

Iowa Years

Ralph Budd was born on August 20, 1879, on a farm about four miles from the Cedar River, near the town of Washburn and some seven miles from Waterloo, Iowa. His father, Charles Wesley Budd, was descended from English, Scotch, and Welsh colonists who had settled in Burlington, New Jersey, in 1668. Charles' forebears had moved first to Ohio, then on to Iowa in 1854. Ralph Budd's mother, Mary Ann (Warner), was born in Maryland not long after her parents had arrived from Germany. They came to Iowa during the Civil War.

From the outset there must have been plenty of activity around the household, for young Ralph had an older brother and sister, two younger sisters, and a younger brother — six in all. And their mother was determined that each should make the most of the vast opportunity she saw inherent in frontier Iowa. Of all her lively brood, she may have felt that Ralph was particularly fitted to translate her hopes into reality. At any rate, as he has often testified, that quiet determination of hers has been the most prolonged and consistent influence on him ever since.

Farm life in the corn-and-hog country during

the '80's and '90's was, by modern standards, a simple, neighborly affair. Down the road lived Ralph's Uncle Job, from whose farm the school grounds were taken, the Danes, the Lichtys, the Shaulises and the Stoys. All of them had children who were playmates of Ralph's. Together they scuffed out "roads" through the thick leaves that carpeted the maple grove north of the house in the autumn, or visited the imaginary Mr. Hickorynut and Mr. Butternut who lived in the sandy "caves" along the road that led to the Danes' house. Sometimes Ralph would hitch up the two-wheel cart and drive off to the Cedar River to fish, particularly when his maternal grandfather — an ardent angler — came to visit. They seldom caught anything larger than a sunfish or bullhead, though occasionally they would hook a pickerel or a pike. Prairie chickens were plentiful then, too, and Ralph used to accompany his older brother John on shooting expeditions. On his own he trapped squirrels and pocket gophers.

But there was work to do on the farm, and Ralph took his turn at all the usual chores. Because he was so patient with the animals, his particular job was to coax the heifers into being milked. Apparently courtesy and self-control were already part of his make-up; he seemed to know instinctively that only gentleness and consideration would bring cooperation from domestic animals, and that no amount of short temper

would hasten the ripening of the farmer's corn.

The whole Budd family was active in the Presbyterian Church and Sunday School at Washburn. As a boy Ralph attended the local country school about three-quarters of a mile from his house where Mathilda Gibson, Sarah McMurray and Rolla Patterson, among others, took him through the three R's and beyond. These teachers, Budd recalls, were for the most part adequate; "some of them were excellent." He particularly admired Miss Gibson who taught him in the early grades. "We were given to understand," he says, that "it was a privilege to go to school and very important that we worked at our lessons. . . . One book I have kept and still enjoy reading is *Appleton's Fifth Reader*. The selections from standard works — classics in prose and poetry — were such as to instill in a child the desire and taste for more extensive reading of the books quoted. I think any who missed reading those Appleton school readers missed a real opportunity and privilege."

During recess the children flocked to the school yard to play games. In those days, country boys and girls rarely had a chance to get together except at school, and they made the most of every moment. The boys played a sort of baseball, but not very well; they had virtually no equipment.

In 1893 the Budd family moved to Des Moines. Ralph, aged 13, immediately took advantage of

one opportunity the city offered by getting himself an early morning paper route from the Des Moines *Leader*. He saved his money and before long surprised the family by coming home with a girl's bicycle. In explanation he said that he as well as his sister Helen could ride a girl's wheel, and thus they could both enjoy it while he earned enough more for one of his own, which he promptly did. That fall, just turned 14, Ralph entered North High. There his country school training together with his native ability stood him in good stead; in addition to his freshman work he took plane geometry with the juniors and found it easy enough.

During his high school days he once took a job during a Christmas vacation at the news stand in the Equitable Building at Sixth and Locust — now the Bankers' Life of Des Moines. One day a customer paid for a five-cent purchase with a five-dollar gold piece and hurried away. Ralph called after him, but the man paid no attention. Thereupon the lad took off in pursuit, finally caught up, and explained the situation. Typically enough, the man was at first irritated, insisting he had paid correctly; when he checked his pocket book, however, he was glad enough to have his money back.

In addition to his school work and extra-curricular activities, Budd quietly went ahead with what was steadily crystallizing into a major interest. His older brother John, who had been graduated

from Highland Park College in Des Moines as a civil engineer, was doing among other things a good deal of work near the city surveying coal mines and showing, on maps, where the underground workings were located. While still at high school Ralph helped him with this and, in fact, any sort of engineering work he was permitted to do. Meanwhile he attended lectures at Highland Park. "It probably was not very regular but at the time it seemed logical and a simple thing to take advantage of living right at the college and among the faculty members." So it was that his combined high school and college took him only six years, for he was graduated from Highland Park in 1899.

In college, Ralph followed in his brother's footsteps and specialized in civil engineering under Professor Frank W. Hanna. Dr. Clifton Scott taught him physics, and Sherman R. Macy chemistry. But even science majors at the turn of the century had to undergo rigorous training in the classics and humanities. James R. Hanna — Frank's brother and later mayor of Des Moines — taught Budd Latin; L. T. Eaton was in charge of his English, while President O. H. Longwell gave logic and grammar. Fortunately for the young student, all these men lived very near the Budds' home on Euclid Avenue so that Ralph came to know them well outside the classroom; he always maintained a warm friendship with them.

But Budd was far from the "all work; no play" type. His wide circle of undergraduate friends included particularly Robert E. McCollum, John W. Colebird, Stella Brockway, Blanche Griselle, W. O. Loudenslager, John L. Hamery, Maude Bechtell, Harvey Ross and — most important of all — Georgia Marshall, whom he was to marry before long.

Greek letter societies were not permitted at Highland Park so, nothing daunted, Budd and some of his friends organized the Kitchi-Gammi Literary Society, with a strictly Indian name. Though one of the youngest members, Budd was president of the organization throughout his college years, and so enthusiastic about it that he even taught his five-year-old sister the Kitchi-Gammi yell with instructions to give it wherever she went. This she faithfully did to the acute embarrassment of her long-suffering mother.

Despite these varied diversions, Budd's interest in engineering grew steadily. Meanwhile his brother John had turned to railroad location, running the line of the present Rock Island north of Des Moines. From there he went into western Nebraska to locate the Burlington's track between Bridgeport and Brush, and later moved on to Wyoming where he worked on what was to have been a Burlington extension to the West Coast. Ralph was fascinated by his brother's exploits and while in college bombarded the Burlington engineer in

charge for a job during vacations which, he hoped, might become permanent after graduation. But all he got back was a series of polite letters saying that his application had been received and placed on file. A generation was to pass before the C.B. & Q. would invite Ralph Budd to join the organization, and then in quite a different post than as a member of a locating crew.

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