water which adheres to the mouth and below the lips should be removed by a handkerchief and not by the tongue.” What succinct hygienic etiquette!<sup>370</sup>

At West Union school in 1925, Jo organized local young people who, following evening rehearsals, staged a comedy at the school (with Miss Teeter as The Maid). “Most of us rode horses to practice. I rode Bill Bogle’s horse that he rode to school. I don’t remember having to put the horse in the barn. I guess Russell Stump or Harry Kracht who would ride home with me must have.” Not surprisingly, rural chivalry was yet alive and well in Van Buren County. Josephine’s West Union successor followed her example by organizing another play.



WEST UNION SCHOOL District Number 3 Lick Creek Township, Van Buren, County, Iowa 1925—1926 JOSEPHINE TEETER, Teacher	
PUPILS	
Mae Laughlin	Wayne Hendricks
Charles Bogle	Veryl Kerr
Edith Tweedy	Edith Laughlin
Lula Wiles	Roscoe Mathias
Florence Teeter	Ernest Tweedy
Jasper Teeter	Mary Ehret
Herbert Boggs	Roy Lewis
Mabel Boggs	Vida Kerr
Ester Wiles	Andy Tweedy
Clifford Boggs	Gerald Teeter
Dale Hendricks	Beulah Mathias
Lucile Lewis	Glenn Teeter
SCHOOL BOARD	
P. C. Stump	Charles Lewis
Oscar Mathias	Reid Bogle, Sec.

Box Suppers and Pie Socials

If a Des Moines Township teacher wanted a “Victrola, maps, pictures or anything else that would make the schoolroom more attractive,” or wanted books or playground equipment, she had to buy them. Or, much more likely, she resorted to the thinly veiled charity of a box supper. “Miss Josephine Teeter, teacher at No. 7 Des Moines and pupils gave a program followed by a pie social . . . The program was fine . . . The social was also a success as almost \$32 was taken in. Pieces of pie, wiener sandwiches and coffee were . . . served. Miss Rebecca Teeter was voted the most popular young lady and received a box of candy. The money is to be used to purchase some musical instruments” (which had translated into “Victrola”). The “Health Program,” hardly run of the mill, included: a recitation of health rules by Mildred Ancell; a play, *The Road to Health*; “He Wouldn’t Use His Tooth Brush,” Ruth Ancell; “Mary’s Cold,” Dura Thomas; a song, “Keep the Good Work Going”; and a final recitation, “Thank You and If You Please,” Clarence Cloak. That was Friday evening. On Saturday, Jo, with Edith Stull

and Letha Ornduff, attended the “Rural Musical Contest at Fairfield.”<sup>371</sup>

In her second Turkey Scratch year appeared this belated public notice: “Miss Josephine Teeter of Des Moines No. 7 and pupils will give a program at the schoolhouse Friday evening, November 7. A pie supper will follow and all ladies are asked to bring a box or a pie to be sold in pieces.” Clearly, pupils were expected to sing, if not for their supper, then for school equipment; girls and women (and teacher) to provide ingredients and kitchen labor and nicely beribboned boxes. Following the program, Wayne Peebler, auctioneer, sold all this to the highest male bidders, amid much tomfoolery concerning the stalwart buyer and the blushing seller.<sup>372</sup>

Seventy-five years later, Jo thought Chet Curtis attended and bought her box. She took a box to No. 5 in 1927 or ‘28, where auctioneer Walt Davisson pretended to see bidders against Chet so as to “run up” his cost. Whereupon Chet, from thriftiness or acquired cunning or affinity for practical joking, dropped out, so that Walt had to “eat” the cost and eat with Jo.

A pie social at County Line School “bought a slide while I was there. Someone ahead of me bought the organ with pie social money.” Nevertheless, box social receipts were never enough. Miss Teeter bought a ball and bat for one school. At Rabbit’s Delight, Bill Hutton, her future brother-in-law, and a rare male rural elementary teacher, erected a basketball hoop for his five big boys, with whom he played as he had in high school. Jo regretfully followed popular Bill at that school.

At her first school, Turkey Scratch, where there had also been a popular man teacher, Miss Teeter should have been at least equally popular because with her own money she bought a ten-volume World Book Encyclopedia for \$50. This tore a huge hole in a month’s salary, a purchase, not surprisingly, Mother Ollie thought too expensive. Students got nearly two year’s use there. Then Miss Teeter took the set to other schools. She was forced to sell it to Hazel Dell School in 1936 for \$16, “because we needed the money very bad.” Why did she buy the set? In fact, an encyclopedia peddler had literally come knocking at the schoolhouse door during recess. Miss Teeter had ordered it on the spot, and had upon receipt paid the entire amount in cash from meager earnings.

### **Tender, Patient Care, so Requisite to the Proper Development . . .**

Like school boards, the community, including most teachers themselves, quietly assumed that Bill Hutton would be paid more than Josephine Teeter—and that rural women teachers would be paid less than



town teachers. Mildred Sandell Dallner, rural schoolteacher for decades, probably spoke for Josephine and most 1920s rural women teachers: “I have that nature of taking what comes.” And Jo pointed out, “No wages were high. . . . I think . . . we were paid as well as other workers.” Also, teachers like herself, with Normal Training certification, were paid \$5 a month more than those with ten weeks summer preparation. But Mildred



Mildred Sandell and Jo Teeter,  
mid 1920s

admitted as well that, like herself, her colleagues “didn’t know any better . . . A lot of girls thought they’d teach a couple of years, you know. Women were not used to looking toward a career . . . at least the ones I knew of . . . They just thought [they’d] get a little money, buy some clothes, save a little money up for the future.” You could buy a “decent” dress for \$10, or make one for much less. Most young women rural teachers could live with their parents while teaching nearby because boarding out took “a lot out of a little paycheck.” Rural schoolteachers’ parents, therefore, in effect subsidized schools, although a daughter might contribute to their expenses.

As Edith Stull Giltner, Josephine’s sixth and seventh grade teacher, recalled of her early career, “If you could get out and get thirty-five or forty dollars a month and stay at home you helped your parents out keeping you.” Mary Thompson, another Iowa teacher, agreed, for there was “nothing else to do. You just didn’t hear about girls doing anything else but teaching. Father was up in years and I needed to support myself. So it was pointed out that that was the way to go.”<sup>373</sup>

That way had been pointed much earlier. In 1860 three of four Iowa teachers were male. But a few years earlier the state’s Superintendent of Schools had advocated hiring more women because the “tender, patient care, so requisite to the proper development of these young plants,” was “naturally and prudently exercised by that sex.”<sup>374</sup>

Caroline McKinley Carson, a retired teacher, corroborated and elaborated this argument. She had been drawn to the profession in late-nineteenth-century Iowa by her kind first teacher, Miss Anna Griffith, who “directed my use of English and frowned upon any tendency to coarse expressions. She kept me supplied with literature . . . This fine woman exerted a far wider and more determining influence upon her community,



than many who were better qualified by education and environment.” Because of women like Miss Griffith, “The public school was the only civilizing influence in the community . . . The struggle for a livelihood . . . appeared to leave no time for developing higher standards of living.” The undoubtedly salutary influence of rural women schoolteachers made them even more attractive to school authorities.<sup>375</sup>

### **65 Cents on the Dollar: Salaries for men \$168.55, women \$109.57**

From State Superintendent to local boards, however, everyone was aware that women teachers cost less. They were cheaper than men, and they were plentiful, in part because little other “respectable” employment was available to late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century rural women. And, since they were expected (and themselves generally expected) to marry after a few years, inevitably to leave teaching, inexperienced (and even less expensive) young women would inevitably apply. For whatever reasons, Iowa “often paid her teachers less than did any other midwestern state.” By the early twentieth century, certainly by the 1920s, women made up the overwhelming number of rural teachers in Jefferson County and in Iowa. And local rural young women overwhelmingly supplied rural schools. In 1921 County Superintendent Chidester noted, “Sixty-eight of the seventy-eight teachers . . . have been raised or are living on the farm.” In 1921 the average monthly salary for Jefferson County teachers—which surely included those in towns—was men \$168.55, women \$109.57. By 1927 men averaged \$1 a month more, women \$1.50 less.<sup>376</sup>

Like many rural teachers throughout the state and nation, Jefferson County young women were a temporarily captive work force. They might like teaching, and be concerned about their pupils, but they could rarely find other employment. Relatively inexpensive, they were relatively powerless. They had no strong organizations, usually none at all, and were employed on one-year contracts at most, and for only a few years. Thus, they necessarily left most decisions concerning salaries, working conditions, and school supplies up to boards of directors—local men, farmers, neighbors, often friends of a teacher and her parents. Like Josephine Teeter, like almost all of her contemporaries, women teachers changed employment by marrying.<sup>377</sup>

Difficult conditions for Jefferson County women teachers probably continued longer than elsewhere in the state. This was because school consolidation was particularly slow there, given rural opposition to its high cost, and to ceding local control of schools to “experts” who presumed to

know what was best for rural children. Opponents of consolidation noted a 1920s study showing that rural students did approximately as well on national tests as consolidated elementary school students, a bit better earlier, not so well in later grades. Opposition to external influences appears to have been particularly strong in Des Moines Township, which seems always to have been a poor relative in the county. As early as 1868 implicitly referring to the biblical story of Moses, an anonymous “Libertyville” correspondent remarked concerning county schools, “Des Moines Township has been sometimes called the Egypt of Jefferson County. Perhaps this is one of the reasons her schoolhouses are hid away in the brush.”<sup>378</sup>

In truth, the township often seemed far from the center of county government, of influence and wealth, both to some inhabitants, and to some nearer the center. In 1891 a local columnist, boasting that the township’s south side had college men, asked rhetorically, “Now who is it that calls Des Moines [Township] ‘Old Missouri’?” A week later, however, critical of new courthouse costs, the columnist himself referred to the area as “Old Missouri.” In 1905 a Libertyville columnist, just east over the line in Liberty Township, remarked rather snootily, “Des Moines Township Sunday School Convention was held at a place known as Turkey Scratch,” in southwestern Des Moines Township, where Jo, of course, would begin teaching.<sup>379</sup>

An image emerges of an area somewhat peripheral, somewhat scorned, somewhat resentful, somewhat less prosperous and forward looking. In spring 1903 before Josephine was born in the fall, Des Moines Township voters both rejected “centralization of schools . . . by a large majority,” and voted down a new schoolhouse proposal. In 1912 they rejected a proposal for three new ones, but voted for two in 1913. In 1914 the township voted “strong against” uniform textbooks. In 1921 as Jo prepared to teach, among schools Iowa recognized as coming up to “standard” and worthy of receiving state funds, Jefferson County had eleven, none in Des Moines Township although one school “hoped” to be named soon. In that year, the high water mark of the early-twentieth-century Iowa consolidation movement, the state had 439 consolidated schools, only three in Jefferson County, none in the southern area, Des Moines Township’s location. No further consolidation occurred during the agricultural depression of the 1920s and 1930s, and not until after World War II.<sup>380</sup>

### **Jo’s Life as a Boarding Teacher**

Miss Teeter began at Turkey Scratch for \$60 a month, rose to \$65 the next year, to \$75 at West Union, and beginning with the fourth year

plateaued at \$80 for the rest of her 1920s career. Some of that income went for room and board. During 1925-26 at West Union, a dozen miles from home, "I stayed at the Reed Bogle's about a mile from the school [to] which I walked. I gave \$16 a week board and went home over the weekend." This left just about \$10 income for a month. With the Bogle family, however, Josephine ate heartily, much as at home, including a farmer's breakfast of "fried potatoes, meats, buckwheat cakes." Supper, also hearty, included meat, potatoes, vegetables, and always a dessert. Her culinary experience contrasts dramatically to that of teacher Caroline McKinley Carson's, whose late-nineteenth-century hostess "cooked everything but the coffee in the frying pan,—meat, potatoes, vegetables and eggs, so everything tasted of everything else; but she saved on dish-washing."<sup>381</sup>

At the Bogles, Jo had "a room of my own . . . No bathroom. I had a large pitcher and bowl for washing up and potty under the bed which had to be carried to [the] outhouse when no one was watching. I had a dresser, commode, bed and chair in my room. The door was left open during the day to heat my room. I only helped with work if I wanted to, like setting table, drying dishes, and the like. I was always treated very nice and looked up to by this family."

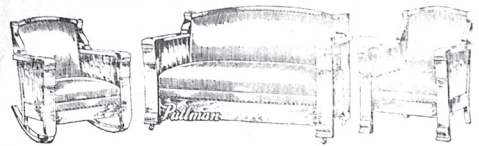
In commenting fifty years later about another teacher who had felt lonely as a boarder, Jo wrote, "I don't remember too much about loneliness when away from home. Perhaps in this period there was less activity, and there was always something to read." A Bogle neighbor and friend of Jo's, Nellie Hendricks, still in Birmingham High, enlivened one evening at the Bogles by reciting "Bill Smith", a long tall tale howler in the tradition of Mark Twain and other such humorists. Miss Teeter could have continued at West Union and at Bogle's, "but I wanted to be closer to home. . . . [partly] in order not to pay out money for board," but also, "I guess I was just a home person."

During almost all of her other five teaching years Josephine stayed at home, only boarding during the very coldest spell one year with Maggie and Harry Copeland across the road from Rabbit's Delight, and at County Line for a couple of spring months. This was after her parents moved to Ollie's inherited farm, and just before Jo married and left teaching, as she thought, for good. In those last weeks, "I had a private room, unheated, not modern . . . [and] . . . learned to play pitch with the 'Colonel' Laughlins," a skill that would serve her well in early married years—and much, much later.

## Boarding at Home

When Josephine stayed at home, the first two years of which sister Rebecca was also teaching and staying there, she helped with housework after school and during holidays and summers. Summer canning was a major continuing task; and dressmaking as well as “fancy work” with needle and crochet hook filled “leisure” time. There were occasional shopping trips to Fairfield or Ottumwa; and occasional socializing, as when “Miss Josephine Teeter visited a few days with friends at Keosauqua.”<sup>382</sup>

Rebecca and Josephine did not pay for room and board, but in addition to housework, they gave Ollie and the family “expensive gifts,” notably a leatherette upholstered couch and matching twin rocking chairs, bought in Batavia’s Davidson’s Furniture Store. This “three piece parlor suite” cost perhaps \$75, no small investment on a woman teacher’s salary, or even that of two. But, then, they bought quality, as an ad for M. A. Davidson, The Furniture Man, asserted: “There are two kinds of furniture—that which is MADE, and the kind that is THROWN TOGETHER. Our furniture is MADE, every piece of it, and it will last a life time—and then some.” (The rockers—reconditioned—have long continued to serve and soothe later generations faithfully.) The two working girls also bought for their parents a wonderful floor model, windup Victrola and records at the Fair store, south side of the square, Fairfield, a gift that undoubtedly benefited themselves as it did me and other grandchildren years later.



**PULLMAN 3 PIECE PARLOR SUITE**

Frame finest quartered sawed Oak in wax finish, uph. litereed in imitation Spanish Leather Grade 35. Davenport spring edge spring back, opens and makes a full size bed with all metal parts of bed finished gold. Our price on this Suite Complete for April is

**\$89.00 FOR THREE PIECES**

See the New Solid Walnut Dining Room Suite in the ITALIAN RENAISSANCE Design in our window. This is solid walnut.

**DAVIDSON**

Batavia, Iowa.

*Batavia News*, March 30, 1922

As must be obvious, the young unmarried rural schoolteacher could hardly claim a private life, if she so wished, apart from family and community purview. Having only recently reached the legal age of adulthood at twenty-one—if that—she continued to live in her father and mother’s household and be influenced by their authority—and of, perhaps, an older brother’s. If she boarded with another family, their overt authority was limited, but pressure to conform was at least as great as at home, particularly when that family included some of her students. At school ten or fifteen reporters observed and evaluated Teacher’s language and demeanor, not to mention her professional qualifications.

In the *Weekly Ledger-Journal* County Line column of March 1,

1928, Mrs. R. T. Gonterman reported, “Miss Josephine Teeter has been out of school for the past week with a nervous breakdown and flu.” Sister Mrs. Rebecca Wheeldon had been filling in. The correspondent noted in the same column, “Miss Josephine Teeter took three of her pupils to take part in the rural school contests held at the court house in Fairfield Saturday.” Seventy-five years later Jo could not remember a breakdown or the flu, but recalled driving Mildred Clark and a couple of other students to the spelling contest. Concerning the breakdown, Jo reckoned if Letha Gonterman said so, then it may have been so. Through the rest of March and most of April reports of Miss Teeter’s normal teaching and social activities are interspersed with indications that she “is still on the sick list.” Although she is teaching, sister Rebecca substitutes occasionally, and “Josephine is taking treatments,” unspecified, in Ottumwa. Mrs. Gonterman’s last report of the school year suggests a happy ending to the episode, with a large attendance of parents, grandparents, other relatives, and friends at school to witness the combined students from No. 3 and No. 8 perform, and to enjoy the picnic. “The same teachers,” the correspondent concluded, “will teach their respective school for the next year.”<sup>383</sup>

### **The Jazz Age, Dancing, Bobbing, and a Moral Life**

Only rarely could Teacher escape family, neighbors, and local newspaper columnists to the semi-privacy of the buggy or the automobile or the town. But the relative anonymity small town Fairfield offered could easily prove a snare and delusion where relatives overflowed, friends, former classmates, and casual acquaintances were numerous, and almost everyone else knew your family and could identify you by sight. Oh, yes, plus former, current, and future students. As Rosa Schreurs Jennings noted in *The Country Teacher*, “Teachers were surrounded with prohibitions, some by contract, others by custom—no drinking, no dancing or card playing where the community attitude was against it, no ‘gallivantin’ around,’ no slang.” Bertha Riemath remembered that in the 1920s, “I was to have no dates or attend any function from Sunday night through Friday night unless it was a school function.” In Libertyville, where Jo danced, “probably . . . a few times” after graduating from high school in 1923, the town council in 1924 “voted to declare the public dance a nuisance.”<sup>384</sup>

As in the Teeter family, important elements of the community and country had trouble with Charleston style—and even milder—dancing in the 1920s, just as they had had with the Bunny Hug, the Grizzly Bear, the Turkey Trot, and (among sophisticates) the Tango, before and during



Tango dancers entwined

the Great War. Jazz music, believed the “Omaha dancing masters, some of them at least,” “is responsible for the improprieties of the modern dance,” particularly because “the saxophone player is something of a reprobate.” Said one member of the “board of inspectors,” “You can’t blame the dancers if they have only jazz music to follow. No wonder some dancers engage in wiggly-wobbly movements when they hear that sort of music and witness the movements of the musicians. These saxophone players must sit down hereafter.” One manager of a dance “academy” proposed requiring bright lights in all rooms, stairways, and passages; banning “shadow” or “moonlight” dances; having

“a sufficient number of supervisors”; “touching of heads, undue familiarity, exaggerated or suggestive forms of dancing positively prohibited”; and closing no later than 12:30 a.m. A Kalamazoo, Michigan, ordinance forbade dance partners to gaze into each other’s eyes. And this, folks, was for the big town, never mind Libertyville, where square dancing was much more probable than “wiggly-wobbly movements” and intimate gazing. Worse yet, early in the 1920s the marathon dance craze virtually forced couples to cling to each other after a few hours. In 1924 the National Lutheran Council banned any attempt to combine jazz and church music.<sup>385</sup>



Paris jazz dancers eye-gazing

Not only did jazz endanger a modern girl’s morals, according to “some physicians” in the “U.S. public health service,” its “Excitement and Thrills Keep Mind and Body Functioning Beyond Limits,” causing “among young women . . . a slight increase in tuberculosis. Hurried social life, the strain from school or business, not taking sufficient time to eat, insufficient rest and scanty clothing wear out the body and result in a breakdown.” Men were not mentioned as endangered, perhaps because their clothing was less scanty. According to filler in the same column, “The papers tell about a Baltimore girl who lost her frock at a dance, but don’t tell how she noticed the difference.”<sup>386</sup>

Not only was the American girl threatened in 1928, but all of



European culture, according to Camille de Rhynal, “president of the Dance Teachers of France and also of the International Dancing Federation.” This, she asserted, was because of imported American jazz and dances: “The Charleston, Black Bottom, and the Heebie Jeebies . . . burst upon the ballrooms of England and the Continent and cleared them of many nice people . . . In their place we got the flapper and the young men of her kind. Now, there are dances on the horizon that will bring back the nice people . . .” Sure. Right. Like 1930s and ‘40s swing? In England as well, improper dancing and improper flappers doing the shimmy shake drew attention. For, “In greedy haste, on pleasure bent, / We have no time to think, or feel, / What need is there for sentiment, / Now we’ve invented Sex-Appeal? / We’ve silken legs and scarlet lips. / We’re young and hungry, wild and free. / Our waists are round about the hips. / Our skirts are well above the knee.”<sup>387</sup>

Meanwhile, back in America and Iowa, to community controls formal and informal concerning appearance and deportment and dance, school boards often added specific and sometimes contractual requirements and prohibitions. Mary E. Francis, elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1922, asserted that she would not try to dictate “personal” matters of “cosmetics and dress.” But for whatever reason, she was turned out of office in 1926. Sometimes school boards prescribed dress and makeup regulations. Sometimes, as in the mid-‘20s experience of Edith Stull (Giltner) at Agency, Iowa, contracts required that teachers attend church. “Some places in Iowa at that time,” Jo reminisced fifty or sixty years later in an era of almost inconceivably altered social mores, “one could not have bobbed hair, smoke, dance or go out during the week.” Marjory Baker corroborates Jo’s memory. In 1923, “I signed that I would not: smoke; drink intoxicating liquors; bob my hair; date high school boys!” Well, ok, but what’s this about bobbed hair?<sup>388</sup>

One is reminded of the furor that ensues in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s 1920 short story when “Bernice Bobs Her Hair.” The *Ledger* reported in 1921 that “Bobbed hair is on the increase in Fairfield, according to the barbers, who are shearing the fairmaidens of the city by the dozens.” Three days later the *Weekly Ledger-Journal* reported, “For a year the misses have been abbreviating hair at an increasing pace . . . At first only the subdebs went in for shorn locks, but now age is no barrier.” Perhaps coincidentally, Alfred’s barbershop had reduced haircuts to the traditional pre-war twenty-five cents. (Shaves were also back down—to fifteen cents.) Most girls could scrape up a quarter. Bobbing spread, even though Fairfield’s females (and their barbers) had been reminded that Paul (First Corinthians

11:13-15) had forbidden women to bob their glory.<sup>389</sup>

In 1924 Fairfield, “Barbers say bobbed hair is ruining their business.” Earlier that year, of fifty-seven young women in Parsons College dormitories, forty-one were bobbed. Requiring less comb-time, “Bobbed Hair Lets ‘Em” get to breakfast faster. Proving “age is no barrier,” in California (of course), Mrs. Elizabeth Goodrich, “a staunch supporter of the flapper,” to celebrate her one-hundredth birthday had her hair bobbed. Women young and old who wanted a bit of extra dash could buy “The Flapper Curler.”<sup>390</sup>

On July 17, 1924, the *Weekly Ledger-Journal* editorialized in “The Barbers And The Bobbed” that a Fairfield barber’s announcing he would “bob no feminine hair on Saturday, started a livelier discussion among the fair sex of the city than the league of nations and the political conventions combined. The ladies . . . refuse to accept the explanation” that mere business, and no dark plot, is involved, that “barbers, hard pressed by . . . demand for bobs of various styles and degrees” are “keeping their old reliable shaves and haircuts sitting impatiently.” Advancing several crucial degrees beyond the mere business argument, the editorial called upon History: “The barber shop is the time honored club of Mere Man. It always has been more of a forum than the saloon, and in it have been discussed questions of state and matters of private concern but lately the men have been much disconcerted by the patronage of the women, and the barber shop has not been the same since the shinglebob came into fashion. So the men, uneasy . . . have begun . . . to study the safety razor ads.” Abandoning even the facade of objectivity, the editorial concluded, “For a time the men had hopes that bobbing was merely a passing fad and that women would revert to their crowning glory and get back into the pictures of the mid-Victorian novels . . . But the women are not content so long as there are any restrictions to their liberty . . . They are not willing even that the men should have their day set apart for them in the barbershop.” One is almost forced to recall that just a year earlier among songs listed in Sears Roebuck catalog was “Cows May Come, and Cows May Go, but the Bull Goes on Forever.”

A fad bobbing may have been, but in 1924, several years after it began, bobbing was not passing. From the barbers’ point of view, and of certain male customers, bobbing was an insidious menace. Who knew where it would end? Women had the vote after all. And those “subdebs” were watching all this, and often enough taking the lead. In 1922 or 1923, in Ft. Madison, Iowa, Ruth Hale (Hilleary) was ten or eleven, only in the fifth or sixth grade, but old enough to know what was going on, old enough to pester her parents, especially her father, to death. So that finally George

gave in, and Ruth went down to the barbershop where she was known because her Grandpa had often showed her off there. She just quick-stepped down there after school, marched in, and after having to insist, got her hair, tiresome heavy braids and all, bobbed. And paid her quarter. At age eleven, or ten! And came home with her braids in her hand, and her mother cried, and her dad was mad.

And then she went to her best friend Letha Berstler's house and asked her father, Mr. Frank Berstler, if he wanted his ponies exercised, as she and Letha often did. And Mr. Berstler turned from his desk and cried, "Why, Bob-bie!" Which became her nickname for a while. And the next thing that happened was that Bob-bie's mother, Iva, properly went down to the beauty shop and got her hair bobbed too. And then, unlike many males of that era, George decided he liked bobbed hair because he always liked what Iva did. In that happy family, Ruth would heat a curling iron above a lamp and would make forehead curls for her mother.

To later observers the problem of women's hair in the 1920s may seem of amazing duration and irrational heat. Publicity helped. In *Love Conquers All* (1923), Robert Benchley's play included the insulting line, "Aw, go have your hair bobbed!" At Fairfield's Victory Theatre in 1926, *Bobbed Hair*, starring Marie Prevost and Kenneth Harlan, "The story of every woman's question by twenty famous writers," added clippings to the flames. In that year as well screen comedienne Louise Fazenda, preparing for a movie, "created . . . four modish haircuts . . . The Curly Cut, delightful for blonds; The Fifth Avenue Bob, quite irresistible for titians; The Debutante Cut, a careful carelessness distinctly appropriate for the young girl and the Windblown Bob, an amazingly saucy style for brunettes." Bobbed hair became associated with bohemian radicalism. In Chicago, Sinclair Lewis's Carol Milford, later Kennicott, "was taken to a certified Studio Party, with beer, cigarettes, bobbed hair, and a Russian Jewess who sang the Internationale." Irresistible indeed with Hollywood and Broadway and Chicago steam bestirring the Windblown Bob, women's hair nevertheless came in for the unkindest cuts—and slings if not arrows. In 1927 a freshly bobbed Des Moines woman came home to a husband so appalled that he slung dinner plates at her, which a divorce judge judged to be cruel and inhuman treatment. The problem was international. Viennese authorities in 1925 were forced to close down the university because male undergraduates "dragged all bobbed hair girl students, exhibiting banners declaring 'no respectable German girl bobs her hair'." Taking a mild contrariant view in Berlin of that era the fictional Sam Dodsworth rather liked "the cropped girls rather masculine as far down as the neck but thoroughly

feminine below.” In 1927, “Alpine Village Ousts Bobbed-Haired Girls,” in the middle of the night after they had doffed their headgear, whereupon a villager had rushed to ring the fire alarm. The “girls,” Viennese of course, were accompanied by their (also ousted) husbands. And, after a Neapolitan boss ordered otherwise, all six women workers bobbed up next day, and were fired, and appealed to an arbitration board. Contrarily, in Warsaw, a male university student shot his professor who had ordered him to cut his hair. Clearly, hair was a big deal long before *Hair*, the musical, appeared in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>391</sup>

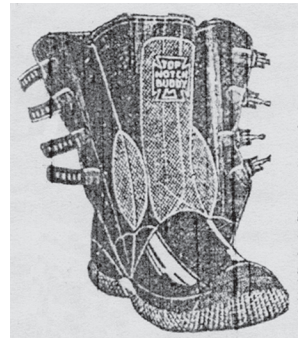
Hair had apparently been a big deal earlier as well, at least in the nation’s capital. In 1885 “Washington Letter” had editorialized almost lasciviously, “The short hair craze has struck Washington, and Pennsylvania Avenue . . . is filled with the daughters of noted men . . . dressed in sealskin cloaks, fine dresses and nobby hats, under which the hair, cut like that of a boy, shows forth. Some look better for the change; others are made horrible by it. A pretty girl looks well with short hair, and her plump, rosy cheeks, round full, soft, white neck and jauntily poised head, on a pair of good straight shoulders are brought into more striking contrast by the rakish cut of to-day.” “Washington Letter” concluded fearlessly, “Fashion rules in Washington, and before the season is over, there will be a lot of natural hair switches for sale cheap.”<sup>392</sup>

In 1927 willing to deny that fashion was frivolous and changeable, “Bobbed Hair To Stay” was “the opinion of one of Chicago’s most noted coiffure artists . . . Mme. Louise.” Mam’selle L. had asserted, “bobbed styles were the only ones now accepted,” that “The prevailing mode is a clinging swirl curled in a finger wave or a permanent wave resembling a marcel.” (M. Marcel was, of course, a nineteenth century hairdresser.) The bob being *de rigueur*, what was a girl to do?<sup>393</sup>

On February 17, 2003, seventy-eight years later, Jo revealed that “I had my hair bobbed in about 1925, in the summer. I was the first one [in the family]. Mother didn’t say very much, but Dad wouldn’t speak to me. It’s funny now, but it wasn’t funny then. I had it bobbed in Fairfield, in a men’s shop. Afterwards it was ok for Rebecca [to have hers bobbed].” Why did you do it? “Well, everybody else was having it done. I was one of the last ones [among her friends] to get my hair bobbed.” Repercussions? Nothing serious and long-standing. Dad George, after getting all in a lather, eventually came around, and, “When I went back to teach in the fall the kids didn’t say anything.” Neither did her school director. The times they were a’changin’—at least a little.

In a later age, it may be difficult to conceive of a young woman having

to calculate the possible penalties of a haircut. And not only teachers. Iowan Elizabeth Lynch remembered that in the 1920s, “Nurses were not allowed to ‘bob’ their hair as that was a bad reflection on their reputation.” Most women teachers probably managed the bob problem eventually, but higher bars remained. Rigorous social controls upon teachers of that era would now seem unconscionable, but, as Jo pointed out, “At that time teachers were not as independent as they are today,” and “didn’t think too much about discipline” that was as strict for themselves as for their students. Interestingly, Jo understood at the time that “flappers,” (named so for wearing unfastened, flapping, rubber overshoes called galoshes) “weren’t very nice . . . weren’t very good,” even though they wore clothes that were “the same as we did, as I’m remembering” (not to mention hair). Girls and young women in 1920 and thereafter no doubt patterned themselves after the enormously popular Norma Shearer (no pun intended?) in *The Flapper*. The novelist Feike Feikema’s Iowa character, the young widow Kaia with “her black mink eyes” and her “gypsy ways . . . had always been jolly,” but she was at heart an unsavory siren. “She had been the first in the village to flaunt bobbed hair, first to wear short skirts, first to wear the seductive low waist.”<sup>394</sup>



Four buckle overshoe

To a later age, bobbed and booted flappers may appear playful and cute—and perhaps at least half-serious feminists under surface sheen. In Sioux City, 1922, “Several of the girls are flapping to school daily to the accompaniment of the merry tinkle of little bells which they have attached to their unflapped galoshes.” Flapper belles! The school board, flummoxed, hardly thinking those girls were cute, threatened action of some sort. That same year President William Neilson of Smith College, perhaps to forestall outbreaks among his female charges, in a tight-lipped phrase referred to the flapper as a “shrewd, keen, hard, worldly little thing.” Billy Sunday, the retired baseball Chicago White Stockings player turned revivalist, undoubtedly delighted pious audiences by denouncing flappers in lengthier and earthier terms. According to a wire service’s paraphrase, the fortunately named revivalist, Mr. Sunday, had opined that flappers who “run around the streets with their stockings rolled down, their forms adorned with peekaboo waists and short skirts, and their hair all frizzed up,” were too much for a man to bear. In Sunday’s own memorable words, “Any man who can look at the short-skirted, barenecked, frizzle headed,



gum chewing, fudge eating, modern flapper without having a moral blowout should get a government pension.”<sup>395</sup>



Young women and 1920s cars, contrasting styles. Jo Teeter (left), Billie Carlson (right). Courtesy of Fairfield Public Library

Despite, or perhaps because of the ambivalence of such men as the evidently titillated Reverend Sunday, who gazed longingly at those cute little things who were going to hell in a handbasket, some young 1920s women teachers defied the conventions, at least for a time. Or at least they tried to create the illusion of being flippant flappers. In February 1927 Jo received an envelope postmarked Birmingham, Iowa, bearing the standard two-cent stamp for first class letters and containing an ostentatiously hurried note from another teacher, Jennie Carmichael. Jo in 2002 remembered knowing her in high school as a younger student and then becoming reacquainted while teaching at West Union. Wrote Miss Carmichael, “Please excuse me for being so long in sending this. But I have been busy seems like. I was at Buchanan’s 3 nites last week & forgot about it each time . . . Say don’t you owe me a letter. Have sure been having a keen time the last few weeks. Have been to two dances this week & am going to another tomorrow nite. Neighborhood dances over around the school house. Last Wed nite it was at Buerkens. I stayed all nite. We didn’t go to bed till 2:30 & I never woke up till 8 bells. It was 8:40 when I got [to] school. Latest ever yet. Last Sat nite we went to Schwartzs & didn’t get home till 2. Sun. nite I had a date . . . & practiced Mon. till 12 bells & Tues nite we gave the play at Libertyville. It was 1:45 when I went to bed. F. E. brought me home & say I thought he



never would go. Maybe you think I didnt put in a real nite's sleep last nite. Do you still go with Chet? Well ans. Josie & I'm signing off for this time." Josie?! Now wasn't Miss Carmichael's letter just the cat's meow, just the bee's knees? According to then current slang, Miss Carmichael was, or wanted to be, a peacherino, a pippin, a real lollapaloooser. And, "Ain't We Got Fun?"

## School Boards and Matters of Law and Custom

School boards, symbolic of public authority in matters of law and custom, were in Jo's experience, and generally at the time, entirely male, typically farmers and neighbors. Des Moines Township's board was composed of one member representing each school and alone responsible for hiring and oversight of that school's teacher. Jo's first interview was eased when Rebecca, then teaching at Turkey Scratch, took her to meet that school's Director, Mr. Myers. West Union, an independent school district, had three directors, all of whom came to interview Miss Teeter at her parents' home. Mr. Deed Scovel, Director of Rabbit's Delight, interviewed Josephine in his home. "I dressed as I was instructed to dress, but that wasn't right in the country, really. But I did wear a hat, and it seems to me I wore a suit." Yes, a suit borrowed from Rebecca. Whether Josephine was dressed too formally or not, Mr. Scovel hired the neighbor girl, and now experienced teacher, on the spot. He signed her to a basic contract, as was customary, in which she contracted to teach eight months and the director contracted for the township to pay her a certain amount, in this case \$80 per month.



Jo Teeter, mid 1920s

Although a Kansas school board might be "Asking For The One With The Good Looks," boards wanted no flappers, no boy cuts, no flaming youth who got all dolled up in their glad rags and went out to petting parties. In Iowa as in Kansas and elsewhere, "Young women with too much color in their faces and who wear short skirts that are too short are not desired"—this in an era when movies like *Rouged Lips* were playing at Fairfield's Victory theater. School board members certainly wanted not the breath of a suggestion that sexuality and adept teaching of the three R's might be

commingled in the same woman. In the 1920s a rural woman schoolteacher was nearly always prohibited from continuing if she married. Nora Oliver, Josephine's teacher at Ellmaker No. 2 in the fall of 1914, quit in mid-year to marry. When Rebecca Teeter and Homer Wheeldon wished to marry in 1924, halfway through her teaching year at County Line, they had to go off secretly thirty or forty miles to the town of Washington in another county. Rebecca apparently told no one, certainly not even sister Josephine, until the school year ended.<sup>396</sup>

The tradition of prohibiting marriage was of long standing. In 1905 a local teacher had married during the school year, whereupon as a matter of course the board of directors hired a replacement. Miss Pearl Kneedler, a rural Floris teacher, had married secretly in August 1915, taught that year, "and none in the locality was the wiser." She and Rebecca Teeter Wheeldon must have been in a small minority who successfully evaded the rule. Retired teachers who had taught in Jo's area during the '20s and '30s remembered only one public exception to the rule, Ethel Morrison, who had continued teaching many years after marrying Fred. Margery Loy Ornduff offered the reasonable suggestion that, "Well, she was awful good, and she didn't have a family," that is, had no children. Veteran Jefferson County teacher Margaret McGaw married Harold A. Nelson in 1919, but nevertheless was asked to fill a suddenly vacated position in Union school northeast of Fairfield, which she did for a year or two before becoming pregnant. An 1899 example from neighboring Wisconsin is more typical, for there the Milwaukee school board refused to appoint "women who have husbands capable of supporting them." That tradition was reasserted officially in Fairfield during the Depression when the school board announced that it would hire no married women after September 1936.<sup>397</sup>

Beyond rules and customs that affected a young woman teacher's behavior were the facts that school boards offered at most one-year contracts, that most women were limited in the range of schools where they might work, and that rumors of impropriety would magnify as they spread with the blinding speed of a phone call on a party line. Finally, a low salary's limitations were significant. After paying for boarding out or giving her parents gifts, Jo bought some clothing, including a few dresses and some dress material over the years. She paid for some movies (although dates with Chet limited those costs); contributed some school supplies; saved a bit, although some of that bit was lost when the Batavia bank failed. There was simply not enough money to live high or to travel far, at least not as a matter of course.

## Jo's Travels and Adventures, at Home and Afar

Ok, go to the Fair, but don't take any wooden nickels. Three times while teaching, Jo attended the Des Moines State Fair. She went by train in 1924 (with a special round trip fair ticket of \$2 and change) and stayed in a hotel with Edith Stull and Rebecca. This was Jo's first State Fair, her first hotel. She went by train with Mildred Sandell in 1926, staying a couple of nights with Mildred's aunt. And she went by car in 1928, "with Mother, Bernard, Clarence Stewart and his mother and we camped and that was a different experience. We

didn't get much sleep because people were calling, 'Here Joe, here's your mule.' Or they were calling hogs." "Calling Swine" had been "A New Sport"



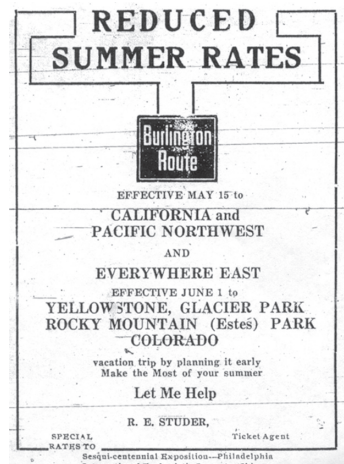
*Batavia News Historical Edition, July 2, 1936*

in Phil Stong's *State Fair*, experiences that three chaste movie versions downplayed or ignored. Jo's trips in these years were short trips, brief trips, all in state.<sup>398</sup>

But in 1927 Jo managed a major exception because Edith Stull recruited her for an adventure. Edith had cousins in Wichita, and she and Jo had a mutual friend (and Jo's high school classmate), a local teacher, Irene Meyers, whose family lived in Denver. So early one bright morning in mid-June, after serious planning and packing, after Jo's normally undemonstrative father had kissed her goodbye, after Nellie Stull drove them to Batavia station, she and Edith boarded the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy cars and rolled across all of Iowa to the west. They rolled across all of Nebraska—Jo's first travel



in 1926, but it had grown pretty old by 1928, although it continued for many years thereafter. Never, of course, did Jo even approximate the racy experiences of those neighboring Van Buren County fictional youngsters



*Batavia News, May 6, 1926*



Granddaughter-in-law  
Kathryn Venz Curtis  
modeling Jo's 1920s  
knickerbockers



Irene Meyers and  
Edith Stull, Estes Park,  
Colorado



Edith Stull at Denver  
zoo, modeling 1927  
knickerbockers

anywhere outside of Iowa—and then on into Denver the next morning after sitting and sleeping in their chair car, after picnicking their supplies away.

Irene and her father met them with the family car, and during several days guided them around Denver and environs. In Denver Jo saw and heard her first talkie. Edith, Jo, and Irene stayed in an Estes Park hotel. Seventy years later Jo recalled vividly, “Going up Big Thompson Canyon was the first time I’d seen anything like that, and it really was thrilling. Now I understand it’s all built up there.”

In eastern Colorado the two travelers also visited the Garden of the Gods near Colorado Springs. And they took a seven-passenger, open touring car up Pike’s Peak, surely another thrilling experience in that land of great spaces and long views, so different from the gentle prairie swells and low hills of southeastern Iowa. Among Jo’s papers, a blank postcard from that trip features the Royal Gorge in full garish color, almost as wondrous in its depths as Pike’s Peak in its heights, scenery that Jo and Edith absorbed from the seat of another seven-passenger, open touring car. A second blank postcard in color features Cheyenne Mountain (later to become a honeycombed U. S. Defense Department cavern). Its florid accompanying text asserts, “Without a doubt the most wonderful scenic feature of the Pikes Peak region is a trip to the Cripple Creek Gold District

over the famous Corley Mountain Highway. The magnificent panorama of mountain scenery presented for a distance of forty-five miles has no equal in the world. By horseshoe curves and loops it sweeps around almost impassable abysses and mountains, showing several elevations of road below.”

Then, still breathless, it was back on the train for Jo and Edith, across great rolling Kansas wheat fields toward Wichita; a visit with Edith’s cousins there; a brief stop between trains in Kansas City. There the seasoned travelers “shopped”—Jo buying a gift (“maybe a teapot”) for Ollie. Then the final leg, arriving on Rock Island No. 30 at County Line station, Wednesday evening, June 29, where Nellie met them; and finally down the road less than a mile, home after a full two weeks in the wider world. “They report a wonderful trip.” That fall Jo returned the favor she had enjoyed in Colorado when “Miss Irene Meyers of Fairfield was an over Sunday . . . visitor with Miss Josephine Teeter and attended the Harvest Day program” at County Line church.<sup>399</sup>

Josephine, born in 1903 only a few weeks before the brothers Wright first flew at Kitty Hawk, returned from the West in late June 1927, amidst swirling excitement incited by another traveling midwesterner just a year older than Jo, a transatlantic traveler, Charles Lindbergh, Lucky Lindy, Slim. In 1923 as Jo had graduated from high school and was preparing to teach, Slim Lindbergh had bought his first plane, had barnstormed and hedgehopped around northern Iowa and Minnesota. Now he had been the ninety-second man to fly the Atlantic (the first two in 1919), but the first to fly alone, a significant fact in the psyche of many Americans (and French, etc.). Lindy was The Lone Eagle. Later that summer newspapers reported the flyer would appear at the Iowa State Fair, and a later headline read, “Lindy To Pass Over Ottumwa” on his way from Kansas City to Davenport, a leg of his triumphal victory lap around the country. Ottumwa businesses were asked to paint the town’s name on roofs, as a navigational aid, which some did, including John Morrell and Company. Just one year and five days following Lindy, another midwesterner, Amelia Earhart, became the first woman to fly the Atlantic; but, traveling as a passenger in the company of males, she received much less attention. Four years later, in 1932, she made the flight alone, but in the public mind, nurtured not only by the press but by the new media of radio and movie newsreels, focus was always on the handsome, photogenic, modest hero Lindy, Lindy, Lindy. The jitterbugging Lindy Hop swept the country. Lindbergh landed at Paris in late May; by mid-June, People’s Furniture Company in Fairfield was selling Lindy statuettes for a \$1.10. Both Jo Teeter and Lindbergh would marry



in 1929, and the next year both would have a firstborn boy, both seized by tragedy.<sup>400</sup>

During the 1920s, before and after the Denver interlude and the Lindy excitements, Jo's travels were down-to-earth, limited, and generally routine, although not always unexciting. Morning and night during six years Miss Teeter walked to and from school, when distances were a quarter of a mile or a mile, rode or drove a horse and buggy for greater distances, and took the family Ford on occasion during 1926-27 at Rabbit's Delight. While teaching at Turkey Scratch, Miss Teeter sometimes rode a horse three road miles from her parents' home just east of County Line, sometimes drove a horse and buggy, sometimes walked as the crow flew. "When I walked I walked through the fields straight south two miles. Dad walked with me the first time," Jo was amused seventy-eight years later. "I guess he was afraid I might get lost."

Depending upon weather and season, walking might be delightful, difficult, or dangerous, in soft or stinging air, with meadowlarks on fence posts in spring, and redwing blackbirds in the sloughs; or in winter a crow trio black against the snow, or, rarely, a rabbit fleeing a fox. In whatever conditions or scenery, walking served a utilitarian, everyday purpose. Nowadays, Jo Curtis opined accurately in the year 2000, albeit a bit sniffily, people walk for "exercise."

### **Blizzards and Other Lonesome Dangers**

Depending upon weather, day, hour, or critter; riding or driving a horse might be delightful, difficult, or dangerous. When she wasn't driving the Model "T," Miss Teeter, her skirts tucked up modestly fore and aft, rode astride "Bonnie," the tall bay mare, rode almost five miles to and from Rabbit's Delight. This was the horse that "brother Earnest had broke to take off when you got one foot in the stirrup . . . I was always lucky [and expert enough?] to make it up on her." Did you run her or walk her? "Mostly I walked her, I think, after I got her slowed down. One time my feet were so cold I thought I'd get off and walk and send her home. She didn't want to go because she must have thought she hadn't taken me far enough, but she finally did. There was a barn right across the road from the school. I kept her there. Copeland's barn."

In some situations, even being lucky or expert around horseflesh was woefully insufficient. One Friday afternoon in March 1926, late winter, Jo's brother Bernard traveled as usual the dozen miles from the Teeter's near County Line to West Union school, to get Jo for the usual home



weekend. Because roads were too abominably muddy for the “T” Ford, he came with a team and buggy; and he came with a blackening blizzard at his back. In *Vandemark’s Floy* describes an Iowa blizzard: “In an instant, almost . . . the air was filled with such a smother of snow that the landscape went out of sight in a great cloud of deep-shaded whiteness . . . As the storm continued, it always grew cold; for it was the North emptying itself into the South.”<sup>401</sup>

When they headed west for home in a Vandemarkian blizzard, Bernard, Jo, and horses had to face driving sleet and snow head on. Now, as we know, a cold horse wants to get warm and to get to the barn. As we should also know, if a cold horse is a frisky horse, two cold horses illustrate, sometimes dangerously, the principle of synergism, which abbreviated means that two cold horses as a team are friskier than two separate horses. Which is a convenient circumlocution for saying that somehow Bernard, at twenty plenty strong and plenty expert around horses, suffered plenty of bad luck when the wooden double tree that linked horse harness to buggy either broke or pulled loose in the windy chaos. Next thing Bernard and Jo knew the horses had torn loose from the buggy and the reins from Bernard and were gone; and there Bernard and Jo sat, empty handed, huddled together on the buggy seat, orphans in the storm. By now it was as pitch black as blinding white snow can make it; and they had to find shelter soon. So they started plodding and plowing up the road toward the Goehring’s house, which turned out to be about half a mile: “That’s a long way in a blizzard,” long enough and cold enough and scary enough to give a fella—or a girl—the heebie-jeebies, as the current popular song said.

At the Goehring’s was that godsend in crises, the telephone—when the lines weren’t down—which they weren’t this time. “At that time all were on party lines [and everyone listened in when Jo reported to their parents while Bernard hunted and finally found the horses]. Neighbors heard the call and two friends [including Jimmy Laughlin, one of Jo’s 20’s dates] came in a car for us. They arrived at the place where we were [and] we started back, but it was blowing and drifting so much we only got about a half mile. We walked” back to Goehring’s house “and had to stay all night. I slept with one of the children. It was so cold and not enough covers that I slept very little.” Later, a Goehring girl reported sleeping under the bed because the top was taken. “The boys sat up around the stove. The next morning my brother Earnest and Colonel Laughlin [Jimmy’s father] came for us in another buggy . . . The car had to be left and the buggy was mended and we arrived home late Saturday a.m.”

Jo’s experience somewhat echoed Emerson’s “The Snow Storm,”

in which “All friends shut out, the housemates sit / In a tumultuous privacy of storm.” But the tale is not quite over. For the unremarked fact in Jo’s memoir is that the next day, Sunday, she (and no doubt brother Bernard) had to trek back to West Union. Did they take that same frisky team?

On another occasion, although less dramatically, a blizzard figured in Miss Teeter’s teaching experience, and her salary. During her first winter, snowfall being significant and more on the way, she had stayed overnight with a family near the school. Next morning’s driving blizzard made prospects for students dim or nonexistent, but Miss Teeter made her way through drifts, built up the fire, and dawdled a determined half day alone in Turkey Scratch schoolhouse. Why such dedication? Because the school board required a teacher’s attendance for at least a half day, if she were to be paid for that day. Thus snow days were no-pay days, although a teacher could be reimbursed if make-up days occurred.

A schoolhouse could be a spooky place for a young woman alone. In 1929 a friend of Jo’s, Dorothy Hoffman, took a rather elegant school (in Nebraska) with a basement and a furnace, “where I had the cat and the tramp! There was a school cat that lived in the cob bin in the basement. She kept us free of mice and she slept by the furnace register during the day. And the tramp! Well he came regularly and slept in the cob bin too. He came late—how he entered no one knew, but when I arrived in the a.m. I could smell his pipe.”

Bessie C. Thompson, although admitting to being afraid when early or late at school, discovered benefits from such visitors: “I have looked back and have seen a man going into the school house. They never did any harm and would keep a good fire all night and it would be warm in the morning.” Another Iowa teacher, finding her schoolhouse warm, “left a ‘thank you’ note on the board, and the building was warm more often.” Another, Agnes Samuelson, had similar warming experiences, but one morning found this blackboard note: “I did not kidnap Pat Crowe, but I would kidnap the teacher if I got a chance.”<sup>402</sup>

In comfortable and distanced retrospect, these were evidently harmless, homeless men—an almost normal fact in the rural 1920s—who had to get out of the cold, but at the time such situations were nevertheless authentically scary. Once at Turkey Scratch, when Jo “arrived at school all the shades were down and I was scared to open the door but found nothing else disturbed. I learned later it was no tramp but a young man who lived not far from the school who decided to stay in the schoolhouse instead of going home . . . I don’t know how he got in the building . . . We had [steel mesh] guards on all the windows.”

During 1926-27, when weather and mud roads allowed, when Earnest or Bernard or her parents didn't need the family car, Miss Teeter drove fairly often to Rabbit's Delight, surely enhancing her status with students female and male alike. Jo had learned to drive the family "T" Ford open touring car soon after high school graduation. Her primary driving teacher was probably little brother Bernard; her auxiliary teacher, more-than-occasional-date Chet Curtis in his mother's car of the same type and approximate vintage as the Teeter's. A few years before she drove to Rabbit's Delight, the Teeters had sold the open car and had replaced it with a much more practical, closed Ford sedan. As for Jo's driving license, what license? In those days, one simply learned a little bit and lurched off. Iowa did not require driver's licenses until 1931. In later, much later, years, respectably and legally licensed for many decades, Jo continued driving for a short time into the third millennium.

### **Jo Dates Local Men, including Chet**

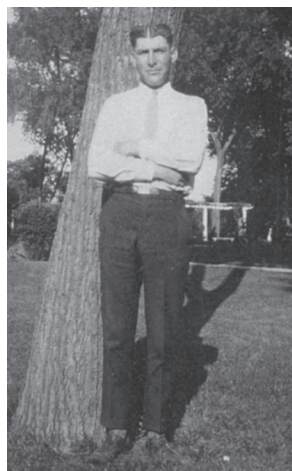
Jo had begun dating Chet Curtis in early summer 1922, after they had met when he blind dated best friend Mildred Sandell that spring, on a Fairfield movie double date. Jo had been with Ralph Harris, who had brought Chet. She had dated Ralph casually a few times, but "he had trouble with his teeth and got sick." And, "I went with Earl Somebody, but I can't think of his last name." In early June, Chet called Jo "and asked if he could come over. I had to go to a children's program with Rebecca at the Brethren Church. So he and Homer came and took us home." Ollie, presumably adhering to the safety-in-numbers-double-dating theory, "wouldn't let me go" with Chet unless Rebecca had a date as well. So, the four, with Homer Wheeldon squiring Rebecca, went out "quite a bit."

One of Rebecca's children told the family story that Homer and Chet, neighbors, "sometimes came in the Model T to call on the girls." One night after the couples had separated for fond farewells, "one went to the car and the other to the porch for several hours . . . Each guy



Homer Wheeldon and Chester Curtis, mid 1920s

wondered why the other was so late.” In fall ‘23, as Jo was beginning teaching, “The Misses Rebecca and Josephine Teeter, Homer Wheeldon and Chet Curtis motored to Burlington Sunday and spent the day at the Russell Gorman home.” One winter Chet drove a team and bobsled the five or so miles from his mother’s place west and north of Batavia to Jo’s parents’ east of County Line. From there he and Jo, Rebecca and Homer Wheeldon, Letha Ornduff and Bob Gonterman, drove around chill country roads before retreating to the house. By 1925, however, reported Ennis Sterner, “Chet Curtis had to go Teetering by himself since Homer Wheelding got married.”<sup>403</sup>



Chet Curtis, late 1920s

On dates, “Where did you go? What did you do?” Thus asks inquisitive, prying son in December 2000. “Oh, I can’t answer that. We went to different things. I don’t remember everything.” A meat loaf demands to be ovened immediately. Son: “Don’t you want the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your book?” Mother: “You can leave some of it out.” “We went to programs at County Line Church.” And beginning in fall ‘22, senior year, Chet began driving her back to Fairfield “most of the time” on Sunday evenings from her parents’ in his mother’s “T” Ford touring car, with rag top

and removable side curtains. One Sunday evening the fabric “was torn clear across the top, and it was down in our faces, and it was cold.” Jo came home by train, returned by car. Like millions of others, romantic reasons or no, she was shifting from public toward private transportation.

Actually, Jo had not been drawn to Chet early on. “It took a long time, really.” Nevertheless, the two continued seeing each other through Jo’s teaching years. “We went to any shows that were at Batavia. Then we got to going to Ottumwa, and we went to Eldon to movies [in the Opera House]. We went to his [Batavia High] alumni banquets. He was President a lot of the time.” In 1927 among those offering toasts was Chester Curtis, ‘21, to



Jo and Chet at Waterworks Pond, Fairfield, late 1920s

“Courage.” Both Josephine Teeter and Chester Curtis appear regularly on County Line Night Club guest lists in 1928. In that same year, Jo and Bernard attended the Batavia funeral of Chet’s grandfather, Judson Curtis. And that summer, “Miss Josephine Teeter and friend [guess who] were among the visitors at Oakland Mills, near Mt. Pleasant, Sunday.” For Christmas 1928, Chet gave Jo a rather elegant wall mirror.<sup>404</sup>

During at least the early 1920s Jo saw other local young men as well, although casually and apparently without strong flickers of interest, at least on her part. Who else did you go with in the ‘20s? “There was Russell Somebody . . . Oh, yes, Russell Stump.” He was short? “No, he was tall. And Jimmy Laughlin, Harry Kracht, Russell Stump, Verle Blair. I don’t remember. That’s enough.”

Jimmy Laughlin, who had tried and failed to rescue Jo from the blizzard, had been an elementary schoolmate, a friend. “I think I only went with Jimmy once. I don’t remember where we went.” Harry Kracht and Russell Stump had been involved in the young people’s neighborhood play Jo had promoted and directed at West Union school. Concerning Harry, “I rode his horse. I don’t remember what he rode. At times I rode a Bogle horse [which he and Russell apparently vied to put away in the barn], and Harry was in this play, so we were together at different times. One time after practice we went to a charivari [that one for Carl and Larue Clark Frieburg] on horses because it was so muddy.” That was in late February 1926.<sup>405</sup>

Concerning Russell Stump, “He took me to a pie supper at County Line. Also we took a walk with Walter Davisson and the girl he was with. I can’t think of her name. This was one time I stayed at the Bogle’s over the weekend. Well, we went to the round barn. That was really something to see at the time. That was probably a mile.” In a farming community, that round barn was certainly an attraction. Fifty feet in diameter, sixty-five high, with three floors for livestock, grain, hay, and vehicles, it had been fitted out by Fairfield’s Loudon farm equipment company. It even had running water and an electrical generator that served the farmhouse as well. Curiosity satisfied, the walkers returned “to the girlfriend’s house and had supper, spent the evening there talking, and then we walked home. She was in the school district, so it couldn’t have been more than two or three miles.” Readers who total those miles will note that Jo was her peripatetic father’s daughter. She was a fast walker into her eighties. Then a slower walker in her nineties and beyond as a centenarian, but a walker nevertheless.<sup>406</sup>

In the ‘20s, concerning Verle Blair, “We were on the porch. We hadn’t got gone yet, and his girlfriend came. She was very nice about it.



And the next day she apologized for coming. And he married her.” And, one supposes, lived happily ever after, with Jo no-future-home-wrecker. “We just took a ride in Verle’s car, just went around.” Did you stop? “Not that I remember. They’re both dead, so you can’t prove or disprove this.”

## **From Teaching to Marriage, Motherhood, and the Great Depression**

When did you start going steady with Dad? “Oh, I can’t remember. We got engaged in the fall of ’28” while on the way to a pie supper. How did that happen? “How? He asked me to marry him, and we went to Burlington in his car and got both rings from Uncle Gus,” who had a jewelry shop. They then visited sister Irene and Russell Gorman before returning smoothly up US Highway 34, newly paved only a year or so earlier, in Chet’s first car, a Ford coupe he had bought from future brother-in-law Homer Wheeldon.



Jo’s Uncle Gus Teeter in his jewelry and watch shop

Why didn’t you marry sooner? “I guess he wasn’t ready to.” You were? “I think so. Yeah, I was.” Perhaps Jo would have agreed in part with Edna Spencer’s succinct summary: “So I got married. I got tired of that teaching.” Chet and Jo married in April 1929, very soon after her last day, as she thought, of school teaching.<sup>407</sup>

Did you enjoy teaching? “Well, yes and no. Oh, I got along all right. But it wasn’t the profession . . . I would rather have been a stenographer.” Ollie had not only objected to Josephine’s original wish in high school, but as well to her later wish while she was teaching, probably in 1925, to take a summer business course. And, foreshadowing of their future together, Chet had also demurred. In 2000 Jo was not certain that he had objected in so many words, but, “I think it was because he thought men [in offices] were not as good to ladies as they should be.”

Despite thwarted wishes; despite sometimes dirty, dull, and dilatory students; despite small potatoes pay, Miss Teeter “got along all right.” Jo must sometimes have agreed with teaching veteran and friend, Mildred Sandell Dallner: “I always said it was like grinding sausage. You just ground and ground and ground.” Nevertheless, Jo found the daily work interesting and challenging in its way; and she had as well the enduring satisfaction of serving her students and her community as an honest professional. Early in 2002 more than seventy-five years later, Jo hoped that she had been “an example to many children. I hope that I have been, as I have taught.”



On the last day of her second and last year at District No. 7, Miss Teeter's students, some of whom she had disciplined, had washed behind the ears, and had failed in classes, presented her nevertheless with an elegant carnival glass bowl on tripod legs. Late in 2006



eighty-one years Jo Teeter (right rear) with Turkey Scratch students later, a nursing home aide volunteered that one of the last things she ever heard Jo say, was that she had taught at "Turkey Scratch." Is there, asked the aide, such a place as Turkey Scratch?



Jo Teeter (left) with County Line students glasses. "And I still have them." By accident or design, at a County Line ladies wedding shower, Grandma Acton presented her with a matching half dozen. And the dozen still make a handsome set.

More than seventy years later, Jo received a ninety-eighth birthday card from a County Line student, "With many happy memories of my year at school and you as my teacher . . . This was my first year of a little country school. It was a change, but I did like it so very much . . . So glad you

At County Line No. 3, in 1929 as she prepared to leave them and teaching altogether, Miss Teeter's students showered her with wedding presents. Her girls brought individual gifts, while her boys had pooled money for six clear, stemware dessert

were one of my early teachers. I'll always remember you with love. Alma Mellott Woolums." For Jo's hundredth, a student at Rabbit's Delight in 1926-27, Helen Scovel (Hoffman), herself almost eighty-nine, noted, "I put your picture on my door . . . Your picture is very nice."

While teaching, as later, Jo was grateful for appreciative students. She was also glad that since Normal Training had prepared her well, being fully certified meant summer school renewal classes were not required. She was able to do most preparation and grading during school hours so that most evenings, weekends, holidays, and summers were free for housework, reading, occasional Ottumwa or Fairfield shopping, and socializing with girlfriends and a few young men, principally Chet.

Although pay was minimal, after subtracting living expenses and small savings, the rest was all Jo's to spend as she wished. Low pay was somewhat compensated by low costs: a \$10 "decent" dress, dress materials for much less; Jo could remember that a big J. C. Penney bath towel was twenty-five cents, sheets ninety-eight, a pillow case thirty-five. Travel costs—the occasional State Fair, the big western loop (costing perhaps a month's pay)—were not entirely prohibitive.<sup>408</sup>

Finally, Josephine Teeter's ability, as a young, rural early-twentieth-century Iowa woman, to derive even limited satisfaction from limited opportunities, illustrates that her view of life, its potential, and its satisfactions, had developed relative to time, place, and condition. Thus it seemed to her in later years that she had had, "nothing to worry about before 1929," that is, nothing to worry about in those relatively carefree years before being plunged into Marriage, Motherhood, and the Great Depression of the 1930s.

## CHAPTER 6: THREE CHARIVARIS— AND NO HONEYMOON

Their many friends wish them a happy and joyous married life.

—*Batavia News*, May 2, 1929

For all her yielding and self-sacrificing, there is something in her that doesn't give when it's pushed at. She only gives up her wishes, never herself.

—Wallace Stegner, *Big Rock Candy Mountain*

It was raining pitchforks on the day Mr. Chester Kerlin Curtis of rural Batavia and Miss Josephine Mae Teeter of rural Des Moines Township were wed. The Mississippi River was in flood, in neighboring Kansas a potato field was six feet under, and in southeastern states fifty people had died in tornadoes. Three decades later on my own wet wedding day, Chester's mother, my grandmother, drew upon her Kentucky background for the old saying: "Rainy day, stormy bride." If Ada Tresenriter Curtis had made that prediction on her own daughter-in-law's wedding day, she would have been, as we shall see, entirely mistaken as she was about my own bride.<sup>409</sup>



Mr. and Mrs. Chester Curtis,  
April 28, 1929

On Sunday, April 28, 1929, at 3 p.m., in accordance with local custom dictated in large part by financial concerns, Chet, age twenty-five, and Jo, twenty-six, had a private wedding in the rural Agency, Iowa, home of their favorite Methodist minister. The retired Reverend David Phillips, a Welsh immigrant, had formerly filled Batavia and County Line pulpits. The groom, wavy black hair severely trimmed on the sides, parted exactly in the middle, wore a light checked suit and flowery tie. The bride had Brunette hair strikingly Marcelled in rigorous waves and wore "a beautiful gown of tan georgette

crepe trimmed in tan lace to match,” a tea length gown she had bought in Ottumwa. Bride and groom were accompanied and witnessed only by Jo’s brother, Bernard, and Chet’s sister, Naomi. In the couple’s wedding book is a Fairfield Flower Shop envelope to “Josephine Curtis” with a handwritten card to “My darling with Love, Chet.”<sup>410</sup>

Following the brief ceremony and after dropping Naomi off at the Fansher place, Bernard drove the newlyweds in the Teeter Ford back to the house where Jo’s parents had wed in the parlor thirty-seven years earlier. Ollie had prepared a family supper for bride, groom, and Bernard; for Jo’s sister Rebecca, Homer, Vernon, Louise, and George Wheeldon; and for sister Irene, Russell, Bernice, Ferne, and Leonard Gorman.

After Ollie’s feast the newlyweds made the short drive in Chet’s Ford coupe to his widowed mother’s farm northwest of Batavia. Chet had worked that farm since graduating from high school. As Jo and Chet prepared to marry in 1929 Ada and her youngest, Leonard, then thirteen, moved from Ada’s new house to the small one just down the road, on Johnny Fansher’s land that Chet rented and farmed.

On Ada’s farm the bride, only days earlier “a very successful school teacher for several years,” and the groom, “a young man of sterling qualities . . . who has already made a fine success of the farming industry,” settled in. They did so with the published assurance that they were “highly esteemed” in their community and that “their many friends wish them a happy and joyous married life.”<sup>411</sup>

### **Ear-Splitting Charivari, a Rural Ritual**

Their many friends notified them thus by charivari. On their wedding night after Ollie’s supper and after dark, bride and groom arrived at their newly furnished home, which lacked only curtains and shades. Soon after arriving the potentially joyous couple was roused out by window-rattling blasts from three shotguns wielded just outside the house by Harry and Bertha Curtis McNiel, Charlie and Marie Loy Gorman, Margery Loy, and Delbert (Deb) and Grace Morrison Johnson. Marie and Charlie, having married just a month earlier, were highly conversant with noise-making methods. Marie remembered one charivari whose perpetrators had a large circular steel buzz saw blade dangling from an iron rod through the center hole, “and somebody’d get on each side, and then they’d hit that a crackin’, and they’d be makin’ all that racket.” After sufficient noise, Chet and Jo invited everyone in to receive obligatory cigars for the “boys,” candy for the “girls.”

That rural Iowa ritual observed, the happy couple could now settle down. Until Monday night. At least a hundred friends and neighbors arrived, so Chet had to send best man Bernard to town for more see-gars and candy. "We invited the group inside and they stood around and visited. When the treats arrived they all filed out wishing us much happiness . . . The Monday night group threw so much rice on us as they left. It got in the rug very bad and not having a vacuum we had to pick the last of it up with our fingers."

Much happiness. Until . . . "Tuesday night some of the neighbors came. They were late. We were in bed. It took much scrambling to get dressed, having to dress in the little hall as we hadn't gotten the shades up and were afraid they would shine lights in the windows. The hall was [the] only place where all doors could be closed. When we turned the porch light on Frank Lamis was doing an Indian dance." Frank and Lena's son, Ronald, age four, "had gone to sleep in the car [and] was much disappointed the next morning that he had missed out on the fun." Fifty years later, Jo was still miffed at closest neighbor down the road, "Ernest Latta who smoked his cigar and dropped all wrappings and ashes on the floor." And on the just recently-riceless rug. (Mr. Latta's carelessness, incidentally, was enduring. During World War II when auto tires were rationed and Chet bought some hay from him, Ernest mentioned casually that Chet and the boys might run across the half dozen or so tires that he had carelessly placed out of sight in his haymow.) Their marriage now sanctioned by three charivaris (the large number perhaps related to Chet's practical joker reputation), farming demanded the newlyweds' attention.

### **Clearing and Civilizing an American Serengeti**

From early pioneering days to 1929 a major task for farmers had been to clear the land of undesirable but sometimes incidentally money-making flora and fauna, to make the county, state, region, safe for commercial farming. Barbara Kingsolver writes in *Prodigal Summer* of "the undercurrent of tragedy that went with farming." And Curtis Harnack writes baldly but truly in *We Have All Gone Away*, "Every farmer must be a killer of both wild and domestic plants and animals." A descendant of Calhoun County, Iowa, pioneers noted, "Most of the grain they planted for the first several years was eaten by wild ducks, geese and cranes. Deer came to the haystacks at night." Similarly W. H. Sullivan, Jefferson County pioneer, remembered chasing passenger pigeons from crops. As a boy the conservationist John Muir saw perhaps millions of passenger pigeons clear "thousands of acres

perfectly clean of acorns in a few minutes.” The naturalist John J. Audubon witnessed a three-day cloud of pigeons so thick that “the light of noon-day was obscured as by an eclipse.” Iowan John Newton Hughes recalled, “In the season of 1886-87 . . . a farmer had . . . left in the field some forty to sixty acres of corn. When the snow was deep and feed was scarce, the prairie chickens . . . increased daily until . . . more than fifty thousand birds made . . . an inspiring sight . . . and the rustling of their wings was similar to an approaching storm.” Such depredations obviously could not be allowed. In the work of clearing out undomesticated fauna, farmers became hunters and trappers, as did eager townsmen.<sup>412</sup>

To many farmers and other residents, the unwelcome cornucopia of varmints and pests to be killed seemed endless in this American Serengeti. In addition to passenger pigeons, in 1909 W. H. Sullivan remembered deer, turkey, pheasant, prairie chicken, big and little timber wolf, wildcat, lynx, catamount, ground hog, otter, and wild hog. Speaking in 1876 at Eldon Peter Mulvaney listed wild turkey, pelican, geese, brant, mallard, wood duck, snipe, prairie chicken, partridge, quail, pheasant, pigeon, rabbit, squirrel, mink, coon, possum, polecat, muskrat, and some deer.<sup>413</sup>

And there were snakes. In 1879 Jefferson County, north of Fairfield, “Mr. James Hedge . . . killed a batch of twenty-three rattlesnakes,” two old, about three feet long, the rest young, dug out from a nest two feet underground; Hedge’s total for the year thus far, twenty-six. In 1884, “A large rattlesnake with seven rattles was killed . . . at the water works park” just outside Fairfield, and in 1899 a twelve-rattler there. “Mr. S. Glotfelty killed a large rattlesnake with five rattles” in 1889 Jefferson County; as did Frank Daggett in 1899, a seven-rattler on Cedar Creek; as did the Reverend Cummings’ Des Moines River fishing party in 1912, a nine-rattler. Rattlesnakes virtually disappeared, but not entirely. About the time Josephine Teeter was born, a mother was horrified to find a rattlesnake on the bed with her sleeping baby. In 1904 a three-rattler critically injured a child east of Fairfield. The next year, “Only twelve rattlesnakes have been killed on the Stubbs farm northeast of the city . . . where a hundred was not an unusual number a few years ago . . . Not one has been killed on the city water works ground.” Miss Helen Putnam of near Mt. Pleasant killed one with a club in 1909, the first “seen around here for years.” In that year a Fairfield store put a seven-rattler in its front window, added two rats, and let nature take its course. Mother Nature sided with the rats, which killed the snake, although one victor died. As late as 1923 after Jo graduated from high school, “Rattlesnake Bite Kills Child Near Farmington,” a twelve-year-old girl, bitten on the ankle. According to a ghoulish report, “The



house occupied by the family is an old one and it is believed the snakes have a den under the building. A snake crawled through the room where a neighbor was sitting up with the corpse of the child, but was killed. This is the third rattler to be killed in the neighborhood this summer.”<sup>414</sup>

The best and boldest killers reportedly seized rattlers by their rattles, played crack the whip, and snapped their heads off. Most snakes suffered sticks and stones, slings and arrows, hoes and corn knives. Whatever the method, such deadly creatures obviously could not be allowed to cohabit. But many hunters simply blazed away at virtually any inoffensive creature, and in any numbers. In 1879, “Mr. Vic Lamson went shooting . . . on Cedar Bottom and succeeded in bagging sixty ducks.” In 1880, “John Teeter [not Josephine’s uncle], one of our good shots, brought down sixteen” on Cedar bottom. In 1885, “near the water works, M.A. Repass and Ralph Lamson saw two very large white birds . . . fired and brought them down . . . pelicans, the first . . . ever seen about here. The male measures eight feet four inches . . .” After being stuffed and mounted they would be presented to the Fairfield library museum. Fish, equally inoffensive, suffered as well. In 1889 using nets, “A party of Penn Township fishermen caught 3,000 pounds of fish at a single haul in a Skunk River slough last week.”<sup>415</sup>

In 1889 as well the *Fairfield Tribune* noted an upcoming “grand hunt” for “hawks, crows, skunks, owls, etc., but if farmers would consult their interests they would not kill one of them,” because they kill many mice—much worse pests. The *Tribune* represented growing support for at least limited preservation of wild species, perhaps for themselves alone, certainly as economic assets for farmers. Despite such warnings, a few weeks later, “Liberty and Des Moines Township boys had a side hunt” [that is, two sides competing], which bagged “852 rabbits, 80 owls, 60 quails, 4 pheasants, 1 skunk, 2 crows, 3 hawks, 3 squirrels.” Novelist Feike Feikema describes a similar hunt, but graphically: “Drips and puddles of blood spread everywhere. Cornstalks were drenched red. The earth seemed to be bleeding out of myriads of pores. Bits of torn flesh, scraps of live fur, burned powder, dust, corn smut, weed seeds flying in the air made it hard to breathe. Men cursed. Guns rumbled. Dogs barked and snapped . . . More guns thundered. Ejectors ejaculated empty shells, yellow and blue and red.”<sup>416</sup>

By 1929 arable land not originally covered with prairie grass on Ada’s 160 acres that Chet was farming had long been cleared of trees and brush, any of that relegated to ditches and a small timber pasture. The practice of clearing land was sweeping and of long duration. In 1881, “McAlister &

Kelly have commenced to ship their walnut logs . . . twenty-three car loads . . . all taken from Competine and Cedar creeks . . . These logs cost on the cars . . . \$4,000. They are now sold for delivery at Glasgow, Scotland and Liverpool, England.” Steam engine trains evolved toward use of coal as fuel, but as late as 1898, Frank Fowler “contracted to saw 1,000 cords of wood at Krum for the CB&Q railroad.”<sup>417</sup>

By 1929 bison, bears, and bobcats were hardly a memory. The wolves that Jo’s father and ancestors had chased for bounty were long gone, as were most coyotes (sometimes casually called wolves or prairie wolves or timber wolves), at least for a time. In February 1889 there had been “three wolves roaming near Lockridge, one is black. The *Ledger* will give \$5 for that fellows pelt.” Next month a circle of two hundred hunters found no wolves. In April a Jefferson County farmer found seven wolf pups in a straw stack nest, killed them, and from the county pocketed \$2.50 bounty for each, each equaling about two days’ work. In 1908 J. A. Baldoser [Baldosier], Lockridge Township, shot and collected bounty for a wolf, but a “wolf hunt” that year numbered four or five hundred men, lots of rabbits slain, and no wolves. Hunters in 1913 and ’14 claimed numerous bounties (by then a significant \$4 for a cub, \$20 for an adult) from the county for “wolves,” mostly cubs from nests; but in a Wapello County wolf hunt participants saw one only, which escaped both hunters and hounds. Meanwhile, much more dangerous to livestock, particularly sheep, were dogs running wild. The 1875 Iowa Census reported that in Des Moines Township alone dogs had killed fifty-eight sheep. In 1920 Jefferson County reimbursed sheepmen \$2,136.75 for kills.<sup>418</sup>

Like wolves and coyotes, fox numbers were small in early-twentieth-century Jefferson and Wapello Counties. Much later, in 1934 after much publicity, 1,200 hunters surrounded a nine-square-mile circle and beat the brush as they moved toward the center, bagging a grand total of five foxes and two “wolves.” Deer had been rare since late in the previous century, rabbits were fair game for food and pelts, and quail numbers were way down from pioneer days when, as Batavia’s George Clark recalled, “Quails were so thick that I used to catch a hundred at a time in a net.” Wild turkeys would not reappear for many years. Passenger pigeons by the hundreds of thousands had long ago been slaughtered for sport, for meat, and because they fed on small grain. They had been “shipped out of Charles City to eastern markets for food at the rate of a [refrigerated rail] carload a day.”<sup>419</sup>

## The Disappearance of Prairie Chickens

Although many Iowa hunters had been banging away for years, in 1879, “The young prairie chickens [a bird in the grouse family] are . . . plenty . . . and will furnish sport in a few weeks.” Writing in 1867 a Marshall County resident recalled that one party had bagged 708, and another 311, “returning to town with their wagon loaded down.” By the time of Josephine Teeter’s 1903 birth, “The prospects for [prairie] chicken hunting are poor.” In the “Passing of the Prairie Chicken” (1905), J. S. Trigg warned that it was almost extinct in Iowa and much of the Midwest. “It is simply impossible for it to hold its own with pot hunters, market shooters, repeating and breechloading shotguns and the utter indifference and contempt with which the American people regard all laws for the preservation of wildlife.” A 1914 *Eldon Forum* article noted that W. G. Smith was trying to protect fifty-three prairie chickens and some quail on his farm from weather and hunters, but “the man with the gun . . . can destroy more in a few shots” than Smith could save in several seasons. The *Forum* also asserted in 1919 that each quail saved farmers \$10 to \$25 a year by eating insects and weed seeds.<sup>420</sup>

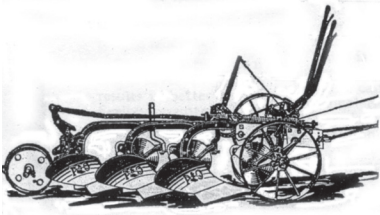
The last prairie chicken Chet Curtis could remember had been along a fencerow in March 1915 when his parents had moved across snowy fields to their new farm with children, livestock, machinery, and household goods. Such creatures could not survive seventy-five years of hunters and rapid loss of prairie habitat. By 1921 in *Vandemark’s Folly*, Herbert Quick could have his protagonist speak in elegiac tones about the decline or disappearance of the sight and sound in Iowa of Canada geese, snow geese, Wilson geese; and “the myriad voices of curlew, plover . . . bob-o-link, meadowlark, dick-cissel, killdeer and the rest.” And of the prairie chickens, “the musicians of the morning and evening . . . with their wild and intense and almost insane chorus . . . nobody will ever hear it again!” In the *Des Moines Register*, April 7, 2006, Perry Beeman noted current efforts to restore prairie chickens, and that “the species disappeared [completely] from the state in the 1950s.”<sup>421</sup>

Conservationists and legislators sometimes cooperated effectively. Announcement of an 1895 Burlington “shooting tournament” promised 10,000 live blackbirds and a thousand pigeons. By at least 1904 it had become illegal in Iowa to use live birds for trap shooting. But it was impossible to prevent all or even most wildlife killing, much openly acknowledged in local papers. The *Fairfield Ledger* noted in 1907 that Cedar Creek hunters had killed a female otter that was suckling young and that “It has been many years since one . . . has been captured in this part of Iowa.” The *Fairfield*

*Tribune*, sometimes conservationist, announced without comment in 1912 that on Crow Creek south of town John Conner had shot a golden eagle with seven-foot wingspread. Sensible Fish and Game laws in 1915 were easier to print than to enforce, and they could hardly cover every creature that might attract pot shooters. Blaming crows in 1924 and forming crow-hunting clubs, “Sportsmen are alarmed at the scarcity of game birds.” In 1927, “Paul Kesselring brought an eagle to school . . . His father shot the bird . . . the first . . . killed near Batavia for about ten years . . . It has been doing much damage carrying chickens away.” A headline in 1928 mournfully noted, “Squirrels Migrate And Ducks Are Few; Sportsmen Forlorn.” And, finally, in 1933 the year of my birth, “A large golden eagle—the only real golden eagle killed in Jefferson County in recent years . . . is on display in the Gobble and Heer clothing store windows.”<sup>422</sup>

### **The Pre-Depression Business of Farming**

Birds and other beasts under control, prairie grass and flowers and other native flora relegated to fence rows and wasteland, domesticated land and livestock safe, farmers like Chet Curtis could pay closer attention to business. In 1929 this meant focusing on increasingly necessary commercial aspects of farming as they struggled to get ahead, at least to get along, in a modern market economy. A 1920 *Fairfield Tribune* article succinctly compared the “modern” industrial agricultural model to antiquated methods: “The Old Time Farm Was Not A Business.” Rather, “It was simply a means of livelihood. Tedious and wasteful methods were the reason. Today the well managed farm is a plant—a place where every dollar invested shows a profit.” In such a system, a farmer had better pay attention to business, even on the day after his wedding. This even though in the outside world there were attractive distractions. Newspapers reported that glamorous evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson had been acquitted of charges that she had fabricated her own mysterious kidnapping; flamboyant Louisiana Governor Huey P. Long was being impeached for extortion, bribery, and misuse of public funds; Mexico’s government claimed it had killed a thousand rebels in the north; nevertheless Anne Morrow had left Mexico City on a northbound train for Laredo, Texas, and she might wed Lindy soon; Italian Premier Benito Mussolini, who had seized power in Jo’s senior year, also headed thirteen government ministries; some eastern and a few midwestern cities were going on “daylight savings time”; Jo’s favorite actress, Mary Pickford, would soon appear in *Coquette*; Nazi Party membership was approaching 200,000; and a son had been born to the

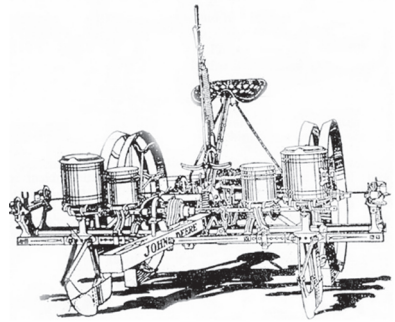


Large “three bottom” plow,  
*Batavia News*, August 18, 1927

family of a Baptist minister, Martin Luther King Sr. of Atlanta, Georgia. All of this might have been interesting, but was not relevant to matters at hand. Chet and Jo would be at work by sunup and often after sundown trying to use, rather than save, as much daylight as possible. And their work hardly depended on any national or international personage. It might have been heartening

to read a United States Department of Agriculture official’s prediction of a “golden age” of agriculture during the next decade. But the very next day they surely read that Grandpa Judson Curtis’s bankrupted Batavia Farmers State Bank assets—which included five parcels of land and \$135,000 of notes and judgments—had sold for \$5000 and change.<sup>423</sup>

Probably Chet, perhaps Jo, had noted if not exactly welcomed rain on their cool wedding day. For late April was planting season, and both newlyweds, offspring of generations of farmers, watched weather and temperature and soil conditions as naturally as later suburbanite commuters would ingest traffic reports with morning coffee. With farm work to be done, a honeymoon was never considered, even if desired. In fact in those days before commercial hybrid seed was readily available—or affordable—Chet had already shelled and sorted the best kernels from last year’s corn. Within a week he was planting them, following the annual cycle of his—and Josephine’s—ancestors.



Corn and soybean planter,  
*Batavia News*, April 12, 1923

## The Curtis Line of Farmers

The Curtis line of farmers, which included a circuit-riding Baptist preacher, church deacons, and upright jack-of-all-trades carpenters and handymen, extended well beyond American boundaries. It could be traced to deeply entwined roots in the English Midlands, in Leicestershire and Rutland. The original Curtis migrant, Henry, had been comfortably landed, having inherited from his father. But he chose to transport his wife, Alice Broughton, and twelve children to a New World and a new nation, perhaps because of the hard fact of numbers—the twelve—most of whom were boys.

In fact, his eldest son, John, already a man, led the way in the very early nineteenth century and bought a couple of farms and three houses for the family in Otsego County, New York. Henry and Alice died of disease in this New World, leaving twelve orphans, but each with a modest inheritance.

A younger son, Thomas, migrated to Manhattan, perhaps to live with a married sister. Perhaps at church he met Elizabeth Adams and her parents, late-eighteenth-century emigrants from London. In 1816 they were wed in Oliver Street Baptist church near East River wharves. In 1817 they had a daughter and moved to Kentucky, near Georgetown, fifty miles south of the Ohio River. Thomas farmed for seven seasons while their family grew. In 1824 following a common pattern including several of Jo Teeter's ancestors, Chet's ancestors crossed the river to southeastern Indiana.

A farmer on Ebenezer Ridge, Dearborn County, for his family's living, a circuit-riding Baptist preacher for his soul, Thomas Curtis would have known or known of Josephine Teeter's Baptist ancestors—Steeles, Dunns, Wilsons, Miles, Christies, Hands—in nearby Jefferson and Ripley Counties. He surely would have known if not admired Evan Miles, Baptist preacher who turned Universalist.

With Elizabeth Adams, Thomas begat Thomas Broughton Curtis, farmer and deacon of Ebenezer Baptist; who with Elizabeth Riley begat Thomas Judson Curtis, whiskey barrel maker, sawmill operator, farmer, land speculator, Methodist, mayor, and bank president in Batavia, Iowa; who with Louisa Loveday Bainum begat eldest son Thomas Arthur Curtis. Arthur, like earlier eldest Curtis son, John, led the way westerly for his family. He moved first into Illinois, where his father's family followed, and then to western Iowa, finally turning back east after being flooded out of Missouri River bottomlands to join the extended family near Batavia in 1903.

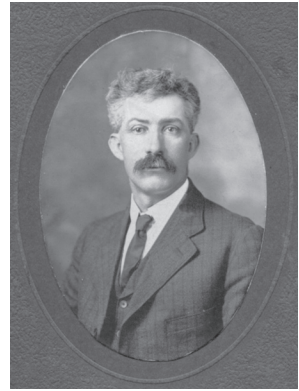
Chester's mother, Ada Claudia Tresenriter, was granddaughter and daughter of blacksmiths John Allen Tresenriter and John Wesley Tresenriter. Like Chet's other ancestors, and like Jo's, Ada had central-Kentucky roots, but deeper ones, having been born in the hill-and-river town of Greensburg, Green County. Her father Wes's poverty, however, and perhaps her mother Molly's ill tempered, sometimes disastrously dangerous outbursts, caused her at thirteen to become a "hired girl" in her sister Belle Tresenriter James's Illinois farm family. There she married neighbor Thomas Arthur Curtis, who with Ada begat Chester Kerlin, third child, and third son, in a family of seven.

Father Arthur died young of tuberculosis when Chester was fourteen, in 1918, leaving Ada with a bright and restless brood and a





mortgaged farm; leaving Chester without a father's guidance, someone to lay down the law. Ada was strong willed but obviously harried. Chester, born like J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* in 1904, became and remained the family's leading practical joker in an era of practical



Ada Claudia Tresenriter joking, he pestering and Thomas Arthur Curtis attempting to dominate his younger sisters, Bertha and Naomi, whom Ada urged to stand up for themselves.

An indication, perhaps, of Chet's developing public personality, and perhaps of his private self as well, appears in flyleaves of his textbook, *Carlyle's Essay on Burns*, for an English class at Batavia High School. There appears twice on the same page in his hand, "Mr Chester Curtis Senior B.H.S. 1921"; on another page his note to the effect that "Burns had emotional qualities," his only reference to the text; and in his hand also, two rhymes:

I loved her much further last night than ever I loved her before  
Her father came in and I slipped behind the door.

And,

In time of disappointment don't forget to call on me,  
I can pull off all the latest stunts and do them gracefully,  
I quite a hop-to-molly am as slick as slick can be,  
In time of disappointment don't forget to call on me.

Chet also made a significant marginal mark next to this passage in the Preface: "Carlyle says of his ancestors: 'They had to scramble, scuffle, for their very clothes and food. They knit, they thatched for hire, they hunted. My father tried all these things almost from boyhood . . . Misery was early training the rugged boy into a stoic.'"

Chet worked hard on the farm from an early age, especially after his father died. Batavia High School senior class news, fall 1920: "We are sorry that Ethan and Chester Curtis have to be absent from school so long on account of shucking corn." In fact the boys missed most of November plugging away at this often-miserable work; in fact Ethan delayed graduating

for a year because of farm work. He and Ada's eldest, Estol, for a few years helped at times, left eventually, left Chet in charge of the farm. With Mother Ada, he also had considerable authority over his younger brothers and sisters.<sup>424</sup>



Ada Curtis family. Ethan, Chester, Lawrence, Leonard, Bertha, and widow Ada. Not shown: Estol and Naomi

### **Getting Married was the Natural Thing to Do**

More than fifty years after her wedding, Jo wrote in a memoir, "Getting married at that time was the natural thing to do. It took me a long time to really fall in love with Dad," which for Jo was a process apparently at least as much of choice as of chemistry.

After a long and rather formal courtship, Jo found the everyday-ness of married life "surprising"—everyday work clothes, workaday relationships. When she and Chet had dated, "We were always dressed up and everything was lovely." She noted with apparent approval late in the twentieth century that in dating, "people are so casual with each other." Implicitly, women and men could now know each other less artificially, more naturally, before they married.

Just as marrying was "the natural thing," even if it brought a

surprising or even rude awakening from a Sunday kind of courtship, so “having babies was the natural thing then.” Ollie had taught Josephine little about sex, except that it was “dangerous.” Jo was left to seek, if she were not too reticent, whatever sources were not too reticent—perhaps older sisters, perhaps young married women friends, perhaps no one. While Josephine was in high school, a story headlined “Morality Lecturer Will Talk To Girls on ‘Story Of Life’” announced that Mrs. Linnie Carl of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union would discuss “delicate subjects” in the school auditorium, but that “She talks ideals of life rather than biology.” When Jo married, a Brooklyn, New York, woman was fined \$300 for mailing *The Sex Side of Life*. In Jo’s early years sex “was a sort of a secret.” Cornelia Otis Skinner, also young in the ‘20s, but much more worldly, nevertheless wrote in 1942, “In comparison with the modern generation, ours was an innocence which bordered on arrested development.” Jo always chose to be reticent about sexuality. Young Josephine knew of course that single neighborhood girls got pregnant sometimes (indelicate folks said they must have swallowed watermelon seeds) and generally married without great scandal. Inexperienced sexually, wed in the spring, pregnant by fall, Jo was a mother by late summer the following year.<sup>425</sup>

Although Jo found the shift from courtship to marriage “surprising,” she also wrote in 1981, “I don’t remember it being too hard to adjust to married life. I guess I am a person who takes changes as a matter of course, just sort of grow into what comes.” But she admitted that “The hardest part was not being free to make up my own mind in what I wanted to do like joining the ladies guild of the church and going to town when I wanted to. Dad didn’t want me to do things unless he could be involved. His mother was always home and he thought I should always be ready to do what his desire was. Most of my married life was good. In his way there was no one better than your father. He was always good to help me with any work I was doing; taking care of you boys, washing diapers, and all kind of work.”

Even so, Chet had made clear early in their marriage that Josephine’s desires were secondary, and that his will would prevail even in minor matters. One evening cousin Warren Curtis had been a supper guest and needed a ride home. Chet was ready, but Jo wanted to wash dishes before leaving. Chet and Warren waited, but once they were back home Chet berated Jo for embarrassing him and demanded that she never do such a thing again. “And,” said Jo, “I never did.” In November 2002 upon reviewing what she had written earlier, Jo admitted, “I had lived under Mother as boss all the time, so it didn’t matter.”

Ten years after being widowed, Jo emphasized that Chet “had to be the boss, or else. And this was the way to live with him. People have said I’m independent. But I certainly wasn’t when I was married. I always wanted to ask him what I should do. I didn’t make decisions. I did [decide about] clothing. He liked for me to look nice. But he wanted to accumulate money. Wanted to get out of debt. Wanted to be all out of debt by the first of the year. So if anything was left over you could have Christmas presents, or whatever.”

When she married, Jo had some teaching money in Fairfield’s First National Bank. “Chet wanted me to cash it out, and I did,” whereupon he deposited it in his Batavia bank account, upon which Jo could write checks. This was effectively a joint account, but in Chet’s name, apparently to him an important symbolic and perhaps practical distinction.

Years later, Jo wrote, “It’s too late now but I think at times I should have asserted myself. He would have gotten over it, I suppose. I believe it’s a woman’s privilege to express herself.” Then Jo returned to a crucial theme: “I’d seen my folks fight so much that I wasn’t about to live a life of fighting. But he wouldn’t fight. He’d just pout.”

Never with violence directed at Josephine, seldom with direct commands, Chet controlled primarily by withdrawal into tight-lipped silences, by body language that signaled withdrawal of approval or affection or permission. As Jo explained early in 2001, “You know, he could turn on and make everyone else mad, and then he could act like nothing ever happened.” When things went his way, increasingly most of the time, Chet could be pleasant, affable, a joker even. Chet’s wishes satisfied, her marriage sunny, Jo didn’t have “to live a life of fighting.”

Chet controlled the money, and he controlled the car. Jo had long driven, but when Iowa required driver’s licenses in 1931 Chet reasoned that since he drove Jo hardly needed one. She went without until 1937, when it became necessary to drive her eldest son to school while Chet worked. Perhaps understandably obsessive about saving money and escaping debt, he assumed control of finances, although both he and Jo generally kept the books, paid bills, and figured taxes together. Unlike her mother, Jo never had an independent income from cream, chickens, and eggs, which she regretted. Lacking independent income or transportation, the latter crucial for a rural woman, Josephine was inevitably and early dependent on her husband.

By most measures, Chet was a good man. In society he was law-abiding, honest, and civil, a religious believer and practical supporter of the Methodist Church. He was a good neighbor in an occupation and community

where the phrase had practical meaning. An injured neighbor—and some merely dilatory—could count on his hard working help. I have seen him, hearty and cheerful, visit a bedfast neighbor terribly afflicted with sleeping sickness; and with a younger man, bedfast, blind, and hydrocephalic. A good son, kind to his mother Ada, he contributed to her support when he could. A respectful son-in-law, he ran business errands and fixed things around the house for Ollie. Nephews and nieces remembered Uncle Chet affectionately as a fun-loving jokester.

In November 2002 soon after Jo had turned ninety-nine and after having become over the years somewhat more open in her remarks, I expressed unease at discussing her and Chet's relationship in this book. She responded immediately, "I think it needs to be in here," because "It's part of life." And when I said that there was the public Chet and the private Chet, she responded immediately again: "Right. He was two different people."

Josephine was married to the good public man as well as the flawed private man. But even at home as she often noted, Chet was a helpful partner in their work, outside and inside. No man worked harder in those hard days to be as good a provider as possible for his wife and sons. Chet had to be boss, but, with that relationship established Jo could sometimes experience his sunnier, pleasant, playful self, even though, as she once said, she "took a lot" over the years. Poor as they were, worried about debt and daily subsistence, usually at night tired if not exhausted, they were nevertheless young and vigorous. Times of weeping there certainly were, but sometimes surely laughter and lovemaking. When I suggested in November 2002 that marriage was complex, Jo agreed: "Yes. I think he loved me. He worried about me, how I would get along without him," when he was dying of cancer.

Like their era of hard times, Jo and Chet's marriage was in part a matter of making do and getting along. They could hardly have contemplated another way. Both had married from families and lived in a time and place that still took marriage vows literally, even as social attitudes and behavior were changing. Men and women who stayed together for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, still represented the ideal. Those who separated or divorced in the 1930s and '40s often experienced community and family disapproval, or at least unease, as when Jo's sister, Irene, divorced, first to do so in the Teeter line. When Chet's brother, Estol, divorced, his Uncle Walter, then the eldest clan member, was openly ashamed, said Jo, that the first divorce ever in the Curtis family should have occurred while he lived.



In November 2002 Jo said of Chet, “He thought I couldn’t support myself if I got a divorce.” How did she know? Jo admitted that she and Chet had never even come close to mentioning divorce. I suppose neither ever consciously entertained the idea. But, she said, “I just know. He was that sort of person,” the sort, I suppose, who understood power relationships and used them to his advantage. Couples who stayed together for better, for worse, in the era of harder times reflected not only a community and family ideal but harsh economic realities as well. How could a farmer get along without a cook and housekeeper? The short answer was, not easily. The full answer was that he could get along better than could a woman with dependent children, no income, and no marketable skills in a depressed economy, and who was without a man to provide at least a pittance. The answers were so obvious that the questions could hardly be consciously formed. An inevitable melding of love, community custom, and economic necessities determined Chet and Jo’s relationship during those trying years.

### Products of Hard Work and Hard Times

By birth, by childhood observation and training, and by experience as young adults, Chester Curtis and Josephine Teeter were products of hard work and hard times. Jo had brought a little money into the marriage; Chet a car, some farm machinery, some livestock, almost no cash but no debt. They were rural farmers in an era before modernity had dramatically altered their way of life and economic status. From the perspective of less than a century later, it is remarkable how much closer the rhythm of their daily lives seems to their forebears than to their descendants. To understand their early-married lives one must be reminded again that modernity did not at all affect all Americans equally or simultaneously.



Courtesy of Ottumwa Public Library

In the late 1920s and early 1930s a rare biplane might pass over the farm as Jo and Chet sweated below. On October 15, 1931, the *Batavia News* editor reported that on a short flight from Fairfield to Batavia, “No hint of

depression was evident in the smooth well-kept fields viewed from the air.” To find the Great Depression, the editor might have come down to earth by consulting the increasing number of sheriff’s farm sales announced in his own paper: six, for example, a few weeks later, November 19, 1931. Chet



and Jo could have shown the editor what Depression looked like up close, but they never flew above it, or above anything else until after World War II.

To find Depression the editor might also have looked eastward down the tracks about 4 p.m., August 4, 1932, where fourteen CB&Q fast freight No. 62 cars had derailed. Among the freight in those cars were about fifty men, two of whom were killed. Dead and injured were from Iowa, Chicago ("Mexican," "Negro"), Detroit, Ohio, Louisiana ("Negro"), New York City, and Frisco. All fifty were transients, hoboes, 'bo's, unemployed, riding the rails, some looking for work, some escaping families, Depression, the law. How many were in cars that did not derail went unreported. In this period Henry Ford reportedly said of hoboes, "Why, it's the best education in the world for those boys, that traveling around! They get more experience in a few months than they would in years at school."<sup>426</sup>

To find Depression—and foreshadowing of that fall's election—the Batavia editor could even more easily have noted his paper's story earlier in the summer that "Five travelers (or 'Bo's') stayed in the jail because of bad weather and rain . . . They call the jail a 'Hoover Hotel'." During 1928 down the CB&Q line, 601 transients had slept in Jefferson County jail. The practice was so common, sanctioned by custom and law, that hoboes begged food on Fairfield streets and then cooked it on a jail stove. In 1934 four hundred "gypsies" camped east of Lockridge near the railroad were "dispersed by the sheriff and sent out of the county." Early in 1937 Batavia's council barred transients from the town hall. The editor might have been aware in 1933 of art as social criticism, such as Reginald Marsh's painting, *The Park Bench*, showing desperate down-and-outers, or Jack Conroy's autobiographical novel descriptively titled, *The Dispossessed*. A few years later, closer to home was John Steuart Curry's mural, *Kansas Pastoral: Unmortgaged Farm*. Evidence of hard times was hard to miss in that hard decade.<sup>427</sup>

South across level fields Jo and Chet could see and hear trains a mile away on that busy Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad that hauled freight and hoboes. But the freight and virtually all passenger engines were still steam powered, as they had been when their great-grandparents were young, and as they would be until after World War II. The CB&Q did introduce the diesel powered and silver aluminum streamlined two-car "Zephyr" passenger train in 1934. Jo could remember

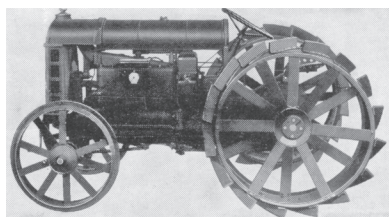


The Burlington Zephyr, 1934

May 26, early afternoon, standing on the back porch with Chet and Wayne, with Bruce still an infant in arms, seeing the Zephyr on its world record-setting run, Denver to Chicago. Robert Craig Brown saw it scorch Batavia at ninety miles an hour; Robert P. Long and Julius and Ruth Hilleary saw it highball through Fairfield at a hundred. Thereafter Jo and Chet could see the Zephyr stream by daily; but, neither time nor money allowing, they took it nowhere.<sup>428</sup>

As a token of emerging modernity, Chet did have a primitive, hand-cranked Fordson tractor, Henry Ford's contribution to Britain's World War I effort; a machine he started selling domestically in 1918 for \$750, and by 1922 for \$395. (A new word, "tractor," combined "traction" and "motor.") In this period brawny names like "Titan" and "Samson" tried to compete, but Ford won because of superior assembly line production, superior marketing, and low prices. An Eldon Fordson dealer both sold ten tractors at cost and got endorsements from owners. Dealers often held Fordson demonstrations. By 1919 Iowa had 9,000 tractors in the field.<sup>429</sup>

A March 6, 1919, *Batavia News* ad quoted Ford: "I believe the tractor will make farming what it ought to be—the most pleasant, the most helpful, healthful and the most profitable business on earth." Such pure utopianism, even in an ad, might have embarrassed anyone, although in some ways the Fordson did trump raw horse power. But Jo found it too slow, heavy, and cumbersome for anything but plowing, and perhaps disking and harrowing. The beast was, she said, "very temperamental," chose its own times to start and stop. Chet bought a somewhat newer Fordson in the early '30s, little improved over the old. Most fieldwork continued with centuries-old, two- and sometimes four-horse hitches.



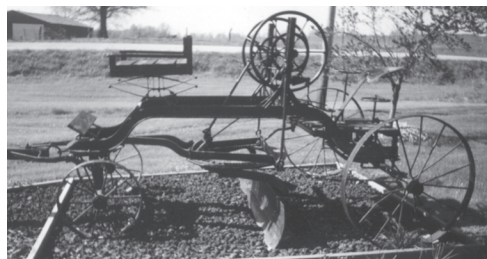
Hand cranked Fordson tractor

Chet and Jo had a car, a used Ford coupe, replaced in spring 1930 with a used Pontiac coupe. Newly paved US No. 34, which got folks out of the mud and led to far off places, was less than a mile away across fields, a mile and a half by road. In 1927 Batavia celebrated this "new cement highway" linking Jefferson and Wapello Counties, locally funded and federally subsidized, destined to extend far beyond the state. Festivities



Chet in muddy Pontiac, early 1930s

featured 6,000 free barbecue sandwiches, five marching bands anachronistically led by Dr. King on a prancing horse, at least three speeches, and a banner reading, “The Harding Highway, the first to be paved from coast to coast.” Notably, “Mrs. Sarah Pfeiffer, 89 year old Wapello County pioneer, who witnessed the coming of the railroad . . . broke a bottle of milk on the new pavement” in a Prohibition-era christening. Fairfield’s *Weekly Ledger-Journal* aptly referred to “a united jollification,” noting the bands “added their music to the cries of the barker at the ‘doll racks,’” suggesting a carnival atmosphere. Among “a large crowd of County Line folks,” Jo, still single of course, probably went with Bernard to “the [square] dance upstairs above the grocery store. I probably danced with Johnny Clark,” who had once perfidiously sent valentines on the same day to both Jo and Clara Stouthammer.<sup>430</sup>



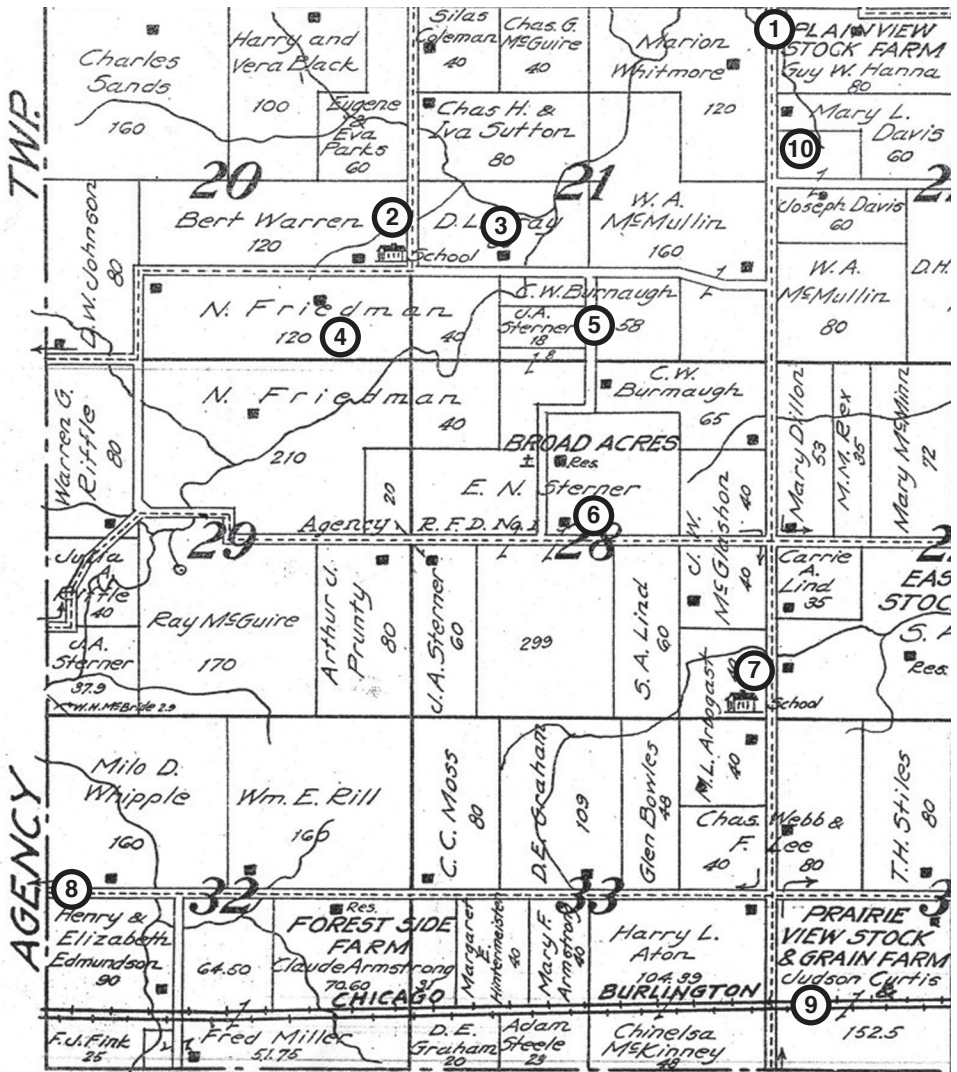
Horse drawn road grader

It may have been that Doc King’s parade horse was not entirely anachronistic since “a large number of horses” had prepared the highway grade. In spring 1929, however, soon after Jo and Chet married, Batavia’s livery stable was torn down, signaling the onrushing auto’s triumph. The *Batavia News* editorialized, “This old barn was a popular rendezvous for the old timers, the town gossip and the young bloods who drove the nifty horse and buggy. If this old building could talk it could tell some history, good, bad and indifferent. Just as well it can’t.” So, it was on to a new age. Those of us immersed to our eyebrows in that age surely must view cars and highways from a more jaundiced perspective than a 1921 *Fairfield Tribune* editorial: “Better roads means more cars, more cars mean more good roads—it is a beneficent circle that . . . has no end.”<sup>431</sup>

A grand new highway just a mile or so away from the newlyweds, yes; but roads leading there were rough dirt and gumbo. Gumbo, that unbelievably sticky clay, often made roads impassable after rains or snow

**Big Celebration**  
 — AT —  
**BATAVIA**  
**Tuesday, November 22nd.**  
 Dedication of Pavement linking Jefferson and  
 Wapello Counties—Speeches by Prominent  
 Men—4 BIG BANDS  
**Free Barbecue & Coffee at Noon**  
 Bring your own Cups and Spoons,  
 and Your Appetite  
 —Dance After The Program—

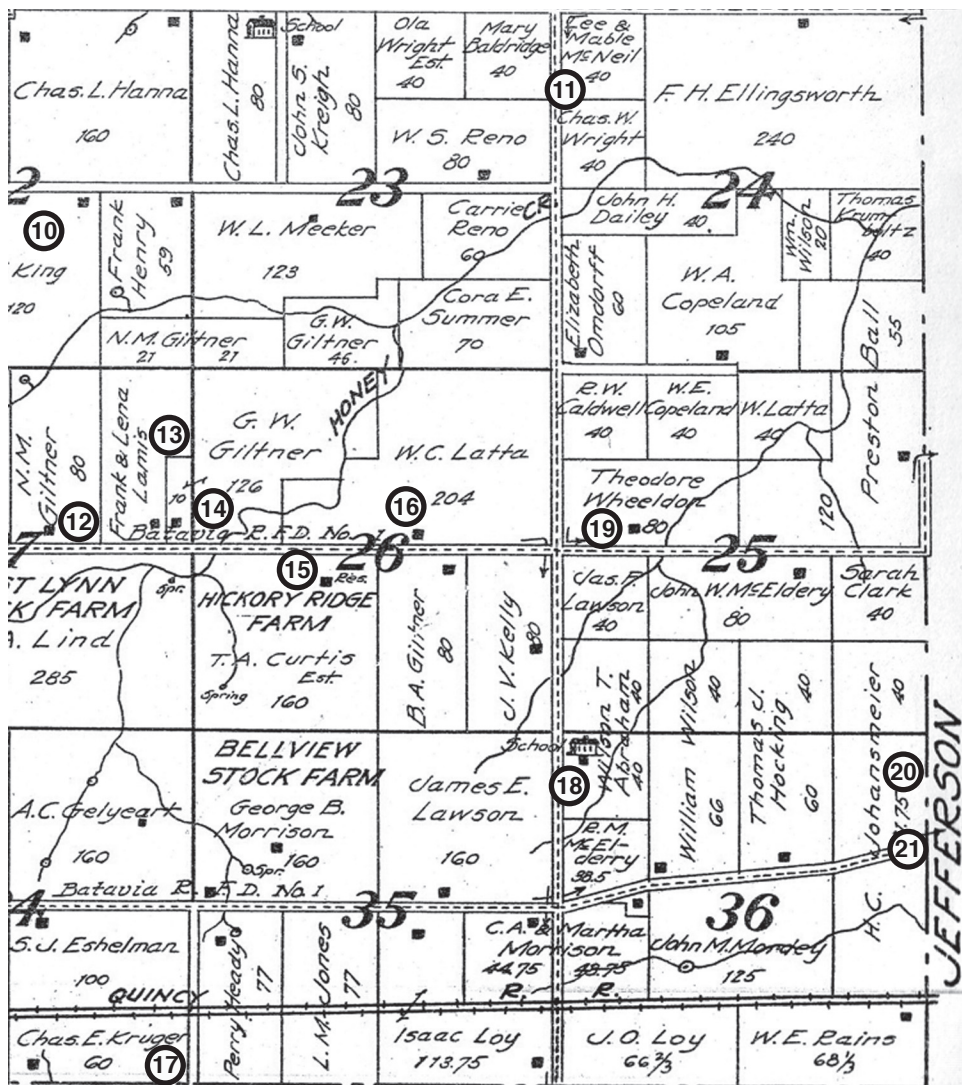
*Batavia News*, Nov. 17, 1927



Wapello County, Pleasant Township southwestern area, 1922 map

1. To Bladensburg Christian Church
2. Buckeye School
3. Chester & Jo Curtis "poor farm"
4. Friedman farms
5. Chester & Jo Curtis 18 acres
6. Ennis (Yampy) Sterner farm
7. Yampa School
8. US 34 to Agency & Ottumwa
9. Judson & Louisa Curtis farm
10. Dr. King farms





Wapello County, Pleasant Township southeastern area, 1922 map

10. Dr. King farms
11. To Lee McNiel ice pond
12. Everett & Alyce Giltner farm
13. Frank & Lena Lamis / Muri & Nina Black farm
14. Grace Giltner farm
15. Arthur & Ada Curtis / Chet & Jo Curtis farm, 1915-
16. Ernest Latta farm
17. Arthur & Ada Curtis farm, 1903-1915
18. Hazel Dell School
19. Homer & Rebecca Teeter Wheeldon farm
20. Walter Curtis farm, 1914-1920
21. US 34 to Batavia & Fairfield

melt, even if you got down in the muck and hooked up tire chains. County Line church cancelled one Sunday service in November 1932 because of awful roads. In March 1936 County Line to Batavia, a couple of miles, “eleven cars were stalled in the mud.” A week later, “The mail carrier passed” County Line “for the first time since January.” That same week, “due to the bad roads only a few were present” at the Hazel Dell Community Club, but they included Chet, Jo, and the boys, who may have walked the mile or so. A year earlier, March 8, 1935, Clifford Swasick, Wapello County farmer, wrote, “This makes 111 days of bad roads.”<sup>432</sup>

If not mud, then snow. Jo: “The first winter after we were married Chet was doing road work [paid by Pleasant Township]. When it would snow and drift he would hitch six horses to a road grader and clear the back roads. Some winters it was too deep for the horses to get through. Then the men would scoop their roads by hand. Chet being half way from either road . . . was wanted both ways and usually complied.” In such difficult times even estranged neighbors might share work: “Two of the men would [not] speak to each other until they had to clear the road. Then when they had the road cleared they wouldn’t speak again.”

### **Respite on the Road**

Even when roads were passable and Chet and Jo got to the highway, lacking time and money, they rarely went far, with two major exceptions. After Christmas 1932 leaving brother Leonard to do chores, they packed baby Wayne, clothing, and food (for snacking and for cooking in “tourist courts” on the way) into the Pontiac coupe. They hoped to escape winter for a couple of weeks while visiting Uncle Bob and Uncle Ralph’s families, offshoots of the Grandfather Judson Curtis clan who had developed rice lands around Stuttgart, Arkansas.

There, Jo got to go duck hunting where great flocks gleaned rice after harvest. She went only because Aunt Nora, strong willed and brassy, overrode Uncle Bob’s objections. “I didn’t shoot . . . Just wore Uncle Ralph’s boots and went along. Chet got a duck. Ducks were so thick you just pointed your gun and you got a duck. I suppose Aunt Nora kept Wayne.” On that trip, also, Wayne, alert and talking at two years and four months, saw “his first Negro. And he talked too loud, we thought, about seeing the Negro. It must have been in Stuttgart. ‘Oh, there’s a black man!’”

In late summer 1934 leaving their sons with Bernard and Isobel for another rare respite, Chet, Jo, Ada, and equipment crammed into that old Pontiac coupe with the wooden spoke wheels, left their dryasdust farm for



welcoming, relatively green, northern lands, Leonard again doing chores. They visited Uncle Hubert Curtis's Charles City family before continuing to Lake Superior. There they took an advertised moonlight cruise, "with no moon and rain," during which Grandma Ada, never one to rock the boat, sat squarely amidships. Safely ashore, they set up camp in darkling rain, slept late, woke all alone, campers gone, and they having forgotten how to exit. Once reoriented, they drove south through greenery for a time before returning to harsh home realities, life seemingly destined to be too wet or too dry, too hot or too cold.

### **A Comfortable, Almost New, House**

The newlyweds had in 1929 moved into a comfortable, almost new, house. Its gasoline-engine-powered "Delco" electrical generation and battery storage system worked reasonably well for a couple of years. Eventually it proved too difficult and expensive to operate and maintain. Thereafter traditional kerosene or white gasoline mantle lamps provided limited light, as they had for parents and grandparents. A *Batavia News* Iowa Electric Company ad, June 7, 1934, asserted, "The Everyday Necessity is Electric Refrigeration and it is Now Available to Everyone." Well, not quite. In 1929 when Jo and Chet married, fewer than 10 percent of American farms were electrified. For many years they could look out south windows above the kitchen sink and see lights a mile away in houses along the highway where electrical lines ran. But even the New Deal Rural Electrification Administration, the REA, did not reach their dark neighborhood until after World War II, not until the late '40s. Chet, Jo, and the boys were in a sizeable minority in those Depression-and-War years. As Harvey Green notes, "Thirty-three percent of all Americans [particularly in "the working class"] had no running water in 1940, 67 percent had no central heat, 47 percent had no built-in bathing apparatus . . . 48 percent had no . . . interior access to washing machines, 48 percent had no refrigerator, and 33 percent cooked with wood or coal." This was apparently so, although in 1941 U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics estimated that 80 percent of homes had electricity.<sup>433</sup>

In their almost new house in 1929, Jo and Chet had a bathroom but no water system, which would have been useless without electricity to pump water. For baths, water had to be heated in teakettles on the kitchen stove, carried, and poured into the cold bathtub—ensuring tepid and shallow luxury at best. Although livestock water was pumped by windmill, household water had to be hand pumped and carried in buckets from well

or cistern. Lacking plumbing and a water system, the family resorted to a spider-infiltrated outhouse on hot days and cold nights.

My friend, Murl O. Black Jr., recalling outhouses, wrote, “After a few cold experiences it occurred to me that if I took some crumpled paper, lit it and threw it down one of the holes I was not using I could get a very cold task warmed up quite a bit.” Junior Black, an inventive guy, assumed the practice was widespread, but lacking statistical evidence, I nevertheless doubt that it was so.<sup>434</sup>

## Telephone and Radio



Hand cranked telephone

Although without electricity, the newlyweds did have a telephone, of course, a party line wall mounted outfit in the kitchen (long distance after Batavia connected with Northwest Bell in midsummer 1934). They had a car-battery powered (notoriously ineffective) radio that Chet's brother, Ethan, had built. Radio was the coming thing in the '20s when folks gathered to listen, just as a later generation clustered around a pioneering family's black and white TV. In 1922 Fairfield,

“The Ledger Journal this afternoon will give the returns from the world series baseball game, by radio, play by play. A loud speaker will be directed out of the second story window of the office.” After class, did high schooler Jo Teeter sit and listen on a Central Park bench?<sup>435</sup>

In 1927 Batavia, “Mrs. John Lindeen and Mrs. Bert Sumner were invited to the home of Mrs. Swenson on Tuesday evening for supper and where they also enjoyed the program from WHO from 5 to 6:30.” That same year the County Line Night Club, including Josephine and Bernard Teeter in a large crowd at Harold Hite's, enjoyed “visiting, contests and a radio program.” A 1927 Fairfield newspaper ad announced, “The Atwater-Kent radio will give the full fight report tonight at Central Park.” What fight? Well, of course everyone knew it was the rematch between brawler Jack Dempsey and gentlemanly Gene Tunney.<sup>436</sup>

Early in 1923 the *Batavia News* began publishing the schedule of “Radiophone Station WOC—The Palmer School of Chiropractic, Davenport, Iowa.” That pioneering station's programs ranged from weather, markets, and “Agriograms,” to sports, music, Sunday church services, and educational talks, such as “The Washing Machine As a Household Appliance,” by a

washing machine company's president. And an inspirational lecture on "Selling Yourself," by Colonel B. J. Palmer himself. On August 2 under an "EXTRA!" head, the *Batavia News* announced, "Word was received by Radio, at 9:52 Thursday night announcing the death of President Harding." By 1925, "Iowa Has 21 New Radio Stations." Thirty-seven stations, including WOC, Davenport, linked to broadcast Lindbergh's Washington, DC, reception in 1927.<sup>437</sup>

Newspaper radio schedules were like a flirt's promised kisses, reception was another thing altogether. Ethan's kit being inadequate, next came an impressive looking floor model Atwater Kent, also battery powered, which got awful reception. "You couldn't breathe while it was on because Chet couldn't hear." On Thursday, December 10, 1936, Edward VIII was to abdicate the throne of England for love of that almost twice-divorced American, Mrs. Wallis Warfield Simpson. "I was entertaining (we were quilting for somebody, but I don't know who) and everyone went home early so they could hear it. Our old Atwater Kent was out and we were going to get a new one." Soon thereafter they did.

Jo could have waited to read that romantic royal tale in the newspapers as that day a defective Atwater Kent ensured she would; but, like her early departing neighbors, she preferred not to. Her parents had devoured multiple newspapers and had eagerly taken up the telephone. Now radio, when it worked, broadcast not only news, information, and entertainment but it could catch the romantic timbre and tone of a lovelorn king. Much more intimately and powerfully than any previous medium, except perhaps movies as they developed, the radio served to connect, but in so doing to emphasize the immeasurable distance between the wealthy and worldly on one hand and the struggling Iowa farmer and his wife on the other. This for a time. Eventually radio, and supremely television, would entice and coerce later princes and princesses of the realm to give over virtually all reticence and privacy for their own moments of mass celebrity.

Mass celebrity and mass entertainment went hand in hand with radio's development in the '20s, spectacularly so in the '30s and '40s. In Chet and Jo's home, as in millions of others, certain weekly shows became standard, often for years, actually shaped the rhythm of family life. Leading shows featured Jack Benny, Bob Hope (born like Jo in 1903), *Fibber McGee and Molly*, *Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy*, *The Great Gildersleeve*, *Burns and Allen*. In 1929 alone, the year Chet and Jo married, appeared Kate Smith, Bing Crosby, Rudy Vallee, and *Amos 'n' Andy*. Entertainment there was aplenty, but before entertainment always came inevitable work.<sup>438</sup>

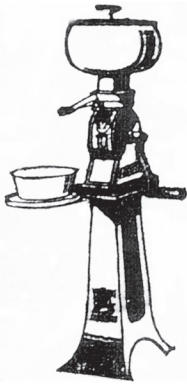
## Work was Inevitable

Early on Monday, April 29, 1929, occurred the new couple's first Wedded Work Breakfast. Jo, experienced cook, used the unfamiliar three-burner gasoline pressure stove with oven she had inherited from mother-in-law Ada. Consequently, but

perhaps also from nerves, she "burned it, most of it, and Chet was very nice and said that's how



Gasoline stove

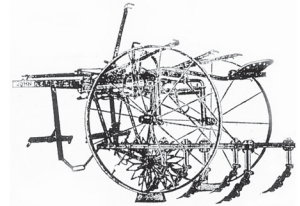


Cream separator

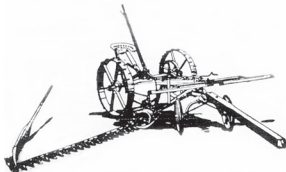
he liked it." "We had big breakfasts when we were first married," traditional farm meals, big breakfasts for a big day. (Ollie had given Josephine a wedding gift cookbook with many dozens of Church of the Brethren Sisters recipes.) Chet was out early and late, before and after working the fields, doing twice-a-day chores—feeding chickens (work Josephine shared), sheep, pigs, horses, and cows; milking; spinning off the lighter cream from the whole milk with a hand-cranked centrifuge "separator."

## Harvesting and Threshing

Working in the fields alone, sometimes with Josephine, and during hay and grain harvest with neighbors, Chet plowed with the plodding old Fordson; with horses disked and harrowed plowed ground to pulverize and smooth it. He planted and then "cultivated" the gridwork-planted corn both down and across the rows to uproot weeds, until (in a good year) it was "laid by, knee high, by the Fourth of July." He

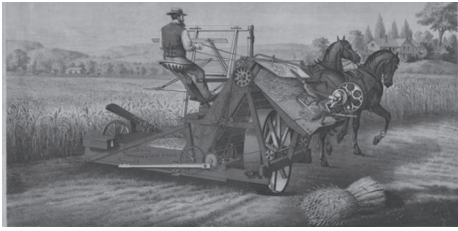


planted and row-cultivated soy beans; cut, raked, loaded on hayracks, and "put up" loose hay in the barn haymow.



Horse-drawn mowing machine, *Batavia News*, May 16, 1929

Chet planted oats and wheat, and cut and bundled the grain in sheaves with a horse or tractor drawn "binder." Then by hand he set eight sheaves upright tight together in a circle and



Horse-drawn binder



Oat shocks to be threshed

leaning inward in a “shock” with a ninth spread across the top as a “cap” to shed rainwater. Then he left those hundreds of shocks in the field to cure and dry ‘til the threshing crew came.

“Bringing in the sheaves, bringing in the sheaves, we shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.” As in their parents’ and grandparents’ time, threshing days were the busiest, most anticipated, most dreaded, most exciting, most exhausting among all days in Chet and Jo’s annual round of work. Always gregarious, Chet welcomed the day’s joking camaraderie and competition. There was great social satisfaction in hard work with neighbors in the sun and the chaff while engulfed in a steam engine or tractor’s roar, and in the whining moans of a grain “separator.” And all this melded with the immense if weary private satisfaction of seeing results of a season’s labor literally pouring into a granary.

Josephine certainly felt with Chet the satisfaction of saving a harvest that had escaped myriad dangers of drought, rainstorms and hailstorms, blight, chinch bugs and grasshoppers, from all of which crops were at risk. She too wanted to get and stay out of debt, to pay the bills, maybe even to “get ahead.” And she certainly enjoyed neighborliness and conviviality. The further fact is that for Josephine, as for every farmer’s wife she knew, the excitement of threshing days was counterbalanced by dread. On such days—she had learned as a girl at her mother’s elbow—a farm wife might have help from neighbor women, but the dusty sunburned men with the white foreheads who came to eat her dinners and suppers were not only ravenous but discerning. For they had eaten at various other women’s tables on the threshing “run,” and would judge accordingly.

Aside from the particular anxiety that a new bride might feel, the preparation, cooking, washing, and cleaning up were, as all farm wives testified, exhausting. Exactly forty years later, Jo remembered that in summer and fall 1929, her newlywed year, threshers came six times. Chet asserted that her count was low. They had threshed wheat, oats, soybeans, and clover seed, the latter repeatedly because of rain. As late in the fall as October 24, 1929, the *Batavia News* reported, “Chas. Morrison is hulling clover at Chet Curtis’s.”



Whatever the exact number, both agreed that each day Jo had had to serve both dinner and supper, and the usual stupendous array of roast beef or pork, chicken, various vegetables, potatoes and gravy, tomatoes, applesauce, pickles, pie and cake. Bread and butter. “I baked bread all the time,” although allergic to flour dust from the hundred pound bin, which caused Jo to sneeze and her eyes to water. But, “I think I bought the bread for threshers.” Ironically, under “Occupation” in the 1930 Census, Josephine Curtis had “None.” Had that been true, perhaps she could have blithely hired the enterprising Packwood Methodist Ladies Aid, which in the past had served 904 thresher meals at fifty cents each, for a significant \$452.<sup>439</sup>

In the last year Chet and Jo threshed, I was a teenager, old enough, my father thought, to help him stack straw. Just about thirty years earlier, in summer 1918 as Chet’s father, Arthur, was weakening before dying of tuberculosis in the fall, he had had to give up threshing work. That July he had asked his second son, Ethan, to take his place with a bundle wagon on the threshing run. On a July day thirty years later I was to learn why threshing was no occupation for a sick man, or, by the end of that day, for a growing boy.



Thomas Arthur Curtis harrowing with four horse team, spring 1918

## **Straw Monuments and Threshermen**

One threshing job, that of water-boy, was easy, exciting, and fun. To sweating and grateful workers, he carried a ceramic jug (with corncob stopper), the jug wrapped in wetted burlap to keep the water cool. If lucky he had a horse. Other jobs were hard—tossing bundles, loading bundle wagons, scooping grain—but those jobs were nothing compared to stacking straw. The work began easily enough on the bare ground, with a man, a boy all bright eyed and bushy tailed—feeling his oats, as it were—each with a pitchfork at nine in the morning.

We began by creating the curving outline of the big stack as the first straw and chaff blew full force out of the two-foot diameter blower tube of the roaring grain separator. But within minutes, as the stack began to elevate, we two began to sink into the loose straw and the stinging, itchy

chaff that kept raining horizontally and hostilely as the sun rose higher and hotter on a day that became a scorcher. Our job was to shape the stack with our forks so it would shed rain, to tramp it down as solidly as possible, to try to keep up with, if never ahead of, the machine. If I had had time to think and had been able to sing without getting a mouthful of stuff, I would have sung a song about John Henry and the steam drill that was out to kill him.

There must have been water, if not water breaks; there must have been noon dinner. I can remember nothing of all that. I can only remember heat and sweat; the whining roar of the machine grunting as it was fed too many bundles at once; a hurricane of straw; dirt and chaff down my back, in my shorts, my eyes, ears, nose, throat; through it all pitching straw into a shapely, water-shedding pile; stomping waist deep all day in the stuff.



Man stacking in the straw and chaff. Courtesy of Michigan State University Library, Special Collections

I do remember the end at dusk, as the last bundle was swallowed with a gulping moan by the separator, the last grain was dumped, the last straw streamed from the blower onto our high stack. I remember the immense gratitude I felt to hear the roaring whine of the machine decline and slow and die; remember the immense silence that followed, into which my father and I descended by ladder from our fifteen-foot stack, into the cooling silence. Now, a half century or so later, I would be the first to admit that stacking straw may not have been as hard as I recall. It may have been harder.

One more thing I remember. I remember feeling that with my father I had created something memorable that day, although our straw monument would disappear into livestock bedding, would be mixed with manure and scattered on the fields before winter was through. It may be that threshing hung on for so long among certain farmers because it was noisy, romantic, exciting, and sociable. It was so much better than working alone, isolated on a tractor pulling a modern combine, or even more isolated in the hermetically sealed, air-conditioned cab of a self-propelled machine.

In the fall of 2002 I interrupted the rounds of a Jefferson County farmer to ask for directions and was struck by his eagerness to climb down and talk, by his evident reluctance to climb back into his cab, even as an immense fenceless soybean field waited. Modern technology has given farmers power and speed, often-impressive debt to match impressive yields, and certainly, isolation compared to nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century predecessors.

Ennis Sterner, the political radical for his time and place, was as well a flamboyant jack-of-all-trades, merchant, bandleader (Chet's brothers Estol, Leonard, and Lawrence played for him at various times), *Batavia News* columnist, and post-divorce bachelor. He was owner-operator of a threshing outfit from 1914 to 1942, and more than once President of the Iowa Brotherhood of Threshermen. At least once, he spent an evening with friends and his pet owl in an Ottumwa saloon, no doubt blowing off steam from a hard day on the rig. In 1923 "Yampy" wrote a long piece of doggerel that attempted to express the romantic mood a thresherman or farmer might feel, and which ended,

After all I'd rather be a thresher with my tanned and dirty face  
Than be a king, dude, or princess and occupy some exalted useless place.  
I want to serve mankind in the best way that I can.  
That's why I'm content to die a dirty thresher man.

Years later novelist Herbert Krause attempted to capture the visceral exhilaration that drove steam thresherman Johnny Black: "Power—power which spun iron and lifted shakers, which ripped the confined life of wheat from its husk and poured grain from the spout . . . Power which was deaf to any thought about the sweat of the pitcher heaving the bundles correctly . . . or the grain men pulling the heaped bucket past the tally arm. . . . Give him the rig, the flash of the sun on a flywheel, the slip-slap of belts, the mist that floated with smoke from the stack when the wind was right (sweat from the iron belly of the machine). . . . The engine filled him with an almost kinesthetic delight . . . gray blur of the flywheel . . . the up-and-down motion of the belt. It made the blood thump in his head."<sup>440</sup>

Well, yes, but . . . Even by noon, even by ten o'clock, on that straw stacking day I would not have been willing to subscribe to Mr. Sterner's elevated sentiments or Johnny Black's excitement. I would certainly, however, have endorsed the realism of Krause's "stackmen in the straw pile [who] spat chaff and stem ends . . . There ain't no harder job in thrashing than sweating in the straw . . . When you sneeze, it's pure dirt." Chet might have wanted to continue with Ennis and Johnny, but the next year he

nevertheless realistically faced the future with a second hand combine, a technology that had slowly begun to be available long before, soon after World War I.

Josephine would undoubtedly have approved of the change sooner than later. As an article of 1920 on the “New Thresher” had predicted, “It is a safe bet that the women on farms will love the Harvester-Thresher to death.” In 1928 J. I. Case Machinery Company published

a pamphlet, *What Mother Thinks Of The Case Combine*. Mother was obviously as exhilarated as Johnny Black had been. No more massive meals for noble threshermen! Although Jo would not have been one to deny the sentiment of service Ennis Sterner expressed, at the end of her long day of service at the stove she would surely have preferred that he serve mankind somewhere else, although certainly not in a saloon. As for our family, the annual harvest cycle completed, we attended Methodist church on Sunday and sang “Bringing in the Sheaves.” And as in Ruth Suckow’s Iowa novel, *New Hope*, the hymn “overflowed the room, sounding through open doors and windows, and was heard far out upon the streets—the almost empty Sunday streets of the town, small and raw in the midst of the great countryside, where the corn was ripening, where late summer wildflowers grew ragged and thick along the dusty country roads.”<sup>441</sup>



A “combine” that combined cutting and threshing grain in the field. Courtesy of Michigan State University Library, Special Collections

## Ice House Refrigeration

Josephine cooked both gargantuan threshers’ meals and regular everyday meals on Ada’s three-burner gas stove, and in its oven. This seemed an improvement over the wood and coal burning cookstove she had grown up with in Ollie’s kitchen, although some housewives continued to favor the cookstove as providing more even, dependable heat. Jo lacked electricity for refrigeration, of course, but most of the time she did have ice and an “icebox” to keep perishables at least cool. Only a couple of miles away, Lee McNiell had both a pond that froze deep and a neighborhood icehouse. For several years during the coldest days of winter, Chet and other neighborhood men would gather at Lee’s with ice saws, tongs, and horses. They would joke about who would be on the lower end of the saw, would cut blocks loose, attach tongs to the ice on one end, a horse on the other, and would skid the six-or eight-or even sometimes ten-inch thick

blocks out of the pond. They would store them between layers of sawdust, an excellent insulation, in the icehouse, itself sawdust insulated. Once blocks were tallied, each family could calculate its share and could try to make it last through warm weather. Don't open that icebox door! Within a few years, however, this old and widespread method was replaced as commercially produced and relatively inexpensive ice became available in town and eventually even for rural home delivery. Even now, I feel nostalgic recalling the unique chemical taint of those ice chips on the tongue.

### **The Fall Corn Harvest Followed Threshing**

With summer threshing and haying done, fall corn harvest loomed. Sometimes cornstalks with ears attached were cut off close to the ground with corn knives (like machetes), and the stalks shocked like tepees, a pleasant job in good weather. But tearing down a snow-and-ice-sheathed-shock to feed livestock in midwinter blizzard darkness was another matter. Misery might be forgotten temporarily when the dog chased field mice and the occasional rabbit that fled loss of a winter home. Most corn was "shucked" off standing stalks in the field, again a task pleasant enough in dry Indian summer conditions, miserable enough when cold drizzle or dripping snow soaked cotton gloves and overalls. This was all hand work in those days, ear by single ear ripped off stalks with dry sharp edged leaves, each ear stripped of shucks, thrown into the horse-drawn wagon, ear by ear, bushel by bushel, a hundred bushels a day for legendary pickers, less for ordinary mortals. Day after day shucking went on, increasingly with cracked and sore fingers, and then you had to shovel those bushels into the crib noon and night. And sell it at worst for ten cents a bushel. Better to burn it for fuel, as some did in the most desperate days of the '30s.

Corn being an unusual fuel, with cold weather oncoming it was time to begin cutting firewood in earnest. This was often a cooperative neighborhood project in which someone's tractor-powered or gasoline-engine-powered, circular buzz saw—a rightfully fearsome machine—was moved from woodpile to woodpile. Thus, "Walter Harrison, Vern Hummel, Chet Curtis and his brother Nuts [Estol] helped Russ Hedge saw wood last Thursday."<sup>442</sup>

Those wood chunks, the men would josh, warmed a man twice, the first being right now. Such warming cooperative work appeared as hearty good fun, at least when jokester Ennis Sterner was *Batavia News* correspondent and central character: "The Yampa wood sawing outfit and crew transformed Omer Wheelding's [Homer Wheeldon's] wood pile last





Ada, Arthur, and Chester Curtis buzz sawing wood about 1917

Friday and as Omer is a bachelor he took us to Batavia for dinner and ordered it at Hulse Cafe. We all took the regular roast beef menu but Nuts Curtis and I had beans and angel food cake added for embellishments.”<sup>443</sup>

More often in later years as cooperative sawing declined and disappeared a farmer worked alone, as Chet did, with his sons. The work involved pulling a two man (or boy) crosscut saw, splitting the big chunks with steel maul and wedges, hauling wagon loads with horses, and slinging chunks into the basement “coal room.” This in the late 1940s and early ‘50s when most farmers had turned to coal or fuel oil, as Chet and Jo could soon afford to do.

### **Winter Work Led to Spring, and More Work**

Depending upon demand and temperature, woodcutting and hauling in earlier years might have continued at least episodically. But winter was principally a farmer’s time for tending to livestock, sometimes for fixing and building fences if the ground was not solidly frozen, for repairing machinery and harness, shelling seed corn, planning crop rotations, updating account books, plowing snow from the roads. Sometimes on the rawest days, winter was a time for sitting with feet on the furnace register and reading the *Ottumwa Courier*, journals like *Wallaces’ Farmer*, the Bible, Sunday school lessons, and the occasional book. Even a time for almost-guilt-free daytime dozing. Winter might also be a time to market livestock. On January 9, 1930, the *Batavia News* reported, “Lee McNiel, Chet Curtis and Cal McMullin returned home Thursday from Chicago where they had taken several carload of sheep.” For a free ride and to look after their stock they

rode the caboose with the freight train's conductor and brakemen.<sup>444</sup>

In spring fieldwork resumed, but other work filled gaps between preparing, planting, cultivating, and harvesting. In corn and bean rows were always weeds to pull that the cultivator had missed, pasture thistles to cut, fence rows and roadsides to trim, lawns to mow, and gardening. In September 1929 the *Batavia News* reported, "Mrs. Ada Curtis is improving her buildings with a dress of new paint," which translated probably meant "Chet," although his hard working mother may well have been involved, and Leonard, and perhaps Josephine.<sup>445</sup>

A month later, "Chet Curtis and John Fansher pulled hedge last week." "Hedge" referred to Osage Orange, a tough and thorny growth imported from Texas and Oklahoma. In pioneer days before barbed and woven wire appeared, it had served as hedge fencing more effective than rails, but if not trimmed regularly it grew into tough and thorny trees. Osage Orange fence lines shaded and sapped crops, and so became a nuisance best cut or pulled with difficulty by horses or tractors or, later, "Caterpillars," and then sawed into extremely durable fence posts. This was nasty and sometimes dangerous work. When I was young, a neighbor wielding an ax lost an eye to a flying thorny hedge chip. In earlier years, near Eldon, H. J. Israel "had an eye removed after a hedge thorn penetrated the eyeball."<sup>446</sup>

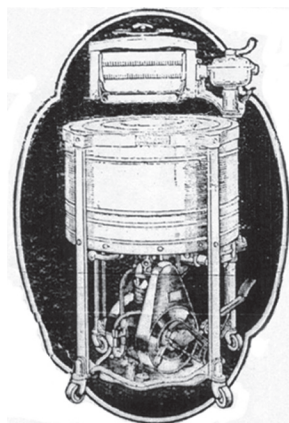
### **Jo and Chet Shared Work, Indoors and Out**

Before childcare became consuming, especially during spring rush, Jo often helped with fieldwork. She managed to get the hang of driving the lumbering Fordson with plow, and sometimes disk and harrow, thus freeing Chet for the horses. In fall 1929 and sometimes later, Josephine helped shuck corn as mother-in-law Ada had in the '20s. "Dr. King was surprised that I could shuck corn. He didn't think I was strong enough." I remember as a youngster sleeping in the wagon on a warm and sunny Indian summer afternoon in the late '30s. I remember hearing the strangely comforting sound of corn ears hitting the high "bang boards" on one side of the wagon box as my babysitting parents shucked and threw, shucked and threw, and the horses jolted the load down the rows. In the later '30s and early 40's, Jo was even pressed into milking service for several years, work she detested as much as her mother had enjoyed it.

In the 1930s Jo and Chet shared much work, indoors and out. Chickens and eggs were a family project, as was gardening, both major food sources, and poultry and eggs of income. Early on, they churned butter by hand, time-consuming, tiresome, not lucrative. Soon they simply

sold cream, although they made butter for home use sometimes before turning to oleomargarine. They even made old-fashioned soft soap with lye produced from water strained through wood ashes, and then combined with animal fat.

In a 1984 memoir Jo wrote, "I enjoyed working outside but I hated that thing of coming in and having to do cooking. Your dad was very good to help." Like father-in-law George, Chet cooked only rarely, almost exclusively when Josephine was ill, but he sometimes volunteered to dry dishes after supper. Jo always had a washing machine, an electrical double tub when the Delco system was working, later a gasoline engine powered single tub model with wringer. When not working elsewhere, Chet always helped with carrying water, washing, wringing, hanging out on the line, and bringing in clothes. For a time when Chet's then single younger brother, Lawrence, lived and worked in Ottumwa, Jo, sometimes with Chet's help, did Lawrence's laundry as well, for small change.



*Batavia News*, May 9, 1929

As always, like their parents and their rural ancestors for generations, fall butchering absorbed the family in a common task and often neighbors as well. In 1934, "Glenn Leathers, Chester Curtis, and Homer Wheeldon assisted Jno Kelley butcher." To eat rather than sell beef or pork required calculation because it lessened income, but a depressed economy eased the choice. As Jo wrote in 1983, "During the depression we sold four wagon loads of hogs for \$2.25 a hundred" pounds, perhaps \$4.50 for a hog. This may actually have caused a loss, even when the hog had been fed corn at only ten cents or so a bushel. To eat your own meat at three cents or a nickel a pound made more sense than buying processed meat at seventeen or fifteen, just as burning ten-cent corn for heat might be cheaper than selling it or feeding it to livestock. Perhaps an added advantage is that it gave the lie to poverty. In Lois Phillips Hudson's novel of the Depression, *The Bones of Plenty*, neighborhood farmers are finishing a meal after butchering: "By the time they got to the pie, heaped with sweet whipped cream, they were relaxed and triumphant. One more bit of harvest was safely put away, preserved from all future accidents. Surrounded by the bounty of the huge pig they did not feel poor."<sup>447</sup>

## CHAPTER 7: HARD TIMES—MAKING DO

On a certain bright, sunny day, when the breeze sighed its loveliest out of the northwest, strange clouds would appear in the western sky; swiftly they would advance, floating lazily through the clear air, a sight beautiful to behold. But these clouds would be made up of innumerable dark-brown bodies with slender legs, sailing on transparent wings; in an instant the air would be filled with nameless, unclean creatures!

—O. E. Rolvaag, *Giants in the Earth*

There have been heroes here, and saints and martyrs, and I want you to know that.

—Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*

A hit song when Chet and Jo married in 1929 had been “Happy Days Are Here Again,” but another had been “I May be Wrong.” For Chet and Jo, like other farmers in Iowa and elsewhere, the agricultural harder times of the 1930s merged almost seamlessly with the agricultural hard times of the ‘20s. Immediately after the Great War, however, prospects looked good. In 1919 as the “boys” came home, the three-cent wartime cost of first class stamps, two for postcards, returned to the prewar two and one. Bread returned to the prewar nickel a loaf. Still surfing the barely receding tides of war, corn was government-guaranteed at \$2 a bushel, but by 1921 was forty-one cents with the mid-20s average at sixty-three. Oats were also down. Cattle and hog prices had begun declining in 1920. Newspapers



Chet and Jo Curtis with Bruce and Wayne, 1937

in 1921 are upbeat about agriculture prospects, but at times seem to be whistling in the dusk. Iowa land prices are still high, down from 1920, but still highest in the country. Declining farm hand wages will reflect lower produce prices. Iowa's crop income tops the nation, and farmers have more cars per capita than those in other states. Countering Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace's prediction, a headline asserted, "Iowa Farmers Are Not Going To Burn Their Corn As Fuel." Despite bravado, the slide continued into the mid- and later- '20s.<sup>448</sup>

Having never experienced affluence, Jo and Chet may have been better prepared to weather desperate days. Even so, from those times that tried the souls of women and of men, both stored searing, unforgettable memories. They agreed that higher farm produce prices during World War I had produced waves of optimism leading to higher land prices as farmers rushed into mortgages, often using existing land as collateral. "Optimism" is too pale; "giddiness" is better.

Writing of *The Valley of Democracy* in 1917, Meredith Nicholson reported that the midwestern "farmer . . . is roused to a new consciousness of his importance; he is aware that thousands of hands are thrust toward him from over the sea, that every acre of his soil and every ear of corn and bushel of wheat . . . has become a factor in the gigantic struggle to preserve and widen the dominion of democracy." Just as dramatically, and no doubt more arresting to farmers, 1918 headlines reported Iowa land jumping \$100 an acre at Glidden, record land prices at Marengo, and probable record Jefferson County prices.<sup>449</sup>

In 1919 a headline, "Looks Like Somebody Is Going To Pay Too Much For Land," reflected an Iowa State College farm management department warning that "Last year was one of unprecedented price levels," which "surely cannot continue over the next five or ten years." Later that same year, however, the same source reported that land prices had been on a "Steady Increase From 1850 Until The Present Day." And—the greatest was the most recent, 121 percent from 1900 to 1910, and an unbelievable 180 percent from 1910 to 1919.<sup>450</sup>

Articles of 1920 supported the unbelievable. One, citing steady twentieth-century land price advances, promised, "Value will be permanent," the authority cited—a real estate dealer! Another, headlined "Iowa Land Values Are Higher Than Any Other State," cited U.S. Department of Agriculture figures showing that Iowa land had soared 33 percent in the last year, but that all the corn belt was booming. Farmers evidently had joined the other fat cats who had cashed in on the war.<sup>451</sup>

Trouble began, although gradually, when even as overseas demand



declined, the government withdrew wartime agricultural subsidies and, as after the Civil War, began in 1920 to deflate the currency, thus making debt repayment more difficult. Fairfield's *Weekly Ledger-Journal* announced in 1923, "Iowa Land Prices Decline Slightly" during the preceding year, although still significantly higher than in prewar 1916. But the paper revealed in 1926 what everyone was seeing, and many were experiencing firsthand, that "Iowa Farm Land Value Is Halved" compared to 1920.<sup>452</sup>

## **The Farm Recession Moved Toward the Great Crash and Depression**

Even as the 1920s farm recession plunged toward Depression, the nation's general economy seemed to boom, up an annual 6 percent average from 1921 to 1929. In 1928 alone the numbers of those with incomes over \$1 million increased 40 percent. Much of that gain was, however, attributable to stock market tissue paper. And much of the nation's wealth, about 40 percent, was in the hands of 1 percent of the nation's households. Farm households were not among that 1 percent.<sup>453</sup>

In the mid-and late 1920s, the bottom dropped out of farm produce prices as the national and international economic system virtually disintegrated—most visibly as banks all around failed. In Chet and Jo's area, numerous small town banks had failed in the mid- and late '20s before the national Crash. A sampling included in 1924 Stockport and Lockridge banks; in 1925 Chet's Grandpa Judson's Farmers State Bank of Batavia; in 1928 at Farmington and the Batavia Savings Bank, in which Chet lost a little money. On November 7, 1928, the *Fairfield Ledger* announced that Iowa-born Herbert Hoover had been elected President over New Yorker Al Smith, by the heaviest popular vote ever; but the same edition announced that Bonaparte and Mount Sterling banks had closed. Nationally, conditions worsened after the 1929 Crash; in the next three years more than 5,000 banks failed. "Bankers' hours" came to be very long or very short. With banks, businesses, and the economy crashing all around, fewer ruined men went out windows than myth would have it. But a hotel joke asked, "Do you want the room for sleeping or for jumping?"<sup>454</sup>

An unusual survivor among late 1920s banks was in Iowa's Van Buren County where eleven of seventeen failed. The Farmer and Merchants Bank of Douds survived, it seems, because its owners collected \$100,000 in small bills, and hung the loot from the ceiling in a wire basket, evidently easing depositor fears and avoiding a run on its limited assets.<sup>455</sup>

By 1930 farm income was about a fourth that of a decade earlier. Then in the '30s the weather went bad, insect plagues of biblical scale

descended, and crops often failed or were stunted. Many overextended farmers could no longer make mortgage payments, especially with deflated dollars, and so lost everything. Land like Jo's parents', \$200 an acre in 1920, went for half that in 1930, and for half that throughout most of the '30s and into the '40s, if it sold at all. Early in the Depression about half of Iowa's farmland was mortgaged, and farm bankruptcy rates were twice as high as in other midwestern states except Minnesota. Iowa tenant farmers, 25 percent of all farmers in 1880, and 40 percent in 1920, by 1930 were 47 percent, and in 1940 almost exactly 50 percent.<sup>456</sup>

Much bankrupted land went on the auction block at the behest of creditor banks and insurance companies. Countrywide in the year I was born, 1933, 350,000 farmers lost their land. A typical warning appeared in the May 17, 1934, *Batavia News*: "SHERIFF'S SALE NOTICE . . . NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN That on the 8th day of June, A. D. 1934, at 11: 00 o'clock A. M. at the Court House . . . will be sold at public auction, to the highest bidder, for cash, the following described real estate . . . in favor of John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company." Meanwhile, the private land market virtually disappeared. On January 17, 1935, the *Batavia News* referred to "one of the first real estate deals to be transacted here in many months." Not until after World War II would land prices return to 1920 levels.<sup>457</sup>

### Some Farmers Revolt

Jo and Chet tended not to blame vast international, national, financial, or political forces and conspiracies for woes they and their neighbors suffered. They were not deeply politicized, certainly not radicalized, as were



Ennis Sterner, *Batavia News Historical Edition*, July 2, 1936

Milo Reno, whom they knew by local reputation, and their neighbor, Ennis Sterner, activists in the political cooperative Farmers Union and, in the early '30s, the Farmers' Holiday Association. Reno, nationally known as leader of the Iowa Farmers' Union, was described in 1928 as "a tall, gray-haired 'farmer-turned-business-man' from Des Moines, head of a Farmer's Mutual Insurance Company and a power in the livestock industries of Chicago and St. Paul." In August of that year he had said that although he had not bolted the Democratic party, at least not yet, he would not support either Democrat Al Smith or Republican

Herbert Hoover because neither had promised adequate farm relief. As we have seen, Ennis “Yampy” Sterner was the local radical, a Senator Robert LaFollette and Progressive Party advocate; a farmer, entrepreneur, and iconoclastic columnist. Both men would have agreed with the novelist Hamlin Garland’s attack on all those businesses and forces that “farmed the farmer.” Both were flamboyant in behavior, language, and way of life—seeming and sounding radical. Malcontents like Sterner and Reno, even though their belief in the value and power of mass organization proved to be correct, as politicians no doubt made themselves less attractive to many traditional neighbors and fellow Iowans.<sup>458</sup>

Ada Curtis disliked what she considered Milo Reno’s vulgar language, even if he was supposed to be a preacher. (He was an ordained Campbellite.) The *Eldon Forum* reported in 1913: “The Ashland M.E. church was crowded last Saturday night to hear Milo Reno preach.” Ashland once had been a town of several hundred with hotels, liverys, blacksmiths, physicians, stores, a school, a steam sawmill, a brickyard, and a bank. In 1913, however, it was moribund, having long ago been bypassed by three railroads, and with the stagecoach route to Agency City even longer abandoned, but it still had Baptists in the “Woodpecker Church,” and it had the Methodists. Both Ada and Arthur Curtis were members and regularly attended the latter church, as did of course their children. I doubt seriously whether any one of them attended on the evening of December 6. Dale Kramer, who knew Milo well, had worked closely with him, noted that his fingers “were gnarled from fist-fighting” as a youngster around Agency City, and that “All the Reno boys were a bit wild, according to neighborhood account. They drank and they rode good horses fast and they had reputations as mighty wooers.” Milo, Kramer wrote, “with his slim ramrod figure and his coal-black hair and regular features and flashing eyes, was the most successful with the ladies.” From a radical Greenback and inflationist, Populist and Bryanite family, Milo wore a red tie and ten-gallon hat, chain smoked, fiddled at dances. The picture didn’t sit well with numerous upright folks. Reno’s critics would have noted with interest in 1936, the year he died, his arrest in Des Moines on a charge of intoxication, to which he pleaded innocent. Nevertheless, and even though he had publicly taken the temperance pledge in 1920 (which he later broke), lots of local folks would have believed that Milo had been on another real bender.<sup>459</sup>

Thus in 1920 when Milo Reno roared his defiance of the farmer’s enemies at the annual picnic of the Wapello County Farmers’ Union in Ennis Sterner’s grove, just two miles west of Chet and Jo’s gate—they, like

numerous disapproving neighbors, were not in attendance. This was not only because Milo Reno was there. Chet's father, Arthur, had disapproved of Ennis Sterner, as did Chet, as did Jo. Ennis, like Milo Reno, frequented saloons, was brassy, was too challenging. They were not there even though everyone had been promised a "big Fourth of July celebration," a "day and night program," including a "sports program for men, women and children. Tug-of-war, ball games, horseshoe pitching, dancing" to two bands, both "modern" and "old time," and a full roster of speakers.<sup>460</sup>

## **A New Deal for Farmers and the Country**

But hundreds and hundreds of farmers around were there, not merely for fun, but because they needed hope, and hoped they had found it in Milo Reno. So they made Milo their hero that day, as did many more Iowa farmers later that year at the Des Moines Farmers' Union state convention, made him state secretary-treasurer and soon an attention-getter nationwide. His leadership in the Farmers' Holiday Association during the early Depression years would follow naturally, would help to stir larger figures and forces into action. Inspired by leaders like Reno in surrounding states, someone wrote, "Come fellow farmers, one and all— / We've fed the world throughout the years / And haven't made our salt. / We've paid our taxes right and left / Without the least objection / We've paid them to the government / That gives us no protection. / Let's call a 'Farmers Holiday' / A Holiday let's hold / We'll eat our wheat and ham and eggs / And let them eat their gold." Small but influential groups of farmers in Iowa and elsewhere sought by persuasion and rarely but notably by force to withhold produce from the market. By force or threat of force in some instances, they halted farm sales and evictions, even on one notorious occasion threatened to hang a judge. The farmers' movement was brief but white-hot, was to some extent effective in calling early New Deal attention to the practical and political necessity of addressing the plight of Midwest farmers. His movement weakening as the New Deal developed an agricultural program, Reno wrote that "The Farmers' Holiday Association has . . . done more than any other farm organization . . . to bring about the attention of the entire nation to the plight of the American farmer." The *New York Times* editorialized when he died in 1936, "The strikes inspired by Mr. Reno are generally credited with having frightened the East and big business into acquiescence in some farm aid." Thus was the sturdy independent yeoman of American legend absorbed into the developing modern managed economy.<sup>461</sup>

In 1928 Herbert Hoover had campaigned on the slogan, "A chicken

in every pot, a car in every garage.” But now many found they had no car, no garage, no chicken, no pot. The Crash and consequent Depression ruined any hope the Republican president may have had for re-election in 1932. For his name had become either a joke or a curse—lose your job and you were Hoovered; hobo jungles were Hoovervilles; park benches and newspapers were called Hoover beds with Hoover blankets; jackrabbits for the hungry became Hoover hogs. Hoover asks his Treasury Secretary for a nickel so he can call a friend. Secretary hands President a dime, says call both your friends. Jokes derived from appalling facts. In that election year stock prices were just 11 percent of the 1929 maximum. People leaving the country in 1932 exceeded the number of immigrants. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt, crippled by polio but a jaunty, aristocratic, apparently fearless leader, was elected easily and took office in March 1933, about 40 percent of American banks had failed since 1929. Unemployment nationally, little more than 3 percent in 1929, was by 1933 a crushing 25 percent. Even postage stamps had gone back up from two to three cents under Hoover, for gosh sakes.<sup>462</sup>

With the dawning of the Democratic New Deal Chet and Jo Curtis, like many thousands of farmers, learned quickly to appreciate agricultural and land conservation subsidies and production controls. Such measures had resulted partly from successful farm bloc lobbying, nudged into life by agitators like Milo Reno. On Ada’s 160 acres that Chet was farming, the Civilian Conservation Corps—the “CCC”—made up of formerly unemployed young men in an almost military organization, came daily in trucks for awhile: “eighty-five relief workers.” To limit soil erosion, they set up terrace lines and planted black walnut and locust trees along ditches. Jo found that all went well, except, she remembered almost seventy years later, one of those eighty-five CCC “boys” stole all the clothespins off her line.<sup>463</sup>

A few years later Chet and Jo’s eighty-acre “poor farm” (which had earlier been platted to Milo E. Reno) would also benefit from government programs. Iowa went Democratic in 1932, as did the *Batavia News*, which on January 4, 1934, praised the men of the Civil Works Administration (CWA) as “fellows, all of them conscientious in their work . . . not a single shirker.” Such praise served as counterpoint to hostility in some quarters to the later Works Progress Administration (WPA), which some said stood for “We poke along.” Following is one of many limping rhymes that poked fun at the WPA specifically and the New Deal generally:

There was a works progression man who lay upon the ground,  
And he said to his comrades sadly gathered round,  
Break the news to mother and tell her that I died,



Leaning on my shovel which is buried by my side,  
Don't quit the job boys, don't work too hard,  
Remember that you're working by the day and not the yard,  
I joined the WPA upon a day in spring,  
I little knew what hardship, what trouble it would bring,  
I thought all I'd have to do would be to draw my pay,  
Instead I have to come and lean around all day.  
Oh, I'm for you, Mr. President  
I'm for you all the way  
You can take away the alphabet  
But don't take away this WPA.

And so on. Some people complained, but they and many others benefited both in the short and long term from an array of WPA and other New Deal programs. The WPA program built roads, bridges, dams, water systems, hospitals, public buildings, and schools. It employed hundreds of artists, writers, and musicians. Both Joy Hilleary and I attended high schools built by New Deal programs. Throughout many years together, we have tented in innumerable camps and hiked innumerable trails fabricated by CCC men across the country. We have traveled on a national highway system that had its real beginnings during the New Deal. In 1933, my first year as well as Franklin Delano Roosevelt's, in addition to the CCC and CWA, appeared among others the NRA (National Recovery Act), AAA (Agricultural Adjustment Act), TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority), and FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation). Like millions throughout the country, Chet and Jo had lost money in banks, as had, disastrously, Jo's parents. Although too late for past losses, they must have been gratified to learn that "The Peoples State Bank of Batavia became the first bank in Jefferson County to attain membership in the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation." To paraphrase the Democrat's theme song, happier days were in some respects here again, probably. Despite witnessing the power of positive government programs, however, both Jo and Chet tended in retrospect to see their Depression woes as not having resulted from failed or nonexistent governmental economic policies. Rather they dwelt on matters of individual judgment, or on inscrutable events that could not be controlled, events as mysterious and dangerous as the weather.<sup>464</sup>

### **Too Hot, Too Dry, Too Wet**

Farmers had always lived with the sure knowledge that they could not count on the weather. Or, that they could count on the weather to do the wrong thing. In the decade of harder times, they were cruelly

reminded. In the early 1930s more often than not the weather in their area of southeastern Iowa was too dry, as in 1933—the year of the first great dust storms out of the plains states—and in 1934 and 1936. The year 1934 was notable for spring dust storms; burning midsummer heat (108 to 112 degrees at Batavia); a drought in which wells and cisterns ran dry; gardens, pastures, and field crops withering, with little food in prospect for humans or livestock. The *Batavia News* railed that Wapello County farmers without livestock feed were eligible for state funding of cattle purchases, but not those in adjoining Jefferson.<sup>465</sup>

In 1935 spring had been too dry and with dust storms, but the rest of the season had been too wet. On Saturday, March 16, had occurred, “A dust storm in the morning so one couldn’t see the road, [but] sleet and snow and a raging blizzard in the afternoon.” “The dust . . . caused the light . . . to take on a sickly yellow hue as the sun tried to shine through the ebony atmosphere.” In early June 1935, while CCC workers were curbing Curtis farm erosion, “dust filled the air” as topsoil from the Great Plains blew in. In 2002 Jo exclaimed, “Oh, yes, it was Oklahoma dust” that covered house windowsills “red with dust.” And the sun sank red in the west. Perhaps it is not entirely fanciful to imagine some of that silt may have drifted onto Grandma Ada’s farm from Ed Tucker’s out in the Oklahoma panhandle, he a relative of Ada’s whose land was pretty regularly blowing away northeastward. In Oklahoma, Iowa, and great expanses around and in between farmers and farming country were being driven out and buried under.<sup>466</sup>

Two weeks after Chet and Jo’s area was smothered by that dust storm, it was hit by “torrential rain,” a real gully washer. That fall one five-acre plot on the farm produced only one low wagon box of shelled corn. In August threshing at the neighboring “McMullin boys” farm had produced a pitiful twelve bushels an acre.<sup>467</sup>

Winter 1936 was the coldest in Iowa records since 1874-75, and the fourth snowiest. From January 18 through February 22 Iowa temperatures averaged 2.4 degrees Fahrenheit above zero. On February 5 the low was twenty-eight degrees below. Average Iowa snowfall that winter was fifty-one inches on the level—before drifting. On January 23 the *Batavia News* reported, “Northwest Wind on Wednesday Blows Up 21 Below Weather.” A second story reported that while walking to school from southwest of town high school senior Ferne Huffman “froze her left wrist as well as both legs from the top of her galoshes to the knee.” (She was surely wearing a dress, as good girls still did.) Not only people, but livestock and wild creatures, like pheasants, suffered and sometimes died.<sup>468</sup>

Throughout that frigid winter Chet and Jo yearned for summer, which became the hottest and driest in Iowa records. Six days in June were above one hundred degrees, and for more than three weeks of July, with the fifteenth at 115, and the average July high at 102.7. August had sixteen days over one hundred. The *Fairfield Ledger*, July 16, 1936, reported, "One egg placed on the walk at the south side of the Iowa Loan and Trust Co. Building fried solidly in eighteen minutes today." Summer 1936 led in number of hot days, almost every day a scorcher, but parts of Iowa had experienced 110 degrees in 1933; 1934, with the worst May heat in history, reached 111.5 in July, mid-afternoon, at Fairfield (Batavia claimed 112); 1935 reached 108.<sup>469</sup>

Too hot, too dry, too wet. Under such conditions, crops suffered, and of course in those years even poor harvests brought poor prices, as did often-lean livestock. In those days and years of extreme weather Jo believed that flies, mosquitoes, and other bugs had been worse than in a later insecticidal age. Certain insects were irritating, others disastrous.

### **Insects Under Foot, in the Crops, in the House**

"Chinch bug, a kind of bug, with a disgusting odor, which does great injury to wheat and other grains in dry seasons; the *Blissus leucopterus*." On July 27, 1933, the *Batavia News* reported that the season's "second generation" of "chinch bugs are now depositing their eggs" on corn plants. "The chinch bug situation in southern Iowa is very serious" because of dry weather; the insects having "destroyed a very large percentage of wheat, oats and barley." The article suggested methods of eradication, including burning sites where chinch bugs would "overwinter," and protecting bird habitat. As Jo emphasized forty years later, despite these and other palliatives, principally trenches filled with oil, "Thirty-four was awfully hot and dry . . . Forty acres of corn that the chinch bugs didn't get to" were saved, but the corn yield was dismal, and the bugs ate a hundred acres of oats. "We didn't even get the binder out" to try to salvage something from the field. Another Iowa woman, Inez McAlister Faber, complained wryly, "We empty them from our shoes before entering the house. We crush them beneath our feet as we walk across the kitchen floor. We find some of the bolder spirits happily swimming in the water bucket. A carefree group romps in the butter dish." Chinch bugs flourished in varying degree throughout 1933, '34, '35, and '36. During the latter summer, grasshoppers also flourished in the unbearable heat and tried to eat whatever plants hadn't wilted into nothingness. Chinch bugs had of course appeared earlier,

in 1923 and at other times, as had grasshoppers. In the '30s, however, it was the concentration of pests, impossible weather, debt, and a ruptured economy that many farm families found overwhelming.<sup>470</sup>

### **From Boom to Bust, Farms were Lost, and People Cried for Jobs**

Farmers had gone from Boom to Bust in little more and often less than a decade. Sheriff's sales plagued the land as surely as chinch bugs and grasshoppers. Friends went broke and had to face the music. In spring 1929 Frank Lamis, all hilarity, was doing a charivari "Indian" dance on Chet and Jo's front porch. In the early '30s, he and Lena lost their farm up the road from Chet and Jo's. The Fred Ornduffs lost farms. Johnny Fansher lost a farm. The list extended.

Chet's mother, Ada, nearly lost hers—the farm that he and Jo worked. Ada and Arthur had bought 190 acres in 1915, but for Ada, hard times had struck particularly hard when Arthur, only forty-five, died of tuberculosis in 1918. As Jo said, her own Teeter family had never had much, but as for Chet's, "I don't think there ever was a time that they didn't have a hard time." In the 1920s and '30s, only by selling thirty acres north of the road, and with the work and financial aid of family members, was Ada able to avoid disaster that struck so many neighbors. She had received advice and loans from father-in-law Judson Curtis who, on December 7, 1925, wrote, "Received of Ada C. Curtis \$838.43 in payment in full for all debts." In 1932 and '33, when Chet and Jo were unable to scrape together quite enough for Ada's mortgage payments, Estol, Ethan, and Lawrence—although hardly affluent themselves—made up the difference, \$65 each.

Some bankrupted owners like Frank and Lena and the Ornduffs recovered in the long run, but in the short many became renters or "hired hands," or lived with relatives. A few local farm people went on "the dole," or if lucky to Roosevelt's New Deal work programs, such as the WPA or, if young and single men, to the CCC. Chet remembered that "People just cried for a job." He had offered a man the fair choice of shucking corn for two cents a bushel, or for a dollar a day and board. The man took the dollar and guaranteed meals. "Another day, another dollar," was now literally true—if a man was lucky.

In "On Relief," Iowa poet James Hearst images "a man with want-ads in his eyes." One of the few hit songs of 1932 and of the '30s that was neither a love ballad nor a silly song was "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" It had an urban theme, but farmers weren't doing very well either. In Feike Feikema's novel, *This is the Year*, Pier Frixen is a model of the

hard working, ever hopeful Iowa farmer who loses farm, home, and family to weather and the bankers. He takes to the road, seeing himself as “a torn blade of grass, wind-blown, flying over the land, one moment soaring, the next caught on a stone,” and as “a blinded Cyclops hurling a stone at an invisible enemy.” A tramp like Pier might sigh plaintively, “Oh, lady, would you be kind enough to give me a bite to eat— / A piece of bread and butter and a ten-foot slice of meat? / A cake, a pie, a pudding, to tickle my appetite—”<sup>471</sup>

## **Born into an Era of Drought and Chinch Bugs**

When I was born, a second son, in an era of drought and chinch bugs, about 8:30 p.m., November 23, 1933, my father had labored at fall plowing in snowfall as my mother labored with me all day in the front bedroom. “I remember Wayne standing by my bed and holding my head,” Jo said in February 2001. “I guess he felt sorry for me.” As well he might have, for she labored without a doctor’s assistance, he having been called late and arriving as, or even after, I was born, neither Grandma Ada nor Chet wanting to bother Doc King prematurely. Nevertheless, my life expectancy was fifty-nine years, about ten more than when my parents were born early in the century. Not surprisingly, however, the country’s birth rate was the lowest in history, 6.5 per thousand, compared to twenty-five in 1915. Having been born at home, I was, incidentally, in an American majority. Not for another five years would more than 50 percent of births occur in a hospital.<sup>472</sup>

Chet remembered in 1969 that I had been “a hard one to get paid for.” Doc King’s bill for a home birth had been \$25 or \$30. That’s not much money—unless you don’t have it. As Jo said, it didn’t matter if bread was a nickel if you didn’t have a nickel. If you had one you might buy a loaf at Swenson and Nelson’s in Batavia, the “Old Reliable” general store since 1909, or a can of Van Camp’s Pork and Beans at Sadler’s Market. Regrettably, you couldn’t afford to waste a nickel on two big ice cream cones, and you were even less likely to waste seven cents on a “refreshing and rich” malted milk at The Welcome Inn. Many years later, Jo regretted that “We never had enough money to have Bruce’s [baby] picture taken.” Neither had my parents enough money to pay for pregnancy checks, except once when Jo was eight months along.

Ironically, in 1933, Chicago’s Exposition celebrated a “Century of Progress,” and in *The Gold Diggers of 1933* Ginger Rogers sang “We’re in the Money.” A more appropriate popular song was “Smoke Gets in Your




Eyes”; another, “Everything I Have is Yours,” could well have been dedicated to America’s mortgage companies for “one-half of all home mortgages . . . were in default.” The Chicago Exposition, incidentally, would have been in default as well, had it not been for Sally Rand, fan dancer, who brought in the bucks. One of the more popular songs of my birth year was Walt Disney’s “Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?” The title was apt, for the new President Roosevelt and his country faced not only national and worldwide Depression but also new Chancellor Adolf Hitler with his Nuremberg Rallies and Dachau concentration camp, not to mention Josef Stalin’s Soviet Union, which America belatedly recognized just that year.<sup>473</sup>

**Running a Tab to Make Ends Meet**

Between the rock and the hard place, or between Little Red Riding Hood and her Nemesis, sometimes stood Doc King, or a store like Swenson and Nelson’s, willing from sympathy or necessity to extend credit. Do not, twenty-first century reader, try this at a supermarket or Health Maintenance Organization. Consider interest rates on unpaid credit card bills. Extending credit to patients was hardly new for Doc King. In 1924 he ran a front-page ad, apparently his own creation: “Each thirty days your doctor pays medicine bills to cure your ills. Should he neglect to send the check, ‘Your credit’s dead’ is promptly said. Doc’s ‘carried’ you a year or two,—you havent yet paid him that debt. One day, right quick, you’re taken

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days from 10 to 11 A. M. only.  
Office over Batavia Savings Bank  
BATAVIA, IOWA

*Batavia News*, Nov. 19, 1925



Dr. King’s house, Batavia

sick, and costly drugs (not bought in jugs) must win the strife to save your life . . . Since time began what other man works night and day and trusts for pay?” A decade later Doc King was still trusting for pay. The good doctor did, however, manage to acquire nicer houses and cars, and more farmland, than most of his patients, partly because most patients eventually paid somehow.

Having farms was convenient for Doc King; at least once, for attending a birth, he was paid in pigs.<sup>474</sup>

As for Swenson and Nelson's, Chet remembered he and Jo had once owed \$50 or \$60, "the only time we ever had a store bill." But Jo was sure that later, not long after Pearl Harbor and before her father died in mid-December 1941, they had had "no money" and another store bill, probably again at Swenson and Nelson's. Short of going on relief, running a store tab was the only way to make both ends almost meet.

I, blessedly unaware of bills and hardly aware of being poor, remember that store as a cornucopia of viewable goods on tall shelves against high walls. A long counter had (forbidden) candy jars, and a clerk or two behind it, eager to snare a box of Kellogg's Corn Flakes from a high shelf with a gripper at the end of a long pole. But in our house we ate oatmeal, not flakes; nor did anyone in our family drink coffee brewed from beans the store offered in a wonderfully aromatic open hundred-pound sack with a self-serve wooden scoop. We bought only necessities. Five pounds of oatmeal, good for several weeks, cost sixteen cents, about an hour and a half's wages. When Chet and Jo had collected their few purchases, before plastic or even paper bags were common, a clerk would tear off a square of brown butcher paper from a roll, wrap our goods, and tie the package with string from a spool hanging over his head.<sup>475</sup>

Two Swenson and Nelson items appeared in the November 7, 1935, *Batavia News*, the first, "Nelson Cuts Finger": "Raymond Nelson had a serious accident Thursday afternoon. His middle finger was caught in the meat grinder and was taken off to the first joint. A shot was given to prevent infection." Second, their weekly ad featured ground meat at fifteen cents a pound. Perhaps the cannibalistic linkage provided wry amusement for hard times, helped ease whatever heartbreak.

SATURDAY — SPECIALS — MONDAY

Kraft Dinner, per package .....10c

10 Pounds Sugar, in cloth bag .....54c

2 Pound Bob Crackers .....15c

Peaberry Coffee (we grind it fresh)

Per pound ..... 25c, 20c, 15c

Creme Sandwich Cookies, 2 lbs. ....25c

I O A Pancake Flour, 3 lb. bag .....15c

Palmolive Soap, buy 3 bars and get one for 1c

Woodbury Soap, buy 3 bars and get one for 1c

2 Lb. Bag of Raisins .....15c

Large Grape Fruit (Texas Seedless) 8 for ..25c

Our Congratulations to Batavia on the Completion of its NewMethodist Church

— MEAT DEPARTMENT —

Lard, package or bulk, per pound ..... 10c

Bacon Squares, Chunk, per pound ..... 18c

Longhorn Cheese, per pound ..... 22c

Wieners - the best, per pound ..... 20c

Swenson & Nelson

THE OLD RELIABLE STORE—BATAVIA

*Batavia News*, March 20, 1941

## Deeper and Deeper into the Depression

“You got along, more or less, with what you had,” Jo said matter of factly. All farm people and most in towns had gardens. You had to buy flour and sugar, but mostly you grew your own food. Unemployed townsfolk without gardens or access to farm produce were in trouble. Ottumwa, Wapello County seat, had soup lines. Just before I was born authorities estimated that if relief were cut off for one week, “5,000 Ottumwa persons would suffer from cold and hunger.” Half of Community Chest funds were going to relief. County officials were planning relief work for the unemployed. Meanwhile, County workers were going unpaid. The federal government had provided 23,000 pounds of surplus pork for the area needy. Boy Scouts were collecting warm clothing for the needy. On November 13 a windstorm left “trees damaged, windows shattered, telephone and electric service crippled.” On November 16 the thermometer dropped to eight above zero.<sup>476</sup>

Even if farm families did not go hungry, the fare, especially in winter, was often monotonous. Some people like brother-in-law Homer Wheeldon hunted and fished to supplement their diet. More people than usual fished the Des Moines River, Cedar Creek, or smaller streams. Chet shot a squirrel once and dressed it, but he didn’t like dark meat, which was all a squirrel had, and Jo didn’t like the looks of it. They threw it out. We sometimes had our own chicken eggs and bacon (two slices only) for breakfast. Thick cream and one tiny spoonful of sugar improved oatmeal. Sugar, Depression-expensive, became Wartime-rationed, even until Peacetime 1947. I once sneaked and devoured several spoonfuls, but soon regretted it—for physical if not ethical reasons.

Jo had one good dress and maybe a couple of others. “But you didn’t have a whole closet full of clothes. I remember talking to Grace Morrison—Grace Johnson—and saying I didn’t have a dress to wear to Chet’s alumni banquet. She said you can get the goods for a dollar. And I did. It only cost a dollar.” Even as the country edged out of hard times, farmwomen might still choose to buy a certain brand of chicken feed or flour if the patterned cotton sacks were attractive. Two would make a dress. Like other women, Jo altered old dresses into children’s clothing, made a snowsuit from her woolen 1920s middie blouse. Some of the boys’ few clothes she washed every day by machine, cloth diapers by hand. Boys’ shoes, unfortunately, had to be bought new.

To pay for store-bought food and other necessities like shoes, Chet’s work clothes, medical bills, gas and oil for car and tractor, and the essential

telephone, a little money came in from crops, depending upon the year; from pigs at whatever price they would bring; and from traditional sources of cream, eggs, and chickens. Eventually, limited New Deal Agricultural Adjustment Act subsidies were available for reducing grain and livestock production in an effort to raise market prices.

People made do and got along, but sometimes under heartbreaking conditions. In 1981 Jo returned to a repeated theme in her memories. "We had some good times and bad times," she wrote, "but it seems the bad comes back plainer." In the Bible God subjects a man to the most severe tests, to test Job's love and obedience to Himself. The poet, William Kloefkorn, in "Alvin Turner as Farmer," reports a vision: "And I looked up to see / Christ like a pea-eyed whirlwind / Sitting on a buckboard. / Are you Job? he asked. / No, I said, he lives one farm to the north." Lest we forget, sometimes in the 1930s, in Iowa, just one farm to the north, Job was a woman.

### Wayne Keith Curtis

Josephine and Chester's firstborn was Wayne Keith, on August 28, in their second year of marriage, 1930.



Wayne with Grandmother Ada Curtis, 1930

He was "such a pretty baby he never was red and ugly . . . the prettiest baby we had ever seen." Attended at home by Doc King and Grandma Ada, at ten and a half pounds his delivery required the use of forceps. Consequently his head was somewhat misshapen, but it soon returned to normal. On Wayne's birth certificate Dr. King reported that he had been born alive at 6 a.m., although "asphyxiated," that is blue and not breathing; but whether Slightly, Moderately, or Severely he did not indicate. To Jo, Wayne seemed to develop as expected, and was sitting up at eight months for his baby portrait. Grandma Ada, who helped regularly, remembered

a normal baby, "laughing and cooing." The photograph shows Wayne wearing baby shoes that are, except for the instep, stained on the soles. Another photo shows him standing, aided by someone's hand on his arm. Pretty or not, in those early months, "He was a hard baby to take care



of, perhaps partly because I tried to breast feed him and also tried to keep everything in order and have company in, which was not good for either of us.”

When Wayne was eleven months, sitting up but not yet crawling, Chet was caring for him one weekday morning while Jo was gone somewhere. Chet later told her that both were on the bed, Chet reading, when Wayne somehow rolled off. He quickly began to “lose control,” to have balance problems, to be unable to sit up. That afternoon, Ada believed Wayne could not see.



Wayne Keith Curtis, nine months

Chet “didn’t want to take Wayne to the doctor that night. At that time you didn’t take children to the doctor like you do now.” Nevertheless, Jo, supported by Chet’s hired hand, Lelio Reed, pressed the matter. But Doc King, after examining the boy and having him sit up by himself, found nothing wrong. Wayne “soon regained control,” perhaps by the next day, certainly within a few days. He did not walk by himself, however, until he was twenty-two months.



Wayne at three

Sometime between age two and three, in 1932 or ‘33, Wayne fell with something, a ruler or a pencil, in his mouth and “lost control” again for a time. Whether he fell because he lost control, or lost control because he fell, is unclear. A visit to a chiropractor revealed nothing and he seemed to recover.

Then very early in January 1935, the sixth, a cold Sunday, Wayne wanted to go to the barn with his father. Although Jo “bundled him up,” he quickly complained of being cold and Chet brought him back. “I

thought he was unsteady then. He staggered on the porch coming to meet me.” By Monday morning he had again “lost control,” and could not walk or even sit up.

Jo’s friend and former neighbor, Grace Giltner, recommended an Ottumwa pediatrician, Dr. Hughes, who, after an office visit, quickly arranged for Wayne to be examined at University of Iowa Hospital, almost a hundred miles away. There he was tested for several days in eleven different departments, “and his case history had to be given each time.” At night Jo, Chet, and Wayne stayed in Grace’s apartment, she an Iowa City high school domestic science teacher, still at home for the holidays.

Jo, Wayne, and Chet went home, but, ultimately, “The decision was that he might have a brain tumor. We consented to brain surgery. There was no tumor. We were told that he would keep getting worse, that his brain would harden, he would have convulsions and nothing more could be done . . . When his wound healed we took him home. There was no improvement. He lost weight. He couldn’t do anything. He had to have enemas. He did urinate without help.” It was still January. As Wayne weakened, he became lethargic, even seemed no longer to enjoy Leonard’s attempts to entertain him with the guitar.

“I remember,” Jo wrote, “bringing Wayne home from Iowa City and all we had was navy beans and little bitty potatoes cooked with skins on and Wayne would want attention and food would get cold. . . . I would go to take care of him and by the time I was back to table everything was cold and I couldn’t eat.”

And at fourteen or fifteen months baby Bruce was simply getting too heavy to lift. I had been born late in 1933, which meant that Jo had been pregnant for most of that dry and difficult year for the nation, for Chet and Jo as farmers, and as parents of ailing Wayne. Although healthy and not notably troublesome, I was an additional complication and burden. Furthermore, Jo recalled, “At that time Naomi had Leona who was three months older than Bruce. She also came to stay at our house with Leona who whined so much it almost drove me up the wall and I didn’t feel I got much sympathy from Chet.”



Bruce, Wayne, and Bob the dog, 1934



## Multiple Medical Crises

Utterly worn down from literally years of care and crisis, Josephine developed mastoiditis, a serious, potentially fatal infection of the mastoid bone behind the ear. As she remembered, "It really never hurt me. I was just so run down." Doc King came at least twice, and Jo entered Ottumwa Hospital in mid-February 1935. "I was so run down I had to be built up before surgery could be done." How then to pay for an absolutely necessary operation? Fortunately, Wapello County had paid for all of Wayne's medical bills, but Jo and Chet were without even the concept of health insurance, either public or private. For the mastoidectomy bill, Jo "offered Dr. Prewitt some price. It wasn't what he normally charged, but he took it, and it was paid in full."

The *Batavia News* reported in early March, "Mrs. Chester Curtis spent the weekend with home folks. She has been a patient at the Ottumwa hospital for the past month. She is still under the doctor's care and expects to stay" for a week with Chet's sister Bertha and her husband Harry McNiell in Ottumwa. Meanwhile, "Wayne Curtis, who has been sick since the first of January, is able to walk around now. He is still taking treatments in Ottumwa." And both Wayne and Bruce had recovered from mid-February mumps. The Curtis family's multiple crises were receding, although getting to and from the highway to Ottumwa and elsewhere was an everyday headache with mud roads "practically impassable," with even rural mail carriers "in plenty of trouble," using horses, hiring helpers. In fact, "M. A. Davidson, Batavia mortician, was forced to use a horse drawn hearse . . . Mr. Davidson said that the road was in the worst shape . . . in over 25 years . . . The hearse was forced to make a seven mile trip over the bottomless road." Despite such dispiriting times, by late March Jo was recovered enough to attend an Our Day Out club meeting. In mid-May Chet was Toastmaster at the Batavia High School alumni banquet, and Jo took both boys to Helping Hand Club. Nevertheless, she recovered her strength and precarious health only gradually. Once school was out, Jo's teenage niece, "Miss Berniece Gorman came . . . to work at the Chester Curtis home," where she stayed for more than a month, because Jo "couldn't do everything that I was supposed to do."<sup>477</sup>

After Wayne's operation and before Jo's, she and Chet had consulted with Wayne's Ottumwa chiropractor, who, like University of Iowa specialists, could offer little or no hope for his recovery to normality, perhaps even his survival. On the way home, they met Bertha and Harry, and, Jo said, "Chet couldn't talk. I had to do the talking. He was all broke up about the way

Wayne was.” Given their distressed condition, Josephine and Chester could hardly have carried on without help. Friends and family members pitched in. Chet’s brother, Lawrence, came for a time, was kicked by a cow, but carried on nevertheless. Mabel, his wife, stayed and helped. For several days, Ollie soothed mumps-ridden grandsons. A neighbor, Mrs. Crile, kept Bruce at least once while Chet and Jo took Wayne to treatment.

Ada and Leonard still lived just down the road. Always willing to help indoors or out, they were godsend during the dark winter of 1935. In fact they moved back to the home farm temporarily to care for livestock and for Bruce when Wayne was in Iowa City. Whenever she had to leave, Jo was torn, for, “It was so hard to leave Bruce as he was talking much. He wouldn’t say anything but he knew. When we were getting ready to leave he would go to the door and sit by it. He was walking at eleven months.” She and Chet could take comfort, however, in knowing that “[I was] eating whatever you wanted. . . . Grandma and Leonard were cramming you from both sides when we were not there.”

While Jo was recovering in Ottumwa Hospital from the mastoidectomy, she and Chet decided to take Wayne back to the Ottumwa chiropractor. “Wayne was having enemas at all times . . . also he could not set up. He was losing weight.” Lacking equipment, the chiropractor refused immediate treatment, suggested, rather, Palmer chiropractic school x-rays in Davenport. Ada held Wayne in the Pontiac coupe from the farm to the chiropractor’s office, and stayed at the hospital with Jo until Chet returned that night.

“Chet took the car and the chiropractor held Wayne” all the way to Davenport, several hours away. There, “x-rays showed a slipped vertebra at the base of the skull . . . The next day he had a very slight adjustment and after that his bowels began to function . . . With each adjustment he improved.” Even while returning home that first day, Ada was surprised to hear Wayne say he was hungry for ice cream. “He had several treatments and became able to walk and take care of himself.” This by early spring 1935.

Thereafter Wayne’s health stabilized. In late April he and Bruce contracted measles from Cousin Leona Hutton, but neither suffered lasting effects. Wayne started to school in fall 1935. Later



Wayne and Bruce, 1937

in the century, if he had not been enrolled in a special education program, he would have been “mainstreamed.” But a one room rural school had only one stream, and no special education beyond that offered by sensitive and understanding young teachers from the neighborhood.

For Wayne, life was immeasurably stressful because the damage he suffered to his nervous system did not destroy his sense of self. Wayne was aware that he was not exactly like others of his age and sex. His life, consequently, was a constant, painful, often cruel, schooling in the facts that there were things he could not do, standards he could not meet, tests he would not pass, life experiences he would not have.

Wayne learned to walk and to run, but not well and steadily, to throw and bat a ball, but not accurately. For pick-up games, he was last chosen. He had trouble remembering and following the rules of games, of new directions and procedures generally. To strangers and the unkind, his speech seemed slurred. He learned to read, write, and do sums, but in the higher grades the strain intensified. Although calloused by everyday irritations of living with an older brother who often could not cope, one night in our living room I felt wrenching pity when Wayne broke down and sobbed because he could not solve his seventh grade math problems. Eighth grade was no better.

To offer him the semblance of a high school experience, and hoping he might succeed at eighth grade on second try, Josephine took the lead in sending Wayne to Batavia, where elementary and high school shared a building. He apparently enjoyed the year, more stimulating than in a rural school, although he told me at least once of being teased and given a mocking nickname. In our rural neighborhood, however, after Wayne left school for farm work, surrounded by family, relatives, church members, and kindly neighbors, such events were rare.



While there may be a season for all things, the closer truth in Josephine and

Wayne Curtis, 1943

Chester's relationship may have been that they learned to live every day year in and year out with their son's tragedy, and theirs. Wayne would, after all, be an ever-present reminder in their home and social life until after Chet died. Chet must have had to learn to live every day with the

bitter fact of his son's injury and with his part in it. He certainly managed to control his temper and behavior rigorously in dealing with Wayne, often in frustrating situations. For Wayne, despite his always-best intentions, often made erratic mistakes, sometimes broke things, sometimes endangered not only himself but others. I cannot remember, however, that he ever spanked Wayne, or allowed his emotions to rage.

Chet controlled his behavior, suppressed his emotions, swallowed his bitterness. Jo, as has been and will be seen, poured self-sacrificing energies into caring for her family's needs, certainly for Wayne's, but for both her sons' as equally as possible, and for her husband's as long as he lived.

### **Jo Serves Family, Church, School, and Community**

In the early years Jo's family absorbed her attention almost completely. On November 28, 1929, local radical Ennis Sterner reported in the *Batavia News*: "The lady that operates the Victory movie in Fairfield" was arrested for opening on Sunday. "All other towns do it, why not Fairfield?" The *News* reported on February 6, 1930, "Communists attempted recently to stage a demonstration before the textile mills in New Bedford, Massachusetts, but the gathering was quickly dispersed by policemen who used their clubs freely." And it noted April 20, 1933, that Batavia's town council, expediting a state law in effect April 17, had gone wet, had authorized sale of 3.2 beer. (Council had done so, apparently, with hardly a dry eye in the room, and without so much as a nod to those Methodist saloon-smashing ladies of long ago. The Twenty-first Amendment to the Constitution, repealing national Prohibition, was not officially declared ratified until December 5.)<sup>478</sup>

Jo, still of sound mind and memory early in the third millennium, nevertheless could not remember these things. Neither could she remember an altercation between near neighbors involving two Lattas, father and son; five Morrisons, father and sons; clubs, a knife, knife cuts, bruises; and a disputed \$14.50 Latta debt for a Morrison son's labor. Notably, Ernest Latta, he of discarded cigar wrappings and ashes on newlywed Jo's pristine carpet, appeared in court with a bandaged nose.<sup>479</sup>

Life in the 1930s had gone on and would go on in the world, nation, and community even as their own crises absorbed Jo and Chet. Even earlier, "I never voted 'til after I was married, although I always could have. I guess Mother didn't vote, and that was probably the reason I never did vote." In 1976 widowed only a few years and conversant with burgeoning feminist ideas, Jo confessed while discussing national politics, "I was bad. I let you

dad look after everything like that. Your dad was a pretty strong person. I kind of went along with whatever he said. It was bad because I didn't think for myself." As a former teacher, "I knew more about the Revolutionary War than about events in my life." But you were involved in raising kids? "And chickens. And farm work, yes. What went on outside wasn't all that important."

At times, Josephine was her own harshest critic. Despite disclaimers that were undoubtedly accurate in part, she did develop views concerning the value of the New Deal and its various programs. About some, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Soils Conservation Service, her views derived from personal observation of their salutary effect on Ada's farm and later on hers and Chet's. Neither did Jo always follow Chet's opinions, as in the case of the firecrackers: "I remember one time at Helping Hand Club when it came up about firecrackers on the Fourth of July. (I knew it would come up and your dad had told me to stay out.) All of a sudden I heard myself saying a law is a law and they are meant to be obeyed. If you are going to break this law you are not teaching children right. I feel sure this was inspired by God. There were no firecrackers at the club gathering."

Religious faith was then and continued to be an indispensable source of Jo's strength. One stifling mid-July night in 1934, with two thousand others in the huge old wooden auditorium in Fairfield's Chautauqua Park, she and Chet heard the flamboyant evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson tell of praying for shoes and finding a pair outside her door



Aimee Semple McPherson

next morning. Not one to deny miracles outright, Jo thought without enthusiasm that it was "possible." She would have been more impressed had God answered Mrs. Semple McPherson's very public prayer for rain to relieve drought-and-heat-stricken Jefferson County. When God did not act upon her proposal, she cut short her Fairfield sojourn and reportedly said she was going to "vacation somewhere on a lake," leaving Jo and all behind to swelter and watch their crops wither. Although she might be willing to give credence to miracles, Jo consistently found revivalist enthusiasm distasteful; both she and Chet preferred their local church's more sedate Methodist worship and "fellowship."<sup>480</sup>

Early in their marriage, the first monthly meeting of the Methodist



Young Married People's group was held "with President Chester Curtis and wife at their home . . . A social good time was enjoyed at the close of which refreshments of ice cream and cake were served by the host and hostess." Two years later, sharing the front-page with, "Crops Need Rain, Are Hit By Grasshoppers," and "Oppressive Heat," was the announcement that Chester Curtis had been elected a church Steward, as he was also the next year.<sup>481</sup>

Even before marrying, Jo had helped Chet organize annual Batavia High School alumni banquets because gregarious and willing, "He was President a lot of the time." This included their wedding year when at the banquet Jo received a rolling pin, no doubt accompanied by jocular remarks about who would be boss. "And after we were married I had to help him plan" more banquets. As late as at least 1958 Chet again headed the alumni.

"I was home for a long time with two little boys," but Jo "was not depressed as people would be today"; nevertheless, like Chet, she enjoyed an occasional outing. The newlyweds and soon parents added various neighborhood social groups to their calendar. On Friday night, June 17, 1932, "The Yampa Helping Hand Club held a moonlight picnic at the Chester Curtis home . . . for their families. They were driven home by a storm early



Hazel Dell School,  
Pleasant Township,  
District No. 6

in the evening." The Hazel Dell Community Club met monthly in the schoolyard in good weather, with children, for picnics, gossip, games, skits, and "stunts," inside in bad weather. In October 1933 among officers elected was Chester Curtis, President. That same month, due to deliver in November, "Josephine Curtis attended Hazel Dell Club at Mrs. Fellows, and members quilted for Mrs. Fellows." In August the Club had met "with

Mrs. Chester Curtis," and "The ladies tied a comfort." Also beginning in the mid-'30s, Chet and Jo became long-term members of a monthly pitch card club.<sup>482</sup>

Jo helped organize the "ODO," whose first monthly meeting was at her home in November 1933, days before I was born. It was conceived "just so women could have a little fun," which included games and contests involving written questions, recipes, and jumbled words. The club's full title, "Our Day Out," was meaningful but somewhat misleading since mothers brought children. Often guests hemmed tea towels or did "fancy work" for the hostess who served "dainty refreshments."

The Helping Hand Club's title was more exact. Elizabeth Sterner

wrote to Jo, “We started the club during World War One . . . to make cakes, breads and other things without the use of sugar and white flour. We also made cheese, soap, learned to cold pack fruits and vegetables, also meats. Many were the quilts and rugs made . . . if not for the hostess then given to needy families or organizations.” Charter members of this inclusive neighborhood group were Kate Acton, Mattie Arbogast, Mrs. Austin, Anna Creamer, Ada Curtis, Alta Giltner, Grace Heady, Beulah Jones, Mrs. Charles Kruger, Ida Lawson, Mrs. Gust Lind, Ethel Morrison (first meeting hostess), Mrs. George Morrison, Elizabeth Sterner, Mrs. Ezra Sterner, Mrs. Charles Young, perhaps Minnie Sterner, perhaps Helen Warren. “Dad wanted me to join because his mother belonged as a charter member. I didn’t join right off. I wasn’t too enthused about it.” But join she did. And in 1935 organized games for members and served “dainty refreshments of sandwiches, coffee and pickles.” Many years later, in 1959, a dozen members met at Jo’s, including charter member Ada Curtis, and they “knotted a comfort” for someone.<sup>483</sup>

The Ladies Aid, later called the WSCS, or Women’s Society of Christian Service, and yet later United Methodist Women (UMW) was also a service organization. Early on Chet had not wanted Jo to join, but eventually he relented. Jo was unsure why in both instances: “I didn’t always ask questions. It was better to leave things just as they were.”

Members met at the church (without children) for a monthly luncheon and religious study. They prepared and served food for the usual occasions—funerals, weddings, church fundraisers, farm sales; for charities and missions, for fire and illness victims, and for injured farmers whose neighbors were planting or harvesting their crops. In 1955 WSCS women painted the church basement. Jo attended UMW into the twenty-first century for a time, but ODO and Helping Hand declined and disappeared as the farming population lessened and young farm wives increasingly took paying jobs.

The common denominator of Jo’s participation in Helping Hand Club and Methodist Church Ladies Aid can be found in their titles and is seamlessly related to her earlier participation as student and teacher in school box suppers. Like other women, her friends and relatives, Jo contributed unpaid work to the welfare of neighborhood, school district, church, and community. For Jo, as for other women of her day and earlier, leisure, socializing, membership in churches and clubs and family—all included as a matter of course working for others.

Naturally, 1930s social life centered for Jo and Chet on church, school district, neighborhood, and family affairs. Family visits after church

for Sunday dinners and reunions were customary. In early September 1931 Chet's Uncle Stanley and Aunt Osa Warren Curtis, who lived with their large family on Highway 34, about three miles away, just east of the Eldon "Y," held a reunion for Arkansas, Illinois, and northern Iowa families, and for local Curtises. Next day, Sunday, it was Chet's—and Jo's—turn to entertain the throng. Although such gatherings were "cooperative," did thoughts of threshing dinners dance in the heads of women in the kitchen? Despite the work, Chet and Jo entertained often because Jo wanted it so, especially, of course, at Christmas. As in other local institutions, so in their families, women were expected to serve. And perhaps other women, like Josephine, both expected and wanted it so.



Young wives, late 1920s-early 1930s: Mary Unkrich (Estol Curtis), Gladys Nelson (Ethan Curtis), Bertha Curtis (Harry McNiel), Jo Teeter (Chester Curtis)

On April 29, 1933, exactly four years to the hour since Bernard Teeter had witnessed for Jo and Chet, in the same rural Agency house and before the same minister, they now witnessed for him. Bernard was "a clean, upright and most ambitious young farmer" who was marrying Iva Isobel Manning, "a cultivated and educated young lady of an amiable disposition." Although they were not among the 125 or so celebrants who charivariated the newlyweds, Jo and Chet frequently "visited back and forth"

with Bernard and Isobel and others in their families. Most lived within a few miles, easily within automobile era reach—if mud road conditions allowed. When Ollie (and sometimes George) visited, she could see both Josephine and Rebecca, who lived less than a mile apart. More often, Chet, Jo, and the boys went to Grandma Ollie's after church for roast beef, potatoes boiled in the broth, and memorable desserts, plus essential sugar cookie snacks.<sup>484</sup>

On November 30, 1933, *Batavia News* "Hazel Dell" columnist Gerald Fellows noted, "Born—Thursday evening to Mr. and Mrs. Chester Curtis a son," and—with curious but revealing insensitivity—"Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Teeter, Mrs. George Teeter and Miss Edna Steele . . . called on Chester Curtis Sunday." One supposes they may also have looked in on Josephine and her two-day-old second son. They may, however, have found the look-in disappointing since Grandma Ada Curtis had already pronounced me the ugliest baby she had ever seen. Perhaps it will not seem excessively defensive to note that his naturally more objective mother later wrote, "No matter what Grandma said, Bruce grew into a sweet baby and was always so cute . . . He was always a joy, although his skin was dark and never looked quite clean." If cleanliness were actually next to godliness, by all appearances even early on I faced multiple hurdles. This although, beginning in 1933 and thereafter, Lifebuoy soap informed the radio and magazine public incessantly that it had discovered the cure for B.O., and surely for general darkling uncleanness.<sup>485</sup>

With church events, neighborhood contacts, and family "get togethers" as Jo and Chet's social center, other recreational activities tended to be rare or peripheral. Neighborly visits of families or individuals were almost everyday occurrences, as when, "Mrs. John Fansher called on Mrs. Chester Curtis Monday," November 13, 1933, presumably to comfort and commiserate with her nearly-ready-to-deliver friend. Jo tried roller skating once only, and unsuccessfully, after both sons were born. In 1935 the family went to an Ottumwa air show. When courting in the '20s Jo and Chet had gone to Eldon's Wapello County Fair, to dirt track races, both auto and horse, but Jo couldn't remember attending in the '30s. "We weren't the kind of people who went to all the different things. I mean like dances and all those things. And I suppose, you know, there were dances and gaiety and all that, but we weren't the type of people that went to them." In this, their lives differed little in the '30s from the '20s. In the '30s and early '40s, "Once in a while if you had a dollar you could go to a show," but "Movies were rare. I remember having a dollar for Chet's birthday [March 29, 1940, and] we went to *The Grapes of Wrath*. It told of the hardships people went

through. I thought it was a pretty true movie.” Indeed.<sup>486</sup>

After having worked continuously at farming as a boy, while in high school, and as a young man in the ‘20s; after having married and become a father twice while farming well into the ‘30s; after having gone from Boom to Bust to Scrape Along while fighting dust and mud, heat and cold, hoppers and chinch bugs; after all this while always trying to dredge up enough rent money to cover his mother’s mortgage, and not always succeeding—after all this no one should be surprised that Chet Curtis became discouraged with farming in general and with his mother’s farm in particular. Farming, as the saying went, had become too hard a row for Chet to hoe.

### **Jo and Chet Bought the “Poor Farm”**

In 1935 the year of Wayne’s worst illness, of his operation and Jo’s, of extreme weather and insects, Chet took the lead that fall in buying eighty acres with “a small three room house and [enclosed] back porch” about three miles from his mother’s place. It had been advertised for \$2,000, but Chet and Jo’s offer of \$1,800—\$22.50 an acre—on the face of it an absurdly low price, had been accepted. They could pay cash in the hardest of hard times after Chet took a shipment of lambs to Chicago by rail in late December 1935, and after a surprisingly successful public sale of machinery and livestock in mid-January 1936. Now, near the bottom of America’s worst depression, because of Chet’s drive to save and Jo’s cooperation, they owned, mortgage free, a poor small house, a poor small barn, and a very few poor outbuildings on dismally poor land.<sup>487</sup>

Chet’s mother Ada and brother Leonard soon moved to the little house on the “poor farm.” The next year, after Ada sold her few personal belongings and moved to Cleveland with daughter Naomi and radio engineer son-in-law Bill Hutton, the house stood empty for a time. In fall and early winter of 1936-37, “when weather [and mud roads] permitted,” with Wayne in Hazel Dell School, Chet and Jo, with Bruce tagging along, cleaned, papered, and painted the three small rooms.

In late February 1937, Ada’s farm having been rented to John Baumgartner for the year beginning on March 1, Chet, with neighbors helping, moved his family. “It was a terrible cold day. The [horse drawn wagon] loads were taken through the field where roads were not passable.” Chet managed to get the car, now a Ford Tudor that he had traded with a Goehring for the Pontiac coupe, within three fourths of a mile of the house. Chet and Jo “then had to wade deep snow drifts carrying things, as well as Chet carrying Bruce. Wayne could plod along with some help and



hanging on to us.” The family had help from an unnamed neighbor whom Josephine, granddaughter of the profane Joseph Elliott Steele, “had never heard anybody swear as he did.”

“So thin was the land . . . when Mr. Curtis bought it,” reported the *Ottumwa Courier*, “that for years the 80-acre area had been known as the ‘poor’ farm.” The rolling land was so gullied and worn out by disastrous farming methods that “even cockleburs would not attain . . . average size.” Mr. Curtis, presented as a model for other area farmers, had “joined the list of co-operators” with the New Deal’s Soils Conservation Service, which had contoured, fertilized, and seeded the barren soil, with the result that by 1938, the land “offered a luxuriant pasture cover”—only a slight exaggeration. On such salvaged land a man, his wife, and young boys could run some livestock on pasture and a little boughten hay and grain, without the cost of machinery and the work of plowing, planting, cultivating, and harvesting.<sup>488</sup>

On moving day the Curtis family emerged from freezing snow into a frigid house that had to be warmed with a wood-burning stove situated against the little living room’s north wall. Later they would buy a used coal-burning, square jacketed stove. For auxiliary although expensive heat they used Ada’s three-burner stove, later replaced by a gasoline pressure stove with oven above four burners, bought used at Agency Hardware. “I didn’t see it,” Jo asserted, perhaps a mite testily, “‘til Chet brought it home.” A table and four chairs filled much of the remaining kitchen floor space. The icebox was kept on the unheated back porch, where I would sleep in warmer weather. For now, I would sleep on a cot under the window against the small bedroom’s west wall, Jo and Chet in the double bed, Wayne on the kitchen daybed that could be folded out to accommodate two. The kitchen, where a washtub on the floor was “filled” with a teakettle or two of rapidly chilling hot water, served as the Saturday night bathroom. This, to be utterly obvious, was a house with scant privacy and few comforts.

Behind the house was a sod-covered, concrete-domed “cave” for preserves dug into the hillside; a toilet beyond the cave; a chicken house up the hill above the cave and toilet; a hard water, shallow dug well downhill from the toilet and barn lot. The hard water tasted bad and sometimes seemed to act as a laxative.

The family had moved from a house hardly ten years old, with its three bedrooms, bathtub—even if without running water—varnished floors, roomy kitchen, full basement, and central furnace. Jo hated to “move from a nice house to an old house and be crowded up.” She had surely known the change was coming when they had bought the farm. But in the fall of

'36, with Ada gone, Chet did not consult Jo; rather, "He just made up his mind he was going to move . . . He came in and said, 'The boys and I are moving. You can go along or not'." Jo went along. Forty years later, a widow, she said, "What was I to do . . . you make the best of things."

### **During Hard Times, Chet did Carpentry and Odd Jobs**

Making the best of things, making do, getting along. At least Chet and Jo were out from under Ada's farm. And, even if they were almost literally penniless, they had a paid-for, almost tax-free, house and farm. Gradually they settled in with a milk cow or two or three, a few sheep, a few pigs, a few cattle; a large garden soon bordered with Jo's evening primroses and hollyhocks, and her whitewashed decorative wire fence that fronted the little-traveled dirt road.

Chet, with a wide range of practical skills, picked up jobs here and there. Doing so was not easy. Even by 1938, about 20 percent of workers were jobless. One spring and summer Chet shepherded turkeys on the big Monte Friedman farm across and up the road a half-mile, took his dinner bucket and stayed all day. The Friedmans, an Ottumwa merchant family—furniture, clothing—had invested considerably in land. After the flock was marketed in the fall, with Jo's help Chet shucked Friedman corn, the jostling ears gradually covering me as I napped in the wagon. Chet built fence for a neighbor at a dollar a day; built fence—fourteen months' worth—at \$2.50 a day on the nearby Sterner farm that an insurance company had repossessed. This work reflected the fact that in the '30s, and earlier, repossessed and rented farms increased in Iowa and elsewhere, as individual farm ownership declined.

In Pleasant Township alone could be found many hundreds of acres owned (according to a 1936 plat) by: F. & M. Bank of Durant, Ia.; First Trust Savings Bank; Iowa Inv. Co.; Farm Lands Inc.; Equitable Life Ins. of U.S.; Ottumwa Savings Bank; Mahaska Inv. Co.; American Savings Bank & Trust Co., Burlington, Ia.; Hercules Life Ins. Co.; Equitable Life Assurance Soc.; Farm Lands Inc.; E. W. Clark Commissioner of Ins.—Iowa; Bankers Life Inc.; Iowa Farms Inc.; and First Trust Stock Bk., Chicago. "Pleasant" Township was not very in those days and years.

Immediately adjoining Chet and Jo's poor farm on the north was a Union Cent. Life Ins. Co. eighty acres. Diagonally from their southeast corner was 105 acres held by Federal Land Bank of Omaha (to which Ada's 160 was mortgaged and teetering on the brink); that bank owned at least three other farms in the township. Directly south of the poor farm was the

Farmers Auto Insurance Company's 299 acres where Chet built fence.

He was finally lucky enough to get a factory job ten miles away in Ottumwa, making Johnston lawnmowers. This was 1940, and he started at \$16 a week. Even with \$2 out for Social Security, said Jo, "We were rich." And Chet, "It was the best job I'd had in a long time." Since lawnmower manufacturing was seasonal, especially for a new hand, when laid-off Chet found other seasonal jobs. He worked several weeks a year for several years as a Wapello County tax assessor. He carpentered—as on Bill Reagan's new house in 1941.

In fall 1940 and into 1941 Chet carpentered on the new Batavia Methodist church—our church—after the old one (built in 1899 and where Billy Sunday had once preached) burned early Sunday, December 17, 1939. Roused by a general alarm phone call, we piled into the car for the five-mile rush to see a roaring blaze, to see the northeast corner's blazing collapse. To save money the congregation had no paid minister while meeting in the school auditorium, the Lowenberg Building, or the parsonage. The new church was a major carpentering project. Chet Curtis was the last man down from the steeple's very top, and proud enough of that to tell me later.<sup>489</sup>

As a jack-of-all-trades, Chet puttered about at home. For outdoor summer ablutions, he began with an old table, on it stacked a tin rinse tub on legs, which, partly filled with water and heated by the sun, allowed for luxurious, if brief, evening showers when and if the sun shone. Although lighting was principally from kerosene and gas mantle lamps, with brother-in-law Bill Hutton, Chet rigged up a "Windcharger," whose propeller was attached directly to a generator wired to a six-volt car battery. Propeller and generator and wind vane they clamped to the top of a gas pipe mast above the house, the mast attached directly to the house and to guy wires. On wild and windy nights the contraption would shriek and whine, the guy wires would twang, the mast would, it



Old Batavia Methodist church



Batavia Methodist church, 1941

seemed, vibrate the entire little house. But, hey Presto! Power for a dim bulb and an erratic radio! One Sunday afternoon on that radio I first heard the unbelievable, unforgettable sound of an operatic soprano.

Day of rest, church, and opera over, Chet was off to the factory, leaving Josephine to rounds of cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing, mending old and sewing new, gardening, canning, and with her sons whitewashing the fence. She saw that her sons were cleaned, dressed, and sent off with dinner buckets for the quarter mile walk to Buckeye School No. 8 on top of the gentle rise to the west.

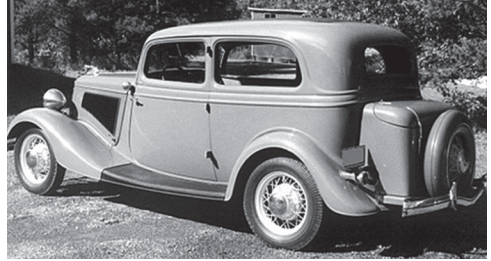
Since Chet left before dawn, Jo, with sons, was assigned farm chores as well. We fed and watered livestock and chickens (as many as two hundred in summer), and gathered eggs in dark and often bitter cold and wind. Worst for Jo was milking cows, even if only a couple or so. Chet worked overtime regularly during World War II, leaving evening chores and milking to Jo and the boys. At age ninety-nine, Jo noted that more than once, "I was on one end of a crosscut saw," cutting firewood on the poor farm. For perhaps obvious reasons, when her sons were not in school or working, long after they were too old, Jo insisted that everyone take afternoon naps.

When Chet was building fence, he hired a young man or two to help with cutting and setting oak posts and stringing and stretching wire—Harry Sheets for a few weeks, "Jiggs" Humble at another time. Josephine fed the hired hand with the family in the kitchen, morning and night, made a bucket dinner, and bedded him down, perhaps on the living room couch. When Grandma Ada Curtis or anyone else came to visit, similar shuffling occurred.

When Naomi with Leona stayed a few days in spring 1937 before joining husband Bill Hutton in Cleveland, the two slept on the fold-out kitchen day bed, while Wayne doubled up with me on the single. Naomi was pregnant with Rex, and Jo was down with a gall bladder attack. Naomi: "Cooped up in that little house, it was just rain, rain, rain." Jo: "I was sick and she was sick and the kids weren't too good, and they just got into everything." "The kids" were, of course, country bumpkin Bruce and city slicker Leona, who misled me, of course. "Everything" included riding a tricycle round and round in wet chicken feed dumped on the back porch floor, and a marathon egg throwing event against the chicken house walls, punishment coinciding exactly with Chet's return from work. I knew enough to cry immediately. Leona didn't—or wouldn't.

## The Touring Curtis Family in Their Ford

During the poor farm years, if only once, summer of 1939, Leonard again doing chores; Chet, Jo, and the boys took a huge looping trip in the tan Ford Tudor with the “suicide doors.” These big doors were so named because they swung open from the back rather than the front, particularly dangerous doors in a time long before seat belts. That trip, a camping odyssey featuring both relatives and sightseeing, first took us to visit the rapidly expanding Arkansas branch of Curtises. The numbers were courtesy of Great Uncle Ralph and Great Aunt Lily, parents of eight older first-cousins-once-removed, ranging in age from twenty-five to twelve—all incredibly old from my not-quite-six perspective. We stayed in a less crowded house with Great Uncle Bob, a busy businessman, and Great Aunt Nora, a lively, entertaining former nurse.



1934 Ford with suicide doors and “trunk”

That visit was particularly enlivened when (about July Fourth) certain Arkansas Curtises, after thoughtfully consulting Josephine—who thoughtfully did not consult Chet—attached a smoke bomb to the electrical system of Chet’s car. When, bright and early after a delightful stay, the family four, especially Chet, eager to head West, an equally eager baker’s dozen of relatives waiting to see us go off, as it were, Chet pushed the Ford’s starter button—the smoke bomb worked, and admirably. Followed by Chet’s panicked leap out the left-hand suicide door to tear open the left-hand hood, he half-observed by swirling smoke. “And Aunt Lily was bent double laughing at Chet,” setting an example for a dozen more Arkansas Curtises, plus a few other Curtises. The practical joker among practical jokers for once had gotten his comeuppance; the Arkansas clan had gotten his goat.

The whirlwind tour of a few weeks understandably seemed to Jo “quite long.” From Arkansas the Ford passed through Norman, Oklahoma (relatives); through interminable stretches of dusty plains (tumbleweeds); into Colorado (my attempted campground irrigation-ditch drowning, a real cowboy on a real galloping horse, Jo’s return after thirteen years to the Garden of the Gods); through interminable Utah (Navaho herding sheep across the Colorado River bridge) to Salt Lake, both Great and City (Mormon Tabernacle Choir for sedate parents, the playground for rowdy





Bruce and Wayne out West, 1939

remnant; Great Salt Lake salt in youngest member's ears, even upon returning to the poor farm, souvenir and presumptive evidence of parental inattention to small worries).

As far west as it would go, the Ford turned northward to Yellowstone tenting—normal—a rummaging bear—probably normal—overturned card table in tent, whereon had been flashlight and defensive weapon hatchet, both now utterly elusive—utter chaos—Chet desperate—and Jo distraught—Wayne's sleep disturbed. Only Bear and I—I sleeping in the car's back seat—were unruffled.

The Ford thereafter turned southeastward for a thousand-mile escape, first diagonally down Wyoming to Laramie and Cheyenne (relatives, family's first rodeo). Then the route paralleling the meandering Platte River as Nebraska air streamed through wide-open windows, air that would have boiled had it contained moisture. Chet bought a block of ice, placed it in a pan at Jo's feet near the open air-vent, closed all windows, and air-conditioned the car—ever so slightly.

Jo bought a half gallon of vanilla ice cream and a huge pack of cones, dipped innumerable—and increasingly liquid—treats for the boys (perhaps twenty each), thus paying off (with generous bonuses) entire debt owed the boys for picking stickery gooseberries—5c per two-quart lard bucket = 5c per cone. The ice cream interlude eliminated for the moment back seat bickering that throughout the trip Chet had vainly combated, by driving left handed while blindly swatting rearward with a rolled newspaper in his right. Cones were clearly better than newsprint in getting us to pipe down.

At long last, slightly cooling evening brought westernmost Iowa, Council Bluffs, a visit with another Curtis family. After supper, Chet's Uncle Hubert took the boys for a walk to see their first streetcars—and thoughtfully bought each a big five-cent vanilla ice cream cone.

## Entertainments, Commercial and Homemade

Excepting this Grand Tour, we traveled little, even locally, during the poor farm years. Except for Chet's work, travel to town was infrequent, especially since he normally shopped on the way home for groceries and other necessities. Now, he brought home the bacon both literally and metaphorically. A memorable exception to our usual isolation was that Mother began during these years taking my brother and me to Ottumwa's public library on alternate Saturdays, visits determined by book due dates. This was a godsend to us all given the family's limited reading matter. By the mid-1940s I was devouring books at what must have seemed to my parents an alarming rate. One Christmas morning I unwrapped *Robinson Crusoe*, disappeared, except for dinner and supper, to a desert isle, and was returned to civilization only after consuming the last page. Obviously, Andrew Carnegie's library was the alternative to book-budget-busting or literary impoverishment.

Despite your undoubted robber baronial faults, thank you, Mr. Carnegie. Your mission was accomplished, never mind the satirist Finley Peter Dunne's satirical gibes about your evidently self-promoting tactics: "Ivry time he gives a libry he gives himself away." And how many librys had Mr. Dunne given away? And, thanks to a mother who cared enough to take her sons there.



Ottumwa Public Library.  
Courtesy of Ottumwa Public  
Library



Bruce Curtis, 1943

On one trip—it was 1940—Mother took Wayne and me to see Jack Benny in *Buck Benny Rides Again*, the second movie I remember, and one of the silliest. Devouring it intently, I emerged into late afternoon sunlight with a severe headache. The first movie I remember, one scene vividly, in which Indians tie a white settler to (I think) a hay wagon intending to burn him alive, a fate from which he is saved by a merciful shot from the fort, was John Ford's *Drums Along The Mohawk* with Henry Fonda. That was on a rare family outing in 1939, my sixth year. In 1943 we saw *Stormy Weather*, and when Lena Horne sang the title song, I, ten years old, with impeccable aesthetic taste, knew instantly that

her image was the most beautiful I had ever seen. Early the next year *Look* magazine referred to Ms. Horne as “the sepia sensation,” but I saw her first.<sup>490</sup>

More in tune with the times was *Mrs. Miniver*, in which Greer Garson and Walter Pidgeon demonstrated understated British pluck during the Blitz and Dunkirk’s desperate days. Touching our family more intimately was *The Fighting Sullivans* (sometimes called *The Sullivans*), about the death of all five brothers of a family from Waterloo in our state when their ship went down. In 1944 also, escaping from war, violence, and death, our family saw *Lassie Come Home*. It starred a girl almost my age, but, as was utterly obvious, worlds more worldly than I. She was (in Technicolor) violet-eyed Elizabeth Taylor. Who else was in the movie I didn’t know and didn’t care. What dog? Somewhat later, parentless, Wayne and I accompanied sophisticated city cousins Richard and Bob McNeil to a Saturday matinee whose feature film escapes me. But the opening serial in which intrepid hero is about to be consumed by inescapable fire just as the installment breaks off—’til the next Saturday that never came—is frozen forever in my mental eye.

Gripping entertainments at the edge of a fiery pit were, however, unusual. Simpler, less expensive, much more common entertainments were featured in our chilly little house on the poor farm. Given cramped conditions, Chet and Jo could not entertain as formerly. They could have no large family Christmas dinners like those Jo had enjoyed preparing. They could host relatively small neighborhood gatherings such as the monthly rotating pitch card club, with tables in kitchen, living room, and even bedroom. They hosted small family groups, one family and sometimes two, but summer picnics for larger reunions.

Summertime in the little house, and later the big house, brought the church or neighborhood ice cream social, often at the end of a hot, dusty, and tiring workday. After chores, after home supper, a small crowd would gather at a neighbor’s house as the long evening dusk began to settle, as the late sun streaked clouds from west to east in the variant red and pink and blue and purple and indescribable pastels of a summer harvest sky.

The men would gather around the back porch steps, scan that sky in an era before the weather channel, and in hearty outdoor voices seek to divine whether tomorrow and tomorrow would bring rain and ruined hay, or drought and ruined crops. This was, as novelist Ivan Doig writes in *The Whistling Season*, “the argot that farmers had been speaking since seed time on the Euphrates.” Individualistic gamblers all, they were perpetual public pessimists, necessarily with secret hopes, but seeking always to forestall open optimism, and with good reason. Too much rain, too much

sun, too little of one, too much of the other, could cause disastrously poor crops. And yet, perfect weather conditions; combined with perfect timing for planting, cultivating, and harvesting; combined with hard work for the season; could bring in bumper crops, a plethora of nature's bounty; and yet, and of course, overproduction and depressingly lower prices for that cornucopia. As Don Kurtz's protagonist in *South of the Big Four* thinks, "Nothing makes a farmer feel more secure than a recitation of his troubles."<sup>491</sup>

And so the men around the back steps bemoaned their fate in an occupation that depended on God's weather and Washington politics, especially the politics of subsidies for crops and conservation. And so they chewed the fat while taking turns hand cranking an ice cream freezer or two or three as others added ice from town that had been smashed to small bits with a maul or machine hammer from a twenty-five pound block in a burlap "gunny sack." They added ice and salt whenever consensus indicated, all the while kidding around about whatever topic or potential butt of a practical joke came to the collective mind, egging each other on to do or say some silly thing, getting a kick out of each other.

Meanwhile the women, separate but more than equal in their contributions to the party, having prepared the custard mix to be frozen, having baked the perennially accompanying cookies, set out tables and tableware and strong iced tea under the darkening trees. All the while their soft and warm and slow voices on the cooling evening air stirred topics of current interest. Often they first echoed their husbands' concerns for crops and weather, their own fortunes riding as they were on their gambler husbands' coattails. But soon they turned to domestic and neighborhood gossip, to matters of life and death—births, datings, weddings, illnesses and injuries, funerals, rarely scandals concerning affairs or divorces or other such carryings-on, which were carefully reserved for private whisperings. As the novelist Ruth Suckow writes most perceptively, "The murmur of the women's voices was low, intimate, and continuous, both a comment upon, a deference to, a withdrawal from the conversation of the men. The men's talk seemed to spread out, the women's to draw tightly to center."<sup>492</sup>

Meanwhile the kids were relieved somewhat from protocols of etiquette by the informal outdoor setting. They could make more noise than usual without being told to pipe down, could run around and be more than a little wild. So they escaped adults as soon as, or sooner than, decently possible, ran off into back yard and orchard and barns, started the inevitable games of tag and hide and seek, both spiced by gathering dangerous dark in unfamiliar surroundings. In the dark, crickets and

sometimes cicadas began to sing, and an immediate sky full of lightning bugs began to compete with distant emerging stars.

And so games were suspended as everyone chased lightning bugs blinking bright and brighter before moonrise; chased bugs, dumped dozens into a fruit jar, sacrificed other dozens, plastered them ingloriously on fingers as glowing rings, riotously on each other's foreheads and noses. The barbarity continued 'til the moment, and not beyond, when calls came that the ice cream was ready. The luckiest, fastest, or most aggressive kids got to scavenge first tastes from dasher paddles drawn from the frozen mix as mothers began to distribute enormous dishes of the stuff. My mother's venerable cookbook asserted that homemade ice cream was better if packed for several hours, but no one wanted to find out.

The stuff was, naturally, made from rich undiluted cream, plentiful eggs, and sugar. Vanilla. The stuff was not frozen hard and packed as solidly as Precambrian granite, not like the commercial stuff that glaciated a later age. It was frozen just hard and compactly enough not to melt immediately upon exposure to cooling summer evening air, just hard enough to reach the mouth and to melt delectably there, the cream, the eggs, the sugar, above all the vanilla, all revealing themselves to the palate, gliding down our collective throats in chilling ensemble.

From beginning to end, the ice cream social was denial of deferred gratification, the code these partygoers normally and necessarily lived by. The ice cream social was huge seconds, and sometimes thirds, if remnants and Mom allowed. The ice cream social was denial that tomorrow and heat and sweat, dirt, danger, and household drudgery would ever come again. The ice cream social beat Sunday.

And yet Sunday offered respite as well, regular respite. Sunday was the day, especially in summer, when after-church families we knew, like families countrywide, took an afternoon drive and often "dropped in" on neighbors and relatives with a "Yoo hoo, anybody home?" Many years later, early in 2002, Jo recalled that Mary Ruth, her niece, had "talked about our taking rides and singing . . . I did enjoy taking rides and going on back roads and seeing where people lived." William Manchester notes that even after World War II in 1954, "After Sunday dinner half of all families with cars took an afternoon pleasure ride." The automobile gave even folks with little money freedom of movement if they could afford a little gas.<sup>493</sup>

The highly informal practice of dropping in seemed entirely acceptable socially in that pre-cell-phone era. Relatives and friends who dropped by were invariably invited to stay for the next meal, and they generally accepted. The standard method for most of the year,



given icebox limitations, was for hosts and guests to descend upon the chicken house to choose the main course. There, amidst gleeful shouts and flying feathers, a fryer, perhaps two, was cooperatively seized, decapitated on the chopping block, bled, dunked in boiling water, plucked, singed over a newspaper fire to eliminate tiny “pin” feathers, butchered, dredged in flour, and popped into a sizzling lard-laden skillet.

This, that is, was the normal, almost inevitable pattern. Except once when Jo and Aunt Wilma McCleary Curtis, always called Pat from childhood love of Irish potatoes, were the invasion vanguard. All alone, they surrounded clustered pullets, signaled each other, pounced, and—as squawking chickens flew and fled on foot in every direction—they unaccountably missed every chicken, seized each other’s hands instead. And then stood there, utterly chickenless, holding hands, shrieking with laughter as Chester and Uncle Leonard completed the task in a more dignified, manly way, for cryin’ out loud.



Sisters-in-law Wilma (Pat)  
McCleary Curtis and Jo Curtis

## CHAPTER 8: DEFERRED GRATIFICATION GRATIFIED

It is harder for a woman to want a life different from the one decreed for her. You men have it much easier. You are commended for recklessness, for boldness, for striking out, for being adventurous. A woman has so many inner voices telling her to behave prudently, amiably, timorously.

—Susan Sontag, *In America*

If everything goes along all right, you don't have any battles to fight, and you just become like jelly.

—Josephine Teeter Curtis

On December 7, 1941, after Sunday School, Church, and Sunday



Jo, Wayne, Bruce, and Chet Curtis, 1941

dinner, the Curtis family went to an Ottumwa movie house, a rare event for them, but not quite so rare as in the hardest times. There they saw *One Foot in Heaven*, based on Hartzell Spence's biography of a traditional preacher and his wife (the author's parents) facing twentieth-century modernity in small town

Iowa. Ironically, as the Great War ended in 1918 the Reverend Spence had prayed that wars would be no more. My mother remembered the awesome news of 1941 being flashed on the screen. I seem to remember excited newsboys shouting in the street when we emerged.

On that day at Pearl Harbor, we were to learn, eighteen ships, almost two hundred planes, and 2,403 people had been destroyed. The main Pacific fleet had been moved from California to Pearl, had been placed in harm's way, only in 1940. World War II changed the lives of the Curtis family fundamentally, as for so many millions of other families worldwide, although for us indirectly and not in the bloody, more obvious ways of war. In the 1930s and '40s, many millions died, soldiers and civilians. Many

millions more suffered hardship and injustice. In the United States itself more than 120,000 Japanese-Americans without hearings or trials were dispossessed and “interned” for the war’s duration in what might have been called concentration camps. They would not regain citizenship until 1959. A 1983 federal panel recommended compensation, but many would never regain their property.<sup>494</sup>

Chet, over thirty-seven when war began, married with two children, was in little danger of being drafted, certainly not when his factory turned to war work. Lawnmowers being entirely expendable, Johnson’s retrofitted to make wire reel carts for the Army Signal Corps. The consequence was long hours—and time-and-a-half overtime hours—in unionized work for Chet as an American Federation of Labor machinist. Soon, instead of \$1 a day, or even \$16 a week, he was making \$40, and piling up seniority. For Americans generally, unemployment would shift from a Depression high of 25 percent to a wartime low of little more than 1 percent.

Prosperity. Jo thought then, and still fifty years later, that it was “a shame” to have war spawn prosperity. This was a supremely terrible worldwide war that the historian Niall Ferguson has called “the greatest man-made catastrophe of all time.” Even so, and even regretfully, Jo and Chet Curtis could now see beyond the next dollar and the next grocery store bill. As Chet asserted in 1969, succinctly expressing the psychology and practice of deferred gratification, “We saved.”<sup>495</sup>

### **The Death of Grandpa George B.**

During this early time of war, more than seventy-eight years after being born during the bitterest American conflict, George Brinton McClellan Teeter died. The Thursday morning moment we learned of his death is indelible. The phone rang—always an event to seize the family’s attention. Mother, in the kitchen, answered. Ollie reported that her husband, Josephine’s father, long a sufferer from diabetes and Bright’s disease (of the kidney), increasingly infirm, had died in bed, and that she had discovered his body at 6:30 that morning. Dad, alerted by the phone, had come in from the back porch, where he was helping Mother with the washing. He stood there in the kitchen in knee-high rubber boots, holding Mother, while she told us the news.

Not since before he married had George B. Teeter been much for socializing beyond being a civil neighbor. No churchgoer, he rarely attended even secular community events, especially as he aged and weakened. Excepting always forays to field and stream, he had been very

much a homebody. I, at six or seven or eight, viewed Grandpa Teeter in his later years as thin, gaunt, an intimidating figure, even if unintentionally, even when one late Sunday morning he fixed me with his eyes and smiled as I made my hellos under my father's watchful gaze. We had come directly from church to Grandma Ollie's for Sunday dinner, and Grandpa was seated in the downstairs bedroom, which had once been the parlor where he and Ollie had wed in 1892.



Front row: Rebecca Teeter Wheeldon, George B. Teeter, Ollie Steele Teeter, Josephine Teeter Curtis, Chester Curtis. Back row: Edmund "Bud" Cronk, Earnest Teeter, Irene Teeter Gorman, Helen Clark Teeter, Isobel Manning Teeter, Bernard Teeter, 1937

His chair, inherited from mother-in-law Sarah Elizabeth Miles Steele, was a sort of skeletal recliner with a darkly varnished wooden framework and red plush back, seat, narrow arms, and footboard. The chair's mechanism interested me more, I admit, and was certainly less scary, than Grandpa. Once only when no one was watching, I sat in that chair and practiced reclining. Interesting as well was Grandpa's evil-smelling, attractive-smelling, pipe, but I never touched it.

As befitted a homebody, Grandpa Teeter's was a home funeral, the last Jo attended, and my only experience, 11 a.m. Saturday morning, December 20. By 1941 most funerals were staged in churches or funeral parlors, but for her husband Ollie had chosen otherwise. As for herself, she had of course little use for funeral-director-undertakers. As for George, surely she knew he would have felt false in any church.

So Grandpa George was laid out in his coffin in the living room of the house that with his father, Abraham, he had built in the late 1880s for Joe Steele, his future father-in-law. That house he had modernized after he and Ollie had moved back in 1929—had added a bathroom and "breakfast nook," had torn out the entry hall wall, enlarging the living room where now his body lay. With Grandpa George in that room with the light-capturing southern bay window were Libertyville's Methodist minister, the Reverend John W. Lathrop, George's pallbearers, singers Mrs. Dwight Fulton and Mrs. Walter Davisson, and piano accompanist Miss Caroline Layman.

In the parlor, now the bedroom where George had died, were Ollie, Josephine, Chet, and other adult family members. Other relatives and family friends were seated in the dining room and kitchen and perhaps on the open stairs with the elegant varnished banister, down which I never dared to slide. Certain grandsons were bathroomed—Elmer, George, Bernard Albert, Wayne, Bruce—seated without chairs on obvious fixtures and floor. Older cousin Elmer whispered of a time (perhaps, I think now, apocryphal, at least embellished) when Grandpa had heroically crawled under a porch to confront and retrieve a mad dog. I think now he would have done the sensible thing and just shot it.

Following a hymn, reading of psalm 121, prayer, another hymn, the preacher read a bare bones obituary. His sermon, preserved in the funeral program and replete with abstract religious references, avoided entirely the supposed object of discussion. This was surely inevitable from a preacher who would have known little or nothing directly of George Teeter, he who had rejected his ancestors' Brethren religion, had rejected all organized religion, before the twentieth century arrived. Finally, "Rock of Ages," and the end.

Following the service, six pallbearers with familiar neighborhood names—Fred Boysel, Will Carmichael, Harold Hite, C. J. Layman, Frank Stever, Harvey Van Ausdeln—carried Josephine's father's casket onto the front porch and down to the lane and the hearse belonging to Thorne and Pedrick of Douds. The hearse led a cortege of cars to Fell cemetery only a few miles away. After interment services, relatives and friends returned to Grandma Ollie's house for a traditional hearty potluck meal and reunion of sorts, an extremely mild and dry midwestern Protestant version of a stereotypical Irish wake. And then gradually folks, after paying their respects to the widow, drifted away, leaving Grandma Ollie alone at the holiday season's onset, always a hard time for her. But her faithful son, Bernard, was only a half-mile up the road and around the corner, and other family members would soon visit.

### **Jo and Chet did War Work**

As the war against the Axis powers accelerated, Chet was not drafted, but his wife was, rather, was volunteered. As some six million women learned, the war wonderfully altered for the moment attitudes about women's place and women's capabilities. For generations, there had been a virtual prohibition against mothers or even wives as elementary schoolteachers. But now, as many thousands of young women entered



more lucrative and sometimes more exciting war work in offices and factories, teachers evaporated. Iowa, the National Educational Association reported in 1942, had lost more teachers to industry than any other state, 27 percent, surely in part because salaries were so low. Four thousand emergency certificates had been issued.<sup>496</sup>

Josephine had been elected Director of Buckeye No. 8 in 1943, traditionally a man's position, to ensure that schooling proceeded smoothly and to hire a teacher. But now Chet proposed that Josephine apply. She acquiesced, and the new Director, neighbor Franz Johnson, hired her. "After thirteen years of married life, during World War II, I was granted [by Jessie M. Parker, President, Board of Educational Examiners, and Miss Celia Bell, Wapello County Superintendent of Schools] a Special War Emergency Certificate to teach on the merits of my grades . . . on my original certificate."



Buckeye School, Pleasant Township, District No. 8 , 1945

Jo may have returned to teaching because her country called, but most particularly "to help pay for the Curtis home farm which we had bought from the Curtis heirs," that is, Ada, and Chet's sisters and brothers. In 1943-44 Mrs. Curtis was paid \$100 a month, less \$20 in taxes, "as I was not supporting myself." Having paid no taxes in the 1920s, Jo's 1940s' take home pay was the same as in 1929. Nevertheless, after hard times, the extra money was an unexpected bonanza.

A bonanza is, however, dug out by heavy pick and shovel work. Mrs. Curtis certainly knew the teaching routine, but there was brushing up to do, planning, grading—all the time-consuming minutiae of teaching. Not all of that work could be accomplished during the day in the traditional white schoolhouse on the corner at the top of the rise, a quarter of a mile up our dirt and mud road. All such professional work was inevitably piled atop Jo's rural housewifery and barnyard duties, indoors and out, with little respite or additional assistance.

Chet, now regularly working overtime, as well as the boys, may have helped somewhat more than usual, but probably not much. In those days, I once asked Mother, "Doesn't Dad ever come home?" For he left and returned while I was sleeping, morning and night. Coming home from work in muddy times, at our hilltop near the schoolhouse he would turn off the road that the New Deal's WPA had recently graded and graveled. He would drive through our field gate, down through our contoured pasture,

and park on top of the little hill behind the house. In cold weather the first thing he did in morning dark was to slide a pan of live coals from the heating stove under the oil pan of our chocolate brown '39 Ford Tudor deluxe that he had bought from Campbell, Batavia's undertaker. Heat from the coals thinned the cold, stiff oil. (Some people used a blowtorch.) After breakfast, which Jo fixed, and whether the weather was cold or warm, badge no. 86 pinned to his cockily tilted cap, he would swing his dinner pail to the car. He would adjust the choke, turn the switch, depress the clutch, find second gear, release the brake, let the car roll down the hill, jump (release) the clutch, and hope the engine roared.



Chet's Johnston Lawnmower identification badge

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World War II ration book and 5 ration stamps

This ritual was designed to save the battery, which more likely than not was too run down to start a cold car.<sup>497</sup>

Whynot a new battery? Too expensive. Maybe not available. New tires? Don't you know there's a war on? Tires were rationed almost as soon as war began, gasoline the next year, shoes the year after that. Foodstuffs were rationed—sugar, coffee, meat, butter, cheese, canned goods. "Roses are red, Violets are Blue, / Sugar is sweet. Remember?" Families had ration books with perforated stamps from the Office of Price Administration, the OPA. Consumer goods production stopped cold. Chet could have bought

black market tires from the likes of Ernest Latta, but I suppose he preferred to be aboveboard in his dealings. Rationing of meat, butter, and most foodstuffs did not end until Friday, November 23, 1945, Thanksgiving Day, but more importantly, my twelfth birthday.

To help Jo, while Chet drove to work and back on balding tires (presumably at the wartime thirty-five mph speed limit), he delivered and picked up the family's laundry at Henrietta Black's in Agency, a novel development. Jo hired her eighth-grade student, Mary Durlinger, to clean occasionally on weekends, and young neighbor Maxine Hart sometimes to iron, but most of her work could not be delegated. Jo learned to get along with at least two jobs, as many wartime women were doing, and as many millions more would be doing in war or peace later as the millennium turned. I was once or twice privileged to visit Johnston's to see my dad at work. There I also noticed several headscarved women at the big machines. One may have been Mrs. Nevelyn Carnal, "whose nimble fingers," reported the *Ottumwa Courier*, April 6, 1943, operate a press "ten hours a day for six days a week."

Just as Josephine and her family were becoming acclimated to their new and arduous schedule early in fall 1943, Wayne became seriously ill, was diagnosed with cerebral meningitis, and was hospitalized in Ottumwa for a week or so. Only sulfa, a wartime panacea, Dr. Newell said, had saved him. Fortunately, Grandma Ada was visiting when Wayne "took ill" and continued with housework so that Josephine missed only one teaching day.

### **Jo's Wartime School Teaching**

As Mrs. Curtis discovered, Buckeye School's physical setting, the curriculum with minor exceptions, and students were all still recognizable and familiar. The school, however, was at least as poorly equipped as any in which she had taught fifteen and twenty years earlier. It had a tabletop Victrola, spring wound by hand, and a few 78 rpm records. These were primarily religion-tinged and wartime-patriotic (the latter including "You're a Grand Old Flag" and "There's a Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere"). Buckeye No. 8 had a set of encyclopedias, but hardly a dozen other books, and absolutely no playground equipment except a softball for playing "Andy Over." No swings, no slides, no teeter-totters, nothing. Jo could recall no pie suppers or programs to raise money, no spring field trips to Ottumwa businesses, as in other years, nor do I. "During the war, people didn't go very much." Despite a budget that was spartan to the extreme,

I can testify that it included funds for sweeping compound, a sort of oily sawdust to be sprinkled on the floor, stirred around with a broom, retrieved with a dustpan, and discarded almost anywhere outside or in the stove.

This was the school for which a few years earlier, I, not yet five, had yearned. I had sneaked off from home one warm and drowsy fall afternoon, had knelt worshipfully on the metal foot scraper mat at the open entrance door, a pilgrim onlooker, unaware until later of the gridwork pattern deepening on my pilgrim knees. I had watched, waited, listened, and yearned through the warm waning of that school day. Now, in 1943, I, with my brother and a few neighbor kids, was a student to my mother in this traditional, rural, one-room school.

Mrs. Curtis did alter one tradition—the cold noon sandwich—in a desirable way by cooking for her students “once a week during the winter months . . . a warm meal kept warm on the heating stove. And at Christmas time we had a real Christmas dinner.” Otherwise, school kept regularly to its rounds of study, recitation, and play, with notable exceptions. To support the “war effort,” students had little war bond books in which they could add twenty-five cent stamps that might (and did) eventually total \$18.75, to be worth \$25 in ten years. We collected scrap metal to be turned into weapons (not to mention pocket money, most of which with parental oversight went into war bond stamps instead of pockets), and fluffy milkweed seeds to be substituted for foreign kapok in flotation life vests. In summer to save on rationed shoes, we sacrificed by going barefoot. We students kept up with war news and information worldwide in *My Weekly Reader*, which seemed to me an interesting publication.

I remember vividly Mrs. Curtis sending me out to the Curtis mailbox for other regular reading, the daily day-old *Ottumwa Courier*, and remember there at the box seeing a front page story, with photo, detailing the death in a pilot training accident of a young neighborhood man, Russell Adamson. Once, returning from work, Chet suffered the emotionally scarring experience of helping drag a cadet’s body from a crashed biplane trainer based at Ottumwa’s naval air station. Sad parents had to replace a blue service star banner in their window (a WWI tradition to show a family member was in the armed services) with a gold star banner (families hung Gold Stars in their windows in honor of the deceased veteran, formally since 1928). Not until years later did the awful irony occur to me that we had all been taught to strive for gold stars. I remember also seeing a newsmagazine photo of a tank column near the great battleground of Anzio in Italy. Peering from the lead tank was a cousin’s face. Max Curtis, son of Uncle Stanley and Aunt Osa, eventually returned safely from the war.



Twenty-five years later, Jo believed that “Children were not much different than when I had taught before. They still respected their parents and their elders.” Not only was Mrs. Curtis a more experienced



Buckeye No. 8, Front: Harry Durflinger, Bruce Curtis, Wayne Curtis. Back: George Durflinger Jr., Charles McGuire, Keith Abel, Delmar McIntosh, Lothar Bendorff

elementary teacher than her students would probably ever have, she was at forty an older neighbor lady. Consequently, she had virtually no discipline or attitude problems, except perhaps once or twice with her younger son/scholar. And even he, within a few years, recognized Mrs. Curtis as his best teacher ever, “which,” she wrote, “made that year worthwhile.”

Twenty-five years later, Jo had lost sight of some students: Donald and Darrell Dalton; Gladys and Lloyd Phillips; Glenn, Phyllis, and Richard McCoy. Others she could name, chart their marriages and sometimes divorces, sometimes affairs, their children, grandchildren (and even later, great-grandchildren), their occupations. She remembered the five Durflingers, Roger Johnson, the Curtis boys—Wayne, of whom she was proud “for his ability to cope . . . and his many friends,” and Bruce, “for his good judgment in falling in love with a wonderful girl and marrying her, and his two beautiful children.”



Buckeye No. 8, Front: Gladys Phillips (?), Louise Durflinger, Wayne Curtis, Harry Durflinger, Bruce Curtis. Back: Mary Durflinger, Teacher Mariam Goughnour, George Durflinger Jr.



## **Jo and Chet Bought More Land and the Family Farm**

Mrs. Curtis taught from August 30 to May 17. "I resigned at the end of one year," Jo wrote, "The farm was paid for." As Chet had emphasized of this period of wartime wages, double employment, and rising livestock prices, "We saved." Even before Europe's war had broken out, late in 1938, Chet and Jo had bought from the Sterner family a poor timbered eighteen acres back in the woods near the poor farm. It had cost, intriguingly, "one dollar and other consideration." To better run a few cattle on the land, our family worked at clearing brush, once having a midday meal made memorable by Irish potatoes baked in a pit covered with dirt and then with coals from our brush fires.

Buying Ada's farm had been Jo and Chet's financial focus for nearly four years. In fall 1940 with better factory wages in prospect and with deferred gratification as an ingrained principle, Chet had taken the lead in proposing to his mother, Ada, and to Estol, Ethan, Bertha, Lawrence, Naomi, and Leonard as heirs, that he and Jo buy the family farm. This he did after testing the market for Ada by offering it to her renter, Grant Lewis, who declined, and by listing it with a realtor. Learning that only one local farm had sold recently, he and Jo decided to make a proposal.

Responses of Ada's several children were impressively in agreement. They hoped their mother's mortgaged life, farm-burdened since 1915, could be lightened, and that she could be reimbursed for her \$2000 investment. All agreed that Ada should be consulted first and that her wishes should prevail. All agreed that, if their mother should die before being fully reimbursed, Estol, Ethan, and Lawrence, who had contributed to mortgage payments in the worst of times, should be repaid before the estate was divided among all siblings. They hoped Chester and Josephine could "make a go" of the enterprise.

On September 1, 1940, Estol wrote from Ft. Madison, Iowa, "I believe if you can swing this proposition . . . it . . . will make you some money, at least I hope so. Surely the low cost of land cannot last much longer. The very sustenance of the nation comes from the farm and it seems that that industry must flourish first before the others can follow." Long-term effects of New Deal agricultural policy, war, and the prosperity of a rapidly developing American Empire would soon prove Estol correct.

Ada, cleaning at Ottumwa Hospital and living in a room there, wrote to her children on September 8 without referring to her own interests. "I am in favor of [the proposal] as I don't know when we could ever sell for any thing to be divided among the rest of you." Ever since they had been born,

beginning with Estol in 1899 and ending with Leonard in 1916, certainly as a widow after Arthur's death in 1918, Ada's life had been devoted to her children's welfare. He having died intestate, she had by state law inherited the widow's third, their children the rest. Ada had become the court appointed administratrix of Arthur's estate and guardian of their seven minor children, then ranging in age from two to twenty.

Almost a decade later, May 4, 1927, a "final report" filed in Wapello County noted that "in order to rear said large family it was necessary for her to conduct the operations of said farm and to keep the stock and implements . . . in order to make sufficient money to maintain and educate said family; that since her appointment she has properly clothed and reared all of her children and has given all of them proper training and education, five of the oldest have graduated from High School at Batavia, Iowa, and Ethan J. Curtis the second eldest has graduated from Parsons College, all of which has been at great expense; that she is now living on the home farm and maintaining and supporting her three youngest children . . . Lawrence A. Curtis, now 18 years of age; Naomi G. Curtis now 15 years of age and Leonard W. Curtis now almost 11 years of age." The report does not note that two other of Ada's children, Estol and Bertha, had also attended Parsons for a time. Ada's three youngest would graduate from high school on schedule.

The report does note that when Arthur died, the 190-acre farm carried an \$11,000 first mortgage and a second of \$3,000; and that because Ada sold thirty acres for \$6,000, and added \$2,000 "of her own money which was derived from life insurance of her deceased husband, said mortgage was reduced to \$6,000.00 which is the amount which now stands against said farm of 160 acres."

Furthermore, "in addition to said above mentioned expenses she was compelled to build a new home on account of the old one being so old and dilapidated at a cost of \$4,000.00 which was taken out of sales of live stock and produce . . . That all of the personal property as inventoried in her prior reports have now been sold and disposed of, and the money derived therefrom has now been fully exhausted and there remains nothing to myself as widow or to my said seven children."

Finally, "This Administratrix makes no charge for her services in said estate."

A related Wapello County court order, 19 April 1927, notes the farm is mortgaged to the Federal Land Bank of Omaha at \$6,400 for 36 years at 5 percent interest. Annual interest payments would thus amount to \$320. A summary of Chester's proposal sent to sister Naomi, on September 19,

1940, revealed that, thirteen years later, the mortgage remained virtually the same, \$6,370.12, as in 1927. Through thirteen years of hard and harder times, painful payments of 5 percent interest per annum payable semi-annually, and payments of whatever taxes accrued, had allowed Ada, Chester, and the family to save the farm, but to gain no ground on reducing the debt principal. To this mortgage of \$6,370.12, Chester—and Josephine—now proposed to “add \$1800.00 and \$180.00 which I agree to pay to Mother and the three brothers who advanced the \$180.00 some years back and I believe it will total \$8350.12.” Chester concluded by responding to Naomi’s concern: “As to your letter I would certainly like to see Mother get \$2000.00 and more if it were possible but we offered all we felt the farm was worth,” approximately \$52 an acre.

On January 15, 1941, Chester K. Curtis and Josephine M. Curtis signed an interest-free note promising to pay Ada C. Curtis \$1,800 within nine years, at \$200 minimum annually, but with no maximum limitation. Although Ada would not be entirely reimbursed for her \$2,000, she was now at age sixty-three free at last, after a quarter century, of a mortgaged farm that had constantly verged on bankruptcy and total loss. Chet remembered that his father Arthur’s favorite song, which he would play on his fiddle, had been “Pop Goes the Weasel.”

A penny for a loaf of bread,  
A penny for a needle,  
That’s the way the money goes,  
Pop goes the weasel.



Thomas Arthur Curtis’s fiddle and bow

This was surely a verse poignantly appropriate for a struggling early-twentieth-century farmer and his family. Naomi remembered that once on her birthday her father had dug into his vest watch pocket and given her, with apologies, a penny, his only money.

Ada would live another thirty years, restlessly, without a true home, with minimal funds from her own work and savings, and from her children. As Chester said in her later years, “Mother had a hard life . . . She worked awful hard.”

Chester and Josephine assumed all home farm debts early in 1941. With a speed that surely stunned Ada, other family members, and most particularly themselves, they had paid off Ada, three brothers, the other siblings, the Federal Land Bank of Omaha, and all taxes by the end of Josephine’s teaching year in spring 1944. Jo had contributed her net earnings, \$720. In little more than three years, because of hard work, good

management, family sacrifices, and worldwide forces entirely beyond their control, Jo and Chet had cleared debt that had hung over farm and family for three decades. Utterly landless and almost broke in 1935, by 1944 they had earned, free and clear, three parcels of land, 258 acres.

This was a century and a year after Sac and Fox land that would become Wapello County had been opened to homesteaders from the jumping-off line near Creesville, later Batavia, on the first minute of May 1, 1843. For some days earlier mounted “Dragoons” from Fort Sanford near Agency had patrolled the border area between Jefferson and future Wapello County, had driven squatters back to join the many hundreds camped impatiently east of the border, had burned illegal shacks and torn out boundary stakes. Once signal guns went off, within hours, by starlight and early light, most of the new land was staked out, was possessed. The Indians were now dispossessed in fact and law, excepting a certain amount of silver.<sup>498</sup>

As a boy, I was fascinated by a large, laboriously smoothed, gray stone ax, its center grooved for a handle, that renter Grant Lewis had found in our fields and now used as a doorstop. Several years later, my throat parched by July heat while riding a one-row horse-drawn corn cultivator in our dusty southwest forty, I tied the team, slid into the ravine, lay on my belly, and drank from the spring that a white surveyor had plotted in 1846, a spring I *knew* hunting and berry picking Indians had used.

Our family’s appropriated acres appreciated rapidly in value as farm commodity prices recovered and were supported by government subsidies. Not only had the war resulted in historical highs of Iowa farm production and income but land values more than doubled in the decade following 1940. By 1946 land prices countrywide matched those of 1920.<sup>499</sup>

### **Jo, Chet, and Their Boys Moved Back to the Home Place**

Now, what to do with the land? Chet had led in acquiring it; Jo led in deciding how to use it. Concerned for the future of her sons, particularly Wayne’s prospects for working and living, it seemed to her that the larger, more fertile home place would offer better, longer-term solutions than the poor farm. “I thought we should move back because of you boys. I don’t know if it was the right thing to do. Chet didn’t want to move back. I don’t think Dad was happy farming; he was in the factory most of the time; he liked to be with people; it was hard for him to be by himself.”

Sociable, gregarious, a practical joker and all ‘round good fellow who delighted in greasing certain other workers’ tool handles or wiring

down their dinner pails, or pulling someone's leg in one way or another, Chet had reveled in the factory floor's din, bustle, and camaraderie. He acquiesced only reluctantly to Jo's logic, but he soon told John Swaim, impressive hundred bushels a day corn picker and good farmer that he, Jo, and the boys would return to the home place March 1, 1945. A large family rented the little house, despite Jo's warning about its size. Chet and Jo would continue to rent it to various families for \$20 or \$25 a month.

In February, as she and Chet prepared to move, Jo, now forty-one, pregnant for a few months, miscarried. Doc King came, but Josephine was not hospitalized, recovered somewhat, and continued to help pack. Strange as it may seem, Jo noted that she and Chet had never used contraceptives, even though neither wanted more than two children in hard times, particularly since one son's health was precarious. "We didn't know" about contraception, for people "didn't talk about" it. In 1977 she wrote, "To me and your father sex life was a private thing." Jo and Chet were not unusual. Talk and publications about birth control methods were long prohibited by custom and law. In 1916 New York City, Margaret Sanger, a nurse, had been jailed for opening a birth control clinic. By 1923 when Jo graduated from high school, Sanger could do so legally. But legal information and methods spread slowly, especially in socially conservative rural areas. Even in a feminist era, in 1982, Jo's widowed friends still didn't talk about such matters.

One morning in 1945 while Jo was recovering on the living room daybed and Chet was boiling clothes-washing water on the red-hot heating stove, the ceiling caught fire where stovepipe met chimney. When Jo shouted "Fire," Chet, ignoring hot water immediately under the flames, ran to the well, apparently more than once, and ran back to splash the ceiling with fresh cold water. Someone called "Central," the telephone operator, who rang a general alarm, answered by close neighbor Franz Johnson who insisted quite reasonably upon checking the attic for smoldering sparks. Once the water mess was cleaned up, Chet, having preserved his hot water, resumed washing.

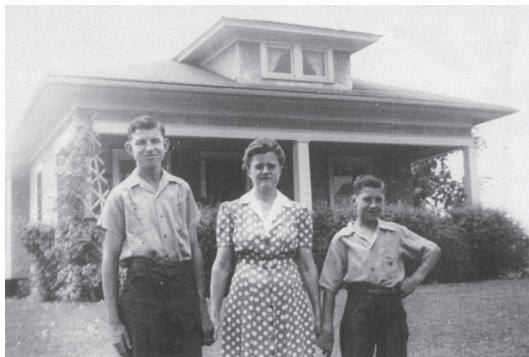
Despite Jo's recent crisis, despite the fire scare, on the traditional moving schedule, March 1, neighbors George Dueser, Charley Arganbright, and Franz Johnson with pickup truck helped the Curtis family move. With Chet and sons driving a small herd of livestock, being greeted and sometimes helped by neighbors like the boys' instant new friend, Junior Black, the family retraced the three mile route taken eight years earlier, back to the home farm, back to the big house.

Many years later I returned to the poor farm to find the little house,



the barn, all other outbuildings, the gridwork catalpa tree windbreak grove, the well, even the cool, dank hillside “cave,” all gone. On the hill east across Buckeye Creek, where I had caught tiny catfish and once almost drowned in springtime flood, saved because Wayne ran for my father while I clung to a wire water gap, was a huge raw new house and pond. That establishment seemed to dwarf the whole east forty where I had once stalked a family of five foxes while hunting the cows.

In 1945 our big house, still without electricity or running water, was nevertheless little more than twenty years old; had three bedrooms, dining room, and living room, all with varnished woodwork. It had a potentially luxurious bathroom; a large, airy kitchen with adjoining screened porch; a large open front porch for viewing occasional vehicles on



Wayne, Jo, Bruce, and the Big House, 1946

the dirt road a hundred yards down our dirt lane; and a basement with coal room and furnace. Returning to this cornucopia from a one-bedroom house was not only gratifying to Jo; it made her work much easier for the next quarter century.

### The Lights Came On

This was true particularly in the very late ‘40s when a New Deal blessing—the Rural Electrification Administration (REA)—belatedly brought electricity to us. As the wartime song had promised, when the war ended the lights came on again all over the world—and for the first time on our back road. And as the protagonist of Terry Kay’s *The Year the Lights Came On* realized, electricity sharply divides those who lack it from those who have it. Lacking electricity, “The way we bathed, cooked, dressed, looked—even the way we voided ourselves—was different.”<sup>500</sup>

But now, on the REA “high line,” Jo and her family could revel in electric lights, an electric water system and heater, electric refrigerator (with freezer, making Batavia’s freezer locker unnecessary), electric stove and oven, electric washing machine, electric iron, electric vacuum cleaner, electric sewing machine, electric mixer, electric toaster, electric skillet, electric radio, electric fan, electric clock, electric razor, eventually electric

television, even an electric carving knife, electric shop tools and other things electric, including an electric blanket for cold nights. On April 5, 1955, reported the *Batavia News*, "Mr. and Mrs. Homer Wheeldon, Vernon and Donald and True spent Tuesday evening at the Chester Curtis home, watching TV." People who have always had electricity may well take it too much for granted, just as so many do, nowadays, take radio, not to mention television, not to mention dozens of electric and electronic tools and toys. To emphasize again, rates at which people have experienced modernity, certainly electricity and television, have varied dramatically. In 1936 BBC London began airing three hours of television daily. By 1940 New York City television had 10,000 viewers. But even by the beginning of the twenty-first century, a billion or so people worldwide were still beyond electric lines, not to mention TV.

In 1945 as well as lacking electricity, our cornucopia of a house was, ironically, virtually empty space. Now house-rich, we were furnishings-poor and nearly penniless. Excepting a few beds, a kitchen table and chairs, the stray rocker, a radio stand, the family "mostly got along without." Jo's sister Rebecca contributed a useable dining room table. That first season the family raised turkeys and eventually bought furniture with the proceeds.



Chet and Jo Curtis's home farm

As with the big house, so with the big farm. Chet and Jo were land-rich, equipment-poor; with few livestock, a team of horses and then two; a wagon, old horse-drawn two-bottom plow, disk, harrow, and cultivator; no tractor and no money for one. That first spring, Chet tried to plow with an antiquated four-horse rig, fell behind, was forced to seek help from brother-in-law Homer Wheeldon and his Ford tractor. Later that season or the next, he got Ford tractor help from another neighbor, Everett Giltner, and his son, Dean. Chet paid both back with his own hayfield sweat, and that of his sons. And much obliged. You bet.

By such rigorous bootstrap means, made possible only by an era of unprecedented national prosperity, did Chet, Jo, and the boys work their way out of what in retrospect looks very like poverty. The Curtis family's rising fortunes paralleled America's surge into a booming wartime economy, and the increasingly evident dominance of Allied military forces worldwide.

### **1945: Large Changes and Prosperity**

That first year on the home farm, on May 8, 1945, VE (Victory in Europe) day, Nazi forces utterly devastated, Germany capitulated. Celebrations swept the country as radio and newsprint reported, but the event, although noted with relief, hardly altered the Curtis household work routine. No one went to celebrations. Almost a month earlier, on April 12, as Chet and a visiting neighbor were talking in the barnyard, the boys listening, Jo had called from the back porch steps that the radio had just reported President Roosevelt's death. Chet and the neighbor were silent for a moment as they absorbed the news, then made obligatory comments in the presence of death, and returned to immediately pressing issues of weather and crop prospects.

As with VE day, so with President Harry Truman's announcement at 6 p.m., August 14, that, following America's atomic bomb destruction of Hiroshima and then Nagasaki, Japan had capitulated. "The downtown streets of Ottumwa" were filled "with milling, shouting throngs . . . And as the evening wore on, the celebrating became more intense . . . First it began with honking auto horns. Then whistles and sirens joined the din, from factories and locomotives and fire engines. Then there were explosions from bombs [firecrackers] and guns." As a precaution, all the city's twenty-five policemen were called out. Fifty shore patrolmen from the naval air base just north of town added their necessary authority. "No attempt was made to keep naval personnel on the base . . . all beer taverns were being allowed to remain open," although a policeman and an SP were assigned to

each tavern with instructions to prevent only fighting and property damage. “One police official said, ‘We wouldn’t have jail space to put every body we found drunk on the streets’.” A smaller group, but nevertheless hundreds, gathered for thanksgiving religious services.<sup>501</sup>

The Curtis family went nowhere to celebrate, but continued to pay attention to crops and weather and work. By attending to such crucially practical matters, within a year or two the worst was over for the family. Chet bought a well-used Minneapolis-Moline tractor, soon a new Ford tractor, and more and better equipment generally. He bought more and better cattle, pigs, sheep, and chickens. Crops grown from hybrid seed, commercially fertilized and protected by pesticides, produced amazingly. Bumper crops brought higher prices as well following removal of wartime price controls and appearance of peacetime government-stabilized prices for both livestock and grains. These measures allowed farmers to avoid a crash like that following World War I. Several years of favorable weather followed, as did more land to farm through rentals. Melded with the fortunes of war and empire, weather and agricultural politics, were, as a matter of course, long hours of toil and much sweat. And, absolutely, refusal to go into debt for more land, or a tractor, or a car, or for anything else. Chet and Jo always paid cash on the barrelhead. After interminable years of sweat and sometimes tears, if not blood, at last everything seemed hunky-dory.

In late summer 1947, during the normal farm work hiatus, Jo and Chet left their sons to look after livestock and weeds. They traveled with old friends Lena and Frank Lamis to Colorado—yet another visit for Jo to the Garden of the Gods and Denver; then the Black Hills and Mt. Rushmore, before



Chet and Jo near Mt. Rushmore, 1947





Chet with new Pontiac

returning across Nebraska plains and Iowa prairie. A year later they performed a virtual reprise with the boys, and, family tourist-camping days over, stayed in tourist courts and cabins. Next came a family visit to Arkansas Curtises. Then an eastern swing through Ohio, Pennsylvania, and upper New York state featured a visit with Naomi Curtis Hutton's family near Cleveland and, at Niagara Falls, the obligatory yellow-slickered spraying under Horseshoe Falls and misty excursion on *The Maid of the Mist*. In 1950 Chet and Jo bought their first new car ever, of course for spot cash, a black Pontiac four door, just in time for their younger son to sport around a bit before entering college in fall 1951.

### The Depression Experience

Perhaps best seen from their position of rising affluence, it is evident that even in the hardest times, Chet, Jo, and the boys were better off than millions of people worldwide. Even in the United States they were better off than most among racial and ethnic minorities and the urban poor and the "Okies" and the utterly ill and destitute by the millions.

We can, of course, rightly celebrate the virtues that Josephine and Chester exercised at the brink of destitution—courage, determination, hard work, honesty, intelligence, good sense—in prevailing over harsh and dispiriting conditions, virtues not evident in Everywoman and Everyman of their era. We can understand that they and other Americans like them might have concluded that their rising affluence resulted from practicing the traditional work ethic. In that understanding is some degree of truth. We can also recognize, however, that the Depression-and-War generation to which Chet and Jo belonged was also caught and carried up by the tide of American Empire, a tide that would never rise for millions of courageous, determined, hard working, honest, intelligent, and commonsensical people worldwide. As William Manchester concludes, "Tax returns testify the real beneficiary of the war boom was the small family which had saved little or nothing during the Depression."<sup>502</sup>

If we think of hardship as relative to time, place, culture, and country, then clearly Chet, Jo, and the boys had enough food to survive, if not always to enjoy, but always meat and vegetables and fruit; enough clothing to keep from freezing, even if not stylish; a roof, floor, and windows with



panes; a stove for warmth, even if sometimes fueled with corncobs and wood. Even in the hardest times, they had horses, and usually a tractor, for fieldwork. They had a car, even if second or third hand; a telephone, even if on a party line; a radio, admittedly of inferior quality. They could pay for the occasional movie, and they could take the rare road trip to distant and pleasant places.

Most obviously, they were safe from wars, brigandage, and the worst of corrupt government officials. Furthermore, they benefited directly from the banking, land conservation, and agricultural policies, and eventually Social Security programs, of the New Deal and thereafter. Poverty in a potentially rich and comparatively well-governed country allowed Jo and Chet, among millions of other Americans, to hope for future relief and eventual escape into better times, even into minor affluence. Eventually, they could even go to a “Hard Times” party and pretend (with some inner authenticity) to be poor.



1960's Hard Times party

To point to hope, sometimes dim, is not to deny insidious fears that seeped into lives that had never known financial security even before enduring the '30s. This was certainly true of Chet, who abhorred debt, who in later years mortgaged nothing to the future, who paid for everything in full and at once, who came to accept relative affluence only provisionally and hesitantly. Even in his last days, while his mind dimmed, Chet lay attempting to do sums in his head and worrying about grain prices.

For Jo, hard times led to fear that life might always be too hard. But her experience led as well to enduring belief that, for later affluent Americans, life might not be hard enough. “I think there was always that fear,” she said in 1976, “that you might not have enough.” Such fear was both generalized and specific because Jo feared there might not be enough to support her eldest son. Although that specific fear eased and virtually disappeared with time, the contest of hope and faith against fear continued as a theme in Jo’s views of life and society. As she said of the '30s, some became embittered. “Some people can withstand things and some can’t. You have to have faith in something that things are going to work out right. Many people just lost heart . . . Some people don’t have enough faith in God, and depend too much on themselves. And they don’t have faith in their fellow man.”

Jo believed that a key to understanding the affluent late-twentieth

century lay in the Depression experience, for then most people could not have everything they wanted when they wanted it. Instead of instant gratification, they “had to live within their means, couldn’t borrow money unless they had something to back it up. I don’t think this affected us so much,” she said of Chet and herself, “but many people lavish things on their grandchildren because they couldn’t do for their children. Perhaps this is where a lot of our troubles come from now—that because I couldn’t have it I want my offspring to have it. And it isn’t good. Life is too easy now for children. They don’t have anything to do. And lots, most parents, give kids everything they want . . . If everything goes along all right you don’t have any battles to fight and you just become like jelly.”

Should life be hard? “It should be harder than it is [now], probably. Hard times didn’t make all people good. But to a certain extent . . . you don’t have the money to go out and drink and get drugs.” Hard times also led people that Jo knew to be more cooperative, less independent and isolated. She would have agreed with Marilynne Robinson’s preacher in *Gilead* that “It is a good thing to know what it is to be poor, and a better thing if you can do it in company.” Thus, the best consequences of hard times toughened people internally, while nevertheless making them more sensitive both to their need for, and the needs of, other people. The fortunate, and perhaps stronger, had learned to empathize with the unfortunate, who might or might not be weaker. In her own life, Jo Teeter Curtis acted upon this understanding with remarkable consistency and civic responsibility.<sup>503</sup>

Life eased for Jo and Chet in the 1950s and ‘60s, even as a busy round of work and obligations continued. After leaving school in 1946



Helping Hand Club at building of new home for Lena and Frank Lamis. Lena is 2<sup>nd</sup> from left and Jo Curtis is 2<sup>nd</sup> from right, middle row, 1948

Wayne returned home to help with farm work, with livestock, haying, and gardening. I, however, off to Agency High School in 1947, could help only weekends and summers. Even before entering Parsons College with a grant-in-aid in 1951, I found paying farm and construction summer work elsewhere. In addition to that income Chet and Jo defrayed some of my modest college expenses with gifts and loans.

### **Grandma Ollie and Idyllic Memories**

Chet and Jo not only attended to farm work and their sons, they paid close attention to the welfare of their mothers. Grandma Ollie continued in her farmhouse for some years after Grandpa George died, a reasonable choice given that son Bernard lived nearby and that other of her children visited regularly on Sundays and often by phone. Sometimes she borrowed a grandchild as companion, such as Ferne Gorman soon after George B. died, or Louise or George Wheeldon. George, who stayed for most of summer '42, recalled that Ollie, then seventy, was milking eight cows by herself. She thought Grandson George was not a good enough milker, but she would allow him to bring the cows home. On one such excursion, George insisted, he was amazed to see a blacksnake gently attached to a cow's hind teat (the one Ollie had regularly found empty). George speculated in 2003 that, since cows sometimes leaked milk, a snake could learn to suckle. Within a few months, Ollie's cows contracted Bang's Disease (infectious undulant fever, unrelated to serpents), and she sold them, depriving at least one snake of an easy life, and herself of a lifelong avocation.

I stayed with Grandma Ollie during an almost idyllic two weeks in midsummer 1945. My visit was marred by a day in early August, the seventh, when, sent down the little slope from the house to fetch the mail, I stood in the dirt road beside the mailbox and read in the day-old *Ottumwa Courier* of a terrible new weapon, "the most terrible destructive force in history . . . which looses pent up forces of the universe . . . the force from which the sun draws its power" —whose firestorm had immolated a place called Hiroshima in Japan. President Truman had characterized it as "an important Japanese army base." The newspaper noted that it had had "a major quartermaster depot and . . . large ordnance, machine tools and aircraft plants," and that it was "a principal port." Only incidentally did the Associated Press article mention that the city had had 318,000 civilian residents. Like the firebombing of Dresden and Tokyo, Hiroshima and Nagasaki illustrate, as Niall Ferguson writes in *The War of the World*, that

World War II “required terrible moral compromises” by the Allies: “This was no simple war of evil against good. It was a war of evil against lesser evil.”<sup>504</sup>

That moment at the mailbox has haunted me into a new millennium. And yet it mingles with other memories—of Grandma Ollie’s tales of pioneer days when her parents came to this very farm on Lick Crick by covered wagon from Mudlick, Indiana, and lived in an old cabin just up the hill there, just up and to the right from where the barn now is, a cabin that had been an Indian trading post, from whence they had seen a lone wolf loping off across the fields. I remember her tales of first meeting, and reluctantly allowing herself to be courted, and finally marrying, the carpenter’s son who with his father had built her pa’s house, this very house we’re in now. I remember Grandma Ollie laughing, her eyes twinkling, her head slightly trembling from side to side, telling of being shot in the leg by Grandpa George when he was cleaning an “unloaded” revolver, of his having ‘pert near shot baby Earnest.

I remember Uncle Bernard Teeter that summer shooting a baby beef in the head for butchering, the revolver aimed point-blank between the eyes at the forehead a foot away. I remember the beef’s legs giving way, collapsing, so incredibly and suddenly as or before the crack sounded. I remember pretend hunting with an old, hopelessly rusted, single-shot ’22 rifle of Grandpa’s that I had found while snooping in his smokehouse toolshed. I remember moving soundlessly and swiftly like an avenging wind under the shagbark hickories and oaks, as had Zane Grey’s broad shouldered, lithe, and taciturn Indian fighting hero, Lewis Wetzel, in *The Spirit of the Border*. I had received that book as an “award for perfect attendance” at school in 1943-44 from my teacher, otherwise known (and signed) as “Mother.”

I also remember reading endlessly in the limestone walled cellar through moldering stacks of dear departed Uncle Gus Teeter’s old pulp western magazines, remember climactic inevitable gunplay on the cool afternoon cellar stairs. I remember particularly hearing at second hand of Grandma Ollie’s disapproving report to my mother that I had spent fifty cents in Fairfield for a new book, *Outlaws of Halfaday Creek*. Even after reading it in a day, I had thought it well worth the money just for the gunplay alone. Mother told me of Ollie’s displeasure, but did not reprove me herself. What a gentle summer of guns, mayhem, and violence, that summer of Hiroshima and the Pioneer Wild West.

Grandma Ollie moved from her parents’ farm into a small, white, one-bedroom Batavia house she bought in 1946, the same year that son

Bernard and daughter-in-law Isobel moved from their nearby farm. Bernard, however, continued to farm her place, and the Steele-Teeter house was rented out. Ollie was then seventy-four, and would live in Batavia more than twenty years. Since she was now hardly three miles away, and hardly more than three blocks from the Methodist church Josephine and Chet attended regularly, they looked in on her often, and Josephine phoned even more often. When Ollie moved, Josephine took her mother's washing machine and did Grandma's laundry as well as ours. Bernard, Ollie's youngest, her "stay," as she always said, and her other children, looked after her welfare, as did Chet, increasingly so after Bernard died in a tragic tractor accident in 1965. Chet ran her business errands, "fixed up" her house, and ultimately served as her estate executor. The *Batavia Beacon* on October 5, 1961, reported that Josephine, Chester, and "other relatives" had papered and cleaned her house while Ollie visited daughter Irene in Burlington.



Ollie and children, Irene, Rebecca, Earnest, Bernard, and Josephine, 1947



Ollie and family. Front: Helen Clark Teeter, Chet Curtis, Josephine Teeter Curtis. Middle: Carl Knopp, Earnest Teeter, Ollie Steele Teeter, Bernard Teeter. Back: Irene Teeter Gorman Knopp, Rebecca Teeter Wheeldon, Homer Wheeldon, Isobel Manning Teeter, 1955

Over the years Ollie visited Jo and Chet's for birthday parties (her eighty-third), New Year's (watching the Rose Bowl parade with Alta Giltner in 1957), and Easter, or for no occasion. They took her places as well—to Pella's tulip festival, to Osceola for her sister Cora's Golden Wedding anniversary, and to Burlington for her eighty-fourth birthday with Irene. Josephine took her to the Mother-Daughter banquet a block from her home in the Batavia Christian Church basement, in May 1968, where, not surprisingly, at ninety-six she was the oldest there.



In Batavia, a village of a very few hundred, Ollie spent a quiet life. Sometimes she walked slowly down the shady block in her early years there, often stopping to speak with neighbors on their front porches, but increasingly living indoors, while neighbors, friends, and relatives kept an eye on her or on her house. In 1960 she gave to the town public library Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* in memory of her late husband. Ollie was a plump little old lady—in looks she and the elderly Mary Todd Lincoln resembled each other somewhat, except that Ollie looked cheerier. Grandma Ollie typically could be found sitting where she could spy from two sheer curtained windows of her house on the corner, sitting in one of the big brown faux leather rockers Rebecca and Josephine had given their parents for boarding them as schoolteachers in the 1920s.



Ollie Steele Teeter sewing in her favorite rocking chair

There Grandma Ollie kept up with the world by reading magazines and local newspapers, by keeping a sharp eye out her windows for neighborhood goings on, by gossiping on the phone and with relatives and friends who were welcome to drop by anytime, she commenting on human foibles with a slightly jaundiced but always twinkling eye.



Ollie Teeter with great-granddaughter Hilary Ann Curtis, Jo, and Bruce Curtis, 1965

In that big rocker, her feet up on a little stool, when she was not reading Grandma Ollie crocheted, crocheted, and crocheted dozens and hundreds of elegant things ranging in size from doilies to baby clothes to huge heirloom cloths for tables that would serve a dozen. All these things, all that work, she gave away—to her daughters and sons, to her numerous grandchildren, to their babies, to friends and *their* grandchildren and *their* babies. In 1966 she crocheted a luxurious yellow and white dress for her great-granddaughter, Hilary Ann Curtis, born the preceding year. Grandma Ollie was a crocheting cornucopia who doted on Wheaties, a box of which was always on her kitchen table, although in earlier years she (or husband

George) had favored puffed wheat in large cellophane bags.

In 1968 Ollie sold the farm that her father, Joseph Elliott Steele, had bought from his father, Joseph Steele, exactly a century earlier, in 1868. I guess she waited for that symbolic marker. This was land Joe and his bride, Sarah Elizabeth Miles Steele, had homesteaded a hundred and five years earlier, in 1863, the year Ollie's husband, George Brinton McClellan Teeter, had been born.

Within a few months of being ninety-seven, her nimble mind and fingers still active, Fannie Ulrica Steele Teeter suffered a stroke and, without regaining consciousness, died January 4, 1969. Methodist minister John Nye, who had liked Ollie, "because she would argue with him," preached her funeral in Batavia's Campbell Funeral Home. An independent iconoclast to the end, married more than forty-nine years, widowed more than twenty-seven, Grandma Ollie was buried wearing her wedding ring and next to the grave of Grandpa George in Fell cemetery.



Fannie Ulrica (Ollie)  
Steele Teeter, 1872-1969

Not many years after Ollie died, the house that Grandpa George and his father Abraham had built for Joe Steele, Ollie's father—the house with the elaborate cornice braces that George's brother, Adam, had crafted—was torn down, its native limestone cellar and foundations bulldozed, all traces eradicated. Gone was the south facing big bay window where all year round Ollie had grown flowers and ferns. Joe Steele's and then George's smokehouse/tool shed, gone. Ollie's little gare-age, for about a year in the late 1880s the home of the Steele family while the big house was being built, gone. The barn with not one but two dismantled buggies hung on its cobwebbed interior walls, gone. Only a few great white oaks and shagbark hickories remained to mark the site, these and a ragged row



Steele-Teeter house

of perennial orange day lilies along the old driveway entrance, flowers eventually trampled into oblivion by cattle. Jo did manage to salvage four of Uncle Adam Teeter's cornice braces that I fashioned into coffee table legs. And she kept, in a small oval frame, A. E. Keller's bright pastel of the house with day lilies. Oh, America, The Temporary.

## Ada Claudia Tresenriter Curtis

Chet's mother, Ada, after leaving the home farm in 1929, never lived anywhere permanently, but here and there for a few years at most. She took cleaning and housekeeping work or visited and "helped out" in her numerous children's homes. Those who knew her best remember her as of course hard working and helpful, but not as lighthearted. To granddaughter Leona Hutton Domino, Ada was certainly not "bubbly." Daughter-in-law Josephine noted Ada's sadly understandable concern with money, with saving. "She kept it bottled up." Even if she had a new dress, she couldn't wear it. She kept it in her closet.

Each of her children once gave Ada \$50 and encouraged her to spend the money, but since she only hoarded it, they didn't try again. Instead, they pooled funds to buy her useful things—a mattress, a rug, chest of drawers, clothing. Nevertheless, said Jo, "She never seemed to be happy with anything, never liked her clothes, thought she always looked worse than anybody, and always put herself down, although she was very superior."



Ada Tresenriter Curtis and children. Front: Leonard, Naomi, Ada, Bertha Back: Ethan, Lawrence, Estol, Chester, 1940s

After World War II, Ada had wanted to live with Chet, Josephine, and the boys on the home farm, but that arrangement hadn't worked out. "She thought she wanted to go back to the farm, but it was so different. It wasn't hers anymore. I don't know . . . She was unhappy, and she made everybody else unhappy, because we knew she was unhappy." After a few months Ada moved to a little apartment, and then another, in Fairfield, perhaps her ninth and tenth moves since first leaving the home farm.

In a sporadically-kept diary, Ada sometimes revealed herself to herself in ways she could not easily or at all do to others. A common theme appears as she records dreary rounds of housework for pay: "I ironed and mopped kitchen am tired and just plain lonesome" [February 22, 1940]. Although rarely indulging in naked self-pity, Ada wrote that "I washed. I am lame in my back. No one knows" [February 28, 1947]. She once admitted

to herself, "Have had the blues this wk til I cant even be decent" [March 11, 1950]. A decade earlier, on a Sunday, she had been, "O, so lonesome for company. No one knows how I long for some one to just say . . ." [January 28, 1940]. Here the entry breaks off, illegible because of Ada's heavy blackened erasure.

Ada is lonesome for company, but much lonelier because of losses long ago and yet ever present. On February 1, 1940, she wrote that "26 years ago to day we burried our 10 mo old baby." That was Willard, named after her brother. A decade later, on March 16, Ada wrote, "If Willard had lived he would have been 36 today." On her birthday, February 9, 1940, she wrote, "22 years I have been alone. Dark and cloudy and rain to nite." The preceding year, on October 2, Ada had written, "Arthur has been gone 21 years today. How I long for him." Given her way of life, Ada kept few mementos, but she did preserve a half-dozen silver-plated spoons that she and Arthur had bought within a week or so of their wedding in 1898; she kept as well little lost Willard's baby spoon.

Through all her widowed hardship years, Ada was sometimes bored and wearied by unending rounds of housework, but her burdens were sometimes lightened temporarily by the kindness and friendship of relatives and friends. She sometimes enjoyed brief outings, as when she attended *The Grapes of Wrath* with Chet and Jo; or with Chet, Jo, and the boys saw Harry Truman in Ottumwa as he whistle-stopped across the nation in 1950 following his successful 1948 presidential campaign. Through it all, Grandma Ada carried on with her work, even as she silently carried her loneliness and grief.

As they had for Ollie, Chet and Jo took Ada places; took her to get new glasses after she had fallen; entertained her at birthday and other parties; joined her at parties her other children hosted. They visited in her Fairfield apartment, or in hospital, or in her son Leonard and daughter-in-law Wilma's Fairfield nursing home when she was ill. More than once when "poorly" she stayed with Jo and Chet.

From my then young and admittedly limited perspective, Ada enjoyed and was gratified by her daughters and her sons, all self-supporting even in hard times, all supportive, respectful, and kind to their mother. I remember her suddenly gay laughter at family gatherings. From my perspective, Grandma Ada enjoyed children. She had certainly birthed and nursed and rocked and fed and patched up enough of her own, and her neighbors', and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, to know something about the joy and sorrow of having, and losing, children.

One sunny early September Saturday afternoon in 1943, my parents

attending Wayne with cerebral meningitis in Ottumwa Hospital, I, almost ten, took Grandma fishing on muddy little Buckeye Creek that dribbled through the poor farm. I remember her laughter as I, gallant guide, led the way over barbwire and through thigh high thistles. Even now, I can hear vividly her suddenly gay and lighthearted laughter as she swung a tiny catfish, her first fish ever, she told me. Her first time fishing, ever, even though she had lived on Kentucky's Green River until she was thirteen, and was now sixty-five. For her sake, and for my own, I'm glad we went.



Ada Tresenriter Curtis with great-granddaughter Hilary Ann Curtis, 1965

In her very latest years, paying from meager savings, Ada moved into a Fairfield nursing home, contracted pneumonia, never recovered fully. Always little, increasingly thin and rather rawboned, she became thinner still, almost skeletal. In those few last years she was often lost in herself, often confused in the nursing home, even on the once familiar town square, often restless and fearful. I frightened her once by appearing in her doorway wearing a new dark and bushy beard. At times, however, she could enjoy

periods of lucidity and visits from children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

With Chet, Josephine, Leonard, Wilma, and Bertha at her bedside, Ada Claudia Tresenriter Curtis, age ninety-three, died peacefully in an Ottumwa nursing home, April 17, 1971. Josephine, knowing well how life's burdens had weighed upon her mother-in-law, was thankful that the last words she heard Ada say were, "It's so good to be home." Grandma Ada was buried in Ashland cemetery, after twenty-six years of marriage, and fifty-three of widowhood, beside her husband, Thomas Arthur Curtis, and her son, Willard Leland Curtis.



Ada Claudia Tresenriter Curtis, 1878-1971



## Jo and Chet Traveled More and More

During these years of looking after mothers and sons, Chet and Jo traveled more whenever farming and Chet's occasional Pleasant Township tax assessing allowed. They continued visiting with neighbors and relatives, attending church affairs, and celebrating weddings and wedding anniversaries (including their own twenty-seventh in 1956 with dinner and a show in Ottumwa). Inevitably, they attended more funerals, but also high school and college games, commencements, and plays. They saw Des Moines ice follies and Mt. Pleasant Old Threshers. In 1955 with Frank and Lena Lamis they visited Des Moines repeatedly—for a Home and Flower Show, Farm Family Day, and “shopping.” In 1960 Chet, Jo, and Wayne saw “daughter-in-law Mrs. Bruce Curtis receive her Bachelor of Arts degree” at the University of Iowa.<sup>505</sup>

Longer trips proliferated in the 1960s—to Connecticut, Kansas, and Michigan to see Bruce, Joy, and, eventually, grandchildren. They wintered in warmer territory. First in 1951, widower-neighbor George Dueser staying with the boys, they toured Florida—viewing the nation's oldest schoolhouse, Bok's Singing Tower, their first Brahma cattle. In 1958 they drove to *both* Florida and California between mid-January and early March. In 1959 they visited Chet's brother Lawrence and his wife, Mae, at Coarsegold, near Yosemite. On one Florida trip, Wayne went along, but otherwise he stayed home to feed livestock, often eating and gossiping with Homer and Rebecca Teeter Wheeldon, or Murl and Nina Black, or other near neighbors. One winter he stayed with Donald and Anna Curtis Parrett, one with Grandma Ada. Meanwhile, I was in college, the army, graduate school, and college teaching.<sup>506</sup>

Jo and Chet made one marathon Alcan Highway trip to Anchorage and back, in two short weeks with Bernard and Isobel Teeter to visit their daughter and son-in-law. Another year they drove up Winnipeg way for fall colors. But for twenty years, most of their vacations, as befitted farmers, occurred in winter. Sometimes they visited Arkansas, Oklahoma, or Texas relatives.

Whether in Florida, Texas, Arizona, or California, their holiday lives featured tourist rooms and motels with “cooking privileges” (in later years a travel trailer), and much rendezvousing with friends and relatives. These were generally farm folk from Iowa or other frigid climes, with whom they went touring local sights, shopping, beachfront or poolside sunning and dipping. There was shuffleboard for everyone, pool games mostly for the men, cards, eating, reminiscing, and enjoying with others of a certain age



Chet and Jo in Arizona, 1960s

belated rewards of surviving and prevailing in an era of hard times, hard work, and world war. The Curtises drove to California and back with farm neighbors, the Giltner—Jo and Alyce in back watching scenery, while up front, “Everett and Chet farmed all the way out and all the way back.” In a postcard to me in 1952, Chet commented on New Mexico, west of Las Cruces: “We saw lots of worthless country today.” An

incorrigible Iowa farmer, he felt the same about much of the country, even most farmland, which, excepting in central Illinois, hardly measured up to his standards.

### **Joy Diane Hilleary and Bruce Curtis**

Upon returning to the big house in 1945, Jo had resumed larger social events—big family dinners, bridal showers for nieces, Batavia Literary Guild meetings and picnics, the Helping Hand and Our Day Out Clubs, neighborhood card parties. On Tuesday, December 6, 1955, “Mrs. Everett Giltner and Mrs. Chester Curtis served lunch at the Curtis home . . . for the seven negro singers from Rush College in Mississippi. Reverend and Mrs. Earl Erb and Everett Giltner were also guests.”

During these halcyon entertaining days Jo had the happy task of presenting an elegant wedding rehearsal dinner for eighteen on an Ollie Teeter-crocheted tablecloth, Saturday evening, June 11, 1960. Her task was a happy one because more than once during University of Iowa graduate school years, I no doubt looking thin and anemic, Jo had urged me to marry for my health, for more and better food. Now, at age twenty-six, I would at last be able to satisfy my appetite. Actually, Jo’s sumptuous feast, featuring Swiss steak especially for the virtual bridegroom, satisfied every guest, not least bridegroom-and-bride-to-be.

Joy Diane Hilleary, a Fairfield lass, was the daughter of intrepid housewife and civic-minded mother of five, Ruth Hale Hilleary, and of inventive Loudon factory engineering supervisor, Julius Lawson Hilleary. Listed more or less chronologically, but with space-saving omissions, in her short life Ms. H. had been: a deadly marble-shooting shark (see Norman Rockwell print); assiduous butterfly collector (including a perfect Luna moth); breeder of blue-ribbon rabbits (and dissector of same, including eyeballs); reader one summer of every children’s seafaring book in the public

library; unsuccessful organizer of public agitation for a public swimming pool (but years later lifeguard of same); Saturday sunrise bakery worker and display-case scrubber; nominal housecleaner but actually companion, piano duet partner, and three club caddy for Ms. Margaret Clinkenbeard, her high school English teacher; group singer, pianist, violinist, French hornist; junior high school newspaper co-founder; high school and nursing school yearbook editor; champion scholar; airline hostess; registered nurse.

In her early years a wide-eyed, wide-awake, loving and lovely girl, Joy was then known in some quarters as “Birdlegs.” By 1960 age twenty-five, she had achieved five-foot-two + two—with elevated eyes of blue—had become a loving and lovely young woman with, if I may say so, lovely legs. In the year of my birth, 1933, opened the first American movie drive-in, and exactly twenty years later my future bride blind-dated me in Fairfield’s version.<sup>507</sup>

From the beginning Chet liked Joy very much, as did Jo, whose highest praise for her son was that he had had the good sense to marry the girl. Over many years Jo and Joy created a mutual admiration society, Jo unable to imagine a better daughter-in-law, wife for her son, mother of her two grandchildren; Joy increasingly viewing Mother Jo as a “saint.”

Wedding day dawned, although, veiled by sheets of rain, it hardly dawned at all. At the church door Grandma Ada, now eighty-two, recited the old saw, “Rainy day, stormy bride.” But her granddaughter-in-law was to disprove the prediction many times over. A Zephyr perhaps she was, or a balmy Chinook; even—and often—an enthusiastic Whirlwind; but never dark and stormy—excepting, I confess, upon severe and repeated provocation.

Under lowering skies the Fairfield Methodist Church wedding service was duly completed, the groom having experienced severe lower limb tremors, the bride’s lovely lower limbs tremorless under a flowing, white, floor-length, borrowed gown. “Her elbow-length veil,” however, which “fell from a small lace cap trimmed with rhinestones and pearls,” was “fashioned by the bride.” The church basement reception and Hilleary home gift-opening procedures were duly surmounted. The tomfoolery of Joy’s Uncle Harry Bryant, abetted by just-minted and traitorous brother-in-law Jack Hilleary, was duly suffered—a purloined distributor rotor from the car’s engine, and tin cans wired to its bumper. Thereafter, in late afternoon haze, the happy couple eagerly left town. Or, the eager couple happily left town. For a honeymoon week I had borrowed from Chet and Jo \$100 and their late model, two-toned, gray-and-white Pontiac.



Chet & Jo Curtis, Bruce & Joy Hilleary Curtis, Ruth & Julius Hilleary, Methodist Church, Fairfield, Iowa, June 12, 1960

Carless, Chet and Jo reached home through the charity of Julius and Ruth Hilleary, little dreaming of blessings an empty garage might offer. Stormy weather. Continued. One early evening Jo and Chet, tired and sweaty from gardening in muggy weather under threatening skies, went to bathe and shower, Jo upstairs, Chet in the basement. Suddenly Jo, absorbed in ablutions, was startled by Chet's frantic shouting that the storm was coming, the wind was rising, get down here pronto. Literally empty-handed, Jo raced down basement steps as howling winds hit.

On the bottom basement step Jo and Chet huddled together—Adam and Eve just outside their Garden—cowering before the Lord's stormy wrath, and clothed similarly—but without even a fig leaf. Cowered there as their garage went airborne, to be discovered, dismembered, next day half a field away. And while they clung together there on the steps, did Jo and Chet perhaps think of their newish car, safe somewhere beside a tent in the Wisconsin Dells? Not reportedly.

Many years later, Jo reported, not to me but modestly to her soulmate, Joy, that on the basement steps, dripping, her mind had flashed, "What if the house goes next and we're found like this?" Suddenly, being hospitalized with holey underwear was no longer the worst scenario.

### **Chet Retired at Sixty-Two**

In 1966 Chet retired at sixty-two. He rented the farmland to Walter Adam, took Social Security benefits, had a livestock and machinery sale January 2, 1967, continued overseeing Wayne's work with remaining

livestock, looked after Ada and Ollie. He got a basement pool table, one with a composition board rather than slate bed. Although playing on it was a bit like navigating a golf green, he and friends, notably Frank Lamis and Murl Black, spent many pleasant hours around it. But within a few years, Chet's health began to decline. Although he continued to be relatively active, lean, and fit, years of hard work had begun to tell. One of his favorite sayings had always been that "Hard work never hurt a man," but the equally familiar phrase, "mankilling work," was clearly more pertinent.

### **A Driverless Runaway Tractor, Nothing Much for a Farmer**

Chet had spent a lifetime in a dangerous occupation, and he had scars as evidence. At age three, in September 1907, standing up to wave at a CB&Q train, he had fallen off and under the wheel of a wagon load of ceramic field tile his father was driving, which broke his leg; ever after when tired he limped a little. Years later while repairing a field mower he cut the tip off a finger (reattached anesthesia-free with needle and thread that afternoon by Agency's Dr. Reed). He was kicked by a horse; fell off a hayrack on his back across that wagon tongue; fell across joists in the house attic, which hospitalized him with deep bruises; was trapped under a tractor's rear wheel.

It is July 1957 and I, home from the army and waiting for graduate school, am helping my father and brother combine oats. At this moment, in the warm, utterly cloudless early afternoon I am flat on my back in the oats stubble, cap over my eyes. I am half-drowsing, waiting for the combine to make another round and unload the grain hopper into the wagon I have just emptied at the barn granary. From just over the hill in our northwest forty I have been hearing the combine and tractor my father is running, but the sound has stopped and the wait is longer than usual. Gradually aroused, deciding to investigate, I unhitch the wagon and mount the little Allis Chalmers tractor, borrowed from good neighbor and friend, Murl Black.

As I top the rise I am plunged into a nightmare scene—our Ford tractor, out of gear on the slope and driverless, rolling downhill toward a shallow ditch filled with thorny Osage Orange hedge limbs, my brother running and yelling, my father off the combine tractor and pursuing the Ford, trying to board the tractor from behind just as it hits the little ditch, and bounces, my father thrown off behind the right rear wheel, the tractor rolling up the opposite bank a little, then settling back, catching my father behind tire and on thorny branches, rolling back against his chest, I rolling down the hill on Murl's tractor, then bailing out, jumping off, letting the



tractor go on, into another ditch as we learn much later, I running to my father over the thorny brush pile, vainly trying to lift the tractor tire off him, it attached to a tractor weighing almost 2,500 pounds, 'til he, gasping, says, drive it off, I onto the tractor seat, even at the moment irrationally aware of



Ford tractor

adding weight to my father's crushing chest, the tractor somehow starting at first attempt, I letting out the clutch just enough, not so much to drive the tractor off my father's chest as to spin the wheel an eighth or sixteenth of a revolution up the ditch slope, enough to spin him out from under, I hearing a sudden jerky moan as he is freed, I braking and turning off the tractor, leaving it in gear, my brother's unearthly screaming subsiding, the sudden quiet, except for my father's gasping, wheezing, breathing, as he lies behind the wheel in thorny brush.

Then followed the next nightmare of getting my brother off for help, despite my father's gasping protests that he would be all right, of knowing that he should not be moved but needing to get him off the thorns, and then eventually succumbing to his demand to go to the house, he finally up on the tractor seat, I behind on the draw bar supporting him on the painfully slow first gear drive back to the house, then getting him onto the back porch daybed helped by my shocked mother, just returning from United Methodist Women as we drive up, then calling and arranging for, waiting for, waiting for, the Fairfield Hospital ambulance, which was directed at every corner by neighbors Wayne had alerted, ignoring the speed limit on the way to the hospital, and the waiting and waiting for news, news ultimately comforting, after x-rays and examinations, of only some cracked ribs and assorted cuts, punctures, and bruises. Nothing much for a farmer, nothing like what could have been.

That night, home from the hospital, I broke down completely, lay on the grass in the front yard, saying it should have been me, love for my father wrenched out of me; but my mother, with the ancient sacrificing wisdom of wives and mothers, saying, no, that my life was still beginning, that Dad had had a good life. And so late that night we slept.

Next day, while Mother and I were preparing to combine, Frank Lamis gently suggested we not bother, that help was on the way. Sam Dovico had alerted the neighborhood, so that next morning a stream of friends and neighbors, including Chet's brother, Leonard, began arriving with big equipment and went to work. At noon, also in the great tradition of neighborliness, United Methodist Women served dinner. By day's end, neighbors had combined and binned the remaining twenty-five acres of

our oats harvest, had raked and baled the bedding straw, had stacked the 1,300 bales. Then with perfect grace they had one by one gone off with a wave and self-effacing comments that what they had done wasn't much, and happy to have done it for Chet, who would surely be out of the hospital soon. Which, surprisingly, he was. Nothing much for a farmer. Nothing less than a farmer's wife might always fear.

The fifty-seven who helped, including Methodist women and two water-girls, is virtually a neighborhood roster—Giltner, Lamis, Redeker, Berrier, Wheeldon, McMullin, Fogle, Curtis, Dovico, Booth, Morrison, Schmitter, Shields, Walker, Clark, Ornduff, Salts, Peebler, Bonnett, Coury, Shanholtzer, McCormick, Parrett, Shieler, Rose, Bradfield, Durflinger, Black, McCombs, McNeil, Hoffman, Whitmore, Adam, Frotz, Thomas, Epperson, Thomann, Lanman, Dunne, Mercer.<sup>508</sup>

Among those helping was Vernon Wheeldon, Chet's nephew, who would later die under an overturned tractor. That fall, with twenty-five others, Chet helped harvest corn for Bert Huffman, all of whose fingers on one hand had been torn off by a cornpicker.<sup>509</sup>

### **Chet Weakened Even More**

The runaway tractor and other dramatic events catalog only Chet's memorable injuries. These and six decades of countless other unremarked insults to his body slowed him down and brought on stiffness if he sat too long. But an even more disquieting problem began to lurk in his consciousness. "It was coming on him for quite awhile before he gave up and went to the doctor. You're a man. You know how men are. They don't



Jo, Hilary, and Chet, 1965

want to go to the doctor. One time he decided to go to Ottumwa and told me he wasn't feeling good. He didn't want to stay home and work." Early in the summer of 1970, while we were all camping at Iowa's Geode State Park, he told me about a vision problem in his right eye.

Late in 1970, suffering increasingly, Chet was diagnosed as possibly having cancer, melanoma. Fairfield Clinic doctors referred him to State University of Iowa Hospitals, where the eye was removed just before

Christmas. Another surgery made a prosthetic eye impossible. These were dispiriting events for Chet. As Jo explained, "He was such a proud person and losing his eye hurt him so much and he was so afraid the looks of it would offend people. I remember him having his handkerchief over his eye when Hilary [their six-year-old granddaughter] was in bed with us. She asked why he covered his eye. He said, 'You wouldn't want to look at it,' and her answer, 'Oh, I don't mind'."

Despite such a distressing illness, Chet and Jo carried on. In late February 1971 after he had recovered somewhat, they flew to Phoenix, met Bill and Naomi Curtis Hutton, and visited Rex Hutton's family and other relatives. Before Ada died that spring, they returned to Iowa in Bill and Naomi's car. They vacationed that summer in Colorado. In their last winter, with limited vision, Chet drove in January 1972 from Iowa to McAllen, at the southern tip of Texas, and parked their travel trailer on his cousin's property. They enjoyed nearby friends, including Frank Lamis, who had "Indian" danced at Chet and Jo's third charivari, and Lena, who would remain Jo's confidante until she died at 103. Other friends there included Wayne and Margery Loy Ornduff, the Paynes, the Whipples. The time was bittersweet, for "most of the time Chet was not well." Jo wrote, "I am thankful [your] Dad and I had as many years together as we did. That he was able to do the traveling he did, to enjoy life which now look[ing] back seems so short."

Still weakening in March, and despite Jo's warning that I might have to fly down to help, Chet, refusing Jo's offers to spell him, drove car and trailer back from the southern tip of Texas. He arrived just in time for a family birthday party in his honor. Here, and later as he declined, numerous relatives and friends visited, wished him well, sent messages of concern and support.

Late that spring, just turned sixty-eight, he learned the cancer would be fatal, for the melanoma had metastasized unmanageably to his liver. Hoping doctors would learn something that would help others, he endured three courses of chemotherapy, the first devastating, almost deadly.

That summer of '72, Joy, Hilary, Jason, and I traveled to Iowa in June and again in early July, but late in that month Chet chose to drive with Jo five hundred miles to see the northern Michigan cabin that Joy and I had built the preceding summer. Dad enjoyed two tiny trout I caught for breakfast, but he was weakening and becoming more dependent on Mother. Almost immediately upon returning to Iowa, he entered University of Iowa hospitals for a week, then returned home, but not for long.

He entered Fairfield Hospital for the last time early Saturday morning,

August 5. Joy brought his grandchildren, Hilary and Jason, to play outside, where he could watch from his window. Attended by Jo, myself, and other family members; cared for by sensitive and warm small hospital, small town hospital staff; Chet declined steadily for five weeks, became less and less communicative, ultimately drifted away.

Chester Kerlin Curtis, age sixty-eight, died early on September 6, 1972. His funeral was in the Batavia Methodist church that as a "Finance Worker" he had helped pay for, as a carpenter he had helped build, and as a church officer, Sunday School teacher, and choir member he had supported for a lifetime. He was buried in Batavia cemetery among the graves of neighbors, friends, and many relatives. He left two sons, two grandchildren, and, after forty-three years of marriage, Josephine.



Chester Kerlin Curtis, 1904-1972

## CHAPTER 9: WIDOWHOOD AND A WIDER WORLD

Whatever the theories may be of woman's dependence on man, in the supreme moments of her life he can not bear her burdens . . . We may have many friends, love, kindness, sympathy and charity to smooth our pathway in everyday life, but in the tragedies and triumphs of human experience each mortal stands alone.

—Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Solitude of Self"

We are all, in the last analysis, alone. And this basic state of solitude is not something we have any choice about. . . . But women need solitude in order to find again the true essence of themselves.

—Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *Gift from the Sea*

"At first one is numb when you become a widow. Then the loneliness. I would go places, then I would want to rush home to get away from everyone because of being so alone where there were other people enjoying themselves. I miss the love and companionship, no one to depend on." So Jo wrote in 1982 a full ten years after Chet's death. And again in 1985 the theme: "I was so much more alone when I was out in a crowd than at home by myself." There is, Jo wrote, an emptiness "in one's life that cannot be filled." In an undated note she returned to the theme of being alone in a crowd but added, "I have never gotten over the thing of eating by myself." As another widow, Madeleine L'Engle, wrote in the 1980s, "Now I am setting out into the unknown. It will take me a long while to work through the grief.



Josephine Teeter Curtis, 1970s



There are no shortcuts; it has to be gone through.”<sup>510</sup>

And yet, even as grief was most immediate and for years after, there were consolations for the inconsolable. Supreme among them was that Josephine’s husband of forty-three years had been released from suffering without enduring the fate of lying “in a nursing home as a vegetable. That would be heart breaking . . . I think that would be worse than giving one’s mate up to death.” Even in her first days of grieving, she had been able to believe that Chet had been released from suffering into hope. She was grateful that his funeral service had been conducted by a former long-time pastor and still friend, the Reverend Earl Erb, kindly and comforting, assuring Jo of religion’s “hope in a future life.”

Relatives and friends, during Chet’s illness and after his death, had offered Jo indispensable aid and comfort. As she said, “I was lucky. People came to see me, and that helped a lot.” Jo’s “luck” in having concerned and loving relatives and friends was, however, the consequence of having lived sixty-nine years in a community where her relationships were literally uncountable.

Josephine had always moved in a family culture whose members—chiefly women—valued, memorized, and could explain how the family web had been spun—births, deaths, marriages, children, grandchildren. She had lived among neighbors with equally long memories. They might remember her as a little girl on a horse, as the girl who went off to Fairfield High, who returned to teach at Turkey Scratch and Rabbit’s Delight and County Line, who married Chet Curtis from up around Batavia, who had long been a member of Helping Hand and Our Day Out and the Methodist Church. They would surely remember that Jo had always been a neighbor and friend to those in need.

Those who remembered came not only to comfort but to help. Brothers- and sisters-in-law Leonard and Wilma McCleary Curtis, Ethan and Gladys Nelson Curtis, Harry and Bertha Curtis McNiel, “were very good to . . . do a few things . . . that I couldn’t do” around the house, farm, and garage. “Harry . . . was tops in advising and helping take care of my car, advising me on roofing the house, helping with garage sale and other things.” Friends and relatives visited Jo and Wayne, and hosted visits and dinners.

Josephine was grateful for comfort from her sons during and after Chet’s last illness. Wayne lived at home for a time and then visited regularly from Ottumwa. I, free from teaching at Michigan State University in the summer, had stayed with Joy’s parents, just down Adams Street from Fairfield hospital, to be with Dad, and with Mother daily in from the

farm, during those last five weeks. Joy had brought their grandchildren for extended visits. Joy, Hilary, Jason, and I had returned to school and to work soon after Chet's funeral, "which left a hole." But Wayne was still there for company and, "That helped as I had to go ahead with cooking and practically the same work."

From her early days and months of widowhood Jo treasured particularly old friend Lena Lamis, whose husband, Frank, had died unexpectedly in May 1972, before his old friend Chet died in September. Jo had been with her then, and now Lena "was a big help. . . . Life has to go on and it was a great help to have Lena Lamis as a friend who was going through the death of her husband at the same time. . . . After Chet's death we talked most every night and went places together."



Iva Isobel Manning  
Teeter

Drawn together by shared pain and the common interests of survivors, Jo's circle of friends among widows like Lena expanded over the years. On Friday evening, January 26, 1973, Jo, Lena, Isobel Teeter, and Lucille Emack "dined at the Red Lyon Inn." Thus began years of dinners among Jo's widowed friends. "I am so fortunate," she wrote in 1982, "as I have so many widow friends that we can go out and eat together [and] to play cards with." She was thankful in 1985 "that I have made friends with so many widows. We do have fun times."<sup>511</sup>



Jo with Fairfield friends, 1976

Just as Jo was grateful for Wayne's company and a daily routine, so she found comfort from immersion in other tasks: "I missed Chet but keeping busy helped a lot." In some ways, Jo's social life went on as before—visiting with relatives and friends, church affairs, weddings, club meetings. As always, but now increasingly, she attended funerals as a recognition of universal mortality, and as a mark of respect for relatives, friends, and neighbors. These things she did, but all without Chet.

And business details demanded attention, again without Chet. In addition to settling his estate, Jo, like mother-in-law Ada years before, assumed the burden of farm management. This involved lease arrangements; bookkeeping; tax and other payments; and decisions concerning timing of crop sales, conservation practices, maintenance of buildings and fences, and the like. In most of this business, she had always been involved, but as a junior partner, never alone.

In addition to the home farm, there was the other land. Within a few years, finding the poor farm unprofitable, and aware of Chet's wish that she dispose of all but the home farm, Jo sold it to Glen Thompson; the eighteen acres to Dwight Berrier. One comfort derived from busyness in attending to business, given that farming continued prosperous, was that Jo began to feel more secure financially. By 1985, she was "thankful that I am left with enough that I can live comfortable."

Even as she began to feel more comfortable financially and indeed generally, Jo noted, nevertheless, "On being widowed one doesn't always have the same feelings." One is grateful that a mate was freed from illness. But one may be tempted to become bitter and angry as some survivors do. Pain may ease, but may revive unexpectedly. "Trying to help [sister-in-law] Gladys through" her husband Ethan Curtis's death in 1983 "made me live through Chet's death all over again." And for a long time, "I think the hardest thing for me was to go to my church when Chet was [not] there in the chorus in front of me. I could go to other churches." Also recurrently painful was "when I hear the song, 'How Great Thou Art,' which was sung at the funeral. It is such a beautiful song and yet it brings back all the memories," memories of that day and place, of loss and loneliness.

Loneliness for Chet was a perennial theme for Jo, coupled with the view that one must go on. In 1984, "I miss [your] Dad but I don't dwell on it as some widows . . . One has to go on with life, make new friends, and keep as many of the old as one can." Even so, at the end of the twentieth century, Jo revealed that "As I get older, I miss Chet more." To my observation, "I would have thought you would miss him less over time," she said, "Yes, but it doesn't work that way." Years earlier, in a prefatory note to a memoir on

widowhood that I had requested, she had written, "I hope this meets your approval. Please don't ask me to write any more about this. It really upsets me." Recurrent pain and loneliness were themes in Jo's widowed life, even as she sought and learned to heal and go on.

### **To Travel Alone**

In trying to work out a new life, Jo was drawn both to past and future, to old and new, to dependence and independence. When comparing her own situation and feelings to those of other widows, she believed that "We are all affected differently. I never was as much alone at home . . . while some widows can't stand to be alone . . . I have one friend who says she tries to live as near like she and her husband lived [as possible]. I don't want that. I want to be me, although I think many times that Chet would not approve of what I am doing. His influence will always be with me." He might not approve of "money I spend, places I go. He never liked to eat out." He would go because Jo liked to, but she knew he would rather be at home. He worried about the cost, and he disliked most food. "If you were satisfied cooking the same thing, it wasn't hard to cook. His mother ate everything. It was kind of odd that he didn't learn to. I think most of his brothers and sisters ate a variety of things."

Jo believed that "on the whole married life was good. . . . I guess I feel death is part of life and I am thankful that we had the years together we had, and I hope I made life pleasant for your dad." Then she returned to her perennial worry: "I wish I could remember the pleasant things instead of the bad times. I am sure the happy times did exceed the bad."

January 2003: Did you ever consider remarrying? "No." Why not? "Well, I just never thought about it." At times in her early widowhood years Jo examined her life alone and her future prospects and found them good—that "It is good to be free to go and come as I please. . . . You can do what you want." Chet would have continued worrying about the expense of things. And had he lived they would have continued southern wintering, which Jo enjoyed less than he, finding changeable southern winter weather unsettling, and worrying about Wayne home alone. "I went because Chet wanted to go. I never wanted to go after he died."

Having now the freedom to do, to come and go, as she pleased, and in a feminist era, Jo not only understood but was able to say, "One should have some independence, even if they are married. I wasn't a very independent person. . . . Maybe I was wrong because I never questioned [Chet]. If he said no, that's what he meant, so I never questioned him." Now,

“One learns to depend on oneself, to travel alone.” Jo began to develop and express social and political views more openly than in the past. Once, just over a hundred, she recalled that Dad George had voted for Franklin Delano Roosevelt, but that Mother Ollie never voted. Concerning herself and the more recent past, had she voted for Ronald Reagan? “I hope not,” Jo smiled slyly. At first unwillingly, and often with ambivalence, at age sixty-nine and thereafter, Jo began to experience a first freedom, relatively independent of those who were or had been closest to her—her mother, her husband, and even her elder son.

### **Wayne Left Home**

Following Chet’s death Jo had continued living in the farmhouse with Wayne who continued working on the farm, but now alone except for some advice from his Uncle Leonard Curtis. Since leaving school in 1946 Wayne had worked with his father and for neighbors tending livestock, gardening, cutting weeds, tossing hay bales, scooping corn, whatever hard work was required. One day in the 1960s Wayne taught himself to drive the tractor, which “He would never have done if he hadn’t taken it out when we left him at home alone.” Thereafter he was able, for example, to haul corn in “from the field in the fall and could unload the corn with the elevator.” Since working around such machinery was dangerous, Jo “always tried to be with him when he was unloading.”

By 1972 working alone was obviously too difficult and dangerous for Wayne. At forty-two he was feeling the strain of long term hard work and injuries. In 1967 while wrestling hay bales, he had fallen disastrously out of a neighbor’s haymow onto concrete, had ruptured his spleen, and had almost died during a racing ambulance ride to Iowa City. That major injury, as well as many other cuts, bruises, and burns over many years in a dangerous occupation he now faced alone made it increasingly obvious to Jo, to Joy, to me, and to Wayne that change was necessary.

Increasingly obvious also was that he and Jo were quite isolated on the farm. In fall 1972 Wayne spent a few weeks in Iowa City to have his condition and health evaluated, which Jo found “hard. . . . very lonely.” But Wayne, enjoying the change, attempted to extend his stay without consulting Jo. Still living at home, he commuted for more than a year to a sheltered workshop in Fairfield and then Ottumwa, where he enjoyed its social activities. Then he left home to live in Ottumwa, first with the Brown family, and then became the first resident in the new Baptist-sponsored Crest Home, where he continued to live successfully into the new millennium.



Long accustomed to living with aging parents who regularly wintered southward, and to a social life that centered on church and neighborhood affairs, Wayne reveled in the relative independence, and the work, educational, sports, and social programs of his new environment. As Jo noted in 1981, “He gets along fine with both staff and clients. He is learning to cook (burns himself frequently) but loves to try cooking. He keeps his room clean, does his own washing, has other duties around the home, has a small garden.” For some years, in addition to participating in the sheltered workshop, he delivered a daily paper and then a weekly advertiser.

In addition to church affairs, and visits and correspondence with relatives and friends in his former neighborhood, Wayne took classes—math, current events—and worked toward a high school equivalency certificate. Sports offered exercise, entertainment, travel to state Special Olympics meets, many blue ribbons in track, basketball, and bowling. In 1989 Wayne was Iowa Special Olympian of the Year. Crest Home staff organized as well shows, summer camps, and sightseeing.

Because she and Wayne had lived together more than forty years, she as a long-term responsible mother, he as a companion who shared neighborhood gossip, Jo found the separation difficult even as she recognized its desirability and necessity. Even so, at times cool reason gave way to concern that she was abdicating responsibility. In a few years, however, Jo would write, “It is better for Wayne that it is me [rather than Chet] that is left as he would still be on the farm staying alone in the winter.” And, after ten years, in 1984: “I am glad Wayne is in Crest Home. It has been much better for him. It has broadened his outlook on life. He is interested in so many things and wants to try everything . . . The way it is now he is content and he had made one adjustment of leaving home where if he had stayed with me he probably would have had to make two adjustments at the same time.” That is, he would have been forced to move into a new, unfamiliar environment after her eventual death. In fact, he would have had to do so at age seventy-six.

“My advice,” Jo addressed parents with children similarly situated, is to “take them out of the home for their own good. Don’t think that is the honorable thing to do to keep them at



Wayne and Jo Curtis, 2000

home, because you are doing the child an injustice. No matter the mistakes” Wayne makes, he “is someone to be proud of. He has many friends and can meet people easily and is very outgoing . . . I am so thankful that Wayne is as good as he is, and I thank God for this.” For Jo’s hundredth birthday, Lynn Bacus, of Crest Home’s staff, wrote a comforting note: “Wayne and I have become good friends . . . I enjoy working with Wayne; he is a kind, good hearted man with a strong will and a wonderful sense of humor.”

Jo’s responsibilities lessened when Wayne left home—and were relatively light when he visited—but she continued to look after his welfare. She kept in touch by visiting and phoning him, and with Crest Home and Tenco workshop staff, both in Ottumwa, twenty miles from Fairfield.

### **Jo Left the Farm, Making a New Home in Fairfield**

Meanwhile she had turned to her own affairs, for the first time in her life—at age seventy-one—not subject primarily to the demands and importunities of others. Upon leaving the farm, Jo chose to live where she had attended high school more than fifty years earlier, where she knew and was known by many dozens of relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

By Christmastime 1974 Jo was a comfortably installed ground-floor



Jo bearhugging grandchildren Hilary and Jason Curtis, mid 1970s

renter in an elegant old Fairfield home, conveniently located, roomy, sunnily pleasant with large windows and southern exposure. There she settled in for a decade. “I guess I thought I would live on South Main the rest of my life,” but the big house was unexpectedly sold. Her next move, in 1984, helped by Hilary, Jason, Joy, myself, and others, was to a smaller, less elegant, ground floor East Burlington apartment.

Jo found it would do for a couple of years, but it was a bit drafty and the electric heat was expensive. Besides, she had begun to want a place of her own where she could settle in permanently. Aided by Ed Vanderlinden, the carpenter who rented her farmhouse, Jo chose a three-bedroom ranch at 707 West Fillmore, with basement and attached two-car garage—which featured a luxurious automatic door opener. There she hoped to settle in.



Jason and Bruce repairing Jo's house, 1999

First, however, she had to buy it. With self-deprecating humor, she told of asking what the terms of sale to her were. Whereupon the agent looked at this lady, now eighty-four, even if apparently vigorous and healthy, looked her directly in the eye, and said, "Cash." So cash it was. Early in 1987, helped by spring-vacationing grandson Jason, and by numerous friends and relatives, Jo packed again. This time, however, she moved into a house entirely hers—owned free and clear—with her own lawn where she could poke her magical green thumb into flower beds and potted tomatoes.

Having moved to Fairfield late in 1974, Jo plunged into numerous activities, some traditional, others adventurous. Her May 1979 calendar is representative, including "bond interest, perm, TTT card party, bridge, Keep Young Club, style show, United Methodist Women, Association of Retarded Citizens, Libertyville church, pal party, bridge, Wayne, picnic, Ralph W. funeral, and oil change." October entries: "Literary meeting, hostess TTT, bowling, to Dubuque, Snyder farewell, driver's license, bridge, car in, to Bruce's [in Michigan], bridge, music by Clyde and Doris Davis."

One activity involved both old and new—Jo organized a "Twenty-three Club," known more often as "the girls of '23," graduates of Fairfield High. As Mildred Sandell Dallner explained, eight members met once a month for lunch. Jo, preparing to leave on a cruise in 1977, audiotaped a message that "We six girls from the class of '23" had picnicked at Lacey State Park near Keosauqua. Even by her fiftieth class anniversary in 1973, a third of her classmates had died. In time, the girls—and boys—of '23 would one by one fade away.

Batavia Methodist church work continued to claim much of Jo's attention. For "several years," Jo drove eleven miles to teach an adult Sunday school class. Marie Loy Gorman complimented her by saying that "You were just as good a student" of the Bible as Chet. For decades Jo served as well in various offices of Church Women United of Jefferson County, and especially in United Methodist Women. As Historian, she wrote annual reports and co-authored a history of the Batavia church from 1840 to 1981 with Mary Mc Niel, Donald Parrett, and Anna Curtis Parrett.

Most colorful in that history was how church ladies had banished

the town saloon. It noted the old church fire and building the new, including the fact that its \$11,000 cost (\$5,700 after insurance receipts) had been paid off so quickly by methods that included churchwomen suppers. Still in hard times, it was debt free when dedicated in spring 1941. WSCS “served their first public dinner in the new church basement,” a fundraiser, just days after the dedication. Jo’s contributions focused on, but were not limited to, the Batavia church. In 1999 a Fairfield Methodist churchwoman’s note thanked her for donating *The Story of American Methodism*.<sup>512</sup>

Among Jo’s secular activities were her decades-long participation as member and officer in Literary Guild of Batavia, or “Literary,” monthly meetings. Jo joined in 1954, presented dozens of book reports, and continued to attend for a time into the new century. Of the secret sororal and charitable society, “TTT,” she wrote, “I am not a good member.” On the other hand in 1983 Jo reported that “In September I will begin my third year as Second Vice President of the Jefferson County Women’s Club.” That, Jo wrote, is “just a name,” which “sounds big but [is] just a lot of work,” principally calling members about meetings and the like.

### **To Live Long in Community**

Throughout many years, Jo volunteered for the Jefferson County Hospital. For three years she worked in the gift shop half a day a week but was responsible as well for scheduling other volunteers. For ten years she worked in the hospital’s used sales outlet, the “Bargain Box,” until being on her feet became too tiring.

Indicative of Jo’s continuing concern for Wayne’s welfare, and for those with whom he lived, she was a member and officer of the Association for Retarded Citizens, traveling to many meetings with other parents in Ottumwa. In March 1985 Jo received a letter from a widow and mother like herself: “I’m incapable of finding adequate words to tell you how much your expression of sympathy meant to me . . . As we squeezed hands . . . I felt your deep and warm understanding of the grief and loneliness I feel having lost a truly loved spouse of 41 years, and the frustration I’m now feeling as a widow . . . You are the first to portray a true understanding for my feelings and situation with a ‘special person’ and I want you to know that . . . was worth a thousand comforting words to me.”

To live long in community meant that Jo inevitably comforted others. A friend who had suffered a devastating family loss wrote, “I’m sure it would be impossible to . . . express my appreciation for your thoughtfulness, love,

understanding and listening ear . . . I'm only sure God must put dear friends close to those who desperately need help . . . Love to my dearest friend."

## Bridge

When Jo moved to Fairfield, "Everyone was good to me." A friend took her to Women's Club, Jo joined, "was a member for several years, attended for several years, was an officer for a few years." But then, "Our bridge club . . . changed from night to afternoon," and since the clubs conflicted, "I picked bridge over Women's Club." Ah yes, bridge, Jo's love affair with bridge. Jo had never played, but soon after returning to the town where she had met Mildred Sandell (Dallner) at Kirkwood and North Court their first day of high school, they reunited to take lessons from Thelma Yeager. Later a club formed from her students, Jo deciding not to join because "I thought I didn't want to be tied down."

Tied down or not, Jo enjoyed the game thoroughly, belonged to several clubs, subbed in others, including the spurned original. She accepted an invitation from close friend Hazel Trautwein to join a club, members with links to the former Parsons College, Jo's son providing the old school tie. And, "I belonged to a bridge club in Batavia later, but I quit as it became too far to drive." Important to Jo was that "Hazel Trautwein, Mary Dowell, and Margaret DeLashmutt invited me to play bridge with them on Sunday p.m. This meant a lot to me as they were all such nice people."

Perhaps primarily for social reasons, a group of six, including Mary, Margaret, and Jo, plus Mildred Fisher, Lucille Emack, and Naomi Sasseen, for some time played Friday pitch, but for Jo bridge endured. Playing two or more times weekly, by 2000 she was the remaining member of one club, original and oldest member of another, but had begun to "cut down" to an average of perhaps once a week, plus, of course, subbing.

Jo played not only for sheer enjoyment, or for the society of friends, but deliberately to keep her wits sharpened. For the same reason, she made daily rounds of crossword puzzles and her father's game, solitaire. Puzzles and solitaire at home, and crocheting as well. Never as prolific as her mother—really, who was?—Jo crocheted a great deal over



Jo's crocheted afghan  
Christmas gifts for Bruce,  
Jason, Hilary, and Joy, 1979



the years, including tablecloths for formal dining and, in 1979, afghans for Wayne, Bruce, Joy, Hilary, and Jason.

In those Fairfield years, angina and other indications of potential heart trouble began to bother Jo. The problem was manageable with medication, but a wise physician suggested a daily dose of liqueur. A liqueur? Doctor prescribed Drambuie. Mother turned to son for discreet purchases. Joy once arrived to find Jo's lunch table nicely set with tablecloth, napkin, a dessert, and a liqueur glass of Drambuie. Mother followed doctor's orders. Only once was I present when she partook of wine, this while she and Aunt Isobel Teeter visited Joy and me in Michigan. Our dinner was made memorable by a good bottle of red, during which Jo and Isobel became quite cheerful, even, it seemed, a bit giddy.

### **Jo, Traveling Again on Land and Sea**

In her new life, Jo's adventuring took her far beyond the bridge table, to distant lands hardly dreamed of. Jo and Chet had traveled much in America, somewhat in Canada, barely in northernmost Mexico. As she recalled in later years, "I thought I would never be able to travel without Chet, but found I have had many nice trips. Her "first outing . . . a year after Chet's death," was a bus tour with Lena Lamis, Mary McNiel, and others to enjoy several Branson, Missouri, productions. Another featured a St. Louis Cardinals game, but especially memorable were antics of a genteelly riotous group—Jo, Lena, Mary, and Dorothy Newland, who "entertained us . . . On the way home we sat in the back of the bus and laughed most of the way. Everyone wondered what was so funny."

In the Midwest as well were travels over several years: with a Fairfield group to a scenic Dorr County, Wisconsin, fish boil; through commercialized



Jo with high school graduate grandson Jason, 1985

Wisconsin Dells scenery with Isobel and Wayne; a visit to Minneapolis; and a Chicago holiday tour to enjoy Dickens' *Scrooge* with Wayne. Another bus trip took Jo and Wayne to Nashville's Grand Ole Opry. Jo and Wayne occasionally visited Jason, Hilary, Joy, and me in Michigan, Jo more often alone in East Lansing or at our northwoods cabin. She toured Pennsylvania's Amish country, near that of her Teeter ancestors. Farther yet from home were a fall color tour of Boston, upper

New England, and the St. Lawrence valley. (Jo, born in October, believed that “fall is the prettiest season.”) Another tour included Washington, DC, Mt. Vernon, and Williamsburg; another, a Smoky Mountains week. There were Florida winter tours. A Hawaiian holiday with Mary McNiel included leis and a smiling photo of Jo with a handsome local lad at her elbow.

Touring one’s own country was all very well, but Jo flew farther afield. In fall 1978 elegantly dressed, looking in gloves and hat somewhat like her virtual age mate, the Queen Mother, Jo visited Joy, Hilary, Jason, and me in London for sightseeing and theatre. In these traveling years, she grew fond of cruises, several in the Caribbean. “I like cruises, as you can hang up your clothes and they will be there as long as the cruise” lasts. There was also “good entertainment at night,” card games (naturally), and dance lessons.



Jo’s passport photo, mid 1970s

Jo’s first and most significant cruise by far was in the Mediterranean with the “Holy Land” as her ultimate destination. On October 8, 1977, with sister-in-law Naomi Curtis Hutton who had been widowed almost exactly as long as she, and who had suggested the trip, Jo Teeter Curtis, devout Christian, lifted off from Boston on Alitalia to begin a once in a lifetime pilgrimage. Years later at the turning from the second to the third Christian millennium, she wrote, “I am sending a book with outline. You can write what you like” about the adventure.



Jo and Naomi Curtis Hutton on Mediterranean cruise, 1977

Jo’s small memo book is a shorthand version of events and impressions that may reverberate in the memory of other travelers: “The sunrise was beautiful” over the ocean; “Milan—red roofs, much forest”; Venice—“My luggage did not arrive.” Her ten year old grandson, Jason, to whom she sent ancient coins, she advised, “I was lucky in one way as I was carrying my nite clothes but no tooth brush, so when you travel carry your tooth brush.” Concerning Venice otherwise: “St. Marks Square enjoyed”; gondola—“Canals were amazingly clear [compared to] what we had heard”; “Met my cabin mate Marie Palmer, very nice”; slept poorly—“too

much sinus”; lectures by Drs. Vermillion and Trevor, the latter a Dead Sea Scrolls authority; “Walk in Alexandria,” where sheep parade daily through the streets; “Sound and Light in front of pyramids”; “Take \$1 dollar bills when traveling abroad.”

In her letter to Jason after telling him that Egyptian children were required to attend school only to age twelve, and that she had seen boys his age digging ditches, she offered cautionary information concerning monetary matters. Her group had dined elegantly in a Cairo hotel with “marble walls gorgeous chandeliers Persian rugs,” but “The bad part about it was the waiter brought cans of seven up . . . and all thought it went with the meal . . . [but] the waiter asked for \$2. each . . . Some one made a big fuss [and] they came down to \$1.75.” As Mark Twain himself learned, Americans are perpetually *Innocents Abroad*.

Abroad Jo was, but in Israel not entirely innocent. For she had read the Bible all her life and had studied the Holy Land. Now she was attending lectures and seeing the land, its monuments and ruins. Her journal reflects a desire to absorb everything: “Port Said now sailing for Haifa where we will debark for Galilee”; “Homes destroyed, then another city built on top”; “Cotton biggest crop”; “Wheat, avocados, peaches, apricots, grapes, bananas, export fruit mainly to Europe”; “Solar heat to heat water”; “Corn you eat on the street. Never served in restaurants”; “Everyone is welcome to immigrate”; “Friday Moslem worship”; “Crossing Sea of Galilee we had services” based on the Beatitudes; “Jordan River” (wherein Jo’s Mother Ollie had claimed she wanted to be baptized, and where Jo and Naomi, skirts tucked up, laughing, bathed their feet); some tour folks wanted



Naomi Curtis Hutton and Jo Teeter Curtis in Israel’s Jordan River, 1977

total immersion, “but they were only sprinkled.” (Ollie would have been pretentiously disappointed.) “Shops did close from 1 to 4”; “Cypress trees look like soldiers”; “Kibbutz or commune”; “Palestine refugee camp”; “Can’t

go where Jesus was born because of wars”; “Bedouins living in tents near Jerusalem”; “Shalom.”

“Oct 19 spent on ship, Greek entertainment”; “Athens, the center of education and culture. Here Democracy began”; “Dubrovnik nice and clean and beautiful”; “Creative ability that everyone has given to each by our Creator”; “Holy Land belongs to all people . . . Hope all may live in peace.”

Their cruise ended, instead of returning, Jo and Naomi elected to continue traveling. Jo’s journal continues to be not only descriptive, but interpretive: “Oct 23 Left . . . for Florence. Part of the drive was through farm land which the guide said was poor land. They were raising field corn and vegetables. I felt the guide thought it was poor because they didn’t raise grapes. Through beautiful mountain country”; Florence—“Went to shop at leather and gold and silver factories”; “We couldn’t go to Ravenna because of danger our busses might have rocks thrown at them. Agitation. Strikes”; “Pisa—tower and Baptistry and Cathedral—the policeman chanted while we were in the Baptistry. It was so wonderful, the acoustics. It was a grand day”; “Vatican, Sistine, Forum, Coliseum. The Appian Way was the main way in Jesus’ time”; Catacombs; “Oct 27 By bus to Naples. Then by boat to Capri. Then to the Blue Grotto which was a wonderful experience by small boat.” To grandson Jason: “The water was such a gorgeous blue and the man that was rowing us sang. He never forgot to mention tips.”

Naomi recalled that on Capri, October 27, Jo’s birthday, “I asked for cake, but they were too busy with a wedding reception. They did let me have a small cake, and we sat . . . and ate that without any coffee or ice cream.”



Jo leaving cruise ship, 1980's

Jo wrote gratefully about the cake, and that the thirty “sang Happy Birthday to me.” This at the end of a perfect day and a memorable Grand Tour. Twenty-six years later, Naomi sent Jo a hundredth birthday note reminiscing about good times, including Jo’s Italian birthday.

Final entry: “Oct 28 Flying 31,000 feet. 10 past 12 noon in New York. 10 past 7 here.” Jo Curtis, seasoned traveler, just turned seventy-four, came down to earth in Fairfield, but not for long. She continued to travel, to cruise,

for a good many years.

“My last big trip was to South America,” a 1990 cruise at age 86, with Mary McNiel, Bernice Frescoln, and Ruth Salts. They flew to Barbados, boarded *Crown Odyssey* to Buenos Aires, calling at Brazilian and Uruguayan ports, and returned by air. Veteran cruiser Jo wrote, “Food and entertainment are extra good.” In years after, she limited outings to day trips with Fairfield groups.

### **At 97, Jo Wore Out Too Fast in Traveling . . .**

In 2000 at age ninety-seven, Jo wrote, “I now stay home as I wear out too fast in traveling.” The girl who ninety years earlier had loved riding horses, who had had her first auto ride a little way down the road, her first train a few miles down the tracks, who in later years would visit far away lands and seas, would travel no more, except in memory. Memory was quiet and private. In 2002 she said, “Some people talk about what they have done, traveling and so on. I don’t like to . . . because I feel like I’m bragging.” Nevertheless, her outlook had inevitably expanded into a wider world than she had known as a girl and as an older adult in rural Iowa.



Jo Curtis, mid 1990s

In Jo’s Holy Land journal, a paraphrased entry reads thus: Englishman enters train compartment filled with people and one seated dog. Lady refuses his request to unseat dog. American enters. Same request. Same refusal. American raises window, ejects dog, sits down. Englishman: “You Americans always do things wrong. You drive on the wrong side of the road, you drink your beer cold, and now you throw the wrong bitch out the window.” Not only did traveling broaden Jo’s outlook but she must sometimes have fallen in with racy companions who would tell such tales. Bon Voyages, indeed! A final archaeological note: buried at the lowest level of a midden-box containing Jo’s Hawaii mementos, I unearthed one day a “Top of Waikiki-Revolving Restaurant” swizzle stick.





## Jo Chose Assisted Living

In June 2001 Mother Jo informed Joy and me that she wanted to apply for an assisted living apartment in Ottumwa, if only she had the energy. She had for several years been weighing advantages and disadvantages of living independently in her own home in her own hometown versus the alternative she now preferred. In Ottumwa where Wayne had lived for a quarter century, they could see each other often and easily. Because of long Wapello County residence before moving to Fairfield she had relatives, friends, and acquaintances in Ottumwa and Sylvan Woods.

Now was the time, Jo felt, because she was clearly losing energy. In recent years Margie Sales, who had long cleaned for Jo every two weeks, had begun coming weekly, and cheerfully ran to grocery or drug store or gas station as well. Even so, Jo was tired of cooking, eating, and keeping house alone. Even eating out became more difficult as the number of her friends declined. Although Jo had continued driving, the imminent end of that great convenience and virtual necessity for independent small town living was being made officially clear to her.

Mother Jo's decision gratified Joy and me. We supported her desire to live independently as long as she wished and could do so. But we had become increasingly concerned for her safety and welfare. For years, relatives, friends, and neighbors had looked out for her by visiting and phoning, and she was linked to the hospital alarm system, but now more help and closer protection seemed desirable, especially as another winter would be coming on. Consequently, with a speed that may have dazzled her, we expedited her application and learned that an apartment might be available early in 2002.

In October Joy and I were traveling when we learned that an apartment would be available by November 1. Hilary (with Matthew and Thomas, a second grader and kindergartner) and Jason volunteered to leave their work in Michigan and Florida to help their grandmother move. Also helping were Mary Ruth Wheeldon Hanna, Donald and True Wheeldon, Ed Croisant, and Jo's farm renter, John Mulliken (whose grandfather



Jo and granddaughter Hilary, 2001

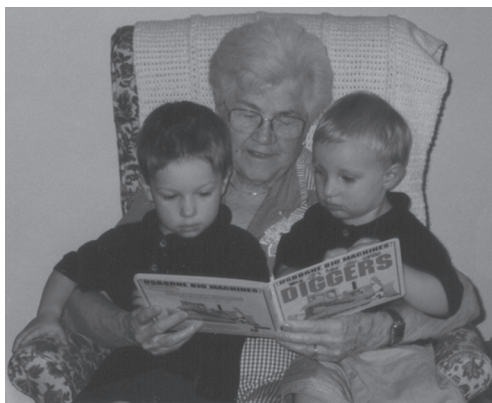
had helped the Curtises move to the “poor farm” sixty-five years earlier).

When Joy and I arrived early in December, Mother Jo was comfortably settled in a one-bedroom apartment with a bay window; her (now limited) familiar furnishings; a galley, walk-through closet, and safe bathroom. We had only to dispose of unneeded belongings, including her Fairfield house.

Jo left that task to us, even deciding not to superintend, which seems emblematic of how she changed her life. She had rationally and unhurriedly weighed alternatives and decided to move. Without vain regrets, she moved. Even before moving, she told Hilary and me that she had decided to like Sylvan Woods. She did. She liked eating in company thrice daily (food chosen from a menu and pleasantly served). She sometimes implicitly and once or twice explicitly criticized those who complained excessively about the menu, which she usually found at least adequate.

Jo liked having convenient services in the building; church; a beautician, manicurist, and pedicurist (red fingernails, red toenails complemented her favorite red outfits); groups for “coffee and conversation,” and for cards. “You don’t need to think” to play pitch. As for bridge she noted that she hadn’t been invited, but admitted that no one knew she played. “I’m not sure I want to play. Maybe they’re too good for my playing. Maybe I don’t want to find out.” Despite ambivalence, she did begin and continued for awhile, mentioning only that the local method of counting was not hers. Later she “sort of” played. When another Sylvan Woods resident suggested that Sunday bridge players might be consigned to hell, Jo almost flippantly doubted that such a small transgression, if it was even that, would elicit such dire punishment.

Jo read daily in this early period of assisted living, as she always had, having almost resumed her pace following cataract surgery in one eye. Early in 2002 she asked me to collect material, preferably brief, on her current interests—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jimmy Carter, Dorothy Day, St. Francis, Joan of Arc, Mother Teresa, and Saint Teresa. The common denominator is obvious.



Jo reading to great-grandsons Matthew and Thomas Curtis Arthur

In September 2002 as a long time fan of Maya Angelou's autobiographies, Jo asked me to pick up her latest, *A Song Flung Up to Heaven*, which she had learned about when the author was interviewed on *Oprah*. Within a couple of days after receiving it, she had finished and found it good, but somewhat slight, not as interesting as Angelou's first, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, which I had given to her. She remembered it in detail, having reported on it at "Literary" in 1993. Why was the earlier book better? "It was just kind of down to earth, what I would know," about a young black girl's life in small town Stamps, Arkansas, not entirely unlike a young rural Iowa white girl's.

Jo generally chose to read religious and inspirational literature, a broad category that might include any of the English veterinarian James Herriot's books or other books about animals, including of course horses. Over time, she read less because, she said, of eyesight difficulties, and because she easily forgot what she had read. As a reader, she tended to be open-minded, but there were limits. She once flung a book—after finishing it completely—Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*—from the Pontiac's window into a dark swamp somewhere in darkest Florida. This is the only instance of which I am aware in which Josephine Teeter Curtis can be accused of littering what she considered trash.

Television occupied some of Jo's time before but especially after she moved into assisted living. Whenever I called in the evening during the first couple of years, a program was generally on—*Wheel of Fortune*, *Larry King Live*, *Oprah*, *Lawrence Welk*. She began inviting a few other ladies to watch *Welk* regularly, following her lifelong practice of promoting mutually enjoyable societies. Do you get lonesome? "Well, no, I don't think I do. I get lonesome to hear from you and to see your family . . . But I know I can't . . . I try to be calm and take my time and do what I have to do—very little." Gradually Jo watched less TV, more often sat alone in the afternoon and in the evening dark.

After having driven for three-quarters of a century, Jo had planned to give up her car once she moved. She gave it (with only a couple of dents) to one grandchild, equivalent value to the other. To granddaughter Hilary, Jo admitted that she missed driving. When Joy and I suggested lunch a few months later, she wanted to eat out and was happy to add on shopping. She gradually cut down on longer drives with us, but often wanted to dine out.

As I worked with Mother in this period of transition for her, and for us, I began to understand better that one measure of true wisdom and true courage is the ability to give up things before circumstances force us to do

so. We all have only limited control over our destinies, but as we age our control may lessen and our choices narrow. Paradoxically, Jo controlled her own destiny by choosing to give up a way of life she could no longer manage easily on her own.

Jo did, however, continue to manage her own business affairs, including the farm, with tax help from her Fairfield attorney, Gary Cameron. She also began seeking bill-checking help from Joy and me, and from nieces, Mary Ruth Wheeldon Hanna and Orpha Wheeldon Dodge, whose other kindnesses she much appreciated, as did Joy and I from distant Michigan. Finally, early in 2003, hospitalized with an almost annual respiratory problem, at ninety-nine and a half, she told me I must take over.

There are gains from choosing to be “assisted” in living. But even uncoerced sacrifice remains sacrifice. Jo gave up her favorite place to live, a town easy to get around in, with so many relatives and friends; gave up a convenient home with lawn, flowers, potted tomatoes, and privacy. She gave her car away, limiting freedom of movement, when walking, at least very far, was becoming more difficult. Jo now had to wait for others to visit. Wayne came at least once a week, and for a time twice. Bruce and Joy visited often, Hilary and Jason’s families once or twice a year. Then Jo could hold her five great-grandchildren, at least briefly, and watch them play, at least for a time.



Great-Grandma Jo and Thomas Arthur, 2002



Great-Grandma Jo with Julia, Emma, and Sabrina Curtis, 2004



Great-Grandma Jo with Sabrina, Emma, and Julia; Joy Hilleary Curtis, and Kathryn Venz Curtis



Great-Grandma Jo and Matthew Arthur, 2001

Jo chose to be assisted when she was beginning to feel forgetful, beginning to fear her short-term memory was declining. She gradually gave up crossword puzzles and “forgot how to play solitaire.” Her long-term memory, impressively revealed in this volume, became less reliable. Even so, in December 2005, at 102 years old, Jo told a nurse and me that horses she had ridden eighty and ninety years earlier were named “Bonnie” and “Coalie.” At a hundred-and-three, she could still name Coalie. Not long after becoming a centenarian, Jo had remarked that “I can remember as a child, but not as an adult,” something of an exaggeration but not entirely so.

Despite declining memory and energies, as she rounded one hundred years Jo continued to walk to meals, sometimes using a walker, and eventually always; walked to church in the building with Wayne after Sunday dinner; walked to hear Mennonite hymn singers from down around Bloomfield. She went beyond Sylvan Woods less often, ate out less. She also threatened to stop going to “Literary,” telling me and Mary Ruth, who took her regularly, that “it was just too much,” too hard to hear, too demanding for her heart. Nevertheless, she went at least occasionally. On September 9, 2002, members answered roll call with “fond memories” of Jo Curtis. They presented her with a corsage and, fittingly, a book, “for her nearly fifty years of loyalty and service to the Batavia Literary Guild.”

Some things Jo chose not to do. With a wry twinkle, “I don’t go to decorate cookies and such. I’ve done enough of that.” She did continue “Coffee and Conversation” and “Tea and Poetry,” although concerning the latter she said, uncharacteristically, even uncharitably, “This gal that knows everything goes and takes up all the time, so I may not go all the time.” One spring day after she had turned 102 in the fall, Jo was sitting in a public room with her niece, Orpha, reading a magazine, when another resident seized and took it away. Jo, who now sometimes had trouble remembering words, said immediately, “Oh, she’s just a kleptomaniac.” In those late years, Jo became slightly more outspoken, at least in private, concerning certain types and individuals past and present that disturbed her. Significantly, they were assertive or aggressive, dominant or domineering individuals like those who had limited Josephine’s own choices. Just after turning one hundred, Jo, who tried never to nurse a grudge, said to me nevertheless, “Sometimes I think of my mother and I think she thought I could only teach.” So, you’re mad at your mother? “I don’t think a mother,” she said, “should tell a daughter what she should do.” Seventy-five and eighty years after having her wishes disregarded and overridden, Jo still felt pain and resentment concerning lost hopes.



## Loss and Outlasting

One other loss was irrefutable. If we consider the rewards of longevity and old age, we must also consider penalties, pain, and loss. Born almost at the outset of the twentieth century, by the early years of the twenty-first, Josephine had lost all her closest relatives. She had lost her grandparents, her parents, all her brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers-in-law, mother-in-law, two nephews, two nieces, and all her sisters-in-law but one, Mary, the younger second wife of widower Lawrence Curtis. And Chet had been gone for more than thirty years. Ultimately, Jo was the lonely last of her generation.

In the poem “My Wars are Laid Away in Books,” Emily Dickinson concludes,

How sweet if I am not forgot  
By Chums that passed away—  
Since Playmates at threescore and ten  
Are such a scarcity—.

At seventy, certainly, but what if one is a hundred years old, and more? By the early-twenty-first century almost all of Jo’s best friends were gone—long friendships sealed by shared sorrows and good times; a sorority of widows who had played bridge, eaten out, traveled, shared photos of children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren. A legion of friends, neighbors, and acquaintances were gone—all her high school classmates, and most of her elementary school students from the 1920s.

Friends of Jo’s generation were not generally demonstrative physically. There was little hugging. That “came into style later.” Nevertheless, Jo had had numerous close friends and relatives over the years, numerous of whom photographs show her hugging. Among best friends, were especially her brother, Bernard, upon whom she could always count; and Francis Hite, Lena Lamis, Mary McNiell, Roberta Gooley, Hazel Trautwein. Anyone else? “Isn’t that enough?”

Hazel had been “a very good friend.” What makes a good friend? “Somebody that you could trust.” With what? “With anything. Everything. You could tell her anything and that was all the farther it would go.” Did you tell her everything you wanted to tell her? “Probably not. You always regret something that you haven’t said to a friend . . . I don’t think you ever tell anybody everything that you have lived.” Could you tell your best friends what you really felt about things? “I think you could.” Did you? “Maybe not always . . . You didn’t want to hurt their feelings” if their views

differed. When Hazel had died far from relatives in 1994 Jo “had to be pretty much the director” of the funeral, notifying next of kin, dealing with the undertaker, choosing a dress. Before she became ill, Hazel had asked Jo to do all that if it were ever sadly necessary.

It’s hard, Jo said as the millennium ended, to make new friends. “It takes so much energy.” Jo had friends in Sylvan Woods, of course, but no best friend. There may be pride in enduring and

surviving, but it is a lonely pride. As a Conrad Richter character says in *The Town*, when “you’re the last of your generation, then you can drink a draft of loneliness you never drank before.”<sup>513</sup>

Jo had survived and grown in wisdom throughout a wonderful and nevertheless grim hundred years, a century of marvelous inventions and the most terrible of wars. Hers was a world grown both larger and smaller, both richer in wealth and perhaps poorer in spirit. In space exploration, the human race had found its horizons expanding toward infinity. And precisely as a consequence, the world had become smaller in the perceived immensity of the universe.

### **One Hundred Years and More**

Possibilities of traveling rapidly had shrunk the size of earth as well, and of America, and of Iowa. Americans in 2003 and later were at least as addicted to cars, planes, and speed as in Jo’s youth. Travelers could go farther to more places more rapidly, could see more in greater depth, or could skim more surfaces more rapidly. Jo herself had been able to travel easily and far, and had profited immensely from her experiences.

“Globalization” of its economies increasingly united the world, a process begun much earlier in Iowa when Jo’s Grandpa Joe Steele could begin shipping cattle and corn from Libertyville on a new railroad, and just a year after the Suez canal began expediting worldwide transportation in 1869. Globalization promised to improve the condition of people everywhere, but as well threatened to strengthen and concentrate often-corrupt economic and military powers. As the century turned, the gap



Hazel Trautwein and Jo Curtis,  
Christmas 1993

between rich and poor had increased and was increasing in America and in many other countries.

Because of concentrated economic power and ability to move rapidly military forces could blanket world “trouble spots” in days or weeks. The American Empire after a century seemed supremely powerful economically, culturally, and militarily. And yet that Empire continued often to be frustrated in trying to impose its will worldwide. Early in the twentieth century, early in Josephine Teeter’s life, the United States military half a world away had been frustrated, as had American politicians. They could not understand the refusal of Filipino “insurgents” to believe that a budding American Empire wanted only to rescue them from evil rulers and to expand the realm of freedom.

Early in the twenty-first century, half a world away, “insurgents” in Iraq were entirely distrustful as well of American motives. They were acting as had others for a hundred years—throughout the Caribbean, in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. These peoples had believed that America held its own interests most closely to heart.

Abroad the United States seemed to become a warfare state. At home, in Jo’s century, some said it had become a welfare state. In fact, primarily because of the disastrous decade that she and her generation had endured in the 1930s, many Americans were far better protected than when she had been born. They were better protected from the worst excesses of the market, better protected financially in their elderly years, and in their health.

Although the poor and some ethnic minorities died sooner than the majority, Americans generally could expect to live longer in 2003 than had Jo’s grandparents or parents or those of her own generation. Modern sanitation and medicine were largely responsible. An affluent society could afford better health care although it had avoided making that care universal. It could afford better nutrition, but for a great and growing mass of people in this rich and hurried land, America was becoming a soft society, a fast food society, an obese society. As Jo Teeter Curtis, toughened by decades of hard times and war times, had feared, for many affluent Americans, accustomed to instant food and instant gratification of material desires, life might not be hard enough. People might not have to become strong individually and socially through adversity. “If everything goes along all right,” she had asserted in comparing life in the Great Depression and later, “You don’t have any battles to fight and you just become like jelly.”

A major development in Josephine’s century had been improved conditions for American women, as for other minorities, a fact that as we

have seen she found most heartening. The fall issue of the feminist *Ms* magazine offered evidence of those gains as well as of gains yet to be made. It focused on women's concerns worldwide, including sexuality, economic and political status of women, poverty, medicine and health, and religious and human rights issues.

Not that all women everywhere a century after Josephine Teeter's birth were either downtrodden or radicalized or had rejected tradition. In their fall issues of 2003 *Midwest Living* and *Country Woman* featured as usual articles on cooking, gardening, home decorating, and crafts. But that fall as well, even on Jo's birthday, October 27, 2003, the *Fairfield Ledger* reported that the girls' volleyball team of FHS, Jo's alma mater, and where her mother had prevented her from playing sports, had won yet another game over Mount Pleasant High. Accompanying the text were images of the team leaping about in shorts so short that Josephine's Mother Ollie would have been appalled, and Jo delighted.

Finally, and importantly, on Jo's hundredth birthday the *Ottumwa Courier* reported, "Church Members Rebuild Family's Roof." Through all the changes and dislocations that had marked Jo Teeter Curtis's century, the American and Iowa tradition of the voluntary organization and of neighborliness seemed to have survived. This tradition Jo herself had helped maintain and strengthen through Helping Hand Club quilting bees and countless church dinners prepared for fundraisers and weddings and funerals and lunches to feed those who were helping the ill or injured. If the American spirit had actually become poorer in Jo's century, it was not evident in her community's apparently surviving spirit of neighborliness.

By mid-morning on March 5, 2004, Jo was tired, sighed often, said she went to bed early nowadays. By eight? "No, earlier. Sometimes the girls bringing my pills find me in bed." Why so early? "There's nothing to do." TV? "I haven't seen anything much that's interesting." Reading? "My eyes won't take it." Should you have a cataract operation on the other eye? "No." Why not? "Because I'm going to die soon." Wouldn't even thirty days of clear sight be worth it? Or a hundred days? Jo is unresponsive, seems to think not. Maybe, I say, you'll live to be a hundred and ten. "I hope not." How long do you want to live? "I'm ready to die." Do you want to die? "No." Does this mean you're not worried? "Yes." I say I think that's good. "I think so too."

Jo lived on to celebrate her hundredth birthday with relatives and friends, and she lived beyond that, to her hundred-and-first and another party at which she presided gracefully. And lived beyond that to her hundred-and-second-and-third and showers of congratulatory cards. Jo

lived on, but without particular pride, not as if longevity were a personal achievement or mark of merit, lived on serenely.



Jo at 101 with niece Bernice Gorman Cronk



Jo at 101 with nephew Elmer Teeter and son Bruce

As Jo reached a hundred, and then a hundred plus one, and so on, her strength and physical stability declined only gradually but noticeably nevertheless. Then she began to fall more or less regularly, fortunately without serious consequences. But Joy and I and the Sylvan Woods staff worried increasingly, especially when in the winter of 2004-05 she wandered out of doors more than once. In March 2005 we persuaded her to move to Vista Woods long-term care, also at Pennsylvania Place, where she could receive more attention and be better protected.

Jo would not have chosen to move to smaller quarters and to become more dependent, but she submitted to being transferred, even as she asserted that she would rather not, wanted to supervise closeting clothes, would, as she said, “rather be boss.” After a third of a century of independent and then semi-independent living, it was hard for Jo to give up being her own boss.

At Vista Woods, Jo always used a walker, slept more and more, fell more and more, and was often bruised distressingly on her face and arms. Then she fell and broke her best arm, her left arm. In that hurting time she did say to me, “It’s hard.” What’s hard? Everything? “Yes.” And she said, “I wish I didn’t have this problem. . . . I wish they would stop working on me.”

Nevertheless, she seemed to blame no one for the impositions of necessity. “I’m happy,” she had said, “to be alive, but I’m ready to go anytime.” Ready to go, yes, but she carried on, day by day. In a January 2007 sympathy card a Vista Woods staff member wrote, “Jo was always so pleasant and kind to be around and to care for.” Another staff member



told Joy and me, “She’s always been nice. A lady.” As usual, as always, Jo carried on quietly and graciously. A lady.

*The boundaries of her world narrow, from walking to walker to wheelchair to bed. From reading and bridge and conversation to phrases and words and silences. From laughter to sometime smiles of understanding and recognition. Ultimately to holding hands, to the narrow but necessary communion of touch. One day she had said, “Touch me so I will know . . .”*

Josephine Mae Teeter Curtis, married forty-three years, widowed thirty-five, born early in the morning, October 27, 1903, died late in the day, January 19, 2007.



Jo's 95th birthday, 1998. On floor: Joy Hilleary Curtis with Sabrina Curtis, Jason Curtis, Bruce Curtis. Seated Kathryn Venz Curtis, Hilary Curtis Arthur with Matthew Arthur, Josephine Teeter Curtis, Michael Arthur with Thomas Arthur, Wayne Curtis

## CHAPTER 10: GOODNESS AND MERCY

I thought if I wrote a book, I would have to examine the quality in the human spirit that continues to rise despite the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

—Maya Angelou, *A Song Flung Up to Heaven*

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

—Psalm 23

How does one go on despite such slings and arrows, such losses, as Josephine Teeter Curtis endured in her long later years, and despite declining energies? In 1981 Jo's best high school friend, Mildred Sandell Dallner, who had known her sixty-two years, said, "She's so well. She seems to be so much stronger now."



Jo Teeter Curtis at 101 with sons Bruce and Wayne

The most important thing about Jo? "Not giving up, I think, carrying on," becoming stronger as a widow and as a person. Jo could carry on, not give up, because of a lifetime of character building in good times and bad. Her views on such matters were often expressed in religious terms, but typically in an ethical, practical, everyday this-worldly context.

Jo had long considered herself an orthodox Christian, an orthodox Methodist. She knew and could recite the tenets of the faith, but was nevertheless broadminded enough to write, "I don't think there is much difference in whether one is Methodist, Presbyterian, [or] Disciple of Christ." And she expressed a widespread American belief: "I do not believe one has to belong to a church to be a Christian but that one can be a better Christian by attending church." Before and during World War II, she, Chet,

and the boys had attended the nearby Bladensburg Christian church much of the time rather than Batavia Methodist, partly in wartime to save rationed gasoline, partly because it was pleasant to meet close neighbors. When a Methodist minister to whom she told this was critical, she did not attend his services again. As a broadminded Christian and Methodist, she always, however, personally drew the line at revivalist emotionalism and cultist beliefs and behavior. She might have enjoyed a newspaper quip of 1898 that “Emotional Christians, like jelly fish, float with the tide.” As a Christian, Jo practiced as well the Greek concept of the Golden Mean, sought the moderate course between extremes of belief or behavior.<sup>514</sup>

During a long lifetime Jo had come to understand better, she believed, the difference between being formally and being truly religious. Early in 2002 she recalled that, as a girl, going to County Line Methodist with Rebecca and Bernard was “just the thing to do.” It was a social more than religious occasion. In fact, “I never joined the church ‘til after I was married,” and even then it was Batavia Methodist, “because it was the church that your dad belonged to. And I think you boys went in at the same time.” Which meant that Josephine was years more than a decade into her marriage before she joined, and even then at least in part for social and family reasons. Nevertheless, Josephine’s earlier experiences in those small rural churches may have planted seeds that would ultimately germinate. On the back of a photograph (which included her Grandpa Joe Steele) of a Des Moines River baptism, she wrote that her Grandmother Sarah Steele’s Baptist church had been the “first place I remember going to church.” “The hymns,” Jo wrote so many years later, were “There Shall be Showers of Blessings” and “Will There be Any Stars in My Crown?”

Early in 2002 Jo believed that only in recent years, only in the very late twentieth century, had she begun to feel really religious, “probably five or six years [ago]. But I always went to church. And I taught a Sunday school class. I taught different Sunday school classes. Probably all classes.” Surprising as it might seem that she had not been really religious until recently, nevertheless, “I think that’s true.” Religion was “more valuable to me now than when I was growing up, and also age makes a difference, I think . . . you become more religious, you think about it more.” Jo had asked me for material on such figures as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Dorothy Day, and Mother Teresa because “I wanted to know about those people,” what they believed.

“I feel different about religion now. I feel . . . that I am saved and that I will go to heaven.” What would heaven be like? “Well, it will be beautiful, and I will be with God.” Several years earlier, in 1995, Jo had written,

“Ministers preach funerals like we will know our mates in the hereafter, but the Bible says there will be neither male nor female. If we would know persons as we did on earth there would be disappointment for I feel and hope I am wrong that some who we love on earth would not be there.” In heaven, then, souls alone would be with God.

Even when thinking about heaven, however, Jo could not escape concern with her life here on earth. For as she said in 2002 concerning Jesus, “I have always felt that His second coming is the time when you pass away, and He comes for you . . . You haven’t finished your work on earth until you die.” As for what her work was now, at ninety-eight years old, “That I don’t know. I don’t know what my work is . . . unless it’s to be an example to somebody”—perhaps an example to her sons, and an example as an observing, churchgoing Christian. The best part of growing old? “Well, I haven’t thought of that . . . I guess your work is not done here on earth.”

At ninety-eight, newly in her assisted living apartment, Jo was uncertain about her work: “It’s the best I can do, and I am probably past being an example for anybody,” although perhaps she could be an example by not complaining needlessly. Jo chose instead to be “thankful that I can get around without having a wheelchair or a walker.”

Jo had decided in advance to like Sylvan Woods because, “I think if one decides that they’re going to like wherever they are, you will. I didn’t come with the intention of complaining.” At ninety-eight Jo had decided what she would be and do, just as long ago, when she was six, she had decided not to follow the example of quarrelsome relatives, had decided to control her temper. Why she had decided, “I don’t know, but I decided it on my own that I would be more calm than any of my family.” As an adult, Jo developed the pattern begun as a child of seeking the Golden Mean by following the Golden Rule. Sometimes, of course, as we have seen, she experienced the consequences of attempting to be peaceable and a peacemaker, of not being as assertive, aggressive, or combative as others.

At ninety-eight Jo was not dogmatic about her religious beliefs or even central aspects of her religion. Concerning prayer, “I haven’t got my mind completely made up about prayer.” Prayers were not necessarily answered, for what we want may not be what we need. Despite uncertainty concerning the efficacy of praying, “I do, at times. I don’t have any particular time. I pray for people. I don’t know whether I’m praying right or not.” In this she was at one with another widow and person of faith, the writer Madeleine L’Engle, who believed that “We don’t have to understand to

know that prayer is love, and love is never wasted.”<sup>515</sup>

Jo knew and understood the formal or formulaic aspects of prayer, but she regretted an inability to lead others in public prayer. To her, prayer was at its core personal and private and sustaining. “I say a little prayer to God to help me through and I get through,” she wrote in 1984. Parenthetically, Jo might have referred (but did not) to Christ’s advice in Matthew about finding a closet and praying in private, rather than in public with the hypocrites. One of Jo’s favorite Bible verses was Isaiah 4:31: “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” Jo wrote in 1995 of that awful time sixty years earlier, “I believe sometimes God speaks to us as when Wayne had brain surgery. Without asking I was told that Wayne would live.” Once in a dream, “After my father’s death I had an answer from him that he was safe.”

“I have changed my mind about prayer in school,” Jo wrote in 1995, “as we have so many different kinds of religion. But I do think that a moment of silence would be good. If the child wants to pray his religion that is fine.” She went on to say, however, turning to the principle of majority rule, “If enough of a senior class want prayer at Commencement they should be allowed to have [it] either by a classmate or a minister of their choice.”

Jo wrote as an orthodox Methodist that, “I do not believe in Predestination. We are free to choose what we do with our lives. . . . Jesus said to the disciples by faith you are saved. (That [Jo wrote] perhaps fit that time.) I believe there are things we need to do to show our faith by helping other people.” Josephine Curtis’s life is witness to the Wesleyan view that while faith is essential, works in support of faith are necessary to Christian life in society. At times, even, she seems to make works equal to faith. Jo’s evident courage and endurance in everyday living were surely buttressed by adult religious belief; but that belief was grafted onto a six-year-old child’s determination to gain control over her own emotions and behavior in a household and family where tempers often raged. Even at six, Josephine had been no Predestinarian.

A lifetime believer in free will, Josephine necessarily believed in the parable of the talents, and that a person must develop and use for the social good whatever abilities one has. “Too many talents are wasted,” she wrote, “because people are afraid of failure so they never try.” Humility was a necessary virtue, but even a humble person, even a woman in rural American society, must do her best in whatever calling she finds herself. As a rural schoolteacher in the 1920s, Jo would have preferred to be a stenographer or secretary. That desire blocked, she chose to do her best



as a teacher. One did one's best in life and tried to avoid vain regrets, for "One can't look back and correct mistakes."

One must go forward while using one's talents and abilities to benefit others. To do so was not merely to revel in self-sacrifice. Rather, it was to find satisfaction in helping others as a daughter, schoolteacher, wife, mother, church member (especially that), community member, neighbor, friend. Much of this book, readers will recall, is a compendium of Jo's wide-ranging works that benefited others.

For Jo's ninety-fifth birthday numerous people wrote reminiscing letters, notes, and cards. Junior Black wrote that one of his "key memories of your mom" concerned his chance encounter with a snake one day, one that on later reflection was clearly harmless. "I ended up at your house out of breath and terrified. Your mom calmed me down, gave me some milk to drink and talked me into . . . going home . . . Your mom didn't talk down to me, so I thought she was extra special that day."

A niece, Louise Wheeldon Bishop, remembered that "I always admired how neat and clean her house was. She was calm and poised, didn't seem to get upset over little things . . . Dear Aunt Jo, you are so important to our family. You have been an important influence in my life, and I love you." Another niece, Mary Ruth Wheeldon Hanna, remembered, "When I was . . . six or seven she made me a red blouse and a . . . jumper. I can still remember how pleased I was . . . I can remember sitting on her lap and watching an evening flower open up just at dusk. And running to her for protection when Uncle Chet would chase us . . . I learned a lot from her when I was young that shaped my life."

Finally, Bernice Frescoln wrote, "Jo is a long time acquaintance and a very good friend for the past fourteen years. We attended the Methodist Church . . . since 1929 and worked in the women's organizations. We worked together in church bazaars, meals for bereaved families . . . wedding receptions, meals to raise money to pay for [the] new church . . . (twenty-five cents for a chicken dinner), farm sales, etc. . . . After Bruce [Bernice's husband] passed away in 1984 and I was alone, Jo sort of took me under her wing and took me out to eat, [and] on my first cruise which I thoroughly enjoyed and had never even thought of doing . . . Jo is just a very good friend."

For her ninety-eighth birthday, as she prepared to move from Fairfield into Ottumwa and assisted living, Jo received many notes from Fairfielders, Batavians, and others saying they would miss her at church and bridge, and wishing her well. Among them was Gladdis Gaines, who reminded Jo that "As you look back you have many good memories to

enjoy . . . I'm so glad . . . we became friends. I've enjoyed many bridge games we have played together with other friends." For her hundredth, Jean Keith Selz, another bridge club member, wrote, "I have enjoyed your friendship immensely."

Jo's view of her relation to others in society was based on the Golden Rule that one should "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Which is both a religious and an ethical injunction. One should love one's neighbor as oneself, "which is very hard to do." Concerning racial and other sorts of prejudice, at age ninety-nine she said, "I'm trying not to be." One should "Look for the good in people instead of the bad," should "Try not to judge others." Jo's beliefs concerning the necessity for love and civility, forbearance and tolerance, deriving from both sacred and secular sources, led her to write to me in 1995 that "We should try to see the good in others . . . I am trying to remember the good that was in your father . . ." To focus on the good was both a private and a public necessity. "When people gossip about someone if one can think of a good thing to say about that person it will stop the gossip."

As a religious person, born and reared in an entirely white and Protestant community, Josephine Curtis chose toleration of other faiths, although she would not choose the more extreme forms of religious expression for herself. She had been born and reared in a time and place of casual racist references to "niggers" and "nigger shooters" and "jewing" and being "gypped." Referring to a baseball throw target at county fairs, a grinning Upton Sinclair World War I character says, "Every time you hit the nigger you get a good seegar." A 1919 Batavia newspaper advertisement had announced, "Brazil Nuts for Christmas . . . Everybody calls them Nigger Toes." The revived Ku Klux Klan, historically contemptuous of Negroes, Catholics, and Jews, claimed a million members in 1923, most in the North. In 1925 40,000 Klansmen paraded in Washington, DC. The Klan had a beachhead in Iowa during Josephine's formative years. An Appanoose County teacher lost her job when the Klan attacked her family as foreign born and Catholic. The mid-'20s Klan recruited in Batavia, in full regalia marched in Ottumwa, burned a cross near Fairfield.<sup>516</sup>

In 1921, when Jo was a high schooler, the Grand Master of Iowa's Masons was one among numerous Iowa voices attacking the Klan's "appeals to bigotry and endeavors to foster hatred of any nationality, class, religious faith or sect." In 1923, the year Jo graduated from high school, Alex Miller, "former editor and postmaster at Washington," [Iowa] told Fairfield Lion's Club that "true Americanism cannot be taught behind a pillowslip mask . . . Hatred for and mistreatment of the Negro and . . . the Jew," as

well as “unfounded religious prejudices” generally “are the greatest foes of America.” In part because of such opposition, the Klan did not flourish in Iowa.<sup>517</sup>

Quietly, as was her way, Jo would have agreed with the views of such speakers. Issues of racial and religious prejudice were, of course, national in scope. In the late ‘20s, one of President Coolidge’s favorite radio shows was reported to be *Amos ‘n’ Andy*, as it was in our house later. The show ran for fifteen years, until 1943. Despite such common and pervasive popular stereotyping thinly masked as humor, despite naked racism and bigotry in American society throughout her lifetime, to my knowledge Jo Teeter Curtis never spoke ill or disparagingly or jokingly of any race or ethnic group, nor of any individual member. Viewing achievement of tolerance and understanding of others as a process, more than a goal that could be reached absolutely, at age ninety-nine, as earlier, Jo was “trying not to be” prejudiced against anyone.<sup>518</sup>

As a woman whose early widowhood years coincided with an exciting feminist era, Jo was able to examine her own life in light of new and renewed analyses and attitudes concerning women in America. She was able to recognize the paramount, overriding influence of her mother and her husband in her life choices. She was able without bitterness to voice her regrets at not having been stronger; was able to do so without surrendering



Mother Jo and Joy Hilleary Curtis, 2003

to the temptation to view or present herself as a victim; was able to wish younger generations of women well. Her daughter-in-law, one among the rising generation of “nontraditional” career women with children, Jo admired unreservedly. In her later days when little else seemed to stir her, Joy’s arrival, or even mention of her, would bring a flash of pleasure and a slow smile to Jo’s face.

In 1977, five years after being widowed, while critiquing a manuscript that Joy and I were preparing about a “delicate and ailing” Victorian lady, Jo wrote in a marginal note that “Any woman should learn to be independent to a degree. Not always dependent on the husband. Life would be so

much easier when one has to depend on oneself, if they had learned this when not alone.” Concerning the vexing question of abortion rights, Jo repeatedly asserted over the years that each individual woman should be free to choose. The decision was “no one’s business but the woman’s.”

As a religious woman Jo could write in 1995, “I feel that God does not mean for things to stand still. That is why more women are taking a role in the church, also in government and community things.”

At one hundred-three years, two months, twenty-three days, Josephine Mae Teeter Curtis died, January 19, 2007. For me, the sharp pain of her passing was somewhat lessened by a halo of memories. Some were personal and familial. Some concerned her public and civic beliefs and behavior. As a religious believer, as a citizen in democratic society, as a woman born well before women could vote in national elections, my mother, in her beliefs and behavior, over many years evolved toward egalitarian tolerance and respect for the rights and dignity of every individual. If Socrates was correct in believing that the unexamined life is not worth living, then one may say that Josephine Teeter Curtis, from childhood to old age, indeed lived a thoughtful, introspective, worthwhile life. Indeed one may say that from “ordinary people” may grow the extraordinary person. And that sometimes in the person born ordinary the human spirit soars.



Jo and Bruce, 2004

## SELECTED SOURCES

To provide information on sources as unobtrusively as possible, reference numbers appear only at paragraph ends, with notes for a paragraph clustered. Because newspapers of the time and place are generally brief and sometimes unpaginated or illegible, especially in microfilm, notes list no page or column numbers. To avoid excessive paraphernalia I have generally listed sources by short title only. Quotations in the text have been very rarely corrected for clarity or spelling. Finally, I have treated genealogical information with care, but I would not guarantee its accuracy.

For legal, historical, and genealogical records, I am grateful for help from employees and volunteers, uniformly courteous and helpful, in the courthouses, archival libraries, and genealogical societies of numerous counties and cities in several states: in Harrisburg, the Pennsylvania State Archives, State Library of Pennsylvania, and Harrisburg Historical Society; in Philadelphia, the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania; and in the Pennsylvania counties of Adams, Beaver, Bedford, Cumberland, Fayette, Lawrence, Mercer, and York. In Frankfort, the Kentucky Historical Society; in Lexington, the University of Kentucky Library; in Louisville, the Filson Club Library and the Louisville Public Library; and in the Kentucky counties of Bourbon, Scott, and Shelby. In Fort Wayne, Indiana, the Allen County Public Library; in Indianapolis, the Indiana State Library; and in the Indiana counties of Dearborn, Jefferson, and Ripley. In Illinois, the counties of Crawford and Wayne. In Des Moines and Iowa City, the State Historical Society of Iowa Library and Archives; in Iowa City, the University of Iowa Library; in Batavia, the Public Library and the City Hall; in Agency, the Public Library; in Eldon, the Public Library; in Fairfield, the Public Library (most especially); in Keosauqua, the Public Library; in Ottumwa, the Public Library and the Wapello County Genealogical Society; and in the Iowa county offices of Jefferson and Wapello. In Lansing, the State of Michigan Library; in East Lansing, the Public Library, the Michigan State University Library, and the LDS Family History Center. In Janesville, Wisconsin, the Rock County Courthouse and the Rock County Historical Society.

Important for specific and personal information was the *Diary of*



Ada Tresenriter Curtis. The most valuable collections of manuscripts I have used, particularly for the lives of Iowa women as rural elementary schoolteachers and farm wives, are in the State Historical Society of Iowa Library and Archives, Iowa City [*SHSI Ms*], and in the Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Library, Iowa City [*IWA*]. I have profited from examining articles in the *Annals of Iowa* [*AI*] and *Palimpsest* [*P*] cum *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* [*IHI*].

Newspapers have been most useful, including the *Birmingham Enterprise* [*BE*] and the *Keosauqua Republican* [*KR*], in the Keosauqua Public Library; the *Eldon Forum* [*EF*], on microfilm in the State Historical Society of Iowa; the *Fairfield Daily Journal* [*FDJ*], *Jefferson County Republican* [*JCR*], *Fairfield Ledger* [*FL*], *Fairfield Weekly Journal* [*FWJ*], *Fairfield Weekly Ledger* [*FWL*], *Weekly Ledger-Journal* [*WLJ*], and *Fairfield Tribune* [*FT*], all in the Fairfield Public Library on microfilm; and the *Ottumwa Courier* [*OC*], in the Ottumwa Public Library on microfilm. The *Batavia News* [*BN*], on microfilm in the Fairfield Public Library and the State Historical Society of Iowa, has been indispensable, as has the *Batavia Beacon* [*BB*], in Batavia's Public Library and City Hall. Useful and convenient collections are *Batavia News Historical Edition*, July 2, 1936 [*BNHE*], and *Ottumwa Courier Historic Front Pages*, July 1, 1976 [*OCHFPP*]. Fortunately for me, these newspapers amply proved nonsensical the old saw asserting that a lady's name should appear in public print only at birth, wedding, and death.

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- <sup>2</sup> Cole, 70-71.
- <sup>3</sup> *EF*, December 2, 1915; February 21, 28, 1918; Charles J. Fulton, 11; *FL*, May 15, 1907; *FT*, May 26, 1921; *OCHFP*, July 1, 1976; Cole, 270; Arnold, 79-81.
- <sup>4</sup> Riley, 16, 18.
- <sup>5</sup> *FL*, January 29, 1908.
- <sup>6</sup> *JCR*, July 29, 1904.
- <sup>7</sup> *FT*, December 18, 1895; January 5, 1898; September 19, 1900; *FWJ*, January 12, 1898; *FWL*, September 18, 1900; *JCR*, September 18, 1900; *FL*, May 20, 1908.
- <sup>8</sup> *FL*, July 30, 1902; April 22, 1903; *FWJ*, December 28, 1898; Ferguson, *War*, xxxvi; Lewis, *Dodsworth*, 1.
- <sup>9</sup> *FT*, June 26, 1912; Morris, 11, 25 *FT*, June 26, 1912; Morris, 11, 25.
- <sup>10</sup> *FL*, June 24, 1903; September 23, 1903; November 11, 1903; *FWL*, August 26, 1903; *JCR*, October 30, 1903; Hobson, 444.
- <sup>11</sup> *FL*, April 15, 1903; *JCR*, October 30, 1903.
- <sup>12</sup> Eldredge, throughout.
- <sup>13</sup> *FL*, April 15, 1903; Barnes, 48-49.
- <sup>14</sup> *FT*, April 29, 1899; *FL*, January 22, 1908.
- <sup>15</sup> *FL*, September 2, 1903; *FWL*, September 9, 1903; November 11, 1903.
- <sup>16</sup> *WLJ*, November 15, 1923; Boorstin, 98-101; Lord, 92-93; Boyne, throughout; Clymer, 139.
- <sup>17</sup> *FWJ*, Apr 28, 1897; *JCR*, July 8, 1897; April 12, 1898; H.G. Pedrick, "Ottumwans Take Time to Play," *OCHPF*, July 1, 1976; Atherton, 192-193.
- <sup>18</sup> *FL*, October 21, 1903; September 2, 1903; October 7, 1903; May 20, 1903; *JCR*, October 16, 1914; November 11, 1915.
- <sup>19</sup> Krause, 214.
- <sup>20</sup> *WLJ*, May 25, 1898; *FL*, April 1, 1903; April 19, 1905; *FWL*, July 29, 1903; October 21, 1903; *OC*, June 2, 1903.
- <sup>21</sup> *WLJ*, February 9, 1922.



- <sup>22</sup> *FL*, January 14, 1903; April 1, 1903; May 23, 1903; *FWJ*, June 24, 1903.
- <sup>23</sup> *WLJ*, July 20, 1898; Erik Larson, 122-123, 192-194, 232-233, 236-240.
- <sup>24</sup> *FL*, April 30, 1902; June 17, 1903.
- <sup>25</sup> *FL*, April 8, 1903.
- <sup>26</sup> *FL*, April 22, 1903.
- <sup>27</sup> 1886 *Directory*, Jefferson County, Iowa, 221.
- <sup>28</sup> *JCR*, April 1, 1898; *FL*, May 14, 1902; May 13, 1903; September 24, 1906.
- <sup>29</sup> *FWJ*, January 17, 1900; March 21, 1900; *FL*, January 4, 1893; April 29, 1903; May 13, 1903; September 16, 1907; *FDJ*, February 15, 1913; February 17, 1913; Charles J. Fulton, 400-401; Riley, 243.
- <sup>30</sup> Charles J. Fulton, 386-388.
- <sup>31</sup> *FL*, April 1, 1903; February 3, 1904.
- <sup>32</sup> *FL*, December 20, 1905; *JCR*, April 19, 1917; Lord, 150.
- <sup>33</sup> *FL*, August 14, 1907.
- <sup>34</sup> *FWL*, July 29, 1903; August 26, 1903; *FL*, April 1, 1903.
- <sup>35</sup> *FL*, September 23, 1903; June 17, 1903.
- <sup>36</sup> *FL*, April 15, 1903; June 24, 1903; July 29, 1903; *FWJ*, July 10, 1903; *FWL*, July 1, 1903; July 29, 1903; August 26, 1903; Ginger, 321.
- <sup>37</sup> *FWJ*, December 21, 1897; April 5, 1902; *FL*, November 18, 1903; September 5, 1906; September 12, 1906; August 7, 1907; August 21, 1907.
- <sup>38</sup> *FL*, September 14, 1904.
- <sup>39</sup> *FWJ*, February 7, 1900.
- <sup>40</sup> *JCR*, September 20, 1898; November 15, 1898; *FWJ*, May 10, 1899; *FL*, May 20, 1903; *FWJ*, September 2, 1903; September 16, 1903; Ginger, 241-42; Ferguson, *War*, 287-288.
- <sup>41</sup> Stong, *Hawkeyes*, 118.
- <sup>42</sup> Grover, 194.
- <sup>43</sup> *FWJ*, July 1, 1903; Kagan, 5.
- <sup>44</sup> *FWJ*, January 19, 1898; February 23, 1898; Morris, 595; Tuchman, 173; Wiebe, 241.
- <sup>45</sup> *FT*, August 17, 1898; *JCR*, April 12, 1898; December 6, 1898; December 16, 1898; Morris, 608, 615; Boyne, 296, 413; Tuchman, 174.
- <sup>46</sup> *JCR*, August 5, 1898; *FWJ*, June 22, 1899; July 20, 1899; July 27, 1899; Doctorow, 3; Charles J. Fulton, 399-400.
- <sup>47</sup> *JCR*, May 27, 1898; June 6, 1899.
- <sup>48</sup> *FWJ*, June 22, 1899; September 6, 1899; December 20, 1899.

- <sup>49</sup> Lord, 7.
- <sup>50</sup> *JCR*, May 17, 1898, May 31, 1898; Mayers, 202.
- <sup>51</sup> *JCR*, May 13, 1898; Tuchman, 186.
- <sup>52</sup> *FL*, April 8, 1903; *OCHF*, July 1, 1976.
- <sup>53</sup> *FWJ*, September 14, 1898; Tuchman, 171.
- <sup>54</sup> *FWJ*, October 5, 1898; November 23, 1898; November 30, 1898.
- <sup>55</sup> Lord, 1, 37.
- <sup>56</sup> *FL*, April 30, 1902; July 23, 1902; *FWJ*, July 16, 1902; Schott, 27-28; Linn, 174; Feuer, 205; Miller, 219; Mayers, 197, 205-207.
- <sup>57</sup> Miller, 88-89, 188, 206-213, 218, 230-239, 255; Davis, 223-224; Mayers, 198, 211; Tuchman, 183.
- <sup>58</sup> Ginger, 264; McCullough, 250-252, 334-386.
- <sup>59</sup> *FL*, October 25, 1903; Mayers, 208, 216; Wiebe, 234-263.
- <sup>60</sup> *JCR*, May 1, 1903; January 25, 1907.
- <sup>61</sup> Charles J. Fulton, 385-386.
- <sup>62</sup> *JCR*, November 12, 1909.
- <sup>63</sup> *FT*, July 20, 1904; August 14, 1907; *FL*, July 31, 1907.
- <sup>64</sup> *FT*, August 21, 1907; *FL*, May 6, 1908; *WLJ*, June 28, 1923.
- <sup>65</sup> *FT*, September 17, 1909; October 22, 1909; March 15, 1918.
- <sup>66</sup> Krause, 114; Riney-Kehrberg, 216; Lynch, 17.
- <sup>67</sup> *WLJ*, January 12, 1922.
- <sup>68</sup> Riley, 76.
- <sup>69</sup> *FL*, March 21, 1906.
- <sup>70</sup> *BN*, August 2, 1923; *WLJ*, July 12, 1928.
- <sup>71</sup> *WLJ*, March 22, 1899; *FL*, July 2, 1902; *JCR*, September 1, 1911.
- <sup>72</sup> *FWJ*, July 27, 1899; January 26, 1908; July 29, 1908.
- <sup>73</sup> *A Stroll Back*, throughout.
- <sup>74</sup> Sister Madeleine Marie Schmidt, "Ghost Mining Towns," *OCHF*, July 1, 1976.
- <sup>75</sup> *JCR*, May 12, 1911; December 1, 1911; *FJ*, November 29, 1911; *FL*, November 29, 1911.
- <sup>76</sup> Ginger, 224.
- <sup>77</sup> *FWJ*, August 16, 1911.
- <sup>78</sup> Neihardt, 114.
- <sup>79</sup> *FWL*, September 23, 1903; *FT*, August 10; November 2, 1904; *FL*, June 3, 1964.
- <sup>80</sup> *JCR*, October 7, 1915; *FWL*, January 6, 1921.
- <sup>81</sup> *FT*, May 26, 1921.
- <sup>82</sup> *WLJ*, October 20, 1927.
- <sup>83</sup> *FL*, April 30, 1920; August 26, 1921; May 16, 1935; June 25, 1964; *BN*,

December 18, 1919; *WLJ*, July 9, 1925; Welty, 317; Hilleary, *Twentieth Century*, 54.

<sup>84</sup> *EF*, July 8, 1919; *FLJ*, March 17, 1927.

<sup>85</sup> *EF*, September 26, 1912; April 13, 1916; March 8, 1917, February 20, 1919; *FT*, June 23, 1921; August 4, 1921; *WLJ*, August 30, 1923.

<sup>86</sup> *JCR*, June 24 1915; *EF*, July 24, 1919.

<sup>87</sup> *EF*, July 23, 1914; *FWL*, January 6, 1921; *WLJ*, March 20, 1924; June 30, 1927.

<sup>88</sup> *EF*, September 20, 1917; *FT*, July 29, 1921; *WLJ*, February 24, 1926.

<sup>89</sup> *WLJ*, April 26, 1928; Cahill, 265.

<sup>90</sup> *FWJ*, July 20, 1899; *EF*, September 11, 1913; August 8, 1918; *FT*, December 8, 1921; *WLJ*, October 11, 1928.

<sup>91</sup> *BN*, September 7, 1916; *WLJ*, August 25, 1927; *BNHE*, July 2, 1936, 29.

<sup>92</sup> *FL*, November 22, 1905; *WLJ*, November 17, 1923; November 23, 1923; December 22, 1923.

<sup>93</sup> *WLJ*, October 22, 1925; Louis, *Dodsworth*, 1.

<sup>94</sup> Sinclair Lewis illustrates this and other early cross-country driving hazards in his 1919 *Free Air*.

<sup>95</sup> *WLJ*, January 17, 1924; June 24, 1924; Cahill, 264.

<sup>96</sup> Stong, *Hawkeyes*, 160.

<sup>97</sup> Lord, 299; Riney-Kehrberg, 2, 68.

<sup>98</sup> Lynch, 35.

<sup>99</sup> *BN*, August 2, 1923.

<sup>100</sup> Berry, 103.

<sup>101</sup> Faralla, 148.

<sup>102</sup> *FT*, December 13, 1888.

<sup>103</sup> *FT*, April 13, 1895; *JCR*, February 3, 1897; March 3, 1897.

<sup>104</sup> *FT*, January 6, 1892.

<sup>105</sup> *FT*, March 30, 1892.

<sup>106</sup> *FT*, June 15, 1892.

<sup>107</sup> Bailyn, 62; Hotle, 22; Atherton, 111.

<sup>108</sup> Boorstin, 52; Bailyn, 65-67.

<sup>109</sup> Bourbon Co, KY, records; Steele Family Bible; *DAR Patriot Index Centennial Edition*, 1994, 897; Elizabeth F. Rhodes, "Thomas Dunn, Kentucky Pioneer of 1776 (1740-1818)," 1977, Kentucky Historical Library; US (IN) Census, 1820.

<sup>110</sup> Jefferson Co, IN, records; Madison, IN, Historical Society; Madison, IN, Public Library; Steele Family Bible; B.S. Wolfe, *Index to Revolutionary Soldiers of Indiana*, 1983, 127; DAR, *Soldiers and Patriots of the*

- American Revolution Buried in Indiana*, 1938, 19; Scott Co, KY, records.
- <sup>111</sup> Jefferson Co, IN, records; Madison, IN, Historical Society; Madison, IN, Public Library; Steele Family Bible.
- <sup>112</sup> Gail Christie, <christie@hsc.vcu.edu>; Miles. Ancestry.com; Shelby Co, KY, records; Shelbyville, KY, Public Library.
- <sup>113</sup> Gail Christie, <christie@hsc.vcu.edu>; Ripley Co, IN, records; Jefferson Co, IN, records.
- <sup>114</sup> Ripley Co, IN, records; Ripley Co, IN, Historical Society; Jefferson Co, IN, records; Andrew Devore Boyd; <boydfam11@man.com>; Linda Bucholz, <mannesah27@cox.net>; US (IN) Census, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870; Steele Family Bible; Steele Family archives.
- <sup>115</sup> *FWJ*, March 24, 1897; Charles J. Fulton, 408.
- <sup>116</sup> Riley, 20-21.
- <sup>117</sup> Jefferson Co, IA, records; Steele Family archives; Charles J. Fulton, 175, 179, 189, 204; *FL*, March 7, 1906; Mayers, 80-81.
- <sup>118</sup> No author, *History of Jefferson County*, 77, 160.
- <sup>119</sup> Newhall, 2; Alexander R. Fulton, 21.
- <sup>120</sup> *FL*, July 17, 1907; November 14, 1906; McCoid, 212; Charles J. Fulton, 33.
- <sup>121</sup> Suckow, *New Hope*, 62, 201.
- <sup>122</sup> *FT*, October 16, 1889; Russell G. Nye, 22, 37, 152; Wall, 8-15.
- <sup>123</sup> *FT*, August 14, 1897; September 1, 1897; September 8, 1897; September 24, 1920.
- <sup>124</sup> *FWJ*, January 10, 1906.
- <sup>125</sup> Riley, 6, 88.
- <sup>126</sup> Riley, 7, 76, 85-87, 92, 96.
- <sup>127</sup> Riley, 80, 83, 93; Boorstin, 56; *FL*, October 8, 1863.
- <sup>128</sup> *FL*, May 20, 1903.
- <sup>129</sup> Riley, 96-98.
- <sup>130</sup> *OCHFP*, July 1, 1976; Prior, 58-59.
- <sup>131</sup> Riley, 77.
- <sup>132</sup> Wall, 49; Sage, 310; Newhall, 12-13.
- <sup>133</sup> Schwieder, 58-65; Carr, 7, 59; Alexander R. Fulton, 45, 50.
- <sup>134</sup> *FL*, August 17, 1853.
- <sup>135</sup> *JCR*, February 17, 1897; *FJ*, September 2, 1908; *WLJ*, September 7, 1922; *FL*, June 25, 1964.
- <sup>136</sup> *BNHE*, July 2, 1936, 28; *OC*, June 10, 1935; *OCHFP*, July 1, 1976; Carr, 45-47.
- <sup>137</sup> *FL*, May 13, 1908; *FT*, September 22, 1921.

- <sup>138</sup> *FWJ*, May 24, 1899; *FL*, January 29, 1902; Russell G. Nye, 85.
- <sup>139</sup> *FWJ*, January 31, 1900; *FT*, January 29, 1899; June 14, 1899; August 2, 1899; March 27, 1907; June 26, 1907; December 11, 1907.
- <sup>140</sup> *FL*, July 10, 1906.
- <sup>141</sup> *FL*, October 6, 1870; June 25, 1964; *FJ*, September 2, 1908; *EF*, December 2, 1915; Margaret Jean Hill, "Eldon," *OCHF*, July 1, 1976; Fletcher, 10; Albert P. Butts, in Hamilton, 149-150.
- <sup>142</sup> Quick, *Vandemark's*, 147.
- <sup>143</sup> *FT*, June 22, 1887; October 16, 1889; December 18, 1912; *FWJ*, August 24, 1898; October 27, 1904; *FL*, January 23, 1907; Williams-Searle, 28, 66.
- <sup>144</sup> *FT*, August 18, 1881.
- <sup>145</sup> *FT*, December 28, 1887; April 30, 1890; February 24, 1897; April 20, 1898.
- <sup>146</sup> *FT*, September 17, 1890; October 3, 1894; *EF*, May 7, 1914; Boorstin, 102-104; Tuchman, 140.
- <sup>147</sup> Thompson, 55.
- <sup>148</sup> McCoid, 125-126.
- <sup>149</sup> *FL*, May 21, 1879; *FT*, July 6, 1887; March 16, 1889; April 20, 1889; August 29, 1889; December 27, 1893; Hobson, 297; Reynolds, 33.
- <sup>150</sup> Paul C. Jeffries Survey, 1846, Fairfield Public Library; *FT*, April 13, 1892.
- <sup>151</sup> Quick, *Vandemark's*, 111; Riley, 28, 218-19; Prior, 29; C.V. Finley, in Hamilton, 85-87.
- <sup>152</sup> Riley, 8; Quick, *Vandemark's*, 228.
- <sup>153</sup> *FL*, January 18, 1889; *FT*, April 11, 1889; Arnold, 53; Möberg, 121.
- <sup>154</sup> *FT*, August 29, 1889.
- <sup>155</sup> *FT*, August 8, 1888; *WLJ*, December 15, 1921; Waterman, 90-94.
- <sup>156</sup> Paul C. Jeffries Survey, 1846, Fairfield Public Library; *FL*, July 23, 1902; Welty, 381-382.
- <sup>157</sup> Sterling, 424; Charles J. Fulton, 367.
- <sup>158</sup> *FWJ*, March 15, 1899; Madson, 228.
- <sup>159</sup> *FT*, November 3, 1881.
- <sup>160</sup> *FT*, June 29, 1882; July 13, 1882; July 20, 1882.
- <sup>161</sup> *FT*, August 10, 1882; August 18, 1882; October 26, 1882; February 1, 1883.
- <sup>162</sup> *FT*, May 26, 1921.
- <sup>163</sup> 1886 *Directory*, Jefferson County, Iowa.
- <sup>164</sup> Catton, *Glory Road*, 111-25; Catton, *Hallowed Ground*, 88; McPherson, 596.



- <sup>165</sup> *FL*, August 24, 1904; *OCHFP*, July 1, 1976; Catton, *Glory Road*, 129, 230; Charles J. Fulton, 341-342; Wubben, x, 33, 67, 69, 93, 96, 114, 168.
- <sup>166</sup> *FL*, December 10, 1863; December 24, 1863; February 4, 1864; June 2, 1870; McPherson, 626-684; Wubben, 160; Charles J. Fulton, 371.
- <sup>167</sup> Catton, *Glory Road*, 212, 237; McPherson, 450-451.
- <sup>168</sup> *FL*, October 2, 1888.
- <sup>169</sup> *FT*, December 27, 1893; *FL*, November 11, 1903; December 5, 1906.
- <sup>170</sup> *FT*, October 12, 1887; November 2, 1887; June 6, 1888; August 29, 1888; September 5, 1889; October 2, 1889; October 9, 1889; July 30, 1890; August 13, 1890; September 24, 1890; June 24, 1891; September, 16, 1891; August 23, 1893; August 16, 1899; July 25, 1906; *JCR*, September 6, 1898; *FWJ*, August 16, 1899; *FL*, April 27, 1892; July 25, 1906; Waterman, 94.
- <sup>171</sup> *FT*, May 19, 1896; August 12, 1896; August 19, 1896; September 30, 1896; *BNHE*, July 2, 1936; Mills, 192.
- <sup>172</sup> *FWL*, August 8, 1900; *FL*, September 19, 1906; *FT*, August 21, 1907; March 25, 1908; July 15, 1908.
- <sup>173</sup> *EF*, August 7, 1919.
- <sup>174</sup> *FT*, December 17, 1890; January 21, 1891.
- <sup>175</sup> Wiebe, 4-17.
- <sup>176</sup> *FT*, July 18, 1894; December 12, 1894; May 1, 1895; August 24, 1898; May 10, 1899; September 12, 1894; July 27, 1898; October 11, 1899; *WLJ*, August 10, 1899; *FWJ*, July 20, 1899; September 7, 1905; November 8, 1905; November 15, 1905.
- <sup>177</sup> *FT*, May 12, 1881.
- <sup>178</sup> Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Warrant, March 14, 1785; and Land Patent, November 8, 1787.
- <sup>179</sup> Brumbaugh, 126.
- <sup>180</sup> Bedford Co, PA, records; Bedford Co, PA, Pioneer Library.
- <sup>181</sup> Teeter Family Bible.
- <sup>182</sup> Teeter Family Bible.
- <sup>183</sup> Lawrence Co, PA, records; New Castle, PA, Public Library; US (PA) Census, 1800, 1850.
- <sup>184</sup> *FL*, July 11, 1894; Teeter Family archives; Fairfield Public Library.
- <sup>185</sup> Teeter Family Bible; Teeter Family archives.
- <sup>186</sup> *EF*, December 19, 1912; *JCR*, June 30, 1905.
- <sup>187</sup> Catton, *Hallowed Ground*, 26.
- <sup>188</sup> *FL*, January 31, 1906.
- <sup>189</sup> *FT*, May 13, 1880; September 30, 1880; December 3, 1890; October

- 29, 1897; April 13, 1898; December 26, 1922; *FL*, October 2, 1939; *JCR*, February 3, 1897; Welty, 169-170.
- <sup>190</sup> *JCR*, December 23, 1904; February 10, 1904; February 17, 1904; May 12, 1904; June 30, 1905; Church of the Brethren, *Gospel Messenger*, July 29, 1905, 479.
- <sup>191</sup> *EF*, May 30, 1912.
- <sup>192</sup> New Castle, PA, Public Library.
- <sup>193</sup> Wayne Co, IL, records; Illinois Census, 1855; New Castle, PA, Public Library.
- <sup>194</sup> *BNHE*, July 2, 1936.
- <sup>195</sup> Judge Duane Gaines, *Oration*, Palestine, Illinois, Public Library.
- <sup>196</sup> *BN*, August 12, 1922; *FT*, March 23, 1922; May 4, 1922; July 6, 1922.
- <sup>197</sup> *FL*, January 12, 1883; *FWJ*, October 12, 1905; January 8, 1908; *FT*, September 1, 1909; *WLJ*, March 9, 1922.
- <sup>198</sup> *FT*, June 1, 1922; March 22, 1923; *FL*, April 21, 1923; April 26, 1923; May 3, 1923; *WLJ*, April 26, 1923.
- <sup>199</sup> *WLJ*, March 29, 1923; April 26, 1923; May 3, 1923.
- <sup>200</sup> *FT*, May 13, 1880; Harness, *OC*, June 15, 1951.
- <sup>201</sup> *FT*, May 13, 1880; *BNHE*, July 2, 1936; Charles J. Fulton, 295.
- <sup>202</sup> Boorstin, 93; Atherton, 32.
- <sup>203</sup> *FL*, July 31, 1907; August 21, 1907; December 30, 1903; August 22, 1931.
- <sup>204</sup> *EF*, June 20, 1912.
- <sup>205</sup> *WLJ*, January 26, 1922; March 5, 1925.
- <sup>206</sup> *FL*, January 7, 1903; December 12, 1906; *FWL*, throughout, 1903; *JCR*, throughout, 1904; *FWJ*, December 21, 1898; September 27, 1899; January 3, 1900; *FT*, March 20, 1879; September 1, 1897; June 26, 1907.
- <sup>207</sup> *FL*, January 7, 1864; May 3, 1905; *FT*, July 13, 1898; *FWJ*, September 28, 1898; *FWL*, November 14, 1900; *JCR*, September 20, 1898; throughout 1904.
- <sup>208</sup> *FT*, May 30, 1889; September 10, 1890; October 9, 1895; June 24, 1896; September 8, 1897; January 5, 1898; *FWJ*, October 27, 1897.
- <sup>209</sup> Boorstin, 148-151.
- <sup>210</sup> Smiley, 199; Suckow, *Iowa Interiors*, 128.
- <sup>211</sup> *FT*, July 3, 1879; *EF*, August 5, 1915.
- <sup>212</sup> *FWJ*, February 22, 1911; *FL*, March 25, 1923; Wookey, no page; Prior, 62.
- <sup>213</sup> *FWL*, September 3, 1903.
- <sup>214</sup> Stong, *Hawkeyes*, 117.

- <sup>215</sup> *FT*, March 20, 1895; *EF*, December 16, 1915.
- <sup>216</sup> Charles J. Fulton, 400.
- <sup>217</sup> *FWJ*, March 31, 1897; April 7, 1897; January 10, 1906; *FT*, April 21, 1897; January 11, 1905; August 16, 1905; *FWL*, August 22, 1900; *FL*, March 5, 1902; September 10, 1902; January 7, 1903; July 26, 1905; February 28, 1906; *JCR*, February 17, 1905; March 10, 1905.
- <sup>218</sup> *FT*, July 12, 1883; August 23, 1883; January 24, 1906; *FWJ*, August 17, 1898; December 14, 1898; May 3, 1899; July 13, 1899; *JCR*, October 22, 1898; *FWL*, July 25, 1900; *FL*, April 24, 1907; June 25, 1964; *WLJ*, March 31, 1927; *BNHE*, July 2, 1936; Charles J. Fulton, 394.
- <sup>219</sup> Trout, 34.
- <sup>220</sup> *FWL*, September 23, 1903; *FWJ*, February 15, 1911.
- <sup>221</sup> *JCR*, March 10, 1905; *EF*, October 28, 1915; *WLJ*, December 11, 1924; Pelton, 71.
- <sup>222</sup> *BN*, October 23, 1919.
- <sup>223</sup> *FWJ*, November 2, 1898.
- <sup>224</sup> *BN*, May 19, 1927; *EF*, December 9, 1915; November 20, 1919; *WLJ*, September 13, 1923.
- <sup>225</sup> *WLJ*, January 4, 1923; February 3, 1927.
- <sup>226</sup> Wearin, 20-21.
- <sup>227</sup> *FL*, December 1, 1870.
- <sup>228</sup> Hagen, no page.
- <sup>229</sup> *JCR*, August 4, 1911; Lynch, 116.
- <sup>230</sup> *BN*, July 8, 1920.
- <sup>231</sup> *FT*, October 17, 1900; Dorothy Schwieder in Bergman, 333.
- <sup>232</sup> *EF*, December 20, 1917; June 13, 1918.
- <sup>233</sup> Ferguson, *Pity*, 209.
- <sup>234</sup> Shaara, 634.
- <sup>235</sup> *BN*, November 14, 1918; *EF*, November 14, 1918.
- <sup>236</sup> *WLJ*, August 17, 1922; March 3, 1927,
- <sup>237</sup> *FT*, December 7, 1922.
- <sup>238</sup> Fink, 26-29; *FT*, December 19, 1894; July 5, 1899; June 20, 1900; *JCR*, September 10, 1890; December 24, 1890; December 31, 1890; August 12, 1904; August 19, 1904; *FWJ*, June 13, 1900; June 20, 1900.
- <sup>239</sup> *FT*, May 4, 1922; *BN*, August 3, 1922; *WLJ*, September 2, 1926.
- <sup>240</sup> *FL*, August 24, 1904.
- <sup>241</sup> *FL*, November 2, 1854; August 24, 1929; Riley, 244.
- <sup>242</sup> Charles J. Fulton, 266.

- <sup>243</sup> *KR*, October 1, 1925; Clipping, no date, Fairfield Public Library; *WPA Guide*, 525; Charles J. Fulton, 264.
- <sup>244</sup> *FT*, January 5, 1898; November 2, 1898; *JCR*, January 7, 1898; *FDJ*, May 7, 1909.
- <sup>245</sup> *EF*, October 14, 1915; *FLJ*, November 22, 1923.
- <sup>246</sup> *WLJ*, February 16, 1922; July 14, 1927; Lynch, 92.
- <sup>247</sup> *FT*, May 21, 1890.
- <sup>248</sup> *WLJ*, February 16, 1922; *FT*, February 16, 1922; March 9, 1922; May 25, 1922; *BN*, April 6, 1922.
- <sup>249</sup> *FT*, June 14, 1893; Reynolds, 61.
- <sup>250</sup> *JCR*, throughout, 1917.
- <sup>251</sup> *BNHE*, July 2, 1936.
- <sup>252</sup> Schwieder, 256.
- <sup>253</sup> *McGuffey's Eclectic Reader*, 25-26.
- <sup>254</sup> Teeple, no page.
- <sup>255</sup> *FT*, August 12, 1880; May 7, 1890; July 13, 1898; *EF*, May 7, 1914; Heynen, 7; Critchfield, 209.
- <sup>256</sup> *WLJ*, July 31, 1925; July 21, 1927; Riney-Kehrberg, 57.
- <sup>257</sup> *JCR*, August 5, 1898.
- <sup>258</sup> *FT*, September 2, 1892; September 8, 1897; December 14, 1904; December 27, 1905; November 27, 1907; *FWJ*, September 8, 1897; August 16, 1899; February 7, 1900.
- <sup>259</sup> *FT*, May 18, 1887; August 24, 1887; July 29, 1891; *FWJ*, October 27, 1897; *FL*, June 12, 1907; June 10, 1908.
- <sup>260</sup> *WLJ*, May 25, 1898.
- <sup>261</sup> *FT*, December 6, 1905.
- <sup>262</sup> *FT*, April 24, 1879; *FWJ*, October 19, 1905; *BN*, February 3, 1921; *BN*, September 16, 1922.
- <sup>263</sup> *JCR*, February 9, 1906.
- <sup>264</sup> *FT*, June 21, 1893; March 15, 1898; February 8, 1905; *JCR*, June 3, 1898; *FL*, May 24, 1905; July 22, 1908.
- <sup>265</sup> *FT*, October 13, 1898.
- <sup>266</sup> *FWL*, January 13, 1921; *BB*, February 9, 1956.
- <sup>267</sup> *BN*, June 30, 1927.
- <sup>268</sup> *FT*, August 25, 1909; June 25, 1920; *WLJ*, November 16, 1922.
- <sup>269</sup> *WLJ*, September 1, 1927; December 29, 1927.
- <sup>270</sup> *FT*, October 4, 1899; June 29, 1922; *EF*, May 23, 1912.
- <sup>271</sup> *WLJ*, January 21, 1926; August 25, 1927; July 19, 1928; November 22, 1928; Berry, 115.
- <sup>272</sup> *FL*, December 6, 1922; *FT*, December 7, 1922; *WLJ*, December 8, 1927.

- <sup>273</sup> *BN*, November 30, 1916; Inman, 370.
- <sup>274</sup> Pederson, 4; Burns, 73; Dorothy Schwieder in Bergman, 329, 335.
- <sup>275</sup> *FT*, October 20, 1921; *FWJ*, May 16, 1900.
- <sup>276</sup> *BN*, September 20, 1923; March 15, 1928.
- <sup>277</sup> Atherton, 184-185; Walker, 289.
- <sup>278</sup> *BN*, July 26, 1923; *WLJ*, April 21, 1927; August 25, 1927.
- <sup>279</sup> *BN*, March 1, 1923, February 28, 1929.
- <sup>280</sup> *FT*, July 13, 1922; Pederson, 206.
- <sup>281</sup> *BN*, June 21, 1929.
- <sup>282</sup> *FT*, May 14, 1890; May 21, 1890; October 16, 1889.
- <sup>283</sup> *FT*, December 25, 1889; October 16, 1907.
- <sup>284</sup> *JCR*, July 27, 1906; September 28, 1906; *FT*, April 1, 1908.
- <sup>285</sup> *BN*, January 6, 1916; *BNHE*, July 2, 1936; Brown, 63.
- <sup>286</sup> *JCR*, May 16, 1902, *BN*, July 16, 1925.
- <sup>287</sup> *WLJ*, January 19, 1922; *FT*, March 30, 1922.
- <sup>288</sup> *FT*, June 1, 1922.
- <sup>289</sup> *BN*, April 26, 1934; March 20, 1941.
- <sup>290</sup> *FT*, April 21, 1921.
- <sup>291</sup> *BN*, April 22, 1926; June 14, 1929; September 12, 1929.
- <sup>292</sup> Charles J. Fulton, 221; *BNHE*, July 2, 1936; Brown; McNiel, et al; *OCHF*, July 1, 1976.
- <sup>293</sup> Mason, 92.
- <sup>294</sup> *FT*, December 5, 1900; *JCR*, February 23, 1900; September 11, 1900; March 21, 1901; *FL*, August 22, 1906; December 30, 1908; *OC*, clipping, no date, 1886, Ottumwa Public Library.
- <sup>295</sup> Mills, 192; Sterling, 195-197; "Ottumwa a Rough Town in Ferber's Day," *OC* clipping, no date, Ottumwa Public Library; Steve Walker, "Ottumwa Recalls Red Light Days," *OCHF*, July 1, 1976.
- <sup>296</sup> *FT*, July 18, 1894; January 30, 1895; July 5, 1899; July 12, 1899; *FWL*, March 10, 1921.
- <sup>297</sup> *FWJ*, December 21, 1898; *FWL*, March 17, 1921; *WLJ*, May 18, 1922; July 7, 1927; June 30, 1927; November 28, 1928.
- <sup>298</sup> *FWL*, July 25, 1900.
- <sup>299</sup> *JCR*, June 30, 1905; *EF*, December 23, 1915; *BN*, January 6, 1916; Stong, *Hawkeyes*, 144.
- <sup>300</sup> *BN*, February 7, 1918.
- <sup>301</sup> *FT*, March 15, 1918; *BN*, June 28, 1918.
- <sup>302</sup> *FT*, February 16, 1922; *BN*, April 22, 1926.
- <sup>303</sup> *BN*, April 2, 1936.
- <sup>304</sup> *WLJ*, June 4, 1925; *BN*, October 27, 1932.



- <sup>305</sup> Kesselring, *As Batavia Grew over the Years*, Typescript, no date.
- <sup>306</sup> *FWJ*, October 6, 1910; March 8, 1911; *FDJ*, September 5, 1910; Trout, 53; Lord, 215.
- <sup>307</sup> *JCR*, May 13, 1910; *FWJ*, May 25, 1910; June 22, 1910; September 28, 1910; August 2, 1911; *FDJ*, September 3, 1910; *FWJ*, September 28, 1910; *FWL*, May 31, 1911; *FWJ*, August 2, 1911.
- <sup>308</sup> *FWL*, May 18, 1910; *FWJ*, January 4, 1911; February 22, 1911; August 16, 1911; *WLJ*, July 7, 1927; Charles J. Fulton, 385; Berg, 62.
- <sup>309</sup> *FWJ*, August 18, 1909; May 25, 1910; January 25, 1911; *JCR*, January 14, 1910; November 11, 1910; *FDJ*, September 9, 1910.
- <sup>310</sup> *JCR*, November 11, 1910.
- <sup>311</sup> Charles J. Fulton, 401; Atherton, 324, 327.
- <sup>312</sup> *FJ*, July 22, 1908.
- <sup>313</sup> *FWJ*, May 25, 1910; June 15, 1910; July 13, 1910; July 20, 1910; September 5, 1910; January 18, 1911; August 9, 1911; *FDJ*, June 15, 1910; September 9, 1910.
- <sup>314</sup> *FL*, August 30, 1882; May 21, 1910; *FWJ*, April 6, 1910; May 11, 1910; May 25, 1910; July 13, 1910; September 28, 1910; February 15, 1910; *JCR*, November 4, 1910.
- <sup>315</sup> *JCR*, February 18, 1910.
- <sup>316</sup> *FT*, February 3, 1909.
- <sup>317</sup> *FL*, September 5, 1906; *JCR*, July 15, 1910; *FWJ*, September 7, 1910; December 7, 1910; January 11, 1911; *FWL*, March 22, 1911; Geraghty, 78.
- <sup>318</sup> *FWJ*, January 12, 1910; January 18, 1911; January 25, 1911; February 8, 1911; February 22, 1911; March 1, 1911.
- <sup>319</sup> Andrews, 36; Wookey, no page; Ferber, 40; Barnes, 266.
- <sup>320</sup> *WLJ*, December 8, 1927; Doig, 184
- <sup>321</sup> *FT*, March 23, 1887.
- <sup>322</sup> *FT*, May 26, 1921; Geraghty, 61.
- <sup>323</sup> Fuller, 191; Grover, 188, 203; Reynolds, 235; Stong, *Hawkeyes*, 160.
- <sup>324</sup> Critchfield, 196.
- <sup>325</sup> *BN*, October 10, 1918.
- <sup>326</sup> Barry, throughout.
- <sup>327</sup> *FT*, May 26, 1921.
- <sup>328</sup> Geraghty, 69; Reynolds, 72-73; Riney-Kehrberg, 86.
- <sup>329</sup> *FT*, March 2, 1910; April 3, 1912; August 7, 1912; November 16, 1922; *FDJ*, August 30, 1919; *FL*, September 14, 1920.
- <sup>330</sup> *BN*, April 13, 1916; June 19, 1919; *FDJ*, September 2, 1919.
- <sup>331</sup> *WLJ*, January 26, 1922.

- 332 *FL*, August 8, 1928.
- 333 Van Etten, 209; Andrews, 146.
- 334 *FT*, May 26, 1921.
- 335 *JCR*, November 15, 1898.
- 336 *FT*, May 26, 1921.
- 337 *FL*, January 10, 1906.
- 338 *FJ*, October 4, 1911; *BN*, November 20, 1919; Geraghty, 138, 141; *WLJ*, November 2, 1922; *FT*, November 30, 1922; *BNHE*, July 2, 1936; Judy Krieger, "Ottumwa Recalls Early Days of Girls Basketball," *OCHFP*, July 1, 1976.
- 339 *FWJ*, February 3, 1904; March 14, 1906; November 14, 1906; *FL*, January 31, 1906; February 5, 1908; *JCR*, February 20, 1914; February 4, 1915.
- 340 *FWL*, January 13, 1921; February 10, 1921; *WLJ*, March 17, 1927.
- 341 Lord, 257.
- 342 *FL*, August 25, 1919; *BN*, September 1, 1921; March 31, 1921.
- 343 *FT*, February 1, 1923; *BN*, May 31, 1923.
- 344 *BN*, March 20, 1921; March 27, 1921.
- 345 *WLJ*, June 7, 1928.
- 346 *FT*, April 16, 1920.
- 347 *WLJ*, September 7, 1922; Dorothy Schwieder in Bergman, 332.
- 348 Lord, 92; Russel Nye, 374.
- 349 *BN*, April 12, 1923.
- 350 *WLJ*, April 14, 1927; Russel Nye, 379.
- 351 *WLJ*, April 20, 1922.
- 352 *BN*, September 28, 1922; December 14, 1922.
- 353 *WLJ*, May 24, 1928.
- 354 *FT*, April 13, 1892.
- 355 *FT*, May 13, 1880.
- 356 *BN*, December 6, 1923.
- 357 *BN*, December 2, 1920; *FWL*, February 17, 1921; *JCR*, November 11, 1915; Kaufmann, 120.
- 358 *FT*, May 26, 1921; November 23, 1922.
- 359 Jennings, "The Country Teacher," *AI*, 31, 52, July 1951; *SHSI Ms.*
- 360 *FT*, September 28, 1904; May 15, 1907; January 1, 1913; *OC*, March 23, 1907; *EF*, January 21, 1915; Andrews, 121.
- 361 *WLJ*, November 11, 1926.
- 362 Kaufmann, 122.
- 363 *BN*, August 30, 1923; January 10, 1924.
- 364 *WLJ*, March 20, 1924; February 24, 1927; April 14, 1927; December 1,

- 1927; August 30, 1928; September 6, 1928.
- <sup>365</sup> *WLJ*, November 22, 1928.
- <sup>366</sup> *WLJ*, November 5, 1925; August 18, 1927; September 1, 1927; September 8, 1927; December 1, 1927.
- <sup>367</sup> *WLJ*, April 30, 1925; May 24, 1928.
- <sup>368</sup> *JCR*, November 11, 1915; *FT*, May 26, 1921; *WLJ*, September 1, 1927; *FL*, November 25, 1974.
- <sup>369</sup> *JCR*, September 17, 1909; *BN*, September 4, 1919.
- <sup>370</sup> *FL*, June 7, 1905.
- <sup>371</sup> *BN*, November 15, 1923; *FLJ*, November 22, 1923.
- <sup>372</sup> *BN*, November 11, 1924.
- <sup>373</sup> SHSI Ms.
- <sup>374</sup> Robert E. Belding, "An Iowa Schoolgirl—1860s Style," *P*. 58 (Jan/Feb 1977), 11.
- <sup>375</sup> SHSI Ms.
- <sup>376</sup> *FT*, May 26, 1921; Fuller, 129; Geraghty, 58.
- <sup>377</sup> Theobald, 97-101.
- <sup>378</sup> *FL*, October 8, 1868; Reynolds, 5, 29, 225, 235, 246.
- <sup>379</sup> *FT*, January 14, 1891; January 21, 1891; September 7, 1892; *FJ*, July 6, 1905.
- <sup>380</sup> *JCR*, March 13, 1903; April 10, 1903; August 9, 1912; March 13, 1914; *FT*, January 15, 1913; May 26, 1921; George S. May, "Iowa's Consolidated Schools," *P*, 37 (Jan 1956), 34-56; Reynolds, 226-227.
- <sup>381</sup> SHSI Ms.
- <sup>382</sup> *BN*, June 5, 1924.
- <sup>383</sup> *WLJ*, March 1, 1928; March 15, 1928; April 5, 1928; April 12, 1928; April 26, 1928; May 24, 1928.
- <sup>384</sup> *FL*, November 8, 1923; Jennings, *The Country Teacher*, SHSI Ms; *Readin' . . . : A Bicentennial Project*, 54.
- <sup>385</sup> *FWL*, January 6, 1921; Lord, 203, 312.
- <sup>386</sup> *WLJ*, October 18, 1928.
- <sup>387</sup> *WLJ*, November 1, 1928; Pearsall, 18-19.
- <sup>388</sup> Mills, 19; *Readin' . . . : A Bicentennial Project*, 55.
- <sup>389</sup> *WLJ*, November 10, 1921; December 22, 1921; *FL*, December 19, 1921.
- <sup>390</sup> *WLJ*, February 7, 1924; April 10, 1924; *FL*, July 14, 1924.
- <sup>391</sup> *WLJ*, June 4, 1925; September 3, 1926; December 16, 1926; January 6, 1927; January 28, 1927; April 28, 1927; *WLJ*, January 28, 1927; Lewis, *Main Street*, 15; Lewis, *Dodsworth*, 233.
- <sup>392</sup> *FT*, December 14, 1885.

- <sup>393</sup> *WLJ*, June 30, 1927.
- <sup>394</sup> Lynch, 60; Feikema, 489.
- <sup>395</sup> *FT*, September 15, 1921; *WLJ*, January 5, 1922; January 19, 1922.
- <sup>396</sup> *WLJ*, March 2, 1922; January 31, 1924.
- <sup>397</sup> *FWJ*, June 15, 1899; *JCR*, December 29, 1905; *EF*, February 10, 1916; *FL*, March 30, 1935.
- <sup>398</sup> *WLJ*, June 24, 1926; July 22, 1926; September 2, 1926.
- <sup>399</sup> *WLJ*, June 30, 1927; December 1, 1927.
- <sup>400</sup> *WLJ*, July 14, 1927; August 18, 1927; *FL*, June 17, 1927; Berg, 71-72.
- <sup>401</sup> Quick, *Vandemark's*, 397.
- <sup>402</sup> SHSI Ms; *Readin' . . . : A Bicentennial Project*, 141.
- <sup>403</sup> *BN*, September 23, 1923; May 7, 1925.
- <sup>404</sup> *BN*, May 26, 1927; *FLJ*, May 26, 1927; *WLJ*, March 8, 1928; May 3, 1928; May 31, 1928; August 2, 1928; October 4, 1928.
- <sup>405</sup> *BE*, February 25, 1926.
- <sup>406</sup> *FL*, April 25, 1923.
- <sup>407</sup> Edna Spencer, SHSI Ms.
- <sup>408</sup> *FL*, April 30, 1929.
- <sup>409</sup> *FL*, April 26, 1929; April 27, 1929; April 29, 1929.
- <sup>410</sup> *WLJ*, June 7, 1928.
- <sup>411</sup> *BN*, May 2, 1929.
- <sup>412</sup> *FT*, April 28, 1909; Kingsolver, 322; Harnack, 79, 85; Black, 54; Mann, 355; Scot, 217.
- <sup>413</sup> *FT*, April 28, 1909; *EF*, March 7, 1918.
- <sup>414</sup> *FT*, August 7, 1879; September 18, 1884; August 29, 1889; October 4, 1899; *FWJ*, July 13, 1899; *EF*, July 11, 1912; *FT*, August 10, 1904; July 14, 1909; July 16, 1909; *FL*, August 2, 1905; *WLJ*, August 16, 1923; Messenger, no page.
- <sup>415</sup> *FT*, March 20, 1879; October 28, 1880; September 17, 1885; December 25, 1889; Riley, 220.
- <sup>416</sup> *FT*, November 27, 1889; Feikema, 262.
- <sup>417</sup> *FT*, October 5, 1898
- <sup>418</sup> *FT*, June 9, 1881; *FL*, February 12, 1889; March 12, 1889; April 30, 1889; December 25, 1889; July 3, 1905; January 22, 1908; February 5, 1908; *EF*, March 13, 1913; April 10, 1913; December 11, 1913; April 16, 1914; February 5, 1914; *FWL*, January 6, 1921; *JCR*, April 24, 1914; Charles J. Fulton, 223.
- <sup>419</sup> *FT*, November 12, 1920; *BN*, November 22, 1934; *BNHE*, July 2, 1936.
- <sup>420</sup> *FT*, August 7, 1879; November 29, 1905; *FWL*, October 11, 1903; *EF*, February 19, 1914; September 11, 1919; *IHI*, Fall 2005, 104.

- <sup>421</sup> Quick, *Vandemark's*, 139-141.
- <sup>422</sup> *FT*, April 10, 1895; August 17, 1904; October 30, 1912; *FL*, May 15, 1907; *EF*, June 17, 1915; *BN*, October 13, 1927; *WLJ*, February 7, 1924; October 11, 1928; December 23, 1933.
- <sup>423</sup> *BN*, April 25, 1929; *FL*, April 26, 1929; April 27, 1929; April 29, 1929; April 30, 1929.
- <sup>424</sup> *BN*, November 11, 1920; November 18, 1920; November 25, 1920.
- <sup>425</sup> *FT*, April 28, 1921; *FL*, April 29, 1929; Skinner, 157.
- <sup>426</sup> *BN*, August 11, 1932; Davis, 272-273.
- <sup>427</sup> *BN*, June 2, 1932; March 4, 1937; *FL*, December 31, 1928; August 9, 1934.
- <sup>428</sup> Brown, 67.
- <sup>429</sup> *EF*, July 11, 1918; *WLJ*, January 24, 1924.
- <sup>430</sup> *BN*, November 3, 1927; *WLJ*, November 23, 1927; December 1, 1927; *BNHE*, July 2, 1936.
- <sup>431</sup> *FL*, February 4, 1983; *BN*, May 23, 1929; *FT*, April 28, 1921.
- <sup>432</sup> *BN*, March 5, 1936; March 12, 1936; Huffman, no page.
- <sup>433</sup> Green, 7-8, 62-63.
- <sup>434</sup> Black, *Outline*.
- <sup>435</sup> *FL*, October 5, 1922.
- <sup>436</sup> *BN*, November 17, 1927; *WLJ*, July 21, 1927; September 22, 1927.
- <sup>437</sup> *BN*, January 4, 1923; August 2, 1923; *WLJ*, February 12, 1925; June 9, 1927.
- <sup>438</sup> Russel Nye, 393.
- <sup>439</sup> *WLJ*, August 30, 1923.
- <sup>440</sup> *BN*, March 8, 1923; *FL*, February 24, 1927; *BB*, June 14, 1973; Kesselring; Krause, 168, 328, 384.
- <sup>441</sup> *EF*, July 22, 1920; J.I. Case, Michigan State University, Special Collections; Suckow, *New Hope*, 43.
- <sup>442</sup> *BN*, Jan 6, 1921.
- <sup>443</sup> *BN*, March 9, 1922.
- <sup>444</sup> *BN*, January 9, 1930.
- <sup>445</sup> *BN*, September 19, 1929.
- <sup>446</sup> *EF*, June 24, 1915; *BN*, October 31, 1929.
- <sup>447</sup> *BN*, February 22, 1934; Hudson, 263-264.
- <sup>448</sup> *FL*, July 3, 1919; *FT*, March 18, 1921; May 12, 1921; June 9, 1921; October 27, 1921; November 3, 1921; Egan, 43; Welty, 324; Kramer, 198.
- <sup>449</sup> *FT*, March 1, 1918; October 25, 1918.
- <sup>450</sup> *EF*, July 31, 1919; December 11, 1919.



- 451 *FT*, April 14, 1920; April 23, 1920.
- 452 *WLJ*, June 14, 1923; January 14, 1926; Kramer, 192, 199.
- 453 Ferguson, *War*, 191.
- 454 *FL*, December 26, 1924; February 19, 1925; February 27, 1928; November 7, 1928.
- 455 Arnold, 102; Stong, *Hawkeyes*, 173.
- 456 Welty, 324; Nelson, 116; Choate, 40.
- 457 Hudson, 437.
- 458 *WLJ*, November 22, 1928; August 23, 1928; Kramer, 245.
- 459 *BN*, January 16, 1936; *BNHE*, July 2, 1936; Waterman, 281-282; Kramer, 193, 201; Shover, 25-26.
- 460 *BN*, June 27, 1935.
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- 466 *BN*, March 21, 1935; June 6, 1935; June 20, 1935; Wolfert, 1-100.
- 467 *BN*, August 8, 1935.
- 468 *BN*, January 23, 1936.
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- 474 *BN*, May 8, 1924; January 17, 1935.
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When to the sessions of sweet silent thought  
I summon up remembrance of things past,  
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,

But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,  
All losses are restor'd, and sorrows end.

—William Shakespeare, from "Sonnet 30"

