

ALBERT WEBB JEFFERIS ATHLETE STUDENT ATTORNEY

Short Story of a Young Man Who Has Made His Way in Life by Hard Work, Native Ability and Pluck to Stick to His Undertakings Until Success Comes to Him.

SIXTEEN years ago, back in New Haven, Conn., a squad of nine muscular athletes from the University of Michigan were testing their prowess on the diamond with nine other trained athletes from old Yale. There was a good deal of presumption in their ambition to beat the athletic monitors of the east on their own grounds, but the Badgers have never had a reputation for letting their modesty beat them out of any laurel wreaths that happen to be lying around unclaimed and their nerve for trying to beat old Eli to this particular insignia of physical skill is not to be wondered at.

The score stood 2 to 1 with the visitors at bat. Two men had managed to find their way to bases. The tall bedimpled young man who had held down first came to bat. This young collegian whose height and broadness of shoulder set him out from his companions, had been lying dejectedly on the grass apart from the rest of the team. For a short time before he had been befuddled by a false move of the pitcher and had dropped the ball allowing a Yale player to score the second run which put his own team at the disadvantage.

He picked up the bat and swung unsuccessfully and left handed at two balls and the umpire called two strikes. Stepping across the home plate he fixed his bat for a right-handed try at it. He put all the force of his huge body into the next swing and the ball rose clear over the heads of the outfielder for a three-bagger. The pair on bases scored and the game was won for Michigan.

That night when the news was flashed back to the waiting thousands at Ann Arbor, the students did what any well organized band of energetic collegians would do under similar circumstances, and by dark the campus was blazing with a big bonfire that is still talked about when two or three old Michigan alumni get together. The name of "Jeff," "Big Jeff," was on every tongue and when the team returned a few days later "Big Jeff" was the first man after the captain to be dragged from the train and carried down the hill on the shoulders of the hurraing students.

The tall, brawny first baseman who won the game for Michigan was Albert Webb Jefferis, who has just won another of his long series of victories by capturing the republican nomination for congressman from the Second Nebraska district.

The little incident in the Yale game was just a sample of the way he has been accustomed to do things and it is little wonder that when the news of his nomination was received by his old class mates in Chicago, Samuel McRoberts of the Illinois Tunnel company, an old college chum, cried:

"Good for old Jeff. He was a sturdy fellow in college and will make a fine congressman. If he does politics now the way he did athletics he will be heard from."

Debate Won by Daring

But while athletics played an important part in his college career, foot ball and base ball were only incidental, recreative. Another incident related by one of his old college chums, who is now in Omaha, concerns another department of college activity in which "Jeff" was an adept. It also gives a side glimpse into the forming character of the young law student.

Michigan at that time, was one of the leaders of the west in debate and it was an honor to be striven after to represent the college in the annual contest with Wisconsin. Sixty-four were entered in the preliminary contests and under the system or lack of system, then in vogue, each man was to a great extent his own coach. Young Jefferis was one of the sixty-four at the start, and was still in the running when chaff had been fanned out and only eight contestants remained. The night of the finals was an eventful one. The hall was crowded with the friends of the competing debaters. When "Jeff" reached the hall he found to his dismay that his seven rivals were faultlessly attired in dress suits and formal shirts, while he had on his everyday clothes, mainly because he was paying his way through school and had little spare money to devote to such luxuries as dress suits and tailor bills. It had been arranged that the eight debaters should sit on the platform, but when this plan was announced to Jefferis he balked. He had no desire to make himself conspicuous by lining up with the seven faultlessly-garbed opponents, so he let them take their places, while he remained in the background.

When his turn came he passed by the platform steps and stood on the lower floor with the crowd. Under the circumstances an explanation was due. The question under discussion was whether or not the United States should annex Canada.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began. "This is a question of vital interest to the American people, and when I discuss questions of interest to the American people I prefer to stand on the same level with them."

The crowd was with him in an instant and, with the inspiration to be had by the backing of his hearers, "Jeff" won on the debate floor a victory as sensational as the one on the Yale diamond and was named one of the three to represent his school against Wisconsin. The versatility which marked his success in debate has been one of the marks by which he has come to be known in Omaha and the tribute of Prof. Thompson when he was a college student has been paid him often since.

Professor Discovers His Talent

Prof. Thompson's remark was recalled the other evening by a former Michigan man at a dinner given in Omaha. Mr. Jefferis, as one of the three debaters to defend the honor of Michigan against Wisconsin, went deeply into the preparation of his subject, the merchant marine problem, which is still with us. He read everything the college library contained on the subject. He analyzed what he read and formulated in his mind a definite idea of how the subject should be treated. The other two contestants had carefully prepared speeches and, with the hired assistance of a professional coach, were ready to make an impression on the judges. Before the debate the three contestants were called before members of the faculty to deliver their address. The other two, with perfect inflection and studied gesture, spoke their pieces. Then "Jeff" was called on. He said he had no speech prepared, but he had an idea how the subject should be treated and it was somewhat different from the method which his colleagues had outlined in their speeches; in fact it was radically different. Some of the professors were inclined to veto his plan, but Prof. Thompson interrupted them.

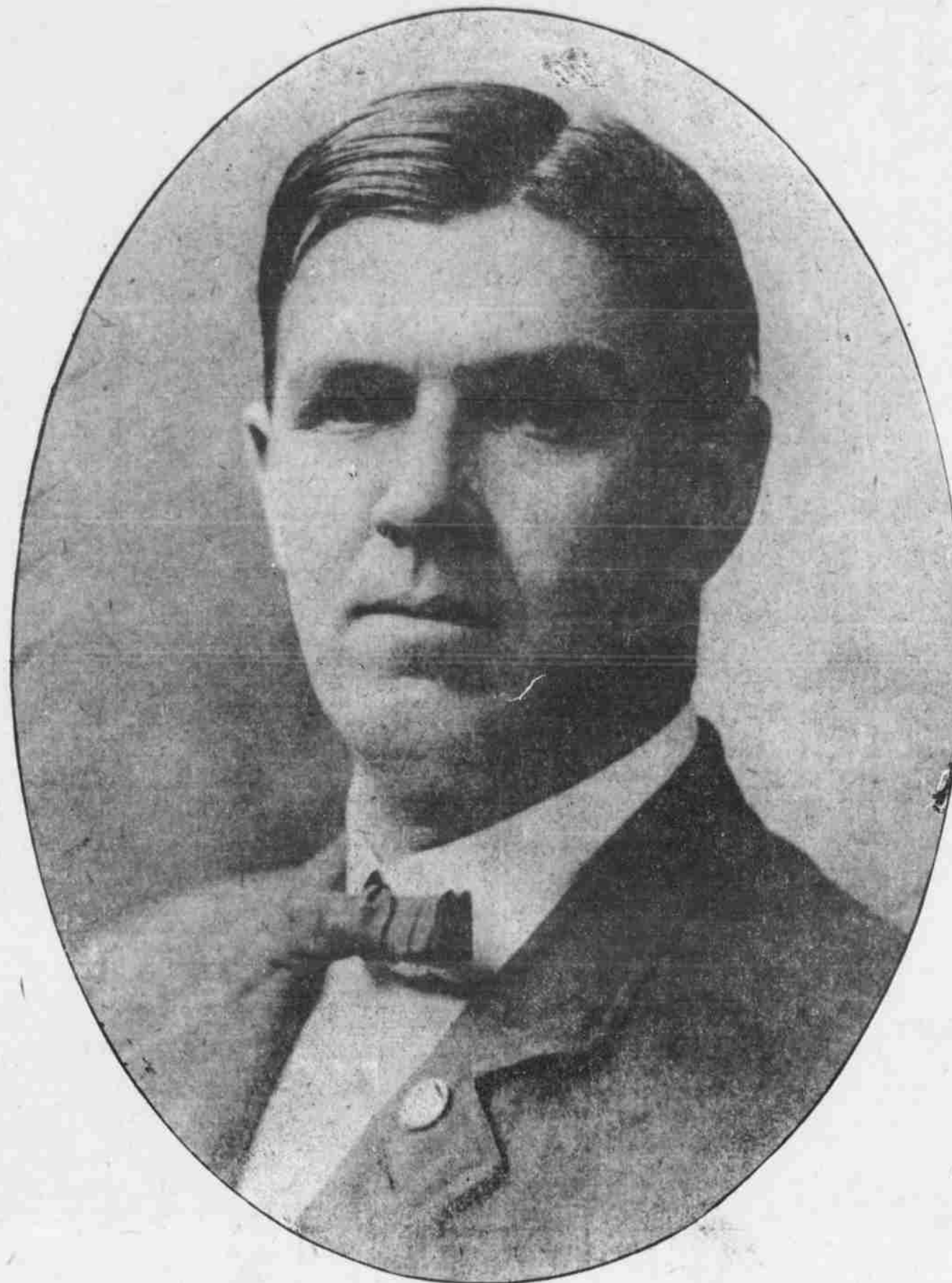
"Let Mr. Jefferis alone," he said. "I have watched him for some time and I think he is able to take care of himself in almost any situation."

This remark has been made of him recently by some of the men who were on the trade excursion in which Mr. Jefferis was principal speaker for the Omahans. Out in the territory where the Omaha jobbers were looked on with a jealous slant situations sometimes arose which called for diplomacy and judgment in the man who was to voice the sentiments of the Omaha crowd. In this "Big Jeff" never fell down. He still had the happy faculty of taking care of himself in any emergency and the cordial feeling the Omaha boosters left with business men of the towns they visited was frequently ascribed to the ability of "Big Talk" Jefferis to say the right thing at the right time and in the right way.

Life in Pennsylvania

The Jefferis family, with its inhabitant in the hills of Pennsylvania, traces its origin back to early colonial times. Mingled in the veins of the later generations is the blood of the Hoopes, the Webbs and other pioneers of the Keystone state. The family has long lived in the community where most of the members now reside. A bridge which figured in the battle of Brandywine during the revolution was named after an ancestor of the present congressional nominee. The sturdy characteristics of the early Pennsylvania Quaker are prominent in the family makeup.

A. W. Jefferis was born December 7, 1868, in Newlin township, Chester county, Pennsylvania. His father was of English extraction and his mother was German, her family name being Rodeback. During his first year he attended a little country school house, to which he walked two miles and back every day before he was 5 years old.



ALBERT WEBB JEFFERIS.

His early religious training was had in the old Quaker meeting house that stood close by the school. When he was 6 years old his father bought a farm in West Bradford township, adjoining Newlin, which is still the family home. The family consisted of five boys and two girls, all living. His first years on the farm were much like those of any farm lad except that because of his size and strength more than the usual amount of work fell to his lot. By the time he was 13 he was able to do a man's work.

When he was 13 Frank Green, now a teacher in the State Normal school at West Chester, interested him in school work and he then formed the ambition to gain a higher education than the country school could afford. The following year, with his father, he visited the memorable battlefield at Gettysburg and, returning, wrote an essay on the battlefield and its history that won a prize at a local teachers' institute and he received as a reward a book of poems, which he still has. This little incident still further fired his ambition and he began deliberately to plan his schooling. To help he had bought a pair of steers and by careful training soon had a valuable yoke of oxen, which he sold for \$150, the nucleus of his educational fund.

Then the business acumen of the ambitious youth asserted itself and, mousing his pony one day, he made the rounds of the neighboring farm houses and announced he was going to open a stall in the market house at West Chester and he solicited the sale of the produce of his neighbors. The first day he rose at 2 o'clock, got his wares ready for the early morning trade by the time his prospective customers were stirring. That day he sold just enough to pay his stall rent and buy some feed for his horse. There was not enough left to buy a meal and the young 15-year-old merchant went hungry.

Business prospered, however, and before long he was selling \$150

worth of produce every day. He now saw the fruition of his plans for schooling and the last year he kept his stall he attended the State Normal school at West Chester, boarding at the college building, rising at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, acting as merchant the early part of the day and student the rest of the time. In this way he paid his way through school and in 1887, at the age of 19, he became a country school teacher at a monthly wage of \$30 and boarding at home.

Pushing Along to Success

The country life has to its credit the impetus to the career of many a successful statesman and public speaker. The youths around his old home are credited with giving this young school teacher his first training in public speaking. Mounted on his faithful horse, he made the rounds of three of the townships, attending faithfully every Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday nights at Marshallton, Romansville and Harmony Hill and taking an active part in the debates, covering all sorts and degrees of public questions.

The following year he became principal of the Marshallton schools and a year later was made private secretary to Principal G. M. Phillips, who is still at the head of the State Normal school at West Chester. He also gained some knowledge of the law in the offices of Bingham & McAelrie and recalls with amusement his first attempts at pleading in the justice courts of West Chester.

All this time he had not allowed his athletic skill to lie dormant. In the summers while he was teaching he played ball with the Brandywine team and by the fall of 1891, when he entered Michigan university, he was a seasoned player. The arrival of the big 200-pound Pennsylvanian was something of an event at Michigan, which was just then trying to recoup its foot ball team. He had hardly

had time to walk across the campus until his six feet two of length and his 200 pounds of flesh, together with his apparent good nature and his dimples, which were said to be very pronounced then, attracted the attention of the pigskin enthusiasts and he was immediately surrounded by a crowd of fifty fellows. "Get a suit," "Get out for practice," they all urged, and within a day or two he was out on the field learning the rudiments of the game, which up to that time was strange to him. After he had chased the ball down the field, practiced tackling and falling on the ball for an hour, Mike Murphy, the trainer, came to him and said: "Go over to the medical building and get rub-down and an examination and then come over to the training quarters." This was the beginning of his college athletic career in which he afterward won a name throughout the west. He played center at first, but later was put in at guard, where his activity, coupled with his bulk, gave him a better chance. During the base ball season he took his place on first and held that position until the end of his college career.

Class Slate Smashed

Another incident connected with his college life and occurring during his senior year in law school indicates the early bent of his mind for politics. There were two strong organizations in the senior class and these organizations usually ran things. When it came to electing class officials each organization put up a complete "slate." Jefferis was not on either list, but some of his friends urged him to get into the contest as an independent. He did so and, rallying around him the men his attractive personality had drawn to him, he waged a fight which lasted through eleven sessions of the class and required fifty-four ballots to decide. The last session was a notable one, and when the "slates" were finally smashed and the majority given to the independent candidate "Jeff" was hoisted to the shoulders of his classmates and carried around the room, followed by hundreds of howling students.

Mr. Jefferis was graduated from Ann Arbor in 1893 and came to Omaha September 5 of that year to try his fortunes as a lawyer. He first rented an office in the New York Life building and hung out his shingle and waited for clients. Nebraska was in the throes of the hard times then and when Doane college sent up to Omaha and asked the former Michigan star to come down and coach its team the immediate prospects of a salary outweighed the indefinite chances of a law practice and he accepted. At the same time Frank Crawford, a classmate at Michigan, had accepted the same position with Nebraska university team. At the close of the season they went into partnership and were together five years.

These were trying times for young lawyers and "Big Jeff" was not exempt from the effects of the general hard times that threatened the west. After a year of practice he found Father Time was gradually slipping up on his board bill and along toward fall had entirely out-distanced it. In fact his board bill was several laps behind Time. In this emergency the aforementioned ability to take care of himself manifested itself. If law practice would not pay, something else might, and he and his law partner decided to promote a foot ball game between Iowa and Nebraska in Omaha. The expense of the game was about \$1,000 and it was a serious undertaking to say the least. However, the crowds came and when the game was half over the exchequer of the two young lawyers was bursting with silver and gold. The profits of the venture were over \$500, sufficient to pull them through the next hard winter.

Wins at the Bar

During this time he was gradually working up a law business and was reasonably successful in what he undertook. One instance is related. Judge Scott had appointed him to defend three negroes charged with a minor felony, and either by appeals to the court or to the jury he had liberated all three of them. E. W. Kerr was in the court room and at the close of the session he remarked: "Jeff, if you keep on setting negroes free as you have today you will be known as a second Abe Lincoln."

In 1896 he was appointed to the only political office he has ever held, that of deputy county attorney. His appointment was by Howard H. Baldrige, who was then county attorney. After he dissolved partnership with Mr. Crawford he went into an office with John F. Stout and later with Judge Troup and Tom Creigh. Eight years ago, while conducting a case at Blair, he met Frank S. Howell, who was looking for an opening in Omaha. The two formed a partnership and have been together since.

Politics has always been a field for activity to Mr. Jefferis. He has been an active campaigner and his strong and attractive personality has been an influence in many campaigns in Omaha. Two years ago he managed the campaign on E. A. Benson for mayor. In commercial circles he has come to be widely known because of his activity on the two last trade excursions by the Omaha jobbers. He was the principal speaker on the trip to the Pacific coast a year ago last June and to Colorado and Wyoming in May. On the first of these commercial journeys he made twenty-three speeches in behalf of Omaha as the market town, one day speaking three times to the people of Portland. His versatility and his ability to make an effective speech on short notice made him a most valuable asset to the trade boosters.

During his senior year at Ann Arbor he met Miss Helen J. Malarkey of Oregon, Ill., who was a student of the class of 1895. After her graduation she became the head of the department of physics and mathematics in the Central High school at Minneapolis. They were married October 22, 1897, and their family consists of two children, Albert, a boy of 6, and Janet, 15 months old. Mrs. Jefferis has been prominent in cultural societies in Omaha and was one of the organizers and the first president of the Fine Arts society.

When the Woods Burn Horror Holds High Sway

A SCOURGE of forest fires surpassing in destructiveness of property and life the recent disaster near Duluth, swept over another section of Minnesota in September, 1894, destroying the towns of Hinckley, Sandstone, Miller and Pokegama. Three hundred and fifty lives were lost and property of unknown aggregate value destroyed.

The destruction of Hinckley was attended by many thrilling incidents and feats of heroism, the memory of which is cherished by the people of the ravaged locality. Most remarkable for daring, endurance and suffering was the exploit of Engineer James Root and his train in retreating from Hinckley with a trainload of refugees as the sea of flames burst upon the town, and the saving of their lives. The story of that exploit as related by Engineer Root follows:

"When we left Duluth Saturday afternoon the air was heavy with smoke. At Carleton the smoke was so thick that it became necessary to light the headlight, which was done by Fireman Jack McGowan. I spoke to Jack about it and said I guessed we were going to have rain. We never thought the fire was so near us. On and on through the night of smoke the engine rushed on its way to Hinckley. We were due there at 4 o'clock, and arrived three minutes late. As I pulled into the station I saw an excited mob of people who took my train by storm. That was the first intimation I had that we were so near the fire. The people were terror-stricken. I could not have started the engine without running persons down on the track in front of me. I received no orders, and as my train was completely filled

with passengers who had boarded it while we were standing there, I was about to pull the throttle to cross the Hinckley bridge, when a wall of flame fully ten feet high burst through the rolling smoke right in front of my engine, cutting off all hope of making the bridge. I noticed that the wind was from the south, and knew then that the fire must have already crossed the bridge and destroyed it, so I reversed the engine and we began a race with the flames back from Hinckley.

"There was not much time for thinking, but I remembered a shallow marsh, known as Skunk lake, about six miles back and north of Hinckley, and I made up my mind to reach that lake, come what might. There was no other salvation. The wind was blowing the fire in the same direction we were going and the flames raced along in the tall grass on both sides of us, almost keeping pace with the speed of the train. I put on my heavy coat and pulled it over my head, and Jack got back in the manhole of the tank. He would stand up and throw water over me as long as he could stand the heat and then he would retreat to the manhole again, and in that way we got to Skunk lake, not more than two minutes before the flames. We piled out of the cab, Jack and I, cutting off the air and kicking the cars down about two car lengths, and made for the lake, getting there just as the fire struck us. It was awful."

Engineer Root continued, after resting a moment, "And I hope I may never live to go through such an experience again. The fire swept right over us and we had to lie flat in the water for a time. After the first sheet of flame passed over us it was not so bad, but still the heat was terrific.

The woods were burning all around us and, to add to the horror of the time, the train caught on fire and the cars burned fiercely, radiating an awful heat, which affected us almost as much as the first fire, we were so near the track. For four hours we remained in the water, and then the ground began to cool sufficiently at the edge of the lake so that we were enabled to stand on the bank by wrapping our heads in coats. Later I went to the engine and sank down on the hot seat of the cab, the engine having passed through the fiery ordeal almost unscathed. I did not fall asleep, but fell into a kind of stupor, from which I was not fully aroused until the rescuing party came for us with handcars. So far as I know there were only two persons on our train who lost their lives. They were a couple of Chinamen who could not be gotten off the train, and they were burned to death on the cars."

James E. Lobdell of St. Paul, Mr. Holt of Duluth and Mr. Anderson of Minneapolis were passengers on this train. These three men, after passing four hours of agony in the lake, started out while the woods were still on fire and the ground was so hot that it blistered their feet, and walked, fell and staggered through six miles of fire and smoke to Hinckley, swam the river at that point and struggled on to Mission Creek, from which point they rode into Pine City on handcars and gave the first intelligence of the burned train, the desperate straits of its passengers and the sad news of the destruction of Hinckley and many human lives. It was an awful journey through the night of smoke and flames and Mr. Lobdell's description of it pictures a fearful experience.

"I hope to never see such sights again," Mr. Lobdell said. "The moment the cars were stopped at Skunk lake a small marsh about two acres in extent and lying close alongside the track, the passengers crowded off pellmell, unmindful of each other in their mad desire to reach the water. The air was full of flying sparks and the heat was awful."

"In my coach there were two Chinamen who became crazed with fright and refused to leave their seats. They clung to the seats and could not be pulled away, although I saw two or three men tugging at them even in the awful hurry of the moment. That was the last I saw of the Chinamen and later I heard that they remained in the coach and were burned to death along with the train. We reached the water none too soon. The roar of the flames could be heard south of us toward Hinckley even before we reached the water's edge and a number of women fainted before getting to the lake. They were picked up by the male passengers and everybody reached the water in time to save their lives. What we suffered for four mortal hours in that marsh baffles description. Men, women and children piled into the water in one heterogeneous mass. Everybody abandoned his baggage, nor thought of aught else but saving his own life. I had a small traveling grip along with me and carried it into the water. We had been in the lake scarcely half a minute when through the wall of smoke there burst a sea of flame. The heat was awful. Somebody shouted, 'Get under the water for your lives!'"

"I obeyed the command and I guess everybody—
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