

## An Innocent Abroad: An Iowan Tours Europe In 1912\*

EDITED BY  
WALTER F. PETERSON AND JANET ARNTZ

*Mr. Peterson is an Associate Professor of Hsiotry at Lawrence University, Appleton, Wisconsin. Miss Arntz is working on her M.A. in History at the University of Oregon.*

Red Oak, Iowa in 1912 was a bustling town of 4,500 people whose lives centered around their square, their churches and their one and only industry, the Murphy Art Calendar Company. The ambition of the Montgomery County pioneer farmer was to retire to Red Oak, the county seat, and enjoy the hustle and bustle of life on the main line of the C. B. & Q. railroad. George Binns did just that. His white frame house on 8th street was in sight of the railroad and only six blocks from the square. His daughter, Florence Binns, was close to the heart of Red Oak through her association with the three main elements of the town's life. As secretary to Thomas D. Murphy, leading citizen, Florence moved, in vicarious fashion, in the upper levels of the social scene and as a leader in the Methodist church, she upheld with diligence the religious and moral attitudes of the community.

The step from town leader to world traveler did not seem a great one for Florence, judging from the diary of her European tour in 1912. Despite her lack of experience in traveling, she seemed to apply her background to the trip with abundant success. Miss Binns seemed to prove that a European tour, if planned sufficiently and correctly, was no more trouble than a trip to Des Moines, though perhaps a bit more exciting. And this tour was certainly well planned. A graduate of the Des Moines Business College and an unattached woman of thirty-three, Florence was not given to impulsive actions. The view one gets from the diary is one of a guide book, a Cook's or Baedeker's tour. Every detail is laid out with precision so that posterity is able to read that Florence —

Took 3:00 o'clock train for Toronto, reaching that station at about 8:00 A.M. June 19. Breakfast at station, auto ride on sight-seeing tour, then took boat at 11:00 o'clock for Sewisten. Dinner at hotel here, then took gorge car for Niagara Falls. Beautiful ride with climax at end of trip. At Table Rock, we alighted from car and went into curio house, climbing several flights of steps and at the top had fine view of both falls - American falls at left and Canadian falls at right.

Florence Binns' own methodical personality and training naturally led her to choose a conducted tour for her European travels. The discipline of a guided tour then and now allows one to dash through a country and still see everything one should see. From the very nature of the organization of the



FLORENCE BINNS

diary, the reader can see that such a schedule pleased Florence. Constantly on the move, visiting 35 Canadian and Western European cities in two months, Florence still took time to write rather extensive accounts of what she saw. In order to preserve the memory of her travels in detail, she made good use of guide book descriptions in writing in her diary at the end of a busy day.

Our first important encounter with Florence Binns, through her diary, occurs on the trip across the Atlantic. As the personal secretary to Thomas D. Murphy, she naturally traveled in first class accommodations. The benefits of traveling in style were many, as Florence quietly points out in her diary. One had the pleasure of dining with the captain and the advantage of more social and intellectual contacts. Her encounters with steerage passengers were rare although she did visit the steerage quarter to see, it seems, how "the other half" lived.

The opportunities for intellectual stimulation as well as entertainment were varied for the first class passengers. On the first Sunday out, Florence is present at a religious service conducted by a Reformed Lutheran minister and at an "impromptu concert . . . more or less sacred in character." Later in the week she participates in a round table discussion on the book, *Our Forces and How to Use Them*, although she must admit that "our remarks are not always in keeping with the serious nature of the book." The less serious entertainments of the voyage include a Virginia Reel "danced amid great hilarity."

The routine of the ship pleased the methodical mind of Florence Binns. She notes with interest the ceremony of saluting passing ships and the afternoon boat drill of the crew. After reading Florence's description of the drill, one may well speculate on the safety of the passengers.

A boat drill was given in the afternoon. The officers and crew all line up and at the call of the bugle scatter, each to his place. A couple of life boats are lowered a few feet, then returned to their places

Being a virtuous, God-fearing woman, Florence was unconcerned with any pessimistic possibilities. Although it was her first time at sea, Florence acquitted herself very well. She proudly records that while others were confined to their cabins for days, she enjoyed 14 rounds about the deck and the delicious meals. She was never seasick!

One by one the people disappear into their staterooms, and I consider myself fortunate to be up when seasickness has attacked every other one of our party except Miss McL. Shuffleboard and quoits have suffered a decline. Some are in their chairs, looking the

picture of dejection; some lying around on couches. I walk fourteen times about the bridge deck, which makes a mile.

From her notes, one may assume that the sea voyage was, all in all, a pleasant one. But how could it be less when one had "a pretty little boy in sailor costume," outside one's stateroom to sound reveille each morning.

Florence and her party arrived in Scotland on July 2, 1912 and proceeded directly to their first destination, Anderson's Temperance Hotel in Melrose. As a strict Methodist of the revivalist tradition, Florence was thoroughly in agreement with the principles of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Neither she nor her companions wished to become associated with individuals of "low" moral standards. Not that such an association would be harmful to one whose own principles were high, but it was best to avoid temptation, even during a vacation. Despite her caution Florence did happen upon two instances which might have shocked a weaker woman. One concerned those Frenchmen who "enthroned a disreputable woman" in Notre Dame Cathedral during the French Revolution. Such elements of history were really better left unsaid. In Rome's National Museum, Florence came upon "one room where no women are allowed to go — vulgar statues from Pompeii." Such experiences were overlooked in the light of the numerous examples of a generally healthy moral atmosphere which Florence saw — the hundreds of churches and the Sunday services. The Sabbath was always observed by the party even in areas of Italy and France where a Methodist service could not be found. The group organized their own quiet observance with a Bible reading or short talk by one of them. A vacation from Red Oak, Iowa did not mean a vacation from one's duties.

One notices in reading the diary of Florence Binns that the extent to which she enumerates the details of a tourist attraction seems to indicate the extent of her interest. She rather naturally copies nearly word for word the information provided by the guide catalogues on Shakespeare's home. These books were actually very helpful for no one could possibly be expected to remember all the minute details of such a scene. With these aids Florence could, for the remainder of

her life, describe Shakespeare's birthplace precisely for the satisfaction of her family and friends.

*Shakespeare's Birthplace*, Half timbered house with leaded glass windows. Enter door at left and see room with stone floor somewhat sunken (said to be probably caused from butcher's block, a butcher having lived in house since S's time). Quaint fireplace. Old desk removed from Grammar School. Beamed ceilings. At right is room used as museum. Seven books printed during his lifetime dates 1600-1619. Picture of Globe theatre. Old deeds indentures and autographs framed on wall. Ascend stairs and see collection of Shakesperian books, double room. Mantel piece carved chair. Busts of S. Kitchen — large fireplace, small sitting room, restored and reduced in size. Windows restored. Stains original. Out of kitchen stairway winds into room where S. was born. Many names written on plastered walls and scratched on windows before there was a guest book. Names of Carlyle, Scott and Browning. House sold to Butcher in 1806. Wool room. Portrait of Shakespeare by Gainsboro, locked up every night.

The English heritage of literature, law and custom shared by Florence Binns with most Americans made England more understandable and the time spent there a bit more precious. While the continent existed for purposes of observation, England was to be appreciated. One faced the problem in London of so much to see with so little time. As a consequence her diary sometimes reads:

In afternoon go to London Tower (see guide)  
Visit National Art Gallery (see catalog)

Although her descriptions of those attractions which would be on the guide route are detailed, Florence is little aware of other points of European life. Her mention of scenic beauty is infrequent and a bit uninspired. Switzerland may be proud that its countryside rates a rare burst of enthusiasm — "Magnificent scenery surpassing everything seen previously." But France's famed Luxembourg gardens receive only an "effect not bad" while England and Italy get only a passing glance.

If Florence did not appreciate the natural beauties of the European countryside, she understood and appreciated the political activities even less. The year 1912 was a fairly eventful one in European affairs. Italy was waging war against Turkey to gain colonial territory in Africa; The Balkan nations joined in a concentrated attack upon Turkey to achieve complete independence; existing European alliances were strengthened and new ones were formed; Germany was frightening Europe with her enormous arms build-up. But

none of these events interested Florence; perhaps she was unaware of them. At any rate her only brush with anything vaguely related to political life occurs in the ruins of Pompey where she notices, "signs on buildings — 'Don't forget Saladius the Roman' — supposed to be a political campaign on."

Continental political affairs in 1912 were a remote and uncertain quantity to most Americans — Europe was so far away. The history of the area was far removed in point of time and becomes increasingly vague and inexact in direct proportion to its romantic appeal. Florence apparently saw no great difficulty in attributing the Grand Trianon to Louis XV rather than Louis XIV. To her the difference must have seemed minimal, but it does seem unlikely that even Louis XIV could have built it in the early thirteenth century when he came to the throne as a child of six in 1643.

As a staunch Methodist reared in a Protestant community, Florence Binns naturally was little acquainted with the Roman Catholic faith. Her lack of understanding of Catholicism becomes evident when we read of her visits to the cathedrals and shrines of Europe. She is curious about the ceremonies surrounding different shrines, particularly those involving indulgences.

Drive to Scala Sancta, a flight of steps brought from Jerusalem near end of Crusades. Said to be those on which Christ ascended to Pilate's judgment hall. No one may ascend except on knees. (8 people on way). Nine yrs. release from purgatory for each of 28 steps ascended.

"Money offerings (to some saint buried below) thrown over railings" of Milan's cathedral even while "service taking place" does engage the interest of Florence although it seems unlikely that she contributed. But she is most struck by the statues of the popes, one with "diamond eyes" at St. Paul's in Rome and by the "muscular Christ" of Michaelangelo in the Sistine Chapel. Despite, or perhaps because of, her constant contact with Catholicism, Florence thought it imperative that she visit Rome's English Protestant cemetery to view the graves of Keats and Shelley. The inspiration received from this short visit probably remained with Florence throughout her tour of Catholic Europe.

Although Florence was concerned with those points of in-

terest which were emphasized on any European tour; monuments, art galleries, churches, castles and the like, she did occasionally notice the activities of the people of the countries. Her attitude toward these people is generally one of curiosity, though this is mixed with a slight sense of superiority.

Afternoon — took street car for Schevingingen, a Dutch fishing village. People generally in Dutch costume. The surprise of the phenomena of Dutch Costume in Holland is matched only by her later discovery that in Ireland "few can speak a word of English."

The European tendency toward what American tourists have long considered unsanitary living conditions shocks Florence a bit.

Children come running, wooden shoes clattering on pavement. One child stops at fountain to drink from shoe, then hurriedly puts it on. Washday in Naples. Drive through side streets. People living in street—washing clothes, cooking spaghetti, cooking corn, mending shoes . . . selling fruit and dirty bread.

She seems equally distressed by the European's seeming desire for money.

All lined up to be taken [Kodak snapshots] then swarm about us crying "money" — the one English word they seemed to know. Pennies thrown among them — chase us to our car, Mrs. B. said she had no money but they pointed to gold in her teeth. Old woman begging — gives blessing for money — "God carry you save home and give you plenty to eat."

Florence's concern for the niceties of life was a natural result of her upbringing. In the United States people simply did not live in such a manner, at least not in the company in which Florence moved, and she knew little of other classes. The tendency of Americans to look with a feeling akin to superiority upon the Europeans drew the former together during their tours. Prior to World War I the American tourist in Europe was the exception rather than the rule. Florence notes with a decided pleasure that she encountered a couple from Baltimore in France. At one point, Florence and her party gathered in London, with evident relief, for a happy holiday, American style. Her true patriotic spirit is shown in Ireland where she views—

Eagle's nest—no eagles here except Am. eagles—best kind. Property for miles owned by Lord Kenmore — not a good landlord.

Mr. Vincent, an American, has estates adjoining — good landlord. Florence's patriotic fervor seems to be overextended when she begins to judge the relative merits of landlords.

Although the diary of Florence Binns' European tour is precise and serious in high degree, there are rare phrases which seem to indicate that Florence did possess some inclination toward romance, however small. Italy particularly brings out the heart of Florence. In Venice she swims in the Adriatic Sea, almost upon impulse. The spirit of Rome sends her to view the Colosseum by moonlight. But it is in romantic Naples that Florence becomes poetic:

Leave for Capri. Small boats take us to steamer. Bay of Naples brilliant blue; sky bright. Vesuvius at left, quiescent. Music on boat — singer, violin and guitar.

Unfortunately an attack of mosquitoes interrupted this idyllic scene bringing Florence back to the seriousness of life. Another such misfortune turned the romantic trip to the Blue Grotto of Capri into a mild disaster.

Pass Capri 11:00 A.M. and go on to Blue Grotto. Take small boats. Water very rough. Boat dashes against rocks at entrance and springs leak. Change to another boat. Roof of grotto very blue, water silvery. Pass through entrance in safety but waves thoroughly drench us. Hat lost, waist torn, dinner at room in Capri — priest, Father Anastasin, from N.Y. recovers hat. "Found a bird in water." Back to Naples in evening, hatless and with a new wet waist. *No more blue grotto for me!*

This last line has a finality which convinces one that Florence is finished with such romantic interludes and must return to the serious task of seeing Europe.

Toward the end of the tour, Florence indicates that the task is a rather tiring one. Her entry for Saturday, July 20, reads "We call this Sunday and rest." The activities for the afternoon consist of quiet naps and checkers. By August 1, the usually punctual Florence must "skip breakfast and rest . . . tired out." The weeks of travel and the hectic tour schedule were wearing, even for Florence and her Midwestern determination to do her duty. But the trip was soon to end, for on August 8 Florence said goodbye to her tour-mates in Paris and traveled to Ireland for her last week in Europe. It may surprise an American tourist of the present to find Florence referring to her companions as formally at the end of the trip as at the beginning.

Said goodbye to Miss Eversmyer, Miss Pasche, Miss Mitchell and Miss Fiske . . .

One must remember, however, that polite society of 1912 followed a stricter code of conventions than does society of to-

day. First names were rarely used for close friends and certainly never for acquaintances.

On August 17, the S. S. Athenia set sail for Montreal. The trip back seems to be much less enjoyable for Florence than the trip across. Even the evening concerts, before so stimulating, are "very long and generally dreary." Florence occupies the slowly passing hours on the voyage home with poetic pursuits, such as the following:

Blue, blue is the ocean,  
 And blue is the sky.  
 The waves are all sparkling,  
 The bright sun is high.  
 Green is the ocean  
 Near the white foam.  
 The waves are all dancing;  
 I'm on my way home!

But she certainly revives when she reaches the Canadian shore and is within a few days of Red Oak and her family. Her diary increases in tempo as she nears her home.

August 27, Ar. Toronto 7:30 A.M.

August 27, Lv. Toronto 8:45 A.M.

August 27, Ar. Chicago 9:45 P.M. Lexington

After lunch at Toronto meet Rev. and Mrs. Jenkins and Miriam on train. Lunch at Port Huron after inspection of Baggage on train by U.S. Custom officer. Dinner on train. Reach Chicago 9:45 P.M.

The trip across the Midwest to Iowa was occupied with the composition of poems of homecoming by Florence and her companions.

P. S. by Rev. James A. Jenkins, Omaha

Oh, its home again to Iowa, 'tis Iowa for me  
 I much prefer the cornfields to the blue and briny sea  
 When I can see the prairie, some corn, a bug or two,  
 Farewell to dukes and nobles and all the titled crew.  
 So it's off again and gone again, etc.  
 To see the lands historic, it surely takes the coin,  
 Next time I'm going to visit the state house at Des Moines  
 I'll make a bluff at Council Bluffs and then across the map  
 Hie me to Cedar Rapids, to hear the rapids rap.  
 So it's off again and gone again, etc.

P. S. by G. McI assisted by M. McG. and F. B.

Oh, its Athenia, Athenia, ne'er again for me  
 My stomach's turned against her, her coffee and her tea  
 I'm looking toward Nebraska, to the land of Steak and pie  
 With a table full of pancake that would almost make you cry.  
 'Twas good to see the old boat and travel up and down  
 Among the famous passengers and preachers of renown  
 To eat the sunshine pudding and duck put up in can  
 We somehow had to chuck it down to fill the inward man.  
 But it's Omaha and Omaha, Omaha for me

My heart is turning home again to fair Nebraska  
To the land of pork and plenty, to the best town in the state,  
Where we ne'er will feed the fishes  
With what we've taken on our plate.

Well-educated, perceptive Americans from Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson to the present have visited Europe with a genuine sense of appreciation. However, little note has been taken of the level of appreciation achieved by the average citizen. We have here a diary of an American tourist in Europe written in 1912; one that could just as well have been written in 1963. The grand memories remain and may become grander; but Europe, it seems, doesn't quite live up to the original expectations. The closing poems of the diary of Florence Binns express an evident sense of relief at the return to the home of the American eagle—the best kind.

---

## Few Recall 'Infidel' Town Of Salubria

BY GEORGE SHANE

*From The Des Moines Sunday Register*

*Oct. 7, 1951*

Farmington, Iowa—It is for the most part only the older residents of Farmington who remember today the story of Iowa's so-called "Infidel colony" which sprang up near here more than a century ago.

This was the colony of "The First Society of Free Enquirers," and the town name was Salubria.

It was founded by one of the most widely known ministers and intellectuals of the day, Abner Kneeland of New England, who came here to encourage formation of that unique settlement of fellow thinkers and their families.

The story of Iowa's other colonies and movements, religious or intellectual—the story of the Mormon trail, the Icarian colony of French at Corning, the Amanas, have been well publicized through the years.

But the town of Salubria and Abner Kneeland, with his

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.