

The following article was written by Lou Porter for the February 23, 1962 Bulletin.

Louis E. Porter was born in Greensburg, IN on February 16, 1863. His parents were Charles R. and Margaret Zoller Porter. Porter graduated from Greensburg High School in 1911, then attended the University of Michigan. He worked and lived in Cincinnati only to return to Greensburg for visits. Louis E. Porter died in May 1963 at the age of 70. He is buried in South Park Cemetery in Greensburg, IN.

I Remember

Recollections of a boy's life in a small town during the first 12 years of the 20th Century

By Lou Porter

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My family were Hoosiers and I was born and reared in Greensburg, Indiana, a small County seat town of approximately 6500 souls. So far as I know, the population has not changed to any appreciable extent. There were four of us, Dad and Mother, brother Bob and myself and we lived in a large, old brick home of twelve rooms, with high ceilings and spacious halls; there was a large back yard, orchard-like with trees of all description and a giant vegetable garden of great dimensions. This back yard afforded us genuine privacy as it was enclosed by a huge wooden fence over which no one could look. Our house, typical of the period, had rooms of vast extent and area and all of the five bedrooms upstairs carried ample closet space. My Mother did not believe in "shutting" off rooms in cold weather so we lived in every room in the big home all year around. There were gas-heated grates all over the place and the ancient Welsbach burner provided our illumination. Our home was brilliantly alight from early evening till late at night. Built shortly before the War between the States, the structure was as secure as a fortress with walls two feet thick. Of course, this house still stands, people continue to live in it and people will still be living in it two hundred years from now.

One of my earliest recollections is framed in memory of the year 1898 when the Spanish-American War was fought. It was of short duration and not too many casualties but I can still hear my Aunt singing the war song of the period "Just Break The News to Mother;" when the year 1900 arrived, neighbors debated whether this was the final year of the 19th century or the 1st year of the 20th century; One September afternoon in 1901, some neighborhood youngsters along with my brother Bob and I were playing in the back yard when a newsboy came shouting up the street that President McKinley had been shot while attending the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. News traveled very slowly in those days and word of this tragedy did not reach our town until an "extra" edition of "The Indianapolis News" had arrived by interurban traction line. There were no buses, trucks, or motor cars and few telephones. It was still the "horse and buggy" era and the livery stable was the news center of the Community. Old men played checkers in the rear of the corner grocery "down town," some played dominoes and cinch while the younger boys played parcheesi. Some of us had "Ping Pong" as an indoor sport. There was a soap widely advertised called "Sapolio," a patent medicine "Tanlac" which was supposed to cure most ailments and of course every paper carried an ad about "Lydia E. Pinkham;"

Quinine and calomel and castor oil were the standard medications for boys and girls while some of the older generation preferred Bourbon. There was no Juvenile Court in Greensburg in 1901 for we had no serious delinquency. School teachers did not spare the rod (or the 15 inch ruler) and every cloak room in the elementary schools closeted three or four sturdy sticks of hickory that were replaced at frequent intervals. Boys and girls were taught to respect their teachers, their parents and their elders. Older people were still playing Euchre as a social past time and it would be several years before "Whist" or "bridge" would become popular. Youngsters enjoyed everything, both summer and winter. We had the old "Swimmin' Hole" where bathing suits were unknown for boys and girls. It was still the "age of innocence" for us. Directly back of our home was a long, steep hill which afforded bob-sledding all winter; there were a dozen creeks, quarries, and ponds for ice skating; on the fringe of town beyond the corporate limits were dark and foreboding forests where small game such as rabbits, squirrels and foxes could be found in profusion. We also became quite expert catching fish under the ice on cold winter afternoons after school. None of our "city cousins" ever had as much fun as we enjoyed in those long ago days. During summertime we caught all varieties of fish from the common "cat" and yellow bellied giant sun fish to the small mouth black bass. Most of the time we fished from the bank of the stream but some times we would wade into the water and engage in "fly fishing." We played base ball, foot ball, lawn tennis, held horse shoe pitching contests, played marbles "for keeps," collected stamps, rode ponies, and almost every kid in town had his own two dollar "Brownie" kodak and a bicycle. We built small oven-brick furnaces in the back yard' these bricks we found in alleys which divided every block in town; in those days it was of real interest to behold what came out of back alleys. Weiners comprised our principal part of these outdoor lunches, supplemented by fresh garden vegetables. No one then had ever heard of Vitamins. Food was very reasonable; weiners were five cents a dozen, eggs ten cents a dozen when we had to buy them which was seldom; bananas five cents a dozen, a large loaf of home made bread was five cents; a quart of milk cost five cents and the man at the Meat Market gave us soup bones and liver. A hair cut cost fifteen cents, men paid ten cents to get shaved, and safety and electric razors were yet unknown. "The Saturday Evening Post" was a nickel and most metropolitan newspapers cost one cent. But bear in mind that while a dollar in those days bought more, there were not nearly so many dollars in circulation as today.

When we had advanced to the 4th grade in School, our interest in books began to expand. I recall "Uncle Remus," "Black Beauty," "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch," "Grimm's Fairy Tales," also the folk tales of Hans Christian Anderson, the old McGuffey readers, some of Mark Twain, and at home we had all the books of Horatio Alger. In another year or so boys were devouring books called "The A.B.C. of Electricity" by one Thomas Edison.

When I was about 6 years old, my Mother asked me to sit down and listen to a story. It was a story published in serial by the "Ladies Home Journal;" I have never forgotten that story, nor have I ever forgotten its author with whom I soon became well acquainted. The story was called "The Bears of Blue River," written by Charles Major who lived in our neighboring town of Shelbyville, Indiana. This book still enjoys wide circulations among the boys and girls of Shelbyville and Shelby County. Mr. Major resided next door to my Uncle, Enos Porter, in Shelbyville. One Sunday afternoon in 1901, Hester Porter, my younger cousin, took me over to

the Major home so I could meet my favorite author and story-teller. Mr. Major was a delightful character, warm and friendly with children and his cordial hospitality endeared him to us forever. I might explain that the "Blue River" runs directly through Shelbyville and Shelby County and enters the Ohio river one mile above Leavenworth after a course of nearly one hundred miles. The principal action of this fascinating juvenile story was supposed to have been in a forest country about ten miles outside of Shelbyville, away "back in the twenties (1820) when Indiana was a baby state." And the story concerned a young pioneer boy named Balser Brent and his experience with bears. With child-like curiosity I asked Mr. Major if these bear stories were true and he assured me all the stories were founded on truth. Then to my great delight he took down from his library shelf the completed book and read to us advance chapters of the story so I wouldn't have to wait for future issues of the "Ladies Home Journal" to find out what happened to Balser Brent. The next day he came over to my Uncle's home and presented me with an autographed first edition of "The Bears of Blue River" and I never was happier in my life. Charles Major was a lawyer without too much law practice but he was a devoted student of English history; in 1898 his superb novel "When Knighthood Was In Flower" was published and this book at once became a best seller. It was later dramatized and Julia Marlowe was the star of the stage play just as years later, Marian Davies became the screen star in the same play. Mr. Major was now famous and well to do, but in 1901 I thought his "Bears of Blue River" excelled anything he had ever written. Not many people know that Mr. Major loaned the manuscript of his first novel to James Whitcomb Riley (before it was published) and it was Mr. Riley who suggest the title given the book. This title or name had much to do with making the book popular and successful. It was still the Victorian age, you remember.

There were many illustrious authors, poets and writers in the Hoosier state in those days. Riley was the most famous of all the poets and never has been surpassed to this date. Then also there was George Ade, who said he had gone to an Engineering school (Purdue) to learn how to write; there was Lew Wallace, of "Ben Hur" fame, Meredith Nicholson, the great Booth Tarkington who was just beginning to arrive; Kin Hubbard better known as "Abe Martin;" the old and respected Edward Eggleston, J.P. Dunn, William Dudley Foulke, Gene Stratton Porter, John T. and George Barr McCutcheon, David Graham Phillips, William Vaughn Moody, Theodore Dreiser, Senator Albert J. Beveridge who later distinguished himself with "The Life of John Marshall" and many, many others. People had time to relax and read books in those times for neither Radio nor TV were yet invented.

Another memorable experience of my early youth and this also happened on a visit to Shelbyville was seeing the famous Wild West Buffalo Bill show. I can still see that parade with Col. Cody himself riding a big white stallion leading what then seemed to me ten thousand Indians. The famous Annie Oakley was with the show whom "Sitting Bull" had named "Little Miss Sure Shot;" and many real characters of the old West and Pony Express days were among the troupers. It has been said that "memory plays strange tricks" so I must admit that I don't recall too much about the afternoon show as I was very young. I never saw Buffalo Bill alive again, however in June of 1917 I visited his grave located just outside Denver on a high mountain peak. No monument had yet been erected as he had just been buried a week. The old

trailblazer had requested to be buried on this high lonely mountain so much in keeping with his great, wild career.

Everyone loves a Circus and our little town was exception. Around five o'clock of the morning when the Circus arrived in town, most of the townspeople gathered at the West end Railroad yards to watch the Circus pull into town and unload. The Circus in the early days of which I speak, traveled in their own special trains. Some of the more ingenious boys would get temporary employment with the Circus by supplying water for the elephants. Elephants with a show like Ringling Bros. were well trained and did many chores to expedite the early daylight unloading. Then we would hurry out to the Fairgrounds to see how expertly and quickly the huge tents were put up; but most of all we were watching the wild animal cages, the elephants, horses and circus people themselves. It was a notable occasion and long to be remembered. The morning parade through the main section of town took place about eleven o'clock in the forenoon. This was likewise a noteworthy event and just before the calliope at the very end of the parade, the elephants came jolting along. I can still hear the parade barker shouting through a megaphone to the farmers who had driven to town, "hold your horses, the elephants are coming." No one missed the big tent show in the afternoon and everyone went home filled with peanuts, cracker jack and pink lemonade. The Circus had been to town.

When writing from memory of days far away and long ago, it is often difficult to keep things in chronological order but I shall do my best. My maternal grand-daddy, Mr. Zoller was a staunch Democrat. He admired the young William Jennings Bryan, famous for his 1896 "Cross of Gold" speech. My paternal ancestors were all Republicans and thought a Democrat was sort of a varmint. To me, in 1900, it didn't make the least difference for I worshipped my Grand-daddy Zoller. Even in our small town, torch light parades were held with bugle and drum corps and in 1900 Mr. Zoller engaged me to accompany him in some of these evening parades. It was all staged in the grand manner and ended in some public auditorium where the leading orator of the Party would deliver the main address, eulogizing Mr. Bryan and all candidates of the Democratic ticket. I can clearly recall wearing a large BRYAN campaign button while walking in the parade and Mr. Zoller had "bribed" me to howl and exclaim at certain intervals:-

"Hurrah for BRYAN,
He's our man,
McKinley's in the
Oyster Can."

My Porter relatives were shocked and looked with contempt upon my behavior even though they realized I was being "touted" by my Grandfather Zoller. Of course McKinley won the election and in those days the election returns were flashed on a large canvas screen in the center of town area, usually the Public Square. Even in 1916 after I had moved to Cincinnati, election returns were brought to the Public in much the same manner. Everyone thought Charles Evans Hughes had been elected President of that Election Night but when results from the far west had been counted, Woodrow Wilson was still our President. Radio had not made its debut as yet.

A great friend of mine, although much older, was Gov. Will Cumback who lived directly across the street from us. He had formerly been Lieutenant Governor of Indiana, had many friends over

the State, and back in 1861 had introduced President Lincoln to the people of Greensburg. Gov. Cumback, as everyone called him was a splendid orator, extremely witty and did not understand the meaning of fear. Even in his advanced years, his appearance on the rostrum was stately and majestic. He spoke in a loud bell ringing tone, captured and held the attention of his hearers and no one ever went to sleep while Cumback was making a speech. A grand old gentleman indeed. I was visiting with him the evening when news came of the death of Queen Victoria. He told me about her, how she had been Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland since 1837, exactly 64 years. He would have been a wonderful Professor of History in any University.

The years 1903-04 are both memorable years to me because of what was happening in Detroit and St. Louis, Mo. In Detroit Mr. Henry Ford was organizing his famous Motor Company on small capital. Until he succeeded in raising the necessary cash, anyone could have invested in this yearling company. The memory still lingers about Mr. Ford. Mr. Zoller, of whom I have spoken, was entertaining a distinguished gentleman from Detroit one evening. He had a large home, a baronial dining room that would accommodate 35 to 40 guests and his chief delight in life was entertaining big dinner parties, especially with his own family. At that time and until his death in 1913, Mr. Zoller was President of the Third National Bank in Greensburg. It was a prosperous little bank, conservative and well managed. His guest from Detroit was not a stock promoter but sold investment securities, such as municipal and school bonds. But in passing, as if by observation, he did say "Mr. Zoller, I believe that if anyone could purchase some of that new stock in FORD, it would prove in a few years to be a gold mine." The family talked about what the man had said following his departure but any enthusiasm created by his remarks was silenced when my Grand father remarked "nothing will ever beat the horse;" there was about five thousand dollars investment money around that dinner table the evening before which went into 4 ½ percent municipal bonds the next day. To be sure no one then present understood gasoline engines or motor cars. Had they been acquainted with Detroit men like John Dodge, Alex Malcomson, James Couzens, J. W. Anderson or Mr. Ford himself, I know they would have felt differently. The story is told that a sister of Mr. Couzens, Miss Rosetta V. Couzens invested one hundred dollars in the original Ford Stock and this one hundred dollars eventually returned to her \$355,000.00; and there were no income taxes in those days.

The year 1904 will always remain bright in memory for that was the year of the St. Louis World's Fair. One bright October morning, my Dad, Mother, brother Bob and I boarded a New York Central train (then called the Big Four Railroad) and arrived in St. Louis about sun-down. Up to that time, I had never seen such a huge City. Our first view of the Mississippi river was breath-taking. My brother exclaimed "no wonder De Soto called it the father of waters" and I said it ought to be called "the Mother of waters too" because it was named "Miss-iss-ippi." We stayed at a new hotel built earlier in the year by a fellow named Statler called the "Innside Inn;" we were right inside the big grounds where the Fair was in progress. I think it was "Forest Park" but am not sure. I know I couldn't sleep all night because of the day's excitement. All of us were up early the next morning, having "batter cakes" in the big dining room down stairs, and anxious to get onto the Midway or "Pike," the main thoroughfare, visit the Exhibits, see our own State Building, but most of all Bob and I wanted to see some of the shows. "The Boer War" was a very spectacular and thrilling event; "the Galveston Flood" was educational, Chief Hale's Fire

Fighters from Kansas City, Mo. left a lasting impression, but uppermost in memory was Karl Hagenback's great Wild Animal Show. We spent ten glorious days and nights at this Fair and lived it again for years afterwards. Only one attraction I missed was a ride on that sky-high ferris wheel. This same Ferris Wheel had been at the Chicago World's Fair back in 1893 but my parents vetoed my idea of boarding it. And when my Dad said "No," – it meant NO. There was no appeal.

Our town's Courthouse, located in the center of the business section, called the Public Square, has had a maple tree growing atop the clock tower ever since I can remember; sometimes Greensburg is called the "Tree City;" Just how this maple tree ever started to grow in such a strange environment remains a mystery to this day. There have been several trees on the tower and the first tree took root there over 65 years ago. I am told the present tree is of the fourth generation. Old folks back around the McKinley era surmised that a bird had planted a seed between the stone blocks and the seed, being fertile, yielded forth a tree. Whether this be true or not, I do not really know. The present tree is 15 years old. (*Since this article was written, the tree in the courthouse tower has also been identified as a Large-Toothed Aspen and most recently a Mulberry Tree.*)

As I look back it is hard to believe that women of the earlier years of this century every were able to bear up under the attire characteristic of those times. It was the age of Petticoats, corsets and bustles, high button shoes, long black stockings and long hair. The ladies of 1900 placed no accent on sex. And this mode of dress continued for many years, almost in fact until 1917, the year of World War One. To my way of thinking, the American girl of today is better dressed, has more style, more appeal and more class than at any time in history. Glamor was unknown in the McKinley era and women did toilsome chores of housework in the hardest possible way. Hired girls were a luxury that only a few families could afford for their average wages came to three dollars a week. Mothers and grand mothers grew prematurely old and if you are in doubt about this take a "look" at the grand mothers of today and then glance at the photograph of the grand mother of 1901-2-3-4 etc. Had a young lady of those days dared to use "make-up" such as lip-stick and rouge, she would have created gossip of an unsavory flavor. But the girls and older women at that time for the most part did have beauty of character, nobility of purpose and they knew how to keep house, cook, sew and rear families. They didn't smoke, drink at cocktail bars or repeat vulgar stories. Old fashioned, yes, but fine, decent women of a generation that has now gone. Girls learned at home from their own mothers all the essentials of home making, for the schools had no home economic courses or tutorage in domestic science. In all reality, the first twelve years of this century differed little from the last fifty years of the 19th century.

When I was a boy, a trip to Indianapolis was always a big event. While still young, I developed a keen interest and liking for the theatre whether it was a tent show or staged in some fine Opera House. On one of my first visits to the State Capitol, I saw Lew Dockstader's Minstrels. Over the years I have seen many a minstrel performance but never one to compare with the Lew Dockstader show. His was the greatest in my time. My brother and I were taken to the old English theatre located on the Circle at Indianapolis to enjoy stage presentations of Robert Mantell in Shakespearian roles, Sothern and Marlowe, William Faversham, Olga Nethersole,

Otis Skinner and many others. But at home in Greensburg we enjoyed equally as much the traveling stock companies which presented a different play every night of the week. Admission to these productions was ten, twenty and thirty cents. I saw nearly all that came to town at the old K of P Opera House because the Editor of our leading newspaper supplied me with "passes." Of course "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was a favorite, however there were other productions such as "East Lynn," "The Bells," "Way Down East," "The Little Church Around the Corner," "The Lion and the Mouse," "Tom Thumb," "The Two Orphans," "Sis Hopkins," and no one in town missed "Sousa's Band." Today most of these dramatic presentation would be considered "corny" but 50 years ago they were the top hits. During this era, the Chautauqua craze hit Greensburg. Usually the Chautauqua lasted one whole week and was produced in some wooded grove in the corporate limits of the town. There was an improvised platform up front and enough benches and chairs to seat five hundred persons who made up the audience. The Program Committee brought some extraordinary talent and among the outstanding orators was William Jennings Bryan. Mr. Bryan was strictly a "money" speaker and even in those days had to have a guarantee of Five hundred dollars for his afternoon discourse. He was a brilliant speaker in his day but could not compare with men like Jim Watson of Rushville, Ind. who later went on to become our U.S. Senator. In fact Jim Watson was the finest orator I ever heard. He was a "natural" and could speak on any subject at any time. He never read a speech and his eloquence captured and held your attention. When I was much older I entertained the late Clarence Darrow in Cincinnati after he had spoken to a local luncheon Club of which I then was President but even Mr. Darrow did not top Jim Watson. Darrow was a Court Room lawyer, logical, convincing and sincere; he scarcely ever raised his voice but he was extremely effective and absolutely fearless. I have never seen his equal in a Court Room. When I met him in 1927 he did not drink a drop of liquor but he was opposed to any law which prohibited anyone else from having a "drink." Another speaker of no mean calibre on the political forum was "Uncle" Joe Cannon of Illinois. He was Speaker of the House in the U.S. Congress back in 1904 and even though of advanced age, he was a fighter to the end.

I am getting a little ahead of events but in 1912, I was a page boy at the Republican National Convention in Chicago. Jim Watson was there and all the bigwigs of the Party. This was the Convention that nominated Wm. Howard Taft for his second term but when Teddy Roosevelt bolted the Convention, he took enough hencemen with him to form the "Bull Moose" Party and as a result Gov. Woodrow Wilson of New Jersey was elected President of the United States. I recall meeting a man from Pennsylvania at that Convention named Boies Penrose. He was of the old school of political bosses and how he loved politics and life. Mr. Bryan was no sluggard as a gourmand but compared to Boies Penrose he was a rank amateur. Mr. Penrose enjoyed both food and drink in great abundance; he was a large, bulky man and he understood politics better than any of the delegates at the Convention. He knew every important man in the Country, the politicians and the non-politicians. It was educational to watch him work and to see how he achieved every objective. We don't have men of his type today – whether this be for good or bad I am not prepared to say.

One institution that flourished in those earlier days and whose "swan song" was sung Dec. 16, 1920, when the 18th Amendment went into effect, was the old fashioned Saloon. Now I am not

talking about the hoodlum bars around the river in river towns but of the up town well managed, mahogany bars that close at 12 o'clock midnight and catered only to men. A book could be written about the "Free lunches" of that era and the very excellent beer, the fine service and prices charged, and the patrons served. There were about seven "emporiums" in Greensburg in 1905-6-7 and a high ball made with bonded whiskey cost one dime; beer served in a twelve ounce Pilsener stem glass was five cents; in larger cities of Germanic background like Cincinnati, the beer gardens catered to the best people and a man could safely take his wife and children to such a garden and be just as secure as at home. There was no disorder and no unsavory characters were permitted to frequent these gardens. After Prohibition came, all this ended and it was the end of an era and an institution never to return. For 13 years, the home brew joints, the speakeasy and hijackers took over. Bath tub gin became popular, boot leg whiskey made in some basement down the street and worst of all mob control, creating violence in the big Night Clubs that sprang up all over the land. Gangsters and Gangland controlled the business and not the U.S. Government. We will never see the old German Beer Gardens again nor the free lunches. And there are those who call it "progress."

Everyone knows how the Grand Army of the Republic started and what a power it was in politics during the years directly after the Civil War. Of course Indiana was a Union State and kids in Public Schools, which I attended, were taught that only Rebels lived down South. As we grew older we discovered that the South had many brave and patriotic men and women, of fine character, such as Gen'l Robt. E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Joseph E. Johnston, Gen'l. Longstreet, General Beauregard and Jeb Stuart. Even old Jefferson Davis himself believed in his cause just as much as the Union men of the North believed in their cause. I do not mean to discredit Mr. Lincoln whom I have always regarded as an immortal, nor any of the brave men who fought to save the Union. It was a war that never should have happened. The G.A.R. veterans during the early years of the century who lived in Greensburg always had a parade from the Public Square out to the cemetery on May 30th. A committee asked me one day if I would organize a drum corps to lead their parade on Memorial Day. This was an easy thing to do as most of my young friends had drums and we got a big thrill leading a parade of such distinguished veterans. We would sometimes "beat" too fast a march and had to be "slowed down" for naturally these old soldiers could not step as fast as we could, from the center of the Public Square we would march to the South Park Cemetery, where it is still located and an appropriate ritual was there performed by the living for the dead. Flag decked graves still dominate the old cemetery although the G.A.R. boys are all gone. The brave men who died in 1917-1918 and in the 2nd World War and at Korea are resting in this same place where we as youngsters beat drums for the "boys in blue."

It seemed that time was running ahead of us. Here it was 1908 and the old swimmin' hole was no more; it wasn't safe to ride our bicycles as we used to do for the town was becoming flooded with those "horseless" carriages, especially that Model T made by Mr. Ford and we remembered what Grand-daddy Zoller had said a few years before, "Nothing will ever beat the horse;" the old dirt and gravel roads were disappearing and new concrete highways being built; in another year or two the livery stable which always smelled so good to me, would be torn down for a filling station. You couldn't exactly describe it but everyone and everything was gaining in

acceleration; a dollar wouldn't buy quite as much as it used to buy; and then suddenly before I realized it, it was High School graduation day in 1911; I was at Ann Arbor attending the University of Michigan when early in 1912 my father passed away quite suddenly. I knew that childhood days were over. My world would change and soon the entire world would change. In two short years all of Europe would burst into flames, the start of World War One. But life must go on and I went on with it. The only thing today when I occasionally go back to my home town that looks familiar is that maple tree still growing on the Court House Tower. Nothing else is the same. Old landmarks have disappeared, new school buildings have arisen, no one knows me and I know no one. My friends of former years are either dead or have moved away.

It was a grand and glorious era in which to have been born and reared however and a wonderful little town for boys and girls to have lived and grown into teen-agers. But as O.O. McIntyre once said "You should never go back to your home town after having been away from it for over 20 years." He was SO RIGHT.