

William Elgin Wickenden
Chronicled by Marion Lamb Wickenden
from
Memoirs of the Thomas Rogers Wickenden Family

On December 24, 1882 William was ushered into the world in Toledo, not with a silver spoon in his mouth, but with a speech upon his lips.

At the age of three, so it is reliably reported, he regaled audiences from a soap box with bursts of oratory patterned after the manner of the incumbent preacher of the Second Baptist Church. Besides possessing a tendency to vocalize, he was born with a fighting spirit. Mother Wickenden once told me that he could bang his head on the stone walk in front of the house and scream with more violence than any of her other children when in a state of annoyance with the world, a characteristic which doubtless stood him in good stead in later years.

I do not know which one of the boys was hauled home from the Franklin School by an irate mother to hang up his nightshirt, but William was ever neat and tidy. His methodical habits were approved by Mother Lamb, who claimed she set her clocks by the timing of the daily newspapers which he dropped at our door each afternoon. He must have been somewhat studious, too, because he graduated from the Toledo High School as valedictorian of his class.

There was much family discussion as to whether he should go to college, not so much as to where the money to send him would come from, as to whether the family could get along without whatever wages he might bring home. His summer earnings as a draftsman with the Toledo Bridge Company at a dollar a day, netted him enough to buy a suit of clothes, and with sixty-five dollars in his pocket, he went to Denison University. It was an important decision, as we recall the twenty or more members of the Wickenden Clan, who following in his footsteps, have brought credit to the institution and luster to the family name.

Money was a very scarce commodity in those days. William's jobs were many and varied. He helped pay expenses as a "printer's devil" for the Granville Times, the village newspaper. He wore shirt "fronts" instead of shirts. There was neither time nor money for the corner drug store, except behind the counter occasionally. He spent his summers working in the Engineering Department of the City of Toledo. Sometimes he also spent hours in the Wickenden kitchen, acquiring a proficiency in household management. He used to recall one Fourth of July when Father Wickenden almost ruined his standing as a satisfactory parent by appearing with a couple of bushels of cherries he had picked up at a roadside stand because they were cheap. The reason for the low price tag was that they had to be canned immediately, holiday or not.

William never had but one girl. His first date with her was in his senior year in high school, but throughout their early school and college days, it was always "Will and

Marion." It was just understood. He never had a chance, poor fellow. We were married in September 1908 in the Baptist Church in Toledo, Homer playing the organ.

Our meager lares and penates were set up in Madison, Wisconsin where William taught in the Electrical Engineering Department of the university. Two events of the first year stand out in my memory, Betty's arrival and William's daily battles with a balky furnace in one of Wisconsin's coldest winters.

Our two years there were followed by nine years at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston, during which time William became an assistant professor of Electrical Engineering and we lived in West Roxbury.

In 1913 Bill was added to our growing list of assets.

It was at this point that we felt the need of larger quarters and William set about the designing and building of a house to meet the requirements of his particular family. With no architect and with no plans other than his own, he and the builder did a very satisfactory job, so much so that when it became necessary to sell the house, the first prospect who looked at it bought it in spite of its unique features, or perhaps because of them.

The children's room on the first floor caused much comment. The entry hall had two doors, one of which opened into the living room and the other one into the children's room. One side of the children's room was lined with low bookcases, shelves and drawers. The tables and the chairs were low, as were the hooks for the coats and caps. Adjoining was the children's lavatory. Proper lighting was planned. The children decided what pictures were to hang on the walls and when they were to be changed.

There was much shaking of heads over the decision of a husband that a wife's height should be considered in building a house for her. William followed me around day and night with a measuring stick to make sure that in the future I could dispense with the daily use of the step-ladder.

He threw himself with great enthusiasm into the planning of the kitchen. The sink, the working space and the shelves were exactly the right height. All hooks were within easy reach. He even planned the windows so that the cross-bars would not be on a line with my eyes, thus obstructing my view of the garden as I kneaded the bread and rolled out the pies! Such loving devotion should have been rewarded by a string of blue ribbons from the county fair, but my memory fails me at this juncture.

We belonged to a jolly group of young people who called themselves "The Night Outers." We met once a month for informal fun and originality was its chief characteristic. This group decided that the Wickendens should have a housewarming. It took the form of a summer camping party, although it was December. The furniture was taken from the living room. Pine trees were brought in from the woods and a small tent was set up. Printed signs directed the guests to PURE DRINKING WATER, a bucket

and dipper on the stairway under some branches; to LOVERS' LANE; to THE OLE SWIMMING HOLE; to THE COOK-OUT; or to GENTLEMEN'S WALK.

All of the guests had arrived in summer camping clothes, each bringing a literary effusion and a log or a few twigs to throw upon the fire as he expressed his good wishes. Amid much song and laughter, the biscuits, which William and a fellow camper had mixed, were baked in an outdoor oven before the fire. When they were a golden brown, tin pie plates and tin coffee cups were produced, and to the biscuits were added butter and maple syrup poured from the can.

William was always at his best in such a gathering. He had an unlimited capacity for enjoyment. His gaiety, his songs and his jokes must have been missed by his fellow "Night Outers" when we changed our place of residence from West Roxbury, Massachusetts to Upper Montclair, New Jersey. It was not a one-sided regret. We never again belonged to such an uninhibited group. Maybe it was just the exuberance of youth that made it such fun.

It was in 1918 that the decision was made to leave the teaching world for that of business. William became Personnel Manager for the Western Electric Company in New York City. Three years later he was made Assistant Vice President of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company.

For the next ten years we made our home in Upper Montclair where William became active in civic and church affairs. Not all of these were of a serious nature. Looking back over the years, it is the amusing and often trivial experiences that come to mind. I remember particularly an evening of entertainment at the church. William and three of our neighbors, two lawyers and an advertising man, engaged in a debate on the subject "Resolved that newspapers do more harm than good." One of the arguments broached by William had to do with a broken windowpane stuffed with a newspaper in the neighbor's house directly opposite our bedroom window. William probably knew what he was trying to prove - he usually did - but I don't myself know which thesis he was upholding. At any rate, it was quite a hilarious evening and everybody including the debaters had a good time.

His work with the telephone company involved a great deal of travel. One summer it sent William (and me, who always seemed to be in the offing at travel time) on a wonderful trip to the West Coast, stopping in city after city to study the working methods of the company and to be duly feted and corsaged. William justified the excellent meals by his fine speeches. Marion earned the corsages by listening to the same stories night after night. I have always felt guilty about that particular trek because the Company never did profit by it. Immediately thereafter William was called upon to undertake a six-year study of Engineering Education under a grant from the Carnegie Foundation. He never went back into the telephone company. We must owe them something.

I think that the investigation of engineering education was the hardest assignment of his life, especially the European part of the study. However, the results were published in

two volumes which became the standard classic of the profession. We lived a year and a half in Europe, Betty and Bill spending a year in schools in Switzerland, and William becoming a long-distance commuter. Christmas at St. Moritz, Easter in Rome and summer vacations spent in England, France and Italy made the difficulties of the job seem less formidable. It was a worthwhile experience because he came to know the problems of engineering education in both Europe and the United States as no one else had ever done. He became the authority in the profession on the subject.

In 1929 he went to Cleveland to become president of Case Institute of Technology, a post which he held for eighteen years. These were busy, active years of achievement sometimes of disappointment. Many honors came to him. He received honorary doctor's degrees from Case, Western Reserve, Denison, Rose Polytechnic Institute, Tulane University, Oberlin, the University of Wisconsin, Bucknell, Toledo University, Otterbein, Lafayette College and Worcester Polytechnic Institute. He received the Lamme Medal from the Society for the Promotion of Engineering Education. The Chamber of Commerce of Cleveland awarded him a medal for his civic accomplishments. The Case Alumni Association conferred a Meritorious Service Award for his leadership in college affairs.

He was past president of the Ohio College Association, Vice President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and Chairman of the American Council on Education. He was a director of the Apex Electrical and Manufacturing Company, The Equity Savings and Loan Company, a trustee of Case, of Lake Erie College for Women, and the Cleveland Clinic.

In 1945 he was elected president of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers. In this capacity he (meaning we) travelled some forty thousand miles, mostly by air, visiting hundreds of colleges and chapters of the organization, including some in Mexico and Canada.

During all of these years, we had many fine vacations in many places before September 1938 when we bought "The Clearing" in Jaffrey, New Hampshire for the family summer home. William loved this place. He escaped to it as often as he could. He used to say that he knew every inch of the roads between Cleveland and Jaffrey. His garden was his pride and joy, and his specialties were red raspberries and sweet peas.

In May 1933 to his great satisfaction he acquired Tex Goldschmidt as a son-in-law, and in due season Pat, Ann and Jean as interesting and rewarding grandchildren. In January 1944 he welcomed Bill's pretty and capable wife, Peggy, into the family circle.

The times when we were all together at Jaffrey were happy ones for him. I like to remember him as he looked, sitting on the wide-open porch in the early evening watching the sun go down behind Mt. Monadnock, spreading an afterglow of mauves and pinks across the skies.

It seemed tragic that death should claim him within a few hours of the time that his

official retirement as president of Case went into effect. On August twentieth, 1947, while vacationing in Jaffrey, he suffered a heart attack which resulted in his death in the hospital in nearby Peterborough on September the first. The trustees of Case have honored his years of effort on behalf of the college by dedicating the beautiful new Electrical Engineering Building on the campus to him. On a bronze plaque in the lobby of the building is engraved the following inscription:

April 18, 1955

This building is dedicated to the memory of William E. Wickenden, 1882-1947, who served Case faithfully as its third president from 1929 until 1947. His career as an electrical engineer, teacher, scholar and educational and civic leader offers an example for generations of Case students. His unselfish devotion to this college and to engineering education symbolized his own belief that "Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain."

Marion passed away in Bronxville, New York on August 26, 1961.

To Will and Marion were born a daughter, Elizabeth, on May 8, 1909 at Madison, Wisconsin, and a son, William Clarence, on April 14, 1913 at Boston, Massachusetts.

Elizabeth married Arthur Edward Goldschmidt in New York on May 27, 1933. They are the parents of three children all born in Washington, D.C., including Arthur E., Jr. on March 17, 1938; Ann Wickenden on February 13, 1942; and Jean Wickenden on September 9, 1943. Arthur E. Goldschmidt, Jr. married Louise Robb in Westfield, Massachusetts, on June 17, 1961. William Clarence Wickenden married Margaret Elsie Papen on January 22, 1944, at Worcester, Massachusetts.