

Memories of Ottawa
By Clarence W. Moody
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FCHS Headlight
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When some of my old time-cronies around the Herald office asked me to indulge in a bit of nostalgia and write, of all things, memoirs of Ottawa experiences, I wasn't right sure whether to assume the role of Enoch Arden, Rip van Winkle or the Ancient Mariner. Enoch Arden, as I recall, came home a disappointed and disillusioned lover, and Rip van Winkle got back as a wizened and bewhiskered old man. While our own memories encompass some amours of an Ottawa locale, we've not yet gone in for whiskers and we're not yet willing to admit, even at 62, that we are worn and wizened. As for the Ancient Mariner, more about him later.

In beginning a treatise on Ottawa memories which always has and always will hold an upper-most cubicle in our small but ambitious brain, we scarcely know where to start. There are many places at which we might begin, so guess we might as well start at the beginning as far as we are concerned. As far as you are concerned, you'll be more interested in where we're going to leave off.

Without any stretch of the imagination, we can now go back better than 50 years because it was in the spring of 1904 that we first laid eyes on Ottawa and became a window washer and pearl-diver [dishwasher] for Detwiler's restaurant which was then at 129 Main. During odd times we carried messages for the old Home Telephone company when the U.S. Hannums were in charge and Manta Elder was a younger and eager student operator, with Minnie Taylor as one of the supervisors.

Main Street wasn't paved then. In fact, no other streets were paved, either...and Fred Dobson stirred up clouds of dust when he roared down the principal thoroughfares at the astounding rate of 15 miles an hour in the town's first automobile. The Davenport-Lathrop Dry Goods company, Mose Cohn's Boston store, H.A. Dunn, Jake Zellner's clothing store and George Watts' Leader were the principal stores...a man named Harkness ran a variety store and he had a nice daughter on whom we were a bit sweet at the tender age of 13. George B. Crane also sold dry goods and H.L.T. Skinner was a clothier where Bud Wassmer now holds sway [202 S Main]. S.B. Bodley and his sons ran the town's only cab service...it was horse drawn, of course, and Charlie Jacobson was one of the most expert hostlers. Farmers all got their horses shod at A.A. (Bony) Bean's on the east side of Main between the tracks and the river, while Remaley & Remaley were rival blacksmiths across the street. If you wanted to rent a fast steeper hitched to a fancy rig, you could be accommodated at the Hotel de Hoss up in the middle of the 400-block or at Jim Kerr's over at Second and Hickory. The OK Stables were

where the Hudson agency is now [?], and there was a whole string of livery barns in the Second street block where the post office is.

The big men of the town were the Underwoods... Bert and his brother [Elmer] whose name we've forgotten... John P. Harris and Peter Shiras, H., F. Sheldon, Henry Branson, E.M. Sheldon, Billy DeFord, John W. Pollack, L.C. Stine, the lawyer; J.L. Stratton, Adam Dobson, Sam Rohrbaugh, the Cranes of whom there were several, Charles Voorhis who eventually became a big executive in the automotive world, Judge Alfred W. Benson, John W. Deford, and Jim DeFord, Walter Costigan and his brother Sol, and many others...

(To be continued)

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Those were the days of the Chautauquas when as many as a thousand tents or more would be set up for two to three weeks over in Forest Park which also was equipped with very substantial buildings including the huge horseshow-like tabernacle. From the platform of that historic structure, long since dismantled, there came the nation's most distinguished names of clergy, statecraft and the entertainment world... William H. Taft and Theodore Roosevelt were among the political bigwigs, and so was William Jennings Bryan who came several times. The Rev. William A. Elliot was a busy figure in the Chautauqua. The Marais des Cygnes always rared (sic) up and went on a spree almost every time they held the Chautauqua and often drowned it out. Finally they gave up and let the critter die. They said the river had whipped them, but the truth was they had run out of money. They used to shake the public-spirited men of the town down for guarantees every season but this soon grew old with the donors.

Probably the town's best known carpenter and contractor in those days, outside of the Beeler family, was J.T. Black, Joe Black as everybody knew him. He was a tower of strength in the Methodist church and always helped run the Chautauqua. We recall one day when a noted male quartet was due to appear on the tabernacle's stage, and Joe was the first to greet them when they arrived at the park. He looked them over and then querulously remarked, "Only four of you?" Noting that he was serious, one of the quarter replied, "Yes, just four of us now."

By 1906 we and the town were getting up in the world. The first paving had been laid on Main Street, automobiles were becoming a little more numerous and John Nelson, whose big store on West Second Street handled everything from stove pipe to living room rugs, became the first Ford dealer. John was a born salesman but he never quite understood what made an automobile tick... He would call attention to the shiny brass lamps and the trimmings, to the horn that you pumped with a rubber bulb and then he would say "Wait

a minute and my boy Eddie will tell you all about how she runs.” Henry Houser was another early day automobile dealer...We think it was the Dodge he introduced.

We, too, had prospered and advanced. In addition to washing dishes and running errands, we also had acquired a newspaper route...We were the Herald’s second best carrier on the north side of the river. Ray Anderson was the only other carrier over there then, and neither of us delivered as many as 100 papers. The Herald now [1955] has five carriers over there.

However, business picked up suddenly one day for Ray and us. There was a Santa Fe policeman who lived on North Oak...His name was Bodley and he was shot and killed by a Negro preacher whom Bodley discovered robbing a boxcar in the Santa Fe yards. Everybody was interested in the murder...it was several days before the mystery was solved...and we would bring in 10 to 20 new subscribers every night. We won a gold watch in a circulation contest for it too...all the other boys wished for a murder on their routes.

Rusty Lucas, Joe Beeler and his brother, Fred; O.L. Hankins, Harold Hutchinson, Glen Spears, Elmer Manley, Pierre Elder, Lafe Jones, Sam Hubbard, Gardner Walker and Fred Houghton were colorful figures then in the then-coming-on generation. Fred Houghton probably was the first man to smoke cigarets (sic) in public and mothers used to point him out to their children as a spectacle of a ruined life. Rusty Lucas was the best snare drummer the town has ever known and was always in demand for GAR events and the old Rohrbaugh theater....

We could go on and on, but as we said in the beginning, you’re probably anxious for us to reach a terminus...and so are we. Here it is. We’ve decided to accept the role of the Ancient Mariner...good as our memory is in some cases, it’s not perfect, and like the Ancient Marnier, we’ve had to say to some who haled us, By thy long gray beard and glittering eye, now whyfore stoppest thou me?”