

38. Life in Bloomington

So what we have learned through all this rambling discourse, Little Dear One, is that the circumstances were right for Johnnie and me to make a great success of our dairy farming adventure in Wisconsin. Not only had we a move-in-ready farm, but we were on the cusp of that whole period in history when so many changes were occurring: telephone, electricity, cars, gasoline engines, roads, and improvements in rail. Our farm had telephone service and the possibility to hook up to electricity, which we soon did. Our farm was only four miles from town and on a major road, the fairgrounds road, which meant that the road was better maintained than many other roads, which, in turn, meant faster and easier transport of milk to town or to cheese factories. In addition, Johnnie and Lena had spent five months improving the fields and harvests, which meant that Johnnie was ready to increase his herd, which, in turn, meant greater milk production and profitability. Johnnie and I were quick learners because we were highly motivated to prove ourselves to family and friends. Johnnie also had a quiet, unassuming way about him that made it easy for older and more experienced farmers to share their knowledge with him. His immediate connection to the New Glarus operations gave him access to the latest information and innovations, including cooling processes, milking machines, and cows for his herd, which he could buy directly from New Glarus if he wished. One of the most important factors in our success, of course, was that we had an automobile. With our Ford Model T Johnnie could get our milk to the creamery or the cheese factory in half the time a team of horses would take. With our Model T all the heavy farm work like plowing and harvesting became faster and easier.

Indeed, we were so successful in our venture that this is what happened within three years of our move to Wisconsin:

- On February 28, 1911, our good friends Bernard (Ed) and Lena Hermsen bought a farm near us, 120 acres for \$9720.
- In April of 1911 we bought our first automobile, a 1911 Ford Model T Touring Car For \$750.
- Within six months we were connected to electricity from town, which we could use at designated times of the day.
- On July 5, 1911, our first child was born, your Daddy, my Little Dear One, and what a truly wonderful day that was for us! How we loved our sweet baby boy!
- On March 1, 1913, my brother Joe and his wife Lizzie bought a farm near us, 160 acres for \$24,000.
- December 31, 1913, your Daddy's brother Marvin was born, our second beautiful baby.
- On March 2, 1914, Johnnie's father bought three sections of land near us, 160 acres, 80 acres, and 40 acres, a total of 240 acres, for \$30,800.
- On February 15, 1914, Johnnie and I bought our farm from his father for the agreed-upon price of \$17,500, the remaining balance after we had paid rent for three years. So in three years and three months after we moved to Wisconsin we owned a 240-acre farm free and clear, had two telephone service connections plus electricity, owned an automobile, and had two beautiful, healthy baby boys! It is easy to understand why Johnnie and I look so proud in this 1914 photo, my favorite photo.



Two more children were yet to be born to me, Lucille on December 22, 1915, and Patricia on March 23, 1918, just six months before I had to come to this hill. Let's return now to the way Bloomington was when I was living there.



Sprague & Hatch Building

Ora Hatch had his drugstore in the right side of this large 1880s building known later as the Legion Building. The left side was a bakery and restaurant in 1912, and sometimes when Johnnie and I were in town we would stop in for a special baked treat, something different from what I baked at

home. The photo below was typical of Bloomington's main street in our first years in Bloomington, as the first cars started to appear there and farmers would walk with their horses to avoid having them spooked by the loud cars. The sidewalks were brand new, installed in 1912. I was very grateful for them! But the street was still oiled gravel.



Main Street in 1912

Even though I loved our new Ford automobile, I still thought there was something lovely and romantic about transportation like this.



Many of the houses in town were large and comfortable, on well-kept plots and tree-lined streets.



Pritchett's Hotel



Pritchett's Palace of Sweets

For years our small town of Bloomington supported two regular hotels plus a number of rooming houses. The popular spot above, Pritchett's Hotel, stood on the corner of Canal and Pleasant Streets and was noted for "good grub and plenty of it." It was demolished in 1921 to make way for the Orr Bros. garage building, to service the many cars now flooding the streets of the village. In the early 1900s Pritchett's Palace of Sweets was a companion business to Pritchett's Hotel next door. It had a soda fountain, and they sold ice cream, fruit, candies, cards and tobacco. My little boys loved to stop in this store and would take many minutes to choose from the variety of candies they saw there. The ice cream available there was my favorite.

The Bloomington Post Office was in the Pritchett's Hotel for a number of years.

The next photos are different views of Canal Street in Bloomington, the main street in the town.





With each passing year there were more and more automobiles on the street, with only the occasional horse and buggy like the one below under the Ludden's sign. Some of the earliest cars were not Fords. On July 13, 1910, Dave Ballantine bought a 40 H.P. Lambert automobile. On July 24, 1912, R. N. Hoskins bought a new 1912 model Cadillac. On July 31, 1912, R. French bought a new E.M.F. Touring car.





Fire of 1915

Rubble marks the site of D. F. Brown's General Store following the fire of 1915. To the left is Brodt's Jewelry Store and the current Legion Hall. The old creamery occupies the site today.



Just a few short years after I came here, downtown Bloomington looked like this, chock-a-block with cars and trucks. It is quite astonishing how quickly that transition happened! The notation on the back of the card said, "Bloomington must be prosperous with all those Fords on Main Street." Many of these would have been purchased from the A.S. (Fred) Welsh Ford dealership.



And 20 years later, in your time, my Little Dear One, this is how the downtown area looked. That car on the right is what your Daddy's car looked like.



But while I was there, this is what things looked like, and I thought it was all quite wonderful.



This is Bloomington's own famous "Brooklyn Bridge" about 1901. It connected "the suburb of Brooklyn" with the main street downtown. This view is from Brooklyn looking west towards Main Street (Canal Street). The rear of the Ballantine and Record buildings are on the left. The first wooden wagon bridge across the ravine at this site, shown in the photo below, was built in the summer of 1877. Prior to that the ravine was spanned by an elevated foot bridge. In the autumn of 1891 a new and substantial steel structure was complete, joining the village with its "Brooklyn" subdivision.



The foot bridge on Second Street also connected Bloomington to Brooklyn and was always referred to as "Lovers' Lane." It was removed in 1957. This footbridge was one of my favorite things in Bloomington.

I always liked bridges, and most especially bridges you can walk across, like this one.





I was always too busy to walk it or just stand on this footbridge and watch the scenery, but I always tried to drive past it and admire it whenever I came into town. Fog in the bottom made it particularly enchanting.