

Recollections of His Father by Maurice M. Whitten

The children of Anthony and Charlotte Whitten received much of their early education on the premises at Lowestoft. There was a one-room schoolhouse a short distance from the house. It served as a district school for several sheep stations. The teachers boarded at various homes in the area. All the teachers were men; my father never saw a woman teacher until he came to the U.S. He disliked most of his teachers, There was only one that he liked; I think his name was Jack Ward. He made up rhymes for many lessons in geography and history.

My father always had a warm place in his heart for his oldest brother, Robert. One sadistic teacher caned one or more students every day. Robert went to him after classes one day and said, "If you cane those two young boys, you will have to deal with me afterwards." I believe they didn't get caned the rest of the year.

Some of the boys once in a while would ask grandfather Whitten, "Why do we have to go to school?" His answer, "To learn to read and write and to cipher and to learn some law."

When my father was going to theological school in Sydney, some classes would have in a guest speaker. One day, they had the Superintendent of the Insane Asylum in Sydney. After his lecture, he was answering questions. One student said, "What are the major causes of insanity?" He promptly replied, "Slow horses, fast women, and bad grog,"

My father was assigned to do student preaching in some town about 150 or more miles from Sydney, I think possibly toward Broken Hill. He got off the train and a man came to him and said, "Are you the new student preacher for the Methodist Church?"

My father said, "I am." The man then introduced himself and said, "I am from the Methodist Church and am here to inform you that the chief layman in the Church is Mr. Bastard and you'd better pronounce it "Bah-stard" or you will be taking the next train back to Sydney." My father thought it was hilarious. I don't know how he kept a straight face when he met Bastard.

The two brothers were leaving Australia about the time of the Titanic disaster. Some people refused to board ship at various ports because the ship was part of the Cunard White Star Line fleet which also owned the Titanic. Superstitious. Incidentally, my father was never seasick even in real bad storms. Uncle Alf sometimes got seasick when the ship was tied to the dock.

The brothers had discussed coming to the U.S. but did not make the final decision until they were in England. They wanted to compare theological education in the U.S. with theirs in Australia so enrolled as special students for the fall semester, 1912, at Drew Seminary (Methodist) in Madison, New Jersey. At the end of the semester, Alf left to go home. There was a girl waiting for him. She became Aunt Ethel. My father decided to stay for the Spring Semester, 1913. In several classes, frequent references were made to books and articles by faculty at Boston University School of Theology. My father decided he would like to go there for a year, 1913-14. While there he became friendly with a young Methodist minister from Maine. In the spring of 1914, the young minister told my father that he had an opportunity to be pastor of a desirable church in the mid-west. The Bishop of the Boston Area (included Maine) would not release him unless he found a minister to go to Maine. So the minister said to my father, "You are long on theory and short on practice. How about going to Maine for me?" My father did.

While at Boston, my father was licensed as a student supply pastor and was assigned to a church in Putney, Vermont. He took a train every Saturday to Putney, preached Sunday morning and took an afternoon train back to Boston.

My farther joined the Maine Methodist Conference, Spring 1914, and was assigned to the Churches in East Pittston and North Whitefield. He was there 1914-16. It was a rule of the Conference then that a minister could only stay two years in a parish.

Stupid rule!!!! He was appointed to the Church in Harmony, Maine, 1916-1918. The principal of the high school was Harold G. Noyes. His wife was Esther Steere Noyes from Rhode Island. Early in 1917,

Esther had her oldest sister, Caroline A. Steere, come by train to visit her. When Caroline came, she met my father. They were married in April, 1918, in Rhode Island. The rest is history!

Transportation:

In 1917 in Harmony, ME, my father bought his first car, a second-hand 1914 Model T Ford. He had several Model T Fords over the next 12 or 13 years. In 1930, in Strong, (named after a governor of Massachusetts) ME, he bought a new 1929 Model A Ford. Our first car with glass windows all around.

When my father came to Maine in 1914, he bought a horse, a buggy, and a sleigh. After he bought his first car, he sold the buggy but kept the horse and sleigh because, at that time, roads were not plowed and sanded. He sold his horse and sleigh in spring of 1919. For the next few years, he rented a horse and sleigh if the roads were too bad for cars to travel.

Naturalization:

My father became a naturalized citizen of the U.S. in 1922 at Knox County Courthouse in Rockland, ME. He said, "I never felt as much affection for King George V as when I had to swear disaffection to him before swearing allegiance to the U.S."

Interesting incident:

My father was appointed to the Methodist Churches in North and East Vassalboro in 1940. When my folks went to the Board of Registration of Voters in town, one member of the Board, a lawyer (solicitor) said, "I understand you were born in Australia. Are you a naturalized citizen of the U.S.?" My father said, "Yes," Lawyer, "I cannot register you until I examine your naturalization papers." So, my father went home and got them. It was the only time in 27 years as a U.S. citizen that he had to show his papers.

Then it was my mother's turn to register. The lawyer, "Mrs. Whitten, when did you marry Rev. Whitten?" My mother, "April 10, 1918." Lawyer, "Mrs. Whitten, you cannot vote because under the law at that time, you lost your citizenship because you married an alien." My mother, "I have been voting in every election since women were given the right to vote in 1920. I think that's the most stupid law I ever heard of!"

Net result:

My mother, technically, was a woman without a country for about 22 years. So, in 1940, she became a naturalized citizen of the U.S. at Kennebec County Courthouse in Augusta. I think she didn't say "thank-you" to the clerk who presented everyone with a small U.S. flag at the end of the ceremony. That "stupid" law has long been gone!

Titanic & the Olympic - Sister Ships:

I think because my father and Uncle Alf left England to come to the U.S. on the Olympic which was the sister ship of the Titanic. Owned by White Star Line, built in Belfast, Ireland, completed in June 1911. 44,440 tons. Capacity: 2021. Passengers; officers and crew: 850.

In those days British passenger ships always had Sunday Church services. On the Olympic, my father preached at the Sunday morning service and Uncle Alf assisted. For the evening, their roles were reversed. I believe that if there were no clergy on board, then the Captain conducted the services using the ritual of the Church of England.

And another note from Maurice 20 June 2013:

My father's diary was destroyed when the Church, parsonage, school, and many houses in Newfield, Maine were destroyed by fire in October, 1947. That day there were 87 fires burning out of control in Maine. My folks only had about 10-12 minutes to put a few things into the car and escape.

I had some of Uncle Alf's diary transcribed and sent to me. I think Murray's wife did it. My father always said, "Alf kept a much better diary than I did."

I see by Jeannine Baker's letter that she is interested in passengers from Australia to the North Pacific. Uncle Alf never did. He went in the opposite direction.

At the risk of boring you, I will outline the brothers' journey:

They left Sydney, sailed south and west to Perth, then to the Holy Land, Rome, etc. to England. They were still in Australian waters when news of the Titanic sinking (April, 1912) came to them by "wireless telegraph."

In England, they decided to come to the U.S. Did so on the Olympic, sister ship of the Titanic. Passenger capacity: 2020. Officers and crew: 850.

Left from Southampton.

My father said: "Many passengers planning to get on at Southampton refused to get on. Superstitious".

In the U.S., the brothers went to Madison, New Jersey, to sign up for classes at Drew Theological Seminary. Alf signed up for a quarter; my father for a year. Alf went to Canada (late in 1913) and travelled by train across to the west coast. Then got onto a ship for Australia. I think he stopped in Hawaii, then home.

This April on our way home from Florida, we went out of our way to go to Madison, N.J., where I walked around the Drew Campus.

My father finished the year at Drew, then went to Boston University for a year, then came to Maine in 1914. So much for history.

I doubt if Maine Historical Society has anything about my father. I know the Librarian there, Nicholas Noyes, and will check with him soon.