

AFFECTIONATE RECOLLECTIONS BY A
GRANDSON OF
CHARLES COOLIDGE PARLIN
AND
DAISY BLACKWOOD PARLIN

by
Charles C. Parlin, Jr.

It seems appropriate that our generation—born between 1927 and 1935—should pay tribute to the original editors of this family profile. Charles Coolidge Parlin and Daisy Blackwood Parlin were our grandparents. We loved them.

At the corner of 35th Street and Park Avenue in New York City is an old mansion which now houses the Advertising Club. On its walls hang portraits of the members of the Advertising Hall of Fame. Along with the portraits of John Wanamaker and other famous marketing people hangs the portrait of Charles Coolidge Parlin.

Grandpa is famous as the founder of market research. He was the first person to analytically study consumer markets and consumer buying habits. The Library of Congress in Washington contains dozens of his pioneering marketing studies of automobiles, department stores, etc. The American Marketing Association sponsors every year in Philadelphia the Parlin Memorial Lecture in recognition of Grandpa's great work.

But as kids we didn't realize what an impact Grandpa had made on the business world. We knew Grandma and Grandpa only as elderly folks who were lots of fun. Grandpa was round and short, had big ears, and was sort of funny looking. He loved to tell humorous stories and would laugh uproariously at his own jokes. On a number of occasions he would laugh so hard he developed a stitch in his side and had to go lie down—without even finishing the joke.

Grandma was round, a bit taller than Grandpa, and she had a lovely face. She must have been very beautiful as a young woman. I recall that she loved to arrange flowers, and that she cherished life-long friendships she had made as a girl.

There used to be a football game every Thanksgiving Day between Penn and Cornell at Franklin Field in Philadelphia. We all used to gather at Grandma's and Grandpa's house for Thanksgiving dinner and then go on to the football game. We sometimes stayed overnight. Since the house was a typical small Philadelphia row-house, we really packed it. These family gatherings for Thanksgiving Day were very jolly.

But we really got to know Grandma and Grandpa during the summers of 1937-1942. 1937 was our first summer in the big house at Silver Bay. The bedroom next to the sitting porch was Grandma's and Grandpa's room. Grandpa had just retired from the Curtis Publishing Company and they used to stay with us all summer.

The boathouse at Silver Bay was also new that summer and we had a brand new speedboat, the Pinafore. Grandpa was the official captain and had a uniform appropriate for that high office—a gray jacket and a white yachting cap. How he loved to take guests and grandchildren on rides on Lake George in the speedboat!

The only problem was that he was a lousy driver. Especially did he have a very distinctive style of docking the boat. Once he had the boat aimed at the boathouse slip he would drive at what seemed like top speed. Just at the last moment he would jam the propeller gear into reverse with the motor still going full blast. The screeching noise was terrific! What's more, the system didn't work very well. More often than not, the boat would crash into the dock. All the kids were scared stiff.

After a while only the unwary would volunteer to go with Grandpa for a boatripe. We were too polite to refuse outright, but we were ingenious with excuses. However, Grandma used to loyally round up reluctant passengers for Grandpa by subtle appeals to family loyalty. If necessary, she resorted to not-too-subtle bribes involving ice cream and other goodies.

I remember Grandma principally as being very good natured in a quiet sort of way and loyally supporting Grandpa in his family projects. I also remember her reading quietly to the grandchildren when they were sick—and on rainy days.

But if we hated the boat rides, we sure loved the movie shows! Grandpa liked to take motion pictures and he took good ones. He

laboriously edited them with title inserts and since these were silent movies, he used to provide a running commentary.

After Grandpa retired he and Grandma had taken a cruise around the world on the *Stella Polaris*. This was a very small ship—really an overgrown yacht—and the cruise lasted many months. It stopped at all kinds of out-of-the-way islands in the South Pacific which had barely been touched by Western Civilization. A few years later the bloody events of World War II made many of these Pacific Islands well known. Rodgers & Hammerstein's Broadway Musical of 1950—*South Pacific*—and the jet airplane of the 1960s popularized the area for tourists.

But when Grandma and Grandpa visited these islands they were relatively unknown and unspoiled. Grandpa recorded the primitive ways of these strange places with his movie camera. What's more, he did it with color film which was then still very new. To preserve it he had to arrange with the ship's captain to store the color film in the ship's refrigerator. These motion pictures of native life were fascinatingly different and brilliant with gorgeous colors.

At Silver Bay the neighbors were frequently invited over to the big house for an evening of Grandpa's movies. Remember that TV was unknown and color movies were still a novelty. Grandpa's movies were very popular with everyone—including the grandchildren. The living room at Silver Bay was always packed for these shows.

Grandpa was also a marvelous speaker. No matter how often we saw his films and heard him give the travelogue, we always thoroughly enjoyed them. My favorite sequence was of a puberty rite on one of the islands. Before a boy could be recognized as a man of the tribe he had to jump over a large flat-topped rock without touching it. Grandpa's colored movies recorded, in slow motion, a number of unsuccessful tries and then the successful, triumphant, leap. How exciting this sequence was!

A scene recorded frequently in these movies was Grandma beaming happily and handing out candy to a large crowd of smiling native children. Note the parallel to Silver Bay—Grandma with great pleasure was loyally supporting Grandpa's projects with a harmless bribery.

What a tragedy that the color shortly faded on these marvelous films and they are no more.

Towards the end of the summer of 1942 Grandpa one day drove a number of the grandchildren down to Braisted's store (it is now the Silver Bay store) for some ice cream cones. The car weaved back and forth across the highway and the kids were terrified. It was reminiscent of the speed boat dockings.

It turned out that this wild ride signalled the beginning of Grandpa's final illness. He died in *the fall of 1942*. Stew was 15 and Blackie was 7. Grandma died about a month later, and her funeral was held in the living room of the big white house on Hillside Avenue in Englewood.

Undoubtedly it is our affectionate recollection of Grandma and Grandpa, as well as our enjoyment of their Volume 1 of this series, that has prompted the continuation of the series in this Volume III.