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Strawberry Point Has Retained Its Name

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FROM THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

In 1893, America emerged from the tinsel and wonder of the World's Fair in Chicago to drop immediately into such a depression and panic as it had never experienced before.

Less than 200 miles west of Chicago, in its beautiful setting of rolling hills and fruitful fields, lay the quiet, self-sufficient little Iowa town, where I spent my earliest childhood—Strawberry Point. No radios blasted out the tales of unemployment and hunger in the nearby cities. There were no automobiles and no highways to drive them on; no planes to disturb the quiet; and at that time there were not even telephones in this small village.

Quite unaware of depressions, or even the rest of the world, the town went quietly about its daily living, secure, serene, and well-supported by the fertile farms around it.

The winter of 1893 Papa went to his father, who owned a large farm about four miles from town, to borrow money. Father was a photographer, and the town's one little studio was for sale. The amount of money needed for the venture was the sizable sum of \$500. Grandfather Roe was a good businessman when it came to marketing the produce from his 200-acre farm, but the vanities of life held no interest for him. Not a word was said about "hard times," not a word to indicate it was a hazardous time to go into business. Grandfather could see only one objection.

"But George," he remonstrated, "what will you do when all the people in town have had their pictures taken?"

Evidently Father's explanations satisfied Grandfather for he got the loan. Prosperity was not supposed to have returned

to the country until 1899, but by 1898 my enterprising parents not only had paid their debt to Grandfather but had saved \$500 more. This they used as a down payment on a home of their own—a home completely free of debt when the new century arrived two years later. In that unenlightened era a mortgage was shunned, and no home-owner breathed freely until the ogre of debt was completely vanquished.

Strawberry Point took its name from a triangular-shaped patch of wild strawberries at the west end of Main Street.

This broad, tree-lined street, skirted by comfortable homes, meandered leisurely downhill to the business district at the "Four Corners."

The Franklin Hotel, the pride of the town, stood at Four Corners. I doubt that it was built as early as 1893, but as far back as I can remember it was an important landmark. Uncle Frazee and Aunt Alma managed the hotel during all the years of my childhood. Every parade, in fact every event of any importance that took place on the streets of the town, we viewed from the large, bay window of the public parlors on its second floor. From that vantage point we could see far down the streets in all four directions.

Aunt Alma's private sitting room, with its large windows on the south and east, overlooked East Main Street and was the room I loved the best. Comfortable, bright and cheerful, it seemed to send out a special welcome to a little girl. In this pleasant room, with the kindly help of this loving aunt, I first learned to hold a tatting shuttle and make my first picot.

Cousin "Dory," Aunt Alma's niece, reigned supreme in the hotel's kitchen. Not even Aunt Alma gave orders to Dory. Her word in the kitchen was law and we all kept well out of her way when she was cooking for her "transients." She was as temperamental as any artist and was justly proud of her culinary skill. Probably it was Dory's cooking even more than the clean, comfortable rooms that made the hotel so popular.

The hotel bore the name that the town had tried very hard to make its own. When the railroad arrived it was thought that the town should have a more dignified name than Strawberry Point. Franklin was chosen and painted on signs at

either end of the station building (we called it a depot). But the town fathers and the Milwaukee Railroad reckoned without human nature. Strawberry Point the town had been for 25 years, and Strawberry Point it continued to be.

After a few months' trial, the signs on the depot came down and the conductor on the one daily train ceased singing, "All out for Franklin" to the passengers who continued to sit unconcernedly in their seats. They were going to Strawberry Point. Undignified as it may be, Strawberry Point it has remained. But to those who know the town and love it best it will always be "The Point."

The Wheels of Progress Roll in Strawberry Point

The Christmas of 1903 Papa surprised us with a Graphophone. As the little black cylinders revolved and the music came forth from the morning-glory horn we sat entranced. Never had we heard anything like this.

Strawberry Point could boast of a "dance band," occasionally road shows brought with them a musician or two, and once the "Cherry Sisters" regaled us with "Ta-ra-ra Boom-de-ay." But mostly we fed our hunger for music by providing it ourselves on the piano in the parlor. Now, with the advent of this wonderfully magic "music box" we heard really good music. How thrilled we were and how our feet tapped to the inspiring strains of Sousa's marches played by his famous band.

The Graphophone was only one of several inventions that began to seep into our little town from the outside world shortly after the turn of the century. One wonderful day, Papa had telephones installed at both the photograph gallery and home. What a help that was to the errand girl of the family! Not everyone shared our enthusiasm for this modern convenience. As a matter of fact, it was not considered of much use in the average home—what one has never had one doesn't miss!

When Great-Uncle Eddy had a telephone installed in his drug store, his father did not try to hide his disapproval. With his strict, Quaker background Great-Grandpa was inclined to

distrust any new "contraption," especially one as noisy as the telephone.

One morning, soon after the new instrument was installed, he was "tending store" for Uncle Ed, and upon his return Great Grandpa, with a nod of distaste toward the telephone, greeted him with the remark, "That thing on the wall made considerable noise while you were gone."

"Did you answer it?" questioned Uncle Eddy.

"Yes," said Great-Grandpa, "I went over to it and talked into it. I said, 'Eddy will be back in half'n hour'—but the thing kept right on ringing."

"But did you take the receiver off the hook and put it to your ear?" Uncle Ed persisted.

"I certainly did not," Great-Grandpa replied with spirit. "I wouldn't touch the thing. But I talked right up to it, just like you do."

This new invention had become well accepted throughout rural Iowa and practically every prosperous and progressive farm home was equipped with a phone by the time automobiles made their appearance. Uncle Charlie, Papa's brother, bought the first one in our part of the state. It was a two-cylinder Rambler—a seven-passenger red touring car. Horses were terrified when they met this monster on the road, and farmers often called Uncle Charlie on the telephone before they ventured into town to do their trading. If he was planning to be out with the car that day, the farmer deferred his trip to town rather than risk an encounter which might very well end in a runaway.

There were no side doors on the touring cars in those days. The center back seat lifted up and, when the door at the rear of the car was opened, a step dropped down. After the back-seat occupants had filed in, the center seat was let down again. The car had a right-hand drive, and the crank (no starter, of course) was on the driver's side. There were wicker baskets along the sides of the car to carry the luggage and wraps. The top, a canopy affair, was never raised except when a rainstorm threatened. When it was up it interfered

with the speed of the car, and we did so enjoy skimming along the country roads at the thrilling speed of 20 miles a hour!

The summer of 1903 Uncle Charlie invited our family to accompany him and his family on a trip to western Iowa. That was real pioneering. There was no place to buy gasoline except at hardware stores, and not a repair man to be found in all the 200 miles we traveled. The tires were poor, so loose they slipped, often pulling off the valve stems. We soon resigned ourselves to at least a half-dozen punctures a day.

Another daily problem on the trip was that of runaway. Never a day that I did not hide my head in Mama's lap while some beautiful horse reared, balked, or ran furiously. Uncle was very quick to stop the car and give a helping hand.

Cars were a real curiosity that summer of 1903. When we arrived in a town, a crowd would gather almost before we stopped, asking all kinds of questions. Farmers would telephone ahead to their neighbors that an automobile was coming, and often whole families lined up at the fence to watch us go by.

Our destination was Marcus, Iowa, where Grandfather Roe's brother lived. Except for the two days we were there, we spent the full two weeks we had planned to be away just traveling or attempting to travel the 200 miles. In retrospect, it seemed to Mama, Aunt Belle, and me that we spent most our time sitting by the roadside in the broiling August sun waiting for the men to patch and patch and patch our unreliable tires.

The inner workings of this huge machine were undependable, too, and neither Uncle nor Papa were mechanically inclined. At the little town of Newell, on the return trip, the car rebelled completely and we were stranded there until repairs arrived from the factory.

In spite of the difficulties we experienced on the trip, however, Papa was still very enthusiastic about this new invention. With spirits undampened by Uncle Charlie's troubles, Papa began to talk about the need of a car to drive to his branch galleries, so Mama and I were not at all surprised when one day Papa returned from Cedar Rapids driving an Oldsmobile

roadster. It looked very much like our old buggy, except that it was steered by a long lever.

Papa was accompanied home by a young mechanic who departed by train the following day. We saw him leave with many misgivings and our fears were well grounded. The car proved every bit as temperamental as Uncle Charles' model. However, when it was on good behavior, the car sped along so smoothly and swiftly (to us who were accustomed to the leisurely pace of Black Bess) that all the trouble it caused us was quickly forgotten.

The dirt roads were definitely a drawback to pleasant driving. At that time there wasn't a paved road in all Iowa, nor a paved road in Strawberry Point. Usually we came in from a drive completely covered with fine white dust. Mama and I always wore thin coats (dusters they were aptly called) to protect our dresses, and our hats were securely anchored to our heads with flowing veils.

Probably the worst experience of all was to be caught out in a rain that turned the roads into rivers. If we were unfortunate enough to be on a clay hill, then the wheels began to spin and we knew we must throw ourselves on the mercy of a nearby farmer. He came with his team, hauled us into his yard, and usually offered us the hospitality of his home for the night.

Papa's sisters were not too eager to ride with either of their brothers. But one day, when Aunt Eleanor was visiting us, Papa talked her into going for "a little spin." All went well at first, but it was not long before we heard the ominous skip-skip-skip which prophesied trouble. From the expression on Papa's face and his listening attitude, she knew he was concerned about something.

"What's bothering you, George?" she shouted. (One had to shout to be heard above the roar of those ancient automobiles. They sounded like threshing machines.)

Papa answered that one of the cylinders was missing.

"Oh, that's too bad," she sympathized. "Do you suppose you left it in the garage?"

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