

CHAPTER XI

A TRIP TO MAINE

But I started to write about the trip with your great grandmother and your great great Aunt Cyrene from Wisconsin to Maine. We went by day train to Chicago and thence by sleeper to Niagara Falls. It was Grandfather's first night in a sleeping car - that is, the first of which he was conscious. As a baby his mother had taken him East for a visit, but, of course, he could remember nothing of that trip. Little did Grandfather then dream that he would live to travel more than a million miles by train and steamboat and automobile and airplane, and that for many years of his life he would average more than one night a week on the sleeper.

From Niagara Falls we went to Ogdonsburg, New York and thence by river steamboat through the Thousand Islands and over the rapids of the St. Lawrence River. Grandfather can well remember sitting at the very prow of the steamboat as we plunged over Lachine Rapids. The boat dashes right at a cliff and just as you feel sure the boat cannot escape striking the rocks, it swings gracefully around the corner. We stopped for a night at Montreal and went by daylight through the White Mountains, which seemed very wonderful, for the country about Brodhead was very flat. We continued in to Portland and thence to Skowhegan, Maine, where your great, great grandfather Parlin lived in a fine colonial home overlooking the Kennebec River. The home is now owned by the American Woolen Company who keep it as a home for their manager. It has been well kept up and some day, perhaps, you can see the home with its colonial doorway and its curious staircase which used greatly to entertain us young folks.

The story of the house is rather entertaining. A man who for some years had been "going with" a young lady finally decided to build a fine home and then propose marriage to the young lady. This man owned a sawmill and he gave orders to his men to sort out pieces of pine which had no knots. As Grandfather recalls the story, it took this man three years to accumulate enough knotless lumber and to build the house. With the house completed, he asked the lady - by this time not so young - to become his wife, only to find that the lady had got tired of waiting and had accepted another man. So he sold the house to your great, great grandfather Parlin.

Your great, great grandfather Parlin was not large of stature, but was very dignified in manner. He always dressed very neatly and, on the street, in accordance with the best practice of his day, usually wore a high hat. He took great interest in his garden, which after his death was sold to the city of Skowhegan as a site for the public library.

His wife, your great great grandmother Clymena Steward, as your grandfather has always understood, although the names are spelled differently, was a cousin of A. T. Stewart, who founded the first great department store in America (the present John Wanamaker store in New York). She had died several years before our visit. Your great great grandfather had married again to a very nice woman whom all the family liked.

Your great great grandfather, feeling himself growing old, invited as many of his children as could to come to Skowhegan for a family reunion. To this family reunion at Skowhegan came your great great Uncle George with his wife from Machias and your great great Aunt Ella Parlin

Coolidge from Chattanooga with her children - Elizabeth, Walter, Ned and Ellen - all younger than your grandfather. Cousin Elizabeth was recently reminding your grandfather how as a boy of sixteen he used to stand on a large stump and orate to all the assembled children - quite early and quite literally, as you see, making stump speeches. We had a grand time at Skowhegan and the visit there is one of the choicest memories of your grandfather's life.

From Skowhegan your great great Uncle George took us to Portland and thence by steamboat along the Maine Coast to Machias. It was a great event in our lives and is still a vivid memory. In Machias your great great grandfather Burnham had a large colonial home with a garden extending from the house to the Machias River which at full tide was about half a mile wide. Great great grandfather Burnham and his wife had both passed away but the home was at that time well kept up by your great great Uncle Sanford. At a later time a railroad was put through along the river, destroying the lawn and cutting off direct approach to the river, and after Uncle Sanford's death, the place passed out of the family's hands. The last time your grandfather saw it, the house was only a wreck which seemed sadly to yearn for the days long passed, when one brother and seven sisters had filled the home with youthful merriment.

Grandfather had heard his mother many times tell how beautiful this river was and was very anxious to see its beauty. It was after dark when Grandfather arrived, but early next morning he jumped out of bed and rushed to the window to see the great river, and what do you suppose he saw - about a half of mile of mud with a little creek in the middle of it.

You see, the tide was out. Along this part of the coast of Maine the tide is very high and twice every day the water comes in and fills that river full right up to its very banks and twice a day almost all the water runs out to sea again, just leaving great mud flats.

By about eleven o'clock the river was pretty well filled with water and Uncle Sanford let your grandfather take his row boat and go out for a ride, but cautioned him to be sure to be back before the tide turned. But in that day boys sometimes did not listen so attentively as they should to the advice of their elders. What a joke that Uncle Sanford did not think Grandfather was strong enough to row against so little a thing as a tide. So Grandfather, although he intended to do what his uncle had suggested, rowed down stream too far and when he got part way back, found that the tide had started out and, row hard as he could, he could not make progress. So he quickly rowed to shore and drew the boat up on the bank.

Soon Uncle Sanford came running down the road greatly excited. He noticed that the tide had turned and was afraid your grandfather would be carried out to sea. Grandfather now saw how very important the warning of Uncle Sanford had been and although he went out in the row boat many times thereafter, he never again took a chance of getting caught by the tide and swept out to sea.

A few miles from Machias lived Cousin George Swett, who was just about Grandfather's age. When Grandfather went to visit him, George suggested that he and Grandfather go deer hunting in the dense forest which began within walking distance from George's home. George had only one

deer rifle, but that would probably be enough. Grandfather had never been hunting before and this was a new and thrilling experience. We carefully crompt through the woods for several hours and became quite tired. We had seen no deer, but a partridge flew up and lit on the limb of a tree. Grandfather suggested that we shoot the partridge. George said that the bullet would tear the bird to pieces. Grandfather said: "Then let's just shoot its head off." George laughed and said: "You try" and Grandfather, who did not have enough experience to know how difficult this was to do, with beginner's luck shot the head square off, much to the amazement of George. We did not see another partridge, so Grandfather emerged with a reputation in George's mind for being a crack shot. Finally, as we approached the clearing, we gave up looking for a deer and George threw the rifle over his shoulder - when crash through the woods just ahead of us went a deer. Before George could shoot, the deer was gone.

From Machias we returned by boat along the Maine Coast to Portland just when the autumn foliage was in all its glory and thence back to Wisconsin by train. Grandfather had much to tell the boys back home, of rivers with great rapids, stupendous waterfalls and swift tides, of mountains, of forests, and of the limitless ocean.