

KOLSTRA

From Depression to War

When Idelle Kolstra was asked what she remembered about the 1940s, she said, "We were still reeling from the disastrous effects of the Depression of the Thirties."

Mrs. Kolstra's written reminiscences, in somewhat shortened form:

When Louis and I were married June 5, 1930, I had been teaching rural and state graded schools in the Rudolph area for six years. Married teachers were not allowed at that time, so we thought my teaching career had ended with our marriage.

We were going to be farmers. Louis had worked his father's farm near Rudolph and thought it would one day be his.

I had been raised on a farm and, as an only child, had done every kind of work: milking, barn chores, field work, gardening, taking care of the chickens, canning, helping with butchering and curing of meat. I prepared meals and baked bread when I was just a little girl.

But we were not experienced in depressions. The bottom fell out of farm prices, and there was no keeping up with expenses. The Federal Land Bank had a mortgage on the farm, and the interest had to be paid. The personal property was mortgaged, so that was more interest to be paid.

I sold eggs all summer for eight cents a dozen, but that barely paid for groceries. We sold a cow for beef. After shipping expenses, our check was \$4.75.

We had to disconnect our telephone and electricity. We had to go back to pumping water by hand for all the cattle. We couldn't use the milking machine, so the two of us had 19 cows to milk by hand.

I couldn't use the washing machine, so I had to use the washboard and tub. We went back to kerosene lamps for light.

We didn't milk much in winter and, one December, our milk check was only \$4.40.

Louis laid the check on the counter of the village hardware store and said, "Give me the best gas lamp you have for this price. We have to have a light at night." That was our only Christmas present that year.

It was a very hot, dry summer. We worked hard, but everything was discouraging.

On the 11th of August, 1930, we were dealt the worst blow of all. We were threshing and blowing the straw into the barn. It was late in the evening so the men wanted to finish the job. With supper partly ready, I went after the cows, put them in the barn and started milking.

Suddenly, someone yelled, "Fire! Fire!"

A wall of flame came out of the blowpipe. It went into the barn. Soon the barn and all its contents were on fire. I turned the cows out, and we kept them in the corner of the cow yard, away from falling wires.

There were no fire departments to call for help. The threshing crew pumped both of our wells dry trying to save other buildings. They then hauled whey from the cheese factory across the road. But we lost the barn and granary, and all the hay, straw and grain.

This stroke of bad luck brought about many changes.

Louis' family, who had moved to town, decided they must return to the farm so Louis' father could start building the barn. Without hay, straw and grain, it was necessary to have an auction and sell most of the livestock. Our farming days had ended.

Louis tried all that fall to get a job at the Consolidated paper mill. But so did hundreds of other jobless men.

Farmers were at a disadvantage because they had no trade. He finally turned to the want-ads for farm help in the *Wisconsin Agriculturist*. He was ready to accept a job in eastern Wisconsin when a farmer north of Rudolph hired him to clear land on his farm. So, Louis took the job for \$1 a day and board.

I went home to stay with my parents, south of Rudolph. Louis always had to be on his job for milking. The only time he could come to see us was for a few hours Sunday afternoons.

Our first baby was born that year, 1931, but she never saw her daddy often enough to know him.

One Sunday, Louis came to see us in great pain. We put him to bed and tried home remedies, but to no avail. He was very sick all night and, at 4 a.m., I helped him into my father's car and hurried to Wisconsin Rapids.

I knew where Dr. Waters lived on Third Street South, and I stopped there. I rang the doorbell several times and finally heard the measured tread of the doctor coming down stairs to answer the bell. The old doctor was well known for always taking his time.

"Take him to the hospital," the doctor said. "I'll be right down." Emergency surgery was performed on the nearly ruptured appendix. Louis spent a couple weeks at Riverview Hospital and another week at rest.

The year was 1932, and we finally had some time together. But it was an expensive vacation.

In March of 1933, another bombshell fell upon us.

Louis' father died suddenly of a ruptured appendix. That left his mother alone on the farm with two daughters in school.

So, we all moved back and lived together again. The barn had been rebuilt, but there wasn't much hope of farming again as the Federal Land Bank was foreclosing. Louis' parents and my parents lost their farms and everything they had worked so hard on all their lives.

We had very little income, so Louis cut wood in the winter and sold it for \$4 a cord. Most went for groceries. He continued to go to Consolidated, but it wasn't until the summer of 1937 that he was called. He started working in the boiler house. It was the hottest, dirtiest place in the mill, but he worked there seven years.

We moved off the farm and went to Wisconsin Rapids in September 1937.

During the winter of 1938-39, while working in the boiler house, Louis decided to go to night school and learn to be a welder. Maybe some day he could work in the machine shop!

After we moved to Wisconsin Rapids, I took seasonal jobs. At the Sampson canning factory, I sorted beans. I also sorted cranberries out on the marshes later in the fall. In the early 1940s, I worked at the Harvard clothing factory in Rapids when extra help was needed to complete a large order of army overcoats.

In the winter of 1943-44, recruiters appeared in town, looking for workers to go to the Puget Sound Navy Yard at Bremerton, Washington. Many men were needed to repair ships being brought in from the Pacific war against Japan. Louis felt he could make use of and improve his welding skills.

He finally signed up to go to Washington in April. But he didn't think the family should go. Both girls were in good schools and doing well with piano lessons.

Finally, I made the decision. Either we all go or nobody goes. I was pregnant with my third child, and it was not an easy decision.

On April 11, 1944, at 4 a.m., we left in our V-8 Ford, pulling a two-wheel trailer with all our clothes and three pieces of furniture: a large cabinet Victrola and records, a washing machine and my sewing machine.

Gas stamps were provided for the trip to Port Orchard, but no stamps for a return trip. And we were promised a new tire if needed.

As we traveled through North Dakota on U.S. Highway 10, which in places was little more than a cow path, it seemed one of our tires needed attention. We stopped at the next town and asked where we had to go for a permit for a new tire and were directed to the office. There, we were told, "The committee will not meet until next Wednesday, so we cannot do anything for you until then."

We had to continue on our way and hope for the best.

We were to live in a new housing project near Port Orchard. That was a

redeeming feature. We had never lived in a brand new apartment. It would be furnished with new furniture but we did not know how meager the furnishings would be: a coal stove to cook on; an icebox (not a refrigerator); a small table; and four chairs in the kitchen.

A small living area had only two arm chairs and a small cot to sit on. Two small bedrooms were furnished with beds and small dressers.

School was in session when we first arrived in April. If I had not been pregnant, I could have taught school. Anyone who could hold a book was trying to teach.

Our baby was due to arrive in September with the accompanying, doctor and hospital bills. I felt I should get a job, so I picked beans in fields where I could take our daughter Nancy with me.

People had flocked to the area from all over the United States. We stood in line for everything, and there were many shortages.

I had not brought clothespins from Wisconsin. I thought I could buy some when I got to Port Orchard. There were none to be purchased and, for two months, I hung up the washing with safety pins.

The little post office could not handle the deluge of mail for the project. Long lines waited at the post office windows. Christmas 1944 was especially bad. The storage area was visible from the windows. Boxes and packages were piled to the ceiling. But, when 5 o'clock came, the windows closed, no matter how long the lines were. We were receiving Christmas mail in late January 1945.

To save gas and tires, the men who lived in the project usually took a bus to the boat landing at the village of Port Orchard, then took a boat across the bay to the Navy yard.

One morning, they were crossing the bay when Louis noticed the water was acting strangely, making waves that caused odd movements of the boat.

He asked the men what made it do that. They answered in a matter-of-fact manner, "Oh, that's an earthquake."

Louis enjoyed his work but felt our daughters were not getting the good education they would receive at home in Wisconsin Rapids. In the spring of 1945, we decided to return to Wisconsin Rapids.

How could we get the gas stamps we needed? None were given for the return trip.

A sailor waiting for his ship to be repaired made a deal with us. He said, "When you go back to Wisconsin, take my wife with you part way. Then put her on a bus that has a straight route south to Texas and I'll get you the gas stamps you need."

By the time we were ready to leave, in August 1945, the war was over, and everyone wanted to return to their former homes. We had a head start.

On the way home, we stopped at Yellowstone park and rented a little cabin. When our baby, Judy, 11 months old at the time, developed a fever, we decided we had better drive to Cody, Wyoming, 100 miles away, to see a doctor.

All I could think of on that long trip was, "It is August, polio season. Polio victims have a high temperature. Judy's has remained at 104 for too many hours."

We had a small pail in the car. Whenever I saw a water-filled ditch along the road, we stopped and filled the pail, so I could bathe Judy to bring the fever down.

We finally got to Cody and, from the telephone book, we chose the name of a doctor. He was an old man and said Judy had an intestinal disturbance and prescribed a bad-tasting liquid which she spit out as fast as I could give it to her.

The next day, we went to a little hospital. The young doctor there gave her a thorough exam and said, "I cannot find anything wrong with this child except that she is trying to cut a whole mouthful of teeth."

We arrived home a couple days before Labor Day 1945. On Tuesday, Louis went to Consolidated and came home on "Cloud 9." He was going to work the next day in the machine shop. That "pipe dream" of 1938-39 had come to pass.

HOTEL ROMANSKI

Newcomer looks for a home

Although he doesn't know it and never will, the young man is not alone. As he sits writing, a stranger, unknown and invisible to him, looks over his shoulder.

It is an evening in July 1945, and the world is taking a turn.

The 26-year-old correspondent is Donald Engel, a former Seymour farm kid who has recently fulfilled his war duty as a welder at a Manitowoc shipyard. He corresponds from Wisconsin Rapids.

His wife since 1942, Arline "Sally" Engel, waits with some impatience at her parents' farm near Seymour. Sally is pregnant with the couple's first child.

"It went pretty good today, just about as I expected," Donald writes. "I worked harder than all the while I was at the shipyards, putting away pipe fittings and welding rods and such stuff. The people were all very nice to me. I think I will get along all right."

"The people" are the operators of the Frank Garber Co. From its McKinley Street location, "Garber's" sells plumbing and industrial supplies.

Frank Garber, a Russian Jew, had immigrated 40 years earlier. One son, Bernard, had been born in Russia of a first wife. In the United States, a second marriage produced sons Harry and Sidney.

As World War II approached an end, advertisements were placed in newspapers for a stock clerk. One of the applicants was Donald Engel.

"The job is still open," Bernard wrote to Donald on December 2, 1944. The

new employee would work a 48-hour week, selling pipe, fittings and plumbing fixtures.

"The living conditions in Wisconsin Rapids are very much lower than they would be in Manitowoc. The rent in this city runs about \$25, \$30, or \$35 per month. We have a fine, progressive city here," wrote Garber.

For his interview, Donald rode to Wisconsin Rapids in a passenger car attached to a Green Bay and Western freight train.

Having accepted the position, Donald asks Sally in his letter, "Did you notice I'm staying at the Hotel Romanski? Frank got this room for me."

The small room is above a tavern, says Donald, a non-drinker. "It seems to be a pretty nice place." The window looks out at another building about five feet away.

"Bernie Garber plays in the band. He took me along to the band concert tonight. They played at the old people's home. Then we went to look at an apartment. It has three rooms."

That upstairs apartment "in a new house fixed up pretty nice" includes an L-shaped bedroom and a bathroom without bathtub. The apartment is insulated and wired for an electric stove.

"After we looked at the apartment house, Bernie, his wife and daughter, who is about six years old, took me down to have some root beer. Mrs. Garber says we should come over some time. They were very nice to me."

As for the apartment, "He told me to come back tomorrow. The rent is only \$20 a month. It is heated with an oil burner, which he furnishes."

Donald doesn't mention the bedroom is so small that, to make the bed, Sally will have to crawl over the mattress itself to get to the far side.

Donald writes again from Hotel Romanski to his wife in July 1945. He has gone to look at "our house" again after work and has talked to "the lady downstairs," Mrs. Kubisiak.

In view of the postwar housing shortage, he says he is lucky to get the apartment because there are three or four other couples after it.

Somewhat apologetically, he remarks that the apartment is "a little smaller than our last place," and that she better leave anything they won't need for a while, including the kitchen cupboard he had made, the wash boiler, big kettles and a work bench.

Donald mentions that Company F of the Wisconsin State Guard, in which he is a sergeant, is, going on two-day bivouac that weekend.

In a third letter, Donald writes that he is getting along better at Garber's every day, filling most of the orders, waiting on customers and straightening up.

"It's quite a mess, but it looks a lot better already, and it will be better when we get in the new building. I probably will go to the show tonight to see Mrs. Parkinton."

A fourth letter purports to include a picture of the apartment. "I don't even know what our new address will be. I know it's at 11th Avenue at Fremont, way out on the west side of town, not very far from Garber's."

Donald says he ate supper "at a better place tonight" and got a good meal for a nickel less than the 45 cents he had paid the night before.

He continued to find the work more difficult than welding had been. "I can't sit down all day. I get pretty dirty, too."

Donald mentions that he has seen the movie, "Abbott and Costello Lost in a Harem." "It was real good and a nice theater, too."

Sally joins Donald in Wisconsin Rapids in time to have her baby delivered by Dr. Nelson early Sunday morning, August 12, at Riverview Hospital. The name is David Donald.

From Okinawa in the South Pacific arrives a letter from Donald's brother, now "Uncle" Roy, a Navy construction worker or "Seabee."

"Congratulations," says Roy. "I sure would like to see David. I bet he is cute. How do you like Rapids now?"

On 11th Avenue, not far from St. Lawrence Catholic church, the stranger cocks an ear. From a window above comes what will become a familiar sound on the west side and later out by Sand Hill, the seemingly incessant wailing of the Engel heir.

TWO MILE GYPSIES

Adventures at the edge of town

From first grade to graduation, Pudge Rucinski moved 57 times “and we never left Two Mile School,” she said.

“We moved 13 times in one year,” said Dave Rucinski, the brother of “Pudge,” who, at the time of her 1999 death, was Pauline Rucinski Schroer.

According to their sister, Joan Fritsche, “We were known as the Two Mile gypsies.”

Children of Sophie and the late Harry Rucinski, the three knew a pastoral world around Two Mile Avenue in the 1940s and 1950s. They told me about it as we sat at my mother’s kitchen table on the fabled thoroughfare.

The numerous moves were caused by their father’s profession, they explained. Harry Rucinski built houses and sold them, usually before they were completed.

In a typical cycle, the outhouse was erected first, then the garage.

The family would move into the garage and Harry would start on the house. Then they’d move into the basement, when there was a basement.

When Harry got the main floor finished, the move was made upstairs, “if we got that far.”

Typically, the units had two bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen—no bathroom. For a bath, you sat in the sink; toilets were out back.

On the corner of Two Mile Avenue and 8th Street stood the dominant landmark of the neighborhood in those days: Two Mile School.

“How many times in winter I stuck my tongue on those fence posts,” said Pudge, viewing an old photo.

Rucinski mother Sophie and a grandmother cooked school lunches.

“Everything was served in cups,” said Joan. “With a slice of bread. All for five cents.”

Next door to the school was the Gray sawmill. You could hear the buzz of saws during class.

Just north of school was the Snack Shack restaurant. To the south on 8th Street were the free movies shown at John Dove’s tavern.

On the corner of 8th and Two Mile was the big log building that housed Radomski’s tavern.

Across 8th was a meat market and grocery owned by Stamels, “from Milwaukee.”

Two Mile Creek to the south provided a memorable incident for Pudge. With a couple friends, she dragged her mother’s new copper wash boiler across the field for a little boating.

The vessel adequately held two friends but, said Pudge, “They’re bobbin’ along and I jumped in; right to the bottom it went.

“Ma didn’t know what happened to her boiler.”

“Them Gypsies,” she said, meaning the real kind, that used to travel Two Mile with their horse-drawn cart, pots and pans hanging from all sides.

“Ma always warned us not to go out by the road because they took kids,” Pudge said.

The place that perhaps most reveals the former character of the area was the Paul Thalacker farm, southwest of the then dead-end of Lincoln Street at Two Mile.

In appearance, they say, Thalacker was “a bruiser of a man with eyebrows like John L. Lewis.”

His wife was soft and gentle, white-aproned, her hair in a beautiful pug; she always gave you a cookie. When you picked up milk, you waited for her to spoon off the cream.

“There were cows, horses and pigs running around where Pine Avenue is now, all the way down to Two Mile

Creek,” said Joan. “Where Woodside School is, they used to make hay and corn and everything.”

“One night a window-peeker took off across the hay field. We would not go get milk in the dark after that.”

When pigs were butchered by Thalacker, they were dipped in a large cauldron to scald.

“He used to give me the curly tails,” Pudge said. “One time, he surprised me and gave me a little pig. I used to ride him to school.”

Dave said he spent a lot of time around the farm. Once, when Thalacker failed to kill a pig by shooting through the bars of a cage, he lifted the gate to slit the throat.

“We opened the door and the pig come sailing out,” said Dave. “He caught the knife in its throat and it took off halfway to the creek, bleeding all the way. It ran out of blood and fell down.”

“You boys go drag that pig in,” Thalacker ordered.

Dave and his friend, Tom Gray, tried but failed and had to shovel a path through snow so a horse could haul it in.

By the time they got the porker to the big pot, the pig was nearly frozen and the hair had set.

“Well, skin it then,” said Thalacker.

“That’s when Tom and I took off,” said Dave.

In 1945, the Rucinski kids watched Army trucks coming down Two Mile Avenue carrying German prisoners.

Because Dave did yard work for one of the guards, he was allowed to visit at the Tri-City Airport prisoner of war camp, with his friend, Gray.

The prisoners, he said, ate well. Leftover chicken or steak was handed over to the visitors.

Dave said the Germans had no intention of escaping, although the creek-side of the airport was unfenced.

Having also worked with the prisoners at the Griffith nursery, Dave said, “There were a lot of nice guys there. Some of ’em didn’t even want to go back after the war.”

LAURA

Part Two

Laura. She was one of the richest women in the world.

The night before her death, she said, "I know I have done a lot of foolish things in my life, but as a little girl I often dreamed of knowing all the kings and queens in the world. And I've had my wish!"

Laura Corrigan, who, in the latter days of the Depression, had three armored trucks move her \$21 million from Cleveland to New York to spite the city that had rejected her 20 years earlier.

Laura, who had married Jimmy Corrigan, heir of the big steel company, Corrigan-McKinney of Cleveland, December 2, 1916, at the Biltmore Hotel, New York.

But there was a problem. Jimmy was a known playboy. After his father, James C. Corrigan, died in 1907, former accountant Price McKinney was put in charge of the firm.

Wealthy enough even when unemployed, the newlyweds greeted the city of Cleveland in Laura's wedding present, a lavender Rolls-Royce. She planned to wow the locals from the Corrigan villa.

But invitations were ignored and parties proved dismal. Some charged the snub to Price McKinney, who judged Laura an unrefined fortune hunter and advised his friends to stay home and play whist when the Corrigans were entertaining.

Following an unhappy year in Cleveland, Laura and Jimmy departed for New York. When their welcome in that metropolis proved nearly as chilly as it had been in Cleveland, the two moved on to London.

But in 1925, they returned to Ohio.

Laura.

By now she had acquired enough stock to give herself and her husband a

majority vote in the steel company. The two walked into a directors' meeting and voted McKinney out.

After the deposed executive committed suicide, Laura was more unpopular than ever in Ohio. While a sobered Jimmy remained in Cleveland, Laura frequented numerous locales: her villa outside Rome; a Palm Beach mansion; a London townhouse; and an apartment at the Ritz Hotel in Paris.

When Jimmy died in 1928 at age 47, Laura controlled nearly 55 percent of Corrigan-McKinney stock.

By then, she had learned a few lessons in achieving social success. But still Laura was lampooned, at least in print.

For example: upon her return from Europe, she was asked if she liked the Dardenelles.

"Loved him, hated her," she replied in a flat Midwestern "twang," supposedly not recognizing the reference to a famous waterway.

She was also known for standing on her head, according to sources.

In 1930, Laura sold her interest in Corrigan-McKinney for over \$30 million, resulting in an annual income of about \$800,000.

Laura.

Rich, spoiled, silly. But Laura soon became a saint.

Her continental spending spree abbreviated by the Blitzkrieg, Laura, residing at the Paris Ritz, began a charity campaign to help the French people, at the same time assisting hundreds of needy American citizens abroad.

Wearing a self-designed uniform, she converted her hotel suite to a workshop for hospital supplies and contributed \$21,000 a month to French war relief, supplementing a U.S. government allowance of \$500 per month with \$400,000 worth of jewels, tapestry and furniture.

When Paris fell to the Germans in 1940, Laura was forced to go south to Vichy in unoccupied France.

There, wonder of wonders, she shared a bathroom with six other women, writing to a friend: "I have sold everything except my pearls, my two

wedding rings and my wristwatch. All I possess here could be put in a suitcase."

She had gone so far to help others that she had undermined her own health. In December 1940, while rushing to help a sick woman, Laura was injured in a traffic accident, breaking both wrists and an ankle.

In 1944, she escaped to London via Portugal. There, she organized the Wings Club for Allied air force officers.

Returning to Paris, she opened another canteen for Allied airmen.

Her benefactions continued after war's end.

A January 1946 Cleveland newspaper said, "Mrs. Laura Corrigan, lady bountiful to war-stricken French refugees and heiress to a fabulous Cleveland steel fortune, has regained control of her \$800,000-a-year income and is mapping plans to spend it on French war relief."

For her good deeds, the French government awarded Laura the Croix de Guerre, the Legion of Honor and the Croix du Combattant. The British government added the King's Medal.

While in New York for cancer surgery, Laura drew up a will and soon died, on January 22, 1948. Her body was cremated and buried in Lake View Cemetery.

Of a personal estate of \$1,350,000, over a million went to her sister, Mrs. Mabel Florence Armstrong-Taylor of San Francisco and \$50,000 to another sister, Clara Andrews.

Miscellaneous heirs included princesses, marchionesses, viscounts, barons and knights. At the same time, the \$20 million estate of her late husband was divided into 16ths as his will dictated, meaning \$5 million more to Mabel Taylor.

A 16th of the mighty fortune also went to another sister.

This one, Mrs. Grace Parker Bassett, lived a long way from Paris, New York and even Cleveland.

She lived in Wisconsin Rapids, hometown of one of the world's most notable women, Laura Corrigan.

Laura was a Rapids girl.

LAURA

Part One

River City poor home to famous figure

Who was the little girl Laura who dreamed?

Who was that little Laura, who became Mrs. James Corrigan, one of the world's richest women?

She was little Laura Mae Wittrock, born in the "German Settlement," a few miles east of Grand Rapids, now Wisconsin Rapids, on January 2, 1879, a date she later revised to make herself appear younger.

Her German-born parents were 29-year-old Charles Wittrock (later spelled Wittrock), a harness maker, and 23-year-old Emma.

When she was born, Laura had a sister, Clara, three years older than she was.

Laura's father, Charles, had apparently been married previously, in 1873, at "Seneca," probably Seneca Corners or the township of Seneca, west of Rapids.

Two years following that date, his wife, Lina, told the divorce court that Charles had deserted immediately after the wedding.

Charles Wittrock moved on to Stevens Point, where, about 1875, he married Laura's mother, Emma Sitherwood.

Suffering delusions of persecution, Charles repeatedly threatened suicide.

Then, on a Tuesday morning in 1881, while brother-in-law Henry Osterman,

and others of the Whitrock clan, stood outside his house, Charles put a shotgun to his head and pulled the trigger.

His wife, Emma, and the girls had been visiting her parents in Stevens Point.

"Though surprised and terrified at the sad intelligence, she bore her most sorrowful bereavement with fortitude and genuine womanly courage," Charles' obituary said.

After Charles' death, Emma took Clara and Laura to her parents' home in Stevens Point.

Emma married lumberjack and handyman painter William F. Parker, November 24, 1884.

At Stevens Point were Laura's half-sisters: Mabel, whose father has been identified as Charles Wittrock; Vera, who died young; Veda, who would die a newlywed; and Grace, who survived to inherit part of a fortune.

Laura's older sister, Clara, married Louis Andrews, a mill worker.

Laura attended Point schools and the local business college, attracting attention for her "exquisite" dressing and "strong, pleasing personality."

By 1900, Laura was back in Grand Rapids, working as a bookkeeper and/or stenographer for attorney and mayor William E. Wheelan and boarding on what is now Third Street South.

"She wore such beautiful clothes, swishing taffeta skirts, carrying a parasol," recalled Emily Bell, who said an invitation to Travel Class was Laura's "start."

In 1902, the *Wisconsin Valley Leader* reprinted a photo of Laura's face under an immense, rose-shaped hat.

"The charming subject of this sketch is not only fair in form and feature but possessed of no common talent for literary work," the *Leader* said.

The *Leader* also reprinted a short story "from Miss Laura's facile pen," a short story that investigates the relationship between poverty, wealth and "fortune hunting."

From Grand Rapids, Laura moved to Chicago, where she worked as a writer and editor. In 1907, she married Dr. Duncan R. MacMarten, house physician at the Great Northern Hotel.

The *Stevens Point Journal* observed that a large portrait of Laura appeared in the *Chicago Herald*, March 13, 1911. "She is noted for her beauty and vivacity," the *Journal* said.

While married to MacMarten, Laura began an affair with Jimmy Corrigan, son of the Cleveland iron magnate. When she divorced the 49-year-old MacMarten in 1914, Laura was 35.

Shortly after her marriage to the younger Corrigan three years later, she bought, for her mother and stepfather, one of Stevens Point's finest homes, at 731 Main St., providing a maid, nurse, automobile and chauffeur.

Her mother, Emma, died July 18, 1933. Two table lamps bearing Mrs. Parker's name are still in use at the Stevens Point public library.

Her stepfather, W.F. Parker, died a year later.

Laura didn't forget her old home town, Grand Rapids, now Wisconsin Rapids.

In 1933, she sent \$10,000 to be divided among nine institutions by her half-sister, Grace Bassett (Mrs. J. Edward), a Rapids resident.

But it seems the little poor girl that became one of the world's richest women, would never be unconditionally loved and accepted by the River City elite.

According to Consolidated heiress Emily Bell, Mrs. Bassett called Emily's mother, Ruth Mead. Could Mrs. Parker bring Laura down to the paper city's most distinguished residence, the Mead house on "The Island?"

"Of course," Emily heard her mother say. But when Emily came downstairs later, the house was darkened. Her mother had pulled the curtains and locked the doors.

"Mother, for Heaven's sake. What is going on?"

"Laura Corrigan is coming down to see the island," Mrs. Mead said, "And she's not coming into this house."



Laura Corrigan