



Winifred Smith Hummel Revealed Through Her Love Letters to Barton Hummel 1901-02

Commentary by Barton's Grandson, Richard Hummel, March, 2013

The box of love letters between Grandma Winifred and Grandpa Barton Hummel from the 1900-1902 era provide the insights recorded here. I must confess this is a moving experience, reading the voice of my grandparents when they were young, 21 and 20 respectively. Voices from 110 years ago are coupled with the fact that I knew my grandmother in her later years, as she had suffered a stroke in 1948-49 and lived with my family and the family of my Aunt Marge and Uncle Curly for 6 months at a time in each household for the rest of her life (d. Feb. 1962). I berate myself repeatedly that I did not have the wits or interest to talk with her about her childhood and any stories she might recall of Barton and his life at Bonneyville Mill.

Winifred Smith loved the outdoors on moon-lit nights, boat rides on Pleasant Lake just north of Edwardsburg, Michigan, where she lived. She had attractive handwriting and wrote very literate letters to her beau, Barton Hummel, of Granger, Indiana. She was a fastidious, conscientious cook and housekeeper. She thought the Edwardsburg (when she was aged 20) was a dull place with little excitement happening.

In January 1901 she wrote to Barton and included two song lyrics that she claims she copied for Barton. One is very romantic and the other a tragedy about a crying child and her father on a train with a dead mother in the box car ahead of them. In the letter the game of crokinole is mentioned as being played in parties by Winifred's mother. She makes a reference to Teddy vs. McKinley.

In a letter in Oct. 1902, just before their wedding on Dec. 24, she lists the furniture pieces she will ask her father to make for them: kitchen cupboard, stand tables, work bench, pie board, ironing board, etc. She reported making a rug or two (hooked?) and some sofa pillows for their upcoming new home.

Late in the school year 1902 she complains to Barton of a bad day where she disciplined two girls for whispering after being instructed not to. The girl's sisters began their own whispering campaign, claiming Winifred was unfair and showed partiality. The letters display repeated lovers' misunderstandings, longings to be together, pleadings to write long letters, come and visit.

Barton writes in October from Elkhart about his first days on a new job in a foundry. His arms hurt from lifting and he went to bed at 7 pm. He had an accident riding his bike home after work. He tried to avoid hitting a dog in the path and fell off and skinned his knee and tore his pants.

A letter from Barton Oct. 1901 he reports sowing wheat and rye and doing harrowing. He may have been doing this work for others for pay.

Almost all social events involved going to church or community band concerts.

April 22, 1902 letter to Barton asking about reports of Small Pox in Edwardsburg and wanting news from him regarding that. Winifred was teaching school in Adamsville, Michigan and boarding with someone. She reports homesickness. She declares she wishes they could be married right away.

Barton writes after returning from working on a wheat threshing crew, reporting they "threshed 8,007 bushels of grain."

Distance between Granger, IN and Edwardsburg, MI is 4.1 miles. Distance between Granger, IN and Adamsville, MI is 7 miles. Time required driving horse and buggy unknown.

Dec. 1901 Winifred reports horrible headaches (at age 20) that persisted, I recall, in her diary of 1937, preceding her stroke in 1949. Then she reports a friend's mishap the previous evening on the way home from church Sunday evening when he and his sweetheart ran their buggy (from a livery stable) into a tree and broke the whiffletree(?) He had some trouble finding another buggy to use and a lantern! She asks Barton to come down so they can practice songs they are to sing if they get an invitation. (?)

Dec. 11, 1901 she reports that "butchering" was conducted at her house or nearby yesterday and she never wants to see any more "meat."

March 9, 1902 she expresses anxiety over the tests she has to take at "Cass" that I assume are for her high school graduation. She talks about her graduation photos that cost her \$.01 apiece!

She refers to band concerts on "the island" just "downtown" and laments that she is not in it. Did she play a band instrument? The "island"—was that some feature of Pleasant Lake? No island structures appear on modern satellite maps of the lake. Puzzle!

July 8, 1902 she writes of attending a show downtown involving large snakes on display and the demonstration of snake handling.

She was visiting 422 W. Jackson St. in Elkhart on October 8, 1901, her aunt and cousin. Looking for work?

In April 1902 she wrote to Barton about her teaching job in Adamsville, the day before and the first day of school. Here is her reaction to her first day:

April 26, 1902, Wednesday P.M.

My Dearest Love—

“I have accomplished my first day’s school work, and really I don’t know what to think of it myself. I can’t say that I like it and yet I don’t really dislike it, but would far sooner do housework any day. I got along all right I guess, but I have got so much to do that I can hardly think, and at times I don’t know which way to turn. My head rings with every thing tonight, and I don’t wonder that school teachers get cross and cranky. I expect I will be a regular old crank when I get through up here. I wish this was the commencement of the 9th week instead of the 1st.”

That’s where the letters end. A cousin, Noreen Ward, granddaughter of Effie (Hummel) Held, (sister of Barton) recalls that Effie described Winifred as very, very superstitious.