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GEORGE GARDINER OMAHA'S PIONEER TELEGRAPH LINEMAN

How the Wanderlust Brought a Boy from the Canal Boat Service in England to the Telegraph Service in Nebraska More than Forty Years Ago, and How He Has Prospered Since

THE cosmopolitanism of the Anglo-Saxon is traditional. Out from the little home island of Britain sturdy men have sailed away by thousands every year since the days of the Crusades and long before. They have ventured into the wildest parts of the world, have adapted themselves quickly and either established a civilization where there was none or taken active part in that which was already established.

One of the sons of John Bull dropped into Omaha in 1862 and became a pioneer. George Gardiner was born in the village of Shefford, Gloucestershire, England, in 1834. Shefford is one of those odd little villages peculiar to England, with houses set along the crooked street at irregular intervals and in all kinds of odd lines as though each builder had built with the determination to have his house stand in some different way from those of his neighbors. Some of the second stories project beyond the first, the roofs are tiled, chimney pots rise from the tops of the chimneys. Shefford is one of the quaintest of the many quaint villages of England.

Through Shefford runs the canal. A great thing was the canal when Mr. Gardiner was a boy and young man. It was the highway along which a man could go to many strange places. He could visit the towns, villages and cities along its course clear to Birmingham (pronounced Burnigam). He could go beyond that by canal to Liverpool and there he could take a ship flying the Union Jack and go to any port on the face of the earth. Many a lad went out along that canal from the village and never returned.

The people of Shefford were such as are so admirably portrayed by W. W. Jacobs in his short stories. Their chief interest was in shipping. A boy started life working on a canal boat when he was little more than out of the cradle. If he rose to own a quarter or half interest in a boat people said he was "right smart of a la-ad." If he secured a whole boat of his own he was pronounced "sum-mot o' a genius."

Family Fortune Founded on Canal

The father of young Gardiner had made his fortune on the canal and at the time his son was added by a liberal stork to the already large family he was one of the village real estate magnates and owned several of the crooked, tile-roofed, chimney-potted houses. The boy followed in the footsteps of his ancestors and secured a berth on a little canal boat, "Susan Jane" by name, which plied from Shefford to Birmingham.

"'Twas a proud day for me when I got that place," says Mr. Gardiner. "I'd never been out o' the village and you were great sights to be seen. We 'ad a tiny cabin forrard on the 'Susan Jane,' where we 'ad a stove and cooking utensils and bunks. We made about twenty miles a day. In the evening we were always in a new town. We 'ad sooper and then could spend the evening ashore 'aving a pot o' ale at the inn and a bit o' gossip wi' the people. We brought into Burnigam in about three days and a half. Cooming back we always hauled coals, which were plentiful up Burnigam way, but scarce doon at Shefford."

So he spent his youth, plying up and down the canal. He proved to be "right smart of a la-ad" and no pampered scion of his father, the village real estate magnate. He owned part interest in the boat when he attained his twenty-first birthday. That year was further made memorable by his marriage. His wife's name was Miss Emma Astman and she was his companion through life until only five years ago, when she died.

A solemn, seedy-looking, but earnest Mormon apostle was the direct cause of Mr. Gardiner's emigration to America. The Mormon propaganda in England at that time was extremely active and one of the apostles sent from Utah found his way to the quiet little village lying so far out of the ordinary path of travel. He appeared on the crooked little street and the odd people from the quaint houses flocked out to see and to hear him. He told them of the "true religion," he painted a picture of the prosperity of Utah and held out golden promises to all those who should join the caravan which was being organized to cross the sea and to traverse the continent to that distant Canaan.

Mormon Starts Him West

The apostle was successful in Shefford as others were successful elsewhere. George Gardiner and his wife were among the 900 men, women and children who gathered at Liverpool and embarked upon the sailing vessel which had been chartered by the Mormons. Storms beset the vessel and adverse winds blew it out of its course. They were on the ocean six weeks and three days before they sighted New York and by that time, says Mr. Gardiner, they didn't care whether they ever landed. They were treated miserably on the ship, having poor food and miserably squalid sleeping quarters. There was no medical aid for the sick and a number died during the voyage.

But when they were on land once more they quickly plucked up spirit and came on toward the west. He and his wife journeyed with the pilgrims as far as Florence. There they "got disgusted with them," stopped, came down to Omaha and determined to make it their home. Here they remained and Mr. Gardiner has been closely identified with the upbuilding of the city and the west.

He was an employe of the Western Union Telegraph company for more than thirty-eight years. When he first arrived in Omaha he worked for Sheely Bros., butchers. Before he had been here a year Edward Creighton completed the Pacific telegraph as far as Julesburg. Edward Rosewater, who had just been made manager of the Omaha district, met Mr. Gardiner on the street one day and asked him if he wanted a job. The young Englishman thought he would like the telegraph business and promptly accepted.

Duties with Telegraph Company

"'Twas a jack of all trades I was with the company in those days," he says. "I had to cut wood, carry messages and act as lineman. I ran all over this town delivering telegrams. I sawed cords of wood to burn in the office stove in the winter. The office was on the second floor of the building where the Union Pacific ticket office is now at Fourteenth and Farnam streets. There were two tables and two men besides Mr. Rosewater. He surely was a worker, a regular engine for getting things done. He worked, too, for all he got. I knew the time when he was living in a little room on Jackson street and cooking his own grub."

As the infant telegraph business was more and more perfected Mr. Gardiner's duties became greater. He was put in charge of the line west as far as Columbus, and sometimes had to go out to Grand Island. Down along the river he had to keep the wires in order to Nebraska City. This was before there was a railroad and most of the traveling had to be done on horseback, with saddlebags in which to carry his tools and material. He traveled hundreds of miles in this way, in all sorts of weather, by night and by day.

"We had only one wire then," he says, "and if it got down or broke there was no more telegraphing until I could get it fixed. So the work had to be done in more of a rush than now. The poles were almost anything in those days. Some of them weren't hardly strong enough to hold a man to climb up on them. We used only sixteen poles to the mile then. Now they use thirty-five.

"The Indians didn't give us much trouble about the wires. Once in awhile a stray band of bucks would get out and pull down a few strands just for fun. But we told them that the wire led to the home of 'The Great White Father' in Washington and that if they pulled them down the White Father would be very angry."

In building and keeping in order the lines across the Missouri and Platte rivers Mr. Gardiner showed great skill and intrepidity. There was no bridge across the Missouri at that time and the problem of carrying the wires over was a difficult one. He had four poles, each sixty feet long, shipped out from Chicago. Having set up one of these with a cross-bar near the top, like the yard on a ship's mast, he drew the other one up by block and tackle and fastened it on top of the first one. Then the cable was strung from the top, more than 100 feet above the ground. The span of the cable across the river was nearly half a mile. He also put wires across the Missouri river at Nebraska City and over the Platte river at several points.

GEORGE GARDINER.

Mr. Gardiner was here when the Union Pacific line was first talked of and he worked on the wires along its line for thirty years. "The people pretty near went wild with joy when the line was built," he says. He has a clipping from an early day paper which demonstrates something of the popular feeling. The paean of joy is as follows:

Jubilate Omaha

"Ring out, ye church bells and assemble the choirs. Let the deep-toned organs swell the anthems to the skies. Ding, dang, dong, ye school bells and let the children shout. Today let banners float, tonight let bonfires burn and rockets cut the darkness. Cannons boom and wake the cloud gods.

"Bring all the instruments out—the cornet, flute and fiddle, hornpipe and drum. Sound the the hewgag, blow the humstrum, smite the tonjon, beat the fuzzy-guzzy and rattle the bones. Let your torturing inharmonies be sweet harmony now. Ding, dong, bum, boom, tut, hoot, bangety, bang, dickety, clack.

"Let all nature join the chorus. Blow, ye Nebraska winds, boil anew Big Muddy, and thou far-famed Platte bring the mountain waters.

"All living things take part. Bellow, ye herds and flocks, for soon ye shall ride to the Chicago stock yards on cars. Skip, ye juvenile muttons, and frisk, ye little pigs, for soon the passage to slaughter will be in style.

"Aborigines, arise. Pawnees and all redskins of the plains, come and jubilate. Free passes on flat cars to you all forever. Old bull-whackers, begin to prepare to make ready to lay down your gads forever, for soon the iron horse will supersede your bulls forevermore.

"Old settlers, prick your ears to hear the first snort. All the emigrant world, open your eyes and behold the grassy vales and rounded hills of Nebraska. Tourists of the globe, pack your trunks for the Rocky mountains.

"Close the concert, ye mighty oceans, for your ships shall anchor at the ends of a continental iron band blending your waves in one and holding the hemispheres in nearness close and union firm."

Early Investments Pay Well

Mr. Gardiner took an interest in Omaha real estate at an early date. He built a house on Capitol avenue between Tenth and Eleventh streets in 1865. He paid $100 a thousand feet for the lumber used in the house. When Edward Rosewater bought the lot at Seventeenth and Farnam streets on which part of The Bee building now stands Mr. Gardiner loaned him $200 of the purchase price.

"He begged me to buy the lot next to his," says Mr. Gardiner, "but I wouldn't. Of course, money wasn't any too plentiful with me then, but I would have made 2,000 per cent on the investment if I'd followed his advice. I used to plant potatoes on the lot and ran a little garden up there on the bluff, but I never thought of buying it."

Many of the great men of the state were among Mr. Gardiner's friends. He is well acquainted with President Clowry of the Western Union and calls on him when in New York. He is on terms of friendship with many other leading officials in the Western Union company.

Since retiring from the service of the company in 1900 Mr. Gárdiner has been engaged in attending his real estate interests. He lives at 805 South Twenty-third street. He owns considerable property in different parts of the city and in managing this he is quite active in spite of his 73 years of age. Unlike most of his fellow Britons, he does not smoke and never has done so, but he saves the traditions of the race by indulging in an occasional pot o' ale. Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner have four daughters and a son, all of whom live in Omaha. Mrs. Gardiner died in 1902. Mr. Gardiner has traveled considerably in late years. He has made two trips to England, where he visited his old home. For the modern generation of linemen he has no admiration.

"They carry a whole machine shop in their belts. We had nothing but pliers and holders. Lots of them don't know what they're going up a pole for. None of them could ever go through what we did in the old days."

Early Struggles and Triumphs of Richard Mansfield

SINCE Mansfield has gone the writers for the press throughout the country have vied with each other in efforts to give the fullest possible information concerning the man who was admittedly the head of his class. Much that is curious has been brought to light concerning him. He was born in Berlin, not Helgoland, as has been so often set forth in public print. He was cast away on the island by a shipwreck when a babe, and from this grew the statement that he was born in that little island. He did spend his babyhood there. Later he was taken by his mother to England, where he was sent to school.

Not much is known of his first schooling, but they sent children to school early in those days, and his mother, as a professional woman, had not much time to spare for the training of youth. Richard had a schoolmaster in his childhood who, to his infantile mind, seemed a sort of ogre. He used to frighten the lad terribly, and once he declared that he had reproduced some of the characteristics of this awful personage in his portrayal of the grim hero of "Ivan the Terrible," especially in the earlier scenes in which that fateful czar is represented as a tyrannical husband and cruel parent.

It is known that Mansfield passed ten years, from his seventh to his seventeenth, in the public schools at Derby, in England. Dr. Clark, the head master, was one of his warmest friends, and at the time of Mansfield's engagement in London in 1888-9, he took his company to Derby and acted some scenes of "Richard III" on the school platform, where he had appeared in his youth frequently in scenes from "The Merchant of Venice" and other Shakespearean plays, after the fashion of English schools.

His mother was very fond of him and heeded his slightest wish when there was plenty of money in the family exchequer; but the finances frequently ran low, which was the reason why he went, briefly, into trade instead of going to Harvard college as was planned. He had already spent a year in the Latin school. He soon left Boston to go to Paris to study art abroad. Mr. Mansfield always had a very skillful way of painting water colors, but he never had much skill in selling them. Many water colors are easily sold that are less meritorious than his, and, doubtless, a handsome sum would be paid nowadays for one of his little pictures as a souvenir. He had them by him in large quantities during his early days in New York. In fact, they helped largely to furnish his flat in West Twenty-ninth street. After he began to make money he employed the pleasing occupation of hunting them up in old picture shops, for he had gradually lost them all through stress of circumstances. He had gathered together quite a collection of Mansfield works, which he afterward kept by him.

From Paris, after some hardships, he went to London, where he entered as a pupil at South Kensington, but remittances from home were irregular, so he soon found it necessary to do something for his own support. In the old Savage club he met George Grossmith, father and grandfather of the present Grossmith family of the English musical comedy stage, who was renowned as an "entertainer," and was one of the first to go around to society functions and enliven the guests with songs and mimicry. Mr. Grossmith noted Mansfield's musical and mimetic skill, and advised him to take up the same line. Hence came "Mrs. Didymus' Party," the musical sketch in which the performer sat at the piano, sang the songs of his own composition and spoke the original descriptive passages between them. This was practically the entertainment which he afterward introduced so successfully in the last act of "Prince Karl" in the first year of his starring career, 1886.

These were gay days for Mansfield in London, and he frequently made enough money to live on, though art naturally suffered and sometimes there was very little in his pocket. He always had a dress suit, however, and managed to keep up appearances. He tells a story of starting out one night, when he had a 10 o'clock engagement at a house in Mayfair, with only a single shilling in his pocket. On the Strand a cab stopped and a friend jumped out. "Hullo, Mansfield," he exclaimed, "let's go into Short's and have a champagne cocktail." Champagne cocktails cost 6-pence in London. After they had drank theirs the friend discovered that he had come out without his purse. "Just pay the shot, Dick," he said, "and I will see you tomorrow."

Richard bravely pulled out his only shilling and, giving up his cherished plan of having a cheap fish smack or fried sole and a half pint of bitter, in Covent Garden market, walked the streets until the hour of his engagement, and fainted that night at the piano.

Of these hard days in London he told a circle of friends some of the details. He said:

"I went on the stage because I was poor. I had an excellent education and started life as an artist. I was living in Boston, and had many friends, so I sold every picture I painted as soon as it was finished; but soon my list of friends began to decrease, and with every picture I sold I lost a friend, until at last I had not a companion left and no market for my wares, and I returned to London.

"You know what the life of a young painter is like. I had to give up my art and go into business, but at the end of a year I made a dismal failure and returned to art. But I made no money, and was so poor I could not pay for my lodgiugs. Sometimes the landlady would shut me out, and then I would wander through the streets all night and sing ballads. If I got a few pennies I would invest them in hot potatoes, and, after thoroughly warming my hands and pockets I would proceed to make a meal and warm my stomach."

A grim smile stole over his face at this thought, and then he added:

"Some people wonder why I am not one of the boys; they do not know that I have been through it all; before Beerbohm Tree ever thought of going on the stage I have stood among the cabbages in the market at 4 o'clock in the morning, singing songs. My great chum in those days was young Hepworth Dixon. Sometimes we used to sing together, and often when his father would shut him out he would come to spend the night with me—that was before my landlady locked me out."

"At that period of my life I often dined on smells. There was a famous brewery on Cheapside and I used to go there every morning, because I thought the smell of hops strengthening. For a second course I would stand in front of a butcher shop, then the baker's.

"Sometimes for days I lived on smells, but once in a while I was lucky enough to receive an invitation to dine with some of my friends at the Savage club. I was one of the original members, and the only time in my life that I ever got drunk was there. Receiving an invitation to dine, with eager steps I hastened to the club as fast as my weak condition would permit, but my strength gave out and I arrived just after the last course had been cleared away. The boys were drinking wine, and foolishly I joined them, and was soon as drunk as a lord.

"The first time I was ever on any stage was at a German read, all the rage when I was a young man. It was an entertainment something like the theater, only all love was expunged from the two short plays that constituted the performance. To give it a semblance of parlor entertainment there was always piano music between the plays, and so it was the bishops and ministers of the church attended and applauded. Young Hepworth had a great deal of influence in society, and once when one of the performers in a German read was taken ill he obtained the position for me. Faint with hunger, I approached the piano; I attempted to play, was too weak and fainted dead away, falling forward on the keys. I was dismissed and for some time longer continued to starve.

"Few persons know that my play, 'Monsieur,' is taken from life—my own. The critics object to my writing plays now, but once I wrote a sketch for a German read and had it returned with the remark that it was excellent, but contained too much love and might offend some of their patrons. So I was out that much writing paper.

"At last, in despair, I called on W. S. Gilbert and asked him to use his influence in my behalf. He took a fancy to me, and when 'Pinafore' was finished I was sent out in the provinces as Sir Joseph Porter, and under D'Oyly Carte's stingy management I played the leading role in the opera for three years at a salary of £3 a week. One day I determined to go to London and try my luck. I had become a great favorite in the provinces; so without a penny more than my fare I boarded the train. The company all came to see me off. I was universally liked then; but things are different now. I don't know why.

"As the train was rolling out an elderly lady, a member of our company, thrust a paper into my hand; it was a £5 note—a small fortune to one of that company. I returned it soon afterward and have often looked for the old lady to give her an engagement. She was a crank—only cranks do kind deeds in real life.

"I made a success in London and have never known real want since."

Mansfield had a very sensitive nature; that was the essential truth about him, and that was something that people who did not know him well could never understand, for he did not show his sensitiveness and his aspect was generally that of a severe and rather cynical man of the world. But he greatly appreciated the smallest kindness, and only those who knew him intimately ever saw the better side of him or enjoyed the real charm of his personality. His social gifts were pronounced. He was a splendid host, but he was given too much to the resentment of little informalities and unintentional rudeness.

He used to tell some droll stories of his earlier career. After his great hit in "A Parisian Romance" he was engaged for the Madison Square theater to act a part in "Alpine Roses," a feeble little play by the late Prof. Boyesen. On the first night, before the curtain rose, Mansfield, clad as a foppish young man, in mountain attire, was standing on a rustic bridge, and Georgia Cayvan, the leading actress, dressed as a mountain maid, was standing by him. The scene was idyllic, even viewed from the stage, but the atmosphere at that moment was quite the reverse.

"Mr. Mansfield," said Miss Cayvan, "you must know that I have influence with the management of this theater, and I want to tell you now, before the curtain rises, that if you put one word tonight in your part that has not been rehearsed I will have you dismissed from this theater."

Mansfield was duly impressed and his amazement was increased a moment later, when David

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