

CEDARCROFT

By Mary Margaret Moninger

The following is a small section of a family history written by Mary M. Moninger in the early 1940s. Miss Moninger was born and raised in Iowa, attended Grinnell college from which she graduated in 1913, and taught school in Iowa for two years. In 1915, she went to the Island of Hainan, South China, as a missionary under the Presbyterian Board.

This history, entitled "Cedarcroft" after the name of the family farm home mentioned below, typifies family farm life in Iowa in the late 1800s. A previous chapter of this history was published in the Summer issue of this magazine. "Cedarcroft" is here published by permission of Miss Louise Moninger and Mrs. Helen Moffatt, sisters of the author.

By 1902 Father and Mother were ready to carry out a plan they had made when they moved to their farm in 1892—to build a new home in ten years. By that time there were three children in the family, Margaret (the author), Dorothy and Helen.

The housebuilding was a wonderful process for us all. During the spring Father was getting materials ready, and he rented out the farmland that summer to be free for other things. Marshalltown, nine or ten miles away, was our nearest town of any size. As I remember those days, some lumber came by freight to the "station," as we always referred to Moningers; some came to Albion on the Iowa Central and some to LaMoille on the Northwestern. It was hauled home from these places and stored in the granary. Some Daddy hauled from town, riding down "on the reach" and coming back with his load. The masons came, and the carpenters—four men did the carpenter work. The men all slept on the spacious upper floor of the granary, which they facetiously called the "Pilgrim," as Marshalltown's elite hotel was called. Anna Reynolds, the girl who helped Mother for several years, and I made the beds every day and kept the place clean and tidy. We all ate together at a long table, set in whatever part

of the house that was not torn up. After dinner, the men sat under the trees and talked and cracked nuts until time for work—they were union men and kept union hours.



Cedarcroft

When the house was finished it was a comfortable, pleasant place, with plenty of room. There were three rooms in the cellar. The old cellar we used for storing canned fruit and for potatoes, apples, squash (I can feel my mouth watering now at the thought of the huge Hubbard squashes Dad cut open for Mother with the big corn knife; we had them baked in big pieces on the shell, or steamed—as only Mother could steam squash), turnips, onions, cabbage, eggs packed down in salt, hams and bacon, pickles in brine, vinegar in kegs, sorghum molasses in covered pails, and whatever else we stored away for winter food. The new cellar had the furnace room, with a heavy wall between it and the old cellar, so the food supplies would not get too hot, but still would not freeze. Adjoining the furnace room was the big wood room, piled high with the three-foot hickory logs we burned in the first furnace for many years, before a coal furnace was put in.

On the ground floor the kitchen and pantry and separator room and bathroom were in the old one-story part of the original house, to the east of the new part. The dining room came next, then the sitting room, which was really the living room. This room had a little southeast-southwest bay window for Mother's plants, and room enough for the sewing machine in front of the southwest window. The fireplace faced the south door; there was a double mantel and a mirror over it and our clock stood on the top shelf of the mantel. A little vestibule opened off the south side to the main verandah and we kept our second-best outdoor wraps, etc., in this vestibule. There were sliding doors between the dining room and the sitting room, and also between the sitting room and the parlor which was a sunny southwest room with three "tower" windows and a big west window. Father's big roll-top desk and swivel chair (which we usually called the "whirly chair") were in the sitting room but Mother's smaller desk and the piano were in the parlor, and there were bookcases everywhere. In later years an old-fashioned sofa from Grandma Kellogg's house in Grinnell, a "horsehair" one, stood against the wall near the piano. I remember one Christmas vacation when Auntie was playing Christmas carols on the piano; John kept turning summersaults on the old sofa, but Auntie did not stop him, and commented afterwards, "He never missed a note in singing all the time."

Making over an old house and adding new rooms always gives unexpected angles and corners, and our house was no exception. The front hall wandered around, so to speak, from the dining room between the parlor and sitting room on one side, and Mother's and Father's bedroom and the stairway on the other, to the proper "front door," opening on the west side of the verandah towards the road; only that door was not often used—the south door was the real entrance. It was possible in cold or stormy weather to drive right up to the porch steps, and there Mother would meet her guests or her returning family. I can see her yet—it is my favorite memory of her—in a fresh white apron over her dress, her hair neat and tidy, welcome in her smile and her softly shining brown eyes, and often the cheery light from the fireplace almost making an aureole around her head.

Upstairs there were five bedrooms. The large many-windowed room over the parlor was the main guest room. There was an alcove off that room, with a couch lounge in it that was a favorite retreat for me when we did not have guests. It was a lovely place to lie and read. The southeast room was generally known as mine after we no longer had a girl to help with the housework and occupy it. The northwest room was Dorothy's and Helen's for many years and, after that, Louise's. The northeast room was Uncle Henry's while he lived with us, and later John's. The cozy wee room tucked between two others, on the east side of the hall, was Auntie Park's when she spent the winters on the farm. Over the bedrooms there was a gorgeous big attic, all safely floored, where we could store things, dry the washing in the winter, hang up the popcorn ears, etc. The tower room of the attic had a big shelved cupboard full of reading matter—files of the "Youths Companion" from about 1872 on, "Chatterbox Annuals," "Godey's Ladies' Book" and all sorts of other interesting things that came from Grandma Moninger's attic when that place was sold.

The octagonal tower roof was shingled but had a metal tip and metal strips down the edges. The woodpeckers seemed to love to test out their bills on the metal. At least, we often heard the brisk rat-tat-tat of their drilling, and when we had guests in the tower room below, we used to try to remember to tell them not to be frightened when they heard that noise. The woodpeckers made music on the windmill wheel, too, but, that wasn't so terrifyingly close.

The big verandah around the south and west of the house was lovely for riding tricycles and pulling express wagons, and for the porch chairs and swing. Wisteria and madeira vines trained over the west side to keep out the summer sun. A Crimson Rambler and a Seven Sisters rose climber over their trellises on the south. A magnificent trumpet vine covered the bay window and even wound around the windows of my room above the kitchen roof. Native white clematis festooned the back porches, and there was a big purple clematis vine on a front porch trellis.

The front yard, grove, house site and garden must have been almost a city block in extent. At first there was a board fence along the west side next to the road, and along the south

side between the house yard and the barnyard. This was a lovely fence for children to play on. The baseboard was about a foot high, painted red. The four evenly-spaced four-inch boards above were painted white. Then, joy of joys, a five-inch board lay flatwise on the top, slanting at about a 30-degree angle. How many hours we spent walking the top of that fence! There were hazards in the journey; two little picket gates didn't have the flat board top, and we were about ready to graduate *cum laude* when we dared walk the narrow, narrow strip making the upper part of the gate, without touching the pickets. A lovely big soft maple tree, up in whose branches we had a seat, stood right in the path of the fence, and we had to get down and walk around it, until we were big enough to clasp our hands almost half way around the rough trunk from one end of the fence to other and manage to slide around without getting down. Our teeter-totter board was on this fence, too, sometimes under the big maple tree and sometimes over by the lilac bush near the stoop. We started with the teeter board resting on the baseboard of the fence and gradually put it up, board by board. I think Mother was always glad the top board slanted so we could not use it for the teeter and the board could go no higher.

Some of you may know what a stoop is, but your children will not. Some people called it an "upping block." In the days of horse carriages and buggies, the wheels were so high that there was always a little iron step on the buggy to help you climb in, but many places had a stoop, too, near the gate and the hitch racks. The stoop at our house was a platform about three feet high, even with the fence on the driveway side. It was about four by four feet in size, with broad, easy steps at one end leading into the house yard. Thus, our guests could step right from the buggy floor to the platform and the horses could be hitched right there under the double row of evergreens—if the guests were not staying long enough for the team to be unhitched and put in the barn to be fed. I used to use the stoop to get up on my pony when I first got him, and was plenty proud when I could scramble up on the saddle without any help. When I was dressed up and rode sidesaddle, though, I always had to use an upping block, or else step on someone's outstretched hand.

We had a 50-foot windmill just a few yards from the house. The first tower was of four wooden timbers, with a wooden wheel; but, years later, when it went over in a big wind, fortunately striking no buildings hard enough to do very serious damage, a three-post steel tower was put up, with a steel wheel. Oiling the windmill—and riding the disc—were the only farm tasks Mother worried about and she was anxious when Father or any of the men were doing either, but there never were any accidents. The well was a drilled one, 197 feet deep, with lovely clear cold water so “hard” that it coated the tea kettle with lime; left rusty sediment if it stood too long; had to be “broken” with lye when used for laundry purposes (we had cistern water nearly always sufficient for washing clothes and dishes, and for bathing purposes); and had a mineral taste which, while not unpleasant, made any other water taste as flat as an egg without salt. When Father bought the farm the only drawback was lack of sufficient water—the four dug wells on the place were not sufficient for use. Sam Burger came and “witched” for the water, either with a witch hazel stick or an apple tree limb, and an 84-foot well was dug; in the spring there was 60 feet of water in the well. So the big Halliday mill was put up—and pumped the well dry in two and a half hours! A well-drilling man working at a nearby farm agreed to drill on down from the bottom of the dug well, charging only for the casing. He struck rock at 194 feet and went down 3 feet further to strike a vein which has never gone dry. I can just remember when they “witched” for the water, and the squash vine I planted on top of the great pile of blue clay where the drill poured out the silt. What is the secret of “witching” for water, anyway? Certainly Father and Mother were not superstitious, and just as certainly, water seems always to be found where the witches stick says it will be. Whenever anything went wrong with the wheel or the gearing on the mill, Mr. Mabie of St. Anthony came to fix matters; and when pistons or cylinders or valves in the well were not working properly, Mr. Frank Dennis of Albion came to pull the pump—and these were great occasions for us children.

In the days before we had a cream separator, the “milk

house" stood by the well, on the south side of it, and I remember it chiefly because we dried our walnuts on its roof. Later it was moved down below the garden to become part of the chicken house. The "Tank house" or "shop" stood on the east side of the well. We called it the tank house because it sheltered the big round red wooden supply tank, capacity 100 barrels, from which water was piped to the kitchen, the bathroom, to the small water tanks for the calves, and the larger tank below the barn, where the horses and cattle drank. The tank was on ground level or just slightly above it, so there was no pressure enough to force water to the upstairs. The bathroom had drainage into the cesspool well below the house, and Mother often said she never minded carrying the hot water from the range to the tub as long as she didn't have to empty bath water any more. Of course, water in the open tanks would freeze in winter so when cold weather came in, the connections with the small tanks were cut off and the cast iron airtight heater was set up in the middle of the larger open tank. Father fed the tank heater fire with cobs, chunks, and any old boards at hand. Only rarely would the pipe between the tank and the kitchen freeze, even in the coldest weather, and it could soon be loosened up. The tank house was also the shop where Father had his workbench, vise and other tools and, where many a time the neighbors came to borrow, as my father had received many of Grandfather Kellogg's tools. The icehouse we used at first was a frame building attached to the north end of the shop; but, when we made a new underground icehouse out in the grove, the old one became the storehouse for the kitchen stove wood. The chicken house, granary, haybarn, cattle and horse barns, etc., were in the barnyards south of the house.

Mother loved trees and flowers and we had roses and peonies in the back yard; bridal wreath, syringa, flowering currants, lilacs and wigelias in the front, and beds of flowers. Gradually we transplanted young cedars from the timber and made several hedges of them—and Mother named our home "Cedarcroft." None of us dreamed that the destructive cedar blight would harm the apple orchard—the round brown balls only seemed ornamental like the blue seed berries, and odd-

looking when queer streamers of bright orange sometimes poured from the balls in all directions.

"Cedarcroft" was a lovely farm home. We had many many happy times there, and many guests to share them with us. The first winter after the house was finished, the force from the Bendict drygoods store (at the time of this writing, Brintnall and Brintnall) in Marshalltown had their annual sleighride out to the house, followed by an oyster supper, and we children thought we had had a proper housewarming indeed. I remember the first Christmas in the new house, too, with the Grinnell relatives all visiting us, including George and Carolyn Parks, and how George sang for us.

There were two births in the house—Louise and John. I do not remember much about Louise's coming, but well remember the night John was born. Father called Dr. Burroughs about 7:00 p.m. He was ill and could not come, so he sent his younger assistant, Dr. Merrill. Mother had engaged a practical nurse, Mrs. Brock, who had cared for her before, but she, too, was sick when Father telephoned her to come out with the doctor, as per the previous arrangement. So Father got Grandma Moninger and Mrs. Shewalter, one of the neighborhood women, and I took Louise upstairs to bed. About daylight, I heard a wee wail and Father called up, "We've got a boy down here!" The next morning we made arrangements for a trained nurse, Miss Veach, who came that afternoon, and all was well. Dorothy and Helen were in Grinnell and, when some kindly neighbor asked them if they were anxious to get home to see their little brother, they said they were lonesome for their little sister Louise, she was a lovely baby and said cute things.

There were two weddings in the old home, Anna Reynolds Moffett's and our own Dorothy's. Hers was such a pretty home wedding, on the morning of Oct. 20, 1921, with only members of the two families present. Louise played the wedding march, and Gorda's brother Joe and Helen stood up with them. After the ceremony and the wedding breakfast, they drove to Albion and Joe and Grace were married at the Presbyterian parsonage there by the same minister who had married Dorothy and Gorda. We went to the depot at Marshalltown and saw Dorothy and Gorda off for Chicago for their wedding trip. There

were two funerals from the home, too—Grandma Moninger's and later Mother's mother passed away March 27, 1928, at the Methodist Hospital in Des Moines, following an operation.

The following February, Father sold the farm to Mr. McKibben and moved to Marshalltown. Mr. and Mrs. McKibben wanted the farm for a home and cared for it and kept it in good shape. But Mrs. McKibben passed away in 1937 and then the place was rented to tenants. Just as a change was being made in occupants, in late February or early March of 1938, the house somehow caught fire and burned to the ground. Really, I think my deepest feeling about the news was one of relief—our precious memories need not be dulled or affected by seeing our beloved home gradually decay under unappreciative hands. The new bungalow put up in its place had no associations for us.

THE MAYTAG MUSEUM

The Maytag Company, Newton, Iowa, has recently opened a museum of home laundry appliances. On exhibit there are 30 machines, marking milestones in Maytag's history and in the progress of home laundering itself. The company is one of the oldest (1893) and largest producers of laundry appliances.

The earliest Maytag (1907) was made of wood and called a "Pastime." The washer shown is steel-banded and looks like the top half of a barrel sawn off and set on legs. It is hand-powered, with a crank at the top and a lid for inserting the clothes. Later wooden models are equipped with wringers and machine-powered.

The old-time display is decorated with tin types, a crank-type telephone, vintage wind-up phonograph, kerosene lamps and other curiosities. For those who fancy roll-top desks, there's one that looks like a collector's item standing in this section. It was used by the company founder.

The exhibits culminate in two handsome displays—one of a laundry area in modern bright yellow cabinetry; the other a beamed-ceiling kitchen setting, with matching dark-paneled overhead and counter cabinets.

The Maytag museum is open to the public from 8:00 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

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.