

Chapter Eight

Halcyon: New Home for the Stenquists

At the start of 1929 our mother Louise and her brother Robert crossed the entire country on their own from Massachusetts to the coast of central California. Our mother was almost 12 and her brother was 13. They probably had little information about where they were headed and what the place was like. All they knew was that their mother had left them with friends in their hometown four months before, and now she wanted them to join her out west in a place called Halcyon, California.

Louise told the story about their journey west often – how she and her brother Bob traveled across country by themselves when they were only children. Louise told us how she was somewhat fearful to be heading out into the wild west, where there were dangerous bandits and Indians along the way. Louise also had a bad experience on the trip. She recalled that at some point during the long journey, a strange man tried to French-kiss her.

Uncle Bob told me of this adventure differently. He recalled being very excited and eager to be traveling out west, that he relished the adventure. During an interview with our cousin Vicki (Bob Stenquist's daughter) we learned a different take on Bob's experience. She stated that coming across the country by train, which took several days, "was probably a pretty fearful experience." *[Interview, Vicki Stenquist Chafin, February 6, 2020]*

They did the whole trip in five days. Louise and Bob left Worcester on January 1, 1929, and arrived at the Oceano, California train station on January 5. There to meet them were their mother, Ebba Stenquist, and a friend and Temple member, Borghild Jansen. *(Bob Stenquist 7/14/96)* Coming from urban Worcester, Massachusetts, an industrial powerhouse in America in the early 1900s, young Louise and Bob probably felt like they had arrived at the far edge of the western frontier. A very different way of life awaited them. The coastal region of San Luis Obispo County when Louise and Bob arrived in 1929 was quite a remote place and sparsely settled. Halcyon was perhaps the furthest from Worcester, Massachusetts that one could get within the United States at that time.

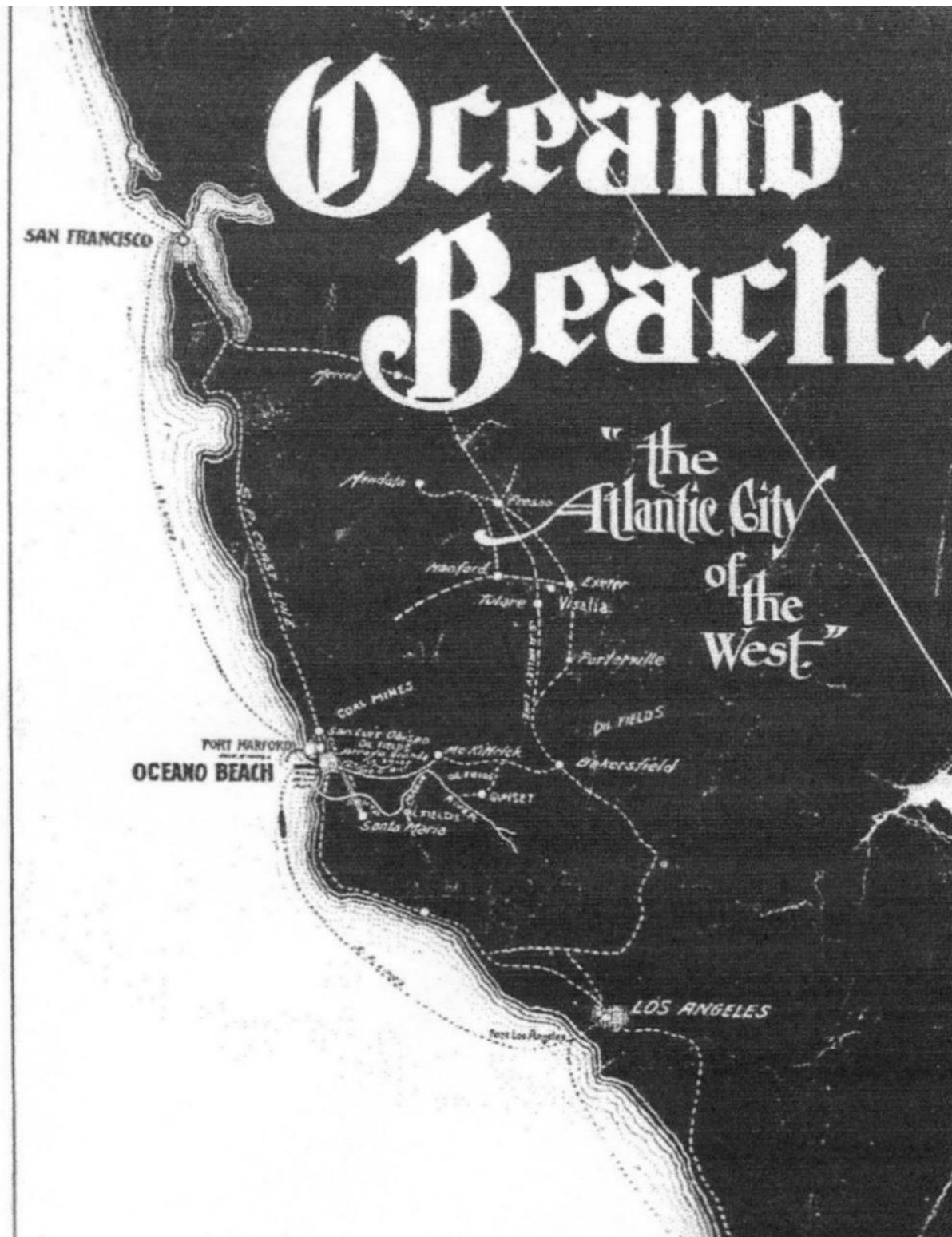
Before we tell the story of Louise and Bob's life in Halcyon as teenagers, we will explore what the draw was to that part of the California Coast, how the town of Halcyon was formed, and the organization The Temple of The People.

The Central Coast, The Temple, and Halcyon

The photo below was taken between 1925 and 1927, looking north along the beach. This is what the area looked like when Louise and Bob arrived on the train, in Oceano. The Oceano Pavilion and pier are at the lower left. The city of Grover Beach is to the right of center, and Pismo Beach is above the open area of sand dunes. In the distance is the Santa Lucia mountain range. (*Images of America, Oceano*, p.29)



Around the turn of the century, real estate developers had felt that Oceano would make an excellent beach resort, like Atlantic City in New Jersey. The brochure on the next page was published in 1907. It boasted of a railroad, a boardwalk, and a large dance pavilion. (*Images of America, Oceano*, p.10)



This two-story dance pavilion (below) was built in 1904 just south of Pier Ave., and a 1,000-foot pier was constructed at the end of Pier Ave in 1908. (As we will read in this chapter and in Part Two of our family history, Louise and her friends often went dancing at this pavilion.) Today, Pier Ave. is the main access road for autos entering the beach at the Oceano ramp. When it was torn down in 1961, it marked the end of the dance hall era on the Central Coast.



Oceano Pavilion in the early 1920s. Pier Avenue is in the foreground.
(Images of America, Oceano, p.28)

Another pavilion (not pictured) was LaGrande Pavilion, located in the heart of the sand dunes, about 2 miles south of Arroyo Grande Creek, facing the ocean. It was intended to be the “anchor” for a planned development of 7,000 lots. This pavilion fell victim to the elements and was torn down for salvage in 1920.
(Images of America, Oceano, p.87)

About The Temple of The People

A group of followers of Theosophy formed ***The Temple of The People*** in Syracuse, NY in 1898. Their teachings were (and still are) an attempt to fuse basic tenets of all religions with science and art. They sought a place where they could practice their beliefs and live in harmony with each other and attempt to be a model community for others to emulate. In 1903 they moved their headquarters to Halcyon. They bought a farm from a man named Coffee Rice.

At this point in our story it is useful to quote at length from a book about Halcyon, the result of many years of research, written by Paul Ivey: *Radiance From Halcyon. A Utopian Experiment in Religion and Society*, published in 2013.

The Temple Theosophists were part of a middle-class migration into California that took place between 1900 and 1920 as a “second wave” from the East Coast. Many of these migrants believed that California represented an ideal where nature and social setting provided the fundamentals that would allow them to attempt to establish a “new life.” This ideal was health, popularized in the later nineteenth century through the widespread idea that California was the land of restorative climate. Health seekers flocked to southern California in droves in the 1880s, enough to call it a “health rush,” and set up a “sanatorium belt” that stretched from San Diego to Loma Linda. Many of them were city dwellers, but they worked outdoors on numerous citrus farms and bee ranches, gaining back their health and improving their livelihoods (p. 99-100).

The Beginnings of Halcyon

Another excerpt from *Radiance From Halcyon* provides a brief but useful overview of the origins of the town of Halcyon.

With utopian visions both messianic and practical, a new cooperative colony was established in the Arroyo Grande valley in 1903. Named Halcyon and organized by a new theosophical movement called the Temple, it was an attempt to practice the Christian Golden Rule in a communal setting of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Nearly a year after they arrived, on Wednesday, May 25, 1904, members invited other residents of the Central Coast to tour the buildings and grounds and to attend the grand opening of the Halcyon Hotel and Sanatorium, the first nature-cure hospital in the region. At an evening ceremony, founders of the Temple physician William Henry Dower (1866-1937) and spiritual leader Francia Amanda LaDue (1849-1922), recently relocated from Syracuse, New York, spoke about the objectives of the new cooperative Temple Home Association. The group was building Halcyon nearby and was responsible for renovating the sanatorium’s three-story Victorian house (p.1-2).

The Halcyon Hotel and Sanatorium was housed in a Victorian mansion originally built around 1885 by the owner, Coffee Adam Rice. The Temple purchased the mansion, a barn, several outbuildings, a windmill, a 10,000-

gallon water tank, and 30 acres of land, which included a soft water spring, from Mr. Rice. The mansion had 20 rooms and had running water, which was uncommon in this area at that time. It is still standing, located in Oceano near the corner of Beach and 25th Streets.

Temple co-founder Dr. William H. Dower married Jane Kent, an accomplished musician from Pennsylvania, in October, 1912. Their daughter, Flamore, was born in January, 1919, and she was born with severe mental challenges.

In the photo below Jane (Kent) Dower and Dr. Dower stand in front of this three-story Victorian house, which served as the Halcyon Hotel and Sanatorium.



Halcyon in the 1920s – 1930s

In 1923, Dr. Dower and Mrs. Dower bought a new home west of the Sanatorium. The Dower home was a large, two story mansion, at 2411 Beach St, in Oceano, just one block west of the Sanatorium. It is shown in the photo below.

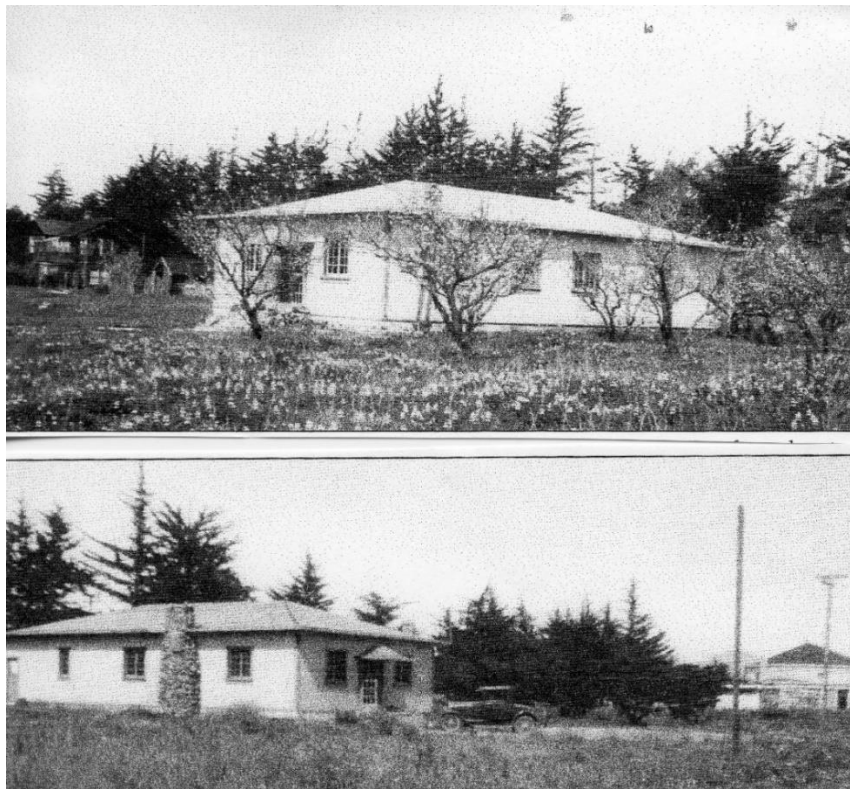


Both Dr. Dower and Francia LaDue worked for American Indian rights in New York State and were welcomed there as members of the Onandaga tribe before moving to California. They continued extolling the virtues of Native American culture in their outreach efforts locally, and the Hiawatha Lodge was constructed there in the spring of 1927 as Halcyon's community center.

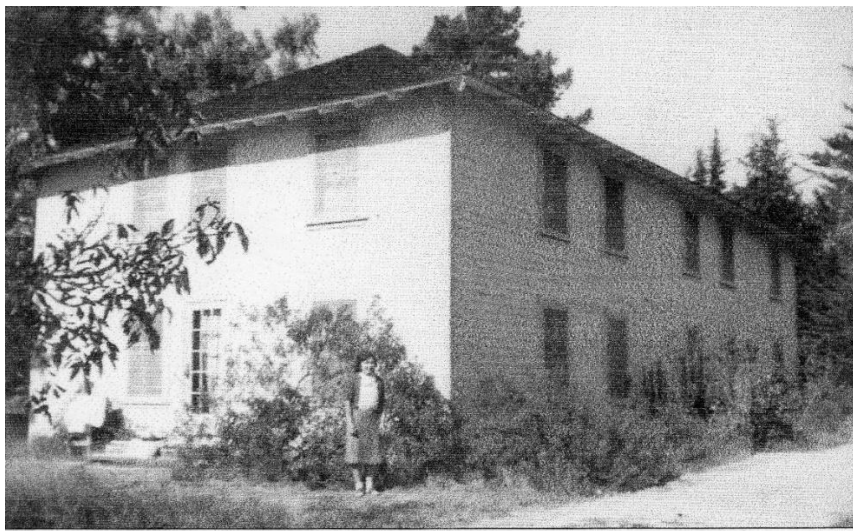
Below are two photos of the rustic, single-walled Hiawatha Lodge, named after the famous American Indian Hiawatha.

In the top photo below, apricot trees bloom beside the Lodge in the spring around 1928. Dry-farmed apricot trees were abundant in Halcyon, as the site was originally a farm. The bottom photo was taken during the early 1930s. The apricot orchard had been removed, and a new stone fireplace had been built on the west side of the building.

It has been used for many purposes through the years: Holiday dinners, dances, theatrical performances, community classes, and even at one point in time a classroom for students with special needs.

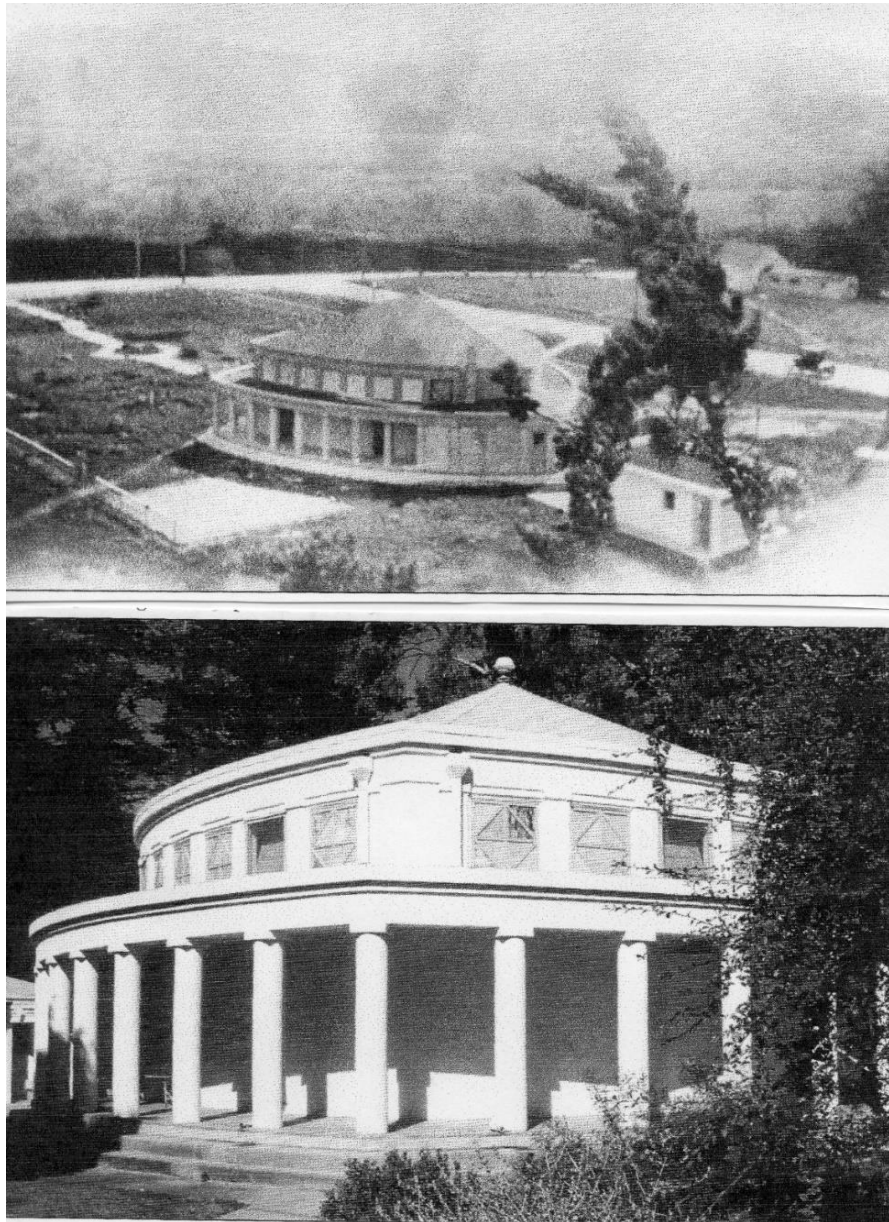


The Halcyon Guest House was an important facility that enabled the Temple to carry out its mission. Shown in the photo below, it was originally constructed as a two-story guest house in 1931-1932. It had 16 rooms and a bathroom with hot/cold running water on each floor. Several single rooms on the first floor were remodeled in 1956 to create the William Quan Judge Library.



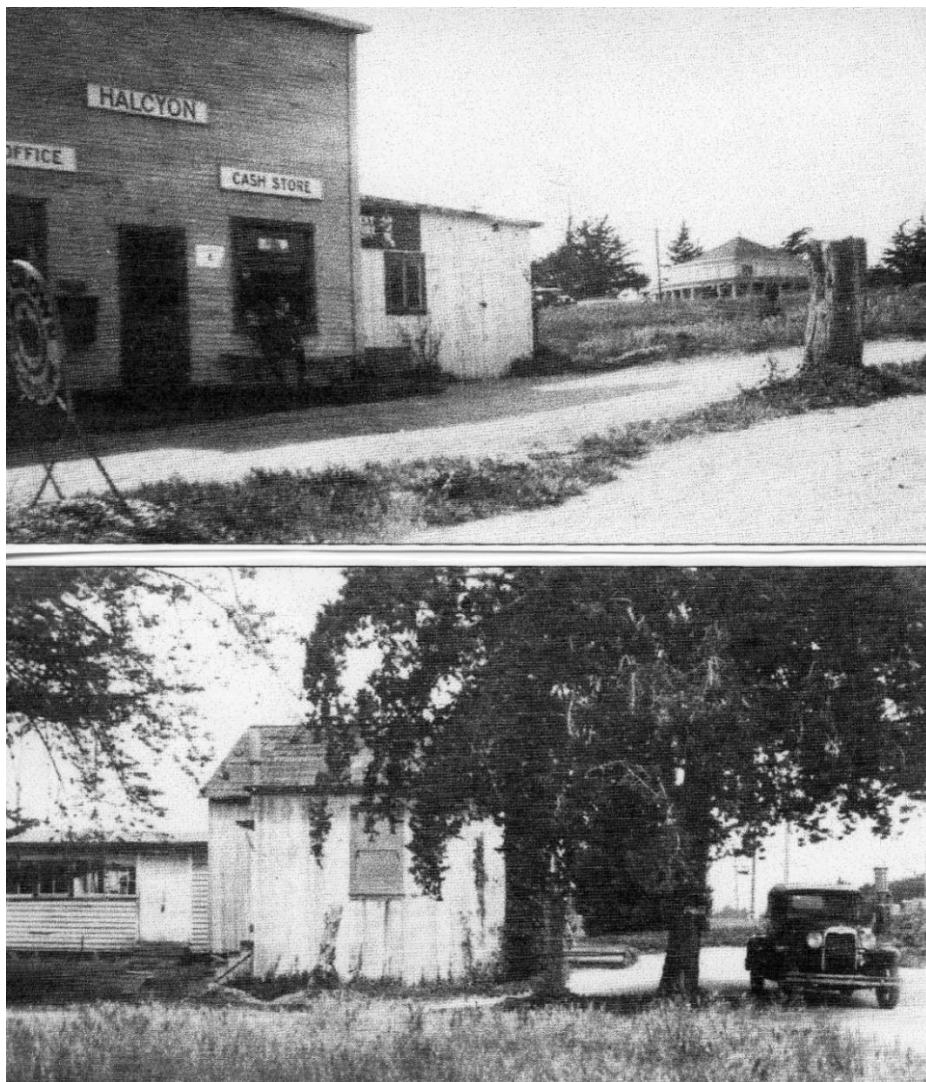
Below are two photos of the temple, the heart of life for Temple members. The top image is an aerial photo of the temple taken in 1926, shortly after construction was completed. The road running left to right is Halcyon Rd. The Halcyon Store and Post Office can be seen at its first location on the right.

The bottom image (taken in 2015) is exactly how the temple looked in a late 1920s photo. (From *Images of America, Halcyon*)



The Halcyon Store and Post Office was vital to the daily life of residents of Halcyon. During the 1930s “Edgar Cheetham carried the mail for many years on his bicycle from the train depot in Oceano to Halcyon” (*Bob Stenquist Talk in Temple July 14, 1996*). The post office was established in response to a request made by the Temple to the general post office department in Washington, D.C. The application for a second-class post office under the name of Halcyon was granted in 1908. The structure that housed the store and post office was salvaged in 1947 and used to build the new store a half block south.

In the photo below the store and post office is shown relative to the temple.



The photo above shows a vehicle parked in front of the Halcyon Store, partially blocking the view of the roadside gasoline pump.

Ebba Stenquist Finds Her Place in Halcyon

What drew Ebba Stenquist to relocate her home, and her children, all the way across the United States? Why would a 36-year-old woman, going through a divorce, and with children ages 11 and 13, make such major life changes?

As described earlier, Ebba had been introduced by her father to the theological writings of the Swedish philosopher, Emanuel Swedenborg. The most philosophical of his works was *Divine Love and Wisdom*, published in 1763. “In it, he discusses the nature of God, the heavens, and life itself, laying out a number of ideas that are important to understanding his thought.” (*A Swedenborg Sampler*, page 71).

Most likely Ebba became receptive to the ideas expressed by the Theosophical movement from reading books by Swedenborg and listening to her father talk about Swedenborg’s philosophy. In particular, after being introduced by one Mr. Taylor of Worcester to Theosophy and to the publications of The Temple of The People at Halcyon, Ebba informed her daughter that “this is what she had been seeking all her life.” (*Audio recording of Louise during family reunion of 1984*)

Ebba Stenquist left Worcester around the first of September, 1928. When she arrived in Halcyon in early September the membership was growing and new buildings were being constructed all over town. “Mrs. Ebba Stenquist, of Worcester, Mass., has been with us since early September and plans to become a permanent resident. Her two children, a boy and a girl, will soon be here. Mrs. Stenquist is a very fine pianist and a splendid acquisition to the Temple Center, and we need the young folks” (Temple Family Letter, December, 1928).

It is very likely that Ebba stayed in the Halcyon Sanatorium or in a cottage on the Sanatorium grounds. After settling in, Ebba sent for the children to travel out west to join her in Halcyon. The next Temple Family Letter provided an update (*Temple Family Letter April, 1929*)

We told in our last issue about Mrs. Ebba Stenquist, our sister from Massachusetts, and her hope to stay here as a permanent resident. Her two children, Robert (13 yrs.) and Louise (11 yrs.), arrived from the east just after Christmas, and there was a happy reunion. ... They are a real acquisition to the Center, not only because of Mrs. Stenquist's musical talent, but because of the children as well, who fit in at once by general adoption as some of the needed young life.

When she first came out to Halcyon, Ebba made a living by playing piano at the dances in Arroyo Grande and Oceano, and at silent movie theaters. I recall her telling me stories of how she hitch-hiked from Halcyon into Santa Maria to play at the silent movie theater there. She told me that there was no printed music for her to play. She said she just improvised as the movie went along.

In the 1984 audio recording, Louise said “My mother was a great musician. She used to play the piano for dinner banquets and for silent movies.” Perhaps the first time that Ebba played piano during the Temple Convention was in August 1929, and she would continue doing so every year thereafter, eventually becoming the director of the Temple Choir.

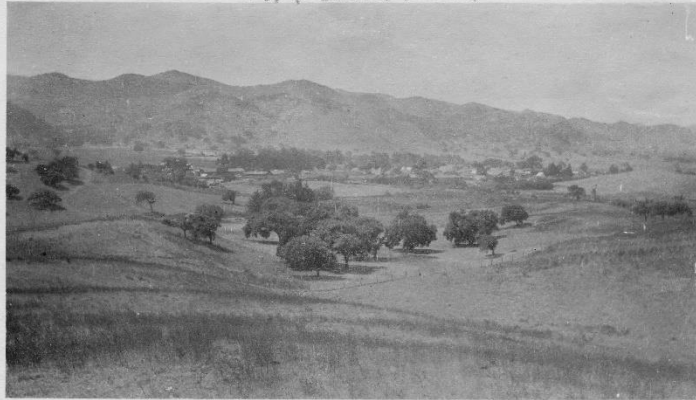
Frederick Elijah Whitney – Our Step-Grandfather

Fred Whitney (October 24, 1873) was the youngest of four children of Benjamin P. Whitney (1834), and Sarah Martha McMurray (1848). Fred’s father was a Blacksmith in Los Alamos, a small rural town just 35 miles south of Halcyon. This is where Fred grew up. In an 1896 directory, Fred and his father were the only two members of their family listed as still living in Los Alamos. Fred was 22 years old and his occupation was listed as “Teacher.” Just a few years later, Fred moved up to San Jose, probably to attend Stanford University.

Photos of his home in Los Alamos are shown on the next page. The top photo shows the Los Alamos valley and the little town in the distance. The two in the middle show the front of Fred’s house, and the bottom photo is labeled “The Shop.”

In the 1900 U.S. Census Fred is listed as living as a boarder at 903 Santa Clara St, San Jose; his occupation was “Day Laborer.” Ten years later, on a 1910 California Voter Registration form, he was shown still living in Santa Clara County, this time at 292 Kingsley, Santa Clara. His occupation was listed as “Author.”

Los Alamos



my home, Los Ala.



The "shop", Los Alamos



Fred Whitney and the Varian's of Halcyon

Fred learned about the Temple and Halcyon from John Varian, in 1911 while he was living near Palo Alto, California. A little story about John and Agnes Varian will help us better understand who Fred Whitney was. They lived in Halcyon for many years, participating in Temple activities and their children became quite successful as entrepreneurs. The following information on John Varian and his connection to Fred Whitney is from *The Inventor and the Pilot* (1983) by Dorothy Varian. (Dorothy was the wife of Russell Varian.)

John and Agnes Varian immigrated to the United States from Ireland in May, 1894. They lived for a few years in Syracuse, New York, where they had joined the Temple of The People, a newly formed Theosophist sect. John and Agnes moved to Palo Alto in January, 1903. They may have been motivated to move out west because the Theosophist sect that they had joined in Syracuse moved to Halcyon, California in 1903.

They helped organize a branch of the Temple in Palo Alto, called a "Temple Square" and members met in the Varian home. "John Varian gathered about him a diverse group of like-minded individuals, many of them interested in Theosophy, which included professors and students from Stanford" (The Inventor and the Pilot, p.34).

In 1914 the Varian family moved to Halcyon. John Varian brought a new vitality to the town, with his music, sparkle, and wit. He was followed by others from the Palo Alto area who acquired homes and became permanent, or part-time, residents, adding diversity to the group. (The Inventor and the Pilot, p.49).

One of these followers was Fred Whitney, a Stanford University alumnus. (*The 1940 U.S. Census shows he completed four years of college.*) During the time that John Varian hosted Temple Square meetings at his home in Palo Alto, Fred Whitney was in his 30s.

Fred Whitney's Activities

Among some of Ebba's remaining papers and astrology charts were notes about Fred, whom she referred to as "Beloved." These notes were dates of Fred's ascension within the Temple. Fred became a member of the Temple on March 14, 1911, and in June, 1912 he was admitted into the Order of 36 (the first step in a succession of orders leading to becoming a priest).

We know that in 1914 Fred went on an extensive expedition in the Sierra Mountains, traveling from Lake Tahoe to Yosemite Valley with pack horses. We found several photos from this trip in one of his photo albums.

One source indicates that Fred left Palo Alto for Halcyon around 1915. But it is more likely that he initially lived in Los Alamos. As he became more involved with The Temple, he rented an apartment in the Administration Building in Halcyon, and probably split his time between Los Alamos and Halcyon.

We have sketchy information about what Fred did from 1915 to 1929. There is mention of him in the 1917 Temple Artisan: "Brother Fred Whitney is staying for a short while." From his U.S. Military Draft Registration form dated September, 1918, we learn that he was living at Fallen Leaf Lake, in the Lake Tahoe region. At age 45 his occupation was listed as "Camp Employee at Fallen Leaf Lodge."

Fred was increasingly involved with The Temple throughout the 1920s. We know from Ebba's diary notes that during the Temple Convention of 1920, Fred was admitted into the Order of 28, the preparation to enter the priesthood. His contributions are documented in The Temple Artisan and Temple Family Letters from that decade. In 1922 Fred wrote a booklet "A Confession of Faith for the New Age" and gave it to The Temple. It was "a short, concise review of the old creeds of the West, which are failing, and of the new ones which will take their place. It strikes the keynote of the new age. Price fifteen cents" (*Temple Family Letter December, 1922*).

Fred travelled regularly to other cities along the Central Coast of California giving lectures on Theosophy, The Temple, and its teachings. In 1923 he began a series of Temple Talks, every two weeks, in San Luis Obispo, Atascadero and Paso Robles. "These lectures have been well attended and a growing interest in the Temple and its mission is most gratifying" (*Temple Family Letter February, 1923*).

The Temple Family Letter added "He has been interested in bee culture for several years but as he wishes to devote his entire time to lecturing, would be glad to dispose of his bees. Any member who may be interested can write him for further information" (*Temple Family Letter February, 1923*).

Later that year Fred initiated a series of lectures to be given over the next two months, starting in Atascadero. His itinerary included "Palo Alto, San Jose, San Francisco, and if conditions are favorable, Ashland and Portland, Oregon" (*Temple Family Letter November, 1923*).

The year 1924 was a busy year for Fred. In addition to becoming a priest within The Temple (admitted into the Order of 14 in December, 1924), he was appointed to an Executive Council to assist Dr. Dower, the Guardian in Chief. The purpose of this council was to assist Dr. Dower with the executive planning and management of the Temple work. Fred gave lectures in Santa Barbara that year in July and September and again in August, 1925.

Fred also played a major role during the annual Convention of The Temple of the People, usually held the first full week in August. The Temple Artisans give evidence that, beginning with the 1927 Convention, each year for several years, he chaired the "Social Science Meeting" as one of the activities for convention-goers.

Below is a 1927 photo of Temple members on the porch of the temple. In this photo Fred Whitney appears just left of center in a light-colored suit. To the left of him is Dr. William Dower.



Fred's busy schedule of conducting "outreach" on behalf of The Temple continued in 1928 and 1929.

Mr. Fred Whitney, who has an apartment in the Temple office building is doing splendid work as a Temple lecturer in nearby towns. This fall he made a trip to Santa Barbara, to lecture in the Santa Barbara Truth Center ... At least once a month he has for a long time made a regular trip to Atascadero

... where his work has been bearing great fruit in the establishment of a solid, growing, and devoted Temple Square (Temple Family Letter December, 1928).

Our main standby as Temple lecturer, Frederick Whitney, who has a bachelor apartment in the rear of the Temple office, is doing splendid work. In July he made one trip to Santa Barbara, lecturing for several days in the Home of Truth, and the good delegation from that place to Convention is evidence of the interest aroused. He has just returned from a lecture trip to Los Angeles where he has been for several days lecturing and giving a "boost" to a Temple study class which Mrs. Louise Awerdick has been forming there. (Temple Family Letter July, 1929)

At this point in our story I'd like to add a personal note. My middle name is Fred, and I grew up knowing that I was named after our step grandfather, Fred Whitney. But I didn't appreciate until now, as I compose this family history, what a kind, generous and intelligent man he must have been. I am certainly proud to have been given my middle name after him.

Ebba Stenquist and Fred Whitney Unite

It is likely that Ebba first met Fred in 1928, soon after she arrived from Worcester. Then a year later, they acknowledged their love for each other. In her diary entry dated December 19, 1959, writing about she and Fred (seven years after his death), "30 years ago we pledged our troth and it was in truth the happiest day in my entire life!"

Thus, the same year that Louise and Bob arrived from Massachusetts, 1929, their mother established a strong bond with Fred Whitney. Fred had been a student at Stanford University; he was a writer, poet, lecturer, high mountain explorer and beekeeper.

They pledged their love to each other on December 19, 1929 and they got married two years later on November 1, 1931. Fred was much older than Ebba, and (according to family members) their love was a platonic type of love. When they married, Ebba was 39 and Fred was 58.



From the book *Images of America: Halcyon*, we see a photo of Ebba and Fred sitting on their front porch.

Five generations of the Whitney-Stenquist-Lentz-Clark family have lived in Halcyon in a complex of homes they constructed on Temple land just north of the Blue Star memorial Temple. California native Fred Elijah Whitney learned about the Temple and Halcyon in 1911 while living in Palo Alto as a Stanford student. Whitney came to the community four years later, built a small cottage in 1929, and expanded it after his marriage to Ebba Stenquist in 1931 (page 117).

Just a few years later in late 1934, Ebba lost both of her parents. Her brother's wife, Ida Stromberg, wrote a letter to Ebba describing her father's last weeks and of his passing. Just a week before he died, Andrew said "Write to Ebba and ask her if she remembers when she played and sang 'Till We Meet Again!'" Her father Andrew passed away in August at age 80. Sadly, just a few months later her mother Anna passed away in December at age 82.

Bernard Lentz Arrives – and Thrives in Halcyon

In one of Herb's letters we learn that Bernard left home when Herb was about nine years old. That would have been in 1926. Bernard would have been 23 years old. And from Herb's letters we know that Bernard arrived in Halcyon around 1930, when he was 27. Where was he between the time he left home and when he arrived in Halcyon?

Evidence leads to the conclusion that Bernard visited Cuba before arriving in Halcyon, in 1930. In one of Herb's letters to Louise, he wrote about his brother, and with a touch of resentment "He had some swell opportunities when he was younger, Dad had prominent friends; but Bernard just tossed them aside; had to go down to Cuba and mingle with his Spanish friends" (*February 22, 1939*).

During the prohibition years, especially the late 1920s, large numbers of Americans flocked to Havana, Cuba. It seems like it would have been a great opportunity for a young, adventurous man from New York to join the thousands of other Americans headed to Cuba. (There is an interesting story about this online, and a link is provided at the end of this chapter.) It was then that Bernard visited Cuba, perhaps living and working there a few years.

Bernard's politics most likely leaned toward socialism. As indicated in Chapter Five, Bernard's younger brother Howie accused him of being a communist. Yet it remains a complete mystery as to how Bernard learned about The Temple at Halcyon. He was an ardent follower of Theosophy, and it is most likely that pathway led him to Halcyon.

The earliest reference to his activities in Halcyon is from *Images of America, Halcyon*. He participated in a dramatization of The Prophet in the Hiawatha Lodge, in the early 1930s (p.75). Our mother confessed at the Family Reunion of 1984 that when she was 16 years old, she "fell in love" with Bernard. This would place him in Halcyon in 1933, when he was 30 years old.

The first reference to Bernard in the *Temple Artisans* was in the April/May 1933 issue: Bernard donated a book to the Temple library. In one of Louise's letters to Herb (*September 22, 1938*) there is a description of Bernard performing in a play in Halcyon, in which Bernard sings a song in Spanish.

Bernard became very involved in Temple meetings in the 1930s, contributing several talks at various times. The first reference was in the Feb/March 1937 issue of the Temple Artisan: He gave a talk at a regular meeting of the Temple on January 31 of that year. Bernard also participated in the 1937 Convention of The Temple by reading selections on social science from the Temple Teachings referring to different forms of government (Temple Artisan Oct/Nov 1937).



Left: Bernard in Halcyon, 1936.

In the next few years Bernard gave a number of talks at Temple meetings, as listed below.

June/July of 1938 "Occult Centers"
September 18, 1938 (no title given)
November 20, 1938 "Soul
Knowledge vs Head Learning"
February 19, 1939 "Temple and
Theosophical Terms"
Oct/Nov 1939 "Lodge Agents"
February 11, 1940 "The Higher Self"
August, 1940: "Theocracy, The
Government of the Future." The
complete text of this talk was
printed in the Temple Artisan of
Oct/Nov 1940.

Louise's and Bob's Teen Years in Halcyon

Arriving at the Halcyon Hotel and Sanatorium in 1929

We recall that their mother had left them with friends in Massachusetts for four months before they journeyed out west all by themselves. When Bob and Louise arrived in Halcyon to join their mother, they were only children but they had already learned to be self-reliant. Bob, being the older of the two, had felt a keen responsibility for taking care of his sister.

In this new village, far away from their childhood home and their friends, their lives and attitudes about a great many things would be influenced by where they would live and who they would live with.

When Louise and Bob arrived in January 1929, according to Bob, the family stayed in a cottage on the grounds of the Sanatorium. They lived there until Evelyn Carlberg's father, Harry Elliot, could build their house. (*Bob Stenquist Temple Talk, July 14, 1996*). Stories within our family were that this temporary home was "a tiny shack." "He lived in a trailer. He lived in an old trailer that used to be parked in the eucalyptus trees. And he used to live in the Sanatorium. He had good experiences, there, too" [*Interview, Vicki Stenquist Chafin*].

In Bob's own words "There were a lot of eucalyptus trees behind the Sanatorium and I used to cut them down, cut, split and tier the wood for a dollar a tier, plus another dollar a tier for furnishing all occupied rooms in the Sanatorium with wood." "I don't remember any conversations with Dr. Dower other than asking him for money when it was due, and that was pure agony." "My mother tried to convince me I should do the work as 'my contribution to the Temple' (*Bob Stenquist Talk in Temple July 14, 1996*).

"Behind Dr. Dower's house was a pump house used for storing old books and magazines. I got permission to help myself. Most of them were science fiction, which I read avidly" (*Bob Stenquist Talk in Temple July 14, 1996*).

Where the Stenquist Family Lived During the 1930s

The new arrivals from Massachusetts were the talk of the town in 1929. Below is an excerpt from the Temple Family Letter of April 1929.

They have gone to work to make themselves a home here and have succeeded in putting up a tiny but attractive little cottage close by the Temple on the Halcyon road just above the Tarbox home, and this promises to be a home nest indeed.

Based upon this description of where their cottage was located, and family recollections of our neighbors back then, we are confident that this humble cottage for the Stenquists was located on the long dirt driveway off Halcyon Road, now named Whitney Lane. It was either the cottage which became our original home, or it was the small cottage at the very end of the driveway.

But the family still was not entirely together. When Ebba and son Bob moved into their new cottage in Halcyon, Louise would begin (or continue) living with the Dower family in Oceano. In one of her letters to Herb, Louise revealed that "From the time I was 12 until 16, I lived with Dr. and Mrs. Dower" (*June 12, 1938*). Most likely this was in their home on Beach Street, just one block west of the Halcyon Sanatorium. According to her ages as reported, this would have been from 1929 through 1933.

Not quite a year after Louise and Bob arrived in Halcyon, they also would have learned that their mother had developed a close relationship with Fred Whitney. They loved each other, but we suspect this was a different kind of love than what we are accustomed to. Family members claim it was not a romantic love.

In 1929 Fred completed construction of his own cottage in Halcyon. This was the very same house that they would come to live in for the rest of their lives, next door to our family's home just to the north of the temple. We would remember the house as "Nanny's house."

Louise's Early Years in Halcyon

In 1929 Louise started eighth grade and Bob started in high school. Their school was up on Crown Hill in old Arroyo Grande village. From her letters we learn that she played handball a lot in 8th grade. In one of her letters Louise remarked about herself, as she was looking through a photo album from her school days, that she was "strangely innocent" at 12 and 13 years old.

Louise's own account of where she lived during those early years in Halcyon conflicts with what we learn from the May, 1930 US Census. On the census report we see that household members included Ebba (38), Robert (14) and Louise (13), living within the town of Halcyon. (It was also reported that the family owned a radio, and Ebba's employment was "music teacher.")

The same census report shows only Dr. and Mrs. Dower and their daughter Flamore living at their residence in Oceano. It is impossible to know where Louise was actually living at that time. It could be that she was living with the

Dower's (as stated in her letter) but with an agreement that she would be reported on the census as living with her mother. It is also very likely that somehow this was an arrangement meant to benefit the Stenquist family financially, as well as provide for needed assistance for the Dower's handicapped child, Flamore. She was only two years younger than Louise yet cognitively still a child.

Louise's daily life must have been taken up with Temple activities and caring for Flamore. The Temple Builders group (meetings and activities designed for children of Temple members) was active then, although likely with few numbers.

Louise started high school in the fall of 1930. When she was a freshman at 13 years old, she had a boyfriend, also a freshman, named Milton. In one of her letters she wrote "We were very much in love with each other (so we thought)" *December 13, 1937*. They had an on-again, off-again relationship until she was a senior in high school. Then Louise's illness interrupted everything.

She wrote "I used to work in the office at the high school under the [government program] for \$6 a month." She thought working the study hall windows was fun (*November 15, 1937*).

In 1931 when she was 14 years old, Louise was participating in Temple Builders. She gave a speech during the Temple Builders Sunday of the 1931 Temple Convention. She wrote in one of her letters to Herb that everyone liked it. Temple leaders in those days encouraged participation in the Temple Builders program, even by teenagers. In one of her letters, she wrote about the population in Halcyon. In 1932 "there was only one kid in town" (*May 24, 1938*).

A New Family Forms

Much later in life, Bob reflected back upon his impressions at the time. "My mother married Fred Whitney when I was fifteen [actually he had just turned 16]. I remember thinking that getting married at their age, so far over the hill, was a pretty senseless thing to do" (*Bob Stenquist Talk in Temple July 14, 1996*).

According to Halcyon historians, Fred expanded his cottage after his marriage to Ebba in November 1931. But there still may not have been enough room for the whole Stenquist family at Fred's cottage, so Louise understandably would continue to live with the Dower's.

Family stories also indicate that Bob lived in the attic of Ebba's house. It is likely that this was the place referred to. We have memories of this home (next door to the house we grew up in) and how the main room had a very high, steeply sloped ceiling, and above the "north room" there was an attic of considerable size.

The Halcyon Guest House was built during 1931-1932, and shortly after it was completed, the Whitney family lived in the Guest House (see photo, earlier in this chapter). Louise wrote in a letter "When I was 15 we were all living in the Guest House, and my room was the one you had when you were here" (*June 12, 1938*).

It seems reasonable then to conclude that they lived there during the time that Fred would have been doing the work of adding on to his original home just north of the Temple. It was a temporary arrangement for the new "hybrid" Whitney family, and it is likely that this was the first time in over four years that Ebba and her two children were all living together as a family again.

But if we follow the timeline described in Louise's letters, she later continued to live at the Dower's until 1933. At some point in 1932, as Ebba, Fred and Bob moved from the Guest House into Fred's expanded cottage, Louise then returned to the Dower's home on Beach Street, where she would also resume providing part time care for Flamore, until she came down with rheumatic fever in 1933.

Bob Graduates and Louise's Social Life Ends Abruptly

In the spring of 1933, Bob graduated from Arroyo Grande high school, at the age of 17. "He talked about coming to Arroyo Grande High School, going to public school in California. And I guess that he had an accent – a New England accent and Swedish. He was supposed to be Valedictorian at the high school [graduation], and they said 'Oh no, not him, nobody could understand a word he said.' So, I wonder if Louise had that accent too" (*Interview, Vicki Chafin, February 6, 2020*).

Family members recall that Bob was very smart. In fact, he was accepted into Stanford University, but he could not attend because he didn't have the money to do so. After graduation, he must have started work or did odd jobs to earn money.

Louise presided over the Temple Builders meeting during the 1933 Temple Convention, and she wrote a play which was performed by the Builders

members during the convention. This level of activity would imply Louise's active engagement with the Builders throughout the year. The name of the play she wrote was "*The King, The Queen, and The Bee.*" During that convention she also joined three other residents of Halcyon in a comedy sketch during the convention week.

Louise's relationship with Herman Volz was interesting. Although he was 13 years older than her, she explained that he had loved her since she was about 16 years old. (*December 4, 1937*) She also explained in another letter that they used to go riding in the car. They would park, and he would talk. "But never once did he put his arm around me!" "I can't make him out sometimes, although I like him a lot. But he's funny." (*March 17, 1938*)

Then in September 1933, life changed dramatically for Louise. She began her senior year of high school, but was unable to continue. She wrote "Then Mrs. Dower died in [September] 1933 and two weeks later I went to bed. When I first had heart trouble" (*June 12, 1938*). She had a severe case of rheumatic fever, and was confined to bed.

Louise had rheumatic fever when she was 16 and 17 years old. Sister Susie also had it when she was a freshman in high school, and she recalls that Louise had told her that she had the same thing when she was in high school. Susie's hands were affected the same way Louise's hands were (*Conversation with Susie Clark 1/5/20*).

Where Louise lived next is unclear, and we can only make assumptions based on limited evidence. Dr. Dower's own health began to fail and he had to close the Sanatorium as a treatment facility in late 1933. So, without anyone at the Dower home to care for Louise, and with the Sanatorium closed as a treatment center, it is likely that Louise moved into the Sanatorium.

In a letter she wrote "I was at the San once when I was ill, and it was just as dilapidated as it is now. The stairs used to creek at night and the owls screeched" (*December 4, 1937*). We still do not know how long she lived there.

Life With Rheumatic Fever

Louise wrote about how her illness interrupted her high school experience. She wrote that she was a senior for six weeks [the start of the 1933/34 school year]. Then in 1933-1934 she was confined to bed for six months. She wrote that she

was in bed when she was 16, and at the time a song was popular: "It's Only A Paper Moon" *July 9, 1938*.

Louise must have recovered somewhat several months later, because she directed another Temple Builders play during the Temple Convention in August, 1934.

One has to wonder about who took care of Louise when she was ill from rheumatic fever from September, 1933 until she returned to her senior year of high school in September, 1935. "I went back to school two years later" *February 19, 1939*.

"You know, when I had heart trouble, I nearly died, but now I know why I didn't. Only the good die young" *October 22, 1938*. (Louise had a good sense of humor.) Louise also wrote that Bob would iron her dresses for her when she was sick with heart trouble. *October 24, 1938*.

Louise's illness also may have caused a lapse in care for Flamore. Since Flamore's mother (Jane Kent-Dower) had passed away in 1933 when Flamore was only 14 years old, and her father's health was failing, someone in Halcyon must have begun to look after these two teenage girls.

Most likely it was Pearl Wilshire, who was a Nurse's Assistant. Pearl also had been in charge of Dr. Dower's branch treatment facility in Lompoc, an hour south of Halcyon. She had returned to Halcyon to live and then was appointed to the position of Temple Treasurer in August 1934. It is possible that Pearl took care of Louise and Flamore from late 1933 until the time the Fred Whitney home was expanded to accommodate Louise as well as Bob.

Additional information about rheumatic fever, such as Louise had, can be found at the end of this chapter.

Louise Returns to the Whitney Home

It is likely that Louise lived with Ebba and Fred again starting in 1935. But it appears as though she had a room of her own, separate from their main house. In one of her letters to Herb she told him that her brother Bob told her she could use his radio while he was away in college. "Fred put Bob's radio out in my room today. It's been up in the attic since last January. Now I'm very luxurious with a radio beside my bed" (*January 11, 1938*).

Another letter has reference to her living quarters: "Fred and my mother give up in disgust and tiptoe when they go outside past my room" (*January 22, 1938*). The phrase "*go outside*" suggests that her room was separate from the main house. Another reference is from a letter the next day: "Tonight, Jean and I entertained Yoshiko and Gabriel, out in my room" (*January 23, 1938*).

In conversation with Susie (8/4/20) we determined that the original house in which we three Lentz children grew up, which was added onto twice, was a very small cottage in 1935. This must have been Louise's room "out there."

Louise and Bob Expand Their Horizons

In the Fall of 1935, Louise returned to high school as a senior, at age 18, and Bob either began or continued with Junior College. We know that Bob attended Junior College prior to enrolling at San Jose State Teachers' College in 1937 with the help of Louise Awerdick (Temple member and Halcyon resident), who helped him financially.

Louise enjoyed swimming for exercise and probably went to the Pismo Plunge often, until it closed in 1938. In a letter to Herb, she wrote that "the plunge" in Pismo Beach was turned into a penny arcade, or "fun house," and she was so mad about that (*July 4, 1938*).

In the spring of 1936, Louise graduated from Arroyo Grande high school, at 19 years old. Louise's relationship with Milton suddenly resumed, then abruptly ended. "When I was a senior (again) in 1936 – it was a couple of weeks before graduation – I met him at a dance, and we were both attracted to each other." "Then last year [1936] I heard he was home so I wrote him and asked him to come see me (something I was sorry ever after that I did)." But he answered that he soon was to be married (*December 13, 1937*).

Louise wrote "I was in a hurry to get better quick so I could go to Los Angeles and work. Everybody said I'd only get back in bed again if I did that, but I didn't care. I thought that the fun I had in Los Angeles would be worth the price I had to pay for it" (*December 27, 1937*).

That summer she and her good friend Yoshiko went to Los Angeles. They lived near Hollywood and worked part time. She wrote that they were trying to earn money to go to Business College by doing housework; Louise also provided child care for a 20-month-old boy (*September 25, 1937*). She wrote that she liked living and working in there (*September 22, 1938*).

In one of Louise's letters she wrote that she had a very busy week of social activities. Presenting it here is to provide a sample of what she might have been doing, socially, in the years just prior to falling in love with Herb.

"The Mallory's invited us all – meaning the Dower family which includes Pearl, Flamore, Clarence, Mrs. Varnot, Bernard and myself – to dinner tonight. I've just come home from there. It seems like I've been out a lot lately, doesn't it? Friday night I went to the high school dance, Saturday night was dinner at Tedford's, Sunday night I went to the show, tonight the Mallory's, Friday night Bernard and I are going to the show – to see Annapolis Salute – Saturday night is a Halloween party" (*October 26, 1937*)

In the same letter she references needing ink to continue writing, but the ink was in Fred's room, and he was asleep. (She was writing the letter late at night before going to sleep.) She was living with her mother and Fred – even though in the paragraph above she included herself in the group "the Dower family" (*October 26, 1937*).

A Decade of Musical Service by Ebba Whitney

Beginning in 1929, Ebba frequently played piano during Temple meetings and at Convention proceedings. Beginning with the 1929 convention, she played at every convention thereafter, eventually becoming the director of the Temple Choir. Following are excerpts from Temple Artisans and Family Letters describing a few of her noteworthy accomplishments.

Our devoted Temple musicians (Edgar Cheetham, George Ficke, and Ebba Stenquist at the piano or organ, and Borghild Janson, Otto Westfelt, John Varian, and Henry Carlberg vocalists) take their turn and make the meetings very precious from a musical standpoint (Family Letter November, 1929).

Tuesday evening a concert of music was given under the direction of Ebba Whitney. Ebba Whitney directed a performance in the Lodge of readings with tableaux from scenes from Longfellow's Hiawatha. "The performance was in modernistic style, using tableau, pantomime and lights, suggesting idea and action in a manner that was convincing and truly artistic." The

accompanying music was written by Ebba Whitney, and theme songs were sung by Louise Stenquist and three others (Temple Artisan Aug/Sept 1938).

Ebba Whitney directed the Temple choir and “rendered beautiful Christmas music” (Temple Artisan Dec 39 / Jan 40).

Ebba Whitney played organ at the opening of the Convention week: “Seventh Symphony” of Beethoven, along with Cethil Mallory on the piano (Temple Artisan Aug/Sept 1940).

Perspectives on Halcyon

From Our Mother

In her letters to Herb, from 1937 through 1939, she often wrote that she had nothing to say, or nothing to write about, because “Nothing ever happens here, really. The same thing over and over again.” *January 16, 1939*

She wrote that she realized that “most of the people in Halcyon are old. And there are not many young ones, and some of the young people make poor Temple members.” *January 23, 1939*

In one letter she wrote what it was like living in a small town such as Halcyon.

Halcyon is a nice place darling, but you have to have a good sense of humor to live in it. You can’t even think of doing something without somebody coming up and saying ‘I hear you’re going to do this or that.’ But just the same I love it. (September 24, 1937)

In another letter she wrote to Herb about how she really felt about living in Halcyon. This was part of an extended written conversation about where they might live when he got back from his duty overseas.

I think I would just about die if I had to live here the rest of my life without a few years away from here. After a little bit anyway – I’d be most content here. But I’ve been here ten years now, and had a little taste of the outside – just enough to make me want more. You can’t do all that you want here without being talked about. Ideas are different here than in the outside world. But you’re tired of the other and want what’s here. I think I’d have to get away some (June 27, 1939).

From our Uncle Bob

The following passages are excerpts from a talk that Bob Stenquist gave in the Temple on July 14, 1996. These excerpts serve to illustrate Bob's very practical outlook on life. He was a critical thinker, and I recall listening to him on many occasions, and I would be enthralled with his perceptiveness.

Annie Altamirano cooked at the Sanatorium for years and also prepared lodge dinners. She was a good source of information about the early years. According to her, under the Master's direction a cooperative set-up was established here based on subsistence-type farming and a dairy, as well as printing, bookbinding and making pottery. The cooperative was a great source of friction and never worked. Those who owned land and were real farmers tore their hair out by the roots and screamed in agony at being told how to run their businesses by people who were long on talking but short on doing. Many left the Temple with great bitterness. Annie said that many nights Dr. Dower would be out at the barn milking the cows by lantern light because those who were assigned to the task didn't do it.

In the early days and continuing in my teen-aged years, people believed they were specifically chosen by the Masters to be part of a group to usher in ... a new age for mankind. They were given plans for a great city to be built here. According to Fred Whitney, this would all come to pass in a few hundred years or so, but most members thought it would all come to pass in their lifetimes.

The road ahead requires self-responsibility; every time we try to use authority as a prop to lean on the prop will break. Somehow, we have to get away from wanting to be cared for, having someone do our thinking for us, and wanting someone to tell us what to do.

All of the distortions I saw in the 1930s, all the misinterpretations, all the silly positions taken by various individuals, all of the self-serving uses of the Master's authority, all are part of the learning processes we all go through. Dependence on authority is like a habit-forming drug, and a history of the Temple is a history of our withdrawal pains.

We all sort of think that down the road the Master will send us a knight in shining armor as guardian who will lead us to the heights we belong on. Well, it won't happen. It can't happen. The thought itself negates the principle of self-responsibility. The greatness of the Temple is wholly dependent on the growth of the individual members.

What Have We Learned About Louise?

In just ten years Louise experienced several major life changes. Her happy childhood in Worcester was shattered by her father leaving Ebba for another woman; she was devastated by her mother leaving for California and separating her from her brother; she undertook a risky journey into the unknown, “out west;” she learned the ways of a small town centered on spiritual development of mostly older people, while still mostly living apart from her mother; she nearly lost her life from rheumatic fever; she missed two years of high school recovering from her illness.

She didn’t have friends her own age, for the most part. Frequently mentioned in her letters were Yoshiko, 2 years younger than Louise; Jean Tedford, 6 years younger; Patty Altamirano, 8 years younger; a woman named Anita (much older than she, and previously married). She grew up very close to a severely handicapped individual, Flamore (two years younger) and Louise was often her primary care-giver.

When she was reintroduced to Herb by his brother Bernard in September 1937, what would have been her mental/emotional state?

In her life she had experienced losses, and serious health issues. She had experienced separation from family members. She grew up alongside older people constantly observing devotional practices to unseen “higher order” beings. She was immersed in the daily activities of a sleepy little town on the central coast of California.

She would have been very ready for a person of adventure to fulfill her desire to do so many things that she had not yet been able to experience in her life.

The next chapter tells the story of Herb Lentz, and how his life journey brought him to Halcyon, and how he came to know Louise. We will see in his adventures what it might have been that attracted Louise to him.

Chapter End Notes

Rheumatic Fever

Overview

In the early years of the last century, rheumatic fever was a big killer even in the developed countries of that era. In the USA in the 1920s, rheumatic fever was the leading cause of death in individuals between 5 and 20 years of age and was second only to tuberculosis in those between 20 and 30 years. The only treatment was salicylates and bed rest. The majority remained at home for weeks, more often for months, with a smoldering illness; in the USA and Europe, the sicker children were managed in foster homes or special institutions for the chronically ill.

Source: "Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease a Historical Perspective" by [Rachel Hajar](#), M.D. Accessed from internet July 30, 2020.

Conditions of Rheumatic Fever

The following information is from www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions

Accessed July 30, 2020

Rheumatic fever is an inflammatory disease that can develop when strep throat or scarlet fever isn't properly treated. Strep throat and scarlet fever are caused by an infection with streptococcus bacteria.

Rheumatic fever most often affects children who are between 5 and 15 years old, though it can develop in younger children and adults. Although strep throat is common, rheumatic fever is rare in the United States and other developed countries. However, rheumatic fever remains common in many developing nations.

Rheumatic fever can cause permanent damage to the heart, including damaged heart valves and heart failure. Treatments can reduce damage from inflammation, lessen pain and other symptoms, and prevent the recurrence of rheumatic fever.

Rheumatic fever symptoms vary. You can have few symptoms or several, and symptoms can change during the course of the disease. The onset of rheumatic fever usually occurs about two to four weeks after a strep throat infection.

Rheumatic fever signs and symptoms — which result from inflammation in the heart, joints, skin or central nervous system — can include:

- *Fever*
- *Painful and tender joints — most often in the knees, ankles, elbows and wrists*
- *Pain in one joint that migrates to another joint*
- *Red, hot or swollen joints*
- *Small, painless bumps beneath the skin*
- *Chest pain*
- *Heart murmur*
- *Fatigue*
- *Flat or slightly raised, painless rash with a ragged edge*

American Bartender Invasion of 1920s Cuba

Below is a link to this interesting story. While our Uncle Bernard probably was not a bartender, this story portrays the interest in Cuba by many Americans.

<https://www.diffordsguide.com/encyclopedia/360/people/the-american-bartender-invasion-of-1920s-cuba>

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