

### III

## WALTER WELTY CLIPPINGER

### *The Patriarch of the Cincinnati Clippingers*



My grandfather, W.W. Clippinger, made a major impression on me during my youthful years. He was a no-nonsense, autocratic man, who expected both his children and grandchildren to respect his wishes. A taciturn man, he was rarely given to small talk and was stern in his demeanor, which I found quite intimidating as a boy.

One of my most vivid memories concerns a summer garden I kept at the age of 10 to 12 at W.W.'s insistence on the Clippinger farm on Indian Hill. Actually, in retrospect "garden" seems to be a bit of an understatement. This was no small plot next to the kitchen, but rather one that covered a full acre. My chief boyhood responsibility for three summers was tending this garden. W.W. plowed it in the late spring; but I planted it (with some help from my father) and did most of the gardening. I planted one-fourth of the acre with melons and the rest with sweet corn, tomatoes, cabbages, and other vegetables. The work was overwhelming. When the plants reached full maturity and the vegetables were ready to be harvested, then W.W. would come into my garden, cane in hand, and walk slowly along the rows of melons, tapping the fruit with his cane and listening to the sound. When he found a ripe one, he would tell me, "This melon will be good for breakfast tomorrow morning." And then he would order me to cut it off the vine and take it to Aunt Sallie Clippinger in the farmhouse kitchen. I can remember those moments so clearly that they sometimes seem to have happened just yesterday instead of almost 60 years ago.

Walter Welty Clippinger was John Henry's fourth son, born on April

20, 1865, in Monrovia, Indiana. This was a tiny crossroads town southwest of Indianapolis where the Clippingers spent time briefly before finally settling in at McCutchanville. W.W. was only ten when his father died under those dramatic circumstances already described, a death that impoverished the family. They could not even afford a tombstone to mark John Henry's grave. On December 24, 1878, the Methodist church held an oyster supper in the McCutchanville Hall to raise money for the purchase of a proper tombstone for their deceased minister. They raised \$27 after costs that evening, enough to buy the imposing marker that now stands.

For the next 20 years Mary Rebecca and her eight children got by on the charity of neighbors and the hard work of the Clippinger boys. W.W. and his brothers hoed the fields of neighboring farmers from dawn to dusk for the grand total of 50¢ a day. This was hard, hot, backbreaking work. In later years he and his brothers refused to talk about those difficult times of their youth. That was probably their way of dealing with memories that were simply too painful to recollect.

And yet, through the lean years Mary Rebecca kept all her children in the McCutchanville school. She insisted that her sons stay focused on achieving her twin goals of a good education and a solid professional career. And in this she was successful. Despite the poverty of their circumstances, this was a closely knit family, highly respected in the McCutchanville community and blessed with an abundance of loving friends. About 1885 Mary Rebecca moved her family to a house belonging to one of the McCutchans, located in town about a quarter of a mile from the church.

In 1883 W.W. graduated from the McCutchanville School, and by the middle of the following school year he had joined the staff as a teacher. Before long he became both the school's principal and its janitor, for a combined salary of \$30 a month. The Evansville Journal of April 13, 1892, ran a lengthy article about a picnic and flag-raising that constituted the closing exercises of the McCutchanville School. According to that account, W.W. presided over the festivities and made a presentation speech before the crowd of 400 students and parents. He also found time to serve as the superintendent of the Methodist

Church's Sunday school program.

In the final years of the nineteenth century W.W. lost three of his brothers unexpectedly to disease. James Armstrong Clippinger (July 1, 1861–June 24, 1889) developed his father's disease, tuberculosis, and moved to



*James Armstrong Clippinger*  
*W.W.'s older brother.*



*Charles Simpson Clippinger*  
*W.W.'s younger brother.*

San Diego on his doctor's recommendation, where he worked on the construction of the famous Hotel del Coronado in the months before his death. Charles Simpson Clippinger (August 9, 1870–August 2, 1898) died of heart trouble that resulted from typhoid fever. And Joseph Warren Clippinger (March 2, 1874–December 1902), John Henry's eighth and last child, died of an undiagnosed illness while in Colorado.

Mary Rebecca's health worsened as she aged. In 1891 she suffered a stroke, which confined her to a wheelchair. Yet she continued to do housework, much to the distress of her two daughters. A second stroke in 1893 left her bedridden and helpless. She died on August 30, 1895. Her obituary notice in the Evansville Journal eulogized: "She was a woman of deep piety, earnestness, and purity; of a beautiful Christian character, trusted and loved by all. Her friendship was reliable and abiding."

W.W. had bigger plans than simply being the principal of the

McCutchanville School. His father, on his deathbed, had ordered W.W. to become a lawyer, and this he determined to do. Then an event occurred which dramatically changed his life. He had taken a temporary job one summer as a desk clerk at the popular Hot Springs Hotel in Hot Springs, Virginia, located in the Appalachian Mountains about 35 miles southwest of Deerfield. Probably one of his Armstrong relatives had gotten him the position. While there, he met John Jefferson Glidden and his family from Cincinnati, who had gone to Hot Springs on a vacation. John Jefferson was a prominent corporation lawyer noted for a wonderful memory. He had won national recognition when he argued and won a case before the Supreme Court. On this vacation he was accompanied by his three daughters. W.W. found himself particularly attracted to the oldest, Helen Louise (born June 20, 1872), and the two young people soon fell in love. John Jefferson apparently saw W.W.'s potential and, upon learning of his desire to study law, invited him to come to Cincinnati and study law at a school there while serving a paying apprenticeship in his law firm.

W.W. quickly accepted John Jefferson's invitation and moved to Cincinnati, probably in the early fall of 1892. There he enrolled in the Cincinnati Law School and graduated with his law degree in 1894. To gain some practical experience to complement the more abstract approach of his classes, W.W. served an apprenticeship under his father-in-law. This eventually led to a full time position in the Glidden firm that lasted until his John Jefferson's death in 1902. (At that point he and another apprentice, a young man named Hudson, decided to form a partnership. Hudson's sole child, John, would develop such a close friendship with the Clippinger family that they considered him another son. John Hudson was perhaps my father Carl's closest friend growing up.)

That connection with John Jefferson also allowed W.W. plenty of opportunity to court Helen Louise. She was far more sophisticated than he, with better education and much more polish. Her father had sent her to a private school, operated by a man named Briol, in the mountains overlooking Switzerland's Lake Geneva for much of her education. She returned to Cincinnati a highly refined, educated young lady who spoke

fluent French, could converse at length about a broad range of cultural issues, and was an accomplished artist in several mediums, especially that



***Helen Louise Glidden***

*Wife of W.W. Clippinger. (June 20, 1872 - October 2, 1928.)*

of wood carving. The couple were married on June 1, 1894, in the living room of the imposing Glidden house located at 264 McCormick Place on the edge of the University of Cincinnati campus. W.W.'s older brother, the Rev. Henry Clayton Clippinger, performed the ceremony. The newlyweds took up residence in the spacious Glidden house.

W.W. soon learned how distinguished a family he had married into



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***The newlyweds, Helen (age 22) and W.W. Clippinger (age 29)***  
*Photographs were taken about 1894-95 by Landy of Cincinnati,*  
*winner of many World's Fair awards for High Art Photography.*

that day. The Gliddens had arrived in this country from Britain in the early seventeenth century and settled in New Hampshire. Helen's uncle was the distinguished inventor, Carlos Glidden (1834-1877), who, with



*Rev. Henry Clayton Clippinger (left) and W.W. Clippinger  
Photographed some time before 1920 in McCutchanville, Indiana.  
W.W.'s older brother, Henry, officiated at W.W. and Helen's marriage  
on June 1, 1894.*



C. Latham Sholes, designed and patented the first working model of the typewriter. In 1874 they sold their patents to E. Remington & Sons, the gun manufacturers in New York. One of the original Sholes & Glidden machines is on permanent display in the Smithsonian Institution's collection at the Museum of Technology. A cousin was Joseph F. Glidden (1813-1906), also an inventor, who hailed from DeKalb, Illinois. In 1873 he received the first patent for barbed wire, an invention that made him wealthy and changed the course of Western history. And a Glidden in another branch founded the big Glidden Paint Company.

Throughout much of her life Helen was a woman of frail health. During her first pregnancy, she was so ill that her family feared she would die. Instead, on April 19, 1895, she delivered a healthy baby girl in her bedroom at her father's house. In a sentimental, romantic gesture, quite unexpected from the usually restrained W.W., he named his daughter after the state where he had first met his future wife-Virginia Welty Clippinger.

Within 18 months W.W. was making enough money from his legal practice to purchase a farm with a rambling frame house on Drake Road in the farming community of Indian Hill, on the eastern edge of Cincinnati. Over the next few years three more children were born: John Henry Clippinger (1897-1979), who would go on to become one of the city's most prominent lawyers; Ruth Helen Clippinger (1899-1967), who would become a distinguished teacher in the English Department at Hughes High School next to the campus of the University of Cincinnati; and, finally, my father, Carl Armstrong Clippinger (1903-1945), who would find his calling as a realtor. Virginia (1895-1960), the firstborn, would conclude several careers as a teacher whose innovative ideas would revolutionize the teaching of kindergarten across the country.

Indian Hill in the early 1900s when the Clippingers moved there lacked almost all the modern conveniences we take for granted today. Electricity had not yet arrived from the city. Residents drew their water from wells or cisterns. However, party-line telephone service was available. The postman with the day's mail arrived in his horse and buggy. The only public transportation serving the area was the "Swing Line,"

an electric streetcar line that ran past the Clippinger farm on its way to the communities of Terrace Park and Milford.

In those early days, Indian Hill had no organized fire department to



***John and Virginia and the pony cart they often used to travel to school in Madisonville***

*This picture was one of their family possessions saved after the disastrous fire in 1906 which destroyed their family home in Indian Hill. It was reproduced in an article in the Indian Hill Bulletin in September, 1971.*

provide protection for the farmhouses and their out buildings in the event of fires. When a fire broke out, the bell in Armstrong Chapel about a mile down the road from the Clippinger farm was rung to alert neighbors. The sight of a column of black smoke by day or the red glow of a burning structure at night would guide the volunteers to the site.

One day in the late spring of 1906 Virginia and John rode back to their house on the Swing Line at the end of their school day in the nearby community of Madisonville. As they approached their stop, they

were horrified to see their farmhouse in flames. All the passengers and the motorman hurried over and joined the neighbors' unsuccessful efforts to save the house. However, they did manage to salvage some of the family's furniture and personal possessions.

W.W. and Helen decided to rebuild almost immediately. They erected several spacious tents, which served the family as bedrooms, kitchen, and dining room. (Aunt Virginia and Uncle John recalled that back in the summer of 1906 the Clippinger children were the envy of their friends because they got to sleep in tents every night while their new house was under construction!) The completed building became a wonder of Indian Hill for its modern features. For example, W.W. ordered the latest water system installed, consisting of a series of gutters that collected the rainwater from the roof and directed it into several large holding tanks on the third floor, from which, by gravity, it then flowed into the bathrooms and kitchen.

W.W.'s law practice continued to flourish. In 1907 he decided to construct a second, much larger house, closer to his office in the center of Cincinnati but still far enough away that he and his family would enjoy all the benefits of a smaller, more intimate community. He bought a lot in the town of Madisonville, a few miles away from the Clippinger farm. He built his house at 4412 Erie Avenue for \$3,500, a major sum in those days.

Today, Madisonville is a working-class black area that has fallen on hard times, suffering from depressed property values and a high crime rate. But back in 1907 when W.W. built his second house there, the community was the home of many influential leaders who affected the Cincinnati area. In the words of one local historian, "No other Cincinnati community, in proportion to its size, could claim as many residents who were important in the intellectual and professional affairs of Cincinnati, especially during the first 40 years of [the twentieth] century." Many professional men, especially educators, chose to live in this quiet village with its tidy, tree-lined streets because they could easily commute to their offices in the downtown area.

Thus, the Clippinger family found themselves dividing their time between these two houses. W.W. lived mostly in the Madisonville house



*W.W. Clippinger as a young man*

during the week, commuting into Cincinnati to his law office. The four children all attended school in Madisonville. The family often spent their weekends on Indian Hill. During the summers the farm was the preferred residence for much of the week, probably because there were more breezes there and, of course, the added benefits of fresh fruits and



*The Clippinger family house at 4412 Erie Avenue, Madisonville  
This was the second of W.W.'s two houses.*

vegetables from the extensive gardens. And in the heat of the summer months the Clippinger children and their friends could often find relief by splashing in a swimming hole to the rear of the farmhouse, which W.W. had created by damming a small stream.

Before W.W. bought his first car in 1912, the family traveled back and forth between the two houses either by streetcar or, when the weather was pleasant, in a small, one pony, four-wheel carriage. When Grandmother Helen Clippinger made the trip without one of the men along, she always carried a small pistol on her person, just in case trouble should develop!

W.W. rarely paid any attention to his attire. As a testimony to the

frugal ways he had picked up in his youth in McCutchanville, he owned only one business suit at a time. “He would wear that suit until it was ready to fall off him, and then he would buy another and start all over again,” Clippinger family friend John Hudson recalled in later years. “Mrs. Clippinger got after him about his clothes, but it never did any good.” Wilbur Clippinger confirmed W.W.’s indifference to clothes and fashion at our reunion in 1986 and added, “I never saw a crease in Uncle Walter’s pants!”

Blessed with a far more sophisticated education, W.W.’s wife, Helen, was completely devoted to her husband, in spite of his foibles. Throughout their marriage she managed to have a polishing effect on her husband’s somewhat rough country ways. For example, to make business contacts she encouraged him to join the Madisonville Round Table, an exclusive club with a membership limited to just 20 men. They met once a month for dinner at the homes of the members. Afterwards the group always discussed a book which had been selected in advance. W.W. was not much of a reader, so Helen would always read the assigned books, work up a series of thoughtful observations and questions, and coach her husband before each dinner to insure he would make an impressive appearance before the group if called upon.

Helen, by the way, was responsible for the founding of the first kindergarten class at the Madisonville Elementary School. She had been reading about such programs in a magazine to which she subscribed and thought it would be beneficial to the community’s youngsters.

Helen also enjoyed a reputation as an accomplished wood-carver. She had a special room at the farmhouse for her woodworking studio. This was strictly Grandmother’s property. Her children could visit but were told that if they touched anything it had to be put back exactly where it came from. Once or twice a week she had a German-born craftsman come in and tutor her. Aunt Virginia wrote about her studio at length in her unpublished novel, *Forgotten Springs*, which preserves many of the Clippinger family events from this period. As she described it:

“On one side stood a long, heavy worktable. In front it had little doors that opened; hanging on the insides of these doors were Mother’s

carving tools. Inside lay the boards that Mother carved and then gave to Mr. Friehoff to make into little cupboards, shelves, wall-brackets, and small tables. Into the boards Mother cut pictures of flowers, leaves, and grapes from the garden.

“Old Mr. Friehoff had white hair, a hump on his back between his shoulders, and large round hoops of gold in his ears. On cold days he wore a red knit cap and looked exactly like a gnome—except that he had no pointed ears. Once Mr. Friehoff had carved altar rails for cathedrals back in the ‘Old Country,’ and he knew all about woods. He would sit on his stool beside Mother’s worktable, his legs hunched up under him on the rungs, his head in its red cap bobbing this way while he talked to Mother about the boards.”

Grandmother Helen had little to do with the day-to-day business of running her husband’s two households. Rather, this was left to the seventh member of the family, Sarah (Sallie) Jane Clippinger (1868-1953), W.W.’s devoted sister. She had never married. Although she had earned a teaching certificate, she never taught or held a job. She came to live with her brother’s family after Aunt Virginia’s birth in 1895 and helped raise the four children. She made certain that the domestic side of the Clippinger household ran smoothly. For example, she handled all the cooking, baking, and canning, including the preparation for the large gatherings of family and friends that W.W. always insisted upon inviting for both Thanksgiving and Christmas. The family always spoke highly of Aunt Sallie as the angel from heaven. Wilbur Clippinger recalled during our 1986 reunion, “No one was ever rude to Aunt Sallie; they always loved her so much.” In 1945 she moved to Mariemont to live with Aunt Ruth Clippinger at her home on Beech Street.

This is as good a place as any to elaborate on the matter of the Clippinger family car, which became the source of many of the family’s most oft-repeated recollections. W.W. had the distinction of owning the first car on Indian Hill, buying a Stanley Steamer about 1912. However, he soon found himself quite intimidated by the “machine.” Early on he had climbed in one morning to start it up, shifted into reverse gear thinking he was in forward gear, and backed the car through the wall of his chicken coop. On another occasion he was driving up a particular-



*Sarah (Sallie) Jane Clippinger (1868 - 1953)*



ly steep hill on Indian Hill Road near the farm when he stalled the car. He got out to crank the engine up, forgot to set the emergency brake, and watched helplessly as his car rolled backwards to the foot of the hill and crashed. After that he put the car in his barn on the farm and refused to use it. His son, John, who was then about 14 years old, got hold of the owner's manual one day and taught himself how to drive. He would



***Aunt Sallie, W.W.'s "angel sister"***

*Sallie is pictured here in a snapshot taken in 1952 at age 84. She died one year later.*

take the Clippinger car out for rides around Indian Hill, often with his friends as passengers, during the day when W.W. was at work in his office in Cincinnati. One day a neighborhood farmer spotted John driving the car and congratulated W.W. a few days later on the fine way his son handled the car. W.W. immediately called John to him and demanded to know if he had been driving the car. John admitted that he had.

W.W. then insisted John demonstrate his driving skills. Off they went, father and son. W.W. was so impressed that he made John his chauffeur. Thereafter, whenever W.W. needed to go someplace by car, he had John drive him. Poor Uncle John. Driving the family car had changed from being an adventure to a chore!

W.W. took his family to Europe on two occasions in the years after the end of the first World War. On the first trip his two older children, Aunt Virginia and Uncle John, accompanied their parents, while on the second in 1923 Aunt Ruth, my father, Carl, and his closest friend, John Hudson, went along. Mr. Hudson recalled years later that they traveled light: “Your grandfather and grandmother traveled on the principle that the way not to lose any luggage was to keep it with them all the time.



*Aunt Ruth Clippinger, John Hudson, Carl Clippinger (left to right)  
The guide is at the rear. Note their clothes and coats, and how they are roped together to cross the glacier. They are near InterLaken on the Jung Frau mountain. Seventy years later, Joan and I were in the same area and climbed Mt. Eiger, an adjacent mountain.*

So they insisted that we all travel light. Carl and I each had two grips, while W.W., Helen, and Ruth had one apiece. And that took care of everything.”

At Grandmother Helen’s insistence a long stay was made on each trip at the small town near Geneva where she had attended school many years before. Aunt Virginia left behind a detailed description of those visits in her unpublished novel, *Forgotten Springs*. She wrote:

“From Paris the family went to Switzerland where, at the Chalet aux Pleiades on the mountains above Geneva, Mother’s class reunion was held. Mother joined the other mothers at the Grand Chalet; the children were sent to the Petite Chalet behind it, which had been set aside as a dormitory for all the children.

“In the mornings the children had fencing and French lessons from Professor Nusbaum, who was an old man and taught in his daughter’s school. But in his youth he had been a famous court tutor teaching French to young kings.

“In the afternoon the children wandered into St. Legier, the little mountain village nearby, and watched the peasant women washing clothes in the mountain stream—or peeked into the barber shop where the town barber, a woman, shaved her customers. Often, the young Frenchman in charge of the boys would take all the children mountain climbing. Once they spent a day at a grape festival and watched the peasants in their canton costumes do folk dances.”

On the passage back across the Atlantic in mid-October the ship steamed directly into a major storm. My father, Carl, and his friend John Hudson were good sailors and didn’t miss a meal. But they found themselves eating in an almost-empty dining room. W.W. and Helen, along with their daughter Ruth, remained in their cabins for the duration of the rough weather.

One of my most vivid memories of the Clippinger farmhouse on Indian Hill, when I was a small boy, is of a large, hand-carved coat rack in the front hall depicting a mother bear and her two cubs, both of which had climbed a tree. They were all life-size. Grandfather had bought it as a gift for his wife in Switzerland on their last trip there in 1923. In the gloom of the hallway that coat rack was quite frightening

to the young Dave Clippinger!

For all his rough ways, W.W. was, surprisingly, very much of a visionary. For example, back in 1901 he founded the Cincinnati-Beaumont Oil Company, sold shares to several wealthy individuals in Cincinnati, and became an active player in the famous Texas oil rush that was soon to change American history in the twentieth century. This is one of the great sagas in the Clippinger family history, but unfortunately one we know too little about.

The great Spindletop oil field was born on January 10, 1901, when the first well was brought in with a roar, as a great column of thick black oil gushed skyward for twice the height of the derrick before cresting and falling back to earth as a greasy shower. Such a sight had never been seen before in North America. The roar of that gusher was heard around the world. Virtually overnight, the field established America as the world's foremost producer of oil and secured for the country an almost unlimited supply of energy to fuel the tremendous expansion of the first half of the twentieth century. Spindletop marked the beginning of the age of gasoline. Out of Spindletop and its successors came the automobile and airplane industries, improved rail and marine transportation, and all the comforts and conveniences of the age of petroleum. The modern oil industry, including such giants as Gulf and Texaco, and much of its technology were born there.

Overnight Beaumont became a boomtown, its population tripling to 30,000 in less than three months. Tents, one-room shacks, saloons, and gambling houses were raised to handle the flow, but still the people came. Six trains plus specials were scheduled into Beaumont from Houston, and they were always fully booked. (The Texas railroads advertised, "In Beaumont You'll See a Gusher Gushing!")

Downtown Beaumont became a carnival of wild speculation. Land and leases were sold without titles or abstracts and at all hours of the day and night. A reporter on the scene in early 1902 noted: "Thousands of acres of this land 150 miles from Beaumont have sold for as much as \$1,000 an acre, with \$900,000 having recently been paid for one acre near the oil field. No sales in the vicinity of the strike were made for less than \$200,000 an acre. Spindletop today may be justly assessed at a val-

uation of \$500,000 an acre. Two years ago it could have been bought for less than \$10 an acre.”

Today it boggles my mind that W.W. had the foresight and vision to see immediately the potential of that great oil strike. He seemed to have known intuitively that the Spindletop oil strike represented far greater riches than the Klondike gold strike a few years before. And almost immediately he formed his company, raised some money, and took the train down to Beaumont to begin wheeling and dealing for oil drilling rights on the adjacent land. For the next 30 years of his life W.W.’s oil leases and their supervision were a major part of his business life, requiring two or more trips a year to Beaumont from Cincinnati.

On one of his early trips there he took Aunt Virginia, then a young girl. Decades later, she would recollect at length about her experiences in that rough and wild boomtown. She was only a girl of six or so at the time, a prim, late-Victorian lass who looked upon her time spent there with W.W. as a grand adventure. She and her father stayed in a hotel in nearby Port Arthur.

Aunt Virginia recalled the boomtown of Beaumont as a muddy, mosquito-infested, rough-and-tumble frontier settlement that had sprung up almost overnight after the first oil well had gushed in. The streets were all dirt, the sidewalks made of wooden board and elevated. The mosquitoes were fearsome. The men had to put on protective clothing and cover their faces with finely meshed net to guard against the clouds of mosquitoes when they were in the field. One morning as she and Grandfather walked along a board sidewalk and crossed an alley, Aunt Virginia looked up and saw a shirtless man lying still in the mud, covered with a blanket of mosquitoes. “What is that man doing there?” she asked her father. W.W. just hurried her along and told her not to look. The man had fallen drunk in the mud the previous evening. Aunt Virginia told us that she had always thought he had probably died from the repeated stinging by thousands of mosquitoes.

Now, almost a century later, all of W.W.’s grandchildren continue to get royalty checks once or twice a year from a big oil company that currently works the land on which our grandfather acquired the oil rights. The checks aren’t large any more, under \$100 for the most part. But



*Rev. Henry Clayton Clippinger and his wife Aunt Hettie (front row)  
Mary Clippinger Scott, daughter of Rev. Henry Clayton, married to General Scott, a Two-Star  
General in W.W. II. (second row, first left) Wilbur Clippinger, "Uncle Doc" (last on right)*

when each one arrives in the mail, I always stop for a moment and reflect upon W.W.'s farsighted involvement in that oil boom at the start of the twentieth century.

W.W.'s next great vision concerned Indian Hill, where his farm was located. Throughout the 1920s and '30s he had been quietly accumulating farmland throughout the village, eventually owning over 500 acres. Mary Clippinger Scott, the daughter of John Henry's oldest son, Henry Clayton, recalled visiting the Clippinger farm once when she was a young girl. W.W. took her and her father to the highest point nearby and then, with a wide sweep of his extended arm, boasted proudly, "All the land you see in every direction belongs to me!" (After the Great Depression settled in, he found himself land-rich but cash-poor!)

Conditions on Indian Hill improved steadily in the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1920 all the farms were hooked up to electrical lines. In 1922 the town established its first fire department. Funds to acquire equipment were raised by the sale of stock and by a series of carnivals, card parties, and minstrel shows. And finally, in 1925, the Cincinnati water works extended water and sewer service to Indian Hill, thus opening up the community for extensive real estate developments. W.W. was the first to see that Indian Hill had the potential to become Cincinnati's most exclusive residential community.

Until then, the rich and influential in Cincinnati had lived mainly in town in Walnut Hills, a community of stately mansions on spacious lots. But that area's demographics began to change dramatically after the end of the First World War. Land speculators built large complexes of inexpensive apartments for the working poor, first on the outskirts of Walnut Hills and then, a few years later inside. W.W. saw that it was just a matter of time before large numbers of West End blacks moved into Walnut Hills.

If the richest residents of Cincinnati no longer had Walnut Hills to call home, then the question became: what new neighborhood would attract them? For W.W. the answer was readily apparent—Indian Hill. That farming community offered an abundance of land at reasonable prices at a safe distance from the inner-city working-class and black residents and many opportunities for such outdoor activities as golf, horse-

back riding, and gardening. (In 1925 W.W. was instrumental in the formation of the prestigious Camargo Country Club, which he astutely situated just to one side of his own farm, thus in short order driving his own property values significantly higher.) Furthermore, fresh air and outdoor recreation had been prescribed since the late nineteenth century for their therapeutic effect on respiratory disease and the “nervous disorders” thought to be brought about by the crowded, dirty, smoggy conditions of modern cities. Indian Hill, as W.W. no doubt pointed out, also boasted a much higher elevation than the adjacent city of Cincinnati, thus allowing it to escape from the unhealthy fumes and eye-burning smoke that often collected in the air over the Ohio River Valley in the heart of the city,

W.W. then began a single-handed campaign to persuade the city’s richest and most influential people to buy land on Indian Hill and construct new mansions there. He and a handful of other speculators understood, in the words of one historian, “how legal tools, such as zoning, and political tools, such as incorporation, could enable them to control growth and preserve a semi-rural atmosphere.”

W.W.’s great contribution to Cincinnati was his idea to develop Indian Hill, which became the largest real-estate development project in the history of the city up until that time. He sold various key people on the idea of moving to Indian Hill. And then he managed to acquire options on an enormous amount of property, which he sold at reasonable prices. Such old-line Cincinnati families as the Tafts, Fleishmanns, Chatfields, Geiers, Emerys, Drackets, Dubois, Tates, Rowes, and Yeisers relocated to Indian Hill in the years between 1923 and 1930. By late 1940 when Indian Hill incorporated, it boasted a population of about 2,000 residents. W.W. was promptly elected the town’s first mayor, a position he held from July 1 until December 1, 1941.

Curiously, W.W.’s contributions to the formation of Indian Hill are rarely recognized today. In 1962 when the Indian Hill Garden Club published *Hither and Yon on Indian Hill*, a history of the community, almost no mention was made of W.W. I’m not surprised. My grandfather was an enigma to the high-society people he brought to Indian Hill. Socially, he was not one of them. To the end he remained a coun-





*W.W. in mid-life*

try lawyer, whose brilliant ideas were often for them obscured behind his rough manners and careless dress. He did not fit the mold of the fashionable and wealthy people who started calling Indian Hill their home. These people and their lifestyle of conspicuous consumption did not interest W.W. He rejected them, so they rejected him. Hence, they left him out of their histories of Indian Hill.

Throughout much of this triumph W.W. was alone. His beloved wife, Helen, died from breast cancer on October 2, 1928. In those early years doctors had virtually no medical protocols for advanced cancer patients except bed rest and aspirin. Grandmother Helen had no surgery. Rather she retired to the Clippinger farmhouse on Indian Hill to await the end.

As W.W. aged, he spent most of his life on the farm. The Madisonville house fell into disrepair. I remember as a boy walking through the Erie Avenue house. Obviously, it had been closed up for many years. In one drawer I discovered dozens of stock certificates for companies that had gone bankrupt in the early years of the Depression. (Some time after 1948 when the Clippinger family sold the Erie Avenue house, the new owner subdivided it to make four apartments, two on each floor, and so it remains today. A four-family apartment building was constructed in the rear of W.W.'s property.)

W.W. lingered on perhaps too long, slowly sliding into senility in his final years. He never knew that he was at the center of the Cincinnati Clippinger family's most bizarre incident, one so outrageous and improbable that no novelist would ever be tempted to use it as a plot device.

In 1944 W.W.'s mental and physical condition had deteriorated to the point that the family felt it was imperative to have a nurse at the Indian Hill farm on a full-time basis to take care of his medical and domestic needs. Uncle John, by then a prominent lawyer in Cincinnati, undertook to hire the best possible person. He thought he had found her in the person of Dorothea Giese, 47, a German-born nurse with excellent credentials and a set of impressive recommendations. She was the widow of a Dr. Leopold Cohn, a much older man, who had died in Cincinnati three years before. W.W. and Dorothea had met in April 1944 when he was a patient in a Cincinnati hospital where he had gone for

an operation. Later Uncle John hired her as W.W.'s full-time nurse. She proved highly competent; over the months he entrusted her with more and more responsibility.

Then in the late fall of that year W.W. and his nurse disappeared. No trace was found. None of the family members had the slightest idea where they might have gone. Uncle John launched a search. As the time of his disappearance lengthened, the local police were brought in, and, finally, the F B I. Uncle John learned through his FBI contacts there the Bureau had a file on the woman. Dorothea Giese had been born in Germany, come to this country in the late 1920s, and then returned to Germany about 1936 after Hitler issued a call for German nationals to return to the Fatherland. Because she spoke good English and had lived in the United States for many years, the German Intelligence recruited her into their service. They trained her and sent her back to the U.S. about 1939 with a large sum of American cash and instructions to link up with a German espionage ring on the eastern coast.

Somehow the FBI had learned of the operation. They followed Dorothea from the moment she disembarked from her ship. However, unknown to them, she had decided not to join the German network but rather to strike out on her own. Some time after the United States entered the war against Germany, she moved westward and finally ended up in Cincinnati, where she knew she would have blended in, given that city's large German population. In the fall of 1944 she approached my uncle after she heard that he was seeking a live-in nurse to take care of W.W.

Gradually, this is what Uncle John learned. The nurse had drugged W.W., transported him across the river to Kentucky, paid an obliging justice of the peace to marry them, and then headed south to Daytona Beach, Florida, where she bought a small house. About this time she began cashing in all of W.W.'s liquid assets—his bonds, bank accounts, checking accounts, and other assets which could easily be turned into cash. This included the most lucrative of his oil leases in the Beaumont area, which she sold for 50¢ on the dollar. All this yielded a total sum of \$50,000 or more. Uncle John started three legal cases: one in Cincinnati, charging kidnapping; one in Kentucky to annul the marriage; and a third in Florida to extradite W.W. and his “wife.”



*A sketch of W.W. in 1931  
Illustrated are two of his favorite activities: horseback riding and travel.*

Because Aunt Virginia had been closer to Dorothea than any other family member, Uncle John asked her to travel to Daytona Beach in late February of 1945 to keep an eye on W.W. With her two young sons, Jim and Walter, Aunt Virginia traveled by Greyhound Bus. The nurse welcomed them into her home. Aunt Virginia soon learned that Dorothea kept W.W. in bed, heavily sedated. (He still thought he was in Cincinnati during those rare hours when he was alert.) Then, one evening in March, the radio news carried the surprise announcement that Germany had surrendered. By the next morning this was repudiated as a rumor. But before the correction, the nurse had decided that because the war was over she could no longer be prosecuted as a spy—so she ordered Aunt Virginia and her two young boys out of her house and onto the streets. They finally found a place not far from the beach and stayed there another couple of weeks. Uncle John then sent his sister bus tickets, and they returned to Cincinnati.

Uncle John decided in the end it was cheaper to negotiate. The agreement let the woman keep all the cash she had received already from W.W. In return, she signed papers annulling the marriage and agreed to forego any additional rights and money. W.W. returned to Cincinnati, never understanding that he had been married.

Uncle John hired a private investigator in Jacksonville, Florida, to keep track of Dorothea and file an annual report. What he learned was that every 12 to 15 months she placed a classified advertisement in a different small-town newspaper, seeking a retired farmer for companionship leading to marriage. The ads stressed that she was both a nurse and an excellent homemaker with her own home. She picked her men carefully, always older men in poor health who had been retired for some time with no close family members, such as grown children. After brief courtships, she married them. Then, inevitably, after six months or so of marital bliss, the men died of “natural” causes. She had the bodies cremated. And then the ads reappeared. After five years or so, Uncle John turned the information over to a prosecuting attorney in Jacksonville. The man reviewed the material. “Yes,” he agreed, “there is no doubt that these old gents died under suspicious circumstances. But there is no evidence on which I can move against her in a criminal action.” In other

words, she had engineered the perfect crime, not once but several times.

In the basement of his house at 1263 Hayward Avenue Uncle John always kept Dorothea's medical bag, containing her syringes, stethoscopes, and other instruments, all marked "Made in Germany."

About 1946 the family put Grandfather in a nursing home. At that point he was far gone into senility. Aunt Jane, Uncle John's wife, remembered years later that whenever she visited W.W. there, he always was under the impression that he was on a perpetual cruise at sea. He would say, "Jane, shall we go for a stroll along the deck?" And off they would go. I suppose the wooden banisters along the walls reminded him of a ship's railing. W.W. finally died on November 22, 1948.