

A Family Tale

Last winter Sarah Rockenbach Belcher, a Society member from Woodstock, sat down and penned some recollections of her large family and their move off a farm in Lake County to Crystal Lake. Though we haven't printed her entire account, what she does say about adapting to the move and working together as a family to get through the Great Depression should remind all of us of the strength we can muster.

The Rockenbach Family Move to Crystal Lake

On February 15, 1927 Almon and Elizabeth (better known as A. O. and Lizzie) Rockenbach, after twenty-eight years of arduous labor on a 160 acre farm on Milwaukee Avenue near Half Day, relocated to a small 12 1/2 acre farm in Crystal Lake on Virginia Street and Rockland Road.

Following an auction of farm machinery, cattle and some horses, plans to move involved the whole family. George (20 years old) and Rodney (10 years old) drove a hay wagon loaded with furniture, pulled by two prize Belgium horses named Jack and Dick, carrying feed sacks full of oats and milk cans full of water for the horses. They set out at 6 a.m. traveling at 3 1/2 miles per hour through Half Day, Lake Zurich, Fox River Grove, and Cary. Six hours later they arrived in Crystal Lake. Robert, the oldest sibling, drove a Reo truck with more furnishings. The remaining family members traveled in a new 1927 Chevrolet and a Graham Paige touring car.

The following day it was off to school! It was decided, after a family conference, that the boys would wear knickers rather than bib overalls, as they were accustomed to wearing to Tripp School, the one room country school we

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

all attended. The boys decided to put on a good front and "not look like country hicks."

Joe and George enrolled at Crystal Lake High School; Shirley, Ray, Mary, Lyle and Rodney entered Crystal Lake Junior High and Sarah and Dorothy entered Crystal Lake Grade School. Ruth and Elizabeth May, two older sisters, had graduated from Deerfield Shields High School Philip being only five, remained at home.

It was a traumatic experience going to a two story dark brick school house with over a hundred students after attending a small one room white clapboard school house with twenty-two students. When the bell rang for all to enter, to my utter embarrassment, I walked up the steps to the second floor with all the boys. I never heard of separating the boys and girls! We all slowly adjusted from toasting our sandwiches in the furnace in the basement of the little school house to playing jacks, jumping rope and the boys joining the basketball and football teams.

The family loved the beautiful clear lake. My parents went on their first vacation, in their first new car, to Niagara Falls. The time of reward for all that hard labor came to an abrupt halt on October 29, 1929, the day of the stock market crash.

Living Through the Depression

The Depression struck in October 1929 and was a sad day. We were forced to take the farm, in Half Day, back or all go to work. The clear swimming beach, the good schools and

the Congregational Church, that we were all attending, were such a plus; a decision was made to stay in Crystal Lake.

Each of us cashed in our savings (mine amounted to \$34.00) and added our money to the family "kitty". George and Joe worked in the summer carrying ice, my mother did home nursing, my father started truck gardening and growing gorgeous gladiolas to sell. Rodney was employed as a stock boy in the National Tea Co. Grocery Store. On Saturday nights the manager gave him all the produce that couldn't be held over until Monday morning. At that time stores were

closed on Sunday in observance of the Lord's Day.

I worked in the North Shore subdivision of the lake for the Scoville family, doing cleaning and cooking for \$3.50 a week. When I did baby sitting I received 35 cents an hour.

To reduce expenses a big black cook stove was moved into the kitchen. It had

a reservoir to supply hot water. At night we wrapped stove lids in newspaper which we took to bed to keep our feet warm. Putting hot water in mason jars was also tried but usually this turned into a disaster!

Sometimes the cupboards were bare so we had huge pans of Johnny cake (cornbread) from which to fill our stomachs; and then canned peaches and milk for dessert. My mother and sisters canned a couple of hundred quarts of peaches, pears, and green beans every summer. We also dried sweet corn in the oven or in the attic, because as I recall we removed the hot cook stove in the summer time.

(Continued on page 7)



We had many hobos stopping in for homemade bread and fresh milk from our Guernsey cow.

Every summer we were fascinated for a half day as we watched the National Guard pass by our place on Virginia Street (near Woodstock Street) on their way for a two week encampment in Wisconsin.

Joe and Lyle enrolled in the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) in 1934. This was a big help as part of their salary was sent to the family at home.

Soon after arriving in Crystal Lake in 1927 we joined the Congregational Church.

Rev. Seth Huntington and their family encouraged us to put our trust in Jesus Christ and encouraged us spiritually. We became fast friends and continued to see them even after they moved to a pastorate in Berea, Kentucky. The family survived and came through the Depression, by banding together, working hard, and putting our trust in God.

Sarah (Rockenbach) Belcher
Woodstock
January 2001