LET'S VISIT ROCKVILLE
1907-1925

A MEMOIR

By

Alma Louisa Hess Stieg
The Four of us
Papa, Mama, Beatrice, and Alma
C. 1919
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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my parents and grandparents:
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hess (Frieda and Henry)
Mr. and Mrs. William Hess (Louisa and William)
FOREWORD

This is a remembrance of a very interesting period. It may be you, or your parents and grandparents, lived, worked, and played during this era. In every state customs were about the same. Please join with us as we all relive the beginning of this century, 1907-1925

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Many thanks to my kids, Jonyl and her husband James, for running all those errands that kept popping up for many months.

My grateful thanks to Ardis Abbott for her interest in this true story, "Let's Visit Rockville."
Alma - age 2
Let's Visit Rockville
1907-1925

Shortly after the beginning of this century, Rockville was known as a small city, and I was a little kid. We were a family of four, living in a white house of nine rooms (including the attic). My grandparents, before building what was later called Rockville's skyscraper by us kids, had lived in our house. Therefore, their eight children (2 died in infancy), including papa were born in the same bed, same room, same house, years earlier than my sister and myself.

Here's what we had: carpet sweeper, broom, nice furniture, good home, plenty to eat, great relatives, neighbors, friends, and lots of love. Here's what we didn't have: refrigerator, washing machine, dryer, vacuum cleaner, furnace, electricity, radio, and television.

As did many others, Papa worked for the Hockanum Mills Company, took care of our yard, did things for his parents next door, and took care of his Rhode Island Red chickens and us. Mama cooked, baked, cleaned, washed, ironed, and mended. My sister Beatrice and I played, were happy, and kept on growing.

My grandparents had Plymouth Rock chickens. When the winter weather became extremely cold, Grandma cooked a huge kettle of "mash" so the chickens would have a warm meal everyday. They sure ate as if they were pleased. Sometimes I used to go with her before school. One day I've never forgotten. The chickens were clucking and eating when one of the roosters decided my red hair bows might be good to eat, so he flew up and started pecking
at me. Grandma grabbed him and rushed to the chopping block by the woodshed—and all of us had chicken soup that night! Papa explained that when a rooster does that once, he is likely to do it again and peck someone causing permanent damage to the face. So I learned even chickens and roosters had "do's and don'ts."

On Sundays everyone attended church and Sunday school. According to their affiliation, they went to one of the following: St. Bernard's Catholic, Union Congregational, Rockville Methodist, St. John's Episcopal, Baptist, St. Joseph's Polish Catholic, or Trinity Lutheran. The Baptists often used Bradley's Pond for their baptismal ceremony. The Jewish people walked to Ellington where many of their faith lived, to observe their Holy Days. It's possible a Rabbi came from Hartford to participate in their services. Our entire family attended church regularly and worked for and in our church, Evangelical Lutheran Church.

When Reverend F. Otten was our pastor, he often held evening services that were exceptionally well attended by people of all faiths.

There were five schools in Rockville: East District, West District, St. Bernard's Catholic, St. Joseph's Polish, and the Rockville High School, which was and is an accredited school. There were many teachers who dedicated their lives to teaching. Three taught at East District: Miss Bessie Durfee, first grade; Miss Della Durfee, fourth grade; Miss Florence Whitlock, sixth grade. Also, Mr. Phillip Howe, was a teacher and Principal of the Rockville High School. Frequently, they had taught one or both parents and their children during their tenure.

School offered us an excellent education with great teachers, which made us happy. However, we found out certain germs were at school with a gift for us—namely measles, mumps, chicken pox, German
measles, pinkeye, and whooping cough. Any siblings in our families soon found out that they would catch the germs from us and become ill. My sister would stay as far away as she could, but somehow the germs knew where she was. I was very fond of school, but always anxious to get home every afternoon.

In the winter of 1912, a blizzard hit Rockville. I was in first grade. Miss Durfee, hearing a knock at her door, hurried to answer. There stood my grandmother who said she had come to take me home, and that all the young children wouldn't be able to reach their homes later through the deep snow. The principal, superintendent, and police captain were called for a conference. The decision was made that the first three grades of the East and West District schools would be dismissed. Grandma lined up children in the order of the location of their homes in our area. Policemen were called, did the same, and each child reached home safely to the joy and thanks of all our mothers. However, the other kids told me we had the best deal. Grandma's woolen skirt acted as a snowplow for us.

Of course, we girls had on our high shoes, rubbers, and our leggings. These leggings were made of thick, heavy flannel cloth, with straps that fit into the insteps, and buttons that marched as closely as possible up the sides from bottom to over our knees. There was always the possibility of an extra button or buttonhole at the top, skipped one again. Arriving home, we would hang our leggings on a wash line in back of the kitchen stove to dry.

On the way to school we walked past the forty-four steps; first flight, twenty-two steps, then across a bridge over the railroad tracks, then twenty-two more steps and down the hill. This was a shortcut to Brooklyn and West Main Streets, and used daily by many folks to and from the mills.
Further down High Street was a nine-tenement house. The top three rents had doors opening to High Street. The lower two stories of three rents each opened to Brooklyn Street.

An opera house stood on Market Street hill. In previous years operas had been performed here. Now there were bowling alleys on the second floor. Many bowlers enjoyed knocking down those pins, seeking "spares" and "strikes." On the first floor was the headquarters of *The Rockville Journal*, one of our newspapers. *The Rockville Leader*, our second paper, was located on East Main Street just beyond the boardwalk.

One day a bit of the "old west" came to our city. The captain of the police department received a call from the Hartford police that a prisoner had escaped and was thought to be headed to Rockville by train. The captain immediately went to the railroad station—the train arrived—the convict was sighted. A chase ensued across the street to the opera house, through the first floor and second floor, to the rear exit where a fight began. The railings gave way and they both fell quite a distance to the ground. The captain had sustained a serious injury to his back, but he succeeded in physically capturing the former escapee, took him to the lock-up at the town hall, and notified the Hartford police that their prisoner had been captured. At doctor's orders, Captain Krause spent several weeks in bed, and officers came and went from his home (the second floor in my Grandparents' house) as they all carried on with their duties.

Walking to and from school with friends was always interesting, but I did enjoy getting home. In our kitchen stood a wooden icebox. Mr. West cut ice from Shenipsit Lake. On his delivery days, Mama would call out to him what size piece would fit in our
box. On Saturdays it was always a fifty-cent piece. He would chip it off a large chunk of ice, throw a piece of rubber over his shoulder, and with huge tongs, he would toss the ice on his shoulder, carry it in and fit it into our box. There it slowly melted, keeping the contents of our box very cool while it dripped slowly down a pipe to a pan beneath the icebox. This was emptied at intervals; in summer it was wise to empty it frequently.

Every Sunday evening, Papa brought up a tub from the cellar. Hot water was put in, and the clothes to be washed were soaked overnight. In the morning, Mama scrubbed them on a scrubbing board; then they were put through a wringer and hung on our lines in the back yard. On stormy days the wash was hung upstairs in our spare room. The wash water was then used to clean the outdoor stairs back and front. The next day irons were heated on the kitchen stove. Everything was ironed, even all the handkerchiefs (no Kleenex then).

Each year in late spring or early summer our Special Cleaning Day arrived. It had to be a "warm but not hot, breezy but not windy, not a cloud in the sky" day. Oh yes, Papa had to be home to help. It began by carrying out some chairs on which mattresses would be laid; next down came the mattresses. Bedding, pillows, and clothing from the closets were hung on the lines, all rugs were brought out to be beaten by using a carpet beater. Doilies and scarves were washed and put out to dry and curtains were stretched on a curtain stretcher already set to the correct size. This was carefully done as the pins were very sharp. Indoors, we now swept ceilings and walls, wiped shades, washed windows and scrubbed floors, polished furniture, and cleaned closets. Pantry dishes and cupboards were done the day before.

Late afternoon and time to put up the curtains,
bring in mattresses and bedding, remake beds, hang clothes in the closets, lay the rugs, place doilies and scarves on tables, chairs and bureaus. Another successful Spring Cleaning Day!

Heating our home for the winter started in late summer or early fall. Shortly after giving our order to Mr. Martin, the day would come when we would hear the horses and wagons coming down High Street to our house. Windows in our coal cellar were opened, chutes were placed from the wagons through these windows into our huge bins. The anthracite (hard) coal and the bituminous (soft) coal noisily scampered down the chutes filling our bins to capacity. Now we were all set for the cold weather. Well, not quite—another order was made to our farmer (the one who delivered our milk everyday) to bring us a load of wood. It arrived some days later. Then it was up to Papa to split the chunky pieces in halves, quarters, and small kindling wood. This was stacked in our wood cellar.

We also had a wine cellar where two casks of wine stood, made from grapes grown in our yard. Grandpa, Papa, and Uncle Louis would crush the grapes in the large cellar of Grandpa’s house every five to eight years. Whenever any of the adults had a winter cold, which wasn’t often, a very small glass of wine was heated just before bedtime with which to “sweat out” the cold, which it did. We kids had hot lemonade. It worked also. All summer long our favorite drink was lemonade made in our favorite large brown pitcher.

In the early fall came the time to stock our vegetable cellar. Unlike the other cellars with concrete floors, this one had a dirt floor and no windows. We always had two barrels of apples and five barrels of potatoes. Pears picked rock-hard from our trees were wrapped in paper and placed on a shelf to ripen slowly,
which they did. Cabbages were hung from the rafters by the roots, thus preserving them for a "plucked from the garden" quality much longer. Boxes of sand on the floor held carrots and beets.

Just outside of this cellar, under the stairs, stood many crocks filled with dill pickles, pickled peppers stuffed with cabbage, sauerkraut, and water glass eggs for cooking. In a large cabinet across the room stood jars of canned cherries and canned quinces. Nearby were jars of currant, grape, and elderberry jelly. The currents and grapes were grown in our back yard. The elderberries came from bushes growing along the sides of country roads. Those were not the days when one could purchase pectin, therefore, Mama stirred the "jelly-to-be" for many hours.

In our pantry, in a floor cabinet, we always had a barrel of flour and a barrel of sugar. Every fall we purchased a keg of cider from the Lanz Farm. While it retained its sweetness we enjoyed drinking it. Then it was placed in our cellar where it soon became our vinegar.

At dusk, during the winter, the blinds in the kitchen and dining room were closed and the shades drawn to keep out the cold. We were kept cozy warm by a large kitchen stove and a pot-bellied stove in the dining room. During the evenings Papa would bring up hods of coal for both stoves and fill the wood boxes to last through the next day. We would close off the parlor and our spare bedroom downstairs. This bedroom, formerly used as the "birthing room" was now filled most of the summer with relatives from Massachusetts, Virginia, New York City, and Washington, D.C. They surely did love coming to the "country."

How did we make a fire in our stoves? As I recall, first make sure the dampers on the stovepipes are open. This allows air in, smoke out. Start by
crumbling one or two sheets of newspaper, place it in the fire box, add a few pieces of kindling wood, then one or two pieces of larger chunks of wood followed by some bituminous (the soft coal that burns faster). Quickly, but carefully, light the newspaper with a match starting at the furthest corner. Adjust the damper to keep heat in the house, and smoke going up the chimney. More coal can be added as needed. The ashes fall into an ash box that Papa emptied every night, carrying it to our ash heap way down in the backyard. At bedtime Papa would add more coal, lower the damper so it would keep on burning but more slowly, thus keeping our house warm during the night.

During those very cold days of winter, Mama often made oatmeal for our breakfast. Out would come her large double boiler. The bottom held water that would boil, cooking the oatmeal in the top half of this odd kettle. This was always done the night before and re-heated for our breakfast the next morning. Definitely not the “add hot water to a package” kind of oatmeal.

Lighting the lamps in the kitchen and dining room gave us bright circles of light so we could play games, read, and do our homework. Mama sewed. She always made our slips and dresses. When Papa finished his chores, he would read the newspaper. Often we played Parcheesi, our favorite game. The outer edges of the rooms were always shadowy. On Saturdays all the lamps were cleaned. Mama would replace wicks when necessary, cut edges if the wick was still long enough, and then refill the lamps with kerosene.

Long before bedtime, during the winter, Papa would put bricks into the oven of the kitchen stove. At our bedtime these were wrapped in cloths, rubbed over our sheets, and left at the bottom of our beds to warm our feet all night. With blankets and feather beds on
top, we were warm as toast even though the windows were entirely frozen with ice. In our pantry ceiling was a register that allowed heat from the kitchen stove into our upstairs bathroom. At bath times we also used an oil heater, but always watched it closely as they can easily flare up and cause a fire.

Once a week our butcher came in his horse-drawn, ice-filled wagon. Mama often bought a pot roast. After asking her if she would like some bones, he would give her four, filled with marrow and covered thickly with meat. These would become a tasty vegetable and meat soup with marrow glace (small dumplings).

Mama often made potato pancakes for dinner. Sometimes we would have homemade applesauce with them. Or maybe I'd go to Henry's lots where watercress grew on the edges of a babbling brook. The carefully picked leaves would give us a delicious salad. On days when she was making bread, she would fry dough for our breakfast. That made us happy, too.

Among the stores downtown was Mr. Bingenheimer's Butcher Shop on Market Street. Once in a while Mama would ask me to stop on my way home from school to buy a pound of tripe. In the Fall, all the mothers made Schisselwurst (pan bologna). Now I know these meals were not my favorite, and I found out other kids didn't like them either. I guess it was something that was "good for us". But what we did like was meat bologna made by Grote and Weigel. On Wednesdays I would go down two houses and cross the street to Hattie and Minnie Glazier's store to order the bologna. On Thursdays I, and many neighbors, picked up our bologna, "freshly made" and "no preservatives." Our family and our neighbors enjoyed supper very much!

Growing up meant doing errands such as going to the creamery on the corner of Vernon Avenue and High
Street for buttermilk. Every summer we made two trips three times a week to get buttermilk for our grandparents, our aunt and uncle, and ourselves. I enjoyed watching butter being made, and all of us were very fond of buttermilk.

Grandma would send me to the bank with her store deposit. I'd march downtown with the money in a small brown paper bag. Helping her in the store was a treat. She kept a rocking chair near the stove and always had coffee ready to serve. Often farmers brought their wives to visit with grandma (and me if I was there) and to relish the hot coffee, maybe a cookie, and always a long chat. They would purchase something that didn't grow on their farms and some candy. Their husbands, after getting a haircut and picking up bags of feed from the feed and grain store for their cattle, never forgot to stop for their wives—not once.

Let's check on a few items in the store then and now. Then, coffee, tea, saltines, cookies, and prunes, sold by the pound; now sold in boxes, bags, and jars. Then, flour and sugar were sold by the pound from barrels standing on the floor of the store; now they are bagged in advance. But Kellogg's corn flakes were sold by the box both then and now.

Mama used to buy one-half pound of green tea leaves with a bit of black leaves. The very first cans of vegetables on Grandma's store shelves were "Burt Olney's Canned Peas." For us kids, the candy counter was a favorite place. Looking through the high glass cover to choose required our full attention. A penny would buy five licorice sticks or two chocolate-covered coconut mounds. These were about an inch wide at the bottom, tapering to a point about an inch high—usually my choice out of the many kinds of candy on the counter. For Beatrice and me, Grandma gave it free; a penny saved! What our stores didn't sell was
beer and liquors of any kind. Rockville did have a saloon near Market Street, but we kids were told that women and children never went there, only some men. They sold something called “beer” from kegs with a spigot. It didn’t sound interesting, and we kids never went near the building.

Another of my summer duties was to carry the daily dinner pails to Papa and Uncle Louis Schweitzer at the Springville mill. In those days, the dinner pails had three compartments. A certain amount of dexterity was required if the pail happened to contain soup in one compartment, coffee in another and main course in the third. Those definitely were the days of “dinner” at noon and “supper” in the evening. Often Mama and Aunt Elizabeth would send vegetable soup in their dinner pails on the same day. That meant being very careful going down the very steep McLean hill where the dirt and stones could easily cause you to lurch.

My route wasn’t varied—down High Street, McLean Hill, turn right onto Vernon Avenue. On a hot day it was suffocating. The only two spots of shade trees were near the railroad trestle and down Vernon Avenue as far as the street before the New England mill. There one wished to hold one’s breath if possible due to the odors permeating the air, particularly on muggy days. Wet woolen cloth has an odor all its own, as those working with it well knew. Then came a small bridge over the Hockanum River and the water gushed over the rocks casting a cooling spray upward. Leaning a bit forward, this was refreshing on one’s face. Carrying two dinner pails wasn’t convenient for soothing a hot forehead. Then around the corner and down West Main Street to the Springville mill where once again shade trees surrounded the main office of the company.

Papa was the boss finisher and Uncle Louis was
a weaver. I always started out a bit early in order to have ample time to hear the machines and watch the men working. In the "dry" department there were also ladies "specking," which I learned one year when the mills were seeking any additional help they could obtain. Now "specking" I found is quite an accomplishment. The idea was to pick out with tweezers any specks of threads that weren't supposed to be there. With certain patterns where specks were the main feature, it was doubly difficult to ascertain the right speck to be removed. However, it was indeed surprising how easily one can spot the undesirable speck after a bit of training.

I always managed to get to the second floor in time to hear upward to one hundred looms clanking back and forth causing the floor to vibrate so it almost seemed to rock. Here and there a shuttle wouldn't "woof" correctly and the loom was stopped as quickly as possible. The weaver then had to undo the incorrect threads caused by this shuttle fling, else the pattern wouldn't evolve as planned. This, I assure you, was a task that every weaver wished to avoid.

At twelve o'clock noon the whistles blew, and the contrast of the sudden silence as every machine discontinued its function gave one an eerie sensation, as if one gigantic structure, instead of many humanly controlled machines—a world of motion—had ceased temporarily. Dinnertime was an enjoyable hour, visiting with each other, for the men had been at work for five or six hours with no coffee breaks. For years they worked until six at night—the hours were lessened as the years brought changes in working conditions in the mills.

Rockville was very fortunate to have the following places where employers offered every man and all eligible women—unmarried or widowed—an opportunity for lifetime employment. The Hockanum
Alma’s Great-grandparents in Warehouse Point
July 18, 1914. She was 84, he was 90...

Elizabeth Park, Hartford, CT, July 17, 1918
Alma & Beatrice sledding c.1917

Aunt Lizzie & Uncle Louis c.1923
First Grade, East School, 1912
(Alma top row, 3rd from right)

Walter Krause, c.1916 with bloodhounds, King & Queen
Alma and Grandmother, Easter Sunday, 1920.

S.S. Hartford
Mills Company was composed of six woolen mills: the Minterburn, New England, Springville, American, Hockanum and Saxony mills. There were also other textile mills, the Rock, Regan, Belding Brothers, as well as the Rockville Iron Works, U. S. Envelope Company, and Kingfisher Fishline companies, and other places of employment. Some people worked in their homes, as did Mr. Miffitt, who was blind. He made brooms, and every homemaker made sure to have one in her home. His mother salvaged cloth from the mills that she used to braid beautiful rag rugs that could be seen in many homes in our city.

When Mama and Papa took us to buy new shoes, probably at Liebe’s, we would often stop at a nearby “snack shop” where they served tall glasses of the “best hot chocolate” with real whipped cream topping, and very thin, crispy saltines. We also had The Palace of Sweets on Market Street, owned by a family from Greece. Everyone sat on white iron chairs at white iron tables and were served very good ice cream sundaes. However, one trip downtown I didn’t like. Every summer we had to go the dentist for a check-up and what if he found a cavity (no Novocain then).

After supper, during the summer, all of the kids from our neighborhood would gather in our yard. We would always first play croquet. Croquet is a quiet, refined game, but one evening was different. My ball was in position to be hit right through the last two wickets and hit the stake to win. One of the kids decided he would win by knocking my ball out of position with one of his spare shots, which he did. In showing my lack of indifference, I raised my croquet stick and the mallet fell off, sort of hitting Raymond on the side of his head. I panicked and yelled for Papa who came quickly and checked him, finding nothing. Raymond gallantly said “nothing hurt” and he was fine. He won the game, and after that Papa fixed every
mallet so that not one would ever come off! Raymond was back the next night for croquet, and he was fine.

Often we would all join in for a game of tag, finishing up with “I Spy”. There were excellent hiding places as we all had big yards. Finally, it was Fox and Geese time. Often the geese ran to Henry's lots. With a head start and two possible exits to Hammond and Thomas Streets, and down Hammond Street hill, it was very probable the “fox” wouldn’t catch a “goose” that night.

Some afternoons we played baseball, boys against the girls. Many kids from the West District area joined us in Henry's lots. We girls did actually win some games; some of us were good runners. However, none of us received an offer to join the big leagues. When it began to get dark everyone left for home with a “see you tomorrow.” Then Grandma usually said, “Alma, get something to eat from the store.” Usually I chose a handful of prunes and one handful of very crispy saltines—a good snack.

Mr. Henry left his lots to the city of Rockville. These lots are now a part of Henry Park. Located diagonally across the street from our house, the lots became a favorite place for everyone to go. It was a beautiful area. One special sight was the three-foot-high, lengthy rows of piled, round stones at each side of every lot. One lot was full of white daisies, another had light blue wood violets, and some lots had a scattering of wild flowers. Other lots were used by Mr. Poggie's cows during the summers for grazing. Every morning they would clump up the street to the lots, and every evening they clumped back home under his watchful eyes.

Every year Aunt Elizabeth would leave home, carrying a basket. This meant she was going to Metcalf's woods—with their permission—to gather mushrooms. Upon returning, she'd always offer some
to Mama and Grandma, both of whom always politely refused. It seemed there was always the possibility of a toadstool being plucked by mistake, but as my aunt and uncle survived each year, living long lives, it's proof she really knew her mushrooms, and we had missed out on a treat.

Special days brought special events. At Easter time the "bunny" never forgot to leave a nest filled with colored eggs that had been slowly boiled with onion skins, the nest was always left in the tall grass beneath the old sour apple tree. So sour were those apples not even one worm would nibble on an apple, but they made the best applesauce, pies, and kuchen you could ever eat!

On July Fourth Papa would light small firecrackers, one at a time, in the middle of the road (no traffic). He'd put a can over each one as he lit them—"bang" and the can went about ten feet in the air. Later he would put "pin wheels" on the fence in our yard. Lighting them forced them to spin around, their colors blending and smoke spouting out. Evening was "sparkler time." These we were allowed to hold after they were lit with our parents' supervision. Neighbors and relatives always joined us for the fireworks show.

We looked forward to eating goose on Thanksgiving and Christmas. We would order two from our farmer, and Papa would butcher them as needed for each holiday. From these geese we got much more than a holiday dinner. First of all, we got an ample supply of soft, white feathers to stuff pillows. Then, by placing the goose, unseasoned, in the oven, it would ooze grease that was put in a jar, saved, and used if one of us got a quinsy sore throat. Then the grease was heated and rubbed on your throat and covered with a cloth wrapped around your neck. Next, the doctor was called to get some "Sweet Spirits of
Niter" for your fever and in two weeks you would be well. Finally, the goose was roasted and enjoyed in a great meal.

Christmas was always very special. It was church and family oriented. Christmas Eve we all went to church where during the service children recited their memorized verses and poems to an overflowing congregation. The huge tree with its sparkling ornaments was always beautiful. Grandparents, Aunt and Uncle, and four cousins came to our home after the service. We always found Santa had also brought us a beautiful tree standing in our dining room near the porch door. Papa would light the candles (a pail of water stood nearby). We sang carols, then ate Mama’s good stollen and fruitcake. On Christmas day we found gifts under our tree. Beatrice and I were happy to see our dolls, all dressed up in new clothes, socks, shoes, and new hair in a different color. We might also find some furniture for our playroom, knitted scarves, caps, and mittens, or a new game. Relatives came to visit and to deliver gifts that Santa had left under their tree for us, such as home-made cookies, fruit, and cloth for new dresses. We gave them gifts Santa had left at our house for them. It was always a happy, thankful time. Adults didn’t exchange gifts; it was a day for celebrating Jesus’ birthday and a day for the children.

Every summer we had a special treat. Aunt Elizabeth and Uncle Louis had many houseplants—one room full. Among them was a “Night Blooming Cereus.” This plant’s sole purpose seemed to be to nurture one flower. In the summer of each year it bloomed in the evening hours. When they knew it would be blooming the next night, relatives and friends were notified. The plant was placed on the top step near our kitchen door so everyone could watch. About nine o’clock, extremely slowly, this velvety, white,
seven-inch long flower raised its upper petals making an arch with each petal to the rear of the neck of the flower with the ends of each tip raised ever so slightly. The lower petals were straight, curving only at the very ends. As the flower opened further, we saw a huge amount of golden yellow strands from neck to tips. In the center of these strands for a space of about an inch, the strands stood one-half inch higher. When the flower was fully opened, folks came silently to view closely this most beautiful flower and to breathe in its delicate, sweet fragrance. Some softly cried as hours passed and it began to close just as slowly as it had opened. No one moved. Whatever significance people felt was within them. It was after midnight as we all, silent and speechless, saw it close tightly and droop. Still silent, we left for our homes.

Another pleasure was our wintertime sliding. No plows meant a "double-ripper" went from the top of Vernon Avenue with sufficient momentum to slide up a slope, turn the corner and continue the entire length of West Main Street. It was a long walk back but worth it!

A few times during those years our family would rent a cottage from Mrs. Krause at Crystal Lake for a week of boating, swimming, and fishing. Due to the mill workers not having vacation time, Papa would ride to and from the lake on the trolley everyday. This was truly a "cooling" experience. Everyone got off at a particular pathway to the cottages and entered an alpine woodland. Trees were so thick and tall very little sunshine was seen or felt. Just delightful coolness as we walked on a very thick carpet of pine needles which had piled up through many years.

My aunt and uncle on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary took a long journey to visit a cousin who was the bandleader at West Point. A very nice cadet at this military academy was assigned the duty of
showing them all the sights. They spoke of him often and remained interested in his career. We all know him as General MacArthur.

\[\text{Growing older meant getting confirmed at our church, teaching a Sunday School class of sixteen four-year old little girls, graduating from East District school (eighth grade), four years later becoming an honor graduate from Rockville High School. I also played the piano at Miss Fitch's recitals at her home. I learned to cope with my grandmother's passing and the move to Thomas Street where my parents had purchased a new home two hills up nearer to Fox Hill.}

Beatrice was growing up too. She had gone from making mud pies in the back yard with a neighbor friend to playing house on the front porch with friend Ellen Kembel every day with their doll babies. They took turns daily using the front porches (they were lifelong friends). She also used to take walks with our grandfather who was ill from blood poisoning. He was very appreciative of her company as she brought out his smiles. He died in 1914. She graduated from grade school, then went on to high school. She had many friends, enjoyed playing the piano at Miss Fitch's recitals, played for a friend of Miss Fitch's in Hartford which was an honor for Beatrice, and she loved baking fancy cakes. They were good!

\[\text{On Good Friday, April, 1924, fifty-four students from high school with Mr. Philip Howe and two teachers left Rockville for New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. —our senior class trip. We boarded the ship, the S. S. Hartford at Hartford for New York, and soon found we were to have a rough night. The rain poured down, the fierce winds rocked the ship so furiously that the sides of the ship dipped into the very high waves causing water to come through the portholes into our rooms. The crew} \]
rushed to bring us pails—we sure were seasick. Unless we held our pails, they would go back and forth, to and from the sidewalls. The cargo below had been fastened securely and some horses in the hold were tied so they wouldn’t be injured. The captain was unable to stop at Essex to pick up passengers who were waving lanterns “for a ride,” as he feared a disastrous accident if he tried. When our seasickness subsided, we were told to dress and sit in the center of the ship, which we did.

By morning, we were out of the storm area and soon arrived in New York harbor to a sunny day and a breakfast at Child’s Restaurant of three plate-sized pancakes that we quickly devoured. In Philadelphia we viewed the crack in the Liberty Bell. In Washington, D.C. we visited everything—buildings, parks, White House where we saw President Coolidge (also a red head), superior court in session, Ford’s Theatre, walked up the stairs at Washington Monument, Memorial Buildings, Arlington Cemetery and the changing of the guard. Afterwards, we sailed down the Potomac to visit Mount Vernon, went to Monticello, and also visited the mint—they didn’t give us any samples. On our way home we again stopped overnight in New York where we went to the Follies. That Saturday we arrived back home in Rockville very tired but happy and grateful—an unforgettable trip.

In June we were graduated from high school. The ceremonies took place on the second floor of the Memorial Building. A large hall accommodated everyone’s families and friends. We were happy to receive our diplomas, flowers, and gifts, but we were sad, knowing each graduate would be taking a new pathway in their lives.

Next, I became happily employed at the Rockville National Bank. Mr. Frank Maxwell was the president. The “bank bunch” as we called ourselves, always enjoyed a delicious dinner at Mr. and Mrs.
Holt’s home on Union Street every summer. Mr. Holt was our bank manager, and Mrs. Holt surely made the very best lemonade—she gave us the recipe. They had an organ and a piano; both played and they would always entertain us with beautiful music. On Columbus Day weekend, we all traveled to Stockbridge where we stayed at “the Laurels,” toured the entire area, and took many snapshots.

In Rockville it was the custom for folks to make visits to their plots at either St. Bernard’s or Grove Hill cemeteries. Saturdays and Sundays seemed to be the favorite days. People brought flowers from their yards and running water was available. It always looked like a huge flower garden. Folks greeted each other and chatted for a while. At one intersection in Grove Hill Cemetery stood a three-tiered sculpture with running water, fountain style, and gold fish swimming around. There were funeral homes in Rockville also, but it was the custom to bring the deceased home for the viewing period. Horses and carriages were used for the funerals.

A Town Farm, commonly called the “poor house,” was in use during these years. It was located on Lafayette Square. It was managed by a husband and wife who had living quarters in this home. People who were destitute were given room and board. This was supported by the town as there was no Social Security then.

The Memorial Building served as the Town Hall. The Police Department was on the first floor. Captain Leopold Krause and all the officers were of the highest caliber. Every family was very proud of them. Two “lock-ups” stood at the side of the office, often holding one or two prisoners awaiting either release or transportation to the jail in Tolland. Captain Krause had two bloodhounds, “King” and “Queen,” which were housed in a shed on my grandparents’ property. To
keep their instincts alert, they were never free to roam as were pets. One night Papa woke up and noticed that the window of the dog shed looked somewhat lighted. He grabbed Mama’s wash basket, told her to call Krause’s, ran down and yanked out the oil burner which had started to flame up. He grabbed the puppies, put them in the basket, and ran out with them, telling King and Queen to run out just as the Krauses arrived. All ended well and Papa had gained new dog friends.

If there was a fire of suspicious origin King and Queen were rushed to the scene. They would sniff the area, find a scent, go among the people, always accompanied by police officers and always find the person or persons with the same scent. They and their officers had their man. However, some years later, Captain Krause, after much urging, and against his better judgment agreed to allow the dogs to be exhibited at our annual fair with strict instructions that they were never to be separated and never to be without a guard at all times. Somehow they were separated and left unguarded and King evidently tried to get over the fence to be with Queen and he was strangled. Queen later died of a broken heart. When Captain Krause retired from the Police Department, the family moved to their home at Crystal Lake.

During this era, our country was drawn into World War I. In school we were asked to give up something that would save money that could be used for those “serving our country.” The Red Cross asked for knitters. I gave up using sugar in my tea and knitted scarves. When the war was over, everyone gathered downtown to watch a huge bonfire on Fox Hill to celebrate the end of the war and the homecoming of our soldiers and sailors.

Folks in Rockville were very family
oriented, and as we didn’t have cars, we walked, sometimes miles, many miles, to visit each other. Guess what we did on Sunday afternoons. In good weather when we weren’t going visiting and no one was coming to our house we took nice long walks. To visit out-of-town relatives, we used trolley cars. We would board them at Central Park. They ran on tracks in the road by use of a pulley running along an electric wire overhead. If it dropped off, out ran the conductor to put it back on, and once again the motorman was in control. Most of the rides were smooth, but on the one to Warehouse Point the trolley swayed back and forth and jumped somewhat so that I often became ill. The motorman suggested I stand near him and it wouldn’t affect me as much and it didn’t. In the winter ice storms, there were times when it was impossible to keep the pulley on the wire. Then there were “no trolleys running!”

During the summer we had “open trolleys” with benches that ran from side to side across the trolley. We kids liked sitting near the side edges (a protective railing ran along both sides). In case of a sudden storm, the conductor would let down heavy rubber curtains on both sides. Every year our church had a picnic at either Elizabeth Park or Forest Park. A special trolley was sent to take us there and to bring us back later in the afternoon. Every year the last person to board the trolley was Mr. Shietz, our Sunday School superintendent. He would bring a red tub and bags of lemons and sugar. He always stayed up front with the motorman. He was our official “lemonade maker.” We would all enjoy a wonderful day seeing the flowers, feeding the ducks in the pond, using the swings, playing games, eating sandwiches, and drinking lemonade. If we had gone to Forest Park, we would also spend time visiting and watching the animals. Once a year our whole family would arrange a get-
together at one of the parks. It was always a fun time being together, and a time to get a few more pictures for our picture books.

The Interurban ran on the train tracks. It made a quicker trip to or from Hartford, but its stop in Hartford was at the railroad station with no stops in between. Trains also came to Rockville. At our station was a telegrapher, Miss Emma Zuelke, and a ticket tender, Mr. Ed Dowling. He also stopped people and horse-drawn wagons from crossing the street when the train was due to arrive. It had probably previously stopped at Mr. Martin's to leave cars of coal and also cars of supplies for a feed and grain store on Brooklyn Street.

There was a great possibility that some passengers on board were to be guests at the Rockville Hotel run by the Chapdelaine family.

Mama and Papa did get out once in a while together and Aunt Judith would come to stay with us. I was told that one Sunday when I was starting to walk at age one, Aunt Judith had come over from next door to read the newspaper and to "keep an eye on" me while Mama and Papa went upstairs to dress. We were going visiting. Evidently I found the hod of coal interesting. I'd quietly emptied every piece either on me or around me. Needless to say I received another bath and clean white clothes, and Aunt Judith learned "quiet" didn't necessarily mean all was O. K.

Why always white clothes? In those days girls wore pink and boys wore blue. However, redheads didn't ever wear pink. Mama wasn't about to have people think I was a boy, therefore, I wore white. When my sister arrived, she was also a redhead so two little girls wore white. When we started school, however, Mama decided on all colors, including pink, could and would be worn by her girls.

As we got older, we'd stay with cousins Annie and
Tillie and Aunt Mary Schillinger when Mama and Papa went to dances at the Turners' Hall. Aunt Mary lived near the hall, and from her porch we could hear the music and see everyone dancing. A few years older, we thought, and then we could go.

Rockville had a lovely library on Union Street. It had a huge number of books of all types for all ages. Many students went there to study and do homework. On Fridays I went to take out four books for weekend pleasure.

There were three banks in Rockville: Saving Bank of Rockville, People's Savings Bank, and Rockville National Bank. Just about every person was a customer of at least one of the banks. On payday night, the banks were exceptionally busy. The Vacation and Christmas Club area always had at least two lines of folks. It was an excellent way of saving money.

Wages, also costs, were considerably lower than today. Workers received $8.00 per week. Those in charge of a department—known as a "boss"—received $11.00 per week. This was the total income for a family. When a girl married, she stopped working to "care for the home and children." Only unmarried women and widows worked, earning $6.00 per week. However, prices for a good rent were in the range of $6.00 to $8.00 per month. Anyone who paid $10.00 was considered extravagant. Food, clothing, and shoes were priced so that families were able to "make ends meet" and sometimes save a dollar or two.

Mothers sewed most of the clothing for themselves and their children. In eighth grade Miss Hendricks taught the girls sewing. I made a dress. Twice a week we attended cooking class. Boys were taught manual training and a sport. This gave us a glimpse of the future.

The people in our city could well boast of their
"Boardwalk" lined with stores and businesses. It was the only city in the State known to have a boardwalk. Most of the stores and businesses were family owned and family run. There were stores on Market, Union, and Village Street also.

On West Main Street, Mr. Arno Weber owned a very large Variety Store. Every summer he went to Germany to buy merchandise. It was truly a great place to shop all year round and a joy at Christmas time—something for everyone.

Businesses, doctors and dentists, and stores had telephones; hardly any homes had them. My grandparents did have one because they were store owners. We and others asked them to call a doctor whenever we had need of one. However, the lack of a telephone did not mean lack of communication. We used a penny postcard or a picture postcard with a one cent stamp on it to send our messages by mail.

When Beatrice started school, it became necessary to call the doctor often. She would get the croup, an inflammation of the respiratory passages, usually around midnight. The sound of her trying to breathe awakened us all. Papa would hold her in a sitting position, Mama would open the window and call Grandma. The doctor always came immediately. Beatrice was soon breathing easier. In trying to alleviate these spells, the doctor asked whether she wore knitted socks. He suggested that might be the cause of these spells. I'm not positive about the cause and effect, but wearing other socks meant no more spells, making us all happy, especially Beatrice.

How was it possible to call from our house to my grandmother next door? Her bedroom was on the further side of the house. It's very simple. Our nights were silent— no trucks, no cars, no airplanes. Folks
were asleep, even nature's creatures were quiet. Therefore a call in the night would register as an unexpected noise. Thus, the call was heard.

Radios and television were not yet thought about. But we did have good times. Chautauqua came to Rockville for many years. A tent was pitched on the empty lot in back of the Hotel. Programs varied, so everyone could choose their favorites. Miss Marietta Fitch, a prominent music teacher and pianist, highly approved of their musical programs, and she gave her pupils tickets to enjoy some of them, which we did. For some years, beginning in 1910 you could take a steamboat ride on Shenipsit Lake. The steamboat left from and returned to West Bridge on the lake.

The firemen had a fundraiser at the town hall every year—always well attended. After all, it was a night of dancing.

We also had a Palace Theater on School Street where you could see a new reel, a serial movie—one chapter every Saturday—and a complete movie accompanied by music. Each year the theater was loaned to the eighth grade class of East District School and some of the pupils performed the May Pole dance on their large stage. Later on, another theater opened on Village Street.

Band concerts were held weekly all summer long (in good weather) at Central Park or Talcott Park. Mr. Carlton Buckminster was the bandmaster. Great music! I truly believe every person in Rockville came each week. We all met our relatives, neighbors, friends and 200,000 mosquitoes.

The Rockville Fair, held yearly at the fairgrounds, was always a very special event for all of us. Exhibits, booths, and attractions were everywhere. And let's not forget those sulky races. Mr. LeRoy Martin, the owner of the Kingfisher Fishline Company, whose fishlines were classed as the best line made and
were sold all over the United States, was an ardent fan of these races. He also participated in the sulky races every year. One of his horses he named after his wife. Perhaps on the day I saw him racing, he was driving his favorite horse, “Bessie Lightfoot!”

CONCLUSION

Thank you for taking the time to read this story of life during the beginning of the twentieth century. For some it will be reliving a memory. For others, it will be viewing a glimpse of a past generation and their daily activities. It was a lovely, genteel time that brought out the best that was in us. I thank God who gave me the strength to share this with you.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Several years ago, while reviewing an acquisition for an exhibit, I came across a letter written by the donor, Alma Stieg. The letter recounted her memory of carrying lunch pails to her father and uncle who worked in one of Rockville's textile mills. We decided to publish her fascinating account in our Newsletter to highlight our annual exhibit. Subsequently, through an acquaintance, I was able to contact Mrs. Stieg, and suggested that she might like to share more of her memories with us. This booklet is the result of that conversation.

Born Alma Louisa Hess on April 13, 1907, Alma lived in Rockville until 1926. She attended the public schools through high school, worked here for a while, and then, with her family, moved on. She currently resides in Unionville. While it has been many years since her last visit to Rockville, she retains vivid memories of her childhood there. Taking about a year and a half, and working on an old Underwood manual typewriter, she has recorded these memories for us to enjoy.

Mrs. Stieg has graciously donated her manuscript and all proceeds from the sale of her memoir to the Vernon Historical Society. We thank her for her generosity and her willingness to share her memories for the benefit of future generations.
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<th>Businesses located on or adjacent to the Boardwalk</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wendheiser Music Store</td>
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<td>Fitch Dry Goods</td>
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<td>Keeney Shoe (Chapman's)</td>
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<td>Kelner Drapery</td>
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<td>Metcalf Drug</td>
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<td>McNeil's Grocery (Restaurant)</td>
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<td>Woolworth's 5 &amp; 10 Store</td>
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<td>McCarthy Millinery</td>
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<td>Lutz Hardware</td>
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<td>Cavanaugh &amp; Burke (Furniture &amp; Undertaker later, W.T. Grant)</td>
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<td>Butler Family home</td>
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<td>Miss Seidel's Millinery</td>
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<td>T.F. Rady - Rockville Leader</td>
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<td>Rockville Iron Works</td>
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<td>The American Mill</td>
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<td>Belding Bros. Silk Mill (to Brooklyn Street)</td>
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